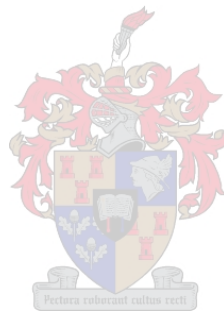


Contemporary implications of the first-century counter-ethos of Jesus to the scripted universe of gender and health in John 4 & 9. A narrative-critical analysis

by

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Declaration

By submitting this thesis, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the authorship owner thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

March/April 2015

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Abstract

South Africans are confronted on a daily basis with the social inequality among individuals which greatly inspires violence, victimisation, discrimination and life-denying ethos. These acts of injustice are not simply inspired by formal laws and policies, but spurred on by various ideological and symbolic categories and power structures. In a way, social behaviour can be said to be 'scripted' by the ideologies, perceptions and language internalised, normalised and passed on within society at large. One does not have to look very far to see the way in which this 'script' functions in South Africa and what impact the pre-determined and 'scripted' identity markers of gender and health have on individuals and groups, as categories like *man*, *woman*, *HIV positive*, and *disabled* already trigger a set of preconceived ideas and expectations regarding these individuals. The normalisation of this 'script' and its social hierarchies is extremely counter-productive as it often pre-determines the value, abilities, potential, limitations and 'appropriate' ethos of individuals and groups on the basis of the categories they fall into. The scripted nature of society is however not a twenty-first century phenomenon, but something deeply integral also to life in first century Palestine. This script interpreted, determined and reinforced the prescribed status, agency and ethos of different individuals and identity markers of health and gender were paramount in this process of scripting. Part of this 'scripted' world was Jesus of Nazareth. However, upon reading the narratives of John 4:1-42 and 9:1-41, it would appear that the relationship between the societal script and the actual ethos of Jesus was anything but simplistic. Upon reading these two episodes against the grain of the first century societal script, Jesus' ethos as a Jewish man in relation to a somewhat questionable Samaritan female and blind and impure beggar brings forth some inconsistencies toward the script. It would seem as if Jesus was reluctant to read his context one dimensionally and simply comply with popular custom and ideology. The aim of this study would therefore be to explore whether these inconsistencies between the societal script and the ethos of Jesus could be of any significance in an analogously scripted twenty-first century South Africa, a society pleading for critical reflection upon the societal script. When the possible 'counter-ethos' of Jesus is considered, faith communities might be challenged to embrace the fragility of social categories and hierarchies and perhaps embody a

similar critical attitude and ethos toward the life-denying societal script and its taken-for-granted assumptions.

Opsomming

Suid-Afrikaners word daagliks gekonfronteer met die sosiaal ongelyke stand van ons samelewing. Hierdie ongelykhede is grootliks verantwoordelik vir geweld, viktimisasie, diskriminasie en nie-lewensgewende etos. Die bogenoemde word egter nie bloot deur formele wette geïnspireer nie, maar aangevuur deur verskeie ideologiese en simboliese kategorieë en magstrukture. Sosiale gedrag kan as't ware gesien word as 'n voorafbepaalde teks, ondersteun deur die ideologieë, persepsies en taal wat ons internaliseer, normaliseer en aan ander oordra. Hierdie voorafbepaalde 'samelewingstekse' is uiters prominent in Suid-Afrika, waar 'n bepaalde status, etos en grense dikwels aan individue gegee word op die basis van identiteits-merkers van onder andere gender en gesondheid. Die identifisering van iemand as *man*, *vrou*, *MIV positief*, *gestremd*, ensovoorts spreek ideologiese boekdele van hul plek, doel en perke in die samelewing. In hierdie sin dien die vooropgestelde 'samelewingstekse' 'n uiters teenproduktiewe rol, aangesien dit die waarde, vermoëns, potensiaal, en 'korrekte' etos van individue vooraf bepaal op grond van die simboliese kategorieë waarin hul val. Die voorafbepaalde 'samelewingstekse' herbevestig dikwels sosiale hiërargieë, wat ongeregtigheid normaliseer en bevorder. Hierdie is egter nie net 'n een-en-twintigste eeu se verskynsel nie, maar iets wat al reeds prominent voorgekom het in eerste eeu se Palestina. Hierdie 'samelewingstekse' het die gepaste status en etos van verskillende individue bepaal op die grond van identiteits-merkers, soos die van gender en gesondheid. Dit is ook die samelewing waarin Jesus van Nasaret homself bevind het. Wanneer die narratiewe van Johannes 4:1-42 en 9:1-41 gelees word, kom dit egter voor asof die verhouding tussen hierdie 'samelewingstekse' en die etos beliggaam deur Jesus kompleks was. Wanneer die twee episodes in lig van die voorafbepaalde 'samelewingstekse' gelees word, blyk Jesus, 'n Joodse man, se etos teenoor 'n redelike verdagte Samaritaanse vrou en blinde en onreine bedelaar in spanning te wees met die etos aan hom voorgeskryf. Dit sou voorkom asof Jesus gewaak het teen die eenvoudige beliggaming van wat deur die 'samelewingstekse' as gehoord voorgeskryf en verwag is. Die doel van hierdie studie sou daarom wees om te ondersoek of die spanning tussen die eerste eeu se 'samelewingstekse' en die ware beliggaamde etos van Jesus enigsins betekenisvol kan wees in lyn van die een-en-twintigste eeu se voorafbepaalde 'samelewingstekse' in 'n land wat ryp is vir

kritiese refleksie op dit wat as 'normaal' en 'korrek' beskou word. Die moontlike 'kontra-etos' van Jesus kan geloofsgemeenskappe uitdaag om die broosheid van sosiale en simboliese kategorieë en hiërargieë aan te gryp en 'n soortgelyke kritiese houding en etos teenoor die nie-lewegewende 'samelewingstekes' en sy voorveronderstellings te beliggaam.

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Figure 1:

Visual representation of the relationship between authors and audiences

(See 2.2.2)

Figure 2:

Adapted visual representation of the relationship between authors and audiences

(See 2.2.2)

1. Setting the scene

1.1 Personal motivation

The Gospel of John has been referred to as a book in which a child can paddle and an elephant may swim deep (Burridge, 2007:287). In 2013 I found myself particularly drawn to the Fourth Gospel and its artistry. Through simplicity, John communicates a meaningful message with the rhetorical capacity to transform individuals and groups. For this reason (and many others) I embarked on this journey with the Gospel of John as my initial conversation partner.

As outlined by the Church of Sweden, the current MTh program serves as a bridge between the issues of gender, health and theology. Part of this program consists of a compulsory Gender and Health core module. Within this module, I found myself moved by the power of language and ideology and the realisation that individuals do not necessarily perceive reality as *it is*, but rather as *they are* (and as they are socialised to be). The world, and specifically South Africa, seems to be ordered into certain ideological power structures, which are influenced and determined by various identity markers of, among others, health and gender. As Sewpaul (2013:117) puts it:

On the basis of biological manifestations, people have attached to them social descriptors and cultural extensions that have come to be widely accepted and naturalized.

Life-denying power structures are not simply kept in place by laws and those in authority, but by the unseen 'script' of our society, which lies deeply embedded in the ideologies and language used by even those who have fallen victim to these structures.

This 'script', and the often uncritical adherence to it, often perpetuates misguided perceptions regarding societal roles, positions and appropriate behaviour. This fascinated me and brought the question of *why* rather than *what* to the fore. Instead of asking, for example, *what* the status, agency and ethos of a woman with a positive HIV status should be, I found myself asking *why* such a woman ought to be placed within a category such as 'female' and 'HIV positive' in order to determine anything

regarding the status, agency and the ethos she ought to embody and whether these categories would have possibly had any relevance to Jesus of Nazareth.

1.2 Background

South African theologian Denise Ackermann (1993:20) succinctly describes this scripted nature of our universe, and its role in dictating what we perceive as reality, when she states:

We cannot know reality apart from our own particular intellectual constructions of it and our thinking is formed by socially-conditioned linguistic rules and metaphors.

No individual finds her/himself in a blank canvassed universe. Language, discourse and ideology¹ establish a symbolic universe, or script, which becomes incarnated in the ethos² of those adhering thereto³. This script with its implied ethos is more often than not aimed at maintaining social hierarchies (Sewpaul, 2013:117) and therefore responsible for perpetuating systems of injustice. The state of an individual/group's gender and health are key identity markers in this script and often dictate the quality of life and agency of those categorised by them⁴.

When considering the contemporary South African context⁵, one does not have to look very far to see the way in which the societal script functions and what impact the identity markers of gender and health have on the status, agency and ethos of individuals and groups.

¹ Ideology can be defined as any wide-ranging system of beliefs, ways of thought, and categories that provide the foundation of programmes of political and social action. In short, it is a conceptual scheme with a practical application (Blackburn, 2008:178). Schüssler Fiorenza (1999:64) defines ideology negatively as "a process of mystification or misrepresentation".

² Ethos will be briefly defined in 2.7.

³ See 2.7 for an unpacking of the symbolic universe or script, formulated mainly around the thoughts of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann.

⁴ Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998:10) argue in a similar direction stating that individuals who are labelled as 'deviant', "undergo daily and progressive public disconfirmation of their ability to act as adult persons". These individuals also find that their movements and choices are restricted in such a way that they are often denied the option of being "genuine agents on their own behalf".

⁵ I am aware that speaking of a general South African society is almost impossible due to the diversity in our country. As this is simply a brief and general overview, no specific South African community or group has been identified. To narrow down this section to a specific group would require an empirical study. The emphasis of this study still remains the biblical text, and therefore the contextual problem(s) will only be discussed in broad terms.

Strebel et al (2006:517), after observing the links between social constructions of gender, gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS in the Western Cape, remarked as follows:

Culturally sanctioned gender roles are intimately connected with both gender-based violence (GBV) and HIV risk. All known human societies make social distinctions based on gender, and virtually all allocate more power and higher status to men.

According to Jewkes (2002:1425), societies with stronger ideologies of male dominance have more intimate partner violence. It is estimated that fifty percent of South African women will experience some sort of abuse in their lifetime (Sparg & Tomlinson, 2012:23). Demeaning Ideologies regarding women are at work on many societal levels and affect female autonomy, influence, agency and participation. Such ideologies also affect formal laws and policies, and the seriousness with which complaints from women about abuse are treated by law enforcers. On an individual level, men who hold strong ideas about the lower social status of women are more likely to abuse them (Jewkes, 2002:1425).

Luyt (2012:35) notes that current idealised versions of masculinity in South Africa emphasise the importance of “control, (un)emotionality, physicality and toughness, competition, success... and responsibility”. The use of physical strength as marker for masculinity often legitimises violence as an appropriate exhibition of power (Dworkin et al, 2012:5). Wood (2005:311), in her research on gang-rape in South Africa, remarked that, according to rural and urban Xhosa elders, a punishment of a slap or any other action toward a woman is permissible as long as it does not draw blood or cause any visible injury.

Kalichman et al (2007:23), in a study on sexual abuse in an informal settlement in Cape Town, found that more than 22% of participants admitted to having enforced sexual abuse and that one out of every five of these men, blamed the incident(s) of abuse on the female (2007:21). Those who have been involved in enforcing sexual abuse in any form were also very strong perpetrators of rape myths. More than half of the participants agreed with statements representing hostile and inferior attitudes and ideologies toward women, more often than not justifying sexual and physical abuse (Kalichman et al, 2007:24).

Ideologies on gender have also impacted the position of women in the public sphere and a great deal of South African women is still marginalised in the work place. According to the Department of Labour (South African Administration: House of Representatives 2012:11), women occupied only 19% of top management positions in South Africa in 2011. Moreover, identity markers of gender are fuelled and accompanied by others such as race and class. Women of colour, for example, experience greater difficulty than Caucasian women in being perceived as credible (Sewpaul, 2013:121). McGregor (2008:1) refers to the poor representation of women in higher education as something stirred among academic leaders in such a way that young people often learn that leaders are men.

Identity markers of health have an equally major impact on the status, agency and ethos of people. Pilch (2000:27) refers to the fact that hierarchies of health values are constructed within every society, which are internalised by the individual through the process of socialisation. “Culture dictates what to perceive, value, express, and how to live with illness” (Pilch, 2000:27). When speaking of health, the issue of HIV and AIDS raises particular concern, as it is estimated that more than 5.6 million people in South Africa are currently living with the virus⁶. Moreover, South Africa is regarded as the country in the world with the most HIV positive individuals as an estimated 12.2% of the South African population was already infected in 2012 (Shisana et al, 2014:1). Director of Collaborative for HIV and AIDS, Religion and Theology (CHART), Beverley Haddad (2005:32), refers to the fact that ideologies and perceptions around the virus largely affect those infected by it and fuels stigma and discrimination, limiting the agency and well-being of these individuals.

These attitudes are often internalised⁷:

Cultural and societal understandings, family attitudes, and personal experiences of shame and guilt are deeply absorbed, hindering life-giving responses to stigma (Ackermann, 2006:230).

⁶ 2013. Mid-year population estimates (online). Available: <http://beta2.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0302/P03022013.pdf> [accessed July 28, 2014].

⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza (1999:64) refers to the process of naturalisation, which contributes to a distorted self-understanding of the oppressed, when their subordination and innate inferior status is internalised.

Ackermann (2006:228) refers to stigma as the “most explosive” aspect of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Such a person will live with an “undesirable difference”, one that is often understood as “deviance” or what Goffman describes as a “spoiled identity” (Ackermann, 2006:228). Stigma however never arises in a social vacuum. In order to mark someone as deviant, there needs to be a perception of what ‘normal’ is. In other words, the societal script is a prerequisite to stigmatisation.

One of the biggest phenomena is where the stigma and social implications of the virus become closely associated with a certain status, agency and ethos. Not only are infected individuals marginalised, but those individuals who do not consider themselves to fall into the sex, race, creed, religion, sexual preference or national origin associated with HIV and AIDS, carelessly disqualify themselves from the risk and possibility of actually getting infected (Shisana et al, 2014:115).

A similar notion can be seen in the often sheer disregard of people with disabilities in the process of creating awareness of the virus. According to the South African National HIV Prevalence, Incidence and Behaviour Survey (Shisana et al, 2014:xxxviii), people with disabilities 15 years and older were significantly less informed on the virus and how it is transmitted and prevented than those without. Myths and perceptions of asexuality among those considered as disabled are largely to blame on the neglect of these individuals in awareness initiatives (Rohleder, 2009:856). Moreover, the data shows that the number of informed persons with disabilities regarding the virus deteriorated from 23.3% in 2008 to 17.7% in 2012 (Shisana et al, 2014:xxxviii).

South African legal scholar, MC Marumoagae (2012:345), states that the discrimination and limitation of people with disabilities⁸ within South Africa has often been ignored and has been given a secondary place to issues of gender, race and religion. People with disabilities are the most marginalised in all societies on the grounds of cultural, physical and especially social barriers (Marumoagae, 2012:346). These individuals are mostly perceived and scripted as those with some “negativized form of human difference” (Swinton, 2012:177). The script becomes increasingly

⁸ It is essential to grasp that the individual's disability is not die primary characteristic that they can and should be identified by. Therefore I choose to refer to such individuals as ‘*people* with disabilities’ rather than ‘the disabled’. See Swinton (2012:173) on the importance of the language used to refer to people with disabilities.

problematic to those who are classified as disabled or ‘abnormal’. Claassens (2013:55) emphasises that “[p]robably one of the most daunting challenges facing people living with disabilities is the stereotypes and misguided perceptions regarding disability that pervades society today”⁹.

The above (and many more) categories of difference or otherness reduce individuals to particular identifying traits (Thomson, 1997:34) and strip them of a multifaceted existence, sentencing them to a prescribed status, agency and ethos. In other words, certain individuals are handed certain roles to play within this script, based on certain categories to which they are allocated – whether they like it or not. South African Social Work Scholar, Vishanthie Sewpaul (2013:118), affirms this:

A whole range of assumptions slips into our minds when we think or hear of individuals in certain categories... Categorization has an instantaneous symbolism for those within and outside defined categories, and the material and substantive implications of categorization for people are immense, as absurd as the categories in themselves may be.

These categories do however not seem absurd to those perpetuating and endorsing them, as they are so tightly knit into our daily existence:

The ideologies that we hold are reflected in, and reinforced by, activities in the home and school, cultural norms and practices, religion, politics, and the media. Our thinking, in turn, shapes social policies and social structures, reflecting a circular and dialectical relationship between structure and agency (Sewpaul, 2013:119).

The uncritical adherence and perpetuation of this script is detrimental to the health of society and wellbeing of humankind, and without critical reflection, what has been scripted will always seem ‘normal’. Sewpaul (2013:121) seeks to remind us that women-themselves serve as key agents in reinforcing the views of women’s lesser

⁹ One of the most destructive stereotypes or misguided perceptions regarding disabilities is the failure to recognise that ‘disabled’ cannot simply be regarded as a homogenous group. Swinton (2012:179) refers to the term ‘disability’ as a “thin description”, which tempts us to “develop thin understandings of the lives of those people we choose to call disabled”. This thin description creates thin, one dimensional people. Swinton warns that “[t]he moment we catch ourselves using language such as schizophrenics, Alzheimer’s victims, paraplegics, Down’s kids, the disabled, or any other term that tries to sum up a particular form of human difference without reference to unique individuals, we should start to become concerned that our thinking may be suffering from conceptual weight loss of the most serious kind”.

status. Therefore, the setting forth of this absurd state of ‘normal’ lies not simply in the hands of those benefitting from the societal script, but in the hands of those afflicted and marginalised by it.

South African theologian Jan Botha (1993:80) remarked that New Testament scholars expertly reconstruct the socio-political, historical-religious contexts of individual biblical writings, but are less skilled in reading their own socio-political, cultural, historical, and religious contexts. The need for proper, critical exegesis of one’s scripted universe with its ideologies and popular language¹⁰ cannot be overemphasised.

The scripted nature of society is however not a twenty-first century phenomenon, but something integral to life in first century Palestine. Hierarchical ranking was extremely important in this honour and shame context, as it provided the social interaction compass and kept those of power in power (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:49). It was common that individuals and groups would act in accordance to their publically recognised honour rating (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:53), determined by various identity markers such as nationality, religion, health and gender. This naturally included Jesus of Nazareth, who, being a Jewish man, would probably have had his¹¹ ethos, status and agency more or less pre-determined by the script. However, upon reading the narratives of John 4:1-42 and 9:1-41, it would appear that the relationship between the societal script and the actual ethos of Jesus was anything but simplistic. Moreover, the effects of this possible short circuit between the socially prescribed ethos and the ethos actually embodied by Jesus seem to have had interesting effects on other characters within the narratives and possibly on the first audience.

¹⁰ Thatcher (2011:17) emphasises that “[r]elations of gender rely heavily on the use of *language*, and on the exercise of types of social power that some people have over others”. This is also affirmed by Halliday (1976:583), who refers to language as the “realisation of the power structure of society”.

¹¹ In order to take Jesus seriously as a character in the flesh and not paint the picture of him as an abstract deity outside of the script, the personal pronouns referring to him will be in small case letters. This is not the case with the Father, for whom capital letters will be used.

1.3 Problem Statement

Considering the above information, the following problem statement came to be¹²:

1.3.1 Main question

What, if any, are the contemporary¹³ implications of a possible counter-ethos¹⁴ of Jesus to the scripted universe of health and gender in the first century as reflected in John 4 and 9?

1.3.2 Sub-questions

- What is the/a scripted universe?
- How was first century Palestine scripted, specifically in terms of health and gender as key identity markers, and what would the implied status, agency and ethos of different individuals have been?
- How does this script manifest in the various settings within the narratives of John 4 and 9?
- What is a counter-ethos and can it be found in John 4 and 9 through a narrative-critical analysis?
- What would the rhetorical effect of such a possible counter-ethos be to the first century audience and their script?
- What would be the possible implications of such a possible counter-ethos for issues of health and gender today?

1.4 Hypothesis

The perpetuation of life-denying systems of inequality and injustice through the societal script is not a modern problem. Jesus, within the Gospel of John responds and counter-acts to a deeply scripted and symbolic universe and embodies a prominent counter-ethos¹⁵. The effects of this counter-ethos on the characters surrounding Jesus indicate a remarkable glimpse of the possibility of a countering

¹² The problem statement will be formulated in the form of a series of questions, which will guide the study. The exploration of these questions will serve as the framework for the layout of the study.

¹³ The term 'contemporary' is ambiguous since it can both refer to the first century as well as the twenty-first. This is intentional, as it is more fruitful to explore the potential of the text for the historical audience in order to possibly do likewise (not the same!) within the modern day context.

¹⁴ The concept of counter-ethos will be used for counter-scripted ethos, in other words: the ethos that does not concur with the prescriptions of the societal script.

¹⁵ Being fully aware of the fact that the Empire and the Jewish elite also perpetuated these systems of inequality systemically, politically and through jurisdiction, the focus of this study will nevertheless be on the life-denying oppression created by language, stereotyping and popular ideology.

response to the societal script. Exploring the possible counter-ethos of Jesus to the first century Palestinian symbolic universe can provide us with a useful analogy – a dynamic process of interpreting our own context likewise, and finding a counter-ethos to the life-denying scripted aspects of life.

This study will be an attempt to explore whether critical reflection can be done of the perceptions and ideologies that underline the symbolic order of a particular society and to which degree this knowledge and awareness holds the potential to liberate¹⁶ individuals to embody a life-giving counter-ethos, liberating both themselves and others. It is thus an attempt to explore in which ways the social-symbolic order can be refashioned¹⁷ and whether the ethos of Jesus of Nazareth can serve as a possible example of this¹⁸.

1.5 Theoretical framework, research design and methodology

With regard to the research design to be employed in this study a non-empirical, exegetical-hermeneutical study will be chosen. Moreover, a two-fold methodological approach will be followed: for the Johannine text, a narrative-critical approach will be employed, and the settings (temporal, spatial and social) discerned from the narrative will be extended through a socio-scientific analysis of first century Palestine¹⁹. The theoretical framework for this study will be the scripted universe as unpacked by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann. This framework will be applied in the unpacking of the social setting of first century Palestine and explored through a narrative-critical analysis of the Johannine texts (Jn 4:1-42; 9:1-41).

According to Powell (2010:240), narrative criticism²⁰ is paired well with the Four Gospels and would therefore provide an adequate lens through which to explore the narratives of John 4 and 9. Narrative criticism focuses on stories in biblical literature and attempts to read these stories with insights drawn from the field of modern literary criticism. The goal is to determine the effects that the stories are expected to

¹⁶ Ackermann (1993:27) defines liberation in its most basic meaning as “to set free”.

¹⁷ Chopp (1994:9) states that a refashioning of the social-symbolic order is essential in order to include liberation for all.

¹⁸ Herzog II (2000:110) affirms this by stating that Jesus’ public ministry be seen as a “form of praxis, a combination of action and reflection for the sake of changing the world”.

¹⁹ The narrative settings, which are reconstructed purely from the texts, should not be confused with the historical settings, which are reconstructed through the use of extra-biblical literature. The historical settings will be explored and appropriated to enrich the narrative settings within the texts.

²⁰ This section will discuss narrative criticism in brief terms, but the methodology will be unpacked in 2.2.

have on their audience(s) (Powell, 2010:240). The scholar thus works with the implied author and audience²¹, and not necessarily the historical author and audience (Powell, 2010:241). Narrative critics do not seek to find the application of the text within a specific historical community as historical criticism would, but seek a diverse application within different contexts – thus searching for a whole array of meanings to be appropriated (2010:243)²².

Narrative criticism has often been criticised for being abstract and ahistorical (Powell, 2010:254; Stibbe, 1992:51). As this study will explore the narrative world of the Gospel of John, an awareness of the real contextual world represented within the story is essential. For this reason, the contextual will be accounted for by making use of a social-scientific methodology, with a specific focus on the social world of first century Palestine and the impact of gender and health thereon. A social-scientific methodology explores the sociological, anthropological and psychological dimensions of a text and its context (Barton, 2010:40).

In this inter-methodological approach, I aim to bring the literary dimensions of the texts into conversation with the socio-cultural realities in which the narratives (not necessarily the texts) originated, as far as the texts would allow me. The socio-scientific analysis will ideally provide “a thick description based on the cognitive maps of how people in Palestine believed their universe worked” (Love, 2002:86). Stibbe (1992:52) raises the importance of the relationship between narrative and social identity, and therefore narrative criticism should not exclude the social reality of the narrator and characters. It is however important that the exploration of the social reality be led by the narrative itself and only be used to enrich the narrative settings portrayed in the texts. Even though the social world of first century Palestine (chapter 3) will be explored before the narrative readings (chapters 4,5), the motifs discussed stem from a preliminary reading of the texts in order not to impose socio-scientific and historical findings on the narrative that cannot be found within the texts.

²¹ This refers to the perspective from and to which the work appears to be written. The implied readers are those who will respond to the text in ways consistent with the expectations that we may ascribe to its implied author (Powell, 2010:241).

²² This study will however briefly explore the rhetorical possibilities of the narratives on the historical Johannine community, in order to possibly do likewise in the modern application.

1.6 Scope of study

The study will explore two biblical narratives within the Gospel of John, namely 4:1-42 and 9:1-41. John 4 includes the account of the Samaritan woman at the well. The reason for this choice is the obvious initial embedded status of Jesus and the Samaritan woman within the societal script on the grounds of gender, nationality, race and religion. What Jesus possibly does regarding these seemingly absolute identity markers is remarkable (Culpepper, 1998:139). The narrative of John 9 illustrates the embedded status in this script in terms of the identity markers of health, ability and purity, and yet again illustrates Jesus actively engaging with the social and religious absolutes of the time. Both these narratives embody the interaction of Jesus with someone severely marginalised and scripted on the grounds of gender and health.

Put in narrative terms, the focus of this study will be the ethos of Jesus as character within and toward the social settings within the narratives, and how this ethos plays into the development of other characters. The goal of this study is to explore possible contemporary contributions of Jesus' ethos toward his scripted universe from a narrative reading of the text. Developing a concrete, practical process or model would however take the study beyond the scope of a Master's thesis.

1.7 Demarcation of the texts

As the particular demarcation of the chosen episodes was not simply done at random, it needs to be accounted for. The narrator of the Gospel of John carefully demarcates episodes or smaller narratives within the bigger narrative by using literary conventions such as entrances or exits, or attention to time and place (Brant, 2011:13).

The narrative of John 4 starts with the conjunctions Ὡς οὕτως ("now then"), which draws the audience into the scene. It creates a break between the former speech of Jesus in John 3 and shifts the attention to a different topic at hand, namely the Pharisees' knowledge of Jesus' doings, which serves as the motivation for the change in spatial setting from the Judean countryside to the passing through Samaria (O'Day, 1986:54). Verse 1 also does not follow in the impersonal pronouns of the preceding events, but the narrator speaks of the characters at hand by introducing them again by name. This indicates a break from the preceding narrative.

Verse 43 indicates a change in spatial setting when Jesus departs for Galilee and the audience is moved away from the scene in Samaria. Therefore verses 1 to 42 will serve as the first scene.

The demarcation of John 9:1-41 as a scene is however not as easy, as John 9 technically serves as a continuation from chapters 7-8²³ and 9:41 only provides the audience with a chapter break, which does not necessarily conclude the episode (Brant, 2011:159). Since the focus of the narrative reading remains the societal script in terms of the identity marker of health, this theme will demarcate the text. The introduction of the character of the blind man only occurs in verse 1, as the spatial setting changes from the temple, to an unidentified area outside. The significant ceasing of conflict in John 9:1 compared to that which arises in the end of John 8 also redirects the audience's attention to the scene at hand. As 9:42 signifies a shift from the theme of blindness to the good shepherd discourse, 9:41 can be considered as a boundary in the demarcation of the scene (Köstenberger, 2009:324). The episode will thus be read from 9:1-41²⁴.

1.8 Layout of the study

Chapter one, "Setting the scene", will serve as the introduction, for the background, starting points, objectives, and methods of the study to be laid out. This will include accounting for the methodology and the demarcation of the text. The contextual problems, with specific emphasis on the factors of gender and health, which serve as a starting point for this study, will also be discussed.

Chapter two, "Laying the groundwork", will unpack the essential components of the study. This will include methodological approaches, their strengths, weaknesses and contributions to the study, as well as the reason for pairing the two methodologies. This chapter will also include the unpacking of the theoretical framework of 'the script' or 'symbolic universe' and a brief reference to what the term 'ethos' implies.

Chapter three, "Scripting Jesus: a socio-scientific analysis of first century Palestine", will be aimed at exploring the scripted universe of first century Palestine. This will

²³ Brant (2011:152) emphasises that the fact that Jesus is not named in 9:1 indicates no clear break between 8 and 9.

²⁴ Another reason for the demarcation of 9:1-41 as one episode is the thematic grouping of the happenings as part of the sign of healing (Köstenberger, 2009:324).

include a brief introduction situating Jesus within his first century Palestinian context, which serves as spatial and temporal settings. The main focus will be the social settings within the first century Mediterranean society. Ancient identity markers and what they implied will be of great importance, with specific attention given to the influence of health and gender, and how this societal script was perpetuated. The findings in this chapter do however not yet serve as the narrative settings for the episodes, but will be appropriated to provide depth and insight into the narrative settings which will be discerned from the text. The socio-scientific analysis thus serves to open up a world of possibilities to be *appropriated* in the narrative readings as the texts allow us.

Chapter four, “Scripted by gender: a narrative reading of John 4:1-42”, will situate John 4 and 9 within the larger narrative of the entire Johannine Gospel and provide narrative insights on the Gospel as a whole. This will be followed by a narrative-critical analysis on John 4:1-42 in the form of *retelling*.

Chapter five, “Scripted by health: a narrative reading of John 9:1-41”, will comprise of a narrative-critical analysis on John 9:1-41, in a similar fashion than 4:1-42. This chapter will conclude by returning to the question of counter-ethos and use the findings of both narratives to seek whether and how such a phenomenon can be spoken of.

Chapter six, “Counter-scripting? Contemporary appropriations of a counter-ethos”, will briefly explore the possible rhetorical effect(s) of the narratives on the first century Johannine community and finally return to the contextual situation discussed in chapter one to explore possible contributions of the narrative analyses of John 4 and 9.

A separate **conclusion**, “The invitation”, will serve as a concluding summary of the study.

2 Laying the groundwork

2.1 Introduction

When embarking on an exegetical journey like this study, one becomes aware of the manifold methods available to explore biblical texts. This is due to the various layers of interpretation at work in the different parts of the process – from the historic event to the modern reader (Gooder, 2009:xix). In an attempt to make sense of the ever expanding range of ways of interpreting biblical texts, scholars have divided the manifold methodological approaches to the text roughly in terms of three broad categories: the world *behind* the text, *within* the text, and *in front of* the text (Gooder, 2009:xviii).

The world behind the text, often referred to as the author-centred approach (Tate, 2008:2), refers to the events and context that lie behind a certain text (Gooder, 2009:xviii). This approach will see the text as a window through which meaning can be accessed (Green, 2010:10) and the “social, political, cultural, and ideological matrix of the author” is of key importance in the process of discerning meaning (Tate, 2008:2). The meaning of the text is thus contained within its history, and the historical context of the text serves as essential to the exploration thereof (Green, 2010:11). Methodologies within this approach include historical criticism, socio-scientific criticism, and the use of extra-canonical Jewish and Greco-Roman literature. This approach is necessitated by the gap between the original contexts in which texts were birthed and the modern contexts in which they are and have been read throughout centuries. It invites the reader into the context and framework in which the texts originated and serves to provide a better understanding of the situations which necessitated the composition of certain texts. Scholars who use this methodology as their sole approach have been criticised for neglecting the texts-themselves (Tate, 2008:3). The realisation of this greatly led to an approach which would give more attention to the texts.

The world within the text, also called the text-centred approach (Tate, 2008:4), refers to the attempt to understand the words within the text without the need to interpret the events and circumstances that inspired the text or those who first received it (Gooder, 2009:xviii). This approach became especially popular since the 1950's, where the conviction gradually began to grow that meaning can be extracted

from biblical texts irrespective of extensive knowledge regarding the historical worlds they originated in (Tate, 2008:4). The belief in textual autonomy can be regarded as the springboard for this methodological approach, as meaning is believed to reside within the artistry of the finished text. Methodologies within this approach include genre analysis, discourse analysis, modern linguistic and word study, and narrative criticism (Green, 2010:12-13). This approach is useful in drawing attention to literary codes and the artistry of the text, but has often been criticised for pronouncing the author and reader, virtually dead, since they are not regarded as key role players in the pursuit of meaning (Tate, 2008:4).

The *world in front of the text*, also referred to as the reader-centred approach (Tate, 2008:4), refers to methodological approaches where the main concern lies with the way in which the context of the modern reader affects the interpretation of the text (Gooder, 2009:xviii). Readers bring to the text a vast world of experience and conviction and this approach takes them seriously in order to obtain meaning from the biblical text (Green, 2010:13). Texts are regarded as units that contain potential meanings, which become actualised in the world of the reader(s) (Tate, 2008:4). The texts thus engage the readers as they engage the texts (2008:5). Methodologies within this approach include feminist, post-colonial, and queer criticism.

Considering all of the above, it becomes clear that, when choosing a methodology, one immediately narrows the scope of the study and will automatically not be able to give (equal) attention to every nuance and detail of the text. Green (2010:14) emphasises that no one method can claim to give the full interpretation of biblical texts and that a single ‘correct’ method will always remain an illusion. It is therefore important to be aware of the limitations and scope of each interpretative method.

This study will attempt to bring two methodological approaches into dialogue with one another: the one being narrative criticism (with the *world within the text* as focal point) and the other socio-scientific criticism (with the *world behind the text* as focal point). Gooder (2009:xix) refers to *pluriformity*, the combination of multiple methods and views in order to engage more holistically with the biblical text, as one of the new and innovative trends among scholars. In order to understand the reason for the use of the two specific methods, and how they could possibly be combined in a

complimentary way, the technicalities, contributions, presuppositions and limitations of each of these two methods need to be explored.

2.2 Narrative criticism

Narrative criticism interprets the New Testament narratives²⁵ as literary texts, using categories that are applied in interpreting all other forms of literature... (Malbon, 2009:80).

This method, also sometimes referred to as *narratological criticism*, is a text-centred approach, which seeks to interpret the text in its final form, primarily in terms of its own story world (Gunn, 1993:171; Malbon, 2009:80). Narrative criticism concerns itself with the literary rather than historical elements in order to interpret the text and assumes that the literary work contains a life of its own (Jonker, 2005:95; Malbon, 2009:80). The text itself serves as the point of departure and the platform of meaning (Jonker, 2005:96). Elements such as plot, characterisation, setting and rhetoric are utilised in order to attempt to understand how the story could communicate meaning (Gooder, 2009:47; Malbon, 2009:82).

Narrative criticism is usually employed in the study of the Four Gospels, the Book of Acts, and occasionally the Book of Revelation (Rhoads, 2011:107). The focus is on the world of (or within) the story and how it is told. This methodology formally emerged in the 1970s when redaction critics became aware of the fact that gospel writers were crafting stories designed to impact their audiences through the art of narrative (Rhoads, 2011:107). The emergence of narrative criticism thus served as a call to explore the story within the text and not simply the world outside of it, as source- and form critics were accustomed to (2011:108).

The focus of narrative criticism is the world created by the narrative, which has its own specifications and dynamics. The actual historical world behind the text is therefore not of primary concern in this methodology, even though it can never be fully ignored. For this study, certain factors regarding the narrative will be of greater concern than others. These include the implied author and audience, narrator and narratee, plot, setting(s), characters and rhetorical strategy and effect.

²⁵ A narrative can be defined as “any work of literature that tells a story” (Powell, 1990:23).

2.2.1 *Implied author and audience*

The implied author, as well as the implied audience, is a construct discerned from the narrative²⁶. The implied author reflects the perspective from which the work appears to be written (Powell, 2010:241). It is the presence of the author found within the text, and may differ from that of the historical author (Jonker, 2005:98). Culpepper (1983:16) emphasises that the implied author actually never communicates with the audience directly, but can be seen as the sum of all the choices made by the actual or real author in the composition of the work. Various works by the same historical author can portray various implied authors, as the perspectives on life will vary. The narrative will therefore always portray the values, beliefs and truths of the implied author.

The implied audience would be the ideal audience implied by the values and beliefs portrayed within the story (Rhoads, 2011:109). It would be those who actualise the potential meaning of a certain text and respond in ways the text would seek to invite (Powell, 2010:242). Powell (1990:21) emphasises that the implied audience is a hypothetical concept and that it cannot be said with certainty that such (a) person(s) ever existed or ever could exist. Other than historical critics, who seek to determine the effect(s) a text had on a specific historical reader or hearer, narrative critics usually discover a wide range of meanings applicable in a variety of contexts (Powell, 2010:243). The goal of narrative criticism is to read the text as the implied author within a variety of contexts²⁷ (Powell, 1990:20). Through the narrative the implied author would thus lead the ideal readers or hearers into a process of embodying the ideal ethos portrayed within the text. This is done through the use of the plot, setting, characterisation and rhetorical strategy (Stibbe, 1992:10).

The actual author and audience cannot be known through exploring the implied author and audience, but only through a historical construction of the world behind the text (Jonker, 2005:98). Many scholars however believe that, due to the vagueness and uncertainty regarding the authorship of some biblical texts, the

²⁶ The term 'audience' is used instead of 'reader', since the narrative originated within an oral context and therefore the written account of the Gospel does not signify the birth of the narrative (Malbon, 2009:81).

²⁷ Powell (1990:21) however reminds us that "[t]o the extent that the implied reader is an idealized abstraction, the goal of reading the text 'as the implied reader' may be somewhat unattainable, but it remains a worthy goal nevertheless".

implied and actual historical author will more or less coincide (Jonker, 2005:99). For this study, the implied rhetorical effect of the narrative will be of more importance than the actual historical interpretation thereof, and therefore an attempt is made to read the text from the perspective of the implied audience. The first probable historical audience, namely the Johannine community, will however be sketched in broad terms to illustrate the possible challenges of the narratives to the ancient context and perhaps move in a similar direction concerning today's context²⁸. In this process, the role of the narrator and narratee cannot be neglected.

2.2.2 Narrator and narratee

Along with the implied author and audience, the narrative also contains a narrator and narratee. The narrator is the person telling the story (Jonker, 2005:99). This person can either be part of the events and serve as a character within the narrative (first person narrator), or be omniscient and not bound by the story (third person narrator). A third person narrator can also be in more than one place or within more than one temporal sphere at a time (Jonker, 2005:100). The Gospels generally employ a third person narrator. Jonker (2005:99) uses the metaphor of film to explain the function of the narrator as similar to the eye of the camera, choosing what information will be made visible to the audience. The option to choose what the audience sees and hears has great power to persuade and manipulate (Jonker, 2005:100). The techniques used by the narrator can give the audience a good idea of the response he/she is trying to evoke (Jonker, 2005:100). This is why exploring rhetorical techniques (to be discussed later) within the text is so important.

The narratee also functions independently from the characters in the story (Rhoads, 2011:109). This is the group or individual to whom the story is told by the narrator. The narratee and narrator are not necessarily identical to the implied reader and author, but serve as rhetorical devices created by the implied author (Powell, 1990:26). Rhoads however (2011:110) points out that, generally within the gospel

²⁸ This does not imply a positivistic application of the perceived theological truths of the text to the modern context, but rather an attempt to discern possible processes of meaning making between the text and ancient context and apply a similar (but not identical) process to the unique modern context.

narratives of the New Testament, the narrator shares the beliefs and values of the implied author, and the narratee is usually identical with the implied audience²⁹.

The literary critic Seymour Chatman (1978) originally proposed a model to illustrate the relationship between the different (historical and textual) authors and audiences (Malbon, 2009:80):

Actual author > [implied author > narrator > narratee > implied audience] > actual audience

Figure 1 Visual representation of the relationship between authors and audiences

This model, which has been updated by several scholars, illustrates the flow of the narrative as originating from the pen of the actual or historical author, written according to the convictions of the implied author, which is voiced and directed by a narrator to the narratee, who attempts to create an implied audience in the life and situation of a specific actual or historical audience who physically hears or reads the narrative. As mentioned above, in the case of the Gospel of John, there is little reason to distinguish the implied author from the narrator, as well as the implied audience from the narratee, and therefore, the term 'narrator' and 'implied audience' will mainly be used to encapsulate these terms. The probable relationship between authors and audiences of the Gospel of John can therefore be illustrated as follows:

Actual author > [narrator > implied audience] > actual audience

Figure 2 Adapted visual representation of the relationship between authors and audiences

The scope of narrative criticism generally includes that which falls within the confines of the brackets of the above illustration, and thus the actual author and audience do not generally enjoy as much (if any) attention in this methodological approach. To some, this is regarded as a great pitfall of narrative criticism.

By pairing narrative and socio-scientific criticism, this study seeks to encapsulate something of the actual author and audience and therefore seeks to move beyond the above brackets³⁰.

²⁹ The Gospel of Luke serves as a good exception to this rule, since the story seems to be told to someone named Theophilus (Lk 1:3), who serves as the narratee and is not identical with the implied audience (Powell, 1990:27).

2.2.3 Plot

For the narrative critic the sequence and selection of events carries particular meaning potential to the implied audience (Malbon, 2009:81), and therefore the plot serves as particular concern. Malbon (2009:81) defines the plot as the way in which the events of a narrative are selected and arranged and that which answers the *what* and *why* questions of the narrative. It is precisely the plot or story-line that characterises a narrative being as such (Jonker, 2005:96). As characters serve as the agents of the plot (Rhoads, 2011:111), the analysis of a narrative cannot exclude characterisation.

2.2.4 Characterisation

Since the 1980s characterisation has gained remarkable prominence within exegetical studies (Merenlahti & Hakola, 1999:13). Characters are not simply objects of the narrative, but active subjects. Some are flat and predictable, whereas others are round and show great depth and development (Powell, 2010:247). Malbon (2009:81) defines flat characters as those who consistently embody only one trait, whereas round characters appear more complex. Some scholars categorise characters in terms of the categories of static or dynamic, depending on the way their basic profile changes or remains the same throughout the narrative (Powell, 1990:55). Static characters are those who do not show any growth or change, whereas dynamic characters embody some form of character development.

The narrator introduces and develops characters to the audience in such a way that the audience is given the opportunity to make their own value judgements on them. Characters can be portrayed through words and actions – their own, those of the narrator or those of the other characters (Malbon, 2009:81). They are usually evaluated and portrayed in relationship to one another. This creates a certain impression with the audience, which can be confirmed or overturned as the narrative unfolds and the characters develop (Rhoads, 2011:112). Generally in biblical narrative the goal is not to fix attention on the characters and their own psychological situation, but rather to use them as part of the story line, since they serve as an important part of the process of forming the ideal audience and conveying the

³⁰ An extensive study of the Johannine community and their reception of the text would however be beyond the scope of this study. Some brief and general remarks of the possible transforming potential of the text within the Johannine community will be made in chapter six.

message of the narrative (Jonker, 2005:97). Within the two narratives that this study will explore, the characters, and how they develop in terms of the setting and one another, will be of great importance.

Each narrative provides a certain standard of judgement, also referred to as the point of view, according to which the audience will evaluate the characters. This can be a certain value, state of being or ideal character. The narrative critic must accept the implied author's point of view, even if they do not share it (Powell, 1990:25). Within the Gospel of John, the standard of judgement, or point of view, is belief in Jesus³¹. The narrator of John thus affirms belief in Jesus and condemns unbelief (Rhoads, 2011:112). This value of belief and the knowledge of Jesus' true identity will become very significant in the reading of both the Johannine narratives, since it will serve as a dividing factor between the protagonist(s) and antagonists and will mark the development of both the Samaritan woman and the healed blind man.

2.2.5 *Setting(s)*

Characters do not simply act, but rather act toward or in relation to a certain setting. The setting provides the limitations of the narrative and is anything but neutral. It embodies the cultural and religious backdrop for the characters within the narrative. Malbon (2009:81) emphasises that external factors, such as geographical location or chronology (spatial and temporal settings) are not so much the priority of the narrative critic as internal factors such as the social world and internal systems of meaning (social settings). The spatial and temporal settings will therefore only be briefly explored, where the social setting(s) will serve as a focal point to shed light on the actions and behaviours of the characters. The scripted universe of first century Palestine will be unpacked in order to build on and better understand the social settings within the narratives of John 4 and John 9.

2.2.6 *Rhetorical strategies and effect*

The narrator makes use of various storytelling *strategies* to evoke a certain response from the audience (Rhoads, 2011:112). These strategies include symbolism³²,

³¹In Jn 20:31 the narrator states that the events conveyed in the Fourth Gospel have been selected so that the audience may "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" and that through this belief, they might have life in his name.

³² Symbolism can be defined as a "recognition that something means more than it initially appears to mean" (Powell, 1990:30).

repetition, intertextuality, irony³³, parallelisms³⁴, quotations, and so forth. The narrative also has an implied rhetorical *effect* which refers to the possible ideal impact it was to have on its audience and is closely related to the implied reader (Rhoads, 2011:113). Here the focus moves from what a story says to what it *does*, or was *meant to do*. This does not always fall within the scope of narrative analysis. However, since narrative is one of the best ways of conveying convictions and a specific message, Jonker (2005:108) emphasises that narrative criticism must go beyond simply exploring the literary qualities of the text and move towards an understanding of the theological intention of these documents.

2.3 Strengths, limitations and contributions of narrative criticism to this study

Alan Culpepper, in his ground-breaking *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* criticised the way in which the Gospel of John was often solely seen as a window into the lives of the Johannine community and therefore reduced to history. This led to the failure to acknowledge the genre of story and narrative within the Gospel (Culpepper, 1983:8). It needs to be kept in mind that the Gospel of John is a narrative and therefore Culpepper (1998:62) opts for a narrative analysis as the starting point, stating that it tells a story in which Jesus and those around him are the characters.

This method empowers the text to communicate meaning and views the narrative as an end in itself (Powell, 1990:7). It invites the reader to explore the narrative and to work with what the texts presents us with rather than with what has been 'left out'. Powell (1990:86) however emphasises that narrative criticism does not allow the opportunity to fully escape the use of sources other than the biblical text, since a basic social knowledge is important in order to understand the setting(s) of the narrative. For this reason, this study combines the narrative approach with a socio-scientific approach.

Another great advantage of narrative criticism is the fact that it has a way of bringing scholars and non-professional Bible readers together (Powell, 1990:87). Since the motivation for this study stems from societal issues, the transforming potential of the

³³ Powell (2010:248) defines irony as "literary cues that indicate readers are expected to interpret the story in ways that run contrary to what might initially appear to be the obvious interpretation".

³⁴ A parallelism can be defined as a literary phenomenon where two textual bodies (words, lines, paragraphs, etc.) "may exhibit synonymous, antithetic, or synthetic parallels of thought" (McKim, 1996:200).

texts needs to be opened up and made accessible to those very societies. Narrative criticism provides the reader with a revelation in the present, since it is found in the story which remains with us today (Powell, 1990:99). The implied author and audience open up the meaning potential of the text to an audience not necessarily familiar with the historical context and all of its conventions (Powell, 1990:20).

Furthermore, narrative criticism stands in close relationship with faith communities in the sense that this method offers exegesis from a faith perspective (Powell, 1990:88-89). Powell (1990:88) notes that although historical criticism has enriched faith communities in insight regarding biblical texts, it has often demanded scepticism which does not quite correlate with the position of faith that the believing communities embody. Culpepper (1998:474) affirms this by emphasising that the indispensable source of vitality and life for faith is not found in hypothetical historical reconstructions, but comes mainly from the biblical texts themselves – very often the narratives of the Gospel.

Narrative critics are aware that the world of the text is not necessarily the physical world of reality and therefore the world and content of the narrative is not necessarily regarded as factual or historical. Jonker (2005:107) affirms that the value of the narrative does not necessarily lie in its historical correctness, but with the testimony of faith in God³⁵. The reader is thus prevented from approaching the narrative genre with the wrong questions.

Stories and narratives also have the power to transform individuals, which thereby has the potential to transform whole societies.

Powell (1990:90) emphasises this:

There is an increasing appreciation among scholars today for the ability of stories to engage us and to change the way we perceive ourselves and our world. What is it that makes stories so infectious? Some have suggested it

³⁵ Jonker (2005:107) uses the example of the book of Jonah to argue that, whether Jonah really existed or whether a giant fish really swallowed him, will not affect the theological message of the book. It is however important to note that the historical accuracy of some details within the narrative of the Gospel of John is important and in this sense, the Jesus-narrative does differ from other biblical narratives such as the book of Jonah. Whether a man named Jesus actually existed and whether he really died and rose again is central to the Christian faith (see the Apostles' Creed: <http://frcrockingham.org/about-us/what-does-it-mean-to-be/creeds-and-confessions/theapostlescreed.pdf>).

is their resemblance to life itself; the narrative form itself corresponds in some profound way to reality and thus enables us to translate our experience of the story world into our own situation (Powell, 1990:90).

A lot has however been written regarding the shortcomings and limitations of narrative criticism and to embark on this exegetical journey in an accountable and transparent way, these also need to be discussed. Many scholars have criticised this method for often anachronistically applying modern literary methods and theory to ancient texts (Powell, 2010:255). Jonker (2005:107) warns against imposing modern literary theory on ancient texts without the required investigation.

Alongside this is the objection that narrative criticism forces methods designed for the interpretation of fiction upon biblical narrative such as the Gospels (Powell, 1990:93). Many have complained that it treats the text as a mere story and not as a record of a significant moment in actual history (Powell, 2010:254). To this, Powell (1990:94) argues that narrative criticism is used to explore the poetic function of a text, regardless of its historical accuracy. He distinguishes between form and genre: the Gospels qualify as narratives in their form, but the genre remains undisputedly gospel. Narrative criticism seeks to explore the form of the text and therefore does not subtract from its historical reliability.

The biggest critique against this methodology is the opinion that it often ignores the historical and social dimensions of the text (Stibbe, 1992:51). Since any narrative communicates and engages with a historical value system, the focus cannot solely lie on the literary text without situating it within a historical context. Rhoads (2011:109) emphasises that even though a narrative reading will explore the story portrayed within the text, readers need to keep in mind that the Gospels are still first century narratives and therefore make use of what they know of the first century – not in order to add to the text, but in order to understand it better.

The potential impact of the narrative on the first audience also sheds light on the rhetorical potential of the text, and therefore, although the focus remains on the narrative world, the social and cultural information from which the text originated can unlock many possibilities in terms of interpretation. This study would therefore not simply take into account the context from the world in which the *narrative* originated

(early first century Palestine), but also briefly of the world in which the *text* originated (late first century Ephesus).

Another objection to narrative criticism is that this method views the Gospels as coherent narratives, and therefore does not take into account the inconsistencies and interplay of different sources used by the author(s) to compile the text. Many scholars therefore claim that narrative criticism assumes a unity in the text that in fact is not there (Rhoads, 1999:266; Powell, 1990:92). Even though this is a valid criticism, Powell (1990:92) claims that this objection misses the point, as it presumes that the legitimacy and unity of the narrative is something to be proven from an analysis of the material and compositions thereof, where the narrative itself in actual sense grants coherence. Narrative criticism encourages a shift from the author to the reader or hearer, and therefore the study of redaction becomes somewhat insignificant to the exercise (Rhoads, 1999:267). All works of literature have a process of compilation, which is not (necessarily) studied in order to understand the poetic function of the final product (Powell, 1990:92). Therefore, this study will not seek to explore the process of compilation of these texts or evaluate the literary unity of the narratives. It is also important to account for the fact that this study will not consist of a narrative analysis of the Gospel of John as a whole, but will cast the lens on two specific episodes (Jn 4:1-42; 9:1-41) within the greater narrative.

To overcome some of the limitations of this methodology, some scholars resort to methodological pairing, as narrative criticism is highly compatible with other interpretative methods³⁶ (Malbon, 2009:87). Rhoads (2011:113), one of the pioneers in this act of pairing, affirms this by referring to the pairing of narrative criticism with socio-scientific criticism. Here a cultural-anthropological analysis is made of the dynamics of the story-world. In doing so, it becomes possible to determine in which ways the narrative mirrors the social world and in which ways it subverts it. Since the first century Palestinian society was a high-context society – in other words, the individuals within the society were very much aware of their social situation – the narrator does not always see the need to explain social and cultural phenomena to the audience but assumes the knowledge of it in the implied reader (Malina &

³⁶ There are scholars who find narrative criticism on its own insufficient for interpreting the biblical text (Malbon, 2009:87). This can however be said of all interpretative methods, since each one has its limitations and shortcomings (Powell, 1990:97). It is therefore crucial to be aware of the scope and limitations of one's chosen method and to be able to account for doors opened and doors left shut.

Rohrbaugh, 1998:16). This is problematic for twenty-first century low context audiences³⁷, who do not have the contextual vocabulary to understand the significance of certain things within ancient texts. The internal features of settings (especially the social setting) would thus not be known to the modern reader if the socio-scientific world is not explored. For this reason socio-scientific criticism will be used on the context of first century Palestine.

2.4 Socio-scientific criticism

Socio-scientific criticism, built on the foundation of historical criticism, is a methodology which makes use of social sciences, which would include sociology, psychology and anthropology, to better understand the world of the New Testament (Barton, 2010:40). This methodology can be used to explore the world behind and in front of the text, but just as effectively to explore the world within the text³⁸ (unpacked as the narrative settings) (2010:41). This approach presupposes that the narrative within the text is a product of social and cultural conditioning. The aim is to discern the extent to which cultural factors and social forces played a part in the lives of those involved in producing the biblical narrative and how it is manifested within the narrative itself.

Barton (2010:42) describes the function of this methodology as focussing on “the way meaning is generated by social actors related to one another by a complex web of culturally determined social systems and patterns of communication”. This interdisciplinary approach covers an extremely wide array of phenomena and it is important to note that the interpreter will mainly determine the focus of the methodology (Malina, 2009:20). The socio-scientific method is partly indebted to the sociology of knowledge, studied and theorised by individuals such as Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann and can be referred to as “sociological exegesis”.

³⁷ “Low context societies, like the industrial West, produce detailed texts that spell out matters in considerable detail and leave little to the imagination” (Neyrey, 2003:108). When such a low context reader reads a high context text, he/she will not do so imaginatively and any information left out by the narrator will be regarded as irrelevant if the possible world behind the text is not explored.

³⁸ In this study socio-scientific criticism will be used to explore the world behind the text, in order to illuminate the conventions found in the world within the text. In this process, it is essential to remain aware of the tension between the historical and narrative dimension.

2.5 Strengths, limitations and contributions of socio-scientific criticism to this study

Socio-scientific criticism has been a great contributor in discerning a deeper cultural and communal dimension to biblical texts (Barton, 2010:42). This methodology has put new questions on the exegetical table. Howard Kee (1989:65-69) identifies seven such questions: boundary questions, authority questions, status and role questions, ritual questions, literary questions with social implications, questions about group functions, and questions concerning the symbolic universe and social construction of reality. This study will lean more towards the last question, without ignoring the others.

Barton (2010:44) emphasises the ability of socio-scientific criticism to piece together fragmented texts into a larger, explanatory whole. Although this whole remains hypothetical, it can help the interpreter “fill the gaps in understanding created by the fragmentariness of the texts as source of historical information” (2010:43). Here, the assistance of other disciplines, such as the social sciences, becomes important and useful for New Testament scholars to ensure that the field of biblical scholarship is being used as effectively as possible (Malina, 2009:20). As the interdisciplinary nature of this methodology is one of its greatest assets, it also serves for one of its biggest challenges, as it could be difficult to attempt to interweave disciplines and fields that are not primarily connected and did not originate in the same camp³⁹ (Malina, 2009:20).

Another contribution of socio-scientific analysis is the fact that it could possibly guard against theological docetism, which is the sole regard for a-contextual theological truths, abstracted from the historical and literary setting of the text (Barton, 2010:44). Socio-scientific analysis thus seeks to move beyond ideas and rather discern how these ideas were embodied in the real lives of people within the first century. This methodology is not blind to the fact that modern, Western readers are foreigners to the first century world in which these texts originated (Malina, 2009:13). It seeks to overcome the ethnocentrism of modern readers by identifying the probable social,

³⁹ Malina (2009:20) states that several of the philosophical roots of socio-scientific criticism stem from epistemological atheism and are therefore not primarily rooted in a theistic world view. Although the atheistic genealogy of some of these methods can be helpful in cultivating a hermeneutics of suspicion, the interpreter needs to be aware of this.

psychological and anthropological phenomena of the ancient context and translating it into an understandable language for modern readers (2009:13).

As any methodological approach, socio-scientific analysis also has its limitations. One of the dangers of this method is anachronism, where modern sociological, psychological and anthropological methods and models could be enforced on an ancient context without taking the significant differences between the contexts into consideration (Barton, 2010:47). This could result in the text, and happenings within the text, losing its particularity⁴⁰. The danger of claiming too much within the socio-scientific analysis also needs to be noted (Barton, 2010:48). Although this method sheds a certain light on the text, often highlighting aspects that are overlooked by other methods of interpretation, socio-scientific analysis is only one lens and cannot claim to encompass the full interpretation (2010:48). The construction of the first century world remains hypothetical and tentative, and therefore needs to be applied with the greatest humility.

2.6 The contribution of the methodological pairing for this study

Even though these two methodological approaches differ in their scope and focus, they do not necessarily contradict one another and can even be used in a complimentary fashion. According to Rhoads (1999:280), narrative and socio-scientific criticism go well together, as socio-scientific criticism “helps to clarify the common assumptions made by author and hearers in the act of communication”. Powell (1990:98) opts for a symbiotic relationship between narrative and historical approaches to the text and for these different methods to be used side by side in order to supplement one another⁴¹. This study presupposes the Johannine Gospel as a narrative testifying of the historical Jesus⁴² and that the narrative used by John therefore reflects an actual social reality.

⁴⁰ Examples are Jesus simply being interpreted as one of many charismatic leaders or the early church as just another millenarian movement (Barton, 2010:48).

⁴¹ This will however not be an attempt to oversimplify the relationship between the historical and narrative, since there remains a tension between the two.

⁴² Scholars such as Robinson and Stibbe also affirm this notion and claim that the Jesus within the Gospel is read as a historical Jesus rather than simply the Johannine reconstruction of Jesus (Stibbe, 1992:69). Stibbe (1992:75) emphasises the story-like character which is inherent within the life-history of Jesus. As this study explores the narrative world of the Gospel of John, an awareness of the very real contextual world represented within the story, and the very historical nature thereof, is essential.

Gunn (1993:171) emphasises that no paradigm or method can ever guarantee the ‘correct’ interpretation of the narrative, and therefore the inclusion of socio-scientific criticism in the narrative analysis will broaden the exegetical lens, but still only capture a glimpse of what the text has to offer. Powell’s (1990:101) metaphor effectively illustrates the incorporation of the socio-scientific within the narrative reading of John 4 and 9:

Different methodological approaches to exegetical study may be likened to a set of keys on a ring. The various keys open different doors and grant access to different types of insight. Narrative criticism has been able to open some doors that had previously been closed to scholars... But it will not open all the doors... Some of these may yield to a historical-critical inquiry; others require assistance from outside the field of biblical sciences altogether.

The complementary use of socio-scientific and narrative criticism in no way supposes a full set of keys and this study will leave so many doors unopened, but it is the intent of the study to explore perhaps a few exciting new rooms in the house we call biblical studies.

The pairing of the socio-scientific and narrative is especially found in the incorporation of the societal script of first century Palestine in the narratives of John 4 and 9. As the societal script (or often simply referred to as ‘the script’ or ‘symbolic universe’) will serve as the methodological framework of the study, it is essential to unpack the concept.

2.7 The script

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann were pioneers in the exploration of a ‘symbolic universe’, which they define as a socially constructed “overarching universe of meaning” (1966:115). The symbolic universe is not an ideal realm removed from everyday life, but “the system of meanings that anchors the activities of individuals and communities in the real world” (Johnson, 1999:11). In this symbolic universe, *typifications* are produced among individuals (Berger & Luckmann, 2002:43). As humans observe one another, they begin categorising others and acting accordingly. In this interaction, the lives of individuals are defined by a widening sphere of taken-for-granted routines. This essentially leads to the formation of a social world.

The concept of institutionalisation becomes increasingly important within the confines of a society. Institutionalisation is the cementing of habitual ethos of individuals into the societal order (Berger & Luckmann, 2002:43). Ethos can be defined as “habitual character and disposition”, which differs from ethics, which is a “scientific discipline, dealing with the process of human decision-making on moral issues” (Smit, 1991:52). It involves more than moral values, but also encapsulates the cultural and communal, and speaks of who and where individuals and groups are (Schütz, 1976:289-292). Schrag (1986:179-214) defines ethos as the shared intellectual space of freely accepted obligations and traditions as well as the *praxical* space of discourse and action. Ethos is thus a concept which encompasses behaviour, thought, conviction, and ethical system.

The more an ethos becomes institutionalised, the more predictable and controlled it will become. How things are thus becomes normative – in other words, how they *ought to be*. The institutions of a society are perceived as something existing over those who embody it and having a life of their own (Berger & Luckman, 2002:45). Berger and Luckmann (2002:43) refer to this as “incipient in every social situation continuing in time”. Every society contains within itself a social script, reinforced and affirmed by the repetition of the appropriate ethos, and individuals within this particular society will perpetuate the specific script when acting according to their given status, agency and ethos. Berger and Luckmann (2002:46) refer to the “paradox that man [sic] is capable of producing a world that he [sic] then experiences as something other than a human product”. In other words, the ‘actors’ are ignorant of the fact that they are writing the script, as it seems like the script is writing itself.

When this script is passed on to others, it is done with the understanding of ‘this is how these things are done’ or ‘this is how it has always been’. It becomes real, cannot easily be changed, and is experienced as an objective reality even though it is actually humanly constructed and produced (Berger & Luckmann, 2002:45-46). Most individuals are ignorant to this fact and, despite not understanding or agreeing with the script, they continue acting it out and handing it down to others.

Berger and Luckmann (1966:194) therefore emphasise that identity and ethos exist within a dialectical relationship to society. Ethos is formed by social processes, which maintain, modify or even reshape it. The social processes involved in both the

formation and the maintenance of identity and ethos are determined by the social structure. The ethos of the individual again maintains, modifies or reshapes the given social structure. Thus the script and ethos of those within its order influence one another respectively. Meeks (1983:6) affirms this by his definition of society as a “process in which personal identity and social forms are mutually and continuously created”. The perpetuation of this script is essential to social control, which exists in every society (Berger and Luckmann, 2002:43). When new members enter into the social sphere, the institutional world is passed on to them (Berger & Luckmann, 2002:44). In other words, the script is handed down.

Language and discourse, mostly of casual nature, serve as the principle way in which the script is perpetuated (Berger & Luckmann, 2002:48-49; Blount, 1995:13; Malina, 2009:14). Halliday (1976:572) emphasises that all languages, sounds, words and structures are socially charged. Social dialects always have an inherent hierarchical character determined by class, religion, sexuality, economic ability, and many other factors (Halliday, 1976:580). Thus, according to Halliday, the social function of this dialect is to “express, symbolize, and maintain the social order” and that the social order is essentially hierarchical. Blount (1995:11) affirms this by stating that “[t]he language we use conditions our perception of both our selves and the social structure in which we live and act”.

Schüssler Fiorenza (1999:46) moreover emphasises that language serves a far greater function than simply creating and transmitting meanings, but that it in a sense “transmits values and reinforces certain social systems and patterns of behaviour”. Morality and appropriate ethos is thus determined by citizens through public discourse (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1999:66). Reynolds (2013:21) refers to language as the vehicle for inscribing the “normal” into our everyday sense of who we are within a social identity. This leads individuals and groups to “buy into the cult of normalcy”, since it is presumed that security entails “conforming to the projected strength of others, bolstered by the conventions of society and its power mechanisms” (Reynolds, 2013:22).

Berger and Luckmann (1966:172) affirm this when they refer to casual conversation (which includes verbal and non-verbal communication) as the most powerful vehicle of reality maintenance. These social interactions are flooded with ideology, which

“produces discourses that can be seen, heard, spoken, proclaimed, printed, believed, [and] valued” (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1999:152). This social reinforcing of the script depends on its casual nature for its reality-generating action (Halliday 1976:581). As long as it is casual and unquestioned, it is at its most effective. Therefore, discourse can be oppressive without the speaker or actor even being aware thereof.

An example is the everyday phenomenon of *kyriocentric language*, which refers to language not simply propagating male domination, but a whole system of factors such as racism and colonialism (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1999:51).

Kyriocentric language does not cover up but constructs reality in a certain way and then mystifies its own constructions by naturalizing them... kyriocentric texts, literary classics, visual arts, works of science, anthropology, sociology, or theology do not cover up reality “as it is”. Rather they are ideological-rhetorical, constructs that produce the invisibility and marginality of wo/men as a given reality (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1999:51).

Discourse can be applied in various ways to perpetuate the societal script. Rosnow and Fine (1976:91) refer to gossip as talk with a social purpose, which is primarily used by groups to maintain an already established social hierarchy or exclusivity. This would include the affirmation of group values (Capps, 2012:105). Gossip supports hierarchical sorting and keeps individuals in their place within societal order (Capps, 2012:104). While gossiping, participants remind one another of what they share, but also remind themselves of what they do not share with those discussed.

Under this umbrella of discourse few others are as powerful as religious discourse as the script is often perpetuated from the pulpit. Schüssler Fiorenza (1999:11) stresses that the Bible, and the way in which it is interpreted, plays an important role in the “social construction of reality and the discursive formations that determine individuals, religious communities, and society on the whole”.

As anyone working with wo/men suffering from domestic and sexual violence can tell, the words of Holy Scripture keep many religious wo/men in such places of violence (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1999:14)⁴³.

As the script is enforced and perpetuated in many ways of discourse, it is important to note that it is not simply something enforced from the top down, but essentially negotiated and contested in a process of multi-dimensional discourse (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1999:153). This means that even those who do not gain from the societal script internalise and perpetuate it unknowingly. “All human groups enculturate their members into internalized sanctions that keep those members from disrupting the group” (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:120). In his definition of what ‘a place’ consists of, Moxnes (2003:12) emphasises the role of social structures and forces, which organise individuals and groups as they ought to be (everything and everyone has its place). People therefore seem to be unconsciously oriented toward the values of their group or society and allow themselves to be guided by traditional meaning systems in their social behaviour (Stegemann, 2002:53).

Young (1990:148) therefore stated that oppression is not primarily enacted in official laws and policies, but in “informal, often unnoticed and unreflective speech, bodily reactions to others, conventional practices of everyday interactions and evaluations, aesthetic judgements, and the jokes, images, and stereotypes pervading the mass media”. Eiesland (1994:98) refers to the “attitudinal supports” that rob individuals of their dignity and rightful place in society, whereas Thomson (1997:5) speaks of the “cultural encoding” of individuals and their bodies.

One of the primary ways in which our universe is ordered is that of (conscious and subconscious) purity codes. DeSilva (2000:245) refers to the fact that people of different classes or races would often not even consider dating or getting married, simply because of the awareness of some boundaries between them that dare not be crossed. The way in which people often treat the homeless is also evident of this virtual boundary. Since homeless people are seen as having lost their rightful place within society, they are virtually regarded as unclean and even in some cases their presence within a certain space would be condemned as making the space impure

⁴³ One ought to be cautious not to simply make the biblical texts the culprit here, since texts are always *interpreted* in order to gain meaning from them.

or unclean (deSilva. 2000:245). These purity rites are not formally inscribed anywhere and stem from no legal code or system, but are deeply ingrained in the world view of individuals or groups.

Mary Douglas (1966:35) refers to the notion of ‘dirt’, which can be defined as “matter out of place”. To have “matter out of place” there needs to be a system of organisation that defines the natural order of things (1966:41). In other words, there needs to be a script. This script is constantly construed by the specific society and individuals and their behaviours are assessed in terms of this framework. When ‘dirt’ is removed, the system is yet again affirmed. This is the essence of purity codes: to order the world and then make sense of one’s world by using this “seemingly Divine” order (deSilva, 2000:246).

Individuals can find themselves scripted by manifold identity markers, but due to restricted space, this study cannot include a detailed discussion of all of these⁴⁴. The identity markers of health and gender, and how individuals are scripted according to them, will be the focal point of the socio-scientific analysis of the first century Palestinian context, and will be of concern in the narrative reading of the two texts. These identity markers also serve as the motivation for the chosen texts, as the script manifests itself in the characters and their ethos in both texts – in terms of the broad category of gender with the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4), and the broad category of health concerning the blind man (Jn 9).

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter served to unpack and explain the significant aspects of the study. We have established that narrative criticism will serve as an effective methodology in the reading of the texts, and that a socio-scientific analysis of first century Palestine can be useful in providing the modern low-context audience with some depth regarding the narrative settings. The concepts of societal script and ethos have also been explained. The next chapter will provide a detailed socio-scientific description of the social world of first century Palestine, whilst keeping the theoretical framework of the societal script in mind.

⁴⁴ Thomson (1997:5) identifies disability, race, gender, class, ethnicity, and sexuality as only a few of these “culture-bound, physically justified differences”.

3 Scripting Jesus: a socio-scientific analysis of first century Palestine

3.1 Introduction

Whenever reading a narrative, one needs to be aware of the fact that any story represents a wide array of social constructs of reality (Rhoads, 1999:278). It is therefore helpful to the audience to attempt to grasp certain details of the social world in order to better understand the settings of the narrative. For this reason, socio-scientific criticism has proved to be a fruitful tool in the illumination of the Gospel narratives (Rhoads, 1999:279). Johnson (1999:11) emphasises that one of the many benefits of a sociological analysis of the New Testament is the fact that it takes into consideration that human beings are not simply individuals but part of a complex social system, which exists not only on the grounds of how we behave, but on what and how we think. Stegemann (2002:52) emphasises that “the ethos of Jesus arose in a real-life context” which was “generally determined by the social system and cultural value orientations of his society”. Jesus did not simply act a-contextually but conversed with his social context and responded to a real life scripted universe, which also features in the narratives of John 4 and 9.

In order to work towards an understanding of the ethos of Jesus and to explore the possibilities of cultivating something life-giving and -sustaining within our own context, it is imperative to explore the scripted universe of first century Palestine in which Jesus found himself. This tentative unpacking of the symbolic universe will feature as an extension of the settings portrayed in the texts. The narrative settings will thus be enriched by what we are able to construct socio-scientifically. Before the social setting can be unpacked, it is essential to firstly discuss the spatial and temporal settings.

3.2 Situating Jesus: spatial and temporal setting

The narrator of the Gospel of John situates the narrative in terms of the person of Jesus. Therefore, in order to place the narrative in a certain time and place, the person of Jesus needs to be situated.

For this study, Jesus is assumed to have lived within Palestine in the 20s and early 30s of the first century⁴⁵. First century Palestine was primarily an advanced agrarian society, under the control of the Roman Empire (Hanson & Oakman, 2009:94). This context was shaped by three main forces: Israelite tradition, the Roman Empire and Hellenism (Hanson & Oakman, 2009:7), and was therefore anything but simplistic.

3.3 The scripted universe of Jesus: social setting

First century Palestine was highly stratified, with power relations greatly infiltrating society on all levels (Hanson & Oakman, 2009:104). Pilch (1991:149) refers to lineal-orientation or hierarchical concern as something integral to the lives of all the people within the first century Mediterranean⁴⁶. The foundational value orientation of this society was that of honour and shame, which altered and determined the boundaries of an individual's identity and behaviour. Scott (1989:79) states that everyone within this society had a certain "social map", which defined their position concerning identity, kinship and behaviour⁴⁷. One of the most important components concerning the social context of first century Palestine was the collective nature of identity formation. Once this is accounted for, several other social and societal phenomena become more clear and understandable.

⁴⁵ I am aware of the fact that, by exploring the context of the Gospel of John, two possible historical situations come to the fore. One being the late first century context of the Johannine community in Ephesus, who probably were the first to receive the Gospel of John in written form, and the second being the earlier Palestinian context in which Jesus lived and acted, within which the oral tradition of the narrative originated (Love, 2002:86). For the purpose of this study, and in line with the character of narrative analysis, the earlier Palestinian context will be the chosen one. However, as we will see in chapter six, the early Palestinian and late Ephesian contexts feature more on a continuum as they share a similar societal script, and cannot be regarded as mutually exclusive and removed from one another (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:11).

⁴⁶ At the top of the pyramid was the urban elite (roughly 1-2% of the Palestinian population), comprising of Herodians, high priests and lay aristocrats. In the next strata were those known as the retainers. This group represented 5% of the population and included bailiffs, tax farmers and scribes. Merchants, artisans and some day labourers represented the nonurban elite (roughly 3-7% of the population). The majority of the population comprised of freeholders, small freeholders, tenants, village artisans, day labourers and slaves, which represented 75% of the population overall and were referred to as peasants. The bottom of the pyramid was reserved for the unclean, degraded and expendables (10%), such as beggars, prostitutes, tanners, sailors, the poorest day labourers, bandits, ass drivers, usurers, dung collectors and shepherds. This group would not be allowed to identify with any other group and separation from them was ideal (Rohrbaugh, 2002:35-36).

⁴⁷ I would however be wary of agreeing with Scott's use of the word 'everyone', as there were seemingly some exceptions to the rule, such as social bandits, who protested against the symbolic order of society (Hanson, 2002:285). They arose from peasants who could not maintain their honour and social standing and would therefore be labelled as 'deviant' by the elite (2002:288). It could however be argued that they were, ironically, simply acting out the script of deviance assigned to them. For a more thorough discussion on social banditry, see Hanson (2002:283-300), and Malina & Rohrbaugh (1998:262-263).

3.3.1 *Collective identity formation*

First century Mediterranean people were socially defined (Malina, 1996:36). Identity formation was a collective and relational process which naturally lent itself to stereotyping others (Pilch, 1991:248). Malina (1996:21) emphasises that the ancient Mediterraneans judged according to socially shared stereotypes. Within this group-centred society, interdependent collaboration was the norm (Pilch, 1991:146). This also implies that the individual's needs were necessarily subordinate to the needs of the group (Pilch, 1991:149). Malina (1996:42) states that behavioural controls were “social, deriving from a set of social structures in which all persons [were] expected to participate and to which they [were] to adhere,” and that behavioural controls were not “within the person” or under control of the “choice of ‘conscience’”. Within this collectivistic society, the option for personal opinion was largely absent⁴⁸ and opinions were derived from social consensus (Malina, 1996:84)⁴⁹. Very important in this collective society, was the role of family.

3.3.2 *Kinship as identity marker*

The primary social domain in first century Palestine was that of kinship and thus the family and its concerns were at the foreground. All family members were socially and psychologically embedded within the unit. Females also found themselves embedded within males – as wives, mothers and daughters. Females not embedded within males, such as widows with no sons or divorced women, were essentially without honour and lived with a reduced status⁵⁰ (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:88).

The family also had a tremendous impact on the wider society as political structures were essentially determined and influenced by the form and function thereof (Hanson & Oakman, 2009:21). Kinship also influenced one's political, social and economic standing within society. The honour of a family would directly determine the honour of the individual, and individuals were expected to act within the social parameters of their family name and honour (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:32). Malina (1993:37) emphasises the importance of maintaining the gap between those of a

⁴⁸ There were some exceptions to this rule. Malina (2009:14) refers to pseudo-individualists as people who acted like modern individualistic persons. These were however at the very top or very bottom of the social ladder and were in the absolute minority.

⁴⁹ The notion of social consensus will be of particular importance in the collective affirmation of dogma and judgement as seen among the Jewish leaders and crowd in the narrative of Jn 9.

⁵⁰ This gives some profound insight on the Samaritan woman's marital arrangements (Jn 4), and will be picked up in chapter four.

higher status and those who found themselves in the lower strata of the pyramid. The gap between a superior and his/her subordinate had to be clearly visible and demonstrated through the behaviour of both parties to maintain honour. Inside, as well as outside of the family, gender featured as one of the most prevalent markers of identity, status and agency.

3.3.3 *Gender as identity marker*

Not only was the patriarchal system, which assigned public life domination to (specifically elder) males, the ideology of the day, but the entire social space was gendered and gender roles were extremely important (Hanson & Oakman, 2009:12)⁵¹. The ancients viewed the world and everything in it as being divided in terms of gender (Neyrey, 2003:102). Within the home or family, individuals were primarily defined by their gender and this “gender-focused family served as the organizing structure of Mediterranean life” (Malina, 1993:71). Both Jews and Gentiles agreed on the hierarchical organisation of the household, where the father or husband had authority over all other members (deSilva, 2000:180).

This awareness of and emphasis on gender created a basic symbol in terms of which life and reality were to be interpreted and read. The gender division was already prevalent at the birth announcement of an infant (Malina, 1993:72). If the new-born was male, a far more expensive gift would be expected from the women attending the birth. Within the Mediterranean-Judean culture, this overemphasis on maleness would be taken so far that some parents simply counted their sons in order to list how many children they had (Malina, 1993:73).

Hanson and Oakman (2009:24) argue that the male/female differences in the first century might have been drawn from the legal system, but that for the most part, these had to do with the “assumptions operating deep in the society’s structures, arrangements, and habits”. In other words, the gender-based ethos of groups and individuals did not primarily stem from formal laws and decrees, but from the ideologies underlining the societal script. The privileged status of the male was largely engendered by the idea that the seed of the man carried the life of the child

⁵¹ Patriarchy cannot simply be defined as the rule of the father, but the rule of the male elite. It is thus not a system confined to gender alone, but also to class (Schottroff, 1995:31).

and that the woman merely provided the womb. This was further compounded by the Israelite creation story in which the man was created first and the woman formed out of his rib (Hanson & Oakman, 2009:24). Overall the female represented the natural subject and was often treated similarly to property⁵² (deSilva, 2000:180-181).

Not simply was male supremacy theologically and biologically legitimised, but males also feared females in a great sense, since it was believed that the man, simply by looking at the woman, could be overpowered by lust for her (Hanson & Oakman, 2009:25). Females within a certain family structure, under the submission of a male, were not antagonised as much and were even at times worthy of praise, if they strictly adhered to the parameters set by males. Thus a mother, wife, daughter or sister would be “worthy of love, care and respect” (2009:25). Females from the outside were however severely antagonised and men felt that they needed to protect themselves and their families from them⁵³.

Within the household, gender division was regarded as essential for maintaining order:

Before anything else I should speak about the occupations by which a household is maintained. They should be divided in *the usual* manner: to the husband should be assigned those which have to do with agriculture, commerce, and the affairs of the city; to the wife, those which have to do with spinning and the preparation of food, in short, those of a domestic nature (Hierocles, *On Duties*: 4.28.21; cf. Neyrey, 2003:103; emphasis added).

Females were expected to manage the household (*oikos*) and males were to be in charge of the public domain (*polis*). Philo (*Virt*: 19; cf. Neyrey, 2003:102) referred to the differences in the shape of the male and female body as a sure indication of the different tasks assigned to the different genders. Only men would be allowed to instruct others and to teach within a public space (Malina, 1993:17).

⁵² DeSilva (2000:182) emphasises that although females were treated in ways *similar* to property, there is not enough evidence to prove that they were regarded as property.

⁵³ This gives us great insight on how the Samaritan woman of Jn 4 was probably antagonised within her society.

Valerius Maximus (*Fact. Et. Dic.*: 3.8.6; cf. Neyrey, 2003:107) put it this way: “What have women to do with a public assembly? If old-established custom is preserved, nothing.” It would be considered “putting on men’s airs” when a woman would use the public domain to speak (Plutarch, *Lychurgus and Numa*: 3.5; cf. Neyrey, 2003:107). In line with these cultural norms, it was unthinkable for a woman to enter a town and start testifying in the public space to what would probably have been men (Jn 4:28-29). A woman like this would not simply shame herself and her family, but would show no regard for her womanhood, clothing herself in that which is male.

Not only was it forbidden for females to speak in public, but a lone woman wandering the streets in the sight of other men was condemned. The private sphere was centred around the household, including spaces such as the village well, where women went about their business. The only time women would be allowed to enter the public sphere was when going to the temple and even this was to be done after noon, when the market place was empty (Hanson & Oakman, 2009:26). The ideal was to keep women out of the gaze, as well as speech of men (Neyrey, 2003:106). The less a female’s name would feature in the conversations of men the better it would be for the honour of her and her family. The ideal would thus have been for the fame of a woman to be known to many only after her death, but while alive, there ought to have been “no random talk about fair and noble women, and their characters ought to [have] be[en] totally unknown save only to their consorts” (Plutarch, *Apophthegmata Laconica*: 217F; cf. Neyrey, 2003:107). To have anyone but your spouse know and speak about your general and personal affairs was utterly shameful⁵⁴. The public honour of the family was rather carried by males, in the protection of their family, in virility, sexual aggression and boldness (Hanson & Oakman, 2009:26). Females, on the other hand, protected the family from shame by being modest, restrained and submissive.

3.3.4 *Health as identity marker*

Apart from gender, a person’s condition of health also served as a prominent identity marker. Honour was carried within the body of an individual and ‘honourable’ bodies would be placed higher than others (deSilva, 2000:31-32). A person’s body would therefore also be a good indication of the worth and ranking of the individual.

⁵⁴ This will become of great importance in the narrative reading of Jn 4, especially regarding Jesus’ intimate knowledge regarding the Samaritan woman and her marital relations.

Wholeness of the body was absolutely essential (deSilva, 2000:262). One of the main ways of judging in the ancient times was that of *physiognomics*, where the character of a person would be derived from their physical state of being (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:157). This necessarily dictated the individual's status, ranking and behaviour within the social system.

DeSilva (2000:244) emphasises the significant social dimension of the separation from the sick and impaired. Since holiness and purity referred firstly to wholeness, those with damaged bodies were regarded as unholy or impure (Herzog, 2000:120)⁵⁵. Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998:114) emphasise that people living in the first century paid little attention to “impersonal cause-effect relationships” and therefore would not regard the biomedical cause(s) of a disease or impairment as something worth considering. The major problem of sickness or impairment in the first century was not the individual's inability to act, but the fact that the person's state of being was not seen as valuable (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:114). To be ill was to have something ‘out of place’⁵⁶ and therefore the individual was regarded as ‘out of place’. Examples of such individuals were lepers, the blind, lame and malformed. The blind man in John 9 serves as a prime example hereof as his days were spent on the margin, begging.

Healers in the first century would not so much attempt to address the illness or impairment in a biomedical way, but would rather focus on the social relationships the impaired or sick found them in (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:114). Physicians would seldom, if ever, physically touch their patients and would mostly hire slaves to do this for them⁵⁷. The boundaries of not touching the impaired would not simply be public, but often even within the private sphere of the home. Love (2002:91) states that even within the home, no one was to lay in the bed of a menstruating woman and therefore even intimacy with her spouse and children would cease.

⁵⁵ This will be of importance in the way the disciples initially interpret the blindness of the man in Jn 9 as a result of sin and also in the attitude of the Pharisees and Jewish leaders to this man.

⁵⁶ Malina & Rohrbaugh (1998:114) refer to the example of leprosy, where the afflicted individual would be regarded as unclean and socially out of place, because the outbreak on the skin was something ‘out of place’.

⁵⁷ This will become increasingly important when considering Jesus' method of healing the blind man in the narrative of Jn 9.

The state of health also determined the status and identity of other persons and not just that of the “stricken individual” (Pilch, 1986:102). Parents would discuss the achievements of their children, because it inherently reflected upon their own worth and honour (Malina, 1993:79). The same would apply in the case of sickness or disability. An impaired or unhealthy child would be said to reflect a transgression or error of the parents or ancestors⁵⁸. The quality of the child was therefore essential in determining the quality of the parent. Identity markers also organised individuals into categories called in- and out-groups.

3.3.5 *The in-group and out-group as identity marker*

While out-groups required no commitment from the individual, in-groups assumed commitment and controlled the behaviour of those belonging to this group. Individuals were bound together in an in-group due to the sharing of a “common fate” (Malina, 1996:79). This would include social criteria, as well as cultural boundaries. The distinction between Judeans and other nations serves as a good example of in-group-out-group behaviour (Malina, 1993:47). This was especially true in the case of Samaritans, whom Judeans considered as being part of the out-group and thus stereotyped in a very negative light (Esler, 2002:187)⁵⁹.

While a person’s behaviour toward those in the in-group was characterised by loyalty and compliance with the assumed code of conduct of that group, a person’s behaviour toward those outside of the in-group would be characterised by “defiance of authority, competitions, resentment of control, formality, rejection [and] arrogant dogmatism” (Malina, 1996:79). Each individual would be socialised into this in-group-out-group mind-set and behaviour from infancy. In-group behaviour was characterised by “reciprocity, obligation, duty, security, traditionalism, harmony, obedience to authority, equilibrium... cooperation... dependency, [and] high superordination and subordination in the hierarchy” (Malina, 1996:79). Out-group members were so marginalised that they were sometimes even treated and considered to be animate beings or of another species (1996:81). The suffering and death of those in the out-group was not in the least of concern to the in-group crowd.

⁵⁸ As seen in the assumptions made in the narrative of Jn 9.

⁵⁹ This would imply that Jesus treat the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4) as out-group member.

The boundaries were so clearly drawn that everyone knew who those within the out-group were (Malina, 1993:89)⁶⁰.

3.3.6 *Purity as identity marker*

Another factor determining the status, agency and implied ethos of individuals and groups in the first century would be that of purity. This notion especially flourished due to the great influence of second temple Judaism in first century Palestine. Within the 'purity maps', culture and nationality were key. To the Jews, Gentiles were known as those who practice abominations (deSilva, 2000:256). Other factors such as impairment and sexual sin would immediately render an individual to be considered impure⁶¹. The aim of purity codes was to prevent the 'holy' from being contaminated by the 'unholy', and they were specifically prevalent in the case of bodies (Pillay, 2008:150). The human body was seen as the centre of purity, as it served as a "microcosm of the social body" (Love, 2002:91). Apart from purity, the hierarchical status of an individual was also of key importance.

3.3.7 *Hierarchical status as identity marker*

Malina (1996:127) defines authority as "the social recognitions of the right of another to oblige others"⁶². Authority was assumed on three grounds. The first is an ad hoc standard, such as the one in authority being stronger or wealthier. The second was traditional or customary norms, such as the father being the head of the household, and the third comprised of legal authority.

Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998:49) emphasise the importance of hierarchal ranking within this honour and shame context, as it provided the compass for social interaction and therefore kept the powerful at the top. Leaders gained honour not by standing apart from the script, but by embodying its values (Herzog, 2000:69). These

⁶⁰ This sheds some light on the Samaritan woman's initial reluctant response to Jesus in Jn 4 and will become increasingly important as the narrative and interaction between the two of them progresses.

⁶¹ According to these criteria, both the Samaritan woman at the well, due to her questionable sexual history, and the blind man, due to his disability, would have been regarded as impure. This would imply that both of these characters be denied any religious agency, as they would have not been seen as vessels worthy of the works of God.

⁶² One of these authoritative systems was that of the patron-client relationship. Since first century Palestine was a highly stratified society, with little social mobility, the basis for dependency was ripe. Patrons consisted of those from the elite, who were able to assist those of a lower status or ability, using their wealth, power, authority and influence. Clients were those of a lower status, who found themselves dependant and therefore obligated to these patrons (Hanson & Oakman, 2009:65). Hanson and Oakman (2009:66) state that patronage kept the social hierarchy intact.

hierarchies were determined by several factors such as wealth, power, education, knowledge, religious and ritual purity, local community status, family and ethnic-group positioning (Carter, 2008:54). Stratification was thus multi-dimensional and all-pervasive.

As remarked by Berger and Luckmann (2002:45-46) the societal script in any society is continuously perpetuated by those who find themselves in it. The power of this cycle usually lies precisely in the casualness thereof. It will therefore be helpful to explore the ways in which the script was perpetuated in first century Palestine.

3.4 How was this script perpetuated?

Since power was extremely vulnerable, and the elites were dependent on the societal script to stay in power, the first century symbolic order needed to be clear to everyone (Carter, 2008:56). This scripted nature of identity and ethos was not simply manifesting itself at random, but would be consciously and subconsciously perpetuated by certain systems. One of these was that of honour and shame.

3.4.1 Honour and shame

Various scholars identify honour and shame as the core of social life in Mediterranean antiquity (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:121; deSilva, 2000:23). Malina (1993:1) defines honour as “a person’s (or group’s) claim to worth, along with the acknowledgment of that worth by others in the community”, and therefore “socially acknowledged worth”. First century Palestine was structured in such a way that the maintenance of honour was essential to life (Hanson & Oakman, 2009:4). This entails “reputation, status and sexual identity”.

This orientation meant that individuals were likely to strive to embody the qualities and to perform the behaviors that the group held to be honorable and to avoid those acts that brought reproach and caused a person’s estimation in the eyes of others to drop (deSilva, 2000:35).

The concern for honour permeated every aspect of public life, and therefore the members of society usually adhered to the ethos prescribed to them. Members who did not adhere to the script would be shamed in order that they return to the conduct approved of by the group (deSilva, 2000:36).

In a very pervasive way, honor determined dress, mannerisms, gestures, vocation, and posture, as well as who can eat with whom, who sits at what places at a meal, who can open a conversation, who has the right to speak, and who is accorded an audience. It serves as the prime indicator of social place (precedence) and provides the essential map for persons to interact with superiors, inferiors, and equals in socially prescribed or appropriate ways (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:122).

Honour and shame were also influenced by the family group and lineage each individual belonged to. A person's merits were directly derived from that of his/her lineage (deSilva, 2000:158), which would be influenced by factors such as trades, stories connected to the family, patron/client associations, religious purity, potential marriage partners, etcetera (Hanson & Oakman, 2009:47). Power and honour were often justified by referring to the past (Carter, 2008:97), which placed high importance on lineage and genealogy in establishing the identity and character of a person (2008:161). In many ways the lineage of a person served as the starting point of their honour (deSilva, 2000:28).

The type of honour which the person acquired passively was referred to as ascribed honour (Hanson & Oakman, 2009:48). An individual could also actively acquire honour via public challenge and riposte, which acted as a rhetoric contest between two individuals (deSilva, 2000:28). Since it was only possible to challenge someone equal in honour, this system of honour acquisition did not bring about any mobility in terms of honour ranking. A person with very little honour could therefore not simply challenge a highly honoured person in public, wishing to acquire an immense amount of honour, since the acceptance of a challenge from a person of a lower ranking was shameful⁶³ (Malina, 2001:52).

While the system of honour and shame influenced the ethos of people within all ranks, the criteria for behaviour were not equal, especially regarding a situation such as adultery. In first century Palestine, adultery was seen as the dishonouring of the male by having sexual relations with his wife (Malina, 1993:11). This essentially

⁶³ This will become very significant in the narrative reading of Jn 9, and especially in the public conflict arising between the religious leaders and the formerly blind man.

meant that adultery could never be committed against a woman⁶⁴. The rigidity of the sexual honour of women also implied that any sexual transgression would be held against them for the duration of their lives and that their sexual honour could never be restored. This was not the case for men, who could even regain their sexual honour in some cases (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:124).

It is important to note that the honour and shame system was not simply enforced by those benefitting from it, but that it was internalised even by those for whom it held no benefit⁶⁵. Malina (1993:76) refers to the example of the separation of male and female roles within the household and states that it would have shamed the wife if her husband were to assist her in the household work in the presence of anyone else. Thus, not only the honour of those at the top of the social pyramid was at stake, but even those who found themselves in subordinate positions ran the risk of losing honour when stepping outside of their boundaries. Honouring and shaming therefore became a prominent way of enforcing unlegislated values⁶⁶ (deSilva, 2000:36). Having respect for the societal order and acceptance of one's position in society and in life were seen as being virtuous (Malina, 1996:79). A good example hereof would be the fact that silence was regarded as a highly virtuous quality for females to practice (deSilva, 2000:184) and a woman questioning the social script would be severely frowned upon.

Virtue also connects to the positive definition of shame within the first century. Where shame signified the evaluation of the individual as less than valuable due to actions contrary to that which the group deemed as honourable, it also referred to a sensitivity to the group's and significant others' opinion and an awareness of an ethos that could possibly shame the individual and harm the group as a whole (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:124; deSilva, 2000:25). Thus, the positive characteristic of shame compelled the individual to respect the popular value system and adhere to it so as not to be shamed when stepping out of line. Women were considered as "special bearers" of this positive shame (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:124).

⁶⁴ To the first century audience, the Samaritan woman would therefore not likely have been regarded as a victim.

⁶⁵ This will give some insight regarding the woman's initial hesitation toward Jesus in the narrative of Jn 4.

⁶⁶ The word 'value' can be defined as "some general quality or direction of life that human beings are expected to embody in their behavior" (Pilch & Malina, 1993:xiii). A general value becomes concrete when it is realised within a certain social institution (Stegemann, 2002:53).

3.4.2 *Language*

Malina (1996:80) refers to first century persons rather using context than content in their language. The meaning expressed by language was therefore derived from a deeper level than the wording itself, but lay deeply embedded within the local social system (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:3). Carter (2008:58) refers to rhetoric (which implies language) as a crucial role player in keeping those in power in their position. The language and discourse used was highly contextual and reaffirmed in-group or out-group membership and ethos.

Herzog (2000:92) emphasises the fact that the oppressed did not necessarily need the elite as much as the elite was dependant on the oppressed to stay in a position of power. The oppressed were however conditioned otherwise as their inferiority status was internalised. Thus, even the oppressed perpetuated this social script unknowingly – a great deal through the language they used⁶⁷.

3.4.3 *Religious Tradition*

Not simply were honour and shame, the value system, ideology and language powerful tools in perpetuating the scripted order and nature of society, but the contemporary religious – and especially Jewish – traditions of first century Palestine occupied a significant role. Within Palestine the Judean temple served as a basis of power (Herzog, 2000:104) and was fully embedded within the political and cultural system of the day (Carter, 2008:27; Herzog, 2000:113). The temple also served as a reflection of society, as it arranged people into ranks of purity or wholeness (Herzog, 2000:120):

[T]he temple, by its very structure and ideology, sanctions the ordering of life into a series of interlocking and mutually reinforcing hierarchies for the purpose of drawing boundaries and defining relative degrees of cleanness or purity... The power to define social relationships by including and excluding was as significant as the power to proscribe and prescribe behavior.

⁶⁷ This will become very clear in the way the Samaritan woman (Jn 4) initially responds to Jesus as her very first words to him serve as a tool to identify and script him as a Jewish man and question the appropriateness of his ethos toward her, a Samaritan woman.

The temple did not simply serve as a religious entity, separated from the political and social sphere, but in a sense became an embodiment of and tool for political and social order. Therefore, being excommunicated from it signified more than a religious act, but was social, cultural and political⁶⁸.

Alongside the temple was the Torah. Herzog (2000:149) raises the issue of the “great tradition”, which can be defined as “the social construction of reality”. The carrier of the great tradition within first century Palestine was the Torah and therefore the group that controlled its interpretation, would largely control society. In other words, the Torah served as a stamp of authority on the ideologies of those using it. The Pharisees and Jewish leaders were those fighting for the right to interpret the Torah (Herzog, 2000:150). However, the interpretation of the purity code inscribed within the Torah became a major source of injustice and inequality (2000:164). The purity codes were drawn as an attempt to create a system for God’s cosmic order, so that individuals could know their place (deSilva, 2000:248)⁶⁹.

Within this order, sickness was necessarily connected to impurity⁷⁰ and often sin. This meant that the sick or impaired found themselves not only socially ostracised, but also morally and religiously – as will be explored in the narrative of the healing of the blind man. DeSilva (2000:249) states that “purity issues undergird morality and the ethos of a group, identify the boundaries of the group, and create internal lines within the group, giving structure and hierarchy to the group”.

Within Palestine, the stratification of people from holiest to least holy was a key factor in determining the status, agency and implied ethos. At the top of the pyramid would be the priests, followed by the Levites and then full-blood Israelites. These would be followed by illegal children of priests and heathen converts (called proselytes). Slightly less holy would be converts, who had previously been slaves, followed by bastards (those born from mixed marriages and incest). These would be followed by the fatherless, foundlings and eunuchs (castrated men). Moving towards

⁶⁸ This will be discussed further in chapter five, as the expulsion from the synagogue serves as a very important event in the narrative of Jn 9.

⁶⁹ This is ever so clear in the way the religious leaders theologise around the identity of both Jesus and the blind man in the narrative of Jn 9.

⁷⁰ DeSilva (2000:243) refers to purity codes as a way of talking about what is appropriate and what is not within a certain society. That which is out of place, and therefore impure, would typically be referred to as pollution.

the bottom of the pyramid would be those with sexual deformities and hermaphrodites. Gentiles were at the very bottom (van Aarde, 2002:78).

The primary criteria for this pyramid of holiness were the marriage regulations obtained within the second temple period, which dictated who could marry whom and who could enter the temple (van Aarde, 2002:79). The purity of the individual was directly connected with his/her ability to marry or have a 'normal marriage' according to societal norms and therefore those with an ambiguous or 'incomplete' sexual identity would be placed at the bottom of the pyramid, followed by Gentiles who were never considered eligible for marriage within the Israelite tradition. The art of naming or stereotyping would have been key in the maintenance of these structures.

3.4.4 Stereotyping

Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998:149) emphasise that ancient identities came through stereotyping – whether it was the affirmation of the person's position and behaviour within the social system⁷¹ or whether in the form of deviance labelling⁷². People were not known by their individual personalities, but by the label(s) under which they were classified and stereotypical descriptions and explanations were used as a framework into which human behaviour had to fit (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:165). Appearances were regarded as very important and the way in which a person was perceived by others determined their – and their family's – social worth and standing (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:124).

The necessary social information on a person could be derived from the label they carried (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:165). Negative labelling, or deviance accusations, would be used to undermine a person's place in the community (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:150). The dangerous labels or stereotypes within the first century would include examples such as sinner⁷³, unclean, demon-possessed and barren. The relationship between stereotypes and identity was reciprocal in the sense that who someone was, was derived from their specific stereotypical identity

⁷¹ This could have positive or negative implications. Compare for example the label of 'lord' to that of 'peasant'.

⁷² Deviance labelling could never be positive, since it meant that the individual acted 'unscripted' and therefore even positive behaviour not adhering to the script would evoke suspicion and antagonism.

⁷³ This form of deviance labelling will be specifically important in the narrative of Jn 9, as the religious leaders use it to stereotype both Jesus and the formerly blind man in order to undermine their authority and agency.

markers, as much as stereotypical identity markers were derived from the way in which a person conducted him/herself (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:165).

3.4.5 *Gossip*

Another vehicle for the perpetuation of the script and its ideologies in the first century was that of gossip. Daniels (2012:207) defines gossip as “a face to face evaluative talk between two individuals or groups about an absent third-party subject, generated by unexpected, unscripted words and/or deeds that cut against the grain of managed impressions of the way things ought to be”.

Gossip served as a prominent social phenomenon during the ancient times (Daniels, 2012:204). The fact that first century Palestinians found themselves in a collectivist society, which was underlined and controlled by the notion of honour and shame, propelled gossip. The purpose of gossip and rumour would have been to reinforce the social script in line with a certain event (Daniels, 2012:207). Rohrbaugh (2007:138-144) emphasises the function of gossip within the Mediterranean first century as that which formed and maintained boundaries, enforced group values, assessed and organised society into roles, functions and importance.

Since a social script reflects the shared values of the community that construes and affirms it, it is understandable why gossip is at times quite vitriolic in character seeing that an event generating the talk is essentially challenging the script (Daniels, 2012:207).

Gossip implied the passivity of the person discussed, but not necessarily their physical absence. It could therefore occur in the presence of an individual, where people would murmur among themselves, exclude the subject from the conversation, or simply openly discuss him/her within the third person (Daniels, 2012:207). The lack of agency therefore mainly characterised the process of gossiping.

In the Gospel of John, the identity formation of individuals through the process of gossip and rumour is quite common (Daniels, 2012:209). An example is the way in which Nicodemus describes Jesus according to the gossip and rumour networks of the Judeans. The identity of both the Samaritan woman at the well and the blind man have probably been greatly influenced and enforced by the act of gossip within their societies.

3.5 Conclusion

It is clear that the societal script is not at all unique to the twenty-first century, but was integrally part of the lives of those living in first century Palestine. This script worked towards interpreting, determining and reinforcing the prescribed status, agency and ethos of different individuals and groups in line with identity markers pertaining to kinship, purity, status, collective grouping and especially gender and health. It seems unlikely that this script was in any way questioned or protested against, but was rather perpetuated by the social concept of honour and shame, language, religious systems, stereotyping and gossip. This societal script qualifies as part of the potential settings of the narratives of John 4 and 9 and will be appropriated as the narrative allows in the next two chapters. After roughly orienting ourselves in terms of the potential social settings behind these narratives, it would seem appropriate to enter the narrative world of the Gospel of John.

4 Scripted by gender: a narrative reading of John 4:1-42

4.1 Introduction

The Gospel of John is regarded by some scholars as the centrepiece of the Johannine writings (Johnson, 1999:525). It tells the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Many debates have arisen regarding the complex composition process of this Gospel and scholars agree that it cannot simply be considered as an eye witness account (Johnson, 1999:525)⁷⁴. It is however not the purpose of this study to explore the process of composition and discern the 'real' or primary Fourth Gospel from the possible multiple redaction processes, as this does not fall within the scope of narrative criticism. When embarking upon a narrative reading of a text, the final form of the text as we have it is the focal point (O'Day, 1986:50). Rhoads (1999:265) refers to the two main functions of narrative criticism as exploring the story world of the narrative, and analysing the implied rhetorical impact. The latter will be the focal point of chapter six, whereas the next two chapters will serve to explore the story world of the texts. These chapters will therefore serve as a guide into the narrative world of the Gospel of John and especially the episodes of John 4 and 9.

It is important to note that, as mentioned in chapter two, this study will not comprise of a narrative reading of the entire Gospel of John, but will examine John 4:1-42 and 9:1-41 as narratives or episodes within the greater narrative of the Fourth Gospel. This is not usually regarded as characteristic of traditional narrative criticism (Merenlahti & Hakola, 1999:15; Rhoads, 1999:264), but Rhoads (1999:272) remarks that detailed treatments of episodes within the greater narrative are becoming more popular among scholars. Culpepper (1983:88-89) affirms this in the case of the Fourth Gospel by stating that the entire plot of the Gospel of John is compressed into each individual episode⁷⁵. Thus, the plot of a narrative episode such as John 4:1-42 can in itself function as a prototype of the overarching plot of the entire Gospel. This does not mean that these two episodes will be regarded as isolated from the bigger

⁷⁴ Most scholars agree that the development of the Gospel of John was a lengthy and complex process, as the tradition probably originated in early Palestine and was penned down in written form in or around Ephesus in the years 90-100 (du Rand, 1993:20). The Gospel as we have it, probably underwent a long process of literary development, which would include the "collecting and editing of oral and written material into various editions" (1993:29).

⁷⁵ The plot of the Johannine Gospel will be unpacked in 4.2.1.

narrative, or from each other. Therefore, the bigger narrative context of the entire Gospel of John will be briefly unpacked before the individual episodes are analysed.

The reason for the specific choice of narratives or episodes is the fact that these narratives seem to portray characters typically scripted by identity markers of health and gender (among others), but that both of the characters (the Samaritan woman at the well and the blind man healed on the Sabbath) seem to emerge as dynamic, showing some significant character development when confronted by the identity and ethos of Jesus (Culpepper, 1983:103), which does not quite seem to be in accordance with the societal script. Both narratives seem to portray a conflict in the behaviour of Jesus with what is socially, culturally, and religiously acceptable, and how this conflict is interpreted by various characters. Another consideration for the choice of these specific two texts is the fact that they seem to tie in with one another thematically. Conway (1999:135) even goes as far as referring to the blind man as the male counterpoint to the Samaritan woman at the well.

These narratives illustrate how a similar social climate, or symbolic universe, can embed different characters in different ways within society, and what possibilities for development the ethos of Jesus could open up. The narrative readings will thus give specific attention to the behaviour of Jesus toward the social setting and the other characters. The broad social world behind the narratives, as identified in chapter three, will be appropriated in terms of the narrative settings of the episodes. The 'societal script' of first century Palestine (or at least that which applies to the narrative settings discerned from the texts) will serve as the constant in terms of which the ethos of Jesus and development of other characters will be explored. The temporal and spatial settings will also be used to illuminate the social settings, but will not serve as main foci throughout the reading. As stated above, the episodes used are part of a greater literary unit, so, before they can be explored, their position within the Gospel of John as a whole, as well as relation to one another, needs to be unpacked.

4.2 John 4 and 9 as part of the larger narrative

Both of the texts explored in this study fall into the larger textual unit within the Gospel of John called *The Book of Signs*⁷⁶. In this section Jesus performs seven miraculous signs, which evoke different responses from different characters (Hakola, 1999:225). The works of Jesus stand in close relation to his identity. Therefore this literary unit is categorised by constant attempts to identify Jesus – by himself, the narrator and by others (Johnson, 1999:539).

Culpepper (1983:70) surmises that the Gospel of John covers roughly a period of two and a half years over twenty one chapters. The events are centred around the three Passovers (2:14-3:21; 6:5-65; 13:1-19:42), which represent three subsequent annual intervals. Jesus' three days in Samaria (Jn 4:1-42) happen during the first year, where the healing of the blind man (Jn 9:1-41) is believed to have taken place around the Feast of Tabernacles in the ninth or tenth month of the second year (1983:72). It is therefore important to realise that these two narratives signify events that occurred more than a year apart – the antagonism of the religious leaders toward Jesus has for example increased severely between chapter 4 and 9.

Moreover, the narrative speed of the Fourth Gospel is not equally spread out and the narrator is known for glossing over some parts (summaries) and slowing down during others (scenes). Scenes refer to “instances when the duration of discourse time and story time are roughly equivalent” (Powell, 1990:38), whereas summaries only provide essential information and generally encompass a period (Culpepper, 1983:71). Scenes will consist mainly of dialogue and monologue with some interruptions from the narrator. Both John 4 and 9 can be regarded as a scene⁷⁷. Scenes and summaries are arranged in a particular order known as the plot.

4.2.1 Plot

The plot serves to interpret events by placing them in a particular sequence, context and narrative world (Culpepper, 1983:85). Thus, the actual events are secondary to

⁷⁶ The Gospel of John can be divided into five main literary units (Johnson, 1999:534): the *prologue* (1:1-18), which announces major themes within the book, *The Book of Signs* (1:19-12:50), which focuses on the deeds of Jesus, *The Book of Glory* (13:1-20:31), which consists of the revelation of Jesus' glory through teaching his disciples (13:1-17:26), the manifestation of his glory through his death and resurrection (18:1-20:31), and an *appendix* (21:1-25), which shows the restoration of Peter and interprets the death of the beloved disciple.

⁷⁷ Throughout the study, ‘episodes’ or ‘narratives’ will be most commonly used when referring to these narrative scenes.

the message or the story, which gives meaning to them. The examination of the plot is therefore essential in order to discern meaning and message from the narrative. Each of the four Gospels essentially tells of the same events, but their plots are developed in a unique way to convey a specific meaning according to the specific contextual challenges of the different audiences. When the plot of the Johannine Gospel is considered, the prologue becomes increasingly important, as it provides an introduction around which the plot revolves. John 1:11-12 can be seen as a short summary of the Johannine plot:

He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

The plot of the Gospel of John can therefore be said to revolve around “Jesus’ fulfilment of his mission to reveal the Father and authorize the children of God” (Culpepper, 1983:88). This notion seems to repeat itself within nearly every episode in the larger narrative, and therefore the story can in a sense be said to be repeated (Culpepper, 1983:89). The plot does not revolve around the *development* of Jesus’ character, but around the revelation of the identity of his eternal, steadfast and static character, which *leads to* development in other characters⁷⁸. This plot is propelled by the conflict between belief and unbelief, acceptance and rejection of Jesus and his ethos⁷⁹. This is done by the use of various episodes or smaller narratives within the bigger story (Culpepper, 1983:97). The narrator can be regarded as the grand artist behind the plot.

⁷⁸ For this reason, the ethos of Jesus will be the focal point of the narrative analysis. This ethos however seems to continually clash with another constant – the societal script. The conflict between these two constants and the call for a re-orientation will become increasingly important in the discussion of the rhetorical effect of the narratives in chapter six.

⁷⁹ In terms of conflict, the first four chapters of the narrative embody no more than “token opposition” to Jesus and a “foreshadowing of more to come” (Culpepper, 1983:91). These chapters serve to establish the audience’s conviction of the identity and mission of Jesus. In Jn 5, the conflict around Jesus suddenly intensifies and escalates. This conflict around his identity and the refusal of the Jewish leaders to accept his true identity reaches a new height in Jn 7, where the opposition begins to mobilise itself and factions start forming among the crowd (Culpepper, 1983:92). The verbal confrontation between Jesus and the Jewish leaders reaches its climax in Jn 8, after which the pitch of hostility seems to drop in 9 and 10, still perpetuating the division among those who believe in Jesus and those who do not (1983:94). The next transitional moment is to be found in Jn 12, where Jesus’ public ministry is brought to a close and the audience is prepared for his arrest and death. Jn 18 sets events into motion for the death of Jesus, after which he is captured, interrogated and crucified. After this, the conflict is resolved by the resurrected Jesus appearing to individuals and remaining with his disciples in the end of the narrative (Culpepper, 1983:97).

4.2.2 *Narrator*⁸⁰

The narrator describes the setting and characters and is responsible for guiding the audience through the story, providing perspective and point of view (Culpepper, 1983:16-17). In the Fourth Gospel, the narrator embodies a very active role, often interrupting dialogue in order to share his/her⁸¹ point of view.

In John, the narrator is the one who speaks in the prologue, provides explanations, translates terms, and tells us what various characters knew or did not know (Culpepper, 1983:17).

The Johannine narrator can be said to be self-conscious, since he/she is aware of the fact that they are communicating to a real group of people, and soon gains the audience's trust as a reliable source to the meaning of the life and death of Jesus (Culpepper, 1983:17).

In terms of how the narrator conveys information, the prologue is used as a space where the audience is given preliminary information regarding the narrative. This allows first impressions to be formed and confirmed before the narrative sets into motion (Culpepper, 1983:19). Comments by the narrator are also distributed throughout the story, used to introduce, illuminate and conclude scenes. This narrator is therefore generally active and involved and immediately provides the audience with enough information to understand the story (1983:19). In the reading of the two texts, narrative comments will become increasingly important, as these remarks paint the picture of the narrative settings and will allow links to be made between the behaviour of characters and the societal script.

Considering the point of view of the Johannine narrator, it is clear that he/she serves as an observer of the action and therefore can be identified as a third person narrator⁸² (Culpepper, 1983:21), providing an omniscient point of view, being able to give insight on the feelings, thoughts, motives, and emotions of some of the

⁸⁰ As stated in 2.2.2, the term 'narrator' will be used to refer to the narrator as well as the implied author, since these two are in perfect accord in the Gospel of John (Powell, 1990:26).

⁸¹ The Johannine narrator is identified as neither male nor female and therefore gender-inclusive pronouns will be used when referring to him/her.

⁸² There are however some instances where the narrator speaks in the first person plural (1:14,16; 21:24), but these are exceptions to the rule.

characters⁸³. The narrator can give insight into what Jesus knows and therefore serves as an authoritative interpreter of his words (Culpepper, 1983:34). The thoughts and feelings of Jesus are specifically helpful and a reliable source in providing insight into the other characters. The narrator also makes numerous references to the inner thoughts and feelings of the disciples. The audience is thus provided with inside views which the characters would not usually have. The depth of the narrator's insight is however limited (Culpepper, 1983:22).

The responses of various characters are also explained by the narrator by revealing inner knowledge about them. John 9:22 serves as a good example here, as it motivates the reaction of the healed man's parents to those who questioned them⁸⁴. Over all, the narrator does not make any deep analysis of any of the characters, but his/her omniscience serves in guiding the audience through events and giving explanation for certain actions. The narrator however doesn't share everything he/she knows and claims to have knowledge which is not made known to the audience (Jn 20:30; 21:25). Powell (1990:26) remarks that this is done in order to keep the audience dependant on the narrator.

Spatially the narrator of the Gospel of John is omnipresent, as he/she is free to move between places and characters (Culpepper, 1983:26). In the case of John 4, the narrator is present when Jesus and the Samaritan woman converse at the well, but moves with the woman to her village when she testifies about Jesus, while simultaneously reporting on the conversation between Jesus and his disciples at the well. Where the narrators of the Synoptic Gospels are spatially confined to the earth, the narrator of the Gospel of John can also describe the Divine realm (1:1-5) (Powell, 1990:26). Temporally the narrator speaks retrospectively. This means that he/she tells the story from a future point of view – as if these events had already taken place (Culpepper, 1983:28). The audience is in some cases moved from the time of the telling of the story to the time of the happening, as the narrator switches

⁸³ Jn 4:1 serves as an example, where the narrator informs the audience that Jesus knew that the Pharisees had heard that he was making and baptising more disciples than John. As this information is not provided through the character of Jesus himself, it means the narrator was aware of the knowledge of Jesus in order to share it with the audience.

⁸⁴ "His parents said this, *because they feared the Jews, for already the Jews had agreed that if anyone would profess Christ, he [or she] would be expelled from the synagogue.*"

to the present tense (Culpepper, 1983:31). The purpose of this is to draw the audience into the scene.

Since the narrator of the Fourth Gospel is anything but neutral, the value system portrayed and propagated by him/her needs to be unpacked. The ideological or evaluative point of view of this narrator can be said to be *reliable*⁸⁵ and *stereoscopic* (Culpepper, 1983:32). The audience find themselves in a position where the information given by the narrator is completely trustworthy and at no time are they led to question what is conveyed. The cues given by the narrator regarding the settings of the episodes will thus be regarded as trustworthy in the reading of the texts and, as the characters in the story misunderstand and misinterpret the words of Jesus, the narrator in turn provides the audience with the correct interpretation (Culpepper, 1983:35).

The term *stereoscopic* refers to the way in which an object is viewed from two different angles to form a fuller image thereof (Culpepper, 1983:33). The narrator of the Gospel of John maintains a stereoscopic view of Jesus, as he/she views Jesus and his ministry from two perspectives: where he comes from (his Divine origin), and where he is going (his destiny as the exalted Son of God). Whenever Jesus is described, he can never ideologically be removed from these two vantage points⁸⁶. The narrator shares in Jesus' self-knowledge and is aware of his status as pre-existent *logos* and eternal Son. Culpepper (1983:36) also emphasises that the narrator and Jesus' point of view correspond in such a remarkable way, that in some cases it is difficult to determine who is speaking⁸⁷. Powell (1990:26) affirms this by stating that the point of view of the narrator and Jesus becomes indistinguishable at times. This will become increasingly important when looking at the possibility of a counter-ethos of Jesus, as this will probably be shared by the narrator (and therefore implied author) to a degree⁸⁸.

⁸⁵ It is important to note that the reliability of the narrator must be distinguished from historical accuracy (Culpepper, 1983:32). This means that the audience is never led to believe that any information given by the narrator would be deceptive in terms of the narrative itself, but does not imply that the narrator's words are to be regarded as a precise historical account.

⁸⁶ This does not imply that Jesus should be regarded as a supra-narrative character. His Divine identity does not guarantee immunity from the societal script.

⁸⁷ Jn 3:13-21 and 3:31-36 serve as a prime example of this as it is often difficult to establish where the narrator takes over from Jesus and John (Culpepper, 1983:41).

⁸⁸ The possible counter-ethos of the narrator or author will be explored in chapter six.

The fact that the narrator and Jesus overlap, does not imply that the one mimics the other, but both serve to strengthen the implied author's point of view (Culpepper, 1983:43). The narrator's reliability in terms of the interpretation of Jesus is thus a rhetorical device used to convince the audience of the reliability of the entire Gospel's interpretation of Jesus. As stated in chapter two, the idea of literary devices in a narrative is to convince the hearer or reader to identify with and become the ideal and implied audience (which in the case of the Gospel of John can be regarded as interchangeable with the narratee⁸⁹). In this narrative reading of the two episodes, the ideal would be to read the narratives from the point of view of the implied audience. A great tool used by the narrator to pull the audience into becoming the implied audience, and a narrative element that will be particularly important to this study, is that of characterisation.

4.2.3 *Characterisation*

Newheart (1996:51) states that any characterisation in the Gospel must first begin with the characterisation of Jesus. As Jesus' character remains constant and serves as a focal point in the following narrative readings, it will be discussed only in this section and briefly referred to in the explorations of the two episodes.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus is presented as a static, yet round and complex character⁹⁰. He is regarded as the protagonist of the entire Gospel. There is hardly a scene that does not revolve around him or in which he does not appear (Culpepper, 1983:106). The crux of characterisation in the Gospel of John is to highlight something of the character and identity of Jesus, and to explore the different responses to him, since this also signifies the overall plot of the Gospel. He is the central point around which all characters are portrayed (Culpepper, 1983:145). The other characters in the narratives will therefore be discussed in close relation to Jesus. Culpepper (1983:103) identifies both the Samaritan woman and the blind man as dynamic characters that undergo significant change. This statement will be explored in the narrative reading of the two texts and will become essential in the discussion of a possible counter-ethos of the character of Jesus, and the possible steering of these characters into a counter-ethos themselves.

⁸⁹ As stated in 2.2.2.

⁹⁰ Note that 'static' is a narrative term referring to a character that does not show development or change (Powell, 1990:55) and that it should not be interpreted in a negative way. The character of Jesus is both static and life-giving.

Culpepper (1983:146) states that characterisation in the Fourth Gospel is used to create analogies which simultaneously create and break norms. It is important to note that in the Gospel of John, the identity of characters is shaped by their position in society and their interaction with Jesus (Culpepper, 1983:145). It is precisely these two elements that will be of key importance in the characterisation of the Samaritan woman and the blind man, as their position in society, which stems from the societal script, is confronted by their position toward the (eternal) person and ethos of Jesus. Detailed characterisation will be discussed in the respective narrative readings.

The narratives will be read in the same order that they appear in the Fourth Gospel, and therefore John 4:1-42 will be read first, followed by John 9:1-41. The chosen method of analysis will be that of *retelling*, where the narrative will be retold in the form of my own Greek translation with relevant literary commentary interwoven therein⁹¹. The broader settings (spatial, temporal, and especially social), as unpacked in chapter three, will be invited into the narrative settings as the story permits. As these episodes or narratives are situated within a broader narrative, namely the Gospel of John, the events preceding the episode are key in sketching the setting of each episode, and will briefly be retold.

4.3 Events preceding John 4

After the prologue (1:1-18), which introduces Jesus as the word made flesh and John as the witness to Jesus, the testimony of John follows (1:19-24), where he speaks of the one who would come after him. Jesus enters as a character in John 1:29, where John identifies him as the Son of God. A day after this episode, Jesus calls his first two disciples (Andrew and Simon, whose name he changes to Cephas, or Peter) to follow him (1:35-42). The next day Jesus moves on to Galilee, where he calls Phillip, who in his turn calls Nathanael, to follow him (1:43-51).

On the third day Jesus attends a wedding in Cana, Galilee, where he performs his first miracle by turning six stone jars of water into jars of wine (2:1-11). After the wedding Jesus departs to Capernaum with his mother, brothers and disciples, where they remain for a few days (2:12). After a few days in Capernaum, Jesus leaves for Jerusalem for the Passover of the Jews, where he drives money-changers and

⁹¹ Text translations are made using idiomatic, gender-inclusive language, while still attempting to stay as true as possible to the Greek text.

merchants away from the temple (2:13-17). What follows is Jesus' first public challenge by the Jews, where he predicts the fact that he will rise again after three days. The Jews however misunderstand him and assume he is talking about rebuilding the temple in three days (2:18-22). Jesus remains in Jerusalem and many believe in him because of the signs and wonders he is performing (2:23).

One evening a Pharisee named Nicodemus approaches him and Jesus raises the issue of being born again. In this conversation, Jesus distinguishes between the flesh and spirit and, to the confusion of Nicodemus, emphasises that one must be born of the Spirit. Jesus once again alludes to his identity as coming from heaven and predicts his death, but Nicodemus does not understand (3:1-21). After this, Jesus departs to the Judean countryside, where he proceeds to baptise people (3:22-24). This sparks a conversation between John's disciples and a Jew, which leads to another instance where John speaks of Jesus' identity and alludes to his coming from heaven and being sent by the Father (3:25-36).

The preceding events to John 4 shed a lot of light on the identity of Jesus, although this is not done explicitly. After Jesus cleanses the temple, more instances of confrontation and conflict toward and about him can be seen. Jesus has also started performing miracles. The episode at hand starts with a shift in temporal setting as Jesus departs for Galilee.

4.4 The narrative at hand: John 4:1-42

The episode is a singular narration, which means that it only occurs once in the Gospel (Powell, 1990:39). The duration is three days (Culpepper, 1983:72) and the events are set into motion with Jesus departing:

¹Now, then Jesus came to know that the Pharisees had heard that he was making and baptising more disciples than John – ²and yet Jesus himself did not baptise, but his disciples – ³he left Judea and went away again to Galilee. ⁴And he had to go through Samaria. ⁵So he came in the town of Samaria called Sychar, near the property which Jacob had given to Joseph, his son. ⁶Now, Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, who had grown weary from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.

The narrative starts by placing the episode in its spatial setting, which is Jacob's well near a town of Samaria, called Sychar. The narrator explains why Jesus left Judea and departed for Galilee, but not why he had to go through Samaria. His departing from Judea was probably for his own safety. Bruner (2012:242) affirms this by emphasising Jesus' sensitivity to the "religio-political realities at the time" and that Jesus knew that he had to get away in order to avoid premature confrontation with the religious leaders (Ridderbos, 1997:153).

While travelling, Jews would usually avoid going through Samaria at all costs, in order to avoid conversation with the Samaritans (Culpepper, 1998:139). They therefore often circumvented Samaria by going around it to the east (Bruner, 2012:236). The narrator however uses the word *δεῖ* to justify Jesus' travel through Samaria. The root word *δεῖ* can be translated as 'it is necessary' or 'it has to be done'. The narrator thus emphasises that Jesus *had to* pass through Samaria. The reason for this imperative journey is not clear, since this was not the only way to Galilee. There are some scholars, such as Ridderbos (1997:153), who argue that the main road between Judea and Galilee ran straight through Samaria and that the necessity of Jesus' walk through it was obvious, but most remain convinced that this was not necessarily the case and that it was due to the instruction of the Father (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:139; Bruner, 2012:236; Köstenberger, 2009:201)⁹². That the main road from Judea to Galilee passed through Samaria was probable, but the option of taking this road was still strictly taboo for any respectable Jew (Köstenberger, 2001:42). Thus while the geographical necessity of passing through Samaria is not certain, what is certain is the fact that Jesus, as a Jew, is doing a highly unusual, even offensive thing passing through this town.

The setting of the well mimics the typical type-scene found in the Old Testament, where a leading character (or his slave) encounters his future wife at a well, as was the case with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses (Culpepper, 1983:136; Maccini, 1996:119).

⁹² In other instances in the Gospel of John where the word *δεῖ* is used, it connotes a theological or Divine necessity (e.g. Jn 3:14,30; 9:4) and it would therefore not be unreasonable to assume that the narrator is referring to a Divine necessity in this regard as well (O'Day, 1986:55).

The scriptural associations of the scene are underlined in the other references to Jacob (4:5,12)⁹³. This type-scene will typically consist of the protagonist travelling to a well in a strange land, where a maiden awaits. After water is drawn, she will rush home to prepare for the coming of the man to meet with her father, followed by a wedding (Culpepper, 1983:136; Fehribach, 2003:107). However, the type-scene is treated differently in this episode. Jesus asks for a drink of water, but does not necessarily receive any and the central point of concern does not become the (literal) well water, to which the woman has access, but (metaphorical) living water, of which Jesus is the source. This woman is also no marriageable maiden, but has had five husbands and her classification as a Samaritan makes her a highly ineligible option for marriage to a Jewish man. Perhaps this almost parodying use of the type-scene serves as some rhetorical strategy on the narrator's behalf. This will be discussed further in chapter six.

The scene is set into motion when the two main characters, Jesus and the Samaritan woman, meet:

⁷A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her: "Give me [something] to drink." ⁸For his disciples had gone away to the town so that they could buy food. ⁹So the Samaritan woman said to him: "How is it that you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman [something] to drink?" (For Jews did not associate [use (utensils) together] with Samaritans.) ¹⁰And Jesus replied: "If you perceived the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you 'give me [something] to drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." ¹¹[The woman] said to him: "Sir, you do not have a container and the well is deep. Therefore, where do you get the living water? ¹²You are not greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his cattle, are you?" ¹³Jesus replied: "All who drink from this water will thirst again. ¹⁴But whoever drinks from the water which I will give him [or her], will never thirst again, but the water which I will give him [or her], will become in him [or her] a spring of water, bubbling up to eternal life." ¹⁵The woman said to

⁹³ The references to the well dug by Jacob (4:5-6,12), as well as the Samaritan fathers worshipping on Mount Gerizim (4:20), and the mention of the fact that both the Jews and Samaritans were expecting the Messiah (4:25), are all examples of historical *analepses*. *Analepses* are references to events that have already taken place prior to the origination of the narrative (Culpepper, 1983:57). These *analepses* are used to "enrich the narrative by extending it back to the beginning of time and by tying it to the central events in the larger biblical story" (Culpepper, 1983:58).

him: “Sir, give me this water so that I will not thirst and not have to come here to draw water.”

The narrator’s description of her as a woman from Samaria (γυνή ἐκ τῆς Σαμαρείας) already indicates two strikes against her (Bruner, 2012:245). The narrator makes use of the stereotypes according to which the woman would most likely be evaluated and immediately gives the audience the opportunity to make a judgement. In terms of the religious hierarchy discussed in chapter three⁹⁴, Samaritans, who were regarded by the Jews as heathens or Gentiles, would be found at the bottom of the pyramid – below bastards, the fatherless, foundlings, eunuchs, and those with sexual deformities. Not only is she a Samaritan, but also a woman, which immediately disqualifies her as a conversation partner to Jesus.

The fact that she is fetching water around the sixth hour (ὥρα ἕκτη) is highly significant. While some scholars have hypothesised that it could refer to a time around 18h00, most agree on the fact that, according to first century time, where hours were counted from 06h00 in the morning, the sixth hour would refer to a time around noon (Bruner, 2012: 240; Culpepper, 1998:139; Ridderbos, 1997:153; Köstenberger, 2005:147; Lewis, 2005:24). Women would usually approach the well early in the morning or later in the evening to draw water (deSilva, 2000:184; Köstenberger, 2005:148). The fact that this woman went at neither morning nor evening, but at noon, a time when no one else was around, is not simply out of the ordinary, but culturally ‘wrong’ (Neyrey, 2003:109). She also finds herself alone, and not in the company of other women, which would normally be the case at communal wells (Neyrey, 2003:109). Bruner (2012:240) also emphasises that archaeology has provided evidence of water sources nearer to the Samaritan woman’s town. She therefore does not only come to the well at an uncomfortable hour, but travels an uncomfortable distance. With this information the narrator gives some insight regarding the woman’s probable status within her own community as it would seem like she has been ostracised among the Samaritan women (Köstenberger, 2005:148; Neyrey, 2003:109). This furthers the extent of the judgement the audience will make.

The dialogue begins when the woman comes to draw water at the well. After having addressed his mother at the Cana wedding (Jn 2:3-4), this is the second noted public

⁹⁴ As discussed in 3.4.3.

conversation between Jesus and a woman – the first with a woman outside of his kinship group. In light of the fact that men in the ancient Mediterranean world would never address women publically, this behaviour is already raising warning signals among the audience (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:105)⁹⁵. DeSilva (2000:33) emphasises that within the first century, the honourable place for a woman would be within the home and private sphere. Certain places, such as the village well, could have been regarded as an extension of the private sphere and it would therefore have been appropriate for the woman to be there. However, the public discourse between a woman and a man within such a space would not be considered as honourable. The interaction between Jesus and the Samaritan woman is thus not necessarily shameful from her side, but detrimental to his honour as a Jew and a man – yet he is the one initiating it.

In the first century, when a person would ask for something to eat or drink, the asker would place himself/herself beneath the one who has been asked in terms of social power, since this scenario would imply an act of hospitality (Bruner, 2012:245; Brant, 2011:83). By asking this woman for a drink, Jesus consciously moves down the social ladder, especially when taken into account that the last person he was interacting with before the Samaritan woman was Nicodemus, a male and teacher of the law. Not only does Jesus defy the cultural norm of appropriate public communication, but he shows a disregard for the appropriate power relations of the first century by asking this woman for a drink, making himself, a Jewish man, dependent on her, a woman from Samaria, and therefore lower than her in terms of social power (Bruner, 2012:245).

The fact that she is from Samaria also implies that she is to be regarded as an out-group member by Jesus. This means that from the outset they had no obligations

⁹⁵ There are however scholars who disagree with this statement. Maccini (1996:133) refers to the Gen 24 account where Abraham's servant publically converses with Rebekah at a well and emphasises that the narrator does not in any way imply that the public conversation between Rebekah and the servant would be regarded as inappropriate. Maccini therefore argues that Jesus does not cross any boundaries of gender, but only those of ethnicity and religion. Although this is a valid argument, it needs to be kept in mind that what was considered acceptable in first century Palestine differed from the settings portrayed in the Genesis-narrative and after extensively reading up on the social world of first century Palestine, I remain convinced that the boundaries of gender, especially regarding discourse outside of the kinship group, were highly probable. If the only boundaries crossed in this narrative were that of ethnicity and religion, it would seem odd that the woman did not simply ask Jesus why he, a Jew, was asking her, a Samaritan, for a drink, but also includes the fact that she is a woman in the question. The disciples' shock at Jesus' interaction with a woman (v 27) also illustrates that this may have indeed been unusual.

toward one another, since the suffering of an out-group member would not in the least be of concern for those in the in-group⁹⁶. Jesus does not seem to be fazed by this and treats her as though she is in the in-group by expecting concern and hospitality from her (Malina, 1993:95). He shows himself to be a trespasser not only of social and cultural laws, but also shows high disregard for the rules of Jewish piety (Köstenberger, 2005:148). To a Jewish audience, Jesus is not simply committing social suicide, but is in fact inviting impurity by finding himself alone with an impure woman, engaging with her, but even worse, making himself dependant on her hospitality and provision by asking for a drink (Brant, 2011:83). This ethos of Jesus goes completely against the grain of the societal script.

The Samaritan woman is immediately aware of the inappropriateness of Jesus' ethos as her awareness of the societal script manifests itself when she asks him how he, a Jew (Ἰουδαῖος) could ask her, a woman of Samaria (γυναικὸς Σαμαρίτιδος) for a drink. Her first words to Jesus are therefore immediately aimed at questioning the appropriateness of the conversation he has initiated (Conway, 2003:84). This is not only a 'scripted' response, but a lawful one (Moore, 2003:93). By protesting against Jesus' request, this woman is reminding him of the script he ought to adhere to, fuelled by the very Jewish law he as a Jewish male represents. The woman is thus not simply identified and portrayed by the narrator as a helpless victim of the script, but also (unknowingly) as enforcer and perpetuator of it as she seeks to highlight Jesus' social ignorance and remind him of the appropriate ethos of a man of his stature. Her perception of Jesus is understandable and true up to a point (Koester, 1996:11). He is after all a Jewish man and logic would dictate that she refuse his request (Brant, 2011:84). The woman's response is therefore not strange as she utters the words that would probably have been on the audience's lips.

As Eldridge (2011:85) puts it: "This encounter is scandalous right from the start. This is a white man asking a black woman for a ride in her car in Birmingham at the height of segregation". We might replace Eldridge's 'Birmingham' and 'segregation' with our very own 'South Africa' and 'Apartheid'.

The narrator emphasises the merit behind the woman's question by stating that Jews had no dealings with Samaritans. This verse can be translated more exactly as

⁹⁶ As discussed in 3.3.5.

“Jews do not use [utensils] with Samaritans” (Bruner, 2012:254). Jews regarded Samaritans as ‘mongrel Jews’, as they shared a religious background, but diverged in such ways that Samaritans could never qualify as anything more than half-breeds (Brant, 2011:83; Eldridge, 2011:98). Having intermarried with colonisers after the Assyrian invasion in 722 B.C.⁹⁷, the Samaritans were regarded as ethnically impure (Lewis: 2005:24). Moreover, as the Samaritans worshipped in different temples and did not use all the scriptures the Jews did, they were regarded as Gentiles. The fact that Samaritans often boasted of their Jewish origin worsened the Jewish hostility toward them (Bruner, 2012:255).

Everything upon which Samaritans lay, sat, or rode on, as well as their bodily fluids, were considered unclean, and Samaritan women in particular were, like Gentiles, considered to be in a continual state of uncleanness (Köstenberger, 2005:149). It is thus important to realise that Jesus, the Judean man, asking to drink from the same utensils as this Samaritan woman is doing more than crossing personal boundaries, but is, in a very real sense, setting aside centuries of hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans, showing very little regard for one of the key social and purity conventions of his day (Culpepper, 1998:140). Eldridge (2011:85) affirms this by stating that “Jesus doesn’t even hesitate; he is utterly free from those religious and social prejudices disguised as ‘What good people do’”.

The woman seems clearly baffled by Jesus’ apparent disregard for the boundaries of religion, ethnicity and gender between them. He however does not answer her question, but responds by emphasising that if she really knew him, she would have asked him and he would have given her living water. Two things are of importance here: the fact that, had she known his true identity, she would have asked him for living water, and the fact that he would have actually given it to her. Thus, if this woman was truly aware of who Jesus was, she, a Samaritan woman would have boldly asked him, a Jewish man, for this living water. Jesus is hinting at the fact that in some way, the true knowledge of his identity would have relativised the knowledge of his and her scripted identities. He is in a sense denying this woman’s identification of him by implying that she does not really know who he is (Brant, 2011:84). Identifying him as a Jew (Ἰουδαῖος), correct as it may seem, is incomplete and

⁹⁷ As this study primarily revolves around the person and ethos of Jesus of Nazareth, the abbreviation B.C. (Before Christ) will be used for the era commonly known as B.C.E. (Before the Common Era).

holding her back from the reward of life that he has to offer. Jesus is pointing to a different reality, one in which these boundaries have no role (Ridderbos, 1997:155) and hinting at the fact that the revelation of his identity beyond the script known to her would have had the potential to steer her beyond the script herself.

Living water serves as a symbol for life – not simply life after death, but also life in abundance (Jn 10:10) or life through the Spirit (Culpepper, 1983:194). With this claim, Jesus identifies himself as the provider of new life, and makes her the beneficiary thereof. He is also essentially reversing the appropriate male/female order by offering to become a serving figure to this woman (Neyrey, 2003:116). No longer is it the male typically asking the female to serve him with something to drink, but the male is actually making an offering of servant-hood toward her. This is a remarkable push at the boundaries of gender, as Jesus uses the imagery of a household task to illustrate something of his life-giving works.

The woman's response in verse 11 is ironic ("Sir, you do not have a container and the well is deep. Therefore, where do you get the living water?"). Irony is characteristic of the Gospel of John, and this part of the dialogue serves as a prime example thereof. While Jesus tells the woman that if she perceived who he was, she would have asked for a different kind of water, the woman starts musing the depth of the well and Jesus' lack of a container, completely missing what he is trying to tell her (Johnson, 1999:533). This misunderstanding is similar to that of Nicodemus in John 3:4⁹⁸. At this stage the woman still calls Jesus "sir" (κύριε), which implies that his true identity is still unknown to her⁹⁹.

Her next question, where she sarcastically asks Jesus if he is greater than their father Jacob, who gave them the well, is even more ironic, since the woman is expecting a negative answer.¹⁰⁰ The implied audience is however aware of the fact that the answer to the question is an undeniable yes. The woman patriotically defends Jacob by referring to the many that were able to drink from his well

⁹⁸ "Can a man enter into his mother's womb a second time and be born again?"

⁹⁹ The vocative κύριε from κύριος can also mean 'lord' or 'master', but since it is apparent that this woman does not yet grasp Jesus' identity as Lord, the use of this term cannot be said to have any Christological implications at this stage (Köstenberger, 2005:150). As the title is simply used to show respect to this Jewish man speaking to her, 'sir' would be the appropriate translation. The same applies for the translation of Jn 9:36 in chapter five.

¹⁰⁰ The question marker μὴ is used, which creates the expectancy of a negative answer (O'Day, 1986:62).

(O'Day, 1986:62). Jesus answers this question by stating that the water from Jacob's well will not eternally quench her thirst, but that he gives water which will well up to eternal life (ζωὴν αἰώνιον). This intrigues her as she responds by asking for this water, but yet again shows her misunderstanding when giving her reason for asking ("...so that I will not thirst and not have to come here to draw water"). Jesus continues the conversation with a strange request:

¹⁶He said to her: "Go, call your husband and come here." ¹⁷The woman replied: "I don't have a husband." Jesus said to her: "You spoke well [to say] that you have no husband. ¹⁸For you have had five husbands and the one you have now is not your husband. You spoke this true." ¹⁹The woman said to him: "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. ²⁰Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you say that [in] Jerusalem is the place we ought to worship." ²¹Jesus said to her: "Believe me, woman, that there will come an hour when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²²You worship what you do not know, we worship what we know, because the salvation is from the Jews. ²³But an hour comes and is now [here], when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵The woman said to him: "I know that the Messiah is coming, he who is called Christ, [and] whenever he comes he will announce all things to us." ²⁶Jesus said to her: "I am [him], who is speaking to you."

Jesus initiates the second part of the conversation by referring to the woman's marital status. As discussed in chapter three, a woman not embedded in a male, would have been without honour¹⁰¹. This woman is without husband, and therefore probably without much honour. By moving the conversation to the private affairs of the Samaritan woman, Jesus shows a new level of disregard toward the dichotomy between the private and public sphere, as he is doing more than simply having a forbidden conversation, but actually forces private issues into the public domain¹⁰².

¹⁰¹ As discussed in 3.3.2.

¹⁰² For more about the dichotomy between the public and private domain see Malina & Rohrbaugh (1998:98; 104-105).

Important to note is that Jesus exposes things as they are, but does not deem it necessary to cast any moral judgement upon the woman or her situation (Spencer, 2003:35). Perhaps he is aware of the high possibility that this woman was the victim of several divorces or tragic deaths in order to have had five husbands (Bruner, 2012:260), or perhaps judgement had already been cast upon her so many times. Regardless, the passing of judgement did not seem to be a priority to Jesus at this stage.

In the eyes of the culturally conditioned observer, this Samaritan woman is marked not simply as second class in terms of gender and nationality, but also in terms of morality (Bruner, 2012:260). Despite the many possible explanations for her marital situation, her coming to a far-off well at an unusual time still speaks greatly of her probable standing in society and her possible victim status in the situation would not have disqualified her from losing her sexual honour in the process¹⁰³. To the audience, this woman would probably have been branded as an adulteress and her social grading would seem as one of impurity. Since the family was seen as the core to society, anyone associated with adultery would be accused of attacking the stability of the family, and essentially that of society at large (deSilva, 2000:36). This Samaritan woman would thus be seen as someone with very little to no family and societal honour (Brant, 2011:82).

Since adultery would be more than a moral transgression, but a threat to the health of society, Jesus, as a Jewish man, who ought to hold purity and holiness in highest regard, would be expected to avoid contact with this woman at all costs. His physical need for water might have, in a sheer moment of desperation, driven him to ask her for a drink (even though the narrator never mentions whether she actually does give Jesus some water), but engaging in conversation with her after she reveals her marital status is unthinkable¹⁰⁴. As a Jewish man, Jesus was most definitely aware of the rigidity of the sexual honour of a woman. Once lost, she could not regain it and she would be shamed for the rest of her existence (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:124).

¹⁰³ As discussed in 3.4.1, her questionable marital history and status would still mainly reflect on her honour and not necessarily on the honour of the involved men – whether she was in fact a victim or not. Moreover, this study does not seek to focus on and judge the actual moral acts of this woman, but rather to focus on her probable *perceived* acts and status by society.

¹⁰⁴ Ridderbos (1997:154) however emphasises that “no right-minded Jew would do that even if he were dying of thirst!”

This woman is thus stamped, branded and scripted for life. Surely an upright Jewish man ought to know better and run for the hills in a social and moral situation such as this.

Jesus' intimate knowledge of her leads her to perceive that he is a prophet (προφήτης). This leads her to introduce what would probably be one of her people's biggest theological concerns, namely the right place to worship. She does this by referring to the fact that the Jews insist upon worshipping in Jerusalem. The reason for this response could also be to divert attention from her moral situation (Bruner, 2012:261). As this woman feels exposed and scripted by the revealing of her marital status, her way of passing the buck is scripting Jesus by once again re-enforcing his Jewish label upon him. This could be a valid explanation, but the recurring issue at hand, which is the great divide between this woman and Jesus, cannot be disregarded. Jesus' sheer disregard for the scripted divide is probably still puzzling her and bringing up the mountain could just be another way in which she voices this, as if to say: "How can you, a Jew (in fact, a Jewish prophet), speak about the *gift* of God and living water to me, a woman of Samaria (and what a woman), as if 'this mountain' were not an enormous stumbling block between us?" (Ridderbos, 1997:162).

She therefore again seeks to remind Jesus of the polarised relationship between them, as she did in verse 9 ("How is it that you, *a Jew*, ask me, *a Samaritan woman* [something] to drink?"). Jesus however relativises this woman's religious scripting, by referring to a transformation beyond the 'correct place' of worship, claiming that that which both the Jews and Samaritans believe to be absolute will become relative¹⁰⁵. In relativising the correct place of worship, Jesus is doing far more than transcending the divide between spaces to worship – he is hinting at the transcendence of the divide between the worshippers.

Jesus' response that salvation is from the Jews is puzzling. In interpreting this statement, one needs to keep in mind that he himself became flesh in the form of a

¹⁰⁵ When the woman brings up the religious divide, she refers to her people's fathers (οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν, *our fathers*) as the agents or representatives of their way of worship. Jesus' response however draws her in as he uses the second person plural *you* (ὑμεῖς) when referring to the Samaritans and their way of worship. This woman thus becomes a representative for her people and their way or worship (Webster, 2003:134).

Jewish man (Bruner, 2012:262). It is therefore highly probable that Jesus does not refer to the fact that salvation will come upon all the Jews, disregarding all other nations, since an act of faith in him is required from everyone as continually seen throughout the Gospel¹⁰⁶. He rather indicates that salvation for this woman and her people will (ironically) come from that which is socially, culturally and religiously taboo for them. This is a powerful notion in the narrative, as Jesus affirms that salvation will come from that which separates itself from all that is Samaritan, but at the same time assures the woman that if she were to ask, living water would be bestowed upon her and she would never thirst again (vv 10,14). Thus, she is offered salvation (eternal life), but the fact that salvation comes from that which she ought not to culturally, socially and religiously associate with is also confirmed, which leaves her and the audience with a paradox. The only way of reconciling these opposing claims is to assume that, to Jesus, they are in fact not opposing. This implies that the social, cultural and religious differences do not faze him in any way and that the scripted taboos are in fact only scripted, since they are not manifested in his ethos. Jesus once again illustrates how rigid the symbolic walls are that keep them apart, as he has been doing since the minute he approached this off-limits lady at the well.

Jesus' next statement that the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth (ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀλήθειᾳ) again affirms this. He answers this woman's question about where worship should be taking place by pointing beyond appropriate *places* and *times*. This also serves as an affirmation that the worship of neither Jews nor Samaritans has been adequate up to this point (Brant, 2011:86; Köstenberger, 2009:204). To the Samaritan woman's messianic expectation Jesus responds that he is the Messiah she had been waiting for, by stating "I am" (ἐγώ εἰμι). This is the first of Jesus' several "I am" statements in the Gospel narrative. Bruner (2012:265) marvels at the fact that Jesus makes himself known to this woman, the Samaritan, with the irregular past, which affirms that his gift and revelation is given "completely independent of gender, nationality, or merit; completely independent of one's past or even present history" (Bruner, 2012:265). In other words, the revelation of Jesus transcends the script – past, present and future.

¹⁰⁶ A good example is Jesus telling Nicodemus, a Jewish leader, in Jn 3:7 that he has to be born again in order to see the Kingdom of God. If salvation would come upon the Jews simply for being Jewish, this conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus would not have taken place.

After this significant moment, the disciples enter the scene:

²⁷And just then his disciples came [back] and they marvelled because he was speaking to a woman, yet no one said: “What do you seek?” or “Why do you talk with her?” ²⁸So the woman left her water pot and went away into the town and said to the people: ²⁹“Come, look at a man who told me all that I have [ever] done. Could this be the Christ?” ³⁰They went out of the town and came to him.

Here the narrator draws two new sets of characters into the story as both Jesus and the Samaritan woman return to their “natural associates” (Ridderbos, 1997:166). When Jesus’ disciples return, they are surprised that he is talking to a woman and even marvel at the act, but do not confront him about it. The conversation between Jesus and this woman is shameful and this could be the possible reason for the disciples not drawing attention to the situation by addressing it (Brant, 2011:87). Nevertheless, the narrator brings up the questions that the disciples are probably pondering on. This is done in anticipation of the questions the audience probably would have pondered on, just once again emphasising the strangeness and inappropriateness of Jesus’ conversation with this woman (Neyrey, 2003:110). According to Reinhartz (2003:28), the fact that the disciples marvel at Jesus’ conversation with a woman is a clear indication that there were no women among Jesus’ disciples. This becomes increasingly significant as the woman will later begin to function as a disciple, testifying about Jesus. Jesus, having twelve male disciples to his disposal, chooses to use a Samaritan, marginalised woman to deliver his message of life to the town of Sychar.

The Samaritan woman leaves her water pot at the well and runs into the town to tell the people that she had just encountered a man who told her everything she has ever done. As discussed in chapter three, the ideal for any woman would be to not be gazed, pondered or commented upon by any man other than her spouse¹⁰⁷. The fact that Jesus had this information regarding the woman is utterly shameful, but the fact that this becomes what she boasts about and of which she testifies is almost unthinkable. This woman takes the public-making of her private affairs to an even more public space. The inversion of the private and public sphere, the script turned

¹⁰⁷ As discussed in 3.3.3.

upside down, thus becomes the stamp of authority on the person and ethos of Jesus. Moreover, Spencer (2003:32) remarks that men in the first century often used information as a means to dominate and have power over others – especially women. The fact that an individual would have information about someone immediately created a power dynamic. Jesus however breaks this stereotype as the intimate knowledge he has about this woman is not used to play a power game, but empowers her to testify as it serves as the basis of her confession (Spencer, 2003:36). The fact that Jesus has knowledge about her does not make her a defenceless victim, but rather a powerful and zealous witness. Not only is she boldly referring to the shameful fact that a strange man knew “everything” she had ever done, but she is unashamedly, to a public (and probably male) audience, announcing the fact that she had just openly conversed with this fellow.

As she storms into the public sphere she significantly leaves behind her water pot. This could possibly mean that she would be coming back to the well (O’Day, 1986:75) or that she has found the living water – the life defined by a different identity and breathed by the Spirit. Moreover, this act signifies great character development and indicates a transformation (Reinhartz, 2003:21). Pilch (2000:8) refers to the example of Peter’s mother-in-law being healed in the Gospel of Luke (4:38-39). Immediately after she had been healed, she arose and served the men. Within this society the cultural role of women was to serve and tend to guests, and as Pilch states, had Peter’s mother-in-law desired to go and testify of the healing she had just experienced, she would be acting inappropriately and not in a group-oriented way. Her purpose was seen as being “subordinate to the group expectations of what a dutiful woman or wife ought to do”. The Samaritan woman, however abandons her ‘womanly duties’ at the well and rushes to do that which only a man is fit to do as she testifies about Jesus.

Moreover, leaving the water pot behind has serious implications for this woman’s livelihood. Since a divorced or widowed woman was economically vulnerable, it would be wise to make sure she found another patriarchal provider. The reason for this woman living with another man could have been the restriction of social and economic opportunities that came with the absence of a husband (Schottroff, 1996:209). Chances are she did not simply fetch water for herself, but also for this

man and perhaps his family. Leaving the water pot behind and abandoning her duties as a dependant woman, is a brave and risky action and could be detrimental to her economic well-being. She leaves behind her scripted womanly ethos and sets off to do the unwomanly, even manly act of speaking in public. This woman is therefore given the opportunity to redefine herself in such a way that the identity marker of gender becomes secondary to the revelation of the identity of Jesus. This however makes her highly vulnerable to shame and danger, as she is stepping outside her appropriate ethos as determined by the script.

The action of the woman leads to Samaria's first sermon regarding Jesus (Bruner, 2012:273). The words τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, which translates as '[to] the people', is used to include all genders. The woman therefore does not run back to her town to testify to the women in the private sphere, but brought her testimony into the public domain, probably the town market place where all the men were gathered (Neyrey, 2003:111). "She did not go from door to door, interrupting the private lives of her female neighbors; she did not go to her own house. She did not return to private space at all, but went into public space, to the one place where males would be expected to congregate" (Neyrey, 2003:111).

The interjection "come" (δεῦτε) and imperative "look!" (ἴδετε) add a certain degree of boldness and urgency to the woman's proclamation. As unpacked in chapter three, it would be highly inappropriate for a woman to teach or proclaim in the public sphere¹⁰⁸. Her encounter with the Christ ("Could this be the Christ?") had moved her in such a way, that her ethos takes a radical turn to the point where she completely contradicts her earlier objection to Jesus' interaction with her, a woman. She, still being a woman, and probably still living on the societal margin due to her marital status, shifts these identity markers aside since she has found something new, and makes this known publically. Neyrey (2003:98) emphasises that this woman, according to cultural expectations, represents the quintessential deviant, but becomes transformed in such a way that she comes to represent the "radical inclusivity of Jesus' circle".

The tentative nature of the woman's confession regarding the identity of Jesus is interesting. The word μήτι does not function as a denial, but also not as a full

¹⁰⁸ As discussed in 3.3.3.

affirmation (O'Day, 1986:76). This does not necessarily imply doubt, but rather a sense of theological humility on the woman's behalf. Her testimony is not that of which she is theologically certain, but a simple statement of what happened to her and what this could possibly imply. This notion will become increasingly important in the reading of John 9:1-41, as the danger of instant and unexamined dogmatism manifests itself in the behaviour of the crowds and religious leaders toward Jesus and the formerly blind man.

Although theologically and dogmatically humble, the woman does not compromise on the urgency and boldness of her message. Her act of testifying implies remarkable character growth since the beginning of the narrative. She now *deliberately* enters the town (τὴν πόλιν) and draws attention to herself by testifying publically¹⁰⁹. This entails taking a massive risk. Not only is she a woman, but a very unconventional woman – one whom the community perhaps might have wanted to exclude (Webster, 2003:131). Coming alone to a far-off well at noon, she was probably well aware of this fact. The risk however pays off. The people of the town respond to her and her testimony leads them to come to Jesus.

As the woman testifies, Jesus converses with his disciples:

³¹In the meantime, the disciples were asking [urging] him, saying: "Rabbi, eat!" ³²But he said to them: "I have food to eat which you don't know [of]." ³³So the disciples said to one another: "Has anyone brought him [something] to eat?" ³⁴Jesus said to them: "My food is that I do the will of Him who sent me and complete His work. ³⁵Do you not say: 'There are still four months and [then] the harvest comes'? Look, I say to you, lift your eyes and behold that the fields are white for the harvest. ³⁶Already the reaper is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that the sower may rejoice together with the reaper. ³⁷For in this the saying is true that one is the sower and another, the reaper. ³⁸I send you away to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured and you have entered into their toil."

¹⁰⁹ τὴν πόλιν directly translates as 'the city', but since it probably refers to the small village of Sychar (Köstenberger, 2001:51), 'the town' would be a better translation.

Yet another misunderstanding occurs when the disciples urge Jesus to eat, and he responds by mentioning food that they do not know of. Upon hearing this, the disciples ironically assume that someone else had already brought him some food to eat. This response by Jesus is truly significant, since he implies that he has ‘already eaten’, which means that he sees that which has just happened to the Samaritan woman as the will of God and that he interprets his dealings with her as accomplishing the work of the Father. In a great way, Jesus’ refusal to eat acts as the stamp of legitimacy on the preceding events. The fact that a Jewish man spoke to a Samaritan woman in public – asking her private information, crossing boundaries of gender, religion and purity, exposing the temporary and illegitimate nature of the religious divide between Jews and Samaritans, male and female – and the fact that a woman exits the private sphere and sets out to the public sphere to do the unthinkable act of speaking in public, is confirmed by Jesus as the will of God – the work of the Father. The counter-ethos and sheer disregard of the script by both Jesus and this woman thus carries the approval of God.

The Jewish proverb “It’s still four months until harvest” is equivalent to our Western “Rome wasn’t built in a day” (Bruner, 2012:275). Jesus is clearly trying to get the disciples’ attention and probably referring to the literal harvest on their way from the town of Samaria (Köstenberger, 2005:162; Kysar, 1984:31; Ridderbos, 1997:168). It is difficult to determine exactly who the reaper and what the harvest is, but Reinhartz (2003:22) emphasises that the crux of the conversation is to affirm the Samaritan woman’s role of sowing the Divine word into her community.

And how fruitful the harvest of this sowing of the word:

³⁹Now many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him, because of the word of the testifying woman: “He told me all that I have [ever] done.”

⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them and he stayed there two more days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of his word. ⁴²And they said to the woman: “No longer do we believe because of your talk, for indeed we ourselves have heard and saw that this is truly the Saviour of the world.”

Here, the narrator returns to the Samaritan story line and affirms that the woman’s testimony was accepted and caused many Samaritans to believe. The significant

event here is that they believed the testimony of the woman before even meeting Jesus. This is a radical inversion of the usual male/female order of representation. As the male usually represents the female in the public sphere, this woman sets off to the *polis* to represent Jesus, a male remaining at the extended *oikos*. She is described by the narrator as a woman who testifies (τῆς γυναικὸς μαρτυρούσης) and the fact that she bears witness becomes part of her new characterisation. A Samaritan woman takes on the role of one of Jesus' best Jewish disciples and performs spectacularly.

This leads the townspeople of Samaria to ask Jesus to stay with them. Hospitality across boundaries, that against which the Samaritan woman initially protested, suddenly becomes that which the Samaritans desire. As the script declares, Jews had no dealings with Samaritans, and as mentioned earlier, Jews would at all costs avoid interaction with Samaritans. The unwillingness of Jesus to comply and the insistence upon a radical otherness, stirs a radically unscripted ethos in the Samaritan woman, as well as many Samaritans. By agreeing to stay with them for two days, Jesus yet again shows that "[t]he Jews' scruples regarding ritual purity, which caused them to refrain from association with Samaritans" was clearly of no major concern to him (Köstenberger, 2005:164).

The fact that the fellow Samaritans inform this woman that it is no longer because of her talk that they believe, but that they have heard for themselves, is not a rejection of her testimony. With her words, she has led them to the real thing. They have obeyed her words: they came and saw for themselves. The title Saviour of the world (ὁ σωτὴρ τοῦ κόσμου), which they give to Jesus, illustrates that he does not simply have dealings with Jews, or Samaritans, but that the whole world will be given the opportunity to worship in spirit and truth (Bruner, 2012:278). Their father Jacob provided many within his clan with water, but only this man can quench the thirst of the world – regardless of class, nationality, gender, background, or religion. Those naming him have become aware of this marvellous fact.

4.5 Preliminary Conclusion

Very plainly, this woman can be said to be a *woman* from *Samaria* with a *shameful* past (Culpepper, 1983:136). This one sentence says so much about her when one considers the societal script. The narrative as laid out in this chapter follows Jesus'

encounter with Nicodemus. In many ways, the character of Nicodemus stands in sharp contrast to who this woman is and what she represents. Nicodemus represents a male member of the Jewish religious establishment, where the Samaritan woman represents the enemy people of Samaria (O'Day, 1992:295). Unlike Nicodemus the woman has no name and is only characterised by that which divides her from Jesus – being a Samaritan and being a woman. BurrIDGE (2007:336) adds that not only is she the wrong gender and race, but “her beliefs about where God can be found are as unorthodox as her marital arrangements”.

Examining the unfolding of the narrative through the lens of the societal script produces something truly profound. Within this narrative, the dialogue carries most of the power and unfolds the tension as the woman step by step realises who Jesus truly is (Culpepper, 1998:140). In verse 9, he is only defined as a Jew (Ἰουδαῖος). A more neutral sir (κύριε) is used in verses 11-12 and 15. In verse 19, she defines Jesus as a prophet (προφήτης). In verses 25 and 30 the revelation of him as possible Messiah becomes apparent and finally in verse 42 Jesus is perceived as the Saviour of the world. The woman's first identification of Jesus is true. He is a Jewish man, and at no time in the conversation does he attempt to prove her wrong. He does however call her ideology (which, in a collective society, is a reflection of the ideology of society at large) regarding the ethos of a Jewish man into serious question.

Ridderbos (1997:154) remarks that it is as though Jesus were totally oblivious to the “boundaries and barriers that alienate and separate people from each other”. When taken into account that he had profound insight into the life and deeds of this woman, it would be highly improbable for him not to be aware of the societal script and the appropriate ethos prescribed to a man like him and a woman like her. Thus being fully aware of the script, he consciously chooses to ignore it. For this reason Bruner (2012:246) calls Jesus the great barrier breaker, as he, in the most natural manner, breaks down the “most unnatural and inhumane of barriers”.

This leads the character of the Samaritan woman to undergo a tremendous transformation, as her understanding of Jesus deepens (Maccini, 1996:119). The narrator initially introduces her as an anonymous Samaritan woman at a well, and soon her marital history and status is exposed. The audience is therefore given the

full opportunity to script her. Jesus, given the exact same opportunity, does not seem to make use of it and embodies something out of the ordinary with his ethos – something in great tension with the societal script underlining the setting of the narrative.

Neyrey (2003:114) claims that the ethos of Jesus actually transforms the status of the Samaritan woman from an outsider to an insider in Jesus' circle. This stirs her to take the initiative to invite other outsiders in. The transformation is accompanied by Jesus forcing himself into the woman's private sphere, where men and women share food, beverages and exchange information. Jesus' radically, counter-scripted ethos initially forces her into a place of compromise in terms of the script. It is extremely powerful that Jesus himself initiates this shameful or dishonourable conduct in asking the woman not simply about the weather, but deeply intimate and personal questions. He takes the risk of initiating a counter-scripted ethos, with no guarantee of how the woman would respond. Although she is hesitant, something of this upside-down moment draws her in.

It is remarkable that, as the identity markers which script her are brought to light, Jesus begins taking her beyond them to the point where this woman becomes a missionary to her own people. Jesus' shameful ethos inspires a shameful ethos within her, as she leaves the extended private space and moves to the public space in order to testify publically – simply unthinkable in an honour and shame context. She, freely and enthusiastically makes the choice to counter the ethos of a first century woman as she begins calling others similar to the way Jesus had called his disciples in John 1:39 ("Come and you will see!").

Merenlahti (1999:51) emphasises that narrative characters in antiquity did not necessarily have a personality, but rather an ethos, which refers to a static set of virtues and vices. This ethos usually remains unchanged. When the ethos of a character becomes dynamic, it does not simply represent a change in behaviour, but in a very real sense, a change in personality. Jesus' defiance of the societal script stirs a transformation in this woman that goes beyond a change in behaviour, but rather stirs a transformation of identity and ethos. As Jesus approaches the situation with an ethos contrary to that prescribed by the societal script, this woman begins undressing herself of the script in such a significant way, that she eventually finds

herself dressed in something contrary to that which she, a woman from Samaria, ought to have embodied.

As unpacked in chapter three, stratification in first century Palestine was something multi-dimensional¹¹⁰. This Samaritan woman found herself to be marginalised in various ways, embodying most of the social liabilities that would marginalise her in her society (Neyrey, 2003:124). Her identity as a woman, fuelled by her ethnic and religious grouping as a Samaritan, her shameful family status as unmarried and possible low moral social standing, caused her to creep up to a distant well at an obscure hour, probably with the hope of not being found. He who finds her is a Judean man, prophet, Messiah and Saviour of the world. He does not reject her and in a highly socially inappropriate way unravels the script familiar to her with his counter-ethos, showing great disdain for the divisions of gender, religion, ethnicity and moral reputation (Burridge, 2007:336). Jesus contravenes cultural expectations about ritual purity and ethnic boundaries, and shows little regard for the appropriate male/female order and the ethos it implies (Neyrey, 2003:116).

“In John 4, all social taboos customarily separating males and females into separate worlds are systemically recognized, but broken and transformed” (Neyrey, 2003:100). Reversing socially appropriate power relations, Jesus gently starts tugging at the threads of society’s fragile script. As the script unravels, this woman is given the opportunity to weave herself into a new identity. With no guarantee of social acceptance, she is launched into a new ethos, fuelled by the counter-ethos of the one she had just encountered.

¹¹⁰ As discussed in 3.3.7.

5 Scripted by health: a narrative reading of John 9:1-41

5.1 Introduction:

In chapter four we explored the ethos of Jesus in relation to the societal script in terms of the identity marker of gender and found that, not only does Jesus transgress the 'correct' male/female order in John 4, but essentially inverts it, allowing for the Samaritan woman to counter-script herself. Moreover, the identity markers of religion, purity, sexual identity and ethnicity are beautifully relativised. The narrative at hand brings the identity marker of health and its implications to the forefront. Kysar (1984:49) describes John 9:1-41 as one of the narrator's typical and favourite literary constructions, where a simple healing story is used to draw the audience into the realisation that the meaning potential of the narrative goes beyond the act of healing physical blindness. John 9, as with John 4, can also be classified as a singular narration, even though some themes may overlap with the healing of the invalid on the Sabbath in John 5:1-17. The duration of the episode is one day (or perhaps two) (Culpepper, 1983:72). Keeping the larger Johannine narrative in mind, the events following John 4 and preceding John 9 will be briefly retold.

5.2 Events preceding the episode

After the episode with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus departs to Galilee, where he heals an official's son at Capernaum (4:43-54). Hereafter he leaves for a feast of the Jews in Jerusalem, where he heals an invalid at the Sheep Pool in Bethesda (5:1-9). As this healing takes place on the Sabbath, it evokes confrontation from the Jews (5:10-17). At this point, the narrator informs the audience of the Jews' plans to kill Jesus. The reason given is the fact that he healed someone on the Sabbath and that he called God his Father, which implies that he considers himself as equal to God (5:18).

This is followed by Jesus' speech elaborating on his relationship with the Father (5:19-47), after which he departs to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, followed by a large crowd. Here Jesus miraculously multiplies five barley loaves and two fish in order to feed a crowd of at least five thousand men. After everyone is fed, twelve baskets of food are left over (6:1-13). This leads the crowd to affirm Jesus as a prophet who has come into the world (6:14). Jesus however realises the crowd

wants to take him by force to make him king, so he withdraws to the mountain by himself (6:15).

That evening, Jesus' disciples go down to the sea and start rowing across to Capernaum. Jesus, walking on the water, meets them after they have been rowing for about three or four miles. The disciples are frightened, but after Jesus assures them that it is him, he gets into the boat and they immediately reach their destination (6:16-21). The following day, the crowd realises that Jesus and his disciples must have gone to Capernaum and they follow them there (6:22-24), where Jesus gets into a discussion with the crowd about doing the work of God. This is followed by the crowd asking him for a sign and referring to the manna their forefathers received in the desert (6:25-33). When the crowd requests that Jesus always give them the bread from heaven (6:34), he begins to teach that he is the bread of life and that he will grant eternal life to whomever believes in the Son (6:35-40). This leads to another confrontation with the Jews in the synagogue, where Jesus again states that he is the living bread from heaven, and that whoever eats of his flesh and drinks of his blood shall receive eternal life (6:41-59). This teaching offends some of those following Jesus, and after he rebukes them, many of his disciples turn around and cease to follow him (6:60-66). After this, he confronts his remaining disciples and the narrator informs the audience that Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, would be the disciple to betray him (6:71).

After this, Jesus departs to Galilee, deliberately avoiding Judea, since the Jews are plotting to kill him. Jesus' brothers ask him to go to Judea with them for the Feast of Booths, but he refuses and they leave without him (7:1-9). After they left, Jesus secretly departs to Judea (7:10). Around the middle of the Feast of Booths, Jesus enters the temple and begins to teach (7:14). At the Jews' confusion regarding his teaching, since he was an unlearned man, he responds by drawing the distinction between teachings from God and those which come from men (7:15-18). He also confronts them about their plans to kill him, but they deny this, claiming he has a demon inside him (7:19-20). This leads to him confronting the Jews about the way in which they keep the Law of Moses (7:21-24), followed by the narrator informing the audience that some in Jerusalem were beginning to believe he is the Christ (7:25-31).

When the Pharisees hear that some believe in Jesus, they send officers to arrest him, but he confuses them by speaking of what they do not understand (7:32-36). On the last day of the feast, he yet again refers to living water, which the narrator interprets as a reference to the Holy Spirit (7:37-39). This creates great division among the crowd (7:40-44). When the officers sent to arrest Jesus report back to the chief priests and Pharisees, they exclaim that they could not arrest him, since no one has ever spoken like he does. This angers the Pharisees (7:45-52), and Jesus departs to the Mount of Olives (8:1).

Early the next morning Jesus returns to the temple and begins to teach again, where, in order to test him, the Pharisees bring before him a woman caught in adultery. He responds by saying that he who is without sin should throw the first stone. This leads the Pharisees to walk away, leaving the woman standing alone before Jesus, who does not condemn her and sends her away to “sin no more” (8:2-11).

After this, the Pharisees yet again confront Jesus when he teaches that he is the light of the world. He responds by accusing them of judging by the wrong standards and not knowing the Father, and again starts predicting his own death, and that they will know who he is and that the Father sent him when the time has come. This leads many to believe in him (8:21-30), followed by an argument between Jesus and the Jews who believed him. Here Jesus affirms that he came from God the Father, and (ironically) accuses them of coming from *their* father, the devil (8:39-47). At this the Jews accuse Jesus of being a Samaritan with a demon. The conflict builds up and when Jesus claims to have existed before Abraham, they pick up stones to throw at him, but he hides himself as he leaves the temple (8:48-59).

The episode at hand (Jn 9:1-41) thus starts with Jesus fleeing from the temple. At this point it is important to note that the conflict between him and the Jewish leaders (or Pharisees¹¹¹) had reached a dramatic height.

¹¹¹ Both Jews (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι) and Pharisees (οἱ Φαρισαῖοι) are often used interchangeably in John's Gospel, referring to the religious leaders of the Jews. Οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι could also simply refer to the Jews as ethnic and religious grouping (of which Jesus is a part). Although these groupings are far more complex, the translations will simply distinguish between Jews (referring to the wider ethnic and religious group, which includes Jesus) and Jewish leaders (including the Pharisees).

5.3 The narrative at hand: John 9:1-41

¹And as he passed by, he saw a man, blind from birth. ²And his disciples asked him, saying: “Rabbi, who sinned – he or his parents – that he was born blind?” ³Jesus replied: “Neither he nor his parents sinned, but so that the works of God can be made known in him. ⁴It is necessary for us to do the works of Him who sent me, while it is [still] day. The night is coming when no one can work. ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶After saying these [things], he spat on the ground and made clay from the spittle and spread it [the clay] on his eyes. ⁷And he said to him: “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam (which means [being] sent).” So he went away and washed and came back seeing.

The episode begins with Jesus fleeing from the temple when he encounters this blind man. The narrator informs the audience that the man had been blind since birth. This is the only information given regarding the man and thus the only thing that he is characterised by. With this information, the narrator, as with the Samaritan woman in John 4, gives the audience the opportunity to cast judgement on the character of the blind man. As unpacked in chapter three, the physical state of a person's body would be essential in determining their identity, value and appropriate ethos¹¹². The fact that this man is not physically whole would have marked him as a human being of diminished value.

The fact that he is male intensifies this marginalisation, since men were expected to gain their honour in the public sphere¹¹³. This man however uses the public sphere to beg for money, showing himself to be dependant and shameful. It is important to remember that ancient Palestinians did not separate the occupation of an individual from his/her personal life (Malina, 1993:117). Therefore, what an individual did for a living directly classified them as a certain type of person. This is also true of those individuals who could not do much. Someone begging would obviously not be able to make a contribution and therefore would not be worth much within society. Beggars were seen as ‘expendables’ and were forced to reside outside of the city walls. During the day they would roam the streets to beg (Pilch, 2000:135). This characterisation gives the impression of a man who would quite literally and socially

¹¹² As discussed in 3.3.4.

¹¹³ As discussed in 3.3.3.

find himself on the outskirts of society – someone with a low status and very little to no agency. Moreover, he was not at all regarded as an in-group member. Being blind and therefore not whole, he would not only be esteemed physically inferior, but also morally, since the body was regarded as the centre of an individual's purity¹¹⁴. His physical state therefore had severe social and moral implications, scripting him as socially and morally 'out of place'.

The disciples are the first to acknowledge this collective knowledge, asking Jesus who had sinned to cause this man to be blind – the options being him or his parents¹¹⁵. It is important to note that the disciples' assumption (and probably that of the historical audience and society at large) cannot be disregarded as foolish or superstitious (Bruner, 2012:570). It might seem archaic to a modern audience, but in first century Palestine, it was common belief (Pilch, 2000:132). It might be argued that Jesus himself affirms this (possible) link between suffering and sin in John 5:14 (Poirier, 2010:61), when he says to the healed man: "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you". The notion of God's justice led people to believe that infirmity and affliction was the result of sin¹¹⁶. This was due to the *interpretation* of the purity code inscribed within the Torah (Herzog, 2000:164)¹¹⁷. Pilch (2000:132) refers to the "symbolic bridge", which links personal experience with social relations and religious and cultural meanings. This symbolic bridge in a sense paved the way for the assumption that the blindness of the man is the result of sin. It therefore becomes clear (and will even more so in the religious leaders' condemnation of Jesus as a sinner from v 16) that ideology and scripture had become very much intertwined in first century Palestine.

Jesus confronts this way of thinking by eliminating both the man and his parents as culprits for his blindness. This does not imply that the idea of a possible link between suffering and sin is suddenly disregarded, but that it is not applicable in this instance. Jesus does not correct the disciples on their general theological convictions, but he

¹¹⁴ As discussed in 3.3.4.

¹¹⁵ Since he was born with this disability, the two options would be prenatal sin by the man in his mother's womb or sin by the parents, which was passed on to him at birth (Köstenberger, 2009:223).

¹¹⁶ Culturally, a blind person was seen as someone from whose eyes darkness emanated, and was said to have darkness in the heart (Pilch, 2000:133). Blind individuals were therefore said to possess the 'evil eye'.

¹¹⁷ Important to note is the fact that the purity code itself did not necessarily condemn this blind man, but that this tradition of condemning the impaired was formed out of the *interpretation* of this code and was blindly enforced upon every situation.

corrects them on their rash and uninformed interpretation of this man and his situation. The reason given by Jesus for the man's blindness is even more significant, as he claims that it serves to allow the works of God to be displayed in him. This statement is absolutely provocative and religiously inappropriate. As an individual with a significantly low purity and holiness status, God cannot possibly display His works in this blind man, since He is holy. As Jesus would never call God's holiness into question, he is perhaps problematising this blind man's lack thereof, as his supposedly cursed life is strangely declared to be blessed by Jesus. This response is completely contra-scripted to the Jewish way of thinking and esteeming status and holiness.

Jesus then goes on to perform the miraculous healing. In ancient Palestine physicians would rarely touch patients, but usually employed slaves to handle the physical interaction with the impaired individual(s) (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:114). Weissenrieder (2002:207) emphasises that when it came to illness and impairment, the social norm was to avoid any physical contact with the sick and impaired. Jesus acts completely contra this social (and religious) norm by touching the blind man while healing him. The act of physical touch, while customary to the way in which Jesus normally healed, does more than restore health to a broken body – it essentially restores dignity to a broken person and wholeness to broken relationships by touching the 'untouchable'. Therefore "*Jesus functions as a healer of both physical and social bodies*" (Weissenrieder, 2002:207). Not only does he critique the social norm, but he sends a profound message in terms of religious standards by relativising this blind man's impurity. The verb ἐπέχρισεν can be translated as 'spreading on', but also as 'anointing'. This anointing of the man's eyes stands in sharp contrast to the state of impurity ascribed to him.

The miracle quickly draws attention:

⁸So the neighbours and those who had seen him before as beggar were saying: "Is this not he who [used to] sit and beg?" ⁹Some said: "It is he." Others said: "No, but he is like him." He kept on saying: "I am [he]." ¹⁰So they said to him: "Then how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹He answered: "The man called Jesus made clay and spread [it] on my eyes and told me:

‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So, after going away and washing, I received sight.” ¹²And they said to him: “Where is he?” He said: “I don’t know.”

The scene shifts from Jesus and his disciples interacting with the blind man, to him (now healed) in the company of his neighbours. Confusion reigns over his identity. This once again affirms the crude manner of identity formation and the man’s out-group status, as not much else was known about him, other than the fact that he was blind and a beggar. Since he is not embodying those two identity markers at the moment, those around him seem to have nothing else to recognise him by.

The crowd does not ask the man who he is, but resorts to gossip in his presence, denying him basic agency to speak for himself¹¹⁸. This talk regarding the man is not done in the spirit of gaining information regarding the event that had just taken place, but it seems so be an attempt to control an event not understood (Herzog, 1972:133). This will be seen repeatedly in the questioning of the blind man throughout the narrative. Eventually the man himself has to convince them that he is this formerly blind man. This is the first time in the episode that he speaks for himself. Up to this point, his characterisation was done by the narrator, Jesus and the disciples. The imperfect tense used for the man’s action of speaking (ἔλεγεν) indicates a continuous action (He *kept on* saying: “I am [he]”). The man is probably repeatedly trying to affirm himself with very little attention given to what he is saying. He is finally heard, but this causes the crowd to interrogate him. For the first time he is deliberately given the opportunity to speak.

The scene quickly shifts to the presence of the religious leaders:

¹³They brought the formerly blind man to the Pharisees. ¹⁴Now it was the Sabbath, the day when Jesus made clay and opened his eyes. ¹⁵So the Pharisees were asking him again how he received sight and he said to them: “He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.” ¹⁶Then some from the Pharisees said: “This man is not from God, because he did not keep the Sabbath.” [But] others said: “How can a sinful man do such signs?” And there was division among them. ¹⁷So they said again to the

¹¹⁸ See 3.4.5 for a discussion on gossip, and how it can occur in the presence of the discussed individual(s).

blind man: “What do you say about him, since he opened your eyes?” And he said: “He is a prophet.”

The situation intensifies when the crowd brings the man before the Pharisees. The Pharisees can be characterised as the Jewish leaders seeking the improvement of piety and the observance of the law, especially among common people (Lindars, 2000:67; Culpepper, 1983:131). Generally, and in this narrative, they function as flat and static characters, showing very little depth and development.

The narrator informs the audience that this healing took place on the Sabbath, the day on which work was forbidden. Except for saving a life, treatment for ailments would not be allowed on the Sabbath (Bruner, 2012:583). Since this was not a situation of life or death, Jesus could have waited until the next day to heal this man of his blindness (Köstenberger, 2005:285). As the sabbatical laws also strictly forbade the application of spittle and the kneading of clay (Bruner, 2012:574), the healing clearly violated the Jewish Sabbath regulations. According to the religious ideology of the day, a man sent from God would strictly observe the Sabbath (Culpepper, 1998:176). Jesus is therefore considered as being lax in regard to the practice of the Sabbath, as laid out in the Law and promoted by the Pharisees (Lindars, 2000:73).

The Pharisees directly ask the man how he had received sight. His response creates division among them – this time regarding the identity of Jesus. While his ethos is running against the grain of appropriate Jewish behaviour, he performs a miracle of healing – something that would be expected of God. This confronts the Pharisees with a paradox surrounding the identity and ethos of Jesus, as it does not quite seem to fit the prescribed role of a man of God.

What is surprising is that the Pharisees ask the blind man his opinion regarding Jesus. The deictic use of the pronoun σὺ (you) can be regarded as a challenge to the man by which the Pharisees attempt to manipulate him in a direction of re-evaluating Jesus’ identity in the hopes that he would renounce him as healer (Brant, 2011:156). He however responds by naming Jesus a prophet (προφήτης), the same title used by the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:19). His eyes have thus been opened in more than one way and his affirmation of Jesus as a prophet alludes to a Godly

origin concerning the words and works of Jesus. This man chooses to deliberately go against the verdict of some of the Pharisees who claim that Jesus is not from God (Ridderbos, 1997:340).

His statement stirs a dramatic response:

¹⁸But the Jewish leaders did not believe [him] that he had been blind and received sight until they called the parents of the man who had received sight, ¹⁹and asked them: "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰His parents answered: "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. ²¹But how he now sees we don't know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him, he is of age, he can speak for himself." ²²His parents said this, because they feared the Jewish leaders, for already the Jewish leaders had agreed that if anyone would profess Christ, he [or she] would be expelled from the synagogue. ²³Because of this his parents said: "He is of age, ask him."

The Jewish leaders' interrogation of the man's parents is not done in the spirit of gaining information, but seeks to challenge the absurdity of their son's claims (Ridderbos, 1997:340). The parents' reply testifies of fear. As the synagogue or temple served as a symbol of Jewish religious life and societal order, ranking and organising individuals, the expulsion therefrom is highly detrimental as it would represent a severe form of social ostracism¹¹⁹ (Köstenberger, 2005:288). The blind man, being cast out of the synagogue later in the narrative, still finds himself embedded within the religious system at this stage. Because he is considered of a severely low rank, his membership in the temple system might have been his last bit of social belonging – although the extent of this belonging may be questionable. This system of belonging seems crucial to the parents of the formerly blind man, and to avoid being cast out of it, they shift the pressure onto their son.

As unpacked in chapter three, the social standing of an individual and that of their family was intimately connected¹²⁰. These parents do not deny that this is their son, but dissociate themselves from him by stating that he is of age and that they are no

¹¹⁹ Also see 3.4.3.

¹²⁰ As discussed in 3.3.2 and 3.3.4.

longer responsible for defending him. This however turns out not to be a negative thing, as the formerly blind man gains agency through these words from his parents.

²⁴Then for a second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him: "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." ²⁵He replied: "Whether that [man] is a sinner I don't know. One [thing] I know: that though I was blind, I now see." ²⁶So they said to him: "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷He answered them: "I've already told you and you didn't listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" ²⁸And they reviled him saying: "*You* are a disciple of that [man], [but] we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹We know that God spoke to Moses, but we don't know where this [man] comes from." ³⁰The man answered them: "Wow, this is a wonderful thing! That you don't know from where he is, and [yet] he opened my eyes. ³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He listens to him [or her]. ³²From the beginning has it never been heard that someone opened up the eyes of one born blind. ³³If this [man] were not from God, he would be able to do nothing." ³⁴They answered him: "You were born in utter sin and you [would] teach us?" And they cast him out.

The Jewish leaders approach the healed man claiming that they know (οἶδμεν) that Jesus is a sinner. This is a serious form of deviance labelling, which attempts to undermine a person's position within society¹²¹. Deviance labelling usually followed when a person was acting against the script and would be used to draw attention thereto in order to restore their ethos to that which is socially prescribed and appropriate. In the religious system of purity, a sinner would have very little status and agency. Moreover, the Jewish leaders attempt to strengthen their claim by commanding the healed man to give glory to God, indirectly commanding him to agree with them (Bruner, 2012:589). This command serves as a solemn exhortation to confess or tell the truth, with the implication that the person exhorted is in the wrong (Köstenberger, 2005:289). The religious leaders therefore position themselves as those who possess Divine truth.

¹²¹ As discussed in 3.4.4.

As discussed in chapter three, due to the vulnerability of social power, those in a position of power had to make sure everyone knew their place in this hierarchy¹²². The Jewish leaders therefore do the appropriate thing by reminding the blind man, themselves and those listening to the conversation that ‘they know’, and therefore, everyone ought to know, that this Jesus is a sinner. The complex nature of the situation regarding Jesus’ identity is therefore not up for debate and if this man were to do the right thing, he would agree with the general knowledge of the Jewish leaders. As the Jewish leaders were the carriers of the ‘great tradition’, their interpretation of the Torah was seen as synonymous with the Torah itself¹²³. Their role as interpreters of the law and how it applied gave them a certain authority and control within society. No one dared challenge or question what they ‘knew’ (or at least not openly) (Malina, 1993:142).

The fact that they yet again ask the man how the healing had taken place is a technique to unsettle him (Brant, 2011:158). The healed man responds sarcastically which stands in sharp contrast to his parents’ response to the Pharisees. Something has stirred fearlessness inside of him. As unpacked in chapter three, the challenge and riposte were reserved for individuals of the same social standing and it would be inappropriate and scandalous for someone at the bottom of the pyramid to challenge those at the top¹²⁴. Malina (1993:142) affirms this by referring to the utter shameful nature of the act of contradicting a superior – something no one dared to do in ancient Palestine. This man, clearly at the bottom of the social pyramid, disregards the gap between himself and the Jewish leaders, who rank significantly higher. Moreover, he openly ignores their command to “give glory to God” (or at least their interpretation of this act). The healed man thus experiences a drastic break, not simply from his former biological nature of blindness, but greatly from his social identity and position, as he mimics the counter-ethos of Jesus.

By sarcastically asking the Pharisees whether they would also like to become disciples, he directly and publically challenges their honour. What is significant here is that the Pharisees actually require a response from the blind man, someone of an extremely degraded class (Pilch, 2000:135). Jesus’ counter-ethos does not simply

¹²² As discussed in 3.4.

¹²³ As discussed in 3.4.3.

¹²⁴ As discussed in 3.4.1.

inspire counter-ethos from the blind man, but in a sense also from the Pharisees, who, under normal circumstances, would not dare address someone of such a degrading class to acquire significant information. At this question the Pharisees become defensive and accuse the man of being a disciple of Jesus while emphasising that they are disciples of Moses. Their identity as disciples of Moses serves as the antithesis to this man's inferior discipleship to Jesus, and they are sure to make a clear distinction between the two (Ridderbos, 1997:345), illustrating that "this man" called Jesus is clearly opposed to that which they have come to know as from God.

They continue the distinction between Moses and Jesus by stating that they know (οἶδμεν) that God had spoken to Moses, but that they have no idea where Jesus, referred to as "this [man]" (τοῦτον) comes from. This statement is used to counter the legitimacy of Jesus, since they, the religious leaders, do not know where he comes from and therefore do not recognise his legitimacy and authority. They therefore reiterate the limited, if not absent, status and agency that (according to them) has been allocated to Jesus in an attempt to force him 'back in line'. The irony is that by not knowing where Jesus comes from, they are in fact diminishing their own legitimacy (Bruner, 2012:591). This is a classic example of Johannine irony, since the vantage point of the narrator, keeps the audience at a constant state of knowing Jesus' origin and eternal destiny. Jesus is rejected because his origin is not known by the Jewish leaders, but they are unaware of his Divine Father and Divine origins which make him greater than Moses. The blind man is however gradually becoming aware of Jesus' true identity (Culpepper, 1983:171).

The blind man brilliantly responds, reminding the Jewish leaders of the inconsistency between the assigned status and agency of Jesus from their side, and the ethos embodied by him. It would seem that God has perhaps chosen to work outside of the acknowledgement and affirmation of the religious leaders and interpreters of the 'great tradition'. His exclamation that it has never been heard of that someone opened up the eyes of one born blind is an example of external *analepses*, allusions to events taking place prior to the beginning of the narrative. The purpose of these external *analepses* is to tie the story to events which form part of the history, or the pre-history of the audience (Culpepper, 1983:60-61). Bruner (2012:591) affirms this

by stating that “[t]he healed man proceeds to give the Serious¹²⁵ lessons in both theology and history” (Bruner, 2012:591). This illuminates the fact that this act by Jesus is indeed a strange occurrence to everyone present, which explains why the religious leaders are having such a hard time making sense of it. The problem (and irony) is that, instead of admitting that they are puzzled, they attempt to make instant sense of the happenings by deeming that which they do not understand as wrong.

By (ironically) using their own phrase of reassurance, the formerly blind man claims that “we know” (οἶδμεν) that God does not listen to sinners, therefore reminding them of that which they have conveniently forgotten in their judgement on Jesus and his actions, and in a rhetorically powerful way, forcing them to reconsider what they previously claimed to be certain of: that Jesus is a sinner. In terms of the symbolic and religious order, this man’s argument is daunting. As the scripted universe of these religious leaders is organised in terms of purity and holiness, someone from God would be supreme therein. The man coming from God would be utterly pure and holy. Jesus however exemplifies impurity by touching this blind man’s impure eyes, and far worse, doing it on the Sabbath! If he is from God, it would imply that either God is impure or that He cannot be controlled by His people’s codes and ranks of holiness – the very tradition with which they organise and control society. This then implies that their way of defining whether something or someone is from God ought to be called into question.

To this argument, the Pharisees do not have an adequate response, but the possibility of them reconsidering what “they know” seems unlikely as they amount to attacking the healed man. As discussed in chapter three, techniques of shaming would often be used to force members of society into the appropriate ethos when it would seem like they are not adhering to the script¹²⁶. To quiet the healed man down, they return to their scripted ideology as they refuse to be persuaded otherwise, and resort to a personal attack. They conclude that the man was born blind under the judgement of God and therefore does not have any authority to teach them (Culpepper, 1998:178), reminding him of his out-group status and the indelible stigma of sin he is supposed to carry around with him (Ridderbos, 1997:346). Stripping him of his agency, they reduce him to his former condition of health and its

¹²⁵ Bruner (2012) uses the term “the Serious” to refer to the Pharisees and Jewish leaders.

¹²⁶ As discussed in 3.4.1.

subsequent ideological implications. As a ‘blind man’ he is sentenced to remaining destitute and is stripped from any validity as a witness (Brant, 2011:153). This man is however not blind anymore and therefore his identity as a blind man and supposed sinner does not physically abide anymore, but the socially embedded nature of his former blindness still echoes in the way others perceive him¹²⁷.

The ethos of the formerly blind man stands in contrast with that of his parents. This man shows very little appreciation for the symbolic order of society and his counter-ethos leads him to be cast out from it.

³⁵Jesus heard that they cast him out and having found him, he said: “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” ³⁶He replied: “And who is he, sir, that I can believe in him?” ³⁷Jesus said to him: “You have [even] seen him and it is he who is the one talking with you.” ³⁸And he said: “I believe, Lord.” And he worshipped him. ³⁹And Jesus said: “For judgement I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see and those who see may become blind.” ⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees heard this and said to him: “Are we also blind?” ⁴¹Jesus said to them: “If you were blind, you would have no guilt, but now [that] you say ‘we see’ your guilt remains.”

This conversation between Jesus and the healed man would have probably been the most offensive and unexplicable to the Pharisees and Jewish leaders, as this Jesus, whom they have labelled to be a sinner, is claiming to be the Son of Man. The fact the formerly blind man is worshipping him is profoundly ironic in relation to the Jewish leaders’ earlier command that the man “give glory to God” (v 24). This is indeed what he is doing, but it is manifesting itself in a way paradox to that which they demanded and expected of him.

Jesus condemns these Pharisees for claiming to be enlightened. Bruner (2012:589) states that the clause “we see” (βλέπομεν) can be regarded as similar to the “we know” (οἶδαμεν) of verse 24. These phrases represent the Pharisees’ symbolic universe or script. The fact that they are called blind is ironic. This man, who had literally been blind since birth, gains not only physical sight, but insight in terms of the identity of Jesus Christ and therefore he becomes enlightened in terms of his own

¹²⁷ Humbly I must state that this is even the case in the way the man is named within this study, since his character is still identified and named in relation to his former physical condition of blindness (‘the formerly *blind man*’).

possible status, agency and ethos. The revelation of the person of Jesus radically alters the ethos of the formerly blind man. The unwillingness of the Pharisees to go beyond what “they know” (i.e. their societal script), keeps them in a position of blindness. They are blind because they cannot see beyond the literal (Culpepper, 1983:130). As they tend to script those around them, they themselves remain firmly scripted to the detriment of life.

Petersen (1993:83) makes the observation that Jesus actually inverts the everyday judgemental process taken up by the Pharisees, which leads them to judge him as a sinner and expel the formerly blind man from the synagogue (1993:84). This judgement process, which would be normal and permissible to the Pharisees or Jewish leaders, leads to their condemnation. They, being the ones conducting the trial up to this point, are suddenly shown to be the actual ones on trial (Kysar, 1984:51). Jesus essentially demonstrates an inversion of the script, trapping the judgemental writers within their own script. Their echoing of the script, and the passion with which they defend it, becomes their downfall.

5.4 Preliminary Conclusion

This narrative serves as a powerful illustration of the dangers of unquestioned and unevaluated ideologies and dogmatism. All characters are confronted with Jesus’ counter-scripted act of denying the common religious origin for illness and disability, declaring the works of God in an impure vessel, showing utter disregard for religious and moral code by doing what he did on the Sabbath, and then claiming Divine origin. All are therefore confronted by the inconsistencies between the implied ethos of a man of God and the embodied ethos of Jesus. What distinguishes the characters is their willingness to re-evaluate what they believe to be true and absolute.

The Pharisees and Jewish leaders claim immediate certainty and uncritically echo the popular ideology and script of the day. Their assumptions stand in sharp contrast to the formerly blind man’s humble confessions of ignorance¹²⁸ (Brown, 1966:377; Köstenberger, 2005:285). Lewis (2005:51) paints the picture of the blind man and

¹²⁸ Where the formerly blind man states that he “does not know” (v 12) the Pharisees claim with certainty that Jesus is not from God (v 16). He also confesses to not knowing whether Jesus is a sinner, where the Jewish leaders claim Jesus’ sinful status with certainty (v 24).

Pharisees or Jewish leaders as moving in opposite directions – “the man toward the sight of faith, and the latter deeper into sightless darkness of willful [sic] ignorance” (Lewis, 2005:51). As Jesus is the light of the world (v 5), those who define others according to the societal script and not in relation to the Son of Man, are left in the dark. The narrative thus seeks to expose the sin of spiritual pride among those unwilling to reconsider what they believe to be the truth (Köstenberger, 2005:278). It exposes the static nature of those enforcing the societal script and their absolute loyalty toward it.

This is beautifully illustrated by Herzog (1972:134):

I know what I should do. But I am blind. Around me, too, gather the curious, the powerful, and the callous. What they see is premised on their confidence that they think they see. They say they “see”. They know exactly what I should do, how I should behave, and what I should say.

The irony is that the Pharisees’ and Jewish leaders’ certainty of (in)sight is actually keeping them in the darkness. Quite boldly Jesus claims that their usually reliable social and moral compass has “gone haywire” (Malina & Rohrbaug, 1998:166), and therefore injustice prevails because they assume they know what justice is.

The physical sight that the man is given becomes insight into the identity of Jesus, which stirs change in his own ethos. The Jewish leaders again move from a place of physical sight, with its implication of understanding and insight, to being ironically exposed as ignorant and eventually sentenced to blindness (Culpepper, 1983:192). The Jewish leaders and the formerly blind man have in actual sense exchanged positions (Pilch, 2000:131). Sin is shown not to reside in the one born blind, but in those who reject him who heals the blind and enlightens the ignorant. Through the Jewish leaders, John thus “explores the heart and soul of unbelief”¹²⁹ (Culpepper, 1983:129).

The narrative is therefore not so much about the healing of the blind man, but about the unconventional and offensive ethos of the one that radically acted against the traditional norm by healing on the Sabbath (Pilch, 2000:120) and touching ‘the

¹²⁹ This narrative wishes not to criticise or expose the Jews – after all, Jesus was a Jewish man. Their responses to him and his works do not come from their Jewishness, but from the fact that they have not seen the Father and have not received Jesus and believed in him (Culpepper, 1983:129).

profane'. The fact that the man can see does not exhaust the meaning of his healing (Koester, 1996:11). The true meaning is found in his increased perception and insight, so that he eventually gains the boldness to tell the Pharisees that Jesus is a prophet (v 17), who had come from God (v 33), and finally he worships him as the Divine Son of Man (vv 35-38), knowing that this will have severe consequences.

One cannot disregard the role of fear and power in the Jewish leaders' and Pharisees' ethos. As they were utterly dependant on the societal script and the order it implied, the act of scripting was more than a religious and social activity – it was an assurance of order and power¹³⁰. The fact that the Jewish leaders cling so tightly to the societal script however actually blinds them to the glory and works of God. Jesus makes spittle and clay on a Sabbath, but also opens a blind man's eyes. They condemn him for the first, while disregarding the majesty of the latter.

Bruner (2012:581) puts it this way:

(1) Making anything on a Sabbath was strongly discouraged. (2) Healing a man born blind is exceptional. Shouldn't the life-restoring number two have overridden the cautionary number one?

This is a prime example of life-denying ideology, as religious code becomes more important than the well-being of a person (Herzog, 1972:135). The narrative of John 9 interrogates the life-denying script (Culpepper, 1998:174) and seeks to remind that the Torah was set in place for the distribution of justice, and not for "hoarding and exploiting others" (Herzog, 2000:166). Jesus' counter-ethos confronts the violation of a Divine gift and the mutilation thereof into a life-denying religious script. He is not challenging the Torah or temple, but the elite's *interpretation* thereof (Herzog, 2000:168).

This narrative can truly be regarded as an antidote for blind dogmatism (Lewis, 2005:54). The healed man's interaction with the Son of Man stirs him to "give glory to God" (v 24), but what inglorious glory manifests in the eyes of those who 'know' and 'see' what everyone else ought to be aware of. Jesus calls what they know into question in radical ways: an impure man as a vessel of God's works, and Jesus, 'a sinner' as agent of God.

¹³⁰ As discussed in 3.4.3.

5.5 Conclusion: a counter-ethos?

Throughout the narrative reading of both these episodes, the need and demand for proper and critical exegesis of the societal script has been illuminated and affirmed numerous times. Both narratives illustrate the working of God as contrary to that which the script deemed as ‘appropriate’ or ‘correct’, as the revelation of Jesus comes in the form of something radical and even ‘wrong’. Seeing as breaking free from the script would have been regarded as a vice in the first century¹³¹, Jesus – in both of these narratives – embodies something unvirtuous, unethical, inappropriate and even rebellious toward the first century Palestinian script – something that could only be called a counter-ethos.

Muecke (1969:15) defines irony as a “two-story” phenomenon, where the higher level of meaning is contradictory of the lower, more apparent level of meaning. As characters are often stuck in the lower level of understanding, the author guides the implied audience to achieve the higher level of understanding. To this, Culpepper (1983:168) adds that the Gospel of John consistently emphasises the distinction between apparent and higher understanding and evaluation. This is seen in the character of Jesus, who does not judge and act according to the obvious and apparent script, but judges and acts according a higher evaluation and insight. Thus, Jesus’ ethos is not just counter-scripted, but can in a sense be said to be ironic. He boldly avoids the lower level of interpretation of the Samaritan woman and the blind man and acts from a higher level of meaning – one where the Samaritan woman is not scripted by her gender, ethnicity, and sexual history, and one where the formerly blind man becomes more than a physically, morally and socially inferior sinner. Jesus, in radically counter-scripted ways, deems these marginalised individuals as agents of God. Those adhering to and perpetuating the script are played for the fool, since Jesus is the one acting from a higher revelation.

The character of Jesus is static and eternal (Culpepper, 1983:88). It is however when the other characters are confronted with this eternal character and his ethos, that development becomes possible. In terms of emerging faith and the fruit thereof, the Samaritan woman and blind man serve as each other’s counterparts in a bold message of counter-ethos to the scripted universe of their time. Both these

¹³¹ As discussed in 3.4.1.

characters progress in the revelation regarding the identity of Jesus (Köstenberger, 2009:224). It is in this undressing of who Jesus is that the characters begin to imitate a similar counter-ethos, transcending that which limits them in the societal script¹³². They are invited to share Jesus' higher vantage point and similarly invite others to do so.

The important thing to remember is that none of those falling into the trap of the lower level of interpretation are being unreasonable. From the vantage point of a twenty-first century reader, the first century script might sound strange and foolish – especially sin being attributed to disability or the fact that a woman ought not to speak to a man in public, but in line with the first century Mediterranean context, these people, in reiterating the script, are actually doing the culturally acceptable and socially, religiously and politically correct thing. The goal is therefore not simply to critique the assumption of a relation between disability and sin, or between gender and agency, but to critique the assumption that any conclusions can be drawn or justified on the ground of a person's 'scripted state' – be it according to his/her health or gender. It is therefore important that these narratives be used not to simply stir critique toward the first century script, but to become aware and critical of the twenty-first century script steering our own ethos and convictions¹³³.

Jesus' self-revelation is contrary to that of the script. And therefore, in the acceptance of the revelation and counter-ethos of Jesus, life and freedom leads these characters to critically re-evaluate the scripted universe of their time and reconsider who they are and ought to be in relation to him. The beggar, born in sin, begins not only by verifying an act of healing on the Sabbath, but worships the sinner who performed this healing, challenging the religious leaders, and eventually disqualifying himself from the religious system of the day. Likewise, the Samaritan woman, who initially seeks to remind this Jewish man of his inappropriate conduct, gradually embraces it and eventually becomes an embodiment of a radically

¹³² See Webster (2003:126-142) on how the Samaritan woman transcends the categories of being adulterous, foreign and unknowing throughout the narrative. Webster reads the narrative of Jn 4:1-42 through the wisdom tradition of the 'Strange Woman' (or 'Woman Folly') described in the book of Proverbs, illustrating how the Samaritan woman can be identified with the Strange Woman, but how she ultimately transcends this identification through the transformation that she undergoes.

¹³³ Although the scope of this study does not allow for this to be done in detail, some examples of the contemporary scripted nature will be discussed in chapter six.

inappropriate public ethos, which leads her fellow townspeople to buy into something beyond what is 'normal' and 'appropriate'.

So even as the *Book of Signs* reveals much about Jesus, the ethos and identity of Jesus does not leave others without some revelation about (or at least interrogation of) their own. In realising who Jesus is and who he is not, these two marginalised and scripted human beings realise who they are not and begin showing symptoms of a completely different ethos than prescribed to them – a counter-ethos. This does not mean that they suddenly find themselves unscripted, but that they have, through interaction with the counter-scripted Jesus, become willing to deviate from that which society perceives as set in stone. The disciples, as well as the Samaritan woman at the well, in their initial echoing of the societal script, illustrate that no human being can claim to be completely unscripted, but the willingness to be challenged serves for a healthy ethos.

One also ought not to go as far as claiming that for Jesus, the identity markers of these individuals and others were non-existent. He is not oblivious to the fact that the woman in John 4 is a Samaritan, a woman¹³⁴, or to her rather unorthodox marital status – just as he is aware of the fact that the man in John 9 was born blind. What he denies is the interpretation and application of their identity markers to their ethos, worth and agency. He raises concern for the ideological convictions that lie behind these identity markers and unmask these categories of gender and health as pseudo-distinctions (Herzog, 1972:72).

The formerly blind man's repeated admittance of ignorance on many matters (Lewis, 2005:54), as well as the Samaritan woman's willingness to (although hesitantly) participate in something totally unscripted, allows them both to embrace the works of God – something they would have missed had they clung to their societal scripts. The Samaritan woman could have grabbed her water pot and run for the town as soon as this Jewish man opened his mouth to speak to her, and the formerly blind man could have ignored the seemingly sinful command of this stranger and simply

¹³⁴ Referring to the Samaritan woman as γύναι (woman), he does not all of a sudden deny the fact that she is female (Conway, 2003:81), but essentially denies the appropriate ethos for and toward females as determined by the societal script.

echoed the religious leaders' interpretation of this individual who showed no regard for the religious laws of the Sabbath.

Both the Samaritan woman and the formerly blind man's counter-ethos bear fruit and have consequences. For the Samaritan woman, her break from the script has produced the remarkable fruit of freedom and a powerful new role as evangelist, but potentially ruined her domestic situation and probable economic safety net. The formerly blind man is given a voice, but banned from the synagogue. Many scholars are of the opinion that names and characters in the Gospel do not simply represent individuals, but groups of people in general (Johnson, 1999:533). These narratives are therefore not simply about a Samaritan woman and a blind man, but invite all characters of society to re-evaluate the script they are adhering to and critically engage with it. Narratives can be used either to confirm existing ideologies and values, or to challenge them, by exposing their weaknesses (Culpepper, 1983:210). When this happens, the reader is forced to seek beyond the world that is familiar to him/her, and find a counterbalance to these norms and ideologies. The familiar ideologies and values – 'the script' – becomes what the reader needs to move beyond, since it has been exposed for what it is (Iser, 1974:xii).

It is no wonder that Bruner (2012:597) refers to the narratives of John 4 and 9 as "probably the two most pleasurable chapters to teach in the Gospel before... the stories of the Passion and the Resurrection themselves". Both these narratives carry a powerful message which truly challenges the audience. As the plot of the Johannine Gospel revolves around drawing the audience in-to accepting the revelation of Jesus (Culpepper, 1983:98), the plots of these two narratives seem to be working towards a similar goal. The implied audience are presented with a new reality to determine their ethos – the testimony and counter-ethos of a man called Jesus.

6 Counter-scripting? Contemporary appropriations of a counter-ethos

6.1 Introduction

Gospel narratives are not stories composed for the sake of art or entertainment, but written to “promote interests that transcend the limits of [its] exclusive storyworld” (Merenlahti & Hakola, 1999:33). The goal of such a narrative would be to introduce readers or hearers to the implied audience¹³⁵ and encourage them to “believe in the values shared by the Christian community from which they emerged” (1999:33). In chapters four and five, the narrative worlds of both John 4 and 9 were explored with some significant findings. The theological findings will however remain abstract and ‘in the narrative’ if not brought into conversation with (a) contextual situation(s).

The rhetorical possibilities of the narrative will guide this chapter. Rhetoric seeks to move beyond what the story means and says, to what it attempts to *do* (Rhoads, 1999:273). Since the aim of narrative criticism is to explore a variety of potential meanings for a variety of contexts (Powell, 2010:243), the narratives will be brought into conversation with two specific contexts. This chapter will attempt to shed light on what these narratives were/are potentially able to do within the contemporary Ephesian context of the Johannine community and the contemporary twenty-first century South Africa, thus exploring the ways in which historical audiences (both of the 1st and 21st century) could have or can be challenged and invited to re-orientate themselves towards the implied audience, adopt the point of view of the narrator’s or implied author’s ideology, and be re-orientated into embodying a certain ethos as “children of God” (Culpepper, 1983:226)¹³⁶. When the point of view of the narrative is grasped, this re-understanding, re-orientation and re-embodying becomes accessible to a multitude of historical audiences¹³⁷.

¹³⁵ Koester (1996:9) is of the opinion that when speaking of the implied audience of the Fourth Gospel, it is better to refer to a spectrum of readers and hearers than one monochromatic audience.

¹³⁶ The reconstruction of the first century Eastern Mediterranean world is however not an exact science, but a process dependant on various diverse sources. It is therefore important to note the tentative nature of this process as scholars often differ on precise details and notions.

¹³⁷ Rhoads (1999:270) however emphasises that “any effort to provide an airtight unified interpretation of a writing will do violence to the complexity and multivalence of the narrative”. Therefore, as these texts are multifaceted and contain a great possibility of interpretations, it would be impossible to exhaust them all in any study. Therefore the aim is to explore some potential implications – the emphasis remaining on gender and health.

One of these is the first historical audience of the Gospel of John, known as the Johannine community¹³⁸.

6.2 Contemporary appropriations: The Johannine community

This community probably existed in the Eastern Mediterranean region of Ephesus in a time around 90A.D. (Johnson, 1999:522; Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:19). The overarching script of late first century Ephesus testifies of an Israelite version of Mediterranean Hellenism (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:11). “Both Judean society and the Johannine group share the same overarching system of meaning, just as both are part and parcel of the same overarching social system” (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:11). The wider symbolic universe in which the Johannine community found themselves would therefore have been very similar to that of first century Palestine discussed in chapter three. The narrative settings within the Gospel of John were not simply chosen at random, but in a way that the Johannine community could relate to in order to convey a powerful message. Since the meaning of language does not simply lie at the level of wording, but is derived from social systems (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:3), the particular words chosen by the author of the Gospel responded to a social reality beyond the narrative.

Johnson (1999:521) emphasises that the Johannine community was confronted with the integration of the symbolic universe, their community, and the interpretation of Jesus. They were thus challenged with a new interpretation of themselves and others in relation to Jesus Christ in the midst of a society strictly demarcated by a life-denying script. Carter (2008:256) is of the opinion that the author of the Johannine Gospel sought to create and affirm an alternative community and identity among the audience. In order to achieve this, both the narrator and the character of Jesus (as protagonist) speak a special language (Petersen, 1993:1). Both lure the audience in with that which is familiar, after which they are suddenly estranged by the use of language that is contra-cultural. Scholars refer to this way of speaking as

¹³⁸ Talking about a Johannine community is however anything but simple. To some, this community is simply hypothetical, representing a school of thought, whereas others use this term to refer to a cluster of loosely organised local house-churches (Johnson, 1999:522). The roots of the Johannine tradition and interpretation already lie in the early Palestinian environment and therefore the Johannine community cannot be cut off from this process of development and simply added at the time the Gospel was written down. The formation of this community was a complex and dynamic process and any discussion thereof will always be hypothetical (du Rand, 1993:19). The continuity between the later Ephesian and the earlier Palestinian context should however not be underplayed.

anti-language¹³⁹. Anti-language, or counter-language is a version of society's everyday language, used in conflict with popular ideology and the societal script (Petersen, 1993:89). This implies speaking out against established modes of conception and perception, and ultimately leads to a process of re-socialisation (Malina and Rohrbaugh, 1998:10-11; Halliday, 1976:575). Counter-language is a vehicle for social reality, but an alternative reality – one that primarily runs against the grain of society at large (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:11).

Since language functions so effectively in keeping the societal script alive, the author of the Johannine Gospel turned to language as a tool to dismantle this script and affirm a radical counter-script with the ethos it implied. Counter-language “derives from an antisociety that is set up within another society as a conscious alternative to it” (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:46). The Johannine community thus functioned as a counter-community. Fuglseth (2005:55) refers to John's Gospel as representative of a ‘cultic’ community which claimed to be different from society at large and justified this difference through a new revelation that changed the original tradition or societal order. This ‘new revelation’ was the revelation of Jesus of Nazareth and his counter-ethos.

The counter-language of the Johannine Gospel served a revolutionary and resisting role to the first century script as it served to create solidarity within this counter-society and encourage the community not to give in to the pressures of the societal script (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:11). In the eyes of the opponents, John's community was either on the margin of the societal script, or transgressed it (1998:9). For those acting-out against the script, the Johannine Gospel and community became a place of refuge. The use of counter-language was thus a strategy employed by the author to encourage and affirm counter-ethos. Everything the narrator and characters do is strategically plotted out to create and strengthen the counter-language and -perspectives on the audience's world. This counter-language served as an invitation to the counter-community to keep on re-orientating themselves in the midst of a firm and life-denying societal script.

Since the Mediterranean society was a collectivist society, individuals felt the pressure to conform to the societal script in order to be granted an identity within the

¹³⁹ See Halliday (1978:164-182) for an unpacking of anti-language.

system (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:163). As social standing and kinship norms largely regulated belonging, status, ethos and agency (1998:165), a counter-ethos would imply an often irreparable loss in terms of kinship and honour. In creating solidarity among those within this counter-community, the author creates a fictive kinship. Fictive-kinships would be groups where individuals treated each other as if they were kin (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:236). These groups would normally be reserved for individuals with the same honour ranking and social status, but Jesus' disregard for this illustrated a powerful and radical ideal for the Johannine fictive kinship.

The Johannine antisociety functioned as a surrogate family. It transcended the normal categories of birth, class, race, sex, education, wealth, and power; hence, it was inclusive in a startling new way (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:89).

This would include moving beyond the scripted meanings of the very prominent Eastern Mediterranean identity marker of gender. Within the greater society females were still very much regarded as embedded within males (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:88-89). Gender segregation was commonplace in the Ephesian society, as males belonged to the public sphere (*polis*) and females to the private (*oikos*), and in some areas an elected official called a *gynaikonomos*, would be charged with regulating the appropriate public discourse (or absence thereof) between males and females (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:105). The fact that the narrator clearly notes the gender of the woman at the well and the strangeness of Jesus' conversation with her implies that gender-distinctions and -ideologies were commonplace in the Johannine community (Conway, 2003:103). According to this societal script, the counter-ethos of Jesus toward the Samaritan woman, and her eventual embodiment of a radical counter-ethos, would be utterly unthinkable – especially in terms of public talk.

Spencer (2003:16) emphasises that most biblical narratives containing conversations between men and women are androcentric in nature. This means that women simply feature as literary devices in order to have men's voices heard and that little to no attention is usually paid to what she is trying to say. The Johannine author does not only give the Samaritan woman the agency to function as a round and dynamic character in the narrative, but also remarks that those in the town of Sychar (and not

only the women!) paid close attention to her words. Whereas women were largely scripted as gossipers with little to no public agency and authority (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:103), the narrator illustrates the Samaritan woman's talk as profoundly authoritative. Moreover, the use of the well type-scene is an apt illustration of ironic counter-language on the author's behalf as familiar language and imagery is used to draw the audience into their own script and make their own assumptions and conclusions, followed by a radical and unfamiliar turn of events¹⁴⁰. In this sense, the narrator of the Gospel of John functions as a master of counter-ethos.

Schneiders (1998:518) refers to the patriarchal character of the culture in which the early church developed. The narrator, explicitly stating the disciples' surprise at Jesus' dealings with the Samaritan woman, deliberately reflects on this. Some scholars also believe that the narrative of the Samaritan woman was particularly used to address a situation in the Johannine community, where Samaritan converts might have experienced rejection from the community of believers due to cultural, ethnic and religious biases (Lewis, 2005:28). This narrative effectively illustrates how the person, works and words of Jesus exceed these boundaries and are eagerly received by the Samaritans (Lewis, 2005:28). The fact that Jesus reaches out to this woman and that he gladly accepts the offer of hospitality from her townspeople ought to have encouraged the Johannine community to do likewise.

The invitation to this community also crossed the boundaries of health set out by their societal script, where the health condition of an individual was directly associated with that person's status, agency and appropriate ethos (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:114). Infirmary and disability were regarded as a deviance of cultural, moral, religious and social norms (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:114) and the connection between sin and sickness was very much alive. Jesus' counter-ethos within the narrative of John 9 serves as a clear defiance of these scripted ideologies, as it challenges the dominant purity system of the Eastern Mediterranean (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:94)¹⁴¹. Both narratives would have served to invite the Johannine

¹⁴⁰ See 4.4 (pp 71-72) for a brief illustration on how the narrative of John 4 can almost be regarded as a parody of the usual well type-scene.

¹⁴¹ The fact that the Johannine community found themselves outside of Judean Palestine did not guarantee the absence of Jewish religious leaders and the systems of purity advocated by them

community beyond this place of scripted order by affirming the counter-ethos of Jesus – an ethos clearly ‘out of bounds’. This probably resulted in a hostile relationship with the larger Jewish community and opposition and expulsion from the synagogue would not have been strange to the Johannine community (Cirafesi, 2014:175; Lindars, 1994:53; Reinhartz, 2003:31).

Moreover, being a counter-community, the Johannine group would have found themselves completely ‘out-grouped’ by society at large. Lindars (2000:73) refers to the community as “a beleaguered sect, alienated from the local society”. Since honour and shame was the internalised sanction that kept individuals and groups in their place and thus served as the prime indicator of social worth and place (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:122), the Johannine community as counter-community would have felt particular pressure from this value system to conform to the societal script. This community would therefore have been challenged to move beyond the system of allocation of honour and shame that they were socialised into and invited to be liberated from their social status and its subsequent ethos and agency.

As a counter-ethos could have caused the whole system to come crashing down (Carter, 2008:56), it was crucial to the elite that everyone remain in their scripted position. Fear was a powerful tool used by those in authority to keep everyone in line (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:150) and the embodiment of a counter-ethos would be a risky and scary thing to do. In the midst of this major risk, the counter-language of the author fulfilled an encouraging role.

The important thing to realise is that the author and narrator’s counter-ethos is anchored in the initial counter-ethos of Jesus. Without the person of Jesus, there would have been no need for the Johannine counter-society. Jesus illustrates counter-language in an embodied form. As the Word made flesh (Jn 1:14), he is not simply a speaker of this counter-language, but also a doer thereof. Since the first century did not represent a time of introspection and individualisation, characters were mostly interpreted as representing a group (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:87). Therefore, what Jesus effectively does in these narratives is not simply to vindicate an individual, but he effectively vindicates a group, a people – women, Samaritans,

(Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:177). Du Rand (1993:20) affirms that there was a large Jewish community in Ephesus.

adulterers, the sick, the poor, the marginalised, the counter-community. Jesus thus functions as the one coming to give life to this community (Pilch, 2000:120). It is in him that they can expect to find comfort, and not in the systems and scripts of society¹⁴² (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:60).

In a society where individuals were mainly characterised by the different categories they would fall into, of which gender and health were of key importance (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:149), the invitation extended to this Johannine community through the narratives of John 4 and 9 was to be re-orientated and -socialised in relation to the person and ethos of Jesus. In the midst of a script of stereotyping, deviance labelling, gossiping, out-grouping and shaming, the challenge remained to radically counter-act, -speak and -identify others and themselves in a life-giving and counter-scripted way. As 'boundary maintenance' was essential for the script to flourish, the counter-language, -ethos and -being of this counter-community would essentially be in the business of boundary-breaking as initiated by Jesus of Nazareth.

6.3 Contemporary appropriations: today

Culpepper (1983:4) states that as analogies can be drawn between the first century and the modern context, the Gospel of John continues to speak to the modern audience. This does not imply that we simply apply biblical texts to our respective contexts, but that we discern a process from the way in which texts possibly spoke to a certain ancient context and seek ways to apply a similar process to our context. As these narratives sought the formation of and transformation to communities of Christ-like believers, they ought to inspire communities and believers today to be challenged, formed and transformed¹⁴³.

As briefly unpacked in chapter one, 'the script' is very much alive in modern day South Africa¹⁴⁴. People seem to be mainly organised and categorised according to this symbolic universe of meaning and scripted as soon as a meaningful social category becomes available (McCrea, Wieber & Myers, 2012:51). Examples of such categories are endless: *disabled*, *HIV positive*, *woman*, *black*, etcetera. These

¹⁴² "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" (Jn 14:27).

¹⁴³ Keep in mind that we are taking a leap of 20 centuries, situating ourselves in a context culturally, socially, economically, religiously, politically and physically far removed from the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean.

¹⁴⁴ As discussed in 1.2.

categories also often intersect to create new ones, which marginalise individuals even more. Individualities and differences within these categories are more often than not overridden by the general stereotyped categorisation of the group¹⁴⁵. These identifications are always accompanied by a prescribed status, agency and ethos with its limitations and obligations.

In terms of gender, the societal script has not only manifested itself in social, religious and economic inequality, but has also fuelled the problem of sexual, domestic and gender-based violence in disturbing ways. With this in mind, the need for critical reflection upon ideologies and perceptions connected to gender becomes increasingly important, since the effects of these are manifold. Numerous scholars have pointed out that masculine domination relies very strongly on traditional ideology, norms, and rules (Ratele, 2013:133). These are reproduced and perpetuated by “females and males, children and adults alike” (Sewpaul, 2013:116), since they lie embedded in the societal script. This has in many cases led to the acceptance and perpetuation of hostile and inferior attitudes and ideologies toward women (Kalichman et al, 2007:24). As long as male and female will allow the identity marker of gender to socially script and limit them apart from the revelation of Jesus, structural and political action will prove to be futile.

Alongside this is the health identity marker of disability. One cannot but sense the absolute frustration of the formerly blind man, anxiously trying to assert himself¹⁴⁶. Similarly, those with disabilities often find themselves without the basic agency to be their own mouthpiece and are simply defined, limited and spoken for by others.

This attitude seems to be derived from some sort of ‘logic’ or rule of how things ‘ought to be’, but as Reinders (2008:43-44) hauntingly remarks:

Most people with disabilities do not suffer from their disability, nor do they necessarily suffer from what ‘we’ think about ‘them’. What they suffer from, if anything, is what we think about ourselves, or – even better – our lack of thinking critically about our own position.

¹⁴⁵ This is especially prominent when considering the umbrella-term of disabilities. Swinton (2012:174) emphasises that a term such as disability is used to bind together a whole array of unconnected and dissimilar conditions with no regard for the vast differences and individualities among them, stating: “You may be blind and I might have Down’s syndrome, but we are melded together in our shared oppression; to be disabled is to be oppressed” (2012:176).

¹⁴⁶ V 9: He kept on saying: “I am [he]”.

Without critical reflection upon the way in which we script ourselves, the script will continue to harm those who are different from us. Swinton (2012:179) goes so far as to refer to the term ‘disability’ as an actual “moving target” on the individual deemed as such. It is essential to consider how the script is actually making life harder for these individuals, and how it is detrimental to the well-being of society at large.

In few other situations has the societal script done more damage and been more counter-productive than in the case of HIV and AIDS. This is becoming especially problematic in South Africa (UNAIDS, 2013:v), as the effect of stigma and ideologies around the virus muffles the voices of those infected and affected by it¹⁴⁷. Ackermann (2006:223) highlights that people with HIV will often, out of fear, not disclose their status. Just as the Samaritan woman who visits the well when no one else would come near it, exposing herself to danger and loneliness, these (often women), to avoid the judgement of others, will not disclose their status, exposing themselves to the dangers of walking the road alone. The silence is often deadly, as it does not allow those who need help to seek it.

When considering individuals with HIV, the question of the disciples to Jesus regarding the blind man becomes less ridiculous and even justifiable: “Who sinned – this person or their parents – that they are infected with *the virus*?”¹⁴⁸ Ackermann (2006:229) emphasises that cases of HIV and AIDS are often linked to behaviours already stigmatised and therefore often seen as caused by moral fault rather than a virus.

However, countless of HIV infections are the result of rape¹⁴⁹, job exposure, blood transfusions, breastfeeding, childbirth, etcetera. How devastating that our societal script more often than not deems these individuals as sinners, morally and socially inferior and disqualified as agents of the works of God. And could we perhaps get ourselves to empathise with the individuals who, in their innocence, were infected

¹⁴⁷ According to the South African National HIV Prevalence, Incidence and Behaviour Survey (Shisana et al, 2014:xxxix), 50% of participants answered the stigma question “*Would you want to keep the HIV-positive status of a family member a secret?*” positively.

¹⁴⁸ This can also in a great way be seen in the case of disabilities. With the proliferation of genetic testing, the perception that the prevention of disability lies with the parents of an unborn baby has become increasingly strong, which has been stirring a feeling of entitlement from society to personally hold people responsible for having a disabled child (Reinders, 2001:4). Even here, the perception of the sin of the parents in allowing such a child to be born is not foreign to our modern society.

¹⁴⁹ Studies have shown a significant association between HIV infections and sexual violence, especially among women (Kalichman et al, 2007:20).

with this disease, would the narrative of John 4 call us out again. The Samaritan woman could have been the victim of several divorces or been widowed several times, but the odds are, she could have simply been an adulteress, guilty of immoral sexual conduct. Regardless, the reason for her questionable marital status does not seem very important to Jesus, as he does not even enquire about it and still uses her as a powerful agent of the works of God. Perhaps this is the biggest ideology to overcome: that those who, by their own moral mishaps and sexual sinfulness have been infected with the virus, remain firmly scripted as sinners and societal beggars – pushed to the periphery. Why would Jesus, Son of God, seek hospitality from someone like that; why would he enter into communication with them; and why on earth, would he use them to do the works of the Father?

Our society is in dire need of individuals who are willing to ‘act out’ toward the societal script. Eiesland (1994:94) pleads for this counter-ethos, which she deems as “the revolutionary work of resistance”. This includes the rejection of the stigmatised social identity so often imposed upon individuals that are ‘different’ (Eiesland, 1994:27). In other words, a counter-scripted definition of individuals – where they are not primarily identified in terms of their physical, mental, or emotional state and given according values, roles and agency in society, but where they are given the opportunity to move beyond this to a state of being in relation to Jesus. Reinders (2013:35) refers to this as thinking theologically about each human in such a way that the distinctions between people *with* and people *without* disabilities (or male and female, HIV positive and HIV negative, etc.) become irrelevant in the way they are perceived and valued¹⁵⁰. This is exactly what Jesus illustrates in both of these narratives. As he does not deny the physical or biological state of being of the characters, he deems the social conventions and ideologies of these conditions completely irrelevant.

As the script materialises in the ethos of those who obey and perpetuate it, the critical evaluation of it must materialise in the counter-ethos of those who question and critique it. The ability to disrupt the script comes from the opportunity to think in a

¹⁵⁰ Perhaps for practical purposes this distinction on the grounds of ability is necessary, but theologically and religiously, they fade into insignificance (Reinders, 2013:36). This is also the case with gender as certain distinctions in being and function between male and female cannot be disregarded. This study wishes not to critique distinctions and orders, but to question ‘this is how it’s done’ as a valid motivation of enforcing anything.

way that is alternative to dominant ideologies and perceptions. “Sometimes a single word, phrase, or observation can constitute an epiphany that makes us question and alter the ideas and values that we have grown up with” (Sewpaul, 2013:119). Social categories only exist because members of society agree on the fact that they are real and continue to be committed to that perception (Johnson, 1999:11)¹⁵¹. Schüssler Fiorenza (1999:80) emphasises that individuals have the capacity and capability to critically (and actively) interact with this symbolic universe.

In both narratives Jesus uses those at the bottom of the system – perhaps to illustrate that they are not purely victims of the script, but also responsible for perpetuating it. Ackermann (1993:22-23) speaks of “conscientization” as a discovery of the self as oppressed which leads to the desire for change. In this, a counter-reality is created, in which a deep awareness of the social structures and hierarchies is achieved (Halliday, 1976:576). This illuminates the fact that all reality, all voices and all faces are socially constructed, and more importantly, that they can be critically analysed, questioned and even altered.

The problem is that individuals rarely realise their own role in the reproduction of ideologies, prejudices and stereotypes (Sewpaul, 2013:122). Schüssler Fiorenza (1999:153) warns against the empiricist-positivist understanding of reality as objective, neutral and outside of discourse. It is essential to be aware of the fact that social reality as we know it is already a construct shaped by various ideologies and theoretical frameworks (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1999:153) and can only exist forth if it is (consciously or subconsciously) agreed upon. Group ideology seems to work at its best when it is regarded as the ‘natural’ or the ‘real’ by its members (Apphia, 2001:224). In other words, the casualness and normalness of the script allows for it to be perpetuated most effectively.

¹⁵¹ See Johnson (1999:11-12) for a thorough discussion and illustration of the existence of social categories.

Ratele (2013:148) therefore seeks to remind us that the receivers of tradition need to be critical and that each individual or group has the opportunity (and obligation) to reflect on the dominant script handed down to them in order to potentially resist and rewrite it¹⁵². Schüssler Fiorenza (1999:64) pleads for a critical theory of rhetoric that stresses the subjectivity and distortion of language and tradition. This would include religious tradition and therefore a rhetorical criticism of the biblical texts, as well as the way in which they are *interpreted* cannot be overemphasised (1999:67)¹⁵³. Those who wish to read ancient texts should become aware of their own scripted values (Pilch, 1991:142) before the transformation of the social-symbolic order can be attained (Chopp, 1987:132).

The Samaritan woman, as well as the blind man, were bound to their societal scripts – both by others and themselves – in a way that was life-denying. As the Gospel of John is centred around life (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998:41), the counter-ethos of Jesus serves as a powerful vehicle for breathing life¹⁵⁴. Moreover, Jesus' counter-ethos starts with himself. He is not blinded by the social systems but in a state of being fully and soberly aware of them, *consciously* counter-acts, even in the case of open antagonism and confusion¹⁵⁵. He does not simply seek to rearrange Mediterranean values (Malina, 1993:78), but inspires critical reflection upon them. As representative of God, he stirs the realisation that perhaps God did not script the universe in the same way that humanity does.

¹⁵² It is also important to be critical of *who* the agents of traditions, ideologies, stereotypes and perceptions are. In other words, the interpreters of society's 'great traditions' (such as the Pharisees in the Gospel-narratives) also need to be subjected to critical analysis, since meaning is infused with forms of power and the societal script always serves the societal power structure (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1999:64). Swinton (2012:178-179) illustrates this effectively: "Why are certain deviations from the norm considered beautiful and others marked out and given [a] name...? Because those who define the criteria of the so-called norm decide that to be the case." Jones (2000:88) warns against the cultural imperialistic nature of society where "a more powerful group universalizes its standards and imposes them on less powerful persons... this usually includes rules and standards about appropriate gender roles and behaviours... those who then do not conform are labelled deviant, sick, bad or immoral".

¹⁵³ Reinders (2013:35) affirms this by stating that "[h]uman dignity is only a useful notion when it is developed in a critical encounter with the theological tradition".

¹⁵⁴ To my opinion, a counter-ethos which separates itself from the revelation of Jesus could prove to be futile. Both Samaritan woman and the formerly blind man acts from a revelation of who Jesus is and what that implies about their identity.

¹⁵⁵ It is not Jesus' unawareness of the scripted universe and socio-symbolic order that led him to action. If this were the case he would not have approached the people he did and asked the questions he did.

The invitation remains to undertake a thorough exegesis of the societal script of our time and to recommit and re-orientate ourselves (as followers of Jesus of Nazareth) from a life-denying script-obeying ethos, towards the life-giving counter-ethos of Jesus. This does not imply an ethos of escapism. Stegemann (2002:53) insists that “Jesus’ ethos was a constituent part of the symbolic moral world of his society. We cannot – and Jesus could not – remove our society’s or group’s symbolic moral world like a garment¹⁵⁶. It is like one’s skin, out of which human beings cannot come”. Rather we need to become critical of the roles we play and allow (and often force) others to play. Only when social praxis deviates from the scripted universe, does it inspire critical reflection in others (Steggemann, 2002:53).

However, reflection is futile if it does not take place within a dialectic relationship to praxis:

[T]he greatest challenge is to *act* in terms of this new understanding of society. Reflection uninformed by praxis remains sterile. But praxis without reflection soon becomes shallow and directionless (Lategan, 1989:115; emphasis added).

The counter-script has a necessary performative dimension and pragmatic consequences to it (Lategan, 1989:110) as it cannot simply be written and left unperformed¹⁵⁷. However, those who embody a counter-ethos often find it physically and emotionally exhausting (Jones, 2000:88). “It is not at all a friendlylike [sic], chatty, backslapping reconciliation that is provided, but a painful examination of one’s self-deception” (Herzog, 1972:78). The embodiment of a counter-ethos does not assure the change in circumstances, but essentially a change in perception (of the self and of others) with its open-ended possibilities¹⁵⁸. As it cost the formerly blind man his belonging in the synagogue, the Johannine community their social and religious belonging in the wider community, and ultimately cost Jesus of Nazareth his

¹⁵⁶ It therefore needs to be emphasised that Jesus’ ethos is not regarded as an ‘un-ethos’, which would imply that it hovers above the societal script, but a counter-ethos, which is situated within the script, yet sets itself up against it.

¹⁵⁷ This is why the case is made for a counter-ethos, since ethos includes the praxical sphere of action and the shared intellectual sphere of reflection (see 2.7).

¹⁵⁸ We have no guarantees that the lives of either the formerly blind man or Samaritan woman were forever changed or that their stance in society was in any way altered after the happenings of the two episodes. This study does not intend to propose that counter-ethos will immediately result in change, but rather seeks to evoke critical ethos in order to inspire reflection upon the societal script.

life, it does not come as a surprise that many will be reluctant to accept this invitation.

The Gospel of John is essentially about believing in Jesus, and having life in his Name (Jn 20:30-31). Hakola (1999:223) remarks that the essential thing concerning the characters in the Fourth Gospel is their response to Jesus. Through these responses, they begin becoming who they really are (Merenlahti, 1999:50). Through the narrative, each audience member is actually invited to become a character in this magnificent story and to embody who they really are in relation to the person and ethos of Jesus, who exists as the pre-existing logos. He scripted the universe together with the Father before human ideologies and power structures put life-denying orders into place (Jn 1:1-4). The ethos of Jesus, as incarnated eternal one, is thus a trustworthy source to those who wish to embody life in abundance. Jesus' counter-ethos to his scripted universe demonstrates something of the fragility of the scripted universe and encourages us to question our societal script(s) and evaluate ourselves and others rather against the ethos of the eternal Son of God, than the ideologies of the day.

7 The invitation

The ethos of Jesus is not simply studied in order that it could inspire and be admired, but grasping something of his life and works should result in the formation and transformation of those engaged with it (Burridge, 2007:49). This study initially sketched the horrific inequalities and injustice that individuals within South Africa are confronted with on the basis of skewed social and symbolic categories of among others gender and health. Sewpaul (2013:116) emphasises that we as South Africans find ourselves in a society which pleads for the challenge of taken-for-granted assumptions in order that race, gender, and class (and might I add health) discriminations and inequalities are not reproduced. Systems of injustice and inequality are greatly perpetuated by everyone and anyone uncritical of their scripted universe and often even by those suffering under these systems through unexamined ideology and ethos.

[T]he problems we confront are not disability, ethnicity, race, class... or gender; they are instead the inequalities, negative attitudes, misrepresentations, and institutional practices that result from the process of stigmatization (Thomson, 1997:32).

Through a socio-scientific examination and unpacking of the social world of first century Palestine, the world in which Jesus walked and talked seems to have been formed, ordered and tainted by its own societal script. This script is especially prevalent in the narrative settings of the episodes within John 4 and 9. The narrative reading of Jesus' ethos toward this societal script produces insights of a thoughtful and dynamic exegetical process, in which he challenges the societal script in a dangerous, yet liberating way. This counter-ethos extends the parameters of the narrative and can be seen as reflected in the Johannine faith community, who, through counter-language and counter-ethos essentially functioned as a counter-community toward the life-denying script of society at large.

The challenge remains to critically engage the ideologies and language of the time and to re-examine the implied or prescribed status, agency and ethos of people, specifically those imposed by perceptions of gender and health. It is therefore essential that existing assumptions of the basis of certain identity markers be re-evaluated and perhaps that groups and individuals be counter-defined and -named

in life-giving ways. It is in this instance that an ostracised Samaritan female becomes an evangelist and disciple of Jesus – liberated to move way beyond the appropriate markers of status, agency and ethos set out for her by the script, and that a blind beggar, perceived as ‘impure’, can serve as an agent for Divine revelation and demonstration.

The invitation remains to be moved beyond the unexamined perpetuation of the societal script, to which Schüssler Fiorenza (1999:64) actually refers as “structural sin”, and to counter-think, counter-speak, counter-act and counter-be in life-giving and liberating ways. As long as we presume life to be transparent (Herzog, 1972:136), the ethos of Jesus will always remain offensive and beyond our grasp, but embracing the counter-ethos of Jesus can serve to illustrate the fragility and feebleness of that which seems ‘set in stone’. Only when a social structure is questioned, does it become vulnerable and threatened (Johnson, 1999:12), but unquestioned social orders will remain – and remain strong!

When we say, “I think,” “I believe,” “I know,” we should ask ourselves how do we know, believe, or think, and where do our knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs come from. Each of us has the power to disrupt or to reinforce dominant thinking (Sewpaul, 2013:120).

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