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Rosaries and Statues: Mediating Divine Intervention in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea

Anna-Karina Hermkens 

Discipline of Anthropology, School of Social Sciences, Macquarie University, Sydney, NSW 2109, Australia; anna.hermkens@mq.edu.au

Abstract: In the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (ARoB) in Papua New Guinea, the changes of Vatican II led to significant Church reform, creating “Liklik Kristen Komuniti” (small Christian communities) that gave more responsibility to the laity. Moreover, as elsewhere in the world, Charismatic Catholicism was introduced and embraced. At the same time, private devotions, and in particular devotions to Mary, became immensely popular and powerful in Bougainville. This is partly due to the Bougainville crisis (1988–1998), which caused immense suffering, but also triggered a surge in popular devotions as people looked for spiritual guidance to deal with the hardships of the crisis. This paper shows how in the context of social and economic upheaval, charismatic popular devotions became increasingly influential with rosaries and statues becoming important mediums in facilitating healing and socio-political renewal. This shows the strength of popular devotions and the importance of material religion in particular. It also elucidates how popular devotions in Bougainville are part of global Catholic developments, as well as transnational practices that place Mary in the center of devotional practices.

Keywords: popular devotion; material religion; Charismatic Catholicism; Vatican II; Papua New Guinea; Bougainville



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1. Introduction

During the crisis, other denominations destroyed our statues. Seventh Day Adventists [SDA] threw a cement statue of Mary into the sea, but she floated. In Tubiana Parish, a man who believed in ancestors shot a statue, calling it “a giaman lotu long stone” (false belief in stone). He was later shot by the Papua New Guinea Defence Force. At Koromira, an SDA man broke a statue of Mary, cutting off her arms. He died too. We have now forgiven them, but all of those who destroyed her statue, they died. As Catholics, this strengthens our faith. (Paul, 21 November 2005)

All over the world, people respond to pictures and statues; they kiss them, break them, cry before them, and go on journeys to and with them; they are calmed by them, but also stirred by them, as Paul's quote above illustrates, and incited to revolt (Freedberg 1989, p. 1). This is particularly true for religious objects. In fact, it can be argued that religion is a material practice. The significance of churches, shrines, and temples, as well as artifacts such as candles, rosary beads, and images and statues of saints, exemplifies this. Even in religions that argue that the divine cannot be represented, material culture is used to engage in relationships with the divine. For example, religious texts, such as the Bible or the Koran, specific clothing, tattoos, body ornaments, and larger structures, such as churches and temples, are materialities that commemorate and facilitate interaction and particular relationships with the divine. However, religion is not only a practice that puts objects to work. Religious artifacts also constitute worlds of belief. As Paul's quote above indicates, during the decade-long Bougainville conflict (1988–1998), statues of Mary were a source of denominational conflict, resulting in iconoclasm but also empowerment for Catholics, as

adherers believed in Mary's power to punish those who wronged her. In addition, Mary, represented in rosaries and statues, is also renowned for her powers to protect Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) soldiers. They were fighting for autonomy and independence against the Papua New Guinea government and its armed forces, the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF). In fact, with the help of Mary, the BRA engaged in combat to fight, in their terms, a holy war to restore the Holy Nation of Bougainville. At the same time, Mary is credited with having brought peace, not least by "moving", in statue form, through the warscape of Bougainville (Hermkens 2007, 2009). In this paper, which is based on long term participant observation and interviews with Bougainville Catholics between 2005 and 2019, I address the power of religious objects, and in particular the rosary and statues and pictures of Mary, to provoke and escalate conflict as well as settle it and mediate social and political change in Bougainville.

Bougainville is a relatively small island group in the South Pacific consisting of two main islands: Buka in the north and, separated by a small sea-channel, Bougainville Island in the south. In addition, there are many small islands and atolls, which together with Buka and Bougainville islands used to be a former province of Papua New Guinea (PNG) and are now an autonomous region proceeding towards independence. In 1988, violence erupted when popular leader Francis Ona and his group, known as the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA), sabotaged a power line pylon, cutting off power to the Panguna mine (Carl and Garasu 2002, p. 96). The Panguna copper mine, owned by mining giant Rio Tinto and run by Bougainville Copper Limited (BCL) was one of the largest copper mines in the world. Commencing operations in 1972, the mining project increasingly began to face local resistance and demonstrations by landowners who were led by Ona, a previous mine employer himself. In response to Ona's sabotage, PNG sent armed police forces and subsequently the PNGDF to stop Ona's rebellion. Importantly, Ona's group united with the *Me'ekamui* secessionist movement,¹ a union that transformed Ona's militancy from mainly anti-BCL sabotage into support for secession from PNG (Carl and Garasu 2002, p. 96). As a result, the conflict intensified and lasted for almost a decade. As I have argued elsewhere (Hermkens 2007, 2020a), the main constitutive elements of Francis Ona's ideology to continue his fight against PNG over such a long time frame included strong notions of nationalism, *kastom* (tradition), and Charismatic Catholicism, in which devotion to Mary played a paramount role.

While this strong devotion to Mary is not exceptional (see for example the case studies presented in Hermkens et al. 2009a), the Bougainville case is remarkable, as it shows how, despite perceived global efforts by Vatican II and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) to, as some argue, "denounce" the role and power of Mary (Spretnak 2004), and recurring controversy over devotional practices associated with Mary in Bougainville, as well as elsewhere in the world (De Haardt 2011, pp. 169, 172), Marian devotion gained immense popularity during the Bougainville crisis. In Bougainville, as elsewhere in the world, Marian devotion has been created through a "dynamic interplay of popular religion, theological belief, ecclesiastical interests and cultural expression" (Stevens-Arroyo 1998, p. 51), as well as local customary and spiritual beliefs. It is strongly anchored in cultural and customary ideas about spiritual dependency, motherhood, and the importance of women in Bougainville's matrilineal societies. At the same time, Marian devotion is intimately connected with the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR), reinforcing each other and cumulating in a powerful ethno-theology that urged the conversion of all Bougainvilleans during a time of immense distress. Credited with having mediated both conflict and peace, the Bougainville case study shows the power of Mary, and, as I will be focusing on in this paper, her mediating power through rosaries and statues in contexts of social upheaval and violence.

While according to Vatican II, Christ is "the one and only Mediator" (Pope Paul VI 1964, no. 56), for many Catholics in Bougainville, elsewhere in PNG (see in particular Falck 2021) and beyond, Mary is both intercessor and Mediatrix. Mary's official titles in Oceania and Papua New Guinea, such as 'Mary Help of Christians' and 'Our Lady of Peace' (Pope

John Paul II 2001, no. 53), reflect people's strong belief in her power to provide assistance and comfort and to empower those who pray to her. Moreover, she is considered by many to be the Mediatrix: the mediator of grace for her son and reconciler of, and for, the whole world. This means that all graces that her son Jesus gives are believed to come through Mary. As the mother of Jesus, the mother of God, Queen of Heaven, as well as Mediatrix and redemptrix², she is believed to be a mediator, connecting earth and heaven, humans and the divine. While in Christian theology, this role of mediating between the human and the divine is in general ascribed to Christ,³ and Vatican II emphasizes that "Mary's function as mother of men in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power" (Pope Paul VI 1964, *Lumen Gentium* VIII, no. 60), there is considerable debate and tension surrounding people's requests to have Mary's titles of Mediatrix and Co-redemptrix declared as dogmas.⁴ For many Catholics in Bougainville, however, Mary is considered the "door to heaven". As one of my interlocutors stated: "We pray to Jesus through Mary. This is our motto! Jesus came through Mary, so we must go through Mary." Or, as another interlocutor explained: "Maria is our telephone line to God. When we face problems, we use Maria and the rosary to ask God to help us". This mediating role of Mary became especially significant during the crisis (1988–1998), when people desperately longed for divine intervention. As Peter recalled:

In February 1992, I had a vision of Santu Maria, God, and Jesus. The house was God, and on the door was the face of Jesus with at the back Maria. My eyes changed. I saw God, the son and the mama of God. Maria talked to me. She told me that when praying we have to follow steps: First to Mama, then to Jesus, who will then talk to God. You cannot talk or pray straight to Jesus or God. Maria is the mediator. As she said: "You must come to me first. I will bring it to my son, who will bring it to God the father". I told everyone about this vision. I told them that God and Mary are real. (Peter, 16 November 2005)

This quote shows the importance of using Mary as an intercessor and mediator when praying, while the quote at the beginning of this paper illustrated the power ascribed to statues of Mary.

In order to understand the status that is being ascribed to words (like prayers) and things (like statues) from the viewpoint of a particular religious tradition, Webb Keane (2007) deploys the notion of 'semiotic ideology'. In his study of the mission encounter between neo-Reformed Dutch Calvinists and adherers of the *marapu* religion on Sumba in eastern Indonesia, Keane shows the tensions between both ideologies. Calvinists' semiotic ideology "... privileged belief, associated with immaterial meaning, over practices that threatened to subordinate belief to material form", such as those of the *marapu* religion (Keane 2007, p. 67). This paper provides insight into the semiotic ideology of Catholic Bougainvilleans, revealing how, in contrast to Keane's Dutch Calvinists, and more like followers of the Sumbanese *marapu* religion (Keane 2007, p. 50), Catholic Bougainvilleans seem to privilege belief associated with material forms. As shown for the latter, materiality is essential in communicating with the divine and in experiencing divine presence and power. While this semiotic ideology is clearly anchored in Catholic theology, people's lived religious experience also creates tensions with the institutional Church. This is partly due to the fact that many Catholic Bougainvilleans also draw upon local cultural understandings of spiritual presence, materiality, and agency, but also because the question of the relationship between popular piety and the Liturgy, and in particular the validation of the former over the latter, has arisen throughout the history of the Catholic Church (see *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines* 2001). In the following sections, I will provide a brief historical context of Catholicism in Bougainville, as well as the impact of Vatican II. This will be followed by a description and analysis of Marian devotion in Bougainville and the significance of material religion in mediating divine intervention in particular.

2. Marian Devotion in Bougainville: Historical and Global Context

In Bougainville, the Mother of Jesus is what Eric Wolf (1959, pp. 34–39) termed a “master symbol”, enshrining “the major hopes and aspirations of an entire society”. The seeds for this strong devotion to Mary were planted by German and French Roman Catholic missionaries. Settling in Central Bougainville around 1901, these missionaries were the first Europeans to reside on Bougainville Island (Ogan 1972, p. 46; Laracy 1976, pp. 54–55).⁵ For some twenty years, the Catholics were also the sole missionaries on the island. In the 1920s, Seventh-Day Adventists (SDA) and Methodists, both coming from the Solomon Islands like the Marists, settled on Bougainville, “creating new [Christian] religious divisions” in Bougainville communities (Ogan 1999, p. 3). In some parts of Bougainville, these second and third waves of conversion caused intense rivalry, with Catholic and Methodist factions fighting and destroying each other’s chapels (Laracy 1976, p. 64). During the Bougainville crisis (1988–1998), some of these historical and more recent rivalries flared up again, especially between Catholics and adherents of denominations who did not appreciate Catholic devotion to Mary and their veneration of statues in particular.

Importantly, the missionaries who introduced the Catholic faith in Bougainville were part of the Society of Mary (MSSM). The society derives its name from the Virgin Mary, whom the members attempt to imitate in their spirituality and daily work. Marists act from their love for Mary and with the compassion of Mary, aiming to bring others closer to God through their teachings of faith and practical skills. As I show elsewhere, these missionaries advocated both local and Marist political interests and views in the continuously shifting religious and socio-economical political context of colonial and ‘post’-colonial Bougainville (Hermkens 2018). They also brought their love for Mary to Bougainville communities, introducing and circulating the rosary and statues of Mary and Christ (Hermkens 2007). While the Marist missionaries obviously influenced the strong focus on Mary in Bougainville Catholicism, many of my interlocutors are also convinced that the roots for this strong devotion to Mary are present in customary Bougainville culture.⁶ They argue that the matrilineal system and traditional gender relations are factors that facilitated the acceptance of Mary and conversion to Catholicism (see further Hermkens 2007, 2020a). As one of my interlocutors explained: “Christ came with his mother. This helped people’s understanding and their acceptance of the Gospel. Without Her, it would have been hard.” This particular inculturation of Mary as a mother is also stressed by Eugene Ogan. He writes that among the Naisioi people in Central Bougainville, Mary was venerated as “*Maria niuko*, Mary our mother” (Ogan 1972, p. 46). At the same time, the ideological orientation of Catholicism towards Mary, God, and saints converged with local customary practices and beliefs and the notion that having good relationships and communication with spirits was a source of power. According to Ogan, the Nasioi people perceived Jesus and Mary as some kind of super-ancestral spirits ‘who could be asked for practical benefits as villagers had done in the past with local spirits (Ogan 1972, pp. 30–31). Ogan (1972, p. 46) argues that Nasioi easily converted to Catholicism because they perceived the Catholic pantheon as more powerful than the local spirits (see also Falck 2021, p. 3). Moreover, while in the past every village depended upon a special male caretaker to make offerings at particular sites in the Bougainville landscape to the spirits and mediate for their intercession (see for more details Hermkens 2020a), Catholicism, and Marian devotion in particular, allows everybody, irrespective of gender, to mediate with and embody the divine.⁷ This notion that it is possible to have an intimate individual relationship with God has been reinforced through the Charismatic movement, which developed in the Catholic Church as part of the Second Vatican Council reforms. In Bougainville, the Charismatic movement seems to have aligned with and reinforced a historically strong devotion to Mary.

Considering the Marist legacy, and that Catholicism is still the dominant religion,⁸ it is no surprise that Mary is well-known and much-loved all over Bougainville. Moreover, the popularity of Mary extends beyond denominational boundaries. For example, when the International Virgin Statue of Our Lady of Fatima visited Bougainville in 2007 and most recently in 2016, both Catholics and non-Catholics joined and reached out to her, bringing

churches and communities together.⁹ In the following section, I will elucidate the impact of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) in Bougainville, in particular in relation to its realignment of Mary within a broader Christological framework.

2.1. Vatican II in Bougainville

The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) had a great influence on the Church in Bougainville. In addition to “liturgical changes and attempts of inculturation, the role of laity in the administration of the ‘mission stations’ was addressed”, which resulted in the establishment of Parish Councils (Kronenberg and Saris 2009, p. 96). A major goal of the Bougainville Church became the establishment and support of local Christian communities, termed “*Liklik Kristen Komuniti*”. This implied getting people involved in the Church by training local leaders, setting up local ministries, and training Bougainvillean priests. By the mid-1960s, the overwhelming majority of Catholic priests, sisters, and brothers on Bougainville were nationals, with only seven missionaries left (Pinda 2006, p. 33). The importance of local laity and local priests in the Catholic Church is reflected in Bougainville’s ordination of the Bougainvillean Bishop Gregory Singkai in 1974 (see further Hermkens 2018). Through Bishop Singkai’s reforms, the Diocese of Bougainville became known in PNG as “the Diocese of the Laity” (Kronenberg and Saris 2009, p. 98). Bishop Singkai’s inculturation project implied the accommodation of the Catholic Church within local communities, emphasizing “*yumi iet i sios*” (we are the Church). Instead of drawing people to the parish church, he envisioned priests would travel to the people. Catechists would serve their communities on a daily basis, who in turn would be economically supported by their communities rather than by the Bishop and the Church. It was in this context that the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) was introduced to Bougainville’s Catholic communities.

The CCR originated from the same reforms of the Second Vatican Council that granted more responsibility to local laity and eased Catholic Mission objections to indigenous religious practices (Smith 2002, p. 127; Mayblin et al. 2017, p. 8) in places like Bougainville. Pope John XXIII, in preparing for the Second Vatican Council, had composed a prayer titled “Give us a new Pentecost”, which he wanted to be recited throughout the Catholic Church. The Vatican Council (1962–1965) was continued by Pope Paul VI after Pope John XXIII passed away, but Catholic Charismatic Renewal adherents see that Pope John XXIII opened the windows of the church for the Holy Spirit to bring the changes propagated by the Vatican Council (Moran 2013, p. 288).

However, at the same time as the CCR was introduced, popular devotion and Marian movements lost much of their impetus after the Council, at least in the US (Hogan 2012, p. 237). Devotions are external practices of piety that are not part of the official liturgy of the Catholic Church, but are popular spiritual practices. According to Hogan (2012, p. 237), one of the factors contributing to the decline of popular devotions and especially in the participation and influence of Mary was the perception that Vatican II was deemphasizing Marian devotion. As summarized by feminist theologian Maaïke De Haardt (2011, p. 172), “the Second Vatican Council brought a theological change in the meaning and place of Mary, which can be summarized as: ‘from a cosmic Mary to a biblical Mary’”. Instead of outside or above the Church, Mary’s new title as ‘Mother of the Church’ situates Mary firmly within her proper context. However, as De Haardt (2011, p. 172) argues, this realignment of Mary’s place in the Church can also be perceived “as strengthening the theological subordination of Mary to Jesus and Christology”. While the Second Vatican Council reaffirmed the Church’s special love for Mary due to her part in salvation history and connection with Christ’s work, in Chapter 8 of *Lumen Gentium*, Mary’s subordinate role within the Church is also acknowledged:

The Church does not hesitate to profess this subordinate role of Mary. It knows it through unfailing experience of it and commends it to the hearts of the faithful, so that encouraged by this maternal help they may the more intimately adhere to the Mediator and Redeemer. (Pope Paul VI 1964, no. 62)

De Haardt (2011, p. 172) maintains that the Second Vatican Council's "choice for a more historicizing, biblical and therefore a more ecumenical direction of Marian devotion, strengthens Mary's 'functionality' in relation to her son". Although this does not imply a diminishing of the relevance of the Marian dogmas, this 'realignment' of Mary has liturgical consequences. As argued by De Haardt (2011, p. 172), daily Marian devotions, such "as hymns, prayers or the rosary, are banned from the ordinary liturgy", and classical Marian feasts have been renamed,¹⁰ highlighting that the theological emphasis, and Mary's place, has shifted to "Mary as the first and exemplary believer, and in line with this, to Mary as a type of faith and motherly love, and as Mother of the Church". Some scholars like Spretnak (2004), claim that the Second Vatican Council effectively dethroned Mary as the symbolic Queen of Heaven. Rather than granting Mary her own document, the bishops included a chapter on the Blessed Virgin with the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) (Pope Paul VI 1964; Hogan 2012, p. 237). This chapter was the subject of debate, with original plans calling for a separate document about the role of Mary, but the Council decided that Mary's place within the Church should be part of its Constitution. To some, in refusing to grant Mary her own document, and confining her role to that of helper of Christ, the Vatican Council tried to "overcome theological and devotional excesses and deviations which resulted from unduly isolating Mary from the mystery of Christ and the Church" (McBride 2003). Moreover, the Council taught that piety should be centered in the liturgy and should have a strong biblical basis, while communal celebration of liturgy was to be emphasized instead of individual devotions (Hogan 2012, p. 237).

Enforcing the Second Vatican Council's focus on the liturgy, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) that developed after the Second Vatican Council advocated and still warns against conflating Charismatic worship with popular devotions. According to the previous president of the global CCR, Charles Whitehead, private devotions should not be promoted as part of the CCR, as this can cause confusion and distracts devotees from offering their primary gift to the Church (Whitehead 2003). In addition, proponents of the CCR are afraid that this entanglement might lead to the CCR being "identified with other groups with different aims and purposes" (Whitehead 2003). In the US, this resulted in Catholic Charismatic ritual practices in which saints and Mary are strikingly absent (see for example Csordas 1994, p. 23), despite post-Vatican-II efforts by CCR adherents to bring Mary back.

In the 1980s, Marian devotion and reflection becomes an important aspect of the CCR (Hogan 2012). This was in part due, at least in the USA, to the writings of Fr. George Montague, a member of the Society of Mary, who became a major figure in encouraging Marian reflection in the CCR (Hogan 2012, p. 285). In his book *Riding the Wind* (1974), Montague describes Mary as the prototype of the Church, especially in her faith and response to the Holy Spirit. Montague responded to the question about why we need Mary as a model when we have Jesus as our model by saying "Jesus cannot embody response to Jesus, any more than Mary can be the gift to which she is responding" (Montague 1974, pp. 74–75; in Hogan 2012, p. 286). Montague thought that cultivating devotion to Mary in CCR could bring a sense of balance and wholeness.

According to Montague, sometimes 'charismatics' can focus too much on the initial movement of the Spirit. They can seize on a partial view, rather than patiently discerning the whole picture in a balanced, Marian way. Mary's presence and wholeness help us to interpret the Spirit in the most wholesome way. (Hogan 2012, p. 287)

With the writings of Montague and others and the acceptance and circulation of "the biblical portrayal of Mary as a model of discipleship and receptivity to the Holy Spirit" (Hogan 2012, p. 372), Marian devotion became more recognized in Catholic Charismatic Renewal. As a result, "more individuals were proclaiming how their experience of Marian devotion was an important influence in their growth in Jesus and the Spirit" (Hogan 2012, p. 372). At least in the USA, this meant that from the late 1970s, a significant current of Marian devotion and reflection was developing (Hogan 2012, p. 372).

2.2. The CCR and Marian Devotion in Bougainville

In PNG, the Catholic Bishops' Conference approved the CCR as one of the authentic movements for spiritual renewal of the Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea in May 1985. The conference stressed this renewal was to be made "not independent of, or even worse, outside of, the church" (Kalisz and Raich 1985, pp. 194–95). In Bougainville, the CCR had already been promulgated by, amongst others, Father Neville Dunne and Bill Cunningham, two Australian Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC).¹¹ In the mid-1970s, Fr Dunne started to organize several 'Life in the Spirit seminars' in the predominantly Catholic region of Bougainville, which were well-attended. These seminars introduced participants to a life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. Through instruction, discussion, communal prayers, and testimonies, they provided an opportunity for people to find out more about renewing and igniting the power of the Holy Spirit and cultivating an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ and with God (See further Hermkens 2020a). Significantly, Fr Dunne used the writings of Montague and others to spread CCR in Bougainville and PNG. In fact, his materials, which include the booklet *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* by the International CCR services, mention the renewed closeness to Mary within CCR members, as she is the mother of Christ and spouse of the Holy Spirit. CCR members recognize in Mary the first disciple to be filled with the Holy Spirit and a model of faith, obedience, prayer, and docility to the Spirit. Although Montague and others acknowledge the importance of Mary within the CCR, the 'official' view is that the Catholic renewal should focus on the basics of the Catholic Faith, and especially on the liturgy (Dunne n.d.; Whitehead 2003). However, in Bougainville, as elsewhere in the world, many adherents of the CCR seem to have a different focus. Instead of giving attention to the importance of the Scriptures and Sacraments, in Bougainville, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are frequently intertwined with devotional practices, directing the renewal's focus away from the liturgy.

While doing fieldwork in Central Bougainville between 2005 and 2019, I encountered phenomena associated with the Catholic Charismatic Renewal mainly in combination with devotional practices, such as Divine Mercy, The Holy Rosary, Immaculate Heart of Mary (Fatima), The Miraculous Medal (Immaculate Conception), and the Rosa Mystica (see further Hermkens 2020a). Inside their homes and self-made chapels, devotees would speak in tongues and perform faith-healing and exorcism rituals with rosary beads and statues of saints. Directing their prayers to statues and pictures of Christ, Mary, and other saints, these objects would mediate, materialize, and hence externalize the transcendence, with devotees receiving messages (gifts of knowledge), noticing the scent of roses, and witnessing Mary's statue cry or smile. In fact, what I found out during my research was that faith healing, exorcism, speaking in tongues, dream visions, prophecy, and other ecstatic practices, which the Western Catholic church has often decried, are integral to Marian devotion in Papua New Guinea. While this strong entanglement between the gifts of the spirit and private devotion is not unique to this region, what is striking is that in Bougainville some of these devotions developed into nationalistic liberation movements that advocated and supported secessionist warfare.

In a previous article (Hermkens 2020a), I elucidate how the entanglement between the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) and devotion to Mary, as well as ongoing encounters between Bougainville 'custom' and Christianity, resulted in particular Bougainvillean ontologies that placed Mary at the center of devotional practices. During the ten-year civil war that erupted shortly after the official introduction of the CCR in Bougainville and the changes brought by Vatican II, these practices and beliefs supported and advocated a "Holy War" against Australia, Papua New Guinea, and the mining company that was violating local customs and women and draining resources and wealth from Bougainville Island. The establishment of Marian movements such as Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, the Marian Mercy Mission (Hermkens 2020b), and the Immaculate Conception all occurred during the crisis, as people longed for new spiritual guidance in order to deal with the hardships they encountered, but also for sovereignty. As such, these Marian movements had a strong political agenda, urging for the conversion of the whole of Bougainville, but

also for political liberation. These Marian ‘liberation movements’ were clearly inspired or carried out by the CCR and its dogmas. Leaders and followers recount receiving gifts (*charismata*) such as prophetic inspiration from the Holy Spirit and/or Mary, freedom from fear, and speaking in tongues, while prayer meetings were the main structural element of these Marian movements.

Importantly, these charismatic Marian movements developed and flourished to a large extent outside the official Catholic Church. Bishop Singkai and his successor Dutch Bishop Henk Kronenberg were very concerned with the arrival of the CCR in Bougainville and the development of these Marian movements in particular, both fearing these movements would develop into “cults” (see further [Hermkens 2020a, 2020b](#)). Due to the crisis, these Marian movements developed without clerical supervision, as most priests had left Bougainville, and those that remained were hindered in their movements. As such, it was the local catechists, or church workers, who kept the faith (and Catholic Church) alive ([Kronenberg and Saris 2009](#), p. 99). The lack of clerical supervision, however, meant that the spiritual direction of these Marian movements was beyond the Bougainville Church’s control. The movements’ focus on exorcism and healing, while placing Mary at the center of their devotion, clearly posits them outside the center and focus of the church: the liturgy. Nevertheless, despite operating without official approval and placing Mary at the center of their devotional practices, members perceived themselves as operating within the Church. Drawing upon local church workers’ support, as well as the political support of several Marist brothers and priests to obtain sovereignty ([Hermkens 2018](#)), Mary became central to the movements’ liberation theology (see further [Hermkens 2020a](#)).

Importantly, the association of Marian imagery with warfare is not unique to Bougainville. From the sixteenth-century Battle of Lepanto in Greece and her role as the guardian and protector of the Polish nation and army in its struggle for an independent nation-state ([De Busser and Niedźwiedź 2009](#)), to the establishment of the “Blue Army” and the International Pilgrim Virgin Statue of Our Lady of Fatima in the United States to combat Communist ideology ([Morgan 2009](#)), Mary has inspired her devotees to take up arms and resist injustice. In fact, all over the world, Mary has been a source of empowerment, but also support and comfort to those who face hardship and oppression. “Classic historical, sociological, and theological studies have observed that Mary often appears to the less powerful in the religious or social hierarchy: women and children, sick and old, or ethnically and religiously marginalized people” ([Hermkens et al. 2009b](#), p. 4). Mary’s concern with the oppressed is announced in Mary’s Magnificat (Luke 1, pp. 46–55), a song in which Mary proclaims, “the mighty will be deposed from their thrones and the lowly raised to high places”. In this part of scripture, Mary thus becomes a key figure and an active agent in being able to bring about social change ([Hermkens et al. 2009b](#), pp. 4–5).

In Bougainville, the hardships of the crisis directed many Catholics towards Mary. As a Bougainvillean priest stated, during the crisis “it was mainly Marian devotion that kept people going”. Praying to Mary facilitated communication with her son Jesus, and hence God the Father, whose aid was desperately needed to deal with hardships brought about by an economic blockade and the violence that pitted various political and religious groups, as well as ethnicities against each other. The rosary was part of people’s daily lives, with mothers, fathers, elders, soldiers, and children carrying it on their bodies and reciting its prayers every day. Moreover, during the conflict, statues of Mary were very much sought after and carried around or buried near one’s house so that Mary would convey her protection over the house and its inhabitants who had been forced to flee. In the following section, I will further explore the power of Mary through rosaries and statues, elucidating the significance of material religion and of mediation in particular.

3. Mediating Divine Intervention: The Power of Rosaries and Statues

Catholicism is a fundamentally material religion ([Mitchell 2009](#), p. 275). In Catholic theology, the divine is manifested in the material world, with Christ and the Holy Spirit

immanently revealing themselves. One of the main rituals during which Christ is believed to be present is the Eucharist ([Catechism of the Catholic Church 1993](#), pp. 1406–19):

By the consecration, the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ is brought about. Under the consecrated species of bread and wine Christ himself, living and glorious, is present in a true, real, and substantial manner: his Body and his Blood, with his soul and his divinity. ([Catechism of the Catholic Church 1993](#), p. 1413)

In addition to the sacraments,¹² which are Christ-instituted, Catholics also recognize sacred things instituted by the Church, sacramentals. A sacramental is a sacred sign or gesture that signifies effects, particularly of a spiritual nature, which are obtained through the intercession of the Church. “By them men are disposed to receive the chief effect of the sacraments, and various occasions in life are rendered holy” ([Catechism of the Catholic Church 1993](#), p. 1667). Sacramentals can be material things, blessed or pious objects (such as scapulars, rosaries, crucifixes, statues, pictures, prayer books, or medals), or actions such as prayers and rituals. Only a deacon, priest, or bishop has the power to bless an object and make it a sacramental. As such, it is not the inherent merit of the object that makes it sacred. When blessings are invoked in the name of Jesus, God sanctifies the words and the objects are blessed. The theology behind sacramentals is that “symbols are transformed and subsequently can have a transforming effect on one who makes use of them” ([Edmisten 2006](#)). Sacramentals not only symbolize holiness; they are holy. Within Catholic theology, sacramentals are credited with the power to remit venial sin, prepare the soul for grace, and exorcize evil spirits ([Catechism of the Catholic Church 1993](#), pp. 1670, 1673). In contrast to the sacraments, however, the power and effectiveness of sacramentals depend upon the power and prayers of the Church and the pious disposition of the person using them.

Importantly, the power and presence granted to religious objects, and in particular to sacramentals, as well as their veneration, has been a point of contention within the Catholic Church.¹³ Throughout its history, the Church and theologians have repeatedly sought to strip images and statues of their power when they threatened to gain undue influence ([Belting 1994](#), p. 1; [Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines 2001](#)). For example, in 1947, Pope Pius XII warned against the veneration of “multitude of sacred images and statues” in churches and altars, bringing “religion into derision and lessen the dignity of worship” ([Pope Pius XII 1947](#), no. 189). When interviewing Bougainvillean Marist brother John Mauro on the topic of Marian devotion and images of Mary, some of these tensions between ‘official’ or orthodox theology and popular piety came to the fore. As Mauro explained:

[. . .] I started to talk about the rosary in my classes, trying to explain that the beads themselves have no power. Only when praying to the Virgin Mary it will be helpful. It is not for decoration or magic, like a good luck charm.

If a person has a statue, I assume that he or she has a special devotion to Mary. I would ask if that statue or image is used as a charm, or as a reminder of Mary, like a photograph. (Marist Brother John Mauro, 2 September 2005)

While Catholic doctrine may be clear, the actual use of rosary beads and statues contests and blurs boundaries between devotion and worship, between words and things, between the material and the immaterial, and between humans, things, and Mary.

Catholic Bougainvilleans use various sacramentals, but rosaries and pictures and statues of Mary and Christ seem to be among the most popular ones. The rosary, which includes meditating on the life of Jesus and Mary, is considered to be a powerful instrument for devotion to God through devotion to Mary.¹⁴ Reciting the rosary faithfully means that one obtains the graces, blessings, and protection of Mary and God. During the crisis, Catholic members of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army used the prayer of the rosary, as well as rosary beads, in their independence struggle against the Papua New Guinea Defence Force. Before engaging in battle, the rosary was collectively prayed, and soldiers took rosary beads onto the battlefield as a form of protection.¹⁵ While some wore them

around their necks, others tucked the beads in the back of their pockets, as they were convinced that Mary would block their machine-guns, not allowing them to kill their Christian PNGDF enemies.¹⁶ Although they trusted Mary in protecting them against getting killed, they were also convinced of Mary's loving nature and her power to prevent *any* killing for that matter. However, people do attribute their victory over the Papua New Guinea Defence Force to the rosary and Mary. As a former BRA soldier and supporter recalled respectively:

During the crisis, I was in the BRA. I was a soldier. I experienced Santu Maria. She saved my life in plenty battles. I was committed to the Church. My prayers worked through Maria. Maria is like the stairs of a house. You must follow the steps to *kam antap* (go up). When going to the Solomons, we were bombed, but the bombs missed us. Mama Maria helped us through her prayers, through our prayers. (Cletus, 18 September 2005)

During the crisis we stayed in the bush, carrying a statue of Mary around, helping sick people, praying the rosary. We only prayed the rosary; it was, and is, our Church. We tried to stop the crisis. In this area, it was all BRA who were staying here. We all stayed inside the bush. During the crisis, the rosary was very powerful; God stayed very close to us. Lotu (belief of/in the) rosary was very strong. (Francis, 12 September 2005)

Moreover, several informants emphasized that Mary and the rosary were also instrumental in bringing peace:

We asked Santu Maria to stop the fighting. We fought with the rosary to bring peace. But we also prayed for freedom and autonomy. [. . .] Now we must reconcile, we must unite. Through the rosary we ask for peace, harmony, and reconciliation. (Andrew, 21 September 2005)

During the crisis, we prayed the rosaries to prevent the PNGDF (Papua New Guinea Defence Force) operations [. . .]. During the crisis, we were hopeless, we only had Maria, and She helped us. We prayed to Her, we cried to Her. Before, other churches would ridicule the rosary. But now, they are afraid. We are not ashamed. We carry the rosary with us. Because of the rosary we have autonomy now. The fact that the UN came is because of our prayers. Prayer is power! It is order, right and eternal. Maria has helped us with this. (Bruno, 22 September 2005)

The previous quotes elucidate the power of prayers, or words, and how verbal performances gain tangible reality and have consequences and impacts on the material world (see also Coleman 1996). In addition, Catholic Bougainvilleans, and Catholics in general, also believe that images and statues have the power to mediate divine actions and make the divine immanent (see also Meyer 2011, p. 62). Whether mass-produced plastic replicas, self-made statues of Mary, or a copy of the International Pilgrim Virgin Statue of Fatima that travelled to Francis Ona's hideout in the Panguna Mountains during the crisis (see Figure 1), statues are believed to embody and reveal the immanent presence of, in this case, Mary. Importantly, this presence is not passive. Mary is believed to operate through her statues. For example, those who witnessed Fatima's pilgrimage to Guava village are convinced it was Fatima's statue that brought peace to Bougainville. As Father Pisi, one of the organizers of the pilgrimage, narrated:

People blamed and killed each other, and Papua New Guinea citizens were targeted. During the war, everything got blurred. Local resistance forces were fighting against the local Bougainville Revolutionary Army, who fought with the Papua New Guinea soldiers. After the (Fatima) statue came, it all stopped! It is the work of Mary. She brought this about. The starting point of peace was Ona's statement: his commitment to this statue to seek peace. Even today, some say it was the statue that brought peace to Bougainville. (Fr. Pisi, November 2005)



Figure 1. The International Pilgrim Virgin Statue of Fatima with Francis Ona in Guava village, Bougainville, in 1997. Fragment from the film “Pilgrim of Peace, made by Fr. Zdzislaw Mlak (Courtesy of Fr. Zdzislaw Mlak).

So how did this statue of Fatima persuade Ona to work towards peace? And how did it communicate this message of peace to her audience? According to David [Morgan \(2009\)](#), who analyzed its visual efficacy, the statue implores the faithful to look into her eyes, thereby drawing them into her powers and conveying her messages. By engaging viewers in “an enthralling gaze that embodies the presence of the Virgin for the devout, appealing directly to the soul and thereby eclipsing the appeal of false gods [. . .], the Fatima statue both enfleshes and ritualizes messages” ([Morgan 2009](#), p. 54). As expressed by the custodians of the International Pilgrim Virgin statue of Our Lady of Fatima: “You look at the statue. There are no words. But there is an experience of Her presence . . . It is as though looking into the eyes of your mother” (in [Morgan 2009](#), p. 54).

Jon Mitchell ([Mitchell 2009](#), p. 264), in his work on ‘Performing Statues’, argues that “statues [. . .] link the material world and the immaterial—the natural and the supernatural—in ways that resolve inherent tensions within Catholic theology, between immanence and transcendence [. . .].” Some informants explained this conundrum, of how the transcendence becomes immanent in a statue, by arguing that the statue is actually not a statue:

Mama Maria is not a statue or a picture. She is a real woman. She is alive. She brings us close to her son. I must talk to her face-to-face. When I am sick, I ask her as my mother to heal me. Sometimes when I pray, I look at her image and see her lips move. Is she talking to me?! (Maria, 22 September 2005)

I cannot call it a statue. She is a human being. Mama Maria is alive. When I pray to her, it is like sitting with a real human being. She is Mama Maria, alive. She is always there. (John, 24 September 2005)

These quotes illustrate that for some believers, Mary’s statue or picture is not an object. Instead, they conceptualize her image as a “real” woman, as being alive. In doing so, believers conflate conceptual distinctions between the spiritual and material (see also

Derks et al. 2012). In fact, believers conceptualize statues neither as things or objects in a secular sense, nor as pious objects (sacramentals) as in Catholic theology, nor as idols, as many interlocutors stressed. How then are statues of Mary defined? How is her presence constituted?

The notion of Mary's statue being "real" is a recurring experience all over the world. According to most scholars, this does not imply people believe the statue *is* Mary. As David Morgan (1998, p. 9) argues in his work on visual piety, "images [or statues] make real what they depict" and, as such, they make the absent present. In his work on lived religion, Robert Orsi (2005, p. 10) similarly argues that statues make the saints present. He also emphasizes that statues are not perceived of as saints themselves. Likewise, Roland Barthes (1991, pp. 21–40) argues that images present a "certificate of presence". In the introduction of the edited volume *Moved by Mary* (Hermkens et al. 2009b), it was argued that presence is communicated and invested in Mary by repetitive performative acts, by selecting or duplicating her image, carrying it around, gazing at it, or narrating about it. These interactions enable Mary to operate, move, and mobilize people (Morgan 1998, p. 50; Hermkens et al. 2009b, p. 8):

Although all believers know that the specific statue in front of them is made of plastic or plaster, at the same time it is personified and deified. It is more than an object, because for the believers it is at the same time filled with the Lady's presence and imbued with her power. People stroke it, kiss it, hug it, and hold it near to their heart as they would stroke, kiss, hug, and hold a beloved one. (Hermkens et al. 2009b, p. 11)

The personal investment in and interaction with Mary become evident in how people attribute agency to Mary's statue in the context of iconoclasm. For example, an SDA man who was believed to have decapitated a cement statue of Mary located near a Mission Station in Central Bougainville drowned a few days later, while another SDA member who had shot a statue of Mary was himself shot by the PNGDF. In both these cases, Catholics are convinced it was divine intervention that caused these men's deaths, as they had desecrated Mary's image. As narrated by Paul when reflecting upon the crisis and the destruction of Catholic relics and sacramentals:

They destroyed Catholic churches, statues. They thought it was part of the crisis, part of the Papua New Guinea government. Those who attacked the statues died. It was the power of Maria that killed them. Now, Seventh Day Adventists and United Church start to see the importance of Maria. Before they argued it was "a statue of nothing"! (Paul, 20 September 2005)

Almost all of my interlocutors accuse Seventh Day Adventists (SDA) of having committed this iconoclasm. Blaming Catholics for worshipping "a piece of stone" and creating a Catholic landscape by placing statues and shrines along public roads, SDAs are believed to have tried to purify the Bougainville landscape from these "idols", at the same time aiming to reveal Catholic superstition and their idolatry. As such, the perceived Seventh Day Adventists' attacks on statues of Mary, and other sacramentals, reveal a process of what Bruno Latour (1993) terms "purification". The aim of acts of purification, like iconoclasm, he notes, is to create "entirely distinct ontological zones: that of human beings on the one hand; that of nonhumans on the other" (Latour 1993, pp. 10–11).

The attacks on Catholic relics and images embody a strong "denial of the power of things to mediate divine actions" (Keane 2007, p. 60). As such, they effectively contradict "the symbolic conception of the image as upheld by Catholics" (Dekoninck 2012, p. 150). In Catholicism, ontological zones between humans and non-humans are fused through doctrines of immanence and transubstantiation. While Catholics will often downplay "the material aspect of the image to reaffirm its transitive nature: what is being venerated is not the stone and the wood, but what they represent" (Dekoninck 2012, p. 150). Paul's quote also elucidates a more offensive approach to accusations of idolatry and iconoclasm. Mary is believed to have taken 'revenge' by killing her attackers. This 'proof' of the divine,

referred to by some interlocutors as “Mary’s touch”, which is not just represented but embodied in and through the object, facilitates immediate sacral restoration.

In short, Mary’s presence seems to be constituted through people’s actions and their engagement with Mary’s images. However, for believers, it is not the object that makes Mary present, but Mary herself, who reveals herself through the material form of the object. Perhaps more importantly, then, in how religion is lived and experienced, is the corporeality of belief (see also [Fedele and Blanes 2011](#)) and the embodiment of Mary (and God) in particular. Mary is embodied in her stone, or plaster images, but also enfleshed in the bodies and spirits of her devotees as they are possessed by her spirit¹⁷ (see also [Falck 2021](#)) and as they mimic Mary and internalize her physical features and virtues, such as obedience, patience, and, most of all, holiness. Catholic women fighting for peace during the Bougainville crisis mimicked Mary by dressing up in blue and, just like Mary, clasping the rosary in their hands, while mediating between fighting parties. At the same time, BRA soldiers used Mary as an example to become and stay holy before and during combat. Not only does Mary make them reflect upon themselves and their lives, but they are also encouraged to transform themselves in light of what Mary represents to them ([Hermkens 2007, 2008](#)). In this context, mimesis is not simply ‘imitation’. Mimicking Mary implies that a spiritual but also “palpable, sensuous connection between the very body of the perceiver and the perceived” ([Taussig 1993](#), p. 21) is created.

The reception of Holy Communion is probably the most prominent example of embodied religious experience within Catholicism, but, as the above shows, statues as well as other sacramentals have similar effects. Prayers, blessings, and objects help devotees to see, hear, smell, taste, and feel God’s work. They are not simply reminders of Mary or God, but physical and spiritual sensations conveying divine presence and touch. Witnessing a statue of Mary taking ‘revenge’ on its/her assaulters, shedding tears, and smiling to and even talking to her devotees shows the physical relationship that humans and images have. It is this combination of bodies, minds, cognition, and emotions that defines lived religion, as “spirituality is developed by just such embodied practices” ([McGuire 2003](#), p. 15).

4. Conclusions: The Power and Intimacy of Mediation

In this article, the impacts of the Second Vatican Council have been discussed by focusing on its interpretation and implementation in Bougainville, a now autonomous region in PNG working towards independence. While some of the Second Vatican Council’s decisions have profoundly shaped the organization of local Catholic Bougainville communities, the devotional lives of ordinary believers seem to have been less impacted by its reforms. While the Second Vatican Council, as well as the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) and local church officials like Bishop Kronenberg, wished to restore popular devotion to its proper place, private devotions and devotion to Mary have remained immensely popular, even supplanting the central importance of the liturgical life of the Church, especially during the crisis.

Focusing on people’s lived religion and how they practice and conceptualize their faith, I have shown the power of Mary and how her divine presence and agency are believed and perceived to be mediated through rosaries and statues. During the Bougainville crisis, praying and carrying the rosary is believed to have impacted the course of warfare and provided safety to those who sought her protection. Attacks on Marian statues are believed to have resulted in the punishment and death of the offenders, and her statues have been seen to cry, smile, talk, heal, convert, produce miracles, and bring peace.

When reflecting upon agency and power, objects are often subjected to human agency and their fate, as in Arjun [Appadurai \(1986\)](#) and Nicholas [Thomas \(1991\)](#) studies, to become entangled with and “live out the social life of men” ([Pinney 2005](#), p. 259). This seems to suggest, as argued by for instance Colleen [McDannell \(1995, pp. 3–4\)](#), that religious objects have no intrinsic meaning or power on their own, only gaining significance within specific patterns of relationships. Alfred [Gell \(1998\)](#) theory on the agency of art advocates a similar relational epistemology wherein objects have social agency only due to their positioning in

networks of social relations. Christopher Pinney (2005, p. 260), however, warns against this tendency to subject objects to human agency and relationality, arguing it renders the object powerless and erasing “any engagement with materiality or visuality except on linguistic terms”. As this paper has shown, elucidating the process of mediation reveals that objects do not have to be reduced to reflections of culture, dependent upon social networks and human agency.

The Bougainville case study elucidates that the ability of rosaries and statues to create social change is not located in either a strict division between objects and subjects, or in their ability to merge, but rather in their mutual coexistence. As the Bougainville case study shows, religious objects and people are significantly intertwined in their mutual coexistence and, moreover, in the conceptualization of that ontological reality. Their semiotic ideology reveals that both objects and subjects can mediate and be extensions of sacred beings and powers, or even *be* sacred beings. This shows how religion and belief work not just through meaning and inward belief, as is often emphasized in more conventional religious studies, but also, and perhaps more strongly, through mediation. In fact, recent scholarship suggests we should study religion *as* mediation (Meyer 2011, p. 61; De Vries 2001). As phrased by Hent de Vries: “We should no longer reflect exclusively on the meaning, historically and in the present, of religion—of faith and belief and their supposed opposites such as knowledge and technology—but concentrate on the significance of the processes of mediation and mediatization without and outside of which no religion would be able to manifest or reveal itself in the first place” (De Vries 2001, p. 28). In de Vries’ analysis, religion becomes media. Whether this approach to the religious message and its medium is an adoption of the Protestant theological tradition that emphasizes the opposition between inner belief and outer expression (Hirschkind 2011, pp. 92, 96) or a Catholic perspective in which message and medium are one and the same (Engelke 2011, p. 100) remains debatable. Of importance here is how mediation works for Catholic Bougainvilleans, and in particular how they perceive their relationship and communication with Mary and God through words and things. The ‘semiotic ideology’ (Keane 2007) of Catholic Bougainvilleans shows that materiality and mediation are essential in communicating with the divine and in experiencing Mary’s intercessory and heavenly presence and power. Moreover, mediation is not something that is external to them. In fact, the result of mediation is the immediacy of the divine and heavenly presence (see also Meyer 2011, p. 61).

A focus on mediation also shows that Mary’s various images contain their own prior contexts that *can* become “entangled” with other, particular, social and cultural temporalities. Emerged from particular religious, artistic, social, and historical contexts that shaped her many formal and material properties, Mary recursively “remediates” each new social context to which she becomes relevant, often at great spatial and temporal removes from her origins (cf. Mazzarella 2004, p. 358; Hermkens and Venbrux 2011). As Pinney (2004, p. 205) rightly argues for visual culture in general, objects exist in temporalities that are “not necessarily co-terminous with more conventional political temporalities”. Fatima’s pilgrimage to the hideout of Francis Ona in Bougainville exemplified the process of remediation, but also the tensions and changes it evoked (see further Hermkens and Venbrux 2011). This and other examples in this paper show how the materiality and spirituality of Marian objects impact themselves upon the contiguous world.

The power and agency attributed by believers to rosaries and statues of Mary also highlight the continuing tensions between lived and institutionalized religion. Popular devotions in Bougainville have tended to move away from the Church, and, as a result, the Bougainville Catholic Church and its clergy have been trying to rein in and control devotional groups, in particular those that arose during the Bougainville crisis (see further Hermkens 2020a). However, believers and the movements’ members continue to identify themselves as Catholics and nurture the universal identity of the Church as “One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic” (see also del Pinal 2017). This shows that despite reforms of the Second Vatican Council to impact the devotions of ordinary Catholics, lived religion has its own dynamics. Grounded in particular contexts, religion is intimately intertwined with

local cultural and political processes and events, which, as the Bougainville case shows, may mobilize ordinary Catholics to empower Mary and her presence in rosaries and statues to advocate a Holy War and bring socio-political renewal and change.

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Notes

- ¹ *Me’ekamui Pontoku Onoring* roughly translated means “government of the guardians of the sacred [or holy] land”. It is also called the “Fifty Toea Movement”, a reference to the monetary contributions members made (Regan 2002). *Me’ekamui* is used to refer to Bougainville as a Holy Island; *me’eka* meaning holy or sacred and *mui* meaning island or land.
- ² The title Co-redemptrix refers to Mary’s participation in redemption.
- ³ “In Jesus Christ, ‘there is no distance or separation between the medium and the message: it is the one case where we can say that the medium and message are fully one and the same’” (Engelke 2011, p. 100).
- ⁴ As the “Blessed Virgin”, Mary is “invoked by the Church under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, and Mediatrix. This, however, is to be so understood that it neither takes away from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficaciousness of Christ the one Mediator” (Pope Paul VI 1964, no. 62). Although the title of Mary as Co-redemptrix was discussed at the Second Vatican Council, it was not adopted (see also Glass 2021).
- ⁵ Ogan writes that the Kieta mission was established in 1901, while Laracy argues that this happened in 1902.
- ⁶ While most of the data presented in this paper derives from fieldwork conducted in the Koromira area of Central Bougainville (predominantly among the Nasioi people), many beliefs presented here are shared among Catholic communities elsewhere in Bougainville. Ethnographic fieldwork was mainly done in 2005–2006, with short visits in 2018 and 2019.
- ⁷ Christiane Falck (2021) describes how in the Sepik region of PNG, women have started to lead Catholic charismatic prayer groups, which men can attend, and although men can feel God’s spirit, only female bodies are possessed by spirits of God. In Bougainville, both men and women can be possessed by spirits and saints, irrespective of gender (see further Hermkens 2020a), but I have only encountered women being possessed by Mary’s spirit (see further footnote 17).
- ⁸ In 2011, the majority (68%) of the 249,358 Bougainvilleans were Catholic, followed by adherents of the United Church (UC), Seventh Day Adventists (SDA) and Pentecostals (NSO 2011).
- ⁹ Interviews with pilgrims, conducted in 2018.
- ¹⁰ De Haardt (2011, p. 172) mentions that Candlemas (2 February) became ‘The Feast of the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple’ and that ‘the Annunciation (of the Blessed Virgin Mary)’ on 25 of March, is now called ‘The Annunciation of the Lord’.
- ¹¹ While in some parts of PNG the CCR has been under guidance of mainly foreign priests, in Bougainville it is a lay movement that, although approved of by the late Bougainvillean Bishop Unabali, has been receiving mixed support from local priests. Despite this mixed support, and sometimes outward rejection of the CCR by parish priests, the

CCR has a large following in Bougainville, being part of Bougainville Catholic communities since the mid-1970's (Hermkens 2020a).

- 12 The Eucharist is considered one of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church, which “touch all the stages and all the important moments of Christian life”, uniting the stages of natural and spiritual life (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1993, p. 1210).
- 13 As Matthew Engelke's work *A problem of Presence* (2007) shows, the issue of presence in relation to religious objects is not confined to Catholicism, but while Engelke's adherents of the Masowe Chishanu Church in Zimbabwe are committed to “a faith in which things do not matter” (Engelke 2007, p. 9), for Bougainville Catholics religious objects reveal divine presence.
- 14 By reciting the four sacred mysteries, referred to as the joyful, sorrowful, glorious mysteries, and the mysteries of light, one reflects on Mary's pains and joys, but also on the pains and joys experienced by oneself.
- 15 In various areas in Papua New Guinea, wearing a rosary is believed to protect oneself, or one's children, against *raskols* (criminals) or other evil.
- 16 There is a long history of using devotional objects in periods of conflict with the hope that they would stop bullets. See, for instance, Ewa Klekot's work on “The Spanish Civil War *detentebalas*: some notes on the materiality of the Sacred Heart” (Klekot 2012).
- 17 In Solos on Buka Island, in the north of AROB, three girls, referred to as visionaries, were regularly ‘possessed’ by Mary's spirit, with Mary taking possession of the girls and speaking through them about the need to combat local declining morals and social issues, such as alcohol abuse and gambling, but also about the need to eliminate sorcery (for more on sorcery on Buka, see Opperman 2016).

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