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### Conclusion, Intimacy and Community in a Changing World: Sikaiana Life 1980-1993

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### XIII

#### CONCLUSION: An Intimate Community in the Late 20th Century

In 1985, I talked with Paul Knight and Calvin Crouch, two American navy pilots who were shot down in combat over Sikaiana in August 1942. Even after 40 years, both still had vivid memories of their few days on Sikaiana. Paul was wounded and told me that he believes the attention his wounds received there saved his life. Calvin commented to me that he felt at home with Sikaiana's simple life style because he had been brought up on a farm.

In separate conversations, both asked me the same question: wouldn't it have been better if the Sikaiana people had been left alone without any of the changes associated with modernization? The Sikaiana needed neither the conveniences nor the worries of industrialized societies; modern technology and Western institutions could only harm their happiness. Life on a Polynesian atoll seems idyllic, especially in the middle of a war.

Anthropologists constantly combat a popular view that societies like Sikaiana are engaged in a raw, simple, pre-rational struggle for existence. In this view of non-Western peoples, Western technology and education are seen as a hope of enlightenment for these primitive societies. But there is another stereotype, just as inaccurate, that culture change is inevitably harmful. In this latter view, societies like Sikaiana were once blessed with a kind of primal happiness, noble savages, only to be ruined by the forces of modernization. It seems that both views are ingrained in the American popular consciousness. Both views are distorted and inaccurate.

I have already discussed the importance of manufactured goods, especially steel tools, for Sikaiana's present economy. Steel is much easier to use than shell, although it means making copra or earning wages to pay for it. Culture contact has introduced new diseases along with unhealthy tastes for tobacco, sugar, and fried food. Nevertheless, the Sikaiana are probably in much better health as a result of vaccines and improved medical care. The Sikaiana can now read books and write letters, and if their eyes are weak, they can get glasses to help them read and write. **More recently, education has given them ability in English and access to world-wide knowledge. They can use the internet to participate in a world-wide forum, which they seem to appreciate.**

The atoll cannot support the number of Sikaiana people who are alive today. Without emigration and culture change, there would only be about one third as many Sikaiana. Whether or not life was better in 1900, without the changes of the 20th century, there would be a lot fewer Sikaiana enjoying that life.

The Sikaiana themselves sometimes claim that there is more conflict in their society today and attribute it to the breakdown of their traditional values. But there was hostility in the traditional society which centered around adultery and the retribution of ancestral spirits. If there are more divorces at present, there is almost certainly less

adultery. The Sikaiana may complain about present-day hostility, but in former times the atoll was vulnerable to natural disasters and marauding invaders. The cyclone of 1986 would have been a devastating tragedy if not for modern relief efforts. In the balance, even with the on-going land disputes, there may well be less conflict in present-day Sikaiana society than there was in 1900. The present-day Sikaiana view of a harmonious past is probably based upon memories of the years between about 1930 and 1950 when there was a period of relative harmony supervised by missionaries and a colonial government. But even in this period, there is evidence from official Protectorate reports that there were conflicts and disagreements, especially over local leadership and land tenure.<sup>1</sup>

Many Sikaiana also lament that they are no longer as tightly bound by kinship ties. Fosterage, although frequent, is less prevalent than in former times. There are more family quarrels. People no longer help each other as much. Young people are no longer obedient. More and more, they say, people are going their own way. These complaints, however, could apply to many times in Sikaiana's history. Moreover, there are also new ways in which the Sikaiana are united: the fundraising events for their community activities; the community-wide management of the atoll's institutions; and, in Honiara, their sport's association and dances.

Finally, any discussion of culture change on Sikaiana must recognize that they were often willing participants in the process even though they were not in control of many circumstances or consequences of this participation. In the 19th century, the Sikaiana were eager to sell copra to traders, and some left on visiting ships. The population's friendliness to foreigners, which made it popular with whalers and traders, probably is at least partly the result of an interest in establishing contacts with outsiders and having access to their goods. In the 20th century, men were eager to work on government ships and often complained about Protectorate regulations which restricted labor recruitment. The Sikaiana were enthusiastic to participate in many Western institutions, to earn cash, and to travel abroad. It is true that they were unaware of the consequences of adopting new institutions, practices and technology. In this latter respect, however, they are very much like their contemporaries everywhere in the world, including in Western countries.

At the same time that they participated in new practices and incorporated new institutions into their social lives, they have preserved many indigenous practices and incorporated new ones in a manner which preserves communal values and relationships. Exchange and reciprocity are important in their daily lives. Fosterage maintains ties among extended families. Marriages unite the community, not only at the wedding ceremony, but also in the complex networks of exchanges which accompany it. The integration of governing institutions on the atoll involves widespread participation by most adults. Christian holidays are occasions for communal feasts, singing, dancing and drinking. Dances are now ways to express a sense of ethnic identity to others. Guitar songs are expressions of distinctively Sikaiana concerns. Fundraising events bring Sikaiana migrants together to collect money for community projects.

I don't claim that these communal activities will be maintained forever. There are

constant pressures changing Sikaiana life. People are always distancing themselves from community activities through intermarriage, migration, and lack of interest. Salary differences may increase pressure on people to isolate themselves from others. Perhaps wealthier Sikaiana will distance themselves from other Sikaiana as they join emerging stratified social classes within the Solomon Islands. Perhaps younger people will abandon most Sikaiana practices in order to participate in the more cosmopolitan life of Honiara. On the atoll, there is increased training required for some of the offices including priest, teacher, nurse and justice. There is constant exposure to other cultures through the media: the radio, cassettes and most recently videos. But, thus far, these factors have not resulted in a loss of communal activities, and in many cases new practices have resulted in new community activities. **As of 2020, there are still communal activities, many of them new since 1980, but it does seem that in important ways, Sikaiana has lost a lot of its integration as a community as its people have become more integrated into a regional and global social system.**

### **The Social Organization of Interpersonal Relations**

An earlier generation of anthropologists described the social organization of small societies in terms of relations based upon kinship and descent. Contemporary anthropologists, for a variety of reasons, have lost interest in these issues of social organization. Although no longer fashionable topics in anthropological discourse, kinship and descent are certainly important for understanding Sikaiana social relations. But the study of social organization also concerns how people maintain or develop associations and express various kinds of attachments, familiarity and intimacy. Sikaiana has new roles and institutions as the result of Western contact which connect them with world-wide systems. The study of social organization in present-day societies should include the detailed analysis of human social relationships in small settings and how these smaller groups articulate with larger and more impersonal social groups.<sup>ii</sup>

Social interaction and relations, moreover, are shaped by cultural definitions about the person, intentions, and motivations. On Sikaiana, interactions and relations are understood in terms of general affective states and dispositions including shyness, compassion, kindness, happiness, trust, distrust, attachment and independence. Sikaiana relations are developed through ties of reciprocity and sharing in many different social contexts: the household, kinship relations, marriage exchanges, and fosterage. Reputations are constructed out of life events which are interpreted in terms of these cultural values.

Not all interactions and relations are familiar and intimate in the same manner. Some relations, such as those involving shame between in-laws, are marked by avoidance of certain behaviors. People have varying degrees of involvement in patterns of reciprocity, ranging from relationships in which goods are shared freely all the time to those in which sharing is infrequent. The same two people may find their interaction quite different depending upon social context. In courtship for example, couples, who must avoid one another in public, have their most intimate moments in secrecy. At the community level, there is a generalized intimacy in which all Sikaiana participate as a

distinct community within the Solomon Islands.

Social relations are not necessarily harmonious; often conflict is inherent in the relationship. On Sikaiana, there are nasty conflicts over land rights. Sikaiana concepts about person and interaction describe their suspicion about the motivations of others and a darker side to human behavior. When drinking, a Sikaiana person may become truculent. When singing, the Sikaiana ridicule and taunt others. Nevertheless, the intensity with which people express hostility and conflict demonstrates the importance of these local concerns in their lives. As one person explained to me, his mother prefers to stay on Sikaiana and continue to live with the people with whom she has quarreled all her life, rather than leave them to live elsewhere among strangers.<sup>iii</sup>

The introduction of Western occupational roles has only partially resulted in a differentiated social system. Until recently, minimal training was required for many of the new positions on Sikaiana. Most people have served in a variety of offices and on Sikaiana's numerous committees. Moreover, most people residing on the atoll, including those who work for salaries in Western occupations, also fish and plant gardens. These skills have become something of a specialization because men and women brought up in Honiara have difficulty mastering them.

Training and certification in specialized occupations and professions are more important for migrants living in Honiara. There a decent living is dependent upon mastering a skill which involves specialized training. People work as secretaries, carpenters, plumbers, teachers, administrators, pharmacists, lawyers, and nurses. They are specialized in their employment but, as in many Western countries, their private lives are separate. This private life, however, is not an isolated one, but one which often involves other Sikaiana people in communal activities such as the sports association, festive drinking, marriage exchanges, and funerals.

Sikaiana social relations cannot be understood unless they are examined in the context of not only a local system but also how that local system articulates with larger systems. Social organization, as the study of the formation of relations and groups, also concerns differentiation within smaller systems and the integration of these smaller systems into larger ones.

### **Integration and Differentiation**

The Sikaiana have new institutions, roles and identities through which they interact with other Solomon Islanders, and with many other people in the world. They are now "citizens" of the Solomon Islands with all the privileges and obligations entailed by that social category. Like many people in Western nations, they vote in elections, pay taxes, and complain about what they consider to be their government's poor services and policies in health, transportation and education. They are interested in both national and world events which they hear over the radio and read about in papers and magazines. Although Sikaiana customary law influences local court cases on Sikaiana, judicial procedure in the Solomon Islands is based upon British jurisprudence. Criminal

cases and appeals in civil cases are heard by justices and magistrates from elsewhere in the Solomon Islands. Sikaiana students are taught the same subjects as students throughout much of the world. If they pass the qualifying exams, they will attend secondary schools with other Solomon Islanders. After completing school, most Sikaiana males work in an occupation or profession for a salary, at least for part of their lives. These occupations, such as teacher, plumber, electrician, carpenter, accountant, and mechanic, often require expertise which is similar throughout much of the world. Even those who remain on the atoll need some money to survive and find their lives affected by worldwide prices in commodities, especially copra. The Sikaiana are Christian, sharing a set of religious beliefs with many other people throughout the world. Similarities with outsiders also exist in their leisure and recreation. Whether residing in town or on the atoll, the Sikaiana now play soccer, netball and cricket. They dance face-to-face, boy to girl, in styles derived from Western countries. On their radios and cassettes, they play popular music which is heard all over the world.

The new roles and identities that provide them with similarities with outsiders are also creating new types of distinctions among the Sikaiana themselves. Some people have gone to schools and acquired specialized skills. There are salary differences as a result of differing wages in occupations, and some Sikaiana are comparatively wealthy in comparison with others. Moreover, the present-day Sikaiana community is made up of many individuals with different life experiences, varying levels of involvement in Sikaiana and non-Sikaiana activities, and differing attitudes toward these experiences and activities.

Although there are new ways in which they are integrated into an outside world and differentiated among themselves, there are also new ways that they find that they are integrated amongst themselves and differentiated from the outside world. One hundred years ago, when contact with outsiders was still sporadic, the Sikaiana community was defined by the circumstances of birth on an isolated atoll. At present, however, the atoll is no longer isolated and the community is no longer limited to a locality which is encircled by a reef and isolated by hundreds of miles of ocean. The community now includes emigrants to Honiara and is built upon shared relationships and activities which extend across time and space. In traditional Sikaiana society, an ethnic identity centered around the ancestral origins of the various 'clans.' At present, they possess a new sense of ethnicity in a larger social context that defines them as a distinct population in their relations with other cultures in the Solomon Islands.

In the course of this century, life on the atoll has become more public, at the same time that the Sikaiana have developed a sense of themselves as a separate group or ethnicity within the Solomon Islands. Older people claim that in former times households were established in separate settlements throughout the atoll. At present, residence is concentrated along the shore of the lagoon at Hale and people have freer access to one another. Traditional restraints on relationships associated with shame, such as the behavioral prohibitions between in-laws, are less important in restricting Sikaiana relations. In this respect too, people have increased access to one another. Moreover, there are more atoll-wide activities which bring people together: for example, the twice daily church services. According to older people, toddy drinking was formerly

done in private. Now it is a public activity which involves large numbers of Sikaiana during holidays, marriage exchanges and fundraising.

Although life on the atoll is more open and public, the entire social system of the atoll has become redefined as a personal and private one in terms of the outside world. This sense of a private community in a multi-ethnic nation is extended to Sikaiana migrants in Honiara. Non-Sikaiana visitors are welcome and treated with hospitality. But there is a kind of familiarity among Sikaiana that is valued, maintained, and reinforced in their associations, even between people who may be hostile to one another. Public events for these migrants, such as fundraising and wedding exchanges, are often held in the relative privacy of the Sikaiana settlement at Tenaru.

Over 100 years ago, Georg Simmel suggested that group size, sense of identity, individuality and social differentiation were inter-related processes.

The narrower the circle to which we commit ourselves, the less freedom of individuality we possess; however, this narrower circle is itself something individual and it cuts itself off sharply from all other circles precisely because it is small. Correspondingly, if the circle in which we are active and in which our interests hold sway enlarges, there is more room in it for the development of our individuality; but as *parts of this whole*, we have less uniqueness: the larger whole is less unique as a social group (1971:257).

Social groups have to be understood internally in terms of those who participate in them and then also externally in terms of the larger society in which and against which they are defined. The Sikaiana community can be best understood in terms of different reference points, both internal and external. Internally, they maintain some practices which make them distinct from a larger encompassing social system. They have become increasingly integrated into a larger region, the Sikaiana have developed a greater sense of identity of themselves as a separate social group with a shared heritage. They are also self-conscious about their shared and communal activities as a result of the very same processes which are altering those activities. But Sikaiana people also participate as individuals in the larger social system which marks them as distinct from one another in new differences based upon wealth, occupation, and experience.

### **The Sikaiana Community: Maintained and Constructed**

The term "community" is used by sociologists and anthropologists to refer to a variety of different social groupings. Sometimes, they use the word "community" to describe the inhabitants of a locality: something more than a neighborhood but less than a city. In this usage, there is not necessarily the implication that these people maintain any special social relationships other than the fact of proximity. Other times, however, the term is used to imply that members of a group share special relationships although not necessarily a locality. This usage refers to the "community of scholars," or in international relations, the "Atlantic Community," for example. Social groups such as small liberal arts colleges or religious groups sometimes refer to themselves as a

"community," implying a special commitment or concern among their members, even though this special concern and commitment often is of limited duration and includes people who do not know one another.

Sikaiana is a small locality. The relationships of most people are enduring for their lifetimes. The Sikaiana maintain relations amongst themselves which have the special quality of being based upon personal knowledge of one another and shared activities. At the center of this community is a location: the atoll. But the Sikaiana community includes emigrants who live away from the atoll, most of whom still refer to it as "home." Members of this community share a cultural heritage. As a result of their descent-based membership in lineages, they possess specific rights to the atoll's resources. They also are tied together by kinship ties which are reinforced through fosterage, sharing and reciprocity. But more than shared resources and ties of kinship, they hold common concerns, interests, and commitments which are expressed in their ceremonies, festivities and associations.

As a body of people, the Sikaiana community has fuzzy edges and there is constant pressure changing it. There are some individuals who are Sikaiana by birth but do not participate in the community's life. Simon Tokulaa represents the outsider on the inside, a non-conformist and cynic but still an accepted member of the community and, in his manner, a full participant in it. Sale is more conforming than Tokulaa in some aspects of her life style, but she says that her marriage to a non-Sikaiana man places has distanced her from Sikaiana life. Most other people who are married to non-Sikaiana participate less in Sikaiana activities than Sale. A few have emigrated to distant areas of the Solomon Islands, and although they are remembered, these emigrants have only sporadic contact with other Sikaiana. A few women have married ex-patriots and have left the Solomon Islands to live in England, Australia and New Zealand. Some young male migrants seem to be minimally involved in the activities of the Sikaiana. Most people married to non-Sikaiana are less involved in Sikaiana activities. Their children often do not speak the language. They rarely, if ever, return to the atoll. They participate less often in Sikaiana events such as marriage exchanges and fundraising activities.

The organization of the community is affected by the fact that Sikaiana is an administrative unit within the Solomon Islands with certain rights and responsibilities as a self-governing unit. Sikaiana's isolation has the ironic effect of enhancing the introduction of Western institutions. The missionaries and Protectorate government had to establish all their major institutions on the atoll and provide it with basic services. In other parts of the Solomon Islands, regional administrative centers were established which often indirectly administered distant villages. Sikaiana's residents were directly exposed to these institutions and eventually given some degree of local control in managing them.

But the organization of the Sikaiana community is not only the result of administrative circumstance. The Sikaiana have incorporated outside institutions into the social system of the atoll in an indigenous manner which results in maximum participation and control. Moreover, Sikaiana emigrants living in Honiara maintain



special ties with one another even though they are not united as political unit or isolated from other ethnic groups. In Honiara, people are dispersed in their different places of residence, and during the week, they work in separate occupations. The Sikaiana in Honiara live among people from the other ethnic groups of the Solomon Islands. The few hundred Sikaiana in Honiara, a rapidly growing town of about 20,000 people in the 1980s, over 80,000 in 2020], have very little influence in the administration of Honiara's institutions. Nevertheless, the Sikaiana in Honiara are united by sports events, marriage exchanges, fundraising events, and funerals. Many of these emigrants cluster together in residence at Tenaru and Bahai Center. People living away from Sikaiana often take their vacations on Sikaiana and may return there when they lose their job or retire.<sup>iv</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Giddens (1990) argues that the breakdown of communities is the result of the "disembedding" of social relations from time and locality. Transportation and communication now transcend localities, breaking down boundaries and integrating small communities into larger social systems. Local places no longer exist as the primary locus of social relationships. Time is abstracted to a universal measure applied everywhere in the world also transcending any locality. Systems of international expertise replace those which are developed in each locality. Teachers, lawyers, mechanics, electricians and justices are taught professional expertise which is standardized throughout much of the world. Money is a token which can be used to establish relations between complete strangers, replacing sharing and reciprocity which are built from personal relations.

In this perspective, it is possible to understand how Sikaiana is maintained as a community. The atoll is a small locality, whose isolation, even today, provides the basis for embedded relations. But migrants in Honiara, who live in dispersed areas, re-embed locality into their relations by arranging to meet periodically and by returning to the atoll. Time, as Giddens suggests, is now an abstract concept on Sikaiana, and everyone uses clocks and calendars. But on the atoll, time becomes re-embedded in the community by marking specific community activities. The daily work schedule is organized around morning and evening church services; the weekly schedule around community work days and Sunday communion; the yearly schedule around Christian holidays when people are not permitted to work. The arrival of the ship, announced on radio and scheduled by the government, is a monthly communal event. In Honiara, time-schedules measure not only the workday but also the time-off from workday. Evenings, weekends and holidays are private times which are often shared with other members of the community. Reciprocity and exchange, not money, remain the primary manner in which the Sikaiana interact with one another; money is used in their relations with outsiders. Even when money is used in Sikaiana relations, it is most often part of a reciprocal ceremony such as collections and distributions of cash in wedding ceremonies, or the collection of money at fundraising events.<sup>v</sup> Finally, expertise has become increasingly important but thus far it has not torn asunder the boundaries of the community. On Sikaiana, there has been an attempt to incorporate new specialized roles in a manner that preserves community participation. Fishing and gardening are still the basis for economic relations. In Honiara, wages and systems of expertise permeate the life of employment, but there remains the personal time-off, much of which is devoted

to events involving other Sikaiana people. On Sikaiana, isolation makes the communal something which is personal; in Honiara, the personal time away from work is used to participate in activities which are communal.

### **Modernity and Spheres of Personal Relations**

Throughout the world, villages, towns and other local groups are being amalgamated into larger regional systems. American small towns, it is often asserted, have lost their autonomy and self-sufficiency as they become integrated into larger regional and national systems through the mass media, transportation, an integrated, and specialized economy and centralized government planning (see Lynd and Lynd 1929, 1937, Stein 1960, Vidich and Bensman 1968).

Among social theorists, there is a definite ambivalence about this process. Weber wrote about the efficiency of modern administrative institutions, and still lamented modern humans as "specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart" trapped in an "iron cage" created by capitalism, industrialization and bureaucratic organization. Durkheim thought that only modern society with its diversity and differentiation offered the opportunity for true individuality and freedom; he also argued that sometimes the costs of this individuality and diversity sometimes included feelings of meaninglessness and despair which he termed "anomie." 20th century writers in social sciences and humanities continue this tradition of ambivalence (see Sapir 1924, Wirth 1938, Stein 1960, Bellah et al 1985.)

Although there is frequent mourning for the loss of community life, popular views of life in small communities are contradictory. Sometimes, small communities are presented as orderly settings for human relations and contrasted with the more impersonal-- if not evil-- social relations found in urban centers. Other times, small communities are described as gossip-ridden, parochial, and bigoted, lacking not only diversity but also tolerance. Social critics in industrialized nations may lament the loss of community life in industrialized society, but they probably never experienced life in a small community and would not find Sikaiana to be a communal paradise. Most Western readers of this book probably would find life on Sikaiana to be confining rather than intimate.<sup>vi</sup>

There is disagreement about whether or not industrialization and urbanization are necessarily accompanied by the demise of close, intimate relations. There are a few small groups of people in industrialized societies who maintain their distinctiveness. The Amish and Hutterites are among the most publicized examples of such groups in the United States (Kraybill 1989, Hostetler 1974, 1980).<sup>vii</sup> There are communes and communitarian organizations, and various alternative movements (see Turner 1969; Kephart 1982, also Fitzgerald 1986). Moreover, even if small towns are disappearing in industrialized nations, research on social relations in the United States suggests that this doesn't necessarily mean there is a loss of personal attachments (see Bender 1978). Fischer (1981a, 1981b) has found that, in urban life, intimate circles develop which are organized around shared perspectives and interests in a diverse and heterogenous society. The ubiquity of fraternal organizations and voluntary associations indicates that

for many people there is a fundamental disposition to create small groups of intense interaction and special commitments. Small cliques of intense association develop in contexts as diverse as urban, ethnic neighborhoods (see Gans 1962) and among in combat soldiers (Stouffer et al 1949). Administrative, bureaucratic and occupational institutions are infamous, not only for their formal ties, but also their personal, informal ones.

People in industrialized societies establish intimate personal relations in various settings or activities: in friendships, school, places of employment, families, sports teams, clubs and other associations. They build up personal knowledge of one another that is recounted, played upon, and joked about. Modernity forces individuals to define themselves through their personal interests and establish highly personal relations with others by "opening out" and revealing one's self to others in the process of establishing trust and intimacy (Giddens 1990:114-124; see also Berger, Berger and Kellner 1973:91-92). Accompanying the breakdown of communities in Western societies, a different kind of intimacy is developed which is dependent upon the shared preferences of isolated individuals rather than shared kinship and communal commitments.

Intimacy and personal relations are not lost with modernization but they are fundamentally altered because of the overall organization of social relations and the manner in which small personal groups articulate with larger ones. In complex societies personal relations are often highly idiosyncratic among a few people, and often there are exclusive circles of privacy. There are no larger groups organized around familiarity which encompass these intimate relations and set them off from other such groups in the social system. For the Sikaiana by contrast, there is a larger sphere of familiar relations which marks the entire community as private in reference to the rest of the Solomon Islands and the rest of the world. Within this communal sphere of general intimacy, there are smaller subspheres of heightened intimacy: lovers meeting late at night; a group composing a song with hidden meanings; the variations in relationships which are expressed in terms of sharing and reciprocity; the special ties created by fosterage. But these special relations can only be understood as secret or private in terms of the larger community of people within which they are defined as special and intimate. The secrecy of romantic meetings is only meaningful and secret for that community of people who care that lovers should not meet and at the same time are excited to learn the names of those who do. The secrecy of songs is only meaningful because it is important to a larger community of people who want to understand a song's meaning and establish identities and events. Sharing and fosterage define special alliances in terms of a larger community within which there is the potential to create special relations through culturally determined practices and understandings. The community as a whole is the locus of meaning for all these activities. The kinds of intimate relations described by writers about modernity in Western societies are not dependent upon a similar encompassing community.

As mentioned in earlier chapters it is often asserted that in small societies relations are "whole person" to "whole person," involving a range of interactions and biographical knowledge. I have found that Sikaiana social relations are shaped by a variety of factors including kinship, gender, age, and interactional conventions about

etiquette and harmony. In this respect, they are not "whole person" to "whole person" and are channeled through expectations about role and interactional etiquette. But there is a sense in which Sikaiana relations are "whole person" to "whole person," not in specific interactions or relationships, but instead in reference to the entire community. Their community is structured by interlocking roles and identities based upon kinship, fosterage, gender, rights to land, and personal knowledge. Marriage exchanges bring together most people to celebrate a ceremony and also tie people in networks of reciprocity. Song composition recounts specific events in terms of general values. Toddy drinking creates a world of conviviality and sociability. Gossip and interest in one another's activities are the daily news events. Such interpersonal relations are the inescapable basis for much that is important in one's life.

Modernization and culture contact have redefined the organization of many personal relations. Some new identities, such as "Christian" and "citizen," create new ways in which the Sikaiana can enter in relationships with other Solomon Islanders, and new ways in which they can interact with one another. These new kinds of interactions have replaced traditional relations, especially those requiring restrictions. In this respect, there is increased emphasis upon individual choices and preferences, as opposed to communally imposed expectations. The Sikaiana now have wider latitude in constructing the content of their interpersonal relations. But these relations are still largely constructed within a community where people know one another and can judge one another by long periods of personal knowledge and previous actions. The revelations of self which some observers (Goffman 1963:64, Giddens 1990:114-124) describe as central in Western relationships are not so relevant in a community where people are familiar with one another over long periods.

Erving Goffman has developed a "dramaturgical" approach to social relations which describes humans as social actors who perform roles in staged encounters. Developing Goffman's stage metaphor, it seems to me that people, whether in industrialized, urban societies or on remote coral atolls, develop their own scripts and stages and then perform to the audiences made up of the company they keep. The difference is that in industrialized and differentiated social systems, these stages include a much smaller number of people, often only one other person. Relationships are isolated as people move between different stages with different actors and audiences. Both for better and worse, there is fragmentation between many different stages with many different actors and audiences. For the Sikaiana people, by contrast, there is one large stage where everyone is partly actor and audience.

The Sikaiana stage for personal relations exists in the much larger context of world-wide economic and political forces which have very important consequences for Sikaiana life, but over which the Sikaiana people have relatively little control. These world forces include a world economic market which affects prices and wages, geopolitical pressures which affect the Solomon Islands, and a constant barrage of foreign cultural practices especially in the international, commercial media. As potent and fateful as this large context is, the Sikaiana live their daily lives in a much smaller personal sphere of known people and shared activities. Within this smaller sphere of everyday life there is some sense of control, although some social scientists might

legitimately argue that this sense of control is illusory when examined in the context of the wider world. It is within this smaller world, nevertheless, where the Sikaiana create their lives. Their efforts to maintain this smaller sphere suggests that it is valued for the fact that it is one in which the Sikaiana people can define and construct their relationships. It is their stage upon which they can perform their own drama, where they are both actors and audience.

### **Polynesian Voyagers in the 20th Century**

Throughout their history, the sea and sea-voyaging has offered the Sikaiana both opportunity and danger. As I stated in describing my initial interactions with them, Sikaiana's isolation makes its people both suspicious of and fascinated with outsiders and their traditions. Isolation and interactions with foreigners are constant themes in Sikaiana social life. These themes continue to the present-day, although under changing conditions.

Sikaiana legends depict the vulnerability of the atoll's inhabitants. Its founder hero, Tehui Atahu, staked his original claim when the atoll was still submerged. He returned to find the atoll above water and inhabited by a race of people, whom he deceived and slaughtered. The atoll's vulnerability is recounted in the legends concerning the pirates from Tona and, more recently in the 19th century, the Gilbertese (Kiribati) plot to overthrow their hosts. Although relations with traders were generally good, the story of trader Alan Piva's murder suggests there was some distrust of outsiders. In the 20th century, the atoll's small size and comparative isolation made it vulnerable to outside influence. Western institutions were rapidly introduced into the atoll's social system.

The legendary voyagers, Kaetekita and Semalu, along with the historical Luka whom de Quiros met in Taumako 1606, were motivated in part by the desire to see and meet people from beyond their small atoll. The interest in outsiders is evident in the 19th century when most traders and whalers found the Sikaiana people to be friendly and receptive to outsiders. They also found young men who wished to leave the atoll. In the 20th century, Sikaiana people were interested in leaving the atoll, in part to make money and acquire trade goods, but also for adventure. This desire to interact with the wider world continued to motivate their voyaging even as the outside world and the mode of voyaging and frequency of contacts changed, continually, during the 19th and 20th century. It may also explain why Sikaiana has been so receptive to new institutions and practices in the 20th century.

The present-day population is much more mobile than their ancestors were. Over the past four centuries, the modes of transportation have changed. Voyaging is no longer undertaken in outriggers. Instead, the Sikaiana travel in boats and on airplanes. The percentage of the population which travels has increased dramatically. In Luka's time, long distance voyaging was probably quite rare, the activity of a few adventuresome men. By the 19th century, contacts with outsiders were much more frequent and there were opportunities for a few to voyage with traders and whalers. During the 20th century, travel abroad offered not only adventure, but as the atoll's population

increased, travel abroad also became an economic necessity. As manufactured products became important in the local economy, and as the Sikaiana became partial to many consumer goods, people felt obliged to emigrate to earn money. In the early 20th century, people worked abroad to earn cash, usually with the intention of returning to the atoll. After World War II, many Sikaiana became permanent emigrants and their children were raised in towns away from Sikaiana. These people maintain ties with other Sikaiana and visit the atoll, although by and large their lives are organized around living away from it.

The Sikaiana have been consistently interested in meeting foreigners, and over the past 50 years in adopting and participating in Western institutions. But in doing so, whether in Honiara or participating in the Western institutions established on the atoll, they have preserved institutions and practices which contribute to maintaining Sikaiana as a separate community. By choice, they are no longer isolated. More than most other local communities in the Solomon Islands, they have adopted Western institutions and participate in them. But if no longer isolated, many Sikaiana, by choice, remain separate. Whether working in Honiara or residing on the atoll, they remain-- at least through the latter part of the 20th century-- a group of people with special interests in one another.

In confronting the processes of modernization and change, the Sikaiana have managed to preserve, and indeed create, relations among themselves based upon familiarity and intimacy. They provide a perspective through which to better understand the variety of possibilities in personal relations and community life which develop in response to processes affecting everyone in the world.

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i. For a discussion of how Christian concepts have been incorporated into present-day views of tradition in the Solomon Islands see Keesing (1989), again White (1991).

ii. Writing in the 1930s for the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Robert Lowie defined social organization in the following terms:

Every human group is organized; its individual components do not behave independently of one another but are linked by bonds, the nature of which determines the types of social unit. Kinship, sex, age, coresidence, matrimonial status, community of religious or social interests, are among unifying agencies; and in stratified societies members of the same level form a definite class.

Later editions of the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* do not have an entry for "social organization." Lowie's list of unifying agencies are no longer adequate to describe all the kinds of bonds and social units even in remote societies such as Sikaiana.

iii. Simmel (1908/1955) has discussed the importance of conflict in social relationships.

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iv. One might think of the Sikaiana as an "ethnic" group both in the popular sense of sharing a common genetic ancestry, and in the more accurate sense of sharing a separate sense of identity, history and traditions in a multi-cultural (and "multi-racial") society. But the term ethnicity does not convey their mutual interest, face-to-face interaction, and the intensity of Sikaiana social ties. Some large ethnic groups, Italian-Americans for example, include individuals who have very little if anything to do with one another. Popular conceptions of ethnicity often serve to define a cultural identity in a diverse social system. I use the term ethnicity in referring to how the Sikaiana interact with, and are perceived by, other Solomon Islanders. In contrast, the notion I want to convey by the term "community" is a special, internal cohesion among a group of people. The Sikaiana are an ethnic group in the Solomon Islands, as are descendants of Italian immigrants to the United States. But the Sikaiana also maintain personal ties and interests in one another that do not necessarily unite many ethnic groups.

v **This was written from the perspective of my stays in the 1980s. Robert and Priscilla tell me that it is now possible to pay for food on Sikaiana.**

vi. Both views of small towns are offered in *Mainstreet* by Sinclair Lewis. The issue of community life is not only of concern for social theorists, but is also a central theme in American culture. Although Americans often talk about individualism, the concept of community is also ingrained into our national consciousness. The Puritan settlers founded small self-governing communities, John Winthrop's "cities on a hill". De Tocqueville wrote that the system of townships, local government and voluntary organizations formed the basis for American democracy and political life. See also Donner 1998.

vii. Unlike the Amish or some Mennonites, the Sikaiana embrace modernization. Moreover, the Sikaiana religion, very unlike that of the Amish, serves to unite them with other groups far more than it isolates them. Although public opinion is important on Sikaiana, there is nothing similar to the Amish mechanism of "shunning" and expulsion for maintaining social control.