



Gender equality has become a major strategy for success in development work by donor agencies and non-government organisations (NGOs). In our region, AusAID and the New Zealand Aid Programme (NZAID) stress the importance of gender equality in both their policy documents and their delivery of aid (AusAID 2007; NZAID 2007). Much of the impetus for this has come from the United Nations (UN) Millennium Declaration, which states unequivocally that progress towards gender equality is essential if poverty is to be eradicated and sustainable development achieved.

One result of the focus on gender equality is that the issue of violence against women, a violence based on gender, has become a major concern of development practitioners. Recognising how widespread the problem of violence against women is, the 2006 UN Secretary-General's In-Depth Study on all Forms of Violence Against Women Report asserts that 'as long as violence against women continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace' (UNGA 2006:9).

Some of the highest incidences of violence against women in the world are reported for the Pacific. The problem is particularly severe in the cultural region of Melanesia (Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, Papua and Fiji). Due to limited data, the exact extent of the violence is unknown, but the available figures paint a bleak picture. Recent national figures from Solomon Islands reveal prevalence rates of sexual/physical partner violence of 64 per cent among ever-partnered women aged 15–49, with 42 per cent of women reporting this in the past 12 months (Secretariat of the Pacific Community 2009:3).

The problem of violence against women is especially acute in the largest country of the region,

Papua New Guinea. No nationwide generalisable research has been undertaken in Papua New Guinea since the Law Reform Commission's research in the 1980s,<sup>1</sup> but reports from the police, the media, anecdotal evidence and an increasing number of reports by NGOs and donor agencies indicate that gender violence, especially violence against women, is endemic (Amnesty International 2006; Bradley 2001; Human Rights Watch 2005, 2006; AusAID 2008; Haley 2005; Kopi et al. 2010). Week after week, horrific reports appear in the national media of women being killed by intimate partners or of cases of violent rape. In the face of such horror stories, it is easy to be pessimistic about the prospects for violence prevention in Papua New Guinea. Although in recent years the prime minister and other ministers have deplored the appalling levels of violence, it still largely remains the concern of donor agencies, NGOs and churches. My focus here is on the churches and how some churches are grappling with the problem of violence against women (particularly violence in the domestic or marital sphere).<sup>2</sup> It is important to take into account that violence against women is violence based on gender, because this demands a broader study of all the ways that gender, including masculinity, is constituted.

Although there is an undeniable need for much stronger legal and judicial measures, gender violence is a complex problem that cannot be solved by this alone.<sup>3</sup> This is not merely because much gender violence is not brought to the notice of the law, or because police and judiciary often have little capacity or willingness to deal with the issue but, more essentially, because legal and judicial measures do not address the root causes of gender violence (Eves 2010a:68).<sup>4</sup> Beyond creating a legal and policy environment supportive of women's rights, a primary prevention approach focuses on preventing

violence before it occurs, fostering a culture that promotes non-violence and relationships based on equity, and supporting individuals to take a public stand against abuse (Michau 2005:3; see also Eves 2010a:68).<sup>5</sup>

The effort to prevent violence before it occurs changes the perception that it is solely women's responsibility to stop such violence (Michau 2005; AusAID 2009:15; Bird et al. 2007:112). In the past, the issues of gender equality and the elimination of gender violence were often seen narrowly as a women's issue — as a matter of helping women become more assertive and to change their circumstances. Though women's social and economic empowerment remain imperative, it is now realised that focusing on women alone is insufficient to overturn the power structures that entrench gender inequality and sustain violence against women. Until recently, the need to analyse and understand the lives of men as well as women was barely recognised in most development policy, even though men are clearly implicated (Cleaver 2002:1). Gender having been seen as synonymous with women, policy makers and development practitioners, both men and women, have often misunderstood or dismissed 'gender' as a women's issue. Men were conceptually absent in this equation but their presence, though hidden, has been overpoweringly present, for most development policy has been based on the assumption that subjectivity is male and the privileging of masculine authority. It is men, or more particularly groups of men, who control the resources, exercise power over women in various ways and perpetuate gender inequality and women's disadvantage (Flood 2005:2, 2007:10; Chant and Gutmann 2000). Clearly, it is possible for inequality to exist without overt violence.

### Engaging with Men in Violence Prevention

To attain a gender-equal society that is free from violence against women requires men to think and act in new ways, to reconsider traditional images of manhood, and to restructure their relationships with women (Connell 2003:4). Because gender inequality is intimately tied to masculine discourses and culture, men's practices and identities and their

participation in complex gender relations, achieving gender equality is not possible without changes in men's lives (Flood 2005:2; UNDAW 2004:3–4). Men's involvement can make other interventions more relevant and workable and, importantly, can create lasting change by confronting the opposition currently built in to gender relations (Flood 2007:11).

Changes in this direction are already occurring. Many development practitioners are now persuaded that men and boys must actively participate in challenging and changing unequal power relations (UNDAW 2004:3; Barker 2001:94; Chant and Guttmann 2000:1). There has been a growth of literature on the need to engage men in violence prevention measures (Cornwall 1997, 2000; Correia and Bannon 2006; Flood 2007; Grieg et al. 2000; Ruxton 2004; Sweetman 2001; White 1997). Various newer initiatives now actively engage men in violence prevention, both in Papua New Guinea, the wider Pacific and internationally.<sup>6</sup> However, much remains to be done, particularly in the field of research.

An essential prerequisite for designing effective violence prevention initiatives is an understanding of the contemporary forms of masculinity and the factors that are producing them. Theories of masculinity have moved beyond universal and singular conceptions that disregard cultures, histories and contexts. In-depth studies show that multiple forms of masculinity exist, and that these are constantly being reshaped under new influences. This means there are many different cultural models of manliness (see Connell 1995; Guttmann 1997; Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994; Cleaver 2002:7).

This is certainly the case for the Papua New Guinea, where there is no single way of being a man. Some attention has been paid to masculinity in that country, focussing particularly on the rituals associated with the transition from childhood to adulthood (Herdt 1981; 1992).<sup>7</sup> The social and cultural ideas and beliefs that shape men's ways of being are particularly important, but, so far, insufficient scholarly attention has been given to the effects on masculinity of recent rapid social and cultural changes or to the many masculinities that have emerged as a result (but see Brison 1995; Eves 2006; Sai 2007; Wilde 2003). Many changes

that have had a profound impact on gender have occurred, such as exposure to modern media, Christianisation, Western education and labour migration.

In seeking to develop initiatives to address violence against women, and gender violence more generally, it is productive to look not only at those factors that produce behaviours with negative consequences for women, but also at those factors that produce non-violent and more equitable masculinities. It is significant that not all men are violent and that alternative ways of being a man exist. Not all men conform to masculinities that have negative consequences for women, not all successful and strong men are aggressive and violent, and many men positively reject and condemn violence towards women. For some men at least, this is a consequence of the form of Christianity they have adopted, as I explain below.

The existence of alternative local conceptions of what it is to be a man can provide culturally meaningful starting points for developing interventions that promote more equitable behaviour. Careful research is needed to discover what might influence men to reject negative violent masculinities in favour of more reasonable and equitable ways of relating to others. Thus, we need to understand not only the specific conditions (social, cultural and economic) that may produce masculinities that are violent and dominating, but also those that are non-violent, collaborative and equitable.

In this paper, I consider some of the alternative ways of being a man that have emerged in Papua New Guinea. Specifically, I discuss the ways that some forms of Christianity are promoting more caring, responsible and non-violent forms of masculinity in Papua New Guinea. Considering Christianity's huge influence there, together with the need to ground interventions in the local context, a good understanding of the nature of Papua New Guinean forms of Christianity, and how they impact on gender, is necessary for designing effective primary prevention initiatives. Though my focus here is on the specific case of Papua New Guinea, which I know best, many of my observations are almost certainly applicable to other

countries in Melanesia and the wider Pacific, where Christianity is also highly influential.

### Christianity

Christianity is one of the most successful and entrenched cultural legacies of the European expansion into the Pacific that began in the late eighteenth century. The widespread success of the missionaries, and of the indigenous churches that developed from their work, is reflected across the region in the large numbers of people who identify as Christian. In Papua New Guinea, a survey in 2008 found that 97.28 per cent of the population identified as Christian (Operation World). Others have put the figure closer to 99 per cent (Hauck et al. 2005:v).<sup>8</sup> Christianity has a pervasive influence in daily life and is central to the framework through which people make sense of the world. Public discourse is saturated with Christian language, and Christian groups dominate civil society, often defining the terms of public debate over important issues.<sup>9</sup> Christianity is enshrined in the Constitution, there is a Christian church in every community — often several — and church leaders generally command a great deal of respect, often far greater than representatives of the government.

The first missionaries had a very distinctly gendered approach, both in their church organisation and in their efforts to 'civilise' by instilling conduct appropriate to each sex. In fact, the missionaries endeavoured to reform gender by cultivating new and different forms of masculinity and femininity. Thus, these efforts to transform gender norms did not displace traditional notions of gender hierarchy, but merely reinscribed them in a different form. Leadership was allotted exclusively to men, who continue to occupy the key roles of pastors, priests, ministers and bishops today. The missionaries did try to quell masculine violence but they also desired to domesticate the women, whom they considered unruly (Eves 1996).

Today, some of the churches play key roles in the delivery of services to the population and in addressing some of the pressing problems facing the country, such as corruption, conflict and the HIV epidemic (Eves and Butt 2008; Benton 2008;

Hauck et al. 2005; Luker 2004; Stein-Holmes 2003). This applies especially to the mainstream churches (Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran and United Churches), which are all involved to varying degrees in the delivery of health and education services throughout the country, particularly in those provinces where they have historical roots. Because of their central place in education and health, and because, on the whole, people listen to them, the churches are in a position to play a crucial role in addressing the problem of violence against women together with the broader issues of gender violence and gender equality. Not only do they have great authority in the community, but, as Bradley says, Christianity 'as a value system provides both an alternative to the traditional model of male–female relationships, and the rationale to motivate attitudinal change' (Bradley 1990:162–63).

Christianity, however, is not monolithic; different churches address these issues in different ways. Some churches hold very rigid and conservative views on the proper roles and behaviour of women and men. Others are more flexible and progressive and to some extent pose alternatives to dominant Christian views on gender. Uniformity does not exist inside each church either. While some members of church hierarchies and some church policies may express more progressive views, members of congregations are not always so egalitarian. This is a terrain full of inconsistencies. Some of the more fundamentalist churches reject male violence, but also valorise the conventional family with its defined gender roles, with the man as its authoritative leader. It is also a shifting scene, with many churches embracing change, so that something that was once acceptable may now be rejected.

### **The Catholic Church: 'A Happy Marriage Also Means One Without Violence'**

The Catholic Church has been at the forefront of the churches in responding to domestic violence in Papua New Guinea. The Catholic Bishops Conference of 1987 publicly stated that marriage must be a free contract between equals and that there was no place for violence between marriage partners (Bradley 1990:157–58). The conference also

resolved that the payment of 'bride price' does not give the husband the right to beat his wife (Bradley 1990:158). Further, in the following year a directive was issued to pastors who were preparing couples for marriage to make it clear to both parties that bride price does not legitimise wife-beating (Bradley 1990:158).

The Catholic Church National Pastoral Plan (2006–10) also contains specific initiatives to address domestic violence. All parishes are expected to have 'adopted protective action strategies in situations of domestic violence as a Christian obligation for all' (Catholic Church 2006:17). The Pastoral Plan also stipulates that training programs for counselling on domestic violence and HIV/AIDS should reach each parish at least every three years (Catholic Church 2006:19).

On the other hand, despite some gestures towards equality in the Catholic Church, such as a reference to women's empowerment in the Pastoral Plan, primacy is often given to the traditional model of the man as the head of the family. This is illustrated, for example, in the way that some men's groups have developed. Set up in several provinces as a male equivalent of the Catholic Women's Federation in an effort to address domestic violence, these 'Papa groups' have been organised to examine what men can do together to address the issue of violence.<sup>10</sup> However, rather than working to establish more equitable relations with women, some men see the role of the Papa groups as an affirmation of male authority. In my discussions in 2006 with several men responsible for organising Papa groups in Bougainville, one group leader used the model of the family to explain the reason for having men's groups (see Eves 2006:61). Since there were women's and youth groups in the church family, he said, there was a need for men's groups, since the father is the head of the family. 'The father,' he said, 'is the head of the family and the father has all the rights over things in the family. His family must behave themselves, all the children must behave themselves and follow Christian ways.' Another leader saw the task of men's groups as strengthening men's role in organising, disciplining and bringing family members into line. For both men, men's

groups were not about redefining gender, not about men learning new ways of relating to women (and other men), nor about developing more equal relationships within the family, but about reasserting male authority.

Hermkens describes how an unquestioning acceptance of men's right to authority is instilled in Catholic women when they resort to devotion to the Virgin Mary in an effort to deal with domestic violence. Praying to Mary does give women a feeling of empowerment, says Hermkens (2008:151). However, Mary is venerated for her virtues of obedience, patience and submission, which the women are expected to emulate. The feeling of empowerment is largely illusory, because the Church encourages women to accept their situation and to stay with their husbands no matter how abusive they are (see also Bradley 1990:159–60). As Hermkens writes:

By submitting to God, trying to accept their situation as being God's will and plan, women often gain the necessary strength to keep going on, that is: to stay with their husbands. The idea of suffering, of having to face this violence as part of their penitence in order to, eventually, receive holiness and redemption, equally strengthens women to stay in an abusive situation. Moreover, the conviction is that if you show patience and pray to Mary, those [men] who backslide and commit sin will change their behaviour (2008:158–9).

When women's prayers to change their husbands' behaviour do not succeed, the consensus is not that this was an exercise not worth pursuing but that the women have not prayed hard enough (Hermkens 2008:159). The emphasis is on changing the victim herself, not the husband. As Hermkens says, women learn that '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' (2008:160).

Hermkens describes how a woman leader counselled others that because marriage was a sacred union established before the eyes of God,

wives must fight for their marriages — that is, they must work hard and show humility. This meant taking good care of the husband lest he look elsewhere, and certainly not trying to 'boss' him (Hermkens 2008:163). While this strategy does mean that women 'actually attribute power and agency to themselves', this is severely limited (Hermkens 2008:160). In effect, the problem is turned in on the victim who, if her husband's violence continues, obviously has not been a good enough Christian wife.

There are, however, other Catholic initiatives that aim to address men's treatment of women, and especially violence against them, more directly. For some years, the parish of St John in Western Province has each year been promoting a different value in the hope of cultivating a more caring and respectful view of women. In 2006, the value was equality. A parish publication explains convincingly why equality is a Christian ideal. Its recognition of difference and equivalence is worth noting:

We are all created differently and gifted with different gifts and talents. Physically we are different. We have different attitudes and characters, and we belong to a different family, clan and tribe. But we are coming from the same Father, God in Heaven. As children of God we have the same dignity. We are created in his own image. God created human beings making them to be like him (Gen 1:27) we have the same Holy Spirit. We are all one in Christ so that we are EQUAL. We are no longer Jews or Greeks or slaves or free persons or even men or women, but we are all the same, we are Christians: We are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28) (St John Parish 2005:3).

The way that difference is recognised within a framework of equality in this publication is quite remarkable. Because many Papua New Guineans have highly essentialist notions of gender, this way of framing the discourse on equality within a discourse on difference is likely to be more effective. While notions of difference need not entail inequality, in Papua New Guinea women are often perceived as inferior, basically because of their different bodies. The St John Parish publication seeks to displace this perception that difference means inferior-

ity by saying that each person has a responsibility to treat all others fairly, which means being just to others and respectful of their rights. It concludes, 'No one is superior so that she/he can put the other down' (St John Parish 2005:3).

### Born-Again Churches

The ambiguity and contradiction that characterises the Catholic Church also applies to the newer, fast-growing evangelical, Charismatic and Pentecostal churches, which for brevity I call born-again churches. The global spread of these churches was one of the most dramatic developments in Christianity in the twentieth century and it continues today (Martin 2002:1). Reliable figures are not available, but in the last decade or so in Papua New Guinea, the born-again churches have grown spectacularly, largely at the expense of the mainstream churches whose members have turned to these newer, more vibrant forms of Christianity. There is a profusion of these smaller churches, with estimates varying from approximately 150 (Hauck et al. 2005:v) to more than 180 groups (Gibbs 2007:23).

Most of the born-again churches can be characterised as fundamentalist since they believe strongly in the absolute accuracy of the Bible (Lawrence 1989:5; see also Ammerman 1991). For them, the Bible gives a true account of history, science, morality and religion, providing all the guidance necessary for understanding life on earth and achieving salvation in the hereafter. Beyond this, fundamentalists expect to 'find in Scripture clues to the future destiny of this world' and many of these churches focus heavily on the apocalyptic prophecies about the end of the world contained in the last book of the New Testament and other prophetic sections of the Bible (Ammerman 1991:6; Eves 2000, 2003). Because of their central concern with personal salvation and their belief that God ordains the future, the born-again churches have tended to shun the political process and issues of social development (see Eves 2008a). Their approach differs strongly from many other churches that seek to deal with inequality through social and political action (Anderson 2012). Rather than transforming this world where people live and suffer, the born-again churches seek to con-

vert individuals, to set them on the path to heaven.

Given their fundamentalist nature, it might be expected that the born-again churches would hold particularly narrow views about gender, and negative views about women's rights. It might also be expected that they would use biblical authority to justify arguments that women should be subservient to men, as has been noted in other countries (see Mate 2002).<sup>11</sup> Certainly, a common justification for wife-beating is that the husband is the head of the family and so must be implicitly obeyed. This has been well documented (Bradley 2001:158, 1985:45). During one of my earlier periods of fieldwork (1990–91), I heard this invoked in New Ireland by the devout wife of the church deacon when a man, enraged by his wife's participation in a mixed volleyball game, beat her so badly that she miscarried the infant she was carrying (Eves 2010b). This notion of men taking precedence was also explained in a sermon as a hierarchy, with God at the summit, followed by men and then by women. However, while this view remains common, it is no longer universal and some born-again churches are voicing counter-narratives that undermine its cultural salience.

These forms of Christianity often assume spiritual and moral equality between those of their members who have become born-again. When you are saved, they say, you are just like any other person who is saved in the eyes of God. This idea of spiritual equality accepts that women can receive spiritual gifts just as readily as men, and sometimes allows them to assume considerable power and moral authority. Many of these churches accept what Flora calls the 'priesthood of all believers,' which gives women and men equal authority to take on the roles of teaching and preaching (Flora 1975:415). However, in Papua New Guinea the extent to which women actually fill leadership roles is often restricted. In the New Ireland Pentecostal church discussed below, women may preach but the key leadership roles are reserved for men. Women cannot, for example, become pastors or ministers, though this sometimes occurs in other Pentecostal churches (see also Drogus 1994:3; Flora 1975:416–17).<sup>12</sup>

Some scholars have suggested that the assumption of spiritual and moral equality results

in changes to the ideal male role behaviour, since male converts are called on to adopt female moral norms, such as more ascetic consumption patterns and behaviours, particularly the renunciation of alcoholic drinks and extra-marital affairs (Willems 1967). Brusco says that male evangelical converts in Colombia must bring their spending into line with women's preferences for spending on family consumption (Brusco 1995:123).

Certainly, in Papua New Guinea becoming a born-again Christian entails reforming or radically changing oneself to become, in effect, a new person. Converts are required to take control of their lives, subjecting themselves to a rigorous and continual process of self-scrutiny and self-regulation, and living a righteous Christian life, called, in Tok Pisin, *strepela pasin* (virtuous habits). There is a strong emphasis on rupture — of making a complete break from the past. Converts must renounce the 'evils' of their past lives and many of their cultural traditions, before they are reborn into a new, fully Christian life (Eves 2007; see also Meyer 1998).<sup>13</sup> Beyond the well-known biblically named sins, such as murder or adultery, there is a litany of acts that must be abandoned, including behaviours such as magic (*papait*), ridiculing (*tok bilas*), and even playing sport.<sup>14</sup>

Agreement about what should be proscribed is not universal, but there is considerable uniformity across many born-again churches on the prescription of behaviours that may be considered to contribute to negative masculinities, such as drinking alcohol, engaging in sex outside of marriage and polygamy. Besides these negative prohibitions, born-again Christians practise constructive virtues, such as generosity and compassion towards others.<sup>15</sup> These virtues are not exclusive to born-again Christians; for many people in Papua New Guinea these are cultural ideals, formed from a mixture of traditional and Christian moral frameworks. They have, however, been far more rigorously and proactively applied within the born-again churches. One aspect of this is the eschewal of conflict; a born-again Christian must not allow ill-feeling to fester but actively seeks to resolve any differences with others amicably.

People are warned against causing, participating in, or perpetuating conflict in the community, and should actively promote their resolution. In particular, this means avoiding disputes over land, or failure to contribute to community and church projects, but it often also includes avoiding violence. When giving accounts of their conversion, some men emphasise that being born-again has changed and improved their relations with their wives. While such changes involve renegotiating and reforming negative and violent forms of masculinity, it should be borne in mind that this is not the central, or explicit, aim. Rather, the change in masculinity is a by-product of a much larger project of reform undertaken by converts.

The rejection of violence comes through clearly in the following account of the factors that led one New Ireland informant to 'change his life'. He begins by stressing the forms of consumption that are considered destructive to God's *holi haus* (holy house — the human body) before mentioning other aspects of bad behaviour that he wants to change:

I left these things — smoking, betel nut, drinking alcohol, and now I want to follow the *gutpela pasin*. I do not want to be angry, to swear. [Question: *Gutpela pasin* what is it?] Answer: You are not angry. You don't drink alcohol. You don't have evil thoughts about other women. You don't steal. You don't beat your wife. You don't behave arrogantly. You don't call out [behave boisterously] — all these kinds of things.

Another informant from New Ireland also draws attention to his relations with his wife and the way he had been treating her. As in the previous account, this was preceded by a more general discussion of what becoming a born-again Christian entails:

*Tanim bel* is the same as being born-again. It is big thing and God has announced that it should take place throughout the world that we must *tanim bel*. The meaning of this, the origin of this is that people must abandon 'sin' — ways that are no good (*pasin no gut*), ways that are not straight (*pasin i no stret*) and the kinds of things that mean people do not live good. This is the belief of God. God does not like sin

... Before I used to fight with my wife and lie to her, and I didn't believe that she was something worthwhile in my life. Among the men here, too, women are undervalued. Because I did not want to behave like this I became born-again, following good ways of treating my wife. Previously I was not very good to her. Now my wife feels I have empathy (*marimari*) towards her and I live a new life. The basis of this is repentance. It is a big thing that must come up in a man — he must be very good in the eyes of God, the eyes of his wife and the eyes of all the people in this world.

As a form of conflict, domestic violence is generally considered to interrupt the harmoniousness of the household and to prevent a person from being an obedient and virtuous Christian.

These accounts of men rejecting violence are encouraging, but it is to be noted that the born-again churches do not often recognise the more general category of gender violence. Their focus on domestic violence or violence within the home construes violence only as a family problem, presents both partners as equally responsible and deems that the problem can be solved simply by better mutual understanding (AusAID 2008:116). This does not necessarily challenge gender roles and notions of male authority. Further, some churches, consider domestic violence to be a problem only if it occurs in public, so that violence in the privacy of the home is tacitly condoned. During my fieldwork in New Ireland, I heard this articulated on several occasions. One specific case involved a pastor who was subject to disciplinary action by the church and suspended from his role for a period of months, after beating his wife. The suspension was not imposed for his act of domestic violence, but because during the episode, his wife ran outside partly naked, and so brought the incident before the public's eyes.

This concern about such incidents becoming public was repeated by another informant in a discussion about acts precipitating suspension from the church:

A man who seduces another woman or a leader who beats his wife in the eye of the

public will be suspended. [Question — so he can beat her inside the house?] Inside the house, there isn't a problem. It's alright. But if you beat her in front of others, so they can see, it is not good. The church has forbidden this — you cannot beat your wife in front of others. True, you can beat her inside of the house.

For these New Irelanders, the primary concern, which is based in the culture, is that things of a private and intimate nature should remain secret, since their airing in public brings shame, not only to those directly concerned but also to close relatives. Indeed, when I asked one informant about the extent of domestic violence in the village where I was based, he could not recall a single case going before the village court. The reason, he thought, was that women do not like to go before the village court because it will involve their private affairs being aired and discussed in public, which invariably brings shame. This is especially so if the matter concerns a woman's sexual relations, which should never be discussed publicly. These ideas of shame are not new or a consequence of Christianity, but are a feature of tradition that has continued into the present (see Eves 1998:126–35, 2003:260). The tacit tolerance of domestic violence in the home does not mean that members of the church hierarchy always condone it. Indeed, one Sunday in 1997 I heard a remarkable sermon by the minister, who spoke at length about the marriage relationship, the value of women, and how husbands should look after their wives.<sup>16</sup>

Despite this tacit sanctioning of violence in the confines of the home by the church in New Ireland, domestic violence there appears to be lessening.<sup>17</sup> This was the perception of one of my closest male informants, whose narrative I recounted earlier. This man used to beat his wife when they were first married, but stopped after the birth of his first child. When I discussed the issue with him in 2008, he thought that there was not 'too much' domestic violence in the village and was able to specify the perpetrators, a list that no longer included some men I knew from my past fieldwork experience to be especially violent.

The lessening of tolerance of domestic violence in New Ireland is evident in other ways also. In

2008, the village where I was based formulated a village constitution, as part of broader community-level government initiatives promoted by the New Ireland Provincial Government. The constitution was a curious blend of traditional and Christian values and emphasised many of the normative rules that governed relations between the sexes. Importantly, the constitution included a specific component for women, and although some aspects of this sought to govern the women's behaviour and to reinforce gender roles in particular ways, it stated that cases of domestic and sexual violence were to be referred to the National Police and the legal system.<sup>18</sup> Violence within the confines of the home was no longer accepted.

The equivocation evident in the public versus private dichotomy of my New Ireland field site is less pronounced in some other parts of Papua New Guinea, and some churches are likely to respond to cases of domestic violence wherever it occurs. Sometimes perpetrators are suspended from church membership, or even expelled. This was true of a number of churches in the Southern Highlands, whose pastors I interviewed in 2007.<sup>19</sup> For the Bible Missionary Church, for example, the absence of anger and violence was a sign that a person was a true Christian. When I asked how the church responded to members beating their wives, the pastor said that such a man would be disciplined and suspended from the church for a period. He would undergo counselling and would be reminded that anger is not part of a true Christian's demeanour and shows that he has not really become a born-again Christian. He would be called on to repent and to truly change his life. For a particularly brutal attack, the suspension could be for a year. Suspension does not preclude the perpetrator from attending church but from taking an active role in the work of the church. Such a person cannot preach, lead the choir or even contribute to discussion in the church, but a public declaration of contrition and repentance would be welcomed.

The influence of the church on marital disputes can be considerable, allowing married couples to use the church and its teachings as a mediating influence. If ministers and village pastors become aware of domestic discord and violence,

they endeavour to counsel the married couple. It is not clear whether this entails an emphasis on submission as occurs in Hermkens' case material, described above, but nonetheless it does allow abused women to turn to a higher authority and potentially equalises male and female relationships (Drogus 1994:3).

Some born-again churches are articulating less hierarchical notions of gender. A poster pinned to the wall of a minister's office in New Ireland that reworks the Biblical story of Adam's rib is an interesting example.<sup>20</sup> The story of God using Adam's rib bone to create Eve, the first woman, has in the past been used to explain woman's inferior position. The poster, however, points out that the rib having come from the man's side shows that women and men should stand equally, side-by-side.

Woman was created from the rib of man,  
not from his head to be above him  
nor his feet to be walked upon  
but from his side to be equal,  
near his arm to be protected,  
and close to his heart to be loved.

While the poster still privileges men, since woman depends on man for her very existence, it does counter the more usual conception of women being below men in the hierarchy, or being a 'door mat', as I heard it expressed.

The poster's existence shows that some Christians are actively working to improve the relations between men and women, by promoting more co-operative partnerships and mutual decision-making.

My experience in the field is that, although men (and women too) continue to accept men's authority in the home, its harsh edge is declining. Men's roles have expanded to include more substantial participation and responsibility in the household and family. One of the informants whose stories of conversion are given above consults his wife closely when making important decisions, though he still considers himself to be the head of the household. The decision-making process in his household seems similar to Stacey and Gerard's description of 'patriarchy in the last instance' — that is, the man makes the final decision only when an accord cannot be reached (1990, cited Heath 2003:438).<sup>21</sup> Maintain-

ing men's ultimate authority in principle may make the egalitarian familial model more palatable (van den Eykel 1986:331), serving to 'preserve male ego while fostering greater equality for women within the household' (Drogus 1994; see also Wyrod 2008:799).

Some churches in Papua New Guinea encourage greater marital egalitarianism by invoking the principle of mutual submission. For example, a Church of God pastor in the Southern Highlands said that, rather than the traditional requirement in marriage being that the woman must obey the man, this was necessary for both husband and wife. As he observed:

The man must be underneath the woman all the time. The woman must be underneath the man. If the woman says something, the man must listen and follow it. If the man says something, the woman must listen and follow it. The married couple must act like one body.

This stress on equality between men and women provides a framework for men to 'do' gender differently from prevailing models. The practice may often fall short of complete gender equality, but it has lessened some of the harsh treatment women have received in the past.

### Conclusion

My case material shows that support for more equitable and non-violent masculinities sometimes comes from surprising sources. The morality that some born-again churches are promoting is based, not on the discourses of development, human rights or feminism, but on the New Testament ethos of care and compassion, and a desire to maintain harmonious relations within the community. For these churches, marital discord and all conflict and violence negates the godliness of a born-again Christian. Men who follow the born-again Christian ideals are concerned about how they treat women, reflect on their roles in

family life, attempt to share decisions about the domestic sphere and, importantly, reject violent methods of resolving conflicts within that sphere. This is a big advance on previous gender relations when harsh treatment of women was the norm, even though in practice it often falls short of complete gender equality. It would be useful to find ways of encouraging all Christian churches to embrace more fully and to promote the philosophy of gender equality. While some churches are in the process of doing this (see Anderson 2012), there is considerable scope for this to be widened.

That some born-again men have been persuaded to behave more considerately towards their wives and other women is encouraging because it shows that change is possible. It may also have a worthwhile ripple effect, since men who reject violence and have more equitable relations with women demonstrate to others in their communities that there is an alternative way of being a man. Another positive aspect of church-led reform is that men who want to change enjoy the support of the authoritative voice of the church. This is important because there is often considerable peer pressure on men to conform to the prevailing negative and violent masculinities. This point deserves further thought: How might support for men to 'do' gender differently from prevailing models be provided more generally in the community?

Beyond the context of the churches, the challenge is to find ways of making these non-violent masculinities mainstream. Christianity cannot be a cure-all for gender violence, even in this highly Christian region. Respect for women needs to become a widely promoted and, eventually, generally accepted standard of behaviour. There is a very practical purpose in working to understand in detail the reasons why some men reject gender violence and are much closer to accepting gender equality. Such study may provide useful models for developing more effective anti-violence interventions.

## Author Notes

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## Endnotes

- 1 The Commission found widespread violence against women in the form of wife-beating, with 67 per cent of women in rural areas and 56 per cent of women in urban areas having been abused by their husbands (Bradley 2001:7). Sexual violence has been a major problem in much of PNG for many years (National Sex and Reproduction Research Team and Jenkins 1994; Bradley 2001:13; Banks 2000). Violence and coercion, including verbal threats and forced sex, are common features of young women's sexual experiences and of adult intimate relationships. Recent research on women attending antenatal clinics, clinics for sexually transmissible infections, and voluntary counselling and testing clinics in four provinces found that 27.5 per cent (114 of 415) of women had been sexually abused before the age of 16 years (Lewis et al. 2007:5, 57).
- 2 Gender violence is any form of violence used to define or keep in place strict gender roles and unequal relationships (UNDAW 2004:31). Thus, it constitutes a 'policing mechanism' to 'keep women (or different types of men) in their place', to assert 'who makes the decisions' in a relationship or 'who holds the power' (UNDAW 2004:31; and see also UNGA 2006). Though it generally refers to men's violence towards women and girls, it also refers to men's violence towards other men and boys who are considered to challenge prevailing masculine gender ideologies. Importantly, making distinct the gender dimension helps to firmly ground the concept in gender and directs attention to the cultural dimensions of gender and the way children are socialised to become adults. Especially, it highlights the ways that some forms masculine socialisation valorises violence and aggressiveness and in doing so often authorises violence against women.
- 3 Some legal and constitutional mechanisms to promote gender equality and challenge violence against women exist in Papua New Guinea. The constitution states a commitment to equal human rights, and Papua New Guinea is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), having ratified the convention in January 1995. It is also a signatory to other international and regional platforms for action that commit the government to promote the advancement of women by eliminating domestic and sexual violence. These include the Pacific Platform for Action on Women and Sustainable Development (1994), and the Revised Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality (2004). However, at its forty-sixth session in 2010, CEDAW raised concerns about Papua New Guinea's lack of a comprehensive framework of action addressing all forms of violence against women (UNCEDAW 2010:7). Currently, violence against women is addressed through the Criminal Code (1974) provisions relating to common assault and aggravated assault.
- 4 Indeed, the failure by the Papua New Guinea state to seriously address the issue of violence against women led Amnesty International to conclude in 2006 that the Papua New Guinea state 'is doing very little to promote and fulfil the realisation of women's rights or to protect women from human rights abuses' (Amnesty International 2006:3). Indeed, the report went as far as to accuse the police of being 'directly implicated in perpetrating violence against women' (Amnesty International 2006:3; see also Human Rights Watch 2005, 2006).
- 5 This, says Michau, requires moving beyond programs that focus on one sector (such as health, police, education or judiciary) or one group (such as policy makers, battered women or youth), since effective change requires a critical mass of institutions and people who aspire to these ideals and are prepared to put their beliefs into practice (2005:3). An essential

first step, she argues, is to develop a gender-based analysis of why violence occurs and to recognise that women's low status, the imbalance of power, and rigid gender roles are root causes of violence against women.

- 6 Male advocacy programs have proliferated in Papua New Guinea in the last few years. Some are home-grown, but many are funded by international NGOs working in partnership with Papuan New Guinean NGOs or by donor agencies, such as AusAID or NZAID. Some of these initiatives address violence within a broader framework of sexual and reproductive health, such as the Men and Boys Behaviour Change Program and the Men and Boys Sexual Health and Behavioural Change Program run by HELP Resources in East Sepik Province. Since 2002, the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre has been training men in its Male Advocates Programme. A number of churches also have specific male advocacy programs. For example, the Anglican Church has a *Man Tru* (real man) project in the Highlands.
- 7 These 'rituals of manhood', as they have been called, involved the radical separation of boys from any contact with women and fostered male sociality and bonding. Though it is unclear whether they continue to be practised today, the belief continues to be strongly held that women, especially their bodily secretions, are dangerous and undermine men's power. Avoidance of women is considered to be vital for the success of various pursuits, ranging from hunting to warfare.
- 8 According to the 2000 census, the population of Papua New Guinea is 5,190,786. Of the 5,158,083 people in private dwellings, 4,948,441 (95.93 per cent) identified as Christian and 57,468 as 'other religions', though curiously this included Church of Christ and the Jehovah's Witnesses. For a detailed discussion of the 2000 census and the Christian churches, see Gibbs (2007).
- 9 The Christian moral framework heavily influences public discussion of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. See Eves (2003, 2008b, 2012) and Wardlow (2008).
- 10 Apart from Mt Hagen, Kundiwa, Mendi and Bougainville, the proposal has not been widely embraced and no national movement has emerged. The General Secretary of the Catholic Bishops Conference, Lawrence Stephens, thought that the failure was partly because the suggestion came largely from within the church hierarchy (personal communication 2006).
- 11 Mate suggests this is supported by a verse in Colossians 3: 18: 'Wives, submit to your husbands, for that is what you must do as Christians' (Mate 2002:557).
- 12 Possibly this reflects the United Church's origins in Methodism, which had a strong emphasis on hierarchy and established structures. Women, especially in the nineteenth century, were major figures in the development of a number of churches that eventually gave rise to the Pentecostal movement.
- 13 For a more expansive account of New Ireland Christianity and its context, see Eves (1998, 2003, 2007, 2008b, 2010c, 2011).
- 14 These sins are listed on a poster sometimes used in church workshops. The list includes, in Tok Pisin: *ai giris* (looking desiringly), *tok stil* (gossiping), *mangal* (coveting), *tingting nogut* (having ill thoughts), *bel hot* or *koros* (anger), *bel nogut* (being uneasy or disappointed), *tok pait* (arguing), *bik maus* (being loud-mouthed or boastful), *giaman god* (worshipping false gods), *giaman* (lying), *gridi* (greed), *papait* (magic), *sipak* (drinking alcohol), *tok bilas* (ridiculing), *burukim marit* (breaking up marriage, meaning adultery), *hambak pasin* (showing off or vanity), *tok pilai nogut* (sexual or lewd joking), *singsing nogut* (bad singing and dancing — that is, related to magic and sorcery), *prout* (pride) and *pamuk* (promiscuity).
- 15 In New Ireland, *marimari* is probably the most important attribute that a born-again Christian should embody. Indeed, one person remarked that in the Bible 'this beats everything and God sent Jesus to the earth to give it to people'. Without this virtue, a person's claims to being born-again are largely considered empty rhetoric. For the New Irelanders, *marimari* includes several virtues, including forgiveness, patience, compassion and concern towards others. *Marimari* is also considered formative of the new moral self, since I was told if a person did not have this virtue, they would be full of 'all kinds of negative behaviours', amongst them greed, stealing, anger and promiscuous behaviour. As a virtue it gives rise to good, I was told.
- 16 The sermon was directed pointedly at his son-in-law, who had savagely beaten his wife in the preceding days. Whether the act of violence would have elicited

such a response had it not been directed at his daughter is open to question.

- 17 This also appears true of other forms of violence, such as sexual violence. See also Salomon and Hamelin (2008).
- 18 This component included a rule that women who wore t-shirts or trousers were liable to a fine of fifty kina. The ban on t-shirts had been instituted first in 1997, at the regular Monday community meeting, with a fine of five kina for disregarding the rule (as some women did) (see Eves 2010a).
- 19 I undertook one month's fieldwork in the village of Ibia in the lead-up to the 2007 Papua New Guinea general election (Eves 2008a).
- 20 This poster was also being used by the Catholic Church in Western Province to promote more equitable gender relations.
- 21 Very little research has been done to explore decision-making in families. This has implications not only for understanding violence but also for the domestic economy and the control and use of resources.

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The State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program  
acknowledges the generous support from AusAID for the  
production of this Discussion Paper.