Women's Engagements with Christianity in Oksapmin, Papua New Guinea

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Graduate Program in Anthropology  
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts  
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Women's Engagements with Christianity in Oksapmin, Papua New Guinea
(Spine title: Women and Christianity in Oksapmin, PNG)

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Angela MacMillan

Graduate Program in Anthropology

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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The thesis by

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entitled:

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Date

Chair of the Thesis Examination Board
Abstract

In Oksapmin, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Christianity provides an idiom and organizational form that women use to engage the pressing problems of modernity. This thesis examines the life narratives of Christian women in order to determine the individual and collective forms of agency they enact through the church. It compares past and contemporary engagements with Christianity as a way to understand how women approach social change. By doing so, this thesis sheds light on changing gender relations in PNG.

Keywords

Gender, Christianity, Oksapmin, Papua New Guinea
Dedicated to the memory of Kombati Kombamong
May 14th, 1913- April 10th, 2011
Acknowledgments

This thesis has been a labour of love for Papua New Guinea and the people of Oksapmin. I arrived in PNG with already high expectations and I am happy to report that my first foray into the field was an overwhelmingly positive and fulfilling experience. During my time in PNG, my expectations were not only met, but were ultimately exceeded due to the kindness and graciousness of the families who took me in and the numerous individuals I met along the way. While I do not have the space to thank everyone here, I would like to mention a few.

I met Benson on my flight into Oksapmin and I would like to thank him for providing important introductions that helped me find accommodations during the first part of my stay. Rose and her daughters were hospitable hosts at Oksapmin Station and I want to thank them for welcoming me into their home. I would like to also thank my neighbours at the Works Camp, Mathilda and Thomas for their kindness and insights into the SDA Church. Special thanks are reserved for Bips, who helped me find my way around at Oksapmin station and Teklah for our long conversations.

In Sambate, I would like to thank Yanit, Rosi, Lips, Naus, and Itpopin who were considerate, and generous hosts. In particular, I would like to thank Jacklyn for her friendship and also for acting as an interpreter. While I do not have to space to highlight the specific contributions of the following individuals, I would also like to express gratitude to: Salex, Sabrina, Bulex, Gex, Tawardz, Linda, Ris, Nase, Jerolin, Ava, Suey, Alem, Sapoti, Rex, Cleatus, Benny, Peter, Essa, Josephine, Angela, Timothy, Browsers, Douglas, Betty, Moses, Florin, Manuna, Nathaniel, Alexison, Tobias, Walwi, Aiparin, Susan, Martin, Christina and Pastor Kasi.

I gratefully acknowledge Alfred, Josephine, Jemina and Emmy for making my stay in Tabubil comfortable by providing me with accommodations. I also extend thanks to Jacklas and Jacka as well as Loksy and Rinzo for their help during my stay in Tabubil. At BUPNG I would like to thank Fredah Wantum, True Friends and Pastor Daniel Dinnen. The leaders and members of the Baptist,
SDA, and Rhema churches were all welcoming, approachable, and receptive towards this research and I thank them all for taking an interest in my project.

I am very indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Dan Jorgensen for recommending Oksapmin as a field site and for his advice, encouragement and for continually demonstrating his confidence in me. His passion for PNG has been inspirational and I thank him for the time and energy he put into discussing, reading and commenting on my work. In addition, I want to thank the members of my examination committee: Dr. Sherrie Larkin, Dr. Andrew Walsh and Dr. Danièle Bélanger for providing stimulating questions during my defense and feedback concerning the content of my thesis. Dr. Adriana Premat and Dr. Kim Clark have provided me with support since I joined the graduate program, so I express my gratitude to them. I would also like to thank Micha Pazner for being an important mentor outside of the department who early on helped me determine my academic path.

I also thank the numerous individuals I had the chance to reunite with in Mt. Hagen, including John Melson, Rose Morok, Dongtine, as well as Esarom and Kathy Tiki. Thank you to Rose and Emmson Maliaba for facilitating my trip to Mt. Hagen, and I give my sincerest thanks to their daughter Sharon who was the first to welcome me to PNG when I arrived in Port Moresby.

I would like to thank my parents, Robert and Barbara, for “introducing” me to PNG and for encouraging my ambitions. I consider myself lucky for having such supportive parents. Thank you to the rest of my family including Rob, Jodie, and Naomi. I am also indebted to the support given to me by friends during the writing of this thesis, especially Renée Matta, Hayley Shannon, Örsi Tímár and Monica Kelly. Finally, I thank the McArthur family and the lovely staff at Fisherman’s Cove for their encouragement.

I am grateful for having the opportunity to carry out my Masters research in PNG. My research would not have been possible without the financial support provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Regna Darnell Graduate Award, the Western Graduate Thesis Award, the Terry Demers Memorial Bursary, and the Western Graduate Research Scholarship.
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## Abbreviations

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABMS</td>
<td>Australian Baptist Missionary Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUPNG</td>
<td>Baptist Union of Papua New Guinea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUWA</td>
<td>Baptist Union Women's Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLTC</td>
<td>Christian Leadership Training Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>LLG</td>
<td>Local Level Government</td>
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<td>SDA</td>
<td>Seventh Day Adventist</td>
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INTRODUCTION:
Narratives of Development, Decay and Deliverance on the Edge of a Resource Frontier

Development and Decay: The Works Camp

The rusted machinery that sat across from my place of residence at the Oksapmin Government Station\(^1\) was used to construct the main road that begins in Trangap Valley and links a series of locales throughout the high intermontane valleys that comprise the Oksapmin area. Consisting of a road grader, tractor, and backhoe, the machinery has been exposed to the elements for upwards of a decade, and is overgrown by weeds that sprout through the corroded metal and the windows that have been defaced by local children who etch their names into the mildew coated glass. The machinery along with the two houses situated adjacent to it make up the Works Camp, which was constructed by Papua New Guinea’s (PNG) Department of Works and Services—a department that employs the slogan “We build the nation for you”, a statement that explicitly links nation-building and development.

In the period that immediately followed PNG’s Independence in 1975, development was viewed as a nationalistic endeavor whereby PNG citizens could strive towards common goals centered upon the acquisition of modern

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\(^1\) For the sake of clarity and brevity, I will refer to the Oksapmin Government Station as Oksapmin Station. I will use Oksapmin, when I am referring to the linguistic area as a whole.
lifestyles and ambitions (Jorgensen 2007b). While the main road was previously wide enough to accommodate a tractor or truck, it has now become narrow in places and is overgrown at the edges by tall grasses and overcome by mud and large puddles of water that resist being absorbed into the rich clay-based soil. Given the retreat of government services, the slogan employed by the Department of Works and Services is now incongruous with the realities faced by people in Oksapmin, as well as those living in other rural areas throughout PNG. My hosts at the Works Camp frequently relayed frustrations concerning governmental disengagement, sentiments that were shared by other individuals during my time there.

Figure 1: A map of Oksapmin detailing the main road (map by A. MacMillan)
Deliverance: Churches as Alternative Structures to the State

It was through my journeys walking up and down the main road and bush paths that I came to experience a side of Oksapmin life that helps contextualize the role that Christianity plays there. The deterioration of the Works Camp and the main road demonstrate the nonlinear patterns that modernity can take (cf. Ferguson 1999) while also speaking to the collective aspirations of the Oksapmin people. These aspirations were frequently framed in terms of the desire for development and the access to sought after goods and public services. Christianity fits into this picture in a myriad of ways; however, a good starting point is to acknowledge the role that the Baptist Church played in the provision of goods and services in Oksapmin. The arrival of the Baptist Mission in 1963 was followed by the arrival of the Seventh Day Adventists (SDA) in 1967, and over the last fifteen years a number of Pentecostal denominations have arrived in the area.\(^2\) As the first mission to establish itself in Oksapmin, the Baptist Church continues to fill a void left by an ineffective political structure marred by corruption at all levels of government. This is a pattern that was also prevalent during the colonial period as churches have been acting as ‘alternative structures’ for more than a century in some areas of PNG. As McDougall (2008:1-2) points out, “colonial administrations throughout Melanesia were under-funded and under-

\(^2\) The other Pentecostal denominations found in Oksapmin are Rebaibal, the PNG Bible Church, and Flame of God.
staffed, and Christian missions, not the colonial state, provided health services and education to rural villagers.”

The Pacific is now one of the most actively Christian areas of the world and over ninety-seven percent of Papua New Guineans identify as Christian (Eves 2008:206). Christian principles are enshrined in the PNG constitution alongside *kastom* (Narokobi 1980), and as a result “to a remarkable degree the modern Pacific nation rides on Christianity’s back” (Young 1997:91). Given the significant role that Christianity plays in the contemporary social, economic, and political landscape of PNG, it is not surprising that PNG is often referred to as a Christian Nation—a term that is especially salient when it comes to understanding the way that individuals in Oksapmin framed their discontents and expressed widely-held sentiments that church-administered institutions are more trustworthy than those of the state. By acting as alternative structures to the state, churches not only provide essential goods and services, but have captured the hearts and minds of believers through the promotion of deeply-held ideological systems and moral values.

**Putting Oksapmin on the Map**

Oksapmin is a sociolinguistic population of about 10,000 individuals located in the Southeastern corner of Sandaun Province (Brutti 1999). It is

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3 Even though schools and health posts may be affiliated with religious institutions, they still receive government funding.

4 *Kastom* is a Tok Pisin word that can be loosely translated as tradition or custom.
physically demarcated to the East by the Strickland River, a point that marks the boundary with Southern Highlands Province and to the Southwest by the Bimin, an ethnolinguistic population bordering Western Province. In regional terms, Oksapmin is a part of the cultural and ethnic affiliation known as the Min or the Mountain Ok (see figure 2) and the nearest town is Tabubil, which is the site of the Ok Tedi mine that was established in the mid-1980s (Jorgensen 1996).

Tabubil serves as the main hub for goods and public services that are not easily accessible in Oksapmin, and is also the main destination for those seeking formal employment. According to local estimates, approximately half of Oksapmin’s total population currently resides in Tabubil and its surrounding informal settlements. These patterns of migration are gendered since Oksapmin men are more likely than women to permanently relocate to town in search of employment. As a result, Oksapmin women are affected by the high rates of male absenteeism, which has led to the emergence of social problems including the informal dissolution of marriages, difficulties obtaining money for goods, and increased responsibilities in the context of village life.
Introduction

In this thesis, I aim to recast women’s engagements with modernity by examining the role that Christianity plays in their lives, an area of research that has remained surprisingly understudied despite the fact that women are acknowledged to be active participants in the church context throughout Melanesia (i.e. Eriksen 2005, 2009, 2012; McDougall 2008; Douglas 2003; Van Heekeren 2003). While men are frequently represented as strongly aligned with modernity, women are “cast into the role of performing nostalgic antimodernism” by male discourses on gender (Wardlow 2002a:163). By taking women and
Christianity as its central focus, this thesis will question such generalizations by examining the forms of agency that are open to women through their engagements with the church.

During the early stages of Christianity in Oksapmin, the charismatic experiences of women made Christianity speak to local concerns, which was integral to the localization of church institutions. Today, women in Oksapmin continue to address local concerns through the church, as individuals and also collectively through their involvement in women's groups. Christianity therefore provides an idiom and organizational form women use to engage pressing problems of modernity. Many of the problems that women address have emerged due to changing gender relations, and the difficulties accessing goods and public services in Oksapmin. Through their engagements in the church, Oksapmin women seek to initiate positive social change in ways that are consistent with their Christian sensibilities. While there are distinct denominational differences in the ways Oksapmin women seek solutions to these problems, I argue that Christianity has expanded the agency of women by providing a platform for participation in public life.

**The Local and Regional Orientations of my Fieldwork**

**Village**

During my time in PNG, I conducted fieldwork in several ethnographic locales within Oksapmin itself, and in two major towns that are important for understanding how Oksapmin fits within a broader regional framework. In
Oksapmin, I spent two weeks at Oksapmin Station and then relocated to Sambate for approximately a month, which is a short walk from the Baptist Mission Station located in Tekin. While I was based in these two locations, I also visited other villages throughout Oksapmin in order to attend church services and to visit the friends and relatives of my main informants. Splitting my time between different locales in Oksapmin allowed me to gain a broader perspective on Christianity in the area as well as a deeper appreciation for the denominational differences that characterize Christian life there, especially among members of the two largest congregations: the Baptists and the Seventh Day Adventists (SDA).

Town

Once I departed Oksapmin, my time in PNG was rounded out by nearly two weeks spent in Tabubil and a week in Mt. Hagen, a town in the Western Highlands Province (see figure 3). While I did not originally intend to conduct multi-sited fieldwork (cf. Marcus 1986), the short trips I made to Tabubil and Mt. Hagen enriched my research considerably. In Tabubil I was able to gain insight into the social and economic ties that connect individuals living in town and village contexts. This informed my understanding of the social consequences brought about by migration and allowed me to track the flows of economic benefits that are channeled through social relations. Since I became acquainted with Tabubil with the help of Oksapmin friends, I was able to get a sense of what Tabubil means to them, and how it appears in their eyes. As a result, I was given
considerable insight into the world of Oksapmin people precisely because they introduced me to it.

Figure 3: A map of Oksapmin’s position in relation to important urban centers (map by A. MacMillan)

During my trip to Mt. Hagen, I was able to observe how local churches in Oksapmin articulate with larger regional and national networks facilitated by the institution structures of the church since it is the site of both the Baptist and SDA Headquarters. This provided me with insight into how women are able to draw upon the connections facilitated by the church in order to implement projects that address local needs, particularly the issues that specifically affect women.
Methods

Although my stay in the field was brief, it allowed me to follow Abu-Lughod’s (1991) lead by employing ethnographies of the particular, which focus on documenting the life stories of specific individuals rather than making broad generalizations. In terms of content, the interviews I conducted were open-ended but geared towards the collection of information concerning the Christian beliefs and practices of research participants, their involvement with the church, as well as their travel histories. I also collected personal genealogies, which allowed me to follow up on the kin relations of rural research participants when I went to town, and also provided a way to corroborate information and events. While the majority of the interviews were conducted with women, I also interviewed men so I could deepen my understanding of gender relations in Oksapmin. Unless otherwise noted, all of the interviews were conducted in the lingua franca of PNG known as Tok Pisin, or in Oksapmin language with the aid of an interpreter.

Gender and Christianity in Oksapmin: Theoretical Contexts

Dealing with Cultural Change

In order to gain a sense of the how the particular history and ethnographic situation of Oksapmin fits in relation to neighbouring populations, I examined the literature that explores how Christianity was established in the elsewhere in the Min region (Jorgensen 2005, 2007a; Robbins 1995, 2001, 2004). Robbins’ (2004) theory of cultural change was helpful in formulating my understanding of how the church came to take on its local forms in Oksapmin. Drawing upon
Sahlins, Robbins (2004) outlines three ways that local populations respond to intercultural contact: assimilation, adoption, and transformation. The Urapmin responded to Christianity through adoption, whereby “people take on an entirely new culture on its own terms, forgoing any conscious effort to work its elements into the categories of their traditional understandings” (Robbins 2004:10). This corresponds to the way that the Urapmin wholeheartedly took on Christianity through the revival movements that initiated radical religious change throughout the Min region.

Robbins (2004) then combines this account with Dumontian notions of values in order to understand how the Urapmin confronted a dual cultural system. The individualistic focus of Christianity directly conflicted with the traditional values of Urapmin culture, where the paramount value was the relationship (Robbins 2004). Robbins describes how these conflicts were addressed in the moral domain, which led to the development of a coherent notion of sinfulness that governs the everyday lives of the Urapmin as they struggle to remain faithful Christians. From these conclusions, Robbins (2007) finds the tendency of anthropology to stress deep-seated cultural continuities woefully inadequate for dealing with charismatic Christianity. He argues that studies of religious change are better served by models of rupture that account for the discontinuities that Christians face within their lives (Robbins 2003).

Robbins’ (2004) model of cultural change applies to Oksapmin, since both populations underwent intense periods of revival that resulted in mass conversions to Baptist Christianity (see also Jorgensen 2007a). However, other
anthropologists have stressed the importance of recognizing the dynamism between continuity and discontinuity as well as the interplay between tradition and Christianity (see Barker 2012, Mosko 2012, McDougall 2009, Jebens 2011). As stated by Barker (2012), “in many places, people have experienced conversion as an addition to or fulfillment of local traditions, [which demonstrates] that there is considerable continuity in change.” Together, these arguments address the different ways that anthropologists theorize modernity and religious change, which are largely dependent upon the specific ethnographic context under study. While Robbins (2001) notes the importance of attending to situations when individuals address the content of modernity on its own terms, Barker’s (2012) view is inline with arguments concerning vernacular modernities, which acknowledge how modernity can take on different forms as it is translated into diverse social contexts (i.e. Knauft 2002).

**Understanding Gender**

In the Min region, both Jorgensen (1981a, 2007a) and Robbins (2012) have discussed the important roles that women took on as *spirit meris* (female spiritual mediums) during early revival periods in the Min region. However, Robbins' does not view gender as a relevant distinction governing Urapmin engagements with Christianity. In line with his theory of cultural change, Robbins (2012) views *spirit meris* as evidence of the shift in paramount values among the Urapmin. He argues that *spirit meris* epitomize Christian individualism due to their ability to communicate with the Holy Spirit on a one-to-one basis. In this
thesis, I will address these claims by examining the forms of social action that women engage in through church groups.

Eriksen (2012) addresses this gap through the notion of gendered values, which discusses how forms of social action can take on male or female forms (cf. Strathern 1988). In her examples from Ambrym, Vanuatu, Eriksen (2005: 298) juxtaposes female modes of social action, which are associated with lateral connection making, with male forms of social action that seek to “emphasize oneself more than emphasizing the social whole.” As a result, Eriksen (2005) argues that the church in Ambrym has been gendered female, in that it focuses on extending relations in the creation of a social whole, rather than asserting an individualistic or hierarchical status consistent with males forms of social action. As a result, the female mode of social action has been placed at the top of the value hierarchy as a result of Christianization—since creating relations laterally is more important than hierarchy in the context of the church (Eriksen 2005).

Furthermore, Eriksen (2012:104) also implies in her use of gendered values that “masculinity and femininity are moral ideals which most women and men seek to achieve.” This is important since different paths, ways of conduct, or patterns of behaviour are subject to strong differential moral evaluation under the influence of Christianity. As a result, contemporary gender relations are strongly inflected by moral ideals concerning the acceptable and unacceptable modes of action open to men and women. In this thesis, I argue that women are held to higher moral standards than men, although women are able to gain significant leverage by representing themselves as committed Christians. This is also
relevant towards understanding the attitudes that committed Christians have towards those who backslide into sin. I will examine the perceptions of proper gender roles from the perspectives of both men and women, which are often framed in terms of social obligations. By doing so, I understand female discourses on their own terms, rather than male representations of them, in order to demonstrate the agency that women enact in everyday life and in the church (i.e. Josephides 1999; Weiner 1976).

The anthropology of Christianity is now an established topic of study in Melanesia (i.e. Barker 1992, Jorgensen 2005, McDougall 2008, 2003, Robbins 2004); however, this topic is not often approached from a perspective that takes gender as its central focus. Despite this, there are a few exceptions that touch upon some common themes. The literature has examined the charismatic experiences of individual women (Eriksen 2012, Jorgensen 2007a, Robbins 2012), as well as their involvement with church groups, which has led to the emergence of new forms of collective sociality (Douglas 2003, McDougall 2003). Much has also been said about the outward-looking focus of charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity, which facilitate links between local congregations and broader networks, which are integral for the operations of women’s groups (Douglas 2003, McDougall 2003).

**Outline of the Thesis**

In Chapter Two, I will begin by discussing the important roles that Baptist women played during the early stages of Christianity in Oksapmin. While their
contribute are often underrepresented in historical narratives that privilege the experiences of men, this chapter argues that the roles of women were integral to the localization of church institutions. By doing so, Chapter Two will address arguments concerning rupture and continuity, and demonstrate how women should not be viewed as more strongly aligned with tradition.

Chapter Three will examine the backsliding narratives of men in order to understand the changing context of gender relations in Oksapmin. As such, this chapter addresses how masculinity has been reoriented under the influence of Christianity and broader engagements with modernity. In Chapter Three, I also address the negative circumstances that women face due to changing male subjectivities.

In Chapter Four, I highlight the specific ways that women seek solutions to the problems brought about by social change through their engagements with the church. This Chapter will also highlight the differences between the approaches that SDA and Baptist women take towards addressing social issues that emerge in the village context.

Finally, in the Conclusion I offer a brief summary of the main points of my argument and suggest their broader meaning in terms of gender, Christianity, and modernity in Oksapmin.
The Affective Dimensions of Sunday Service

Baptist services begin on Sunday mornings and often continue until noon. These services are marked by an emotional tenor that engages participants during periods of prayer, worship, and song that punctuate the sermons of Baptist pastors. Upon attending a Baptist service, perhaps one of the things you would first notice is the fact that women participants always outnumber men—resulting in a gendered dynamic that shaped the service, a pattern that is mirrored across the denominations. While men lead the services through their positions as pastors or by leading the music with guitar, the sheer volume of women united in song would cause their voices to rise above those of men. Some women would accompany the musical rhythm with tambourines while the rest would clap their hands if they lacked instruments. About halfway through the service, the emotional tenor would reach a climax as some of the elder women sitting in the front rows would stand up and sing along to the music, clapping their hands with their arms raised and sometimes beginning to dance. Following the lead of these women, the emotional responses of the other attendees would soon follow suit as they began to sing louder and become more engaged with the service, although some participants were content to stay seated and demonstrated a more reserved approach to worship.
As the largest denomination in Oksapmin, the Baptist Church has successfully built up an active membership base throughout the area and there are currently forty to fifty Baptist Churches located throughout Oksapmin. The music and emotional tenor of Baptist services are considered a huge draw for attracting and retaining members, and women contribute substantially to the church in this regard. As a result of my observations of Baptist services, I began to wonder: what roles did this generation of women play in establishing the Baptist church and what was the series of events that led them to exhibit such high levels of enthusiasm and become so emotionally invested with Christianity?

*Figure 4: The Baptist Church at Oksapmin Station*
Introduction

In tracing the trajectory of the Church in Ambrym, Vanuatu, Eriksen (2006) juxtaposes what she terms the loud story and the silent story: two versions of the history of how Christianity was established in Ambrym. While the loud story focuses on the counter-movements instigated by high-ranking men in their resistance to Christianity, the silent story demonstrates the agency that men of lower grades and some women enacted during early encounters with the Church (Eriksen 2006). In this chapter, I endeavor to conduct a similar exercise by rewriting women back into a dominant historical account of how the Baptist Church was established in Oksapmin (cf. Polier 1998).

While men in Oksapmin became the local face of evangelization through their public leadership positions, women played important, although less explicitly acknowledged roles that helped direct the localization of Church institutions in Oksapmin by making Christianity relevant to local concerns. This chapter will examine the retrospective life narratives and charismatic experiences of the generation of women who experienced both the arrival of the Australian Baptist Mission Society (AMBS) in 1963 as well as a locally directed charismatic movement known as the Rebaibal in 1984 that resulted in mass conversions to Baptist Christianity. While the contributions of this generation of women are often overshadowed by a loud version of history that privileges the experiences of the men who became missionaries and pastors, an examination of these women’s narratives reveals the important roles they played through their practical activities as well as their charismatic experiences that were integral for the localization of
church institutions in Oksapmin. By examining the narratives of this generation of women, I will also demonstrate how their spiritual experiences underlie much of the collective charismatic force (cf. Eriksen 2012) of the Baptist Church, which is integral for securing its future given the recent arrival of numerous Pentecostal denominations and the rapidly growing membership base of the SDA Church. This chapter will therefore provide insight into how self-narratives can provide non-essentialized accounts of history as well as female agency, and address theoretical arguments concerning the use of models of sociocultural change that rely on dualistic images of rupture and continuity.

**Dealing with Narrative**

Before proceeding with the narratives, or *storis* (stories) that were told to me by women who experienced the arrival of AMBS as well as the *Rebaibal*, I will first describe the pre-Christian ethnographic context in Oksapmin, which is necessary in order to discuss what the *Rebaibal* was and what it accomplished in regards to the reorientation of gender relations in the Min region. The following accounts are in line with the “loud version” of the trajectory of Christianity in Oksapmin that I first encountered when I began to ask people about the history of the Baptist Church. These narratives were volunteered to me by Oksapmin men who would corroborate what others said in order to ensure that I received an “accurate” version of events, although they would overwhelmingly emphasize the roles of specific expatriate missionaries and local men who became pastors and missionaries. In addition to helping me gain my bearings in the field, these
narratives helped me develop lines of questioning that were employed during my interviews with women that aimed to address the gaps. Here, I do not examine the versions told to me by men in depth, but rather have combined their accounts with the ethnographic literature in order to construct a broader narrative that is meant to act as a foil for the women’s storis that I examine throughout this chapter.

It is important to note that the storis told to me by women do not contradict the loud version of history told to me by men, but rather reveal different dimensions of experience and engagement that have been left out and are integral to situating women’s narratives within a broader historical framework. This point is in line with Polier’s (1998:511) objective of “writing women back into cultural accounts” that draws upon postcolonial feminist theory. In contrast to the concept of culture that “attains its analytical heft through ‘horizontal’ connections among elements that bestow meaning,” narrative provides an ideal way to situate temporally embedded events in a broader historical picture “by connecting elements ‘vertically’ across time” (Donham 2001:139). As such, I employ the narratives told to me by women in order to overcome the overgeneralizations that often result from historical accounts and to acknowledge the agency that women enact.
The Arrival of the Baptist Mission: Local People as the Agents of Religious Change

In Melanesian ethnography, Christianity was previously represented as an intrusion or a “perennial outside force—threatening, corrupting, and only merely dusting the surface of the authentic focus of anthropological concerns” (Barker 1992:165). The aversion that Melanesian ethnographers previously felt towards the study of Christianity was in part due to its close association with colonial projects, which led to the dismissal of Christianity as authentically Melanesian since expatriate missionaries, rather than local people, were viewed as the primary agents of religious change (Barker 1992). These mischaracterizations have been refuted by those who have studied the effects of Christianity, including Jorgensen (1996: 203-204) who states that the period of Rebaibal among the Telefolmin was locally directed and “took place not simply apart from the wishes of missionaries, but also to some extent in opposition to them.” In Oksapmin, AMBS consciously employed measures to involve local people in the evangelization process by training several men in Tok Pisin and the teachings of the Bible with the expectation that they would become pastors (see Flatters 1981). These men subsequently became the local face of evangelization and helped facilitate the spread of Christianity throughout the Oksapmin Local Level Government (LLG) by establishing new churches, but it was not until the Rebaibal that Christianity took hold in a large way in Oksapmin.
Men's Cults: Contextualizing Contemporary Gender Relations

Prior to the widespread conversion to Christianity, the Min region was characterized by a clear distinction between the ritual and mundane spheres of life, which were reproduced through a gendered initiation process known as men’s cults wherein young males attained important ritual knowledge that was integral for their socialization into adult roles and the reproduction of society as a whole (Jorgensen 1981b; Barth 1975). The separate ritual and mundane domains were inscribed in spatial terms, delineated according to gender, and reinforced by a endless series of taboos, which corresponds to a broad pattern also found throughout several regions of PNG (see Barth 1975, 1987; Bateson 1958; Gell 1975; Harrison 1985; Schieffelin 1976 for comparison). Integral to these ritual processes were extended periods of seclusion for male initiates where esoteric knowledge was transferred between men to the exclusion of women. As a result, men’s cults reproduced polarized gender relations between the sexes due to the separation of the ritual sphere from everyday life where men were able to foster “by exclusion, a domain over which they exercise an unchallenged hegemony based upon radical difference” (Jorgensen 1991:269). Christianity thereby resulted in a pervasive reformulation of gender relations due to the collapse of former organizational factors that separated social and ritual life since the church sought to include men, women, and children alike.
The Rebaibal: From Skin Christians to True Christians

While hundreds of people were baptized during the initial baptisms carried out by the Australian missionaries, these baptisms led people to become “skin Christians”, a term used to describe those who had not yet experienced a deeper level of transformation that would enable an individual to fully commit his or her life to Christ. In contrast to those who were considered committed Christians, skin Christians retained their tambuna (ancestral) ways including a continued belief in sanguma (sorcery) and wiskrap (witchcraft), resulting in a syncretism frowned upon by the Baptist Church that viewed these practices as antithetical to its evangelical Protestant tenets. The term skin Christian therefore refers to someone who is only superficially Christian, and has not experienced a deep, underlying transformation that enables the reorientation of one’s soul towards Christ; however, it can also refer to those who attempt to pass themselves off as true Christians, while covertly engaging in sinful behaviour.

The loud version recounts the experiences of Diyos, a man from Eliptaman who successfully initiated the Rebaibal in Oksapmin on Easter of 1984 and elsewhere throughout the Min region in the mid to late 1970s (see Lohmann 2007; Robbins 1995; Jorgensen 1996, 1981a; Hyndman 1990 for comparisons). During his time in Oksapmin, Diyos held frequent meetings where he told of his charismatic experiences that recounted revelations that he received through communication with God. Through these revelations, Diyos revealed that some people in Oksapmin were still carrying out their traditional beliefs and practicing sanguma or wiskrap, resulting in a series of accusations that led people to
publically confess and repent their sins. During this time, many people in Oksapmin would spend all day and night in church services and in constant prayer, despite the imminent threat of a famine due to people not tending their gardens. In order to reduce this threat, the *kiap* (government patrol officer) placed limitations on the time that people were allowed to spend in service, informing them that they could only attend church for one hour per day.

From the Haus Tambaran\(^5\) to the Church: The Roles of Women during the Rebaibal

While the versions of the *Rebaibal* told to me by Oksapmin men frequently underrepresented the specific contributions made by women, this is not the case in the anthropological literature that has already addressed the important roles that women took on during the *Rebaibal* (Jorgensen 1996, 2007a; Polier 1998; Robbins 2004, 2012). Women actively sought to break down the hierarchical divisions institutionalized by men’s cults through the destruction of cult relics, and by deliberately breaking the taboos that were meant to reinforce divisions between the sexes (Jorgensen 2007a; Polier 1998). As such, while the *Rebaibal* led to deeper spiritual transformations as the Holy Spirit broke into people’s hearts through processes of second-stage conversion,\(^6\) women were

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\(^5\) *Haus Tambaran* refers to the institution of the men’s cults.

\(^6\) Second-stage conversion refers to the deeper level of transformation that occurs when someone who was initially baptized (i.e. a skin Christian), undergoes a further transformation in the process of becoming committed Christians (see also Robbins 2004: 87). This is particularly prevalent during revival movements.
overwhelmingly responsible for the charismatic force of this movement due to the 
ability of some to act as mediums for the Holy Spirit. Earlier I mentioned how 
formal positions in the church are monopolized by men; however, women are 
more likely to receive spiritual gifts, which is attributed to their characteristically 
“soft-hearted” nature that indicates not only the openness of their hearts to the 
Holy Spirit (see also Eriksen 2012), but also represents their benevolence and 
selflessness towards others. Mediums for the Holy Spirit, known as spirit meris 
(spirit women), were key agents during the Rebaibal due to their ability to predict 
future events, determine the causes of illness and experience visions (Jorgensen 
2007a, Robbins 2012). As a result of their charismatic gifts, spirit meris helped 
direct the course of the Rebaibal, and localize church institutions by making 
Christianity speak to local concerns. This is because spirit meris obviated the 
need for local people to rely on missionaries or scriptures to provide 
interpretations or act as intermediaries, thereby enabling the Holy Spirit to 
address people living in the Min region directly (Jorgensen 1996).

While I have just demonstrated the important roles that women played in 
giving the Rebaibal much of its charismatic force, I will begin with a stori that 
outlines the arrival of Australian missionaries in Tekin, and accounts for the 
important roles that women played behind the scenes in establishing the Baptist 
Church in Oksapmin. This will be followed by the storis of women who have 
received charismatic gifts such as visions and healing.
Stori as Strategy: The Positioned Narratives of Oksapmin Women

*Nakome*

Nakome is a woman who has experienced many changes over the course of her lifetime, including the arrival of AMBS and the Rebaibal. Born in the early 1950s, Nakome tells *storis* that diverge from the dominant narratives of evangelization by revealing the specific roles that women played in establishing the Baptist Church in Oksapmin. The *storis* that Nakome shared were always animated and inflected with bits of humour, which reflected her vibrant personality. Her *storis* were memorable, precisely because they were told in a way that was meant to be entertaining and these qualities are reflected in her recollection of the arrival of AMBS. During her recollection of this event, Nakome specifically highlighted the time when an Australian missionary named Keith Bricknell called everyone to meet in Tekin so that they could worship together. After everyone arrived, Bricknell told the attendees to close their eyes so that they could pray. Nakome laughed as she recounted the initial awkward encounters between the expatriate missionaries and the Oksapmin locals because at this time, many Oksapmin were unfamiliar with the concept of prayer. Nakome described how people pretended to close their eyes to pray, while at the same time looking between the cracks of their fingers in order to witness the behaviour of the Australian missionary that at the time seemed outlandish. Now in retrospect Nakome, like most other Oksapmin women of her generation, has fully embraced the practice of prayer and prays both at night and in the morning to God.
The Tekin Airstrip

After the arrival of AMBS, news reached the Tekin area via Bricknell that a small plane would soon arrive, and they requested that the people clear the area that would become the Tekin airstrip. Nakome emphasized the important roles that women played in clearing the bush, stating that women undertook the majority of the work with only two, three, four or five men helping at any time. The women began by cutting down the trees and digging up the tall grass. When the plane eventually arrived, it dropped down copra bags filled with material items such as spades and picks that were used for digging the ground that would eventually become the airstrip. Before the plane brought these spades, the women used sticks to remove the grass, a process that was very labour intensive so the supplies brought by the plane were a welcome relief. In compensation for their hard work, women received highly valued goods such as bush knives, bibles and laplaps (cloth), rather than money. By emphasizing the work that women carried out in building the airstrip, Nakome was laying a claim to the airstrip—emphasizing that it was because of the hard work carried out by women that the word of God was able to come into Oksapmin. She said that because the airstrip was the product of women’s work, it retains important meanings for the generation of women who helped construct it.
Nakome’s narrative concerning the Tekin airstrip was contested by some men who did not fully agree with her version of events. Nevertheless, it is clear that Nakome was motivated to tell me this story in order to highlight the significance of the work carried out by women in helping establish the Baptist Church. In Oksapmin, women’s non-charismatic contributions that support the church are widely acknowledged by men and women to be important. Today, the practical activities of women provide direct and indirect support to the church. When I would ask men about the roles of women in helping establish the Baptist Church, they would frequently acknowledge that through the sale of garden produce, pigs and cassowaries, women were able to raise funds in order to support their husbands in their path towards becoming pastors, making many sacrifices along the way. Interestingly, similar to the framing of women’s
charismatic experiences as spiritual gifts, their practical activities are also referred to as gifts. This point demonstrates the high value that people in Oksapmin place on the non-spiritual contributions of women in sustaining and helping to establish the church.

During her mid-twenties, Nakome married a man who was among one of approximately ten men who were schooled by Bricknell and sent to the Christian Leadership Training Center (CLTC) in Banz located in Western Highlands Province for further training. While her husband was away at CLTC, Nakome supported him financially and through prayer. Women were also key for spreading the gospel, as they would learn passages of the Bible and then perform outreach to other areas of PNG, which was integral for evangelization initiatives. Nakome performed outreach throughout the Oksapmin area, although other women joined fellowship groups where they travelled to places such as Mt. Hagen, Tabubil, Telefolmin, and areas along the border with West Papua, Indonesia. Today, spreading Good News remains an important cornerstone of the women’s ministry and exemplifies the important role that women have taken on through spreading the word of God.

While women did not desire to take on formal leadership positions in the church, this should not be viewed as an indicator that women were less committed to Christianity than men. Although Bricknell also attempted to educate the women who were wives of the men who became pastors, Nakome emphasized that she did not desire to take on a more publically prominent role herself. Through her recollection of the attempts made by expatriate missionaries...
to provide the women with formal education, Nakome laughed as she detailed how she, along with the other women, had no interest in the education provided by the missionaries and subsequently forgot what they were taught. For younger generations of women, taking on leadership positions is considered more of a desirable possibility now, as some drew upon discourses of gender equality to demonstrate how women could also be gifted in the forms of oratory that were previously viewed to be the domain of men and is viewed as a necessary quality to become a pastor. When asked why there were not many female pastors in the Baptist Church, women would tell me of examples of female pastors who lead churches in Australia, stating that in all likelihood PNG women will soon begin to take on more senior positions in future.

**Visions, Revelations and Healing: The Charismatic Experiences of Baptist Women**

*Suey*

While I initially attempted to gather the conversion narratives of women by focusing on the event of baptism itself, what I found was that the narratives of this generation of women did not often represent baptism as a specific moment of transformation or conversion. Instead, many women told rich *storis* about moments of spiritual awakening where God revealed his presence by giving women spiritual gifts such as visions or charismatic healing. This is in line with the processes of second-stage conversion that took place during the *Rebaibal* where those who may have been baptized earlier, experienced profound spiritual
experiences and transformations that reoriented them to Christ. A woman of the same generation as Nakome, Suey first experienced a vision when she was at a retreat, which involves extended periods of worship and prayer in the forests located in the mountains. As she began to fall asleep, Suey was awoken by a bright light unlike anything that she had ever seen. In retrospect, Suey compared this light to a power light that was located in the night sky. Suey woke up her friend who was asleep beside her and both stood up to witness it. The two women watched the light as it remained fixed in the sky. Failing to descend closer to the ground, the light eventually disappeared and retreated into the clouds.

The next morning, Suey and her friend went to worship at the base of the mountain. During their worship, they witnessed another vision, which consisted of a man erecting an iron post deep inside the ground. Suey explained these two visions: the bright light indicated God’s presence to them and the iron symbolized God’s strength that would enable the women to carry out their ministry work in areas outside of Oksapmin. While these two visions were revealed to Suey and her friend by God, other visions may provide insight into things that are hidden from public life, such as people’s engagements in sinful practices including pamuk pasin (promiscuous sex, sometimes in exchange for money), drinking, drug use (marijuana) and theft. Through women’s charismatic experiences that involve drawing upon the power of the Holy Spirit, they are able to bring hidden or sinful practices into the open and make them subject to the scrutiny of the public (Dundon 2007).
Cecilia

When Cecilia was pregnant with her first child, her husband left her to marry another woman and after she gave birth, she went to cry in her garden. As she cried, she experienced a vision of a bright light and a wooden cross akin to a crucifix that showed nails where Jesus was hung by his hands and legs. During this vision, Cecilia, who is now approximately 60 years old, felt a sense of clarity and knew that she had become a true Christian since the Holy Spirit affirmed its presence by showing her this vision. As a result of this vision, Cecilia had no desire to start a fight or become angry at her previous husband or his new wife since she did not want to soil herself with sinful thoughts or actions. Already aware of the existence of God, she knew that if she conducted herself in ways that are consistent with Christian principles that she would be able to secure her place in heaven. Along with her sister, Cecilia raised her child, working tirelessly in the garden to come up with money to pay for her young son’s school fees. She has since remarried and given birth to another child; however, her first son has grown up and now has children of his own. He currently plays a prominent role in the Baptist Church as a treasurer and often leads Sunday services through song as a guitar player. In addition, he has obtained a well-respected job as a teacher and Cecilia attributes his success to her faith and commitment to God.
Dealing with Continuity and Change

Robbins (2007:6-7) argues that anthropology remains a science of continuity, and this makes it difficult to deal with Christian notions of time, belief and change that are “based on quite different assumptions, ones that are organized around the plausibility of radical discontinuities in personal lives and cultural histories.” The next example that I examine will deal with the charismatic healing practices of women in Oksapmin. Earlier I mentioned how the belief in traditional spirits and practices were reframed as sinful under the influence of the Baptist Church. The people I spoke with in Oksapmin unequivocally stated that they no longer believed in these things; however, the charismatic healing practices carried out by women are often geared towards healing those who have become afflicted with illness as a result of possession by ancestral spirits such as *masalai* (nature spirits). Rather than viewing this as an example of continuity with the past, Robbins (2004:129) argues that these examples demonstrate how charismatic Christianity employs “locally meaningful idioms for talking about the past and about current social problems—for spirits are always a language for talking about broader concerns.” As such, the example I outline below demonstrates how charismatic Christianity is “open to localization and utterly opposed to local culture” since it accepts local ontologies involving traditional spirits, *sanguma*, and *wiskrap* while taking these as the forces that Christians struggle against (Robbins 2003:223, see also Jorgensen 2005).
Charismatic Healing

While previously gifted with visions, Suey has since lost this gift and has received another: the power of healing. Through this gift, Suey has healed many people through prayer—too many for her to remember, although she recounted some moving examples of individuals she was able to restore life to after they were close to death. These were individuals of varying ages who were plagued by sicknesses that were attributed to possession by spirit nogut, a generic Tok Pisin term that refers to spirits with bad intentions and encompasses a variety of types including masalai. The individuals possessed by these spirits often had difficulty breathing and problems with their personal mobility as they were unable to move around independently. The families of these individuals would send word to Suey to come and heal them, and Suey—well known for her healing powers, would make trips to attend to these sick individuals who were sometimes located at the healthcare post and other times located in their homes throughout Oksapmin. The periods of prayer through which Suey healed these individuals were often extensive, sometimes lasting several days.

The Healing of a Woman from Gaua

Suey was summoned to Gaua in order to attend to a young woman who was very ill and close to death. This woman was unable to walk since she had difficulty straightening her limbs, with her legs drawn up to her chest in a cross-legged position and her arms rigidly crossed to her shoulders. Suey prayed for a period of three days with still no effect on the woman’s well-being, but on the fourth day of prayer the woman muttered some words that indicated that she
was possessed by a *masalai*. Suey told me that *masalai* cause wide ranging effects, by hindering the growth of garden produce and preventing individuals such as school children from gaining new knowledge. As a result, women’s prayer groups such as the Spirit Warriors carry out spiritual warfare\(^7\) in order to rid the landscape of *masalai* through prayer. Prior to this woman’s possession, a curse was said to be plaguing the area and the Spirit Warriors worked to obliterate the curse through the destruction of the *masalai*. The woman that Suey worked to heal became sick as a result of the empathetic feelings that she harboured towards *masalai*. As a result, the *masalai* sought refuge inside of the young woman’s body instead of leaving the area. Her illness was the result of the *masalai* that began to drain the life from her body by eating her from the inside. Armed with the cause for this woman’s illness, Suey continued to pray for the woman until she was healed and began to regain her mobility by straightening her limbs. Now, this young woman remains healthy, is living in Tabubil and Suey intends to visit her in the future.

The possession by *masalai* demonstrates the intersecting belief systems at play, since these types of illness could not be treated by conventional medicine. Through prayer, Suey was able to determine the cause or origins of the illness and subsequently work to rid these spirits from the woman’s body. It is perhaps not a coincidence that the women who receive gifts of healing are often of Suey’s generation. As individuals who are familiar with the ways of the past,

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\(^7\) Spiritual warfare refers to active responses towards killing local spirits such as *masalai*, which is viewed to be a part of a broader battle between God and satanic forces (see Jorgensen 2005, Dundon 2007).
healers like Suey are better equipped with knowledge that is used to determine and treat illnesses attributed to possession by *spirit nogut*. In these instances, it is clear that a continued belief in local ontologies does not indicate that people in Oksapmin are still acting in continuity with the past. Rather, the work of women in particular is “aimed at introducing discontinuity by severing these relations forever” (Robbins 2003:227), rather than attempting to appease the spirits. As such, the aims of these women work to facilitate a complete break with the past through their charismatic experiences (Robbins 2003, Jorgensen 2007a).

Here, it is important to recognize that the actions and experiences of charismatic Christians operate with a model of rupture, rather than continuity—a point that directly contradicts stereotypical views of women as more tied to culture or tradition than men. Recollections tended to emphasize a break with the past: the pre-Christian context was referred to as *bipotaim* (before time) where the landscape was populated by spirits, and the bush was viewed as a non-human realm set apart by a mythical ancestress known as Afek, from whom all Min populations descended. These recollections often paralleled biblical passages where darkness is a metaphor for ignorance and evil, and *bipotaim* was referred to as a period of spiritual darkness (*tudak*). In this way, it is not surprising how in the visions of women God is said to take the form of a bright light since it represents a non-physical manifestation of God’s supernatural presence. In line with standard Christian theology, I was told that humans are unable to look directly at God, even upon their arrival in heaven—instead
humans are only able to see the physical manifestation of God through the body of Jesus and feel his presence through the action of the Holy Spirit.

The Collective Charismatic Force of the Baptist Church

Throughout this chapter, I have demonstrated the important roles that women took on in establishing the Baptist Church and given examples of their charismatic experiences. Eriksen (2012:111) argues that “the ecstatic religious experience in the encounter with the Holy Spirit creates an inter-subjective space that challenges the prominent position of single individuals, such as the prominent pastors, in these churches.” In addition to the leveling potential brought about through charismatic experiences, I argue that the charismatic experiences of women are integral to securing the future of the Baptist Church in Oksapmin. This is because, their charismatic experiences help determine the temperature, or strength of the church.

Recently, a number of Pentecostal denominations have arrived in Oksapmin that seek to expand their membership bases in order to establish themselves. Numerous people told me that the Baptist Church was going through a cold phase, a measurement that is used to determine the strength of the church. When the church is hot or strong, it is filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, and the church will hold retreats in the mountains where members will undergo intense periods of prayer that may initiate charismatic experiences, not unlike the ones I described above. During Baptist retreats, many people who have fallen out of favour with the church will confess their sins and partake in
singing and dancing, which enforce a general feeling of togetherness (wanbel tru). Participants will also share food, having large feasts consisting of a bounty of garden produce and numerous pigs, which are provided by congregation members. There is no time or system to determine when the church will go through hot or cold phases, but when the church is down—meaning that lots of people do not attend church due to other commitments, God will compel them to come together, with the members experiencing revival akin to a feeling of having a fire lit inside believers. As a result, while Rebaibal was a charismatic movement, it never really ended and now, revival is a form that the church has taken (Jorgensen 2007a; Robbins 2001).

A Note on Denominational Differences and Conversion

People in Oksapmin are compelled to join new churches for a variety of reasons including: an attraction to new things, joining their kin or friends who have defected to a new church, or encountering different denominations in town and subsequently seeking new churches when they return home. In contrast to the Baptist Church that goes through hot and cold phases, one of the aspects that compels people to join the newer Pentecostal denominations is that they are considered to be hot all the time, due to their increased propensity for charismatic experiences. Those who remain with the Baptist Church, consider the hotness of the Pentecostal churches to be inauthentic and the result of people trying to force revival, rather than naturally letting it come about.
I will only be discussing one Pentecostal Church, the Rhema Church located at Oksapmin Station. This congregation was founded in 1995 by a married couple from Oksapmin. Rhema arrived from East Sepik Province and it is a locally driven Church that has approximately 50 members and exceptionally high rates of female participation.

The other denomination that I will be discussing is the SDA Church that arrived from Wabag in 1966. The SDA Church has the second highest membership base after the Baptists with approximately 3000 members throughout Oksapmin. SDA members would frequently comment on the highly organized structure of the church, which was necessary for tithing and collections that were directed towards local, national, and international aims. It is a fundamentalist protestant Church and many members are drawn to it because of its strict doctrine focused on cleanliness and self-discipline. SDA members adhere to Levitican food restrictions and as a result refrain from eating pig, bush meat, and caffeinated drinks such as coffee and cola. In addition, the SDA Church strictly prohibits smoking, drinking alcohol, and chewing betelnut. In contrast to the other Churches, the SDA Church holds Sabbath on Saturdays and worship frequently lasts all day, beginning with a general service in the morning, women’s ministry in the afternoon, and family service at night. Unlike the Baptists or Rhema, they are not a charismatic church and therefore do not believe in the reception of spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit.

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8 This is an estimate that was given to me by an SDA pastor.
A similarity between all three of these Churches is a strong, pervasive belief in the second coming of Christ. While I want readers to gain a sense of the pluralism associated with Christianity in Oksapmin, it will also become apparent that there are some common themes underlying how Christian beliefs and practices are carried out in Oksapmin that were reinforced by the fact that the members of the varying denominations were more or less relaxed towards each other due to their belief in a common God. As a result, it is not unusual to have immediate members of the same family attending different denominations. This level of flexibility tends to be not as pronounced among SDAs due to their fundamentalist beliefs that draw upon statements made in the Bible to support the veracity of their version of Christianity while excluding other denominations. However, while Seventh Day Adventism is noted for not having a high tolerance for traditional beliefs or practices (McDougall 2009), this is highly variable in Oksapmin and some members stated that God is able to reveal himself through their culture.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided an alternative account of the historical trajectory of Christianity in Oksapmin, by examining the practical contributions and charismatic experiences of women during the early stages of Christianity in Oksapmin. By doing so, women emerged as central actors who helped initiate the Rebaibal and also made Christianity speak to local concerns. Together, the storis of this generation of women demonstrate that women were acting to
facilitate a break with the past, rather than in continuity with it. This refutes problematic associations that align women as closer to tradition than modernity. In the next chapter, I will shed light on the contemporary situation of gender relations in Oksapmin by examining the backsliding experiences of men.
From Sin to Salvation: Navigating Contemporary Masculinities in Oksapmin

Pastor Teklah’s Stori: an Example of Female Faith and Moral Virtue

Teklah Ricks⁹ has been a pastor at the Rhema Church since 1998—a Pentecostal congregation whose membership is almost entirely female. During our conversations, she told me many stories about her life, but perhaps the one she was most proud of was the story of how she became the only female pastor in Oksapmin. In many ways, Teklah’s situation is unique precisely because of her position as a pastor, a title that garners her significant respect from the members of her congregation and non-members alike. She is referred to by others as a save meri—a term that connotes sophistication, knowledge and wisdom, due in part to her high levels of education, her knowledge of English, and the fact that she is well-versed in the ways of the Bible. Through her work as a pastor, Teklah has travelled throughout the East Sepik, Sandaun and Western Provinces to attend conferences, receive leadership training, and to conduct ministry work, at times bringing other Oksapmin women along if they have access to funds.

Although born a Baptist, Teklah converted to Rhema after attending an outreach event along with her now estranged husband. At the time, the couple was travelling with their daughter and as they passed the outreach event the music captured the interest of the young girl. As Teklah and her husband

⁹ Interview conducted in English and Tok Pisin.
attempted to leave, their daughter began to cry and roll around on the ground, indicating her desire to go inside to hear the music and participate in the event. Teklah now interprets her daughter’s refusal to leave as a sign from God. God spoke to them through their daughter in order to compel them to go inside the church—a point that marked the beginning of Teklah’s journey to become a pastor and establish a Rhema congregation at Oksapmin Station, the place where she was born and raised.10 While both Teklah and her estranged husband underwent pastoral training and worked together to establish the Rhema Church, her husband has since backslid into sin and is no longer a pastor, or a practicing Christian for that matter.

Figure 6: Pastor Teklah and two of her children

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10 Teklah is an ethnic Oksapmin.
I begin with Teklah’s *stori* since it provides a way to understand the roles that Christian beliefs and practices play in women’s lives and also because it demonstrates how women and men respond differently to modern engagements, or as Wardlow (2002a:147) puts it, how gender acts as “a central axis of difference through which the disjunctures of modernity are engaged, performed, and instantiated.” While Teklah’s situation is unique because of her position as a pastor, the stories of her life also mirror the situations that many women in Oksapmin face, such as the dissolution of her marriage due to her husband’s acquisition of a second wife\(^{11}\) and the difficulties she faces as she attempts to provide for her young children while balancing her church responsibilities. It is perhaps due to these reasons that many women are attracted to her congregation, as they identify with her as a strong, Christian woman and her situation resonates with many of them.

The backsliding of Teklah’s estranged husband typifies the experiences of many Oksapmin men and those who count on them: the influences of town life are alluring but are viewed as a source of village problems that emerge when some men fail to fulfill their obligations as fathers and husbands. In the face of these difficulties, Teklah draws upon her relationship with God to give her strength and unlike her estranged husband, continues to live her life in accordance with Christian principles. However, Teklah’s *stori* is also important since it refutes the uncritical categorical representations of rural women as more

\(^{11}\) Having multiple wives is not common in Oksapmin. It is discouraged by Christianity, although it is tolerated among those who were married to two wives prior to their conversion.
place-bound than men who are construed as more mobile—an inherent quality that often defines modern forms of masculine identity.

**Introduction: Backsliding and Masculinity**

This chapter will examine the backsliding narratives of Christian men that are framed as personal testimonies and illuminate the path that one has taken towards becoming a devoted Christian. In the context of these testimonies, incidences of backsliding or falling into sin are often initiated by trips to town or by the negative influences associated with modern lifestyles that are present in the rural context. Very often, during the course of becoming a committed Christian, the individual experiences a spiritual epiphany that marks the moment where one achieves true salvation or deliverance from his or her previously sinful life. These testimonies often take on a confessional tone and are meant to impart a lesson that stresses the importance of living one’s life in accordance with Christian principles and values.

Backsliding narratives reveal much about the contemporary forms of masculinity engaged with by Oksapmin men and as a result, provide insight into the context of gender relationships in Oksapmin. In order to understand how Christianity can provide an alternative framework for realizing masculine ambitions, I will discuss the testimonies of men who have become devoted Christians after backsliding, in order to highlight the distinctions between what I will term ‘Christian’ and ‘urban’ masculinities. Christian masculinities necessitate a continual process of self-examination in order to prevent moral lapses and this
enables men in Oksapmin to engage in the sought-after dimensions of modernity while not compromising familial obligations. As such, men adhering to principles of Christian conduct enact forms of masculinity stressing the importance of socially embedded kin relations while also fostering a cosmopolitan outlook produced by their membership in a global Christian community. In contrast, urban masculinities are viewed as a source of problems because they often lead to a neglect of kin obligations through individualistic and self-interested actions, which are antithetical to Christian values and Melanesian ideals of reciprocity. By understanding masculinities in this manner, it is possible to provide insight into the dynamics between town and ples from a perspective that takes gender into consideration, and also the way that moral values are applied differentially on the basis of gender.

**The Malaise of Masculinity**

The ethnographic literature tends to view the decline of men’s cults in terms of arguments concerning what Wilde (2007) refers to as the 'malaise of masculinity'. This perspective posits an emasculinization that men have experienced as a result of colonialism and missionization. Many of these arguments link the erosion of corporate male activities with the current social problems that have emerged in postcolonial PNG. These social problems include, but are not limited to: high rates of gender based violence including domestic abuse and sexual assault (Wardlow 2006); high urban crime rates

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12 *Ples* is a Tok Pisin word that can be loosely defined as the village.
largely attributed to disenfranchised groups of men known as raskols (Harris 1988); and the problems associated with the transmission of HIV/AIDS (Wardlow 2008; Lepani 2008). These issues are often attributed to the insecurity of the male in the urban setting, shifting notions of masculine prestige due to engagements with the cash economy, rapid urbanization, as well as the general lack of employment and educational opportunities for young men. While Oksapmin experiences its share of social problems emerging from the high rates of male absenteeism and the disillusionment that young men in particular express towards village life, it has been largely unaffected by the major social issues that are prevalent in large urban centers and throughout the Highlands region. Part of my objective in examining the backsliding narratives of men is to examine why this is the case, and I argue that a major reason lies in the ability of the church to provide avenues for realizing alternative forms of masculine identity (see also Eves 2012). In order to contextualize this argument, I will first discuss some of the conclusions drawn by anthropologists who have examined how ideas about masculinity have been reoriented as a result of missionization.

Many of the arguments concerning masculinity are linked to subtle changes concerning notions of personhood that are the result of emerging individualistic values that have shaped how masculinity is formulated. Due to missionary rhetoric that viewed the strong-willed autonomy of men problematic, masculine power among the Kwanga of East Sepik Province was viewed with ambivalence as males who responded to change with violence further reinforced colonial messages that linked poverty to violence (Brison 1995). As a result, the
absence of development became linked to colonial ideologies that tied poverty to moral shortcomings (Brison 1995:158). While such reorientations of gender ideologies are often characterized as leading to a “range of negative experiences including feelings of inferiority, subordination, bodily detumescence and dependency,” Wilde (2004) demonstrates the different trajectories that masculinity may take by highlighting the experiences of the Gogodala of Western Province. In the Gogodala case the United Fields Mission’s muscular approach to missionization enabled men to determine their own paths for demonstrating faith in emphasizing the virtues of work and physical strength rather than theological knowledge. As a result, the Gogodala men “experienced colonialism and change not simply in terms of alienation or emasculation but as a dynamic process that reinforced many aspects of their work ethic, bodily capacities and lifestyle” (Wilde 2004:32).

In his discussion of Urapmin engagements with Christianity, Robbins (2004) argues that conversion was in part a response to “humiliation” arising from a disenchantment with or rejection of certain traditional values. One result of this was that moral difficulties in everyday life became assimilated to a coherent notion of sinfulness, which became the lens through which moral shortcomings were viewed. I think that this argument applies to the Oksapmin, and I argue further that the notion of humiliations can be extended to the situations that men face as a result of expectations of modernity that are left unfulfilled. Here Droogers’ (2003: 274) insights are helpful when he observes that testimonies (stories of sinfulness and redemption) “express the contrast between the
community of believers on the one hand and the sinful world on the other.” In the process, he argues, they also embody a critique of the surrounding society alongside confessions of individual shortcomings.

Contemporary masculinities in PNG are fluid, plural, shifting and sometimes ambiguous in certain contexts rather than singular and locally grounded (cf. Gutmann 1997). Furthermore, they speak to the importance of recognizing how “gendered identities are inflected by local configurations of modernity” since women and men are subject to different ideals concerning what it means to be successful in the contemporary context (Knauft 1999:160).

Despite the denominational differences in Oksapmin, the testimonies of men illustrate the dilemmas they face in enacting modern masculine identities and how they are confronted in the moral domain. As such, while I juxtapose what I refer to as urban and Christian masculinities, I do so to demonstrate how men perform different modes of social action in distinct spatial locales. This helps situate the different ways that lapsed and practicing Christians enact masculinities.

Finally, backsliding narratives provide a way to deal with changing notions of masculine identity in terms of the way it was described to me by Christian men in Oksapmin, who framed their struggles in moral terms as they travelled between town and ples, undergoing periods of intense self-examination as they attempted to remain good Christians in the face of spiritual tests. By employing a framework that demonstrates how Christian men fall into cycles of sin and
redemption, it is apparent that masculinity is not something that is stable, but is rather constantly in the making.

The Contemporary Situation

Cosmopolitan Ambitions

As noted in the introduction, gender relations in Oksapmin are shaped by the high rates of male absenteeism due to the outmigration of men to town in search of work. These patterns were first initiated in the late 1960s when Oksapmin men were recruited to work as migrant labourers on plantations in the Mt. Hagen area and elsewhere in PNG (Jackson 1981:46). Today, the regional pattern has shifted to Tabubil, the site of the Ok Tedi mine, where many Oksapmin occupy positions in the lower service sector and have a reputation for being particularly ambitious (Jorgensen personal communication). Although less likely to relocate to town permanently, women are also highly mobile and make frequent trips to Tabubil for banking purposes, to access services such as healthcare, and to visit kin. As a result, the patterns of migration and movement are integral for contextualizing gender relations in Oksapmin.

Urban Temptations

In town, men encounter *pasin bilong graun* (things of this earth). The phrase refers to sinful practices that are either discouraged or banned such as smoking, drinking, chewing betelnut, gambling, illicit drug use (marijuana) and extramarital relationships. While these activities are characterized as sinful, they are also coded as male since they indicate a level of disposable income and
provide men with a means to display a level of economic achievement and status through acts of conspicuous consumption that are associated with modern masculinities (Macintyre 2008). Herein lies the ambivalence associated with migration since while mobility is considered as a necessity in the contemporary context in order to gain access to sought-after goods and services, pursue avenues of higher education and search for formal employment, it is also a major precipitating factor of backsliding. The way that Christians in Oksapmin discuss backsliding tends to employ a dichotomizing framework between town and ples. Although sinful behaviours are said to emerge as a result of outside influences, these behaviours are by no means confined to urban areas and also take place in the village context.¹³ As such, even though town is often discussed as the source of negative influences that emerge in Oksapmin, many behaviours that are coded as sinful can be traced to broader levels of engagement with the global cultural economy including the pervasive influence of the popular media that resonates with younger Oksapmin men and is reflected by their stylistic preferences for certain types of dress and music (Macintyre 2008).¹⁴ For example, many young village men bear the performative and stylistic markers associated with urban masculinities including dreadlocked hair, reggae-style clothing, and camouflage pants (see also Macintyre 2008).

¹³ When I was in Oksapmin, alcohol was banned from entering into the area.

¹⁴ Even though Oksapmin lacks electricity throughout, there are a few people who own electronic goods such as televisions, laptops, stereos, and DVD players that they power by solar panels or fuel-powered generations.
Expectations and Frustrations: The Disillusionment of Young Men

The difficulties associated with finding steady employment in town are a considerable source of frustration for Oksapmin men, especially for those who are highly educated by PNG standards. Not everyone who migrates to Tabubil is able to find work, a factor that in many ways reflects the PNG economy’s high rates of unemployment. The feelings of disillusionment that are particularly prevalent among young men may be fuelled by the difficulties associated with raising funds for school fees as well as the failure to meet established academic benchmarks needed to gain admittance to schools.

Men who migrate to Tabubil but are unable to find formal employment are dismissed by rural people as *stap nating long settlement* (living in the settlements without work), a phrase that appears innocuous but implies a certain level of animosity that those who live in Oksapmin feel towards settlement dwellers.¹⁵ The latter neither take part in socially embedded forms of labour that are undertaken by their rural kin, nor provide financial support through remittances. Those who have succeeded in town have often done so through the assistance of their rural kin, who often make considerable sacrifices in order to raise funds for school fees, accommodation, and travel expenses. As a result, there are expectations that this assistance will be reciprocated upon graduation when the individual obtains formal employment.¹⁶

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¹⁵ Only those who are employed by the mining company are allowed to live in Tabubil.

¹⁶ This point relates to work done on Melanesian social systems, and the stresses that people living in town feel towards helping out their village kin (see Monsell-Davis 1993).
Questions to Consider

The contemporary social situation in Oksapmin illustrates the considerable conflicts that men may face that often have clear moral dimensions. For example, how is it possible to achieve modern aspirations despite the systemic and structural barriers that have resulted in a relative lack of opportunities? Furthermore, how is it possible to engage with modern economic and sociopolitical systems while remaining a committed Christian? By highlighting men’s predicaments through these questions, I will illustrate the ambivalent tensions and often unresolved conflicts that emerge; while Christianity is part and parcel of larger conceptualizations of modernity, the beliefs and values perpetuated by Christianity are often diametrically opposed to modern ambitions and desires as they are engaged with in other realms of life.

In order to answer these questions, I outline the testimonies of two men named Alexison and Nathaniel, who are on track to becoming Baptist pastors. Both of these young men are from Tumobil, which is located near the border with West Papua, Indonesia. They are currently undergoing pastoral training in Oksapmin at the Min Baptist Bible College located in Waulap, a village located en route to Tekin. These examples will be followed by the experiences of an established Baptist pastor named Isaac and an SDA man named Thomas. Together these examples show the stresses placed upon masculine personhood in the contemporary context but they also highlight how Christianity can provide alternative frameworks for realizing masculine ambitions.
Men’s Pathways to Salvation and Restoration through Testimonial

What follows is a version of a testimony that Alexison told me personally, after I witnessed him preach a similar testimony in the Sambate Baptist Church as part of his pastoral training. Like many church services, the audience for his sermon was predominantly made up of females, older men, and children. Younger generations of men are often conspicuously absent during Church, and this is attributed to a lack of interest on their part. Given the audience, it is a story that was not only meant to relay a message concerning the redemptive qualities of Christianity, but also to help attendees appreciate and understand the challenges that face young men who have backslid.

Alexison’s testimony highlights how his conversion experience was initiated as a result of a dramatic vision he experienced while he was sick due to poisen,\(^{17}\) which he understands as a punishment for his previously sinful life. Furthermore, his testimony highlights the path that he has taken towards becoming a true Christian and demonstrates how many of the activities that are integral to forms of masculine identity and collective male bonding are framed as sinful. His journey towards becoming a pastor represents his personal commitment to Christ and his desire to help others rise above the negative influences present in their lives. Furthermore, his example demonstrates the motivations behind his conversion, which include his desire to secure his place in heaven, which is represented by the Holiness City.

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\(^{17}\) Poisen is similar to sanguma (sorcery) except that it is directed at individuals through spells rather than physical attacks. In this example, the poisen was directed at Alexison when someone took his cigarette butt in order to aim a spell at him.
Alexison

When I was younger, I would join the other boys and we would fight each other, all day every day. I would steal, get angry and start fights. Sometimes we would go to diskos (dances) and marijuana use is also a big problem where I am from. I was previously a heavy smoker and on one occasion when I was attending school in Tifalmin, someone took one of my discarded cigarette butts in order to punish me with poison. As a result, I became very ill and I was taken to a giaman dokta (traditional healer) who told me that there was a bad spirit inside of me. I almost died because of this, but when I was sick I had an experience that changed my life.

As I slept, God revealed a vision to me. In this vision, I saw a man standing on a highway and he beckoned me to follow him. This man told me that this was the Holiness Highway and warned that if I did not change my life, I would die within a year. As I walked along the highway with this man, I was in awe by the beauty of this place since there were plenty of flowers and pleasant music that was welcoming. Eventually, we reached a very large city that extended as far as my eyes could see and the man told me that it was the Holiness City of God. I was so happy that I began to dance; however, the man interjected and told me that it was time to return to my life on earth. I did not want to return, but the man insisted. He told me that I had to go back to my life in Tifalmin and that I would die within a year.

I woke up and later met with a Baptist Pastor in Tifalmin to ask him what this dream meant. He told me to reflect upon it and I came to the conclusion that it was time for me to become a true Christian. Although I was previously baptized when I was younger, I was not yet a practicing Christian since I was too young to understand biblical principles. This moment, in 2007, after I experienced this vision was when I converted. This vision let me know that it was time to change my life so I began to make changes and stopped doing sinful things so that I could return to this place.

The next testimony will tell of Nathaniel’s moment of baptism that demonstrates the transformative effects of ritual and spiritual experiences. At the moment of his baptism, Nathaniel stated that he no longer had a desire to engage in sinful practices; a point that is in line with arguments concerning the radical discontinuity that can be experienced within one’s life as a result of
charismatic Christianity (cf. Robbins 2003). However, people also note that one does not change automatically upon achieving baptism, but continually struggles to change one’s character since sin is believed to come from inside a person. While God can provide direction, and people can be healed through the actions of the Holy Spirit, the responsibility ultimately remains with the individual to accept God into his or her life and act in accordance with biblical principles in order to overcome sin. Here, Nathaniel discusses his baptism and what he felt.

**Nathaniel**

*When the pastor baptized me, he put his hand upon my head and spoke the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. After this moment, the water washed over me and I felt as though the spirit of God was now inside of me. I no longer had a desire to engage in the sinful practices that I participated in before. Before I became a Christian, I didn’t have Christian values: happiness, liking other people—before I harboured feelings of jealousy. Now, everyone is my friend—before some people did not like me, but that was okay because I didn’t like them either. When I was baptized, everyone became my friend. I had experienced plenty of hard times before, but when I was baptized everyone would support me by giving me clothes, food and other things. Now I give my thanks to the Lord since once I became a Christian, I see that wherever I go, people will help me. Thank you God for bringing me inside your fence, I am so happy since I became a Christian.*

*I decided to become a pastor so that I can use my example to help change other men and bring them into my Church and help spread the word of God through ministry work. This is how I am going to thank God for helping me change my life. When I become a pastor after my training, I don’t know what the future holds but this is my way of thanking God for providing me with the means to change my life.*

While Alexison’s testimony highlights the negative aspects of modern masculine sociality, Nathaniel’s testimony demonstrates how Christianity provides believers with an alternative mode of sociality premised on giving, mutual trust and friendship. So, for example, when Nathaniel states that he was
brought inside God’s fence, we see a metaphor referencing how he became a member of a broader Christian community encompassed by God. The contrast between these two testimonies is particularly striking, since while Alexison’s demonstrates how some forms of masculine sociality can be inherently violent and destructive, Nathaniel states that as a result of becoming a Christian he no longer harbours feelings of jealousy towards others; as a result he has a much more positive outlook on life. His testimony suggests that the disintegrating effects of modernity and urban masculinity can be counteracted through Christian modes of sociality. The relationships inherent in Christian consociation are reinforced through the exchange of material items to those in need, and demonstrate how it is possible to gain new converts through Melanesian ideologies and practices of reciprocity. While not stated outright in this testimony, Nathaniel also distinguished between the socially productive aspects of traditional masculinities such as hunting, building houses, and gardening, which he later contrasted with the negative aspects of traditional masculinity including sanguma and tribal warfare.

Dealing with the Moral Dimensions of Gender in Men’s Backsliding Narratives

If we return to Alexison’s vision of the Holiness Highway, it is possible to understand how the moral dilemmas that men face are often framed in terms of a moral dichotomy between right and wrong. As such, good and evil do not merely figure as abstract concepts, but are tangible and omnipresent forces to be
reckoned with in one's own life. This has been demonstrated throughout the ethnographic literature that describes how Melanesians deal with sociocultural change, not as a "simple choice between two types of society or economies, but as a moral conflict, a matter of what it means to be a good person" (Barker 2007:12). Backsliding narratives thereby show that it is not sufficient to only hear God’s word: one must also follow Christian principles and beliefs in the context of one’s life. Thus, while urban masculinity is often displayed on the skin, in terms of external markers of status that are linked to performances of masculine identity through stylistic preferences (i.e. Macintyre 2008), Christian masculinities involve a holistic reorientation towards a new way of life. This is the result of not only the changes that occur within oneself during moments of conversion, but also involve a transformation of the social relationships that one maintains with others.

**Negotiating Modern Masculinities: The Christian Conscience of Oksapmin Men**

The next narrative examines the experiences of a Baptist pastor in order to demonstrate how Christianity enables men to enact forms of masculine identity that diverge significantly from the masculinities so commonly seen in town. While both urban and Christian masculinities foster a cosmopolitan outlook and provide ways for men to assert masculine individualism and authority, they do so in dramatically different ways. Christianity has enabled men in Oksapmin to reclaim aspects of traditional masculine identity, while providing them with ways to engage with modernity on terms that allow them to enact the cosmopolitanism
they so highly value. As such, I argue that through Christianity, men are able to confront the humiliations of the colonial era by enacting forms of individual subjectivity that emphasize a one-to-one relationship with God. Through this, men engage in processes of continual self-examination in relation to sin and strive to act in accordance with Christian values. By doing so, some Oksapmin men are able to enact masculinity in ways that mirror the status achieved by great men prior to the breakdown of the men’s cults.

Figure 7: Baptist men at a Sunday service

Pastor Isaac: Becoming Great Men through Spiritual Rebirth

Isaac is often referred to the wasman (guardian, but is also an older Tok Pisin term for pastor) of a sub-clan in Oksapmin. He is around 50 years old and his children are now young adults who are pursuing or have completed higher
levels of education elsewhere in PNG. Isaac is also the pastor of a Baptist Church, and in many ways his journey towards becoming a pastor mirrors the experiences of Alexison and Nathaniel. Isaac was among the men who were recruited to work at the Aviamp tea plantation near Mt. Hagen and he discussed the difficulties of this kind of work: labour intensive, poor working conditions, and low pay. In 1977, he was baptized by some students from CLTC although in retrospect considered himself a skin Christian since he only received his baptism because other men were doing the same. He later became frustrated with his work at the tea plantation and returned to Oksapmin where he found a partner, whom he married in 1982.

In order to look for work to provide for his young family, Isaac travelled to Tabubil but was unable to find a full-time job. Although he was eventually able to find part-time employment, this was sporadic and he was unable to amass savings since he began to smoke, drink, and gamble his earnings away. His wife, who remained in Oksapmin, began to pray for his salvation along with his other female relatives, as they had remained committed Christians.

Upon his return to Oksapmin in 1986, Isaac participated in a Baptist Youth Camp where he felt a fire come up inside him (*bel paia*) that he attributed to the action of Holy Spirit, which compelled him to make changes in his life. Isaac realized that he was gifted in the forms of oratory that are possessed by male pastors (*autim tok*), and as a result he began to share his testimonial experiences of backsliding in town. Through this, Isaac was able to use examples from his life in order to help others determine their own spiritual
pathways towards salvation. After his experiences with the Baptist Youth Camp, Isaac travelled throughout the Oksapmin area for ministry work along with a group of other Baptist families and God eventually called upon him to become a pastor. Isaac enrolled at CLTC and became a pastor at the Baptist Station in Tekin. As the church expanded its membership base, Pastor Isaac established his own church at the sub-clan where he now resides.

Isaac's conversion narrative illustrates a number of important points regarding the changing construction of masculinity in Oksapmin. While Isaac backslid when he was in Tabubil, and squandered his money away on drinking, smoking and gambling, he now performs more than his fair share of labour. In many ways he picks up the slack for younger generations of men who fail to fulfill their obligations and for absent men living in town by clearing bushes for gardens, digging trenches for runoff and chopping firewood (see also Polier 1996). These are tasks that he fulfills not only for his immediate family, but also for his more distantly related kin who are members of the same sub-clan, and by extension are also members of the Baptist Church that he oversees. Thus, while women are said to carry an increased subsistence burden due to male outmigration (see Gordon 2009), Isaac's example demonstrates how men are affected by these changes as well. This correlates to more 'traditional' constructions of masculinity where the productive value of men's work was integral for constructing masculine values (Jorgensen 1991). As such, the problems associated with masculinity are not simply divided along gender lines, but reflect generational differences as well. Women and men alike would lament
the attitudes of younger males, and sometimes young females, who displayed a lack of interest in fulfilling their socially defined roles and obligations. These attitudes are attributed to the increased dissatisfaction with village life and the hard work it entails. Isaac’s example thereby bridges two seemingly contradictory aspects inherent in contemporary constructions of masculine identity in Oksapmin: he enacts masculine individualism through his position as a pastor, while also adhering to customary Melanesian values of relationality by performing socially embedded labour that is integral for maintaining the quality of life for his near and distant kin.

**Denominational Pluralism and Gender Distinctions within the Church**

According to Jebens (2011:93) “recent research on ‘local modernities’ has tended to overlook ‘intra-cultural’ differences, tensions and antagonisms, regardless of whether the people were portrayed as acting in continuity with their past or as making a break with it.” With this in mind, I will now discuss subtle differences in masculinity that are facilitated by the institutional, liturgical, and doctrinal distinctions between the Baptists and the SDAs. McDougall (2009:3) demonstrates how the SDAs distinguished themselves from other churches in the Solomon Islands allowing “members to position themselves differently in relation to a modern economy and thus to achieve different degrees of the individuality that Robbins sees as fundamental to Christian culture.” This is also argued by Jebens (2011:100) who notes how the SDAs have “distanced themselves from the past (and have emulated the example of Westerners) in a more decisive and consistent manner, yet the same rigidity also causes the
influence of the past or the parallels between one's own perception of Christianity and traditional concepts to be more marked."

Figure 8: The SDA Church at Oksapmin Station

The SDA church is marked by a more formal institutional structure, and provides increased opportunities for men, lacking the collective charismatic force that characterizes the Baptists and Pentecostal denominations. Drawing upon Weber's work on early Pentecostalism Eriksen (2012) argues that the development of formal leadership structures often occurs at the expense of the collective charismatic force of the church. As a result, while women are allotted equality due to their ability to challenge the positions of male leaders through their collective charisma, this tendency falls to the wayside as a formal leadership structure materializes (Eriksen 2012). This is evident in the SDA Church, which I
would characterize as more masculinist than the Baptist and Pentecostal denominations in Oksapmin due to underlying qualities of gender nostalgia, which references a longing for the past “wherein masculinity and femininity were more visible and relevant” (Eriksen 2012:109). As a result, higher numbers of men tend to be drawn to the SDA Church and this is particularly evident during Saturday service. The following example will outline some reasons why this is the case.

**Thomas**

Thomas is a man from Oksapmin Station who currently owns a canteen that supplies goods to a Chinese oil prospecting company currently in Oksapmin, and as a result he makes frequent trips to Kiunga and Tabubil in order to make purchases. While originally a member of the Baptist Church, Thomas stated that he was specifically drawn to the SDA Church because of its greater emphasis on self-discipline that is exemplified by its doctrines of cleanliness that emphasize a holistic approach towards health. SDA doctrines view mental health, physical health, and social health as interconnected markers of salvation, since adhering to the food restrictions and consistently attending church service leads to an enhanced status of well being. In addition, Thomas noted how the highly organized structure of the SDA Church appealed to him, telling me about the national and international connections of the church. Within the church itself, Thomas serves as a deacon and oversees the collections that are directed towards numerous initiatives provided by the church including the Women’s

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18 Interview conducted in English.
Ministry, the Young Adventists Program that is focused on education, as well as
the international ministry that focused on West Africa while I was there. SDA
services are significantly more structured than those of the other denominations
in Oksapmin. Sabbath service begins with song, followed by a sermon, after
which the members form groups in order to discuss the weekly Bible study.
During this time, a roll call is taken, since the failure to attend service often leads
to backsliding. When backsliding occurs, SDA individuals are given opportunities
to correct their behaviour. If they fail to improve their behaviour by the third
warning, they are excommunicated from the SDA Church and must be baptized
again in order to rejoin. In contrast to the emotional tenor of Baptist services
described in Chapter Two, SDA members demonstrate a more reserved and
structured approach to worship and services go through a series of processions
of standing, sitting and kneeling.

More so than the other denominations, the SDA Church provides avenues
for men to realize collective accomplishments, as demonstrated by the Good
Samaritans, a group for men that promotes a deep interest in the welfare of
others. The Good Samaritans provide support to those in need, a point which
contrasts to the other denominations where collective church work is primarily
carried out by females and is of significance since besides sporting groups, there
are few gender-specific organizations for men in this area of PNG (see also
McDougall 2008). As such, the SDA Church attracts high numbers of men,
precisely because it has expanded the masculine sphere (cf. Eriksen 2012) and
as a result men can realize masculine ambitions collectively, in ways that are in
line with Christian values. As a result, men play important roles in attracting new members to the SDA Church. This is demonstrated by Thomas’s experience with his wife, who remained a devoted Baptist even after they wed. Through prayer, Thomas eventually compelled his wife to join him at the SDA Church, and when she decided to convert he was overjoyed.

![Image of Thomas and his wife, Mathilda](image)

*Figure 9: Thomas and his wife, Mathilda*

Like the previous examples discussed, Thomas’s moment of conversion was initiated as a result of his trips to town where he fell into sin. However, rather than returning to the Baptist Church, Thomas found the SDA Church more attractive due to the structure that it provides. He likened his first attendance to a SDA service as like being at home, and described the warm and welcoming feelings he felt as other attendees shook his hand and wished him a happy
Sabbath. Other SDA men and women I talked with discussed how the Bible lessons carried out by the church provided them with a deeper understanding of biblical values and principles than they had experienced before. In addition, unlike the other denominations in Oksapmin, English often figures prominently during Sabbath service in addition to Tok Pisin and Oksapmin language. Some songs and prayers are carried out in English, and occasionally SDA pastors will give their sermons in English as well. While the vast majority of individuals in Oksapmin are not fluent in English, it is a marker of education and is therefore considered a useful skill. While this exposure may help some improve their English skills, I argue that it is also indicative of the cosmopolitan outlook of the SDA Church, which serves as an attraction to members.

I argue that Isaac and Thomas exemplify the idealized forms of masculinity as viewed from the perspective of committed Christians in Oksapmin, albeit in different ways, which I attribute to the denominational differences between the Baptists and SDAs. Both men have successfully bridged two conflicting idealizations of masculinity by wholeheartedly engaging with modernity while resisting its potentially sinful aspects by remaining committed Christians. In this way, I argue that the construction of masculine prestige and status in contemporary Oksapmin is dependent upon achieving a balance whereby men engage with modernity in ways that contrast with urban masculinities. This is in part due to the emphasis that Christianity places on fatherhood and remaining a good husband, in addition to fulfilling socially embedded obligations for distant relatives and other members of their church.
The Effects of Urban Masculinities on Oksapmin Women

**Sonya**

In many ways, Sonya exemplifies a modern Oksapmin woman. Now in her forties, she has obtained a post-secondary education, makes frequent trips to town, and has formal employment in Oksapmin as a primary school teacher. Her story demonstrates how the patterns of mobility and engagements with the cash economy have reformulated gender relations, and have resulted in the reproduction of novel social forms. Sonya has been divorced twice and here I will focus on her second marriage, which sheds light on the regional orientations of masculinity and the negative effects of urban masculinities on women.

Sonya met her second husband in Tabubil, a man from Enga (a Highland province to the east) who relocated to Oksapmin so that they could raise their young son together. While Sonya earned significant money through formal employment, her husband lacked work and would spend her hard-earned wages on non-essential goods that could have been directed towards more productive ends. This was a source of considerable frustration for Sonya; however, she did not initiate divorce proceedings against her husband until she learned that he had other wives elsewhere in PNG. Her suspicious concerning her husband were piqued when she accompanied him on a trip to Enga, and she witnessed that many men there had upwards of ten wives, a practice that is unheard of in Oksapmin and elsewhere in the Min region. Upon her discovery that her husband...
also engaged in this practice, Sonya filed divorce papers in Tabubil. As she stood up in court and aired her grievances against her husband, the judge confronted her husband and inquired why he had so many wives despite the fact that he lacked employment and had no means of supporting them, thereby indirectly calling his masculinity into question. Her husband stated simply that having multiple wives was the kastom of his people and did not give any other sort of explanation for his actions. Since their divorce, Sonya has not been in contact with her ex-husband and he is no longer involved in their son’s life either personally or by providing financial support.

While Gutmann (1997) highlights the critiques concerning the cultural regionalisms of masculinity, I argue that Sonya’s experiences with her ex-husband illustrate that there are very real differences between Min and Highland conceptions of masculinity. Individuals in Oksapmin would frequently draw distinctions between themselves and Highlanders, referencing the higher levels of violence, exorbitant bride prices, compensation seeking practices, and less personal mobility due to safety issues in the Highlands region. Due to Oksapmin’s close proximity to the Southern Highlands Province, marijuana was also an issue, as it is grown across the provincial border and makes its way into Oksapmin through personal networks (see also Bell 2006). Given these characterizations of the Highlands region, it is not surprising that individuals often

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19 Sonya noted how it is hard for rural women to obtain a formal divorce since it necessitates trips to town in order to acquire divorce papers, attend court, and obtain the signature of her husband. This is an interesting comparison to Cecilia, whose marriage was informally dissolved. Sonya’s example also provides a way to understand the burden often placed upon women in the context of interethnic marriage.
viewed interethnic marriages as a major way that sin enters into Oksapmin due to the different value orientations of the two regions. While the Min characterize themselves as peaceful and easygoing, they view Highlanders as unnecessarily violent and temperamental (*bel hat*). In many ways these generalizations correspond to ethnic stereotypes (see Jorgensen 1991); however, they also have their basis in personal experiences due to negative encounters that Oksapmin individuals have had with Highlanders in town and occasionally in the village context.

I argue that it is because of the regional differences in terms of how masculinity is constructed that the Min region has experienced fewer social problems in this regard than other areas in PNG. Jorgensen (1991) speaks to this by outlining the difference in how masculine status and prestige are constructed in big men societies, found in the Highlands, versus the great men societies of the Min region. In terms of gender relations, men in great-man societies seek power *apart* from women whereas men in big-man societies seek power *over* women (Jorgensen 1991). As such, “the great man emerges to the extent that he differentiates himself from others; one stands above [big man], while the other [great man] stands to the side” (Jorgensen 1991:270). The previous examples given by Isaac and Thomas exemplify these points, as both men have achieved an idealized version of masculinity by distinguishing themselves from others, rather than exerting power over them. This is particularly true in their relationships with women, which do not correspond to notions of
gender hierarchy and are instead governed by mutual respect and understanding.

**Gender and the Material Dimensions of Modernity**

I discussed Sonya’s *stori*, not only because it highlights the changing context of gender relations but also to examine the role that gender plays in the procurement and usage of commodities and cash. This argument will provide the context necessary to understand how moral values are differently applied on the basis of gender, which I argue are closely linked to the roles that women play in social reproduction, and are also emphasized by Christian discourses. After her divorce, Sonya has continued her work as a schoolteacher and sells pigs in order to supplement her income. While many women in Oksapmin will look after two or three pigs, Sonya at times has upwards of thirty pigs although she has recently has experienced difficulties with young men who have stolen her pigs in order to hold feasts in the mountains. As a result, Sonya stated that she intends to stop raising pigs once her current herd is sold. Sonya noted the difficulties that she faces as a single woman since she often has difficulty finding men to help her make repairs to pig fences and her house.

Money and commodities are understood differently depending on how they are used according to gender since they can be used to facilitate “individual acquisition, but it can also be used as a vehicle for social reproduction” (Stewart and Strathern 1999:183; see also Macintyre 2008). Sonya’s *stori* exemplifies the latter, as she uses the money that she earns in order to pay the school fees of her two youngest children who remain in school, but she has also contributed
significantly to the school fees of her more extended kin including her nieces and nephews. In Oksapmin, numerous students told me that their extended kin and parents paid for their school fees; however, their female relatives made overwhelming contributions so that they could further their education. This point contrasts with the modern masculinities expressed by men in town, who are more likely to direct cash towards material items meant solely for their own consumption. Women, on the other hand, are less likely to spend their money on themselves, and in the event that they do purchase modern goods, they are more likely to redirect them towards social purposes such as gifts (Macintyre 2008). On the occasions when women travelled to town, they would often return with gifts for their children and kin such as jars of peanut butter, packages of cheese puffs and cookies, blankets—and on occasion more substantive items such as radios, mobile phones and fold-up mattresses. Women do so, not because they are required to, but because they place great value in maintaining their social relationships.

The Collective Morality of Women

The previous argument helps account for the absence of women’s backsliding narratives in this chapter. I do not presume this is because women do not backslide since on occasion I witnessed women engage in categorically non-Christian activities such as chewing betel nut, gambling, and smoking. I also

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20 According to data gathered from the Tekin high school, approximately 70 percent of school fees are paid directly to the school, while 30 percent are deposited into the school’s account from Tabubil. This speaks to the large role that local people play in gathering and directing income towards paying school fees.
argue that their reluctance to discuss such stories freely reveals how morality is differentially applied on the basis of gender as women were more likely to represent themselves as genuine Christians who refrained from sinful practices. This was in stark contrast to men who would tell me their backsliding narratives with little prodding on my part and often reveled in such _storis_.

The reasons behind the reluctance of women to discuss such _storis_ are clear. On one level, by not admitting incidences of backsliding, women are likely consciously asserting their collective moral authority over men who are often represented as more subject to the weaknesses of sin. This gives Christian women significant leverage in calling out the sinful behaviours of their male kin. However, an alternative explanation could state that women are more likely to feel constrained by gendered values (cf. Eriksen 2012) that structure how femininity is expressed in terms of idealized notions of what it means to be a good Christian woman. As a result, the examples given throughout this chapter indicate how there are different modes of social action open to men and women. In the event that women backslide, or present themselves as less than committed Christians, they are more likely than men to face severe repercussions. This is less true in Oksapmin, but is particularly salient in urban settings, where alternative gender ideologies are present. In town, women who step outside their roles and fail to fulfill their social obligations run the risk of being described as _bikhet_ (stubborn, individualistic, arrogant, defiant) and subject to retributive violence (see Polier 1998; Wardlow 2002b, 2006). Educated women in urban settings are particularly subject to these problems, as stated by
Josephides (1999:146) who notes how “women in public service told terrible tales of daily violence against women [attributing] this violence to a loss of respect following the spatial dispersal of kinship ties and the breakdown of traditional values, which, in the versions of man, included Christian practices.”

Given these pressing issues that affect gender relations in urban settings, it is no wonder that Oksapmin women often told me that they did not wish to relocate to town, citing the increased costs of living, and not wanting to leave their family, friends, and gardens behind. This was even in the case of women who were married to men who had obtained formal employment in town: when I asked women if they would move if their husbands managed to purchase a house in town—often viewed as the main factor that would enable a woman to join her husband in town—these women still stated that they preferred not to relocate. I was struck by these women’s statements, precisely because of the way that they discussed the conveniences of town life, their trips to areas outside of Oksapmin, and their aspirations for international travel. As such, I argue that their reluctance to move does not indicate that women are more place-bound or less cosmopolitan than men, but reflects an awareness that women in the village context enjoy “the protection of a kinship system that urban women often lacked, and within this protective community they were able to push for their ambitions” (Josephides 1999:146). In the next chapter, I will examine the range of ways that women are able to address these issues through their engagements with Christianity.
The following narrative describes a trip that approximately twenty-five Oksapmin women took to Port Moresby, the national capital of PNG. Planned by the Baptist Union of PNG (BUPNG), this trip demonstrates how the structure of the Baptist Church provides linkages that “articulate the local with wider spheres in contexts where the state is locally absent or invisible” (Douglas 2000:6). For many of the Oksapmin women who attended, this was their first trip to the national capital. When they arrived, the Oksapmin women met up with Baptist women from elsewhere in PNG and together they went to conferences and visited local attractions with explicit Christian purposes in mind. Their experiences during this trip demonstrate how women are able to engage in forms of social critique through their involvement in church groups, through which they can help initiate positive social change (cf. Eriksen 2009).

Over the course of their visit, the women went to the Bomana Jail, a prison located on the outskirts of Port Moresby. At the prison, the women met with several inmates and prayed for their salvation, perhaps not surprising given the intensifying law and order issues in PNG. However, the event that the women recounted the most vividly was their tour of the National Parliament House.

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21 Revisit pages 45-46 for a discussion of law and order issues in PNG as they pertain to urban masculinities.
During their tour, a group of Oksapmin women wanted to pray inside the Prime Minister’s office but as they attempted to enter, they were stopped by a security guard. The security guard dismissed them as *meri nating bilong ples*, village women who counted for nothing and would not be allowed inside. In response, the women erupted into laughter and asserted themselves. They reminded the security guard that as elected representatives, politicians must be held accountable for their actions, even to rural women such as themselves. The women paid no heed to the statements made by the security guard, and entered the Prime Minister’s office so that they could pray.

This is a *stori* that was recounted to me on multiple occasions by women who went on this trip, as well as those who heard of it through second-hand accounts. It is an important narrative for several reasons. On an individual level, this *stori* illustrates the strength that women feel by cultivating and affirming their relationship to God. However, on a broader level, this *stori* also addresses the type of community that Christian women envision for themselves and their families. Through their prayers in the Prime Minister’s office, the Baptist women critiqued the self-interested actions of corrupt politicians as well as the forms of violence that emerge in the context of elections. By doing so, they also relayed hopes to God that future leaders would address the needs of rural women like themselves. As such, women often seek out forms of societal change through their involvement in church groups that correspond to Christian notions of rupture that aim to reformulate the way society is constituted (Eriksen 2009).
Introduction

This chapter will take the Baptist and SDA churches as its focus, in order to examine the range of possibilities open to women through their engagements with Christianity. While both denominations aim to include women, they do so in radically different ways. In the Baptist Women’s Fellowship, women are provided with individual leadership opportunities, as well as avenues for collective action by implementing projects that address local needs. By promoting leadership opportunities and capacity building, I argue that the Baptist Church provides women with a platform for participation in public life, which opens up the potential for women to pursue further leadership roles outside of the church domain. The agency that women express in these contexts is informed by their interpretations of the Bible, which stress notions of gender equity. In contrast, the actions of SDA women’s groups are encompassed within a larger ministry department that aims to provide support to those in need, but underemphasizes the contributions of women’s groups by measuring success in terms of a broader whole.

The Importance of Women’s Work

The productive labour of women in Oksapmin consists of a seemingly never-ending cycle of domestic tasks, including childcare, gardening, cooking, and caring for pigs and cassowaries. Some women possess formal employment; however, most women are solely dependent on their subsistence activities in order to earn money. Women who have jobs are required to balance their work
and household responsibilities, which can be quite tiring. However, their subsistence workload is often reduced through help that they receive from their female kin. In Oksapmin, women consider activities such as gardening to be hard work, although many place a great deal of pride in their productive labour. Women would frequently remark upon their strength as females, a characterization that is evident by the heavy loads borne by women as they carried sweet potatoes and other produce from their distant gardens to their homes or the market. Since the sale of garden produce provides a major source of income in Oksapmin (see also Brutti 2007), women’s productive labour is not undervalued to the same extent that it is elsewhere in PNG (i.e. Wardlow 2006). As a result, women maintain a high level of economic independence, which garners them significant agency in everyday life. In regards to their maternal roles, female kin often look after young children together. From my observations of women’s interactions with children, it was evident that women thoroughly enjoyed their roles as mothers and caregivers.

Based on the previous examples, it is clear that women placed a high value on their productive roles, which are integral for sustaining day-to-day life in Oksapmin. My general impression of gender in Oksapmin is that men and women fulfill complementary roles, provided that they are successful in fulfilling their obligations to each other. Despite this characterization, Douglas (2003:9) states that it is necessary to question “the representation—including the self-representations—of Melanesian women as ‘naturally’ family oriented, communitarian, and less individualistic and competitive than men.” She argues
that the naturalization of women’s roles has been used to justify the subordination of women in Melanesia, since men employ these ideals in order to restrict women to “a ‘traditional’ [pre-modern rural] domain, which is backward by definition” (Douglas 2003:9 cf. Macintyre 2000:149-53, 62). In the following section, I will demonstrate how women’s domestic roles have gained new significance, under the influence of Christian doctrines pertaining to gender.

*Figure 10: Young Oksapmin women in a garden*
Understanding Christian Gender Ideologies

There is a tendency to view Christianity, and religion in general, as an impediment towards the realization of women’s rights. When I first began to attend church services in Oksapmin, I was initially struck by the patriarchal rhetoric employed in Baptist and SDA sermons since women enact a high degree of agency in everyday life as well as in marital contexts. This includes theologically ordained power differences within the family, where the husband is situated at the head of the household, while his wife and children are subject to his authority (i.e. Robbins 2012, Brusco 2010). Women in Oksapmin would frequently state that these aspects of the Bible made sense to them, since they viewed this formulation of gender relationships to be consistent with the ways of their ancestors as well. However, in contrast to the actions of the men’s cults that sought to “obscure women’s powers of reproduction” (Jorgensen 1991:267), biblical doctrines place an important focus on female roles in biological and social reproduction. The following examples will illustrate the viewpoints that Baptist women hold in respect to these roles as well as their interpretations of what the Bible says about gender.

**Diandra**

Diandra was recently elected as a leader meri (leader woman) in the Tekin Baptist Women’s Association, which by her estimates has approximately 500 members.\(^2^2\) As a result of her leadership position, she has been to numerous

\(^2^2\) The membership fee for the Baptist Women’s Fellowship is 6 kina per year (approximately 3 dollars Canadian), a rate set by the development offices at BUPNG in consultation with local churches.
Baptist conferences throughout PNG, including the one in Port Moresby that was referenced at the outset of this chapter. Since women are required to come up with their own funds to attend these conferences,\(^{23}\) not everyone is able to amass the necessary savings. As such, the women who attend conferences will share what they have learned when they return to the village, which in many ways mirrors the act of spreading Good News. The conference in Port Moresby addressed many topics, but the keynote speaker was a Canadian missionary who discussed the importance of putting Christ in the center of one's family. This talk also outlined the various responsibilities and obligations that men and women have in the context of marriage. The Canadian missionary discussed the problems that may emerge in the context of the family including marital infidelities, domestic abuse, and unruly children. He asserted that once Christ is placed in the center of familial life, it is possible to eliminate these problems.

Diandra told me that many aspects of this conference resonated with her own beliefs and she agreed with its message. However, when I asked her about her views on gender ideologies within the Bible, this is what she said.

*The Bible tells us that husbands should respect their wives, and women are subject to the authority of their husbands (stap aninit long man).\(^{24}\) But I don't think that women are beneath their husbands—we are more or less at the same level (laughter). I interpret the Bible in this way because nowadays, God has given

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\(^{23}\) The Baptist Church often subsidizes the costs of airfare, but women are still required to come up with significant amounts of money. They raise extra funds through fundraising initiatives, which include selling garden produce, material goods, and handicrafts.

\(^{24}\) Diandra was discussing a verse from the Bible found in Galatians 6.
women the same level of knowledge as men. We receive education in schools, and also study the Bible in depth.

But when men read the Bible, they interpret it differently. They always say, “wives must follow their husbands, all of the time—no exceptions.” While the Bible does acknowledge that wives are subject to their husband’s authority, it is important for men to also listen to women. Before, men thought that women had no voice and that all of the time we must listen to what they say. This was what it was like before Christianity and after it as well.

More recently, attitudes have started to change with the recognition that men and women are equal. Men should hear and listen to what their wives have to say, but women and children must also listen to their husbands or fathers as well.

Diandra’s interpretation emphasizes the importance of mutual respect between spouses, rather than subordination. This relates to the “Pentecostal Gender Paradox” discussed by Bernice Martin (2003) that addresses why women are drawn to Pentecostal and charismatic forms of Christianity despite the seemingly rigid gender ideologies that they propagate. Martin (2003:54) argues that Christianity establishes a “way of life which decisively shifts the domestic and religious priorities in a direction that benefits women and children while morally restraining the traditional autonomy of the male and the selfish or irresponsible exercise of masculine power.” As such, women are often attracted to charismatic and Pentecostal forms of Christianity precisely because of the emphasis placed on the family, and the high value bestowed upon women’s roles. Men are expected to fulfill parallel obligations in the family as fathers and husbands and as such, they have been domesticated and returned to the home (Martin 2003).

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25 Male enrollment in the Tekin Baptist Highschool is higher than females, demonstrating that some structural inequalities persist.
Through Diandra’s statement, it is evident that Christian ideologies pertaining to gender are not necessarily relevant in terms of hierarchy between a husband and wife, but more so between God and the family as a unit. Therefore, women view themselves as primarily subject to God, rather than their husbands.

**Fredah**

I met Fredah in Mt. Hagen at the BUPNG headquarters, where she serves as a *leader meri* for the Min Baptist Union Women’s Ministry. Through her position, she oversees the range of activities that Baptist women engage in throughout the entire Min region. She is a woman in her early thirties and is from Eliptaman Valley, which is north of Telefomin Station. Fredah’s position has provided her with significant travel opportunities, and in the near future she will represent the interests of Baptist women from PNG at the World Baptist Conference in Hawaii.

Much of our discussion detailed the range of opportunities open to women through their involvement in church groups, and how various projects are implemented. However, we also discussed the reasons why women tend to be drawn towards collective engagement through church groups and exhibit higher rates of involvement in the church. Furthermore, why do men lack their own ministry in the Baptist Church through which they can strive towards similar goals? Fredah told me that the answers to these questions lie within the Bible itself. She stated that women were the first to find and care for Jesus after his

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26 Interview conducted in English.
resurrection and also noted how he was born through women.\textsuperscript{27} Through this example, she implied that women are attracted to collective activities precisely because of their maternal instincts and empathy they feel towards others.

\textit{Gloria}

Diandra and Fredah’s examples illustrate how women feel empowered through their engagements with Christianity. They interpret biblical passages in ways that are consistent with the high value they place on roles that are regarded as female. The next example will discuss the experiences of Gloria, an Oksapmin woman in her mid-forties whom I met in Tabubil. Like Diandra, she has also served as an executive member of the Tekin Baptist Women’s Association. During her visits to Tabubil, Gloria stays in the urban settlements along with her kin where she conducts ministry work. From the perspectives of those from Oksapmin, urban settlements are considered to be hotbeds of sin. The high prevalence of drug use and alcohol in settlements underpins the numerous social issues that emerge there, which are exacerbated by the high levels of social diversity that can ignite ethnic tensions.\textsuperscript{28}

Gloria does her part to help those who live in Tabubil’s urban settlements by leading a prayer group once a week when she visits town. However, her stori

\textsuperscript{27} In this example, Fredah was referencing Mark 14: 40-41 in the Bible.

\textsuperscript{28} Individuals frequently remarked upon these conflicts during my time in Oksapmin. Very often, ethnic conflicts were said to result from ethnic tensions between Highlanders and other urban settlement dwellers. This is exemplified by a fight that broke out between the Tari (from the Southern Highlands Province) and Min populations in the Wagbin settlement, which lies on the outskirts of Tabubil, while I was in Oksapmin. Some Tari were discovered to be harbouring guns, which resulted in their forced removal from the settlement by the Min inhabitants.
also illustrates how gender roles are shifting in the context of the Baptist Church. While not a pastor, Gloria is able to address the congregation directly by speaking in front of the church. Sometimes she gives personal testimonies, while other times she reads passages from the Bible and discusses their moral lessons.

\textit{Before, we were told that women are not allowed to stand in front of the parish and autim tok (preach). However, around the year 2000, BUPNG changed their minds and women can now preach in the front of the church.}

This is important because women have important insight into the challenges that other women face—marriage problems, bearing illegitimate children, the loss of a spouse, difficulties obtaining money for school fees, and so on. It makes no sense for a man to counsel a woman, much in the same way that it makes no sense for a woman to counsel a man.

\textit{When we autim tok, we address the issues that women face. Because of this, women can approach us with their worries, and those who sin can confess and convert.}

Gloria’s statement is of interest since autim tok tends to be viewed as an exclusively male form of expression. In terms of traditional interactional norms among the Min, women were less likely than men to speak in public, particularly in mixed-gender settings (Robbins 2012). This is consistent with the experiences of older generations of Oksapmin women who did not wish to undertake formal leadership positions, as explained in Chapter 2. Even though men continue to monopolize these positions today, Gloria’s example demonstrates how women are beginning to pursue prominent roles as individuals in the context of the church.
Understanding the Agency of Women

Together, the *storis* of these women demonstrate how Christianity enables women to achieve a form of empowerment that diverges significantly from feminist movements in the West. In contrast to Western notions of feminism, Pacific women’s movements view the “self as a *collectivity* rather than an *individual*” (Jolly 1996:183, emphasis added). I argue that through their engagements in church groups, women are able to enact agency in collective terms, which are consistent with notions female empowerment found throughout the Pacific.

During my time in Oksapmin, I came to understand the agency that women enact through their involvement in church groups in terms of notions of relational selfhood. Melanesian personhood is constructed in relational terms, which contrast with notions of possessive individualism that view the person as a discrete entity that exists prior to social relationships (Strathern 1988). As such, Melanesian persons are “frequently constructed as the plural and composite site of the relationships that produce them” and as a result, Melanesians become persons through the relationships that they enter into with others (Strathern 1988:13).

Here, I will contrast my understanding of the agency that women enact in church groups, with Wardlow’s (2006) characterization of agency among *pasinja meri* (mobile women who exchange sex for money), which also theorizes female agency in terms of relational selfhood. Both examples demonstrate how female modes of social action are expressed in relational terms; however, Wardlow
(2006) and I reach profoundly different conclusions. Wardlow (2002b, 2006) represents modernity as beyond the reach of most women, while my insights demonstrate how women are able to strive towards a vision of modernity that is in line with their Christian sensibilities.

Wardlow explains the actions of pasinja meri as instances of negative agency, where women refuse to cooperate with gendered expectations by “abandoning or refusing marriage, appropriating their own sexuality, selling it, and keeping the resources acquired for themselves” (Wardlow 2006:151). These responses are attributed to the cultural constraints placed upon women such as bridewealth, which limit the realization of female solidarity. As a result, pasinja meri enact agency in individualistic, rather than collective terms. By becoming pasinja meri, the actions of these women work to sever the relationships they have with their kin.

This contrasts with the actions carried out by women through church groups that extend relational sociality by filling in the gaps where kin obligations fail. By doing so, women’s groups seek to reestablish relationships through the promotion of a Christian community that bonds individuals together under God. These relationships are fostered through the provision of material and social support to those who lack stable kin relations including widows, divorced individuals, and abandoned children. By performing these actions, women are able to reconcile the positive and negative aspects of modernity through notions of Christian fellowship.
The Baptist Women’s Ministry

Women’s fellowship groups in Oksapmin find their strength in numbers as well as the numerous connections that are facilitated by the institutional structure of the Baptist Church. At the local scale, each Baptist congregation has its own fellowship group for women, and here I will be drawing upon my experiences with the Baptist Women’s Fellowship located in Tekin. In Tekin, the Women’s Fellowship meets on a pre-determined day, which is scheduled during the week. During fellowship meetings, collective activities are planned such as outreach events\textsuperscript{29} and training initiatives. In addition they hold a service, which is often directed by the leader meris who read passages from the Bible. Together the fellowship members will discuss biblical lessons and engage in periods of prayer together.

*The Power of Prayer*

For Baptist women, prayer is particularly important since it helps develop an individual’s personal relationship with God and is also considered a way to effect change. In Tekin, the Women’s Fellowship holds a prayer day on the first day of every month, where they pray together in order to address local, national and international issues. The topics that the Women’s Fellowship address are pre-determined by a list of prayer points sent from BUPNG; however, fellowship members can also suggest topics that they have heard of through the media or from their discussions with others. Together, the women pray for countries that

\textsuperscript{29} Through outreach events, women travel to areas throughout Oksapmin, and in the Min region, in order to spread Good News.
are afflicted by wars, poverty, and governmental corruption. Their prayers are also directed towards those who are considered less fortunate, including widows, orphans, and those who are afflicted by illnesses such as HIV/Aids.

Very often, the topics that women address through prayer overlap with issues that are relevant to the context of PNG as a nation, and therefore also have salience within their own lives. Fellowship members told me that the purpose of these prayers was not only to reduce the impact that these issues have on people’s lives, but to also provide salvation to larger collectivities such as nations, and by extension the world. According to Oksapmin women, the expressed purpose of this is to ensure that others would be directed to heaven. This relates to Eriksen’s (2009) discussion of prayer as a spiritual form of protest, which is employed by female members of charismatic and Pentecostal denominations in order to initiate positive change. Through prayer, women are thereby able to directly challenge larger spheres of power, engaging in a form of social critique (see Eriksen 2009). Furthermore, through prayer, women are drawn into the network of a broader Christian community as exemplified by the World Prayer Day held by the Baptist World Alliance every year on November first. On World Prayer Day, Baptist members from all over the world address common topics through prayer, which serves to further reinforce their participation in a world-wide Christian community.

Projects Implemented by Baptist Women

In this section, I will outline some of the initiatives that have been implemented in Oksapmin through the Women’s Fellowship. These projects
demonstrate how women are able to draw upon the connections facilitated by the structure of the Baptist Church, which link women in rural and urban locales. While BUPNG is the central hub that provides local women’s fellowships with funding, support, and other resources, women are given considerable agency in deciding how to implement projects in order to best address local concerns. As such, BUPNG does not aim to implement projects in a top-down manner, but rather in terms of lateral links that enable women to draw upon regional and national networks for support.

**The Baptist Women’s Resource Center**

The Baptist Women’s Fellowship of Oksapmin has initiated several ongoing projects in the area, including plans for a Women’s Resource Center that were initiated during my time there. The Women’s Resource Center is designed to serve as a central hub for the activities carried out by Baptist women in Oksapmin. Located in Tekin, it will provide Baptist women with a space to conduct training and educational programs that address women’s needs. Furthermore, the Resource Center will provide a potential source of income for the Women’s Fellowship groups in Oksapmin, since others can rent out the space for events. This example demonstrates how the Baptist Women’s Fellowship evokes notions of community that bring women together in order to implement projects with common interests in mind (i.e. McDougall 2003).

In the context of this project, leader meris acted as important figures during the planning process. These women wrote project proposals, which they sent to the Baptist Union Women’s Alliance (BUWA) in Mt. Hagen for approval,
which is situated under the umbrella of BUPNG. *Leader meris* therefore acted as liaisons between women in Oksapmin and BUWA by ensuring that the opinions and concerns of local women were represented during the planning process. Furthermore, *leader meris* such as Gloria also travelled from Oksapmin to town in order to seek donations from business owners in the form of money and supplies. However, Baptist women in Oksapmin also contributed to fundraising initiatives. Each Baptist woman in Oksapmin was asked to contribute a small amount of money to the project, in order to top up the funding that was provided by international donors and the PNG Sustainable Development Program. This example demonstrates how church groups enable women to engage in collective action by channeling money into communal projects through fundraising (i.e. McDougall 2003, Eriksen 2005). In the process of doing so, the products of individual labour are circulated, leading to the creation of a broader social whole (Eriksen 2005). In these terms, BUPNG provides assistance to groups, not individuals. This is meant to provide women with a sense of ownership over collective projects, and remain invested throughout the process. As stated by Fredah, the message that the BUPNG aims to promote is “it is not a Baptist thing, it is your thing.”

**A Note on Church Groups and International Aid**

The Baptist Church has been awarded considerable funds from international donors in order to implement projects for women. While the Baptist

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30 Together, the women plan to fundraise 10,000 kina ($5,000 CDN). This amounts to a donation of 10 kina per woman ($5 CDN).
Church has served as an alternative structure to the state in Oksapmin for decades, the marriage between Christianity and international aid organizations is a more recent development that helps reinforce the idea that charismatic Christianity “enables and encourages the development of a global or ‘outward looking’ focus for rural Melanesians” (Dundon 2011:5). The Baptist Church provides an organized structure that is in many ways more transparent and efficient than that of the PNG state. As a result, it is not surprising that churches are increasingly viewed as alternative pathways to channel international aid towards the community level through local churches. In Oksapmin, this serves to further reinforce the position of the Baptist Church as the primary provider of important programs and services that address local needs.

Here, I want to highlight an important point that distinguishes the Baptist Church from the smaller Pentecostal denominations in Oksapmin. Pastor Teklah Ricks, of the Rhema congregation, expressed frustration over the difficulties she faced as she attempted to secure funds in order to repair her church. This is because the Rhema Church lacks the formal organizational structure characteristic of the Baptist Church and also has a smaller membership base in Oksapmin. As a result, Teklah depends solely on the contributions of her

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31 In Oksapmin, Baptist projects have been funded by a variety of aid organizations. The Tekin radio station received funding from the Canadian International Development Agency. The Women’s Resource Center is funded in part by the Australian International Development Agency. Women’s Fellowship groups also receive cloth for sewing projects and other supplies, through funding received by the New Zealand International Development Agency.
congregation members in order to implement large projects such as the repair of her church.

**Other BUPNG Initiatives in Oksapmin**

McDougall (2003:62) notes that the goals of women’s fellowship have “little to do with either formal politics or planning development projects.” This point contrasts with the projects taken on by the Baptist Women’s Fellowship in Oksapmin, which often have specific developmental aims in mind. Very often, the inclusion of developmental aims serve as preconditions for the receipt of funding from international donors. As a result, many of the training initiatives in Oksapmin are geared towards enhancing the self-sufficiency and economic status of women by providing alternative avenues for earning income. For example, Oksapmin women have recently begun to take part in a handicraft cooperative that is based in Mt. Hagen. Through this, Oksapmin women make *bilums* (string bags) that they send to BUPNG, which are in turn sold at the Jackson International Airport in Port Moresby and on the Internet in order to reach an international market.\(^{32}\) This program seems to have been implemented with limited success in Oksapmin, but has been much more lucrative in Mt. Hagen.\(^{33}\)

Other initiatives that aim to increase the number of economic opportunities open to women include training programs that focus on sewing, making peanut

\(^{32}\) The website for this cooperative is www.hagenhandicrafts.com

\(^{33}\) The bilum initiative in Oksapmin appears to be less successful due to less demand for Oksapmin styles of bilums, which are constructed of natural fibers. This contrasts with bilum styles in the Highlands region, which are more colourful due to their use of synthetic fiber.
butter, and printing t-shirts. Baptist women in Oksapmin viewed these initiatives in positive terms, although they acknowledged that they faced difficulties accumulating the supplies that are necessary for sustaining these initiatives such as sewing machines and cloth. Despite this, it is evident that the importance of these initiatives does not solely lie in their ability to provide women with extra money. While these projects are implemented with varying degrees of success at the local level, they remain important since women are still provided with opportunities that they would not otherwise have.

The SDAs

In Oksapmin, the SDA Women’s Ministry and Women’s Welfare Group, operate as part of the Personal Ministry Department. The Personal Ministry Department also consists of a youth ministry called Pathfinders, as well as a ministry for men called the Good Samaritans. Here, I want to stress the importance of recognizing the organized approach that the SDAs take towards church work, through the Personal Ministry Department. I argue that the SDAs collectively perform actions that are geared towards expanding their membership base through the recruitment of new converts. While there is room in this model for SDA women to attend to issues that specifically address females, the units of the Personal Ministry Department work together as an organized front.

Here, I will discuss the different forms of social action that SDA members enact through their involvement across the units. Like the Women’s Baptist Fellowship, SDA members seek to help those who face difficulties in their lives
by providing material, spiritual, and social support. They perform these actions in two directions: in-reach, which refers to support given to individuals who are already members of the SDA Church, and outreach, in reference to support directed towards the broader non-SDA community. Through outreach, SDA members target individuals who are facing moments of crisis in their lives. The SDA call this mode of social action witnessing, which involves tending to those who are facing problems such as periods of economic hardship, a death in the family, or illness. By directly targeting the individuals who need help the most, SDA members contribute substantially to the well-being of the overall community; they also gain new converts by doing so.

**Christina**

The following story touches upon a number of the key themes discussed above by demonstrating how the support provided by SDA members through witnessing can result in conversion. Here, Christina describes the series of events that led her to become a member of the SDA Church.

*When I was a child, my parents divorced and because my mother was unable to support me by herself, I went to live with an SDA family. I was raised a Baptist, so I was unfamiliar with SDA beliefs and practices. However, from living with this family, I eventually started to learn about their ways. They told me that I wasn’t allowed to eat pig, but my mother would sometimes bring it to me anyways. I would hide it, so that no one would catch me; however, one time I was caught by my adoptive family. In response, they gave me a Bible verse to read from Leviticus (11:7), which said that pig was unclean. I started to think about whether I wanted to join my adoptive family in the SDA Church through baptism. But I was still very young at this time, so I wasn’t very committed. Sometimes I attended church with them, while other times I didn’t.*
I finally decided to join the SDA Church after I experienced a serious illness, where I had to go to Tabubil in order to receive treatment at the town hospital. While I was in the hospital, I was visited by SDA members who stayed by my side and prayed for my health. They provided me with lots of support during this period. After an extended stay in the hospital, I eventually received my test results that indicated that my illness was subsiding.

I thought to myself: the Seventh Day Adventists helped me overcome my illness and as a result I am no longer sick. I returned to Oksapmin, and soon after I was baptized.

While Christina’s experience highlights how witnessing can initiate conversion, I want to discuss why women tend to be more reluctant to become Seventh Day Adventists. These reasons contrast with the examples provided in Chapter 3, where I highlighted why men tend to be drawn to the SDA Church in higher numbers than the other denominations. Since SDA doctrines prohibit the consumption of pig, women are also not allowed to raise and sell them. This is viewed as a constraint by non-SDA women since raising pigs is a major source of money. While SDA women are able to work around this issue by raising cassowaries instead, the sale of pigs provides significantly more income.\(^3^4\) The SDA Church mitigates these effects by giving women money, which is received from the contributions that are collected from parishioners during Sabbath services. In terms of addressing the needs of women, this example demonstrates how the SDA Church focuses on directly providing economic resources to women, whereas the Baptist Church initiates projects with the explicit aim of enhancing their self-sufficiency. This is viewed with considerable ambivalence by women.

\(^{3^4}\) Pigs can be sold for upwards of 1,000 kina (approximately $500 Canadian), while the highest prices that cassowaries garner is 400 kina (approximately $200 Canadian).
some Baptists who view these actions as a form of gris (bribery). This ambivalence is partly to do with the fact that as the SDA Church expands its membership base in Oksapmin, it does so at the expense of the Baptist Church.

Serah

Serah is eighteen years old, and when I met her she was pregnant with her first child. Since her husband currently attends college in town, she depends on the support provided to her by the SDA Church. In many ways, her story mirrors the problems that many young women face throughout Oksapmin. She was forced to leave school in grade four because she was unable to gather enough money for school fees. As a result, Serah took it upon herself to find ways to earn money so she could further her studies. She sold garden produce, wild birds and puppies, eventually earning enough money to return to school. She pursued her education up until grade six, when she was forced to leave school again due to financial circumstances. Since there are not many employment opportunities in the village context, especially for women, the money she receives on a weekly basis from the Women’s Welfare fund helps her with food and living expenses. Serah’s example thereby demonstrates the different approaches that the SDA and Baptist Church take towards addressing women’s issues. The assistance provided by the SDA Church is directed towards individuals by mobilizing a strongly collective organizational form. This contrasts with the Baptist Church, which employs a more diffuse personalistic approach by drawing upon networks in order to help groups.

35 Serah receives 110 kina (approximately $55 CDN) per week for food and living expenses.
Conclusion

I began this chapter with a *stori* that highlighted the reactions that Baptist women had expressed towards a man who referred to them as *meri nating bilong ples*—women who counted for nothing. In conclusion, I want to reflect upon another example that contrasts the agency that women experience through Christianity, with the limitations that are placed upon their agency outside the context of the church.

By all accounts, Ruth is a woman who seemed to have achieved the status of a *leader meri*, not necessarily through her actions within the Baptist Church, but because of the important political roles she served in the local government. She was elected as a Women’s Representative for the Oksapmin LLG for a period of four years. During her occupancy of this position she made frequent trips to Vanimo, the capital of Sandaun Province in order to attend workshops organized by the provincial government. Some of the workshops she attended were for the Basic Education Development Program, which was funded by the Australian International Development Agency and aimed to enhance the political standing of women through their inclusion in planning processes.

Despite her high level of accomplishments, Ruth referred to herself as a *meri nating bilong ples*, in response to my questions about the activities that she engages in now. This was a statement that I interpreted as self-depreciating, with perhaps a hint of irony. However, as I pressed further, she began to illustrate the work she currently conducts as a member of the Baptist Women’s Fellowship in
Tekin, where she is heavily involved, and has recently gained certification as a sewing and handicrafts instructor for Baptist training events in Oksapmin.

By juxtaposing Ruth’s example with the example provided at the outset of this paper, I intend to reassert the importance of the church in giving women opportunities that they would not otherwise have. However, I also think it is important to acknowledge the very real issues that women continue to face due to their relative lack of political participation and representation in the government. I interpret Ruth’s statement as indicative of a frustration over the lack of political opportunities for women, a notion that can be internalized given their relative lack of political power. However, the initiatives provided to women through their engagements with Christianity not only introduce notions of gender equity; they also provide opportunities for community participation, discussion and decision-making. It is evident that Christianity has the potential to cultivate new generations of women who can become not only leaders in the church, but by taking on public roles in the broader community as well.
5

CONCLUSION: Visions for the Future

In this thesis, I have traced the trajectory of Christianity in Oksapmin from the arrival of the Baptist Mission in the early 1960s to the more recent arrival of Pentecostal denominations over the past fifteen years. Throughout this thesis, I have also provided examples that demonstrate how Christianity has achieved its centrality in community life through the actions undertaken by local people, particularly women. I have argued that Christianity enables women to reconcile the positive and negative aspects of modernity as they strive towards a vision of a community that is in line with their Christian sensibilities.

In concluding this thesis, I want to elaborate on the future of Christianity in Oksapmin, or more specifically, the future-oriented outlook that I was continually struck by during my time there. By doing so, I aim to draw together a number of key themes that emerged in this thesis while also addressing a vision of the community that they see themselves living in.

Revelations

I begin by discussing the Prayer Warriors, a group of women who work together to banish traditional spirits from the landscape, pray for world issues, but are also able to make predictions about future events through revelations.

36 For example, wars, poverty, natural disasters, political crises throughout the world etc.
they receive from the Holy Spirit (see also Dundon 2007). Initially a group of five women, there are now twelve members in Oksapmin. As they were praying together, one of the Prayer Warriors experienced a revelation concerning the oil prospecting that is currently being conducted in Oksapmin.\(^{37}\) The Oksapmin expressed high hopes and expectations surrounding this oil project since it would provide increased access to money, goods and services. Many men, and some women, were able to gain work with the company.\(^{38}\) This project could therefore, potentially alleviate many of the problems Oksapmin faces as a rural area.

While the Prayer Warriors prayed in order to ensure the success of this project, one of the women experienced a vision that God would close (pasim) the mountain and prevent the Oksapmin from accessing the oil unless the Christian community was strengthened. Due to the influx of money and outsiders as a result of the project, the Prayer Warriors perceived sin to be rampant in Oksapmin, a sentiment that appeared to be widely shared by others during my time there. Those who worked for the prospecting company were not attending church, which was negatively affecting the moral strength of the Christian community as a whole. The Prayer Warriors invited the oil company workers to visit them to tok sori (confess their sins), so they would not compromise the moral strength of the Oksapmin community.

\(^{37}\) This project was currently in its exploratory stages during my time in Oksapmin, and when I left they were just beginning seismic testing. The oil exploration project was being undertaken by a Chinese resource developer called Honghua, which was operating as a sub-contractor for a larger company called Media Karya Sentosa.

\(^{38}\) Men obtained work as security guards, clearing bush for the seismic lines, and reading the seismic testing results. Women were able to gain jobs as cooks for the company workers.
Moral Outcomes

On one level, this revelation highlights a level of ambivalence that many Oksapmin people had concerning the success of the project. While people desired the access to employment, goods and services, they lamented that it would lead to the emergence of sin, hence more social problems. Even though sin ultimately comes from inside an individual, the cumulative effects of sin can hinder development by reducing the collective strength of the Christian community. While God blessed the Oksapmin with oil, people were failing the spiritual challenges that were designed to test their strength as Christians. They were using money in ways that were antithetical to Christian conduct, rather than redirecting it towards socially productive ends. As a result, the Prayer Warriors revealed that the Oksapmin would not be able to receive future benefits from this project unless they made reforms to strengthen the Christian community.

Blessings

By collectively living their lives in accordance with Christian principles, people in Oksapmin told me that all their needs and desires could be fulfilled in the form of blessings from God. Blessings can refer to projects that promote development such as oil exploration, or the high school that was recently built in Tekin. But, blessings can also emerge in the context of the family or within the life of an individual. Blessings, like development, are said to start from changes that occur at the individual level, emerging inside a person if they act in
accordance with Christian sensibilities. The Oksapmin therefore have much to risk as a result of backsliding since sin is associated with a lack of progress, or regression. In Oksapmin, this has a gendered dimension since men, particularly those with access to money, are more prone to backsliding. However, the other side of the gendered dimension is also evident: the Prayer Warriors worked to actively secure the strength of the Christian community as a whole so the Oksapmin could receive the various blessings that would result from oil development.

Passport to Heaven

I want to end by reflecting upon Jorgensen’s statement concerning the ability of charismatic Christianity to provide opportunities for redressing the “sense of marginality many Melanesians experience in the contemporary world” (Jorgensen 2005:452). I want to juxtapose this characterization with a Baptist service I attended when two missionaries from New Zealand came to preach. During the service, the missionary held up his passport in front of the congregation displaying it to the parishioners. He stated that the Bible is one’s passport to heaven.

This sense of redress comes from the outward looking focus of charismatic Christianity that provides membership in a worldwide Christian community that transcends the boundaries of the nation-state, but also provides local, regional and national networks in the context of PNG. I argue that this outward looking focus enables a sense of redress from the perceived marginality
that those in remote people may experience. The *storis* of women that I discussed throughout this thesis demonstrate how they are not premodern, rural, traditional, or less cosmopolitan than men. In Oksapmin, women use Christianity in order to implement the change they wish to see and construct a larger world for themselves in the process.
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Wardlow, Holly

Weiner, A.B.

Wilde, Charles

Young, Michael W.
Appendix I: Methods

The methodology employed in this thesis involved established anthropological research strategies such as participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and the collection of kinship data. Participant observation helped me make contacts in the field and helped me refine the questions that I asked participants during interviews. Semi-structured interviews provide fixed starting points but are open-ended and this allowed participants to control the direction of the conversation. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were important avenues for clarifying and expanding on things that I observed in everyday life.

In total I interviewed twenty-one individuals in-depth, consisting of seven men and fourteen women although I had informal conversations with many more. Most of the interviews were carried out with individuals; however, some interviews were conducted in small groups consisting of three to four individuals. I interviewed a wide range of men and women who represented different age groups and therefore had diverse personal histories. In particular, this allowed me to understand the changing roles that women are taking on through their participation in the church.

During the course of an interview, questions focused on personal travel histories, conversion narratives, important life experiences framed by Christian beliefs, and narratives concerning the dynamic of social relations between distant kin. Personal travel histories provided insight into how individuals are able to
draw upon the networks facilitated by the church as well as the dynamics of migration. Since conversion narratives discuss profound moments of transformation within an individual's life, they were integral for understanding backsliding narratives and the politics of conversion. Kinship data helped me keep track of the relationships between research participants, but also allowed me to understand the changing context of gender relations in Oksapmin that are largely influenced by the patterns of migration.

I spent a total of six weeks in Oksapmin, a week in Tabubil, and a week in Mt. Hagen. The majority of my time was spent with Baptists since I lived with families who were members of the Baptist Church at Oksapmin Station and in Sambate. At Oksapmin Station, I stayed with a Baptist woman along with her children and in Sambate I lived with a Baptist pastor and his family. Throughout my time in Oksapmin, I stayed in close contact with SDA members as well. I found that splitting my time between the Baptists and the SDAs was productive since they hold services on different days. This allowed me to maximize the use of my time in the field since I was able to attend as many church services as possible.

Attending church services provided a point of entry into the field and allowed me to expand my network of contacts. While most interviews were conducted with lay congregation members, I also interviewed those with formal authority in the church setting such as pastors and missionaries. This was done in order to engage those with formal authority in an ongoing dialogue throughout the course of research, but also helped clarify the doctrinal and institutional
differences between the different denominations. Furthermore, these interviews helped me understand the roles that women play in the church setting, as individuals and as members of church groups.

Oksapmin is a trilingual context. Some individuals are fluent in English, but the majority of people in Oksapmin are bilingual in Tok Pisin and Oksapmin language. Over the course of my research, three interviews were conducted in English. An additional four interviews were carried out in Oksapmin language with the aid of an interpreter who spoke Tok Pisin. This was necessary since some individuals of older generations are not fluent in Tok Pisin. The remaining fourteen interviews were conducted in Tok Pisin, which I studied prior to my arrival in PNG. Consent was gained by reciting a script for oral consent. I tape recorded interviews with the permission of research participants, but when interviews were not recorded I took detailed notes. Pseudonyms are employed throughout this thesis unless the research participant gave permission for their real name to be used.
Appendix II: Ethics Approval

Use of Human Participants - Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Dan Jorgensen
Review Number: 181965
Review Level: Full Board
Approved Local Adult Participants: 0
Approved Local Minor Participants: 0
Protocol Title: Women’s Engagements with Christianity in Okaapmin, Papua New Guinea
Department & Institution: Anthropology, University of Western Ontario
Sponsor: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council

Ethics Approval Date: July 07, 2011  Expiry Date: September 30, 2012

Documents Reviewed & Approved & Documents Received for Information:

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This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMREB’s periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information. If you require an updated approval notice prior to that time you must request it using the UWO Updated Approval Request Form.

Members of the NMREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NMREB.

The Chair of the NMREB is Dr. Riley Hinson. The UWO NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00006941.

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

Janice Sutherland
(jsutherl@uwo.ca)

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# Curriculum Vitae

**Name:** Angela MacMillan  

**Post-secondary Education and Degrees:**  

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<td>B.A. (Hon)</td>
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**Honours and Awards:**  

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