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CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN MEKEO SOCIETY,
1890-1971

by

Michele Stephen

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in the
Australian National University

July 1974
Except where otherwise acknowledged in the text, this thesis represents my original research.

Michele Stephen

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CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN MEKEO SOCIETY,
1890-1971

(Précis)

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THIS study describes the response of the Mekeo, a Papuan people numbering approximately six and a half thousand, to eighty years of European control. It combines three different types of evidence - documentary material (mainly government records), ethnographic data collected during the author's field work and oral history collected in the same manner.

Chapter One briefly describes contemporary Mekeo society and then works back, identifying points of comparison and contrast with the society at the time of first contact in 1890. It demonstrates the strong continuity between past and present observable in local grouping, leadership, family life and kin relationships, and social values.

Chapters Two to Eight trace the history of contact from 1890 to the present. The Mekeo's first reception of mission and government, and their attempts to reconcile the new regime with the traditional structure of authority, are described in Chapter Two. The effect of the pre-war administration's policies of enforced labour and compulsory cash cropping are discussed in Chapter Three. Chapter Four outlines the background of social stability in the pre-war period.

The effects of the Second World War - the breaking down of the former isolation of the village community and the arousing of new desires for economic and social advancement - are discussed in Chapter Five.
Chapter Six argues that the failure of the administration's post-war developmental schemes resulted from its inability to provide the necessary economic infrastructure of transport and marketing facilities. Though discouraged by these failures, villagers were not deterred from experimenting with their own business ventures in the late 1950s.

The struggles of the Mekeo Local Government Council, and the opposition encountered by aspiring political and business leaders from their own communities, are outlined in Chapter Seven.

Chapter Eight analyses the present obstacles to development in terms of the traditional social ethic and the ambivalence underlying social relationships, the direction of change since the war which has weakened the society's capacity to deal with the new developments, and the history of relations with the white regime. It is suggested that the present social values, which are only just beginning to be questioned, will continue to influence the immediate future and that villagers may have to choose between their desire for advancement and the social values which, up to the present, have given dignity and purpose to life.
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In Port Moresby, officials of the Departments of District Services, Agriculture, and Trade and Industry readily gave me access to their files. Bereina District Office staff were also very co-operative in allowing me to consult their records. I am most grateful for the assistance given on many occasions by the Sacred Heart Mission. In particular I would like to thank Fathers Diaz and Coltre of the Beipa mission for their unfailing generosity and hospitality, and for the interesting and illuminating discussions I had with them, many of which have contributed to the arguments presented here. A special tribute is due to Sisters Christine and Denise of the Beipa mission hospital for the care they gave to my husband when he broke his leg during field work.
This study could never have been made without the co-operation and interest of the many Mekeo who shared their history with me. To the people of Inawi and Aipeana and to all the Mekeo whom I met either in their villages or in Port Moresby, I owe a deep debt of gratitude; their tolerance, hospitality and kindness made my field work a most rewarding personal experience. To all our Inawi friends, especially to A'oea Ufai and his family, to the grand old men of the village - Lapu Aufe, Isoaimo Opu, Maino Peafuau (now deceased), Aisaga Evi, Maino Aiso, Opu Paisa, and all the clan chiefs - I offer my sincerest thanks.

My greatest debt is to my husband, who prepared the maps and tables for the thesis and has actively participated in every stage of it from the initial selecting of the topic to the final proof reading.

Michele Stephen
July 1974
### ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>ADC</td>
<td>Assistant District Commissioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADO</td>
<td>Assistant District Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANGAU</td>
<td>The Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARM</td>
<td>Assistant Resident Magistrate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BNG</td>
<td>British New Guinea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DASF</td>
<td>Department of Agriculture, Stock and Fisheries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td>District Commissioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDS &amp; NA</td>
<td>Department of District Services and Native Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DO</td>
<td>District Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGC</td>
<td>Local Government Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMS</td>
<td>London Missionary Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OIC</td>
<td>Officer in Charge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIB</td>
<td>Papuan Infantry Battalion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PM</td>
<td>Port Moresby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHM</td>
<td>Sacred Heart Mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T &amp; I</td>
<td>Department of Trade and Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VC</td>
<td>Village Constable</td>
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NOTE ON SPELLING

The 1973 Village Directory is the authority used for the spelling of village names. In other cases the mission orthography has been followed.

In the quotations the orthographical idiosyncrasies of the writers have been maintained without special notation on each occasion.
INTRODUCTION

PACIFIC historians, reacting against the ethnocentrism of old-style colonial history, have stressed the need to understand not only the policies and activities of Europeans in the Pacific, but also 'the indigenous forces that have similarly contributed to the making of the contemporary Pacific.' ¹ In Africa, a similar reaction has turned attention to the refining of techniques to expand knowledge of pre-contact African history. ² Historians writing of New Guinea have, until recently, confined themselves mainly to the role played by Europeans; but the increasing interest in non-documentary approaches, ³ the firm guide lines for a 'people's history' indicated by Professor Denoon of the University of Papua New Guinea, ⁴ and the aspirations of the people of an independent nation leave little doubt that future historical studies will focus on the village rather than the metropolitan powers.

The present problem for New Guinea historiography, which is as yet only in an exploratory stage, is how to achieve this new emphasis. Up to the present, most scholars who have attempted detailed time-depth studies of the impact of European contact on indigenous New Guinea societies have

¹ Davidson 1966: 21.
² Vansina 1969; Vansina, Mauny and Thomas 1964.
³ This interest is reflected in the section devoted to non-documentary approaches at the Second Waigani Seminar, 1969.
been anthropologists, not historians. The anthropologist, according to Firth, aims at identifying and describing the changes that have taken place in a society by making an analysis of it at two separate points in time.\textsuperscript{5} The historian, on the other hand, attempts to trace the processes that link the two, to describe and explain them; he wants to know how the institutions, attitudes and ideas of a particular society have developed over a period of time. Whilst many studies of social change in New Guinea fit Firth's 'dual synchronic' model, a few have demonstrated how the historical processes of contact may be reconstructed through a combination of documentary, oral and ethnographic evidence.

It is not surprising that until recently historians have preferred to leave such studies to anthropologists for in New Guinea:

...the normal units of historical observation are, on the native side, virtually absent. There are no large political formations, no collective entities or representative spokesmen, no well-defined large-scale events or consolidated policies. The white man's action bears directly upon the small institutions of social life, the clan, the hamlet, the family, and is not mediated through large-scale political entities. A great deal of the native side of the situation therefore becomes visible only when the techniques proper to the social anthropologist are employed.\textsuperscript{6}

Though these problems are not confined to New Guinea, they combine with the fragmentation of linguistic and cultural units to provide a special challenge to the historian. It is not simply a matter of adopting new techniques; the historian

\textsuperscript{5} Firth 1959.

\textsuperscript{6} McAuley 1954: 819.
who forsakes his archives to set out with note pad and tape recorder for the village can have no confidence that the material he gathers will represent 'New Guinean attitudes' in general, or even the opinions of the next valley. Above all, the problem is of dealing with unaccustomedly small units.

The following study is based on the conviction that a deeper understanding than we now possess of New Guineans' response to European contact can best emerge from detailed area studies of single cultural units, or of small groups of contiguous, closely related cultures.

Probably the most decisive among my many reasons for selecting the Mekeo, a Papuan people who have experienced eighty years of European control, was their reputation for a die-hard conservatism - a characteristic which seemed to offer an interesting contrast to the positive response to economic and political change recorded by anthropologists elsewhere in New Guinea. The Mekeo are reputed to be indifferent to progress and opposed to European ways in general. J.P. McAuley wrote in 1954:

> It is certainly the fact, acknowledged by all who have had dealings with the Roro and Mekeo people, that they have no liking for the white man's regime and do not mind making this plain by their demeanour. 7

Over two decades, this reputation has, if anything, increased. Refusing to accept the anonymity of cropped hair, shorts and shirt now adopted by most New Guineans, the Mekeo, with his ankle-length red rami, his elaborate, bushy hairstyle,

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7 Ibid: 818.
his beaded necklace and woven armbands, cuts a flamboyant and arrogant figure. The very confidence of his bearing contrasts with the more self-effacing manner many New Guineans still assume in the presence of expatriates. The failure of expensive post-war development plans in the Mekeo and the struggles of the Mekeo Local Government Council suggest that conservatism is not in appearances only. I was interested to find out more about the Mekeo's attitudes to economic and political development and about the pattern of change over the period of contact. My aim was not to point out simple differences between past and present Mekeo society but to understand its existing attitudes and problems in terms of the historical interaction between the Mekeo on the one hand, and the European agencies of influence on the other.

Though these basic aims were not changed, my initial assumptions had to be completely revised. After examining the government records, I arrived in the village convinced that the impression I had of harsh, repressive pre-war policies and post-war bungling provided most of the answers to the Mekeo's indifference to progress along the lines set out by the administration. A few weeks of field work undermined my admittedly naive expectations that villagers' opinions would merely serve to illustrate the picture I already held. The Mekeo, I discovered, did not regard themselves as anti-government, or anti-European, or indifferent to the attractions of European goods or ways. The consistent interpretation of their contact history which, despite my misconceptions, eventually emerged from villagers' accounts was very different from what I had originally expected.

In one respect, circumstances forced me to modify my original aims. I had intended to give equal emphasis to government and mission policies - there have been no
private settlers on Mekeo land and very few in the immediate area - but after starting the project I discovered that most of the mission documents had been sent to France and were in the personal possession of Father Dupeyrat, author of the mission history *Papouasie*. Consequently, attention centres on government policy, which in any case has been far the more significant in the fields of economic and political development.

The Mekeo are the main focus of the work. It must be recognized, however, that my view point and emphasis are necessarily those of an outsider, writing for outsiders. Despite my efforts to present the Mekeo's side as fairly as possible, my conclusions will not necessarily be theirs.

**Methodology and Field Techniques**

My reconstruction of Mekeo contact history rests on three bases - written sources, ethnographic material and oral history. The scholar who attempts to combine these sources, as Dening remarks, 'tends to be a historian who is an amateur anthropologist, or an anthropologist who is an amateur historian, and in consequence the object of suspicion of anthropologist and historian alike.' It is reasonable, therefore, to expect that both camps will want to know the sort of techniques used; although in this instance the only real novelty of the approach is that it has been carried out by someone trained in historical rather than anthropological methods.

The historian regards it as axiomatic that, before he can talk of change in a particular society, he must learn

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8 Dupeyrat 1935.
9 Dening 1966: 23.
as much as possible of its institutions and values. The medievalist steeps himself in the whole literature of his period. In the case of pre-literate societies, the historian may make use of existing ethnographies, but his only direct means of contact with the minds of the people he is studying is to live among them. If the society has experienced generations of contact and disruptive social change, he cannot make direct inferences about the past. In New Guinea, however, the first contacts occurred less than one hundred years ago, and recent studies, even of groups who have rapidly adapted to the new ways, demonstrate the persistence of traditional patterns of behaviour.

As no full account of contemporary Mekeo society has yet been written, I have had to collect my own ethnographic data. In any case I wanted to obtain first-hand knowledge of the people and their society. In order to acquire it, I borrowed the field techniques of the ethnographer, concentrating on gaining a detailed understanding of one village community. Between May 1970 and December 1971, I spent fourteen months (in three separate periods) living in Inawi, the second largest Mekeo village, which in 1971 had a population of 879. By direct participation and observation, by means of genealogies, maps and a detailed household census, I attempted to collect concrete, quantitative data to compare with the statements informants made about their society. Though my interest centred on leadership and economic activities, I took advantage of whatever opportunities offered themselves to observe different aspects of village life. During the first six months I struggled to learn the language; when at the end of this time I had not gained sufficient proficiency to conduct thorough investigations, I used an interpreter. It was not until the last two months that I
attempted a few independent interviews; nevertheless I was able to follow and direct most of the exchanges between interpreter and informants. As most younger people speak excellent English - a circumstance which made learning the vernacular even more difficult - many conversations and interviews, particularly with business leaders and local government councillors, were conducted in English.

My starting point in Chapter One is the present society. Anthropologists rightly stress the dangers of attempting to 'reconstruct' a society at some point in the past; I have worked back from the present, identifying continuity and change at certain easily identifiable points, without offering any overall picture of the functioning entity which existed at the time of first contact in 1890. The brief accounts of the society in the late 1890s and early 1900s given by Seligman, and a few other observers, provide useful points of comparison.

Chapters Two to Eight, which trace the events linking 1890 with the present, derive their factual framework and chronological arrangement from written sources, primarily government records. The documentary evidence, which was examined first, also provided the guidelines for collecting the oral material, at least in the first stages before any clear interpretation emerged from villagers' accounts.

Rather than trying to gather oral evidence from as many villages as possible, I have aimed at building up a complete picture from one village and then testing this interpretation against a detailed comparison with one other

10 Seligman 1910.
village. Aipeana, the third largest Mekeo village, and the most economically progressive in 1971, seemed to offer an ideal comparison with conservative Inawi which, though less than three miles distant, was isolated by rough tracks. Despite these differences, there was very little variation in the overall view of contact presented by the two villages. Though some information was collected in other villages, I confined systematic enquiries to Aipeana and Inawi, and used the results to give insight into the overall picture presented by the documentary evidence.

Oral evidence consisted of three types - traditions passed down from one or more generations, hearsay, and eyewitness accounts. The use of traditions is confined to Chapter Two and is discussed there. Chapters Three to Eight present the opinions of leading participants in the events described - eyewitness accounts which, critics of oral history should perhaps be reminded, would constitute court evidence under oath. Problems of dealing with retrospective accounts are discussed where they arise in the text.

The question of selecting informants is one which is largely decided for the field worker once he is well known in a Mekeo community. While it might logically appear that in a village of more than 800 people there would be dozens of possible informants on a topic like the rice scheme of the 1950s, villagers expect and direct you to consult those who were office bearers in the rural progress societies, the men who were trained to be mill hands and tractor operators, and, of course, the clan chiefs and elders. People who have not taken a leading part in events, or at least directly participated in them, are reluctant to describe their experiences; most Mekeo will simply refuse to discuss a topic rather than make up some rigmarole to placate the outsider.
I was, of course, well known to the people I consulted, while the people of Inawi were my close friends and neighbours.

During the first six months field work, I made no systematic historical inquiries; at the end of that time I drew up questions on different topics, guided by general impressions of village opinion and the documentary evidence. These 'questionnaires' were intended only to provide a flexible plan, ensuring that the same information was covered with each informant, but modified to suit each particular situation; later they were revised when it became clear that many of the assumptions on which they had been based were false. Naturally the collection of ethnographic material and of information derived from general conversation and social contact continued throughout the whole period of field work. When informants are quoted in the text, statements made at formal interviews are acknowledged in footnotes giving the informant's name (or in some cases initials), the place and date of the interview; in the case of comments made in general or private conversations, no reference is made.

The Wider Relevance of the Mekeo's Experience

Mekeo society defies many of the assumptions usually held about Melanesian societies. Instead of the highly competitive big-man style of leadership familiar from many other parts of New Guinea, the Mekeo possess a complex structure of hereditary chieftainship and a social ethic that condemns competitive, aggressive behaviour. In other New Guinea societies which, like the Mekeo, have stable local grouping, sorcery accusations are usually directed against outsiders and thus help to preserve the group's sense of

12 Berndt and Lawrence 1971.
solidarity. 13 Yet the Mekeo, who are obsessed by sorcery fears, always suspect close kin of using sorcery against them. Though the direction of accusations is suggestive of the ways in which fears of witchcraft operate in many African societies, 14 the Mekeo sorcerer, unlike the African witch, holds a socially sanctioned position as the punitive force behind authority.

The apparent singularity of the Mekeo, however, is largely the creation of current trends in ethnographical research: over the last two decades interest has centred on the Highlands and little attention has been given to the long contacted areas of the Papuan coast. The Mekeo are surrounded by tribes known to have ascribed status and hereditary leadership: the Purari of the Papuan Gulf to the west of them, 15 the Kuni to the east, 16 the Mafulu to the north-east, 17 the Roro to the south 18 and the Nara to the south-east. 19 Further to the east are the Motu who, though they have no hereditary leaders at the village level, have hereditary heads of the clan sections which comprise the village. 20 Malinowski's Trobriand Islanders, perhaps the

14 Marwick 1965; Mair 1969.
16 Van Rijswijck 1967.
17 Williamson 1912.
18 Seligman 1910.
19 Ibid.
20 Groves 1963.
best known example of a society with hereditary leadership, also had sorcerers who functioned as the enforcers of law and order. Mekeo sorcery charms and stones shown to me appeared to be identical to the Koita charms illustrated in Seligman's *Melanesians of British New Guinea*: both the Mekeo and the Mailu, a people of the eastern Papuan coast, had war magicians known as 'cinnamon men' (*faia* in Mekeo) after the cinnamon bark which they used as a charm. Further research among these coastal groups is necessary to correct the present imbalance in our ethnographic picture of New Guinea.

Not surprisingly, the Mekeo's response to European contact has also been different in many respects from the experiences so far recorded in other areas of New Guinea. The parallels which can be drawn with other groups are, therefore, all the more interesting. Yet it is obvious that the validity of my interpretation, and its usefulness as a comparative example, rests largely on its ability to stand alone. For this reason I have, in the chapters that follow, avoided arguing by analogy, presenting the Mekeo case in its own terms as far as possible.

One respect in which contemporary Mekeo society cannot be regarded as unusual is the strong continuity observable between past and present. As McSwain points out, recent studies of social and economic change have emphasized the ways in which traditional patterns of behaviour

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21 Malinowski 1926.
22 Seligman 1910.
23 Abbi 1964.
24 McSwain 1971.
and concepts have enabled progressive groups like the Gorokans, the Chimbu and the Tolai to readily adopt new ways. The traditional flexibility and fluidity of Chimbu society, Brown argues, has allowed it to take rapid change in its stride; 25 the highly developed economic concepts of pre-contact Tolai society, which T.S. Epstein describes as a form of 'primitive capitalism', were easily adapted to new economic stimuli; 26 the competitive, aggressive style of traditional Gorokan leadership provided the model for emerging business entrepreneurs. 27 In the case of the Mekeo, however, their system of hereditary leadership, the social condemnation of competitive behaviour, and the strong conservative force created by sorcery fears, operate against their own desire for progress. Further problems are created by the ambivalence underlying social relationships, which makes co-operation in the new situations difficult, even among close kin; and this ambivalence has been underlined by the process of social change over the last thirty years.

Some scholars argue that the conservatism of coastal societies like the Mekeo has been conditioned by several decades of European contact during which the traditional order was 'uneasily and unproductively stabilised'; whereas the more progressive Highlanders, contacted only in the 1930s, were almost immediately introduced to 'an inter-communicating, highly technological and aggressively developmental modern world'. 28 Yet the Mekeo's pre-war experiences of repressive

26 T.S. Epstein 1968.
government policies did not prevent them from welcoming the post-war developmental projects. The miscarriage of these plans - largely because of the administration's inability to provide the necessary economic infrastructure of transport and marketing facilities - has damaged the administration in Mekeo eyes, but it has not deterred them from experimenting with cash cropping and business ventures on their own.

Many New Guineans, for example the people of the Rai Coast, 29 of Kar Kar 30 and Manus Islands, 31 the Tangu and the people of Manam Island, 32 have sought in cargoism the progress which eludes them. The Mekeo, despite the outbreak of two short-lived pre-war cults, have pursued practical rather than ritual means of satisfying their desire to share in the white man's wealth. The acquisition of cargo had little prominence in the Mekeo cults, which, I argue, should rather be understood as a means of achieving sudden social change - the mass hysteria producing a state of mental and physical abandon during which cultists dared to defy even the most terrible traditional taboos and sanctions.

Possibly the most interesting aspect of the Mekeo's contact experience is the consistent moral interpretation they give to their relationship with the white regime. From the beginning, the government was accepted and judged according to the traditional ideal of authority. Impressed by the fabulous possessions of the white men, which were regarded as undeniable proof of their supernatural powers, and reassured

29 Lawrence 1967.
30 McSwain 1971.
31 Schwartz 1957.
32 Burridge 1960.
by their protestations of friendship and future benefits, the Mekeo calculated that they had more to gain than to lose by the presence of the new-comers. Accepting the new order more or less as an extension of the traditional structure of authority, villagers expected that in return for their allegiance, the white regime was morally bound to confer the benefits it promised. Their response over the subsequent eighty years of contact was based on the premise that if they met the government and the mission's demands - for tax, converts, carriers, rice or whatever - they would eventually fulfil their promises. Within this moral framework, the actions of government, mission and the people themselves assume a very different character. While mission and government complained because villagers did not co-operate more enthusiastically with measures designed to promote their welfare, villagers themselves regarded the same measures as duties imposed by the new regime in its own interests, and having carried them out to the best of their ability, expected some recompense for their labours. When the post-war developmental projects, which villagers had hoped would benefit them, failed, they were convinced that the government had perpetrated a base and deliberate deception.

Despite obvious differences in interpretation and experience, the Mekeo's version of their contact history has certain similarities with the intellectual response of the Tangu and the people of the Rai Coast. Each group has struggled to fit the white man into a moral order which he will not accept. Their experiences underline the danger of

33 Ibid.
34 Lawrence 1967.
imposing upon New Guinea history a simple stereotype of oppressor and oppressed. Neither the Mekeo, the Tangu nor the people of the Madang coast, accepted domination based on force, but were determined to establish a morally acceptable and understandable relationship with the colonial order. The Tangu and the Madang people never succeeded for long in convincing themselves that a satisfactory arrangement had been reached but the Mekeo believed for several decades that the government recognized their expectations of it and would honour them. These responses suggest that Melanesians in general probably did not realize the full extent of the white men's military and technological superiority, at least until the Second World War: in their own societies, technological and military differences were not sufficient for one group to subject and dominate another; any interaction apart from constant warfare had to be conducted on a reciprocal basis. The relationship assumed by the colonial order had, therefore, no meaning to those it claimed to have subjugated. Whether or not this proves to be true in all instances, for the Mekeo and for others, the concept of oppressor and oppressed is an external interpretation of their history which obscures their view and the rationale for their actions.
MEKEO VILLAGES
AND COAST
MAP 3

MEKEO VILLAGES AND COAST IN 1890

Taken from British New Guinea Annual Reports 1889-90: Appendix Y.
CHAPTER ONE

MEKEO SOCIETY PAST AND PRESENT

PART I: THE PRESENT SOCIETY

THE Mekeo inhabit an area of flat alluvial country approximately seventy miles to the north-west of Port Moresby, lying within the Central District of Papua. The Roro and Waima people occupy the coastal strip to the south of the Mekeo; to the east are the Kuni, and to the south-east the Nara and Kabadi. A group formerly known as the Inaukina, or Bush Mekeo, and now as the North Mekeo, lives in the swampy country north-west of the Mekeo proper; though similar in many respects to the Mekeo of the plains, these people constitute a distinct cultural and linguistic unit.

1 The following description of contemporary Mekeo society, except where indicated in the text or footnotes, is based on my own field work carried out principally in Inawi village during 1970 and 1971.

2 Until a full ethnographic study of the North Mekeo is made, it is not possible to determine their exact relationship with the Mekeo 'proper'. Seligman notes that 'A small but uncertain number of villages on the middle reaches of the Biaru River must be considered to constitute an ethnographical annexe to Mekeo, for physically and in their customs generally their inhabitants resemble the Mekeo folk among whom they have formed many colonies and with whom they intermarry to a limited extent.' Seligman 1910: 311-12. According to linguists of the Sacred Heart Mission, the Mekeo 'proper' (composed of two tribes, the Pioufa and the Ve'e) and the North Mekeo (composed of three tribes, the Amoamo, the Inaukina and the Kuipa) speak dialects of the same language, though the difference is so marked that the two groups can only understand each other with difficulty. SHM Grammaire Mekeo: 1-2.
Situated on either side of the St Joseph River, the Mekeo villages occupy the plain behind the low coastal hills which extends to the foothills of the Owen Stanley Ranges. Vegetation consists of heavy forest interspersed with stretches of cane grass, and the rich alluvial soil produces an abundance of indigenous food crops. During the wet season, which usually begins in December and continues until May, much of the region is subject to flooding.

Local Grouping

The significant unit of local grouping is the nucleated village. The present population of 6,421 is divided between fourteen villages, forming units much larger than those considered typical of Melanesian societies: seven of the fourteen villages have over 450 inhabitants and the largest has 1,000. Seligman points out that the people known as the 'Mekeo' constitute two tribes, the Pioufa and the Ve'e. Belshaw, writing in 1951, dismisses this division as a purely mythical association with two ancestral groups. Whilst no corporate functions can be observed today, people still identify themselves as being Pioufa or Ve'e, and there

7 Seligman 1910: 311 refers to them as the 'Biofa-Vee'.
8 Belshaw 1951: 2.
is a slight difference in dialect between the two groups; roughly speaking, the traditional division is reflected today in the distinctions made between the East and the West Mekeo.  

The village, the *paqua*, is composed of a number of named units called *ikupu*, which I term 'clans'. Houses belonging to members of the same *ikupu* are grouped together, dividing the village into several wards. Membership of the *ikupu* is determined patrilineally and all its members are considered to be related, although in many cases this cannot be demonstrated by a known genealogy. Unlike the Motu *iduhu*, which it resembles in many other respects, the *ikupu* insists strongly on the principle of agnation. Genealogies of the *ikupu* comprising Inawi village gave no indication of the clusters of non-agnates found by Groves in Motu genealogies. The *ikupu* is the land holding unit, is ideally exogamous, and has its own hereditary leader.

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9 SHM Grammaire Mekeo: 2. '...la langue des Pioufa et celle des Ve'e presente quelques divergences: racines et tournures differentes. Plus accentuee [no accents are marked on the manuscript] pourtant la predominance du "G" en VE'E, tandisque cette nasale s'adoucit souvent en "N" ou meme "L" chez les PIOUFA....'

10 However Rarai, Inawauni and Imounga, all Ve'e villages, are situated west of the river and Oriropetana, a Pioufa settlement, is on the east bank. Cf Hau'ofa 1971: 153.

11 The word *'paqua'* which Seligman incorrectly equates with 'clan' means 'village' or 'settlement' and is used in a verbal form to mean 'make a settlement'. Desnoes Vol. 11: 917 defines *'paqua'* simply as 'village'.

12 Groves 1963.
Like the Motu iduhu, the ikupu may be dispersed through several villages, each village division functioning as an independent unit. Villagers regard such groups as fragments of one original clan, which has been dispersed by warfare and migration over a long period of time: clan histories relate in detail the processes whereby the present distribution of groups has come about. In contrast to the Motu, members of an ikupu are usually well aware of the genealogical ranking of its different branches and some interaction between them occurs. On important occasions, such as the installation of a new chief or a dispute over a marriage, interaction takes place between certain Inawi clans and their branches in other villages; but naturally circumstances vary - groups may be on bad terms and refuse even normal social intercourse with each other. Regardless of the degree of contact, the village branch of the ikupu retains its essential independence and is the significant functional unit.

The size and composition of this unit varies considerably, ranging from one or two households and a single lineage, to thirty or more households and several lineages. Large ikupu usually display a formal threefold division into smaller units, which are also referred to as ikupu. Houses of the members of one section are built together, forming

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13 Groves refers to the dispersed fragments of a clan as 'sections'; I refer to them as 'branches' of the one clan, reserving the term 'section' to describe the divisions which exist in each branch or village based unit.

14 See diagram following: 3.

15 See fn. 13.
a spatial division of the *ikupu*, with the parts ranked in order of seniority. The three sections are believed to be descended from three brothers; the *fa'aniau* or senior section being founded by the eldest brother, the *eke* or junior section by the second brother and the *iso* or war section by the third. This formalized explanation of the origin of the sections indicates the relationship between them: they are seen as three separate lineages which originally sprang from a common ancestor, the founder of the clan.

Today people can remember the names of clan founders but the names of ancestors linking the founders with known genealogies have been forgotten. Even relationships within a single section cannot always be demonstrated by a known genealogy. Oaisaka, the largest *ikupu* in Inawi, comprises three sections: the senior section, Lopia Fa'a, consists of a single lineage which can demonstrate its relationship; the junior section, Lalae, consists of three separate lineages, and the third section, Iso, of two lineages. No one alive today knows the precise genealogical links between these sections, but the members of Oaisaka insist that they are descended from a single common ancestor. Genealogies collected by the Sacred Heart Mission shortly after it was established in the area in 1886 reveal that at that time people could provide precise links between clan sections.¹⁶

In the case of Oaisaka, for example, the mission genealogies record the links between Lopia Fa'a, one lineage of Lalae and the two lineages of Iso, revealing that their relative seniority accords with the stated norm. Lalae includes a number of unrelated lines, some of which have now died out.

¹⁶ SHM Mekeo Genealogies.
The three largest *ikupu* in Inawi - Oaisaka, Paisapaisa and Ogofoina - are divided into three ranked sections. ¹⁷ One clan, Afai, consists of two sections, a *fa'aniau* and an *eke*. The seven remaining groups are not formally divided into sections, though some are composed of more than one lineage. Villagers explain that all clans should possess three parts but that many groups have been divided and scattered by tribal fighting and migration, hence they no longer retain their original structure.

**The Structure of Authority**

The conventional threefold division of the *ikupu* reflects the structure of authority within it. Ideally each *ikupu* possesses three chiefs: a *lopa fa'aniau*, a senior chief who is the head of the senior section of the clan and the direct lineal descendant of the clan founder; a *lopa eke*, a junior chief who is head of the *eke* section; and an *iso lopia* who heads the *iso* section. The *lopa fa'aniau*, as the direct descendant of the founder of the clan, takes precedence over the *lopa eke*, who acts as his assistant, and the *iso lopia*, who formerly acted as battle commander. The senior chief is also assisted by important specialists in harmful magic, the *faia*, the war magician, and the *ugauga*, the sorcerer, who provide the punitive force behind his commands. Not all clans, however, are expected to have these specialists. Any chief is said to be able to call upon the services of the *ugauga*, regardless of his clan; likewise those chiefs who have no *faia* experts of their own can turn to the *faia* of certain allied clans for assistance.

¹⁷ See diagram following: 3.
Although tribal fighting ceased eighty years ago, the titles of war chief *(iso lopia)* and war magician *(faia)* continue to the present day. A new *iso lopia* was installed in Oaisaka *ikupu* of Inawi only three years ago. In the past, the *faia* was greatly feared as he was believed to be responsible for deaths which occurred in battle and while hunting dangerous animals such as wild boars and cassowaries. Although the *faia* has little opportunity today to demonstrate his powers, men claiming the title and known to possess *faia* knowledge are still respected and feared. The *iso lopia*, who formerly led his clan to battle and was responsible for all the ceremonies and feasts associated with warfare, today acts as a junior civilian chief, as head of his lineage or clan section and as assistant to the senior chief. Three Inawi clans claim an *iso lopia* - one, in fact, having an *iso lopia fa'aniau* and an *iso lopia eke*.

It is evident that in a large village like Inawi, which is composed of several clans, there are many claimants to chiefly office and high status. The number of chiefs a clan has depends as much upon its composition as upon its size. A small *ikupu*, which is not large enough to form the conventional three sections but nevertheless comprises two or more separate lineages, may claim more than one chief. Ugo *ikupu*, consisting of only four households, nevertheless has a *lophia fa'aniau* and an *ugauga lopia*; while Paisapaisa, which comprises three sections and more than twenty households, claims only a *lophia fa'aniau* and an *iso lopia*, the line of the *ekte* chief having died out. A *lophia* is usually head of a separate lineage, no matter how small, but two examples

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18 See below: 54-5.
can be found in Inawi of lopia eke existing within the fa'aniau chief's lineage; both positions have been created within the last fifty years to solve unusual situations in which two prospective heirs were put forward for the position of senior chief. The title lopia eke is also claimed by the living descendant of the original chiefly line of Oaisaka which was removed from office several generations ago: people state that this man is not 'really' a chief but seem more or less content to allow him the title in recognition of the noble origin of his line.

Three clans in Inawi claim no chiefs. Ogofoina Lopia Fa'a, which broke away from the senior section of Oaisaka about forty years ago, has been unable to fully establish its separate identity and install its own chief.

19 In the first case, the adoption by a childless chief of an heir who grew into a foolish and irresponsible man prompted several members of the clan to put forward the son of the chief's younger brother as a more suitable candidate, thus creating two strong claimants to the succession. In the second case, a childless chief took a third wife in the hope of producing an heir. The young wife bore him a son and a little while later, the senior wife also gave birth to a son. Since the child of the senior wife was considered to have valid claims to the succession, he was eventually installed as a lopia eke, while his elder brother was made the senior chief. This is an interesting example of the functioning of the important principle of seniority (see below: 10-11; 35-6): one heir was thought to have precedence by virtue of being the first born, the other because of the seniority of his mother's position.

20 More than sixty years ago, Seligman (1910: 344) noted the existence of this deposed line; it seems remarkable that deference is still paid to his head.
though it is quite a large group. Okope, which now consists of two adopted families, the original line having died out, claims no chief. The third clan, Ougo, is said to be too small to afford the expense of installing a successor to its deceased chief.

Small, weak groups like Ougo and Okope, though retaining their separate name and in some cases possessing their own chiefs, do not function as independent entities but rather as parts of larger and more powerful clans. Inawi can be roughly divided into groups or clusters of clans centering around the three largest ikupu - Paisapaisa, Oaisaka and Ogofoina. Paisapaisa shares its clubhouse with two smaller groups, Afai and Ipoge, whose members have built their houses on land originally given them by Paisapaisa. Contained within the isao section of Oaisaka are four small groups, Okope, Ougo, Ipoge Ugo and Ugo; only Ugo has its own chief and, until recently, its own clubhouse. A third, though less tightly knit cluster is formed by Ogofoina, Ogofoina Lopia Fa'a and Gagai. Gagai maintains a fairly independent existence, having both a senior and junior chief and its own clubhouse; but it often interacts with Ogofoina as it is settled on Ogofoina land and, being a small group, it often requires extra labour and assistance for feasts. Ogofoina Lopia Fa'a, which is also settled on land given to it by Ogofoina, is in the awkward position of having obligations to both Ogofoina and to Oaisaka, from which it originated.

The smaller groups are dependent on the dominant clan, since they live on land originally belonging to it,

21 Hau'ofa 1971: 155 describes a similar arrangement in Belpa.
share its *ufu* and may need its chief to officiate for them. The cluster functions as a single unit more often than not. Feasts may be held jointly, even when the smaller groups have their own chiefs, and food brought back from feasts is distributed to all the members of the cluster. Members co-operate with each other in house building and similar tasks. An intra-clan argument spreads to the whole cluster but does not involve the neighbouring one, and all members of the cluster support each other in inter-clan disputes. Community work required by the local government council, the parents' and citizens' association and the church committee is always apportioned to a cluster as a single group, and the representatives of the various village committees and associations are selected according to this division.

The *lophia fa'aniau* of Paisapaisa, Oaisaka and Ogofoina take precedence over the chiefs of the other clans comprising their cluster, as well as over the subordinate chiefs of their own clan: of the three, the chief of Oaisaka, the founding clan of Inawi, is the most important, being regarded as the 'first' or 'head' chief of the village. The many holders of chiefly office and high rank are thus carefully ordered in a hierarchy of influence. In principle the senior chief of the founding clan is regarded as the most important chief in the village and the other chiefs are said to defer to him, but this is not always the case owing to various circumstances. Beipa, the largest Mekeo village, claims no head chief because the family of the senior chief of its founding clan later migrated to another settlement: at present Aipeana lacks a head chief as the previous *lophia fa'aniau* of the founding clan, Aivea, died leaving no male heir.
A chief's direct influence may be confined to a single lineage or encompass a whole village but it never extends beyond the village unit. Chiefs have rights to demand labour from all individuals married to members of their ikupu but these are rights over individuals, not other groups; and though a certain amount of interaction can be observed between branches of a clan in different villages, on the whole village branches can be said to function independently of each other.

The extent of the Mekeo chief's direct control cannot be considered exceptional for a Melanesian leader, though the units of local grouping are unusually large. Yet the ordering of authority, despite its limited scope, contains elements suggesting a style of leadership and social organization which Sahlins argues to be typical of Polynesia.22 A system of 'ranked lineages', in which descent lines are ranked according to their distance from a common ancestor is well developed within the ikupu, the senior chief being the closest agnatic descendant of the clan founder. The same principle ranks chiefs within the village and within the tribe: the chief of the founding clan ranks above the other chiefs of the village; and of all the chiefs of the Pioufa tribe, the senior chief of Oriropetana village ranks above the rest, as he is the most closely related to the founder of the ancestral village, Isoisofapu. Yet above all, it is the Mekeo concept of authority, the rights and privileges possessed by the

22 Sahlins 1963.
lopio and their relationship with their people, which brings Mekeo leadership closer to the Polynesian stereotype described by Sahlins than to the 'big-man' style of politics familiar from so many studies of Melanesian societies.

The Nature of Authority

Authority is conceived of as having a supernatural origin. A'aisa, the deity believed to be the originator of the traditional social and moral order, created the first lopia, iso lopia, faia and ugauga, and laid down their functions. By virtue of its supernatural origin, authority is removed from the level of petty human competition. Men do not compete against each other for positions of authority, they are born to them. All rank and office are hereditary and follow a strict primogeniture succession. Genealogies taken in Inawi show few deviations from this principle, the few which do occur being always carefully covered by formalized explanations which exclude the

23 Cf. Hau'ofa 1971: 152-3. In its basic outlines, the concept of chieftainship delineated by Hau'ofa corresponds closely with information I collected in Inawi.
possibility of political rivalry. The man who aspires to a position which is not his by birth is looked upon with contempt. To 'beg' for office is beneath the dignity of respectable men. The holders of authority owe their positions not to the support of any faction or party, but to the established order of society - a circumstance which the chiefs like to impress upon the elected local government councillors.

In keeping with its supernatural origin, traditional authority is enforced by means of supernatural sanctions. The holders of authority, through the knowledge entrusted to them by A'aisa, are believed to exercise formidable supernatural powers. Despite the eighty years of mission influence and the growing familiarity with the products of modern technology and science, the traditional system of belief maintains a validity which for most villagers is superior to that of the imperfectly understood new knowledge. People attend church regularly, but in private invoke A'aisa and the ancestral spirits; few hesitate to seek

24 Appendix 1, a genealogy obtained in 1971 of the senior section of Oa'aisaka clan, illustrates the adherence to a primogeniture succession. Deviations are always explained as being the result of a voluntary decision made by the legitimate heir or incumbent. For example, one clan claimed that the transference of its chieftainship to a junior line had come about several generations ago when the real heir, who was short, ugly and unfitted physically to play the public role expected of the lopia, asked his younger brother, a tall, well-favoured youth, to take his place. Another example was given of a chief who relinquished his position to his younger brother because he preferred to go hunting rather than bother himself with the affairs of state. Undoubtedly, these and similar tales are intended to disguise the ugly realities of internal strife which lay behind such transferences of power.
medical aid when necessary, but the traditional cures are never neglected and the outcome, whatever it may be, is always seen as a vindication of the powers of the village sorcerer. Likewise the powers which buttress traditional authority are never questioned.

In common with other similar cultures, the traditional Mekeo world view postulates a universe which men can control by means of ritual and magic. Within this conceptual framework, no event is seen to occur by accident; even minor successes or misfortunes are attributed to the deliberate manipulation of supernatural forces by a human agent. Some knowledge of minor magic - spells and charms to invoke the ancestors' aid in gardening, hunting or courting - is possessed by the majority of villagers. A flourishing garden, numerous pigs, luck in gambling and the like are attributed to such knowledge. Practical effort is taken into account, but the ultimate result is believed to be brought about by magical means. For example, a villager will concede that his neighbour's pigs are fat and healthy because they are well treated and well fed; but he will add, in confidence, that the real reason lies in the neighbour's possession of some special charm, since another neighbour, in spite of all his efforts, recently lost his best animals through disease.

Major magical powers depend upon the possession of special objects and knowledge which were entrusted by the deity A'aisa only to a high ranking few. The magician must have special stones (kepo) which are regarded as a repository of supernatural power (isapu) and were originally

25 Lawrence and Meggitt 1965.
given to men by A'aisa and have since passed down from generation to generation. He must also know how to prepare certain concoctions from leaves, blood and other 'powerful' substances (fua) which serve to release the power within the stone, and he must know by heart elaborate rituals and spells (mega). The magicians' object is to create sufficient power to enable him to attract and then control spirits of the dead and non-human spirits which will do his bidding. Certain spirits are capable only of certain tasks, thus the relative power of the magician depends upon the number and type of spirits he can control. In order to withstand contact with the forces of the supernatural world, he must carefully prepare his body for the ordeal, submitting himself to severe dietary and sexual taboos.

The possessors of major powers are believed literally to control life and death: the imu auga, the rain magician, can create drought or flood or ensure a good season; the magician who controls crops (isani ugo) can cause famine or plenty; others can inflict a variety of fatal diseases which they can also cure, and cause death in numerous ways. Though these powers can be used either in a negative or a positive way, it is their destructive potential which remains uppermost in people's minds. Indeed villagers

26 Each class of spirit has a particular type of stone, fua, and spell appropriate to it. The magician's range of powers depends on the number of different stones and types of knowledge he has inherited (or bought). Also the severity of the dietary, sexual and other restrictions he imposes upon himself varies according to the relative power and dangerousness of the spirit or spirits he is attempting to invoke.
might be said to be obsessed with fears of harmful magic: the force of fear at times becoming so strong that even the outsider senses it as an almost palpable entity. Nor is this dread confined to the unsophisticated and uneducated; neither mission nor secular education has succeeded in providing arguments which invalidate the basic premises of the traditional view. One educated young man reasons:

Disease is caused by germs. But what causes the germs to come to my child and make it sick, instead of your child or someone else? I say the reason is sorcery.

The chiefs themselves are supposed to have no destructive powers. In theory only the faia and the ugauga employ harmful magic; that is to say, they play a socially recognized role as the punitive force behind authority. The faia has lost prominence with the disappearance of tribal fighting and today the ugauga, the sorcerer, is the more important figure; he is said to act as the chief's 'policeman', punishing any offender against the chief's laws with sickness or death. In this way the actual execution of punishment is taken out of the chief's hands, though it is he who commands it. That the chief punishes only through the agency of the sorcerer is most carefully insisted upon in public. By the very nature of his rank, the chief is said to be incapable of any harsh or cruel action:

Lopia means in our language one who is kind and good and does not cause harm or sorrow.
Ugauga is the one who can cause harm and sorrow.

Yet secretly this is admitted to be but a convention, people in fact believing that the lopia have their own destructive powers which they can employ without the agency of the sorcerer should they wish to do so. Like the sorcerers, the chiefs are believed to have been granted supernatural powers by A'aisa, and they possess their own special stones.
and relics. The more important chiefs are said to be great magicians. One Inawi chief is believed to control the rain and to summon dangerous water spirits (faifai) which drown human victims or make them seriously ill. Another has control over village food crops and game supplies. The senior chief of the village is known to command numerous powers, including a special type of magic for killing infants and the ability to inflict incurable sores which swiftly result in death. 27

There are many types of harmful magic which are not the exclusive prerogative of the sorcerer, yet people often loosely refer to such activities as ugauqa and invariably, when speaking in English, use the term 'sorcery'. This usage naturally leads to confusion for the outsider. It is necessary in each case to determine the specific attribution of a death before one knows whether the sorcerer, the chief or some other high-ranking man is the suspected protagonist. For example, the man who states that his child died by 'sorcery' on closer questioning makes clear that the death was caused by a type of magic known as imoi ipapepe penia, which is used not by sorcerers but by chiefs. It should be kept in mind that when government reports or European observers refer to the practice of 'sorcery' and the fears associated with it, the term should be interpreted in the wider sense of harmful magic which can be inflicted by chiefs and other high-ranking men, and not only by the sorcerer.

27 Inawi informants stated that, within living memory, the grandfather of the present senior chief of Oaisaka clan challenged Aufo Afulo, the head sorcerer of Eboa and the most famed sorcerer of his day, to a grand contest of powers - and won.
The tenacious hold of traditional authority must largely be understood in terms of the persistence of belief in the supernatural sanctions which enforce it; while the intense fear and suspicion which today characterizes villagers' attitudes towards their chiefs only becomes fully intelligible in the light of the chiefs' direct possession and use of destructive magic. The fear which the chiefs inspire, even when not deliberately directed by them, becomes a most effective means of social control which the village community may unconsciously operate against the individual.

The Proper Use of Authority

The proper use of authority (and the supernatural powers concommitant with it) is for the good of the group, not the aggrandizement of the individual. The importance of this principle is emphasized in the careful ordering and separation of roles observed in the traditional structure of authority.

The lopia fa'aniau, the senior chief, is represented as the very embodiment of the benevolent aspects of authority; any tasks likely to conflict with this altruistic image are delegated to the subordinate roles of the sorcerer, the faia and the war chief. It is unthinkable that the lopia should desire to cause harm or injury, hence the public denial that he holds destructive powers. He must be generous and hospitable to all, one of his most important duties being to see that travellers are provided with food and shelter. He must be tolerant and understanding with his clansmen, and always available to talk with them and offer them advice. In his dealings with other clans he must 'think on peace and not on war'. Within his own clan he settles disputes and disturbances but is seen as a peacemaker rather
than a stern disciplinarian. As is proper between close
kin, his relationship with his people is based upon mutual
affection and trust. The chief's first and only concern
is to 'look after', 'to care for' (ima) his people; they,
in return, furnish him with the material means for holding
feasts and providing hospitality, respect his advice and
obey his commands. Essentially the relationship is regarded
as a familial one: the chief's position as the senior
member of the senior lineage of the clan is seen to ensure
his responsibility and concern for all members of the
group.

The public role of the lopia is placed above all
possibility of self-interest or the abuse of power. In
contrast, the sorcerer's (ugauga) role is allowed an open
ambivalence. As the embodiment of the harsh and cruel
aspects of authority, the sorcerer is an object of fear
and hatred even though his actions are said to be controlled
and legitimized by the chief. People do not find it
difficult to imagine the sorcerer using his powers for
ends not entirely or even primarily altruistic. Sorcerers
are said to undertake to kill merely for the payments they
receive for their services. Nevertheless, death or misfortune
are not usually attributed merely to the sorcerer's malice
or greed; the cause is commonly sought in the victim's own
sins and omissions, or those of his immediate family.
Sorcerers do not kill without reason, nor do people commission
them without cause. A sick man will search his conscience
to find those whom he has wronged or offended: if he has
not completed his bride-price payments he will conclude
that his in-laws have commissioned a sorcerer to make him
ill; if he has refused to provide a pig for a feast he
will assume the chief has ordered his punishment.
Sickness and death are seen to be part of a logical pattern of moral retribution rather than the result of arbitrary personal malice. Consequently, though the sorcerer plays a role which provokes hostility and suspicion (as indeed do the police and other law enforcers in different societies), his actions within the total framework of authority do not contradict the basic principle that power and authority are used for the good of the group as a whole.

The Functions of Authority in Theory and in Practice

In principle, the management of village affairs is left to the chief, the sorcerer serving only to police his commands. The lopia is responsible for guiding and directing all the activities of his ikupu: he is the centre of the clan's ceremonial life; he is the maintainer of law and order within his own clan and of peaceful relationships with the other clans of the village; he is the guardian of the clan land and possesses rights over food crops, tree crops, hunting and fishing which make him virtual controller of the traditional forms of wealth. Today these functions are divided between many: ultimate authority lies with the government and even within the village numerous officials impinge upon the role of traditional authority - local government councillors, a local government council committee, a church committee, a parents' and citizens' association and a land demarcation committee. The active role the lopia plays today is much narrower in practice than it is in theory. Likewise the observable interaction between villagers and their chiefs bears only a strained resemblance to the stated ideal.

Traditional ceremonial is the only sphere of activity which remains entirely the chief's responsibility. Even so, new occasions for feasting and celebrating - church
festivals, the opening of a new co-operative store, the visit of an important mission or government dignitary - now absorb villagers' interest and energy. Indeed such events often arouse greater enthusiasm and more elaborate preparation than traditional ceremonies; in many instances practices now omitted from traditional ceremonies because of the expense and effort involved are revived to form part of a non-traditional celebration. An episcopal visit to Inawi was the occasion for reviving an elaborate form of greeting high-ranking guests no longer insisted upon in traditional etiquette. Traditional dancing (geva) has virtually disappeared from village ceremonies in recent years, though geva was performed for Bishop Vageke's ordination and for the opening of the Mekeo Local Government Council Chambers in 1971.

The chief's responsibility to organize feasts and furnish hospitality to strangers is seen almost as a sacred trust. Clansmen provide the food and labour for feasts, but all hospitality is given in the chief's name. Likewise food at feasts is presented to the chiefs of the guest clans, who themselves divide their share amongst their own people when they return home. In his ceremonial role, the lopia embodies the spirit of generosity and liberality which is so highly valued by the Mekeo. Another important duty is the maintenance of the clan ufu, or clubhouse, where strangers are received and guests entertained on public occasions. Feasts must be held by the chief to mark such events as the installation of a new chief, the opening of a new ufu, the death of a clansman and the termination of a period of mourning. Celebrations associated with a marriage, the payment of a bride-price, the building of a new house and the like are considered to be private affairs.
and not the concern of the chief. Public feasts are held on a reciprocal basis, each clan being involved in a ceremonial relationship, known as ufu apie, with one or more other clans. A clan's ufu apie are the guests of honour at any feast it gives and are presented with the major portions of meat and other food. When the ufu apie hold a feast they must reciprocate in kind.

An elaborate etiquette surrounds the division and distribution of food at feasts and several ceremonial functionaries exist to assist the chief in these matters. The most important assistant is the aiva auga, the knife man, whose task is to divide the meat once the chief himself has ritually cut up the skin and fat of the slaughtered pigs. Another assistant, the uve auga or string man, ties up the portions of fat and skin as the chief cuts them. The mafe afi auga is responsible for providing the assembled guests with betel nut and drinking coconuts. When the chief attends a feast as a guest he should be accompanied by his functionaries, who wait upon him and receive food and other gifts presented to him, but this custom is rarely followed today. Much of the etiquette and pomp formerly surrounding traditional ceremonies is fast disappearing. The 'feasts' held in Inawi are usually small, dispirited affairs, preserving only a modicum of dignity and ritual. Villagers admit, shamefacedly, that they no longer give proper feasts (gaku), they merely make a small 'tea' to mark important occasions. Many Inawi clans have allowed their clubhouses to fall into ruin; not one maintains the impressive traditional structure properly known as an ufu but improvise with a simple platform, iaua, under a flat roof of corrugated iron or palm fronds.
The chief is responsible for law and order within his clan and for maintaining peaceful relations between his own and other clans; yet according to informants this duty never entailed the holding of public courts to settle disputes. People did not look to their chief to provide redress for individual wrongs, rather his function was to stop the quarrels and open violence which personal grievances might provoke. Disputes within the clan were regarded as family matters. The chief, as head of the family, would warn persistent trouble makers to mend their ways and would remind those involved of their close blood ties, urging them to forget their grievances and forgive each other. When a quarrel occurred between members of different clans, the chiefs of the groups involved attempted to pacify their clansmen and end the dispute. Publicly the chief played the role of peacemaker, his very presence is said to be sufficient to stop a fight as people say that they are 'ashamed' to fight in front of their chief. If fighting should continue after the chief arrived on the scene, he would break his lime pot, scattering lime over the combatants who then retreated in shame and fear. 28

The public role of peacemaker has its darker side. Through the supernatural powers the chief commands, he has the power of life and death over his people; those who commit serious crimes or who are constant offenders can expect punishment in the form of sickness or even death. The matter is never openly debated; the chief alone decides

28 Any man who persisted in fighting would have to give to the chief a large, village-bred boar with tusks, in compensation. Since few possess such an animal, people are anxious not to incur this penalty.
who is to be punished, his decision being communicated in secret to the sorcerer. The chief's justice can thus neither be questioned nor appealed against. Within the traditional framework, the individual could expect no recompense or revenge which he himself did not take, but ultimately evil doers were believed to receive their just deserts and within the group as a whole justice was maintained. The individual who had been injured or offended could not expect his chief to act on his behalf, he had the choice either of taking no action beyond publicizing the injury done to him, or of seeking revenge through sorcery or other means; but in doing so he left himself open to the chief's displeasure and possible punishment.

Today any serious offence attracts the attention and action of the administration, whether villagers desire it or not. People may have their disputes settled in court or they can appeal to their local government councillors to mediate. The chiefs, where they act at all, act behind the scenes and the exact part they play is thus difficult to assess.

Amongst the Mekeo a minor disturbance can fast develop into a major one resulting in injury or death, for tempers are quick and weapons are always at hand in bush knives, arrows, spears and shotguns. A domestic quarrel between husband and wife can easily lead to serious injury. Yet most outbursts of violence are stopped by the people themselves without recourse to the chief or any other higher authority. When a fight starts in the village it is usually stopped by the relatives of those involved; the noise of the fighting soon attracts a large audience and before things go too far the men forcibly separate the trouble makers and take them off in different directions to calm them down.
Many grievances go no further than public abuse, which allows the offended party to 'let off steam' and provides a topic of conversation for the rest of the village. Early in the morning or in the evening, when most people are in the village, someone will begin to hurl accusations at his neighbours; a response is made and soon everyone joins in the argument which is shouted from one side of the village to the other. Usually the matter is soon forgotten, though the councillors may decide to take some action. Presumably in the past the public airing of grievances was intended to draw the matter to the attention of the chiefs.

The local government councillors, like their predecessors the village constable and councillors, do hold informal courts. Villagers occasionally bring to their councillors such matters as a disputed bride-price or stolen garden produce, but often things are settled by those involved or are simply allowed to become one more grudge to be held against an unpopular neighbour or a hated rival. It is evident that in some cases the chiefs use their influence to persuade the parties concerned in a dispute to accept the councillors' decision and not cause further trouble; but since this is always done in private, evidence relies on second-hand statements. Yet it seems clear that the chiefs have no desire to take upon themselves the judicial functions of the councillors. When Inawi was without councillors for three months in 1971 owing to a disputed election, no attempt was made to deal with the various petty disputes which occurred and the new councillors had quite a backlog to handle when they were finally elected.

Sorcerer and chief still retain their roles as executioner and judge, despite the other changes. Villagers
point out that the prison sentences imposed by the administration's courts are nothing compared with the punishments inflicted by traditional authority. Many deaths are still directly attributed to the chiefs even though villagers say that nowadays the sorcerer can act without permission since the chiefs are no longer powerful enough to control them. Undoubtedly fear is the predominant element in people's attitudes to their leaders, regardless of the fact that their powers are said to be waning. The introduction of new authorities and practices has overshadowed the chief's role as peacemaker but has done little to affect the darker aspect of his judicial role.

In theory, the chief possesses rights which make him virtual controller of the clan's economic resources. He controls the clan land; no land can be sold or given away without his permission, though the individual owners may allow friends and relatives the use of their plots at their own discretion. Day to day subsistence activities are not the concern of the chief but his functions as ceremonial leader impinge upon them. When planting their subsistence gardens, people must take into account the chief's demands for vegetable foods for his feasts. If a very large event is planned, the chief can require the clan to prepare a special garden to be set aside for the purpose. Coconuts and betel nut, which are important items at any ceremonial occasion, were subject to strict restrictions in the past. The chief could place prohibitions, enforced by magic specialists known as the kaiva kuku, on the use of tree crops which, according to informants, might last for a year or more.

Domestic animals - pigs, fowls and dogs - can at any time be demanded by the chief for a feast. No man can
kill a large pig without first consulting his chief, even if there is no feast imminent. Hunting is also subject to control. All large game should be presented to the chief so that it may be smoked and kept in readiness for a future feast. Small game like birds or rodents may be kept by the hunter, but he is courtesy bound to offer the best part of his catch for the chief to eat with the men assembled with him at the ufu. Fishing is permitted at any time in the river but is restricted in ponds and streams; no man may fish in these places, even though they are on his land, until the chief has given express permission to the whole clan.

Traditional valuables, which consist in the main of feathers, shells and ornaments made of animal teeth, are not directly controlled by the chief. Nevertheless the wise man is said to present valuables to his chief whenever the opportunity arises as a sort of insurance against future troubles. The chief is expected to protect those who give him especially generous and loyal support, discounting any criticisms made of them by others and refusing to allow their enemies to attack them through sorcery.

In practice many of these rights have been allowed to lapse or are not fully exercised. Chiefs no longer impose taboos on tree crops. All hunting, except of wild pigs, is now unrestricted. Fishing is no longer controlled in Inawi, though some Aipeana clans maintain the old custom. Clansmen are still obligated to provide food and labour for feasts, but villagers state that the demands made on them now are much lighter than in the past. The chief's function as the controller of land is now of far less significance than in pre-contact times, when land was
constantly changing hands through warfare and intra-village struggles. Today ownership is fixed and people refuse to part with their land permanently; the chief thus acts symbolically rather than practically as the 'guardian' of the ikupu land.

One important chiefly function never directly stated as such but unmistakably implied in statements and reactions made in specific situations, is the ensuring of the welfare of the group by supernatural means. He is expected to ensure successful hunting and good crops: when crops fail or villagers are unable to secure game for their feasts, they do not blame sorcerers of another clan or village but their own chiefs. The chiefs themselves often intimate that they are punishing the clan for some offence by spoiling crops or withholding game. Responsibility for protecting the clan against sorcerers from other groups also lies with the chief.

When practice is separated from theory, it becomes evident that the chiefs play a far less prominent role than that described by informants. With no intention of deception, villagers do their best to impress upon an outside observer the dignity and importance of the lopia. Chiefly office, in the abstract, symbolizes ideals and values which are very precious to most villagers. Nevertheless, at a more concrete level, people are acutely aware of the fact that their chiefs do not live up to the stated ideals. Fear of arousing the chief's anger does not allow much open discussion of the

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29 This is reflected in the idealized account of chieftainship reported by Hau'ofa (1971: 152-69), which was based on information gained during his first contacts with the people of Beipa.
matter, but in private villagers bitterly complain of the
chiefs' failure to play a more active part in village
affairs.

Though the chief is not responsible for organizing
mundane daily tasks, he is expected to watch over and
guide the activities of his clansmen, publicly reproaching
the man who is too lazy to keep his house in proper repair,
reprimanding another for letting his womenfolk go to the
garden without proper escort. He is also expected to spend
his free time at the ufu, so that he can discuss the day's
affairs with his clansmen and offer them advice. Villagers
say that this was the normal practice until only a few
years ago. Now the chiefs are rarely to be found at their
ufu, and those who publicly offer advice and reprimands are
the councillors or members of the church committee - the
chiefs sit in their houses and remain silent. Deploring
the present situation, people blame it not on changing
circumstances but upon the moral weakness of the present
lopi, whom they castigate as ignorant, lazy, selfish and
irresponsible - a very mockery in fact of the ideal.

Criticism thus goes much deeper than mere
dissatisfaction with the narrowing role of traditional
authority. People feel that the present incumbents are
chiefs in name only, claiming a title which is neither
merited by their actions nor their personal qualities.
By evading their obligations to entertain strangers, by
neglecting their ceremonial duties, by permitting their
clubhouses to fall into ruins, by avoiding their role as
peacemaker and by demonstrating no interest in the day to
day affairs of their clans, the chiefs are seen to reveal
a complete disregard for the welfare of their people. Not
only are they no longer trusted to act in the best interests
of the group, they are actually believed to be opposed to them. The people of Inawi are firmly convinced that the failures of various recent economic ventures lies in the malicious opposition of the chiefs. Aipeana, which is currently the most economically progressive village in the area, is deeply suspicious of its chiefs' attitudes to this new development and fear of their jealousy and possible reprisals is rife. A sense of frustration and lack of achievement pervades both villages. People hanker after the 'better way of living' which they see in the towns and are anxious to acquire for themselves its visible, outward signs - money, machinery, trucks, stores, electric lights, better houses and the like. The obstacles in the way of a swift realization of these desires are believed to arise from a deliberate check imposed by the chiefs. But in blaming the chiefs for this lack of achievement villagers are not implying that the traditional form of authority and leadership is inadequate to meet the new needs. The present incumbents, as individuals and in concrete situations, are objects of scathing criticism and at times contempt, but the validity of the institution of chieftainship is not questioned. Traditional authority, in the eyes of villagers, has not been weakened so much as perverted: the lopia still hold power but are misusing it.

It would be naive to assume that the actual practice of chieftainship ever exactly coincided with the ideal; nevertheless villagers' claims that it was closer to the ideal in the past seem only reasonable. It is evident that the ideal is still highly valued and that the gap between it and reality is cause for bitter criticism, suspicion and distrust. If this degree of tension and strain had always been present, it seems unlikely that the elaborate ordering
of traditional authority could have survived the long period of contact - in many other similar societies the pattern of traditional leadership has been completely effaced: it seems far more probable that the existing tensions have been created by the process of change.

**Relations Between Kin**

The village branch of the ikupu controls the inheritance of rank, property and land, it regulates the marriages of its members and imposes obligations on members to support and obey its hereditary chief. Marriage within the ikupu is said to be forbidden but a few exceptions occur: of a total of 115 married couples in Inawi, nine belong to the same clan but there is not one example of a marriage between members of the same clan section. Residence after marriage is patrivirilocal, only four exceptions being found in Inawi. The household is usually composed of a nuclear family which, when possible, has its own separate residence. The basic unit may be extended to include the immediate relatives of the head of the household - his widowed mother, unmarried sister, and married son or nephew and their wives; only rarely do more distant kin or the wife's relatives form part of the household. Married brother often share a house, as well as gardens and tree crops, but the house is usually divided by some sort of partition and the wives cook separately. Twenty-one brothers and their families share

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30 Figures are based on a household census I took of Inawi in 1971.

31 The following description of household composition is based on data from the 1971 household census. Approximately two-thirds of the houses in Inawi are occupied by nuclear families.
houses in Inawi and two other families live with the widow and offspring of a deceased brother. In a few cases unrelated families share the one house. The actual composition of households comprising the clan reveal that the strict insistence in principle upon agnation seen in the genealogies is borne out in practice.

Maternal kin have certain formalized rights and obligations to the individual at the time of his marriage and his death. Marriage into the mother's clan is also forbidden, and maternal kin assist in paying bride-prices and share in their division, though they give and receive less than paternal kin. When an individual dies his clansmen must pay his mother's clan the unia afa, the bone price, for the right to bury his body in their land: this payment apparently symbolizes the rights of a clan over the offspring of its female members. Close maternal kin are expected to take a special interest in the individual and can be looked to to provide assistance and support in times of need. Men can approach their mother's clan for the use of land but because of its ready availability this is rarely, if ever, necessary. All Inawi men possess and use their own land, though some may cultivate plots belonging to other people for it is a common practice for a man to ask relatives and friends to make gardens on his land if he has cleared more than necessary for his own needs. Widows using plots belonging to their deceased husbands are the

32 Of the 115 married men in Inawi, not one had married into his mother's clan section, though seven had taken wives from a different section of the same clan.

33 1971 household census.
only householders who depend on land which is not their own. Relations with the mother's clan appear to be ruled by personal preference and choice rather than strict obligation. Williamson observed that though all paternal relatives are called by terms denoting blood relationship, maternal kin, apart from close relatives, were referred to as 'ekefaa', meaning 'friend'. This usage, which still applies today, seems to suggest the general attitude to this group of kin.

Relations with affines are much more formalized and demanding. Two continual sources of quarrelling and grievance between in-laws are bride-price payments and the payments made to the wife's clan when her children reach 'the age to wear clothes'. The bride-price in particular, since it usually involves a comparatively large exchange of valuables, pigs and cash, and may not be completed until the couple have been married several years, becomes a protracted, nagging cause of annoyance which often leads to mutual recriminations and sorcery accusations.

All those married into the clan, the ipa gava, have important obligations to provide labour for feasts held by the chief of their spouse's clan. In the case of men married to women from the same village this duty causes no great hardship, but even ipa gava from distant villages are expected to assist at important feasts and many complain of their obligations for this reason. At feasts the ipa gava are always rewarded for their labour with a hearty meal and

34 Ibid.
35 Williamson 1913: 270.
they are treated in a friendly, joking fashion, but this surface heartiness covers an underlying resentment which is allowed full rein in the practices associated with death and mourning. Clansmen of the deceased treat the widow or widower as if he or she were responsible for the death. During the period of mourning, which lasts for several months or longer, the activities of the widow or widower are ruled by their in-laws, who impose severe privations upon them.

The widower is forbidden all normal social intercourse; he is no longer allowed to go to the ufu, nor may he visit friends and relations; being banned from gardening and other village activities, he is expected to seclude himself in a hut (gove) set apart from the rest of the village houses and to venture out only at night. 36 He may wear only black and is expected to fast rigorously. Driven by the desire to avenge the death of their wives, many widowers are believed to seek out a practising sorcerer, offering to act as his assistant in return for help in obtaining revenge. In doing so the widower exposes himself to dangers and terrors that no ordinary man would face: the practising sorcerer is believed to be trafficking directly with the supernatural and spirit world, consequently he is shunned by the rest of society.

Though the widower's position is unenviable, that of the widow is much worse. She is confined for months in

36 During my fieldwork there were no recent Inawi widowers, though there were several old men whose wives had died some years ago. These men continued to dress in black and to live apart from the rest of their family in a small gove, but were not excluded from village affairs in general.
the house where her husband died, being forbidden to go outside or to receive visitors: until express permission is given by the women of her husband's clan, she may neither cook, nor wash herself, and is dependant upon her female in-laws to bring her a little food and drinking water. Like the widower, she dresses only in black and fasts continually. Villagers quote examples of women who, widowed in their youth, refused to marry a second time for fear that they might have to suffer again the same confinement, starvation and ill-treatment at the hands of their in-laws. This is no exaggeration, judging by the harsh treatment given today to Inawi widows. Early in 1971 a young woman, pregnant, and with a child of twelve months, was confined in the house of her deceased husband; for two or three weeks her in-laws refused to bring her water to wash the child and she was allowed virtually nothing to eat, nor was she able to leave the house to fetch water or food. Finally, under pressure from the parish priest, relatives took charge of the child, but the women of the clan were adamant in refusing the widow permission to leave the house. The lot of the young wife who goes to live with her husband's parents is also an unhappy one. Mother-in-laws commonly treat and regard their sons' wives as little better than work-horses who will take the heavy load of domestic chores from their shoulders. A shrewish mother-in-law appears to be the rule rather than the exception and young wives expect little better, nevertheless an unusually difficult one is often the cause of early separations and of wives returning permanently to their own people.

Relationships with all kin are ordered by respect for seniority of birth and age. The first born of a family is naturally accorded respect by the other members.
Bride-prices are divided on this principle, the father of the bride receiving a smaller share than his elder brothers and sisters. One calls the children of one's father's elder brother 'my elder brothers and sisters', though they may be chronologically younger. The principle which determines the position of the chief thus orders all relations within the clan from the nuclear family upwards. Old people are treated with respect; old men have considerable influence in the community as the younger men and chiefs consult them on matters concerning traditional etiquette and practices. Being regarded as the preservers of traditional knowledge, old men are usually believed to have acquired some knowledge of harmful magic, which inspires fear in addition to respect.

**Economic Organization and Attitudes to Wealth**

Subsistence agriculture based on shifting cultivation is the primary occupation of the majority of villagers. In addition, most families earn a cash income from periodic sales in Port Moresby of betel nut and garden produce, and some make small quantities of sun-dried copra which is sold locally.

The traditional system of land tenure and inheritance is still followed. Land is passed from father to son, the father distributing a portion of his land to each of his sons as they marry; on his death they inherit the land. Each man possesses a number of small plots scattered over the area belonging to his clan. Ownership of a particular piece of land is said to depend upon its having been previously cultivated by a direct agnatic forbear. Villagers explained that in the past members of the clan were allowed to cultivate as much of the clan land as they wished and what they succeeded in cultivating was regarded as their property. This process continued until all the land had been claimed,
consequently various inequalities have come about: those whose forebears cleared large areas of land and had few successors have plenty of land, while others whose forebears cleared fewer plots or had innumerable offspring have proportionately less. Villagers agree that it is possible to sell land, providing the chief and other members of the clan give their approval, but they know of no one who has actually done so. No objection is made to relatives or friends being given the use of land for gardening purposes but permanent crops may not be planted.

Overall there is no shortage of arable land, though some clans, owing to their past histories of migration and dispossession, have little in excess of their subsistence needs. No alienation of Mekeo land to private individuals or companies has occurred, apart from one block of freehold originally leased to the Hall Sound Company in 1902 and later taken over, but never really developed, by Burns Philp. This land was bought back by the administration in 1962 for re-distribution to villagers. 37 A block of 11,000 acres, part of which has been leased to the Sacred Heart Mission, is Crown land. 38 Various groups from three Mekeo and one Roro village claim this land, which separates the two tribes and was the object of constant fighting in the past. Though the administration would like to return most of it to villagers, as Bereina, the Roro village, is short of land, the Mekeo have opposed all attempts to have the area surveyed. Land was the main reason for warfare in pre-contact times and it has continued to be a touchy issue.

37 Kairuku Patrol Report 14, 1969-70; Subdistrict Office File 34-6-2.

38 Subdistrict Office File 34-6-1.
and the subject of endless inter-village disputes, despite the fact there is no shortage of it.

The principal food crops consist of bananas and taro; in addition many varieties of indigenous and introduced fruits and vegetables are grown. Gardening and other daily chores are organized at the level of the individual household, assistance being sought from kinsmen and friends for tasks requiring extra labour. The women bear the brunt of subsistence toil, to them fall all tasks requiring constant daily effort: they prepare the ground for planting, plant the crops, tend and weed them; and since the daily diet depends on bananas, tubers and other garden produce, they must carry large quantities of food from their gardens which are usually two miles or more distant from the village. In addition to working in the garden, they must collect and chop firewood, fetch water, feed the domestic animals, cook, clean the house and its environs, and care for their large families. The men are responsible for house building, fence construction, clearing new gardens, hunting and like activities which are usually carried out in a group to the accompaniment of much merriment and frequent rests for refreshments and gossip. Though the energetic man finds plenty to occupy himself, the same cannot be said of the lazier ones and the leisurely activities of the majority provide a sharp contrast to the constant drudgery expected of the women.

A weekly market is held with the coastal Roro. The traders, all women, exchange betel nut, bananas and other garden produce for fish, crabs and shellfish - cash rarely being part of these transactions. Purchased food items, apart from tea and sugar, are not part of the daily diet: tinned meat and fish, flour, bread, rice and similar
commodities are only eaten on special occasions. Food crops grow rapidly and abundantly in the rich alluvial soil, and there are plentiful supplies of game and fresh water fish, consequently people see little need to pay for food when it can be so easily had 'for nothing'.

Villagers' attitudes to wealth seem to reflect the natural abundance which surrounds them. Despite the careful ordering of rank and authority, men are considered to have equal opportunity to satisfy their material needs. Chiefs do have special rights to certain ornaments and building materials, but even they are not expected to be richer than other men - wealth is not the basis of their power. The principle is borne out in fact in Inawi: the richest men are not chiefs, nor could any correspondence be found between chiefly rank and wealth.\(^{39}\)

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\(^{39}\) This conclusion is based on the 1971 household census. Land, coconut palms, betel nut trees, estimated cash income (from copra, betel nut and other local produce), domestic animals (pigs and fowls) and items such as bicycles, radios and shotguns were taken into account. No attempt, however, was made to question people concerning the amount of cash or traditional valuables (efu - feathers, dogs' teeth, shells etc.) they possessed, as such matters must be kept secret for effective bargaining on bride-prices and other traditional payments. Sorcerers are said to amass large quantities of traditional valuables, and nowadays cash, as they must be paid for their services by all except the chiefs. A sorcerer is reputed to accept payments from the party who wishes to have a particular individual killed or made seriously ill, while at the same time accepting payments from the victim's relatives to cure him. Whether the victim lives or dies, neither party will dare to ask for their payments to be refunded. Since these matters are conducted in the strictest secrecy, it is extremely difficult to determine actually how much wealth a sorcerer amasses in this way.
Few inequalities of wealth probably existed within the traditional system, since the level of technology did not allow of a great differentiation of types of material possessions. The introduction of a cash economy and access to European goods has radically altered this situation. Inequalities of wealth and goods do exist now, though people choose to act as if there were none. There is a marked avoidance of conspicuous spending and behaviour: the man with a large cash income indicates it neither in his house, his clothes, nor the food he eats. Neighbours are quick to notice and condemn behaviour which flouts the convention of a common equality of material possessions; and those guilty of such a breach fear reprisals in the form of sorcery.

PART II: THE PRE-CONTACT SOCIETY

MEKEO society displays so intricate a pattern of continuity and change that no account of it can be given without reference to the past. Likewise, in the absence of any full study made at the time of contact, the only firm datum line is the contemporary society, and any discussion of the past naturally stems from it. A complete picture cannot be attempted; one must work back to scattered references and information - identifying change at one point, survival at another. Assisting in this process is the memory of living informants, who furnish detailed and lucid, often eye-witness, accounts of old customs and practices. Documentary evidence alone shows that the radical rejection of tradition experienced by some New Guinea peoples has been avoided,

40 For example, the Purari of the Gulf of Papua and the people of Manus: Maher 1961; Mead 1961; Schwartz 1957.
and that the former pattern of life has neither been effaced, nor blurred beyond recognition, by the intensity of contact.\textsuperscript{41} The impression of continuity is so strong, in fact, that one must guard against carelessly assuming that all which is not ostensibly the result of outside influence, accurately reflects the habits of the past.

The units of local grouping have remained substantially the same since 1890. The 1973 \textit{Village Directory} officially lists fourteen Mekeo villages - Aipeana, Amoamo, Bebeo, Beipa, Eboa, Imounga, Inawabui, Inawae, Inawaia, Inawauni, Inawi, Jesubaibua, Oriropetana and Rarai. A government map prepared in 1890 marks the position of fifteen villages, twelve of which are identical with those existing today.\textsuperscript{42} Three settlements - Auratona, Taina (Kaenga) and a second Amoamo (situated to the north-west of Inawauni) - no longer exist. Neither Auratona, which comprised only three or four houses and was virtually deserted in 1890,\textsuperscript{43} nor the northern Amoamo are listed by Seligman; both presumably were abandoned by the early 1900s. Kaenga is referred to by Seligman;\textsuperscript{44} informants state that many years ago its inhabitants migrated to Inawauni. Two present-day villages - Jesubaibua and Imounga - are not marked on the map. Jesubaibua was founded shortly after

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{41} As, for example, many features of the traditional ways of life in Busama village, near Lae, had become blurred even by the 1940s: Hoqbin 1951.
\item \textsuperscript{42} British New Guinea Annual Reports 1889-90: Appendix Y; see Map 3.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Ibid: 78.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Seligman 1910: 371.
\end{itemize}
1890, following mission and government efforts to persuade Inawaia village, from which the new settlement was an offshoot, to put an end to tribal warfare. Imouna is not marked nor is it mentioned by Seligman. Possibly Imouna was not at first regarded as part of the Mekeo proper, being separated from Inawauni, the next northernmost Mekeo village, by more than six miles of rough, swampy country: references to it occur in patrol reports from 1920 onwards, but it was often omitted from maps even after this date. Differences, apart from those already discussed, between the villages recorded by Seligman and those listed in recent village directories arise from the fact that Alo Aivea, Ififu and Ngangaifua are now treated by the administration as parts of larger, neighbouring settlements. With only two exceptions, the existing villages are identical with those observed by Seligman.

Likewise, little variation can be seen in the clan composition of individual villages. An intimate knowledge of each village is necessary, however, before its composition can be accurately determined. If one attempted to question people briefly concerning the clans in their village, the information elicited would be misleading and certainly different from that provided by Seligman. People may omit to mention smaller groups as they are regarded as part of a clan cluster rather than separate entities. Sections of large clans may be quoted as if they were independent entities: someone inquiring about the present clans of Aipeana would probably be given the names of Fua, Faila and Faguopa as if these were separate clans, when in fact they are the three sections of the clan Seligman refers to as Oala Aivea.

45 BNG Annual Reports 1892-93: 16.
A detailed investigation of the ikupu composition of Inawi, which seems to be representative of the situation in other villages, confirms the initial impression that few changes have occurred since the early 1900s. Seligman states that Inawi was composed of eight clans - Waiaka, Paiapaia, Ongofoina Kipo, Ngangai, Okope, Ungo, Ipange and a group of people 'who practically speaking belong to Afai'.

There are at present eleven ikupu - Oaisaka, Paisapaisa, Ogofoina Kipo, Afai, Gagai, Okope, Ugo, Ipage (Ugo), Ougo, Ipage (Paisapaisa) and Ogofoina Lopia Fa'a. The last three ikupu are not referred to by Seligman; it seems probable that two of them existed at the time of his investigation but were overlooked. Informants state that Ougo was founded before the Europeans came, and since it is a very small group associated with Ugo and very similar to it in name, it may have been accidentally omitted. Seligman includes only one Ipage: today there is an Ipage included in the Paisapaisa clan cluster and an Ipage associated with the Oaisaka cluster. Villagers believe that both groups settled in Inawi before the arrival of the government. Possibly Seligman treated the two Ipage as one group, though villagers assert that they have different origins, one coming from Beipa and the other from Rarai. In any case, the numbers involved are so small that their presence or absence makes little real difference to the overall picture.

Only two other changes have occurred. Okope, which in Seligman's time was a small, weak group, has now died out. The only living descendant is a woman who is

46 Seligman 1910: 371.

married into another ikupu. Though the original line is extinct, the clan is being perpetuated through adoption since it owns a large amount of land, a member of the Iso section of Oaisaka having been adopted into it as a child. One new group, Ogofoina Lopia Fa'a, has come into existence. Originally part of the Lopia Fa'a section of Oaisaka, the group broke away because of an internal dispute, moving to another part of the village and settling on land belonging to Ogofoina ikupu; the split appears to have taken place in the 1930s. Despite its comparatively large size, Ogofoina Lopia Fa'a has never really succeeded in establishing itself as an independent entity; it has no chief of its own, but recognizes obligations to the chiefs of both Ogofoina and Oaisaka.

The appearance and physical layout of villages has scarcely altered, judging by the descriptions given by Seligman and Guis, and the photographic plates which illustrate their works. At first glance, Inawi (or any of the larger villages) - its long, dusty village street lined by parallel rows of houses built from black palm, bamboo and thatch, and silhouetted against a green background of tall coconut palms and breadfruit trees - seems identical with scenes photographed sixty years ago. Only a scant few galvanized iron roofs - that ugly, ubiquitous symbol of progress throughout Papua - mar the initial impression. While the general layout of the village remains the same,

48 Ibid: 312; Plate XLII.

49 Guis 1936: 17-19; plates facing pp.16, 17, 144. Though not published until 1936, Guis' work was based on material collected between 1894 and 1897: the plates, presumably, date from the time of publication.
closer investigation reveals that housing styles have changed but the difference is not immediately apparent to the outsider, as the materials used are still local timber and thatch. This is but one example of the dangers of too easily assuming unbroken continuity with the past.

Though the units of local grouping have remained stable, the total population was significantly smaller at the time of contact. The first official reports on the area wildly overestimated its population; MacGregor enthusiastically claimed a total of 10,000, with several villages comprising more than 1,000 inhabitants. Even in 1895, the two largest villages were reported to have 900 inhabitants each. Figures provided by the Sacred Heart Mission are much more reliable, as immediately following the establishment of government control it placed priests and teachers in a number of villages; these resident representatives were keenly interested in the number of their flock and the rate of baptisms and conversions. Mission figures for 1895 give the population of the two largest villages, Beipa and Aipeana, as 615 and 386 inhabitants respectively - figures slightly under government census statistics for 1949. Available evidence indicates that the level of population remained more or less steady from the time of contact to 1949. Pre-war government estimates

50 BNG Annual Reports 1889-90: 80.

51 Mekee Station Journal, Dec. 1895.

52 Navarre, Notes et Journal: 141-2. Aipeana was recorded as having a total population of 424 and Beipa of 653 in 1949. Subdistrict Office File, Census and Statistics.
tend to be erratic, being based on a count of houses, or a rough count of heads of those present in the village at the time of a patrol; but apart from the initial exaggerations, the numbers recorded are less than the 1949 totals, and patrol reports make no mention of any significant decline or increase. Since 1949 the total population has risen by seventy-five per cent. 53

Relationships and obligations between kin appear to have been little different in the past - though evidence is fragmentary. The accounts of family life, marriage and death contained in Guis' La Vie des Papous indicate that observances of the various rites de passage were once fuller and more elaborate. 54

The birth of the first child was the occasion of some festivity, a small feast being held for the women of the village, who came to sing and dance in honour of the new mother. This custom is no longer observed but the restrictions imposed upon a woman during her pregnancy continue to apply. She is forbidden certain foods and

53 Figures based on Subdistrict Office File, Census Statistics. Figures for each year are available from 1949 onwards. Records of births, deaths and marriages kept by the mission for all villages since the 1890s contain the information necessary for a detailed demographic study of the Mekee. At the time I was in the field, another researcher, Mrs Barbara Hau'ofa, was working on this material.

54 Guis 1936: 43-85; 118-49.
may not wash in cold water; following the birth she is considered to be 'dirty' (ofu) and likely to contaminate others, hence she may not eat from communal dishes nor cook. For several days after parturition she is made to lie on a platform built over a fire; most births now take place at the mission hospital, but when the mother returns to the village she still undergoes this ritual cleansing. The maleficient actions of sorcerers are particularly feared at this time; relatives and neighbours sit up all night, with lamps brightly burning, to ensure that no sorcerer dare approach the house. Sometimes, to keep themselves awake, the boys and girls sing and play their trade-store guitars. The relatives who keep this vigil must be fed at the expense of the family concerned but it is not considered necessary to kill a pig for them.

No lengthy or arduous puberty rites were undertaken. When a boy assumed the perineal band his father held a small feast. The feast is now omitted, but payments of pigs and traditional valuables must be made to the relatives of the mother of the child. Guis also refers to a ceremony celebrating the completion of a girl's tattooing but there

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55 At this time the woman's body is considered to be 'hot'; contact with cold water and the consumption of foods classified as 'cold' are thought to be extremely dangerous to her. Her physical state is analogous to that of the magician who deliberately builds up heat (isaspu) in his body by avoiding contact with all 'cold' things. See below:107-8. It seems that in the case of the woman, the act of parturition automatically generates the heat in her body. Normally, a woman's genitals are considered to be 'cold' and therefore sexual intercourse is forbidden to the practising sorcerer or magician.

56 Guis 1936: 85; Williamson 1913: 269.
is no trace of it today, tattooing having gone out of vogue. The life once led by unmarried youths provides a sharp contrast with the present. The carefree dandies depicted by Guis, who spent their time in self-adornment, dancing and love affairs, have vanished from the village scene. Few gove, the houses specially reserved for bachelors, are built today, since the majority of young men are either away at school or exploring the excitements of town life.

The mission has had a significant influence on marriage customs. Plural marriage has virtually died out. The formal arranged marriage of the past, which was accompanied by much ceremony and mutual exchanges between the kin of the bride and groom, is now ignored in favour of a simple elopement, following which the boy’s parents agree to pay the bride-price and settle matters with the girl’s relatives. Elopements were not common in the past, being looked on as irregular arrangements; they appear to have gained popularity as a result of the mission’s support of matches hindered by parental opposition. Previously young people had no choice but to bow to the wishes of their parents; the mission provided a new refuge and support - once a couple had been married in church, the parish priest would do all in his power to prevent them being separated. Today church weddings usually take place after the bride has spent some time with her husband’s family and the union has proved to be stable. Except in a very few cases, the religious rites do not involve any feast or public celebration.

57 Guis 1936: 19-42.

Though marriage takes place with little or no ceremony, it is usually followed by a period when the bride is excused from all physical work and appears in public only to display herself in traditional finery. She is first confined to the house and fed as much as she can eat, under which conditions her skin lightens and she soon becomes very fat; only then is she permitted to sit each evening on the verandah of the house, decked in all her finery. Neighbours come to offer their compliments, her sleek, well nourished appearance being considered a formal demonstration of the affection and solicitude shown to her by her new relatives. The exogamous rules governing marriage continue to be obeyed, as do those applying to residence after marriage. 59

Observances relating to death and mourning were formerly more stringent and exacting. 60 The mission has attempted to mitigate the more extreme customs and, to a certain extent, its efforts have been successful: mourners no longer cover themselves from head to foot with soot and ashes, instead they dress in black clothes; a widow is not shut up in a tiny hut built directly over the grave, she is confined to her house. Custom has been modified but not compromised.

The introduction of European goods and a cash economy has not yet radically altered the manner in which

59 See above: 31-2. Evidently the laws of exogamy have remained strong despite the efforts of the mission to support and legitimize unions between couples whose degree of relationship is acceptable according to cannon law. See Egidi 1912: 217-29.

60 Guis 1936: 128-49.
the average villager satisfied his subsistence needs. Guis' description of everyday domestic chores applies as well to 1971 as to 1901 - the only noticeable difference being the time previously spent in the manufacture of tools, weapons and clothing. 61 Cheap trade-store goods have replaced the products of traditional skills, and most of the old arts and crafts are fast disappearing. The arrival of new possessions has reduced the time spent in handicrafts, steel tools have greatly lightened the labour involved in clearing gardens and felling timber; yet many tasks, particularly those performed by the women, have been little affected. Once women carried their water from the river in large gourds, today they fetch it in metal cooking pots - the actual labour involved is no different.

More time was formerly devoted to feasting and ceremony, while warfare added another dimension to life, the actual nature of which can only be surmised. Regular trade took place with the coastal Roro, as it does today, and there were sporadic contacts with the mountain tribes; no ritualized trading complexes, such as those engaged in by the Motu and the peoples of South-eastern Papua, existed.

The present structure of leadership is immediately recognizable as the system observed by Seligman, though the rights and functions which he attributes to authority more closely resemble the ideal than present reality. A brief article by R.W. Williamson, published in 1913, provides additional evidence to show that villagers' statements concerning the former powers and grandeur of chiefly office

61 Ibid: 58-64.
are not fanciful exaggerations. The great feasts of former years are mentioned by both writers. The summary Seligman gives of a feast to terminate a period of mourning (umu pua) substantiates details provided by informants, presenting a clear picture of the lavish display, and the grand scale on which such events were organized. Williamson outlines some of the ceremonies distinctive to the war chiefs: informants give fuller and slightly different details, but both refer to the amount of food involved and the elaborate nature of the festivities. It is evident that such occasions must have required, as informants claim, months, even years of planning and preparation: the brief, perfunctory affairs held today involve weeks spent in hunting and preparation in the gardens, followed by several days of intense activity building platforms, collecting large supplies of firewood, bringing food from the gardens and cooking. Clearly the chief's ceremonial duties put a far greater demand upon people's time and labour, and encroached far more upon their everyday activities. The chiefs' rights to impose food taboos are briefly mentioned by Williamson and Seligman: neither mention restrictions over hunting or fishing but the survival of the old custom in some villages can leave no doubt that they existed.

62 Williamson 1913.
63 Seligman 1910: 359-63.
64 Williamson 1913: 279-81.
65 Ibid: 270.
66 Seligman 1910: 314 refers to the kaiva kuku who policed the taboos.
The outward signs of rank and magnificence that once surrounded the chief - few traces of which survive today - are described in some detail by Seligman. He provides photographs and descriptions of the impressive and elaborately adorned clubhouses which the chiefs used to maintain - a far cry from the simple platform structures which now serve as clubhouses in most villages. He also discusses the special decorative devices which were the chief's hereditary possessions and might be used to adorn his residence; but no reference is made to the special building materials and siting which formerly distinguished a chiefly residence. Only the lopia were permitted to build their houses of afa (black palm) and opogo (a type of hard wood); commoners had to be content with flimsy structures of bamboo and thatch. A chief's residence was also set apart by its position, being built on an axis parallel to the village street; other houses were built facing the street. These rights and prohibitions have now been relaxed but not entirely abandoned. It is no longer possible to easily identify the house of a chief: even in villages where restrictions are said to still apply, most people use at least a little afa on their houses; commoners do not employ the 'chief's position', but neither do the majority of chiefs, and the distinctive decorations have not been seen for many years.

Some of the personal ornaments and insignia of chiefly rank are described by Seligman. He refers to the

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67 Ibid: 333-4; Plates XLIV, XLV.

uma pa'o, a necklace made of pigs' tusks, and illustrates the special lime pot and stick, faoga and lekeleke - all ornaments of the fa'aniau chiefs. Villagers state that the fragments of bone and teeth which are affixed to the faoga are not animal bones, as Seligman alleges, but relics of ancestors; it is thus a potent source of supernatural power and is used as such at important feasts. The war chiefs, the fa'a experts and sorcerers have their own distinctive insignia. Some of these ornaments are very inventive and beautiful, in particular certain shell ornaments and strips of finely made net covered with intricate feather-work. Though these objects are still carefully preserved and treasured, they are not to be seen in public today, even on important occasions: villagers explain that the wearing of them is permitted only at very large feasts at which many pigs are killed, so there is now little opportunity for display.

Perhaps most importantly, Seligman lends weight to claims that the lopia formerly conducted themselves with a dignity and were treated with a respect and affection that has now been lost. The splendour of the great umu pua feast recorded by Seligman, the solemn, stately procession made by the chiefs of the ufua a pie, the bearing of the hosts and audience, all provide a striking contrast with scenes from a contemporary umu pua: a carelessly dressed, straggling mob of villagers, accompanied by their chief, trudge down the middle of the village carrying food to the ufua a pie; as they approach the clubhouse, shouting children

69 Seligman 1910: 348; Plate XLVII.
70 Ibid: 343.
playing ball block and cross their path - no one makes a move to silence the children or rebuke them. Seligman stresses the dignified deportment of the lopia and the unusual degree of respect and affection demonstrated towards them:

There is no doubt that among the Mekeo clans there was a feeling of affectionate consideration for their lopia fāa and a ready recognition of the pre-eminence of the families to which these chiefs belonged, that in many cases may be fairly described by saying that the ikupu most nearly related to the lopia fāa were intensely loyal to their chief. This naturally fostered a sense of dignity, importance and responsibility on the part of the fāa chief which is quite uncommon among Papuasians,... 71

Only two traditional authoritative roles are of functional importance today - that of the civilian chief and the sorcerer. The division of authority and responsibility was originally more complex. According to Seligman, the faia expert was responsible for ensuring the success of warriors in battle. 72 Informants contend that a specialist from the iso clan, the iso auga, who was usually the brother of the iso chief, devoted all his time to preparing protective and offensive magic for the war party, and that the powerful stones, spells and charms necessary were the hereditary possessions of the iso clan. The faia's special importance is said to arise from his supernatural powers to have his own men killed in battle; his ability to foretell who would die in a raid and his

71 Ibid: 343.
72 Ibid:' 345.
efforts to assist the success of the war party were of lesser significance. He used his powers at the command of the lopia fa'aninau, to kill any man whom the chief wished removed. Like the ugauga, he was an agent of supernatural power enforcing the chief's commands, and as such, he was directly controlled by the senior chief, not the war chief. The difference between the faia and the ugauga lies in the means by which they cause death: the faia's victims died in battle or by violent accidents, the sorcerer's by snake bite or some internal ailment. Villagers emphasize that the faia were feared far more than the sorcerer.

The role of the war chief, in keeping with his military functions, was the antithesis of that of the generous, peace-loving lopia fa'aninau. He was expected to be wild, fierce and bloodthirsty. Famous war leaders of the past are said to have acted like 'savage beasts', roaming the countryside alone seeking enemies to kill; invariably they are described as being very hairy of body and face, a physical characteristic thought to be peculiarly repulsive. While safety and hospitality were guaranteed to the stranger at the civilian chief's clubhouse, should he enter, by mistake, that of the war chief, he was immediately killed.

Prior to the cessation of tribal fighting, the war chief obviously played a prominent part. In peacetime, he was responsible for a series of feasts to repay those who had been his allies in war; he also gave feasts to celebrate the building of a new iso clubhouse and the installation of an iso chief. It might well be supposed that he was originally more influential than the lopia fa'aninau; but such an assumption would be based on a misconception of their
relative roles. The fa'aniau chief was in no sense merely the civilian counterpart of the war chief - ultimate authority, even for war lay with him. Informants stress that the senior chief's permission had to be sought before the clan could engage in hostilities, moreover it was he who was responsible for terminating them and making peace. The war chief's functions thus were limited to that of battle commander.

The primacy of the lopia fa'aniau is established in the myths which explain the origin of authority. He is not seen as sharing authority but rather as delegating it to subordinates, while maintaining for himself the controlling power. This hierarchical concept is strikingly illustrated in the simile of the five fingers of the hand used by some informants to explain the relationship between the different parts of authority. The informant, holding up his hand with the fingers straight and held together, points to the middle finger, the longest, saying that it represents the lopia fa'aniau, who is set above the others; the index and third fingers, which are below the middle finger and support it on either side, represent faia and the iso lopia, who are placed below yet assist the senior chief; the little finger and the thumb suggest the faia eke and the iso eke, who support the faia and the iso and, through them, the fa'aniau chief.

Since the lopia fa'aniau symbolizes the beneficient aspects of authority, the traditional emphasis upon his primacy is also an affirmation of the essentially benign nature of authority. It is impossible, of course, to know how the system actually functioned in pre-contact times, but the supremacy of the senior chief, in principle, is beyond doubt.
The present society is noticeably secretive and repressive. People deliberately hide their real thoughts and emotions from each other, and are habitually suspicious of what lies behind the public assertions of others. Rarely do serious matters spark off open violence: men who harbour the most horrible mutual suspicions can calmly sit down and converse together as if they were the best of friends - when people actually come to blows it is usually over something trivial. Competitive actions are frowned upon: the man who is so imprudent as to out-do his neighbours in any way soon suffers from their jealous opposition. Harmful magic and sorcery are the means by which people seek revenge and dominance over each other. Behaviour of this kind is commonly regarded as typical of societies experiencing the strain imposed by contact and denied the free expression of aggression formerly allowed through tribal warfare. Nevertheless, several features suggest that the avoidance of aggressive and competitive behaviour is not a new, but a traditional concern of Mekoo society, which has perhaps been exaggerated under conditions of change. Indeed, when examined from this angle, the whole system appears to have been structured to remove the possibility of open competition and aggression, except in war.

The traditional concept of authority is far removed from the highly competitive 'big-man' style of leadership found in many other Melanesian societies. The hierarchical nature of authority, the mythical explanations of its origin and its method of transmission,

all remove it from the arena of public contention. So important is this principle, that genealogies and historical accounts never even concede the possibility of political rivalry within the group. The relationship between the chief and his people does not depend upon the fashioning of a complex network of obligations and debts; unlike the 'big-man', the chief does not sponsor promising young men nor provide food and financial assistance to poorer, less influential men, in the hope of creating a coterie of dependents and supporters. Obligations lie with his clansmen to furnish the chief with material goods, though these are used for communal ends. There is no element of a sponsor-client relationship between chief and people, the bonds linking them are kinship and family ties. For this reason there little opportunity open to the chief to extend his range of influence: he could not attract new supporters and spread his sway over a wider area by means of the competitive feast-giving and food exchanges employed by some Melanesian leaders. 74

Even in the past, feasts were organized on a reciprocal, not a competitive, basis. Though other guests were invited to important feasts, the major presentations of food were limited to one group, the ufu apie, who were obliged to reciprocate in kind at a later date. Informants observe that it was essential that there be enough food to lavishly entertain the ufu apie and other guests; but there was no intention to deliberately outmanoeuvre rivals by the munificence of gifts made to them, as was the case in competitive feasting. The principle of reciprocity appears

74 For example, the Siuai mumis: Oliver 1955.
to have been developed to the point where each specific type of feast had, in a sense, a known 'price': so many pigs would be counted upon by the chiefs of the ufua pie, the singers and dancers would expect a certain number, as would the other guests. The chief who could not satisfy these expectations would not dare to hold a large feast; villagers aver that this is the reason elaborate ceremonies have been abandoned.

The present manner of holding feasts justifies this view. Ceremonies have been ruthlessly stripped of former embellishments. A single pig and a quantity of vegetable food is considered sufficient today to present to the ufua pie on the occasion of an umu pua ceremony; the uncooked food is taken to the clubhouse of the ufua pie, the chief of the ufua pie speaks briefly to the principal mourners, asking them to put aside their grief and resume normal life, and the whole affair is over in less than an hour. Villagers confess that the present observances are token gestures rather than true feasts: some food is given to the ufua pie and the chiefs of the village are invited to partake of a meal together - that is all. Apparently nothing more is necessary to satisfy custom and convention. If competitive giving had been the central purpose of these functions, it seems unlikely that they would have followed this pattern of simplification and reduction.

The traditional importance of the principles of reciprocity and equivalence is underlined by the existence of hereditary officials whose special function was the dividing of food at feasts - the aiva auga, the uve auga and the mafe afi auga. The duties of the aiva auga, who remains a key figure at any public feast, are crucial, for each guest must be given exactly what is deemed proper
according to a complex ritual and etiquette. Deliberation
over the division of food, even on an occasion for which
only two or three pigs have been killed, usually takes
up most of an afternoon or evening, and it is always done
in public. Should a mistake be made, should a guest receive
more or less than his rank merits, a serious insult has been
offered which in the past might have led to warfare. It is
not necessary for every guest to be laden down with gifts
of food, what is important is that each publicly receives
a portion in keeping with his rank and the part he played
at the feast.

Mekeo society creates a social order in which
every man's share of worldly goods, rank and position is
clearly and firmly fixed by custom. Each knows his
entitlements and proper place: just as the chief's position
is determined by seniority within the lineage structure of
the clan, and hereditary succession, so ordinary social
relationships between commoners are ordered according to
seniority of birth. No open defiance or challenge of the
established order is tolerated. Fear of sorcery and the
supernatural powers of the traditional holders of authority
create an irresistible social force compelling conformity.
Public competition and aggression have no place in this
system, except in times of war. Yet secret rivalries
not only exist but might even be said to be institutionalized.

Feasts did have a competitive element, but not at
the public level of exchanges of wealth - covertly, they
were trials of supernatural powers. Chiefly guests and
hosts fasted for months before important feasts to fit
themselves for the exercising of their powers. Each chief
also called upon the aid of his sorcerer, who accompanied
him to all important events, adding his powers to those of
the chief. During the procession of the ufu apié chiefs, and while the high-ranking guests were seating themselves in the clubhouse, a trial of supernatural strength was taking place as each tried to break through the protective magic of the others, causing them to faint or become ill. The most daring would take the seat next to the opogo - the central carved post of the clubhouse - and if he succeeded in maintaining his position without collapsing or otherwise becoming indisposed, he had demonstrated his victory. In addition to the magic exercised on his behalf by his sorcerer, the chief carried on his person two important repositories of power - the lime pot, foaga, studded with the relics of ancestors whose spirits helped to defend him; and, hidden within his net bag, a special stone, ugauga kepo, combined with certain leaves and other substances to activate its power.

Survivals of these practices can be observed today in a seemingly insignificant detail of behaviour. When men sit together on the ufu to gossip or partake of a meal, they carelessly drop in front of them the bags in which they carry their lime pot, knife, betel nut and similar necessities. On feast days, when the chiefs and other high-ranking men are seated together, each deliberately places his bag so that it stands between his body and his neighbour's bag, for on such occasions people carry with them powerful objects and protective charms.

A full battle of supernatural powers is said to still occur during the installation of a new chief. At the moment when the old chief hands his son the knife with which to ritually cut the skin of a slaughtered pig, all the sorcerers present gather around the young chief, testing their strength against his in a concerted effort.
to overcome and kill him. The crowd always stands well away from the chief at this moment for fear of entering by mistake the field of power being directed against him.

These ritualized expressions of secret competition strongly suggest that the underlying current of hidden rivalries and hostilities evident in the contemporary society was also characteristic of traditional society. Since an open competitive spirit was banned from all normal social intercourse, some other outlet, apart from warfare, was necessary.

The values which are fundamental to the present society - the avoidance of public competition and aggression, the beneficial nature of authority, equality in relation to material goods and reciprocity and equivalence in economic dealings, the pre-determination of rank and position by birth - are traditional values. Being abstract entities, values, in a sense, are more impervious to change than actual behaviour. People may be compelled to act in a manner directly opposed to their ideals but still preserve them, or they may choose a course of action, discovering only later that it leads to a contradiction of values. While the general configuration of Mekeo society remains much the same as in the past, it is evident that the traditional system has been slowly eroded, reduced and simplified during the eighty years of contact. But though actual behaviour has been forced to yield at least a little to new circumstances, the traditional values and ideals have remained intact.
CHAPTER TWO

THE FIRST YEARS OF CONTACT: 'We didn't see these things ourselves, our fathers told us about them'

THE Mekeo's first contacts with Europeans are just beyond the reach of living memory. The oldest men alive today have heard eyewitness accounts of the events of the 1890s from their fathers and grandfathers. Over several decades of telling and re-telling these accounts have become formalized tales which, nevertheless, display concern for accuracy and reliability. For those who preserve the histories, the knowledge passed on to them by their fathers is a truthful description of the recent past.

Only a few men, perhaps one or two elders in each village, are considered by the rest of the community to be reliable sources of such information. Though the stories of the coming of the white man are known to almost everyone in the village, usually only those who are recognized to be authorities can be prevailed upon to tell them in public. The old men sometimes become flustered, their memories occasionally falter and they make mistakes which are observed by the younger people, but their reputations as the most knowledgeable informants are well deserved in most cases.¹ They distinguish carefully

¹ I attempted, of course, to collect traditions from as many informants as possible but invariably found that the fullest and most consistent came from the acknowledged authorities. In the case of the Mekeo, it is not the number of traditions collected from each village, but the source of each that is significant.
between what they were told and what they themselves witnessed; they scrupulously refuse to go beyond the information which has been handed down to them. In reply to requests for further details on a certain point, they will admit the limitations of their knowledge, explaining that they have related all that was told to them and can say no more.²

Certain villages are known to possess the most authoritative accounts of particular incidents, as they played a leading part in them. Aipeana, for instance, is acknowledged to have the fullest history of the arrival of the government, while Inawi boasts the most elaborate mission history. One group will not tell a history which properly 'belongs' to another; such knowledge is regarded in a decidedly proprietary manner. Essentially, each village is interested in recording only those events in which it directly participated.

The purposes and viewpoint of the village history are, of course, very different from those of modern historical research. Since each village is concerned only with the events that took place in its immediate vicinity, and mention is rarely made of what was going on simultaneously in other places, the historian would find it extremely difficult, on the basis of tradition alone, to build up a clear picture of the extension of European control over

² In this chapter two types of oral testimony are used - formalized tales, which have a set content, and information given in response to specific questioning. See Vansina 1969: 27-30. Where the term 'tradition' is used, I refer to a formalized tale or tales.
the region. Even within one village, no single continuous narrative of early contacts exists: different topics - the arrival of the mission, the appearance of the government, the activities of the first government agent - are dealt with in separate stories which give few hints of the connections with other related events. The storyteller, if he is carefully questioned, can usually explain the chronological order of the stories he knows but he does not do so voluntarily, and some he is unable to place.

A set sequence of events and descriptive detail is expected by the audience but the histories do not have an absolutely fixed form: recitations by the same teller on different occasions do not employ the same wording or phrasing and may omit certain elements or confuse the sequence. These variations do not inspire confidence in the accuracy of transmission.

Yet the historian would be foolish to dismiss the traditions simply because they do not serve all his purposes or satisfy all his standards. Their unique value, for him, is that they isolate the incidents which were of the greatest significance to villagers and describe the responses to them. If the most authoritative versions are compared with documentary evidence, the general outline, and even the details (where these can be verified) are shown to be accurate. Taken alone, the histories would prove very awkward to handle; an outline of the first years of contact, drawn from conventional sources, furnishes a convenient framework upon which they can be organized and evaluated.

In view of the Mekeo's post-war reputation as an arrogant, aggressive, intractable people, their first meetings with the white man, as described in official reports and mission histories, seem unexpectedly friendly and peaceable. Villagers' experience of Europeans had been brief and intermittent prior to 1890. Being situated a few miles inland from the coast, they avoided all but a few of the many explorers, traders and missionaries who reached Yule Island and the nearby coast during the nineteenth century. The flamboyant Italian explorer D'Albertis was probably the first white man to travel far enough inland to encounter them: he is certainly the first to leave an account of his experiences. In 1875 he spent several months on Yule Island, making excursions to the mainland and to an inland village called Naiabui which was inhabited by a tribe distinct from the coastal people. There is little doubt that this village was Inawabui, the Mekeo settlement nearest the coast. Two LMS teachers were placed on Yule Island in November of the same year but were removed only a few months later, when fears for their safety were aroused by the murder in Hall Sound of two European naturalists, James and Thorngren. This early missionary activity had no direct effect on the Mekeo, though Chalmers visited the inland villages during the early 1880s. The Mekeo was to become a catholic, not an LMS preserve.

6 BNG Annual Reports 1889-90: 76.
Ten years after the LMS's fruitless attempts to establish a mission on Yule, three representatives of a French Catholic order, the Sacred Heart Mission, arrived on the island. The protests of the LMS forced the Catholics to relinquish their foothold for a few months, but they returned in February 1886, quickly extending their activities to the mainland despite the opposition of their rivals. The first expedition to the Mekeo was undertaken in November by two priests, Verjus and Couppé. Travelling overland by foot they reached Inawabui, where they were greeted enthusiastically and urged to stay. The next day they continued on to Eboa and Inawaia, discovering a large river which they reasoned must provide access to the coast. A few months later the mouth of the St Joseph River was accidentally found in the mangrove swamps of Hall Sound. In May 1887 Verjus and Couppé made a second expedition to the interior, ascending the river in a canoe. Inawae, Inawi, Aipeana and Beipa were contacted for the first time, and Inawaia revisited. The missionaries were delighted to find so many rich, populous villages and were amazed by the cordiality of the welcome they received everywhere. The mission historian, Dupeyrat, describes their final departure, from Inawi, as 'une véritable marche triomphale'. Land was obtained at Inawi, but hopes of founding a station in the Mekeo had to be temporarily abandoned, as the resources of the young mission were scarcely adequate to deal with the difficulties it was experiencing on Yule Island.

7 Dupeyrat 1935: 87-115.
Many visits to the Mekeo followed these initial contacts and villagers began coming to Yule to call on the missionaries. During the 1880s a few prospectors also penetrated inland, but their numbers were not sufficient to disturb the friendly relations between villagers and the mission.

The first meeting with the government took place in April 1890, when MacGregor made an official inspection of the region after receiving reports from the Sacred Heart Mission of a 'great feud' raging between several villages. MacGregor was elated to find an extremely fertile region supporting a large, concentrated population. The people appeared to him to have reached a higher stage of civilization than other tribes, practising neither cannibalism nor head-hunting, and possessing chiefs of real influence. Yet despite the evident wealth and power of most of the villages, they quietly acknowledged the government's claims to a superior authority without any attempt to try its strength first. MacGregor was able to conclude a formal peace with several villages in May; by December a government station was being built between Beipa and Aipeana.


11 BNG Annual Reports 1889-90: 76; Dupeyrat 1935: 132-3. In regions such as the Lakekamu goldfield clashes between prospectors and villagers appear to have been frequent. See Nelson 1973.


14 Mekeo Station Journal, Dec. 1890.
Bishop Verjus of the Sacred Heart Mission acted as guide and interpreter during MacGregor's first tour of inspection, introducing him to the people as their 'Grand Chef'.

MacGregor attempted to impress upon the local leaders that he represented the highest authority in the land, the government, and explained that all tribes must put an end to warfare and live in peace. Though raids had taken place just before his arrival, he was received peacefully in all villages including those involved in the recent hostilities. The large villages on the western bank of the river - Aipeana, Amoamo, Beipa and Inawi - treated the government party in an openly friendly and co-operative manner, and their chiefs readily agreed to obey the government's wishes. Observing the influence wielded by the local leaders, MacGregor hoped it would be possible to work through them. Maino, the chief of Aipeana, had made a particularly favourable impression: his intelligence, influence and obvious support for the government seemed to promise much for the future. Before MacGregor's departure, Maino addressed a large crowd assembled at Inawi, urging the people to obey the government and make peace among themselves.

Not long after leaving the area, MacGregor received word that Rarai, one of the villages concerned in the recent troubles, had been attacked by a northern neighbour and was urgently appealing for the government's protection. Anxious to use this opportunity to consolidate his initial

15 Dupeyrat 1935: 175; BNG Annual Reports 1889-90: 76.

16 The following account is based on BNG Annual Reports 1889-90: 76-80.
efforts to make peace, he returned to deal with the situation personally.

The fighting that had broken out just before the first tour of the district centred around two villages - Inawaia, on the eastern bank of the river, and Rarai on the western bank. Inawaia had raided Inawabui, killing four or five people, while Rarai had been attacked by two of its neighbours, Amoamo and Beipa. MacGregor had visited all the villages involved in the fighting, warning them not to initiate further hostilities. Beipa and Amoamo agreed to make peace but argued that Rarai would not do so until revenge had been taken for the defeat suffered at their hands. Likewise, Inawabui explained that though it would welcome peace, Inawaia would not rest until it had settled the score for a previous raid. The very day after MacGregor visited Rarai, it was attacked by a second Amoamo to the north.

MacGregor was determined to use force if necessary, to settle matters. Mustering a party of eighteen men, including thirteen Europeans, he proceeded to Aipeana where he was met by the chiefs of the surrounding villages, anxious to assure him that they had taken no part in the fresh outbreak of fighting. 17 The chief of Rarai arrived the following day and explained that if MacGregor would approach Amoamo on Rarai's behalf, peace could be made, for the score between the two villages was now settled. Accordingly MacGregor and his party marched north to the new Amoamo which had not been sighted on the first visit.

17 The following account is based on BNG Annual Reports 1889-90: 87-91.
Akut, the chief, calmly accepted MacGregor's demands and though too ill to make the journey himself sent several of his men to negotiate with the chief of Rarai. Peace on the western bank of the river was achieved without so much as a single shot or arrow being fired. Before leaving the district, the government party visited Inawaia and Inawabui, warning them not to attempt to break the peace which had been agreed upon by the other villages.

The achievements of the second expedition had been gratifying but MacGregor was aware that they would be of no lasting significance unless a permanent representative of the government could be placed in the district. Within a few months a Mekeo government agent was appointed; by December a station, built on land sold by Maino of Aipeana, was nearly completed. 18

Villagers enthusiastically co-operated with Charles Kowald, the government agent, during his first few months in the district. He had more labourers than he needed to assist with the construction of the station, as not only local villagers but people from as far away as Motumotu and Lese in the Gulf came to offer their services. 19 The local chiefs encouraged their people to work for Kowald by making a point of themselves assisting with tasks on the station. 20 A band of Aipeana and Beipa men and their chiefs always escorted him when he toured other villages, acting as

18 Mekeo Station Journal, Dec. 1890.
20 Ibid: see for example entries for 11, 18, 30, 31 Dec.
his henchmen.21

For more than six months he encountered no opposition whatsoever, but in June 1891 signs of underlying tensions in certain villages became plain.22 A court case over thefts from the mission had been held at Inawae in May. A few weeks later Kowald received word from the mission that more thefts had been committed at Inawae; when he attempted to enter the village to arrest the culprits, he and his small band of Aipeana men were driven out by armed warriors. Following immediately upon this incident, a party of prospectors travelling inland were menaced by Rarai and forced to return to the station to seek assistance. Kowald escorted the three prospectors back to Rarai, recovered some property which had been stolen from them, and saw that they were allowed to continue their journey without further harassment. Though matters had been easily settled at Rarai, Kowald decided not to attempt to deal with Inawae until he had a larger force at his command.

Fighting between Inawae and Inawabui erupted late in August. MacGregor left Port Moresby on 1 September for a routine inspection of the district.23 At Yule Island he learnt from Bishop Verjus that Inawaia had attacked Inawabui a few days before, killing nine or ten people, and was now boasting that it would destroy both mission and

21 BNG Annual Reports 1891-92: 90; Mekeo Station Journal, June 1891.

22 The following is based on Mekeo Station Journal, May, June 1891.

23 The following is based on BNG Annual Reports 1891-92: 15-20.
government if they tried to interfere. Suspecting that the new outbreak of violence had been inspired by Inawae’s defiance of Kowald in June, MacGregor decided to deal with it first. Only a brief resistance was offered: warriors lined up as the government party entered the village but they fled when one of their number, who had raced forward brandishing his spear at MacGregor, was shot in the leg. Eboa, which was also involved in the conflict, was handled next. A great feast was in progress when MacGregor and his men arrived but, despite the large number of fully armed warriors present, no fighting took place. People began to run in all directions and only six of the fugitives could be captured. Two days later MacGregor marched upon Inawaia, to find it deserted.

Bishop Verjus then approached the three defeated villages in an attempt to calm them and persuade them to accept the government’s terms. He reported to MacGregor on 19 September that he was satisfied they were ready to make peace. The following day MacGregor left the district. On reaching the coast, he sent back some of his men to make a surprise attack on Inawaia by advancing from the east, travelling up the Ethel River and then overland from Inawabui. Assisted by a large force of Inawabui men, the party attacked Inawaia but succeeded only in capturing a few prisoners - the rest of the inhabitants escaped into the bush.

For some time all available government forces were kept in the district against another outbreak of fighting. A further clash with Inawaia occurred a few weeks later when a party of government officers, patrolling the villages on the eastern bank of the river, accidentally came upon an encampment of Inawaia warriors hidden in
the bush. 24 In the brief struggle that followed two Inawaia men were injured and one killed - the first and only death to occur during the government's 'peacemaking'. 25

Kowald received word from Bishop Verjus in November that Inawaia wished to see him to make peace. 26 Though Kowald was distrustful of Inawaia's real intentions, and was loath to be placed in a position where he had to depend so heavily on the mission, he realized that he had little hope of directly approaching the people after the recent violent clash; reluctantly he accepted the bishop's offer to mediate. 27 Despite his misgivings, he was received quietly and respectfully at Inawaia; he assured the people that the government had no wish to punish them further and told them to return from the bush to their homes. When MacGregor inspected the district in December, he found that a mission teacher had been placed at Inawaia and that part


25 Dupeyrat's (1935: 194) claim that there were 'quelques tués' during the September attack on Inawaia is not borne out by the official reports.

26 Mekeo Station Journal, Nov. 1891.

27 Dupeyrat's (1935: 194) account of the peacemaking and the events leading up to it are not consistent with the official reports. He asserts that after the attack by Inawaia, the government party had been forced to retreat down river to the coast and that Kowald, the government agent, would not return to the Mekeo Station until Bishop Verjus prepared the way for him. According to the government reports, the party returned to the Mekeo Station where Kowald later received word from Bishop Verjus that Inawaia was ready to make peace. Kowald went to Yule Island to discuss matters with the bishop and finally agreed to follow him up river to Inawaia. BNG Annual Reports 1891-92: 21; Mekeo Station Journal, Nov. 1891.
of the village was building a new settlement called Jesubaibua - 'the peace of Jesus'.

The government was to encounter no further resistance. Control had been achieved with the minimum of difficulty. The initial attempts to make peace in April and May 1890, and the building of the government station in November and December, met no opposition. Many villages immediately demonstrated their friendship and support. Others, which still had accounts to settle with their enemies, resented MacGregor's insistence that they make peace, but they listened respectfully to his demands and showed no overt hostility. The people's first reactions, therefore, do not suggest that they regarded the government as an invader or an enemy.

The outbreak of fighting in 1891 was not an attempt to destroy or drive out the government and was confined to three villages. The brief resistance made by villagers was defensive not offensive, and took place on home ground. Yet the outbreak demonstrates that the people did not timorously or passively accept the government as a force too strong to resist. Some villages had welcomed it in its self-appointed role of peacemaker, others did not; their acceptance was to be on their own terms and not merely those of the government. Rarai was forced to capitulate following its defeat by the northern Amamo; but Inawaia had not been militarily weakened and was still determined to exact its revenge, even though this involved it in a conflict with the government.

Though MacGregor was pleased with the response of Inawaia and the others to their chastisement, he felt

it best to proceed cautiously. Kowald was instructed not to attempt to extend his control but to concentrate efforts in the Mekeo. 29 How a permanent peace had been achieved, Kowald resumed the task of accustoming villagers to the routine functions performed by the government. His first task was to devise a method for dealing with internal disputes and crime; the second was the enforcing of the burial regulations.

Villagers already had some experience of the role the government meant to play in relation to law and order. Kowald held the first court case in April 1891 over a dispute at Aipeana caused by the victim of a theft burning down the thief's house in retaliation. 30 More than 2,000 people gathered to watch the proceedings, which Kowald deliberately made as impressive as possible. Villagers soon became used to his intervention in such matters. They were so assiduous in reporting crimes by 1893 that he was forced to tell them he could not deal with offences committed before the government's arrival in the district. 31 The men of Beipe and Aipeana energetically assisted Kowald in making arrests and owing to the small number of police at his disposal he had good reason to be grateful for their help. 32

29 Ibid: 22.
30 Mekeo Station Journal, Apr. 1891.
31 Mekeo Station Journal, May 1893; BMG Annual Reports 1892-93: 37.
32 Mekeo Station Journal, 24 Jan., Mar., 31 May, 31 July, Aug. 1893. In August Kowald reported he had only two armed men on the station. See also BMG Annual Reports 1893-94: 43.
Rapid progress was also made in enforcing the regulations which required that the dead be buried in cemeteries set apart from the village. Exhumations and arrests were necessary at first, but within a short time chiefs were reporting culprits from their own villages and co-operating in their arrest.  

Having swiftly accomplished these initial objectives, Kowald's next task was to cut a network of roads linking the Mekeo villages with each other and the coast. Much of his time during 1893 and 1894 was spent in supervising road clearing. Paid for their labour in tobacco, villagers worked willingly; even when regulations were passed which compelled villagers to clear and maintain tracks in their vicinity without payment, there was little protest. MacGregor considered roads important not merely to facilitate administration of the district but also to prepare the way for economic development. He optimistically looked forward to a time in the near future when villagers could be persuaded to use their rich lands to produce crops for export. With MacGregor's encouragement, Kowald devoted a great deal of time and effort to developing the Mekeo Station as an experimental nursery for many different types

33 Mekeo Station Journal, Aug. 1893. MacGregor reported in May 1893 that the ban on village burials was 'so nearly accomplished that there is now no likelihood of its being attended with any serious resistance.' Despatches: British New Guinea to the Governor of Queensland, vol.2: 498. See also BMG Annual Reports 1892-93: 51.


35 Mekeo Station Journal, May, June 1895.

of tropical produce.\textsuperscript{37}

Like the government, the Sacred Heart Mission quickly consolidated its position. The first mission station was founded at Inawi late in 1890,\textsuperscript{38} while the government station was being built near Aipeana. By 1894 the Inawi mission boasted a fine church, two schools and a staff consisting of a priest, a brother and two nuns; two smaller stations had been started at Beipa and Jesubaibu.\textsuperscript{39} Only three years later there were missions in ten Mekeo villages and conversions totalled 861.\textsuperscript{40}

In contrast to the LMS, the Sacred Heart Mission relied as little as possible on Polynesian or local teachers, manning its establishments with European missionaries. Strong emphasis was placed on education from the very beginning and as each station opened, a village school was built.\textsuperscript{41}

The mission had played a vital part in smoothing the way for the government. If MacGregor and his police had arrived unannounced and unexplained in an area which had had no experience of Europeans, or only violent contacts with them, the response might have been very different. The dependence of the government on the missionaries'

\textsuperscript{37} Constant references are made in the station journal to Kowald's experiments with different crops: Mekeo Station Journal 1890-96. See also BNG Annual Reports 1892-93: 37.

\textsuperscript{38} Dupeyrat 1935: 182-3.

\textsuperscript{39} Navarre, Notes et Journal: 116-7.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid: 142-3.

\textsuperscript{41} Dupeyrat 1935: 402.
influence was again demonstrated in the peacemaking with Inawais in 1891. The government placed only one representative in the district, while the mission soon had representatives in almost every village. Naturally villagers developed closer relationships with their parish priest—who spoke their language, lived in their village and concerned himself with the minutiae of their lives—than with the government agent. Kowald plainly resented the mission’s prestige and their pervasive control, which he felt detracted from his own authority. Mission activity on the Mokeo plain became a matter of routine by the late 1890s.

Kowald’s death in December 1896, from injuries received when a stick of dynamite exploded in his hand during an expedition to the Gulf, disrupted the steady progress achieved since 1891. His sudden removal seemed to shake villagers’ confidence in the government, and a succession of less able replacements did little to reassure them. When Bramell, Kowald’s successor, arrived at the Mokeo Station in January, he found villages deserted and rumours rife that the government had come to an end and all were free to do as they pleased. The chiefs of Beipa and Aipeana, who had been Kowald’s staunch supporters, reported that their men refused to work on the roads; the sight of Bramell marching into the village with his police soon induced the people to work, but other disturbances followed.

42 See for example Mokeo Station Journal, Nov. 1891; Mar., Aug. 1895; 23 Apr. 1896.

43 BNG Annual Reports 1896-97: xiii.

44 Ibid. 62; Mokeo Station Journal, Jan. 1897.
One of Bramell's police was assaulted at Aipena in March, and there were more protests from other villages against road work. In a few weeks later when Bramell attempted to recruit carriers to go to Port Moresby, the chiefs of Aipena and Inawi managed to bring sixteen men to the station to sign on as recruits but the majority of villagers, fearing that they would be taken by force, fled to the bush. Bramell was compelled to spend the next few weeks touring the district attempting to persuade the Mekeo and coastal tribes to return to their villages.

On occasions Kowald had experienced difficulty in obtaining bearers and getting road work completed. In August 1895 he had had to put five of the principal men of Inawaia in irons before villagers would agree to act as carriers to Inawabui; the same attitude was taken at Inawabui until people learnt what had occurred at Inawaia. The parish priest of Jesubaibua warned Kowald in May 1896 of a threatened 'revolution' if the regulations concerning road work were put into force. Kowald camped for a night in the village and the next day every man was out working; as there was no further trouble, Kowald concluded that the priest had panicked over a trifle. Several minor disturbances

45 Mekeo Station Journal, Mar. 1897.
46 Ibid: May 1897.
49 Ibid: May 1896.
had occurred during Kowald's time but he was always able to settle them quickly and without fuss; villagers evidently accepted his authority and were prepared to co-operate with him.

Further repercussions from Bramell's clumsy efforts at labour recruiting were felt later in the year. Reports were received in Port Moresby in September of an imminent attack on the government station by all the Mekeo sorcerers. A large force of police was sent to the Mekeo and thirty sorcerers were arrested. The circumstances surrounding this incident are far from clear; the station journal for the months concerned is missing, and so events must be reconstructed from the annual report for 1897-98. It appears that resentment over Bramell's actions in May was still smouldering and that there had been talk of revenge. Winter, the acting administrator, toured the district in December and January, reporting that there was no rebellion afoot and that certain officers had acted rashly in arresting the thirty sorcerers on little evidence.  

Bramell was replaced by C.W. Monckton in May 1898. Four months later A. Guilanetti took charge of the station; like his predecessors, he found villages deserted on his arrival and it was some time before he could

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50 BNG Annual Reports 1897-98: 66.
51 Ibid: xv.
52 Ibid: 89. According to Monckton, Bramell was an accountant and his services were needed in Port Moresby by the Treasurer. Monckton 1921: 113.
gain the people’s confidence. 

Rumours of another ‘revolution’ spread in November 1901, after Guilianetti was found shot dead in the house of the LMS missionary, Deuncey, at Delena on the coast. The culprits, Aisi Obungo, a Moro from Chiria village on Yule Island, and Ai-ai, a Mekeo from Aipeana, were caught and each sentenced to fourteen years’ gaol. Both men were Guilianetti’s prisoners at the time of the murder, Aisi having been arrested for refusing to act as a carrier and Ai-ai for adultery. Guilianetti’s personal servant, a boy from Aipeana related to Ai-ai, was at first suspected of having assisted the murderers but charges against him were later dismissed. The official reports on the case concluded that the motive had been personal revenge and that there was no evidence of any ‘plot’ against the government.

Despite the various disturbances of the late 1890s, the Mekeo villages were considered to be well disposed to the government and firmly under its control. Other parts of the district were demanding more attention. Both mission and government were beginning to explore the mountain ranges behind the Mekeo plain; the mission made two exploratory trips in 1897 and 1899, which were quickly

53 Mekeo Station Journal, Sept. 1898.
54 Report on Guilianetti’s murder, PM Archives G121.
55 Monckton asserts that Guilianetti’s servant, guided by a ‘sorcerer’, was the murderer; his account of events bears little relationship to the facts presented in the official report of the trial. Monckton 1921: 127-8.
56 Report on Guilianetti’s murder, PM Archives G121.
57 RMG Annual Reports 1901-02: 16; 1905-06: 28.
followed by government expeditions late in 1899. The Mekeo Station was an inconvenient point from which to administer the whole district; travel to and from the coast was awkward at any time and extremely arduous during the wet season; transporting equipment and supplies resulted in losses and frustrating delays. As the Mekeo ceased to be the centre of government interest and activity, there seemed to be little point in preserving with these difficulties. In 1906 the government station was transferred to Kairuku on Yule Island.

The smooth establishment of European control depicted by official reports can be partly explained in terms of the circumstances of contact. No rapacious traders and labour recruiters or land-hungry settlers preceded the government; the few contacts prior to 1890 were mainly confined to missionaries who were intent upon winning the people's friendship and confidence. Previous experience of the white man had given villagers little reason to see the government as a potential enemy or invader. The ways in which they did see the new-comers are not revealed by the documentary evidence; nevertheless it provides an independent description of villagers' actions against which the accounts they themselves give may be checked. The two sources of information prove to be complementary rather than contradictory.

58 Ibid: 1899-1900: xviii; Mekeo Station Journal, correspondence: A. Jullien to Government Secretary, 24 June 1899; Resident Magistrate, Central District to Government Secretary, 11 Sept. 1899.

59 BNG Annual Reports 1904-05: 11.

The old people, if questioned about the earliest impressions of the white man, will invariably exclaim, 'When you Europeans first came here our fathers thought you were faifai.' Faifai are supernatural beings which live under water and can assume at will the form of certain fish, eels, tortoises, snakes, and of men and women with white skin, pale eyes and long, straight hair; they can cause serious harm and even death to humans, but may also be controlled for beneficial ends. The village histories reiterate that at first people did not believe the white men were human beings. The fact that the strangers had come from the sea, their pale skins and peculiar physical appearance, all indicated that they were water spirits; and they brought with them curious and wonderful objects entirely different from anything possessed by mankind. Formalized descriptions of people's reactions to the new-comers' goods - the amazement, or consternation, as they tasted salt and rice, looked into a mirror, or found one of the faifai removing part of his 'skin' and offering it to them - are the liveliest and most popular features of any recitation of the traditions.

Villagers are said to have formed their first impressions of the white man from their meetings with the Sacred Heart Missionaries and government officers. The few earlier contacts have left little mark on tradition, though it seems likely that people did learn of contacts on the coast from the Roro as the news of the arrival of the missionaries is said to have been received in this manner. It is hardly surprising that these earlier communications, which were of no lasting significance, should be passed over. It is infinitely more important for villagers to explain how the present agencies of mission
and government came to assert control over them. Traditions do not always clearly indicate which of the two arrived first, largely because the activities of the missionaries are described in one story, those of the government in another, with nothing to suggest the relationship between the two sets of events. But people are well aware of the pioneering role played by the mission. An Inawi elder, while relating his experiences of the exploration of the mountain ranges to the north of the Mekeo, declared:

"It was just like here - the Mission went first and made friends with the people, then the Government followed."  

Inawi, the first village in which a mission station was built, is acknowledged by others to preserve the most comprehensive and authoritative history of the coming of the missionaries. Unlike versions told in other villages, which describe only those events that occurred in their immediate locality, the Inawi tradition opens with Jesus commanding the Pope to send missionaries to Papua, and then proceeds to tell of the landing on Yule Island and the first journey inland to the Mekeo. It relates that news of the arrival of strangers on the coast was passed on to the Mekeo at a market held with the Roro. An Inawi woman, Oaeke Aipa, who had spent her youth in the Roro village of Mou was told of the peculiar happenings on Yule Island by one of her Mou friends, who also gave her some salt obtained from the strangers. When the Inawi women returned home they informed the men of what they had

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61 When quoting informants, I retain capitals for 'Government' and 'Mission' since villagers use the terms as proper nouns.
heard. The chief, Opugu Ogopae, summoned Oaske to the ufuf to tell her story; she then prepared some food for him seasoned with the salt. Discovering how good the ‘white earth’ tasted, Opugu’s curiosity concerning the bringer of such a desirable commodity was immediately aroused.62

A while later two Roro men came to the village to trade for betel nut. They gave Opugu a bag of salt, explaining that it was a present from the faifai people who were eager to visit the Mekeo and meet their chiefs. Deciding it was time to determine whether the rumours he had heard were true, Opugu asked if any of his men were brave enough to make the journey through enemy territory to Yule Island, observe the strangers and report back to him. Two volunteers set off the next day with the Roros. They reached the island safely and were introduced to the missionaries who gave them numerous presents to take back to their chief. After making the return journey without mishap, the two men proudly related their exploits to the assembled village. They presented the gifts to Opugu, explaining that he was to share them with the other chiefs of the district and pass on the news that the missionaries would soon visit them. The strangers were indeed faifai, the scouts reported, but their intentions were clearly friendly. The missionaries had assured them that they would not kill or harm anyone, their reason for coming was to teach the people new things and a different way of life. When the strangers at last arrived in Inawi they were warmly welcomed. Opugu conducted them to neighbouring villages, and before they left he gave them land so that they might settle in his village.

62 The tradition paraphrased here was related in 1970 by Maino Peafau (now deceased), the senior chief of Oaisaka and grandson of Opugu Ogopae.
No reference is made to the Mekeo contemplating violence against the missionaries; a Moro chief is said to have wanted to kill the strangers but was stopped by his fellows. The Inawi history, like other versions, stresses two things - the highly desirable possessions of the new-comers and the friendly intentions they professed. To begin with villagers appear to have been somewhat apprehensive but their fears were soon overcome by their curiosity concerning the strangers and the intriguing goods which they distributed with such generosity. The Mekeo were not prepared to sit back and allow their neighbours and oftentimes enemies, the Moro, to be the only ones to benefit from the new-comers' presence. The tradition reveals that the eventual appearance of the missionaries was seen as the desired culmination of a series of earlier contacts and negotiations; well before the mission's representatives arrived in their villages, people had satisfied themselves that closer contacts with it were desirable. Dupeyrat makes no mention of a visit to Yule by Mekeo villagers before 1887, but it is not unlikely that such a visit was made without the missionaries' knowledge, that the scouts observed them from a distance and obtained some trade goods from their trading partners on Yule Island. In any case, this prior experience of the missionaries makes understandable the enthusiastic reception given to Verjus and Couppé in 1887 - an encounter which seemed to Dupeyrat so remarkable that he chose to explain it in terms of divine grace. 63

63 Dupeyrat 1935: 132.
The peaceful admission of the government is attributed by tradition to the influence of one man, Maino Fagau, a renowned war leader of Aipeana - the same Maino who figures so prominently in the documentary accounts. According to the Aipeana traditions, people’s first experience of the government was of a group of armed men marching into their village demanding to see the war chief, Maino Fagau. As the strangers were evidently prepared for battle, Maino at once sent word to all the Pioufa war chiefs who hastily assembled at Aipeana. While plans were being made to kill the intruders, a Roro acting as a guide to the government party interjected, urging the Mekeo chiefs to reconsider their position. He warned that if the white men were killed there would be no way to obtain more of the goods they brought, and others would come to avenge the deaths, killing many people with their guns. Maino Fagau immediately recognized the logic of these arguments and proceeded to persuade the other chiefs that it would be wiser not to fight - a remarkable reversal of roles for a man reputed to be a fierce warrior and an implacable enemy.

Maino’s action serves to dramatize the decision which villagers were now forced to make. The earliest arrivals, the missionaries, made no show of force and no demands upon the people. With the appearance of MacGregor and his police, leaders like Maino realized that the

64 The traditions paraphrased here were related in 1971 by Aufa Roaka of the Pua section of Aivea ikupu of Aipeana. Aufa belongs to a junior line of Maino Fagau’s clan - his grandfather was Maino’s first cousin. As an elder of sharp intelligence and clear memory, he has come to be regarded as Pua’s authority on tradition and history.
situation had abruptly changed: the newcomers were now insisting that certain demands be met and were clearly prepared to use force if they were refused. People were faced with the choice of either driving out and killing the white man, or of welcoming him as a friend, accepting his demands along with the benefits he offered.

It seems unlikely that such an important decision was made on the spur of the moment, by one man. Presumably some consensus of opinion had already been reached. Maino's sudden championing of the government should probably be interpreted as a public gesture of commitment to a course of action which he knew to be favoured by the majority.

By summoning all the Pioufa chiefs to assist him against the government, he had assumed leadership in any conflict which was to follow: the iso lopie who initiated a battle was regarded as the leader and those who joined him acted as his allies. Maino thus held a position of considerable authority at the time, and his reputation as a successful war leader guaranteed him the respect of his allies - he had recently led all the Pioufa villages against the Ve'e in revenge for the death of his sister at the hands of Inawaia. 65 Circumstances allowed him to make a daring and unconventional gesture, providing it reflected the sentiments of the majority. Made in the face of the other war chiefs' opposition, the same action would have been

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65 BMG Annual Reports 1891-92: 19 relate that during the attack on Inawaia by Laves' party in September 1891 Maino of Aipeana had to be restrained from killing an Inawaia man who, some time before, had killed his wife. According to Aipeana informants, Inawaia had been responsible for the death of Maino's sister, not his wife.
unlikely to have carried the day.

Two reasons for the decision in favour of the government are given: fear that there would be little chance of success in a war against the white men and reluctance to be cut off from their goods. Tradition lays stress on the weapons carried by the white men. Most village histories include a description of the police firing their guns at a pig - or in some versions at a bird or some coconuts in a tree - to demonstrate the power of their weapons. Explanation of the government's easy penetration of the area, in these terms, is so obvious and readily understandable to the outsider that it is difficult not to misinterpret the significance of this point, and thus greatly oversimplify the issue.

The people's first reactions to the white man bear little resemblance of a timid surrender to a superior enemy, and even less of a passive resignation to fate. The way in which villagers eagerly welcomed the missionaries into their territory and actively committed themselves to support the government, suggest rather that they had positive reasons to desire the new-comers' presence.

The traditions reveal that people accepted mission and government at their own estimation of themselves - altruistic bearers of a superior culture and a better way of life. But there was, of course, a wide gulf between what the new-comers meant by their promises and the terms in which villagers interpreted them. Unknowingly the white man had chosen to play a role which was not without precedent in Mekeo experience. The historian trained in modern methods of historical analysis sees the arrival of Europeans in an unexplored part of Papua as a unique historical event. From the people's point of view, the event was neither
unique nor unforeseeable: in the past there had been others, spirits and human beings, who brought technological and social changes, instructing the people in new ways and knowledge. A'aisa was the most important, bringing sorcery and chieftainship, and there had been others before him, like the two brothers, Kaega Amakaga and Kipo Amakaga, who taught people to make fire and to give birth to children in the present manner, setting down the rituals now associated with pregnancy and birth. These events were and are no less real to villagers because an outsider classifies them as 'mythological'. All technical and social innovations are explained in terms of a revelation of knowledge by supernatural beings or by men from distant places.

The arrival and actions of the white man were consistent and explainable within this traditional framework of reference. The powers of the faifai people were undeniably proved by their enjoyment of all manner of fabulous objects totally unlike anything known to human beings: they had shown themselves willing to share these riches and promised that they would reveal their knowledge. Like the earlier benefactors, their powers were naturally assumed to be supernatural, their knowledge ritual knowledge. People evidently expected a revelation of supernatural knowledge but they could have no clear idea of the nature of these secrets or the manner in which they would be disclosed. Nevertheless, since they had benefited from similar events in the past, there was good reason to expect that they would do so again. Moreover, at least until the advent of the government, the circumstances of contact had given no cause to doubt the sincerity of the strangers' promises.
People welcomed the white man because they believed they would gain from his presence among them. Had it been otherwise, had people decided that the strangers boded more evil than good, they would have fought them whatever the odds. The outcome of a battle was believed to be determined not by the warriors, but by the relative powers of the feia, the war magicians, supporting the opposing sides; even so, explain the old men, warriors did not stop to worry that their fate was predetermined but went eagerly to war. Inawais had shown this pertinacity in 1891. Paradoxically, the military superiority of the white man was not so much a negative reason to surrender, as a positive reason to accept him, for it was proof of his powers: if he were not invincible, his ritual knowledge could be of little account and not worth acquiring.

Having chosen to accept the new regime represented by the government, villagers proved their readiness to work in harmony with it. Even when it began to intrude upon the domestic affairs of the village community, the lojia actively supported its measures, including those which impinged on their own authority and cut at basic practices and beliefs. Public courts had never been held by chiefs; in this sense the government's settling of disputes through the means of public hearings did not usurp a recognized function of the chief. Nevertheless, chiefs

66 New Guineans often seem to have identified the first white men with ancestral or benign spirits. Lawrence 1967: 63-8 observes that the people of the Rai Coast associated Miklouho-Maclay with their deity Anut; according to Van Rijswijck 1967: 74, the Kuni (the Mekoe's eastern neighbours) had at first thought that the missionaries were their legendary hero Akaia returned to them. See also Brown 1973: 78-9; Worsley 1970.
were ultimately responsible for the maintaining of law and order among their own people. Their willingness to acknowledge a higher authority in these matters suggests a very determined effort to compromise in order to meet the government's requirements.

Even more remarkable is the chiefs' backing of the burial regulations. The dead were always buried under or close to village houses so that the relatives of the deceased could keep constant watch over the grave, guarding it from marauding sorcerers until they were satisfied that the corpse was completely decayed. If a sorcerer succeeded in removing part of the body, or even in thrusting his spear into the grave and coming in contact with it, he gained power over the spirit of the dead man and could use it to harm his living relatives. Human brains, sexual organs and the liquid produced when a whole body is placed over a fire are ingredients necessary for many of the sorcerer's spells. The government's proposal to leave the dead in a cemetery set apart from the village, where they would become the open prey of grave-robbing sorcerers, must have seemed horrifying, even immoral at first. Kowald suspected that jealousy played a large part in the rapid enforcement of the regulations.\(^{67}\) No doubt inter-village rivalries prompted one settlement to spy on another but the station journal reveals that many chiefs reported culprits from their own village.\(^{68}\) It is most unlikely that jealousy was the motivating force in such cases, for if chief or commoner had attempted to

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67 BMG Annual Reports 1893-94: 59.

68 Mekeo Station Journal, Aug. 1893.
manipulate the new rules to satisfy personal grudges within the village community, the clans comprising it would have been set at each others' throats.

Tradition has nothing to say of people's reactions to the burial regulations or the first court cases. Informants state that the new laws were accepted because the chiefs were persuaded that their people would benefit from them. In accordance with the government's instructions, the dead were buried away from the village; but the grave, of course, still had to be guarded so people adopted the practice of building a small shelter over it where relatives could keep their vigil. 69 The elders dismiss as nonsense any suggestion that measures introduced by the government might have been opposed by the chiefs or caused conflict within the village. They patiently explain to the outsider that this is a nonsensical proposition for the simple and obvious reason that 'the laws of the government are the laws of the chiefs'. 70 There could be no possibility of friction or of misunderstanding between the two authorities since they stood for the same things - for this reason the loipa always upheld the government's measures.

This insistence on the close identity between the aims of the government and the aims of traditional authority

69 See below: 181-2. Even today the dead are sometimes secretly interred under village houses - particularly infants and small children. New graves in the cemetery are still guarded by relatives who take turns sitting up all night with shotguns.

70 This point was carefully elaborated in respect to the village constable and his relations with the government and the village authorities. See below: 180-2.
reveals the way in which people came to regard the new regime. Tradition relates that though villagers at first thought the new-comers were spirits, they later discovered that they were men. The actions of the new rulers began to be interpreted in human terms. The role they played was not difficult to reconcile with traditional ideals: they had come as peacemakers, one of the linga fa'apita's most important functions; they emphasized the primacy of their authority, demonstrating superior powers by their weapons and possessions; most importantly they vowed that their only desire was for the peace and welfare of the people. 71 Apparently there was little difference between the old and the new; the government appeared merely to be an extension of traditional authority.

Kowald, the government agent, was treated as a chief, albeit one who held sway over a territorial unit unprecedented in the past. Many instances described in the station journal reveal the local leaders' attitudes towards Kowald. Whenever an important feast was held in a nearby village, a pig would be brought to the station and presented to him. 72 He encouraged chiefs from distant settlements to report regularly to the station, but at first they had done so of their own accord. 73 When MacGregor inspected the district, chiefs from near and far would assemble to greet him and inform him of affairs in their

71 See above: 18-19.
villages. Chiefly successors were always presented to the government agent or MacGregor. The personal commitment made to Ronald b, the chiefs of Beipa and Aipeana - their eagerness to serve him by working on the station and acting as his henchmen - was concrete affirmation of their acceptance of the new authority he represented.

The government's original policy of dealing through the local leaders must have helped them to identify with it. MacGregor's initial contacts with villagers were conducted mainly through the chiefs, or at least those known to the missionaries. The arresting personality of Maino, the Aipeana leader, and the evident influence and ability of many of the village dignitaries, gave MacGregor reason to hope that the government could successfully deal with the people through their chiefs. He predicted that Maino would soon gain control over Beipa, and expected that government patronage would greatly increase the powers of the more important leaders. A government chief was appointed in each village and in 1897 Maino was made head government chief of the district. MacGregor deliberately attempted to use the influence of the friendly chiefs to

74 BNG Annual Reports 1892-93: 17, 37; 1893-94: 43.
75 See for example Mako Station Journal, May 1891; BNG Annual Reports 1893-94: 43.
76 BNG Annual Reports 1899-90: 78.
78 Maino's appointment as head government chief was in recognition of the assistance he gave during the arrest of the sorcerers in October 1897. BNG Annual Reports 1897-98: 87.
persuade the others to make peace. When he left the
district in May 1890, after concluding a formal peace between
the villages on the western bank of the river, he
optimistically left instructions that the leaders of
Inawabui, Maino of Aipeana and Opugu of Inawi should go
together to negotiate a settlement with Inawaia. 79 Though
the chiefs, especially Maino, did all they could to meet
his demands, it is plain that MacGregor overestimated
their powers.

Neither mission nor government had a very clear
idea at this stage of the actual structure of leadership.
For example, Maino Fagau was not the head chief of Aipeana,
but the war chief of its founding clan, Aivea. 80 He took
the initiative in dealing with the government because it was
assumed that the new arrivals, who came armed and demanding
to see the iso lopia, were intent upon war. Though Maino
continued to hold a position in Aipeana far more important
than a war chief would usually have held in time of peace,
he did not extend his sway over any other village. If
the original policy of creating government chiefs had been
pursued, a new hierarchy of chiefs with greater powers and
new functions might have emerged, as happened in other
colonial situations; instead, government chiefs were
almost immediately replaced by village constables. 81

79 BNG Annual Reports 1889-90: 91.

80 Aipeana informants explained that Maino Fagau was the
younger brother of the chief of Pua (the iso section
of Aivea clan), Aufa Fagau.

81 BNG Annual Reports 1893-94: 58 notes that in most
villages 'the chiefs are also constables'. See also
Miles 1959: 63-4.
Chiefs continued to be appointed as constables but by the late 1890s government agents began to regard the village constable merely as their appointee, paying scant attention to his traditional status. But the effect of this shift in policy was not felt until later.

One respect in which the actions of the new order were difficult to reconcile with traditional ideals was its method of transferring office. Chiefly office, like other positions of authority, was inherited; the appointment of a successor required an elaborate public ceremony which was usually held during the lifetime of the old chief.

It is not surprising that Kowald's death, in the absence of any apparent 'heir', caused villagers to believe that the government had come to an end; nor is it remarkable that Kowald's successor, who arrived without any formal introduction or ceremony, was not immediately accepted.

The rapid turnover of government agents between January 1897 and September 1898 compounded the unease and confusion which followed Kowald's death. When the chiefs of nearby villages came to farewell Bramell as he was leaving the station, he was disconcerted to find Maino of Aipeana hanging on to his hand and wailing. It is little wonder that this faithful supporter of the government was distressed at the apparent impermanency of its authority.

82 BNG Annual Reports 1897-98: 93; 1898-99: 70 note that all the Mekeo village constables were chiefs. The 1899-1900 report makes no reference to their status. After 1898 references in the station journal are to village constables rather than to chiefs.

83 Mekeo Station Journal, 11 June 1898.
Villagers eventually learnt that the government perpetuated its rule in its own manner. The length of time each officer spent in the district soon came to be explained in terms of traditional moral concepts: those who served only brief terms were 'bad' officers who were quickly removed by the government in Port Moresby, those who looked after the interests of the people were allowed to stay longer.

In tradition, 'Chiale' - Charles Kowald - and 'Amadeo' - Guilianetti, the government agent murdered in 1901 - have become the archetypes of the 'good' and the 'bad' government officer. Kowald's entries in the station journal reveal him as having been stern but just in his dealings with villagers. Tradition speaks of him as a good man who looked after the interests of the people - just as a chief is said to do. He is particularly remembered for the many new varieties of plants he introduced to villagers and for his generosity to those who worked for him. In contrast, Amadeo is remembered as a harsh, cruel man who abused the people and his labourers. In agreement with official reports on the matter, informants insist that the motive for his murder was personal revenge but admit that he 'deserved to die' because of the ill will he constantly displayed to the people.

The mission appears to have quickly assumed in villagers' eyes the role it had deliberately chosen and was best fitted to play - that of mediator between the people and the government. Since the missionaries spoke their language, lived in their villages and understood much of their way of life, it was natural that villagers turned to them to act as intermediaries between themselves and the new regime. The old men explain that during the early years
of contact people would consult their parish priest concerning any government measures, such as the burial regulations, which they found difficult to understand. The missionaries are also said to have intervened on occasions when government officers were too harsh or demanding on the people, reporting their actions to the government in Port Moresby. Today the mission is still expected to perform the same functions: the parish priest's advice is sought on many practical matters relating to dealings with the outside world, and such advice is almost certainly more valued by the majority than the spiritual guidance he offers.

Mission and government records provide ample evidence of the rivalry existing between the two organizations during the early years. The government agent's complaints against the missionaries find their counterpart in Archbishop Navarre's suspicions of villages, like Aipeana, which appeared to him to shun the mission in favour of the government. It is difficult to say whether villagers were aware of this situation, or how much they attempted to take advantage of it. It seems, however, that they were far more concerned with their own jealousies. Each village was eager to be the first to have a mission or government station. The prestige that such an establishment gave the community is reflected in the emphasis placed by tradition on the fact that a particular village was the 'first' to receive the white man - attitudes which were conditioned by the importance the society gave to being the first, the 'eldest', and by the rights this position conferred. Maino of Aipeana was swift to realize the

the supremacy of the government and was determined to
become its supporter, yet he was not uninterested in the
mission. He told MacGregor in April 1890 that he had already
selected a site on his land for the mission and was looking
forward to seeing it settled there. Possibly the coolness
which Archbishop Navarre later observed in Aipeana arose
from disappointment that the missionaries had chosen another
village for their first base in the Mekeo.

One adversary of which the mission had frequent
cause to complain was the village sorcerer. Extracts
from Archbishop Navarre’s diary refer to several instances
of the sorcerers’ deliberate malice and the intrigues they
plotted against the mission. Except for the false alarm
raised during Bramell’s time as government agent, there
is little reference in government records to opposition
from this source.

Since the mission considered the eradication of
sorcery one of its most important tasks, it inevitably
provoked the antagonism of the sorcerers; the government
took the matter less seriously, though it later passed laws

85 BNG Annual Reports 1889-90: 78.
86 Navarre, Notes et Journal.
87 Monckton, who spent four months in the Mekeo in 1898,
gives an extremely highly coloured narrative of encounters
with sorcerers in his book Some Experiences of a New
Guinea Resident Magistrate. Little confidence can be
placed in his account; the events described are so
numerous and sensational that it is very difficult to
believe they all occurred in the brief period he spent
in the district; moreover, most of the incidents seem
to owe their inspiration to D’Albertis’ experiences
on Yule Island.
making the practice of sorcery illegal. A direct confrontation was soon abandoned by the mission for more subtle methods. A careful investigation of the nature of beliefs surrounding sorcery was undertaken, some priests succeeding in penetrating far into the secrets of the black art by persuading sorcerers to instruct them in it.88 One in particular, Father Riegler, earned himself a reputation as a redoubtable sorcerer among the Boro and the Hekuo. Stories, told only by sorcerers, describe how the notable practitioners of the past proved the efficacy of their powers to the missionaries—either by causing some serious mishap to befall a member of the mission, or by teaching certain individuals some of their spells. The sorcerers interpreted the missionaries’ desire to acquire their knowledge as an admission of its validity. If this was an unfortunate result from the mission’s point of view, it at least allowed the development of a mutual tolerance. The sorcerer bitterly resented any effort to discredit his powers but once the missionaries showed themselves prepared to respect them he was ready to acknowledge, and no doubt hoped to learn, the special secrets possessed by the white man.

 Tradition and the opinion of knowledgeable informants provide no evidence to suggest that any of the rumoured ‘rebellions’ against the government had foundation in fact; and the rapid progress made by the mission leaves little doubt that, whatever annoyance the sorcerers may have caused it, they put no real obstacle in its path. Even if there had been determination in certain quarters to throw

off the yoke of European control, tradition would give no hint of the fact. No contradiction of the ideal of harmony and co-operation - based upon the identity of interests shared by the old and the new regime - is tolerated; tradition passes over, and the old men dismiss as unimportant any incidents which are inconsistent with their overall interpretation of events. The few instances of counteraction recorded in official reports after 1891 reveal that villagers were not able to absorb the shock of change without experiencing some strain; yet the ease and rapidity with which any resistance was overcome suggests that for the majority the ideal was, at least for a time, a reality.

IN retrospect, it is apparent to villagers themselves, as to outsiders, that the coming of the white man proclaimed the establishment of a new order which was to transform the old. But at the time of contact, people had little comprehension of the ways in which the new-comers would re-direct their lives, and the changes taking place were not immediately perceptible. No obvious break with the past occurred. For a time it appeared that nothing had really altered.

Tradition lays much emphasis on people's desire for the white man's goods, but makes little reference to the effects of technological innovations such as the use of steel tools. Salisbury's study of economic change among the Siane of the Eastern Highlands, carried out shortly after the establishment of government control over the region, has highlighted the results of introducing steel tools into a stone age economy. 89 By carefully observing the time

89 Salisbury 1962.
Sian men spent in subsistence activities and by comparing the results with the times he calculated they formerly spent in such tasks, Salisbury was able to estimate that steel tools reduced from eighty per cent to fifty per cent the proportion of total time a Sian man devoted to subsistence labour. This reduction affected the men only; female occupations such as sowing, weeding and harvesting were not affected by the new tools. For twelve years before the imposition of European control, the Sian had received regular supplies of steel tools through traditional trade routes. The significance of the change to steel tools was that people channelled the time freed from subsistence activities into new directions. Instead of making larger gardens to produce more food, people devoted the extra time to an elaboration of ceremony and warfare.

Unlike the Sian, the Mako had little opportunity to acquire European trade goods until a government station was established in the area. D'Albertis observed in 1875 that the people of Habiabui used implements of bamboo, shell, bone and stone. The rarity of steel tools more than a decade later is revealed in mission records: in 1889 the missionaries presented Maino, the war chief of Aipeana, with a steel axe which had been promised him more than twelve months before (the poverty of the young mission allowed the distribution of trade goods only on a very small scale).
In the absence of any private traders or plantation owners, the government became the most important source of European goods. Records of station expenditure during the first few years show the local demand for tobacco, steel knives, cloth and similar items which were used to pay casual labourers and given as presents to visiting chiefs.

Since access to a regular supply of the new goods coincided with the end of tribal fighting, steel knives and axes had no effect on Mekeo warfare; other circumstances also suggest that their adoption was of less consequence for the Mekeo than for the Siane. Salisbury argues that steel axes cut by two-thirds the time involved in axe work, which was the most time-consuming element in clearing land, fence making and house building. Presumably this reduction applies to any similar society, but the amount of axe work necessary - the requirements of garden clearing and fence building - varies. The Mekeo is far less burdened in this respect than his Siane counterpart.

According to Salisbury, the Siane must clear a new garden every three months; once a plot has been used for one season it does not regain its fertility for several years. A Mekeo household clears, at the most, one new garden a year and spaced planting will ensure that it produces crops continuously throughout the year. Each household usually uses more than one garden plot at a time.

93 BHG Annual Reports 1892-93: 51.
94 Mekeo Station Journal, 1890 onwards.
Though industrious families prefer to make a new garden every year, the lazy individual feels no necessity to make this effort, as a plot is said to retain its fertility for several years. Garden fences are not usually necessary, as most Mekeo gardens are situated sufficiently far from the village to avoid the depredations of domestic pigs. In contrast, the Siane build elaborate fences around each garden which require an immense amount of timber and labour. Also the activities of the Mekeo are limited by a seasonal cycle, which is not the case among the Siane. During the wet season no garden clearing or house building can be undertaken. New land must be cleared during the dry months, most families leaving it until the last minute, when there is frantic activity to get the job finished before the rain starts.

The fact that the Siane combine as lineage groups to clear and fence their gardens, while the Mekeo perform the same tasks as individual households assisted, if necessary, by a few relatives or friends, seems indicative of the different degree of labour required in each case. The seasonal cycle and the fertility of the Mekeo's alluvial land produced a pattern of subsistence activity much less onerous than that which a different environment imposed on the Siane. Since less time was needed for primary subsistence tasks, a proportionately lesser amount of time, which might be channelled in other directions, was freed by the use of steel tools.

97 Ibid: 47-8; 54-5.
98 Ibid: 54-5.
A change which might be expected to have more
far-reaching effects was the cessation of warfare. It
is extremely difficult to gain any accurate idea of the
part war formerly played in New Guinea societies. The
classical ethnographic studies of Malinowski, Mead, Fortune
and others were made after societies had adjusted to an
imposed peace. Even the more recent studies in the Highlands,
made shortly after European contact, are not based on direct
observations of war as a functioning institution. 99 The
work of the Harvard-Peabody Expedition of 1961 among the
Dani of West Irian has provided vivid and dramatic insights
into this matter; 100 but since the other institutions of
Melanesian societies display so rich a variety, it must be
expected that war, and the practices associated with it,
assumed a like multiplicity of forms.

Makéo informants, none of whom are old enough
to have witnessed pre-contact tribal fighting, claim that
men once spent all their time in fighting and preparation
for war. The ritual preparations involved weeks or months
of abstaining from certain foods and total avoidance of
sexual contact with women. During battle the warrior
carried upon his person powerful protective charms; in
order to withstand contact with these objects, his body
had to be carefully prepared beforehand. Any man - sorcerer,
chief or commoner - who wishes to use or call upon the aid
of supernatural powers must first undergo a period of
preparation (gope), during which he fasts, avoiding all

99 Though there is no lack of material on Highlands
warfare - see Berndt 1964 - most of it is based on
secondhand accounts.

100 Matthiessen 1962; Gardner and Heider 1969.
heavy, 'cold' foods such as meat, fish, taro and the like. He may not drink cold water or allow it to touch any part of his body during this time, and he is forbidden sexual intercourse as this is believed to make the body 'cold'. The object of the preparation is to build up the body's resources of heat or power (isepu) so that it will not be harmed by contact with an object containing supernatural power (isepu). If a man so much as touches an object charged with supernatural power without the necessary precautions, its 'heat' will pierce his 'cold' body, causing immediate illness or death. The warrior who allowed no time for ritual preparation was thus compelled to go to battle without the benefit of magical protection. Informants say that the men were so fearful of being caught unawares that they would seclude themselves in the ufu at the first rumour of some future conflict, and immediately begin their ritual observances.

During the men's seclusion, the women would go to the gardens alone, or escorted by the old men and boys. When necessity forced the men to clear a new garden, they would complete the task as quickly as possible and hurriedly return to the ufu; most are said to have attended to such tasks before their seclusion. In peace time the men lived with their wives and helped them in the gardens, but it is said that many, after they had fathered one or two children, spent the rest of their active lives at the ufu, in constant readiness for war.

The picture informants paint is no doubt an exaggerated one, inspired by the rousing tales of former victories and valour told them by their fathers. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the seasonal cycle would allow the men to devote several months a year to warfare, without disrupting
the pattern of subsistence activities. Garden clearing, house construction and the like were undertaken only during the dry months; other male activities, such as tool making, preparing bark cloth and fashioning the various elaborate ornaments carried in battle and the magnificent feather headdresses worn for dancing, could have been performed during the seclusion in the ufu.

The manner in which war was conducted appears to have allowed those who wished to do so, to find constant employment in war. Genealogies, particularly of iso clan sections, often record the names of ancestors who either never married, or else married but had no offspring, because they devoted their lives to war. Stories of the famous Inawi war leader, Aisa Ou'u, tell of how he would go alone in search of some battle; if he could find none, he would prowl the no-man's land between Mekeo and Roro territory, stalking unsuspecting victims. Fighting took place between individual villages, between the two Mekeo tribes (the Pioufa and the Ve'e) and against the coastal tribes. The truly warlike iso lopia and his men could usually be sure of finding some fight they might join in. A war chief would not lightly initiate a battle, for if he were the instigator he was obliged to repay those who came to his assistance with an expensive series of feasts. In addition, he first had to secure the permission of the fa'aniou chief, who was always reluctant to start a war. The fa'aniou chief could also refuse permission for the war chief to act as the ally of another, as any such involvement could result in reprisals upon his own village, but he was unlikely to do so provided he was satisfied that a suitable payment, in the form of a grand feast, had been promised, for whatever meat was earned by the iso lopia was given to him.
On the basis of available evidence it is not possible to estimate exactly the proportion of time allocated to war, but it is evident that ritual preparation and the feasts that followed the battle, in addition to the fighting itself, could totally absorb a man’s energies and played an important part in the lives of all. The gap left by the removal of this complex of activities seems a large one to fill, but it must be realized that the cessation of tribal fighting had a cumulative, not an immediate effect.

Tribal fighting had been removed at a blow, but the rituals and ceremonies of war, which accounted for most of the time occupied by it, still remained, and continued for many years to play a significant part in the life of the community. The peace made with the government can have seemed no different, at first, to other agreements made in the past: villagers resumed their normal peace time occupations, without realizing that they would never again go out to battle. The great feasts held by the iso lopie continued long enough for the old men alive today to have witnessed them in their youth. Fais specialists are said to have employed their protective charms and spells during the Second World War. Rumours were abroad in December 1971 that all the fais and war chiefs should make ready to go to Port Moresby to counter a possible invasion of Papua by Indonesia. War magic and ritual are still preserved against the day when they will again be needed. Villagers say that all that dissuades them from settling scores in the old manner is the proximity of the government.

101 See below 223-4.
Much of the time formerly spent in preparation for war was eventually converted into leisure. The rituals necessitated by war meant that the men were confined to the ufu for long periods during which they rested, gossiped or occupied themselves with handicrafts. These times of case and leisure were spiced by the thought of the coming conflict or the possibility of an enemy raid, and were interspersed with shorter periods of intense activity in fighting, clearing gardens, building houses, hunting or preparing for a feast. Even when it finally became obvious that the justification for long intervals of comparative inactivity no longer existed, it is understandable that the men continued to follow, or to prefer, a mode of behaviour to which they had always been accustomed.

Possibly, for a time, more energy was devoted to feasting and peace time ceremony, but it seems unlikely that any elaboration of these practices took place. The feasts observed by Guis in the late 1890s are such carefully embellished and finished products that it seems impossible to regard them as a brief flowering of ceremonial following European contact; 102 certainly the pattern observable from that time on is one of decline. Whatever time was immediately available for other pursuits was probably absorbed by the new demands and activities introduced by the white man. Mission and government relied heavily on villagers to provide bearers to transport their supplies and to furnish timber and labour to build their stations. The mission needed labourers, teachers and catechists. The government insisted that villagers build roads and enforced 102 Guis 1936: 136-45.
new standards of village cleanliness: houses had to be replaced more often and cemeteries had to be cleared and maintained to satisfy its ideas of health and hygiene. Official reports make brief references to increased gardens and to the enthusiastic planting of the new varieties of vegetables and fruit introduced by the government.

Though it seems likely that the population would have increased after the imposition of government control, there is no evidence of increase until the late 1940s. With the ending of warfare, the death rate must have dropped; and it seems highly probable, as informants claim, that the birth rate increased as men found it no longer necessary to be in perpetual readiness for war. The introduction of more efficient tools, combined with the fact that there was now more freedom to work in the gardens, would suggest that people were able to produce more food to support a larger population. There were, however, certain limitations acting against any sudden increase. The death rate in Melanesian warfare is known not to have been very great, a single death being sufficient to satisfy a raiding party or to terminate an open confrontation. Any increase in the birth rate was limited by traditional restrictions over sexual intercourse until the previous child was approximately a year old. If the parents cohabited before the stipulated period, it was believed that the child would never develop properly. The fact that many people

103 BNG Annual Reports 1892-93: 51.
still obey these restrictions is evidenced by the ages of their children. Food production was dependent not only on the capacity of the men but also upon the women: though the men might have been able to clear larger gardens with steel axes, the women's ability to plant and maintain them had undergone no change. In common with other similar processes, the rise in population was the result of a slow accumulation of change.

Likewise, the removal of warfare struck no immediate blow to the social or political structure of the society. Though it was an important institution, war did not assume for the Mekeo the significance which it did, for example, among the Purari of the Papuan Gulf. When tribal warfare was forbidden to the Purari, the whole political and ceremonial structure of their highly complex society withered: even before the Second World War, much of the old way of life was already gone and the traditional political and social units were disintegrating.

In contrast to the Purari, war did not provide the cohesive force in Mekeo society, nor the centre around which the rest of the society was structured. The position of Mekeo leaders did not depend in any way upon war, their special powers came from an entirely different source. War involved elaborate ritual and ceremony, but it was not the only focus of such activity: a rich peace time culture

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104 The ages of children recorded in the Inawi household census bear this out: these ages were only estimates but firm statistical data could have been obtained by checking the estimated ages against the mission records of births.

105 Maher 1961: 36-55.
existed which centred around the *lopia fa'anui*.

Ultimate authority had always been held by the peace chief, and peaceful activities, at least in theory, were held to be superior to war. Far from irreparably damaging the fabric of society, the cessation of war allowed the reinforcement and underlining of certain important values. The lasting peace which had been established enhanced the ideal concept of authority, represented by the *lopia fa'aniu* and the social values associated with it - peace, harmony, generosity and goodwill. The present concept of chieftainship, and the emphatic insistence on its benign aspects, is, no doubt, largely a creation of the changing emphasis in values which the new situation brought about. Previously the concept had been more complex - the dark and light sides of the chieftainship being represented by the qualities exemplified in the war chief and the peace chief respectively.

The traditional structure of leadership was able to adjust without a great deal of difficulty to the imposition of control by a higher authority. Having turned the new situation to their advantage by using it to underline the beneficent aspect of their role, the traditional leaders adopted the attitude that nothing had really changed. They retained their authority and the new regime posed no threat to them, since it clearly shared the same aims. This illusion of stability and permanence was to survive several decades of slow, seemingly unimportant changes.
CHAPTER THREE

RELATIONS WITH THE WHITE REGIME 1906-1941: 'Before the war the Government asked the people to do too much work - now it's not so bad.'

VILLAGERS remember that in the years before the Second World War, in particular the 1920s and 1930s, the government treated them harshly and made excessive demands on them. It seems that many, if not the majority of Papuans were left much to themselves during these years, and that the white regime only occasionally intervened in village affairs. For some the migrant labour system provided more knowledge of the white man's world than the intermittent contacts with mission and government; others had close relations with missionaries, but rarely saw a patrol officer. Whatever the accuracy of this general impression, it is not true of the Mekeo's experience. They were subjected to constant pressure, particularly from the government. Convinced that the Mekeo's 'chronic laziness' alone stood in the way of economic development, the government was determined to use force to inculcate the necessary habits of industry and enterprise. Probably nowhere else in Papua was Murray's doctrine of 'salvation through enforced labour' more strongly adhered to or more stringently applied.

For example, the Purari of the Papuan Gulf. Maher 1961:45.

For example, the Kunai who inhabit the foothills of the Owen Stanley Ranges to the north-east of the Mekeo. Van Rijswijck 1967: 77-8.

The removal of the district headquarters to Yule Island in 1906 allowed a brief respite; for more than a decade the Neko became a comfortable administrative backwater. The region was now considered to be firmly under control, requiring at the most a routine patrol once every few months. Unless some village dispute erupted into violence, several months might pass without a single patrol disturbing the normal pattern of village life. Since government demands were few, people had little difficulty in meeting them: providing prior warning was given, roads could be quickly cleared, pig fences repaired and the village swept in readiness for the patrol officer's inspection. Reports of the early 1900s usually commented favourably on the state of villages and the conduct of the village constables. The standards of individual officers varied, of course; but should the newcomer find fault with the district, he soon settled matters to his own satisfaction.

The exploration of the ranges north of the Neko plain had begun in the late 1890s. Carriers from the coast and the Neko were used on mountain expeditions, which became more frequent as new areas were opened up. The mission, lacking the means to compel villagers to carry for them,

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4 Papua Annual Reports 1905-6: 28; 1907-8: 57; 1908-9: 60; 1913-14: 27.

5 This is also true of later years. When A. Liston-Blyth took over as ABM Kairuku in 1923 he compared the Neko unfavourably with the Northern District: Patrol to Kivori and Waima 17-19 Feb. 1923. A few months later he congratulated himself, 'I am more than pleased with the present condition of Neko villages and roads - they nearly approximate the N.D. and the advance lately is good.' Patrol to the Neko 22-27 Nov. 1923.
cut trails and employed pack animals to supply its mountain stations. The government, however, continued to rely solely on human porterage until the late 1920s. Though the coastal men did not perform well under mountain conditions, they were more reliable than the newly contacted mountain tribesmen and heavy calls were made on them. Occasionally the Makedo would show their dislike of this duty by deserting a patrol, but until the 1920s the government's requirements were usually met without protest.

Little attention was paid to the economic development of the region after MacGregor's retirement in 1898. The Hall Sound Company acquired a block of freehold in 1902 for a plantation - the only privately owned plantation ever established on Makedo land. Though fertile, much of the plain was swamp, and the arable land was not sufficient to allow European development on any large scale. Desultory efforts were made to enforce coconut planting under Native Regulations in the early 1900s. A report of 1912 observed that tracks on both sides of the river were now lined with newly planted coconut palms, but it seems that for the time being these trees served a decorative rather than an economic purpose.

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7 See, for example, Patrol to Mt Yule 16 May-15 July 1911.
8 MacGregor reported after his first visit to the region that land was not available for European settlement. British New Guinea Annual Reports 1889-90: 19.
9 Patrol to Waima and Makedo 27 Nov.-15 Dec. 1912.
The introduction of native taxation in 1919, combined with the Native Plantations Ordinance of the previous year, marked the commencement of a new policy towards native agriculture throughout Papua. The tax was conceived primarily as an incentive to engage villagers more actively in the cash economy. Regulations under which the planting of economic crops could be enforced had existed since MacGregor's time; the Plantations Ordinance was introduced as an alternative means of ensuring that villagers paid the tax. It provided that the government could establish plantations on Crown or native land, the produce of which would be shared equally by the cultivators and the government. All able-bodied men would be compelled to work on the plantation for sixty days a year and two months work would entitle a man to a full remission of his tax. During the 1920s field staff in many parts of Papua attempted to promote indigenous cash cropping under the new ordinance and earlier regulations. The results of this well intentioned but clumsy policy were not impressive. Experiments with new crops such as rice and cocoa had to be abandoned in most cases; more success was experienced with copra but the disastrous fall in copra prices in the late 1920s discouraged villagers and field staff alike. Before the outbreak of war, nearly half of the 112 Native Plantations proclaimed in the 1920s and 1930s had been rescinded. Two projects survived the war - the Sangara coffee plantations of the

11 Miles 1956: 316-20.
13 Ibid: 324.
Northern District and the Mkeo rice industry. 14

When the tax was first introduced many groups were exempted, or permitted to pay at reduced rates, as the only way for them to earn cash was by wage labour. The Mkeo were always required to pay the full amount and the maximum penalties were imposed on defaulters. The government was convinced that people would have no difficulty in raising their $1 per annum: they could make copra, sell garden produce or cultivate rice. 15 The mission had introduced rice cultivation in the early 1900s and by 1919 many villagers were planting rice for domestic use. 16 The government was keen to see it become a cash crop but field staff were doubtful whether the tax alone would be sufficient motivation. Connelly, the acting ARM, warned that the Mkeo had long been accustomed to an indolent way of life and would not readily undertake the labour to increase rice production when other, easier, means to earn cash were available to them. 17 His suggestion that the crop should be brought under Native Regulations was in line with the prevailing policies of enforced development 18 and was

14 Mair 1948: 90.

15 Patrol to the Mkeo 12-17 July 1924.

16 A patrol report of 1911 notes that a store house had been built at Inawi to store 'a large quantity of rice' grown under the mission's direction; Patrol to Mt Yule District 6-28 Oct. 1911. Village traditions also record the fact that rice cultivation was first introduced by the missionaries. Patrol officers estimated that approximately twenty tons of rice were harvested by village growers in 1919. Patrol to the coastal villages 6 Nov.-16 Dec. 1919.

17 Patrol to the coastal villages 6 Nov.-16 Dec. 1919.

18 Miles 1956: 318-27.
Throughout the 1920s a succession of ARMs persevered with compulsory rice growing. Villagers had produced, without supervision, between thirty-five and forty tons of paddy rice in the 1919-20 season. The next year many substantially increased plantings: Inawi had ten acres planted in April 1922, while Beipa had fifteen to twenty acres. A slump in interest coincided with the appointment of a new ARM, Liston-Blyth. People complained in 1923 that they previously planted a lot of rice but got nothing in return for it. Inawabui village was so disgusted with the situation that it would not even take the trouble to harvest its crop. As the administration had made no arrangements to sell the rice, whatever people produced above their subsistence requirement went to waste. Blyth's successor, Fowler, was not prepared to listen to excuses and took a much harder line: patrol reports of the mid-1920s are full of references to prosecutions against defaulters. The threat of gaol kept villagers working, but there was no other incentive, not even the tax, to produce a surplus which could not be sold;

19 Patrol to Waima, Kivori and Mapeo 4-25 May 1920. The crop was planted in December or January, at the beginning of the wet season, and harvested in June.

20 Patrol to Waima, Kivori and Mapeo 18-28 Apr. 1922.

21 Patrol to Boiibo and Mapeo 1-10 Feb. 1923.

22 Patrol to the Mapeo 16-26 July 1923.

23 See, for example, Patrol to Middle Mapeo District 3-8 June 1925; Patrol to the Mapeo 29 July-4 Aug. 1926.
in these years people earned their tax money not from rice, but by making copra or working as wage labourers. Despite the determination of men like Fowler, plantings seem to have decreased. Inawi, for example, had ten acres in 1922 but only five in 1927, while Aipeana had only three.

The tax was a very artificial stimulus at best; though it forced villagers to participate in cash cropping and wage labour, it failed to create any interest in these new activities. Villagers made no secret of their dislike of the measure. The ANM reported in February 1924 that the Mekeo as a body, convinced that the government could not gag them all, intended to refuse to pay their tax. Such rumours were common enough but appear to have had little foundation in fact. People parted with their money reluctantly, it is true, but the tax was always paid in the end. The first tax patrol of the year, sent out in January or February, usually collected only a fraction of the amount due but all had paid up by the second or third patrol.

The administration's attempts to force economic development coincided with its growing dependence on the Mekeo and other coastal people for carriers. As control over the scattered mountain tribes was strengthened, patrols lasting from two to five months became common, and in 1925

25 Patrol to the Mekeo district 14-20 May 1927.
26 Patrol to Moul 19-20 Feb. 1924.
27 Patrol to Goilala District 20 Feb.-6 Aug. 1918; Patrol to Kunimaipa Valley 15 May-7 July 1922; Patrol to Kunimaipa Valley 31 May-2 Dec. 1923; Patrol to Mafulu, Goilala, Ononghe, Kambisi, Kailapa and Omali 6 Feb.-13 Apr. 1924; Patrol to Ononghe, Kambisi and Omali 17 Nov. 1924-31 Jan. 1925.
a police camp was set up in the Goilala. The necessity of supplying the police camp and extended patrols from the coast, disrupted routine administration in other parts of the district and placed an intolerable burden on the Mekeo and Moro, who were obliged to provide carriers in ever-increasing numbers. A disgruntled AMM protested in 1927:

'KANBISI' Camp requirements interfere considerably with my other work in this district, and the natives are utterly disgusted over the continual call for carriers to the Mountains.

Coastal carriers transported supplies over the first leg of the journey from the coast until the first mountain settlements were reached. Patrol officers attempted to secure local carriers whenever possible, but often none could be found or proved so useless that the coastal men had to be retained for the entire trip.

These demands, in addition to compulsory rice growing and the tax, began to strain villagers' patience. For two decades they had supplied transport to the mountains; now they began to object. Patrol officers of the 1920s conceded that there might have been:

...worse carriers than the MEKEO & MORO, but they would indeed be hard to find.

Carriers deserted patrols, if given the least opportunity, and were likely to bolt at the first sign of danger; they grumbled about poor rations and heavy loads, and fussed

29 Patrol to the Mekeo District 14-20 May 1927.
30 Patrol to Mara 18-24 May 1929.
over minor injuries sustained during the journey. European officers cheerfully ridiculed them for behaviour which seemed undignified and effete. The tone of the following extract is typical:

I was able to dispense with the whole of my Makeo carriers. The weather was very cold, and so glad were the Makeo people to be relieved, that they took to their heels immediately I had announced the good news to them, and there followed the spectacle of L/Cpl Serega chasing these men with a bag of rice for their upkeep, but his calls only made them run faster. The Makeo people have a real horror of the cold mornings in the Mountains, and I was glad to get rid of them. They have no heart.

Yet the same reports reveal that the carriers were often exposed to appalling conditions:

The rain continued heavily and cold blasts of wind from the Kunimaipa did not improve the intense cold. Everyone suffered considerably, more especially the carriers, who in the ensuing three hours before camp was pitched at 7,000 ft., became so weak because of the cold and hunger that numbers collapsed and had to be relieved of their loads.

Following the completion of such patrols, the district office often received rumours of serious illnesses or even of deaths occurring amongst the returned carriers.

31 See, for example, Patrol to Goliola 14 Jan.-10 Feb. 1922; Patrol to the Kunimaipa Valley 31 May-2 Dec. 1923; Patrol to Ononghe, Kambisi and Omali 17 Nov. 1924-31 Jan. 1925; Patrol to Karuama and Loloipa 29 Nov.-22 Dec. 1925.


33 Patrol to Kunimaipa, Loloipa and Mt Yule 19 Dec. 1929-3 Feb. 1930.

34 Patrol to Karuama and Loloipa 29 Nov.-22 Dec. 1925.
Undoubtedly the coastal men, who were accustomed to flat country and a hot, humid climate, found the mountains very hard going: the full effects of exhaustion, exposure and of injuries caused by falls on the steep, slippery tracks were probably often not evident until the men returned home. Some officers made light of these claims but it is evident that deaths and injuries did occur.

During a patrol to the Kunimaipa and Karuama districts in December 1926, one carrier was killed and one wounded in skirmishes with newly contacted mountain tribesmen. 35

Field staff were concerned primarily with getting a job done and had no time in emergencies to employ gentle methods. Headquarters was aware, however, that its policies had placed an unreasonable burden on the people of the district, in particular the Mekoe and Boro. Murray admitted that he had always looked upon the system of human porterage used in Papua as 'rather a disgrace'. 36 Steps to alleviate the situation were taken in 1926. Murray announced in the 1926-27 Subdistrict Annual Report that carriers employed in the Kairuku Subdistrict would in future be paid for their services and that a mule transport system would shortly be

35 Patrol to Kunimaipa and Karuama Districts 3-30 Dec. 1926. The previous year the ANM investigated an incident in which eight carriers died on patrol. It appears that a mountain village afflicted by an epidemic of measles was raided at night to obtain carriers. Twelve men were taken and a few hours later eight of them died, apparently from the effects of the disease combined with exposure. Patrol to Fane 8-20 Apr. 1927. The officer responsible for the raid later resigned. Papua Annual Reports 1926-27: 12.

introduced. Neither measure succeeded in solving the problem and the usual complaints concerning carriers continued. Villagers' attitudes were little changed by the inducement of cash payments for mountain journeys. One harassed officer complained:

Even at the rate of 1/- or 2/- a day they run away. I would advise that all future parties who may wish to go up the mountain road, come here with signed-on carriers from elsewhere. 38

The establishment of the mule service in 1927 afforded some relief, but the pack animals alone could not cope with the growing traffic between Kairuku and the mountain districts. In the mid-1930s ARM Thompson, who was anxious that his new rice project should not be disrupted, employed only prisoners on mountain patrols. 39 But it was not until the late 1940s, when air services to the Goilala commenced, that the Mekeo and Roro were finally freed from this wearisome and unpopular corvée.

New efforts were made in the 1930s to establish a Mekeo rice industry. The haphazard methods of the previous decade were replaced with an organized plan under the guidance of one man, W.H.H. Thompson, who was ARM Kairuku from 1929 until after the Second World War. When the world-wide fall in copra prices began to affect village

37 Kairuku Subdistrict Annual Reports 1926-27.

38 Patrol to Nara 18-24 May 1929.

39 Patrol to Roro and Mekeo 14-23 May 1935. It is not clear how long Thompson continued to use prisoners on mountain patrols; another reference to the use of prisoners occurs in Kairuku Patrol Report 11, 1939-40.
producers in 1930 and 1931, the Mekeo, like most other Papuans, found difficulty in raising their tax. 40 In many parts of the country there was no alternative to copra; the earlier efforts to promote native agriculture had to be slackened or abandoned 41 but no such respite from the government's heavy-handed economic policy was allowed the Mekeo. Thompson was adamant on this point:

I let the MEKEO know that they would always have to pay the tax. Rice is no trouble for them to plant and they can always make their money that way. That is the solution of their difficulties in the future over the tax, they MUST PLANT more rice or go to gaol.42

Previously villagers had grown rice in their gardens; Thompson instructed them to clear special rice plantations or 'companies' which he placed in the charge of the senior chiefs of each village. 43 To ensure that every stage of the cultivation was properly carried out he kept a close watch on the people, sending out his police to supervise the work when he himself could not do so. The first crop was harvested in June 1932. Villagers sold ninety-four tons of paddy rice to the government, which shipped it to Port Moresby for milling; 44 after transport and milling costs were deducted, growers received a total of £389. 45

40 Patrol to the Mekeo and Roro Districts 9-17 Jan. 1931.
41 Miles 1956: 323-6.
42 Patrol to Mekeo and Waima 8-18 May 1931.
43 Patrol to the Mekeo Villages 10-19 Nov. 1931.
44 Kairuku Subdistrict Annual Reports 1931-32.
Field staff optimistically estimated that the 230 acres planted for the next season would yield 300 tons of paddy.  

The supervision of the project had now become so time-consuming that a European manager was appointed. The supervisor's salary and the costs of a truck (purchased to collect rice from the villages) were to be deducted from the amount paid to growers. In May 1933 villagers harvested 300 tons of grain but sold only 191 tons to the government. The additional costs now borne by the scheme, plus a fall in prices resulted in growers receiving an amount slightly smaller (£336) than they were paid the previous year, though they had sold nearly twice as much rice. People were now holding back a large proportion of the crop for their own use, as the women had discovered that it was a highly profitable and easily portable commodity to exchange at the regular markets held with the Roro.

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46 Patrol to Waima, Kivori and Mekeo 30 Jan.-2 Feb. 1933.

47 The manager was appointed in time to supervise planting for the 1932-33 season. The first reference to his presence in the area occurs in Patrol to the Waima, Kivori and Mekeo 30 Jan.-2 Feb. 1933.

48 Patrol to the Mekeo 13-20 Dec. 1934; Kairuku Subdistrict Annual Reports 1933-34.

49 Patrol to the Mekeo 18-20 July 1933.

50 Kairuku Subdistrict Annual Reports 1933-34. The figures given tend to vary from report to report as some quote figures for milled rice, others for unmilled grain.

51 Kairuku Subdistrict Annual Reports 1934-35.

52 Patrol to the Mekeo 18-20 July 1933.
Large areas were planted in November and December 1933, but of an estimated 240 tons of paddy harvested in June, only 100 were sold to the government. After costs were met a disappointing total of £251 remained; as a result many growers found themselves without sufficient cash to pay their tax. Evidently most had assumed, on the grounds of past experience, that if they sold ten bags of rice they would receive enough cash to cover their tax. Villagers were puzzled and angry when the government took their ten bags and demanded in addition that they pay the full 20/- tax. Thompson attempted to explain the situation to them, pointing out that they had really brought the crisis on their own heads by not selling enough rice to the government to allow it to cover costs and pay a reasonable profit to the grower. Nevertheless he fully sympathized with their disappointment and confusion:

I can't see how they are going to pay the balance of their tax; they say they were asked to plant rice and now the Government has a lot of it and still they want to put them in gaol for not being able to pay their full tax of 20/-. I am inclined to agree with the natives

53 Patrol to the Mekeo and the Mountain Road 21-28 June 1934.
54 Kairuku Subdistrict Annual Reports 1934-35.
55 Ibid.
56 Patrol to the Mekeo 13-20 Dec. 1934.
57 Ibid.
and think something should be done to 'save our face' in their eyes. It is a great pity. 58

The project was allowed to lapse for a season; the truck and the European supervisor were removed, little clearing was done in November and December 1934, and no attempt was made to force planting. 59 When people once again had difficulty in paying their tax, Thompson took the opportunity to suggest that rice was the only solution to their problems. Arrangements were made with the mission to buy the crop and the police were sent out in November to start villagers clearing new areas. 60 Despite the people's recent experiences, no prosecutions against defaulters were necessary. 61 After harvesting a bumper crop in May 1936 growers sold seventy-two tons to the mission, 62 which ran its own mill and purchased rice from individuals in the village or at its mill, unencumbered by the expense of the manager's salary and the running of the truck, the project now prospered.

One hundred and fifty tons of rice were sold to the mission in 1938, realising £520 for the growers. 63

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58 Ibid. Miles' explanation of the failure of the project in 1935, which is drawn entirely from the published Annual Reports, is misleading. The scheme collapsed primarily because it could not support the expense of the manager's salary and the costs of running a truck. Miles 1956: 325.


60 Patrol to the Mekeo 5-9 Aug. 1935; Patrol to Mekeo 22-5 Nov. 1935.

61 Patrol to the Mekeo 22-5 Nov. 1935.


63 Patrol to the Mekeo 6-10 Oct. 1938.
Police supervision of planting, clearing and harvesting continued, but Thompson rarely, if ever, had to invoke the penal sanctions available to him. 64 There were even signs that the people were taking an independent interest in the crop. Thompson observed in January 1939 a keen competitive spirit between the different villages over which had cleared the largest plantation and people informed him that they had planted larger areas than ever before. 65 Much of this interest he attributed to the actions of the village constables:

Some of the Village Constables do good work in the rice planting and I feel sure that it is due to their efforts that the rice is a success, this of course combined with the watchful eye of the Government. 66

Several private plots of rice, quite separate from the communal 'companies', were planted for the 1939-40 season by village constables and other individuals. 67

Thompson took more trouble to understand the Mekeo than his predecessors. His greater understanding of the local situation is revealed by his involvement of village leaders in the rice project. Having given the senior chiefs responsibility for the plantations, Thompson explained to them that the crop was their property and that they could sell as much of it as they wished to the

64 DDS & MA to Director DASF, 22 Nov. 1946, DASF File 1-2-59 Pt 1.
65 Patrol to the Mekeo District 25-9 Jan. 1939.
66 Ibid.
67 Patrol to the Mekeo 30 Oct.-22 Nov. 1939.
government. He even suggested that they should place taboos on the rice so that it would not all be consumed in domestic use. Incidents such as his decision to make a gift of meat to the builders of a government resthouse, after learning that this was the practice normally followed by the owner of a new house, demonstrate his desire to respect local custom. Undoubtedly he attempted to see the villager's point of view, and he paid close attention to the explanations of local attitudes given by his Roro clerk and interpreter, Leo. Unlike previous officers, Thompson saw nothing seditious in the Makeo's dislike of the tax:

I cannot help having a certain amount of sympathy with the Makeo & Roro in his attitude of intense hatred of the tax, it is of course a platitude to affirm that no tax is popular anywhere, but they have reasons for their dislike. Papua for him does not exist, he cares nothing for anything outside his own village and his own tribe and probably never will. We come along and take his money, a few Native Medical Patrols and a spear-pump or two are the only outward and visible signs to him of any benefits received in the last 16 years or so of the tax. In truth they do not get much more, apart from a certain amount of medical aid from us, than they did before the tax came into being.

68 Patrol to the Makeo 10-19 Nov. 1931.
69 Patrol to Makeo and Roro 12-23 Jan. 1932.
70 Patrol to Makeo and Roro 21-9 May 1930.
71 See, for example, Patrol to Waima, Kivori and Makeo 30 Jan.-2 Feb. 1933; Patrol to the Makeo 11-23 May 1935; Patrol to the Makeo 25-9 Mar. 1935.
72 Patrol to the Makeo 11-23 May 1935.
He deplored the lack of a more effective incentive to earn money, such as a well stocked trade store in close proximity to the Mekeo (at this time the nearest trade stores were on Yule Island or on the coast). 73

Though he regretted the use of force, even Thompson did not doubt its necessity in the absence of other incentives. Once the rice was harvested and sold he found that villagers were pleased with the results: cries of 'Rice loipano', the rice is good, would be heard everywhere. 74 Yet police supervision was always necessary to ensure that the crop was planted. He marvelled at the 'weird mentality' of people who had to be driven out to start clearing their plantations but then carried on happily and enthusiastically with the work. 75 A patrol officer supervising the project in 1938 reported:

...I was amazed at the spirit of the natives after being sent out to work. Instead of the disgruntled spirit one would expect, these natives invariably were enjoying the work and the areas could generally be located by the singing and shouting of the natives at work. 76

Long experience convinced Thompson that the people did not resent his policy of enforced planting, but actually responded best to this method. He became one of the strongest

73 Patrol to the Mekeo 8-13 Oct. 1931. A trade store was set up near Jesubaibua village in 1933; Patrol to the Mekeo 8-14 June 1933. A later report refers to a 'well established store near Jesubaibua' run by Steamship's Trading Company; Patrol to Paitana, Waima and Mekeo 5-15 June 1939.

74 Patrol to Kivori, Waima and Mekeo 11-19 May 1936.

75 Patrol to Waima, Kivori, Mekeo and Kubuna 27 Oct. 1936.

76 Patrol to Waima, Kivori and Mekeo 5-17 Oct. 1938.
advocates of the view that the Mekeo had to be compelled to work for their own good, believing that compulsion would be necessary for at least a generation. 77 When plans were being made after the war to revise the rice scheme, he solemnly warned against removing the penal sanctions under which it had always operated. 78

The Mekeo are quoted by Healy as an example of an administratively 'hard' people at this time. 79 It is certainly true that many government officers, particularly of the 1920s, considered the Mekeo difficult to handle but when the evidence is examined in detail little justification for this view can be found. Apart from one brief, violent outbreak of cult activities in 1941, 80 one looks in vain for any 'incidents' or rebellion against the government. Villagers never refused in a body to pay tax, as patrol officers always seemed to fear they would; individuals avoided carrying if they could, but the village as a whole never attempted to stand in the patrol officer's way. As in earlier years, the only resistance the government encountered was passive and unorganized.

Healy observes that the administration felt that there was something radically 'wrong' with, or potentially

77 Patrol to Waima, Kivori, Mekeo and Kubuna 27 Oct. 1936.
78 DDS & MA to Director DASF, 22 Nov. 1946, DASF File 1-2-6P Pt 1.
80 See below: 154ff.
dangerous about the Mekeo. Prior to the Second World War when communications were slow and unreliable and a mere handful of police and European officers controlled the entire Kairuku Subdistrict, a comparatively large, highly concentrated population such as the Mekeo was always a potential trouble spot. Had the people become restive it would have been extremely difficult to deal with them. The constant pressures exerted on the Mekeo and the clumsy, repressive methods used to implement government policy, gave villagers good reason for discontent. These circumstances probably explain why field staff were usually so apprehensive about the response they would encounter: aware that their demands were excessive, they were anxious and unsure of their ability to cope with the situation should a village of four or five hundred people rise against them. Consequently close attention was paid to rumours of impending defiance, and any signs of unwillingness to comply with the government's wishes were regarded with deep suspicion. Those officers who described the Mekeo as 'difficult' did so primarily because they felt villagers did not respond with sufficient alacrity to their orders - an attitude which is clearly revealed in a comment by A. Lyston-Blyth, ARM Kairuku in the early 1920s:

The native is a different type [from those of the Northern district], more educated, and lazier, and far too much inclined to try to evade their village duties on the score of being Christians, they do not understand that an order is an order as the Northern man does, and it requires continuous telling and driving to get anything out of them at all....

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81 Healy 1962: 622.
82 Patrol to Kivori and Waima 17-19 Feb. 1923.
The tractable 'native' knew that an order was an order' and did not seek to question it; those like the Makeo, who dared to complain or performed their duties with a visibly bad grace, were considered not merely difficult, but potentially dangerous. The administration always seemed to have assumed that the Makeo reluctantly shouldered the yoke of European control and were only waiting for the first opportunity to rid themselves of it.

Villagers gave vivid descriptions of the pre-war years - especially of the 1920s and 1930s, when today's elders were young men in their prime. In respect to detail, their accounts agree closely with official reports: the difference lies in the interpretation each side puts on the same events. The government had been convinced that its policies would ultimately improve the people's way of life. Villagers, even in retrospect, could see nothing of advantage to themselves in the tasks imposed on them.

If the tax benefited anyone, it was the government.

An Inawi elder commented:

The Government wanted to get money, so they wanted money from the people. The people were saying that the money is made by Europeans so better to give them back what they made.83

A similar opinion was expressed at Aipeana:

Myself, I don't know the reason why we paid tax. We only know that the Village Constable told us to pay but we didn't know the reason why.

We got nothing for the tax. We were just afraid of being put in gaol, so we paid it.84


field staff had always stressed that there was no difficulty for the Makao to find ways to raise cash; in contrast the old men emphasize how hard it was for them to earn money and how unreasonable the government's attitude seemed to them:

They just brought the tax into our area without making the way for us to get money. Therefore they were mistaken in this. At that time we had no coffee, no copra, and no other crops to get money but they expected us to pay the tax.85

Another informant declared:

I don't know why the Government forced us to pay tax. We used to wonder why they asked us that when we didn't have any money.86

The oldest men recalled that they were not made to pay tax until two or three years after it was first introduced; even so, few of them were prepared to pay when their turn came. Some sold their dogstooth necklace or shell armbands to the parish priest in order to get the money; others were saved from gaol at the last minute by relatives running after the tax patrol to pay them off. Unmarried youths usually earned their first tax money by working as casual labourers on the mission plantation, Malera, or on one of the several privately owned plantations to the east of the district. Until the introduction of the tax, the Makao had shown themselves extremely reluctant to sign on as indentured labourers. Even under pressure from the tax, they would accept terms of no longer than six months or a year, and then only on plantations close to home. Most men were unwilling to leave the village at all once they were

married men produced sun-dried copra or made periodic trips around the local plantations selling betel nut to the workers. The experiences related by Aua Vi'i of Aipeana are typical of those described by most informants:

When I had to pay my first tax Father Vitale lent me £1 to pay my tax because I had been helping him. I was helping Father by making fences for the pigs and cows. Next year I went to work at Ungabunga plantation for three months and I got £1.2.0. Also we were paid with rations. Then I worked there for another three months because my first pay I gave £1 to Father Vitale, to pay back the money he loaned me, and 2/- to my mother. Then the next year I went to Yule Island and signed on for one year to work for the mission. I milked the cows. I kept some money from working at Yule to pay my tax. When I had finished that money I heard that some people were selling betel nut at Kanosea, so I took some to sell there. I got about 10/- or £1 for a bag and that is how I paid my tax. This was after I was married. Also I made copra and sold it at Sivota and then later at Paganina. Sometimes I grew rice and sold it at Irlanga and got money to pay my tax.97

This continual round of activities to earn tax money was nothing but an imposition, an unwelcome disruption of the normal course of village life: people had little or no desire to acquire cash for other ends. They devoted to copra production and wage labour only the minimum time necessary to earn their £1 per annum. Few, if any, thought of making larger quantities of copra, or of spending more than six months to a year on a plantation in one stretch. Men would return to their villages after a few months plantation work, saving their wages to cover at least two years tax. When supplies were exhausted they would reluctantly 'sign on' once

again. The returning workers sometimes purchased trade
store items such as a mosquito net, an axe or a blanket,
but informants stressed that money was far too hard to come
up to waste on luxuries:

If we found £2 we kept it to pay two years' 
tax. We didn't buy tea or sugar or flour
but just kept the money for tax and we ate
only our village food. 88

People were not uninterested in the things that cash could
buy them, but the effort necessary to acquire money was simply
not worth the trouble to them. At the rate of 1 1/2d per
pound, which was the price local traders paid for copra
in the late 1920s, 89 several weeks continuous labour were
necessary for a man to produce £1 worth of sun-dried copra.
The young man who was forced to abandon the gay and carefree
life of an o'one 90 for the unaccustomed drudgery of plantation
labour, found the small cash payment he received at the end
of twelve months no worthwhile remuneration.

The tax, failing to promote any spontaneous interest
in the cash economy, served merely to create a sort of
vicious circle - the threat of gaol driving the people to
participate in new activities which they disliked, in order
to earn money which they did not want, to pay a tax which they
did not wish to pay and from which they saw no advantage
themselves.

Compulsory rice growing was seen in much the same
terms as the tax: it involved a lot of work and in the end

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89 Patrol to the Mekeo and Roro 16-25 Jan. 1930.
90 See above: 48.
only the government profited:

I had to work on the rice, there was too much work to be done so I didn't like it. After the rice was harvested, in order to keep it safely, we had to collect imou and stitch them together to make a container to store the rice. This took a long time and it had to be ready before the harvesting or the rice might be spoiled by the rain. The people were tired of the rice and they were angry with the Government for making them grow rice. I don't know why the Government made the people grow rice, probably the prisoner and workers at Kairuku were short of rations so the Government wanted the rice. Before the War the Government asked the people to do too much work - now its not so bad.  

Some informants could not remember ever being paid for their rice and denied that they grew it to pay the tax. Others had clearer memories of the rice scheme in the 1930s; they recalled that at first they were given a good price for their rice but after one or two seasons the government decided not to pay them, though it took the crop and insisted that the people paid their tax money in full. Puzzled by the government's apparent change of heart, many people suspected that they had been deliberately misled:

We don't know why the Government didn't pay for the rice. We were afraid of being put in gaol so we didn't complain about it. Therefore after that we didn't want to grow more rice to give to the Government but we just grew a little for ourselves. Some of my people thought that the Government was tricking us and telling us lies and taking our money. I think that too.  

Of all the tasks imposed by the pre-war administration, carrying was the most disliked. The old men gave lively
descriptions of the horrors of the mountain patrols which they experienced as young men. The cold, wet weather, the steep, muddy tracks, the heavy loads, the meagre rations, the lack of any shelter against the wind and rain at night, the ferocity of the mountain tribes - all combined to make these patrols nightmare journeys:

The cargoes were very heavy, we had to keep on carrying all through the day, we hated climbing the hills and the muddy places and the rain and the cold. Some people got sick up there but medicine was given to them when they reached the mountain stations or when they got home, so they got better - but some died. I hurt my ankle, it was all swollen up and I couldn't walk on it properly but the sister gave me some medicine. During my father's time one Oaisaka man died but during my time nobody from this village died but only got sick. People from other villages did die.93

Another informant exclaimed:

Everything about the carrying seemed bad to us! The road was muddy, the loads were very heavy, the food was not enough for us, there was no place for us to sleep - so I can't say which was the worst thing.94

Villagers remember the introduction of the mule service but declare that it did little to help things as the volume of goods being transported to the mountains kept increasing. Some men claimed that they went to the mountains only a few times because they always hid themselves in the bush when the police came to recruit carriers; others admitted that they deserted patrols, or protested by refusing to go any further. But most informants argued that there was little point in trying to avoid carrying: somebody had to go and

if one man refused, his brother or his uncle might be taken instead; in any case he would be taken to gaol when he was caught. There were ways, however, to get even with an over zealous patrol officer. Informants describe with much laughter how the stronger men would see that heaviest loads were taken by the smallest, weakest men, and then themselves deliberately walk as slowly as possible. Often they would steal the food from the boxes they carried, replacing it with stones so that the loss would not be noticed until the boxes were opened. It is difficult to determine how often an individual was called upon to carry. Informants' estimates vary, but the following statement, though it exaggerates to emphasize the point, accurately reflects the sentiments of the majority:

We always had to carry - up and down, up and down, every year while I was a young man. Sometimes mountain carriers helped us. I went about a hundred times.95

In an article entitled 'The Distance between the Government and the Governed', J.P. McAuley argues that the pre-war reliance on human porterage in the Kairuku Subdistrict was largely responsible for creating the 'floor of congealed resentment' against which relations with the government operated in the 1950s.96 Clearly the Mekeo had ample cause to complain of the pre-war policy of enforced labour. The old men make their dislike of the tax, carrying and compulsory rice growing perfectly plain; yet the tone of their accounts is hardly what McAuley, or any other outsider, might expect.

95 I.O., Inawi
One looks in vain for any real venom or resentment in their statements. Informants regarded as amusing or simply foolish suggestions that the people might have contemplated some sort of resistance against the government's measures. The elders insist that the chiefs always supported the village constable in urging the people to meet the government's demands. People hated carrying, it is true, but they recognized the necessity of the measure and did not feel that they were being victimized:

Every village in this area had to carry, not only the Mekeo, we were all treated the same. The Government had to get cargoes carried as some Government and Mission stations were in the mountains and who would bring the food to them to eat? So the Government told us to carry the food for them.97

This acceptance of the government's actions underlies all accounts. One informant patiently explained:

I didn't think anything about paying the tax - they told us to pay the tax, so we paid it.98

Another succinctly summed up forty years experience of growing rice for the government:

I don't know why they made us grow rice, but whenever they asked to grow rice, we did it.99

Thompson had noted at the time that villagers did not appear to resent compulsion.100 Surprisingly, the views which people express in retrospect seem to support his observations.

98 Ibid.
100 See above: 132.
Villagers did not willingly undertake the tasks imposed on them; they had to be bullied or coaxed into action. They themselves would not deny the fact. What is important in their eyes is that they did pay the tax, did carry and did plant rice - despite their distaste for these activities. By acknowledging the authority of the white regime people had both accepted and imposed obligations. Traditionally, those in authority possessed the right to command obedience and to require certain services or duties but they did not use these powers capriciously or for their own aggrandizement. The rights of authority were balanced by responsibilities. Though the chief controlled the labour and economic resources of the clan, he employed his privileges not to feed himself and his entourage, but to give feasts which were seen to benefit the whole clan. In these terms, the government's right to make certain demands was accepted but something was expected in return. In the first years of contact the government had played a role not inconsistent with the traditional ideals; by the 1920s this was no longer so. Villagers found it difficult to understand why they should be burdened with tasks which were of no interest or benefit to themselves; yet if the government was sufficiently pressing they finally gave in to its demands.

The question of compulsory labour and the use of force needs to be put in proper perspective. People make much of their fear of going to gaol, stressing that defiance was unthinkable in the face of certain and severe punishment. Awareness of the real-politik which dominates colonial relationships tends to obscure for the outsider the inference

101 See above: 95.
behind such statements. It must be kept in mind that the lopis dealt out much harsher and more final retribution; the society endorsed the right of authority to enforce its will. Without the power to compel obedience, the government would have commanded scant respect. In this sense, Thompson was correct in claiming that villagers did not resent being turned out to work on the rice plantations (though this is not to say that force served as an effective incentive to economic development). In retrospect villagers condemn the government not for what it did, but rather for what it neglected to do. They did not object to the use of force per se but to the government's avoidance of its responsibilities to them. Though they had met their obligations by complying with the demands of the white regime, it had shown little concern for their welfare, and had offered no recompense for their labours.

The requests of the mission were seen as essentially no different from those of the government. The government insisted that villagers grow rice and pay tax, the mission asked people to go to church and send their children to school: one was government, the other mission work. This attitude is indicated in comments, frequently heard today, that many of the old ways were abandoned as a 'favour' to the missionaries. People assert that though they saw no reason to give up their customs, the parish priest pleaded with them for so long that finally, to please him, they gave in. Villagers had no interest, on their own account, in the activities introduced by the white regime. Given the choice, they would have preferred not to have gone out to work as

102 See above: 23-6.
wage labourers and not to have sent their children to school: they did these things only because they were compelled or persuaded to do so.

The mission also found the people unresponsive, though it demanded far less than the government and relied on persuasion not force to implement its policies. Initially, missionaries had no difficulty in gaining access to village communities but after a decade or so, they began to feel that their efforts had made little or no impact. Parish priests observed a disconcerting slackness and indifference in their flocks. This dissatisfaction was, at least in part, a symptom of the stage of development which the mission had reached.

By the early 1900s its territorial expansion was almost complete and the excitement of opening up new fields for conversion was over. Though the recently contacted tribes in the mountains still offered plenty of scope for proselytizing zeal, the time had come to take stock of the situation and consolidate the initial achievements—a need underlined by a change in leadership. Forced by ill health to leave Papua, Archbishop Navarre transferred full executive authority to Boismenu in January 1908. The young bishop saw the formation of a vigorous, active Christianity as the mission's most important immediate task. Converts, he felt, had been too easily won; too little had been required of them thus producing:

...des chrétiens indifférents, flasques et mous, réfractaires aux devoirs chrétiens presque autant que des païens.105

104 Ibid: 352.
105 Ibid: 363.
He outlined a new method of approach which would rationalize the inconsistencies of former policies and regularize the methods of conversion. By providing more thorough instruction, and by subjecting existing and prospective converts to stricter conditions, he hoped to give villagers a better understanding of their new faith. A regular program of religious instruction was to be introduced as part of Sunday worship; gradually people were to be accustomed to the yearly cycle of church festivals, and greater efforts were to be made to encourage converts to participate in communion and confession. No adult in good health would in future be allowed baptism until he had undergone a full twelve months period of instruction and preparation. Special emphasis was to be placed upon the Christian ideal of marriage; converts who persisted in irregular unions were to be excluded from attending church and from working for the mission. Above all, new efforts would be made to develop secular education with the aim of creating an educated Christian elite among the youth, which would provide a solid basis for the faith in the future.

The success of these measures was limited. The missionaries themselves were spurred on to greater endeavour, new schools were opened and a significant increase in attendance of church sacraments was achieved but there were still few signs of any spontaneous piety or real commitment to the faith, particularly among the coastal and plains villages. The hardy mountain tribes proved more difficult at first, but once converted they demonstrated far greater fervour. Even

so, Dupeyrat observed that by the 1930s mountain tribes living in close proximity to central mission stations had lost something of their initial ardour. 108

Though a more vigorous campaign of action was followed after 1908, the mission remained tolerant and lenient in its approach. Attempts were made to dissuade villagers from customs which seemed unusually harsh or harmful, such as the restrictions placed on widows and widowers; but there was little in the customs of the Makoa and Aoro which the missionaries found objectionable - unlike the mountain tribes, who indulged in cannibalism, infanticide and other practices offensive to European sensibility. Traditional dancing, the bane of so many missionaries, was not opposed and had at first even been tolerated as part of religious ceremonies, though this was discontinued after 1908. 109 The catholics were opposed to sorcery, and recognized the village sorcerer as one of their most dangerous enemies, nevertheless they swiftly realized that any open confrontation of the sorcerers was more likely to hinder than help their cause. 110 A more inflexible line was taken on marriage. An attack on plural marriage was made almost as soon as the mission arrived in the area: Archbishop Navarre had tried to intervene in the marital affairs of local leaders like Maino of Aipeana and Pago of Inawi even in the early 1890s. 111 The firmer action taken after 1908 on this issue was not without effect:

109 SHM Lettre Pastorale No.5, 1908.
110 See above: 102.
according to Dupeyrat, there were in 1933 only sixty-seven irregular marriages among 1,600 Mekeo catholics. 112

Rowley has suggested that the impact of Christian missions in New Guinea can be partly explained in terms of the messianic appeal which the missionaries' teachings held; they seemed to offer 'a way of being like the white man'. 113 There is, as Rowley argues, a similarity in the basic assumptions made by magical and religious etiologies concerning the effect of supernatural forces over material events 114 but the ways in which different cultures attempt to control and placate these forces are manifold, as are the means of transmitting such knowledge. Villagers might well reason that the white man's devotion to cricket or his preoccupation with shuffling pieces of paper in an office are important rituals which form part of his control over the material world, but this does not necessarily mean that the ritual which he does actually employ - prayer, sacraments and worship - are at once recognized as such, or are accepted to be the real methods he uses. The Mekeo expected that the white man would eventually reveal his secrets: both mission and government had arrived bearing promises of a new way of life and their power to fulfil these claims was proven by the infinitely superior weapons and material goods they brought with them. But these hopes were not placed exclusively on the mission: in fact people seem to have expected more from the government, which exacted more from

112 Dupeyrat 1935: 371 fn 1, combined figures for District de Velfaa and District de Inaouaía.
113 Rowley 1965: 140.
them and was obviously the more powerful entity. Villagers had little reason to believe that the specific ways and means of the white man's ritual would be revealed to a church congregation or a classroom full of children. Stories (isonioni) explaining the origin of different types of magic are told in public but the actual means of executing them - the necessary spell (moga) and potions (fua) - are passed from one individual to another in strictest secrecy, usually in accordance with the accepted principles of hereditary succession. In the past there was no initiation of groups into the ritual secrets of the clan such as occurred in the puberty rites of some Melanesian societies. 115

Observing that their efforts achieved less result as time passed, mission and government concluded that the fault lay in the obdurate nature of the people themselves. The Mkeo, for their part, saw the things required by the white man merely as impositions; they were still waiting for the benefits he had promised. They continued to hope that ultimately both mission and government would fulfil their promises - a hope which was not to be finally abandoned for another two decades. The village leaders still supported the government and urged their people to obey it, even though the original concept of co-operation and of a unity of purpose between the two hierarchies of authority was now much more difficult to maintain than it had been in the first years of contact. But beneath the surface, tensions were building up which briefly found expression in a form challenging both the European and the traditional order.

115 Allen 1967: refers to the Mkeo 75-6.
OCTBREAKS of the so-called 'Vailala Madness' occurred in the Mekeo in 1929 and again in 1941. The earlier movement originated on the coast and only briefly touched the inland villages. Reports reached Kairuku Subdistrict Office in August 1929 that the Roro and Waiima had been overcome by the characteristic 'head-on-round' hysteria and were erecting 'wireless posts' in their villages to contact the spirits of the dead. ABN Thompson learnt that the cult leader, Here Ikupu of Waiima, had toured the coast and the Mekeo a few months before, preaching that goods sent by the ancestors on coastal steamers were being intercepted by the Europeans as villagers could not read the shipping papers: when this deception was revealed all the white men would be driven out of the country. The Roro and Waiima villages had feted Here, loading him with gifts of pigs and other food.

Thompson was determined that these activities should go no further. He promptly arrested Here and his 'chief disciple', Arawai Aihi of Kiviore, sentencing them to four and two months gaol respectively for spreading lying reports. Under police guard, Here accompanied Thompson on a patrol through the affected villages: the 'wireless posts' were cut down and Thompson explained to the people that the cult prophets were not mad but imposters who had robbed them of their pigs and valuables.

Here had obtained few converts in the Mekeo.

His main supporter was Auki of Inawi, who reportedly had

116 The following account of the cult is based on Thompson, Report 1929.

117 Incorrectly spelt Auka in the report.
told his people not to pay the tax, boasting that the government could not arrest him as the handcuffs would fall from his wrists if they tried. Thompson took satisfaction in disproving this prophecy and removed the crestfallen prophet to gaol.

No further disturbances occurred. Thompson appears to have dealt with the matter without prior reference to headquarters and was careful to justify the necessity of his actions:

I trust these forcible measures to rid the District of this tomfoolery will meet with approval, it wants to be nipped in the bud, as emotional people like the ROBO MEKBO might with ease be led into a mob frenzy, with disastrous results to an isolated European. 118

An Inawi chief, Maino Peafau, gave an interesting eyewitness account of the cult which tallies closely with Thompson's reports, except for the circumstances of Heri's punishment:

Heri Ikupu came to this village and visited Auki Aufe. They had a kind of sickness, a headache, and the two of them were running round the village and they said, 'The Government is telling us lies. Don't plant rice. Soon war will start and we will stop carrying and stop the tax.' Then Heri Ikupu went back to his village.

The Government heard about it because the VC went to report to them and the Government came to this village and cut the flags down and they brought Heri and Auki to Kairuku and put them in gaol. They [Heri and Auki] put the flag up and they put one string [from the pole] and he said, 'I am taking a message from this string - war will come and the people

118 Thompson, Report 1929
will stay without tax and carrying.' He told the people this is what he heard from the string. We asked Auki, 'Where do you get the answer from?' He said, 'I am getting the answer from the spirits (iaga)'. He told them this. All the people agreed, 'He is getting a message from our mothers and fathers who have died.' And all the people believed him. So the VC said, 'We will have to go to the ADO and ask him if it is true or a lie.' Then the Government came and put them in gaol.

Mr Thompeon went to Waime to Here's place and he cut down the flag and he quarrelled with Here, so they put handcuffs on Here and Thompeon told the police to cut the flags down. Then they told Here, 'You must come to Inawi to see your friend.' Here said, 'I don't want to come.' So they hit him very hard and picked some carriers from Waime to bring Here to come to Inawi. They brought him here and Mr Thompeon went to Auki and they cut his flag pole down and everyone in the village got very frightened. Only one man, Aisa Ogopee, said he would cut the pole down. He started to cut it - it fell and then stood up in the ground again. They tried to push it down but it was heavy and they couldn't, so he started to cut it again and it fell on the ground. They put handcuffs on Auki and they brought him to the rest house. Then they took him to Kairuku and put him in gaol for two months. And they put Here in hospital. When he got better, they didn't put him in gaol but let him go back to his village.

Some people said Auki was telling the truth but others said he was lying. They waited until Auki came back from prison and nothing very good happened to the people and we were still living the same.119

Maino's detached, almost cynical tone is typical. Another informant states his scepticism and disapproval more explicitly:

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The people didn't believe Auki - they said he was just mad or sick but they just watched what he was doing.120

In fact, many people seemed to find Auki's antics almost as ridiculous as Thompson did:

Auki put up a flag pole in front of his house and he was walking around it. The people were sitting leaning against the flag pole and pretending that it was a telephone and were calling out hello, hello, hello, to it.121

All those questioned, who were old enough to have participated in the cult, declared that they had not been involved and that only a few gullible people had been taken in by Auki. These comments need to be assessed against the background of the personalities concerned and the political issues at stake.

Auki was the head of a group which had broken away from the senior section of Oaiaaka clan some years earlier. The split had occurred when the head of a junior lineage, Auki's father, attempted to use his own sorcery powers to challenge the powers of the senior chief. Auki's family succeeded in separating itself from Oaiaaka but had not established its leader as a chief. Undoubtedly the fact that the cult prophet was also the head of an ambitious breakaway group must have aroused the suspicions of the established authorities, especially the chiefs of Oaiaaka. This is suggested in Maino's statement that the village constable decided that Auki's activities should be reported to the government before his claims were accepted: at this

time the village constable was Oaike Elopo, the brother of the chief of Lalae, the junior section of Oaisaka. Evidently Oaike and the other Oaisaka chiefs had good reason to welcome Thompson's proofs that the cult prophets were imposters. It should also be remembered that Maino Peafuau was the senior chief of Oaisaka and, at the time of the cult, the heir presumptive.

One imagines that by 1929 the Mekeo would have been only too eager to listen to the cultists' promises that the white regime was about to come to an end and that the people would be freed from the burdens of the tax and carrying. Yet outside Inawi the movement received little or no support. Even in Inawi no violence was committed, though some people had been affected by the hysteria. According to informants, only a small section of the village was involved and village life in general was not disrupted. The whole affair, which was in any case an importation from the coast, has a contrived air about it. This, combined with Auki's background, suggests that the Inawi outbreak was deliberately engineered by an ambitious individual who having failed to gain recognition for his group by ordinary means saw in the Waima cult a way to enhance his own standing and perhaps gain the advantage over his rivals.

The 1941 cult in origin, scale and intensity was of a very different order. News of an attack on the

122 This is confirmed both by informants' statements and documentary evidence. Patrol to the Mekeo and Roro 16 Apr.-4 May 1929 refers to Oaike Elopo as the Inawi village constable; details of Oaike's traditional status were provided by Inawi elders.

123 The following account is based on Thompson, Report 1941.
Inawaia mission station reached Kairuku on the morning of
15 February. Thompson and his police immediately set out
for Inawaia. On arrival they found villagers in a state
of virtual hysteria:

...men and women reeling around as if drunk,
coloured rami displayed as flags and wild
dancing going on.124

People were cavorting around altars decked with bird of
paradise feathers and surmounted by crosses. Thompson at
once had the dancers dispersed and the altars pulled down.
One man was arrested for the attempted murder of a priest
and two others for assault.

Thompson learnt from the missionaries that the
attack had taken place the previous day. A group of several
hundred villagers had gathered around the fence of the
mission compound while one Jesubaibua man, Iova Eke, entered
the compound and tried to force his way into the church,
where the nuns and their school children had barricaded
themselves. Hearing the sisters' screams, Father Coltre,
the priest-in-charge, came running to their aid; whereupon
Iova seized a heavy conch shell which was placed near the
entrance to the church and hit him over the head with it.
Father Coltre received a severe cut on the forehead but
fortunately was able to dodge the full force of the blow.
Iova then began to belabour him with a stick while two other
men proceeded to punch him with their fists. As the priest,
with blood streaming from his wound, attempted to defend
himself, a brother and two nuns came to his assistance
and together drove off the assailants. All night villagers

124 Thompson, Report 1941.
shouted threats at the missionaries, promising that in the morning they would kill the lot of them and burn down the station. One mission brother managed to leave the compound and travelled all night to bring word to Kairuku. 125

The attack on Father Coltre was the culmination of four days of hysterical behaviour in Inawaia. The previous Monday night an Inawaia schoolgirl had had a dream in which God told her that he would soon appear to punish the wicked people of Inawaia. In accordance with the instructions of the girl prophet, Philo, the whole village built altars to appease God, and then began to pray and dance around them. The outbreak of the cult had been preceded by rumours that England was losing the war in Europe and would soon be invaded by Hitler. Word spread that God would send guns, trucks and planes so the people could drive the white man out of Papua; at first the appearance of the truck bringing Thompson and his police was greeted with applause, for villagers thought that their promised armaments had arrived. Villagers told the missionaries that the Japanese had already invaded Port Moresby killing all the Europeans; only the ARM at Kairuku was left and they themselves would deal with him.

125 Ibid. According to an eyewitness, Sister M. Martha of the SHM who in 1969 wrote a short account of her experiences, the situation was saved by the swift action of one of the Papuan brothers. Seeing the struggle in front of the church, he seized a shotgun kept by the mission for hunting and pointed it at the crowd, which at that moment seemed about to surge into the church compound. As the crowd retreated, Brother Camille and two of the four Papuan brothers took the opportunity to leave to get help from Yule Island. Martha 1969.
The movement had spread to Inawaia's close neighbours, Jesubaibua and Eboa, and to Inawabui. Steps were immediately taken to prevent it spreading further. Thompson summoned the chiefs, village constables and other notables of all the West Mekeo villages to a meeting at Beipa, warning them that no one was to go to Inawaia for a fortnight and that any Inawaia people who came to their village should be turned away. He was relieved to find that all appeared to approve of these measures and that there was little evidence of any interest in the movement on this side of the river.

Though no further violence was threatened, the prophecies continued in the four cultist villages. In April, two months after the original outbreak, Thompson reported that people had abandoned all normal activities for dancing and 'absurd ceremonies': gardens had been neglected since February, all village pigs had been killed and no one dared to go hunting for fear of being turned into an animal. The movement had coincided with an influenza epidemic which was now taking heavy toll among the cultists. A total of fifty-one deaths had occurred since January in Inawaia, Jesubaibua and Eboa, and fifteen in Inawabui. Other villages were less seriously affected by the epidemic; Thompson believed that lack of food and exhaustion induced by

126 Patrol to the Mekeo 25-8 Feb. 1941.
127 Ibid.
128 Thompson to the Government Secretary 28 Apr. 1941 Subdistrict Office File 7-3-2.
129 Ibid.
the hysteria had weakened the cultists' resistance. In the hope of putting an end to the prophecies, he arrested the cult leader, Philo, and four of her male accomplices.130

Most villages remained aloof from the cult and were now openly scornful of it. Thompson was gratified to overhear some Beipa people jeering at the Inawaiai:

> Any iron or stores from Heaven for sale? Where is your ship from Heaven? Aren't you turned into a fish or a pig yet?131

For a time after Philo's arrest the cult appeared to have subsided: patrol officers reported in May that things were returning to normal in Jesubaibua and Inawaia.132 Just before Philo's release from gaol in early August, signs of the 'madness' were again evident.133 People believed that the prophetess was expecting a divinely conceived child whose birth would augur the downfall of mission and government. A wild spate of spending began as villagers hastened to buy new white clothes to wear for Philo's triumphal return. Fearing that further trouble would occur, the Executive Council in Port Moresby officially declared the cult a Forbidden Act under Native Regulations.134 Despite the persistence of rumours concerning secret ceremonies, all remained quiet on the surface. A few weeks after her release Philo was interviewed by Thompson. She assured him that she had recovered from her 'madness':

130 Ibid.
131 Ibid.
132 Patrol to Makeo and Paitana 5-12 May 1941.
133 Thompson to the Government Secretary 9 Aug. 1941 Subdistrict Office File 7-3-2.
134 Subdistrict Office File 7-3-2.
I do not dream anymore, I am frightened of gaol.\textsuperscript{135}

With the suspension of civil administration in February 1942 and the removal of large numbers of men from their villages to serve as labourers and carriers for AMCAU, what still remained of the cult was swept away in the flood of new experiences brought by the war.

The movement might be said to embody all the 'classic' elements of the millenarian cults described by Worsely.\textsuperscript{136} The hysteria, the jettisoning of traditional goods and taboos, the insistence on a new morality, the expectations of the arrival of wealth from heaven, the prophecies of the imminent destruction of the world, followed by a glorious resurrection for believers - all were present. Cult beliefs centred around the revelation made to Philo that God would soon wreak vengeance on the world; all sinners and unbelievers would perish but the faithful would be re-born. The Europeans were to be driven out, as they had lied to the people and cheated them; guns and other armaments would shortly be sent by the ancestors. No one was to work or go to their garden for the ancestors would also provide them with food; instead they were to build altars and spend their time in prayer and repentance. An eyewitness account quoted by Belshaw relates:

In the year 1942 (February 1941 in the diary) a girl named Aisa Fiau (Pilo) had a dream that an old man (A'aia, traditionally credited with teaching the Makeo their present customs) told

\textsuperscript{135} Patrol to the Makeo 27 Oct.-2 Nov. 1941.

\textsuperscript{136} Worsley 1970.
her to leave her work and to tell all the rest of the people as well. They would get food from the heavens, which their grandparents who died long ago would send them. They believed the God would take them to heaven with their body and soul. The Fathers and Sisters were telling lies, so they tried to chase the missionaries away, and the sky would fall on the earth and darkness would come. During the dark all those who did not believe would all die. And those who stole other people's goods would turn into a snake or a pig. Those who worked would turn into fish and those who did sorcery would also turn into fish or snakes. That stopped people from stealing, telling lies, and sorcery.137

The confusion, or perhaps more accurately, the synthesis of Christian and traditional beliefs is clearly evident. A'aisa is easily transposed for God; a mode of thinking observable today - people insist that though the missionaries tell them that A'aisa is the Devil, they know that he is really God. The cult's apocalyptic prophecies obviously owe much to Christian teachings concerning the resurrection but the theme of re-birth and resurrection is a dominant one in traditional mythology.

The possibility of achieving immortality by shedding or assuming a new skin, as the snake is believed to do - a motif which Worsely shows occurs frequently in Melanesian mythology138 - is the subject of several remarkable tales. One tells of a young man who kept a huge python skin in a clay pot; every so often he would clothe himself in the skin and become a snake. Other stories tell of wrinkled

137 Belshaw 1951: 5.

old woman who removed their skins, revealing themselves to be young and beautiful. The secret of the power to achieve immortality was known to A'aisa and he attempted to confer it upon men. Before A'aisa left the world of the living, he stood on a high mountain and threw down to the people waiting below the knowledge of chieftainship, sorcery and many other things; finally he threw down a human skin (imala). At first the people took care to catch the objects but then they began to laugh and joke amongst themselves, consequently the skin fell to the ground and was spoilt before they could reach it. In this way men lost forever the right to immortality. Another A'aisa story, which closely parallels the Orpheus myth, reveals more of the way in which the skin was to have been used. A'aisa, who presides over the spirit world, was once moved to pity by the grief of the relatives of a dead woman. Disturbed by the laments of the dead woman's children, A'aisa visited their father and, after putting him through many tests of courage, finally led him to the village of the dead. When they arrived the man was overjoyed to find his wife dancing with many other people in the middle of the village, but A'aisa warned him that he must neither speak to her nor attempt to touch her. After a few days A'aisa allowed the couple to leave his village and return to the world of the living, but before they left he gave the husband some banana suckers, explaining that he must wait until these plants had borne fruit before he could touch or speak to his wife. But these warnings were forgotten by the husband when they reached home; no sooner did he grasp the woman's hand, than the fingers fell off and her skin began to fall away. The fragile new skin (imala) which A'aisa had given her was destroyed by the husband's impatience and she was forced to return to the village of the dead. In view of the
importance of such themes in traditional mythology, it is understandable that the Christian doctrines concerning resurrection assumed a special significance and that the declarations of the cult prophets carried conviction.

Likewise, the cultists' accusations that the Europeans had lied to them and stolen goods which were rightfully theirs had a persuasive logic in terms of prevailing attitudes to the white regime. The white man had first been accepted as the bearer of new knowledge and power— as another A'aisa who had promised to share his secrets with the people. Villagers had listened to his promises, bowed to his will and served him to the best of their ability. By acknowledging the authority of the white regime, villagers morally committed it to protect their interests: by right, they expected to share in the white man's estate. But during the 1920s and 1930s it began to appear that both mission and government were concerned only with what they could extract from the people. In this sense, it was not simply revenge, but moral indignation which inspired the violence of the cult.

The explicit attack on the traditional order was also given moral justification. The old ways were to be abandoned; prophets instructed the people to:

...kill all their pigs, dogs and throw away all the native goods such as ornaments and sorcery things and leave their native customs.139

Traditional authority and morality were overthrown. Sorcery, which provided the power behind the lopia, had become a sin. The sorcerers were called 'devils', and threatened with

139 Belshaw 1951: 6.
death or re-birth as animals if they persisted in their evil practices. The recognized leaders of the movement were not the elders, but unmarried youths and girls who lacked adult status in the established order. Philo's leadership encompassed the four villages: deputies were appointed in Eboa, Jesubaibua and Inawabui, the three villages acknowledging their subordination to Inaweia. Belshaw has pointed out that Philo's marriage to a close paternal relative was in defiance of strict exogamous laws. The sexual licence which accompanied the hysteria was equally offensive to traditional mores.

The cultists' aim was to sweep away the old in preparation for the new. The prophets declared that through divine revelation, they could show the way to achieve the 'new life' hinted at, but withheld by the Europeans. Until the final revelation was made to all, expectations concerning this new age were necessarily vague. The acquisition of 'cargo' in itself was not the cultists' primary concern but the goods possessed by the Europeans - which had first been seen as the outward manifestation of their special powers -

140 Ibid: 5.
now became a symbol of what the new age would bring.  

The general appeal of the cult in terms of traditional belief and the colonial experience is clear enough. In order to understand the specific circumstances which provoked the outbreak in Inwaia it would be necessary to have an intimate knowledge of the personalities involved and of the network of kinship and political ties linking them; such a background would take many months to acquire. Since this study was focused on two villages which were not involved in the movement, attempting brief enquiries at Inwaia seemed less fruitful than examining the attitudes of non-participants, who in any case were the majority. Despite the obvious appeal of the cult and the fever pitch which it reached in four villages, ten of the fourteen Mekeo villages remained unaffected - a circumstance which is overlooked by the published accounts.

142 Villagers were neither short of cash nor lacked the means to earn more if they had desired to do so. By the late 1930s, the rice industry alone provided a significant cash income: the mission paid villagers £520 for the 1937-38 rice crop, while the government paid £1,200 for the 1942-43 crop. Patrol to the Mekeo 6-10 Oct. 1938; Thompson, Report 1944. In addition to the rice, which they were compelled to plant, people made copra and sold betel nut and local vegetables; yet they themselves explained that in these years they had little interest in money except to pay the tax. Any explanation of the Inwaia cult in terms of economic frustrations alone, is inadequate in view of the people's indifference to the cash economy at this stage. In fact, more than a decade later field staff argued that the Mekeo's cash needs were still very limited and that they had not yet developed the more sophisticated tastes of many other long contacted areas: Patrol to the Mekeo 16-31 Jan. 1953.

143 Belshaw 1951: 5-8; Worsley 1970: 121-3.
According to Belshaw, people retained their faith in the prophecies, even though they were not realised:

Even to-day the people believe in the miracles and in the essential truth of the message. 144

Though this may still be the feeling in Inaweia, very different opinions may be found elsewhere. At the time, Thompson observed that other villages were highly sceptical of the prophecies. Today non-participants speak of the cult as a type of aberrant behaviour in which only the foolish or irresponsible indulged. They described it as a 'madness', 'sickness' or 'headache' which caused people to run wildly around the village, uttering gibberish. Not all those who joined the cult, however, were thought to have succumbed to the 'madness':

Some people were just pretending. They were not really mad like the others but they were just going around with the girls and young women and therefore some women got pregnant just for nothing. 145

The Inaweia outbreak was not regarded as a new phenomenon. Inawi informants recognised that it was no different in kind to the outbreak they had briefly experienced in 1929. The earlier cult had achieved nothing, so people were cautious when they learnt of what was happening in Inaweia:

The news was spread from Waima to Bush Makoo. They were asking people of all villages to kill their dogs and pigs but most people said they would wait for the time to come and see what happened. This same madness had occurred before at Kerema and then at Waima, and then it happened at Inaweia. 146

144 Belshaw 1951: 8.
146 Ibid.
villagers usually hear of such matters long before the
government gets wind of them. Since all were well aware of
what was taking place, the measures taken by Thompeon only
partly explain why the cult was confined to four villages.

According to Thompeon, the sorcerers of the
affected villages were highly displeased with the whole
affair and promised their assistance in stopping it. The part played by the sorcerers is very hard to judge; it would be interesting to know how they reacted to the cultists' defiance of their powers. Possibly their attitudes are reflected in an explanation of the cult given by an influential Inawi sorcerer. He believed that Philo had made herself mad by touching the sorcery stones and ancestor relics kept hidden in her parents' house (the mere sight of which is believed to bring illness or death to those not ritually prepared for the ordeal). She then ordered everyone to bring out the stones and other things used to make sorcery so that they could be publicly displayed on the altars; in this way the whole village was affected. When the police arrived to stop the madness, the altars were pulled down and the objects displayed on them burnt. The sorcerers were very angry and later caused many deaths in retaliation for the loss of their equipment. Both the origin and failure of the cult are thus seen in terms of its defiance of the established order: the breaking of taboos caused the madness and led finally to an assertion of power in the form of a wave of deaths among the guilty.

No sane person could be persuaded to look at, let alone touch a sorcerer's stones and relics - objects

147 Thompeon, Report 1941.
which are charged with lethal power. Should a person accidentally meet a sorcerer who is on his way to place a spell on a victim, he will be overcome by the destructive power of the objects carried by the sorcerer, even though they are hidden and not intended to harm him. An educated man in his late twenties described his physical reactions after such an encounter:

...about half an hour later I started to feel very cold. I was shivering. Then I had pains in my body and my limbs started to go out of joint and I couldn't walk or move.148

Sophisticated informants often compare the power (isapu) residing in sorcery stones with electricity. They explain that isapu needs to be built up just as electricity is generated and that an object becomes charged with power just as a battery is charged with electricity - to touch it would be as deliberately suicidal as seizing a 1,000 volt cable. Even a practising sorcerer does not touch his stones with bare hands, manipulating them with sticks or covering his hands with cloth to insulate his body from the 'current'. It is astonishing that ordinary people could ever bring themselves to handle and publicly display sorcery objects. Indeed only a madman would be capable of such behaviour; it would be impossible under normal circumstances. Worsely suggests that the physical symptoms of giddiness and hyperactivity associated with millenarian cults are the product of the extreme emotional tension generated when traditional laws and morality are defied.149 In the case of the Inawaia cult it seems that the hysteria was a necessary pre-condition.

for the attack on tradition. Its primary function was to provide a release which allowed cultists to commit acts impossible under any other circumstances; once the taboos were broken, of course, new waves of emotional tension and excitement would follow. The situation may be different, however, in societies where the traditional order had already been discredited to some degree and where the psychological barriers to be overcome were not as great.

The mass hysteria also fulfilled another important function. Except for those unscrupulous individuals who took advantage of the others' madness, the cultists were not considered responsible for their actions. Informants could not see that the movement constituted anything as serious as a protest against the government, even when this was suggested to them. Neither the Inawaia cult nor the brief outbreak in 1929 represented a contradiction of the ideal of cooperation: they were merely the inconsequential foolishness of people who had temporarily taken leave of their senses. Father Coltre, the priest whom Inawaia villagers had tried to murder, stated that after the event was over people spoke to him and acted as if it had never

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150 The cult 'hysteria' seems analogous to the self-induced trances of certain shamanistic oracles during which the practitioner loses all concern for his personal safety. Nebesky-Wojkowitz witnessed a Tibetan oracle throw himself backwards and dash his head against a stone wall while in a trance, despite the efforts of assistants to restrain him. Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1956: 432-40. The action of the Mekeo cultists in handling sorcery objects suggests a similar state of physical and mental abandon.
happened. The 'madness' provided a scapegoat: it absolved the cultists from responsibility for their actions, allowing them, in the advent of the failure of the prophecies, to resume their former lives without excessive guilt feelings. These features of the Inawaia cult suggest that similar movements should be looked on not simply as a specific means of ritually obtaining the white man's wealth, nor as clumsy attempts to adjust to the social dislocation brought about by European contact, but as an efficient social mechanism for achieving immediate and radical change. Should the movement miscarry, it has an inbuilt 'safety device' which allows the society to resume its former patterns until the time is right for another coup.

The 1929 outbreak in Inawi had been a half-hearted affair, an importation from outside which bore signs of deliberate staging. In contrast, the later movement developed within the Mekeo, reaching a fever pitch which enabled four villages to defy tradition and declare a new order. Yet the majority preferred to 'wait and see' before killing their pigs and throwing away their traditional valuables; and once the hysteria had passed the force of social conformity soon re-asserted itself among the cultists. It seems that

Rev. Father Coltre, personal communication. Sister M. Martha, in her account of the cult, describes the same reaction, 'Later as Sister M. Zita [who was injured during the attack on Father Coltre] had left the people often asked for her, why had she left and when I told them plainly that they had wanted to kill her they would say, "Sister don't say that please. We were mad. Why should we want to kill her. Why she did..." Then would come an enumeration of different things Sister had done for them. "We were mad."' Martha 1969.
the Inawāia cult failed to gain wider support primarily because its iconoclasm was premature; people were not yet ready to break with the past. Certainly the old order was still far too stable to be discredited at a single blow.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE BACKGROUND OF SOCIAL STABILITY 1906-1941: 'When the Government's laws were the same as the old laws, the chiefs helped the Government.'

By 1941 Makeo society appeared little different from what it had been fifty years before, despite the intensive campaigns of mission and government to 'improve' the villager's lot. The lopia stood firm in the face of externally appointed village officials, the supernatural powers wielded by traditional authority had not been discredited, local grouping and population remained stable, the disruptive effects of the migrant labour system had been avoided and the values of the cash economy had as yet gained little hold. Though the white man's presence had created hopes of change and betterment, people rejected the new ways which were being opened to them. Paradoxically, it seems, the society continued to be virtually impervious to outside influence.

This apparent conservatism did not, however, stem from any ingrained antipathy to innovation and change. The cultural borrowing from the Gulf observed by Seligman¹ (and acknowledged by today's elders) is evidence of the society's readiness to adopt foreign styles in pre-contact times. The 'new things' brought by the first white men made a great impression on villagers who were eager to acquire them for themselves. People often explain their initial support of some government scheme by saying that they thought they should try it as it was 'something new'.

¹ Seligman 1910: 314.
'New' is no less an expression of approbation than in our own culture. Innovations, nevertheless, must be judged according to their utility in terms of existing conditions and values: villagers simply saw nothing of relevance to their own lives in the new ways offered to them. Whatever the nature of the benefits the Europeans were expected to bestow, it seems that an enhancement not a disruption of the established order was envisaged.

The officials set up by the white regime were never allowed to threaten the dignity of hereditary office. The mission's representatives at the village level - the teachers - did not achieve the influence wielded by indigenous pastors and catechists in many other New Guinea communities; and the church itself continued to remain an external force - an appendage to rather than an integral part of village life. This failure to involve the community lay partly in the attitudes and policies of the mission itself. At first the missionaries had been loath to make use of Papuan helpers, even as manual labourers; they found it simpler to perform the tasks themselves than to instruct villagers:

Dans le personnel de la Mission, et particulièrement parmi les Frères (qui ont le plus à souffrir de la paresse, de l'ignorance, de l'incompréhension des indigènes dès qu'il s'agit de les initier aux travaux manuels des blancs), il y eut toujours une tendance à considérer le Papou, soit comme incapable de jamais rien apprendre, auquel cas il était inutile, soit comme capable de trop bien apprendre, auquel cas l'orgueil le rendait insupportable et nuisible.3

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3 Dupeyrat 1935: 427.
Bishop de Boismenu was keenly aware of the necessity to make greater use of Papuan assistants - a need emphasized by the shortage of mission personnel during the First World War; he urged his staff to overcome their impatience and make greater efforts to use and train indigenous helpers.\(^4\)

In religious matters, the reluctance to devolve responsibility to Papuans was even greater. The catholics had been scandalized by the behaviour of the LMS's Polynesian and indigenous teachers.\(^5\) These attitudes, combined with the difficulty of training suitable candidates, resulted in the virtual absence of catechists during the early years.\(^6\) In 1908, when Bishop de Boismenu took control, there were nine catechists employed by the mission, most of them Filipinos recruited at Thursday Island.\(^7\) De Boismenu, through his educational programme, set determinedly about the task of creating a young, educated elite who would not only provide the 'leavening' in the largely pagan, or only

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7 Ibid: 436.
nominally Christian communities, but would also provide literate, well-informed catechists. In terms of numbers, his efforts were a success: the nine catechists of 1908 had increased to 219 by 1933. In theory, the 'teachers' (as the catechists were known since they also usually served as village school teachers) were given considerable responsibility. In the absence of the priest they held prayers, church services, baptized the dying and buried the dead; when the priest visited the village, they were expected to inform the people in advance and persuade them to attend church and participate in the sacraments. They were instructed to be the 'eyes and ears' of the priest, reporting everything that had happened in the village and warning him of any impending scandals or troubles. Though their position seemed to offer ample scope for the ambitious individual to make himself a powerful figure within the village hierarchy, very few teachers succeeded in doing so. The mission eventually found that its carefully selected, youthful 'elite' made little or no impression upon the communities in which they were placed. It admitted ruefully that few teachers had any influence at all beyond the four walls of their classrooms and that the missionaries themselves tended to look upon them as school masters, rather than catechists.

9 Dupeyrat 1935: 447, fn.2.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 SHM Lettre Circulaire No. 76, 10 Aug. 1947: 203.
The realization grew that the teachers, who had spent a minimum of four years away from home in a mission boarding school, were set apart from the rest of the society by their education. Since they were not fully part of the community, they were unable to actively influence village affairs or provide the link of communication between the priest and his parishioners. The need for a more effective and influential representation for the church at the village level led in 1947 to the formation of parish councils which were to be composed of men and women of good character who had status and respect within the village community.

Though the mission's representatives were of little consequence, those of the government constituted a more dangerous challenge. Anthropologists have observed a variety of responses to the village officials appointed by the administration - the luluai in New Guinea, the village constable in Papua. The complete disappearance of traditional leaders in Busama village near Lae was recorded by Hogbin, who argues that the luluai system was a dangerous one, tending to lead to despotic rule. Salisbury, on the other hand, points out that despotism is a feature characteristic of the traditional 'big-man' style of leadership, not a product of the luluai system. He maintains

14 Ibid: 4-6.
that the luluai's position, which constituted a sort of pressure point between the village community and the government, was not an enviable one: often patrol officers subjected village representatives to so many punishments and indignities that only 'nonentities' could be persuaded to take office. A more complex situation is described by Maher among the tribes of the Purari delta, who once possessed a structure of hereditary leadership not unlike that of the Mekeo. Chiefs were appointed as the first village constables but later selections were made without reference to the candidates' rank. Gradually two hierarchies of power began to emerge: one supported by traditional rights and privileges, the other by the government. As the two groups manoeuvred against each other, competitive politics of the 'big-man' type became the normal practice, dominating a system previously organized on the basis of hereditary rank.

The Mekeo's experience provides yet another variation on the theme. The potential power conferred by government appointment assumed far greater importance than its attendant difficulties and disadvantages. This is demonstrated by the traditional leaders' virtual monopoly of the position of village constable. All Inawi's constables were chiefs or close relatives of chiefs:

18 Amongst the Kunis, who live in the mountains to the north-east of the Mekeo and share a similar structure of hereditary chieftainship, Van Rijswijck observed that government appointments were usually occupied by the chiefs, thus leaving the traditional structure of leadership intact. Van Rijswijck 1967: 269.
moreover, eight of the eleven appointments made were held by the fa'aniau and eke sections of the founding clan, Oaisaka. Two of Aipeana's constables were commoners, one a sorcerer and the rest chiefs. After the clan chiefs of each clan of Aipeana had been appointed in turn, two commoners held office in the late 1920s and 1930s. Presumably the chiefs had assessed the position and come to the conclusion that it could be allowed to commoners without posing a threat to their authority. Kavo Laua of Aipeana explained:

Later the people knew all about the VC's work, so they picked ordinary people. They knew what to do in the village so it was alright to pick ordinary people.

Informants stressed, however, that the two commoners appointed were not weak or ineffectual men. During the Second World War a sorcerer from Meauni clan was appointed, who held office until the introduction of local government councils in 1962.

The chiefs' pre-emption of the office was presented in moral terms:

19 The old men could recall the names of all the village constables who had been appointed in their village and the order in which they served. As a means of checking this information, I also compiled lists of village constables from patrol reports (the Mekeo Village Constable Books have been lost), recording the name and village of every official mentioned in the reports. The lists obtained in this manner were not complete but they corresponded closely with the oral information. I then carefully inquired into the clan affiliations and status of the Aipeana and Inawi constables, at the same time noting down any other details informants could offer concerning each individual.

The reason why only chiefs were chosen to be VC was that if anybody without rank was made VC he might put a man in gaol just for fun, or he might lie to the Government, but if a chief is VC, he will tell the truth.21

According to another informant, himself a chief and an ex-village constable:

They picked the chiefs to be VC because the chiefs are the head of the people - only they can say what the Government said; ordinary people would tell lies to the people and not tell them what the Government really said.22

Most informants believed that the village constables were actually chosen by the chiefs:

If a patrol officer picked out a man to be VC, he would have to ask the chiefs first. Patrol officers or ADCs never picked out VCs themselves - they asked the chiefs to do it.23

A few allowed that responsibility lay with the government but insisted that the choice had to be made from amongst the chiefs:

The Government picked out the VC. When the patrol officer came he always called for the chiefs and he talked to them in the night. Always he picked out the one he wanted among the chiefs. But before selecting one, he called all the chiefs to come.24

Initially, the government had followed a deliberate policy of appointing chiefs but it appears that even by the late

1890s government officers did not concern themselves with the traditional status of their village constables. 25
No hard and fast rules seem to have been followed. 26 Patrol officers rarely had sufficient knowledge of local conditions and personalites to select a man on known merits; most spent only a year or two in the same area and even if they stayed longer could never hope to gain more than a passing acquaintance with the many different cultural and linguistic units contained within the one district. Of necessity, officers depended heavily upon whatever local advice was available. It is probable, under these conditions, that

25 See above: 98.

26 Healy implies that the government deliberately avoided appointing Mekee chiefs as village constables since it suspected that their authority depended on the practice of sorcery. Healy 1962: 606. What little evidence there is on this point suggests not that the chiefs were intentionally passed over, but rather that scant attention was paid to the status of the appointee. Patrol reports record only the names of the village constables, making no reference to their traditional status; in any case it is unlikely that many officers had accurate information on this point. Establishing the status of any individual is not the easy matter it might appear to be: one may live in a village for several months before gaining a clear idea of the actual status of even prominent identities. For example, a man functioning to all intents and purposes as a chief may in fact turn out to be the brother of the deceased chief who is acting in place of the young chief until he comes of age. Another man may be said to be a chief because several generations ago his family held the senior chieftainship which was later transferred to another line. In view of the laws relating to the practice of sorcery, most sorcerers prefer to conceal their rank from outsiders, particularly government officers. It is not surprising, therefore, that in those cases where I was able to check attributions of rank in patrol reports (in most cases recent reports), they usually proved to be unreliable.
villagers were usually able to influence the decision, and that the man they wanted was nominated. In any case, they interpreted the circumstances to mean that the chiefs had control over government appointments in their village. The very manner of selecting village officials thus was seen to underline the ideal of co-operation: the government recognized the rights of the chiefs; in return they insured that only a man who would faithfully carry out his duties undertook the responsibility.

The position of the village constable pivoted upon the ideal of an identity of interests between the government and the traditional authorities. The fact that government's laws could be interpreted in terms of traditional morality provided the whole rationale for communication with the government and for the successful functioning of its village representative. Government laws dealing with such matters as theft, assault, adultery and murder could be seen to follow the principles laid down by tradition. An Inawi elder, Lapu Aufe, explained:

When the Government's laws were the same as the old laws the chiefs helped the Government. For instance if a man was caught for stealing or adultery, the chief himself told the VC to take the culprit to court. This was because these were the old laws. What the Government was thinking was the same as the chiefs were thinking.27

Later he added:

The VC, the chiefs and the sorcerers gave the laws together in the village. Whatever the VC said was only the law of the Government and of the chiefs and sorcerers.

The VC kept talking to remind the people, asking all the men not to cause trouble as the laws were made by the Government and by the chiefs and sorcerers. 'Be busy in your garden so you will have your own food instead of stealing other people's food' - the Government kept on saying that to the VC and he kept on saying it to the people. And if the people still caused trouble after the VC had said this over and over again, then the chiefs told the VC he had the right to put those people in gaol.28

Measures such as government regulations concerning village hygiene, which had no traditional parallels, were accepted as benefiting the people and thus in accordance with traditional principles. Isoaimo Opu, an Inawi chief and himself a village constable for nearly twenty years, declared:

The Government asked the VC to do things because he was the chief, and the Government said to him, 'They are your people and what I am asking you to do is for your own people. So if I say make a fence, do it - these are your things. I am asking you to look after your own things.' And for this reason the chief asked his people to obey the Government.29

Even measures like the burial regulations, which contravened traditional practices, were supported by the chiefs once their purpose was understood. According to Kavo Laua of Aipeana:

There was never any time when the chiefs refused Government orders. In the case of the burial regulations, the dead body had to be buried in the cemetery - this is what the VC said to the people, and the chiefs obeyed the VC and helped him to tell the

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28 Ibid.

people to bury bodies in the cemetery. Yes - this was against the old custom, but the chiefs thought it was a good idea so they supported that idea. They had to build a fence in the cemetery and a house over the body. And there was a law if the people did not build a fence around the body and a house over it. Then some years later they changed their minds and said not to build houses but just fences around the graves. The Government explained that the body would get rotten and flies would come, so they should bury the body away from the village, so the people thought it was a good idea.30

Without this understanding of common purpose between the government and the traditional authorities, there could be no communication between them; with it, there was no possibility of conflict, providing each fulfilled its obligations. The village constable, as a chief, was not attempting to serve two different masters, rather he was doubly enjoined to uphold the standards of traditional morality. Likewise, government appointment gave him no added authority, only increased responsibility.

Informants emphasize that the village constable always worked in harmony with the chiefs and sorcerers. The Inawi elders firmly denied that rivalry existed or that the village constable ever tried to use his position to make himself more powerful than the other chiefs. At Aipeana, however, some conceded the possibility that the chiefs had competed amongst themselves for the position at first, believing that it might give them added power and prestige. The difference in attitude probably stems

partly from the fact that Inawi had always had one chief who is recognized to take precedence over the rest, allowing less room for competition than in Aipeana where the senior section of the founding clan has long been without an effective head. 31 Aipeana also had before it the example of Maino Fagau, the war leader whom MacGregor appointed head chief of the district; the prestige which Maino gained from government patronage must have made a deep impression in his own village. Yet even Maino never achieved any lasting authority outside Aipeana. Both villages were adamant that should a constable succeed in attempts to usurp the authority of the other chiefs, his actions would not be tolerated. An Aipeana elder exclaimed:

Some VCs might have tried to become more powerful than the chiefs, I don't know. But if they tried the sorcerers would kill them. 32

One Aipeana village constable, Aiso Laia, died of snake bite - a cause of death commonly ascribed to sorcerers who are believed to train and control their own snakes. 33 His death is attributed to the fact that he tried to be

31 See above: 10.

32 Aufa Kaoka, Aipeana: 11 Nov. 1971. Burridge remarks without further elaboration that in the case of the Tangu, 'It is true that, were it not for sorcery, both Luluai and Tultul could hold the potential of tyranny.' Burridge 1960: 261.

33 Aipeana informants quoted Aiso Laia's death as an example of the sorcerers' powers. The incident is also recorded in a patrol report of Oct. 1911, '...last week V.C. Aio-Laiangu was bitten by a snake while having the old Govt. station at Kikimori cleaned up. This death, is (as usual) ascribed to Sorcery...'. Patrol to Mt Yule 6–28 Oct. 1911.
too severe with his people. The Inawi elders declared that it had never been necessary to punish a village constable in their village, but they had heard of such cases in other villages:

There is a man at Beipa called Epi Kavili and his father, Kavili, was treating the Bush Mekeo very badly and even his own people, so the sorcerers were against him and his wife died. Also Opugu Aria from this village - he was a policeman during the war - and his only son was killed by sorcery during the war. This was because Opugu Aria called out the big men's names to come out and carry and also he went into the houses to beat the women with the other police...in those days most of the sorcerers and chiefs had power so if the VC was too hard on the people the chiefs and sorcerers would show their power. A man from Aipeana, Kulavi, had his only son killed by sorcery because he was in the police during the war, and finally he himself became blind. Before the war he was a VC and he was too hard on the people so his son died. Then during the war he was in the police service and he was hard on the people again, so to show the chief's power he was made blind.34

The ambitious village constable, who tried to control the other chiefs or was too severe with his people, was punished for his deeds. The supernatural sanctions possessed by the traditional authorities constituted a means of enforcing social conformity which was far too strong for the individual to defy.

Whilst it was essential that the village constable remember his obligations to his people, it was equally important that he should faithfully perform his duties to the government. People insist that the village constable's

relations with government officers were always good. An Inawi chief, Maino Peafuau, who was a village constable in the 1930s, described the interaction between the village and district office thus:

When the VC wanted to give work to the people, he went to see the chiefs first. Then the chiefs said, 'Yes, you must give the work to the people as the Government told you to do.' The VC would then go and give the work to the people. If the VC got an order from the Government and he told the chiefs and they didn't like it, then he went back to Kairuku to report to the Government. If the chiefs didn't like the order the Government didn't do anything to them. The Government said that what the chief says is for him to say, so they would not force him to do it.

Maino, and other informants, asserted that there was in practice only one matter on which the government was ever opposed: the lopia would not agree to requests that people build more solidly constructed houses, as they feared that this would involve an infringement of their exclusive rights to certain building materials:

I myself was told by Mr Thompson to let the people make better houses, but the chiefs said 'No, we won't let them build houses with afa.' I went back to Mr Thompson and told him the chiefs didn't like to allow the people to build better houses. He said 'That belongs to the chiefs so leave it alone.' He gave orders to look after the cemetery, to work on the roads, to make pig fences around the village. And the chiefs didn't say anything against this, they said it was very good to do this. It was only the houses that the chiefs didn't like - using afa, and the post called vouvou, and the chief's house position.

36 Ibid.
Under Thompson, a certain amount of give and take between district office and the village authorities does not seem improbable. Thompson endeavoured to show his respect for local custom and to work through rather than against the lopia; presumably he instructed his patrol officers to do likewise.

Villagers were horrified by suggestions that the village constables were verbally or physically abused by patrol officers. An Inawi elder declared indignantly:

I have never heard of such a thing happening in this village. It may have happened in other Mekeo villages, but I have never heard about it. I was not told about any old VCs being abused by Government officers. I have never heard of a VC being put in gaol.

Aipeana informants were of the same opinion:

The patrol officer didn't call the VCs names or hit them. He would just come and tell the people to clean the village and the roads, and tell the VC to get the people to build new houses and pull down old ones. Whoever was not there when the patrol officer came, the VCs job was to take him to court. I have never heard of a VC being hit by a patrol officer.

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37 See above: 130-1. Thompson's policy directly contradicts Healy's assertion that the administration regarded the Mekeo chiefs as opponents; though it is true that most government officers appear to have simply ignored the chiefs. Healy 1962: 606.

officer. The VCs did their work well. A lot of VCs from Roro were put in gaol, but none from this village.39

People admit that things were different during the Second World War. An incident in which a war-time Inawi village constable was struck across the face for failing to get sufficient carriers is well known to the whole village; but the indignity associated with the event was so great, even after thirty years, that the man involved refused to be questioned about it. Such reactions indicate that gross abuse of the village constables must have been a rare occurrence. This is not to say, however, that government appointment was regarded as a sinecure. People recall that several village policemen were dismissed for taking a second wife, and that one lost his badge of office after spearing the parish priest’s cow, which he found despoiling one of his gardens. The government was equally impatient with widowed constables, who were compelled by custom to spend their period of mourning away from the village. 40

Many government officers, especially those of the 1920s, would have been bemused, if not outraged, by villagers’ claims that the constables always faithfully

39 Aua Vi’i, Aipeana: 24 Oct. 1971. Prior to the Second World War, the government did indeed consider the Roro, Waima and Kivori groups to be far more 'difficult' than the Mekeo. Thompson wrote in 1932: 'The Waima natives I always think constitute one of the worst problems of the District. They are the most idle, thieving, lying & superstitious in regard to sorcery tribe in the civilized parts of New Guinea that I have had the misfortune to come into contact with.' Patrol to the Mekeo and Roro 12-23 Jan. 1932. See also Patrol to Waima, Kivori and Mekeo 30 Jan.-2 Feb. 1933.

40 See ARN Kairuku Diary Oct. 1910; Patrol to Lopiko 16 May-15 July 1911.
performed their duties. Patrol reports of the 1920s rated the Mekeo village constable much the same as a Mekeo carrier - little better than useless. This was understandable at a time when government policy had made it difficult for even the most astute man to satisfy the demands of patrol officers without alienating his own people. No constable dared to go beyond the limits of what he knew to be acceptable to his community; at the same time, he could not ignore the government: as a villager, he resolved his dilemma in a manner which satisfied village, not government, standards. The difference between the two is revealed in the actions attributed to VC Erico in Inawi, whom a patrol report of 1923 castigated as 'completely useless'. When patrols came to the village to recruit carriers, Erico:

...would shout out to the village telling the young men to come for carriers. He said 'Who wants to come as carriers has to come with me to the mountains, but all those who don't want to come must run away. Five or six will be enough, they will go as carriers.' But the police wanted ten or fifteen carriers, but Erico told the people to run away and only four or five men to come. So Erico took four or five carriers to Bioto and the patrol officer asked him 'Why did you bring only four men for carriers?' Erico said 'In my village all my people are sick, so I brought four of them only.' Then they took the cargoes to Kubuna and Erico came back to the village. Because of this people said he was doing a very good job for us.

In villagers' eyes, Erico had fulfilled his duties to the government by providing it with some carriers and his obligations to his people by sparing them as much as possible.

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41 Patrol to Boiboi and Mekeo 1-10 Feb. 1923.

In contrast to the 1920s, official comment on the performance of the village constables is usually favourable, even complimentary, in the early 1900s when pressures had been far fewer, and in the 1930s under Thompson. The fact that the constables managed for many years to satisfy the government strongly argues in favour of the sincerity of their efforts to discharge a dual responsibility.

The village councillors, first introduced to the Mekeo in 1927-28, were of so little importance in villagers' eyes that it was impossible to elicit much information concerning them. Not one informant had any clear idea of the duties the councillors were expected to perform; most simply concluded that the village constable was evidently the more important official as he, unlike the councillors, was given a uniform and paid a salary. Villagers' vagueness on this topic is not surprising since no clear official policy was ever laid down concerning the councillors' functions. In general they were intended to provide a channel of communication between the village and the administration, advising patrol officers on local custom, while explaining the government's wishes to the people. As distinct from the village constable, the

43 See, for example, Patrol to the Mekeo 18 Nov.-2 Dec. 1913; Patrol to the Mekeo 19-25 Nov. 1915; Patrol to Waima, Kivori and Mekeo 18-28 Apr. 1922.
44 Patrol to Mekeo and Waima 5-12 Dec. 1933; Patrol to the Mekeo 25-9 Jan. 1939.
45 Papua Annual Reports 1927-8: 27.
46 Miles 1959: 61-72.
47 Ibid.
councillors were to be representatives of the people, not government employees. Informants' statements make it clear that the village constable, in any case, acted only upon the advice of the clan chiefs, relying upon their co-operation to have the government's orders carried out. Therefore, since an informal council of sorts already assisted the village constable, the introduction of councillors was unlikely to have greatly altered the existing situation.

The effect of the village authorities' response to government appointment was to negate the threat it posed to them, though this is not to suggest that it came to be regarded as unworthy of their attention. Though the position required an accomplished diplomacy to maintain a balance between the interests of the government, the chiefs and the rest of the community, the inherent difficulties were not sufficient to discourage the powerful from accepting it. By establishing their special right to appointment, the chiefs prevented the emergence of any new elite based on the government's power alone. Having been contained by the traditional structure of authority, government appointment became absorbed within it. Few village constables succeeded in using the office to control their fellow chiefs. In the long run the authority conferred by the government on its officials proved to be of less consequence than the powers conferred by tradition.

LOCAL grouping and population remained stable during these years. The few, scattered figures available in government reports indicate that from the 1890s to 1949 (when regular census statistics commence) the total population remained steady, perhaps slightly on the increase, despite influenza
epidemics in 1931 and 1941. The government preferred to see the existing village units maintained for ease of administration. Small groups which attempted to form new settlements were ordered back to the main village, but references to such incidents are few. The changing course of the St Joseph River often necessitated the moving of villages to avoid flooding but people usually consulted the patrol officers before leaving the old site. Possibly fear of government disapproval helped to discourage splits, though other circumstances made the emergence of new groups difficult. The cessation of warfare had removed the means to acquire new land and had stabilized land ownership in the hands of the groups existing at the time of 'pacification': dissidents who wished to sever ties with their parent group were therefore placed in the position where they had to appeal to the chief of another clan to provide them with land. Ogofoina Lopia Fa'a of Inawi illustrates the dilemma faced by such groups: a split from Lopia Fa'a section of Oaisaka clan, this lineage moved from their original residential site and approached the chief of Ogofoina clan to allow them to build their houses on his land. This placed them under obligations to Ogofoina, but as they retained their previous garden land they continued

48 Kairuku Subdistrict Annual Reports 1931-2: an influenza epidemic in 1931 resulted in a 1.5 per cent decrease in the taxable population. Kairuku Patrol Report 17, 1940-41: in some villages the death rate was as high as ten per cent.

49 See, for example, Patrol to the Mekeo and Inaukina Districts 17-25 Aug. 1912.

50 ARM Kairuku Diary Apr. 1910; Patrol to the Mekeo 28 Apr-2 May 1914.
to have obligations to Lopia Fa'a. Under these conditions, there was little opportunity for ambitious groups to achieve an independent identity. Unless very serious grounds for separation existed, it was better for clansmen to settle their differences and remain together than to throw themselves on the mercy of another clan or village. Informants, in fact, state that land ownership had been stabilized and the present villages established long before the arrival of the Europeans. These statements are supported by the composition of clan units: larger clans usually incorporate small immigrant groups which arrived before European contact and were given land by the larger group. In pre-contact times, however, warfare gave some flexibility to the situation. Land might change hands, and those clans possessing a large amount of land were no doubt glad of the arrival of other groups who would help them defend it.

People were little concerned with the world beyond the boundaries of their own village communities until the 1940s. Travel outside the subdistrict was rare - so rare that people claim that they would wail and mourn, as if for the dead, a relative departing for Port Moresby only eighty miles away. Patrol reports reveal that by the late 1930s some people were travelling as far as Port Moresby to sell betel nut, but the majority did not venture beyond the Kanosia and Hisiu plantations. The migrant labour system, which provided so many Papuans with new goods, new ideas and a greater awareness of the white man's world, held few attractions for the Mekeo. The secular education afforded

51 See above: 9-10.

52 Kairuku Patrol Report 6, 1941-2.
by the mission was felt to have little relevance to village life.

Few Mekeo were persuaded to 'sign on' during the 1890s and early 1900s, although the ARM Kairuku hopefully observed in 1911 signs of increasing interest in wage labour:

The native labour being recruited from this district has been steadily increasing for some time, which is gratifying to note, & although at present the natives will only sign for six months, I am of the opinion that it is only a matter of time when they will sign for longer periods. Formerly very few natives of the district would go to work at all. 53

This optimism appears to have been premature; the following year patrols attempting to recruit labourers for the Department of Works in Port Moresby visited all the Mekeo villages but found no volunteers. 54

The situation changed with the introduction of taxation in 1919; for the first time many Mekeo were forced to seek employment. Attitudes to wage labour have already been discussed in some detail. 55 Married men, who had the responsibility of a wife and children, and had assumed full adult status in the community, rarely sought employment away from the village. Unmarried youths, who found it difficult to earn money at home as they had no gardens of their own and no wife to assist them, reluctantly exchanged a carefree adolescent life for a term on a plantation in order to earn their tax money. Work histories taken in Inawi of 157 adult men confirm the general statements made

53 ARM Kairuku Journal, Mar. 1911.
54 Patrol to the Mekeo and Inaukina Districts 17-25 Aug. 1912.
by informants concerning their experiences. By the 1920s and 1930s a brief period spent in wage labour had become normal for most young men: of a total of twenty-seven men over the age of fifty-one, eighteen were employed during these years. Only four out of a total of twenty-three individuals who worked before the war were employed outside the subdistrict and this was in the late 1930s. It appears that at the outbreak of war a handful of Inawi men were working in Port Moresby. The tax compelled many to seek employment but their evident distaste for wage labour earned the Mekeo a bad name with employers. A patrol report of 1935 noted:

> The HISUI & KANOSIA Managers now fight shy of them, when they offer themselves as N/L's, as they are so lazy.

Migrant labour has always been less attractive to groups who had other means to obtain cash. Certainly the Mekeo did not lack other means, but the failure to exploit them supports the contention of informants that people had no desire or need for money except to pay the tax. The enterprise of a group like the Tolai, whose advantages were not much greater, contrasts sharply with the

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56 This information was collected as part of the household census taken of Inawi.

57 A few of the men interviewed concerning their wartime experiences stated that they were working in Port Moresby at the time of the outbreak of war. Kairuku Patrol Report 6, 1941-2 observed that fully fifty per cent of taxable men were absent in Port Moresby either trading or working as casual labourers. This estimate appears to be greatly exaggerated.

58 Patrol to the Mekeo 5-9 Aug. 1935.

59 Mair 1948: 129.
Mekeo's lack of interest in the cash economy. The Tolai were selling coconuts to traders in the 1870s before the establishment of German control; by the early 1900s people were increasing their planting of coconuts to keep up with the demand for copra, and in the 1930s were operating their own copra driers. From the time of first contact villagers had been eager to sell food crops to traders, settlers and plantation owners. Though the Mekeo lacked the stimulus provided in the Tolai's case by early traders, they had ample opportunity by the 1920s to sell copra to local traders and food crops to the nearby plantations. But, as Salisbury has shown, the accumulation of capital and credit were vital concerns of Tolai society before the Europeans arrived, while for the Mekeo the whole business of earning money was an irksome necessity created by government fiat.

A similar indifference was displayed to education. From the outset the Sacred Heart Mission fully committed itself to the task of educating its converts. In the 1890s every mission station had its school, which was run by the parish priest himself in the absence of auxiliary staff. Under the direction of Bishop de Boismenu, a more organized programme was developed. Parish schools catering for more able pupils who had spent two or three years in the village schools were built in central mission stations. Children from surrounding villages boarded at the schools under the

63 Ibid: 405-17.
missionaries' supervision. English was taught in addition to reading and writing in the local dialect. Some of the central schools offered elementary technical and vocational training; in 1924 a school was set up at Yule Island to train carpenters, boat builders and other tradesmen. By 1934 fifteen parish schools were teaching a combined total of 535 students. The Mekeo were served by one parish school at Inawaia and by St Patrick's School on Yule Island.

Though some profited from the opportunities offered by the mission, the majority of villagers saw little reason to send their children to school if this meant disrupting the domestic routine; and very few were prepared to part with their offspring for the minimum of four years which the mission required students to spend at its boarding schools. Patrol reports of these years make many references to complaints from the mission concerning school attendance. The elders recalled, with much amusement, that it was the village constable's duty, under the watchful eye of the patrol officer, to cane the truants. They shrug off with a laugh the one or two years they spent at the village school, declaring all they learnt in that time was 'to say Ave Maria'. Few middle-aged or older people in Inawi have had more than one or two years elementary education: no person over the age of fifty had attended a parish school.

This apathy to, or deliberate avoidance of, the channels through which new ideas and new values might have

64 Ibid: 430.
65 Ibid: 417, fn.2.
66 Information obtained from the household census taken in Inawi.
reached the village - education, migrant labour, travel, the cash economy - provided existing institutions with an effective insulation against change. The traditional order remained unchallenged, the standard upon which new experiences were evaluated. It is little wonder, under these circumstances, that the Inawaia cult of 1941 achieved no permanent break with the past. The accommodating of the demands of the white regime had, of course, involved a certain amount of adjustment and compromise - the cult gave evidence of the existence of new tensions - but the changes which were taking place were so gradual as to be imperceptible to those experiencing them. Since the results of these changes are not evident until much later, it is difficult to pinpoint them; the process can perhaps be most readily identified in the slow decline of chiefly ceremonial occurring during these years.

People complain that the chiefs no longer give 'proper' feasts; certainly those which can be observed today are a far cry from the elaborate affairs described by Seligman and Guis.67 By carefully questioning the oldest informants in Aipeana and Inawi, it was possible to estimate roughly when certain ceremonies, or elements of them,

were abandoned. The Inawi elders were able to recount in detail the distinctive ceremonies which were once held by the war chiefs - the iso and faia lopia. When an iso lopia gave a feast he invited only the iso sections of other clans and he was expected to kill forty or more pigs to present to his guests. Warriors attended the feast clad in full war dress, each clan performing war dances (pani, kuriza) in front of the host's clubhouse as they arrived. When all the guests were seated on the ufu, the chiefs of each group would sing war chants (falaia) boasting of the enemies they and their forefathers had killed in battle: this performance was likely to lead to violence if the singer enumerated among his victims the ancestors or relatives of other clans present, thus charging the whole affair with excitement and tension. The feast continued all through the night, with food being served at regular intervals and whole pigs being presented to each of the invited chiefs. In the morning many more pigs were slaughtered and given to the guests. Each chief received several pigs which were not consumed by the warriors, but

The method followed here was first to carefully question several knowledgeable elders concerning the types of ceremonies once held by the chiefs. Having sorted out this information, and having gained a clear idea of all the different ceremonies held by the various dignitaries and of the manner in which they were held, I then re-interviewed the same informants to determine whether they had actually witnessed the feasts they described, and, if so, when was the last time they had seen them held. Events were roughly dated by establishing whether the informant, at the time of which he was speaking, was a child (mini fa'a), an unmarried youth (o'oea), a married man (au), or a married man with one, two or three children, etc. It is possible that there were other ceremonies held in the past of which my informants had no knowledge; though they themselves deny this.
taken home and given to the senior chief of the clan who divided the meat amongst the whole group.

Inawi informants explained that they themselves had not seen such feasts but had been told by their fathers and grandfathers how they should be held. Though the titles of iso and faia lopia continue to the present day, the elders state that during their lifetime the war chiefs have installed new chiefs and built new clubhouses employing ceremonies which were merely a simplification of those proper to the civilian chiefs. The last faia clubhouse in Inawi built in the traditional manner is said to have been pulled down when the oldest informants were children. The war chiefs of Aipeana were only a little behind the Inawi chiefs in abandoning their distinctive ceremonial. Two of the oldest men in Aipeana saw the investment of a faia chief when they were small boys; as youths, they attended a feast in their own village and one in Beipa at which iso chiefs were installed. All war chiefs installed after this gave feasts similar to those of civilian chiefs. The last iso clubhouse in Aipeana fell down sometime before the Second World War and was not rebuilt. No one from either village claimed that they had seen the great feasts formerly held to repay allies after a battle. These testimonies indicate that the ceremonies proper to the war chiefs were becoming obsolete by the early 1900s and had been almost entirely abandoned by the 1920s.

The special feasts formerly given by the ugauga lopia (sorcery chiefs) were dying out by the 1920s. The sorcerers were always presented with the choicest cuts of meat at feasts given by the civilian chiefs and were therefore obliged at some time to make a return feast. Like other chiefs, they also held feasts to celebrate the investment
of a new ugauga lopia or the building of a new clubhouse. The elders of both villages state that they participated in such celebrations in their youth; the last was held at Eboa in the East Mekeo and the sorcerers of Inawi and Aipeana are said to have undertaken to make a return feast, but never did so.

The civilian chiefs also gradually dispensed with the more elaborate and expensive ceremonies. The fa'aniau chiefs once built dwellings which were distinguished not only by their position and the materials used, but also by special ornaments and insignia. The construction of such a house was a lengthy and expensive affair. Experts, who had to be richly rewarded for their labours and fed for the duration of their work, were employed to execute the necessary carving and painting. The decorations were kept hidden by screens of palm fronds until completed; when all was ready a great feast was given to celebrate the occasion.

The oldest Inawi informants related that the senior chief of Oaisaka built an elaborately decorated house when they were small boys. While preparations were being made for the opening feast, a clansman died and all celebrations had to be cancelled. Consequently the house, which was the last of its kind in the village, was never lived in, though later it occasionally served as a government resthouse. Aipeana elders remembered two or three such

69 According to informants in both villages, Seligman's statement that 'As a rule there is nothing distinctive about a chief's house...' is not correct. Seligman 1910: 347-8. See above: 52. See also Hau'ofa 1971: 162.
houses in their village when they were children but said that when these dwellings fell into disrepair they were not rebuilt because of the expense involved. Just after the Second World War, one chief chose to build a house in the old style; but it appears that this was a deliberate revival rather than a continuation of the old custom.

The civilian chiefs continued to build clubhouses, to install their sons as chiefs and to supervise observances for the death of a clan member but proceedings were simplified by curtailing the part played by the *ufu apie.* On all important occasions, the host clan usually called upon the chiefs of its *ufu apie* to honour them with a grand ceremonial procession through the village. Seligman describes in detail the first stage of this stately display:

The chiefs of the *ufu apie* solemnly leave their *ufu* chewing areca nut, and from time to time making a rattling noise by rubbing their lime spatulae against the neck of their lime gourds. This produces a loud clicking noise, which is a warning to keep the track clear. The chiefs of the *ufu apie* then make a move towards the village whither they are bound but usually stop after a few steps, and rattle their spatulae on their gourds pretending to be too tired to go on. They are immediately given a present of food and begged to forget their fatigue and to remember only the sorrow of the village to which they are bringing relief. When they have received sufficient presents they proceed on their way. They are thus 'refreshed' two or three times every hour until they reach the outlying coconut trees of the village that is in mourning.71

71 Seligman 1910: 360.
Later the chiefs would progress in similar fashion, but even more slowly and with lengthy pauses, down the centre of the village street to the hosts' ufu. The event proved very expensive to the hosts, who had to have many pigs and a large amount of game ready to present to the chiefs during their journey. In addition, the rest of the ufu apie was invited to dance and had to be richly rewarded in meat. The ufu apie were always the major recipients of food from a feast but on lesser occasions, which did not merit the same expense, matters could be simplified by sending the food to the ufu apie and not inviting their presence.

The ufu apie continued to be invited to attend important feasts, but gradually the most extravagant element - the procession of the chiefs - was omitted. The oldest informants recalled that when they were boys and unmarried youths they had seen the ufu apie chiefs parade through their villages, though the practice had ceased by the time they were married men. Dancing and singing by the ufu apie continued for much longer. The last occasions on which they danced in both villages were in the late 1940s - at the installation of the present chiefs of Afai clan in Inawi and of the chief of Apagoa clan in Aipeana. The ufu apie have not danced in either village since then, though at one or two feasts they have been invited to sing.

The gradual diminishing of ceremonial life roughly coincides with the stepping up of government activity in the 1920s and 1930s. The elders emphasize how much time they spent in government work as young men; some claim that the

demands were so excessive that at times people had not even enough food to eat, let alone for feasts:

They kept on carrying cargoes and because of this people in the village were starving and quarrelling broke out as people were stealing from each other because they were hungry.73

It seems unlikely that people actually starved; nevertheless, the new activities required by the tax, enforced rice growing and the constant drain on the village's labour force caused by carrying certainly disrupted the normal pattern of village affairs. Large feasts, which required months, even years of careful planning and husbanding of resources, must have been extremely difficult to organize under conditions prevailing in the 1920s and 1930s. People explain that the chiefs and the village constable always worked out between them the apportioning of time to government work and traditional tasks; but in practice this must have involved considerable compromise on the part of the chiefs. Since the early 1900s certain clans have reduced the number of clans they recognize as ufu apie: this is revealed by a comparison of Seligman's list of ufu apie with contemporary custom.74 In some cases the reasons given for the reduction are political but it seems economic considerations probably lay behind them. A well informed Inawi elder directly attributed the termination of an ufu apie relationship with his own clan to the effects of European contact:

The old people used to have three ufu apie: one from Afai, one from Ina'oae and one from Aivea, Inauefae ikupu. When the Europeans came they started to ask for plenty of work, so we cut one off. Now there are only two. This happened when I was small.75

74 Seligman 1910: 369–72.
75 Lapu Aufe, Inawi: 12 May 1971.
A relaxation of the taboos and restrictions which formerly gave the chief full control over his clan's economic resources accompanied the gradual simplification of ceremonial life. Magic specialists (called *fula ari* by many informants and referred to as the *kaivakuku* by Seligman) once existed to enforce strict taboos which were placed on the use of coconuts and betel nut months before a large feast. Old people in Inawi and Aipeana claimed to have seen the *fula ari* in their youth, but most young people had never even heard of such specialists. An Inawi chief in his late forties recalled that one of the most frightening experiences of his early childhood was sitting with his grandfather on the *ufu*, watching the *fula ari*, who were disguised by weird masks and clothing, run through the village searching for those who had broken the taboos. These statements suggest that the *fula ari* had ceased functioning by the 1930s.

Chiefs would have found it impracticable to impose severe restrictions on coconuts after the introduction of the tax, as most people earnt their tax money by making copra; by the 1930s betel nut was also being sold for cash. As circumstances made it increasingly difficult to organize large scale feasts there was, in any case, no longer any real need for the restraints that had applied in the past: fertile gardens always provided a surplus sufficient to meet the modest requirements of smaller feasts. Chiefly rights to conserve supplies of game and fish were retained for longer. Middle-aged people related that the strict controls made meat so scarce when they were children that their mothers used to feed them with certain types of beetles.

76 Seligman 1910: 314.
The process had not yet progressed far enough to attract people's attention, but a slow undermining of chiefly prerogative and prestige had already begun. Similar invisible processes of modification and change were taking place in other areas of the society. Under pressure from the mission, the patterns of family life and marriage were imperceptibly assuming different forms, and the observances relating to birth, marriage, death and mourning were less rigorously followed then before. The grudging concessions made to external pressures seemed of little importance at the time. The fact that no faia clubhouse had been built in the village for several years, or that the ufu apie had not been invited to dance at a recent feast, were not in themselves matters for concern; it was only later, when people began to realize that no chief would ever again build a faia ufu - as the proper ritual had been forgotten and no one could muster sufficient resources to hold the grand feast necessary for its opening - that the accumulation of small, apparently insignificant changes made its impact.

When people look back over their experiences it seems, therefore, that the years before the war represented an unbroken continuity with the pre-contact past, and that the old ways were suddenly swept away after the war.

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77 These changes could have been traced in detail by using a method similar to that applied to the decline of chiefly ceremonial, but because of limited time in the field I did not attempt to do so.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE WAR 1942-45: 'Then came our hardest time'

THE Second World War provides the most important chronological division of the Mekeo's contact history. When people are asked to date the changes they describe, they invariably do so with reference to the war; and indeed the majority of readily apparent changes have occurred over the last thirty years. The first fifty years of European control represented no sharp break with the pre-contact past; for five decades villagers were at least able to maintain the illusion that nothing important had been altered by the arrival of the white man. The war marks the beginning of a new era, and of a new phase of relationships with the white regime.

Though most Papuans and New Guineans were in one way or another affected by the war, their experiences were by no means uniform. The Mekeo region, as part of the Kairuku Subdistrict, was incorporated into the wartime Lakekamu District, which was classified by ANGAU as an 'indirectly affected' area. According to an ANGAU report of 1943:

...in this [the Lakekamu District] and the other 'unaffected' Districts, except to the extent that the communities were deprived of the presence of numbers of able bodied men who were recruited for service with the Army, the native population were not subjected

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to any hardship and at no time was there a shortage of native foodstuffs.²

In comparison with the occupied areas of New Guinea and Papua, and regions such as Milne Bay and Port Moresby, the people of the Lakekamu District suffered little: they did not experience the dislocating effects of Japanese invasion, their territories were never battle fronts and their lives and property were not threatened by the enemy's bombs. Yet the Mekeo, for one, remember the war as their 'hardest time'.

The Lakekamu District was heavily recruited for labourers and carriers. In September 1943, 4,000 men had been recruited, a number which ANGAU considered to be the maximum labour potential of a population estimated at 33,000: at 12.1 per cent of the total population, the level of recruitment was just slightly below that of the highest of 12.58 per cent in the Samarai District.³ By the end of 1942, the Mekeo villages were reported to be 'practically drained' of young men.⁴ A census check in December 1942 revealed that approximately 497 men were absent from their villages and that 'in a case of vital necessity' between sixty to 100 extra labourers could be obtained, of which perhaps half would be fit for carrying.⁵

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² ANGAU Native Labour Section Statistics 1943.
³ ANGAU Native Labour Section Statistics 1943. Appendix A of a 'Report...in respect to Native Relief and Rehabilitation...'.
⁴ Patrol to the Mekeo 13-19 Nov. 1942.
⁵ Patrol to Terapo via the Mekeo 19-30 Dec. 1942.
Most men recruited in mid-1942 were sent to the Bulldog trail, the supply route which provided a tenuous overland link with the small Australian force left to defend Wau. Supplies had to be transported by ship from Port Moresby to the mouth of the Lakekamu River in the Gulf of Papua, and from there taken by barge up river to Terapo. Goods were then loaded into canoes for a further two day journey up stream to the Bulldog labour camp; carriers covered the distance from Bulldog to Wau - a seven day journey on foot. Men were also conscripted as plantation labourers: some worked on the rice plot established by ANGAU in the Mekeo, others on the copra and rubber plantations to the east of the district. Later in the year, many were sent to Kokoda.

The effects of the men's absence on village communities must have varied from group to group, depending on the requirements of the local subsistence economy. The Gulf people, for instance, depended on a staple diet of sago which necessitated the men's labour to fell, transport

6 Ryan, 1972: 1215.

7 In December 1942, ninety Mekeo were reported to be working in the Jesubaibua and Kubuna rice plots: Patrol to Terapo via the Mekeo 19-30 Dec. 1942.

8 According to ANGAU Native Labour Statistics for 1943, forty-four men from the Kairuku area were employed as plantation labourers. It is not clear whether this figure is inclusive or exclusive of the men working on the ANGAU rice plot. Possibly the urgent need for carriers had reduced the number working on plantations. Some informants stated that they had worked for six months or so on the Kanosia plantations and then were sent to Kokoda as carriers.
and cut the sago palms to size, before the women could wash and prepare the sago starch. In the case of the Mekeo, whose rich alluvial lands allowed crops to be cultivated on the same plot for several seasons, and where the greater part of subsistence labour normally fell to the women, the men's absence did not seriously endanger village food supplies. Despite serious floods in November and December 1942 and again in 1943, patrols reported no food shortages. In fact supplies were sufficiently plentiful to allow ANGAU's Food Supply Section to make regular purchases from villagers - a slight scarcity of local food crops reported in 1944 was attributed to excessive buying on its part. Informants recalled that American troops also toured the area to buy food, exchanging tins of meat for fresh fruit and vegetables.

With virtually all able-bodied men absent from their villages, field staff did not expect much rice would

10 See above: 38.
11 A patrol to the Mekeo 22 Nov.-8 Dec. 1943 observed that 'the various foods which generally grow, such as corn, sweet potatoes, cabbage, sugar cane, taro, pumpkin, tomatoes etc. have all been washed away [by the floods], and the people are practically living on taro alone. Paw Paw and bananas are plentiful.' Fieldwork in 1970 and 1971 indicated that European-introduced fruits and vegetables were items grown primarily for trade, forming only a very unimportant part of the average villager's daily diet. Since bananas, the staple, were plentiful and taro was also available, the absence of the other crops mentioned in the report can hardly have constituted a food shortage in villagers' terms.

12 Patrol to the Mekeo District 8-16 May 1944.
be planted for the 1942-43 season but patrols were sent out as usual to supervise clearing and planting. The first patrol reported that only two or three villages had commenced work and that the rest declared they could manage only very small plots since all their men were away. Less than two weeks later, a second patrol was surprised to find the women and old men hard at work clearing new areas, and expressing their determination to produce more rice than ever before:

The old men cut the large trees down, while the women and children do all the clearing and burning, and these people are to be congratulated for the work they have done. The people are fully aware that this rice cultivation is necessary to help the war effort, and these old men and the women are certainly doing their bit to help on that effort, it is hard work for them, but they are carrying on just as their sons are in other parts of the Territory, and their one idea is, that this year their crops will exceed those of the previous years....

In a note attached to this report, Thompson remarked with satisfaction that the Mekeo's efforts indeed represented a '100% war effort'. Patrol officers praised the people's labours and stressed to them the importance of growing as much rice as possible for the army, which had undertaken to pay growers a penny per pound for their grain. Despite damage to the crop caused by flooding, the women and old men succeeded in equalling the pre-war production figures.

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13 Patrol to the Mekeo District 13-19 Nov. 1942.


15 Patrol to the Mekeo District 13-19 Nov. 1942.
with a harvest that realized £1,200. This positive response contrasted with the reactions of the coastal Waima and Kivori people, who were not only the most inveterate deserters from the Bulldog labour lines but also refused to co-operate in such small matters as supplying firewood and food for the police.

By mid-1943 the effects of the men's absence were becoming more noticeable: field staff observed that tracks and roads were overgrown, and that fences and houses were badly in need of repair. After a patrol in March 1943, one officer reported that some Mekeo and nearly all the Waima and Kivori women had approached him, asking that their menfolk be sent back to help them make new gardens. Nevertheless, with the help of the old men, the hardy Mekeo women planted 118 acres of rice for the 1943-44 season. Presumably because of the floods in late 1943, only 33 1/2 tons of grain were harvested - approximately only one

16 Thompson, Report 1944.
18 Patrol to the Mekeo District 10-20 May 1943.
20 Patrol to the Mekeo District 8-16 May 1944, note attached by W.H.H. Thompson.
21 Patrol to the Mekeo and Waima 9-14 Oct. 1944.
quarter of the amount produced the previous year. The
government rice mill had been moved to the Mekeo and set up
near Jesubaibua village when the bombing of Port Moresby
commenced in 1942. In addition to supervising the village
rice plots, ANGAU employed several indentured labourers
on a rice plantation which was cultivated by means of a
tractor plough. 22

The scarcity of male labour made the problem of
obtaining carriers far more acute than it had ever been in
the past; mountain tribesmen now had to be persuaded or
forced to come down to the coast to carry supplies for
mountain stations. 23 A patrol of the Mekeo and coastal
villages in January 1944 had to employ female carriers,
as there were no men available. 24 The situation was
relieved a few months later when many native labourers
were repatriated during the lull in hostilities which
followed the fall of Madang in April. By August, many
Mekeo men had returned to their villages. 25 Two months
later a total of 452 men were instructed to each plant a
half acre of rice for the 1944-45 season; 26 presumably
most if not all of this number were repatriated labourers.
Apart from rice planting, there was plenty of work awaiting
the men: houses had fallen into disrepair, pig fences

22 Thompson, Report 1944.
23 Patrol to Goilala 8-22 Mar. 1943.
24 Patrol to Mekeo and Waima 17-28 Jan. 1944.
25 Patrol to Mekeo, Kivori and Waima 7-17 Aug. 1944.
26 Patrol to Mekeo and Waima 9-14 Oct. 1944.
needed rebuilding and new gardens had to be cleared. In some villages patrol officers ordered that a complete, new set of houses should be built. Villagers enthusiastically set about the tasks given to them and field staff were pleased with the results. When work commenced on the rice plots in November, Thompson was able to report: '...an excellent start is being made by apparently most willing natives'.

Wartime patrol reports paint an optimistic picture of relations between the Mekeo and the government. No disruption of government authority was noted. Thompson, the ARM, now became Major Thompson, an ANGAU district officer, but he remained at Kairuku and he and his officers continued to patrol the region as they had in the past. Villagers are reported as willing acceptors of the sacrifices required of them, the young men serving as carriers for the army and the women and old men labouring in the rice fields to feed the troops. Though people left in the village were obliged to undertake a far heavier workload than they were accustomed to in peace time, no one went hungry, and communities were not seriously affected by the absence of the men. In practice, the wartime government was compelled to employ harsh methods, but patrol reports reveal a more sympathetic attitude and a greater appreciation of villagers' efforts. Whereas in the

27 Patrol to Mekeo, Kivori and Waima 7-17 Aug. 1944.

28 Patrol to Mekeo 1-23 Sept. 1944; Patrol to Mekeo and Waima 9-14 Oct. 1944.

past carriers on mountain patrols had been ridiculed for their complaints and unmanly behaviour, officers inspecting labour lines on the Bulldog trail readily admitted:

The carriers employed on these sections are certainly doing a man's job, and don't get any comfort or assistance from the weather which as already mentioned is very cold, and invariably wet.30

The same attitude is reflected in comments on the rice industry. Previously villagers had been considered foolish not to have eagerly participated in an activity from which they would profit; now field staff were appreciative of labours which would help the 'war effort'. Government officers had always cast themselves in the role of benefactors; suddenly the situation was reversed. Ken Inglis observes that the carriers on the Kokoda trail were 'needed as natives had never been needed before by white men in New Guinea'.31 It seems that this need, which was dramatized in an immediate and direct way on the Kokoda trail, also influenced situations far removed from the battle fronts.

In many respects informants' statements substantiate the general picture presented in patrol reports. Villagers agreed that there were no food shortages. The Inawi wartime village constable, Isoaimo Opu, affirmed:

Even during the war the food in the village was good and there was plenty of it. People continued to make new gardens, the boys who had just left school were asked to help chop down the trees and make new gardens. No one went hungry.32

30 Patrol to Edie Creek and Wau 26 Apr.-13 May 1943.

31 Inglis 1969: 505.

The women, particularly, spoke proudly of their efforts to grow rice to feed the soldiers. Their determination to equal the pre-war production reflects the pride the hard-working Mekeo woman takes in her own physical strength and industry: it was a special sort of triumph for the women to prove that they could produce even more rice without the help of the men. They emphasize that they had to work very hard but they make no suggestion that they were forced to do so. When the men boast of their exploits, the women point out that they too made their contribution.

Other comments, however, indicate that the picture has a darker side which the documentary evidence tends to pass over. Many references are made in reports to recruiting labourers and arresting deserters but few details are given: one gains the impression that these matters were merely routine and accomplished with a minimum of fuss. In contrast, informants' accounts suggest that the high-handed methods of ANGAU officers and the brutality of the native police caused disruption and tension in village communities. Patrol officers marched into the villages with their police, according to informants, handcuffed all available men and led them off to Kairuku where they were forced to sign on as labourers for the army. Often surprise raids were made at night. A carrier on the Bulldog trail recalled the circumstances under which he was 'recruited':

One night when all the village was asleep, police came and surrounded the village and went to each house and got out every man and handcuffed them and brought them to the middle of the village. They kept us there till daybreak and then walked us to Kairuku and forced us to sign on for two years.33

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Within four or five months, each village had, in this manner, been stripped of virtually every able-bodied man. The government's methods can hardly have inspired confidence. For those left in the village, this was a time of uncertainty and insecurity: people recall that when planes passed overhead the women would weep, thinking of their husbands and sons, and fearing they would never see them again.

Mass desertions from the Bulldog carrying lines and labour camp occurred in 1942; in October one patrol arrested ninety deserters in the Mekeo and Waima villages alone. The runaways usually returned to their villages - informants recalled that it took nearly three weeks travelling by foot to complete the journey - and then attempted to avoid capture by hiding in the bush when patrols visited the village. People claim that the police did not waste time pursuing the fugitives but instead intimidated their families until the men allowed themselves to be taken. The police would raid the houses of suspected deserters, hitting the women and children, shooting the family's pigs and destroying or seizing property in the house, including the box of traditional valuables which each household carefully hoarded to make bride price and other traditional payments. Patrons usually recruited new labour and arrested deserters simultaneously, and it appears that in the confusion of a police raid the new


35 See, for example, Patrol to Mekeo and Waima 12-25 Oct. 1942: ninety deserters were arrested by the patrol and 205 new labourers recruited.
recruits were treated just as roughly as the deserters. A man who served on both the Bulldog and the Kokoda trail described how he had just returned home from a mountain patrol, when some carriers deserted from Bulldog:

We came back to stay in the village and some carriers ran away from Wau and came back to the village also. Mr O'Malley came first to get carriers from this village and the police went to the houses of the men who had run away from Wau. They took the boxes containing riches out, also they took other things in the houses, and they put handcuffs on us and they whipped us very hard in the village - also they spoilt the village. The village constable was calling out 'All the men who ran away, the police are going to spoil your property, so all of you must come out.' And so all of us came out in front of Mr O'Malley.36

Desertions on a smaller scale than those of 1942 continued throughout the war; villagers declare that police raids similar to the one just described were a common occurrence. One Inawi man is said to have tried to spear a policeman because native police were 'always coming to the village and hitting and kicking the women and children'. Those Mekeo police who served in the district are believed to have been punished later by the sorcerers for the brutality they displayed to their own people.

The wartime village constable evidently found his position very uncomfortable. In the past it had not been an easy matter to balance the demands of the government and the interests of the people, but it had usually been possible to smooth matters over so that, at least on the surface, relations with the government appeared to be

satisfactory. Now the situation had abruptly altered; patrol officers could no longer be put off with excuses, what they wanted they took by force. Under these circumstances the village constable could be powerless to provide any buffer against the government's demands, and he might find himself the target of the patrol officer's blows and abuse. An Inawi village constable was dismissed in disgrace, according to informants, because he was unable to arrest the deserters from his village. People avowed that this was the only occasion on which they had ever seen a government officer strike a village constable. The incident appears to have caused a considerable stir in Inawi. Isoaimo Opu, a chief of Gagai clan, who was appointed in the disgraced official's stead, explained that the other chiefs were not consulted as they had 'run off into the bush' and that Mr O'Malley, the patrol officer, had simply selected him on the recommendations of the village constables of Aipeana and Beipa. The flight of the chiefs, and the arbitrary appointment of a successor, represent an undignified departure from the former ideals of consultation and co-operation.

Informants agreed that Isoaimo was selected because he was a 'big, strong man' who the patrol officer thought would be capable of dealing with the deserters. Though he is indeed a man of imposing physical appearance and powerful personality (in addition to being a chief), Isoaimo made it clear that he relied on diplomacy, not bullying, to achieve his ends:

I didn't go and get the runaway carriers by force but I persuaded the men to come with me to Kairuku, telling them that if they stayed in the village the Government would punish their families, so after a while they would
change their mind and go. One man [who is known to be very much under the thumb of his shrewish wife] ran away from carrying and I went to his wife and told her 'You must keep on asking him to go to Kairuku and telling him that if he refuses to go the police will come and raid your house. I will ask him, but you must help me to keep on asking him to change his mind.' So finally he agreed to go. When the men agreed to come I handcuffed them and took them to Kairuku.37

In this manner he was able to satisfy the government without bringing the wrath of his own people on his head. Tactful treatment also helped to avert the rages of patrol officers:

...whenever officers came to the village I would look after them and give them fruit, vegetables and eggs. I did this just for a favour, not for payment. After I had looked after them like that when they came to the village, next time they came they were easier to get on with.38

During the war officers were usually harsh and often abusive but, he declared, none dared to strike him for if they had, he 'was ready to hit them back'.

Villagers had felt that the government made heavy demands on them in the 1920s and 1930s but the experiences of these years did not prepare them for the ruthlessness of wartime measures. It is little wonder that people remember the war as their 'hardest time'. For other people of the district, for example the Nara and Kabadi, who were exposed to few pre-war pressures, the government's actions must have seemed even more alarming than they did to the Mekeo.


38 Ibid.
THOSE left in the village were told that their hardships were necessitated by 'the war'; but ANGAU's propaganda can have given little understanding of what the white man's war involved to people who saw nothing of the fighting. It lay with the men, who left their homes to serve on the carrying lines and battle fronts, to give some perspective to events and to provide some overall interpretation of the war experience.

Whatever the capacity in which the men participated - as carriers, labourers, police or soldiers - the sights they saw, the things they learnt and the new relationships which they formed made a deep impression on them. The 'war' is a topic which even today arouses the most stolid individual to give an animated account of his experiences. In retrospect, events are seen in very clear cut terms and the men display a strong sense of the importance of their own contribution. The issue at stake, as informants saw it, was quite straightforward - Japan wanted to take Papua New Guinea from Australia. The New Guineans and the people of the Northern District believed that the Japanese would do more for them than the Australians had done, so they fought on their side, but the Mekeo and other Papuans helped the Australians to win. Oaisa Aisa, who was a carrier on the Kokoda trail, explained:

The Japanese wanted to get Papua New Guinea so they were fighting for it. Probably they had seen this place so they wanted to get it and use it as their own. The Japanese produced rice and this country produces rice - this may be the reason they wanted this country. The New Guineans and the Northern District helped the Japanese but the Papuans helped Australia and America. I was expecting the Australians and Americans to win so we would be saved. But if there had only been
the Australians and Americans they would not have won, but the Papuans helped them to win.39

According to Auki Kua, a wartime policeman:

The Australians were not treating us properly so the Japanese thought they could do better, therefore the war started. That's what some people thought, therefore the Northern District people were helping the Japanese. But the people of Mekeo didn't know the Japanese' ways or how they would treat us, so we didn't like them to control us and so we helped the Australians.40

These explanations are typical, though the reasons for Japan's desire to acquire New Guinea vary in different accounts. Informants made their sense of involvement explicit by the manner in which they described the alignments for and against the Japanese. In fact, villagers probably had little alternative but to assist the army that occupied their territory, nevertheless the alignments are presented as the result of deliberate choices and commitments.

The Mekeo clearly grasped the idea that they were defending their territory against an enemy, even though their own lands and villages were never directly threatened. They feared that if the Japanese won, they and other Papuans would be killed for helping Australia. Auki Kua related that, in the event of a Japanese victory, the Papuan soldiers and police wanted the Australians:

...to send all the Papuan women and children to Australia. But the men must remain to keep on fighting.41


41 Ibid.
Such attitudes at least partly reflect the success of ANGAU propaganda. Officers took pains to impress upon the carriers and labourers that their contribution was an essential part of the 'war effort'. Investigating the desertions from the Bulldog trail in 1942, one officer claimed:

The Mekeo natives are well aware that this fight against the Japanese is theirs as well as ours, and I explained to them that it was necessary to keep supplies up to the troops, as by their desertions from the lines they were causing a delay which might become serious. I had a good talk to them and afterwards had no trouble in obtaining many more new labourers for the lines. These deserters realise that they should not have deserted....42

It is impossible to say how convincing these arguments seemed in 1942; but they have since gained acceptance. Today villagers do speak of the war as 'their fight', in which they suffered and to which they contributed.

Men who were forcibly taken from their homes to fill ANGAU's carrying and labour lines - no less than those who served voluntarily with the police and the Papuan Infantry Battalion - describe their experiences with all the enthusiasm and fire of old soldiers. Though none of them were old enough to have participated in pre-contact warfare, all must have heard first-hand accounts of it from the old men. Occasional outbursts of violence over land and other matters still occurred after contact: older informants had taken part in a fight between Inawi and Aipeana over land, in which three men were killed. The warrior traditions persisted; men still felt themselves

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to be warriors should the need arise, as indeed they still do today. Undoubtedly the white man's warfare proved to be very different from their own, but it was natural that they should tend to see it, at least at first, in their own terms. Informants believed that certain exponents of faia magic, who were recruited by ANGAU as carriers, played an important part protecting the carriers from harm, warning when the enemy would strike and predicting the Australians' ultimate victory. One of the most powerful Mekco faia magicians, Kelemo Aisa of Rarai, laboured as a carrier on the Kokoda trail; the fact that no Mekco carriers were killed on the trail is attributed to his powers, and he is also said to have correctly predicted when the Japanese would attack. Some informants admitted that they were frightened because the Japanese killed so many Australians, others stated that they were confident as the faia magicians had said their side would win. Lapu Aufe, who carried on the Bulldog trail, recalled:

We were very frightened if the Japanese should win. We thought the Japanese would kill us because we helped the Australians and Americans. Some Australian soldiers asked us who was going to win and we didn't know so we didn't say anything to them. All my friends thought that the Australians and Americans must try hard to win or else we would be killed. Also faia men went after the soldiers and said they were going to win. The Papuans said we are going to win now. Some soldiers heard that Papuans were saying that they were going to win and they proved it. The soldiers said 'The carriers said we are going to win, so we did.'

43 See above: 110.
Men possessing some knowledge of war magic took their own protective charms with them. One informant recalled that his father specially prepared a powerful charm for him. A sorcerer declared that the Europeans also carried charms; while he was working on the Bulldog labour lines some Australian soldiers had shown him locks of their relatives' hair; in return he had allowed them to see the hair and other ancestor relics on which he relied for protection.

The carriers deeply resented the fact that they were not permitted to fight the enemy themselves and were strictly forbidden to handle weapons. Opu Lala, a carrier on the Kokoda trail, exclaimed:

We wanted to shoot some of the enemy but we weren't taught how to use the guns. We were very angry and wanted to kill the enemy!\textsuperscript{45}

According to Auki Kua and others, the European soldiers sympathized with the carriers:

When they [the troops] saw the carriers they said, 'You are supposed to be carrying a shotgun or a weapon but now you are taking the place of horses carrying supplies.'\textsuperscript{46}

Informants admitted that they were not capable of handling guns; they blamed their ignorance on the Australians who, they felt, should have taught them, as they believed the Americans had taught the negro soldiers. Opu Opu, who at one time was a bosswboy on a barge transporting supplies from Terapo to Bulldog, illustrated the point with a story of how he had nearly shot down the 'Australian general's plane' because of his ignorance of the markings on planes.

\textsuperscript{45} Opu Lala, Inawi: 28 Apr. 1971.

\textsuperscript{46} Auki Kua, Inawi: 12 Apr. 1971.
While working on the barge he was given charge of a machine gun, but when he shot at an Australian plane, believing it was the enemy, the gun was swiftly taken from him: This story is, of course, calculated to elicit laughter from an appreciative audience, but the fact that the men can laugh at themselves does not make the moral any less plain. Many other Papuans, all of whom shared a similar warlike tradition, must have felt humiliated, as the Mekeo did, by the passive role they were compelled to play.

The Mekeo's positive sense of commitment contrasts strongly with the reactions observed in the occupied areas of the Mandated Territory, where people had seen the Germans replaced by the Australians and them in turn driven out by the Japanese. Some groups felt themselves to be simply the helpless pawns of vastly superior powers; others believed the Japanese were the returning spirits of the ancestors and the bearers of cargo. Little has been published, as yet, concerning the attitudes of people like the Mekeo, who experienced an unbroken continuity of colonial rule. The government had never been discredited in the Mekeo's eyes; it continued to control their territory and though it was

47 Burridge 1960: 12.


49 A graduate student of the University of Papua New Guinea, Neville K. Robinson, has undertaken a study of the effects of the war in three separate areas of Papua New Guinea, including the Gulf District of Papua which, with the Kairuku Subdistrict, formed the wartime Lakekamu District. His unpublished paper 'Kukipi in the War', presents a preliminary survey of oral material collected from four villages of the Malalaua Subdistrict of the Gulf District.
clearly hard pressed by an external enemy, it was not defeated. Though their response can be explained in terms of a different contact history, it seems, on the other hand, that some Mekeo may have had just as much reason to welcome the arrival of the Japanese as, for instance, did cultists of the Madang coast. Early in 1941, prophets of the Inawaia cult spread the news of an imminent invasion of England by Hitler and his 'iron men'; during the attack on the mission station, villagers announced that the Japanese had landed at Port Moresby, killing all the Europeans. Yet whatever the cultists' views may have been, there is no evidence to suggest that their overt reactions were any different from the majority, who had taken no part in the cult. They too served as carriers and labourers for ANGAU, while their women grew rice for the army; and subsequent events indicate that they shared in the new horizons and hopes born of the war.

It is unlikely that in 1942 any villagers were as sure of the situation as they are now, thirty years after the event. It seems rather that their sense of involvement has grown out of their experiences. Few Mekeo gave their services voluntarily. No more than three or four men in each of the larger villages served with the police or the PIB, judging from informants' statements. One man interviewed in Inawi, who had been working in Port Moresby at the time of the outbreak of war, was persuaded by his employer to voluntarily sign on as a labourer at the naval base; no doubt there were a few others who did likewise. The majority, however, were forcibly conscripted by methods

50 Thompson, Report 1941.
which have already been described. Desertions from the labour lines were common, and many youths attempted to avoid recruitment by finding employment with American troops stationed in Hisiu and Port Moresby. 51

Desertions from Bulldog were so frequent that the district office at Kairuku made investigations into conditions on the carrying lines. The runaways complained that they were given excessively heavy loads, that they had to carry seven days a week without being allowed a rest and that they often had to work all day on an empty stomach, as they were forced to leave camp in the morning before their food had been distributed to them. 52 According to Peter Ryan, the labourers on the Bulldog trail carried:

...under shocking conditions, up and down precipitous mountain ridges over 7,000 feet high, mostly through dank rain forest, constantly wet. Temperatures at night dropped nearly to freezing point, and carriers were lucky if they had a cheap cotton 'trade' blanket apiece. In the daytime their attire was usually merely a loincloth or g-string. Their main food was rice which they had to cook for themselves when they arrived tired at the end of the day, with sometimes a supplementary tin of meat or packet of army biscuits. Malaria and deficiency diseases ravaged them and sickness rates of 25 per cent occurred; 14 per cent was regarded as acceptable. 53

In addition to these hardships, informants stated that they had to put up with constant abuse and beatings from

51 Patrol to Terapo via the Mekeo 19-30 Dec. 1942.
53 Ryan 1972: 1215-16.
the native police. After a time, the backbreaking, monotonous labour and the police bullying became intolerable, so they decided to escape. Most were captured not long after they returned to their homes, given a good flogging and sent back to the labour lines. A deserter from Bulldog described his punishment:

We had court and then they showed us a 44 gallon drum - some police and some of the bossboys brought us to the drum and pulled us one by one on to it and held our arms and legs. They gave us a very hard beating with a cane stick - some got ten strokes, some got twelve.54

The floggings did not, however, discourage them from running away a second time; most men interviewed had deserted from Bulldog at least twice.

Fear was not given as a reason for desertion. Unlike Kokoda, the Bulldog trail was not a battle front, but merely a supply route to Wau, from where a small group of Australian troops made sorties against the Japanese based at Salamaua and Lae.55 Carriers stated that they saw little or no fighting and asserted that none of their number was killed or even wounded by the enemy. Later most saw fighting when they were moved to Lae and other areas. ANGAU officers investigating desertions in 1942 also denied that 'war fear' played any significant part.56 In June the following year, when Bulldog labour camp was bombed by the Japanese, the carriers, including hospital patients, fled

into the bush but they were soon rounded up and persuaded to return to the camp; since they had not previously experienced a bombing raid, no one was punished. 57

It was difficult for men who knew nothing of modern warfare to understand the vital importance of transport and supply. Bulldog carriers had only the word of the Europeans in charge of them that their labours were necessary. They had little direct contact with the troops and saw nothing of what was happening on the battle fronts; they themselves were not allowed to fight and were employed merely as pack animals. It seemed, therefore, that their efforts had very little relevance to the war and its outcome. Their own hardships preoccupied them and when these became intolerable, they ran away as they had done in the past on mountain patrols. One deserter commented:

...I heard when we were running away from carrying - the Japanese are trying to take this land so we are fighting them, so don't run away, you must help me by carrying food while we are fighting. At that time I was just thinking about carrying the heavy things and getting tired of it, and we didn't think about who was going to win the war. 58

The position of the carrier was clearly summed up in a remark made by Auki Kua, a wartime policeman:

We [the police] didn't run away. We were not signed on as labourers so we didn't think of running away. 59

57 Patrol to Edie Creek and Wau 26 Apr.-13 May 1943.
59 Auki Kua, Inawi: 12 Apr. 1971.
A policeman, who was given weapons and responsibility, did not desert. In pre-contact times, according to the old men, one man always followed behind a party of warriors; if any attempted to run back through the others, he would spear them. Such was the warrior tradition - a carrier was something of a different order.

Though frequent references are made in patrol reports to deserters from Bulldog, and an occasional runaway from the Kanosia plantations, no mention is made of carriers returning home from Kokoda. The men interviewed who had been sent to Kokoda stated either that they simply had not thought of running away, or that they were too frightened to leave. Some said they were deterred by rumours they had heard of a party of Roro deserters being killed by Koiari people as they attempted to make their way to the coast. These fears would account for the fact that few, if any Kokoda deserters returned to their villages; some, however, did take advantage of the confusion at the battle front to escape to Port Moresby where they could find more congenial employment. One informant said that he had managed to absent himself from the labour lines, finding a job in Port Moresby with the American troops; another escaped to Port Moresby and worked as a labourer 'digging holes for telegraph posts' until ANGAU caught up with him and sent him back to Kokoda.

Those who served on Kokoda were of the opinion that they were well treated and not unduly harried by the

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60 cf. Grahamslaw 1971: 117. My informants stated that the men attacked were Roro not Mekeo. It is still a common practice to use the term 'Mekeo' to refer in general to people from the Kairuku Subdistrict - a usage which often leads to confusion.
native police, though specific examples of brutal treatment were not lacking. One carrier related that he had become very ill on the track and had finally collapsed; when he was unable to get to his feet, as he was ordered to do, the European supervisor of the line beat him senseless with a heavy stick. Later his companions carried him to a field hospital where he spent several weeks recovering from his injuries. Such incidents suggest that the Kokoda carriers received no more consideration than their counterparts on the Bulldog trail, but certainly the overall situation was very different. In contrast to Bulldog, the Kokoda trail was not merely a line of communication but also a moving battle front. Bearers took supplies to the front lines, and carried back the wounded and the dying. They witnessed the Australian retreat before the Japanese and the desperate fighting to regain Kokoda; they were horrified by the numbers of soldiers killed, most of whom seemed to the carriers to be only 'young school boys'. Their own hardships paled into insignificance in face of the terrible suffering of the troops. Those who took supplies to the soldiers and assisted the wounded to hospital were made fully aware of the importance of the part they played and of the gratitude of the men they served. This sense of involvement and purpose, as much as anything else, probably accounts for the fact that few thought of deserting from Kokoda. As one carrier expressed it:

61 The youth and inexperience of the Australian troops, which had been apparent to informants who were only young men themselves at the time, is commented on by Ryan 1972: 1213.
Those who went to Kokoda didn't run away but the ones who went to Bulldog did - they were talking and not working, so they were beaten by the Europeans and they ran away.62

The men freely admit that few of them volunteered their labour, that many served reluctantly and deserted when they could; but within the total context in which the wartime experiences are now seen, these actions are felt to be unimportant and in no way a contradiction of their present attitudes. When war broke out in 1942, villagers had no comprehension of what was about to take place; later they were to see things from a different perspective. Gradually the explanations of ANGAU, the response of the troops, and their own experiences brought to men, who had felt humiliated or simply indifferent to the role they were compelled to play, a realization that the services they performed were necessary and that they could make a significant contribution. Ken Inglis writes:

For once, in the relationship between European and native people, there was partnership of a kind. It was not the partnership of equals. But white men would starve to death or be killed for lack of weapons or die of wounds, if the carriers did not get through. There were not enough white men to do the work of carrying; and they could not do it as well as the natives.63

It was precisely this fact - that the Papuans were needed by the Europeans - which gave meaning to events in Mekeo eyes. Villagers could see that in this context, their labours and hardships had not been pointless, and that


63 Inglis 1969: 505.
there had been good reason for the harsh measures employed by ANGAU. 'It was war', they say, 'so we all had to suffer'; and they are aware that others suffered far more. Likewise the women, who strained to grow rice for the army, do not complain of compulsion but boast of the efforts they made. Looking back over events, even the Bulldog carriers feel that they were not unjustly treated. Lapu Aufe declared:

They [ANGAU] gave us rice, bread, meat and fish, tea and sugar - I won't tell lies, its true they gave us enough. It was the time for war, so they drove us very hard, also if we did something wrong they whipped us - but they didn't whip us for nothing.64

One measure which informants felt could not be rationalized in these terms was ANGAU's confiscation of the clothing, tools and food which the troops, particularly the Americans, gave to the carriers. They spoke bitterly of ANGAU's destruction of these gifts, and of its attempts to keep the Papuans segregated from the soldiers who befriended them.65

The army's dependence on Papuan labour created a new basis on which relations between white and brown were to operate; moreover the egalitarian attitudes and behaviour of the vast numbers of Australian and American troops which flooded into the country soon broke down the barriers of caste previously maintained to preserve white 'prestige'. Many Europeans believed that the new familiarity served to reduce their status in the natives' eyes.


Hogbin and Read, anthropologists who had the opportunity to directly observe villagers' reactions to the war, found that New Guineans were astonished by the contrast in behaviour between the troops and the pre-war officials and settlers: some concluded that the newcomers must be a different race of men from the Europeans they had known before the war. Nearly a decade later, Mead observed in the stories the Manus told of their wartime experiences, the deep impression which their contacts with the American troops had made:

"The Americans treated us like individuals, like brothers", which meant that the Americans took no responsibility for the preservation of the caste relationships which existed between Europeans and natives.

The Mekeo still recalled the friendliness of the troops - Americans and Australians - after the passage of more than three decades. They, however, contrasted the actions of the soldiers not with the attitudes of pre-war officials, but with those of ANGAU. In a sense, the two represented the opposite poles of the range of possible relationships with white men. The aloof ANGAU officers were far harsher and less considerate of the people's welfare than any pre-war government official; the troops, on the other hand, displayed greater generosity and friendship than had any Europeans since the arrival of the first missionaries and government officers. Informants said that they worked side by side with the soldiers, talked

67 Read ibid.
68 Mead 1961: 149.
with them as friends and ate with them. Often the troops attempted to take the Papuans' part against ANGAU. Opu Opu, a Bulldog carrier, related an incident in which some Australian soldiers quarrelled with the supervisor of the carrying lines:

One of the Australian soldiers asked ANGAU, 'Why are you treating your labourers like pigs and dogs, if you keep treating them like that you should send them all home'. This started an argument between the ANGAU officer and the soldier, so the soldier said he would write a letter to the Government about the matter. We asked him whether he sent the letter but he said, 'No, I was just trying to scare him.'

Alongside the wealth and generosity of the Americans, however, the Australian troops took second place. Some informants criticized the Australians for neglecting to share with the carriers the parcels of food sent by their relatives, in contrast to the Americans who always shared what they had with the Papuans, loading them with gifts of food, clothing and money. Ame Maino, a Kokoda carrier, declared:

The Americans were very good. They gave us tobacco, matches, and food and clothes - especially clothes. ANGAU issued us with some clothing every six months, but the Americans gave us clothing every time we asked. The Americans were very kind to us, but ANGAU did not supply us with what we needed.

In the eyes of most informants, the Americans were not only more generous, they were bigger, stronger and better fighters than the Australians. Compared with the people of Manus, the Mekeo had only passing contacts with Americans;


nevertheless most of what Mead writes of Manus reactions might equally apply to them. 71

Informants identified ANGAU as 'the one who looked after the carriers and labourers'; and as such it was distinct from the 'Government'. Thompson, the former ARM who remained at Kairuku as an ANGAU district officer, was identified as the 'Government'; the recruiting officers and those who supervised the labour camps and carrying lines were 'ANGAU'. The precise relationship between the two was not made clear, though Thompson assumes an almost benevolent, protective role in many informants' accounts. The runaway carriers were brought to Thompson to have 'court'. One man stated that the second time he deserted from Bulldog, he explained to Major Tom he was worried about how his wife and seven children would manage without him; consequently he was allowed to return home to look after his family. According to another story well known in Inawi, one of the village's most powerful sorcerers, Maino Kauka, was recruited as a carrier by ANGAU and later deserted. When he was brought before Thompson, he explained that he was a sorcerer and should therefore be looking after affairs in the village. Thompson agreed that he should go home, on the condition that in future Maino would use his powers to deter any other deserters from returning to the village - an agreement which, it is said, was honoured by both sides. Judging from informants' statements, the beatings which they describe were delivered at the labour camps, not at the district court - a circumstance which would tend to put Thompson's actions in a more favourable light. When the

71 Mead 1961: 149-60.
war was finally over, Thompson is said to have sent letters to the various ANGAU officers in charge of the labour camps, asking them to send 'his men' home.

In reality, Thompson was no less a part of ANGAU than the officers who came with their native police to round up the carriers, but in villagers' eyes he remained a representative of the 'Government' as they had always known it. The fact that such a representative existed allowed them to perceive ANGAU as a temporary institution which was justified by wartime needs. In the long run, its brutality and excesses were felt to have little relevance to the wider context of relations with the government.

The presence of the troops was also only a temporary phenomenon, but one which was felt to have a lasting significance. The soldiers' disregard for the barriers which previously separated white and brown was welcomed as a gesture of friendship - a friendship valued not only in itself, but also for the moral relationship it implied. There was, however, no suggestion in informants' statements that the familiarity of the troops reduced the stature of the white man in their eyes.\(^{72}\) The new relationship was not one of equality, as Inglis points out, though it had laid a basis for it. The soldiers freely admitted a

\(^{72}\) Osmar White claims that the war was responsible for dispelling the white man's 'mystique of inimitable superiority': White 1972: 135. The Mekeo example suggests, in the first place, that the white man was a superior being only in his own estimation - villagers saw his greater wealth, not as the result of some innate superiority, but as concrete evidence of his possession of a superior ritual, through which the physical world could be controlled. In this sense, the war gave new proof of the immense potency of this ritual.
dependence on their Papuan helpers; their affability and generosity were positive demonstrations of their willingness to reciprocate. Moreover, public promises were made that, after the war, Papuans would be rewarded for their services by the government.

Lawrence discovered that Yali, the Rai Coast cult leader, was convinced by promises he heard in Brisbane in 1943 that the Australians would reward their native helpers with a large-scale distribution of cargo; for a time these hopes brought about a rapprochement with the white regime. The Mekeo spoke most emphatically of the promises that were made to them in public addresses given at Bulldog, Kokoda, Lae and at the celebrations held at Port Moresby to mark the end of the war. They explained that no specific content had been given to the promises - they were simply told that they would receive 'something good' for the sacrifices they had made and the help they had given the Australians:

After the war, before the labourers were sent home, the generals from America and Australia both made a speech and it was translated to us. The Australians and Americans said, 'You Papuans haven't been educated properly, so you can't be paid as much as the other soldiers - all the American and Australian soldiers will be given good pay and rations for working in the war - but you Papuans can't be paid because the Australians didn't teach you to use guns and other equipment. But you will have the right to have trade stores and shot guns.' They didn't actually mention shot guns but said, 'You will be given something later on.'

73 Lawrence 1967; 124; 129; 139.
We thought there would be changes - that the Government would give us some food or money. 74

Another recalled:

While we were working at Bulldog, one of the big Government men came to talk to us there. He told us, 'The war is going to stop. We are chasing the enemy back to Buna and soon we will chase them away. After the war is finished, you'll see something good - the Government will give you something.' He didn't say it out but he just suggested that something good was going to happen. We didn't find out what it was. 75

In the wider context of past experience, these promises came as the culmination of five decades of unfulfilled hopes and expectations. At last, it seemed, the Europeans had acknowledged their responsibilities and were ready to honour their original promises. In the past villagers had tried to co-operate with the white regime in the belief that it would ultimately reciprocate, but their efforts had simply been met with increasingly harsher demands. Then came the war and they were inflicted with greater hardships than ever before; but out of this ordeal had come an unequivocal re-affirmation of the protestations of friendship and good will made at the time of contact.

In one other respect the war re-created something of the emotional impact of first contact. What Mead terms the 'great technological achievements of a modern army'. 76

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75 A.O., Inawi: 3 May 1971.
76 Mead 1961: 146.
impressed a new generation of men no less dramatically than the trade goods brought by the first Europeans had impressed their fathers and grandfathers. Mead comments on how fascinated the Manus were by the Americans' machinery and equipment:

The Americans did everything with 'engines'; they had engines to cut down trees and engines to saw boards and engines to lift loads and engines to fire guns, and, so their American friends told them, at home they had engines to wash the dishes.\footnote{Ibid: 154.}

The Mekeo displayed no less a fascination and admiration for the equipment which the white troops had at their disposal. They described excitedly, with graphic gestures and appropriate noises - much in the manner of small boys enthusing over some mechanical toy - the machine guns, grenades, bombs, planes, aircraft carriers, ships and submarines which the armies deployed against each other. They had seen roads blasted through the mountains with dynamite and bulldozers, airfields cleared and laid in what seemed a trice, men and supplies transported in a matter of minutes by plane over a distance that would take months on foot. Tasks impossible with man-power alone were easily and swiftly accomplished with the Europeans' machinery.

People had coveted the trade goods brought by the first Europeans - steel tools, rice, clothes, blankets, mosquito nets - but by the 1940s many Papuans, including the Mekeo, had the means to satisfy their modest demands for such items. Now a new demand was created: people wanted their own machinery to work for them, though they had no idea of how they might acquire it or how they would learn to use it unless the Europeans agreed to help them. Little adaptation was necessary to learn how to

\footnote{Ibid: 154.}
use a steel knife, or wear a shirt, but the men soon realized that machinery was useless without the necessary skills and knowledge to operate it. The carriers smarted under the knowledge that they had not even been taught how to handle a gun. It was in this respect that the American negro troops assumed a special importance. The black soldiers were dressed and equipped like their white counterparts; they carried weapons, drove trucks and bulldozers, and fought against the enemy just as the white soldiers did. Some informants said that at first they had thought the negroes were Europeans, then they were told that the ancestors of the negroes had lived just like themselves until the Americans went to their country and taught them to live as Europeans:

One of the white Americans told us, 'Can you see the black Americans? Well they were just the same as you - not them but their fathers and grandfathers. But not long after we controlled them, we had mixed marriages and from that new race we got people who were very clever and they were able to build their own boats, trucks, shotguns and plenty of other things. Then we had a war and we asked the negroes to help us and they did help us. And during the war we were working together and fighting together. Not long after the negroes had a war and the negroes asked the white Americans to help them and they did. So you can see that they always work together as friends.'

Though other informants did not suggest that mixed marriages were responsible for the negroes' abilities, the statement is interesting because it identifies a war, in which both

white and black helped each other, as the basis of friendship and co-operation between the two. The following comment is perhaps more typical:

We saw the negro soldiers and some of us worked with them. They told us, 'If the Australians had taught you like the Americans taught us, then you would be working the same as us. You have the same skin as us. The Americans have taught us and now we are working with them.' We were surprised to see the negroes - they have black skin, but they are clever and working the same as white people.79

For the Mekeo, as for the people of Busama village near Lae, the black soldiers were:

...convincing evidence...of the truth of the earlier contention that coloured peoples, if given the chance, could rise to the same economic level as whites.80

Moreover they provided a concrete example of what Papuans might expect from Australia. Informants claim that the Americans, both white and black, were constantly criticizing Australia's failure to develop Papua properly. These criticisms might well have provided ammunition for a new cult prophet to declare that the 'real' knowledge had been withheld; it seems, however, that the Mekeo were impressed by the emphasis put upon education and practical instruction, and that they had learnt from their own experience that practical, mechanical skills, not ritual knowledge, were the first prerequisites for using the machinery which

80 Hogbin 1951: 288.
Europeans employed to such effect. The presence of the negro soldiers thus not only demonstrated that black might live like white, it also gave some insight into the manner in which this transformation was achieved - suggesting a new model of practical instruction and learning, while reinforcing the old ideal of mutual co-operation.

In general the men had little to say of their contacts with other Papuans. When questioned they replied, rather indifferently, that they had worked together with people from many other places and that they usually got on well together, though sometimes fights occurred. At present, it appears that the Mekeo see the war primarily as an important episode in their relations with Europeans, and not as an event which brought some sense of identity with a unit broader than village or tribe. Perhaps in the future the emphasis will be different; certainly the war did break down much of the former exclusiveness of the village community. Distant places like Buna, Lae and Madang became familiar territory to people who had rarely travelled outside their subdistrict before the war. Whatever the terms 'Papua' or 'New Guinea' had previously signified,

81 Informants appeared to have little comprehension of the war as part of a wider conflict, or of the strategic importance of New Guinea to Australia. Implied in their view of the war as a struggle between external forces for the possession of New Guinea is a sense that the prize was especially desirable or valuable in some way. For example, some informants reasoned that the Japanese, whose staple diet was rice, wanted their country because it produced rice. Though the idea is only partly formulated at present, it may become significant in future interpretations.
they could now be interpreted against a background of far wider geographical horizons.

The men returned to their villages in 1944 and 1945 with new horizons, new insights and new hopes. They were happy to be reunited with their families and set enthusiastically about the many tasks that awaited them after their long absence. Many of the young men, however, returned to Port Moresby immediately, signing on as labourers to clear up the war debris around the town. Others soon joined them. After the excitement of war, village life seemed, for the first time, flat and uninteresting. Men who were previously unwilling to take employment away from their villages, now eagerly sought jobs in Port Moresby and other towns. In 1942 they had been reluctantly 'flushed out of their ethnic backwater'; now the wider world had at last engaged their interests and ambitions.

82 Several of the men interviewed stated that they had returned to Port Moresby to work immediately after their discharge by ANGAU.

83 Figures provided by patrol reports indicate the rapid increase during the late 1940s in the number of men working away from their villages as wage labourers. See below: 362-3.

84 White 1972: 137.
CHAPTER SIX

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMMES FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT 1945-1959:

'We thought that this was a way of having something for ourselves of the way of living in the future'

The carriers returning to their villages in 1945 brought with them hopes of instant riches and a bright new world which could not possibly be fulfilled. Undeniably, irresponsible promises had been made, and with little realization of the significance they held; nevertheless, the white man did intend to keep his word. The post-war administration was confident that it could indeed bring a different and better way of life to the people of New Guinea. Over the last three decades, the country has been developed at an unprecedented, from the white man's point of view an almost miraculous, rate; for the Mekeo, and for others, the results have often fallen short of what they themselves anticipated and desired.

In 1948, during the first wave of post-war enthusiasm, the new administration initiated a bold and costly developmental project in the Mekeo.¹ The failure of the so-called 'Mekeo

¹ The Mekeo rice project was one of the first post-war developmental projects initiated by the Department of Agriculture; see Belshaw 1952. For convenience, the titles of administrative departments have been shortened in the text: the Department of Agriculture, Stock and Fisheries is referred to as the 'Department of Agriculture' and the Department of District Services and Native Affairs as the 'Department of District Services'. In quoting references, departments are denoted by their initials: e.g. DASF and DDS & NA.
Rice Scheme', and of all subsequent schemes the government has attempted, are well known facts; although the causes and consequences have been largely overlooked. It is usually assumed that the Mekeo, presumably out of sheer perversity, rejected the administration's help. This explanation was given at the time of the event and later accepted by new generations of officials who dealt with the Mekeo; the notorious 'Rice Scheme' has become a cherished part of the lore passed from one patrol officer to his successor, proving that the Mekeo are one of the most intractible and unresponsive groups to be found in all Papua. Yet the events that can be reconstructed from official correspondence and contemporary reports provide small justification for the long held assumption that government schemes foundered in the Mekeo because villagers were uncooperative. Before discussing the Mekeo's response, it is necessary to examine official actions and decisions in some detail.

Though it offered a new solution to the problem of persuading the Mekeo to plant rice, the scheme initiated in 1948 by the Director of Agriculture, W. Cottrell-Dormer, basically grew out of attempts to perpetuate the existing rice industry which Thompson started in the early 1930s, and kept in operation during the war. When civil administration resumed in October 1945, the new Department of Agriculture officially assumed responsibility for the future development of the industry but did little beyond sending agronomists to report on the economic potential of the region; meanwhile

2 Reports on the existing rice industry were prepared by J.L. Foggatt in December 1945, C.A. Cockshott in July 1947 and J.R. Vicary in October 1947, DASF File 1-2-6F Pt 1.
Thompson and his patrol officers kept villagers planting. 3

Cottrell-Dormer visited the Mekeo in July 1948 to assess plans made by his department to replace the old government rice mill left by ANGAU and establish an agricultural station in the region which would produce rice on a commercial basis. 4 He at once realized that if villagers were to grow rice voluntarily, a different approach was needed. During meetings held in several villages to discuss rice cultivation, he learnt that villagers had very definite ideas on the matter. 5 They complained bitterly of the primitive methods of hand cultivation which they were forced to employ, emphasizing that they were not prepared to increase production under these circumstances; the mechanically cultivated ANGAU rice plot had demonstrated that there were more efficient and far less laborious ways to plant rice and they felt it was time the government helped to lighten their load. The previous year villagers had expressed similar opinions to the regional agricultural officer; 6 and in 1946 a delegation of Mekeo village constables and councillors visited Port Moresby to ask the administrator for assistance in buying the rice mill and other agricultural machinery left in the area by ANGAU. 7

3 DDS & NA to Director DASF, 22 Nov. 1946; DDS & NA to Director DASF, 4 Dec. 1946, DASF File 1-2-6F Pt 1; Patrols to the Mekeo, 7-11 May, 28 Aug.-9 Sept., 28 Oct.-6 Nov., 12-18 Nov. 1946.

4 Cottrell-Dormer to the Administrator, 26 Aug. 1948, DASF File 1-2-6F Pt 1.


6 Vicary to Director DASF, 20 Oct. 1947, DASF File 1-2-6F Pt 1.

7 DASF File 1-2-6F Pt 1.
Cottrell-Dormer sympathized with the aspirations of people who, as they themselves pointed out, had not advanced 'beyond the digging stick and the village mortar and pestle' despite more than seventy years of European influence. The function of his department, he believed, was not to impose any specific policy upon indigenous farmers, but rather to show them how to use the resources available to achieve their own goals. The Mekeo seemed to provide an ideal test case: the people possessed an abundance of arable land and had more than four decades experience growing rice - a commodity imported into the Territory at the rate of approximately 10,000 tons a year; moreover they now desired economic advancement and looked to the government for guidance. The region was evidently well suited to mechanized cultivation and plans were already under way to use machinery on the proposed government rice plantation. If machinery could also be made available to village growers, Cottrell-Dormer was convinced that real interest in the crop could be generated.

The administration had removed the penal sanctions formerly applied to rice growing (much against the advice of Thompson who firmly believed that the Mekeo would not work without compulsion), but neglected to provide any effective

8 Cottrell-Dormer to the Administrator, 26 Aug. 1948, DASF File 1-2-6F Pt 1.
10 Cottrell-Dormer to the Administrator, 26 Aug. 1948, DASF File 1-2-6F Pt 1.
11 DDS & NA to Director DASF, 22 Nov. 1946, DASF File 1-2-6F Pt 1.
incentive in their place. The Department of Agriculture continued to maintain the old mill as a market for growers, and a centre from which technical advice and assistance might be sought, but Cottrell-Dormer found (as an earlier report had indicated) that these services were now performed more efficiently by the Catholic mission. In addition to operating its own mill and carrying out extension activities such as distributing seed and advising when to harvest the crop, the mission paid growers a higher price for their grain and offered free transport from the villages to its mill. The government mill consequently received only a fraction of the crop: Cottrell-Dormer estimated the mill would process no more than ten tons of rice that season, while his department would spend more than £1,200 in salaries alone, to keep it in operation.

Under these circumstances, there seemed little point in pursuing the original plan to erect a new mill. A more promising alternative was suggested by an old village councillor during a meeting held at Inawaia: when asked what he would like the government to do for his people, the old man replied, 'Help us obtain our own rice mill and run our own rice industry.' It occurred to Cottrell-Dormer that instead of constructing an expensive network of roads to link villages with a central mill, each village might be encouraged to form a co-operative society to grow rice and buy its own mill. In this way villagers would be able


13 Cottrell-Dormer to the Administrator, 26 Aug. 1948, DASF File 1-2-6F Pt 1.

to amass capital to purchase the machinery they desired; a mill and engine serving as the initial objectives around which the societies would be formed. Deciding to take advantage of the opportunity presented by the old man's request, he offered to provide Inawaia with a mill and engine on the condition that the people raised £100 towards the initial costs; the balance could be paid from the proceeds of next year's crop. Villagers accepted with alacrity and so the first Mekeo rural progress society was formed.

On returning to Port Moresby, Cottrell-Dormer outlined his new scheme for the Mekeo in a report to the administrator. Village rice production would be encouraged by the formation of co-operative rice growing societies, such as that already started at Inawaia, and by the introduction of mechanized cultivation. The societies would hire machinery from the Department of Agriculture until they were sufficiently developed to purchase their own. The previously planned government rice plantation would become instead an experimental station, testing seed varieties and methods of mechanized cultivation, and providing technical assistance and machinery to village growers. Immediate steps were taken to implement these proposals. The following month, an agricultural officer, C.S. Franko, was sent to organize the first village societies; by November

15 Ibid: 2.
16 Correll-Dormer to the Administrator, 26 Aug. 1948, DASF File 1-2-6F Pt 1.
work had commenced on the Epo Experimental Station.  

Though at first referred to as 'co-operatives', the rice growing societies were never officially registered as such with the Co-operative Section. Believing that the Mekeo were not yet ready for the more complicated organization this step would involve, Cottrell-Dormer simplified management as much as possible; and by taking personal control of finances - funds were held in a Treasury trust account - he hoped to avoid the credit giving, stealing and staff defections which often accompanied the early stages of co-operative operations. The societies were able to start with very little initial share capital by the simple expedient of allowing members to capitalize their labour; profits from rice sales were to be divided among members on the basis of work done and then put back into society funds as share capital subscriptions. Some initial investment, such as the £100 raised by Inawaia, was considered necessary, however, in order to give members a sense of ownership and responsibility.

18 Wales to Director DASF, 1 Nov. 1948, DASF File 1-2-6F Pt 1.

19 At this time part of DDS & NA, the Co-operative Section later became a division of the Department of Trade and Industry which was created in 1961; see Parker 1966(a) 196-7.


21 Cottrell-Dormer to Director DASF, 7 June 1952. DASF File 1-2-6F (D).

The rural progress societies, as they were later known, were not to be limited to agricultural development but would become agencies of general economic and social advancement. This point was emphasized in an address made by Cottrell-Dormer to a conference of district officers held in 1949.\textsuperscript{23} The capital raised by the societies, in addition to purchasing agricultural machinery, would provide community services such as village water pumps, electric light plants and any other projects which people desired in order to raise their standard of living. It was essential, he stressed, that economic and social development should go 'hand in hand';\textsuperscript{24} all departments of the administration would have to work together to make the scheme a success.

As in other parts of the Territory, few villagers possessed the basic technical skills to enable them to operate and maintain machinery or to keep financial records. The scheme would have to prepare its own trained workers – a task which could only be accomplished with the help of other departments.\textsuperscript{25} Two young men from each society were selected to train as mill hands or tractor operators and arrangements were made with the Department of Education for them to receive several months instruction at Idubada Technical School in Port Moresby. Others were sent to the Co-operative Section of the Department of District Services for training in book-keeping and simple accounting. The Department of Agriculture had appointed one young man with a good command of English as a native agricultural assistant.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid: 13.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid: 13.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Ibid: 5-6.
\end{itemize}
Transport and communications posed special difficulties in the Mekeo. Yule Island offered the only suitable port for coastal boats; all goods sent from Port Moresby were unloaded at Kairuku and then taken across to the mainland in smaller craft. Supplies destined for the Epo Experimental Station or the West Mekeo societies had to be landed by whale-boat on an open beach. Access to the East Mekeo was by launch across Hall Sound to a small landing up the Ethel River; from there a road covered the fourteen miles inland to the Mekeo villages. Road maintenance was difficult because of seasonal flooding, and the St Joseph River provided no alternative as it was navigable only to very shallow draft vessels. To complicate matters further, communications between the Mekeo and Yule Island had to be sent by runner to the coast and then by canoe across to the island. Though establishing a satisfactory transport system for the project was clearly beyond the resources of the Department of Agriculture alone, Cottrell-Dormer was confident that it could be achieved by co-ordinating the efforts of all government agencies involved in the region. Having requested the Navigation Board to provide more frequent shipping services between Port Moresby and Kairuku, he negotiated with the Department of Public Works to construct a road linking the Epo Experimental Station with an inlet on the coast which would allow all-weather access by launch from Yule Island. Arrangements were also made to establish radio contact between the Mekeo and Kairuku. The Department of District Services and the Catholic mission each operated a launch

26 Ibid: 3.

27 Ibid: 3.
between Kairuku and the Arapokina landing, which gave access to the East Mekeo villages; and the Department of Agriculture was to purchase two trucks for use on the east side of the river.

Cottrell-Dormer was anxious to gain the mission's support for his project. Previously the mission had been able to buy locally much of the grain it needed to supply its boarding schools and other establishments. Realizing that the introduction of the rural progress societies had cut off this source, Cottrell-Dormer arranged for the mission to purchase 100 tons of paddy rice at 2\1/2d per pound after the first harvest in 1950.\(^{28}\) He stressed the importance of the mission's role in breaking down traditional superstitions which were blocking progress, and urged that the administration encourage villagers to incorporate christianity into their daily life.\(^{29}\) At his suggestion, the people of Inawaia asked their parish priest to bless their new mill, and a feast and procession was held in honour of the occasion.

For twelve to eighteen months Cottrell-Dormer obtained the co-operation he needed and the project received full official support. After inspecting the rice harvest in June 1950, the Executive Council congratulated the Department of Agriculture on its achievements in the Mekeo.\(^{30}\) Plans were made to extend operations. Two new extension

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28 Cottrell-Dormer to the Government Secretary, 10 July 1950, DASF File 1-2-6F Pt 1.


30 The Administrator to Department of External Territories, 26 June 1950, DASF File 1-2-6F Pt 1.
stations were to be set up, one at Beips in the West Mekeo and the other at Inawaia; both were to be independent in terms of machinery and staff from the Epo Experimental Station. Determined to see his ideas properly carried out, Cottrell-Dormer announced that he intended to resign from his position as Director of Agriculture to personally supervise the development of the new Inawaia station.

Despite the apparent success of the rural progress societies, some senior officials were now beginning to question Cottrell-Dormer's methods. Originally the Mekeo scheme had been put forward as a possible 'blueprint' for development throughout the Territory; since it was an ambitious programme, and in certain respects a radical one, it naturally attracted considerable attention. Ironically, two of its most admirable features laid it open to criticism. Cottrell-Dormer had not arbitrarily decided what would be good for the Mekeo; he had made a sincere effort to understand their ambitions and to help them achieve them. The fact that this involved introducing fully mechanized agriculture to subsistence farmers did not deter him; but in the eyes of many of his colleagues, this step seemed too radical - the project was proving extremely expensive and might strain the resources of an administration which had neither staff nor finance to spare; the practical obstacles were enormous and the long term effects of mechanization on indigenous communities was uncertain. Likewise, Cottrell-Dormer's

31 Cottrell-Dormer to OIC Epo, 25 July 1950, DASF File 1-2-6F Pt 1.
32 Ibid.
insistence on co-ordinating all aspects of development was to cause friction within the carefully compartmentalized system of administrative departments.

The Department of the Treasury was one of the first to voice its disapproval. A Treasury official was sent to investigate the financial organization of the rural progress societies following the Executive Council's official commendation of the project in June. 34 Treasury Inspector Duncan stated bluntly that the results of the scheme were hardly impressive in view of the expenditure of machinery and staff; the 1950 harvest was in fact the smallest on record - a mere thirty-eight tons of paddy compared with the 200 tons produced by hand in 1922, when the first government rice project was introduced. He considered the type of machinery which had been purchased underpowered, and deplored the lack of proper facilities for the maintenance and repair of equipment. He pointed out that the polished white rice produced by the societies' mills was unsuitable for Government Stores and compared unfavourably with imported white rice because of its high proportion of broken grain. Above all, he condemned the failure to establish a satisfactory supply route for the project. All supplies, including heavy equipment, had to be transported to the Epo Experimental Station under what he described as 'almost impossible conditions'. A road had now been made linking Epo with an all-weather inlet on the coast but bridges had not yet been built over the two creeks it crossed; goods had to be manhandled over the first stream, while the second was negotiated by means of a raft constructed of forty-four

34 Report by Treasury Inspector Duncan on Makeo Rice Project, Aug. 1950, DASP File 1-2-6R.
gallon drums. Supplies had to be handled ten times in all between shipping at Port Moresby and landing at Epo, causing delays, expense and damage to valuable equipment.

Transport, in Duncan’s opinion, was the most serious immediate problem; other difficulties were predicted for the future. 35 If the Department of Agriculture continued to expand its activities in the Mekeo, it would eventually take over all but the judicial and police functions of the Department of District Services and Native Affairs, thus creating an anomalous situation within the existing system of departmental administration. He also argued that the long-term effects of introducing mechanization to the Mekeo would be undesirable. Members of the rural progress societies would merely sit back and watch the Department of Agriculture grow rice for them; under these circumstances the Mekeo's notorious dislike of hard work would only increase and they would never gain the experience and sense of responsibility necessary to run the industry themselves.

Cottrell-Dormer, who had not been informed of Duncan’s visit, considered that these criticisms were based on misunderstandings. 36 The areas planted by the village societies had been deliberately limited to a few acres each, and would not be increased until further experience and confidence had been gained. 37 Though transport still posed

35 Ibid.
36 Cottrell-Dormer to the Administrator, 18 Oct. 1950, DASF File 1-2-6R.
many problems, these were gradually being overcome as the project developed. When he took up his post in the Mekeo in January 1951, Cottrell-Dormer expected that the scheme would continue to expand in accordance with its needs. As Director of Agriculture, he had negotiated in person with the heads of other departments to secure their co-operation and was able to use the resources of his department to get what he wanted for the project; as an agricultural officer isolated in the Mekeo, he soon found his requests ignored, even by his own department. During 1951, headquarters cancelled plans for road construction, bridge building and for the erection of storage sheds and a fully equipped workshop. 38 The Department of District Service's launch broke down, leaving the project without water transport; urgent demands for a replacement brought no results. 39 Essential orders for fuel, oil and spare parts apparently received no attention at headquarters. Cottrell-Dormer warned the director in November that the project was doomed to failure if supply could not be speeded up and transport facilities improved; 40 he emphasized that the scheme was as yet only partially developed and that it could not possibly succeed unless Agriculture continued to develop it as originally intended.

Treasury, which considered that too much had already been invested in the Mekeo, actively opposed further commitments: financial estimates for machinery in 1951 were

38 Cottrell-Dormer to Director DASF, 19 Nov. 1951, DASF File 1-2-6F (D).

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.
rejected on the grounds that they represented approximately one quarter of the total amount allowed for expenditure on agricultural machinery for that financial year. Independent experts were now beginning to share Treasury's conviction that the Department of Agriculture was devoting a disproportionate amount of its resources to the Mekeo project to little effect.

An article by a social anthropologist, Cyril Belshaw, published in Oceania in September 1951, questioned the ability of the rural progress societies to fully satisfy villagers' ambitions. He demonstrated that the cash return from the rice crop had so far been small and compared unfavourably with other available sources of cash income - for instance wage labour. Obviously the societies would have to improve their financial position if they were to fulfil their original purpose of raising capital for community development. He further implied that the Mekeo's present enthusiasm might well be based on unreal expectations not suspected by the European organizers.

The cost of growing rice in the Mekeo was now the subject of wild rumour and gossip, which reached the columns of the Islands' press:

> There has been a lot of criticism of the Mekeo agricultural experiments. To a large extent the Administration has brought this on its own head by lack of factual information on the

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41 The Treasurer to Director DASF, 2 Aug. 1951, DASF File 1-2-6F (D). In November 1951, Cottrell-Dormer reported that he had £20,000 worth of agricultural equipment in the Mekeo; DASF File 1-2-6F (D).

42 Belshaw 1951: 16-17.
venture. Because no statements have been made on the cost of producing the rice grown in the Mekeo, fantastic rumours have put the figure at almost so much per grain rather than per pound.43

O.H.K. Spate, then Professor of Geography in the Research School of Pacific Studies at the Australian National University, visited several parts of the Territory in April 1952, including the Mekeo, as part of an investigation on behalf of the Department of Territories.44

Having enumerated the many practical difficulties, especially transport, faced by the Mekeo project, he observed that though they could probably be solved, the cost of doing so might prove beyond the present resources of the administration. Even if the venture succeeded, and this was by no means certain, it would directly affect only a fraction of the Territory's total population. Would, he asked, the experiment have to be 'repeated over and over again until some significant proportion of the population has been brought into modern production?'45

An article by James McAuley in the April issue of South Pacific condemned not only the practical and financial defects of the rural progress societies, but warned that the project could have serious social repercussions.46 Repeating an argument earlier put forward by Treasury, McAuley declared that the introduction of mechanization, by

44 Spate 1953: 153.
46 McAuley 1952.
reducing the need for manual labour, gave villagers no opportunity to develop self-reliance or learn responsible management. Moreover, full mechanization would eventually deprive the nuclear family of its role in economic production. Similar undesirable effects could be expected from the fact that the enterprise had been organized on a collective basis. Once individual incentive and responsibility were removed, problems related to work motivation would arise; in order to ensure that each member contributed his share, coercion of some sort would prove unavoidable. Collectivism would also tend to weaken the role of the individual family, whose stability, in a time of social upheaval and change, should be preserved at all costs.47

This mounting tide of public criticism must have shaken the confidence even of those who continued to support Cottrell-Dormer. The venture was now becoming an embarrassment to the administration in more ways than one: Agriculture was competing with the Department of District Services as the co-ordinator of administrative services in the Mekeo; production figures remained small, while the financial commitment continued to increase. The rural progress societies and the Epo Experimental Station produced a combined total of only 100 tons of paddy rice in 1951.48 Plans to extend planting by seventy per cent in the 1951-52 season were cancelled when practically the whole crop was lost because

47 McAuley seems to have opposed collectives mainly on ideological grounds.

48 Telegram to Director DASF, 28 Nov. 1951, DASF File 1-2-6F (D).
of severe lodging. 49 In view of this new problem, Cottrell-Dormer informed headquarters that plantings would probably be reduced in the coming season; he warned that disappointment resulting from the poor harvest would probably dampen villagers' enthusiasm and result in a temporary setback. 50

It seems that Cottrell-Dormer's opponents were ready to seize upon the first signs of a slackening of interest as portents of the scheme's imminent collapse. The Deputy Registrar of Co-operatives, G. Morris, spent two weeks in the Mekeo in September, ostensibly at Cottrell-Dormer's request for assistance with auditing the rural progress society accounts; he returned to Port Moresby with the news that villagers were dissatisfied with the societies and were likely to withdraw their support. 51 Members were suspicious because they had received no cash payment or wages for their work nor had they actually seen the money the societies were said to have made (since funds were held in a trust account); many feared that their money was being used to finance the Department of Agriculture and Cottrell-Dormer personally. Inter-clan and inter-village friction was resulting in continual bickering over work contributions and the communal nature of the work aggravated matters. In general, the people seemed to feel not that the administration was benefiting them, but rather that they were helping it by growing rice.

49 Cottrell-Dormer to Director DASF, 18 June 1952, DASF File 1-2-6F (D).
50 Ibid.
Revealingly, Morris' solution to the situation was to convert the existing societies into full co-operatives. After distributing the present assets on a work done basis, members would be invited to subscribe £5 share capital each to form a co-operative; sufficient capital would probably be raised in this manner to purchase necessary transport facilities. Communal production of rice would cease. Instead, each society would divide its rice plot into several small blocks; members who wished to grow rice would be required to subscribe £5 per block to cover machinery costs and would be individually responsible for it. Any member who failed to complete his work on time would forfeit his £5 subscription. This system would have the advantages of allowing individuals to choose the size of the area they wished to work and of providing a single contiguous area suitable for mechanized cultivation. Undoubtedly it was very satisfying for the Co-operative Section to demonstrate that the troubles of the much vaunted native societies set up by the Department of Agriculture could be solved by a conventional co-operative approach.

Morris' observations were accepted by the Treasurer, H.H. Reeve, as proof of earlier predictions that mechanization, far from increasing the Mekeo's interest in rice production, would eventually result in apathy and indifference. He disapproved, however, of the proposal to reconstitute the rural progress societies as full producer co-operatives arguing that such a scheme, in order to operate economically,
would require more initial capital than villagers could raise. A more practical alternative, he suggested, was to limit co-operative activity to milling and marketing, leaving production the responsibility of the individual grower. Since little mechanization was involved in these processes, and the societies already possessed their own mills, it would be possible to raise enough capital to make spot cash payments to growers. The administration would continue to provide machinery where necessary, but on a much 'lower level' than previously.

If any doubts persisted that Cottrell-Dormer's approach was actually detrimental to the Mekeo's best interests, they were swept away with a report from W. Tomasetti, the new assistant district officer, Kairuku. 54 He established that communal organization - condemned in general by McAuley - was unsuitable for the Mekeo as it clashed with traditional practices: subsistence agriculture was carried out by the individual household, not by the village or even the clan unit. Since the Mekeo's cash needs were limited and could easily be satisfied in other ways such as wage labour, making copra or selling betel nut, they had little economic incentive to grow rice but they would be more willing to undertake the work, he argued, if it were organized along lines compatible with the normal pattern of subsistence agriculture. If villagers were permitted to choose their own units of production, he was convinced that the majority would prefer to plant by hand rather than meet the costs of hiring machinery out of their own pockets. Though the roads, equipment and buildings established in the region by Agriculture would become

54 Patrol to the Mekeo 16-31 Jan. 1953.
redundant as far as the village industry was concerned, they could be used to set up a government rice plantation. In the light of these arguments, Cottrell-Dormer's scheme, though well intentioned, seemed entirely misconceived and misdirected.

In July 1953, six months after Tomasetti's report was prepared, a committee to consider the reorganization of the Mekeo project was convened by the new administrator, Brigadier D.W. Cleland. Its decisions closely followed the earlier recommendations of Reeve and Tomasetti and were ratified immediately. Control of the revised scheme was vested in the district commissioner for the Central District, while immediate responsibility in the area was given to the assistant district officer, Kairuku. The Department of Agriculture's role would in future be limited to purely technical assistance on agricultural matters only, though it would continue to provide machinery. Cottrell-Dormer, at his own request, was transferred to another district. The rural progress societies would be converted into full co-operative societies, under the control of the Co-operative Section of the Department of District Services, and would

55 The reorganization took place against a background of changes at the highest levels of policy making - the coming to power of a Liberal government in Australia, the appointment of Hasluck as Minister for Territories and the replacement of J.K. Murray by Cleland in February 1953 (Cleland 1969: 213). Until further research has been done on the period, it is very difficult to assess what influence these events had on the fate of Cottrell-Dormer's scheme.

56 District Commissioner to ADO Kairuku, 7 July 1953.

57 Proposals for the reorganization were outlined in Reeve, Henderson, Elliot-Smith to the Administrator, 3 July 1953, DASP File 1-2-6F Pt 3.
limit their operations to the milling, processing and marketing of rice. Production would become the responsibility of the individual grower, who would be required to meet the costs of hiring machinery if he chose to have his land mechanically cultivated. Cash payments for grain would be made to growers by the new societies.

Meetings were held in each village to close down the rural progress societies and distribute funds to members on the basis of work contributed. Though Tomasetti reported that people were much dissatisfied with the amounts they received and that the meetings were 'fairly stormy', field staff had little difficulty in persuading villagers to invest more money in the new venture. Glowing accounts of the Mekeo's ready acceptance of the revised scheme, and of their renewed confidence in the administration, seemed justified by a good harvest in June 1954 - eighty tons of paddy rice were sold to the co-operative societies and planting was to be increased for the coming season.

Tomasetti attributed this success to the fact that villagers were now free to adopt units of production which harmonized with traditional work patterns. Other reports


59 Bensted to Director DDS & NA, 23 Dec. 1953; Conroy to Director DASF, May 1954, 1-2-6F Pt 3; Tomasetti to District Commissioner, 8 July 1954, DC File 17-7.


61 Tomasetti to District Commissioner, 8 July 1954, DC File 17-7.
indicate that the new system of work organization had far more importance in official eyes than it had to the Mekeo. Only two villages, Beipa and Aipeana, chose to divide into clan groups: Inawi, Inawaia, Jesubaibua and Eboa all cleared one contiguous area for the whole village, which was then divided into clan plots. Field staff attempted to insist that the clan units were further divided into family plots, though Jesubaibua, for one, refused to comply with this instruction. Officials also opposed decisions made by Inawi and Jesubaibua to divide the crop according to status within the clan. Evidently villagers were free to choose their own productive units only when these corresponded with the district office's idea of traditional practice.

Experience proved that the reorganizers had also misjudged the significance of mechanization to the scheme. Tomasetti emphatically stated in 1953 that machinery could have no real economic significance to people who could easily satisfy their subsistence needs in other ways: a year later he was beginning to realize his mistake. Villagers made it clear that any expansion of planting for the 1954-55 season depended upon the necessary machinery being made available to them. Despite his earlier convictions, Tomasetti was now forced to justify the need for more equipment:

If the machinery is not supplied it seems likely that the normal expansion of the Project will be frustrated. This will put the Administration in the position of having tried to interest a native

63 Kairuku Patrol Report 1, 1954-55.
64 Ibid.
65 Tomasetti to District Commissioner, 11 Sept. 1953, DC File 17-7.
people in mechanised agriculture, achieved some
success, and then ignored the logical need for
expansion. This, of course, will be
incomprehensible to the natives concerned.66

Though the recommendations for reorganizing the
rural progress societies made much reference to 'native
attitude' in general, it seems that officials saw in the
Mekeo's response what they wanted to see. They were anxious
to reduce expenditure on the project and to counter public
criticism; this meant reducing mechanization and altering
the collective organization; and they could argue, on the
basis of traditional practice, that these changes would
make the scheme more acceptable to the Mekeo. In fact,
the reorganizers had produced little evidence to support
their contention that villagers were no longer interested
in the rural progress societies. Both Reeve and Tomasetti
accepted Morris' account without question, though it is
possible he overestimated the importance of the complaints
he heard. When reviewing the situation in January 1953,
Tomasetti limited his comments on villagers' dissatisfaction
to the following brief paragraph:

Agricultural officers attribute this decrease
in area [of rice planted that season] to waning
native interest.... Agricultural officers in
the Mekeo also state that the rice is commonly
referred to as 'Govt. rice'. The patrol found
few signs of native enthusiasm for the scheme
and in addition received a couple of vague
hints that 'before the war we carried stores
to Goilala and now we grow rice - growing rice
is the easiest.'67

66 Tomasetti to District Commissioner, 13 June 1955,
DC File 17-7.

He ignored the fact that Cottrell-Dormer had predicted a setback following the poor harvest in 1952 and had instructed that plantings were to be reduced. Villagers had not refused to grow rice and the societies were not bankrupt. 68 It could be argued, in the light of villagers' subsequent reactions to the revised scheme, that their initial ready acceptance of it indicated that they were not ready to abandon the rural progress societies so easily and were still determined to persevere with rice.

The rural progress societies were disbanded before any crisis was reached: the revised scheme, on the other hand, ended in unequivocal failure. A total of 235 acres was cultivated for the 1954-55 season and further increases were anticipated in 1956. 69 Field staff optimistically hoped for an area of between 400 to 500 acres but by January 1956 estimates had been reduced to a mere 150 acres. 71 In July, the district commissioner instructed the new assistant district officer Kairuku, K. Brown, that though the scheme had suffered a slight 'recession':

This year every effort should be made to plant up the maximum area of suitable country which can be properly handled. 72

69 Tomasetti to District Commissioner, 13 June 1955, DC File 17-7.
70 Timperley to Director DASF, 13 Aug. 1955, DASF File 23-3-2 (J).
71 Patrol to the Makeo 19 Jan.-2 Feb. 1956.
72 Acting District Commissioner to ADO Kairuku, 9 July 1956, DASF File 23-3-2 (J).
If the district commissioner was as ignorant of the real situation in the Mekeo as these instructions suggest, Brown's restrained, but devastating special report of August 1956 must have caused some embarrassment at headquarters.

The situation described by Brown was one of complete administrative chaos. He advised that no preparations for the 1956-57 crop could be made until rice from the two previous seasons had been milled, sold and removed from the area. The 1954-55 crop had not been milled because all the co-operative societies' mills were inoperative and the officer in charge of Epo Experimental Station refused to process village rice for fear of mixing the grain with his experimental varieties. Though it had been purchased from growers by the co-operatives, the administration had not yet removed the crop from the area or paid the Kairuku Association of Co-operatives for it; meanwhile the grain lay deteriorating in storage at Beipa and Aipeana. The 1955-56 crop had yet to be bought from growers who had left the rice unharvested in the fields or stored it in their houses; nor could it be purchased until the previous season's crop was removed from the only available storage. To make matters worse, roads throughout the region were impassable and virtually all vehicles and machinery were in urgent need of repairs.

Brown recommended that efforts should be concentrated on making the Epo-Beipa road trafficable - a task which he estimated could be completed in two weeks if the Department of Agriculture agreed to make available the tractors at Epo

73 Special Report Mekeo Rice Scheme, 15 Aug. 1956, DASP File 23-3-2 (J).
and the Beipa Extension Station. Agriculture's co-operation was also necessary to provide transport to remove the two outstanding crops from the area and have them milled at Epo. Payment for rice should be made at once and village debts settled. Once these immediate tasks were completed, more adequate storage should be built and the area mechanic given time to carry out repairs and put all equipment into good working order.

Not only was it physically impossible to put matters to rights in time for the coming season, but villagers had declared that they had no faith in the Department of Agriculture's promises and would not begin clearing their land until they had seen the machinery with their own eyes. Brown learnt that field staff had previously encouraged growers to clear as much land as possible and then had been unable to meet their commitments to provide machinery. Difficulties were also created because plots were too small and too scattered; time was wasted and numerous mechanical breakdowns occurred while attempting to move heavy equipment long distances. Evidently officials had only made a rod for their own backs by insisting, in the false hope that villagers would no longer want machinery, that rice be planted in family plots. Brown concluded his report:

In my opinion to go on under the existing conditions is only signing the end of the scheme altogether. Concentrated efforts to rectify the mistakes of past years will do much to regain the waning confidence of the Mekeo people.

Headquarters was forced to agree with him.

74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
Brown's report clearly depicts the situation he found in August 1956, but it does not explain how such a complete administrative paralysis overtook the project. There is little evidence to suggest why the district commissioner, who had been given ultimate authority for the scheme three years earlier, did not know what was happening in the Mekeo, or why the administration had failed to pay for the 1954-55 crop, or why field staff had been unable to cope with the processing and transporting of the rice. The reluctance of the officer in charge of the Epo Experimental Station to mill the village rice or provide transport facilities suggests friction between Agriculture and the Department of District Services. Headquarters' unawareness of the actual situation suggests that field staff may have deliberately attempted to cover up their blunders, though undoubtedly many of their difficulties were created by the failure, at a higher level, to effect payment for the 1954-55 crop. A later report indicates that the inferior quality of the Mekeo grain made it difficult to market. Six years earlier, Treasury had drawn attention to the poor grade of rice produced by the rural progress society mills; for some reason this defect was overlooked when the project was revised.

The co-operative societies, which had never been financially stable, were fatally weakened by the collapse. When the co-operatives were first introduced, officials warned that difficulties in meeting spot payments for the rice could be expected because capital was too low in relation

76 Report on Mekeo Rice Project and Epo Experimental Station, 8 Jan. 1957, DC File 17-7.
to the assets which the societies had purchased. Following the successful harvest of 1954, it was decided to incorporate the Mekeo and coastal societies into the Kairuku Association of Co-operatives. Presumably this move was intended to strengthen co-operative activity in the region, yet in June 1956 the financial position of the Association was reported to be 'border line'. According to the Co-operative Section's annual report for 1955-56, investment in hulling equipment, expenditure on transport and the cash outlay necessary to buy copra, and in particular a seasonal crop such as rice, had reduced the 'financial safety margin' of the Association to the 'barest minimum'. Credit giving by certain societies' store managers had consequently led to disaster: in April 1956 two East Mekeo societies, Eboa and Inawaia, had to be liquidated.

The effects on an already insecure financial organization of the delayed payment for the 1955 rice crop are obvious; having extended itself to purchase the crop, the Association was then left with practically no funds to buy copra and continue store trading, let alone pay for the 1956 crop. Though the Mekeo societies marketed copra and ran retail stores, they were expected to make most of their profits from rice; turnover suddenly dropped when officials decided that the societies should not buy the 1956 crop. This combination of circumstances reduced the Mekeo societies

78 Morris to Chief of Division (Development and Welfare) DDS & NA, 19 June 1957, T & I File 21-4-1.
80 Ibid.
to the point of bankruptcy by mid-1957; field staff considered that the fate of the whole Kairuku Association hung in the balance as a result.

Against the advice of ADO Brown, and despite the co-operative societies' decision to stop marketing rice altogether, the rice scheme now entered its third and final stage. Only the two large West Mekeo villages, Beipa and Aipeana, chose to continue. In 1957 the Department of Agriculture planted eighty-two acres by mechanized means at Beipa; the following season a total of 82.61 acres was cultivated for several growers from Beipa, Aipeana and the Roro village of Bereina. Arrangements were made for Agriculture to purchase the crop. By assessing the costs and returns from individual rice plots, field staff proved that the majority of growers were now actually producing rice at a financial loss. The few who continued to plant presumably did so because they could not understand that once they paid for machinery costs, and the feast which custom demanded for the relatives and friends who assisted with the harvest, they had lost money on the venture.

81 Morris to Chief of Division (Development and Welfare) DDS & BA, 19 June 1957, T & I File 21-4-1.

82 Report on Mekeo Rice Project and Epo Experimental Station, 8 Jan. 1957, DC File 17-7.

83 Ibid.

84 Summary of work done on behalf of Native rice growers 1957-58 season, 21 Mar. 1958, DASF File 23-3-2 (3).


Officials impatiently waited for villagers to finally realize for themselves the futility of persevering with the crop - an ironic ending indeed to a project which had been pushed so long and so hard by the administration. Not one grower requested mechanical assistance for the 1959-60 season; ADO Brown announced with relief:

It seems that the Mekeo Rice Scheme as such has closed down. Fortunately, increasing interest in copra, coffee and cocoa is taking the place of rice....

The co-operatives followed a separate, though equally disastrous course after 1956. The acting district officer, D.R. Marsh, was convinced that the Mekeo would be better left to themselves and opposed attempts to prolong the co-operatives' struggle. The Co-operative Section was nevertheless determined to save the Kairuku Association, which depended largely on the survival of the Mekeo societies.

The societies which had weathered the crisis in 1956 were now beset by transport difficulties. In the wet season floods brought all transport to a halt for approximately five months of the year; the large amount of copra accumulated during this period had to be cleaned and rebagged when it finally reached Kairuku, thus increasing costs; and in order to buy sufficient stock to keep their stores operating, societies built up large debts to the Association. When the roads were opened in the dry season,

88 Marsh to Registrar of Co-operatives, 12 Sept. 1956, T & I File 21-4-1.
89 Pyne to Registrar of Co-operatives, 29 Aug. 1956, T & I File 21-4-1.
the West Mekeo societies and three inland Roro societies had to hire vehicles, at exorbitant cost, from local traders. Transport costs were so high that between April and September 1956 the West Mekeo societies grossed a surplus of only two per cent on a copra turnover of £4,425. The problem, as Pyne pointed out, was hardly a new one; since the inception of the rice project in 1948, transport had been one of the most serious obstacles to development. Yet, once again, nothing had been done to improve the situation when the project was revised in 1953. The changing of the course of the St Joseph River during the floods of 1956 disrupted local transport, cutting off canoe access to Hall Sound and Yule Island, but it did little to aggravate the co-operatives' problems as they relied principally on road transport.

The Department of Agriculture, which no longer had any responsibility for the Mekeo societies, was not prepared to continue hiring vehicles to them, as it had done in the past. Pyne attempted to persuade members to subscribe new share capital to purchase their own vehicles; their poor response did not surprise him as ten societies in the Association had been liquidated recently and members had lost most of their money. In June 1957 he reported that unless transport was made available, the West Mekeo societies would have to stop marketing copra.

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90 Pyne to Registrar of Co-operatives, 2 Nov. 1956, T & I File 21-4-1.

91 Pyne to Registrar of Co-operatives, 18 June 1957, T & I File 21-4-1.

92 Pyne to Registrar of Co-operatives, 2 Nov. 1956, T & I File 21-4-1.

93 Pyne to Registrar of Co-operatives, 18 June 1957, T & I File 21-4-1.
The only solution, in the opinion of the Registrar of Co-operatives, was to apply for a loan from the Native Loans Board. Despite opposition from DO Marsh, who argued that the Mekeo were deriving a good cash income from their betel nut trade in Port Moresby even though the co-operatives were foundering, applications were made for loans totalling £4,900. The Association was to receive £2,500 to erect a bulk store, office and staff quarters at Kairuku. Aipeana, financially the most stable society, was to apply for £1,500 to purchase a tractor and trailer to provide transport for the West Mekeo societies; Beipa needed £900 to forestall liquidation.

Administrative procedures delayed the granting of the loans until June 1958; meanwhile, a tightening up of restrictions by the Copra Marketing Board resulted in the rejection of most of the Association's copra and turnover dropped from £56,000 in the previous year to £23,000. The loans, in any case, proved only a temporary palliative, and by August 1959 the situation was again critical.

94 Registrar of Co-operatives to Chief of Division (Development and Welfare) DDS & NA, 19 June 1957, T & I File 21-4-1.

95 Marsh to Registrar of Co-operatives, 27 June 1957, T & I File 21-4-1.


Though the Aipeana tractor and trailer helped reduce transport costs by nearly fifty per cent, societies continued to suffer losses because of freight overheads.\textsuperscript{99} Co-operative officer Pyne, still firmly convinced of the potential of the Mekeo, claimed that constant supervision could overcome difficulties stemming from the people's inability to use transport economically, inefficient stock ordering for the co-operative stores, the exceptionally high cost of local casual labour and the Mekeo's apparent inability to work together.\textsuperscript{100}

Not surprisingly, headquarters remained unconvinced by Pyne's arguments; if it required the full time attention of a European officer, the operation of the five remaining Mekeo societies must certainly have been a delicate business.

Villagers were suspicious of demands for more money and Pyne could not persuade them to subscribe additional share capital. Beipa and Aipeana, the two societies which were now operating on government loans, would not be able to meet payments on the loans out of available funds unless something was done quickly.\textsuperscript{101} Beipa's position was particularly precarious. Suspicion of the credit notes issued by the Association in return for copra had prompted members to deal directly with the Copra Marketing Board; the Association therefore stopped supplying store goods on credit, and the society found itself without ready cash to purchase goods or copra, since payments from the Copra

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{100} Pyne to Deputy Registrar of Co-operatives, 6 May 1959, T & I File 21-4-1.

\textsuperscript{101} Co-operative Officer's Journal, Aug.-Sept. 1959, T & I File 20-3-5.
Marketing Board took several weeks to arrive. An outbreak of credit giving accompanied the drop in store turnover; liquidation was clearly imminent if members refused to subscribe more capital.

Officials issued an ultimatum in August: the members of Beipa and Aipeana societies were each to contribute £5 additional share capital, and Inawi members £3, by 31 October; if they did not, the societies would be closed. Beipa made no effort to raise the necessary capital, while Aipeana and Inawi contributed less than half. Preparations were made to liquidate Beipa society and store trading was suspended in the two other societies until the full amount was raised. Early in 1960, Beipa and one of the two remaining East Mekeo societies, Inawabui, were finally closed down. Aipeana and Inawi were allowed to resume store trading; most resident members had paid their subscriptions, though many absent from the village had not. With only three societies left functioning, hopes of establishing a viable co-operative organization in the Mekeo finally died.

By 1960, the administration had experienced more than a decade of frustration in the Mekeo. A great deal of money had been invested and many dedicated officers had laboured to bring the schemes to fruition. Certainly failure had not resulted from lack of effort on the administration's part, but rather through lack of foresight. The co-operatives

102 Ibid.
had been financially unstable from the start, while the rice scheme represents a veritable kaleidoscope of administrative blunders and misjudgements. In view of the numerous practical obstacles to development officials were unable to solve, it appears that regardless of the Mekeo's response, the schemes would have foundered. There is, in fact, considerable evidence of a very determined perseverance by villagers. Cottrell-Dormer's rural progress societies were reorganized in 1953 because officials feared members had lost interest, yet they were easily persuaded to invest their energies and money in a new venture: whatever the immediate causes of the collapse in 1956, it stemmed not from the Mekeo's refusal to grow enough rice, but from an administrative failure to dispose of what they produced: in 1959 field staff could barely contain their impatience with the few obstinate villagers who still wanted to plant rice. Overall, the documentary evidence supports the Mekeo's claims that they were keenly interested in the projects and did their best to carry out the government's instructions.

A COMPLEX background of uncertainty and anticipation on the part of the Mekeo provided the setting in 1948 for Cottrell-Dormer's project. Three years earlier, the men had come home from the war deeply impressed by their experiences; they had been dazzled by the technological achievements of the white man, encouraged by the example of the negro soldiers - black men who, they were told, had been taught by the white Americans to live like Europeans - and elated by the friendly advances and assurances of the Australian troops that 'things would be better' after the war. Official promises were made to them at public addresses given by the 'Australian and American generals' that their labours would not go unrewarded.
The carriers were not certain what their 'reward' would be, though they hopefully speculated:

...the Government might supply us with food, give us our own stores and supply us with trucks and shotguns.106

Their comments revealed that they expected some immediate recompense in the form of a free distribution of goods or money. Informants believed that the Americans were to receive either money or land for the assistance they had given Australia; they considered that their services though less than the Americans', merited formal recognition. They resolved not to help a second time if they were overlooked.

We said, 'Probably they will give us a shotgun for suffering here. If nothing is given to us after the war, we will not help them with the next.'107

In traditional warfare, the victors were obliged to pay their debts to their allies with a lavish feast and large distributions of pigs and vegetable foods; evidently the Australians were expected to act in a similar way. Informants stressed that they thought they would receive a free gift; though they agreed that today they had such things as stores, shotguns and trucks, these had been achieved with their own efforts and bought with their own money - they had not been given anything. For people whose social relationships are based on reciprocity, mere protestations of gratitude or friendship are not sufficient; they must be expressed concretely in the form of gifts or services. An outright gift was presumably necessary in the carriers' eyes as a ratification of the Australians' services.


107 Ibid.
verbal declarations of friendship; once this had been made, relations could begin on a new footing. Yet despite the most sanguine hopes, the eagerly anticipated 'reward' was not immediately forthcoming.

After the excitement and turmoil of war, village life quickly resumed its former familiar pattern. When the labourers returned home in 1945, they found their houses, gardens, livestock and other property still intact; some work was necessary to clear new gardens and rebuild the houses and fences that had been neglected in their absence but things were quickly put to rights. In contrast, those areas of Papua New Guinea directly affected by the fighting experienced a sharp physical break with the past; bombing raids forced people to flee from their homes, taking only what possessions they could carry with them; when they returned there was nothing left - new villages were built, new livestock purchased and new household equipment acquired with the war compensation money granted by the administration. Some Mekeo bitterly observed that compensation had been paid even to groups that aided the Japanese, though they themselves received nothing; in their opinion, those who received large sums of money from the government, enabling them to build new houses with corrugated iron roofs, replace their livestock with larger and healthier European-bred animals, and buy trade store goods in place of the clay pots and rough implements of traditional manufacture, were far better off than themselves, who returned from the war only to find things just as they had always been.

The wartime experiences had raised hopes of a new relationship being formed with the white regime, yet it seemed

that the government was bent on reimposing its former demands. During the war, when labour was unobtainable, ANGAU maintained the mountain stations in the Kairuku Subdistrict by means of mule trains and occasional air lifts of supplies; when civil administration resumed, it was forced once again to rely on local carriers. The rice industry had been kept going by the women and old men; as soon as the able-bodied men returned, they too were instructed to work in the rice fields. Though rice planting was no longer compulsory, Thompson was determined that the industry would survive; clearing, planting and harvesting continued to be supervised by patrol officers and their police. 109 Floods and the lack of supervision during the take over by civil administration, resulted in a small harvest in 1946 110 but the following season villagers were persuaded to plant 200 acres and this was increased to 300 acres in 1948. 111 Carriers for mountain patrols continued to be required in large numbers until the opening of the Tapini airstrip in 1948. 112

109 See above: 247, fn 3.
110 DDS & NA to Director DASF, 22 Nov. 1946, DASF File 1-2-6F Pt 1.
112 Patrol to the Mekeo 28 Oct.—6 Nov. 1946 notes that 319 carriers from Mekeo and Paitana were necessary to transport stores to Goilala. Patrol to Goilala, Ononge and Mondo 11 Aug.—3 Sept. 1947 notes that 150 Mekeo carriers were used. Thompson observed, '...unless the Tarpini "drome" service is brought into operation, we shall not be able to keep our present mountain Administration in being. ... This compulsory human porterage will not be possible to enforce in the future, and I am convinced of this.'
Previously villagers had accepted, if grudgingly, the necessity of the labours imposed on them by the government; now they were aware, as an Inawaia councillor informed Cottrell-Dormer in 1948, that there were 'better ways'. Rice did not have to be planted by hand, it could be planted much more quickly by machinery. In 1947, village officials protested against the renewed demands for carriers, pointing out that during the war the government had managed to supply the mountain stations without the help of carriers. Villagers expected that the post-war government would be prepared to lighten their burdens. These hopes were outlined in a petition presented to the administrator in 1946 by a deputation of Mekeo village officials:

St Paul's School
Beipa'a
2.12.46

Dear Governor Murry,

Just aguring amongst ourselves in the villages of Mekeo District, We are demanding your help to assist us in our work, It is impossible for us to carry on a job like this, so it would be very good if you give us a hand.

We have a lot of work to do besides the planting of rice.

We bring her I banboos for fencing, 2. wants for flors, canes, sago kipes [?] for walls Etc. We came to Kairuku at list 30 or 40 times in a year, And at present there is a lot of carven line [carrying lines] going on in our villages. But if could be possible that this Mekeo carven lines should be cut off, that we may have less work to look after.


You've quite well know; because you've been here, and visited our Mekeo villages and our rice mill.

We are asking now to see the price of our rice, and say where the mistake is? Now in these days it is very hard for us to get the tools from the store; and we are using oarm [?] tools too. (1) We clean the bush, (2) then cut it to dry (3) when dried we burn and plant it. (4) When it grows we have to look after it and cut the weads [weeds], (5) when it beres seeds and dry, we start harvesteting, and it take us for atlist a month before we finish harvesteting. 6) when it is baged. 7) we bring it down by raft or a canoe, and in this way, sometimes we lost some of our rice.

Our fathers had starded to plant the rice, and we boys are still going planting. During the war we boys were joined to the army, and our wives were still planting the rice for the army while other villagers were doing nothing, but, still the price of our rice is penny a lb. we would be agree if you, could arange it up to atlist 3 pence a lb.

It would be very good if you do agree to our request. What we want is this, We want to buy the rice mill for ourselves, or lend it till we pay it all.

If you are not agree to our wishes it dose not matter; if you agree it; here is our V.C. Alano Saguta [?] and 2 Counselors to see you about it.

You are the only man who is minding us and so we are giving our report.

As we cannot do anything for our selves. There is a tractor at Mou, we would like you to give us that old tractor to help us. And the old [?] that are at Kairuku, that are doing nothing there, if you want us to buy it; we will buy it slowly by and by with our rice money. There is a boy named Kavo Ameua who knows how to repeare it for us; He has been saw how to repeare the tractor by Mr Sageant Edned [Sergeant Edwards of the ANGAU rice plantation]; we will try to buy what is needed for it.
If you help us as our wishes, or if not, we like you to take our report peper in front of our V.C. and our Counselors.

That is all.

Yours Counselors of Mekeo District. 115

Possibly villagers could have approached the white regime with as much assurance five years earlier, but it seems unlikely. The petition puts the people's case with some subtlety: their faithful service, the government's responsibility to them and their dependence on it are stated confidently. In the context of this relationship, people naturally expected that the government would not wish to impose unnecessary labours on them. If the government insisted that they continue to produce rice, it would surely be prepared to assist them. The village constables asked the administrator to raise the price of the rice and to help them acquire the agricultural machinery left by ANGAU, but they did not, as officials later assumed, ask to run their own rice industry.

Officials in Port Moresby attempted to discourage the petitioners' ambitions, believing that they lacked the capital and experience to operate their own machinery. 116 The following year, a visiting agricultural officer discussed with East Mekeo villagers the possibility of running the government rice mill themselves but no further action was taken. 117

115 DASF File 1-2-6F Pt 1.

116 Cottrell-Dormer to Spate, 19 June 1953, DASF File 1-2-6F (D).

117 Vicary to Director, DASF, 20 Oct. 1947, DASF File 1-2-6F Pt 1.
Hopes of the anticipated 'reward' had been briefly raised when the chiefs of each village were granted permits to own shotguns. Informants recalled that they were disappointed and indignant on discovering that only the chiefs, not those men who had served in the war, were to be allowed permits. Lapu Aufe of Inawi declared:

They told us that when the war finished we would see good things - perhaps they meant they would give us guns or stores in our villages. They just told us that after the war you will see something good but they didn't say what it was we would see. When the war finished and we came back it wasn't long before the chiefs only got shotguns. We had been carriers and we saw the chiefs buying shotguns - we started to think back to the hard work we did - but we didn't get anything, so we were very unhappy when we saw the chiefs buying the guns.118

An Aipeana elder, Aufa Kauka, expressed the same opinion:

After the war the King sent a message [to the government], saying 'In the war we gave the people very heavy things to carry, and hit them and put them in gaol. So when the war finishes, we will give them guns and stores and all sorts of things to make them happy.... [Later] the chiefs got guns, even though some of them did not serve as carriers, when this happened the others were very angry.119

If this was the promised reward, it was a paltry one; even the chiefs were not given the guns but had to buy them.

Against this background of rebuffs and disappointment, it is not difficult to imagine the emotions aroused by Cottrell-Dormer's visit in July 1948. People recalled that everyone wanted to join the new societies. According to Aua Vi'i of Aipeana:


We thought it would be a good idea to work with him [Cottrell-Dormer] so we would have a store in the village instead of having to go so far to buy things. He told us that if we had plenty of rice he would help us get a store in our village.

He told us we would get a rice mill and iron roofs for our houses, so we thought it would be a good idea to work with him.120

Cottrell-Dormer envisaged a simple, practical means of enabling villagers to amass capital for community projects; villagers interpreted his proposals in their own terms.

People expected that Cottrell-Dormer would either give them the machinery he promised or at least allow them free use of it. Kavo Laua of Aipeana explained:

The only thing we knew was that he would plough the fields without us paying. This was how he helped us so we felt like working with him.121

Other informants indicated that they did not understand at the time that the administration would deduct from the rural progress society funds costs for hiring machinery: some continued to believe that no charges for machinery were made in the early stage of the scheme.

People also expected that machinery would remove what Belshaw termed 'the pain of labour'. He observed in 1951:

Finally, and perhaps most important, the societies are expected to reduce the 'pain' of labour. This is a hope that may possibly not be fulfilled, and as it is so ever-present in the minds of the people it may turn out to be the critical point.122

122 Belshaw 1951: 23.
Compared with the mechanized production villagers had seen used by ANGAU, the methods of hand cultivation on which they relied seemed ludicrously time-consuming and laborious. Cottrell-Dormer was told frankly in 1948 that people were not prepared to produce more rice under the old methods.123 If the government needed more grain, it should help people to employ the 'better ways' they now knew existed - this was the essence of the village constables' demands of 1946. Undoubtedly, ideas of what machinery might accomplish were far from realistic; very few villagers knew anything about its actual working or operation. Only experience would give a more practical assessment of its value.

When Cottrell-Dormer introduced his scheme, few, if any villagers fully understood that in planting rice they were working for themselves, not the government. The crop had always been regarded as 'government rice'; they had supplied the government with rice for two generations and continued to do so. There was nothing new in Cottrell-Dormer's request that they produce more grain; what was different was his immediate offer of machinery to lighten their work load, and the promise that, in the future, they would have their own trucks and tractors, stores and whatever else they desired to improve their way of life. His proposals were seen in terms of a simple exchange of services: if people grew sufficient rice for the government, it, in return, would help them obtain the things they desired. Whereas in the past, they had received only a little money, most of which the government had taken back as tax.

123 Cottrell-Dormer to the Administrator, 26 Aug. 1948.
DASF File 1-2-6F Pt 1.
Informants firmly denied any suggestion that they themselves ever asked to run their own rice industry; they stress that the government alone was responsible for introducing the project. They explained that when the rural progress societies were started, people knew nothing of 'business' and of making money. According to A'ose Ufai, who was one of the young men Cottrell-Dormer sent to Idubada Technical School for training as a mill operator:

...at that time people didn't know how to start a business on their own or how to get money, so they didn't bother about money [i.e. about being paid for their work on the rice], they were just happy working.124

The majority of villagers did not realize that they could earn seemingly unobtainable things such as machinery through their own efforts; they believed they were solely dependent on the largesse of the white regime - a point emphasized in the 1946 petition. Villagers' understanding of the rural progress societies was clearly indicated in the attitude, observed by officials in late 1952, that they were 'assisting the Administration instead of vice versa'.125 This feeling had not grown out of dissatisfaction with Cottrell-Dormer's societies; the Mekeo had always regarded rice as a sort of tribute exacted by the government.

Misconceptions of what Cottrell-Dormer was offering naturally led to disappointment. At first, all worked happily and willingly:

It was new to them so most people were working hard; because it was a kind of game they were playing there were no quarrels. They were happy and sang while they worked. The old


women prepared food for the young people so they could keep working.  

Enthusiasm was still high when Belshaw inspected the project in 1951.  

The initial impetus was gradually lost as people discovered that the much vaunted machinery fell far short of their expectations. They had joined the rural progress societies believing that the tractors and ploughs would remove the necessity for long hours of toil in the rice fields; they found that they still had to clear the land and weed and harvest the crop by hand, only the ploughing and sowing was done mechanically. In contrast to the claims of some critics of the rural progress societies, informants asserted that a great deal of effort was required of them. Opu Vi'i, who was a committee man in the Inawi society, recalled:

We worked very hard clearing the land. All the men and girls and women went to cut down the trees and cleared up the place and burnt the stumps. The land was ploughed by machine and the machine planted the rice. It was harvested by hand.  

After the second or third season, people were growing tired of the demands made by the new societies. According to Kalama Kalama, today one of Aipeana's prominent business men:

They didn't say openly that they wouldn't work but in their minds they were sick of the work.

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It is very difficult to judge just how far this dissatisfaction had progressed by late 1952. Most informants tended to confuse the various stages of the scheme; in particular attributing the events of 1953 to the collapse in 1956. Cottrell-Dormer is so closely identified with events that many informants at first denied rice was grown after his departure; many did not remember that the co-operative societies dealt in rice for two seasons. The details given were often contradictory, nevertheless certain important points of agreement emerge, and there is a clear interpretation of events as a whole.

Informants' attitudes to Cottrell-Dormer are illustrative of the contradictions which occurred in their accounts. On the one hand, he is remembered as a 'good, kind man' who came:

...because he wanted to help us, because at that time we had no money, nothing at all. The poor fellow felt sorry for us so he came to help. Those who went to war had some money, though not much - we who stayed in the village had no money, so for the sake of the village people he came.130

People recall how he used to sit with them in the ufu discussing matters; he spoke their language and even chewed betel nut - a symbol of hospitality and friendship commonly despised by the white man. Some warmly defend him and deny that there was ever any hard feeling towards him:

Mr Dormer stayed here four or five years. He knew our language. I don't know why he left; I think he was told by headquarters to leave. No one here told Dormer to leave, headquarters told him to go. People weren't angry with him, they were happy with him because he was doing something good for the people.131

130 Thomas Ine'e, Inawi: 5 Apr. 1971.

But the majority, when pressed, concede that 'he was a European so he might have known the way to trick us'; and finally confess they suspect Cottrell-Dormer and other agricultural officers of stealing their money. This ambivalence is largely the product of hindsight: in 1952 villagers did not know that Cottrell-Dormer's scheme would be a failure. Several informants stated that it was only after the rural progress societies closed that their suspicions were aroused. Aua Vi'i of Aipeana made this distinction clear:

Dormer was telling us lies but we were not angry with him. He was telling us lies because he didn't spend enough time with us. We were not angry with him while he was here, but once he left we said, 'Dormer was telling us lies for not staying with us long enough.' But later on we forgot all about it.132

The same point was underlined by Ete Kua, another committee man in the Inawi rural progress society:

We didn't know why Dormer left. We only heard he left but we didn't know why. When he left, we thought he gave us the work but left before we really understood it. So we said, 'Why did he leave when he hadn't shown us the work properly?'133

There were, however, a few hints that before the closure of the rural progress societies, some educated men, working for the administration as clerks and agricultural assistants, spread accusations that Cottrell-Dormer was misusing members' funds. According to one Inawi informant:

People didn't talk about Dormer stealing their money until the young men who had been educated

133 Ete Kua, Inawi: 4 May 1971.
told their parents about the money and said that Dormer and A. [one of his Mekeo assistants] were stealing their money. Then the old people began to talk about it.\footnote{A.U., Inawi: 15 Apr. 1971.}

Others explained that since the majority of people had no idea how a business enterprise was run, they did not think about their money until the matter was raised by a few sophisticated young men:

...they told us that if anyone works they should be paid with money. Because they heard this some people refused to carry on. It was one of our own people, not Europeans telling us that.\footnote{A.V., Aipeana: 31 Oct. 1971.}

Such comments give some context to Morris' assertion that members of the rural progress societies feared that Cottrell-Dormer had misappropriated society funds.\footnote{Morris to Registrar of Co-operatives, 20 Sept. 1952, DC File 17-7.} The comparatively well educated, English-speaking Mekeo working for the administration were the individuals most likely to be called upon by visiting officials to interpret local opinion; the suspicions these men voiced represented a minority opinion which later gained wider acceptance when Cottrell-Dormer suddenly left the area and his societies were disbanded.

One point was clearly made in all accounts: whatever the actual situation at the time of reorganization, villagers were by no means ready to reject a scheme to which such fervent hopes had been fixed. Officials assumed that villagers had little to lose if they withdrew from the scheme. The monetary investment in the village societies

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{A.U., Inawi: 15 Apr. 1971.}
\item \footnote{A.V., Aipeana: 31 Oct. 1971.}
\item \footnote{Morris to Registrar of Co-operatives, 20 Sept. 1952, DC File 17-7.}
\end{itemize}
was certainly small, as Morris pointed out, but much more than the few pounds contributed to them was at stake. Abandoning the societies at this stage would have meant abandoning the hopes which people were convinced could only be realized with the government's help. This dependence was emphasized in the reasons informants gave for joining the co-operatives. An educated, younger man exclaimed:

We are like empty boxes! What would we know about something new? Whatever is new, we will be happy about it. We wanted a business and we wanted a good way to live. We worked with Mr Dormer, then he stopped and gave our money back. We wanted to do something and they explained to us about the co-operatives, so we put money to buy shares and start a co-operative.138

The revised project was welcomed, not because villagers found it in any way more acceptable than Cottrell-Dormer's scheme, but simply because they were relieved to be offered an alternative. Kalama Kalama described how the co-operatives were received by Aipeana:

We had a meeting and the co-operative officer told us how to start new societies. He told us the whole village would have to pay $10 each and then they would build a store and get a profit from it. We are not educated people - one told us to grow rice and we were too lazy and so that work collapsed, and now another came to help us so we thought we should listen to him.139

Lapu Aufe of Inawi reiterated the same point:

We didn't compare the co-operatives with Dormer's societies but because we were asked

137 Ibid.
138 Andrew Isoaimo, Inawi: 10 May 1971.
to join the new society, we joined it to do something instead of sitting around doing nothing. We were thinking that this was another way of having something for ourselves of the way of living in the future.  

Villagers did not, as Lapu explained, concern themselves with the details of the respective schemes (even if they could have understood them); mechanization proved to be the one thing of real importance. The demand for machinery increased under the new scheme, even though the individual grower was now required to meet the costs out of his own pocket. Mechanization had always been a crucial issue; the rural progress societies lost their initial support because villagers felt that the government had not lightened their labours sufficiently. This concern did not stem from a simple distaste for hard work. Mechanization represented the only concrete difference between the pre-war rice 'companies' and the new projects; it became a sort of pledge of the government's good faith. In villagers' eyes, the 'Rice Scheme' was mechanization.  

Matters which loomed large on the official horizon were evidently of minor importance to villagers. Informants dismissed the question of work organization, saying that the system followed under Cottrell-Dormer and that introduced under the revised project were both 'good'; even when pressed, they would not concede that one had the advantage over the other. Their assertions are justified by the choices actually made in 1953.  

The effectiveness of introducing cash payments to growers for their grain is more

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141 See above: 267.
difficult to evaluate. It may have provided a more concrete incentive at the time, though informants did not regard the payments as an outstanding feature of the revised project. Certainly in the long run, the payments were not successful in dispelling rumours that the administration was taking the people's money. Villagers openly accuse the agricultural and co-operative officers that succeeded Cottrell-Dormer of deceiving them:

I think the Government must have taken the money - Mr Dormer, Mr Lamrock, Mr Willis, Mr Bell and Mr Lawrence all got big money and then went away. I got £8 for working at Epo and no rations but I think they got more than us! The agricultural officers got big money.142

Despite the confusion surrounding the crises in 1953 and 1956, informants clearly recalled that most people finally stopped planting rice when the Department of Agriculture failed to plough their land. Opu Opu of Inawi heatedly described the closing stages of the reorganized scheme:

The Government was asking us to grow rice. For a start we were going all right but finally the Government asked us to clear a new place so we could have better rice. So each clan cleared a place but once the land was cleared the agricultural officer didn't bring the tractor to plough the land. The people had put a lot of effort into clearing their plots, so they went to the district office and asked them to ask Agriculture to provide the tractor and plough. But Agriculture refused, so the people refused to carry on with the rice work. Clearing the land is a big job and each clan had spent at least £6 buying food for the other clan people who came to work with them. So they had spent quite a bit of money to clear that land and yet nothing was done on it.143

Opu firmly states the moral responsibilities involved: villagers believed that they had played their part by following the agricultural officer's instructions but the government refused to meet its obligations. People were angered and puzzled by this apparent volte-face. Its sudden withdrawal of assistance could only mean that the administration, despite what it said, no longer wanted their rice. Aua Vi'i of Aipeana reasoned:

When harvesting we just picked the rice with our hands and this took a long time. Because of this there was a lot wasted in the field and that's why we didn't get much money. If the header was used we could have paid off the field machinery and still get enough money for producing the rice. I thought that because the Government didn't want us to work with them they didn't provide us with the header. So we didn't want to grow big fields - just enough for the family.\textsuperscript{144}

It is inconceivable to most villagers, even today, that the administration's actions were anything other than deliberate.\textsuperscript{145} The Mekeo universe admits no accidents. The government's 'power' is obviously such that if its schemes fail, they are intended to do so. Levels of understanding vary of course; there are now people whose experience and education allow them to see matters in a different light. An Inawi informant reflected:

I didn't know myself when the co-operatives started, but now when I look back at it I understand. I realize now that the rice scheme and the co-operatives were just experiments -

\textsuperscript{144} Aua Vi'i, Aipeana: 31 Oct. 1971.

\textsuperscript{145} See above: 14.
the government didn't really know what would happen.146

But those capable of this realization are, as yet, only a minority.

Once it was apparent that the government had lost interest in the project, most people saw little point in continuing. A few optimists were still convinced that they would 'make a profit' out of rice; after one or two seasons they were finally discouraged by the expense of the obligatory feasts held for relatives and friends who assisted with the harvesting.

Interest had now turned to copra as a cash crop. Following the decision in 1955 not to market rice through the co-operatives, officials attempted to persuade members to plant coconuts and increase copra production. Villagers regarded copra not as an additional crop, but as a replacement for rice; when the Department of Agriculture failed to plough their land, many disappointed growers decided to convert their rice plots into coconut plantations. According to Opu Opu of Inawi:

The people didn't sell any rice to the co-operatives. As soon as the agricultural officer came to the village they had an argument with him. He said that he only had one tractor to do the work for many people.

146 A.O., Inawi; 18 Apr. 1971. Informants who were consulted on the war and the pre-war period had had much the same work experience and education. The situation abruptly changes when one comes to the 1950s and later events. Not only do levels of education and experience differ widely, but many people, in common with the informant just quoted, now look back with a new understanding on events in which they themselves participated ten, fifteen or twenty years ago.
The people said, 'You should have more than ten tractors, one is not enough. So you are telling us lies, you are asking us to grow rice but you can keep the rice, we are going to plant coconuts instead of rice. You didn't plough the land so we could plant rice, so now we will plant coconuts'. Mr Pyne kept asking us to make copra to sell to the co-operative store, as in this way the store could get goods.147

The co-operatives are so firmly identified with copra that many informants, like Opu, denied that they had ever dealt in rice. Copra, the co-operative society and the co-operative store were seen as a 'new way' offered by the government. After 1956 coconut planting increased; many areas of established palms around Beipa, Aipeana and Inawi are said to have been planted at this time. Hot air copra driers were built in most villages in the late 1950s.148

Although Pyne and other field officers were able to generate interest in copra and the co-operatives, villagers had no clearer understanding of the new organizations than they had of the rural progress societies. They were told that the co-operatives would do two things: set up village stores and make a profit for members. While the former was quickly achieved, the promised 'profit' proved to be a mysterious and elusive entity. Most informants recounted the history of their society in the form of a long recitation of the occasional profits and frequent losses made by it, and the changes in store keepers and office bearers which were made following each loss. No mention was made of other matters such as the rejections by the Copra Marketing Board and the excessively


148 Patrol to the Mekeo 4 June-4 July 1958; Subdistrict Annual Reports 1960-61.
high transport costs. Evidently all that was visible of the societies' financial operations was this enigmatic sequence of profit and loss. Members were jubilant when the co-operative officer announced that there was a profit to distribute; when he announced a loss they were angry and puzzled. At the outset, the co-operative officers had spoken only of the profits they would make:

The government told the people that if they joined the co-operative society they would get a profit, but it didn't explain that if the society made a loss the people would make a loss.149

Villagers could see no connection between these failures and their own actions; it was as if the society were some complex but erratic piece of machinery which occasionally functioned correctly but more often broke down.

The only intelligible explanation offered by the co-operative officer was that the store keeper and other society office bearers were stealing funds or giving goods on credit. Consequently each time the accounts failed to balance, the store man was dismissed and new office bearers were chosen. The losses, nevertheless, continued. The real cause of the trouble obviously lay elsewhere. Informants agreed that many of the store men, secretaries and treasurers were either incompetent or dishonest but were not convinced that they were primarily responsible for the losses; some suggested that it seemed far more likely that the co-operative officer himself, who made up the accounts, was to blame:

I think there were good store keepers but the officers came to do stock taking - they might steal the money when they had stock taking.

It might be happening that way also. We think that way. It was not the store men but the co-operative officers stealing.\textsuperscript{150}

Observing the frequency of defections by society officials, field staff theorized that the sanctions against theft which existed in other groups were absent in the case of the Mekeo.\textsuperscript{151}

The belief that the co-operative officers were the real culprits partly explains why people might have been reluctant to take action against defaulters, though this is only one side of the coin.

Schwartz's study of the Manus co-operatives led him to believe that behind the people's conscious disapproval of thefts from the societies was a 'collective vicarious participation by all in the holding and use of the missing money.'\textsuperscript{152}

The Mekeo, far from feeling any collective responsibility for the losses, were intensely jealous and therefore suspicious of the officials they elected. Pyne and other officers were apparently not aware of undercurrents of intrigue against prominent office bearers. A former secretary of the Aipeana society described how he had been removed from office, without the knowledge of the co-operative officer, after members accused him of stealing the society funds; no court case was made against him but he was sick for several months with a severe illness which doctors in Port Moresby could not diagnose. Similar accounts of jealousy and revenge were given in Inawi. These actions were not prompted simply by anger that the society funds were missing,

\textsuperscript{150} A.U., Inawi: 10 May 1971.

\textsuperscript{151} Co-operatives Annual Reports 1956-57, T & I File 20-2-3.

\textsuperscript{152} Schwartz 1967: 43.
but rather by fears that the officials were using their position to increase their personal wealth and influence. The Aipeana secretary, on the basis of his own experience, explained:

...according to the custom the people often direct their jealousies towards the person who has been appointed in the society. The people are jealous because the storeman is getting paid.153

A rare piece of contemporary documentation in the form of a report prepared in 1959 by another Aipeana society secretary, Kuekue Kavana, vividly describes the people's reactions:

Look at that man [a co-operative official]: look at him! He ought to be ashamed of himself - trying to do the work which British people do: He's trying to be Higher than us. Ha-Ha-Ha that never will be! Shame on him! His skin and our skin is one! We mustn't obey his orders anymore. *Because if we keep on obeying him, he will become a great man in the end and we will be nothing*.154

Villagers were suspicious of the co-operative officers but above all, they were distrustful of the ambitions of their own leaders. A former secretary of the Inawi society admitted:

If they had had good leaders they would have been O.K. In their minds the people thought the leaders were stealing their money and that's why they were afraid of it. That's why they didn't want to put money in the society.155


154 The underlining in this section is my own. Pyne to Registrar of Co-operatives, 3 Feb. 1959, report attached, T & I File 21-4-1.

The Mekeo's difficulty in grasping the basic principles of co-operative activity stemmed from what Morris, then the Deputy Registrar of Co-operatives, identified as the lack of a 'capital concept' - 'an understanding that capital in itself and of itself can be a productive medium'. Just as the members of the rural progress societies had not realized that they could earn money through their own efforts to buy seemingly unobtainable things like agricultural machinery, members of the co-operatives did not understand that they could use money to earn money. The society's assets were not regarded as capital investments which would make money, but as purchases to provide members with certain services. People were therefore indignant when they were asked to pay for goods from their 'own store' or were charged to use their 'own tractor'. Kuekue's report of 1959 clearly describes these attitudes:

This is our own store! We've put in a very big money for an establishment! Therefore the prices should be very low! Even if we have no money, we should be given store-goods freely!

Because this is our own store! the storeman is unfair! He's stealing our money! One of these days, I'll jump over the counter and hit him! If he hits back, I'll plunge this knife into him! Shame on him! He thinks he's a whiteman! Cheek of him!

Do you see now? Another lie? See! We've bought the Tractor and Trailer with our own money, and yet we still have to pay for it doing our work! This sort of work is not good! The storeman is deceiving us! We've thrown away a very big money on it for nothing.

156 Morris 1958: 32.
Because we've bought it with our own money, it should do our work freely.157

Villagers' inability to follow the workings of the co-operatives made the whole affair seem an elaborate 'lie'. Though they did not wish to lose their store and other assets, they became reluctant to invest further money or effort in their society, believing that in doing so they would only be lining the pockets of the European supervisors and increasing the prestige of the office bearers, without benefiting themselves. When the societies were eventually liquidated, the stores closed, the stock and all assets sold, they were finally convinced of the government's perfidy. An educated man who has had long experience with the co-operative movement stated bluntly:

Those villages in which the co-operatives were closed feel that the Government told them lies as they gave their money but got nothing in return - in fact they lost the money they had invested.158

While the failure of the government's schemes cannot be attributed to the Mekeo's lack of support, it is obvious that their responses were often negative and destructive, if unintentionally so. People's distrust of the administration and of their own leaders would have created serious obstacles to development even in the absence of all other practical and administrative difficulties.

Field staff also had cause to complain of villagers' apparent inability to work together at the village unit, and below. Pyne, for example, found it almost impossible to organize


efficient use of the Aipeana tractor, which was intended to provide transport for all the West Mekeo societies; Beipa, presumably out of pique, preferred to pay a higher rate to hire a mission tractor rather than use its neighbour's vehicle. A pattern of self-defeating behaviour, which was to emerge clearly later, is already discernable.

Villagers were as unaware of the results of their own negative responses as they were of the effects of high transport costs or the financial consequences for the co-operatives of the collapse of the rice scheme in 1956. They had wanted the rice scheme and the co-operatives to succeed - their perseverance over more than a decade attests to the truth of their statements. Their actions had not been deliberately obstructive. On the contrary, they believed they had carried out their part to the best of their ability: they had planted rice, made copra and joined whatever societies the government had seen fit to devise.

The rural progress societies and the co-operatives had left few concrete achievements, nevertheless much had been learned from them. An Aipeana entrepreneur acknowledged this debt:

Yes, I think the co-operative society has helped this village. We didn't know how to run businesses but the co-operative officers came and now most of us are running our own businesses.

Even informants who condemned the government for not rewarding them for their services during the war admitted:

159 Co-operative Officer's Journal, Jan. 1959, T & I File 20-3-5.

The government gave us good ideas to start businesses and stores.161

People had begun to realize that they need not be dependent on the government for the things they wanted: they could earn money for themselves, start their own business ventures. Several of the younger men, who had benefited from various training courses in Port Moresby and had gained experience through the village societies or worked with the administration as agricultural assistants and clerks, were keen to put the new ideas they had gained into action.

The late 1950s witnessed a modest florescence of small village enterprises. Only a few months after the liquidation of the Inawaia co-operative society in 1956, a group of Inawaia people had raised £1,087 towards buying a tractor.162 The Inawaia Transport Company, as it was later known, purchased its first tractor early in 1959 with the assistance of a government loan; by December of the same year, the loan had been repaid and another applied for to buy a second tractor.163 This success soon prompted others to try similar ventures. Another group from Inawaia and a number of people from the neighbouring village of Eboa applied for loans to purchase vehicles during 1959.164 In 1961 loans were sought by Beipa and Jesubaiubua.165 By

162 Co-operative Officer's Journal, 1957, undated entry, T & I File 21-4-1.
163 Subdistrict Office File 25-3-4.
164 Ibid.
165 Ibid.
1963, seven of the fourteen Mekeo villages owned between them seven tractors, two trucks and one utility. 166

The tractors and other vehicles were used primarily to transport passengers and goods to and from the coast and Bereina, which in 1962 became the subdistrict headquarters. The need for transport arose from the rapidly increasing sale of betel nut and garden produce in Port Moresby. Prior to the war, many villagers raised their tax money by selling betel nut to workers on the Kanosia plantations; some even travelled as far as Port Moresby. A regular trade in Port Moresby sprang up after the war and was well established by the early 1950s. 167 By 1958, an estimated two tons of betel nut was taken by air weekly from Bereina and another six tons by sea. 168 Despite the increase in the volume of trade, it continued on an individual basis, each seller travelling to Port Moresby with his produce. Field staff complained that betel nut brought villagers such a high cash income that they had little need of other crops such as rice and copra which required far more time and effort for a smaller return.

In addition to the transport businesses and the betel nut trade, many small clan ventures, usually called clan 'clubs', were started at this time. The 'clubs',

166 Kairuku Subdistrict Annual Reports 1962-63.

167 Patrol to the Mekeo 29 Aug.-8 Sept. 1950 notes that 'frequent trading ventures' to Port Moresby may bring '£60 or £70 for the leader with lesser sums for his assistants.'


169 See, for example, Patrol to the Mekeo 10 Feb.-1 Mar. 1954; Patrol to the Mekeo 9-22 July 1954; Report on Mekeo Rice and Epo Experimental Station, 8 Jan. 1957, DC File 17-7.
modelling themselves on the co-operatives and often competing with them, made copra to raise money which they usually invested in a small store; many also built hot air copra driers.

The fact that the final stages of the administration's developmental schemes coincided with the first flush of successful independent enterprises, naturally blunted the edge of people's disappointment. Despite the frustration of projects which had absorbed much of the villagers' interests and energies for more than a decade, the 1960s opened on an optimistic note. People were too busy with the new activities to brood on events. But it would be false to imagine that the administration's failures were easily passed over or forgotten.
DESPITE initial optimism, the 1960s saw a worsening of relations between the Mekeo and the government, and a mounting frustration within village society itself. The introduction of local government was to prove as unsuccessful as earlier programmes for economic development, destroying any remaining faith in the government's good intentions; while the better standard of living which villagers had striven for, and which had seemed to be within easy reach by the early 1960s, still eluded their grasp ten years later.

Officials had observed with relief the signs of an independent interest in economic activities apparent by the early 1960s; it seemed that the debit sheet of the 1950s was balanced by a new optimism and prosperity. Now convinced that large scale community projects for economic development were unsuited to the 'highly individualistic' Mekeo, officials were confident villagers would succeed through their own individual efforts. A policy, initiated by ADO Brown, of encouraging small, independent village enterprises through the granting of government loans provided the guide for the future. Brown's foresight in recognizing that the rice scheme and the co-operatives were already moribund by 1957, and that the seeds of future development lay in enterprises like the Inawaia Transport Company, probably did much to forestall

1 Marsh to Registrar of Co-operatives, 27 June 1957, T & I File 21-4-1.
the complete disillusionment which might easily have resulted from the collapse of the government's projects. Beginning with the Inawaia Transport Company, he arranged loans for several groups, gave them practical advice and followed their progress with keen interest.\(^2\) The effectiveness of his approach was demonstrated by the many small transport businesses in operation by the early 1960s.

Most of these ventures operated on a modest scale, transporting passengers and goods to and from the coast and undertaking road work contracts offered by the administration. The Inawaia Transport Company, however, indicated that such ventures had far greater potential. Its assets in 1961 were worth £5,316 - two tractors, two trailers, a plough, a harrow, a hot air copra drier, an office building, a launch, a canoe and outboard motor, a garage and an engine and fittings for a water reticulation system.\(^3\) This was a notable achievement for a group consisting of seventy men and their wives.

In addition to transporting passengers, carrying out road work contracts and making copra, the company used one of its tractors and the farm implements to cultivate members' gardens; plans were made to install a reticulated water supply for members and to build them European-style houses at the rate of fifteen per year. It had already gone a long way towards achieving the goals set but never fulfilled by the rural progress societies and the co-operatives.

The betel nut trade - now a flourishing concern in most villages - was seen by officials as further proof of

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\(^3\) Kairuku Subdistrict Annual Reports 1960-61.
the Mekeo's success as individual entrepreneurs. 4 Although most of the co-operative societies were closed, copra production was increasing and by 1961 hot air copra driers had been built in most villages. 5 The Department of Agriculture had even been able to arouse interest in two new cash crops - cocoa and coffee. In 1958 Inawauni village planted its first cocoa and small areas of coffee were started by several planters from Inawauni, Aipeana, Beipa and Inawi. 6 Plantings increased in the early 1960s: there were 1,000 mature and 4,800 immature coffee trees in 1963-64, while two northern villages owned 561 mature and 2,186 immature cocoa trees. 7

Headquarters was anxious to see the Mekeo's commercial successes matched by progress in other fields, in which they were now lagging behind other economically less developed areas. Local government councils were first introduced to Papua New Guinea in 1950 8 but though the Mekeo were reported to be ready for local government as early as 1953, 9 it was postponed first because of staff shortages and the preoccupation with the rice scheme, and later because of hostility created when the scheme was brought to a halt in 1956. 10

4 See above: 308.
5 Kairuku Subdistrict Annual Reports 1960-61.
7 Bereina Subdistrict Annual Reports 1963-64.
8 Parker 1966(b): 249.
9 Patrol to the Mekeo 16-31 Jan. 1953.
10 Kairuku Subdistrict Annual Reports 1956-57.
council was finally proclaimed in 1961 and the first elections were held in January the following year. Local response to the elections was felt to be satisfactory, even encouraging. An ambitious five year programme, covering many aspects of community and rural development, was announced by the new council. The initial enthusiasm was short lived. Not one of the proposed projects had even been started twelve months later. Increasing local dissatisfaction was evident in the low tax return for the second year; of an estimated £4,437 little more than half was actually paid. By the end of the year, two important projects supplying four villages with water had been completed and the assistant district officer was convinced that the council was at last 'on the road to success'; but the future pattern of bungling management, failure to meet tax estimates and reduced works programmes, had already been set.

The council area was extended in 1965 to include several villages to the north of the Mekeo formerly known as the 'Bush Mekeo'. The new constituents responded with some enthusiasm at first but were soon discouraged. Less than thirty per cent of the works programme for 1965-66 was carried out and tax came in very slowly. According to patrol

12 Ibid.
15 See above: 1.
officers conducting them, the elections early in 1967 gave evidence of a growing 'frustration' amongst voters. A number of villages expressed their desire to withdraw from the council altogether.

Little attempt was now being made to disguise the fact that the council was as great a disaster as earlier schemes. In August 1967 local attitudes to the council and its financial position were reported to be 'very disturbing'. A tightening of regulations against tax defaulters and an effort to improve council management was ordered by the district commissioner. Tax registers were to be revised, all people absent from their villages being recorded to allow a more accurate tax estimate. A more realistic works programme based on the new tax estimate was to be drawn up, the council being duty bound to include in it any project promised but not completed the previous year. Above all, tax collection was to be made more efficient, early notification of tax patrols were to be given and penalties imposed on defaulters. These measures produced a higher tax return in 1967-68, but otherwise no improvement. Once again, many projects were cancelled and achievements for the year were not impressive - an aid post was built in the North Mekeo, two outboard motors were purchased for North Mekeo and a gift of $500 was made

19 Hayes to District Commissioner, 4 Aug. 1967, Subdistrict Office File 41-7-4.
20 District Commissioner to Regional Local Government Officer, 5 Sept. 1967, Subdistrict Office File 41-7-4.
to the Beipa mission hospital. The council advisor complained of the 'amazing' lack of interest villagers displayed, while conceding that this was reinforced by a council which had 'no concrete platform or plans'.

The situation seemed hopeless to field staff and headquarters alike. The district commissioner admitted that the crux of the matter seemed to lie in the nature of Mekeo society itself. He believed that villagers were not interested in local government because it offered 'little opportunity for monetary gain' and because the councillors' role conflicted with that of the chiefs. Not only were councillors faced with a complete lack of interest on the part of their fellows, they had to work in a society in which there was no community co-operation beyond 'the extended family'. The Mekeo's reputed 'individualism', which in retrospect provided officials with a convenient explanation of the misfortunes of the 1950s, offered a ready made excuse for the council's difficulties.

It was tempting for officials to overlook their own short-comings, and certainly villagers' reactions were exasperating at times. Several villages refused to sell land for council projects which were to benefit them; one village refused a water supply, claiming that underground water was 'poisoned'; plans for a school had to be cancelled when people insisted that the mission should continue to

21 Mekeo LGC Advisor's Report 1967-68.

22 District Commissioner to Regional Local Government Officer, 5 Sept. 1967, Subdistrict Office File 41-7-4.

23 See, for example, 'Amendments to a paper prepared by Dept. of Territories on the Rice Scheme'. 1 May 1959. DASF File 23-3-2 (J).
take responsibility for education in the area. 24

Poor business management appears to have been the main reason for the council's inability to implement a satisfactory works programme. Reluctance to pay the tax on time no doubt hampered activities, but lack of funds was not the council's main cause of embarrassment. The first year's tax was paid in full, yet not one project was completed until the end of the second year. Even later, when tax collection was becoming difficult, carry over figures from one financial year to the next revealed that the council was unable to spend the funds it had in hand, let alone the amount it estimated it should receive. 25 Some officers attributed inefficiency to councillors' over reliance on the advisor but it was unreasonable to expect that the councillors, who by Australian standards have only a very limited education and little experience of council or government procedures, could ensure proper management. Constant changing of advisors - as many as five different officers filled the position in one year - did not help the situation. 26 The administration must take most of the blame for the council's failure to provide taxpayers with satisfying community services; villagers clearly have ample cause to complain of its record of achievement, though how far this has conditioned their negative response is another question.

Tax payment and management showed some improvement with the appointment of a permanent advisor in 1968. 27

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24 Bereina Patrol Report 12, 1963-64.

25 Hayes to District Commissioner, 4 Aug. 1967, Subdistrict Office File 41-7-4.


Council prestige was enhanced by the completion in 1969 of the council chambers at Bereina - an impressive complex of brick buildings shared with the Kairuku Local Government Council. The new advisor took pains to establish friendly relations with his councillors and the people of his area; his optimism and enthusiasm alone was an improvement on the fatalistic view formerly taken, though it perhaps led him to confuse his good relations with villagers on a personal basis with a change in attitude towards the council in general. The Subdistrict Annual Report for 1970-71 tempered the over-confidence of the advisor's reports.28

The council's struggles coincided with a slump in the village enterprises which had appeared so promising in the early 1960s. Many transport groups were experiencing difficulties by the mid-1960s; the expense of maintenance and repairs to vehicles often proved prohibitive and in some cases, vehicles were left inoperative for months on end.29 The Inawaia Transport Company, which had earlier enjoyed such spectacular success, fell upon hard times (for reasons not explained in the reports) and managed to repay its final loan only with difficulty.30 The coffee and cocoa trees planted in the late 1950s now stood neglected; copra production remained more or less static.31 Only the betel nut trade continued to flourish. The 1965-66 Subdistrict Annual Report observed:

30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
Generally apart from transport organisations there is little striving for economic development amongst these people.\textsuperscript{32}

Despite major road works in 1968 and 1969 which linked most of the larger Mekeo villages to Bereina with all-weather roads, and the finance for village enterprises made available by the opening of the Rural Development Bank, the situation had improved little by 1971. Aipeana, a village which previously relied on its co-operative tractor for transport and had taken little part in the early developments, showed the most initiative. Since 1967 several transport groups have been formed in Aipeana\textsuperscript{33} but the most surprising development has been a renewed interest in rice as a cash crop. A partnership was formed in 1967 between an Aipeana transport group and a European to grow rice; fifty tons of paddy were produced in 1968 and 120 acres were planted for the next season.\textsuperscript{34} The partnership broke up in late 1969 but its success was sufficient to prompt others to follow its example. Eight groups from Aipeana and one from Beipa planted a total of 150 acres of rice in 1970-71.\textsuperscript{35}

The future of this new interest is uncertain. One of the most serious problems faced by the rice farmers in the 1970s, as in the 1950s, is the difficulty of obtaining labour. The secure cash income flowing from the betel nut trade means that few people are willing or feel the need to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{32} Ibid 1965-66.
\item \textsuperscript{33} See below: 342-51.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Bereina DASF File 23-3-2; Bereina Subdistrict Annual Reports 1968-69.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Bereina DASF File 23-3-2.
\end{itemize}
work as paid labourers. Until 1971 the problem had been partly eased by the Department of Agriculture hiring its harvester (used on the experimental station at Bereina) to local growers but for some time plans have been underway to disband the station and move all heavy agricultural equipment from the area. Without this assistance the rice farmers would be in a very awkward position as they cannot afford to buy their own harvesters and, on the basis of past experience, a co-operative association of rice farmers seems unlikely to be supported by the administration. Up to 1971, all the grain had been disposed of locally but the market was already becoming saturated and, if the industry continues to expand, marketing will become a problem. Unless these difficulties can be overcome, the renewed interest in rice is likely to suffer the same fate as the rice project of the 1950s.

Apart from rice planting, the only new activities were cattle and pig raising projects sponsored jointly by the Department of Agriculture and the Rural Development Bank. The concerted efforts of the council advisor and the rural development officer had generated some enthusiasm for these projects, which were designed on a small scale and intended to be managed by an individual farmer assisted by his nuclear family. Several villagers had completed farmer training courses and inspection tours of similar projects in other parts of Papua New Guinea but only a few projects were actually

36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 Bereina DASF Files 14-2-5, 14-2-4; Bereina Patrol Report 11, 1971-72.
operating by 1971. One Aipeana farmer had received his first livestock - ten heifers and a bull loaned by the Department of Agriculture - while six other cattle projects in six different villages were in preparation. Four pig breeding projects had been started in three villages and another three were still in preparation. There is a ready local market for pigs as villagers prefer to buy pigs, if they can, rather than use their own animals for feasts and bride price payments; though in certain circumstances, purchased animals are not acceptable. The cattle projects, planned with the completion of the highway to Port Moresby in mind, are intended to provide meat for the town market. Whether the Mekeo can adapt to the demands of careful animal husbandry is yet to be seen, for their treatment of village pigs and other livestock is extremely casual; if people are to raise animals for sale, they will have to radically change their present attitudes to the care and feeding of stock.

Throughout the 1960s villagers continued to buy vehicles; in 1971 they owned a total of forty-one, of which only twenty-six were in working order.\(^{39}\) The recent improvement of roads has meant that trucks and utilities are now more efficient means of transport than the tractors and trailers which were necessary to negotiate the rough tracks of the mid-1960s. Many people are therefore looking for new ways to employ their tractors; Aipeana, for example, had five tractors in good working order in 1971 which were being used mainly on the new rice plots. Lack of proper facilities for the maintenance and repair of vehicles, difficulties in obtaining spare parts (which often have to be ordered from

overseas), the ignorance and carelessness of drivers and the condition of roads which, though greatly improved, are still rough particularly in the wet season, result in vehicles having only a short life. Inawabui, for instance, had one truck and a tractor in working order in 1971, though at least six other vehicles lay around the village, rusting and in pieces. Transport businesses provide an important service for their communities but, under existing conditions, they are not likely to be very profitable ventures.

The proliferation of small, village retail stores also continued during the late 1960s. The average village store is a very modest affair, often conducted simply from the owner's residence; such ventures have a short life expectancy, but since little outlay is involved, as soon as one closes another opens. The thirty-eight village stores operating in the Mekeo in 1971 had an average stock on hand worth $85 and a monthly turnover of $72. A few larger stores have been started with Rural Development Bank loans and one Eboa villagers had opened a large trade store in Bereina, though he was in serious financial difficulties by 1971.

Copra still ranked second to betel nut as the most important cash crop but though planting was increasing, production had dropped - compared with an estimated 180 tons produced in 1961, the 1968-69 total was 164.2 tons. Coconuts are, of course, an important item of domestic consumption; nevertheless the proportion of immature to mature trees counted in 1971 - 51,216 to 38,949 - suggests a commercial

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40 Ibid.

41 Kairuku Subdistrict Annual Reports 1960-61; Bereina DASF Annual Reports 1968-69.
interest in the crop over the previous five to seven years. In 1967-68 the Department of Agriculture counted 6,000 new plantings, mostly around the villages of Beipa and Aipeana. Since the late 1950s, many individuals and clan groups have been establishing their own 'plantations' yet little copra is produced, even by individuals who own 1,000 or more trees.

The indifference shown to other cash crops is usually attributed to the success of the betel nut trade, which dominates the region's economy. A faintly disapproving attitude is adopted towards it by the administration, largely because betel nut is not an export crop and its success discourages villagers from exploiting the region's potential for other crops. Because of the danger of flooding local markets and thus bringing down the price, no attempt has been made to encourage villagers to increase plantings or to assist the trade in any way. It seems also that white residents and officials have other less rational objections to the trade: firstly, because betel nut can be grown, harvested and sold with very little effort compared with other crops, it fails to satisfy the ethic of hard work advocated by McAuley and others in the 1950s and still firmly espoused by many expatriates; secondly, the chewing of betel nut is considered to be a harmful, if not disgusting, habit, though presumably the cultivation of tobacco would not be opposed on these grounds.

43 Ibid 1967-68.
44 Personal communication, Mr J. Cooper, DASF Bereina.
45 See above: 257, 260-1, 263.
The total volume of the trade, which is still conducted on an individual basis, is very difficult to measure accurately. Some sellers airfreight their produce from Bereina to Port Moresby but most is taken to the coast and transported by sea in locally owned launches and canoes; reliable figures are therefore available only for the amount airfreighted. In addition to betel nut, some fruit and vegetables are also taken to market. In 1958-59 two tons of betel nut and other produce were taken by air weekly from Bereina and an estimated six tons were taken weekly by sea. In 1963-64, 6,000 pounds of produce were airfreighted from Bereina each week, while an estimated 500 tons left the district annually. A survey made by the Department of Agriculture in 1967-68 indicated that a total of 600 tons of betel nut was sold that year. The growth in the size of Port Moresby over the last twenty years, the expanding population of the Mekeo, together with improved transport facilities in the area, might be expected to have increased the volume of the trade but available figures do not suggest a dramatic increase. The weekly average of produce airlifted from Bereina in 1971 - approximately 6,000 pounds - represents a forty per cent increase on the figures quoted for 1958-59, but only a marginal increase on the 1963-64 figure. The rate of growth, however, may not be accurately represented by the amount airfreighted, and estimates of the total taken by sea are not sufficiently accurate to be used as a firm guide.

47 Bereina Subdistrict Annual Reports 1963-64.
48 Bereina DASF Annual Reports 1967-68.
49 Figures provided by Trans-Australian Airlines and Ansett Airlines of Papua New Guinea.
The 1960s gave little justification for the confidence officials had placed in the entrepreneurial skills of the individual Mekeo; over the decade, little if any economic progress was made. Official reports offer no explanation of the fact beyond the people's dislike of hard work, the easy money provided by betel nut and the indifference to progress in general. Indeed, any observer is likely to form much the same opinion, whether watching the Mekeo nonchantly boarding the plane in Bereina with their loads of betel nut, or driving into a village at midday, as the sun bakes the dusty village street and the pigs lie motionless in the shade under the long, huddled rows of thatched, grey huts, to find a few men gossiping and smoking desultorily on the verandas. The slow pace of village life, at least at first acquaintance, leaves the impression that people are content with their lot and see no reason to change it.

AFTER more than a decade of grandiose promises and few results, villagers listened warily to the administration's proposals for a local government council. Unlike many other groups, the Mekeo did not welcome it as the first step towards local autonomy. Not one informant questioned on the topic referred to the council's role in political development nor was this often raised in general conversation. Evidently villagers regarded local government primarily as another means of achieving the social and economic advancement outlined by Cottrell-Dormer in 1948; they explained their acceptance of it purely in terms of the material benefits they hoped to receive. A'ose Ufai, twice elected as a councillor by Inawi, declared:

50 For example, the Tolai and the people of Karkar Island: Salisbury 1964: 232-3; McSwain 1971: 281.
I thought it would be a good thing to get roads and hospitals and schools for the people.51

Aipeana’s councillors shared the same hopes:

When I stood as councillor they told me that when the people paid their taxes they would get water supplies and other things for the tax money.52

The performance of the council was judged on this basis.

People were prepared to give the government another chance to prove its good intentions; at the same time, they had no intention of persevering with a project which bore the obvious earmarks of earlier failures. When the council had no concrete achievements to its credit after twelve months, the initial spark of interest quickly died. An Inawi informant observed disgustedly:

The money they collected, I thought that money would be used for us - to help us - but the clerks have been stealing the money. We thought this money is going to help us - but the people who are looking after the money are stealing it. So how can they help us if they keep on stealing the money?53

Disillusioned by this fresh proof of the government’s perfidy, villagers wanted no part of the scheme. Lapu Aufe described Inawi’s reaction:

Before bringing the council, they told us it would be a good idea - it will help most of you in some ways and give you some new ideas', they said. When we did get the council, we found that nothing was happening. Therefore when the next election came, most people didn’t feel like having a council in this village.54

To their dismay, they found the administration was not going to give in on this issue; the council was there to stay whether they wanted it or not. The line of passive resistance taken in face of this situation is clearly outlined in government reports. 55

The opinions aired in Aipeana, Inawi and other Mekeo villages in 1971 left little doubt that, despite the optimism of the council advisor, there had been no improvement in local attitudes. Villagers bitterly condemned the council for taking their tax and giving them nothing in return. Aipeana was one of the first villages to receive a motorized water supply, but this was in 1963:

The work the council does now is seeing that the people build new houses and pig fences and clear the roads. The water is the only big thing the council has done for this village. We got that the first year.... 56

In a sense, this initial achievement has only served to underline the council's subsequent inactivity. For villages like Inawi, which had received no water supply or similar service, projects completed in other villages serve as an invidious comparison:

In 1962 it started, in 1963-64 Inawaia, Eboa, Aipeana and Beipa got water supplies. In 1964 I was a councillor. I wanted an aid post for this village, but they said we were too close to Beipa so we didn't need one. Later other villages got aid posts and schools and water supplies. Here the water supply is still not working. Other villages have got things but not us. 57

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55 See above: 313-17.
People claim that the councillors cannot perform effectively the tasks formerly carried out by the village constables. Young and old alike shared the opinion expressed by a former village constable:

In those days the VC and the councillors kept the village clean, the roads clear and got the people to build better houses. Now the councillors are supposed to do that but time has passed and nothing has been done. I don't really know what the council is supposed to do but it seems that the councillors have nothing to do.58

Whilst villagers deplore the fact that the council is not a more forceful institution and blame the administration for its lack of achievement, they are well aware that its ineffectualness at the village level is the consequence of their own choice and actions. Their determination that the council will impinge on their lives as little as possible is revealed in their choice of representatives, in the limited role they allow them and in their attitude to council work.

One of the first two councillors elected by Aipeana succinctly described the type of candidates preferred:

The people pick weak men so they won't have to work. If they pick a strong man and he makes them work, they won't pick him again.59

Most Inawi and Aipeana councillors have been educated, younger men who can speak English: three out of the six Aipeana councillors elected between 1962 and 1971 (one of whom has been re-elected five times) fall into this category, as do six of a total of nine Inawi councillors. Whilst it is understandable that these men are considered best able to deal

with the administration, they are also the men who have least influence in their own community. Even if he possesses traditional status, the opinion of the educated young man holds little weight. The absence of the chiefs from the council is very noticeable after their active participation as village constables and as office bearers in the rural progress societies and the co-operatives. Up until 1971, Aipeana had elected only two men of important status, neither of them chiefs; while Inawi had elected only one young chief whose position is in dispute. Chiefs apparently have not stood as candidates and people assert that they would not vote for them if they did:

In the past the Government was at Kairuku. It was far away so it needed someone strict to look after the village. So it picked chiefs to be VCs - they were hard on the people, they beat them and put them in gaol. Now the Government is close - also it is for the people to do things for themselves so they pick a man who will not be too hard on them.

The councillor is allowed the functions but denied the power of the old village constables. His duty is to see that the village is kept clean and roads and tracks kept clear. One day a week is set aside for 'council work', which is seen as no different from the day previously set aside for 'Government work': activities are at no time expected to impinge on village

60 See above: 176-7. Senior chiefs, along with commoners, served as office bearers in the rural progress societies and the co-operatives. The chiefs are said to have always supported government policy until the introduction of the council. In particular, the head chief of Inawi, Maino Peafua (who died in 1972), figured as a staunch champion of the administration in informants' accounts.

affairs except on the set day. Aipeana tended to regard the council day as a rest from their other pursuits; I was instructed to visit people on this day or on Sundays as these were the times when they were to be found in the village and would be free to talk to me.

Occasionally councillors hold courts and even impose fines, though this is not strictly in conformity with their official status. Such 'courts' were previously held by the village constables and councillors and are now part of the expected functions of the local government councillors; evidently the chiefs are content to leave these matters to them. 62 People cannot be compelled to accept their mediation and they can only act when all parties involved are willing.

The councillor's position is neatly shown of authority by two circumstances; the office is conferred by democratic election, and the successful candidate rarely possesses traditional rank or is backed by those who do. As an elected official, he must use circumspectly the power given by the government if he wishes to be re-elected. Lacking traditional status, he cannot act freely in the knowledge that no commoner or man with lesser powers would dare cross him. Few councillors are rash enough to antagonize men of high status. The audacity of one Inawi councillor in daring to prosecute a senior chief of the village for failing to perform council work in 1970, scandalized Inawi and surrounding villages. A former councillor who took a much feared sorcerer to court in 1967 over a serious case of assault still lives in fear of the consequences. One of the first two councillors elected

62 See above: 25.
in Inawi gaoled a senior chief renowned for his possession of a very powerful magic to cause incurable sores; not long afterwards, the councillor's son contracted an ulcer which spread until his leg had to be amputated.

Even councillors who attempt to assert their authority in more minor matters are quickly put in their place. An intelligent and progressive young councillor elected in 1971 stated, only a few months after coming to office, that he despaired of making any impression on people; no matter how often he requested things to be done, he was ignored and he felt ashamed to expose his weakness by asking yet again. Men laughed at him, in a good-natured way, when he warned them about illegal gambling in the village, were reluctant to attend meetings and took no notice of advice to attend important meetings in other villages. With neither the chiefs nor the people who elected him behind him, he could achieve nothing. Most councillors stated that though the chiefs spoke in favour of the council when it was first introduced, they now give it no support whatsoever.

The negative response to the council - which contrasts with villagers' determination to persevere with earlier schemes and the chiefs' former role as active supporters of the government - is in part the consequence of government failures. It has proved the turning point in relations with the white regime. Ironically, the ideal of a community of interests between government and people survived the heavy-handed paternalism of the pre-war era, only to be abandoned at a time when villagers were being given greater responsibility for their own affairs. People make no secret of the bitterness of their feelings towards an administration which, they believe, has rewarded their obedience and service with trickery and deceit. A middle-aged man stated quietly, but with cutting emphasis:
Whatever the Government says now - I don't believe it.
The government's power is still respected but people avoid dealings with it as much as possible, believing that they will inevitably be at a disadvantage. They often remark, however, that the government is no longer as 'hard' on them as in the past, that it now makes very few demands on them and rarely intervenes in village affairs, except in cases of violent crime; they seem to accept this change as tacit recognition of a new, neutral relationship involving few mutual commitments.

The Mekeo Local Government Council's inability after nine years to function even as a body capable of providing useful community services indicates that its problems are more deep-seated than those recorded elsewhere. Though many difficulties were met when local government was first introduced into the Highlands - mainly because of villagers' confusion over the nature and procedures of the new institution - these have been sorted out and people have now adapted successfully to the multi-racial councils.63 Trouble on the Gazelle Peninsula stemmed from a desire for greater political autonomy, nevertheless the Tolai councils have achieved far more than the Mekeo. 64

Even if the council's success had not been prejudiced by the miscarriage of other government schemes, it seems unlikely to have gained easy acceptance. Villagers acknowledge the fact that, if given the choice, they will not elect a man capable of asserting himself. Their desire to belittle their

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councillors is not merely an attempt to foil the administration; they enjoy taking down any man who has airs above his station. The very idea of providing a council president (or any other elected official) with a fine house, servants, private transport and posts for his supporters - as is not uncommon in other parts of New Guinea - would be offensive to the Mekeo, who will not tolerate a commoner setting himself above his fellows. These attitudes extend to national politics. A division of votes between two or more Mekeo candidates has so far prevented the election of a Mekeo to the House of Assembly. Like many of their countrymen, they are sufficiently parochial to prefer a local candidate; yet the Mekeo who have stood for election have been unpopular and disliked, even in their home villages - because they have been comparatively successful businessmen, or simply because they aroused jealousy by standing for public office. Villagers' intense suspicion and jealousy of ambition is seen even more clearly in relation to aspiring business leaders.

Having rejected the council, and with it the former dependence on the government's guidance, villagers have found the way ahead more difficult than they anticipated. In 1971, after a decade of experimentation, they felt that the better standard of living they had been striving for was as elusive as ever; and though it was an easy matter to set up their own businesses, they had found unexpected obstacles looming in their way.


66 Epstein, Parker and Reay 1971: 309. The Mekeo were part of the Lakekamu Electorate in the 1964 election (Ryan 1964); in 1968 they became part of the Hiri Open Electorate.

Though Aipeana was probably the most economically progressive Mekeo village in 1971 and Inawi one of the least active, both have followed a similar pattern of development. Like several other villages, Inawi began to form clan 'clubs' in the late 1950s to produce copra, build copra driers and open small stores. Some clans used money they had earned from rice sales to buy stock for a store; others organized themselves into working parties which could be hired to do building or garden work. Rice growers in other villages often employed these clubs to help with the harvest and at other busy times: they represent an interesting attempt to convert services normally exchanged on a reciprocal basis into cash, fulfilling the need for a labour supply larger than could be sustained by traditional obligations.

Four clubs, involving all but one of the important clan sections, had been formed in Inawi by the early 1960s. Their composition varied but reflected traditional divisions and clan alliances. The Gagai Club consisted of two ikupu - Gagai, an independent clan, and Lalae, a section of Oaisaka clan. The two sections of Ogofoina clan formed the Ogofoina Club; the Iso section of Oaisaka started its own separate club and three clans - Paisapaïsa, Afai and Ipage - combined in the Paisapaïsa Club. Leadership did not lie in the hands of any one clearly identifiable individual; office bearers were chosen, in imitation of the co-operative society, but were periodically changed. When the clubs began to close, it seemed

68 The following account of developments in Inawi is based on information provided by the individuals concerned and leading members of the clan clubs.

69 See diagram following: 3.
ominously significant that the clan section of the senior chief of the village had not been involved in any of the ventures.

Disputes between members and a quarrel over land with another clan led to the disbanding of the Gagai Club in the early 1960s. The Ogofoina group survived until 1969, when the clan chief, who had charge of the club store, was accused of stealing goods and money. Rumours that one of the clan leaders had registered the Iso Club's communal copra plantation in his son's name led to the suspension of club activities in 1971.

A dramatic series of three deaths associated with the Paisapaisa Club significantly influenced the present attitudes towards business ventures. Formed in the early 1960s, the club made copra and built a hot air drier. After the drier had been in operation for a short time, the president's young daughter died and members reasoned that the clan chiefs, who had not joined the club, were angry because the men spent their leisure time at the copra drier instead of going to the ofu. A new president was elected and shortly afterwards his infant son died. Following the death in 1966 of the youngest child of the third president, members were convinced that their chiefs opposed the club and were too frightened to persist with it.

Another series of deaths accompanied the attempts of an educated young man from Ogofoina clan to start his own business. Returning to the village in 1968 after several years working in Port Moresby, he used his savings to build a European-style house about two miles away from the village on the main road to Bereina. About a year after he completed his house and set up a retail store and a poultry farm, his infant daughter died. Despite relatives' insistence that he
give up his business before worse misfortune befell him, he was determined not to give in. Some months later his paternal uncle died and then his father. Now unable to bear the social pressures upon him, and burdened by his own guilt, the young man abandoned his house and store and killed all his livestock for his father's funeral feast.

Another independent businessman, Charlie Maino, has experienced similar discouragement. The first Mekeo to purchase his own vehicle, Maino featured in government reports of the early 1960s as one of the district's most successful entrepreneurs. His assets in 1964 included two trucks, a tractor, farm implements, a motor bike and a store - in fact these had been bought with savings and did not represent profits from his business ventures. As a skilled welder, he found he could earn better money working away from the village. The transport business proved unprofitable because of the extremely poor conditions of roads in the early 1960s; he tried rice growing and started a small coconut plantation. Then in 1966 his youngest brother was lost at sea; the village attributed this death also to chiefly retribution. Disheartened by his bereavement, Maino neglected his business interests for three years. In 1969 he planted four acres of rice but difficulty in obtaining land prevented him from planting the following season. Though improvements to roads in the late 1960s had made transport ventures more profitable, his vehicles were becoming very old and he found it difficult to keep them running.

Since the late 1950s numerous small stores have been started by individuals or groups, and have failed. Usually
boasting only a few dollars worth of stock, they are brought to an untimely end by mismanagement and the demands or dishonesty of relatives. Two privately owned stores were operating in 1971, both larger than the average Mekeo village store. Charlie Maino's store is now owned by several share shareholders from two clans; its stock was comparable to the co-operative store and turnover in 1971 was $900.\textsuperscript{71} The other store, owned by two prominent families of the senior section of Oaisaka and started in 1967, had a turnover of $1,200.\textsuperscript{72}

By 1971 all the clan clubs had closed, there was not one copra drier operating, only two of the many small stores had survived, no new entrepreneurs had established themselves, and the village's one transport business limped along, maintained largely by the owner's dogged perseverance. If some people were content with the situation, they were a minority - intrigue and discontent underlay the outward indifference to economic development.

Though little is said openly, the matter is heatedly debated in private. Villagers are convinced that their efforts to achieve a better way of life for themselves and their children are being deliberately thwarted. Every attempt to start a business venture in Inawi has ended not only in failure, but in personal tragedy for those concerned. The reason, people confide, is plain - the chiefs oppose the new developments and punish through sorcery any man who tries to go against them. Even the most ambitious man is held back by the conviction that he may endanger the lives of his wife and children. It must be stressed that these fears are very


\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
real and very intense, and that they influence even the best educated and most progressive members of the community. No matter whether the chiefs deny the accusations made against them or simply remain silent, commoners are convinced they are concealing their real intention - to prevent commoners from usurping their position of privilege and authority. Economic progress in itself is not opposed; the lapia want to control the new developments just as they controlled the traditional sources of wealth. One of the leaders of the ill-fated Paisapaisa Club, a commoner, reasoned:

Anyone who has tried to have a business in this village has failed. Everyone is expecting the chief to lead his clan people. If the chief says 'I want every one of my people to have so much money to share with me and we will start a business' - then the people will be willing, but an ordinary man can't start a business with the rest of the people.73

No such fears and anxieties are associated with the betel nut trade or with the production of small quantities of sun dried copra: these are activities in which everyone takes part and which do not set one man apart from the rest. Most Inawi households made some copra in 1971, drying the coconut meat on the verandas of their houses and selling it a few pounds at a time to the village co-operative society. I estimate that the average income per household for the year was less than $20; only two families, one of which made $100 and the other $120, earned more than $30 from copra.74 These estimates correspond with the copra purchases recorded


74 Figures based on 1971 household census.
by the Inawi co-operative society. 75 Not one hot air drier was operating in 1970 or 1971. Yet several families possess over 500 trees each, 76 and many people stated that they are establishing coconut 'plantations' as a source of future wealth for their children - an attitude which presumably reflects the emphasis the administration has put on copra production. At the present price of four cents a pound, 77 copra does not compare favourably with betel nut as a cash crop and it is not surprising that villagers do not care to produce more copra, even though they possess the resources to do so. Moreover, production on a larger scale and the use of hot air driers is associated with the series of deaths occurring in the mid-1960s among the members of the Paisapia club; such activities constitute 'business', while the making of a few pounds of copra per year by an individual family does not.

The betel nut trade, like small-scale copra production, is carried out on the basis of the individual family and is more or less regarded as an extension of subsistence activities. Each household harvests and markets the crop itself. A man may undertake to sell a bag of betel nut for a relative, along with his own produce, and in some cases families have relatives living in town who sell produce for them; but the usual practice is for each man (or his wife) to travel to Port Moresby and to attend market every day until his nut is sold.

75 Subdistrict Office, Co-operative Files record that the Inawi co-operative society purchased $1,237 worth of copra in 1969-70.

76 Five households possessed over 1,000 trees.

77 The price in 1971, according to Subdistrict Office, Co-operative Files.
Sometimes husband, wife and children make the trip together, though more often, because of the difficulty of finding accommodation in town and the necessity to leave someone in the village to attend to gardens and livestock, husband and wife take turns. The average Inawi family makes two to three visits to Port Moresby a year to sell betel nut. Undoubtedly villagers, in particular the hard-working women, enjoy the break from domestic drudgery and the excitement of shopping sprees in town.

In addition to betel nut, other garden produce is sold - mainly bananas, taro and some seasonal fruits such as pineapples. Inawi people usually take roughly equal quantities of betel nut and fruit and vegetables when they go to town. The food items, which command much lower prices per unit weight and volume than betel nut, help feed the seller and his family while in town or else a substantial amount is presented as an obligatory gift to the family providing him with accommodation; the remainder is sold at market, usually bringing enough cash to meet the costs of fares and freight for the trip.
In 1971 the average income earned by an Inawi household from betel nut was $308. Of a total of 108 families, eleven earned from $500 to $1,000 and five earned over $1,000. Ten families made less than $100 and two families derived no income at all from betel nut. All those families earning less than $100 were either disabled by sickness or old age or consisted of a widow confined to her house for mourning and her children. Income from the trade is thus fairly evenly distributed throughout the village. Since it is a traditional crop, everyone has his own trees and is familiar with the techniques of cultivation and harvesting. Though the chiefs formerly imposed taboos on betel nut to ensure sufficient quantities for feasts, these restrictions are no longer applied and no rights are claimed over its sale. The desires and energies of each family are the main factors which determine their income. People tend to regard the trade not so much as an enterprise from which they should earn as much as possible, but rather...
as a useful resource which will provide for their cash
needs as they occur. 80 People make trips to Port Moresby
when they need cash for a particular purpose - for a feast,
a bride price, clothes and books for school children.
This is one reason why there is a great concentration of
sellers in town in December when people need cash for the
coming Christmas and New Year festivities and to prepare
their children for the new school year.

No one fears any evil consequences from selling
betel to earn cash; every family participates in the trade
to satisfy its cash needs just as it produces its own food.
A certain accepted level of cash needs exists - each family
needs money for clothes, tobacco, tea, sugar and occasional
food items, kerosene for lamps, cooking utensils, knives and
simple tools. Many families have an income which is more
than sufficient to meet these comparatively modest needs, yet
there is no sign of the fact in the clothes they wear, the
food they eat or the houses in which they live. There is
no visible difference in the standard of living of families
earning over $1,000 and those earning less than $100. Many
Inawi families could afford to build more sturdily constructed
and more comfortable houses - fear, not indifference, prevents
them from doing so. Over the last decade, each of the few
families which have built houses with galvanized iron roofs
in place of the traditional thatch has suffered a death
shortly afterwards. Once again the chiefs are blamed. Since
the lopia have traditional rights to special building materials

80 As T.S. Epstein (1970: 23) observes, demand in Port Moresby
for betel nut and food produce greatly exceeds the supply.
Though most Mekeo households could produce more produce
to meet this demand, they did not attempt to do so.
and styles, a commoner who builds himself a house with an iron roof or other European materials is considered to be challenging the chief's pre-eminence. Any commoner who attempts to distinguish himself in any way is thought to risk provoking the chief's jealousy. It is obvious, however, that people avoid conspicuous behaviour as much out of fear of their neighbours as of their chief. Each household watches the other, ready to condemn the first sign of ostentation. In blaming the chiefs for opposing business enterprises and progress, the people of Inawi project their own resentment of the man who attempts to set himself above his fellows; and in doing so they have unconsciously erected a barrier which will be very difficult to overcome.

Development has come later and on a more ambitious scale in Aipeana. In 1965 two groups began saving to buy their own tractor; four years later five new tractors and one second-hand tractor had been bought by four clubs and one individual businessman. From 1958 until 1965 the co-operative society tractor provided the village with a transport service; when it broke down in 1965 and spare parts could not be obtained, Aipeana was left dependent on the tractor owned by Inawi businessman, Charlie Maino. The idea to start a tractor club was born when the Inawi tractor failed to arrive to take the Aipeana women and their produce to the weekly market held at Bereina. Furious that they would have to carry their heavy loads of vegetables the ten miles to Bereina, the women decided on the spot to form a club to buy their own tractor.

81 The following account of recent developments in Aipeana is based on interviews with the business and club leaders. Details they gave of finance, loans and the areas of crops planted could be checked against Subdistrict Office and DASF files.
Originally the other tractor clubs were also started with the intention of conducting transport businesses.

Both the leadership and composition of the Aipeana clubs differed from those of Inawi. In each case, the group centred around an easily identifiable leader or leaders. Membership was not determined by simple clan affiliation but by multi-lateral ties with an individual leader; maternal and affinal as well as agnatic relatives were included, spreading membership across several clans. The first of these ventures, the Women's Club, was the most truly communal: all the married women in the village participated and contributed towards buying the tractor. When the club finally broke up, no one person was considered to have any real right to the tractor, which was finally appropriated by the husband (a powerful sorcerer) of the president of the club and used for more than two years to run a private business.

The other clubs gathered around leaders who initiated the venture and who have been left in control of the club vehicle when the group breaks up, as it inevitably does. Shortly after the Women's Club was formed, a prominent man from the Iso section of Aivea ikupu, Kalama Kape, in partnership with his close friend and affinal relative, Simon Imamaiva, decided to start a fund to buy a tractor. Kalama, Imamaiva and their close relatives formed the core of the group and are said to have made the largest contributions. A number of other members were drawn from several clans in Aipeana and a few distant relatives of the leaders from two other villages also contributed money. When the club was abandoned in 1969, Kalama took the second-hand tractor belonging to it for his own use and Imamaiva was left in possession of the new tractor. Despite much bitterness and complaint over the situation, the other members were left with nothing.
The importance of the leaders' personalities in the formation of clubs is indicated by the fact that not all the people from Kalama's admittedly very large clan section joined his group and that another club was started in the same clan section. A former employee of the Department of Agriculture, Fagau Maino, who had been given a medical retirement, believed he was to receive compensation in a lump sum and planned to use the money to buy a tractor. He persuaded several men from his own clan to form a separate club and a number of people from other clans joined them. When the group, which called itself the Iso Club, disbanded, Fagau and his half-brother were left in control of the tractor.

The third club was started by Oaego Apau, a prominent sorcerer of Apagoa ikupu. Himself, his two adult sons, his brother and brother-in-law contributed most of the money and smaller sums were given by several other Apagoa clansmen. Following the pattern established by the other clubs, the vehicle purchased by this group is now regarded as Oaego's personal property.

In contrast to Inawi, most of the Aipeana business leaders also have important traditional status or are backed by close relatives of high status. Kalama's exact status is not clear; he is called lopia eke by many people, though his genealogical position in the clan suggests that he is merely lopia akina, the younger brother of a chief. Imamaiva's father was a sorcerer and his father's brother, who is now the head sorcerer of Meauni clan, is said to support Imamaiva. Oaego Apau is the uquaga lopia or head sorcerer of Apagoa clan. Simon Aluofo, an individual businessman, is the younger brother of the chief of Meauni clan and the paternal nephew of a renowned sorcerer of the same clan. Fagau Maino has no
traditional status but was able to secure the support of Ako Fafine, the lopia eke of his clan section. Even in the case of the Women's Club, the office bearers were wives of chiefs and other important men, mostly of Inawefae clan.

The four clubs have followed much the same pattern. Each was able to raise sufficient initial capital to secure a bank loan within a comparatively short time - usually less than twelve months. Sometimes the groups worked communally, as in the case of the Women's Club, producing copra for sale; but in general, money was raised by members making cash contributions to the club fund on an individual basis. This is described as 'paying shares' to the club, in imitation of the village co-operative society. In fact, the so-called 'shares' merely represent donations to the club since no system has been devised of dividing profits in accordance with the investment made by each member. Members usually raised their contributions by selling betel nut and copra.

Initiating a club and raising money for a particular purpose seem to pose no problems, and the wealth of the region, particularly in betel nut, means that large sums can be quickly amassed by fairly small groups of people. Problems develop when the tractor is obtained and members begin to wonder whether they are going to receive any return from the venture. They become suspicious of the leaders when no profits are forthcoming; quarrels break out and the group finally splits up, leaving the leader in possession of the club's assets. The Inawi clubs, though on a smaller and less ambitious scale, suffered a similar fate; three out of four groups were closed because of suspicion of the leaders and resultant quarrels among the members.

Only one Aipeana businessman, Simon Aluofo, has worked on his own to buy a tractor. A well educated man now
in his mid-thirties, Alufofo decided to start his own business in 1963, when he was forced to resign as secretary of the Aipeana co-operative. He raised sufficient money to open a small store by selling copra and betel nut; later he began to charter planes to transport his stock from Port Moresby to Bereina, making a handsome profit by backloading planes with sellers taking produce to Port Moresby. Though he was eventually forced to close his store, partly because of mismanagement on the part of close relatives, he had saved enough capital to obtain a loan to purchase a tractor in 1969. Since acquiring the tractor, he has grown sweet potatoes and rice commercially, and was able to pay off his loan quickly. He planted fifty acres of rice in the 1970-71 season.

Though only this one businessman started independently, the closing of the tractor clubs has left several men working on their own. In 1971 Kalama and Imamaiva were working independently, each on his own rice farm. Fagau and his brother were planting rice, as was Oaego Apau. Individual farmers were being encouraged by the Department of Agriculture to start cattle and pig raising projects. Several individuals were establishing small coconut plantations.

The road of economic progress has been far from smooth for Aipeana; and though individuals appear to have had more success, and current trends indicate that future development will be in this direction, it is evident that the Aipeana businessman, like his counterpart in Inawi, faces severe obstacles which not only limit his activities but which could make them impossible. Difficulty in obtaining land and labour are two important practical problems; more intangible but perhaps even more significant, is the envy of fellow villagers and the social pressures it creates.
Though there is no lack of rich, arable land, the individual wishing to engage in cash cropping is hampered by the system of land tenure. Aipeana businessmen have manipulated both maternal and agnatic ties in attempts to obtain the use of more land, and at least one has successfully appealed to rights which are not based on kinship. In 1971 Aluofo had planted rice on several acres of land belonging to Afai clan which had been lent to him in recognition of Afai's debt to Aluofo's forebears, the chiefs of Meauni clan, who had given land to Afai on which to build houses when the group settled in Aipeana seventy or more years ago. Most people, however, say that they find it difficult to persuade even kin to lend them land. Jealousy is said to be the cause: people do not like to see even their own relatives using their land to make a profit. Even the most powerful men, who might well be considered too dangerous to refuse, complain that their activities have been curtailed because they could not obtain more land.

The individual also has problems in securing sufficient labour if he needs more assistance than can be provided by his immediate family. He can call upon his clansmen, relatives and friends to form a work party but he must feed them well while the work is in progress, and when the task is completed he must kill pigs and hold a small feast. Not only is this expensive, it is also an unreliable means of securing help: many will attend to gossip and enjoy the free hospitality, a few will work. Envy of the man who is 'making good' creates unwillingness to assist him. One Aipeana entrepreneur attempted to ensure a supply of labour by allowing several families to make their gardens

82 See above: 36-7.
in the area he cleared for rice the previous season. Villagers from both Aipeana and Beipa accepted his offer and in return assisted him with the current rice crop. Another rice farmer regularly hired women's clubs from coastal villages to weed and harvest his crop. In respect to both land and labour, the group enterprise obviously has an advantage over the individual.

There have been no deaths associated with the recent developments in Aipeana; nevertheless the aspiring businessman is acutely aware of working in a potentially explosive situation. He well knows that his success arouses the envy of others, particularly the chiefs; he takes pains to avoid infringing the chiefs' traditional rights or neglecting in any way his duties to them. This applies, no less, to holders of traditional status. A number of people starting rice farms or cattle projects had built temporary houses at the site and spent most of their time away from the village; they are quick to insist that their permanent dwellings remain in the village and that they have built only temporary shelters on their farms. Chiefs are opposed to their clansmen living away from the village for a number of obvious reasons. The family concerned is removed from the chief's direct control and supervision and he suspects that the head of the family may intend to set himself apart from his authority. He further suspects that the family will ignore his rights to certain fish and game. Perhaps more importantly, the chief knows that he will lose control over the family's labour and resources. People who spend much of their time away from the village are conscious of the need to allay such suspicions. An Aipeana entrepreneur, who himself has traditional status, explained the precautions he must take:

The chiefs do not mind the people moving away from the village as long as they return to do
the chiefs' work - *ipa gava* work and every death must be taken to the chief. The chiefs will be very angry if even a tiny baby is buried away from the village. Also in the case of a wild boar with tusks - this must be taken to the chiefs. If they hear you have killed one and eaten it yourself they will be very angry. Also the other things I have mentioned [cassowary eggs and certain types of fish] must be taken to the chiefs first. Even if I am in the middle of ploughing my field and the chief calls me to go to the village and help him with his feast, I will stop my work and go.

The people must keep the chiefs happy. If the chief wants to build a new house, then all the people will buy at least one sheet of iron and give it to the chief. Then when his house is finished he will say, 'You are very good, my people, to help me make such a good house, so now you should build yourselves good houses.' The chiefs have no rights over iron because that was made by Europeans - they only have the right to *afa* and *opogo*. But if a person builds a tin house, he should kill a pig for the chiefs to have and then they will be happy.83

Many Aipeana people claim that the chiefs are not against them starting businesses; others say they are not really sure what 'is in the chiefs' minds'. According to one entrepreneur:

> In this village some chiefs are for business and some are against.... In this village we might be frightened to start businesses because some one will die but if we don't, we will die any way. If we sit doing nothing, we will have nothing, so we must try to work like Europeans to get money.84

The uncertainty in people's minds is clearly revealed in the necessity felt to respect the chiefs' traditional rights. An educated, young man admitted:

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I don't like the chiefs keeping these things for themselves but still I am frightened of it. 85

It is also indicated in the belief that it is essential to 'keep the chief happy'. People might claim that the chiefs have no rights over such things as iron roofs and money, nevertheless they recommend that commoners should first build their chief a house with an iron roof before thinking of their own. Another businessman, who is also a clan chief, insisted that the Aipeana chiefs do not oppose any one who wishes to get ahead, immediately adding the following condition:

After starting his work, he [the businessman] may feel like making a feast for the chiefs to come and sit with him because he has started a job in the village. 86

The Aipeana entrepreneur, whatever his own rank and power, realizes that his position is a delicate one and that success largely hinges upon his ability to avoid any rivalry or direct confrontation with the lopia. He attempts to find ways to placate them, in the hope that they will tolerate those aspects of his role which fit uneasily into the traditional system:

It is alright for us to live away from the village and grow a lot of food and rice and make money but when the chief comes and asks for help for his feast, I must give a lot of food - more than any one else. Then the chief will say, 'This man is doing good work, so here is plenty of food for my feast.' Then he will be happy. 87

Not only the chiefs are feared - entrepreneurs are equally afraid of the jealousy of their fellow villagers.

including their close friends and relatives. Aipeana people say that poisoning is now even more common than sorcery as it has the advantage that any one can use it without any special training or knowledge. Battery acid is said to be commonly employed. The successful businessman is therefore very wary of whose hospitality he accepts:

...everyone at Aipeana is frightened to go at night and eat and drink at other people's places. They are all warned against it. Usually the person will be killed by a close friend as he is the only one he would be likely to eat or drink with. 88

Another businessman believed that a severe illness he had suffered recently had been caused through sorcery by his close relatives who were envious of his achievements:

I am the only one in this village who has had trouble because of business. They don't worry about about the man who just has a small trade store or is starting some little business but only the one who is really making a lot of money and is getting ahead. 89

The opinions expressed by the Aipeana entrepreneurs - all those quoted are men of traditional status or are backed by powerful relatives - reveal the uncertainty and danger of the role they are attempting to play. In terms of facts and figures, the number of vehicles owned, the variety of new projects being started, Aipeana presents a comparatively impressive picture of development, yet it is only necessary to scratch the surface to see that the difference between Aipeana and Inawi is far from being as great as it seems. In both communities the same tensions, fears and pressures

89 Ibid.
surround European-style enterprises; the history of business ventures over the last decade reveals the existence of a complex web of social pressures which constricts and threatens to strangle the development which villagers themselves desire.
CHAPTER EIGHT

THE OBSTACLES TO DEVELOPMENT: 'Things are a little better now but...'

STUDIES published over the last two decades of economic and social change in New Guinea have, on the whole, presented a highly optimistic picture of the adaptability of Melanesian societies. Recent studies by Finney and Brown of the Highlands, and by Salisbury and Epstein of the Gazelle Peninsula, emphasize the ways in which traditional institutions and values have assisted change. The only shadows on this otherwise bright horizon are the regions where development is hampered by recurrent cargo cults. Lawrence and Meggitt maintain that a basically different orientation predisposes the 'religion-minded' coastal societies to cultism, while the 'relatively secular-minded' Highlanders eschew ritual in favour of more practical means of obtaining the new wealth. Finney argues that the variation in development between the

1 Belshaw's In Search of Wealth, published in 1955, and Mead's New Lives for Old, published the following year, appear to have initiated the trend. Most subsequent studies have been of societies which have experienced rapid development, it is not surprising, therefore, that the trend has continued. Yet, as Finney (1973: 124) points out, the stereotype of an economically backward New Guinea remains 'generally true'.


3 McSwain (1971) challenges the optimistic view expressed by other scholars, demonstrating how cargoism has obstructed development on Karkar Island.

4 Lawrence and Meggitt 1965: 5-25.
coast and the Highlands can be better explained by the nature of European contact, the effectiveness of government aid and the natural resources available. The Mekeo's experience adds a further episode to this debate, providing little support for either side. Many of the present obstacles to development clearly lie within Mekeo society itself, but these are not the result of cargo cult thinking; and though the Mekeo might be considered a classic case of a society whose initiative had been broken by stultifying government policies, in fact people are eager for advancement.

The Mekeo, no less than the Gorokans, the Chimbu and the Tolai, aspire to the 'better way' of life they see around them, particularly in the towns. In the early 1960s it seemed that they were on the brink of a new stage of economic development yet they have been unable to move beyond what Epstein terms the 'investment trial period'. Like other New Guineans, the Mekeo lack business skills and experience, but this inadequacy has been only one of many difficulties. No simple single formula can be given to explain the problems encountered over the last decade. The nature of Mekeo society, the modifications it has undergone since the war, relations with the white regime, have all combined to create the present situation, and to form the attitudes which will influence the immediate future.

**Traditional Values and Social Cleavages**

While arguing that most New Guinea societies are 'pre-adapted' for economic change, Finney adds that the

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7 Ibid.
response of societies possessing hereditary leadership remains an 'open question'. Clearly many of the obstacles encountered by aspiring Mekeo business and political leaders have been created by the social values associated with a system of strictly ascribed status; others are produced by the ambivalence underlying kin relationships and the concept of authority.

The administration's claim that the Mekeo's 'individualism' is the main stumbling-block to progress obscures rather than explains the situation. Far from experiencing unqualified success, individual enterprises have encountered pressures from all sides. The businessman's role conflicts with the important social premises that each individual has equal opportunity to satisfy his material needs and that rank and privilege are conferred only by birth. The ambitious, acquisitive man who attempts to set himself above the rest offends all sense of dignity and propriety; sorcery provides a most effective way of dealing with his anti-social behaviour. At the first sign of illness or misfortune, he will find a stream of solicitous visitors at his door, each confidentially advising him that some important chief or sorcerer opposes his activities and that it would be best to abandon them before serious trouble befalls him or his family. The anxiety built up by these insidious pressures soon becomes intolerable. Though the entrepreneur who has traditional status is in a less vulnerable position than the commoner, he is by no means shielded completely as the fears expressed by the Aipeana business leaders reveal.

The local government councillor meets little opposition providing he accepts the very limited role ascribed to him. The ambitious councillor, on the other hand, or the man who contests higher political office, is likely to arouse the anger of his community. Like the businessman, he flouts the convention that authority is the prerogative of birth and he becomes the victim of similar pressures. By their own admission, villagers use the system of democratic election to control ambition, deliberately selecting docile officials who will not attempt to capitalize on their position. In areas like the Gazelle Peninsula, prominent men have refused to stand as councillors, dismissing its functions as beneath their dignity, but there seem to be no recorded examples of New Guineans intentionally selecting ineffectual candidates when more able men stood for election. Studies of the House of Assembly elections have been based on the assumption that the successful candidate was regarded by electors as the man best able to represent them. In the Mekeo case, such an assumption could be misleading: they are likely to prefer the man whom they feel is the least enterprising, and therefore the least dangerous.

While this response can be partly attributed to a desire to give as little power as possible to the administration, it is also apparent that elective authority lacks any real legitimacy in traditional terms. Authority is not something which can be conferred by the simple volition of one's fellows.

10 Epstein, Parker and Reay 1971: 8.
11 See above: 12-18.
since it depends on the possession of supernatural powers. Whatever position the councillors and other elected officials may have, they gain through the power of the government, not by virtue of the people's choice which in itself can confer nothing.

Providing the leaders have traditional status, group enterprises do not offend the social ethic; they break up because of internal pressures. The pattern they follow is already familiar from responses to government projects: ignorance of business principles give rise to suspicions that members of the group are not receiving a fair share of the profits and finally the venture is abandoned amidst quarreling and intrigue. Finney observes that Gorokan entrepreneurs also feel threatened by jealousy and that their activities may be hampered by the necessity to appease their supporters. The Gorokan situation, however, seems far less tense and critical than the Mekeo, where business leaders are never able to retain support for long. The Mekeo's intense suspicion and jealousy of each other and of their leaders - whether these be government officers, elected officials, commoners or chiefs - reflect the ambivalence underlying the traditional concept of authority and existing in most social relationships.

The careful division of authority into its benevolent and destructive aspects reveals an acute awareness of the dangerous potential of political power. The senior chief acts as a safeguard against the misuse of authority, controlling the holders of destructive powers; yet in order to enforce


13 See above: 16, 18, 54-6.
his will on the war chiefs and the sorcerers, he must have coercive powers of his own. This apparent contradiction in his role is disguised by the secrecy surrounding the real nature of his powers and the emphasis laid on his benevolent nature. The only limit on his power, in fact, is his moral obligation to his people; though this obligation is more compelling that it at first appears. The ideal concept of chieftainship provides a standard by which commoners can judge the chiefs. As long as a chief's actions do not stray too far from the ideal, people will support him but if he fails to live up to it, they will suspect him of using his powers against them. A subtle system of checks and balances exists; clansmen cannot easily get rid of a chief, because of his supernatural powers, but it is obviously in his best interests to maintain their support and co-operation.

The ambivalence of relations between chief and people is paralleled in close kin relationships. Jealousy and suspicion permeate all levels of the society. The relationship between brothers (male siblings) displays an open ambivalence. In one sense, it is symbolic of unity and solidarity, providing the theoretical foundation on which the clan system is constructed; yet though brothers are considered to be bound by the closest bonds of kinship and affection, they represent to each other the most immediate and most feared rivals.

The system of inheritance, whereby brothers are often placed in the position of sharing land and other property for several years before it is divided up on the

14 See above: 5.
15 See above: 31-2, 36.
death of their father, naturally leads to friction. It appeared, however, that most Inawi families came to fairly amicable agreements over such matters. Strife was more likely to occur over less tangible property - magic, ritual knowledge and status. Even though primogeniture succession is strictly followed, the eldest son often fears that his father may have withheld certain powers from him and passed them to a younger brother. If the eldest son is known not to have been the father's favourite, or if he has been away from the village for several years while the younger brother has stayed home and tended the father, such suspicions are naturally heightened. Though a younger brother rarely actually challenges the position of the chief, he is often felt to be competing with him. Should the younger brother prove to be more intelligent, his magic more successful, and his popularity with the rest of the clan greater than his brother's, he becomes a thorn in the side of the chief, who must put up with the praise heaped upon his rival and the insinuations that he would make the better chief. When I first arrived in Inawi I had the opportunity to observe a classical example of such a conflict in the head chieftainship of the village. Both the chief and his younger brother were men in their sixties; the younger brother was a very popular figure and was constantly praised for his wisdom, knowledge and generosity, while the elder brother, the chief, was feared and disliked. About a month after my arrival the younger brother, who had been seriously ill for some time, died; his death was at once attributed to his elder brother who was considered to be very jealous of him. I expressed surprise that a man would use sorcery against his own brother, no matter how jealous he might be of him; nonplussed by my naïvety, people insisted that in any case of sorcery one always looked first to one's brother as the protagonist.
Their statements were to be borne out by the innumerable fears and suspicions I was to hear expressed of brothers during my stay.

Even in mythology, the archetypal conflict is between brothers. The A'aisa cycle of myths closes with the story of how, after he had conferred chieftainship, sorcery and other things on human beings, A'aisa quarrelled with his brother, Isapini, who took revenge by killing through sorcery A'aisa's son, named Isapini after his uncle. A'aisa retaliated by killing his namesake, A'aisa, Isapini's son. A'aisa then took the dead body of his son and travelled along the coast until he came to a place called Kariko where he lives today with the spirits of the dead. The closeness of the two brothers, the enormity of the crime, is of course expressed by each brother killing his own namesake - in a sense, himself. The theme of fraternal conflict is one which appears in many other less serious tales, such as the story of Popopo and his brother, Lainapa.

Close agnatic kin, brothers, cousins and uncles, and affinal relatives are always the ones suspected of wanting to do one harm. All but one of the eight deaths that occurred during my field work in Inawi were attributed to sorcery and in each case the suspected protagonist was

16 A special relationship is said to exist between an individual and the child of a close relative named after him (or her).
a close agnatic or affinal relative of the victim. The individual's heavy obligations to his affines - *ipa qava* work, the bride-price and the payments made when children reach the age to 'wear clothes' - cause much friction and often serious conflict: one death and several illnesses occurring during my stay were attributed to failure to complete a bride-price or to make payments for children. Hostile and jealous in-laws figure frequently in mythology. One well known story of how Afai clan obtained the right to build a particular type of *ufu* relates that the knowledge was given to a woman married into Afai clan by supernatural beings who live under the ground (*faifai*). Because the woman passed on the secrets revealed to her by the *faifai* to her husband's clan, instead of sharing them with her own clan, her relatives took revenge by killing one of her children through sorcery.

The less formalized relationships with maternal kin appear to produce less tension. A man (or woman) interacts most often with his agnatic and affinal kin and his greatest obligations are to them. Within each of the two most significant kin relationships, therefore, there exists an almost formalized

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17 Only a few recognized sorcerers can practise the art, nevertheless, anyone is believed to be able to hire their services. In referring to the 'protagonist', I mean the person responsible for commissioning the sorcerer. Public accusations, such as those described by Marwick (1965) and other Africanists (Mair 1969) do not take place among the Mekeo, nor is the sorcerer himself openly challenged. Though the whole matter is supposed to be kept secret, rumours always leak out and before long the suspected protagonist is a matter of public knowledge.

18 See above: 33-5.
polarity. The positive and negative aspects of these relationships - their potential for rivalry and hatred, as well as solidarity and affection - are equally emphasized and expected.

The Direction of Change Since the War

During the period of European contact, but particularly over the last thirty years, the ambivalence existing within Mekeo social structure has been intensified. Though in 1971 it essentially retained the features possessed at the time of contact, there have been many internal changes which, indirectly and unperceived by the people themselves, have subtly shifted the balance of the structure, weakening its cohesiveness. These changes have undermined its capacity to handle the new developments.

Prior to the war, the village community was a tightly knit, exclusive unit which had little concern with the outside world. 19 Few villagers travelled beyond the boundaries of the subdistrict or could be persuaded to accept employment far from home. The war, and the events that followed, quickly broke down this isolation, bringing new experience and new goals. In the late 1940s, while the government was attempting to give positive direction at the village level to the newly felt desire for economic development, the physical horizons of the village were also being expanded by increasing travel and a trend towards employment in urban centres. 20 In 1946 an estimated eighty Mekeo were employed

19 See above: 192-7.

20 See Appendix III, Occupation Analysis - Inawi Village 1921-70.
as wage labourers away from their villages; 21 by 1949 the number had risen to 249 22 and in 1953 patrol officers expressed concern that of 1,040 able-bodied men, 319 were absent from their villages, 23 either working or attending boarding school. According to Belshaw, it had become customary by the early 1950s for the average Mekeo youth to spend a period working in one of the urban 'fleshpots', usually Port Moresby or Lae, before settling down to village life and marriage. 24 Trading expeditions to sell betel nut and vegetables in Port Moresby also became common in these years. 25 The trend towards semi-skilled employment in towns continued in the late 1950s.

The Subdistrict Annual Report for 1958-59 noted:

Very few natives seek employment in the labouring field. They have a marked tendency to prefer domestic service in the larger centres. Although plantations offer unlimited work, only a few locals work under agreement. These are usually in the higher wage bracket.

In contrast to apathy displayed towards education in the pre-war years, missionaries state that parents are now eager for their children to attend school and are inconsolable when told a child lacks the ability to proceed to higher grades. Most villagers see education as the key to better and higher paid jobs for their children and are keen for them to achieve a high standard; their chances of doing so are now much greater

21 Patrol to the Mekeo 7-11 May 1946.
23 Patrol to the Mekeo 16-31 Jan. 1953.
24 Belshaw 1951: 18.
25 See above: 308.
than in the past. Both mission and government have become much more active in education since the war. The Sacred Heart Mission maintains several village and central primary schools in the subdistrict, two secondary schools and a teachers' training college. Two vocational schools have been established in the area by the administration but the real importance of government activity in education lies in the increased opportunities for secondary, tertiary and vocational training now available in Port Moresby and other centres. The mission has also established seminaries and other training institutions in town centres which are open to students from its elementary schools.

Since there is little opportunity for employment in the village or even in the subdistrict, rising standards of education have swelled the flow of workers to urban centres. Many people now live away from the village on a more or less permanent basis, occasionally visiting kin during their holidays. Also many young men and women are away from home undertaking vocational training and higher education of various types. The demands of the betel nut trade create a stream of sellers constantly travelling to and from town; many men who have no employment there spend much of their time in Port Moresby, selling their produce and then living off the proceeds. The 1970-71 Subdistrict Annual Report estimates that at any one time twenty to twenty-five per cent of the total population of the Mekeo is absent from the village. Moreover the population of the average village community has increased by approximately seventy-five per cent.

over the last twenty-five years. The previously compact, close-knit, homogeneous village unit has become a much larger, more amorphous entity, divided by wide differences in education and work experience and by new residence and employment patterns.

Accompanying these changes, and perhaps the natural result of them, has been a growing emphasis on the role of the nuclear family at the expense of larger units, in particular the clan. Since the war, the importance of two central foci of clan life - the "ufu" and the "go" - has waned. Previously married men spent most of their leisure time at the "ufu": wives would prepare their husbands' food and carry it to the "ufu" where it would be shared with friends. Though each family had its own house, this was essentially the domain of the wife and children. Men preferred to remain at the "ufu", even sleeping there to 'avoid the noise of the children'. Today most men eat their meals at home with their wives and children, social contact takes place mainly in the form of visiting between houses (as in European communities), and the "ufu" may remain deserted for days. Feasts are still held there but it has ceased to be the principal centre of social and communal life. The neglected, delapidated condition of Inawi "ufu" gave eloquent proof of this: at least two clans had let their clubhouses partially collapse. When a death occurred in one of these clans in 1971, relatives could not place the body on the "ufu" for the customary few hours of public mourning before burial because the shaky edifice was likely to give way under the weight of the mourners.

27 See above: 46.
While the ufu functioned as the centre of the clan's social life, ties between clansmen and their chiefs, their mutual obligations and responsibilities, were constantly being reinforced and stressed; but as the role of the nuclear family has grown in importance, and the focus of activities has shifted away from the ufu, so the former emphasis on clan ties has weakened. By creating a situation in which contact between clansmen is far less frequent and less intimate, this shift intensifies the strain already put upon intra-clan relationships by new residence patterns and the growth in the size of the group.

Another significant change in family life is the virtual disappearance in many villages of the gove, special houses set aside for bachelors. Formerly unmarried boys were strictly segregated from the rest of their family and lived together in the one or more gove maintained by their clan. Today widowers, who are in the main old men, each have their own separate house, which is called a gove, but young bachelors usually live with their family. People say that nowadays young men spend most of the time up until they are married at school, only coming home for holidays; thus they are still thought of as 'children'. The change has taken place over the last fifteen years in Inawi; men in their late twenties and early thirties state that they spent their adolescence in the gove. Like the shift away from the ufu, the new practice stresses the role of the individual family while weakening the former solidarity of the youths of the clan as a group.

28 Some East Mekeo villages, most noticeably Eboa, continue to maintain several gove. When, however, a large part of Inawaia burnt down in the late 1960s, no effort was made to re-build the gove.
The mission has encouraged and, at least in part, has probably helped to create these new trends. Its influence has perhaps been strongest and most pervasive in the areas of marriage and family life. Since one of its most important tasks has been to explain the church's ideal of christian marriage and family life, it has done its best to stress the role and interests of the nuclear family above those of the clan. With the quickening tempo of change after the war, young people, most of whom have been educated by the mission, have no doubt been more ready to adopt the modes of behaviour it advocated in relation to marriage and raising children.

The attenuation of bonds between clansmen has, of course, equally affected people's relationships with their chiefs - the clan heads. Though rank appears to be meticulously stratified, this relationship is not in any way institutionalized in the form of courts, taxes, tributes or the like. The workability of the system depends on a situation of familial intimacy and trust, in which clan members can be sure that their chief is acting in the best interests of the whole ikupu, or family. As the unit becomes larger, and blood ties between members and their chief become further removed, as the opportunity for clansmen to interact with each other becomes less and many members spend most of their time away...

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29 Dupeyrat 1935: 369-72; 440-1. Implicit in the concept of christian marriage is the importance of the nuclear family: missionaries who have had long experience in the area have observed the shift away from the ufu and themselves attribute it to their efforts to impress upon parishioners their responsibilities to the nuclear family.
from the village, the former trust and solidarity is lost and positive co-operation becomes more difficult. Those distantly related to the chief will be certain that he favours his closer relatives above them; those who live away from the village, and therefore have neglected to provide food and labour for feasts, fear his anger; since the ufu is now usually deserted and the clan rarely functions as a whole, people claim that the chiefs hide themselves from them and ignore their responsibilities.

Many circumstances have combined to undermine chiefly prestige. Traditional ceremonial life has shrunk to a pale shadow of its former splendour over the last thirty years. After a brief revival in the late 1940s, the simplification of ceremonies and the relaxation of chiefly rights, which new pressures had forced even before the war, 30 rapidly accelerated. A number of important feasts held just after the war incorporated features which have since been omitted from ceremonies held by Inawi and Aipeana. One Aipeana clan held a feast to celebrate the building of a chief's house decorated in the traditional manner - the last of its kind in this village; three other feasts were the last occasions on which the ufu apie were invited to dance at the installation of a chief and sing at the opening of a new ufu. Two large feasts held at roughly the same time by Inawi, were the last occasions at which the ufu apie danced. The position in the East Mekeo appears to have been much the same. Inawabui people recalled that there had been only one feast held in their village since the war at which the ufu apie danced, nor had there been such feasts held in other villages in the area

30 See above: 197-205.
during the 1950s and 1960s. Villagers explain that they ceased to hold large, elaborate feasts in the 1950s because of their preoccupation with the administration's developmental projects. The rice culture also required its own feasts for clearing the land and harvesting which no doubt absorbed resources that otherwise would have been directed into traditional celebrations.

The rarity of large feasts today is attributed by the chiefs to their people's reluctance to donate pigs that can now be sold for high prices: commoners accuse the chiefs of laziness and lack of interest. Both, however, stress that the old ceremonies have not been forgotten and can be held at any time provided a sufficient number of pigs are killed. After an interval of twenty years, a grand feast at which the ufu apie danced was held in 1970 by Inawaia to mark the opening of an ufu built and decorated in the old manner.31

Important feasts formerly served to ritualize and dramatize the chief's role. Chiefs acted little differently from commoners in the normal routine of everyday life: like other men they had to provide for the subsistence needs of themselves and their families. Only on ceremonial occasions was the distance between chief and commoner, and the grandeur of chiefly office, displayed in full. As the

31 The isolated northern villages, Ififu and Imounga, however, have retained many features of ceremonial life long since abandoned by other villages: personal communication from Mr E. Hau'ofa. These small northern villages have in general been cut off from the main stream of development since the war and appear to have largely avoided the government's attention in the pre-war years.
opportunities for ritually underlining chiefly power have become fewer and less impressive, much of aura and prestige surrounding the lopia have been stripped from them, causing people to remark that the chiefs are now 'acting just like ordinary men'. Moreover, as feasts began to be held on a diminishing scale, the chief's actual control over the resources of his clan and his ability to mobilize them have been gradually limited. Though in theory he still possesses rights over the economic resources of his clan, it has been so long since he has insisted on them that, for all practical purposes, they have lapsed, and it is impossible today to extract the large number of pigs and vast quantity of vegetable food which were demanded in the past.

Along with this unintentional and largely unperceived loss of chiefly stature, there has been a deliberate relaxation of chiefly rights since the war. During the 1950s Inawi chiefs gave permission to commoners to use the building materials and styles which they had formerly reserved exclusively for themselves; restrictions over fishing and hunting (except those relating to wild pigs) were also removed. It is said that Aipeana chiefs still retain these rights, though some modifications have obviously been permitted. Most houses in Aipeana, for example, in fact employ a narrow band of afa, a type of timber allowed only to chiefs, at the base of their walls; though it is true that it is not used to build the full lower half of walls as is done in Inawi.

Though the Aipeana chiefs insist more strongly on their traditional rights than those of Inawi, they have recently taken the remarkable step of doing away with the ufu apie relationship. One of the senior chiefs, an educated man who was working away from the village at the time, suggested
the change; people felt that inviting the *ufu api* to all feasts and presenting them with most of the food was a waste of time and resources, so it was decided to stop the practice. This is a remarkable move since the *ufu api* relationship represents the idea of reciprocity usually found in all Melanesian feasts and food exchanges. It is too early yet to know what the result will be but one wonders how ceremonial life is to continue functioning once this relationship is completely abandoned, as it necessarily adds a different character to feasts. The insistence on chiefly rights today can be expected to vary from village to village, depending on the personalities and relative strength of the chiefs concerned.

Villagers usually explain the giving up of such rights in terms of the chief's goodwill towards his people; being 'sorry for his people', who had little meat to eat, he allowed them to hunt and fish without restriction; because he was 'sorry' to see his people building poor houses, he allowed them to use *afa* and other building materials. Essentially these concessions were made under pressure from patrol officers, who ordered that villagers must build more solidly constructed houses; or under pressure from clansmen who wished to hunt at a time when it was no longer necessary to keep strict control over game. This new leniency, though formally presented as the result of the chiefs' generosity, has acted against them by removing yet another area of village life from their control, while contributing to the growing feeling that they themselves no longer care about their position and are neglecting to carry out even those limited functions left to them.

The officials set up by mission and government have had a similar effect. The church committee and the
local government councillors offer no direct challenge to the chiefs' position, but their presence and activities add to the impression that the lopia now play a lesser part in village affairs:

The chiefs are not powerful now. Before there were powerful chiefs and sorcerers and the people were afraid of them. Before the chiefs ran the village, now all they do is hold a few feasts - death feasts and umu pua. That's all the work they do. 32

The parish councils, which have come to be known as 'church committees' in the Mekeo, were created by the mission in 1947 in the hope of gaining more influential representation for the church at the village level than could be provided by the catechists and teachers. 33 The intention was not to alter the existing hierarchy of authority, but rather to work through it. Whether or not the system works effectively for the mission, it appears to have made little difference to the existing structure of power.

Probably the most damaging blow to the chieftainship has been the frustration of villagers' independent efforts to achieve economic advancement. Since the lopia are expected to guarantee by supernatural means the welfare and success of the community, 34 the failure of business ventures over the last decade, and the deaths associated with them, are regarded as irrefutable proof that the chiefs are withholding their powers to spite the people or, in the case of Aipeana, are using these powers to serve their own ends at the expense of the people's welfare.

33 See above: 175.
34 See above: 28.
As the chief's role had been eroded by the many changes taking place since the war, its latent ambivalence has been brought to the surface. Now that chiefs are no longer able to satisfy the ideal, suspicions that they are misusing their powers come to the fore. Very few, if any, villagers realize that even the best intentioned chiefs have been forced into this position by circumstances beyond their control; they accuse them of deliberately neglecting their responsibilities:

The chiefs themselves are letting the customs go. They are not keeping the customs properly. Now when they make a new chief they do not follow the rules properly - before if the rules were not followed exactly, people would die.35

The gap between the ideal and present reality is so great that some see no future for the chieftainship:

Now young men are taking their fathers' place as chiefs and they don't care about the old customs.... When the old men die the young ones will not feel like keeping the old customs of the chiefs and then it will come to mean nothing. The people feel that the chiefs are no longer doing their work properly. If any stranger or traveller comes to the village, the chief must give him food and whatever else he needs.

This was the responsibility given to the chiefs and as long as he carries it out, he would remain chief but now the chiefs are just sitting in their houses and not caring. Also anything the chief had he should take to the ufu to share with his ulalu people but now the chiefs' sons go to Bereina and buy a case of beer and sit in the house and drink it by themselves, and then the people say that this is very bad. But the old people are still there keeping the chieftainship.36

Fear of the coercive powers the old chiefs and sorcerers are believed to wield continues to command obedience where trust and affection have been lost.

While not destroying traditional values or radically altering the character of village society, the process of change since the war has widened its existing lines of cleavage. The suspicions existing between brothers, neighbours, affines, clans, have been aggravated by the loosening of ties of common interest, kinship and residence which once unified the village community. Likewise, chiefly prestige has been weakened to the point where the *lopi* though they still hold sway through fear, cannot give positive direction to the new developments.

In the ordinary day-to-day affairs of the village, co-operation is achieved, though often not without considerable arguing and wrangling. In traditional situations, the tensions which are likely to divide people are allayed by the fact that every individual knows his rights and entitlements, and those of his neighbours as well. As long as the traditional standards of behaviour are followed, occasion for jealousy and rivalry is minimized. In most of the new situations created by European economic activities, villagers have no idea of their rights and no standard by which to judge whether they are receiving a fair share of the profits. Their latent fears of each other and of their leaders - which are now aggravated by differences in education, the growth in the size of the community and the emphasis on the role of the nuclear family - become intolerable under these conditions. For example, the educated

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37 See above: 35-6; 59-60.
man returning to his village after several years working in town and determined to use his experience and savings to start a business, is more likely to be regarded by his elder brothers as a threat to their position than the family benefactor. If he does manage to persuade his brothers to join him, they feel at a disadvantage because of their lack of education; the first signs of financial difficulties are therefore sufficient to confirm their doubts. Other relatives and friends who might be talked into contributing money to the venture have even less confidence in the leader, who is a virtual stranger to them after his many years away from home. Yet if he tries to strike out on his own, he will meet even stronger opposition.

The betel nut trade, however, fits easily into a potentially explosive social situation. While the administration has argued that the trade is proof of the Mekeo's individualism, it in fact clearly demonstrates the points just made. Since all may participate freely in it and the income is fairly evenly distributed over the village community, it offends no social values; and since it is conducted on an individual basis, it does not aggravate latent suspicions and rivalries.

The old social values persist, having become all the more important now that many of the bonds formerly uniting people have been weakened. They cannot be discarded as if they had ornamental value only: they function as guards against the tensions and frictions which at any time threaten to divide people. The ethical basis of the chieftainship has not been questioned; the lopis are condemned explicitly for their failure to uphold the traditional standards. Thus the discrediting of the traditional leaders makes the acceptance of new leaders no easier. Younger people
sense that the old ways are holding them back, yet even if they could simply do away with the chieftainship at will, this would not solve the problem of finding an acceptable replacement. The fierce pride which will not allow a man to accept any other individual's claims to superiority or authority unless these are based on unquestionable supernatural powers, would remain even if the lohips were deposed. Before the old patterns of behaviour can be discarded, a new basis for social co-operation and leadership must be found.

Relations with the White Regime

Judging from external evidence only, the Mekeo might well appear to be a classic example of an apathy towards development created by administrative mishandling. Their case closely parallels, at least on the surface, that of the Orokaiva of northern Papua, whose present indifference to cash cropping and other commercial enterprises is attributed to a past history of unpopular and unprofitable government schemes. In the 1920s and 1930s the Orokaiva were compelled under Native Regulations to plant coffee. The plantations were abandoned for a time during the war but in 1944, when an ANGAU officer was posted to the area, compulsory labour on the plantations was re-introduced. Various unsuccessful attempts were made by the administration after the war to extend the coffee industry and to promote new crops. It is tempting but false to assume that the results of these very similar experiences have been the same for the Mekeo as for the Orokaiva. The period of compulsory rice planting before the war, unpopular as it was, did not

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38 Waddell and Krinks 1968: 296; Crocombe 1964: 36.
39 Crocombe 1964.
prevent the Mekeo from eagerly welcoming Cottrell-Dormer's proposals for a new rice scheme in the 1940s; nor have subsequent government failures discouraged them from striking out on their own or from experimenting with new ventures, however unsuccessfully.

Useful comparisons cannot be made on the basis of a purely external view of the contact experience. The Mekeo's unexpected reaction to a familiar set of circumstances becomes understandable in terms of their particular framework of reference. They place their whole history of relations with the white regime in the context of the traditional relationship between the holders of authority and their subjects. The authority of the government was accepted from the outset; the legitimacy of its claims to rule were validated by its undeniably superior supernatural powers (demonstrated by its terrifying weapons and amazing possessions) and its protestations of friendship and help. During the first few decades of contact it was possible, or at least not impossible to accept the white regime as it represented itself - a benevolent power which could confer desirable goods and knowledge. Villagers treated it as an extension of the traditional hierarchy of authority and expected it to respond in kind; in return for the material benefits it offered, they were prepared to give their obedience and service. By the 1930s the government seemed to be demanding more than it had ever given but the war renewed hopes that it would at last honour its original promises. People eagerly welcomed the post-war developmental schemes but were mystified by the new activities. The failure of these projects, to which such high hopes had been fixed, could only be understood in terms of deliberate intent on the government's part: with the introduction of the local government council, most villagers were finally convinced
that the government was indifferent to their welfare and was only taking advantage of their attempts to co-operate.

The government's actions and policies have discredited it in the Mekeo's eyes: its failures are interpreted as a deliberate evasion of its responsibilities but they have not created apathy towards development in general. Certainly villagers did not enjoy compulsory rice growing, nevertheless they recognized the government's right to demand certain services just as the lopia have rights to certain goods and services. The collapse of the post-war schemes did not convince people that cash cropping was unprofitable, but that the government had appropriated the profits which were rightfully theirs.

In view of the prevalence of belief in magic and ritual today and the outbreak of a violent cult movement in 1941, it seems surprising that the final discrediting of the government has not led the Mekeo to seek refuge in cultism, claiming like the people of Karkar Island and the Madang coast that the administration is withholding the 'key' to progress from them. In laying the blame on their own leaders, the Mekeo clearly recognize that the source of their present problems is internal not external. Despite the frustrations of the last three decades, villagers have persisted with practical rather than ritual means of obtaining the new wealth.

A cult of sorts sprang up in the late 1950s. The leader of the movement, a self-styled wonder worker from Amoamo village in the West Mekeo, attempted to raise money

40 McSwain 1971; Lawrence 1967.
in all the Mekeo villages to buy a ship which would bring goods from Port Moresby. According to Inawi informants, he claimed he could make money out of newspaper:

He cut the newspaper into pieces the size of £1 notes and then he took a piece and rubbed it between his hands and out came a £1 note. This is how he got the people to support him. Because of this the people thought he had some kind of power so he would be able to help them.41

Though most villages preferred to 'wait and see' before contributing any money, he obtained considerable support in the three villages which had been involved in the 1941 cult - Inawaia, Eboa and Inawabui. A large store to receive the expected cargo was built at Inawabui. After several months had passed and there was no sign of the ship or cargo, people began to lose faith in the leader's powers. Rumours of the affair first reached the subdistrict office in May 1958;42 a few months later further complaints were received from villagers who claimed that their money had been taken under false pretences.43 In September 1960 the leader was finally taken to court but charges against him had to be dismissed for lack of evidence as villagers were very reluctant to testify about their part in the matter.44

This rather desultory cult, which was accompanied by none of the hysteria and emotionalism characterizing the earlier movement, appeared at a time when villagers were just

42 Subdistrict Office File 7-3-2.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
beginning to explore the possibilities of buying their own vehicles and setting up their own village stores. Inawi informants' statements that only the older people were interested in the cult are supported by the fact that one of the first to report the matter to the administration was an educated young leader of one of the Inawi transport groups. No doubt the alignment for and against the cult was also influenced by clan rivalries and politics of the sort discussed in relation to the Inawi cult of 1929. By the time the cult leader was taken to court, the transport ventures were going from strength to strength: if cultism had ever been regarded as a serious competitor to more practical means of economic advancement, it was only for a short time and for a minority. The pre-war cults, which were very different in nature and which I have argued were abortive attempts to throw off the restraints of the traditional order rather than a means of obtaining 'cargo', were likewise confined to a minority and short lived.

The Mekeo's perception of relationships with the white regime helps to explain why cargoism has played only a secondary role in their contact history. Lawrence argues that 'cargo' assumed such importance for the people of the Rai Coast because it was seen as the means of establishing relationships with the white man on a proper footing: without 'cargo' villagers could never hope to deal with the new-comers on a basis of reciprocity and equivalence. Describing the

45 See above: 307-09.
46 See above: 153-4.
47 See above: 168-70.
complex interaction of cargoiism and contact history on the Rai Coast. Lawrence shows how villagers' attitudes 'alternated between expressions of friendship and hostility according to whether it was believed that white men were likely to uphold or repudiate the principles of reciprocity and equivalence. Mekeo hopes that the white regime would honour its obligations to them waxed and waned in a similar manner, but in contrast to the Madang people they had not expected to approach it on strictly equal grounds, as a friendly but independent people, rather they regarded it as an extension of their own social and political system. In return for their allegiance, villagers expected material benefits but 'cargo' did not become the means of establishing their own identity nor the 'index of their self-respect' as it did on the Rai Coast.

Worsely observes that the studies of Lawrence and Burridge have convincingly demonstrated that the acquisition of 'cargo' is:

...more than a consumer itch. It is a search for self-respect, identity, and meaning in life,...

This search for identity vis-à-vis the white man and the colonial order is surely the very crux, not only of cultism, but of the Melanesians' role in the history of contact. Cargo cults are only one aspect, which itself may take a multiplicity of forms, of Melanesians' attempts to establish their identity in their own eyes and in those of the white man. Lawrence and Burridge not only warn us 'against assuming a

simple and universal conflict model for the cults', they demonstrate its inadequacy to explain the complexities of the whole contact situation. Whilst it is important for historians to evaluate the moral implications of our responsibilities for the colonial order, this should not become the excuse for perpetuating European ethnocentrism under a new guise. In a more confident age, we held the stage as conquering heroes bringing civilization and salvation to the benighted heathen; there seems some danger that we might continue to dominate the historical stage, though this time as the villains, while still relegating to the Melanesians a passive and secondary role.

The simple stereotype of oppressor and oppressed ignores completely the role the Mekeo see themselves as having played. The average villager would be highly indignant to be told that he belonged to a conquered, oppressed people. The Mekeo’s confidence in themselves and in their rights is illustrated in the comment of an old clan chief, Isoaimo Opu, who when asked whether in his twenty years’ service as a village constable he had ever been struck by a government officer, replied fiercely:

They never tried to hit me because they knew
I’d hit them back:

Perhaps it is not surprising that pre-war officials always felt so uneasy about the Mekeo — the confidence of their bearing must have seemed very disconcerting in a people whom the government claimed to have subjugated. In terms of the traditional framework of reference, which still holds

53 See above: 133-5.
its validity, the Mekeo have lost no dignity in their relations with the government; whereas the government, by its harsh treatment and refusal to meet its obligations to its subjects, assumes a morally indefensible position, now tacitly recognized in its policy of non-intervention in village affairs.

The desire common to the Mekeo, the Tangu and the people of the Rai Coast - despite the variation in their responses, their cultural differences and the divergence in their contact experience - to establish relations with the white regime on a morally acceptable basis, suggests one direction in which we might look for a theme common to all New Guinea contact history.

WHILST it is impossible to predict long-term trends, the Mekeo’s immediate future will continue to be influenced by existing values and assumptions. A sort of impasse has been reached at present. Villagers desire economic and social advancement but trust neither the government nor their own leaders to guide them, and the persistence of traditional values prevents the emergence of new leaders.

It seems unlikely that the Mekeo will play a much more positive role in local or national politics in the near future. Apart from the difficulty of adjusting to elective authority, villagers regard both the local government council and the national assembly as agencies of an administration which is indifferent to village welfare. Nor is the creation of an independent national government likely to inspire any greater confidence; villagers are apprehensive at the thought of self-government, and though they have little faith in the goodwill of the present administration, they have even less in the ability of their countrymen to rule. The government,
like the **lopia**, may have been discredited, but it still has an unquestioned power to maintain control which its replacement lacks. In 1971 people were already talking of how they would settle by violence disputes with neighbouring tribes when the white regime withdrew. The volatile and fiercely parochial Mekeo are scarcely likely to accept the elected representatives of other groups when they cannot accept their own.

Prospects for economic development appear better. The success of the betel nut trade, where almost every other communal or individual venture has failed, demonstrates that developments in which all members of the community can share more or less equally are likely to encounter little opposition. With the opening of the new highway to Port Moresby, market gardening offers a promising alternative, or addition, to betel nut.\(^{54}\) Lower transport costs should encourage villagers to produce more fresh vegetables and fruit for the Port Moresby market and officials hope that eventually the area will become one of the main suppliers of food for the town. Like the betel nut trade, market gardening is an activity in which everyone could participate and which, in its early stages, would require only an extension of present activities and not the introduction of a whole complex of new techniques and practices. Its development seems likely not only to raise the average cash income, and therefore the accepted standard of living, but also to increase the already noticeable trend for people to spend most of their time away

\(^{54}\) The highway has now been completed and I am told that Inawi has purchased three new trucks since I left the village in December 1971.
from the village, living at the site of their rice or cattle farm. A substantial movement of population away from the village, bringing an entirely new pattern of local grouping, would facilitate the breaking of old bonds and the formation of new types of social relationships.

The mission is the one representative of instituted authority which has not been discredited and which may become more influential in the future than it has been in the past. It is often stated - by government officials, white residents and the missionaries themselves - that the mission holds little sway over the Mekeo. Outwardly, considerable deference is paid to it; people attend church, participate in church festivals, seek the advice of their parish priest on many matters apart from religion, they value the health services offered by the mission and, above all, the education which it provides for their children. Yet the church and Christianity seem to remain externals. There are very few signs of the genuine conviction and piety observed by Van Rijswijck amongst their close neighbours and converts of the same mission - the Kuni. 55 In contrast to the Kuni, Christian values and teachings seem to play little part in the everyday affairs of the Mekeo; people's actions and judgements are guided by traditional considerations. In times of trouble, few find comfort in prayer; they are too busy identifying the sorcerer or magician who is the cause of the calamity and attempting to placate him.

Among young people under twenty-five, many of whom have spent several years in mission boarding schools, mission influence appears to be strong and one gains the impression

55 Van Rijswijck 1967.
that many of them are sincere catholics; though whether
this is because a white face tends automatically to condition
a certain response from them is very difficult to say. The
older people, particularly those over forty, make no secret
of their views once out of earshot of the mission:

The missionaries say that A'aisa is the Devil,
but we know that he is really God.

They assert that A'aisa and the christian God are one and
the same, and that the ethical teachings of the church merely
confirm the standards always upheld by their ancestors. The
missionaries, like the government, taught that people must
not kill, steal, lie or commit adultery - these had been
the laws of the chiefs since time immemorial. The following
comment is typical of the comparisons drawn between christian
and traditional belief:

[if you do wrong] the missionaries will say Santa
Maria will punish you in the same way as our
grandfathers and fathers said that A'aisa and
Isapini know what you are doing. What will the
chief say? He will say that A'aisa and Isapini
are watching you and therefore your work will
either succeed or fail.

'The missionaries say...we say...' is a common formula
suggesting the way in which villagers relate the two sets of
beliefs - one is simply the white man's version of the same
teachings and truths. The traditional beliefs, therefore,
provide the standards most suitable for village life. Since
people wish to remain on reasonably good terms with the
mission, they pay some heed to its likes and dislikes even
though they are not convinced that practices condoned by
tradition could be morally reprehensible. Villagers acknowledge
this attitude when they say that they have given up various
customs 'to please' the missionaries. The pattern of Inawi

56 See above: 144.
church attendance reflected the same attitudes. On Sundays
when the parish priest was able to come from the Belipa mission
station to hold services, the whole village turned out in its
best clothes to attend mass. Villagers respect and admire
their parish priest and enjoy his sermons, his visit is
therefore regarded as something of an occasion. On other
Sundays, when one of the village school teachers leads
prayers and hymns, only school children and a handful of
adults, mostly women, will be found in church.

It appears that the mission has never been able
to bring traditional beliefs into question. By persistent
opposition or support of particular practices, it has been
able to influence people's behaviour, but not the underlying
beliefs. The practice of sorcery, which lies at the heart
of people's belief in the supernatural, presents an
interesting example. Though belief in the efficacy of
destructive magic remains as strong as ever, villagers claim
that its practice is declining and attribute this decline to
the mission. Many examples might be given of middle-aged and
older men who refused, on the grounds of the mission's
teachings, to follow in their fathers' footsteps to become
sorcerers. Other examples could be given of men who endured
the sorcerer's arduous 'apprenticeship' but later refused
to use the powers they had acquired. People claim that many
chiefs, fearing that they were passing on evil powers to
their successors, destroyed their magic relics and stones,
and refused to instruct their sons in the necessary rituals
and spells. One chief, for example, confided that his father
had possessed a special type of magic to kill infants by
stopping their mothers' flow of milk but he had not divulged
the secret of this power to his son, saying that it was
better that such evil knowledge should die with him.
Destructive magic has, of course, always been regarded with fear and horror; the mission has merely had to build on existing convictions.

A sorcerer lives an arduous and dangerous life; he is shunned by the rest of the community as a creature of utter malignancy and must deal with terrible supernatural powers which will turn against and destroy him should he lose control of them. No doubt mission teaching provided a welcome justification for many to abandon a career which they had no inclination to follow. Other factors besides the mission's influence discourage young men from undertaking the lengthy training necessary to become a sorcerer: they are much more anxious to acquire the skills that will equip them for employment outside the village than to learn complicated bodies of traditional lore. Today the sorcerer's son is more likely to be an electrician, an agricultural officer or a clerk in Port Moresby or running a trucking business in the village, rather than following his father's calling.

Young people often claim that when the elders die, the old customs, including the chieftainship, will be abandoned as there will be no one left to enforce them. The transition is not likely to be as simple as they imagine; as long as the belief in sorcery exists, there will be those who will exploit it. Whether or not there are individuals who retain the old knowledge and rituals, people will still suspect that there are; the young men who today are considered to be ignorant of such matters, will be the knowledgeable elders of tomorrow. Nevertheless, the fact that young people today are themselves questioning the value of existing assumptions gives the mission a new opportunity to extend its influence. The educated young man
wishing to carve out a new life for himself and his children, the emerging business and political leaders are in need of guidance and reassurance. The mission, which up until the present has been able to make little impression on villagers' thinking, may well play a vital role in the search for new social values and new types of social relationships.

Ultimately, the future lies with the Mekeo alone. If they are to achieve their present desires for a 'better way of life', they may have to jettison the social values which up to the present have given dignity and purpose to life; or they may succeed in giving new strength and content to the existing social ethic - a task which should not be beyond the capabilities of a new generation of educated chiefs better equipped to handle the modern world. Whatever path villagers choose, they have their eyes fixed firmly ahead. Echoing the comments of many, an Inawi elder mused:

Ah, you would have been very sorry to see how we lived before the war. We had no clothes, no matches, no saucepans - nothing. Things are a little better now but....

Like many of their compatriots, the Mekeo complain not of what they have lost of the old culture, but of how little they have gained of the new.
APPENDIX I

GENEALOGY OF THE LOPIA PA'A SECTION OF OAISAKA IKUPU
(Male descent line)

Inawāi 1971

Key to abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>unk</th>
<th>unknown</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nny</td>
<td>not named yet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Δ</td>
<td>male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>chief</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first letter in brackets before a wife's name indicates her clan, and the second letter indicates her village of birth according to the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clans</th>
<th>Villages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Afai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Lopia Pa'a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Gagai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Iso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP</td>
<td>Ipage Paisapaisa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU</td>
<td>Ipage Ugo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Lalae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Ogofoina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NL</td>
<td>Ogofoina Lopia Pa'a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>Okope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Paisapaisa</td>
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<tr>
<td>U</td>
<td>Ugo</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BETEL NUT INCOME COMPARED WITH TREES OWNED BY INAWI HOUSEHOLDS 1971

*Taken from household census statistics, Inawi Village, 1971. Income is estimated on an average return of $50 per bag of betel nut sent to Port Moresby.
### Occupation Analysis - Inawi Village 1921-1970

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employed During Period</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plantation Labourer</td>
<td>Domestic Servant</td>
<td>Semi-skilled &amp; Labourer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921-25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926-30</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931-35</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936-41</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Second World War</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946-50</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951-55</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956-60</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961-65</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966-70</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures, taken from the household census, represent the jobs previously held by Inawi men resident in the village in 1971.
### APPENDIX IV

#### EDUCATIONAL STANDARD OF ADULT MALES
**IMANI VILLAGE 1971**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE RANGE IN YEARS</th>
<th>1-3 years Primary</th>
<th>4-6 years Primary</th>
<th>1-2 years Secondary</th>
<th>2-4 years Secondary</th>
<th>Tertiary</th>
<th>Technical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 - 25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 - 30</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 - 35</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 - 40</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 - 45</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 - 50</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 - 55</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>56 - 60</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 60</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table includes full-time students not resident in the villages.
## APPENDIX V

### EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS AND OCCUPATIONS OF INAWI MEN UNDER 30 WORKING AWAY FROM THE VILLAGE IN 1971

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Education</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Place</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary Secondary</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Bouganville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Welding</td>
<td>Port Moresby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Mess Boy</td>
<td>Port Moresby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Port Moresby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Welding</td>
<td>Port Moresby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Ag. Labourer</td>
<td>Port Moresby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Port Moresby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Aircraft Refueller</td>
<td>Port Moresby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Kerema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Power St. Sup.</td>
<td>Port Moresby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Port Moresby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>Port Moresby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Port Moresby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>Port Moresby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Kundiaa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Electrician</td>
<td>Port Moresby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>Goroka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Bulolo</td>
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<tr>
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<td>28</td>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>Mt Hagen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Port Moresby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Plumber</td>
<td>Lae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Trainee Pilot</td>
<td>Port Moresby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>Port Moresby</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Information taken from Inawi Household Census.
A'AISA | the deity responsible for instituting
| the traditional social order

AFA | type of timber reserved for the chief's
| use

AIVA AUGA | one of the chief's ceremonial functionaries
AU

EFU | traditional valuables
EKE | junior, younger
EKEFA'A | friend; term also used to refer to
| maternal kin

FA'ANIAU | senior, elder
FAIA | war magic; cinnamon bark
FAIA,LOPIA | war magic chief
FAIFAI | harmful spirits that live underwater or
| underground

FALAIA | war chant
FAOGA | the ceremonial lime pot of the fa'aniau
| chief
FUAI | substances - usually plants - used in
| the preparation of sorcery and other
| magic

FULA ARI | magic specialists who enforced food
| taboos; alternate name for the kaiva kuku
FEAST

GAKU | feast
GEVA | traditional dancing
GOPE | fast undertaken by practising sorcerer
| and magician
GOVE | houses for widowers or bachelors
IAUA | platform
IKUPU | clan, family
IMA | to nurture, look after
IMALA | skin shed by a snake
IMOI IPAPEPE | a type of magic used to kill infants
PENIA
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tr>
<td>IMOU</td>
<td>a type of leaf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMU AUGA</td>
<td>rain magician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPA GAVA</td>
<td>in-laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISAGE</td>
<td>spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISANI UGO</td>
<td>a type of garden magic possessed only by specialists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISAPU</td>
<td>supernatural power, heat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISO</td>
<td>spear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISO AUGA</td>
<td>war magic specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISO LOPIA</td>
<td>war chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISONIONI</td>
<td>myth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KAIVA KUKU</td>
<td>magic specialists who enforced food taboos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KEPO</td>
<td>stone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KURIVA</td>
<td>type of war dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEKELEKE</td>
<td>one of the ceremonial lime sticks of the fa'aniau chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOPIA</td>
<td>chief; good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOPIA AKINA</td>
<td>chief's younger brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOPIA EKE</td>
<td>assistant or junior chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOPIA FA'ANIAU</td>
<td>senior chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAFE API AUGA</td>
<td>one of the chief's ceremonial functionaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEGA</td>
<td>spell, incantation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MINI FA'A</td>
<td>small child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFU</td>
<td>dirty, contaminated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O'OAE</td>
<td>bachelor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPOGO</td>
<td>the central post of the ufu; type of timber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAGUA</td>
<td>village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PANI</td>
<td>type of war dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UFU</td>
<td>clan clubhouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UFU APIE</td>
<td>a reciprocal ceremonial relationship between two clans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGAUGA</td>
<td>sorcery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGAUGA LOPIA</td>
<td>sorcery chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ULAU</td>
<td>commoner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UMA PA'O</td>
<td>an ornament made of pig's tusks worn by the fa'anisau chiefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UMU PUA</td>
<td>a feast to terminate mourning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIA AFA</td>
<td>payment made on the death of an individual to his maternal kin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UVE AUGA</td>
<td>one of the chief's functionaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VOUVOU</td>
<td>a type of timber reserved for the chief's use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Files
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34-6-1
34-6-2

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Author</th>
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<td>SECOND WAIGNANI SEMINAR</td>
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