

The Problems and Victims of Sorcery and Witchcraft Practices and Beliefs in Melanesia: An Introduction

Miranda Forsyth and Richard Eves

The belief that illness, death and misfortune of all sorts is frequently caused by the deliberate interventions of individuals with special powers or magical knowledge is pervasive throughout Melanesia. As a result, sorcery and witchcraft beliefs and practices exert a powerful influence on many aspects of day-to-day life, as well as being significant vectors for community tensions, conflict and violence. Moreover, rather than disappearing under the influence of Christianity and modern life, sorcery and witchcraft practices and beliefs are proving extremely resilient, with many claiming that they are increasing and spreading. In recent years, most of the attention given to the problems arising from sorcery and witchcraft beliefs and practices has been on the attacks and killings of accused sorcerers and witches. Three widely publicised events in 2013 and 2014 brought these forcibly into public focus. In Mount Hagen in 2013 a woman was tortured and then burnt alive in front of hundreds of onlookers, including members of her community and police officers. Later that year, a female teacher in Bougainville was publicly tortured and beheaded. Then, in November 2014, two men in Vanuatu were publicly hanged in a community hall following accusations that they had been practising witchcraft. However, sorcery and witchcraft beliefs and practices also give rise to a range of social problems that are not as visible, including the retarding of economic development, poor public health, undermining of social cohesion, incentivising crime and creating insecurity.

Today, as in the past, many communities, individuals, church organisations and policymakers in Melanesia are trying very hard to grapple with these negative societal impacts of belief in sorcery and witchcraft. Partly as a result of the three incidents detailed above, the 'problem' of sorcery and witchcraft is increasingly a focus of international attention, such as through special rapporteur reports and the work of international non-government organisations (NGOs) (e.g. Heyns 2014; Manjoo 2013). The chapters in this book document and discuss the ways in which different actors are addressing and exploring the different facets of the problems associated with these beliefs in Melanesia. As such, this book's emphasis is on trying to understand what is happening, and also on the types of interventions that are being trialled and their successes and failures.

At the outset it is important to observe that understandings about what the actual problems are differ widely depending upon the world view of the person concerned. For the overwhelming majority of the population across Melanesia, the problem of sorcery and witchcraft is the harm that sorcerers and witches do to their communities, killing and harming innocent people, undermining local businesses and national development projects, and leading to fear and insecurity. From this perspective, victims of sorcery are those people who are believed to have been killed or otherwise negatively affected by the actions of a witch or a sorcerer. In contrast, most international NGOs and human rights bodies consider the problem to be the violence that sometimes emanates from sorcery or witchcraft accusations, and characterise victims as those who are accused of *being* witches or sorcerers and consequently attacked or expelled from their community.

This radical difference that world view makes has resulted in much confusion, misunderstanding and lack of traction in the well-meaning efforts of different groups to address the 'problem'. It has also meant that meaningful dialogue between those with different world views has been limited. Partly in response to this, this book seeks to engage with, and interconnect, a variety of viewpoints on both what the problems of sorcery and witchcraft practices and beliefs entail, and who the victims are and how they are suffering. The authors in this book are Melanesians and non-Melanesians, academics from a variety of disciplines including anthropology and law, policymakers, lawyers and members of church organisations. Taken together, their insights demonstrate the multifaceted nature of the issues arising from sorcery and witchcraft practices and beliefs, and lead to the conclusion that any redress must be alive to the interwoven elements involved. Similarly, the chapters in this book highlight the futility in distinguishing between 'traditional' and 'modern' causes or expressions of sorcery, suggesting that such dualistic ways of thinking are unhelpful to the analysis (see also Herriman 2014).

It is also critical to acknowledge that sorcery and witchcraft beliefs and practices do not always lead to harm, and, from a local perspective, these powers often have a range of associated positives such as healing, gardening and weather magic. By and large, however, this book is not about these positive elements, except in a tangential way that respects their existence and continued beneficial importance. The focus of this book is rather on the problems associated with these beliefs and practices, problems that are the focus of struggle and concern for communities around Melanesia. It aims to contextualise these problems in ways that avoid simplistic solutions and provoke deeper investigation into creative and realistic paths forward.

This volume originates from two multidisciplinary conferences in 2013, one in Australia and one in Papua New Guinea (PNG), focusing on the negative social

consequences of belief in sorcery and witchcraft in Melanesia.¹ Both involved academics, policymakers, human rights activists, church organisations, NGOs, international organisations and aid donors. Participants and speakers came from PNG, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Australia, New Zealand, Europe and North America.² This volume brings together a selection of papers from both conferences, and although the majority concern PNG, two chapters deal with Solomon Islands and two with Vanuatu. While there are a number of similarities in the experiences of these three countries, and indeed within them, there are also crucial differences, especially in regard to the extent of violence associated with the beliefs.

This collection forms part of an extensive body of literature about sorcery and witchcraft in Melanesia (e.g. Fortune 1963; Knauff 1985; Lindenbaum 1979; Patterson 1974–75; Stephen 1987; Zelenietz and Lindenbaum 1981; Zocca 2009) and around the globe in general (e.g. Ellen and Watson 1993; Kapferer 1997; Siegel 2006; Whitehead and Wright 2004), a full overview of which is beyond the scope of this introduction. Historically, the topic has been dominated by anthropological writings in the form of classic ethnographies that have largely sought to describe in detail such beliefs to illustrate their inherent logic, often in comparison to science. The classic here is Evans-Pritchard's (1937) *Witchcraft, oracles and magic among the Azande*. Contemporary anthropologists have turned to consider sorcery and witchcraft beliefs as indigenous critiques or commentaries on modernity, capitalism and unequal development (e.g. Ashforth 2005; Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Geschiere 1997; Moore and Sanders 2001; Niehaus et al. 2001; Smith 2008). More recently this topic has been addressed by academics from a range of disciplines, such as lawyers concerned with the possibilities and limitations of legislative change (e.g. Forsyth 2006), academics concerned with the relevance of human rights for addressing attacks on those accused of sorcery and witchcraft, public health academics (e.g. Baskind and Birbeck 2005) and development academics concerned about ways in which these beliefs undermine development (e.g. Ashforth 2005; Brain 1982; Fisiy and Geschiere 2001; Golooba-Mutebi 2005; Kohnert 1996; Leistner 2014; Petrus 2012; Smith 2005). There is also an increasing amount of grey literature being produced in this area, including by church organisations, NGOs, international NGOs, United Nations agencies and others.³ The increasingly wide range of commentators interested in this topic is reflected in the varied backgrounds of the authors in this volume.

1 Sorcery and Witchcraft-Related Killings in Melanesia: Culture, Law and Human Rights Perspectives Conference, The Australian National University, Canberra, 5–7 June 2013; and Sorcery and Witchcraft Accusations: Developing a National Response to Overcome the Violence Conference, Goroka, PNG, December 2013.

2 For further details of the conferences, see Forsyth (2013a, 2013b, 2013c).

3 See, for example, the 'resources' page on the Witchcraft and Human Rights Information Network website, www.whrin.org; Amnesty International (2011); HSIIMR (2004); and Oxfam International (2010).

The book is structured into three parts. The chapters in Part 1 discuss the social, economic and cultural dimensions to the belief in witchcraft and sorcery. Part 2 contains a number of chapters that deal with the legal dimensions to the belief in witchcraft and sorcery. Finally, the chapters in Part 3 explore some positive ways forward in overcoming one of the most problematic aspects of sorcery and witchcraft beliefs and practices today, namely sorcery accusation-related violence.

Terminology and cosmological perspective

As mentioned above, terminology in this area is problematic and frequently misleading, as both the problems of sorcery and witchcraft and the victims of those problems depend upon the world view of the person concerned. This book aims to be neutral in relation to the question of whether sorcery and witchcraft 'really' occur, and as such refers to sorcery and witchcraft beliefs and practices. A number of authors also refer to sorcery and witchcraft accusation-related violence to clearly distinguish that group of victims from those considered to have been harmed by sorcery and witchcraft itself.

Definitional clarity is also needed in respect of terms such as sorcery, witchcraft and magic. It is clear that there is much confusion around the use of these terms, that they are often used interchangeably, and that none of them adequately describe the particular nature of the phenomenon as it is experienced around the region. These terms can also be viewed as dangerously neo-colonial, and reference European traditions that are highly inappropriate in the Melanesian context. Following the work of Evans-Pritchard (1937) among the Azande in Africa, anthropologists around the world have tended to distinguish between sorcery and witchcraft on the basis that witches are seemingly possessed of an innate and unconscious propensity to harm others, whereas sorcery involves the conscious and deliberate manipulation of objects and/or spells to achieve a desired outcome (Eves 2013). However, as always in Melanesia, distinctions and categorisations of any sort are often confounded by the multiple variations that are present in almost everything, sorcery and witchcraft practices and beliefs included. The diverse nature of what is understood by sorcery or witchcraft in the region is reflected in the range of vernacular terms used to describe it: *puri puri*, *mura mura*, *dikana*, *vada*, *mea mea*, or *sanguma* in PNG; *vele* and *arua* in Solomon Islands; and *nakaemas*, *posen* and black magic in Vanuatu. As a general rule, the authors in this volume use the terminology that best suits their particular context.

Part 1: Social, economic and cultural dimensions to the belief in witchcraft and sorcery

The first part of this volume contains chapters that analyse the social, economic and cultural context of witchcraft and sorcery practices and beliefs, written by Melanesian and non-Melanesian anthropologists and policymakers. These authors demonstrate that such beliefs and practices give rise to, and are associated with, a wide range of negative social problems, from poor economic development, public health and social cohesion, to crime and insecurity. Belief in sorcery discourages entrepreneurship because jealousy derived from economic inequality is a key source of sorcery and witchcraft accusations. Crime and insecurity arise because people react to deaths, sickness and misfortune by seeking to punish, expel, cure or get revenge on those identified as being the sorcerer or witch responsible. While sorcery and witchcraft accusations often occur within communities or even families, in some areas they are also implicated in intercommunity warfare. As well as physical attacks and murders of those accused, such accusations can also lead to civil unrest, property destruction, and the fostering of a pervasive culture of insecurity for relatives of the accused.

Here we identify a number of common themes in the chapters in this part, and also incorporate a number of relevant observations made during the two conferences by presenters whose papers are not included in this volume.

The modern nature of witchcraft- and sorcery-related beliefs and practices (and some of their potential causes)

It is clear from many of the chapters that the actions following witchcraft and sorcery accusations, and indeed the underlying expressions of beliefs today, vary markedly from precolonial times. The very public nature of many witchcraft-related attacks today, and the associated prolonged sexualised torture of the victim that has been witnessed recently in PNG, are said to differ from traditional practices, when victims were dispatched secretly, often by kin. Attention is also drawn to the fact that witchcraft- and sorcery-related beliefs are being transported around PNG, and Melanesia in general, to places where they never previously existed. One participant in the Canberra conference commented that people are reacting to new social ideas in terms of old belief systems, and so for example are talking about witches using helicopters and mobile phones. Other speakers observed that in the past people referred to stones being used to 'poison' people, but now it is chemicals that are said to be used. Sorcery practices are

also being commodified and increasingly able to be 'bought' at local markets as new modes of accessing power, meaning that a far greater range of people have access to them than previously. The variety of forms of sorcery and witchcraft seem to be increasing, rather than dying out.

Many of these changes are discussed in Chapter 1 by Jack Urame, Director of the Melanesian Institute. His chapter, which is based on several years of research into the issue, details the extent of the violence associated with sorcery accusations, the various ways in which the rate and pattern of sorcery-accusation violence has grown and changed, and also the different types of violence associated with it. He identifies a number of contributing factors to sorcery-related violence, including lack of development, collapse of traditional systems, economic imbalance, lifestyle diseases, generational conflict, and lack of information or misguided information from medical workers.

Chapter 2, by John Cox and Georgina Phillips, also provides an important insight into a significant contributor to the prevalence of the sorcery and witchcraft complex in PNG today, namely the failing health system. They explore these issues through a focus on emergency departments in hospitals and explore the ways in which notionally biomedical spaces can be places where meanings of illness and death are contested. They call for reinvestment in medical services and training as a strategy for combating sorcery-related violence.

Perpetrators of violence against accused witches and sorcerers

Some authors argue that it is 'useless', disenfranchised young men who are carrying out the physical attacks on alleged witches and sorcerers, although the accusations may have been first made by women or older men (Urame, Chapter 1, this volume). Young men are associated with drugs, alcohol, small arms and frustration, and are positioned as unable to find a meaningful role for themselves in their communities. Conversely, they see themselves as local heroes in the role of protecting their communities. These authors therefore suggest that strategies targeted towards working with such men, and confronting the troubled forms of postcolonial masculinity, are necessary in dealing with sorcery and witchcraft practices today. However, others complicate this picture, presenting research that suggests there is far more community support for the violence than these descriptions depict, and that violence is often carried out with widespread public approbation (Eves and Kelly-Hanku 2014). This is certainly an area that requires more research.

The gendered nature of sorcery and witchcraft

The gendered nature of sorcery and witchcraft is a subject on which many different viewpoints are expressed. Although there has been a tendency for the problem of sorcery and witchcraft to be described in international discourse as a problem experienced by women, in fact those accused of perpetrating acts of sorcery and witchcraft, and the victims of sorcery- and witchcraft-related attacks, are both men and women (e.g. Jorgensen 2014). One speaker at the Canberra conference commented that a common theme in the victims of these attacks was that they are either 'strangers on the inside' such as women who have married-in, or else 'insiders who have become strangers', such as community members who predominantly live away from their communities in urban settings, returning home sporadically. However, certain geographical areas tend to target one gender or the other, depending upon local cultural understandings and beliefs about sorcery and witchcraft. For example, a speaker at the Goroka conference was adamant that in Mekeo, PNG, no woman is associated with sorcery practices, and this is the realm of men who use the powers to attack neighbouring tribes or defend their communities from such attacks. Overall, however, women appear to be greater targets of witchcraft accusations than men, particularly in PNG (Amnesty International 2009; Eves and Kelly-Hanku 2014). In addition, where women are the victims of sorcery accusation-related violence, they are often more vulnerable and at risk than men, due to unequal power relations, lack of support structures, and lack of access to land or income.

Social changes and breakdown of traditional authorities

Classical analyses of sorcery and witchcraft have correlated the increase of such beliefs, in particular places at particular times, with periods of illness, misfortune and uncertainty. They explain witchcraft and sorcery in terms of anxieties born of radical social change, suggesting that accusations arise when communities experience dramatic upheavals and conflicts precipitated by epidemics, labour migration, incorporation into the cash economy and political insecurity (Behringer 2004; Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Eves 2000; Zocca 2009). These observations appear to hold true for Melanesia today, where the beliefs are associated with unexplained deaths and sickness, social stress and change, poverty, uneven development, issues of jealousy, and the problem of drugs and alcohol. New forms of wealth, and trends towards individualism and materialism, are leading to economic disparities and provoking jealousy and envy, which also feeds witchcraft- and sorcery-related suspicions and accusations. This is associated with the growth of settlements, people living in larger communities, and with people traditionally considered as 'outsiders' moving into communities. It is also

clear that service delivery failure, particularly in health services, education and transport infrastructure, are major contributors to the premature deaths that are fuelling accusations of sorcery and witchcraft, particularly in PNG. Finally, intergenerational tensions were also highlighted as a significant contributing factor to sorcery-accusation violence. Paul Barker, the head of PNG's Institute of National Affairs and MC at the Goroka conference, observed that when young men carry out this violence, 'They're also demonstrating their power versus that of the traditional leadership, including the more modern leadership, the local village court magistrates and other leaders' (ABC News 2014).

Many speakers referred to the disintegration of traditional authority structures, in particular control over young men by community leaders, as being a particular problem. Even if there is a desire to stop sorcery and witchcraft accusations getting out of control, there is limited power to do so at a local level, meaning that there is a frequent theme of requiring more state engagement in managing the issues. Jack Urame (Chapter 1) observes, 'Unlike in traditional societies, today traditional leaders are often reluctant to intervene when sorcery accusations occur because they are afraid of being physically attacked or blamed for being sorcerers themselves'. Again, this is less marked in Vanuatu where the customary governance structures are relatively stronger.

The role of churches

There are differing views about whether churches contribute to sorcery accusation-related violence or whether they help to overcome it. Many speakers at both conferences stressed that Pentecostal churches with their emphasis on Satan and their campaigns of 'spiritual warfare' and need for exorcisms were fomenting beliefs in witchcraft and sorcery. Some observed that there is a need to control the proliferation of such churches. However, positive examples were also given of strategies developed and adopted by the more established churches to control sorcery and witchcraft accusations. Philip Gibbs (Chapter 17) describes the Catholic Church's 'five-point strategy' that has had a restraining effect on sorcery-related violence. There was considerable discussion during the conferences of the sometimes contradictory roles played by the Melanesian Brotherhood in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands in relation to these issues.

The role of the media

Questions were asked during the two conferences about the role of the media in engendering 'copycat' sorcery- and witchcraft-related violence in PNG. Responses to these concerns stressed that news about sorcery- and witchcraft-related attacks were being transmitted through informal networks (particularly mobile phones) as much as, or more than, through formal media;

that the more informed the debate can be the better; that the power of the media can be harnessed in positive ways such as through the enormously successful *Haus Krai* movement in 2013 and the 'Remembering Kepari Leniata Campaign' on Facebook;⁴ and that standing by and watching the most vulnerable members of communities be attacked and victimised is not a palatable alternative. The comment was also made that a major problem is that the message of impunity in relation to these attacks as a result of police unwillingness or incapacity to act has already gotten out loud and clear.

Sorcery and violence

Many speakers at the two conferences drew attention to the different forms of sorcery-related violence. The attacks on the two women accused of witchcraft in PNG mentioned above were shown to be just one particular manifestation of violence, although media exposure on this suggests to outsiders that it is the only type. For example, sorcery was also demonstrated to be a trigger for intercommunity tribal warfare in the highlands, and also to have been causative in disputes between different clans in Bougainville. Some speakers also discussed the fact that most accusations of sorcery and witchcraft do not end up in violence, particularly in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, and this is also a point compellingly articulated by Salmah Eva-Lina Lawrence (Chapter 3).

In this volume, the relationship between sorcery and tribal warfare is demonstrated through a case study by Father Patrick Gesch and Jonathan Julius (Chapter 7), which seeks to investigate what lay behind the killings of seven men and a three-year-old boy in Madang Province in April 2014. This chapter describes a cycle of violence that was contributed to by the gradual withdrawal of all government services from the communities involved, ongoing disputes over land, and cult-like practices associated with the *haus man* group.

Overall, many speakers at both conferences considered sorcery-accusation violence to be part of a wider problem of the pervasiveness of violence throughout PNG society, including domestic violence and sexual violence, that urgently needs to be addressed. To this end, a decision was made in the planning stages for the Goroka conference to focus on breaking the link between sorcery accusations and violence. This was a pragmatic decision that recognised that violence is the most problematic aspect of the beliefs in PNG today. It was also intended to allow some conceptual separation between the beliefs themselves and the violent responses to accusations of sorcery or witchcraft, although there is considerable debate about the extent to which this separation can in fact be made.

4 www.facebook.com/NationalHausKrai; www.facebook.com/TheLeniataLegacy.

Finally, it should be noted that the problem of violence arising from sorcery and witchcraft accusations in Melanesia today is by no means unique.⁵ Rather, it is part of a growing global phenomenon, with new pockets of what has been termed an 'epidemic' appearing in many diaspora communities worldwide, and developing in new and troubling directions in many parts of Africa and Latin America.⁶

Differences in sorcery- and witchcraft-related beliefs across Melanesia

The chapters in this part of the book highlight the diversity of witchcraft- and sorcery-related beliefs across Melanesia. It is clear that understanding the particular cultural context involved is fundamental to an understanding of the problems associated with the beliefs, as is argued by John Himugu (Chapter 5). He describes in some detail the beliefs of the Huli people in PNG and the way in which they have developed their own mechanisms to deal with the social issues they generate. As a result of this diversity, there are limits to the extent to which valid generalisations can be made in the context of sorcery- and witchcraft-related beliefs and practices. Further, accusations and counter-accusations are often embedded in particular local political landscapes, a point convincingly made by Siobhan McDonnell (Chapter 8) on the linkages between tensions over land and sorcery accusations in Vanuatu. She shows how land is a major source of social tension in rural areas in Vanuatu, and argues that solutions to *nakaemas* must recognise the social circumstances and relations that surround sorcery and that this must be built into any regulatory model.

For the East Sepik, Father Patrick Gesch (Chapter 6) reports that the institutions of sorcery and witchcraft have their supporters in the leaders of the communities. They are social forms of review of what is happening or what harm evildoers are bringing to the village, and as such these institutions serve particular roles in the community that must be understood within their particular context.

Multifaced nature of sorcery

At the Canberra conference, it was noted by Professor Margaret Jolly that divine power has many faces in Melanesia, and commonly those who are thought to have the power to harm also have the power to heal. Although the focus of this volume, and the two conferences, is and was on the negative social effects of sorcery and witchcraft beliefs, participants also stressed positive aspects

5 It is also a problem for Indonesia; see Herriman (2007).

6 For Africa, see Ashforth (2002, 2005); Comaroff and Comaroff (1993); Geschiere (1997); Moore and Sanders (2001); Niehaus et al. (2001); and Smith (2008). For Latin America, see Whitehead and Wright (2004).

of the beliefs, such as gardening and healing magic, and the need for these to be taken into account in policy responses. In Chapter 3, Salmah Eva-Lina Lawrence describes how sorcery and witchcraft empowers and contributes to the status of Milne Bay women. She characterises witchcraft into three types — harming, protecting and healing — and notes the importance of these bodies of knowledge as key community resources, for example, by giving women control over their own fertility. Some speakers suggested that the polarising of sorcery into good and evil is a product of Christianisation with its emphasis on evil and Satan, and that previously spirits were neither good nor bad, just powerful.

In Chapter 9, Laurent Dousset reminds us that in many respects the narrative of sorcery is a means by which communities deal with social change. He argues that sorcery is ‘a place where belonging and being are reconfigured and therefore where notions of the “person”, the “group”, “ethnicity” or “power” are redefined and adapted to changing historical and material conditions’. Comparing his analysis of Malekula in Vanuatu with the accounts reported by Maurice Bloch for Madagascar, he suggests that sorcery incorporates both a generalised sociocognitive and a localised historical component. Through the former, sorcery constitutes the process in which ‘boundaries’ between humanity and animality, or between ‘self’ or similarity and ‘other’ or difference, are challenged. The localised historical component, on the other hand, reflects the particular material and immaterial conditions that trigger this process of boundary reconfiguration with as a possible corollary important changes in the local sociocultural and political order.

Sorcery as impeding economic development/jealousy

A number of speakers linked fear of sorcery with jealousy and envy, leading to an unwillingness of some in the region to work towards advancing their own living standards. Setting up businesses and becoming successful (especially if wealth is shown outwardly, such as in building new houses) is widely seen as being risky and as inviting a premature death through a sorcery attack. These fears are to an extent supported by the sudden deaths of apparently successful (and hence often overweight, stressed, physically inactive and so forth) middle-aged men and women due to heart attacks and other non-communicable diseases such as hypertension and diabetes. It was generally agreed that these concerns have to date been largely invisible in development discourse. Lawrence Foana’ota (Chapter 4) sets out in some detail how the belief in sorcery and witchcraft in Solomon Islands has pervasive negative effects on social and economic development, and is often blamed for the failure of development projects. This in turn is problematic, as it deflects attention from alternative explanations of such failures, such as corruption.

Part 2: Legal dimensions to the belief in witchcraft and sorcery

The belief in sorcery and witchcraft also raises a host of complicated legal issues that are explored through six chapters in Part 2 of the book, focusing firstly on PNG and then Solomon Islands. Christine Stewart (Chapter 10) and Mel Keenan (Chapter 11) contextualise the legal treatment of sorcery and witchcraft in a historical setting, providing the background to the enactment of the PNG *Sorcery Act 1971* and its colonial antecedents. Miranda Forsyth (Chapter 12) then updates these discussions in the light of recent developments in the region, including the repeal of the *Sorcery Act 1971* in 2013. She sets out a number of overarching questions central to any criminal justice response, including whether sorcery or witchcraft should be a crime in the criminal justice legislation, whether beliefs in sorcery and witchcraft should be available as a criminal defence or be able to be taken into account in mitigation of sentence, and whether the state should provide forums (such as courts or mediation centres) for dealing with allegations of witchcraft and sorcery, and if so where and how.

The chapter by Ravunamu Auka, Barbara Gore and Rebecca Koralyo (Chapter 13), all legal officers in the PNG Office of the Public Prosecutor, sheds a number of insights into the operational difficulties of prosecuting sorcery- and witchcraft-related cases in the state criminal justice system. They demonstrate the extremely limited way in which the state criminal justice system has been able to operationalise the *Sorcery Act 1971*, and also to deal with the perpetrators of sorcery accusation-related violence. Their statistical analysis was supported by Monica Paulus and Mary Kini of the Highlands Human Rights Defenders Network, who presented at both conferences. They stated that in the 36 cases of sorcery accusation-related violence they have been involved with, only one had led to a successful prosecution and that was because the victim in question had money to pursue the issue. This chapter is also an important reflection of the limitations of a regulatory approach that focuses solely on a legislative response, demonstrating the critical need for engagement of the whole of the criminal justice system, particularly the police. Auka and colleagues argue that '[i]n PNG the police are inadequately paid and infrastructure relating to their work needs either maintenance or restructure. With a police force in this situation, PNG cannot possibly contain sorcery-related violence, because the violence is usually a group attack and everyone in the community usually takes part. Police are often outnumbered and outgunned.'

Their chapter also demonstrates the influence of social attitudes on the operation of the criminal justice system. For instance, their statistics show that only 25 per cent of the cases that have ended up in the state courts have involved a female victim of sorcery-accusation violence, despite evidence from elsewhere

that women are far more likely than men to be victims. They surmise that this 'could possibly mean that the death of a woman may be less significant or may go unnoticed in the community or may not be seen to warrant an action taken against the offenders'. These statistics were supported by a presentation at the Goroka conference from the village courts secretariat, whose statistics showed that a significant majority of cases coming before the village courts involved male complainants and also male defendants.⁷ Clearly, addressing this issue requires challenging fundamental stereotypes about the respective worth of women and men, and also issues of real and perceived barriers to women's access to the state justice system.

The campaign against sorcery accusation-related violence is being increasingly articulated within the discourse of human rights, both at international levels and also at very local levels, such as with the Highlands Human Rights Defenders Network. Mark Evenhuis (Chapter 14) interrogates the promise and limitations of relying upon the language of human rights to know about and respond to these issues, focusing particularly on Bougainville. He argues that human rights law inevitably conceptualises sorcery-related violence as a traditional practice productive of societal disorder, which demands state-led interventions involving law and cultural transformation. He suggests a more productive approach would take into account the broader political and socio-economic contexts in which accusations of sorcery arise. He shows how the violence that is the subject of critique by the developed world through the language of human rights is, ironically, actually in large part a result of the economic pressures on Bougainville caused by its economic exploitation by those developed countries. Salmah Eva-Lina Lawrence (Chapter 3) also notes that in discourse and praxis there is an absence of 'acknowledge[ment] [of] the negative effects of Eurocentric modernity and its contemporary guise of development, and consideration of its impact upon civil unrest and criminal activity, and indeed upon gender violence'.

Since 2013 the law reform commissions in Vanuatu, PNG and Solomon Islands have started to review their laws against sorcery and witchcraft in attempts to better deal with the legal issues involved. The final chapter in this part, by Philip Kanairara and Derek Futaiasi of the Solomon Islands Law Reform Commission, gives an insight into the preliminary findings of the commission on the issue and outlines possible future directions. These are seen to involve enrolling local courts, chiefs or community leaders and the churches. The authors recommend that if this is to happen, the state must provide training in areas of natural justice, human rights principles and other basic legal principles for those who

7 Presentation by Miriam Dondo, Village Courts and Land Mediation Secretariat, Goroka conference, 2013.

will be involved in dealing with issues arising from the belief in sorcery. This will empower them to conduct and discharge fair hearings and settlements for parties who seek remedies from them.

Part 3: Positive directions in overcoming violence

The final section of the book is concerned with identifying positive directions in managing sorcery-related social problems in non-violent ways. In fact, this was a central concern of the Canberra conference, and as organisers we were disappointed by the limited number of abstracts we received that provided good examples of such actions. This disappointment was subsequently partially alleviated by some inspiring presentations given formally and informally at both conferences, albeit without academic papers, by individuals and organisations involved in managing disputes at the grassroots level in PNG. These presenters included Monica Paulus and Lily Be'soer for the Highlands Human Rights Defenders Network, Mary Kini for KUP Women for Peace, Josephine Siviri's work in Bougainville, Bishop Bal's work in Simbu Province, and Dr Jan Jaworski of Kundiawa Hospital. All demonstrated the enormous power of individuals to overcome violence and to offer real comfort and support to a wide range of victims. For example, at the Goroka conference Dr Jaworski described an occasion when he gave the relatives of a person with important political connections a thorough biomedical explanation of his death. They asked him to address 100 distraught relatives and he did so. After he had finished, someone stood up and said to him 'thank you doctor, we will not search for *sanguma*'. Dr Jaworski observed that such an explanation can bring relief and also allows people to stop searching for the person responsible.

The potential of communities to overcome sorcery accusation-related violence is also powerfully demonstrated by Clara Bal (Chapter 16), who describes the way in which the Gor community in Simbu Province has written new laws for itself and created a local police force to assist in enforcing these laws, drawing upon a group of young men who may otherwise be tempted to turn to victimising 'sorcerers' in a quest for community recognition. At the Goroka conference there were also a number of examples of positive initiatives that could be extended to deal with sorcery and witchcraft practices and beliefs. For example, the male champions program involves men acting as agents of change by seeking to change problematic perceptions about women in their daily interactions with other men within their own communities.

The final chapter by Philip Gibbs, as mentioned above, sets out a five-point plan developed by the Catholic Church to deal with the problems of sorcery

and witchcraft practices and beliefs. Father Gibbs identifies the crucial role that individual leadership can have, especially when combined with pastoral support from a local priest and biomedical explanations of death and sickness from health professionals. The chapter also powerfully reflects upon what can be done in restoring community relationships that have been horribly fractured by sorcery accusations and violence.

A common thread running through all these interventions is the need for communities to engage in internal discussions about the problems of sorcery and witchcraft practices and beliefs as they see them, in order to identify ways forward that fit within their own sets of priorities and world views. Advice, assistance and gentle guidance from trusted outsiders can be catalytic in such discussions, and different communities and individuals have and will continue to derive strength and support from a variety of sources, such as Christian faith and human rights discourses. Continuing examples of these and similar positive community actions are documented on a new website, Stop Sorcery Violence Papua New Guinea.⁸ However, it is also clear that solutions coming from outside that are imposed upon communities in paternalistic or doctrinal fashion are unlikely to achieve any traction.

In conclusion, it is perhaps helpful to sketch out the series of events that have occurred in PNG following the initial conference on the topic in Canberra in 2013. As already noted, this led first to a follow-up conference at Goroka, which in turn led to the development by the participants of an outcome statement that sketched in general terms a way forward. The participants were of the view that any solution to the problems raised by sorcery and witchcraft has to be holistic, multipronged and pay close attention to local conditions. Dealing comprehensively with the issues relating to sorcery and witchcraft beliefs was felt to require working across multiple government departments, in particular health, education and justice, in addition to working with a range of non-state institutions and organisations. Legislative responses, although important, are not sufficient in and of themselves to stem sorcery- and witchcraft-related violence. Similarly, a regular law-and-order approach (for example, recruiting more police and increasing penalties) is not likely to be effective unless coupled with other interventions.

This outcome statement was further refined through a workshop on 12–13 June 2014 in Port Moresby, in which 80 or so participants from a range of government departments and civil society, church and academic organisations drafted a national action plan to overcome sorcery- and witchcraft-related violence. The plan involves a number of government ministries and their departments, including the Department of Health, the Department of Education, the Royal

8 www.stopsorceryviolence.org.

Papua New Guinea Constabulary, the Department for Community Development and Religion, and the Department of Justice and Attorney General. It also includes a range of NGOs, such as Oxfam, the Highlands Human Rights Defenders, the Family and Sexual Violence Action Committee's networks, church organisation networks, and international development partners, such as the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the United Nations. It has five core areas: legal and protection, health, advocacy and communication, care and counselling, and research. Each area contains a few key recommendations and sets out concrete activities to be taken in both the short- and medium-term to implement the recommendations (Forsyth 2014). It will take some time to see the extent to which the government and other stakeholders commit to, and then implement, the action plan. However, the commitment to date to developing a comprehensive approach is highly encouraging, and we hope that this volume will provide a firm foundation on which such new initiatives can be based.

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