Paper

My Words Have Power: The Role of Yuri Women in Addressing Sorcery Accusation-Related Violence in Simbu Province of Papua New Guinea

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Abstract: This article examines the role of women in peacebuilding and in reducing accusations of sorcery and related violence among the Yuri tribe in Papua New Guinea (PNG). The formation of the community-led peace movement YAKA (Yuri Alaiku Kuikane Association) in 2013 led to a stop of the tribal fights that frequently occurred among the Yuri people over several decades. Accusations of sorcery, previously related to tribal fights and contemporary forms of violent accusations, disproportionately affect women in the patriarchal PNG highland society. However, less documented are women's roles in addressing sorcery accusation-related violence. Building on women's agency and involvement in local peacebuilding, this paper investigates the contribution of women in mitigating sorcery accusations and related violence. The action research project discussed in this article included the local storytelling approach *kapori* and incorporated photovoice for participants to share their lived experiences. We examine the gendered dynamics in local activism and the cultural context of Yuri with regards to community well-being and leadership to inform future violence prevention strategies. Our research investigates the strategies of Yuri women to meaningfully contribute to peacebuilding and social cohesion to inform future violence prevention strategies. We demonstrate how Yuri women enact their agency in both private and public spaces, informed by empathy, traditional and Church values, family, and relational concepts.

Keywords: Papua New Guinea, sorcery accusations, peacebuilding, gender, photovoice

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Introduction

This article highlights women's roles of activism and advocacy in addressing sorcery related and other forms of violence among the Yuri women of Papua New Guinea (PNG). Sorcery accusation-related violence (SARV) is a form of violence based on the belief that someone possesses supernatural powers to cause misfortune, illness, or death to others in a community (Forsyth and Eves 2015). The role of women in addressing SARV presents challenges in PNG because of the widespread, male dominated sorcery accusations, gender-based, and other forms of violence (Biersack, Jolly, and Macintyre 2016). The Yuri women are part of the Simbu Province of the highlands of PNG, which is predominantly patriarchal (Brown 1978). Research shows that women in the PNG highlands are disproportionately affected by violent sorcery accusations (Gibbs 2012). While acknowledging this fact, the focus of this paper is on the role of courageous Yuri women who stepped up in addressing and preventing SARV. The action research project discussed in this article was designed to document the lived experiences, motivations, and actions of Yuri women and men in response to SARV.

Foundational to the Yuri experience has been a community-led peace movement that addressed many decades of tribal fighting in the area. Through the Yuri Alaiku Kuikane Association (YAKA), formed in 2013, Yuri people voiced and demonstrated their concerns for safety and community well-being. YAKA is a tribal initiative comprised of all men and women from the fourteen clans of Yuri. The Yuri tribal system is based on clan kinship relationships. Understanding the intra-clan unity and consciousness of the Yuri people is key to how Yuri people have been participating in productive activities for peacebuilding after many decades of inter-clan wars (Botu 2017; Kuman 2016). Inter-clan violence refers to fights between clans which have had devastating effects for the Yuri people. Intra-clan relations refer to activities within a clan.

The lead author, Bomai Witne, is from the Nulaikia clan of the Yuri tribe and has been part of the conversations to unite the Yuri clans under YAKA for the purpose of peacebuilding and addressing local conflicts. Co-authors Verena Thomas and Jackie Kauli have extensive experience in action research projects and human rights activism in PNG, particularly with women-led organisations. Christina Spurgeon's work has focused on community-based uses of media for the purpose of enabling social participation through creative expression and self-representation. In this paper, the authors bring together their experiences in understanding grassroots activism through action research, storytelling, and visual methods.

Culturally appropriate and locally led peacebuilding and advocacy initiatives have been integral to many communities in PNG. Women have played and continue to play key roles in peace and reconciliation initiatives, using Indigenous cultural and social institutions and leadership in the absence of state and legal entities, such as after ten years of civil war in Bougainville (Boege and Garasu 2011). In the Highlands region, the Kup Women for Peace rubbed mud, joined hands, and walked into the male dominated battlefield and ended almost two decades of intra-tribal and clan warfare. They then developed advocacy programs with support of international organisations and churches to create social change in the community (Garap 2004).

In the context of Yuri, collective peacebuilding and advocacy recognised the adverse effects of all forms of violence and how it affected women and children. Adults were concerned about displacement and loss of culture while the youth were concerned about lack of education, illiteracy, and unemployment (Witne 2016). The women worked with men and collectively advanced peacebuilding and advocacy initiatives for social change. The specific role of women in advocating against SARV is highlighted in this discussion to deepen understanding of the complex sociocultural environment in which women's multiple roles were demonstrated, based on community values of relationships, empathy, responsibility, care, protection, and social cohesion. In this article, we first provide a background to cultural and gender dynamics and sorcery accusations in PNG and the region where the Yuri people live. We then outline the action research approach taken in this project, which combines traditional protocols and oral culture with photovoice processes. The findings highlight the active role women play in addressing SARV through experiences shared by women and men. This article contributes to larger discussions of women's role in local peacebuilding, activism, and prevention of violence while promoting the need of these processes to be formally recognised through research and creative expression at national and international levels.

PNG's Cultural and Gender Context

The South Pacific Island nation PNG occupies the eastern half of New Guinea, the world's second largest island. With extensive coastlines and mountainous regions in the interior, PNG is a multi-tribal, linguistic, and cultural country, divided into twenty-two local administrative provinces. The provinces comprise matrilineal and patrilineal societies, and the roles of men and women differ significantly throughout PNG. While the role of women and men in patrilineal provinces in the highlands of PNG differs from one province or community to another, generally, women have been seen to participate in private life such as raising children, gardening, and engaged in productive activities to support men. Men traditionally participated in public life, collective work, and made decisions of war and peace to protect the community (Brown 1978). In the Simbu Province, Brown and Brookfield (1959) noted that men took pride in tribal and intra-clan wars, arranged exchange ceremonies, danced, and participated in events that were perceived as important to protect the name and safety of the clan and tribe. In the context of Yuri, success in war was measured by the number of enemies they killed on the battlefield. However, there was a growing consciousness among Yuri people of the adverse effects of tribal and inter-clan fights. This triggered inter-clan conversations, leading to the birth of YAKA, a social platform and collective association that served as the vehicle for open dialogue, unity, and peacebuilding (Botu 2017; Witne 2016).

In matrilineal communities, women's roles also differed. While all women inherit land and other traditional rights, their public life and voice were mostly controlled and directed by men. This was evident, for example, in clan mobilisation and increasing local participation in the development of the Lihir mine. Very few women participated in male dominated public meetings, but most women engaged in productive activities to achieve the objectives of men (Macintyre

2003). Dickson-Waiko (2013, 178) noted that in pre- and post-colonial years, a greater number of women in PNG lived in their villages and were committed to gardening and other produtive work. A wife of a politician in post-colonial PNG regarded the role of the women to be mother figures for the whole community, where people from other communities might come to seek advice and help.

The roles of women and men and the gender dynamics in both patrilineal and matrilineal societies have been undergoing many changes. Many of the cultural institutions, processes, practices, and protocols that shaped knowledge, worldview, and experiences of men and women in PNG were unwritten. In these cultures, there were specific rituals and protocols for guiding spiritual and physical development of a person to be responsible and productive citizens. Biersack, Jolly, and Macintyre (2016, 132) observed that Western education, Christian churches, modern media, and wage labour were some forces that changed formal local protocols and rituals for both men and women.

A particular change that influenced women's changing roles is Christianity. There have been successive waves of missionisation to the point where the country is regarded as Christian. Dickson-Waiko (2003) highlighted that Christian churches were instrumental in creating a space for the mobilisation of women as early as the 1920s. This provided a significant space for women who expanded participation in the changing context of the socioeconomic, political, and cultural life of the independent state of PNG (Dickson-Waiko 2010). The women of Bougainville used Nazareth, a name linked to the biblical birth of Jesus, the basis of Christianity, and emulated Christian principles of love, care, and protection in reaching out to victims of sorcery and other forms of violence to save, protect, and care for them (Garasu et al. 2017).

Some Christian churches established education, healthcare, research institutions, and wider national and international networks to advocate against all forms of violence. The Catholic Church built and used resources to advocate for an alternate understanding of misfortune and illness and attribute deaths to God. The Church investigated the cultural perceptions of sorcery and related violence and attempted to change the world view of people, particularly beliefs such as sorcery, which led to violence and abuse of human rights (Gibbs 2015; Zocca 2009). The churches combined local knowledge with Christian principles as a guide for Christians on healthy living, caring, sharing, providing comfort, and maintaining social relationships in times of illness and deaths (Schwarz 2011).

There have been some contradictions in defining and addressing sorcery between earlier and recent waves of missionisation. The recent wave of missionisation, mostly pentecostal churches, was spiritual and equated sorcery accusations and practices to the biblical demonic spirits. These churches related some local ways, practices, and cultural totems and symbols to demons and sorcery. Significant in the national representation, in 2013, a group of pastors, with the help of a Papua New Guinean pentecostal politician, condemned and demolished cultural poles and artefacts in the national parliament and replaced them with an imported metal cross and bible (Rio, MacCarthy, and Blanes 2017, 2). This demonstrated the changing context of Christianity to the detriment of Indigenous spirituality and cutural objects. At the community level, people bring

together a variety of influences as they draw on both traditional and Christian values. Van Meijl (2007, 189) reminded us of Sahlin's view that cultural change is inevitable, but there must be continuity where Indigenous peoples have their own cultural integrity and are active agents in the process of change. Accusations of sorcery and related violence pose significant challenges to local and national systems and have disproportionally affected women. Understanding community members, and women in particular, as active agents in the process of change can highlight the different roles people play in providing solutions to sorcery accusations.

Sorcery Accusations in Papua New Guinea

Contemporary sorcery accusations are an aspect of varying changes in PNG society. Interpretations of this form of violence are deeply embedded in cultural and social community structures (Kuman, 2011). Often caused by the death of someone in the community, accusations are made towards individual members of the community to have caused the death or other misfortune through the practice of sorcery. These accusations have been observed to be targeted toward vulnerable people in the community. They have led to the torture and killing of people who are often made to confess what they are being accused of (Gibbs 2012).

In the context of PNG, it has been estimated that between 2000 and June 2020, sorcery accusations in different parts of PNG resulted in 3,000 deaths (Forsyth et al. 2021). According to the Women and Harm Reduction International Network (WHRIN), the consequences of SARV are devastating, especially for vulnerable people, including women and children, who are frequently victims of SARV. International attention frames SARV as a serious problem of human rights abuse (WHRIN 2020).

Recent developments have seen changes in legislation in PNG on how to deal with violence related to sorcery accusations. What the law failed to address initially was differentiating sorcery as spiritual beliefs from the practices that lead to violence. In doing so, the beliefs were subject to legal interpretation instead of the violence. This was corrected in the repeal of the Sorcery Act 1971 by including sorcery-related violence to be dealt with under criminal law (Eves 2013). However, it has been noted that there is widespread confusion among the people about the laws addressing SARV (Gibbs 2015).

Law enforcement, in addressing violence related to sorcery accusations, has presented further challenges. The processes of complaint, investigation, arrest, court hearing, statements from witnesses, and court verdict can be lengthy for victims. Police do not have sufficient resources to address SARV consistently. In many cases, police have been outnumbered by perpetrators, who often act in mobs (Forsyth et al. 2017). Research suggests that community peacebuilding and collective declarations against SARV provide a concrete foundation to which individuals refer in addressing it. Human rights activists and researchers alike understand that SARV is most effectively addressed through contextually appropriate responses informed by local knowledge of specific causes and forms of SARV and by changing local contexts (Kauli and Thomas 2020; Forsyth and Eves 2015). It is important to include people's voices and participation to tell their own stories and to change the widespread narratives of gender-based, sorcery-related,

and other forms of violence in PNG. The research methods used in this research were carefully thought out and articulated in ways so that participants, particularly women, felt safe to openly express their lived experiences, motivations, actions, and challenges in addressing SARV.

Methods

The research was informed by Indigenous and action-research principles of privileging local knowledge, encouraging mutual understanding, and conversations aimed at creating a collective output for mutual benefit. Acknowledging Indigenous knowledge and indigenous perspectives was critical and key to understanding the histories, struggles, and social contexts that inform the ways communities relate to each other. Women have played an important role in supporting peace building in the Yuri community, yet these efforts remain latent and obscured. Smith (1999) calls for deeper considerations for communities' own priorities and issues, arguing that it "demand[s] an understanding of the ways in which we can ask and seek answers to our own concerns within a context in which resistance to new formations of colonisation still has to be mounted and articulated" (Smith 1999, 4-5). In the case of Yuri and the work of the women, Indigenous methodologies underpinned and guided the inquiry. The research was not just an activity to unmute women's voices and highlight the way they employed local knowledge to mediate peace. Using an Indigenous lens also contributed to the way we understood how women worked with men and their tribal affiliations to advance peace initiatives amongst the Yuri tribes.

Action research "involves learning in and through action and reflection" (McNiff 2013, 24). To understand the sociocultural context that shapes the world view and experiences of women and motivates their response to SARV, forty participants, comprising an equal number of men and women from over fourteen clans of Yuri tribe, were recruited for this research from December 2019 to March 2020. The field research, led by Witne, occurred in two stages, employing semi-structured interviews in the first phase and inviting participants to collectively reflect by using the local form of storytelling, *kapori*, integrated with photovoice in the second phase. The kapori storytelling and photovoice sessions were undertaken in a workshop format over several days, allowing participants and researchers to learn and reflect together.

The initial interviews involved twenty-six participants, aimed at documenting Yuri social reality from within their own community. Hesse-Biber, Nagy, and Leavy (2008) suggested that semi-structured interviews provide an option to collate attitudes and worldviews of participants. Semi-structured interviews in the context of this research provided the opportunity for the researcher to come face to face with female and male participants, asking questions, listening, and asking more questions to gain insights into their world. The interviews were analysed thematically and formed the foundation for a three-day workshop that integrated kapori and photovoice in a collective participatory environment. The kapori storytelling and photovoice sessions were undertaken in a workshop format over several days, allowing participants and researchers to learn and reflect together.

Kapori is the word for storytelling in Yuri language. While this can include all forms of storytelling, including what might be considered gossip (Conciliation Resources 2019, 51) and

harmful to others, in this research, kapori was developed as a research approach to bring together men and women to share their experiences of SARV through collective storytelling. Participants were asked to recall experiences of SARV incidents and share their active involvement in dealing with such incidents.

Bennett et al. (2019) explain that the photovoice method has great potential to be applied in any Indigenous research, particularly valuing grassroots knowledge and participation in solving community issues involving photographs that represent underlying issues for education, advocacy, and influencing public policies. Integration of kapori and photovoice enabled fourteen participants to create kapori in audio-visual media to represent the complexities and to capture multiple responses to SARV. After the kapori session, the participants were induced to use digital cameras to take photos to represent their stories. They walked into the nearby village, and each of them took several photos, reflected on each of the photos, and chose one photo for their own story. The participants were insiders who had lived in Yuri for at least five years at the time of the research. The opportunity to learn through careful conversations, listening, asking questions aimed at gaining insights into the practical world of women participants based on mutual respect, open dialogue, and appreciation was a practical benefit afforded by the research methods. Integration of kapori and photovoice enabled fourteen participants to create kapori in audio-visual media to represent the complexities and to capture multiple responses to SARV. The research process resulted in the production of a photo booklet, which captured each of the participants' stories and selected photos, and which is intended to be used for education and advocacy addressing SARV. All participants agreed for their names to be used together with their story.

Findings

The research process sought to provide a safe space for both women and men to share their experiences in relation to sorcery accusations. This was achieved through the individual interviews ensuring gender balance with representatives from each of the Yuri clans as well as storytelling sessions that embedded cultural and gender-conscious protocols. While women face challenges with regards to peace and security, the joint peace movement of YAKA provided the foundation for stories and experiences to be shared openly, activating the social systems that provide support to people in the community. During the storytelling sessions, participant Vero Silkope, of the Ahngale clan, recalled her personal challenges of being a target of accusations:

> I wanted to take the accusers to court, but the people in my own clan did not support me. It seemed like all the people in my clan supported the accusations. That was a big burden, and it weighed heavily on me. I kept to myself.

Accusations of sorcery might lead to fear and isolation of people. A key component is trust in community structures to overcome fears of sorcery. For women, who are considered particularly vulnerable to accusations, community peace inititiatives such as YAKA and family and community support systems are important to ensure a peaceful environment. Vero identified the various support structures around her:

I thought of what the people who accused me of sorcery were saying and went to church. I knew the truth. There is no truth in any sorcery accusations. I drew strength from my son and husband. We remained on our land. We have food and everything we need. There are people in other clans such as Nulaikia and Wamilgauma who are supporting my family for the good things I do. Our councillor also supported me.

Women of Yuri drew on their various support networks to promote peace and community well-being because they experienced the devastating impact of tribal fighting and sorcery accusations on the lives of their families. They identified the need to address education and support for young men, who often become involved in sorcery accusations.

At that time, we had not started the association. We've always looked after our young men well, but if someone got sick or faced problems, they might accuse us of sorcery. (Veronica Peter, Gomgale Village, Srangau clan)

In her photo, Veronica focuses on the influence that the Church has had on her and the need to remind young people of Christian values (see fig. 1). Among the Yuri, the Church is not separated from traditional, customary values but builds on existing Yuri value systems. A key component of the YAKA peace movement was that women were actively involved. YAKA harnesses the understanding of the Yuri people living under the guidance of the spiritual ancestor Alaiku. Both women and men used the narrative of that spiritual guidance in their appeal for peaceful communities.

We started YAKA, and they appointed me to be a board member, representing women. I was so happy. We must strengthen our faith in Alaiku. There are many people in our community who felt this pain as I did. The Alaiku Association was like a big light into our community. We must show care and love for each other in our community. Fighting must stop, and we must have peace among us. (Veronica Peter, Gomgale Village, Srangau clan)

FIGURE 1. Veronica Peter's photograph.

The knowledge, experience, motivations, and actions of women for activism against SARV were inspired by cultural values of caring and sharing for others and strengthening their position in the community. Veronica Peter further elaborates how she acquired knowledge, drawing inspiration from her father, who held a leadership role in her community. In times of turbulence, she positioned herself and gained respect in the community. Mediation and reconciliation ceremonies for sorcery accusations required food and pigs to contribute to peace building.

> In our custom, my father was a leader. I observed him gather and lead his people to live peacefully in this community. I learnt my habits from my parents. When I married into another community, I participated in community activities and was loyal to that community. The best garden produce or pig I raised, I offered to the community to slaughter; someone cut it and shared the pork fairly for everyone. The people shared food with me and respected me. I learnt to promote good community values and the community respected me as a good woman. (Veronica Peter, Gomgale Village, Srangau clan)

Apart from gaining respect in the community by contributing to customary obligations, the stories demonstrated how women stepped in to support other women affected by violence and to find the most sustainable solutions for them. Augustina shares how she supported a woman who was affected by violent accusations.

> I looked after her until she got well. I asked what she wanted to do. She said her life was risky if she stayed back and wanted to go back to her community. I felt sorry for her and

slaughtered her own pig, cooked and sold it at the village market, and gave her money and told her that she worked hard to raise it so she could take the money and return to her community. I did that and she is with her community. (Augustina, Gomgale Village, Kopan clan)

While working with traditional and customary forms of leadership, women used Christian values and church networks to intervene and to care for those affected by violence. A young woman shared how she worked with her Christian church leaders to respond to SARV.

I sent the church leaders to bring the conflicting parties together. I knew that they would be neutral and provide good thoughts for both sides to understand the issue. The church leaders knew where to pick words that would provide peace to both sides. The party that wanted to use violence against others stopped. (Julie Philip, Oldale Village, Ahngale clan)

Women also worked with their husbands to address SARV, finding the courage to speak up and knowing the role they could play in influencing the husband's decision.

When the community wanted to talk about sorcery (accusations), my husband and I went and stopped them. We explained that they were spoiling their brother, mother, and sister. They should stop talking about sorcery. (Mary Bainan, Omdara Village, Pilegauma clan)

I am a woman. My words have power. If I talked against a sorcery accusation, they would fight me, but my husband and people will listen to me and stop it and bring peace. (Veronica Peter, Gomagale Village, Srangau clan)

When women are recognised for their wisdom and competency, supported, provided with information, and strongly positioned to act, they are powerful actors in the space of reducing sorcery accusations and protecting victims. Women's roles in Yuri continued to shift to directly impact decision making. The word of a woman magistrate demonstrates the power of women's agency and proactiveness in curbing sorcery accusations. Brigita Grai, a female magistrate, talked about how she dissuaded her immediate relatives from starting sorcery accusations after her uncle died:

As a village court magistrate, I could not say it was sorcery, so I told my family to stop saying it was sorcery. Yuri Alaiku Kuikane Association advocated against sorcery accusations. I told my family that my uncle had lost his life so everyone can live in peace within our family and in the community. (Brigita Grai, Oldale Village, Kumaikane clan)

Even though Brigita comes from the largely patriarchal society, her voice counted, and her role as female magistrate also counted. Her decision was equally acknowledged and respected by her community:

Many in the community heard this and said the Magistrate said this. I got a good name for making this stand. I too cannot involve myself in sorcery discussions. The law says don't spread sorcery rumors; we must be at peace that Uncle has lost his life. (Brigita Grai, Oldale Village, Kumaikane clan)

Brigita took a photo of the grave of Alaimbia, an ancestor of the Yuri tribe, reconstructed in 2013, as a symbol of peace and unity of the Yuri tribe (fig. 2). According to Brigita, Alaimbia has been a source of peace and unity on which YAKA was built.

FIGURE. 2: Brigita Grai's photograph of the grave of Alaimbia.

Women were, and continue to be, integral and pivotal to addressing SARV and contributing to achieve broader goals of peace by actively integrating community protocols and the law. The Yuri women believed in themselves and the power of unity to address common issues in the community. Returning to Vero Silkope, who experienced accusations, she now describes her path forward:

I want to learn the laws of the village court. I contested in the last election to be a female magistrate, and I will contest again. Not every person in my Ahngale clan is against me. Some of them will vote for me. Other clans like Nulaikia, Kerikane, and Dikakane will vote for me. I will work with all the men in the village court. If a man or woman comes

to court for sorcery accusations, I will remember how I felt and that they feel the same. I will deliberate on the case as a magistrate.

Women play a key role in eliciting empathy and in activism against SARV. The action research workshop not only captured these narratives but also provided a further tool to use this documentation for continued advocacy and education.

I want to share a story of my photo. I will take my photo home, and when people ask me about it, I will explain that we normally talked about sorcery when our children were sick. We must take the child to the hospital first to understand the cause of illness. We must not talk about sorcery. (Rita Gilbert, Omdara Village, Wamilgauma)

During the workshop, men recognised the contribution of women, reflecting on their role within their families, the church, and as understanding the government law. The workshop provided a space to reflect and discuss the various contributions to intervening in sorcery accusations.

We know Rita's story, regarding her sick baby. Her husband did not know and just guessed. Rita knew why her baby was sick and took the child to the hospital. I think this was the best decision—to take the baby to the hospital. (Apa Kaupa, Omdara Village court chairman)

I would like to make an overall comment on all the stories and the one from yesterday. It started in the Church and came out and the laws that govern us in our community, so we have peace and no fighting and no sorcery accusations. This happened because we have the law and the Church. With the government law, we ourselves have been using it. Now we can give priority to the Church. This is my comment and I agree with [her] because she is a church worker working for God. (Jacob Tolpari, Waramon Village, Kerikane clan)

In the context of peacebuilding and advocacy against SARV in Yuri, the findings demonstrate the multiple roles of women. They drew on customary and church values to strengthen relationships, advocated against sorcery accusations and protected victims of SARV and participated in broader communal peacebuilding conversations. Women shared how they adapted to contemporary social and legal platforms such as schools, YAKA, and village courts in Yuri to advocate for change. They wanted their experiences and stories to be used for further activism and advocacy. In the next sections we discuss the implications for understanding women's roles as active peacebuilders in communities to address accusations of sorcery.

Women's Agency and Collective Response to SARV in Yuri

The PNG national community is aware of the adverse socioeconomic and cultural implications of SARV and demand community action (Forsyth and Eves 2015). Women's responses to SARV have not been easy in Yuri and elsewhere in PNG because the dominant emic view was that sorcerers were "real" and caused the death of people. Therefore, accusing and killing

people perceived to be sorcerers was a way of shaming and preventing the same sorcerers from killing other people in the community (Gibbs 2015). Such a dominant perception of perpetrators of sorcery violence was built into the patriarchal culture of male-dominated pride and of participating in events to protect and uphold the name of the tribal community (Brown and Brookfield 1959). Women have been the ones predominantly blamed and accused of sorcery in the PNG Highlands (Whiteman 1965, 142; Gibbs 2012).

Biersack, Jolly, and Macintyre (2016) highlighted that violence against women was not restricted to the Simbu Province but found in many parts of PNG and the Western Pacific. This evidence required collective national efforts, translating the National Action Plan (Forsyth 2014) in culturally appropriate ways to respond to SARV. There continue to be many responses to SARV in PNG, and the movement of Kup Women for Peace in Simbu or the Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation in Bougainville demonstrate the active role of PNG women in peacebuilding and addressing SARV. These approaches resonate with the experience and response of the Yuri women. To this end, women have contributed significantly to peacebuilding efforts made potent by the fact that women led these movements in largely patriarchal societies. When seen within the broad critique of women's subordinate roles in PNG and the dominant way that women have limited agency to catalyse change, this becomes important. Macintyre (2019) critiques this view and considers a nuanced view of women, stating that: "It is possible that the international face of Melanesian feminism and activism, backed by foreign organisations, sometimes obscures quite different grassroots actions that aim to change gender relations and improve women's lives (Macintyre 2019, 294). Macintyre argues that community-based organisations and groupings often provide the space for women to challenge patriarchal concepts and to integrate locally specific values aligned with human rights principles. The shared collective movement of YAKA positioned women in an active role in peacebuilding, and Yuri women used their position in peacebuilding, as well as within their families, to broaden and advocate for social justice issues.

In an international context, women's role in peacebuilding is acknowledged and promoted through United Nations Resolution 1325 (United Nations 2000). Scholarly debates over the past two decades have engaged in understanding the role of women in peace and security. In the Pacific Islands, this is also closely linked to the need for women's participation in political decision making. While local peace processes and strategies are important in addressing SARV, our research work must also consider the need for increased representation of women in formal decision-making roles.

George (2010) discusses the important cultural roles of women as mothers and carers but warns of the risks of "advocacy aiming to advance the status of women through a celebration of women's maternal roles" undermining their political roles (George 2010, 92). Yuri women utilised their roles as carers for their family in contributing to changes in attitudes. They also recognised the societal challenges that were being faced with young men and communicated their concerns to others through YAKA. A woman participant expressed that it was women's duty to look after and raise young men in the community, but when someone was sick or died, the same young men would accuse them of sorcery, like they did to others. She was so delighted that YAKA would

relieve her of that fear. When in decision-making positions such as village court magistrate, they talked about how they used their experiences to understand how others felt and how that influenced their decision-making processes. Yuri women carefully navigated their traditional roles as mothers and sisters and transferred them to impacting community change.

Like traditional and customary practices, church networks provided accepted support systems that gained community support when intervening in SARV. Women demonstrated agency in addressing SARV, but they did so through their collective community networks and in line with community structures. In the case of Yuri, the collective efforts of women, pastors, village court magistrates, husbands, and sons have the potential to further reduce and prevent SARV.

Healing and Reconciliation Towards a Sustainable Response to SARV

Braithwaite (1999) pointed out that reconciliation was an extension of peace. In the context of local peace building, reconciliation processes bring conflicting parties to the table for open conversation, seeking forgiveness and healing and to publicly denounce violence. In the context of Yuri and Simbu Province, peace and reconciliation acknowledged social relationships through cultural ceremonies, the exchange of gifts, sharing, and caring. Brown and Brookfield (1959) observed *boromai suara* (one-blood), how people were connected through blood at birth, which was expressed in relationships at different times in a person's or community's life.

Custom is used to illustrate intrinsic relationships and values of Papua New Guineans (Dinnen 1988). For Yuri, bormai suara gives life and meaning to restorative justice customs, where people come together to discuss and respond to problems. It manifests in sharing food, caring, and mutual respect and culminates in rituals such as slaughtering pigs and rubbing pig's blood in cordyline-plant stems. These are symbols of toil, friendship, and renewed social relationships during times of peace and war. Podolefsky (1984) observed that during times of war, people of one blood, such as cousins or uncles, did not shoot at and kill each other. Instead, they helped to unite and forged peace for the warring tribes or clans. This cultural practice resonated with the account of Zimmer-Tamakoshi (2016) among the Gende people of Simbu, who become good men and women by helping other people in times of problems. In particular, the way Yuri women calling on the support of their husbands and identifying key support within their families allowed them to meet cultural obligations while promoting changes in attitudes within their families.

De la Rey and McKay (2006), in their study in South Africa, explained that components of peacebuilding involving greater participation of women included emotions developed from witnessing specific conflicts or wars. Karam (2000) pointed out that war experiences forced women to learn new skills, and they acquired social and economic exposure and strength. The effects of conflicts and lessons learnt extend from the battlefield to domains of daily life. These emotions and lessons were expressed in building collaborations, support, and trust, which extended to networking and supporting one another. Building trust provided confidence for women to understand and appreciate who is out there to talk to and start conversations for social change. A young Yuri woman reached out to a church leader to intervene in sorcery talk. Another relied on her husband, and a female village court magistrate used the trust bestowed on her to speak up and

dispel sorcery accusations in her family. Here, women relied on generating empathy for those who were being impacted by the violence.

The cultural legacy of women contributing productively to community life and welfare in private space (Dickson-Waiko 2013) has been evident in the efforts of women to address SARV in Yuri. For them, kapori about their efforts in responding to SARV in different capacities served as a process of healing and reconciliation. Yuri women worked hard, raised pigs, and contributed to supporting their community to gain respect and value in society. While this aligned with the need to be seen as a "good woman," the raising of pigs and garden food was also used in the traditional reconciliation process. YAKA peace processes demanded traditional reconciliation processes to impress the perpetrator, mostly men, to strive for genuine and sustained peace. Women were largely contributors to these feasts. We can see the benefit of a traditional reconciliation process in the documentation of the peace movement in Bougainville:

> Community members strongly emphasised the need to use traditional or customary reconciliation processes. Participants felt that these processes result in more genuine and sustained outcomes. Traditional processes require both parties, and in particular the perpetrator, to invest time and labour, and strengthen community accountability by involving family and community members. This builds a foundation to heal divisions once the reconciliation process is complete and allows time for wounds to heal. (Conciliation Resources 2019, 13)

Sister Lorraine Garasu, leading activist during the Bougainville peace process, confirms the way in which women developed strategies utilising family networks and harnessing traditional processes to facilitate constructive dialogues across warring factions (Garasu 2013). Dickson-Waiko (2013) argued that women rarely participated in mainstream state building, particularly because of patriarchal dominance and the lack of attention to support women in those spaces. However, women built networks and support from their kin to support their family and address social challenges because achieving and maintaining peace held a better outcome for them and their children. During these times, Yuri women openly discussed with and solicited support from men to address SARV. This fact made women public figures in the community. Women found ways to position themselves strongly in their community, acquiring recognition from the community. The YAKA peacebuilding process recognises the efforts of women and places them in key positions in the YAKA organisation, and the strategies that Yuri women employed have contributed to peace amongst the Yuri tribes. This experience highlights the importance of women's inclusion and leadership in the larger policy dialogues of addressing SARV in the nation. Certainly, the context-driven approaches align the current strategies for localised initiatives for sustained change. These acts are further promoted through action research approaches that create spaces for reflection on the different roles of people within a community. The stories have a wider potential to heal, reconcile, and unite people in a peaceful community.

Conclusion

All forms of violence, including SARV, undermine the conventional cultural and human rights of people. Communities that are living with destructive sorcery accusations and violence require practical human rights and legal and multiple community approaches to address them. This research strongly demonstrated that deliberate, culturally relevant peacebuilding and the promotion of diverse views and experiences in open conversations provide deep insights to understanding and addressing SARV.

The role of Yuri women in protecting people from violent accusations and advocacy against SARV has been invisible, partly because of the dominant narratives of women as victims of violence. However, there are strong and courageous women in similar environments who do not remain silent about violent issues affecting them. The role of Yuri women demonstrated this collective courage of women in PNG. They wanted their experiences, stories, and voices to be visible and to be part of the solution to problems affecting them. Continued research, in particular action research, can promote women's important contributions in support of increasing their participation in both informal and formal governance structures and decision-making roles across the Pacific.

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