Engendering Violence in Papua New Guinea
Engendering Violence in Papua New Guinea

Edited by Margaret Jolly and Christine Stewart
with Carolyn Brewer
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For Dorothy Counts and Dame Carol Kidu
Preface

Christine Stewart

It all began early in 2004, when I had just started my PhD program at The Australian National University, Canberra. Suddenly, stories of the Three-Mile Guesthouse Raid burst into cyberspace. The emails started flying, the hidden tales were posted online, email discussion lists picked up the issue, lawyers dissected the police case, distressed anthropologists and social workers tried to understand. On ASAONET, the discussion list of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania (ASAO), someone asked: why the violence? Others contributed their thoughts, observations and theories to the discussion. Someone suggested that it would make a good session topic for ASAO’s annual meeting.

For two weeks, I was glued to my keyboard, frantically networking, fielding questions to which I had only partial answers. This was my place, my territory, my work. I had lived, studied and worked in PNG for more than half my adult life. I had been involved in the later stages of the Law Reform Commission’s initiative on domestic violence of the 1980s and 1990s. I had drafted PNG’s HIV management law, just a couple of years previously, constructing it as far as possible so as to render HIV stigma and discrimination unlawful, and ensuring that sexual minorities were included in the protection afforded by the law.

Now, I was appalled at and perplexed by the total abjection of the helpless women caught up in the raid. How could anyone be treated so shamefully and brutally in public, in the nation’s capital? Who was protesting? Hardly anyone, it seemed at the time.

When the ASAO session was suggested, I waited anxiously. Nobody volunteered to facilitate. Then Dorothy Counts chimed in with a query about the original news item. At the time, Dorothy was only a famous name to me: editor and driving force behind two books and a special journal edition devoted to domestic violence in cross-cultural perspective. Was she going to take charge again? Perfect, I thought, and contacted her. No, she replied, she would not take on the task, but she offered me every assistance if I would.

Do it, said my long-time friend and former UPNG law teacher Jean Zorn, now far away in the USA. Do it, said Margaret Jolly, head of what was then the ANU Gender Relations Centre. And so this volume was born, initially christened ‘Gender Violence in Oceania’ and developed into its present form through sessions at ASAO annual meetings in Hawai’i, California, Virginia and
Canberra. My first thanks must therefore go to ASAO and its cheery band of itinerant anthropologists, who welcomed me into their ranks and supported me throughout.

Many potential contributors arrived to join the session. Some left, and their founding work does not appear here. I want to thank Lawrence Hammar, Vicky Lockwood, Abby McLeod, Marta Rohatynskij, Paige West and ‘the two Christines’, Christine Salomon and Christine Hamelin, for their enthusiastic participation and fascinating contributions in the early stages of our work together. I also make special acknowledgement of Phineas Hartson, prevented from attending his first (or any) meeting by USA immigration requirements, simply because he had once been arrested for participating in a gay rights protest in Australia—gender abuse of a slightly different kind?

An even bigger thankyou goes to those who stayed the course, crafted their papers, willingly joined in the round robins of commenting on each others’ work—even, in several cases, completely re-writing and shifting ground as we progressed. The results of their labours make up this volume.

A special huge thanks goes to my supervisor, professor and mentor Margaret Jolly who on several occasions and in various ways rescued me, my PhD and the entire Engendering Violence project from total oblivion. All we asked her to do, really, was to become our lead discussant, but ultimately she did far more. It was Margaret too who enlisted the assistance of Carolyn Brewer, rédactrice par excellence, who skilfully crafted our simple texts into professional online book form. Thanks also to The Australian National University, to its newly established Gender Institute, and especially to the Australian Research Council, which in funding the Discovery Project Oceanic Encounters and the Laureate Project Engendering Persons, Transforming Things has made the resources available to bring this important project to fruition.

Most of all, I thank Dorothy Counts. She retired from active participation after the Engendering Violence project was safely under way, but she was always there for us, if not in person then in spirit.

Tenkyu tru, bosmeri, yu bin halivim long givim nek long husat oli bin pilim pen bilong dispela pasin nogut long daunim ol meri.
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We especially thank the two readers of this book, whose constructive suggestions made a good book even better.

Finally our thanks to the editors of both *Oceania* and *Catalyst* for permission to republish previously published work:


Margaret Jolly  
Christine Stewart  
Carolyn Brewer  
March 2012
# Abbreviations and Acronyms

Note on language: In this text, all foreign words are italicised and the relevant language is noted by the use of the following abbreviations:

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## Other abbreviations and acronyms

- **AIDS**: Acquired Immunity Deficiency Syndrome
- **AusAID**: Australian Agency for International Development
- **CAD**: Canadian dollars
- **FSW**: Female sex worker
- **HIV**: Human Immunodeficiency Virus
- **ICRAF**: Individual and Community Rights Forum
- **MSM**: Males who have sex with males / Men who have sex with men
- **NCD**: National Capital District
- **NGO**: Non-government organisation
- **PacLII**: Pacific Legal Information Institute
- **PNG**: Papua New Guinea
- **PSP**: Poro Sapot Project
- **RPNG**: Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary
- **SPC**: Secretariat of the Pacific Community
- **STI**: Sexually transmitted infection
- **VCT**: Voluntary counselling and testing
Prologue: The Place of Papua New Guinea in Contours of Gender Violence

Margaret Jolly

Friday 24 March 2006. Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. A large group of women and some men are gathering at Jack Pidik Park at Five-Mile to march to Tabari Place in Boroko. The women are of diverse generations but most of them are residents of Port Moresby. Some wear casual clothes, some are more formally dressed, some wear the striking uniforms of their professions, the women’s and church groups they belong to or the NGOs they work for. Many are carrying bilums (string bags) which suggest both their national identity as citizens of Papua New Guinea (PNG) and their diverse ethnic origins (from the Sepik, from the Highlands, from the Gulf ...). They carry banners and posters, some professionally printed, some handmade on cardboard, which echo the language of protest against gender violence in many countries of the world. Some are in English: STOP the Violence against Women; No Means No; Say No to Incest; Respect Human Rights. Some are partially or wholly translated, vernacularised into Papua New Guinea’s lingua franca of Tok Pisin: Meri Ikirap Sapotim Education for Good Governance, Active Citizenship and Women’s Rights (Women Arise Support Them: Education for Good Governance, Active Citizenship and Women’s Rights), Hei Ol Man Mipela ino Pik o Dog Bilong Yupela (Hey men, We are not your pigs or dogs) and Lukautim yu yet long AIDS (Protect yourself from AIDS). The banners protest gender violence, they call for stronger penalties against rapists and they affirm the importance of human rights in PNG. Street marches are part of the global vocabulary of politics and protest against gender violence along with Thursdays in Black and White Ribbon campaigns (see Merry 2006). For many Papua New Guineans, gender violence is a pervasive and intractable problem—in the home, on the streets, in the marketplaces, in the towns and villages of the nation. The women and their male supporters march from Five-Mile along the main highway to throng Tabari Place in Boroko, where the sole woman in the PNG Parliament then as now, Dame Carol Kidu, MP, a tireless advocate for women, human rights and HIV awareness in PNG, addresses the crowd. The scene is captured in a series of photographs taken by my co-editor Christine Stewart, some of which appear on the cover of this volume and in subsequent pages.3

1 Meri Ikirap Sapotim is variously known as just Women Arise or Women Arise Support Them. It is an NGO led by Sarah Garap (personal communication Katherine Lepani and Nicole Haley 26 January 2012). Its logo can be seen on their banner in the photo (see Figure 1).

2 This hand-made banner signs off more breezily with Luv Mipela, Love from us (see Figure 2).

3 I thank Christine Stewart for her description of this event of which she was a witness.
Figure 1. *Meri ikirap Sapotim*. Some women, like members of this NGO, wear striking uniforms during the March against Gender Violence, Port Moresby, 2006.

Photograph by Christine Stewart.

Figure 2. ‘Hey, men, we are not your pigs or dogs. Please think about that, and don’t treat us badly.’ Handmade banner proudly displayed during the March against Gender Violence, Port Moresby, 2006.

Photograph by Christine Stewart.
This march and a multitude of other public protests and workshops in the towns and villages of Papua New Guinea in the last decade suggest that gender violence is increasingly being seen as an important problem by many Papua New Guineans and that it is possible to mobilise large congregations of women and men in protest and to increase the visibility of gender violence as a national political issue. The shape of this march also suggests the huge ethnic diversity of PNG, the particular place of educated and urban people in such struggles, the respective roles of the state, police, churches and NGOs in combating gender violence and the ways in which such movements connect to global agendas and foreign aid.

Little over thirty years before this march, in September 1975, PNG gained independence from the erstwhile colonial power, Australia. Several authors (Wolfers 1975; Nelson 1977, 1982; Waiko 1993; Moore 2003) have told the complex story of European exploration and exploitation of this vast territory, started in earnest from the mid-nineteenth century by Germany in the north (German New Guinea) and Britain in the south (British New Guinea, later Papua). The British presence was primarily promoted by Australian interests in Queensland. The colonial fate of the country was intimately entangled with the two world wars between the rival imperial powers of Europe and Asia. Australian
troops occupied German New Guinea in World War I and administered the north first as a mandated territory and then, after brutal battles in the Pacific, including at Rabaul, the Bismarck Sea, Kokoda, Milne Bay and many other sites during World War II, as a United Nations Trust Territory (see Nelson 2006). Following World War II the two territories which had been administered separately were conjoined as a single administrative and judicial system: the Territory of Papua and New Guinea.

The unity of a state was thus imposed on indigenous peoples of enormous diversity. PNG still boasts about 800 indigenous languages (tok ples) spoken by the current population of six and a half million people, alongside the lingua franca Tok Pisin and English. Its overwhelmingly indigenous inhabitants derive from two distinct migrations: ancestors of those who speak Papuan languages from around 50–60,000 BP and the ancestors of those who speak Austronesian languages from c. 4000 BP. Of these two distinct language families, the former are concentrated in the interior mountainous regions called the Highlands and the latter in the coastal and insular regions, but this is not an exclusive or rigid configuration. There has been much intermingling of diverse languages and cultures, occasioned both by indigenous patterns of exchange, trade, conquest and movement and processes originating in the colonial period: the circuits of Christian missions, schools, and hospitals, the predominantly male migrant labour to plantations and mines both within the territories and overseas and, increasingly, from the 1960s and especially after Independence in 1975, when freedom of movement was guaranteed by the new constitution, processes of migration to urban centres engaging women as well as men (see Moore 2003).

The remote valleys of the Highlands, though settled earlier by indigenous inhabitants (where the origins of agriculture can be traced to 50,000 BP), were the last region to encounter ol wait man (TP: white men) in the 1930s (see Connolly and Anderson 1983, 1988; Bonnemère and Lemonnier 2009). Coastal and insular regions such as the Sepik and the Massim had a far deeper experience of the several agents of European colonialism dating back to the mid-nineteenth century: explorers, Christian missionaries, planters and traders, and officials of colonial states. The Australian colonial state was arguably more successful in the promotion of its blatantly commercial goals through the establishment of private expatriate plantations and mines than in the cultural and political goals of bringing ‘civilisation’ and modern political and legal structures. Ted Wolfers (1977), Bill Gammage (1999) and Sinclair Dinnen (2001) and others have stressed the draconian, racialised character of Australian administration in its laws enforcing spatial segregation, sartorial differentiation, curfews and ordinances protecting white women from the perceived threat of sexualised violence from black men (see Inglis 1974). The independent state is still often seen today as a foreign, remote and ineffectual entity by many Papua New Guineans. Christian
missions were far more successful than secular political institutions in gaining indigenous legitimacy and adherents. Today 96 per cent of Papua New Guineans identify as Christian following either the mainstream denominations introduced early in the colonial period (Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist/Congregationalist—the latter two now amalgamated as the United Church), a burgeoning variety of evangelical churches (Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, Mormon, Assemblies of God) and an ever-increasing number of independent, charismatic, fundamentalist and Pentecostal churches (see Gibbs 2004; Jebens 2005).

The independent state has not fulfilled the more optimistic hopes of its founders and the nationalist aspirations of the first generation of leaders, intellectuals and artists. The huge wealth generated from the profitable extractive industries of mining and logging has too often benefitted primarily expatriate owners and multinational corporations, national and local politicians, and a minority of primarily male landowners (Filer 2001, Filer and Macintyre 2006). Bougainvillean attempts to secede from the independent state of PNG in the context of a controversial mine at Panguna morphed into a complex and bloody civil war which lasted a decade and engaged PNG national troops on one side of this divisive conflict (Saovana-Spriggs 2007; Regan 2010). Poverty, at least as defined by a commodity economy, is palpably worsening both in some remote regions and in the squatter settlements of towns (Allen, Bourke and Gibson 2005; Cammack 2007). The state of education and health is parlous especially in the rural regions of the country and some PNG citizens look back on the colonial period with nostalgia as a time when schools and universities, clinics and hospitals were better resourced and administered. Malaria, TB and various STIs continue to be endemic diseases while HIV has been pronounced a generalised epidemic (Luker and Dinnen 2010; Lepani 2012). There are major problems of law and order in urban centres like Port Moresby, Mt Hagen and Goroka and on major roads like the Highlands Highway where raskol gangs combine theft with murder and rape. Police responses tend to be as draconian and violent as those in the colonial period (Dinnen 2001). The national parliament continues to be dominated by men, with a sole woman representative, Dame Carol Kidu, MP, who has announced she will not stand at the next election in July 2012. As I began writing this Prologue, the Government of the new Prime Minister Peter O’Neill was promising to endorse the proposal espoused by Dame Carol Kidu and many others, that twenty-two seats in the National Parliament be reserved for women. The first stage of this process was achieved in November 2011, when Parliament passed enabling legislation. But an ongoing leadership dispute between O’Neill and previous Prime Minister Somare creates a strong possibility that necessary constitutional amendments may not be approved before Parliament is prorogued and the nation goes to fresh elections scheduled...
for 2012. Dame Carol Kidu remains confident, saying that progress has been made, and whatever happens, the legislation sets the foundation upon which to build after 2012 (Tiwari 2012). These persisting problems in PNG have occasioned negative media both within PNG and beyond, most especially in the erstwhile colonial power, Australia. There have been several versions of doomsday foreign policy rhetoric, portraying PNG as a ‘failed state’ or as a crucial point in an ‘arc of instability’ which curves around the region embracing Solomons, Fiji and even Vanuatu (May ed. 2003; Jolly 2007; Fry and Kabataulaka 2008). Such dystopian discourses are fuelled by the fact that Australian aid to PNG consumes the largest part of its aid and development budget ($436.5 million in 2011–12). Such expenditure on programs to assist education, health, justice and good governance, to promote gender equality and combat HIV and gender violence are seen by some to be ‘wasting’ the money of Australian taxpayers, especially if inefficacy, extravagance or corruption can be detected. This has led to successive controversies and standoffs around the tension between the sovereignty of PNG as an independent state and how Australia perpetuates its ‘special relationship’ with PNG through various forms of tied or conditional aid or by sending Australians to be line managers and executives in its state bureaucracy.

Clearly any analysis of the pervasiveness of gender violence in PNG must perforce contribute to the negativity of its national portrait. This is patent in any website search and especially from the salience of gender violence in PNG in the web presence of major NGOs such as Amnesty International, International Women’s Development Agency, Save the Children, Caritas Australia, Human Rights Watch and Medicins Sans Frontiers. The contributors to this volume, all long-term residents or scholars of PNG, are painfully aware of this fact. But it must be acknowledged that there was recognition of the problem of gender violence by the independent state in the early 1980s and indeed a series of studies and reports emanating from the Law Reform Commission which still constitute some of the most comprehensive studies of the problem in PNG. But, as a series of subsequent reports has suggested, successive governments have failed to implement recommendations fully and indeed some initiatives such as public awareness programs or attempts to change the perceptions and practices of the police have failed (see Introduction).  

4 I thank Christine Stewart for the wording of the four preceding sentences. There is now a striking difference between the several independent and predominantly Anglophone states of PNG, Solomons, Vanuatu and Fiji where there are very few women in national parliaments and the Francophone territories of New Caledonia and French Polynesia where the French metropolitan laws on ‘parity’ have been recently mandated and have in general been highly successful in bringing women into the formal political system. Despite some caveats expressed about the possibility of similar legislation elsewhere in the Western Pacific, Jon Fraenkel (2006) Nicole George (2011) and others support the enormous potential of such moves to break the perduring male domination of legislative politics in countries of the western Pacific.

5 This is the amount directly from AusAID. The total from all Australian government departments was $482.3 million (Papua New Guinea. Australian Government AusAID 2012).

6 I thank Martha Macintyre for the wording of the two preceding sentences.
The way in which current debates about gender violence articulate with fraught colonial histories both in settler states like Australia, New Caledonia and Hawai‘i and sovereign states like PNG, Vanuatu, Solomons and Fiji is worthy of a broader comparative study (see Merry 2000; Merry and Brenneis 2004). Writing from Australia in 2011 it is impossible not to mention the salience of gender violence and the sexual abuse of children in legitimating the bipartisan political support of the national government’s ‘intervention’ in the indigenous communities of Northern Australia, even though that has been hotly contested and critiqued by both indigenous and non-indigenous Australians (Altman and Hinkson 2009). Yet it is a complete dead end to blame either indigenous ‘culture’ or the devastating dispossession and emasculating effects of colonialism for such contemporary configurations of gender violence. The pervasiveness and complexity of the problem require more than such black or white solutions.

To name and to analyse indigenous gender violence is fraught, especially for indigenous women, and is too often portrayed as a betrayal of racial or ethnic solidarity. As the brilliant Kanak author, feminist and independence activist and now Deputy President of New Caledonia, Déwé Gorodé, suggests in her incendiary novel *The Wreck*, there is a complicity between the gender violence of indigenous patriarchal forms in New Caledonia, perpetrated in *la coutume* (custom) over generations and the violence of colonial possession of the land and gendered violence against its peoples, including the capitalist commodification of women’s bodies.7 The same might be said of PNG.

This then is the complex historical and contemporary context for the essays in this volume. The chapters traverse the diversity of the country from the remote rural regions of the islands (West New Britain, Ch. 1) and the Highlands (Simbu, Gende, Chs 2 and 3) to the towns of Madang (Ch. 4), Port Moresby (Chs 5 and 7) and Bomana Prison on Moresby’s outskirts (Ch. 6) (see Map 1). We approach the problem from diverse vantage points complementing the particularities of localised research done in indigenous languages in villages and mine sites, with a national perspective viewed from the courts, police stations, jails, government suites, NGO offices, and guesthouses of the towns and a global perspective on how gender violence in PNG is situated in the complex networks of foreign aid, development assistance and international agendas (Introduction and Ch. 8). We trust this volume contributes not just to enhanced understandings but to strategies for effecting change so that the pervasive and perduring problem of gender violence in PNG can be ameliorated.

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7 The novel, while it celebrates the joy of sexual desire and heterosexual union, depicts intergenerational practices of older Kanak men coercing younger women into incestuous relations and the horrors of a gruesome pack rape and murder of a wilful woman. Her editors comment on the multilayered character of her view of gender violence and its perduring perversity: ‘Moving edgily between a critique of the violence of colonization, a protest against the global exploitation of women’s bodies and an uncompromising gaze at the underside of Custom, Gorodé’s novel attempts to mitigate the impact of its revelations by showing that its criticism of violence against women is both anchored in particular historical and social contexts and resonates beyond Kanak society. In fact perplexing many of her readers, Gorodé’s fiction leaves the question of the origin of violence against women open, partially undecideable’ (Walker-Morrison and Ramsay 2011: xii).
Map 1. General map of PNG showing the sites of research included in this volume. Map production by Education and Multimedia Services, College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University.
Prologue: The Place of Papua New Guinea in Contours of Gender Violence

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References


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4. Becoming Mary: Marian Devotion as a Solution to Gender-based Violence in Urban PNG

Anna-Karina Hermkens

Abstract

This chapter deals with how, in the urban setting of Madang in Papua New Guinea, Marian devotion is deployed in response to gender-based violence, including in the context of HIV. While providing insight into the lived religious experiences of Catholic women and, in particular, female members of the Legion of Mary, this chapter shows how women seek help from Mary and God in order to find a solution to the everyday violence they face. The experiences and perceptions described here reveal women's engagement in painful processes of self-analysis and self-transformation to hopefully adapt to and change their situation. In such processes, Mary is used as a role model.

Introduction

The association between Mary, the mother of Jesus, and violence may seem unlikely, but in Papua New Guinea (PNG), as elsewhere in the world, people turn to Mary in order to seek a solution for the problems they face (Hermkens 2007; Hermkens et al. 2009). This chapter deals with how, in the urban setting of Madang, Marian devotion is deployed in response to gender-based violence and HIV. In analysing the experiences and perceptions of female members of

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1 I am indebted to all who have accommodated and assisted me with my research in PNG. Special thanks to Father Joe Forstner, the members of the Legion of Mary, and the Catholic Women’s Association for assisting me with my research in Madang and Port Moresby. Thanks also to Father Jürgen Ommerborn, Philip Gibbs, Richard Eves, John Barker and Lawrence Hammar. Special thanks to all participants of the ASAO session ‘Engendering Violence’, and to Margaret Jolly, Christine Stewart and Carolyn Brewer for their insightful comments and suggestions on various drafts of this chapter. I thank the ‘Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research’ (NWO) for funding and the research programme ‘The Power of Pilgrimage’ at the Radboud University Nijmegen, Netherlands and The Australian National University and the Australian Research Council Laureate Fellowship, Engendering Persons Transforming Things for institutional support. This chapter is a shortened and revised version of an article which was published in the journal Oceania 78(2) (July 2008):151–67. I thank the editorial board of Oceania for permission to republish it in a revised form.

2 While in this paper it is shown how Marian devotion helps women to cope with violent environments, other cases show that Marian devotion can be used as a powerful and subversive tool to challenge existing economic, social and church hierarchies (see for instance Ram 1991; Margry 2009; Hermkens et al. 2009).
the Legion of Mary we must relate this to the current debate on Christianity in PNG (e.g. Robbins 2004; Jebens 2005), and to earlier calls for a more intensive anthropological investigation of the experience of Christianity by Melanesians (e.g. Barker 1990: 9; 1992).

The influence of Christianity in PNG is profound. Christian values are part of the country’s constitution, which states that ‘We, The People Of Papua New Guinea … pledge ourselves to guard and pass on to those who come after us our noble traditions and the Christian principles that are ours now.’ Moreover, almost all Papua New Guineans say they are Christian and political discourse is saturated with Christian rhetoric and references (Gibbs 2005). In urban areas, the abundance of churches, evangelical rallies and the popularity of gospel music testify to the popularity of Christianity and its pervasiveness in daily life.

The majority of people living in the urban areas of Madang Province are Catholic (35%), followed by Evangelical Lutheran, Pentecostals and Seventh Day Adventists (NSO 2002). The predominance of Catholicism in Madang Province is also visible in Madang town, which is the Papua New Guinean cradle of ‘The Legion of Mary’, a lay Catholic organisation founded in Dublin, Ireland in 1921. Spread throughout the world, its members give Glory to God ‘through the holiness of its members developed by prayer and active co-operation in Mary’s and the Church’s work.’

All over the world, the basic unit of the Legion of Mary is called a praesidium. The secretary and president of each praesidium report to their council, their curia, who in turn report to their regia, which falls under a consilium. In PNG there are two regiae, one on the mainland of PNG and one in the islands of PNG. These regiae work with the consilium in Ireland. The regia on the mainland of PNG has its headquarters in Madang and looks after fifty-four curiae, making Madang the centre of all legion activities in the country.

Each week, both male and female members of the Legion of Mary in Madang gather for a praesidium meeting, intermingling prayer with reports and discussion. In addition, each member is assigned work to be performed during the week, which is done in co-operation with another member. Mostly, this implies visiting sick people in Madang hospital, but sometimes legionaries also visit people in prison or others in need of spiritual help. For the women I interviewed, the weekly legionary meetings and assigned works constitute only part of a Catholic schedule. In addition to the legionary meetings and

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3 According to the Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea, the number of Catholics in Madang Province is larger. In 2004, reportedly 142,000 people (49.8%) were Catholic (Archdiocese Madang, Statistics http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dmada.html, accessed 2 November 2011).

related duties, there are other activities: Sunday mass and subsequent meetings with legionary members and other Catholics, weekly evening prayer groups, visiting evening masses in the Madang area, and occasional Church work, such as fundraising, cooking and cleaning.

From the late 1970s, Father Ernest Golly was the Legion’s national director. In addition to translating the Legion’s handbook, he published several dozen pamphlets on Marian devotion. Besides being the national director, he was also the spiritual director of the mainland regia and parish priest of Jomba parish in Madang. In exercising these functions, he also largely controlled the practices of the Legion of Mary in Madang and the PNG mainland, and how Catholicism, and in particular Marian devotion, was practised in Jomba parish and beyond. In Fr Golly’s view, devotion to Mary was an essential part of Catholicism and Christianity. Moreover, when dealing with issues such as HIV and domestic violence, faith in God and devotion to Mary are both crucial considerations.

This chapter focuses on the experiences of Catholic women and, in particular, of female members of the Legion of Mary. It offers insights into how Marian devotion is practised and used by individual women in seeking a solution for the violence they face. In what follows, I offer an overview of the various forms of violence Papua New Guinean women confront, and how these simultaneous personal acts of violence and structural ‘states of violence’ shape their individual everyday experiences.

**Acts and states of violence**

My daughter was working as a teacher in a remote area. On their way back their truck was looted and all the female teachers, including my daughter, were dragged out of the truck. The male teachers were trying to help them but there were too many raskols [TP: roving band of criminals]. They pulled my daughter aside and she was raped. When she told me, I cried. At that time, my husband came home and found us

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5 Father Golly passed away in May 2010.
6 Although Fr Golly had a huge influence among Catholics (both legionaries and non-legionary members) in Madang, he was certainly not representative of all Catholic priests in PNG. In Madang alone, there are several Church officials who do not concur with Fr Golly’s point of view and the way that he used his fire and brimstone theology to counsel his legionary and Parish members. However, he faced little or no interference from the Catholic community and his superiors.
7 Women (and men) turn to Mary and God to seek guidance, help and empowerment in addressing and redressing violence. Although I also interviewed male members of the Legion of Mary, and Catholic men in general, focus in this chapter is on how Legionary women live their devotion to Mary and cope with gender-based violence in particular. The men I interviewed did not approve of domestic violence. Some used devotion to Mary to reduce and control their own feelings of anger. All were of the opinion that the husband is the head of the family.
crying. He started hitting me, beating me, saying it was my fault that my
daughter was crying. My daughter then started crying because of me. I
asked him to stop so I could take care of our daughter. He stopped and I
took her to the hospital; we were so afraid of AIDS. She had a boyfriend
and we did not know how he would react upon my daughter having
been raped. Fortunately, the test was negative; no AIDS. Her father did
not know what had happened to her. He just left us for three years. So,
this is what we as women are facing! (Interview with Alice: Madang
2005).8

This story was told to me by Alice, a woman of forty-nine years—mother of
seven children, grandmother of five and member of the Legion of Mary. The
story recounts not just Alice’s experiences, but her reflection on the different
forms of violence that women in PNG might face. The violence addressed in
the previous narrative is pervasive (Kleinman 1997), comprising both ‘acts of
are violent practices such as beating or robbing someone, while, according to
Robert Brown (1987: 34–5), ‘states of violence’ refer to violence that is so part of
the given social order as to be institutional or structural.

The several acts of violence that are addressed in Alice’s narrative are criminal
violence (including being held up and robbed), sexual violence (rape by
strangers), domestic violence (physical beating and emotional abuse by the
husband) and violation of health (risk of being infected with HIV). In Alice’s
and other women’s experiences, such acts may occur on public streets, in the
community, in domestic settings, at work and even in institutions such as the
Church.

Alice’s experiences with different forms of violence are not unique. As argued
by Christine Bradley (2001: 2), ‘the majority of adult women of Papua New
Guinea have been physically assaulted by their husbands, forced to have sex
with them, or have been raped or sexually assaulted by other men.’ Statistics
also reveal that domestic violence is the most dominant form of sexual violence.
Surveys conducted in the mid-1980s showed that 67 per cent of rural women
and 56 per cent of urban women have been hit by their husbands (Toft 1985:
14).9 In my own research among Catholic women in Port Moresby and Madang
from August 2005 till February 2006, I found that twenty-two of the forty-two
female members of the Catholic Women’s Association and the Legion of Mary
that I interviewed reported having experienced domestic violence.10

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8 Although the key informants of this article emphasised they wanted to be mentioned by their full names,
I have instead decided on protecting their identities by using pseudonyms.
9 The PNG Law Reform Commission conducted research on domestic violence between 1982 and 1992. The
final report (1992) showed that 70 per cent of all women in PNG had been beaten by their husbands.
10 From August 2005 until February 2006 I did fieldwork in, amongst other places, Port Moresby and
Madang concerning Marian devotion and domestic violence. In addition to five interviews with Christian
A census conducted in the 1980s revealed that marital fights are mainly the result of alcohol, money and jealousy, followed by problems with the children and violence perpetrated by the husband (Conway and Mantovani 1990: 121–22). Domestic violence was attributed to men's drinking, gambling and bad temper, and to women's behaviour, such as 'gossiping', going out alone, not performing their 'duties' and talking to strangers of the opposite sex (Conway and Mantovani 1990: 127). In more recent studies, alcohol is frequently mentioned as a precipitating factor in family problems (see for example Banks 2000: 89). The perceived 'misbehaviour' of women, however, suggests that there is an underlying cause for domestic violence, namely male domination and men's fear of losing control over women. Alice's case, as well as others, shows that in general violence against women occurs when 'men perceive they have lost control over women; when women are perceived by men to have breached certain expectations of conduct; and when there are underlying prior injuries within the family' (Banks 2000: 95). In particular, continuing presumptions of male dominance (Kidu 2000: 30; see also Macintyre, Ch. 8) and gender-based hierarchies seem to fuel violence towards girls and women (Eves 2006: 26). This suggests that violence experienced by Alice and other women is actually part of what Emmanual Mounier referred to as 'states of violence' (Mounier cited in Brown 1987: 34), violence which is institutional and structural. Other scholars of PNG suggest that gender violence is a form of structural violence. Martha Macintyre (Ch. 8) argues that in PNG violence against women is an expression of deeply-entrenched political discrimination against women at personal, local and national levels.

Moreover, gender-based violence can lead to another form of structural violence: the endangering of women's health. One of the major problems PNG is facing today is an HIV epidemic (Butt and Eves 2008). Some of the reasons for this crisis and the increasing rate of infection among women involve both gender-based violence and growing impoverishment which ensure increased vulnerability to the virus (Jenkins 1995: vii). This risk is exacerbated by the fact that women have hardly any means of protecting themselves against HIV. While the government advocates the use of condoms, most women are unable to negotiate

women who are not affiliated with particular religious groups, interviews were conducted with women belonging to the Catholic Women's Organisation (CWA) in Madang (19 women), and with people belonging to the Legion of Mary in Madang (10 women and three men) and Port Moresby (13 women). Of the nineteen CWA women, sixteen reported that they had been beaten by their husbands, while among the Legion of Mary members in Madang and Moresby six women (three in Madang and three in Port Moresby) had faced domestic violence. The women I interviewed belong to different tribal backgrounds. Moreover, they belong to different socio-economic strata, although none of them lives in the so-called squatter settlements. The majority could be labelled as middle-class with a few women belonging to the lower-class and one woman to the upper-class.

11 Various studies have attempted to analyse the 'culture of violence' in PNG (Bradley 1994, 2001; Dinnen 1997; Dinnen and Ley 2000; Jenkins 1995; Kidu 2000; Toft 1985; Zimmer-Tamakoshi 1990, 1997, 2004). In addition to existing gender hierarchies and male dominance, factors that have been identified in relation to sexual violence are: economic impoverishment and increasing criminality, changing gender relations, as well as a decline of morality, especially in urban settings.
Engendering Violence in Papua New Guinea

for safe sex, and so many are unable to use them or ‘Just say “No”’ (Hammar 1999: 151; 2007: 79). In addition, especially among Catholics, there is a strong belief that condoms interfere with God’s divine will through contraception, and in HIV awareness condoms are actually spreading HIV as they encourage sexual promiscuity (see also Wardlow 2008). Julie, who works at the Archdiocesan HIV/AIDS office, is of a similar opinion, urging her clientele to instead practise the calendar or rhythm method or abstinence and faithfulness. Yet her own experiences show that this might be difficult to achieve. Julie’s husband had unprotected sex with others and she could not refuse him. So, it seems that women, and especially Catholic women, are unable to protect themselves against being infected with HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs, see also Hammar 2007: 79). Moreover, once infected, women can find it difficult to obtain help because husbands and families may prevent women from seeking medical attention as they do not want their wives, sisters and daughters to be seen as ‘sexual beings or to admit that they have been affected by male relatives’ (Hammer 1999: 50–51).

The different forms of violence endured by Alice, Julie and other PNG women result in, and are the result of, acts and states of violence that effectively structure their everyday lives (Schmidt and Schröder 2001: 1). In Alice’s experience, the domestic violence she endured for twenty-seven years was not only physical. The fact that she and her husband were always arguing is as much a part of her perception of the violence of her everyday life as the physical abuse. In a similar way, her husband’s regular adultery and his disrespect towards her amplified Alice’s sense of having to endure a lifetime of violence. The effects of this violence on her children contributed to Alice’s own sense of suffering. Alice is convinced that the violence that was part of her married life resulted in her first daughter’s sudden death. But, she feels that she is responsible for her daughter’s death. This guilt results in an all-pervasive sense of suffering, which is in itself a form of everyday violence (Kleinman 1997). Women thus not only have to cope with violent acts which are both physical and emotional assertions of power by

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12 This negative perception towards condoms is, however, not characteristic of the whole of PNG. Lepani (2008), for instance, shows the positive attitude that the Trobriand people have towards condom use and how they conceptualise HIV in terms of their socially-constructed realities, as enabling the transformation of high-risk sexual practices (Lepani 2008: 266).

On 21 November 2010, Pope Benedict XVI, in Peter Seewald’s book, Light of the World: The Pope, the Church and the Signs of the Times, appeared to endorse condom use by male prostitutes when he said: ‘There may be a basis in the case of some individuals, as perhaps when a male prostitute uses a condom, where this can be a first step in the direction of a moralization, a first assumption of responsibility, on the way toward recovering an awareness that not everything is allowed and that one cannot do whatever one wants. But it is not really the way to deal with the evil of HIV infection.’ Church commentators were quick to explain that while Pope Benedict XVI was talking of male prostitutes and homosexual acts, he was not discussing sex between married heterosexual people or sex between a man and a woman. Indeed, as Scott P. Richert (2011) explained, ‘Pope Benedict did not change one iota of Catholic teaching on the immorality of artificial contraception.’
Becoming Mary: Marian Devotion as a Solution to Gender-based Violence in Urban PNG

men (Schmidt and Schröder 2001: 1), but also with their own embodied state of violence suffused by their suffering. Such everyday violence is both confirmed and enhanced by media coverage.

Almost every day, newspaper reports inform Papua New Guineans, as well as the world, that PNG is a violent society. In addition to violent burglaries and hold ups, sexual violence against women and girls appears to be endemic, and, according to some reports, even increasing. For example, Papua New Guinea’s daily newspaper, the Post-Courier, stressed its role in representing domestic violence stating that ‘family violence is PNG’s national shame’. In its 4 June 2009 editorial, the editor stated:

Family violence in Papua New Guinea is a story that needs to be told, over and over. For the consequences of this crime against people are huge. That is why we make no apologies for telling you of the tragic event which unfolded in Port Moresby this week as the police family and sexual violence office continued its probes into complaints by victimised women and children (Editorial 2009).

The regular front-page news coverage and the activities of both government and non-government organisations concerning the occurrence of sexual violence seem to have created a concern which Anou Borrey (2000: 105) termed a ‘social panic’. While Borrey puts sexual violence in PNG in perspective, the fact is that especially in Papua New Guinean towns, women do live in a state of ‘low level terror’ (Macintyre in Bradley 2001: 2). This state of terror is exemplified by Elaine, a forty-three-year-old teacher and mother of four children living and working in Madang:

When my husband is away for travel I protect myself by hanging the rosary at the doorway so Mary will protect me and the children. I am very scared when my husband is away, but we are always all right as the rosary makes sure Mama Maria is with me during such times.

Seeking solutions

To address this ‘state of terror’ occasioned by gender-based violence, the PNG government conducted large-scale research through the Law Reform Commission in the 1980s (Toft 1985a, 1985, 1986; Toft and Bonnell 1985). Despite these reports and more recent studies (AusAID 2007 preliminary; AusAID 2009) however, the government has been slow to respond and take adequate measures (Bradley 2001). Only recently has the government supported public campaigns in which gender-based violence and the relationship between violence and HIV have been addressed. These campaigns are mainly the initiative of foreign AID
donors or NGOs. Deploying huge billboards, advertisements and posters, the official message is clear: Real men do not harm women and girls; and if men and women want to have sex they should use condoms. Likewise, organisations such as the Country Women’s Organisation in Madang and the Madang Family and Sexual Violence Committee have launched poster campaigns against domestic and sexual violence by addressing men’s lack of respect towards women. However, the success of these campaigns is debatable, especially as posters are frequently ‘misread’ (Eves 2006: 55, 88–89; Hammar 2008; McPherson 2008).

In contrast to poster and action drama campaigns (see McPherson 2008) that often seem to fail, the impact of religious movements in addressing morally threatening issues such as violence and HIV seems to be enormous (see for example Eves 2003, 2008; Hammar 2008). With regard to HIV, the Catholic Church strongly objects to the government’s express policy of advocating condom use as the solution for HIV. The Church, its clergy and many of its members strongly oppose the use of condoms, first, because it allegedly encourages promiscuity and thereby seems responsible for spreading HIV, and second, because condoms interfere with the divine plan of God. Fr Golly, who, as we have seen, was both the national and spiritual director of the Legion of Mary in mainland PNG and priest of Jomba Parish in Madang, was, until his recent death, very outspoken against condom use. As reported in the National newspaper:

During a Jesus March in Madang in May 2006, Parish priest Fr Golly spoke against fornication and sex before marriage. He told the large group that ‘the only sure way of avoiding HIV/AIDS was to use Abba, a Hebrew term meaning ‘father’. ABBA is the acronym and stands for ‘abstinence, be faithful, be faithful and abstaince.’ In his concluding remarks, Fr Golly said condoms were not of any help in preventing this deadly disease and should not be used as an alternative (National 29 May 2006).

In an interview I had with Fr Golly (Jomba Parish 2005), he explained his attitude towards condoms as follows:

God does not allow us to use condoms. We are not animals! People should use the calendar method. This is the way of God. Condoms are the Devil’s work! The only country where AIDS is decreasing is Uganda. They took the way of the Lord!13

Julie, who works at the Archdiocesan HIV/AIDS office, has a similar view to that of her spiritual director, Fr Golly, but at the same time is pressured to follow, to a certain extent, the point of view of the government which advocates condom

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13 The ‘calendar method’, referred to by Father Golly, is similar to the rhythm method of contraception.
use. Caught between religious norms and values and government policy, she promotes the ABCD (abstinence, be faithful, condoms, delay). However, when asked to explain her standpoint she states:

When a woman comes for advice regarding adultery committed by her husband, I talk: ‘You are in danger. You must take good care of your body and talk with your husband.’ I tell her where to get a blood test. I do not tell her to use condoms, because maybe they do not use it well, get AIDS and blame me. The Catholic Church does not approve of condoms. This is to encourage moral understanding of sex. One must practice delay, abstinence, get married and stick together. ‘Condoms i stap, sapos yu animal, yu usim!’ [TP: Condoms exist: if you are an animal you use condoms!] (Julie, Madang 2006).

People working in healthcare and hospitals often juggle their religious attitudes and official government rhetoric (see Wardlow 2008). For example, Anna, a Catholic nurse working in Madang hospital, is strongly against the use of condoms and told me that despite the hospital’s policy of promoting condoms, she advises her patients not to use them.

I object to the use of condoms, it is my faith. Because my faith in the mother. I tell my nieces, keep yourself Holy for Him. Do not use medicines or injections to intercept the baby. I work in the hospital and I do not want to go against the government but I speak from my faith. It is our body. It is God’s way for us to have a baby or not. Condoms interrupt the plan of God (Anna, Madang 2005).

Such attitudes of hospital workers in privileging Church policy over government policy are also reported by Holly Wardlow in her study of HIV among the Huli. The hospital workers that Wardlow interviewed depicted condoms as encouraging illicit sex and as being useless in preventing HIV infections (Wardlow 2008). According to Naomi McPherson in her study of HIV awareness campaigns in the Bariai district in West New Britain, the church is also responsible for exacerbating the HIV problem in stressing the sinful nature of promiscuous sex, making condom use even more out of the question (Dundon 2010; Wardlow 2008: 196–97; McPherson 2008: 244; McPherson, Ch. 1).

Importantly, the link between ‘immoral’ behaviour and HIV implies that those who are infected have somehow called down misfortune on themselves through immoral behaviour. McPherson notes that most of her informants believe that ‘it [HIV] is God’s punishment for immoral behavior’ (2008: 244). In fact, in some areas of PNG, HIV is not only seen as an aspect of moral decay, but as

14 The abstinence here links directly to the ‘Abstinence’, Be Faithful’ and ‘No Condoms’ policies associated with USAID during the Bush era (Butt and Eves 2008).
actually marking the approach of the end of the world within the framework of apocalyptic Christianity (Eves 2003). Among members of the Legion of Mary, I did not encounter such apocalyptic views of the ‘end-times’, but the general perception was that HIV was still a sign of a general moral decay that is believed especially to affect urban areas like Madang.

To confront and change ‘immoral’ behaviour which allegedly results in illnesses such as HIV, many people look for spiritual help. Certain Catholic healing ministries and individual healers make use of statues of Mary and other Saints, holy water, prayer and the rosary to free people from demonic possessions and illness. Pamphlets with personal accounts of having been healed from AIDS, of having overcome alcohol abuse and of having resolved family problems through faith in God are distributed widely. One such pamphlet reads:


This faith in divine healing is grounded in both Christian doctrine and locally established concepts about the nature and purpose of healing as well as of sickness in general. The two streams of knowledge reinforce the belief that illnesses like HIV are not just medical but are also social and moral phenomena.

The question is: how do Catholics and in particular Catholic women prevent themselves from getting infected? Faced with a high probability of being a victim of rape and/or domestic violence (as are all other Papua New Guinean women), since the use of condoms is not an option for them, they seem to be especially vulnerable to HIV infection. As Julie said,

The time I was married, I did not know about AIDS. I was teaching at the Family Life Office, so I should have realised. But I thought I was safe because I was married. Only after my husband left us I realised this danger. Just recently, when we did this program about voluntary testing, I had my blood tested. I got worried … but fortunately, God has been protecting me.

My husband did not use condoms when having sex with me. I did not either. I do not think he used condoms when sleeping with other women. So I say: ‘Thanks Lord! You protected me!’ (Julie, Madang 2005).

Julie’s narrative indicates that Catholic women feel protected because they are married, even if they know that their husbands have extramarital relationships.
Moreover, as indicated by Julie, these women are convinced that God will protect them, as long as they have a strong faith and lead a good Christian life (Hammar 2010).

Among Catholics in Madang, not only belief in God, but also devotion to Mary is believed to prevent one from getting infected. In order to stay on the right path, Mary is promulgated as a role model, thereby on one hand preventing infection and, on the other, enabling salvation. For example, in the Post-Courier (December 29, 2004) medical doctor Thomas Vinit (Madang Hospital) argues: ‘Let us use good models that portray chastity and purity, such as the devotion of the Virgin Mary’ in order to address the root of the HIV problem in PNG, which are ‘moral and socio-economical problems’.15 This emphasis on using Mary as a role model in order to solve moral and social problems is also instrumental in how Catholic women deal and cope with various forms of domestic violence. Confronted with domestic violence and divorce in an environment where this is seen as sinful, many Catholic women like Alice and Julie seek spiritual guidance; finding solace in prayers directed to Mary and gaining strength by using Mary as their example.

**Mimicking Mary and the power of self-transformation**

Sometimes I wonder: how did I survive all this? I thank God and our Lady, she is my role model: a simple, humble woman (Alice, Madang 2006).

All over the world, Mary’s celebrated virtues of humility, obedience and faith are appropriated by women and inscribed on women’s bodies. Especially among members of the Legion of Mary, this use of Mary as an example, as a ‘role model’ whose virtues must be aspired to, is propagated. The Official Handbook of the Legion of Mary (Concilium Legionis Mariae 1993: 12) describes Mary’s virtues, which constitute its members’ aspirations, as follows:

The Legion of Mary in particular aspires to Mary’s profound humility, Her perfect obedience, Her angelical sweetness, Her continual prayer, Her universal mortification, Her altogether spotless purity, Her heroic patience, Her heavenly wisdom, Her self-sacrificing courageous love of God, and above all Her faith.

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15 Dr. Vinit, while strongly opposing condoms, is now head of the Lifestyle Diseases Division of the National Department of Health (Hammar 2007: 75).
Mary the ‘Immaculate Conception’ is the Legion’s worldwide leader. The image of Mary crushing the serpent’s head symbolises that Mary is the Immaculate Conception: the Divine Maternity born without sin, ‘the crushing of the serpent’s head in redemption, and Mary’s motherhood of men’ (Concilium Legionis Mariae 1993: 20). As a legionary, members are expected to submit to Mary completely: ‘the legionary distrusts the promptings of his [sic] own inclinations and in all things listens intently for the whisperings of grace’ (Concilium Legionis Mariae 1993: 30). In fact, ‘the giver places himself [sic] in a condition equivalent to that of a slave possessing nothing of his own, and wholly dependent on, and utterly at the disposal of Mary’ (Concilium Legionis Mariae 1993: 37). In addition, the members of the Legion are also perceived as Her ‘warriors’. Based upon Genesis 3:15, the Legion perceives itself as Mary’s warriors against sin that turns to Mary’s enmity with the devil as a ‘source of confidence and strength in its warfare with sin’ (Concilium Legionis Mariae 1993: 20). The legion is thus perceived as an army, which ‘throws itself in the warfare of Christ’ in which its members submit themselves ‘to His glorious commands’. Being both slave and warrior is actually seen to empower the legionaries. As the handbook states: ‘The imitation of Mary’s humility is both the root and the instrument of legionary action’ (Concilium Legionis Mariae 1993: 27).
As an example, Mary teaches legionaries to aspire to qualities such as humility, patience, faith and obedience—characteristics that are ascribed to Mary in particular by the Legion of Mary and the Catholic Church in general (Ruether 1993; McLauglin 1974). As Alice observed:

Mary is a model to me: Pasin bilong en, em daun passin [Her style/fashion is humility]. Understanding and following Mary, brought understanding about my own self. Now, I believe in humility and the truth. I find peace in not making others angry, but helping them instead.

When asking other female members of the Legion of Mary in both Madang and Port Moresby what role Mary plays in their lives and in their families, I encountered similar expressions. For many, Mary is their spiritual mother who guides and protects them and whose virtues of peace, humility and caring, are loved and admired. Theresa, a sixty-three-year-old auxiliary member of the Legion of Mary, suggested:

Mary is an example to all women. She is the mother of the Holy Family and as a woman and a mother she understands the problems and hardships that we [women] go through. She is the comforter (Theresa, Port Moresby 2005).

But Mary is not just an example to women in the sense that they admire Her and seek Her out as their spiritual mother. The women I interviewed actually aspire to be as Mary. By ‘becoming’ Mary they try to come closer to her, and consequently, to God. This mimesis is achieved by praying the Rosary. Furthermore, members of the Legion of Mary aspire to achieve Mary’s virtues by dressing in blue. In this context, mimesis is not simply ‘imitation’. Mimicking Mary implies not only that a spiritual connection is achieved, but that ‘a palpable, sensuous connection between the very body of the perceiver and the perceived’ is created (Taussig 1993: 21). This bodily connection is an important dimension of any form of belief (Ram 2005) and crucial in women’s sense of self-transformation and spiritual passage. According to many of the women I interviewed, becoming like Mary meant internalising Mary’s virtues, transforming their bodily behaviour and, consequently, changing their lives. As explained by teacher Elaine:

Mary is a very good example. I follow her footsteps, as she understands everything. She changed my life. To me, I am very impatient. I get cross easily because I am so impatient. I often get cross with my husband, who is a quiet man. Then we started to pray [the Rosary] and I realised I could not be impatient to my children and husband anymore. Also in my work, I have to be patient. My husband realises I have changed. I am trying to be a good mother, instead of screaming and beating them.
Now I do not do it that way. Thank God I realise this now. Maria is my example. I admire her motherly care for her children, her humility and humbleness, and her love for Jesus. She is a woman of prayer. I ask her what to do and follow her.

What is striking in such narratives by women in their aspirations to be like Mary is the emphasis on self-transformation. As articulated by Elaine and others, Mary provided insights into their bad habits, which they subsequently tried to change. According to Alice and Julie, Mary’s qualities as a humble woman showed them how they had failed in their own marriages. By changing themselves, by changing their own anger into humility, they did, alas, not change their husbands, but they received peace and acceptance of their situation as it was at the time. For many of the other abused women I spoke to, this emphasis on self-transformation was not just the only way to change their situation, but also the way to change their husbands.

Faced with domestic violence or other problems, the most effective way to achieve results is to focus on what can be changed: oneself. To scrutinise oneself and to work and turn oneself into a good Christian wife is, for most women, the most accessible way to change their situation. In this, women attribute power and agency to themselves. As argued by Griffith (1997: 166) in describing published narratives of Aglow women in the US, ‘women centre their narratives on their own capacity to initiate personal healing and cultivate domestic harmony.’ This personal power is, according to Griffith, encoded in a ‘doctrine of submission’. In women’s narratives described by Griffith (1997: 166), ‘good results will follow a wife’s willing acquiescence: once women’s attitudes are transformed and they accept their submissive roles, their husbands also become happier and more benevolent.’

Such a doctrine of submission is also visible in Catholic women’s narratives, wherein submission is not only to Mary and to God, but also to one’s husband. As Mary, president of the Legion of Mary in Madang, expressed: ‘Mary is our role model. She is obedient to God. So we submit to our men. They are the head of the family.’ Others equally stressed Mary’s role in providing them with a good example of being a good Christian woman who submitted to both God and her husband. As one of the Legion’s members stated: ‘I imitate Mary’s humility, Her faith, praying, sacrifices, obedience. Obedience to my husband and towards religious duties.’ Importantly, this religious doctrine of submission resonates strongly with gender hierarchies in PNG where, in general, male domination is the status quo and women are expected to submit and be obedient to men (see also Macintyre, Ch. 8). As such, religious doctrine, just like kastam, emphasises male domination, empowering women to submit, rather than resist, and thus promoting domestic harmony. This union of Christian and cultural values results in a powerful doctrine of submission which is, despite growing
opportunities for women to divorce and circumvent cultural values of female submission, difficult to resist. Women’s social and religious environment keeps re-inscribing woman’s responsibility in attaining domestic harmony and being obedient to both husband and God. Failing to do so means failing socially, religiously and personally and can lead to social isolation and even depression, as Alice and Julie discovered. Mary provides women with a shining example of how to fashion themselves into good Catholic wives in PNG.

Importantly, mimicking Mary not only involves changing women’s attitudes. It involves the transformation of one’s self. The emphasis on self-transformation into the image of Mary actually calls for the submission and suppression of the self. As stated in the Handbook of the Legion of Mary: ‘The legionary, in turning towards Mary, must necessarily turn away from self’ (Concilium Legionis Mariae 1993: 30). The ‘humble Virgin’s heel’ not only crushes Satan, but it also crushes ‘the serpent of self with its many heads’. These are the heads of self-exaltation, of self-seeking, of self-sufficiency, of self-conceit, of self-love, of self-satisfaction, of self-advancement and of self-will (Concilium Legionis Mariae 1993: 30). Yet paradoxically, this Christian rhetoric which calls for the denial of the self also emphasises the self.

Negation or suppression of the self?

As argued by Joel Robbins (2005), Christianity focuses on the subject, on the self. More precisely, ‘Christianity forces oneself to identify with one’s own inferiority, one’s sinful nature.’ It teaches people to look inward and to alter their notions of subjectivity as something to be regulated (pp. 46–47). Focus is thus on the subject, on the formation of self. Richard Eves makes similar observations in his study on modernity, morality and illness among the Lelet people in New Ireland. By converting to Evangelical Christianity, Lelet converts ‘create a new self, a self-refashioning’ in which they seek to cultivate a new Christian way of being (Eves 2005: 28).

In contrast to Robbin’s (2002: 311) claim that Christianity increases individualism, Mark Mosko (2010) stresses the personal partibility in Melanesian Christianity. Relying heavily on Marilyn Strathern’s insights on Melanesian ‘dividual’ personhood, which is the product of relations with other persons, Mosko argues that the sociality of (Melanesian) Christianity is not individualistic in the sense of bounded personhood but consists instead ‘in elicitive transactions between dividual persons, human and spiritual’ (p. 222). My experience with Catholic women in Madang is that both representations of personhood, individual and relational (or dividual) coexist, albeit sometimes in conflictual tension (see also Wardlow 2006: 19–20). The Catholic Church, and in particular the rhetoric
of the late Fr Golly, continually confront the legionaries and parish members with their sinful nature, which calls for self-reflection and, importantly, self-transformation. In addition to this emphasis on the individual self, this rhetoric also impacts on women’s relational and dividual personhoods as it promises women that they can change their husbands by giving up their sinful selves and giving themselves to Mary and God—thereby receiving divine help and blessings.

The women I spoke to in Madang and Port Moresby engage in similar processes of self-refashioning. Women are encouraged to monitor their behaviour, to stop cursing and arguing with their husbands, to be patient and obedient. By internalising and re-enacting Christian values through the image of Mary, their focus is thus on self-discipline (see also Robbins 2005: 51). In Michel Foucault’s terms, these women engage in ‘self-surveillance’ (Foucault 1997). Self-surveillance is usually understood as ‘the attention one pays to one’s behaviour when facing the actuality or virtuality of an immediate or mediated observation by others whose opinion he or she deems as relevant’ (Vaz and Bruno 2003: 273). In this case, one of the main observers of women’s behaviour is Mary—an inescapable omnipresence.

So Mary becomes a powerful icon around which women rework (part of) their identities and transform themselves into ideal Christian women through self-surveillance. In Madang, the doctrine of religious and domestic submission that is adhered to is empowered by Christian rhetoric which demands obedience and, especially, submission from the wife, both in her relationship towards God and towards her husband. These values are propagated through books concerning Mary (for example Hahn 2001) which are extremely popular among Marian devotees, and Christian booklets that are published and distributed in PNG (for example Fountain 1984; Malins 1987; Sala 1999). Moreover, these values are part of the rhetoric and advice given by legion members as well as by its erstwhile spiritual director, Fr Golly:

I was told to pray, pray. My spiritual director [Fr Golly] told me to find my weakness and perform. He told me: ‘You go back to your husband!’ I cried. I cried and I prayed. I was so scared to go back. But I went back, and … I was again abused. I went back to Father Golly and I told him that I valued my life. Who is going to take care of my children? But he was looking at my marriage, not at my own safety.

In 1991, for six months, I did not give myself to my husband. Father Golly told me to break my heart of stone. And I prayed to do this and I did it, but without love, to satisfy my husband (Alice, Madang 2006).
Marie Griffith (1997) argues that personal power is intrinsic to women's submission as this enables them to change their situation by changing themselves. However, Griffith fails to offer insights into how women's reworking of their identities is actually a very difficult and painful process, and may not elicit a parallel self-fashioning in the husband, who may continue to act in aggressive or other difficult ways or even, like Alice's husband, desert the family. For women like Alice, the effort of becoming an ideal Christian woman was painful and the price paid was high.

The power of Mary: Re-enacting normative violence?

This chapter has addressed the place of Mary in the negotiations of a particular group of urban Catholic women with various forms of violence. As shown, women like Alice and Julie not only have to cope with violent acts such as rape, but also with 'states of violence'. These states of violence are linked to the dynamics of the urban context in which morally troubling issues such as gang violence, criminality, gender and sexual violence, and the threat of HIV affect people's lives. As argued, acts of sexual violence are not only a form of violence against women's bodies and their mental health. Women's medical health is also threatened as sexual violence is linked to impoverishment and vulnerability to HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

While seeking solutions for the morally troubling issues that affect their lives, the women I interviewed turn to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary not only offers women solace and help, She also appears to empower women to endure their suffering. Following Mary's example, they gain confidence in the process of self-transformation into good and strong Christian wives. The women I interviewed see this transformation as empowerment—of being able to change themselves, their situations and, eventually, their husbands.

This form of empowerment refers to the process whereby women become aware of their capacity to change their lives. However, as argued by Macintyre (Ch. 8), this power has to come from somewhere. In the cases described by Macintyre, 'empowering women' often means wresting power from men so that women might represent their own interests (Ch. 8). The Catholic women I interviewed draw power from Mary. And since the effects of her power—obedience, patience, humility—are not considered problematic by men, this process does not generate conflict with them. Instead, it is often welcomed and supported, both by the male clergy and by women's husbands.
The question is: to what extent can we view the process of becoming Mary as empowerment? When seen in the light of Foucault’s notion of self-surveillance, such a form of empowerment looks very feeble. As shown, women’s self-surveillance is constituted by dominant gender relations, by the religious community—such as the members of the Legion of Mary and Church clergy like Fr Golly—and, perhaps even more importantly, by the Virgin Mary. Mary exemplifies, to use Antonio Gramsci’s (1971) term ‘hegemony’, the quintessential ‘hegemonic femininity’—a femininity that is accepted as dominant (cf. Connell 2005 [1995] on hegemonic masculinities). Mary’s submissive image coincides with pre-existing gender relations and gender hierarchies, in which women’s roles are constituted as being submissive to their husbands with an emphasis on their roles as caretakers of the family and as mothers. As already noted, the Church’s teachings on Mary ‘reflect and express the ideology of the patriarchal feminine’ (Ruether 1993: 149). The virtues ascribed to Mary in the teachings of the Church and the Legion of Mary, such as silence, obedience and modesty, constitute the very essence of passive, female submission (McLaughlin 1974). The advice given by clergy such as Fr Golly to abused women, urging them to stay in abusive relationships, to be patient and show forgiveness towards those who abuse them, is equally part of the hegemony and disciplinary power. In fact, it can be argued that Marian devotion and its focus on self-surveillance is actually a form of normative violence—a ‘state of violence’ that submits women to a violent doctrine of submission. In Foucault’s terms, this doctrine of submission reduces women to docile and subjected bodies and thus seems to deny the possibility of resistance and agency.

However, as we listen to women’s stories and experiences, Mary also seems to offer an escape. Mary is held up to women as a model and is appropriated by women as a model. But this model is appropriated and internalised in ways which do not always coincide with the Church’s teachings or notions of the patriarchal and hegemonic female. Women like Alice and Julie not only admire Mary’s virtues of patience and modesty, they also see Mary as a strong woman, as a leader. Julie, who has ambitions of being and becoming a leader herself, explains: ‘Mary is a big female leader. When we women look at her, we can see our responsibilities in our family and in our communities’ (Julie, Madang 2006).

Considering women’s agency, we can speak in Margaret Jolly’s (1992) and Holly Wardlow’s terms of ‘encompassed agency’ (Wardlow 2006: 13). In the case of Catholic women legionaries of Mary, women’s agency is not only constrained by male and social domination as described by Wardlow, but also, and perhaps more strongly, by Catholic doctrine, its clergy and Mary. In fact, one could describe women’s agency in terms of ‘ecclesial encompassment’, as the women I interviewed exercise their agency and their creation of new subjectivities within the policed boundaries of the ecclesia.
So Mary’s role is even more ambiguous than is evident in her paradoxical role of helping women to stop violence and of facilitating a hegemonic patriarchal power which constrains women. In fact the figure of Mary as a submissive image can transform into that of a strong and powerful woman, reflected in the portrait of the worldwide leader of the Legion of Mary, the Immaculate Conception (see Figure 7). This particular image of Mary encapsulates Mary’s virtues of goodness, sweetness, humility and obedience, but at the same time evinces her power to crush evil and lead an army against sin. Mary thus provides women not only with an example of how to be a good Christian mother and wife, but also how to be a strong woman leader. Mary’s role as a strong woman also enables her followers, like Julie, to assume leadership positions and endure the struggle that goes with such positions and aspirations in the context of contemporary Papua New Guinean society.

This powerful dual role of Mary reflects how religious women’s groups are in the foreground of changing things in PNG—including gender relations (Dickson-Waiko 1999, 2003; Lee 1985; Sepoe 2000). Religious women may actively resist male domination and violation against women, urging men instead of women to change. Unlike the female members of the Legion of Mary described in this paper, who seek empowerment through individuated agency while being supported in this quest by their Legion members, women in certain other Christian groups successfully exert agency in collectives. Perhaps it is the identification with a highly individualised Mary and her personal virtues and experiences of suffering that prevents legionaries in Madang from collectively taking up arms against domestic violence. Or perhaps it was the power exerted by the Legion’s spiritual director, the late Fr Golly, who confined women to their roles of docile and forgiving mothers and wives, and prevented them from acting, both collectively and individually, as warriors against the sins of men.

References


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