

AIDS and ‘building a wall’ around Christian country in rural Papua New Guinea

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This paper explores an ongoing dialogue about Christianity in light of the recent influx of HIV and AIDS into the villages of the Gogodala of Western Province, Papua New Guinea. I argue that a suggestion by a woman in late 2004 to ‘build a wall’ around the Gogodala region in Western Province in order to stop or slow the spread of HIV/AIDS reflects a recent concern with the sustainability of this rural Christian community, referred to in English as ‘Christian country’. Understanding AIDS to be a threat posed largely from outsiders, whether Papua New Guinean or European, sections of these primarily village-based communities aim to create both a physical and metaphorical boundary between themselves and outsiders. At present, local prevention and intervention strategies concerning HIV and AIDS focus on conservative, evangelical narratives about the preservation of the principles and practices of Christian country, through the repudiation of unrestrained sexuality, for example, which is believed to be increasingly prevalent not only in their own area but throughout urban Papua New Guinea. A growing divide between rural and urban Gogodala, then, has become a major part of the local dialogue about AIDS and represents significant contestation over the practices and ideational basis of Christian country.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I explore an ongoing discussion about the nature and constitution of Christianity and community among the Gogodala of Papua New Guinea (PNG), which is exemplified in the local concept ‘Christian country’. I do so through an exploration of recent concerns over the spread of HIV and AIDS through Gogodala villages in the Western Province as well as in urban enclaves of Gogodala migrants in Port Moresby, and Daru in particular. I have been conducting fieldwork in this area since 1995 and, in late 2004, while researching local understandings and perceptions of HIV and AIDS, I attended a meeting of the Evangelical Church of Papua New Guinea (ECPNG) Women’s Fellowship. Held weekly, such meetings bring together women who attend the ECPNG Church in their ward or village. I had been invited to the meeting as I wanted to ask the women some questions about HIV/AIDS and they were more willing to talk in a group than individually.

At this meeting, I asked a series of questions. To one question, ‘Do you know of any way to stop the transmission of HIV?’, I was offered several suggestions, many of which focused on marital fidelity and sexual monogamy (cf. Dundon 2007a). One woman, however, responded with a comment that she had offered

earlier to a representative of the National AIDS Council (NAC) during a workshop held in the area. She said: 'this is sort of like a possible way, sort of like putting a boundary [around the area] or something like that. If a worker [is] coming to this place from another place, [Balimo] ward councillors would be able to push on this [idea so that] that if she or he comes to work here, his or her blood [is] tested first'. Many in the Church agreed with her, and there was much nodding of heads and murmurs of consent. She went on to say that many of the women in her ward, and others in the wider ECPNG, had come to the conclusion that 'building a wall' around 'this Gogodala area' was the only sensible solution to the influx and spread of HIV and AIDS.

This recent interest in constructing literal and metaphorical boundaries between Gogodala villages in Western Province and their regional and national neighbours is not new, despite its articulation in this comparatively 'new' context—one that is reflected throughout the country as Papuan New Guineans begin to conceptualise and articulate their experiences and understandings of the AIDS epidemic (cf. Beer 2008; Butt & Eves 2008; Haley 2008; McPherson 2008; Wardlow 2008). While this is marked particularly by an emphasis on exclusion and distinctions between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', for example, and may be based on local or regional conflicts and distinctions, for those in Gogodala villages it reflects a growing sense of 'boundedness' that has been expressed in various ways but is particularly evident in the self-designation of 'Christian country'. Since the Unevangelised Fields Mission (UFM) first came to the area in the 1930s, Gogodala have considered themselves a Christian community, defined by certain practices as well as an ancestral history that sets them apart from their neighbours and other Christian groups in their region and nation (cf. Dundon 2002a, 2004). But while this sense of community has been recently defined in light of the spread of HIV/AIDS in terms increasingly of exclusive and more 'solid' boundaries (like a wall), like Cohen (1985: 12) I suggest that these boundaries are not necessarily fixed or 'objectively apparent' and 'may be perceived in rather different terms, not only by people on the same side'. Such boundaries between inside and outside have shifted over time and in different contexts and, for the Gogodala, have been indelibly shaped by their close residential and 'imagined community' with UFM missionaries and the wider Christian world (cf. Anderson 1983: 15).

The notion of Christian country came into being over a period of time, but originated in a close residential relationship with the UFM, a group of expatriate missionaries from a non-denominational but evangelical persuasion, primarily from Australia and the United Kingdom, who established mission stations in the area in the 1930s. In the contemporary context, this is spoken about as the time when 'the spirits were sent away' and the Gogodala committed to a Christian *ela gi* or 'way of life'. By the 1940s and 1950s, male initiation rituals were no longer being performed and practices like polygamy, betelnut chewing, tobacco smoking and consumption of locally grown *i sika* or kava had largely lost their social significance (cf. Crawford 1981; Dundon 2004). In general terms, people embraced what they understood

to be a Christian lifestyle and followed the words and practices of not only the expatriate missionaries but also the growing number of local pastors and Gogodala missionaries sent to the southern highlands and Papuan plateau. In general terms, from the Gogodala perspective (and certainly from those in Western Province), a continuing commitment to the principles of the UFM (later the Asia Pacific Christian Mission, APCM, and since 2000, the Pioneers) and the Evangelical Church of Papua New Guinea (ECPNG, the indigenous Church that developed out of this relationship), has set them apart from not only their closest neighbours but most in contemporary PNG.

With the relatively recent influx of HIV/AIDS, referred to in Gogodala as *mele-sene bininapa gite tila gi*—literally, 'the sickness that has no medicine/cure'—there have been calls, largely from the villages, to renew a commitment to Christian country in general, to the Christian *ela gi* and, in particular, to the ECPNG Church and its hierarchy. Thus, early responses to the epidemic in this area of PNG focus on evangelical Christianity and an adherence to the principles and practices of a village-based Christian lifestyle as the primary means of the prevention of the transmission of HIV. Recent Gogodala discussions about AIDS, then, represent a growing divide between those who live in urban centres and the majority of Gogodala who populate the villages between the Fly and Aramia Rivers in Western Province.

CHRISTIAN COUNTRY: FROM CONSTITUTION TO CRISIS

This paper is based primarily on research among village-based Gogodala or those living in Balimo, a peri-urban District administrative centre in Western Province dominated by Gogodala speakers but also resident to various neighbouring groups as well as professionals, teachers, health officials and health workers from all over PNG. A distinction between those who live outside the Gogodala area or work and live in Balimo town, classified as urban-dwellers, and their village relatives, has been part of the Gogodala experience since the early 1900s when young men, in particular, left to join the pearling and *bêche-de-mer* industries to the south or plantations further afield. There is a small but significant group of expatriate Gogodala who are long term, in some cases second and third generation, residents of the national capital, Port Moresby. Of a population of over twenty-six thousand, however, only perhaps four thousand live either outside the area or in Balimo town. By far the majority, then, live in the thirty-five villages and mission or government stations between the Fly and Aramia Rivers in the Western Province of PNG and are reliant on the environment for their subsistence.

The early UFM missionaries chose Balimo and two other sites in the Gogodala area as their 'gateway to the Fly River' and the inner reaches of what became Western and Southern Highlands Provinces. From their perspective, Gogodala mission stations represented a more stable base from which to move into these northern and western areas than the original headquarters at Madiri Plantation on the southern banks of the Fly River (cf. Weymouth 1978). Albert Drysdale, the first UFM

staff member at Madiri in the 1930s, was attracted to the Gogodala workers at the plantation for their diligence and 'work ethic' (Prince & Prince 1991; Wilde 2004).¹ An early UFM mission focus was the value of hard work in the constitution of a local Christian lifestyle. Particular emphasis was placed on work in the gardens and sago swamps, the procurement of other forms of food, the construction of sturdy houses and village Churches, and the cleanliness of homes, clothes and bodies. Such practices were believed to produce strong, clean and healthy persons and villages, the embodiment of 'Christian morality' (Dundon 2002a: 146). A focus on subsistence, as opposed to ceremony and dance, cleanliness, and the care of children, village and Church, became important markers of early Christians. Proscriptions upon the consumption of certain substances like kava, tobacco and betelnut were also a significant aspect of what came to constitute the local Christian community. The consumption of locally grown or produced foods and products, from sago, coconuts, bananas and fish defined, and continues to define, Gogodala Christianity (Dundon 2004: 80). In contemporary village life, work, *oko*, is central and plays a significant role in the articulation and experience of Christian *ela gi* or 'way of life' (cf. Wilde 2003). Work is celebrated as the basis of village life, and the image of the villager, hard-working, strong and physically adept, was and is a central facet of Christian country (Dundon 2004: 77).

Early Gogodala Christians were encouraged to set themselves apart from others by their refusal to participate in ceremonies, feasts and dances, or to carve racing canoes, drums and other figures associated with male initiation rites that, until that time, had been a vital part of morality and the constitution of not only male persons and bodies, but the community as a whole. They became known for their reluctance to participate in any of these events, refusing to hunt for game, to fish or collect the precious sago grubs for ceremonial foods prepared at such times, or to carve the personal and communal objects demanded of men on these occasions. They refused to dance, men no longer grew tobacco in their gardens or traded for shells to make lime for chewing with *ema*—betelnut. And they stopped growing and consuming the local species of kava, *i sika*, that had been integral to both ceremonial occasions and more mundane interactions.² Many of these early Christians suffered fines of sago and punishments of extra cleaning duties in the village for failing to participate in dances and ceremonies, and there was great deal of initial resistance to the transformations inherent in Christianity (cf. Weymouth 1978; Dundon 2007a).

But although those who became Christians in the early years of mission contact were encouraged to embrace certain practices, the notion of Christian country, as an exclusive Christian community, did not enter the local lexicon until the 1970s and 1980s when the Gogodala experienced what become known as a 'cultural revival'. In the early 1970s, an Australian, Anthony Crawford, working to establish a collection of artefacts from various areas in PNG for the Art Advisory Board of Australia, came to the Balimo with over one hundred black and white photographs of Gogodala artefacts taken in the early colonial period (1900s–1940s) (Crawford

1976: 4–5). In his attempts to locate artworks like those depicted in the photographs, he initiated a great deal of local interest in carvings that had not been made for some time—many not since the 1930s. Missionaries with the UFM and early converts and Pastors had targeted these objects in their efforts to transform local practices and people in the early days at least. As a result, in the 1970s when Crawford arrived in Balimo, there was little in the way of artefacts to present to him and Crawford reported that he found little material for his collection (Crawford 1976: 5).

Enthusiasm generated by Crawford's arrival and talk of the display and sale of cultural artefacts resulted in a revival of certain carving and painting techniques, particularly those associated with clan designs or *gawa tao* in Balimo and several of the surrounding villages, activities that were subsequently funded by a grant from the newly formed National Cultural Council in Port Moresby. Within eighteen months, young carvers were producing quality carved and painted objects under the tutelage of elderly and knowledgeable clan men. After meetings with village leaders, it was decided that a traditional longhouse would be built to house these carvings and to showcase revived dance forms. By 1974, the Gogodala Cultural Centre (GCC) was complete and was opened that year by Chief Minister Michael Somare (who in the following year became the first Prime Minister of PNG). In a series of publications, letters and papers, Crawford and others proclaimed that the Gogodala had experienced a cultural revival, in which they had reclaimed their cultural heritage 'destroyed' by evangelical missionaries in the 1930s (see for example Crawford 1976, 1981; Beier 1975; Babadzan 1988).

Although for Crawford and many outside the area, including politicians at the time of national independence, the revival represented a return to or the triumph of culture in the face of cultural destruction, I argue that in the local context the revival did not substantiate a divide between custom or 'customary ways' and Christianity as some commentators suggested. Rather, the revival resulted in the crystallisation of Christian country—a designation that draws on both discourses of culture and Christianity (Dundon 2007a: 139). Thus, although the impetus for the revival and the Gogodala Cultural Centre slowed and interest waned with the departure of Crawford from Balimo and the increasing inability of staff at the GCC to market carved artefacts, the main legacy of the revival was a renewal of a local debate about the significance of evangelical Christianity. In this context, Christian country became in many ways the basis of a public Gogodala dialogue about the relationship between custom and Christianity.

In the mid-1990s, when I began my fieldwork in Balimo, the Gogodala overwhelmingly described themselves as Christians, with particular allegiance to the dominant evangelical and now national ECPNG. Few other Churches had gained a foothold in this area of PNG. The community presented, to the outsider at least, a seemingly united code of Christian behaviour, maintaining prohibitions on dancing in Church, and the consumption of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs like marijuana readily available in many areas in PNG. Carving had continued from the 1970s in a

limited form as the market for such artefacts had waned considerably, but the carvings that were produced were no longer perceived to present a challenge to the authority of the Church. Many argued at that time that 'other communities had not embraced Christianity with the same fervour, and continued to utilise magic, sorcery and other aspects of their past that the Gogodala had rejected' (Dundon 2002a: 218).

By the late 1990s, however, a crisis seemed to be looming with increased internal conflict about the continuing role of expatriate missionaries in the area and the future directives of the ECPNG. The development of the CEF or Christian Evangelical Fellowship, a Church registered in Port Moresby in the mid-1990s, represented a major challenge to the ECPNG. Established by a group of well-educated Gogodala residents in Port Moresby, it was brought to Balimo for the first convention in 1997. One of the founders was a former ECPNG Pastor and Chairperson, who held a bachelor of Divinity from Banz College. The CEF sought to challenge the supremacy of the ECPNG, as well as its long-standing relationship with the remaining members of the expatriate mission of the APCM/Pioneers. At the convention in 1997 held at the Council Chambers in Balimo, its founders introduced their new Church as the 'true Gogodala Church', for it had been registered as a religious institution while the ECPNG was simply a Property Trust of the APCM. Many gathered for the convention were shocked by this revelation and there was some feeling that the Gogodala community as a whole had been deceived (cf. Dundon 2002a). The CEF claimed a large support base in Port Moresby among the expatriate Gogodala population in the 1990s and, by the end of the decade, had made significant inroads into villages in Western Province. The founders of the CEF began also to publicly question the ongoing relationship between expatriate missionaries and the ECPNG, and argued that, as Papua New Guineans, the Gogodala should embrace a 'Melanesian' Church.³

The other factor that became increasingly significant in the middle of the 1990s was the presence of an American Seventh Day Adventist missionary and his family, who established themselves at a village on the Aramia River several kilometres to the north of the town of Balimo. It was a remarkable incident because it was the first time that an expatriate from another mission or Church had ever taken up residence in the Gogodala area. Although in the 1990s this missionary concentrated much of his effort in the village of Kotale, where he and his wife established a small SDA school near the Church building, his presence was felt as a distinct challenge to the dominance of both the ECPNG and the APCM. By 2000, a website called Gogodala.com had been established in which the SDA sought financial support for a push into the Gogodala area, arguing that the community still clung to its 'heathen past' (<http://www.gogodala.com>). The push into Gogodala villages received increased impetus after 2000, when two new SDA missionary families arrived to take over Kotale school and Church as well as establish a new base in Balimo. In 2004, the Balimo-based family was running a series of Bible and English language courses, opportunities no longer offered by the ECPNG except through the more

formal offices of the Mapodo Bible College, which focused primarily on the training of ECPNG pastors. The SDA project received vital financial and social support when a prominent Gogodala businessman, who later became a Member of Parliament and Minister in the national government, became a committed Seventh Day Adventist. He arranged for his large property in central Balimo to be made available to the SDA families and provided access to transportation, food and other supplies.

The last decade, then, has proven something of a challenge to the dominance of the ECPNG and the APCM in the constitution of the principles and practices of Christian country. Locals in Balimo and surrounding villages have become increasingly interested in these new expatriate mission families, particularly in light of the withdrawal of most of the former APCM and Pioneer missionaries from Balimo in recent years. There has been some speculation as to whether the SDA missionaries will seek to establish a medical centre of some sort, as the UFM originally did, or strengthen their claim to this area of PNG through offering formal as well as Christian education. That the unity of Christian country has, to some extent, been undermined is a source of much disquiet to the majority of the Gogodala who remain with the ECPNG.

A 'FOREIGN SICKNESS': AIDS AND THE OUTSIDE

In recent times, an influx of real and imagined cases of HIV/AIDS has become part of the dialogue about the practices and principles of Christian country. PNG is facing a crisis with the spread of HIV and AIDS throughout the country: since the first case of HIV/AIDS was identified in 1987, the AIDS epidemic has become generalised in PNG, only the fourth country in the Asia Pacific region to do so. Despite this, it is difficult to estimate how many people in PNG are infected with HIV/AIDS; testing is sketchy and nationally unreliable (Jenkins 1997; Hammar 2007). In 2006, it was estimated that up to 100,000 people in PNG may be infected with HIV or living with AIDS, although only 11,800 had been confirmed as infected (*The National*, 4 April 2006). The 2007 *Estimation Report on the HIV Epidemic in Papua New Guinea*, however, estimates that in December 2006, the number of people living with HIV in PNG is 46,275. In 2006, 4017 people tested positive to HIV, which was a 30 per cent increase from the previous year and brought the total cumulative number of diagnosed cases to 18,484. Revised estimates indicate that the national HIV prevalence is 1.28 per cent among adults aged 15–49 years (National AIDS Council Secretariat and National Department of Health 2007: ix).

Although figures held at the Health Centre in late 2004 suggested that HIV/AIDS cases for the Balimo District—a population of some 51,000—are low in relative terms (between 27 and 35 people), the opinion of both health professionals and lay people alike is that these numbers are considerably understated. As is noted elsewhere in PNG, HIV infection rates are chronically underreported and, as of October 2004, only the most advanced cases of AIDS-related illness had been recorded at BHC as there is little voluntary testing for HIV in Balimo. Testing for

HIV is conducted through the Outpatients Department at the BHC: a separate unit for STIs and HIV was quickly disbanded after a short time in operation in the early 2000s after it became obvious that the lack of attendance was the result of the unit's high visibility and the shame associated with attending it. Only pregnant women are routinely screened for STIs and HIV and in 2004 antiretroviral treatments were unavailable through the BHC.

Most in the area have heard of HIV/AIDS, referred to in Gogodala as *melesene bininapa gite tila gi*, 'the sickness that has no medicine or cure', or simply 'AIDS' in English. In general terms, information about the dynamics of transmission of HIV is sketchy and based primarily on anecdotal evidence rather than information supplied by Balimo Health Centre staff or attendant village community health workers. Most, however, seem to be aware that HIV is spread through sexual contact, although the details of how or why this might be the case are not generally known. For Gogodala, sexuality and sickness is often linked: sex can play a pivotal role in the development of sicknesses and other misfortunes or lead to the failure of gardens or lack of success in fishing or hunting expeditions. But it is a certain kind of sexuality and sexual behaviour, practiced particularly by those engaged in either 'illicit' or inappropriate forms, times or places of sexual contact, that poses a threat to the health and well-being of people, rather than sexuality in general. In more recent times, older generations (including those in the mid to late thirties but particularly older men and women) often articulate a general disquiet and anger about the ways in which 'young' people—especially unmarried or newly married men and women—flaunt behavioural proscriptions on sexual practice. There has been a lot of comment on the number and frequency of young mothers without husbands, the carelessness of those engaging in pre-marital and extra-marital sexuality, and the implications for families, villages and the community as a whole (cf. Dundon 2007a, 2009). In the context of the AIDS epidemic, the lack of detailed information about transmission through sexual contact is leading to an association between 'sexuality, particularly sexual promiscuity, and thus immorality' (Eves 2003: 255; Dundon 2007a). Simultaneously, however, there is an understanding of HIV transmission through other forms of contact with an infected person: through their breath, saliva or sweat, clothes, cups or plates (see also Beer 2008; Dundon & Wilde 2007; Eves 2003; Haley 2008; Hammar 1996; Lemeki 2003). Consequently, many express fear of sharing cups, plates and other utensils, or wearing clothes worn by an infected person.

The level of anxiety about transmission routes is particularly acute, as women noted in fellowship meetings that I attended in late 2004, because health workers emphasise that anyone can have HIV/AIDS without being aware of it. AIDS, then, is 'a hidden disease'. For Gogodala, whose understandings of ill-health, referred to as *gite tila gi* 'sickness is looking at/seeing you', are based on the visible 'signs' or symptoms of sickness as it is manifested on the body of the 'victim' or patient, AIDS is frightening. And, as potentially socially invisible agents of AIDS, those infected with HIV are perceived to pose a considerable threat to the community's

well-being (Dundon 2007a). This is related also to the perception that AIDS originates from outside the area: outsiders, whether Europeans, Southeast Asians, Melanesians or Papua New Guineans deriving from other provinces and districts or Gogodala resident in other parts of PNG, are increasingly seen as the major source of AIDS. Wilde (2007: 61) has recently pointed out that Gogodala people refer to AIDS as *kapelanapa gite tila gi*—'the stranger or foreign sickness'. The Gogodala are situated downstream of the Ok Tedi Mine at Tabubil in Western Province, which is bordered by three logging camps at Kamusi, Sasalama and Panakawa. The first case of HIV/AIDS reported at the Balimo Health Centre in 1993 was traced to a former employee of one of these logging camps. The origins of the majority of subsequent cases recorded at BHC have been men and women returning from employment elsewhere in the Province or country.⁴

Wilde and I have argued that this belief is echoed in many rural communities throughout the country in which AIDS is perceived to derive from outside the area and/or is a disease most associated with 'outsiders'—whether workers in towns or cities or employed in mining, logging or other industries in PNG (Dundon & Wilde 2007: 7). Keck (2007: 48), for example, notes that, for the Yupno of the Finisterre Ranges, there is an 'agreement that this disease is brought into the Yupno region from outside, from men infected by women in town and returning to the village'. Haley (2008: 31) explores the substantial history of out-migrating Duna men of Southern Highlands Province looking for employment outside the local area. This is often a time, she says, of 'premarital adventures'—with the consequence that 'returning workers and men who have travelled to urban centres make up the bulk of confirmed HIV and AIDS cases at Kapiago' (Haley 2008: 31). She suggests that, since the first case was recorded in 1997, a 'small but steady stream' of Duna has returned to the area 'to die' (Haley 2008: 32). McPherson (2008: 232) similarly points out that AIDS is understood among the Bariai of New Britain as 'a disease of development and modernity brought into the country by sexually promiscuous Western people and transmitted by Westernised women and men who reside in towns'. And Beer (2008: 111) suggests that, for Wampur of the Markham Valley near Lae, despite little direct experience of AIDS or those living with it, there is a clear perception of it as a disease of outsiders. She writes that the level of anxiety about HIV and AIDS and the distinctions drawn between outsiders and insiders have only reinforced connections drawn between 'immigrants, immorality and danger' (Beer 2008: 111).

The stratification of Gogodala into those in paid employment and those in the village, with correlations between employment and education levels, dates back to the early days of the mission. In the mid-1930s, Albert Drysdale of the UFM sought to establish a place for himself at Balimo village. In a mission publication called *A Church is Born*, Prince and Prince (1991: 105) noted:

[T]he elders of the village allocated Albert a choice position, adjacent to their new site, for him to build his own house ... he struck a bargain with the village people. If they

would help him build a house, he in turn would provide the school they wanted. (Prince & Prince 1981: 20)

Schools were opened, sometimes in response to communal demand, but these were often 'mainly to teach the reading of the scriptures' (Prince & Prince 1981: 126). The only high school in the area was opened in 1963 at Awaba on the Aramia River to the north of Balimo which, by 1969, offered up to Grade Ten, making secondary education available to the district at a time when there were many areas of PNG without such facilities. The UFM trained, employed and educated early Gogodala Christian converts and their families. As a result, children of pastors, missionaries, deacons and other prominent early Christians were the first to be offered educational opportunities available at mission schools. As this was the only form of education available in the area for many years, it created another source of differentiation between Christians and their fellows. A major percentage of Gogodala with higher school certificates or university degrees are the children or grandchildren of early Christians and/or Pastors.⁵

When I first came to the area in 1995, each village was organised around a central ECPNG Church, which formed a formidable support base for the ECPNG in general. Very few other denominations or faiths had representatives or buildings in these villages. Most alternative Churches were set up in Balimo and were geared towards the more diverse urban population of the town. Those in urban settings like Balimo live in ways that, from the village perspective, bear little resemblance to one based on subsistence and physical work. Many speak languages other than Gogodala, including Tok Pisin, Motu and English, attend different Churches from the evangelical ECPNG, and have relatively high levels of formal education. To use a local idiom, they 'live on money' rather than subsistence. Gewertz and Errington (1999) note that class 'happenings', as instances of inequality and differences in status and wealth, have become increasingly common in postcolonial PNG, and that these take on the character of lifestyle. In this way, lifestyle differences are both constituted by and constitutive of class distinctions between the middle class—those employed, educated and often town-dwellers—and the 'grassroots', the rural and urban poor.

The divide between those in the village and those employed or resident in towns and cities in PNG also began early for the Gogodala and for many, expatriate and Gogodala, it marked the differentiation between a Christian and a more secular lifestyle. Prince and Prince (1981: 174) write that:

In the village it was a relatively simple choice, either people accepted the behaviour codes of the church, or they overtly flaunted them and were disciplined ... Inevitably limited freedom of choice and a low level of education reinforced the legalism inherent in traditional culture. Spirituality was equated with not drinking, not smoking, not beating your wife and being regular at church. Indeed how else could it be seen in the village? Yet these measures of commitment were inadequate for those in the educational spiral or in secular employment.

The tensions focused initially around Balimo, the site of both the major centre of the mission and church, and the government station. Balimo thus 'felt the winds of secular change early' as 'secularised national teachers, medical personnel and police' brought the experience of a 'non-Christian life-style' to those living in the villages surrounding Balimo (Prince & Prince 1981: 173). At this time, according to Prince and Prince (1981: 173), '[m]oney from employment or business pandered to the materialism always present in the culture. Secularisation brought Gogodala society a freedom of choice which the church was unused to'.

Although the divide between those in Gogodala villages and those who live in the town, whether Balimo or further afield, has been the source of much discussion over the years, until recently it has never lapsed into absolute distinctions between those who live on the inside and those on the outside in quite the way it now appears to be developing. As Barth (2000: 17) has recently noted, 'making a distinction does not entail drawing a boundary'. This, however, does seem to be changing: internal migration between village and town, whether inter or intra-provincial, is a common feature in PNG, although increasingly these movements are becoming permanent, family-based migrations (cf. Crosbie Walsh 1985; Clunies Ross 1984; Keig 2001; Curry & Koczberski 1999) with the more established 'urbanisation of the population' (Connell 1997: 176). The recent cases of HIV infection at BHC sourced by outsiders, however, have confirmed for many in the villages that this distinction is an increasingly important one in the fight against AIDS. Those who live away from the area, in paid employment or with relatives, move and act beyond the reach and gaze of their village-based contemporaries. The opportunities for sexual and other behavioural freedoms are greatly increased by this mobility as are the chances for wider forms of social and interpersonal contact and interaction with (potentially 'dangerous') others.

A recent male-only survey of sexual practices in Balimo and Wardlow's (2007) recent research into Huli men and extramarital sexuality, however, suggests that this conflation of extra- or pre-marital sexuality, male migration (in particular) and risk might be justified. In a survey of 117 male respondents conducted in 2004 in Balimo by Wilde, twenty-three per cent of men admitted to having extramarital sexual relationships within the previous three years, and many more indicated that they had extramarital relationships that predated 2001; fifty-three per cent of single men had sexual relationships in the three-year period (Wilde 2005). Significantly, Wilde noted that fifty-four (forty-six per cent) of the 117 respondents had spent time at the logging camps bordering the area, from a period of a few days to several years. Most of these men had returned to the villages and Balimo town to marry and have a family or were already married and trying to establish themselves financially. In a similar setting, Wardlow (2007: 1006) argues that, for Huli migrants, there are more 'socioeconomic structures that promote, enable and normalise' male extramarital sexuality than those that discourage or limit it. She notes that, for Huli men interviewed in 2004, labour migration outside of Tari 'seemed to guarantee men's extramarital relationships', a situation that did not necessarily stop after the men

returned home—in fact, it seemed to ‘set in motion an enduring pattern of extra-marital sex’ (Wardlow 2007: 1009, 1011). As a group, particularly, men who move between town and village are increasingly talked about as representing a significant threat to the health and well-being of residents of Western Province villages. Fears about those who return after periods of absence are creating a schism between urban, educated Gogodala who are often employed as public servants, teachers, health professionals and officials, or young men travelling to and working in logging camps, and those who stay in the village. This may parallel a more general opposition to cities and urban living in PNG that, in recent times, has cast the urban space as a ‘law-and-order issue’ and may add to what Koczberski *et al.* (2001: 2019) refer to as recent ‘anti-urban sentiments’.

BUILDING THE WALL AROUND CHRISTIAN COUNTRY

Anderson (1983: 15) has commented that ‘all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even those) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined’. Such communities need to be understood in the context out of which they arise (Anderson 1983: 19). The term ‘community’ implies a commonality between members that distinguishes them from other groups; thus, community implies simultaneously both similarity and difference (Cohen 1985: 11). Gogodala villagers in the Western Province, a relatively large group of villages spread out over a substantial area between the Fly and Aramia Rivers, have a history of ‘imagining’ themselves as a community: connected through a common language, a shared system of names and clans, substantiated through similar daily experiences and consumptive practices, and articulated in various contexts from the cultural revival in the 1970s, the establishment of new Christian churches and practices and, more recently, in relation to the appearance of HIV/AIDS.

But the deployment of community as a concept and the boundaries that it implies is inherently contextual. Cohen (1985: 12) makes the point that ‘the use of the word [community] is only occasioned by the desire or need to express such a distinction’ between self and other. The call to build a wall around Christian country in response to the threat of the spread of HIV/AIDS into this area reflects a growing perception that establishing or developing a literal and metaphorical boundary between those ‘inside’ and those ‘outside’ the community is the most appropriate response to the encroachment of AIDS. Perhaps this is not a surprise, given that ‘[c]ultural and social boundaries of various kinds mediate the perception and presentation of fraught conditions and ambiguous behaviour’ (Cohen 2000: 1). The Gogodala are not alone in drawing increasingly rigid and uncompromising distinctions between themselves and others based on moral and/or Christian terms in the context of a climate of considerable anxiety over HIV prevention strategies. Both Haley (2008: 24) and Hammar (2008: 60) point to the public and emotive appeal by prominent and popular southern highlands politician Jacob Sekewa to

exclude those with HIV/AIDS, distinguished by their preparedness 'to step out of the normal human moral boundaries' and 'act like animals', from the lives of 'moral people'. And in Tari, for example, Wardlow (2008: 187) reports that 'some community leaders asserted that the arrival of AIDS in Tari was a good thing, because the threat of death and stigma might spur people to finally become good Christians, a goal they fear was rapidly receding'. The appearance of AIDS in Tari 'seemed to have been an important catalyst for mobilising and solidifying Christian identity among the Huli' (Wardlow (2008: 188). Christianity is the new 'fence' or discipline against the incursion of AIDS and there is much emphasis on becoming a 'true' rather than 'skin' Christian (Wardlow 2008: 192).

The appeal to Christianity in response to the threat posed by HIV/AIDS, then, is neither singular nor confined to the Gogodala. What is significant is the call for a return to a certain set of Christian practices and principles, one that connects Gogodala villagers substantially to a wider imagined community of global Christians while setting them apart from their spatially close neighbours. This proposal for a return to earlier and more stringent principles of the ECPNG Church has emerged primarily from villagers in Western Province, who are still predominantly affiliated with the ECPNG despite recent changes and challenges to the church's domination. It is proposed that this renewed form of conservative evangelical Christianity presents a commonsense platform from which to meet not only the dangers of HIV/AIDS but also the disintegration of Christian country through the influx of new ideas and practices, parallel processes that are increasingly conflated. At meetings of women's ECPNG fellowships held in Balimo town and village, then, many expressed a central concern—that a new type of lifestyle, developing along with new forms of Christianity, ideas about dance, sexuality, drugs, condoms and money, was putting the community at risk from the spread of HIV/AIDS. One woman argued that the way to avoid this deadly sickness was the maintenance of a Christian lifestyle: prevention was 'dependent on the way of living—it depends on the way you live'. Another argued for the value of monogamy in the fight against AIDS. 'In the beginning God created man and woman so that plan is in order, it's in place. So it should be followed that [plan] one man, one woman [in marriage]'. Yet, another explained that 'for us, you know, we know the word of God and we trust each other; our husbands and us, we trust each other. And so, when you stay faithful like that, it's okay'. Others simply reiterated that 'we are Christian *lumate*—Christian people'.

Many rural Gogodala, then, envisage a return to the imagined simplicity of an earlier form of Christian country based on a reinvigorated evangelical Christianity promulgated by the ECPNG. There is a suggestion that the influx of new ideas and Churches has significantly weakened the saliency of evangelical Christianity, a feeling substantiated by the recent withdrawal of the Pioneers from the Balimo District. Some have argued that the absence of an expatriate mission for the first time in seven decades presaged many of the difficulties and transformations that have occurred in the last few years—including, perhaps, the new health crisis. The

suggestion to build a wall around Christian country, then, argues for not just a literal boundary between those inside this area of Western Province and outsiders in order to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS, but also for a metaphorical one that limits the influx of new Christian, as well as other, ideas and practices. It underlies a call for a return to sexual fidelity and marital monogamy and posits a challenge to more recent sexual freedoms for young and old alike (cf. Dundon 2002a,b, 2004, 2007a). It suggests a move away from a more recent focus on the importance of paid employment, money and educational opportunities for young people and towards the continuing significance of the village lifestyle for the future of Gogodala communities.

But boundaries drawn between communities are not fixed or immutable and may actually serve to establish connections between groups as much as they separate or draw distinctions between them: drawing boundaries does not, after all, 'determine all the social forms that eventuate' (Barth 2000: 28, 30). Distinctions between rural and urban ECPNG members and other Christian or non-Christian groups, those with a high level of education and those without, those in paid employment and those living in the village, are porous and suggest the ways in which people can and do move across the boundaries over the course of their lifetimes. Those living in urban areas, for example, working as teachers, public servants, and health workers or officials usually return to the village from which they originally came, either in retirement or after a shorter period of absence. Those living in Balimo, a peri-urban centre but arguably a central site of the source of Christian country as a former mission station, can and do regularly move between town and village. The interaction between village and city is constant and an integral part of both rural and urban life in PNG. Likewise, despite recent negative correlations between higher levels of education, employment and moral degeneration, these are still highly valued attributes. And young men who work intermittently at the logging camps located a day's canoe travel from Balimo argue that they are not working 'outside' of the area at all—that the camps are proximal and therefore 'local' and are substantially connected to Christian country through regular ECPNG church services held at the camps by visiting ECPNG pastors (Wilde 2007). Thus, they seek to mitigate the categorisation as 'outsiders' through emphasising connections to home villages and Christian practices. Increasingly, however, those in urban contexts or Balimo town are facing a level of community resistance to unmediated movement between town and village. In late 2004, the protest of the village was still relatively quiet; this may well change should deaths of those afflicted with AIDS rise significantly in the next few years.

NOTES

- 1 Impressed, he formed a bond with them and they invited him to travel to the north side of the Fly River to meet with others in their home villages. After he did so, he wrote to the home office with the suggestion that the UFM move to establish mission stations on

the other bank of the Fly among these Gogodala communities (Lea 1940: 23; Prince & Prince 1991).

- 2 Weymouth (1978: 140–1) notes, however, that although the early missionaries attacked 'heathen customs' like tobacco smoking, the consumption of betelnut and kava, they focused most of their antagonism on male ceremonies and rituals.
- 3 They sought to displace the ECPNG's position on dancing, both in Church and elsewhere, encouraging spontaneous and organised dancing in CEF services and at conventions. Many younger people were attracted to these fun and noise-filled services and I noted in 2002 that arguments about attendance at CEF services and functions were beginning to strain both family and village relationships.
- 4 Cases under investigation in late 2004, for example, related to the construction of a road between the airstrip and Balimo town by a crew of construction workers who were flown in from the Ok Tedi mine for a period of six months. Health workers at BHC were trying to trace the sexual partners of one particular Ok Tedi worker who had subsequently died of AIDS at Kiunga hospital.
- 5 Prince and Prince (1991: 105) note that: '[e]ducation must surely be one of the most successful ministries of the Church. Through its school system, the ECP has given many children the opportunity to get education which the government would have not been able to offer. The schools here also taught the Word of God and many bear witness to the effect of this early teaching'.

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