THE FAILURE OF THE TOMMY KABU MOVEMENT: A REASSESSMENT OF THE EVIDENCE

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In the evolution of Papua and New Guinea from the status of a United Nations Trust Territory under Australian control (1946) to an independent nation-state (1975), Melanesians experienced the paternalism of European missionaries and administrators alike. Although official aims for social, economic, and political development in the post-World War II period were annunciated, most Melanesians experienced oppression rather than development, domination rather than liberation. Potential leaders were among the most persecuted, since their efforts to achieve autonomy were invariably perceived as a threat to the existing colonial order--especially by its major advocates, European missionaries and government administrators.

In the period before the war, relations between church and state had been stabilized by two informal, yet highly significant, conventions. Firstly, several of the limited number of Christian missions in the territory had observed "comity agreements" that defined their respective territorial "spheres of influence." In observing "comity agreements," the major Protestant missions ensured the limitation of sectarian rivalry among themselves. By a second long-standing convention, the government entrusted the missions with the education, social development, and spiritual and moral enrichment of the entire population.[1]

In the postwar period the efforts of Europeans to retain their hegemonic control over the population and to retain their prewar status clashed with the growing desires of Papuans and New Guineans for greater autonomy and development. Papuan society had experienced

Pacific Studies, Vol. 14, No. 2--March 1991

rapid transformation during the war years, and the sectarian autonomy that missions had exercised from the time of first European contact until the evacuation of civilians in 1942 was being challenged on three fronts: by a growing secularism, by a desire for modernization, and by the establishment in the territory of numerous new religious movements and missionary organizations.

Thus the comfortable conventions of the colonial order, established in an earlier period, swiftly decayed. The influence of European missionaries in temporal affairs was being replaced by the authority of a colonial administration; and Melanesians no longer acted so much as pliant natives as nascent Papuan and New Guinean nationalists. This article documents the rise and fall of Koivi' Aua, better known as Tom Kabu (1922?-1969),[2] from the I'ai tribe of the Gulf of Papua's Purari people. I suggest that Kabu's "protonationalist" initiatives--designed to effect major cultural, social, and economic changes among the Purari--occurred in a context of failed patron-client relations and that Kabu's experience was indicative of Papuan-European relations in the period from the late 1940s to the 1960s. Examination of Kabu's struggle exposes the unwillingness of missionaries, longtime surrogates of the colonial administration, to support the organizational and economic initiatives of potential Papuan leaders; demonstrates the refusal of Europeans to recognize the regional and national aspirations of Papuans; clarifies the context in which new religious movements were established in the territory; and contributes in general to an understanding of colonial missionary discourse.

Kabu: Evidence and Interpretations

Kabu had attended the London Missionary Society's Urika school "for a short time" but had "run away from there and from the Delta when still young."[3] His life was transformed, as were those of so many men of his generation, by the events of World War II. In 1937, after leaving the Purari River Delta, he had joined the native constabulary and in 1940 had joined the Papuan Infantry Battalion. He was stationed at Samarai when the Japanese invaded and in 1942 made his way with two Australian army officers by small boat to Cooktown, Australia. From there he later traveled to Cairns, Brisbane, and even Sydney and Adelaide.

Kabu was repatriated from Queensland to Papua late in 1945 and was discharged in June 1946. He immediately commenced activities intended to raise the living standards of Purari society to those he had witnessed in Australia. He encouraged village migrations to healthier

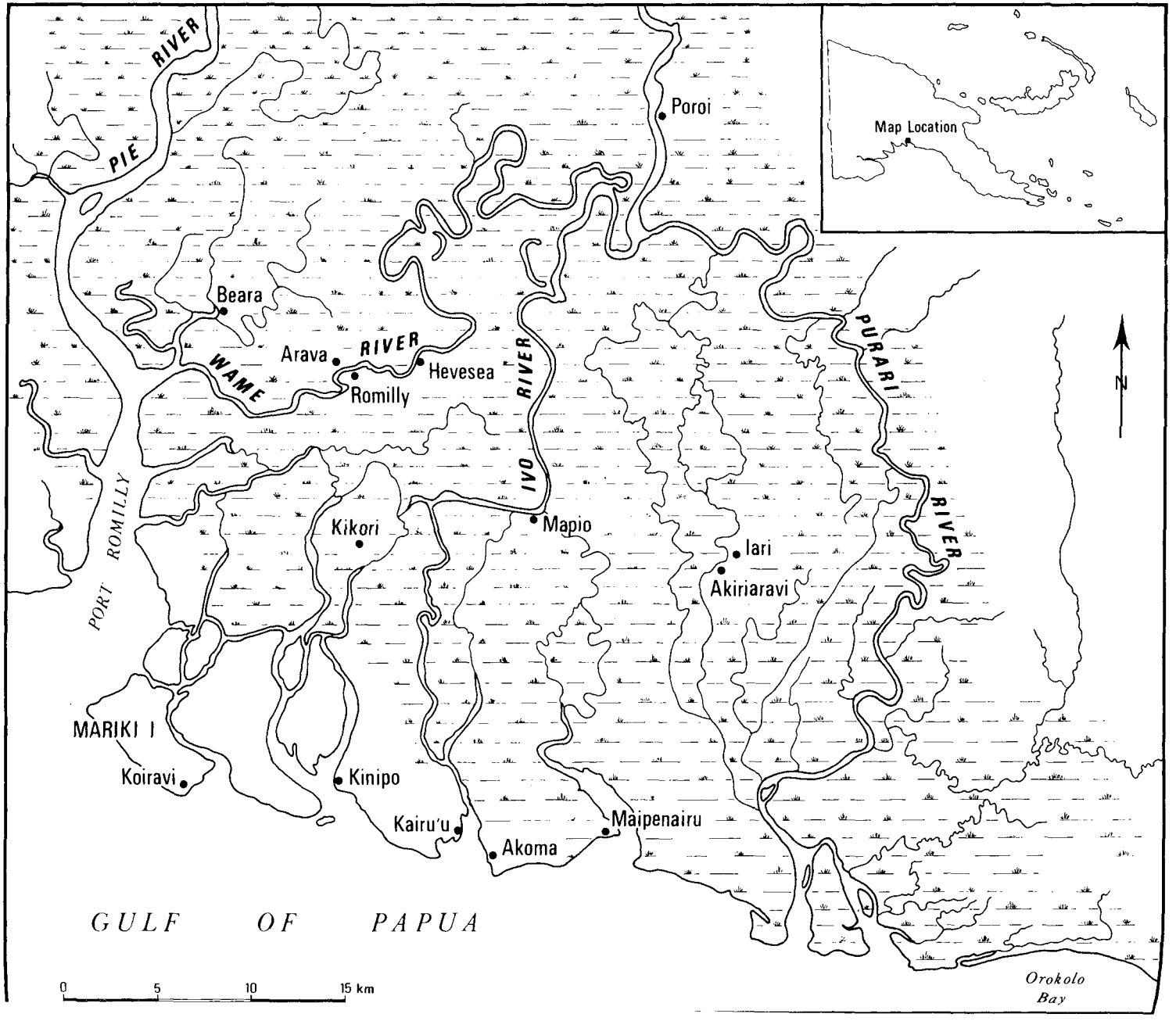
locations; sought the betterment of women's social position and the destruction of the *ravi*-ceremonial houses that he felt epitomized the backwardness of Purari culture; advocated the spread of a new, more European type of architecture in imitation of that which he had seen in Australian towns and cities; sought the cessation of injurious initiation ceremonies for young boys; and encouraged the spread of Police Motu as a lingua franca in place of the local dialect, Namanau.[4]

These activities, promoted by Kabu during 1946-1947, caught the administration unawares. Anthropologist Robert Maher suggests that they might have been resisted by the colonial administration had it known of them but "once accomplished, they were accepted."[5] The more "nationalistic" ambitions of Kabu's "New Men," on the other hand, were "directly worked against" and "rather easily suppressed without doing much violence to the rest of the movement's objectives."[6] Kabu's overall objective, toward which he labored from the late 1940s into the 1960s, was the transformation of the traditional Hiri trade between the Gulf people and Motuans into a monetary exchange.[7]

> The Purari tribes would take over the sago trade, for money not pots, and the Motu and others would be merely customers. In the abstract, the plan was well conceived. Sago flour would be produced from the abundant palms that grew in the Purari swamp, transported to Port Moresby in a ship purchased through funds donated by the villagers, and marketed there by Kompani members at the settlement christened Rabia ("Sago") Camp. All matters were considered except for the skills necessary to a successful conduct of the plan. The Kompani failed.[8]

Why did Kabu's *kompani*, and most later initiatives, fail? Whereas the hostility from some departments of the Australian colonial administration, the administrative ineptitude of others, and the limitations of Kabu's technical expertise have been identified as key factors in his economic and political demise, the active participation of London Missionary Society (LMS) personnel in opposing his aspirations and obstructing his initiatives has heretofore evaded close examination.

In part, this occurred because the major research concerning Kabu relied on missionary sources for information about his early life and his relationship with the LMS. Maher's *New Men of Papua*, based on fieldwork in 1954-1955 and published in 1961, and Nigel Oram's 1962-1965 study of Rabia Camp,[9] the Port Moresby settlement established by Kabu in 1946, both rely on the published accounts of the LMS mission-


PIE RIVER
Poroi
Map Location
Beara
WAME RIVER
Arava
Hevesea
Romilly
IVO RIVER
PURARI RIVER
N
PORT ROMILLY
Kikori
Mapio
Iari
Akiriaravi
MARIKI I
Koiravi
Kinipo
Kairu'u
Akoma
Maipenairu
GULF OF PAPUA
0 5 10 15 km
Orokolo Bay

aries J. H. Holmes and L. W. Allen in describing the missionary presence among the Purari. Of the two, Holmes was the better ethnographer. He settled on Urika Island in 1907, the first European to live among the Purari, and eventually published papers on initiation ceremonies and linguistics.[10] Allen's contribution, a firsthand account of Kabu's *kompani* written for a technical paper produced by the South Pacific Commission, is less important for its anthropological insights than for its ironic description of Kabu, his movement, and the European response to it.[11] In describing Kabu's relations with the LMS, both Maher and Oram--and others--rely on the testimony of Allen.[12] Kabu's major patron while associated with the Australian navy, Norman S. Pixley, also recalled Kabu's time in Australia in his correspondence with both Maher and Oram and later in his memoirs.[13] Mission records, possibly unavailable at the time of the inquiries by Maher and Oram, provide more candid views held by LMS missionaries concerning the work and influence of Tom Kabu.

What was Kabu's attitude toward Christianity and toward LMS missionaries? The few sources available are apparently contradictory. Both Maher and Oram describe his campaign for the abolition of pagan ceremonies and the destruction of the ceremonial houses and traditional objects connected with them, often to the accompaniment of Christian prayers and readings from the Bible.[14] They report his preference for monogamous Christian marriage over polygyny, the traditional Purari practice. Maher suggests that Kabu's movement held Christianity to be, "at least in name," the religion of his new order.[15] Similarly Oram judged that Kabu "did not equivocate over religion and his attitude to Christian missions."[16] Analysis of colonial and mission records, however, indicate the extent of Kabu's disagreements with the missionaries and suggests that his relations with the LMS's representatives were rarely conducted to the satisfaction of either party.

The LMS and Conversion of the Purari

LMS missionary attitudes toward Kabu's initiatives are best understood in the context of that mission's aspirations in the Gulf region. Despite LMS plans for a "New Advance" in Papua in the period of postwar reconstruction, missionaries in the Gulf more often reported high hopes than progress. The history of the LMS in the region, reported S. H. Dewdney, missionary at Urika before Allen, showed a "sad lack of even representation of what the LMS stands for": the lay-readers were untrained and inefficient, and the mission was losing converts to Sev-

enth-day Adventism.[17] In Urika District, one of approximately ten Papuan LMS districts and the one in which Kabu's relations with Christianity were molded, church membership in the 1950s remained at less than one hundred and illiteracy stood at 99.5 percent.[18] The Purari, Allen subsequently wrote, were "going through a time of very great crisis" and large segments of the population were "drifting all over the place." The *ravi* had fallen into a state of disrepair and traditional gods, in the eyes of the young people, had been discredited.[19] Although Allen expressed dismay at the destruction of traditional culture, his major concern was that the Purari failed to replace it with Christian belief and a strong indigenous church.[20]

Of further concern to the mission was the loss of prestige it stood to suffer if it gave the impression to the colonial administration (as well as to other Europeans and to loyal followers of the mission) that it had failed to obtain sufficient hold over its "sphere of influence." Thus Allen reported in his publication for the South Pacific Commission, "In so far as Tommy considered his Kompani to be a Christian Crusade, he was always prepared to accept guidance from the missionary. . . . All members of the Kompani, including Tommy, were always well disposed towards the Mission . . . at no time did he show unfriendliness to the mission, and was quite sympathetically disposed to the religious, medical, and educational work of the missionary."[21]

Since the expectation of Europeans was that the missionary and the patrol officer, rather than any native Papuan, were to be accorded the highest levels of respect, popular support for Kabu implied not merely his moral and perhaps even political authority, but resistance to European ascendency. This context assists an understanding of missionary E. R. Fenn's enigmatic remarks concerning Kabu's "enormous prestige" and the "extraordinary things" he had been able to do with the manpower of the district; as Allen reported,

> At his orders all gods were thrown out and many Ravis (Dubus) burnt down. Considerable quantities of native garden produce have been shipped to Port Moresby and have found a ready market at high prices. Some thousands of contributors subscribed funds to finance the purchase of a boat which subsequently burnt out before it had so much as commenced its first voyage. We do not desire to go into detail about the whole situation except to say that our work has been affected in many ways.[22]

Desperate to report progress, Allen found Kabu's leadership of the Purari inexplicable and came to regard him as the main obstacle to the success of his work. Although the missionary wished to extend his patronage to Kabu, potentially an important client, the latter submitted to what was at best a cool relationship.

The extent to which Kabu assimilated Christian doctrine is unclear. Pixley described Kabu during time spent in Sydney as a quiet man who constantly read his Bible, one who neither drank, smoked, nor associated with women.[23] According to Maher, the Purari retained belief in *imunu,* described by him as "the all pervading essential of the world, a force which resided in all things, and without which they would not be what they were."[24] Oram suggested that Kabu's adoption of Christian worship had "no deeper significance than imitation of European custom," a way of adopting the European's *imunu* and of thus achieving the Purari's desired economic goals.[25] For both Oram and Maher, however, Kabu's relationship with the LMS and with Christian belief was a secondary consideration, as they were mainly interested in cultural change, migration patterns, and issues of social and economic development.

Oram dismisses Peter Worsley's suggestion that Kabu's followers "misinterpreted his Christian propaganda for millenarianism," and points out that, whereas both LMS missionary J. H. Holmes and government anthropologist F. E. Williams wrote of the Purari belief in the return of spirits of the dead, neither noted evidence of cargoism.[26] Yet the movement generated some excessive behavior, which led to administrative intervention. The establishment by the "New Men" of a police force and construction of a jail in 1947 prompted the administration to send a patrol to reestablish government control.

Allen's 1952 report sheds some light on his role in the conflict.

> Early in 1947 reports reached me of the burning of the ravis and of harsh treatment being meted out to dissentients. I immediately set out by canoe to send a message to the District Officer at Kikori. On the way to Port Romilly, I met a party of Australasian Oil Company personnel who were having difficulty with recruiting labour. They also had heard reports of unusual occurrences, and it was arranged that we should travel to Kikori and inform the District Officer. En route to Kikori we met a boat which was conveying a patrol officer to the Purari to conduct an investigation. Though there was some unpleasantness, the patrol officer conducted his investigation, finally tak-

> ing Tommy Kabu to Kikori for consultation. Since then there has been a gradual subsidence of interest and activity and the people settled down to life under new conditions.[27]

Kabu's experiences at the hands of Australian colonial officials appear to have marked a turning point in his attitudes toward the government and toward the mission. Although Allen refers to Kabu's detention for "consultation," Oram suggests that Kabu was "arrested with a considerable degree of force" and taken to Kikori because local officers were disturbed at the size of a movement that transcended administrative boundaries and threatened to usurp their authority.[28] Although the acting director of District Services and Native Affairs (DSNA) wrote to Kabu and to the Beara District officer in December 1946 to say that the movement should be treated with sympathy and consideration,[29] Maher suggests that in 1947 some of Kabu's followers had thoughts of taking the movement underground.

Some individuals within DSNA acted with prejudice, one officer believing that the movement's "unsettling influence" impeded the task of the administration.[30] There was also distrust and suspicion between officers and the movement, and Oram suggests that whereas higher authorities in the department were consistent in the policy that the administration should, in general, recognize as leaders men who were seen that way by their tribes, there was some disagreement in the lower echelons, which were closer to the scene, on "just what Tommy was," and that senior administrators had a more detached view of Kabu than did officers in the field.[31] "By different men and at different times he was regarded as everything from the 'outstanding native in the district' to something very near a bandit. This would not have particularly mattered, if it were not for the clear fact that Tommy was a leader, and the most important leader the Purari had ever had."[32]

Government officials, like the missionaries, resented Kabu's widespread popularity. He was spoken of as "our *taubada*" and "our *biaguna,*" and houses more prestigious than the government rest houses used by patrol officers were erected for him in numerous villages. The people supplied him with more food than they offered to officials.[33]

Economic Patronage: Missionary Clients and Colonial Obstruction

Kabu's successful establishment of the Purari Sago Trading Company early in 1946, his initial success in transporting sago for sale in the colonial capital, and his success in gaining subscribers for the purchase of

the boat *Ena* from the Australian navy for £2,003 exhibited to the mission and to the administration an influence in the Gulf region that both coveted.[34] The unfortunate destruction of the *Ena* by fire before its first voyage gave them the opportunity to obstruct future initiatives.

Although the original decision, made after acting District Officer C. F. Healy's consultation with Kabu and his shareholders at Urika in 1947, was to recover the money and purchase a smaller, more suitable vessel,[35] the Purari were not only prevented by the administration from purchasing a new boat but, according to Maher, commercial shipping "often could not and sometimes probably would not handle the amounts of sago which had piled up for shipment from the Delta," so that much of it spoiled.[36] Whereas Maher offers no reason for this reluctance by European-operated vessels to enter into commercial transactions with Kabu, Oram suggests that damp sago threatened to corrode the ships' hulls and that it occupied too much space on the top deck.[37]

Maher believed that no one in the tribe had the knowledge or experience to operate such a vessel in the difficult Purari Delta (and that no one possessed the bookkeeping abilities to manage the *kompani's* finances),[38] and Oram points out that the administration did not encourage the purchase of another boat because it believed that the river people did not have the ability to handle a large vessel. He points out furthermore that the "unco-ordinated policies of different government departments" and the lack of transport were among the most important causes of failure.[39] But Snowden notes that along the coast to the southeast, the Toaripi Association, unlike the Purari Sago Trading Company, was aided in its purchase of a vessel in 1948 because its founder, Posu Semesevita, enjoyed the patronage of a nearby mission. The involvement of a mission in economic work, some administrators reasoned at that time, prevented those involved from becoming "too materialistic . . . [and thus] regarding their society as a purely money-making concern."[40] This attitude and concern was shared by the Co-operatives Section of the Australian administration, which lent support to individuals and groups in areas of strong mission influence--such as Anglican areas of the Northern District and the Kwato-influenced region of Milne Bay--in the belief that they played an important role in "curbing materialism" in Papuan and New Guinean societies.[41]

This was precisely the case Allen made against Kabu's economic enterprises.

> From the missionary's point of view, the whole thing was a tragedy. In most native communities, the change-over from the

> old to the new has been attributed to the coming of the 'light'. In the case of the Purari people, the changes took place without the church being founded, and the people, while attributing some benefits to the message of the missionary, prefer to think that they have made these new adjustments quite independently and on economic rather than religious grounds.[42]

Kabu, clearly, was not beholden to mission advice. Allen reported that, although the leaders of the movement quite frequently visited the mission station and freely discussed their plans, they refused to take advice regarding some aspects of the movement.[43] Consequently, despite Allen's publicly charitable statements concerning Kabu, annual reports to the LMS's Papua District Committee presented more clearly missionary attitudes toward the man and his movement. Fenn, writing from Aird Hill in 1947, referred to the threat to the peace of the mission from "King Tom, a Papuan with brawn, boldness but little brain," who was "gifted with a certain shrewd cunning and backed by the influence and teaching of what are to us the undesirable elements of European civilization."[44] Fenn hoped for more lay-readers or teachers to counteract Kabu's influence,[45] while Allen referred to the "utterly yet [sic] impossible company."[46]

Allen could not understand why Kabu banned his men from contracting as laborers for the Australasian Petroleum Company.

> Considering the large number of men employed by this company, one would have thought it would have been considered of important assistance to the Kompani. This was not the case. Tommy gave orders that as soon as men completed their contracts they were to leave the A.P.C. and never to renew their contracts. The opinion was held that it was beneath the new dignity of the emerging Puraris to be the slaves of the white man for such a pittance. There was a genuine desire to be independent of such sources of income. The A.P.C. recruiters, who seemed always to have the advantage over other recruiters, were now unable to secure a single man from the Purari.[47]

Allen did not see that the Papuans' refusal to work for the company was an obvious gesture of resistance to the growing number of European-owned enterprises in the district. The territory's largest sawmill operated at Port Romilly, and a second mill operated at Ogamobu, where also the British New Guinea Development Company had developed a

rubber plantation. The LMS itself established a third sawmill at Veiru. Missionaries and administrators alike expected Gulf laborers to work at these sites or produce copra at the village level.

At one time Allen joined with the patrol officer at Kikori in attempting to dissuade Kabu and his followers from their economic plans.

> We advised them to form smaller companies, within their own tribes, and to develop co-operative enterprises which would be sure of yielding returns. We put before the men a scheme whereby the villages could buy such utility improvements as roofing iron to secure drinking water. However they were disinclined to turn from the plan put forward by their leader Tommy Kabu, and refused the advice offered.[48]

Similarly, to the southeast of the Purari Delta, Dewdney and an official from the administration's post at Kerema urged the representatives of three tribes, who had collected a total of £1,320 for a scheme similar to Kabu's *Ena* shipping venture, "not to be hasty in the purchase of a vessel and to concentrate on getting smoke houses ready for copra production" and to "continue to work as separate bodies." As in Kabu's case, the administration withheld support because mission patronage was absent: Dewdney was going on overseas leave and Kerema station was "too understaffed to supply the necessary aiding supervision."[49]

Kabu's cooperative ventures were too "communal" in nature, and potentially communistic, and colonial officials reacted by assisting other Delta men in the transportation and marketing of their sago and copra production in competition with Kabu's efforts. In 1948 village constables Kiri Morea of Maipua and Ove Mairau of Oravi were selected to receive all possible help "to make their ventures a success,"[50] and in May 1949 Patrol Officer Francis Dobb suggested a scheme to support Kiri, in order to reduce Kabu's fortunes:

> Could arrangements be made as regards shipment, a sound idea would be to receive sago at Beara Police Camp, for shipment and sale in Port Moresby (possibly some of it for government labour). In the latter case, scales could be installed here, and the sago bought on the spot; with an allowance for freight deducted. Could this be done, then I feel sure that the activities of the Ina Coy. [Company, Kabu's cooperative] could be much reduced. . . . It is my opinion that the only way in which to check the activities of the Ina Coy. is to give every possible assistance to those who wish to trade outside its confines.[51]

Shortly after, in 1951, Patrol Officer Herbert Clark identified Kaipu Varupi of Koiravi village, Mariki Island, as a "rival" of Tom Kabu, whom Clark saw as a leader, not a "driver." Clark, who was new to the area, refused to accede to Kabu's request to accompany Clark on a patrol to find out what the villagers wished to do with a government refund of the money earlier invested in the ill-fated *Ena;* Clark stated that it was not possible to unite the Purari peoples.[52]

When Co-operatives Section officers found that Kabu consistently operated at a loss, they forbade him in 1953 from further engaging in the purchase of sago. Even so, when he left Rabia Camp and returned to the Delta to live, sago was shipped to Port Moresby for sale at Koki market throughout the early 1960s. Efforts to destabilize Kabu's authority continued. In 1956 the deputy registrar of cooperative societies reported that the Tommy Kabu movement had been "broken up" and that the administration had been "built up."[53] In letters to the administration Kabu indicated that he had been "argued against, attacked and misled," and in letters to the Australian navy he complained about, and named, officials who were opposing him.[54]

Bureaucratic Control over Village and Urban Migration

With the eclipse of Kabu's cooperative ventures, his influence declined among the Kaimare group of Mariki and among the Poroi villages, but remained among the Koriki, particularly in the villages of Akoma and Kairu'u. Evidence suggests that Kabu aspired to uniting the Delta peoples politically and to securing "a sovereignty for the Purari tribes as a unit separate from the Australian administration."[55]

As part of his effort to improve living conditions, Kabu moved villages from unhealthy, low-level sites to new locations on drier ground--in some cases bringing people onto land owned by other tribes. Ukiaravi was entirely abandoned, the village split into four. Kabu's group, the I'ai, resettled mainly at Mapio on the Ivo River, but some helped Kabu establish a new village, Hevesea, near the sawmill wharf. It was sometimes known as "Tommy's village" and was intended to serve as a collection point from which products were shipped to Port Moresby. But Hevesea was declared a "forbidden settlement" by the administration in 1950. Officially, the government declared that it wished to avoid trouble erupting because Hevesea was established on the land of others; yet at the same time the ruling demolished the strategic depot Kabu had established near the wharf at Port Romilly. Hevesea's population subsequently rejoined the members of Kabu's original village at Maipenairu, on Urika Island near the coast.[56]

Once the *kompani* declined, a host of smaller economic ventures emerged. The most promising, according to Maher, was the Pai-iri Mailu Trading Company--known as the I'ai Society--organized in 1952 in the I'ai village of Mapio in cooperation with the Beara patrol officer and Kabu. By April 1955, when Kabu returned to the Delta and established headquarters at Akoma with the intention of promoting copra production, the organization was still alive but inoperative.

In the meantime, both the administration and the mission supported the Purari Community Development Project Department initiated in 1951 by the Department of Education and the South Pacific Commission. The program was supposed to address economic development, village improvement, local government, nutrition, and education, but was successful only in the last, and that mainly because the teacher F. Daveson was posted to the area in 1951. His school, established at the Kinipo group, was relocated to the Beara patrol post by 1955.[57] Once more, however, the "development" of Papuans entailed European initiative and control.

In Port Moresby, Rabia Camp had evolved by 1955 into a full-sized village occupied by Purari and some Goaribari. Officers with the administration's Co-operatives Section had given guidance to the Tommy Kabu Camp Society, which had been established in 1948 and which operated a tea shop, a bakery, a laundry, and a store until closed by the administration in 1953. Kabu had made several return trips to the Delta to collect cash for another boat but had not raised sufficient capital. He became involved in seeking improved wages for Purari men working at the wharves in Port Moresby. In a letter to Pixley in May 1962, he indicated his desire to establish a "Christian native co-operative association for the whole of Papua New Guinea."[58] While settled for a time at Akoma, Kabu was engaged by Urika mission to oversee a small work force in the production of copra, and in 1963 he revived a plan to relocate the inland Pawaia peoples to the Purari River. Although the Pawaia responded to Kabu, the administration once more intervened and convinced the people to return home.[59]

Religious Change

In the 1950s and 1960s the London Missionary Society in Papua experienced change: many European missionaries retired from the field, Papuan adherents were allowed increasing measures of authority, and negotiations proceeded first for the mission's independence as the Papua Ekalesia (1962) and then for its incorporation in the United Church of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands (1968).

By October 1951 the missionary Allen had left Urika and been replaced by a Samoan pastor. Samoans continued to man the LMS stations at Urika (Beara) and Petoi (Kerema) throughout the 1960s, and by 1962 Urika station was one of nine LMS establishments in the Gulf District, three of which were manned by Samoan pastors.[60] LMS missionaries Dewdney and Bert Brown were stationed at Orokolo and Moru.[61] A Seventh-day Adventist missionary, Pascoe, was established at Belepa, and a Catholic priest, Blanc, was at Terapo. The LMS and Catholic missions were represented by either missionaries or educated Papuan members on newly established local government councils and on the Gulf District Advisory Council. Other missions had entered the region, and the sectarian autonomy once enjoyed by the LMS had given way to sectarian rivalry in which the LMS competed with the promoters of at least four other religious beliefs. Whereas the Seventh-day Adventist and Catholic missions established schools and medical posts as part of their evangelistic efforts, Jehovah's Witness and Bahá'í supporters offered spiritual and social laws and practices without providing welfare services.

In 1965 Tom Kabu became the first Papuan Bahá'í.[62] Doctrinally, the Bahá'í religion centered on the claims of the Persian prophet Bahá'u'lláh (1814-1892) to have revealed Gods laws for the rehabilitation of the peoples of the world. Bahá'u'lláh's teachings emphasize the existence of a single, unknowable God; the unity of his prophets; and the unity of the human race. Two Bahá'ís had entered the Territory of Papua and New Guinea in 1954,[63] and some New Ireland villages had adopted the Bahá'í religion by 1956. Response in Papua quickened with the settlement of Australian Bahá'ís David and Sue Podger in Port Moresby in 1965. Although Kabu was living at Rabia Camp, originally established to help his Purari kin, by 1965 he had, he told Podger, become disillusioned with the tribe because of their seeming inability to progress and unwillingness to work and had shifted his attention to the Pawaia, an inland tribe that the LMS and other missions had tried to evangelize with little success but that held promise of being diligent workers.

Approximately twenty Papuans became Bahá'ís in Port Moresby immediately after Kabu. The Podgers reported that "Tommy Kabu, the Chairman of the Local Assembly, has been on a teaching trip to his home area for six weeks. He is a well known leader of his people in the Baimuru area in the Gulf District. He has the distinction of having had anthropological monographs written about his efforts to advance the social conditions and beliefs of his people."[64]

It is not clear to what extent Kabu understood Bahá'í belief. No doubt

its emphasis on racial and sexual equality appealed to him, and he may have noted that the religion had no clergy: even its "missionaries" were merely expatriates working in secular professions, in business, or with the colonial administration. In 1966 David Podger and two New Guinea Highlands converts accompanied Kabu to the Gulf, where he spoke in numerous villages about his new religion. Response came among the Koriki tribe at Mapio village and among the Pawaia in the remote inland village of Poroi, provoking efforts by LMS teachers to make them reconsider their decision.[65] In April 1967 the Bahá'ís in Poroi established a nine-member "Local Assembly" to take responsibility for the group's activities. Although such assemblies may have resembled the meetings of deacons or elders, they differed in that women were as involved as men in elections and in the holding of offices. The European Bahá'ís were involved in guiding and encouraging new assemblies, but were not interested in establishing mission stations or sponsoring welfare services. Sue Podger reported Poroi Assembly's activities to the annual convention of the Australian Bahá'í convention:

> Tommy Kabu assisted in the formation of the Poroi Assembly. We have written to them and Vi. Hoehnke . . . paid them a visit last September. We have encouraged believers from Pawaia to go back, and find ways of earning money in their own area, as it is very poor, and most young men have left to work in Port Moresby. Tommy Kabu has been establishing a saksak (native housing material) weaving business in Ara'ava, on the Purari River, and this is going fairly well. Another believer, Se'i Seneai, went back with a gun to shoot crocodiles. Some have followed to join him. Amongst these people it is the custom for old men to marry all the young women. The young men have been encouraged through the teachings to return and marry, and some have done this.[66]

Rather than becoming more dependent on a pastor, priest, or missionary, the tendency was for the Bahá'ís in Purari and Poroi villages to assert their autonomy and to dispense with the services of LMS pastor/teachers. In 1968, for example, meetings between LMS teachers and the Bahá'ís of Ara'ava had not reversed the conversions, and the teachers left the village in April.[67] By May 1968 Kabu had established Bahá'í communities in Ara'ava, Mapio, and Akoma. The assembly established at Poroi, however, disappeared the following year with the temporary dispersal of its inhabitants.[68]

Kabu indicated in correspondence with David Podger during 1967-1968 his continuing concern with economic development (he had initiated the loom production of *selo* sheets, mats made of plant fiber) and the need for government assistance. This does not preclude the possibility that Kabu was a true believer in Bahá'í beliefs, but he simultaneously viewed David Podger, a lecturer at the Administrative College, as a sympathetic patron. In addition, Sue Podger's acquisition of Motu, which allowed her to converse and correspond with Kabu in his preferred tongue, eased communication between the Australian Bahá'ís and Kabu. Whereas Podger assisted in the acquisition of looms for the production of *selo,* he wrote to Kabu in 1967, "You are a good Bahá'í Tommy, but I think you try too much to get the people money."[69] He hoped that Kabu's followers, whom Kabu believed were unhappy and no longer interested in working, would revive their economic fortunes by first reviving their spiritual lives.

If Kabu had aspired to uniting all Papuans, with himself as head (as Oram believed, from correspondence with Kabu as late as 1962),[70] his conversion to Bahá'í belief brought both advantages and disadvantages --although time was running out for him to experience either. If Kabu had intended to achieve unity through political means, Bahá'í membership included prohibition of involvement in party politics--although this had not prevented Kabu from contesting a seat in the second House of Assembly in 1968 when he was secretary of Ara'ava village's Bahá'í assembly.[17] Kabu ran as a People's Progress Party candidate against Albert Maori Kiki, Tom Koraea, and Keith Tetley. Although the seat was won by Koraea, secretary of the local government council at Kikori, Kiki's view was that it would have gone to Kabu had he not lain seriously ill in hospital throughout the campaign period.[72] The following year Tom Kabu contracted tuberculosis and died in October.[73]

Conclusions

It would seem that some individuals in both the mission and the administration attributed the failure of Kabu's initiatives to the inferiority of his race rather than to inferior levels of education achieved in the Gulf District. Until the 1970s virtually all Australian administrators and European missionaries shared the belief that Papuans were incapable of establishing successful regional economic ventures. Their inability to believe that Kabu was capable of establishing a successful regional economic venture and the disappointments that Kabu experienced in his relations with officials of both church and state are indicative of postwar Papuan-European relations.

Kabu observed, and felt keenly, race discrimination. Whereas Europeans operated vessels freely, he was obstructed in raising sufficient capital to purchase similar transport. Whereas the LMS freely established mission districts, which grouped tribes together and made possible the formation of the Papua Ekalesia and later the United Church, Kabu's attempts to establish supraclan economic ventures were obstructed and denigrated. He knew that higher living standards required monetary wealth and pinned his hopes for success on his commercial scheme for the production of sago in the Delta, its transportation for sale in Port Moresby, and the redistribution of proceeds both to workers and into new economic ventures.[74] This trading pattern--which, government anthropologist Charles Julius pointed out in 1947, merely revived the traditional export trade of the Purari--Oram described as "remarkable for its consistency and thoroughness."[75] Breaking with tradition, Kabu had been able to override the traditional divisions among Purari tribes and had established contact with the Ipiko, Goaribari, and the inland Pawaia peoples.

There is no doubt that colonial officials would have been more responsive to Kabu's economic program if the LMS had been more firmly established in the Gulf District. Furthermore, they would have been more sympathetic to Kabu if his relations with the mission had been more congenial. Although it has been widely assumed that missionary attitudes toward Papuan social, economic, and political development fostered nationalism and territorial independence, a strong case can be made--by comparing mission rhetoric with a close assessment of candid missionary attitudes toward the colonial, later the national, secular state--that rather, they favored continued patronage and dependence.

Finally, the proliferation of new religious movements (NRMs) in Papua New Guinea--and this argument can be extended to other South Pacific colonial environments--was related to a significant extent to the inability of the major missions to accommodate the rising expectations of colonial societies and of emergent and potential national leaders. It is worth noting, with regard to religious change in Melanesia, the tendency for novel religious forms and ideas to disperse from urban areas to remote communities via literate (or at least semiliterate) Melanesian converts whose relations with existing missions had invariably been discordant.

By failing to conform to missionary expectations, Tom Kabu alienated himself from the modes of missionary and colonial patronage that existed in the first postwar years. Lacking power over the printed word and possessed of insufficient facility with the English language to con-

vey his ideas, his position in both colonial and missionary discourse has been constructed by the very forces that conspired to subdue him. As a protonationalist, Kabu experienced slightly more than two decades of disappointment with the colonial administration and its missionary adjunct. His struggle was not merely with the Purari Delta's grinding poverty, swamps, and disease, but with agents of colonialism with whom he never lost composure and to whom he never entrusted his spirit of independence.

NOTES

I wish to thank the anonymous referees for their valuable comments on my paper, "Tom Kabu and the London Missionary Society: A Case Study in Missionary Hegemony," presented at the biannual conference of the Pacific History Association in Brisbane, June-July 1989, of which this paper is a revised version. I am grateful to Mrs. Chandra Jayasuriya, Geography Department, University of Melbourne, for preparation of the map of the Gulf District.

1. Concerning missionary activity in Papua and New Guinea, see Georges Delbos, *The Mustard Seed: From a French Mission to a Papuan Church* (Port Moresby, 1985), and Ian Downs, *The Australian Trusteeship: Papua New Guinea 1945-75* (Canberra, 1980). A recent important contribution to the field of missionary discourse is Mary Huber, *The Bishops' Progress: A Historical Ethnography of Catholic Missionary Experience on the Sepik Frontier* (Washington, DC, 1988).

2. Koivi' Aua received the name "Tommy" while with the Australian navy. He later changed this to "Tom" when he and his followers "became aware that the diminutive might be lacking in dignity and respect." Robert F. Maher, "The Purari River Delta Societies, Papua New Guinea, after the Tom Kabu Movement," *Ethnology* 23, no. 3 (July 1984): 226 n. 3. Early administration reports incorrectly recorded Kabu's name as "Tomu." "Kabua" means "the man who owns things" and was coined by Tom's followers; it was subsequently shortened to "Kabu."

3. Robert F. Maher, *New Men of Papua: A Study in Culture Change* (Madison, Wis., 1961), 55.

4. "Some idea of the prestige which Police Motu had acquired during the war is to be gained from the life story of one Papuan who made a name for himself after the war trying to improve the lot of his people. He was Tommy Kabu." Tom Dutton, *Police Motu: Iena Sivarai (Its Story)* (Port Moresby, 1985).

5. Maher, *New Men,* 69. Oram disputes Maher's account, suggesting that Tommy Kabu outlined his plans for development to Aua Akia, who returned to the Delta and commenced the I'ai company in 1946. Nigel D. Oram, "Rabia Camp and the Tommy Kabu Movement," in *Rabia Camp: A Port Moresby Migrant Settlement,* ed. Nancy E. Hitchcock and Nigel D. Oram, New Guinea Research Bulletin no. 14 (Canberra and Port Moresby, 1967), 10-11.

6. Maher, *New Men,* 69-70. In 1948 the acting director of District Services and Native Affairs was concerned lest Kabu's activities "develop along similar lines to that of the Wedau Welfare Club." J. H. Jones to District Officer, Delta, 2 June 1948, Patrol Reports Beara, National Archives of Papua New Guinea, Port Moresby (National Archives hereafter cited as TPNG).

7. In the traditional Hiri trade, Motuans from around Port Moresby sailed to the Gulf of Papua to exchange earthen Motuan pots for sago and canoe logs. On the utilization of sago, see Vanda Moraes-Gorecki, "Notes on the Ownership and Utilization of Sago, and on Social Change, among the Moveave-Toaripi of the Papuan Gulf," *Oceania* 53, no. 3 (Mar. 1983).

8. Maher, "Purari River Delta Societies," 218.

9. Oram, "Rabia Camp."

10. J. H. Holmes, "Initiation Ceremonies of Natives in the Papuan Gulf," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 32 (1902); "A Preliminary Study of the Namanau Language, Purari Delta, Papua," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 43 (1913); *In Primitive New Guinea* (New York, 1924).

11. L. W. Allen, "The Purari Kompani," in *The Purari Delta: Background and Progress of Community Development,* South Pacific Commission Technical Paper 35 (Noumea, New Caledonia, Nov. 1952).

12. Nigel D. Oram, "Tommy Kabu--A Remarkable Papuan Leader," *Post Courier,* 13 Oct. 1969, 4; Maher, "Purari River Delta Societies"; Sam Tua Kaima, "King Tommy's Ideal Dream Is Shattered," *Times of Papua New Guinea,* 5-12 Sept. 1986, 10. An important, unpublished analysis is Catherine Snowden, "Co-operative Societies in Papua New Guinea" (M.A. thesis, University of Papua New Guinea, 1983). Maher, "Purari River Delta Societies," is incorrect in stating that Kabu died in 1968 following a heart attack. He died in October 1969 from tuberculosis.

13. Norman S. Pixley, "Tommy Kabu of Papua," *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland* 11, no. 3 (1981-1982): 1-13.

14. Oram, "Rabia Camp," 11. This follows Allen, "Kompani," 5: "Tommy Kabu, with a few of his lieutenants, when visiting a village, gathered the people into the ravi and pointed out to them that all the old ceremonial was bad and without reality. He proposed that in order to begin the new ways of life, a good start would be to destroy the old ways and practices. After painting a picture of the greatly improved standard of living which they were going to achieve, Tommy would then refer to an English New Testament and a few loose papers of Communistic origin. He would point out that the people would learn the Christian way of life, and then, after a brief prayer, would apply a fire to the building."

15. Maher, *New Men,* 59.

16. Oram, "Rabia Camp," 39.

17. S. H. Dewdney, "Urika," Papua District Committee (hereafter cited as PDC) Annual Reports 1946, Station Reports, 3/7, Methodist Papers, New Guinea Collection-University of Papua New Guinea, Port Moresby (hereafter cited as UPNG).

18. Allen, "Kompani," 2. Maher noted in 1961 that the "mission's main concern, of bringing Christianity to a Pagan area, made little headway, and even after the second world war, Urika's congregation did not number above two figures" (*New Men,* 44). Oram noted in 1969 that very "few people had had any schooling and the London Missionary Society had failed to establish a church in the area" ("Tommy Kabu," 4).

19. L. W. Allen, "Urika Report," PDC Annual Reports 1946, Station Reports, 3/7, Methodist Papers, UPNG.

20. Allen reported his own dismay at the destruction of the ravi and "so much that was beautiful and essential to the cultural life of the people" ("Kompani," 8, quoted in Oram, "Rabia Camp," 17). He suggested that the LMS missionaries appreciated Purari culture and had not attempted to interfere with it: "Up to the time of my appointment to the Purari Delta, in 1946, there had been no significant changes in the culture of the people. . . . The agents of the London Missionary Society had been active since 1911, but had not caused any radical changes in the traditional patterns of the culture." Allen, "Kompani," 2.

21. Allen, "Kompani," 5, 8. Oram noted in 1969 that Kabu adopted Christianity as the official religion of the movement "in name only" ("Tommy Kabu," 4).

22. E. R. Fenn, "Aird Hill," PDC Annual Reports 1947, Station Reports, 3/7, Methodist Papers, UPNG. Allen, "Urika Report."

23. Oram, "Rabia Camp," 8.

24. Maher, *New Men,* 26.

25. Oram, "Rabia Camp," 40.

26. Oram, "Rabia Camp" 40. Allen states that Kabu claimed descent from the king of England and that he once promised a visit by the king ("Kompani," 5). Oram, however, suggests that whatever rumors circulated about Kabu's royal bloodline, they were never voiced by Kabu himself. Allen makes clear that the movement had no cargo overtones and that it at no time produced religious hysteria. Although Maher reported a wireless cult in one of the Maipuan villages in 1955 (*New Men,* 77), Friedrich Steinbauer stretches the definition of cargoism to include Kabu's movement *(Melanesian Cargo Cults,* trans. Max Wohlwill [Brisbane, 1971], 29-32). Government officers in contact with Kabu at no time suggested that his movement had cargoist tendencies (Gulf Division Quarterly Report, 1/4/51-30/6/51, TPNG, DS 29/3/38).

27. Allen, "Kompani," 3.

28. Oram, "Rabia Camp," 18. C. Belshaw, however, noted in 1950 that the administration, for the first time, was encouraging Kabu's movement and aiding it in its development program--an indication that contradictory attitudes toward Kabu were being expressed ("The Significance of Modern Cults in Melanesian Development," *Australian Outlook* 4, no. 2 [1950]: 121).

29. Oram, "Rabia Camp," 17-18.

30. Maher, *New Men,* 70. The Co-operatives Section's 1952-1953 Annual Report (TPNG, 247, 35/8/47) suggested that in the Beara District there had been repeatedly demonstrated a "desire to participate in some form of business enterprise" and that there had been "con-

siderable frustration caused by the misguided efforts of native leaders." In 1961 District Services and Native Affairs continued to refer to the "notorious" Tommy Kabu. Maher, "Purari River Delta Societies," 218.

31. Oram, "Rabia Camp," 17.

32. Maher, *New Men,* 70.

33. R. T. Galloway, Patrol Reports Beara, Patrol Report 3 of 1947/48, TPNG.

34. Neither Maher nor Oram points out that original purchase of the *Ena* was opposed by Chief Collector of Customs Grahamslaw and by W. R. Humphries of the Native Affairs department because the transaction did not comply with the territory's relevant ordinances, while Kabu believed the obstruction was due to racial discrimination. John Black to D. A. H. Lea, 24 Sept. 1969, AL64, UPNG.

35. Monthly Report, Delta Division, Mar. 1947, TPNG, DS 29/3/15. The intention of higher administrators to refund the money outlasted that of local-level officials to prevent it: M. C. W. Rich, acting director of DSNA in 1949, assured Kabu personally that the amount paid for the *Ena* was to be refunded to the contributors personally at an early date, and he secured Kabu's agreement to work thereafter with the administration. M. C. W. Rich to Government Secretary, 1 Dec. 1949, TPNG, CA 35/8/44.

36. Maher, *New Men,* 67.

37. Oram, "Rabia Camp," 20. European vessels in the Delta included Australasian Petroleum Company vessels MV *Elevala,* MV *Doma,* and MV *Kamonai;* administration vessels *Bareto, TNG, Ogamobu,* and *Haraga;* the LMS vessel *Tamate;* and others representing Steamships Trading Company. Monthly Report, Delta Division, Apr. 1947, TPNG, DS 29/3/16.

38. Maher, "Purari River Delta Societies," 218.

39. Oram, "Rabia Camp," 18, 20.

40. Reported in Snowden, "Co-operative Societies," 18. But in the early 1950s, some cooperatives established by Australian Anglicans in the Northern District proved equally cumbersome. Of one Anglican cooperative movement, an official wrote: "Men, women and children donated a flood of money under the most unsupervised conditions. Committees, officials, communal gardens, meeting houses, and pseudo-societies sprang up everywhere. The activities to which most of this organization was applied had no hope of success, even had the natives worked sanely and consistently, which they did not." A. A. Roberts, "Co-operative Movement, Northern District, New Guinea Anglican Mission Representations," 18 Mar. 1954, TPNG, series 247, box 320.

41. Snowden, "Co-operative Societies," 59.

42. Allen, "Kompani," 10.

43. Allen, "Kompani," 8.

44. E. R. Fenn, "Aird Hill," PDC Annual Reports 1947, Station Reports, 3/7, Methodist Papers, UPNG.

45. ". . . we would feel more happy if we had one or two more lay-readers or teachers out there helping Tesimale." Fenn, "Aird Hill."

46. L. W. Allen, "Urika Report," PDC Annual Reports 1948-1949, Station Reports, 3/8, Methodist Papers, UPNG.

47. Allen, "Kompani," 8. Kukukuku men, who were being courted by both the Seventh-day Adventists and the LMS, were working for the company in 1946-1947. S. H. Dewdney, "Orokolo," PDC Annual Reports 1946, Station Reports, 3/7, Methodist Papers, UPNG.

48. Allen, "Kompani," 2.

49. District Office Kerema, Monthly Report, Apr. 1946, TPNG, DS 29/2/6.

50. G. D. Collins, Patrol Report Gulf (Beara) 4 of 1947/48, Villages of Purari Area, 13-22 June 1948, p. 5, TPNG.

51. Francis Dobb, Patrol Reports Beara, Patrol Report 6 of 1948/49, pp. 6-7, TPNG.

52. Herbert E. Clark, Patrol Reports Beara, Patrol Report 1 of 1951/52, pp. 4-5; Patrol Report 4 of 1951/52, Oct. 1951, p. 8, TPNG. Kabu had accompanied Patrol Officer Dobb on a patrol in July 1947 and had been "of considerable assistance, although he naturally requires very close watching." C. F. Healy, District Monthly Report for July 1947, Delta Division, 11 Aug. 1947, TPNG, DS 29/3/19.

53. Deputy Registrar of Co-operative Societies to District Officer Kikori, 26 Apr. 1956, quoted in Oram, "Rabia Camp," 18.

54. Quoted in Snowden, "Co-operative Societies," 16. Kabu's letters (14 Mar., 4 Apr., 18 Apr., 7 May 1949; 17 Feb., 23 Nov. 1953; and 4 Apr. 1954, TPNG, CA 35/7/40) name Ivan Champion and H. H. Jackman as administrative officials from whom no reply had been received. Champion had arrived to take the post of district officer, Kerema, in April 1946.

55. Maher, *New Men,* 59.

56. Maher, *New Men,* 62.

57. Maher, *New Men,* 72.

58. Pixley, "Tommy Kabu," 13.

59. Maher, "Purari River Delta Societies," 221.

60. Annual Report, Gulf District, 13 June 1962, p. 24, TPNG, 5516, 48/2/2.

61. Here Brown worked among the Kunimaipa.

62. This is noted by Charles Forman, *Island Churches of the South Pacific* (Maryknoll, 1982), 200; and is discussed in J. K. Parratt, "Religious Change in Port Moresby," *Oceania* 41, no. 2 (Dec. 1970): 106-113. The fact of Kabu's conversion three years prior to his death is little known. Maher noted during a 1973 field trip the presence of Bahá'ís and Jehovah's Witnesses among the Kinipo ("Purari River Delta Societies," 225), but was not aware, evidently, that it was Kabu who had taken Bahá'í beliefs to the Delta. Kabu's conversion was reported in *Bahá'í Bulletin* 141 (May 1966): 17.

63. These were Violet Hoehnke, an Australian nurse employed on Manus, and Rodney Hancock, a New Zealander who first worked in Rabaul and later established businesses on New Britain.

64. "New Guinea, Papua," *Bahá'í Bulletin* 146 (Oct. 1966): 17.

65. David Podger, "Nineteen Declarations from Papua Teaching Trip," *Bahá'í Bulletin* 150 (Feb. 1967): 7. In March 1967 Kabu, writing from Akoma, described to Podger attempts by LMS teachers to remove the Poroi villagers from the Bahá'í faith. Kabu to Podger, 11 Mar. 1967. There were some fourteen Bahá'ís in Poroi, and the LMS had sent a teacher and two medics to reside in the village. Kabu to Podger, 9 Mar. 1967. (Documents cited here and in nn. 67, 69, and 71 below were made available by David and Sue Podger, Sydney, and are hereafter cited as Podger Papers.)

66. Sue Podger, "Report on Teaching Activities in Papua for the Past Year 1967-1968," in *Annual Bahá'í Convention for Australia BE 125--1968*, 50. Photos of Kabu and the Bahá'ís of Poroi are included in *Bahá'í Bulletin* 150 (Feb. 1967): 6.

67. Kabu to David Podger, 12 Aug. 1968, Podger Papers.

68. "New Assemblies Formed in Papua," *Bahá'í Bulletin* 166 (June 1968): 11.

69. David Podger to Kabu, 23 July 1967, Podger Papers.

70. Oram, "Rabia Camp," 17.

71. In 1968 there were nineteen Bahá'ís in the village. Ara'ava Bahá'ís to Violet Hoehnke, 1968, Podger Papers.

72. By Kiki's account, Kabu "became seriously ill, did next to no campaigning and spent most of the pre-election period in hospital." Albert Maori Kiki, *Kiki: Ten Thousand Years in a Lifetime* (Melbourne, 1971), 171.

73. Some years after Kabu's death, Prime Minister Michael Somare dedicated a monument to Kabu at Rabia Camp. By 1987 the monument, and Rabia Camp itself, gave an appearance of considerable neglect and disillusion.

74. Maher, *New Men*, 58.

75. Oram, "Rabia Camp," 10.