

CHAPTER TWO

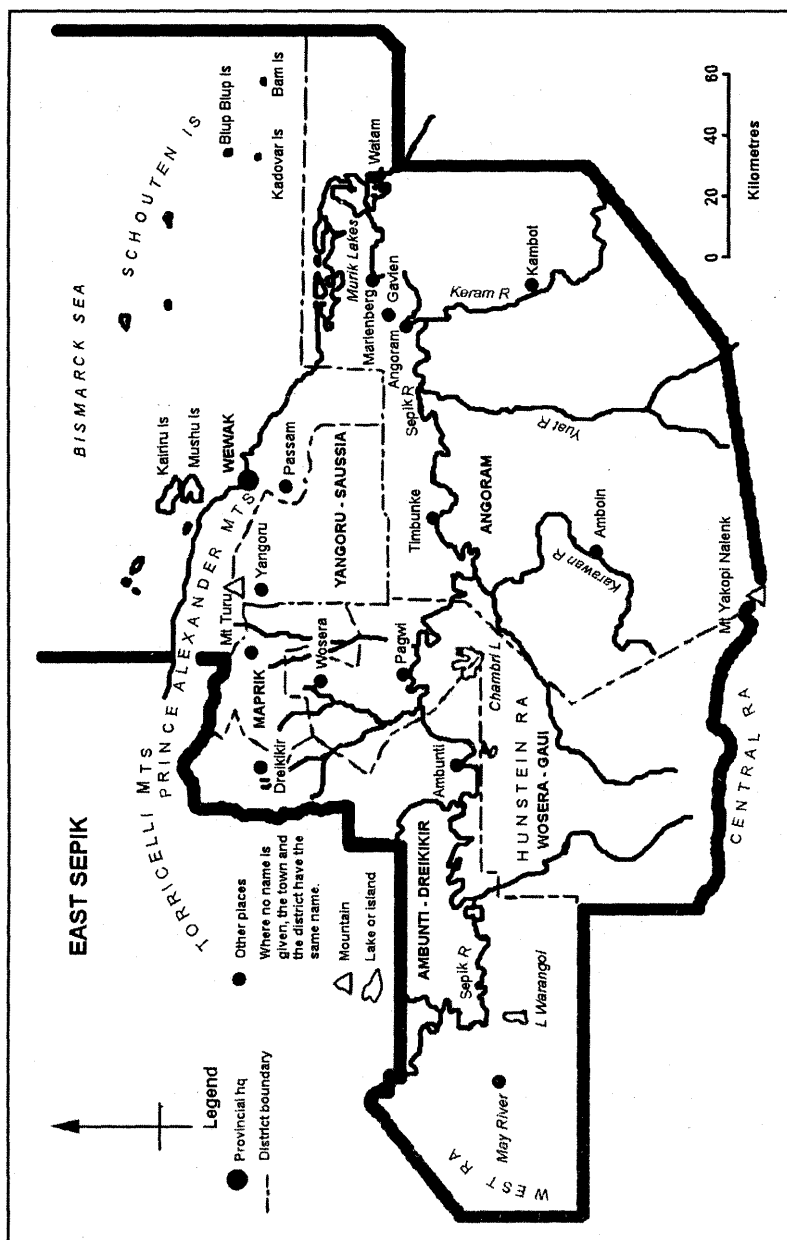
SORCERY AND A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE IN THE EAST SEPIK

Philip Gibbs and Josepha Junnie Wailoni

1. Introduction

Speaking to an elderly Christian woman from the East Sepik Province about her attitude to sorcery, we proposed two possibilities: Did she think Sorcery was just superstition, so if she refused to believe in it, it would not affect her, or is it something which she thought she should take seriously but her faith as a Christian gives her protection against, so that Sorcery will not harm her? She considered the proposed options, but did not respond to either of them. Instead, she spoke about right relationships. "*Lotu na kastam i wankain. Sapos mi abrusim mak o mi no givim samting long narapela man na mi haitim, ol bai kros na kilim mi long posin. Sapos mi laikim olgeta arapela man, mi no inap indai long posin*" (Faith and traditional values are similar. If I contravene customs or laws or if I have something and I hide it and don't share it, others will become upset and resort to Sorcery. If I love and respect others, I don't have to worry about Sorcery.) She was combining indigenous and introduced Christian values to interpret the source of Sorcery in any lack of harmony and reciprocity in social relations. Our theoretical questions served little purpose for her, divorced as they were from the social context.

This study is about Sorcery in one part of the East Sepik Province (ESP) (see Map 1) of Papua New Guinea (PNG). It will show how the English term "Sorcery" must be considered in a broad sense in order to take account of phenomena such as *sanguma* and witchcraft. It will note the great diversity that exists, even within the limited area covered by the study. Having described the context, and then Sorcery in its various forms, then the social implications



Map 1. East Sepik Provincial map

today, the question is raised as to how Christian churches can understand and best respond. Sorcery and Christian faith are inimical at the level of practice, yet, as indicated by the example above, they may co-exist conceptually. Christian faith seeks a life of harmony and promotes ways to counter the jealousy and fear associated with Sorcery.

Here we use the term Sorcery (capitalised) to refer to a wide range of magical procedures that seek to influence events. How this term relates to concepts such as *sanguma* and witchcraft will be explored further in section 5 below.

2. Method

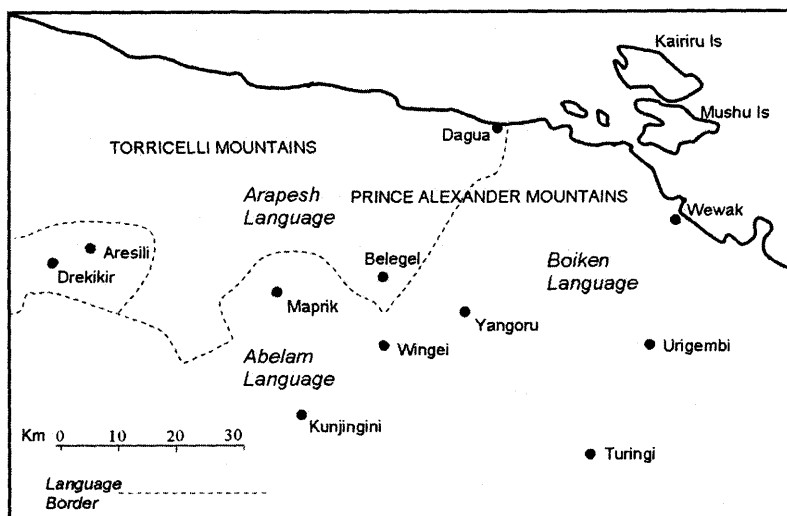
Following a review of relevant literature, the writers visited the ESP on two occasions – in May-June 2006 and May-June 2007 spending a total of five weeks in the field. Josepha Junnie Wailoni comes from Belegel village, some 15km West of Yangoru. The visit in 2006 focused on the Arapesh speaking people in Belegel and nearby villages.

While conducting in-depth investigations among the Plains Arapesh the researchers were continually reminded of the diversity of belief and practice in other parts of the Sepik. Consequently, the second visit took in a broader field of study to include groups along the Sepik Highway as far as Drekikir and Aresili, returning to Wewak via Kunjingini near Maprik, then Wingei, Yangoru, Turingi, and Urigembi. The researchers also walked from Yangoru over the Prince Alexander Range to Alitoa where Margaret Mead had lived for eight months among the Mountain Arapesh (Gibbs and Wailoni 2008).

The principal method in the field was to identify key persons in a given community and to conduct and record personal interviews with the help of a question guide. There were also focus group interviews with church and health workers. The study is limited to sites in the hill country between Wewak and Drekikir (see Map 2).

It does not include coastal communities, the Sepik River or the mountain peoples south of the Sepik.¹ Being from the region, Josepha Wailoni was able to establish good contacts, however there were times, particularly when dealing with *sanguma*, when interviewees did not want information given to women. In such cases only men were present for the interviews and this paper will not describe details of some rituals and practices in deference to the wishes of these men. The research team conducted 51 interviews with over 80 persons during the two visits to the ESP and in follow up discussions in Port Moresby. Interviewees in villages belonged to various Christian churches or to no church at all. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.² On a delicate issue, such as Sorcery, it could be that people might respond along the lines of, "We don't do that but those people over there do." However, we encountered very few responses of that kind and we feel confident that those we spoke to were honestly responding to our enquiries.

The paper benefits from insights of functionalism, modernism, post-modernism and other recent theories, yet the main focus of the paper will be missiological, linking faith questions with a phenomenological approach based on ethnographic enquiry.



Map 2. Research Area in the East Sepik Province

3. The Context: People and Place

3.1 Geography: The East Sepik Province occupies 43,700 km² in the northwest of PNG. The northern part of the province is dominated by the Wewak coastal plains and islands, the Torricelli Range and the Prince Alexander Range. South of these mountains is a large area of hill country that stretches from Drekikir in the west, to Angoram in the east. The middle of the province covers the plains, floodplains, swamps and lakes of the Sepik River and its tributaries. The Sepik Valley is around 80 km wide and 320 km long. South of the Sepik Valley are the rugged mountains of the Central Range, which extend into Enga Province and the Southern Highlands. The east of the ESP province consists of the mouth of the Sepik River and large areas of coastal swamp around the Murik Lakes. Altitude varies from sea level to over 3000 m on the Central Range (Hanson et al: 2006). The six districts in ESP are Ambunti-Drekikir, Angoram, Maprik, Wewak, Wosera-Gawi, and Yangoru-Saussia. According to the year 2000 census there were 343,181 persons in the province. Ethnographic data in this study is drawn from investigations in communities in five out of the six districts of the province.

3.2 Languages

As shown in the map above, the study site covers two major language groups of the Torricelli Phylum: Boikin and Abelam languages in the East and South and the Arapesh and Urat languages in the West. There are over ninety languages in the province, but the languages of the study site are first languages for a major part of the population of the ESP. Tok Pisin is the second principal lingua franca in the Province and is spoken by the vast majority of the Sepik people. Most of the interviews for this study were conducted in Tok Pisin.

3.3 Economy and lifestyle

The Sepik Highway runs from Wewak to Maprik through the areas which have the highest population densities in the province (Hanson et al: 207). People in the hills, between Drekikir and Yangoru, and on the coast and islands around Wewak, live within four hours' travel of Maprik or Wewak. Average incomes in the ESP are relatively

low with the majority of the population working in non-monetary activities such as gardening or fishing for their own use (National Census 2000, Table D1B). People around Drekikir, Maprik and Yangoru earn moderate incomes from the sale of cocoa, coffee and fresh food.

Those in the Sepik Valley and on the Wewak Coast earn low incomes from minor sales of fresh food, fish, cocoa and betel nut. There was a boom in sales of vanilla in the first years of the new millennium but this was short-lived. Cocoa is the main cash earning activity in the hill country where most villages have at least one fermentary.

However, the marketing of cocoa is constrained by poor road maintenance. Despite a large migrant population outside the province, little money is remitted back to rural villages (Hanson et al: 2009). There are no large-scale resource extraction industries in the province. Most people live by subsistence gardening of yam, taro and sago, supplemented by various other foods such as bananas, coconut and introduced vegetables like tomato and beans.

Outside of the small “towns” like Yangoru and Maprik and well developed mission stations such as Kunjingini, people live in villages that range from hamlets with just a few homes, to large communities, such as Ilahita with over 2,000 inhabitants (Tuzin 1997: 53). Settlements are often on the crest of ridges on an area totally cleared of all grass and vegetation – what Tuzin describes as “swept tidiness verging on bleakness” (Tuzin 1976: 9). Land is held by patrilines, though clan members may be scattered over a broad area in different hamlets or villages.

Relations are generally classified according to the “Iroquois” system: mother’s brother is “uncle” with his children called “cousin brother” or “cousin sister”. New forms of leadership follow the system of Local Level Government with Wards and Ward Councillors. However, councillors often have little power or credibility unless they exhibit qualities of traditional leadership such as business acumen or the ability to establish social relationships. Traditionally

in this area men's reputations depend greatly on their expertise as yam growers. Women have children – men grow yams.

3.4 Health and Education Services

The ESP province is well supplied with educational institutions including: 110 Primary Schools, 8 Secondary Schools, 1 National High School, 1 Teachers' Training college, and various other Vocational schools, Bible colleges, Seminaries, etc. In 2002, fifty four percent of students in primary education were at schools administered by churches. The existence of schools does not ensure the quality of education, nor does it mean that teachers and students will adopt a scientific-medical view of illness and death.

The ESP has many health institutions including clinics, Aid Posts, Health Centres, Hospitals, and VCT & Day Care Centres. Other services are provided for the disabled by Callan Services. Of these, 25 health centres and 23 Aid Posts, Callan services and most of the VCT & Day Care Centres are administered by the churches. It continues to be difficult to maintain health services in isolated rural areas of the Province. As will be noted further in this paper, Western medicine may be seen as having little relevance for *sik bilong ples* (sicknesses perceived as having a social or spiritual cause, including Sorcery).

3.5 Changes

The Sepik River was the main route for migration and trade into the Highlands for thousands of years. Austronesian traders had contact with the Sepik Coastal areas from 4,000 years ago (Rynkiewicz 2004: 28). As early as 1887 the German steamer Samoa navigated 380 miles up the Sepik River. By 1910 the lower Sepik was already a source of plantation workers, though there was little contact or control over the inland, non-riverine populations. The Sepik was first explored by a Hamburg museum expedition 1908-10, then by the German border-marking expedition of 1910, and more thoroughly by Richard Thurnwald for a joint expedition by German museums during 1912-14.³ Thurnwald passed near what is present-day Maprik. In 1912 Catholic missionaries Fr Eberhard Limbrock and

Fr Franz Kirschbaum patrolled the Torricelli Ranges into the area near Yangoru (Limbrock 1913). Some missionaries left valuable ethnographic observations (Puff 1926; Gerstner 1934, 1937, 1952, 1963; Aufenanger 1972, Gesch 1985, Schroeder 1992). The area came under Australian rule after the First World War only for this to change with the Japanese occupation during the Second World War. After the extensive damage during the war there followed a time of rapid change with education, health and socio-economic development. Cultural change was noted by a number of post-war scholars including Forge (1971), Tuzin (1976), Brison (1992, 1995), Leavitt (1989), Stephenson 1995, and Koczberski and Curry (1999).

These changes could be very traumatic for the people. Bryant Allen has noted the increased adult death rates in various epidemics (smallpox, dysentery, influenza) – the unintended consequences of colonialism. He estimates that WWII caused a 20-30% reduction in the population (Allen 1989: 50). For most village men and women, diagnosis of illness depends more on the recent activities of the patient and his or her social position than on any symptoms. Allan argues that with increased death rates these people's world became more unpredictable and they seemed to lose control over illness. So they adopted new forms of Sorcery and Sorcery divination to better protect themselves in what seemed to them to be an increase in the level of Sorcery activity.

4. Worldview and Traditional Beliefs

4.1 Traditional Beliefs.

Sorcerers are by no means the only cause of sickness and death. There are believed to be various spirit beings, some of them able to cause illness or misfortune if ignored or disrespected. There is some variation in the area covered by this study, however, for example, Arapesh refer to *masalai* (*walehas*), bush spirits (*ahiweim*) and dwarves (*maulehem*, *bonobanom*) that can cause sickness or death if disturbed or if people do not announce themselves when entering their territory. There are also ghosts of the recent dead (*segebehas*) around village graveyards and ancestral spirits (*bahlohim*, *bahas*)

responsible for the well-being of the clan.⁴ Success and blessing depend on good social relations with the living and harmony between the living and the dead.

The cassowary assumes great mythic importance in the area and a cassowary woman is believed to be the first ancestor of the Arapesh and other groups in the area (Mead 2002: 262; Tuzin 1980, 1997). The bones of the cassowary woman are thought to be the source of the first yams (Mead 2002: 252-3). While the the origin myths involving the cassowary appear to be benevolent, there is a malevolent dimension to the cassowary in the *haus tambaran* with the use of cassowary bones and the “*muruk* (cassowary) stone” in the practice of *sanguma*, as will be explained further in this paper in section 5.

In myths and legends, certain aspects of the environment such as trees or rocks are believed to have been formed by a primeval cassowary or other supernatural forces. The land belongs to the ancestors, so whatever grows or lives on it must be cherished and be passed on to others who will come to care for the environment in future generations. Yet, there are dangerous, harmful places also. These *masalai* places will be deep water holes, quicksands and bogs, dark forests, silent waters, areas with big rocks or other unusual environmental features. Usually the *masalai* inhabiting that spot is named and regarded as the special *masalai* of that place. Mead says that belief in witches is “food for fancy and casual superstitious practice” (Mead 2002: 279) whereas belief in *masalais* is “the cornerstone of the religious system” (Mead 2002: 279). A man addresses the ancestors but it is the *masalai* who punish him if he fails to do so. The *masalais* and ancestral spirits protect the hunting ground, the gardens, and the water holes and the *masalais* punish those who don’t observe the required taboos such as the taboo against menstruating women visiting a waterhole. Punishment will most likely result in sicknesses or trouble.

A person’s well-being depends not on the person alone but on relationships with other persons and with the spirits. That is a reason why people try to maintain good relations within their families and

with neighbours, fulfilling their social obligations and observing taboos. To neglect these relationships and obligations risks illness or misfortune. People are believed to have a “soul” or life force (*win* or *tewel* in Tok Pisin) that can leave the body during dreaming and which departs from the body permanently at death. Some malevolent beings and sorcerers have power to capture a person’s soul and in that way cause the person to suffer or die.

4.2 Rituals and Magic

Magic, usually involving spells and/or herbs or charms can range from love magic or spells to make pigs or gardens grow, to more malicious forms that may cause illness such as diarrhoea, boils, deformities etc, or even death. People distinguish magic from witchcraft and other destructive rituals such as Sorcery. Sorcery requires the observance of special taboos, but magic normally does not.

Magical charms consist of a set of names and a series of verbal statements which are repeated. People offer no explanation for the meaning of the names and simply say they are sacred. Those who practise magic have to be wary lest the practitioner become the victim of his or her own magic. For instance, a man’s own children may become sick if they walk or jump over the place where magic implements are stored. Magic can be powerful or dangerous and must be used with caution lest it result in unwanted consequences.

Manuguh is a magic spell used by the Arapesh said to cause various kinds of illness such as paralysis, diarrhoea, urinating blood, boils on any part of the body, having hookworms in the stomach, deformities of the limbs, body shakings, the protruding of the intestine out of the anus, and continuous bleeding in women. A coconut or betelnut tree may have a spell put on it. Once a person comes to collect nuts from the bespelled tree, he or she comes under this spell.

The person making magic can drink strong-tasting lemon juice (*muchubun*) to become “hot” so that the spell will take effect quickly. To reverse the effect of the spell, the victim would have to find the

person responsible for the magic and apologise or do something so that the magic will be removed. *Manuguh* is not Sorcery. There are no taboos or other procedures to be observed when applying this spell.

4.3 Cargo movements

There have been a “plethora” of cargo cult movements throughout the Sepik area (Gesch 1985: 126). Gesch provides details about the Mt Turun movement in the 1960s and 70s and refers to documentation on earlier movements by Bryant Allan (Gesch 1985: 121) (See also Allan 1989: 63). Gesch quotes Fr Willie Morman as telling elders around Negrie-Yangoru, “If you drop sorcery, and cease disputing, then the good times will surely come” (Gesch 1985: 126). Some informants told us how they believed missionary priests would visit cemeteries to talk to the dead and receive money in return.

4.4 Mission influence

Early Catholic missionaries from the Society of the Divine Word landed on Tumleo Island on the north coast near present-day Aitape in 1896, to be joined by the Holy Spirit Sisters in 1899. Fr. Eberhard Limbrock and Fr Franz Kirschbaum patrolled near our research area in 1912. There are other patrol reports from 1926 and 1933 (Gibbs and Wailoni 2008: 151). Young men were brought to the coast for training as catechists. Intensive mission expansion came only after WWII. At that stage other mission groups such as the South Seas Evangelical Mission (SSEM) and the Assemblies of God were also working in the area. Most early missionaries denounced magic and Sorcery as being mere superstition. The Catholic missionaries, aided by anthropologists such as Andreas Gerstner (1934, 1937, 1952, 1963), tended to promote scientific views, whereas missions such as the SSEM attributed Sorcery to local spirits taking possession of individuals at the behest of the Devil (Allen 1989: 50).

Today people express their appreciation for mission education and health services. Yet, some people are loath to remain in the ward of a mission hospital away from the protection of their families and vulnerable to the attack of evil forces. People wear medals and

carry rosary beads like charms against evil and the holy water is popular for keeping evil forces including Sorcerers away. One Catholic woman told how sorcerers, knowing that she defends her property with holy water, avoid coming near her house lest their power go “cold”.

4.5 Attitudes to Sickness and death

Because of the integral nature of relationships with the cosmos, the spirit world and other human beings, people seek an explanation in terms of relationships when things go wrong.

Stephen Leavitt explains the Bumbita preference for imputing explicitly malicious motives rather than regarding illness or dying as a natural consequence of living (Leavitt 1989: 323, 367). People do not “simply die”. Because of their understanding that an individual’s well-being depends ultimately on the mutual assistance and caretaking among family members, “simply dying” would imply neglect. So bereaved family members search for other explanations. Mead, writing in the 1930’s says that theoretically, all deaths, even the deaths of the very old are laid to sorcery” (Mead 2002: 242).

However, today people have more options to explain sickness and death. A woman with nursing training said that she looks for signs to distinguish between “ordinary” deaths and those caused by *sanguma*. Nevertheless, even when it is known that a person has died from pneumonia or cancer the question still arises as to why the victim contracted pneumonia or cancer when other people did not. In so-called accidents like a fall from a tree, snake bite or a car accident it is thought that the victim has been sorcerised or bewitched.⁵ Even in the case of a violent death through a spear or bullet it is believed that the instrument would not find its mark unless the victim had been sorcerised or bewitched.

In October 2008 a young man from Belegel was killed in a knife attack (*The National* 7 Nov. 2008: 10). The killing was ostensibly because the young man had cut down coffee trees planted by someone else. However, people think that the real target was the

young man's father, and that someone has worked *posin* on him and the killing of his son was inevitable since the father was a marked man because of *posin*. Killing the son was a way to hit back at the father.

Once one is marked by *posin* the only certainty is that misfortune or death will happen, not how it will happen. A young man was hired by another village to teach a cultural dance to young people there. Later in the evening they drank some beer and he collapsed and died beside the fireplace in the house of a friend. His family pointed to a burn mark on his chest and suspected that someone had mixed weed killer with the beer and he had been poisoned by the weed killer. The family does not believe the news that an autopsy was cancelled because the inner organs were "already decomposed". When people reflected back on the young man's actions and relationships they realised that he had died beside the fire in the very house where he had caused trouble by defecating in the fireplace two years before. This must have been how people obtained his "specimen", and also gave them a motive for working *posin* as Sorcery, so that he became a marked man leading to his death through poison by weedkiller.

If a person is sick for a long time and medical personnel can't find a solution, people will conclude that it is "*sik bilong ples*" with the cause of the illness located in social relations. Koczberski and Curry, writing about the Wosera Abelam near Kunjingini note how ancestral spirits, witchcraft and magic including sorcery "are all important elements of everyday life believed to influence the behaviour, well-being and health of individuals and groups (Koczberski and Curry 1999: 237).

A person told us how after an argument over him receiving shell money, "they paid the *sanguma* to make me sick. I went to the hospital but I was not healed. I then returned to the village and gave them some money and after that I got well. I gave the money to those concerned and said that I want this worry to be straightened so that I won't be sick anymore".

5. What is Sorcery, *Sanguma* and Witchcraft?

Applying general terms in any cultural complex is problematic. This applies to terms such as “sorcery”, “poison”, “witchcraft”, and “*sanguma*”. In its wider sense, Sorcery is the use of magical power to influence events. The Papua New Guinea Sorcery Act (1976) distinguishes between “innocent” sorcery that is protective or curative and “evil” sorcery which is intended to produce harmful results.⁶ In common parlance sorcery is thought to bring about illness, death or misfortune. However, as will be shown in examples from the Arapesh, good fortune may be sought also.⁷

Researchers often distinguish between sorcery involving contagious magic, and assault sorcery; the former utilising malevolent actions on the “leavings” of a person, the latter involving direct physical harm to the person. Writing on witchcraft among the Azande in West Africa, Edward Evans-Prichard distinguished sorcery and witchcraft in terms of the former using techniques of magic, while the latter uses hereditary psycho-physical powers (Evans-Prichard 1937:387). Leonard Glick provides a similar distinction while writing for Papua and New Guinea, “A sorcerer’s capacity to harm ... depends on his ability to control extrinsic powers; whereas a witch, who can inflict sickness or death on others simply by staring at them or willing evil on them, possesses powers inherited or acquired as an intrinsic part of his or her person” (Glick 1973:182).

Sanguma is a form of sorcery in which the *sanguma* person 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. In some places the *sanguma* is thought to take animal form.⁸

The term “poison” also can have several meanings. One, closer to the standard English use of the term, refers to a toxic substance which if ingested will cause sickness or death.⁹ At other times the term *posin* is used as a Tok Pisin expression for Sorcery. In Pidgin usage in the Sepik today, the term *posin* most often refers to the “leavings” or *doti* or “specimen” of a person (what Margaret Mead

terms “*exuviae*”, using latinate vocabulary), bound up in a packet of leaves, which will be used in the practice of Sorcery.

In the Sepik, sorcerers are not *sangumas*. Sorcerers are real men who learn their trade “hands on”. *Sangumas* are humans who during an extended period of initiation are said to learn the ability to take on spirit form to become invisible. Finer distinctions may be made using terms from the local language, however, because we are dealing with multiple languages, in this paper we use the capitalised term “Sorcery” as an English term for the whole complex, and the Tok Pisin terms *posin man*, *sanguma man* and *sanguma meri* to refer to sorcery using contagious magic, males involved in assault sorcery and females involved in assault sorcery or “witchcraft” respectively.¹⁰

6. *Wokim Posin*

Talk about *posin* is part of everyday life for the Plains Arapesh. However, such talk takes on greater importance if there is a prolonged sickness, a sudden death, or some other tragedy. *Posin* provides an explanation for such happenings even among those with a tertiary education. Some Christians think of misfortunes as “punishment from God”, but in the church context most remain silent, because they suspect that the talk of *posin* might well be true.

Plains Arapesh identify three different types of sorcery which they call *posin*. These are *ouhluh wichang* and *atiglineige* (Gibbs and Wailoni 2008). *Ouluh* refers to the bundled specimen consisting of “leavings” that is used in the main act of *posin*. *Wichang* is linked to the aforementioned *posin*. It is optional and can bring both benevolent and malevolent effects. *Atiglineige* is an optional practice for capturing the “soul” or spirit of the victim. These types of Sorcery or *posin* should be distinguished from other magical practices such as putting people’s specimens in *masalai* places and in a wild taro plant (known to cause an itchy skin reaction). A sorcerer may perform such magic but this is not Sorcery. Sorcery as *posin* among the Arapesh involves a complex procedure requiring taboos and using special substances with the intention that the victim will become

ill and in many cases – die. Materials used in *posin* include genital fluids, remains of food, clothes or pieces of cloth that have deposits of perspiration on them, mustard that has been used for chewing or betel nut husks that have saliva on them, nail parings or anything else that is believed to have been somehow part of a person. The most effective specimens used in such *posin* are genital fluids. The use of material that has been part of a person can be a source of suspicion and fear below the surface of everyday life. One has to be cordial to everybody because one never knows whether an offended person might already have taken your *posin* (materials such as those listed above) and could pass it on to a *posin man* (*yowepineim*). It also helps motivate people to maintain good relations and for parents to teach children about the obligations that they will be expected to fulfil throughout their lifetime. They also tell them of the places they should not visit “because a *posin man* lives there”. Any accumulated wealth is to be used for feasts, bride price, etc. Failure to do so may bring dire consequences. One never knows the consequences of conflict. For example an argument with one’s mother could lead to mother’s brother having a reason to give your specimen to the *posin* men. The researchers noted that this also makes for very clean villages, with no food scraps or rubbish lying around as is common in some other parts of PNG.

The materials collected must be kept in a dry place, away from water, from menstruating women, and certain plants. Mead identified other examples of such materials as well as those that it is not possible to use for *posin* (Mead, 1940:44). The symptoms experienced by the victim are affected by the material that has been used in *posin*. For instance, head pains are associated with hair having been used as a specimen, and so on. The materials collected are then bound into small bundles with nettle leaves. Other special leaves that cause itchiness such as *giglagih*, and a type of fern called *sehleo* are also used. Such leaves are believed to cause irritating effects on the sorcerised victim.

The bundled specimen(s) is/are hung over a fire to be smoked. This may take six days to six months or even longer depending on how

quickly the *posin* men want the victim or victims to suffer, get sick or die. The heating is usually done either in an isolated location in the forest or in a hidden location such as a cave. Those who practise Sorcery usually work in a group. There is somebody responsible for heating the specimen and there is a guard or guards who are on the lookout and somebody who will actually “kill” the specimen. *Posin* men must observe certain taboos. For instance, they must not bathe or drink water. If one smokes he must do it away from the fire. The person who is heating the specimen or tending the fire must have someone special to look after him. This person should be single. Married men stay apart from their wives at this time lest they become “cold”. Above all, *posin* men must stay away from *wamileb* plants lest which have a strong “cooling” effect.

Ahih is a red powder used with the *ouluh* in sorcery practice to make the person become sick and die. One interviewee explained how the *ouluh* is like a car and the *ahih* the battery which provides power so that the car will start. *Ahih* is lime made from burning the leg bones of a warrior or a man who was feared. The bones are burned until they are reduced to ashes. This *ahih* is made by specialists and usually stored in bamboos to be used with the *ouluh*. Sap from a vine is mixed with the lime to make it turn a red colour. (More recently some sorcerers use red paint bought from stores in Wewak.) Sago thorns (*wehas*), a sewing needle or a sharp piece of coconut broom are dipped into the *ahih* and thrust into the bundled specimen (*ouluh*). A storm with thunder and lightning occurring soon after this act is seen as a sure sign that the *ahih* has been effective in powering the specimen.

While the specimen is being heated spells are used to lure the soul or life force (*miching*) of the victim to the fire for it to be physically killed. To “kill the poison” means to lay the bound specimen on a piece of wood and beat it with a hard instrument. As he beats the specimen, the *posin* man will call the name of the victim’s clan (similar to the way a clan name is called when a pig is delivered to a village for a feast). Then the specimen is hammered and thrown into a container. Calling the name is thought to attract the *miching*

of the victim. To have an animal such as a lizard or an insect appearing will be seen as embodying the *miching* of the victim. The *posin* man will call the name of the victim and ask this animal or insect to enter a container such as a piece of bamboo. Once trapped inside, the *miching*, which is the “soul” or life force of the person, will then be treated just like the specimen and “killed”. Healing can only take place if the animal or insect representing the *miching* of the victim is released. Once the *miching* is released, the specimen is put in the water where it becomes “cold” and loses its power to be used again in sorcery. The *posin* men must undergo purification rituals, lest they be haunted by the ghost of the victim(s).

Wichang and *atiglineige* are optional practices accompanying sorcery using *ouhluh*. *Wichang* is swung in a circular motion over the container containing the heated specimen. The victim’s name is called and requests made for things that people desire. For instance, if there is a land dispute, a request will be made for one party to leave the village for good. *Wichang* might also be used to convince a pig owner to accept a cheap offer and sell it willingly. It serves other purposes as well such as motivating people to contribute to bride price or for winning court cases or cancelling them. *Wichang* appears to be a form of magic associated with making *posin*, however, the Arapesh think of it as *posin*, not mere magic. Some people move to towns physically far away from the ESP. However, physical distance and cultural distance are not the same and it is believed that *posin* and *wichang* performed in the ESP can affect people living anywhere in PNG or even overseas.

Atiglineige is used to capture the *miching* of those whose specimens cannot be collected through “leavings”. The *posin* man has to drink bitter lemon juice to become “hot” before performing *atiglineige*. A small piece of wild taro stalk or the red coconut tree root (*manyibel*) is put on a path normally used by the victim so he or she will step over it enabling the sorcerer to capture his or her *miching*. The object stepped over is secured and rubbed with the same red lime (*ahih*) used with a specimen. It is believed that the victim will die when the *atiglineige* is brought to be hammered at the fireplace

and thrown in the container used for *posin*. Accompanied by *wichang*, *posin* men can put in requests for the manner in which the victim will die.

Posin men have a reputation but no status. However, some established leaders are suspected of having knowledge of Sorcery and links with *posin* men. The *posin man* is hired and paid. One informant said that he supported Sorcery as it provided a good means of income. All items used have to be bought, but the transactional aspect is highlighted when the specimen has been heated and the *muching* captured. Money (traditionally *suluh* shell rings) is brought with other requests for what they want the *Wichang* to do for them. The *posin* man expects payment before the specimen is killed. If relatives of the victim discover in time, they can pay to have the *muching* of the victim released. The payment will only be one part of a process that will involve reconciliation, making amends and other necessary peace settlements.

In 1993, the sitting member of parliament Hon John Jaminan decided to act against the *posin* men because he felt that they were causing people to become ill and that they were an obstacle to development in the district. He says, "I saw it (*posin*) as an evil act and so I had to move to protect the lives of many people against this evil. ... Sorcery is one of the forces that gets humans down and stops human development." He called in a squad of police from outside the province who went from village to village throughout West Yangoru to find out who were the *posin* men in each village. They rounded them up, forced them to hand in any implements they had.¹¹ Jaminan lost the subsequent election, but is still proud of what he did. He claims: "I have never feared Sorcerers and I have never been attacked by sorcerers of any kind."

7. *Sanguma man*

Sorcery as *sanguma* is not practised in the West Yangoru District, though *sanguma* men from other areas sometimes visit the area. We encountered *sanguma* men in the area around Urigembi and further west of Maprik around Drekikir. Like *posin*, *sanguma*

provides an explanation for such illness, death and misfortune. Most Christians are fearful of it, and try to preserve good relations so that they will not be the target of *sanguma*.

Traditionally all men underwent initiation in which, amongst other things, a man was taught to bleed his penis for purposes of purification (*waswas*). Part of the blood was saved in a coconut shell to become his “bodyguard” to warn its owner in case of danger. *Sanguma* men undergo a further lengthy initiation marked by confinement, food taboos, and rituals involving drinking of body fluids from the dead. Concoctions are made from fermenting various plants and insects including a mushroom or fungus found deep in the forest (Stephenson 2001: 191) along with the umbilical cord or placenta from a newly born child (the woman is paid).¹² The mixture is heated, and ashes and this mix will be used to give *sanguma* men magical powers. In ingesting the lime-like ashes they are said to “eat *sanguma*”.

Some of the mixture is kept as a liquid and this is said to have the power to “close the ears” of the *sanguma* men (they are deaf to any call to change their mind) so they are like possessed persons who can kill. In fact, in a sense, they are empowered by the spirit of the dead coming from the liquid or powder ingested. Rubbing the liquid on their skin is said to make them invisible.¹³ They must follow certain taboos such as not sleeping with wives or eating food prepared by women, not holding a child, avoiding certain types of bananas and abstaining from cold water and from cassowary meat.¹⁴ The initiands go out for their “practical” work which is to kill a child or a pregnant woman. People interviewed said that the death of young children and pregnant women is “proof” that initiation still takes place. *Sanguma* men described their going out to kill as being like going to “fight”. *Sanguma* attack is a physical attack, usually by a group of *sanguma* men. During the attack the victim is rendered unconscious and a poisonous liquid poured into their mouth or injected into them in some other way. They are left to regain consciousness and make their way home but they have changed,

and, if not given an antidote, will die within a few days. A woman described such an attack.

"In June 1999 I was attacked by sanguma men who were out on their practical. I went outside the house and the sanguma men called me over to them. When I reached them, they told me to lift up my hand and they injected me. After that they sent me back to the house. Back in the house I went straight to sleep. In the morning I saw them standing next to the toilet. Again they called me over and asked if I had any bananas in the house. I quickly came back and cooked some bananas over the fire. When no one was looking, I took the bananas to them in the nearby bushes next to the village and they ate. I was told that in the early hours of the next morning around 6 o'clock I was to start an argument with my husband. I was to get a knife and attack him and he would use the knife to kill me. I did as I was told. I visited the relatives and came back and slept. Early the next morning I started arguing with my husband and he saw that I had tucked the knife next to where I was sleeping. He quickly wrestled with me to get the knife but I was holding on to it tightly. For some reason, he thought he should use a pin to prick me because I was behaving so strangely. So he got a pin and pushed it into my upper arm. I didn't feel anything, nor did I scream from pain as the pin sank deeper into my arm. That confirmed his suspicion that something was wrong. He then called out and his cousin and his wife came to see what was happening and confirmed that I had been attacked by the sanguma. My unusual behaviour and the pin going through my skin without causing pain or drawing blood made it clear to them that I had suffered an attack by the sanguma. They quickly searched for someone to give me some herbs. I had not been eating the food given to me, especially food with protein and that is another sign of a sanguma attack. They went and cut a special bush vine and extracted the sap. They then blew

the sap into coconut liquid and gave it to me to drink. After that, I must have slept for some minutes and then I woke up. They asked me to recount the experience. I told them that there were six men who attacked me. They attacked me because they were new recruits out on training and so tested their power on me. They confused me with lime and then any instructions given by them were followed. Those that are diagnosed quickly are saved but others usually die. I could have died but because I drank the herbs the process was interrupted. They came back to check if everything had happened according to plan on that same evening I was cured. My tambu's wife was in the toilet at that time. They came and surrounded her. Somehow the village men expected it so they shouted and ran towards them and the sanguma men disappeared. They are like spirits and can trick people easily. I had been very rude to people while under the influence of the sanguma. My own father was so embarrassed that he went and stayed at another village. He could not believe that I would behave the way I did. But he didn't know that it was the sanguma which was controlling me. After it was found out, I was forgiven."

The story above is typical of many stories we heard about *sanguma* attack: ingestion of a liquid which gives them power over a person, antisocial behaviour, refusal to eat meat or to drink liquids, divination using a pin and (in fortunate cases) a herbal antidote (which usually induces vomiting).¹⁵

In the account above the *sanguma* men are said to have been out on their "practical" and during that period can target people at random. Usually they are hired to settle personal grievances.¹⁶ We heard a case where men were angry with another man so they hired *sanguma* to kill his sister so as to hurt him. Normally *sanguma* will not kill for no reason. They only kill when one has wronged someone and that person hires them to come and kill you or a loved one. So, we were told, "it is best to solve any conflicts and problems

with other people quickly before they resort to using *sanguma*.” We found differences between *sanguma* in Urigembi and in Drekkir. In Urigembi the *sanguma* use a “*muruk* stone” to point or swing at a person in order to disorient them or render them unconscious. *Sanguma* men are known as *maienduo* (literally: *sanguma* man). The head *sanguma* is known as a *yamianduo* (literally: *muruk*/cassowary man).

Around Drekkir, spirit men are called *arukwine* (a term from the Wam language referring to a powerful mushroom). They are believed to have the power to assume the form of animals. There men described to us the use of a *sanguma* “spear”. The spear, which is a short piece of bamboo or hollowed out human or cassowary bone, is charged with lemon juice and the lime made from the decayed matter from dead bodies is thrown over the shoulder of the *sanguma* man as he calls the name of the victim (Stephenson 2001: 193). We were also told that the *sanguma* man throws a dead man’s finger bone in the direction of the victim.

Sanguma are said to prey on the weak. Many people told stories of how they must watch carefully over the sick, especially those in hospital, lest a *sanguma* assume the form of the sick person and take their place while the real sick person is taken away to die at the hands of the *sanguma* men. There are other precautions taken such as having a menstruating woman jump over a new grave to discourage *sanguma* men from coming to exhume the body. *Sanguma* men who were spoken to said they did not intend to pass their knowledge on to their children. *Sanguma* might have a positive dimension in acting as a “policeman” in society, but they thought it is too dangerous and did not want to end up with empty villages. Yet, the belief continues, as one man said, “*Indai i stap. Sanguma i stap*” (There is death [so] there is *sanguma*).

8. *Sanguma meri*

While staying in the villages of West Yangoru, people would often refer to *sanguma meri* at Wingei, not far distant, but across the border from Arapesh-speaking people into Abelam-speaking territory.

They were said to be very different from the Arapesh *posin* men. Abelam *sanguma* meri are called *kwutakwa* in the local language. They are real women who have the power in their spirit form to appear as animals, to pass through solid walls and to fly. Reputedly they feast on the bodies of the dead. They are not malicious in the sense of attacking people for no reason. Indeed, it is said that previously they used to assist men to win in battles. However, today they may well harm someone who would offend them, and in particular someone who would make them feel jealous. One woman said how she had been proud of her large productive garden. She would share food crops with some but not others. One night a pig broke through the fence and did a great deal of damage to her garden. She believes that the pig was really a *sanguma* woman who was envious of her garden and upset that she was not given food from it, so this person took the form of a pig and destroyed it.

Another woman said how fearful she was because her husband earns a wage and people see them returning from town with bought store goods. She fears that a *sanguma* woman will be jealous of their good fortune at being able to buy store goods and will do harm to her husband or her family. She tells about one time when her husband was returning home and he encountered a group of women whom he suspected to be *sanguma* women. One of the women, who knew his father and grandfather well, led him away, picked up an empty beer bottle, blew into it and told him to do the same. She then dug a hole and buried the bottle. This was a sure sign that he should not talk about what he had seen. In fact he revealed this encounter to his wife only after the death of the old woman. People suspect that *sanguma* women are around when they see certain birds, especially big forest birds like hornbills coming to alight in trees near a village. Flying squirrels (*wasupiak* or *gwasalo*) are another sign of their presence. These creatures are not the *kwutakwa* themselves but only a sign that the *kwutakwa* is around. They also tell stories about how when a *sanguma* woman bathes alone, it is possible to see the little creatures that live inside her swimming beside her. They are like little rats and they swim alongside

her. After bathing they go back inside her vagina. It is said that her strength comes from these creatures.

The power of witchcraft is thought to pass from mother to daughter. In the night, a mother jumps over her daughter and a form of sex takes place. The daughter is not aware but later finds out that she has extraordinary powers. She has then to observe taboos (*sakrifais*, *sakrafais*) for three weeks: no water aibika or pig meat. Observing the taboos is important lest she become deranged. After that she has to do her "practical", which might involve killing a newborn baby or a young child.

A woman near Kunjingini told about a time when she returned at night from a prayer meeting bringing food with her which she shared with her son. On leaving the kitchen to throw away the leaves that had covered the food she shone her torch on the roof and noticed a woman there. The woman appeared to be wanting to jump down from the roof. She continued,

"I screamed loudly. Our neighbours thought that my husband was belting me so they did not respond. Eventually others including my husband came and saw her. She was a real woman who we knew. Most probably she had wanted to fly but she must not have observed all the taboos about not eating aibika, pig meat and so on, so she was not able to realise her full powers."

They helped the woman down and she gave the excuse that she had "lost her way and got stuck on the roof." The woman telling of the experience believes that the *sanguma* woman, smelling the food, had followed her and intended to steal some but failed. Not wanting to embarrass the woman further she apologised to her and did not raise the matter again.

People in areas frequented by *sanguma* women carry a means of protection. Some will carry a piece of ginger which is said to act as a "security" against harm. Others put a piece of *bangwi* bush vine

in their lighted torches when travelling at night so that *sanguma* women can be seen. Christians use holy water. Some people have spells that are said to cause the *kwu* (the small animals inside her that give her power) to come down to the lower part of the woman's body. This makes movement difficult because the creature will be resting in her vagina, making it difficult to walk. She will have to sit in one place until set free by those who have cast the spell.

Sanguma women play a significant role in the socio-spiritual universe of people in parts of the ESP. From a functional perspective they provide an explanation for misfortunes such as snake bite, falling from a tree, or the death of a child. But functional explanations cannot deal well with fears and emotions. From the viewpoint of gender, *sanguma* women offer both an excuse for women to claim power and a reason for men to blame women for misfortune. In our interviews it was only men who spoke about having killed a suspicious animal, only to hear the next day that a woman had died. From a missiological angle, *sanguma* women challenge Christian believers to enter into a deeper faith commitment so as to explain events in a way that takes seriously both faith and cultural sensitivities. For example: how should people of faith interpret stories told in all seriousness about lost women found on kitchen roofs at night? What are we to think of parents instructing their children to avoid talking to or relating to older women lest these be *sanguma* women? How best should a priest or church minister officiate at a funeral of a woman that the community believes to be a *sanguma meri*?

9. Discerning and Countering Sorcery

In the ESP, as elsewhere, it is presumed that people do not "simply die" and the first presumption on hearing of a death is to pursue the cultural ideology which considers most fatal illnesses or accidents as a symptom of Sorcery. The type of death and signs at funerals such as the state of the body or the movement of fireflies may provide hints as to what sort of Sorcery was involved. There are other culturally specific rites of discernment. These include having people step on the lower leg of the corpse and look for a sign on the

body such as the appearance of blood (Leavitt 1995: 356) or holding a length of bamboo which will move when the name of the Sorcerer is called. However, the process by which Sorcery accusations are confirmed may be lengthy and inconclusive. Symptoms at death are not as important as social relationships and the activities of the deceased prior to the illness or death.

The discernment may take years as relatives gain some emotional distance and take a wider, long-term view of an event which is part of a complex of social relationships. We encountered a number of examples where an apparently innocent person died as a result of revenge on a parent, brother or other close family member. For Christians to stay detached from such intrigue risks alienating themselves from family and their cultural ties. Death is still the most unevangelised dimension of life in Melanesia (Gibbs 2006: 97).

Efforts to counter or protect oneself from Sorcery are commonplace. Some Christians from Pentecostal or Revival churches are at pains to avoid anything associated with “magic”, however, Catholics tend to have a more flexible approach when it comes to symbols or charms. A church leader at Kunjingini said:

“We have protection such as ginger, lime and tree bark that we use to keep them away. When we had a land dispute with another village we planted ginger and menstrual blood as protection on the main roads around the village that we thought the sangumas would take. We are also carrying tree bark as kol. This is usually chewed with betelnut to keep the sangumas away. During the land dispute my children were sick because of the sangumas. I crushed the tree bark and ginger and mixed that in my children’s tea for them to drink. I sometimes crushed those things and blew the mixture on their bodies. At other times these things were burnt in the fire and the sick were brought next to it so as to be smoked by the fire. This will cool the effects of the sanguma.”

An elderly Catholic woman said she was not afraid of *sangumas* because her house was protected by holy water sprinkled liberally around it and she felt shielded from harm by the rosary beads she hung around her neck.

10. Attempting to Understand Sorcery

10.1 From a medical point of view

The phenomena we have described here are difficult to explain from a medical point of view. The leading surgeon at Boram General Hospital in Wewak said that in her many years serving at the main hospital she has never encountered a case of foreign objects made of bone, bamboo or wire having been inserted into a person as allegedly happens with *sanguma* (Sr Joseph Taylor. Pers. Communication, Wewak 6 June 2007). The writers have viewed implements taken from accused sorcerers and kept as “evidence” by police, however there is no evidence that such items ever “worked” from a medical-scientific point of view.

Some interviewees were of the opinion that it is helpful to have a medical opinion:

“I had a mother at home who had liver cancer. Everybody at home was talking about posin. Then I took her to the hospital and in the hospital they said she had cancer. So after that they said she had cancer.”

So, the medical explanation at times will help change the way people talk about illness and death. They can come to understand that “*Sik bilong em i winim marasin*” (The illness is not able to be cured by medication). However, there are also cases where a person is sick – they look sick and feel sick, but then all the medical tests don’t reveal anything. Medically there is no explanation. That is when people will start talking about “*sik bilong ples*” and about sorcery.

Bernard Narokobi, in a paper prepared for the Law Reform Commission of Papua New Guinea (1978) is of the opinion that “it

is futile to try to establish scientifically whether sorcery works as it is reputed to do, or whether it is all a hoax instigated by big and self-seeking men as a way to hold others down” (Law Reform Commission 1978: 14). He says that sorcery helps establish the reason for the happening of an event, whether there is a medical explanation or not. Sorcery reaches beyond the empirical since it is also a form of “inner violence” that unleashes the inner consciousness of people’s deep fears.

10.2 From a cultural perspective

Nigel Stephenson points out that for the villagers, Sorcery is an indisputable fact and a reality. It is undeniable that people of all ages and both sexes die. It is also a fact, borne out by witnesses, that some people turn their hand to Sorcery. The two fields of evidence are connected and a causal link created. This logic is supported by natural signs that people interpret in certain ways. For them signs, such as lights, bird calls, etc, amount to proof of what they already suspect is true (Stephenson 2001: 190). One person told us, “Of course we believe in germs, but this belief in *kwutakwa* is in our blood. Ninety percent of the people here know that spirits exist.”

Stephen Leavitt, who worked among the Bumbita near Maprik argues that maybe sorcery fears are entirely reasonable in societies where people really perform Sorcery and where the cultural system admits no readily available alternative explanation for death. Compare, for example, Sorcery with “mugging” in America. If Sorcery is practised and anyone can be attacked, is it not reasonable, then, to fear it? (Leavitt 1989: 377). The same goes for mugging. Whether or not Sorcery is involved in a particular death, there is always a real possibility that it may be. This possibility, along with a cultural ideology which regards most fatal illness as a symptom of Sorcery attack, makes people’s fears understandable.

Leavitt further argues that since from a cultural perspective people do not “simply die”, then accusations of sorcery defend the deceased’s close family against a fear that it might be actual interpersonal relations among close family members that have caused

the death. The agent of death is better located in an external malevolent figure – the Sorcerer.

A common theme emerging through all our enquiries is jealousy. Whether better termed envy or craving – “jealousy” could arise from someone else being given a bigger shell ring or more money at a public ceremony, someone having more or better land or gardens, someone having resources to buy store goods, or a person being given employment in preference to another. Whatever the incident that leads to jealousy, the end result is a sense of offence and disharmony in social relationships that leads to accusations of Sorcery. This was the logic followed by a woman declaring that she was wasting her time taking her child for medical attention at the clinic while a dispute between two members of her lineage remained unresolved (Koczberski and Curry 1999: 238).

10.3 From a Christian faith perspective

Christians believe in the non-empirical, and in spirits both good and evil, however the way one encounters those spirits can be different in different cultures. Stories from the New Testament have Jesus casting out demons from people who today by Western medical standards would be diagnosed as epileptic or bipolar (See Mark 5:1-20). Some churches tend to follow the Biblical worldview, understanding Sorcery as the work of Satan and *sanguma* men and women as demonic.

As part of this study a group of eight Catholic priests (seven national men from the Sepik area) responded to a questionnaire. In response to the question: “I think the following are like the sort of demon possession Jesus used to cast out”, with a choice for them to mark *posin*, *sanguma* or witchcraft, one marked the box for *posin*, four the *sanguma* box and six the box for witchcraft. Obviously the priests see New Testament stories of casting out demons more in terms of *sanguma* than *posin* and more in terms of *sanguma* women (witchcraft) than *sanguma* men. Some Christians approach these phenomena from a psycho-spiritual viewpoint. From this perspective, if one gives space to fear, then the power of evil and destructive

thoughts and feelings can enter and nurture that fear. Faith helps the mind control fear and jealousy, thus countering the power of evil by goodness and love. Usually this viewpoint is complemented by a medical perspective so that people have an alternative to *posin* or *sanguma* for explaining sickness and death.

In our experience in the ESP most Catholics subscribe to the prevailing cultural ideology, but combine traditional and Christian means of dealing with it. For example they will bring ginger or tree bark and ask the Christian prayer leaders to pray over them before using them as protection. Sorcerers acknowledge the power of Christian faith. When asked why his methods did not work with a devout Christian, a *posin* man responded “*Paia bilong mipela em kol long em!*” (He made our fires cold!).

11. Social and pastoral implications

The Catholic priests were asked to complete a short questionnaire. In their responses most agree that Sorcery as *posin*, *sanguma* and witchcraft have power, but they feel that Christian faith is more powerful. Yet they also agree that Sorcery poses a real threat to people today, including Christians. All but one said he had personal experience of at least one form of Sorcery and all said they know of people who have had experience of Sorcery. Three said that they knew of people in their parish who had died from Sorcery or *sanguma* and the majority had been asked to pray with people or to bless people concerned about Sorcery. One priest responded: “I personally find it very difficult because this *posin* thing is deeply involved in the culture. People practise *posin* to gain prestige, a big name, riches and so forth.” From the responses to the questionnaire it is apparent that Sorcery is an issue for these churchmen.

Sorcery impacts on society in various ways. We highlight three here. Firstly belief in Sorcery builds on threats, intimidation and distrust and may in turn contribute to the presence of such negative social factors. One never knows who has a specimen of yours that can be given to *posin* men. People live in fear that someone will attack them and inject them with poison. Parents tell their children, “*No*

ken go long hap – posin man i stap” (Don’t go there – a Sorcerer is there!).

Secondly, belief in Sorcery discourages people from investing themselves and their resources in projects that would lead to development and human welfare. If one has more education, more possessions, or more power, others will easily become jealous and one may well be the target of Sorcery. Hence, it is safer to remain with the crowd rather than to get ahead. Politics is seen as the most effective way of getting ahead, yet there is a saying about elections in the ESP: *Wanpela man mas dai bilong opim rot long ol i singautim spirit* (A man must die for the spirit to work). People believe that one or more people will die (from Sorcery) before there is a winner in the election. Politics is about power and power has a sinister dimension.

Thirdly, belief in Sorcery acts as a controlling force – what is often termed a “policeman” in society. Police can have both desirable and disastrous effects. East Sepik villages appear tidy and clean with no rubbish or food scraps. This is just one indication of how fear of Sorcery can influence people’s behaviour. It can reduce theft, and other antisocial behaviour as well. Unfortunately, as traditional beliefs change, some young people are bringing *sanguma* beliefs into “*raskolism*” (criminal behaviour) and assault. Young criminals enter into pacts with *sanguma* men in their attempts to become invisible, and in turn they concoct new mixes for *sanguma* from industrial waste such as old battery acid (Stephenson 1995: 192). Just as traditionally *sanguma* threatened to subvert village people’s existence from the inside, so now modernity with its illusion of wealth and prosperity leaves many village people politically and culturally disorientated and dependent (Stephenson 1995: 193).

Belief in Sorcery also has pastoral implications. We develop four here.

Firstly, most national priests, sisters and Catholic church leaders we spoke with think that Sorcery should not be simply ignored. It is an

issue to contend with pastorally and this should not be denied. One of the priest respondents to the questionnaire – an expatriate missionary – wrote how as a young missionary he had tried to convince people that there was no truth to Sorcery and that their fear was groundless. After more experience in PNG he has changed his approach to one of helping people find strength in prayer and the power of Christ over evil. Members of Evangelical and Pentecostal churches tend to see Sorcerers as being in league with the Devil. Their strong stand against Sorcery reinforces the conviction that Sorcery should not be treated lightly.

Christian tradition has a long history of dealing with good and evil. It is no stranger to the non-empirical world and spirits of the living and of the dead. A national sister in Wewak spoke of the importance of disciplining the mind and heart. She said how random thoughts and fears can too easily leave one vulnerable to powerful outside forces – possibly those coming from a Sorcerer. People need to learn that if a thought or inclination comes seemingly from nowhere that they should bring faith to bear before following through on it. This is a discipline that a person of faith has to learn. The advice integrates well with what Christian spirituality terms “discernment of spirits”. As people mature spiritually they become more aware of the interior movements of their mind and heart. A “good” spirit brings one to a peaceful and joyful decision. A “bad” spirit leads to conflict and uneasiness. In the Catholic tradition, this discernment forms an important part of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola. In Charismatic and Pentecostal traditions it is referred to in terms of holy and unholy spirits discerned through the power of the Holy Spirit. In some churches the outcome is “spiritual warfare” (Gibbs 2005: 18). However one may conceive of it, determining from what spirit impulses emanate is at the heart of the pastoral advice offered by the sister in Wewak.

Secondly, we refer back to the words of the elderly woman in the introduction to this paper. She is of the opinion that if she loves and respects others then she does not need to be concerned about Sorcery. Sorcery thrives on jealousy, revenge and attempts to dominate others

through fear. Such attitudes are not only socially counter-productive but are also the antithesis of the Christian love ethic. Following the logic of her argument, if Christian evangelisation would be successful and Christian communities became a reality there would be no need or concern for Sorcery. Christians have a mission to proclaim the reign of God seen in love, joy and right relations (Rom 14:17). However, in reality, Christian teaching too often instils fear with accusations of depravity and threats of hellfire. Following imposed rules and performing external rituals out of fear is little different from the way of life that Christian faith claims to supersede. A positive pastoral approach will be liberating and will stress that as children of the God of life we are called to live that life to the full.

Thirdly, we need alternatives to sorcery both functionally and in a psycho-spiritual sense. Sorcery fulfils in society a function of explaining why people die and helps people gain a sense that there is some control over misfortune. If Sorcery is undesirable, then what can take its place? It is one thing to have a squad of police go around seizing lime containers and other implements from those thought to be sorcerers, but another thing to bring about an attitude change so that people don't wish to hire sorcerers to resolve issues. This is where Christian "movements" can play a part in bringing about a change of attitude. There are the Legion of Mary, Divine Mercy, Charismatic Renewal, Bible-based evangelisation and Pentecostal and revival movements. However, preaching about a vengeful God may be a functional substitute for sorcery as an explanation for misfortune, but this may have little advantage over Sorcery from a psycho-spiritual perspective. Control by force and fear are seldom liberating. Moreover, missionaries and church leaders have done little as yet to develop a helpful theology of death in PNG. What is the destiny of the ancestors? What happens to the ghost of the deceased? Hospitals provide medicine and care, but once a person dies, the scene abruptly changes to one dealing with spirits of the dead and traditional obligations and taboos (Gibbs 2006: 84-88). Until Christians develop a culturally sensitive pastoral theology of death, little will change with regards to Sorcery as an explanation for death.

Fourthly, the future of Sorcery belief and practice depends a lot on the education of future generations. But will education result in what Desmond Tutu calls “religious schizophrenia”? Many young people today feel alienated from their traditions, yet have been taught to fear Sorcery. Sorcery beliefs left unchallenged may easily be transformed into occult practices and “blackpower”, as has happened in some secondary schools including Passam National High School in the East Sepik (Hayes, 2000). From the perspective of post-Enlightenment secular education, Sorcery and witchcraft are reduced to “a trait of primitive people which will disappear with Westernization” (Hill 1996: 328). But history is revealing the limitations of that perspective. Modern education has little room for Sorcery, nor for principalities and powers that are of concern in Paul’s letter to the Colossians. Ultimately Sorcery beliefs are cultural variations on the age-old problem of evil. It is not so much a matter of dismissing Sorcery as mere superstition or thinking that conversion will mean the substitution of a Christian way for the tradition. Rather, the Christian response must be to engage with the beliefs and practices in question so that people, young and old, can come to see “evils” such as sickness, death and misfortune through the eyes of faith.

Endnotes

- 1 The paper does not deal with beliefs from other parts of the Sepik such as the *pukpuk kanu* (crocodile canoe) of the Sepik River.
- 2 The writers were supported by the Melanesian Institute. We also thank all those who offered hospitality and who were willing to share their ideas and experiences. Others helped correct earlier drafts of this paper. Some informants requested anonymity, so names or details that might lead to their identity will not appear in the text.
- 3 <http://uscngp.sai.net.au/about.php> (Accessed 26.12.08)
- 4 There are also Culture Heroes such as Unaluh and her two sons whom people refer to during feasts and other celebrations, and a Supreme

being (*Echoweih*) who was thought to exist but has little influence in people's lives.

- 5 "Sickness and death have a predominantly social component. People are not so interested in what a person may just have died from, as they are in who might be responsible for the death, who set off the chain of causes resulting in that death. Someone may fall from a tree and die, and a Wam will be quite aware that the fall caused that death. But what is of concern to him is what, or, better put, who ultimately set off this fall" (Translated from German. See Stephenson 1995: 182).
- 6 The Act notes that "sorcery" includes "witchcraft, magic, enchantment, *puri puri, mura mura dikana, vada, mea mea, sanguma* or *malira* whether or not connected with or related to the supernatural".
- 7 The diversity of understandings is brought out in a comment by Nigel Stephenson about a trans-cultural sorcery mediation involving villages from the Wam, Urat, Muhiang and Bumbita language groups after a series of deaths in the wider area: "What made it interesting was the fact that the participants had first to create an etiology of sorcery because it showed that the different groups had quite diverse views about sorcery methods and the kinds of death they produced" (Stephenson, Personal Communication 27 December, 2008).
- 8 In some parts of Papua New Guinea, particularly the Highlands (Simbu), the term "sanguma" is used for a form of witchcraft using psychic or occult power to harm, rather than employing physical objects or substances. For further discussion on the term "sanguma", see McCallum 2006.
- 9 This is the sort of poison referred to by Stephenson (2001: 192-3) in the form of battery acid or weedkiller.
- 10 We have chosen not to use the English term "witch". People have terms in their own language for various approximations to this concept, but when using Tok Pisin, they use the term *sanguma meri*.
- 11 We were told that the *posin* men were also forced to drink a "tea" which unknown to them contained traces of *wamileb* leaves and menstrual blood – both substances with very strong "cooling" powers.

- 12 One of the ingredients is from a vine that when used under water can stun or paralyse fish so they come to the surface and can be caught easily.
- 13 Allen tells of a case where this knowledge was being used by young men in an effort to become invisible so they could break into premises in town (Allen 1989: 63).
- 14 The spirit of the cassowary is important, especially in the Urigembi area, hence the taboo on killing and eating it.
- 15 See Gesch 1985:193-199 for discussion on the social dynamics of sorcery and *sanguma* in the Yangoru area. Gesch typifies *sanguma* as a kind of "bush hysteria".
- 16 If not paid properly by the man hiring them, they may end up killing that person, who would now be indebted to them.

Some terms used

In Melanesian Pidgin:

<i>kol</i>	quality of taking away power
<i>masalai</i>	spirits that inhabit waterholes and sacred places, also clan spirits
<i>muruk</i>	cassowary
<i>posin man</i>	Sorcerer
<i>sakrafais</i>	taboos
<i>sanguma</i>	practice of or the one who practices assault sorcery
<i>sanguma man</i>	man who practices assault sorcery
<i>sanguma meri</i>	woman who practices assault sorcery, a witch
<i>sik bilong ples</i>	illness with no scientific medical explanation
<i>tewel</i>	life force or soul
<i>win</i>	life force or soul

In Arapesh:

<i>ahih</i>	red lime made from human bones used in sorcery
<i>ahiweim</i>	bush spirits
<i>atiglineige</i>	a type of sorcery using a taro stalk or red coconut tree root

<i>bahlohim</i>	ancestral spirits
<i>bahas</i>	ancestral spirits
<i>bonobanom</i>	dwarfs
<i>giglagih</i>	a leaf that causes itchiness
<i>manuguh</i>	a spell using words
<i>manyibel</i>	red coconut tree root used as <i>atiglineige</i>
<i>maulagehem</i>	dwarfs
<i>minging</i>	life force of a person equivalent to soul
<i>muchubun</i>	lemon
<i>nabat</i>	a dog, in sorcery it refers to the sorcerer who looks after the others
<i>ahlibenoh</i>	a type of plant that is also used to counteract sorcery
<i>ouhluh</i>	“specimen” from a person
<i>segabehas</i>	ghosts of the recent dead
<i>sehleo</i>	dried ferns
<i>suluh</i>	traditional shell money (ring)
<i>ubabel</i>	a type of lizard
<i>walehas</i>	<i>masalai</i> spirits
<i>wamibel</i>	a type of plant that neutralises the implements or agents of sorcery
<i>wamileb</i>	plural form of <i>wamibel</i>
<i>wehas</i>	sago thorns coated with lime (<i>ahih</i>)
<i>wichang</i>	a type of grass used in the type of sorcery known as
<i>yowepineim</i>	sorcerer

In Abelam language:

<i>bángwi</i>	protective bush vine
<i>gwasalo</i>	flying squirrel
<i>kwu</i>	small animals living inside a <i>sanguma</i> woman
<i>kwutakwa</i>	<i>sanguma</i> woman or witch
<i>wasupiak</i>	flying squirrel

In Wom language (near Drekikir)

<i>arukwine</i>	A mushroom, also name for a <i>sanguma</i> man
-----------------	--

In Boikin language:

<i>maienduo</i>	<i>sanguma</i> man
<i>yamainduo</i>	cassowary man

References

- Allen, B. J. 1989. "Infection, innovation and residence: illness and misfortune in the Torricelli Foothills from 1800", in *A Continuing Trial of Treatment: Medical Pluralism in Papua New Guinea*. Edd. S. Frankel and G. Lewis (editors) Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 35-68.
- Aufenanger, Henry. 1972. *The Passing Scene in North East New Guinea*. St Augustine: Anthropolos Institute.
- Brison, Karen. 1992. *Just Talk: Gossip, Meetings and Power in a Papua New Guinea Village*. University of California Press.
- . 1995. "You Will Never Forget: Narrative, Bereavement, and Worldview among Kwanga Women", *Ethnos*, 23(4), 474-488.
- Damoi, J. 1976. "A *sanguma* man of Bregam village in the East Sepik Province", *Oral History* 4 (3): 53-55.
- Department of Education, 2002. *2002 Education Statistics*. Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.
- Evans-Prichard, E. 1937. *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*. Oxford.
- Forge, A. 1971. "Prestige, Influence and Sorcery", in M. Douglas, ed., *Witchcraft: Confessions and Accusations*, ASA, no. 9.
- Gerstner, Andreas. 1934. "Auf Reisen ins Missionsneuland" [On patrol in a new mission land], *Steyler Missionsbote* 61:235-237, 258-260, 286-288.
- . 1937. "Zauberei bei den But-Leuten an der Nordküste Neuguineas" [Sorcery among the people of But on the north coast of New Guinea], *Anthropos* 32: 967-973 [Analecta et Additamenta].
- . 1952. "Der Geisterglaube im Wewak-Boikin-Gebiet Nordost-Neuguinea" [Belief in spirits in the Wewak Boikin area of northeastern New Guinea], *Anthropos* 47: 795-821.

- . 1963. "Der magische Meuchelmord in Wewäk-Boikin-Gebiet (Nordost-Neuguinea)" [Assassination by magic in the Wewak-Boikin area in northeastern New Guinea], *Anthropos* 58: 719-736.
- Gesch, Patrick. 1985. *Initiative and Initiation*, St Augustin: Anthropos.
- Gibbs, Philip. 2005. "Political Discourse and Religious Narratives of Church and State in Papua New Guinea".
- http://dspace.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/43157/1/05_01wp_Gibbs.pdf
- . 2006. "Kumanda: Death and Pastoral Care – a Christian Enga Perspective", *Catalyst* 36.1: 81-99.
- Gibbs, Philip and Josepha Junnie Wailoni. 2008. "Sorcery among the Plains Arapesh", *Anthropos* 103: 149-158.
- Hanson, L.W. et al. 2001. *Papua New Guinea Rural Development Handbook*. Canberra: Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies.
- Hayes, A. 2000. A Briefing on Antisocial Sub-cultures in the National High Schools. Manuscript.
- Hill, H. 1999. "Witchcraft and the Gospel: Insights from Africa", *Missiology* 24: 323-344.
- Koczberski, G. and Curry, G.N. 1999. "Sik bilong ples: an exploration of meanings of illness and well-being amongst the Wosera Abelam of Papua New Guinea", *Australian Geographical Studies*, 37(3), 230-247.
- Law Reform Commission. 1978. *Sorcery among the East Sepiks*. Papua New Guinea Law Reform Commission, Occasional Paper No. 10. Port Moresby, Law Reform Commission.
- Laycock, D.C. 1973. *Sepik Languages: Checklist and Preliminary Classification*, Pacific Linguistics, Ser.B, no.25.
- Leavitt, Stephen. 1989. Cargo, Christ, and nostalgia for the dead: themes of intimacy and abandonment in Bumbita Arapesh Social experience. Ph.D Dissertation, University of California, San Diego.

- Limbrock, Eberhard. 1913. "Buschreise ins Hinterland von Beukin", *Steyler Missionsbote*, 40: 126-127; 142-143. [A bush journey into the hinterland of Beukin, translated by Nancy Rand and Paul Roscoe, 1986].
- McCallum, P. Maurice. 2006. "'Sanguma' – Tracking Down a Word", *Catalyst* 36.2: 183-207.
- Mead, Margaret. 1933-4. "The Marsalai Cult among the Arapesh with special reference to the rainbow serpent beliefs of the Australian Aborigines", *Oceania* 4 (1): 37-53.
- . 2002 [1938] *The Mountain Arapesh*, 2 vols. (with introduction by Paul B. Roscoe, pp xv-xxxi.) New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- National Statistical Office. 2002. *Papua New Guinea 2000 Census: Final Figures*. Port Moresby.
- Puff, Andreas. 1926. "Zu den Ringschleifern" [To where they make the shell rings], *Steyler Missionsbote* 54: 106-108.
- Rynkiewich, Michael. 2004. *Cultures and Languages of PNG: The story of the origins, migrations and settlement of Melanesian peoples, language and cultures*. Goroka: Melanesian Institute.
- Schroeder, Roger. 1992. *Initiation and Religion. A Case Study from the Wosera of Papua New Guinea*. St Augustine: Anthropos Institute.
- Stephenson, N.A. 1995. "Alter Bedrohungen, moderne Zeiten. Über das Kriegswesen bei den Wam (PNG) in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart" [Old threats, modern times. On the warfare of the Wam people, past and present.], in: P. Braeunlein and A. Lauser (eds.). *Krieg und Frieden. Ethnologische Perspektiven* [War and peace, ethnological perspectives]. KEA. Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaften, Sonderband 2: 173-194.
- Stephenson, N.A. 2001. *Kastom or Komuniti: A Study of Social Process and Change among the Wam People, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea*. Basel: Basler Beiträge zur Ethnologie.
- Tuzin, D.F. 1976. *The Ilahita Arapesh: Dimensions of Unity*. London: University of California Press.

- 1980. *The Voice of the Tambaran. Truth and Illusion in Ilahita Arapesh Religion*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 1997. *The Cassowary's Revenge. The Life and Death of Masculinity in a New Guinea Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.