

7. Strengthening the voices of human rights defenders in the media

A case study on addressing sorcery accusation-related violence in Papua New Guinea

Abstract: Civil society and human rights defenders in Papua New Guinea have played an important role in bringing about legislative changes with regard to domestic and sorcery accusation related violence in recent years. Their insights in understanding how to address complex issues at the community level when accusations occur have also proven crucial to keeping people safe and providing processes to hold perpetrators accountable. However, the mainstream media has rarely reported on their stories and included their voices in the reporting of sorcery accusation related violence. They have focused on exposing the problem, often by showcasing the horrific nature of some of the crimes related to accusations, instead of further investigating possible solutions. In this article we explore our work with human rights defenders to capture their experiences around sorcery accusations and violence and provide ways to bring their stories into the mainstream media. In particular, we explore questions around the ethics of representation when it comes to reporting human rights abuses and violence and suggest alternative ways of reporting.

Keywords: community media, human rights, media ethics, Papua New Guinea, sorcery

VERENA THOMAS

JACKIE KAULI

Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane

Introduction

IN 2013, international media caused an outcry about sorcery accusations happening in Papua New Guinea (PNG). The images of the public burning of Keparri Leniata went around the world. Subsequently, international agencies and local civil society groups put pressure on the PNG government to

adjust legislation related to sorcery accusation and domestic violence. Between 2013 and 2016, the strong movement from civil society to demand legislative changes that would ensure people's safety and rights (Biersack, Jolly, & Macintyre, 2016) was successful and PNG significantly modified laws connected with domestic violence and the protection of victims of sorcery accusations. As the government continues to face challenges with enforcing the laws, most of the work at the community level continues to be supported by human rights defenders (HRDs) and civil society organisations (UNDP & PNG Department of Community Development and Religion, 2016).

While news media have drawn attention to reported cases of violence, the representation of the issue of sorcery accusations has often failed to provide an indepth understanding of how these cases might be addressed at the community level. Our research revealed, for example, that the voices of HRDs and civil society groups are often missing in national PNG news media representations about reported cases of violence. Given the prominent roles of HRDs in addressing cases in their community, their knowledge and strategies can bring further understandings to the issue. In addition, the approaches taken by news media, both national and international, raise questions about the ethics of representation because news media representations often focus on the horrific nature of the crime, and on victims, instead of investigating potential solutions to the problem. In a country that presents challenges in responding to the issue of sorcery accusation related violence (also referred to as SARV) through legal and state interventions, the media can play a crucial role in supporting education and encouraging positive social change.

This article shares the approaches developed in collaboration with HRDs under the *Yumi Sanap Strong* (Let's Stand Strong Together) initiative, which aims to co-design communication strategies to address sorcery accusation related violence in PNG. Through digital storytelling and continued advocacy at community and national events, stories of change by HRDs were brought to the media's attention. This included directly working with media staff, and strengthening the capacity of HRDs to produce their own stories. We argue that stories from HRDs and community change makers in mainstream media can contribute to shifting audiences' perspectives about human rights and violations related to sorcery accusations. As our case study demonstrates, strategies for bringing such community media and mainstream media closer together can further support human rights advocacy work in the Pacific.

Sorcery accusations in PNG

Sorcery and witchcraft beliefs are part of the fabric of life in PNG. Beliefs maintain a spiritual system embedded in the social relations of people and communities, and are often used to explain unexpected incidents within a community.

Sorcery accusations occur when these social relations break down and people are targeted as having caused the harm the community is experiencing. There have been significant changes over the past decades, with different regions in PNG seeing variations in the way sorcery accusations manifest in communities.

The underlying causes of contemporary sorcery accusations and related violence in PNG vary significantly. In recent years, sorcery accusations can be attributed to being motivated by personal gains and broader inequalities within society. It has been documented that predominantly vulnerable people with limited support systems in their communities become targets of accusations. While accusations are often triggered by an unexplained death in the community, accusations often re-enforce existing disputes or structural inequalities (Statement on Sorcery-related Killings and Impunity in Papua New Guinea, 2013; Eves & Forsyth, 2015). Perpetrators of violence usually act in groups and are often known to those being accused as they are often from the same community (Thomas et al., 2017). Because of these factors, the impunity of perpetrators remains a challenge in addressing the issue of violence in cases of sorcery accusations.

A common interpretation, often supported by international media reports, is that sorcery accusations happen due to a ‘primitive’ cultural belief system, and that ‘modern’ structures offer the solution to the issue. Lawrence (2015) argues that culture and modernisation should not be seen as opposites, but, rather, as integrated with each other. And Stewart and Strathern (2003) regard contemporary sorcery and witchcraft ideas as ways of ‘conceptualising, coping with, and criticising the very “modernity” that was supposed to have done away with them’ (p. 5). This complex link has presented challenges when it comes to media representations of sorcery accusations and related violence because a deeper understanding of the underlying causes is often required. At the beginning of our project in 2016, news media predominantly covered sensationalist accounts focusing on the horrific nature of the crimes related to accusations, including showing the scarred bodies of female victims (Evenhuis, 2015).

The joint movement by civil society groups to address violence related to sorcery accusations in PNG led to legislative changes, including the repeal of the *Sorcery Act* in 2013, and the development of the SARV National Action Plan (Chandler, 2013; Thousands attend anti-violence protest in PNG, 2013). The plan identifies the need for a multiplicity of stakeholders to work together, including developing effective advocacy strategies. Calls have been made to support the media to strengthen reporting and investigations about sorcery accusation related violence, and improve representations of those marginalised by such violence (Rooney, 2017). The posting of violent incidents on social media to alert the police has also simultaneously caused discussion about the role of social media in representing marginal voices and raised issues about the ethics of posting images of human rights violations. The complexity of incidents of

sorcery accusations, the considerable risk that people who stand up against it put themselves in, and the limited funding for investigative reporting all play a role in the way sorcery accusation related violence has been reported in the media. Nevertheless, but also because of this, the representations in the media of violence related to human rights abuses need to be examined. This further aligns with previous propositions of a deliberative journalism or development journalism that seeks not only to highlight or expose a problem in the media, but also to investigate possible solutions to the issue (Robie, 2013; Romano, 2010). There is a need for alternative forms of representation that can, on one hand, support journalists, and on the other hand, strengthen the depth of reporting on the issue.

Representation of violence and ethics in human rights reporting

The media outcry of 2013 about sorcery accusation related violence in PNG was largely based on a shock effect: photos of a body burned alive in public with bystanders surrounding the event were publicised through global media. There has been much discussion about representations of violence in the media and how exposure to such representations may affect behavioural patterns, particularly among children. It has been argued that exposure to violent media increases the probability of aggressive and violent behaviour among audiences (Bushman & Anderson, 2015, p. 1818). However, this debate is not the focus of this article. Instead, we ask questions about the ethics of such representations, the consequences for individual victims whose stories are shared and the consequences for their families, and the potential of victims' stories to encourage positive social change among audiences.

Thomas (2018) discusses harm in journalism and reflects on codes of ethics. He acknowledges the dilemma that journalists might face in highlighting issues, and agrees with Bivins that, in some cases, 'harm is either a necessary byproduct [of journalism] or literally unavoidable' (as cited in Thomas, 2018, p. 223). When it comes to human rights abuses, it is journalists' role on the one hand to expose harm; however, on the other hand, they must manage and mitigate the risk of causing harm to those who might be the victims of such human rights abuses. Even more challenging are these considerations in an increasingly under-resourced media environment, and an environment in which codes of ethics and ethics of representation are further blurred through social media engagements and citizen journalism. In this scenario, 'what are the possibilities for robust ethical debate about harm or for the transmission of values through moral exemplars?' (Thomas, 2018, p. 15). One of the key challenges is to:

... create and share social justice and human rights material in a manner that balances the right to privacy (and the integrity of the person) with the right to freedom of expression—balancing the urge to expose human

rights violations with a consideration of the very real dangers to human rights defenders and victims or survivors. (Gregory, 2010, p. 14)

Those who view violence through the media could potentially become more aggressive, but one needs to also consider the potential trauma that viewing might cause to them, in particular for younger audiences and those who have experienced similar forms of violence themselves. In addition, we need to consider the representation of the incident and the community it took place in, as well as the people who might be identified in the images. There are therefore several considerations when wanting to expose human rights issues and violations. Firstly, how are audiences affected by exposure to the media representations of violence? Secondly, how are the people in the images and stories represented, whether they are victims or survivors or by-standers? And thirdly, does this kind of representation make media audiences into by-standers when they are watching or seeing an act of violence but are essentially not interfering or might not have any means to act?

With reference to media in PNG, and more broadly Melanesia, such debates must also be seen within the historical and cultural contexts because media representations and ethics operate at the individual, group and national levels. Peace journalism advocates have criticised the way that mainstream minority-world journalism often reports only on the subject and the individuals involved, instead of also recognising the relational and structural issues bound up in conflicts (Shaw, 2011). Indeed, the human rights discourse has promoted an individual rights-based approach that has been pointed out as limiting in understanding the relational and customary responsibilities that need to be contextualised within PNG (Evenhuis, 2015; Lawrence, 2015). Considering these aspects could promote a more sustained practice of development journalism that seeks to identify solutions and provide further education to readers and audiences.

Approach of the project

At the beginning of the project, a media content analysis was undertaken to understand the representation of sorcery accusation related violence in the PNG media during 2016. The content analysis was guided by searching for the words 'sorcery' and/or 'witchcraft' in news media. While this involved looking broadly and widely at both national and international media, a systematic review of newspaper articles from 2016 in the two main national PNG daily newspapers, *The National* and the *Post-Courier*, was undertaken. This content analysis served as foundational research for the project to better understand the narratives and those quoted by the national media.

As a second step, the project worked closely with civil society groups and government agencies. Key to the approach was working with four community-

based partners in four different provinces in PNG via creative workshops. The partner organisations were Kup Women for Peace (Simbu), Kafe Urban Settlers Women's Association (EHP), Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation (Bougainville) and Kedu Seif Haus (Milne Bay). The creative storytelling workshops were focused on better understanding community narratives. The creative workshops and engagement followed a relational approach and used creative means, in our case photography and digital storytelling, to better understand the causes, impacts and solutions to sorcery accusations and violence. As Lambert and Hessler (2018) write, storytelling provides multiple benefits, including providing:

a learning modality through memory, as a way to address our connection to the changing world around us, as a form of reflection against the flood of ubiquitous access to infinite information, as the vehicle to encourage our social agency, and, finally, as a process by which we best make sense of our lives and our identity. (Lambert & Hessler, p. 13)

That way, according to Lambert and Hessler (2018), we do not remove the 'messiness of living', but rather engage in it, embracing ambiguities, contradictions and lived experiences. We hoped to gain a better understanding of the complexities and nuances of sorcery accusations, while, at the same time, documenting the solutions that HRDs had developed at the community level. This method was both a research process for us to better understand various cases of sorcery accusation and a reflection process for participants (see Spurgeon & Burgess, 2015). The process of storytelling gives voice to the experiences of HRDs and facilitates the sharing of these narratives, so that they may have an impact on other people. An important consideration of the process of sharing stories is that of consent, which we discuss further in this article.

The workshops produced 41 digital stories, each between 3 and 6 minutes in duration. These digital stories served as a basis for a thematic analysis. This then led to a continuation of participatory action research and, as stories were shared (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014), iteratively providing evidence and feedback for the development of communication strategies to address sorcery accusation related violence. More than 100 screenings of digital stories were documented and audience feedback collected, and our work with media and journalists was monitored to document how the approach provided alternative ways to represent sorcery accusations and violence.

Print media content analysis

In our newspaper analysis in 2016, we found 118 articles that included the word sorcery or witchcraft (63 articles in the *Post-Courier* and 55 articles in *The National*). We coded these articles into three categories: incidents, comments/

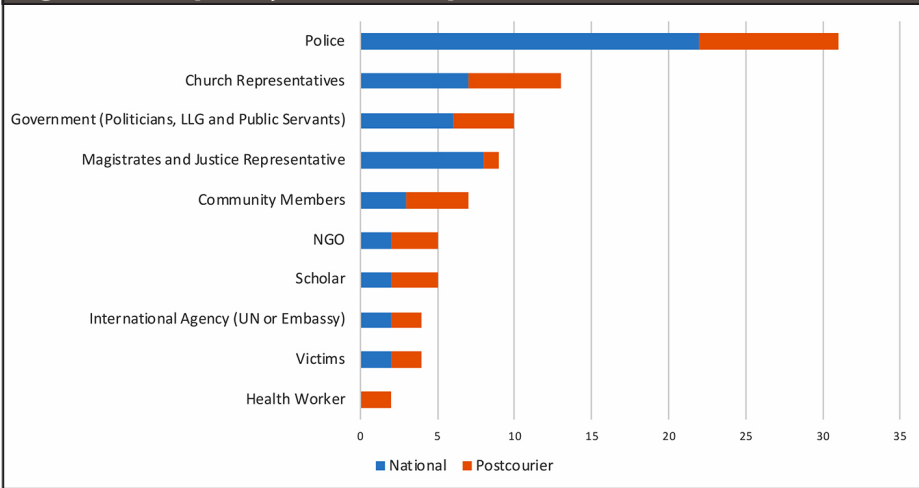
analysis and mentions. It is not our intention here to compare the two national newspapers in their reporting, but to share common findings about the reporting on sorcery accusation related violence in PNG print media.

From this analysis, we found that while details were made available about the victims’ ordeals, there was limited investigation about the cause of accusations or the mechanisms inside the communities that allowed it to happen. The topic of fear and threat underlying the communities’ actions and reactions was mentioned occasionally, but not analysed in depth. No deeper understandings of incidents were provided, nor follow up of the cases and initiatives. In our sample, reporting on sorcery related violence appeared to occur haphazardly, following access to press releases rather than proactive investigation.

Press releases by the government regarding legal court decisions appeared regularly in the two newspapers. Names of senior officials from the Department for Community Development came up repeatedly in relation to sorcery and gender-based violence (GBV), whether in direct or indirect connection with the issue. However, more thorough—educational—explanations about the actual content of the laws and their implications were encountered on only one occasion.

The main source of information concerning sorcery related violence appears to be the police, whether from general monthly reports or ad hoc ones (Figure 1). A number of senior policemen—who had developed media profiles by being vocal and, in one case at least, by being practically committed to the ‘fight against sorcery related violence’—were quoted as calling for support and cooperation from the government and communities, sometimes despite threats to their personal safety.

Figure 1: Frequency of sources quoted in PNG articles, 2016



Note: Quantitative representation of sources used in print media from the two national newspapers, *The National* and *Post-Courier* in 2016

Victims' voices were reported less frequently in the sample articles. When their voices were reported, the journalists reported the relevant details in a context that usually contained no police quotes; for instance, the link between victims' ordeals and perpetrators' substance abuse. On the level of practical initiatives, churches' voices were reported, and churches expressed their commitment to addressing the issue. Grassroots initiatives were hardly reported. On the rare occasions that grassroots voices were reported, there was little follow up or documentation of the work happening inside communities to reduce violence.

The choice of language used in the articles highlighted several challenges. The victims and the perpetrators were often described by words that illustrated their proximity inside the community—whether using kinship or community relationship terms. This choice of words thereby emphasised further the predicament and isolation of the victims, particularly within the context of tight communities in remote areas. Repeated allusions to 'jungle justice' (Mondo, 2016), paired with senior policemen and church officials' calls for cooperation, underline the general perception from the articles that the government's efforts on a legal level are not sufficiently supported on a practical level. This added to documenting the perpetrators' feeling of impunity and the victims' and their defenders' feelings of helplessness.

In our 2016 analysis, we also found confusion around the 2013 repeal of the *Sorcery Act 1971*, legislation that provided the possibility of justifying violence by referencing sorcery. There was a lack of critical engagement in relation to leaders wanting to see the law re-instated because 'sorcery was a criminal offence' (Tarawa, 2016). There was confusion about the distinction between the belief system and the violence that occurs with accusations, as well as re-enforcing the idea that there are no laws in place to deal with violence associated with sorcery accusations (Sirias, 2016). There was a clear need for clarifications and clear messages about the existing laws by which acts of harm and violence are considered offences.

Engagement in creative workshops and key narratives emerging

In the workshop, we were interested in the personal experiences of HRDs and how they worked within their community networks to address issues of violence and sorcery accusations. Crucial to their stories were their own personal experiences of violence and their motivations to create change. The HRDs explored the causes of accusations, hinting at cultural, social and structural impediments that triggered violence.

There were several triggers for the violence mentioned. For example, in the case of Seho Dubai from Eastern Highlands Province, sorcery related violence was triggered when a community tried to come to terms with the death of a family member:

I was in my village when a close member of my family died ... [M]y family said that I took my brother's life using sorcery: 'You have to leave this place before Sunday, when we bury him on Sunday.' When I heard this, I knew something bad would happen ... I left the village with my two brothers and three children. I left my wife and other children behind. Later, we heard that our houses were burnt down and our properties were destroyed.

The accusations towards Seho's family were partly motivated by community members wanting to obtain his land. Other issues explored in the stories included jealousy towards those who were doing well in society. At the same time, the stories highlighted the vulnerabilities of those who were accused. In Leah's case in the Simbu Province, the label of '*sanguma*' (common word for sorcerer or witch in PNG) was traumatising:

I was worried that all the students [had] heard about me being named a sorcerer. And this name is not a good name. Especially in the highlands, this name gives a bad image to someone. I thought to myself that, if I live, everyone [had already] heard about it, so later they will still call me that name. I thought of killing myself.

Leah's story weaves in the complex relationships within her family and her lack of social security within her own family. In the highlands region, women in particular are vulnerable. Their vulnerability is reflected in those who are accused but also those who try to stand up to perpetrators. As Jacobeth Bapka shares:

At about 7pm the [accused] women escaped and came to my house to seek help. The mob came and surrounded my house ... I stood by the door with my seven-months-old baby ... I plead[ed] for them to go back and leave the women alone and talk to [them] in the morning.

JACOBETH BAPKA



A man died in the community and two women were accused of killing him.

I told the police that we have an issue and the police came. They came but they were late. They had maimed the women.

When the police arrived all the men left, it was just us women who were there. We helped them bring the women to the police car.

One of the injured women heard my voice, and she said: "Please look after my kids!"

Jacobeth Bapka

Figure 2: Excerpt from Jacobeth Bapka's story expressing the impact of sorcery accusations on children.

The mob of young men came and took the women, so Jacobeth was powerless to help the women. The accused women had children but no other family to support them and stand up for them.

The stories by HRDs demonstrated the impact of the violence within their communities and the trauma that many of them and others had experienced. Storytelling became a process that allowed them to share and reflect on their experiences and develop a collective strength. The HRDs harnessed these lived experiences and curated them into a repertoire of narratives that could be shared with communities for reflections. Supported by photographs that used metaphors, the stories trigger emotional responses to the impacts of violence, instead of showcasing horrific incidents. This is a kind of creativity that Romano (2010) refers to in her discussion of a deliberative journalism, one that ‘engage[s] all verbal and nonverbal elements that can stimulate a sense of connection and understanding among audiences’ (p. 234). The storytelling and photographs provided a way for us to explore these various layers of emotions and connections and discuss them collectively.

The HRDs are a network of partners across the highlands of PNG who have developed solutions to addressing various forms of human rights abuses and violence in communities. They are actively cultivating relationships with key institutions to garner support from them. In Goroka, for example, Eriko Fufurefa, Director of Kafe Urban Settlers’ Women’s Association, works with Judy Girua, Police Sargeant at the Family Sexual Violence Unit, to address violence against women. Judy’s witnessing of an event motivated her decision to do more:

In 2012, while working, I received a report from Banana Block that two women were accused of sorcery and tortured. I wanted to see for myself what had happened. The two women were seriously injured ... From there, I came up with the idea to create an office to assist women and children who are being accused of sorcery. I partnered with Kafe Women’s Association. We came together with ideas on how to work best, so we work in partnership and created a strong network.

There are state and local interventions that the HRDs draw on to address the extent of violence in their communities. A key strategy that HRDs use is stories of transformation with strong personal motivation for change. Uмба Peter’s story is one such example:

I have been involved in sorcery accusations, as a perpetrator. One day, they accused my auntie of killing her own brother using sorcery. My mother and I went to check on her—they had tied her hands and legs with barbed wire. When my auntie saw me, she called out my name: ‘Uмба!’ I turned around and we saw each other, our eyes met. I felt so sorry, I lost all my strength, my heart melted. That was a turning point for me.

Umba further shared how he became an advocate speaking out against sorcery accusations. The collection of digital stories show courageous individuals motivated to make communities safer. A key component of their own experiences is their feeling of empathy, which audiences experience when hearing the HRDs' stories (Manney, 2008). The HRDs' advocacy networks provided a platform to amplify their existing efforts, instead of focusing on 'voiceless' victims. The HRDs were already established as change agents, and they wanted to engage with the media to strengthen their advocacy work.

Bringing the voices of HRDs into the media

Once the stories were produced, we collectively created *Yumi Sanap Strong* as a combined initiative among the participating organisations. Launch events to showcase the digital stories were held in the different provinces, and HRDs themselves have been using the digital stories for their advocacy in communities and with stakeholders. In addition, the digital stories were distributed via social media and a website was created.¹ We facilitated sessions in which we brought HRDs and journalists together.

From the community screenings, feedback demonstrated how audiences were affected by the viewing of the stories. They felt angry, worried and sorry for innocent people who had been accused. The screenings generated points of reflection for individuals identifying with the stories of the HRDs:

It makes me feel ashamed of the violence that I have caused over the years. I am very regretful when I see all these pictures. The people I caused harm to, have not come back to tell me such [a] thing and the ordeal they have gone through, but they have gone through the same situation. (Male, 45)

Through facilitated screenings by HRDs themselves, this provided opportunities to discuss possible actions and opportunities for change:

Yes, before I support[ed] using the word '*sanguma*', but [after] seeing children impacted, I don't know now. I have children and I think children have a long life ahead of them and we should protect them. Their lives are important, and they are the future of our community. (Male, 52)²

Yes, I will try to help and educate people in my community to understand and I will explain things, so people can understand. (Female, 34)³

At the same time, the HRDs needed to manage challenging discussions at the screenings and manage the risk and potential existing conflicts, with survivors of violence and perpetrators among the audience. The HRDs' digital stories triggered reflections and dialogue that unpacked and reflected on what was happening in people's communities and created empathy among audiences.

Audiences related to the stories because they focused on the impact of storytelling as a shared human and lived experience.

While the value of community media and storytelling has been highlighted in various accounts (Kidd, Rodriguez, & Stein, 2009), we see the potential for community media to link with news media and support journalists with their reporting. For this reason, we invited journalists to attend events and join discussions with HRDs about the representation of sorcery accusation related violence, with the aim of highlighting solutions and the active work that has been happening to address this violence.

One key theme that emerged from bringing both groups together was a shared appreciation for each other’s work and what they could learn from each other:

As a human rights defender, I [had] the opportunity to meet and connect with the media personnel and share my challenges. And [now I] also know the media team[‘s] challenges and [can help to] find solutions for the challenges. (HRD workshop participant, Port Moresby, 2018)



Figure 3: Umba Peter’s story shared in the *National* newspaper (Gwangilo, 2017).

Very timely. The journos need to know how to report on the issue of SARV well. (Journalist, workshop participant, Port Moresby, 2018)

A key challenge in reporting on GBV and sorcery related violence for journalists is their limited understanding about the issues; therefore, at the workshop, we provided an introductory insight to GBV and sorcery related violence. One of the objectives of the workshop was also to remind journalists of the role they played in terms of representation. One journalist commented on the importance of this:

The media needs to report well, so the nation can understand the full extent of the issue. And also, so the government can do policy changes to the issue before us ... [and] more stakeholders come on board to address this issue, like the media. (Journalist, workshop participant, Port Moresby, 2018)

Based on the workshop evaluations, both HRDs and the media personnel would like more collaborative, interactive workshops such as the one we held. There was a general consensus that collaboration and information sharing was a key component to contribute to addressing sorcery accusations and GBV. But, to do this, one participant expressed the need to

... participate in combined workshops or trainings with government leaders, and organisations, so that they could understand the struggles and obstacles faced by human rights defenders and have access to stories and information surrounding SARV. (HRD workshop participant, Port Moresby, 2018)

After the workshops, journalists were able to write about key characters of these stories. For example, Umba Peter was featured in *The National* newspaper with the headline ‘Torture of aunt turns Umba into human rights defender’ (Gwangilo, 2017). Through connecting with HRDs, the journalists had opportunities to tap into different kinds of stories, many of which demonstrated change and possible solutions, and encouraged individuals and communities to contribute to safer communities. These empathetic and solution-oriented newspaper stories in PNG also informed international media coverage of the issue, with agencies such as the BBC and *The Guardian* exploring the content of the stories, albeit maintaining a focus on the female victim and the scarred female body (Lyons, 2020; Webb, 2018).

Discussion

The ethics of representation

The use of graphic images in reporting sorcery accusation related violence in PNG has raised questions about the ethics of representation and concerns about

the re-victimisation of those who have been represented (see Gregory, 2010, p. 11). To report on those who are already victims of violence in a form that does not give them voice and agency is to further stigmatise them because ‘people lack control over the materials from which they must build their account of themselves, then this represents a deep denial of voice, a type of oppression’ (Couldry, 2015, p. 46). As such, journalists must consider this in their representation of violence and reflect on the benefit of victims’ stories, which, most times, provide little control and agency to the victim to represent themselves.

When discussing the ethics of representation, one of our key foundational concepts when working with HRDs has been an informed and multi-layered consent process. As Gregory (2010) writes, one must consider principles of disclosure, voluntariness, comprehension and competence (p. 12). This means that individuals whose stories are told participate on their own terms, they understand how the material will be used and they have a level of agency to make that decision. Further, we promoted a strategy that develops shared distribution approaches in which those whose stories are told are involved in distributing and sharing them.

The lack of in-depth reporting on the multiple layers of sorcery accusations and possible solutions to the issue, as demonstrated in our media content analysis, has limited the media’s contribution to sustained positive change on the issue. Our work with storytelling and visual images uses a creative approach to consider ways of connecting audiences, so that they understand the impacts of the actions, instead of making audience members into spectators or by-standers of the action. As we have demonstrated, this encourages audiences to reflect and feel empathy for others (Manney, 2008). Finally, by having HRDs take their own photos, we support the idea of contextualised understanding, instead of the focus on victims (or scars on the female body). Community media play a key role in providing a safe space to reflect on impacts and possible solutions.

Role of community and participatory media in addressing sorcery accusations

Community and participatory media can play a key role in addressing social issues in community, and in providing a better understanding to inform news media or commercial media. Core to the idea of community media is the concept of voice: ‘Voice as a social process involves, from the start, both speaking and listening: the building of alternative media is a social application of that principle’ (Couldry, 2015, p. 46). Within such dialogue and exchange of narratives, we are able to better understand contexts and relationships and empathise with others. This process is important to making sense of sorcery accusation related violence within each of the varied contexts that it occurs.

In particular, when we talk about reporting on acts of violence, community media provides a space for lived experiences and the ordinary ways of life and

how people seek to contribute to peacebuilding (Rodriguez, 2011). In addition to journalists being more informed and having access to stories about community solutions to address sorcery accusation related violence, the process of supporting storytelling generated a new “communicative competence” (Couldry, 2015) among the four participating human rights-based organisations and created a better understanding of how they could engage with media personnel in the future. As a collective, then, the HRDs built ‘processes for social, civic and political change, which increase the likelihood of processes of voice being sustained and taken into account in wider public culture and decision-making’ (Couldry, 2015, p. 51).

The strengthening of organisational capacities and partnerships with journalists and media outlets are an important component in a news media landscape that is under-resourced and dominated by top-down news stories. The topic of sorcery accusation related violence provides further challenges to journalists in terms of the risk they might face when reporting certain stories. The HRDs’ understanding of the issue is important in mitigating risk and undertaking ethical reporting.

Pacific community media and human rights reporting

In the case of reporting on sorcery accusations in PNG, we demonstrate what Robie (2013) would call a ‘conventional or Western journalism’, as opposed to the development journalism that is suggested for the South Pacific media to best contribute to social development. Development journalism, according to Robie (2013), includes certain characteristics that we have highlighted through the way we have engaged with HRDs in community and participatory media, including considering the causes of events, providing alternative solutions identified by people and community, and promoting understanding, attitude and behaviour change.

Promoting a Western model in journalism risks not taking into account relationality and context in Melanesia and therefore perpetuating a model of interpretation that regards Melanesian communities as not able to deal with their issues or that misinterprets the social issues they are facing. On a larger level, alternative models of journalism, including storytelling projects, are part of decolonial practices to engage in human rights discourses that provide a strength-based approach that builds on cultural context, instead of seeing these contexts as hindrances to the human rights agenda. Our approach has highlighted a myriad of community solutions by HRDs that have previously been absent from media reports, and this process has harnessed the strength of HRDs’ support networks.

Discussions about human rights reporting have increasingly debated the mechanisms of participatory processes, including processes that use photography (Gormley & Allan, 2019) and use journalists as agents of change (Sampaio-Dias, 2016). However, it has also been pointed out that the realities of day-to-day journalism and capacities need to be considered when suggesting alternative forms

of journalism. Therefore, a model for such journalism might be to encourage partnerships and joint initiatives, such as between HRDs and journalists.

Conclusion

In this article, we have described our approach to supporting media that reflect the complexities and lived experiences of sorcery accusation related violence in PNG. We have asked questions about the representation of violence and re-victimisation of those targeted by the violence. Our approach has provided an alternative way of sharing impactful narratives that build on the strength and bravery of HRDs. We acknowledge that their sharing of stories is not without risk, but our process involved careful considerations of consent. Crucial to the ability of HRDs to expose their stories, however, are the strong support networks they have, which are based on the organisations they work with. Our close collaboration with the community-based organisations was a crucial component for the development and sharing of these stories and lived experiences.

In that process, we have recognised the potential of strengthening organisational capacities to engage with media in a way that reflects their context, relationships and experiences. By supporting local organisations to build up their media capacities, they are in a better position to share their experiences and knowledge with journalists and media outlets, resulting in more contextualised and impactful reporting. This kind of community media, including the telling of stories and the distribution of stories, makes an important contribution to media for social change and reaching communities in PNG. At the same time, this can feed into national and international media representations, promoting more in-depth understandings and solutions to the issue.

Our experiences demonstrate that there are further opportunities to continue bridging communication between journalists and human rights organisations, and providing a platform for people to share their own stories. Not only does this provide content for media outlets, but it also provides spaces for reflection and opportunities for positive change, while acknowledging the relational contexts in the Pacific. Because of this, community media has a key role to play in reporting on and developing solutions to human rights issues in the Pacific.

Notes

1. See www.yumisanapstrong.org
2. Original quote was recorded in Tok Pisin: *Yes, bipo mi save sapatim tok 'sanguma,' tasol bagarap wea ol liklik pikinini kisim, mi no save nau. Mi gat ol liklik pikinini na mi ting olsem ol pikinini igat longpela laif blong ol istap na mipela imas noken bagarapim ol. Laip blong ol important na ol ikarim future blong komuniti raun.* (Male, 52)
3. Original quote was recorded in Tok Pisin: *Yes. Mi bai traim long helpim na educatim ol pipol long peles lo understandim sampla ways na pasin insait lo komuniti na explanim ways bai oli ken understandim.* (Female, 34)

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Dr Verena Thomas is an associate professor and senior research fellow in the Creative Industries Faculty, School of Design, at Queensland University of Technology. Her research fields are primarily in Communication and Social Change, Communication for Development, Arts-based Research, and Visual Methodologies.

verena.thomas@qut.edu.au

Dr Jackie Kauli is a Senior Research Fellow in the Creative Industries Faculty, at Queensland University of Technology. Her work is in the area of Drama and Applied Theatre and its utility in understanding and addressing social issues. She works across Papua New Guinea and Australia.

j.kauli@qut.edu.au

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