

## THE BANABAN RESETTLEMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR PACIFIC ENVIRONMENTAL MIGRATION

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In the mid-1940s, Banaban Islanders relocated to Rabi Island in Fiji. The decision was the culmination of decades of phosphate mining on Banaba in colonial times. This article examines the context and long-term impacts of policies and legal frameworks relevant to the Banaban resettlement. The Banaban experience is a significant case study because it involved relocation of an entire island population rather than individual or family migration, and the resettlement crossed international boundaries. Although the Banaban resettlement is unique and was contingent on peculiar colonial and factual circumstances it offers insights for environmental migration. Long-term preparation establishing trust funds, advance land purchase, and the adoption of policies favorable to preservation of the community's culture were the principal reasons for the resettlement's success. How the Banabans retained their group identity, adopted their indigenous system of self-government, and maintained their social structures and world views are proofs of the resettlement's success.

MIGRATION, whether by individuals or entire communities, is not new in the Pacific. Pacific Islanders have moved great distances in the past. Recent events and processes, however, suggest that migration resulting from environmental change is expected to increase significantly over the coming years (International Organization for Migration 2009). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change projects that the "greatest single impact" of environmental change will be on "human migration and displacement" (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 1990), because many Pacific islands, including several low-lying atoll states, are at risk of flooding from

increasingly frequent storms and rising sea-levels (Nicholls and Tol 2006). In some cases, the relocation of entire island communities may be necessary.

This paper focuses on the Banaban resettlement on Rabi Island, Fiji, a case of community relocation commencing in the 1940s that merits detailed consideration for its implications for potential climate-change relocations in the Pacific. The Banaban resettlement on Rabi is a significant case study on environmental migration in that it involved the relocation of an entire island population, as opposed to gradual, individual, or family migration; the resettlement was triggered by gradual resource depletion through decades of phosphate mining on Banaba Island, which made the island unfit for human habitation; and the resettlement crossed international boundaries, in contrast to internal or intrastate relocations. Because the relocation happened more than 60 years ago, a study of the long-term impact of resettlement and of the policies and legal frameworks relevant to this is now practicable.

Existing literature on the Banaban resettlement focuses on the social (Maude and Maude 1932; Maude and Evans 1994), historical (Binder 1978; Sigrah and King 2001), anthropological (Silverman 1977; Kempf 2003; Karutake et al. 2004), and development (Kumar et al. 2006; Collins 2009) aspects of resettlement. There is a gap in the literature regarding the role of policies and legal frameworks relative to the resettlement. This paper addresses that gap and demonstrates the significance of legal systems for resettlement.

The paper adds to the existing knowledge of environmental migration in general by presenting a case study on how Banabans recreated their community on Rabi, and it reflects on the role of preservation of cultural identity as an element of successful community relocation. Using a policy and legal framework, the paper focuses on three aspects of the relocation: (1) the long-term implications of colonial decisions in establishing trust funds, and the advance purchase of the Banabans' new island home; (2) how the Banabans coped with resettlement while retaining their ethnic and cultural identity, yet at the same time being open to the possibility of redefining the concept of what it meant to be a Banaban; and (3) how Fiji, as the host state, responded to the incoming resettler issue.

The paper is structured as follows: Part one presents an overview of the Pacific situation in relation to environmental migration. Part two explains the context and history of the Banaban resettlement on Rabi Island. Part three outlines the unique features of the Banaban resettlement in their new island community. Part four reflects on "success" in environmental migration and on the future of Pacific environmental migration. The paper

concludes that, in this era of climate change where residents in the Pacific may have to face the possibility of relocating, the Banaban resettlement has strengths, as well as weaknesses, worth learning from, and may even be pronounced a qualified success. Poor by world—even Fijian—standards, the Banabans nevertheless reknitted their social fabric, re-formed their community structures, and articulated themselves in the host state with their group identity and traditions largely intact.

The materials used in this study were derived from four principal sources: (1) documents on the Banaba resettlement held in the H. E. Maude Special Collection Section, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide; (2) materials collected in the course of the legal actions that the Banabans brought against the UK Attorney General (1971) and the British Phosphate Commissioners (1973) in the Chancery Division of the British High Court of Justice; (3) accounts from British and foreign newspapers; and (4) secondary research materials on the Banaban resettlement. The Maude Collection was particularly helpful by shedding light on the protection and legal frameworks attendant to the resettlement. Harry Maude, a key figure in the purchase of Rabi Island, was a former Lands Commissioner of Banaba and later Resident Commissioner of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands colony.

### **Pacific Overview**

The Pacific region, with its low-elevation island nations dispersed in a vast ocean setting, is particularly vulnerable to environmental challenges from the physical environment. The region is predicted to be among those most affected by the adverse effects of environmental change (Locke 2009). Campbell projected that by midcentury, environmental migrants in the Pacific could be between 665,000 and 1,750,000 when the total population of the Pacific will exceed 18 million (Campbell 2010a, 38). Although speculative, the prediction is nonetheless daunting in combination with the documented rising of sea and air temperature levels and widespread melting of glaciers and polar caps (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2007). Should relocation become necessary, what will need to be ensured is not only the physical survival and legal rights of the inhabitants but the continuation of their cultural and traditional legacies. The preservation and possible recreation of culture in host states are among the matters that require consideration at various levels of policy making in cases of relocation. For this reason, Cernea has repeatedly recommended the study of the long-term effects of resettlement schemes and the role of resettlement policies (Cernea and McDowell 2000). The Banaban settlement on Rabi provides this opportunity.

### Historical Context

Banaba, also known as Ocean Island in colonial times, is an isolated Pacific island with an area of 6.5 km<sup>2</sup> (1,500 acres), a few kilometers south of the equator at 0.53°S latitude (see Fig. 1). Banaba's nearest neighbors are Nauru some 285 km to the west, and the Kiribati, the country to which Banaba Island is politically attached, some 400 km to the east. Its interior, before the depletion, featured a plateau rising to 79–82 m, where most of the phosphate was situated (Reed 1903). Banaba comprises the tip of an ocean mountain surrounded by a reef where for thousands of years bird guano accumulated to up to 24 m, forming one of the world's largest deposits of high-grade phosphate.

Albert Ellis, an employee of the Pacific Islands Company, who would ultimately become a British Phosphate Commissioner for New Zealand, confirmed the existence of a huge deposit of high-grade phosphate on Banaba upon his arrival on May 3, 1900. On the same day, he entered into an agreement on behalf of the Pacific Islands Company for the right to extract the island's deposits for the duration of 999 years. In exchange for mining rights, the company agreed to pay the Banaban landowners a yearly rental of £50 or trade equivalent to that value (*Tito v. Waddell*, No. 2, 3 All ER 129, 1977). In August 1900, mining operations began, although the exclusive right to occupy for mining purposes was only granted to the

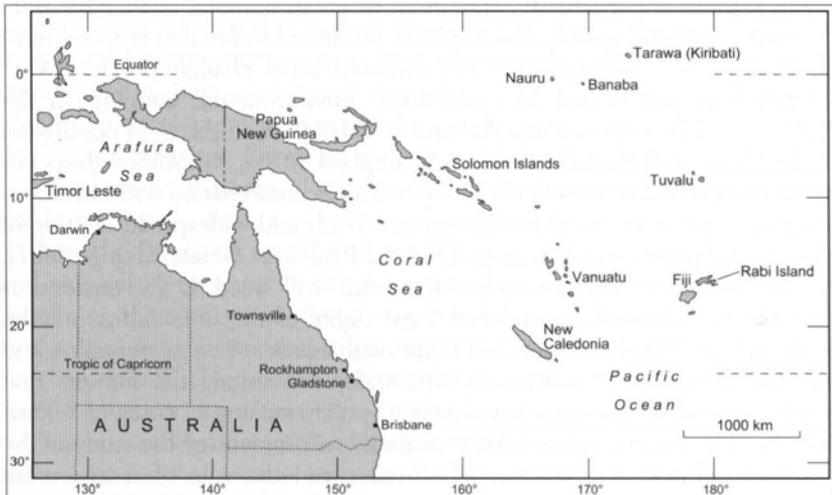


FIGURE 1. Banaba and its South Pacific neighbors.

Pacific Islands Company by the Secretary of State for the colonies on October 2, 1900. The High Commissioner then made a Queen's Regulation placing Banaba within the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Protectorate on November 30, 1900.<sup>1</sup> The regulation prohibited the removal of guano in the protectorate without prior permission of the High Commissioner or Resident Commissioner of Banaba. When the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Protectorate became the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony in 1915, Banaba also became part of the colony through the Order in Council of 1916. The change had two far-reaching legal consequences for Banaba. First, Banaba was obliged to share its phosphate revenues with the rest of the colony, where 85 percent of the royalties were diverted to the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Administration, leaving 15 percent for the Banabans. Second, by becoming a colony, the Banabans lost their right to sue the Crown since, as became apparent when the Banabans sued for damages before the High Court of Justice in 1971, the Crown cannot be sued (Binder 1978).

As demand for phosphate increased, the Banabans became opposed to further extraction of their reserves. The women were particularly adverse to the transfer of land under any conditions (Macdonald 1982). The impasse took a turn for the worse in August 1928, when Resident Commissioner Arthur Grimble sent what became known as the Buakonikai letter, pressuring the Banabans into accepting terms of the British Phosphate Commission (BPC) and threatening compulsory acquisition should they fail to accede to the additional 150 acres requested. The following month, Mining Ordinance 1928 was enacted mandating expropriation, if negotiations failed, and empowering the Resident Commissioner to prescribe the rates of royalties. The ordinance contained four preconditions to expropriation: (1) the mining licensee did not have land rights over the mining area; (2) negotiations with the landowner to mine the land had failed; (3) the Secretary of State deemed expropriation was in line with public interest; and (4) the Resident Commissioner was convinced that the terms offered for expropriation, including royalties, were reasonable.

Once these preconditions were satisfied, the Resident Commissioner could deliver to the owner the notice of his intention to possess. If the landowner refused, the Mining Ordinance empowered the Resident Commissioner to possess the land, because it was deemed to be Crown land.

As early as 1909, Banaba's Resident Commissioner Quale Dickson was concerned that the island's relentless mining would eventually make the island unsuitable for habitation. He suggested a fund earmarked for the purchase of an island (*Tito v. Waddell* [No. 2], 1977). No progress came from the proposal, despite the establishment of a general Banaban fund

in 1913 and the new Resident Commissioner Edward Carlyon Eliot's reiteration of the proposal (Grimble 1952). In 1931, a provident fund was established for the purchase of the Banabans' "future home" (Maude 1946: 6–10). The Fijian islands of Wakaya and Rabi were suggested (see Fig. 2). Fiji, like the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony, formed part of the British Empire.

Wakaya was eventually rejected for lack of fertile soil and water, making it unsuitable for a large population, aside from the fact that there was disagreement as to its purchase price (*Tito v. Waddell* [No. 2], 1977). Thus, Rabi Island, then a coconut plantation owned by the Lever Brothers' Pacific Plantations Limited, was purchased in March 1942 for A£25,000. The amount came from phosphate royalties, particularly the provident fund earmarked for the purchase of the Banabans' future island home. A few kilometres east of Fiji's Vanua Levu, Rabi is a volcanic island rising to 463 m. At 66 km<sup>2</sup>, Rabi is ten times larger than Banaba (see Fig. 3).

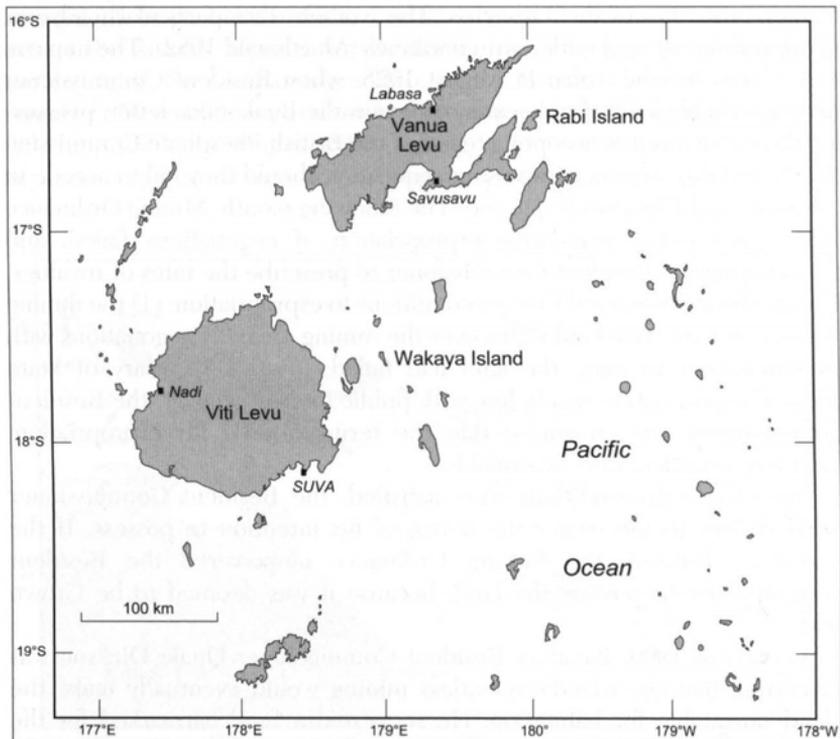


FIGURE 2. Rabi and Wakaya Islands.

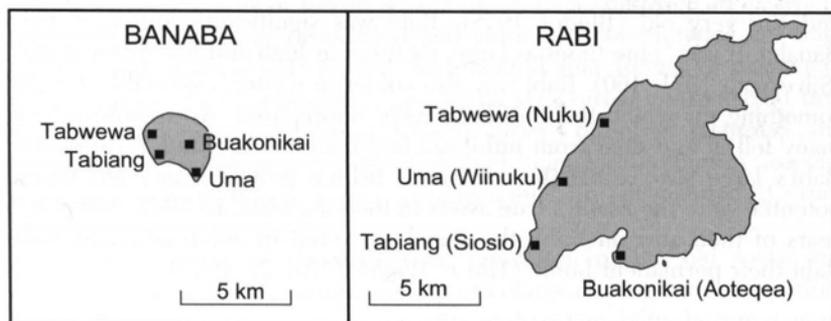


FIGURE 3. Banaba and Rabi Islands.

In August 1942, Japanese forces occupied Banaba, and not long after, the Banabans were deported to various parts of the Caroline Islands archipelago. As the Second World War was coming to a close, the BPC decided to resume mining, and the Banaban question became of urgent significance. Some maintain there was a “migration plan on paper” by which the Banabans would be “collected when freed from Japanese hands and taken directly to Rabi” (Williams and Macdonald 1985, 338). The BPC’s reasons for supporting such a move were not difficult to assess: “[i]t would have liked nothing better than to get the troublesome islanders out of the way” of resumed mining (Howard 1988, 159). For their part, the Banabans were asked whether, in view of the post-war destruction of Banaba, they were willing to relocate to Rabi for two years with the option of coming back at the government’s expense. Although the Banabans “unanimously accepted” the proposition, in fact they had no choice in the matter. They could not go back to Banaba because it “would not be possible” for them to reoccupy Banaba because of the “absence of food supplies and the total destruction of all four villages” (Maude 1946: 12–13). Banaban leader Rotan Tito stated the reason Banabans agreed to relocate was to be nearer to the High Commissioner and, thus, facilitate the redress of Banaban grievances (Silverman 1971). At the time, all British Pacific colonies were governed by the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific based in Fiji.

On December 14, 1945, about 1,000 Banabans with some Gilbertese friends and relatives arrived on Rabi on board the BPC-owned ship *Triuna*. Rabi is 2,100 km southeast of Banaba. Lack of preparation and lack of adequate facilities, coupled with the settlers having to adjust to a strange environment, contributed to unnecessary confusion and suffering and resulted in death for at least forty new settlers, particularly the very young

and the very old (Binder 1978). Rabi was significantly different from Banaba. It was “nine times as large, six times as high and five times as wet” (Silverman 1971, 160). Rabi was also colder in winter, especially at night, something for which the Banabans were unprepared. As a consequence, many fell ill and died from influenza and pneumonia (Binder 1978). Yet, Rabi’s large size, availability of water, fishing grounds, and agricultural potential were the island’s true assets in the long term. In 1947, within two years of their stay on Rabi, the Banabans voted by referendum to make Rabi their permanent home (*Tito v. Waddell* [No. 2], 1977).

### Resettlement Features

If the Banaban experience on Rabi is to assist in evaluating the current prospects for environmental migration in the Pacific, it is important to consider its key features and evaluate whether resettlement has been a success. A simple but useful framework is Cernea’s conceptualization of resettlement as a process that almost always involves the risk of landlessness, homelessness, joblessness, marginalization, food insecurity, loss of access to common property resources, increased morbidity, and social disarticulation (Cernea 2004). The framework has been used to reveal the impoverishments of resettled communities because of the construction of dams and development projects (Mejia 2000). Yet, the insights are deemed applicable to other cases of resettlement, including environmental resettlement (Ferris et al. 2011).

The framework has also been used in evaluating whether certain features of a resettlement may, even minimally, be considered a “success,” noting the potentially problematic concept of the term where peoples and societies have different cultural criteria and conceptions of what truly constitutes success. For development agencies such as the World Bank, resettlement success refers to a situation where the settlers’ livelihood condition is at least minimally restored (Voutira and Bond 2000). For Scudder, success comes not only through economic development but through genuine community formation and the handing over of a sustainable resettlement process to the later generation of settlers, as new institutions are formed. Emphasis is placed less on personal home building and more on the establishment of farmers unions, water associations, cooperatives, burial societies, and municipal councils (Scudder 2005). In the context of long-term climate and environmental change, such as desertification or the possible rise in sea levels, relocation is permanent. Thus, it is important to define success beyond—although not altogether discounting—economic requirements and toward the long-term sustainability of the social and community fabric.

One of the dangers of forced relocations is social disarticulation, where social organizations are dismantled and close-knit communities are fragmented and dispersed. It is well documented that forced displacement tears apart existing communities and social structures, interpersonal ties, and the enveloping social fabric. Kinship groups often get scattered, and life sustaining informal networks of mutual help, local voluntary associations, and self-organized service arrangements are dismantled (Cernea 1997).

To overcome social disarticulation, recreation of the old social and cultural fabric assumes significance, particularly in long-term relocations where the need for community integrity and sustainability becomes more necessary. In the case of the Banabans, it took the collective efforts of the Banabans themselves, the host state of Fiji, and the colonial administration to bring the new community to the level it has reached today. An important component was the establishment of policies and legal frameworks that took account of the rights of the settlers in relation to the host state. Social rearticulation involves the re-creation of familiar community and cultural structures and group identity preservation. Hirschon regarded the resettlement of Greek nationals in Kokkinia, Greece, pursuant to the compulsory exchange of populations between Turkey and Greece under the 1923 Lausanne Convention, a success for its reconstitution of community and neighborhood life in the resettlement site. This, despite the absence of economic welfare in the context the term is understood in development literature. Kokkinia was a community marked by a high degree of social integration and group identity reservation (Hirschon 2000).

The way that Banabans maintained their social systems and ways of living in their new home, and preserved their integrity and identity over 60 years of resettlement, is a testimony to the resettlement's success, albeit qualified and despite the lackluster economic indicators of Banaban society on Rabi. This paper offers three reasons for this success: (1) the role of trust funds and the advance purchase of a resettlement site; (2) the Banaban coping strategies; and (3) Fijian policy responses.

*Resettlement preparation through the establishment of the trust fund and advance land purchase*

Among recurrent concerns in resettlement are issues of funding and availability of resettlement sites. Who should pay the expenses of resettlement because resettlement of communities entails costs of transportation and site purchase, not to mention the settling in costs and expenses for infrastructure needed to make the relocation site minimally liveable? Wrathall

observes that, because resettlement entails impoverishment and marginalization, careful planning and a realistic provision for substantial and properly allocated funding must be prepared in advance (Wrathall 2011). The fund may be used to purchase land and construct homes, roads, schools, and facilities on the site, as well as pay an initial settlement allowance. In the case of Banaba, the colonial government played a central role in both the establishment of trust funds and the advanced purchase of Rabi Island.

Although the actual relocation occurred in 1945, the establishment of the trust funds for the future of the Banabans was conceived more than thirty-six years before relocation was deemed necessary. In December 1909, Banaba's Resident Commissioner Quale Dickson suggested to the Pacific Phosphate Company (which bought the Pacific Islands Company in 1902) that, because mining would ultimately eat out the island, an annual sum should be put into a trust fund for the benefit of the Banabans and for the potential purchase of a new island home for them. He proposed the "purchase of another island in the Gilbert group and the ultimate transfer of the natives to the island" (*Tito v. Waddell* [No. 2], 1977). It was not until four years later, in 1913, that the Banaban Fund was established and written into the agreement between the Banabans and Pacific Phosphate Company. The agreement established a trust fund to which an initial contribution of £4,734 was made from the 6d. per ton royalty on all phosphate shipped from the island. The fund had two components: first, the largest portion was for the "benefit of the existing Banaban community"; second, an annuity scheme of £150 per year (increased later), taken from the main fund, was to be distributed among the landowners who "lease land to the company."

In 1931, a second fund was established, this time coming from the 8.5d. per ton royalty on phosphate mined from the 150 acres compulsorily acquired through the Mining Ordinance of 1928. Although its purpose was similar to the earlier fund, the 1931 fund provided, for the first time, a provision dedicated to the purchase of a new island home and to make provision for the Banabans in the future. This was called the Provident Fund (Silverman 1971). In 1937, the first and second funds were amalgamated to constitute a single fund, namely the Banaban Royalties Trust, which was also known as the Banaban Fund or Common Fund.

Although the intention underpinning the Provident Fund was the purchase of a new island home, because their island was increasingly becoming uninhabitable, initially the Banabans were averse to that (*Tito v. Waddell* [No. 2], 1977). Later they agreed to the purchase, but for a different reason:

The second island would only be an investment. Ultimately, events would force them to recognize that what was intended for investment purposes would become their new home.

The Banaban Fund continued to operate until 1979 when depleting phosphate reserves, falling world prices, and Banaban opposition to continued mining convinced the then recently independent Kiribati government to discontinue phosphate mining (Pretes and Petersen 2002). Today other sources of Banaban revenue on Rabi include proceeds from the sale of copra and kava, internal revenue, and interest from the A\$10 million settlement paid by the British government in the aftermath of the case filed by the Banabans before the Chancery Division of the British High Court of Justice.

#### *Resettlement and preservation of culture*

An outstanding feature of the Banaban experience on Rabi was the recreation of their original society on foreign soil. Many factors contributed to this, among them certain policies of the colonial administration and later of the Fijian government. Yet, it was also Banaban flexibility and openness to adapt to changing circumstances that pulled the Banabans through the resettlement years. Although a "slight depression of spirits" occurred among older people in the early phase of the resettlement, the "majority of those men of working age" were "developing skill[s] at their new work" and displayed "unexpected energy" (Kennedy 1946a, 2). Some explored the possibilities of reef fishing; others were "anxious to learn the work of running the [coconut] plantation" (Kennedy 1946b, 2). However, during the general meeting held within a month of their arrival, at least two women were heard to call out: "Let us return to Banaba" (Minutes Banaban Meeting 1946, 2).

While resident in Banaba, the inhabitants had developed a cohesive and distinct social identity, which proved to be one of the community's strengths during relocation. The high degree of Banaban local autonomy in Fiji developed a more confident and assertive Banaban identity. The Banabans actualized a type of resistance identity allowing marginalized groups to build platforms of resistance and survival on the basis of principles different from or opposed to those practiced in the dominant society (Castells 1997). From a docile and traditionally obedient community, the Banabans fought back and asserted their rights. In 1971, some 300 Banaban landowners led by Council Chairman Rotan Tito sued the United Kingdom-, Australia-, and New Zealand-operated BPC jointly and severally for costs of restoring

food-bearing trees in mined out areas estimated at A\$21.4 million and against the British government through the Attorney General for underpaid royalties (Maiden 1975). Although the royalties case was dismissed as unenforceable in the courts and meager damages awarded in lieu of the impracticability of replanting, the Banaban case generated considerable international attention. The momentum caused the Banabans to demand for an independent Banaba in free association with Fiji (Braine 1977). Three to four hundred Rabi-born Banabans re-occupied Banaba. From 1975, boatloads of Banaban settlers from Fiji landed on Banaba for that purpose (*Fiji Times* 1975). Although the move for a sovereign Banaba failed to gain ground politically, morally it strengthened Banaban identity formation particularly among the younger generation, albeit with a Rabi component. As one Rabi-born Banaban stated: “we love Banaba too”; however, “[w]e love Rabi because we are Fijian citizens. . . . Rabi is our own, Banaba is our own, so we want to develop these two islands” (Nei K. K. interview, quoted in Hermann 2004, 210).

Banaban identity had evolved long ago, in part because of the island’s geographical isolation. As European hegemony blanketed most of the Pacific, Banaba was bypassed as an insignificant speck with nothing to contribute to the costs of empire building. By the time the West wanted a stake in Banaba’s phosphate reserves, the Banabans had developed a high degree of homogeneity and a distinct “Banaban” identity with its own cosmology, rituals, art, and unique dance forms. The *Te Itirake* and *Nei Tearia*, respectively, the Banaban myth of precreation and creation, are oral traditions that situate Banaba as the *buto* or navel of the world.

#### *Adoption of familiar place names*

The Banabans established villages replicating the names and features of their four original villages on Banaba: Tabwewa, Uma, Tabiang, and Buakonikai (see Fig. 3). These were established on the southwest coast of Rabi and today are connected by an “all-weather access road” (Hindmarsh 2002). Tabwewa (“Nuku,” prior to resettlement), the northernmost village and the most populous, was made the island’s administrative center. The former Lever Brothers Building is now used by the Rabi Council of Leaders, the island’s governing body, for “administration, wholesale shop and community library” purposes (Hindmarsh 2002). Replicating features and names of former villages in Pacific community resettlements is not unique to the Banabans but was also typical of resettlers from Niuafo’ou on ’Eua Island (Rogers 1981) and Ambrym on Efate Island (Tonkinson 1979). In every case, it provided a sense of continuity.

*System of government*

Unlike other Pacific resettlers, the Banabans, with the help of enabling legislation in the host community, successfully replicated their former governmental system in their new home. Although the colonial government in Fiji had enacted the *Banaban Settlement Act* (1945), which provided for a local government council, the Banabans were left to decide on what form the council would take. As a matter of policy, the local self-administration was to be “as near as possible [to] what the Banabans were used to in Ocean Island” (Western Pacific High Commission 1946).

One of the first things the Banabans did on Rabi was to decide what type of council would be suitable for self-government. A general meeting was held on January 26, 1946, attended by the District Officer for Rabi, Major Donald Kennedy, and 153 Banaban elders representing 153 families. The group agreed to form the Rabi Council of Leaders (“council”), a body that has both “[l]egislative and executive functions” with some members “constitut[ing] a Court for hearing criminal and civil actions under the local regulations made by the Council.” The council members are composed exclusively of, and are elected by, the Banabans themselves. The elders constituting the council are elected according to family groups, or *utu*, which according to Banaban custom are “those people who eat over one fire” (Minutes Banaban Meeting 1946). The council became Rabi Island’s administering body, dispensing ordinances according to indigenous laws and customs on internal affairs only, because the Banabans were at the same time subject to the colonial regulations of Fiji.

The council was not only the political but also the economic and spiritual backbone of the Banaban community, a fact not always to the Banabans’ advantage. The overcentralization of authority, for instance, is said to have encouraged paternalistic dependency and even abuse. In 1991, some council members allegedly “misused council funds” for alcohol and overseas travel, which resulted in unpaid wages and forced the Fiji national government to intervene and install an interim administration, the first act of which was to “close the liquor store” (Hindmarsh 2002). Yet, the council recovered and remains the Banaban community’s face to the outside world. For example, in recent years the council entered into a joint venture with a Chinese fishing company and developed trade links with Kiribati for the export of kava. In 2005, it received an ambulance donation for the Rabi Health Center from the government of Japan (Embassy of Japan 2005).

*Redefining Banaban identity*

Self-identity was something the Banabans took for granted while on Banaba. In Banaba, everybody knew who were Banabans and who were not. Among

the latter were Gilbert and Ellice Islanders who worked in the mines. Being a Banaban was a matter of lineage. Once on Rabi, the question of who was a Banaban assumed legal significance, as awareness dawned on the resettled group's heterogeneity. Three hundred Gilbertese nationals went with the Banabans in their resettlement, as noted by Maude in his contemporaneous Memorandum (Table 1). The Gilbertese had joined the Banabans by virtue of marriage or friendship. Because of intermarriage, the question of who was "Banaban" assumed not only legal but also social and political significance.

The *Banaban Settlement Ordinance No. 28* (1945) defined "Banaban Community" as follows: "the natives hitherto living on Ocean Island and such other persons as may now or hereafter be accepted as members of the Banaban community in accordance with Banaban custom." The definition further confused the issue because it was not clear which Banaban custom was applicable. A legislative amendment was made in 1957 that attached Banaban identity to the place of destination rather than origin. Under *Banaban Settlement Amendment Ordinance No. 15* (1957), a Banaban was any "member of an aboriginal race indigenous to Micronesia and Polynesia [*sic*] who is ordinarily resident on Rabi." The latter conception excluded the Indigenous Melanesian Fijians and looked at place—Rabi—as the basis of affiliation.

What emerges is a conceptualization of a Banaban by reference to Rabi community membership, rather than a strictly Banaba-based origin. Therefore, this included Gilbertese nationals who arrived on Rabi with the Banabans in 1945 and who were associated with them by virtue of friendship or marriage. A 1965 ordinance further introduced an intergenerational component as it responded to the greater mobility prospects of the times by hinging nationality on blood, rather than residence. A Banaban under the *Banaban Lands Act* (1965) was a "descendant of the original indigenous inhabitants of Ocean Island, of the whole or of the half blood, illegitimate or legitimate, or a person who is accepted as a member of the Banaban community in accordance with Banaban customs."

TABLE 1. Resettled population in Rabi in 1946 (Maude 1946).

	Banabans	Gilbertese	Total
Men	185	152	337
Women	200	97	297
Children	318	51	369
Total	703	300	1,003

The question of who is a Banaban has legal and political ramifications with respect to matters such as land distribution, pay rates, and the privilege of electing officers or holding an office (Silverman 1971). Under both the *Banaban Settlement Act* and *Banaban Lands Ordinance*, only Banabans enjoy full rights on Rabi. This includes entitlement to certain services, a share from the communal income, and a designated lot of up to two acres on Rabi Island. Only Banabans may vote and be representatives on the island's governing body, the Rabi Council of Leaders.

The Banaban identity question also has ramifications beyond Rabi. For instance, the Kiribati Constitution (1979) grants Banabans land rights and freedom of movement into Banaba. These rights shall "not be affected in any way by reason of the fact that he [*sic*] resides in Rabi" (Sec 119). The Banabans are also constitutionally granted a "reserved" seat in the Kiribati Parliament for "a nominated representative of the Banaban community" (Sec 117). A Banaban is defined under the Kiribati Constitution as a former inhabitant of Banaba and "such other persons one of whose ancestors was born in Kiribati before 1900 as may now or hereafter be accepted as members of the Banaban community in accordance with custom" (Sec 125).

#### *Policy responses of Fiji as the host community*

If resettlement is to succeed, much depends on the attitude of the host community to the resettlers. The contribution of Fiji to the resettlement was the willingness by which it allowed the Banabans to settle on its shores, both during colonial times and later when the country became independent in 1970. It granted the Banabans autonomy to manage local affairs with minimal interference and has encouraged local autonomy to the present day. In 1994, because of funding problems on the island, the Fijian government established the Rabi Subvention Fund to help the council defray operational costs (Office of the Prime Minister of Fiji 2012). As a further token of goodwill, a commemorative stamp was issued by the Fijian government on the fiftieth anniversary of the Banabans' arrival in Fiji (see Fig. 4).

At a time when the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) and soft law declarations proscribing minority discrimination and marginalization still lay in the future, Fiji, as a colony and later as an independent state, enacted legislation favorable to the Banabans. Neither the *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities* (United Nations General Assembly 1992), nor the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (United Nations General



FIGURE 4. Fijian stamps commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Banaban arrival.

Assembly 2007) existed when Fiji enacted the *Banaban Settlement Ordinance* (1945), which provided for Rabi's self-government through the Rabi Council of Leaders. Under the *Banaban Lands Act* (1964), legal custody and trust of the entire island of Rabi for the Banabans was granted to the council (Paterson and Zorn 1993). To prevent abuse, Sec. 5.1 of the amended *Banaban Settlement Act* (1970) has subjected the council's decisions to the review and supervision of the Prime Minister. Some see this as Fiji's way of maintaining a degree of central control over Banaban affairs, if not downright paternal interference, such as when Fiji suspended council operation and installed an interim administration in 1991.

When Fiji became independent in October 1970, the old settlement ordinance was substantially reproduced under the *Banaban Settlement Act* (1970) and further amended under the *Banaban Settlement Amendment Act* (1996). Under the latest act, the Rabi Council of Leaders is to consist of nine members—two from each of the four villages and a secretary elected by the entire island. The chairman will be elected from among the council members. The council's deliberately undefined role as local legislator gave it and the community a chance to exercise the high degree of autonomy it needed, in effect allowing the Banabans to govern their affairs along traditional patterns. The council was likewise empowered under the *Banaban Lands Act* (1965) to hold the freehold title of Rabi land under its name as trustee "for the benefit of all members of the Banaban Community." Even roads on Rabi are vested in the name of the council and, as such, are deemed privately owned. In one case, the Supreme Court of Fiji ruled that, although Banabans are subject to Fijian laws, traffic ordinances do not apply on Rabi, the island's roads not being public roads. Titles to the island's

roads are still vested in the council (*Attorney General v. Langdon*, 16 FLR 43 [Fiji Supreme Court], 1973).

Under the *Banaban Lands Act* (1965), the council may designate portions of Rabi Island to members of the Banaban community. The allocations are on a lease basis; hence, the lots cannot be used as collateral for loans. The Lands Act prohibits all forms of disposition such as sale, lease, or transfer of any part of the island to non-Banabans. On the downside, the scheme constrains the growth of business by way of active outside investment. Yet, taking note of Banaban culture and history of land deprivation, the scheme allows Rabi to be preserved and protected from being alienated to outsiders. A Land Court was established by the Banaban Lands Act consisting of the officer appointed to the Rabi Island Tribunal under the Banaban Settlement Act with four other assessors appointed by the council. The Land Court has a nonappealable jurisdiction to decide on all land cases on Rabi and “determine questions of Banaban custom relating to land” (Paterson and Zorn 1993). During the first year of the resettlement, Fiji legal authorities wanted the settlement ordinance to contain “land clauses” declaring the land “straight off to be the property of the Banabans” and providing for its “permanent division” among the Banabans. However, the colonial government wanted to “leave out” the land clauses to begin with and wait to ascertain whether the Banabans would decide to settle on Rabi permanently, in which case the division of the land and the vesting of freehold would be done “in accordance with their [Banaban] land customs” (Western Pacific High Commission 1946).

The Banaban Settlement Act and Banaban Lands Act were among the specially protected statutes under the Fijian Constitution (1997). They may be amended only upon special majorities in Parliament, which includes the concurrence of “9 of the 14 members of the Senate appointed by the *Bose Levu Vakaturaga*.” However, compared with earlier rights granted to the Banaban community by the 1970 constitution, some Banaban rights—among them affirmative action rights—had been reduced under both the 1990 and 1997 constitutions. Under the 1970 constitution, Banabans were included under the classification “Fijian.” As such, they could avail themselves of the government’s affirmative action programs reserved for indigenous Fijians, such as scholarships. Under both the 1990 and 1997 Constitutions, the Banabans were reclassified, over their objection, into the category “General voters” consisting of minorities who were neither indigenous Fijians nor Fijian-Indians, hence losing rights they formerly enjoyed as indigenous Fijians (Kumar et al. 2006). Although the Banabans had formerly been classified and voted as indigenous Fijians, it was not until 2005 when the Fijian government began their formal naturalization process

that the Banabans were granted a three-month period to apply for Fijian citizenship, a privilege availed of by the Banabans. As Fijian citizens, this puts the Banabans in a unique position as citizens of one sovereign country, yet maintaining links by having a constitutionally reserved parliamentary seat and representation in another country (Sec 117 Kiribati Constitution, 1979).

Despite the Banaban reclassification under Fiji law, the Fijian government continued to support Banaban self-government on Rabi. In 1994, it established the aforementioned Rabi Subvention Fund. The initial amount allocated was FJ\$30,000, which was eventually raised to its current funding of FJ\$95,000 (Office of the Prime Minister of Fiji 2012). The fund was originally intended to meet the council's administrative and operational costs. Now the allocation is redeployed at 40 percent for operations, and 60 percent on capital projects, forcing the council to streamline operational costs and concentrate on "community welfare and development" projects.

### **"Success" in Environmental Resettlement**

For Campbell, a successful relocation is one in which the "important characteristics of the original community, including its social structures, legal and political systems, cultural characteristics and worldviews are retained: the community stays together at the destination in a social form that is similar to the community of origin" (Campbell 2010b, 59). By this definition, one may view the Banaban resettlement as a qualified success. The community not only retained its worldview and broad identity as Banabans—if with some Fijian transformation (for instance, the Banabans' acquired habit of kava drinking during social occasions)—but it replicated on Rabi Island the social and administrative features of Banaba. This demonstrates not just the sense of continuity between old and new but kept the community intact in both tangible and intangible ways. It preserved their collective identity.

However, life has remained close to subsistence on Rabi. Statistics rank the Banabans among the poorer minorities in Fiji (Hindmarsh 2002). Current job prospects on Rabi are limited. For instance, the island's only formal employer is the Rabi Island Council; otherwise, opportunities are limited to farming and small business (Kumar et al. 2006). Yet, Banaban poverty is relative and only consequential in relation to mainstream Fijians and not in an absolute sense. Relative poverty, according to Anand, is measured in terms of the larger society's prevailing living standard (Anand 1983). Poverty is ultimately a socially constructed phenomenon depending on the prevailing society's level of acceptability (Kumar et al. 2006).

Although official data characterize the Banabans as poor, there is no starvation on Rabi. Moreover, Banabans continue to benefit from the interest of the A\$10 million deposited in blue chip investments in European banks, the bulk of which has been spent on community projects (Hindmarsh 2002). Without agricultural skills upon their arrival, Banabans have acquired the necessary skills to cultivate Fijian staples such as yam, cassava, bananas, and to tend Rabi's coconut plantations, although the older trees already need replanting. On Rabi, the Banabans also learned agribusiness by selling commercial quantities of Rabi Kava in Suva and Kiribati. Overall, Rabi has the greater potential for sustainability than Banaba. It is the bigger and higher island; it has more water, fertile soil, and opportunities for fishing and agriculture.

Compared to the Banaban resettlement, the Bikinian resettlement experience on Kili Island resulting from nuclear tests in their home island was dismal. The Bikinian resettlement proved not only disruptive but destructive of their culture, identity, and lifestyle as the environmentally inhospitable new home made the Bikinians' traditional fishing and livelihood skills useless (Kiste 1974). Because of insufficient land, the Bikinians' traditional social arrangements based on land could not be implemented. Because there were more claims than availability of land in Kili, a more artificial way of apportioning land had to be devised rather than one based on lineage membership. Unlike the Banaban experience on Rabi, which used traditional social systems and indigenous ways of organizing life in their new home, the Bikinian experience created a long-term structural fragmentation of households and increased tension among the Bikinians (Kiste 1974). Unlike the Banabans, the Bikinians were also barred from returning because of long-term radiation effects. The Banabans have the option of rehabilitating their home island and returning to Banaba should they wish.

Relocations of whatever type or duration are by their nature always disruptive and usually traumatic. Long-term relocation is even more complex and problematic. Relocation unravels spatially and culturally based patterns of social organization as it uproots all members of the community, including the sick, elderly, and very young, allowing for little psychological or physical preparation (Cernea and McDowell 2000). Relocated communities often find themselves in a state of discontent with many wanting to return to their home islands (Campbell et al. 2005). As noted above, during a meeting of the Banabans on Rabi, within a month of their arrival, some Banabans adamantly wanted to go back home. A sense of loss is especially pronounced in relocation because of environmental triggers, where relocated populations suddenly find themselves uprooted from their traditional lands

and systems (Kirsch 2001). Yet, the same is true of resettlement triggered by slow onset environmental deterioration, as the Banaban experience suggests.

Banaba's chief contribution to an understanding of environmental migration is how, with colonial assistance, preparations were made in advance of eventual relocation by establishing trust funds and purchasing a new island home. Relocation of whatever type and cause involves costs: from preparation, to transportation of communities, to the setting up of infrastructure, such as roads, housing, and utilities, in the relocation site. Eventually, provisions for establishing of schools and health centers would have to be made available as well. In the case of Banaba, a resettlement trust fund had been established years prior to the relocation, made possible because of Banaba Island's phosphate royalties. Environmentally vulnerable Pacific countries may not have similar resources to establish the trust funds necessary for their adaptation, including possible relocation, in situations of severe environmental change.

One scenario that must be understood is the so-called disaster-preventive action dynamic where "[d]onors face strong public pressure to respond rapidly to disasters and often mobilize funds outside their normal budgets," whereas "funding of preventive action is often constrained" (Bettencourt et al. 2006). Although the benefits of preparation and foresight may not be discernible in the initial years, such efforts "pay off in the long run" because they have the benefit of preventing or minimizing hazards.

The traditional approach of "wait and mitigate" is a far worse strategy than proactively managing risks. There is no benefit in waiting to see if global warming will affect the region. Natural hazards already take an annual toll that destroys valuable property, threatens and takes lives, and disrupts national economies. Any additional disasters arising from climate change will only make matters worse (Bettencourt et al. 2006).

The need for long-term financial preparation is no less vital for vulnerable island states. Regional and international foresight and collaboration would become necessary.

Banabans were also fortunate in having a feasible relocation site within the Pacific that was not contested. In terms of possible contemporary resettlement sites of vulnerable Pacific countries, Australia and New Zealand are often mentioned as possible host countries because of their proximity and existing preferential or circular migration schemes for Pacific peoples. Yet, unless relocated on separate island "havens" with policy protections preserving ethnic identity, the downside to relocating in metropolitan countries would likely result in the possible loss of the resettlers' culture.

This theme was evident in the failed Nauruan resettlement in Australia. In the 1960s, Nauru, because of resource depletion and environmental destruction, was offered resettlement in any one of the three metropolitan states of the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. Ultimately Nauru declined, in spite being offered a separate island in Queensland, because of Nauruans' fear of losing their cultural and national identity (Tabucanon and Opekin 2011). The Nauruans were uncomfortable being assimilated into the larger Australian culture, a sentiment summarized in the Trusteeship Council's report to the United Nations General Assembly as "a very strong and earnest desire on the part of the Nauruan people to remain the people of a distinct small nation" (Weeramantry 1992). The Banabans may be said to have had a similar fear, hence, their insistence on maintaining their group identity and culture in their adopted state.

### **The Future of Pacific Environmental Resettlement**

The resettlement of the Banabans on Rabi Island offers insights into the complexity of migrations that are precipitated by environmental change. Although the Banaban experience is unique, and was contingent on peculiar colonial and factual circumstances, it is a good springboard for reflection because it raises important issues that need to be addressed in circumstances affecting the future of Pacific environmental resettlement.

First, there is often an "uncritical acceptance of a direct causal link" between environmental change and migration. The assumption is environmental degradation, because migration trigger can be separated from other social, economic, or political causes (Brown 2007). The Banaban experience belies this assumption. Migration is a multicausal phenomenon and an environmental change but one of interrelated factors influencing the decision to relocate (Black et al. 2008). Environmental migration needs to be understood within the overall migration dynamics. The Banaban situation was not only triggered by environmental degradation but also by other factors and opportunities such as social, cultural, economic, and political avenues present at the time. Some Banabans for instance saw the move as political for them to bring their grievances closer to the authorities. Also, it is neither correct to characterize environmental resettlement as purely forced or voluntary. As the Banaban experience tells, the triggers are multicausal, and the boundary between environmentally compelled and motivated are often blurred.

Second, for the Banabans, change came in the form of slow-process environmental depletion of their island's chief natural resource. This presented opportunities for preparation, which the Banabans and their colonial

administrators pursued such as the establishment of the trust funds and advance purchase of an island home. As the community directly affected by environmental degradation, the Banabans became recipients of the benefits the colonial system offered at that time: the chance to relocate to a similar yet larger and more fertile island home environment. The availability of Rabi Island and the relative ease with which the Banabans resettled in Fiji were realized in part because Banaba and Rabi Islands were both under British colonial control. Although such opportunities no longer exist for today's vulnerable populations, other alternatives may be pursued: among them bilateral and multilateral arrangements. Also, although types of environmentally induced population movements—such as those triggered by sudden onset environmental disasters—may not allow the same chance of preparation available to the Banabans, the adoption of proactive policies and legal frameworks anticipating the need to bolster adaptation (or, in extreme cases, migration) may produce beneficial outcomes. The Banabans had a strong moral and legal claim against those responsible for their island's degradation. The British colonial administration, as the responsible government, facilitated both the preparatory and operational phases of the relocation, although some maintain the decision was impelled by less than noble motivations, notably to clear Banaba of opposition to mining immediately after the Second World War. The relocation was also aided in part by the host community Fiji's colonial status, but after independence, Fiji substantially maintained and continued the policies established during the colonial era. Not all Pacific states have the benefit of these colonial connections.

Third, the preservation of human cultures, like the preservation of biodiversity, has value not only for the individuals concerned but for all humankind. For the Banabans, the recreation of their social and governmental structures, as well as the preservation of their identity, became a defining character of their resettlement experience. The Banabans successfully replicated in Rabi a form of social system and self-government that they were used to in Banaba. This, in part, was aided by the British colonial legislation and confirmed by Fijian legislation that upheld Banaban autonomy and identity on Rabi Island. The preservation of cultures within migrant communities is not a new concern of migration studies. However, the issue has special poignancy if the migration is not voluntary or if the sending society ceases to exist, thereby denying migrants the possibility of renewing their cultural practices by interacting with those who stay behind. These remain persistent problems for any large scale environmental migration in the Pacific. Feasible strategies for "social-economic and ethnic integration, as well as for long-term sustainable reconstruction" would have to be pursued (Ferris et al. 2011).

Today, sixty-five years since the Banabans first set foot on Rabi Island, the Banaban resettlement experience provides opportunities to reflect on the overarching issues covering environmental migration in the Pacific. For Banaba, long-term preparation by way of establishing trust funds and advance land purchase and the adoption of policies favorable to preservation of the community's culture were the principal reasons for the resettlement's success. Yet, the Banabans were also beneficiaries of a colonial system that facilitated international resettlement within colonies. Such opportunities no longer exist today, and vulnerable populations would have to pursue other alternatives such as bilateral or multilateral arrangements with countries having sufficiently open migration policies.

Migration has long been an accepted response of populations to both sudden and gradual changes in their environment. As states continue to have near-absolute discretion over which person or group would be allowed entry into their territory, it remains to be seen whether individual states or the international community could provide a humane framework for meeting the unavoidable impacts of an increasingly globalized change in the environment.

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### NOTES

1. Art 108 of Pacific Order in Council, 1893, empowered the High Commissioner to make, alter, and revoke the Queen's Regulations for various purposes.

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