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Chapter 2, Getting There in Intimacy and Community in a Changing World: Sikaiana Life 1980-1993

William Donner

Kutztown University of Pennsylvania

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II: GETTING THERE

It was late in the morning when I first arrived in the Solomon Islands. Henderson Airport is located on a narrow coastal plain, a few miles outside of Honiara, the capital and main town of the nation.

It was hot.

Only one story tall, the airport terminal building is much smaller than the ones I had travelled through on my trip from Philadelphia. Henderson Airport doesn't have any enclosed walkways, ramps or spokes. A staircase is wheeled to the airplane and passengers disembark directly into the tropical heat and glare.

The airport, when one gets to know it, is open, airy and informal. Since terrorism is not a problem in this part of the world, there are none of the guards, metal detectors, and walls of security which are ever-present in American airports. But I was used to airports that are enclosed, temperature controlled, and full of mechanized barricades. I also was tired and disoriented from my flight. That first morning, rather than friendliness and informality, I felt uncertainty and vulnerability.

The other passengers rushed into the terminal. Not sure what I was supposed to do, or even where I was going, I simply followed everyone else. There was a line and I got at the end of it. Ahead I could see that it was for Immigration. When my turn came, a smiling man in a neat khaki uniform asked for my passport, visa and an airline ticket to a forward destination. I only had a passport. I planned to buy my return ticket when I knew when and how I would be leaving. The immigration officer hesitated and seemed puzzled for a moment. I wondered if I was going to be thrown out of the Solomon Islands within ten minutes of arriving. Then the officer smiled, banged down a couple times on my passport and told me in clear English to come to the Immigration Office later in the week.

I followed another line of people to pick up my baggage. Then there were several lines for Customs. When my turn finally came, my camera and tape-recording equipment were closely examined. Aware that I could be slapped with an import tax (a major source of revenue for the Solomon Islands government), I mumbled that it was part of a research project. I don't know whether or not the customs agent understood what I had said. But after a close perusal, giving me another easy smile, she waved me by.



By this time the flight's passengers had disappeared and I was the last person in the small lobby and waiting area of the airport. After the rush and tension of going through Immigration and Customs, I suddenly was aware that I was completely alone. Everyone seemed to have somewhere to go and to know how to get there. I had no idea of what I was doing, where I was going, or how I was supposed to get there.

I knew that Honiara was somewhere near the airport but I had no idea how far away it was or even where I was going to spend the night once I got there. Already, the airport seemed deserted. The passengers had rushed to taxis and vans and sped off to wherever they were going. There are very few international flights to the Solomon Islands, and in between their arrivals, except for a few local flights, the airport is deserted. I got to the airport's entrance but there were no taxis or vans in sight.

I had come to the Solomon Islands to do ethnographic research for my PhD thesis among the people of Sikaiana, a small atoll about 100 miles into the Pacific Ocean away from airport. I had spent the last few years of my life studying, reading and writing grant proposals. But, for me, Sikaiana was nothing much more than a name, a tiny dot on a few maps of the Pacific Ocean (most world maps don't include it). Alone in the airport lobby, I was sure of only one thing: if I was going to start my research project, somehow I had to get out of the airport.

Bill Davenport, my dissertation advisor, had spent several years doing fieldwork in the Solomon Islands. He had given me the names of some people to look up in Honiara, along with others to try to avoid. But no one was preparing for my arrival. He told me that the cheapest hotel in Honiara was an establishment named the "Hibiscus," and being on a tight budget, I thought I'd try to get a room there. If I could find transportation, I figured that I would tell the driver, "take me to the Hibiscus," and see where that got me. Like everything else about the Solomon Islands to me at that time, "Hibiscus" was just a word, in fact a word for a flower not a hotel. The driver might not speak English; the Hibiscus might be out of business; it might have a new name; I might pronounce it wrong. I knew a name but I wasn't sure about the meaning that would be attached to it.

A van with the words "Sol-Air" (the name of the national airline of the Solomon Islands) pulled up in front of the airport entrance. There were no passengers in the van and the driver hastily got out and went about some business inside the terminal. Because there was no one around, I suspected it was on some official business and not for passengers. But desperate to get away from the airport, I began moving my luggage toward it. Loading my luggage into the back of the van, I kept waiting for someone in a uniform to stop me and advise me that the van was on official business and not for passengers.

Several other people appeared. I had no idea from where because the airport had seemed deserted. They began loading their luggage. The driver reappeared and got back into the van. The driver looked preoccupied, but then so did everyone in the van. He and the rest of the passengers had the quiet determination of people who know what they are doing. I envied them for it. No one noticed me and yet I felt horribly

conspicuous. The driver turned and looked at each passenger. In totally self-assured, calm and certain tones, each one said some unfamiliar words to which I could not attach any specific meaning but assumed were destinations. I wasn't even sure whether or not they were speaking English. The driver turned to me. I said the word "Hibiscus" in the hope that the driver understood English and that he would know what I was talking about, even if I didn't. He did not ask me anything more but simply moved his eyes to take a destination from the passenger sitting next to me. I must have said something meaningful. I was on my way.

The airport is several miles outside of Honiara. We travelled at about 40 miles an hour along a dusty two-lane road. This was my first look at the Solomon Islands and it wasn't reassuring. The scattered houses along the way seemed rundown. Some were of leaf; others had flat board walls with rusting corrugated iron roofs. Most houses looked as if they were in some degree of disrepair. This wasn't the exotic foreign culture I had read about in anthropology books. Nor were there the majestic settings I had seen in the pages of *National Geographic* or on television. In preparing me for fieldwork, Bill Davenport warned me against over-emphasizing the exotic and primitive and ignoring the many changes taking place in the Solomon Islands. I had left the United States prepared for a Solomon Islands influenced by Westernization. But I wasn't prepared for what I saw on that first ride into Honiara. It looked like rusty, dusty, sun-bleached modernization.

I was nauseous from dust, heat, jetlag, and uncertainty.

The van followed the coast. After about fifteen minutes, we arrived at an area where there were some one- and two-story buildings which looked comparatively well kept. They had large front windows and painted signs. Something familiar-- they were stores. Although I didn't know it until later, we were driving through Honiara's commercial district. It is not very developed, even by small country standards. Small towns in Fiji, where I had spent the previous few days, are larger, with taller buildings, and stores there possess bigger display windows.

The van was now stopping occasionally and letting off passengers. Soon there was only me and one other man left. I began to wonder if I had missed my stop. Maybe I said the wrong words. Maybe the driver had already stopped at the Hibiscus and I didn't know it. The van turned several corners into what I took to be a back street, although I really wasn't sure about what was central or peripheral. Then it pulled into a shady alley. The one other passenger didn't make a motion to get out. The stop, I deduced, had to be mine. There was no sign that I could see and I wasn't sure this was the right place. I could see a restaurant and so assumed there might be a hotel.

I now know exactly how to get from the airport to the Hibiscus. I can visualize the streets, the bridges, the shops, and landmarks along the way. I can match most of these places with specific people whom I came to know and events that took place over the course of several years. The trip no longer brings forth an image of either modernization or dilapidation. It is familiar; simply the way things are. I have happily bought cigarettes, soap, and dried milk in the stores which looked so formidable in their

simplicity. I know that inside those modest houses with rusting roofs and masonite walls, people live lives which are full of happiness and sorrow, satisfaction and frustration. But on that first trip everything was a disconcerting blur.

I chose Sikaiana as a research project because I was interested in studying a society among the small and comparatively isolated islands of Oceania (Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia). After talking over my interests to Bill Davenport, he suggested that I look into doing research on Sikaiana or Stewart Island, a small atoll located about 100 miles east of Malaita in the Solomon Islands. Bill had done years of field research in the Solomon Islands. He knew that Sikaiana men had worked on government and trade boats in the Solomon Islands. It was one of the very few Polynesian cultures which had not been described by anthropologists.

The Solomon Islands is a former British Protectorate which became independent in 1978. On my first arrival in 1980, The Solomon Islands had a population of about 200,000 people. There are over 60 different languages spoken by the different ethnic groups in the Solomon Islands. Sikaiana is one of the smallest of these groups with a population in 1980 of about 600 people. Sikaiana is inhabited by people whose language, culture and heritage are Polynesian.

The Polynesian culture area is often referred to as a triangle: starting at Hawaii on the north, one leg travels southwest to encompass Tonga, Samoa and New Zealand; then the triangle's base travels east across most of the Pacific Ocean, past Tahiti and the Marquesas Islands to Easter Island; then the last leg runs back to Hawaii. Sikaiana is located outside of this triangle's western leg, much closer to Melanesia, the diverse culture area which includes the peoples of coastal New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji. Sikaiana along with some other islands and atolls on the margins of Melanesia and Micronesia were settled by Polynesians who migrated west out of the Polynesian triangle, mostly from Samoa and Tuvalu (Ellice Islands). Collectively these islands inhabited by Polynesians along the fringes of Melanesia and Micronesia are called "Polynesian outliers." These outliers are comparatively isolated, and in some cases preserved their traditional Polynesian ritual practices into the early 20th century.ⁱ The larger Polynesian islands such as Hawaii, Tahiti, Samoa and Tonga, which are better known to tourists and high school geography teachers, began having extensive contacts with Europeans in the late 18th century.

Meeting the Sikaiana

The years I had spent reading and writing as a graduate student did not mean anything on that first afternoon in the Solomon Islands. I had to meet and get to know some Sikaiana and try to learn something about them. Other disciplines in science and social science must provide specific methods of preparation for research: chemists in labs, historians in archives, most social scientists with questionnaires. In cultural anthropology, at least in 1980, the main method was to somehow get to know a very different group of people. There is little way to prepare for this, except to trust one's instincts. These initial encounters involved uncertainty for me.

I walked across the street in front of the Hibiscus, across the small shaded field, and into the door of the offices of the National Museum. I did not know where to start my research project, but perhaps someone there knew something. I had sent a research proposal a year earlier and had heard nothing. At Bill Davenport's suggestion, I made an international call to the Ministry of Youth and Education. The officer in charge of research at that time in what must have been early 1980 was one of the few remaining ex-patriates from the British Protectorate. He told me that they had forwarded my application from the Sikaiana Area Council but had not heard a reply. The officer told me that since they did not say no, I could assume that the research had been approved. This would never pass today (2020), but I was anxious to go, I had some form of approval, and so I had left.

Inside I met Henry Isa, the Director of the Museum, who seemed bewildered by my presence. He vaguely remembered my research application which had been sent to the Solomon Islands over a year earlier. But he wasn't sure whether or not it had been approved. Although no one at the National Museum was quite sure what I was doing there, they did know a Sikaiana man, Jacob Tavao, who worked in another department of the same government ministry. They decided to take me to him, perhaps he would know about the project.

Jacob is a tall, slender man who at that time was in his thirties. Jacob remembered that several other applications to do research on Sikaiana had been turned down by the atoll's local governing council. Although he did not know anything about mine, this news was not reassuring. Before I left his office, Jacob told me that he would try to contact Sikaiana by shortwave radio and find out about my application. He also suggested several other Sikaiana people living in Honiara whom I should contact.

My first encounters with the Sikaiana were awkward. I was insecure. The Sikaiana looked strange to me, as if made from wood. I had no idea of how I was supposed to interact with them. My career depended upon getting to know them. But even more important, learning about another culture, doing ethnographic field research was my deepest hope and dream. I felt that my life dream depended upon whether or not they liked me. Years of reading thick tomes with complex and sometimes subtle theories of social behavior seemed irrelevant. I was faced with the very different issue of trying to get along with unfamiliar people. There was a schism inside of me. I was excited and at the same time bewildered. One part of me doggedly insisted on meeting the Sikaiana. Another part of me went along and watched, as if from over my shoulder, in a daze of disbelief, with the constant thought, so often a part of culture shock, "what on earth am I doing here?"

When I reflect back on these initial meetings, I am certain that the Sikaiana people had a better sense of what it was that I wanted to do than I did. They knew other Westerners: administrators, missionaries, and American soldiers in World War II. Some Sikaiana women had married European men. Some had studied abroad. Moreover, several people doing ethnographic research had visited with them before. There was one anthropologist who lived on Sikaiana for several months in 1966, although he never published the results of his research. A Maaori linguist, Peter

Sharples, had studied their language. An ethnomusicologist, Hugo Zemp, had collected songs from them. Several of the Protectorate's administrators had collected information about aspects of their traditional culture. They knew much more about what to expect from me, both as a researcher and a foreigner, than I did about them.

The Sikaiana have mixed feelings about foreigners. They are wary of being harmed. Their legends record several occasions when outsiders, after initially pretending friendship, have killed or threatened them. At the same time, there are very strong norms for hospitality and courtesy towards strangers. The ancestors of the Sikaiana were themselves immigrants and foreigners to the atoll. Newcomers are also an important source of innovation and excitement. They often bring new technology and provide new styles in fashion, recreation and leisure. I soon learned that Americans had visited Sikaiana during World War II, were well remembered, and were liked for their generosity and the relative equality of their relations as opposed to the more formal British Protectorate officials. The Sikaiana were interested in the United States and world politics. Even if I had nothing new to offer in the way of fishing techniques or fashions, I was something of a celebrity. A stranger is a threat, but also an opportunity and a source for excitement.

On my second day in the Solomon Islands, I met Jacob at the Hibiscus. He had made a call on the shortwave radio to Sikaiana in order to ask whether they knew anything about my plans for research there. Sikaiana maintains almost daily contact with Honiara via a short-wave radio operator in Honiara to exchange information about weather conditions, shipping schedules, and medical emergencies. Jacob told me that no one had answered his call on the shortwave. He added with a giggle, which would become familiar, that the radio operator, who was another relative of his, may have had too much fermented toddy to drink the night before.

Jacob then took me to meet Brown Saua, a young Sikaiana man who was a rising administrator in the Solomon Island's government. At that time, Brown's office was in a trailer parked outside of a government building on Mendana Avenue, the main street in Honiara. Brown was in his thirties, slender, with dark curly hair, deep brown eyes, and a wispy beard. He was fluent in English. More than other Sikaiana, he was used to interactions with Europeans, first as a student in high school and college, and now as a government official. He seemed at ease with me, much more at ease with me than I felt with him.

Brown was interested in having an anthropologist work on Sikaiana, especially in recording their traditions, which he felt were being lost and replaced by Western ones. He had made some tape recordings himself of older people talking about life during their youth and singing traditional songs. He told me not to take pictures and make recordings of songs too hastily, however. The Sikaiana, he explained, needed to practice before they would be able to properly perform their traditional ceremonies. Brown, as many Sikaiana would do in those first few weeks, warned me not to become too involved with any one particular group on Sikaiana. There were many different factions, especially those developed from court battles over land use. If I became associated with any one faction, Brown warned, it could adversely affect my research.

Later in my second day in the Solomon Islands, a young Sikaiana man, Robert Elito who had heard about my interest in Sikaiana, came looking for me at the Hibiscus. Robert was the son of Jacob's sister and at that time was preparing as a novitiate in the Melanesian Brotherhood, a Christian religious order which had been founded in the 1920's in the Solomon Islands. Robert was interested in my project and that evening he guided me around Honiara and introduced me to some of the Sikaiana families who lived there. Later, I would visit those households by myself and I lived in several of them. But at the time, Honiara was a confusing labyrinth of dusty roads and small houses. Robert acted as an interpreter, translating my halting Pijin and English into the vernacular. Later, I found out that some of the people for whom he was acting as translator could speak English.

Within the next few days, I learned that my research had been approved by the Sikaiana Area Committee. A short time later, I was issued a two year research visa by the government. After a few visits, I straightened out my visa with the Immigration Department. Jacob's wife, Harriet, worked in the Immigration Office and helped me get everything in order. As it turned out, I had remarkably good fortune. In the following year the government prohibited all new research in the Solomon Islands. They, however, allowed me to continue on my visa. The new law stated that a person must receive the research permit while residing outside of the Solomon Islands. I would not have been admitted into the country if I had waited another year. Finally, I learned that the Sikaiana Area Committee had turned down other applications before they received mine. I am not really sure why their local council approved my application and turned down the others. But, over the next two years, I would learn that compassion is very important in Sikaiana relationships. A person who makes a sincere request for help will be treated with sympathy. When I asked to do research, I was also asking to eat and live with them, and unbeknownst to me at the time, making a request which is hard for them to refuse. The fact that I was there made my request more effective. There was also the fact that since World War II, most Sikaiana people liked Americans. Finally, John Kilatu, a Sikaiana doctor and influential member of the community, told me that he had approved my proposal because he had heard that the American government had a "freedom of formation act." He took this to mean that my research would be accessible to the public. He said the Area Council had turned down a Canadian's request the previous year.

There is a boat, the *Belama*, that travels once a month from Honiara to Sikaiana. The *Belama* takes food, supplies, and other material to Sikaiana. It brings back copra, dried coconut meat which is processed into cosmetics. Copra is the atoll's main source of cash. The boat also takes Sikaiana people to and from the atoll. Usually, there are between ten to thirty passengers aboard. I wanted to get on the *Belama* on its next trip.ⁱⁱ

While I waited for the next boat, I lived with a Sikaiana family at Tenaru Beach about 15 miles outside of Honiara. Tenaru is something like a suburb. In 1980, there were about six or seven extended Sikaiana families who had purchased land and lived there (in 1987 about ten more Sikaiana families purchased land there; and the area was more developed in 1993).ⁱⁱⁱ

The houses are located close to the ocean, never more than a 100 yards away. The beach faces a body of water which during World War II came to be known as "Iron Bottom Sound" because of all the ships that were sunk there during the war. Tenaru is also called "Red Beach", the name given to it by the First Division of the American Marines Corps who landed there to fight the Japanese on August 7, 1942.

Some of the men living at Tenaru commute to jobs in Honiara. Others fish and grow crops in small gardens near their houses. One ambitious man planted coconut trees in order to produce copra, dried coconuts which are used in making cosmetics. Most people plant sweet potato, cassava, pineapple, and keep chickens. The houses are made from lumber and masonite with iron roofs. Every few hundred yards, there are concrete floors left in World War II by the American military, presumably the bases for storehouses, or perhaps docking areas for supplies. The Sikaiana now use the concrete floors for dancing at their parties.

Jacob stayed at Tenaru on weekends at the house of his brother, and Robert frequently visited his relatives there. The Sikaiana people living in Honiara often gather in Tenaru's open spaces and comparative isolation for community celebrations such as wedding exchanges.

A friend of mine once remarked that new lovers tell each other about their entire lives on their first few days together. The rest of their relationship involves getting to know the subtleties of what was discussed in the first few days. Whether or not true about lovers, I found that ethnographic research has a somewhat similar quality of being exposed to important values and behaviors in initial meetings, and then spending long periods of time to understand the subtleties of these values and behaviors in their social context and daily routine. Rereading my notes, I find that my record of these first weeks and months contains much information which is important in my present understanding of the Sikaiana, although I didn't understand what was going on at the time.

These experiences of the first weeks in 1980 are quite different from the time that I returned to Sikaiana in 1987. I had lived there for almost three years during my first stay, and for the following four years I had spent much of my time writing about Sikaiana culture. When I returned to the Solomon Islands in 1987, I underwent an initial sense of novelty, but it was the novelty of returning home after a long absence. Things looked a little strange but I knew personalities, histories and the contexts of behavior. At the airport in March 1987, I joined the legion of determined passengers who know where they are going. I knew people in town who would be happy to see me and I was excited to be able to see them.

I know it must seem implausible, but in 1987 after about 2 days of living with a Sikaiana family, I had the feeling I had never left. Like those rare friends who immediately restart conversations after a long absence, I took up my life where I left it four years earlier. My second trip was like swimming underwater with a diving mask. I had been away long enough so that the ordinary aspects of Sikaiana life stood in sharp,

colorful contrast. Behavior was in slow motion, magnified and vivid. Some people call the method of participant observation, "immersion studies," and so it seemed aptly named on my second trip. Because I had been away from the Sikaiana people for almost four years, everything seemed to be new. But because I could speak their language and had lived with them before, I also recognized the contexts of behavior and understood not only words and actions but many of the intentions which motivate them.

Staying at Tenaru in October 1980, however, I had no such sense of context. I was like a person trying to watch fish from above the water surface. I only saw grey distorted reflections and shadows.

My memories of those initial encounters in 1980 recall specific events in detail but they are disembodied and without context. In contrast, my memories of my later times on Sikaiana are less sharp in terms of specific events, but clearer in terms of repeated activities and routines. I can't always remember the chronological sequence of specific activities but there is a clearer perception of what things mean in their social and cultural contexts.

In those first weeks in October 1980, I encountered many of the main features of Sikaiana social life, but without understanding their implications. I was introduced to a young Sikaiana man and tried to explain to him that I wanted to learn the Sikaiana language. Calling me "mate," the young man replied in English that he wished me luck but he couldn't help me much with the language because he had been away from Sikaiana so long that he no longer spoke it well. Again and again, when I talked about learning the language, I was told by the younger people that they didn't really speak it very well themselves, and preferred to speak in Pijin English. Many people told me that not only their language, but also their traditional culture and practices were being forgotten and replaced by Western ones. Overhearing me talking with her husband, a young wife mocked her young husband's explanation of Sikaiana traditions, calling out in Pijin with a convulsive laugh, "*em no savi*"-- "he doesn't know".^{iv}

Christianity was an important aspect of Sikaiana life. At Tenaru, every evening before meals, there were prayer sessions which included reading some of the liturgy. People often spoke with deep respect about the priest on Sikaiana. They recounted the activities of various people who had joined religious orders, especially the Melanesian Brotherhood, which originally converted the Sikaiana people to Christianity 50 years earlier. Sometimes, they recounted miracles performed by these people. Everyone talked about the Sikaiana interest in drinking alcoholic beverages, especially *kaleve*, which is made of fermented coconut toddy. I was constantly warned about land tenure disputes. There were rumors that an anthropologist who had been on Sikaiana earlier had been unable to complete his research because his field notes had been destroyed by a Sikaiana person who thought they would be used in court against his land interests. I also was warned about the devious character of certain Sikaiana people, although different people warned me about different individuals.

There were also stories about previous interactions with Americans, especially during World War II. A special party was held for me one evening at Tenaru at which

the women performed a dance and song which recounted the time during World War II when three American fliers were shot down and stayed on Sikaiana. There was plenty of beer.

The *Belama*

After I had been in the Solomon Islands for about three weeks, I heard that the *Belama* was preparing to make its monthly voyage to Sikaiana. The boat is mostly institutional yellow and green, painted in a manner that shows no special care, except to make the paint thick enough to prevent the corrosive effects of saltwater (even so, there are spots of rust.) Its shape and movement are like a tub. It rolls and chugs, never fast, but secure. It won't be smashed by waves, and as much as it rolls, it won't roll over: Nothing special, only reliable serviceability.

The *Belama* has a large hold underneath for carrying supplies. The hold is about 20 feet deep and there is an aluminum ladder leading down. (By 1987 several of the rungs had broken.) People load their suitcases and sacks of sweet potato, sugar, rice into the hold. Sometimes, people load lumber and roofing iron for a new house. Usually, several people work on the deck and wharf, passing these supplies over the edge of the boat and then into the hold. Someone is usually positioned halfway down the ladder to pass the supplies further down. Other supplies are placed in a compartment under the ship's bow, where a wooden bench follows the curve of the bow from starboard to port.

The *Belama* docks at Honiara's main harbor. There is one long wharf for the large container ships bringing imported goods to the Solomon Islands. There are about four or five shorter concrete wharfs for the smaller boats servicing various villages and localities within the Solomon Islands. Sometimes, there is no room along these docks and boats are anchored side by side.

Throughout the day of its departure, Sikaiana people arrive at the wharf to load supplies onto the boat. By evening, a large number of Sikaiana residing in Honiara come down to the wharf to see off relatives and friends. Many people send food and supplies to relatives on Sikaiana, especially 20 kilogram bags of rice, flour, sugar and 20 liter cans of kerosene. Since sweet potato is difficult to grow on Sikaiana, bags of it are sent to relatives there. People gather in groups along the wharf, talking and joking. If another boat is loading or unloading on the wharf, there will be people from other ethnic groups also preparing to depart. Most Sikaiana prefer to keep to themselves in a separate group.

The boat usually departs at about 10:00 or 11:00 PM. As the boat prepares to depart, people at the wharf shake hands with those on the boat. Some of the young men will continue running along the dock until the ship is pulling away, clasping hands across the slowly widening gap between the boat and dock.

The ship heads for Auki, the administrative center of Malaita Province. The trip

takes about 7 hours. Auki is a simple and small administrative center, with about 2000 residents. It has several single story government buildings with corrugated roofs, a bank office, post office, police station, library, prison, and several churches. Nearby is a hospital. There is a single concrete wharf where the *Belama* docks. Just off the wharf is the Auki market. The market is quite small but offers the last chance to purchase goods that are not grown on Sikaiana including betel nut (which a few Sikaiana people like to chew), pineapple, yams, sweet potato, and sugar cane. The few one room stores in Auki are stocked like those in Honiara but the prices are a little higher. While the *Belama* is docked there, Sikaiana passengers wander about town and purchase a last few items for their trip.

The *Belama* only stays for a few hours in Auki and then at about ten in the morning departs for Sikaiana. It circumvents Malaita Island, sometimes stopping at small villages along the coast. By dusk it passes the protection from the wind and tide offered by Malaita's land-mass and heads into the rougher weather of the open Pacific. Sikaiana is located about 100 miles east of Malaita. Occasionally, ships miss Sikaiana and must turn back. Several hundred miles beyond Sikaiana are the scattered atolls of Tuvalu (Ellice) and Kiribati (Gilberts). Beyond them, the Pacific Ocean extends virtually unbroken for 9000 miles until it reaches the American continent. In 1980 the *Belama* was equipped with radar and did not miss Sikaiana. But Brown Saua can recall his school holiday when the boat did miss Sikaiana and had to turn back to Malaita.

The *Belama* chugs throughout the night. Women and children sleep on a tarp above the hold, men sleep along wooden benches or wherever they can find a flat dry surface. At dawn, a small dark spot is visible on the horizon.

Sikaiana is sighted.

i. For a comparative review of the settlement and relationships between the Polynesian outliers see Bayard (1976); for an examination of their languages, see Pawley (1966), (1967), Howard (1981). Tikopia is the best known of the Polynesian outliers due to the extensive ethnographic research of Raymond Firth (1936/57), (1959), (1967), (1970); see also Kirch and Yen (1982) for a detailed archeological description of Tikopia. Other research on other outliers includes: Nukuoro (Carroll 1966, Davidson 1971), Kapingamarangi (Te Rangi Hiroa 1950, Emory 1965, Lieber 1968); Nukumanu (Sarfert and Damm 1929-31, Feinberg 1986); Ontong Java (Sarfert and Damm 1929-31, Hogbin 1931, 1934/61), Rennell and Bellona (Christiansen 1975, Kuschel 1989); Anuta (Feinberg 1981). There are a few some scattered descriptions of Sikaiana social life (see for example, Thilenius 1902, Sarfart and Damm 1929-31, Krauss 1971, Woodford 1906, 1916, MacGregor 1933, and MacQuarrie 1952). Some linguistic work has been done there (Capell 1935-37, Sharples n.d., 1968).

ii As of 2020 the boat service is far more sporadic, every few months.

iii Tenaru is still a center for Sikaiana settlement. The location is the site of cultural

village established for tourists and the location for annual games, Tuata, that bring together Sikaiana people from throughout the Solomon Islands. Several families moved away after some ethnic fighting in the early 2000s.

^{iv} I learned from Robert and Priscilla that for the most part the Sikaiana language has almost entirely been dropped from use among the Sikaiana people. Even people I knew in the 1980s as fluent speakers do not speak it any longer. There are active users of Facebook who mostly post in English, sometimes with Pijin mixed in, a few occasional Sikaiana phrases.