

## *Chiefly Models in Papua New Guinea*

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Despite the anthropologically well-known dichotomy between the Melanesian “big man” and the Polynesian “chief” (eg, Sahlins 1963; Lindstrom 1982; Marcus 1989), there has been a burgeoning literature on chiefs and rhetoric about chiefs in a variety of contemporary legal and political contexts within Melanesia (see White and Lindstrom nd). However, most of this literature seems to derive from “eastern” Melanesia, where there has also been a history of interest in “traditional chiefs.” For example, Geoffrey White wrote:

Chiefs had some role in the colonial administrations of the British in Fiji (Kaplan 1989), in Solomon Islands (White 1991) and in Vanuatu (Allen 1984), and of the French in New Caledonia and Vanuatu (Douglas 1982; Guiart 1956). . . . At the time of independence, Fiji, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu recognized the status of chiefs through constitutional provisions specifying constitutional roles for chiefs in government (Powles and Pulea 1988; Ghai 1990). (1992, 74)

In contrast, Papua New Guinea and Irian Jaya have been surprisingly absent from, or underrepresented in, the resurgent interest in applying traditional “chiefly models” to contemporary legal and political affairs. *The Constitution of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea*, despite its length (123 pages as initially published in 1975), makes no mention whatsoever of chiefs. Furthermore, at a popular 1992 working session of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania, entitled “Chiefs Today,” no papers representing either Papua New Guinea or Irian Jaya were offered. Why should this be so? Why is there more “chiefly literature” from Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu, and New Caledonia than

from New Guinea, with its much larger population of both indigenous peoples and anthropologists?

In this paper, I argue that the answer is linked to the distribution of Austronesian and Papuan languages in Melanesia, and to the differing cultural characteristics of the speakers of those languages. I argue that hierarchy, and consequently “chiefs,” are primarily Austronesian characteristics and concerns (see Douglas 1979, 12). Speakers of Austronesian languages predominate or are exclusively present in Fiji, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, and Solomon Islands. By contrast, speakers of non-Austronesian or Papuan languages constitute the overwhelming majority in Papua New Guinea and Irian Jaya.

I further argue that much of the rhetoric about chiefs that does derive from Papua New Guinea seems to originate from or be associated with Austronesian-speaking regions or peoples, a fact that is critical in assessing its significance and impact. I believe that linguistic and cultural differences between Austronesian and non-Austronesian Pacific peoples, which have not received adequate attention in the analysis of social equality and inequality in Melanesia, provide a key for understanding critical differences in chiefly models and politics between eastern and western Melanesia. Because the use of chiefly models is becoming increasingly important in postcolonial legal and political reform in the Pacific, results have important implications for Papua New Guinea’s involvement in the application of these “traditional” forms of leadership in contemporary contexts.

## THE DISTRIBUTION OF PAPUAN AND AUSTRONESIAN LANGUAGES

The Austronesian language family is the largest in the world, numbering over six hundred languages (Foley 1986, 1). Previously called Malayo-Polynesian, the Austronesian languages are spread widely throughout Southeast Asia and the Pacific. With the exception of Australia, New Guinea, and a few nearby islands, speakers of Austronesian languages occupy the entire Pacific basin, including all of Polynesia and Micronesia. The Lapita Culture of about 3000 BP is the first generally agreed upon Austronesian prehistoric culture recognizable in Melanesia, although Bellwood estimated the antiquity of Austronesian cultures in Melanesia to be some five thousand years (1980, 180).

“Papuan” languages constitute a much more diverse linguistic cate-

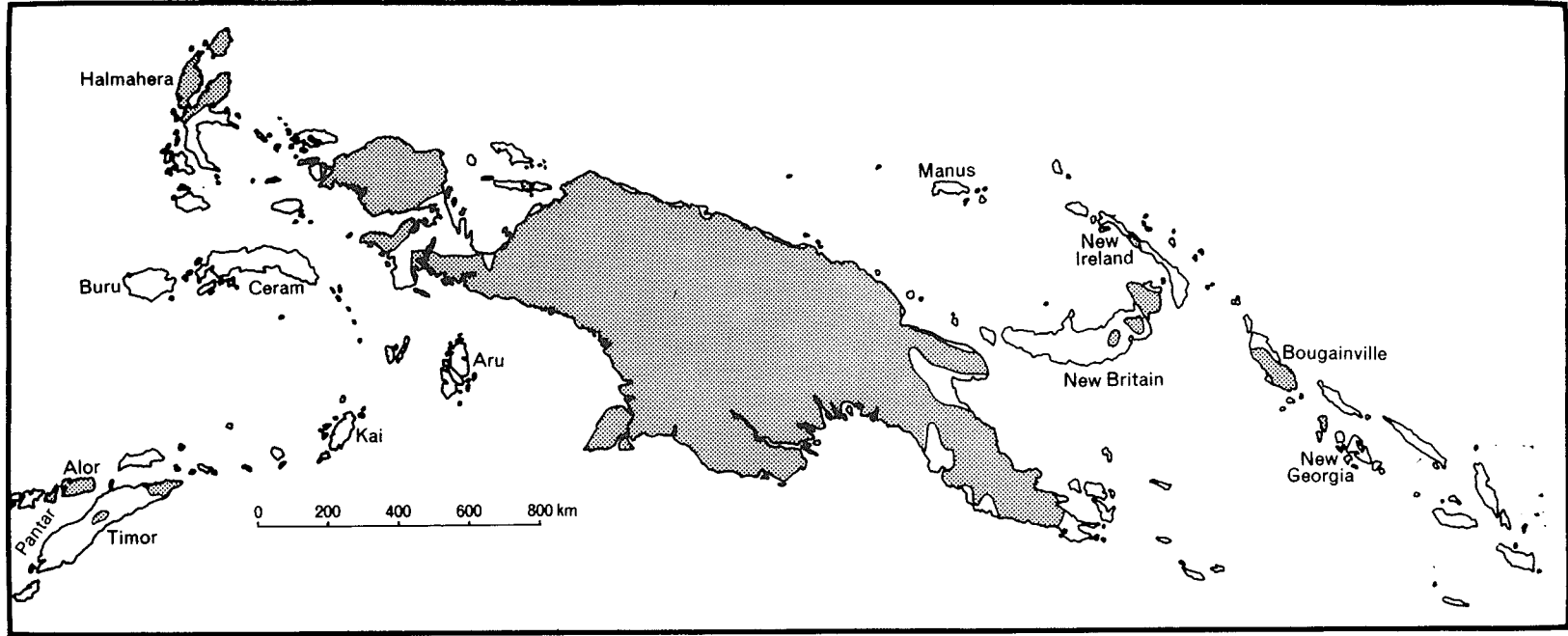
gory. They form a group more in opposition to Austronesian languages than because of any clearly distinguishing characteristics of their own, accounting for the commonly used label "Non-Austronesian."<sup>1</sup> Speakers of Papuan languages have much greater antiquity in Melanesia, perhaps forty thousand years or more (Bellwood 1980, 174), resulting in much greater diversity. Unlike the Austronesian languages, Papuan languages have not been demonstrated to be all genetically related. The more than seven hundred fifty Papuan languages of New Guinea and its environs belong to upward of sixty distinct language families and include a few dozen isolates, making this part of Melanesia the most linguistically diverse region in the world (Foley 1986, 3).

Map 1 indicates the distribution of the Papuan languages. It will be immediately apparent that Papuan languages are almost exclusively concentrated on the island of New Guinea, where Austronesian languages are confined to a few, mostly coastal, locations. Within the political boundaries of Papua New Guinea, however, lies the New Guinea Islands region, including such large islands as Manus, New Britain, and New Ireland, where Austronesian languages predominate. It is also noteworthy that the Papuan languages are confined within the political boundaries of Papua New Guinea and Indonesia, except for a very small representation in Solomon Islands.

In terms of numbers of speakers, Papuan languages greatly predominate in Papua New Guinea. According to Wurm and Hattori's estimates (1981), Austronesian subgroups with large representation on the New Guinea mainland, which include Central (68,769), Milne Bay (99,519), Siassi (75,997), and Adzera, Buang, Lamogai, and Hote in Morobe Province (51,564), probably constitute less than 10 percent of the mainland population. When combined with large Island region subgroups including New Ireland and Tolai (115,311), Manus (20,100), Bougainville (27,150), and isolates, all Austronesian-speaking peoples together probably constitute only about 13 percent of Papua New Guinea's population.

## OFFICIAL LINGUA FRANCAS IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Before leaving the topic of Papua New Guinea languages, it is important to examine the nature and distribution of the country's main lingua franca, in which chiefly political rhetoric is most often conducted. Papua New Guinea has three official languages: English, Tok Pisin (New Guinea



MAP 1. Location of Papuan languages in the Pacific. (From William A. Foley, *The Papuan Languages of Papua New Guinea*, page 2. © Cambridge University Press 1986. Reprinted with the permission of Cambridge University Press.)

Pidgin, actually now a creole), and Hiri Motu. Of the three, Tok Pisin is by far the most commonly spoken. Certainly more than half of the country's population are speakers, probably numbering more than two million.

Tok Pisin developed in the plantation areas of the New Guinea Islands, centered in New Britain and New Ireland, during the German administration. Although the original superstrate language was German, the substrate language was Austronesian: either Tolai or one of the closely related languages of New Ireland (Foley 1986, 36). Today, much of the grammatical structure of Tok Pisin closely resembles Tolai and its lexicon is still 10 percent Tolai (Mosel 1981). However, as Tok Pisin began to be spoken widely by diverse populations, the importance of Tolai declined, and the language developed without the influence of a substrate language (Mühlhäusler 1977).

Hiri Motu is a pidginized version of the Austronesian language Motu. Foley estimated that it is spoken by perhaps two hundred thousand people, mostly in Papua (1986, 32). It exists in at least two distinct types: one used by the Austronesian-speaking peoples in the Central Province around Port Moresby and more heavily influenced by the Motu vernacular; and one used by the Papuan-speaking peoples of other areas and somewhat more pidginized (Dutton and Brown 1977).

Thus, the Austronesian-speaking peoples have had a considerable linguistic impact in Papua New Guinea. Although the proportion of indigenous Austronesian speakers in the nation is quite small, both main rural lingua francas had Austronesian roots. Austronesian-speaking peoples have also had a disproportionate amount of political influence. The original New Guinea administration was based in Rabaul, in the territory of the Austronesian-speaking Tolai people, whereas the administration of the Territory of Papua has always been based in Port Moresby, among the Austronesian-speaking Motu people. These groups quickly became involved with the local administrations, serving as police and public servants of various types. Austronesian-speaking peoples were consequently overrepresented in the political and governmental affairs of the Territories of Papua and New Guinea, and continue to be influential in the affairs of the independent state of Papua New Guinea. However, they are much in the minority on a countrywide basis.

## HIERARCHY AS AN AUSTRONESIAN PHENOMENON

I turn now to my contention that hierarchy, and consequently “chiefs,” are primarily concerns of Austronesian-speaking peoples. As already mentioned, all Austronesian languages are genetically related in that they all descend from a common language called Proto-Austronesian, which was spoken roughly six thousand years ago (Foley 1986, 3). Linguists have long been concerned with reconstructing this Proto-Austronesian language. In 1975, Wurm and Wilson published an *English Findex of Reconstructions in Austronesian Languages*, consolidating the rather scattered findings of this research to that date. Reference to this volume reveals that many terms suggestive of hierarchy reconstruct for Proto-Austronesian, supporting the hypothesis that Proto-Austronesian society was already ranked if not stratified.

Perhaps most interesting for this paper is the fact that reflexes of the term *datu* (chief) have been reconstructed for Proto-Austronesian by a number of researchers including Dempwolff (1929, 1938), Lopez (nd), Dyen (1953), Dyen and McFarland (1970), and Blust (1972a,b). While the exact meaning of this apparently multivalent term has been the subject of some debate, it appears to suggest some centralization of authority, and also some possible connection between political rank and ritual status. According to Blust, “relevant linguistic observations suggest at least four components of meaning in the definition of \**datu*: (1) political leader, chief; (2) priest, custodian and administrator of customary law, medical practitioner (hence religious, legal and medical authority = traditional scholar); (3) aristocrat, noble; and (4) ancestor, grandfather, elder” (1980, 217). Also reconstructed for Proto-Austronesian are many other terms suggestive of hierarchy, including *ruler*, *rule*, *sir* or *lord*, *law* or *regulation*, *slave*, *title*, and *order* or *command* (Wurm and Wilson 1975).

In contrast, such terms are unusual in Papuan languages, but since Papuan languages do not reconstruct to a proto-form, direct comparisons are not possible. Because there are so many Papuan languages, and many are not well known, it would be a truly monumental task to establish the infrequency or absence of such terms, except by assertion and example. Abelam (or Ambulas), the Papuan language with which I am most familiar, is a language of the Ndu family. It has no term for “chief.” The closest equivalent would more precisely be translated as “big-man,” both literally and figuratively. This term, *némaandu*, also refers to one’s genealogi-

cally older brother or sister. *Némaan* means “big” or “important,” and *ndu* means “man;” hence “big-man” is a literal translation. A person of influence in the village might also be referred to as *némaan mban* (important one). The term suggests influence but not authority or power.

If Proto-Austronesian is indeed characterized by a “lexicon of hierarchy,” the question of actual social hierarchy remains. Unfortunately, the presence of social hierarchy is difficult to establish for a prehistoric culture of this type. Hierarchy is difficult to “see” in the archaeological record (J P White 1985) and, even when it can be seen, any associations between prehistoric cultures and the languages they spoke must be somewhat speculative. However, Bellwood (1980, 1989) believes that certain archaeologically known societies in the region of South China or Taiwan are associated with Proto-Austronesian culture. Genetic data also support a Southeast Asian origin for Austronesian-speaking peoples (Hill and Serjeantson 1989, 286–291; Irwin 1992, 37–38).

Based on linguistic reconstructions, it appears that Proto-Austronesians “cultivated rice and millet, and perhaps also yam, taro and sugarcane. Their domestic animals included pigs, dogs and perhaps chickens. Very early in the expansion of Austronesian-speakers into the islands to the south a number of purely tropical crops were added to this inventory: breadfruit, banana, sago and presumably coconut” Bellwood (1980, 178). Under this scenario, as the expanding Austronesian populations moved into insular Southeast Asia, they “entered a region of constantly humid equatorial climate where the early cultivated rices did not thrive and where land clearance without metal and a reliable dry season became more difficult. . . . Hence the newcomers’ cereal crops gradually diminished in importance and were replaced as major sources of food” (Bellwood 1980, 178).

If this scenario is accurate, Austronesian-speaking peoples would probably have developed chiefdoms and social hierarchies as cultivators of cereal crops in Asia or Southeast Asia, and would have arrived in Melanesia with a tradition of ranking or social stratification or both. Austronesian speakers then would have moved out into the Pacific basin, where they “passed on to their Polynesian descendants their aristocratic form of leadership, their Mongoloid genes, and a few features of material culture, particularly adzes, their art style, and perhaps their fishing and voyaging technology” (Bellwood 1979, 255).

Within Melanesia, however, Austronesians often interdigitated, both

linguistically and culturally, with Papuan-speaking peoples, a factor that greatly complicates the contemporary ethnographic picture. In some of the “purer” Austronesian-speaking areas, most notably on Kiriwina Island in the Trobriands, hereditary chieftainship remains strong today. In many other areas, Austronesian-speaking peoples seem to have experienced a decline in the ascriptive elements of leadership, at least in comparison with the reconstructed model I have described. This is certainly related in part to a modified subsistence base and in part to a cultural “blending” with Papuan speakers. In a few areas, Papuan speakers have even taken on aspects of ascriptive leadership, apparently a consequence of their close association with Austronesians. Despite these complications, however, I believe that the Austronesian or Papuan “models of leadership” I have outlined provide a useful lens through which to examine chiefly models.

#### ETHNOGRAPHIC REPORTS OF CHIEFS

Nothing I have said so far should be taken to mean that there is no literature or no ethnographic concern with “chiefs” in New Guinea. Indeed, Mosko (eg, 1991, 1992) has recently written of Mekeo chiefs and how they articulate with “the two other prototypical Melanesian leaders—big men and great men” (1992, 711). Lutkehaus has recently been concerned with hierarchy and “heroic society” on Manam (1990). Nor do I mean to imply that other researchers have not been aware of the connection between Austronesian-speaking peoples and “chiefs.” To quote Mosko at length:

A non-exhaustive list of additional Austronesian-speaking Melanesian chiefdoms would include the Roro, Motu, Nara, Kabadi, Sinaugoro and Hula of Southeast Papua New Guinea (Seligman 1910; Davis 1981; Groves 1963), the Trobriands (Malinowski 1922; Powell 1960; Weiner 1976; Mosko 1985: 209–33), the Kalauna (Young 1971; 1983; n.d.), the Wogeo (Hogbin 1960), the Baluan of Manus (Otto, n.d.), Vanuatu (Guiart 1963; Allen 1984), New Caledonia (B. Douglas 1979, n.d., Bensa 1982). A number of non-Austronesian-speaking chiefdoms have also been described, however, including the Purari, the Toaripi and the Elema of the Papuan Gulf (Williams 1940), and the Koita of Southeast Papua (Seligmann 1910). [1992, 714; citations omitted from references]



Although other researchers have noted the trend toward an association between Austronesian societies and “chiefs,” I believe that the usefulness of Austronesian-Papuan distinctions in examining “chiefly” phenomena has not been sufficiently appreciated because of the extensive cultural “mixing” that has taken place. Bronwen Douglas stated, “Despite *some correlation* between Austronesian language and a tendency to hereditary office, it is of doubtful validity to invoke specific relationships between particular cultural traits and linguistic or racial affiliations, since several thousand years of migration, interaction and flux in western Melanesia have produced a complex mixture of cultures” (1979, 12, emphasis added).

It seems to me that measuring the strength of this “correlation” between Austronesian language and hereditary office in the Pacific, although difficult, is critical for assessing the impact that chiefly models might have in non-Austronesian contexts. One of the major impediments to such an endeavor, however, is the problem of operationalizing the concept, “chief,” because the term has thus far eluded precise definition in the anthropological literature. As Blust’s four components of meaning in the Proto-Austronesian term \**datu* suggest, *chief* is a complex, multivalent term that cannot be reduced simply to the presence or absence of a single attribute. Chiefs are (and do) many things. They normally occupy formal offices or hold titles, and are generally installed into their offices in a formal public ceremony. The right to occupy such offices is limited to certain people in the society, typically those within a certain kin group or special family. To varying degrees, “chiefs” have authority over certain resources and can allocate or redistribute them. Their activities and duties may extend to many spheres, including the economic (collect tribute, redistribute goods), ideological (sponsor ceremonies, guard public morals), administrative (appoint officials, organize labor), and judicial (adjudicate disputes, punish wrongdoers). Still broader considerations in defining the concept of “chief” include the scale of the societies in which these leaders operate, with some authors requiring a regional polity in which two or more local groups are organized under a single leader (eg, Haviland 1993, 318). For this reason, the authors of many introductory anthropology texts choose to define the term *chiefdom* rather than *chief*. Serena Nanda’s definition is typical: “A society with social ranking in which political integration is achieved through an *office* of centralized leadership” (1991, G-2).

All of this begs the question of the exact nature of local constructions of leadership. What terms are actually used by local people, and what dimensions of leadership do they include when they use these terms? Godelier's (1986) model of the "great man" and his theoretical contrast between great-man and big-man societies underscores the complexities of indigenous conceptions of local leadership in Melanesia. Godelier suggested that there is a range of Melanesian societies in which "equivalence" dominates, where there is no articulation between the production of wealth and the reproduction of kinship. Where women are exchanged directly for women rather than for wealth, Godelier argued, the big man as accumulator and manager of social relationships cannot arise. Godelier's work suggests the existence of a multiplicity of leadership "types" in Melanesia, particularly when indigenous conceptions of influence and authority are considered. This further complicates the task at hand.

The diverse forms of Melanesian leadership, and the difficulties in defining the concept of "chief" notwithstanding, I determined to estimate the strength of the correlation alluded to by Douglas. For my attempt, I used as a sample the 151 Pacific societies described in the *Oceania* volume of the *Encyclopedia of World Cultures* (Hays 1991). This is not a random sample in the statistical sense, but rather a judgmental sample maximizing geographic representation and ethnographic coverage. Linguistic affiliation is fairly clear and was relatively easy to operationalize for the purposes of this study. When in doubt I used Wurm and Hattori (1981) and Grimes (1992) as authorities.<sup>2</sup> To sidestep the complex problem of defining and operationalizing the many dimensions of the term *chief* myself, I used a relatively simple method of operationalizing this variable, using the authors (who in most cases are also the ethnographers) as authorities. If they employed the word *chiefs* in their ethnographic description, I counted chiefs as present, if not, I counted them as absent. These authors are in a far better position than I to consider all the complex dimensions of local leadership in the communities described, and, since their ethnographic summaries (if not the original research) are fairly current, they have also had the benefit of contemporary research and thinking on this topic. For better or worse, this method produced Table 1.

The correlation in Table 1 is quite strong, extremely unlikely to be due to chance, and supportive of the hypothesis of a strong association between language affiliation and leadership type in the Pacific. Of the 78 non-Austronesian societies in the sample, only three (Mafulu, Namau,

Table 1. Cross-tabulation of ethnographic reports of "chiefs," by language affiliation

	Austronesian	Non-Austronesian	Total
"Chiefs" reported	52	3	55
"Chiefs" not reported	21	75	96
Total	73	78	151

Notes:  $df = 1$ ;  $\chi^2 = 73.94506$ ;  $p \leq 0.00000$ ;  $\Phi = 0.69979$ ;  $\Phi^2 = 0.48970$ ; 95 percent confidence interval;  $0.60698 \leq \Phi \leq 0.77376$ .

and Orokolo) were reported as having chiefs. The ethnographic summaries of these three societies are all based on rather dated reports (primary ethnographies are Williamson 1912; Holmes 1924 and Williams 1924; and Williams 1940, respectively), and it is possible that the original ethnographers did not use the term *chief* in as precise a manner as contemporary ethnographers might. While there are other ethnographic reports of chiefs in non-Austronesian-speaking areas of the Pacific, particularly in the Papuan Gulf and in the Moluccas (most notably Ternate and Tidore), Table 1 suggests that such associations are quite rare. A related observation based on this table is that, if we do accept a "chiefly" base for proto-Austronesian society and an "egalitarian" base for non-Austronesian societies, the influences seem to be moving primarily in one direction. That is, some Austronesian societies seem to have "lost" strong elements of ascriptive leadership, perhaps because of new environments (either ecological or social), whereas non-Austronesian societies seem only rarely to have "adopted" chiefly models. This apparent unwillingness of non-Austronesian societies to "accept" chiefly models is important in considering the differential acceptance of rhetoric about "chiefs" in contemporary Melanesia, to which I return later.

#### THE LULUAI: COLONIAL USE OF CHIEFLY MODELS

I have mentioned that colonial administrations in New Guinea historically have had a close working relationship with Austronesian-speaking peoples. Often, in Austronesian-speaking contexts, colonial models based on "chiefly" authority were promoted by the administration and achieved

some success. However, when these models were extended to Papuan-speaking contexts, they met with much more limited success if not downright failure, as might be predicted from the earlier discussion. Perhaps the clearest example is the installation of village “chiefs” (*luluai*) and their assistants (*tultul*). Initially undertaken by the German administration, this experiment was continued and expanded by the Australian administration in the Territory of New Guinea.

Various attempts to install “official chiefs” and promote “chiefly authority” in New Guinea villages had been made relatively early under German rule. The initial success of the *luluai* system, however, was due almost exclusively to the efforts of Albert Hahl, the governor of German New Guinea from 1902 to 1914. Hahl was young, energetic, and had already had considerable experience with Austronesian-speaking peoples, in both New Guinea and Micronesia. He had been an imperial judge or administrator in New Britain 1896–1898, vice-governor in the German Caroline Islands 1899–1901, and acting governor of German New Guinea 1901–1902 (Firth 1986, 62).

Hahl was in the habit of traveling widely in rural areas. He was quite an amateur anthropologist, and studied the customs and traditions of the Tolai, an Austronesian-speaking people residing in the Rabaul area. He learned their language, Kuanua, and listened to their grievances. He also had a history of using traditional models and structures to accomplish his aims.

In the Gazelle Peninsula, Hahl noticed, “the young people are accustomed to working for the heads of their families in return for food and small payments, often in order to work off bride price.” He adapted the traditional system to have roads built by the Tolai, paying them in food, shell-money and iron tools to construct bridle-paths and roads which by 1898 stretched from Kokopo halfway around the bay towards the site of modern Rabaul, inland towards Vunakokor, from Matupit to Rabaul farm, from Malaguna to Rata-vul and along the north coast as well. To the amazement of other officials Hahl’s orders were obeyed. At his command Tolai villagers cut roads, kept them in good order and planted coconut palms. (Firth 1986, 63)

Hahl also took note of Tolai political organization. Tolai land was collectively owned by matrilineal clans. In each clan, the genealogically senior male, called the *lualua*, controlled clan land and could command kinsfolk to cultivate it (Firth 1986, 45; see also Epstein 1968, 6; Salisbury

1970, 70–71). Status also accrued, in the form of a recognized title, to *luluai* or fight leaders (Epstein 1968, 27; Salisbury 1970, 35). Men who had accumulated a rich store of shell money were called *uviana*. The greatest Tolai leaders were all of these things: clan elders who had achieved distinction in both warfare and economic pursuits.

Extending this model, Hahl began appointing village “chiefs.” Initially these men were called “*lualua*,” but later the title was changed to “*luluai*.” They were presented with a cap and a stick, like the sticks carried by the traditional *lualua* to signify their authority (Firth 1986, 64). These appointments were made in great numbers, at first around Rabaul and in the Duke of York Islands, and later in the Madang area and beyond. In controlled districts, the Australians who occupied the Old Protectorate of German New Guinea in 1914 “encountered village chiefs with caps and ‘a kind of walking stick with a fancy knob’.” These chiefs, according to the Australian military administrator Colonel S. A. Pethebridge, were referred to as ‘Loo Loo Eyes’ ” (Firth 1986, 2).

Recognizing the utility and effectiveness of *luluai* in the Tolai area, the Australian administration was at first quick to embrace these “village chiefs,” and continued to expand and extend the system. The *luluai* (in some areas they were called *kukurai*) were formally appointed by the director of District Services on the advice of patrol officers. Normally the policy was to let villagers “elect” their own traditional leaders. Also appointed were assistants to the *luluai*, including a “*tultul*” (an assistant who spoke Pidgin) and a “medical *tultul*.” In some areas, “paramount *luluai*” with rather unclearly defined duties were selected to preside over other *luluai* representing groups of villages. By 1939 there were 3865 *luluai* and 66 paramount *luluai* (Mair 1948, 74).

However, once this system was expanded outside the New Guinea Islands region, with its heavy concentrations of Austronesian-speakers, major problems began to surface. Traditional authority seemed to be much more diffuse in other areas. In speaking of the *luluai*’s role as magistrate (one of the four “components of meaning” of the Proto-Austronesian \**datu*), Rowley wrote, “The annual reports were not very enthusiastic about the results. . . . the recognised jurisdiction of a *luluai* did not necessarily coincide with the area of his traditional authority, even where a ‘big man’ had been appointed; nor was traditional authority necessarily relevant to the new tasks” (1966, 78).

Even in regions where Austronesian-speaking peoples had moved

inland and were exposed to more regular cultural contact with Papuan speakers, problems surfaced. In 1945, Kenneth E Read was present at a ceremony of the Ngarawapum people of the Markham Valley for the appointment of a new *luluai*. Although these people are Austronesian speakers (Wurm and Hattori 1981, 7), they apparently did not respond favorably to the installation of “chiefs.” Regarding the meeting, Mair wrote, “The central feature was a reiterated assertion of the old men that [the *luluai*] was nothing but a representative of the government. ‘It is they [the old men] who know what should be done and what should not be done’ ” (1948, 73).

In my own work with the Papuan-speaking Abelam people of the Sepik area, it was also clear that the *luluai* had very little influence and authority. They simply were not accepted by the people (Scaglione 1985, 92). Early patrol reports frequently mentioned the lack of authority of *luluai* and bemoaned their ineffectual nature. Patrol Officer Wearne, for example, observed that “the village officials of North Wosera are mostly incapable or unco-operative but are gradually gaining recognition as spokesmen in inter-village disputes. In their own villages on matters affecting village hygiene they are often ignored” (1954, 5). Patrol Officer Duncan stated, “The people of this area do not seem to realise the importance the *Luluai* and *Tultul* should carry with their position. Hence most of the officials have very little influence” (1954, 4).

It appears then, that a “chiefly model,” derived from existing elements of an Austronesian-speaking society, seems to have worked fairly well in that context. However, when attempts were made to expand that model to Papuan-speaking peoples, or even to less “pure” Austronesians (that is, ones who had undergone considerable genetic and cultural blending with non-Austronesians), the model was not accepted. Even most Austronesian peoples in Papua New Guinea seem to be more willing to accept the “authority” of traditional chiefs than their “power.” I believe that this situation has not been uncommon in the history of Papua New Guinea, and continues today. “Chiefly models,” spawned in Austronesian-speaking contexts, have certain utility and popularity for a variety of reasons. When extended more widely they have not been so favorably received.

#### SIR MICHAEL SOMARE, “THE CHIEF”

An apparent exception to the assertion of an Austronesian-speaking basis for rhetoric about chiefs in Papua New Guinea is provided by Sir Michael

Somare, widely (and affectionately) known as “the Chief.” Somare earned this “title” by virtue of being the first (and only) chief minister of Papua New Guinea during its brief period of self-government. He later became prime minister after independence. In July 1975, Sir Paul Lapun made a prophetic statement: “Though [Michael Somare] will soon be prime minister, for many of us he will always be ‘the Chief’ ” (Somare 1975, vii).

Somare has done much to foster “chiefly” images. Soon after becoming prime minister, he adopted a style of dress, modeled after Fijian fashion, consisting of a tailored lavalava and sandals. While adopted by a few others, including Sir Pita Lus, a strong Somare supporter and fellow Sepik, the style did not become the form of national political dress that Somare had perhaps envisioned. In a recent speech, Somare made reference to “our Melanesian and Pacific chiefs” (1991, 13). He often talks of being a “*sana*,” a traditional “chief” of his people. Yet, interestingly, his own people are Papuan speakers from the Murik Lakes area of the Sepik region. In the early days, many of his close associates in the PANGU party were also Sepik Papuan speakers. Given this background, whence did Somare’s chiefly models emerge?

Ironically, at least part of the answer can be attributed to the Austronesian-speaking Tolai people from whom the *luluai* model was derived.

I spent my first six years in Rabaul. I learned to speak Pidgin at home and when playing with the children of other policemen. When I played with the village children in Vunamami, I learned to speak Kuanua, the language of the Tolai people. It was not until I was six years old, when my father went on leave to Karau, that I began to learn my own language, which is Murik. (Somare 1975, 1)

Kathleen Barlow, an ethnographer of Murik culture, observed:

During the migration period, the Non-Austronesian or Papuan people from the Sepik Basin had extensive contact with Austronesian-speaking peoples who inhabited the offshore islands and some regions of the coast. Murik culture thus became an integration of Austronesian and Non-Austronesian cultural features. (1991, 220–221)

The Murik, it would seem, are a relatively unusual example of a Papuan-speaking culture heavily influenced by Austronesians. Regarding the nature of traditional authority, Barlow stated:

Senior members of the descent groups in each village provide political leadership. These individuals control the descent-group insignia (*suman*), named

ornaments of shell, feathers, and other valuables assembled and displayed on ritual occasions. The firstborn of a descent group in each village controls the *suman*, in whose presence there may be no conflict or violence. He or she thus manages resources, evaluates membership claims, and settles disputes. (1991, 222)

Somare, then, was influenced by Tolai language and culture in his formative years. His people were also heavily influenced by Austronesian-speaking peoples. Presumably, the "title" of "*sana*" was linked to the descent-group leadership of which Barlow has written. However, Somare frequently gives the impression of much broader authority. It is worth quoting him at some length regarding his understanding and recollection of the ceremony in which his father assumed that position:

Somare, my father, went home to Murik in 1942 in order to take up his chieftaincy. . . . Somare had to make a big feast for his Uncle Emang, who handed the title to him. When Sana, Somare's father, died he left his children in the care of Emang, his cousin. Emang had been instructed to hand the chieftaincy to Somare when it was time. Now, in the custom of our people, when Somare assumed the responsibility of the chieftaincy, it was not *he* who was being honoured, but Emang.

My father had to decorate Emang with pigs' tusks and feathers, and Emang had to be placed on a platform like a big chief. My father prepared a twelve-pig feast for him. This was an expression of respect and gratitude. He thanked Emang for having looked after Sana's children all those years, for looking after the chieftaincy and preserving its dignity, and for now handing it over to his nephew.

It was during this feast that I was adopted by my Uncle Saub. . . . My father had now made Saub responsible for handing over the chieftaincy to me. . . . Saub became my new father and would train me for my future responsibilities. . . .

After the ceremony my father returned to Rabaul to resume his post in the police force. (Somare 1975, 2)

It appears that to the extent that *sana* was actually a "title," it applied only to the hereditary leader of Somare's Murik clan. However, Somare has made good use of the term in various political contexts, expanding and extending the concept. He sometimes equates *sana* with *ratu*, a title attached to the name of a Fijian chief. In a recent speech, Somare stated, "What did a traditional *ratu* or *sana* know of the respective merits of the Westminster or presidential systems of government?" (1991, 3).



Of course, Somare is relatively open about the “creation” of traditional chiefs in a modern political context. When speaking of Sir Buri Kidu, he said:

Our first national chief justice, Sir Buri Kidu, through his immense integrity, through his refusal to compromise and his determination to uphold the constitution, imperfect though that is, has practically created a traditional chieftainship out of a constitutional office.

Sir Buri Kidu is very much the special “chief” who protects the inviolability of our system of justice. And the “cape” he wears, as a robe of office, is lined with the traditional “elepa” design which, in the old days, was carved on the mace of authority that was carried by all Massim chiefs. (Somare 1991, 7)

Of Sir John Guise, the first governor general and first national speaker of the house of assembly, Somare stated, “There is another heart warming example of a man who has created a new chieftainship where none existed before, and with roots going deep into our traditional sources of power” (1991, 6).

Both Guise and Kidu derive from Austronesian-speaking areas. Although Somare has made much of the “invention” and “extension” of chiefly models of authority, he has not neglected the more diffuse forms of leadership that are present in Papuan-speaking contexts. Of traditional forms of leadership in the Pacific in a general sense, Somare stated:

When it came to the business of learning how to govern, most of the men who were first called on to lead our Pacific countries were, in fact, traditional leaders in their own right. They were all “big men,”<sup>3</sup> “taubada,” chiefs of paramount clans, “sanas,” “ratus,” “lohia bada.” (1991, 5)

#### LEXICON OF CHIEFLY RHETORIC: THE *LOHIA BADA*

This list of “traditional leaders” is perhaps worth a closer examination. The nature of “*sanas*” and “*ratus*” has already been explored. As previously mentioned, Tok Pisin and Hiri Motu are the main lingua francas of Papua New Guinea. *Taubada* and *lohia bada* are both Hiri Motu terms that I will discuss later. Missing from the list is any Tok Pisin term for “leader” except insofar as “big man” and *bikman* can be considered equivalent. Tok Pisin, the lingua franca of choice in most Papuan-speaking areas, has no real term for “chief,”<sup>4</sup> although Mihalic’s dictionary lists two terms: *hetman* and *kukurai* (1971, 233). *Hetman* is clearly derivative

from the English “headman,” which does not necessarily imply any sort of hereditary authority; nor does the term as it is currently used in Tok Pisin. *Kukurai* is a reflex of the introduced “*luluai*” as I have already noted. I have never heard the term used in contemporary speech. In Tok Pisin, village leaders are usually referred to as *bikman* (big-man) or *bik-pela man bilong ples* (village leader) or possibly *pesman* (“first man,” spokesman).

*Taubada* and *lohia bada* originally derive from Austronesian-speaking contexts and require some explanation. *Taubada* literally means “big man.” For many years, it was used as a term of address (some might say “respect”) for a white man.<sup>5</sup> In contemporary speech, it still may refer to a white man, although the alternate *tau kurokuro* is also heard. It may also refer to any man of influence: Papuan speakers of Hiri Motu would use it to refer to a classic “big-man” in Sahlins’ sense. *Lohia* is a term which Dutton and Voorhoeve translated as either “chief” or “headman” (1974, 199). In contemporary speech, *Lohiabada* usually refers to Jesus Christ.

It seems that *lohia bada* in the context of the Austronesian-speaking Motu people provides yet another example of chiefly models that, when extended and expanded, were not accepted. The Motu *iduhu* is a patrilineally based residential unit. The genealogically senior branch normally appoints a *lohia*, or *iduhu* leader. According to Belshaw, “He represents the *iduhu*, leads it in ceremonial, controls its dances, receives gifts in its name” (1957, 20). In earlier times, he was also responsible for war-making. Traditional leadership, then, did not extend beyond the *iduhu*. “Of recent years, however, the attempt has been made from time to time to formalize a village chieftainship, to be known as *lohia bada* (big leader) and to search for historical precedents. The search is based largely on the story of Boe Vagi, a famous villager who was invested with ‘chiefly’ powers by a visiting naval officer” (Belshaw 1957, 21). The details of this event are disputed. Apparently a naval officer (possibly Commander Erskine) “installed” a “village chief” and gave him a mace as a symbol of authority. All accounts indicate, however, that the *lohia bada* never had any real villagewide influence, and the experiment was abandoned once village constables (who also did not generally enjoy villagewide influence) were appointed.

Thus Somare’s list of “traditional leaders,” which I have examined in some detail, draws heavily on Austronesian-derived models of “author-

ity,” although it does not ignore more diffuse forms of leadership. Even in Austronesian-speaking contexts, the Papua New Guinean examples of the “traditional leaders” he cited apparently did not enjoy authority beyond the local descent group. However, as I have said, Somare has been straightforward about the need for Pacific leaders to employ and extend traditional models of leadership in contemporary government.

### THE EMERGENCE OF CHIEFS ON BOUGAINVILLE

Another context in which rhetoric about chiefs has recently arisen is on Bougainville Island, which contains a blend of Papuan (eight) and Austronesian (ten) languages (Wurm and Hattori 1981, 15). Bougainville Island is bracketed by Austronesian speakers on both Buka Island to the north and the Shortland Islands to the south. Recent news from Bougainville has been sometimes sketchy and often controversial. Reports of traditional “chiefs” making requests and pronouncements have consequently been difficult to trace to a specific people or location. For example, an article by Mary-Louise O’Callaghan, South Pacific correspondent, in *The Age* (Melbourne, 23 Oct 1992) reported only that a move by Papua New Guinea forces into the rebels’ central stronghold “followed requests from local chiefs and leaders.”

As I have argued, rhetoric about “chiefs” is not unexpected from Austronesian-speaking peoples, and much of what can be traced to a particular region seems to derive from this context. For example, at a recent conference entitled “Bougainville Crisis—Towards Resolution” held in Canberra on 29 September 1992, Ruth Saovana-Spriggs spoke to the conference of the potential for drawing the “council of chiefs” into the main government structure. She felt that groups operated very well when chiefs were backed by a few educated people, and that in the care center, chiefs were given the responsibility of maintaining order and ensuring equal distribution of supplies and services (Evelyn Hogan, *Times of Papua New Guinea*, 8 Oct 1992; see also *Pacific Islands Monthly*, Nov 1992, 17). Saovana-Spriggs is from Tinputz, an Austronesian-speaking area that Wurm and Hattori placed in the Buka–North Bougainville Group of languages (1981, 15). According to the *Times* article, Saovana-Spriggs took part in language workshops on Buka Island and “spent some time on the main island.” As far as locations could be traced from these articles, these experiences all took place in Austronesian-speaking contexts.

However, there are other reports of “chiefs” from south Bougainville, in Papuan contexts, which would be surprising, according to the hypothesis argued here. In the same two articles just cited, Evelyn Hogan reported that “Buin and Siwai chiefs” had already invited the Papua New Guinea Defence Force to secure the area because of attacks on their leaders. Given the unstable political context of these reports, it is difficult to know to what extent (and by whom) “chiefs” are being invented or exploited for the legitimation of various actions of both sides.

Some insight into this phenomenon has been provided by Ogan, who wrote of the neighboring (Papuan-speaking) Nasioi:

A pattern of small, scattered settlements characterized Nasioi life before colonization and is correlated with political atomism. The typical role of big-man took a very modest form among Nasioi. A Nasioi *oboring* (big-man) established his position by industry, generosity and wisdom, but he remained a person of influence, not authority. The status of oboring was achieved by giving feasts, and it was not normally inherited. Today, when many Pacific Islanders are eager to “reinvent tradition,” Nasioi claim that “paramount chiefs” were customary, although early published accounts and informants’ reports dating from 1962 contradict this. Because of their post-World War II discontent with the social changes brought about by colonialism and subsequent political and economic developments, Nasioi have for the past forty years been especially vocal in demanding Bougainville’s succession, first from the Trust Territory of New Guinea and now from the independent nation of Papua New Guinea. As of August 1990, the Nasioi-led “Bougainville Revolutionary Army” claims authority over the entire island. (Ogan 1991, 235)

It is certain that the Nasioi saw the utility of the “traditional chiefs” of their Austronesian-speaking neighbors in a modern political context. It would not be surprising if they “reinvented tradition” in order to exploit these models. However, for the “chiefs” of the Buin and Siwai peoples, a more direct, precontact Austronesian influence can be postulated:

In spite of the lack of good fishing and suitable gardening land, and the presence of mosquito-ridden swamps and crocodile-infested lagoons along the southwestern Bougainville coast, there formerly were several Siuai settlements there. This is attested by traditions of the natives themselves and by accounts of Europeans who visited this region in the early twentieth century and shortly before. At that time there was a lively trade between Mono and Alu Islanders [Austronesian speakers of the Shortland Islands] and the Buin Plainsmen; and whole communities of trade middlemen settled along the coast. When Bougain-

ville was severed politically from Alu and Mono and brought into the Territory of New Guinea, a customs barrier was imposed between the Territory and the Solomon Islands Protectorate and as a result native trade between Bougainville and Alu-Mono ceased. Consequently most of the coastal settlements of the Siuai were deserted, and the inhabitants moved inland to healthier, more productive land. (Oliver 1955, 17)

## BIG-MAN MODELS IN AUSTRONESIAN SOCIETY

Thus far I have explored at length several examples of both colonial and contemporary “chiefly” models in Papua New Guinea. I have argued that such models normally derive from Austronesian-speaking contexts, but rarely enjoy much popularity among Papuan speakers, a fact that has limited their effectiveness, extension, and spread at the national level. Virtually my entire discussion has focused on coastal areas in which the articulation of Austronesian and Papuan cultures has been most pronounced. I have not touched on the New Guinea Highlands, containing half of Papua New Guinea’s population, which are virtually devoid of Austronesian languages.<sup>6</sup> The dangers of importing models from elsewhere to explain Highlands social organization have been duly noted (eg, Barnes 1962) and the few claims for “chiefly” models of authority that have appeared in the Highlands literature have been largely discredited (eg, Vicedom and Tischner’s 1943–1948 descriptions of the hierarchy, social stratification, chiefs, and slaves of the Mbowamb [Melpa] people, and the criticisms of Strauss 1962, A Strathern 1987, and Stürzenhocker 1990). Instead, the Highlands has been the area in which the “big-man” model has been refined and has received most attention (eg, A Strathern 1971).

Interestingly, shortly after Papua New Guinea’s independence, a reversal of the patterns I have discussed took place, in which “big-man” models of diffuse authority were not accepted in a more hierarchically oriented Austronesian-speaking context. Village courts were established in Papua New Guinea by the Village Courts Act 1973 (no 12 of 1974). As described by section 18, the primary function of a village court is “to ensure peace and harmony in the area for which it is established by mediating in and endeavouring to obtain just and amicable settlements of disputes” by applying relevant customary practice. A mimeographed report entitled “The History of Village Courts in Papua New Guinea,” prepared

by the Village Courts Secretariat, makes it clear that among the reasons for establishing these courts were the recurrent tribal fighting in the Highlands, and the rejection of local courts (based on more “hierarchically based” models) in many areas of the country (eg, Strathern 1972; Scaglione 1976, 1985).

Clearly, village courts were established with Papuan-speaking models of leadership in mind. An *Explanatory Booklet of the Village Courts Act 1973* stated, “The Magistrates will be chosen from big men in the village who are accepted as traditional dispute settlers” (Cruickshank and Holmes 1974, 2). A circular entitled “Selection of Village Court Officials” stated, “The ‘big men’ of the villages, such as traditional fight leaders of years past; traditional dispute-settlers; village elders who possess and use their powers or ‘magic’ over garden cultivation, and other village leaders whom the people customarily abide by the advice and opinions handed down by them on relative matters, would in most cases be an ideal choice” (Village Courts Secretariat 1975, 1).

In the initial draft of the Act, the number of magistrates was left quite vague: “A Village Court shall be constituted by an odd number (not being less than three) of Village Magistrates, and decision is by majority vote” (section 14[1]). “Subject to Subsection (1), a Village Court may add further Village Magistrates to its number at any time during a proceeding before it” (section 14[2]). Section 8(2) states, “There shall be not less than three nor more than 10 Village Magistrates for each Village Court.”

While acting as principal legal officer for the Law Reform Commission of Papua New Guinea, I had occasion to carry out research on village courts on Kiriwina in the Trobriand Islands. Kiriwina is an Austronesian-speaking area in which chiefs traditionally enjoyed extensive authority and power (eg, Malinowski 1922, 62–70; Weiner 1988, 6–7). One of my informants described the ineffectiveness of village courts: “Nobody will listen to the magistrates. They are commoners, and everyone knows the chief will make the final decisions about these things.” Because the Village Courts Act required a minimum of three magistrates, the local or paramount chief could not be chosen without sharing his authority in a “majority rules” situation with the other magistrates, clearly an unsatisfactory situation. Thus village courts were seen as usurping the authority of traditional chiefs.<sup>7</sup>

I had previously noticed a similar problem with a village court in the

Marshall Lagoon area of Central Province. Again acting as a principal legal officer, I worked with Wari Iamo, then a university student from the area, to study the village court of the Austronesian-speaking Keapara people in Paramana and Maopa villages. The Keapara traditionally had clan chiefs (*kwalu velenā*) as well as village chiefs (*vanua velenā*). Once again, chiefly authority had clashed with a “democratically based” diffuse model of authority. Younger and more educated men, who were not in the chiefly genealogical line, had been chosen as magistrates, again resulting in rather ineffective courts (Iamo 1987). By contrast, similar research among the Papuan-speaking Abelam people revealed very effective courts (Scaglione 1979) that have continued to be successful (Scaglione 1990).

## DISCUSSION

Focusing attention on the historical, linguistic, and cultural differences between the Austronesian- and Papuan-speaking cultures of Papua New Guinea can shed light on the nature and distribution of the rhetoric about chiefs that emerges in a contemporary context. Linguistic reconstructions of Proto-Austronesian culture suggest a society characterized by considerable hierarchy, one having important hereditary authority. Contemporary Austronesian-speaking societies, both in Papua New Guinea and elsewhere in Melanesia, seem to have much less powerful “chiefs” than do those of many other areas of the Austronesian-speaking world. Yet notions of chiefly authority must have very deep historical roots in all Austronesian societies, casting some doubt on arguments that chiefs are being “created” wholesale in such contexts. More likely, the traditional authority of Austronesian chiefs is being resurrected, rediscovered, reified, expanded, and legitimized.

Although the rhetoric about chiefs seems much more salient in the contemporary scholarly literature and political debate of eastern Melanesia than of Papua New Guinea, the issues I have explored for Austronesian-speaking Papua New Guinea are reminiscent of the issues that arise in eastern Melanesia: questions of cultural authenticity; the invention, construction, and modification of tradition; the use of chiefs as symbols of identity and power; and the empowerment of traditional chiefs to facilitate or legitimize postcolonial political reform.





## Notes

1 For the balance of this paper, I will use the term *non-Austronesian* to refer to all Pacific languages other than Austronesian ones (thus including Australian languages), and use the term *Papuan* in the sense of Foley (1986, 3) to refer to languages of the Melanesian region that are not Austronesian.

2 Terence Hays (personal communication) kindly drew my attention to an error in the *Oceania* volume of the *Encyclopedia of World Cultures* (Hays 1991, 248), in which Nissan Islanders were incorrectly reported to be speakers of a non-Austronesian language. Figures reported in Table 1 count their language as Austronesian (see Grimes 1992, 855).

3 The entire written text of Somare's speech is capitalized. It is therefore not known which if any of these terms or titles he would have considered sufficiently institutionalized to warrant initial capitalization. To avoid making judgments, I have chosen lower case for all of them.

4 An anonymous reviewer of this paper pointed out that both Solomons Pijin and Bislama *do* have terms for "chief."

5 A white woman would be referred to as *sinabada* (important "mother").

6 To be absolutely accurate, some speakers of the Markham River Adzera family may extend into the political boundaries of the Eastern Highlands Province along its northeastern border.

7 It is my understanding that the Act was subsequently amended to allow for a minimum of one village court magistrate, as we recommended, and that Kiriwina chiefs were later appointed as the only magistrates in their areas. A subsequent draft bill contained the proviso: "Notwithstanding Sections 6 and 16(3) where custom so requires, the Minister may, in respect of a specified Village Court, by notice in the National Gazette, declare that a Village Magistrate sitting alone shall constitute that Village Court" (section 7).

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### *Abstract*

There has been a resurgent interest in traditional “chiefs” in eastern Melanesia, both as symbols of identity and power, and as agents for the facilitation and legitimization of postcolonial reform. However Papua New Guinea seems to have made relatively little use of such models of authority. This paper argues that the distribution of Austronesian and non-Austronesian languages within Melanesia helps account for this difference. Austronesian languages appear to be characterized by what is called “a lexicon of hierarchy,” in which concepts related to chiefly models of authority are not uncommon, whereas non-Austronesian languages generally lack such terms. Speakers of Austronesian languages predominate in Fiji, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, and Solomon Islands, whereas non-Austronesian languages predominate in Papua New Guinea. Chiefly models seem to arise periodically in Papua New Guinea in Austronesian contexts, but are rejected by non-Austronesian-speaking cultures when an attempt is made to apply the models more broadly. Results have important implications for the practical implementation of legal and political reform in contemporary Papua New Guinea.

**KEYWORDS:** Papua New Guinea, chiefs, hierarchy, Austronesian languages, Papuan languages, leadership, legal development