# 'KILL ALL THE SORCERERS': THE INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN SORCERY, VIOLENCE, WAR AND PEACE IN BOUGAINVILLE

Miranda Forsyth*

*This paper provides new insights into how violence in war structures peacetime violence by highlighting how war alters ontological positions or worldviews, such as those concerning the relevance of threat of harm through spiritual means. It presents a detailed case study of sorcery accusations and related violence before, during and after Bougainville's decade long civil war. New empirical data are used to illustrate the mechanisms through which violence against those accused of sorcery was enabled and legitimized during the war and how this remains linked to contemporary sorcery accusations and related violence two decades after peace. Drawing on Braithwaite and D'Costa's framework of cascades of violence, the paper also tracks the ways in which sorcery discourses, practices and beliefs cascade to war.*

Key words: sorcery, witchcraft, war, violence, cascades of violence, peace

## Introduction

A significant missing element in current theories about how war structures peacetime violence is the long-term impact of the role of war in altering ontological positions or worldviews, such as those concerning the relevance of threats of harm through spiritual means. This paper shows how beliefs about sorcery or witchcraft[1] can be intensified during war and catalyze civilian and non-civilian violence both during war and for a long time afterwards. It does so through a detailed case study focussed on the long Bougainville civil war (1988–98) in which the region fought for its independence from Papua New Guinea ('PNG') ('the Conflict'). Sorcery or *poisin* was a critical means of both offensive and defensive warfare during the Conflict, generating widespread terror and insecurity. Insurgents and defence force operatives brutally tortured and killed scores of individuals on the grounds that they were sorcerers or *poisin-man*, viewing them as responsible for death, sickness and misfortune. Military leaders legitimated and condoned violent responses to sorcery-inspired terror, most famously through the so-called 'standing order' to 'Kill all the sorcerers' made by the leader of Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA). Almost two decades after the peace accords, wartime experiences connect in various ways to peacetime forms of sorcery-related violence in Bougainville. The strength of these connections emerged unexpectedly

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*Miranda Forsyth, School of Regulation and Global Governance (RegNet), College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University, Canberra, ACT 0200, Australia; Miranda.forsyth@anu.edu.au.

[1]The term 'sorcery' is used in this article to mean 'the belief, and those practices associated with the belief, that one human being is capable of harming another by magical or supernatural means' (Patterson 1974: 132).

during fieldwork into contemporary sorcery accusation-related violence,[2] as interviewees repeatedly and spontaneously referenced wartime experiences as explanatory of violence today.[3]

Criminologists have long noted the criminogenic nature of war (e.g. Bonger 1936; Jamieson 1998; Ruggiero 2007). Particular focus has been placed on the links between war and peacetime violence, to ascertain whether war leads to an increase in such violence (typically measured in homicide rates), and if so, in what conditions and why (Archer and Gartner 1984; McGarry and Walklate 2016; Braithwaite and D'Costa 2018; Stamatel and Romans 2018). The recent review article by Gartner and Kennedy (2018) has classified the various theories about what links violence post-war to war. One explanatory strand focuses on the direct impacts of experiences of war, such as harm to the bodies or psyches of war participants; and the experience of war providing a process of learning or habituation to violence, for example war operating as a 'school of crime' (Jamieson 1999) or legitimatizing violence. Other explanations focus on war's effect on broader culture, in particular creating a 'culture of violence' (Steenkamp 2005) that makes violence in daily life possible and acceptable. They also note challenges to these learning- and culture-based explanations, especially the failure to explain why some countries do not experience post-war violence, or why most civilians and combatants exposed to cultural messages extolling violence do not become violent after wars. In response, Gartner and Kennedy (2018) identify explanations detailing which post-war conditions amplify the lessons of war and trauma effects in ways more likely to cultivate post-war violence. These include war's ongoing impact on social, political and economic institutions and formal and informal social controls during peace, and also the nature of the transition to peace. Gartner and Kennedy (2018) stress the methodological difficulties in assessing the empirical evidence base for these theorized mechanisms, noting they are more frequently assumed than measured and that '[a] state's legitimation of violence during war may increase a society's tolerance for violence afterwards, but there is limited direct validation of such a process of cultural change'.

Stamatel and Romans (2018) have recently also investigated the theoretical explanations connecting war to peacetime violence. Although they successfully replicated Archer and Gartner's classic 1984 study (which concluded that post-war homicide rates increase because war legitimizes the use of violence as a means of conflict resolution), they found that the legitimization argument did not explain the additional *modern* wars they included in the data analysis. They concluded that genuine questions remain about *how* and *why* violence modelled during war becomes legitimized in peace, leaving open the inquiry into what else is salient in linking violence in war to violence in peace.

This paper addresses the knowledge gaps identified by both Gartner and Kennedy (2018) and Stamatel and Romans (2018) through a fine-grained account of the interconnections between sorcery accusation-related violence during the Bougainville Conflict, and the forms of such violence today. The paper's findings support several of the explanatory models outlined above, in particular that habituation and legitimation of

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[2]This paper forms part of a multi-year project investigating the drivers and inhibitors of violence against individuals accused of using sorcery or witchcraft in PNG. It is a joint study between the Australian National University, PNG's National Research Institute, Divine Word University and networks of local research assistants in a number of provinces.

[3]In 2018, a quarter of the inmates in the main Bougainville jail were there voluntarily, hoping to find safety in detention following accusations of sorcery having been made against them, illustrating the current extent of sorcery-related violence.

violence during the Conflict led to greater acceptance of violence post-war. Importantly, it details how this occurred, showing the significance of the role of publicly articulated arguments legitimizing the annihilation of alienated 'outsiders' to ensure the safety of public 'insiders' (Bauman (1989), demonstrating how such legitimizing statements may remain salient decades after concluding formal peace accords. It also identifies the importance of ontological orientation in stimulating and legitimizing ongoing violence, showing how spiritual sources of insecurity engendered in war continue in peace. Whilst some authors have touched on the impacts of ontological insecurity in war and peace (Crelinsten 2003; Young 2003), the role of ontological positions in the construction of new classes of enemy, new forms of threat and in the moral reasoning for violence has not as yet been developed through a detailed empirical case study.

The study also supports Gartner and Kennedy's (2018) argument about the salience of post-war conditions, particularly the 'public security gap', in explaining the ongoing impacts of war's lessons. It shows the continuing relevance to sorcery accusations and related violence of the destruction caused to formal and informal security institutions during the Bougainville Conflict, and how that has generated ongoing anomic social conditions in which violence continues with relative impunity.

The case study covers a 20-year period following cessation of the Conflict, thus also engaging with debates about what duration constitutes the post-war period. Although the convention is to use a five-year period after the end of a war (Gartner and Kennedy 2018: 7), our findings suggest that the post-war period is sometimes better understood in terms of decades rather than years, thus joining those who problematize viewing war as a 'bounded historical episode' (Pankhurst 2008; Jamieson 2014: xiii). The case study therefore supports emerging research demonstrating the long-term impacts of war and conflict on trauma, the normalization of violence and perpetuation of insecurity (e.g. United Nations, World Bank 2018).

In addition to identifying how sorcery beliefs and practices during war structure violence during peace, the paper also discusses how they can catalyze war. Part 1 of the paper illustrates how sorcery accusations and suspicions in Bougainville acted as sparks to conflagrate and intensify war hotspots at localized levels. The multidirectional nature of the connections between sorcery, violence, war and peace are discussed using Braithwaite and D'Costa's (2018) concept of 'cascades of violence'. Their framework is based on the key idea that violence cascades across space and time from one kind of violence to another and includes ten propositions to explain patterns of violence. The two of most relevance to the paper are that: (1) 'crime often sparks cascades to war and war to crime. As crime-war-crime cascades from hotspot to hotspot, violence becomes less shameful and easier to excuse'; and (2) 'violence cascades when violent imaginaries are modelled' (Braithwaite and D'Costa 2018: 8, 7).

Criminology is becoming more adept at viewing violence through a lens attuned to different cultural and religious worldviews and epistemological standpoints, the importance of which is highlighted by the fields of postcolonial, and more recently southern, criminology (Travers 2017; Carrington *et al.* 2018). The criminology of war is one of the few areas of criminology where the geographic locus of much recent research extends beyond the standard European and American focus (e.g. Jamieson 1999; Steenkamp 2005; Broadhurst *et al.* 2015; Braithwaite and D'Costa 2018). Adding a further geographic region largely overlooked by criminologists, this paper contributes to southern criminology by drawing attention to sorcery beliefs and practices prevalent in much of

the global South. It demonstrates how a purely secular analysis of relationships between violence, crime and morality is blind to contexts where the population's worldview is framed by the capacity of the supernatural world to influence the physical world. Paying attention to this ontological dimension to conflict and violence makes apparent cultural understandings about sources of evil, causes of death and destruction and the extent of personal responsibility for misfortune. Such spiritually informed motivations for violence are often overlooked in standard northern criminological analysis.

It is important that criminology and war literature incorporates an awareness of beliefs and practices associated with sorcery because they often play an important role during war. They may be deliberately intensified and harnessed by leaders, or evolve organically as a response to increasing desperation. By attributing causation for death, sickness and misfortune to individuals (Comaroff and Comaroff 2004), sorcery discourses personalize larger social, political and economic events in a powerful way that enables conflict to jump between the national and the local, and trigger or amplify violence. Sorcery beliefs and practices can play other important roles during wars, including legitimating the elimination of alienated individuals, increasing insecurity, enforcing obedience and as tools of both psychological and spiritual warfare (e.g. Wild 1998; Ellis 1999; West 2001; Israel 2009; Wlodarczyk 2009; Branch 2010; and in relation to PNG see MacDonald and Kirami 2017; Schwoerer 2017).

The paper is structured in two parts. Part 1 summarizes the nature of sorcery beliefs and practices and associated violence before the Conflict, followed by an overview of the Conflict itself. It builds the case for the causal significance of sorcery beliefs in igniting local dimensions to the Conflict, which in turn fuelled the regionwide conflagration of violence. It then details the various ways in which sorcery practices and beliefs and the types of violence associated with them were used and developed through the Conflict. Part 2 presents new empirical evidence about the nature and extent of sorcery accusation-related violence in Bougainville today, and then makes the case for specific links between such violence and the Conflict, including how these links support or add to the theoretical explanations discussed above.

The paper is based on mixed methods research, primarily involving 27 semi-structured interviews, most conducted in August 2017 in and around the two main towns of Buka and Arawa. Interviewees included leaders of the main state and non-state justice agencies,[4] religious leaders including the Catholic Bishop, leaders of key women's advocacy organizations and women's groups, youth leaders, former BRA leaders and academics with deep experience of Bougainville and the Conflict. The research also draws on newspaper reports,[5] grey literature and 167 case studies of contemporary sorcery accusations collected during 2016 and 2017 by a network of local recorders as detailed below (see also Forsyth *et al.* 2017).

### *Part 1: Sorcery Beliefs and Practices and the Bougainville Conflict*

Three hundred thousand people live on the two islands forming the Autonomous Region of Bougainville. Situated within Melanesia, Bougainville is a region famous for

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[4]Police, *wanbel kot* (local informal courts) chiefs, members of the Council of Elders, District Court clerk.
[5]Twenty-three articles in the two major national newspapers from 1996 to 2016.

its cultural and linguistic diversity; this includes multiple forms of supernatural prac-
tices (Oppermann 2016), with each society having distinctive types of sorcery. This part
draws heavily on two early anthropological accounts of Bougainville (Blackwood 1935
and Oliver 1955[6]), supplemented by personal accounts and reflections of a range of
Bougainvillean leaders and scholars shared in interviews, and accounts in *Bougainville
before the Conflict 2005* (Regan and Griffin 2005).

According to these accounts, traditionally the belief in sorcery or *poisin* was pervasive
in Bougainville. Widely believed to cause sickness and death, sorcery was traditionally
used as a customary basis for social order (Regan and Griffin 2005: 43), although it
became increasingly viewed as a dangerous force that had been released from the con-
trol of elderly male community leaders. Before the Conflict, accusations against indi-
viduals for using sorcery were limited and any that did occur were mediated through
customary processes and community leaders. At least from the 1930s, fear of sorcery
was *primarily* responded to by people being suspicious of each other, seeking assistance
from traditional healers, and taking preventative measures, such as using talismans
and amulets (Blackwood 1935: 474), abandoning their settlements and keeping women
out of public gaze. The historical record is not entirely clear on the gender of those
believed to use sorcery. Blackwood (1935: 465) observes that people known to use sor-
cery can be men or women, and while Oliver (1955) does at one point refer to sorcer-
esses, the predominant accounts in both her and Oliver's works concern men.

Murders of persons accused of using sorcery were occasionally carried out, but they
were executed in secret and highly ritualized. Oppermann (2016: 202) describes the
institution of death-pacts called *korupako*, 'in which an enclave of *tsunono* [customary
leaders] met in secret in the bush and considered the use of lethal force against an indi-
vidual; if they agreed on death, they would eat a half-cooked pig. Their decision would
then be made known with a song, "death tomorrow"'. After colonization, this secrecy
may have been due to a colonial ban on violence against accused sorcerers. Evenhuis
(2015: 270) records the following from an interview with the subnational coordinator,
UN Women in 2013: 'In the decades before the Bougainville conflict, sorcery-related
violence was reportedly rare due to the strength of community, clans and the church,
and the absence of guns in the community'. There is no mention made of the use of
torture against accused sorcerers in any of these pre-Conflict accounts.

*A brief overview of the Bougainville Conflict*

In 1972, a huge copper mine was established in the centre of Bougainville, resulting
in socio-economic upheaval, massive environmental damage and disagreements over
revenue allocation. Regan (2017: 358) argues that '[t]he landowner revenue share was a
tiny percentage of total revenues, was distributed in ways that were poorly understood
by most people, and involved significant sources of inequality'.

The Conflict started officially in 1988 with the unmet demand by the New Panguna
Landowners Association that the PNG national government cancel the Mining
Agreement. A series of attacks on mine property followed, eventually leading to the

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[6]His fieldwork was conducted in the 1930s.

mine's closure in 1989. The PNG police riot squads were brought to Bougainville at the end of 1988 and some consider allegations of police brutality were the primary factor in the escalation to war (e.g. Regan 2017: 378). At this time, clan members in the mine area established the BRA, and formulated a secessionist stance calling for Independence. Following attacks on government property throughout Bougainville, the PNG Defence Force (PNGDF) joined in the Conflict in March 1989, launching 'a series of increasingly more aggressive counterinsurgency offensives' (Lasslett 2012: 714). The most frequently cited mortality estimate resulting from the Conflict is 10,000 (out of a population of approximately 160,000 at that time) but there is uncertainty about the figure and estimates range from 1,000 to as many as 20,000 (Braithwaite *et al.* 2010: 86–8).

Regan (no date) argues that the Conflict had three dimensions. The first is primarily characterized by BRA against PNGDF (with some commentators adding Australia's colonial legacy; Lasslett 2012). The PNGDF was supported by various groups of Bougainvilleans opposed to the BRA, collectively known as the Bougainville Resistance Forces (BRF).

The second dimension is characterized predominantly by conflict between BRA and BRF. This conflict emerged when the PNGDF left Bougainville in March 1990 (during 'the Ceasefire'), leaving a vacuum of power with the loosely structured BRA as the only governing body. Absent all state forms of government, Bougainville relied solely on custom and chiefly authority. Meanwhile, the PNG national government imposed an economic and communications blockade upon Bougainville, causing severe hardship for the population. During the early 1990s, a staged redeployment of the PNGDF occurred, commencing in Buka and gradually spreading to other parts of Bougainville.

The third dimension to the Conflict underpinned the previous two, consisting of local level conflicts including BRA v BRA, BRF v BRF and inter-village and inter-clan conflicts. Boege (2009: 31) argues: 'Traditional conflicts between different groups and clans were also fought under the umbrella of the "great" war of secession. Parties entangled in local conflicts either joined the BRA or the Resistance'. Amnesty International (1993: 2) reported: 'During this period BRA members were reported to have committed serious human rights abuses, including arbitrary executions, torture and rape'. This third dimension helps to explain the spread of the Conflict from a relatively localized dispute over mining royalties to a regionwide civil war that lasted for ten years. Both the spread and intensity of the Conflict are widely reported to have caught everyone by surprise, and were uncharacteristic of grievances over mining, which usually remain localized (Lasslett 2012: 707).

Attempts at peace started almost as soon as the Conflict broke out, eventually leading to the final Peace Agreement in 2001. The Agreement included an 'unhurried' approach to disarmament (Boege 2009), but left untouched some key questions at the heart of the Conflict. As discussed below, this practice of deferment had implications for sorcery accusation-related violence.

*Sorcery beliefs and practices as amplifiers or causes of war?*

This section examines the connections between sorcery beliefs and practices and the Conflict, showing how sorcery accusations and related violence can *cascade war* in

addition to *being cascaded by* war (Braithwaite and D'Costa 2018). Two relevant theoretical propositions are Braithwaite and D'Costa's proposition that many small sparks can lead to a larger conflagration (2018: 8) and Kalyvas' (2006) work on civil war suggesting the pertinent question of 'not what causes a civil war but rather what causes violence within civil war'.

Most published accounts of the Conflict locate disputes over distribution of rent revenue from the mine as the initial cause or trigger. Many authors acknowledge multiple other contributing factors, such as increasing economic inequality between clans, land pressures, a youth bulge, environmental degradation and negative reactions to the use of migrant labour (e.g. Kent and Barnett 2012). With the exception of Braithwaite *et al.* (2010), none include the role of sorcery beliefs and practices as a contributing factor. This section supports and develops Braithwaite *et al.*'s (2010) contentions that sorcery beliefs and practices were a significant factor in the third dimension of the Conflict.

Braithwaite *et al.* (2010) argue that the causes of war in particular parts of Bougainville (and elsewhere) are often due to 'micro-narratives of resentment' and localized intergenerational conflicts, rather than grand narratives. They provide numerous illustrations of highly localized sparks that joined up to fuel the broader conflict in Bougainville, observing 'a particular piece of land or an act of sorcery could be a big issue in what the war was about in that village' (2010: 81). Their book also documents sorcery as a factor in the different and second-stage conflict in the region's South, noting 'allegations of sorcery and disputes over unequal access to land were involved in the local split' (2010: 31). The authors conclude that 'myriad local proximate factors such as land disputes, sorcery, [and] grabs for local political ascendency' (2010: 103) underpinned the Conflict.

Little other written support exists for this analysis in Bougainville, possibly because sorcery beliefs and practices are often invisible to outsiders, the main generators of the written historical record. However, interviewees stressed the prevalence of sorcery beliefs and accusations and the social discord they reflected and generated during the Conflict. This empirical evidence supports the hypothesis that sorcery beliefs and practices provide easy fuel to ignite local conflicts as they inspire terror and create cycles of accusation and counter-accusation. These local conflicts then fed into the Bougainville-wide level war.

The importance of sorcery-related disputes in both reflecting and promoting micro-level social discord, fear and resentment is illustrated by an account given of a reconciliation process in 2015–16. The participants noted that the reconciliation was about 'the most difficult issue [i.e. sorcery]', which had provoked a conflict that continued for 25 years, and 'is a story that involves the whole community' (PACSIA 2017: 22–3). The conflict involved one clan member suspected of using sorcery, causing significant repercussions for the entire community, including blocking channels of communication and spreading fear.

Further support for the hypothesis that sorcery beliefs and practices were a factor in spreading and escalating the Conflict comes from Anthony Regan, a constitutional lawyer who has written extensively about Bougainville and who was involved in the peace negotiations from 1994. His opinion was that sorcery accusations were 'an integral part of the mix of localised conflicts that made up the critical third dimension to the Conflict'. A former BRA Commander also expressed the view that the BRA's reliance

on sorcery (discussed below) 'rekindled beliefs in sorcery' and 'the subsequent accusations of sorcery at all levels of Bougainville society intensified the Conflict' [BV1723].

The evidence from Bougainville therefore supports Braithwaite and D'Costa's (2018) proposition that crime may cascade to war, particularly through igniting multiple hotspots. Sorcery accusations and the cycles of re-accusation and threat of or actual violence acted as vectors of fear and mistrust within communities, providing opportunities for simmering hostilities to break out into open conflict. Sorcery is a catalyst *par excellence* for achieving such an effect because it feeds into a population's greatest fears and engenders insecurity, anger, a sense of injustice, mistrust and suspicion within families and kinship networks. For instance, in one slim publication detailing the peacebuilding Panguna Dialogues Project, sorcery accusations and violence come up repeatedly as a central factor in disputes from both during and after the Conflict (PACSIA 2017). One of the participants is recorded as stating: 'I will talk about the root of every problem here. The root of the problem is sorcery'.

Following Kalyvas' (2006) insight about the need to examine what causes violence to spread within war, this study identifies sorcery beliefs and accusations as vectors of violence. They were instrumental in spreading the war, aiding it to jump scale from the more structured and official first and second dimensions, to the more localized third dimension.

### Sorcery during the Bougainville Conflict

Three distinct phases define the BRA's relationship with sorcery during the Conflict, although each overlaps and intertwines temporally.

### Phase 1: a call to arms

The first phase could be termed a 'call to arms', when the charismatic BRA leader, Francis Ona, included sorcerers in his general call for support from the population. His rallying cry was along the following lines: 'use anything and everything that you have, if you are a thief, steal, if you are a murderer, kill, if you are a sorcerer this is the time I want to see your sorcery, if you are a priest get down on your knees and pray, if you are a woman, cook' [BV1723]. The BRA was not overwhelmed by volunteer sorcerers, which apparently became a source of keen bitterness to them. One interviewee [BV1723] explained this unwillingness was probably because such people may have not wanted to provide evidence that could be later used against them in local court cases. Another explanation is that many who are/were believed to be sorcerers do/did not self-identify in that way. Although the BRA created a list of suspected sorcerers to press-gang, relevantly few names were listed [BV1723].

### Phase 2: sorcery as a weapon of war

In the second phase, the BRA leadership decided to experiment itself in the use of sorcery and poison/*poisin*[7] in its guerrilla warfare and established a 'biological warfare

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[7]The relationship with actual physical poison is extremely hard to disambiguate, as Oppermann (2016: 188) states 'there is certainly something of poison in *poisin*'. *Poisin* is sometimes worked using substances with actual or intended chemical effect (originally plants but today including battery acid and weed killer) together with particular rituals.

unit'. Despite this impressive title, the BRA's operations must be understood in the context of being operated by a relatively formless and impoverished rebel army hidden away in the bush. One source describes how this unit developed the practice of laying particular plants across bush tracks to cause inflamed legs and genitalia when walked upon [BV1723].

Alongside this interest by the BRA leadership in sorcery as an instrument of warfare, soldiers (BRA, BRF and PNGDF) and civilians throughout Bougainville experimented with using sorcery as both an offensive and defensive device. One element involved old human skeletons dug up from local cemeteries. In at least one offensive, an entire BRA group attacked the PNGDF armed with nothing but spiritual weapons. An interviewee sadly noted 'they were mown down like calves' [BV1723]. Multiple similar accounts were shared during interviews. One told of witnessing an old man desperately engaging in a magical ritual of blowing lime (a common ingredient in *poisin*) into the sky to repel a helicopter attack instead of seeking cover. Oppermann (2016: 194), whose work is amongst the BRF, describes 'necklaces' made of human bones and notes a wide range of effects attributed to such charms, including rendering a man undetectable or extremely strong. He records collecting 'many corroborated accounts of the production of warfare magic during the Bougainville crisis' and personally examining such charms. He states (2016: 192) that such objects were produced in large numbers in the 'hungry, dangerous days of the Bougainville conflict' and related stories by former fighters who faced off against an armed BRA unit with nothing but sorcery.

Awareness of the use of sorcery as a weapon during the Conflict is widespread in contemporary oral accounts of the Conflict. One interviewee stated: 'during the crisis the BRA made use of the sorcerers against the PNGDF. . . For example, they used poisoned arrows: even a tiny scratch from these arrows killed the PNGDF soldiers. Or magic flashlights: soldiers turned blind and died'. A former battle commander for the BRA stated: 'Before, during times of peace, the poison-men [sorcerers] were afraid to kill anyone but with all the chaos, they were no longer afraid and by killing our own people, they were helping the soldiers, so we killed them too. Some we shot and some we killed by attacking them at night' (Howley 2002: 37).

Sorcery was frequently 'bought' from the neighbouring Solomon Islands by the BRA soldiers, continuing a long-standing practice started through early trading networks and developed through labour mobility on plantations (Sagir 2005: 354–6). An anthropologist living in Northern Solomon Islands at the time corroborated this account: 'A man from West Guadalcanal sold *poke sosolo* [a type of sorcery] to the BRA for 2000 kina' (Ryniker 2012: 159). He also recounts that people from this area sided strongly with the BRA and joined in the battle against the PNGDF using 'silent missiles' (i.e. sorcery). Active use of sorcery as a weapon during war changed it from being primarily a preoccupation of the old, to associating it with young men, particularly mobile young men who could buy new and allegedly more potent forms of sorcery from elsewhere.

*Phase 3: kill all the sorcerers!*
The third phase of the relationship between the BRA and sorcery involved Francis Ona's 'standing order' to eliminate sorcerers. A source close to Ona at that time alleged that motivation for the order was frustration at the failure of sorcerers to heed the earlier call to arms. Significant dispute exists over exactly what was said and how 'formal'

the order was. Regardless of the actual wording or intent of Francis Ona, his order appears to have had wide-ranging impacts and has been interpreted by interviewees as legitimating the use of public violence against those accused of sorcery. A number of interviewees explained that they had witnessed acts of public torture against accused sorcerers for the first time during the Conflict. These included boiling or drowning people alive in 40-gallon drums filled with water; putting tyres around them and drowning them in the sea; dragging them behind cars; and hanging them from trees, sometimes upside down and for days on end. Howley (2002: 51) notes an episode recounted to him: 'For three days, the rebels tortured my uncle and auntie by hanging them over a fire and beating them in an attempt to make them admit that they poisoned the youth. But they said they were not sorcerers'. Interviewees from different parts of Bougainville all told similar stories, and observed that extreme public violence against those accused of sorcery was first seen during the Conflict.

Our interviewees only ever discussed men being treated in this way, even though from mainland PNG our data include hundreds of accounts of attacks on women. Howley (2002: 41) writes: 'Some of the *raskol* [undisciplined] BRA used the opportunity to satisfy their lust for killing and others because they wanted to steal their property. They accused their victims of being spies for the Army and others they accused of sorcery'. Such acts in turn led to retaliatory accusations and payback, further intensifying the cycle of violence and feeding into the local dimension of the Conflict discussed earlier. The only newspaper report of an incident of sorcery accusation-related violence during this period records two men being shot by BRA from a different faction 'while they were seeking retribution over the death of their commander's relative at the hands of a sorcerer' (Post Courier, Monday, 19 April 1999).

In sum, this Part has shown how sorcery gained new prominence as a real and dangerous weapon during the Conflict, and how this led to the legitimation of new types of public violence and murder against persons accused of sorcery. The next section focuses on the ways in which these 'violent imaginaries' (Braithwaite and D'Costa 2018: 7) that were modelled against sorcerers during the war have continued into peace, and the nature of other links between wartime experiences of sorcery and sorcery accusation-related violence today.

*Part 2: Sorcery Accusation-Related Violence in Bougainville Today and Its Connections with the Conflict*

This section first presents the findings of an empirical study of sorcery accusation-related violence in Bougainville and then examines the different links between this contemporary phenomenon and the Conflict.

Adding a 'sorcery lens' to the study of war, crime and violence requires using, and even inventing a range of methodological tools to overcome the 'blindspots' of standard criminology methodologies (such as official crime statistics, hospital records or victim surveys) that do not typically catch information relating to sorcery beliefs and practices. These difficulties are addressed by drawing on qualitative research methods such as semi-structured interviews and developing a case-collection database built from data collected by a network of locals observing cases in their own villages and reporting details on a standardized form (Forsyth *et al.* 2017). This approach recognizes that

subjective accounts of incidents of actual and threatened violence provide more rigorous and reliable data than the fragmented and under-resourced government records. The validity of the study findings also matches the general contours of another more limited study into sorcery accusation-related violence in Bougainville conducted in 2013 (Evenhuis 2015).

*Sorcery accusation-related violence in Bougainville today*

Sorcery beliefs and sorcery accusation-related violence are rife in Bougainville today. Interviewees explained a wide range of antisocial behaviour by reference to both fears and accusations of sorcery.[8] One stated: 'Because the level of consciousness of sorcery has increased, the level of fear of sorcery has increased. The level is at 100 per cent. I have not found anyone who is not afraid of sorcery. The whole society, everybody fears sorcery' [BV1723].

The case-collection network identified 167 cases of sorcery accusation in Bougainville in just five locations (each covering no more than a few hundred people) between January 2016 and November 2017. Of these cases, 45 (26.9 per cent) led to violence. Most frequent types of violence (many of which were present in the same case) were property damage (28) and threats (26), followed by major physical violence (20), torture (18), banishment (16), minor physical violence (15) and emotional harm (11). Less frequent were forced imprisonment, clothing removed, burning and killing. These violent incidents resulted in 28 permanent injuries and ten deaths. Of the cases involving torture and attempts to extract a confession, most of them (79.5 per cent) took place in public.

The 167 cases of sorcery accusation involved 245 accused. Three-quarter (75.4 per cent) of the cases involved only one accused, and 14.4 per cent involved two accused. The remaining 10.2 per cent of the cases involved three or more accused, occasionally as high as six. The majority of accused are males (94.0 per cent). Over half of the accused (54.7 per cent) are middle-aged (41–60 years), and an additional 25.7 per cent are young adults (19–40 years). There is also a very small proportion (2.0 per cent) of youths (10–18 years).[9] A substantial proportion (17.6 per cent) are elderly (60+ years), a large number, bearing in mind that many old people did not survive a civil war in which access to medicine and medical care was cut off for years.

Due to the secrecy of these cases, and limited geographic coverage of the local recorders, it is highly likely that many other cases occurred during this period that we have not recorded.[10] Certainly, public perceptions are of high levels of violence against those accused of using sorcery. One interviewee claimed the entire number of people being harmed through contemporary sorcery accusation-related violence in their area

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[8]Such as schools being shut down due to concerns about sorcery-related illness or death; social stigmatization of children and family members of those accused of sorcery.

[9]According to a household-level survey in 2013 approximately half of the population of Bougainville is aged less than 20 years (Chand 2013: 1).

[10]Only a small percentage of these cases get to the state criminal justice system for a variety of reasons, including its limited capacity, unarmed police, large numbers of perpetrators and witnesses reluctant to give evidence for fear of payback. In the case studies, 35 per cent involved 5–20 perpetrators; 19 per cent involved 21–50 perpetrators and 26 per cent involved more than 50 perpetrators.

is likely to total more than those who died during the Conflict [BV1719]. This high level of violence is supported by a 2013 family health and safety survey in Bougainville (Jewkes *et al.* 2015: 13) that found '[o]ne in two men and one in four women had witnessed someone experiencing violence, after being accused of sorcery. Nearly one in five men had engaged in such violence . . . Sorcery accusation-related violence is very often fatal'.

Over the last two decades, newspapers have also recorded concerns about high levels of sorcery accusation-related violence. In 2010, the Buka Hospital Chief Executive is reported to have 'raised serious concerns on the increasing number of patients admitted to the hospital from sorcery related violence. He said the number is increasing every week' (Post Courier, Thursday, 28 October 2010). These reports make repeated reference to: youths carrying out the violence; its public nature and the fact it is carried out by members of their communities; the police being unable to do much; and assertions by those involved in the violence that it is legitimate. For instance, in 2011 a Police Station Commander is reported to have said: 'We are talking to these people but we can't do arrests because people are not coming out to assist us as they are saying it is their right to do this and that, including murder of people' (Post Courier, 26 April 2011: 4). A 2010 article reports: 'Yesterday, a report received from Taiof Island stated that a father was nearly bashed to death along with his son over allegations of sorcery after a meeting with the community. A meeting was held to get the alleged sorcerer to own up to his activities. Furious with the outcome, the youths chased the victim's son away and bashed his father'.

The high levels of sorcery accusation-related violence were supported by interviews conducted in 2017 with 27 interviewees. These included accounts of a man voluntarily imprisoning himself in a local police holding cell for eight months out of fear for his life and two young men who applied to the District Court for restraining orders to stop people trying to harm them. Police at one of the three police posts reported that about five people per year seek refuge from threats of violence resulting from sorcery accusations. The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture also noted this when he visited Bougainville in 2010, observing, 'the police of Arawa had not been investigating [sorcery] cases in the villages with the justification that "there are too many cases in the communities" and not enough resources' (UN Human Rights Council 2011: 39). The manager of a women's refuge stated their safe houses were often filled with victims of sorcery accusations, although not designed with such a victim group in mind. The head of the largest NGO in Bougainville stated: 'Now in our other projects we are discovering this [sorcery accusation related violence] is all over the place in Bougainville' [BV1726].

These levels of violence represent a significant new dimension to the finding from Braithwaite and D'Costa's (2018) literature review that cascades to criminal violence after wars often kill more people than the numbers directly killed in the peak years of the war. This new dimension is consistent with the classic study by Archer and Gartner (1984) finding that homicide rates increased post-war after both large and small wars (see also Stamatel and Romans 2018).

*Links between the Conflict and contemporary sorcery accusation-related violence*

The gaps in the historical record outlined above, as well as the fragmented nature of written and oral evidence, mean that it is not possible to satisfactorily use causal tracing

or engage in a counterfactual analysis of the relationship between the Conflict and sorcery accusation-related violence. However, it is possible to identify three clear links between the Conflict and the situation today, strongly suggesting causality.

The first link concerns changes in the extent and public nature of violence. In addition to the highly elevated levels of violence against accused sorcerers today as opposed to the accounts of pre-Conflict, the violence is now public and put on display rather than hidden from the gaze of others. For instance, a few months before fieldwork for this paper, three men were accused of sorcery and shot in broad daylight, their bodies lined up on the roadside for everyone to see [BV1708]. Many interviewees stressed that sorcery *per se* was not new for Bougainville, but the violence against those accused, particularly the sadistic public violence, *was* new: 'Sorcery is not a new word for us here in Melanesia. It is a word from our traditional system or language that has been there since time immemorial. But it was not used or people were not harmed like they are now' [BV1720]. Another stated: 'In our society you didn't go and kill sorcerers in front of everybody, if people were going to murder sorcerers it was a hidden thing . . . This business here it is happening in public' [BV1703]. Others observed that before the Conflict they had sorcery but not killing, people kept suspicions inside their heads. Although public violence is present in sorcery accusation-related violence in other parts of PNG, such as the Highlands (see Forsyth and Eves 2015), and indeed in many instances of historical and contemporary lynching worldwide, the trajectory the forms of violence have taken, from ritualized and secret to public and uncontrolled, is of new significance. A village court magistrate stated: 'We have identified this problem as going back to the Crisis' and explained that children growing up during these times absorbed the idea of resistance to authority ('*fasin blong bighed*') and preferred violence ahead of talking ('*fasin blong faitim man olbaot*') [BV1725]. This direct link from the war supports Bonger's (1936) argument that war zones habituate youth to a 'spirit of violence'. The techniques used for torturing those accused of sorcery today are also notably similar to techniques introduced into Bougainville by the PNGDF (Amnesty International 1993). Overall, this first link can be explained through the theory of habituation to violence and modelling of 'violent imaginaries' proposed by Braithwaite and D'Costa (2018). It shows a cascade of violence from torture in wartime interrogation to torture in the context of sorcery accusations in peacetime.

The second link between the Conflict and sorcery accusation-related violence today is the way in which explicit legitimization of violence against accused sorcerers during the Conflict has continued for decades post-Conflict. This supports Archer and Gartner's (1984) theory that a state's legitimation of violence during war increases society's tolerance for it afterwards. Interviewees repeatedly referenced Francis Ona's standing order and the BRA's (and others') subsequent violence against, and killing of, those suspected of sorcery to explain contemporary violence. One interviewee stated that this violence came in '[s]traight after they signed the Ceasefire, that is the time the BRA started to kill the sorcerers. They were the first ones who started this. They just got them out of their houses and shot them with guns. . . After that the villagers started accusing the new ones again' [BV1710]. A prominent and widely respected peace advocate reflected:

In Bougainville when I was growing up there was talk of sorcery and people knew who was the sorcerer in the village but in the past it was not a common practice for people to kill a sorcerer. . . But . . .

at the very start of the Crisis, 1988, 1989, 1990, just after the blockade, there was a general command sent out by the BRA for sorcerers to be killed . . . [B]ecause that has not been corrected, people in Bougainville largely practice the killing of sorcerers or people they believe to be sorcerers. [BV1720]

A prominent woman leader stated: 'Before the Bougainville Crisis it was a problem but it was not that big. [During the Conflict] the young men went back to our culture to find ways they could put a stop to the PNGDF using magic [against a PNGDF that indeed proved to be fearful of that magic], so that was revived at that time . . . During peace these things were not given back' [BV1909]. This is reinforced by Oppermann (2016: 192) who argues: 'With peace, the justification for this type [warfare sorcery] of sorcery ended – yet magic charms have been retained long after the conflict, and speculation is rife that they are traded in a black market'.

Other interviewees suggested that aside from the 'standing order', the BRA's alternating recognition of sorcery during the Conflict as both a potential tool in its struggle, and sorcerers as a populist target, further reinforced the necessity to act violently against sorcerers. One interviewee stated: 'Given the experience from the Crisis years people now know that there are sorcerers around and that they are powerful. This is the reason for the many sorcery accusations today'.

The historical relationship between the BRA and sorcery accusation-related violence in Bougainville today has been suggested to impose some level of responsibility on, and to require a response from, the BRA leadership. A central figure in Bougainville peace-making stated: 'I had talked to responsible people in the ABG and the BRA . . . they are aware . . . that they need to somehow recall or correct that; if they send out a general statement for people to stop that it would be better' [BV1720]. Other interviewees used the language of weapons control to discuss what should have occurred: 'The weapons disposal after the crisis should also have included these weapons of the sorcerers, but unfortunately, this did not happen. That was a mistake' [BV1711].

Very recently there are indications that such a responsibility has been acknowledged and is started to be acted upon, with positive impact. In March 2018 one of our local researchers involved in the study reported that sorcery accusation-related violence had recently been minimized in the South Nasioi area, once a hotspot of sorcery accusation-related killings in Bougainville. She states:

A major reason why this is so is because the Ex-Combatants (BRA) from these communities led by their Commanders have taken on themselves the tasks of visiting every community and villages and marketplaces and carry out awareness on SARV [sorcery accusation related violence]. . . One main reason for doing this is because of the upcoming referendum and secondly because they want to undo the general command that was ordered to them by the BRA hierarchy in the 1990s to kill all sorcerers. The ex-combatants see that too many unnecessary killings have greatly disrupted peace and order in the communities.

A third direct link between the experiences of the Conflict and today are the cycles of sorcery accusation-related violence and payback accusations established during the Conflict that have since continued. One interviewee stated that he knows of ten people from his area who have had their heads chopped off, either as payback for previous deaths or as new suspects of sorcery accusations, between 1989 (when they were taken from their homes and put into PNGDF 'care centres') until 2013. He had heard of many other cases, including recent ones. In one family, the father was beheaded during the

Conflict, and his sons killed the perpetrators in payback. All the males in both families have subsequently died in cycles of payback [BV1727]. Gartner and Kennedy (2018) identify revenge for suffering and losses experienced during war as a significant causal factor in peacetime violence in many parts of the world, noting it is often enabled by the absence of strong public security mechanisms.

These three links support legitimization theory, the modelling of violent imaginaries and the role of revenge as explanatory of war's reach into peacetime. However, continuation of the impact of the violent imaginaries for such long duration post-war requires further explanation, recognizing post-war conditions as also causative, as argued by Gartner and Kennedy (2018). Bougainville's state infrastructure was almost completely destroyed during the Conflict and its governance and administrative structures, including its justice, policing, educational and health systems, have not been successfully rebuilt. All police officers are unarmed as a condition of the peace accords, making for a serious imbalance of power between them and villagers, contributing to the widespread impunity enjoyed by perpetrators of sorcery accusation-related violence. Our research has been unable to locate a single reported successful prosecution of sorcery accusation-related violence in Bougainville.[11] The prevalence of arms left over from the war is a further contributing factor, although much of the violence against accused sorcerers involves machetes as well as guns.

Sorcery discourse and practices during the war, and the narratives circulated subsequently, further reinforce sorcery as an explanatory tool for sickness, death and misfortune today. Sorcery beliefs had been diminishing before the Conflict, discouraged both by the colonial government and higher levels of healthcare and education. Post-Conflict, the education and health systems have not been restored to pre-Conflict levels, a result of which has people seeking to identify *who* rather than *what* is responsible for death and disease, leading to the common utterance heard during fieldwork: 'there is no such thing as a natural death'. This leads to blaming sickness and death on deliberate supernatural attack, therefore legitimating violence against accused sorcerers. Further exacerbating this ontological position is the disruption in education and culture for the 'lost generation' of children who were school-aged during the Conflict and current poor school attendance.[12]

Anomie is the final relevant post-war factor aiding the high levels of violence manifested today. The link between anarchy, violence, anomie and sorcery accusations has been identified elsewhere (e.g. Broadhurst *et al.* 2015: 277–8). In the context of Cambodia, Zucker (2011: 92) argues:

in an atmosphere of flux and chaos, categories were being restored and social order buttressed by labelling people as traitors or sorcerers. These accusations echo other societies where strong links between charges of sorcery and radical social change have been identified . . . accusations of traitorous activity and sorcery seem to provide a logic to the chaos of war and to the often mystifying sources of modern globalised products and ideas.

In Bougainville, anomie is both caused by, and manifested in, a breakdown in the authority of customary institutions, with evident consequences for sorcery accusations

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[11]See also footnote 9.
[12]Even in 2013 it was found that one-third of school-age children were not attending school (Chand 2013: 1).

and related violence. Unlike in past sorcery-related violence—where violence often occurred in pursuit of a leader's order or after following through a customary process to test the validity of the accusation—today it mostly involves young men engaging in vigilante violence. Anomie also manifests in Bougainville as ontological confusion whereby customary, Christian and imported 'Western' explanatory frameworks about disease, death, good and evil all jostle for purchase in the minds of a population undergoing rapid social change. In the context of weak state institutions and weakened customary and religious institutions, there are few restraining forces on the resort to violence to attempt to quench fears of, or calculated attacks on, those accused of sorcery.[13] Equally importantly, there are few voices of certainty and authority that are speaking out to reassure the population that sorcery is not a force to be feared, as even many leaders have seeds of doubt in their own minds.

### *Conclusion*

This paper has provided a detailed empirical account of the interconnections between wartime experiences of violence and post-war violence through a focus on a single form of violence, namely that directed against those accused of practising sorcery. It argues that no single theory can explain and predict connections between violence in war and in peace, but that multiple factors during both war and post-war interrelate in ways that lead to ongoing violence. In particular, it shows how in Bougainville, the cascading of violence from war to peace resulted from a combination of modelling of 'violent imaginaries,' legitimation of violence against sorcerers during war through explicit authorization of the BRA leadership *and* through failures of peacetime institutions to properly re-establish basic services such as justice, policing, health and education. The war gave new credibility to sorcery-based explanations of death and disease, leading to ongoing high levels of spiritual and physical insecurity (Ashforth 2010) and anomie, which in turn lead to the public condoning of sorcery accusation-related violence. This identification of the significance of ontological positioning in explaining continued violence in peacetime is an important new contribution to the scholarship on how legitimacy and learning operates. It complements work such as Steenkamp's framework of a culture of violence (2005; 2011), which argues that protracted violent conflict creates a socially permissive environment in which violence can continue even after peace accords are signed.

The nature of sorcery beliefs and practices, notably their ability to inspire terror and insecurity, make them potentially powerful vectors for cascading violence towards war, and for continuing violence during peace. This finding underscores the importance of differentiating between various types of violence when seeking to understand connections between violence in war and violence in peace (see also Binford 2002).

Looking forward, the mechanisms linking the Conflict and sorcery accusation-related violence provide important indications about how to uncouple the legitimation of wartime forms of violence during peace. A number of interviewees made calls for 'disarmament' of supernatural weapons in the same way there had been disarmament

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[13]The relationship between worldviews and behaviour in relation to sorcery accusations and related violence is the subject of ongoing research.

of tangible weapons. Such calls highlight the need for actions that actively seek to: (1) undercut any veneer of legitimacy that sorcery accusation-related violence may have developed; (2) make engaging in such practices shameful; and (3) model peaceful mechanisms for dealing with concerns about sorcery within communities. As such, this paper contributes to the debates on the moral responsibility of leaders post-war to address ongoing consequences of war, and to find ways to 'disconnect' the positive values associated with violence used during war (Jamieson 2014). Where supernatural beliefs inform society, such as in Bougainville, responsibility for achieving this disconnection cannot be shouldered by the state alone but requires active participation of civil society, churches and ex-combatants themselves, along with evident disarmament of magical as well as physical weapons of war.

To conclude, it is critical that criminologists, peacebuilders, war strategists and others identify *all* the sources of insecurity in a particular population. This may include intangible sources, such as magic, not immediately apparent from a secular or Western perspective and routinely disregarded in assessment of causes of conflict and violence (e.g. United Nations, World Bank 2018). In countries such as PNG, with traditions of sorcery beliefs and practices, this will necessitate incorporating a 'sorcery lens' into analysis of war, peace, insecurity and violence. Developing this lens will require explicit attention to extending the standard criminological data sources and tools that are currently blind to the existence of these forms of insecurity and triggers of violence. As shown above, this can be done through developing networks of local researchers who can document sorcery accusations and related violence in their community, and also through drawing on semi-structured interviews, newspaper reports and ethnographic literature. Failure to develop a 'sorcery lens' before or during war may result in missed opportunities to douse sources of local conflict that can escalate to more widespread conflicts. Failure to develop one after war risks allowing the beliefs and the violence associated with sorcery fears and beliefs to fester, catalyze retaliatory violence and undermine the social capital so critical in building and cementing peace.

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