

Austronesia

Lakalai

1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family:

Lakalai (aka Nakanai, West Nakanai, Bileki, Muku). Language: Lakalai (very close to Nakanai, often just grouped with that), Austronesian language family. ("Lakalai")

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com):

Nak ("Ethnologue").

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

Located approximately 150°30' to 150°6' E and 5°25' to 5°40' S. Central and eastern part of Hoskins Peninsula of the island of New Britain, part of Papua New Guinea. ("Lakalai")

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

1920s christian missionaries arrived. Set up schools; later in '68 government replaced these with better schools, and some Lakalai even have degrees now. But, tuition high and burden to families. When missionaries came, warfare and traditional political organization was suppressed. ("Lakalai")

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

Tropical islands. Fairly frequent volcanic destruction. Most villages close to the beaches among the brush. Rainforest in center of island (Goodenough).

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density

Traditionally small, around 150 people in each. Villages near each other usually got along well, intermarried, helped with warfare, etc. ("Lakalai")

Total population around 3,000 in 1963. 23 villages, each with several hamlets (Valentine).

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

Traditionally taro, harvested and replanted daily, but in 1960 they suffered a taro blight and nowadays rely on other foods, such as sweet potatoes, manioc, and bought rice. ("Lakalai")

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

Fish, shellfish, and megapode eggs (bird eggs buried underground and historically fought over by villages) for main daily protein. Wild pigs important to diet and still hunted. Used to hunt marsupials and birds but not anymore. ("Lakalai")

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

Today, shotguns (mostly used for hunting wild pigs). Spears. Slings. Shields. ("Lakalai")

2.4 Food storage:

Unknown.

2.5 Sexual division of production:

Men hunt and fish, and before warfare over megapode eggs ended they collected these too.

Women fish a little, gather shellfish, plant and harvest many crops, and cook. ("Lakalai")

2.6 Land tenure:

Land vested in clan, but sometimes outsiders can get permission to use some of the land.

Today this happens less often with population up and cash crops taking most space.

Traditionally, the land belonging to the clan could be given out to anyone with close ties, usually family, with someone within the hamlet. ("Lakalai")

2.7 Ceramics:

Unknown.

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

All protein is shared throughout the village (“Lakalai”).
Wealthiest/most powerful get the most (Goodenough).

2.9 Food taboos:

Individual clans have their own unique food taboos. Clans that share food taboos consider each other “brothers.” (“Lakalai”). If a hamlet/family group is named after a particular fish or plant species, it is taboo for members of that group to eat the fish/plant (Swindler).

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

Canoes, highly decorated. Special canoes for racing (“Lakalai”).

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

M: 5’5, F: 5’1 (Swindler).

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

Unknown.

4. Life History, mating, marriage

A person is believed to have not reached full maturity until they are grandparents.
(Valentine, 454)

In a person’s life cycle, go through very sexual period. Expected. (Valentine, 454)

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

Unknown, presumably around ages 11-13.

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

Unknown.

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

Unknown.

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

Unknown.

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

Unknown.

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

Women could only divorce a husband if her clan agrees she has been mistreated, but nowadays women have much more say in their lives and can get a divorce themselves (“Lakalai”).

Divorce rare after birth of children. Children stay with mother if there is a divorce (Chowning).

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

Men try this to avoid divorce, but most women are very against it and a stable polygynous relationship is hard to find (Chowning).

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

Mention of spears covered with shells for use in marriage payments. Dowries and marriage payments (“Lakalai”).

Bride-wealth, paid by husband’s family (Chowning).

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

Land is for clan, but individual trees are inherited from parent/grandparent. Matrilineal when it comes to bloodlines (“Lakalai”).

Paternal line inheritance, though families are traced through the mother’s line (Valentine).

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

Today many children support their parents by working far from home. Many work to repay their parents for their education. Today men and women share a more equal role in childcare (“Lakalai”).

When men take a wife, they bring their wife to the home of their father. If their father is dead or a widower, they take their wife to the next father-figure. If their father is dead they have a father surrogate. This surrogate is usually the next older male relative; father’s brother, mother’s brother, mother’s brother-in-law, older sister’s husband. Depending on how close the relationship is between the surrogate father and son, the son either builds his home close to his surrogate, or is free to chose another hamlet he has ties to. The son usually stays close to his biological father while he is alive. When he dies, the son is free to move (Goodenough, 6).

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

Unknown

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

Outsiders are only welcome if they are related to the insiders or have some other close tie to an insider (Goodenough).

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized?

One man fathers a child, no partible paternity (“Lakalai”).

4.14 What is the belief of the mother’s role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”)

Mother helps create child with father (“Lakalai”).

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?

No.

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

Unknown, but frowned upon. Myths condoning rape have rapists severely punished (Encyclopedia of Religion).

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)

No real preference (Swindler, xvii)

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

Somewhat, but she is expected to keep it secretive. Unmarried pregnancies are strongly disapproved (Chowning).

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

None.

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

Unknown, but presumably the mother’s sisters or father’s sisters.

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

Unknown.

4.22 Evidence for couvades

None.

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)

None.

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

4.24 Joking relationships?

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations

Matrilineal (“Lakalai”).

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

Forbidden to marry siblings and immediate relatives (Swindler, xvii)

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?

Unknown.

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

Preferred to be within community, though it isn't forbidden to marry someone from another village/territory (Swindler, xvii)

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?

Father or mother's brother of both groom and bride arrange many marriages, but if couple have permission from their families they can choose each other. This is much less common today (Chowning).

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

Unknown.

Warfare/homicide

Warfare down since missionaries came in '20s. When war leaders tired of fighting, they got together to talk it out with other war leaders. Formal Peace Ceremonies. Compensation was paid for deaths. ("Lakalai").

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

Unknown.

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

Unknown.

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

Megapode nesting grounds were once worth going to war over. Also worth fighting over: kidnapping women, killing a wild pig in someone else's territory ("Lakalai").

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

Tentative to hostile relationship; some evidence of kidnapping of women or pigs. Most conflicts that I've seen so far are over the nesting grounds of megapodes. Some trading did occur but it was careful and considered dangerous ("Lakalai").

4.18 Cannibalism?

None.

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

Traditionally small villages, around 150 residents. Today due to government pressure they are slightly bigger. ("Lakalai"). Several hamlets grouped together = village (Valentine).

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

Travel between nearby allied villages common (trade, ceremonies, celebrations, weddings, etc) ("Lakalai"). Family groups move fairly often; when a patriarch of a hamlet kin grouping dies, his sons/younger male relatives will often scatter to create their own kin groupings or join other kinsmen in already established hamlets (Goodenough, 10)

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

Senior resident clan males make decisions. Patriarchal ("Lakalai").

Before Europeans, no chieftainship. Afterwards, villages each chose a headman.

No inherited positions (Valentine).

5.4 Post marital residence:

Women live within their father-in-law's household until they have had several children or until they have reached an equivalent age. After this, the couples either build their own households close to the husband's father or build in another hamlet where the couple has close ties. When a husband's father dies, the couple are free to move wherever they like (Goodenough, 6)

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

Several villages may ally together; intermarrying, celebrating together, going to war together. Warfare between territories used to be common ("Lakalai").

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

Women don't have as much importance as men do. Though a woman should be respected by her brother as the carrier of their bloodline, any other man doesn't need to. Strong male bonds, male solidarity, excludes women and keeps them disadvantaged.

Stigma around menstruation and childbirth. It's thought that close and prolonged contact with women will make a man weak, especially if she is menstruating. Men stay away from newborn babies, thinking they are infected with the aura of childbirth. Women's positions in society have gone up recently because of missionaries, but still are not great ("Lakalai"). Men have easier time moving up in their world. More opportunities for men. Masked secret society only for men (Valentine).

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization:

Villages split into several smaller "hamlets," each with own men's house, feasting area, and dance plaza. Houses lived in by extended family. Shared garden and freshwater supply ("Lakalai").

Hamlets are clusters of kin groupings surrounding the patriarch. The patriarch is surrounded by his sons or other male relatives and their families. When the patriarch dies, his kin group reorganizes itself; they may stick together or scatter, either to join other kin groups or to start their own kin group. Rarely is there a pattern to the groupings besides kinship; personal disputes may lead a son to leave his father's group and join his brother-in-law's, etc. (Goodenough).

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

Villages split into several smaller "hamlets," each with own men's house (where men slept traditionally), feasting area, and dance plaza. Every adult woman has her own cooking hearth. Today, men's houses are less common ("Lakalai").

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

Mention of pandanus sleeping mats made by women ("Lakalai").

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

Matrilineal, but father's mother's side also important. Inheritance from paternal side (Valentine).

Hamlets are organized into several clans or family groups, tied together by ancestors. Sometimes these groups are loosely tied, but the core is their shared ancestry. Sons move with fathers and usually stay. (Goodenough, 6) As male members of the older generations die, their younger male kin who had grouped around them either stick close to one another or disperse to other family groups. There is a pretty constant shifting of families (Goodenough).

5.12 Trade:

Today, cash crops (especially coconuts and palm oil). Traditionally trade was considered a highly dangerous advance into enemy territory. Traded shell beads (used for money by the tribe they traded them to) for obsidian, red paint, and tortoiseshell (“Lakalai”).

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

Mention of “senior resident male” giving permission to use village land. Male dominated society (“Lakalai”).

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

Unknown.

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

Garden/war/weather specialists. Most Lakalai know at least some small spells (“Lakalai”).

6.2 Stimulants:

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

When boys were ready for marriage, groups of them, wearing special headdresses, would parade through the village. One of the few ceremonies that do not happen anymore.

Group ceremonies for girls when they put on their first leaf skirts.

Smaller ceremonies honoring: a girl’s first menarche, any time a child has a “first” (“Lakalai”).

6.4 Other rituals:

Men-only masked secret society (Valentine, 443).

Fathers are expected to sponsor the ceremonies for their children (“Lakalai”).

6.5 Myths (Creation):

Generally, the idea is that the earth and elements were already here, existing in a state of chaos. The creation of humanity, culture, life, etc. is attributed to deities, totem spirits, sometimes ancestors. Very vague (Encyclopedia of Religion).

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

“Elaborate painted bark-cloth masks and carved objects were made for ceremonies, and dances were accompanied by wooden slit gongs and hourglass drums.”

Headdresses, masks, etc. (“Lakalai”).

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

Most men know love spells, hunting and fishing magic. Women know fertility and child growth magic. Elder men said to know death-dealing spells, though deaths are usually blamed on those with famous sorcerers as their ancestors. “Both sexes rescue souls captured by ghosts and act as curers.” (“Lakalai”). Men-only masked secret society (Valentine, 443)

6.8 Missionary effect:

1920s christian missionaries arrived. Today all Lakalai are christians (“Lakalai”).

Many old beliefs stay the same. Christianity has been added to the mix but its really not too different. Interrelated christianity and traditional beliefs (Valentine, 444).

6.9 RCR revival:

Many ceremonies are still celebrated, with changes to allow for the modern culture, but still basically the same. Only one completely gone is the parade for boys ready to marry (“Lakalai”).

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

Believe that spirits of the dead hide in uncleared bush and wild seas. Kin spirits can be helpful, but other than that spirits should be avoided and they only cause trouble.

Before missionaries: dead were buried in the floor of their house. A leg bone was dug up for ceremonies and attached to a spear that had killed a man. After missionaries: dead now buried in cemeteries. Other relics besides bones are used to represent dead. Still: mourning includes seclusion of widows, giving up favorite foods (“Lakalai”).

Respect for ancestor spirits. (Valentine, 443)

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

None.

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

None.

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

One volcano god: Sumua. Spirits reside in uncleared bush and wild oceans. Spirits of kin can be helpful, but in general they only cause trouble (“Lakalai”).

Complex mix of totemic monsters, ancestors and ghosts, some human-like deities. Magic used for healing, death, fertility, etc and believed that almost everyone knows at least a few small spells. (Valentine, 443).

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

Tattooing: less common than before (Swindler, xviii)

7.2 Piercings:

Both sexes pierce/stretch ears. (Swindler, xviii)

7.3 Haircut:

Hair often dyed reddish-orange or black. Many comb it straight up. (Swindler, xviii)

7.4 Scarification:

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

Ornaments of tortoiseshell, shell, and plaited fiber (“Lakalai”).

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

Elaborate masks, headdresses, and ornaments. (“Lakalai”).

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

Women wore leaf skirts and were bare chested. Men wore wraparound sarongs and were also bare chested (“Lakalai”).

7.8 Missionary effect:

Modern clothing (“Lakalai”).

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

Making of traditional ornaments has been largely abandoned today (“Lakalai”).

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

Patri-Iroquois type (Valentine).

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

Patri-Iroquois type (Valentine).

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Numbered references

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