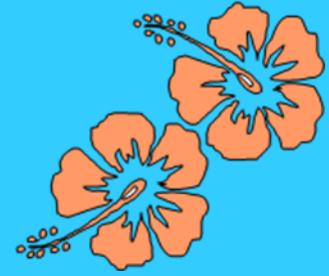


The “Bula Bulletin”



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A Polynesian ‘pearl’ in Fiji: Kioa Island

Geographically Kioa is a beautiful, but not an exceptional island; similar to the surrounding area, it has steep, wooded, volcanic slopes, fertile soils and plentiful rain. What makes Kioa Island unique in Fiji, however, is that it is home to the people of Vaitupu Island in Tuvalu (formally the Ellice Islands Group). Only here can you get a glimpse of life in a Polynesian community surrounded by Melanesian neighbours.

History of the purchase of Kioa Island

Kioa Island was purchased at auction for £3,015 in 1946 on behalf of the people of Vaitupu. They were notified earlier about the sale and had approached the colonial Fiji government to be allowed to make a bid.



“When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself...”
Leviticus 19: 33-34
(NIV)

For some time the Vaitupuan community had been looking for land to exploit commercially and Kioa presented an opportunity too good to miss: “The migration to Kioa is a natural outcome of their expanding population, shortage of land, financial status and outstanding initiative...” wrote the acting colonial secretary in 1948. The Fiji government authorised that 250 Vaitupuan could relocate to Kioa over the following 10 years.

In late 1946 a party of five men and one woman representatives from Vaitupu visited Kioa to assess the potential of the island for relocation. It was agreed that an advance group of settlers be sent directly to Kioa as soon as possible to establish a community.

The first Vaitupuan to relocate

Even with the initial reconnaissance, there were many unknowns to the move; the earliest pioneers had to overcome their fear of wild animals (there were no snakes or iguanas in Tuvalu) and Fijians were still known for their past cannibalism, despite having been peaceful converts for many years! ‘Brave’ volunteers were therefore sought for the first trip.

The approach to Kioa



The Vaitupuan community were gathered in their *maneapa* (community hall), a mat was placed in the centre, and an *ofo* (challenge) was made to the community for able-bodied volunteers. Those who wished to go were asked to come forward and sit on the mat. Once the surface of the mat had been filled with people, no one else would be able to join the first group. Thirty five, mostly men, volunteered; among them were community leaders, teachers, administrators, accountants and medically-trained personnel, the people needed to create a community.



50th Anniversary plaque: Council advisor and local historian, Lotomau Fiafia pointing out the names of the first settlers in Kioa

The first settlers travelled to Kioa onboard the “Awahou”, a trading boat that regularly made the trip between Kiribati, Tuvalu and Fiji. Only one child, a two-year old girl, was among the group.

They arrived in Kioa on 26th October 1947. It was a Sunday at 2 pm when they landed in their new home. After unloading their luggage, they gathered together and gave thanks to God for their safe arrival.

“Lord you shall be with us always even with the difficulties that we will face in this land knowing that you will never forsake us and that you will never leave us”.

Today a plaque, unveiled in 1997 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the arrival, stands near the church. It is positioned directly inland from where the first settlers landed. All 35 settlers are listed on the plaque.



The *maneapa* (foreground) and community bure, Salia village

A Vaitupuan prophecy predicted that one day the Vaitupuan people would leave their homeland and go to *Vai siku lagi*, ‘the land beyond the horizon’ (literal translation as water, land, sky). According to the present-day Kioans, the prophecy was fulfilled in 1947.

Further groups of Vaitupuan arrived over the next few years and a final collection of 41 names was submitted for relocation in 1956, when it was estimated that there were 200 Vaitupuan in Fiji.

The relocation was traumatic for the first Vaitupuan who moved, and once news of the difficulties reached those back in Vaitupu, there was reluctance among the islanders to volunteer for subsequent trips.

Kioan song (title and author unknown)

Source: Paton (2009)

Verse 1

Ite tausaga 1947
Ite lua afeafe ate asu Tapu
Ne tu laukele mai ei aui Kioa nei
Seai loa se fakatalofa io mese leo i logona
Te loto fiafakai kai fai la nei pefeia.

Chorus

Fakalofa au
Fakalofa au
Fakalofa au i toku loto nei
Mea ne momoe
Kae ne faga ne koe
Vaitupu e manaua mai au ne leve.

Verse 2

Kakafetai lasi Atua ite lagi
Mo tena alofa lasi mo tatou
Ko aulia manuia nei tatou tea so tenai
Fa-sefulu-valu tausaga o Kioa mo toku galue
Fua mo toku malie
Fakafetai lasi mote pula te Atua.

Verse 1

In the year 1947
At two o'clock on a Sunday afternoon
I set foot in Kioa
There is no welcome, no sounds to be heard
We think of return but there is nothing that can be done.

Chorus

Pity on me
Pity on me
Deep pity on me
It was lying dormant and you woke it
Vaitupu remember us here.

Verse 2

Thank you very much God up there
For all the love that you have given us
You have blessed us with this richness on this day
Forty-eight years now in Kioa
Working without pay
Thank you very much for the leadership God.



Line fishing for Wahu

The Kioan community today

**“When Tuvaluans emigrate, they carry their culture with them”
(Sioni and Paeniu, 2012)**

A visit to Kioa Island ensures a genuine, warm Polynesian welcome... Today about 300 people live in Salia village, Kioa and nearly all are descendents of the original Vaitupuan settlers. A 13-person Kioa Council runs community affairs and Council meetings are held each month.

The importance of faith and tradition

Community life revolves around the Church and the *maneapa*, the two community buildings constructed first, shortly after the settlers arrived.

Kioans never miss an opportunity to praise and glorify God. Meals are always preceded by prayer, and each evening, at 6pm, a bell sounds to summon families together for a time of family devotion. A second bell indicates the start to the devotion and a third, its end. No one is outdoors during that time. All attend church and most attend the Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu (EKT) Church, where, on the first Sunday of the month, a Eucharist service is held. We were fortunate that our visit coincided with that service.

The *maneapa* is the focus of Kioan tradition. Each respected male elder of the community has an assigned post (position of authority) inside the hall, and all community meetings, gatherings and celebrations are held there. It is also in the *maneapa* that the children of Kioa are instructed in the traditions and culture of Vaitupu. Elders are to be respected in all matters, families and family roles valued and the unity of the community defended.

Unity of the community

Collectively Kioans accomplish much together and they are proud of the strength of their unity. The village of Salia, for instance, is divided into two sides for purposes of competitions or communal activities (to the east of the church is Sunrise and to the west Sunset); and the week before our arrival, the young men of Salia had rebuilt the community *bure*, a structural casualty of Cyclone Tomas two years previous. There are five geographical groups of ladies in the community, each of whom takes turns in catering for guests and also for organising the compulsory Tuesday afternoon Ladies' Exercise Class. Thankfully I found an excuse on the Tuesday of our visit, though *apparently* I missed out on much 'fun' as a result!

Kioan identity and the future

Elderly Kioans acknowledge that, with each new generation, changes come (marital alliances, education opportunities and commerce exposure) that will eventually alter the culture and traditions of Kioa, a precious, pure, Polynesian pearl in Fiji.



Two elderly ladies retain the skill of catching octopus



'Gentle' warm-up exercises...

Ladies' meeting inside the *maneapa*

Our meal times in the community *bure*

Sporting 2011's commemorative t-shirt at ladies' volleyball

Performing for the tourists from the weekly boat, 'Tui Tai'





Retired teacher and local researcher, Jone Temo

The original owners of Kioa?

Oral history tells us that the original Fijian settlers of Kioa Island were members of the *Salia mataqali* (clan). Almost a hundred years ago clan members were forced from Kioa Island, their homeland, by the *Tui Cakau*, the paramount chief of the Cakaudrove Province.

Out of respect for the authority of *Tui Cakau*, in those days, no ordinary person could challenge any decision that the *Tui Cakau* made, so when the *Tui Cakau* wished to sell land, the traditional occupants were not in a position to challenge the sale. The people of the Salia clan, therefore, were unable to object to the sale of Kioa Island. "If they had objected they would have been punished by death", said Vaviano Tia, an elder of the Salia clan, living in Buca village.

Jone Temo's great, grandmother came from Kioa. Temo's research has revealed that around 1914, with the change in ownership of Kioa, the Salia clan were forced to leave their home. They dutifully, but reluctantly crossed over to mainland Vanua Levu, and in so doing, became a landless people, losing their home *and* their status within Fijian society.



The Salia clan occupy a flood-prone area within Buca village

Descendents of the Salia clan now live in Buca village, facing Kioa Island from across Buca Bay. They feel aggrieved; their forebears received an injustice: "This is such a sad, sad situation because the Salia people were just chased out like animals without explanation given to them," said Buca villager, Mereani Nawaikula.

"For far too long they have been fighting for their land but no one has come to their aid. Where is the justice in that?" said Buca villager, Uraia Naibuka.

Salia village, the current-today home to the descendents of Vaitupu, is the name of the only village in Kioa, and members of the Salia clan are registered as *Kai Kioa* (belonging to Kioa) in the *Vola ni Kawa Bula*, the registry book where all indigenous Fijians are registered.

Land ownership

Land ownership, the greatest concern in any relocation of people in the Pacific, is rarely straightforward. The Kioan community legally hold the freehold title to Kioa; decades before the purchase, the Salia clan were forced from the land, and are now landless in Buca village. While the two movements of the Salian and Vaitupuan people are unconnected, the relocation of each demonstrates the sensitivity necessary in examining the issue of land and landlessness across the Pacific region.

God bless
Julia

Prayers and reflection:

- Pray for the people of Kioa Island, Fiji as they proudly and fondly retain the culture and traditions of Vaitupu Island, Tuvalu.
- Give thanks for the richness of cultural diversity, and pray that we may love, respect and value 'the other' whenever we see differences.
- Pray that the Salia clan receive grace and peace as they seek reparation for the perceived injustices of the past.
- Pray for other communities forced from their land in a previous age, and who experience discrimination today as a result of past wrongs.
- Reflect on how we can uphold the dignity of all, when past wrongs are viewed as current 'rights'. What would be the right thing to do in such situations? How can we/should we (re)address the past?



Preparing freshly-caught barracuda, Buca village