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## Menschenrechte

Philip Gibbs

### Sorcery Accusation- Related Violence in Papua New Guinea

#### Christina – a Case Study

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## Sorcery Accusation- Related Violence in Papua New Guinea

### Christina – a Case Study

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Dear readers,

Scenes of women or men who are detained, tortured or even executed by an angry mob because they are accused of practising witchcraft or sorcery – for many people, these images conjure up thoughts of the Middle Ages and the early modern era. Experts, however, have cautioned that more people have already fallen victim to such crimes in recent decades than between the 15th and 18th centuries in Europe. Sorcery accusation-related violence is by no means a thing of the past; on the contrary, it continues to be a contemporary phenomenon in many countries and regions of the world, such as Latin America, South-east Asia and especially Africa.

Frequently it is personal misfortunes, such as illness or death, that trigger this kind of violence. Negative incidents are attributed to acts of witchcraft, causing those seeking answers to resort to a variety of rituals in pursuit of a culprit. If the presumed witches are then found, they are tortured or murdered in the most cruel of ways. Even close relatives are often powerless and cannot or will not intervene.

The present study focusses on Papua New Guinea. Located north of Australia in the Pacific, and boasting a varied and fascinating landscape, Papua New Guinea is home to about a thousand ethnic groups each with their own language and culture. At the same time, the country faces many social struggles, including illiteracy, unemployment and widespread violence against women and children. A dangerous trend towards sorcery accusation is increasingly being observed; numerous men and women have already been brutally tortured or murdered.

This case study relates the story of Christina, a courageous woman accused of being a witch and tortured. Christina survived, but her perpetrators are still at large. Christina's case is representative of countless women and men worldwide who fall victim to this perilous sorcery accusation. This case study will help us better understand this phenomenon by analysing the behaviour of the different actors involved and by highlighting new perspectives on how to bring about changes to protect innocent women, men, and children.

Documenting this violent crime will also help present Christina's case to the United Nations, whose intention it is to take a particularly close look at the human rights situation in Papua New Guinea in the spring of 2021 as part of its Universal Periodic Review. It is imperative that government agencies and aid organisations join forces in order to put an end to sorcery accusation and to raise public awareness not only in Papua New Guinea, but in all countries affected. The local police and law enforcement authorities must also take a more resolute stance against these violent crimes.

The present study also demonstrates how Sister Lorena, a *missio* project partner, has dedicated herself in an impressive way to the fight against sorcery accusation-related violence and how her courageous commitment has made her a true beacon of hope for those affected. In 2018, Sister Lorena was awarded the Weimar Human Rights Award for her commitment. *missio* will continue to support her work and promote public awareness with publications and campaigns. *missio* has, for example, declared August 10th, 2020, as the World Day

Against Sorcery Accusation-Related Violence in order to raise awareness, not only among the people in Germany but worldwide, about the devastating consequences of sorcery accusation, to bring together experts and to harness campaigns.

With your interest in the case study and in the work of the *missio* project partners, you too are contributing to raising public awareness about the cruel practice of sorcery accusation, to ensuring that victims are given a voice and to finding ways of escaping this form of violence. And, for this, I would like to thank you sincerely.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dirk Bingener". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Pastor Dirk Bingener  
*missio* President

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## Papua New Guinea and the Southern Highlands Province



Population of Papua New Guinea: 7,26 Mio. (Source: CIA, World Factbook 2020)

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### 1. Introduction

Belief in sorcery and witchcraft is widespread across Papua New Guinea (PNG). Beliefs vary across the country but they all stem from the fundamental understanding that misfortune and death are caused deliberately by persons using supernatural powers. People do not easily accept natural causes of illness, sickness or death, and commonly dismiss medical reasons that explain them. If they do accept natural causes, they will ask why this person and not another person.<sup>1</sup> Many Papua New Guineans interpret the world from a premodern worldview that allows for magical causes whereby an act and its effect involves a form of magical or mystical causality. When there is misfortune, people tend not to explain it as “chance”, but rather will question what might be the malevolent force behind it. If a person dies, there will often be enquiries as to who could be responsible for bewitching the deceased. Sorcerers or witches are by no means the only cause of sickness and death. It is commonly believed that there are various spirit beings, some of them able to cause illness or misfortune if ignored or disrespected. It is also believed that there are ghosts of the recent dead around village graveyards. However, sorcery and witchcraft appear to be undergoing a re-

<sup>1</sup> The text for this introductory section is taken from a Joint Stakeholder Submission for the Universal Periodic Review of the UNHRC (25th session of the UPR) April/May 2016. The group comprised VIVAT International, Passionists International, Franciscans International, International Presentation Association.

vival<sup>2</sup> and violence associated with these beliefs have assumed prominence in media reports on PNG in recent years.<sup>3</sup>

Belief in sorcery and witchcraft vary across PNG and so do responses to it. In some places belief is strong, but people have developed social mechanisms for responding that may involve counter magic, compensatory payments or even isolation of the accused. However, in other places, the socio-cultural response involves physical violence including torturing and killing the person accused of using sorcery. We call this sorcery accusation-related violence (SARV).

Empirical research on victim numbers delivers alarming results. A recent multi-year collaborative research project into overcoming SARV presents figures of 1032 sorcery accusation-related incidents in four provinces in four and a half years from January 1, 2016. This led to death or serious harm against 304 victims. They note that these numbers are likely to be under-representative, since local recorders are not notified or do not become aware of every incident, particularly because SARV often occurs in secret or with widespread community support, making reporting less likely.<sup>4</sup>

Cases that are reported appear to be concentrated in the Highlands Region.<sup>5</sup> This is possibly due to socio-cultural factors that have a bearing on respect for equal rights and the status of women. Both men and women,

and even children, have been accused of sorcery and have been subjected to violence including torture and killing. Yet, particularly in some parts of the Highlands, women live in fear of being accused of sorcery. Sorcery accusation-related violence in the Highlands is commonly perpetrated against widows or women with no male kin living nearby to defend them. Women have lost land, homes, produce and livestock, and in many cases have been exiled from their communities. Most of this violence involves vicious sexual assault. Young men or boys, acting with the sanction of other members of the community commonly lead the attacks. In some cases, those accused of sorcery are not killed but banished from the communities.

Fear seems to be embedded in the community and people are afraid to intervene lest the attackers turn on them, accusing them also of sorcery. People also are afraid to report to the police lest members of the community retaliate for perceived disloyalty. Police inaction is also linked with the police's own lack of skills and resources.

The PNG government has repealed the Sorcery Act of 1971 and has been party to the development of a draft Sorcery National Action Plan (SNAP)<sup>6</sup>. That plan was approved by the National Executive Council, but the government has yet to fulfil its commitment to fund it, meaning that the required administrative implementation lags far behind. Some dedicated bureaucrats in the Department of Justice and Attorney General have tried to keep the issue alive in government circles, sponsoring SARV National Action Plan core group meetings at their national office, and some training for police and court officials, yet efforts to counter sorcery accusations and violence in the field are largely left to individuals, NGO and FBO groups such as Human Rights Defenders and some of the churches, with little active involvement of the PNG government.

The world learned of the deaths of Kepari Leniata, burned alive in Mt Hagen and Helen Rumbali, tortured and beheaded in Central Bougainville at the beginning of 2013.<sup>7</sup> These horrific killings showed to the World through the social networks, turned the attention of the international community on PNG. These two murders also triggered a rise media discourse focusing on witchcraft and sorcery-related violence.

2 Cf. Schwarz, N., *Thinking Critically about Sorcery and Witchcraft. A Handbook for Christians in Papua New Guinea*. Occasional Paper 14, Melanesian Institute 2013, p. 1.

3 Scholars often distinguish between sorcerers and witches according to the source of their power — sorcerers relying on magical spells and implements, and witches possessing inherent mystical powers. In this paper I will not follow that distinction and will generally use the commonly used term “sanguma”, which in common parlance covers both terms. One affected by sorcery can be said to be ensorcelled, and by witchcraft as bewitched. I will use the latter term. For more information on sanguma in PNG, see Zocca, F./Urame, J., *Sorcery, Witchcraft and Christianity in Papua New Guinea*, in: *Melanesian Mission Studies 5*, Goroka: Melanesian Institute 2008; Zocca, F. (ed.), *Sanguma in Paradise: Sorcery, Witchcraft and Christianity in Papua New Guinea* (Point 33), Goroka: Melanesian Institute 2009; Bartle, N. *Death, Witchcraft and the Spirit Word in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea: Developing a Contextual Theology in Melanesia* (Point 29), Goroka: Melanesian Institute 2005; Mantovani, E. (ed.), *An introduction to Melanesian Religions: A Handbook for Church Workers* (Point 6), Goroka: Melanesian Institute 1984.

4 SARV Project Incident Dataset, Australian National University (ANU).

5 Forsyth and Gibbs present figures from the Enga Province which is a Highlands province bordering on the Southern Highlands. They record how spanning 1 January 2016–December 2018, 43 incidents of sorcery accusation in the Enga Province led to major physical violence and 82 that did not lead to violence, involving in total 201 accused. (Cf. Forsyth, M., Gibbs, P., *Contagion of Violence: The Role of Narratives, Worldviews, Mechanisms*, in: *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 8 [3] 2019, pp. 4–5. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcsd.v9i2.1217> [12/06/2020].)

6 In 2019 the Sorcery National Action Plan (SNAP) was renamed SARV National Action Plan.

7 Cf. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-21363894>; Blackwell, Eoin, *Bougainville woman accused of sorcery, tortured, beheaded* (The Sydney Morning Herald 09/04/2013). Retrieved from: <https://www.smh.com.au/world/bougainville-woman-accused-of-sorcery-tortured-beheaded-20130408-2hh6r.html> (23/06/2020).

A year before the murders of Kepari Leniata and Helen Rumbali, in 2012, a Southern Highlands woman Christina Pakuma experienced accusation and extreme torture. She lived to tell her story which is recounted in this paper, giving an account of the sorcery accusation-related violence and the Human Rights violations she has suffered. The account in her own words and the words of closely related actors helps shed light on the underlying causes and dynamics leading to such violence.

## 2. The Southern Highlands Context

The Southern Highlands has had a complex socio-political history verging on anarchy since independence in 1975. The province started at Independence with a provincial government system known as provincial assembly. In this system, a Provincial Assembly was made up of the Constituency Members representing each sub-district now known as Local Level Governments (LLGs). After 1995 a different system came into existence after legislation of the Organic Law on Provincial and Local Level Government (OLPGLLG). The provincial member system was abolished and replaced by LLG Presidents who automatically became members of the provincial government. The most attractive aspect of the OLPGLLG was the law that gave greater financial and political powers to LLGs with increased funding. Further changes have meant that councillors are mandated by the Electoral Commission to vote for the LLG presidents.

In the midst of these changes political leadership was characterised by instability interspersed by suspension of the provincial government. The third Premier Andrew Andaija died in a plane crash in 1980. The first Provincial Governor died in a car accident in 1997. Due to inability to govern, the provincial government has been suspended three times (1992, 2000, 2006). The third time a State of Emergency was declared. In 2018 there was another

State of Emergency after parts of the SHP suffered from a severe earthquake and in June 2018 riots broke out when supporters of the losing candidate for the Southern Highlands provincial seat rioted after word of a court decision about the election reached them. They burned a Link PNG (Air Niugini) Dash 8 aircraft at Mendi airport along with the Mendi town courthouse.<sup>8</sup> Only quick action by soldiers from the Defence Force prevented rioters from burning the Provincial Headquarters.

### 3. Sorcery as “Sanguma”

“Sanguma” is the term used for a particular form of witchcraft or assault sorcery in which a person possesses a force capable of causing harm and even death. Heinrich Aufenanger considered this form of witchcraft and sorcery as “an evil, supernatural power, which a man or a woman acquires from a bad, personal spirit or spirit-like being, and which he or she uses for asocial purposes, for doing harm to people and animals.”<sup>9</sup> People watch over recent graves armed with bush knives and guns watching to see if the sanguma will appear in animal form to enter the grave and devour the corpse.

In some coastal areas of PNG, such as the Sepik, sanguma is a form of sorcery in which the person harbouring a sanguma spirit is thought to become invisible and force a harmful object or inject a harmful substance into the victim so that they get sick and/or die. During the attack, the victim is rendered unconscious and a poisonous liquid poured into their mouth or injected into them in some other way. Victims are left to regain consciousness and make their way home and if not given an antidote, will die within a few days.<sup>10</sup>

In parts of the Highlands, sanguma are said to remove and devour vital organs such as the victim’s heart. A well-known form of sanguma sorcery in

8 Cf. Tlozek, Eric, Angry protesters burn passenger plane after PNG Highlands’ election result (14/06/2018). Retrieved from: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-06-14/angry-mob-burn-plane-after-learning-election-result-in-png/9871762> (12/06/2020); Kero, Gynnie, PM: A sad, embarrassing day (The National 15/06/2018). Retrieved from: <https://www.thenational.com.pg/pm-a-sad-embarrassing-day/> (12/06/2020).

9 Aufenanger, H., Kumo, the deadly witchcraft in the Central Highlands of New Guinea, in: *Asian Folklore Studies* 24 (1) 1965, pp. 103–115, here: p. 104.

10 Cf. Gibbs, P. (with Josepha Wailoni), Sorcery and a Christian Response in the East Sepik, in: Zocca, F. (Hrsg.), *Sanguma in Paradise* (Point 33), Goroka: Melanesian Institute 2009, pp. 55–96, here: pp. 74–75.



the Highlands is known as *kumo*, found in parts of Simbu Province.<sup>11</sup> *Kumo* refers to a malevolent power said to take the form of a creature such as a rat, bat, frog, snake, or flying fox (usually a nocturnal creature), with the power to kill or harm people. The *kumo* creature lives within the body of its host and is said to pass from parent to child or grandparent to child and runs in families. *Kumo* are said to be able to fly and to pass through walls or doors. While the person possessed by *kumo* sleeps at night, the *kumo* creature can take human or other form and roam at night, eating human waste and searching for human flesh, particularly vital organs like the heart or liver.<sup>12</sup>

In recent decades, belief in spiritual forces such as that from Simbu appear to have spread westwards to provinces such as the Southern Highlands (SHP).<sup>13</sup> In a newspaper report from 2011, the Provincial Police Commander from the SHP was concerned that sorcery was “an evil practice which used to be confined to the Eastern Highlands, Simbu and the mid-Waghi area of Western Highlands and this had now crept into Southern Highlands”<sup>14</sup>. News reports of sorcery in the SHP appear from the beginning of this century. One finds headlines such as “Hired Sorcerers Killed in Mendi”<sup>15</sup>, or “Two Alleged Sorcerers Kidnapped in SHP”<sup>16</sup>. There is an article entitled “Kangaroo Court for Suspected Sorcerers”<sup>17</sup> which tells of eight men accused of sorcery facing a kangaroo court at Ialibu. In reference to a belief similar to the *kumo* from Simbu, the article notes how “The accused, however, have not made public

the whereabouts of the alleged ‘living creature’ from whom they draw their magical powers.” The creature which “fed off meat” is said to come from Kainantu in the Eastern Highlands and the people of Ialibu have offered to contribute money in order to return the creature to its place of origin. A later article on the same incident, with the title “Ialibu in Frenzy over Sorcery”<sup>18</sup> tells how people had been flocking to Ialibu station and nearby Walume to see the alleged sorcerers being interrogated. It was thought that the imported creature was hiding in a creek and people led by women from the nearby Catholic Church, with prayer and religious songs, were combing the creek and surrounding areas to find the creature.

In the Southern Highlands witchcraft accusations have taken on particular forms with the “sanguma” being called “Dracula” after the blood-thirsty character in Europe. It is said that people will put a plastic pipe into a grave and at night go and talk through the pipe and hope to get information from the deceased. In other parts of SHP, there is reference to “Stoneman sorcery”.<sup>19</sup> Southern Highlanders around Mendi and the Nembi Plateau also resorted to a method, called *trambol*, using a length of bamboo for divination. A piece of the bewitched person (hair or clothing) is attached to a piece of bamboo held at either end by two men. Along with spells the men allow the bamboo to lead them to the suspected sorcerer’s house or to the sorcerer him or herself. In Mendi people say that the sorcerer gets power from the ground, so suspected sorcerers are placed (or hung) on platforms (often a sheet of iron) off the ground. They may also be taken to a river and submerged in water as it is thought that water can neutralise the power. These particulars emerging in the Southern Highlands are particular to the area around the SHP, different from other provinces.

11 Cf. Sterly, J., *Hexer und Hexen in Neu-Guinea*. München: Kindler 1987; Gibbs, P., *Engendered Violence and Witch-killing in Simbu*, in: Jolly, M., Stewart, C., Brewer (eds.), *Engendering Violence in Papua New Guinea*, Canberra: Australian National University E-Press 2012, pp. 107–136. Retrieved from: <http://epress.anu.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/ch032.pdf> (12/06/2020).

12 Df. Damien, C., *The myth of Kumo: knowing the truth about Sanguma in Simbu Province*, in: *Catalyst* 35 (2005) 2, pp. 114–134, here: p. 128. The reader can learn more about kumo from publications on the topic including those by Aufenanger, H. 1965 (see footnote 9); Nilles, J., *The Kuman of the Chimbu Region*, in: *Oceania* 21 (1950), pp. 25–40; Brown, P., *Enemies and affines*, in: *Ethnology* 3 (4) 1964, pp. 335–356; Sterly, Joachim 1987 (see footnote 11).

13 Southern Highlands Province (SHP) is one of the seven highlands provinces in PNG. It is 15,089 km<sup>2</sup> in area, with a population of around half a million people. It is situated on the broader south-western section of the central Cordillera and is characterized by a series of rugged ranges, valleys and volcanic plains. It shares political boundaries with neighbouring Hela on the northwest, Enga on the north, Western Highlands on the east, Gulf to the south and Western province on the west.

14 *The National* 6 April 2011, p. 4.

15 *The National* 27 February 2002, p. 5.

16 *The National* 16 November 2004, p.4.

17 *The National* 25 June 2001, p.5.

18 *The National* 9 August 2001, p.5.

19 Cf. Pacific Islands Report, “Stone Man” Sorcery stirs PNG village, 17/11/2004. Retrieved from: <http://www.pireport.org/articles/2004/11/17/%C3%A2%C2%80%C2%98stone-man%C3%A2%C2%80%C2%99-sorcery-stirs-png-village> (12/06/2020).

## 4. The Engendered nature of sorcery belief

It is notable that most of the articles about sorcery in the SHP in the ten years following 2001 note the engendered nature of the belief telling how the alleged sorcerers are men, and that men were those mainly affected by the occult powers. In the Ialibu case it is said that the creature was weakened by the power of women and that men were afraid and had resorted to not moving around alone, but with women for protection. Women as sorcerers in SHP first appear in an article in 2010<sup>20</sup> and articles claiming women as sorcerers in SHP become more common from 2011<sup>21</sup>.

The violence inflicted on both male and female is often sexualized. In several cases where men were tortured the men were stripped naked and torture involved violent manipulation of the men's genitals. Women too are stripped naked, paraded in public and the burning includes having heated objects thrust into their genitals. When asked about this by the writer, people responded that they focus on the genital area because that area is very sensitive and there the accused will feel the greatest pain. However, one cannot ignore research that reveals a fundamental antagonism between the sexes<sup>22</sup>, particularly in the Western end of the Highlands. Previously men would eat, socialise and sleep in the men's house and because of menstrual taboos women were never allowed to enter. Referring to the neighbouring Enga, Mervyn Meggitt says that the Mae Enga inter-sexual conflict reflects

the anxiety of prudes to protect themselves from contamination by women.<sup>23</sup> Richard Eves notes how female bodies were, and in some places in PNG still are, avoided because of fear that "a man's abilities will be impaired by the powerful emanations of the female body. ... While many of the rigid rules of avoidance of women are no longer followed today, and gender relations may be said to have improved in the sense that they are less dichotomous, it is likely that the antithetical power women have been reputed to possess continues to be dreaded today."<sup>24</sup>

20 Cf. Post Courier 27 October 2010, p. 13.

21 Cf. The National, 6 April, 2011, p. 4.

22 Cf. Amnesty International, Papua New Guinea. Violence against women: never inevitable, never acceptable (03/09/2006). Retrieved from: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ASA34/002/2006/en/> (12/06/2020).

23 Cf. Meggitt, M., Male-Female Relationships in the Highlands of Australian New Guinea. *American Anthropologist New Series*, 66 (4) 1964, Part 2: New Guinea: The Central Highlands, pp. 204–224, here: p. 221.

24 Eves, R., Exploring the Role of Men and Masculinities in Papua New Guinea in the 21st Century, Caritas Australia 2006, p. 39.

## 5. The Case Study: Christina Pakuma's testimony

The *Post Courier* newspaper of 8 March 2013 carried an article with the headline "It Never Ends". The article refers to a case of accusation and torture in Mendi from seven months before. The article notes how "What was alarming was that the village leaders, including the pastors who claimed to be man of God took part in torturing her." The victim in this case was Christina Pakuma whose story is the principal subject of this paper.<sup>25</sup> Research on Christina Pakuma's experience is significant because it offers a chance to learn about the complexity of socio-political, cultural and personal issues associated with sorcery accusation-related violence through the eyes of a survivor. As one of the first cases in the SHP, and particularly through photographs of her torture that circulated in the social media, the case gained notoriety both within PNG and abroad. This research seeks to learn the story of Christina from social justice perspective. The research for this paper involved several visits by the writer to the SHP and to Kundiawa in Simbu Province as well as a number of phone conversations. The assistance of long-term missionaries in SHP Sr Gaudentia Meier and Sr Lorena Jenal was invaluable to help establishing respectful quality contact with Christina.

25 The term "victim" can lead to confusion. When referring to "victims" of sorcery a majority of Papua New Guineans think, not of those accused of sorcery, but rather of those who have suffered misfortune or have become ill or died as a result of having been ensorcelled. From this perspective the sorcerer/witch is the perpetrator who has bewitched the victim. On the contrary, from a more scientific perspective it is the person accused of being a sorcerer or witch who is the victim. This distinction is made even more complicated when many of those who suffer accusation and torture, during torture, admit to have harmed another person using sorcery powers, but afterwards, if they survive, recant and say they are innocent and that they admitted harming another simply to please the torturers in the hope that they would stop torturing them. Debates can be confused when these different perspectives and varying meanings of the term "victim" are not understood.

Christina's story begins with English translations of sections of interviews conducted originally in Tok Pisin. The study then considers the opinions of other local people, including perpetrators. The section with interviews is followed by views on the police, the legal system and church interventions. The study then moves into a six-part analysis of the situation from various points of view, followed by an update on Christina's current situation, and a concluding summary.

### 5.1 Beginnings

Christina was born in 1973 or 1974 at Ayarep village near Mendi town. Her father Pakuma is from Ayarep village and her mother Ome Martha is from Wa village near the end of the airstrip in Mendi. She has three half-brothers from her father and his first wife and two sisters from her father with her mother.

Her father was a respected man in the village, and he made sure that his sons at least went to school. Dominic Dia completed High School and entered the diplomatic service, serving as ambassador for PNG in Singapore. Her second half-brother Simon Womi is a bus driver in Mendi. Her other half-brother Angelus was a teacher but is retired and lives in Port Moresby. Her sister Linda is married and lives in Mendi. Her other sister Grace died in Lae. Christina did not complete primary school and did not go to High School. Around 1992 she married and had a daughter - Grace. The marriage did not last. She married again around 2005 and had two boys Milton (14) and Jonathan (10). Her second husband left her the day Jonathan was born.

Christina seems to have moved around staying with relatives outside of the Southern Highlands - in Benabena, Goroka, and in Simbu where one of her cousins had married into the well-respected Nilkare family of Gumine. Christina was close to her half-brother Dominic and at one time visited Singapore where he was stationed. Later, after he returned to Port Moresby she stayed in his house in Mendi, caring for the house, two cars and his pigs. It seems that the good fortune looking after the house and possessions for her relatively wealthy brother may have been a source of envy on the part of other relatives.

In 2010 an extraordinary number of pigs were getting sick and dying in Ayarep village, including pigs belonging to Dominic Dia. Christina takes up the story.

## 5.2 First rumours and conflicts

“In 2010 and 2011 there were rumours going around, being spread by the wife of Simon Womi. The news spread around that I was a sanguma eating the pigs. It spread secretly, but later it came out in public and I heard about it. Where does sanguma come from? It started in Buyabi prison East of Mendi where Simon Womi’s wife is from. Someone from the prison passed it on to a person in Wa village (my mother’s place). Then it went to Kumin and on to Ayarep (my father’s place). So, when a man died, they accused me. In fact, I didn’t know anything about it.”

“My brother Dominic Dia was still alive when this trouble started. I was looking after his house and the family was jealous. I was watching over his two cars and his pigs. He told people that he was leaving it to me to take care of because we were from the same blood of our father Pakuma. He put it all into my hands and left for Port Moresby. Others were jealous because I had care of the six big pigs and the seventh had piglets. He gave the six pigs to his daughter and I was caring for two small pigs inside the house and one big pig worth K1000 outside. One morning I came outside to find that someone had badly cut one of the pigs and it was dying. I didn’t say anything to anyone, and I buried the dead pig. Then another night it happened again and I quietly shared what had happened with my cousin Rebecca Navy. Dominic heard about the pigs dying and thought that I had eaten the pig or that I had sold it, so I wanted Rebecca to be my witness. I wondered what was happening with the pigs being attacked at night and I was afraid.”

“A month later someone called Dominic Dia and his wife in Port Moresby, telling them that I was a sanguma and I was eating their pigs. What do I think of sanguma? Is it real? I don’t really know. I was innocent and for no reason they said I was a sanguma. It was caused by jealousy within the family. I was in the house looking after valuable things there and it was hard for them to get rid of me. That wife of N must be a sanguma who cut the pig and ate it in the night. For no good reason she blamed me. She called my elder brother on the phone and they sent me away from the house. I don’t know anything about sanguma.”

“Dominic returned and evicted me from the house and sent me off to Wa, my mother’s village, together with my mother and K1000. The people at Wa village came on the back of a Dyna truck to take me there and then shared the K1000 among themselves. I think the trouble started within the family who were jealous over the money I had and the food and the bags of rice. That is why they wanted to send me away.”

“At Wa village I stayed with Joel Bia, the son of my mother’s sister Ekepi. I was fine there, but then we heard news that Dennis Yakaronda had died. Dennis, originally from Daru in Western Province had married a woman from Wa village and he had been living from the income of timber sales in the Western Province. I think it was people from Daru who poisoned him because of money. They were talking about me being behind the death, but I did not hear anything. A woman there named Celestine apparently dreamed that I had killed Dennis. Celestine is my cousin – daughter of my mother’s brother, and a cousin to Dennis. Then at the funeral a man named Kongo stood up and announced that all the pigs were dead at Ayarep (my father’s place) and that they suspected a sanguma had done it. They started to suspect me saying, ‘Christina, you have become a sanguma and you removed his heart to eat.’ I didn’t say anything but went there to the *singsing* ground (village dance ground and meeting place) to mourn. I noticed his wife was making strange signs with her hands. It seems they had already suspected me and they were looking for a sign [such as blood from body openings or the eyes opening]. The next day I came again to mourn. People must have heard that someone would be accused and tortured because it seemed the whole of Mendi town came to Wa that day.”

## 5.3 Accusation and Torture

Christina continues her story. “When I arrived that day (August 10th, 2012) suddenly Yabook Karabus took a knife and cut off my clothes so that I was naked in front of everyone. I was surprised and when they used the knife to cut off my clothes I was totally confused. They got a sheet of iron and put me on top of that with my legs astride with my arms up at either side. That is the way they hung me. They hung me up and burned me with fire. A man who had a car brought a car tyre. They heated a big piece of iron in the fire and then started to burn me with the iron. When they burned me, I could not think properly. Whatever they said, I just replied, ‘yes I did it.’ They said that if I would not talk that they would cut me. They said, ‘We will cut off your life so tell us what you have done or not done.’ They wanted me to admit that I killed him and how I ate his heart and insisted that I say ‘yes, yes.’ (*ol tok yu tok yu tok, hau yu kilim em yu tok hau yu kaikai lewa bilong em yu tok*). I was confused and could not think properly when they stripped me in public, so whatever they told me I replied ‘yes’. It was a lie and not true. (*Tingting bilong mi tu em foul pinis mi no gat wanpela gutpela tingting taim ol rausim klos bilong mi long pablik na ol karim mi go tingting bilong mi paul so wanem samting ol tok mi tok yes yes tasol bikos mi tok giaman i no tok tru*).”

“They were asking me to give the names of others who assisted me. It is hard for me to really know because they had covered my eyes. I had untruthfully called various names. I was suffering from the pain and was beside myself and I just called names for nothing (*nating nating*). There was another woman whose name I had called – Ruth Besake. They hung her up too, but she declared she was innocent, and they took her back. In fact, Ruth Besake was one of those who had said that I was a sanguma after the death of Dennis Yakaronda. She had spread rumours that I had killed her mother through sanguma. She did that to me and I felt the terrible pain on the cross like Jesus, so in return I did it to her and I called her name.”

“They asked me to name other accomplices and I just called the names of women because I was tired of them asking and I called the names of others who I didn’t even know. The police came but they didn’t do anything. They were just elderly men (*lapun*) and they watched as I was being tortured. The only one I knew by name was their driver. Magistrates did not help either. They just watched. Michael from Kumin Catholic Mission, father of Angeles, was the only one who spoke out. He told them that they should not have me sit on the sheet of iron and questioned why they were doing that to me. He questioned what I had done wrong. He told them to stop. He was the only one. While I was hanging there, Sr Gaudentia and nurse Sr Maria Koke came. Sr Gaudentia told them to give me to her. But they refused and asked Sister if she wanted to be burned also. Then one of the men burned Sister on the hand.”

“One man cut my hand. Others burned me all over, on my side or in my private parts right up to my breasts, all burned. They continued to burn me and then in the afternoon around 4 o’clock they locked me in a police cell [in fact it was a nearby campaign house]. I stayed there the night and the next day they brought me back to interrogate me again. After that they put me in a campaign house together with my mother. They had beaten my mother and broken her leg [her mother suffered a dislocated hip]. They talked about ‘black power’ [from Daru, since Dennis was from there]. They also practiced some magic using *kambang* (lime). There was a Tolai woman [from East New Britain in the New Guinea Islands] there who led that.”

“In the morning they said that something must be inside me and that I should send it out. I had no idea about sanguma and when they said to take out what was inside me, I thought – what am I supposed to take out? I could not do what they were demanding so they stripped me again and tied a rope onto my wrists and in a big rain storm they dragged me telling me to produce whatever it was that was possessing me. I pretended and told

them that I had buried it in a garden and they dragged me there, but I could not locate anything so they dragged me back to the *singsing ground*. There Martin Pat felt sorry for me and gave me K100 so I could buy soap and wash myself. [Martin Pat’s wife used to work at the Catholic Diocese as Caritas coordinator before she died]. People saw that and protested saying, ‘She killed and ate a man’s heart, and now she wants to eat the money you are giving her.’ Martin told them to shut up. ‘It is not your money I am giving her. She has lived here. Why don’t you talk to her instead of torturing her for no reason?’ I gave the money to my sister and asked her to hold it for me. They took me down to the river and made me sit in the water and told me to take whatever it was out from my belly (*bel*)<sup>26</sup> I had nothing there inside me so how could I do that? I did not know what to do.”

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26 Bel in Tok Pisin has a wider meaning than the English belly. It could include stomach and intestines as with the English meaning, but „bel“ could also include heart and lungs.

## 5.4 Deception and escape

Christina continues, “Then they locked me in the house and they told me that the next day they would pour petrol over my mother and myself and burn us to death. I thought of my two children and slept near the fire. I was thinking what I could do and then in the semi-darkness I saw a dirty stone in the fireplace. I took the stone and forced it into my private parts. It was difficult and it was hot, and it hurt me a lot. Then that night when the men had gathered, I announced that what they were asking of me they could remove from me. ‘It is there, take it!’ One man found hospital gloves and tried to remove the stone but was unable. Then a boy from Mt Hagen said how he had come out from a woman<sup>27</sup> and he tried, and he removed the stone from inside my private parts. He took it outside and placed it on the sheet of iron they had prepared to place me. With that the men went outside leaving the door open and I was able to leave the house.”

“Councillor Uncle George then went to the Kumin mission and saw Sr Gaudentia who went to the Police Station. Police Station Commander Inspector Napote drove to Wa village and then took me back to the Epe Anda (mission clinic). I went with my mother (helped by a woman named Angela) and my small boy Jonathan. One man questioned why we were going, but the Councillor told him to shut up.”

“We thought we could stay at the Epe Anda mission clinic, but some men came and threw stones on the roof saying that a sanguma could not stay there. “Sr Gaudentia what are you doing bringing such persons here?” St Gaudentia had to decide to send us to the police cells for our own safety. We stayed in the police cells for about a month and then Sr Gaudentia sent us to Kundiawa Hospital to be cared for by Dr Fr Jaworski. We have been here in Kundiawa seven years now.”

## 5.5 Concerns for the future

Christina reflects on her future: “Sometimes I am worried about finding school fee for my boys or rent for the house and I am told to go and stay somewhere else. I think of that woman [Celestine Kereve] who accused me and now she has food and a house and I am just floating. Sometimes I have

the urge to go and kill that woman. A number of people have come [from overseas] and asked me to tell my story and I tell them that my story is not a good one and they should go back. Father, now my story is finished. I have come like this and this is how I am. I cannot return to Mendi. I have no hope to go back. Sr Lorena and Sr Gaudentia and Fr Jaworski help us, and Fr Jaworski was planning to help me with a house.”

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27 Literally he was referring to all men having come out of a woman’s vagina. In fact, he was claiming social permission to put his hand into Christina’s vagina by indicating that a woman’s vagina is not totally private but has been somehow shared with men through their birth.

## 6. Assessments of other people

Do others concur with Christina's version of the events? I spoke with some community members who help shed light on the situation.

### 6.1 A close relative

Reflecting back seven years, a close relative of Christina gives his version and his opinion of the 2012 accusation and burning. The following is an English translation of key points in the interview.

"I heard that they were cutting Christina Ome. [Ome being the name of Christina's mother]. I came back to the village and it was a very tense situation. The body of the deceased was in one part of the dance ground and Christina was being interrogated nearby. She was being asked whether she had killed him and to give the names of those who had assisted her. They would call names and she would respond, "yes, yes." The story was circulating that before he died the young man now deceased had said that Christina was staring at him. Others said that she had already admitted killing him and that it was no use and they should bury him."

"The second day we questioned her again. The police came and simply watched. I spoke personally with the police telling them that they were supposed to save her. They did try, but the people blocked them."

"On the third day they went to find a diviner or ritual expert (*glasman*). She said that they had to force her to remove the source of *sanguma* (*rausim as bilong sanguma*). This time it seemed the whole of Mendi was there, thinking that they would witness someone removing the *sanguma* from the

woman. Christina gave the names of others – people from the same clan. People told the diviner that they would only trust what she was saying if she could confirm what Christina said. The diviner woman used a ritual with lime (*kambang*) but admitted that her power was weak because there were too many people there. That day too they accused and chased away Christina's mother, telling her that she weakened the power of the diviner/ritual expert. The priests and sisters from the mission came but people threatened them and would not release Christina or her mother."

"On the fourth day in the evening I heard a commotion. Boys came asking for surgical gloves. They said that Christina admitted that there was something inside her and that they should remove it. It seems they wanted to put their hand in her private parts to remove a stone. Later they showed a stone that they had taken from her. I heard that she was gone and was told that she had turned into a bird and flown away. Her small son was hungry and crying. Father Don came from the mission. I explained how the vast majority of the people were against the women. I asked Father Don to find a safe house. They asked the Bishop and called the police. The police took the two women away, leaving the small crying boy behind. We gave him into the hands of Father Don."

The close relative continues, "There was a history of sorcery accusation in her family. People believe that it is inherited. In 2018 people accused Christina's daughter Grace after a young girl fainted and a dog was seen running from Grace's house. Grace was accused – "because she is my daughter". Grace has inherited her blood (*Blut bilong Christina em i go pas long Grace*). In the 1960s people claim that they accused Ekepi, her mother's sister and put her in jail. [Ekepi denies this]. Christina was initially married as a second wife to a man from Kiburu, but her husband sent her away accusing her of *sanguma* for wanting to chase away the first wife. She married another man and he also accused her of *sanguma* and sent her away. She then came back to the village to stay with her mother Ome and her mother's sister Ekepi. Then came the problem of Dominic's pigs dying, and she went to stay in the village with Ekepi's son Joel Bia. Before PNG Independence, sorcery was different. There was no torturing the accused. The idea of turning into a dog or a pussy cat, and of removing human hearts is recent. Previously it was called *Sokele*, and the symptom was pain around the rib area [pneumonia?] and people would treat it with lemon grass."

Referring to Christina, the close relative adds, "We got rid of the *sanguma* woman and it is good riddance. If she wants to take it to court it will put others at risk. It is too late now."

## 6.2 The mission clinic nurse

Maria Koke (nurse at the mission clinic and a key person in Christina's rescue) in an interview, adds further details. She confirms that there was a male diviner (*glasman*) from Karinj (in the SHP north of Mendi) who declared that Christina possessed (or was possessed by) the sanguma spirit. Several of those present at the torture were using marijuana. Father Don and Sister Gaudentia tried to stop the torturers but failed, one of the perpetrators burning Sr Gaudentia's hand. Later Sister Gaudentia and nurse Maria Koke administered sutures to a wound in Christina's side.

Maria Koke tells how eventually Christina is taken by police to the mission clinic. However, people threw stones on the roof of the clinic in protest saying that they did not want a sanguma staying in their health facility. Christina was taken for safety to the police cells, and the mission clinic remained closed for a month. During the weeks that Christina was in the police cell, nurse Maria Koke and Sr Gaudentia visited her every day, bringing food and medicine. Eventually Brother Ray Ronan from the mission, very early one morning, took Christina, her son and her mother to Kundiawa Hospital (A five-hour drive from Mendi).

Maria Koke advises against taking the matter to court, saying that Christina had been blind-folded so how could she recognise anybody, and besides, starting a court case will bring more trouble and "they will kill her." She is of the opinion that there is now no place for Christina in the Mendi community.

## 6.3 Other relatives

Other relatives of Christina (Martin Pat and Simon Kake) have raised the following points in interviews.

- There were suspicions circulating prior to the accusation of Christina. There was a common SHP saying circulating in the community: "bring the heart" (*Karim lewa i kam*) which refers to bringing a person back to life by restoring their heart (*lewa*) from evil forces that have removed it (*and made someone sick*). This created an atmosphere of distrust and expectation in the community.
- Some suspected Christina even before the accusation at the death of Dennis Yakaronda. In order to help remove her from a potentially dangerous situation, one of her relatives gave her money so she could go and

stay with a relative at Engolai in Simbu (where the sister of Joel Bia who Christina was staying with is married into the Nilkare family) but Christina did not go. A man named John Ripala died only a few days before Dennis and even at that time Christina was suspected. There was rumour circulating in the community that she was practising flying (indicative of occult powers).

- One of her relatives confesses that when the torture started, he felt powerless. "I couldn't do anything. I did not want to make a decision but allowed the perpetrators to continue."
- Were the perpetrators on drugs? At least one of the perpetrators has a reputation as a drug addict (*drag bodi*). The man from Karinj too was identified as one who smokes marijuana.
- Did they have weapons? Christina says that she did not see anyone with a gun (but she was blindfolded.) The relatives say that probably the police had guns, but many others carried long bush knives, a common practice for village men in Mendi.
- What happened to the stone taken from her vagina? The relatives say that people wrapped it in paper and plastic and hung it on a stick. They are not sure of its whereabouts now. Some say that men burned it.
- Afterwards people destroyed Christina's house – particularly her toilet as people think that sangumas like to eat waste and get power from toilets.



## 7. Involved persons

The following description of those involved and their actions completes the eyewitness accounts and provides a basis for the analysis outlined in section 9.

### 7.1 The perpetrators

Christina identifies a number of persons as perpetrators and names those who assaulted her. Though she was blindfolded through much of the assault, she claims to recognise them from their voices. There are photos of the torture and Christina identifies the perpetrators easily when shown photos from the torture. Perpetrators in the torture include her own male cousins. There was at least one outsider (a man from the Karinj area north of Mendi) reputedly experienced in identifying witches. Christina identified two teenagers, but the majority were mature married men from the local community. No women took part in the torture.

Some of the men Christina has named now deny supporting her torture. Others that she mentioned were unavailable for interview. The writer did speak with perpetrators in a case involving another woman in 2018 at the same location. They explained how a young boy had gone missing. The family sought a *glasman* to help them find the missing boy. The *glasman* demanded payment first and they collected K800 and deposited it into his nominated bank account. A day later he called back to say that the boy was killed by his own mother who had become a *sanguma*. He explained how his mother killed the boy and threw his body into the river. The mother denied it but they stripped her and hung her up in public similar to the what had happened to Christina. A week later the young boy arrived back from

Mount Hagen alive and well, and the people realised that they had wrongly accused his mother. They collected K2000 as an initial compensation payment. The mother and her natal clan are now demanding compensation of K50,000 and 50 pigs. Two of the perpetrators told me, “We can’t believe these *glasman* anymore. It is work of Satan.” This case contrasts with that of Christina since she is not planning on claiming compensation because she does not have the necessary support of her own clan. They are not interested in compensation and are content that she has left Mendi and have no desire to see her again.

### 7.2 Police and Magistrates

The writer met with two police officers at the Mendi Family and Sexual Violence unit at the Mendi police station.<sup>28</sup> They said that there had been just one sorcery accusation-related violence case brought to them in the previous seven months of 2019. The main problem they see is lack of cooperation from the communities. Even if police attend a call, they find the community will oppose their attempt to rescue the accused. The last conviction for SARV in the SHP was several years ago in 2015. Currently there is a Family and Sexual Violence (FASV) action committee attempting to bring some life into the organisation. The writer made appointments to speak with the provincial police commander on three occasions, but he turned out to be unavailable for any of those appointments.

Isaac Meya, Manager of Village Courts and Land Mediation in the SHP says that “Mendi is a lawless place.” There are three levels of courts in the SHP: Village courts, District courts and the National court. Isaac manages village courts in the Province where there are 163 village court areas. Each village court has eleven members, making a total of 1793 village court officials in the province. Of these 968 have some training and 875 are yet to be trained. Of the 163 women in the village courts, only 88 have received the standard one-week training.

Courts at the Village Court level in PNG often accept circumstantial evidence such as the accused being in close proximity to the deceased, or the accused having stared or gazed intently at the deceased. However, when people seek more evidence, the forced confessions of a person being tortured may be considered sufficient evidence for conviction. The fact that the confession was obtained under duress (torture) is not considered. Such practices along with acceptance of confession as justifying the torture used

<sup>28</sup> Senior Sergeant Naring Bongi and Senior Constable Jimmy Suai (12th August, 2019).

to obtain it, or accepting “magical” implements that rely on mystical powers, appear to blur the boundaries between requirements of a modern legal system and the ways of cultural custom.

The situation of higher courts is bleak. The Mendi courthouse was burned down on 14th June 2018 and so far, there have been no convictions for SARV at that level of courts. Principal magistrate Vincent Erakua comments: “We have no logistical support. No vehicle, no office, no courthouse. It is one year since the burning of the courthouse and nothing has happened. We need politicians who live in the SHP.”<sup>29</sup>

### 7.3 Christian Churches

Christian Churches have generally opposed the violence associated with Sorcery accusations. There have been gatherings in PNG such as a conference in Lae in November 2016 organised by the Constitutional and Law Reform Commission to gauge views, comments and suggestions from church leaders, elders, and the general public on how best to approach the issue of sorcery and sorcery-related violence and killings.<sup>30</sup>

Christian Church presence is fragmented in the SHP with many denominations.<sup>31</sup> The Catholic Church is the largest in terms of the number of adherents and infrastructure. Catholic Bishop Donald Lippert says that the Church has largely failed to change beliefs about magic and sorcery, but must work to change associated violent behaviour because “it is intolerable for people to behave in this way.”<sup>32</sup> Bishop Lippert is of the opinion that somehow, we have to affirm the power of Jesus over the powers of evil. He adds that people who engage in sorcery accusation-related violence “excommunicate themselves from the Church.” Following a statement by the Highlands Catholic Bishops (See Appendix 2) he sponsored a two-day forum at Kumin, Mendi, in November 2015 to which he invited interested local church and NGO leaders and also the United States Ambassador, Walter North. A team including members of the police and interested NGO representatives was formed from the meeting. However, the team has become inactive. A woman associated with the Diocese, Rebecca Joseph, runs an informal safe house on the outskirts of Mendi town. At the time

of our research visit in March 2019 she was caring for two elderly women who had been accused of sorcery and rejected by their families. She is a very strong personality and simply refutes objections that she is harbouring witches.

Sr Lorena Jenal FSDP works now full time for the Catholic Diocese of Mendi, doing awareness, but also arranging for rescues and support for survivors. In August 2019, she had ten active cases of women who had been accused and tortured, who needed help, not only for their physical and emotional wounds, but also for protection.<sup>33</sup> Christina’s accusation and torture was the first case for Sr Lorena. Here I allow Sr Lorena to comment in her own words.

“Jonathan her little boy came to ask Sr Gaudentia to come and help his mom run away from the fire and he shouted that he is too small to live without mummy.... I never believed that something would happen with those people. Honestly, I couldn’t believe it. I felt completely shocked.”

“I think it was the worst case I ever experienced. Being trained in counselling and then trauma counselling and encountering someone hurt like Christina locked in a jail, that was just everything against human proper feelings for me. The police were not doing anything, they were not helping at all and they were even getting her out of jail I believe. On the 11th in the morning, they got her out of the jail and brought her back to the place [of torture] again with the whole thing [starting] all over again. I was totally shocked. I will always remember till I die.”

Sister Lorena views the experience from a Human Rights perspective. “In my own approach to human rights, I just thought you have to stop that. Even later when Christina was in Goroka [at the Catholic Family Life Office] with me, the very first time she was still having all these cuts all over her body. I remember that and we were talking a lot about doing awareness in connection with human rights.”

“One of the feelings that is very strong in me is how in God’s name can we torture women, burning breasts and private parts when we all came out of the womb of a woman. That’s still my point, in terms of human rights, that we all would not be alive without a mother carrying us in in her womb for nine months and caring for us and all these guys who do that torture, they have a mother, they have sisters and this is still something I’m struggling with.”

29 Personal communication, Mendi, 13th August, 2019.

30 Cf. <http://www.stopsorceryviolence.org/clrc-churches/> (12/06/2020).

31 Cf. Gibbs, Philip, Growth, Decline, Confusion: Church Affiliation in Papua New Guinea, in: *Catalyst* 34 (2004) 2, p. 179. The main Christian denominations in the SHP are Baptist, Brethren, Evangelical Brotherhood, Catholic, Church of Papua, Lutheran, Pentecostal Churches, Seventh Day Adventist, Union Mission, and United Church.

32 Bishop Donald Lippert OFM.Cap, interview at Kumin, Mendi, 15th March, 2019.

33 Sr Lorena features in the longer, one-hour version of the film “Everybody’s Business” by Philip Gibbs and Maria Sagrista. Retrieved from: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZYD3iX-fcRUL1npFEm-cbocuFYT9k3SPJ/view?usp=sharing> (20/11/2020).

Since that time from her office at the Diocese in Mendi and from the National Catholic Family Life Office in Goroka, Sister Lorena worked on awareness about Human Rights and Sorcery Accusation-Related Violence. This includes meetings in schools, in churches, and in marketplaces. “We talk about the glasman [diviner], we talk about no torturing, we talk about how we have to find better ways [of finding out] what really happened and we talk a lot about suspects, whether suspecting someone is true...”

“In the Pomborel Parish, we are very successful because parishioners go to the funeral place and they take different spots at the funeral place. One group is listening to what the people say – the relatives of the dead. The other ones are very alert to somebody already planning or pointing their finger. Up until now we have three cases that we were able to bring out of the funeral places before anything happened”.

## 8. Christina Today

Christina’s life changed dramatically after her accusation and torture. She lives in Kundiawa in Simbu Province and her main concern has been rent for the house (K100/month) and school fees for her two boys. She looks forward to her boys growing up and as is often expressed by PNG parents, hopes that one day her boys will give her a good funeral.

Through Dr Fr Jan Jaworski in Kundiawa and funding from overseas through Sr Lorena, Christina now has a small house situated on land owned by the Catholic Church in Kundiawa. The land and the house belong to the diocese, but she will be given the right to stay and can regard it as her house. What rights, if any, her sons will have is yet to be resolved. Jonathan has been with his mother the whole time and witnessed first-hand her accusation and torture. He swears that when he grows to be old enough, he will avenge his mother.

Christina still wants justice. She says, “I think that I would like to take the perpetrators to court, but I have not done it, because I have no support. I don’t have a way to start a court case because I don’t have anyone to start it or to help me or support me. My clan who could support me have turned against me and ruined me. This woman [Celestine Kereve] accused me of killing Dennis, but everyone knows that his heart was rotten and he existed on cold water and he was going often to the hospital. He was not a healthy man who died. He was sick and he died. But my sisters and cousins did not point that out to support me. They thought of getting compensation from Dominic Dia and they put pressure on those who accused and tortured me. My cousins were adamant in accusing me. I have left Mendi. I only went back a few times when there was a big need and I go secretly at night and stay with the religious sisters at Kumin mission. I get an early morning bus to return to here.”

Christina says that she cannot go to the police because they just watched when others were torturing her. She feels she would need a lawyer if she took the matter to court and that would cost money which she does not have. She would not accept compensation. “I don’t need their pigs and their money!” She muses that if she could take her perpetrators to court then she would want them to end up with jail terms. „I have experienced troubles including the pain of bush knives, pain of fire, pain of axes, pain of them staring at me, pain from my paternal clan, every sort of pain in my body and I want them to go to jail“.

On the contrary, the opinion of everyone interviewed in Mendi, including her supporters, is that a court case might well cause a lot more trouble and she would probably end up being killed for it.

Christina thinks it would be good to marry again but she feels she cannot since her body is “ruined”. In terms of support she says she gets no assistance from government agencies (who, she claims “eat” any funds to benefit themselves). She does recognise the help she receives from the Church. Some of the Catholic women in Kundiawa encourage her and help pay her rent. She admits, “Every so often I get help from the Catholic Church.”

## 9. Analysis

### 9.1 Relevant Factors Framework

There are many theories explaining the existence of witchcraft beliefs in different places and times throughout history.<sup>34</sup> Ronald Hutton summarises current knowledge as follows: “It is a general rule that dramatic economic, social and cultural changes commonly induce a sharp increase in witch hunts among people who have a traditional fear of witches. It is also a rule, however, that such an increase is not an automatic result of such changes.”<sup>35</sup> Forsyth and fellow researchers using data in research findings from a multi-year collaborative research project into overcoming SARV in PNG propose a framework that blends together exogenous and endogenous elements for a comprehensive, dynamic and multifactorial accounting for patterns of SARV.<sup>36</sup>

They propose a framework based on three layers of ‘landscape’ on which SARV sits:

Layer 1: Conducive structural factors

Some factors are essential, whilst some are conducive to SARV but not essential.

Layer 2: Proximate factors

Shorter-term, more localised factors that provide the enabling environment.

34 For examples of scholarship on sorcery issues in Melanesian cf. Forsyth, M., Eves, R. (eds.), *Talking it Through: Responses to Sorcery and Witchcraft Beliefs and Practices in Melanesia*, Canberra: ANU Press 2015.

35 Hutton, R., *Anthropological and historical approaches to witchcraft: potential for a new collaboration?*, in: *The Historical Journal* 47 (2004) 2, pp. 413–434, here: p. 430.

36 Cf. Forsyth, M., Gibbs, P., Hukula, F., Putt, J., Munau, L., Losoncz, I., *Ten Preliminary Findings Concerning Sorcery Accusation-Related Violence in Papua New Guinea*. Development Policy Centre Discussion Paper 80 (2019).

### Layer 3: Trigger events

Events that often lead to a particular accusation occurring. They release or channel the energy built up through the structural and proximate factors.

In the case of Christina Pakuma, conducive structural factors include a magical worldview, as described in the introduction to this paper, in which occult powers can intervene in the physical world through human agency. Other structural factors include the chaotic socio-political situation in the Southern Highlands as summarised in section 2. Adam Ashforth has proposed that witchcraft beliefs flourish when there is a pervasive sense of insecurity among people.<sup>37</sup> People have to manage their fear of evil forces – witchcraft being one of these. Section 2 above provides insights into sources of insecurity in the PNG Highlands and particularly the Southern Highlands. Such structural factors help set the scene for more localised factors in the second layer.

Proximate factors in layer 2 in the case of Christina Pakuma include disputes and jealousies within her family and the local community as described in section 5.1 and 5.2. Christina's lifestyle was atypical, coming from a privileged family and she had experienced several attempts at marriage that did not last long. She herself identifies jealousy as an underlying cause of the accusations and events that followed. We have learned how she had been identified as a "suspected" witch for several years before she was publicly accused and tortured.

The trigger event(s) for the accusation of Christina were the unexplained death of pigs in the village and then the death of Dennis Yakaronda. Christina herself claims that a woman in the village had told people at the funeral that she had dreamed that Christina had killed Dennis by removing his heart. With the heightened emotions of the funeral the news spread like wild-fire and Christina was accused, assaulted, and publicly tortured (section 5.3).

The three layers framework helps account for relevant factors at different levels of scale from the national level down to interpersonal levels drawing attention to their interconnectedness. As Forsyth and colleagues note, "SARV is, after all, at once about fundamental clashes of what is believed to be the forces of good and of evil – particularly when framed in Christian terms of Satan and God – and at the same time about individual jealousies

and conflict."<sup>38</sup> It still begs explanation though as to why there should be violence in some places and not in others. What factors work to activate or to contain violent impulses across the three layers?

## 9.2 Narratives, Worldviews and Mechanisms of Transmission

A significant process that leads to violence is the circulation of particular stories or narratives about sorcery or witchcraft. These narratives are often very particular to the place involved, such as the narrative about the sanguma spirit in Enga and Southern Highlands Province, that enters into women and causes them to seek out and eat the hearts of others.<sup>39</sup>

The sanguma narrative is transmitted with a behavioural script that prescribes the response to a woman believed to be a sanguma. This script requires torture, often including burning, to obtain a confession, or to force the accused person to name others as their accomplices. The accused may be asked to replace the heart and bring the sick or dying person back to life again. Such a script is used to justify the violent actions, "setting the moral compass of what is often a group response."<sup>40</sup>

Sometimes the accused women themselves perform according to the script, either confessing or blaming others, or claiming they have given the heart to another sanguma. At times sick people coincidentally recover after a person has been tortured, which further tends to legitimise the violence script, since people attribute recovery to the effectiveness of torture in persuading the accused to put back the heart. In Christina's case as we see in sections 5.3 and 5.4, supported by the testimony of her relatives who were at the scene, torturers first demanded that she admit that she had taken the heart of the deceased, and then demanded to know her accomplices. Following the narrative, the torturers, presuming that she had not totally consumed the heart demanded that she show them where she had put it. She led them on a futile search in a garden. Afterwards they tried to neutralise the power of the sanguma by having her be immersed in water. This clearly follows a script common to other cases in the PNG Highlands.

The public spectacle of violence in SARV cases is another important mechanism that transmits both the sanguma narrative and behavioural script. One community leader observed that in the SHP violence is seen as a me-

37 Cf. Ashforth, A., *Witchcraft, Violence, and Democracy in South Africa*, University of Chicago Press, 2005.

38 Forsyth et al., 2019 (see footnote 36), p. 11.

39 Cf. Forsyth & Gibbs 2019 (see footnote 5).

40 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

ans to resolve conflict and that is why when the community wants to reject this sanguma spirit, they use their own means, and that is violence. The violence often continues over multiple days and is witnessed by the entire community, including children.<sup>41</sup> Thus, public spectacles play a role of inter-community as well as intergenerational transmission.<sup>42</sup> In Christina's case she commented how it seemed like the whole of Mendi town was there to watch.

Mounting a counter-argument, based on an alternative (post-modern scientific) worldview need not be the best way to oppose the sanguma narrative. We see an example of how Christina claimed her women's agency in the resources that she had available in her own tortured body and within her cultural worldview. Stones thought to have sacred powers were part of traditional religious beliefs in much of the Highlands, including the SHP. Christina's trick described in section 5.4 above builds on the engendered nature of sorcery belief in the Highlands and the narrative that imagines the sanguma as a creature residing in a woman's genitals. Using little more than her wits she used this narrative and convinced the men that the occult power was found in a stone hidden in her vagina. Thus, by building on the dominant epistemological framework she was able to divert attention away from herself and find a way out of immediate danger.

### 9.3 Counter Narratives

Differences of opinion and uncertainty about how to proceed may disempower those advocating against SARV as they lack a secure contra-narrative. Examples given in section 6 above show how leaders worry about endangering their community by advocating on behalf of the accused. Additionally, in a situation where there is strong group pressure advocating for violence against the evil accused who is considered a threat to the community, it will be dangerous to speak out on the accused's behalf.

Counter narratives used to oppose both the sanguma narrative and the violent behaviour script can be seen in the women's movement supported by Sister Lorena. Counter-narratives are drawn from a range of different types of authority (Christianity, state, global human rights norms and the local culture), such as: 'You say you are a Christian', 'violence is against the law',

41 Cf. Huesmann, L. R., Kirwil, L., Why observing violence increases the risk of violent behavior by the observer, in: Flannery D. J., Vazsony A., Waldman I.D. (eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Violent Behaviour*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007, pp. 545–570.

42 Cf. Forsyth & Gibbs 2019 (see footnote 5), p. 16.

'she could be your sister', 'We are your wives.' ,Respect us.' Though women may be put down, they are community insiders with the greater likelihood that their counter-narratives may have an impact, reducing both accusations and violence. To date they claim some success in mitigation in the Pomborel district but have certainly not eliminated the problem.

Even if the sanguma narrative is culturally based and Christian churches try to develop counter narratives (section 9.6), the receptiveness of the sanguma narratives can be enhanced by churches and pastors. Some pastors are convinced that a person is possessed and claim that they can cast out the sanguma spirit in a person. They preach about Satan and possession in ways that resonate with and reinforce the sanguma narrative.

### 9.4 Legal Framework

The repeal of the Sorcery Act 1971 has left a lot of confusion. After the high profile cases of Kepari Leniata and Helen Rumbali in 2013 the PNG government came under international and domestic pressure to repeal the Sorcery Act, on the grounds that its existence implied that sorcery existed or that it justified violence against those believed to have used sorcery.<sup>43</sup> The PNG Constitutional and Law Reform Commission had also produced a report based on extensive consultation in which it had come to the conclusion that the Act 1971 should be repealed as it was hardly ever used, and in its opinion the Village Courts remained the best place to deal with cases involving sorcery beliefs and practices.

In response to pressure to be seen to be taking a firmer stand against sorcery accusation-related violence, at the same time the Sorcery Act was repealed the government passed a new amendment to the Criminal Code Act. Section 299A provides that any person who intentionally kills another person on account of an accusation of sorcery is guilty of wilful murder, for which the penalty is death (See Appendix 1). This was meant to send a message that such violence will no longer be tolerated. Unfortunately the means of implementing the law has faltered and in fact many people seem to think that whilst wilful murder is covered by the law, lesser forms of violence such as grievous bodily harm, or burning, are not. There is still a call for a revised sorcery act.

SARV in PNG has received mention in the Universal Periodic Review of the United Nations Human Rights Council. In the section on Implementation of internal human rights obligations, section B.32. there is reference to the following:

43 Cf. PNG, Parliamentary Debates, 28th May 2013.

“The country team recommended that Papua New Guinea strengthen its efforts to address gender-based violence, including by providing training and awareness-raising on gender-based violence and violence related to sorcery accusations, strengthening accountability mechanisms and allocating sufficient budget to support such programmes. Similar recommendations were made by the Special Rapporteur on summary executions. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women made recommendations that included ensuring that all cases of assault or murder based on sorcery accusations are treated swiftly and effectively by the National Court; put in place emergency procedures to rescue and resettle women who are at risk of suffering sorcery-related violence in their communities; and develop a project for the establishment of a government-run shelter for women victims of violence in the Highlands region.”<sup>44</sup>

To date little is being done in the SHP to follow through on these recommendations. Sister Lorena recommends starting with establishing better communication networks between the Catholic Diocese, the hospital and the police. Valuable research, funded by Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development, is being done by a team of researchers on “Improving the impact of state and non-state interventions in overcoming sorcery accusation related violence in PNG”.<sup>45</sup>

There have been national efforts to confront SARV in PNG, linked to three conferences commencing in Canberra, Australia, (5–7 June 2013), and follow-up conferences in Goroka (December 2013) and Port Moresby (12–13 June 2014). The outcome of the Port Moresby conference is a Sorcery National Action Plan (SNAP), now renamed Sorcery Accusation-Related Violence National Action Plan (SARV NAP).<sup>46</sup> The plan has five core areas: Advocacy and Communications, Medical, Legal and Protection, Care and Counselling, and Research. Each area contains key recommendations and sets out concrete activities to be taken in both the short and medium term to implement the recommendations. The main focus of the plan is to address the violence

caused by those who accuse others of sorcery and to encourage people to deal with sorcery accusations using non-violent means. The plan has an overall co-ordinating mechanism in the form of the Technical Committee Against Sorcery Accusation-Related Violence, led by the Department of Justice and Attorney General (DJAG). The Committee is responsible to the Human Rights Forum (chaired by DJAG) and is to report at each of the Forum’s quarterly meetings as a regular item on the agenda. Unfortunately, funding expected after endorsement by the PNG National Executive Council in December 2016 has not eventuated, hindering the full implementation of the Plan. The SHP is usually not represented at meetings of the technical committee for the SARV NAP. On a national and international level a recent initiative is a conference “Sorcery Accusation Related Violence – the Harm and the Healing”, at Divine Word University, PNG, which was to take place 11-13 June, 2020, now postponed until after the COVID-19 issue is more under control.<sup>47</sup>

The criminal justice system in PNG faces challenges in dealing with SARV including the lack of witness protection, difficulties with gathering evidence, intermittent and weak responses by police and other law enforcement personnel, and the limited capacity of the police to respond. For example, a United Nations (UN) survey estimated a median of police to population ratio of 1:300 worldwide in 2006, while in PNG it was approximately 1:1,400 in 2006.<sup>48</sup> Potential users of the criminal justice system also report significant frustration, particularly the high costs for survivors and victims to use the system, and the frequent adjournments.

## 9.5 Networks and Initiatives

Research by Forsyth and fellow researchers shows that police and court officials are often not the first or the most likely persons to intervene.<sup>49</sup> Those who most frequently attempt to intervene when accusations are made are village leaders and family members, followed by pastor/religious figures, and neighbours. The police intervene in less than half of the incidents. Specifically, in relation to trying to intervene when violence is occurring in SARV

44 UN document A/HRC/WG.6/25/PNG/2, No. 32. Retrieved from: [https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/papua\\_new\\_guinea/session\\_25\\_-\\_may\\_2016/a\\_hrc\\_wg.6\\_25\\_png\\_2\\_e.pdf](https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/papua_new_guinea/session_25_-_may_2016/a_hrc_wg.6_25_png_2_e.pdf) (12/06/2020).

45 Cf. <http://www.stopsorceryviolence.org/improving-impact-of-interventions/> (12/06/2020).

46 Cf. <http://www.stopsorceryviolence.org/snap-sarv-nap/> (12/06/2020). See also Forsyth, M., Responses to and Issues Arising from Recent Cases of Sorcery Accusation Related Violence in PNG. Regnet Research Paper 122 (2016). Retrieved from: [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2869615](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2869615) (12/06/2020).

47 Cf. <http://www.stopsorceryviolence.org/call-for-papers-and-panel-proposals-sorcery-accusation-related-violence-the-harm-and-the-healing/> (12/06/2020).

48 The global median is from the report of the Secretary-General on the state of crime and criminal justice worldwide from the 12th UN Congress of Crime and Criminal Justice in 2010. The PNG estimate for 2006 was in a report on police to population ratios by the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police Secretariat (2009).

49 Cf. Forsyth et al 2019 (see footnote 36).

incidents, it is the village leaders and immediate family members who are more likely to attempt to stop the violence.

There are examples of proactive policing together with community efforts in other parts of PNG including the Highlands. For example, in Simbu, the rapid response unit in Kerowagi works in partnership with the Highlands Human Rights Network to respond to SARV. This network is supported through Oxfam PNG. There are various other hybrid legal institutions and justice processes playing an important role in preventing SARV and responding to it, including local neighbourhood committees, Operation *Me-kim Save* (OMS) courts in Enga Province, and *wanbel* and peace agreement courts in Bougainville.<sup>50</sup>

These individual initiatives are promising, yet the low number of arrests and charges being laid reflects some of the difficulties and challenges that police and law enforcement agencies experience in responding to SARV. Interviews with police from rural police posts in Eastern Highlands revealed that most killings related to SARV occurred with community support making police intervention very difficult.

A further type of community-led initiative is the creation of community laws to address sorcery accusation-related violence, in particular by stopping accusations. One of the earliest communities to do this was the Nauro-Gor Community in the Kundiawa-Gembogl district in Simbu.<sup>51</sup> The Community comprises over 5,000 people and is in a province with a dismal record of sorcery accusation-related violence, yet has had only one sorcery accusation and no sorcery accusation killings in the last 16 years of the community's existence. Other communities in the Highlands are also having success, with further examples in the Eastern Highlands, Simbu, Jiwaka Province and in the Western Highlands. All these groups have come together to find community-led ways of stopping SARV.<sup>52</sup> The writer is not aware of any such successful community initiatives as yet in the SHP.

## 9.6 Church interventions

The Catholic diocese of Mendi has taken a lead with continued awareness and rescue work in the area of SARV. The Diocese of Mendi Pastoral Plan 2016–2021 contains the following instruction on sorcery (*sanguma*):

“*Sanguma*. The persistent belief in *Sanguma* is a telling sign that the belief in Jesus Christ as Lord, God and Saviour has not reached the ear of many people in the SHP and HP (Hela). Belief and practice of *Sanguma* is incompatible with faith in Jesus. It enslaves people in ignorance and fear.”<sup>53</sup>

Fr Isaiah Timba leads a “*Strongim Bilip*” [strengthen the faith] program for the Diocese. As part of their awareness they use a booklet for diocesan renewal entitled *Sutim tok nating long narapela olsem em i gat sanguma i rong* (Falsely Accusing another of possessing *sanguma* is wrong). The 28-page booklet contains nine lessons following the see-judge-act method of awareness and conscientisation. Participants learn how SARV runs contrary to the law of God, of the Church, of International Human Rights law, and the laws of PNG. The researcher heard several voices appreciative of the work of the Strongim Bilip team. Currently there is an initiative to have a “House of Hope” – supported by the Pontifical Mission Society *missio* in Aachen, Germany – that will be constructed on the mission station in Pomborel that will be a refuge for accused women.

As mentioned in section 7.3 above, Sister Lorena Jenal facilitates a network of faith leaders in the Southern Highlands province. As part of awareness, community groups create dramas demonstrating the problems generated by accusations of sorcery. They have a scene where people are in mourning and there is an individual identified as being a *sanguma* through the use of a bamboo/ diviner and she is almost burnt. Then a group of women all wearing white come and process around carrying signs that read “We are Women” “We are Your Wives, Your Sisters. Don’t Hurt Us. Respect Us.” “Save Us” “Help Us”. They perform the drama in a convincing way at markets and other public events. The members of this network are made up of Catholics together with various other Christian denominations. A public statement like this about solidarity for those accused can be a powerful way of challenging a community’s mindset about how to respond to rumours of sorcery and the fear such rumours generate by making it clear that violence

53 Pastoral Plan 2016–2021, p. 9.

50 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 21.

51 See the film *New Life in Nauro-Gor* filmed and edited by this writer. Retrieved from: <https://vimeo.com/210762053> (12/06/2020).

52 For further information on Community Rule Making in relation to SARV and more generally, see Australian National University, School of Regulation and Global Governance (REGNET). Retrieved from: [http://regnet.anu.edu.au/news-events/events/7159/codification-and-creation-community-customary-laws-South-pacific-and-beyond?tb=General\\_information#tab](http://regnet.anu.edu.au/news-events/events/7159/codification-and-creation-community-customary-laws-South-pacific-and-beyond?tb=General_information#tab) (12/06/2020).



is not condoned by a significant section of the community and highlighting the human costs. The inclusive scripts that have been developed are very important – highlighting the relationships and including those accused within the community rather than out-casting them as non-human *sanguma*. Such groups have not stopped SARV, but without them the situation would surely be much worse.<sup>54</sup>

Along with commendable efforts, questions must be raised about their effectiveness. For example, the value of challenging beliefs in sorcery and witchcraft. Based on our research to date,<sup>55</sup> it seems better initially to focus on interventions and initiatives that change the emotional, cognitive and behavioural consequences of these beliefs. This means diverting people away from making accusations directed at individuals and from violence as a legitimate response, often through raising doubt about whether or not there is sufficient evidence to support particular accusations, rather than engaging in the debate about whether sorcery ever occurs.

Catholic Bishops have spoken out strongly directly against SARV and belief in sorcery and witchcraft (See Appendix 2). Taking both a legal and a religious approach, the Bishops call SARV a crime against humanity, a justice issue, and a betrayal of the Gospel. They note how Jesus and his disciples did not torture or kill anyone in dealing with such evil forces. Nor did they accuse anyone of harming or killing other people. In the Gospel stories, possession by demons/evil spirits made the affected people sick, in need of cure. By contrast, the current belief in the PNG Highlands is that people thought to be possessed by the *sanguma* spirit are not made sick and disabled by it, but endowed with extraordinary powers for doing evil.<sup>56</sup> The Bishops clearly state that “this practice of calling on a diviner or ‘glasman’ and accusing someone, puts trust in powers of evil, a trust that runs contrary to our Christian faith.”

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54 Networks are being created throughout the country as more individuals and organisations mobilise to prevent the suffering being witnessed. In Bougainville, Sister Lorraine Gerasu at the Nazareth Rehabilitation Centre at Chabai also works effectively with a group of volunteer human rights defenders from throughout the Autonomous Region. Another example is the network created by Catholic youth and other leaders in Enga province who have convened a series of workshops around areas where SARV has been particularly violent. These workshops have brought together religious leaders, village court magistrates, health workers, police officers, community leaders and survivors to discuss ways to address accusations and violence in particular communities.

55 Cf. Forsyth & Gibbs 2019 (see footnote 5).

56 Cf. Zocca, F., *The Papuan Spirit Nogut in the Light of the Gospels*, in: *Catalyst* 45 (2015) 2, pp. 111–120, here: p. 118.

The Catholic Bishops in all five PNG Highlands dioceses have been united in opposing SARV. However, being from the local culture, two national Bishops in the Highlands have taken a lead in denouncing SARV.<sup>57</sup> Following in the footsteps of Bishop Henk Te Maarssen, Bishop Anton Bal of the Diocese of Kundiawa (now Archbishop of Madang) has promoted a strategy with five related components:<sup>58</sup>

1. Help broaden people’s understanding of the causes of illness and death
2. Early intervention before or during a funeral (since lots of accusations start there)
3. Immediate family members taking ownership
4. Promoting respect for law and order
5. Fostering faith to influence attitudes and emotions.

Bishop Bal considers that this five-point plan has helped reduce *sanguma* accusations in many parts of Simbu, particularly around the Catholic headquarters of Mingende.

Bishop Arnold Orowae of the Diocese of Wabag has taken a strong stand, announcing that SARV can have no place in Catholic communities and that anyone involved in SARV is excommunicated from the church. He has followed up on these words by stopping mass and holy communion in some parishes in the Enga Province where there has been SARV until they have gone through a lengthy period of discernment and penance, and made a commitment never to be involved in such activity again. Such actions have strengthened communities with a strong Catholic identity and earned the ire of others who accuse Catholics of being “witch supporters”.

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57 Both Bishops appear in the film, “Everybody’s Business.” A film by Philip Gibbs and Maria Sagrista. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=12AnEwRIF90> and <https://vimeo.com/user3238380> (12/06/2020).

58 Cf. Gibbs, P., *Practical Church Interventions on Sorcery and Witchcraft Violence in the PNG Highlands*, in: Forsyth, M., Eves, R. (eds.), *Talking it Through: Responses to Sorcery and Witchcraft Beliefs and Practices in Melanesia*, Canberra: ANU Press 2015, pp. 309–327.

## 10. Conclusion

Christina Pakuma suffered the horror and shame of being accused of killing a person through witchcraft. She was stripped, sexually assaulted, and publicly tortured with hot irons, to force her to admit to the accusations and to name any accomplices. After three days of torture she was rescued by missionaries from the nearby Catholic Mission. Police and magistrates did very little to stop the torture, but the police did cooperate afterwards, at the urging of the sisters, by agreeing to shelter Christina in the police cells. Eventually she found a measure of safety and security under the care of Fr. Dr Jan Jaworski in Kundiawa in the Simbu Province.

Christina admits being very angry with at least one other woman says she would like to take her perpetrators to court and have them sent to jail, however, in speaking with relatives and community leaders in Mendi this researcher encountered very little empathy for Christina. Even a close relative considers it good that Christina is no longer with them and advises against follow-up through the courts claiming that it would stir up more trouble in the community and could even lead to Christina being killed. It appears to be only the expatriate missionaries who are the ones still raising justice issues over her accusation and torture.

It is one thing for the Church to promote justice and human rights, but another to apply such principles in the village context of the PNG Highlands. Photographs of the inhuman torture illustrate the shocking story narrated by Christina. However, it begs the question as to what is an appropriate response to this offence against her human right to life, liberty and degrading treatment. The local justice system is dysfunctional, and it is unlikely that Christina will ever be able take her torturers to court. It remains for

the Church to promote life-giving alternatives. The Church has started by assisting Christina with a house in a safe environment where she can start a new life. However, issues remain as to what needs to happen socially and politically to change the situation.

I conclude with seven recommendations based on the analysis above:

1. Comprehensive prevention strategies aim to reduce or even halt the trend of sorcery accusations and violence. Yet there are still people, most women, in the Highlands, including the Southern Highlands, accused and faced with little opportunity for justice. There needs to be investigation into further possible ways to support such victims even when the community claims that pursuit of the case will only mean more trouble and successful repatriation is unlikely.
2. The layers framework (section 9.1 above) may well be usefully applied in awareness programs. Structural factors take time to change, however it will be useful to identify proximate factors. The five-point plan of the Diocese of Kundiawa provides a helpful example of the Church identifying and influencing proximate factors that may lead to violence.
3. There is a tendency among some agencies to assume that witchcraft issues can be addressed simply through the provision of education or bio-medical explanations of death. However, there is no assurance that explanations using a bio-medical model will be effective. Rather than assuming that a narrative based on a magical/pre-scientific worldview must necessarily be replaced by another, it may be more fruitful to envisage co-existence of different causal reasoning systems. Then the task is to identify the different factors that appear to be salient in determining which worldview and hence mode of causal reasoning will dominate in particular contexts: the lived experiences of individuals, for example, the physical place and emotional context in which the person is located; and the responses of co-present individuals, particularly authority figures.
4. Disunity in the Churches' response impedes the development of effective counter narratives. Efforts by the PNG Constitutional and Law Reform Commission for churches to come to a common understanding have not been entirely successful. Sr Lorena has made every effort to include leaders from various churches in the SHP, but still there are confusing differences of opinion as to the source of evil in the case of Sorcery accusations: whether the spirit of evil is hosted by the accused, or whether to locate evil and error in the accusers/perpetrators.

5. In the context of a chaotic socio-political context in the Southern Highlands, interventions require cooperation between community, government, law enforcement and church agencies in order to promote meaningful and effective prevention strategies. The law and justice sector seems paralysed and the contemporary reality is that torturing and killing people continues with impunity. Bishop Lippert of Mendi is of the opinion that this is a sign of society in chaos. Committed faith leadership at all levels is called for in such a situation.
6. Community interventions are starting to have a noticeable positive effect in other parts of the PNG Highlands. The writer recommends that the Church study and document these interventions across the Highlands so that there might be mutual assistance for the Diocese of Mendi from other parts of the Highlands.
7. Churches, including the Catholic Church need to draw inspiration not only from scripture and theological tradition, but also from human rights ideals. The Church plays an important role in interpreting rights language and values into cultural frameworks and social teaching meaningful to people in a given local context. Unfortunately when the Church leads there is a tendency to expect the Diocese to fund the initiative and there is pressure from “volunteers” to expect allowances for their service or be compensated for anything they do. Greater independence and assumption of responsibility of local churches could counteract this attitude. More needs to be done for the local church and lay people to assume responsibility for local initiatives without depending on the Parish Priest or the Bishop.

## Acknowledgments

The writer acknowledges the invaluable assistance of Sr Lorena Jenal FSDP, Bishop Donald Lippert OFM.cap, church workers and public servants in the Southern Highlands Province, Divine Word University, Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development, and most of all Christina Pakuma, who bravely shared the painful story of her accusation, torture and steps towards recovery. Christina is only one of many women facing such human rights offences and I greatly appreciate the efforts of Missio in helping to reveal the injustice and the human tragedy of Sorcery Accusation Related Violence.

### The Legal Framework in PNG

Miranda Forsyth / Stop Sorcery Violence / July 12, 2018

*This summary is prepared by Dr Miranda Forsyth, Australian National University, in order to clarify misunderstandings about the legal situation in relation to these issues. It has no official authorisation.*

Sorcery accusation related violence, including torture, is covered by a number of **Criminal Code** offences, including:

- **Willful murder** (s299) and **Murder** (s300)
- **Grievous bodily harm** (s319) and **Assault** (s335)
- **Unlawful assembly and riot** (ss64 and 65)
- **Threats to use violence** (ss243 and 293)

There is no defence that the perpetrator of violence believed the victim had practiced sorcery. In fact, this may lead to increased penalties as the courts have been viewing this as aggravating factors in sentencing. This means longer and harsher sentences are being given for these cases. The average sentence for wilful murder in these cases is 18 years imprisonment, and many of these involve hard labour.

In addition, section 299A of the Criminal Code Act provides that **any person who intentionally kills another person on account of an accusation of sorcery is guilty of wilful murder**, for which the penalty is **death**.

Under the Criminal Code, people who order, encourage and assist others to conduct sorcery accusation related violence may also be charged as perpetrators (see sections 7,8,307, 308).

**Torture** is illegal in PNG and confessions obtained through the use of force are not regarded as credible evidence in any court of law.

People such as glashan who trick people by pretending to identify individuals as being sorcerers may also be charged under the Criminal Code for the offence of obtaining property by false pretences (subdivision F).

Many acts of **sorcery accusation related violence also breach the human rights provisions in the Constitution**, such as the **right to life** (section 35), **right to freedom from inhuman treatment** (section 36), **protection of the law** (section 37) and **right to freedom** (section 32). Cases claiming such breach of rights can be brought before the National Court under the Human

Rights Rules and Constitutional provisions by anyone whose rights have been breached or by someone acting on their behalf.

People who accuse others with no proof may also breach section 11 of the Summary Offences Act 11. FALSE REPORTS. A person who spreads false or wilfully misleading reports tending to cause trouble or ill-feeling– (a) amongst people; or (b) between the members of a group of people; or (c) between groups of people; or (d) between individuals, is guilty of an offence. Penalty: A fine not exceeding K100.00 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding three months.

The **Village Courts** have jurisdiction to deal with a limited range of offences that concern people who pretend to practice sorcery or threaten others with sorcery or try to pay someone to perform acts of sorcery. The prescribed offences are:

- practicing or pretending to practice sorcery
- threatening any person with sorcery practiced by another
- procuring or attempting to procure a person to practice or pretend to practice or to assist in sorcery
- the possession of implements or charms used in practicing sorcery
- paying or offering to pay a person to perform acts of sorcery

The Village Courts also have a mediation function and are well positioned to assist in dealing with concerns people have about possible acts of sorcery committed against them in a non-violent manner. They can also issue preventative orders (section 51 Village Courts Act 1989) to stop community members acting violently against those accused of practising sorcery.

## **Pastoral Letter on Sanguma – Catholic Bishops of the Highlands Region**

(26 July 2013)

[https://www.voiceofrot.com/news/png-highlands-bishops-wage-war-on-sorcery-/  
\(09/11/2020\)](https://www.voiceofrot.com/news/png-highlands-bishops-wage-war-on-sorcery-/09/11/2020)

### **“God put all things under Christ’s feet and gave him to the church as a supreme Lord over all things.” (Eph. 1:22)**

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

We Catholic Bishops from the Highlands region are sending this letter to all parishes in the PNG Highlands because we want to express our deep concern about a growing problem in our communities. That is, when some people accuse others of using sorcery or sanguma to kill or harm other people. This stems from a modern corruption of some traditional beliefs. When people following such beliefs get involved in torturing innocent people and even killing them, we have not only a crime against humanity, but a serious betrayal of the Gospel, our faith in the supreme Lordship of Christ, and of the liberating work of the church. There is often an issue of justice here also since it is well known that many allegations are based on old grudges and target the weak and vulnerable.

“Satan” and “the Devil” are ways to talk about the reality of the existence of evil forces. In the Bible we read how Jesus ministered to the sick and how he cast out evil spirits (Mat 17: 14-21; Mat 8:28-34). Jesus and his disciples did not torture or kill anyone in dealing with such evil forces. Nor did they accuse anyone of harming or killing other people. When asked who was to blame for a man being blind Jesus taught that neither the blind man nor his parents were responsible for his blindness (Jn 9:1-3). In healing people Jesus sought to bring harmony and joy to the community. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus conquered death (Rom 14:8; 1Thes 4:13-14). When sickness or death come into our community there must be no false allegations such as accusing a person of causing death by stealing the deceased’s heart. We repeat that such allegations are unchristian. As people of faith we

should follow the example of Christ in promoting forgiveness and harmony in our communities. If someone dies, in the midst of our tears, we can be comforted by believing that they have returned to the One who gives life.

But now it seems that in some of our communities people are abandoning their Christian faith and believing the talk of diviners or “glasman.” We state clearly that this practice of calling on a diviner or “glasman” and accusing someone, puts trust in powers of evil, a trust that run contrary to our Christian faith, especially when the diviner urges the relatives or supporters of the deceased to acts of violence. We have seen the fruits of this, and they are bad fruits indeed (Mat 12:33)! Seeing the fruits of such violence it appears to us that it is actually those who torture and kill innocent people who are the ones succumbing to the forces of evil.

If someone gets sick, do not even talk about sanguma. The only power sanguma has comes from people talking about it and fearing it. Put your faith in God and support the sick person with your presence and with your prayer. If someone dies, you must not talk about sanguma or support anyone who starts with this sort of talk. Do not look for a diviner or glasman. Do not try to find someone to blame. Ultimately, life and death are in the hands of God. Put the deceased person and their family in God’s hand and thank God for the life of the person who was part of your life but who has passed away to eternal life.

Parents, do not teach your children to believe in sanguma. Sicknesses have their cause and medical doctors can tell you the reason why someone is ill. Care for your bodies and bring sick people quickly to the hospital or health centre. Don’t wait until it gets so serious that medicine can no longer help. Doctors and health workers, it is better that you do not talk about sickness having “traditional” causes found in tensions in families and communities. It is true that worry and fear can cause people to get sick, but this is something to settle within the family, or through the village court – not something to blame on sanguma or an evil spirit.

The problem comes when people’s faith weakens, they become fearful, and they forget about what it means to be Christian. We need good upright Christians in the community who can provide leadership in difficult times. Through this letter we want to support and strengthen your faith so that you can in turn help others to follow the right path, and in so doing find justice peace and joy brought by the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17). You must conquer evil with good (Rom 12:21).

We Bishops challenge our priests, religious brothers and sisters, catechists, and all church leaders and ministers, and we invite other churches too, to join with us in taking a clear, unambiguous, and strong stand against all talk about sanguma and all attempts to lay the blame on anyone, especially at the time of sickness and death.

In the coming months we hope to launch a program of renewal of our faith in the supreme Lordship of Christ. We are convinced that when people have a genuine faith in Jesus Christ, there will be no room for sanguma talk in their lives. In the meantime we urge everyone to read, reflect on, and pray over these texts, which will help those whose faith is wavering to rediscover the joy of putting their trust in Jesus Christ alone, and not in any other power.

- Gen. 1:26 Man and woman made in the image of God
- Eph. 1:15-23 Pauls' prayer for the power of the Holy Spirit
- Mat 17:14-21 Jesus gave a command and the boy was healed
- Rom. 14:13-23 Do not make your brother or sister fall
- Rom. 8:31-39 Nothing can separate us from the love of God
- Col 2:6-19 Fullness of life in Christ

*Archbishop Douglas Young (Mount Hagen)*

*Bishop Francesco Sarego (Goroka)*

*Bishop Anton Bal (Kundiawa)*

*Bishop Arnold Orowae (Wabag)*

*Bishop Donald Lippert (Mendi)*

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