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# Recovering Ocean Island

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*Keywords* phosphate; mining; land; Banaba

My story is about a two and a half square mile island in the central Pacific that became the focus, along with nearby Nauru, of British, Australian and New Zealand agricultural desires for nearly a century. Banaba, also known as Ocean Island, translates as ‘the rock’ in the Kiribati (Gilbertese) language. Indigenous identities here and across most of the Pacific are deeply rooted in place. In the Kiribati language this is reflected in the term *te aba* which incorporates both the land and the people, and *kainga*, ‘the place that feeds’, that also refers to the local family unit.

Both Nauru and Banaba are rich in phosphate rock, the essential ingredient in super phosphate, a fertiliser used intensively on Australian and New Zealand farms for most of the twentieth century. Through an eighty-year process of mining, the rock of both these islands was scattered across countless farms in and beyond the British antipodes. In this version of Banaba’s rich and complex history, I juxtapose the stories and perspectives of several communities connected to the mining venture across time and space. There are the Indigenous Banabans who essentially lost their land rights; Gilbertese labourers who signed up to work in the mines on the lands of their distant Banaban relatives; and the Rabi Islanders, the Banabans who now live on Rabi in Fiji and perform a specific version of their historical drama every year on December 15, the anniversary of their Fiji landing. These are combined with a visual and literary reflection of phosphate history from New Zealand and Australia.

Elsewhere I have undertaken a more in-depth analysis of the multi-sited research process that was required to track Banaba’s fragmented histories (Teaiwa ‘Our Sea’). As the land was broken through mining, so too are the stories of the communities and individuals whose lives were profoundly transformed by this process. In the paragraphs below I illustrate just one cross-section of some of these peoples and lands through brief but telling critical juxtapositions.

## Diffraction

Donna Haraway’s (1997) interpretation and application of the term diffraction is useful for tracking the Banaba story. Diffraction occurs when a wave of light splits

as it passes through a narrow slit or aperture. Following the paths of diffraction constitutes a kind of historiographical technique. Haraway describes the potential of diffraction, in contrast to reflection and reflexivity:

Diffraction is an optical metaphor for the attempt to make a difference in this world[...]. Diffraction patterns record the history of interaction, interference, reinforcement, difference. Diffraction is about heterogenous history, not about originals. (Haraway 273)

One can imagine the rock of Banaba split into twenty million tons of tiny particles that, over eighty years, must now be dispersed across the planet via the British colonial machine and the industries of mining, shipping, farming, food and clothing manufacturing (see Teaiwa 'Our Sea'). An island worked so intensely holds a great deal of meaning for those who worked it, those who consumed it and those whose identities are rooted in it.

The mining venture began in 1900 not long after Albert Ellis, an Australian turned fiercely loyal New Zealander, discovered the valuable rock on Ocean Island. Phosphate was essential for both New Zealand and Australian agriculture and Ellis quickly secured access to the mineral in a negotiation not fully understood or endorsed by the Banaban community. He also raised the British flag and brought the island quickly under the jurisdiction of the British Empire. Over the next few decades the Indigenous community was displaced from their land as it literally disappeared from beneath their feet. A multinational corporation—the British Phosphate Commissioners (BPC)—combining British, Australian and New Zealand interests, ran the industry from 1920 (see Williams and Macdonald). The phosphate deposits and the highly developed mining infrastructure made the island a major target for Japanese occupation during World War II. This resulted in a dispersal of the community to Kosrae, Nauru and the Gilbert Islands (Kiribati) to various war camps. After the war ended, a phosphate company ship collected all the Banabans and moved them to Rabi in Fiji, an island purchased for them out of their own trust funds. This move allowed the company unfettered access to all phosphate deposits, some of which were under villages and homes.

By the mid 1990s, years after the mining had stopped, people on Rabi would say: *e kawa te aba*, pity on the land, pity on the people. This lament was repeated across a community that, in the 1970s, bravely attempted to sue the former colonial administration for not honouring several clauses in the land lease agreement negotiated with the company. The trial drew great interest and support from the British public and the judge presiding over the case was sympathetic, but he could assign no monetary compensation for 'bad' colonial policies and practices (see *Go Tell It to the Judge*). So while the Banabans won a moral—but not legal—victory against the British in their own high court, the company that had mined out their homeland for phosphate was never held responsible. Similarly, the governments of Australia and New Zealand, the shipping companies, the farmers, labourers, food manufacturers, and consumers who benefited from the mining were also never held accountable. Today, memory

of the once important industry resides in ageing generations of Australians, New Zealanders, Gilbertese, Tuvaluans<sup>1</sup> and of course, Banabans.

While anthropologists such as Sidney Mintz have tracked the history of agricultural and colonial products, in our everyday lives we rarely consider the stories behind the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the milk we drink, or the grass beneath our feet. When I began my research on Banaba in 1997 I was intent on writing about the injustices of the mining and the displacement of the Banabans to Fiji. Then, while combing through the archives of the British phosphate commissioners it became very clear that there were multiple, layered and diverse experiences of the island. It meant different things to different stakeholders and the Banabans emerged not just as victims, but, at times, unknowing agents in their own displacement. The stakeholders included not just Indigenous Banabans but the British administrators, the Australian and New Zealand company managers, politicians in all three countries, Gilbertese, Ellice Islander, Japanese and Chinese labourers, Scandanavian ship captains, the Australian wheat industry, the New Zealand beef industry and the list goes on (see Teaiwa 'Our Sea').

This diversity gave me pause and forced me to consider non-Indigenous perspectives. The primary evidence in the archives also compelled me to pay attention to the six-square kilometre island itself. The mining company had so meticulously chronicled and photographed every centimetre of their physical development that I felt like I was viewing the rise and fall of the industrial revolution on a tiny island in the very centre of the vast Pacific. The agency of the landscape itself thus came into relief. Ocean Island fractured like light through a prism and spread across the globe enabling the production of all manner of consumer goods.<sup>2</sup>

Between 1900 and 1980 as the technology became more sophisticated, the pieces of the island began to disappear faster. Beginning with pick and shovel the industry morphs into a winding complex of tramways, skips, hoppers and dryers facilitating the extraction of vast chunks of the island; siphoning it directly into the holds of ships and off to ports in Australia and New Zealand. I thus started to think about the very materiality of mining and the island itself and to consider this thing called 'the land', *te aba* to Banabans and I-Kiribati, as tiny particles of phosphate rock. This shift in scale had the effect of optical zooming so that I ceased to think of Banaba as an island located just under the equator—a fixed homeland that most Banabans would never return to—but rather, a place that was literally, in motion.

Jim Clifford has written that, 'Thinking historically is a process of locating oneself in space and time. And a location . . . is an itinerary rather than a bounded site' (Clifford 11). The histories of Banaba are multiple itineraries or trajectories of an island, and thus productively tracked through the method of diffraction and of thinking through human and material interactions and interferences. And if Indigenous identity is rooted in place, in specific landscapes, then Banaban land and Banaban identities have now become coordinates between islands and landscapes. As the island fractures into pieces and moves across the ocean it



creates and breaks countless relationships between peoples, places and products.

In the next sections I juxtapose specific ethnographic moments in which I encountered diverse, and often competing, experiences of these multilayered Banaba histories.

### Kieuea

I am looking at a page in a notebook belonging to Henry Evans Maude in the special collections of the University of Adelaide Barr Smith Library (see Figure 1). The late ‘Harry’ Maude is well known as former Professor of Pacific History at the Australian National University and lands commissioner for the British colonial administration in the Gilbert and Ellice islands in the late 1930s.

This fragment is from one of the notebooks from Maude’s 1930 lands survey on Ocean Island. The word ‘finished’, scrawled to the left of the name ‘Kieuea’ at the top of the page indicates that this land has already been mined out. Nei Kieuea is my great, great grandmother and her name continues in our family through my elder sister and younger cousin. Kieuea literally means chief

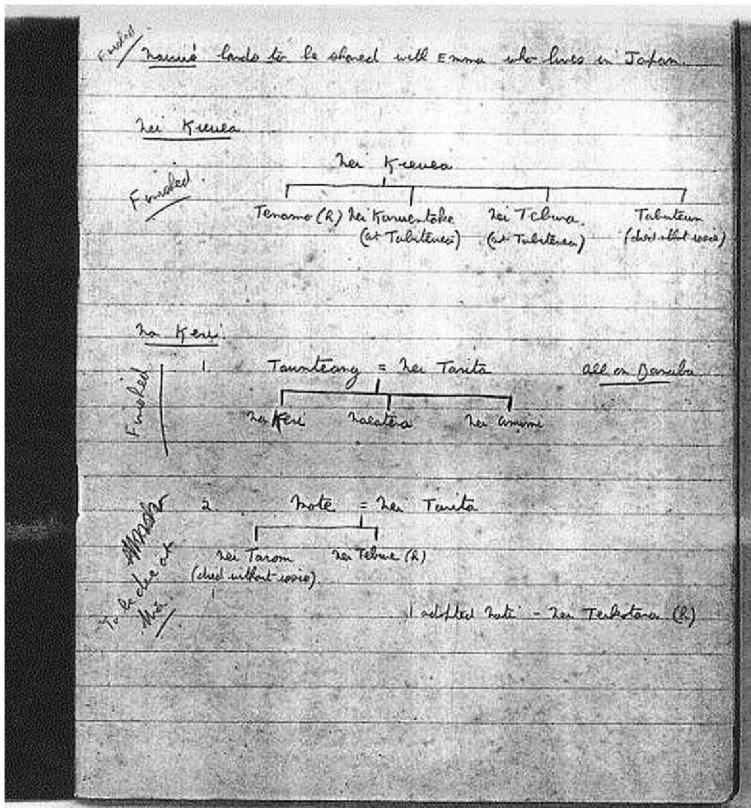


Figure 1 A page from HE Maude’s notebook (Pacific Collection, Barr-Smith Library).

weaver, as in weaver of mats. Kieuea te unaine (the elder) had four children. Tabuteun died without children, and Tenamo, Karuentake and Tebuna lived on Tabiteuea in the Gilbert Islands, the home of their father, Toariki. Tenamo had a child, Teaiwa, but by then the relationship with Banaba, a few hundred miles away, was broken. When my grandfather was born he had no idea he was Banaban until he was recruited from Tabiteuea by the BPC to work in the mines. When he got to the island his relatives identified him and he never left the community. Today his descendants live on Tarawa in Kiribati; on Rabi and in Suva in Fiji; in Wellington, New Zealand; Canberra, Australia; and in New York, in the USA.

### Lovely Banaba

I am on a yacht called *Martha*, headed for Banaba. I am twenty-five years old and have two male cousins with me because my uncles on Tarawa think it is ludicrous that a single woman of my age should sail off with a crew of men she does not know on a three-day journey in a small boat.

I have hired this yacht because there is no regular transport to Banaba. In the 1930s every ship sailing through the central Pacific stopped at the island but, in 2000 the wait for transport is months long. As a result, several passengers stranded on Tarawa and much needed cargo are loaded onto our boat. I get the captain's bunk and we set sail. A few hours into the journey two of the passengers spontaneously start to sing.

On the beach and the streets of Banaba  
 I'm in the shadows of a golden dream  
 When I'm watching the boys and girls playing  
 Happy working for the BPC  
 Lovely beach lovely place of Banaba  
*Aomata* [the people], *I-Matang* [the white people], *a kukurei* [are happy]  
 Everybody including myself  
 Happy working for the BPC...

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

Lovely beach lovely place of Banaba  
*Aomata*, *I-matang*, *a kukurei*  
 Everybody including myself  
 Happy working for the BPC...

When we arrive on Banaba the island is nothing like the song.



Figure 2 Banaba in 2000. Photograph by K. Teaiwa.

### Remembering

I was late for my appointment with Teweia and very embarrassed when I arrived. I had been held up in the *mwaneaba*, a large meeting house, at the new Temwamwaung Primary School where the community wanted to watch the videos I had recorded of the school's name-changing ceremony. I arrived at Teweia's house on the back of Tina Mangarita's motorbike—*Tina* meaning 'mother', the title given to nuns. I apologised profusely for my tardiness and we made our way into his small house. I think I was far more concerned about the time than he was.

Unlike many of the other houses I'd visited, Teweia's was on the ground and had walls made from the mid-rib of the coconut palm. I was used to climbing up to sit on the raised thatched floor of people's houses, but in his we had to duck down and sit on mats covering the sand. Like my grandfather, Teaiwa, Teweia Intiua is from Utiroa village on Tabiteuea Meang or 'Tab North' as it's called. When I interviewed him he was 70 years old. He told me of his relationship with my grandfather:

*I rangi ni kinaa Teaiwa bwa rarou ngke I roko mai Kosrae... Te ikawai riki ngaia nakoju bwa e a tia ni iein ma Takeuea ae natin Kabuabwai ao tao uoman natia, ma I ti uringa Terianako ae e mena irouia... I aki ata natia ane Tabakitoa ae e atongaki bwa e mena iroun tibuna Tebwerewa I Terikiai. Eng, I rangi ni uringa Teaiwa n te tai anne bwa kanga te aomata ae rau arona ao e mamanging, ma te tia akawa ae koro arona... e rangi n rabakau te akawa ae te taumata, ao I nanako n akawa ma ngaia n kawa are Kabuna.*

He was a close friend although he was much older than myself and he was married to Takeua, the child of Kabuabwai and they had two children, one was Terianako whom I used to see with her parents and the one you mentioned, Tabakitoa, who lived with Tebwerewa in Terikiai. Yes, I remember clearly Teaiwa then, he was rather unsettled and he drank... However, he was a good fisherman particularly with the *taumata* style of fishing using a fishing line and a pair of goggles... we used to go fishing in Kabuna (southern end of Tabiteuea North).

I played some of the old BPC mining footage for Teweia on my digital camera and he immediately became excited. He recalled that he went to Banaba with his parents in 1942 when he was about eight years old and said living conditions were poor. For example, they had to collect their own firewood for cooking and when people were sick it was a big expedition to carry them to the hospital. There was no ambulance and a general lack of medical equipment. He said that pregnant women in particular struggled in these conditions.

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

Teweia also described in detail the movement of the phosphate from the grab at the rock-face, through the aerial cable and skip mechanism and into the crushing and drying hoppers. He reflected on the fact that some sections of the fields were mined with a grab and the others by hand. He described how each system had a number, ‘*kaeboro n tai akekei tai n te tai arei . . . iai number teuana, te skip number teuana . . . ao number uoua te skip e naba*’ [‘here was cableway no.1, skip no.1. and skip no.2 . . .’] and then he described how he would shift from operating the cable to drive the motorboats containing the baskets that dumped the phosphate into the hold of the ships. Like the other miners I interviewed, Teweia called the phosphate rock *te tano*—that is, sand/ soil/ clay/ ground/ land—as opposed to *te aba*.

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

In the process of writing history we often leave out the things we forget or don’t know, preferring to present as authoritative an account as possible. In most oral accounts, stories are inflected with the very process of remembering. In between verbal utterances there are silences, pauses, furrowed brows, heads down which suddenly rise when a memory or image leaps back into consciousness. When I asked specific questions like, ‘What do you remember about the island as a boy?’ Teweia reflected for a moment and then exclaimed, ‘*Te mwakuri!*’ ‘The work!’ He remembered that before the war there was so much work, so much activity on Banaba. This contrasted dramatically with the ghost of a mining town I explored when I visited Banaba on the *Martha* (see Teaiwa *Visualising*).

Teweia worked for the company for 11 years and left in 1965.



Figure 3 Teweia Intiua, Tabiteuea 2000. Photograph by K. Teaiwa.

### The Better Farming Train

In the novel *Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living*, Carrie Tiffany writes about life aboard 'the better farming train' as it winds its way around Victoria in Australia in the late 1930s. The better farming train is a kind of extension service for the department of agriculture. The men tell farmers about new, better, scientific ways to increase their production, and the women tell wives how to become better home economists. Aboard this train is Mr. Petergree, an expert in superphosphate. He is able to tell you exactly where any sample of soil comes from by tasting it. Many test his skills but he can identify a sample even when he is totally drunk and when the soil has been mixed with foreign elements to trick him.

The narrator, protagonist and soon-to-be wife of Mr. Petergree, Jean Finnegan, writes:

The soil and cropping wagon is a relief. It has been newly added to the train for our tour into the wheat growing districts of Victoria. The wagon's glass-roofed—all sunlight and air and waving plants, a greenhouse on rails. We walk down the aisles as if down the middle of a field parted by God. The wheat in the good field on the left is tall and vigorous, the stems reaching out to touch our skirts; on the right just a few dry sticks poke from the soil.

*The soil is hungry for phosphate- use SUPERPHOSPHATE*, says the sign. There can be no doubting the magic of it.

Mary Maloney explained super phosphate to me like this: 'It's an earth mineral, a powdered earth mineral, the best ever discovered, and it makes you light up'.

'How do you mean?'

'Well . . .' Mary's words were unsteady. 'I'm just telling what I heard, not what I've seen, but when you touch it in the sack or on the ground it makes you glow like there's a light inside you. Dad heard of a bloke down at Drouin who spread it in the morning and woke up in the night with his hands all alight. They found him in the dam next morning, stiff with cold.'

Sister Crock said his death was clearly a case of poor farm hygiene. But I rolled the strange new word around on my tongue—super phosphate, super phosphate, super phosphate. (Tiffany 7)



In the novel, the application of super phosphate doesn't do much for the drought-stricken country, and the farmers end up losing everything, along with their faith in science.

## Dancing

These eternal holiday routines, Christmas rituals—Midsummer nostalgia, what do they mean to us? Why do we repeat, voluntarily or under duress—those same patterns: waiting, tiredness, disappointment, gloom—from one year to the next? Is it because these holidays allow us to keep our common past alive? We do battle together against time, separation, ageing and death. Together we experience acute sorrow over the transitory nature of life—we are refugees from the past, there is no going back. And who would want to? (*Tell Me What You Saw*)

Every 15 December, the Banaban community gathers at Nuku on Rabi Island to celebrate their first landing in Fiji in 1945. The day has a set format that has been followed for several decades. It begins with the arrival of the Chairman, a marching display—including a brass band—the flag raising, the Chairman's speech, cultural performances, lunch, and then rugby games. I captured this sequence of events in a short visual essay I made in 2002.

The film begins with a shot of the *SOFÉ*, the *Spirit of Free Enterprise*, an inter-island vessel which travels between Suva, Savusavu and Rabi every December bringing Banabans home from the big islands of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. A few days before the 15th, the boat anchors in the waters at Tabona near Tabiang and outboard motors shuttle back and forth bringing passengers and cargo to the island. In December 2000 I set up my camera on a tripod on the beach and shot this activity for half an hour. Funds permitting, Banabans get direct passage to Banaba once a year in December. Otherwise transport is limited to a long boat or plane ride to Savusavu, four-hour bus ride to Karoko, and another boat to Rabi.

Every 15 December, the Banaban Dancing Group, for years led by a man named Namaraki, performs a drama to commemorate the historical experiences of the Banaban people. Significant historical events and aspects of Banaban culture are always depicted in this drama. The first is the importance of the underwater caves or *bwangabwanga*. These were owned by certain *kainga*, or hamlets, as *maniba* or wells where rainwater that had seeped through the earth collected. Originally only women were allowed to enter these caves to draw water, which they carried to the surface in coconut shells. In the drama, female dancers ease their way along the ground using hands, hips and feet to illustrate the process of collecting water. Martin Silverman theorised the domain of underground caves as the space dominated by women compared to the sea, dominated by men. On both my trips to Banaba, I made a point of visiting the *bwangabwanga* and crawling through the narrow spaces between caves. Since the arrival of the phosphate company the taboo over men entering the caves has lifted. Both times I explored the *bwangabwanga* I was the only woman in a group of four or five men.

The second important feature of the annual drama is the arrival of Albert Ellis and the discovery of phosphate. The leader of the Banaban Dancing Group usually plays Ellis and offers the Banabans ‘One pound note or twenty-four pennies’ in exchange for mining their land. One stanza of the accompanying ‘How Pity’ song illustrates this:

It gave its price the BPC  
One pound note, 24 penny  
They said, they said  
Ti tangira 24 penny bae plenty riki kanoana  
Ao an animai ao kare matam tei Buritan o,  
  
You really gave a bad result  
Nakoia student of Ocean Island.

It 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

*Chorus:*

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

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

This song laments the pitiful legacy of the Banabans and is always sung on December 15th. Betarim Rimon describes the same mistake over money made on Banaba but writes that the people were offered a one-pound note or six pennies rather than twenty-four. According to him the representative of the BPC, ‘... in one hand held out the six loose pennies, in the other he held out a pound note and asked the landowners, “which one would you prefer to be the price of your soil per ton?”’ (37). The Banabans picked the pennies because they were more impressive than the simple paper.

The Japanese occupation of Banaba between 1941 and 1945 is usually depicted as a fearful period in which many were executed. The group always acts out at least one beheading. This period in fact also included the execution of about one hundred Gilbert and Ellice Island labourers whom the BPC left behind before the Japanese landed (see Pacific Collection 100–4). Only one man named Kabunare survived to tell the story.

The Japanese forces removed the Banabans and a few Ellice Islander and Gilbertese families, like Teweia’s, to camps on Kosrae, Nauru and Tarawa and soon after the war ends the dancing group enacts the journey by ship from these camps to Rabi. The first thing they highlight about life on the new island is the major environmental changes. They perform the experience of living in tents or beneath ‘awnings’, as they were commonly called, for the first two months on Rabi. Since the Banabans arrived on Rabi during the hurricane season, life under a tent was particularly perilous. Coming from the dry central Pacific they were unaccustomed to rainy or windy weather.

A popular comedic feature of the drama is the Banabans’ first experience with cows in the middle of some of the first nights on the island. Most of them had never seen such animals and thought they were large dogs or ghosts. The drama



usually ends with celebrations of enduring faith in God and Banaban survival on a new land. This is then followed by choreographed dance performances in which Banaban communities illustrate the new forms of music and dance that have been developed on Rabi.

### First Home, Second Home

In 2003 I invited a Maori artist to create an installation based on my research. Brett Graham, renowned New Zealand sculptor, created an exhibition called *Kainga Tahī, Kainga Rua: First Home, Second Home*. This featured 10 large containers coated in phosphate, each representing two million tonnes of removed land. The spheres above the coffin-like structures alluded to the rusting and once mighty infrastructure of the mining enterprise (see Teaiwa 'Our Sea'). Such industry was hurriedly left behind when the BPC departed in 1980



**Figure 4** *Kainga Tahī, Kainga Rua* by Brett Graham, Adam Art Gallery, Wellington. Reproduced with permission from the artist.

after dozens of Banabans from Rabi returned to protest on the island, bombing the mines, and were arrested by the Gilbertese government. My grandparents were among the protestors (see Teaiwa 'Teaiwa's Kainga').

On the three spheres Graham projected the following images: a top-dressing plane following the contours of the Wanganui hillside in New Zealand; a metal grab digging up the rock in a Banaban mine; and the Banabans, reliving their journey through song and dance. *Kainga*, 'the land that feeds' and 'home', has similar meanings in Maori and Gilbertese and sometimes when Nauruans and Banabans visit Australia and New Zealand they laugh and say, 'this is my home (and my land) too'. Literally.

Sir Albert Ellis, who discovered the phosphate on Banaba in 1900 and eventually became the New Zealand phosphate Commissioner, passed away on 11 July 1951, and the last I read of him during my archival journey was in part of a speech I found in the Maude papers in Adelaide. Ellis was erecting a memorial on Rabi marking the Banaban arrival to their new home in December, 1945. With unfaltering faith in the good of the phosphate enterprise, he proclaimed:

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

In 2009 Banabans are amongst the poorest in Fiji and usually cannot afford the tinned meat produced from the cattle fed by the grass grown on lands nourished by their home island. So they are growing their own food, fishing, choreographing dances and composing songs to tell stories of their two homes (see Shennan and Tekenimatang). Their efforts to better integrate into Fiji society have regularly been thwarted by the political instability of the country over the last 22 years.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, they have picked up a favourite Fiji pastime—growing and drinking kava, the root of a pepper plant which is a natural sedative. People sit around the kava bowl, drinking and tell stories or singing. This can go on for hours from dusk into the early hours of the morning.

The Banaban Dancing Group no longer exists. Its members are dispersed and Namaraki now lives in Kiribati. For a time the children of Tabiang Primary School took over the role of performing the historical drama on 15 December and for tourists who visited on the ship Tui Tai. In 2008 a new group emerged called the Rabi Banaban Dancing Group and has taken over this role of preserving the historical dance theatre. In September that year they performed the story of Banaba for my wedding celebrations in our *kainga* on Rabi. My husband, Nick, and his family, all in attendance, are from farming country in Victoria.

## Acknowledgements

*This piece was written in memory of my dear friend and mentor, Greg Dening. I would also like to thank Paul Arthur, two anonymous reviewers, and my husband Nicholas Mortimer and his mother, Nancy Mortimer, for their comments.*

## Notes

- [1] Ellice Islanders because Tuvaluans at their independence from Britain in 1978. Both the Ellice Islanders and Gilbertese were mining workers on Banaba from the early 1900s till 1980. While the Gilbertese or I-Kiribati are closely related to the Banabans through ancient inter-marriages, the Ellice Islanders are more recent kin of the Banabans through similar exchanges.
- [2] In Australia and New Zealand the superphosphate fertiliser supported sheep, wheat and a variety of grains, and cattle and dairy farms. These provided significant exports for the two countries, the value of which cannot be underestimated in terms of the economic development of both countries in the 20th Century. In 2001 I began to make inquiries with the Fertiliser Industry Federation of Australia (FIFA) about their foundations in the work of the British Phosphate Commissioners as their website proclaimed this genealogy proudly. Within a couple of months all references to the BPC were removed from the site.
- [3] Fiji experienced two military coups in 1987, a civilian coup in 2000 and another military coup in 2006. Central to these overthrows of government were the tensions between the Indigenous Fijians and Indo Fijians, most of whom are descendants of indentured workers brought to Fiji to work on sugar plantations from 1879 and who now form a significant portion of the population. All other minority groups thus exist within a political framework shaped by bi-racial politics—the word ‘race’ is very specifically used—that rarely factor in Fiji’s multicultural makeup. The 2006 coup initiated by army commander Frank Bainimarama purports to be in service of a truly multicultural Fiji.

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