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GRAVE MATTERS IN OCEANIA

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# GRAVE BUSINESS IN ENGA

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The Enga people in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea did not always bury their dead in an identifiable grave.<sup>1</sup> Before Australian control and mission influence that began in the late 1940s, bodies of the dead were buried with few markings in a shallow pit far from houses and gardens. Today in the Enga Province, especially along the Highlands Highway, one sees an ever-increasing number of elaborate graves situated in gardens and near houses.

I first came to Enga Province in 1973, as an Anthropology student researching changes in people's religious beliefs and practices. I served there from 1978 to 1988 as a priest. While working in various parts of Papua New Guinea until today, I continue to make frequent visits to Enga. Over four decades I have witnessed the transition from very simple graves marked by a row of *tanget* plants (*Cordyline fruticosa*), situated far from human habitation, through various developments in position and grave design to the situation today in which grave styles appear as a new form of status symbol and burial is becoming an expensive business. This paper traces aspects of that transition in Central Enga Province.

## DEATH IN ENGA

The Enga understanding, persisting today, is that human beings even before they are born are animated by a spirit (*imambu*, sometimes termed *waiyange*). This same term is also used for a person's shadow. The spirit is like a life force and at death it leaves the body to become a ghost (*timongo*). Ghosts have the ability to perceive people's thoughts and to influence positively or negatively a person's activities (on ghostly abilities see Brennan 1977).

In central Enga after a person dies the clan has a meeting (*kambuingi*) to discuss upcoming activities for the funeral process. They will consider whether the death is a natural one or caused by some form of accident or malpractice, in which case they will look for ways to prove it and to claim compensation. They will also discuss where to bury the deceased, and how best to deal with the deceased's mother's clan (*wane tange*), who often express their sorrow in demanding and violent ways.

Ghosts or spirits of the dead (*timongo*) are thought to roam around at the spot where the person died, whether at home, a hospital, in the bush or on a battlefield. It could be at the roadside if the death is caused by a car accident or at a riverbank where a person drowned while attempting to cross a flooded river. Wherever they might be found, ghosts are generally feared

as having the power to bring about illness or misfortune or even death to those they had left behind.

There are several usual ways of communicating with the deceased—who are not entirely “dead”. Mediums will interpret whistling noises (*yaka yope*) said to come from the spirit of the deceased. Spirits of the deceased are believed to communicate with the living through dreams, which can be interpreted as predicting prosperity but most often misfortune (Meggitt 1962). People will also go to grave of a deceased person known for fighting and lay their weapons on the grave so that the spirit of the deceased will make the weapons effective. Men sometimes communicate with the deceased in divination rituals to discover the spirit responsible for misfortune or death. In a ritual known as *pepe miningi*, a spear is held over the body of the deceased and while a ritual expert calls possible names of the culprit (or his clan) while tapping the spear. If he calls the correct name the spirit of the deceased will cause the spear to move, sometimes violently.<sup>2</sup>

People feel that it is no use burying a body if it is not accompanied by the person’s spirit (*imambu/waiyenge*). If a person is found dead out of the village, male relatives will go to where the body has been located to check for signs of the spirit’s presence such as a sound like a whistle. They will request that the spirit provide some kind of signal and if there is no response they will go to the place where the person died and perform a ritual to recover the spirit and bring it back to the site of the body (Gibbs 2006).

Relatives of the deceased gather for several days or even a week or two to mourn at the *kumanda* (house of the dead). A funeral party hosted by the clan of the deceased is a visible sign of the end of the mourning period. The larger portion of the food, particularly pork, is given to people from the clan of the mother of the deceased.

What I have described in this section are customary beliefs that originated in pre-contact times and continue today. Introduced ideas from Christianity or other sources tend to co-exist with these beliefs. My experience as a priest-anthropologist, participating in countless funerals and listening to people speaking about their understanding of these events, leads me to appreciate how underlying beliefs persist alongside radical change in external practices. For example, in the past contributions at funerals would be mostly firewood or food such as sweet potato, and sugarcane. Nowadays, in addition to those items people also contribute rice, lamb flaps, Coca Cola, betel nut, or money. Those bringing contributions normally expect some form of repayment during the ensuing funeral party and this can place a heavy burden on the family of the deceased. Today a funeral lasting three days, with costs of transport, food and gifts to outsiders and to the mothers clan, might cost K100,000 (USD \$40,000). The customary structure of the funeral is the same, but the economic and social consequences of death have significantly changed.

PAST BURIAL PRACTICES (*MALU PINGI*)

Encounters during a lifetime often generate tensions and these tensions continue to be played out with the deceased. Hence in the past death and burial was a tense and fearful time because of belief in the malevolent spirits of the dead, particularly those of women who were believed to have the power to cause illness and death to those they had left behind. Men (never women or children) would take the body for burial to an unidentified place and all instruments used for burial and the men's hands and feet had to be washed thoroughly before they returned to meet people in public places.

In the distant past in Central Enga, according to stories told by older people, bodies of the dead were buried in shallow pits scooped by digging sticks. The bodies were buried in a crouching position often with vines binding the torso to the legs and sometimes with vines holding the head so it faced downwards. Fearful of spirits of the dead, burials were completed quickly and often pitilessly. Older informants tell of men using their feet to roughly force bodies into the pit, and of women who had borne many children being buried head down to deter them from returning for their children and bringing them along into the afterlife of the deceased. Women's bodies might have wooden stakes driven into their eye sockets to hamper their return. Sometimes bodies of women might be interred along the bank of a river with the expectation that the next flood would carry the remains away. In the past, bodies of children were buried away from their houses because it was thought that their ghostly spirits would come to join with live children while they were playing, causing them to die. Leprosy was greatly feared and those badly affected by the disease were sometimes buried alive in swamps far away from human habitation.

In the past relatives or family members of a deceased took old clothes like aprons, belts, rain capes or anything of value and placed them at the grave. That was done in order that the spirit of deceased persons would not go around causing trouble but stay near the grave because their property was right there.

There were many protective measures taken against the spirits of the deceased depending on the type and capacity of the grudge a person had with someone who has died. When an elderly man died, a pandanus tree or a casuarina tree that he had planted might be chopped down as a sign for him to go. For a woman who died, people might damage part of her garden or hang a net bag with some of her personal possessions outside the house, signalling to the ghostly spirit that it should go away. These acts were signs to the deceased that their ghostly spirits should not come around to their former house or gardens. Rituals were also performed by both men and women so that their dead spouse would not return to take them along to the place of the dead (Gibbs 2006).<sup>3</sup>

## CHANGES IN BURIAL PRACTICES

Burial practices began to change significantly after the coming of the Australian Administration and with mission influence after the Second World War.<sup>4</sup> Religious services and Christian prayers have become part of the funerary practices. Responding to Christian influence, graves are now often positioned so that body of the deceased is facing into the rising sun. Fear of ghosts has lessened. Women and children now participate in burials. Graves are increasingly placed near human habitation, in garden plots and near houses. Once the burial process is completed, during daylight hours, people appear to have little fear of graves, and no hesitation to walk by graves or for children to play near them.

With reduced fear of burial sites, a practice developed whereby a few months after the burial, or up to a year later, immediate relatives of the deceased returned to the grave to build a fence around it. This is called *malu kakopenge*, literally ‘around the grave’.<sup>5</sup> (Figure 1 shows such a fence constructed in the 1990s around the grave of a man killed in a tribal fight). A small feast would be held in recognition of this task. The end of this ceremony was a chance for a woman in mourning to remove the bundles of *waku* ‘Job’s tears’ beads around her neck and place them on the grave. This helps remind other people that mourning is over and that the persons



Figure 1. Grave at Kaiap. The deceased was killed in a tribal fight in 1994.



Figure 2. Grave of Hadi Napi at Takowas.

in mourning are now free to work or participate in community activities. In recent times women wear black garments rather than *waku* beads and with changes in burial practices employing cement, the term used is *malu semena miningi*, literally 'cementing the grave'.

Nowadays, bodies are usually buried in a prone position, face upwards, in a box or coffin, though occasionally bodies will be buried face down. In a recent case in the lower Ambum a child died and people began arguing that the death was caused either by the spirit of his deceased father or of a malicious spirit (*sanguma*) associated with his mother, who was still alive. Some people thought that the ghostly spirit of the child might return to cause another family member to die. So they decided to bury the body face downwards to make it more difficult for the spirit to return and engage with the living. People claim that the procedure was successful since no close relative has died in recent times. The grave of that child is shown in Figure 2.

#### CHANGES IN GRAVE DESIGN

The practice of fashioning a simple grave in the ground outlined with cordyline plants marking the dimensions of the grave is still found in Enga, particularly in remote places. However, grave design today reflects the

changes in burial practices described in the previous section. In the 1970s I observed an increasing number of graves bounded by a wooden fence. In recent times the fence is constructed from steel rods or iron posts linked by steel chain. In the 1970s, throughout Enga, but particularly in the western part of the province where there is influence from neighbouring Huli practices, graves began to be built with a pandanus leaf or metal roof. By the 1990s in central Enga it became common for people to erect a small house (the size and shape of a dog kennel) over the site of the grave.

Nowadays a Christian cross is common on graves and more recently some have headstones with a message and information about the deceased, their date of birth if known, date of death and sometimes the cause of death particularly if it was from an accident or murder. In some places in Enga, photos of the dead are put on the head stone or under a glass cover over the grave. Flowers (real or plastic) may be left to beautify the grave. Occasionally a personal item will be left at the grave, such as a pack of cards for a person known to have been an avid gambler.

The first decade and a half of the 21st century has seen the development of ornate graves in central Enga. A large cement foundation may be lined with coloured tiles, the house erected over the grave may be large enough for a person to live in and it may have a fan or electric light. The whole construction is painted brightly and surrounded by an elaborate metal fence. Signs of the previous occupation of the deceased adorn the grave, such as the national or provincial flag for a public servant, or marks of prosperity such as coloured tiles or electric light for a businessman.

These developments have not been arbitrary. Rather, I see them as powered by several influences: introduced beliefs, compensation claims, and links to the Enga system of social standing.

#### INTRODUCED BELIEFS AND GRAVE DESIGN

##### *Christianity*

The majority of Enga people today identify as Christian. People have been introduced to Christian concepts of life and death, body and soul, heaven and hell, but it could be debated to what extent these concepts have influenced customary Enga beliefs associated with death, which are still strongly held. Death is the most un-evangelised dimension of life in Enga. Understandings of the fate of the “soul” vary across different Christian denominations. For example, the Enga language New Testament, promoted principally by the Lutheran and Catholic churches, uses the Enga term *imambu* for the soul (e.g., Matthew 10: 28). The Catholic Church with its understanding of the communion of saints promotes the practice of praying for the souls of the dead, something rejected by other denominations, particularly Evangelical

Protestant and Pentecostal churches. Generally, however, there is support for the belief that the dead should be buried in a dignified way. Religious leaders vary in their support for ideas associated with satanic spirits, the last judgement and the resurrection of the body. There is talk in some circles about housing bodies of the dead as they wait for the second coming of Christ but it is unclear to what extent such ideas have influenced grave design.

While Christian beliefs have been accepted by the majority of people, such beliefs often co-exist with customary belief in malicious intent of spirits of the dead (ghosts). Many Christians today say that because of their faith they are not afraid of the spirit of their dead parents, particularly if the parents were baptised Christians. Yet, particularly in times of stress, customary beliefs in ghosts and the dead having grudges against the living may come to the fore. For example, around 1996 I was presented with a case where a young man was seriously mentally disturbed. The family, all practising Catholics, decided that the disturbance was caused by the ghostly spirit of the young man's grandmother. She had been treated harshly by her son while she was living and people concluded that she wanted to get back at her son by causing illness in his son (her grandson). They dug up the grave of the grandmother and burned the contents in an effort to send her away. Unfortunately the disturbance in the boy continues. Today as in the past, the burial of those killed in tribal fighting is another case that activates customary beliefs. The grave of the dead warrior may be situated near a track used by the enemy clan or overlooking enemy clan territory, and fingers of the deceased folded downwards in the form of a clenched fist as a sign of how many men the spirit of the deceased would cause to die.

#### *Witchcraft Beliefs and Associated Practices*

By all accounts the central Enga have never believed in or practiced witchcraft or sorcery, but they did have a belief in an occult force called *yama*. *Yama* harms others through jealous thoughts. For example, if a person was seen carrying pork or some desirable food home and does not want to share it, then another person who saw that person and smelled the food might feel jealous or have a strong desire to eat the food, and those jealous feelings could cause harm to the person carrying the food. As a general precaution against *yama*, people carrying food go directly to their houses on paths where they were not likely to meet people. Once home they eat the food with friends and relatives in an open way so as not to arouse jealousy.

In the last decade Enga belief in *yama* has been transformed by ideas about what Enga call *sanguma*,<sup>6</sup> which are prevalent in provinces to the east. *Sanguma* is considered much more dangerous than *yama*, often involving the (spiritual) removal of a person's heart, thus killing the victim of the *sanguma*.



Belief in *sanguma* is behind many of the horrendous torture and brutal killings experienced in Enga in recent years (Gibbs 2015a, 2015b).

*Sanguma* spirits are thought to possess greedy persons and are believed not only to attack and kill the living, but to have an insatiable hunger for human corpses. They are said to come to graves at night in animal form and to magically enter the graves to feast on the corpse. In response armed men watch over a new grave at night for several weeks, killing any animal that approaches the grave. Killing such a creature is believed to also ‘kill’ (*pyao kumasingi*) the *sanguma* spirit and possibly also to kill or disable the human host of that spirit.

*Sanguma* beliefs have had some influence on the design of graves. In the 1990s construction of a cement block over a grave started to become more common. However, introduced *sanguma* beliefs have contributed to a situation where now some graves are totally lined with concrete reinforced with steel mesh.

Because of belief in *sanguma*, a practice developed in some places in recent years whereby some graves are surrounded by torch batteries set into the ground around the grave (Fig. 3). People recognise that batteries, with their positive and negative terminals are a source of power for torches and other devices. So batteries set into the ground surrounding a grave are said to neutralise or “cool” the power of the *sanguma* spirit, making it less likely to be successful in entering a grave or eating its contents. Positioned in this



Figure 3. Batteries in pairs around grave at Kaiap.

way, batteries are thought to offer protection in the early weeks or months after the burial, until the body has sufficiently decomposed that it appears unattractive even to a hungry *sanguma* spirit.

Another ruse for discouraging *sanguma* spirits is the common practice today of placing a false empty coffin on top of the grave (see Fig. 11 below). The body is actually buried in cement metres below the false coffin, but the intention of having an empty coffin above is that the *sanguma* spirit, finding the coffin above the grave empty, will go away and leave the grave alone.

While the earlier Enga fear of ghostly spirits has subsided, allowing people the freedom to position identifiable graves in places much closer to human habitation, fear is now generated in a new form, in *sanguma*, resulting in new forms of defence around the grave site. Enga had ways (principally spells) of dealing the *yama*, but this new spiritual adversary seems uncontrollable and thus much more difficult to deal with. Modern forms of fortified graves and defensive nocturnal behaviour at grave sites are an attempt to thwart the *sanguma* spirit. Christian belief and practice have apparently had little influence on the impact of *sanguma* beliefs.<sup>7</sup>

#### GRAVES AND CLAIMS FOR COMPENSATION

What appear to be graves in Enga today may not contain a body because the body of the deceased is buried elsewhere. These absentee graves function as part of claims for compensation, as memorials to the dead and increasingly as status symbols for the living.

Constructing a grave near a main road can be a way of calling for compensation. This could be in the form of erecting an absentee grave on the roadside where there will be improvements and road widening thus making a claim to the government for compensation for removal of the grave to undertake roadwork. Another occurrence can be after a road accident where those responsible for the accident will drive past the absentee grave and be reminded that they should pay compensation for the death of the one memorialised in the grave. The absentee grave of the late Leo Latu (see Fig. 4) is situated beside the Highlands Highway at the entrance to the Pompobus parish. The deceased died in an auto accident at that spot and this is a sign to the owners of the offending vehicle who will surely notice the grave each time they drive past.

In order to function as a status symbol a grave needs to be seen and thus be positioned near a road or a busy track. But the ideal position to show status may not be ideal in terms of burying a relative in familiar territory; hence the practice of erecting a grave in a public place, but burying the body in a more modest way nearer to the home of relatives.



Figure 4. Grave of Leo Latu at Pompobus.

#### GRAVES AND SOCIAL STANDING

An elaborate grave reflects the status of the family or clan of the deceased. People of influence, whether in business or politics reflect their status onto their family and clan. So when they die people feel that they should recognise the status of the deceased in his or her grave. An elaborate grave makes a social statement that the deceased was rich and/or powerful. Their kin and supporters even though they personally may not have much standing at all, still bask in glory of their influential relative—*nogut nem bilong em i lus nating* / ‘it is not good that his good reputation be forgotten’. This is quite in accord with Enga longstanding practice whereby special attention is paid to a *komongo* ‘bigman’ and the various ways that people would show allegiance to him. Two influential political figures from Enga are Sir Tei Abal and Malipu Balakau. Sir Tei Abal was leader of the United Party and Leader of the Opposition in the first National Parliament in 1975. He died in 1994 and he was buried at Keas in Wabag in grave topped by a little house (Fig. 5).

Malipu Balakau was another influential leader in the early days of Enga Province. He was serving as the Communications Minister of the National Government when he was shot dead in Mt Hagen in 1989. His grave (Fig. 6),



Figure 5. Grave of Sir Tei Abal.



Figure 6. Grave of Malipu Balakau in Wabag.

with cement walls and a prominent image of an orchid—symbol of the Enga Province, is situated in the Government compound in the centre of Wabag town, the provincial capital.

These were two of the first people in Enga to have large graves made of permanent materials. The general feeling was that it was fitting to honour their name with a large permanent grave. However, the graves of the two prominent politicians appear small and drab when compared with the graves being constructed today.

A more recent political figure was Kelly Aiyoko, a businessman and politician, who died in 2013. His grave situated beside the Highlands Highway at Kamas, a few kilometres west of Wabag, is one of the most elaborate graves to date (see Fig. 7). The grave comprises a two-story house with windows, curtains and steps leading up to an artificial coffin covered with tiles. The body of the deceased is entombed some metres below this elaborate structure. Its ornamentation features a prominent image of the Enga orchid, his name on one post at the entrance and his clan (Pumane) on the other post. Remains of a cross, carved from stone, tops the gateway. Three metal rod fences and metal gates surround the structure. The principal colours are green and yellow—the colours of the Enga flag. People at the site said that they feel happy that their leader could have such a grave and that it reflects the status of their Pumane clan in the Province.



Figure 7. Grave of Kelly Aiyok at Kamas near Wabag.



Figure 8. Grave of Nicholas Tombiame.

A hundred metres from the Kelly Aiyoko's grave is the grave of Nicholas Tombiame (Fig. 8) who was killed in 2013 in a dispute over a position at Kopen Secondary School. He is also from the Pumane clan and his relatives have constructed a grave intended to bring admiration to him and to the clan. The grave is notable for having electric lights on the corner posts (though the lights have not been linked to the power system as yet).

The grave of Augustia Aku of Kopen (Fig. 9) is notable for having a battery light that illuminates the grave at night. She had gained a high status, working at the Porgera Gold Mine in the west of the Enga Province and marrying Joseph Kiela, a landowner from Panandaka, Porgera. Her high status, which is not common for women in Enga, provided an impetus for burying her in an elaborate grave. After she died in October 2015 her workmates along with her husband constructed her grave at Kopen near the entrance to Kopen Secondary School.

Across the road from Augustia Aku's grave is Joseph Wapan's grave (Fig. 10). Like many graves in Enga there is a photo of the deceased mounted on the headstone. Colours are chosen to be appropriate and since he was a policeman his grave is painted blue and red—the colours of the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary. The cost of modern graves may be covered by the Government or politicians, as was the case with the grave of Otto Napi (Fig. 11) who was the driver and friend of National Capital District Governor Powes Parkop. The Governor arranged for construction of Otto's grave at Takawas near Yampu Hospital at the cost of K12,000.



Figure 9. Grave of Augustia Aku.



Figure 10. Grave of Joseph Wapan.



Figure 11. Grave of Otto Napi at Takowasa with false coffin above the grave.

#### GRAVE BUSINESS

Elaborate modern graves are indicative of other changes in Enga; people now crowd to funerals hoping to gain something. Nowadays people calculate the wealth and status of the deceased; if the family is wealthy or of high status, they will expect a generous repayment. Relatives and friends come with gifts of money, pigs and foodstuffs, and often they will name a member of the family when they give their contribution, thus establishing a claim on that person for a return after the funeral. Some families will prolong the funeral and in that way have an opportunity to receive more gifts. Others try to shorten the time of the funeral in order to reduce their obligation to those giving. In addition, the family has to take the mother's clan into account. It is said: *Lain mama i putim sori bilas na kapsait i kam!* / 'People claiming to be members of the mother's clan wearing mourning clay in their faces just pour in!' They come hoping at the end of the mourning to receive food (pork) and drink (Coca Cola). It used to be that rubbing clay on one's face at a funeral was a sign of sorrow. Now it is said that such decoration is more a way of entrance to a funeral party where one will share in food and drink. People admit that funerals have become like a business offering social status to those investing their material and political support.



Elaborate graves are part of that business-like activity. A grave costing K20,000 to K30,000 (USD \$8,000 to USD \$12,000) is a part of the Enga system of gaining a name through largesse—in this case constructing a grave in a style that demonstrates the perceived status and wealth of the deceased. Graves are part of what appears to be a competition to see who can build the bigger grave.<sup>8</sup> There are grumblings of discontent from some who say that that elaborate graves are a way of ‘showing off’ (*panasingi*) and that the money could be better used for daily needs such as paying school fees. Voices can be heard saying, “God created us out of clay and our body will go back to the soil. So why waste so much money on rotting soil!” Some complain later, saying that the food they brought could have been sold for a large sum of money at the market and why should they be receiving only a small portion of meat at the final funerary feast.<sup>8</sup>

Grave construction has developed in Marshall Sahlins’ (1963) terms, as competitive prestige-enhancing event through which followers “eat the leader’s renown” (Sahlins 1963: 293). By constructing an elaborate grave friends and kin demonstrate their loyalty and obligation to the deceased. In doing so they are establishing in their midst a permanent reminder to the deceased’s fame in a way that is more enduring than the shifting sands of the competitive bigman system. The deceased becomes a hero cemented into the geographical landscape, visible to the clan and anyone else passing by.

Constructing elaborate and costly graves is not limited to Enga, but is now common in other Highlands cultures as well, indicating that the Enga developments are part of wider trends in the PNG Highlands. Why is this happening now and why in this form? I do not subscribe to any grand theory of social change. I acknowledge that there are many questions and issues to explore in further research. In the interim my opinion as conveyed in this paper is that changes in grave construction are part of a process in which people seek meaningful responses to external influences. There are socioeconomic factors such as mining and other projects feeding the national and local economy. New access to wealth provides opportunities to display the status of a family or clan. This can also favour the competitive interests of powerful groups at the expense of others. Beliefs from Christian evangelisation contribute to reducing fear of ghostly spirits. Ideas about sorcery and witchcraft diffusing from other provinces bring new fears. In the interaction of these and other factors people engage in an interpretive process seeking a meaningful way of achieving their best interest. Grave construction reflects the expression of that interest today, establishing a permanent reminder to the deceased’s fame and the clan interest in a way that is more enduring than the instability of the competitive bigman system.

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#### NOTES

1. The Enga have been extensively documented in anthropological literature. Brennan (1977), Meggitt (1965a, 1965b) and Westermann (1969) mention death and burial, but there is little description of graves, perhaps because there was little to describe.
2. Nowadays some people claim to have phone numbers to use in communicating with the deceased by cell phone.
3. People also believed that the ghost of a dead could help the living. An example is that in a tribal fight a flying arrow targeting a man's heart can be diverted when he calls out *aiya tata* 'father'. The spirit of his father comes to his aid.
4. The first Westerners into Central Enga were most probably the Leahy brothers in 1934. The first Christian missionaries entered Enga territory in 1947.
5. Fencing the grave is important socially. In a dispute or argument a man might say to his clansman: *Embanya tange malu ongo kakopala naenge silyamo* / 'You have not even fenced your father's grave! (Therefore you are not fit to argue with me).'
6. *Sanguma* is a form of assault sorcery that takes different forms throughout Papua New Guinea. Belief in *sanguma* in Enga is closely related to *kumo* witchcraft in Simbu Province (Gibbs 2012).
7. There is a body of opinion that Christian (especially Pentecostal) evangelisation as one of many factors implicated in the spread of *sanguma* belief (Jorgenson 2014).
8. A grave recently constructed at Makapumanda for clan leader and businessman, the late Wilson Pes, is estimated to have cost K75,000.

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#### ABSTRACT

In Central Enga burial of the dead used to be a means of protecting the living from ghostly malice, however, now burial is becoming an expensive business, and grave styles a new form of status symbol. This paper traces significant aspects of the change from pre-contact burial practices to those of today. Introduced beliefs and new ways of establishing social standing are contributing to the development of elaborate graves. Grave construction has developed as competitive prestige-enhancing events through which followers demonstrate their loyalty and obligation to the deceased. In doing so they are establishing in their midst a permanent reminder to the deceased's fame in a way that is more enduring than the instability of the competitive bigman system.

*Keywords:* Papua New Guinea, Enga, death, graves, burial practices.

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