TIRAWATA IROUIA:
RE-PRESENTING BANABAN HISTORIES

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Chairperson
My research is dedicated to all my ancestors and guardians, but especially my Nei Kaka (grandmother), Takeua of Eita village on Tabiteuea.
I would like to say thank you and “I love you THIS much” to my mum and dad John and Joan who’ve sacrificed so much for their daughters, my talented and hardworking sisters Maria and Tere, and ikatuni nephew Manoa. Au karabaraba to all the relatives and friends who agreed to talk to me “in English” in Suva, Rabi and Banaba, especially Nei Bure, Bauro, Banto (Tebannang), Kaukau, Maia, Bokanawa, Temarewe, Arariki, Taiman, Rengaua, Tebuke, Namaraki, Christine, Tokobea, Willie, Kewekewe, Tenikoria, Taukoriri, Terikano, Nawaia, Aren, Turenga C., Fatiaki, Turenga S., Temanarara, Batere, Toma, Alipate, Ioane, Alofa, Tireta. Au kaitau naba to the whole Teaiwa kainga—Takaia, Teruamwi, Terianako, Rakomwa, Tebarutu, Eritai, Taita, Tekarika, Terereieta, Tamaria and their families. I am unable to directly quote the names of those I interviewed because of the “Human Subjects” policy of the University of Hawai‘i, something I had to negotiate with regret after I had already done my research. THANKS also to my committee who put up with my last-minute approaches to work and especially those who let my focus be distracted with faith that I would still “finish.” Mahalo to Karen Peacock, Luciano Minerbi, Mimi Sharma, Nicole Sault, Kehaulani Kauanui, Margaret Jolly, Elfriede Hermann and Wolfgang Kempf for their indispensable support and interest. I would like to acknowledge my most stimulating “choice” friend April Henderson (!!!!! girl). And finally thanks also to Michelle, Mariana, Krissy, Oni, Ili, Babli, Wouter, Jenz, Kuhio, Ann, Keith, Matiota, Kinai, the entire Pan Pacific Club 96-98, Kamatoa at BYU, Auntie Barbara, Carrie-Ann, Lisa, Jennifer and all my friends in Hawai‘i. My final semester of courses at UHM was made possible through a scholarship provided by the Renee Heyum Foundation and for this I am very grateful.
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<thead>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>aba</td>
<td>land; people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auriaria</td>
<td>the god of the sun; ancestral spirit and hero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bangabanga</td>
<td>cave or hole; underground water caves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>buto</td>
<td>navel; center/heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPC</td>
<td>British Phosphate Commissioners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buakonikai</td>
<td>village on Rabi furthest away from Nuku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e kawa te aba</td>
<td>pity on us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEIC</td>
<td>Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iango</td>
<td>idea; thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I aki rawata</td>
<td>I’m not burdened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-Matang</td>
<td>person from Matang; European or white person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kava</td>
<td>grog; yqona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kainga</td>
<td>site of residence usually for relatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kan tiroaki</td>
<td>show off; wanting attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maneaba</td>
<td>meeting house, traditionally with boti or sitting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maneaba</td>
<td>places according to genealogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maungatabu</td>
<td>village meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nakon</td>
<td>(go) to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nareau</td>
<td>one of the original ancient gods; the spider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>natin</td>
<td>children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nei Anginimaeao</td>
<td>female ancestor from Beru who divided Banaban land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuku</td>
<td>main town on Rabi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rawata</td>
<td>heaviiness; weight; physical or moral oppression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCL</td>
<td>Rabi Council of Leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabakea</td>
<td>the first of all beings; the turtle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tau</td>
<td>to hold and keep (rights)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ti aki kawa</td>
<td>we’re not pitied</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ti rawata iroum  because of you we are burdened
Tabiang  smallest village on Rabi
Tabwewa  largest village on Rabi, historically dominant
Tituabine  ancestral female spirit, the stingray
Uma  village on Rabi between Tabiang and Nuku
yago  vessel; canoe; body (Fijian)
yaqona  Piper methysticum; grog; kava; root drink
“Education as a process of alienation produces a gallery of active stars and an undifferentiated mass of grateful admirers.” This statement by Ngugi Wa Thiongo in one of the most inspiring books I have ever read, “Decolonising the Mind” (1981), is something that haunts me constantly. Higher education, especially for people of color, is a privilege in the United States so you can imagine what it means in the South Pacific. Whenever I go back home to Fiji I find I have less and less in common with my friends and this is disconcerting. Ironically it is the development of a particularly critical and challenging approach to History, Literature, Art and the Social Sciences that creates the self-conscious and potentially lonely individual scholar. Does it have to be this way? I think not, but it is up to students and teachers alike to create a flexible and creative intellectual space in which we can negotiate the rapidly expanding, complex web of issues in Oceania. Thanks Tere.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND DISCUSSION

During the year 1900
There came there came on Ocean Island
Te Kambana ae te BPC
Ao an tanimai ao kareke matam
Te universe, ba te kun ae mainaina
Te tia rabakau, ni kaminoa boon te
Phosphate...Nakoia ake ngkoa

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 tanimai ao kare matam tei Buritan o,
You really gave a bad result
Nakoia student of Ocean Island.

How pity...how pity...Oh
They misunderstood the value of money!
Our ancestors! Ake ngkoa ngkoa

Oh gentlemen and Ten Tebuke
May God bless you till the end
E Matoatoa te case be brave ni karokoa rekena
Ao an tanimai ao kareke matam iaon abam
Ba tia reimaurua ibukon te iango e kakaoti
Ibuakon te nang ae almost dull
Ao an oki mai ao kareke matam
Iaon abam, ba tia reimaurua i buakon teiango
Ae kakaoti ibukon te nang ae almost dull.

During the year 1900
There came on Ocean Island
The company, the BPC
Face and look this way, world
At these clever white skins
To confuse us with the price of phosphate
Our ancestors of long ago

Its gave its price the BPC
One pound note 24 penny
They said, they said
We'll take the 24 penny it must have more value. Face us and look this
Way Oh British, you really gave a
Bad result for the students of Ocean Island long ago

How pity... how pity... Oh
They misunderstood the value of money
Our ancestors! Of long ago.

Song sung by the Banaban Dancing Group at every annual celebration of the December 15th landing on Rabi.
With respect to the Banaban phosphate mining case, an Historical review reveals the complex integration of native, foreign, individual and group interests at several economic and political levels. It is amazing how far the phosphate trading empire stretched across the globe and left its stamp on the personal lives of many people, of many kinds, during a century marked by two world wars and rapidly increasing industrial innovations. How small the activities of phosphate islanders must seem at this grand level. How much smaller the voice of one Banaban descendent concerned with these concerns might be in academia.

I did not approach the Banaban question in any comparative fashion because I am not ready to ignore my own personal experiences of Banaban History and histories in favor of purely objective, poetic or political analysis. I admit I fall unwillingly into that emerging mass of native voices who just want to “tell our own stories” (any way we want). This step towards Banaban scholarship is not an easy task. It is tantamount to stepping off a cliff. I’m still falling and there just seems to be no ground/ing in this plunge. I’m not proficient enough in academic theory (of any kind) or familiar with every study conducted on a Pacific population to pretend to present something that isn’t really just about what I am imagining and responding to on this journey.

This paper IS about what I am thinking and the resulting interpretations and reactions often come out in running reels. These are images and words that run as fast as anything would when you’re hurtling by at a hundred miles an hour. I then deliberately submit an interpretive lens through which a Banaban history is revealed in all its appropriate disordered entirety, held only together by its pensive gesturing towards the process of “decolonization” that marks much contemporary scholarship within Pacific
Studies. In my case, the notions of pity, *kawa*, and burden, *rawata*, are convenient tools within the Banaban narrative but I admit up front that my approach leaves room for many more questions than answers. I will play on History and histories to illustrate the contrast between narratives of the dominant, singular “H” kind, usually simplistic and based on “fact,” and the “h” types which are more complex and disconcerting perspectives. By examining six “representers” I will articulate my own understanding, as a Banaban by blood, of the Banaban past.

1.1 Kawa and Agency

*Tirawata irouia* means, “because of them, we are burdened.” I chose this phrase because it is connected to *e kawa te aba*, which means, “pity on us.” In this paper I am re-reading historical texts from a space in the present where many Banabans are both burdened with and seeking pity for their tragic history. The “them” in my own case are the writers, scholars and colonial administrators who represented Banabans in the last hundred years—my “burden” to re-read and re-present. I’ve chosen certain authors because their texts helped create a sad, complex History that continues to dialogue with Banaban self-image and histories today.

In the Gilbertese language, *aba* includes both land and people (related by blood); there is no possessive form of the word—*abau* means me/land, not “my land.” In another way, land and blood are metonymies for the person and the group. Kawa for the Banaban aba emerges as the dominant paradigm at both the local and global levels in an historical narrative of change, integration, exploitation and displacement. The Banabans of Rabi
Island in Fiji are originally from Banaba, or Ocean Island, in Kiribati and were forced to
move because of the large-scale mining activities of several colonial powers including
one of the first multinational conglomerates of the twentieth century—the British
Phosphate Commissioners. The Banaban History is pitiful because of the alleged helpless
reality of any small community in the face of large, powerful interests. The Banabans
could be seen as one of the many little bumps in the paving of a South Pacific dominated
by Britain, and subsequently, Australia and New Zealand. The purpose of this paper is to
discuss historical, anthropological and popular illustrations of Banabans and comment on
their influences on contemporary Banaban life (mine included).

When New Zealander, Albert Ellis began the appropriation of Banaba for
phosphate mining in 1900, he initiated a restructuring of the entire society, already being
re-fashioned by Christian missionaries. Relationships were complicated and compounded
by new meanings for land and autonomy. The Church, the Colonial government and the
phosphate mining company all became salient categories of meaning for Banabans
layered upon previously existing networks and communal relationships (a central theme
in Silverman 1971). The interests of the mining company were later directly connected to
the interests of three governments—British, Australian, and New Zealand and Banaban
land ultimately served as nourishment for their agricultural industries.

Banaba or Ocean Island, known traditionally as *te huta* or “the naval” of the earth,
did indeed provide an umbilical link between native re/source and foreign consumer.
From a gendered feminist perspective this labor of Banaban land for imperial power is
akin to the proverbial black (insignificant, powerless) mother who suckles the master’s
children with little or no acknowledgement for [her] role in [his] welfare. Images of tiny
Ocean Island as a source of survival and progress for larger powers, brim with countless revealing, potentially creative and critical metaphors; reflections in a time when the governments in question consider the topic obsolete. Is it not similarly the case with Hawaiian or Native American struggles for redress from the US Government? In the last two or three centuries so much native stuff—mud, blood, water and spirit—was used as fertilizer for white progress. These are abominable activities, but I have to remind myself that in this case, Banabans had some agency in their own turbulent transformation. Certainly in their own “development,” the polemical boundaries between good and bad actors cannot always be drawn between brown and white persons.

The traces of pity that remain in the minds of those who cannot extricate themselves from victim status dialogue with other narratives of victimization that exist in the writings of academics, travelers and journalists who took up the “Banaban cause.” My own writing is a journey through the messy web of documented and oral accounts of Banaban histories as well as a connecting of these issues to my own personal “native,” and “privileged,” experiences and worldview. Many accounts are emotional and others more objective but all situate anyone connected to Ocean Island by blood under many layers of historical, political and cultural issues.

My approach to Banaban histories moves between the macro and micro levels. This large task is necessary to excavate Banabans from their minimal status in Pacific literature. The Central Pacific Ocean is perhaps the least studied area of the Pacific and this is both a blessing and handicap for a student of Pacific Studies writing about Banabans. I do not have a multitude of voices, opinions, facts and approaches to synthesize, analyze and critique. At the same time, within Anthropology or Pacific
Studies, Banaban History, culture and politics is a much less contested field then, for example, Hawaiian or Maori issues. One reasonable methodology might have been a comparative exercise between, for example, Banabans and Bikini Islanders, or between resettled Banabans in Fiji and Gilbertese in the Solomons. But the Banaban experience is more than just an issue of resettlement and certainly not one of migration.

David Chappell discusses the victim-agent discourse within Pacific historiography (Chappell 1995). He acknowledges that there are no neat boundaries between islanders as victims of or agents to colonial and imperial oppression. Really, it is difficult to categorize whole nations of people in the past as one or the other. A simplistic two-sided paradigm such as this only makes current dialogue between outsider and islander academics more fruitless and stagnant. He says, “For example, Banabans and Bikinians could be shown to be victims because they lost their islands, but they also made choices along the way, however misguided” (315). I agree with the general idea, particularly his calls to acknowledge the island voices of the present when looking at the past (318). From my “native academic” location I would take it further to reflect on the power relations within island communities both of the present and past as well. This is not the most efficient or comfortable approach but so much of “our problems,” regardless of the greater outside forces that are mainly responsible, have to do with a lack of internal introspection.

The Banaban case is similar to the Bikini experience in that the whole island was given up for “the good of mankind” (T. Teaiwa 1994: 87)—in this case to feed the healthy appetites of Australian and New Zealand colonial settlers. In a poetic and literal fashion, the “blood” of Banabans, their land, was shipped across the ocean to nourish the
land, the blood, of people who were busy oppressing the native peoples in their own countries. The Aborigines and Maoris were certainly not benefiting then from the fertilizing techniques of the agricultural industries in either country. One might genuinely ask whether Banabans are both victims of and unknowing accessories to what is essentially a racist ideology that continues to this day in many ways. An ideology that also prevents marginalized natives from sharing and talking to each other because they are preoccupied with the great bad white “other.”

I do not make this provocative suggestion flippantly. The comment I made earlier about acknowledging internal power structure is relevant here. Within the Banaban and perhaps Gilbertese consciousness as well lies an epistemological approach to white skinned “others” that confers superiority to them. The Christianization of Banabans under a god of the white men, also organized leadership within the community, particularly that of Methodist Ministers, who were seen as immune from wrong doing by the moral status of their position. The Christian Banabans were all tied with the Christian businessmen and Christian colonials who managed the phosphate empire (see Williams and Macdonald 1985), by one moral philosophy (Silverman 1971) which placed white people—the teachers and transformers—above the natives.

With respect to my suggestion about being “accessories” to other people’s oppression I say this because the all-consuming pity of Banaban History (H to connote “official” less complex histories) has made some people ignorant of the struggles of any

1 Blood and land form the central core of Silverman’s (1971) anthropological study of Banaban culture on Rabi Island. These two factors defined both identity and direct custom and conduct on Banaba. Adoption was very popular in Banaban society and ties were secured by the passing of land to adopted children. After this process, the adopted were real kin. Thus land and blood functioned in the same way to define membership in a community. The Gilbertese language further solidifies the fundamental connection
other group of islanders. This is one of the main aspects of a pity-based ideology—it is hard for people to see past their own needs, wants or desired compensation. To quote Chappell again, “In such a discourse, being acted on unjustly requires compensatory counteraction” (310) and “If you devictimize a people you strip them of their moral authority” (309). My own thinking on this is influenced by my father’s approach to Banaban “development” issues. In his “Strategy for Rabi Island Development” he offers this vision: “To make Rabi a place where people can enjoy a good standard of living earned through hard work and self-reliance” (J. Teaiwa, 1997: 4). The “hard work and self-reliance” has particular significance because the Banabans have acquired a reputation for “laziness” over the years. My father, John Tabakitoa Teaiwa, was elected Chairman of the Rabi Council of Leaders in December 1996 and he can’t stand Pity.

1.2 Contexts of Kawa

I first heard about kawa while visiting Rabi Island in 1997. People invoked “Ekawa te aba” at least once an hour every day in almost any context of frustration, sadness, between land and blood by, for example, the word mwi, “trace” or “remains” which refers to inherited lands. To have your mother’s mwi is to have some of her land (72-75).

2 History, capital H, goes: droughts on Banaba, Albert Ellis’ “trick” to obtain the leasing agreement from Tabwewa chiefs, phosphate mining, British deception of phosphate revenues, fruitless Banaban resistance to land acquisition, World War II and Japanese atrocities, displacement to Rabi, abandonment by British administration, the siphoning of funds to Gilbert and Ellice Islands, the long journey to the British High Court, the long trial, the unsatisfying end to that trial, the result of the $10 million settlement, the ensuing corruption by the Rabi Council, the 1991 coup, the resulting lapse in self-esteem of the entire community, recovery.

3 However, the all-consuming victim status is based on very real painful historical experiences that are most often created by white actors against black or brown subjects. No one can deny the dominance of white agency in Histories of slavery, oppression, racism and genocide. The black-white dichotomy is the most available paradigm for explaining why some people won and some people lost their cultural dominance.

4 I repeat this in context to present one of the dominant images of Banabans but throughout the thesis we can see that over the years they’ve been preoccupied with many things, some of which prevent them from
anxiety, humor, anger or reflection, right after “ti rawata.” These phrases probably have origins in the Gilbertese linguistic culture but this is something I have little knowledge about. What I am trying to understand are the contemporary contextual manifestations of these ideas on Rabi. The state of pity seems to implicate all Banabans even when elicited privately between two people. All Banabans on Rabi, and most outside the island, are fully aware of the common heritage they share. They (we really, and I explore my inclusion in the “they” later) are all bound in an Historical saga of disaster, conversion, struggle, profit, development, aid, rehabilitation and desired compensation. Any Banaban who denies inclusion in this History is viewed as trying to be “better” than the rest. Banaban society has to be one of the most egalitarian in the region—not because of some noble distribution of power, but because of the unconscious desire to prevent anyone from escaping a common kawa and rawata.

There are about 6000 Banabans by blood or adoption on the planet. Most live on Rabi and others in cities like Suva, Savusavu or Lautoka in Fiji. There are three generations on Banaba from a repatriated group in the late 1970s and more scattered throughout the islands of Kiribati. To my knowledge there is also at least one community on the Big Island of Hawai‘i, descendants of a group who migrated during the terrible droughts on Banaba in the 1870s on labor recruiting ships (Hinz 1997: 45). The remaining Banabans are individuals, mostly women, who married men from Australia, New Zealand and the United States, living in those countries with their children.

All Banabans are Christian thanks to the missionizing efforts of the American
Board of Commissions for Foreign Missions. About mid-century, the doctrine of the Methodist Church was paramount, but through the influence of their Gilbertese cousins, a few became Catholic (see Benaia, 1991). Today on Rabi the small community has fractured into Seventh Day Adventists, Pentecostals, Assemblies of God, Church of Christ, Jehovah’s Witness and Ba’hai. I discuss the influence of Christianity in Chapter 2 and note now that the proliferation of alternative denominations is indicative of increased social diversity. In such a small population one has to ask why such diversity is needed. I think fracture is occurring for many reasons some of which I am only guessing at this point: things that happened in the past to unite Banabans under one political and moral banner have not maintained their utility into the present. Some observations relating to this are dealt with in 3.5 under “Silverman’s Issue.”

When I was on Rabi in December 1997, a group of Evangelical missionaries came from New Zealand. I was sitting on the porch of our house with my cousins when one woman approached me asking, “do you speak English?” I was inclined to pretend otherwise but nodded instead. “Wonderful,” she said. “Do you know that Jesus loves you?” I said, “I’m Catholic,” as if that was a reasonable answer while my cousins grinned on. Despite being very familiar with the suit clad Mormon types who wander around suburban centers I confess I thought that missionaries were a thing of the past. They are so well frozen in History books as the sternly faced hell and brim fire types who clothe natives from head to toe in cotton. There isn’t enough literature on the impact of modern religious crusaders or how different Churches continue to shape the Pacific reality today. Most islanders don’t discard their ancient beliefs altogether so how does God fit in with gods today? Some church ministers on Rabi say that the female spirit who protects
Banaba, Nei Tituabine the stingray, predicted and promoted the native conversion to Christianity before the first missionary even came.  

The state of pity on Rabi appeals to religious, historical, social and economic sensibilities. It invokes both sad and humorous emotions as people imagine an unfortunate past and the prosperous present they were cheated out of by the fates of kawa. I brought up the kawa question during a long interview around the yaqona bowl at Tabwewa village. I did not receive an answer until the day before I left Rabi in December. My relative told me that he had discussed it with some other men in the village and they’d decided that “e kawa te aba” had two orientations. For the older people who remember the time of phosphate annuities, it means: “the spoon feeding has stopped.” For the younger people, it describes the present socioeconomic condition—the constant work they’re asked to do because they never had the benefits of annuities. My teenaged cousin on the other hand told me kawa was “slang.”

On Rabi, when the annual dance drama is performed and the “How pity..., How pity...Oh” song is sung, members of the audience are familiarly amused. They’ve seen this theater many times. I imagine that the first few years it was staged, people remained solemn during the reenacting of the World War II atrocities when Japanese soldiers occupied Banaba. Today the audience laughs whenever one dancer pretends to chop off another dancer’s head, or when the dancers are lined up and shot in imitation of the 1945 massacre of 100 laborers. I talked to one of the main choreographers of the drama about this response. His group had recently performed in Tokyo at a conference devoted to

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5 I discuss the role of Nei Tituabine in 2.3 and 2.4. I still can’t say for sure, though, why Tituabine in particular, of all the deities is still active but the general story is that she told the Banabans that the Christian God was better and more powerful than the ancient ones.
marginalized peoples within the Japanese Empire. I asked him how the audience in Japan responded to the show. He said there was total silence and tears streamed down the people’s faces. I asked him why people on Rabi laughed, but neither of us had an answer. This drama is one of the main ways in which pitiful History is kept alive on Rabi.

Pity is funny and sad simultaneously. There’s nothing funnier than the sight of a cousin muttering “e kawa te aba,” after he has been roused from sleep or dragged from a game to do “serious work.” If a mother invokes pity because one of her five small children suddenly drops to sleep on the ground in the middle of a tortuous journey between houses that are only eight meters apart, it is even more humorous. However, the appeal to pity by a group of elders or women with respect to some event of crime, drunkenness or spouse abuse, marks a sad situation. The women at the Women’s Interest Group office in Nuku, especially used this phrase to describe how they felt about the excessive yaqona drinking habits of men on the island and the lack of proper health conditions in the households. What connects all these situations is the shared Banaban History that has brought one and all to the present state of life on Rabi.

1.3 Negative Difference

An important element of Pity is the implicit reference to some alternative “non-pitiful” state of existence. This could be drawn from the widely available representations of material comfort supplied by Western ideology and the memory of a recent historical period in which phosphate revenues and individual annuities were generous and mistaken to be never-ending. The island of Nauru, also mined by the BPC, was another major
source of comparison throughout the years, especially as Nauruans seemed to have more legal rights than the Banabans. Ocean Island, for its part, was a modern civilization of colonial comfort and the inhabitants—British, Australian, Banaban, Gilbertese and Chinese, no matter how segregated, developed specific notions of what constituted "progress and comfort," and what did not.

One reply I received when I asked what people remembered best about life on Banaba was: "chocolate and movies." I do not wish to imply that some people are just shallow and materialistic but I also do not want to pretend that what happened on Banaba was a case of deliberate destruction of a "traditional" ethic. Any notions or materials introduced by Europeans were incorporated into a Banaban culture that had never been stagnant or inflexible. This, of course, does not make the exploitative activities of the Pacific Islands Company, the Pacific Phosphate Company, the BPC and the British, Australian or New Zealand Governments any less loathsome (see 1.5, 3.1-3).

When I first pondered on the issue of kawa I thought hard about the idea of "difference." Who is pitiful and who is not? Obviously you have to be better off than the person to whom you can offer pity, right? How do you get to be at either one of those positions? I decided to consider an alternative, expanded approach to the Western understandings of inequality and racial or class differences. I started with the idea that there was a global hierarchy according to the Western developmentalist ideology of Progress (big P).

This hierarchy though, from a Pacific Islander, not European epistemology becomes informed on a number of levels. People are different, unequally, naturally, not just because of color or power but because of the human acceptance of particular benefits
of progress (small p). Since culture is never stagnant, progress must already be built into the human evolutionary process. But is it just a coincidence that in dominant Histories, "natives" end up on the pitiful side of the fence? It seems to me that negative difference is a creation of certain individuals and groups to make others exist beneath them (so they can pity them later). Western Progress isn’t natural; it’s created for power but as the rest of humanity tries to secure a better future for themselves through progress they get sucked into Progress.6

I’ve decided that in the modern era everyone will never be “rich” so everyone will always be different negatively. This seems to be one of the requirements of capitalism. In the Pacific, at least at this stage of History, the subscription to dominant models of “success,” even in ways that purport to maintain unique cultural resources, is fast trapping people in a materially determined regime of Development. It is not just the grand condition of capitalism or the dominant historical processes of imperialism and colonialism that traps people but the acceptance of an ideology of hierarchical difference informed organically, genetically, scientifically, culturally, politically and spiritually. The hierarchy of differences exists in our minds, as memory and as new information, at many different levels at the same time. The notion that “native” values move along circular paths, always maintaining “balance” is questionable if we accept that in history, natives have changed (by force or choice) and circles have become straight lines.7 The “darkness

6 I don’t mean to digress into big P’s and little p’s here, but I am trying to comment on the reasons why cultures change. Looking back from the present we can say that things done in the past have been good or bad (for us) but what drives decision making at that particular time? I suggest it’s this idea of progress. I haven’t read anything about it yet but I’m sure there’s a whole philosophical discourse available for comparison.

7 Ideas about what is better and what is not are realities for natives who have to make decisions regarding change. The incorporation of Christianity is dealt with in this way and the attraction to money and other goods is indicative of some human longing for any means to increase personal or group ends. For example,
to light” discussion in Chapter 2 tries to illustrate one of the Banaban preoccupations regarding “development.”

Throughout the thesis, the subtext on Matang, the mythical Gilbertese and Banaban land of powerful fair-skinned ancestors, and other references to racial hierarchy speak directly to my developing ideas on difference. I am implying that white people who represented Banabans later, fit into an ideological relationship that is based on white superiority shaped over a long period of time, perhaps even before contact. I do not know exactly how Banabans and Gilbertese described their fair-skinned ancestors but people in positions of power certainly took advantage of the existence of this myth.

The representers I discuss in Chapter 3, with the exception of Teresia Teaiwa, are parts of the privileged Matang discourse. Arthur Grimble (1972, '89) and Harry Maude (1931, '46, '94) fit into this subtext in obvious ways because of their colonial powers and responsibilities and ensuing scholarly prestige. Pearl Binder (1977) occupies the liberal white space where moral indignity, indignity only afforded those who are privileged already, induces guilt. She presented Banabans in a completely sympathetic manner. Maslyn Williams and Barrie Macdonald (1985) illustrate the power to present Histories for the colonial “winners,” not native losers, because of the acceptance of a natural state of Progress and emphasis in academia to treat the “original” documented sources as uncontestable. Silverman (1971) plays the objective, reflective academic role, safely

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with the Banabans the memory of harsh droughts prompted them to accept new information on alternative philosophies. These themes aren’t central to the paper but are some of my “universal” explanations for why things happen.
1.4 Dominant Representations

This thesis is about the Pities of Banaban History. It’s my own narrative of the Banaban past, a look at all the ways in which different cultural and historical representations of the last 130 years have been static, tragic, sad, pathetic, indignant or evasive and free from emotion. Threads of joy and laughter are present in Binder, who both endeavored to approach Banabans as a pitiful community at the macro level and as joyous, singing natives of Paradise at the micro level. The rest of the literature is by serious and no-nonsense male Colonial officials, romantic Colonial Resident or Phosphate Commissioners cum intellectuals like Grimble and Maude, and “The-Business-of-Serious-History” adherents like Williams and Macdonald.

I would have liked to included E.C Eliot’s “Broken Atoms” (1938) and Albert Ellis’ “Ocean Island and Nauru: Their Story” (1935) in my critique, as well as an examination of the Banaban Heritage Society and Stacey King’s role in Banaban representation. But I had to select those narratives that had the most impact in either academia or the community. The BHS would have been a very appropriate aspect of the discussion but their vehicle for news circulation, the internet and Society Newsletter are

8 Most people, Banabans, academics, anthropologists admit that Silverman’s book is very, very hard to read. I had to review it four times over the space of two years to finally “get it.” It was absolutely worth the time but how much more conducive it would be to be comprehensible in one reading.
rather difficult materials to cite and I have already written one controversial paper on
King's activities and modus operandi (K. Teaiwa 1997).

Generally missing from the literature are the specific feelings and attitudes of both
male and female individuals within the community at the period of academic "capture." At least four television documentary productions on Banaban issues have attempted to
include people's "feelings" but these representations position the community too neatly
within the pity saga as victims (Barraclough 1975, Sixty Minutes 1993, Foreign
Correspondent 1995, Japanese National TV 1997). In addition the media coverage over
the years has been biased in favor of the perceived positive or negative activities of the
first head of the Rabi Council of Leaders, Minister Rotan Tito and his descendants. Rotan
and his sons played major roles in the "development" of the community on Rabi and still
exercise some influence today. When a Japanese television station covered the Banaban
story in 1997, it was along the idea of "lost Paradise" with the grandson and great-
grandson of Rotan as the protagonists. This family, as one of the largest landowners on
Banaba, naturally have heightened interests in the mining revenues and sought as much
from the BPC, United Nations and the British Government. To their credit, though, they
have been a major part of Banaban resistance to colonial exploitation over the decades.

The Fiji population has been exposed to Banabans issues through the local media
over an inconsistent period of time through the Pacific Islands Monthly magazine and Fiji
Times newspaper. In general the Fiji Government has not paid much attention to Rabi
and many in the general population think the island is actually in another country Kiribati.

9 Though Silverman does a pretty good job by including songs, language and a few oral traditions in his
analysis.
perhaps. To land on Rabi in fact, feels like you’ve left Fiji, not because of the landscape but the people—“natives” who are obviously not “native” to the land or even southern Pacific region.

In the first few decades after the 1945 landing Banabans chose not to participate in the national “community” of Fiji and to this day some still refer to Rabi as “our country.” Banabans were never briefed on Fijian ways in the beginning and there are many stories of offence committed by Banabans in interaction with the much more stratified and ritualistic Fijian societies who occupied the villages directly across Buca Bay on Vanua Levu (see Benaia 1991: 57 on the story of Beniamina). Some Fiji residents who are familiar with the Banaban case think they live off “hand-outs” instead of working hard for their livelihood. The articles in the Fiji Times regarding the 1996 elections included references to “skullduggery” and other alleged irresponsible behavior of previous councils (Nata 1996).10

1.5 Money and Land

The reference to “hand-outs” is based on the widespread knowledge that Banabans received $A10 million dollars after their widely publicized suit against the British and BPC. In fact that money was *ex gratia*, and offered only if Banabans agreed to never bring up the issue again. It was not paid out by any one of the three

10 Banabans are also seen to be really bad business people because they cannot seem to manage their funds properly. Though the Banabans received relatively low payments compared to the profits incurring to Australian and New Zealand farmers and consumers, they still had funds that could have been saved or invested wisely. However what developed was a behavior whereby money was disposed of as fast as it was received. One explanation is that this kept all the Banabans equal as a group, and material equality is one of the strongest values within the community.
governments, it was drawn from accumulated BPC funds. No compensation was ever attached to Judge V.C Megarry’s 1976 finding that Britain had ignored a “higher” trust and “fiduciary obligation” towards the Banabans (Ghai 1987: 27). Pearl Binder’s (1977) replication of the judgement reads as such:

I am powerless to give the plaintiff any relief, but in litigation against the Crown I think a Judge must direct attention to a wrong that he cannot right and leave it to the Crown to do what it considers proper. The crown is traditionally the fountain of justice and justice is not confined to what is enforceable in the court. The question is not whether the Banabans should succeed as a matter of fairness or ethics or morality. I have no jurisdiction to make an award just because I conclude that they have a raw deal (167).

She then comments on the disappointment the Banabans felt because they’d had so much moral faith on the justice of their cause. Their faith in Christianity, as the ethical system that binds all men, was probably dully tested after the £750,000 trial. The faith that God would lead, God would provide had fueled them up to this point. She also illustrates the emotional impact of this trial on the British population. After “Go Tell it to the Judge” was screened on the BBC, thousands of sympathetic letters poured in and “Many people sent what they could. Children sent their pocket money. Old age pensioners dug into their savings” (169). This public response seems to have prompted the offer of the ex gratia payment as well as £1 million “for development purposes” (Aidney 1994: 16). Banabans did not accept the money because it prevented them from future claims but in 1981 they acquiesced. By this time it had accumulated almost $4 million in interest. The capital of this sum was placed in required preservation under the 1981 Banaban Settlement Act amendments.
Civil servants and older members of the community in Fiji would be most familiar with the subsequent activities of some Banaban leaders, especially under the leadership of Methodist Minister Reverend Terubea Rongorongo from 1989 to 1991 (see Aidney report 1994 for a thorough account). In this period large amounts of money disappeared into the pockets of businessmen, fishing companies, lawyers and accountants. The most interesting part of this moment in History is that none of the men who benefited financially were ever convicted of their crimes against the Banaban community. This, despite an investigation by a Fiji Government appointed Committee of Inquiry that produced considerable proof of financial mismanagement (and outright theft) and a seven-year trial conducted by the District Public Prosecutor’s Office that ended suspiciously due to “lack of evidence.”

The Banaban Trust Fund was never supposed to fall under the original $A10 million. In 1987 it was $15 million because of Fijian devaluation. In 1989 the Rabi Council asked to withdraw capital amounts and sought adjustments in the Settlement Act to provide for this. They did not get the necessary approvals but started withdrawing sums anyway. Accounts of all the ensuing transactions were, “treated with casualness by all parties and authorities involved” (Aidney 1994: 25). By 1990 the Rabi Council of Leaders (RCL) was in debt for $2.987 million after losing money in two business ventures and withdrawing capital for things no one is sure of. It was at this point that Banabans threw their Councilors out of office.

Money is a major pity of Banaban History—no “one” Banaban ever has to pay for the destructive things that have been done, whether the initiators are internal or external to the community. Every one pays because kawa is ALL-inclusive. The British trial
affected all, as did the financial mismanagement even though individual actors initiated and sustained both activities.

Banaban money and land is best dealt with in Silverman’s book, especially with respect to how Banabans themselves view Ocean Island, “their” land and “their money. There is not much documentation on exactly how the people felt in the past as they watched their land being dug up by sophisticated machinery but in the beginning, with Ellis, it was a wheelbarrow and shovel venture and the Banabans readily collected rocks for the Company. It seemed to be a friendly enough scheme at this point once each village sorted out their agreements with the Company. Everyone was interested in benefiting from the new activities. Previously, an agreement had been struck with the representative of only one village—Tabwewa who had rights to board visiting vessels (see Chapter 2: 2.2), and Ellis had unknowingly obtained mining rights from a “King” who had no general authority over the island. The agreement was for 999 years at £50 per annum with stipulations towards the conservation of fruit bearing trees and trading benefits for Banabans (Williams and Macdonald 1985: 30-37). In all it was “progress” and a better life that was promised to the islanders. For a generation that experienced the harsh consequences of several droughts the Company and its promises were quite welcome.

Later on as the Companies demands increased and they had secured annexation of Ocean Island to the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony (GEIC), mining became more problematic for Banabans. Compulsory acquisitions of land, as shown by the Mining Ordinance No.4 of 1928 indicate that Banabans were not cooperating with the demands of the Company or Colonial Office. I further refer to the circumstances surrounding this
in Chapter 3 with respect to Grimble’s letter. The Company had received license for mining on October 2nd 1900, acquired further lands through the 1913 agreement which continued to ensure compensation for food-producing trees, and by now imported the necessary labor to expedite larger scale activities. Various funds were set up to distribute royalties and future security (see Appendix C). The interests of the Company rarely changed but the generations on Ocean Island did. Officials now had to deal with grown up natives who knew nothing of droughts, were nurtured on Company stores and educated in the Christian moral doctrine. They were much more politically active than their elders were and rather astute about the exploitation that was surrounding them.

After the traumas of World War II and displacement to Rabi, the accumulated phosphate royalty funds were combined into one Banaban Trust Fund, which became the source for much political and economic tension over the decades. This fund and its uses, along with the specifics of mining activities on Ocean Island, results of at least two major Banaban Lands Commission surveys and $A10 million settlement after the British High-Court trial constitute the “official” and factual History that the 1960-1980 generation focus on (see footnote 2). On Rabi, many families, especially those with larger land holdings on Banaba keep records of all their land rights and the appropriate genealogical or historical connections which dictate those rights.

Today, any official political and economic decisions, development plans or landowning cases that are raised are based on these important Historical matters (money, land, rights, court case). What most decision makers and perhaps Banabans themselves focus on less, are the histories of social and cultural change, responses to these and psychological matters of geographic displacement, identity and generation gaps that
unfolded in between and around the central issues. Some needs, especially those regarding identity, are catered by the revival and perpetuation of dance and song, based less on some static traditional past then on the imminent need to practice "culture" now. Through creation of costumes, choreography, poetry and oral traditions, Rabi Islanders are carving out a specific cultural niche for themselves, the "How Pity" song being one of the first results of this process. 11

1.6 My "Banaban" Father

I am a Banaban by blood, not by culture. This is an important distinction. There are no more "pure-blooded" Banabans left but this isn't why we have no blood quotas. Blood is very important for Banabans, but not in terms of quantity. Both descent and participation—nature and culture—determine identity. Both descent and participation on Banaba determined land holding. Each individual had their own piece and this was passed on or divided according to custom, duty and fulfillment of responsibility. Identity, blood and relationships were once closely bound up in the exchange of land. The move to Rabi and substitution of money naturally complicated the previous system (this is elaborated best in Maude 1932). My own family never had serious investments in land issues on Banaba because an ancestor gave most of her land away to friends or distant relatives for sound reasons. Thus we are not bound up in the politics of money or land as much as others.

11 There is another intriguing history connected to the revival of specifically "Banaban" (authentic) songs, dances and costumes but it is out of my scope to deal with. It is connected to the idea of cultural perpetuation as survival and identity and the outside factors that influence this evolution.
Through my father, I have the nature, but not culture, part. I was not raised in a Banaban community and I do not speak Gilbertese fluently, but like one friend on Rabi says, I have “very BIG education.” Education is a modern mark of status because many Banaban children do not finish high school, let alone university. Some of my relatives think it is quite bizarre that my father’s daughters have been “in school” this long, are all unmarried and over the age of twenty-one. Education stands out as a modern substitute for any privilege that might have previously been exemplified through more concrete forms of wealth (like land). Since we never had any interests in politics before, our family on Rabi is seen as more neutral and possibly apathetic to historical Banaban causes.

My sisters and I had good “western opportunities” that most people on Rabi and perhaps many in Fiji never had. We went to good primary and secondary schools, were positively exposed to literature, dance, music, art and sports, were able to travel overseas, and managed to succeed in our academic studies with relative ease. I consider it quite an achievement on my parent’s part that we did all this without being active members of any elite social, economic or political class whatsoever. We all obtained bachelor’s degrees in the United States and until 1996 were those “Suva relatives” who practically only existed in stories told by relatives who’d seen us perhaps once in their lifetimes.

I was born in Savusavu and raised in Lautoka and Suva City. My Banaban identity for many years was marginal and manifest only in performative spurts over a period of about twenty-one years. The main reason for this was my father’s personal decision to distance himself from Banaban politics and social life for almost thirty years. We are Banaban through my paternal grandfather’s grandmother, Kieuea, who was from
Ocean Island and who married a man from Tabiteuea in the Gilbert Islands. Her children moved back to Tabiteuea and my grandfather was actually recruited from there to work on Ocean Island as a laborer. He freely moved with the population to Rabi in 1947, sending for his wife and three of four children who were on Tabiteuea. My father, his personal history and present political position are crucial to my interpretations of Banaban issues, and consequently this paper. My general loyalty to him provides the grounding for my emotional and intellectual biases with respect to things Banaban or Gilbertese.

John Tabakitoa Teaiwa was born with such an inherent desire for personal achievement and development that his attitude was nothing less than “weird” on Rabi. When kids were begging their parents not to be sent to school, he was begging his parents to go. He caused such a fuss when his father tried to stop him from attending high school in Levuka that Teaiwa Tenamo was forced to give in. Tabakitoa preferred to work in the school gardens for his education, rather than stay on Rabi cutting copra. I almost hate to hear his childhood stories because they always create heart-wrenching images of a small brown boy trying in vain to excel and be creative while living in a social environment that was preoccupied with anything but “modern” education. This is a privilege that only people like the Rotan family could afford, and the Teaiwas were far from such a position. In addition, why did anyone need education when phosphate annuities took care of all material needs?

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12 My grandparents had 10 kids. Large families on Banaba were not popular, at the most families had two kids due to the harsh environmental conditions. When the phosphate royalties were paid out on an individual basis the number of children per family took a giant leap. This was particularly rampant on Rabi where more kids meant more money. Now that annuities have stopped more kids still means benefits, because there are more hands to help for everyday survival. I think children resent this responsibility placed on them by their parents.
This is the main reason my sisters and I are given every modern opportunity possible—my father's own struggle. He really wanted to be a doctor. His mother, Takeua, was a healer and would often send him into the bush to pick all kinds of herbs, flowers, twigs and leaves. She would instruct him to chant certain things before or during picking and to face east or west, depending on the time of day. With some form of innate defiance for "primitive" practices, he would deliberately disregard her directions and face west, when it was supposed to be east, or miss a line of the chant, just to see if it would make a medical difference.

I can never understand his inattention to what could be described as native "magic" because he was raised for four years from birth by an "adopted father" who was one of the most devoted pagans in the village of Terikiai on Tabiteuea, an island famous for its "traditional" inclinations. Tabakitoa, in fact, wanted to be a "modern" doctor. The eldest of ten brothers and sisters, he found every way possible to get himself into and through primary school on Rabi, and secondary school in Levuka. He had to work in the taro and cassava plantations to pay for his school fees but he didn't mind. He attended a boy's boarding school where he took up sports, excelling at rugby in particular. He would wake up at 4 a.m. everyday to train by himself, even if his one pair of clothes was drying on the line and he had to run naked (provoking of course, a severe scolding from the Catholic priests).

He went on to study at the Fiji Teacher's College in Suva at which time the RCL promised him a scholarship for medical school. He left teacher training and returned to Rabi, but the Council then denied having ever made this pledge.\textsuperscript{13} Later on, my father

\textsuperscript{13} Refer to Silverman's quote on education and communal funds in 3.5.
discovered that the minutes of the meeting at which the offer was made were strategically removed from the record. Quietly angered, as is his way, he decided to cut off all ties with Rabi and pledge loyalty to the Fiji Government. They eventually sent him to the University of Hawai’i at Manoa, through an East-West Center grant, to study agriculture. There he met and married my very Catholic, African American mother. She came from a military family where education was the most important thing in the world.\footnote{My mother is a major force in my life as well. She is the main reason that us girls appreciate music, dance, art and literature. What a gift.}

John Teaiwa quietly worked his way up through the civil service until he became Permanent Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Over a period of twenty five years he was involved in Fiji’s sugar trade agreements with the European Union, introduced agricultural innovations from Asia and Europe through technical exchanges, directed government support for sugar cane and rice farmers, and as Permanent Secretary for Housing and Urban Development, initiated the set up of the Department of Environment, and helped establish the nationalizing of Fiji’s Fire Control Authority. He retired at the age of fifty-five, as is compulsory in the Fiji civil service.

After two months he was approached by representatives of the Suva based Banaban community to run for elections on Rabi as one of two village representatives and for the position of Council Chairman. In December 1996 the first democratic election for Chairman took place and he won, mostly on the votes of young (under forty years) people. In this new Council, the political leaders receive much smaller financial perks than they did in the past, mostly because of my father’s administrative policies. In an
ironic twist of the pity saga, he works four times as hard, is responsible for all the mess left by past Councils and gets paid nothing because of his own incorruptible nature. In the meantime, two of his daughters are still in universities overseas that drain his pockets and constantly push him to ask why, I at least (my younger sister is studying to become a doctor), can’t study something that offers appropriate financial returns. I can’t argue with that can I?

So I’ve tried to say who I am, by saying who my father is. But if I only have nature and not culture and am not historically invested in land or politics, why I am so connected to and sunk in Banaban issues? Did I make it all up for myself, so I would have a cause? I don’t have a satisfactory answer to this question except that if Banabans need my father in his administrative capacity I, as an educated woman with opportunities may provide the community with something else.

*Out of adversity springs hope, it is often said. In the case of Rabi nothing is more apt. Out of the turmoil which led to riots on the island in December 1991, the Banabans have realized what a fickle and false world they have been living in. "That had become a lesson because they have nowhere else to turn to but to help themselves," says new Rabi Island Council chairman John Teaiwa. "It has been encouraging from that perspective; from all the negative things the previous council did, the people have got up to help themselves." Teaiwa, as the new leader of his people, has no illusions about the task ahead of him. The hope of the Banaban people is pinned on him and, in the light of the sad history of mismanagement of Banaban affairs, much is expected of the former civil servant. His election to the council and then as chairman is an unequivocal statement by the people that the era of skullduggery must stop. Significant in that, as a career public servant and having lived away from Rabi in most of his adult life, Teaiwa could be considered an outsider (Joe Nata, Fiji Times 12/17/96).*

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15 My father does not like me promoting him this way. He believes his administrative policies are simply based on the reality that there is no money to throw around, but I remind him that this didn’t stop a previous council from finding the money to fulfill their wants, even if they had to dig into the trust capital (see appendix). His reputation is now extending its benefits to the community as a whole even though he achieved everything he did without their (including his immediate family’s) support whatsoever.
1.7 Rabi

My father won the election on Rabi despite having not lived there for over thirty years and despite his family’s status as “Gilbertese Banabans.” For that same period of time, life on the island was moving in a decided direction of “under-development.” I am one who finds the normal model of “progress” rather Eurocentric and deceptive but Rabi was in a genuine state of distress. The Banabans were relocated to Fiji by the British Colony of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, where they landed on Rabi on December 15th 1945. Their island was determined uninhabitable because of excessive damages from colonial phosphate mining and Japanese bombing. Banaba, which lies in the calm waters of the central Pacific, is generally hot and dry. Rabi on the other hand was given to erratic weather changes and could get incredibly wet, windy, cold, and possibly “too” fertile for people who mainly relied on fish in their previous homeland.

After years of “adaptation” in the 1970s, people had spent some of their phosphate revenues on exhaustible consumer goods, and devoted the rest to fund a very expensive civil suit against the British Phosphate Commissioners and the British Government. A paltry settlement of $A10 million dollars from their own royalty reserve fund was all they received out of this passionate, well-publicized trial. In the 1980s people began to take crop cultivation more seriously since there was less money for store bought food. A number of students were sent to Suva for secondary and tertiary education and several projects were established on the island including the youth and women’s interest centers.
Earlier on, Banaban dance performance was revived and this continued to thrive over the decades resulting in the formation of at least three major formal groups. Unfortunately the leadership within the Council of Leaders was deteriorating and key individuals were blatantly using public funds for personal wants. In my book there are no special historical, cultural or social excuses for this corruption. It was sheer greed and disregard for the mandates of public office that caused leaders to appropriate the growing interest of the ten million-dollar trust fund so irresponsibly. This fund was the result of the 1978 trial against the British Government and was drawn from sources already set aside for the Banabans. On December 16, 1991, a large assembly of Banabans gathered in the main town and declared the deposition of the corrupt Rongorongo Council (see Aidney 1994: 1, 92).

This recent aspect of Banaban History had not been described in any academic paper or publication until last year. Two German anthropologists and myself were on Rabi at the same time doing research. The 1991 coup began seven years of uncertainty and intense pity on Rabi which resulted in, amongst other things, the creation of the Banaban Heritage Society. This was the initiative of Stacey King (nee Bridges), the descendent of an Australian family that had worked on Ocean Island for decades. King made a visit to Rabi in the early 1990s and was so overwhelmed by the requests for “help” that she decided to devote her entire life to the Banaban cause. The BHS, a non-governmental organization, now re-named the Banaban International Society, was launched in 1994 along with Pacific Historian, Harry Maude’s, “Book of Banaba,” which named King as “Rabi’s Good Samaritan” (Maude 1994: xiii).
My first public paper on Banabans was written about the BHS, aid, and the “help” available to struggling natives (K. Teaiwa 1997). The theme of kawa is dominant for life on Rabi and is invoked in many contexts. I do not think that kawa is prevalent because all people see themselves as helpless but because people think it is the best way to interpret their sad history and to ask for help. Over time, Banabans have desperately needed aid as a group in at least three major periods. The first was after three years of drought on Ocean Island in the 1870s, the second after World War II, and the third after the 1991 coup. Some Banabans think that these periodic experiences of strife represent a fatalistic cycle that follows them across time and space.

There were periods on both Rabi and Ocean Island where Banabans demanded respect from others because they felt it was their right and this earned them a reputation for being both snobbish and lazy. Later on they spent lots of money to ask for reparation humbly of the British Justice system and got nothing. After 1991, the religious values of charity and benevolence probably seemed much more appealing as avenues for material rehabilitation. Some even suggested to me that we actively seek assistance from the American Peace Corps and other volunteer organizations so Rabi could get help at no cost.

At least four generations on Rabi know little of Banaba but they are constantly reminded of the politics of phosphate mining and land issues through the discourse of the first two generations. No one I talked to wanted to return to live on Banaba but many thought they were owed quite a bit for the misuse of Banaban land. Culture and society on Rabi has developed on top of layers of Ocean Island issues and taken it to new levels
of complexity. This complexity added to my own personal issues was something I hadn’t contended on dealing with for my Masters thesis.

1.8 Personalizing Methodologies

I acknowledge up front that my method of scholarship might be messy. This may be unsettling but my personal approach is hardly a theory to be tested out by fact-finding scientific methods. I am concerned with issues of power and representation in Banaban History that allow me to say how I and others feel about awful things that have happened in the past but I don’t claim to provide the one and only true interpretation. I’ve picked notions like rawata and kawa that have currency on the island to speak to the greater discourses of colonialism, imperialism, religious conversion, economic exploitation and “outsider” representation that occurred and continue throughout the Pacific. I realize that to imply that empirical and objective approaches to scholarship might not be as important as emotional ones is not very popular but this necessary meandering through the downs of history may raise important questions that otherwise would not be addressed by formal approaches. In Greg Dening’s presentation of “A Poetic for Histories,” he says that “Cultures cannibalize their own images” (Dening 1991: 369). For me this is true in that many Banabans, including myself, have accepted their own pitiful images of the past and created the consciousness of the community accordingly.

It is not easy for me to focus on tragedy and exploitation because I know for a fact that life on Rabi today is not a living hell and everyone does not go around in self-pity all day—far from it. I spent many an evening laughing, chatting and playing games with
friends and relatives. Banabans maintain an autonomy that many islanders do not have and the real freedom, if they chose, to shape their own future positively. Many people are very active in their yaqona plantations and make good money after harvesting, particularly if they don’t drink it all (that would really be e “kava” te aba). Most of the young men are athletically motivated and the normally Fijian dominated sport of rugby has become an integral part of the extra-curricular activities. This is supported by the RCL who, in the last two years, has improved infrastructure on the island and addressed immediate problems of mis/management. However, opportunities for creative occupation are more available for boys than girls mainly because of the domestic pressures on women. The school dropout rate is disconcertingly high and the average age of marriage is eighteen, though elopements at fourteen or fifteen are not unusual. There is a widespread tendency to place all responsibility for pregnancy and child rearing on young women instead of both parties.

There is a lot of pressure on Rabi to get married young and set up house. Formal education stops for many young people at the third or forth forms (grades 9 and 10) and most women have had their first child at eighteen. At twenty-three, I was an old maid compared to many. I was also overly conscious of my location as a non-Gilbertese speaking overseas-educated woman and sometimes I tried too hard to fit in with the community. For a month I acted as if I was a normal member of the village, playing netball in the annual competitions and performing dances on behalf of “my village” even though: a) I was a very, very bad netball player, and b) I taught people dances they weren’t used to doing, alienating some cousins by my bossy approach to rehearsals. Let
me just say that when doing research on “your own” people, don’t act like you are a member by culture if in fact you are only a member “by blood.”

In the beginning, before I tried to be a “real” Banaban, I drew up questionnaires and interviewed about twenty-five people, mostly below the age of fifty. I didn’t really want to talk to the elders because I thought they would be too preoccupied with phosphate compensation issues. I set up all my questions in terms of things to do with Development and History and then talked to people that I thought represented as many segments of the community as possible, including Suva residents. This produced a whole tangle of stories and more questions rather than answers as each interview digressed into offshoots that were far more interesting than: “What do you understand by the word “development?” Some Banabans were willing to tell me things they probably wouldn’t tell an outside interviewer but others also were very careful about what they said.

I had to conduct all but one interview in English because I wasn’t proficient in the language, and was rather stubborn to learn because it was a big joke that a Banaban girl couldn’t speak her own “mother tongue.” My travels consisted of three weeks in Kiribati, including a week in Banaba, eight weeks in Suva doing archival and library research and interviews, and nine weeks in total on Rabi. During this period I felt more like an I-Matang than a native. My insecurity stems from a strong personal belief that while it is okay for white people to be both “better” and “different,” it is NOT okay for “one of us” to be like them. This is a deeply rooted idea that is both distracting and unproductive but nonetheless real. The emergence of kawa and rawata as a tool for pulling together all my

16 I tell the netball story in 3.5 with respect to Banaban egalitarianism. Even though I’m not a member by culture, I have a place in the entire scheme of relationships because of blood connections.
interests, hang-ups and inclinations after all the “fieldwork” was belated but totally appropriate.

During the research period I had many encounters of a more metaphysical kind. These included everything from spirits to “magical” plants and seemingly prophetic dreams. I do not want to analyze any of these things but I have to mention that they greatly influenced my approach to this paper. Every supernatural encounter was a lesson for me, especially when I had done silly or ignorant things in the “real” world. Some of these “silly” things included participation in discussions of a highly political nature that implicated my father or the RCL unnecessarily. Other revelations came later, after I’d left Fiji for Hawai‘i. They made me reflect on the fact that I had not been cautious enough on Rabi, especially in terms of exposing myself personally to the knowledge of others, knowing fully well how people would interpret my actions in light of my alleged “status” within the community. Since “equality” is a great value on Rabi I probably contributed positively to the hope that a woman as educated and full of opportunities as myself could be as insecure and ignorant as any other normal person. This for me was one of those necessary “growing up” experiences. I was too busy trying to be a “real native,” trying to belong and forgetting to be me. 17

1.9 Personalizing Decolonization

To speak in the present as an islander/a native and to speak about the past/History is an act that demands questions of right and responsibility. By experiencing concrete

17 This is the thrust of my politics. I occupy a space that is critical of both essentialist native and colonial versions of History. I’m not an advocate of fence-sitting or apathy but I think it is REALLY hard to find truth at either pole. I’m not really trying to appeal to the “human” audience but I do prefer to approach
"inauthenticity" in my "native" environment I was able to be more self-reflexive within the university about questions regarding the right to speak, and the Eurocentric activity of categorizing real and un-real natives. I have become self-conscious of both sides of the polemic—Islanders at university who claim nativity uncritically (as I once did) and academics who equate politics and education with over-influence. A nasty letter received by my department regarding a controversial paper I'd presented in Suva (K. Teaiwa 1997) during the research period concretized some of my fears and inadvertently prompted much needed self-reflexivity (K and T Teaiwa 1998).

In this paper I've attempted to mix different kinds of analysis and critique with a personal approach but I do not utilize tools from any one particular discipline, school of thought or interpretive language. I acknowledge that I have learned to reflect on things in certain ways because of different classes I've taken at the undergraduate level in biology, sociology, anthropology, political science and psychology but I've never accepted that certain "ways of knowing" are the property of discipline of the academy or another. At the most I've been influenced by gloriously anti-disciplinary teaching methods in Pacific Studies at UHM and the fact that my family—because as you can see both my father and elder sister are directly involved in my approach—is never separate from my work.

The language of this paper is best described as "conversational" because in my own way I loathe the objective, impersonal, unemotional intellectual voice. Unlike most academic papers, written mostly for academic audiences, unlike most scholarship on the Pacific, rarely produced for or by Pacific islanders, this paper has no specific audience. I things in a complex way, not for academic or intellectual purposes but because "complex" is what life is and I guess I'm kind of into truth seeking.
do hope that Banabans will find it interesting...I know they would, even after they pick
their way through the long-windy language...

I have not been able to choose one audience over another—despite all well-
intentioned advice—so as to formulate in my mind an homogenous audience-
type to address. For this reason I speak in bursts, splashes and puddles, opening
windows to what I have expected to be major controversial knots engendered in
my putting together Tango and decolonization. The thread that underlies the
whole “thing” is this controversy of putting together that which I cannot resolve,
sunk as I am, in the conflicts themselves (Savigliano 1991: 9).

It is unusual for writers to talk about themselves or their families in their writing. But
like Marta Savigliano, this intellectual journey is not something conducted outside my
body. These Banaban histories are a part of me—literally—and finding structure is like
trying to create an objective map of my own cerebral processes. My audience may have
to work hard for comprehension or pretend I’m a neurotic artist.

Much literature on the Pacific Islands, Islanders, colonial structures and
administrators, is presented in distinction from the identities or interests of the authors.
This makes the work appear more objective, scientific, factual and most importantly, less
emotional. We “know” the author through his or her work which appears to say nothing
explicitly about him or her. Other approaches, supplied in a poetic, usually romantic,
manner manage the same claim to authority by virtue of their persuasive language and
subscription to European notions of paradise and the exotic. In the Contemporary Pacific
things have evolved conducive to these standards as well as to islanders’ efforts to
decolonize the literature. Scholarship is now mainly concerned with three things: the

18 Savigliano’s dissertation on “The Political Economy of Passion” (1991) is one of the most incredible
things I’d ever read and bold step towards decolonizing the academy.
recuperation of colonial, imperialist, voyaging personalities; reflection on Pacific culture, art and politics with respect to "humanity" and "truth", and Development and Change in the region.

Islanders, though, are increasingly expected to say who they are, especially when writing about their own communities. To write about another native group with "authority" is rare. In a class on Pacific Studies consisting of many nationalities and ethnicities, it is the islanders who will be expected to "speak for" their communities. The historical subject of discussion is finally speaking and this is a novel situation. It is a necessary process for decolonizing the academy but this "speaking for" also freezes students in a certain location where the dominant issues are "authenticity" and "inauthenticity," "the politics of representation," "the politics of identity," and "native nationalism." This is a space in which many "objective" critics are happy to bring up the issues of privilege, elitism, colonial mimicking and "over-influence-ism."

Within Pacific Studies, the famous Keesing-Trask-Linnekin debate which featured in the 1991 edition of The Contemporary Pacific, illustrates the inherent tensions in the insider-outsider paradigm. What do insider-outsiders like me do then in terms of "approach"? I’ve tried to copy what my sister Teresia Teaiwa has done, in that I’ve gone "personal." Precedence for a highly personalized "non-poetry" approach to intellectual work is set by Vilisoni Hereniko through his 1995 publication, "Woven Gods: Female Clowns and Power in Rotuma." Hereniko interspersed dreams, story-telling and personal encounters, a native form of scholarship, with formal Western anthropological analysis. He also addresses the personal tensions faced by islanders in universities compared with those in the village.
Teresia reveals the issue of “native authenticity” in her article, “Scholarship for a Lazy Native” (1995). She says, “As native students we felt that we were anomalies: on the one hand the academy seemed to operate quite happily by assuming the authenticity of our absence; on the other hand, our presence in the academy was enabled by the absence of our authenticity as natives” (60). Margaret Jolly addresses similar problems in her article, “Specters of Inauthenticity” (1992: 49), where she discusses the equating of unself-consciousness with authenticity in academic literature on the Pacific, especially with respect to the promotion of timeless “tradition” or “kastom.” Unself-conscious communities are natural as opposed to the unnatural, invented ones. In this dichotomy, authenticity is imputed to the natural and inauthenticity to the unnatural, traditional and good to the past and modern, Western, “polluted” to the present. Further along the logic we can equate uncritical and “under-educated” with the natural, and traditional, critical and “over-educated” with the invented. Jolly is critical of these assumptions and the way in which they frame, for example, Pacific politicians and national projects in relation to rural villagers with more common interests.

Pure Pacific Islandness of the past does not exist and is not free from politics any more than life in the present. Greg Dening says the same of history “in” the Pacific: “our histories will always be political,” because our histories are what presents we make of the past (Dening 1989: 139, 1991: 349). It is true that many native students in Pacific Studies are occupied with the task of making sense of the past in light of what they feel or know about the present. Our “approaches” thus emerge out of our individual, family and community historical contexts. When you belong to more than one community the process is much more complex and frustrating. I usually don’t like to speak to an issue
without making sure that my audience knows where I am coming from (which is many places). This may seem like a rather idealistic, and self-indulgent, approach but since I don’t trust most “authority figures” I don’t want to be mistaken for one either.

I do not think that we can all understand each other simply by beginning every article with “the story-my-life,” but some sort of real, sympathetic, communication between those who think their words and ideas are good enough to sit in a library, and those who have to read them in order to graduate, would be nice. I guess I do realize that the academic ethnographer often imagines his or her audience too narrowly or too broadly and consequently loses consideration for the actual “subjects.” Who can blame them if they’re life long work on this and that culture or island won’t be read by 85 percent of the discussed group? But, in a larger sense the recorded representations will eventually influence the formation of stereotypes about the island or culture, stereotypes that can be cannibalized later.¹⁹

I dared to ask about “relevance” after a long multi-media presentation by an esteemed and prolific scholar in Pacific and colonial cultures at UHM. He told me very politely that “relevance” was something I should figure out for myself—he could not say how or why his presentation about islanders was appropriate for islanders. I interpreted this to mean that as an islander I shouldn’t expect that people like him ought to write “for” us. It’s true, scholars in Pacific Area Studies rarely write for Pacific resident that’s what journalists are for. Academics write for particular disciplines and circuits of interested peoples who speak a certain language and this can be verified by the incestuous

¹⁹ I say “cannibalized” here because one of the main points of my thesis is that “pity” and a tragic History, for those who keep it alive in the present, is part of the maintenance of low community self-esteem. We are constantly reminded of and in turn consume our victim status.
inter-quoting that often goes on in their books and articles. But like most islanders, I want to ask, “antai? Ko roko maia ngkoe?” “Who are you, where did you come from?” Writer and educator, Konai Thaman is one Pacific intellectual who always incorporates her personal life into her “lessons” and this honest strategy of expression is something I greatly appreciate.

Scholarship on Oceania has definitely become more politicized in what some call the climate of decolonization. The move for increased sensitivity is a consequence of liberation struggles all over the world, particularly on the African, Asian and South American continents, and from marginalized groups within Britain and the United States. In my thinking there are two main types of decolonization: that of the legal-flag-lowering-and-raising variety; and that of the mind. I witnessed one movement towards increased “diversity,” “multiculturalism,” and “sensitivity,” at the utmost superficial level at my university in California and that was where I learned to be skeptical of much white liberal ideology. A decolonization of the mind, undertaken in the most critical and non-polemical fashion, i.e., through critique of both self and other, with the long term goal to transform the dominant power structure in all its various manifestations, is my kind of decolonization.

One of my main intellectual preoccupations is the issue of “voice.” As liberating as my experience was in Hawai‘i, I also became frustrated with the idea that one could appear to speak “for” one’s people, one’s entire ethnic nation and historical experiences. It was obvious that different people in the same ethnic and national category could remember or interpret the past differently from each other and it seemed pointless to me for an individual to claim otherwise. I also found that a few of the more sensitive
“outsiders” who wrote about the Pacific seemed to have strategically evolved their discursive methods in light of the decolonization movement, now opting for anti-political critique or increased ambiguity under masses of “empirical evidence” and literary jargon.

The difference between alluding to the privileged “us,” as in the case of reflexive, in-vogue scholarship, and the privileged “me” which is less trendy, is that one runs the risk of renouncing hard earned academic “authority.” This is a very dangerous movement in a career that pretty much relies on the belief that intellectuals have secret, special knowledge or hermeneutic abilities. A radical change in the intellectual approach, especially in the “traditional” disciplines, is crucial for the humanization of an intellectual Western academy that has been distant, authoritative, objective, apathetic and defensive for too long. Some scholars in Pacific Studies, both natives and residents, are beginning to incorporate a less conventional and flexible approach to Pacific issues but there are still very few published articles or books of this nature in circulation. The most exciting and inspirational work comes from African, African American, East-Indian, Vietnamese, and Native American scholars. For me personally, radical and different scholarship in the Pacific would be critical, non-essentialist work written, painted, carved or danced in a language many could understand. 20

To be liberating, history in the Pacific needs to be two things. It needs to be vernacular and vernacularly tolerant of great variety...I would encourage my students to “write,” “write,” “write”—or dance, or sing or make poetry (Dening, 1989: 137, 138).

20 It’s not that I’m advocating “frivolous” scholarship. “Lazy” maybe, but never frivolous. My sister Teresia identifies laziness as a strategy of resistance (1995) and I interpret that to refer directly to structure and communication. Sometimes you want to talk in garbledy-gook, and be left at that, or say nothing at all. Sometimes you want to talk in really simple language but you know you’re deceiving yourself. I have to adjust my mode of expression and academia has to make flexible its rules in order to reach that decolonizing middle-ground.

I will attempt to illustrate some of the Banaba complexity as revealed in published representations of Banaban History, through my identification of pity and burden, e kawa and ti rawata—an interpretive framework for my own historical theater.

_We have been to His Honour the Resident Commissioner with our request indicated, but we received no help from him. We afterwards transferred the same request to His Excellency the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific during his short stay at Ocean Island on 29th July 1931, and yet the British Phosphate Commissioners are still working on this new area up to date._

_So therefore please kindly help us by your merciful arbitration and judgement in front of Our Heavenly God and in front of His Majesty King George V._

_We are,_
_Your Lordship's most pitiable people,_
The Banaban Community.
Writer: T. Rotan
For the native landowners

(Binder, 1977: 84)
(Williams and Macdonald 1985: 249)
CHAPTER 2: “PRE-HISTORY,” LIGHT, DARKNESS AND BANABA

There are many different versions of the Gilbertese and Banaban cosmogonies in the writings of Harry Maude and Arthur Grimble. Depending on who was telling the story to either writer, the same deities have different degrees of importance. Maude (1994) quotes a Nei Tearia and Te Itirake of Banaba as his main sources but many of his re-presentations are also based on Grimble’s original recordings (1972, 1989). These histories and origin stories are also handed down orally through Banaban and Gilbertese families and many of us have heard some version of them. The names and descriptions of all te anti and te atua (spirits and gods) are generally consistent, but these beings can exist at the same time in different places and be active in the realities of a number of different generations. Banabans and Gilbertese share many gods and ancestors but some Banabans in the present refrain from promoting this publicly to preserve their unique political identity.

In this chapter I’m not naming all the gods, just the ones that play a major role in the origins of humanity. In many ways as the ancient gods are becoming an elusive mythical background to the “real” Christian Banabans of today, so is Banaba becoming more of a mythical background to Rabi. But “myths” as methods of knowledge and identity are always as relevant as “facts.” The pre-European history is an integral part of the layerings of cultural and environmental change experienced by people, especially those regarding Nei Anginimaeao and the allocation of te tau—(holding) rights, duties and responsibilities. These are points still argued on Rabi which are difficult to resolve.
because people are not living on the very lands they are discussing. For example, the rights of Tabwewa to board visiting vessels first must have taken on new meaning after Albert Ellis mistook the Tabwewa representative for the Banaban King in 1900. He essentially solicited the agreement of someone who could hardly speak for the whole island and some may go back further to say that this right to board canoes first was problematic anyway. This incident initiated the eventual alienation of Banaban land and illustrates the profound impact of European contact with pre-contact cultural norms.

We also need to look at life and knowledge on Banaba in order to understand the social and cultural context of Rabi today. The Banaban consciousness is completely connected to the activities of their ancient gods. Pity connects the pagan “conversion” to Christianity by providing a descriptive and emotional link between a time of “darkness,” te bongiro, and “light,” te ota. This association between the past as dark and the then “present” as light is how new converts to Christianity were taught to interpret religious change. This is the manner in which many Banabans still view their past but it is ironic that the time of light wasn’t as glorious as the dichotomy would suggest. In my interpretation, darkness to light implies progress but in the Banaban case was played out as “dependency” rather than self-sufficiency or security. With Christianity came a reliance on the white man’s God; with phosphate mining came a reliance on white men,

1 The issue of rights and privileges is not fully elaborated in this text. References are made with respect to Nei Anginmaeao and the Beru invasion (2.2) but that is where it ends. I raise the issue in this section to illustrate how certain cultural activities were based both on genealogical precedence and particular land localities. If you don’t live on your land any more, what happens to those rights and privileges? I do not present these “pre-history” narratives as the one and only accounts of the past. There are many other forms of these stories that may have not made it into Grimble’s or Maude’s notebooks, or lasted the passage of time and geographic displacement. These are presented to give a general picture of previous spiritual explanations for earthly existence; explanations that I believe were always based on much “fact.” The narrative styles in Maude’s and Grimble’s books are based on Islanders’ own words and my replication of them should not be seen as a compromise of my opinions, in chapter 3, of the authors’ colonial roles. All texts, despite the politics and actions of their producers are inherently both problematic and useful.
money and their decisions. With displacement to Rabi came a need for reliance on themselves but by then many values, ideals and notions of “right and wrong” were inextricably bound up with the British civil and Christian moral influence.

When the BPC came with all their industry and technology to Banaba, they brought as much “light” as the missionaries did. Banaba was lit up for decades, discernable at night to many ships like a shining beacon in the middle of the dark ocean. When the mining ended in 1979 the light went with the company. When I visited the island in 1997, the reminders of civilization included the electrical cables that hung dilapidated rather menacingly, marks of a modern era that once existed on Banaba. A point raised to me by a good friend who is also writing about Rabi was that Banaba is a living model of how “reversible” the process of development, modernization and Progress is.

The place of ancient gods and spirits fits appropriately into the pity/burden narrative. Supposedly the spirits represent a time that is “no more” but in fact they are just another layer on which contemporary experiences have been added. They add to the complexity which is reality on Rabi, part of the “burdens” of history that constantly need to be negotiated but as often as not, part of the solutions readily available for giving meaning to change. Silverman takes this general approach to Banaban cultural development—that nothing is ever really thrown away, though some things may be less useful than others. He does not discuss the ancient traditions in detail, leaving that to remain the realm of Maude and Grimble but he does reveal ways in which Banabans use ancient knowledge to reinforce claims and other issues from Rabi.
The pantheon of spirits and gods is flexibly represented here because there are no public cultural rules today regarding their description. There are, however, individuals who still worship and invoke Banaban and Gilbertese spirits and one would be hard pressed to find a Banaban who denied the existence of the supernatural world. However, this aspect of Banaban tradition is not one that is preserved publicly. Ancestor worship and the practice of magic are underground activities that are still crucial for everyday life but do not compromise Christian convictions. Banabans can live under many philosophical conditions as long as they contribute to social and cultural survival. Banaban identity is publicly more preoccupied with Rabi, phosphate, political history, Christian morality and the promotion of ethnic particularity, especially in contra-distinction to Gilbertese identity, through song and dance. I am inclined to view the public dispensing of ancient gods as a pity, especially under a moral system dictated by foreign "ways of knowing" but that’s my own interpretation.²

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate re-presentations of Banaba and connections between Banaba and Rabi that coincide or contrast with the European preoccupations of the next chapter. I also give accounts of my own experiences on Banaba to connect the narratives to one individual contemporary experience of them. Looking back at the past is never more concrete then when you visit the actual places you are intellectually absorbed in. My own journey to Banaba is relevant to the chapter because I had many expectations about going “back in time” to a homeland that was the site of both organic connection and colonial transformation. What I found by day was a

² I see it as a pity because I have a habit of never discarding gods or spirits despite my Catholicism. In fact most Banabans do the same but Christianity is a major part of the public, social life and it is taboo to talk about the supernatural, except in fun or gossip.
very pitiful (and dangerous) looking graveyard of industry. At night it felt like the darkest spot on earth but it was only in the blackness, from that rock on the Pacific Equator that I experienced the most vivid, complete view of the star filled universe.

Because of the "Human Subjects" policy at the University of Hawai'i, which came to my attention after I'd already finished "fieldwork," I am unable to name the Banabans who gave me pieces of the oral tradition but I hope they understand that I am very grateful they chose to share. The main sources in 2.1 and 2.2 are Maude (1994) and Grimble (1972), combined with oral accounts. I am using Maude and Grimble as sources here despite my severe critique of them in the next chapter because their recordings are based on the actual words of Banabans and Gilbertese and are generally applicable to Banaban and Gilbertese cosmogony.

A well known scientist...once gave a public lecture on astronomy. He described how the earth orbits around the sun and how the sun, in turn, orbits around the center of a vast collection of stars called our galaxy. At the end of the lecture, a little old lady at the back of the room got up and said: "What you have told us is rubbish. The world is really a flat plate supported on the back of a giant tortoise." The scientist gave a superior smile before replying, "What is the tortoise standing on?" "You're very clever young man," said the old lady. "But its turtles all the way down!" (Hawking 1988: 1)

2.1 In the Beginning...

In the beginning, Heaven was a rock lying over earth, rooted in the sea. The lands of the Ancestors were embedded in the overseide of Heaven and Banaba was the buto or naval. Tabakea, the turtle, was the first being on Banaba. After him there was Nakaa an ancestor, Auriaria the giant, Tabuariki the shark and thunder, Tituabine the stingray and
lightning, Taburimai an ancestor, Nawai, Aorao and many others. Under the rock lived the *baba ma bono*, the deaf mutes, the fools and *te rang* or slaves. In the time of the Black Darkness the inhabitants of Heaven began to have children. Tangan-nang, a cloud, had Te Kunei, a bird, who found a small fish that grew into a terribly fierce Urua. Tabakea decided to save them from the Urua with a thought—Nareau the spider—a black dwarf that sprung from his forehead. Nareau destroyed the Urua and scattered his bones around Banaba.

Auriaria was the lord of *Te Bongiro*, the Black Darkness. He was a giant and pierced the Heavens with his staff. The rock fell into the sea, upside down with its roots in the air,burying Tabakea, the turtle, underneath. Auriaria also flung Riki, the eel, into the sky to form the Milky Way and Katati, the razor clam, to make the sun and Nimatanin, the shell-fish, to make the moon. He then voyaged across the sea to plant a tree in Samoa where a host of ancestors grew. Then he returned to Banaba and his children have been there ever since.

2.2 Nati n Anginimaeo

In the beginning all was Black Darkness. Heaven and Earth rubbed together and Tabakea was born on Banaba. As Heaven and Earth continued to rub, Auriaria the giant and spirit of the Tree, Taburimai a fish, and Tituabine the stingray, were born. Tituabine and Tabakea gave birth to Korereke, Karabinobino, a star, Nakaa, and Tewenei, a meteor. The Black Darkness was called Te Bongiro. Banaba was the navel of Te Bongiro and around it were many other lands. They were Nangiro to the north and east, Roro to the
south and west. The land in the east was Abariringa and to the west were Matairango, Tanabai, Bantongo, Waituru, Makaiao, Kabingtongo, Te Biken Onioniki and Nabanaba.

Auriaria was the lord of all the lands and he separated Heaven and Earth. He went to the south and raised a great mountainous land called Tamoa te Ingoa. There he flung Katati to the East as the sun and Nimatanin to the west as the moon. He planted his staff on Tamoa and it became the tree of Samoa. From this tree Auriaria cut branches to form Nikunau, Abemama and Butaritari. The roots of the tree followed the trunk, floating north from Samoa and there they stayed at Tarawa.

All useful things were hidden in the roots of this tree and men and other things grew from them. Auriaria went to Beru and lay with Nareau’s child, Nei Aningimaeao, and they had two children, Te Antimaomata and Na Boborau. They were the spirit-man and the voyager. They traveled to Banaba where Antimaomata gave birth to Te Bun Anti, children who had mastery over the rain and sunshine. The children of Nei Aningimaeao are always quarreling so sometimes on Banaba it rains and sometimes there’s a drought (Maude 1994: 8-13).

Aningimaeao came with her brothers, Na Kouteba, Na Manenimate and sister Nei Teborata. This is the famous Beru invasion of Banaba. It is said that these people were not really brothers and sisters but husbands and wives who lied to protect their lives. Aningimaeao and Kouteba divided the foreshores of Banaba for their party while Auriaria and the original inhabitants stayed at Tabwewa. Aningimaeao had two children, Na Borau and Nei Aningimaeao the younger who had a child named Na Kataburi. He had a child named Na Borau the younger who had a daughter named Nei Aningimaeao. There was a time when Na Borau the younger went to pace out his foreshore and was invited to

50
stay with a man named Na Ning. Na Ning was a descendent of Auriaria and the Tabwewa folk. Eventually Na Borau’s daughter came looking for him and asked him to come home with her.

In return for his hospitality, Na Borau asked Nei Anginimaeao and her brothers to return prior rights to Na Ning and his people. These were:

- wam n tieke, ao kanam te amarake, ao kabiram te ba, ao awem te kaue, ao kanam te ika te on ke te kua, ke kanam te ika te urua, ao ruoiam, ao taeka n ao n te aba, ao katika ni kora n ao n te aba and ao boni buki ia arei iroum. The rights of precedence to board visiting vessels, accept peace offerings of food, anoint with oil and garland visitors, take any washed up porpoise, turtle, or urua, direct the dancing or games, draw the measuring stick across the land, and to settle land disputes, were returned to Tabwewa in this way. But Na Borau also said “tiku amarake i aon te ora anne i maaiu,” which means “Remain with these foreshore rights until I claim them back from you.”

In the beginning, when God created the universe, the earth was formless and desolate. The raging ocean that covered everything was engulfed in total darkness, and the Spirit of God was moving over the water. Then God commanded, “Let there be light”—and light appeared. God was pleased with what he saw. Then he separated the light from the darkness, and he named the light “Day” and the darkness “Night.” Evening passed and morning came—that was the first day (Genesis 1: 3-5).

Maude (1932, 1994: 22-28) records that these foreshore rights were not given away really because of the reminder at the end that the giver could claim them back. He recorded this account from Nei Beteuea of Tabiang, so this is the Tabiang account of settlement. The Tabwewa account by Nei Teotintake does not include any of the references to favors being done or rights being given. According to her these rights always belonged to Tabwewa. This history critically foregrounds Ellis’ mining agreement with the “King” of Banaba—a member of Tabwewa village—because many people today still claim that there was no King and whoever met Ellis had no right to give away the entire island for mining.
2.3 Te Bongiro nakon Te Ota

This “light to darkness” interpretation of time is popular in islander history. Vilisoni Hereniko has used it in his contributions to two collection on Pacific Islands History, “Tides of History” (1994) and “The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islands” (1997), to connote a Rotuman version of time. He describes it to include old (static) times, uncertain (challenged) times and new (negotiable) times but he does not go any deeper into the symbolic meaning (significance in a racial hierarchy) of black and white tonal schemes. This racial resonance is something I allude to in all three chapters but never elaborate enough because I do not want to sway from the Banaban focus. I apologize for this, though, because it is one of the more interesting aspects of ideological incorporation for the Pacific region and in many other places where natives were “converted.”

The church took the Banabans out of darkness. The concept of darkness as seen by the missionaries in the context of Banaban society implied immoral behavior, unhealthy living conditions, heathen practices, worship of ancestral Gods and Goddesses and paganism. The introduction of the church symbolized the Light that helped to dispel the darkness...Through the church the Banabans became civilized. People could read, write and speak English. They bought their own Bibles and Hymn books. The church broadened the people’s outlook and way of thinking (Benaia 1991: 37).

Christianity came to the Pacific as the saving force of morality marking a transition of progress for many societies. Missionaries were most successful when their actions coincided with colonial and European economic activities. They offered islanders stability and meaning in a time of profound cultural, political, demographic, social and
material change. In the face of continental wars that played out in and across the ocean, missionaries sometimes provided the faith necessary for hope and survival. In the midst of intense population decline because of introduced diseases or natural disasters, Christianity offered universally applicable explanations. Today one cannot extricate this spiritual force from islander development and consciousness, but it is possible in retrospect to comment on the illusions that Christianity provided for islanders.

This section of the thesis is crucial to kawa and rawata because History has shown the danger in accepting the darkness to light dialectic. Actions towards “light” can end up creating histories of pity and burdens of history. All humans want to believe in progress and growth but Banabans are a living testament to the deception of ideological systems such as this. I am not implying that they would have been better off staying on Banaba and sticking to ancient gods. I am saying that the ideas that drive action, especially when introduced in the interests of outside, imperial powers who are always seeking the universalization of their economic, religious and political doctrines, are often disconnected from the historicized native reality. Acceptance of the moral immunity of church ministers and the supremacy of a white God indicate compromises in the indigenous consciousness in favor of immediate survival. But survival is not always just a matter of maximizing options, a habit that Silverman says epitomizes Banaban society (1971:89). Survival usually includes successful reflection of lessons learned from the past and thoughts towards a better collective future.4

4 Silverman says that Christianity was a success because it drew the white man’s power into the existing social circuits. He speculates on the connections between this perceived power and the notion of Matang which directly plays into the notion of “better life.” That Christianity and progress (towards survival) were bound is undeniable but technology and money are also accommodated within the Christian practice. Technology and money are major aspects of Banaban’s historical problems and this is why the religion is both problematic and necessary.
I am trying to be more objective with this particular section because I am both a Catholic, devout supporter of religious diversity and staunch opponent of religious fundamentalism. The Christian influence is something I see as both problematic and necessary. It is problematic because it is deeply embedded in the group consciousness, making it less likely to be open for critique. It is also one of the few things that humans can cling to for a sense of belonging, meaning and feeling of uniqueness. God’s really good children are always more special than the bad ones and everyone likes to think of themselves as good and just. God is always taking pity on and saving his chosen people and people who, as a nation or ethnic group, experience trouble for long periods of time need to feel “chosen.” The Christian influence is necessary for the same reasons as it is problematic.

In the 1870s, Banaba experienced a terrible drought. So many people died that the two thousand or so population dwindled to about four hundred. In 1885 Missionaries from the American Board of Commissions for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) arrived and began a slow but relatively successful conversion process. The Banabans had survived on the freshwater from underground caves called te bangabanga. Different kainga, or family units, owned these caves and only women could draw the water. They would tie vessels made from coconut shells around their waists and crawl in naked gathering just enough to supply their families for a day.

During the Japanese occupation from 1942 to 1945, the soldiers tried to pipe this water up to the surface for storage. The tanked liquid began to smell after a couple of days above land and they could not drink it (there’s been no confirmed explanation for this phenomenon). The issue of water scarcity on Banaba marks one of the harshest
aspects of life. Perhaps the hearkening for a place and state of social life in which water was abundant was one of the greatest desires for Banabans. Silverman states that, "the natural environment was a source of great uncertainty" and this ensured that, "any social structure that survived must have been a very flexible one" (1971: 87). Experiencing hurricanes on Rabi probably presented an option to drought that was equally undesirable.

The impact of World War II was a definite test of faith for the Banabans. The Japanese represented an alternative to European power that people never had to consider before. There are many accounts of brutal Japanese activities, but during interviews on Rabi I also came across stories within families that gave more humane pictures of the Japanese occupation. For example, one Japanese man who befriended a Gilbertese warned him of the Japanese policy towards laborers and ended up saving his life. Nevertheless the Banabans were traumatized for four years and one religious based interpretation of that time goes as follows:

Thinking deeply about the history of the Banaban people, I am strongly convinced that they were like the Israelites in the wilderness who went through a lot of hardships, trials and persecution and torture in lands that were foreign to them. Like the Israelites, the Banaban people's faith was tested and challenged by God. Some of them became steady and devout Christians and managed to survive the unfortunate ordeals, while others lost hope in this very trying period when they lost their families and friends (Benaia 1991: 51).

There definitely needs to be more research on the Japanese occupation because it tends to act in the literature as an evil that at best, was worse than the exploitation of the white phosphate Company and colonial administrators.

Silverman suggests that the incorporating of Europeans into Banaban culture may have been a creative response or based on general understandings of I-Matang. In "We Chose The Islands" (1952), Grimble says that Banabans did not feel inferior to whites,
but thought of them as brothers. This was mainly because of their ancient heroes who
"...sprung from the branches and roots of a single ancestral tree, were of the red-
complexioned, blue-eyed strain called 'The Company of the Tree, the Breed of Matang,'
from which the race claims descent in the male line" (46). Matang was supposed to be a
paradise sweeter than anything with forests and mountains. Auriaria said in one tradition
that he would return to the Banabans, "...wherever they might be, with all the heroic
Company of Matang around him" (47). This was undoubtedly one of Grimble’s favorite
myths because it fit his own position as white brother, father and superior to Banabans.
For the impact of Christianity it was definitely an accommodating tradition.

Captain A.C Walkup was the first Protestant missionary on Banaba. He was a
member of the ABCFM which had been relatively successful in the Pacific. The ABCFM
entered the Gilberts with a letter of support from King Kamehameha of Hawai‘i. The
famous missionary Hiram Bingham arrived in 1868 along with Hawaiian missionaries
who effected drastic changes in Gilbertese social and political life. Walkup came to
Banaba with a Tabiteuean named Kinta who was the first resident missionary on the
island. Before the missionaries came Nei Tituabine is supposed to have predicted their
arrival urging the Banabans to abandon all their ancient gods and goddesses. Nei
Tituabine who, according to Grimble, is blonde haired, blue eyed and red-skinned
(Grimble 1952: 46; 1989: 263) plays the accommodating role throughout Banaban
modern history and protects Banabans today even on Rabi. Since she is also the
embodiment of lightening, I accept that her eyes may be of a fiery color, as well as her

5 The Christian war of 1881 on Tabiteuea led by Kapu and Nalimu (Alamu 1979: 50) is a particularly
violent history. Tabiteuea previously allowed no bloodshed or chiefs on their land (tabu-te-uea means no
hair and skin. However, a “blonde haired, blue eyed” goddess can be interpreted in obvious ways when a people are submitted to the power and authority of white men.6

Verse 1

Tetrake ngaira i Banaba
Ba reira maatina katiki
Ni kamaura ara Iuhire
Kanimangaun ririki te ota

Stand up us Banabans
Live up to march
To greet our Jubilee
50th year of Light

Chorus

Uboubo haira karahwebwe
Kimareirei n ara Iuhire
Kanimangaun ririki te ota

Clap our hands and make sound
Be happy in this Jubilee
50th year of Light

Verse 2

Ti ururinga aron Mr Wakahu
Ngke e anganira ara Mitinare
Kinta ae tei I-Tabiteuea
Nimabwi te ririki ngkoa

Let us remember Walkup
When he gave us our Minister
Kinta the I-Tabiteuea
Fifty years ago passed

Verse 3

E bati n raba Atuara
Bae tangirira ao e kairira
Rinanon kaman te ota
Ba tiaonga n ata te maiu

Thanks to our God
For he loves us and guides us
Through the path of Light
So that we may know the Light

(Benaia 1991: 36)

chiefs) but through the missionizing activities of these pastors the people were drawn to war with their own kin. Kinta, in fact was trained by a man called Aberaam who was trained by Kapu (Benaia 1991: 24).

6 See section 3.5 for Tituabine’s move to Rabi. She was known as the “police” on Ocean Island and people still tell stories of how recent visitors incite wrath when they offend her. Supposedly, only a couple of years ago, a whole boatload of Scandinavians were chased off the island after engaging in sinful activities in the guesthouse. Tituabine is also the one who brings Banabans messages from their ancestors and protects them at sea when she is present in the stingray. She seems to be the communicative link between past and present and the strongest survivor of “conversion.”
This song was performed in 1935 at the 50th anniversary of Christianity on Banaba. By this time the ABCFM had transferred its duties to the London Missionary Society (LMS) which was more conducive to the British colonial presence on Ocean Island. The effect of the Church was distinct, according to Silverman, “Christianity carried a universal morality, which in the long run was of central importance, as it meant that kinsmen, Banaban, Governor, and Parliament were bound by a single moral system” (1971: 90). In the next few decades when Banabans sought redress from the British Government it was with the conviction that universal justice was well within their grasp—if only the highest of high powers, the English High Court, could hear their case. In addition,

Land no longer could have the same position of ultimacy that it had before. The indigenous focus on land was particularizing, as was the concept of Banaban custom, which became elaborated. Christianity pulled in a universalizing direction. The places with which it was concerned were all places, and the people all peoples. Indigenous morality had probably focused on kin, age and sex roles; Christian morality ideally focused on the unity of all men, perhaps more practically adherents of the same church. Christianity was inimical to the local references of the aboriginal religion. Even at this early stage the idea of the possibility of realizing on this earth a better world far different from that currently in existence may have been communicated to the people. This would have been one of the most significant changes of all (94).

Silverman’s thoughts connect to the story of Natin Anginimaeao which is an illustration of specific, land bound rights and privileges, rooted in the activities of ancestors. It also connects the idea of negative difference mentioned in the introduction and discussion because of the idea of “progress,” inherent in the Christian influence. To accept something “better,” especially on a widespread social and cultural scale is one of the indicators of “development.” People rarely consider the implications of major
ideological shifts on their existing social or cultural relationships. Banabans must have imagined that they would have all they had before and more, “better” more with the acquisition of Christianity. But as we all know, in the face of drastic change, culture becomes frozen and self-conscious and disputes over who has the right to what are magnified especially when the new “religion” turns out to be more problematic than profitable.

In the next chapter when I discuss Grimble’s obsession with Matang, I am proposing that Grimble’s “better other” paradise was Matang, which in his mind, for the Banabans, was the land of white men. While Banabans were busy imagining a forward, progressive “other,” Grimble was experiencing his own version of positive alterity which, actually extended backward, not forward in time. Natives were supposed to embody primitiveness, that is why they are special, and he desperately wanted to be a part of that. However, he also wanted to retain all the benefits of civilization and British power so in a way Grimble was a paradox with power, unlike the Banabans who became paradoxical without power.7

In the minds of Banabans themselves, before considering the move from Banaba to Fiji, their future home may have been imagined within the progress parable. The Banabans really had little choice in the timing of the move to Rabi, being conveniently located off their homeland at the time. Environmentally, Rabi is an improvement from the devastated Banaba but the “historically contextualized” Banabans were never going

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7 See 3.5 for the Banaban paradox, illustrated by their ability to be both individualistic and group oriented in contradicting political ways. Grimble’s attitudes are obvious in “We Chose These Islands” (1952) and I am unwilling to dismiss him as some ignorant vestige of a time gone by. His fame was maintained throughout academia and popular literature and he retired quite comfortably within the colonial scheme of things. His character disturbs me and I can’t let go of this idea that he embodies other forms of undeserved power that continue to exist to this day.
to “develop” on Rabi without some serious help.\textsuperscript{8} Thus the darkness to light shift embodies layers of meaning, articulated drastically in the actual physical and geographic move of an entire nation of people.

Banabans arrived on Rabi in 1945 in two denominations: Catholics and LMS. In 1953 it was proposed that the Protestants become a part of the Methodist Church of Fiji. This was more convenient because LMS headquarters were in Kiribati and the exchange of church resources across the distance just wasn’t practical. The adoption of Methodism was at first resisted but a decision was reached in July 1959 after negotiations between LMS pastors on Rabi and Fiji Methodist representatives. From January 1960 they were a part of the national Methodist community. Reverend Tebuke Rotan, who eventually became Chairman of the Rabi Council of Leaders and led the court case against the British was the first graduate in 1963 of the Davuilevu Theological College (Benaia 1991: 67).

The Methodist Theological College became one of the main educational vehicles for Banabans. In 1966, according to Benaia, there were 1,810 Banabans on Rabi of which 1,099 were Methodist. Between 1966 and 1980 there was intense political and social change on Rabi through the activities of the Rabi Council and the impact of the British trial. The Christian Banabans, previously connected to Christian centers in the Gilberts also became highly suspicious of the Gilbertese move towards independence.\textsuperscript{9}

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\textsuperscript{8} Banabans had just experienced many drastic changes within the space of forty years including a complete shift in their religious and economic values and behavior, submission to a law and authority which was not within their control and extreme poverty and violence during World War II and Japanese occupation. Landing on Rabi with some tents and boxes of food was probably quite frightful after this tumultuous history.

\textsuperscript{9} Since phosphate land was feeding the GEIC Banabans, now out of the GEIC, were really not benefiting from mining revenues. Banaba still belonged to the new nation of Kiribati and Banabans couldn’t stand to have their land feeding so many others when they themselves received so little.
officials on Rabi saw the British and Kiribati refusal to give up Banaba as revealing of, “the hidden conviction of the I-Kiribati Christians. Instead of upholding the truth and justice, they became champions of greed and injustice” (78).

Religion had come a long way from its first organizing attempts on Banaba to evolve into a distinct political instrument. Perhaps not surprisingly, as Christianity had managed to create war and bloodshed in the Gilberts in places previously unknown to such large scale violence, the church on Rabi became one of the main instruments through which Banaban and Gilbertese suspicions of each other were articulated. In March 1979, a Banaban “invasion” party, including deputy Chairman Reverend Kaitangare Kaburor, made a protest trip to Ocean Island. The Pacific Islands Monthly reports that “The marchers wore black armbands to represent the ‘death’ of British justice” (April 1979: 22). The protest included hurling petrol bombs at mining machinery and a demonstration at Albert Ellis’ commemoration stone, surrounding it with placards reading “British Justice Stinks” and “Banaba for the Banabans.”

Part of the purpose of this trip was to show the Kiribati government that Banabans despised the idea of losing their land for the benefit of the newly independent nation. In this same year a hundred young Banabans were assigned to “occupy” Banaba for the native population. This was a significant move because most of the occupants of the island had been Gilbertese laborers. At least two generations have now grown up there from a inter-marriages between the Rabians and Gilbertese creating a new group of re(dis)placed Banabans who still fractionalize themselves along religious lines this time, between the more Banaban-Gilbertese Protestants and Catholic Gilbertese-Banabans.
Today the Protestant church still has influence but the increase in denominational diversity is indicative of the diverging interests and needs of the community. By 1986 there were 2,860 people on Rabi of which only 1,169 were Methodist (76). Religion, while serving as a civilizing force also organized politics and this is something that often happens throughout the Pacific. The point is that Christianity is useful for islanders, they don’t convert just because they want to know Jesus and Jehovah. However in the rhetoric of missionaries, religion continues to be the innocent and pure force of transcendent salvation.

From being a benighted poverty stricken herd of pagans they had been raised by the Gospel to a self-respecting and generous Christian community, and by the development of the Phosphate industry they had become comparatively speaking a well to do community not unmindful of their duty to help their needy brethren (Reverend George Eastman, 1935, in Silverman 1971:138).

2.4 Dependency and Pity

According to Silverman, the Banabans on Rabi did not see themselves as developed, well to do, independent or “free.” They saw themselves as bound to the British like wife to husband or child to father. Pitifully bound. A song about a woman who is constantly deserted by subsequent husbands and becomes sick in the process illustrates this self-image. Her husbands are servants of a great Chief, which in Silverman’s logic represents the British King or the British government. After she was deserted by so many husbands the Chief stopped finding husbands for her but, “she still wanted to marry as she said she lived more comfortably in marriage than in single life”
The girl decides to go find her own husband and sails to Britain lamenting on the Chief and husbands who have lied to her in the past. The song ends with "the husband of Miss Abandoned has now been found: Mr. Saunders, the lawyer from Britain" (183). Mr. Saunders was an attorney with a firm in Suva who the Banabans wished to employ for legal advice. They had just gotten rid of the previous British Advisor because he seemed to act for the government rather than them. This song described the Banabans as a "pitiable girl" and invokes countless metaphors about many kinds of dependency relationships.

The dependency issue is exemplified in a 1977 report by Richard Posnett, representative of the UK Secretary of State who spent about four days on Rabi and came up with the assessment that, "They have become dependent on royalties and when royalties cease they are going to suffer 'withdrawal symptoms.' " Consider how this conclusion connects to the pitiable girl who cannot live without her husband. She lives more comfortable in married life and that is the crux of the relationship—issues of comfort and "progress." It was because of Posnett's report that the $10 million ex gratia offer was made, but another reason for his investigation was to forever dispel the idea that Banabans were unique and different (racially and culturally) from Gilbertese. This would ensure that Ocean Island never separates from the newly independent public of Kiribati.10

For Silverman the song of pity was a telling part of the Banaban's own self-image and for me it is this and more. It illustrates the fact that Banabans knew exactly what was

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10 Posnett's report (1977) was based on no cultural investigation, he wasn't even amongst the Banabans long enough to decided whether or not they were just like Gilbertese, and how would he know what Gilbertese were like anyway?
happening to them and knew they could not get out of it because their values were tied up in their land which was tied up with money which was tied up with the British who controlled the money. In 1945 the Banaban Settlement Act under Fiji Law established the regulations of the new community on Rabi and the formation of a Council of Leaders and Banaban Trust Fund Board. By a secret ballot 85 percent of Banabans had agreed to remain on Rabi. The Banaban Advisor was to be an “officer of the Government of Fiji to advise the Banaban community resident on Rabi on all matters connected with its social and economic advancement” (Aidney 1994:12). It was this office of Advisor that people referred to in the song. In 1947 when further lands were requested for mining, the Advisor conveniently stayed away from negotiations. The Banabans felt betrayed by his absence because they depended on him for good advice and they depended on the royalties of the mining for compensation for their land.\footnote{The particulars of this incident are in the Appendix but we are still left with a partial picture of the exact words and activities that must have led up to the creation of this song. For me it is a very powerful indication of the dependency of Banabans on the British. This singularly focused dependence ultimately released Australia and New Zealand from responsibility towards the Banabans even though they were the main beneficiaries of the mining and major decision-makers through the BPC. A thorough read of Williams and Macdonald (1985) will show how in many respects Britain was trying to look after too many needs and making a mess of its paternal role but still retaining its precedence as the founder and father of all colonial ventures.}

This aspect of dependency on outside advice and support for something that already belongs to people (like land) is fast waning on Rabi. The younger generations definitely don’t like to depend on anyone for their welfare and sometimes resent their elders for their old ways. This has created part of the atmosphere of “disrespect” that I refer to in Chapter 3 and serves as background to younger people’s interpretations of kawa. The imagery of Banabans as wife to their Advisor or child to the English father, a\footnote{66% of phosphate went to Australia, 28% to New Zealand 2% to the UK, 2% to Malaysia, 1% to Japan and 1% to Canada. A total of 17,652 tons were mined, processed and shipped from Banaban between 1920}
relationship exemplified by Grimble, contrasts with the motherly role of the actual island of Banaba with respect to the hungry Australian and New Zealand farmers. I've referred to the “umbilical” relationship between Banaba and the BPC countries in the introduction. Ironically, while Banabans were imagining themselves as children, or dependent girls, with respect to white Advisors and protectors, their poor island was toiling away at nurturing the Australian and New Zealand children of the British Empire. These “children” had healthy appetites, were growing up pretty fast and asking for more. They eventually sucked Ocean Island dry and strolled off, like ungrateful “brats,” with their “lights” in 1979, leaving their “mother” in a devastating mess.\textsuperscript{12}

For me this is the greatest pity and burden of histories. Unraveling the paradoxical realities of power and relationship in the past. Banabans today embody paradox in their own ways by growing up “undernourished” and manifesting this handicap in their contradictory social and political mannerisms. These issues are further discussed in 3.5 but so much more careful research needs to be done to connect the ideas I've touched on here.

\textbf{2.4 History, Relationships and Memory}

The Darkness to Light approach to the past includes the Banaba-Matang, Banabans-Europeans, land-money, pity-non pitiful, pagan-Christian, Banaba-Rabi comparisons, ideas and ideals that dominate Banaban consciousness. Silverman has\textsuperscript{65} and 1979. In this period, rural production in Australia and New Zealand rose considerably (Williams and Macdonald 1985: 564-569).
described Banaban values and the institutionalization of these in a hierarchy where you, "Maximize your options," or "Keep your options open." He says, "...a 'have your cake and eat it to' outlook dominates the manner in which alternatives are confronted; there is an attempt to get the best (or at least something) of all worlds" (Silverman 1971:15). Without going into full and specific detail of Banaban culture as evidence for Silverman's analysis, I want to say that I believe this to still be generally true, from personal experience and observations within the community, particularly within my own family.

A set of ideals and the potential to realize these is always left open to individuals because of overlapping loyalties and memberships. Before I even read Silverman I was astounded at the number of connections each individual on Rabi had to other families, clans, villages, church communities, sports groups, dance groups, work groups, school groups, kava circles and more. Members of the same nuclear family could have different loyalties because of decisions made inside and outside the family and especially in the past. If someone's great-grandmother helped heal or care for someone's niece thirty years ago, a baby born today may have to participate in whatever relationships were formed from that action. I found it very difficult to keep track of all the loyalties, and explanations would only come when some drastic public action had been taken. This is why "maximize your options" is a ready reality for Banaban individuals—they can draw on layers and layers of relationships to develop their individual personality in the social context.

Churches are some of the main overarching institutions through which this complex reality is articulated even as it dialogues with meanings for life within the
Christian doctrine and those available through Banaban History (as produced by Maude, Grimble, et al and oral tradition). I do not mean to gloss superficially over this interesting issue, because it is one of those aspects of Banabans' life that demands so much more inspection and reflection. On Rabi I was immediately drawn into circuits that I had no clue about but whose members certainly had knowledge about where I was supposed to fit in. I cannot emphasize enough the idea that relationships are layers and layers of meaning going all the way back to Banaba, or Tabiteuea in my case.

The very reason my family lives in Tabiang village today has to do with a large favor one of my great, great, great grandfathers gave on Banaba. He shared knowledge for survival with other people during the great droughts and this type of sharing is rare. Knowledge for everyday survival is jealously guarded by Banabans and even close family members will not share with each other. It was because of the preserved memory of this favor by my grandfather's first cousin that we now have land and houses in Tabiang. But within our own family group are members who are not related by blood, who don't belong to the same church and who live in the kainga only some part of the year.

Within a family, if someone has a fight with someone else, he or she will have about four different options for where to live, whom to talk to about it and where to get support in the meantime. It's a matter of making strategic decisions. In a way this mode of life also preserves a major part of the past because it is that knowledge of relationships which is essential for survival. For example, last year my father encountered a man who asked him for money. My father, who does not spend money except for good reasons, immediately gave it to him because he remembered going with his mother as a child, on
Tabiteuea, to this man’s father for a similar request. Because his mother received help from this man’s father fifty years ago, he had a connection to him. They both remembered and retained the relationship even though they hadn’t spoken for many years.

Sometimes people “remember” things because of the direction of ancient gods, Nei Tituabine in particular. She’s supposed to have traveled to Rabi with some Banabans on their return from the 1947 *te tautia* (boundary marking) trip back to Ocean Island.

The young man’s story was that when the people returned to Ocean Island, Nei Tituabine appeared to members of that hamlet and said: “So you Banabans are not all dead. I have been looking for you.” She came back with the people on their ship. After the return, the health of the community improved; before, there had been many deaths. The improvement was Nei Tituabine’s work. Ocean Island had come to Rabi (Silverman 171).

Other personal gods and ancestors have also followed certain individuals from their homes on Ocean Island or in the Gilberts. These beings can be vehicles for the preservation of relationships and obligations because they will appear when necessary to remind those who stray from their duties. A request put forward by the *te aka* clan regarding the return of their ancestral skulls from overseas museums, illustrates part of this dialogue between past and present. Apparently their ancestors come to Rabi Islanders in dreams to remind them to bring them back home. The *tautia* trip also marked a growing uneasiness amongst younger Banabans on the importance of genealogical

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13 The *te aka* are descended from what they claim to be the original inhabitants of Banaba, who were there even before Auriaria. They believe their ancestors are Melanesian. Evidence for their claims is manifested by the existence of the skull of an ancestor, Teimanaia, who was a giant who lived on Banaba many generations ago. This skull was only removed from Banaba this century by a Dr. Gould from the USA. An archeological excavation of the *te aka* cite by an ANU and Bishop Museum team did not uncover any major pieces of evidence (Lampert 1965) but people are still searching for Teimanaia’s skull. The Auriaria
information. It was apparent that they had to rely on their elders for knowledge on land and many disputes arose over the accuracy of "memory" amongst other things. Silverman illustrates this through the reproduction of a song composed by Kawate Maibintebure for the trip (171).

The boundary marking on Banaba;
Where is the boundary?
This is the boundary.
I really don't know
The boundary
But I hear that
Miss What's-her-name and Mr. So-and-so
Are next to me

Knowledge of the past, its significance redefined in light of phosphate mining and British law regarding land ownership and leasing, is definitely connected to genealogical precedence. This precedence is bound up in the activities of gods and ancient spirits, especially the more recent ones like Anginimeao and her descendents and their relationships to the original Tabwewa people. In addition other clans have emerged that claim precedence outside of these historically documented ancestors, the strongest being the te aka claim which allegedly precedes the Tabwewa claim. I have no complete information on the subject and custom or genealogy is not a main focus of this thesis. However it is important to mention to fill in gaps about how Banabans must imagine themselves with respect to Banaba and the pre-colonial past. Everything is bound up in blood and land and memory; ancestors or ancient deities can prompt memory.

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myth is based on the migrations between the Gilberts and Samoa so all the gods of his time, especially the "red-skinned" ones are probably more Polynesian in origin.
The following experience I had last year was interpreted for me in terms of the above-mentioned reality regarding memory and reminders.¹⁴

One night in October 1997 I had a dream. I was driving a car with my father sitting next to me. Three women appeared in the back seat. They were just heads with no bodies. They were trying to make me do something, change the direction of the car or agree to do them a favor. They were not speaking in English but I knew exactly what they wanted. I said "no" and told them to get lost. They did but then four male heads appeared and they were much more aggressive. They reached out with invisible hands to grab the steering wheel and I struggled with them. I kept telling them: "no, no, go away and leave me alone," but they persisted. My father said nothing throughout the whole ordeal but remained at my side. Finally I agreed to their request and they disappeared. It was all calm after they left but when I woke up I had no idea what I’d agreed to do.

I’ve taken this dream to also partially answer the question raised in the introduction: if I’m only Banaban by blood and not by culture, and not sunk in politics or land, why am I sunk in Banaban issues today? Perhaps the Banaban people as a whole have needs that, if not met by normal human means, and for decades this has been difficult, can be met in other, spiritual ways.

This is one of the main reasons I consider academic and popular representations of our past, captures of “memory,” to be my own food for critique and analysis. In a way, the academy is my community and I don’t take knowledge on Banabans or Gilbertese lightly, objectively or scientifically, I first take it personally. The “histories” of individuals, ancestors and gods exemplify the gaps in the “Histories” researched, written, published and circulated in academia and the media. The issue of source validity and significance seems to restrict the incorporation of personal experience and oral tradition

¹⁴ It also fits into the te aka narrative because of the body-less form of the messengers. Throughout Kiribati, skulls were vessels through which ancestors remained close to their relatives and they were kept in places
into the academy and perhaps this is one of things I try to do myself, beginning with “me
and my personal experiences.”

2.5 Journey to Banaba

The first and only time I’ve ever been to Kiribati was in July 1997. I stayed at the
Otintaaï (Rising Sun) Hotel in Tarawa for five days then my father and I made a trip to
Banaba. Our little catamaran was so small and so laden with food, people, chickens,
puppies, ducks and motor bikes that the predicted one and a half-day journey took two
nights and three days. The vessel might have comfortably accommodated 15 people but
there were at least 50 of us. The ocean on the equatorial belt is relatively calm and most
of the time I lay with my feet above my head on a pile of mats, and my ear to the back of
a mother suckling her new born baby. On the last day, after surviving stubbornly on a cup
of water a day, two or three biscuits and a mandarin orange, the rock of Banaba appeared
on the horizon. It looked like the hump of a great turtle shell, submerged in the ocean and
I was indescribably thankful to see it. Most importantly, it was green and teeming with
vegetation and not like the rock lunarscape that I’d imagined.

We had two official welcomes on Banaba because the two main political factions
were not speaking to each other. One was conducted in the main maneaba near the harbor
and the other at the Catholic maneaba in Fatima. My father was there to try to help
negotiate the deep seeded problems and he seemed to make some progress over the bowls

of honor in homes or maneabas.
of Rabi yaqona consumed almost every night. I kept to myself most of the time; the highlight of the first two days being the viewing of videotapes of Fiji TV. Back in Suva, our overseas, “other better” world is symbolized by the pirated video industry of Australian and New Zealand television programs, and here was Banaba, nurturing its imagination on Fiji television. We all play our important roles in the hierarchy of development I suppose.

After three long days on Banaba I was weak, irritable and could not sleep at night. I was totally consumed by PMS and that heightened my sensitive state. Rats kept me awake, and I really hate rats. The only other time I had to live with rats was on Rabi and it was a particularly harrowing and hair raising experience. My father and I were sleeping upstairs in the old house of the first phosphate company manager and eventual commissioner—Sir Albert Ellis. He discovered phosphate on Banaba on May 3rd 1900, the first day of his arrival aboard the ship Archer. On that day Ellis not only arrived on Banaba and discovered phosphate, but he had the entire island signed over for mining rights. His house was a huge dilapidated colonial mansion on the side of a hill above the phosphate processing plant. At first I was in awe of the structure with its balconies and ceiling to floor windows, but it soon began to give me the creeps.

There was a tennis court outside, strangled by weeds with a huge water tank above it. A tree with a trunk as wide as I was tall lay severed in front of the court. I would sit on the first floor balcony every day, writing in my little notebook, feeling like a real anthropologist-in-the-field, with that tree lying right in front of me. Usually one of the

15 Yaqona, kava or grog is a drink made from the roots of the piper methysticum plant. It is a ceremonial drink among Fijians and still maintains its ritual uses today. However, its consumption is also the major
three women looking after us would bring out a pot of tea and we would sip it dutifully in the heat. The kitchen was something out of a Victorian novel with an earthen fireplace and a massive kettle always on the boil. Rare flush toilets with mysterious dark bowls and no seats occupied each bathroom and there were at least four of them throughout the house. A winding wooden staircase extended from the first to second floors, rotting and groaning in many places. The house was free of furniture, save for our beds and a few mats. There were numerous ceiling fans, countless electrical outlets and not a drop of electricity.

Every night one benzene lamp and two kerosene lamps were lit. Three lamps for ten very big rooms. I never appreciated modern technology more in those five dark nights on Banaba. I was terrified of the place and longed to stay with my uncle and his family in the workers’ quarters down by the harbor. My father got irritated with me every night as I stayed awake waving a flashlight and hissing at every cockroach and rat that dared to peep. I cheered myself up in those sleepless hours by laughing at how tough I was on “native rights” and “tradition” at school and how I really didn’t know the last danged thing about living like a “real” native. My father said that I should not be afraid because the rats were my ancestors coming to visit. I was not impressed.

Banaba was physically, a very depressing place. It was a sad fossil of Western civilization. Huge mining sheds housed piles of broken glass, wire, iron, steel and wood that residents casually strolled through with their thick, leather-like soled feet. Wrecked trucks and tractors littered the roads, also lined with electricity-less power poles. There were no windows or doors in most of the old ghetto style laborers’ quarters and the social preoccupation of many people, men in particular, of all ethnicities in Fiji, none the least Rabi
outdoor movie projectors lay rusted and dilapidated in the sun. The atmosphere of the place was almost thoughtful, in that people did not often laugh or smile, especially during our initial arrival but did not look exactly sad either. According to BPC and British projections, Banaba would have been barren and unlivable by now, but there was an abundance of fruit, vegetables and root crops available and I was impressed with every meal we were given.

On the fourth day we were there, which was a Thursday, my uncle came to collect me, accompanied by three men from the boat. They were going to take me to a bangabanga, an underground freshwater cave. I was very excited but nervous too and almost talked him out of it. We hired the one passenger vehicle available and drove as far as possible into the center of the island. We then walked through the bush across pinnacles of phosphate rock and through some rather dangerous plant life. Finally we reached a hole in the earth where a rusted ladder descended into oblivion. The men lit a benzene lamp and we made our way down into the darkness.

We came out at the mouth of an immense cave with stalactites twinkling in the light of the lamp. The rock was a deep golden brown with streaks of amber, rust and iron gray. We walked across the cave and made our way further down into a water-filled passage. We waded, swam, crawled and slithered through the water caves for three hours, sometimes through openings that couldn’t have been more than eighteen inches wide, till we could go no further. I saw the famous Japanese pipes and some words like “Takei was hia 1993,” painted on the walls. The water felt incredibly pure and though it was very cold I did not shiver. I knew I was in the land of the spirits, deep in the heart of the rock. I
slept much better that night and when I left Banaba I gave my uncle my fishhook necklace that I'd worn throughout college. All the really old Banaban fishhooks were made from bangabanga rock.

On Friday night it was time to leave and we made our way down to the harbor where our boat was supposed to be waiting. The catamaran was just a flashing light far out in the ocean because there was no way for the captain to negotiate the harbor in the dark. We were supposed to be transported expediently from the dock by smaller vessels with little motors but we ended up sitting on the dock for four hours while people scrambled around (in the dark) to actually solicit the outboard motors, hose pipes, fuel, containers for bailing water, spark plugs and whatever else it takes to outfit such expeditions. I felt quite hysterical in the knowledge that Banaban society is so egalitarian that the necessary boat for the Rabi Council of Leaders was not even prepared for the head of the Rabi Council. I distracted myself with some cousins by flashing signals to the catamaran with our little torches. The vessel would sail in as close as possible to the harbor, shut off engine, and promptly get dragged back to sea by the current over and over again. We watched this back and forth ballet in amusement until our boats were ready.

When everything was finally set we were carried out of the harbor, freakishly at the speed of light by some navigators who seemed to know their way in the darkness quite well. I half scrambled, half crawled aboard the waiting vessel after balancing precariously on the bobbing motorboat and holding on for dear life to any projecting piece of the catamaran. The journey back to Tarawa took only a day and a half without all
the cargo. For me the idea of Banaba, "homeland" and "nativeness" was quite
demystified.
You cannot avoid trying to translate your critique and ideals into everyday academic practice. It is difficult to maintain the dichotomy between the academic and the personal: your guideline is always the question of which changes you want to support with knowledge—directly or indirectly, inside or outside the university. This means that, besides criticism of the past, an ideal for the future is allowed into the practice of the here and now (Joke Schrijvers 1992: 39).

Harry Maude, Arthur Grimble were actively involved in the transformation of Banaban society even as they “froze” cultural representations of the people in time. These men viewed “real” natives as occupants of a particular kind of space especially with respect to their own I-Matang status. Thus they don’t like “uppity” educated natives who do not appreciate the “traditional” ways of their forefathers. Maude and Grimble are primitivists who conveniently ignore their own ideological influence on the subjects they are preoccupied with. Maude and Grimble were both colonial administrators in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony who accommodated the phosphate mining company and helped displace Banabans from their land. Banaba, or Ocean Island, was only incorporated into the Colony for phosphate mining and no other reason. Phosphate was important as a source for funding the Colony’s administrative needs and fulfilling Britain’s responsibilities to Australia and New Zealand.1

Standard Histories like Barry Macdonald and Maslyn Williams prolific empirical journey through the BPC annals ultimately marginalize islanders. Banabans are definitely pitiful nobodies in The Phosphateers (1985). Any references to their resistance are
tantamount to the struggles of fireflies in a typhoon. Perhaps it was realistic of the authors to focus their attention so well on just the white men who controlled the phosphate empire but surely a 586-paged book would say more about the inhabitants of the islands that were mined? Maybe not but according to a friend who also viewed the same BPC archival sources, the Banaban resistance to land appropriation was enormous and this made the company very nervous indeed. The move to Rabi was a (pre-mediated) godsend for the British and the BPC; subsequently the newly independent Kiribati government was launched on Banaban phosphate revenues. This book illustrates the obsession that businessmen-politicians had with "Empire building" and in a cute way depicts the desperation (human) and struggle (human) for control that everyone, including people (men) with lots of money have in an unstable world.

Pearl Binder presents a simplistic view of Banabans, but this time in opposition to the big bad ways of exploitative British colonials. The Banabans are saints in her account and this is also not always helpful because it freezes them in "innocence." These literary activities are a part of the burdening pity narrative because they complicate and confuse Banaban identity with their claims to authority. Martin Silverman takes a very sophisticated approach to Rabi Islanders, grounded solidly in symbolic anthropology which is difficult for most normal humans to comprehend. At least two people who are academics and who work on Banaban issues cannot believe I read his entire Disconcerting Issue (1971). Nevertheless it is invaluable as the only book on Banaban

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1 See appendices for chronology of Banaban incorporation into the British Empire.
2 I find "innocence" problematic for the reasons regarding victimization and agency described in the introduction and discussion. In addition, Binder's views of the community no matter how sympathetic left out many internal issues of power that are not very pleasant. Banabans may be "naive" but they are not totally innocent.
culture, from Banaba to Rabi, and a treasure in that Silverman was a sensitive and thorough scholar.

Finally, Teresia Teaiwa’s work, “yaqona/yagoqu: routes and roots of a displaced native” (1998), is included amongst all the I-Matang accounts not just for contrast but to show how pity, “because of Banaba,” is prevalent in the alternative approach of a Banaban writer as well. Banaban History is so sad that it enrages us, particularly when we are confronted by confusing and conflicting representations of ourselves. Teresia talks quite a bit about how Banabans have been portrayed in the media, how our land (blood/roots) was siphoned off across the ocean (routes) to nourish others and how this dialogues with her own self-image. She then reverses pity by re/rooting her identity in Fiji, an empowering move. I haven’t forgotten a piece of advice she shared with me last year: “decolonization must be specific.” In this essay she has specifically decolonized the tragic idea of Banaba and offered a very realistic alternative way of thinking about “Banabaness.” Her notion is rooted in Rabi through the re-consumption of land (blood) by the drinking of roots (yaqona). I close this journey after Teresia with reflections on a few organic activities.  

3.1 Our Father, Kurimbo

The tradition of redness, or fairness of skin, which has been seen to cling so closely to the people and gods of Matang, is well supported in our myth, and is further emphasized by two useful pieces of social evidence. The first is that the tedious bleaching process called te ko, to which Gilbertese girls of high rank

3 Teresia’s approach, unlike the other texts is not historical or anthropological. It is personal so I cannot compare her text to other texts. The purpose of discussing her paper is that it is the only one by a Banaban which takes this approach to the past and present simultaneously. She raises issues of Banaban identity in a book of poetry called “Searching for Nei’ Nimanoa” (1995) but the “yaqona” paper fully elaborates her understanding of the complex web that is “Banabaness.”
were once subjected, was undertaken with the avowed intention of reproducing
the ancient fairness of the Matang people, and the second is that when
Europeans first appeared in the Gilbert Group, they were immediately called,
because of their fair complexion, I-Matang (inhabitants of Matang), a name that
they bear today (Grimble 1989: 34).

Arthur Grimble (1888-1956), or Kurimbo, was the most prolific on Gilbertese
culture and oral traditions. Quite a few books and articles have honored him as a pioneer
in Pacific Studies. In the introduction to the University of Hawaii Press publication
Tungaru Traditions editor Harry Maude credits Grimble for practically saving all
Gilbertese knowledge for today’s “ignorant” generations. Men like Grimble and Maude
felt they had kept Gilbertese knowledge in trust for the future, conveniently forgetting
that they played specific roles in the transforming of the generations of their own time.
They were also very naive to think that such a strong oral tradition as still exists in
Kiribati today could be devastated so swiftly by Western values.

Maude says, “Perhaps the most important benefit of all to accrue from the
publication of the Grimble Papers may prove to be the restoration to the Gilbertese of
today of a valuable part of the information on how their culture used to function as an
entity (Grimble 1989: xxxii).” We all know today that culture is not static but no one can
deny the impact of such attitudes by esteemed scholars. No one can deny the impact of
such attitudes by esteemed scholars who were also COLONIAL ADMINISTRATORS
working (whether they wanted to or not) with the British Phosphate Mining Company
and playing it very safe with politics and local knowledge in order to preserve their own
careers.
Grimble had arrived in the Gilberts at a propitious time, when there were still a few elders alive who possessed this first-hand knowledge and who had been saddened and humiliated by the lack of interest taken by the younger men and women in their expertise. Small wonder then that their self-esteem, and no less their prestige on their own islands was immeasurably raised when one of their fair-skinned race from the land of Matang, which their legends spoke so much about, valued and was eager to acquire the traditional wisdom that had been spurned by their own kinsfolk. And so they told him gladly, sometimes in the maneaba with their colleagues, but more often closeted with him alone in his room, all they knew of the traditional lore of the Gilbertese people (Maude in Grimble 1989: xxiv).

Grimble collected and organized Gilbertese and Banaban genealogies, aspects of religious, social and cultural organization and composed romantic narratives of his 16-year residency in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony. This act of recording was later problematic for both Banabans and Gilbertese. For Banabans the presentation of rank and right based on genealogical precedence was tied up in the politics of land leasing for phosphate mining. For the Gilbertese, Grimble did not talk to all elders on all islands so his Gilbertese Traditions do not include all Gilbertese clans. Such issues are still being debated today. We can’t deny the value in documenting oral traditions but the whole nature of “oral tradition” is ultimately compromised by such a freezing in time by “well meaning” white men. This freezing process is part of the whole problem with pity because it presents an “as if” and “when we were” sort of backward hearkening

4 In the Gilbertese and Banaban context, “knowledge” does not just have to do with who people are and where they came from. It is about how to survive from day to day and this is why it is necessarily memorized and adjusted by subsequent generations. It may have been the case that knowledge imparted to Grimble was that which seemed less and less necessary for survival in the modern world. Nevertheless, he definitely would not have been given all the information because to do so would compromise the Gilbertese belief in their own perpetuation. They had survived for centuries in the harsh equatorial environment and they certainly weren’t going to discard their whole way of life in the way Maude implies they did. Values may have changed, but always in the interests of “progress.” Refer to my discussion in the introduction 1.3.
discourse. The frozen past is then conveniently critiqued in academia when invoked for nationalistic agendas.

Grimble was not rooted in the Gilberts no matter how many years he lived there or how many tattoos he acquired, and he certainly wasn’t the “authority” just because he wrote everything down in a structured manner. He eventually lived out his life quite comfortably as Governor of St. Vincent (1989: xxvi) unlike some other Resident Commissioners who weren’t so accommodating of the phosphate company. Two previous characters were Captain Quayle Dickson, who ended up demoted to the Falklands when he challenged the rights of the Company (Binder 1977: 60), and Carlyon Eliot who left Ocean Island in 1920, frustrated about “upholding the rights of primitive races” in the face of British apathy (1977: 69). Why Maude and Grimble should come out academically on top despite their “safe” policies and practices is matter for serious reflection about the ways in which power plays out within and connects between the academy, colonial governments and political and economic interests.  

Grimble is well known for his influence in the compulsory land acquisition Ordinance of 1928 that basically legalized the taking of all necessary Banaban land for mining by the BPC. His letter, written in rather strange language, sent to the villager’s of Buakonikai on August 5 was nothing less than a scandalous document that featured later in the legal actions taken by Banabans against the BPC and British Attorney General starting in 1971 and ending in 1977. This letter is taken from “The Ocean Island Cases” in The Political Economy of Law: A Third World Reader edited by Yash Ghai, Robin Luckran and Francis Snyder (1987:24).

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5 “Play-it-safe” scholarship is always better circulated than those that challenge the structure of power.
To the people of Buakonikai, Greetings, You understand that the Resident Commissioner cannot again discuss with you at present as you have shamed his Important Chief, the Chief of the empire, when he was fully aware of your views and your strong request to him and he granted your request and restrained his anger and restored the old rate to you—yet you threw away and trampled on his kindness. The Chief has given up and so has his servant the Resident Commissioner but I will put my views as from your longstanding friend Mr. Grimble who is truly your father, who has aggrieved you during this frightening day which is pressing upon you when you must choose LIFE or DEATH. I will explain my above statement:-

POINTS FOR LIFE. If you sign the agreement:— (1) Your offence in shaming the Important Chief will be forgiven and you will not be punished; (2) The area of the land to be taken will be well known, that is only 150 acres, that will be part of the agreement; (3) The amount of money will be properly understood and the company will be bound to pay you, that will be part of the agreement.

POINTS FOR DEATH. If you do not sign the agreement:— (1) Do you think your lands will not go? Do not be blind. Your land will be compulsorily acquired for the Empire. If there is no agreement who then will know the area of the lands to be taken? If there is no agreement where will the mining stop? If there is no agreement what lands will remain unmined? I tell you the truth—if there is no agreement the limits of the compulsorily acquired lands on Ocean Island will not be known. (2) And your land will be compulsorily acquired at any old price. How many pence per ton? I do not know. It will not be 10 1/2d. Far from it. How many pounds per acre? I do not know. It will not be £150. Far from it. What price will be paid for coconut trees cut down outside the area? I known well that it will remain at only £1. Mining will be indiscriminate on your lands and the money you receive will be also indiscriminate. And what will happen to your children and your grandchildren if your lands are chopped up by mining and you have no money in the bank? Therefore because of my sympathy for you I ask you to consider what I have said now that the day has come when you must choose LIFE or DEATH. There is nothing more to say. If you choose suicide than I am very sorry for you but what more can I do for you as I have done all I can. I am your loving friend and father, Arthur Grimble.

P.S. You will be called to the signing of the agreement by the Resident Commissioner on Tuesday next, August 7, and if everyone signs the agreement, the Banabans will not be punished for shaming the important Chief and their serious misconduct will be forgiven. If the agreement is not signed consideration will be given to punishing the Banabans. And the destruction of Buakonikai village also considered to make room for mining if there is no agreement.

How any group would come out "not" looking pitiful in the face of such threats is beyond me. The Company and the colonial administration made attempts to thwart every Banaban move to protect their land and the fear of this resistance is apparent in Grimble's
letter. Arthur Grimble was a British subject first and foremost, rising from cadetship in the colonial office on Ocean Island in 1914 to District Officer on Tarawa, Abemama and Beru, to become the first Native Lands Commissioner and finally Resident Commissioner from 1929-1932. He was drawn to the islands by his studies in anthropology at Cambridge University under W.H.R Rivers and later became acclaimed as both an excellent scholar and administrator. Banabans, on the other hand, joke about how some people name their dogs after Kurimbo.

Grimble took a paternalistic approach to Pacific islanders. His descriptions of them were in racialized types along a descending Polynesian-Melanesian hierarchy with the former being the more desirable breed. He loved to talk about things like, how Gilbertese girls weren’t as pretty as their fairer Samoan cousins and so on and so forth.\(^6\) Grimble not only characterized people this way but their gods as well.

That a black folk was once subject to a brown seems to be clearly shown by the Naubwebwe traditions, where we see Naubwebwe portrayed as one of the bogeys who block the way of the departed souls to the land of Matang. Matang is palpably a paradise of the brown men, for it is inhabited by the blonde Tituabine, whose fathers were Tangaroa and Timirau, well known as fair-skins throughout Polynesia. Naubwebwe on the other hand, is an old black man, evidently no relation of the beings in Matang. His look is slavish; his occupation of cleaning up rubbish on the road is that of a slave; he grins and grimaces like an idiot—or a slave...and he is dumb, which is the first mark of slavery in the estimation of the Islanders...Evidently of the same complexion and probably the same obliterate theogony as Naubwebwe, are those dark-skinned, huge eared, red eyed, and cannibalistic hags who collaborate with him in barring the soul’s progress to Paradise (Grimble 1989: 260).

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\(^6\) The reference for that claim is in a small thin summary of Gilbertese culture located in the University of Hawaii Hamilton library. There is a picture of a young Gilbertese girl inside the article and right afterwards, Grimble says Gilbertese woman are not as pretty as their Samoan cousins. I did not record the reference but his words were branded in my mind.
His assignment of positive traits to fair-skinned Polynesian ancestors are partly based on his racist ideals but also on the general indigenous attitude that life in the equatorial belt of the Central Pacific Ocean is hot and hard. It is obvious that he was most pleased to find the Matang myth within Gilbertese oral tradition and capitalized on it greatly as evidence for racial hierarchy.\(^7\)

The environment of an atoll is intensely harsh and offers scant resources for survival. There are no mountains, rivers, valleys, rainbows and waterfalls. Supposedly, fairer skinned people do not have to be out in the sun all day working for survival. Grimble took advantage of this reality to "innocently" uphold the dominant colonial ideology. Whether or not I can make such unscientific judgements is questionable but if his work can still be published and circulated by institutional authorities, criticism is highly overdue. There is a whole discourse criticizing Margaret Mead, why not Grimble or Maude?

Really, Grimble's words speak for themselves. But his approach and character continue to be praised in the present day by less critical sentimentalists. Last year an article appeared in the November issue of the Hawaii based *Pacific Magazine* under the "Knights and Knaves of the Pacific" series which named Grimble as one of the nicest administrators in History (1997: 45). I wrote a letter back asking them to please refrain from such praises unless they got their historical facts straight, to which I got a reply

\(^7\) Like I've said before, I am not prepared to let Grimble off for ignorance of the times. He reveled in his discoveries and was titillated to infinity by the contrasts between dark and fair people. \(^85\)
about how we “read” the past from our own political biases of the present, to which I said, “no s*%#!” 8

The Gilbertese of his day, Grimble felt, were “children, and at bottom very well-disposed children”; but while in the northern islands years of government tutelage had inculcated “discipline and obedience,” in the south the Islanders had been left largely in the hands of the Protestant mission, resulting in “the disappearance of the native gentleman with his primitive yet perfectly clear cut standards of conduct” and the “birth of the native snob; a being ashamed of his ancestry, ashamed of his history, ashamed of his legends, ashamed practically of everything that ever happened to his race outside the chapel and the classroom...The fine courtesy and respect paid in pagan days by young to old are dead with disuse” (Maude in Grimble 1989: xxiii).

My indignation towards Grimble’s work is apparent, specifically because of the contemporary ramifications of both his scholarly and administrative work. Like Captain Cook and Sir Arthur Gordon, Grimble is one of those historical characters that desperately needs de-mystification. The question of temporal politics and “re-inventing the past” can be applied to my approach but the fact of the matter is that any allusions to truth bending by objective critics are irrelevant. We are all, whether objective, subjective, emotional or neutral, a part of a process of truth bending upon truth bending for our own selfish interests. Mine is to make the pieces of histories, even the unpleasant ones, particularly conspicuous for all readers.

3.2 Strategic Harry Maude

When Harold Maude applied to the Colonial Administrative Service he boldly wrote “Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony only” on the form (Maude 1968: xii). In his

8 Isn’t it also possible that “neutral” parties in the present reading “neutral” characters in the past might just be enacting a strategic politics of their own? Perhaps that of that of strategic denial?
introduction to the eloquent collection “Of Islands and Men: Studies in Pacific History,” essentially an assortment of stories about Europeans in the Pacific, he relays the following:

Scattered over a third of the earth’s surface, isolated to a varying degree by the vastly more extensive ocean surrounding them, their inhabitants have evolved over a thousand or more years of occupancy a diverse assemblage of social, economic, religious and political systems, of ideas and values, which makes the region in a sense the counterpart of the natural scientist’s laboratory (1968: xvi).

Maude’s language embodies the rational, objective scholarly approach. He discusses the importance of Pacific History, criticizing the Paradise school of romantic writers, of which Grimble his mentor was definitely a member, and emphasizes the importance of fact-based Pacific History. He suggests that both documented and oral sources are biased and that the “truth” is probably somewhere in-between. He also calls for the simultaneous utilization of tools available in the disciplines of anthropology and history, to best uncover these truths. His contribution is apparent in the proliferation of “historicalanthropology” that has emerged, particularly from the Australian National University in Canberra where he resided in the Pacific History Department for many years.

Maude’s approach could be described as a theoretical opposite to Greg Dening’s (1989, 1992) fiction/fact, past/present, “fragments of truth” view, one I personally find more persuasive. As students, after reading pages of “The History of x, y and z,” my

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9 A poetic for Histories” (1992) and “History ‘in’ the Pacific” present more complex approaches to issues of fact and fiction, past and present that are sometimes too difficult to comprehend. Dening realizes that nothing is as it seems and often presents this reality in language that normal people cannot understand. But unlike some academics who use jargon as an excuse to say nothing about nothing, Dening uses sophisticated ideas to reflect how sophisticated the world is. His mode of presentation is never very conducive to the practical politics of everyday life in the Pacific and few would find it useful as a way of
peers and I got tired of asking, “where are the islanders in these Histories?” Harry Maude suggests interesting approaches to the region and its inhabitants, essentially “us” who are now reading him, but all his publications fall neatly into the dominant colonial style—lots and lots of discourse about why this and that occurrence is important or interesting, how it benefits the global approach to History, and how through this we can know “man” (not islanders) better. His work epitomizes the role of academia as the rational, effective intellectual arm of colonial hegemony in the region and his histories of Banabans in particular, through documents, memos, and strategic compilations, have done quite a bit to complicate any form of possible “truth” about the past. To his credit, though, I name Maude as one of the most significant intellectual architects of Pity in the History of Banabans. 10

Harry Maude was both colonial subject and social scientist when he lived in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony (GEIC). I have always found this double role highly disconcerting. He and his wife, Honor, were both expeditors of change and recorders of “tradition” during their forty-year residence in the islands. It is standard that researchers and scientists make moral compromises in sacrifice for objective analysis, but the sorts of choices the Maudes’ would have had to make for their “factual recordings” are quite significant for the British Empire, the native subjects of discussion and the discipline of

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10 Even into his nineties Maude participated in Banaban “pity” by endorsing the Banaban Heritage Society. Reference to Stacey King as the Banaban’s “Good Samaritan” in “The Book of Banaba” (1984) shows how Maude still considered the people to be helpless even in the 1990s. Yet throughout his career he did little to help them. As Lands Commissioner he simply recorded things and never once came out with the conclusion that the separation of Banaban from land would be drastic and devastating. If he suspected as much he never mentioned it in his scholarly activities. Such strategic logic is unforgivable. Maude was only interested in preserving his own career.
Pacific History. Harry Maude was the Chief Lands Commissioner for the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony for many years and even as he wrote in diaries and journals about how essential land was for natives he continued to assist in the removal of the land from underneath them and then the eventual extraction of them from that land.

H.E Maude was a thorough strategist. Where incidents and attitudes might imply exploitation, neglect and sheer apathy on the part of either the BPC or colonial administration, Maude’s language and tone labor with such authority and non-bias that a critic such as I actually starts to doubt my own indignant convictions about European Empire building habits. In the same breath Maude can assure that Banabans are well looked after and then describe their situation as degenerate and predatory. His 1946 memorandum, as Resident Commissioner of the GEIC on the Banaban future portrays this evasive and strategic mode of operation quite well. The document is of course read with the biases of retrospect but rightfully from within an academic field in which he eventually figured prominently as pioneer. It is necessary to quote a portion of the Memo so we can examine his colonial loyalty; in an appendix the significance of the document might evaporate. The numbers here correspond to his own format in the memo but only those of importance for this thesis are reproduced.

MEMORANDUM

2nd September, 1946

To: The Secretary, Western Pacific High Commission

From: H.E Maude, Esquire.

Subject: The Future of the Banaban Population of Ocean Island; with special relation to their lands and funds

3. Ocean Island, or Banaba, as it is called by the natives, was discovered by the British vessel "Ocean" in 1804. From the only good account of the island prior to the discovery
of the phosphate deposits, we learn that in 1851 the population was between 2000 and 3000 and apparently flourishing. During the latter part of the nineteenth century, however, it was visited by a series of severe droughts, and the inhabitants starving and thirst-stricken, and reduced in numbers by new diseases and wars which followed the introduction of firearms, flocked on board every labor-recruiting vessel that visited the island, to be scattered over the Eastern Pacific. By 1900 the miserable remnants of the former population numbered 450, riddled with disease and reputed to be among the poorest natives in the Pacific.

4. The phosphate deposits on Ocean Island were discovered by Mr. A.F (now Sir Albert) Ellis in 1900, and, as a result of representations made by the Pacific Islands Company, who were interested in their exploitation, the island was annexed to the Empire on the 28th September, 1901.

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 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."

32. As stated in the letter to the Colonial Secretary of Fiji announcing the purchase, the object was "to provide an island for the settlement of the natives of Ocean Island" against the time when the phosphate deposits in that island will have been worked out and the island will, in consequence, have become largely "uninhabitable"...

33...In the event however, the Japanese landed at Ocean Island in August, 1942, and the Banabans remained under enemy control until September 1945...

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.

35.....It would not be possible for the Banabans to reoccupy [Ocean Island] for at least two years, owing to the absence of food supplies and the total destruction of all four villages. It was therefore proposed to settle the Banabans temporarily on Rabi...they would be returned to Ocean Island at the end of two years if they so desired.

37.....1003 persons carried by the s.s "Triona" to Rabi and landed at Nuku on the 15th December, 1945...
38. As explained above, these rations were supplied from Colony funds for a month only, after which the community was expected to live off the resources of the island, supplemented by food purchases from the four years’ arrears of annuities paid to them shortly after their arrival.

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.

Maude was slightly less racist but more evasive in his approach than Grimble. He is notorious for leaving out entire sections of History in his accounts of Banaban life. He is also consistent in his belief, like Albert Ellis, that the native must always appreciate his cultural and genetic character and only “progress” along the appropriate lines. In other words, he never really advocated complete modernity for islanders but always excused the British Empire from responsibility for the process of “change.” He should be so lucky if all that came out of the Banabans traumatizing experiences should be “indolence and apathy.”

How convenient for the British, the Pacific Islands Company, the Pacific Phosphate Company and the British Phosphate Commissioners that the Banabans should already be miserable by 1900, the exact year that mining commenced. They were just longing (pitifully) for the merciful (pity) intervention (pity) of generous (pitying) British (pitying white) influence. How bizarre of Maude, at the end, not to connect the pitiful state of the Banabans after all this “positive” British influence to mining or colonialism. Maude must be described as a master of skewed logic. His words in point 28 are maddening because it is obvious when comparing with Williams’ and Mcdonald’s
account and reading between the lines, that the Company wasn’t as much worried about
the environmental condition of Banaba, as dying to get rid of Banabans!

His reference to Japanese as “the enemy” is also strategic because Maude sustains
the Japanese as the only evils in Banaban history (besides the ignorant natives use of
money and material goods) all the way until his 1994 publication of papers which include
the tragic story of Kabunare who escaped Japanese slaughter (1994: 100-104). There is
no word of why the British Colonials and Company officials took off so swiftly before
the Japanese landed in August 1942, leaving the Banabans and Gilbertese laborers to fend
for themselves until September 1945 (Maude 1931: 12). This is what I mean by the
gaping historical holes in Maude’s work. It is generous of him to suggest (in point 34)
that the Banabans may not trust the British government at all after being abandoned so
kindly by their benevolent superiors.

The colonial administration must really have believed that all natives knew how
to “live off the land” as indicated by point 38. Why else would they transport 1003
individuals from coral atolls and dry rocks in the Central Pacific to wet, volcanic,
hurricane prone mountains in the South Pacific without a crumb of information on Fijian
geography, vegetation, customs and culture? Yes, they must’ve believed this, despite
living with them for 17 years, recording all their material, cultural, racial and
psychological features, and then supplanting these with British laws, morals and material
practices.

The interests of the younger generation are fast becoming centered around the
mission church and the British Phosphate Commissioner’s trade store, and their
lands are of little importance to them except as a source of income when sold to
the phosphate industry. But in spite of the drastic orientation of their lives which
has been crowded into the last thirty years the Banabans retain a courtesy and
independence of thought which makes them one of the pleasantest races to live
with and augurs well for their future in the difficult times of adjustment ahead
(Maude 1932: 301).

It is a blessing that Banabans can be the pleasantest and most displaced and pitiful
at the same time. The British would never be blamed for anything Maude disapproved of
in the development of natives because the British were only doing what was natural, right
and realistic in the evolution of mankind. His work is rather frustrating to read if you
know something about the experiences of Banabans because there are so many obvious
gaps in his logic. In his 1994 publication, The Book of Banaba, there is no section
whatsoever on phosphate mining, a feat that only Maude, with his unequivocal reputation
and authority could have achieved.

Maude casually refers readers to the book by Williams and Macdonald as the
most appropriate reference for the complete History of phosphate mining. This book,
though unrivaled in its comprehensive coverage of the Pacific Islands Company and
British Phosphate Commissioners, says nothing about whether or not what the PIC and
BPC did was right or wrong. The Phosphateers (1985) is not unpleasant to read, and is
definitely informative and valuable; the author’s do not hesitate to acknowledge the
paternalistic and self-interested actions of Australian, New Zealand and English
businessmen and government officials. But their approach also confers with little
subtlety, a distinct admiration for these twentieth century pioneers. If that approach is
some practical form of History writing it says much for the way Histories are produced to
begin with—almost always in the service of the winners and more often than not with the
realistic attitude that nothing can be done to change the past. The Banabans emerge as the
unfortunate victims of something that was, undoubtedly, greater than them anyway.
3.3 Williams, Macdonald and The Business of Serious Historymaking

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. These were the Phosphateers—an appellation long part of the family language of the phosphate industry...All, from the earliest pioneering times until the recent cessation of the Phosphate Commissioners' activities, have been linked by a common feeling of achievement. The Phosphateers are those who wove the fabric of this history (Williams 1985).

You simply cannot help but admire the way in which good imperialists combine morality, piety and a remarkable sense of adventure with their colonial exploits to create History. You cannot help but admire the way in which good Historians combine objectivity, thoroughness, structure, skill, subtlety and a remarkable sense of adventure with their academic exploits to create History.

John T. Arundel, "...the patriarch of the British phosphate industry in the Pacific," is described as one adventurous sort by Maslyn Williams and Barry Macdonald in The Phosphateers (Williams 1985: 6). He pioneered the formation of the successful Pacific Islands Company (PIC) which was chaired by none other than Lord Stanmore, otherwise known, and quite fondly by many Fijians, as Sir Arthur Gordon, Governor of Fiji and protector of native land. In his 1981 MA thesis, August Kituai describes Gordon thus, "in a private capacity he appears to have put aside his philosophy concerning respect for the rights and well-being of peoples of other cultures, and to have engaged in business, determined to develop [trade] profitably in the territories he had formerly governed" (26). The PIC had interests in the Gilbert, Ellice and Marshall Islands and traded primarily in copra, pearl shell and guano.
The famous story that led to the phosphate mining of both Nauru and Banaba is the extraordinary tail of "The Office Doorstop." This rock lay at the door of 1 1/2 Macquarie Place, the Sydney office of the PIC. Mr. Albert Ellis, close family friend of the Arundels as well as prospector and analyst for the Company, discovered that it was 78 percent phosphate lime during a routine chemical test, an event that led to a complete shift in focus for the entire Company. The guano ventures of the Company were dwindling fast making Arundel and his managers rather anxious about its future. The doorstop was a rock from Nauru, then under German imperial jurisdiction and all those party to its potential advanced their plans with the utmost secrecy.

Nauru, under German jurisdiction, was almost impossible to secure with mining rights but through intense inquiry they discovered the existence of Banaba, close to Nauru and of similar formation. Within five months strategic arrangements involving ship rendezvous, decoys to ward off any competitive observers, and inquiries into Banaba jurisdiction, progressed with amazing speed. The Company had the powerful talents of Arthur Gordon who knew the workings of the colonial bureaucratic system in the islands better than anyone. Apart from being a popular administrator he was a devoted Christian businessman and liked Arundel. It was to him in 1900 that the Resident Commissioner of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony sent the recommendation for annexation of Ocean Island. Between Telfer-Campbell, Ellis, Arundel and Gordon, the entire future of Banabans was shaped (1985: 10-18).

By this time the fertilizer trade was in a state of transformation. Agricultural chemists had discovered the significance of phosphorous in the ecological system—as encapsulated in the textbook aphorism 'there can be no civilization without population, no population without food, no food without phosphate'... (Williams 1985: 7).
They should have added, "[for Banabans] no land with phosphate." With the general attitude that Banaba was occupied by no intelligent life whatsoever, all kinds of permission to mine the land were sought from the British Government rather than the Banabans. Ellis had already acquired the "x's" of the "King" and his "chief" in 1900, on a document that gave over mining of the entire island. Every Banaban knew that the two men, who were representatives from Tabwewa village, and thus had first rights aboard visiting vessels, did not represent the entire island.\(^{11}\) This is why the Company later rushed to get British permission. From the moment of annexation on September 28 1901, the indigenous people lost real control of their island. It was at this point that mining became legal (according to British law). No one has ever asked if mining prior to 1901 was legal or not because of the two, in my eyes, highly illegal "x’s."

There are many documents and agreements about how much and which land was allowed for mining at what price, but it is my belief that the Banabans were never a priority of concern except as irritating obstructions to the mining operations. Any Resident Commissioner of Banaba who tried to work in the best interests of the people rather than the Company was swiftly replaced. The British Administration now had a vested interest in the mining through the British Phosphate Commission, an alliance of Australian and New Zealand phosphate interests and British administrative needs. The Empire had discovered a most propitious way to rule the Gilbert and Ellice Islands—through what they must have considered convenient, native and not British taxpayers money.
This aspect of the British GEIC is an example of one of those ingenious Imperial maneuvers. Not only did the BPC dispossess Banabans of their land for what they considered to be rational, practical reasons of white expansion and survival—that of white people in Australia and New Zealand—but they used the money from the Banaban dispossession to fund the “development” of at least twenty-one other islands, not including Banaba. In addition they employed Gilbertese laborers who were placed in a subordinate position to Banaban landowners and this fostered a notion of superiority on the Banaban side, especially as they didn’t have to “labor.”\textsuperscript{12} Similar things were happening in Fiji between the Fijian landowners and cultivating East-Indians, though in that case the two groups were not connected by histories. The twenty-one other islands in the GEIC group already existed within the Banaban cultural framework, understood in particular historical relationships of language, kinship and cosmology. What the BPC exploits essentially introduced was a seed of mistrust, jealousy and competition between the Gilbertese and Banabans that continues to this day.

Between 1967 and 1979 when the Banabans actively sought compensation from Britain, a cause in which they basically failed, two issues can be raised that aren’t directly addressed by Macdonald and Williams. The Banabans believed that the only place they would get justice was at the highest level possible—the British High Court. In theory this should be true but in practice it was impractical. The Banabans were given the minimum of advice along the way from Colonial officials regarding their political cause. The Banabans were at fault too because they stuck to a religious based faith in a higher moral

\textsuperscript{11} Refer to 2.2 on Natin Anginimaeao, those rights to board vessels eventually led to this ethnographic encounter which was to have drastic economic and political consequences for the Banabans.
justice. Had they been more strategic in their negotiations, dealing directly with the BPC and its managers rather than the Crown, they might have achieved better compensation. Their refusal to attend the 1967 Wellington meeting between the BPC and GEIC indicates this.\textsuperscript{13}

The judgement by Justice Megarry in 1976 regarding the Crown’s moral duty was as much as Britain could admit. The fact that he did not attach a monetary figure to his judgement is significant. Would Britain have to pay all exploited natives in all its former colonies if they started with this one? That was a snowball they must never set rolling. Admitting guilt was morally acceptable, especially as the subject had been raised in the United Nations, but acting practically on that confession would mean that Australia, New Zealand and everybody else would have to compensate for exploited land and labor. What a precedence that would have placed on the global Imperial community, not to mention economy! Banaba wasn’t taken by force, why should they have to pay?

Secondly, the theory driving all the acceptable exploitation of Banaban land was one of pure utilitarianism. The Banabans were a few and the Australians, New Zealanders, Tuvaluans and Gilbertese were more. For that matter, so was the general British piece of mind. Banaban land was valuable for many; there were no external laws regarding its exploitation and the Banabans could be disposed of as conveniently and humanely as possible. The Colonial administration had to balance costs and benefits and consider the future in light of the majority needs. The people’s removal to Rabi in their eyes was probably the nicest thing they could do and still please the powerful, hungry

\textsuperscript{12} I also discuss the increasing antagonism between Banabans and Gilbertese in 2.3 with respect to Christianity.

\textsuperscript{13} See appendices: 1967.
phosphate Company. The British Government was not bound by any international rules or trusts of the post war period to look after the Banabans welfare, unlike the Nauruans. As a former German territory, the Nauruans had international rights under the United Nations mandate that protected their lands and earned them independence.

The Banabans had NO RIGHTS except within British law,\textsuperscript{14} which, as the enactment of the 1928 Ordinance shows, was there for the convenience of British, not Banaban, needs. In addition, the Colonial government usually determined what the Banaban needs were anyway. Banabans had no control whatsoever and this had to have been frustrating. Money was the only thing that accurately substituted for land, and the only thing that seemed to reflect real power in the modern world. What happened to the Banabans was a moral shame but a clever political and economic feat on the part of the three countries. This is the tragedy of Banaban History.

From the perspective of “modern Progress,” the Independent Nation of Kiribati would have been impossible without Banaban phosphate money. Millions of dollars were set aside by the British Government to fund the development of the nation and when they achieved independence in 1979, they were left with $A69 million for infrastructure, education and health investments (Van Trease 1993: 161). For their part, the Banabans were unceremoniously dumped on Rabi with some tents and food for a month and left to manage fluctuating royalty funds. It was their misfortune that the British despised them so much, out of guilt I’m sure, because they were eventually placed in a complicated legal and geographic position of helplessness after resettlement on Rabi.

\textsuperscript{14} Or within their own native laws and customs if anyone bothered to consider those.
The Phosphateers covers the entire evolution of the phosphate empire from 1900 to 1980, through two world wars, depression, legal implications of the United Nations mandate and Australian and New Zealand politics, always taking a sensitive approach to the distinct personalities of the white male actors. It ends without a description of the ruin that was left behind, even though in 1985 the authors would certainly have access to such knowledge. Anyone reading this book would think, and rightly so, that the British Phosphate Commissioners were the most enterprising and innovative men in the world. Any phosphate mining descendant should be proud of their grandfathers when reading this book.

For the descendents of the “mined,” however, it is not so exciting to read. There are about three full pages on Banabans in the whole book, and acknowledgements to the effect of: “the Banabans couldn’t have known they were signing over their land, but Ellis surely didn’t realize that they did not know either” (Williams 1985: 31). Their defense of Albert Ellis is so unbelievable that the project might have been commissioned by the BPC itself. However, it is important to suggest that by reading the personal correspondence of all these phosphate pioneers, including references to how their wives were doing, when they went to church, when they were happy, when they were frustrated, and so forth, the authors may have been endeared to these men by a “human” connection. Something they certainly didn’t have with Banabans or Nauruans.

3.5 Binder’s Tragic Treasure Islanders

History, here as elsewhere, is always established and recounted by the conquerors. The fair-skinned, God-like conquerors of Banaba claimed that their arrival and victory was prophesied and expected by the inferior savages whom
they dispossessed. The successful invaders of Banaba, however in claiming descent from their God-like ‘Breed of Matang,’ Aryan ancestors, were laying up trouble for themselves in the future. For there were other fairer-skinned, straighter-haired, better-armed and more aggressive aggressors to come to Banaba (Binder 1977: 13).

Pearl Binder captured some Banaban histories in her book Treasure Islands. She wrote a sympathetic account of the Banaban struggle for phosphate compensation during their civil suit against the British Government. In a journalistic style that rarely produced direct information on her sources, Binder presents a romantic picture of native persecution and survival. Her description of the pious and humble characters of Banaban leaders in particular is definitely a partial truth. It is not my goal here to produce alternative interpretations of “brown” actors and activities during that intense period of Banaban history. But, I would like to say that Pearl Binder’s harsh criticisms of the British Colonial administration, the British Justice System and attitudes of white people in general, coupled with the privilege and flexibility of her own social and historical position only adds to the landscape of pity on which the Banabans live/d.

Binder has interesting things to say, though, particularly about GEIC Resident Commissioners.

Both Eliot (Broken Atoms) and Grimble (A Pattern of Islands and Return to the Islands) wrote books after their retirement about Ocean Island and the Gilberts. Eliot had the courage to tell the truth. Did it have an effect? He had a story to tell and is not boring. Grimble, a romantic and entertainer, a would-be poet, wrote so enticingly that his books are still in print, perpetual bestsellers. And Grimble, while not often telling actual lies, either avoided unpalatable and shameful facts altogether, or else skidded round them. It is from Grimble (who was also an enchanting broadcaster) that millions of people in the English-speaking world have learnt about Ocean Island. Not from Eliot’s painful truth (Binder 1977: 69).
Binder basically slams Grimble for being “like all weak men,” who bullied, threatened and lied to secure their colonial position (70).

Binder’s faults lie in her uncritical acceptance of the primitive ideal. Throughout the book she criticizes Christianity, western ways and thinking as inappropriate corruptions of native innocence while still illustrating the integral role in which Christian ideals drove community politics. She yearns for the golden-bodied Polynesians who were forced to give up their naked freedom. “The Fijian women shrouded their luscious bodies from neck to ankle in muumuus and viniavors...” and so on and so forth she says (86).

Her [Polynesian] Banabans are struggling, surviving victims held together only by the leadership of Rotan Tito.

Similar to Silverman, she observes the Banaban ability to live on several different levels at the same time, “…an Ocean Island-backwards-looking, shut-in life on [Rambi]. Always directing their thoughts backward to an increasingly unreal Ocean Island homeland, and forward to the dream of the great trial for their rights which was to come—in London” (113). She credits this multiple-level living talent for survival and compares the Banabans to Jews who “…play hide-and-seek [with the past] in a manner confusing to outsiders but perfectly comprehensible to themselves.” I’m not sure if anything regarding the past, present or future was ever “perfectly comprehensible,” and the great London trial and subsequent $10 million settlement is something that many are familiar with. But who can say exactly why all those Banabans journeyed to London for the trial? A sizeable contingent made the trip and according to Binder, just wanted to give evidence and return home. On Rabi now, however, people say some went for an adventure and a good (all expenses paid) holiday. Maybe this is just cruel judgement
made in frustration because the trial did not seem to produce as much as it could have.\textsuperscript{15} The Barraclough documentary (1977), and almost every Pacific Islands Monthly and Fiji Times article on Banabans, deals with this event abundantly.

Binder’s book is valuable in that it is a quick, interesting read that covers many historical issues. Her racialized, feminizing discourse gets tedious though. There’s only so much of “.the tropical scenery was ravishing and so were the islanders” (121) or “Alas the dancing girls were also wearing horrid European lace bras,” that one can take (123). What is the limit of fascination that one can reach in the observation of colored peoples and cultures? I tried to recall my experiences in Europe amongst French, Spanish, German, Irish and Italian “others” and could not recall such racialized curiosity. But then I’ve grown up in a materially multicultural society, have been tuned to the white-skinned norm and live in the age of globalization where everything is game for commodification and exchange.

\textit{The Banabans, as everyone who knows them well agrees, are lovely people, obsessed, like the Jews, with their tragic history, holding together tightly for survival. They do not have enough to eat, certainly nothing like enough protein. Their social life is warm and vivid. They know what to do with leisure. Sometimes, especially during Methodist service and hymn-singing on Sundays, I felt like I was in a small village in Wales (117).}

\textsuperscript{15} I think that the issue here is one of sound legal advice. The Banabans never seemed to have it available and according to themselves, this is because they didn’t want anyone telling them what to do. Only when they’d reached the highest power possible did they leave the issues in outside hands, because that was the end of the road. It took ages to find a lawyer, the trial took forever (1971-1976), in the end the settlement was meager and not even based on the trial’s findings.
3.4 Silverman’s Issues

*The history of the Banabans is in part a history about history, and about culture* (Silverman 1971: 5).

Martin Silverman gives perhaps, the most sensitive and comprehensive address to the Banaban situation having, ironically, the “purest” academic approach to their historical cultural development. I know little about his personal background but his work is mainly based on the methodology of structural anthropology and is almost a blessing in its jargonistic presentation.16 My treatment of his book is drastically different from the others, longer and more reflective because I think it has more value (for me).

Silverman spent a total of 18 months in 1961 and 1964-65 doing research on Rabi and published *Disconcerting Issues: Meaning and Struggle in a Resettled Pacific Community* in 1971. When I checked out Maude’s, Grimble’s and Binder’s books from the library of the University of the South Pacific, where a few Banabans attended school, there were all kinds of notes in the margins. Things like: “!!”, “rubbish!”, “no chiefs in Banaba or Kings!” and “Grimble refused to find lawyer for Banabans,” were everywhere. The issue of defacing private property aside, there were no such comments in the book I checked out which had been there since 1977 at least. Silverman’s margins were relatively bare and this could have been because either few could understand his language—I certainly struggled—or they took less issue with what he wrote.

The book is a relatively sophisticated approach to Banaban culture and history. I have to praise his efforts this way because so much was written by those with specific and direct self-gratifying moral or material interests in the Banaban situation. In
November last year I went to the Fiji Archives in Suva and came across a Rabi Island Census Report produced by Silverman in 1965. I had to sympathize with the man because he was dealing with Banabans during a most complicated time and state in their existence. He tried to establish an alphabet coding system for members of each household in the four villages and by the first household he was describing families in the following terms: “XmZiDhN is the female relative of the absent husband of the resident daughter by a previous marriage of the resident husband of the resident sister of the absent mother of the anchor man” (1967).

Relationships, alliances, loyalties and most social activities on Rabi would not appear consistent to any outside observer. With the layering of “traditional” culture and historical precedence, land displacement, material change, religious change, the substitution of money for land, a diversification of occupations, Western education, immigration, and inter-marriage among other things, the capturing of a Banaban “reality” is rather difficult. Only older members of the community who can remember where obligations and commitments lie, for whatever past or present reasons, possess the knowledge that explains why people do anything. To ask them, though, would yield many partial stories.17

Silverman handles this partiality quite well to create a holistic picture. He observes political and religious behavior and connects it back to Banaba and the British in a masterful way. Such writings on other island populations may not be as much appreciated because they allow academics to dispossess natives of their own meanings by

16 A blessing because much “simpler” presentations like those just discussed, often formed the corner stone of official pitiful History.
implying that they, as authorities, are the only ones with “the truth.” I keep this in mind as I read Silverman but somehow he just doesn’t seem to fall into that category of snobs. Maybe it’s because his work was conducted almost thirty years ago and he stopped writing about Banabans soon after. He didn’t make the community his lifelong project or capitalize on it for career purposes, unlike Maude and Grimble, nor did he reproduce an “archival” history. Silverman’s work is also politically conscious and even if, in his eyes, politics is simply one explanation for cultural change I can still interpret his work in other more useful ways.

In the introduction I alluded to the “all inclusive” nature of (pitiful) history. Reading through Silverman’s book I came across a section on people’s attitude to money and what was rightfully owed to them. It sparked a memory of a brief interview I had last year with one of the most respected historians on Gilbertese and Banaban colonial History. At that time I was not articulating my intellectual approach very well and it was obvious that he didn’t think I would go far in academia. When I asked him how he thought I should approach the Banaban question he said, “find out about their work ethic.” With respect to what I said in the beginning about Banabans being thought of as lazy, this direction prompted many hours of reflection. What was their work ethic?

Silverman recounts one of Rotan’s comments, “We did not come to Fiji to be workers on the land, but to get our money” (195). Apparently the most attractive aspect of Fiji in the minds of Banaban political leaders, as a place of temporary resettlement, was its proximity to the office of the British Western High Commission and more

17 Young people can usually identify on sight who they are related to but they don’t always know the names of their cousins or the exact genealogical connection. The older people say: “that’s your relative and that’s your relative and...”
developed Suva center. This is connected to the deeply embedded sense of moral community fostered by the Christian incorporation and notion that the closer the Banabans were to the center of power, the more likely they would get their money.

An annuities-bonus system had been set up in 1937 whereby landowners received royalties based on mined lands and the whole community received equal share of a community fund. Originally qualification for the fund was based on full Banaban and half-Banaban blood quantum but the people dispatched with this distinction themselves and then included all residents on Rabi and Ocean Island (193). The Rabi Council wanted to abolish the general annuity scheme in direct favor of just the landowners, thus creating a system that considered wealth in terms of individual land holding over general existence in the community. The Fiji government didn’t really like this idea and so only approved a continuation of the general annuity/bonus scheme. These funds were not distributed but used mainly, until 1965 for general development on Rabi in accordance with the directives of Banaban Trust Fund board members chaired by a British Advisor.

In 1964 the Council demanded the money be distributed amongst individuals, despite government worries about individual misuse of funds because, if “...the distribution of annuities might indeed result in “misfortune”...the people would all be unfortunate together” (196). This decision played out at a maungatabu, or town meeting where the notion of “Banaban community” was concretized in terms of political concert over landowning matters. By now money and land were one and the same and Banabans were beginning to realize that they weren’t getting much at all of the profits benefiting the GEIC or the Australian and New Zealand farmers who were enjoying phosphate at a

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18 This is another manifestation of “all inclusive” pity.
price way below the market one (Aidney 1994: 15). In addition, the Nauruans, the other “other” to which Banabans could always compare their situation to, seemed to be getting better treatment. Nauruans gained independence under the United Nations trust policy, were allowed to remain on their island and received direct payments on the mining of owned land.

The desire for individual access to funds, by a community consensus was not universal and according to Silverman, a few Banabans did want the money to remain directed towards general development. However, the roads and houses being constructed on Rabi, as material signs of progress were poor compared to what they knew on Banaba, where the BPC created mansions, services and recreational facilities (mainly for their own staff) much faster than on Rabi. Silverman says, “It is not that Banabans are trying to get something for nothing. The something that they are trying to get, in their view, properly belongs to them” (195). Whether or not this attitude prevented the development of a “work ethic” is beyond my judgement because I think that Banabans did deserve more money. But with hindsight I also know that Banaban individual control of money, because unlike land, money disappears in a matter of days and months if not saved, was another evil in itself.19

Observations he made on Rabi regarding political decisions still exist today. “For what is interpreted as a situation of poverty, there is, on the one hand, the attitude, ‘why doesn’t the council do something about it?’ and on the other, when there is a plan for doing something about it, ‘What right would they have to tell me what to do?’ ” (195). The “money-means-control” observation he also made in connection to politics also
strikes a familiar chord (195). My father as RCL member encounters these issues all the time during his by-monthly village visits—in 1998, thirty years after Silverman’s experiences. I will admit up front that my excessive admiration for his work has everything to do with its reinforcing of both my father’s and my own convictions on politics and society on Rabi. However, the two generations that have grown up since 1968 probably haven’t been interviewed enough and their values would definitely be different from their elders’. The young people I talked to were much more concerned with the future and community benefit in general.

Another invaluable point raised in this book was that regarding leadership. He described a double characteristic of communities whereby people could exist simultaneously in concert and discord, free as individual, bound as a group, and almost never liking to be led (203-4). He said that people were aware of this dualism to which they responded with “c’est la vie, and isn’t it dreadful” (204). In my time “e kawa te aba” pretty much covers the whole gamut of idiosyncratic Banaban behavior. People want to be free, equal and well, but they are not sure how to get there politically or socially. Silverman also says that,

The people recognize that envy is one of the main major disconcerting factors in their lives—it is in their nature as Banabans, and they have been unable to overcome it. It is freely admitted, for example, that many will oppose the supporting from community funds of the higher education of children who are not their own, because those children and their families will rise in prestige. This is the dark side of the formal ideal of egalitarianism. It is a bad thing which threatens the progress of the community, but it is recognized that individual and family considerations are difficult to transcend. And just as behaving in a certain manner for the benefit of the group or conformity to an explicit norm are sufficient explanations for behavior, so is self-interest (204).

19 Actually, because of the mining, land DID disappear in a matter of days and months. Perhaps Banabans were just treating money the way their land was being treated?
Consider this paragraph with respect to three questions. Why were many Council leaders corrupt, in that they used trust funds self-interestedly? Why did none of them meet with any formal legal or social condemnation? Why are all Banabans pitiful? One more: why does my father not fit into the normal mold of leadership? The answer to this last one is that he extricated himself early from this system, especially after he fell victim to the educational funding issues mentioned above. He then spent many years being part of a team responsible for Fiji agriculture as a whole, balancing the needs of many groups of farmers, fisherman and the government as best he could.

A month ago when he visited a Tabiang village to discuss community issues they reminded him that he belonged to their village, and to remember this fact when he sat as Chairman of the Council. He politely replied that as Chairman his responsibility was to the entire island, not just his village, his family or his friends. This response was met with great reflection because no other leaders ever acted with respect to the entire community. They’d considered their close relationships first and foremost, except when “national” action was conducive to self-interests as well. My father, who’s always had the reputation of being a not so friendly snob, examined within this context, becomes more of a necessary antidote for the habits of egalitarian, free money spending, over-friendly counterparts of the past.

Part of the problem of leadership on Rabi seems to do with decision making processes. This is one explanation that Silverman seems to have for that issue.

In precolonial times there was apparently little genuinely collective Banaban action. The creation of the Banaban community as a corporate entity was basically a response to the requirements of colonial administration and to the
requirements of dealing with the phosphate company. A paternalistic government and company provided many of the things the people must now provide for themselves, if they want them, and many of the decisions the people are now faced with making for themselves. Thus a clash between the ideas of collective and individual responsibility had little opportunity to occur in concrete situations, since such situations occurred but rarely (205-6).

Since the end of British paternalism, though, how much time is needed to develop the ability to make responsible decisions for the community? The Committee of Inquiry into the Rabi Council Affairs (Aidney 1994) seems to indicate that it takes more than a few decades.

On Rabi people who appear to be seeking public prestige, leaders or otherwise, are not well regarded. This is why people like to talk to each other exactly the same. This idea is connected to my worries in the introduction about appearing “better” than others. If you’re a pure outsider, especially a white person, you will get the natural respect offered to all white people. If you are a government official, no matter what color, you will also get that respect. But, you can be a Councilor or even Chairman and be spoken to in the same manner as if you were a twenty-one year old cousin, forty-year old nephew or thirteen-year old adopted grandchild.

I return briefly to the reference regarding my bad netball playing here, because I think it is relevant; I read it as a vignette on Banaban egalitarianism. I really wanted to participate in a village sport and proceeded to train with the girls from Tabiang. I was generally fit at the time so had no trouble with the practice routines. However, I found it

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20 The habit of envy and selfishness can be understood from a different perspective. In the central Pacific, everyday survival, which I referred to in the discussion of Grimble and knowledge, is critical and people jealously guard their skills. Resources are scarce and people are in competition for survival, this is why they were never united under one leader but instead evolved an egalitarian, “organic” (Silverman’s terms) system which placed people in relationship with others but rarely above each other. What does all that mean on Rabi Island where resources are much more plentiful? What kind of attitude would the younger generation evolve with respect to the habits of their elders and the realities of the environment?
hard to impart the fact that I couldn’t remember all the rules of the game especially as I had been out of high school for almost six years. Some people assumed I must know how to play well, especially coming from Suva and being relatively tall. The first day of games we were winning our first match against a relatively easy team but I wasn’t playing. I was supposed to switch at half time with my opposite number but when I stood up to go on court she ignored me and stayed on. The team eventually won the game and I was totally embarrassed.

The next day, she readily gave me the first play against the toughest team on the island. I felt like the whole island was watching the game that day. The Tabwewa girls were twice my size and width and I felt like a freak flying all over the grounds trying to defend and intercept without knowing the exact rules anyway. Everyone witnessed this and some said kindly that had I known how to play what an asset I’d be, but of course that wasn’t helpful for my ego. I reflected hard on this later and realized that my teammate, had set up a clever scheme by which she got to play the first easy game and look good, and I got to play the harder game and came out looking awful.

Was this an enforcing of the egalitarian code? I think so and after pondering on the fact that some people don’t appreciate any aura of prestige that might surround heads like mine, with respect to my education or father’s position, I believe that what I experienced that day was a real life encounter with many of Silverman’s issues raised above. In part it was also my fault because I ignored my own handicaps regarding the game to “show off,” possibly deluding myself into the notion that in fact I was better and could damn well play whatever sport I wanted. I was reacting to the people’s egalitarianism by trying to escape it through a foolish gesture of superiority (willing
myself to excel at something I had no clue how to do). Another popular phrase on the island, “ko kan tiroaki?” meaning, unfavorably, “you want attention?!” applies directly to my netball encounter. Aue, e kawa te aba!

The younger generation have definitely picked up on the egalitarian vibe, and though they may not have the same convictions on phosphate and land, many do on leadership and power. Having been brought up in Suva, where I’m a little bit more familiar with indigenous Fijian and Indian notions of protocol and respect (not that I’m skilled at any of these) I found attitudes and behavior on Rabi scandalous, but then, by some maddening organic connection, began to imitate it. Or had that attitude always been inside me? It was not that I saw people acting the opposite of me, it was that I found them acting or thinking just like me. And I have always been self-conscious of the fact that I am generally blunt or downright insolent with my opinions. Here was an island full of people exactly like that, from my three year old, pint sized cousin to a number of unnamed older relatives. I contrast to my father like [blood to mud] and he’s supposed to be the Banaban one...The culture, versus blood question ideally pop’s up again here but that is fodder for another academic project.

I could have spent this entire thesis just on Silverman, comparing and contrasting his observations with my own personal experiences. This would have been perfect and enjoyable but there is a gnawing thought, once in awhile, that my acceptance of his authority might be my own desperate search for reasonable explanations of those Banaban problems I have no idea how to interpret. It is easy to criticize Maude, Grimble, Williams, Macdonald and Binder because they present very one-dimensional pictures of the past. Silverman, on the other hand, while admitting he was doing anthropology,
described histories as well and started off with “this is disconcerting.” I think it’s the honesty that got to me (and the fact that I’m not currently caught up in anthropological debating circles).

In “the field,” researchers usually interact directly with subjects but then produce work that their subjects will never read. The literature becomes the general body of knowledge on what Samoans, Tongans, Banabans, Kanaks or Fijians are like. We always know less about what anthropologists contribute than what they take out and circulate. Silverman is valuable for me because I’m a university student trying to finish my Master’s degree but his book has to be the least comprehensible source for Banabans on Rabi. I had to read through it about fours times over a period of two years before his language, structure and reference points made sense. Nevertheless, I would like to shake him vigorously by the hand for delving into the greatly tangled Banaba and Rabi web and coming out with something that is, at least, unique for being the only one of its kind in depth and breadth on Banabans.

*Britain has just closed the books on a dolorous episode in the history of colonial exploitation in the Pacific Islands in a manner that has some relevance to a sticky situation in which the United States finds itself. Following long litigation, the British government finally settled accounts last week with the displaced people of Banaba, also called Ocean Island, who had gone to court demanding compensation for the destruction of their homeland, a 1,500 acre dot on the map, just south of the equator, by open-cut phosphate mining (Trumbull 1981).*
3.7 Teresia’s routes and roots

I would like to end the thesis on a personal note by discussing my sister’s writing. As I begin this section the following words of our good friend Sia Figiel spring to mind: “My Sister And I have nothing in common. But I follow her around. Anyway” (Figiel 1996: 74). Sometimes the only thing we do have in common is blood and at other times it is a deep commitment to social and historical issues and the will to change dominant power structures. But our blood relationship complicates the latter aspirations. In academia you are not supposed to mix family and work but in my case I have no choice.

Last year she taught me a new word. It was “nepotism.” It means, according to the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, “the practice amongst people of power or influence of favoring their own relatives.” Not that I think I have any great power but this paper may come out as “The John Teaiwa family promoted version of how all good and sensitive Banaban things and ideas should be conducted or interpreted.” I’m not sure what to say to that but I will admit that both my father and elder sister figure favorably in my thesis because a) I objectively admire them as people and b) I subjectively admire them as daughter and sister and c) they are very available as valid scholarly sources for this project. I am privileged to have them in my intellectual and personal life.

I’m always moving in Teresia’s intellectual shadow, even though I am nothing like her in appearance, voice or character. Her approach also situates Banabans within a historical narrative of pity but it is an empowering poetic response to tragedy and displacement. I deeply admire her personal, sensitive and reflective representation of Banaban histories and identity. She does not try to simplify Banaba or Rabi for the
readers, she tells the story in all its complexity cleverly using a personal voice and visual style that she calls “treatment for a video project.” This allows her to paint a picture of Banabaness that soars across ocean and islands (for the “bird’s eye view), and then plunges into the depths of Rabi and Banaba to throw up “disconcerting issues” in righteous anger. In “yaqona/yagoqu: routes and roots of a displaced native” she roots Banabans on both islands through the routes of travel that move Banaban blood and land across the Pacific.

Teresia’s piece immediately appeals to emotion. But not universal human emotion—specific historically contextualized emotions that some humans would find threatening and others liberating.

the camera captures a projectile hurtling from the tail of a frigate bird to the island. i remember so clearly yet vaguely the many wryly and crudely amused comments about ‘islands made of bird shit.’ so little respect for the life cycle. So little respect for birds that can create islands. so little respect for birds that didn’t just come here to shit. frigate birds fly for miles and miles, thousands sometimes, to nest, mate, and reproduce at the same place. giving life to baby frigate birds, they gave life to an island, giving life to an island they gave life to a people (95).

This paper is a self-conscious narrative that appeals to the seemingly helpless, emotional trials of all islanders and individuals who negotiate past, present, family, language, change, modernity, technology, power, disempowerment and identity in a world that layers and layers and layers stuff (shit?) on native peoples. I end this paper with Teresia because she excavated her Banaban self from the tragedy of mining history and still managed to be critical of her present and future with reference to her family relationships. Using poetic metaphors, she literally consumes the land of Fiji to grow roots of her own.
Through references to our grandfather’s consumption of Fijian yaqona (a Fijian root drink), our father’s nurturing of the Fijian agricultural industry, a linguistic fusing of notions in the Fijian and Gilbertese languages, the re-articulation of Silverman’s land equals blood co-efficient, and figurative reclamation of Banaban land from Australia and New Zealand, she weaves a Banaban journey that is cathartic for her and effective for the reader. Yaqona, the word, becomes the link to the Gilbertese notion of “my idea” au iango. This becomes the link to the Fijian yago, the human body, canoe and vessel of movement, this becomes the link to rabe, the original name for Rabi, land of Rabi Islanders, and description of the “second cup” in the Fijian ceremonial yaqona round. This becomes the link to the Gilbertese word rabi which means falling in curves, this becomes the link to her poetic play on words. This becomes the vision through which she reads lines and curves on my grandfather’s dry “kanikanied” (yaqona affected) body. This becomes her web of routes and roots.

The semantic word play is the “between-the-lines” craft, held together by the historical reality of anguish and rage. Consider her description of the “60 Minutes” (1993) documentary coverage of Rabi.

...back to the feature on rabi. they introduced the segment by saying, ‘these are the most pleasantly relocated displaced people in the world.’ the most pleasantly relocated displaced people in the world. i wanted to fly through the television and ram down that white man’s throat the pleasure of being relocated from an island you knew like the back of your hand, having your hand amputated and having someone else’s hand sewn in its place. they make horror movies about shit like this, man. ‘pleasantly relocated displaced people’ is an oxymoron. if you’ve been displaced your relocation cannot be pleasant. especially when you’ve been relocated from a hurricane-free latitude to a high-frequency latitude. man, those first hurricanes the banabans experienced when they were unceremoniously dropped off on rabi by the british, those first hurricanes are legend now (99).
Talk about personalizing decolonization. This article is something far beyond my own random attempts. It’s specific, it’s universal, it’s critical, it’s, in fact, VERY indicative of the complex web of organic/social/cultural/political/economic/spiritual “isms” we have to deal with yesterday, tomorrow and everyday. It’s not neat and tidy or self-evident like most discourse purports to be. It’s ultimate “de-ification” because it’s persuasive, totally readable and informed on a number of sophisticated levels. Her approach reflects the struggle many of us have with voice and articulation while simultaneously holding one foot in a historical whirlpool and the other in a sterile intellectual academy. This scholarship reflects a global need to change the way in which we speak of the world we have to live in—it’s impossible to speak “truthfully” about anything without illustrating the complicated madness of it all, and only a few will be able to speak this way because not everyone has the opportunity, time, energy and space to do so.

“Routes and roots” was written for a 1995 conference in Hawaii called “Contested ground: power and knowledge in Pacific Islands Studies,” and made such an impact on the audience that people still talk about it today. The main issue for me was that other islanders (and non-islanders too) related to and were moved by her story. The Banaban past is part of a history of all kinds of depressing things that happened in the Pacific and many islanders appreciate honest, personal approaches to this. We’ve had so much access to standard, colonial European accounts that alternatives are desperately more interesting and relevant to the increasing insecurity we all feel in a rapidly changing world. 21

21 I think it is hard to convey the exact sense of her approach and subject because only a full replication of the article would do it justice. I discuss it to illustrate how her interpretation of her identity is complex in its interests and commitments. Both Fiji and Banaba mean something, but we are not rooted in them similarly
Speak-uneasy

choke
gulp
trembling voice
saying
i don't think words
are the end-all-and-be-all
but
i do think i
have something important
to say and
choke
gulp
trembling voice
i will speak
although you may not like
my voice and my words
and you may choose not to hear
and you may choose not to listen
to my voice and my words
but
choke
gulp
trembling voice
i promise you it would be better for you
if i were to speak
because in this body
is a scream
the sound of which
will curdle your blood
and kill you

(Teresia Teaiwa, 1995: 50)
3.8 Reflection

if you keep stirring shit, shit stinks. workin in community. academic. practicing the art of not becoming what i critique; practicing the art of not embodying theories of man inspiring illusions of inadequacy and disconnection from next ones; practicing the art of not giving power mind over to crisis cosmo logies. unlearning abstractions of what i already know. but how do i cite a spirit guide, footnote a dream? thinking why i am here. how i am here. who i am becoming. by choice. workin in community. academic. cuz there’s go to be more than this. another way to be beyond cut throat races to master mass surfaces and you still ain’t said what you really thinkin. feelin kane said what the west doesn’t see does not exist. Mistaking maps for territories human and other (Jones 1998: 2).

Would I like to end with a deep thought on Banaban issues and the finer points of time travel? Yes, but I cannot. I have to fall into that reflective young-person-in-academia mood. This roller-coaster journey WAS about who i am too. Au iango, my words on other re-presentations not separated from my person. Now I’ve figured out a bit about where I am coming from. An intellectual step, not a close/d academic encounter.

“Suppose you an I are walking on the road,” said Swamiji, the holy man whose storytelling I was researching in 1985. “You’ve gone to University. I haven’t studied anything. We’re walking. Some child has shit on the road. We both step in it. ‘That’s shit,’ I say. I scrape my foot; it’s gone. But educated people have doubts about everything. You say, ‘What’s this?!’ and you rub your foot against the other...Then you reach down to feel what it could be...Something sticky! You lift some up and sniff it. Then you say, ‘Oh, this is shit!’... ‘Educated people always doubt everything. They lie awake thinking, ‘What was that? Why did it happen? What is the meaning and cause of it?’ Uneducated people pass judgement and walk on. They get a good nights sleep” (Narayan 1993: 679-681).

If frigate bird shit ever lands on my head, or appears beneath my foot I will recall the organic connectedness of life. I will close my eyes and fly from Banaba to Tabiteuea to Rabi to Oklahoma to Washington D.C. to Suva. Who I am, who am I, who, who,
why...? I will ask questions and obsessively analyze because some of us aren’t meant to get good night’s rests. The Banaban/Gilbertese/Rabi Island/Fijian/African American future lies wide open at this point and I’ve managed to take quite a load off my brain. I aki rawata, Ti aki kawa. But I won’t close.
APPENDICES

CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY OF LANDS AGREEMENTS,
ROYALTY PAYMENTS AND TRUST FUND TRANSACTIONS

Sources: Silverman (1971); Maude (1946); Aidney (1994); Binder (1977); Ghai (1987)

1900 Albert Ellis establishes the existence of phosphate on Ocean Island and on May 3
obtains signatures of the “King” agreeing that the Pacific Islands Company
shall have sole right to work the deposits for 999 years at the rate of £50 a year.
The Banabans ask that land with fruit bearing trees not be mined. Ocean Island is
a total of 1470 acres of phosphate rich rock.

1901 The Company receives legal license from the British Government for mining on
Jan 1 for a period of 21 years. August 13, a second license is given for 99 years
with a stipulation for a replacement of the annual £50 rent to be replaced with a
royalty of 6d. a ton. Ocean Island is annexed into the Gilbert and Ellice Islands
Protectorate on September 28.

1902 The Pacific Phosphate Company is created under the original Company and all
responsibilities for mining are transferred to them on December 31.

1909 The Center of colonial administration has been moved to Ocean Island. Acting
Resident Commissioner Mahaffy expresses concern for the alienation of
Banabans from their land. The royalties from the mining are paid directly to the
GEIP Government for administration purposes and the RC is directly responsible
for negotiating land and royalty issues between the Company and the Banabans.
The next Resident Commissioner, Qualye-Dickson decides to restrict mining
practices of the Company in the interests of the native inhabitants but Ellis
protests vehemently to his policies. Quayle-Dickson is subsequently removed as
RC.

1913 Till this point the Company has been mining all the land they needed under a
“Phosphate and Trees Purchase” agreement whereby the Company took land that
also held trees and agreed to replant them later. The Company requests further
land from the government (looking after the Banabans’ interests) and they agree
to include three new areas for mining. Signature from landowners are received
and direct payment are promised to them. In addition a royalty of 6d. per ton is to
be paid to the government. This money was to be used for the benefit of the
community and royalties would be paid to all Banabans who leased their land to
the Company. Once again the Company agreed to replant all coconut and food-
bearing trees. 250 extra acres were acquired after Quayle-Dickson’s successor,
E. Carylon Eliot persuaded the Banabans. Eliot, like QD wanted a trust fund established for the Banabans in the likely event of Ocean Island becoming uninhabitable.

1916  The GEIP becomes the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony.

1920  The United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand take over the phosphate mining activities for a price of £3 million from the PPC. They create a body called the British Phosphate Commissioners which consisted of three representatives from each government to administer to the phosphate agricultural needs in each country. Their duties are separate from the executive duties of the business itself. The organization is a non-profit venture committed solely to securing cheap phosphate for their national needs. Ultimately Australia and New Zealand benefited most because the UK has their fertilizer needs previously met from other colonies.

1928  The Commissioners begin to seek another 150 acres in 1923. The Resident Commissioner, Arthur Grimble proposes this to the Banabans who refused though the younger generations agree to accept at a higher rate of lease. Both positions are refused by the Government and a Mining Ordinance No. 4 is enforced for the compulsory acquisition of land. By now the Banabans are advised to start thinking about an alternative home.

1930  257 owners had alienated their land by now and were earning £6 a year in income. The Banaban Trust Fund was increasing at £2,600 a year.

1931  150 acres was taken under the 1928 Ordinance. Rent was at 2s. 6d. per acre to be paid to the Colony, each owner received direct compensation for destroyed trees, each landholder was assigned £150 per acre for surface mining rights, and 2d. per ton royalty was to be paid to a new Banaban Provident Fund until the Fund reached £175,000. £20,000 in the old Trust Fund formed the capital of this Provident Fund. 8 1/2 d. royalty per ton was paid to the RC for community needs. As a result of all this there now exists four funds: the Old Banaban Royalty Trust Fund, the New Banaban Royalty Trust Fund, the Banaban Provident fund and the Banaban Landholders Fund. The Banaban Provident Fund was created for the purchase of a new home. Till this time no annuities have been paid out on any of the accumulated funds. In July High Commissioner of the Western Pacific informs the Banabans that surface rights belong to the landowners but any minerals underneath belong to the government. The RC stated that there are no clear native customs regarding underground rights, with the exception of the bangabangas.
1937 On December 10 annuities are paid out to each Banaban at the rate of £8 per adult and £4 per child, this scheme applies to both full and half Banabans. Additional annuities were paid to owners of leased land at £2 for areas less than 1 acre, £4 for 1-2 acres, £6 for 2-5 acres, £8 for 5-10 and £10 for over 10 acres. In this year the 1470 acres of total land is divided between 316 owners. 1080 acres are believed to be mineable. Each piece of land is held by individuals who divide these according to custom between children by blood or adoption. 19 Rules establishing the relationship between kinship, land and locality are established between the government and the elders.

1940 The General Manager of the BPC, Harold Gaze seeks a further 230 acres of mining land. The terms of this agreement are £175 for surface rights, 2 d. per ton for the Banaban Provident Fund with an increased limit of £250,000. It must be noted that the further acquisitions were sought even before all the already obtained lands were mined. The Banabans agree and express interest in acquiring Wakaya Island as a second, not replacement, home. Reasons given for this move include worries about the preservation of their unique culture, especially with respect to European influence.

1942 The government finds Wakaya unsuitable for supporting a large population. One of the major investors in the PPC, Mr. Lever, offers his copra plantation, Rabi Island, instead for a sum of £25,000 Australian. This is accepted in March. World War II explodes into the Pacific and all but three Europeans evacuate Ocean Island. In August, Japanese forces land and take over leadership. Some Banabans are killed including all the lepers. In 1943 there is a serious food shortage and the Banabans are dispersed to Japanese camps in Kosrae, Tarawa and Nauru. During this time records of land, genealogies and Lands Commission disappear.

1945 Australians occupy Ocean Island and find one survivor of a group of 100 young laborers left behind. The government decides that it is best if Banabans are collected from camps and transported straight to Rabi. This is done expeditiously and the Banabans are provided for by Fiji Law under the Banaban Settlement Act. Rotan Tito, speaking on behalf of Banabans pushes for distribution of the Landholders and Royalty Trust Funds at the individual level, paid out per acre. Naturally those who do not hold as much land as others are more satisfied with the “trust” system than the larger owner. All annuity funds are now lumped into one sum under the direction of the Banabans Trust Fund Board.

1947 The BPC seeks the rest of the land, 671 acres. They offer better terms for the Banabans which are accepted. The Banabans have already decided to remain on Rabi. The new leasing terms do not account for inflation and the Banaban Advisor on Rabi is told not to assist Banabans in their negotiations with the BPC. A large boundary-marking expedition is commenced to mark this final land acquisition and almost four hundred adult Banabans journey to Ocean Island for the event, at
the expense of the BPC. They are offered £A200 for surface rights in one group of lands and £A65 in the second. Royalties were increased to 1s. 3d. per ton. In addition to these terms, a sum of £7500 was offered to all landowners of the new area for their own use. This is disposed of with respect to acreage owned. The 1947 agreement was for 30 years with no provision for re-negotiation.

1965 Higher rates of payments are paid out on the existing bonus and annuity system. The bonuses were paid out to landowners of mined areas on the basis of holding size and the annuity was paid out to all Banabans on Rabi equally. The Council wants the total payments to better reflect the land ownership but the government resists. The funds are paid out to the Banaban Trust Fund which is under Rabi Council control.

1967 A Banaban delegation goes to London to voice grievances against the Company and what they perceive to be undervalued compensation for mined lands. They are offered £80,000 by the Commonwealth office which they refuse. A meeting is held in Wellington, New Zealand between the BPC and GEIC to discuss the rate of phosphate benefits. The Banabans refuse to send a representative.

1968 Rotan Tito leads a contingent that meets before a United Nations Committee of 24. By now his sons, Tebuke and Tekoti are respectively, Council Manager and Managing Director of the Rabi Holdings Company. A representative from the GEIC, Reuben Uatioa, opposes the contingent. The Banabans ask for a return of Ocean Island from the GEIC but the UN committee, though sympathetic, can not interfere due to the ‘territorial integrity’ of the UK Empire. No settlement is achieved as a result.

1971 The Banabans bring a $120 million writ against the BPC and the Attorney General of the United Kingdom. John Macdonald, a British barrister, presents their case. Ocean Island No.1 is against the BPC for damages regarding the breach of the phosphate and trees agreement. Ocean Island No. 2 is against the AG regarding the 1931 and 1947 royalty payment agreements which they claim were far less than the proper rates. They had been under a trust relationship with Britain at the time and the Crown therefore owed them the difference between the proper and paid amounts.

1974 The Banabans are now claiming £21,389,783 from the Crown for damages. The action that follows is the longest and costliest in the history of the British Courts and includes the travel of the entire judiciary party to Banaba to examine the evidence.

1976 Judge Megarry finds the Crown guilty of moral negligence but innocent in a legal sense.
1977  An ex-gratia payment of $10 million Australian is offered as well as £1 million for development purposes. If the Banabans accept this money they can never claim monetary rights in this matter again.

1981  The money is accepted and provisions are made for its management under the Banaban Settlement Act. By now it has accrued to $4 million in interest. The major thrust of the provision is the freezing of the capital sum. Only the interest can be used to administer Banaban needs. In practice the capital is subject to exchange fluctuations and over the years the sum grows or shrinks appropriately contributing to a general misconception of its value by Banabans. The money is divided between banks in Copenhagen, London and Paris which invest the funds in bonds in other countries.

1989  $1,169,870 Fiji is withdrawn from the capital amount by the Rabi Island Council Chaired by Reverend Terubea Rongorongo. A further $NZ 172,672 is transferred to the National Bank in Fiji. $F 400,000 was transferred from the Westpac Bank to the National Bank as collateral against an overdraft. In July $NZ 950,231 is transferred to the Council’s accounts in Sydney and Kiribati and a new account is opened at the Bank of New Zealand in Savusavu.

1991  $KR500,000 of capital funds in Copenhagen are transferred to a private account in Sydney. An “investment trip” is taken by Council members, except Tebuke Rotan, to New York, London, Copenhagen and Geneva. The Council votes themselves allowances totaling $F 242,478. The total cost of the mission is $398,000. In this year $F 2,472,805 in capital is withdrawn for purposes outside the benefit of the Rabi community. Council employees are not being paid and the population is not receiving annuities. The fees of Banaban university students are not paid and this situation is the impetus for the coup on Rabi in December. A group of representatives, minus the Chairman, is sent to Rabi on the pretext of obtaining signatures to release funds for the school fees and is attacked at Nuku.

1992  Banaban needs are met by four government appointed interim administrators.

1996  A new council is elected, including the first woman and a Chairman who has not lived on Rabi for thirty years.
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