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# **Cannibals, *Kiaps*, and Magistrates: Three Eras Impacting Samo Spatiality, Interpersonal Relationships, and Bible Translation**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper traces the key colonial events that impacted the Samo people (Western Province, Papua New Guinea), who live in the last region to be contacted (1961) and de-restricted (1969). The result has been a changed Samo perspective regarding interpersonal relationships and a shift in the practice of cannibalism. Australian administrative officers (*kiap* in Tok Pisin) dealt with cannibalism in the Western Province by using a large police presence and the fear of imprisonment. In 1975 the Samo watched the Australians turn administration over to Melanesian magistrates whose emphasis has been to meld estranged peoples into a nation of "a thousand tribes." Furthermore, when the Bible was translated into the Samo language, it provided a renewed understanding of human relationships with a broader rationale for the cessation of cannibal raids. Indeed, cannibalism ceased, and centralized villages replaced isolated longhouses. What emerged was a new perspective of those spatial elements necessary for protection and a new rationale for interpersonal relationships. The result has been an altered view of both their land and the people who live on it.

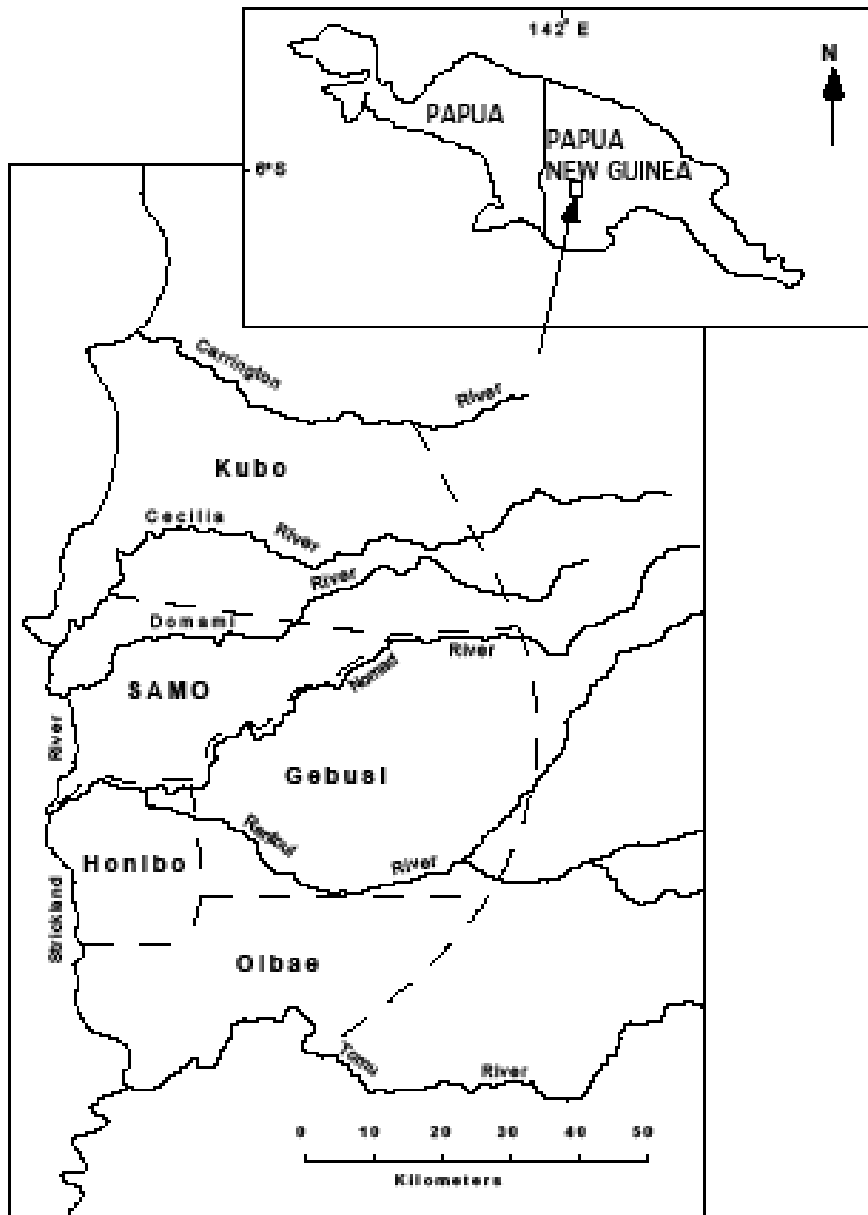
## 1 Introduction

Karl Franklin's career spanned a critical period in the transition of New Guinea from a remote and little known island of near pre-historic proportions under colonial administration to a fully recognized nation on the global scene. At Franklin's entry to New Guinea in 1958 there was no anticipation of national independence. His objectives were to work under the auspices of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) to identify and record the languages and cultures of this little known population. Overseeing surveys, organizing language institutes, and pioneering research among the Kewa of the Southern Highlands Province were all part of his involvement, and they corresponded with his deep interest in cataloguing languages and their distribution across the Australian-administered Territories of Papua and New Guinea (later known as Papua New Guinea (PNG)).

I first met Karl in 1969 upon my arrival in PNG to work with SIL. Soon after my family and I established ourselves among the Samo, Karl contacted me regarding the need for a full linguistic survey of the Strickland Plain and surrounding area (see map) in the Western Province (Shaw 1973:49ff). He was helpful in making suggestions and encouraged my involvement in this process. A similar survey ten years later provided comparative statistics on these languages, and again Karl was not only supportive but also assisted in the process (Shaw 1986 ).

Of import here is the impact Franklin had on the development of our academic appreciation of PNG languages and the people who spoke them. His tenure spanned a significant period of change in the life of this nation, from cannibalism to full nationhood. This change was especially true for the Samo of the Western Province who had yet to be contacted when Franklin arrived in PNG, and who now are a well-documented society, in part due to Franklin's encouragement to see the documentation of as much linguistic and cultural information as possible. Moreover, the people of PNG had an amazing impact on so many expatriates, changing us in ways we could not have imagined when we began our interaction with them. Karl's mentoring of me as a young, naive anthropologist was significant, and this chapter is a token of my appreciation.

Map: Dialects on The Strickland Plain (Permission of Wadsworth Publishers)



The pre-European contact period for the Samo was dominated by cannibalism that impacted relationships at all levels of social structure, from household members protecting each other to the raiding and counter-raiding of enemies. The subsequent colonial presence was dominated by young Australian patrol officers (*kiap* in Tok Pisin) who established a permanent presence in the region in 1961 and oversaw the eventual transition to a national government in 1975 when Papua New Guinean magistrates assumed control.

I will present the material chronologically from the late 1950s to 1980. First I will discuss the aboriginal context in terms of cannibalism and its impact on social structures as they related to the distribution of people in isolated

longhouses scattered throughout the rain forest. Then I will discuss the early colonial period when the *kiaps* responded to cannibalism and established sedentary villages which forced people out of their aboriginal habitations. Finally I will present the late colonial period when the PNG government's magistrates took up their responsibilities as keepers of the peace.

I will account for the veracity of an indigenous population that responded to outside influence in what Eugene Ogan (1996) calls "a near virgin" context. Roy Wagner (1995), in turn, presents how the colonialists had an "intent" for the colonized that produced changes that went beyond the purview of the 'contacted' peoples. Such intent was demonstrated by an administrative encouragement to replace a migratory longhouse pattern of life with a sedentary village-based economic and social environment, one that provided greater protection against enemy raids and made administration of the region much simpler. I seek to show how the colonizers and the indigenous populations interacted to establish what Nicholas Thomas (1994) calls the "colonial project." Furthermore, scripture, translated for people who held to their mythical past yet sought to fit new expectations, provided a rationale for changing behavior patterns that went beyond those that had been prescribed for them.

## **2 Cannibalism: aboriginal households and social networks**

As we began to learn the Samo language, my wife Karen collected a text from some children playing in the village. Their brandishing of toy bows and arrows, whooping, and play acting portrayed an enactment of a raid. When she asked them what they were doing, they responded with the following text:

The Biami [Samo name for the Bedamini people] come for the purpose of killing. Having killed you, they cut you up and stuff you into a string bag. Having stuffed you, they carry you home. Arriving home they cut you up. Having cut you up, they put you with sago and greens for the purpose of cooking. Having cooked you, they eat you. That is all [my translation from Samo].

The Nomad River region, in the center of the island of New Guinea, was the last to be contacted by the Australian administration and remained restricted (outsiders could not enter without police protection, largely because of rampant cannibalism) until 1969. This relatively recent de-restriction provided a unique opportunity to explore the nature of the earlier contact situation. The first intentional contact with the Samo was Brian McBride's patrol in 1959. His patrol report makes note of the circumstances under which the people were living at the time: "The population has had little or no contact and...there is no semblance of our ideas of law and order in the area. Tribal fighting, killings, and cannibalism frequently occur and are openly talked about" (McBride 1959).

Late in 1961 the administration established a patrol post and built an airstrip at the confluence of the Nomad and Homami Rivers. Over the eighteen months during which the station was built, the Samo gradually overcame their shyness and contributed to the work force largely out of curiosity. Those who worked for

a month received a steel ax head. In this way about one hundred steel axes were introduced to the area. By mid-1963 patrol officer Ian Douglas noted that steel axes had largely “replaced the traditional stone ax, but in all other respects the Supei<sup>1</sup> are as primitive as their forebears one hundred years ago” (Douglas 1963).

## 2.1 Pre-contact social structure

In the pre-contact era, a longhouse was the primary dwelling. It was occupied by 25–75 people and was surrounded by gardens that sloped down to sago-lined swamp and the rain forest beyond. The social relationships between people in these isolated communities focused on the activities of a group of co-initiates<sup>2</sup> (both male and female) as they attempted not only to create physical protection through the construction of a longhouse, but also to provide social protection by establishing an alliance network through the exchange of female siblings with men of other households. I have described these relationships elsewhere (Shaw 1990, 1996, 1997), and for the purposes of this chapter I will focus on the protective rationale of these households and their respective alliances to each other as a bulwark against enemy attack which often resulted in cannibalism.

Raiding and subsequent cannibalism were frequent, openly discussed (as McBride noted) and were supported by the rationale for the network of alliances between communities. Through female-sibling exchange, men built a social structure which extended from a given household (viewed as being at the center of their world) to allied communities where female siblings resided after being exchanged as wives. The exchanges between allies and other non-allied communities served to broaden the alliance network. All women who were received from communities where women were called *uyo*, loosely translated as ‘mother’, were themselves called *uyo*. Thus women provided both food and protection, inasmuch as the members of households into which they were distributed formed a protective circle of trusted people stretching ever further into the forest. If these individuals became aware of outsiders (who by definition were considered enemies, i.e., they were untrusted), they could send an alarm to initiate counter measures. This alliance structure then was carefully orchestrated. Each exchange was considered strategic for maintaining ties to previously established allies while, to the extent possible, extending relationships to new allies and thereby expanding their web of protection (figure 1). Proximity impacted this distribution, as a close and on-going relationship

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<sup>1</sup>Early reports use the name Supei instead of Samo. Inasmuch as patrols came from Kiunga in the west and crossed the Strickland River, officers used the name the Pare people on the west side of the river used. The people, themselves, as all groups on the east side of the Strickland, use the name Samo which is currently used by the administration. This reflects the colonial approach of using information from external sources rather than information from the people themselves.

<sup>2</sup>Initiation is central to understanding the use of Samo relationship terms. Though somewhat parallel to “generation” I use “initiation cycle” to reflect the commonality of all those who were initiated after one’s parents but before one’s children. Thus for individuals older than oneself, a parent’s younger siblings are defined as older siblings, and a clear gender distinction is essential. For individuals younger than oneself, no gender distinction is made, and all who are born before one’s children are collectively “younger siblings” to all members of the co-initiate group (Shaw 1996 pp. 44ff).

with those in contiguous land areas was more crucial to survival than relationships with those further away.<sup>3</sup>

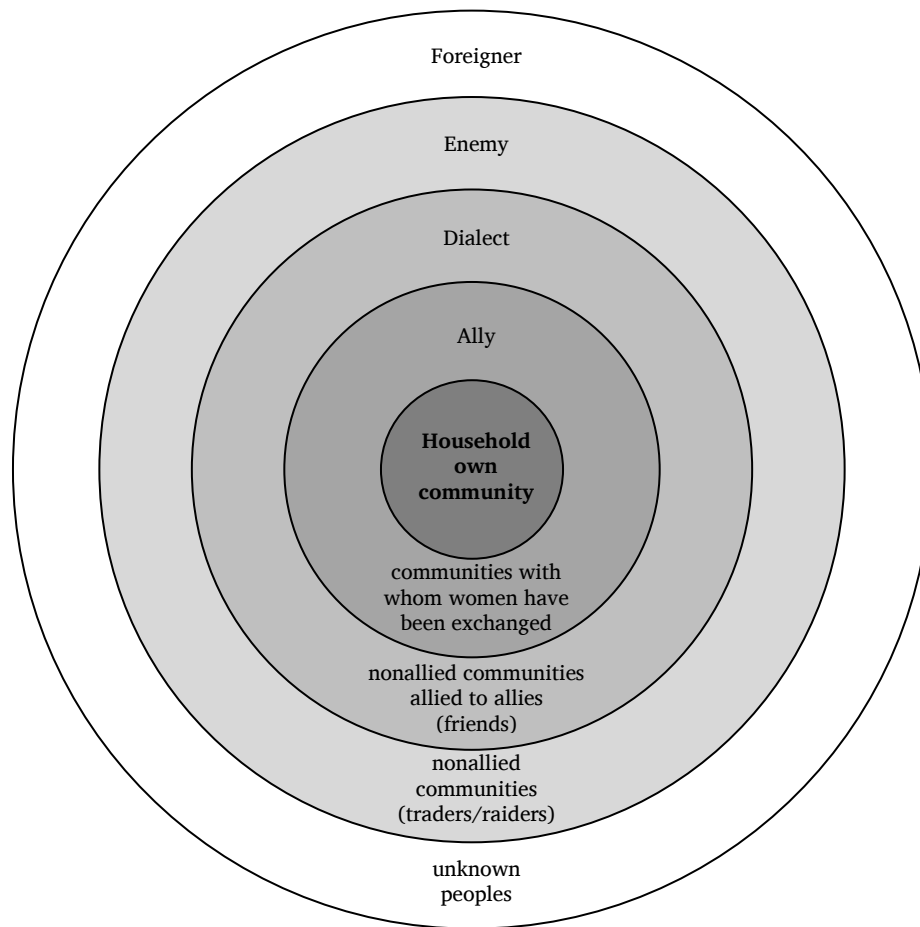


Figure 1: The Samo alliance network (permission of Wadsworth Publishers)

Men in an alliance relationship used the reciprocal term *koiman*, 'in-law', or more broadly, 'ally' for each other, but the relationship was seen largely as an extension of male siblings within a household. When male allies visited each other, they were given the privileges of community membership, e.g., food and sleeping rights commensurate with their position within the initiation structure. Thus, married men would sleep with others in the central, most protected, portion of the house, while unmarried men slept with other bachelors on the porch which doubled as a fighting platform. A watch was kept every night in order to guard against a raid, and the doorway at the front of the house was blocked by filling it with logs. Thus a longhouse served its occupants as a fortress against enemy raids.

<sup>3</sup>Inasmuch as houses were built within the designated land area of each household, they came into closer proximity with different neighbors over time. The alliance structure reflects this proximity and can be traced in the genealogies as well as in narratives connected to the various habitation sites.

## 2.2 Trading led to raiding

The Strickland Plain had an abundance of soft, colored stones which the Samo used to make paint for a wide variety of utilitarian and ritual purposes (Shaw 1990:49ff). However, this region did not provide the limestone that is necessary for mixing with betel nut. Possum fur pelts and stone ax heads were available from the foothills of the Karius Range to the north; tobacco and shell necklaces were available from groups to the south, closer to the coast. Hence, trading parties moved about the region, particularly during lulls in the planting-harvesting cycle and during the processing of sago. Because trading was organized to procure goods not otherwise available within the region, it entailed dangerous journeys beyond the protection of the alliance structure.

To maximize safety, trading parties used well-traveled trails and made loud whooping noises and a lot of chatter as they moved about. No one with treachery in mind, so their reasoning went, would make such a racket and thereby announce their presence. Trading, however, provided an entrance into distant houses as well as a good view of the surrounding land as the traders arrived and subsequently departed carrying their exchanged goods. This knowledge of a house and its environs could be valuable information for a raiding party in the future, and people on both sides of the displayed goods were wary of each other. Women and children were often carefully secluded, and warriors were watchful for the wandering eyes of distrusted visitors who were not offered food and were hastened on their way as expeditiously as possible. A raid, often precipitated by an earlier raid from an enemy longhouse, demanded considerable cooperation and planning, and trading was often part of the preparation.

## 2.3 Raiding assumed cannibalism

After carefully planning a raid, a confederation of allies would set out for their target. Unlike acts of trading, where noise served as protection, successful raids required stealth and surprise.<sup>4</sup> Equipped with knowledge procured from the reconnaissance of a trading party, the men would creep into the longhouse clearing and surround the house in the pre-dawn darkness. One or two especially brave and daring warriors would enter the house through an unguarded doorway, a hole in the floor, or even the menstrual confinement area. Once inside, they would wield a stone club and attempt to crush skulls or break bones. Screams of pain were muffled by a deafening roar from the warriors outside. As confusion spread within the house, people, awakened from a sound sleep, attempted to ascertain what was happening and would often respond by attempting to escape. As they exited the house, waiting warriors would easily shoot them with barbed arrows at close range. With the element of surprise on

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<sup>4</sup>The Samo were particularly wary on wet, moonless nights when it was difficult to see approaching raiders who camouflaged themselves with soot-black and shredded black palm leaves and grasses wedged into their arm and leg bands.

their side, raiders could take advantage of those who in their sleepy stupor were not sufficiently awake to appropriately respond.<sup>5</sup> Raiders acted quickly to dismember the bodies of their victims, throw them into string bags and hasten into the dark forest. Before leaving the site, however, the raiders would pick up their bows and thump the taunt strings, stomp their feet, and let out a rising and falling death knell. They then would torch the house and depart for home with their heavily laden bags of human meat.

Upon arriving home, warriors would be greeted with jubilation as the meat was parceled out, cooked in a leaf oven (much as they would cook cassowary or pork with greens and sago) and consumed in a party atmosphere amidst the recounting of the expedition's details. While retaliation was often the primary focus, procurement of meat was a welcome result,<sup>6</sup> in some measure exacerbated by a protein deficient diet. A commonly heard aphorism in my early days with the Samo stated that "a certain pitch in a baby's cry indicated that only human meat would satisfy." Samo stories (like the one my wife procured) about Bedamini raids were frequent and portrayed both brutality and a focus on food as a primary motivation. This was the context into which the *kiaps* entered in the late 1950s.

## 2.4 The raiding experience makes the Bible clear

When translating for the Samo, we came to the parable of the wise householder: "But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore, you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Matthew 24:43ff).

Interestingly, Samo is a language with no word for "thief." In asking about this, I learned that an assumption within a household<sup>7</sup> is common ownership—everyone shares. As individuals move beyond the household, their allies, and friends—and ultimately those across a river in enemy territory—represent increasingly less trust as well as ownership. Taking something from an enemy is not regarded as stealing, but rather simply as trading or raiding. Whatever they take (including bodies) is regarded as theirs. Such a rationale for behavior, then, is predicated on the degree of trust, so within a household everything is held in

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<sup>5</sup>If the guard on duty sounded an alarm, the household would react. Men would run to the porch, grab bows and arrows stockpiled for just such an occasion, and rain arrows down on the intruders. Women would gather the children around themselves and huddle in the secluded women's section of the house. Raiders, however, often had the upper hand as a product of surprise which was often used to rationalize the impact of murder. Since the Samo believe a person's spirit wanders away from the body during sleep (as evidenced by dreams which the Samo consider real), surprise removes the possibility of the spirit returning to the body before life is taken from it. The raiders, then, were only taking the body, not killing the spirit which, in their view, was free to return to the abode of the ancestors. A destroyed longhouse was often avoided because of the possibility of spirits hanging around looking for their bodies.

<sup>6</sup>Most raids were retaliatory and retributive. They were wide spread throughout the Bosavi region as noted by several writers. Most mention an attitude of "*an eye for an eye...*" and subsequent cannibalism: (Schieffelin 1976: 121ff; Kelly 1977; Sørum 1980; Knauff 1985).

<sup>7</sup>The term for 'house' and for those who live in the house (the household) is the same, *moonson*. This has significance with respect to the expected behavior of everyone living in the community—they are household members who share everything.



common and there is no such thing as stealing. Taking the “spoils” of an enemy raid is not stealing, but rather the reciprocal result of procuring that which has been hard won.

As a translator, I was faced with the task of communicating God’s intent in this passage from Matthew and moving beyond Jesus’ specific use of the term “thief” in order to ensure Samo understanding. I asked, “What in the Samo cognitive environment accounts for the element of surprise and requires vigil?” Clearly the schema surrounding raiding fills this semantic domain. The *ayo*, ‘old man of the house’ instructs the young, unmarried men who sleep on the open porch to take turns keeping watch against the surprise of a raid. With a longhouse positioned at the top of a sloping ridge, which intruders would need to traverse, the household warriors were able to sound an alarm while raining arrows down on their assailants and thus warding off a raid.

Jesus makes his intent clear, “always be ready!” As the householder always posts a guard because he never knows when a raiding party may attack, so the Samo also must carefully watch for Jesus’ unexpected return. This moves the translation into a dramatic cognitive sphere that conveys the intent of the passage with which every Samo householder resonates and every warrior bristles with anticipation. They receive this message with understanding and there is no need for an explanation regarding what a thief does, how that happens and who is involved. The Samo would not understand such an inappropriate focus on something beyond their experience. However, placed in the context of raiding, they immediately understood and were able to appropriate the intent of Jesus’ words to their understanding of the raiding experience and apply the message to appropriate action, an attitude of careful anticipation for that which is unexpected—never be caught unaware.

### **3 *Kiaps*: colonial contact and pacification**

One of the primary objectives of early contact and the construction of an airstrip and patrol post at Nomad River was the pacification and elimination of cannibalism. A favorite demonstration of power for a newly contacted community was to bring a large pig into the clearing and shoot it with one slug from a police gun. The pig dropped dead on the spot and the message was not lost on the amazed observers. Administrators and patrol officers were assisted by an extensive national police force<sup>8</sup> that quickly created a presence and followed up all reports of raiding and cannibalism.

On an early census patrol, the interpreters heard about a raid on a Kubo longhouse to the north. Upon hearing the story the officer returned to Nomad for police reinforcements and then proceeded to launch his own “raid” upon the Komifia raiders. Surrounding the house in the pre-dawn darkness, several police entered the house and apprehended the men, bringing them to Nomad for trial (personal journal).

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<sup>8</sup>In 1968 there were over one hundred police and their families living at Nomad River.

One early book (Anderson 1970) about the region detailed the administration's response to a raid among the Bedamini. These dwellers of the Papuan Plateau were particularly recalcitrant and kept the *kiaps* busy searching out and bringing raiders to justice. Efforts to eliminate raiding subsequently reduced the opportunities for cannibalism. By pacification in 1969, cannibalism was little more than a memory (albeit vivid) for most people in the region. The perpetrators of raids were tried and sent off to extensive jail terms (typically five to seven years) in the provincial capital at Daru. Little distinction was made between raiding and the cannibalism that followed—all who were apprehended were sent to jail.

### 3.1 To eat or not to eat?

In 1971, a clear case of cannibalism without involvement in the preceding murder was brought as a test case and documented in the Australian press. Seven Gebusi men (a related dialect south of the Homami River)<sup>9</sup> were brought to trial at the District headquarters in Daru. Judge J. Prentice subsequently dismissed the case ruling:

On a full consideration of the evidence, I have come to the conclusion that the conduct of the Yulabi villagers and of the man from Dadalibi in eating the body of the deceased Sabasigi villager, [in all the circumstances of the case], was neither improper nor indecent behaviour on their part, [being normal and reasonable behaviour for them as most primitive villagers living in the Gabusi area of the Nomad Sub District in early 1971] in the limited condition of pacification and administration to which that area had then been reduced (1971, Supreme Court Document #634).

Given the absence of a legal precedent on cannibalism and the value of local customs regarding the proper disposal of a body, the judge had no choice but to acquit the accused who had not been involved in the murder. These seven men, therefore, had only engaged in what reporters labeled “a bizarre funeral” (*Pacific Islands Monthly*, September, 1971:47). The court contended that under the Queensland Criminal Code, which served as the jurisdiction for Papua prior to Independence in 1975, cannibalism was little more than “improper and indecent interference” with a body, and the accused were released to return home. Thus, while law required a government response to raiding, by this ruling, cannibalism could be treated as “custom,” a local manifestation of behavior that, though contrary to “civilized” activity, was not deemed criminal.

Ironically, for many of these raiders, incarceration became the doorway to opportunity. While in jail they learned to speak the trade language (either Hiri Motu spoken throughout Papua, or Tok Pisin used more broadly throughout the nation). Some also learned to read and write, use basic math, and, in some cases,

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<sup>9</sup>Bruce Knauff (1985) has chronicled the high incidence of homicide through sorcery among the Gebusi. He has noted that the focus of attention on the Bedamini allowed the Gebusi to come across as peaceful, thereby allowing the administration to be tough on their feared neighbors to the east (personal communication). This ruse enabled the Gebusi, and to a lesser extent others on the Strickland Plain, to carry on much as they always had with little government intervention. Patrols to the south of the Homami River were infrequent and primarily administrative rather than punitive.

carpentry, mechanics, and other skills. Upon their release from prison, these “reformed cannibals” returned home only to discover that life had gone on without them. In many cases their wives had been married to a younger brother in an effort to maintain household relationships and support women and children whose lives had been disrupted by the absence of the accused.<sup>10</sup> Many of these men also found it difficult to settle back into village life, so they used their new knowledge of the world to offer their services to the administration. This resulted in some becoming government interpreters while others became clerk’s assistants and medical orderlies. Some even became policemen or joined the army.

Nevertheless, the cessation of raiding and cannibalism produced a behavioral modification imposed by outside agents of change. Not only was murder deemed inappropriate, a fact reinforced by heavy sentencing, but consuming the remains of the deceased in a feasting context was also viewed as unacceptable by the larger public. Over the years government officers and an expanding support staff represented that “public” to the Samo and made an effort to bring civilization to this remote region. They introduced material culture through frequent plane loads of goods for the station trade store, new ideas through education, and an altered diet through introduced fruits, vegetables, and protein-rich foods that ameliorated the local propensity for cannibalism. This altered lifestyle was most evident in the orchestrated move of people from isolated forest longhouses into villages.

### 3.2 From longhouse to village

Instituting a shift from living in dispersed longhouses to living in centralized villages appears to have been central to *kiap* Ian Douglas’ practice of establishing rest houses for government patrols. His stated objective as presented in his patrol report in 1963 was to establish viable villages in order to facilitate administration.

In due course these rest houses may well act as magnets, drawing in the various outlying houses as their current dwellings become uninhabitable. In this way the area would be eventually reduced to eight or nine villages worthy of that name, thus greatly easing the job of administering the area (Douglas 1963).

Indeed, this was almost prophetic, for over the next ten years the Samo moved to these sites as their longhouses fell into disrepair and they were forced to rebuild. Not wanting to spend undue amounts of time traveling from a forest house site to the nearest government rest house, and never knowing when a *kiap* may demand a hearing, they began the process of establishing new communities. Those households that were most closely allied to each other congregated in

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<sup>10</sup>The Samo utilized the levirate to ensure that women and children remained in the village following a husband and father’s death. Rather than some men having more than one wife, it was common to have a younger household male who was not yet married, become husband and father to the surviving kinsmen. Thus it was not uncommon for a younger man to marry the wife of his deceased *onyon*, ‘older brother’, caring for her and his children including any progeny of the new union (Shaw 1990: 65, 73, 80).

order to form new social units the people called *gaboo monsoon*<sup>11</sup> ‘white man said place’, or simply, ‘village’. As increasing numbers of people gathered at these sites, their need for garden space, building materials, and access to a ready water supply resulted in them opening the surrounding forest, creating, in turn, a greater opportunity for observation of attack by human enemies. Hence the protection of the administration, realized through inhibiting raiding, was central to the success of household aggregation.

A system of trails facilitated the movement of people and goods between these villages. Patrol reports always included a notation on the condition of these “roads” which eventually became passable for four-wheel-drive vehicles. These roads were a great assistance in the administration of a growing number of trade stores, medical aid posts, churches, and schools. This provided the context of transition from expatriate influence directed by *kiaps* to national involvement by the newly independent government of PNG in 1975.

### 3.3 The value of human life

I learned the resounding impact of the *kiaps* upon the Samo when translating the flood story from Genesis. Our team of translation assistants had grappled with the concepts in the story of Noah. They had recounted their own flood myth to help me understand how they perceived such a cataclysmic event. They had marveled at the devastation caused by the flood and that all the people and animals had perished when the waters rose above the highest mountains. They were also impressed with Noah who prevailed after having faithfully followed God’s instructions despite years of taunting by his neighbors. For, in the end it was he who, because of his obedience, prevailed and was rescued. With all this as background we arrived at Genesis 9:5ff “I created humans to be like me, and I will punish any animal or person that takes a human life. If an animal kills someone, that animal must die. And if a person takes the life of another, that person must be put to death.”

One evening I sat on the porch reading the results of the translation team’s efforts to a small crowd that had gathered—after all, we were the best entertainment in town. As I read, various ones chimed in with suggestions for making the text clearer, all the while interjecting their thoughts and joking with each other about what God might do to them because of their social infractions. When I read the above verses, however, a silence came over the group and they sat thinking about what they had just heard. Then an older man sitting in the shadows at the edge of the porch blurted out, “Are you telling us that God condemns cannibal raids?” This created an awkward moment. If I said, “Of

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<sup>11</sup>These structural adjustments resulted in my being able to document a shift from an average of 78 percent lexical cognates between five dialects on the Strickland Plain in 1971 to an 89 percent cognate count among the same dialects in 1981. Samo, as the central dialect, was mutually intelligible with the four other dialects which, because of their placement vis-à-vis each other, were not mutually intelligible. Therefore, Samo, could be considered the dominant dialect and carry the name for the entire language. However, since some of these dialects have been presented in the literature as distinct groups, I would not now encourage such usage of the Samo name. This rapid lexical shift was directly associated with village aggregation and the decision to develop a broader alliance structure (Shaw 1986).

course,” I would be classed with the *kiaps* and their sidekicks, the missionaries. But if I said, “No,” they would possibly take God’s Word too lightly—was I a missionary or an anthropologist? So I countered by asking him to tell me about cannibalism.

For the next hour or so he told me about the rationale for raiding, the devastating effects of raiding and counter raiding, and the inevitable feast that ensued, satisfying everyone with human meat. Then he reflected on the Scripture passage and God’s regret in creating human beings who followed their own path of devastation and self-will. He ended by stating how afraid they were of the *kiaps* who had come and put fellow villagers in jail for raiding and cannibalism. Missionaries from other parts of PNG also had come and told them that raiding and cannibalism were bad. Then he made an incredible statement. “These outsiders came and gave us their message, but no one ever told us why raiding and cannibalism was bad. You are the first one to come and make sense.” Then, in typical Samo literary style he summed up the conversation. “Human beings are special and we must not take their lives and eat them.”

My response was to tell him that this was not my message, but rather God’s Spirit was mingling with his spirit, and he needed to communicate this message to his fellow Samo. Everyone on that porch that night heard the word of the Lord and it went beyond what they had heard before and penetrated their understanding of proper behavior. Clearly, their behavioral expectations did not measure up to God’s standard for human beings whom he had created.

While they had ceased raiding with its attendant loss of life and subsequent cannibalism at that point in time, largely because of their fear of the *kiap*’s response, having Scripture in their language gave the Samo a new understanding of God’s intention for human beings and the value of life. They valued government protection and appreciated its effect of preserving life, but the Scripture in their language gave them a new appreciation for why they should not seek reprisal on their enemies and bring home human meat. Human life, even of enemies, was precious in God’s sight, and that knowledge rose above the confusion of government and missionary messages to a level of divine truth. God had spoken and the Samo had heard!

#### **4 Magistrates: new structures and national development**

For PNG as a whole, independence represented a transformation that Mave O’Collins (1979) called “neo-colonial.” Nationals, she maintained, continued the colonialist attitudes and practices of their predecessors. Those who trained at the Administrative College in Port Moresby soon found themselves in remote places like the Nomad River. Later, former police and government clerks themselves became administrators. This transition, however, meant little to the Samo who continued to interact with outsiders, even though their skin color was now more like their own. What the retiring *kiaps* began, Melanesian *kiaps* continued. Like their predecessors this new group of outsiders had little appreciation for the circumstances under which the Samo lived. In fact, the Samo lifestyle was as

remote and strange to these newcomers as it had been to the Australians before them.

I recall an incident when a magistrate from the New Britain province presided over a case of what a teacher considered “bridal abuse.” Acting in accordance with the custom of taking an unsuspecting girl from her natal community and introducing her to the new husband, a group of Samo men were dragging a kicking and screaming woman who demonstrated her character by attempting to escape. Responding to the ruckus a teacher interrupted the proceedings and took the entire group to the Nomad station in order to inflict justice upon these “ignorant savages.” My journal continues the story:

Early Friday morning, Hogalibo and I went to Nomad to discuss the matter with the magistrate. I tried to impart some cross-cultural understanding and compassion for customs beyond his experience. I explained the importance of women demonstrating their value through the display of uncooperativeness. I also explained the need for the exchange to be completed in order to establish an alliance between the two communities. The rationale for the rather harsh treatment of the woman was to ensure that she arrive at the destination and the marriage alliance be completed with all haste.

During my exposé the magistrate nodded his understanding and reiterated stories he had heard from old men about marriage customs in New Britain. While not the same, and not practiced for many years, he acknowledged the people’s right to express their customs so long as they did not interfere with the laws of the country. We then went out to the flimsy jail house where he verified my analysis of Samo marriage with the incarcerated wedding party. Hoga [the bride] was still, appropriately, sulking and the men were no longer brash and strong. Using Hiri Motu, he questioned them about their activities in light of what he had learned from me. The men supported my analysis and hung their heads while the magistrate cautioned them about being so rough on women and their need to fit into the larger national society. He thereupon released them. Their animated discussion all the way home and the subsequent conclusion to the exchange demonstrated that all was well with marriage alliances in Samoland. However, they were understandably cautious about displaying their culture before the teachers for some time after that (personal journal).

For me, the amazing thing about this incident was the power that this solitary outsider had to halt the procession and hand the entire exchange party over to the authorities. Clearly Papua New Guineans had replaced the Australians of yesteryear as authority figures. While the Samo had more physical power than the teacher, he represented outside authority and they acquiesced and went to Nomad with him.

For their part, the Samo maintained their basic approach to economic and social viability within the rubric of their village structure. For them, the culture of contact was an extension of aboriginal beliefs and values within the framework of villages, connecting roads and the encroachment of the outside world. This became obvious in the extension of household kin terms to all members of a village and the decision to no longer marry between the village households. Former allies now all lived at the same location which precluded the need for further internal exchange of female siblings. What had been household exogamy resulted in village endogamy and, as one informant queried, “What is the value of self alliance?” They chose rather to expand their alliances with other villages. Thus villages replaced longhouses, not only as a domicile, but

also as a structural identity, which required expanded relationships within a community and with a broader alliance structure outside. This broadening of the social structure eventually reduced the distinctions between dialects on the Strickland Plain. As men were forced to look more broadly for potential wives, and thus new exchange partners, and as the government protection reduced the need to worry about raiding and cannibalism, it became safe to marry someone from a greater distance—both geographically and socially. Hence, former enemies began to exchange their women with each other, resulting in a dramatic reduction in lexical differences between the five dialects on the Strickland Plain (Shaw 1986).<sup>12</sup>

The social shifts mirror the spatial adjustments that came with village aggregation. As the land surrounding the villages has become depleted, people have had to go ever deeper into the forest to find sago and suitable land for growing plantain and *pitpit*, ‘wild sugar cane’ producing a pithy/mealy fruit resembling a small ear of corn. This has forced them to spend increasing amounts of time away from the villages, living in small, temporary garden houses. There they seek to survive without the excitement (and pain) of raiding and subsequently feasting on human meat. Ironically, because of the depleted forest surrounding contemporary villages, the Samo are forced to go ever further away to maintain their food supply by hunting, foraging and processing sago. The more the Samo conform to national standards, the more they must revert to their aboriginal lifestyle in order to survive. Migratory longhouse communities were a much better means of utilizing the forest environment than sedentary villages as demanded by the government. Perhaps at some point these wary people will abandon their villages and reestablish the art of building longhouses in the forest.

#### 4.1 God’s protection symbolized by the house

The value of a well-built, secure and safe house was central in enabling us to effectively translate passages such as 1 Thessalonians 5:8 with its emphasis on the “breastplate” of faith and love and the “helmet” of salvation. These elements of Roman armor meant nothing to the Samo. But the broader context gives further understanding of God’s intent and his message to the Samo. In 1 Thessalonians, chapter 4, the Apostle Paul is giving instructions to the original audience in Thessalonica regarding the return of Christ. As Jesus had done in Matt. 24, Paul uses the imagery of a “thief in the night.” With that imagery in mind Paul contrasts night time behavior with what takes place during the day.

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<sup>12</sup>In his most recent book, Derek Bickerton (2008) writes: “Every dialect feature has geographic boundaries, and every dialect is a structured, integrated whole; it’s just not possible for isolated features to detach themselves from their homes and congregate in a single place.” The Samo data would appear to contradict this view and demonstrate that linguistic theories are subject to the dynamics of a context. The contact situation on the Strickland Plain, as it pertained to raiding and cannibalism in juxtaposition to the Samo socio-political environment and longhouse relocation into centralized villages created a very different response from that which Bickerton would expect. Women brought their dialect with them when they were exchanged, but that changed in relationship to being understood by people around them, and the speech of their children. The more exchanges were used to reinforce alliances, the greater the inter-dialect interchange and the greater the commonality that resulted.

This sets up, for the Samo, the scenario of the householder ordering the preparation of a house for nighttime protection. Householders secured the house by “locking” the door, a process that required pulling out the wooden pins that held the logs above the doorway. Those logs then filled the doorway and sealed off the house. During the evening, members of the household habitually gathered in their respective space, the women and children in the kitchen or the secluded women’s portion of the house, the married men in the main room in the center of the house, and the bachelors on the porch. Often a fire was the center of attention as people gathered for warmth, story telling and solace from the vagaries of a harsh world outside.

All this is conjured up in the Samo mind as they listen to Paul talk about the “day of the Lord” which will come when they least expect it. Instead of the protection of Roman armor, the Samo understand the protection of a house, and the translation provides a schema of protection for all who are surrounded by the house ensured by the *ayo*, ‘the householder’ who symbolizes protection and care. With such understanding, the return of Christ takes on new meaning for them as they huddle in their houses knowing that as they love and care for each other and place their faith in Christ the ultimate householder; Oye Ayo, “God” will protect them and bring salvation by ensuring their safety.

This is an incredible picture that throws back to their conceptual framework of raiding, the importance of physical protection, and the solace of human relationships within a household. This relational scenario provides a powerful imagery of interaction—the fear of a raid that is ameliorated by the knowledge that they are protected by their secured space as well as by their social network. Such understanding provides a new awareness for God’s protection. Such awareness further allows those who are not Samo to gain new insight from the physical and spiritual response of the Samo as they anticipate (as expectedly as a watchful householder) the Lord’s return.

## 5 Conclusion

As Karl Franklin encouraged young scholars to investigate the linguistic and social contexts in which they worked, I now recognize the distinct privilege of recording the adjustments the Samo made as they sought to incorporate the activity of *kiaps* and magistrates and thereby forever changed the social context of pre-contact cannibalism. The shift in the nature of social groupings from the isolation of near-nomadic, aboriginal households to a more stable, village-based social structure reflects the impact of colonialism on the one hand, and the Samo response through adjustments that reflect their values and assumptions on the other. The new organization with its focus on villages and dialect homogeneity is by no means a one-to-one correlation with the precontact focus on longhouses and alliances. While a village is somewhat comparable to a grouping of precontact allies, it has a very different rationale, namely bureaucratic demand (see figure 2). Although the Samo maintained the same term for ‘alliance’, the change in the distribution patterns—from that of households to that of villages—



resulted in a broad social network that has had a dramatic impact upon dialect variation.

A Pre-contact longhouse in relation to other Social Groupings	A Post-contact village in relation to other Social Groupings
<i>Monsoon</i> , 'household'	Unlabeled, 'family'
<i>oosoo buoman</i> , 'ally'	<i>Gaboo monsoon</i> , 'village'
<i>ton</i> , 'dialect/language'	<i>oosoo buoman</i> , 'ally'
<i>hatooman</i> , 'enemy'	<i>ton</i> , 'dialect/language'
	<i>kooahage/boo</i> , 'national/expatriate foreigner'

Figure 2: Expanding units of Samo social structure  
(used with permission of Wadsworth Publishers)<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, while enemies have been largely eliminated, and cannibalism is little more than a memory, outsiders have come in increasing numbers and taken on the protective role once allotted to allies. However, outsiders, like enemies, are not trusted, because there is little interaction. Therefore, relationship within the villages has altered the family terminology to encompass all who live at a particular village site. Inasmuch as outsiders largely keep to themselves and do not integrate into community life, they remain untrustworthy. Thus the Samo remain wary of outsiders and maintain an on-going sense of isolation, despite the fact that there are increasing numbers of educated Samo who are becoming teachers, medical orderlies, and politicians. A Samo was the speaker of the Western Province Assembly from 1999 to 2003, and a Samo is the current headmaster at the Hanonabi school.

Such has been the impact of colonialism and the availability of the Bible on the Samo. Over the nearly fifty years since contact, there has been a shift in their social structure and their concept of physical space, the latter now reverting to a more pre-contact appearance as people spend increasing amounts of time away from the village in order to survive. Like other colonized peoples, they have made radical changes to their lifestyle, only to find that in order to survive they must revert, in part, to their aboriginal structures. Colonialism resulted in radical change that left the Samo with a new rationale for a structure that has reduced animosity and increased linguistic compatibility. They find themselves fighting for physical survival in the present post-colonial and globalized

<sup>13</sup>This figure reflects changes in social structure following the shift from scattered longhouses in the forest to sedentary villages. The two sets of groupings have been offset to highlight that though many of the same terms prevail, their meanings are different.

environment, while maintaining a semblance of meaningful structures that provide a memory of the past relevance and anticipate a future significance. Scriptures in their language help provide that significance as they understand themselves as people whom God loves, even as he also loves all who “sleep/reside in all the places of the earth,” as John 3:16 tells the Samo.

Colonialism came in with young *kiaps* demonstrating their power by killing a pig, and it has ended with an elaborate system of roads connecting permanent, but often deserted, villages. How the Samo maintain their viability and adjust their structures to this new system of relative autonomy and broad national identity provides an opportunity for further study and appreciation of social adaptability through time and space. What has happened provides a testimony to the resilience of a people who remain aware of their surroundings, relationships, and structures.

Scripture translation, couched in the conceptual framework of familiarity, while presenting God’s intent for the Samo (as well as all humankind), enables them to make sense out of God within a context that is meaningful to them. And in understanding God’s message, the Samo have developed a rationale for changing their behavior, while at the same time gaining new appreciation for the value of their cultural understanding.

On-going study demands an awareness of the nature of socio-cultural cohesion and the versatility of the human struggle for identity, survival and salvation. As Michael Foucault (1965) demonstrated how the residents of an insane asylum survive the madness of the “civilization” created for them, so I have attempted to show how the Samo have adjusted to and will persevere beyond the impact of colonial hegemony. Without a doubt they will develop new tropes which neither they nor their colonial benefactors could have imagined. Scripture in its turn, gives the Samo renewed hope for their future even as it draws on images from their cannibalistic past to inform their understanding and bring God into their midst.

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