

Kutztown University

Research Commons at Kutztown University

Sikaiana Ethnography

Sikaiana

2020

Chapter 10, Life in Town in Intimacy and Community in a Changing World: Sikaiana Life 1980-1993

William Donner

Kutztown University of Pennsylvania

Follow this and additional works at: https://research.library.kutztown.edu/sikaiana_ethnography



Part of the [Civic and Community Engagement Commons](#), [Migration Studies Commons](#), [Polynesian Studies Commons](#), and the [Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Donner, William, "Chapter 10, Life in Town in Intimacy and Community in a Changing World: Sikaiana Life 1980-1993" (2020). *Sikaiana Ethnography*. 7.

https://research.library.kutztown.edu/sikaiana_ethnography/7

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Sikaiana at Research Commons at Kutztown University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sikaiana Ethnography by an authorized administrator of Research Commons at Kutztown University. For more information, please contact czerny@kutztown.edu.

x

TOWN LIFE AND COMMUNITY LIFE

One afternoon in 1987 I was sitting with a mother and her son on the breezy veranda of a house overlooking the coast. The mother and son got into a humorous quarrel about Sikaiana life. The son had an advanced college degree and the mother had received very little formal education, although she spoke Pijin and, like most Sikaiana, can read and write in the Sikaiana vernacular.

The son, a bachelor at that time despite encouragement from relatives to marry, jokingly criticized the Sikaiana women living in Honiara by claiming that they were too unsophisticated or *tu lokolo*, 'too local'. They walk around the streets of Honiara with a simple piece of trade cloth wrapped around their bodies, instead of dresses and skirts. His mother, who usually wore a dress when shopping in town, went to their defense. She had heard that women in Samoan and Tongan towns dress in trade cloth. If this dress was good enough for these people, considered sophisticated by Solomon Islands standards, it should be all right for Honiara. The son laughed and reiterated that many of the Sikaiana women were simply unsophisticated.

The mother, however, was not out of fire. She said that the son did not have any right to talk about sophistication or criticize his fellow Sikaiana for lacking it. After all, she reminded him, she had given birth to him in a leaf house on a leaf mat. With a laugh, she told the son that she could understand if his younger brother complained about someone's lack of sophistication. She had given birth to that son in a hospital. But he, whose entry into life had been on humble leaf mat, should never criticize someone else for lacking sophistication.

This interaction was not wholly serious. The son, one of the most intelligent people I know, doesn't always think in terms of sophistication and Westernization, nor does he really judge Sikaiana women by such simplistic standards. I also know the mother was very proud of her son's education. In this particular encounter, his mother was cutting him down to size by reminding him of his humble origins.

This interaction used a humorous frame and the pervasive opposition between men and women to discuss the social changes. As in much of Sikaiana social life, new practices were being examined in traditional formats.

Generally, the Sikaiana are fascinated with the technology and power of the West. They want to take part in both its material wealth and fashions. But they also are wary about its consequences for their life style and culture. It was to study such issues of change that I had returned to the Solomon Islands in 1987.

Several months later the mother died. Her illness and death were not only attended by her close relatives. Many Sikaiana took off from work to attend her funeral. Most Sikaiana living in Honiara came. Even those with whom she had quarreled attended her funeral. Several flatbed trucks had to be hired to transport people to her

burial. She was buried at Tenaru, after a short ceremony in the church there. Her death was not simply a personal and family event. For the Sikaiana emigrants residing in Honiara, it was also a community event.

Return to the Solomon Islands

In 1987 I returned to the Solomon Islands to do more field work. I wanted to focus on culture and language change and complete the long-delayed printing of a dictionary of their language. I planned to focus my research on social change, especially the development of careers and the manner in which there was change in speaking the Sikaiana language as a result of migration and the use of Pijin and English.

The most obvious change on the atoll was the result of a cyclone in 1986. It was powerful enough to make American newspapers. (In fact, I first learned about the cyclone from a student in one of my classes who had heard me lecture about my fieldwork and had read about the cyclone in the newspaper.) Sikaiana lost all its leaf houses, garden crops, and nuts from its coconut trees. Fortunately, no one died. Rescue teams brought in food and tents for shelter. By the time of my arrival about a year later, the atoll was readjusting. The area at Taha, where the cyclone hit with its fullest force, was smashed. In the interior, trees seemed more crooked and bent than I remembered, but by the time I arrived in July 1987 their leaves had grown back. There were a few benefits derived from the disaster. The leaf houses were all new and much neater. Foreign aid programs built new water storage tanks, a new school building, and the frame for a clinic. The roof of the church was redone while I was there. The atoll had acquired several fiberglass boats left by various relief programs, but they were still without outboard motors for them. The atoll also was provided relief: sacks of rice and boxes of tinned fish. (The tinned fish started a series of Sikaiana jokes which had a theme similar to "ice to Eskimos.") The taro had been killed by salt water which rose underneath the atoll and up through the swamps. Although the taro plants were just starting to mature again, they were later destroyed by a blight. Coconuts were just starting to mature. Life seemed to be going on much as before, although partly subsidized by various relief programs, including those organized by the Sikaiana migrants who were residing in Honiara.

There were some changes on the atoll. The priest had retired and the new one, a younger Sikaiana man, had lifted the restrictions which limited the times when women were permitted to drink fermented toddy. He also had some competition for the religious allegiance of the Sikaiana. A Sikaiana man and his wife had returned from Papua New Guinea and were holding Bible classes for the Seventh Day Adventist religion. Although they had no converts at the time of my stay, some people did attend their Bible lessons. A new law had been passed empowering traditional councils to hear land tenure cases, and Sikaiana was awash with a new set of hearings about some very old disputes. Without any copra to market and with its building completely leveled by the storm, the cooperative store was out of operation.

Nevertheless, I noticed the biggest difference in Sikaiana life not on the atoll, but instead in Honiara. In 1987 there were more events which united the Sikaiana migrants

there. As in 1980-1983, the Sikaiana living in Honiara gathered together for marriage exchanges. In addition, there were new committees and clubs which supported various activities for Sikaiana migrants. A committee collected money to help the atoll recover from the cyclone. An association was formed to foster Sikaiana participation in sports and also to encourage the preservation of Sikaiana activities, especially dances. Moreover, in 1980-1983, I had not been in Honiara for any funerals. In 1987, I became aware that funerals are occasions for Sikaiana migrants to gather together.

Honiara's inhabitants are from all parts of the Solomon Islands. There are over 60 different language groups in the Solomon Islands and this reflects the ethnic diversity of both the nation and its capital. There are Polynesians from Tikopia, Anuta, Ontong Java, Rennell-Bellona, and, of course, from Sikaiana. The Sikaiana feel some general affinity for these Polynesians based upon similarities in language and heritage. This affinity is especially strong with the people of Ontong Java with whom there is a long history of contact beginning with Tehui Atahu and Tehui Luaniu and the legendary founding of Sikaiana. The Sikaiana affinity for the Tikopians is tempered by their disdain for the Tikopian respect system which still honors that island's chiefs. The egalitarian Sikaiana cannot understand why people crawl before someone or give away their best fish to a chief.

Living in Honiara, there are people from Malaita, the island nearest to Sikaiana, which itself has various different language groups and some diversity in cultural traditions. As a group, the Sikaiana regard Malaitans with some timidity for their alleged aggressiveness. But as is so often the case with these prejudices, they are friendly with the Malaitans they know personally and in recent years there has been intermarriage with them. There are people from the Santa Cruz and Makira Islands. There are the very dark-skinned people from the Western provinces, who as a group are among the most Westernized of the Solomon Islanders. Of all the Melanesians, many Sikaiana are most comfortable around people from Isabel Province. Isabelans share the Sikaiana devotion to the Church of Melanesia and are sympathetic to Sikaiana needs for land. There are people from Guadalcanal, whom the Sikaiana regard as fortunate for having rights to land which is located near Honiara.

Honiara Households

When I lived in Honiara, I almost always stayed with Sikaiana families. Like other young men, *tamataane*, I often slept in the large rooms at the houses' entrance. These rooms are truly family or living rooms which are used for eating, sitting and hosting visitors during the day. At night, people sleep in the room, often under mosquito nets. Beyond these living rooms are separate bedrooms where others sleep. Although arrangements vary, a married couple and some of their younger children often sleep in one bedroom, and then unmarried young women and older children in the other.

In late 1982 and early 1983, I stayed with the family of Moses Teui in one of the houses at Vura. This is the house where Temotu died in 1987. The house has two bedrooms and a large living room. Moses is a carpenter who at that time worked for the

town's Housing Authority. Moses had spent several years in Auckland, New Zealand, where he had apprenticed and acquired his certificate as a carpenter. He is a quiet, friendly man, always easy-going. He is one of the few Sikaiana men who never drinks alcohol. Moses had four sons. Three of them were living in his house. One son lived on Sikaiana with his sister. Moses also had two foster children living with him during my stay: Kupe, the daughter of his wife's brother, who in 1982 was a precocious ten year old and in 1987, a fifteen year old student; and the son of a cousin, Armstrong, who was named after the American astronaut.

With him lived Ralph Evesi, his patrilineal first cousin who was helping to pay the mortgage for the house. (On the maternal side of his family, Ralph was the first cousin of Vinta, Mose's wife.) Ralph had worked in various parts of the Solomon Islands as a book-keeper and during my stay was working for one of the shipping companies at its offices in Ranadi. Ralph walked with a limp from polio. He had never married. He was a kind, friendly, intelligent, and well-humored man.

Not far past the road to Vura is another road, leading to Kukum, a settlement of smaller concrete houses, many of which were built by the government. I spent several months in 1981 and 1982 staying with Frank Saovete and his family who lived there. Frank Saovete worked as a mechanic in one of the garages in town. Sometimes, he took moonlighting jobs working on cars, and there always seemed to be a hopeless-looking broken-down car in the back of his little yard. When he was a young man, Frank had been acclaimed among the Sikaiana as one of the most capable composers of guitar songs. He was among the first of the Sikaiana young men to play the guitar and compose. People recall that in his youth he spent all day playing the guitar. When he married, he stopped composing. But many of his songs are still sung and I consider him one of the most lyrical of the Sikaiana composers. His wife, Pookai, was a large funny woman who told me that one time, after her husband had been drinking (by Sikaiana standards he is far from a heavy drinker), she made a point about beer consumption and household finances by presenting him with a pot of cooked beer cans for dinner. Pookai is the oldest daughter of my Sikaiana neighbor, Reuben Tenai.

Frank's house had two bedrooms, a separate kitchen and bath, and a large living room at its entrance. I slept in the living room with a bachelor, Leonard. Leonard was a relative of Pookai's and a friend of Frank's. Like Frank, he had composed songs during his youth. At that time, he worked in the government's printing department. Frank and Pookai stayed there with several of their children. One child was on Sikaiana with Pookai's father, Reuben. Sometimes their son stayed with Pookai's sister, who lived nearby. At times the house was not very crowded, at least by Sikaiana standards. At other times, Pookai's sisters and family came from Sikaiana and the house was packed with people.

For most of 1987, I stayed with Brown. Brown's house is large and luxurious by Solomon Island's standards. The house was built for an ex-patriate during the Protectorate period. There is a small house behind it for the servants, now used by the government for housing. Behind the porch, there is a large, sunny, breezy living room. The room is decorated with shells, paintings and pictures from all around the world.

There is a picture of the British Royal Family. There are several bookcases, a radio-cassette player, and a VCR with television. The house has two separate bedrooms and a storage room that is also used as a bedroom.

The house was crowded. Brown lived there with four of his six children. One of his daughters, Cathy, sometimes stayed with him and sometimes with his mother, Temotu (who, until her death often stayed with her other sons). Brown also had three foster children living with him.

Brown's wife Kate has a sharp sense of humor and tongue to match. Kate's sister, Joan, in her early twenties, usually stayed with the family to help out by looking after the children, cooking and washing. Tui Savalau, a male relative of Kate's, also lived with them. With financing from Brown and his brothers, Savalau had tried to operate a business driving a taxi-van between Honiara and the plantations at the Commonwealth Development Corporation about 15 miles away along the coast. There are numerous privately owned vans which make money by carrying passengers between the center of town and its suburbs. But the van kept breaking down, and Frank Saovete, who usually worked on it, could not get the parts needed to fix it. Savalau helped around the house, until he found a job with the government as a driver.

Erik, a young man, also lived with Brown. Erik's father had taken Brown as a foster son, and Brown had always taken an interest in Erik's welfare and education. A recent graduate of the national high school, King George VI, Erik worked in a bank. Erik's brother Luke also lived in the house. A young man in his late teens, Luke had trouble finding steady work and took on various part-time and temporary jobs. Typical of Sikaiana's overlapping relations, Luke had been the foster son of Kate's parents and brought up in the same household as Kate's sister, Joan.

Life In Town

In contrast to Sikaiana where the daily schedule is structured around the church, the daily schedule for most of the Sikaiana living in Honiara is structured around their employment. Morning meals are simple, often just tea and bread. Wealthier families, such as Brown's, may have jam or butter to put on their bread. About 8:00 AM on weekdays the men leave for work. Many Sikaiana women are housewives: a new role for the Sikaiana where they spend their time looking after children, cooking, washing, and keeping house. Sikaiana women say that their life on the atoll is extremely busy because they must go to the bush everyday to tend taro gardens and harvest coconuts. Life in towns is much less demanding for them, but it can also be boring. Claiming that they don't have time for plaiting when they are on Sikaiana, some women bring pandanus from Sikaiana to town in order to plait sleeping mats. Some Sikaiana women work for wages. A few are secretaries, others are clerks in the stores. A few like Sale are in the professions, especially nursing and teaching.

If people work near home or have their own cars, they sometimes return for a meal at noon. If work is far, then they return in the evening between five and six. Evening meals often include rice and some tinned fish or tinned meat. Sometimes

fresh fish is bought in the market, as is sweet potato, tapioca and other garden produce. Occasionally, the people living in town go fishing but most fish is purchased from vendors. Wealthier families eat fresh meat with their evening meals; poorer families might simply add a little tinned fish to their rice.

In the evenings and on weekends people visit with one another. On weekends, men, especially young men, drink beer. Many Sikaiana living in Honiara attend Sunday church services, and then spend Sunday afternoon visiting with families in Bahai, Kukum and Vura, neighborhoods which are within walking distance of the church. Occasionally, after the Sunday church service, there are meetings of the Sikaiana residents in Honiara to discuss matters of common concern. Usually, these meetings are held in the courtyard behind the Sikaiana residences in Bahai Center.

The Sikaiana have mixed feelings about life in Honiara as opposed to their life back on the atoll. Many adult Sikaiana have lived both in towns and on the atoll. Life in Honiara is sometimes viewed as fearful because of the alleged hostility of some non-Sikaiana Solomon Islanders. Although I am not aware of any unprovoked violence, many Sikaiana say that they fear it. At community events in 1987, such as fundraising activities, participation is restricted to Sikaiana and their guests in order to control fights and disruptions. Occasionally, the Ontong Java people are invited. Choosing to ignore the complaints about drunken young men or night creeping, people claim to be able to walk about Sikaiana without fear. They say that no one is afraid to go anywhere or sleep anywhere on Sikaiana. This, they claim, is not possible in Honiara where they are frightened by possible violence.

People living away from the atoll also say that they fear the use of harmful magic by non-Sikaiana. The Sikaiana claim that they never had any harmful magic (although some people did know love magic, some of which was claimed to be learned from the 19th century Kiribati immigrants). Whenever they explained the word for this harmful magic, *lapu*, they were sure to add that it never existed on Sikaiana. Harmful magic, the Sikaiana claim, is used by people from other lands, not the Sikaiana. There were several cases in which young women were described as behaving in a peculiar or crazy manner and this was attributed to a spell placed on them by a non-Sikaiana. Although such accusations are not frequent, they are a part of Sikaiana life in Honiara. Nevertheless, life in Honiara has its attractions. Some young women once told me that they preferred life in Honiara to that on the atoll because Honiara was "exciting," or as the Sikaiana say, 'it has life' (*hai ola*).

Preferences about living on the atoll or in town are often couched in terms of economic choices and freedom. Some people talk about life on Sikaiana as offering economic freedom. One woman told me that in towns she has to rely on her children in order to survive, but on Sikaiana she is able to work for herself. She prefers the independence offered by life on Sikaiana. A man told me that he quit his work as a mechanic for Lever Brothers because he was tired of working for the profit of others. On Sikaiana, this man works for himself. It is frequently asserted that in town it is possible to die from hunger. Although this has never happened, it reflects the Sikaiana assumption that cash is necessary for survival away from the atoll. On Sikaiana, people

explain that they can have a livelihood through fishing, gardening and harvesting coconuts. In fact, sometimes it is said that a family will go to Sikaiana in order to save money by living on the atoll's resources and collecting copra. But no one ever got rich by collecting copra on Sikaiana.

Other Sikaiana take a different view. They describe working for wages as providing a different kind of economic freedom. This is the freedom to buy the material goods many Sikaiana now consider necessary for their lives. Many people point out that there is nothing to develop on Sikaiana. Nothing to build upon and leave for one's children. People who have saved money and purchased land away from Sikaiana proudly point to this as an accomplishment not possible for those who stay on Sikaiana.

Among some Sikaiana there is a concept of careerism. This is most evident among those who feel that they have had a religious "calling," to be a priest, a catechist, or to join one of the religious orders. Often, this religious calling is first encountered in a dream. One man described himself as having a "gift" for navigating ships and then later a "gift" for work as a catechist. George Vanteiti, a Sikaiana convert to the Seventh Day Adventist religion, has taken upon himself the difficult task of trying to convert Sikaiana's residents to his new religion. He told me that he felt he had to follow his inner beliefs no matter what the adversity. This adversity included a skeptical Sikaiana audience and some opposition from local religious authorities.

Some other people working in the professions told me that they felt that they had certain predispositions to their chosen careers. This predisposition might be as simple as the claim that they chose carpentry as a career because they like working with their hands. At the more specialized extreme, one young man who studied to be a lawyer told me that he wanted to continue his studies as a lawyer for as long as possible out of his own interest in the law. He also wanted to use his knowledge to help his nation and the Sikaiana people.

The Sikaiana often use the English words, "plan" or "hope" to describe their career or life goals. One man, tired of the regimented life of working for wages, told me all his "hopes" were with life on Sikaiana. Another man, frustrated with Sikaiana's lack of opportunity for development, told me that his every "hope" is in the opportunities offered in town.

Many Sikaiana describe their occupational decisions in terms of helping people. They explain that they entered their various professions, such as teaching, law, or medicine, in order to help other Sikaiana people. The older generation of people who attended mission schools were often encouraged to enter certain professions, especially teaching, by the clergy of the Melanesian Mission. This was part of the Melanesian Mission's strategy for conversion. But younger people schooled in the government system also describe their motivations as based upon a desire to help the Sikaiana people. The Sikaiana also mention salaries as a factor in career decisions. Like most Americans, many Sikaiana people keep in mind the pay scales of various occupations and professions when making decisions about a career.

The Sikaiana Community in Honiara

The Sikaiana migrants in Honiara live in more dispersed surroundings than their relatives on the atoll. They do not constantly meet one another during the course of the day as happens on a small atoll. They live in different neighborhoods and work at different jobs. They do not participate as directly in the administrative institutions of Honiara as their relatives do on the atoll. Nevertheless, most of them maintain ties with one another in a variety of ways and participate in communal events.

Small groups of Sikaiana migrants often try to live together in one locality. At the Bahai Center, there are five contiguous houses which are all occupied by Sikaiana families. At Tenaru beach outside of Honiara, six plots of land were bought by Sikaiana families. More recently, a large plot of land contiguous to this one has been purchased by about ten different Sikaiana people. Outside of Kia, Isabel, several Sikaiana families have purchased tracts of land near to one other.

The Sikaiana people living in town unite in several different activities. Marriage exchanges are held there, often in the relative isolation and open space of Tenaru. On these occasions, large numbers of Sikaiana contribute money and clothing, and participate in the exchanges and drinking that often follows. In 1980-1983, many Sikaiana marriages were marked by separate exchanges, one on Sikaiana and another in Honiara. By 1987, it seemed that many people held only one set of exchanges and close relatives travelled to attend these events. Town residents sometimes waited for their yearly leave to hold the exchange of close family members on Sikaiana.

Funerals are another occasion when Sikaiana living in Honiara congregate. During the time when someone is ailing, relatives, foster children and others gather to visit and care for the person. During my stay in 1987, two elderly people died in Honiara. Both of them were placed in the large rooms of a house. Women sat at the side of body, while other people sang hymns through the night. These occasions were not totally somber. Both before and after the death, there were informal conversations among those present. The Sikaiana frequently accept death with resignation. They say that the deceased reached their time to die, *tona aho*, 'his/her day,' with fatalistic matter-of-factness.

The people who come to visit the body and spend the night are fed by the family of the deceased. There are usually one or two feasts which attract large numbers of Sikaiana, including those who were not always on friendly terms with the deceased. Visitors bring trade cloth to be buried with the deceased. At the two funerals I attended, many, if not all, of the Sikaiana residing in Honiara arrived for these occasions. A message is sent to Sikaiana either on the shortwave or on a broadcast of the national radio system. In both funerals, several flatback trucks had to be hired to take people to Tenaru where there was a short service in the church, followed by the interment.

The Sikaiana living in Honiara have organized several committees to represent the concerns of the Sikaiana residing there. One committee was supposed to advise the

representative of Sikaiana and Ontong Java in the National Parliament. Brown Saua organized several meetings to try to establish a resettlement committee for purchasing land for Sikaiana migrants. In 1987, I found that the Sikaiana propensity to form committees had developed among emigrants living in Honiara. They had formed several viable organizations and committees, all concerned with raising money to help various Sikaiana activities, both on the atoll and away from it. There were fundraising activities which collected money for various projects affecting the Sikaiana people as a whole.

After I left in 1983, I was told about a series of Sikaiana fundraising events to collect money to build a new church for the Sikaiana settlement at Tenaru. When I returned in 1987, new pretty church stood completed there. Once a month a priest visited the church and gave Communion. The funerals of both people who died in town were held there.

After the 1986 cyclone, the Sikaiana living in Honiara had organized a disaster committee which raised money to assist the atoll. Walkathons were held in which each person who walked asked others to sponsor a pledge for the distance walked. These sponsors included other Sikaiana, and also people from other ethnic groups. The Sikaiana held fairs in which food, beer, fermented toddy, and raffle prizes were sold. During my first stay in 1980-1983, weddings and holidays (often weddings were held on holidays) were occasions when large numbers of Sikaiana gathered together to dance, sing and drink. In 1987, fundraising events were another occasion for congregating Sikaiana emigrants residing in Honiara.

The Sikaiana living in town also formed their own sports associations. In Honiara there was a woman's netball league which competed regularly. Two teams composed entirely of Sikaiana emigrants entered into the competition (one team included one person from the neighboring Polynesian outlier, Ontong Java). One of the teams, *Uila* ('lightening') consisted largely of younger women; the other, *Kaniva* ('rainbow') was made up of more mature women, many of them married. Both teams had first and second squads which competed in separate divisions of the league. Each team had its own distinctive uniform made by its members. Between the members of the two teams, there was usually a good natured, although sometimes taunting, rivalry.

During my stay in 1987, both teams organized their own fundraising events to support their activities. *Uila* held Western style dances in a clubhouse which they rented. *Kaniva* rented video tapes and charged admission to see them and also charged for food served to people who watched the videos. *Kaniva* also held one walkathon. At about the same time, the Sikaiana men living in Honiara began organizing their own sports club, *Vania*, named after a large and distinctive rock which rises above the shallow water on the reef at Sikaiana. *Vania* was formed to organize the sports activities of Sikaiana emigrants which included their entries into the tryouts for the Solomon Islands team at the 1988 Olympics in Seoul. It also organized sports competitions among the Sikaiana, entered teams in the various sports leagues in Honiara, preserved Sikaiana recreational traditions, and performed Sikaiana dances.

Vania developed a much more formal organization than either *Uila* or *Kaniva*. They organized a supervising committee which held regular meetings and included a president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary, as well as six committee members. There were membership fees and the organization adopted a charter or constitution regulating membership. They planned to incorporate themselves as a charitable trust under the laws of the Solomon Islands.

By the end of my stay in September 1987, *Vania* was successfully organizing events. Every Sunday, after church service, Sikaiana people gathered at the St. Nicholas School sports field which is on a little hill overlooking the Bahai and Kukum sections of Honiara. People came from nearby areas of Honiara and its suburbs. I estimated about 200 people were there on one Sunday afternoon. This is a substantial proportion of the approximately 300 Sikaiana living in the Honiara area. The participants were almost exclusively Sikaiana. There were round robin matches with teams associated with the various neighborhoods where Sikaiana resided (Kolali, Town Ground, Bahai, Tenaru). The teams competed for small prizes.

I attended two fundraising events for *Vania*. One was held at the Sikaiana settlement at Tenaru. Another fundraising event was held at the yard of *Vania*'s president who lives in the Kolali section of Honiara. Both events were similar in organization. By and large, participation was limited to Sikaiana people. Because alcohol is served, the Sikaiana are reluctant to invite other Solomon Islanders whose drunken behavior may prove difficult to control. There are sales of food including baked sausage, mincemeat, pig, chicken, puddings, sweet potato and other dishes. There were raffle prizes. There are games of chance with beer and soft drinks as prizes. A main attraction is beer, which is often bought on credit from Honiara merchants and then sold or raffled at a marked-up price. The profits are used to support the teams. As will be explained in the next chapters, drinking is often a community event integral to the enjoyment of festive occasions including marriages and holidays. At both *Vania* fundraising events, Sikaiana dancers performed dances.

Externally, the sports association represents Sikaiana as a distinctive group, an "ethnicity," to other Solomon Islanders. Internally, among the Sikaiana, it unites the Sikaiana people residing in Honiara for the purposes of participating together in sports and preserving their traditions. Both objectives are explicitly stated in an official charter of the *Vania* Sports Association which explicitly states that the Sikaiana fear losing their traditional culture and formed the association in order to preserve it and display it for others.

Vania is modelled on Western bureaucratic institutions and in part it was formed to organize participation in Western sports, notably softball, soccer and netball. In this sense it is a modern institution derived from Western contact. But its administrative organization is used to preserve traditional activities and maintain ties among Sikaiana emigrants. Its fundraising events often included the consumption of beer and its activities included the presentation of Sikaiana dances. Singing, dancing and drinking are all important ways in which the Sikaiana preserve and develop their community and ethnic identity. The Sikaiana used modern organizational mechanisms to maintain their

distinctive practices and personal relations.

Tenaru

In 1993, I had the opportunity to return to the Solomon Islands for a short visit of three weeks. Brown had moved his family to Tenaru where they lived in a house that he had built while he rented out the house at Lingakiki. Tenaru had changed since I had first been there thirteen years earlier. About fifteen Sikaiana families bought land next to that already owned by other Sikaiana families. Many new houses had been built there and formed small clearings in what had formerly been rice fields and a palm plantation. The church had been enlarged and there were daily services, and a Sunday school.

Brown's house had three bedrooms and a large living room. Brown, his wife and youngest children slept in the main bedroom. The older children and young women slept in another bedroom, and young adult unmarried men slept in the other bedroom. There was electricity and even a telephone line. Several acres were cleared around the house with a few trees. There was more land which was not being cleared inland of the house. Cooking was done outside in a separate shed and there was a large wooden table next to the cooking shed for meals. There were several small structures which Brown had built to raise chickens, although there were not any chickens in them while I was there.

One of the most surprising changes was the introduction of cash into the local social relations of Tenaru's residents. Many families had small businesses. One family baked ringcakes (donuts) every morning and sold them to other families. Another young man sold fish he caught. Another man raised and sold chickens. An older man ran a small store out of his house and sold soap, tobacco and other goods. A man had a VCR and charged a small admission for neighbors to watch films. Later, I learned that another man sold bottles of fermented coconut toddy. Most of the customers for these businesses are other Sikaiana people. Although small in scale they reflect a new form of economic relationships. Most exchanges among the Sikaiana are based upon reciprocity: as mentioned in previous chapters, people provide aid out of kindness or the expectation for support in the future.ⁱ

In my previous stays on Sikaiana, I knew that a few people had started small stores which sold goods to neighbors. But these stores seemed to constantly dissolve as relatives would ask for credit and operators found it difficult to demand payment. There were a few Sikaiana entrepreneurs in town who cooked fish and chip lunches and then sold them in Honiara, although not usually to other Sikaiana people. Several Sikaiana people had opened small chicken businesses in Tenaru where they raised chickens and sold them in town.

These new businesses at Tenaru were quite different in that there was an assumption that goods and services would be sold among the Sikaiana people for cash. It is hard to determine how these new businesses will develop but they suggest an important source of change in Sikaiana relations which may undercut traditional patterns of reciprocity.

In 1993, life in town seemed more difficult. Honiara's population was increasing and the town seemed more crowded with more people who seemed to have less to do. There were many young men hanging around Tenaru who had no steady employment. Some had been unemployed since my last visit in 1987.

But there were also many community activities. Vania had been disbanded, but the Sikaiana people were continuously collecting money for their local church at Tenaru. Whereas in 1987, the main community fundraising was directed towards the Disaster Committee and Vania, in 1993 the church at Tenaru was a continuing community effort. There were competitive fundraising events, raffles and picnics. My first weekend, there was a fundraising event at a local club where people were charged admission to hear a local band and food was sold. The day I left there was another fundraising event for the church at Tenaru in which food was sold and people paid an entrance fee to drink fermented toddy.

The Sikaiana population keeps increasing. The atoll's carrying capacity remains constant and most people must move to town to live. There, they directly encounter a variety of global forces which disembed them from their indigenous relations. For the most part, they need cash to survive and must work for wages to attain it. If they cannot find work, they become totally dependent on the others. They encounter people from other parts of the Solomon Islands who have different cultures. More importantly, they are exposed to the life of Honiara which is constantly changing by creolizing indigenous Solomon Islands values with Western cultural practices, and then recreolizing the synthesis with Western cultural practices. Sikaiana relations become disembedded in a variety of ways, but at the same time there are attempts to re-embed them. People charge relatives for goods and services but they also try to maintain their distinctive communal living in their settlement at Tenaru. They follow the universalistic teachings of Christianity, but focus their religious efforts at establishing their own local church. They follow Western bureaucratic models and practices in developing organizations which raise funds for their local community institutions and activities.ⁱⁱ

ⁱ As mentioned earlier, in 2019, Robert and Priscilla told me that these type of commercial, cash exchanges now exist on Sikaiana.

ⁱⁱ Robert and Priscilla told me in 2019 that for the last there has been an annual festival and celebration held at Tenaru. There are games and other celebrations drawing Sikaiana people from all over the Solomon Islands. In addition, there is now a cultural village at Tenaru, established for tourists, where Sikaiana people display their traditional arts and dances.