Sikaiana
A Contemporary Polynesian Society
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Sikaiana is located about 90 miles east of Malaita Island in the Solomon Islands (see Fig. 2). It consists of four separate inlets surrounded by a coral reef about 6 miles across. Most people reside on the largest island, Hala, at the eastern end of the reef (Fig. 3). At present, Sikaiana has a resident population that fluctuates between about 200 and 250 people. Approximately 400 other Sikaiana people have emigrated from the island to live in other areas of the Solomon Islands, especially Honiara and Yandina. Since the early 19th century Sikaiana society has experienced dramatic cultural change through contacts with Europeans and their traditions. In the 19th century there was comparatively intense interaction with European traders and whalers. In the 20th century, the Sikaiana people converted to Christianity, and western bureaucratic institutions such as court, local government council, and a school were established on the island. Moreover, large numbers of the population began emigrating to other areas of the Solomon Islands in search of jobs and a western education. The following discussion briefly outlines the history of social change on Sikanai and how outside influences have been incorporated into contemporary Sikaiana society.
Sikuaia in Regional Perspective

The Solomon Islands is a diverse political state made up of many different ethnic and cultural groups. By some estimates, there are 60 different vernacular languages within its boundaries. In 1976, the total population was estimated to be around 500,000. The capital and main port is Honiara, which in 1976 had a resident population of about 15,000 people. It is located near the battlegrounds where Americans and Japanese fought during the Guadalcanal Campaign of 1942-43.

Today, Sikuaia maintains contact with the outside world through a ship that arrives monthly, carrying both people and supplies. The ship for Sikuaia usually leaves at about 10:00 p.m. from Honiara. Early the next morning, the ship arrives in the small town of Auki which is the administrative center of Malaita Province. The ship departs from Auki later in the morning, crossing the northern coast of Malaita Island, and arrives at Sikuaia on the following morning. There is also an air service to Sikuaia that maintains almost daily communication with Honiara. Other than this, direct contacts with the outside world are sporadic.

Kapingamarangi

Sikuaia is one of several island societies geographically Melanesian or Micronesian, where the inhabitants speak Polynesian languages. Collectively, these islands are termed Polynesian Outliers (Fig. 2). They include: Nukedia, Takou, Nukumanu, Ontong Java, Sikuaia, Rennell-Bellona, Pileni, Tanakao, Tikopia, Anuta, Mele-Fila, West Uvea, Aniwa, and West Futuna in Micronesia; and Kapingamarangi and Nukuevo in Micronesia (see Bayard 1976). Tikopia, due to Raymond Firth's rich and extensive descriptions of its society and culture, is probably the best known of these islands.

Presumably, all of the Outliers were settled by peoples who emigrated west from Western Polynesia (Samoan, Tongan and Ellice Islands) into these fringe areas of Melanesia and Micronesia after the formation of a Polynesian or proto-Polynesian language and cultural tradition within their homeland. Some of these societies have retained Polynesian languages, although they have assimilated the culture of neighboring Melanesians. Sikuaia, however, has retained not only a Polynesian language, but also Polynesian culture and social organization.

1791–1929: Whalers and Traders

Sikuaia was first sighted by Europeans in 1791 and was named Stewart's Island. The 18th century was a period of fairly intensive contact with whalers and traders; this set the stage for the rapid social changes of the 20th century. In a composite study of demographic patterns in the central Polynesian Outliers, Bayliss-Smith writes:

Sikuaia was probably among the first of the islands in northern Melanesia to be regularly visited by European ships in the nineteenth century and thus it has a far longer history of contact than the other outliers. (Bayliss-Smith 1975:297–298)

Bayliss-Smith goes on to give two reasons for this first, Sikuaia was located in a convenient place for important trade routes; second, the population had acquired a reputation as friendly and hospitable (1795:295–296). By the middle of the 19th century, European visitors report that outside contact was considerable: trade objects were a regular feature of the material culture, some young Sikuaia men had left the island to work on ships, and some Europeans were resident on the atoll. Europeans who visited Sikuaia during this time report that some of the people could speak 'broken' English.

In the late 19th century, there was labor recruitment or 'blackbirding' of Solomon Islanders to work on plantations in Queensland, Australia; although recruitment was intensive on Malaita, it does not seem to have been widespread on Sikuaia. In 1893, in order both to regulate this unethical practice and to further its own colonial interests, Great Britain established a protectorate over most of what is now the Solomon Islands. In 1897 the protectorate was extended to覆盖 all islands, Rennell, and Belona Islands.

Although it had nominal sovereignty over Sikuaia, the colonial government of this period seems to have had little direct influence upon Sikuaia life. Nevertheless, by the early 20th century, there was continuous interaction with Europeans, and manufactured trade goods were enjoyed in the atoll's economy. Elder people remember tobacco, trade cloth, bush knives, pots, pans, steel tools, flint, flour, and salt meat as being available at several different locally managed trade stores supplied by European traders. By the 1920s, many Sikuaia men had worked for traders and on government ships. European visitors to the island during this time had no problem finding Sikuaia people who had travelled away from Sikuaia and could speak Pidgin English, which was developing into the Lingua Franca of the Solomon Islands.

Conversion to Christianity

In 1929, Anglican missionaries in the Solomon Islands sent their ship, the Southern Cross, to Sikuaia and left a group of missionaries to carry out island's conversion. These missionaries were not European, but Melanesian converts who had taken religious vows to convert the pagan populations of the Solomon Islands. Within ten years the conversion on Sikuaia was complete.

There were several reasons for the missionaries' rapid success. Elder people claim that the Sikuaia people wanted to learn to read and write. This was partly the result of the desire for access to western material goods, and it was also a result of a desire to know more about the outside world. Conversion to Christianity offered access to the educational resources and employment opportunities in the outside world.

Some time in the late 1920s, before the arrival of the missionaries, an overly zealous European trader convinced some of the Sikuaia people to destroy all the sacred sites associated with the ceremonial work of the alik. Elder people claim that without these centers the ritual for ensuring the island's welfare was no longer effective. On the other hand, the personal ritual that involved the aiki remained unaffected. But this latter system is remembered as centering around health, disease, and death. Furthermore, not everyone had access to a powerful aiki, and some families felt threatened by the aiki of other families. Many people joined the church because their families did not have powerful aiki. In the thinking of many Sikuaia people, Christianity offered a devotional system that provided access to supernatural help, both in maintaining the island's welfare and in providing protection from the malevolent spirits of deceased ancestors.

Finally, the rapid conversion occurred because Christian devotions came to be viewed as more efficacious than traditional rituals.
World War II and After

The Second World War marked a watershed in Solomon Island history and was followed by more rapid change on Sikaiana and in the rest of the Solomon Islands. This change was brought about by the accelerated experiences of the Solomon Islanders during and after the War. The church and later the central government provided opportunities for advanced education. Shortly after the War, a Sikaiana man was sent to Australia and ordained as a priest; another man was sent to Fiji, to receive advanced medical training. The government also established many institutions on Sikaiana, such as the local court, a local elected government council, a medical clinic, and a cooperative trade store.

By 1940, there were several Sikaiana people who had attended the University of the South Pacific at Savo, in Fiji, or the University of Papua-New Guinea. Others had attended specialized training courses, most often in Australia or New Guinea.

During this period, the population continued to increase rapidly. In the 1960s, the total number of people on Sikaiana had almost tripled, partly as a result of the prohibition on abortion that was instituted by the missionaries. The present-day Sikaiana population is very mobile, and people frequently move between Guadalcanal, Honiara, and Sikaiana. Most of the emigrants still consider the island as their home. Many Sikaiana people who live elsewhere in the Solomon Islands spend their yearly vacations on Sikaiana. It is not uncommon for people to live on Sikaiana for several years and then leave to work for wages for several years. During my stay most people left the island for short periods, usually going to Honiara. They made these trips to visit relatives, attend weddings, participate in special training courses, or buy supplies.

Long-term emigration is related to several factors. Sikaiana has few resources, and younger people view it as a place with an easy life but only limited opportunity. Moreover, some younger people who have matured away from Sikaiana consider themselves to be better off than other men, and they have only limited opportunities to learn traditional rituals, technology, and legends.

The church (the aitu mata) was a powerful institution that helped to maintain a sense of community. The aitu mata was a powerful deity, but it could not get close to it. The aitu mata advised his medium that the deity must be very powerful and that the medium would be best advised to stop summoning the aitu mata and to worship this new Christian deity. As these stories suggest, during the island's conversion to Christianity the traditional ritual and supernatural system was not viewed as inherently false; rather, Christianity came to be viewed as a more powerful and, in many ways, a preferable belief system.

During the 1930s, the Anglican missionaries sent a boat on yearly visits to Sikaiana. During these visits, the missionaries took many of the island's younger people away to boarding schools located elsewhere in the Solomon Islands. This policy allowed the missionaries to instill Christianity in those children who were distanced to an effective break with the island's traditional culture. Many children matured away from Sikaiana, and they had only limited opportunities to learn traditional rituals, technology, and legends.

Subsistence and Technology

As discussed above, Sikaiana material culture became heavily dependent upon trade items in the 19th century. Imported manufactured goods have continued to be incorporated into the local economy during the 20th century, and there has been a loss of traditional handicrafts techniques and fishing technology.

subsistence on Sikaiana is based upon locally grown swamp taro, fish, and imported food, either sent by relatives living in other areas of the Solomon Islands or purchased with money. Imported rice is a staple of the diet, and tea and sugar are taken with most meals. The diet is supplemented by shellfish, birds, pigs, chickens, bananas, coconuts, and seasonal fruits, all of which are available locally.

Because Sikaiana people are increasingly dependent on a variety of purchased items, including trade cloth, batteries, kerosene, rice, sugar, tea, and steel tools, they are also forced to be increasingly committed to the production and sale of copra which is the main source of cash for most families living on the island. (Fig. 3) Copra is dried coconut which is used to produce coconut oil.

Sikaiana legends recount long-distance voyaging in outrigger canoes (kaua kaua), and the last outrigger canoe was constructed in the late 1960s, and there are none currently in use on the island. The standard canoe for transportation is a single hull dugout canoe (kuekau), which is a recent innovation (Fig. 6). Occasionally, a man vacationing from Honiara brings an outboard motor, but these were not permanently operating motor on Sikaiana during my stay. The last voyage (holona) across the open ocean without an engine occurred about 1921, when a resident European trader ran out of supplies and sailed to Malaita with some Sikaiana men. This voyage did not use an outrigger canoe, however, but the trader's own dinghy. Because there are no outrigger canoes it is no longer possible to practice some of the techniques associated with fishing techniques such as catching flying fish (tui sauna).

Many of the traditional techniques of net fishing are no longer practiced because hand-held nets are not being manufactured anymore. All fish nets currently in use were purchased in stores. Elder informants claim that in their youth fish weirs (tununata) were set up almost everywhere on the reef, but only two weirs were built during my stay. One of the most frequently used fishing techniques became popular only as recently as the late 1940s. In this technique, men dive at night with waterproof flashlights and, using a homemade slingshot (catapult), spear fish which are resting in the coral.

About half the houses on Sikaiana have concrete foundations and iron roofs. The rest of the houses are made from local materials,
with wooden frames and coconut leaf matting (see Fig. 9). Most construction is done with imported manufactured string instead of string made in traditional style from coconut fiber. Light is provided by kerosene lanterns and pressure lamps. Some people own kerosene primus stoves and there are a few families with instant stoves, but most cooking is done with wood and coconut hooks on a hearth or in traditional underground ovens (imai).

Sikaisa people say that they never made bark cloth or tapa cloth and that all clothing material was made on a backstrap loom (meatu; see Fig. 7). By 1900 most clothing was made from trade cloth, although the loom was still used to make mosquito nets (tae namu) and the belts (taaaka) which were worn by women during and after pregnancy for cosmetic reasons. Today, the loom is rarely used, and most women under 50 years old need assistance from elder women on these few occasions when they are weaving with it. All mosquito nets are now bought in stores, and while some women still wear a belt during pregnancy, most do not. Traditional skills are used for making some items. Hand-woven pandanus sleeping mats (caau) are still made (Fig. 8), and most young women are expected to learn how to weave them. Both in Honiara and on Sikaisa it is a matter of pride to possess one of these mats.

Social Life and Expressive Culture

There have been marked changes in other areas of Sikaisa social life. Soccer, rugby, netball, volleyball, and cricket are popular sports. A traditional game, hainau, which is similar to 'kick the can,' is still played, but apparently not as often as a generation ago. Some games that were popular in the childhood of elder people, such as darts (like) and wrestling (maunu), are played infrequently, while others, such as cards and marbles, are still played with enthusiasm. These latter two games were probably introduced by traders in the 19th century.

Traditional songs are still performed during holidays, at greetings for important visitors, and at other festivities (Fig. 9). Many younger people, however, do not know the words of these songs or the movements of traditional dances. Today, few songs are composed in traditional style. In the late 1900s, some younger men learned to compose for and play the guitar using neo-Pacific and western tunes. This became a popular composition style with younger people. These songs are composed in the Sikaisa language and reflect Sikaisa cultural and social values. Although they are very different in verse and rhythm from traditional songs, they retain strong affinities with the older songs in their use of metaphor and in the themes that are expressed. Shortly after the introduction of guitar music, young men and women began participating in western style dances. During the 1960s and 1970s, radios and tape recorders were introduced onto Sikaisa. At present, most Sikaisa families have access to a tape recorder, although there is often a shortage of batteries. It is not yet certain whether Sikaisa guitar music will withstand the popularity of western and Pacific songs which are played on the tape recorders.

Education, emigration, and contact with other Solomon Islanders have had a strong impact on language use in Sikaisa. Elder people claim that the Sikaisa spoken by younger people, and elder people who have spent long periods of time away from Sikaisa, is incorrect. Many younger people, especially males, consider Pidgin English, rather than the vernacular, to be their first language. Some younger males told me that they think in Pidgin English, and most spontaneous conversations between them are conducted in Pidgin English. Younger people do not know much of the vernacular vocabulary, especially in areas such as traditional technology, ritual, and poetics. When speaking in the Sikaisa language, they often borrow
Delivering food and cloth in a wedding exchange on Sikaitana.

An extended family with a wedding payment of cloth, pudding, and a pig.

Women going over the records of contributions to a marriage payment.

terms from English or Pidgin English, even when vernacular equivalents are available. Because it is isolated geographically, the government has established basic transportation, trade, medical, educational, and administrative services on Sikaitana. The Sikaitana people are committed to the successful operation of these institutions. Most adult males living on the atoll are involved in the operation of one or more of these institutions. The island also has a plethora of committees which support these institutions: a school committee, a church committee, a kindergarten committee, several committees that support religious organizations, and two cooperative store committees (although only one functioned during my stay). Most of these committees meet regularly, at least several times a year.

Christianity has been effective in mitigating some of the traditional prohibitions on interaction between certain categories of kin, especially in-laws and the mother's brother. The church also was successful in terminating some practices that were abhorrent to the missionaries. For example, in traditional Sikaitana society most marriages were arranged when the couple were children, but at present most marriages are made by personal preference. Traditionally, women were tattooed on their thighs and bellies. The last tattoo was applied during the Second World War.

Although the church effectively terminated the traditional ritual ceremonies of Sikaitana, many long-standing patterns of kinship remain an important factor in personal relationships. Most Sikaitana people are committed to their extended bilateral kinship ties. This is expressed through mutual aid, shared residence, contributions to marriage payments, and a very high occurrence of child fostering. (In both traditional and contemporary Sikaitana society, fostering is a mechanism for reinforcing and emphasizing social ties, especially those based on kinship.) Moreover, many traditional Sikaitana values, expectations about interpersonal behavior, and patterns of etiquette remain important in social relationships. Finally, there is an important sense in which the Sikaitana people form a distinctive and unique community, regardless of the changes discussed above. Although the population is rapidly increasing, Sikaitana people, whether living on the atoll or away from it, are known personally to each other and are interested in each other's affairs. This includes knowledge of a person's kinship ties, foster parents, marriage, residence, work history, education, and participation in various community institutions. It also includes knowledge of previous interpersonal interactions and an individual's personality or character.
Conclusion

Siluiana has changed more rapidly than many other communities in the Solomon Islands. This may be related to its small size which leaves it vulnerable to outside influences. But it also reflects the choices and desires of the Siluiana people who wished to incorporate western institutions and technology into their society and sought what they perceived to be the advantages derived from the incorporation of these outside influences. It is difficult to predict the extent to which Siluiana will remain a distinctive community. Certainly, through emigration and the development of western institutions on the island, it is becoming assimilated into a wider social and cultural system.

This raises an important issue about the development of a national culture within the Solomon Islands. Solomon Islanders from many different local communities share experiences in their conversion to Christianity, administration by a national government, working for wages, and attending national secondary schools. Moreover, the churches, government, and schools are all centralized administrative systems that are attempting to integrate culturally diverse local communities. Although these institutions were introduced originally by Europeans, they have developed according to indigenous interpretations. Future studies of social change in the Solomon Islands should investigate two issues: (1) the traditional culture and the history of western influences within specific local communities, and (2) the extent to which different local communities in the Solomon Islands are developing shared institutions and values as they incorporate these outside influences.

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The Codification of Minangkabau Worldview

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One of the prominent Indonesian ethnic groups, the Minangkabau constitute 3% of the entire Indonesian population and one-quarter of the Sumatran population. The Minangkabau pride themselves on their matrilineal social system, believing this to provide the core of their customary law and the basis for their social identity. Known also for their literary flair, practicality, flexibility, and acute business sense, Indonesians of Minangkabau ancestry hold important political, economic, and domestic offices in the political mainstream of their country. These are a proud people who celebrate their traditional identity and participate actively in the affairs of their nation.

Local tradition places the origin of the Minangkabau world in the highlands of West Sumatra, an area of stunning natural beauty, which has probably been inhabited since at least the Neolithic period and probably much earlier. Here lies Mt. Merapi, the enigmatic volcano usually hidden in clouds, from which the Minangkabau ancestors are supposed to have descended long ago (Fig. 1). Expanding outward from this center, referred to as the heartland (daro) of the Minangkabau world, is the migration area (rambut) where some one-half of the Minangkabau people live. The rambut is located in the western coastal lowlands of West Sumatra and in all the adjacent Sumatran states. A substantial number of Minangkabau have also made their home in other parts of Indonesia, as well as in Malaysia where the state of Negri Sembilan was formed from groups tracing their origins to the Minangkabau heartland sometime in the 18th century (Fig. 2).

Matriline and migration constitute two crucial axes in the social life of the sexes. Traditionally, young men were expected to leave their homes and villages in order to prove their worth, leaving their sisters and mothers securely in charge of the matrilocal property.