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Visualizing te Kainga
Dancing te Kainga

History and Culture between Rabi, Banaba and Beyond

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The Australian National University

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Except as cited, this work in both video and text is the result of research carried out by the author.

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ABSTRACT

Visualising te kainga, Dancing te Kainga, is an exploration of Banaban and Gilbertese history and culture through archival texts and photographs, writing in history and anthropology, film, music and dance, and fieldwork or what I call “homework.” The form of the thesis resonates with its content as I explore these sites of knowledge production through analysis, narrative, poetry, memory, image, and video. Banaban history and politics has been mainly defined with respect to the British colonial and phosphate mining experiences between 1900 and 1980. Banaba or Ocean Island is viewed as the essential “homeland,” while Rabi is still seen as a new and disconcerting place of exile. I go beyond this two-island frame of reference by arguing for Rabi as “home” and including Australia, New Zealand and Kiribati as valid sites for exploring Banaban and Gilbertese identities. Focusing on kainga, or home, is a tool that allows us to connect these places. Like abu, or land, kainga has multiple meanings including people (and their specific relationships), land, residence and genealogy. Banabans are connected genealogically and culturally to specific islands in Kiribati and more broadly to land, history, politics and economics in Australia and New Zealand through phosphate mining and phosphate fertiliser. Both Banaban lands and bodies have been moved over the last 100 years and “movement” is a crucial aesthetic for dealing with Banaban survival as they create their own brand of culture through song and dance on Rabi. Like dance, film contains an excess of meaning and the overall thesis is associative as well as expository inviting the reader to make meaning, along with the author, between text, image and video.
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NOTE ON ORTHOGRAPHY

In Gilbertese:

ng  is pronounced as in “ring”
b  is pronounced “p”
ti  is pronounced “s” (but t on its own is pronounced “t”)
tu  is pronounced “soo”
w  is pronounced “v” when followed by e

In Fijian:

b  is pronounced “mb” (so Rabi is pronounced “Rambi”)
c  is pronounced “th”
g  is pronounced as in ring
q  is pronounced “ng” with a hard “g” sound
HOMEWORK

[Image of a beach scene with clouds and a calm ocean]

[Images of individuals engaged in activities]
CHAPTER 1: AN INTRODUCTION

One must be prepared to participate in the immense and specific challenges of a wider community, to participate in what Wilson Harris calls the ‘complex creativity involved in the “digestion” and “liberation” of contrasting spaces’ (Petersen and Rutherford, 1995: 189).

Central Features

What kind of scholarly knowledge is produced while inhabiting and moving between islands and bodies, histories and cultures, text and video? I explore this question by presenting representations, experiences and performances of history and culture in Fiji, Kiribati, Australia and New Zealand using a combination of video, autobiography, feminist ethnography, film and dance studies. My research covers a broad time frame from the beginning of the phosphate mining industry on Banaba, also known as Ocean Island, to everyday life in the present across different islands and countries. The multifaceted nature of this thesis, I argue, resonates with the hybrid complex that is Banaban and Gilbertese history and culture.

Ultimately I am arguing for transdisciplinary research that considers the very real historical and contemporary differences and connections between the various sites included in this thesis as well as the personal, epistemological and pedagogical implications of multi-sited knowledge production in the Pacific. “Multi-sited” must not just refer to the content of our research projects but the form as well. This thesis is one of “assemblage” and requires a reader to contemplate at least four forms of knowledge together—word, sound, still and moving images. It needs a response by readers/viewers attending to audiovisual and textual knowledge simultaneously.

The videos that accompany each chapter are not appendices to ideas within the thesis but central components of it. While one constructs an object to be reflected upon, the other reflects on it and provides a larger contextual frame. In the only other image-text thesis I have come across, Josko Petkovic calls this process a
"constructivist" research technique. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) metaphor, the focus is on the construction of a "theoretical rhizome" rather than on deconstruction and analysis. There are many similarities in our overall theoretical desires to connect disparate times and places, to construct rather than deconstruct knowledge, but Petkovic's movements are ostensibly between "East and West" while mine are more often between places and peoples which "the West" might approach as both homogenous and exotic, and gloss as "the Pacific." Petkovic's film was also released for public consumption (film festivals, etc) while my short videos are so far restricted to contexts which are academic, educational or personal (family, friends and colleagues).

Editing each video section was akin to constructing a narrative and required the learning of basic filmmaking skills in the ethnographic film unit of the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies with Gary Kildea. The underlying form of the thesis stresses "movement" between sites and knowledges. The text and videos are intimately connected and I hope interactive.

**Kainga**

*Visualising Te kainga, Dancing Te kainga* is divided into a prelude, five chapters and a finale, each with video components. The chapters are organised around a particular location, "home" or *kainga*. These include archives in Australia, the islands of Banaba, Tabiteuea and Tarawa in Kiribati, Rabi in Fiji, and specific households in all the islands. *Kainga* once referred to both the lands and families (*utu*) descended from a common ancestor living together in a hamlet on Banaba or in the Gilbert Islands.

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1 I am grateful to Tamara Jacka for introducing me to Josko Petkovic's PhD thesis from Murdoch University which is also in text and film. Crucial to Petkovic's argument is the "belief that... more and more of what constitutes the base of our knowledge will arise from, and be supported by, images... academic institutions will have to reconsider the general field and scope of their activities in the light of our changing relationship with the visual" (1997: 3). Petkovich's "constructivist" technique stems from a genealogy of "Constructivism" pioneered by a group of Moscow artists in the early 20th century of which soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein was a member.


Hockings defines it as the territory occupied by the clan and the basic social and residential unit within the *matala* community.

Hockings definition for *kainga* is “ancestral clan estate” and he writes that individuals always tried to maintain residence on their ancestral lands. This is virtually impossible for many Banabans since their lands were physically shipped away and I’ve interpreted it broadly throughout the thesis as “home.” On Banaba and in the Gilbert Islands, the centrality of the *kainga* as an institution diminished with Christianity, colonialism and displacement but now has a broader currency reflecting new social patterns in Kiribati and on Rabi. It is recovered here to talk particularly about my own family’s social and spatial organization and as a metaphor for re-connecting dispersed lands, peoples and histories between Fiji and Kiribati. This is a new reading of an older term; people rarely use *kainga* in everyday speech because it is understood that they no longer live on their “original” lands. The displacement of the Banaban population to Rabi and the displacement of Banaban land to Australia and New Zealand means that Banaban bodies and lands now lie (or “rest”) beyond Banaba. Similarly, images and documents of both Banaban people and lands lie in archives and libraries in Australia and New Zealand.

The following quote from Tony and Joan Whincup’s (2001) visual portrayal of life and dance in Kiribati illustrates this aspect of *kainga* as “resting place” where a people’s ancestors, knowledge, loyalties, identities or bodies might lie.

> Te aro ni utu bon ngaia te veita are a bantaki iai roron Kiribati aika kakeakoro. Tama nani matai bori ngaia kanikinsea a koare a koare a koare a koare a koare a koare a koare a koare a koare a koare a koare a koare a koare a koare a koare a koare a koare a koare a koare.

> Past and present are linked together through the I-Kiribati profound sense of ‘te utu’ (family). Graves on family land serve as a constant reminder of the ancestors (Whincup and Whincup 2001: 49).

People on Rabi and across Kiribati have moved (or been removed) from their ancestral lands for many reasons. I explore some of the causes throughout the thesis. Visualizing and dancing *kainga* or “home” means to make visible something that has become fragment and contentious because of the movement of both bodies and

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4 The *matala* is a large meeting house used for public gatherings. Traditionally each clan had sitting places or *bati* in the *matala*. In this context Hockings’ community refers to a more “loosely knit
lands over time. If *kainga* relations are now absent from everyday sociality it is recovered here to argue that such activities in the present are built upon the past. “Home” in this broader sense of connection between past and present, body and land, the dead and the living; echoes these ancestral meanings.

The diagram below outlines the multiple connotations of *kainga* and the several sites elaborated in subsequent chapters.

![Kainga/Home Diagram](image)

The videos construct a notion of *kainga* which builds upon the original connotations of the word—ancestral lands—to include all the scattered and connected places now inhabited by Banahan and Gilbertese peoples and Banaban lands dispersed through phosphate mining.

This research builds upon my Masters thesis on Banaban histories. That project from 1996 to 1998 involved a short visit to Rabi as well as close readings of earlier writings on Banaban “History” (K. Teaiwa 1999). For this project, fieldwork, or what I argue is “homework,” was conducted between August 1999 and January 2001. Most of what I recorded was on a hand-held Sony digital video camera. I did not assume that one disciplinary method would be appropriate for my research. I

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grouping where social interaction took place on isolated occasions” (Hockings 1989: 109).
preferred to let experiences of a certain place or relationships with particular people dictate what was fitting. These methods involved not just observation, conversation, textual and visual recording, but included embodied practices such as the learning and teaching of dances from different parts of the Pacific. I was not so much hanging out with people in the way that anthropologists are expected to deeply “hang out” with their subjects (Clifford Geertz 1973), but visiting my own relatives (see Chapter 4). My research entailed a process of reconnecting people who would have belonged to the same kainga before colonialism.

My research is different from most because of my personal family connections to both the topic and so-called “research subjects.” I did not just stumble across Banaban and Gilbertese history and culture as a good thesis topic. I applied for a PhD in order to be able to research people, histories and a region to which I am personally connected, and which I feel a commitment to reinterpret in the light of prevailing scholarly and popular representations of the Pacific.

Pacific Studies

Writing or filmmaking on Banaban and Gilbertese histories and cultures is rather sparse compared to that on islands and peoples in Melanesia, Polynesia and “American” Micronesia. This lack of popular academic engagement, while allowing me to be creative in my approach, dissuaded me from doing comparative research or building upon a specific anthropological canon. To the extent that only a handful of people have done in-depth studies of Banaban culture, there is no canon.

My thesis is instead situated in the wider context of “Pacific Islands Studies” where questions about the form, content, reader/audience and the politics of

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5 The labels “Gilbertese” and “I-Kiribati” are interchangeable to an extent but I mostly use the former because one does not have to be I-Kiribati (of Kiribati) to be “part-Gilbertese.” “Gilbertese” is more about shared blood or culture while I-Kiribati is bound to a particular independent nation. Almost all Banabans are part-Gilbertese but for political reasons this heritage is not claimed. In practice, however, Banabans and I-Kiribati share music, dance and family life (marriage or other relations).

6 My “personal connections,” however, are not of a wholly “cultural” nature. While my father fully participates in Banaban and Gilbertese communities, my sisters and I rarely do (we all currently live outside Fiji). I am Banaban and Gilbertese by blood but not “by culture.” I explore many of these personal tensions throughout the thesis but particularly in chapters 4 and 5.

7 Unless the works of H E Maude, Arthur Grimble and Martin Silverman constitute a canon (see bibliography).
knowledge production are actively engaged. Area studies in general are the legacy of colonial governments and in the case of Pacific Studies, of the US Government and Australian governments and their strategic interests in the region (cf T. Teaiwa 2001a; Fry 1991; Wesley Smith 1995). I think T. Teaiwa summarises it best when describing the roots and current institutional approaches to Pacific Studies in the region.

Although the origins of Pacific Studies can be traced to amateur ethnographies from as early as the 17th century to orientalist-type scholarship in journals such as *Oceania* and *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, its consolidation as a field of academic enquiry might best be identified in the foundation of the Pacific Islands Studies Program (PISP) at the University of Hawai‘i (UH), initiated by Norman Meller in the 1950s and the establishment of the chair in Pacific history at the Australian National University (ANU) for J.W. Davidson in the 1960s. UH, which saw the evolution of the PISP into the Center for Pacific Islands Studies (CPIS), has displayed a much more vigorous and innovative approach to the field than the staid ANU, which suffers keenly from the devaluation of Pacific Studies in the current Australian economic and political climate. Perhaps ironically, the characteristic realism and utilitarianism of ANU scholarship on the Pacific has produced its own downfall. Although there was certainly some realism and utilitarianism driving Pacific Islands Studies at UH-especially during the Cold War period when US strategic interests in the Pacific were high—a certain flexibility and willingness to embrace the arts and humanities has buoyed the program in the post-Cold War period. The University of the South Pacific (USP) is unique in being the only university in the world to be owned by 12 Pacific nations, and has a high percentage of Pacific Islanders in its student population. It would seem to be the logical home of Pacific Studies, but USP’s inexplicable ambivalence about Pacific Studies... has led to the field being dominated by UH and ANU for the last half century or so (T. Teaiwa 2001a: 67).

Anthropology in Micronesia, was at the forefront of the colonial and research articulation resulting in the creation of Pacific Studies in Hawai‘i while anthropology and other social science research in Melanesia could be said to be the primary focus of the ANU and the Australian government’s attention (cf Jolly 2001, Kiste 2000 and Wesley-Smith 1995). Pacific Studies has grown since then and now includes engagements with political, cultural, social, economic and artistic production and survival across the region (see Thomas 1997). Of interest to me is the increasing attention to globalization, postcoloniality and diaspora, a turn that has brought
Pacific Studies into close contact with Cultural Studies (see Hereniko and Wilson 1999; Diaz and Kauanui 2001).

The issue of “decolonisation” has dominated Pacific Studies and Cultural studies for over a decade and was the main theme of my masters thesis (cf Tuhiai Smith 2000; Chen 2000). During my studies at the University of Hawai‘i I was influenced by writers such as Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Franz Fanon and Haunani-Kay Trask. The urgent task then seemed to simply let our stories be heard and to have our versions of history and culture be accepted by the academy. Jon Kamakawiwo‘ole Osorio recently defined a particular thread of Pacific Studies thus: “identity (who we think we are) is the foundation on which Native cultural studies is based. No other question is as important to us, and no other question is so seriously contested by others” (Osorio 2001: 361). Identity is one of the things problematized by colonialism, especially in places like Hawai‘i and Aotearoa/New Zealand where there was an active campaign to displace language and culture with colonial forms. As Thomas (1997) has reminded us, however, the “decolonisation” approach sometimes assumes not just a unitary islander perspective but elides the very differences between and within supposedly homogenous (and united) ethnic groups (cf Keesing 1989). I believe that the call to “tell our own stories our way,” a strategy that has had positive consequences for indigenous studies in institutions like Victoria University of Wellington, Auckland University and the University of Hawai‘i, has also problematized the need to acknowledge the complex internal and intra-Pacific politics that shape such homogenizing motivations. While this thesis is still personalizing and privileges my identity as an islander, I do not think that just telling “our own stories” can be the only measure of legitimacy. I agree with Osorio that identity is always at stake but identity is not an internal group thing, or just between colonial and Native groups, it must be articulated with a multiplicity of proximate cultures and peoples.

As in many contemporary intellectual and institutional spaces, increasingly in Pacific Islands Studies, the personal, practical, theoretical, performative and the political matter, and they matter situationally. Some of us do not write or theorize

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8 This summary leaves out important French interests in the region which T.Teaia otherwise
just to publish and further our careers or a canon. We exist in a web of diverse personal and institutional expectations and commitments as well as fraught configurations of the personal, local, national and global. Rather than ignore this reality in order, for example, to make a holistic, detached or objective argument about Banaban or Gilbertese cultures, I let multiple, different (and often contradictory) perspectives and experiences jostle together. The multiplicity here isn’t apolitical, as Dening (1989) might have implied, but takes a position on two things. The first is the form of academic knowledge where writing is assumed to be the primary mode of production, and the second is acknowledging differences and connections between islands, islanders, histories and embodied practices.

By attending to the process of knowledge construction throughout the thesis, I have tried to maintain a consciousness and internal critique of the whole presentation as “a PhD thesis” with all its western institutional and disciplinary expectations and assumptions. As far as I know this is only the second PhD project based on Banaban histories and culture since Martin Silverman finished his dissertation in 1966.

The people of Rabi, Banaba and Beyond

Thinking historically is a process of locating oneself in space and time. And a location... is an itinerary rather than a bounded site... (Clifford 1997: 11)

discusses in the rest of her dissertation (2001a).
9 I mean “local” here not as it has been constructed in anthropology as the ideal location for studying bounded communities but as specific places with fluid borders.
10 See Teresia Teiwa’s description of these aspects of Pacific scholarship in “L(o)osing the Edge” (2001b).
11 I have been baffled by critics within (and just outside) disciplines like anthropology who question the content and politics of writing but not the dominance of writing itself. Clifford and Marcus’ Writing Culture (1986) rocked the anthropological boat but did not question the very institutional forms of intellectual productions—texts on “culture.” In Cultural Studies, the inclusion of photo essays and artwork in journals such as Public Culture and The UTS Review are promising. The nature of on-line journals such as Jacket also highlight the privileged normative forms — text, paper and books.
The Banabans live on Rabi Island off the coast of Vanua Levu in the northern part of the Fiji Islands. They are a distinct ethnic\textsuperscript{13} group originally from Banaba or Ocean Island in what is now the Republic of Kiribati in the central Pacific.\textsuperscript{14} The Banabans were moved to Fiji as the result of two major events. The first was the discovery of phosphate on their island in 1900 by a New Zealander named Albert Ellis, and the second, the Japanese occupation of the island during World War II. The phosphate mining was run by a consortium of British colonial, Australian and New Zealand colonial, business and agricultural interests that operated under three names—the Pacific Islands Company in 1900, the Pacific Phosphate Company from 1902 and the British Phosphate Commission from 1920.\textsuperscript{15}

The mining operations lasted from 1900 till 1979. This was only interrupted between 1942 and 1945 when Japanese forces occupied the island dispersing the Banaban population to camps in Kosrae, Nauru and Tarawa. After the war ended in 1945 the BPC sent the ship \textit{Tirita} to pick up all Banabans and their families, taking them directly to Rabi.\textsuperscript{16} The Banabans thought they would live in Fiji for two years and then return to Banaba but most of them, save about sixty repatriated to the island in the late 1970s, have been in Fiji ever since. Today the population on Rabi is between four and five thousand while Banaba stands at around three hundred. As a result of the mining, twenty million tonnes of the six square kilometre island,

\textsuperscript{13} I acknowledge the problems of the category “ethnicity” and use it here to designate how Banabans see themselves in particular contexts—unique and different. In some other, less public contexts, however, they may draw upon other parts of their heritage—Tuvaluan, Gilbertese, Fijian and so on. In Fiji in particular, they are seen to be a distinct ethnic group. Maude, originally wrote of the Banabans that they, “... are identical with the inhabitants of the neighbouring Gilbert group and are usually referred to as Micronesians being an off-shoot of the Malayo-Polynesian race” (cited in Silverman 1971: 23). He changed this opinion in 1975 when giving evidence in the Banaban lawsuit against the British Government. There he said that the original population of Banaba was not Gilbertese (see Sigrah and King 2001: 32).

\textsuperscript{14} Most of the time I will refer to the island as “Banaba” and will only use the European label “Ocean Island” when I am using a direct quote or when commenting on the name.

\textsuperscript{15} The history of these companies is covered thoroughly in \textit{The Phosphateers} by Maslyn Williams and Barrie Macdonald (1985). The book describes the Australian, New Zealand and British experiences of the industry in detail with minimal attention to Islander and Asian labourers, and indigenous Banabans.

\textsuperscript{16} Rabi was purchased by the BPC on behalf of the Banabans using their own trust fund. It was originally called “Rabe” by the Fijians who had long been alienated from the island—first through inter-island war and then after the island was sold to European planters. It was owned by the Lever Brothers when purchased by the BPC.
popularly known as “the homeland,” was spread mainly across Australia and New Zealand fertilizing their fields but also polluting their waterways.  

The term “Banabans” as a group distinct from Gilbertese or other islanders is used not to efface the specificities of individual Banaban subjectivities but to label a collective and actively invoked identification. It is common on Rabi for people not to speak with the first person singular “I” but with the first person plural “we”—“we Banabans are like this,” “we Banabans are facing that.” Anthropologists have generally classified the Gilbert group, including Banaba, “Micronesian” but this term has very little currency on Rabi (Grimble 1989: 255). Both H.E Maude (1994) and Arthur Grimble (1989) stress the Samoan connections to both Banaban and Gilbertese heritage (Grimble 1989: 284), while some oral traditions emphasize the Gilbertese and Banaban roots of Samoan heritage (Maude 1994: 10). Both writers also acknowledge the Melanesian origins of most of the group’s indigenous inhabitants (Grimble 1989: 256; Maude 1994: 105). The creation stories related by both Te Itirake and Nei Tearia of Banaba in Maude’s (1994) book describe Banaba as te buto—the navel—the rock or earth between the “overside” of heaven and “underside” where the baba ma boro or deaf mutes live.

Banabanimaginings of their island as buto, the centre and origin of the world, are rhetorically strong. The island is situated not just in the middle of the Pacific ocean near the equator (at 0 deg. 48 min. S and 169 deg. 40 min. E) but exactly between those groups problematically labelled: Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. Banaba, which literally means “island of rock” (Benaia 1991: 1), slopes gently above the surface of the ocean. The horizon from this spot on the equator tilts slightly upwards so the sea appears higher than the land and it circles for a full 360 degrees unblemished by the shape of another island. According to Maude the

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17 My sources for this general history are multi-faceted because I am also Banaban. My Masters thesis (1999) covered most of these facts and other sources, including the above mentioned book, are discussed in the rest of the thesis. The issue of water pollution was raised with me in Wellington at the National Museum of New Zealand “Te Papa” during a talk I gave for curators there in 2000.

18 Also see Maude (1994: 105).

19 This does not mean however, that the terms are not salient to many Islanders—particularly those who live in the “Micronesian Pacific” to the north-west, the Polynesian triangle in the north-east, east and south-east and Melanesian group to the south-west. However, the Greek etymological roots of poly meaning “many,” “micro” meaning small, and “mela” meaning dark reflect the Eurocentric nature of their constructions (see Jolly 2001b and Thomas 1997 on history of terms).
island was named twice by Europeans, first as “Rodman’s island” by Captain Jered Gardner of the _Diana_ in November 1800 and then by Captain John Mertho in 1804 of the ship _Ocean_ after which it was named “Ocean Island” (Maude 1994: 71). The “discovery” is normally attributed to Mertho. This was an apt name for such a small island which gave so much of itself to nurture agriculture on larger lands. It was both “ocean” and “island” in both senses of that name. But, its original, nurturing function (like that of most navels) was easily forgotten over time.

Banabans live on Rabi, their new home while some of them are on Banaba, their ancestral home. The volcanic island of Rabi is more than four times the size of the raised coral rock of Banaba. The environmental differences between the islands have obviously contributed to the different cultural strategies that Banabans employ to survive.

Most Banabans, like my own family, are also part-Gilbertese and have even more ancestral homes in other parts of Kiribati or Fiji. For example I also have relatives on Tarawa and Tabiteuea in Kiribati. Martin Silverman once described the two-island (Banaba-Rabi) theme of Banaban identity as “disconcerting” (Silverman, 1971). But there are more than two islands and indeed several nations implicated in the shaping of Banaban culture and history. I thus try to problematize this expectation of one homeland and one place in which race, culture, language, behaviour and technology are supposed to be isomorphic, by expanding “history and culture,” and _kainga_, to include several islands, nations and indeed a couple of foreign cities as well (see next chapter). While people may find multiple identifications “disconcerting” in some contexts—particularly the political where nationalism and essentialism often prevail (see Chapter 3 on “the Banaban plight”)—in other contexts such as cultural performances and quotidian familial life, multiplicity is lived and negotiated.

Through the phosphate mining, the very ground of one of these homes, Banaba, was relocated to several countries, especially the lands of Australia and New Zealand. Records of life on the island and the fate of Banaban land via phosphate

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20 The term “Europeans” is used in Fiji to refer to all white people. Except when specifically talking about British, Australians or New Zealanders, I use it throughout the thesis in this way.
extraction are kept in Melbourne, Adelaide and Wellington. This constitutes yet another re/location of “home.” For Banabans and Gilbertese, “home” is not so much a building but the land to which one is connected by ancestry (cf Hokari 2001). My research, however, aims to deconstruct the notion of “home”, expanding it to include connections to multiple lands, some newer than others, and the cognitive and physical movements between them that lead to creative cultural productions.

Land, old or new, is crucial to a Banaban sense of belonging and connection within a web of relationships. Martin Silverman describes several important aspects of land in his interpretation of “blood and mud” (1971: 72). According to Silverman: “… kinship is symbolized in terms of both blood and rights in land (“mud”). Land functions symbolically in some of the same ways as blood; an assertion of common interest in Ocean Island land is similar to an assertion of common blood. Silverman sees both land and blood are nurturing, “natural,” essential and divisible… Blood symbolizes identity and land symbolizes “code;” code standing for kinship as in “code of conduct” (ibid: 73-74).

Land on Banaba was not merely the ground on which people lived but a right and medium of exchange between individuals. Each tract of land while being individually “owned” (that is temporarily assigned to someone) had currency within the wider social network. The following definitions of certain kinds of land illustrate this (HC and HE Maude in Silverman 1971: 45):

1. kie-ra (the mat for the murdered man to lie on—taken from the murderer)
2. rabu-na (the murdered man’s shroud—also taken from the murderer)
3. te aba ni kamaiu (the land of life-giving—for people who had looked after others during a famine)
4. te aba n i‘ein (the land of marriage)
5. te aba ni butinake (the land of the asking—for lands lying in the wrong hands)
6. te aba n van (the land of peacemaking—taken from an adulterer by an offended spouse).
7. te aba ni karaure (the land of farewell—if someone was leaving)
8. nenebo-n te man (the blood payment for animals—if someone accidentally killed another’s animal)

21 According to Silverman (1971: 4), Banaba is 1600 miles from Rabi, approximately, 2574 kilometers away.
As we can see above, land was constantly circulated through the hands of those who lived on the island. I remember my father describing how our family, which was mostly Tabiteuean by blood, acquired *te aba ni kaminu* land on Banaba. One of our ancestors, Takaia Teangatoa, was a skilled fisherman and through his sharing of knowledge and service acquired rights to land in Tabiang village. The four main village districts on Banaba were replicated on Rabi. It was through the memory of his service that our family argued for the rights to live in Tabiang and why we now have a small *kainga* just on the outskirts of the main settlement at Tabona. Our great-grandmother Kieuea, however, was originally from Tabwewa and we maintain connections to that village through her legacy.22

On Banaba, land was currency but unlike money could not be alienated from the place. Then phosphate mining started, replaced land with money and much of the island was extracted and shipped it away. Entire villages like Buakonikai, for example, physically disappeared (cf K. Teiwa 1999). Money and land now function metonymically in the same way that land and body or land and kinship used to.

Silverman’s approach, as exemplified in his discussion of David Schneider (1968) on “symbol and culture,” presents Banaban culture as a system of cultural constructs rather than empirical facts (ibid. 7). Blood is not really identity and land is not really kinship. Anthropologists do not believe these things to be true but they do acknowledge that their subjects do. While my first instinct is to criticize this anthropological tendency to be empathetic but analytically distanced, it is perhaps more important to emphasize the very different ways in which Banaban land figured culturally or psychically for Banabans, Europeans and other islanders, like the Gilbertese and Ellice23 labourers who mined the island. The rock was nothing more than potential phosphate fertiliser to the European company and a convenient source of money and commercial goods for the worker. It was not someone’s *home* except in a very fleeting sense. For others, particularly the European wives of BPC employees, it was an enjoyable, albeit temporary, home where children were born

22 While we know very little of the actual woman, the name “Kieuea” provides a connection between Rabi and Banaba and between the past and present. Note next chapter and the end of Video 5.
23 The Ellice Islands were part of one British colony including the Gilbert Islands until achieving independence in the 1970s after which they became the nation of Tuvalu.
and friendships were made. The significance of these very different perspectives on Banaba as "home" are further discussed in Chapter 3.

According to Silverman, since displacement to Rabi in 1945, Banabans have been in a perpetual state of "testing out." In this state, people are always maximising their options or keeping options open (ibid: 15). I am inclined to think that the Banaban social or cultural system was always fluid but some of his observations in the late 1960s are still helpful here:

First, ends are multiple but the multiplicity is not institutionally ranked. Second, a "have your cake and eat it too" outlook dominates the manner in which alternatives are confronted; there is an attempt to get the best (or at least something) of all worlds. Third, there is a complex marked by the co-occurrence of fluidity of commitments, loosely defined expectations, conditional acceptance of decisions, and a magnified need for current information about individuals as a background for action. Fourth, there is a willingness to entertain propositions without feeling constrained to decide about their truth or falsity. Fifth, significant aspects of social integration are ego oriented rather than group oriented, so that social ties are widely disposed, and memberships tend to be overlapping rather than exclusive (ibid. 15).

You will find throughout the image-text journey that these descriptions of Banaban culture sometimes apply to my research as well. The content resonates with the form.

**Simple words, multiple meanings**

It seems to me that in an effort at reaching more and more precise descriptions of the complexities of contemporary life, we are succumbing to an impulse towards the accumulation of more and more vocabulary— as if the eternal evolutionary march of language were irresistible. In many of the native linguistic traditions of Oceania, there was no assembly line of language with a constant output of new vocabulary. Rather, existing vocabulary was malleable, one word able to signify in multiple ways. One word can have many layers of meaning; the Hawaiians call this *ka.ona*. Thus, a limited vocabulary does not constitute a limited worldview; the *ka.ona* principle enriches, makes complex and versatile a limited vocabulary. No word is disposable— if the singular referent it "originally" represented is no longer, then the word is recycled to

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24 So despite my claims in footnote 7 that I am not Banaban by culture, I have been otherwise described by my relatives on Rabi and my father as actually being the most "Banaban" person in our family. Being "Banaban" is not just being of a genealogy, place, community or system of social relationships. It's also a particularly "situational" way of approaching the world.
represent a new referent. But more often than not, words will have multiple significations in a single enunciation (T. Teaiwa 2001a: 54-55).

While I do not focus on language my thesis does rest on a grasping of the multiple and often simultaneous meanings of certain words or concepts in the Gilbertese language. The most important are those of “land” and “home.” My understanding/practice/application of certain Pacific words, concepts and multiple “ways of being” are often taken for granted and can be described in the academy as “magical realist.”

Banaba literally translates as “land of rock.” “Ba” serves many linguistic functions but among them the idea of something “fixed” or in the case of coconut oil, te ba, something fluid. As we will see later, the very transformation and movement of Banaba rock through mining requires new understandings of the nature of things perceived to be solid, fixed or timeless. It is not just people or animals or water or vehicles... that move (see Chapter 2).

Rather than categorizing or separating out these simultaneous movements for the purposes of academic exposition I usually understand them to be just that. As I discuss later, the inextricable connections between text (and the worlds of textual production) and video (and the worlds of cinematic production) also illustrate this. In one sense it could be understood as parataxis—placing things side by side without conjunction (image/ rock/ man/ woman/ body/ people/ island/ money...) and in another as magical (the image is a rock is a man is a woman is a body is a people is an island is money...).

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25 T. Teaiwa’s footnote: “For example, as a consequence of migration, much of the Kiribati language is derived from the Samoan language. Thus, after countless generations living on low-lying atolls, the I-Kiribati still have a word for mountain (mu'a). The word is recycled then as an adjective to designate importance or great honour (e.g. mu'asina ni mu'asina—notion of the sacred mountain, or parliament)” (ibid).

26 I borrow this term from a growing genre in postcolonial literature which does not separate the magical from the “real”. It is common in anthropology to explore the native epistemology for the purposes of analysis (or at its most radical to elegantly play on metaphors ad infinitum) but not to imply that one similarly believes that rocks, spiders or trees are “men” (or can speak).

27 Note that in the case of coconut oil, te ba, can refer to both the container and the oil.
The word for land is *aha* but it also refers to people. In the possessive sense, land, like canoes—*wae*—are not separated from the body. One does not say “my canoe” or “my land” but me-canoe, *wae*, and me-land, *abau*. If the dual meaning for the land and the people—*te aha*—is assumed, the question here in order to reclaim and explore displaced Banaba/n bodies is not “what is home?” but “where and when is home”? One possible answer that I hope to demonstrate by the end of this thesis is that home can be many multiple places simultaneously.

Banabans have lived on different lands at different times but in a very physical sense, their own land has also moved and is spread across, transformed and is even “polluting” other times and places (cf T. Teaiwa 1998). This realization led me to a “between our islands” theme as a way of thinking about connections, differences and simultaneities between specific *kainga*, specific lands and peoples.

*kainga* n. A place of residence, ancestral home. v.t. *kaingana*: to take up one’s abode at. v. *kare kainga*: to visit homes of others as pastime (Sabatier 1971: 141).

It follows from the definitions of land then that the land on which one resides is also not separate from the person/people/body complex. Banabans have been displaced from their ancestral homes so the notion of home is immediately expanded to include the new residence. Silverman (1971), Sigrah (2001) and various Gilbertese historians described it as “hamlet.” The hamlets, however, were immediately restructured by the colonial administration into village districts separating members of the same descent group and bringing non-members into

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28 Banabans all speak the Gilbertese language, albeit with what some I-Kiribati call a “Rabi” accent. The Gilbertese definitions in this section are from *Te Tekitini ni teata ni Kiribati mu ni Ingiriisi* (Gilbertese-English Dictionary) originally compiled by Father E. Sabatier and translated by Sister Oliva of the Catholic Mission, Tarawa (1971). All contextual definitions and the translations of various phrases in the rest of the thesis are by John Tabakitoa Teaiwa.

29 See another reading of this relationship in Macdonald (1997) “Body of the land, body of the people.”
closer proximity. This problematized the nature of social relations amongst both Gilbertese and Banabans resulting in the distancing of some ties and strengthening of others including those with non-kin (see Talu et. al 1979).

I use *kainga* to evoke a relationship that has been drastically transformed by colonialism and now by globalization. I understand it to include the ever-expanding connections between current, past or future residences, ancestral lands, ancestors, descent groups and other individuals or groups. It is a corporeal, epistemological and political issue to go beyond, while still acknowledging the various contexts, of the bounded local. The result here, then, is an assemblage of fragments of Banaban lands, bodies, memories, connections and experiences as a result of the island being broken up, displaced, transformed and dispersed.31

The four stills on the title page of this section suggest one possible answer to the “where and when is home?” question with respect to my own Banaban and Gilbertese heritage. “Home/land” lies between Tabiteuea, as illustrated by the three smaller images (in Video 4), and the larger single image of Banaba (Video 1).

![Figure 2. Kainga: home/land/body](image)

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31 This is starkly illustrated in Video 2 when watching the mechanical process of mining rock.
Since home/land is also “body,” my grandmother, Takeua and her kairanga on Tabiteuea Meang, are embodied here by stills of her namesake being dressed to dance. A person can be represented by another person who is both kin and in this case namesake.\(^{32}\) This is juxtaposed with Banaba, the land from which Takeua’s husband, Teaiwa is descended (see Chapter 5). Teaiwa’s mother, however, is from Tabiteuea so the images together hold multiple meanings for me including the fact that there is no one, essential homeland or way of being connected to people and place (for myself, Teaiwa or Takeua).

Figure 5 maps out the itinerary that I think explores questions of home for myself and many other Banabans between and on a number of different lands.

**The Original Project: E kawa te aba**

The title of my “pre-fieldwork paper”\(^ {33} \) was “E kawatu te aba: the Genealogy of Pity from Rabi to Ocean Island.” Originally I wanted to explore the concept of kaua or pity as it shaped Banahan perceptions of their history and culture. “E kawatu te aba” was a popular phrase on Rabi in 1997, used to comment on collective Banahan troubles. The antics of a cheeky child, a lazy (or “grog doped” fn53) husband or a broken-down school bus would be cause to invoke a shared Banahan burden or nava. Following a discussion with a Banahan man named Stephen Christopher and a few people in Tabwewa village (cf K. Teaiwa 1999), it was revealed that there were two basic points of reference for kaua.

The first is the past—the phosphate mining and a colonial history marked by dispossession and material prosperity.\(^ {34} \) For people in the older generations who

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32 See an example from Silverman where he asks a man why he is not attending an ntu gathering and he replies, “my body is going.” The physical person is actually his mother’s mother’s sister’s daughter’s son (1971: 272).

33 This is one of the major requirements of a degree in Anthropology at ANU which usually comes after the literature review and proposal of theoretical question. After research in “the field” you then do a “post-fieldwork seminar” after which you are left to “write up” and submit annual reports until you are finished.

34 Aside from producing much needed fertilizer, the company paid leasing fees and royalties for landowners which allowed Banabans to purchase various consumer goods. A larger portion of phosphate revenue including a mining tax was paid to the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony. According to Van Trease, 85% of the royalties from Banaba went to the government and this accounted for over 50% of its budget (1993: 9, 21). At independence the Kiribati Reserve Fund
remember life on Banaba, pity means the loss of the material abundance once enjoyed when the company first came with electricity and phosphate royalties among other things, and later on Rabi when royalties were at their peak.\footnote{Payments to Banabans for leasing land for mining were first at the rate of £50/year for 999 years. Later, lease money was paid to individual landowners as well as a royalty for each tonne shipped.}

The second reference point is the present, where for younger generations, \textit{kutu} is rather due to the hardships they now face because the phosphate revenues have been squandered and many older people are still preoccupied with Banaba and the past. From their perspective, talking about long gone prosperity does not provide immediate sustenance. As I discuss further in Chapter 5, younger people today have to work hard for money and food and negotiate a political and cultural climate that is primarily Fijian— not Gilbertese or European.

Between 1900 and 1980, Banaba was in fact far more “advanced” than most other islands in the Pacific. This is illustrated directly by the island’s housing and recreation seen in Video 2, the industrial debris of 2000 in Video 3, and in the memoirs of former European residents in Chapter 3. Within a couple years of discovering the phosphate, the island was fully equipped with moorings, a large trade store, electricity, train and tram tracks, and later, double story buildings, modern plumbing, phone lines, tennis courts, swimming pools, golf courses, power plants, large ships and a sophisticated harbor. This all changed in 1979 once the mining ceased. The island today is a wasteland of modernity; a graveyard of “civilization.”

Banaban colonial historical experience defies any linear logic of western progress and development. This island environment went from so called “primitive” (pre-1900) through to “civilization” (1900-1979) and back to “underdeveloped” \textit{because} of the extractive activities of capitalist industry and the manipulations of the British colonial administration and company. When asked about the past some old people reminisce about chocolate and film, things that are luxuries on Rabi today. The actual reversal of the perceived temporal progression from “primitive” to “modern” is one reason why Banaban culture cannot just be approached from the standard “local” anthropological frame. How can we contain in one spatial or

seeded by phosphate money was $69 million (ibid: 21). The fact that Kiribati got a large share of phosphate revenue is a sore point for Banabans.
temporal frame, a people who one day lived off the land and sea and the next had prospectors, followed by miners eager to exchange that land for money? What can we write “holistically” about an entire people who once lived on Banaba next to colonial mansions and drank water shipped in from Melbourne, and then lived in tents next to cows on hurricane-prone Rabi, all in the space of ten years?

A look at contemporary Banaban experience entails a direct but critical engagement with the past in all its traces—in the current social landscape of Rabi, on performing bodies, in minds, on rocks, in rusty bulldozers and scraps of metal left on Banaba.

Though the experience of Banaba is definitely tragic I decided to move away from “pity” during my homework period for three reasons. The first was that my father was then still the Chairman of the Rabi Council of Leaders. Because of years of experience as a senior civil servant in the Fiji Government he was able to effectively manage both the political and economic needs of the island which had previously been in turmoil from internal corruption. He also tried to repair relations with Kiribati, a relationship which was still bitter to say the least, since Banaban efforts at secession had been denied by both the colonial administration and the emerging independent Kiribati government in the 1970s. My thesis on “pity” or its rise and fall, would have had to include why my father’s approach was successful in contrast to former leaders. I did not want to make my thesis a partial biography of my own father, not because I didn’t admire his efforts but because it is bad mana to bring too much attention to a family member and to be seen to be promoting them above others. Banabans and Gilbertese believe it will bring bad luck to him or her. While I can take responsibility for my own experiences and ideas in the academy, I cannot justify a sustained focus on my father in the Banaban context. In this thesis, then, his influence on Banaban survival is implied rather than explicated.

The second problem I began to have with the kauru approach was that it conformed too neatly to a Banaban nationalist rhetoric. This rhetoric deployed an essentialist approach to Banaba as the only homeland while suppressing legitimate

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allowed the set up of a modest trust fund for the Banaban people. Their benefits, however, were still far below company profits and those of the British colonial administration (see Macdonald 1982).

36 See the drama by the Banaban dancing group about tents and cows in the video 5.

37 He was elected in 1996 after living outside the community for almost thirty years. His term ended in December 2000 and despite widespread requests he decided not to run for the next elections.
connections to other islands in the Pacific. This language is best illustrated on the message board of the Banaban website run by Stacey King and Ken Sigrah from Queensland (http://banaban.com) and resonates too closely with a romantic and nostalgic vision of Banaba shared by former European residents who had quite different power relationships with the island and the company. It is the mining company that equated Banaban identity with money through land and it is through problematic equations that questions of “the homeland” are approached by Banaban nationalists. The fluidity between islands previously connected through Banaban blood or movement—in the Gilberts, Tahiti, Hawai’i or Kosrae—diminished during the eighty-year mining period. My inclusion of Tarawa and Tabiteuea tries to break the essentialist and nostalgic recuperation of grounding Banaban identity in their dislocation from Banaba to Rabi.

The final problem with “pity” was that when I visited Rabi in 1999-2000 kava seemed to have much less currency than in 1997. I suspect that this had much to do with the success of policies implemented by my father.39 On Rabi, buses were running, council debts were being paid off, council workers were paid and schools were renovated. “Pity” as a public or popular idea was moreover virtually absent in Kiribati. Organising a thesis around such a concept would have been a misrepresentation of the actual preoccupations of Banabans or Gilbertese during the research period. The connective tissue between all the places I travelled was not pity but rather Pan-Pacific songs, dances, cultural practices, genealogical relationships and the phosphate mining industry. I thus tried to leave “pity” behind and began to think about how I could talk about what actually did happen between November 1999 and January 2001.

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38 See reference to kan tiraki in “The politics of representation.”
39 During his term, the council’s plan for Rabi focused on self-reliance and sustainable development rather than the annuities scheme that previously caused widespread reliance on royalties earned through phosphate. While the responsibilities of the Council Chairman are mostly political, and the job only pays about F$6000 per annum, my father, a former Permanent Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries, and Forestry as well as Rural Development and Housing for the whole of Fiji, worked at it full time and took on board administrative duties in order to revamp the system.
This project: “follow the thing”

George Marcus has described some of the implications of doing multi-sited research (1995). For my own project, this increasingly popular approach was less an option than a necessity for following both the phosphate history and the movement of land and peoples between islands. Marcus’ outline for doing multi-sited ethnography includes: follow the people, follow the thing, follow the metaphor, follow the plot, story or allegory, follow the life or biography, and follow the conflict (ibid: 106-110). All these techniques emerge in my thesis, including “follow the image,” not least of all because “the people,” “the thing,” “the metaphor,” “the story,” “the image” and “the conflict” (the Banabans, the rock, the body/land, the resistance/ the corruption), in the poetic and spiritual sense are one and the same.40

In order to follow “the thing” mapped out by this thesis, new reading practices are required. Reflecting on the necessity of balancing monocultural literacy with mixed cultural literacy Ramona Fernandez states the task elegantly:

The encyclopaedic impulse must be balanced by its counterpoint: the impulse to travel across local knowledges, making a map as you go, weaving a net of connections as you meander and discover. Reading practices are not about creating a canon of knowledge; they are about entering a rhizomatic web of meaning created through association. Reading practices cannot be fixed, texts are not static lumps yielding to invariant decoding (Fernandez 2001: 82).

The View from the Archives

In August 1999 I sat in a very clean, white booth in the Lonsdale Street office of the Victoria holdings of the National Archives of Australia.41 In front of me were the contents of File R140/1 Box 7 from the vast records of the British Phosphate Commissioners. I was looking at shipping records for the movement of phosphate rock from Banaba and Nauru to Australia over a period of eighty years. For

40 The “spiritual” sense is generally taboo in the academy. You’re not supposed to “believe” what you study other people believing. For some indigenous peoples, however, material and spiritual things are connected and metaphors are not just discursive tools.

41 The archival research in Melbourne and Adelaide is covered in the next chapter. The summary of it here overlaps with the version in Chapter Two to illustrate how different occasions initiate different
instance, in 1932-33 the Cresco Company Geelong received 51079 tonnes of rock while Port Adelaide got 24462 tonnes, Port Lincoln 13843 tonnes, Wallaroo 19939 tonnes and Fremantle 47458 tonnes. My academic life in Australia took on new meaning as I imagined the lives and materials transformed by this massive industry. Later on that month I went to the Burwood office of the National Archives of Australia where all of the company's photographs are kept. I stared long and hard at the images of men on Banaba mining the rocks by hand and the pinnacle-ridden moonscape left behind by such activities. I noted the smart looking white managers in snow-white suits and the dark-skinned “kanaka” and “coolie” labourers, all without protective head or footgear. Then I examined the never ending images of ships with names like SS Ariake Maru, SS Port Denison, SS Croarty, SS Rapallo, SS Isleworth, SS Fidrma, the SS Workfield and the prides of the BPC, the Triona, Triaster, Trienza and Tri-Ellis. All of these ships radiated out from and with bits and pieces of the island I had heard invoked by my own relatives in Fiji as the “homeland.”

Chapter 2 describes the process of going through archival documents, photographs and films of this immense industry. I do not synthesize their contents in order to create an objective, “factual” historical overview of the BPC like Williams and Macdonald (1989). Rather I treat each source as a construction, a perspective of life in the industry and on the island equal to non-archival perspectives. As Greg Dening writes, “European inventions of the Pacific to be discovered, wherever there is an academy or an archive or a museum or a library, are beyond measure. And one must add to them all the living inventions not written down but which survive in lore, in shared images, in cannibal jokes, in fantasies about sarongs” (Dening 1991: 357). These are the alternative histories that I look at more closely in Chapter 3 including the memories of former residents who reconstructed their lives on Banaba from the perspective of the present.

My experience in the Banaba collections in both Melbourne and Adelaide, increased my acceptance of the very fragmented nature of information about the presentations of the same past experience. Each version is an alternate view similar to approaches in montage film where an event is depicted from different perspectives.

42 Kanaka was a widely used term for “native” derived from the Hawaiian word. This indexed not just “native” race but the hard labour. The Melanesian islanders who became part of Queensland labour
past, and about the partiality of archival sources. It is no small coincidence that histories of Banaba have come to rest in these two cities, both of which received significant phosphate shipments for decades. Stories of Banaba are as fragmented as the bits of dusty rock that arrived on BPC ships to Australia. Only through the pens, typewriters or computers of historians and anthropologists are such stories made to seem whole.

As I sat in the archives reflecting on photographs, maps, shipping routes, tonnage tables and chemical analyses of phosphate rock I realized that the flow of land from Banaba to its various destinations in Australia and New Zealand constituted a potential “field-site.” Unlike conventional fieldsites it was vast and moving. This was brought to life by my reviewing the diverse, unbounded documented texts and images. I consequently spent two weeks with a good friend and professional photographer, Mark Willie Chung, copying three hundred and eighty images from the last century of mining.

Past images of the island, viewed from the present, shaped a new and highly visual understanding and reinterpretation of both my heritage and the multifaceted mining history. The very act of viewing hundreds of images covering almost a century initiated an encounter with “constructed, contested fields of tension”, in Max Quanchi’s evocation of looking at Pacific photographs (1997: 5). These were contested mining fields where both indigeneity and migration, labour and rock took on charged significance. This experience caused a shift in my focus from what might have been the obvious object of anthropological research—the cultural effects of mining on the indigenous inhabitants (following Silverman) and therefore a focus on pity. Instead I wanted to present the conjunctural moments in which my own, indigenous, Gilbertese, Ellice Island, Australian, New Zealand, and British experiences, interpretations and representations of the island were brought into counterpoint and contradiction.

Not only were the diverse human experiences of the mining increasingly important but the very “experience” of the land, te aba, was thrown into relief. The stark coral pinnacles which now dominate the Banaba landscape—often referred to trade were also called *kanikas* (see Scarr 1967: 154-159). “Coolie” was a derogatory expression used to refer to Asians throughout the British colonial empire.
as a “moonscape”— draws attention to the absence of the earth “in between.” New Zealand artist Robin White has eloquently portrayed the similar moonscape of Nauru, the closest island to Banaba and also mined by the BPC, in a collection of four pieces titled “Postcards from Pleasant Island.” One of them depicts the words, “wish you were here,” and in Gilbertese, te ahu n ri— the land of bones.

Figure 3. Banaba “moonscape” late 1960s (R 132/4)  
Figure 4. Close-up of “Postcards from Pleasant Island” by Robin White.

I didn’t necessarily interpret the company photographs as evidence of certain facts about the past. Quanchi notes that pictorial histories of the region have uncritically treated images as evidence, “suggesting to readers as did the photographers... that what was being offered was ‘truth’ or from ‘real life’ ” (Quanchi 1997: 5). Rather, I saw the images in the BPC collection as captured and constructed moments brimming with excess meaning and colonial motivation. In this reading what could not be seen was as meaningful as what could. I had thoughts on what some of the absences were, greatly shaped by my own complex identifications and experiences of life in Fiji as well as my cultural distance from the Rabi community. Both the photographs and documents gave no indication of the lived experiences of Banabans, mining workers or European employees.

43 A large portion of Robin White’s Kiribati art work was displayed at the Drill Hall Gallery at the ANU in 2002. It was titled “Time to Go.” The image in Figure 4. is used with permission from Robin White.

44 I was not raised on Rabi. I was born in Savusavu, lived in Lautoka as a small child and raised mainly in Suva. We only spoke English in our house though my father and elder sister understand Gilbertese and Fijian as well. See Chapter 4 on “mastering the language.”
Today on Rabi, where most Banabans have lived for fifty-six years, indigenous rights discourse like engagement with the past and "the homeland" is understandable problematic and volatile. This is often articulated against a homogenous exploitative colonial "other". This approach does not acknowledge the differences between landowners and mining workers, nor does it reflect the diverse motivations and views of the white people involved with the mining industry. In Chapter 3, the memoirs of three Europeans who once lived on Banaba are retold and analysed as an important illustration of this.

In 1999 as I reviewed the visual representations of the past, I wanted to re-construct the stories implied by the images in new contexts. I wanted to unravel and reveal the BPC's exploitative agendas but in ways which highlighted the specificities of both the island and the bodies (Banaban, European, Chinese, Japanese, Gilbertese, Ellice Islander) connected to or transformed by it. The images of the company ships recruiting workers from various islands of the Gilbert and Ellice group charted a crucial aspect of this dynamic flow: that of bodies and their labour.45

These workers facilitated the movement of rocks to other lands: extracted, crushed, doused with sulphuric acid, transformed into fertiliser and released across so-called infertile earth from the bellies of crop-dusters.46 It was ironic that man-made fertilizer was distributed with the same physics through which birds had delivered their rich droppings for millions of year onto a spot of coral, protruding from the center of the ocean giving birth to an entire island. Every contour, rock, body, nut, bolt, buoy, cog and wheel, meticulously documented by the company seemed replete with meaning. My task then and now has not been to re-present these meanings as parts of an organic whole, but to choreograph a movement of meanings out of disjointed information and experience. I use the term "choreograph" to hint at what eventually became an articulated experience of both mind and body during my travels between islands.

One might say that the colonially created entities "Australia" and "New Zealand" were nurtured on the fertile land that fuelled their efficient and productive dairy and farming industries. One might say that Australians and New Zealanders

45 See memories of mining workers in Chapter 3.
46 See the New Zealand song The Phosphate Flyers also in Chapter 3.
were nurtured by Pacific islands. Presented with such an excess of stories, materials, images and metaphors in the past, I tried to figure out how to approach their traces effectively through ethnographic work in the present. I now recall the off-hand comment from a rather efficient and thorough member of my anthropology cohort at the ANU. When asked why she didn’t pay more attention to history before going into the field she said, “Oh, but that is so boring!” This dismissal was met with laughter from a few sympathetic anthropologists. However, my experiences of the significance of the past for my project were exactly the opposite. I sat in the Australian archives reading records of my ancestral land which said things like:

So much romance has been entwined around the sunny coral-fringed isles of the Pacific that their commercial value is often overlooked. In Nauru and Ocean Islands, with their vast phosphate deposits, in which Australia has more than a third share, we have a wonderful asset. Our country is assured of supplies of the fertiliser which means gold to our wheat harvest and wealth in every branch of agriculture for at least 200 years. And as farming becomes more intense, the possession of a share in the world’s richest phosphate deposits will increase in importance. Supposing that 500,000 tons of phosphate are removed annually—a liberal allowance—the supplies will not be exhausted for about 200 years. So long as we maintain our part ownership for the islands, then Australians for the next four or five generations will not have to worry about a shortage of the rich fertiliser (The Sun 10 July 1926 in MP 1174).

In her paper on “the roots and routes of a displaced native,” my sister poetically describes the very physical connections between Banahan bodies, lands and Australian and New Zealand agriculture (Teaiwa 1995). Since her paper first imagined Banaban history as a visual project, I quote it throughout my thesis and differentiate it from other sources using an outline. Teaiwa’s paper was written as both a personal story and visual imagining of Banaban history in which bodies, everyday activities like visiting a relative or drinking a bowl of kava, and a number of different landscapes were brought into one frame by tracing the routes of phosphate rock.47

47 The entire paper was written in lowercase.
the whole reasons for banaban displacement is colonial agriculture. i like to say “agriculture is not in our blood, but our blood is in agriculture” (T.Teaiwa 1995: 6)

If generations of Australians don’t have to worry about where there food will come from, the same can’t be said for Banabans. People struggle on Rabi; people sometimes eat a mixture of flour and mashed cassava or breadfruit for days on end because that is all either their pride or action can provide. Agriculture itself is an activity that most people had to take up on the volcanic island of Rabi but a combination of both cultural and economic changes under the colonial-industrial complex have given few the incentive to cultivate the land on a large scale. The diet is mainly of rice, cassava or taro and fish. Yaqona or kava, however, is widely planted as a cash crop but the recent crash in the world market demand for it has meant more Banabans are drinking their own produce. Among other things the result of excessive kava consumption is low appetite, fatigue and *kamkani.* If men have spent a long night drinking kava they will not go out fishing the next day for that much needed protein. Chapter Five includes a discussion of these and other problems that affect the community on Rabi.

The relationships between Australia, Australians, Banabans, Banaba and Rabi, and Gilbertese in Fiji and Kiribati led me to create a homework itinerary that would take me along the same routes travelled by both the mining company, labourers, ancestors and relatives.

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48 Switzerland and Germany have both banned kava after some scientists found a link between kava consumption and liver disease. Currently, both New Zealand and Australia are considering similar action. Some information on this is available at [www.cfsan.fda.gov](http://www.cfsan.fda.gov) as well as [healthy.net/asp/templates/news.asp?id=3814](http://healthy.net/asp/templates/news.asp?id=3814).

49 *Kamkani* is a Fijian word describing the scaly skin that comes from drinking too much kava, also called “grog.” See Teresia Teaiwa (1998: 92-106), for a poetic essay connecting kava, our family, colonialism, phosphate mining, Banaba and life on Rabi in Fiji.
Figure 5. My research itinerary
In December 2000 our kainga had a party to mark my father's retirement as Chairman of the Rabi Council of Leaders. The night consisted of an extended family gathering in the small *meneana* in front of our house at Tabona and members from Tabiang, Uma and Tabwewa villages all attended. There were heaps of food and countless buckets and basins of *yaqona* fuelling at least one *tava*. The whole family sat on the floor of the *meneana* carefully decorated with coconut fronds and hibiscus flowers and illuminated by the light of a large gaslight and a benzene lamp both hanging from the rafters.

The *bootaki* began with a speech by my father about his life as a child on Tabiteuea and then Rabi, his education in Hawai'i and Australia and how he had eventually become Chairman of the Rabi Council of Leaders. Though it was not articulated, everyone knew that it was his return to Rabi that initiated a uniting of the extended family after years of in fighting and disagreement. The recent death of Kaka Teaiwa, meant that my father was now, as eldest male, the head of the family. His speech was a pointed way of encouraging younger members to stay in school and imagine possibilities beyond the island—opportunities that would teach them skills they could bring back to improve the welfare of the family. Then my aunty Rakomwa gave a tearful speech of thanks to my father and uncle Takaia (see Video 5) concluded with further thanks. The family then burst into song followed by two hours of dancing.

My Auntie Baterea acted as emcee and directed each household to present a performance. She turned it into a competition where if any family was not able to perform they had to contribute money to a family fund, usually a whopping five

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50 I am using *kainga* here in a new way because the land on which our houses sit on Rabi is not ancestral. It is the land assigned to us for agricultural activities but which our family decided to use for housing. As a result, a *kainga*-like settlement has emerged.

51 Traditionally the *meneana* was a large meeting house for the whole village but in this context it was a temporarily erected meeting house for our *kainga* which people referred to as "the *meneana.""

52 This is the *bootaki* or gathering featured in Teaiwa’s *Kainga* in Chapter 5.

53 *Yaqona*, kava or “grog” is made from the dried root of the piper methysticum plant. When consumed in excess it can create a dulling physical sensation which people on Rabi call “grog doped.”

54 A Fijian term for the special wooden basin that holds the mixed *yaqona*.

55 *Kaka* means grandparent, the pronoun *Ten* designates male grandparent, and *Nei*, female so we used to call Teaiwa “Ten Kaka.”
cents per waiver. Any visitor expecting traditional Gilbertese or Banaban dances would have been astounded with the variety our family displayed that night. We had two *bino* (sitting dance), a mixture of *batere* (dance) from Kiribati and Tuvalu, two Tahitian *tamarua* (Tahitian dance); a hybrid Polynesian dance of unknown origin; a *bokiturua* 56 a Christian hymn; a “Bruce Lee” style kung fu *maie* (a play or dance); a “rap” item with lots of pseudo break-dancing and a bit of *mukamena* 57 thrown in for good measure; an action song about the pitfalls of pre-marital sex (see Video 6); a generic Hawaiian hula to “Pearly Shells;” and a strange contemporary Pacific dance to the music of *Afro-Celt* which caused everyone to talk about ghosts. 58

Of our Banaban/Gilbertese family on Rabi Island, about ninety-five percent have never been outside Fiji, but are constantly creating new forms of expression and entertainment from both old and new sources. This mode of survival is one of the main motivations for my use of montage (see next section). While rarely the subject of salvage ethnomusicology, innovations in dance and music are primary survival strategies in the Pacific (cf Hayward 1998). Banaban and Gilbertese performance, today a blend of many acquired elements, has changed in form over time but has remained an important expression of identity. As an embodied practice, however, it differs from verbal articulations of identity. Performing bodies reveal traces of places and cultures beyond Rabi and Banaba. Any performance today can be juxtaposed with a history of creative survival through inter-island travels and exchanges, as well as intense colonial and missionary influences (see Lawson 1989). The *bootaki* that night on Rabi in our *kainga* displayed the wide variety of cultural forms that have become available for Banaban expression and entertainment. Banaban identities and cultural practices are thus a montage of diverse influences.

In trying to present this reality in the thesis, the usual conventions of language and argument of academic, genealogical and theoretical authority and the conventional relationship of images to text are tested and transformed to explore

56 The *bokiturua* is a boy’s dance which involves a beat only created by the sounds of the hands slapping the body and feet stamping the floor (see more in Chapter 5).
57 A simple, globally popular dance sequence originating in Latino-American popular music. The *mukamena* was danced in nightclubs from America to India to Fiji.
58 The *bino* is a Gilbertese sitting dance, *batere* is originally from Tuvalu (Ellice islands) but now applies to a variety of Gilbertese dances which are accompanied by beating on a box, *tamarua* is a Tahitian and
meaning, epistemology and methodology through montage. *Visualising te Kainga, Dancing te kainga* is an experiment, a story, an argument, a mapping, a set of short films about ways of knowing islanders and islands, history and culture, dancing and writing, rocks and industry, past and present, struggle and creative survival, local and global and all that lies in between.

Why do I feel compelled to tell all these stories in all their different forms together? Because the world does not stand still and bracket itself off for any kind of analysis. That’s what academics, policy-makers and doctoral students often try to do but not only does the world not stop moving, but analytical activities can greatly affect people’s lives (see for example Rodman in Benson 1993: 173-191). While I can be selective in choosing from a multitude of perspectives or make the imagined borders of a culture, a people and an island seem rigid and knowable I rather want to give a sense of complexity, multiplicity and movement to Banahan and Gilbertese histories. I may show you frames, stills, moments in time and space, but I know I must set them free as well. This is not just a Pacific, postmodern, feminist, decolonising strategy. This is, I believe, closer to how life is consciously or unconsciously for most human beings, anthropologists, rocks, coconut trees, frigate birds and dancers. They do not exist in divided disciplines, genres, categories, subsections or any of the different ways in which western scientific knowledge attempts to control, order and understand the universe (see Hereniko in Howe et al 1994: 407).

Throughout the textual part of thesis, whether in narrative or analytical mode I try to maintain a conversational style. 60 Part of my exploration of alternative forms

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59 After reading a summary of each section of the thesis and then watching all seven of the videos another PhD student, Jennifer Badstuebner, wrote out the following comments on this text-image form, “The very physical structure of the thesis/film confronts the idea of a separation between the visual/audio event of film and the text. By being unable to understand the whole (thesis) without seeing both (film and text) the structure itself works against separation, compartmentalisation and segregation so necessary to the rational objectives of Western knowledge. The thesis becomes more than a text, it is an event to be experienced and in doing so you enter into the ideology of the substance of the thesis itself—that of an utter subjectivity of performance, experience and being. You have no choice as reader/viewer but to become something else, something in-between. This is a confronting experience for those content with neat categories. The hybrid form spawns a hybrid reader/viewer” (personal com. August 30, 2002).

of knowledge presentation includes attention to a variety of audiences. For me, these audiences include my supervisors, my external examiners, my sisters, my father, my family on Rabi, my family on Tabiteuea, the Rabi Council of Leaders and so on and so forth. Given the impossibility of satisfying (while never forgetting accountability to) all of these audiences I try to conceive of words and images as performances or story tellings with synesthetic potential.

It is important, even if problematic, that my thesis be accessible to a broader audience. As I discuss later in Chapter 4, this is why video is a crucial medium for some parts of this thesis. I can take any of the videos and present them to a Banaban or I-Kiribati audience with my own live discussion of how and why I created it. I wouldn't, however, send any of the videos out on their own without my own presence or text to accompany it.

My “multimedia” motivations have something to do with trying to integrate ontology and epistemology, ways of being with ways of knowing. As much as I talk about dance, I dance. As much as I talk about moving images, I make them. As much as I talk about home and history as itinerary, I travel it. As much as I talk transdisciplinary knowledge, I try to practice it.

Much of the information I gained during the fieldwork or homework period, were stories, memories or bits of popular knowledge. Rather than just reinterpret them for academic consumption I have organized them so that their very juxtapositions propose alternative possibilities for theory and critique western academic conventions and forms of knowledge presentation. I thus try to make some generalising claims about Banaban and Gilbertese history and culture as well as explore the diversity of their situated engagements, utterances and simultaneities. Placed together—video, image, dance, story, poetry, memory, archival documents—they truly reflect the complexity of my “homework” experiences.

Kamala Visweswaran discusses the need for “homework” as a critique of the “epistemological weight fieldwork signifies for the discipline” (1994: 102). She acknowledges James Clifford's (1997, 1988, 1986) attempts to displace the prominence of travelling for the anthropologist and the temporal and spatial assumptions of being here (in the west) versus being there (somewhere exotic/ethnographic). Homework for her means speaking from the place one really
is located. I think of “home” as both current location and lived connection (consciously or unconsciously). To speak from one’s location entails multi-sited locution.\(^{61}\) If one’s identity includes being Banaban and especially “Pacific Islander,” then it must be articulated with specific, connected Pacific places. Identity is an assertion of multiple relationships as much as one of belonging.

This “introduction” and the rest of the thesis hardly fall into the conventional logics of a linearly unfolding narrative or argument. Instead, I echo Marta Savigliano who prefaced her very thorough and rigorous PhD exploration of *Tango and the Political-economy of Passion* with a poetic prelude: “I speak in bursts, splashes and puddles, opening windows to what I have expected to be major controversial knots engendered in my putting together...” (Savigliano 1995: 9) this thesis. Like my family’s *bounty* on December 16, 2000, the thesis montage is an assemblage of voices, stories, events, songs and images. This is most likely not the strategy for another student but it is mine for now.

**Montage: writing, editing**

*Visualising te kainga, Dancing te kainga* is very much about the process through which information and experience in the homework period was gathered, organized and edited. To follow that process between different and yet connected bodies, places and forms of knowledge I use the metaphor of montage.

**montage / mon’taz / n.** 1. the art or method of arranging in one composition pictorial elements borrowed from several sources so that the elements are both distinct and blended into a whole, through techniques such as superimposition. 2. Film, TV a technique of film editing in which several shots are juxtaposed or partially superimposed to form a single image. [F: mounting, putting together]\(^{62}\)

Montage in film editing is the cutting between vignettes, shots or meaningful units. It is the movement between frames which creates meaning. I have used it here to invoke movement between lands, as in “between Rabi, Banaba and beyond,”

\(^{61}\) See further discussion of Gupta and Ferguson (1997) and their critique of fieldwork in Chapter 4.

between bodies, and between different kinds of knowledge. Movement is crucial to my structure, as I “move” (leap, bound, slide) between levels of analysis and situated articulations. Montage can be used to think about bringing together disparate elements into a composition, like reclaiming bits of land or bits of knowledge about Banaban land dispersed throughout Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and Kiribati.

“Movement” invokes the cognitive work required to follow Banaban experiences across time and space and “visualising” is one, albeit ocular, mode for presenting experience across different milieu. While “vision” has been widely critiqued as the primary mode for problematic European representations and imaginings of the Pacific, “visualizing” is used here for the possibility of making visible aspects of the past and present that play out on performing bodies and between specific lands or peoples. For example, phosphate/rock/land has been approached more as a conceptual category than a physical or embodied reality. I use video to try to reconnect the land/body or word/body split and to suggest that one rarely gets any closer to “truth”—in the sense that it is highly prized by universities—through verbal articulation (cf Haraway 1988).

Montage as an organising principle for both text and film illuminates the contemporary and historical realities of Banabans in the broader context of Pacific experiences. It is particularly helpful for dealing with the problematic “Native” (rooted or local) in Pacific Cultural Studies which increasingly focuses on islanders in the diaspora. T. Teaiwa writes: “Such an articulation of cultural studies and Pacific studies makes it possible to see how “the Native” is not radically different from or other to diasporic or postcolonial subjects but intimately related to them...the project is...one...of acknowledging difference” (2001a: 77). Such differences must be recognized in terms of the projects of anthropology, which prefers emplaced subjects, and cultural studies with its inclinations towards diaspora. At the end of the thesis Video 7 tries to visualize a bridge between these two poles by specifically connecting emplaced bodies who transcend their bounded locales by participating in

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63 “Realities” here refers not to “the real” in its one-dimensional post-enlightenment interpretation but reality in how many islanders are actually actively negotiating multiple tools for interpreting, understanding and surviving in the world. These tools usually come from the living and the dead.

64 Teresia traces her calls for a re-engagement with “the Native” in cultural studies through Hau'ofa’s (1993) work in “Our Sea of Islands.” “Native” in capitals stands for her theoretical figure.
trans-Pacific culture (cf. Appadurai 1990). This is a montage of bodies and spaces, their very juxtapositions bringing into question static notions of indigeneity.

Montage in general is about bringing together different and seemingly disparate elements to create new meaning. The elements are not blended but gathered together while holding true to their own situated forms, perspectives and experiences. While it is easy to lose grounding in the process of moving quickly between situated knowledges, I consider it faithful to Banaban experience. Moreover, as a self-conscious editing technique, it draws attention to the power of knowledge. Ultimately I am trying to say something about Pacific life, how we represent it and how we might change it for the better. There is multiplicity but it is not just celebratory or relativistic.

There is no way in this thesis to get avoid the aesthetic appreciation of art—the need to engage and contemplate something on its own terms, rather than through constant verbal exposition. For me, both explanation and reflection, or what Gary Kildea, using Kantian teleology calls “reflective judgement” and “determinant judgement” are important (see Kant 1987). A reader or audience must be able to appreciate or experience the videos for example, as things in themselves—cinematic images of bodies and objects in or moving in and out of space, their relationships to each other, to absent bodies and objects and how the juxtaposition of certain frames makes meaning. It is still crucial, however, to situate such bodies, objects and spaces in particular locations, times, and historical contexts. There has to be cognitive movement between the universal and the particular. The end result is a requirement of more work on the part of a reader/audience. Meaning is not handed on a plate but is partly created by stimulating greater audience participation.

While writing long before the advent of the rather problematic and increasingly global obsession with reality TV, with formulaic situation comedies or dramas, or the popularity of music video, I think Walter Benjamin touched on a fundamental aspect of film.

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65 Compare discussion of photography and art in Jeffrey (1981) and Sontag (1977). Photography and filmmaking exist at the interface of science and art in that they try to capture or suggest “the real” but by their very forms create meaning beyond the image.
Actually, of a screened behaviour item which is neatly brought out in a certain situation, like a muscle of a body, it is difficult to say which is more fascinating, its artistic value or its value for science. To demonstrate the identity of the artistic and scientific uses of photography which heretofore usually were separated will be one of the revolutionary functions of the film (Benjamin 1992: 677).

Film or cinema when approached in all its complexity has unending liberatory, pedagogical and epistemological possibilities.

Montage and Methods

In their writings on qualitative research methods, Steven J. Taylor and Robert Bogdan (1998) devote an entire chapter to “Montage: Discovering Methods.” The book contextualizes its recommendations in the history and discipline of Sociology. They warn that researchers, “...must be careful not to be boxed in by a limited repertoire of research approaches” (ibid. 117). Their exploration of “innovative or unconventional methods” (ibid: 118) includes a discussion of Harold Garfinkel and “disrupting the commonsense world of everyday life”; “Qualitative research as autobiography”; “Entering a world without words”; “Personal documents”; “Photography and methodology” and “Official records and public documents” (ibid: 117).

Taylor and Bogdan distinguish between social scientists’ “educating” themselves on ways to study the world by creating anew as opposed to being “trained” in tried-and-true methods. They remind us of C. Wright Mills’ (1959) conclusion to The Sociological Imagination:

Be a good craftsman: Avoid a rigid set of procedures. Above all seek to develop and to use the sociological imagination. Avoid fetishism of method and technique. Urge the rehabilitation of the unpretentious intellectual craftsman, and try to become a craftsman yourself. Let every man be his own methodologist... (Taylor and Bogdan 1998: 117)

Supposedly this would include every woman too but throughout my Kiribati trip I kept wondering about whether “visiting relatives” counted as good research. Taylor and Bogdan’s (1998) discussion of qualitative research and autobiography in particular helped me think through this when I returned to Canberra. The post-
fieldwork paper I gave after returning from Fiji and Kiribati seemed to inflame an ongoing debate in anthropology about objectivity and subjectivity. Apparently, my presentation had sounded too autobiographical and too subjective (cf Fortier 1996). Someone asked me afterwards: “if this [your approach] is the answer, what is the question?” The question was meant to highlight the non-universal, non-replicable nature of my research. After further reflection I realised that some anthropologists were very uncomfortable with the idea that a scholar might treat their unique, specific experiences as intellectually valid. It was extraordinary to me, coming from Pacific Studies where there was an assumed, direct relationship between the islander and the scholarly topic, that for some, the specificity of my connections to the research and people was both irrelevant and rather suspect.66

Apparently this view was nothing new but what I did not realize was that a few doctoral candidates had become alienated and isolated after presenting similar personal and often empathetic accounts of their fieldwork experiences and so-called “subjects.” My seminar was followed a couple weeks later by another student who had just returned from Fiji and presented some of the problems she faced doing research during the 2000 coup. Her response to the situation was seen by some as too emotional and it was again proposed that we have a discussion seminar on “objectivity and subjectivity.”

I was to represent the subjectivity camp and another student, armed with Paul Roth’s (1989) “Ethnography Without Tears,” represented the objectivity defenders. Because of my particular itinerary through academia, I had no idea there was a long and bitter division in the social sciences between those who saw emotion and personal accounts as less scientific and those who recognized the value and mediating nature of all subjective knowledge (not to mention the acceptance that previously colonized and oppressed peoples were now doing research themselves). The seminar did not go well, at least not from my viewpoint. I had forgotten to arm myself with quotes from the multitude of anthropologists who had been dealing

66 I have to acknowledge, though, that many people in the audience appreciated my approach.
with this question for years. I forgot to invoke, for example, Renato Rosaldo (1989) whom I had read at the University of Hawai'i. 67 He wrote:

Such terms as **objectivity, neutrality** and **impartiality** refer to subject positions once endowed with great institutional authority, but they are arguably neither more nor less valid than those of more engaged, yet equally perceptive, knowledgeable social actors. Social analysis must now grapple with the realization that its objects of analysis are also analyzing subjects who critically interrogate ethnographers— their writings, their ethics, and their politics (Rosaldo 1989: 21).

If this is very old news for some it isn't for many others who see anything personal or autobiographic as non-objective.

Taylor and Bogdan’s discussion of methodology and autobiography, however, is obviously positive. While discussing David Karp’s research on sadness and depression in which he uses his own struggle with depression “as a point of departure and a grounding for his theorizing,” they conclude that, “Karp builds solid symbolic interactionist theory and does not attempt to hide the tears” (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998: 121).

In other areas of feminist ethnography and research, similar approaches are taken but there is also a fundamental questioning of the nature of theory and academic power relations. 68 In their introduction to *Women Writing Culture*, Behar and Gordon describe this as a “refusing to separate creative writing from critical writing” (1995: 7; cf Williams 1991). Taylor and Bogdan’s call for method as montage is described more explicitly by Behar and Gordon as inclusive of many different kinds of writing from fiction to travelogues, poetry and fieldwork accounts. This montage of approaches is necessary because knowledge has pedagogical, political, epistemological and historical implications and academia cannot afford to ignore any one of these concerns.

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67 Written in the late 1980s, Rosaldo uses personal experiences to reflect on approaches to other cultures, discusses the pitfalls of “objectivity,” the colonial roots of anthropology and the discipline’s changing politics.

68 See Irma McClaurin (2001) in which research is not just personalized but all articles are prefaced by a photograph of the black female author, all of whom are anthropologists.
Montage and Ethnography

Over the last three years I have had to think of the many different ways in which I could present the information learned from my research, given the space and time constraints of both myself and my potential audience. Neither I nor they could sit down and review all the documents, images and stories of the past that I have encountered.

I first came across the connections between montage and writing in an article by George Marcus who was "interested in modernising... ethnography's apparatus of representation" (1994: 39). He detected a shift in "the space-time framework of ethnography..." (ibid: 43).

Marcus writes:

... I have been noting that the self-conscious experimental moves away from realist representation in both history and anthropology have been undertaken in the name of montage. Montage lends technique to the desire to break away with existing rhetorical conventions and narrative modes through exposing their artificiality and arbitrariness. How montage techniques in themselves establish an alternative coherence, or whether they can, is a major issue in experimentation (ibid).

Marcus is interested in how a modernist text is created in a work where it is shown how "...distinctive identities are created from turbulence, fragments, intercultural reference, and the localised intensification of global possibilities and associations" (1994: 42). He outlines six strategies for dealing with the construction of ethnographic subjects and for establishing the presence of the ethnographer in the text. To summarize, they are (1994: 43-44):

1. Problematizing the spatial—a recognition of the deterritorialization of culture.
2. Problematizing the temporal—a break with the trope of history in realist ethnography; recognition that discourses are often emergent responses to future, not yet articulated conditions.
3. Problematizing perspective/voice—registering indigenous voices without assumptions about how they might be located in terms of the conventional correlates by which structure is constituted in realist descriptions.
4. The dialogic appropriation of concepts and narrative devices—this is to replace exegesis, the intensive appropriating of a key indigenous symbol or concept into the anthropologist's analytic scheme such that he/she is given power to speak
for the other.

5. Bifocality—removing the distance of “otherness” that constitutes the ethnographic gaze. A connectedness between observer and observed is assumed extending to the period before ethnography and fieldwork.

6. Critical juxtapositions and contemplation of alternative possibilities—cultural critique not only of the discipline’s apparatus but of the subjects’ alternative cosmologies and practices, and the conditions of the local site in question.

The schema, briefly sketched here, rather than imposing an academic framework upon the lives of potential subjects is instead created out of a recognition of the heterogeneity of and connections between both scholars and the communities they study. Points 1-4 and 6 are of specific methodological interest to me while 5 is something that many indigenous Pacific scholars rarely have the luxury of choosing to consider, being accountable to our communities in most contexts. We do, however, have to contend with issues of representation raised in point 4. Offering and recording certain versions of history or genealogy can be highly political acts.

The dialogical practice that Marcus calls for is more democratic if we attempt to hold indigenous and other articulations in their own temporal and spatial specificities and then juxtapose them with our contemporary practices and interpretations. For very pragmatic reasons, however, this is not always possible and throughout the thesis I move between appropriation and representation on the one hand, and presentation and juxtaposition on the other.

**Montage and Film**

Montage was the primary cinematic approach advocated by Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein who believed that the artistic activity should be one of constructing knowledge (Andrew 1976: 45). According to Gary Kildea, montage could be placed

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69 See Linda Tuhiwai-Smith’s *Decolonising Methodologies* (1999), chapter 7, for a discussion on indigenous community research.

70 For example, when Maude recorded certain genealogies and creation stories as being the quintessential “Banaban” histories these were intensely debated on Rabi.

71 This is best illustrated in the final video sequence titled “Culture Moves.” The song “pate pate” by the Tokelauan group Te Vaka acts as a kind of overarching narrative but the specificity of each moment of its engagement and performance is retained. This is done by not laying the better quality compact disc version of the song as soundtrack to the dancing. The music sounds exactly as it did during the different performances. The result is a representation which deploys critical juxtapositions as we reflect on why different bodies are dancing to this song across time and space.
at the opposite end of a spectrum from *mis en scène*. In cinematic terms, if montage creates meaning *between* frames, then *mis en scène* creates meaning *within* frames (Andrew, 1976: 158). Andrew observes that filmmaker Bazin considered montage to be a less realistic style in that it cannot naturalistically render an event. The moving temporal and spatial relationships between objects within a frame in particular are effaced by the focus on cutting between frames. So what appears to be at stake in a strategy for rendering meaning through montage versus *mis en scène* is "reality." "Reality" appears to be the property of science in its self-proclaimed rhetoric of representation and objectivity. Such representations are often marked by appeal to rigour, clarity, logic, rational thought and a linear progression of events. These values are embodied in most conventional ideas of academic writing and the structural requirements of an intellectual argument in an essay or thesis.

Photographer and web engineer Stephen Attaway discusses Eisenstein's approach, and in paraphrasing Marie Seaton, defines montage as: "...the uniting of shots of seemingly unrelated objects in the same film sequence so that they take on a new relationship to each other in the mind of the viewer" ([http://www.slip.net/~attaway/montage.html](http://www.slip.net/~attaway/montage.html)). Montage segments are usually short and sometimes deploy a "real time" technique in which several perspectives of the same event are depicted by cutting rapidly from one to the other. Attaway gives the example of televised sports where we see the play, the reaction of the crowd, the movement of a specific player and the attention of the coach one after the other. This is close to Eisenstein's style as seen in the famous scene on the Odessa Steps in *Potemkin* (1925) where the same incident is viewed from disparate locations and the people involved are rapidly brought into the frame. Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil* (1982)...

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72 Ethnographic filmmaker Gary Kildea and I have spent hours discussing different cinematic styles and their philosophical underpinnings. Kildea in general operates with an anti-montage inclination favouring long shots and holding true to the meaning within a given frame and temporal moment. I, on the other hand, prefer rupture, decontextualization and juxtaposition as illustrated by Videos 1, 3 and 5. However, I did attempt to put together a more *mis en scène* style film in Video 4.

73 See discussion of Donna Haraway's *Situated Knowledges* in "Situated Subjectivities" and "Visualizing." Haraway's writing style is montage-like with leaps and bounds between specific political, ecological, biological, and technological spaces and moments. Yet she is still able to reaffirm "objectivity" as a political necessity for dealing with inequality and injustice. She also discusses masculinist, Cartesian scientific logic in contrast to situated and different embodied experiences which she re-names "feminist objectivity." Haraway's style illustrates how form (how she argues) and content (what she's arguing for) are intimately connected.
enacts another type of montage but this time of geographically disparate peoples, places and stories only connected by an anonymous cameraman's journey. Marker's film elegantly portrays the visual and emotional connections between these sites through a collage of sounds and images.

The idea of montage, resonates with the ethnography characterised by feminist ethnographer Kamala Visweswaran (1994) as one marked by a refusal to explain.75 Meaning emerges out of critical juxtapositions. Montage also explains the style of someone like scholar and filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha whose work is described disapprovingly by Henrietta Moore as “marked through by disruption, juxtaposition and dislocation” (1994: 114). Moore is critical of the way in which on the one hand Minh-ha’s style disturbs the fixity of meaning, but on the other hand, “has the unintentional effect of transforming “...images and commentary into assertions, bald statements of some kind” (1994: 119). For Moore, the big missing piece is “evidence,” one of the main ingredients for good argument-making. But I believe there are many kinds of rhetorical strategies and many non-Western ones that academics would not put on par with their own standards and definitions of knowledge (things requiring “evidence.”).

Simultaneous and multi-sited experiences and realities, things that look different from different places and therefore which cannot be proven by one standard of truth, can come together in writing (and do in fiction writing), but are effectively presented cinematically through parallel editing or choreographically by moving bodies.76

In the seven edited films accompanying this thesis Videos 1, 5 and 7 definitely consist of disparate times, places, bodies and spaces juxtaposed for multiple readings of Banaban and Gilbertese history and culture. In a different way, Videos 2 from the

74 Attaway references Marie Seton (1952: 81).
75 From Chapter 5 in Fictions of Feminist Ethnography. Visweswaran reminded me that “the humanist project to know a culture ‘on its own terms’ and render those terms responsibly,” is a power laden exercise. Ethnography does not have to be a master narrative as her exercise in “Betrayal” (Chapter 3) shows. What she describes as “deconstructive ethnography” (1994: 78), a deferral, a refusal to explain where no shared audience is assumed, appeals greatly to me as it enacts useful strategies for a complex decolonization agenda.
76 A good example of this is in the work of Maori-Pakeha choreographer Merenia Gray. In Wild Maori (Te Whaea Theatre 2001) she combined Western, Maori and Pacific movements to illustrate the multiple and simultaneous realities that many mixed Pacific and Maori residents live.
archives of the BPC and Video 3 of Banaba in 2000, are also montages, but within a smaller time frame—that of the journey of the filmmaker to Banaba. Video 4 is quote different and is an exploration in the *mis en scène* style. It consists of long takes in a small space with no cuts that take the viewer out of one household. The film focuses only on the relationships between bodies and objects in that space and the camera is much closer to the subjects than in any of the other videos. Video 6 is a mixture of these two styles in that it is an exploration of one space and one day—that of December 15 2000. The editing is done in such a way that one gets a sense of the length of the day, the space of the playground/stage and podium, as well as the multiple dramaturgical elements.

On the whole, there are almost no sub-titles, the brief exception is in Video 5, and only Video 4 has a voiceover. This was an ethical choice for me because I find the role of an anthropologist as “translator” or “mediator” problematic. To render a culture, people or island totally comprehensible for any audience is to claim an authority that no person can truly have (see Macdougall 1998: 174). I prefer to present possibilities of interpretation and experience.

*Montage and Pacific Studies: Our Sea of different and connected islands*

The Ocean is the Original Internet: it connects all things
(Enzo Piano at Dave Sag *Thoughts on Screen*).

If montage allows filmmakers to suture disparate frames, the ocean in all its real and metaphoric connotations holds disparate, different and yet connected islands and peoples. In an intriguing but brief allusion, Deleuze and Guattari wrote, “Does not the East, Oceania in particular, offer something like a rhizomatic model opposed in every respect to the Western model of the tree?” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 18). The authors write against hierarchies and binaries though they acknowledge that stratified nodes can form along a fluid, rhizomatic web. For them ideas, strategies of survival, resistance, and “becoming” exist in an assemblage of possibilities which include stratified or calcified, tree-like hierarchies as fluid and constantly
transforming activities. The model of the rhizome like montage offers a useful way of theorizing and participating in Oceania—past, present and future.

On a much smaller scale the model of the rhizome (cf Fernandez 2001) can be applied to research on the Pacific if one does not separate history from culture or Anthropology from History. The Pacific is one of those vast spaces in which culture—the many ways in which people organize and experience their collective survival and history—everything that happened from a second ago to the beginning of time, go hand in hand. One cannot look at the present without dealing with the past. Many well known anthropologists who write about the Pacific find themselves necessarily engaging with history including Sahlin (1985), Hau’ofa (in Waddell 1993), Borofsky (2000), Thomas (1997), Silverman (1971) and Jolly (1992), (Des Chene 1997). Similarly, both the locally written accounts of Kiribati history (Talu et.al 1984 and Mason, ed. 1985) describe culture through history.

The ocean is the central metaphor for Epeli Hau’ofa’s Our Sea of Islands (Waddell, 1993) which is described in both cultural studies and Pacific studies as the most influential contemporary vision of Oceania. Hau’ofa’s “Sea of Islands” maps traditional travelling practices or “voyaging,” onto contemporary migratory movements. It is a recuperative vision in which far from losing their culture as a consequence of colonial rule and changing social and economic requirements, islanders have been practicing “world enlargement” through their contemporary, travelling activities (Waddell, 1993: 6).

The problem with any theory that tries to describe an ocean filled with such diversity, from shells and bodies to ecosystems, is that it never satisfies the specificity of each place, person or connection. As Greg Dening has eloquently put it, “The Pacific is, in any case, a hard place to identify with—so much ocean, too many islands. Who can claim authenticity for their history in their connection to something so amorphous and so divided?” (Dening 1989: 134). Hau’ofa’s “Sea of Islands,” for example, while working very well for Polynesian and, to an extent,

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77 See the collection edited by Siikala (1990) on history and culture in the Pacific.
78 The number of Pacific historians who have been influenced by anthropology are much less but include Dening (1989), Douglas (1998) and Hanlon (1988).
79 See Connerly (2001) and Clifford’s references in Routes (1997: 78, 277). Hau’ofa’s vision was preceded by Albert Wendt’s (1976).
Micronesian historical and contemporary migratory activities, does not really account for the different kind of fluidity of the more grounded Western Pacific traditions.80

The following diagram is my attempt to visualize Hau’ofa’s important theorising so that the differences between and within each island are also implied. This is montage by the dictionary definition mentioned earlier—arranging elements in a composition, so they’re still distinct and yet connected, and perhaps by the Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of a rhizome where the web consists of both connections, differences, stratifications or calcifications and rapid movement (Deleuze and Guattari 1988). Each shape represents an island body (land or person or group). The arrows indicate the diversity of exchanges between islands, groups and bodies in the past and present and each element is in 3D to indicate the multiplex nature of islands and islanders. The exchanges can go both ways or one way and vary in terms of force or influence.81

Figure 6.
The Pacific/Oceania (as montage):
difference, connection and interaction across time and space

Montage as a method and approach to knowledge is something that I have been dealing with for a few years before I obtained the (Western) theoretical language to describe it. In Canberra in 1999 for a conference on “Pacific Representations”, I created a presentation with my elder sister, Teresia, using photos, video and live speaking. After showing a sequence of family photos—“representations” of Banabans, we held an interactive dialogue between her on the video and myself in Canberra in front of the audience. The sequence of images and

80 See Jolly (2001a: 417-466) where she discusses Hau’ofa with respect to highlanders in PNG.
81 Some of these exchanges might include religion, food, architectural forms, plants, dance and music, money introduced by Europeans, diseases, ideas about health, gender and race and so on.
dialogue, far from being a linear unfolding narrative about a particular topic, was instead a disconcerting juxtaposition of Banaban representations and performances across time and space commenting on issues of authenticity within and outside academia. 82

T. Teaiwa's (2001 b.) contribution to a special issue of *The Contemporary Pacific* is also an attempt to work through the problems of multiple voices in Native Pacific Cultural Studies. In this piece she directly questions the normative conventions of academic discourse by problematizing the "form" and locale of Pacific theory. She writes with two simultaneous voices or streams of thought depicted by writing in two columns, with two different font sizes and styles. This "form" resonates with the central question, "the edge" in a conference convened by Kehaulani Kauanui and Vince Diaz called, "Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge" at the University of California at Santa Cruz in 2000. One of Teresia's many critiques is that "theory" often comes from the edge and not from within the Pacific as illustrated by the existence, or lack thereof, of "Pacific Studies" in Fiji as opposed to the US (including Hawai'i), Australia or New Zealand. Life in the islands is a face-to-face kind of everyday thing (a good subject for anthropology) while "theory" is usually produced with distance (as in cultural studies). I would say that life in the islands is both about face-to-face and distant (in time or space) relationships. Our "theories" need to encompass and resonate with both.

Teaiwa's essay addresses the tensions inherent in trying to talk about something as vast as the Pacific in academia, given our various personal, political and intellectual commitments. She also challenges what April Henderson and I have often discussed as the problems of "homologous difference." 83 What happens in any kind of decolonising climate is that "difference" while articulated against a homogenous white, colonial, oppressive other, is not attended to within or between

82 This was titled "Disconcerting issues: the politics of performance, appropriation and personalising in a post-colonial Banaban context" for the School of Creative Communication, University of Canberra, 1999.

83 Personal communications on e-mail in 2001 and conversations in Santa Cruz in February and May 2001. Homologous difference is assumed when, for example, people of colour assume a similarity of oppressive experience and then apply the same ethic of resistance regardless of the differences between groups. April Henderson is a PhD candidate in the History of Consciousness Program at the University of California at Santa Cruz.
marginal and decolonising groups. The Manichean allegory—black and white, colonial and native—rules (see Keesing 1989).

Henderson’s own research traces the flow of hip hop music and dance between the US, Samoa, Hawai‘i and New Zealand and explores the various “bearers”—rappers, dancers and other artists—of embodied and musical forms (Henderson 2003). Her research is most importantly a discussion of the differences and connections between communities of colour who all link up through hip hop culture. Bringing to centre stage the relationships between black, Chicano, Hawaiian, Samoan, Tongan... ni-Vanuatu, Banaban, Gilbertese, Tuvaluan... individuals and groups is our biggest challenge in Pacific Studies.

Between IBM, I-Mac and Avid

This thesis emerged out of constant movement between my office in Anthropology and the film unit, typing on several IBM computers and editing on two Macintosh computers. The final form was finished on a new DELL which I was given after an intense bout of RSI (repetitive stress injury) in my right arm. The ANU installed voice recognition software on this computer and some of my chapters were finished not by composing and typing but by speaking into a microphone. This newer computer was convenient as it was faster than previous models and could deal efficiently with all the images I needed to insert into the text. Gary Kildea also burned a draft of my film onto video CD and I could watch it on the computer screen in between typing.

At various times I worked at my desk between computer, VHS video, a digital video walkman or the original Sony camera. At other times I wrote parts of chapters in my office and then moved to the film unit to re-edit or compose a video. The text shaped the videos and vice versa. In the film unit, after initially editing with Gary at an Avid station, I worked at an I-Mac computer on a program called I-Movie 1. This basic video editing software was perfect for drafting the videos because the computer could download images directly from the camera onto the designated

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84 See also Margaret Jolly (1999) for a comparison of indigenous and diasporic differences in feminist anthropology.
hard-drive. I could also select all my stills, save them on desktop and send them to myself via Gary’s e-mail. It did not, however, allow fine editing of either sound or image. Video 4 was done almost entirely in I-Movie because I decided not to cut the material with anything beyond the actual scene. The special effects in Video 7 were also done in I-Movie but all other films were assembled on the Avid. 85

The entire editing process and final films emerged within a three-year discussion (sometimes more like a debate) with Gary Kildea who has created films such as *Trobriand Cricket* (1976), *Celso and Cosa* (1983), *Valencia Diary* (1992) and *Man of Strings* (1999) as well as the editing of a recent film *Since the Company Came* (2001). Kildea was once described as a “film purist.” He approaches film or cinema as a self-contained artistic form operating under universal laws and an Anthropology PhD thesis to be something entirely different, which had its own rules. Before we worked together he was dedicated to the idea that a film could not function in the way I was trying to use the medium but he still supported the project and gave freely of his time above and beyond what I was entitled. More than anything else, it was through long, fertile and generous discussions with him that I tried to bridge the film-text knowledge boundary. We started editing videos in 1999 and they all served as drafts for 6 of the 7 films that now accompany this thesis. 86 Video 2, of course, was created by the BPC itself.

While the constant moving between workspaces definitely enhanced the montage that now exists between text and video it prevented me from producing any kind of thesis that would resemble one written totally on paper or at the computer. It is this difference in the context/s of creation that has to be taken into account when assessing the thesis as a whole.

Writing a thesis is an embodied process. Office walls are often plastered with images of the right way to sit—“Don’t let your posture cost you!” scolds one brochure—and type with “Forearms parallel with floor or angled slightly downwards; the angle between forearm and upper arm at, or slightly greater than, 90

85 Avid Technology Inc. is a company that specialises in digital products for making media.
86 The first film was “Out of Phosphate: the diaspora of Ocean Island/ers” which was an accompanying piece for a live conference presentation in which I did the voiceover for the film. The second video, edited in 2001, was what is now Video 7 in which I decided to juxtapose all the spaces
degrees. Suffice to say here, that this particular thesis was produced with a heightened consciousness of the relationships between body and mind and of that of the body in response to the demands of a PhD degree.

I'd like to imagine that one day sitting—for the most part in isolation—upright with forearms at ninety degrees to upper arms and with lower arm tendons and muscles working constantly, repetitively on overtime do not constitute the primary bodily requirements of a higher degree in the social sciences. That is unnatural.

Video 1- An Opening Montage

In Video I, I juxtaposed several shots taken from the archives and homework. The first clip is of phosphate being dumped into the hold of a ship. This cuts to the title of Video I and then dissolves into an image of Banaba with a woman singing a song in the background over the loud hum of a motorboat. The film cuts to a woman named Roruama playing the ukelele and singing an old song about working on Banaba. The sequence then moves through a rapid cutting between images of Banaba in the past, a European official surrounded by native servants, a European doctor physically examining a potential mining labourer in the Gilberts, the boat journey (we do not know this but it is a journey to Banaba), different body parts of a Banaban woman, European bodies in recreational activities, the Rabi Dancing Group, myself, my uncle Teruamwi, and the ocean surrounding Rabi Island.

The woman in the black and white photo, who is identified in the John Miller photo collection as “Nei Tueueara,” is divided into three frames—head and torso, belly and thighs, and legs covered by a riri. The original photo was whole but I chose to shoot it in three sections to illustrate the break up of the land as well as “the Banaban body” (te ahu- land/people). The expression on her face struck me as wise and slightly defiant resonating with Banaban refusal to sell more land in the

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in which I had seen dances to Te Vaka's Pate Pate performed between Fiji, Canberra, Honolulu, Tarawa and Tabiteuea (see appendix).

87 From a brochure on "Occupational Overuse Syndrome" provided by the Occupational Health and Safety Unit, ANU.

88 Riri is a skirt worn by women made from processed pandanus leaves, today usually for dance but before, and in the early days of colonialism, it was worn as everyday clothing.
1920s. Despite their resistance the BPC and colonial administration changed the law so that all land was subject to the company’s needs (see Macdonald, 1982: 94-111).

Figure 7: Nei Tueuara (from Video 1)

Nei Tueuara’s expression is defiant but the visual breakdown of her body suggests the power of the mining extraction and fragmentation. After juxtaposing this with European bodies enjoying themselves at “Home Bay,” the main harbour at Banaba, the introduction ends with a headshot of a Banaban man from the early 1900s followed by the Banaban dancing group acting out a drama in which two people are about to be killed. The miming of a be-heading cuts to an iron grab as it extracts rock from a mining field.

The images are all of people connected to Banaba shown here in 1900, before World War II on Banaba and in 2000. There is no overall narrative or chronology to this sequence of images but rather it offers an analogy for basic themes in the thesis—land, body and people have a metonymic relationship. Distant moments in time and space are brought together as moments between Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and Kiribati are sutured into a portrait of co-presences. One interpretation of the past as painful and dismembering is offered. This highlights the continuing problems that afflict Banabans on Rabi as they oscillate between periods of boom and bust, celebration and struggle having been quite severed from the land that was the ground of our ancestors’ identity for centuries. ⁸⁹ In the background, through the

⁸⁹ I must qualify this by pointing out three previous events that would have challenged Banaban identities at least temporarily. The first was the arrival of the Auriaria people, a seafaring culture from South-East Asia. The second was that of Nei Anginimaeao and family from Beru in the 1600s whose arrival resulted in a partitioning of the island into new clans. The third was the terrible drought that engulfed the island in the 1870s causing an almost complete evacuation of all inhabitants to Tahiti, Hawai’i and other places until a return by many several years later. For further exploration of pre-phosphate history see Sigrah and King’s *Te Rū ni Banaba* (2001) and Maude’s *Book of Banaba* (1994).
noise of the travelling boat, we hear the Gilbertese woman singing with her ukelele: “Lovely beach, lovely place of Banaba... everybody including myself, happy working for the BPC.”

![Figure 8. Roruama and her ukelele](image.png)

This opening montage provides a map for many of the themes discussed throughout the thesis but it is not an opening in terms of an exposition on what is to come. It is more like an association of “clues” which connect up throughout the rest of the text and videos.

Ramona Fernandez (2001) discusses Gregory Ulmer’s (1989) attempts to discover alternative pedagogical practices including the use of video. She quotes one of his major assumptions, “that video is not something in need of explanation, but something whose operations have changed the conditions of explanation itself” (Ulmer in Fernandez 2001: 188). Fernandez herself explores “trickster” (cf Haraway 1988) knowledges which include the possibility of mystery and meaning. She writes, “While respecting dragons and tigers, individuals must be taught, cajoled, even tricked into weaving their own webs of understanding in response to other webs... To ask for less is to ask readers to remain crippled by a mono-cultural, one-dimensional vision” (ibid: 189).

**Situational Methodologies**

There are many other ways in which I could have written about or presented Pacific lives. I could have used the standard narrative genres of anthropology,
history, political economy, literature or documentary film. Instead I've chosen to work through juxtaposition and a non-linear hybrid form. Through this approach I am also working towards a theory for Pacific Studies (rather than Anthropology or History). Hopefully the tools I've selected do constitute an argument about taken-for-granted western academic conventions and citation genealogies. T. Teaiwa's (2001a) figure of the situational and relational "Native" suggests similar situational and relational strategies, practices or forms of knowledge production.

My interrogation is based on a refusal to abandon the Native position in favor of hybrid and more mobile subjectivities. I am encouraged in this endeavour by particular examples of Cultural Studies which begin to indicate the possibilities of figuring the Native as a relational and situational figure (T. Teaiwa 2001a: 16).

I engage with Teaiwa's concept of "the Native" in Chapter 5 and briefly in the Finale. Her readings of this figure resonate greatly with both my own experiences and how I see others negotiating and strategically surviving on Rabi and in Kiribati. The "Native" also performs the hybridity and mobility normally attributed to travelling subjects.

Visualizing Dancing

"... your dancing posture... you lean forward a bit, never lean backward. This is also one of the important rules of dancing, it is much easier to move around if you lean forward while standing...(the dance)... It's so particular and precise about exactly where your hand is and the angle that your palm is at, and where the elbow's at, everything... it's not, it's supposed to look relaxed but it's not relaxed (Whincup 2001: 145)."

The above quote from a dancer in Kiribati resonates with the same experiences I had of dance on Tabiteuea. In her dissertation on Kiribati performance Mary Elizabeth Lawson wrote that its importance comes from being,

91 See Borofsky's Remembrance of Pacific Pasts (2000) for an important exploration of the many forms of Pacific history "making."
in I-Kiribati words, *bai n atara*, “a thing of our land”: “It is something which originated with and was passed down from the *bakatibu* or ancestors”; a significant marker of cultural identity (1989: 79).

Banaban performance developed on Rabi out of Gilbertese dance and is now a “thing” of more than one land. On the surface it might appear to be just “traditional” island dance but sustained attention reveals layers of incorporation from many other islands and cultures. If dance is “a thing of our land” than Banaban dance on Rabi is “a thing of many lands.” This reality counters the claims of Banaban nationalists to one essential “Banaban” land. The rigidity described in Kiribati dance above is broken down and made fluid by Banaban dancers as we will see in Chapter 5.

Sally Ann Ness quotes Pacific Northwest choreographer Pam Schick replying to the question, “What does a choreographer do?” with, “I make the invisible visible” (Ness 1992: 12). This is precisely what Banaban choreography from Rabi reveals. Watching Banaban dancers perform is like witnessing a live negotiation of connection and difference, present and past, self and other. There are elements from the ancestors as well as other cultures and bodies. Not only are movement sequences from other cultures incorporated but new ones are created to transition from one to another. Banaban dancing is choreographed from ancestral, transculturally acquired and proximately available creative forms (As in the incorporation of Tuvaluan and Fijian styles into Rabi choreography.). Each position in a sequence is like a frame in a cinematic shot.

Banaban dance is one of many ways in which historically contingent culture and identity is performed and is a starting point for me to talk about and between all the specific locations I explore. Rather than unpacking a key Banaban concept in order to better represent and ultimately “speak for” Banabans I offer Rabi dancing as a stimulus for thinking through broader past and present Pacific connections.

With regards to performance, the thesis is not an ethnomusicological exploration of Banaban performance. It rather rests on the general understanding of culture advanced by Turner, for example, as “creative process” (Lavie et.al 1993: 1-29). I

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92 See Rabi Dancing Group performance in Chapter 5.
take the politics and social centrality of dance production and the choreography itself as tools for re-presenting the displacement and subsequent creative survival of specific island bodies (land and people).

The next best thing to actually dancing/moving is to see and experience it. In the opening paragraph to an article called “Ethno-graphics and the moving body” Brenda M. Farnell discusses a photograph which appears in Evans-Pritchard’s *Nuer Religion* titled ‘Movement in the Wedding Dance’ (Farnell 1994). She asks an obvious question: where is the movement? (ibid: 929). Farnell’s purpose is to seriously consider bodily movement as a component of social action. She discusses the history of anthropological engagements with cultural movement including the benefits and drawbacks of various graphic and technological modes for representing it. Farnell’s critique, though quite different in its motivations and disciplinary allegiance, allows me to ask the question: how can we talk about something like “movement,” including displacement, migration or dance, by using a static representation of a process, performance, or lived embodied event?

How can we talk about living processes and specific bodies while just using a knowledge form like a still photograph or a static text that does not resonate with the content of our discussions? While I do think it is possible to write about dance and movement in a way that resonates with the very experience of moving bodies (see Foster 1995 and 1996, Ness 1992, and Carter 1998) it is helpful to be able to see the dancing bodies as well. Videos 5, 6 and 7 focus on such bodies and suggest possible ways of imagining the connections and differences between the choreography and dancers.

By focusing on dance, I argue that Pacific peoples’ survival strategies are found in many areas of cultural production but particularly in performance. I show in Chapter 5, for example, how the creation of a specific “Banaban” dance style was created against the dominance of Gilbertese dance and within the era of cultural revitalization and nationalism in the 1970s. Some of the observations I made about Banaban dance, however, were only possible because I had recorded performances.

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93 I am not talking here about photography as an artistic genre where multiple meanings or an excess of meaning are the norm. I am talking about photographs used in the way Evans-Pritchard did, evoking the word “movement” through a static image.
from the December 15 first arrival celebration seen in Chapter 5. In this way I could
slow down or freeze certain actions and reflect on the choreography.

I returned from my “homework” with one notebook (16.5 by 10.5
centimetres) and fifty hours of digital footage. The camera was originally meant to
be a recording device for later textual transcription but once I started working with
Gary Kildea in the RSPAS film unit I realised the possibility of constructing films as
part of a thesis. The moments captured on film, like the documents and images in
the archives are fragments of the past with the potential to be given new meaning in
the present.95 But cinematic images are different from personal experiences
recounted or transcribed in texts, oral stories, interviews, and documents and even
still photographs. By including them in my thesis I am not arguing that one genre of
knowledge is better than another. I am asking: what happens when we deal with
them together, as we do everyday?

There is no doubt of the power of words, written or spoken in any cultural
context, and especially in the western academic tradition. But I come from a
generation raised on television programs, advertising, radio, compact discs and
music television. In this space of information, different kinds of knowledge are
placed side by side without conjunction or synthesised so that the boundaries
disappear altogether.

The capitalist, global market system has long attended to multiple forms and
sources of knowledge and uses them effectively to influence peoples’ values and
ideas across the globe. In order to make a more effective intervention into the
capitalist value system perpetuated by the global (American) economic ideology,
concerned academics must make their “products” resonate more closely with the
various forms of knowledge in circulation throughout the rest of the world.

Rather than reduce multifaceted presentations of past and present through
realist simplifications, I sometimes juxtapose fragments of each source of
information encountered or created by myself to highlight their differences in form
and content. This is meant not only to reflect the dynamic and synesthetic nature of
lived worlds, but to draw attention to the privileged conventions of academic

94 Sometimes strategies, sometimes “tactics” if we use Rey Chow’s (1993) definitions.
95 Much of my thinking about the past and present is inspired by Greg Dening, supervisor and friend.
representation, namely writing. To not write sometimes, in an academic thesis, is to immediately challenge the axiomatic form of knowledge production taken for granted by both critics and defenders of the content of academic knowledge. While recognizing the current pragmatics of writing as the standard mode of communication for most university disciplines I still want to ask: what happens if we juxtapose our multiple sources and genres of knowledge?

I've been asked several times if my thesis is a CD ROM but it isn't for good reasons. A CD ROM would not necessarily call critical attention to diverse forms of knowledge because they have already been organically incorporated into a new delineated form called “the interactive.” The juxtapositions within the interactive genre may still be illuminating but they coexist within an already constituted format. Montage, however, is used as a guiding theory for website engineers who do have to connect and combine different kinds of information. On one web-site an engineer also describes montage as the principle behind music television.

Keeping knowledges separate but connected—creating an “assemblage” in the Deleuzian sense or montage—has its potential, not just for art, but for epistemology, methodology, pedagogy and activism (inside and outside academia). Still, I need to map my coordinates in the journey of this thesis: montage (the cinematic) to describe the form, and “situational methodologies”—the feminist and choreographic to describe method, motivation, content and the politics of knowledge.

**Feminist Ethnography**

Who sez Black folk, and black women especially, don't do theory?... "What draws Black women— and other marginalized people— to anthropology?" For all of us... are attracted to theory, the politics, the praxis, and the poetics. We are attracted to being part of the knowledge producers of the world. We are drawn to making Black women’s lives both visible and audible (McClaurin 2001: 21).

96 Refer to Arjun Appadurai’s “Grassroots Globalization” (2000) for a discussion of the problems of internationalizing western research conventions.
As methodology gets increasingly codified, the clash between “objective and subjective practices” becomes increasingly acute (Pratt 1986: 41).

Since returning from “homework” I have read enough to realize that the long standing crisis within the discipline between “objectivity” and “subjectivity” often stems from a growing critique of Anthropology’s original colonialist, distancing and authoritative approaches to “the other.” I found the most interesting negotiations of this in the works of feminist ethnographers and critics.

Beverley Skeggs, in her appraisal of feminist ethnography, characterises feminist research practices by three basic features: the concern with power, how it works and how to challenge it; understanding process across time and space, and an attention to gender (2001, 426-442).

Donna Haraway, working between the disciplines of biology, anthropology and politics, defines a space called “feminist objectivity” which calls for a no-nonsense commitment to “faithful accounts of a “real” world and a simultaneous account of what she describes as “radical historical contingency for all knowing claims and knowledge subjects” (Haraway, 1988: 579). It’s a necessary multiple desire. A this, plus this, plus this kind of thing: objectivity, difference and multiplicity of local knowledges. The combination of these things is both contradictory and necessary because “feminists don’t need a doctrine of objectivity that promises transcendence, a story that loses track of its mediations just where someone might be held responsible for something, and unlimited instrumental power” (ibid.).

While feminist research is often dismissed as another area of specialization it actually has wider implications for research across all disciplines. Skeggs covers the multiple roots and routes of feminist ethnography and I have found that my genealogy in anthropology is reflected here.98 The sources to which I owe my appreciation are not the ones that form the heart of the anthropology canon but those that by political, methodological or epistemological orientation fall under the rubric of feminist research. Writers like Kirin Narayan (1997), Dorrine Kondo (1990), Kamala Visweswaran (1994), Patricia Williams (1991), Donna Haraway

98 Skeggs notes Sandra Harding’s point that while feminist researchers have to know about non-feminist research, the reverse is rarely the case (2000: 429).
(1988), contributors to Behar and Gordon’s *Women Writing Culture* (1995) and Mcdaurin’s *Black Feminist Anthropology* (2001) have helped me accept the “post-colonial” (post-imperial, post-racist) while still vexed possibilities of the project of anthropology. 99

Gupta and Ferguson have also outlined the assumptions of the presumed distance between the “other” and the white male archetype of an anthropologist (1997: 17). In discussing a traditional hierarchy of field sites defined according to the distance between the research location and the standard white American middle class self, of this degree of “Otherness,” Gupta and Ferguson have asked, “But Otherness from whom? Is Africa more Other than Europe for a Third World anthropologist? For an African American?” (ibid). These critiques resonate greatly for me in Australia. The first question I was asked when I entered the Anthropology department in March 1999 was: “You’re studying your own people? Isn’t that cheating?” When it happened I was standing directly in front of a printer named “Margaret Mead” (cf Durutalo 1992).

*Situational Subjectivities*

One afternoon in March 2000, in the village of Tanaeang, on Tabiteuea North in the Republic of Kiribati, I sat with three umume or old men and one interpreter in a sleeping house with no walls. I was armed with one microphone and one digital video camera on a baby tripod and a list of questions both in Gilbertese and English. Questions like: “What was it like to work in the phosphate mines on Banaba? Did anyone ever get sick or die? What kinds of interactions did the Europeans, Tuvaluans, Gilbertese and Chinese have with each other? Were there any Banabans on the island?” The three men inconveniently sat to my far right, front and left and as we talked I lifted and pointed the camera in each direction with one hand while juggling pen and microphone with the other. The bright light pouring in through the wall-less umu ni matu or bata, 100 on all four sides framed each man in the camera, as black blobs in a white sea. I was so grateful that they’d agreed to talk to me as a

99 Anthropology’s colonial, non islander-friendly history is partially covered in Geoffrey M White and Ty Kawika Tengan’s article (2001: 381-416).
group that I left everything as it was. Still, I gazed longingly at the numerous pandanus mats folded neatly on one side of the raised floor and thought—if only we could make one of those into a hanging wall that would give us much better exposure!

In the meantime, my interpreter, a schoolteacher, was explaining to them that I wanted to ask them about their experiences working on Banaba in the phosphate mines. Each of them had spent a different decade on the island so I felt I was getting a reasonable range of experiences. One of the men was actually my relative who had already hosted me and the Catholic nuns I was living with for lunch the week before. This day's meeting, however, played out as if I hadn't spent an entire afternoon at his house laughing and playing the popular board game “Sorry.” This gathering was a new context, one I had constructed, and everyone was a bit wary of its usefulness. They spoke in Gilbertese and the interpreter said, “she’s studying to be a doctor of culture.” Enere said, “A doctor? She is too young for that. She’s already done a Masters?” I recalled the way the nuns would introduce me: “e a bare te Bachelor, e a bare te Master, e vevei te Doctor ngfai.” I always felt embarrassed being introduced as a person with such a “big” education when I felt so dependent on them for my survival in the atoll environment. “How old is she?” asked Booti. “Uabui ma usua,” said Temakau, “twenty-five.” Booti harrumphed at that and I looked up sharply. “She could’ve had 5 kids by now!” he exclaimed. My Gilbertese isn’t great but I understood that comment just fine. “Yes, but she will be a doctor,” said the silence as they all looked at me pointedly.

The gathering that afternoon was even more unusual in its make-up for historical and political reasons. Besides the fact that a young Gilbertese woman was interviewing older men, making them objectify their experiences as workers in a way they’d never had to before, it was more unusual that I was also a Banaban woman. Banabans and Gilbertese, many argue, come from the same ethnic and cultural heritage (and I happen to have grandparents who are one of each) but the phosphate mining history between 1900 and 1980, divided them into landowners and labourers. Many people on Rabi in Fiji, home of the Banabans since 1945, speak about their

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100 Ura ni mata is a sleeping house but they are also called bata which refers to a small house.
history as if the main actors were only themselves, the company, the missionaries and the colonial administrators. The two books that significantly cover a grand “History” of Banaba and an anthropology of Banabans — *The Phosphateers* by Maslyn Williams and Barry Macdonald (1985) and Martin Silverman’s *Disconcerting Issue: Meaning and Struggle in a Resettled Pacific Community* (1971) — both of which are excellent in their own way, do, however, marginalise the roles of the mining labourers—Gilbertese, Ellice Islanders (Tuvaluans), Chinese and Japanese.101 These are the people who I found absent from 95% of the archives in Victoria but on my visit to Banaba in 2000, I found filled many of the graves.

In Kiribati, since I was constantly moving between different households and islands, I was never really allowed to locate myself in one comfortable space from which to then see and know well, a good slice of any world. I saw and recorded slices of slices and as Diaz writes on knowledge and partiality, “One always sees only a slice, at a given time, from a particular vantage point, of a fluid and uncontainable history or cultural practice” (Diaz, 2000: 364). In Kiribati, for example, I was never allowed to delude myself into thinking there was an homogenous atoll-bounded space.

This constant moving resonated with the very fragmentary nature of documents and photos in the archives and problematized the idea of a single ethnographic location which one is expected to master. As the eye of my camera moved from frame to frame with all the images in between, so did my body move from house to house, island to island and identities and roles shifted, multiplied or shrank. For example, on Tabiteuea, every time I’d just settled into a routine of reading and writing notes in the old Catholic convent, someone would knock on the door downstairs and voices would drift up discussing the weather, the lack of cargo (especially rice) in the shops, and always the: “How’s your guest, is she busy?” followed inevitably by, “No of course not, she is your relative?” Even when I was

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101 Shlomowitz and Munro (1990) did a brief sketch of this history from an economic perspective. I am interested in the specific subjects involved in the mining on Banaba because they are an integral part of Banaban history. The Ellice Islanders, for example, often highlighted in BPC films are virtually absent from Banaban or academic discourse and yet, as I mentioned above, they fill many of the graves on Banaba.
“sick as a dog”\textsuperscript{102} it was rude to decline any invitation for dinner or to stay overnight. The nuns, though empathetic with my desire for some quiet solitude, always accepted invitations on my behalf.

As my world was always in motion, so were the lives of my relatives on Tabiteuea transformed by my entrance into their households. For example when I stayed with my uncle Riribwe in Terikiai, his cousin’s family, plus the kids from next door, all slept over for two nights because I was there. They ate food that only appeared on special occasions and other rules for domestic routine were temporarily broken. I learned this in the moving between houses because the household I left behind would immediately dismantle after my departure. Food in particular, was important to reflect on. I might write now, as a result of my experience, that “Tabiteueans live on turtle, fish, lobster, rice, doughnuts, \textit{babai}, \textit{te tue} and \textit{te ibo},”\textsuperscript{103} because that was what I was usually given to eat... but I’d be wrong.\textsuperscript{104} Only rice, \textit{babai} and fish were the norm. As a constant guest, I got to experience a particular side of life that was special and honored. I was allowed to do things that most young women wouldn’t, like sleep in until 9 a.m. instead of waking up at dawn to clean and cook. These allowances however, dissolved on my departure and became new and different with distance once again. I noted this when the same hosts would visit me at the convent and show intense surprise that I was still asleep at 9!

Sometimes when I tried to make people into my “informants” they laughed or pretended they didn’t understand. Other times no one talked to me at all, though they were honoured by my presence. The Catholic nuns, on the other hand, who only talked to me in English, offered an abundance of humorous information on social and cultural behaviour from all sixteen islands in the Gilbertese chain and sometimes anecdotes from faraway Christmas and Banaba Islands too. Even when I wasn’t behind the camera, rich frames were painted in stories that shifted rapidly from specific location to specific location (“... because those people from that island are like this, you know...”). There were tales of new fiancées disembarking from planes in Marakei to greetings of “aue, poor girl, this guy is so ugly!” to Australian

\begin{footnotes}
\item[102] A popular Fiji expression.
\item[103] \textit{Babai} is a large taro, very tough and grown in brackish water pits, \textit{te tue} is preserved pandanus fruit and \textit{te ibo} is a white sea worm eaten dried.
\end{footnotes}
nuns riding on the backs of motorbikes in Abaiang while desperately clinging to the shirtless torsos of old Gilbertese men. One jovial nun always had a pocketful of other people’s close-encounters while going to the toilet on the beach and in the bush. There were also more sinister tales of witchcraft and jealousy, suicide and war, revenge and murder that surpassed any fiction I’d seen on television, and then because women in the Catholic mission often get to travel, I was also presented with tales of life in the Marshall Islands, Australia and Rome.\textsuperscript{105}

In an article called “How Native is a Native Anthropologist?” Kirin Narayan suggests that anthropologists’ shifting and complex identifications are a form of hybridity that must be reflected in their texts (Narayan 1997: 23-41). During my two-month visit to Kiribati in 2000 I found myself constantly negotiating conflicting and shifting roles and identities shaped by the numerous relatives I was obliged to stay with and my desire to record stories from people who’d worked on Banaba for the mining company. These roles included daughter or cousin, young woman, educated woman, Catholic woman, person with two cameras, dancer, \textit{kain} Tabiteuea, \textit{kain} Banaba, \textit{kain} Rabi and because of my mother, \textit{kain} America.\textsuperscript{106} My relatives often remarked on how very big and mighty America was compared to Kiribati and did so with enough big smiles to problematize their admiration.

What America knew of Kiribati was what NBC had reported on the Eve of the Millennium, while simultaneously broadcasting a spectacular Kiribati dance display, as those islands first to disappear with Global Warming. The phenotypical evidence of my “mixed blood” was further engaged by little kids who shrieked “\textit{te-I-Matarzg te-I-Matarzg} (white person/ foreigner)” as I drove past on the back of a motor bike operated by a nun with a flying habit. I recalled my Masters thesis attempt to deconstruct the \textit{I-Matarzg} myth with respect to former Resident Commissioner and ethnographer, Arthur Grimble’s joyous interpretation of \textit{I-Matarzg} as a way to back the idea that in the Gilberts, white foreigners were really godly brothers and fathers from the heavens (1989: 34-35). This of course quite nicely

\textsuperscript{104} See Chapter 4 for a more detailed account of my month on Tabiteuea Meang.
\textsuperscript{105} I am intensely grateful to Tina Mangarita for her stories, her generosity and above all her humour.
\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Kain} means “person of.”
supported his simultaneous role as Commissioner and fatherly/brotherly anthropologist.

How, on earth, then did I-Mating refer to me? Everyone always assumed my American mother was of the white variety, and though she has fair skin and grey eyes did I really want to get into the fact that she identifies as African American? Too complicated. So I struggled to keep my institutional labels—anthropologist, researcher and ethnographic-filmmaker-person high on this already unwieldy list of identities, often in defiance of things other people tried to make me into. Perhaps in a way I then did exercise I-Mating status as a woman with more control over her identifications and one who was often excused for her behaviour because she was “outside” the culture.

These scenarios, and indeed many of those in which I found myself over the past year, resonate with the experiences of many female anthropologists whose works I've come to respect. Japanese-American Dorinne Kondo dealt with intersubjectivity in an illuminating study on “self-hood” in Tokyo and earlier I mentioned Indian-German American anthropologist Kirin Narayan who worked in Nasik Maharashtra recording folk narratives. Narayan describes her work as “... the kind of anthropology I would most like to read... I have... a strong aesthetic obligation to try making my ethnography as lively as the stories it contains” (Narayan 1989: 11).

Dorrine Kondo describes the struggles between her multiple American and researcher identities and the proper cultural female identities imposed on her behaviour and body by friends and co-workers. She often embraced the female Japanese identities but also rebelled against them when she felt she had been caught too tightly in a web of expectations and relationships. She doesn’t use the term “Japanese” unproblematically but contextualizes it in the personal, local, national and American discourses of “self and other.” From her experiences, Kondo then tries to employ a narrative strategy that highlights her rich experience and in its very form, “expands notions of what can count as theory, where experience and evocation can become theory, where the binary between “empirical” and

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107 May of these are discussed in an excellent anthology called *Anthropology and Literature* edited by Paul Benson (1993).
“theoretical” is displaced and loses its force” (Kondo 1990:8). Kondo goes on to say:

So I tell a story of how I came to centre my project on notions of identity and self-hood, through an “experiential” first-person narrative I deploy in order to make several “theoretical” points: first, that any account, mine included is partial and located, screened through the narrator’s eye/I; second, to emphasise the processual and emergent nature of ethnographic inquiry and the embeddedness of what we call theory in that process; and third to argue that the liveliness and complexity of everyday life cannot be encompassed by theoretical models which rely on organization structures, “typical” individuals, referential meanings, or invocations of collective nouns like “the Japanese.” Rather, my strategy will be to emphasize, through shifting, multiple voices and the invocation of the “I,” the shifting, complex, individual identities of the people with whom I lived and worked…” (ibid.)

I have a similar narrative strategy to Kondo because I also find it necessary not to attempt the “god trick,” that Donna Haraway lambasts in her now classic piece, “Situated Knowledges: the Science Question in Feminism” (Haraway: 1988). Haraway describes it as the “seeing of everything from nowhere” and “a [distancing of] the knowing subject from everybody and everything in the interests of unfettered power” (ibid: 581). Haraway’s “feminist objectivity” is about “… limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object.” She says, “It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see (1988: 583).” Haraway calls for us to pay attention to specific visions and mediums of visualization (from camera to telescope to satellite) because: “There is no unmediated photograph or camera obscura… there are only highly specific visual possibilities, each with a wonderfully detailed, active, partial way of organising worlds” (ibid.).

The Politics of Representation

During a session on film and autobiography/biography at the “Women in Asia” conference in September 2001 at the ANU, a delegate from India asked me a question. She said she enjoyed my presentation of Teitan’s Kainga but thought perhaps it was a little self-indulgent. Too much “my story” and all that. Was I not
leaving out the crucial perspectives of my relatives? Wasn’t I silencing the subaltern and “navel gazing”? I remembered that my elder sister Teresia had always said to respond when people asked such questions with “Yes, I am. Banaba is te buto the navel, so it’s quite appropriate to do such things.” I didn’t respond with that, however, since I realised that the voice (or lack thereof) of “the sub-altern” as a postcolonial critique of power and privilege is quite different in India with its ancient literary culture than in the traditionally non-literary Pacific. I also understand that other academics assume the boundaries between the university and the community. Our problematic job is to “give voice” to natives, a category which doesn’t include us academics. What I had done in the film was put a reflexive voiceover rather than sub-titles in the sections where my aunties and cousins were speaking to me to emphasize the mediated nature of documentary knowledge rather than its “realism.” Sub-titles offer a ready translation of other cultures, giving the audience the impression that they too can easily understand all peoples from all kinds of very different places (cf Macdougall 1998).

My writing and editing is very deliberately personal or inter-subjective. This is not because I believe, in the words of decolonisation rhetoric that, Pacific-voices-must-speak. Speaking can be highly overrated. My perspective is personal and situational because I can’t represent all Banabans or Gilbertese. Now Donna Haraway (1988) might say: but we need a way of knowing and seeing that allows us to speak with conviction on issues of power! I agree. To speak from the personal, however, for me does not negate objectivity or inter-subjectivity. A feminist objectivity, for example, acknowledges partiality and power. My perspective is situated and situational, situated differently at different times and places on a journey between diverse and connected lands and contexts. The power of representation has quite a direct bearing on both Banabans and Gilbertese lives so it’s crucial that we don’t appear to possess the one and only truth about them/us.

Gilbertese and Banabans are often represented as “egalitarian” peoples (Macdonald 1982, Silverman 1971) and the concretization of any knowledge on

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108 This was painfully illustrated to me when a very senior staff member in the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, in response to something I said about feeling awkward at the ANU, said, “but you don’t really still think of yourself as a native do you?”
paper is grounds for cultural discord. T. Teaiwa writes, "As a fiercely democratic people, Banabans value consensus, especially if it has been reached through struggle and competition" (2000: 95). Every group has its own version of history and culture; interpretations differ between individuals, generations, families, clans, churches, and villages. If I interviewed one hundred people in every place I would get partial, contested perspectives. Such contests are fine for academia but may exacerbate conflicts in the communities being written about. This is regardless of whether or not the researcher is indigenous and whether or not they have general consent to conduct research.109 Knowledge, especially on paper, is power. Not talking to everybody is a major problem because the egalitarian ethic allows everyone the right to argue their perspective. More often than not, however, "everyone" in this case is male. While a few of the first "informants" for ethnographers like Harry Maude and Arthur Grimble were women, in the post-colonial Pacific, very few Banaban and Gilbertese women play a role in public politics. With the introduction of Christianity and other transformations under colonialism, women's roles have become very domesticated or diminished politically (see Jolly and Macintyre 1989).

I have to be careful about presenting the "Teaiwa Family" version of all historical and cultural Banaban and Gilbertese experiences and meanings. Displays of power are seen to be "showing off" and show-offs are targets for all kinds of bad feelings including negative magic. Ko kan tirade is an everyday admonishment that warns children in particular that dramatically obvious behaviour, outside the appropriate context is loathed. It's usually followed by, "You want a smack?!" Allegorically, in order to diminish my chances of getting smacked, I shouldn't show off by pretending I know everything. Everything Banaban or Gilbertese. I know what I saw, heard, felt and experienced. I have to take responsibility for whatever I write or edit myself. I have to have faith that my intentions are good, not selfish, that I'm not really "showing off" and be satisfied that my personal approach isn't just self-indulgent but can be as illuminating as any work by an artist or novelist.

109 Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) has called for researchers to follow indigenous protocol when studying indigenous communities in order to "decolonize" research approaches. This, however, would not make it any easier in the Banaban context as "protocol" is very much one of those things still under dispute. Given the internal power dynamics of any community, protocol can also mask personal agendas and differences especially in the area of gender relations.
who, unlike academics, are not accused of “navel gazing” but often celebrated for it. Furthermore, “navel gazing” is not only determined by academic status but differentiated by class, ethnic and historical background and content.

Lawson makes an important point in her dissertation about egalitarianism in Kiribati society illustrating the importance of the performative context: “A person who attempts to put himself above others...goes against the egalitarian ethic which is so strongly characteristic of the society. However, in the performance such behavior is acceptable” (1989: 103). The only time when Gilbertese or Banabans display superiority over others is in performance including sports and dance. In dance the display is sometimes of a joking nature and many times of a serious competitive one. Thus, if this thesis is sometimes more like a performance, it satisfies the requirements for a Banaban or Gilbertese audience. You can show-off, put yourself on display, talk too much, or be legitimately better than others when you are performing (cf Hereniko 1995).

With respect to voices in academia, a white man like Harry Maude, colonial agent and ethnographer writing about “history” in the Pacific is not the same as either Samoan writer Sia Figiel or Teresia Teaiwa describing past and present in the Pacific, personal or otherwise. A criticism like the one raised by the Indian woman in my seminar cannot be applied like a blanket whenever a piece of work appears to silence the subaltern. It is sometimes a mechanism to deflect from the guilt of academic privilege without appreciating the incredible differences of privilege. Such critiques often assume that all academics are the same, that postcoloniality is uniform across former colonies and that writing or speaking out are the only legitimate forms of resistance. But this couldn’t be less true if one compares not only heritage, culture, survival forms, and social and political commitments but also the very different experiences and politics of specific academic bodies—disciplines, institutions, departments and individuals.

10 Kan tiraiki: you want attention (negative)!!
Dancing: Culture Moves!

In addition to my constant camera eye, another form in which I could always relate and connect to people was dance. When it was discovered that I knew a contemporary Pacific dance to the very popular Tokelauan song “Pate Pate,” I was always called upon to perform or teach others. This song was played at least five times a day on the one Kiribati radio station and always loudly from the high-speed mini-buses that traversed South Tarawa. The Catholic nuns on Tabiteuea actually appropriated a tape recorder from one of the parishioners, and scheduled regular dance lessons three nights a week for which they closed all the curtains of the house, so people couldn’t peep in and watch them shaking about. On Tarawa, I was also asked to teach members of many households how to “pate pate,” to perform at the Ambo Club for the Ministry of Tourism, and for my cousin Rakomwa’s engagement party at Betio. I was even requested to dance on a Sunday as the only Catholic in a family of Protestants who certainly weren’t going to break their Sabbath but who were very happy for me to. On Rabi, this dance has also enjoyed unending popularity and in some way, I felt that by dancing and teaching it in Kiribati we were all embodying a connection that otherwise was logistically impossible for my own relatives’ bodies to traverse.

Dance has become one of the most appropriate forms for me to present those moving temporal connections between specific places and experiences. I do not want to imply that dance resolves any of the tensions inherent in the politics of shifting identifications but it is an appropriate and privileged Pacific form which, depending on the situational specificities, acts as a catharsis for relationships, meanings and forms that might otherwise be seen as oppositional or incommensurable.

One brief example is the performance of a mixture of Samoan, Tuvaluan, Tahitian and Fijian dances by I-Kiribati and Banabans (Video 6 and 7). It is a way of expressing an “otherness” that belongs to everyone. A contrast to this is the normal make-up of a school concert in Fiji or the South Pacific Festival of Arts. These are

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111 The pate is a log drum, see appendix for a description of the song.
of the “variety concert” type where diverse cultural performances are marked as distinct from each other but orchestrated to reflect the multiculturalism of the Pacific. Even if individual members of a dance group are not of that culture, and therefore could be said to be participating in an “otherness that belongs to everyone,” it is not the same as the mixing of diverse forms within one dance. Contemporary Pacific dancing as developed by the Oceania Center for Arts and Culture is one of the few formal spaces within the Pacific where hybrid dance is encouraged. The non-urban spaces of Rabi Island and Kiribati, however, also participate in an active appropriation of other Pacific styles.113

I reflect on this phenomenon in Chapter 5 drawing upon Lavie, Narayan and Rosaldo (1993) and using Teaiwa’s (2001a) theorizing of the hybrid “Native.” Lavie, Narayan and Rosaldo write:

Creative processes emerge from specific people, set in their social, cultural, and historical circumstances. When distinct visions and traditions come together, expressive cultural forms often become politically charged because different actors have unequal chances to make their voices heard. The depiction of situation where cultures mix and blend thus makes both an analytical and a political statement (Lavie et al 1993: 6).

In this way, my depictions of performing Banaban and Gilbertese bodies drawing from music and choreography beyond their own islands and cultures are also stories about history, politics and above all survival tactics.

Though much of my fieldwork was spent travelling and dancing, there wasn’t much recording of the “meaning” of any of the dances. More often than not, when I asked someone about the meaning of a song or dance they weren’t sure. These people weren’t just withholding information. Most of them knew how to dance, how to move in the appropriate cultural style. They knew how a good performance should “feel.” But knowledge of the original choreography and meaning of dance in

112 On Tarawa, this dance was also learned from watching video tapes of a performance to *Pate Pate* danced by Allan Alo and Letava Tafunai recorded by Fiji One TV.
113 See contemporary Pacific dancing in Finale performed by I-Kiribati, Banabans, Samoans... and Australians!
Kiribati or on Rabi is either long forgotten or only held by a few contemporary choreographers and composers.\textsuperscript{114}

This is the same throughout much of the Pacific. My research agenda never included talking to dance “masters.” This, however, did not mean that meaning was “lost” just because few could describe it in words. Gilbertese and Banaban dancers hold knowledge within their bodies. The dance means something in its shapes and gestures, tension and release of energy. Throughout my thesis I try to translate some of this into words but fail hopelessly in outlining the full implications of bodily knowledge. This is why I also rely on stills and moving images to supplement the inability of words to describe the appearance and feeling of performance; the bend of an arm, the fluttering of fingers, the jerk of a head.

My thesis is not an ethnomusicological catalogue of Gilbertese, Banaban or contemporary Pacific movement or music. This presentation is rather an attempt to “move” the audience by juxtaposing different stories and images of the movements on and between islands. Islanders dance to survive, not because they believe their activities contribute towards universal knowledge. Anthropology is generally a practice of describing and theorising the activities and everyday meanings of a demarcated group of people regardless of the potential politics of such concretization and codification of knowledge. In the last three decades, however, challenges to the very form of ethnographic or anthropological research have emerged (Kondo 1990; Narayan 1989).

From the perspective of Pacific Studies and feminist ethnography, both the form and the “affect” of knowledge are considered. While some conservative anthropologists deny their own inclusion in a politics of knowledge, researchers who are rarely included in the anthropological canon (see Behar and Gordon 1995) have been directly or indirectly problematizing the form and affect of academic knowledge for decades. This “affect”, however, must be considered for both audience and subject.

\textsuperscript{114} A good ethnomusicological study of Kiribati dance is Mary Elizabeth Lawson’s (1989) PhD dissertation from Brown University. A very different type of engagement is found in Tony and Joan Whincup’s \textit{Akekatea} (New Zealand, 2001), a powerful collage of images and words illustrating life and dance in Kiribati.
I came to realise this after another woman in the *Women in Asia* session on film and biography, Professor Holin Lin, commented on the second video I showed, *Culture Muses!*, and compared it to an interview based documentary shown by Salwapah Virarang immediately after my presentation. She said:

I felt very emotional about that film when I saw the people moving about so freely... It was very different to watch your film and the next one made by a lady from Lao—I was so familiar with the way she expressed (by telling without body movement) in the film, yet I was touched by your film in which I stopped making sense of “words”, and felt my body sort of moving with it. I was not “reading” their stories, I was “echoing” theirs and making my own stories while watching it. With such a huge contrast between the two films, all memories of my growing years gradually came back to me, reminding me how I have been struggling to take back the right to control my own body, moving my body in the way I want rather than the way I was expected. After all these years of studying feminist ideas, my own body is still not under my own charge; it is the final frontier of my journey of struggle... (personal com 2001).

![Figure 9. Dancing *Pate Pate* (from Video 7)](image)

Professor Lin’s reaction made me realize that for some audiences, the actual movement is more meaningful than the context or history behind the scene. My video made her aware of her own body, perhaps a rare response from a member of an academic audience. It made her self-conscious of her own body’s restrictions and in a later conversation she also said that the restricted body is mirrored by the restricted mind, especially when it comes to the accepted “forms” of knowledge production (writing and speaking in a certain way).

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115 The image is of a dancer at Betio in South Tarawa, April 2000, and the second of three dancers performing in Honolulu, Hawai’i, October 2000. They are both dancing to *Pate Pate*. 
Dance theory and choreography are useful tools for thinking through taken for granted ideas about time, space and movement. For many (not all) Islanders, dancing and singing are as necessary as walking, sleeping, eating, breathing and telling stories. In some indigenous cultures movement comes before speaking. To move is to “be.” Minoru Hokari writes of the Gurindji cosmology: “While the Christian God created the world by word, Dreaming created the world by movement. Historical practice can be possible only through the interaction between the living world and yourself: history happens in/between body and place (Minoru Hokari, 2001:16, 26).116 This resonates with Lawson’s description of Kiribati performance as bai n abara—a thing of the land. Much anthropological knowledge, however, is based on “language” relying on both conventions of the discipline and an incorporation of key concepts in the community studied.117 Theory is derived mainly from words and their applied meaning or from a textual, linguistic analysis of meaning in different contexts. A senior member of the Anthropology department, who apparently had no idea what I was working on, commented one day that too many people weren’t doing “real” anthropology and were instead studying silly things like dance!

In an excellent ethnography on culture and movement in the Phillipines, Sally Ann Ness has pointed out that:

Dance is, for some powerful reasons, the most shallowly interpreted art form in the contemporary United States. It is a stigmatized art form, whose practitioners are given only a marginal economic, intellectual and political place in US society. From the standpoint of political economy, choreographing human movement can be considered a radically “unproductive” activity having no material result—and can be difficult to commodify and mass produce as a participatory experience. This makes the enterprise of choreography itself distinctly unsuitable for playing an integral role in a consumer-oriented society. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that in contemporary US society there is no widespread popular understanding of why the art of performing or designing choreographed movement might become the central focus of a normal person’s life. There is no widespread appreciation of what the process of mastering a choreographic experience can mean to an ordinary culture bearer (1992: 3-4).

116 See a compilation of quotes from Hokari’s writing on Gurindji (Aboriginal Australian from the Northern Territory) cosmology in the Prelude.
117 This is what Marcus is referring to in point 3, page 9 in this introduction.
In Ness' approach the body is a “bearer” of culture and for me this is when specific bodies (from Kiribati, Fiji, Australia etc) bearing certain specific, and often hybrid, movements start to get interesting. An issue which I could not fully explore here but considered while writing the thesis was how discourses on postcoloniality and hybridity in Pacific cultural studies have focused heavily on textual productions, including research, literature and film, and within a black/white, brown/white (native/colonial) binary logic that effaces the everyday hybrid or “multiplex” movements and interactions of brown/brown, black/brown bodies.

Video 7 in the final portion of this thesis illustrates how different groups and individuals, some related by blood, but who haven't met each other, can dance to the same tune, sometimes using the same actions, borrowing from a wide variety of cultural forms and often creating their own new styles. Many of the people in the video rarely travel overseas. Instead, ideas travel and are taken up in specific dynamic spaces.

For me, *Culture Moves* is a montage that illustrates the possibilities of embodying and presenting difference and connection, rupture and continuity, agency and passivity, creative survival and “tradition,” identity and alterity, regional and local culture. That is something I've tried to do in the thesis, the films and many, many waking hours of my adult life. The video speaks as much to the reality of shared resources between islands and islanders, and between islands and the heterogenous “West.”

In most academic disciplines outside the arts and literature, though space may be given for “room to move” critically and narratively, less encouragement is given to emotionally “move” the audience or move beyond the plane of the page. I see this thesis as a step beyond the page but not as yet a dive into the multi-dimensional world of interactive media. I am interested in an “in-between” connected to its former precedents—the often separate disciplines of anthropology, Pacific studies, cultural studies, dance and film (depending on your academic location in the world)—without being something that is restricted by the borders of genres or disciplines.
Chapters and Sources

Interdisciplinarity is risky, but how else are new things going to be nurtured? (Haraway 2000: 46)

This introduction has covered some of the multifaceted themes and approaches of my research including examples of how I dealt with them during the “homework” period. In the next chapter I will focus more on my experiences navigating both the archives, the cities which held these collections and the past as it was recorded by the British Phosphate Commission and a number of writers including Albert Ellis, H.E Maude, Arthur Grimble, Barrie Macdonald and Maslyn Williams. A substantial portion of the chapter is devoted to reading archival images and a BPC film called “A Visit to Ocean Island” which is undated but believed to be pre World War II.

In Chapter 3 I look at peoples’ memories of Banaba, including New Zealanders, Australians, Banabans and Gilbertese and a 1997 documentary film titled Coming Home to Banaba (1998). Banaba is widely acknowledged as a powerful but sad place, once the hub of the central Pacific along with Nauru, but now almost totally forgotten by those nations who directly benefited from its mining. I end with an analysis of Video 2 reflecting my own journey to the island in 2000.

From reflecting on Banaba’s vast history I move to life in Kiribati in the present. As a result of the phosphate mining on Banaba, the relationships between Banabans and Gilbertese or I-Kiribati have been tense for decades despite their common genealogical connections. In Chapter 4 on Tarawa and Tabiteuea in Kiribati I discuss the disconcerting movements between households and islands and the way in which my constant moving, constantly “visiting relatives,” shaped my understanding of Gilbertese history and culture. The very nature of kainga as multiple sites and genealogical connections is also considered by looking at teenagers’ graphic depictions of their own homes and relationships. Kainga contains both spatial and embodied practices and I end that chapter by describing the process of learning and observing Gilbertese dance in the house of my grandmother’s niece in Buota, Tabiteuea.
Chapter 5 considers Banaban culture and politics with respect to the nations of Fiji and Kiribati and relationships between Banabans, Fijians and I-Kiribati. It then looks more closely at our *kainga* on Rabi, its spatial configuration and the relationships that lie behind the buildings and various households. Video 5, *Teaiwa's Kainga* connects our place on Rabi to Banaba and reveals some of the relationships that sustain that connection. Our *kainga* exists in the wider social and political context of Rabi Island, the four villages of Tabwewa, Tabiang, Uma and Buakonikai and their relationships to Fijian settlements across the bay as well as the wider political climate of Fiji, particularly since the May 2000 coup. I then analyze Video 6 illustrating the various elements of the December 15 celebrations commemorating the date of the Banaban arrival on Rabi. This chapter ends with a number of questions about the dynamic nature of Banaban survival in spite of a “pitiful” past and a tumultuous national political climate.

In the “Finale” and Video 7 I offer a visual and poetic illustration of cultural forms and the bodies which bear them, both emplaced and fluid—rooted and routed, and always hybrid.

One of the main texts with which my research dialogues is my sister, Teresia’s, paper “*yaqona/yagoa*: roots and routes of a displaced native” (1995). She originally presented it at a conference at the University of Hawai‘i but it has since been published (T. Teaiwa 1998). This is where the idea for visualizing Banaban roots and routes was born. Teresia wrote it as a “treatment for a film project” and I also referred to it in my Masters thesis. For my PhD I actually traveled some of the routes she described and tried to capture some of the images she imagined. “*Yaqona/yagoa,*” was her *iango*, her idea, reflection, deliberation, her fiction. My thesis is an attempt to visualize her *iango*. Fragments of Teresia’s paper are presented throughout the text and appear marked by a border.


Silverman’s *Disconcerting Issue: Meaning and Struggle in a Resettled Pacific Community* (1971) Betarim Rimon (nd) and Temaka Benaia (1991) provided information on Banaban politics and society on Rabi. While I do not engage with most of the text, at times I invoke issues raised in the most recent book on Banaban history and culture— Sigrah and King’s *Te Rii ni Baraba* (2001). This book operates within a nationalist logic and attempts to establish a primordial originator of Banaban culture. For a number of reasons it should be thoroughly critiqued but for political and cultural reasons, not by me. ¹¹⁸

All other information on Banaban and Gilbertese history and culture came from the archives of the British Phosphate Commission at the National Archives of Australia in Melbourne and the Maude and Grimble Papers at the Barr-Smith library in Adelaide.

Issues in Pacific Cultural Studies were engaged through, among others, Wadell, Hau’ofa and Naidu’s *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands* (1993), Hereniko and Wilson’s *Inside Out* (1999) and T. Teaiwa’s dissertation, *Militarism, Tourism and the Native: Articulations in Oceania* (2001). My sister also discussed many of the problems of postcolonial theory and the Native with me in person. There exists a much larger literature on Pacific economics and development, politics, conflict and governance but I did not look at those issues as they are more closely tied to aid and policy making activities in the region. At this stage I have focused more on theoretical and methodological aspects of doing Pacific studies.

Theoretical sources were drawn widely but the main sources on dance research include *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader* edited by Carter (1999), Ness’ *Body, Movement, Culture* (1992) and Foster’s *Choreographing History* (1995). I was able to think

¹¹⁸ But see T. Teaiwa for a forthcoming scholarly review (2003).
further about dance and movement after working with Samoan choreographer Allan Alo at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture between 1998 and 2000 and Mekeo/Australian choreographer Julia Gray on a contemporary Pacific dance performance for New York University in 2001. Issues in film were mainly shaped by MacDougall’s *Transcultural Cinema* (1998), Andrew’s *The Major Film Theories* (1976), Bordwell’s *The Cinema of Eisenstein* (1993), and Eisenstein’s *The Film Sense* (nd). Filmmaker Gary Kildea provided the main support for and discussion of the practical, technical and philosophical aspects of visual knowledge. I also used Susan Sontag’s *On Photography* (1977) to talk about the politics of photography.

Critiques of anthropology were mainly drawn from Gupta and Ferguson’s *Anthropological Locations* (1997 a.), *Culture, Power and Place* (1997 b.) and from feminist ethnography using Visweswaran’s *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* (1994) and Kondo’s *Crafting Selves* (1990). I am also grateful for Lavie, Narayan and Rosaldo’s (1994) *Creativity/Anthropology* and Benson’s *Anthropology and Literature* (1993).

My PhD process was made easier after reading various articles or chapters by Kirin Narayan, Donna Haraway, Trinh T. Minh-Ha, George Marcus, Margaret Jolly, Marta Savigliano, Arjun Appadurai, Dorinne Kondo, Patricia Williams and James Clifford (see bibliography).

This thesis is above all an assemblage of stories and images about a past that is wide and varied, filled with sounds and silences extending back from the moment of writing to 2000 and across a century to 1900. For something so vast, like the Pacific ocean we live in, the writings of Pacific artists including Ruperake Petaia, Teresia Teaiwa, Tarcicius Kabutaulaka, Steven Winduo, Albert Wendt, Grace Molisa, Hauani-Kay Trask, Sia Figiel, Epeli Hau’ofa and Jully Makini made academic life more liveable. Now if we could only get people to dance more too.
PART 1: KNOWING THE PAST?

In both my text and videos there is a divide between the past approached through archival images, documents and memory (Part 1), and the present, focusing on place, movement and creative survival (Part 2). It is widely understood, however, that in the Pacific, western concepts of time are severely tested. Citing Donna Awatere (1984), Hereniko writes that Pacific Islanders share a, “circular view of life, ‘past and present merge in the cyclic rhythm of nature and the ancestors’ rhythm of life and death’ ” (Hereniko 1994: 408). In a similar way I think the perceived temporal divide between past and present in western epistemology is artificial and people are always moving between disparate temporal moments.

In this section I look at life on Banaba/Ocean Island during and after the phosphate mining period between 1900 and 1979. The past constantly informs current Banaban politics, cultural strategies and a sense of both collective and individual identities. Before 1979 indigenous claims on the island were marginal compared to the agricultural and financial demands of Australia, New Zealand, Britain and the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony. It is a particular perception of the past as exploitative and homogenous that has shaped current Banaban perceptions. The complex dynamics between specific and heterogenous actors are reduced to dominant narratives of colonial power and native subjects.

Histories of the non-European world, in particular were often limited to narratives of the development of colonial policy, and moreover frequently focussed less on administrative problems in colonized regions than on metropolitan decision-making – which, it must be said, made for some pretty dull monographs. History generally remained strongly biased towards documentary as opposed to oral records, and perforce therefore toward the perspectives of those who produced documents rather than those whose lives might be marginally noticed in them (Thomas in Barnard and Spencer 1996: 273).
For traditional historians the past is dead and mainly accessible through written documents (cf Douglas’ 1998: 1-27; Poster 1997: 5). Such records are almost never created by Pacific Islanders.¹ Williams and Macdonald (1989) wrote the only concise history of the company after mining the archives of the British Phosphate Commission in Melbourne, Auckland and England. By the very nature of their sources, the complex experiences of most people within or affected by the company were left out. The histories that live on through memory, genealogy, dance, music, storytelling, in the bodies of Banabans today and on the concrete, iron, rust and pinnacle ridden island are missing from texts such as Williams and Macdonald’s.

While not imagining that more research would make their picture “whole,” the next two chapters are my attempt to re-present multiple experiences of the island. These experiences often come in the form of close readings of the visible world and visual texts, particularly the movements or configuration of bodies and rocks. These reading displace the dominance of documents and the power of those who produced them normally privileged by traditional historians. Rather than taking a text to be a mirror of truth, to borrow Haraway’s optical metaphor, I “diffract” words, ideas, objects, bodies and rocks. Haraway writes,

Diffraction patterns are about heterogeneous history, not originals... It’s simply to make visible all those things that have been lost in an object; not in order to make the other meanings disappear, but rather to make it impossible for the bottom line to be one single statement (Haraway, 2000: 105).

One critique of the visual is that it contains an excess of meaning and MacDougall (1998) suggests it is fear rather than indifference that creates resistance to the visual. He says, “the photograph is... too engaging, for it draws the viewer into an interpretive relationship that by-passes professional mediation” (MacDougall 1998: 68) In other words, far from “vision” being a transcendent masculine metaphor, the excess of “the visual” problematizes the idea of a single and definite truth for any given object.

¹ Though there are printed materials that have been co-authored by Islanders including bibles and indigenous language texts.
In “Locating the Past,” Mary Des Chene (in Gupta and Ferguson, 1997) has considered the differences and connections between archival work and fieldwork, history and anthropology and the emergence of “multi-locale” research. She discusses the possibility of ethnographic readings of historical texts and writes, “one might find the multilocal ethnography well suited to research whose central focus in a historically linked group of people, or an institution that has, over time, caused many people, from diverse locales, to traverse similar circuits” (in Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 73). Such research could be reinterpreted as the following of the movements diffracted by an object like phosphate rock, or a company like the BPC.

While Des Chene’s article compares archival work to fieldwork and argues that the former be considered as “... holding great promise... not threatening the heart of the ethnographic enterprise” (ibid. 79) my attempts at engaging the past in the archives resonated more with the standard notion of “fieldwork” than time spent in the islands. In his examination of fieldwork and spatial practices Clifford (1997) contemplates definitions of “the field.” While reflecting on the work of an earth scientist who identified a “field” he only approached from the air (in a helicopter) Clifford writes

> What made this fieldwork was the act of physically going out in a cleared place of work. ‘Going out’ presupposes a spatial distinction between a home base and an exterior place of discovery. A cleared space of work assumes that one can keep out distracting influences. A field, by definition, is not overgrown. The earth scientist could not have done his helicopter “fieldwork” on a foggy day. An anthropologist may feel it necessary to clear his or her field, at least conceptually of tourists, missionaries, or government troops. Going out in to a cleared place of work presupposes specific practices of displacement and focused, disciplined attention (his emphasis, Clifford 1997: 53).

This basic understanding of “fieldwork” is crucial to lay out here in order to contrast with my own experiences. The archival trip was probably the most “fieldwork-like” of all my research trips in that it was definitely a “cleared space of work.” In counter-point, on Tarawa, Tabiteuea, and Rabi, I did not (could not, did

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2 I understand that the concept has been well critiqued particularly in feminist ethnography and by Clifford (1997) and Gupta and Ferguson (1997a. and b.) but at least at the ANU, “fieldwork” is very much still the rite de passage; a place of disciplined, observational work.
not want to) clear the field of my relatives or any other bodies and ideas that were not local or native enough for anthropology.

An account of my archival trip to Melbourne city in particular, then, is presented to suggest that ethnographic writing is hardly confined to the island or village. The milieu of Melbourne was more "exotic" for me than Rabi, Tarawa or Tabiteuea but these islands were very much present as I reflected on Australia’s particular relationship with this part of Pacific. History and anthropology converged in Melbourne as I explored "the past" in the archives and contemplated "the present" while moving through the city. The archival trip physically retraced some of the routes earlier forged by company employees, ships and correspondence between Australia and Banaba. Melbourne became a palimpsest of this long and complex history.

Chapter Two then looks at textual, photographic and cinematic records of the island and industry from within the colonial-industrial complex. Chapter Three reflects on the memoirs of former company employees and wives, the experiences of several Gilbertese mining workers and my own of the island in 2002. The landscapes of New Zealand, Australia and Banaba are implicated in both chapters.
CHAPTER 2: BETWEEN ISLANDS AND ARCHIVES

In July 1999 I made my first “fieldwork” trip by bus and train across South East Australia. I was on my way to spend three weeks in Melbourne viewing the archives of the BPC in the Victoria office of the National Archives (NAA) and a week at the Barr-Smith Library in Adelaide with the Maude and Grimble Papers.

In my masters thesis I did a critique of the only concise history of the phosphate industry—Williams’ and Macdonald’s *Phosphateers* (1985)—and of the figures of Harold Maude and Arthur Grimble (cf K. Teaiwa 1999, Grimble 1989, Scarr 1979), both of whom were problematic because of their employment in the British colonial administration. Through their respective offices they facilitated the company’s acquisition of Banaban land and the eventual removal of the Banabans to Rabi. They both went on to become prominent writers about Gilbertese and Banaban history and culture. Grimble (1952) was the author of a hugely popular book based on his life in Kiribati and Maude was resident in Pacific History at ANU for several decades. Reading their works motivated me to seek the so-called “primary sources” which had produced such partial and yet authoritative accounts of the past.

Melbourne

I first proceeded about eight hours by bus and train to my new residence in the Graduate House at the University of Melbourne. Now, as I look though my neat records, I cannot locate precisely where Graduate House is in Melbourne. I suppose

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3 Grimble worked in the administration of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony from 1914 to 1933 (Macdonald 1979: 211). Maude arrived in the colony in 1929. Both were described as “sons of the British Empire” (Grimble 1989: vii).
I spent a lot more time making notes on the archival records than on the life around me. A long drawn-out search for a map of Melbourne on the Internet takes me down frustrating paths and links. All I can tell you for sure is that the Parkville campus of the university is about three blocks from the edge of the Melbourne central business district and Graduate House is an old wooden two-storey building. I remember my room was fairly big but dark with one window that opened directly onto a brick wall. I shared bathrooms and ate breakfast and dinner downstairs with twenty or so international students. Sometimes on Thursdays or Fridays we would go for a beer at the pub at the end of the street and one time we made a big expedition to a trendy looking joint on the waterfront. We soon discovered that exorbitant cover charge did not reflect the popularity of the very empty club. Otherwise, I hung out with a Swedish engineering student visiting my first casino and catching a lunar eclipse during the Friday night beers.

I want to describe to you how I got my bearings in this city, how I figured out how to get to the archives from Graduate House but all I can remember is that it was about two blocks east, eight blocks south and then five or six blocks east again. I know that sounds precise enough but I’ve forgotten the various landmarks, shops and tram crossings along the way. I can remember the number of blocks because I remember all the walking and stopping: walk left and cross street twice, walk straight and cross street eight times, turn left and cross street five times. Wait at the light... I am deeply fascinated by cities that are organized into perfect grids.

Another quick search on the Internet confirms my estimates. I do remember getting very confused by all the “little” streets in Melbourne. For every Lonsdale, Bourke and Collins St. there is a Little Lonsdale, Little Bourke and Little Collins St. The latter in particular held my attention. Most letters from the Australian headquarters

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4 All Melbourne photos including reproduction of BPC images are by Mark Willie Chung.
of the BPC are written from “465 Collins Street, Melbourne.” Phosphate House was the subject of many an architectural magazine article apparently a perfect example of the new modern, “Art-Deco” style. It still stands to this day.

Aside from feeling less than trendy, this city was exciting and comfortable for me. There were lots of brown faces and lots of non-English filtering through the bus, tram and traffic sounds. It felt old and funky like San Francisco— busy but tasteful, less frantic, less driven than Sydney and yet absolutely a bustling metropolis. I have noticed that some Australian cities are very interesting but not so are the adjacent roads engulfing the suburbs marked by the sudden abundance of identical motor vehicle sales outlets and McDonalds restaurants. But even Melbourne’s sidewalks have character, texture, unlike like the concrete pavements in Suva, and with towers of steel and glass rising above its walks. Their walls display transnational brand advertising and chain store logos dwarfing intimate markets, Greek cafes and a huge range of Thai, Vietnamese and Chinese restaurants.

It was the availability of “Chinese lollies” in particular that made me feel at home in Melbourne. Fiji has a growing Chinese population and I attended Yat-Sen Primary School in Suva. When we had money, my friends and I bought “Chinese lollies” at the tuck-shop every recess and lunch break. Sweet tamarind, pickled ginger,
mango, pawpaw skins and desiccated plums were all very much a part of my childhood experience growing up in Fiji.5

Figure 12. The lolly shop in China Town.

It isn’t just the cognitive memory of precise buildings and shops that I recall but the kinaesthetic and sensory memory of being surrounded by a swirl of familiar and new smells, signs, objects, bodies and buildings. As I walked through the city my

5 In Hawai‘i the sweets are called “crack-seed” or “li ling mui.”
focus on finding Banaba somewhere in this part of Australia rendered the ambience surreal and vastly meaningful.

The Victoria office of the National Archives of Australia has two main locations. With the assistance of an internet map I can now say that the first location is at the very eastern end of Lonsdale Street in downtown Melbourne. It occupies two floors of a very large, sanitary-looking office building called Casselden Place in which I frequently got lost while looking for a bathroom.

I viewed most of the BPC company letters and records in a hygienic white and grey booth with smooth table surfaces and walls interrupted only by a power-point. I had earlier requested items from record MP1174 of an Agency Series called CA 244. These were ready for viewing every morning in neat boxes and folders, some tied with grey ribbon. I’d plug in my laptop and spend seven hours a day reading and transcribing letters, articles and newspaper clippings. This was my life on weekdays between July 20 and August 6.

I usually took a half-hour lunch break but eating by yourself in a big city can be lonely and I usually ate fast and returned to my booth. For the most part I sat hunched over reading and typing, occasionally looking out through the glass to other record browsers. When I ventured outside the booth for a stretch I would overhear some of their requests: “I’m looking for... my mother’s father... records of... my grandfather’s birth... our land...” I tend to get sucked into other people’s lives very
easily so I would quickly return to the silence of the booth before I started to wonder why each person was searching. While most of them were not academics I felt a resonance of purpose reading through the records of at least one of my ancestral homelands.

Time always passed very quickly and it seemed like there wasn’t really enough to get through the mountain of documents left behind by the company. From Canberra I had eagerly requested the entirety of CA 244, much to the alarm of the NAA Public and Reader Services staff. They would’ve had to bring hundreds of records containing thousands of items from the Burwood office to Lonsdale for viewing! I was politely told to be more specific and request item by item. I ended up looking at no more than 1/10 of the entire BPC collection. Many of the documents were old with wafer-thin yellowish pages. While company letters were chronologically organised, newspaper and magazine articles were not. Many were cut so that dates and journal details were missing. The very forms in which records of the past were kept contributed to the sense of fragmented and partial information.

Three themes, however, remained consistent throughout company correspondence—the segregation of white, natives, *kanaka* and coolie labourers (see fn 42 in Chapter 1); the deflection of any criticism that Banabans were in danger of losing their land, food or shelter because of mining operations; and the desire to have total rights to mine all land. The main theme of all the newspaper clippings was: Paradise + fertiliser = jackpot for Australia and New Zealand. At times I became quite emotional in my small, clean white space when I had to read newspaper cuttings like the following:

Ocean Islanders/ to Go or not to Go/ Bad Outlook for Natives

The matter has an especial interest for the Commonwealth States, by reason of the fact that a good deal of the phosphate obtained from Ocean Island is converted into manure, which enters largely into the economy of Australian agriculture, superphosphate being largely used in connection with wheat growing. The phosphate deposits at this island are enormous.

The Ocean Islander saw his lands and only means of existence gradually disappear leaving, instead of his palm and pandanus groves, worked out quarries. Forseeing the inevitable end the natives some time ago definitely refused to sell any more lands. A public meeting was called to discuss the
matter with the native owners. The natives unanimously refused to sell any more land, declaring that the lands, and the palm and pandanus trees thereon are all they have and they asked what they shall do when the big steamers have carried away their habitable land. There the native stands awaiting some adjustment.

Naturally some think the native... right, yet it is inconceivable that less than 500 Ocean Island born natives can be allowed to prevent the mining and export of a produce of such immense value to all the rest of mankind (MP 1174/1093).

Every afternoon after reading such records I stepped out of Casselden Place to mingle with Australians. I reflected on how this nation got its vegemite, wheat, grain and corn flakes in spite of the protests of five hundred "Ocean Island born natives." Melbourne was still beautiful but the feeling became increasingly melancholy the more I read about Australia's exploitation of my great, great grandmother, Kieuea's home island. I was soon ready to stop reading and look through a very different kind of historical record.

While I had seen a few images of Banaba as illustrations in The Phosphateers, and Maude and Grimble publications I did not realise that the NAA had a collection of over a thousand photographs of industry life on Banaba. These were kept in the Victoria headquarters of the NAA just outside Melbourne city in Burwood. Between August 6 and 16 I thus spent most of my time in East Burwood. On weekday mornings I would walk about two blocks to Swanston St. and then fourteen blocks to the Flinders Street Station (... cross street two times left and then fourteen times forward...). Once in a while I caught a tram but I was only ever sure of my destination if I walked. The front of the station proclaimed the time of day in nine other cities reminding me that at that moment there were people in London, Tokyo and New York also trying to get somewhere or sound asleep or dancing in a club or sitting in an office...

At Flinders I would buy a one-day train pass for about $7.00 and board the Alamein Line. For some reason, I now remember how I felt on these train trips more clearly than my walks to Lonsdale St. It was ten stops to Burwood and for about forty-five minutes I experienced what I can only describe as an ontological shift.
The train was usually quite empty and I had enough space in my seat so that temporarily I did not have to think about my body. I was fully engrossed in the train tracks, each station and what kinds of people were waiting wearing what kinds of jackets, pants or skirts. Where were they going? Where did they buy their clothes? What sorts of lives did they lead? Where were the people on the opposite side of the tracks going? Why did Australia look so interesting when it was rushing past at 100 kilometres per hour? Once in awhile a young dishevelled male would board and then I would hastily return to my body and think about all those movies I’d seen where awful crimes were committed on fast moving trains.

Whenever I took my walkman on these trips my experience of the moving Melbourne suburb-side was a choreography of images and music with my fingers automatically tattooing the music onto my plastic seat. If you’ve grown up with dance, music television\(^6\) and film (especially musicals), it is quite reasonable to be in the world, see the world with an accompanying soundtrack. Experience or identity is hardly reducible to ethnicity or locale. Choreographer Shobanya Jeyasingh once wrote:

> For me, my heritage is a mix of David Bowie, Purcell, Shelley, and Anna Pavlova, and it has been mixed as subtly as a samosa has been mixed into the

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\(^6\) Fiji hurriedly got television in 1991 so the nation could watch the Fiji team play in the Rugby World Cup. Prior to that all the “television” we watched was on pirated video tapes of Australian and New Zealand programming which rented for 50c to a dollar.
English cuisine... it is surprising how many people my heritage could only be things Indian (in Carter 1998: 48).

Similarly from growing up in Suva (which is hardly London, Tokyo or Melbourne) my heritage includes Banaban and Gilbertese music, Tchaikovsky, American musicals, Young Talent Time,7 Michael Jackson and Def Leopard.

Music tends to sharpen my experiences of the world so perhaps this is also why I remember this portion of the trip better than the non-musical walking. If culture is the self writ large, than my experience of Melbourne, Adelaide and indeed the rest of my fieldwork in Fiji and Kiribati was filtered through my idiosyncratic musical tastes and those sounds blaring from shops, buses, private stereos and the tops of coconut trees.8 In Melbourne it was through Irish new-age artist Enya and the posthumously released music of rap-artist Tupac Shakur. I played Shakur's sampling of Bruce Hornsby and the Rain's “The Way it is” over and over again thinking about identity death, land, mines, ships, buildings, the past, Banaba, Melbourne and Adelaide. America was present via the music and the global mediascape (Appadurai 1990). But perhaps the music was not just as Appadurai suggests a vector of ideas and forms to be absorbed locally (1990: 295), but a soundtrack—sound (music or voice) that heightened and shaped the very experience of and response to ideas, places, bodies, images and movements while simultaneously invoking spaces and bodies beyond the immediate. Nostalgia was possibly the primary sentiment I experienced on those train rides but for what I cannot say.9

At the Burwood station I’d take off my headphones and catch a bus up Springvale Rd. to the World Vision building to the NAA headquarters which sits at the very end of the Vision Drive cul-de-sac. Doing research in this location was one of the most productive, relaxing and moving experiences I’ve ever had. Whereas I’d

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7 Young Talent Time was a popular Australian television program hosted by Johnny Young in which young people belonged to a team of singers and dancers. This is where singers like Kylie Minogue and Tina Arena got started.

8 In Kiribati and on Rabi, the toddy cutters usually sing away as they work perched at the top of the tree.

9 Stephen Feld recently gave an interesting seminar at the ANU titled 'Nostalgia and/for Modernity: On the Criss-Crossed Histories of New Guinea Guitars and “Hillbilly” Soundtracks' in which he compared PNG and western mediascapes and how one Pacific space articulates with the west through music.
learned in Hawai'i that archives and record rooms were either dehumanised graves of western history or the repository of stolen indigenous knowledge, neither perspective applied at Burwood.

The personality of the conservator, Stephanie Bailey, had much to do with how comfortable and productive I felt. She was the kind of person who actually considered my requests and then acted above and beyond the call of duty. At one point I discovered reference to a map of the island and after mention to Stephanie, I returned a couple days later to find it rolled out across the entire floor of her workspace.

We worked quietly at our respective desks with her compact disc player softly pronouncing her own musical tastes in the background. With white-gloved hands I turned the pages of about thirty photo albums chronicling the creation of the phosphate industry on Banaba and Nauru to the haunting tunes of Sarah McLachlan’s *Fumbling Towards Ecstasy* (1993) and the Indigo Girls’ (1989) spunky and loving self-titled album. McLachlan’s music in particular is the kind that for me, has always managed to invoke the most intense feelings of loss.

Listen as the wind blows from across the great divide
voices trapped in yearning, memories trapped in time...
would I spend forever here and not be satisfied?¹⁰

![Figure 15. Looking at the massive “Ocean Island” map.](image)

I sometimes broke for lunch and afternoon tea, mostly to give my body a rest from its various and often stationary positions. The reviewing table was raised twice the height of a normal desk and I often stood as much as perched on the edge of the stool. I’d go through each album, take notes in pencil, close the album and walk around the worktable to get the next one eventually finishing with a neat “done” pile.

I was running out of time and had to select a couple hundred images and have them copied within the ten days I had left. What to pick? They all looked important and they all filled in a little drop of the vast Banaba past. Being immersed in the archival images and confronted with this massive map of the island it started to dawn on me that the European label “Ocean Island,” was rather apt. The name captures both the boundedness of the island’s geography, the infinite meanings it held for different groups as well its seemingly inexhaustible supply of phosphate fertiliser for the much larger Australian and New Zealand economies and lands. Here is a place that was ocean and island in every sense of both words.

With so much potential meaning beneath my gloved fingers I had to figure out what to select for reproduction. By a stroke of serendipity, the only Fiji friend I had in Melbourne, the uncle of one of my best schoolmates was a professional photographer. Mark Willie Chung offered to re-photograph everything I needed for my thesis. After reviewing the entire collection as a whole I chose three hundred and eighty pictures for chronological continuity as well as visual content. I was juxtaposing each photograph with at least four other temporal frames: the documents I had read recently in the archives, the books I had read for my Masters thesis on Banaban history, my brief 1997 trip to Banaba and the drama performed on Rabi each year about the BPC (see Video 6). These partial frames overlapped, merged and then fragmented into further pieces of a puzzle producing infinite permutations of possible interpretation.

The Melbourne portion of my trip ended all too quickly and I had to move on. I now had my first “field-notes”—nine rolls of camera film and eight floppy disks. It would take years and probably a postdoctoral fellowship for a future scholar to view and re-read those archives but my brief visit prompted the NAA to devote a portion
of its news bulletin *Menato* to the amazing BPC photographic and textual collection. On August 17 I packed up and boarded the bus to Adelaide.

**Images and excess meaning**

What renders a photograph surreal is its irrefutable pathos as a message from time past... What is surreal is the distance imposed, and bridged, by the photograph: the social distance and the distance in time (Sontag, 1977:54).

In the basement of the Burwood office of the Melbourne Archives sits what must surely be one of the most complete photographic documentations of the material history of a Pacific Island. Banaba is only six-square kilometres (two and a half square miles) and through the images I felt like I was looking at almost every possible view of it including a zoom into every rock, tree, wheel, buoy and wave.

The images of coconut trees in Figure 17 can be diffracted to stories of Banaban resistance in the 1920s over the company's demands for more land. A brief but revealing passage in Macdonald's (1983) history of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands colony described the particularly gendered resistance over the destruction of trees.

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11 See *Menato*, Number 13, August 1999.
As early as 1923 McQuire had observed, "... it is the young men who appear to express the opinions of the majority. But behind them and most formidable of all is the feminine influence on which everything depends and which is entirely reactionary." Grimble found this to be only too true and at Buakonikai village, where their influence was greatest, opposition was 'massive and abiding'. He reported: "Women, especially owners within the proposed new area, arbitrarily and blindly opposed at present to transfer of land under any conditions whatever." Later, when the BPC tried to take possession of its compulsorily acquired lands, it was the women who clung to the trees in an attempt to prevent them being destroyed (Macdonald 1982: 107).

This is one of the few passages that explicitly states the attitude of women to the mining. Macdonald was of the opinion that,

... largely as a consequence of mission influence, there were women's social groups in all villages and these, as recognised entities, met Grimble and BPC officials to discuss the land issue. It may have been thought by the Banaban community at large that to run counter to government wishes was a hazardous course of action and that women might be less vulnerable to coercion or reprisal. Or, and more probably, women represented the conservative element within the community; they had not, in most cases, worked in the phosphate mining industry as many of their menfolk had done, few had any formal education, but all were landowners with clear and recognised rights to speak and act on their own behalf in any matters affecting their property (ibid: 107-108).

The gendered nature of Banaban politics is not the focus of my thesis but one way in which Banaban’s described their island was Bamba, te au n aine –Banaba, the women’s land. This has two meanings I know of, the first which characterizes the island as free of war12 (a peaceful land) and the second which points to the active participation of women in politics before Christianity and the advent of mining. One major difference between Banaban and Gilbertese politics is that unlike the Gilberts, Banaban women were allowed to speak in the munaiku and were always active in decision making and social organization. The custom on Banaba in marriage, for example, was for husbands to leave their kairol for their wife’s. Today, such things are situational on Rabi.

Both sexes also had equal land rights but since 1900 at least, men have normally occupied leadership positions in the community. Maude (1994) describes

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12 This was related to me by Councilor Ioane of Tabiang on Rabi.
how women could inherit important roles but these were almost always carried out by a male representative. On Rabi, at least, the first female member of the Rabi Council of Leaders was not elected until 1996. In my own extended family, the representatives for the whole group are always male. I discuss some of these issues further in Chapter 5.

While the indigenous Banabans were initially of photographic interest to the company they soon ceased to be a feature. Their demise from the photographic record corresponded temporally to the tensions in the written records at Lonsdale Street regarding the company's desire to remove the indigenous population and gain total mining access. Increasingly the images of various Ellice Islander and Gilbertese servants, normally called “kanakas,” instead came to serve under such titles as: “native man,” “native woman,” “native person in native dress.” “Native” was definitely not synonymous with “indigenous.” My own knowledge of the material differences between Islanders of the Gilbert/Ellice/Banaba islands contrasted with the anonymous representations of the company photographer. Brown bodies, even when arranged as in the collage below were presented as non-specific while most white adults were named.  

Figure 18. “No title”  
Figure 19. “Dr. Bracken, matron, Mr. Evans and patient”  

13 This is quite different, however, from the photos in the Frank Miller Collection microfilmed by the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau in 1999. Miller’s family almost always provided the names of the Islanders photographed. They were presumably friends or servants of the family.  
14 This image was one of many that revealed in contrasting civilized and primitive looking Islanders (R32/1, Album 109, BPC Archives CA 244).
At the time I examined these photos I don’t think I could have articulated their theoretical potential. At first I was just looking for material to support an oppositional reading of Williams and Macdonald’s (1985) partial and celebratory *The Phosphateers*. While some of the photographs I viewed are reproduced in that text they serve as illustrations, not as the source of potential questions about the past. Using them as sources for such questions opens the possibility of multiple interpretations or what Macdougall describes as the “excess of meaning” (1998: 68) inherent in photography.

The taken for granted nature of photographs is something I try to counter throughout this thesis. When we look at a photograph we often apprehend the whole but presume a meaning suggested by the caption. My readings of the BPC photographs were rather different.

Initial examination of the photographs was like watching a silent, black and white slideshow of colonial history with my own jumbled voiceover: “This could be x, and this could be y, and I wonder who these people were....”. What interested me was not that the actual answers to these questions were somewhere out there but that such an explosion of questions was possible because of the very nature of visual representation. Hundreds of images covering almost seventy years of mining begged reflection upon how one “knows” the past. It would have been easy just to take the images as representations of racism or exploitation. That sort of reading required no proof. My interest was more along the lines of Susan Foster’s described in *Choreographing Histories*.

In their movements, past bodies also rubbed up against or moved alongside geological and architectural constructions, music, clothing, interior decorations... whose material remains leave further indications of those bodies’ dispositions... these partial records of varying kinds remain. They document the encounter between bodies and some of the discursive and institutional frameworks that touched them, operated on and through them, in different ways... A historian of bodies, approaches these fragmented traces stemum leading, a sign... that his or her own body is seeking, longing to find, the vanished body whose motions produced them... This historian’s body wants to consort with dead bodies, wants to know from them... (Foster 1995: 5-6)
How did these people walk past each other? How did their muscles feel at the end of the day or at the beginning? How did a grown native man feel when a white man called him “boy”? Did his chest tighten, his throat close… or did he smile and do as he was bid and then curse the Europeans later? Did he go home from the mines with a really bad cough from all that phosphate dust? These are the kinds of pasts the photos begged me to engage.

Some images did have captions and corresponded to documents I’d read at Casselden Place. For example, for every shipwreck mentioned in a company letter, there were six or seven photographs of the same wreck in the Burwood location. I realise now that most “traditional” historians would have neatly crafted such disjointed information into a master narrative as did Williams and Macdonald (1985). They read the photos with the documents while I approached the photographs as things in themselves—potential windows to past times, past places, past bodies, past configurations of a changing landscape.

Some images dated back to the same month as Ellis’ “discovery.” Others were in colour with no dates. The collection as a whole, bits of which were organized in leather bound albums, while others were kept loosely in boxes, created a silent yet busy chronology of the mining industry on both Banaba and Nauru. Since few of them were credited, except those of Thomas McMahon (see Quanchi 1994, 1995 and 1997), it is hard to read them as products or artistic creations of a particular photographer. Rather, they come across as collective representations of the company’s approach to and experience of the island.

The exceptions to this pattern were the collage depicted in Figure 18 and photographs with captions that attempted to poetically reflect on a scene. These were all of the ocean, rocks and crashing waves at three different times of the day—noon, dusk and night. I noted that all three of these odes to nature were inscribed onto a view facing away from the much less blissful pinnacle riddled “moonscape” of Banaba.

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15 McMahon was a photo journalist who was popular in the early 1900s. His photos in the BPC archives are from 1907.
Figure 20. “The moon beam turn the rippling waves to nettled links of silver.”

Figure 21. “Light clouds whose soft embraces keep the sunlight on the deep asleep.”

Figure 22. “The clouds with sun and surf at play.”

The trope of “Paradise” informing these captions and some depictions of natives was also consistently applied in newspaper articles, the memoirs I discuss in Chapter Three and the writings of Arthur Grimble (1952) in particular. The environment of the central Pacific ocean—“nature,” was somehow segregated from the extractive and transforming activities of the mining industry. In both the photographic collection and the archival films I discuss at the end of this chapter, there is a strong separation of the space of the mining and labour—in the mines, beneath the phosphate cantilever, European, Islander and Asian workers, from that of recreation—the beach, sand, ocean and sky.16

16 Such divisions are transcended by songs like the one we heard in Video 1 where the mixed community of Banaba, colonialism and hard labour are juxtaposed with the “oceanscape” of the island
Early attention to “natives,” illustrated by the inclusion of some Banaban individual and family portraits soon gave way to a focus on the material, rather than human aspects of life on the island. The images of individuals are confined to the early part of the collection, and those of general company activity dominate the rest. This shift included less attention to the romantic sand and surf illustrated by the above photos. The early human subjects like “Banaban man” and “Banaban belle,” seemed to function as last images of a disappearing race.17

The perceived “end” of the Banaban race was a very real concern for some of the Resident Commissioners in the early 1900s like E.C Eliot and his predecessor Captain Quayle Dickson, both of whom were removed when they refused to support the company’s policy towards Banaban land (see Binder 1978: 58-69; Williams and Macdonald 1985). There was an awareness within the company and the colonial administration that the Ocean Islanders would never be the same again but this was not enough reason to stop mining. In 1946 after World War II temporarily interrupted the industry, a memo from H.E Maude, Lands Commissioner of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, made several points to the British administration:

28. As long ago as 1914 the Authorities were worried about the fate of the Banabans when the phosphate industry on Ocean Island should end, and in

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resulting in feelings of joy, sadness, reflection and nostalgia. See lyrics of “Lovely Banaba” song in Chapter 3.

17 This echoes much rhetoric about Pacific and Australian depopulation in the early twentieth century (see Ram and Jolly 1998).
1927 the creation of a Provident fund was proposed, which should be used for the purchase of a future home for the community. The Resident Commissioner pointed out that if the phosphate industry were to fail, "the race would literally be blotted out of existence: five hundred and fifty denaturalised natives could not possible live on the interest yielded by the Banabans fund."

34. It will take some time for the Banaban community to recover from their treatment during the Japanese occupation: they were only a shadow of their former selves when discovered by the allied occupation forces. It appears, furthermore, that their attitude towards the Government, and Europeans in general, may have undergone a change. While for years they have distrusted the Government’s good faith, they are now said to be more openly critical than before, which is ascribed to their having seen the European beaten, if only for a time, by a brown-skinned race such as themselves.

48... I may state here that I have known the Banabans for seventeen years... and since then contact has been renewed periodically until the war. It seems to me that during this period the community has progressively degenerated morally and physically, and that urgent messages are now indicated if they are not to sink into a state of indolence and apathy (A Memorandum, Maude 1946).\(^{18}\)

The language in Maude’s document suggests that the company and colonial administration saw themselves, at the outset, as saving the Banabans by bringing the mining industry to the island. The phosphate industry is seen as rescuing them from extinction. There is a purported concern for these “denaturalised” natives transformed not just by mining but their shocking experience of Europeans being momentarily defeated by another “brown-skinned race”: the Japanese.

The company’s zeal for photographic documentation seemed to be along the lines of Susan Sontag’s critique of tourism and photography: “photographing something became a routine part of the procedure for altering it” (Sontag 1977: 64). Subjects often appeared to be posed in “typical” native occupations while in reality were having their economic and social landscape was being rapidly altered by the very agents who employed the photographer. There is a striking lack of smiles in these early which suggests their discomfort or indifference to the camera. As Sontag writes of early amateur photographers in America: “faced with the awesome spread

\(^{18}\) From the report: "A Memorandum on the future of the Banaban population with special attention to their lands and funds" by HLE Maude to the Western Pacific High Commission, 1946.
and alienness of a newly settled continent, people wielded cameras as a way of taking possession of the places they visited" (ibid. 65).

But, unlike America, Banaba was never envisaged as an enduring settler colony. For the white settlers on Banaba, it was very much a temporary economic and emotional possession as neither the company nor their employees ever had intentions of making Banaba a lifelong home. Physical possession, however, was irrevocable as it is impossible to replace the missing land. Similarly, at least until they're cleared away, the imprint of the industry remains in the relics of its buildings, machines and cantilever that still stand somewhat dilapidated on the island (see Video 3).

After examining almost a thousand photographs I found less than ten which named the “natives.” The first exception was an Ellice Islander called Kaipati who was a source of great fascination because of his stature. I came across reference to him first in the documents at Lonsdale in an unsourced newspaper article and then in Burwood. Replete with images, the article proclaimed:

A coloured patriot has arrived in Auckland by the Makura and he is keenly anxious to join the Maori Reinforcements for service at the front. His name is Kaipati, and he comes from the Ellice group, away out in the Western Pacific. 23 years of age, 6ft 2 in high and 15 stone in weight, this Island boy is as fine a specimen of native humanity as one could wish to see. Being a sergeant in the native police force, he was chosen to act as orderly to the RC (Mr. EC Eliot) on a trip to Suva, via Sydney and Auckland.

The natives of the Ellice Group are more like the Maoris than most Islanders. This particular boy speaks a little English with the same musical intonation and his expression is one of keen intelligence. When questioned he says he wants to fight for the King. In reply to his master, he expressed the belief that 5,000 more natives would readily come from his and neighbouring groups if they were wanted. Mr Eliot states that the Ellice Islanders are of excellent character, their group being noted for a minimum of crime.

A regiment of Kaipatis, broadshouldered, stalwart and erect would be a spectacle to enthuse over.19

19 The newspaper fragment is titled “Wants to Fight: an Ellice Island Patriot: Thousands more to come,” from MP 1174 R140/1. Grimble makes a quick reference to Kaipati in his famous book A Pattern of Islands. He first describes the Ellice Islanders in the police force on the island: “... no race in that ocean of sea-princes ever produced a more superb breed of surf-riders than theirs” (1952: 16). After a tumultuous journey into Home Bay, the Police Officer in charge of Ocean Island, Stuartsen
In 1907 Kaipati appears to represent the “noble savage” for the whites both on Banaba and in New Zealand. The celebration of his muscular and erect body is underwritten by his patriotic commitment to the Empire. But, alongside Sergeant Kaipati we might consider the house servants in Figure 20. Of rather smaller stature than Kaipati, they represent another type of “good” native—submissive and hard working. This photo was one of the few I saw in which Islanders and Asian workers appeared in the same frame.

The entire collection of a thousand or so photographs was a meticulous visual recording of the social life and the developing technology of the industry: cantilevers, light railway, trains, a grab and skip mechanism, shipping and buoying innovations. The collection functions as an illustration and inventory of development and progress and the pioneering colonial empire in the Pacific. They seem to proclaim: “here, look what we can do with a Pacific island!” But even as every aspect of Ocean Island life seemed to require memorialisation, because of the industry’s transitory

Methven says to the steersman (whom Grimble calls a “bronze giant”) “Nice work Sergeant Kaipati, very nice indeed!” (ibid: 19).
function and from my purview in 1999, a profound mood of loss dominates the images.

**Reading writing in the archives**

In the Internet Age one might find it hard to imagine a time when written or typed letters, carried to and fro on ships, no less, were the only medium of contact and information exchange. The sheer amount and frequency of written correspondence between different personalities in the phosphate company is staggering. I would like to discuss some of the writings of one “phosphateer” in particular—Sir Albert Ellis.

**Kings and Phosphateers**

In 1962, the minister of Agriculture in New Zealand, B.E. Talboys, wrote the following tribute:

> Of Sir Albert Ellis it could be truly said that he became a legend in his lifetime. He was a pioneer who had the satisfaction of playing a long and active role in the administration and growth of phosphate manufacture. Even a man of Sir Albert’s foresight could not have predicted the present New Zealand use of a million and a quarter tons of phosphatic fertilisers and mixtures containing phosphatic fertilisers annually, when he discovered the high-quality rock phosphate deposits on Nauru and Ocean Islands at the turn of the century (Tyrer 1962: 4).

Ellis was part of a cohort of Australian, English and New Zealand men who were the entrepreneurs who spread capitalism throughout the Pacific from the early twentieth century. These were the men who built companies like the BPC, Burns Philp, the Colonial Sugar Refinery and the Lever Brothers. Williams and Macdonald called those in the phosphate industry “the phosphateers” and prefaced their book thus:

> This history is dedicated to the many thousands of men and women who, through their enterprise, skills, labour and patience over eighty years, helped to develop a unique institution (1985, no page number).
Ellis was certainly a major “phosphateer,” what chief BPC representative Harold Gaze called, “the oldest living phosphateer” (Williams and Macdonald, 1988: 417). While going through the Maude and Grimble Papers (F2) in Adelaide I came across an extract from his diary regarding his arrival on Banaba.

May 3rd 1900. Arrived Ocean Island at daylight; steamed round to the King’s village at West end of Island; canoes came off bringing King and Chief. Supercargoes started trading with the natives for sharkfins, vegetables, fruit, curios, etc. Proceeded round to the village South end of Island. Mr. Mortensen and I went ashore with the King and Interpreter and proceed inland about 1 ½ miles; sank several holes, getting depth of 3 feet of Alluvial Phosphate with Rock (Phosphate) mixed up. Found that most of the pillars of rock described by Mortensen were hard coral rock and valueless, but that among them were large boulders of Phosphatestone; saw at once that the deposits are very valuable. Returned to village and opened negotiations with the King, Mr. Mortensen conducting the business. King said would require to refer the matter to a chief on the steamer.

After having lunch at the Teacher’s house, we went aboard the vessel with the King, and after a good deal of talk, the latter agreed to our working the Phosphate deposits at a yearly rental of £50. He and the Chief signed the Agreement, as his authority is undisputed, it was not considered necessary for any of the natives to sign (my emphasis). The King and Chief were firm however, that our prospecting party must not stay at the Southern village, but must go round to the King’s village; this owing to there being considerable rivalry between the two places, it being said that the Teacher at South village was trying to undermine the King’s authority (Ellis extract F2: 1-2).

These passages mark an agreement which has been lamented by Banabans ever since. In Chapter 5 I talk about how they composed songs about many of the mistakes made during this first meeting. There are no such things as “Banaban chiefs,” let alone “Kings.” The rivalries that Ellis appears to have exacerbated are between the villages of Uma (spelled Ooma in the archives) and Tabwewa. Clans belonging to Tabwewa enjoyed certain cultural privileges according to a system of rights distributed between all the kainga groups on Banaba. One of these was the right to board new vessels and to greet visitors. Ever since the so-called “King” mistakenly signed away the rights normally held by individual landowners, this right to meet and greet visitors has been a sore point of contention, even on Rabi today.21

20 A photo image of his diary with one of Phosphate House in Melbourne (R 32/4: 2-23).
21 See a longer discussion of this in K. Teaiwa (1999).
In Adelaide the next section was missing from the rest of Ellis’ diary but I found this earlier in Melbourne. On May 4th Ellis was writing:

Friday Rain squalls during night and today, moderate breeze North East; reef fairly smooth. Decided to shift camp, present locality not being suitable. Pitched tent close to beach; King made a present of a native hut, which was carried down bodily, and placed close to tent... With three Ocean Islanders I went right inland to summit of Island, about 11/2 miles and probably 300 feet high; found Phosphate Rock and Alluvial everywhere. The center of the Island is a Tableland, and is practically covered with Phosphate Rock; many native walls were seen composed entirely of this stone, mostly in lumps for immediate shipment (MP1174/ 1074).

One person’s wall is obviously another’s “lump for immediate shipment.” Banabans had carefully constructed walls and terraces from phosphate rock across the island using them for everything from housing to sacred ritual sites. Ellis obviously had no concern for such things. On his very first day on the island he is already planning how best to ship it off. By 1909, after Banaba was incorporated into the British colony of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, Ellis found himself dealing with men like Resident Commissioner Quayle-Dickson and having to explain how the company obtained its rights in the first place. On November 19 1909 he writes to Alfred Gaze, the representative for the Pacific Phosphate Company in Melbourne:

Re. Original Agreement with the King of Ocean Island,- and Phosphate & Trees Purchase Agreements. The first named was for the general right to work the Island. I had to obtain this right from somebody; the Island didn’t belong to any civilized Government, so I could only deal with the native king. The authorities at Fiji had been previously informed of my intention to visit the Island and negotiate for the Phosphate deposits, and they saw nothing to prevent my doing so. The Phosphate & Trees Purchase Agreements made subsequently with the individual landowners, directly compensated them. The King of the Island couldn’t sell the Phosphate or “all the Cocoanut, Pandanus and all other trees” as they weren’t his; they belonged to each individual landowner, who presumably [has] the right to sell them (MP 1174/1085).

The rest of Ellis’ letters in the archives are consumed with justifying the companies requirements with respect to both acquiring enough land for mining and navigating the original agreement with the supposed “King.” He points out the fact that in the original agreement the Company agreed not to remove any phosphate where cultivated plants grow. This, therefore, excluded most areas where pandanus plants
appeared to grow wild. This tactic of defining certain areas as cultivated and non-cultivated lands was a clever strategy by the Company. On Banaba, pandanus and coconut trees grow almost everywhere and in the Gilbertese language there are no less than three hundred identifiable species of pandanus.\textsuperscript{22} There is nothing wild about the tree or the Banaban and Gilbertese attitude to it.

Ellis begins another section of a 1909 memorandum with a report on a proposal to level some of the pinnacles opened up by mining to facilitate the replanting of food trees. From the present we know that such activities were never carried out and were part of the reason that Banabans attempted to sue the British government in the 1970s. In 1909, however, Ellis states very authoritatively that:

> The patches of Pandanus and Cocoanuts away from the village are very badly cultivated, or else not at all, owing to the inherent laziness of the natives; the consequence is that the dead leaves, grass and weeds accumulate to such an extent that they constitute a great danger as regards fires. In drought times the Island has frequently been swept by fires, previous to the advent of the Company—and since operations were started, there have been numerous serious fires, some of which would have swept the Island, but for the Company's labourers being put on to beat them out. These fires have damaged the food trees much more than the Company's operations have, and they could be avoided if the land is kept in better order (Ellis in MP 1174/ 1085).

The very next section says that levelling the pinnacles would be unfeasible and trees will grow better if they are left alone. Ellis is inconsistent in his recommendations though consistent in his authoritative and definitive tone. Sometimes he seems to express concern for native welfare and other times he advises action that would benefit only the company. He is also extraordinarily exasperated with the fact that the Banabans aren't eager to work for the company. In the same memo referred to above Ellis writes:

> (b) It can hardly be said that the purchase of Phosphate and trees is tantamount to purchasing the land, I think. The natives are quite aware that each block reverts to them after the Phosphate is worked off.

> (d) It is certainly hoped that the Government will help us to secure land when needed; we haven't had much assistance in this request of late. It is however useless to rely on the Banabans for working at the pinnacles or anything else which requires much exertion (MP 1174: 1085).

\textsuperscript{22} See the Gilbertese-English dictionary compiled by Sabatier (1971: 424-426). Among other things, pandanus is used to make fine mats and certain ornaments for dance costumes.
I suppose it makes sense that as the discoverer of phosphate on this island he has committed his life to extracting as much as the company needs for farmers in New Zealand and Australia. Obviously the productive agricultural industries in these lands are much more valuable than the unproductive and less civilised activities of a small number of "Ocean Islanders."

Throughout the mining activities on Nauru and Banaba the company continues to hunt for other islands in Fiji and the Solomons that might contain similar phosphate deposits. The Company looks for alternatives in case trouble rises on Banaba; already there are worries that the Banabans will discover what kind of deal they've been sucked into. If Ellis was confident of the agreement with the King in 1900 he is less so in 1909:

M. Ellis to Gaze: July 22, 1909- ‘The Lightwoods’ Cambridge to Melbourne. Section 6, re. Par 7, b. Though the King of Ocean Island, and subsequently all the four representative chiefs agreed to our working the Island under an annual payment of 50 pounds per annum, they didn’t for a minute think it would be possible to export so much Phosphate as we have been doing, and therefore require so much land. If we were to limit our payments to the 50 pounds per annum, the Ocean Islanders (and others as well) could with some truth say that we took advantage of their ignorance and bound them down by a hard and fast agreement, when they had no adequate idea what they were getting themselves in for (MP1174/1085).

It is for reasons like this that the Banaban dancing group on Rabi composed a song, part of which went like this:

How Pity/ How Pity oh/
They misunderstood the value of money/
our ancestors! /
ake ngkoe ngkoe... 23

Figure 27. Ellis memorial on Banaba

Ellis passed away on July 11 1951 and the last I heard of him during my archival journey was in part of a speech I found in the Maude and Grimble papers. Ellis was erecting yet another memorial on Rabi marking the Banaban arrival and sure of himself as ever, he proclaimed:

Now I would like to tell the Council a little about the phosphate. The white man goes to Nauru and Banaba and takes away plenty of phosphate. What does he do with it? He puts it in a machine and then puts a very strong acid on it and that makes it good to put on the ground. When that is done everything grows very well, the sugar cane and the wheat and the grass for the cattle—every kind of food. That is good for the white man but it is also good for all the other people too. The rice, sugar, tinned beef and flour and other kinds of food which have been grown with the phosphate come back, come to Rambi [sic]. To work the phosphate is good for the white man and good for the Banabans. I am an old man but I am very glad to be doing useful work with the phosphate because it is good work for the white man and good work for the native too (A.F Ellis Speech, Rabi Island 21 September 1948).

Phosphate: a chemistry lesson

In August 1916 the New Zealand Farmer Stock and Station Journal ran a story on the discovery of phosphate by Albert Ellis and declares that if they “could get something of that kind in New Zealand it would be better than all the gold mines in the country” (R138/1).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the phosphate mining industry initiated multiple approaches to and conflicting interpretations of “land” as money and fertilizer or home, body and kauranga. Silverman’s (1971) rhyming “blood and mud” synecdoche captures one complex reading of the body/land connection but it was the company’s much less poetic approach to the phosphate that prevailed over all others.

On August 2 1999 I started to look through a portion of MP1174 called “Item 107” and in particular a July 16th report on the make-up and quality of phosphate. In one sense the chemical composition of the mined rock is not really relevant to the history of its impact on cultures but further reading of the process of transforming phosphate rock into a form useful for plant growth is interesting both as science and metaphor. According to a publication supported by the New Zealand Ministry of Agriculture there are two theories for the original formation of phosphate on Nauru
and Ocean Island (Tyrer 1962). The first suggest that phosphate was formed through sedimentation, “... built up before the two islands were elevated above the sea level by a gigantic convulsion of the sea-bed. The fact that impressions of fish and fossilised shells, including conch shells, have been found among the Nauru deposits appears to lend weight to this belief” (ibid: 9). This theory would really justify the European name for Banaba: Ocean Island.

The second theory proposes that the initial deposits on the islands were sedimentary but that for centuries after elevation from the sea-bed, the islands were resting places for seabirds. Here their droppings collected for hundreds of years on top of the original deposits. This second theory was supported by the fact that Ocean Island was a nocturnal home for thousands of seabirds (Tyrer 1962: 10). They would fly out during the day to fish and return home before sunset everyday. As a result, the highest part of the island on the northern coast has the deepest deposits of phosphate.

Ocean Island was one third the size of Nauru and the mining had a devastating impact on its original 1,540 acres (Tyrer 1962: 28). In 1962 12,700,000 tons of Ocean Island had been extracted for farms in Australia, New Zealand, Britain and Japan. It was estimated that 8,000,000 tons remained and indeed this was almost finished by the time mining stopped in 1979. By then, it was adjudged that the island had been depleted by almost 20,000,000 tonnes of land.

Phosphate was generally divided into two grades—rock and alluvial, the alluvial, according to a pamphlet in Item 101 being anything that got through a screen 9 meshes to the square inch. A sample No.16 (MP 1174/107) listed the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Alluvial</th>
<th>Rock</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phosphoric Acid</td>
<td>37.84</td>
<td>40.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribasic Phosphate of Lime</td>
<td>82.59</td>
<td>87.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carbonic Acid</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carbonate of Lime</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>3.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organic Matter and</td>
<td>7.89</td>
<td>1.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined Water</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 28. Phosphate chemical analysis
While I may have taken a few organic chemistry courses during my undergraduate years, I couldn't understand why these figures did not add up. As I recalled, chemical composition was usually measured in parts/hundred. I also wanted to understand what phosphate of lime was and how it was rendered into a useful form for plant absorption. Most of the literature describes the making of phosphate fertilizer or superphosphate from a treatment of the pulverized rock with sulphuric acid. The standard chemical reaction for this process is as follows:

\[ \text{Ca}_3(\text{PO}_4)_2 + \text{H}_2\text{SO}_4 \rightarrow \text{Ca} (\text{H}_2\text{PO}_4)_2 \text{ or superphosphate of lime.} \]

Lime is calcium carbonate (CaCO_3) and the primary component of coral. Ca_3(PO_4)_2 is inorganic rock phosphate, which is not very soluble in water. Adding the sulphuric acid to the rock makes it into the soluble Ca (H_2PO_4)_2 form (readily absorbed by plants). Phosphate is particularly necessary for strengthening plant roots and the fertilizer is best applied into more alkaline soil with a low pH level. According to the Fertilizer Industry Federation of Australia website, “Plants with a severe P deficiency are generally stunted, develop slowly, lack vigour and have a lack lustre look about them” [http://www.fifa.asn.au/public/soil_fertility/fifa_13.html](http://www.fifa.asn.au/public/soil_fertility/fifa_13.html).

It is no wonder the PIC, PPC and BPC wanted this resource so badly for antipodean farmers. In fact, the Fertilizer Industry Federation of Australia was created by the BPC. What the chemical reaction outlined above basically suggests is the capturing and transformation of a place/material through a western technical process. It is made into a substance more accessible to plants, but specifically for Australian and New Zealand crops. The company had to re-work the substance in order to “live” with it and this is precisely what happened to Banaban culture and ultimately to Banaban bodies—a swift transformation and eventual displacement. The fact that plants need phosphate specifically to strengthen their roots is also suggestive. Banaban plants and bodies and houses were up-rooted to make way for an exploitative industry that would strengthen the “roots” of Australian and New Zealand agriculture.
The standard chemical reaction can usually be imagined in the reverse and Silverman’s (1971) reading can be considered with the company’s chemical approach to imagine a new equation for Banahan land:

\[
\text{blood} + \text{rock} + \text{money} + \text{technology} \leftrightarrow \text{Ca} (\text{H}_2 \text{PO}_4)_2
\]

If we do as Marcus prescribed and “follow” the thing we would have to recover infinitesimal bits of rock from antipodean fields, rivers, streams, weat-bix and the guts of sheep and children alike.

Vilsoni Hereniko once wrote, “Our cultural identities are... always in a state of becoming, a journey in which we never arrive; who we are is not a rock that is passed on from generation to generation, fixed and unchanging” (Hereniko 1992: 407). His “rock” is obviously not from Banaba. For an island that was primarily made of solid phosphate, most rocks had a very great chance of moving, changing, transforming into something new but not as a willed destiny by Islanders. Banaban rock in both its creation over time and transformation through mining was never fixed but the result of deep fluid processes. Hereniko later states, “After all, cultural identity is process not product,” (ibid.). If we follow through on the things that shape cultural identity—land, environment, people and spirituality, land must be in “process” too. 24

**Our Sea of Phosphate: a montage**

There may be no ‘there’ there but there is a ‘there’ here and plenty of ‘here’ there

(Gertrude Stein at Thoughts on Screen by Dave Sago)

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24 Donna Haraway’s (1988, 1995, 2000) work importantly reflects on the borders between nature and culture and on the “the join between the figurative and factual” (Haraway 2000: 24). In the way she uses the language of biology to reflect on history, politics and anthropology. Similarly the language of chemistry could be used to tell the story of Banaba.
the whole reason for banaban displacement is colonial agriculture. i like to say “agriculture is not in our blood, but our blood is in agriculture.” in his study of banaban culture, martin silverman found that banabans equated blood and land and that kinship was constructed not simply on blood or biological relations, but on the exchange of land which signified adoption. these social relations then were no less meaningful and sometimes more meaningful than biological kinship. if banabans think of blood and land as one and the same, it follows then that in losing their land, they lost their blood. in losing their phosphate to agriculture, they have spilled their blood in different lands. their essential roots on ocean island are now essentially routes to other places. places like new zealand, australia, and fiji.

Figure 30. Ocean Island Shipments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vessel</th>
<th>Arr</th>
<th>Dep.</th>
<th>Ooma</th>
<th>Tabiwa</th>
<th>Tons</th>
<th>Consigned to</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mintaro 2</td>
<td>29/1/03</td>
<td>5/3</td>
<td>2223</td>
<td>827</td>
<td>3050</td>
<td>William Crosby and Co. Melbourne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariake Maru</td>
<td>27/2/03</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>1728</td>
<td>1772</td>
<td>3500</td>
<td>Mitsui Bussan Kaisha, Tokyo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapallo</td>
<td>21/7/03</td>
<td>18/8</td>
<td>1125</td>
<td>5175</td>
<td>6300</td>
<td>PIC London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isleworth 4</td>
<td>7/9/03</td>
<td>17/9</td>
<td>1533</td>
<td>967</td>
<td>2500</td>
<td>Theo Davies &amp; Co. Honolulu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windsor 1</td>
<td>21/1/04</td>
<td>20/2</td>
<td>3950</td>
<td></td>
<td>3950</td>
<td>PIC Sydney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croyden</td>
<td>28/9/04</td>
<td>30/9</td>
<td></td>
<td>5000</td>
<td>5000</td>
<td>Maemdray &amp; Co. San Francisco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceana</td>
<td>30/11/04</td>
<td>8/9</td>
<td>650</td>
<td></td>
<td>650</td>
<td>MBK Osaka</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table is from MP1174/1/1050. The columns indicate ships, dates, tonnage from two Banaban districts Ooma (Uma) and Tabiwa (Tabwewa) and where it was shipped to.
Phosphate production was clearing the jungle off with the bulldozer usually, grabbing the soil out with a grab, into trucks... Bringing the trucks up to the crusher up there. Crushing it. Putting it into storage bins. From the storage bins onto conveyor belts into... this particular drive behind us... Dropped out the other end, along cantle, along conveyor belts into the storage bin. Into storage bins to the ships— and then ships to Melbourne (Kaukas in Cooper 1998: 3).

Figure 31. The Routes of Phosphate

The shipment of phosphate from Banaba can be visualised as a web of vessels and rocks radiating out from the tiny island to larger lands from the United Kingdom, Japan to Hawai'i as well as Australia and New Zealand, and I later discovered in the archives as far as Germany, England, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia! Perhaps in this sense the phosphate moves along both routes and roots, like the rhizome of Deleuze and Guattari (1988), especially when processed into superphosphate and absorbed into the roots of other plants creating new routes to other bodies, digestive tracts and back to the ground as waste.

when i was trying to write about banaban history... i found that more images came to my mind than words (T.Teaiwa 1995: 9).
Adelaide Dreaming

I arrived in Adelaide by bus. While Melbourne felt bright and energetic, Adelaide felt desperate and forgotten. For a week I lived in the “Motel Adjacent Casino” on Bank St. between Hindley and the main North Terrace road. In between trips to the Special Collections section of the Barr-Smith Library at Adelaide University and “Motel Adjacent Casino” I learned to love Thai food. Every afternoon after the library closed I would walk back to my motel along Rundle Mall past David Jones, Cole Myers and Woolworths. These chain stores look quite different rising off an open walk then inside the familiar structure of a closed mall. By the time I returned I was grateful for the television in my room. It made me feel less lonely.

I recently read The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho (1988) and the gist of his tale is that if one is open to signs, the whole universe will conspire to get you where you need to go. The central character in his book learns the language of the universe, a realm beyond both words and the visible world. This is what doing research in the Barr-Smith Library was like.

First I was told that the special collections were only open from 1 to 4:30 pm. I was worried that I wouldn’t be able to see much in five days but then the librarian, Susan Woodburn, decided to let me come in at 9 a.m. everyday. This meant that not only was there total quiet for me to work but I had the precious photocopier to myself for most of the day. I got through the entire collection because Susan was so generous.

Confronting the Maude and Grimble papers was nothing like reading the BPC archives. Their recordings were explicitly on the history and culture of Banabans and Gilbertese and things to do with the company were only discussed with reference to the actual Islanders. Part of the immediacy of the past was found in the forms of the records themselves. Things in pencil and cursive tend to invoke the very act of writing and recording more than typewritten text. Compared to Melbourne, there seemed to be much less separation in Adelaide between the records and my very body. Things I read in Adelaide made me sob outright.
Finding Kieuea

The above fragment is from one of Maude's notebooks during his 1930 lands survey. The word "finished," scrawled on the left indicates that this land had already been mined out.

Nei Kieuea is my great, great grandmother. When I found her name in Maude's papers I first went, cold, then hot, and the world came to a complete stand still around me. I did not move for a very long time.

This spindly bit of writing was like a snapshot of my heritage. Here I was in Adelaide, South Australia, staring at what might have been the only recorded trace of my great, great grandmother's existence (beside the fact of the existence of myself and her other descendants). I imagined Maude strolling around with his pencil and exercise book talking to families and noting that the company no longer needed their land. What sorts of questions did he ask Kieuea and why didn't he record her husband, Toariki's name? (see genealogy in Chapter 5). Maybe because he was Tabiteuean and irrelevant to both the company and colonial administration.

Before I found this fragment most of my family did not know that she had more than two children, though the name "Tabuteun" lives on in the figure of one of my male cousins on Rabi. The first two, Tenamo and Kaurentake eventually made it to Fiji where their children stayed or were born. The notes "at Tabiteuea" beneath the names of Karuentake and Tebuna indicate the fact that Kieuea's husband was from Tabiteuea and in our family there was movement between the two islands. Tabuteun "died without issue," without children. According to my father, Kieuea
eventually gave away much of her land because all her children left for Tabiteuea and didn’t stay behind to look after her.

*Real Banaban Bodies*

In 1935 Maude conducted a survey of all Banabans who were considered to be of “pure blood,” that is, not mixed with Gilbertese. Sigrah and King cite Maude’s comments on this study as part of the evidence they use to establish a particular clan called *te aka* as the original inhabitants of Banaba (Sigrah and King, 2001: 35). One of their contentions is that *te aka* were racially different from Gilbert Islanders. While I will not go into detail here about the *te aka* claim I would like to discuss ideas about “real Banabans” furthered by the publication of Sigrah and King’s book but dating back to Maude and Grimble’s time on Banaba.

There is a widespread discourse on Islanders which plays out in two ways. There are “real” Islanders by blood quantum and “real” Islanders by lifestyle, socio-economic status and educational opportunities (see Jolly 1992: 49). Supposedly the more middle-class or educated you are, the less native. Blood quantum on the other hand is tricky. For the most part the identification of just one Banaban ancestor renders one Banaban but when it comes to land issues, or voting on certain community matters, a whole list of attributes not just on blood quantum but “code” (behaving like a Banaban) kicks in.

In 1997 I wrote a paper critiquing a group called the Banaban Heritage Society founded by Queensland based Stacey King (see K. Teaiwa 1997). The group mainly consisted of the well-meaning descendants of former BPC employees or employees themselves who wished to “help” the Banabans. In the process they also got to revive nostalgic connections to “the homeland” (see Chapter 3). King did not like my article and responded personally to the University of Hawai‘i.

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26 I have experienced enough of this discourse on authenticity personally and do not want to go into the literature here but see Trask (1991), Keesing (1989), Linnelkin (1991), and Jolly (1992) for a particular debate on Islander identity, nationalism, authenticity and authority. It usually matters who’s “real,” who has the power to speak or represent in a situation when something like land, power, knowledge or money is at stake.
I have also just received your Newsletter from the Center for Pacific Island Studies to hear that Katerina has been awarded the first HEYUM SCHOLARSHIP. As you are already aware, Katerina is part Banaban and was raised in mainland Fiji and went on for further education in USA, a luxury that no other Banabans can afford. So I hope that the $3,000 she has been awarded will at least allow her the opportunity to spend more than just 5 weeks amongst her people on Rabi and 2-3 days on her homeland of Banaba.\footnote{This is a small part of a letter e-mailed by King to the heads of various departments at UH between September and November 1997 as well as to the chancellor of USP where I presented my paper. She specifically threatened legal action against both universities but then took no further action.}

I present part of King’s reply briefly here not to go into detail about our differences but to illustrate the fact that any perceived privilege can be used to render an Islander inauthentic. In this case she used blood and education to discredit my scholarship. She also called Banaba my “homeland” even though I was supposedly just a “part Banaban,” born and raised in “mainland Fiji.”

Maude’s records below of the “real” Banabans illustrate how any racial notion of authenticity is problematic. I made copies of his tables containing measurements of body parts and everything else from eye colour to bodily hair. Maude presided over the Banaban Lands Settlement project in the early 1930s and it was in this context that the desire to distinguish between “real” and “part” Banabans was established. Below is an example of some of Maude’s recordings of all those with “pure” Banaban blood.

**Figure 33. Anthropometric table**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Birth Place</th>
<th>Eye Colour</th>
<th>Stature</th>
<th>Skin Colour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kureta</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>magistrate</td>
<td>Banaba</td>
<td>dk brn</td>
<td>173.5cm</td>
<td>med. d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mimi</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>landowner</td>
<td>Tahiti</td>
<td>dk brn</td>
<td>152 cm</td>
<td>med. l</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teboman</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>washwoman</td>
<td>Tahiti</td>
<td>dk brn</td>
<td>155 cm</td>
<td>med. l</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tebatau</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>landowner</td>
<td>Hawai`i</td>
<td>dk brn</td>
<td>156.5cm</td>
<td>med l</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\footnote{See Silverman (1971: 220-224) for a description of situations in which the part-Banaban, full Banaban status becomes salient. In the 1960s these distinctions played out around the allocation of agricultural and residential land on Rabi.}
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Birth place</th>
<th>Eye colour</th>
<th>Stature</th>
<th>Skin colour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taukai</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>fisherman</td>
<td>Tahiti</td>
<td>dk brn</td>
<td>170 cm</td>
<td>med dk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mataio</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>kaubure29</td>
<td>Banaba</td>
<td>dk brn</td>
<td>166 cm</td>
<td>med dk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teiakaia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>landowner</td>
<td>Banaba</td>
<td>med dk</td>
<td>159 cm</td>
<td>med l</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eri</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>landowner</td>
<td>Banaba</td>
<td>med dk</td>
<td>173 cm</td>
<td>dk brn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamau</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>landowner</td>
<td>Hawai'i</td>
<td>dk brn</td>
<td>172 cm</td>
<td>med dk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towata</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>landowner</td>
<td>Banaba</td>
<td>dk brn</td>
<td>152 cm</td>
<td>l brn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beteua</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>landowner</td>
<td>Banaba</td>
<td>dk brn</td>
<td>158 cm</td>
<td>med l</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I have only included some of the contents of Maude’s table here but other columns included mother and father’s name, “chin,” “body hair” (chest, forearms and legs), “sitting height” and “beard” (upper cheek and lower cheek). There was a table for each village and the number of “full blooded Banabans” for each was twenty in Tabwewa, eleven in Buokonikai, twenty-six in Uma and sixteen in Tabiang (MSS 003 Part II, Section 5 (6) Maude papers).

While I am hesitant to treat Maude’s anthropometric collection as “evidence” of anything in particular it does illustrate two things. So called “true” Banabans a) travelled to or were born on islands other than Banaba and b) are both physically and socially different from each other. There is nothing homogenous about “real Banabans” and new cultural connections were surely formed through the travels illustrated here and links to other peoples established. These movements would have been during the drought period in the 1870s when passing ships took people from the island to avoid dying from starvation and lack of water (see Maude 1994). Both Tahiti and Hawai’i are a good distance from Banaba. A photograph of two emaciated old Banabans taken in July 1901 serves as evidence of the devastation caused by the droughts (in Maude Papers and R32/1 Box 30 Vol 101, Melbourne).

29 The kaubure was the island council made up of older men from the various villages.
The man depicted here was describe in Ellis’ diary as the “Chief of Tabiang” (MP 1174/1074) and in Maude’s notes he also points out the tattoo marks on their shoulders and chests. Ellis notes that his conversation with “Bulalang” focused largely on the lack of water at which Ellis promises the company will bring fresh water. According to Ellis in 1900 there is an abundance of fruits and other vegetation growing on the island (ibid). But the flora can change dramatically depending on rainfall and in the 1870s, then, for very practical reasons the Banaban would have left their “homeland” in order to survive.

In 1909 the Company was already discussing the possibility of buying another island and removing the Banabans to it (Kuria in the Gilberts was one possibility). They were, however, not keen on spending too much money on such a venture. But Ellis wrote, “From a humanitarian point of view, it gives the Banabans a better chance. At present they are unfortunately dying off from various diseases, some of which we do not appear able to check. At Kuria, they would revert to their original

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30 There is no “l” in the Gilbertese language so this spelling suggests a mistake in transcribing the name.
31 Tattooing diminished with Christianity and there is nothing published on the practice on Banaba (See Koch. There were, however, drawings of tattoos in the Maude and Grimble papers in Adelaide. The designs were mostly of straight parallel lines with short perpendicular lines radiating from each symbolizing bird feathers.
primitive state, and be much healthier I think” (Ellis to Gaze July 22 1909 MP 1174/ 1085).

This view echoes one that was popular in both Maude and Grimble's approach to Gilbertese and Banabans and more recently in the literature of the Banaban Heritage Society. Natives are more natural, more healthy in their "original" state. More "civilised" natives are perceived to be aberrations.

My elder sister had the misfortune to come face to face with such a distaste for "over-educated" and "mixed blood" natives (similar to King's) when she wrote directly to Harry Maude eagerly describing her proposed PhD topic in History. Her topic was to be related to the events I described earlier of Banaban women resisting company pressure for further mining. She also told him of her mixed African-American/Banaban and Gilbertese ancestry and he replied thus:

H.E.M
42/11 Namatjira Drive,
Weston, ACT 2611
Feb, 1991

Dear TKT,

You letter dated 29 January arrived a few days ago and I have read through your 'Statement of Purpose' as requested.

It is an interesting document and I feel sorry that owing, I suppose, to an unusually miscegenated ancestry you have apparently felt compelled to spend your life to date in a search for personal identity and integrity.

This can be, as I well know, a time-consuming and not always successful pursuit, and being necessarily self-centered, it can become a form of self-indulgence, especially if combined with a strong sense of personal injustice.

I am glad, however, that you are now, to use you own word, liberated, and thus able to move outwards into studies of Micronesian women in the colonial era and ultimately of Banaban women now settled on Rabi Island.

As I understand it your source material will be drawn from the personal reminiscences of Banaban women now living. It will thus focus on such a limited time scale that I would envisage you as being happier in the Department of Sociology, or possibly Anthropology...

Furthermore, with your political and other predilections you would find it difficult to ensure an essential objectivity in your questioning and your
interpretation of the answers provided. I am thinking, of course, of subconscious influencing which it is sometimes difficult to guard against in oral interrogations, especially those necessitating answers of a subjective character, with emotional overtones.

Anyway I wish you all good fortune with whatever you decide to do. I have the largest collection of published and manuscript material in the world on Gilbertese culture and history, including several files relating specifically to the Banabans...

All this is available to you, or any other serious researcher but it would not be of any use for your envisaged PhD thesis.

My wife and I were happy to meet Tebuke Rotan and the members of the Rabi Island Council on our last visit to Suva, when we were given an official dinner to thank me for having bought such a lovely island for them and to assure us that after many vicissitudes they were all happily settled in their new home, with only a handful of unimaunu and unsaire still desirous to return to Banaba to have their bones buried beside those of their forbears.

Yours sincerely,

HM

This letter needs no analysis but it reflects many of the ghosts which have haunted me in my thesis project. Maude’s views may be outdated but the discourse on authenticity of both race and culture still prevails. Jolly, for example, critiqued the continuing dichotomies on tradition and invention writing that, “... a notion of true tradition entails a way of seeing Pacific cultures as unitary essences... it concords with a view of Pacific peoples as peoples without history before the West brought “social change,” progress and economic development” (Jolly 1992: 49). Issues of culture, race and nationality are very much tied up and in places like Hawai‘i blood quantum has been used to create various categories of “Hawaiian.” In considering this history with contemporary political struggles, Osorio writes:

Hawaiians are... defined by ancestry, which is an important place of origin in any discussion of Hawaiian identity. For if being a descendant of a Native makes one Native, what if anything does blood quantum have to do with who we are? Does the dilution of Hawaiian ancestry in any significant way change the ethnicity of the individual? (Osorio 2001: 361)

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32 Unimaunu and unsaire are male and female elders.
What, then, is Maude's point in marking my sister's "miscegenated" ancestry? The Banaban case has always been similar to the Hawaiian—Native ancestry makes one Native. But then there is always the question of culture and the code of kinship relations through which Banaban identity is performed. Adjudicating "real" Natives always depends on the political context and when land or money is at stake, the boundaries become quite static indeed.

Thus, in the 1960s, Silverman wrote of a situation regarding two part-Fijian, part-Banaban families who did not live on Rabi, lived in another part of Fiji and were thought to be "Fijianized" 1960s:

Thus, as the situation develops, something is being added: those people are Banabans because they have Banaban ancestors, but this is not sufficient to warrant their inclusion in the Rambi community. Because they are Banabans, they have a certain right, but they have failed to exercise that right, and they thereby lose their claim. They are Banabans but have not been acting as Banabans.

Such incidents help Maude formulate his identity/code (blood and mud) paradigm. King and Maude, though both "outsiders" to the community by descent, also applied this identity/code distinction to both my sister and I. Applying it someone apparently lends them authority to adjudicate real and false Natives.

Maude's words were enough to prompt my sister to change her entire thesis topic—not because she thought he was right, but because she did not want to occasion more of the grief his letter had caused her. She eventually produced her thesis on "the Native" in the History of Consciousness Program at Santa Cruz that I have quoted throughout this thesis. But I later did fall into the same trap of searching for "identity."

After reading through Maude's table, reflecting on Sigrah and King's (2001) efforts to establish the te aka clan as the "true Banabans," remembering King's letter from 1997, and Maude's to my sister in 1991, I wrote the following reflection.
Banahan bodies/ on Banaba dance/ dig/ climb pinnacles/ wait/ listen to Kenny Rogers/ play/ fish/ make tea/ butter biscuits/ karangp, 33/ drink sea water/ clean graveyards/ eat dust/ will not leave/ are not there

Banaban bodies/ on Tarawa drive/ stroll/ pay school fees/ ride fast buses/ cook rice/ sew tibuta 34/ deposit Australian $5 in the Bank of Kiribati/ twist to the Venga Boys 35/ move in the Maneaba/ rake the sand/ watch kung fu films/ wait for the next ship to Banaba

Banaban bodies/ in Suva walk/ dance in Traps 36/ cook curry and ruti 37/ study economics/ pray/ have babies at CWM 38/ watch Fiji ONE TV/ listen to the Baha Boys on FM 96 39/ drink Fiji Bitter/ talk on mobile phones/ have part-time homes

Banaban bodies on Rabi sit/ lie/ run/ dance in Church Halls/ catch fish, throw rugby balls/ drink kava/ mke 40 to Black Rose 41/ batikum/ cook cassava/ fill out paperwork/ clean front yards/ decay on Fatima hill/ drink the rain.

Banaban bodies in Canberra/ Melbourne/ Adelaide/ Wellington/ sit/ sleep/ stare out of photographs/ eat Macdonalds/ theorise in Universities/ dance in skirts made of VHS tape 42/ play rugby/ earn New Zealand $$/ are cold...

People may write, claim, say that there are “true” Banabans, “false” Banabans and part Banabans, but what Banabans are actually doing, how they’re living, moving and surviving defies such narrow partitioning of authentic and inauthentic natives.

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33 Karangp: a Banaban dance using long sticks that beat against partners’; recognized today as the only remaining indigenous Banaban dance form.
34 Tibuta: in Gilbertese, a loose, sleeveless, woman’s blouse with smocking and often a crocheted pattern on the smocking.
35 Music by the Venga Boys was popular in both Fiji and Kiribati. Their music features in the end credits as played on one of the high-speed buses traversing South Tarawa (see video end credits).
36 “Traps” is a popular bar on Victoria Parade in Suva frequented by USP students and middle-class patrons of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds.
37 Roti: flat Indian bread made from flour and ghee.
38 The Colonial War Memorial hospital provides public health care in Suva.
39 FM 96 is the only independent radio service in Fiji. It has 3 stations in English, Fijian and Hindi. “Who let the dogs out” by the Baha Boys was one of the more popular songs in Fiji in 2000.
40 Mke: Fijian for dancing, also referring to Fijian style choreographies.
41 Black Rose: a very popular local Fijian band that came out with a big hit called “Raude” after the 2000 coup (see discography and Chapter 5)
42 See Chapter 4 on videos tapes and dancing skirts.
Visualizing Banaba and the BPC (Video 2)

During my research trip to Melbourne, I came across an index for cinematograph films in a series labelled R125. Of particular interest were four films on Nauru and Ocean Island phosphate in both colour and black and white. The Victoria office of the NAA copied these four films for me and in this section I do a close reading of a film labelled R124 [20] to [21], “A Visit to Ocean Island and Nauru- (Parts 1 and 2).” While labelled as a visit to both islands, the tape only contained the portion on Ocean Island, not Nauru. A group viewing of the same film assisted some of my observations below.43

The dates of these films were given as 1951-1971 so we could not really tell when they had been shot. I then sent off copies to two former residents, W. Ray Dobson in New Zealand, and Mary Zausmer in the USA who had lived on the island in 1950-51. Both Ray and Mary said it was probably pre 1950 and probably before World War II. They both noticed that the buildings on the island were different from the period they’d lived there. This makes sense as much was destroyed during the war. The BPC itself demolished most of its mining facilities to prevent the Japanese from using them and they in turn destroyed some buildings during air raids. Dobson also pointed out that during his stay on the island the main store was called the “Trade Store” while in the film, it is called “General Store.” Most significant to both Dobson and Zausmer was the fact that in this footage, Chinese labourers were shown working in the fields. After the war they were mostly employed as skilled labourers. It seemed likely, then, that the films were from the late 1930s and at the very latest, just before the company evacuated in 1942.

All the BPC-owned ships were named “Tri” for the three governments (Triona, Trienza, Triaster, Triadic and Tri-Ellis after Albert Ellis). According to Williams and Macdonald, the first ship, Triona, was named for Ocean Island— “o” and Nauru “na” (1988: 246). There were two ships named Triaster, the first was the Commissioner’s first motor vessel launched in March 1935 and the second was commissioned in 1951, launched in 1955 and sold to Nauru in 1970 (ibid: 273, 525-
In describing the events around the advent of war in the Pacific in 1940, Williams and Macdonald also mentioned that Triaster (1) had been sunk on the morning of December 8 1940 (ibid: 299-300). It occurred to me that the footage might be after 1955 so I then asked another man, Kevin Speer, who'd worked on the island in the late 1950s what the name of the store was. He also said it was the “Trade Store” and I accepted that the footage was definitely taken between 1935 and 1940—the very short life of the original Triaster.

![Figure 35 MV Triaster 9/4/38](image)

It is important to note that all four films that I received on Banaba and Nauru were silent with inter-titles to describe various scenes. Like many old silent films the camera would jerk along, the picture would flicker and the frame cut rapidly between shots. There was also a good deal of dust, hair and other bits of fluff caught in the film which still appears in the transfer. Quite unintentionally, it would seem, the editing of this footage resulted in a very montage-like product. Throughout the film, if one watches carefully, one can see the jump cuts and multiple perspectives of the same space, event or action. Sometimes the camera is on a moving boat with other boats revolving in the space around it. The result is a spinning frame which heightens the frenetic pace of the action.

The image sequences were organized linearly as a “visit” with the common arrival and departure scenes. Unlike arrivals on other islands, however, there are no

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43 Thanks to Gary Kildea, Margaret Jolly, Maria Bargh, Zoe Pearson, Jennifer Badstuebner and Greg Rawlings who shared their thoughts on this film.
greetings from the indigenous people. This is very important given that the Banabans still lived on the island at the time. The European visitors or new residents arriving on the Triaster are greeted by other white folks; the company has basically claimed the island as its home and established itself as the central authority.

My interpretation of this film very deliberately uses the term “native” to refer to Islanders portrayed throughout the film. This is the term the company used to describe them in most of its literature. All the films had common features including a look at the mining process through extraction, crushing and loading, and an overview of the social and commercial life on the island. This always included “the natives” but there is no specificity about which natives. It was thus impossible to identify workers beyond that label unless they are specifically named.

The footage appears to be promotional films constructed to illustrate the prosperity and harmony of both the industry and the working community on Banaba. The lack of sound or voiceover is important since the “excess” of meaning emergent from the images is less confined by the usual master narrative of conventional documentary. However, interpretation is suggested by the inter-titles as in most silent films.

After a brief flicker of the label “Kodak Safety Film” (a new and improved non-flammable film) the first two inter-titles appear: “A Visit to Ocean Island and Nauru,” followed quickly by “Leaving for the islands” and a shot of a steamship being loaded with cargo. Passengers in warm travelling clothes carrying luggage ascend the gangplank and the frame cuts to “Shipboard sports en route.” Young white men and women are then shown in summer clothes playing deck coits. But then suddenly the screen proclaims: “Arrival at Ocean Island.” We see what appears to be a low-lying mound hovering on the surface of the sea. In a matter of seconds we have traversed the Pacific ocean from somewhere in Australia or New Zealand to Banaba. There is a flurry of activity as native workers approach by launch on a rather choppy sea and the ship’s sailors prepare to anchor.

When Ellis first arrived at Banaba in 1900 he mistook the first men who approached The Archer by canoe to be the most important men on the island. The

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44 This image is from the Burwood collection (Ocean Island Big Book 1935 to 1941: 10-14)
same logic could be applied here as “Doctor and officials board ship.” This is followed by a jerky left to right pan of the entire island and then “Passengers disembark and are welcomed on arrival.” Two almost identical and moving shots of people standing at the wharf are cut together here suggesting that a) we are watching a rough cut b) the editing was done by a non-professional or c) it was deliberately edited to be artistic (more likely it was b!).

The first of these rapid shots has a dog moving in the left corner towards the greeting crowd, many of whom are carrying open umbrellas. The cameraman has obviously arrived on an earlier boat as the frame cuts to an approaching rowboat, oars fanning out in synchrony from its sides. The frame then jumps to the oars held vertically in preparation for landing. We see the phosphate cantilever just in the background before the passengers ascend the steps at Home Bay led by a little boy with a big white hat. To the left of the frame and the mainly female greeters is a row of bare-chested island men in *sulu* looking suitably subservient.

What follows are further “arrival” shots— Europeans in a motorcar and three native porters marching in a perfect row enter the frame carrying suitcases on their left shoulders with right arms swinging in unison. A sense of homogeneity amongst the Islanders is immediately established along with a sense of service and proto-military precision. We arrive at a modern bungalow surrounded by green shrubs with bright red flowers and a white woman greets each of the passengers with a handshake or kiss. There is a brief cut to the porters who arrive with the suitcases and then we move into the interior of the house. Things appear to be most civilized with everyone sipping from cups of tea. Much of this is indecipherable when the film is watched at normal speed but when I slowed it down I discovered that the last shot, which had previously appeared dark and incomprehensible, was of a piano.

The “Staff Residences” are impressive as the frame moves to a sequence of shots of concrete buildings, the bright red and green foliage, a large water tank and

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45 I’ve described this arrival scene in detail in order to prepare the reader for footage from Home Bay in Video 3. In particular, the later shot of the Banaban boys ascending the steps in 2000 struck me as surreal after watching this much older arrival footage. I watched both these scenes in slow motion many times.

46 *Sulu* is Fijian for the wrap commonly worn in the Pacific islands by both men and women. It is *lautulevu* in Samoan and *pareu* in Tahitian.
some of the smaller wooden staff quarters. A native in a more formal _sulu_ and white shirt climbs a coconut tree in the foreground as labourers hover and a white man descends the steps of another building in the background. The film then cuts to a wide shot of a large house raised on stilts with three people sitting on chairs just below it. A close-up reveals a man and two women sitting comfortably while a native woman in a muumuu stands to the right of the frame. The man beckons to the standing woman with his left hand and holds a pipe in his right. She moves closer carrying a small container that she shows to one of the women.

A scene that I used in Video 1 is returned to its original cinematic context as the film now cuts to the next title: “Stone marking Sir Albert Ellis original camp site— in 1900.” A young island man strides into the frame from the left and places his hand on a rock with a plaque mounted on the front. We see his lips move as if he is reading the plaque. We do not know if the man is Banaban, Gilbertese or Ellice Islander but the entire scene appears to displace him, a possible “native” from the very place now claimed by this memorial. The camera reveals its proclamation:

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THIS STONE
MARKS THE CAMP SITE OF
A.F. ELLIS
WHEN FIRST PROSPECTING
THIS ISLAND IN MAY, 1900.
HERE THE BRITISH FLAG WAS FIRST FLOWN.
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It is obvious that someone told the man to walk up to the rock and read the above words but given that we have just witnessed an entire arrival scene of white visitors one has to wonder why one of them wasn’t used in this brief staging. The island now appears to be in total possession of the company and it is as if “Ocean Island history” originated with Albert Ellis’ own arrival and importantly we have a “native” to attest to this originary arrival.

This film lurches from very long to very brief scenes accompanied by awkward inter-titles. Most watching it from the present without any background knowledge of Banaban history, might find it boring or even slightly exasperating. Scenes such the

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47 The semantic load of the piano as icon of civilization is lucid in Jane Campion’s _The Piano_ (1993).
next shot of “Home Bay”, with an almost aerial view of the industrial activity below, seem to prepare us for something but then end peremptorily after exactly 14 seconds. It is as if someone was given the task of capturing some images of life and industry at Ocean Island— and the filmmaker zoomed about like someone with a still camera collecting shots.

We now move to “Stores and Recreation Room” which begins with the arrival of a miniature train with open sides carrying three white men in white outfits on comfortable seats (with lots of room for at least ten more passengers) while six times as many island men stand crowded on a platform behind them. One of the “natives” raises his hat to the camera. They disembark and the camera moves to a large building labelled “General Store.” The film briefly reveals the inside of the building filled with shelves of goods and prospective shoppers lounging on the counter. This is followed by one of the more interesting shots of the road through the main town with pedestrians and bicyclists all moving past and away from the camera.

The “BPC Ocean Is. Office” is revealed: a massive white two-story building sporting balconies on both levels but we’re whisked back to the scene at Home Bay where the ship is now “Discharging Cargo.” The tugboats and launches create quite a bit of traffic between the ship and the land and we see that the cantilever is used to facilitate the arrival of goods as well as the discharge of phosphate. A pulley lowers a steel bucket filled with sacks to a mobile platform and workers push it along to the train. The harbour is a grand scene of activity with the ships seeming to proclaim that progress is here to stay. We see closer shots of the Triaster and a slew of rowboats forming a chain between the ship and the shore.

Finally the film tracks the actual mining process beginning with the title “Phosphate Fields. Mining Phosphate.” There appear to be two methods of obtaining rock, the first via a mechanized contraption with metal jaws that swings back and forth between the face of the rock quarry and transport containers. The camera observes this from above the mining field and then relocates to the level below where workers armed with picks and shovels scrape the rock into baskets which are then dumped into one-ton bins. Ominously none of the men have protective footwear or headgear (except for slight protection from the sun). The company seems to have just capitalised on the fact that island men prefer to work
without shirt or shoes. They all, however, seem to be working away happily as the frame cuts to a wideshot of another part of the field, which is starting to resemble the "moonscape" for which both Nauru and Banaba are now famous.

We see a group of Chinese workers who are considerably more dressed than the Islanders wearing broad "Chinaman's hats." They do appear to be wearing shoes. These men are throwing rocks into the waiting bins which are then launched through the air via a grab and skip transport system to discharge rock into a vibrating hopper. The hopper spits out the rock into the one-ton train cars which are then "...conveyed by narrow guage [sic] train to the "Crushing and Drying Plant."" This train runs on a track cutting through a field of pinnacles, a reminder that the surface of the land once rested at the tops of those coral rocks. The rather clumsy editing of this footage only serves to heighten the very act of removing land as we are jerked to different perspectives of the moving train cars. The rock is then offloaded in a series of shots that simply repeat the dumping motion of the metal car.

Inside the phosphate crushing and drying plant the dryers spin and then the dried rock is "conveyed to Storage Bins to await shipment." Mountains of finely crushed rock rise like pyramids from the bin floor as dust continues to fall from the discharging pipes. Given our present knowledge of the industry and its impact on the Banabans it is hard not to imagine the contents of these bins as te aba, land and body in its several senses. Sunlight pours over the shoulder of a Chinese mechanic emphasising the melancholy mood.

The inter-titles go on: "Loading Phosphate to Ship" and the conveyor belt streams upward carrying its load along the inside of the cantilever. Guided by the hands of a waiting labourer, two mobile nozzles (which look rather like nipples) pour the rock into baskets arranged compactly in a boat. A man is engulfed in a blast of phosphate dust as the camera cuts to a long shot of the traffic between the waiting ship and the collecting boats. There are two almost identical pans between the ship and the cantilever. The activity beneath the cantilever seems to require almost cat-like agility as workers scale the chains between the various levels of the structure and others balance on the heaving boats holding it steady beneath the nozzles and directing the nozzles into the baskets. The next series of shots are a montage of spinning images as the camera is balanced on another boat trying to take in all the
action while moving around the working men. Nothing is stationary— the camera, the sea and the delivery activities. Everything seems to be moving in different directions at different speeds relative to the camera. The collecting vessels are connected by lines of rope and are tugged by motor launch to a giant black and red ship looming above the scurrying workers.

Watching this footage I kept thinking of ant colony hierarchies and their relentless lines of labour between food and the nest. I imagined the thousands of workers as soldier ants and the BPC ships and phosphate commissioners as the queen ants and Australia or New Zealand as the nest. I thought of Deleuze and Guattari and their descriptions of the rhizome as a network of subterranean stems, swarming rats or burrows and concluded: Banaban land is a rhizome: "... any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be... A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections" (1988: 6-7) Banaban phosphate does this in the mining and movement of the rock, in the dust that floats off across the ocean or into the lungs of a Gilbertese worker, that is caught in the handkerchief of a woman just visiting friends on Ocean Island and in the mechanical spaces of the watchful camera eye. The "hair in the gate" that appears in several of these old shots may be lines of "phosphate in the gate." 48 What was probably intended as a fairly simple expository film on phosphate mining may be read as lines of Banaban land, lines of rocks, lines of narrow gauge trains and conveyor belts, lines of motor boats, lines of ships, lines across the Pacific ocean, lines of phosphate fertilizer falling from the bellies of crop-dusters.

Between the launches and phosphate boats there is a brief shot of a man rowing an outrigger canoe amongst all the mechanized activity. The editor then cuts to a shot in which the camera has been re-positioned on shore between the concrete flanks of the cantilever which temporarily frame the scene. The nipple/nozzle analogy is lucid from this point of view. It then zooms back to the agile workers in shadow under the huge structure, the phosphate journey to the ship and finally a basket's rise and fall into the hold of the ship. While things are so busy, so active, so

48 According to Gary Kildea, "hair in the gate" (the camera gate) was a real problem for early filmmakers and was constantly checked by shining a torch onto the lens to make sure no dust or hair was caught on film.
industrious the dark bodies, the lava lavas and woven phosphate baskets belie the universal claims of progress. The camera has called attention to the very anonymous labour exploited by the industry and the very visible racial hierarchies of work and play.

The work section of the film concludes and as if to answer questions on the treatment of labour, we now enter the “Native” portion of the film. As mentioned earlier the “natives” are not Banabans but are still portrayed as a homogenous, if somewhat well provisioned, group. The “native lines” are rows of wooden structures for both married and single workers. There is a brief shot of a man singing with a ukulele as smiling men in the background try to get into the frame followed by two men carrying a large fish between them. According to Macdonald, in the 1930s the government insisted that one third of Gilbertese workers be accompanied by their wives (1982: 120). The next frame includes women and children in the distance but the next pan frustratingly concentrates on the buildings rather than the moving men and women: their heads are left bobbing in the lower left hand corner. For a couple of seconds there is the one and only shot of a single island man speaking to someone behind the line of the camera. We can only wonder what he might’ve said.

The “native” labourers are portrayed as both content and subservient to the whites. A subsequent shot shows two white men relaxing and chatting on a veranda while two “native” servants stand silently by with hands behind their backs. But then, as if to ameliorate the racial hierarchies, the next title proclaims “Native Police.” Lines of men with bayonet tipped rifles march across the frame. Two of them pose for the camera—one of them is Fijian (Fijian policemen were employed on Banaba by the colonial administration).

The sequence on “Native Dancers” probably presented the most awkward and interesting representation for me. Whereas previously, we could not tell who were Gilbertese and who were Ellice-Islanders, from the costumes and choreography I know that this is group is from the Ellice Islands. The actual sound of their performance could not be captured by the camera. They sing away with passion. A close-up a line of singing and dancing women shows two Ellice women who
look like sisters. This is followed by a woman dancing madly for the camera. Clowning is a very big part of Gilbertese, Banaba and Ellice dancing (cf Hereniko 1995 and see end of Video 6).

The frame switches to various performing bodies. The last shot in this assemblance is a close-up of two men singing and dancing, their bodies rising and falling with a bend of the knees, arms reaching forward, to the side, moving to the beat of the music we cannot hear.

The next inter-title proclaims, “Native Fishing” and we are presented with a long shot of a canoe at sea with a large fish trap on board. The two fishermen return, unload their catch and a young girl carries the enormous fish trap on her shoulder. Two women carry the fish on a basket hanging off a pole between them as two more women stand in the background and one scratches her tummy. For some reason, her movements capture my attention more than the two carrying the fish. Her left arm moves round in a circle on the left side of her stomach and her dress moves with it. It was such a normal gesture in what was being portrayed as a very exotic native scene. We are presented with a basket of very dead fish.

We are now arrive at the very modern “Native School.” It seems much more modern than the ones that now exist on Rabi. Schoolboys line up for inspection by a native teacher homogenous in their white sulus, all with brown skin and black hair. See how obedient and disciplined they are as they stretch, bend, stretch and bend, and bow. I think of all my years in primary school standing “at ease... attention!” Arms akimbo, arms straight! A European figure in the left observes this display before we are hurtled into a native cricket match. Swing... swing!

To assure viewers that all the natives are well cared for we visit the “Native Hospital and Baby Welfare Clinic.” A native health attendant checks the lungs of a worker and then the camera pans around the hospital complex. A native doctor washes his hands, another binds the foot of an injured worker as he smiles with gratitude. An assistant puts eye-drops into another worker’s eyes. You might imagine

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49 This image for me resonated greatly with Enere’s story about the two fair skinned Ellice Island sisters. See Chapter Three.
50 This sequence stuck in my mind and I later included in a shot of fish on Rabi in Video 5, *Tevitaia’s Kava*.
that the phosphate dust irritates their eyes after watching them beneath the cantilever with dust flying everywhere. But the BPC is saying, we really look after these “boys.” Following this we momentarily see the very separate “European Hospital” for ten seconds. The privacy of the European patients is not compromised.

Following this rosy view of island health, we move to “Island Recreation and sport.” I recalled a newspaper fragment from the Melbourne archives:

The commissioners have done all that is possible to make life pleasant. On each island is a tennis court well lighted by electric arcs, facilities for cricket, football, halls for cinema and other entertainments and all the essentials of a happy, social life. Mr. Cozens is himself an enthusiast at swimming and he says that on a Sunday at Ocean Island as many as 40 men and 10 ladies have been seen diving at the springboards or sporting in the ocean... The homes on these islands are of the modern bungalow type with electric lights, ice chests and appointments which are suited to a warm climate. Mr. and Mrs. Cozens will return be way of Sydney and they will be happy to find themselves once more in their healthy island home (MP 1774/1093).

There are very healthy bodies diving, springing, swinging and frolicking everywhere in Home Bay. The harbour is so deep it makes the swimming experience that much more pleasant, its depth begging the many intrepid divers.

The Europeans visitors to Banaba enjoy golf and a friendly round of doubles tennis before its time to depart (n the 1970s, the golf course was the last area to be mined. The company must have weighed their recreation needs against the rock, and at least temporarily recreation won). The visitors crowd into the rowboats once more with the native oarsmen ready to return them to the waiting Triaster. A couple of the ladies have umbrellas to ensure full skin protection from the hot, hot sun at the equator. We ascend the gangway once more, the transition from the boat to the ship requires a bit of assistance for the ladies. In a shot looking from the ship down to the row boat we see one man holding a woman’s elbows in case she pitches forward into the ship. Moving hats, dresses and white, white suits fill the screen. Anchors away and the Triaster is off.
As we will see in the next chapter Britain, Australia and New Zealand literally sucked Banaba dry.\textsuperscript{51} After watching this film so closely and reflecting on the prosperity of the phosphate industry which gave birth to the fertilizer industry in Australia, it is ironic to be writing at a time when Queensland and New South Wales farmers are experiencing the worst drought in decades.\textsuperscript{52}

Reflection

In considering the relation between history and anthropology and oral and textual sources, Nicholas Thomas asks “how can a multiplicity of constructions of the past and modes of constructing of the past be acknowledged, without lapsing into an uncritical relativism?” (Thomas, 1996: 275).

Reflecting on my experiences with the BPC archives and Maude and Grimble Papers, I have realized that the problem of oral versus written histories is not the only salient issue in representing past realities of multiple temporal, spatial and embodied experiences. It is not so much a matter of finding “the truth” as a challenge of how to present in the present the seemingly remote experiences of Banaba and the phosphate industry. After describing some visual and textual contents of the archives and the contexts of my experiences reading and viewing them, I suggest that the best strategy for making sense of them is not structural but conjunctural (see Sahlins 1991).

The conjuncture involves material, ontological and epistemological pluralities: the moment in July 1997 when I sat on the wooden balcony of Ellis house sipping tea, the moment in August 1999 when I sat in the Barr-Smith library reading Ellis’ diary, the moment Ellis wrote the words in his diary in May 1900, the moment when a young man walked up to Elli’s memorial and read the words on the plaque for a European cameraman and so on. This chapter has been a diffracted reading of some of the infinite connections generated by this montage of moments. The title of a

\textsuperscript{51} Of course I am temporarily conflating the colonies, the farmers, those who were nourished by their products and the lands that became the fully developed nations of Australia and New Zealand.

\textsuperscript{52} See ABC website for coverage of the drought stricken farming country (http://abc.net.au/news/newsitems/s645810.htm).
1919 magazine article on Banaba by Thomas McMahon encapsulates the island and its ever-multiplying histories:

"Let's-All-Be-Thankful" Island: a little spot in the South Pacific which multiples the world's food" (R138/1: 1-25, Box 1).

PLAY VIDEO 2
CHAPTER 3: REMEMBERING BANABA

Figure 36. View of Banaba from yacht Martha 2002

Figure 37. The standard map of Banaba indicating major districts

Figure 38. "My Home Island" by Ioteba, A. Teabike College, Tabiteua

1 See next chapter for the exercise on Tabiteua which generated this drawing.
okay, now we ask our interview subjects the question. “e uara banaba?” i guarantee every answer or most of the answers will be simple. “e Kamaiau,” some of the answers might be phrased as questions themselves. “e Kamaiau, ka?” as if seeking confirmation2 (T. Teaiwa 1995: 3).

Kieuea’s Kainga/Banaba’s Body

Have you ever really seen an island in the middle of nowhere? With nothing but ocean as far as the eye can see 360 degrees all round? Have you ever seen those films that zoom out of one person standing alone in a desert? Banaba is like that. Alone.

We landed at night. As far as I could see, totally blind. But I was the only one disturbed by the lack of light. I have no idea how they navigated the yacht Martha into the embrace of Home Bay. I have only one thing on my mind. Ghosts.

We have to be very careful stepping onto the algae covered steps that emerge out of the water. I can just see myself back-flipping in the dark. Slipping on the slippery green slime. Half asleep I climb onto the back of a motorbike. Up to the manager’s house and to the first bit of light in this dark, dark quiet place. I feel like I’m in a cemetery.

That first night I worry. What about te ari? I know they’ll visit me.4 I ask Alofa, the manager’s wife, if my male cousins can sleep in my room. What a thought! She is real uncomfortable with the idea. I insist. They sleep on the floor while I sleep on the bed.

2 E seina Banaba, “how is Banaba?” E Kamaiau, “it’s very much alive.”
3 Te ari are spirits.
4 When I first visited Banaba in 1997 with my father I rarely slept. There were rats everywhere and I was convinced that our room was filled with ghosts. My father insisted the rats were our ancestors so I should just relax (I)
I am lying right in front of a large, open, wood framed window. I wait. Then I sense a ball of energy coming through the window. It is quietly buzzing like thousands of tiny bees. I feel my skin start to vibrate, my face, my arms, my toes. This thing is hovering above me. Go away. (I just hired a yacht for $1800 to get here. I’m doing a very important PhD project with a very expensive camera and I’ve got less than three days to do it. I need sleep). Unbelievably it leaves.

Why of all places have I decided in this one that I don’t want to talk to people? To real people? I just want to explore every inch of the island and I’ve got two and a half days to do it. Every time I see a pinnacle or rusted machine I think it’s worthy of great scrutiny and a piece of my camera film. And there are many, many, many dry rocks and rusted machines to look at. Our jeep travels the one road slowly and I hold the digital camera in my right hand pointed directly out the window. My right hand aches but I will not turn off the camera.

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5 The rusted buoy reminded me of a note in one of the Burwood photo albums: “Main 20X12 buoy showing manhole entrance to lower compartment wherein two kanukas lost heir lives” 1915 (R 132/1, Book 8: 31/3/15: 11 to 16).

6 All the figures in this section unless stated otherwise are stills from digital footage I collected in April 2000.

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Figure 39. Rusted crane, bulldozer and buoy\(^6\) at Home Bay.

Figure 40. K. Teaiwa with camera\(^6\)
You know how you can’t tell the age of a landscape at first glance? Especially ones that are in full bloom looking like they were born yesterday? Or how in a rainforest with tall, tall trees you feel young rather than old? This island is like being in the folds of an old woman’s skin. My great, great grandmother Kieuea’s skin. And you feel like she’s been through a hell of a lot. Dry, old, craggy, grey... but still wiser and bigger. Much bigger than you. So birds can sit and shit on her in peace. After all, they probably sense the organic familiarity of this. Particular. Body. Maude may have written “finished” across Kieuea but her bones are here. Somewhere.

As we go round I notice that the tape player in the old jeep still plays music loud and clear. We’re listening to old country music... the kind the FBC used to play in Fiji before we got FM radio. Our driver is happy when I produce a new tape to play. One needs music here because the island is just too quiet. Even the jeep has to move at 10 kilometres an hour in deference to the road conditions. I hand him the tape.

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7 The “Fiji Broadcasting Commission.”
The sound of the creaking jeep and the snap of the dry, dry brush fills the air but then Macy Gray starts to sing:

Games, changes and fears when will they go from here/ when will they stop/
I believe that fate has brought us here/ and we should be together but we’re not/
I play it off but I’m dreaming of you/
I keep my cool but I’m fiendin/

I try to say goodbye and I choke/
Try to walk away and I stumble/
Though I try to hide it it’s clear/
My world crumbles when you are not near/
Goodbye and I choke/ try to walk a way and I stumble/ though I try to hide it, it’s clear/
My world crumbles when you are not near...

“This ain’t no tropical paradise,” I say to Macy as she croons away. The old jeep agrees and whines along. We arrive at Home Bay to the greeting “Beware of Cranes.” Beware in general, I think.

A group of young Banahan boys stand on the wharf at Home Bay. They are dressed as Roman soldiers. One wears a silver crown on his head. As my camera follows they notice and slowly ascend the steps. Their eyes locked with my lens. One boy tries to pull the crown from the king’s head. A brief struggle and the king retains his crown.

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What are you doing? I ask. Are you playing a game? They don’t understand my broken Gilbertese.

Who said there were no kings on Banaba?

I decide to visit the cemetery. Or cemeteries. Do you know that European, Gilbertese, Chinese, Japanese, Banaban and Ellice Island corpses must not be buried next to each other? Even in death the boundaries must be maintained.

9 See Video 4 Taisua’s Kainga for images of segregated graves.
10 The original caption read “Kanaka cemetery 13/13/17” (R 132/1, Book 8 31/3/15: 11 to 16). Savage Island was the European name for Niue and Tube was married to a Banaban woman.
There's a lonely coconut tree between the graves. It's dead too. A spike heading for the heavens. Maybe Auriaria's\textsuperscript{11} old staff. Still trying to separate earth from sky. One dead coconut trunk, one dead coconut palm and one dead coconut. These dead trees are not \textit{nu\textsuperscript{i}}\textsuperscript{12} on Banaba.

![Figure 47. Dead coconut tree on Banaba (Video1)](image)

We drive past many, many old building with no roofs or windows or walls sometimes. I spend a long, long time starring at broken toilet bowls.

![Figure 48. Toilets in old singles quarters.](image)

People don’t trip around this island the way they do on Rabi. Chattering and chewing gum. They are not acting as if they own the world. What’s there to own? Without rain it’s a grim existence. I was told there is hardly any water. And no soap. I was so depressed at this thought until at 10 kilometres an hour, we passed one happy man

\textsuperscript{11} Auriaria is one of the ancestors from the land of Matang. One myth says that Tabakea (the first being) gave Auriaria a staff which he used to separate heaven and earth. All the \textit{bunu nu bono} helped lift up the rock of heaven (see Maude (1994: 6-7)).

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Nu} is a pan-Polynesian word for coconut. It is \textit{te nui} in Gilbertese and the different stages of life are identified. For example \textit{mumato} is the young green coconut good for drinking and \textit{te beni} is the dried nut used to make coconut cream or copra.
beside the road. He was covered from head to toe in soapsuds. Busy bathing. Singing away. Well! I suppose they told me this story because my father is Chairman. Maybe he'll send them extra soap. Isn’t it funny. Water everywhere but hardly any to drink.

I ask the island manager to arrange for me to go to the one source of fresh water in this dry rocky place. With benzene lamp we descend into the *brangiabunga* through a hole in the very centre of the island. We crawl through the spaces that seem to lead deep into the old woman's womb. I remember the drama on Rabi showing how before the company came, only women could enter the *brangiabunga*. Naked and crawling.  

![Figure 49. Stalactite in *te brangiabunga* on Banaba.](image)

Sometimes I have to contort into fantastic shapes in order to get through an opening. To avoid being impaled on a stalactite. I tell my imagination not to conjure up the possibility of being stuck here without air or light. Forever. Are there earthquakes on the equator?

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13 *Brangiabunga* literally means a hole or opening.
14 See Chapter 5 for discussion of how this is remembered in drama on Rabi.
The water down here is freezing. Glorious. For five minutes I allow the Anthropology Department's $3000 camera to explore the surfaces of the cave and pools. Then I wrap it up again in twenty layers of plastic. Later, when I look at my still photos, I discover that the caves inside the old body aren't grey. They are red, orange, brown and cream. They sparkle with water long seeped through the craggy surface into the underworld below.

We return to the manager's house. Precious buckets of water are lavished on my party. We should have collected some in the *buangabuanga* eh? I insist I am fine with one bath a day. If at any all. But custom requires me and my two cousins to eat up one of the few supplies left on the island. How embarrassing. But islanders have never been dirty. That I know for sure.

Bodies, water and rocks are on my mind as I try to see all I can in two and a half days. I carry my own bottle of "pure water" on the dashboard of the jeep. "Pure water" manufactured in Kiribati has a picture of a snowy mountain on the label. I think: water/ rock/ calcium/ phosphate/ coral/ pinnacle. *Te aba*. People. Land. If a body is 85% water then Banaba is incomplete in another way.

The next day we stand as sunset sipping black tea at Home Bay. Tiny canoes now inhabit a sea once teeming with activity, with ocean-liners, motor launches and rowboats. From the harbour I zoom in on a mother holding her child in the shallow. She kicks and screams in protest of her saltwater bath. Behind her the cantilever looms in the light of the setting sun. These Banaban bodies have saltwater on the inside and outside. What was it my sister said? "We sweat and cry saltwater so we know the ocean is really in our blood."\(^{15}\)

We stop for a picnic near an old European camp-site on the western coast of the island. Alofa, Tenamo\(^{16}\) and I walk down into the low tide. A puffer fish floats

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\(^{15}\) See Hau'ofa on "The Ocean in Us" (2000b).
\(^{16}\) Tenamo is my uncle Eritai's son. He is named after Teaiwa's father, Tenamo.
marooned between two rocks. It looks about to burst. It looks like an upside down face.

Figure 51. Footprints to Sea (1)

From the puffer fish I move my camera along a set of marks in the rocks.

They look like footprints leading out to sea. 17

Figure 52. Footprints to sea (2)

Far away on Banaba I am reminded of the way my friend Tarcisius finished a joint presentation we gave in Suva called “Imagining Oceania.”

17 All these images are from my own footage taken on Banaba in April 2000.
If I should be gone
By the time you come
Then I leave my grave
As a footprint
To say that I was once here

If I should be gone
By the time you come
Then I leave my footprints
For you to continue the journey

Figure 53. Footprints to sea (3)

Figure 54. Salt Water Feet

PLAY VIDEO 3

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19 This is image is of my feet hanging over the edge of a canoe, just offshore from our kasinga on Rabi. It was used in a dance production called Salt Water Feet which I created with Australian/PNG choreographer Julia Gray in 2001.
European Memories of Ocean Island

How does one make sense of the Pacific’s varied pasts? Materials abound for the project: There are writings, memories, chants, artefacts, and landscapes waiting to be discovered (and rediscovered). Yet a major complication exists: how to organize and prioritise what one reads, what one hears, what one discovers? The past—in our ambiguous knowing of it—does not proclaim its meanings in a single voice. There are multiple voices (Borofsky, 2000: 1).

Memories of the past, particularly from the perspective of former European residents have helped me accept the multiplicity of experiences and perspectives of Banaba. I have taken the time to relate their memories here in detail as they are not accessible in either a library or bookstore. This does not mean that I consider the recorded memoirs of whites more important than Banaban or Gilbertese oral recountings. I have not re-presented them here in order to fill in some “facts” about Banaba history. These stories all exist as situated knowledges, different in both form and content, written or spoken from different lived contexts but all related to the same island. They are as important as so-called “objective” archival documents or “authentic” oral accounts. Compared to the archives in particular and Williams and Macdonald’s (1985) history, these memoirs illuminate the lives not of “Phosphateers” (or “heroes”) per se, but men and women whose relationship with the island was less privileged and more fleeting than Ellis, Maude or Grimble’s for example.

The first contact I had with European experiences of Banaba was through a woman named Helen Pilkinton who, along with her husband Garth, later became very good friends of mine. Helen’s father, Berwyn, lived on Ocean Island in 1934 and worked as a medical officer. Since meeting Helen I have also become friends over e-mail with two former residents of Ocean Island, who lived there before 1960—Mary Zausmer and Ray Dobson. They have graciously sent me some of their memoirs and I added them to the plethora of information I have collected about Banaba. It may be obvious to say that things look different from different angles but
a scholar's job is usually to synthesize such multiplicities into a whole. It is their very differences, however, that are more significant for me.

We begin with Mary Hunt who lived on Banaba a few decades earlier than Mary Zausmer and Ray Dobson. Hers was the first memoir I found but she had already passed away. Her great-granddaughter, Dinah Dunavan sent me her writings from New Zealand. Mary Hunt (nee Robertson) was from New Zealand and wrote down her memories in Tauranga between 1945-50. The kind of brief, yet revealing accounts of everyday life that Mary offers are almost completely missing from the colonial histories of either Williams and Macdonald (1985) or the anthropologies of Maude (1932) and Silverman (1971) with their focus on the abstract structures of Banaban kinship, economics, politics and myth.

Mary Hunt's story

Mary was born on March 22, 1883 and married Henry Hunt in 1906. They lived in Christchurch, New Zealand. Henry was a plumber whose business had gone bankrupt. While Mary was visiting family in Dunedin, Henry wired her that he was leaving to visit his family in Melbourne. Mary joined him in Melbourne and after five months gave birth to a daughter named Muriel. Mary recounts how two weeks later:

Dad came home from work one night and asked did I know where Ocean Island was, I had never heard of it, so he went round to his people’s place to enquire there, but no one had ever heard of it either. However the next day he used his dinner hour to go to the office mentioned in the advertisement for a plumber to go there, and when he came home that night, he said he was leaving for the Island in a week. He was told at the office that it lay in the tropics, that he would be able to hang his hat on the equator, and that was about all he knew (Hunt, 1945-50: 1).

Henry went off and after two months, Mary joined him via the Sildna, a ship I had encountered several times in the BPC archives.

Mary’s memoirs exhibit a stream of consciousness in which there is a marked oscillation in time and place between there (Ocean Island, the past) and here (New Zealand, the present). I echo this oscillation in my own thoughts, but must note how
hers is structured by preoccupations with the relationship between “civilization” and the “primitive”.

Two extremes of life mix on Ocean Is. On one hand are the primitive dwellings of the native Banabans, Banaba being the native name, a few pandanus posts supporting a palm leaf thatched roof with a few mats spread on the ground, and in striking contrast the comfortable dwellings of the European residents, with the electric power for driving machinery, and supplying light and ice, a good telephone service, recreation rooms, libraries, locomotives and large steamers at anchor, in fact in a small way all the bustling activity of civilisation (ibid: 2-3).

Her memoirs start with reflections about packing her clothes. Having no idea what to take except something light she landed on the island to find to her surprise that, “... living conditions were of a very high standard, that the people there dressed much better than the average Melbourne citizen, and I thought I was going to a half-civilised sort of place” (ibid: 1). Good clothes and houses are symptomatic of a certain level of civilization, and even in these very early stages of the mining, the island is already a “civilized” place for Europeans although, she hints, not necessarily for the other segregated communities, indigenous Banabans and the labourers from other islands, China and Japan.

She seems to have anticipated greater privation and hardship. Her memoir returns from Ocean Island to the period before boarding the Sildra. She is surprised that the Company puts her up in Sydney in one of the best hotels where: “I was able to get my baby washing etc done alright” (ibid: 2). There is a sense of being well looked after by the Company. They provided everything for Mary and her son and daughter, including hansom cab transport between the hotel and wharf. The Sildra had a Norwegian captain and Chinese crew all of whom took a liking to her son. She wrote that whenever one of the crew would pass him on deck, they would give him a Chinese coin, “so he had quite a collection of them which he kept for years” (ibid: 2). She enthused about the trip and in particular the excitement of witnessing a “burning mountain in the sea” (ibid: 2), apparently a volcano issuing smoke and then after dark, great flames of fire shooting up.20 As she approached Ocean Island, Mary

20 Depending on the route of the ship this could have been volcanoes in New Ireland or Yasur or Magam in Vanuatu where active cones still exist and were erupting in the early part of the 20th
thought it like a “sugar bun”, a deliciously Eurocentric confection in contrast to its more usual depiction in oceanic terms as “oyster-shaped”.

Mary’s husband was sent to Ocean Island to put in a new sewerage system. This is rather ironic given that Banabans on the island today have returned to the beach for their toilet, while in the 1900s they were constructing a new plumbing system. Henry would carry the pipes across the reef cementing them to the coral at low tide while “native boys” would dive under the water to fix the chains to the coral below. Mary writes that the “boys” worked so fast that Henry did not believe they had done a good job. Two escorted him below, holding onto each arm so he could see for himself (ibid:3). A disparaging suspicion of “lazy natives” pervades her narrative, even when it is confounded. “The native Banabans were allowed to work for the Company whenever they felt inclined, but only a limited number of them ever felt inclined. They lived the same kind of life as the Maoris, never working, always laughing and very happy” (ibid: 3).

Mary and Henry had a nice, new, cool house sheltered by a coral pinnacle. Most of the furniture was provided along with the coal, wood and electric light (ibid:4). A lamp was used after electricity shut off at 10pm. They ate mainly tinned food but every six weeks or so, free mutton was supplied by the Company along with free fruit while a cow supplied milk everyday for the children. Not mentioned in Mary’s memoirs is the fact that Banabans had to buy food from the Company. In contrast, Mary’s memoirs suggest that almost everything was provided for them: ice, to keep the food cool, a basket of free fish each morning, and a boy to clean and fill the lamp (ibid: 4). She did not even have to do the washing as another boy collected Henry’s suits, towels and sheets every Monday for washing. Again suspicions about lazy natives are confounded. Mary could not believe the “native” women got anything done the way they seemed to have fun while hand washing but they managed to do that and the ironing too!

Mary would bargain for limes and eggs with Banaban children. They would ask for $4.00 for half a dozen limes and go away with a bar of soap. She said they wanted an enormous price but in the end, “were always satisfied with the real value...”.

century according to the web site of the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History.
suppose she didn’t see how much more the Europeans owed the Banabans for exploiting the very land that allowed them to offer half a dozen limes for $4.00.

Most people got up at 5:30 am for tea and were working by 6 am. Mary noted that there was neither a dawn nor twilight, the sun comes up and goes down swiftly on the equator. She suggests a disciplined daily routine: breakfast at 8, lunch break from 11 to 1 pm and work stopped at 4.21 At home the European men would have a combination of a saltwater shower to clean off and condensed water to rinse. Water had to be conserved and during the year the Hunts lived on the island, it rained only once but, “it was torrential while it lasted” (ibid: 4).

Mary recalled that there were only cockroaches on the island, no birds or creeping things which is hard to believe as frigate birds have always lived on the islands, and she later mentions hermit crabs. Every evening Mary said that hundreds of hermit crabs came up from the reef. There were so many that their shells tinkled as they bumped each other. In the dark, they made an eerie sound, she said. She did see one pet Banaban bird chained to a stake, which she thought was cruel. The pet bird is an image displayed in several photo collections I have seen and is reproduced on the cover of The Book of Banaba by the Maudes (1994). She further recalled her memories of the Banabans:

Some of the women were very good looking, especially the young girls with such perfectly shaped hands and lovely teeth and hair. There were large black butterflies with a bright purple spot on each wing, and the young girls used to tie one end of a piece of cotton round the body, and the other end to their hair and with these butterflies flitting round their heads, and a red hibiscus in each ear they made a pretty sight (ibid: 5).

This physical description of the girls is not unusual for its time and the number of photographs of native children taken by Europeans supports this attention. What is unusual is the butterfly observation.22 Butterflies normally live only where there are

[http://www.volcano.si.edu/gvp/volcano/region05/index.htm].
21 This is different from the working hours described in a 1903 pamphlet as going from 6-8 am, 9-1 pm and 2-5 pm (R 138/1 Items 1-25, box 1).
22 There is also Gilbertese word for butterfly buabau, so they did exist in Kiribati and according to a dictionary a black one often seen at sea is called buabau ni manava. I also have a Banaban cousin named A tanakau which means either “understanding butterflies” or “chief (for lack of a better word) of butterflies.” Mary’s memoirs, however, were the first account I’d ever heard of using butterflies as hair decorations!
abundant flowers, trees and other flora and Ocean Island was not supposed to be that lush, but perhaps it was from time to time (after those irregular torrential rains). Obviously around 1909, and the late 1930s as we see in Video 2, they were red hibiscus bushes -- all of these were gone by 2000.

While walking through native villages, Mary observed the abundance of hand sewing machines (ibid: 5). Each person seemed to have one, which is extraordinary since sewing machines are a luxury on Rabi today. Mary had a girl from Tarawa to do housework, whom she described as both thorough and slightly ignorant. This girl once squirted 2/3 of a bottle of kerosene through her mouth to fuel Mary's precious copper boiler which was soon wrecked (ibid: 6).

She observed that native women would wash their children by placing them between their legs and squirting them with water out of a coconut shell after warming it in their mouths (ibid: 5). They would dry them with the blade of a palm. The washing of babies is something that Ellis, Maude or Grimble would never have described and yet it is a quotidian ritual that almost every Banaban is familiar with, though the water may now come out of running taps. She wrote that sometimes families would bathe together in the sea and the father would catch a small fish and give it to his child to suck like a lolly (ibid. 6).

The Europeans would travel between [Ooma] and [Tapiwa] on a trolley pushed along by two or four "kanakas" rowing them in unison like boats. "After having a year of Melbourne's slow old cable trams, it was indeed a thrill to be driven along at such a speed" (ibid: 6). These are the same tramways that I usually avoided while making my way to the archives in Burwood.

Figure 55. "How the staff travel on Ocean Island"23

23 This image is by Thomas McMahon in the BPC collection (R 132/1, Album 117: 0 to 10A).
For Mary life on the island was pleasant, never dull and far above her expectations. She and her son even learned to speak “the Banaban language” (ibid: 6) but her happiness ceased once Henry got malaria and dysentery. The climate apparently suited European women, who had a life of relative leisure rather better than the men who had to work in the hot sun all day. Henry’s childhood emphysemic cough became worse, probably from all the mining dust and they left the island in a hurry after a drunken doctor diagnosed him with consumption. Mary writes, “I was very, very sorry to leave, life had been so pleasant for me, more so than in any other place I have ever lived in before or since” (ibid: 6)

They left in March 1910 on the Promise and after living for several years in Queensland, Mary and Henry returned to New Zealand in May 1920. As she writes from New Zealand after WW II, she notes that all the Banabans had been transported to “Rambi” in Fiji.

W. Ray Dobson’s story

Ray Dobson now lives in Redcliffs, Christchurch and has faithfully kept in touch with me over the last three years. He sent me his memoirs titled On Banaba (Ocean Island) In the Central Pacific 1950/51 and it begins,

I first heard of Ocean Island in 1949 when I was working in a pharmacy in Dunedin, South Island, New Zealand. One month, in the Pharmacy Journal, a position was offered as “Dispenser and Hospital Assistant” on Ocean Island in the Central Pacific. Not knowing where the island was I went to the public library and found that it was a small island just south of the Equator noted mainly for its deposits of guano. With visions of swaying palms and sandy beaches I decided to apply. Incidentally the salary offered was quite good and the conditions excellent... no income tax, free house and all meals supplied (Dobson, 1998: 1).
Ray didn’t get the job but the BPC kept his file on hand. Five months later they contacted him urgently, offering him the job. Apparently the Australian pharmacist who had been contracted was an alcoholic and “… was helping himself to Tincture of Orange which is 90% ethyl alcohol” (ibid: 1). Ray joined the Taeiothanka in Dunedin which stopped at Auckland on its way to Ocean Island. It was a pleasant trip; they each had a cabin to themselves and, “we dined at the Captain’s table and did nothing all day while having the run of the ship. We spent many happy hours in the wireless room chatting to the radio operator and the junior officers and sunbathing” (ibid: 2).

When Ray arrived, the Banabans had been removed but there were Gilbert and Ellice Island workers, Chinese mechanics from Hong Kong and European overseers from Australia and New Zealand. He said the company had started an apprenticeship system for men from the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony where they were trained as electricians, carpenters and plumbers to eventually replace the Chinese.

Ray worked in the hospital with an Australian doctor, Murray Ingram, and a senior registered nurse, ten orderlies for the men’s wards and ten nurses for the women’s. There was also one special orderly for the European ward, further down the hill from the main hospital and one for the Chinese ward across the main road. The hospital like the housing was clearly segregated. The head orderly was Alessana Seosi (a Tuvaluan name) and there was a head nurse named Ute. A nurse named Nei Tiri (a Gilbertese name) did Ray’s washing for a small payment so he could avoid the starchy style of the official BPC washers!

Ray describes the hospital in detail including the dispensary, operating theatre, laboratory and darkroom. He learned basic laboratory analysis and assistance as an anaesthetist while on the island. Ray’s assistant was a young man called Cheong Ken Yu from Hong Kong who, “had grown up under the Japanese occupation there, somehow found his way to Ocean Island and was determined never to return to Hong Kong. He was universally well liked, bubbling over with cheerfulness and always helpful to everyone. He spoke his own brand of Gilbertese and English but seemed to be able to make himself understood by all” (ibid: 4). I wonder what happened to Cheong Ken Yu.

Ray wrote that people on Ocean Island worked for five days and half with Saturday afternoon and Sunday off. Most of the Europeans were Australian so
cricket was regularly played on the sports ground at the very top of the island. They made the pitch out of concrete with coconut matting but, “the outfield was rough and littered with small lumps of coral. If a ball was hit into the pinnacle everyone had to search for it” (ibid: 6). Ray remembers being on a BPC team that got sorely beaten by a team of policemen, “In fact one burly sergeant made more runs than all our teams put together” (ibid: 6). Policemen on the island were usually Gilbertese and Ellice Islanders with a European commander. In the early days, there were Fijian policeman as well.

Ray’s memoirs bring to life some of the archival photographs and material relics I have seen on the island. I had always noticed the floodlights on the tennis courts, because they seem so surreal and modern amongst the silence and dust of the dead town. In his time, Ray wrote that tennis was played at night on a green concrete court to catch whatever breeze was blowing (ibid: 6). The BPC club was called The Ocean Island Tennis Club. Even more interesting was the rifle club. When I was on Banaba in 2000, the manager's wife had told me a strange story of a gun that had shot a man instead of the chicken it was pointed at. I was previously unaware that guns were allowed on the island outside of the police force.

According to Ray the rifle range was in the northern part of the island. Sunday mornings were rifle range days where the men would, “... pile onto the back of a truck, thrust our bottles of beers into a tub of ice and off we would go. Lunch was supplied by the mess which meant we could spend most of the day on the range” (ibid: 6). I guess Australians and New Zealanders in those days weren’t the good Christians like the old men of the company, Ellis and Arundel. One might imagine all the Islanders faithfully at church on Sunday while the European men drank beer and shot ex-army 303s all day long. Apparently the shed the men used to shelter in between sessions was a favourite moulting spot for scorpions and any new club member would find one next to him on his first day (ibid: 6). Ray goes on to talk about the golf course:

Some golf was played on a very primitive course of about 9 holes. The balls had to be painted yellow or red so they stood out against the background of white coral. I can remember my assistant, Cheong, painting these gold balls for the doctor and others. He would pour the paint into the palm of his hand then rub
the ball between his hands. An excellent method of painting but it left his hands rather sticky (ibid: 7).

A shot of Europeans swinging away is a favourite image in all the BPC archival films I've collected. One would never know, however given the black and white film that the balls were red and yellow. Saturday nights were apparently big gambling nights for the men led by the Aussies. They played games like poker, pontoon, solo whist and two-up. Two miners acted as bookies for the Sydney races and there was another for Aussie Rules games in Melbourne which Ray joined in on. Twice while he was there they had a gambling night for charity with lots of games including the “Penny to Pound raffle” and roulette.

Junior staff members had dinner in the singles mess staffed by a Chinese chef and his assistants, an Australian manager and Gilbertese and Ellice waiters. Ray's most memorable dinner was one in which “Millionaire's Salad” was served. Each coconut tree was numbered and plotted on a map of the island. “Sometimes it became necessary to cut down one or more palms to open up an area for mining. In these cases compensation had to be paid but the growing tips were saved and great was the competition for this delicacy” (ibid: 8). Apparently the manager had secured some of this for one special dinner. A quick search on the internet reveals the following from “Mauritian cuisine”:

If seafoods are a favourite of yours, then don’t forget to treat yourself to the “Millionaire's salad” of oysters, shrimps, crayfish, crabs, Rosenberg prawns, served with “sauce rouge” and the heart of a palm tree! Looking for exoticism, weren't you? (http://www.maurinet.com/food1.html)

The most profound thing about this salad is that its uniqueness relies on the death of an entire coconut tree. I don’t think there’s much substitute for that ingredient.

Until 1951 Ray writes that he was usually “bored and spent most of the time... reading, writing letters or studying Gilbertese.” Then an influenza epidemic hit the island. According to his memoirs the epidemic came in from Hong Kong and spread swiftly. It hit the islanders the hardest and they had to erect two new temporary wards. This kept Ray busy for two weeks and even halted mining. Overseers with no jobs became orderlies filling in for the sick islanders. Ray had to improvise on drugs creating five-gallon kegs, “filled with my special mixture which
contained anything I had in store. It tasted vile but was greatly appreciated as the
general opinion seemed to be that anything as vile as that must be good” (ibid: 9).
After running around for 10 days the epidemic ended and Ray finally caught the flu
himself.

Ray goes on to describe the mining process which exactly matches the archival
film footage we see in Video 3.

The method there was to build two towers about 500 yards apart and
connected by steel cables to which were attached large iron bins called “skips.”
These skips were lowered to the ground and the workers filled them with the
phosphate rock. When full the laden skips were lifted, carried along the
cableway, and their contents dumped into hoppers to be later loaded into small
railway wagons for transport to the crushers. After being crushed the finer
material was taken by conveyor belt to the boat harbour where it was poured
into huge drums on barges which, in turn, were towed out to the waiting ships
by motor launches.

Ray Dobson ends his memoirs with three stories. The first was the tale of a staff
member and his wife who had been murdered. The investigation included taking
fingerprints from their house. These matched two Chinese men who were taken to
Fiji for trial and hanged. I wonder about this incident. Since most households had
both Chinese and Islander help, how did they connect such fingerprints to the actual
murder? Ray does not mention what connection the men had to the murdered
Europeans. During Ray’s time the murdered couple’s house remained unoccupied.

The next story was his recollection of “The Recruit.” This was the period in
which one of the BPC ships would go around the colony and return labourers to
their home islands while recruiting new workers. The policy of the Colonial Office
was that a certain quota from each island had to be filled otherwise the company
would contract men just from one or two islands. This made for ethnic diversity
amongst the workers on Ocean Island. The ship would also go to Hong Kong to
return the Chinese workers and the Europeans would often place large orders for
camphor chests. The Islanders preferred uncarved ones, while the Europeans
preferred carved chests. These kept clothes safe from insects. Ray wrote, “The small
boxes are long gone but I still have the large ones and, 50 years later, the odour of
camphor still lingers” (ibid: 11). He unfortunately lost all the other materials he
collected from the island including photographs and embroidered pillowcases made by the nurses. These pillowcases are still valued gifts today in Kiribati, Tuvalu and on Rabi.\(^{24}\)

Ray ends with a story about a young Gilbertese man named George who was the chief apprentice. George was Catholic and asked Ray to take photos of the Catholic church at Tabwewa. Ray agreed and since George was learning to become an electrician, took photos in exchange for a light box to print his negatives. They made with the help of a carpenter and discarded bits of wood. He gave it to George who had become interested in photography by the time Ray left the island. The Catholic church that George wanted memorialised in a photograph still stands today, probably the best kept building on the island. In 2000 I took endless shots of it against the blue, blue sky.

Ray left Ocean Island bound for a job in Moshi, Tanganyika, at the foot of Mt Kilimanjaro.

\(^{24}\) The pillowcases are often embroidered with people’s names, a blessing like, “Sweet Dreams,” and colourfully stitched flowers.
Ray sent me his memoirs along with those of a woman named Mary Zausmer. Mary just turned eighty this year and she and I have often speak on e-mail. She seems to have had a long and adventurous life between the USA and Australia. She was also married three times, her last husband being Eddie Zausmer, a Jewish electrician from Brooklyn. Her stories are written with cultural references that include her life long after Ocean Island but they are also written in that imaginary “ethnographic present.” Here I consider an excerpt entitled “Ocean Island, Paradise of the Pacific,” from her family story: “Asunder Down Under.” 25 Before I read her memoirs I asked Mary where and when she was born and she replied:

I was born in West Vancouver, Canada, on January 15, 1922. My name was Mary Beatrice Critch. (I am now Mary Zausmer) My parents were born in Australia. My mother in Bourke, NSW and my father in Geraldton, WA. 26

Mary’s father lived in Australia and Buenos Aires before he met her mother in Perth where she was working as a nurse in a veteran’s hospital. They had one son and then moved to Canada and then California where her second brother was born. The Critches returned to Australia in 1938 but died in their mid-fifties. After the eldest son also died, Mary and her brother returned to North America in 1955 and she

25 A second version of Mary’s memoirs are titled: The chronicles of Mary Beatrice Robe Critch: a Family Entertainment, 1922 to 1956. Mary wrote her memoirs in her 70s and this version was edited when she was seventy-seven.

26 Personal communication on e-mail April 5, 2001.
currently lives in Tacoma, Washington. In 1950, Mary married a man named Blue, a
surveyor, and they lived in Bomaderry NSW.

Mary’s writing style is lively and full of humour and no amount of paraphrasing
can capture it well so I have decided to reproduce many passages verbatim. She starts
off talking about a man named Noel Frye who had recently been a surveyor for the
BPC on Ocean Island:

He said that since his departure they were still looking for a replacement. Noel
intimated he had resigned after becoming infatuated with Queenie Wills, the
chief accountant’s wife, a beautiful half-caste with four young daughters. Harry
Wills was a tall, muscular man supporting 250 pounds of determination and
Noel weighed about 140 pounds carrying his golf clubs. When Tommy Muir,
the assistant island manager, tactfully suggested Noel might not wish to renew
his contract, he immediately agreed (Zausmer, 1997-2002: 95).

The image of a tall, muscular accountant, and spindly surveyor definitely inverts the
commonly held image of masculine types. Had she wanted, Mary could have been a
popular novelist. In 1950 she joins the *Triana* in Newcastle for the journey to Ocean
Island.

When the other passengers came on board and day of departure arrived, an
energetic little tug towed the *Triana* out into the deep-water channel. I asked Ian
Smith, the first mate, who was leaning over the rail supervising operations,
“Why do we need a tug? Couldn’t they just put the engine into reverse and back
out?” “Because a ship is not a bloody ice cream wagon,” he said with his heavy
Scots accent (ibid: 96).

Once the tug cast off its towing cables they moved off at nine knots. Mary describes
the journey as rather tumultuous, especially on her stomach, “...it was like being in a
washing machine at a laundromat” (ibid: 96). After this unpleasant oceanic
experience Mary decided to stay on Ocean Island forever, or until they put in an
airstrip. She shared her cabin with the wife of a colonial government official in
Tarawa and remembers that the woman said they would have five course meals at
dinner and pass the port wine to the left in accordance with British tradition (ibid:
97).

When they finally reached the island, launches arrived with husbands greeting
their children and wives. This is the familiar arrival scene which we also saw in Video
2. Mary said her husband was wearing an outfit of white twill shorts and a starched
short-sleeved shirt with knee high stockings. “We were soon climbing down the ship’s swaying ladder held in place by a grinning Gilbertese who casually kept one large foot on the ladder and the other on the launch as it rode up and down on the ocean swell” (ibid: 97). On land Mary noticed the white and brown children diving off the sea wall just below the huge dust-covered processing plant. Blue pointed out “Ooma [sic] Point” to Mary as they left the harbour by jeep to their new home on the windward side of the island in an area called Bukentereke (ibid: 97).

Mary noticed that the “native” families lived in large huts with “a steeply pitched thatch roof with low, overhanging eaves and walls of woven pandanus set on a floor of coral sand” (ibid: 97). She remembers a Gilbertese woman in a red and white lavalava strolling along the track who waved to Blue. “As physical examples of the human race, they seemed vastly superior to the average white man and woman,” she wrote (ibid: 98). They drove past a white church with a tall steeple, which had been built by the London Missionary Society. Blue explained to Mary that:

[Every] three months, immediately after the natives were paid, the god-botherers, as the Aussies called them, arrived in their sleek schooner from Tarawa... Later, our houseboy explained that if he did not contribute to the “el-emin-ess,” God would punish him and his family in the Hereafter – salvation on a cash basis (ibid: 98).

The LMS laid the foundations for what eventually became the Kiribati Protestant Church of which some of my relatives on Tarawa are members (see Chapter 4). Mary’s houseboy, an Ellice Islander named Taam, sang the Lord’s Prayer in Latin for them at dinner followed by “a rich baritone version of You are my sunshine, a favourite song among the natives” (ibid: 98).

Mary and Blue lived in a house called “Wireless House” after its original use. It had louvered windows, a front verandah, kitchen and, in the back, an enormous concrete water tank. From Mary’s descriptions the island seemed to have enjoyed a good spell of rain: bougainvillea, coconut trees, pumpkin vines, banana trees and pandanus were in abundance. She noted everything from the water tank to the geckos as well as the employee’s handbook which listed the furniture in the house as:

1 dining room table and 4 wooden chairs
2 Rattan armchairs
1 double bed, mattress, 2 pillows, 1 mosquito net
1 chest of drawers
1 breakfast table and 2 chairs
1 electric stove
1 refrigerator

Like other Europeans, Mary's life on the island was materially comfortable. She did not even have to do her own shopping. A company employee would take her shopping order and it was delivered the next day. At first she drank the water from the taps in the house and was soon spending most of her time in the bathroom. She talked to the company doctor, Les Ingram, about her problems and he laughed, “no one has lived in the Wireless House for two years, so next week we’ll pump out the water tank and the problem will disappear” (ibid: 99). Mary wrote, “After removing the skeletons of a few rodents, the tank was filled with fresh water that had come from Melbourne as ballast. I was glad the problem was solved so easily because no one likes to have dead animals in their water supply” (ibid: 99).

When Mary lived on the island there were Australians, New Zealanders, two Scots, Chinese, Ellice Islanders, Gilbertese and the English Resident and his wife, but she never felt crowded. She said the young native children who were called “piccaninis,”27 attended classes with the white children. These were the children of “houseboys” and “wash janes” – “housegirls” (ibid: 100).

![Figure 59. “Our laundry girls”28](image)

In Mary’s story she relates that the English Resident Commissioner and his wife had been transferred from Nairobi, “they gave the impression of much

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27 “Piccaninis” is a derogatory term used by British and Australians for indigenous children. It is also used for “child” in the Bislama (pidgin) of Vanuatu.

28 From the John Miller Collection, courtesy of Frank Miller.
preferring the Kikuyu tribesman to the uncouth Aussies." Mary was very critical of the British colonial representatives on the island. She describes the husband as overly nostalgic about English colonial superiority and his wife as disdainful of the Company:

On the occasion of the King’s Birthday celebration this dream team once sent out invitations to the senior staff and when the guests began arriving they found the absent minded couple tucked in for the night under the mosquito net reading three-month old copies of the *London Times* with a chilled martini pitcher on the floor... Rising nobly to the occasion, the mem-sahib said, “Ah, yes, the King’s Birthday. Quite. The boy will get you a drink, and we’ll be with you in a moment” (ibid: 101).

The main transport on the island was an old WWI ambulance driven by a man named “Telly,” short for “Telephone.” There were several company jeeps and only two private cars on the island both of which had been badly dented from being swung onto a barge from the ship’s hold (ibid:101). Alcohol was regulated on the island: the whites were allowed one quart of beer per day and a bottle of gin a month. However, according to Mary, more was consumed and every three months, the brand of beer was changed to avoid arguments. Foster’s from Australia was a favourite with everyone (ibid: 102).

In the same flu epidemic described by Ray earlier on in this chapter, Taamo, Mary and Blue’s houseboy, died. Their next houseboy was Nukai who was Gilbertese. He was paid 2 pounds out of the 12 pounds that Blue earned per week. Mary would communicate with him “in gestures, broken English and kitchen-Gilbertese” (ibid:102). Life seemed amiable on the island and Mary talks about how Islanders would bring the whites gifts and entertain them with songs and dances. While “the Aussies” were known not to like natives whom she says they called “boongs,” they seemed to be respectful of those who worked at Ocean Island.

She wrote about how life was generally peaceful and how the wives supported each other, the way they might in the Australian outback. The whites were allowed to bring pet cats to the island but not to take them back. One time, two of them who had become feral, raced into her house and fought to death under her bed. Nukai
then picked up "the loser," walked through the pinnacles to the ocean and threw it in (ibid: 103).

Mary and Blue were eventually invited to the house of Harry and Queenie Wills, the Gilbertese woman whom Noel Frye had fallen in love with. Queenie's father was a Swiss trader who owned a shirt factory in Tarawa. Because Harry had married "a native" (albeit an educated "mixed" woman), he would not be promoted in the Company. They had four daughters, all blonde, who entertained them with a song called "Goodnight Irene, Goodnight." They also often sang what Mary called "Maori's Farewell", to send-off people who were leaving for Australia.

The "Tri-ships" would come in for a loading of phosphate about every six weeks and it was always an occasion for the company employees. They eagerly awaited mail, newspapers and magazines and enjoyed greeting and farewelling neighbours. As Mary got used to living on the island, she said that people developed a "who cares" or "akia kaak" approach to life. I think she must be referring to the phrase *akea te karangata* which means "no problem" which is similar to *sega na lepa*, a stereotype about the cavalier approach to life in Fiji. Certainly, the workers who were slaving away in the mines did have a few problems as we will see. Their lives were hardly carefree.

Mary records six weeks of heavy rain in December that year. It was so heavy that people were bound to their houses and some seemed to develop "cabin fever." She recounts the story of two men who lived in a bungalow together and who were very different in personality. One man was very neat. One man was very untidy. During this rainy period while inebriated they decided to saw their lounge in half so each could have his own territory. The rain then plunged the roof through and damaged everything. The company immediately shipped them back to Australia (ibid: 105).

The BPC would do anything to maintain peace and harmony on the island. One of the ways that the company was able to entertain all the employees (except the Chinese) was through film. This is something that Banabans also fondly remember

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29 While Gilbertese and Banabans are not famous for naming themselves after English things, other Polynesians including Samoans are. I was once told by a Samoan woman that she knew a girl named "Veteran's Association."
from their period on the island company prior to World War II. People especially liked action films about cowboys and Mary said that Nukai was convinced that these films represented real life in Australia and America. Mary remembers a terrible period, however, when they were sent an eight-week supply of “weepies” all starring Margaret O’Brien (ibid: 105).

The wives on the island would have elaborate tea parties for each other all served up on good chinaware. Mary’s speciality was pie made from pumpkins which she says the Japanese planted on the island. Doughnuts were also so popular that they once held a doughnut party. (I wonder if these doughnuts had holes or were more like Akineti’s doughnuts on Tabiteuea!). Mary was good at sewing and had a sewing machine imported from Kowloon where many of the products like chinaware, chests and furniture came from. On weekends they had something called “Sunday Morning Drinks” which started at ten and went from house to house as long as liquor was supplied. Afterwards, the furry mouth lasted until Tuesday” (ibid: 106).

Mary describes in detail a 42-year-old man named MacRobert who was the focus of a number of women’s affections. He was a former Shakespearean actor from London and the manager of both staff housing and the singles’ dining room. He was known as “Mack.” According to Mary he was gay and although Australian men normally did not tolerate his “type,” he was so kind, gracious and competent that everyone liked him (ibid: 106). Mack was a product of the current lack of demand for theatre actors, thanks to the advent of television and film. Mary wrote that the single women, and at any one time the Company allowed only three—the nurse, school teacher and office stenographer—would lavish their attentions on Mack which sometimes made other men jealous. She said the women were hoping for “an immaculate conversion with a happy-ever-after ending” (ibid: 107). According to Mary, Mack never made moves on the men and thoroughly enjoyed the company of women. She writes that women, herself included were ignorant of homosexuality in the 1950s.

Mary and Blue’s marriage eventually deteriorated on the island and after his two-year contract, they parted ways in Australia. She seems to have remembered this period well and her memoirs are lively as a result of her own vivacious personality
and open-minded worldview. Mary wrote with great detail and intensity about people and places, bodies and clothing, personalities and hang-ups. She wrote of scorpions and caterpillars, rats and feral cats and weevils. These are the daily details and the embodied experiences usually left out in company records and history books like *The Phosphateers*.

One of the most interesting connections between Ray and Mary's stories is that of “Wireless House.” The reason that it had been empty for so long before Mary and Blue moved in was because it was the same house in which the European couple had been murdered. Mary thought a native had been convicted of the crime, while Ray wrote that it was two Chinese mechanics. People would casually ask Mary if she had any blood stains on her walls (ibid: 104). Mary was confronted by this legacy one day after she asked Nukai to chop some pumpkins for scones. Nukai later walked out of the kitchen towards her with a crazed look on his face and carving knife in one hand. Mary, ever observant, writes, “my first surprise was that Nukai was left-handed” (ibid) He then fell to the floor and later was diagnosed with the same terrible flu that had afflicted many of the islanders. When Mary wrote her memoirs 45 years later, she still had the same ivory-handled carving knife, “although the handle has yellowed somewhat” (ibid).

![Figure 60. Nukai, Blue and Mary 1951](image)

**Labourers look back to Banaba**

*Auckland Star 22/5/29*

“Like an Oyster: Lonely Phosphate Islands/Deepest Mooring in the World”

*Natives and Chinamen*
On Ocean Island the output is from 180,000 to 250,000 tons per year, which is larger than in former years. Some 600 natives and about the same number of Chinamen are employed and in addition there are about 100 European officials. Mr. Cozens says the Chinese are good workers. The rock is blasted and dug out from the quarries and sent by cars to crushers and driers, from where it is shipped in bulk (MP 1174/1093).

![Figure 61. "Coolies raking their evening meal."](image)

Initially, the recruitment of islander labourers to work on Banaba was difficult for the mining company (the PIC). Banabans did not want to work in the mines and according to Shlomowitz and Munro (1991), Gilbert and Ellice Islanders preferred to work at Fanning and Washington Islands on coconut plantations (1991: 4). Those who were initially recruited often did not want to return for a second contract because they were satisfied with the money earned after the first two or three years. The populations of these islands were also quite small and could not fulfil all the needs of the massive and labour intensive industry on Nauru and Ocean Island.

In 1920, from an available pool of about 1500 men, there were many alternative sources of work available so the company made up their numbers with Asian workers (Shlomowitz and Munro, 1991: 5). Between 1905 and 1920 on Ocean Island they used Japanese workers who were known as "mechanics" (skilled tradesman) and "coolies" (unskilled labourers) (ibid: 5). The company would use ethnic groups against each other and according to Shlomowitz and Munro, "In 1911... the use of Japanese boatmen was seen as "a corrective to the Kanakas who consider they cannot be replaced" (ibid: 5).

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30 Image from BPC collection, 1907-1909 (R132/1, Book 5: 15 A to 26A). This image would have been from the period when the Chinese labourers worked in the mining fields.
In 1920 they switched to Chinese workers from Hong Kong after several labour disputes with the Japanese recruits. From then on Ocean Island had a mix of Chinese, Gilbertese and a few Ellice Island labourers. The Chinese, however, were usually segregated from the rest of the community. According to Mary Zausmer, during her time on the islands the Chinese workers spoke Cantonese and pidgin with their employers and were all single men on five-year contracts. “Ardent gamblers, they spent their leisure hours playing fan tan and sometimes lost all the money in their account, then from necessity signing on for another five year term rather than go home empty handed” (Zausmer, 1997-2002: 101).

There were also great tensions between the Chinese and Gilbertese groups and Macdonald (1982) writes of one particular violent clash in the 1920s,

... an incident arising from a Chinese washing his clothes in drinking water set aside for Gilbertese soon escalated in a general Chinese attack on Gilbertese labourers, retaliatory stoning of Chinese by Gilbertese and full-scale riot after which weapons ranging from nail-studded pieces of timber to broken bottles were seized by police (Macdonald 1982: 118).

In his faithful combing of the BPC archives, the reasons for dislike between the groups was described by Macdonald as primarily cultural with the Chinese looking down on Gilbertese for their lack of culture, and the Gilbertese resenting this and looking down on Chinese as physically “puny men” (ibid: 120). There was also anger over “Chinese attempts to seduce Gilbertese women” (ibid). The above mentioned riot was not the first between Gilbertese and Chinese workers and we might never know exactly how their differences played out on the ground. The category “part-Chinese” or “Chinese” is a very salient way in which Banabans and Gilbertese sometimes differentiate each other and today there are many people of Chinese heritage on Rabi, Banaba and throughout Kiribati.

The Gilbertese men were primarily recruited from the Southern part of the group which was prone to drought. This was a major inducement for employment into the phosphate industry. The numbers of Ellice recruits increased in 1936 when an influenza epidemic resulted in a quarantine of the whole Gilbert group (Shlomowitz and Munro, 1990: 7-8). Each ethnic group on Ocean Island was basically given a different job—Asians filled the ranks of skilled labour including
carpenters, mechanics, boat builders and cooks, Gilbertese worked in the phosphate fields and Ellice Islanders were boatmen. The boatmen and miners, however, often did both jobs depending on when ships arrived for loading (ibid: 10). In their economic overview of the Nauru and Ocean Island labour trade Shlomowitz and Munro are critical of this stereotyping of ethnic groups as suitable for one job over another. Indeed, such a racial separation of employees on the island did not always make for the best working relations between them.

Moreover such divisions were not just between Europeans, Asians and Islanders but between Islanders themselves, as we will see. The Gilbert and Ellice Islands were governed together by the office of the British Western Pacific High Commission. The Ellice Islanders all had to learn Gilbertese, the official language, along with English. Ellice Islanders had fair skin while the Gilbert Islanders from the more exposed atoll environment were darker. As we saw in Chapter 2, Ellice Islanders were highlighted in both the BPC films and individuals like Kaipati, were particularly admired. In the films they were labelled “natives” and it was their bodies and faces that were privileged over Gilbertese or Banaban ones. There was a racial hierarchy on Banaba with Europeans at the top and Gilbertese at the bottom. Part of my task after exploring the archives in Melbourne was to talk directly to some of the men who had experienced life as labourers on Banaba. I was interested not just in the work they did and their attitudes towards the Company and Europeans but the relations with other Islanders.

The following memories of Banaba were all collected on Tabiteuea Meang (or “Tab North” as its called) during my stay there from March-April 2000. Williams and Macdonald (1985) wrote in their history of a 1961 labour strike led by Tabiteuean workers. It was sparked by the harsh language of one Gilbertese overseer over Gilbertese workers but soon escalated to include a number of different grievances and the inclusion of the man’s European superiors who also liked to use harsh language (ibid: 453-454). The company had always had problems finding Gilbertese to fill authority positions because of the egalitarian code. Being promoted over your fellow Gilbertese is always risky and the same usually applies on Banaba and Rabi

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31 This overview by Shlomowitz and Munro is supported by what I read in the BPC archives in MP
today. The BPC approached this strike in the light of a 1948 strike, also led by Tabiteueans, after which Williams and Macdonald claimed no Tabiteueans had been recruited for years after. Contrary to this I found at least three who were recruited in the early 1950s.

Figure 62. Recruiting at “Recruiting labour at “Tapiteuea [sic] South””

I videotaped and interviewed the *muamane* with the help of a translator named Temakau. He was a former seaman or *kaimia* now a teacher at a primary school in Tauma to whom the nuns had introduced me. He had several mechanical and electrical skills which the nuns valued and would come over to fix the solar panels at the convent. After discussing my project with him he introduced me to his relatives, Teweia and Ntongantonga, who also worked on Banaba.

Later in Fiji, I sat down with my father and we went through each of the taped interviews. The following account is derived from our discussions, my father’s translations, my mother’s transcriptions, reviewing the tapes, and my own memories of sitting with the men on Tabiteuea.

*Enere, Booti and Temokou*

Figure 53. From left K.Teaiwa, Enere, Temokou and Booti

1174.

32 From Burwood BPC photo archives (R 132/1, ZK: 35 and 36).
I talked to Enere, Booti and Temoku at Booti’s house in Tanaeang. They all lived near each other and I thought it would be a good idea to hold one collective interview. This proved to be very problematic for a number of reasons. Enere and Booti had worked on Banaba in 1947 while the youngest, Temokou, worked from 1970-79. I asked Temakau to ask each of them the same series of questions and we went round in this way for two hours or so.

I have described most of the aspects of this meeting in Chapter 1 but I can’t stress enough here just how awkwardly it played out. I was a young woman who all of them knew was also Banaban and Tabiteuean and yet I did not speak to them in Gilbertese. I was also asking them to objectify and comment upon a past some decades gone and unlike the Europeans I discussed earlier, these men had not recorded their memories in writing. They thought it quite strange that here I was on Tabiteuea, my ancestral island, and all I wanted to talk about was Banaba. I also got the feeling that their recountings were not so effuse because I had structured the meeting as a series of answers and questions rather than an informal gathering. There was also a reluctance to out-talk each other and a level of low energy and circumspection prevailed (except when the discussion was redirected to me and who I was).

I arrived that Thursday afternoon in March 2000 with more equipment than they’d seen one girl carry in their lives. I was pointing both a camera and microphone at their heads and put myself and the interpreter in the position of “interrogators.” For example, Temakau would turn to me and ask if something said was okay and I would reply, “if he’s answered the question than it’s okay.” If I was later disappointed at the results of the event, it was only because I had been trying to be such a good researcher I forgot to be a “good islander.” The best stories are never planned.

Kamala Visweswaran recounts a similar period of “failure” in the context of attempting to represent women’s subjectivity in India. She writes, “... in emphasizing the tape reorder I had forfeited the trust and spontaneity of a moment of introduction. I had insisted upon my tape recorder, hoping to “capture” women’s words, and in so doing was caught by the desire to capture” (Visweswaran 1994: 97).
I fell into this trap every time I did an interview on Tabiteuea, blind to the revealing stories and relationships that unfolded around me everyday. Nevertheless I tried to reflect on this “failure” in the way Visweswaran recommends we do “homework” in order to “mark decolonisation as an active, ongoing process...” (ibid: 113).

Visweswaran reminds us that we sometimes let out projects dictate our actions in “the field” and when we fail we simply look for new methods to make it right rather than using such “failures” to interrogate certain disciplinary assumptions and practices. Throughout my thesis, the lines between successful and failed ethnography are not drawn but I now know that listening is far more important than interrogating or capturing. Kirin Narayan’s work (1989) is exemplary of what can be achieved when a scholar listens with rigour, compassion and reflexivity. With this in mind I re-read the digital tapes (played off a video walkman in my office next to my computer) in a new light.

Booti sat cross-legged to my right with one knee against a rolled up foam mattress. He described working in the mines and would often mime the actions with his upper body. He’d pretend to lift a rock or use a shovel and then point up to the ceiling, his eyes following his finger as if looking up at a skip above the building.

I went to work on Banaba in 1947... I started in the mines and we worked with no protective clothing against dust and falling rocks into the mine... I started on contract and later on regular hours... when I did contract work five of us were required to fill nine carts. The workplace was unhealthy because of the dust from phosphate rock... My memories of Banaba?... It’s a very pitiful sight now.

Enere sat to my far left leaning against one of the corner posts. He had thick, large glasses perched on his nose and secured by a string around the back of his head. He was a natural storyteller and would often mimic the way people talked with...
great facial expressions. He would sometimes reply “akea... akea... akea” to many of the questions and then proceed to tell a very long and interesting story.

I kan rako Banaba ibukin tangpan te batika, te tieni ao te kani muu rau... I mana au aukuni n 1947... I muskuri mus n te tabo ni koroka. Bon te muskuri ae wuta te muskuri aeki, aoi irima I a ngarua muskuri n te powerhouse. E aiki kargin a ngi ne muskuri n te tabo anu. Bua are kanga ai te tia kabaabamra ngi... Bua ngi jare e kargai te mutanirii, kava atei, I kavai ara te bua, I auki... Ai bon aruna rako rauk ateh... ara mutanirii bon te I-Matau, aoi e aiki kumeina bia te tia kabaabamra a ngi ne muskuri bia te tia kavai te bua... E kanmanokwaaiki urungi Banaba n aron naaia aron ngi keke re tanaar aron nga... Te bua ar a o o o ni, te kana aukun.

I wanted to go and work on Banaba to buy the good things of life. I worked there in 1947. I just worked in the mine. That was hard work. Later I worked in the powerhouse and work there was easy because I was merely doing what I was told to do. When the boss says do this, I do it, take this, I take it... so the work was easy... our boss was a white man... he didn’t bother us that much... My memories of Banaba... it is really sad to think just how beautiful Banaba was then compared to its present state... it is degraded and damaged.

Temokou’s memories of Banaba were clear and detailed since he had been there more recently than the other men. He first worked in the phosphate warehouse and then at the cantilever which had by then developed a swinging arm which deposited the phosphate directly in the hold of the waiting ship.

Nghe I maan roko i Banaba ao I muskuri n te umtana... Iai bua ni muskuri ibukin kamanu te idai ni a o ni bua te abua te ti aki kabaabami ni berina ibukin aoi koroka ni bua bem n istinim bua ni muskuri ak o ko koron na kabanibamra ngi ne... Bon iai tua ibukin tanan a o ni bua te tia muskuri... Iai bua aru mutanirii a ok te aonukt34 ao teuea, e nangi ni kaitumra a o mati tan muskuri naaibana... (and when asked about accidents or problems for workers he said) I urungi raba ae a mati tan muskuri aika bua aka aontaka, aika a o ni a o ni te muskuri n umu a o ni bua te bui... Teuea e banibaka i i a o ke a roko ni te bua te roko... te bui a o te bui n au a o I a o ko koron ni muumiring bia bua ni a o ni bua naaibaka... E nangi ni kanmanokwaaiki urungi Banaba.

When I first went to Banaba, I worked in the phosphate warehouse... we were required to wear protective clothing like face masks, and we were not allowed

33 Akea can mean no, none, or naught (as in zero).
34 Aonuta directly translates as “people” but is usually used to refer specifically to people of one’s own ethnic group. So when Banabans say te aonuta they usually mean other Banabans and the same pertains to Gilbertese.
wear lavalava as this could easily be caught in the machines and endanger safety... there were safety rules which we were required to follow at the workplace... We also had a boss who was Gilbertese who was very strict and hard on us... (later)... I remember a number of people who got sick, there were also fatal accidents in the workplace. I remember while the ship was unloading cargo onto a dinghy a man was knocked by the winch into the water and his body was never recovered... What I can't forget about Banaba?... how good and modern the facilities were then... how all those have become dilapidated... it is so sad.

In general all three men felt that the BPC was a good employer and that, despite the hard work, life on Banaba was easier than life in the village back home. Contrary to Shlomowitz and Munroe's (1990) observations for the 1900 to 1940 period they said that men were always willing to be recruited for work on Banaba. It enabled them to buy things like bicycles, sandalwood chests from Hong Kong, chinaware and kitchen utensils, te baua (a type of tobacco), clothing for special occasions and European food items. They all realised that Banaba now lay in a neglected state and recalled fondly the earlier days of its prosperity.

Concerns about pay, work conditions, skills and safety were central to the racial divisions between the Europeans, Asians and islanders and between the islanders themselves. As mentioned earlier Gilbertese were at the bottom of a perceived racial hierarchy in the first few decades of the industry and this was compounded by their hard labour and intensive work. The following anecdote was related in response to my question about both supernatural experiences and relationships between islanders on Banaba.

Enere remembered something that had happened to a young Ellice Island woman named Pesiki in 1947. According to his version she and her sister went walking one day and one of a group of Gilbertese men resting by the side of the road called out “anna taura” which literally translates as “your light is shining” meaning, “you are beautiful.” Pesiki turned around and snapped back saying, “E aki bo tau te betin na te bata” (Enere calls out mimicking Pesiki), “no comparison can be made between the basin and the pot.” This veiled speech hid a powerful insult.

In interpreting Enere’s story, Temakau said that because the Gilbertese men worked in the mines under the hot sun all day long they were very dark skinned. By contrast, these Ellice Island women were very fair skinned and so the woman...
insulted him by saying: “your skin is so black, don’t think you can talk to us!” My father had a similar translation of this incident, further recalling that there was a song describing it part of which went:

- Te bezin te kuro
- E aki boxau
- Bua i bureteti
- Bua i batangaringi
- Kabarai baren au taeka rako

The basin, the pot
It’s not the same
Because I’m so ugly
Because I’m so black
Forgive the mistakes of my words

After Pesiki so insulted the group by the roadside, one of the men, the one who had called out the compliment, vowed revenge. He was very hurt by her words and approached two Tabiteueans to help him. These men were renowned for their ability to cast spells and Tabiteueans in general were known to be a powerful group. The playing field at the top of the island near the hospital where Buakonikai once stood was known as Maraen te Tabiteuea (the Tabiteuean mmae). These men agreed to punish Pesiki for deriding the dark skin of the Gilbertese men. They lit a fire at Maraen te Tabiteuea and effected a spell which caused Pesiki to lose her mind. One day soon after she walked down the road and tore off all her clothes. She often ran around naked after that and was never cured.

Temokou recalled the unrest on Banaba in 1978-79. This was during the period when a group of Banabans were repatriated to the island to “occupy” their land. Other members of a Banaban nationalist movement who wanted independence from what was about to become the nation of Kiribati accompanied them. Temokou remembered that the Banabans bombed key phosphate installations despite the efforts of the Gilbertese police to stop them. Apparently my grandfather and grandmother, Teaiwa and Takeua also went to Banaba and stayed there from 1975-

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35 A mmae is a public space where people gather for sports or other important events.
36 From his time on the island, Temokou also recalled a woman named Nei Baorita who lived on Banaba in 1970s. She married a man named Kurue who has now passed away and they once lived in Lautoka in Fiji where my own family lived from 1976 to 1980. My father remembers meeting this woman and her husband there. Nei Baorita had a gift for locating missing items as well as those used in witchcraft to harm people. She did this by communicating with her deceased father in her dreams; he was always able to direct her to the missing or destructive items.
37 He also remembered that for the most part relations between the workers were good, despite some problems with alcohol. They went fishing together and had sports events together including soccer and wrestling competitions.
1977. I did not know that Teaiwa returned to Banaba at all until Temokou told me this story on Tabiteuea. My father concurred when I asked him about it later—my grandparents Teaiwa and Takeua had participated in the protest movements on Banaba.

I was late for my appointment with Teweia and very embarrassed when I arrived. I had been held up in the marae at the new Temwamwaung Primary School where the community wanted to watch the videos I had recorded earlier on in the week. I arrived at Teweia’s house on the back of Tau Mangarita’s motorbike, apologised profusely and we made our way to his small house. Unlike many of the other houses I’d visited Teweia’s was on the ground and had walls made from the mid-rib of the coconut palm. I had been used to climbing up to sit on the raised floor of people’s houses but for his house we had to duck down.

Like my grandfather, Teaiwa, Teweia Intiua is from Utiroa village on Tabiteuea Meang. When I interviewed him in 2000 he was seventy years old. Teweia knew my grandfather well but not Teaiwa’s parents. He particularly talked about what a good fisherman and diver Teaiwa was, especially when using “traditional” methods. Teweia had been much younger than my grandfather but avidly followed the older man around.

I knew Teaiwa well. He was a close friend although he was much older than myself. Teaiwa had married Takeua, the child of Kabuabwai and they had two children, one was Terianako whom I used to see with her parents and the one you mentioned, Tabakitoa, who lived with Tebwerewa in Terikiai, I did not know... Teaiwa then as I recall was rather unsettled and he drank... However,

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38 Both Hackings (1989) and Koch (1986) do not mention any houses like these (with these types of walls) and they are probably innovations along with double story houses. According to Hackings, however, bota (small dwellings) were traditionally on the ground, not raised (see Hackings 1989: 145-187).
he was a good fisherman particularly with the tauantau style of fishing using a fishing line and a pair of goggles.\textsuperscript{39} We used to go fishing in Kabuna (southern end of Tab North).

I then played some of the old BPC mining images for Teweia on my digital camera and he immediately became excited. He recalled that he went to Banaba with his parents in 1942 when he was about eight years old and noted that living conditions were poor. For example, they had no furniture, had to collect their own firewood for cooking and when people were sick it was a big expedition to carry them to the hospital. There was no ambulance and a general lack of medical equipment. He said that pregnant women in particular struggled in these conditions. While Gilbertese and Banaban women probably knew how to facilitate home births, there were probably colonial regulations regarding such things. According to Williams and Macdonald the baby welfare clinic was established in 1937 (1985: 284) around the same time Teweia lived on the island as a child. Families were also brought over as nuclear units and the normal extended family or village members available to help out on such occasions would have been absent. One can imagine that simply plonking Gilbertese and Ellice Islander families together on one island would not have resulted in a fluid redistribution of social roles and relationships. People would have created new relationships which varied in degrees of rapport considerably.

Teweia enjoyed playing with other Gilbertese and Ellice Island children but they all had to live in separate ethnic quarters. During World War II, his family was forced by the Japanese to go to Kosrae where they lived for about three years. His father had been a telephone operator on Banaba. After what he called the "American liberation" his family returned to Tabiteuea.

In 1954, Teweia returned to Banaba to work as a cable operator. He wanted to save money for a bicycle and a sewing machine which were prized possessions on both Banaba and in the Gilberts. He also said he wanted to be able to "eat what white men eat." Teweia said that working conditions were very bad for the miners. Some men had been injured by falling rocks and carts.

\textsuperscript{39} See Gerd Koch for more on different fishing styles. He lists tauantau as the method used for catching awit fish (1986: 49).
He also described in detail the movement of the phosphate from the grab at the rock, through the aerial cable and skip mechanism. He reflected on the fact that some sections of the fields were mined with a grab and the others by hand. He described how each system had a number, “kaekei n tai taekei n te tai tarei... taekei n te tarei... te taekei n te tarei... ao nua te skip e nasa” “at that time the cables... here was cableway no.1, skip no.1. and skip no. 2...,” and then how he would shift from operating the cable to drive the motorboats containing the baskets that dumped the phosphate into the hold of the ships. Like the others, Teweia called the rock te tano— sand/ soil/ clay/ ground/ land.

Teweia remembered various grievances about food rations, pay and company information about safety and conditions. He talked a lot about how they were never allowed water (or te muangko—the cups for drinking) while working in te muangkalung, meaning inside the mines. His stories shifted back and forth between when he was on Banaba as a child and as an adult worker. They were punctuated by periods of intense detail as he described things like the mining operations to more hazy and general reflections on life before and after the war. I think that the detail described in the mining operations was stimulated partly by the videos I showed him and partly by the fact that it was such long and monotonous work it would be hard to forget. But on many other things he would stop and we we’d sit in silence as he mumbled, “I nuaninga,” “I forget.”

In writing we often leave out the things we forget or don’t know preferring to present as authoritative an account as possible. In most informal oral accounts stories are inflected with the very process of remembering. In between verbal utterances there are silences, pauses, furrowed brows, heads down which suddenly rise when a memory or image leaps back into consciousness. When I asked specific questions like, “what do you remember about the island as a boy” Teweia reflected for a moment and then exclaimed. “Te maukei?” He remembered that before the war there was so much work, so much activity on Banaba. He worked for the company for eleven years and left in 1965.
Ntongantonga

While I was on Tabiteuea Meang, Temakau suggested I talk to one of his relatives named Ntongantonga. He was a very old man who lived in Tanaeang, not too far from the convent.

As soon as we entered his house Ntongantonga grabbed my hand and faced it palm up to study it closely. I had been told earlier that he was something of a fortune-teller and no one could sit and talk with him without a thorough palm examination. At first I thought he must have been born with this gift of divination, but then he told an extraordinary story of how he'd learned these skills from an African American marine during World War II.

Ntongantonga had met this man in Bairiki on South Tarawa during the US occupation immediately after the end of World War II. The man explained how psychological and biological characteristics could be gleaned by looking at the lines on a person's palm. As Ntongantonga recounted this story he said the words
“biological” and “psychological” in English. He could also interpret dreams but I was not sure if he had this ability before or after he learned to read palms.

Ntongantonga was born in 1914 and at the time I interviewed him he was eighty-six years old. He worked for the BPC between 1935-37 and 1945-47. He said he took up the job so he could afford a bicycle, a most useful and treasured possession in the Gilberts. Ntongantonga first worked as a houseboy and then on one of the boats. He remembers being satisfied with the working conditions. He was Catholic and attended church regularly and enjoyed life on Banaba, especially the leisure activities.

More than Banaba, Ntongantonga wanted to talk about what he remembered about my grandfather and father.

I remember Teaiwa was a strong young man... I don’t remember his marriage or his children... but I heard from those who came through Banaba that Teaiwa and Takeua had a son, Tabakitoa who went to school in America. I heard that Teaiwa asked the Rabi Council to assist with Tabakitoa’s school fees but the Council refused to help. So Teaiwa paid for the school fees himself.

Ntongantonga’s description of my father’s history made me reflect on how people in Kiribati kept in touch with what was happening with Gilbertese in Fiji via networks facilitated by things like the phosphate industry and travel back and forth between Fiji and Kiribati. Ntongantonga still remembered such stories from the 1970s because they continue to circulate after thirty years. The repetition and recounting of stories is the reason why people don’t have to write down the past in order to

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40 My own African American heritage and the fact that both my grandfather and uncle had been in the US army seemed to spiral out of history and loop back onto this moment on Tabiteuea Meang as if normal time and space was suspended.

41 Ntongantonga’s version compresses various events over a long period of time into one story. My father’s version was that the council offered him a scholarship for medical school and then said they didn’t recall making such a promise. My father then went back to Rabi and worked for the council and discovered the pages regarding his scholarship had been torn out of the meeting minutes. He left Rabi to attend Koronivia agricultural college and got a scholarship from the Fiji Government to study agriculture at the University of Hawai‘i.
remember it. It is not “the facts” so much that are important but the fact that people know and recall stories about others far and near.

Reflection

The contexts in which I obtained memories of Banaba from the Europeans and Gilbertese men are obviously very different. It was much easier as a scholar to describe and reflect upon the written memoirs. The oral accounts from the men, however, were obtained in a highly charged inter-subjective situation. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, first and foremost, the men were interested in a) who I was by blood and b) why I was so incompetent in the language (and by implication culture too).

My experiences were similar to Dorrine Kondo who worked in Japan and discovered that “...Japanese Americans and others of Japanese ancestry born overseas are faced with exasperation and disbelief. How can someone who is racially Japanese lack “cultural competence”?” (Kondo 1990: 11). Kondo calls this position “on being a conceptual anomaly” (ibid). The same goes for those who are of Gilbertese blood. Often there were long discussions about what must have happened in my schooling or upbringing to prevent my learning Gilbertese. Unlike Kondo, however, I did not feel pressurized by the “...anthropological imperatives to immerse oneself in another culture...so that...selfhood meant constructing a more thoroughly professional anthropological persona” (ibid). It was my very difference from my relatives and others in Kiribati that became the source of questions about the differences and connections between islands and islanders in general.

Each one of the interviews involved a long discussion about either my grandfather Teaiwa, grandmother Takeua, great grandfather Tenamo or all three of them. This usually took place before anyone wanted to talk about phosphate. Teweia and Ntongantonga for example, spent more time talking about Tenamo and Teaiwa than working on Banaba. Throughout my stay on Tabiteuea people always assumed that I was on the island to learn about my family more than anything else. This was one of the main reasons why I started thinking beyond Banaba and the mining to relationships between islands and islanders, much of which is illustrated in the next chapter on Tabiteuea and Tarawa.
Unlike the Europeans discussed earlier, all of the men knew what state the island was in today. Most of them ended by expressing pity for the island in its current state and in that sense they also expressed nostalgia for a time when they perceived it to be *miu*, alive. The experiences of these and many of the men who lived, worked or died on Banaba are encapsulated in a popular song. This is the same song that Roruama, accompanied by her husband Baekanebu and another man named Martin, sang on my own journey to Banaba (Video 1).

The lyrics convert the hard work, the tensions of racial divisions and even the longing for home into the golden idyll of a Pacific paradise. No one is sure who composed the song, except that it emerged from the labour experiences on Banaba which is why much of it is in English. It is still sung throughout Kiribati even though mining ended twenty years ago. I made several enquires about the song and one reply that I received from New Zealand artist, Robin White, was that it was one of the first songs she learned on Tarawa.

*Lonely Banaba*

On the beach, on the streets of Banaba
I'm in the shadows of a golden dream
When I'm watching the boys and girls playing
Happy working for the BPC

Lovely beach, lovely place of Banaba
A or mata, i Matang, a kukuirei
(The people [the islanders], the white people, they are happy)
Everybody, including myself
Happy working for the BPC

When the sun's going down
I'll be alone
Thinking of my homeland far away
But the moon shining bright on the ocean
Makes me happy forever more

Lovely beach, lovely place of Banaba
A or mata, i Matang, a kukuirei
Everybody, including myself
Happy working for the BPC
When I go out to sea in the night time
I can see all the lights in a sitting line
understanding the lights are calling:
back to shore
have a bath
go to bed

Lovely beach, lovely place of Banaba
Aorata, I-Matang, a kukunei
Everybody, including myself
Happy working for the BPC

The Phosphate Flyers

Far south of Banaba and the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, New Zealand and Australia were enjoying the benefits of the mining industry and a very different kind of industry, farming, was providing work for a different group of young men. The widespread use of fertiliser in New Zealand’s rural history from the 1920s generated the hard risky life of those men dubbed “the phosphate flyers.”

Phosphate has always been New Zealand’s most widely used fertiliser. Our dependence on phosphatic fertilisers is such that only in a few areas can crops or pastures be grown without them. It is impossible to estimate where our agricultural economy would be today without the use of phosphate to augment soil fertility. Certainly livestock farming based on grassland, as we have it in New Zealand, would not have developed so rapidly or so intensively without this vital aid (Tyrer 1962: 3).

The above quote is from an introductory message by the Hon. B. E. Talboys, the Minister for Agriculture in New Zealand, for a publication called Nauru and Ocean Islands Stories (Tyrer, 1962). The book was as tribute, not unlike Williams’ and Macdonald’s Phosphateers, to the “selfless work of the British Phosphate Commissioners over the year” (1962: 3-4). It celebrates Albert Ellis’ fifty years with the industry and that of Mr. A. Harold Gaze, the first general manager of the BPC. Talboys writes in praise of Gaze as, “the first General Manager of the undertaking, who held office until his death and whose wisdom and far-sightedness contributed greatly to the development of the undertaking” (1962: 4). This description of Gaze contrasts with that of Dr. Berwyn Lincoln Deans as recounted by his daughter,
Helen Deans was an assistant medical officer on Ocean Island in 1934 and had rather different memories of Gaze. In a letter to me Helen wrote:

Like my father, Harold Gaze was a member of the Congregational Church, and was active in the London Missionary Society. My father was disappointed that Harold Gaze apparently did little or nothing in response to his concerns about the poor health of the Chinese workers even though he supported missionary work. I believe Berwyn in private dubbed him ‘Harold Gaze both ways’ because I think my father believed that he put profit before principle (personal communication, 1999).

The significance of phosphate for the agricultural development of both Australia and New Zealand cannot be understated but while it was one of the most important building blocks of each nation, its memory has been suppressed in the popular consciousness (and history books) of both nations. In 1962, Talboys was writing:

The superphosphate that we manufacture locally from Nauru and Ocean Islands rock phosphate accounts for 90 percent of the total fertilisers used in New Zealand. When this supply was cut at the source during the Second World War, New Zealand was reminded sharply and unpleasantly of her reliance on Nauru and Ocean Islands. Because our primary industry is so closely linked with our national welfare, the whole nation, and not just our soil, was affected by this threatened phosphate famine (Tyrer, 1962: 4).

In June 2000, long after the mining had stopped on Banaba, and New Zealand had since turned to nitrogen based fertilisers, I gave a talk to curators at the Te Papa Tongarewa, the National Museum of New Zealand. Te Papa has a permanent exhibition on farming in New Zealand called “On the Sheep’s Back.” It was a tribute to the importance of the farming industry to the national development of the nation. In my talk it was soon revealed that not only had New Zealand ridden on the sheep’s back but on the grass that had developed from the soil which was fertilised “on the back” of Nauru and Ocean Islands.

Since I had first encountered the BPC images in the Melbourne Archives I’d been thinking about a visual project that would juxtapose images of mining on Banaba with farming in both New Zealand and Australia. Geoff Park, a senior staff member at the museum, pointed me in the direction of a man named Les Cleveland. He was a political scientist, photographer and musician who arranged a song called “The Phosphate Flyers” in 1956. The experiences of the men who worked with
phosphate in New Zealand are interesting when compared with those who worked in the mines. Both types of work were very dangerous if rather different. The men who worked in the topdressing industry distributed the phosphate while flying high above the earth, while the men on Banaba who extracted it worked up to a hundred feet inside the earth.

According to Geoff Park, this was a very “blokey” song that he had remembered from childhood listening to the radio. Les Cleveland wrote to me to say that he had arranged the lyrics for a song written by a New Zealand poet called Joe Charles. In the 1950s, he and Joe had worked together on a series of radio presentations which included Charles’ poetry. Both he and Charles had compiled rural folk songs and some of these had been turned into popular national ballads. Many of the men who flew the topdressing planes were ex-pilots who flew planes during World War II. It is worth reproducing most of Cleveland’s letter to me here:

I enclose the text of “The Phosphate Flyers” as sung on the recording and as printed in Charles’ book. It relates to the early phase of aerial topdressing in NZ when a lot of ex wartime pilots were earning a precarious living in backcountry flying. War surplus Tiger Moth aircraft were readily available. A hopper was inserted in the back seat to hold a load of phosphate. The pilot flew low over the hillside under treatment and released the stuff at the right moment. A similar technique was used for crop dusting. Later, Cessna aircraft were used. A network of airstrips was established in the NZ hill country and used for fertiliser dropping as well as for venison recovery. This involved picking up deer carcasses shot by meat hunters and flying them to locations where they could be processed for export. I once shared the cabin of a Cessna with the pilot, seven deer and my rifle and pack. Takeoffs were the most exciting part as we were seriously overloaded.

The song can be understood as a piece of occupational folklore which describes the dangers inherent in this kind of flying. (There was a considerable

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42 See http://www.techhistory.co.nz/pages/aerial%20top-dressing.htm for more information about New Zealand topdressing.
43 “The Phosphate Flyers” is one of the tracks in New Zealand Ballads, a 45 rpm, extended play recording issued by Tanza, Wellington in 1959. The words are by Joe Charles, a farmer and ballad writer of Otago and Canterbury. The musical arrangements and vocals are by Les Cleveland. A full text of “The Phosphate Flyers” is located in Black Billy Tea: New Zealand Ballads by Joe Charles, Whitcoulls, Christchurch, 1981.
44 Dr. Les Cleveland wrote to me on July 17 2001 from Wellington, New Zealand. Until retirement in 1987, he was a Reader in Politics at Victoria University in Wellington with a long background as a folklorist and ballad singer. Author of Dark Laughter: War in Song and Popular Culture, Praeger, Westport, Connecticut, 1992 as well as numerous articles on military occupational folksong. He collected, broadcast and made sound recordings of rural ballads from the South Island of New Zealand during the 1950s.
accident rate). Hence “The Phosphate Flyers” is a cautionary tale about the risks of sitting close to a petrol tank with an engine up front and a load of superphosphate behind you. But it is also a tribute to the occupational skills required in this high-risk activity with its anticipatory reference to space travel.

I have juxtaposed this song and an image of a crop duster with that of workers from Banaba. The former released phosphate from the air and the latter dug it up from inside the earth. All these men were connected by an industry that meant many different things for different people.

I was drinking beer in Sullivan’s bar
With a chap called Black Billy Joe,
Just listening to the gas and gab
Of the boys just back from the show.
A lanky leathery sheepman,
With a voice both loud and coarse,
Said, I saw the whole darned outfit,
But I never saw one horse!

A lot of hacks and ponies
Bred for show and sport,
But a horse, with guts and gallop
There wasn’t a likely sort.
And the riders? Well I ask you!
You should have seen the sights—
With fancy pants and bowler hats,
Bow ties and all that skite.

Where are the boys they used to breed,
That like their horses rough?
A moke that couldn’t buck them off
They thought was ladies’ stuff.

Here Black Billy Joe stuck in his oar,
He used to be a Jock once—
A bullock-busting side showman
Who knew the buck-jump stunts.
He said, I’ve ridden some horses
And a few bad bulls beside,
But I’ll tell you chaps there’s just one thing,
One thing, I’ll never ride;
And that’s these aerial topdressing planes—
The modern youngster’s hack—
You wouldn’t chase me into them
With a shotgun up my back.
I tell you, chaps, it takes a man
To be a phosphate flyer!

I don't like these blessed hencoops
Made of calico and wire,
You can't get in the flaming things
Without a mighty squeeze
Sitting on a petrol tank
With an engine up your knees,
And half a ton of 'super'
Sitting bang right on your neck.
You don't find enough to fill a sack
When they boys have a wreck!
And the way they throw things about—

It makes you dizzy to look,
They make a spry young sparrow-hawk
Look like a barnyard chook!
And another thing I'll tell you—
And you know you can't deny—
If ever those brilliant scientists
Make a rocket that you can fly,

And shoot it up to the moon and back,
Or twice as ruddy far,
There'll be more young bucks to fly it
Than flies around this bar.

Joe Charles 1981

Unfortunately, as on Banaba, the intense farming industry of New Zealand severely damaged the environment causing widespread soil erosion. One website describes it as an "ecological disaster." 47

45 Picture Courtesy of Te Papa Tongarewa, National Museum of New Zealand, Wellington.
46 Image from Burwood BPC collection (R132/1, Book 6: 29A to 36 A No. 540).
Accidental communities of memory

The Gilbertese men remembered Banaba in very pragmatic ways. It was a means to a material end and though they made a few good friendships along the way, they were not as romantic about their experiences. The Europeans, on the other hand (perhaps with the exception of the spunky Mary Zausmer) were more or less nostalgic for “Paradise.” My personal memories of the island are neither of these, fleeting yet informed by personal, academic and cultural contexts beyond the island and phosphate history.

Liisa Malkki argues that anthropology’s traditional focus on durable cultural structures undermines the existence of “transitory, nonrepetitive, anomalous phenomena” (Malkki, 1997: 91). The transitory communities of Banaba as well as the ensuing economic, social and political effects initiated by the company’s activities over the last century are an important example of this. They constitute what Malkki, drawing on Barbara Myerhoff’s concept, provisionally calls “accidental communities of memory” (ibid. 91). Unlike Myerhoff’s “accidental communities,” as in the case of Woodstock, for example, Malkki’s, however, “do not necessarily take such public, socially visible, narrativizable, or ritualised forms” (ibid. 91). Malkki’s communities are brought together accidentally by circumstances like war, a development project or in refugee camp.

The kinds of people and events brought together by the BPC form this type of community. Over the eighty-year life span of the industry, people from all over the world were born, lived on, or passed through Banaba. The message board run by Stacey King and Ken Sigrah attests to this (http://www.banaban.com/cgi-bin/banabangb). People are constantly writing in saying they were born on the island, and does anyone remember so and so from 1962, 1933, 1907... It was through networks like this that the now defunct Banaban Heritage Society—a kind of social/historical/aid club was formed out of Queensland Australia (see K.Teaiwa 1997).

Malkki’s discussion reflects on how to deal with such transitory phenomena in the context of anthropology’s predilection for structural phenomena, but the events she describes are not “anti-structural” in Turner’s (1969) sense. She is focused on the
"nonrepeating pattern," on "less explicit and often more biographical, microhistorical, unevenly emerging sense of accidental sharings of memory and transitory experiences" (Malkki 1997: 87 and 91). These are communities that do not usually take public form. Malkki argues that anthropology's focus on communities like nations, neighbourhoods, cultures may trivialize more anomalous collective events. Some kinds of communities are worthy of preservation while the other "does not become nameable at all" (ibid: 92).

Most people who share a common memory of Banaba—Banabans, Europeans, Gilbertese, Ellice Islanders, Chinese, Japanese—have never met each other but at some level feel attached to the island. The mining venture itself was not preserved as part of the national memories of either Australia and New Zealand; there are no public memorials of anything to do with Banaba or Nauru, for that matter, aside from "Phosphate House" in Melbourne and the various "Nauru" building, towers and "houses" that exist from Melbourne to Honolulu.48

So how does one write about such a community? My re-presentation of the memoirs above, juxtaposed with stories, images and experiences from other different, but connected, times and places is one possible method. My analysis inheres in the very juxtaposition of multiple memories or events. But Malkki points out that anthropologists need to recognize that "Who one is, what one's principles, loyalties, desires, longings, and beliefs are—all this can sometimes be powerfully formed and transformed in transitory circumstances..." (ibid: 92). Such a situation has applied to Banaba since 1900 and as Malkki points out there are differences between journalists, focused on events, and anthropologists focused on culture (ibid: 93). Banaban history has been more often told in the media (including television and now the internet) more than academic anthropology or history.

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48 Nauruans, unlike Banabans, remained on their island and were paid much higher royalties for their lands. Their money was invested all over the world but long-term financial problems resulted in what is now a struggling economy, the kind of economy that now participates in the "Pacific Solution," housing refugee camps on behalf of Australia for cash (see Greg Fry, 2002).
Taking up the "Banahan Plight"

On September 10, 1995, a woman named Stacey King, 49 a descendant of four generations of mining company employees, formed the Banaban Heritage Society. The island was a major site of her family history so she decided to go to Rabi in 1993 to meet the Banabans. This was during a very tumultuous period, just after the Council of Leaders had been dissolved due to internal corruption (see K. Teaiwa 1999 and Report by Aidney et al. 1994). In June 1991 wages for Council workers had not been paid for months, people were not able to pay for food, buses had stopped running and the health of the people was deteriorating (Report of the Committee of Inquiry 1994. 90). Most of the members of the Council of Leaders, led by then Chairman, Rev. Terubea Rongorongo, went off on an overseas trip that cost $400,000 while people on Rabi were close to starving (ibid: 90). On 16th December 1991, the Banaban community led by elders and three members of the Council overthrew the Rongorongo faction. The Council was dissolved by the Fiji government in February 1992 and until 1996, Rabi Island was managed by three government appointed administrators (ibid: 1).

By the time King showed up on Rabi, people were feeling rather pitiful and desperate. She was viewed as a potential source of much needed help and she quickly took up the "Banaban cause." King had neither legal nor research experience but was able to rally former employees and BPC descendants who all felt a deep connection to the island. She started a newsletter called "Banaba/Ocean Island News" and began a trade/aid relationship with Rabi. Through her ever widening networks she organized books and second-hand goods from clothing to computers to be sent to Rabi. She also created a website for the Society which soon drew interest from across the world. She talked about taking continuing Banaban grievances over the mining to the United Nations and becoming their formal spokesperson. 50 She began to collect historical artefacts and documents related to Banaba which she kept as the psuedo-

49 See earlier discussion in Chapter 2.
50 See K. Teaiwa (1997) for a critique of the Banaban Heritage Society. In 1997 the Rabi Council of Leaders decided to sever all ties with the Society. This was done through a formal letter and soon the Society was dissolved. King, however, did not stop her cause. It continues to exist at www.banaban.com. I have followed King's activities for years but much of the earlier material posted on the web, has now disappeared.
official “representative” of the people on Rabi. She even had a *marabal* constructed in her Queensland backyard. She organized a major “Homecoming Trip” which attracted great international interest especially when marketed as an island-hopping adventure. King’s society was a problematic mix of aid, tourism, colonial nostalgia and anthropology.

In his 1994 collection on Banaba, HE Maude referred to King as “the good Samaritan of the Banabans” (Maude 1994: xii). Some on Rabi were desperate for advice and King filled the role that many Europeans had occupied over the last decades. In the minds of these Banabans, white people were able to help them because white people were rich, lived overseas and had important connections. Although King was none of these, her importance was drastically elevated on Rabi. This was an appealing position for her and she soon devoted her life to the Banaban cause. In 1996 my father was elected Chairman of the Council which meant that the people of Rabi were ready to start governing themselves after several years. Despite this, King continued to act as a representative of Banabans with little or no consultation with the RCL. They soon asked that the Society cease its activities and most of the members complied with their wishes. King, however, by now, had left her Australian husband and taken a Banaban partner named Ken Sigrah, who has brought some legitimacy to her cause. They continue to operate a website, coordinate international interest in Banaba affairs and have just published *Te Rii ni Baraba* (2001) which claims to be the “true” history of the people, “true” because it was co-authored by a Banaban. Sigrah certainly represents some of the interests of a number of Banabans but in this history like others, there are multiple truths.

This is the background to the film *Coming Home to Banaba* written and produced by Jeremy Cooper with the BBC for the Open University in England as part of a course on Pacific Studies. Cooper actually found the Banaban story via King’s website and as he writes in “The Making of Coming Home to Banaba”, this “was a project born and developed on the internet” (Cooper 1998: 2). The resulting program was first broadcast on BBC 2 in August 1998 and continues to appear at least once a year, all over Europe. It features some of the travellers during King’s “Homecoming Trip.” The trip was a disaster. A chartered ship was supposed to facilitate the island-hopping adventure between Rabi, Tarawa and Banaba but this
never ensued. According to former BHS members, $30,000 paid out by potential travellers was handed to King and never seen again.51 She had made a bad business deal with the owner of the ship in Kiribati who refused to refund the BHS deposit. Many people who wanted to go on the trip did not go and King did not apologize for the fiasco. The Fiji media followed this story as the “motley crew” of the homecoming expedition sought funding and support across Fiji. A few, however, did make it by flying themselves directly to Tarawa including the two-man crew of this documentary.52

As King and Sigrah are central figures in the film, its repeated screening continues to increase her and Sigrah’s legitimacy as Banahan representatives. They have now copyrighted all their “knowledge” on Banaban history and contemporary affairs, and operate as a research/cultural/political team. In actuality, neither of them are very welcome on Rabi and few Banabans ever have a chance to see their website. Sigrah and Stacey have achieved somewhat infamous status in the popular discourse on Rabi and few are short of stories about their trip and their partnership. The 1997 “Homecoming trip” is popularly called “The Honeymoon Trip.” There are also tales of King falling in the pinnacles on Banaba and losing her camera. According to these stories, the spirits of Banaba were not happy and wrenched the camera from her fingers. Apparently, the spirits even caused her to fall again at the jetty at Betio when the boat returned to Tarawa.53

Most people on Rabi have no idea what is being written or said on their behalf by King and Sigrah and especially not on the internet. The problem with their approach is that it claims to be the “true” story of the Banabans but does not take into account people’s shifting allegiances, preoccupations and strategic survival activities. Sigrah claims that as a clan spokesman and with the support of the Banahan elders, he is the only true authority on the Banabans. A recent posting on

51 My sources for this figure and the stories about the disastrous Homecoming Trip are not textual. It is well known on Rabi that the trip was a disappointment for many. I talked specifically to a former member of the BHS in New Zealand who had lost several hundred dollars to this trip. She never even made it to Fiji. This is the problematic background that is left out of the documentary. Several more positive versions of the trip, however, can be found at http://www.banaban.com.
52 See http://www.olio.demon.co.uk/banaba/index.html for a transcript, images and background of this documentary.
53 These stories are not presented here as “facts” but part of popular story-telling topics on Rabi. I heard them in 1997 from a few younger Banabans who also went on the Homecoming Trip.
the message board of their website states this clearly with respect to another site run by Jane Resture\(^5\) which gives another (more inclusive) version of Banahan and Gilbertese history. Sigrah writes:

I would like to bring it to the attention of all those wanting to learn about Banaban history that there is another Banaba/Banaban website administered by a Jane Resture that gives a FALSE (his emphasis) history about the Banabans. We as Banabans have our own identity and heritage that has been well preserved amongst true Banabans. Jane's information has been taken straight from the writings of Maude, especially THE BOOK OF BANABA. Through the recent release of "TE RII NI BANABA - The Backbone of Banaba" the true history of our people has finally been published in line with our elders and Banaban community wishes. I therefore would like to stress that I as a Banaban, clan speaker and historian condemn this false history on behalf of the Banaban people. For those who want to learn true Banahan history please contact me or visit our website www.banaban.com.\(^5\)

Sigrah, however, does not speak for the entire Banaban community either and his self-styled authority annoys at least some of us.

*Coming Home to Banaba*

The film begins with a most familiar Pacific trope—the arrival of a group of weary travellers to a faraway, forgotten island. In the background are the lively voices of a Banaba dancing group performing in the *mareaba* at Uma. The travellers are a mixture of Europeans and Banabans who are making an epic journey back to Banaba. After forty-eight hours on the sea from Tarawa, their boat docks in the deep waters of the man-made cove at Home Bay, a place filled with the decaying fixtures of a long-forgotten mining town. The travellers are ferried to shore in a small wooden dinghy guided along a thick rope extending from the boat to the land. The Gilbertese crewmember pulls the dinghy along the rope and the weary travellers are now “home.”

It's such a journey to get here, you're physically tired, you're emotionally completely drained. You get off that boat and you see this island and you see the wreckage out in Home Bay—Oh, and your heart just breaks (King).

\(^5\) See the message of February 24 at http://www.banaban.com/cgi-bin/banabangb
Looking freshly showered with a frangipani flower in one ear, Stacey King is the first interviewed for this film. In a dark blue T-Shirt sporting the word “Minnesota,” she sits comfortably in one of those rattan chairs I also occupied on the wooden verandah of the old mansion once known as “Ellis House.” The camera cuts from King to the old cantilever that now lies broken in the waters of Home Bay. King is followed by a sequence with a thin elderly Banaban woman named Teburerera Touakin. According to the film transcript she was born on Banaba but left during World War II. Touakin says, “This island is really ruined. We searched for remains of our houses – nothing! We searched for our lands where we used to walk – nothing!” Her words are punctuated by the familiar word “akea,” there is “nothing!” Of course, most of the island has been mined and shipped away but it is the dilapidated state of things which really disappoints those who have returned on this trip. Many of those who left this island during the Japanese occupation remember it as a modern colonial town, very much like what we saw in the archival film in Chapter 2.

The commentator goes on to give some geographical and historical information on Banaban history and their relocation to Rabi. The visual images correspond with his commentary—a map, a boat, a journey. The travellers lie squashed in the hold of their boat sleeping in awkward positions that I am also familiar with after making my own harrowing trip to the island just a couple of weeks before they arrived. Their journey is portrayed as a rare opportunity for both Banabans and the former company employees and their children. As the “motley crew” of the boat gaze forward expectantly, looking for a first sight of the island, he says, “These are people whose relationships with a tiny Pacific Island, and therefore with each other, have been shaped by huge global forces—by international commerce, by the politics of empire, and by world war” (Cooper 1998: 2). The camera cuts back from the obviously emotional faces of the approaching party and the lively singing of the Banaban performers returns. Stacey King walks up to spray perfume on the dancers to show her appreciation for their welcome. It is then that we learn that she is a descendant of generations of miners. “All of us Australians,” says King, “we grew rich during those years in our wheat fields, in our production of sheep and wool, through Banaban phosphate.”
The first female member of the Rabi Council of Leaders, Nei Makin Corrie, has made this trip and the camera cuts to her saying, “Magnificent mansions have been built, but my house has been thrown away. It's been cast aside. People have taken the phosphate off my land and made themselves comfortable. I, too, would love to have that comfort.” Corrie, in a meeting of the Council of Leaders several years later, reminds them that she thought Australia would be a better home for the Banabans rather than Fiji. Her comments on the desired material comforts contrast rather starkly with King's next statement: “Forget the money issue, it's a physical issue of actually putting that soil in Australia.” Corrie's desire, as is the case with many of the older generations on Rabi, is for compensation for the mining. People would be satisfied with material compensation for the devastation of the island. But for King, it is more about the moral and physical problems of using Banahan land to fertilize Australia. The camera cuts to old mining footage.

The documentary then focuses on the mining process, the creation of phosphate over millions of years and how the resulting land could be mined away in just eighty years. We then meet Ken Sigrah who says, “So when the land goes and that’s it, when the sacred land goes and all our waterholes are gone, the spirit of peoples seems to be lost too.” Sigrah's statement implicates all Banabans but certainly doesn't include the hundreds of Rabi islanders who do not view Banaba as a “sacred land,” and who barely know anything about the place. These, however, are not the voices that dominate the formal politics and cultural debates on either of the islands.

The documentary then moves to a brief discussion about the incident that led to the discovery of phosphate on Banaba. Unfortunately they get the famous story wrong. Almost every piece of writing on the discovery of phosphate states that it was a piece of Nauruan phosphate, used as a doorstop in the Sydney office of the Pacific Islands Company, that led Albert Ellis to the nearby island of Banaba. The commentator rather suggests that it was a piece of Banaban phosphate that found its way to Australia. The poignant irony of the whole history behind the devastation of Banaba is that it was Nauruan phosphate that led the rapacious BPC to that part of the vast Pacific. At the time, Nauru was under German rule and the British/Australian company had no way to secure a monopoly on phosphate on.
Nauru. They cleverly decided to search for a nearby island of similar geological formation and thus found Banaba.\(^{56}\)

This is followed by a sequence of archival photographs, many of which I had also viewed during my research in Melbourne and Adelaide, and several of which are reproduced in parts of this thesis. We briefly glimpse the workers who became a part of the transformation of the island and we also hear about the first signs of Banaban activism as they demand better royalties for the devastation of their island. Ken Sigrah’s village, Buakonikai, was destroyed by the mining after the British Government imposed a law permitting the compulsory acquisition of Banaban land. This was necessary for the company after the Banabans refused to lease more land at their current royalty rates.\(^{57}\) The camera cuts to Ken Sigrah:

> After what I’ve seen I just feel sorry for what happened to my people—sorry for them, even for myself. These kinds of feelings it’s pretty hard to reveal, you know. And this is where our ancestors were born. Even though we were born in Fiji our hearts and our spirits are still in this place. We’ll never forget Ocean Island. That’s it (Cooper 1998: 4).

Sigrah’s sad statements resonate with the “pity” theme that I originally wanted to explore with respect to how Banabans viewed their past. Losing the land is like losing a part of yourself. But this simple anti-colonial narrative is but one way of looking at the multiple sites and events that constitute Banaban history and identities. With the death of the village the documentary moves into the theme of death and the loss of life under the Japanese occupation of the island between 1941 and 1945. What the documentary fails to mention is that the company packed up and pulled out as soon as the threat of occupation was imminent. They in effect left behind their workers and the Banaban people to suffer at the hands of the occupying force and even destroyed much of the mining facilities so that the Japanese would not be able to continue the mining. Japan had in fact been the third largest buyer of phosphate before the war.

Councillor Makin Corrie was a young girl when the Japanese first landed. During this period her father was beheaded while she watched. The execution of

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\(^{56}\) See Williams and Macdonald “The Office Doorstop” (1985: 10-21).

\(^{57}\) See my Masters thesis on Arthur Grimble and the compulsory land acquisition ordinance of 1928 in which Grimble spells out the “points for life,” and “points for death” for the village of Buakonikai.
Banabans is a popular feature in the Banaban dancing group drama performed on Rabi every December 15. The audience usually laughs when the members act out these executions. Perhaps many people on Rabi do not feel as emotionally connected to the Banaban past. Makin Corrie watches this performance every December 15 and does not laugh. And, when the Banaban Dancing Group performed on a 1997 tour of Japan, including Tokyo, Chiba, Saitama and Osaka, both the group and the audience members were in tears during this part of the performance. According to the Japanese Representative for the Banaban Heritage Society in Japan, Manabu Kitaguchi, some of the old marines who were stationed on the island during that period were in the audience and apologized afterwards for their behaviour during the occupation.58

Soon after Sigrah’s and Makin’s sad statements, the film moves into the similarly sad experiences of the Banabans after being shipped to Rabi. The Japanese occupation of the island perfectly suited the colonial and company problems by getting rid of the indigenous inhabitants. We learn about another widely known story about the experiences of the first landing on Rabi. The Banabans were given tents to live in even though they’d been promised nice houses by their advisor, Major Kennedy, in Tarawa.59 They were also given very few rations, about a couple months supply, which ran out fast. They lived with the cows that were still grazing on the former plantation island and most Banabans had never seen cows before. Many of the older people died in the new colder, wetter environment. The hurricanes in particular scared the people used to the more uniform and benign climate of the central Pacific. They had never experienced such weather. My father remembers very clearly how they built a house similar to the Gilbertese houses on Tabiteuea (out of thatch and wood) and how when a hurricane came, his brothers and sisters had to hang onto the roof in order to stop it from blowing away. When the wind would shift suddenly, they then ran to the other side of the house and hung onto the roof there. The film cuts to images of a Pacific hurricane.

59 See this drama as performed on December 15 2000 in the video accompanying Chapter 5.
This is juxtaposed starkly with the more positive experiences of the colonial inhabitants of the island. Three women, including King’s mother, all have pleasant memories of the island and as children, had no idea of the exploitation occurring all around them. Home footage of their merry periods on the island swimming, parties, parades, and sporting events dissolve into the dilapidated present as the former residents reflect on the past. A former miner, Michael Kaukas, obviously upset by the current state of Banaban existence says, “We were mining somebody else’s land basically – I was aware of that. But we weren’t aware of the actual plight they were in until we got took back to Melbourne and started to read up about them – and then we realised how bad they’d been done by.” He hangs his head in shame, and sobs.

We then learn about the Banaban suit against the British Government. This is well known as one of the longest and most expensive suits in the history of law in Britain. Banabans didn’t get what they asked for but instead were offered a settlement by the company for A$10,000,000 Australian. In the documentary it is suggested that the British Government offered this sum, but this is wrong. The British Government gave aid money to the sum of £1 million. Altogether this was far below the profits which benefited the company, the farmers, the colonial administration and the newly independent Kiribati government, launched in 1979 on money generated in a phosphate trust fund set up by the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony (see Van Trease, 1994). The story continues to unfold:

Since 1979 about 400 Banabans have moved back to live on Banaba. The population of the island now is about the same as it was in 1900. These are the lucky few, chosen from among the many who wished to return (Cooper 1997: 9).

This film not only makes a problematic assertion that home is best, but it asserts that “home” for Banabans can only be Banaba. The above statement by the commentator describing those who returned to Banaba as “the lucky few,” distorts the feelings of the diverse community who now survive on Rabi. Indeed, many of the older people prefer Banaba, but the younger generations, born and raised on Rabi Island playing rugby and drinking kava would find life on the six square kilometre Banaba rather difficult. The “lucky few,” apparently “live like squatters in the derelict and asbestos-ridden accommodation left by the BPC.” In addition, they have to survive on the
wages provided by the Council back in Fiji. Food crops only grow on Banaba when there is rain and sometimes it will not rain for up to three years at a time. They rely on store-bought food, which is inherently unreliable because of the infrequent cargo supply trips to the island. The camera cuts to a shot of canned corned beef, canned peaches and canned curry chicken! We discover that the biggest problem on Banaba is that of adequate water. The BPC actually shipped water to the island from Australia and the current population are surviving on the dregs in the water tanks. It seems to me, that those on Banaba are actually the “unlucky” few.

King sounds hopeful when she says, “Let’s bring the technology back and let’s do something positive. Let’s use this as a showplace for the rest of the world. Let’s show the world what can be done to rehabilitate a place.” But those who are actually mandated to look after the island—the Rabi Council in Suva and the Kiribati government based in Tarawa—have other urgencies to contend with and do not work closely with either King or Sigrah. So it is still unclear as to how King might realize her rehabilitation goals. Sigrah says that if it is possible to rehabilitate the island, then, “definitely we’ll come back.” “We”? “Who”? Sigrah and King currently live in Queensland, Australia, and it is from there that they maintain their Banaba interest network. Till this day no one knows for sure who funds their projects.

But Sigrah is right when he says that, “It’s awkward to teach our Banaban custom on a different land – that’s Fiji.” The environment of Rabi, the proximity to Fijian, Indian and Tuvaluan communities on Vanua Levu, Taveuni and Kioa, the mixture of Gilbertese and Banaban customs that currently comprise Rabi life, all these are different from what might have developed had Banabans remained on Banaba. Perhaps they would have become more like Nauruans who became some of the richest islanders in the Pacific with some of the worst financial and health problems. We will never know.

Sigrah appears to want to return to a more traditional way of life on Banaba where, “we teach our children on our own land, our custom – because this is where our ancestors were born.” Though Sigrah has never lived on Banaba he valorises “tradition” (on Banaba) over the current syncretic culture that has developed on Rabi. King, on the other hand, talks about technology and progress: “Banabans have been pushed into the modern world – we cannot walk away and leave them. We
must give them technical advice, assistance... rehabilitation programs, projects, development projects, infrastructure, desalination plants” (Cooper 1998: 11). It is not clear if she is talking just about Banaba or Rabi as well. It does not seem as if King understands that Banabans did run their own affairs for decades and their own leaders squandered the money. The continuing point of reference for both Sigrah and King is the company and colonial administration even though Banabans themselves have mismanaged their monies.

Banabans on Rabi did have projects, technical advice, property, vehicles, cooperatives, a fishing company, electricity, telephones and even housekeepers on Rabi in the 1950s and 60s. The missing ingredient in the transformation of Banaban culture was not technology or money but education. Not technical, or religious education but a broader historical, social, political and ethical education. This was something rarely available to any Islander under the British Colonial administration.

The camera moves through the schools and the young generations growing up on this island. A montage sequence follows and we are swept back to the old phosphate plant, to Stacey King and her call for technical advice, to the squatter settlements, to a close up of rock being shifted by bulldozers, to a famous shot of the Banaban contingent to the court case in England walking solemnly down a London street in their smart suits, to Banaban dancers in the mmeaba, to a happy blonde woman waving to the camera during the days of the BPC. The narrator continues:

The history of Banaba is in many ways typical of the Pacific Islands. It is a story of encounters between the old world, and the new, between the traditional and the modern.... And running alongside the story of injustice etched in the very landscape of Banaba, is the romantic vision of the South Sea Island.

Stacey King describes the place as magic: sitting above the rock at Buakonikai, the sea, the sky, the beach at Uma, are all magic. She says, “They can mine this place, they can do whatever they want to it, they can run a bulldozer through it all, it’s still Banaba.” I would disagree. After twenty million tonnes of earth have been removed, after the entire face of the landscape has been transformed, it’s nothing like the place that Banabans once knew it. That is the reality of Banaban history and of survival on Rabi. The film ends with old Terurerai Touakin who is sniffling from what appears to be a cold. With Sigrah interpreting for her, she says she would prefer to stay on
Banaba, to die and be buried there. The end title states that Teburerai did die but at Tarawa on her journey back from Banaba. It seems that King's words, "You wait until you try to leave this place – that's when it hits you," have rung true for at least one old Banaban.

A Perspective from "the homeland": Moanatu Bakatu

According to my father, in the late 1960s the BPC was hiring a small number of Banabans to work on the island. One such man, Moanatu Bakatu, joined the BPC in 1968 as a recruit and he stayed on after the industry closed down in 1979. I videotaped him during my visit to the island in 2000. His description of life on the island today contrasts with the imaginings of the elders on Rabi of Banaba as a viable homeland and indeed the romantic approach of the "homecomers" in the Open University documentary. Moanatu emphasized how people living on Banaba now rely almost totally on the Rabi Council for monetary support. Because of frequent droughts food crops could not grow consistently and they had little water.

According to Moanatu in the period of the interview they were reduced to three buckets of water per family per day. The drought had prevailed for three years when I visited the island in April 2000. The Kiribati government had installed a desalination plant obtained from the Chinese government but it did not seem to produce enough water for the needs of the 290 or so residents. They were allowed to bathe once a day and do laundry once a week. I actually saw mothers bathe most of their young children in the sea. Shipping services were every two months and supplies in the store were dwindling. Moanatu looked directly into the camera as if he were talking to the Rabi Council and the rest of the world and said in Gilbertese:
We appreciate the assistance of the Rabi Council of Leaders and the opportunity to publicize our plight.

Magical Realism

Canberra: June 25 2001

outside my office window:
silver eucalyptus
cold

fossil of an architect’s psychotropic trip

delicate new moon
bird poo on the sill

and now:
back to phosphate

K. Teaiwa 2002

Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford (1995) begin one of my favourite articles like this: “Only a dialogue with the past can produce originality” (Wilson Harris in Petersen and Rutherford 1995: 185). The authors write that Wilson Harris believed, “each living person is a fossil in so far as each man carries within himself remnants of deep-seated antecedents” (ibid).

Floating around in the psyche of each one of us are all the fossil identities. By entering into a fruitful dialogue with the past one becomes able to revive the fossils that are buried within oneself and are part of one’s ancestors (ibid).

Petersen and Rutherford recount a lecture that Wilson Harris gave in Aarhus called “Magical Realism” (ibid: 186-187). I understand the term to apply to a postcolonial literary or cinematic genre in which the supernatural is not separated from prosaic reality. Harris told a story about an experience he had in Guyana on an expedition into the Potaro river, a tributary of the Essequebo which runs out of Brazil into the Atlantic. He is first struck by the differences between the landscape of the coast and

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60 My office is in the Coombs building, described by some as the “catacombs.” It is a set of three interlocking hexagonal buildings with a courtyard in the middle of each. One might take years to learn to navigate it. Some never do.
that of the interior of the region. Here Harris had a revelatory encounter with the concept of place and language as a tool for describing place and community, in addition to identity and the entire past to which he was ancestrally connected.

Harris was part of a team gauging the river for hydro-electric power. He describes that part of the forest as a place where it seems, "... as if the sky is a lake and the rivers are pouring from the sky" (ibid: 186). The team had to anchor their boat at both the stem and the bow in order to take a reading at right angles to the bank so they could gauge the river at its highest and lowest points. As Harris told his story, he painted the richest of pictures of this place with its stark juxtapositions of color and texture. He then described a dangerous incident where the river began to swirl and one of the anchors gripped the river bed causing the boat to spin and take water. To prevent the boat from sinking they cut this anchor free and ended the drama.

Harris then says that two or three years later while he and another team were gauging the river in the exact same way the same incident occurred. This happened more strongly than the last and they started to sink. First they tried to cut the rope but the man at the task was so shaken that his effort was useless. Then the outboard mechanic yanked the anchor and it pulled free. They dragged the anchor to shore and discovered that this anchor had pulled up the same anchor they lost three years earlier.

It is almost impossible to describe the kind of energy that rushed out of that constellation of images. I felt as if a canvas around my head was crowded with phantoms and figures. I had forgotten some of my own antecedents—the Amerindian/Arawak ones—but now their faces were on the canvas. One could see them in the long march into the twentieth century out of the pre-Colombian mists of time. One could also sense the lost expeditions, the people who had gone down in these South American rivers. One could sense a whole range of things, all sorts of faces, all sorts of figures. There was a sudden eruption of consciousness, and what is fantastic is that all came out of a constellation of two ordinary objects, two anchors (ibid: 187).

While staring at the spindly writings or authoritative typing of colonial and company administrators, the images of buoys and wheels and hoppers, and the actual rusty machines on Banaba I similarly felt like a tunnel to the past had suddenly opened up.
The juxtaposition of Banaba memories in this chapter illustrates the situated and subjective way in which place and the past shape specific identities, trigger specific memories and feelings. In a piece which resonates with many of the ideas articulate by Harris, Petersen and Rutherford, Albert Wendt writes of the "art of remembering" (Wendt, 1987).

A society is what it remembers; we are what we remember; I am what I remember; the self is a trick of memory. Physically and genetically we are the unfolding of our DNA, the programmed memory of our genes, which, incidentally, can now be altered through biotechnology. And, as all historians know, history has everything to do with memory and remembering: history is the remembered tightrope that stretches across the abyss of all that we have forgotten (ibid: 79).

Banaba is all but lost to the memory of New Zealand and Australian society but not to specific individuals and certainly not to Banabans or Gilbertese. One is tempted to take personal experiences as evidence for the centrality of heritage or identity in the making of "culture" but as Petersen and Rutherford warn, our fossil values have two sides. They can be revelatory as in Harris' case or invoked for national and racial superiority and become prejudices similar to the approach used by Sigrah and King (2001) when they talk about "true histories" and "real Banabans." Harris thus discusses the possibility of "architectonic" approaches to fossils in which material is never static, but always understood anew. Petersen and Rutherford write, "The possibility and necessity of beginning again is always inherent in it; true permanence is never static, it is an eternal process of becoming, susceptible to dialogue with otherness" (Petersen and Rutherford, 1995: 188).
PART II: CREATIVITY/SURVIVAL?

Between our islands
the sea lurks
like a monstrous storm
wrapped in mystery
on it, we conquered
mountains and dared valleys
in our puny wooden boats,
just visiting relatives

Ruperake Petaia¹

Figure 69. Nei Aom on a motor-canoe between Tabiteuea North and South

In the last two chapters we have explored specific Banaban and Gilbertese histories and reflected upon the conjunction of experiences created by the phosphate industry on Banaba. I would now like to move to the contemporary relationships and exchanges resulting from such a multifaceted history. My argument in the next two chapters is that the mining industry created two sets of practices which are contradictory. The first stems from what I have just explored in Part 1— how an exploitative past can create a sense of victimhood leading to articulations of otherness against groups with whom one might normally have more fluid relationships (cf Chappell in Hanlon and

¹ This poem was used on the soundtrack for “Boiling Ocean II” produced by the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, University of the South Pacific (2000).
White 2000, and Silverman 1977). This is illustrated by Sigrah and King’s agenda to establish a “real” and “true” Banaban history and tradition (cf Keesing 1989; Linnekin and Poyer 1990).

One would think that visiting relatives is about as mundane and perfunctory an activity one can perform. In the next two chapters I’d like to navigate the far more tumultuous waters that exist between Banabans and Gilbertese, many of whom are related by blood but divided by the phosphate mining history. While Banabans and Gilbertese do have many cultural differences, it is the very focus on “difference” which has soured relationships over time. In this chapter I would like to critique those tendencies to disconnect Banabans from Gilbertese or I-Kiribati by exploring the connections between some of my own extended family members.

One of the most damaging things instigated by the company on Banaba was a political division between Banabans and Gilbertese which in one context set up Banabans as landowners and by implication superior to Gilbertese labourers. Silverman quotes one of the first and most influential Banahan leaders, Rotan Tito, as often saying, “We did not come to Fiji to be workers on the land, but to get our money...” (Silverman, 1971: 195).

Despite centuries of contact between Banaba and the Gilbert Islands, through the concretization of money with land and systematisation of land ownership through practices like Maude’s land commission, Banabans became socially, culturally and economically distanced from people of other islands. They began to articulate their identity against a European “other” and then applied the same binary logic to other groups. Under colonial rule and as a matter of community action against exploitative colonial policies (cf Silverman, 1971: 154), groups normally differentiated by kainga or district became the “Banabans” and Gilbertese, for example, became “others.”

The following extract from a 1976 letter to the editor of the Fiji Times from Thomas Teai, secretary to the Rabi Council of Leaders, lucidly illustrates this tension.

Reply to the Gilberts

We would not mind if the Gilbertese were to refer to us as “Our Banaban cousins” in the same way as the British refer to their “American cousins,” a relationship that

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2 A thorough examination of the Message Board on King and Sigrah’s website (http://www.banaban.com) lucidly illustrates their agenda.

3 This is obvious from origin stories that connect Banaba to lands in the Gilberts and Samoa, for example (see Maude 1994 and Silverman 1971).
is not to be taken too literally. But the kinship that the Gilbertese are so anxious to claim goes no deeper than that.

Intermarriage between Banabans and Gilbertese does not change the racial origin of the participants. A Gilbertese marrying a Banaban remains a Gilbertese just as a Fijian marrying a Tongan remains a Fijian.

The Gilbert Islands statement mentions, rather puzzlingly that when we Banabans came to live in Fiji after the war we brought 152 Gilbertese men with us. So what?

They had been with us in Japanese captivity and we had shared many hardships. They asked us to take them to Rabi. That established sympathy and friendship. Nothing more.

They remain Gilbertese. They own no land on Rabi, as they would if they were Banabans... (Fiji Times September 9, 1976).4

Teai’s British: American, Gilbertese: Banahan analogy is weak but presented in a very charged political context. From the late 1960s till the early 1980s, Banaban nationalism was at its peak on both Rabi and Banaba (see Video 5). The Banabans wanted two things— independence from the colony of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands,5 and compensation from the British Government and BPC for the damage caused by the mining industry (see K.Teaiwa 1999). One of the major strategies towards independence from the Gilberts was for Banabans to establish themselves as culturally and racially different from Gilbertese. This incensed Gilbertese politicians in the 1970s who were themselves working towards independence from Britain and were relying on a Reserve Fund, based on income from phosphate shipments, to seed and sustain their economic future (cf Van Trease 1993: 5-6, 183-189). Many in the general Gilbertese population, however, thought Banabans should have a right to the fruits of their own land and did not share the views of the Gilbert government.6

The knowledge that Teai responded to above was created by the Gilbert Islands Government in order to refute Banahan claims that they had not been consulted when Banaba was annexed into the Colony in 1901, ostensibly to secure phosphate for the British Empire. They issued a bulletin called “Ocean Island: Some Facts the Banabans Ignore” (Maude Papers, file 6.5) in which they stated that Banaban claims for independence could apply just as well to all sixteen islands in the group. All these islands had previously been autonomous but were then united under one colonial rule (ibid: 2). They further cited the administration of all islands under the one colony umbrella as being advantageous for the Banabans, in that the colonial government secured better

4 All the newspaper extracts from the 1970s were found meticulously collected by Maude in the Barr-Smith library in Adelaide.
5 The Ellice Islands became the independent nation of Tuvalu in 1976.
6 This knowledge I gained from talking to people in Tarawa and Tabiteuea about the tensions in the 1970s.
deals for them with the mining company than they would have had if left to the exploitative terms of the original agreement signed by the so-called “King.” They then cited the numbers of Gilbertese who had moved to Rabi with the Banabans. They wrote, “Even today of the 2,000 people living in Rabi over 250 have both parents born in the Gilbert Islands other than Banaba. It is indeed doubtful whether there is a single Banahan family which does not have relatives in the other Gilbert Islands” (ibid).

Of the 1003 people brought to Rabi on December 15, 1945, 300 were Gilbertese (see Maude Papers, F3). Silverman describes the predicament faced when the group arrived on Rabi, “... a new problem had to be handled, and that problem was one of the definition of the community itself” (Silverman, 1971: 163). The issue which the Rabi community has been trying to sort out for decades since is how to differentiate kinship from two kinds of place based nationality—Banaba and Rabi. As we’ll see in Chapter 5 this problematic continues into the broader Kiribati and Fiji national contexts.

Initially people adopted into Banahan families who received Banaban lands were considered Banaban. In Fiji this became very problematic as the Rabi community started to define a Banaban identity in relation to the company, the former colonial administration, the nearby Fijian communities and other Gilbertese communities throughout the country. The Banaban nationalist movement in the 1970s then shaped the way in which this process of differentiation played out (see Silverman 1971).

If before the mining industry the notion of who can claim to be a Banaban was more fluid it is now static. Since the upheaval in the early 1990s when Chairman Rongorongo, a man not Banaban by blood but adoption, was thrown out of office for corruption there is a new definition of “Banaban.” A Banaban is a Banaban by blood. Only a Banaban (by blood) can run for Rabi Council elections and only Banabans (by blood) can vote in those elections. 7

If the mining industry caused identity to become static and reduced to “blood” it also facilitated the incorporation of a vast array of cultural practices which now pervade both Kiribati and Rabi life. These continuously fluid connections manifest themselves in performances, everyday activities, marriage and kin relationships, despite Teai’s strong statements. “Difference” is usually articulated verbally, processed legally or recorded in a book like Sigrah and King (2000) and on their website (fn3). “Connection,” however is

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7 According to my father who was the next elected Chairman after the Rongorongo scandal, these definitions were initiated by the Banaban Council of Elders in the period of interim administration between 1991 and 1996. The three administrators were all appointed by the Fiji government and were neither Banaban nor Gilbertese.
also inscribed within and performed by the body of a part Banaban, part Chinese, part Tuvaluan, part Gilbertese person and in the way that Sigrah is acknowledged as part-Kosraean though he never articulates that fact. You simply can't change who your ancestors were or that they came from different places.

One might argue that fossil identities are perforce shaped by “culture” and a “part something, something” person will primarily express the habits and customs acquired in whatever culture and environment he or she is raised. It turns out, however, that there is nothing static or “essential” about either Banaban or Gilbertese culture. Hybrid heritages and histories resonate with and are not in contradistinction to culture, especially when we take culture to be inherently “creative” (see Lavie et al 1993).

It is my contention over the next two chapters that in practice, a dynamic sense of place and connection exists in and between Rabi and in Kiribati. This is partly illustrated by the articulation of land with body—te atua. Attending to the surfaces and movements of both lands and bodies reveals as much if not more about history and culture than political verbal articulations. On Rabi, however, assertions of identity and public gatherings often take Banaban essence to be the most important measure of identity and “rights” (see Silverman, 1971:180-209).

If a Gilbertese or other non-Banaban married to a Banaban wishes to speak in a public meeting he or she will most likely be silenced. Silverman recounts one particular example of this where a meeting was held to sort out a Banaban genealogy and a Gilbertese married to a Banaban woman tried to present his wife’s lineage. He was told, “You have nothing to do with this matter; leave the meeting house!” (Silverman 1971:323-324). Until now, Gilbertese on Rabi are usually barred from actively participating in any position of responsibility or leadership even if they contribute their labour to the village or Rabi community. This is one of the things my father tried to change during his four-year Chairmanship of the Council. He would always start a public meeting by inviting 

8 This information is from my father gained through long conversations about the politics on Rabi. During my visits I would also notice the various people who would visit our house to discuss the political problems playing out in Tabiang village in particular. Some people didn't want non-Banabans to participate in village committees and many non-Banabans felt like they were being excluded from decision-making activities. Such a situation has caused much bitterness cutting across family and other group lines.

In practices like dance the divide is much less concrete. The movements of the body, just like the movements of Banaban land, paint a vastly different picture even
when choreographed for political purposes. Banaban dancing, as it has developed on Rabi, for example, was specifically created to differentiate Banaban dancing from Gilbertese dancing and to create a cultural form and performance that would "represent" a distinct Banaban "race." However, as we'll see in Chapter 5, Banaban choreography, belies this desire for total difference.

In order to understand how Rabi dancing is really fluid we need to get a sense of the Gilbertese forms it both rebels against and builds upon. To that end in this chapter I now look closely at experiences I had learning Gilbertese dance and observing the process of preparing and performing on Tabiteuea in the southern part of Kiribati. My travels to Kiribati were initially prompted by the desire to talk to the men interviewed in Chapter 3 but because I am Gilbertese by heritage, I was obliged to stay with all the relatives I have on Tarawa and Tabiteuea. It was through meeting them in particular that I began to think beyond Banaba to the very real ways in which many Banabans are deeply connected to specific Gilbertese islands and families.9

I first want to contextualize my visit through an exploration of place and relationships in and between islands. I start with the assertion that a Gilbertese or I-Kiribati10 sense of identity and "home" is dynamic and inclusive.

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9 Let me make it clear, however, that I do not see my explorations of Gilbertese connections as anti-Banaban or as precluding Banaban claims against the former BPC governments. Justice can still be sought not by defining Banaban identity against all others but by building on the very strength of Pan-Pacific Banaban connections.

10 Gilbertese and I-Kiribati are interchangeable to a point. I-Kiribati (person of Kiribati) refers to the post-independence period and is a national identity. "Gilbertese," however, can be designated by blood and apply to Gilbertese living long term in Fiji, for example.
CHAPTER 4: BETWEEN OUR ISLANDS

Visiting relatives on Tarawa

Before arriving in Kiribati in 2000 I did not really think too much of Tarawa, except as that place I'd visited in 1997 with my father. That trip pivoted around the Otintaai Hotel, an air-conditioned haven in a boiling atoll environment. Unlike the majority of buildings on South Tarawa, the Otintaai had working bathrooms and I never ventured too far from it except to make a harrowing week-long journey to Banaba. Tarawa in 2000 was far, far different. Rather than what I had thought would be a stepping-stone, a resting place between Tabiteuea and Banaba, it was instead a non-stop roller coaster of family activity.

The landscape of South Tarawa is dominated by a large lagoon on one side and the open sea on the other. The land is no more than two metres above sea level with a narrow band of vegetation including coconut, pandanus, breadfruit, frangipani and uru1 trees, hibiscus bush and bakai or swamp taro. The various islets of South Tarawa are linked by causeways which allow the sea on each side to pass through channels beneath the concrete road. Most people live in the main town of Bairiki or Betio at the very southern end of the group. The other main centres include Teoraereke which holds the main Catholic station, Bikenibeu, another town centre, and the national airport at Bonriki.

My father's younger brother, Eritai, was one of sixty or so young people to be repatriated from Rabi to Banaba in 1976 and he lived there till 1999. He then moved to the capital of Kiribati with his wife and five children and since then I now have no less than fifty close relatives across South Tarawa living mainly between Bonriki and Betio. There are about seven households to which I am related by blood or adoption. Now, in one sense that would mean a great amount of support and companionship but it also meant a great deal of responsibility, time and resources. Many anthropologists attach themselves to one area, family or field assistant but that was not a choice for me. My personal relationships took precedence over any other possible connections. Tarawa was where I had the least amount of time to think about my research but where I spent the most time really living with people.

Before I arrived in Kiribati I had decided to stay with one cousin in her thirties, a graduate of the University of the South Pacific, who heads the women's section of the

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1 Uri (Guettarda speciosa) is a tree with small sweet smelling white flowers.
Ministry of Social Welfare. Aren lives in Betio with her husband Tarataake and daughter Annie, and various relatives who pass through or are attending high school on Tarawa.

In Kiribati the right to host a guest is taken very seriously so my choice to stay with this younger cousin did not go down too well with the other six families to whom I was much more closely related to, (including my own father’s brother’s). Needless to say, in my nine weeks in Kiribati, each one of my relatives, not just on Tarawa but Tabiteuea as well, made very sure that I spent some quality time with them. I’d sleep two or three days in one house, go on to the next and so on such that I always felt like I was on the move and they felt satisfied that I had “recognised” them. But constantly moving between houses on both islands meant I was always approaching the Kiribati world from multiple sites and perspectives.

One of the obvious problems I had in Kiribati was my poor Gilbertese speaking skills. I also don’t look very Gilbertese (people thought I was Samoan or Cook Island or part something-something from Fiji...). This wouldn’t have been such a problem if I was fluent because fluency in Gilbertese overrides any differences in phenotype. On one occasion I went to the Bank of Kiribati to open a temporary account and the teller’s eyebrows shot up when she saw my last name. She said. “Oh! You are I-Kiribati?”

Photo Montage

Figure 70. Taraina, Tenamo and Eritai (between Banraeaba and Ambo), Teekoiti (Teoraereke) 12

Figure 71. Annie (Betio)

Figure 72. Temaotarawa, Tom and children (Banraeaba)

12 Places in brackets indicate where my relatives live.
Figure 73. Tebongiro and Bwakoua (Betio)

Figure 74. Teaiwa (Bikenibeu)

Figure 75. Nakibae (Bikenibeu)

Figure 76. Map of Tarawa with arrows indicating location of my relatives' houses.
My sister recently put together two pamphlets of poetry published by “Fiery Canoe” Productions. The name Teaiwa can be broken down into Te-ai-wa meaning “the-fire-canoe” but it could also be interpreted as “to agitate, make move about, upset” (see Video 5). A Gilbertese person who doesn’t speak the language is certainly a troubling phenomenon since Gilbertese or Banabans aren’t famous for migrating to urban areas overseas where they might lose their language or be raised within a completely different culture. The Gilbertese who do live in places like Fiji, Hawai‘i, the Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands or Auckland still retain the language, though cultural practices and materials have changed. A nuclear family like ours, raised in Suva city, with sporadic interaction with Gilbertese and Banaban communities is something of an anomaly. So part of my long-term “homework” in trying to study our history included trying to learn Gilbertese. This was not just a pragmatic exercise that any anthropologist
might be expected to master. It was emotionally upsetting because I ought to have known this language (cf Ang 2002).

Teresia’s poem is about the absence of Gilbertese in our house. She says, “I cannot forget my first words in Gilbertese: where does it hurt? If it hurts? I cannot remember when my first words in Gilbertese became the last words in Gilbertese to be spoken in our house... when I was a baby” (T. Teaiwa, 2001c). My father initially decided that he would raise his children outside his culture so that we would have the best opportunities for education. My African American mother never learned the language. This worked very well for us in an education system that was almost completely graded in English with a population of students who spoke Hindi, Fijian, Cantonese, Mandarin, Gilbertese, Samoan, Tongan and Rotuman among others. In a system where prizes where handed out for first, second and third place, my father’s three daughters always topped their respective classes. This worked well only until two of us decided to devote our lives to Pacific Studies.

trying to understand Gilbertese exhausts me. but i did catch snippets in spite of myself (T. Teaiwa 1995: 9).

There are six years between Teresia and I and eight between her and my younger sister, Maria. Maria and I grew up knowing three Gilbertese phrases: ko na mtu:ri (greetings), ko uara (how are you?) and tiabo (goodbye). Beyond that we couldn’t understand many of our relatives who also spoke little English. As part of my Masters studies in 1998, I took Gilbertese lessons with a lecturer in language and literature at the University of the South Pacific. I passed my tests but never really managed to speak confidently or listen accurately. When I got to Kiribati in 2000 this proved to be a fairly big problem and I found myself actually decreasing rather than increasing my desire to understand the language. This had to do with feelings of pride and embarrassment. I would say: I matu (I am shy), I kabi (I do not know how) and the long sentence my father had jokingly used to describe my Gilbertese: I baretiri n taetae ni Kiribati (I make hideous Gilbertese!).

my incompetence in the Gilbertese language makes me rely more on my eyes than my ears. i read. i read lines on bodies. i study. i study each strand of hair on my grandfather’s bad haircut. i study the spaces between brylcreamed edges. follow the curves of foreheads and cheekbones. discover that eyebrows are really bones. and that islanders’ noses are not all that flat. marvel at the grace of a toothless mouth and stubborn chin (T. Teaiwa: 9).
My father has since returned to Banabans and Gilbertese social life and he is particularly close to all his relatives on Rabi. My trips back to Fiji always involve a visit to Rabi and in my twenties I am now surrounded by the Gilbertese language more than at any other period in my life. It is still much easier, however, to listen than to speak the language. Like my sister I spend more time watching people, examining surfaces, reflecting on bodies and everyday choreographies.

I have noticed, for example that in any given year, the personalities that circulate through any of my uncles’ or aunts’ houses on Rabi changes considerably over a few months or a year. But to watch them interact with each and the household spaces, you would think they have lived there since time immemorial! “Visitors” always know exactly what to do when staying with relatives. The boys go out to fish, collect firewood and food from the gardens. The girls wash dishes, clothes and small children, comb each other’s hair, cook and distribute extra food to other houses. Both boys and girls spend long hours telling stories sitting on an upturned boat at the beach or on the back porch or front steps of my uncle Terumwi’s house, or beside the volley ball court. Aunts and uncles talk to and direct their visiting nieces and nephews in the same way they treat their own children.

Banaban social life is always distributed across a number of villages and households and I found that this was very much the case in Kiribati. Almost everything I noticed in Kiribati came not from talking to but from watching people or visualizing their connections to both place and each other.

My kainga, my island, my world

One of the few things I’d planned before I left Fiji for Kiribati was to do an exercise with high school students to see which islands and countries each student was connected to. I was usually very busy with family activities on Tarawa and so I waited till I got to Tabiteuea Meang, or Tab North as it’s often called, to try this out.

I soon discovered that I was connected to no less than ten households on Tab North through both my grandfather and grandmother’s lineage. While I lived at the convent with Tina Mangarita, Tina Maria and Nei Aom, people would drop by out of the blue to give me bits of my genealogy which I recorded faithfully. While I was there to interview men who’d worked on Banaba, because of my connections to the island,

\[13\] \textit{Tina} literally means “mother.” The nuns are only called “sisters” in English.
information about my heritage was constantly available from, what initially seemed to me, random people I'd never met.

After this visit, however, I realized that people in Kiribati can always “locate” a Gilbertese person, no matter how far away they live because they know something about people's names and genealogies; many, many genealogical lines are connected through blood or friendship. Some of the people who came by with information were not my own blood relatives but those who knew my grandparents well. When people would ask the nuns, “who is she?” They would state my grandparent's names first, “tibun Teitua, tibun Takeua,” my father's name second, “natin Tabakatu,” and my own name last, “arana Katerina.” Then people “knew” who I was.

Figure 77. Map of Tabiteuea North (Meang) and South (MaISK) with arrows indicating where my relatives live.
Photo montage from Tabiteua

Figure 78. Tina Mangarita, Tina Maria, K. Teaiwa, Terabwata And Nei Aom (Tanaeang)

Figure 79. Raimon, Kaetea and family (Tanaeang)

Figure 80. Temokou, Nei Tai and family (Tanaeang)

Figure 81. Enere’s grandchildren

Figure 82. Tina Maria, Riribwe, Akineiti and family (Terikiai)
Before I went to Kiribati, my father made a very wise plan for my residence on Tabiteuea. I was not at all aware of the politics of hosting guests but he arranged for me to stay with the nuns at Tanaeang. I asked him why I didn’t just stay with relatives but he was unwavering on this point—I must stay with the nuns. I never realised just how significant his strategy was for my visit. Because of the intense feuds that can arise over hosting guests my residence at the convent in Tanaeang was seen to be problematic but neutral in terms of not favouring any household over another.

The idea for the exercise on mapping identity with people and place grew out of a presentation I did with Tarcisius Kabutaulaka for a conference at the University of the South Pacific called “Imagining Oceania” (see K. Teaiwa and Kabutaulaka 2000). In this presentation, we mapped out our lives across the Pacific; Tarcisius started in the Solomons, moved to Fiji and ended in Canberra where we’d met. I started in Fiji, moved to California, Honolulu, Rabi and finally to Canberra. This mapping was done “live” on a blackboard in front of an audience filled with prominent Pacific academics and two of

14 The arrangement of the photos corresponds to the location of Tekabwibwi in the north to Utiroa in the south. One more family, in Buota, is included in the next section on Takeua’s Kinship. I originally wrote out detailed descriptions of each household and my visits but then decided to leave them out of the thesis for the sake of space.
the first theorists of "Oceania"—Albert Wendt and Epeli Hau’ofa. Needless to say, such an audience made for two very nervous ANU PhD students.

At the end of the presentation we had a new map called "Our Oceania," which was rather different in scale and style from a normal geographic map. We were trying to critique the idea of a general theory for Oceania—"our sea of islands" (Hau’ofa 1993)—by presenting a map that was very specific to our own experiences. At the same time, we tried to emphasise connection by including Canberra, our place of study as a "meeting place" and universities in general as important sites on what was both a life history and identity map. The map enacted "theory" through experience and a visualization of Oceania. The drawing was never done on paper but rather performed live and spontaneously in relation to what each of us said to the audience (thus I cannot reproduce it here).

Epeli Hau’ofa attributes his oceanic imaginary to inspiration from the big island of Hawai’i. On the road from Kona to Hilo he is confronted by "... scenes of grandeur as I had not seen before" (Hau’ofa, 1993: 5). The world of Oceania loomed in his imagination as the volcanic majesty of Maunaloa and Kilauea rose out of the sea. For years Hau’ofa had been caught in the pitiful practice of teaching island students (at the University of the South Pacific which hosts the largest number of Pacific islander students in the world) just how helpless they were: "What kind of teaching is it to stand in front of young people from your own region... who come to university with high hopes for the future, and to tell them that their countries are hopeless?" (ibid: 5). His seminal work, "Our Sea of Islands," emerged after thinking about the:

... 'world enlargement' carried out by tens of thousands of ordinary Pacific islanders right across the ocean from east to west and north to south, under the very noses of academic and consultancy experts, regional and international development agencies, bureaucratic planners and their advisers, and customs and immigration officials, making nonsense of all national and economic boundaries, borders that have been defined only recently, crisscrossing an ocean that had been boundless for ages before Captain Cook’s apotheosis (ibid. 6).

If the big island of Hawai’i rising out of the depths of the mighty sea prompted Hau’ofa to re-think his pitiful approach to the Pacific, the island of Banaba does something a bit different for me, sloping gently above the waves near the equator or the narrow ribbon of Tabiteuea Meang or South Tarawa with the ocean in full view whether you turn your head left or right. A historian named Austin Coates once wrote of the Gilbert islands, "You only have to stand on that beach, with the other beach just a few yards behind you, think of where you are— is it the end of the world, or the beginning?"
(Coates cited in Whincup 2001: 51). There is a difference between the majesty of the mountain and that of the sea, conjoined and the absence of mountains in an atoll environment.

I began this section with the above poem by Samoan writer Ruperake Petaia\(^\text{15}\) because voyaging—a metaphor invigorated by Hau'ofa’s reimagining of Oceania—is a familiar trope in Pan-Polynesian discourses of survival, resistance and cultural revitalization (cf Finney in Hanlon and White 2000). The recuperative celebration of sailing and voyaging, particularly in places like Aotearoa/New Zealand and Hawai‘i where travel modes are dominated by cars, large ships and aeroplanes, often erases those particular places where travel by canoe is still very much a part of everyday life. Many of these places are Micronesian.\(^\text{16}\) Similarly the use of canoes and travel by sea as metaphor, inadvertently effaces the very non-reified canoeing activities of islanders on Rabi and Tabiteuea, for example. Petaia’s poem reminds us that travelling—getting somewhere, more modest than “voyaging,” was a matter of “just visiting relatives.” And visiting relatives for many islanders always involves specific political and technical survival skills. Such skills are not just reduced to those of making and guiding craft, fishing or living off the land and sea, but active engagements with distance, materials, bodies and persons; movement in time and space, surfaces and depths, language and tone, self and other.

On a motor canoe travelling between Tabiteuea North and South I notice that here, the ocean is the lightest blue I’ve ever seen. And the land is really, really flat. It is so close to the water it is impossible to forget its presence. In a time when the very future of atoll nations is threatened by rising ocean levels, “our sea of islands” takes on rather ominous connotations. But those who continue to travel shorter distances by sea rather than, or in addition to airplanes still practice “world enlargement” (cf Sacred Vessels 1997).

![Figure 85. Atoll island, between Tab North and South](image)

\(^{15}\) This poem was used on the soundtrack for “Boiling Ocean II” produced by the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, University of the South Pacific (2000).

\(^{16}\) See Vince Diaz’s Sacred Vessels for a cinematic exploration of Micronesian sailing traditions.
On Tabiteuea I wanted to propose an abbreviation of the “mapping Oceania” exercise with I-Kiribati students in order to see whether or not the map generated by myself and Tarcisius was idiosyncratic to our own privileged travels and educational opportunities. The exercise had originally been inspired by a workshop with Greg Dening called “Challenges to Perform” at the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research at the ANU in 1999. For my individual presentation, I drew a map on the board of “Teaiwa’s Kainga” on Rabi (see Chapter 5). I also named every single one of my relatives who lived in each of the houses and situated myself with respect to our extended family. I then began to think about what other people’s kainga might look like if they mapped their relationships similarly.

It was apparent on Tarawa where I stayed for a little over four weeks, that people held, invoked or performed specific family, island, national and Pan-Pacific identities. I wanted to see if this multiplex identity was the case on a non-urban island like Tabiteuea. I wondered how Gilbertese students might visually map their kainga relations, including family, friends, land, islands and other countries. The most interesting factor for me is how people maintain multiple links to distant, imagined and yet connected peoples and places.

I purchased several drawing books, pencils and coloured pens for the exercise which I called “my kainga/ my world.” Soon after I arrived on Tabiteuea I visited the principals of Teabike College, the secondary school in Utiroa, and Buota Junior Secondary School. They both agreed to let me work with some of their students. I knew I would get few volunteers for a written or oral exercise but the drawing exercise proved more enjoyable for most of them. It was the first time I’d stood in front of a school classroom in the role of “teacher” and it was rather disconcerting to be called “Miss... Miss!”

Teabike Secondary School in Utiroa is a government school for forms (grades) one to six and many of the students are boarders from other islands. The forty-one students who participated in my exercise were primarily from forms one to four and came from Nikunau, Banaba, Butaritari, Makin, Marakei, Tarawa, Tabiteuea Meang and Maiaki, Mwaiana, Abemama and Nonouti. I spoke to them in English and instructed them to draw two separate diagrams for “my home/kainga,” and “my world” including indications of any relationships beyond Kiribati. I then gave them an example of my own kainga and relationships beyond Fiji including the US and Kiribati.
Each diagram included name, age and form. What immediately struck me was how old each student was. There were seventeen year olds and thirteen year olds in form four and eighteen year olds in form three. I also found that writing in English was a problem for most of them even though all exams in Kiribati, except for vernacular classes, are in English. The students were most relieved that this was a drawing, not a writing exercise and worked quietly and diligently at it for about an hour. We did the exercise during their physical education period and outside we could hear the “left, left, left, right, left!” of students marching round the field. 17

The following diagrams show some interesting features compared with a standard map including the lay-out of islands, the large number of connections beyond their home islands, the people who make up a kainga, and the geographic distances between parents, children and siblings. It appears that at least some young people in Kiribati have to negotiate their relationships across relatively large geographical distances and conceive of a much larger world than the atoll bounded space. Kiribati is often portrayed as one of the most isolated nations in the world with the smallest land area but this does not mean that I-Kiribati do not travel, do not live beyond their home islands or indeed have many “homes.” The islands may be small but according to the 200-mile “economic exclusion zone,” its national boundaries cover one of the largest tracts of ocean in the Pacific.

![Diagram of My Home Island](image)

Figure 86. “My home island,” Bureua Tekiaben

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17 Marching in military style formation is another legacy of British colonialism and still practiced in schools in both Fiji and Kiribati (see video 5 for marching on Rabi).
The first set of figures above are by my aunty Rainimone’s son Bureua. In the first diagram his *kainga* extends across two villages, Buota, where Rainimone lives with her husband Tekiaben, and “grandpa’s house” where his grandmother Bwakoua lives. His grandfather, Bitia, has passed away. Wives traditionally live in their husband’s *kainga* so Rainimone’s original home is where Bitia’s house is in Eita and this was also my grandmother, Takeua’s home. In the second diagram, Bureua’s relationships extend to Tabiteuea South (Bwakoua’s island), Fiji (where we all live) and Japan.

While features of all the students’ drawings of “my *kainga* or home” included coconut and pandanus trees, *muniku* or well, *museku*, road, beach and bush, common representations of life in the atoll environment, they were all creative and indicated interesting perceptions of scale and geographical layout. Most did not conform to the conventions of the atlas map. For example, one diagram had Fiji to the north and Japan to the west and another had New Zealand to the north and France to the south. In many diagrams, Tarawa, being the capital of Kiribati was drawn bigger than other islands, even though Tabiteuea is the longest chain in the atoll group. In terms of mapping, standard scale or direction was not important. This was similar to my diagram with Tarcisius. While we did try to keep direction consistent with standard maps, the places which were more significant to us were drawn larger than those that were not.
I conducted the same exercise at the Junior Secondary School in Buota. My aunty Katioa (the daughter of my great, great grandfather’s brother’s granddaughter) was the social studies teacher for form two and she helped describe some of the features of the drawing exercise. Unlike Teabike, I worked with the JSS students during their normal class period. When the exercise ran over time other students crowded outside staring through the mesh wire wall into our classroom. The JSS pupils were mostly from Tabiteuea and their relationships were more local though distributed between the various villages on the island. There were also a few students who had families in Beru, Maiana, the Solomons, Tabiteuea South, Butaritari, Nauru, Kiritimati and Australia.
Figure 89. My home-island *kainga* by Koina

Figure 90. My country/ my world by Koina
I noticed that young people travelled more at the secondary level, due to the small number of high schools in Kiribati centred on Tarawa, Tabiteuea, Abaiang and Abemama. Perhaps the main difference with students in any Pacific Island country versus those in the diaspora is the proximity to large family groups and ancestral land like the *kainga*. On Rabi, most people do not live right next door to their own kin. Student’s diagrams, however, indicate that there is still a negotiation of distance in terms of relationships and identities and one has to actually travel (physically or cognitively) relatively large distances in order to visit or imagine all of one’s relatives. There was also an interesting slippage between, at least in English, the ideas of “home,” “island,” *kainga*, my “country” and “my world” (my directions had been—draw your *kainga*, draw your relationships between and beyond islands in Kiribati). Relationships almost always crossed more than one residential space. The student whose drawing appears below also took the time to articulate how she and her grandmother on Rabi “belonged” to more than one “country,” the word country also substituting for “island.”

Figure 91. “My Country” by Beitaake Morris.
Of the sixty students that participated in this exercise across both schools, twenty-one had family members living or originating outside Kiribati and all had connections beyond Tabiteuea. I also noted that many students included friendships in their *kainga* or world maps.

Lawson writes about how Kiribati students who leave home for boarding school sometimes form such close relationships with the families of their friends that a quasi-kin connection is made in which a person might call his friend’s mother, “my mother” (1989: 140). Lawson’s reflects on how performance, normally associated with a clan or descent group is now initiated in schools and how the songs and dances performed in this context are often from all over Kiribati rather than the product of one specific clan or *kainga*. My aunty Temaotarawa has a daughter attending boarding school on Abaiang and she illustrated this trend very well by performing seven different Pan-Pacific *tanemoe* dances during one of my visits to Temaotarawa’s house. I was amazed because not only did she have this repertoire readily available for an impromptu performance, but all the relevant cassette tapes as well (see Video 7). It is in schools that young people are becoming more and more exposed to information, music and dance beyond their islands and beyond Kiribati. Another illustration of this was performed by my uncle Eritai’s children in Tarawa who danced to *We like to Party* the Vengabus by the Venga Boys (1998)! They learned that particular dance in primary school.

To return to the mapping exercise, I have no doubt that my own map prompted students to imagine their connections as broadly as possible but this does not make those connections any less real. What I learned from that exercise was that at least pedagogically, scholars and teachers could frame questions that encourage, not diminish a student’s potential for practicing “world enlargement.” In responding to Hau’ofa’s work, Eric Waddell laments the tendency in higher education institutes like the University of the South Pacific to train Pacific students as “development experts.” He writes, “Certainly we make no sustained effort to help the students enlarge their world, their Pacific Island future world... Why don’t we celebrate their ways of negotiating the present world?” (Waddell 1993: 33)

T. Teaiwa (2001a.) argues that Pacific islanders, and particularly the ones who are often targets of both anthropological and developmentalist attentions, have always maintained a dynamic or creative sense of place in spite of colonialism and post-independence nationalisms. She writes,
... despite colonialist attempts to incarcerate natives within spatial borders—primarily through cartography, military manoeuvres, cultural sciences like linguistics, and aesthetic representations—enough natives have maintained a dynamic sense of place alongside a dynamic sense of history which allows for movement and change while demanding “return” (T. Teaiwa 2001a: 60).

**On place and perspective**

My movements between the various households of my relatives on both Tabiteuea and Tarawa illustrate this dynamic sense of place but it is not limited just to my travels. I-Kiribati are also constantly moving between their own connected spaces tracing a *kainga* that is now widely expanded across a number of villages, islands and nations. While these places are not ancestral lands per se, they are connected by people who share the same ancestors and same ancestral lands, and we know that people, bodies and land are all part of the same cultural and social complex.

Anthropologists, especially those “in training,” were traditionally expected to secure a field-site from which to learn about local life (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 8-9). By contrast my specific connections to diverse families and locations within Kiribati and indeed Fiji, Australia and New Zealand caused me to see and know things in unexpected and often fragmented ways from many “sites.” In their discussion of the centrality of fieldwork to the discipline of anthropology, Gupta and Ferguson write, “As all graduate students in social/cultural anthropology know, it is fieldwork that makes one a “real anthropologist”... (ibid: 1). However, Gupta and Ferguson call for a critical look at the concept of the field in terms of its “micropolitical academic practices,” and “a now widely expressed doubt about the adequacy of traditional ethnographic methods... to the intellectual and political challenges of the contemporary postcolonial world” (ibid: 2-3). They echo Arjun Appadurai’s question: “What is the nature of locality, as a lived experience, in a globalized, deteritorialized world?” (ibid: 3).

In this context the authors note that the discipline has become defensive about it’s “turf” and now relies more heavily on a commitment to “spending long periods in one localised setting” (ibid: 4). While tracing the genealogy of this field science through the writings of other anthropologists including George Stocking and Henrika Kuklick, Gupta and Ferguson find that anthropology’s original identity finds itself in “the detailed study of limited areas” (ibid: 6). They trace the discipline’s roots through the salvage anthropology of Radcliffe-Brown to the direct observation of the primitive pioneered by Malinowski. Through Malinowski’s legacy, the field became concretized as an ahistorical,
ethnographic place devoid of conquest and colonialism—perfect for participant observation (ibid: 7). Those natives living outside their natural state were considered unsuitable for study. They reiterate Hannerz’ (1986) complaint that, “ethnography was still obsessed with ‘the most other of others,’ critiquing a long-standing ethnographic attitude that those most Other, and most isolated from “ourselves,” are those most authentically rooted in their ‘natural’ settings” (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997: 8).

I have represented some of Gupta and Ferguson’s thoughts here because while alternatives to the Malinowskian hegemonic tradition have been encouraged over the years at senior academic levels, at least at the ANU they are encouraged less for postgraduate students. To put this legacy into a visual analogy, if students must follow the traditional boundaries of the discipline, anthropologists, while specialising in “difference,” are supposed to view and organise the concepts and practices of “the other” through a particular frame of reference—locational, epistemological and methodological. They are also expected to gather “data” from a sufficient period in a localized setting.

I experienced multiple frames, facilitated by my place in a genealogical web of ancestors, relatives and multiple islands. These relationships produced almost as many permutations of the past and present as the many frames captured on the digital camera. By the Malinowskian definition, I am not doing anthropology, for two reasons: I am too closely connected to the “subjects” and sites, and I did not stay “long enough” (eighteen months, two years?) in one place.

To an extent, the first diagram (see following page) represents what we’re taught will happen in the field and rarely what ends up happening. It is the archetype of a “real” anthropologist which Gupta and Ferguson acknowledge does not represent all researchers and yet stands firmly as the measure against which we assess “real” anthropology (1997: 11-12). The top diagram also represents the idea of one frame or disciplinary focus, the space between the field and “home” or the place of writing, and the linear movement from process to product. At ANU if we write a proposal, do a pre-field seminar, post-fieldwork seminar and “write-up,” we will come up with a true and whole portrait of some aspect of an/other culture. But the linearly arranged requirements of a PhD degree rarely reflect the reality of the research experience.

The lower diagram represents my multi-sited experiences. In contrast with the first, my “homework” experiences were far less linear, more fragmented, multiple and situational. Contrary to the requirements of “real” anthropology, I never spent a long
period of time in any one place. Kiribati life looks different from specific households, specific islands, and specific perspectives. Kiribati history and culture is shaped by all those different sites. Difference separates connected individuals and households as well as islands, states and regions.

Each box in the bottom diagram of Figure 9. represents a perspective I was temporarily forced to accept while thinking about my project as a whole. Banaban and Gilbertese history and culture was illuminated from many sides, by many voices and many experiences. I do not want to imply that the first picture in its simplicity represents all anthropologists. Most researchers do go through very complex, emotional, theoretical, material, embodied, theoretical processes before they produce “knowledge.” Most feminist ethnographers, for example, like Visweswaran (1995) and Kondo (1990) do describe inter-subjective events and their political consequences. The specific politics of identity in the US, however, are very different from the politics of identity in specific Pacific spaces.

Figure 92. Archetypal anthropology model
Choreography/ ethnography on Tabiteuea

One of the things made visible in any choreographed movement, whether it is the creation of an individual artist or the creation of an entire culture—a folk tradition—is the human capacity for establishing rapport. Revealing the tensions and fluencies, harmonious or discordant, that exist habitually or instantaneously between people or between humans and various elements or aspects of the world around them is one general kind of relation that choreographed movement invariably makes apparent (Ness 1992: 13).

Sally Ann Ness (1992) is one of the few writers I’ve come across who manages to combine ethnography, choreography and story-telling elegantly. She relates ethnographic enquiry, learning to know another culture, to the way in which a student of choreography learns a new dance. As mentioned earlier language became secondary to my experiences
in Kiribati. It was in thinking in and through my body that I became more aware of being connected to specific peoples, places and ways of inhabiting the world.

Life on Tabiteuea is definitely much slower than on Tarawa. Unlike the constant sound of high-speed buses and motorbikes, the Tabiteuean soundscape is dominated by bicycle bells ringing, baby chickens cheeping, laughing children, Radio Kiribati played off old radios, singing voices and the ocean on both sides of the land. At night in some houses the hum of kerosene generators flows into the ocean sounds. While sleeping at the convent on Tanaeang for example, I became acutely aware that the rooster flaps his wings rapidly at dawn before crowing several times.

The nuns and I had a routine which started with breakfast in the morning—tea with home-made bread and butter. Someone would collect water from the manik ina for washing up the dishes and someone would make sure there was a reserve of water for the bath and toilet. Collecting water consisted of lowering a billycan on a long string into the well so that it sunk beneath the water. Then you had to jerk the can right up with a flick of the wrist so that the can was completely filled. After washing up, one of the nuns would go to talk on the “walky talky” to Tarawa. This was a radio telephone through which they kept in touch with the headquarters of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart at Teoraereke.

There was a cooking house just near the ocean and here the nuns would secretly comb coconut cream and special leaves through their hair. Tina Mangarita assured me that even if they covered their heads with a habit they were entitled to shiny, healthy hair! The nuns would often make bread and doughnuts from what they called “ever-lasting flour”—flour that was filled with weevils and many months or years old! They were however, the most amazing, helpful and accommodating hosts that one could ever have asked for. They also had two motorbikes which helped get me around the island. For their help I taught them a dance to Pate Pate and another to a song by Sista Robi from Hawai‘i called Pi‘i Mai Kanalu. I also shared some of my unusual cooking practices like mixing raw fish with chilli sauce and rice!

Tanaeang is a central location for the Catholic Church on Tabiteuea. There is a large church, though there was no priest during my stay. Apparently one arrived after I left and Tina Mangarita called him “the handsome priest.” He was adakatii, mixed European and Gilbertese. Tanaeang was the first place to learn about Catholicism in Tabiteuea. According to Baraniko, Taam and Tabokai (in Talu et al. 1979: 44), a man named Tanako brought the religion from Fiji where he had learned about Tiika (Jehovah)
and the Cross from the Catholic priests (ibid: 52). The worshippers of Tioba were later defeated by the converts to the religion spread by Hawaiian London Missionary Society missionaries, Kapu and Nalimu, but Tanaeang apparently returned to Catholicism later where it has achieved a stronghold every since.

My first night at the convent they held a welcome gathering which began with a big “Mauri o!”\(^{18}\) It started with a clapping game that I had seen my aunties on Rabi also perform to welcome guests. Everyone sat in a large circle and sang while moving back and forth to clap the hand of the person sitting on either side. In Tanaeang they also played a game called “telephone” in which people had to answer a call immediately by passing the “connection” on to another person. If Tina Mangarita called out “Taai!” then Taai called out “Aom!” and so on. If you lost you had to stand up and do a dance for the rest of the group. This made for hilarious entertainment as people did a mixture of European and Gilbertese dance moves.

Tina Mangarita would drive me up and down the length of Tabiteuea Meang all the way to Kabuna and back. We’d stop at a few houses on the way like the policeman’s house in Kabuna and this is how I got to taste te ibo for the first time.\(^{19}\) Tina Mangarita would chat with her friends about what was happening in the village and whether or not cargo had arrived. The shortage of rice was always a great topic of conversation. Tina Mangarita would say, “people here say they do not need the rice. When there is a shortage of cargo and people in Tarawa don’t have rice there always seems to be a big supply on Tabiteuea. People joke and say, ‘we grow rice here.’ ” But then she’d say that when people knew a cargo boat had arrived they would quickly hop on their bicycles and return with a five-kilogram bag on their shoulders.

Dinner time was usually our time for stories and Tina Mangarita is one of the most gifted story-tellers I have ever met. She had a way of making an incident sound very intriguing or very funny. One of her Marakei stories was about a priest from that island who was raised in the Marshalls. She said that people on Marakei were brilliant at making critiques of travellers who would arrive from aeroplanes. They would gather near the plane and start a running commentary from the moment a person appeared at the door of the plane. They particularly noticed that the priest who was raised in the Marshalls was wearing nice long pants but when he got to the ground he unfortunately stepped right into a puddle. She also said that a favourite commentary was whether or not a visitor was

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\(^{18}\) Mauri literally means “health” and is used as a greeting by both Gilbertese and Banabans.

\(^{19}\) Ibo (sipunculus indicus peters) is a worm found in the sandy lagoon mud. According to Koch, a thin stick called kai ni wan ibo is used to dig them out of the sand (1986: 4).
ugly or beautiful. This was always delivered within earshot of the victim. One time they tried it on a woman who was visiting from Abaiang. They called her ugly but she retaliated by saying she had heaps of land on Marakei! By far the best story I heard from the Sisters was about the “karoa from Fiji.” Apparently a man from Fiji came to Kiribati and wore a *sulu* without anything underneath. Lots of people saw the man’s penis when he sat down and from then on the phrase, “the *karoa* (the seed) from *Fiji*” was born.

When I was invited to sleep at my relatives’ houses I then became aware of a different set of sounds, movements and daily practices. One of the relatives I visited was Riribwe, the son of my father’s adopted grandfather. This was one of the houses in which I sat silent for hours. I would watch Riribwe and his friends play cards, watch the large kettle and colourful plastic plates used for lunch and tea, watch the full moon over the beach at Terikiai, watch a woman named Veronica working quietly on a mat, and watch Akeneiti make doughnuts. She sat on the floor with a large basin of dough between her knees and would roll the white stuff between her fingers before pressing it into the deep red lid of a thermos bottle. Then she would remove the dough, roll it one more time between her hands and throw it onto a corrugated piece of iron. It would stick immediately. A woman opposite her did the same thing from her side. At the end there were hundreds of balls of white dough on the grey iron. These doughnuts, however, had had no holes. After meeting Riribwe, his sister Teekoiti on Tarawa and their mother, Tebenua I was able to piece together the story on how my father was adopted by their family. It goes something like this:

Takeua was pregnant with her first child (my father) and Teaiwa’s relatives, Teberewa and Tautong, asked them if they could adopt him. They agreed, as is custom. Takeua lived in Utiroa with Teaiwa and Teberewa lived in Terikiai (see map page ##). The night the baby arrived, a spirit came to Teberewa’s house and brought the message that a boy was born to Takeua. They travelled to Utiroa the next day and surprised the new parents who had sent no message of the birth. Teberewa named the boy Tabakitoa and took him to live in Terikiai. Teberewa still believed in the old Tabiteuean beliefs and would take Tabakitoa with him into the bush to the *banga*.20 My father distinctly remembers being carried on the old man’s back to a place in the bush with a stone altar. He left his adopted grandparents in 1947 after Teaiwa requested the return of his son. Apparently Teaiwa had done some divination and learned that Tabakitoa would become an important man.21 Back on Tabiteuea Teberewa continued to talk about Tabakitoa and told his second wife, Tebenua, that they would know Tabakitoa by a black birthmark behind his left ear. Tebenua never forgot this.

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20 A *banga* is an enclosed sacred place covered by gravel and used for sorcery, composing songs and dances, cemeteries and family tombs (Sabatier 1971: 51).

21 My father told me this story in 1997 after I started enquiring about our Gilbertese heritage.
Another house I visited was Katioa’s in Utiroa. Her family was relatively well off and her father had been a former member of parliament as well as a Catholic minister. They had a store in front of their house and throughout the day we would hear *boo bat*\(^2^2\) called out and Katioa’s mother, brother or sister would go to serve the customer. Katioa was a teacher and I did part of my kainga/island exercise with her students at the Junior Secondary School in Buota. Her younger sister taught in Utiroa and they took me along to a most interesting event.

The community at the Utiora Primary School had decided to change their school name based on a dream one of their members had. Apparently one of the powerful spirits of the place, Temwamwang,\(^2^3\) had come to him and ordered they name the school after him. As a consequence they made the name change and invited the entire Ministry of Education to witness the event. The entire Ministry of Education came on a plane specially chartered for a six hour trip to Tabiteuea Meang. It was a day filled with food and entertainment. This was very interesting to me as I soon realised that the Ministry of Education had lots of money to spend on trips but not on schoolbooks or other materials for students.

My father told me that Temwamwang is widely known to be a prankster who often gets women in trouble, sometimes even making them pregnant. It seemed rather strange that the village would name their school after him but dreams are always taken very seriously. During the opening ceremony, however, during all the speeches given and prayers offered, no one mentioned Temwamwang. When they unveiled the new sign for the school it depicted what looked very much like a white man with a long beard and sunglasses holding a big stone. Apparently this was how Temwamwang had appeared in the man’s dream and an artist had replicated this in paint. My father watched the tape of the opening of the school and pointed out something interesting. At the start of the ceremony one of the old men had given a very impressive and very traditional sounding call to the spirits to bless the day. He was dressed in a grass skirt and held a wooden stick which he used to pierce the ground and then extend to the four directions of the wind as he made his call. Afterwards, however, he simply walked off the field and threw the stick aside. My father commented that there was something about the opening ceremony sounded more clowning than serious ritual and indeed this conformed with the nature of Temwamwang himself.

\(^{22}\) This means “to buy”!

\(^{23}\) A very old spirit—son of Bakewa and brother of Tabakea. I asked if someone could tell me the story of Temamang but it required an island-wide council so I never learned.
The celebrations started with the garlanding of the guests. About forty young girls did this by first dancing onto the area in front of the guests. They danced to tape recorded guitar music and when it stopped they did a powerful, but very short Gilbertese dance. The sounds of the clapping and singing, to which the thirty or so young women precisely marked the beats with their heads and hands, echoed off the roof of murudhu creating an intense if brief moment. Then they danced Cook Island-style towards the guests and lined up in front of them. The teacher blew a whistle to indicate when they should reach for the garland from their own head and when they should place it on the guests’ heads. Once the guests were welcomed in this way, they stood up to dance. The song which blared out from the stereo in the murudhu was a techno version of “everybody sing this song, doo da, doo da, everybody sing this song, oh doo da day.” Everyone, including the Minister of Education, danced what I-Kiribati call te tuiti.24

This was then followed by performances from a number of kuaea and one dance group called Te Kat. They did very lively dances which were obviously a mixture of Gilbertese noia, Tuvaluan batere and Cook-Island dance. They often started a dance with a traditional sounding chant which was followed with a lively song accompanied by a guitar. This group had composed a special song to commemorate the occasion which included the line: “Temwamwang Primary School!” I heard the same tune on Tarawa, sung with completely different words. This is a popular feature at important events as are the other kuaea groups that sing during such celebrations. The girls at the beginning of the feast were the only female performers. For the rest of the day we were entertained by all male groups and afterwards, when we walked back to Katioa’s house, she and her mother pointed out my grandfather’s land just next to the murudhu. Apparently the village murudhu had been sitting on this land for a while until someone pointed out that the land belonged to someone and they moved it.

Figure 94. Teaiwa’s land, Utiroa

24 “The twist,” was first introduced during the colonial period and today any European style dancing is called “twisting.”
**Takeua’s Kainga**

Another family I visited on Tabiteuea was that of Rainimone and Tekiaben. Their eldest child is named Takeua. Naming in the Gilbertese custom is very particular because you can usually trace your genealogy or historical connections through the names shared by families and Takeua, for example shares my grandmother’s name. Rainimone is the daughter of my grandmother’s brother, Bitia. She lives in Buota with her husband, Tekiaben, and four of her seven children (four boys and three girls), Tekiaben’s niece and her child. They live in a large split-level Gilbertese house on about half an acre of land. Tekiaben, is a special constable on Tabiteuea and three of their children are at Teabike College where I did my kainga exercise.

During my stay with Rainimone she was working on a mat that Bitia’s wife, Bwakoua, had started weaving for me before she was called away to Tarawa for her granddaughter, Rakomwa’s engagement party. Bwakoua lives in Eita and her grandchildren often go back and forth between Buota and Eita visiting her. I had no idea that Bwakoua was making me a mat until I stopped by for a visit one day and saw her working away. I said, “what a lovely, mat!” And she and her grandson, Ienraoi laughed and replied, “it’s for you!” All across Tabiteuea people gave me the nicest gifts including mats (te kie), tibuta, sulus and parts of a dancing costume. Weaving is a skill slowly disappearing on Rabi and to a lesser extent in Kiribati as people find new materials for flooring, window shades and dance costumes.

Figure 95. Rainimone and Tekiaben  
Figure 96. Mats I received on Tabiteuea

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25 Many new names, however, are taken from the bible. The names of places is also significant and if, for example you look on the Tarawa map, you will see a place named Tabiteuea. This means there is a connection between that place on Tarawa and Tabiteuea. This is similar to naming places on Rabi.

26 This woman’s husband is a kaimus or seaman and spends many months overseas.
The weaving process took many hours and since Rainimone was busy during the day, she would work at night. Tekiaben would stay up with her keeping her company during this laborious process. There were two colours of thin dried pandanus strips that she had to thread in a specific pattern. I watched for hours as her strong fingers worked the strips into a perfect weave. One night we stayed up till almost three in the morning as Rainimone worked and Tekiaben told me ghost stories. The constant sounds of the ocean on both sides of the island heightened his stories and I went to sleep waiting for more ghosts to visit me.

The next morning, Rainimone and her family put on a performance for the camera. Earlier they'd mentioned that Takeua knew many Gilbertese dances and I asked if she would dance for the camera at home. It is actually very unusual to get formally dressed up in the family home for an informal performance but since I was a guest (with a video camera), they took the time to prepare carefully. Ornaments that they would normally save for public occasions were brought out of the precious treasure tin that held all the costume accessories.

I will not analyze this video in the same way I've done the videos and Coming Home to Banaba film in previous chapters. Video 4 on Tabiteuea is a very different kind of visual piece. It is characterized by low energy, more mundane movements and more interaction between the characters rather than between them and the camera, except when Takeua dances (cf Macdougall 1998). It is very much in the mis en scène style discussed in Chapter 1 and it has no voiceover. Robret Gardner's Forest of Bliss (1985) is one of the few films I've seen that also has neither voiceover, sub-titles, or testimony from characters on the screen. The focus is on the events unfolding in the frame.

I had to do much less editing of the original footage because I kept the action in sequence as it happened on the day. Unlike previous videos which cut back and forth across time (Video 1) or juxtapose disparate locations (Videos 2 and 3) in this one I tried to give a sense of "the present," of everyday household space and inter-personal interaction. The sounds of the baby crying, of children interjecting while their parents are talking, of mother's scolding children, of a daughter's embarrassment at being dressed up for such a small audience. While the video gives a sense of all of this it also illustrates how the occasion of my visit initiated a performance which was very much not a part of everyday activity.
The meaning of the film for me and my immediate family is far from linear or mundane. We juxtapose it with the memory of our grandmother Takeua so certain activities, the people involved (how they’re connected to us) and the location of the event on Tabiteuea have meaning beyond mere relations between bodies in the frame.

Takeua performed a *buki* and *kamai* dance. The *buki* dancer normally wears a heavy coconut or pandanus *ririribiuki* (dancing skirt made) that extends out from the hips in two layers. The first is a short circular layer that sticks out perpendicular to the ground. The second consists of several layers of straight pieces that fall from the hips to form a triangle with the ground. When wearing the dancing *riri*, the heavy skirt paints distinct impressions in the air around the hips. The first is of a side to side swing, then a fan-like shape created by alternating the rotation at each hip and another is a revolving shape where the hips paint a circle on the horizontal plane. When I was asked at the last minute to dance the *buki* at my farewell in Tanaeang I didn’t have the costume and everyone was very concerned that this dance would be much, much better with the skirt.

Women usually wear either a white singlets or woven bra on top. There are also two woven pieces *ririko* or *anihai* that come over the shoulder and cross diagonally between the breasts from each side tied at the back. This is covered by a *kanari* or neck piece in a half circle shape. The head piece, *te mtea* or *te etete* sits on the head with straight pieces (either pandanus or drinking straws) sticking out in a circular shape (see Koch 1986). On each of the arms are four pieces called *kanaru* resembling feathers or flowers. One is tied to the forefinger, the second to the wrist, the third just below the inside of the elbow and the last half-way between the elbow and the shoulder.
Takeua was worried throughout the whole preparation period that people would laugh at her and this is evident in the way she moves her eyes to watching family members and smiles with embarrassment. The sound of her father's single voice was also a source of consternation as most Gilbertese dances will be performed along with a loud and energetic singing group sitting behind the dancer. This part of the performance is missing from Video 4 and when I showed the tape on Tarawa to some of her relatives on Betio they cringed and said, “Help her! Sing!” to other people in the audience.

I started to feel guilty about asking her to dance as soon as I realized that the context was disconcerting. I was ready to declare this moment another ethnographic “failure” but then remembered that it is in moments of seeming failure that we learn more about the politics of inter-subjectivity. What had happened is that Takeua’s family concentrated on the camera as a visual not audio recorder. Had I said, I’d like to record singing and dancing they might have attended to both. Her parents took the whole preparation process very seriously so they could prepare her to look her best for the camera.

The Whincup’s quote one I-Kiribati describing the importance of dance and family obligation as follows:

Dancing is always taken seriously in Kiribati. Dancing is one of the best things in I-Kiribati life. This is often seen in people making comment (if you told them you do not want to dance) as ‘Why? Do you want people to think that we do not give you our best demonstrative parental love, now that you do not want to dance?... The importance of children being involved in dancing is evident in... an old saying that says ‘dancing is a loved child.’ If you don’t dance,... you’re not a loved child! (Whincups’ 2001: 62-62).

While Takeua’s embarrassment is evident in the first dance, the buki, it starts to disappear in the second dance, te kani. This is because another man started singing with her father
and soon other voices joined in too. Unlike the first dance, Tekiaben then successively increased the pace of the *kamei* which is how all Gilbertese *moia* dances are structured. They start slow and slowly increase to a climactic ending. I kept the camera rolling when she removed the *mri* to emphasise the space of performance and of the everyday and mundane. Islanders regularly move back and forth between the two.

**Song Translations**

The following are my father’s translations of Takeua’s dances and the song which Rainimone and Tekiaben sing at the beginning and end of Video 4. I heard this same song sung on Rabi in my own kainga when I visited in April 2002.

**Opening song, Video 4**

\[
\begin{align*}
&Ai kama kuru uwa ineron mmauru/
&Be rangarina be otora butina tokonu/ mume oo... e botika Nei Nimaua/
&(Repeat)
&Takataku ten onon ietan ana bunbouk/ Nei Nimaua oo000 /
&Be ruun ne ruun ne ruun ne ruun/ Be ruun ne ruun ne ruun ne ruun/ E a boo makanon te tooku/ Ma ti a uati n wawu/ E a boo makanon te tooku/
&Ma ti a uati n wawu/ E a boo makanon te tooku
\end{align*}
\]

How amazing the speed of his canoe on the ocean/
How graceful it speeds away/ Men oh... how flirtatious Nei Nimaua27 /The crawling of a sand crab along the rim of Nei Nimaua’s well/
Its fetching water unnoticed/ Its carting water unnoticed/
It listens too much to the sound of the radio/
The soap it’s curdling/ We are washing empty fields
(repeat last two lines)

**Figure 98. Takeua’s *buki***

\[
\begin{align*}
&E buvunwe mai/ E buvunwe mai te rongrong/
&Be ruuia te man te karong/  
&A in bongin katora ma bongin kandakau/  
&ti a karong kengna tonia/  
&Be ruuia te ina kanaa/  
&Talala la talala la talala la/  
&E in te ang
\end{align*}
\]

Where does it come from the news
It is carried by the voice in the wind
This is the day we meet and the day we talk
How pitied we are in their presence/
What are we to do/ Talala lala la talala
The wind has gone28

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27 Nei Nimaua is a personification of the hand, *nimaua* is the number five so, “miss five fingers.”
Figure 99. Takeua’s kamei

E kika te man te take
Mai ison baebuensiki
E manukina katihana na kariaka
(repeat)
Ngie i a kaitibo na te koua motumotu
Ni kaitara angan te ni ne ni mukineua
Bua e aonga n neke ison te barona
Manukumana te kai te bise n eite

The bird has swooped away from its nest
to pursue its insatiable desires for life
There I encounter twin skittles
Facing the place of desire
Where there can be reunion
A gulf that pours love to its ultimate fulfilment

PLAY VIDEO 4

... Kiribati dance consists of characteristic poses, steady, flowing, usually slow movements between poses, and arrival marked by abrupt movements of the head, hands, and arms. Slow and steady changes in body level accomplished by bending the knees, are also employed. Dance composers say that these movements should be linked together in a sequence that is exciting and attractive, and that ideally the dancers should execute the slow, steady movements “as if they are lifting something heavy,” or “holding back,” to create a tension which is resolved by the abrupt movements of parts of the upper body coinciding precisely with the claps in the music (Lawson 1989: 447).

Learning te buki

Place: Tanaeang April 2000
Instructions from memory, July 29, 2001:

I am standing on the thatched floor of Takakung’s house. She is the wife of my great, great grandfather, Nabakoa’s great grandson, Taunaia. We’ve just spent one hour sipping toddy tea and now we’re ready to dance.

28 I heard this song also performed to greet visitors at the newly named Temwamwang Primary School in Utiroa on Tabtieuia.
The floor of her house is high off the ground and the roof low so I feel like a giant. I am nervous. Dancing should come fairly easy for me but we have a language/culture problem here. My nervousness makes it really hard to concentrate. Through gestures and a few translations I proceed to position my body according to her instructions.

Okay. Stand with feet placed firmly on the ground. Shift weight to balls of feet without getting off balance. Move entire body forward about ten degrees (I'm imagining my whole body in a 360 degree plane...) so frame is just off-centre on the vertical plane. Never bend at the waist. Do not arch spine either. Move trunk, but not pelvis, forward. Keep knees soft and get comfortable standing with the body inclined. Yep. That's really (not) comfortable.

Extend left arm forty-five degrees and perpendicular to trunk with hands at eyebrow level. Extend right arm to minus ten degrees from the perpendicular and hands level with waist. Adjust elbow so that the crook of the arm leans towards the area between the two arms rather than the space above the body. This is crucial for the positioning of the arms. They should be gently curved rather than rigidly straight. In the beginning keep palm faced down to floor. Keep fingers softly together at first. Throughout the dance, though, let the forefinger twitch occasionally in resonance with the movement or song. If movement requires palm to face up, move the entire hand without a flourish, without twisting palm. Move entire hand at the wrist in one motion. Holding the arms and hands in this position is particularly taxing on the triceps!

The arms should not be loose, floppy or swinging. There are distinct pathways between positions of the arms and hands and they are always held precisely when they arrive at the correct position. For example, if the right arm is to mirror the movement of the left arm, they should always return to the position they were in before. I think to myself, okay, in this way they are similar to the positions in ballet. First position is always the same, and second is always second. The arms don’t flourish or divert from the paths between first, second, third, fourth or fifth position. In Gilbertese dance, however, positions are not numbered.

Always keep the eyes in the direction of the head. When head moves left or right, eyes will look accordingly. The eyes must never look left if the head is turned right. In general
eyes must not engage the audience. They must not be focused on a person or thing. All the concentration is in the body so the eyes really do not “see” while dancing. In general, start with the gaze on a plane below the perpendicular to eye-level. Keep it there throughout the dance except when marking the clapping with a head jerk. Then the eyes should move with the head. Since you’re not actually looking at anything your awareness is concentrated not in the eyes or mind but totally in the body.

Feet should only take small steps forward or backward. Feet are lifted barely two centimetres off the ground and then planted firmly down while walking forward when required (I am being very mathematical about this...). Hips are moved by bending one knee and straightening the other and I mean really keep one knee straight. Don’t half-bend it! This pushes the pelvis and butt to one side as the opposite knee bends and then to the other as the movement is mirrored on the other side. There are three ways of moving the hips that must be mastered. The first is the basic motion with hips moved up and down on each side. The second is a rotation of the hips from the top of the first sway towards the back of the space surrounding the hip. The hips paint arcs in the space surrounding the pelvis (like a figure eight) rather than straight lines as in the first motion. The last technique for moving the hips is where the whole pelvis rotates in a circular motion rather than from side to side. In this case the bent knees are rotated in their space as well causing a circular movement of the hips and butt.

Each segment of the body must be held according to these fundamental principals and moved in unison as a whole. Hands and upper torso must never be affected by hips or feet and vice versa. Each part of the body has a logic of its own and they must co-exist with the other parts. Similarly the energy levels of each of the parts is differentiated. The hips can move fast but the hands must remain graceful and on the proper path between positions.

You should not grin but a pleasant expression is preferable. Movements are forward and back but for effect a dancer can pause or mark a moment on the diagonal. There is no spinning or twirling and the centre of gravity always remains on the same vertical plane (adjusted by bending of the knees) set up by the shifting of the centre of gravity forward.
When dancers lean forward like this they look like they are about to take off in flight. That tension remains throughout the entire dance.

Reflections on Dance

The above dance lesson took place in Tanaeang village on Tab North. At the time I was living at the old convent with Tina Mangarita and Tina Maria and Nei Aom (see figure 1). When I went to my lessons Terabwata and Nei Aom translated most directions for me in English. I was too nervous to concentrate on the Gilbertese while standing with both arms out like a bird and body off-centre. I believe Takakung was actually trying to tell me in a less mechanical way how to move but this is how I remembered learning something unfamiliar in my body. Takakung would often try to hide her frustration when I forgot to shift my centre of gravity. She laughed when I looked like I was about to fall over. She laughed when my head went in one direction and my eyes in another. Terabwata would translate, “Never look in the opposite direction of your head!”

More often than not, Takakung simply heaved her considerable weight off the floor and as graceful as a bird demonstrated for me or simply took my arms or my hips and moved me. It was the most mechanical thing I’d ever experienced because I was used to modern, jazz and more Polynesian style dancing. Gilbertese dance is the hardest thing I’ve ever learned to perform. Eventually I learned it well enough to let go of my stifling fears and simply remember the actions and placements in my body rather then in my mind. Then I started to grasp some of the tightly controlled passion that is contained in Gilbertese dance movement.

The tensions, releases, and arrivals marked by both music and choreography mirror aspects of Gilbertese culture in their particular atoll environment. It reflects the movements of birds and fish, fishing and moving across the ocean. It also invokes the possibility of transcending the bounded atoll space and “taking off” into the sky or sea. This is impossible in reality but the tension remains. The words in many of the songs used for dance also transcend the islands to places all over the world.

The buki I learned was to a song called “I noria bua uen” is a good example of this. I asked Terabwata and the nuns what this song meant and they said they thought it was vaguely about a journey long ago from Nazareth to a wonderful place. They didn’t know where. My father translated it as follows:

I see it, the flower on the hills of Galilee
the Nazarene, he stands, he trembles
Aururue
Aururuebe
E a tau ati burenetin ana kaini futere
N na ueteia ngai
Raou oo! Nako trnil
E we sail a long, long
-way
to Tibwere
Pass my heart, right turn!

There were aspects of this song that were unclear so my father had to do some imaginative translating but the most interesting aspect of it was the part in English. “We sail a long, long way to Tibwere,” is apparently a part of an English song that includes the phrase “it’s a long way to Tipperary.” My father use to hear his father singing this over and over again as a child. Teaiwa always claimed it was his favourite song. It stuck so much in my father’s memory that when he went to school he looked up the reference in an encyclopaedia. Tipperary is an area in southern Ireland in the Munster province. In the course of discussing this with my dad he told me that Teaiwa used to do lots of dancing and singing. This was news to me as I only knew him as Kaka, the man who sits in the doorway of his house at Tabiang with a sasa broom shooing the kids and waiting for his crackers and tea. This song is apparently an amalgamation of references from the bible, traditional stories and this popular song about a place in Ireland! It is quite possible that my grandfather learned it while working as a labourer on Banaba.

Of Gilbertese dance or moa, Grimble once wrote:

... the moa, together with the more modern and easily learnt futere, became immensely popular pastimes throughout the Gilberts, and it was soon obvious that should any further attempt be made to prohibit dancing to church adherents it would be the number of Christians rather than the number of dancers that would decline (Maude in Grimble 1988: 333).

While reading part of this chapter, one of my advisers, Greg Dening, asked me about learning te buki on Tabiteuea and how Takakung as teacher might have instructed me in Gilbertese. The question was, “were her instructions perhaps more embedded in Gilbertese or Tabiteuean metaphors?” The instructions she gave me were pretty much as I wrote them down, with help from either Terabwata or Nei Aom translating. Many Gilbertese or Banabans don’t learn how to dance in terms of metaphor but rather by instruction on how to move, how to hold body parts, how to hold the tension within you or release it. If a student is particularly difficult, however, they may say things like “don’t

29 Sasa brooms are made from the dried spine of a coconut frond and used to sweep the house.
move as if your canoe is about to tip over! Don’t look at someone on this side of the room when your head is pointing in the opposite direction!” It is understood that the student is already familiar with the social contexts in which dance plays a major role. People know what to do if they’re dancers, singers or audience members.

Usually only choreographers and composers know what the original meanings of dances and songs are and even they also use elements of older forms that are only passed on as “body memories.” But my research didn’t include sitting down with “masters” and finding out what songs and movements meant for them.³⁰ Rather it was to engage with dance and movement in very informal spaces where the music and dance moved through everyday bodies and the focus was on looking right and displaying what was learnt by performing or practicing. Good dancers were immediately recognised by the way they moved— they didn’t look like they were concentrating hard on the next step, there was a balance between body and mind; smiling or not you could tell if they loved dancing or were comfortable dancing. Takakung was described to me as a woman who was “smart” in buki. That was all. Her husband turned out to be my relative and our lessons were very informal, interspersed with lots of toddy tea, not much talking to me but lots of talking about me.

While I am not so familiar with Gilbertese language I am with dance. Since we were children my father took us to social functions in which dance was always a central feature. I grew up noting how bodies moved, what songs sounded like, what kinds of tensions and excitement filled the air.

The buki is a standing dance possibly originating in the Ellice Islands, now known as Tuvalu. The singing is accompanied by the rhythmic beating of a mat laid across a wooden box. The singers sit in a rectangle behind the dancer and face the box in concentric circles. The song is begun by a command: E nako! Or Nako we! followed by four claps. The first three claps are fast and at equal intervals and the last comes after a quick pause. The song always starts slow and then increases tempo at preceding verses up to a climactic release at the end. There are always one or two “conductors” who can order the singers to increase the tempo. The final verse is usually frenzied and the dancer is expected to match her movements to the beat. Preparation for this signalled by the conductor by shouting out a command, blowing a whistle that is hanging around the neck or just sticking the fingers in the mouth and emitting a piercing whistle.

³⁰ See Lawson (1989) for an excellent and thorough study on Gilbertese dance and music.
Gilbertese dancing in general generates strong emotions within both dancers and singers. The singers’ energy is directed outwards, released into the air while the dancers’ is contained within the body. This means that a dancer’s body becomes a taut build-up of controlled passion. While the music becomes a frenzied sound of increasing pace, the dancer is not allowed to similarly “let-go.” She or he must contain her feelings and simply match the rhythm with a disciplined body. The dancer normally tries his or her best not to betray pent up emotions. However, a good dancer is also marked by the inability to prevent herself from showing she is possessed by the dance and music by crying or emitting a squeal of excitement once or twice throughout the dance. It is in those moments of excitement that she is allowed to temporarily forget her discipline. However, should she give into it completely she will be unable to continue dancing. Once in awhile, when an occasion creates a situation in which both music and dancers are extremely excited, either a conductor or dancer will be so overcome with emotion they will go into a trance, have a fit and need to lie down or be comforted by other members of the group. When this happens the dancing does not stop. It is all part of the theatre of dance performance.

Modern island dancing generally initiates less energy and passion while the body moves around much more freely and loosely in space. This was the kind of dancing I saw at the Temwamwang Primary School name-changing day. As we’ll see in the next chapter, the exception to this is Banaban dancing which is already an amalgamation of Gilbertese, Polynesian and modern European styles. A fundamental structure or technique of Banaban dancing has been created such that mastery in it can create a similar build up of passion and spiritual energy. When I was teaching the nuns some of the more modern Polynesian dances I was struck by the contrast between these and Gilbertese movements.

I had much more respect for just how difficult and grounded Gilbertese dancing was compared to the much more free moving and loose contemporary Polynesian styles I had learned at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture in Fiji. With Gilbertese dancing, you could follow all the instructions I described earlier, put your hands in the right places, and still never look right. I-Kiribati can always tell when someone finally gets it and it’s usually after years (and years) of practice.

Gilbertese and Banabans performing dances from other places—Fiji, Tahiti or the Cook Islands will not usually demonstrate as much passion for the performance. I think this has something to do with the tensions between being grounded in a specific and

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31 The director of the centre is none other than Epeli Hau'ofa. In general he tries to promote a fusion of Pacific dance styles rather than segregated ethnic and national forms.
familiar form where the context is understood and both the audience, singers and
dancers know what to expect, versus the always more risky and loose pan-Pacific dances.
This however doesn’t stop anyone from taking on the challenge especially when an
audience can be so severely entertained by it. At my farewell from Tabiteuea, the
Catholic parishioners made the nuns dance what I had taught them (twice) and I have
heard since that people on the island still talk about it and teach it to others.

Back on Tarawa: no water, but lots of video

In her dissertation on Kiribati performance Mary Elizabeth Lawson wrote that,

Travel from island to island via copra steamer or small propeller plane has
dramatically increased. But the rate of change is slow. Except for radio-cassette
players and batteries, most of the items in the trade store have varied little during
the twentieth century. The overall impression of slow and subtle change is an
indication of the way in which the people of Kiribati have adapted conservatively
and selectively to the various outside values and technology that have come their

If you drive down the one road that connects all the islets of South Tarawa you
will find all kinds of houses. Some are made of coconut and pandanus thatch, some of
concrete while others like the Australian and Chinese embassies of something so white
and shiny it looks like marble next to the grey concrete or iron or thatched wood of
other buildings.32 There has been a lot of migration into South Tarawa, particularly to
Bairiki and Betio and those without their own plot of land live jam-packed in
shantytowns without running water and very few bathroom or toilet facilities.33 Some of
the houses in these areas are just made of a tinned roof nailed to four posts with waist-high
corrugated iron walls. Sometimes up to ten people live and sleep in a fifteen square foot
area. Despite this lack of walls, water or toilets contrary to Lawson’s observations in the
late 1980s, many, many houses, like those of my relatives, have a shiny new television
monitor, video deck and often a Japanese stereo system.34 Video and music technology in
particular must have changed a lot faster in the last ten years.

On Tarawa and Tabiteuea one of the things I was constantly asked to do was play
videos for people. Some households would hire a portable generator, video monitor and
deck and ask to see those videos they knew I’d filmed in other villages, the ones I’d

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32 See end credits after video 7 for a drive along South Tarawa.
33 Land belongs to the government and those who are members of South Tarawa kainga. However, if there
are many descendants then the land cannot be divided up for all and thus additional members have to live
in squatter settlements with outer island immigrants.
34 Machine purchase is facilitated by the large number of Kiribati sailors that work on overseas ships.
filmed of them the day before, and especially those from Rabi in Fiji. Rabi, is well known to all in Kiribati as that faraway volcanic island to which many of their relatives have traveled and settled, inter-marrying with the Banabans. I had some Rabi footage in DV form and was compelled to play it off my camera. It worked quite well in exchange for people’s hospitality until I realized it wasn’t so good for the camera itself. Dozens of people would gather in and around the bata thoroughly entertained by images of a place that had until then been more imagined then concrete. Previously held notions of Rabi were than juxtaposed with what the video revealed. On Tabiteuea, an island with very limited electricity, this scene was deeply profound for me as technology made possible visual and “live” connections between extended family members. Once the Rabi videos ended, however, I was subjected to hours and hours of Steven Segal, American Ninja and Delta Force 5, until the fuel in the generator ran out.

The video industry in Kiribati is far more regulated than that of Fiji. My cousin Aren, in the Ministry of Social Welfare on Tarawa was in charge of censoring every single tape that was imported into the country. Along with the Chief Commissioner of Police she would spend many hours a week going through new tapes and deciding on appropriate ratings. As a consequence of my stay with Aren, I got to see the wide variety of movies that were imported into the country. The very first day I arrived on South Tarawa she drove me to the Ministry of Social Welfare at Bikenibeu. Right outside her office a Kiribati theatre group was dramatising how rain clouds passed right over the group and how this lack of rainwater was a national crisis. Right inside her office were boxes of hundreds of VHS tapes.

At least seventy percent of these films were action, science fiction, horror or comedy and very few were drama. All the movies were in English which is interesting
since English is rarely spoken, not even in the capital of Kiribati. I asked my relatives on both Tarawa and Tabiteuea what they like about movies and they always said the “action” (cf Metcalf 2001). They were far less concerned with the dialogue since the rapidly moving images could tell stories on their own. I began to realize just how important the visual medium was, even in a country without television. Video was accessible to everyone. As soon as people saw the digital video camera that I carried around, they borrowed or set up a monitor so they could see exactly what I had been filming. This became the trend in almost every household I visited. Sometimes whole communities that I was not connected to would also request a video session. One uncle even asked that I copy six hours of Rabi footage for him on VHS so they could see relatives they’d never met in Fiji.

Even when I went to Banaba, a two-day boat trip from Tarawa and a place to which there is no regular transport, people had access to a video screen and one family even had Nintendo. I want to emphasise that it was not so much the prevalence of video that surprised me but that video was more available than water and adequate health facilities. For example, while I could watch a wide variety of movies on Tabiteuea Meang, no matter what sickness I got—stomachache, head ache, flu—the only available cure was Panadol (basically that’s like using paracetemol to cure everything).

More research needs to be done on what meanings people make of video movies but I highlight the widespread acceptance of the medium in order to contrast it with things many (but not all) Gilbertese and Banabans do not prefer, like books and academic articles. They do, however, like music, especially techno-pop from groups like “Aqua” and “The Venga Boys” or contemporary island music by “Te Vaka” and “Black Rose” (see discography). Audio and visual information is often more accessible, interesting and familiar than the written word. In Tarawa one can hear songs like “We like to Party: The Venga Bus,” Pate Pate, and “Barbie Girl” by the group Aqua, blasted from most of the high speed mini-van buses that traverse the South Tarawa chain attracting young listeners and customers from Bonriki to Betio. My cousins assured me that some people ride on buses not just to get somewhere but to listen to the music. The “mediascape” of Tarawa is a mixture of techno and Pacific music, Radio Kiribati and Hollywood action movies (cf Appadurai 1990).

The availability of video is also reflected in the innovative use of shiny black videotape as a substitute for coconut leaves in the making of skirts for dance. I first saw one of these skirts in Lower Hutt, Wellington in the house of a Gilbertese and Tuvaluan
family and was intrigued when I found the skirt was actually videotape. The Whincups quote I-Kiribati as saying:

You can see the changes now—using modern music, trying to put in traditional dance—that’s one. Two, the costume—plastic is being used very often... But one interesting thing is since the introduction of video tapes we’ve found that the worn out ones are used for skirts—instead of using blackened coconut. It’s a good size you know—just exactly as the more normal one and you don’t have to go to all the process of blackening the thing because its already black and shiny... (Whincup and Whincup 2001: 58).

Anyone who lives in the islands will note that in any hot and or humid place without air conditioning, videotapes have a fairly short shelf life. Videotapes, then, like words in the Gilbertese language, have multiple functions. Videotapes, like any resource in the limited landscape of Kiribati have multiple uses. It is a medium through which people can be entertained in two ways as film and as dancing skirt. Imagine diffracting one particular VHS skirt!

It was only after I left Kiribati, after travelling to Banaba, Tabiteuea and Tarawa, after learning and watching Gilbertese dances, that my PhD thesis started to take the shape it is now in—multi-sited, focused on connection and difference, the visual and the embodied. Attention to these things shaped the previous chapters even if they are not about dance. Dance, was usually left out of the colonial history books perhaps because the writers never imagined the connections between land, people and movement. As we’ll see in the next chapter, performance is central to Banaban and Gilbertese identity and politics.
Revisiting Silverman's "Disconcerting Issue"

I mentioned that when the Banabans look at certain magazines, they look for themselves inside. This is a special case of a more inclusive phenomenon: they are looking for themselves in general. They are trying to clarify who they are, how they got where they are, what they are doing and what they should do, where they are going and where they should go (Silverman 1971: 14).

During Martin Silverman's research in the late 1960s, the Banabans had only been in Fiji for just over twenty years and the "two-island" theme was viewed as one of the most difficult aspects of both Banaban identity and history and Silverman's own anthropological project. The discipline was geared towards dealing with people and culture "in place" so that environment, language, material and behaviour could be comprehended as one symbolic system. The deep exploration of one symbol, like land, for example, could illuminate the entire culture. The Banaban displacement from their indigenous land complicated this assumption and is maybe one of many
reasons why anthropologists have not flocked to Rabi over the last fifty-five years. Certainly Silverman saw the double connection to both Banaba and Rabi as “disconcerting.”

My approach, far from assuming a problem with two islands, has in fact included Tabiteuea and Tarawa, as well as Australia, New Zealand and Fiji as important places in which Banaban land, culture, identity and history are shaped and connected. It is important, however, to engage with Silverman’s observation that belonging to two islands and the way the phosphate industry disrupted the land and kinship is crucial to cultural processes on Rabi. To an extent, the Gilbertese knowledge, heritage and materials that flow through Rabi are not invoked as aspects of a public, shared, verbally articulated Banaban identity—except when they are used to designate who are “real” Banabans and who are Gilbertese. While all Banabans are dual residents of Fiji and Kiribati, the latter is rarely invoked as a relevant category for political or economic activity.

As Silverman suggested almost three decades ago Banabans face a continuing problem with the very speed of social and institutional transformation since Ellis’ arrival in 1900: “... in a period of five years, the phosphate operation began, with its people, work, money...; Ocean Island was drawn into the protectorate and a native government was set up; the children were in school” (Silverman, 1971: 103). Then, forty-five years later, they were faced not just with new institutions but an entirely new island—a new home.

Silverman sees this rapid change combining with earlier strategies of social organization to create a system in which individuals tend to “maximise their options” (ibid: 15), by maintaining a fluid system of loyalties or alliances. Silverman writes, “A genuine innovative and creative upsurge may be experienced as people try to define the nature of each subsystem, and the nature of the system as a whole” (ibid: 12). Although I do not share Silverman’s vision of systems, it is this creative aspect of Banaban survival that I try to elaborate in this chapter. But I emphasise that that creativity is not limited to situations of displacement or diaspora since as we saw in chapter 4, a different kind of creativity thrives in Kiribati as well.

1 Silverman, German researchers Wolfgang Kempf and Elfriede Hermann, and myself have been the
Since all Banabans are connected through genealogy and history to a wide number of individuals and families, individuals use the possibility of benefiting from all those connections depending on the context. Membership in family, church, village, employment and sports groups, allows the person to exercise a certain amount of autonomy in terms of where his or her actions or energies might be focused. While the political and material conditions on Rabi may have changed since Silverman's research in the 1960s, this dynamic aspect of Banaban relationships perdures. Silverman wrote, "...with the possibilities for creativity and elaboration increased, with differentiation between cultural and social spheres, objectification and the growing systematisation of the culture... become correlates at the individual level" (ibid: 13).

Silverman's analysis of the Rabi situation is helpful but rather confusing because he reproduces Maude's (1932) original descriptions of "traditional" Banaban culture, and then theorizes "change" on the basis of an a priori stable system. The fluidity of Banaban culture appears to him to be a consequence of Rabi displacement. But even Maude acknowledges that as many as 1500 Banabans were dispersed during the droughts in the 1870s returning to Banaba after years of living in Tahiti, Hawai'i and other islands.² Many more perished from lack of food and water on the island. We also know from oral history of the division of Banaba by Nei Anginimaeao of Beru, perhaps more than a century before these droughts (cf K. Teaiwa 1999, Maude 1994 and Silverman 1971). Anginimaeao and her relatives seem to have drastically transformed the social structure of groups on the island. It would be hard to imagine that people ever lived within a stable "system."

My thesis argues that as well as fluidity and multiple connections in political, inter-personal or group relations that Silverman mapped out so well for Rabi, embodied dance and musical practices similarly evince fluidity and multiple sources. The impulse for creativity, fluidity and permeability does not just come from metropolitan centres, "the diaspora," transnational media or neoliberal economics. Moreover, far from being politically disinterested this fluidity is about survival.

² Maude's hand-written catalogues of some of the Banabans indicates place of birth and these include Tahiti and Hawai'i. See Maude papers in Barr-Smith Library.
Silverman cites the small population, the small area of interaction (the island) and the egalitarian ethic as reasons why an individual Banaban can actually make a difference at the island level.3 This may be more true for certain Banaban men than women but Silverman is correct in describing the nature of the social field. It is a relatively level terrain or it is at least outwardly appears so compared to the more hierarchical Pacific societies like Fiji or Tonga, for example.

Though most Banabans and Gilbertese have been moved and no longer live on their indigenous lands, they do not quite fall into the category “diasporic” as it is engaged in cultural studies. This is because Banabans did not migrate by choice, they were moved as an entire population, they did not move to a metropolitan centre in the West, and in Fiji they have relative autonomy on their own island. James Clifford defines the contours of diaporas thus:

Diasporas usually presuppose longer distances and a separation more like exile: a constitutive taboo on return, or its postponement to a remote future. Diasporas also connect multiple communities of a dispersed population. (Clifford 1997: 246)

Many Banabans have always seen themselves “in exile” and the description has been used in both media coverage (see *Foreign Correspondent* 1995) and travel writing (see Wooley 1995). But Fiji is not as far away from Kiribati as India is from the United States or England. Moreover unlike say, the Indian diaspora or even Samoans, few Banabans have moved to reside within erstwhile colonial powers or metropolitan centres. These tend to be the privileged contours of the diaspora as it is conceived in cultural studies as a fertile ground for theorizing hybridity and flux. Such contours elide groups like the Banabans and Tuvaluans in Fiji and Native Hawaiians in the US (cf Diaz and Kauanui 2001; Hereniko and Wilson 1999).

T. Teaiwa describes the origins of diaspora thus:

The term “diaspora” traces its origins to the Jewish experience of displacement from a homeland and dispersal in phases over hundreds of years throughout the Middle East, Africa, Europe and America. The diasporic experience engenders a diasporic imagination and identity which keeps in tension the

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3 Silverman (1971) also describes how in larger societies the everyday person has very little ability to impact the whole group— only people in power can do this, while on Rabi, the distance between the person and effecting island-wide action is much shorter.
memory of the homeland and the exigencies of making a home in a new location (T. Teaiwa 2001a: 50).

Most Banaban leaders have been Methodist ministers like Rotan Tito, his son Tebuke Rotan and Terubea Rongorongo, and some have likened their experience to that of the Israelites. In the preface to his thesis on the history of the Methodist Church on Rabi, Temaka Benaia wrote:

Biblically, the Banabans are like the Israelites who were called from Egypt, the land of bondage and hardships. The Banabans left and travelled to Rabi under very difficult conditions (Benaia 1991: x).

There is a salient discourse on exile from “the homeland” kept alive by particular actors—many of the older generations and a few younger people who are nationalists.

Banabans, like many islanders, have plural and situational identifications not played out in a metropolitan centre or in close proximity to a colonial European other, at least not since 1941. But, following Clifford’s further definitions of Diaspora cultures, the community on Rabi:

... articulates or bends together, both roots and routes to construct what Gilroy (1987) describes as alternate public spheres, forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national time/space in order to live inside, with a difference. Diaspora cultures are not separatist, though they may have separatist or irredentist moments (Clifford 1997: 251).

Teaiwa responds to Clifford’s above statement, “It is my contention that the Native in Oceania does that too” (T. Teaiwa 2001a: 54) Banaban cultural politics as it has developed on Rabi, I think, is a prime example of how strategies and tactics resonate with both diasporic and indigenous discourses.

Banabans consider Rabi to be Banaban land because it was bought with phosphate money—money from Banaban lands (Silverman 1971). But throughout the decade in which the people approached the United Nations, the British Government and the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony for Banaban independence, they never once approached Fiji for Rabi independence.

Perhaps their liminal position between Fiji and Kiribati (and Australia, New Zealand and Britain) has resulted in a lack of attention both from those
Anthropologists wanting to observe "native" places and proponents of cultural studies fixated on diasporic peoples and seemingly eschewing "the native" as uninteresting. And yet Banabans are both diasporic and "natives" (cf. T. Teiwa 2001a).

The removal of the Banaban community as a whole is probably what most distinguishes them from diasporic communities or individuals who articulate their identities against a still present "home" culture. The objectification of "culture" happens differently on Rabi because most Banabans (aside from those repatriated to Banaba in the 1970s) are committed to change and debate it in the new environment. There is enough of a sense of autonomy on Rabi for them, using Silverman's (1971): 157-210) term, to "test out" possible ways of organizing the community as a whole and in its various parts (villages, church groups etc.). The way Silverman sees all this relation to the past is worth mentioning:

Kinship and descent, politics, economics and religion are implicated in the testing-out process. Through this process Banaban culture evolves, and individuals try to give sense to and make sense from their experience. Their experience is neither personally nor historically static. It is calamitous; and the experience of their parents and grandparents, transformed, is alive within them. Again, they are in history and history is in them (Silverman 1971: 15).

Figure 102. Protests on Banaba at Ellis Memorial Fiji Times 24/2/79
On Returning home to Fiji

We have been dancing
Yes, our anklets and
Amulets now are
Yes, grinding into our skin
No longer are they a décor
Yes, they are our chains

We have been dancing
Yes, but the euphoria has died
It now the dull drumming
Yes, of the flat drums
Thud dada thud da thud dada thud
Yes, it is signalling, not the bliss
But the impending crisis.

Vincent Warakai

One of the clearest memories I have after returning from Kiribati to Fiji is of people sitting in a bus waiting for the traffic lights to turn green at the junction of Princes Rd., Waimanu Rd., Ratu Mara Rd. and Edinburgh Drive. I was looking up from the window of our station wagon to the large Tacirua Transport bus stopped just next to the car. All the passengers were sitting stiff in a row, facing forward in total silence. It suddenly struck me that I'd never seen such a quiet bus in the streets of Suva in all my life. Usually people would chat away, look outside, look at each other or look down at the cars next to them. Usually the radio was blasting the eclectic sounds of FM 96 and people were nodding or tapping the window frames to the music. On this day there was something both steely and fearful about the passengers on the bus.

I arrived back in Fiji on May 3, 2000 and on May 19th a group of armed men led by the now infamous George Speight took over government at the parliament complex in Suva. Their main target was Indian Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry who was in the process of initiating major pro-labour changes and land reform.5

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4 PNG poet Vincent Warakai's "Dancing Yet to the Dim Dim's Beat" (Warakai in Wendt 1995: 246). This poem was also used on the Boiling Ocean II CD produced at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture in 2000.

Chaudhry had won the 1999 elections and incensed Fijian nationalist groups as well as a few businessmen who were not in favour of his hard-line approach to economic transparency.

On the day it all happened I was in town to buy a dance costume for a performance produced at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture at the USP. Our group including, Letava Tafuna'i and Allan Alo (see Video 7), were due to dance in Canberra for the Pacific History Association conference in June. Since I’d returned from Kiribati I’d spent most of my time rehearsing for this performance on celebrating the diversity of Oceania. I had not read a newspaper or watched television news in months and did not know that earlier that day a crowd had marched through the streets demanding the protection of Fijian rights.

As I headed towards the Suva market I thought it unusual that most of the shops around me were closing down in the middle of the day. The sounds of bars and grills slamming shut rang in my ears but at first I was oblivious to the rising wave of panic. Then people began to run left and right and I instinctively did the same, reversing my direction and heading back to my father’s office at Banaba House. 6

Within minutes we both discovered that after thirteen years another coup had taken place in Fiji. I was stunned to find that the central Suva police station just outside my father’s office had also pulled its shutters down and there were no policemen in sight. In more than a little panic I drove straight to the Tamavua service station, filled our car with petrol and the boot with noodle soup, milk, rice, tuna, corned beef, sugar and tea. When I was done I saw that at least thirty cars had lined up behind me.

This was the context in which I viewed those passengers in the bus at the four-way junction in Samabula. The coup created an air of uncertainty and fear not just because the government had been violently toppled but because people in general, and particularly Fijians, no longer trusted their own friends, village or province members (cf Lal with Pretes 2001). Many people became suspicious of each other as a matter of course and Indians stopped driving alone. Rumour mongering reached an

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6 Banaba House just down the road from the Cathedral in Suva, was one of the few purchases that the Rabi Council made decades ago which they still possess. The slightly run-down building houses the Suva offices of the Council as well as the Hare Krishna restaurant and Lantern Palace.
all time high as people searched for a way to explain what had happened and imagine its consequences. The international media in particular carried out a sensational coverage which catapulted Speight into temporary stardom. A friend of mine from Lau kept telling me over the phone that President Ratu Mara had to give up his office or face the consequences. Since the President is the high chief of Lau, I realised that factions within the Fijian provinces cut right through normal chiefly allegiances.

Having never written about politics in Fiji, rather than thinking through what had happened in terms of academic and media discourses I observed the impact of the coup in the way the look and sounds of the city and people’s words and movements changed. During the first six months after May 19 people rode around in groups, did not look each other in the eye, looked sad, lost or nervous. The air was always filled with a thinly stretched tension which seemed at the very point of yielding outright chaos.

I remember watching one of Fiji’s most prominent lawyers, an Indian woman, dash with shopping bags from a supermarket to her four-wheel drive vehicle. Her movements were periodically interrupted by a jerk of the head and a quick scan of the eyes. Because there was a curfew, public transportation stopped running early and people would walk miles to get home on time. There was a running joke about how people who did have cars, who worked in Suva and didn’t want to drastically alter their weekly habits would finish work at 3:00pm, go to the pub at 3:15 and be home by 5:45 pm in time for the 6:00pm curfew. When it shifted to 8:00pm they finished work by 5:00, went to the pub at 5:15 and were home by 7:45.

Temporarily, the things I had learned and seen after my intense trip to Kiribati melted away. The celebratory dance show we were rehearsing at USP no longer seemed appropriate and was duly retitled *The Boiling Ocean* (I started thinking of it as the “bloody hell!” ocean). The dances in Canberra and Honolulu that you see in Video 7 were a direct result of that show but reflect the more up-beat numbers choreographed by OCAC resident artist, Allan Alo. As always with any of Allan’s shows a dance to, *Pate Pate* (Te Vaka 1999) formed the conclusion of the show, a positive note in an incredibly difficult national period.
When we weren’t rehearsing I stayed at home watching the news and feeling depressed about the future of Fiji. The footage from one event in particular astounded me. An Australian journalist had been filming near one of the military posts outside the Parliament complex and a whole group of people stormed the barricades. Fijians fought Fijians with guns and fists, their actions made more bizarre by the crazy angles captured by the running cameraman. The sounds of firing weapons emitted from the TV screen. Few weapons had been fired during the 1987 coups because for the most part, the military achieved total and peaceful control of the nation. In the 2000 coup those with guns were civilians or ex-servicemen rather than members of the army.

On the first day of the coup crowds of people rampaged through Suva looting shops in their wake. Men, women and children all participated. In the first weeks after May 19, houses near the parliamentary complex were temporarily evacuated by their owners. A friend of our family had his ransacked. When he finally returned he found faeces smeared on his walls and floor. Deuba primary school (a Fijian school), just across from the complex, was similarly vandalised. For the first time I started to contemplate the reality that Fiji no longer felt like home. I will not lie. Indigenous nationalism took on a whole new meaning for me during this particular coup.

During this period I did no research and not knowing what else to do with the Anthropology department’s $3000 video camera. I turned it on the television.

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7 After the first day of the coup, the military formed a barricade around Parliament. At first they let people in to join the Speight led rebels but later they decided to stop the flow of incoming food and bodies. This resulted in a riot at the barricade which killed or injured several soldiers, civilians and at least one journalist. See the Fiji Times and Daily Post May 19 to July 2000 and ABC archives on the web.

8 What was also worrying was that traditional leaders like Ratu Mara and hero of the first coups, Sitiveni Rabuka were clearly out of favour in 2000. It was a new breed of dissent and no one was really sure who was at the helm. George Speight, for the most part, appeared to be a front man for other forces at work.
Figure 103. George Speight, Mahendra Chaudhry and Tupeni Baba with reporters at Parliament Complex, May 2000, Fiji One TV.
Rabi Elders Look Back to Banaba

The context of the meeting from which the following discussion is taken is that of the period after the May 19 civilian coup in Suva, Fiji. Although Banabans live some distance from the capital city and operate with a good measure of autonomy, they are full citizens of Fiji and are always affected by the political climate in the rest of the country (cf T. Teaiwa 2000). When they first arrived in Fiji, the Banabans had no knowledge of Fijian culture and when they were invited to visit the villages across the bay they did not know what protocol to follow. According to a history of the Methodist Church on Rabi by Temaka Benaia:

The people were not informed of the kinds of physical, social and cultural changes they could expect on arrival in Rabi. As a result, readjustment to the new environment involved both minor and serious mistakes which even cost the lives of some men and women. In the late 1940s a group of Banabans went to Taveuni island (12 miles south of Rabi) to attend a special function, and were welcomed with a full Fijian traditional ceremony. When the first cup of grog was served to each of them, one of the men, Beniamina, refused to take it. In the the Fijian customs, this is very rude and unacceptable. After a while Beniamina went out of the house and he was never seen again (Benaia 1991: 57).

Over the years relationships have grown more amiable and there has been inter-marriage between Fijians and Banabans. The people on Rabi have also tried to maintain a good relationship with the former indigenous owners of Rabi (or Rabe) island who now live in Lovonivonu on the island of Taveuni. The title “Tui Rabe” or chief of Rabe, continues to exist even though Fijians no longer have legal rights on this freehold island. While not wanting to officially recognize the indigenous claim to their island, through rugby, Banabans have managed to include the Rabean descendants to represent Rabi at national rugby matches. My father explained the motivations behind the inclusion of Fijian players on the Rabi team as ‘superstition’. While Rabi had previously reached the finals of the island zone rugby matches, they had not won. They felt that by including members of the original Rabe peoples, they would win. In 2000 they did this: the Rabi team consisted of mostly Fijians from Lovonivonu and a handful of Banabans. They played under the Rabi flag and they won the island zone. The team won again this year and in August The Daily Post
online ran a story titled “Rabi Proves too Strong.” 10 This time none of the players were Banaban and at least in rugby the original descendants of the island have reclaimed their title.

There have been other clashes with the Fijian villages in Buca over fishing rights. The Tui Tunuloa who lives in Koroivonu across the bay keeps an eye on the Banabans to make sure that they do not fish for commercial purposes. Legally, Banabans are only allowed to fish on the reef for subsistence. They have an agreement with the Tui Cakau who is head of all the chiefs of Cakaudrove.12 The restrictions on Banaban economic practices have remained a sore point for some people on Rabi, especially as it is used as a political leverage during national elections.

9 It was originally called Rate Island.
10 See The Daily Post 23/8/02.
11 Nano Matua is the motto of the Tabwewa sports teams and it means “strong” or “persevering.”
When the chiefs of Cakaudrove need Banabans to vote for their political candidates, they always remind them of their generosity in granting them rights to fish on their reefs.

When there is political trouble in the rest of the country and especially when it becomes known that Fijian nationalism is gaining momentum (despite the great differences within factions of the Fijian nationalist movement), some Banabans begin to feel uneasy about their status in Fiji. They start to look back to Banaba as their true home. In 2000, the May 19 coup prompted another such bout of insecurity. The Banaban elders immediately wrote to the Rabi Council at which time my father was still Chairman. Sixteen elders called a meeting which convened on November 11, 2000 in Nuku. The elders raised three points with my father over the course of the two hour long meeting which I was allowed to videotape with their permission.

Originally, old people on Banaba had the traditional authority along with the various clans who comprised the genealogical hierarchy from the village of Tabwewa through to Uma, Buakonikai and Tabiang. Since 1947, however, a Council of Leaders was set up by the British colonial administration and at independence, Banaban rights in Fiji were written into the 1970 law under the Banaban Settlement Act.13 Their own Chairman, Terubea Rongorongo, and his associates amended aspects of this before 1991 when the Rabi Council caved in under his rampant corruption.14 During the last fifty-seven years on Rabi, the old men and women, te unimuare ao nauine, have maintained a symbolic leadership, and have periodically raised the issue of their desire to return to their ancestral land. They are members of the generation who would remember both the prosperity on the island as well as its demise during the Japanese occupation in 1941.

The first point raised was regarding the review of the Kiribati Constitution that had occurred in early 2000 which my father and three other councillors had attended in Kiribati. The elders especially raised an issue with Chapter 9 which dealt with the protection of Banabans and Banaban lands. During that conference, the Rabi

12 Cakaudrove covers the eastern part of Vanua Levu and includes Buca and Natewa Bay, Savusavu, Taveuni, Rabi and Kioa.
13 See "Laws of Fiji" Chapter 123, Banaban Settlement, and Chapter 124, Banaban Lands.
Council had presented their views on both Chapter 9 and Chapter 3 which dealt with Banaban constitutional rights and citizenship in Kiribati. My father explained that the council had expressed their desire to have both chapters strengthened in order to reflect the friendly relations that had developed between the Banabans and the Kiribati Government. This friendship had been considerably strengthened by my father in his four years with the council. In his thinking, the Banabans had a unique opportunity to create economic and cultural exchanges with Kiribati given their dual citizenship.

Unfortunately Banabans and I-Kiribati have always had a rather sour political relationship since the Banabans bombed the mines on Banaba in the late 1970s and actively sought separation from Kiribati even before that country’s own independence in 1968. My father actively tried to mend some of these tensions during his time but such negotiations have since diminished after the council voted for a new representative to sit in the Kiribati Parliament. In 2002 the review of both these chapters is still to be completed and plans to have formal economic relations between Kiribati and Rabi have not developed further.

The second point raised by the elders was their continuing desire for secession from Kiribati. For historical and economic reasons they wanted independence. The economic benefits of life on Banaba were rather hard to prove but a man named Karoro Corrie reiterated a popular rumour that Banaba actually contained mineral oil as well as phosphate. This possibility was seen to be sufficient grounds for independence from Kiribati. My father, however, resisted this idea and stated that he had been elected by the Banaban people to act in their best interests. Independence from Kiribati would not be in their best interests at all, he maintained. My father firmly believes that the Banaban status in Fiji is not threatened and that the people of Rabi can maintain good relations with both the Fiji Government and the Kiribati Government. As Chairman, however, he supported the desire to resettle Banaba but only after the Kiribati government’s plan to rehabilitate the island with the assistance of the former colonial governments was carried out.

14 The Rabi section of Rimon's paper is pro-Rongorongo even though he cites the Commission of Enquiry Report (1993) which in no uncertain terms traces the corruption in the Rabi Council to Rongorongo.
Karawa from Uma: There is insecurity in Fiji and a desire to resettle on Banaba. There is no doubt that Banabans own Rabi under the law, but they can return to Banaba which they own too. Recent events and rumours about Fijians wanting their land back are a real worry and a cause for concern about Banaban safety. The Banaban history of destruction and exploitation could repeat itself.\textsuperscript{15} 

The third issue raised by the elders was their desire to return and resettle Banaba. The Tui Rabe's desire for recognition on the island combined with the events of the coup made the elders feel that the Banaban people were not welcome in Fiji. They worried that they would be displaced again and the island repossessed. According to my father, this is impossible as Rabi is a freehold island alienated from the indigenous owners long before the Banabans arrived in Fiji.\textsuperscript{16} The elders worried that if Fijians could kick Indians out of the country, maybe they would do the same with the Banabans. My father replied that while Indians were perceived by some as a threat to Fijian paramountcy, Banabans were not.

After the coup, an interim government was appointed led by Laisenia Qarasea. This was an almost completely Fijian government of which my father was a member until a second group was appointed by the interim President of Fiji, Ratu Josefa Iloilo. Part of the move of this government was to hand back ownership of the reefs and shorelines up to high water marks, previously owned by the state rather than the Fijian provinces. This would mean the Fijian people of each area would have more rights over waters than groups like the Banabans, Kioans and the general public, including the tourism industry. My father expressed his immediate concern regarding this move and the government said they would take it into consideration. This possibility however, did not help the Banaban elders feel any better about their situation in Fiji. The meeting went on and my father made a statement:

Chairman: Council supports resettlement of Banaba but for reasons different from the Elders. Council has liaised closely with Kiribati on Banaba rehabilitation including remining, upgrading roads and other public works, investigating underground water, and possible commercialisation of pinnacles. It is important to pursue these issues in conjunction with resettlement because

\textsuperscript{15} This meeting was translated from video by John T. Teaiwa.
\textsuperscript{16} Rabi was first alienated after a Fijian war with the great Tongan chief Ma'afu in the 19th century in which the Fijians lost the island to Ma'afu. He then sold it to European planters and eventually it came to be owned by the Lever Brothers in the early 20th century. They had close business ties with the BPC and they in turn bought it for the Banabans.
Council needs to know whether it is feasible. Therefore, proceed slowly, carefully and patiently.

My father continued to say that much had to be done on Banaba before resettlement was possible. This included a new survey of land boundaries as the last one had been done in 1947. The meeting ended after several people had repeated what others said about wanting to return and worrying about the Fijian pressure.

Are Moote of Uma: It has always been our prayer and hope to return to live in our spiritual homeland. Living away from Banaba makes us feel homesick, and recent events have strengthened our desire to return to Banaba to live. Even if we have to face hardship there, at least we will live peacefully.

The meeting then ended, we had a nice morning tea provided by Nei Makin Corrie and her family and I took a photo of everyone outside.

Figure 105. Banaban Council of Elders, November 10, 2000

Relations between Kiribati and Rabi

Political Differences

It may seem like my movements in Chapter 4 described as “just visiting relatives” are idiosyncratic of my own journey and genealogy. But while connections between Kiribati and Rabi are problematic in a political context, the flow of ideas, music and materials continues and connections are hardly restricted to my own travels.
In theory and political rhetoric the divide between I-Kiribati and Banaban still appears to be quite large. As I've mentioned earlier a profoundly divisive instigator of these tensions was the hierarchy set up by the BPC industry on Banaba between landowners and workers. In a harsh critique of Banaban values a former USP student named Betarim Rimon, who is both Banaban and I-Kiribati, described the following problems in a Sociology research paper:

For the first time the Banabans observe labourers toiling on their land. They felt superior and proud as the BPC and workers showed respect to them as wealthy landowners. They were beginning to build their status and pride. This was the time that suddenly erased the lessons of the drought. From the rather poor traditional life style, the families were suddenly moved into a strange environment which can be termed as un-Banaban. They turned out to be most expensive people in terms of their exaggerated needs and wants (Rimon nd: 38).

There is no doubt that the phosphate industry catalysed such divisions but this must be contrasted with the fact that, during the Japanese occupation of Banaba during World War II, families of the Gilbert and Ellice Island labourers who were left behind by the company were invited into Banaban families in a relationship called te bo. According to Rimon, this was partly because the material benefits of the mining industry had substituted certain Banaban survival skills and they had to rely on knowledge of fishing and healing from the company employees (ibid: 40).

Banaban agitation for independence in the 1970s also exacerbated the division, but the Government of the Gilbert Islands in its pre-independence years and the Kiribati government led by Ieremia Tabai, post independence, has responsibility for this as well. Gilbertese politicians took a blanket approach to Banaba claiming it as part of their territory without acknowledging the colonial manipulations that had

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17 I use both the terms "Gilbertese" and "I-Kiribati" to highlight pre and post independence labels for ethnicity and national identity and to delineate the differences between being Gilbertese (by blood) and I-Kiribati (of Kiribati).

18 Betarim Rimon gave me a copy of his research paper and permission to cite it in 2000 on Tarawa where he works in the Ministry of Natural Resources. This paper is based on sociological research with a small number of male informants as well as oral histories. Some events and dates vary greatly from those of Maude, Williams and Macdonald. For example, see pages 41-43 where it appears that the Banabans returned to Banaba before they were shipped off to Rabi.

19 According to Rimon, te bo is not adoption as traditionally understood in the Gilberts where adoption is always between blood relatives, but the joining of families unrelated by blood.
linked the group in the first place. Phosphate and money were (and still are for Banabans) at the heart of both Banaban nationalism and the former Gilbert Government's claims of territory over the island.

The letter to the editor by Teai (Fiji Times 1976 in Maude Papers) cited earlier was one of many in a slew of carefully worded insults and accusations between Banabans and Gilbertese in the Fiji Times, particularly between 1976 and 1979. This exchange, along with articles and commentary about the Banaban court case in London was so frequent for so long that one young Fijian woman wrote to the newspaper in 1979 saying,

Sir—I am writing because I'm so concerned about the Banaban case which has been exploiting our newspapers. Who wants to know about their business with the Gilbertese? I suggest if they want to settle this matter, why don't they all take-off to Ocean Island and talk it over out there since they're both fighting over it... (Fiji Times 15 March 1979).

At the time the Fiji Trade Unions Council and the Prime Minister, Rau Mara, were playing major roles in the Banaban case. The former were acting in solidarity with the Banabans and Ratu Mara was trying to negotiate on their behalf with the Kiribati, Australian and New Zealand Governments. It was just after Fiji had achieved its own independence in 1970 and support for indigenous independence was high.

In the Fiji Times a lot was said about "facts" and "lies" and the Gilbertese and Banaban "facts" were almost always different. The current President of Kiribati Teburoro Tito, who was then at USP, made some rather sardonic remarks after Teai's letter responding to the Gilbert Islands Government "Some facts the Banabans ignore 1976). He and another student at USP wrote:

What cannot be tolerated is the fact that for too long the Banabans have been publicising their motherland (Banaba) as a place where they shall live and die when in reality they have demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt that they would rather remain on Rabi... For obvious reasons, including that of Fiji being naturally more fertile than the rocky, waterless Banaba, they chose NOT to go home.

20 See "Some Facts the Banabans ignore" (nd) issued by the government of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony in the Maude Papers in the Barr-Smith Library at Adelaide University.
21 See images of newspaper articles in Video 5.
Is Mr. Teai not clear that his grandmother came from the Gilberts, his lands are still waiting for him at Arorae... and that according to a Banaban custom one must inherit the identity and birthrights of the mother. Furthermore as a descendant of a Gilbertese woman, he should be more versed with the legendary and historical background of the Gilbertese... people than what he has so far demonstrated.22

The authors insinuated that the Banabans had not wisely spent the royalties they had already earned through the mining and were heavily dependent on foreign advisors. They also stressed that there were 50,000 people in the Gilberts and only 2500 Banabans further implying that the money distribution had really been to the advantage of the Banabans. Another letter to the editor from a T. Kata took a more humorous approach to the whole thing. He wrote, "Ideally speaking, the most feasible sounding solution is to physically drag Banaba out of Kiribati and tie it next to Rabi island. With the help of some sophisticated technology yet to be invented I am sure this will not be a very distant solution" (Fiji Times 13/3/79 in Maude Papers).

Anti-Banaban sentiment was cemented by a particular incident on Banaba which has forever been a sore point for Banaban nationalists. When I visited Banaba in 2000, the wife of the manager, a Tuvaluan woman, recounted the same incident to me as if it had just happened yesterday. Apparently Gilbertese policeman on Banaba were particularly harsh towards the Banabans when they returned to "occupy" their island in February 1979. In one skirmish between Banabans and Gilbertese police a Banaban man was killed. In March 1979 fifty-five Banabans were charged for firebombing BPC mining installations and held in Tarawa (Fiji Times 12/3/79). Apparently Ellice workers refused to act against the Banabans and so the lines were clearly drawn with the Gilbertese on one side and Banabans on the other.

The nation of Fiji was very much embroiled in both this movement and the Banaban case but not all people were supportive. Many thought that the Banaban case was motivated by greed rather then genuine grievance. August Kituai's research in 1982, for example, sought to clarify just what lay behind Banaban nationalism (see Kituai, 1982: 3-48). By talking directly to Banabans he found that:

22 This letter to the Fiji Times editor in the Maude Papers was cut so that the month and day were missing but the year 1976 remained.
The Banabans' struggle for complete independence was frustrated by the BPC but, more seriously, by the inconsistencies of the British colonial policies. The Tuvaluans were allowed to gain their own independence separately from the Gilbertese without any fuss. There was, of course, nothing to lose by their separation. But when the Banabans tried to gain the same privilege, the way was obstructed, obviously for fear of losing the handsome source of revenue from the phosphate. The myth of Ocean Island being traditionally an integral part of the Gilbertese group was unashamedly created as an excuse for blocking the way of these poor people towards gaining their legitimate and inalienable rights for complete political independence (ibid: 39).

From the 1980s onwards, after the Banabans lost both their case and struggle for independence, the discourse on pity or kaua developed.

An example of continuing Banaban resentment over this legacy was demonstrated in Suva in 1999 after I presented a video at the University of the South Pacific edited out of archival film footage and photographs of Banaba, and contemporary images of Rabi. The main questions I received from the floor by Banabans were not about the new visual archival material that I’d uncovered but about whether or not I had discovered any evidence to reinforce the racial and cultural differences between “our people” and I-Kiribati (cf Rimon, nd: 54-55). I replied that I had no problem being both Gilbertese and Banaban though I recognized that Banaban anger over the events of the 1970s was still salient, despite the fact that Banabans continue to marry I-Kiribati.

*The Politics of Dance*

Gupta and Ferguson re-think the project of anthropology in these terms: “We are interested less in establishing a dialogic relation between geographically distinct societies than in exploring the processes of *production* of difference in a world of culturally, socially, and economically interconnected and interdependent spaces” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997a: 43). It is the production of difference between

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23 This presentation was based on a video I initially created for a Pacific Studies conference at the University of Hawai‘i. It was called “Out of Phosphate: the Diaspora of Ocean Island/ers” which included a live voiceover.

24 Of course, I don’t experience these tensions because I did not grow up on Rabi or within the Banaban community in Suva, though we participated in some family functions and December 15 celebrations.
Gilbertese and Banabans that I am most interested in given the pitiful history just explored in Chapters 2 and 3.

In practice, the gap between Banabans and Gilbertese articulated so strongly in political contexts is much smaller than it would seem. Besides marriage, this is probably best illustrated in the area of performance. There is a cultural flow between Fiji and Kiribati via diasporic Gilbertese groups and students who attend the University of the South Pacific. A good example is the recording of programs off Fiji ONE television which are then taken back to Kiribati and viewed on video. Dance programs are a favourite feature of this flow. The choreography for the dance to *Pate Pate* (Te Vaka, 1999), as shown in Video 7, was widely described on Tarawa as learnt from a video of the “FM 96 inter-secondary schools Rock Challenge” which featured guest performers Allan Alo and Letava Tafuna’i. They danced Allan’s rendition to the popular Tokelauan song by *Te Vaka* from New Zealand. Both dancers are featured in the video in the “Pacific History conference: Canberra” sequence in Video 7 and if watched closely, one will discern that while the spaces of performance are relatively disparate (Tarawa, Tabiteuea, Rabi, Honolulu and Canberra), the choreography performed by the disparate bodies is very similar.

At my uncle Tebongiro’s house in Betio I had been surprised to find that not only had Pan-Polynesian style choreographies been incorporated into I-Kiribati entertainment but so had Fijian songs and dances. Two of Tebongiro’s youngest children performed their version of a Fijian *meke* or dance at the engagement party of their eldest sister, Rakomwa. Watching them perform made me realize that it wasn’t just proximity to other groups that fostered the exchange of dance and song. Fijian sounds and movements were most likely carried in the bodies and suitcases of those USP students who travel back and forth between Suva and Tarawa. The forms that are becoming increasingly popular are more loose and fluid than the very precise Gilbertese styles although these in turn are still performed on Rabi, for example.

Every December the Catholic community on Rabi holds an island-wide dance competition at Fatima near Nuku. Judged categories include *te bira* and *te luki*, both

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25 Note that Rakomwa is also the name of one of my auntsies on Rabi (see genealogy in Teaiwa’s *Kainga*).

26 The *bira* is a Gilbertese *meke* (or traditional dance) which is performed while sitting.
of which are Gilbertese dances. Dances including the Banaban *karanga*, Gilbertese *kare* and *kahiti* and Samoan *tavakiti* are also featured and judged. Much preparation goes into the competition—long rehearsals and elaborate costumes are made. It must be noted, however, that both Banabans and Gilbertese participate in the gathering and the Catholic community practices more “Gilbertese culture” than the Methodists who have always led the nationalist movement.27 This competition shows however that in many performance contexts on Rabi, Gilbertese music and dance prevail.

A more specific example of this is a particular *bino* which Terabwata began to teach me in Tanaeang back on Tabiteuea. During a visit to New Zealand, my elder sister played me a compact disc compiled by Ad and Lucia Linkels (Ethnic Series #15).28 I remembered seeing these ethnomusicologists on Rabi recording Banaban music in 1997. Their CD mostly featured sound recordings from the 1997 Catholic dance competition. To my surprise I found that the dance that had won the *bino* category that year was the same one from Tabiteuea (see CD cover). I followed this up on my next trip to Rabi and arranged for our family to visit the group who had performed the dance—*Uean te Tangira*. They were gathered in the Tabwewab *mamaiwa* which is located just behind my great grandfather, Tenamo’s, house in Tabwewab village. After they performed and I recorded the *bino* I immediately recognised that the choreography was similar to that which I had started to learn on Tabiteuea. There are very specific flows of information including choreography and music that go back and forth between Rabi and Kiribati and it is often the channels of the Catholic community.

The cultural influences in reverse, from Rabi to Kiribati, are also apparent and best illustrated by the Kiribati Government sponsored Millennium dance performance group. In the video *Spirit of Kiribati* (2000) produced by the Kiribati film unit, both Banabans and I-Kiribati would recognise that the dancing has been heavily influenced by the fast-paced Banaban styles. I learned on Tarawa that this had been a conscious decision of the Kiribati government to appeal to a wider, and in fact, global audience. The all-night performance was seen by millions of viewers on Fiji

ONE, BBC, CNN, CBS, and ABC on the eve of the so-called “new millennium.” The fact that Gilbertese are learning Banaban dance, however, is problematic for some Banaban nationalists who see the choreography and costumes to be the “property” of Banabans. There have been complaints that a former member of the Banaban Dancing Group is going around teaching I-Kiribati what she’s learned and choreographed over the years.

The Banaban Dancing Group (see Video 6) was created in the 1970s for two specific reasons. The first was to perform an identity and culture that was distinct from the Gilbertese. Up till the 1960s music and performance had been dominated by Gilbertese forms. The Catholic community in particular, while not so vocal in politics, was strong in the area of culture. They had developed string bands and singing groups which were increasingly popular across Rabi. During the suit against Britain in the 1970s, the Rabi Council of Leaders helped create a distinct Banaban dancing group as a kind of emblem for the people and their independence cause.

Figure 106. Protest March in Suva in 1976.

29 Knowledge about the Banaban dancing group came from my father who commissioned a paper on Banaban culture during his Chairmanship between 1996 and 2000. Nei Makin Corrie then presented a paper on how the Banaban dancing group was formed. She and her husband were some of the original members.
30 The article accompanying this image described the Banaban protest against being excluded from Constitutional talks between the Gilberts and Britain. Apparently 2500 supporters turned out that day. This was another newspaper article trimmed to exclude the date in the Maude Papers) but after
The above figure shows the dancing group marching along with leaders of the Rabi community. In Sigrah and King (2001), Sigrah states that he was one of the members of this dance group which eventually toured the Pacific and danced at the opening of the Sydney Opera House in 1972 (87). The principle choreographer for the group was a man named Tawaka Tekenimatang. From the beginning it was acknowledged that the new Banaban dance styles had been specifically created rather than being traditional. Beth Dean, an advocate of Pacific dance in the 1970s, wrote, “The Banaban people have, through an imaginative choreographer... developed a style of dance of their very own...” (Dean, 1978: 62). She did not elaborate on why such a “dance of their very own” was needed but the following pages on Gilbertese dance illustrate one possible motive.

One of the early features of the Banaban dancing group was in the use of castanets which Tebuke Rotan, the man who led the Banaban suit against the British, purchased while visiting Europe. While these are rarely used now, they indicate just how open to possibility and outside influences Banaban dancing was despite this rhetorical stress on difference. According to Dean (1978: 62) the sound of the castanets was replicated by using two pieces of hardwood which groups of female dancers clicked as they weaved in and out in lines creating different shapes like a “V” or “T” (see Video 6 for other patterns).

A photographer and writer named Sheree Lipton who visited Rabi in 1970 described the Banabans as “victims of island stealing” (Lipton 1972: 128) but also noted the castanets and related the following anecdote:

When Tebuke went to London to seek phosphate royalties for his people, he sailed from Sydney on a large ocean liner and made friends with a Spanish crew member. While in Barcelona, his new friend insisted that he see the famous Flamenco dancers and off they went to one of the local nightspots... while watching the flamenco dancers, he got the inspiration to bring back castanets to Rabi for his dancing troupe. On the return trip from London, he searched New York City until he found twenty-two dozen, which the Banaban teenagers have happily incorporated into their dancing routines, making a most unusual addition to their already unique style of dances!

reading through other newspaper articles, it became apparent that the Constitutional talks between the Gilberts and the UK had been held in 1976.
At its very inception, Banaban dancing was an open-ended form, always ready to incorporate new music or materials. The use of the drum and cymbal set in combination with a sitting, clapping and singing group (more characteristic of Gilbertese and Ellice performances) is another illustration of this (see Video 6). Silverman once wrote that Banaban culture consists of a “have your cake and eat it too” (1971: 15) logic and this is very apparent in the area of dance. Banabans have developed something so “unique” and creative it draws not just from all over the Pacific but all over the world, and yet still it is claimed as “Banaban.” Politically “difference” is the goal but in practice, connection is the norm.

**Articulating Rabi**

![Map of Rabi Island](image)
in the beginning was the word and the word was rabi. In one group of Pacific islands the word was originally pronounced rambe and meant to drink yaqona after the chief or the second cup of yaqona drunk by the herald. There was an island named after this crucial part of the yaqona ceremony... but the white man misspelled the word “r-a-b-i” and coincidentally, in another group of Pacific islands there was a word which the white man spelled in the exactly the same way but the islanders there pronounced it rapi. This word meant falling in waves, undulating, a word full of poetry and beauty. People from one of these rabi islands were displaced to the rabi in the other group of Pacific islands... there, in between these semantics, these homonyms, this word play, these images, these semiotics lie the roots and routes of a displaced Banaban (T. Teiwa 1995: 8).

Citizenship

They are citizens of Fiji with full voting and electoral rights, yet they have also a representative in the Kiribati Assembly. They have the right to free entry and residence on both Banaba and Rabi. They have been given wide powers to govern themselves on Rabi, they may set their own taxes and rates, they have the sole right to administer their lands, they may establish their own police force. In many respects they have greater autonomy than the Rotumans (Report of the Committee of Inquiry, Aidney 1994: 73).

In 1947 the Banaban community held an important meeting to decide on whether or not they should return to Banaba. According to Silverman, eighty-five percent said yes, and fifteen percent said no (Silverman, 1971: 169). Those who still want to return, or who at least claim they do, are, however, more vocal than those who don’t. It is unclear in the nationalist rhetoric whether or not those claiming Banaba as primordial home are actually prepared to move back there. It is very clear, though, that they are seeking monetary or other compensation for phosphate mining.31 Despite the continuing talk of going back to the homeland, Banabans have creatively eked out an increasingly self-sufficient life on Rabi, necessarily since people no longer receive annuities from phosphate royalties.32

31 See Sigrah’s Banaban website “Message Board” for the latest posting on August 6 by the Banaban Community Association group based in Suva. The new Chairman, Aren Baoa, clearly states a desire to revive the Banaban case that failed in the 1970s and that Banaba, not Rabi should be used in reference to “home” (http://www.banaban.com/cgi-bin/banabangb).
32 At one point before the 1990s annuities were paid out to all Banabans, including children, at $175-$200 per family member (including children) per year. In a family of ten this was a lot of money to be paid out at once.
In her analysis of the Rabi island community's position in the 1999 Fiji general election, T. Teaiwa describes, "two major 'peripheralties': the way Rabi exists for the most part in the peripheral vision of the nation, and the way the nation occupies the periphery of Rabi islanders' imagination" (Teaiwa in Lal, 2000: 93). But two decades earlier, the Banabans occupied centre stage in the nation's imagination. Like all media stars they later became the brunt of jokes and snide comments on Banaban "skulduggery" and other nasty activities (see K. Teaiwa 1999). At the moment, the most people hear of Rabi is when the mostly Fijian team playing under the Rabi flag wins the Inter-Island rugby zone in Suva. Till that moment both my eldest sister and I had been constantly asked by others in Fiji whether or not Rabi was indeed in Fiji. Some think it is surely part of Kiribati. But since the Banabans have done well in rugby (which is not at all played in Kiribati) to other islanders, they now appear to be more a part of Fiji.

In 1999 T. Teaiwa carried out thirty-three formal interviews on Rabi which revealed some interesting features of Banaban national consciousness. Her interviews were done in the context of voting practices and education during the 1999 elections. The first issue she faced was the reference to "government" in her questionnaire. Invariably she was asked "which government"? (ibid: 94). The Rabi Council of Leaders is seen as the government for the Banabans but there is also the Kiribati government and previously the British government who Banabans have had to contend with.

The most revealing aspects of her survey were the strengthening relations between Banabans and Fijians, despite their perceived peripherality. Thirty of the thirty-three Banabans spoke Fijian fluently and nineteen ranked Fijians as the group they felt closest to above Gilbertese, Rotumans, Indo-Fijians, Chinese and Part-Europeans. Ten ranked the Gilbertese as the group they felt closest to. While not being completely sure how Banabans contributed to the national welfare (in fact their trust fund has brought in important foreign exchange for decades), many responded by describing how Banabans interact with Fijian communities across the Bay through church groups or with the chief of Cakaudrove through sādi (T. Teaiwa 2000: 195).³³

³³ Sādi are monetary contributions for any village, community or church functions.
Source of Identity

Roron Rabi (an anthem)        “Youths of Rabi”
Roron Rabi teirake
Nora tamaroan otin taai
Antai ae wene man aoria
e na reke te kabaia n tera

Chorus:
Baina te nano n aba ae riai
Tabeka rake aran Rabi
Tangiria kain abara
Ni waaki nakon te rairoir.

Ko taku ba tei rabi ngkoe
Kabonganako ibukina
E boni kanga te makuri
Tai toki e na tai bara nanom.

Ti na tei iaoa ara berita
N toro iroun te atua ma te queen
Ni buokia aomata nako
Ni kawakin taian tua nako.

Youths of Rabi rise
See the beauty of the morning sun
Who would lie wastefully
when there is prosperity to be earned?

Be patriotic and truthful
Proclaim the name of Rabi
Love all your people
March towards peace

You claim you are from Rabi
Be of value to it
This is not an easy task
Be strong of heart

Be faithful and loyal
To God and the Queen
For the sake of all the people
And preservation of law and order³⁴

While I have only heard this anthem sung twice, both times in Suva during the December 15 arrival celebrations, it is supposed to have been composed in the late 1970s when Banahan nationalism was at an all-time high. This, however, is puzzling given the absence of any reference to Banaba. The song clearly privileges a “Rabi” identity rather than a Banahan one, and focuses on the youth. These are the generations born and raised in Fiji who have grown up with kava, netball, rugby and subsistence farming.

The line, “who would lie wastefully when there is prosperity to be earned?” seems to encourage Banabans to make use of the fertility of Rabi rather than sit “wastefully,” perhaps dreaming of prosperity long gone from the land of Banaba. The word “earned” is particularly illustrative in the context of an economy that was basically sustained on phosphate royalties and later on annuities from the $10 million BPC ex gratia payment. The anthem clearly locates loyalty and identity with Rabi

³⁴ The song appears in T. Teaiwa (1995: 1).
island quite differently from the preoccupations of the Banaban elders with the homeland, discussed above.

Place of Residence

The politics of identity and homeland are usually articulated beyond people’s everyday concerns and activities. Politics in general is not much of a concern for people under the age of thirty who are generally occupied with school, gardening, fishing, participating in sports or dance groups and church activities. A small number of students also have opportunities to go to technical schools on Viti Levu and the University of the South Pacific in Suva. I’d like to explore some aspects of my own relative’s lives as one example of this.

Most of my father’s brothers and sisters live just outside the village of Tabiang on Rabi at a place called Tabona. Their settlement is one of the few on Rabi which resembles the *kainga* on Banaba and in the Gilberts which was transformed under colonialism. In many ways our settlement operates as a *kainga* with my father as head (see Hockings 1989: 107-130). While this is not our ancestral land, and therefore not *kainga* in the traditional sense of the word, a hundred years from now it *will* be ancestral land to our descendants. Spatially, this group of houses on Rabi is practiced as *kainga* in the way that Clifford, paraphrasing de Certeau (1984) describes space as “discursively mapped and corporeally practiced” (Clifford 1997: 54).

Figure 108. Layout of *kainga*
Figure 109. Teaiwa’s Kainga

Tabiteuea

\[ \Delta = 0 \]
Takaia Teneaitake

\[ \Delta = 0 \]
Eritai Terereieta

Banaba

\[ \Delta = 0 \]
Toariki Kieuea

\[ \Delta = 0 \]
Tekaruantake

\[ \Delta = 0 \]
Tenamo Tebarutu

Tabiteuea

\[ \Delta = 0 \]
Teiwaki Aoniba

\[ \Delta = 0 \]
Teaiwa Takeua

Banaba

\[ \Delta = 0 \]
Takaia Teburenga

\[ \Delta = 0 \]
Teangatotoga

\[ \Delta = 0 \]
Takai Teburenga

\[ \Delta = 0 \]
Takaia Teneaitake

\[ \Delta = 0 \]
Eritai Terereieta

\[ \Delta = 0 \]
Tabakitoa Joan

\[ \Delta = 0 \]
Takai Teburenga

\[ \Delta = 0 \]
Takaia Teneaitake

\[ \Delta = 0 \]
Eritai Terereieta

\[ \Delta = 0 \]
Tabakitoa Joan

\[ \Delta = 0 \]
Takai Teburenga

\[ \Delta = 0 \]
Takaia Teneaitake

\[ \Delta = 0 \]
Eritai Terereieta

Tabakitoa Joan

Teresia O (2)
Katerina O
Maria O

Takaia Teburenga
Teangatotoga Δ (2)
Ana O (d.)
Karuantake (1)
Atanibwebwe O
Tebanang Δ
Tearoba O
Beteri O
Kieuea O

Eritai’ah Taraina
Maiteiti Δ
Tenamo Δ
Tekuriba Δ
Takeua O
Baieria Δ
Tina O

Billie Terianako
Toma* Δ (1)
Bitia* Δ (3)
Tamaria* O (1)
Toariki* Δ (1)
Terereieta* O (6)
Teresia O (3)
Turenga (2)
Tenuanteiti O (1)
Billy Δ (d.)

Iqbal Tebarutu
Niazi Δ (2)
Rehana O (1)
Rashida O

Ketara Teneaitake
Neurita O
Tabuteun Δ
Tiautia Δ
Karaia Δ
Tounang O

Teruamwi Veronica
Tekimatang* O (3)
Bitia Δ
Torabuti Δ (d.)
Bebe O (1)
Temanarara Δ (1)
Tekararaua Δ
Tetou Δ (d.)

Alfred (d.) Rakomwa
Julia O (2)
Lanieta O
Fatiaki Δ
Takeua (1)
Akata O
Tarenea O

Tekara Batera
Torabuti Δ
Mereamoun O (1)
Kouentake Δ
Birimon Δ

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The above diagrams show the *kainga* at Tabona and genealogical relationships between members going back to Teaiwa and Takeua on Tabiteuea, Keieua and Toariki and their parents on Banaba. The nine boxes below Teaiwa and Takeua are those of their children and their spouses, and their own children. In brackets are the number of children each person has. Teruamwi and Terianako were both married before their current spouse but I included all their children’s names from both marriages and put an asterisk next to those from previous marriages. Terianako’s husband, Takabobwe was from Tabiteuea and passed away there about thirty years ago. Teruamwi’s first wife, Ramane is still on Rabi. Many people on the island have had more than one partnership.

Of the nine children, Tabakitoa, Terianako, Rakomwa and Tebarutu married non-Banabans or non-Gilbertese. Terianako’s late husband was Fijian, Rakomwa’s late husband was Rotuman and Tebarutu’s husband is Muslim Indian. Tebarutu normally stays just outside Suva in Nakasi or in Nadi where she and her husband have been managing a hotel.

The *kainga* on Rabi consists of six houses belonging from left to right, Terianako, Temanarara, Teruamwi, Tabakitoa, Teangatoa and Takaia. Temanarara is Teruamwi’s son and Teangatoa is Takaia’s. Both men live with their wives and children. These six houses primarily belong to the people I listed above but others in the family usually visit or stay with them from time to time. Teangatoa and Temanarara are younger and recently married with children so they don’t usually have people staying overnight.

During major events like a *bootaiki* (see Video 5), Tabakitoa, Takaia, Teruamwi and Terianako usually make the major decisions on when and how it should happen. If Rakomwa or Tekarika is available they also participate. Rakomwa usually lives in Tenamo’s old house in Tabwewa village and Tekarika lives in Teaiwa’s house in Tabiang. Teaiwa’s grandchildren will visit or sleep over at either of these houses depending on sports, school or church functions. People’s lives are distributed across at least eight different households in three different locations. As mentioned earlier,

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35 Those who have passed away are marked by (d).
36 Many of these partnerships are not marriages in the legal sense.
37 The smaller squares are toilets which are separate from the houses.
Eritai lives in Tarawa and Tebarutu in Suva and people do not get to visit them as much, though at various times Rakomwa has visited Tebarutu. Sometimes Rakomwa and Terianako also spend time with their older children in Suva.

While Teruamwi’s and Takaia’s sons are supposed to follow along with their parents’ households, both often try to act independently of them. For example, when it’s time to divide up food between the major households and my father directs me to make three basins of food, my cousins will say, “look, we are separate from our father’s houses so you should make one each for our families.” Almost all the children’s names come from ancestral names on either side of their parent’s genealogies but something new that both Temanarara and Teangatoa have done is give their children unusual names. In the same way that Banaban culture on Rabi has become an amalgamation of other cultures, my two cousins have also named their children by combining other people’s names. Temanarara’s daughter is named “Alitalos,” from the names (Al)itia, (Ta)raruru, and Sai(lo)sio who are all relatives of the child’s mother. The first and third names are not Banaban or Gilbertese. It is also unusual that her family rather than Temanarara’s named the child. Teangatoa’s daughter is “Asinta,” a name formed from those of the paternal grandmother’s son from a previous marriage and his wife, i.e. (Asisin)ga and Ma(ta). The choice of these names would be very specific to relationships that both Teangatoa and Temanarara are trying to acknowledge and I am sure they took their time making such decisions. The older people in the *kaira*, however, see this change from the tradition of giving names of ancestors and of according the choice to the father’s family when the child is the first-born, in the case of Temanarara’s child, as reflecting a lack of knowledge of genealogy.

As you can see our family is rather large and every year there is a new child in the *kaira*. While women are supposed to give birth in the health clinic at Nuku many still do so at home. I distinctly remember when my cousin Terereieta was pregnant a few years ago. One day she was pregnant and the next day there was a new baby in the house. I had apparently slept through the whole thing. Teaiwa had two ancestral names to choose from and while I was sitting in one of the back rooms he called out to me, “Shall it be this name (I forget) or Kiritama?” Without hesitation I called back, “Kiritama” and the boy was named.
Over the course of a year all Teaiwa's children and grandchildren will move between various households on Rabi and in Suva visiting their other relatives. To see people hanging out on the front steps of someone's house, though, you'd never imagine just how much travelling people do or how much they articulate their own lives with a much wider world beyond the *kainga* or Rabi Island. As an example of this I would like to look at part of Video 5. In this scene my cousins are making music or *karebaerebrae* by tapping their fingers against the side of the mouth.

Seq 1:  *Karebaerebrae* performed by Asena and Tearoba on the back steps of my father's house.
Seq 2:  Asena and Tearoba playing hand-game and singing about James Bond, Cowboy, Rambo, Jackie Chan and China O'Brien...
Seq 3:  Women on front steps of Teruamwi's house in front of volleyball field.

Dialogue:

Veronica:  “She’s getting the picture of 3 monkeys. One, two, three Monkey”
It will go it to Australia and America.

Turenga (out of frame): “Serious girl. Eat shit!”

Veronica:  “They will see our head lice in America.”

Veronica:  “See, and when Takeua ran and cried ‘*te baerau, te baerau*’ (like cobwebs) in the house (when Kati was dancing last night), and Nei To ran and went like this (she gestures). She’s not shy!”

Tia: “Give it to them those kids (making noise),” (who?) “Kids, the camera.”

Atanibwebwe: “It’s good, she went round (with the camera).”

Veronica:  “Better for Americans and Australians to see!”

Turenga: “Here’s Maria! Maria the devill!” (Maria is my younger sister but Turenga means that Tarenga is a funny comparison to Maria).

Tarenga: “Where, here?... She doesn’t speak (referring to the baby).”

The afternoon in front of Teruamwi’s house was one of those events I didn’t plan and yet ended up being among the most interesting. My aunty and cousins were sitting outside on the steps of uncle Teruamwi’s house, all in a row, and I thought,
what a sight! A grandmother, mother and daughter all engaged in a typical Banaban past time— the brushing and braiding of hair. Like a good anthropologist I ran for my camera. The women then proceeded to talk to and tease me behind that camera.

Any audience watching this scene even in Gilbertese would get the basic gist of it, particularly when Aunty Veronica says “one, two, three monkey!” The women are making fun and talking to me behind the camera. As important as what they’re actually saying is the emotional and physical relationship between all of us. You would never touch another person, particularly not their head, unless you are very close to them. Things like combing hair, massaging, leaning on another person and touching them anywhere near the head are things that relatives can do with each other (mostly within same sex groups).

Both my aunty and cousins are very much aware that this footage may be seen by people far away and she also has a notion of how people in places like Australia or the US view islanders. “We look like three monkeys,” is another way of saying, “we are very much aware that people overseas think Banabans (and islanders in general) are simple.” Another way my aunty Veronica demonstrated this awareness was later, when the video camera was off, by pulling her shirt up over her head so that her breasts were showing. She said, “Hey Kati! Take a picture of this!”

The sequence with my cousins making “mouth music” through kanbruvebu, was shot on a different day from the scene with the women outside Teruamwi’s house. I asked the children to perform kanbruvebu for me, but the hand-game was spontaneous. We shot it behind my father’s house which I later juxtaposed with the front of my uncle’s house. Both spaces are extremely different though part of the same kainga. While all kinds of people are always hanging out in front of (and also behind) Teruamwi’s house, no one can do that in front of or behind my father’s house unless invited to. This is a respect accorded to my father by everyone in the kainga. On that day, the children were sitting on the steps only because I asked them over.

The children’s song illustrates the fact that children, and Banabans in general, have no problem de-contextualizing specific characters and making new meaning for them in a creative and fragmented way. The only logic holding the song together is that they involve action-film heroes. These action films are an entertaining feature of
regular Friday and Saturday movie nights in the village which cost about 20 cents per viewer.  

While translating this song for me, my father continuously stressed just how nonsensical it was. For me, however, it was far from that. Jackie Chan, Rambo, James Bond, "Cowboy" and China O'Brien are all available characters from the numerous videos watched once or twice a week by Banaban children on Friday and Saturday nights. The song imagines what would happen if the heroes took a boat ride to Taveuni, one of four islands near Rabi, and consumed lots of the deadly Fiji Bitter beer. Fiji Bitter is not actually consumed on Rabi as alcohol sales are illegal, but as an idea and practice, it is still available for the imagination.

![Figure 110. Tearoba and Asena](image)

**Children's Song/Hand Game**

Be tuai n roko ngkai  
Ma raweia Jackie Chan  
Tua te baci James Bond  
Ururinga Munroe  
Taratara moan waem Bwa ko  
kawa n onakoa Rambo Rambo!

It hasn’t come  
Catch it Jackie Chan  
Hold this James Bond  
Don’t forget Munroe  
Watch where you’re going  
Lest you run into Rambo, Rambo!

Tiam ni biribiri  
Why take away China Brain  
I’m James Bond, Good Morning Cowboy

After your running around

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38 Another popular action hero is Bruce Lee. My uncle Tekarika is often referred to as "Bruce Lee" and I once saw him perform a dance which looked a lot like "karate."

39 Pronounced China "Brain" in the song. Cynthia Rothrick played the character "China O'Brien" in a number of popular films about a white woman who always saves the down-trodden through her martial arts skills.
Unlike some of the other films, I included my voice in Video 5 to illustrate yet one more way of presenting visual and knowledge, by framing it with a voiceover, and to stress my place in Teaiwa’s kainga. Though some of the videos are more “observational” (cf Macdougall 1998: 125-139) than others, I am aware of not wanting to give an audience “too easily an illusory sense of comprehension” (Nichols 1985: 284) of the people in the frame. MacDougall’s (1998) article on “Observational Cinema” is primarily about representatives of one culture encountering another, and I blur those boundaries quite a bit by being both family and cultural insider/outsider. MacDougall’s exploration of the “self-denying tendency of observational cinema,” (1998: 127) definitely speaks to my desire to become visible in both the text and film. The overall purpose is to keep in focus the idea of knowledge as “constructed,” not self-evident.

This was revealed in a different context during the editing process while Gary Kildea and I were working on this Rabi scene. During one sequence the camera faltered and the frame shifted awkwardly. This could easily have been edited out but we soon agreed that it didn’t matter if the images weren’t seamless and flowing, if it became obvious to the audience that there was a human person behind the eye of the camera. I wanted this to come out as a principal aesthetic of whatever unavoidably bounded video-slice of Rabi, Banaba, Tabiteuea or Tarawa life I end up producing.

The “Situational methodologies” I discussed in “Homework” refer to the shifting approaches I have to my research topic, through the technical ethnographic tool (camera eye) and embodied encounter (with “I”), and to the description of diverse, situated locations and moments in time through one specific traveling body and mind. If I was to attempt to impose a totalizing narrative upon the whole thing, I might satisfy those who believe that this ability to “reduce” constitutes “academic skill.” And I would assist many others outside academia, like those Banaban

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40 My videos are more like “home movies” than ethnographic films.
nationalists who circulate their grand narratives of victimisation under the mining company. For me, however, it is more interesting, and for lack of a better word, “truthful,” to present the tangled and multiple strands of the Banaban/Gilbertese web that extends across time and space, between Tarawa, Banaba, Tabiteuea, Rabi, Suva and Canberra.

Teairum utu bootaki

This year, as I was typing in some of the songs featured in the videos I realized I hadn’t translated any of the ones sung by my family. I asked my father when next he went to Rabi, to ask people what the song sung during a te bino performed by my cousin Tia meant. I had used this song in Video 5 as the background to images of “kainiga” along with a series of newspaper articles from the late 1970s when the Banaban cause was at its peak in the media. Many, many shots in this particular video link up with references earlier made in both the text and previous videos.

The first reaction of my aunties and uncles to the question, “what do those songs mean?”, was one of frustration. According to my father his siblings said: “Why does Kati want to know what the songs mean? Why is she complicating things? We just want to sing and enjoy the songs. Now we have to think of what it means?!” After a few minutes of discussion amongst themselves in which the possible meanings of the song were proposed they said, “We never had to think of these things before. But now we appreciate that the songs have meanings. It’s good that we think about it.”

It must be noted that I do not tell this story in order to generalize about all Rabi islanders. Our family is similar to others in some ways and different in others. Dance and performance are not treated as formal by our group but it would by other groups who participate in competitions or perform regularly outside their own families. Certainly the professional dance groups in Video 6 take both the choreography and music seriously.

At the village level, however, it is usually Gilbertese songs and dances that are performed because Banaban dancing tends to be the property of a professional group. Informally in the villages, people have decontextualized songs and dances so
that a Christian song turns into a buki or bino number or the tune of “jingle bells” is used to compose a hymn. But people still, particularly in public, will perform more serious Gilbertese dances with much less mixing. Depending on the choreography or song, the way it’s sung and audience some performances initiate lots of laughter and others a feeling of excitement and eventual ecstasy for the dancer, conductor or member of the singing group.

This rarely happens in our own family bootaki. The primary purpose of dancing for ourselves is entertainment. The more Gilbertese dances, however, are usually performed with pride as they display an ability to do something more traditional, more Gilbertese. My uncle put it thus after my cousins had just finished doing entertaining modern dances and another cousin sat to begin a bino “You have seen the branches of the tree. Now we will move to the roots.”

Tia’s te bino:

A kekeia ad te beeroo oo
I a taanarangi ma ni kaeweakou inamon ni buana Ma tai kakampukuria
E a tumaia be takamana ti maninga iai everi (going good)
A tiku n vairai taus taua be taimoi
E a a oo ai kamaia oo
Katiki buka bua e aonga n roko imoa

(E) Kabaneia mora
Buam a bon roko ngekai
Te bong are ti kantaningia
Tina tua ni kamutou
Teitei n ari kateve (ox avel)
te kakanzeria ma te kukuwe N ana tai ni boo

This was first interpreted by my uncles and aunts in the following terms: “It’s a very old song from Kiribati. The man who composed the song, he was talking about himself. He was boasting about his skill with words and movement saying he is the best.” I then asked my father to do a literal translation:

I’m creating a chant.
Do not distract.
I know the sound it’s intoxicating, it’s loudness leaves me weak.
Hold! Hold! It’s perfect.
How intriguing
Pull it’s sail so we can be first (racing the canoe)
Happy gathering song: call all our friends because the day has come,  
The day we’ve been waiting for  
Don’t lose hope, don’t give up, persevere, hold on (encouragement)  
During our celebrations we’re singing a happy song.  
Keep singing, we’ll prosper, we’ll be happy!

Part of the reason why I used this song as soundtrack for my visual exploration of kai:ng̱a in Video 5 is because it resonated with the reality of creative survival on Rabi. Despite displacement, despite being peripheralized in the Fiji national imaginary, despite the lack of money and resources to care for all family members, people continue to creatively survive. However, it is telling that in the video, by the end of the kai:ng̱a montage, we return to the bootaki and Tia is standing up, dancing with her “brother-in-law” Naba. Normally a dancer would never stand up during a sitting dance but on that night, Tia started traditionally, but then moved to her knees and finally stood up and began to dance in a western style with her brother-in-law.

She broke the form and content of the Gilbertese dance and made it into something else. She took what was, as my uncle Takaia called, “the root of the tree” and transformed it. This is analogous to what Banabans have done in order to survive several displacements over the last century. They have taken different kinds of cultural possibilities, some of which, like Gilbertese forms are seen to be more “traditional” and rooted, and made them flexible. Perhaps then the tree and root analogy is not as appropriate as the rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari 1988). There is no natural progression between a sitting and standing dance—you do not sit and then stand—and especially one that goes from bino to dancing “disco-style” with your brother-in-law. That is something else entirely but Tia crossed the boundary nevertheless.

Another good example of this rhizomatic movement is the ways in which our family performs te buki during our own gatherings. If we remember the rigidity and disciplined bodily training that I went through on Tabiteuea (as described in Chapter 4, the way in which buki is danced in our kai:ng̱a is very different. I have even seen it

41 See Silverman (1971: 252-253) on eiriki relationships between same-sex siblings and their spouses. It is a joking relationship which is also demonstrated in Video 6 when the women at the end of the Tabwewa make come up to the men and kiss them or make fun with them. The audience then knows that these women are related to the men’s wives.
performed by my male cousin and with two other boys for the 1997 December 15 celebrations. The boys wore full girl's costumes and performed for all the honoured guests.

I created Video 5 specifically to connect the spaces between Banaba and Rabi and many of my experiences between islands and archives. There are also certain names included which correspond to the genealogy shown above. There are other names as well which are not in the genealogy but are of Teaiwa's great, grandchildren, whose numbers are shown in brackets. The video contains many of the key issues I've tried to elaborate throughout the thesis—history as memory and image, phosphate, labour, creative survival and connections between islands. The Banaban nationalism of the 1970s serves as a backdrop to everyday life through a newspaper montage sequence.

PLAY VIDEO 5

December 15 and it's dis/contents

These eternal holiday routines, Christmas rituals -- Midsummer nostalgia, what do they mean to us? Why do we repeat, voluntarily or under duress -- those same patterns, waiting, tiredness, disappointment, gloom -- from one year to the next? Is it because these holidays allow us to keep our common past alive? We do battle together against time, separation, ageing and death. Together we experience acute sorrow over the transitory nature of life -- we are refugees from the past, there is no going back. And who would want to?42

Every December 15, the Rabi community gathers at Nuku to celebrate the first landing of the Banabans in Fiji. The day has a set format that has been followed for several decades. It begins with the arrival of the Chairman, a marching display including a brass band, the flag raising, the Chairman's speech, cultural performances, lunch and then rugby. In this video I have tried to put together some of the central features of the annual celebrations as well as highlights of those pertinent to 2000.

The film begins with a shot of the SOFE, the Spirit of Free Enterprise, an inter-island vessel which travels between Suva, Savusavu and Rabi every December bringing Banabans home from Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. A few days before the 15th, the boat anchors in the waters between Tabona at Tabiang and Buca Bay and outboard motors shuttle back and forth bringing passengers and cargo to the island. In 2000, I set up my camera on a tripod on the beach and shot the ship for half an hour. It is only once a year that Banabans get direct passage to Rabi. Otherwise it’s either a boat or plane ride to Savusavu, bus or four-wheel drive ride to Karoko and boat to Rabi. An image of the SOFE on zoom lens is the first image you see in Video 6.

Every December 15, the Banaban Dancing Group, now led by a man named Namaraki, performs a drama to commemorate the historical experiences of the Banaban people. Certain prominent historical events and aspects of Banaban culture are always depicted in this drama. The first is the importance of the underwater caves or *brungabrumga*. These were owned by certain *kainga* as *mumia* or wells where rainwater that had seeped through the earth collected. Originally, only women were allowed to enter these caves to draw water which they carried to the surface in coconut shells. In performance female dancers easing their way along the ground using hands, hips and feet illustrated the process of collecting water. Silverman theorised the domain of underground caves as the space dominated by women compared to the sea, dominated by men. On both my trips to Banaba, I made a point of visiting these caves. Since the arrival of the company the taboo over men entering the caves has lifted. Both times I explored the *brungabrumga*, I was the only woman in a group of four or five men.

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43 There are about a thousand Banabans living outside Rabi.
44 See Silverman (1971: 77) and his brief comments on sex roles and cosmology.
The second important feature of the annual drama is the arrival of Albert Ellis and the discovery of phosphate on Banaba. The leader of the Banaban Dancing group usually plays Ellis and offers the Banabans “1 pound or 24 pennies” in exchange for mining their land. One stanza of the famous “How Pity,” song illustrates this:

Its gave its price the BPC
One pound note, 24 penny
They said, they said
Ti tangira 24 penny bae plenty riki kanoana
Ao an animai ao kare matam tei Buritan o,
You really gave a bad result
Nakoia student of Ocean Island.

Chorus:

How pity...how pity...Oh
They misunderstood the value of money!
Our ancestors! Ake ngkoa ngkoa

How pity... how pity... Oh
They misunderstood the value of money.
Our ancestors! Of long ago.

This song lamenting the pitiful legacy of the Banabans is usually sung every December 15 but interestingly did not feature in the most recent celebrations. Betarim Rimon describes the same mistake made on Banaba but writes that the people were offered a one-pound note or six pennies rather than twenty-four. According to him the representative of the BPC, “in one hand held out the six loose pennies, in the other he held out a pound note and asked the landowners, ‘which one would you prefer to be the price of your soil per ton?’ ” (Rimon, nd: 37). The
Banabans picked the pennies because they were more impressive than the simple paper.

The Japanese occupation of Banaban between 1941 and 1945 is usually depicted as a fearful period on Banaba when many were executed. The group always acts out at least one be-heading. This period in fact included the execution of about one hundred Gilbert and Ellice labourers whom the BPC left behind before the Japanese landed (see Maude 1994: 100-104). Only one man named Kabunare survived to tell the story. People often forget that both Banabans and Gilbertese died during the war mainly because the mining installations made it a major target for the Japanese.

The Japanese removed the Banabans to camps on Kosrae, Nauru and Tarawa and soon after the war ends the dancing group enacts the journey by ship from these camps and mainly Tarawa to Rabi. The first thing they highlight about life on the new island are the major environmental changes. They group often enacts the experience of living in tents or beneath “awnings,” as they were commonly called, for the first two months on Rabi. Since the Banabans arrived on Rabi during the hurricane season, life under a tent was particularly perilous. They were generally unaccustomed to such rainy or windy weather. A popular comedic feature of the drama is the Banabans first experience with cows in the middle of some of the first nights on the island. Most of them had never seen such animals. The drama usually ends with celebrations of enduring faith in God and Banaban survival on a new land.

In his study of a history of the Methodist church, Reverend Temaka Benaia illustrates the centrality of Banaban faith in terms of justice, survival and leadership:

Biblically, the Banabans are like the Israelites who were called from Egypt, the land of bondage and hardships. The Banabans left and travelled to Rabi under very difficult conditions. The journey by seabed upon reaching Rabi, through realised that, like Canan, the land was overflowing with milk and honey, in the abundance of water and fertile soil to plant food crops. The Banaban leaders or chairpersons of the Rabi Council of leaders, like the leaders of the Israelites, were God’s chosen people, the church ministers namely: Pastor Rotan Tito from the London missionary Society (L. M. S.), Reverends Tebaiti Tawaka, Kaitangare Kaburoro, Tebuke Rotan, and Rongorongo Terubea, all of whom are ministers of the Methodist Church except for Kaitangare, who is a minister

45 See appendix 11 in Sigrah and King, on those who died on Banaba during World War II.
of the Assemblies of God. Like the Israelites, the Banabans had put their trust
in God and they believed that God could help them too (Benaia 1991: x).

Banaban social and cultural life is infused with Christian epistemology in addition to,
not instead of, pre colonial worldviews, which focused on the centrality of ancestors,
dreams and their meanings and spirituality. This is apparent on Rabi when we hear
people attributing certain events to God in one context, and “black magic” in
another.

Figure 112. The Banaban Dancing Group, 2000

In Video 6, after the speeches, the marching and the drama by the Banaban
Dancing Group, other cultural performances follow. The very next one by the Rabi
Dancing Group illustrates another politics of dance on the island. Originally there
was only one dancing group and it was sponsored by the council. In the 1980s and
1990s however, two more Banaban dancing groups were formed, both by people
who had been part of the original group in the 1970s.

The leader of the Rabi Dancing Group is Katauea and it is his troupe which
follows the drama. Their choreography combines Western, Cook Island, Samoan,
Gilbertese and Tuvaluan movements. You can see this in the traces of “twisting,”
Samoan taudati slap dancing and tanuwe. The girls also form shapes and patterns as a
group in ways very different from Gilbertese dancing. But one can still see hand
movements which imitate birds and fish, and jerks of the head to mark pauses and
beats, which are similar to Gilbertese moia forms.
Another dancing group which did not perform on December 15, 2000 is called *Te Kanan Raío*—"the group which makes things good," and they are based in Uma. Their leader is Nenem Kourabi who is the cousin of a man from Tabiang named Ruata. Ruata is a former Fiji heavyweight boxing champion as well as a talented choreographer. It is his choreography that we see in Video 6 when the children from Tabiang perform the “Sex Education Dance” to a song by Bata Peter (1986). Bata and Peter Foon are a very popular team and their music is played from Nauru to Kiribati and Fiji. My father pointed out to me that their music is mainly sold at Suva market stands near the central bus station. Amongst the Fijian, Rotuman, Indian and European bodies mulling around the market, one often hears this Banaban and Gilbertese music blaring from various loudspeakers. The Rabi Dancing Group often prefaces their main performance with a rendition of one of Bata’s songs.

![Image of Rabi Dancing Group](image)

The dances by children from Buakonikai to a Tahitian song by “Fenua” (2001), and by Tabwewa doing a Fijian *make* continue to illustrate my point about diversity and performance on the island. Banaban culture is a mix of many, many influences, despite the rhetoric of essentialism furthered by nationalists. On a formal occasion such as December 15, the island performs not just Banaban dancing but dance from all over the Pacific.

**PLAY VIDEO 6**

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46 The opening line of the *make* and the chorus are: *aai e bale ya?* “Who will challenge me?”
Reflections on Rabi/Banaban dancing

“Creation,” anthropologist Edward Sapir (1924: 418) has aptly written, “is a bending of form to one’s will, not the manufacture of form ex nihilo.” Invention takes place within a field of culturally available possibilities, rather than being without precedent. It is as much a process of selection and recombination as one of thinking anew. Creativity emerges from past traditions and moves beyond them; the creative persona reshapes traditional forms. The circumstances of creativity admit to contact, borrowing, and conflict. Regarded as a field of creativity, the zones of interaction among and within cultures more nearly resemble the overlapping strands of a rope than separate beads on a string (Lavie et al. 1993: 6).

In the introduction to Creativity/Anthropology, Lavie, Narayan and Rosaldo state that, “Eruptions of creativity within cultural performances comment upon, just as they often reformulate, the dilemmas a society faces at a particular historical moment” (Lavie et al. 1993: 6). As we have seen earlier, it was a particularly charged cultural and political situation that gave rise to “Banaban” dance on Rabi in the 1970s. During that decade, the Banabans were struggling for independence from the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, and were in the process of suing the British government for grievances over the phosphate mining.

The creation of Banaban dance may have been an explicit political act but the movements of Banaban dancers point to a larger and more fluid historical experience. They are instrumental in creating a “unique” Banaban identity but they are also pathways beyond an essential Banaban identity. To claim Banaba as the only true home and then perform “Banabaness” though a mixture of forms, sounds and choreographies from all over the world seems contradictory. But Sally Ann Ness stresses what can be learned from moving bodies thus:

When dancing you are not an ordinary instrument, like a towel or a knife, but you are aware of being extraordinarily instrumental all the same. Your body becomes the key to relating a tremendous imaginary reserve of purposeful instances of self-conduct, in the most ideal terms conceivable. The imagined reservoir itself, which is exposed and generated by this activity, is both a cultural and choreographic construct. It is the reservoir of a human being habitus or lifeway, a reservoir of memory, whose depth and surface may be grasped in full significance perhaps only via extraordinary, “metafunctional” practices, such as dance (Ness 1992: 10).

47 For comparison see Momi Kamahele (1992) on hula in Hawai‘i and its role in the Hawaiian sovereignty movement.
A Return to Pity?

The ebb and flow of Banaban survival

If I began this story with a description of the island of Rabi, which is pronounced 'Rambi', I would risk losing your attention from the very start. Only the worst South Seas travel brochure clichés can properly describe this 'quintessential tropical paradise' and that's only the first of them. I can't think of a word other than 'turquoise' to define the colour of its warm sparkling waters. The main beach forms a long delicate curve only too easily described as 'crescent shaped.' 'Blinding white' and 'palm fringed'? Yes, I am afraid it is, and with lush green jungled slopes rising steeply behind the shore into the clearest blue air which, you will be unsurprised to learn, is 'sweetly scented with hibiscus' and a hint of 'overripe mango' (Wooley 1996:133).

If one has never visited Rabi during the hurricane season, or during a period when the sky and sea remain grey for days on end, it is very possible for the island to fit the trope of paradise invoked by Wooley (1996). This problematic opening to a chapter in his Travelling Tales collection, sets the scene for later astonishment that Banabans do not appreciate their tropical paradise. It is a widespread sentiment in both Fiji and Kiribati (and amongst some Australian journalists) that Banabans are a bit ungrateful for the fate history has dealt them.48

When Sheree Lipton (1972) visited Rabi in 1970 she said that Banabans had private cars. The only private cars owned on the island now are by a European man married to a Banaban woman and the resident doctor. Any other vehicles are utility vehicles hired out to transport cargo and passengers between the villages. While the island had electricity and telephone in the 1970s these soon disappeared as funds were squandered on bad investments and bad financial management. After over twenty years without it the villages recently acquired electricity again.49 I described this process in my master thesis as "lights on, lights off," reflecting on how Banaba was once relatively isolated and then moved "into the light" with the advent of Christianity (cf Hereniko 1994). It was then really "lit up" with bright lights during the mining period, plunged back into darkness during the war, and slowly back to

48 Charles Wooley's visit resulted in an Australian 60 Minutes program called Exiles in Paradise.
49 In fact, the reason Uma village did not perform on December 15 2000 is that they were very busy installing electricity in their village.
light again once they were settled on Rabi and royalties were flowing in. Then after internal corruption they were again plunged into "darkness" and lost many things including electricity on the island. Since 2000 the lights are being switched on once again but who knows when the next period of upheaval or material deprivation will arrive.

In his comparison of I-Kiribati and Banaban families and the general tensions between the communities, Rimon writes that, "the I-Kiribati... spend more time mocking the Banabans for their many ups and downs... especially the nature of their administration and leadership" (Rimon, nd: 66). There is a general sense, not just in the Kiribati community, but nationally, that Banabans really have been on a historical roller coaster. Many Banabans themselves speak of the happy and depressing events that have brought them to the present. My focus, however, has been on the images and movements, songs and dances, the creative strategies that have kept both Banabans and Gilbertese going despite the turmoils of the last century.

This is perhaps best illustrated by a cousin of mine on Rabi and his wife. They live in a different village but always join our family for important gatherings. I've always noticed that the two of them are a great team in performance. They both sing, they both know older songs and dances that many of the younger generations do not and they have raised their children to perform as well. They are usually the leaders when it comes to performing traditional Gilbertese dances, particularly *te bino* which my cousin is famous for. They rarely have the means to bring anything material to our gatherings but they can always share their wonderful singing and dancing with the family.50

Life on Rabi can be wonderful if, like our nuclear family, you have a good house, a bit of money and access to other resources. Many people, however, struggle. They get by through kinship networks, by moving from house to house and living with different relatives, by living off the land when they can, depending on whether or not they have or cultivate a garden, and on remittances from family in Savusavu, Lautoka, Nausori, Suva or Labasa.

50 Usually, family members bring food or kava to the gatherings to share with the rest.
There are always high periods, there are always low periods—this has been a constant of Banaban experience, not the straight path of “development.” In the 1870s, before the company and missionaries came, the Banabans experienced three years of drought which resulted in a massive reduction of the population as well as their dispersal to other islands. Then as their numbers built up again on Banaba, Albert Ellis arrived to initiate capitalist industry and “civilization” and they became some of the richest islanders in the world. Then World War II came and many died at the hands of the Japanese while the rest were displaced to camps in Kosrae, Nauru and Tarawa. Then, after the war ended, the BPC with the blessing of the British Government, transported everyone to Rabi where they struggled to begin a new life. In the 1970s they tried to sue the British Government and lost despite a high of national support for their cause in Fiji. Then, after years under a self-imposed economic annuity (pay-out) system, in 1991, their own leaders squandered the public funds and chaos erupted on Rabi. After being governed by government-appointed administrators for several years they finally elected a council and chairman that brought stability to the island for four years. Now that this is over and the island has experienced at least one major tragedy with recent floods, what does the future look like? 51

Generally the low periods have lasted longer than the highs and are characterised by lots of “pitiful” discourse. Performance, however, never seems to hit that low. No matter what happens people continue to compose, choreograph, dance, sing and laugh at themselves, at the past and at the present. For those moments, even if people have no money, no house and no fish they can temporarily celebrate life. This is why I have always thought of Banaban culture as it has developed on Rabi not as “resistance” to an exploitative colonial past but as “creative survival” in spite of colonial historical and current local and national turmoil.

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51 I recognize that in this chapter I have focused less on the particular and more on the general aspects of Banaban and Fiji culture. This is somewhat journalistic but necessary because the Banaban situation requires an engagement at both the particular and general levels. The population is small enough such that, in the same way that one individual can affect the whole, representations of and approaches to the whole affect the individual.
Drinking the Rain

I will drink the Rain (for Toma)

Ko na moi? He asks.
Te ranibue? Te maitoro?
I offer a choice.
His face is blank.
He appears unimpressed.

Coke? I suggest, with bated breath.
He shakes his head.
And slowly says,
N na moi te karau.

So I get him a glass for the rain.

Teresia Kieuea Teaiwa (2001c).

In a section on sex roles and cosmology, Silverman briefly alludes to the fact that a Banaban man were called “‘food of the rain, the dew, the sunshine’ through his risky and uncomfortable activities as fisherman” (1971: 78). My father said that the precise words in Gilbertese are mane kanan te karau. He said this meant that males (of all ages) are “food for the rain.” It is a metaphor for the perceived masculine role: males must be tough and do difficult tasks.

My sister wrote the above poem for our cousin Toma who I once saw make the fastest catch of fish. In December 1997, we were both sitting on the veranda of my father’s house when Toma spotted something in the ocean, a couple of hundred metres from us. In about two minutes he had fetched a fishing net from his mother, Terianako’s house, walked to the beach, out into the low tide, flung his net into the shallow water, and obtained a good sized tekama fish. Tekama is also the name of our own family fishing boat named after my father’s daughters (Te)re, (Ka)terina and (Ma)ria. Toma offered me the fish and I was set for dinner.

Toma’s reply in my sister’s poem that he would “drink the rain” is as poetic as it was factual. On Rabi, we do drink the rain that collects in the tank at the back of my father’s house. Banabans are less likely to boil this water than that which comes out of the tap supplied by the cache up on Mount Rabi. While our house generally
supplies the drinking water for the other houses, whenever one of my cousins catches fish our house is sure to receive one or two. Our trusty water tank, however, was sorely tested during our most recent visit to the island.

In April 2002 I returned to Rabi with my fiancé, Daniel, and my younger sister Maria who was about to get married to a fellow medical school student from Columbia University in New York. The family planned to celebrate my engagement and María’s impending wedding. When we arrived across the bay from Rabi after the usual plane trip from Suva to Savusavu, and four-wheel drive haul from Savusavu to Karoko we found my cousin Lala and Uncle Teruamwi waiting for us in another boat named Ma’Ju[a, after Teresia’s son. The sea was rough and after taking one look at the gear we’d brought with us, my uncle and father decided to hire one more boat for the usually twenty-minute ride across to Rabi. I had never seen the sea so rough and it took us no less than forty minutes to get to our kaini at Ta bona. The rough sea was just the beginning of three harrowing days ahead. That night it began to rain and this continued until one particular night where it poured so hard we could barely hear each other speak in the house.

The next day when we woke there was almost two feet of water surrounding all the houses and about twenty feet of the main road had washed away. When we’d first arrived I’d noticed that new trenches were dug round each house in anticipation of the arrival of electricity lines. These now overflowed with muddy water. A pipe must’ve burst during the downpour and the taps ran dry. My father’s rainwater tank quickly became an invaluable source of water for our family at Tabona and in Tabiang. Two of my cousins moved the one tonne ice chest normally used for storing fish to just below the tank to catch the overflow and this provided extra water for bathing and washing dishes. Some of us had also been taking our showers in the rain.

Figure 114. Flood waters outside Takaia’s house
The day after the heavy downpour we took a short boat trip to Nuku and saw that the sea was brown and filled with lots of debris. I felt sad because Daniel
had been looking forward to fishing at Rabi. It seemed impossible in this murky water to catch anything but we still loaded into *Maroa* with four male cousins and went in search of fish. After travelling for two minutes, the engine on the boat died. One of the men who was a diver simply jumped into the water with the rope in one hand and pulled us back to shore where a mechanic just happened to be working on our other boat *Nei Tekam*. We finally got back out along with a canoe carrying two other cousins. Lala, who is well known to be the best young fisherman in our *kainga* caught a few fish from the canoe but no one on our boat including Daniel and my father caught anything. When we returned from our fishing attempt we learned that six people, two adults and four children, had been killed in a landslide in Buakonikai. They had all been sleeping when the mountain behind them came crashing into their houses. Such a tragedy, along with the struggling new island council and general uncertainty since the 2000 coup, threatens to begin a new cycle of pity on the island.

The reality of heavy rains on Rabi contrasts rather starkly with the arid dryness of Banaba. Despite the contrasting environments, clean and safe drinking water is always a problem for communities on both islands. While the environmental differences have resulted in cultural changes of all kinds, fundamental needs like fish and water have remained relatively constant. Throughout the videos accompanying this thesis, you will find allusions to this through the images of the water bottle on the jeep on Banaba against the backdrop of the dry bush in Video 3 and of the fishermen and fish on Rabi juxtaposed with three Banaban men on Banaba (from the Frank Miller collection) in Video 5.

This year, despite the rain, the flood, the road washing away and the brown muddy sea, our *kainga* had an improvised celebration for Maria and I. Someone managed to catch more fish, someone killed a chicken, some cooked, and despite all the mud, family members walked from at least two villages (one an hour and a half away) to join in. We all sat crowded on the balcony, now sheltered on two sides with a tarpaulin and a bed sheet, and ate, sang songs, danced and drank kava till late.
In our kainga there are two kinds of water used to make kava or grog. Using a porous cloth,\textsuperscript{52} the dried pounded root is soaked and squeezed (loē) in water from the tap—treated water from the Tabiang cache—or water from the rainwater tank. The grog tastes different depending on the water and the latter is preferred. In our kainga, the rainwater tank is further away than the tap so depending on how “grog doped” the designated water fetcher is, the group will have either good or bad tasting grog. After several basins and several hours, when people are really doped, it tends not to matter.

One of the most interesting features of sociality developed on Rabi around yaqona is a new way of telling stories. In both Kiribati and on Banaba usually one person would tell a story and the audience would follow it to its natural conclusion. On Rabi, however, a person might start telling a story around the grog bowl and then another person will interject with his or her version. Another person will again interject and very soon the story will be told by many people, often all disagreeing on the finer details of the story with no satisfactory conclusion. On Rabi they call this phenomenon anai boro or “stealing the ball,” as in rugby when the ball moves through the hands of different players. On Rabi, then, one story moves through the voices and perspectives of so many people that it is hard to decide what really happened. This aspect of story telling translates to gossip and history telling so that multiple perspectives are always in circulation and always up for debate.\textsuperscript{53}

The next day after our last bootaki, we cleaned the house, packed up and said our goodbyes. After we’d all climbed aboard the boat, waved teary eyed to our relatives and travelled for exactly one minute the engine died again. Two of my

\textsuperscript{52} I have seen yaqona squeezed through everything from a proper bag of porous material to an old sock.

\textsuperscript{53} Thanks to my father for discussing this aspect of story-telling with me.
cousins hopped onto the canoe and came out to tug us back to shore where the same mechanic who happened to be working on *Nei Tekamu* again fixed our little 25HP engine. At this point the outrigger canoe was looking like a far better alternative to the outboard motor. We finally left Rabi around mid-day and were back in Suva by 5 pm.

Figure 119. Landing at Nausori airport after trip to Rabi.
Reflections on fluidity and the “Native”

I hope through these last two chapters, I have illustrated how Banabans and Gilbertese enact a hybridity which is vastly different to the static and one-dimensional “native” defined under colonialism and illustrated by the homogenous approach to “natives” in Video 2 or the rhetoric claimed by Banaban nationalists.

In opening up the meanings and references of the now capitalized and personified term “Native,” Teresia Teaiwa, defines it as:

...a discursive figure constructed in histories of travel, discovery and colonialism, appropriated in nationalism, abandoned by the postcolonial, and either erased or commodified by globalization (Teaiwa 2001a: 80).

The Native here includes those who are resident in developing countries, including South Pacific islands, those not born and/or raised in First World nations and particularly peoples who rarely participate in or practice a literary culture. Teaiwa critiques tendencies in Postcolonial and Cultural Studies, in both her PhD dissertation and a recent article (2001b) writing that “... the Native is constantly made to signify simplicity, while postcolonial and diaspora are afforded complexity. Postcolonial theory has not been self-reflexive or critical about its own relationship with the Native” (T. Teaiwa 2001a: 72).

Teaiwa particularly critiques Clifford’s claim that “Tribal of Fourth World assertions of sovereignty and “first nation-hood” do not feature histories of travel and settlement...” (Clifford, 1997: 252) by reminding us all of Hau'ofa’s “Sea of Islands.” She writes, “The critical value of Hau’ofa’s vision is that it does not bind the Native to land, and instead provokes a reformulation of Clifford’s question: In the 21st century...what would it mean to speak of a native ōcearia? In effect, a native ocean—*a priori* fluid, complex, multiple, diverse, hybrid—would render the concept of diaspora almost redundant” (T. Teaiwa 2001a: 58).

In the case of Banaba through a colonial transformation which also rendered Banaban land fluid, the notion of fluidity is even more salient. If we remember the
initial connections between *ala* or land and people. Banabans necessarily live intensely fluid and situational lives.

One does not have to go to island communities in Sydney, Auckland, Utah or Oakland, or require writing from the diaspora, in order to “theorize interstitiality and hybridity” (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 18). The Banabans, a people displaced, “in exile,” some perceiving return and very much still tied up with issues of indigeneity both in Kiribati and Fiji, are also actively interacting with material and cognitive cultural possibilities from all over the world, past and present, that flow into Banaban “spaces.” This includes a constant grappling with memories of one of the largest “multi-national” companies in the Pacific. After visiting Kiribati for nine weeks in 2000 I also came to realize that I-Kiribati (or Gilbertese) life is also just as complex, fluid and hybrid. The differences between Banaban and Gilbertese types of fluidity are specific but the overall tendency is still there. Hybridity is far less an articulation of identity than it is a matter of everyday action and inter-personal relationships.

I believe that both Banabans and I-Kiribati represent some of those “Natives” discussed by T. Teaiwa (2001a). They could easily be relegated to simplicity—formerly colonized, small populations on small islands, not in proximity to a major metropolitan centre and always in need of overseas/government aid. Students who make it to higher education are almost always funded to become the “experts” that Eric Waddell (1993: 33) laments when reflecting on the developmentalist education students at the University of the South Pacific have been getting for decades. Everyday Banaban and I-Kiribati life, however, is anything but simple. People are creatively weaving past and present forms and ideas into future possibilities. People *practice* creativity even if they don’t talk or write about it and even if development experts and policy makers ignore it.

Creativity, as Roy Wagner has argued, is always emergent. Members of a society’s younger generations always select from, elaborate upon, and transform the traditions they inherit. The healthy perpetuation of cultural traditions requires invention as well as rote repetition (Lavie et.al. 1993:5)
Visualizing creative survival

Banaban and Fijian history seemed to converge in May 2000 and later I wondered if I should return to my original thesis topic—_E Katua te A ha: the genealogy of pity from Rabi to Oval Island_. All the historical and contemporary issues seemed similar and salient—the themes of indigenous nationalism, dislike of other ethnic groups, differences over money and who should benefit from economic policies and the measure of authenticity by blood. The future just seemed hopeless for everyone and a very critical international media certainly did not help Fiji’s self-image. Those of us who were neither Fijian nor Indian watched from the periphery wondering when the government might get over the fact that Fiji is not a bi-cultural but _multicultural_ country.

When the May 19 civilian coup transformed the schedule of my project, the camera was the only seemingly constant medium for gauging my rapidly shifting and connected worlds. I’ve since relied on it heavily as a memory tool and “live” recording of disparate peoples, moments and locations. Donna Haraway’s critique of “vision” (1988), however, reminds me to pay close attention to the mediated nature of the instrument; it’s political and techno-ideological histories, its visual limits and possibilities, its subjectivity beneath it’s seeming objectivity. But like all knowledge it is how you use it, how you present it as authoritative or partial that makes a pedagogical difference.

After everything I’d experienced and learned between 1999 and 2001, between islands and archives, cities and nations, relatives and historical experts, I knew I could not go back to the ANU and present an “Eye of God” view (Haraway 1988: 581-584) of the Pacific. I wanted to move towards a strategy for seeing and experiencing history in the everyday from the perspectives of myself and others. In Donna Haraway’s version of a feminist objectivity, in her version of a feminist writing of the body that emphasizes vision, of learning in our bodies, (“endowed with primate color and stereoscopic vision” (ibid: 583), I wanted to “...elaborate specificity and difference and the loving care people might take to learn how to see faithfully from

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54 See Chapter 5 for more on the May 19 2000 Fiji coup and how it affected my “homework.”
another's point of view...” (ibid). I found the spaces between text and video to be the best medium for the task.

After the coup in May I left Fiji and spent four months in Australia and New Zealand until I felt I could return to finish my research. The first trip I made into Suva I went to a buy some curry and roti from a café in Victoria Arcade. There is a bus stop right next to the front of the arcade and as I waited for the lady behind the counter to wrap my parcel of roti I turned and looked over my shoulder to a Vatuwaqa bus that had just pulled into the stop. Like Wilson Harris' moment on the Potaro river in Guyana (Petersen and Rutherford 1995), I felt a tunnel to the past suddenly open up in a rush of sounds and images.

The passengers in the bus were lined up in a row chatting away, nodding their heads and tapping their fingers to the music of FM96 blaring out of the windows and door of the bus. Their movements resonated with a very clear memory I had of sitting behind a girl in a bus on Tarawa speeding between Betio and Bairiki while the techno sounds of the Vengaboyz (1999) filled the air. She and I were wearing the same dangly gold earrings that Nauruan, Gilbertese and Banaban women often wear. That day in Suva, the FM96 DJ was playing Raude56 by a group called Black Roses7 (1999) whose recent album fuses techno beats with Fijian chants and rhythms. While the rhetoric of hate and Fijian supremacy continued to pervade Fiji politics it was at that moment on Victoria Parade, in Victoria Arcade buying curry and roti and looking at the green and yellow Vatuwaqa bus that I knew I could never call Suva, Rabi or Tabiteuea, anything but home. When I got to Rabi a week later, people across the island were enthusiastically dancing to the same music.

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55 Also see Video 4 and note Takeua's earrings. The popularity of gold earrings consisting of dangling shapes hanging on a sleeper, are supposed to have been one of the items introduced during the early mining period when goods flowed between Hong Kong, Nauru, Banaba and the Gilberts. Today it is very distinct to women from these islands.

56 The song is based on a historical experience when Fijians first saw aeroplanes in the sky.

57 The moment was further “diffracted” as I recalled that Black Rose used to play at the Tradewinds Hotel in Lami every Thursday and Saturday night between 1992 and 1995. I was a dancer at the hotel and would nod and smile at the band boys before the performance but never really talked to them.
Figure 120. View from a Tarawa bus
The main ideas that I’ve illustrated in this thesis are situated and multiple knowledges located in specific and multiple temporalities—kainga or homes; research process over product; reflecting on culture and history in both islands and archives; reflecting on bodies, movement, performance and their articulations with history, culture and politics; and using montage as a technique and metaphor for handling all these things.

Beyond these theoretical considerations if one thinks about all the exploitative things that happened on Banaba, juxtaposed with the fact that Banabans and Gilbertese still keep going, not just creatively but often joyously despite having had 20,000,000 tonnes of their land shipped off to Australia and New Zealand, despite toiling in the hot sun all day so that civilized people can have lots of grain, wheat and vegemite, despite having no toilets or bathrooms or running water, despite the rising sea levels to possibly drown atolls and atoll dwellers in the near future..., despite all this, some islanders just, to use my African American mother’s favourite line, “keep on keeping on...”

Annie

Video 7 is a kinaesthetic and auditory montage of many of the sites and people discussed in the thesis. I ended it with images of a young girl who I earlier identified in chapter 4 as Aren’s youngest daughter, Annie. She is a rather shy girl named after a loquacious paternal aunt. I would often pick her up from Rurubao school in Bairiki in the afternoons and try to strike up a conversation. She understands both Gilbertese and English but would usually just smile, nod, shake her head or shrug at me.

When I returned to Tarawa from Tabiteuea Aren asked me to teach Annie to pate pate. She stressed that Annie’s older sister, Vaiete who was schooling in Suva at the time, was the more outgoing and performative one and that I may have my work cut out with this daughter. I was prepared to struggle when the lessons started but to my surprise Annie quickly took to the sessions. Other girls in the house usually joined in and I noticed that Annie was a lot more comfortable dancing than speaking.

After I returned from Banaba to Tarawa I stayed a couple nights with Aren and Tarataake. There I filmed Annie performing solo for guests at her birthday party. At her mother’s request I had tried my best to secure her straight hair in a bun. She also wore a
new white outfit that Aren bought on a recent work trip to India. I remember Aren
telling me that her Hindi was relatively good because she’d learned some in Suva.

Annie’s heritage spans the islands of Onotoa, Butaritari, Makin, Maiana, Kuria,
Abaiang, Tabiteuea, Banaba and Rabi. She is also descended from the Chinese-Gilbertese
families Kwong, Foon and Kum Kee, was born in Fiji and raised in Fiji and Kiribati. To
watch this normally shy girl dance a contemporary Pacific dance to a Tokelauan song
from New Zealand on her birthday in Betio, on Tarawa, in Kiribati... one might just
imagine the complexities that have and continue to shape her life.

On never ending

... the Native is many things before and “after” colonialism, before and “after”
migration and diaspora (Teaiwa 2001a: 55).

Figure 121. Temanarara fishing off the coast of our kainga on Rabi.

Figure 122. Temanara with daughter Alitalos.
Figure 123. John. T. Teaiwa, Rabi 2000

Figure 124. Tui, Tabona 2000

Figure 125. Banaban dancers, early 1900s (R132/5)

Figure 126 K. Teaiwa, Banaba 2000.

Figure 127. Annie, Betio, Tarawa, 2000.
Towards a New Oceania (for Epeli Hau'ofa)

Some things are better forgotten:
like that there are three groups of Pacific Islanders:
Melanesia, Micronesian, Polynesian:
that Melanesians are short, dark, and have frizzy hair;
that Micronesians are short, dark, and have straight hair;
that Polynesians are tall, fair, and have straight hair...
etcetera.

Some things are easier forgotten:
like that there are Melanesians who are short, fair, and have frizzy hair;
Melanesians who are tall, dark, and have straight hair;
Micronesians who are short, fair, and have straight hair;
Micronesians who are tall, dark, and have frizzy hair;
Polynesians who are tall, dark, and have straight hair;
Polynesians who are short, fair, and have frizzy hair....
etcetera.

Some things are better not forgotten:
like that we are all of us Melanesian
because we are all some shade of brown;
we are all of us Micronesian
because we are all of us dots on the world map;
we are all of us Polynesian
because we are...all of us.

Teresia K. Teaiwa
(Suva, February 22, 1996)

PLAY VIDEO 7

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1 This poem by my sister is yet to be published.
APPENDIX

Pate Pate

Performed by Te Vaka on their album Ki Mua 1999.
Song by Opetaia Foa‘i and Malcom Smith

Tokelauan Lyrics:
(http://www.tevaka.com/kimua.htm)

tu la ki luga ke fai malama
 taimi tenei e fai na hiva
 tu la ki luga ke fai malama
 ue lue malie ke fai na hiva

 aue aue tama mimita
 aue aue teine mimita
 aue aue hihiva mimita
 kikila mai la fakaakiala atu

e a mai tau faiva e a mai
 taku ika e fofou ai au
 e a mai tau faiva e a mai

hihiva ki luga hihiva mai ve
 hihiva malie ki te pate pate

chant:

 hiva ki luga hiva ki lalo
 hiva malie ki te pate pate
"Pate" is a wooden drum (like a lali) Generally, the song is about motivating people to get up and dance. Talks about the movement of the feet, rhythm of the drum -- almost like a courtship dance song.

Stand up, be seen
Time to dance
Stand up, be seen
Dance beautifully

Aue, aue
boys of pride
Aue aue
girls of pride

Aue aue
Dance with pride

Aue aue
Look I will show you

How is your fishing going? (euphemism for courtship)

Dance it up
Dance like this
Dance beautifully

To the log drum
Dance up and down
Dance beautifully
To the log drum
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