

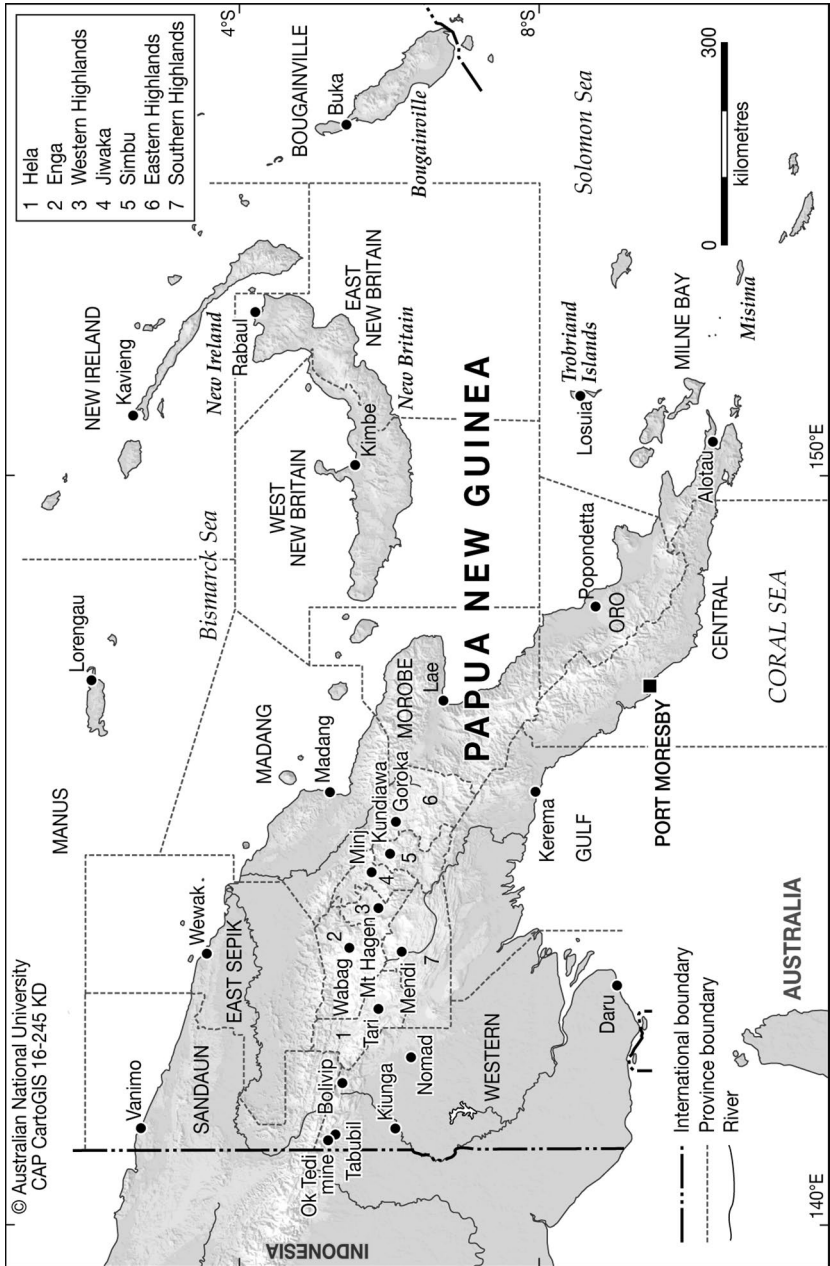
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## Men's Matters: Changing Masculine Identities in Papua New Guinea

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Human rights discourse has increasingly been called upon to provide a foundation for greater equality between men and women. This is particularly the case when confronted by the issue of men and violence in the current context of Papua New Guinea (PNG). Human rights as an ideal inspires most aid agencies, and church-based agencies such as Caritas promote human rights ideals, but also draw inspiration from Scriptural and theological traditions. In PNG, given that most people profess Christianity, a church-based agency may play an important role in interpreting rights language and values into cultural frameworks meaningful to people in a given local context. This article tells of the strategies used and issues encountered by church workers meeting about masculinities (or what have been called 'Men's Matters') over a number of years with a group of men from the Western Province in PNG. This case study of the Men's Matters program provides insights from men's perspective on the task of negotiating concepts of human rights in PNG.



Map 3. Papua New Guinea

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The program with men in the Western Province began in 2006 and continues to the present day. There were two principal initial motivating factors. First, men in the Catholic Diocese of Daru-Kiunga noted how women met in women's groups, which seemed to recognise women and to benefit women and girls in terms of projects and support. The men expressed the desire to have their own groups. Bishop Gilles Côté agreed to their request, but aware of the limitations of attempts to set up 'papa groups' in other places, he wanted to have a Men's Movement that would not reinforce traditional concepts of male authority over women but that would support men in facing the modern world, including healthy mutual relationships with their wives and with their families.

The second motivating factor was the Caritas Australia report by Richard Eves exploring the role of men and masculinities in PNG.<sup>1</sup> Eves noted how in parts of PNG many men see their manhood as dependent on their control over women and that they use violence to achieve this. Could violence be addressed in a way that generates empowerment for both men and women? Eves recommended working with men and boys but that men's groups be completely reconceptualised and restructured to better foster gender equity.<sup>2</sup> Eves visited Kiunga in the Western Province and was told how violence was becoming less acceptable and that there had been some success in reducing it.<sup>3</sup> He notes, though, that there was some misreading of the issue and that gender equity was still conceptualised within a model of opposition and dominance: entailing the equal right to tell one's partner what to do.

The initial workshop for Men's Matters in Kiunga (13–17 November 2006) brought together 39 men from all 12 parishes of the Diocese—extending from Daru in the south to Bolivip in the Star Mountains to the north. Men from the eastern parish of Nomad walked five days to come to Kiunga. It was a diverse group ranging in age from the mid-20s to the 60s and with formal education from nil to tertiary level.

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1 Richard Eves, 2006, *Exploring the Role of Men and Masculinities in Papua New Guinea in the 21st Century: How to Address Violence in Ways that Generate Empowerment for Both Men and Women*, Report for Caritas Australia.

2 Ibid., p. 63.

3 Ibid., p. 23.

They were invited to come to reflect on their identity and roles as men and on the many issues that men face today in a society that is rapidly changing from the impact of copper mining and logging in the area, among other impacts. Though violence was not mentioned specifically at first, it was a significant underlying theme on the part of the organisers. Nor was rights-based language and values a topic for explicit discussion at first. Rather, the facilitators (the Bishop as recognised leader, I was advisor and Mr Joe Kirinam was the men's coordinator for the diocese) decided to start where 'men were at' and to work from there. Themes for the first four days in 2006 were: boyhood, becoming a man, men and women, men facing the future. The principal outcomes sought were those of reflecting together to identify how men understand their roles as men and to develop a strategic plan that would assist men in the diocese to free themselves from whatever was preventing them from living out their roles 'in a life-giving way'.

The workshops involved presentations, free discussion and dramatic presentations. Typically facilitators provided a brief introduction to a theme, then participants would meet in groups to share their own experiences and later report back to the full assembly—verbally, in writing, graphically or in the form of drama. Group reporting often raised questions and issues that could be discussed by the larger group. Other than themes, such as those mentioned above, there was no detailed pre-established program. Facilitators took detailed notes of the discussion and feedback and met each evening with a steering committee to discern how best to proceed the next day. At the end of the third year, there was an afternoon using the 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) technique for evaluation.<sup>4</sup> All the men participated in this exercise. With their permission, the stories were recorded and many of the quotations in this article are from those stories.

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4 Rick Davies and Jess Dart, 2005, *The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) Technique: A Guide to its Use*.



Figure 3. Men's Matters meeting at Kiunga

Source. Photographed by Philip Gibbs, June 2008

An important insight from the initial meeting was that frequently gender roles and identities involve inequality and power imbalance between men and women, and that this imbalance is associated with gender violence. So, the second workshop in Kiunga in July 2007 focused specifically on violence in its many forms. This disclosed a number of issues touching on men's emotional life, so the third gathering for a week in June 2008 focused on the 'inner life' of men. As part of the meeting, the men engaged creatively with the images of chief, warrior, wise man and lover. The fourth workshop in June 2009 followed the theme 'Men building hope for the future'. Concentrating on three issues—the environmental and social effects of the huge Ok Tedi mine, the spread of HIV and AIDS, and sorcery or *sanguma*—they decided to work to counter the negative effects of such concerns and to establish a Men's Movement launched publicly at the 50th Jubilee celebrations of the diocese that same year.

The participants clearly recognised the need for such a program, as evidenced by their commitment over time. Gatherings for the Men's Movement continued for three years at the parish level until a meeting in Kiunga in October 2012 with the core group team of 12 men from

six parishes. At that meeting we evaluated developments to date and made recommendations for the future. The principal topics considered at that meeting were the framework used for understanding relations between men and women and the ways that human rights are part of men's ongoing awareness program about the roles and responsibilities of men in the communities.

In this chapter I illustrate how issues associated with masculinity, violence and human rights were interpreted by the men and how the gatherings promoted awareness, with understandings developed over time as they have worked to form a Men's Movement in the Diocese of Daru-Kiunga.<sup>5</sup> Specifically I will discuss how we have discovered three significant points that influence the framework by which men relate to women, namely roles and duties that are not exclusive to men, equality within the discourse on difference, and the move from a hierarchical to an egalitarian model of control within a community context.

## Becoming a 'man'

Details of men's initiation traditions differ throughout the Western Province.<sup>6</sup> However, now, due to influences including Western education, Christian churches, modern media and wage labour, formal initiation is no longer practised. Those who had experienced formal initiation mentioned a sense of belonging, security and responsibility they felt as a consequence of going through the rites and ceremonies. In former times boys were separated from their mothers and sisters and advised that inappropriate contact with women would weaken them and prevent their growth. They would learn from sayings about discipline in relationships. For example, 'When you see a nice flower growing in someone else's garden, don't pick it' (meaning, no adultery). Today young men and women attend school together,

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5 The Diocese of Daru-Kiunga received financial support from Caritas Australia toward funding for the Men's Matters workshops.

6 F.E. Williams, 1936, *Papuans of the Transfly*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; Fredrik Barth, 1987, *Rituals and Knowledge among the Baktaman in New Guinea*, New Haven: Yale University Press; Bruce M. Knauft, 1999, *From Primitive to Postcolonial in Melanesia and Anthropology*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press; Tony Crook, 1999, 'Growing knowledge in Bolivip, Papua New Guinea', *Oceania* 69(4): 225–42.

join the same youth groups, and meet together on social occasions, raising the question of how young men negotiate their gender identity nowadays.

In cultural groups we discussed the initiation rites that most of our more mature participants had experienced and then considered values associated with them and how we could somehow apply those values in today's world. For example, the boys would go for long periods into the forest. That was to learn the value of independence. 'We don't expect boys to go and spend months in the forest today. So how can they learn the value of independence?' In another example, the boys would be hit by nettles in order to teach them discipline and the ability to endure pain. 'Without such practices how can we teach them values such as discipline and the ability to endure pain?' The latter example raises questions about attitudes to intentionally inflicting pain and whether such practices are helpful at all. Traditional or not, we need to consider what values are helpful, particularly in terms of developing gender identity suited to healthy and harmonious relationships today.

The men settled on three roles defining their identity as men: provider, protector and leader. It was said that a real man provides food and shelter for his family and community. He protects his family and community, his land and his pride. He makes wise decisions that guide his family and community 'lest they be adrift on the ocean with no rudder to steer'. Such roles fit easily with traditional understandings such as the hunter providing meat, the protector in warfare, and the leader in a village.

However, as the workshops progressed, men came to realise that, though culture and cultural traditions came from their 'ancestors', their ancestors were people, so that people can change cultural practices. As one man put it, culture 'is not like a stone'. It can change with human decisions, so they had to make informed and wise decisions about what is helpful and to be retained today and what is not helpful and is to be discarded. For example, they agreed that knowledge and practices associated with sorcery to harm or kill others should to be set aside today.

So, what should fathers or uncles seek to pass on to the next generation? Fathers settled on values associated with the roles of provider, protector and leader. They noted that there are too many

'boys walking around in men's bodies'. These are irresponsible men who abuse alcohol and drugs and seem not to know boundaries to their behaviour. There are many men seeking an identity in wealth, power and many wives. The group questioned whether these are healthy qualities for a 'real man' today. 'Masculine' qualities such as responsibility, assertiveness and strength should be found first of all in the roles of provider, protector and leader.

Further insight came when we tried to assign 'women's' roles corresponding to 'men's' roles of provider, protector and leader. Terms such as nurturer, care giver, etc., seemed not to fit and some of the men pointed out how women can be providers, protectors and leaders also. They gave examples:

My wife provides just as much if not more of the food for our family. She also provides in other ways; for example, she teaches our baby to call me papa. (of female providers)

When I got drunk and was in court, my wife defended and protected me. She told them how I am really a good man and that it is just when I drink beer that I do wrong things. She even offered to pay for the damage I had caused. (of female protectors)

My wife and I observed how our son was coming home late. One time he came very late and my wife told me, 'Don't open the door', and she called out to our son, 'Go and sleep with your friends elsewhere, you're not coming into the house at this time of night'. I think she was right. It was a way of teaching our son discipline and that there are boundaries. (of female leaders)

So, over time, the men discovered that the qualities of provider, protector and leader are not simply masculine qualities within a dualistic concept of male and female. They are qualities the genders share but learn to express in different ways. There is no single way of being a man. A man might be a biological father, but he can learn to be a social father also—actually caring for children, something not typically looked upon as a male role. The men agreed that the challenge today is to find the support and assistance required, particularly by people who provide examples of healthy qualities and values. This is needed to counter peer pressure that might shame a man who departs from stereotyped male roles. It is easier said than done because with rapid social and cultural change there are few men and women who have trodden the same path as those who are negotiating their gender



identity today. This process might be considered as the initial step toward 'vernacularization',<sup>7</sup> whereby new, or introduced, ideas about sociocultural change and the incorporation of alternative values are rendered acceptable.

## Why violence?

Violence, particularly gender-based violence or gender violence, has been noted in many reports, including the Law Reform Commission,<sup>8</sup> Susan Toft and Susanne Bonnell,<sup>9</sup> Christine Bradley,<sup>10</sup> Margaret Jolly, Christine Stewart and Carolyn Brewer's edited collection,<sup>11</sup> and the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women.<sup>12</sup> The topic received wide coverage in 2011 over the case of Joy Wartovo, who is the victim of numerous assaults by her policeman husband.<sup>13</sup> There is an active Facebook site with daily accounts of gender-based violence in PNG.<sup>14</sup>

Why such violence? I began by supporting the opinion of Richard Eves when he says that violence is seen as a normal and justified way of resolving conflict or expressing anger and that 'many men see their manhood as dependent on their control over women and they use violence to achieve this'.<sup>15</sup> The men in Kiunga did not disagree with this view, but their examples reveal a more personal understanding of the complexity of the issues involved.

7 Sally Engle Merry, 2006, *Human Rights and Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, p. 219.

8 Law Reform Commission, 1987, *Interim Report*, Port Moresby: Papua New Guinea Law Reform Commission.

9 Susan Toft and Susanne Bonnell (eds), 1985, *Marriage and Domestic Violence in Rural Papua New Guinea*, Occasional Paper no. 18, Port Moresby: Law Reform Commission.

10 Christine Bradley, 2001, *Family and Sexual Violence in PNG: An Integrated Long-Term Strategy*, Report to the Family Violence Action Committee of the Consultative Implementation and Monitoring Council, Discussion Paper no. 84, Port Moresby: Institute of National Affairs.

11 Margaret Jolly, Christine Stewart and Carolyn Brewer (eds), 2012, *Engendering Violence in Papua New Guinea*, Canberra: ANU E Press.

12 Office of the High Commission for Human Rights, 2012, 'Special rapporteur on violence against women finalises country mission to Papua New Guinea', *United Nations Human Rights*, Port Moresby, 26 March.

13 Rait man, 2011, 'Police bombarded with emails over Joy Wartovo case', *ActNow: For a Better Papua New Guinea*.

14 *Unite to End Family Violence: Papua New Guineans Against Domestic Violence*.

15 Eves, *Exploring the Role of Men and Masculinities in Papua New Guinea in the 21st Century*, p. 14.

The men noted that there are different forms of violence and that while a man might use physical violence, women might resort to provocative verbal violence. A woman who says the names of former boyfriends who are 'better' than her husband, for example, or who tells him to 'go and eat his mother's vagina' risks receiving a violent response. Men also may resort to verbal and emotional violence. Examples of verbal and emotional violence used by the men include statements such as: 'Go and sell yourself if you want money.' 'I paid bride price, so you have to do what I say.' 'I must have married the wrong rib.'

The men noted how arguments arise over money, discipline of children, the frequency and demands of relatives, and one partner returning home late, provoking mistrust and jealousy and accusations of bringing sickness into the family. The men noticed how domestic life could have added strains in a town setting, with social clubs and the availability of alcohol. They seemed particularly offended when wives in town drank alcohol. They said that taking control, even in violent ways, makes a man feel good, particularly if the wife has been *bikhet* (assertive, obstinate). He feels that he has taught her a lesson. 'But then afterward I feel sorry for her.' This is particularly so if she needs hospital treatment and he has to pay hospital fees.

In one session we showed a drawing of a man beating his wife in front of three young children and asked the men in groups to imagine the story behind the picture (Figure 4). Several groups thought that the man was returning home to find his wife had not prepared food in time. One group noted that a girl child in the picture is crying and thought that the man was beating his wife because she had hit the girl. Another group thought that the woman appeared pregnant and that the man was her husband and was beating her because he thought she had been unfaithful and was pregnant to another man. One group said that the man was her husband and that he is angry with his wife because she refused to have sex with him (referred to as a 'bedroom problem'). With three young children in the picture, they assumed that the couple was not following family planning and that the wife was avoiding sex because she did not want to become pregnant.



Figure 4. Poster on domestic violence, displayed in Mt Hagen Hospital, PNG

Source. Department of Health poster, 18 September 2012

The men agreed that there might be many excuses offered, but that the principal reason for violence between partners is one partner (usually the woman) declining sex. '*Las wik yu gat sikmun na nau yu gat gen!*' (Last week you gave the excuse that you had your period and now you say you have it again!). As these responses indicate, men concentrated on *female* behaviour that implicitly justified their violence. Their use of violence as a form of punishment for affront or non-compliance with their desires was seldom questioned, even though some felt remorse because of its effects. A number of the men noted that family planning is an issue, but even more fundamental is the issue of trust and communication between the partners. 'It is not a matter of control. We have to understand and respect our partner as a human being and learn to manage our emotions and desires.'

## Violence in its cultural context

Cases of gender violence are not just random individual acts of misconduct but are deeply rooted in structural relationships.<sup>16</sup> These structural relationships include kinship relations, marriage relationships, religious belief and practice, the socioeconomic setting and many more. Customary rights are integrated in these structures. We are in a situation today where customary rights may be questioned in the context of massive social changes. These changes include the commoditisation of the economy, the introduction of new legal and biomedical regimes, and the influence of Christianity.<sup>17</sup> Such changes can mean greater antagonism between men and women, fuelled by novel, modern tensions.<sup>18</sup>

Papua New Guinea ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1995. CEDAW helps reveal the breadth of the structural relationships of violence in any one society with indicators such as education, health, political representation, legislation and many more. In 2008, PNG sent a delegation to the UN to report for the first time on compliance with the convention. The delegation reported compliance with 28 of 113 indicators, partial compliance with 32 more indicators, and no compliance with the remaining 53 indicators.<sup>19</sup> The review committee was highly critical of the PNG situation. In its concluding comments the committee noted 'its deep concern at the persistence of violence against women including sexual violence at the domestic and community levels ... such violence appears to be socially legitimized and accompanied by a culture of silence and impunity'.<sup>20</sup> There is little to indicate that the situation has improved since then.

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16 Ibid., p. 10.

17 Margaret Jolly, 2012, 'Introduction—Engendering violence in Papua New Guinea: Persons, power and perilous transformations', in *Engendering Violence in Papua New Guinea*, ed. Margaret Jolly, Christine Stewart and Carolyn Brewer, pp. 1–45, Canberra: ANU E Press, p. 31.

18 Ibid., p. 9.

19 UNIFEM and UNDP, 2007, *Translating CEDAW into Law: CEDAW Legislative Compliance in Nine Pacific Island Countries*.

20 Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 'Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Papua New Guinea', Forty-sixth session, 12–30 July 2010, para. 29.

The men's group in Kiunga tested out opinions through discussion on several assumptions that some local men seem to make. One such assumption is that 'men are naturally aggressive, so they cannot help hitting their wives when they get angry with them'. The men as a group disagreed with this assumption, noting that it was more that men cannot control their emotions. Men need to channel their energy into less hurtful practices. An opinion was offered that by hitting women some men cover up their own inadequacies. We viewed the film *Stap Isi* (Take it Easy) produced in 1989 by Christine Bradley for the PNG Law Reform Commission.<sup>21</sup> The film is about two men, both of whom are in the habit of hitting their wives, and how they changed through the intervention of a teacher, a judge and a pastor, among others. The film depicts how men can learn to deal with their emotions, and on the many occasions I have screened the film, I have noted that men viewing the film appreciate that message.

Peer pressure is a significant cultural issue. Men noted how if a man helps his wife, other men would offer smart comments to make him feel ashamed—'*Em harim tok bilong meri tumas*' (He listens too much to his wife). '*Em kago boi bilong yu ah?*' ('Is he your [the wife's] labourer/servant?'). 'If I am on a bush track I don't mind helping my wife carry the load or helping to carry our child, but once we get to the public market, I don't like to carry the child. I wouldn't want men to see and talk behind my back.'

In such a context legal and judicial measures focusing on men and women will not solve the problem. In fact stress on legal rights of men and women can miss the point that gender operates in a broadly gendered field of discourse and is much more complex, fluid and relational than just male and female sexed bodies.<sup>22</sup>

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21 Christine Bradley, 1989, *Stap Isi* (film), Port Moresby: PNG Law Reform Commission.

22 John P. Taylor, 2008, 'The social life of rights: "Gender antagonism", modernity and *raet* in Vanuatu', in *Changing Pacific Masculinities*, ed. John P. Taylor, special issue of the *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 19(2): 165–78, p. 171.

## Inner states and energies

Attitudes and behaviour are influenced by external forces. However, persons are also influenced by the very personal context of inner states and personal tensions. We talked about the physical and psychological signs of anger, and different ways to manage anger by acting, not reacting. 'I need to find where the tension is lodged in my body and to find ways to get rid of that tension. Drinking only drives it deeper, and eventually it will come out in unhealthy ways.'

During our gatherings we spoke about aspects of a man's inner life, and there was time for prayer and personal reflection. Discussion focused on power and various energies. Power can be 'power over', 'power with/for', and 'power within'. Abuse involves misuse of power—usually as 'power over'. 'Being a man is indeed about power, but—power for good and power for others. I think power itself is not evil since the Holy Spirit is the source of power, but bashing a woman is power out of control.'

We talked about sexuality as a power within us that attracts us toward the other sex. However, too often men are like 'roosters', making noise to attract the hens and chase away the other roosters. Roosters compete with each other. We also talked about violence—physical, sexual, emotional, social, psychological. The men considered rape as a form of sexual violence in which men act like dogs. (Some were incredulous when we raised the topic of marital rape, since it challenges their understanding of male sexual rights.)

We also engaged creatively with the images of chief, warrior, wise man and lover. The images come from the work of Richard Rohr in the USA (2005).<sup>23</sup> After some explanation, the men interpreted these images and applied them to their own life situations. When do we exercise the energies of these types? To summarise the kinds of observations made:

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23 Richard Rohr with Joseph Martos, 2005, *From Wild Man to Wise Man: Reflections on Male Spirituality*, Cincinnati: St Anthony Messenger Press. Richard Rohr, an American priest, writes on male spirituality. He is founder of the international movement, 'Men As Learners & Elders' (MAL.E.s).

## Chief

When everything seems to be going wrong—people are fighting and arguing—the chief comes and suddenly everything seems to be right. That person has chiefly energy. The world is safe and reasonable. The chief is the symbol of power used well. A man who builds fear and beats his wife is the opposite of a chief. A person with true chiefly energy uses authority to serve others and encourages others to use their creative energies. As one person put it:

The person with the best chiefly energy that I have met is my wife. She encouraged me to take on responsibilities to serve others and not only to serve myself. I learned from her how important it is to greet people in the right manner and care for those in need. Because of her I am now a leader in the family, the church, and the community.

## Warrior

The warrior in all cultures is a person of courage, persistence, stamina and devotion to a cause. Warrior energy allows us to protect property, life, the truth and the good. Without boundaries or submission to the chief warrior, energy can lead to violence. Somebody explained:

I have been organising sports with the youth. It is difficult work. You think the game is going OK and then others come in and cause trouble. They have no boundaries and simply run around looking for entertainment. I don't go in there to beat them physically, but I do go in to challenge them.

## Wise man

People need wise persons in their lives so that they walk together on the right road and live happy lives. Wisdom energy allows one to correct and challenge what is wrong. Fake wise persons believe too much in themselves, thinking that they are wise and can go on their own. As someone observed:

It used to be that before a man and woman would get together, the parents would meet with them and give advice: things like carrying firewood, not fighting, sharing work, and so on. So often now young people get together without that wise advice.

## Lover

Lover energy allows us to see what is beautiful, true and good in life. It goes wrong (the dark lover) when the lover seeks things selfishly, looks for artificial good feelings (using drugs, etc.). Often the dark lover is a wounded lover who has tasted love but who cannot find it and so looks for it in superficial shortcut ways. One of the participants gave a personal testimony that illustrates the transition from a dark lover to a man more in tune with what we called lover energy:

Having attended two men's seminars in 2006 and 2007, I literally made great improvements and changes in my life. At the end of 2006 my wife deserted me and went back to her home. Her main reasons behind her desertion are genuine, being that I've been strongly married to my job and had little time for the family, always getting drunk and bashing her for unknown reasons, and being a womaniser. After absorbing the fruit of the two seminars, I came to realise my true identity as a man. I decided not to repeat the same mistakes. I said to myself, if someone out there can change, I can too. So that's what I literally did. While back in the village, my wife wrote numerous letters to her friends to put an eye on me and advise her if I had another wife, whether I'm still drinking, womanising, and socialising with friends. After she had positive reports from her friends, she then wrote a love letter to me, apologising for her desertion, asking for my forgiveness and if I could accept her returning. Without delay I phoned her and told her to pick up her ticket at the airlines office, which she did. From there on we have lived happily. Our place is now a good place to work and live. I'm not doing it for my sake but for everyone in the community because we live in one community.

As advisor I was wary of introducing the images of chief, warrior, wise man and lover, lest we slip into a form of pop psychology. But the men really did like it, and entered into long conversations using the images. It was a decidedly 'modern' way of getting in touch with their inner lives in a way they were not used to doing, but they were intrigued interpreting these universal images in local narratives.



## Men and Christianity

The group gathered together by the Bishop is not a random sample of men in Western Province. They identify as Catholic leaders, and presumably their Christian faith has some influence on their attitudes and their behaviour.<sup>24</sup> Meetings began and ended with prayer and ample time was given for personal meditative reflection.

We should note with Eves that Christianity is not monolithic and that different churches have different interpretations.<sup>25</sup> Nor is there a uniform approach within a particular church. For example, a majority of Catholic priests would not fully agree with the advice on virtuous patience given by the late Father Ernst Golly that a woman should rely just on prayer and faith in God to change her violent partner.<sup>26</sup> However, the Catholic Church has not had good press in recent times, and Bishop Côté admitted in a presentation during the fourth workshop, 'Our church tends to be a patriarchal church—which does not recognize the feminine. The church is struggling with this and in our Diocese we are trying to promote community and team work where men and woman participate together.'

The church relies on Biblical and other traditions to educate members about the origins of men and women and appropriate behaviour. There are two accounts of creation in Genesis. The first is where Yahweh creates man and woman together: 'So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them' (Genesis 1: 27–28, NRSV). This is the origin of the *Imago Dei* concept of human dignity stemming from human beings being made in the 'image of God'. The second creation account in

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24 The majority (96 per cent) of citizens in PNG identify as Christian. See National Statistical Office, 2003, *Papua New Guinea 2000 Census National Report*, Port Moresby: National Statistical Office, p. 25.

25 Richard Eves, 2012, 'Christianity, masculinity and gender violence in Papua New Guinea', SSGM Discussion Paper 2012/2, Canberra: The Australian National University, p. 4. The men in this case study view moral action based on Christian virtue as part of the process of change that has already gained currency, unlike the dramatic disjunction between old and new recorded by Robbins during a period of ritual revival among the Urapmin of Sandaun Province. See Joel Robbins, 2004, *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

26 Anna-Karina Hermkens, 2012, 'Becoming Mary: Marian devotion as a solution to gender-based violence in urban PNG', in *Engendering Violence in Papua New Guinea*, ed. Margaret Jolly, Christine Stewart and Carolyn Brewer, pp. 137–62. Canberra: ANU E Press.

the second chapter of Genesis includes the well-known passage of woman being formed from Adam's rib. The story continues with God presenting Eve as *ishshah* (Hebrew woman) to Adam, and that is why 'a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife and they become one flesh' (Genesis 2: 21–24). The men in the group generally interpreted the story meaning that the woman was formed from a man's side (close to his heart) in order for her to face life at his side. Such an image may be interpreted in terms of either complementarity or equality between women and men. The complementarity of male and female is usually understood to mean that men and women have different social roles, which easily leads to a claim that women should be excluded from some of these roles.

Other scripture passages were noted during the meetings: for example, the passage in which Saul, threatened by David, threw a sword at him (1 Samuel 18: 11). David could have retaliated but didn't and spared Saul. The book of Sirak gives advice to parents, 'He who educates his son will make his enemy jealous ... His son is like him' (Sirak 30: 1–4). The Pauline corpus is somewhat controversial in terms of instruction on relations between men and women; however, the passage that we heard from the men referred to there no longer being male or female, 'for all of you are one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3: 28). The scriptures contain many passages related to management of anger: for example, 'Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools' (Ecclesiastes 7: 9) and 'Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger' (Ephesians 4: 26). Such passages support a message of equality and peace, which also finds expression in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.<sup>27</sup>

The message from these passages comes together well in an evaluation from St John's parish, Matkomnai:<sup>28</sup>

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.

27 Catholic Bishops' Conference, 2009, *Bai Olgeta Manmeri i Pulap Tru Long Laip Bilong Krai*s, Katekismo bilong ol Katolik Manmeri bilong Papua Niugini na Solomon Ailan, Goroka: Catholic Bishops' Conference of PNG and SI, n. 944.

28 Eves, 'Christianity, masculinity and gender violence in Papua New Guinea', p. 5.

God created human beings making them to be like him (Genesis 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).<sup>29</sup>

As Eves points out, this passage illustrates a way of framing the discourse on equality within a discourse on difference. The men in the Men's Matters workshops were more likely to view humanity and human relations from a Biblical perspective than from a perspective based on secular understandings of human rights.<sup>30</sup> They, like the women Martha Macintyre discusses, based ideas of humanity, justice and virtue in their understanding of all human beings as God's creation. Thus, the process of vernacularisation is one that men managed through their embrace of Christianity rather than through the secular humanism that underpins understandings of human rights in countries such as Australia or the United States.

## Rights—natural, customary and universal

When discussing rights, the men concluded that everyone has rights by virtue of being a human being made in the image of God. The *Imago Dei* concept provided the ultimate justification for engagement in human rights. Examples cited were right to life, right to eat, right to shelter, etc. However, rights are closely associated with human dignity, and I noticed that the quality of life, what one eats, and the type of shelter seemed seldom to be considered. Human rights discourse in Catholic theological circles in recent times has increasingly been associated with a preferential option for the poor; beginning with actual victims, rather than generalised terms such as 'human beings'.<sup>31</sup> The men in Kiunga admitted that customary rights generally favour men, and initially they felt little need to apologise for that. So from a gender perspective, even though the Biblical text refers to both

29 St John Parish, 2005, 'Evaluation', unpublished report, Catholic Church, St John Parish, Matkomnai: Diocese of Daru-Kiunga, p. 3.

30 See also Martha Macintyre, 2000, "'Hear us, women of Papua New Guinea": Melanesian women and human rights', in *Human Rights and Gender Politics: Perspectives in the Asia Pacific Region*, ed. Anne-Marie Hilsdon, Martha Macintyre, Vera Mackie and Maila Stivens, pp. 141–71, London and New York: Routledge, p. 163.

31 Ethna Regan, 2010, *Theology and the Boundary Discourse of Human Rights*, Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, pp. 151, 161.

men and women being made in the image of God, there is ample room for a more just interpretation if lower status is attributed to one representation of that image. We also discussed land rights, which in the primarily virilocal custom of the Western Province applies more to men than to women.

When did they first hear that 'wife-bashing' is a crime? Most had heard during the past 10 years, either on the radio, TV, or through newspapers. Several heard about it during instruction prior to church weddings. One heard about it from the nurses at the hospital and another in notices in church on Mother's Day. It was new to them. As one said, 'My father had four wives, and I used to see my father hitting them, and I thought it was normal'. Most took what I would term a pragmatic as opposed to a legal approach to wife-bashing, aware that if they caused serious injury they might be faced with hospital bills, and besides, women have brothers who could come and threaten a man if he hit their sister too hard and too often.

The national law against 'wife-bashing' is referred to as *ok an ye lo* or *ok an amop* in the Yongom language around Kiunga. The expressions are best glossed as 'what is forbidden by the whiteman' or 'whiteman law'. So customary law is compared with modern law as old versus new (from the 'whites'), and local people try to find a *modus vivendi* with the two. A village court magistrate provided an example. If a married man had sex with a young unmarried girl, following customary law he would convict the man of having sex with the young girl without having paid bride price and so would require him to pay compensation to the girl's family for having 'ruined' her, since future suitors would consider her 'second-hand' and not be prepared to pay a full bride price. But he would also follow 'modern' or 'whiteman' law and convict her for having had sex with a married man without the consent of his wife. This view of the offense shows clearly that in this region bride price entailed rights of male sexual access. The fact that sanctions against wife-beating are seen as alien—introduced by the 'whiteman'—even though most participants had only become aware of the laws in the past decade (25 years after independence from colonial rule), suggests, too, that men perceive the state and its laws as foreign impositions.

It is in this context that the question of the legitimate use of violence is crucial. We asked whether there were occasions when violence of a husband against his wife is justified. Most agreed that there must be such occasions. After some deliberation they cited two examples: if a woman would be too slow in cleaning the excreta of their child and it was in public in front of other people, or if his wife would steal from another person's garden and be found out. In both cases the 'wrong' was not the tardiness of cleaning the child or of stealing but the shame that the man would feel in front of other people. Such public shame would justify a strong and possibly violent censure. In appealing to these breaches of 'wifely duty' as instances where violence is legitimate, they are not only making statements about the importance for men of maintaining public 'face' in their marriage, but also about the marriage relationship itself. The wife's moral or social failings reflect not on her but on her husband's inadequate management of his household, including her.

Public shame helps illustrate how customary law and modern law function from different premises. The universalist values of human rights and modern law are based on an understanding of the autonomous self with a capacity to make choices and with a responsibility for the consequences of those choices. Customary rights fit with a notion of the person within a community and social conceptions of justice. Following customary law a man will try to regain his damaged masculine identity by publicly reasserting his authority.

Examples were given where women have been justified in insisting on their rights: for example, a woman demanding that she had the right to give her vote to the candidate of her choice and not that of her husband in the national elections. We also heard about cases where women have reported their husband's violent behaviour to village court officials and to the police and had their husband arrested, fined, put in jail, given a restraining order or put on a good behaviour bond. The general feeling of the men was that such a response does not address root causes and risks making the situation worse. Such actions are appropriate only as a last resort if one wants to break up a relationship. It seemed to them that the threat of legal enforcement of rights might best work as a deterrent rather than as a way of solving a problem or ensuring more harmonious relationships.

The men reported that a universal rights concept is difficult to apply in PNG. They preferred to discuss duties rather than rights. Admittedly rights and duties are closely related. Rights imply a person's claims on society, and duties indicate the claim of society on a person. However, this distinction can also support attitudes that regard the woman as a 'jural minor' and a man's claim on the person of his wife. In discussing the duties of men and women, duties were generally seen within a framework of male control. In time (years), some of the men have begun to view duties from a more egalitarian perspective. Women, but also men, have duties as providers, protectors and leaders.

Duty from a Christian perspective is seen as service, as appears in the *Singaut bilong Papa* (Voice of Fathers) newsletter of 29 November 2010: 'As men we need to be at the service of others, starting with our wives, our children, our family members, our community members and our co-workers. To serve is not a duty. We serve because we are followers of Christ. Service is always given out of love.'<sup>32</sup> The men I worked with express such sentiments, using terms such as *poroman* or *poro* to refer to one's partner in life. This equality was agreed to as a good idea, but it only gradually dawned on them what it really means in practice: for example, sharing money equally, respecting the other in decision-making, or never shaming the other in public. One man gave a simple but significant example: 'My wife and I both like the tail part of the chicken. So we take turns. When we eat chicken, I will offer her that part and she might say, "No, it's your turn"'.

## Challenging social values and cultural norms

Cultural norms in a society with patriarchal values tend to situate relations between men and women in a framework of opposition and of dominance and submission. Particularly in the public sphere the man is ultimately in control, though he might delegate responsibility to women. As noted above, for the male leaders in the Diocese of Daru-Kiunga, Christian values raise questions about such dominance and advise a more egalitarian, monogamous understanding of married life.

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32 *Singaut bilong Papa*, 2010 Newsletter—November, Men's Movement, Kiunga: Diocese of Daru-Kiunga.

Modernisation and social change have also brought transformations redefining the household. But it is not a simple matter to change in just one or two generations from the homosocial life of the men's house to the domestic family dwelling, where a man is expected to live with his wife and children in the same quarters. Men are gradually accepting more participation in the family and responsibility in the household, but still in most cases the decision-making process in the household could best be called 'patriarchy in the last instance', where the man makes the final decision when an accord cannot be reached.<sup>33</sup>

In a workshop with the men in Kiunga, the patriarchal system was depicted with the man 'above' and the woman 'below' (see model A in Figure 5). At best the patriarchal system is a convenient arrangement that, when accepted, leads to a relatively peaceful domestic scene. At worst it can lead to violent confrontation with the man demanding control 'because he has paid for it' (through bride price).

An alternative arrangement places the man and woman on equal terms (see model B in Figure 5), a modern idea that requires considerable change to put into practice in a PNG setting. The men in Kiunga were intrigued by the illustrations and recognised the side-by-side latter arrangement as being more in accord with Christian values and also with what they are hearing from those promoting equality in the name of human rights. But some were resistant and wondered whether the ideal is realistic. They want to see the community brought into the equation. Thus, individuals would have rights (and duties) not just as autonomous individuals but also as persons within a family and/or community. They point out how the community provides boundaries to hierarchical authority, allowing the community to censure any person who oversteps the accepted boundaries. Likewise, they see rights as guaranteeing fundamental freedoms within the community context. Rights put into practice will be evident in peace, harmony, and welfare in the family and the community.

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33 Eves, 'Christianity, masculinity and gender violence in Papua New Guinea', p. 9.

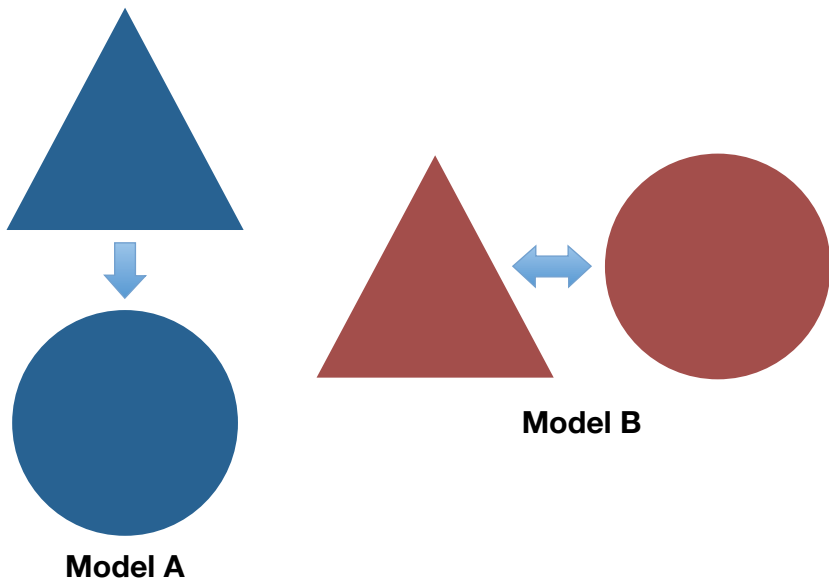


Figure 5. Hierarchical and egalitarian models of relationship

Source. Model developed by Philip Gibbs

Helpful strategies for change will include decision-making together (particularly in the area of family planning) and sharing responsibilities and duties. Some couples appear to be well on the way toward the egalitarian ideal. As one man explained, 'When we got married we agreed to stick together in good and bad times. Then the new law came in, but it didn't make much difference because we were already used to forgive and forget. If we relied on the law we would be spoiling ourselves. The new law is for those who don't want to continue their marriage.'

The Men's Movement is trying to gradually bring about a change from a hierarchical control-based framework to a more egalitarian one based on care and respect. The strategy does not apply to families in isolation but to families in the context of Basic Christian Communities in both the rural and urban settings.<sup>34</sup> The strategy must apply on at least three levels: awareness, skills training and organisational change.

<sup>34</sup> Within the Catholic Church a 'parish' will include a number of Basic Christian Communities. The parish is usually a large assembly that meets on Sundays. Basic Christian Communities comprise people motivated by faith who meet and cooperate together in a way that provides a more communal experience of faith.



For awareness the men continue to hold workshops at the parish level and publish a biannual newsletter *Singaut bilong Papa* that typically includes words of encouragement from the Bishop and testimonies from men who have made a change. The following is an excerpt from the newsletter: 'We came to realize that we are not reptiles hiding in the bushes and harming people but human beings created as men to be fathers to provide, protect and lead our family, fostering peace and harmony in our families and communities.'<sup>35</sup>

Skills training with the Men's Matters group has been limited to exercises during annual diocesan workshops and one-off week-long meetings in parishes. With planning and trained personnel, these could well broaden the focus from provider, protector and leader so that participants could benefit from skills training in areas such as effective communication, sex education, marriage enrichment, dealing with alcohol and drugs, being a father, anger management and skills to prevent violence. Organisational change is part of a relatively effective Diocesan Pastoral Plan with active Basic Christian Communities and the establishment and continuation of the Men's Movement integrated with the Diocesan Plan.<sup>36</sup>

The challenge remains to participate in changing and developing social values and cultural norms suited to the situations of increasingly rapid change (in both rural and urban settings). As someone wrote in the newsletter, 'Many modern influences are happening: mining, logging, politics, oil search, and many others which are challenging the lives of many of us. Easily men who get jobs misuse their money on drugs, alcohol, sex and other social entertainment. The meaning of a true PNG man with its identity is disappearing fast.'<sup>37</sup>

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35 *Singaut bilong Papa*, 2011 Newsletter—August, Men's Movement, Kiunga: Diocese of Daru-Kiunga, p. 6.

36 The Daru-Kiunga Diocese puts great emphasis on Basic Christian Communities, developing pastoral policies and strategies following the 'Movement for a Better World'.

37 *Singaut bilong Papa*, 2010 Newsletter—November, pp. 4–5.

## Layering rights and kinship obligations

Sally Engle Merry raises the possibility of a layering of frameworks whereby a rights framework does not displace other frameworks but adds a new dimension to the way individuals think about problems.<sup>38</sup> Layering allows people to think about issues in different ways and to have distinctive ways of framing a problem and acting on it.<sup>39</sup> Thus, it is not a matter of replacing one framework with another, but of adding a new dimension or way of understanding the situation.

I have noted three significant points that affect frameworks by which men relate to women. First, men have come to realise that women are also providers, protectors and leaders—roles that previously they had claimed only for themselves as men. Just as roles and duties are not exclusive, neither are rights. Second, we have seen how with the assistance of Christian scripture, one can frame a discourse on equality within the discourse on difference. Though different, we are ‘one in Christ’. Third, I have noted how men and women are dealing with two quite dissimilar models of control: hierarchical and egalitarian. I suggest that Merry’s idea of layering might help resolve the existence of frameworks that at first appear to be mutually exclusive. Layers would include the community as the basic layer along with a new dimension associated with rights and duties, thus layering a rights framework over kinship and conjugal obligations.

For example, consider the case of a man returning home after some months away working in the mining town of Tabubil, associated with the Ok Tedi copper mine. From a rights perspective, his wife has a right to ask for money to support the family. If there is any likelihood that he was involved in extramarital liaisons while away, she has a right to ask him to be tested for STIs and HIV, and he has a right to ask the same of her. From a hierarchical perspective of control and superiority, such questions might easily lead to a violent reaction. However, if inserted in the context of a functioning Christian community, there would be values and safeguards to prevent such violence, based not on a modern liberal philosophy but more on human solidarity and the common good within the community.

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38 Merry, *Human Rights and Gender Violence*, p. 179.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 194.

## Conclusions

Eves includes empowerment for both men and women in the title of his Caritas Australia publication on exploring the role of men and masculinities.<sup>40</sup> Martha Macintyre is not so confident, noting how “empowering women” often means wresting power from men so that women might represent their own interests’.<sup>41</sup> From the experience of working with men in small groups, I recognise Macintyre’s concern. Men prefer peace and harmony and are normally not actively looking for clashes on the domestic front. However, men are also reluctant to relinquish their ‘right’ to punish those who would disrupt their own idea of the nature of that harmony. Cultural norms generally give men a superior social status, and a man is acutely sensitive to denial of that status, whether at home in a domestic situation or, even more so, in public. The language of rights challenges male superiority with the ideal of the inherent equality and dignity of all persons. This provides an entry into a larger discourse on justice, and seeking justice can involve conflict.

The group of men from throughout the Western Province that met in Kiunga over a number of years and continues as a Men’s Movement is extraordinary in that they are leaders, most in monogamous marriages, and practising Christians. As such, they are men of relatively high status, bringing with them attitudes and ideas that have been constitutive of their identity as men in PNG. They are also idealistic, seeking ways to live out their faith in their family lives and their communities. They do not typify ‘troubled masculinities’<sup>42</sup> and for the most part are not wanting to shore up patriarchal authority, but they are men who want to have time for their wives and children and to be attentive to their needs. As one explained:

I used to be a rough man and this aspect is still quite strong in me. As we go through the seminar I see more and more the importance of being a true man, and controlling my temper is one way to become

40 Eves, *Exploring the Role of Men and Masculinities in Papua New Guinea in the 21st Century*.

41 Martha Macintyre, 2012, ‘Gender violence in Melanesia and the problem of Millennium Development Goal No. 3’, in *Engendering Violence in Papua New Guinea*, ed. Margaret Jolly, Christine Stewart and Carolyn Brewer, pp. 239–66, Canberra: ANU E Press, p. 247.

42 Laura Zimmer-Tamakoshi, 2012, ‘Troubled masculinities and gender violence in Melanesia’, in *Engendering Violence in Papua New Guinea*, ed. Margaret Jolly, Christine Stewart and Carolyn Brewer, pp. 73–106, Canberra: ANU E Press.

a true man. I want to be a true lover and a good father able to take care of my wife and children. I don't want to scare the children with my rough attitude, because I want them to come close to me. If they see me angry often, they will also grow into persons who are angry. The children won't listen to me if they don't love me.

These men live in villages and towns affected by one of the most profitable yet destructive mines in PNG (OK Tedi). The mine and other industries such as logging have produced social change that their grandparents and even parents could hardly have imagined. These men also have to negotiate their way in relationships with women and reimagine the roles and duties that contribute to their masculine identity.

Their masculinity has not died with Christian commitment, but it has been challenged by the concept of human dignity based on the *Imago Dei* and the consequent equality of all persons. This has led to a journey of self-discovery in an effort to reconcile their duties as husbands and fathers with the ideal of equality between men and women. Human rights discourse also requires observance of equal rights of women and men and the elimination of discrimination and violence against women. Human rights are an essential part of the vocabulary of international agencies, including Church agencies such as Caritas, but (interpreting what they have said) these men in the community context still prefer to layer a rights framework over kinship and community obligations.

The many quotations in this article illustrate the efforts made by this group of men to reframe the new ideals into their system of changing cultural meanings and how religious belief plays a role in interpreting human rights discourse in a vernacular idiom. The project has focused on men on the premise that men and boys are not only part of the 'problem' but they are also an important part of the solution. We might even go further and observe the ways that these changes are forming part of a cultural narrative shared by both women and men. It will be most interesting to learn what will happen with this Men's Movement in future years and also to hear the comments of their mothers, sisters, wives and daughters on what has been said and achieved.

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