

**A PROMISED LAND IN THE DIASPORA:
CHRISTIAN RELIGION, SOCIAL MEMORY, AND
IDENTITY AMONG BANABANS IN FIJI**

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THE CONVENTIONAL UNDERSTANDING of diaspora was very much pegged to the forced emigration, dispersal, and exile of Jews living outside Palestine—a concept that is laden with religious connotations. More recently, however, a somewhat expanded diaspora concept has been developed that is becoming the analytic instrument of choice for a broad band of movements, migration processes, transnational connections, and multiple identifications. Several authors have remarked that, ever since this new diaspora concept emerged, religion has rarely been given due consideration (Kokot, Tölölyan, and Alfonso 2004, 6). Although quite a number of more recent studies of diaspora would seem to disprove this claim (e.g., Cohen 1997, 1999; Gilroy 1993; Gross, McMurray, and Swedenburg 1996; Pulis 1999; Tweed 1997; Vertovec 1995, 2000; Werbner 2002), certainly there is something to the idea. One reason for the scant attention paid to the religious aspect can be sought in the theoretical-methodological paradigm shift of the 1980s and 1990s. Thus, diaspora as a general idea, an idea ever more detached from the religion and history of the Jews (see Dufoix 2008: 18–19), was taken up and further developed by a conceptual repositioning within the social and cultural sciences, one that set its sights on the systematic incorporation of movement and mobility, speed and flows, communication and networks into the formation of models (compare Pile and Thrift 1995, 24); in this context, religion as a field of study was of secondary importance.

Another reason for the declining attention to the religious aspect was that the focus of theoretical scrutiny had shifted to deconstructing, reconfiguring, and opening up such dominant discourses on identity, ethnicity, and nation as were predicated on delimitation, essentialization, and exclusion. Attention was fixed especially on the destabilizing potential of the “in between,” whether in the form of liminality, hybridization, interstitiality, or Third Space. Nor did diaspora (in its more recent sense) escape being used in this connection (see Brah 1996; Clifford 1994; Gilroy 1993, 1997; Hall 1990).¹ Thus, if the relevance of religious institutions, conceptualizations, and practices for the survival of diasporic communities was lost from sight, probably this partly resulted from recent theoretical debate concerning diaspora and hybridity moving in a self-referential space of conceptual abstractions and utopian counter-models, which were, in turn, largely uncoupled from spatially, temporally, and materially specific processes and practices (compare Mitchell 1997: 535, 537, 551; 2003: 74, 82; Moore 1997: 102–4).

However, a more intimate linkage with the history and everyday life of migrants and diasporic societies would only underline what the historian of religion Martin Baumann referred to when discussing the interconnectedness of migration processes and religion: “Constructing *no* places of worship and forming *no* religious associations seem to be the exception rather than the rule; it is those cases that require an explanation, not the fact of establishing religious institutions” (2004, 173; italics in original). His concern to drive home the fundamental importance of seeing a reorganized religious life as an integral part of what have been described as diasporic lifeworlds (and to integrate this into the analysis of diasporic communities) is in step with the frequently voiced request for an improved empirical grounding of the recent theoretical development of this expanded diaspora concept.

In this connection, the Pacific diaspora represents a promising field of inquiry. Two key issues hold center stage here. First, Christianity has long been a sustaining prop in the social and cultural life of Pacific Islanders living in Oceania and elsewhere. Second, mobility, migration, and transnational relationships among Pacific Islanders have gathered pace in recent decades, in terms of both dynamics and extension (see Connell 2002; Spickard 2002; Lee 2004, 2009). The interplay of religion, migration and transnationalism is expressed, on the one side, by the continuing links migrants maintain with their islands of origin, as when engagement on their part via kinship ties, institutional affiliations, remittances, or home visits includes commitments to the local churches (see Lee 2009: 14, 21; Macpherson 2004, 169). On the other side, Christian churches play a prominent role in social reorganization and identity formation of Pacific Islanders

living in the diaspora (e.g., Allen 2001, 2002; Carucci 2003; Cowling 2002; Gershon 2007). Individual essays in the present collection confirm these insights, while contributing to their further differentiation. Take, for example, Ping Ann Addo's essay (2012 [this issue]) on the entanglements between socioeconomic practice and the reconstitution of kin- or family-based ties among younger Tongans in New Zealand. She points out that obligations toward Christian churches in both Tonga and New Zealand are changing over time. Likewise, Suzanne Falgout, in her study (2012 [this issue]) of identity formation among Pohnpeians in Hawai'i, emphasizes just how variable the influence of Christian churches is when it comes to organizing and holding together diverse Micronesian groups.

In what follows, I examine how Christian discourses and practices have impacted the process of constituting place and identity among diasporic Banabans in Fiji. At the heart of the matter is the public representation of events drawn from the recent past and forged into a mnemonic configuration. I ask why Banabans often link their founding narrative of colonial exploitation, war, dispersal, and resettlement to the biblical story (related in the Book of Exodus) of liberation from Egyptian bondage and entry, after a period of wandering in the wilderness, into the Promised Land. In the Jewish religious tradition, the narratives of the Old Testament hold center stage as allegories of liberation and survival and of how the Israelites came to be the chosen by Yahweh. The Banaban community relies on this standardized version to construct their diasporic identity.

The hope for liberation and salvation, which is associated with the Exodus motif, has inspired more than one migrant group to co-opt this narrative and articulate it with their own history of repression. Thus, for instance, black Christian slaves, acting out of a general identification with the lot of the Jews, drew on the Exodus narrative to constitute a collective history and identity as part of the African diaspora (see Gilroy 1993, 207; 1997, 327). Among Banabans, the facts of deportation, dispersal, reunification, and collective relocation during colonial times supply the primary historical context for appropriation of the Exodus motif. Thus the Exodus narrative, whose tenor may be said to be inherently anticolonial, harks back to those bygone days when colonial regimes exerted control over the mobility and residence of local populations in the Pacific (see Lieber 1977; Silverman 1977). A knowledge of colonial transformational processes (and how they subsequently played out) is vital to understanding the development and specific form of the diasporic configuration and identity politics engaged in by today's resettled Banabans. That such historical contextualizations of contemporary Pacific diasporas possess analytic value can be seen from a number of studies (see Marshall 2004; Carucci 2012 [this

issue]; Howard and Rensel 2012 [this issue]; and Lieber et al. 2012 [this issue]).

Banaban History of Displacement

The Banaban people originate from Banaba (Ocean Island), an island in the Central Pacific situated in the country of Kiribati. At the beginning of the twentieth century, lucrative phosphate reserves were discovered on Banaba that prompted an industrial-scale mining operation; this set in motion a machinery of destruction that stripped the local population of their traditional livelihood. Despite mounting a strong resistance, Banabans could not prevent the steady loss of their land. Then, during the Second World War, the Banabans were deported by the Japanese occupying forces and scattered across several islands in the Pacific, with many being pressed into forced labor. Immediately after the war, the British colonial government used the fact of their dislocation to reunite this far-flung community, deciding to relocate them all to Fiji. Accordingly, in May 1945, the Banabans were resettled on Rabi Island. As a result of this forced migration, Banabans today have two “home” islands separated by more than 2,000 kilometers and belonging to two different Pacific nation-states. This elemental doubling of belonging, as it were, is one of the constituting characteristics of Banaban identity. In Fiji, Banabans are known as an ethnic group inhabiting Rabi Island but also owning an island of origin in Kiribati, whereas being Banaban in Kiribati now implicates a second home island in Fiji. “*Uen abau*” (two home islands) is an expression Banabans use for the concept of “homeland,” defying exclusive reference to a single center (compare Kempf 2003, 55). The narrative of exodus from Egyptian bondage and entry into the Promised Land at once stabilizes and authorizes a collective narrative of the events leading to Banaban relocation (and, thus, to articulation of the two islands).

However, when we take a closer look at historical events and how they interlink with archetypal narratives from the Old Testament, another important issue emerges. Banabans compare their experience of exploitation and repression at the hands of the phosphate industry and the colonial administration on Banaba—and even more so their enslavement and deportation under wartime military rule—with the biblical narrative of liberation from Egyptian bondage. Thus, the Israelites’ Exodus is correlated with their own liberation—either from colonial repression on Banaba or from having been dispersed and oppressed by their Japanese occupiers—whereas the Israelites’ taking possession of the Promised Land is correlated with the community’s forced migration to Rabi Island in Fiji.

But why do Banabans, in evoking this analogy, impart an altogether different spin to the biblical narrative? Why do they associate the repression they suffered on their beloved home island, but also at the destinations to which they were subsequently deported, with the Israelites' experience of enslavement in another country, yet insist, at the same time, on referring to the (originally) alien island of Rabi in Fiji as their Promised Land? This difficult question is not made any easier by my insistence on applying the idea of diaspora, as deployed in the social sciences, to the resettled Banabans. For, as I show more closely in the next section, I construe the Banabans on Rabi Island (and elsewhere) as a diasporic society. But can Rabi Island, the "Promised Land" of Banabans, simultaneously be a place in the diaspora? In Jewish understanding, any talk of a Promised Land in the diaspora would make little sense, because diaspora *per se* refers to the fact of dispersal and of living outside the Promised Land (see Baumann 2000: 316–19; compare Dufoix 2008: 4–5). However, could not diaspora in a more recent sense, one tendentially secular because no longer coupled to the historical experiences of the Jews, be better placed to encompass this contradictory coupling of the biblical Exodus and Banaban history?

Thus, let us study first the specific use to which Banabans have put the biblical narrative. I suggest we need to read their appropriation of the Exodus motif as a creative, selective, and multilayered process, one that is intimately linked to the identity politics of this resettled community. Banabans, in the stories they tell, leave us in no doubt that the experience of dispersal and dislocation is central to their historical identity. Yet no less important to them is the fact of having survived as a community on Rabi Island, something that would have been impossible on their home island of Banaba, considering how its landscape and ecology had been ruined by decades of phosphate extraction. Therefore, as I see it, this metaphoric association of historical and biblical storylines has three principal functions. First, it permits Banabans to organize their perceptions of the past, codifying and preserving them for the sake of future generations. The core historical-religious narrative—one that covers a great deal of territory, ranging from deportation to collective salvation—is an informing element behind everything the resettled Banabans do, or have done in the recent past, to reconstitute and perpetuate their identity as an autonomous ethnic group on Rabi Island. Second, by pegging their self-image as victims and survivors of both colonial repression and dispersal to the Exodus narrative, Banabans are backing up their claim to Rabi Island as a God-given second homeland and, additionally, anchoring this claim in the social memory of their diasporic community. Finally, they draw on this core narrative to justify and defend the claim to ownership of Rabi Island that they make

within their country of residence (a claim this time directed at outsiders, especially ethnic Fijians) while simultaneously invoking divine will. The Exodus narrative allows Banabans to encode and pass on their painful experience of oppression and displacement, together with the twin facts of their collective survival and their right to Rabi Island. The motif harks back to an era in which Banabans vented their anticolonial protestations against the repression and dispersal sustained at the hands of imperial powers, protestations that were intended to bestow moral legitimacy on their cause and standpoint. By encapsulating the past in religious metaphors, Banabans synchronize religious affiliation, historical awareness, and identity politics.

Banaban Diaspora

Why use the word “diaspora” in connection with this resettled community? The answer is that no other word better fits the stories Banabans tell about their displacement and subsequent resettlement; and if that were not enough, there is the fact of Banaban identification with the Israelites of the Old Testament, as attested by such not infrequently heard remarks as “We are like the Jews.” Yet, with the notable exception of the intellectual elite (see K. Teaiwa 2005; T. Teaiwa 2005), the great majority of Banabans in Fiji and Kiribati never explicitly mention diaspora. Given this is so, let me state briefly why I think the concept of diaspora applies to the resettled Banabans. Three principal criteria are met, I argue.² The first of these is the recent history of dispersal.³ For Banabans, World War II was, as we have seen, a time of deportation and dispersal under Japanese rule, with their being subsequently resettled on Rabi Island by the British colonial powers. Then, beginning in the latter decades of the twentieth century, Rabi Island became the scene of an ongoing process of dispersal that continues to this day. The Banaban diaspora is currently put at some 5,000–6,000 individuals. Although more than half are still on Rabi Island, a growing number of Banabans have now moved to Fiji’s urban centers, especially Suva, Lautoka, and Labasa; a smaller number live on Tarawa and Banaba in Kiribati; and a tiny fraction are now residents of Australia and New Zealand. Nevertheless, Rabi Island forms the political, social, and cultural hub of the diasporic community. The overwhelming majority of the generations of Banabans who were born on the island, or who grew up there, have come to see it as their home.⁴

The second criterion is that the Banaban diaspora is marked by the retention of links with Banaba, the island of origin in the Central Pacific. Banaba represents the identity-conferring source and origin to which all Banabans, wherever they may be today, feel bound by ancestry, traditions,

land ownership, and collective memory. By “cross-mapping” Banaba’s original four villages onto their new island in Fiji, the resettled community was able to write into the very landscape of Rabi the bonds that tied them to their ancestral homeland. Thus was Rabi Island turned into a geographically, politically, and culturally separate zone, guaranteeing the survival of Banabans as an autonomous group endowed with a unique culture and ethnic identity. Identification with Rabi, therefore, serves as a window into the deeper past of Banaban origins.

Banaba today is a largely marginalized and derelict place, its landscape torn up and destroyed by the phosphate mining that went on there for so long. It is now jointly administered by the State of Kiribati and the political leadership of the Banabans on Rabi Island. Future planning by the authorities about what to do with Banaba oscillates between resuming phosphate mining and rehabilitation. According to official census data, upward of 300 people are now living on the island.⁵ A few are government officials from Kiribati, but most are Banabans from Rabi who were sent over by the Rabi Council of Leaders to act as custodians. Both the island’s history and its current plight confer on the island, and those living there, a sense of diaspora. Thus, the Banaban settlers from Fiji may have built their homes in the ruins of their ancestral island, but there is no escaping the fact that they have settled a deformed land, whose very soil was removed to a depth of several meters prior to shipment to metropolitan countries like New Zealand and Australia, where it ended up fertilizing some farmer’s field (compare K. Teaiwa 2005). Although Banaba undoubtedly exhibits diasporic characteristics, reflecting its originating status, Rabi Island functions now as the new homeland, reflecting its diasporic status. Nor is it the case that homeland and diaspora are reified categories; on the contrary, they are open-ended processes subject to (and still undergoing) change.

However, the Banabans’ new home island in Fiji is very much contested terrain. A third criterion by which Banabans qualify as a diasporic group is found in the difficult relationship they have with Fiji, their country of residence. Military and civil coups have rocked this country repeatedly since the end of the 1980s, destabilizing it economically and politically. Seizure of power was justified, more often than not, as necessary to safeguard autochthonous Fijian hegemony over the second largest of Fiji’s ethnic groups, the Indo-Fijians (e.g., Kaplan 2004; Lal 1992, 2000; Lal and Pretes 2001). This has resulted in a number of constitutional amendments favoring the autochthonous Fijian population, which Banabans see as disadvantageous not only to Indo-Fijians as an ethnic group but to themselves as well. However, what is even worse from a Banaban point of view is that, with this new ascendancy on the part of ethno-nationalist Fijians, their

officially recognized ownership rights to Rabi Island are now coming under attack (see Kempf 2003; Kempf and Hermann 2005).⁶ In addition, the ethno-nationalist movement in Fiji has used religion as an instrument of political legitimation. Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, for instance, defended his seizure of power in 1987 by claiming that God had mandated to him the task of saving the Fijians and their land; one of Rabuka's core messages is that Fiji is God-given territory that must remain in Fijian hands (see Rutz 1995: 84–86). For Banabans, who are fully aware of this Fijian discourse, this provides a means of defense. After all, they share with Fijians a common belief in Christianity, which lets them invoke the same divine authority. Thus, not only can they explain their status as a diasporic community in Fiji in terms of a specifically Christian discourse, they can also hope that the Fijians will appreciate the validity of their argument.

The Motto

“Atuara Buokira” (Help us, O God of ours) is a motto that adorns the letterhead of the Rabi Council of Leaders, the body representing the political interests of Banabans. The accompanying signet—with its stylized depictions of fish and ocean, of frigate bird and sky, of Banaba itself—evokes traditional aspects of an island culture once built exclusively around fishing. The logo was designed in the 1970s, at a time when the Banabans of Rabi were stepping up their legal and political battles with the British colonial government and the British Phosphate Commissioners (BPC). It was then that the case compiled by the Banaban community came before the High Court in London. One aim was to secure adequate financial compensation for Banaban land destroyed by mining; another was to secure a commitment that their home island would be ecologically rehabilitated. In tandem with these legal battles, Banabans sought to win sovereign status for Banaba (in association with Rabi Island in Fiji) in what was a bid to regain control of their home island and any remaining resources. At the height of the political campaign, they incorporated the motto “Justice for the Banabans” into their logo. But this was to prove a false dawn: by the end of the 1970s it was clear that Banabans had been unable to get Britain to agree to even a single one of their demands. To make matters worse, the island of Banaba was then included in the newly created nation state of Kiribati, which gained independence in 1979. To be sure, when appearing before the High Court some years earlier, Banabans had won an important moral victory, but their appeals for adequate compensation and for removal of the scars left in Banaba's landscape had fallen on deaf ears. “*Atuara Buokira*,” explained Taomati Teai, one of the leading men who helped coordinate the

political actions taken at the time, “is actually people crying out. People in extreme distress. They’ve given their best, as they firmly believe, but still they don’t have anything to show for it. So now they are crying out to God: ‘Please help us.’ It is the cry of people in need, in desperate need. . . . We are still crying out for help—that’s why we’ve got that letterhead now” (see also Kempf and Teai 2005). Today the signet of the Rabi Council of Leaders symbolizes a diasporic community that has tied its ethnic identity—its very adherence to Christianity—to the historical awareness of having survived victimization via colonial exploitation, dispossession, and displacement, yet without having had any of these injustices redressed. The motto is intended to recall this principled historical stance and, thus, the need Banabans now feel to seek help from on high. The invocation “Atuara Buokira” further implies that, between the Banaban community and the Christian God, there exists a special relationship. I will take this up in connection with the historical narrative of a Promised Land in the diaspora. However, before doing so, I want to show, based on the narrative of Banabans’ conversion to Christianity, that religion has indeed become constitutive of their group identity.

Conversion to Christianity

Central to the first historical narrative I consider here is the conversion of Banaba’s inhabitants to Christianity, a process that began in the second half of the nineteenth century. As older Banabans tell it, their ancestors’ conversion was heralded by a prophecy. Oral tradition has it that the first Christian missionaries, Protestants as it happened, had already set sail for Banaba, when Nei Tituabine—today seen as the most important goddess in the traditional Banaban pantheon—appeared to a local family, announcing that a great fire would soon be approaching the island. This fire, Nei Tituabine went on, would signal the imminent arrival of a truly powerful god. Nei Tituabine therefore advised the Banabans to renounce all their traditional gods and unconditionally accept this new and greater god, to whom she too would from now on be subordinate. Thus, when in 1885, in the persons of Alfred C. Walkup (an American) and his assistant Kinta (a man from the Kiribati island of Tabiteuea), the first missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) landed on Banaba to commence their missionary work, the Banaban goddess’s prophecy had clearly (from the perspective of the islanders) been fulfilled.⁷ In retrospect, many Banabans see in the approaching fire foretold by Nei Tituabine the arrival of the light that would lead their ancestors out of the darkness of an archaic world of immorality, disease, and ignorance, extinguishing the

heathen beliefs and practices in which they had previously languished (see Benaia 1991: 23–26, 37; Hedstrom 1995: 10–11).

The orally transmitted story of the acceptance of Christianity heralded by Nei Tituabine is firmly lodged in Banaban social memory. This can be primarily attributed to Rabi Islands' Banaban Dancing Group, whose program of performing various episodes drawn from precolonial and colonial times includes the dance drama "Rokon te Aro" (The Coming of Christianity), which begins with the episode of Nei Tituabine's prophecy (see Kempf 2011). This historically and culturally specific conceptualization of Banaban conversion offers a key insight on which Banabans base their special relationship to God: by claiming to have anticipated the coming, and acceptance, of the Christian God through the agency of their local goddess, they are asserting that they have, in effect, played an active role in their conversion. The fact that Nei Tituabine voluntarily submitted to this new Christian God is much emphasized by Banabans. In this historic gesture, they claim, can be discerned a crucial difference from the traditional creator god of the I-Kiribati, Nareau,⁸ who, unlike Nei Tituabine, was at no stage willing to relinquish his power. Hence, for example, a comment made by one member of the Banaban community following a performance of "Rokon te Aro":

E noraki te kaokoro ikai. Te reeti ni Banaba i bon irouna ao Kiribati bon irouna. . . . N aroia kain Banaba ngkekei bon Atuaia Nei Tituabine. . . . Ma e bon okiria kain abana ae Banaba, Nei Tituabine, "kam katukai, kakai ba e nangi roko Te Atua ae maka riki nakoiu". . . . Nareau, e aki, e bon tiku n aroia n Atua irouia kain Kiribati. E taua nmena n Atua. . . . Ao e bon matoa irouia kain Kiribati nikarokoa taai aikai. . . . Ao anne kaokorora kain Banaba. Ngaira Atuara Nei Tituabine ma Kiribati, Nareau.

(You can see the difference here. [Between] the people of Banaba and those I-Kiribati. . . . [F]or the people of Banaba, their goddess really was Nei Tituabine before. . . . But then she turned to the people of her land, which is Banaba, Nei Tituabine did, [saying] "You leave me, leave me, for He's about to arrive, the God who is powerful more than me". . . . [As for] Nareau, he didn't [do that], he just remained there in his own right as a god of the people of Kiribati. He held onto his position as a god. . . . And it's really a firm thing with the people of Kiribati even today. . . . And that's where they differ from the people of Banaba. Our god is Nei Tituabine, while for the Kiribati [it is] Nareau.)

Here we find the traditional gods (and their various historical agencies) being enlisted in the cause of ethnic differentiation; Nei Tituabine and Nareau are given the status of ethnic emblems. The comment illustrates how, on the basis of their ascriptions, Banabans have made the repositioning of their gods within the context of religious transformation processes into constitutive features of their own ethnicity. The narrative of the anticipation and acceptance of the Christian God assigns a key role to the local goddess (as the embodiment of the local power of the land) in the run-up to conversion. Thus Banabans inscribe their historically and culturally specific accession to Christianity, stressing their autonomy of ethnicity and validating Christianity as integral to their identity.

In my opinion, this story of conversion to Christianity is part of a wider-ranging ethnic discourse about the original autonomy of ancestral Banaba, a discourse that Banabans developed in the course of their political clashes with the colonial powers. It paints a picture of a precolonial reality in which the relative isolation of Banaba conferred both ethnic uniqueness and political independence on its habitants; then came annexation, phosphate mining, colonial arbitrariness, and displacement, which brought to an end this autonomy.⁹ In the later struggle for compensation and sovereignty, the Banabans' political leaders took to citing this construction of a prior Banaban autonomy as justification for their demand that their island should not be seen as part of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands. In doing so, they were taking especial aim at the British colonial practice of plowing most of the proceeds from phosphate mining into financing the colonial entity, moneys that they insisted should rightfully go to Banaba's indigenous landowners. The opposing side—the representatives of the British administration, the mining company, the political leadership of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands—argued that Banabans were in fact Gilbertese (in today's parlance, I-Kiribati), who only after the discovery of phosphate reserves on Banaba had (for merely economic reasons) "discovered" that they were ethnically different. Faced with the indisputable fact of kinship ties, cultural intermingling, and linguistic standardization (in the wake of Bible translation into the Kiribati language), this contrarian view only redoubled Banabans' determination to further define their ethnic difference from the I-Kiribati (see Binder 1977: 146–67; Dagmar 1989: 201–3; Hermann 2003, 2005; Kempf and Hermann 2005; MacDonald 1982: 268–69).

The Promised Land

The manner in which the linking of religious affiliation, historical awareness, and political identity is used by Banabans to constitute Rabi Island as their Promised Land in the diaspora is demonstrated in a second historical

narrative. Here linkage is made between the pioneer generation of Banabans, who immediately after the war dared to begin again on Rabi Island, and the Israelites of the Old Testament whom God led out of Egyptian bondage to the Promised Land. This metaphorical linkage is rooted in the experience and memory of war, hunger, dispersal, and resettlement, as subsequently reworked and passed on by the founder generation via oral history until, in a standardized version, it gained a firm hold in the social memory of diasporic Banabans. In this process of codification and transmission, the Banaban Dancing Group rates a mention, taking as it did oral history and turning it into memorable dance dramas (see Kempf 2004, 2011; Kempf and Hermann 2005). Thus, the passage of time has thrown up a mnemonic configuration that can be resolved into four consecutive episodes, or “chapters,” as some Banabans prefer to say: first, a period of repression and hunger following capture and occupation by the Japanese Army in World War II; second, the Japanese-ordered deportation and dispersal of the Banabans to the islands of Nauru, Kosrae, and Tarawa; third, the reunion of the scattered Banabans on Tarawa at the end of the war, including the ensuing voyage to Fiji; and fourth—the final period—the landing of the Banabans on Rabi Island, followed by a precarious time living as displaced persons in a provisionally erected tent camp, a time that all Banabans now associate with a collective oath then taken to build a church in commemoration of the settlers’ arrival.

Given their Christian ideology, Banabans discern God’s hand in the details of how their history has unfolded. Looking back, they are persuaded that God extended a protective hand over the Banaban community in the difficult years: first reuniting them, then conveying them to Rabi; in the final analysis, it was God who had kept them from disappearing utterly. This narrative of survival by the settler generation is compared, especially by church leaders, with Old Testament stories like the Exodus of the Israelites and their entry into the Promised Land. For example, Pastor Temaka Benaia (now deceased) wrote in a treatise:

Biblically, the Banabans are like the Israelites who were called from Egypt, the land of bondage and hardships. The Banabans left and traveled to Rabi under very difficult conditions. They journeyed by sea but upon reaching Rabi, they realized that, like Canaan, the land was overflowing with “milk” and “honey,” in the abundance of water and fertile soil to plant food crops. The Banaban leaders or chairpersons of the Rabi Council of Leaders, like the Leaders of the Israelites, were God’s chosen people. . . . Like the Israelites, the Banabans had put their trust in God and they believed that God could help them too (Benaia 1991: ix–x).

Here the author is reproducing a discourse that, in its basic structure, articulates two different sequences of events. This metaphorical linkage is predicated on the Exodus narrative. The image of Egyptian bondage is usually equated with the repression the Japanese inflicted on Banabans during the Pacific War. The reference to the perilous voyage that Banabans undertook on regaining their liberty and being reunited is a clear parallel with the Israelites' time of wandering in the wilderness. Finally, the Banabans reach Rabi Island, their new home, whose wealth of resources prompts comparison with Canaan, the Promised Land of the Israelites. As a logical consequence, the leaders of the Banaban community are now portrayed, in line with the biblical narrative, as God's elect. Indeed, God is the pivot in this discursive equation. It is in His presence and His agency that Israelites and Banabans alike repose their trust, making their stories comparable. This same God who was the salvation of the Israelites, who led them into the Promised Land, has also liberated and united the scattered Banabans, conveying them to Rabi Island and ensuring their survival as a community. This historical narrative places Rabi Island at the heart of divinely ordained Banaban survival. In turn, it is the ongoing existence of Banabans as an ethnic group that supports their claim to Rabi Island. The nexus between Rabi Island and Canaan turns on Banabans' conviction that God gave them that island as part of His salvational plan, after having first brought them to its shores. A Methodist pastor, who explained to me in a lengthy conversation the parallels between Israelites and Banabans, summed up the matter as follows: "[Rabi Island] is God's present and gift to the Banabans."

The *modus operandi* of this representation of the past involves combining oral history with classical written text. This nexus has two important functions. First, it provides for the possibility of self-authorization. Reference to Holy Scripture allows the narrative construction of a divinely influenced, goal-directed course of history to be authorized, a construct that fashions out of the raw materials of repression, dispersal, reunion, and resettlement a teleology of displacement, so that Rabi Island can finally be recast as a land given to the Banabans by God. Second, the sequential coordination of orally transmitted history with archetypes from the Old Testament serves as a mnemonic device. The point of such mnemonic codification is to preserve institutionalized knowledge of the community's past, a knowledge that future generations must on no account forget. Just how this function plays out in the concrete praxis of remembering may be seen in the following case. The remarks reproduced below were made by a woman in her early forties from the Rabi village of Tabwewa, who, when interviewed on the linkage between homeland, remembering, and emotion, drew a number of parallels between Banabans and the Israelites:

What I do know is that [Banabans] compare themselves with the Israelites. During church, say, it may be recalled during the sermon that the Israelites were captives in Egypt. . . . And they were there for how many years? Forty years of captivity, wasn't it? And then they were set free. And when they were free, they were told to go to the Promised Land. God would give them the Promised Land. That was Canaan, wasn't it? . . . And so they reached Canaan—well, not all of them did. So the Banabans said: "We are just like the Israelites. We were in captivity under British rule on Banaba. [The British] took away our lands and all. And then we were brought to the Promised Land of Rabi. Where there is honey and milk." That's what's they often say. . . . You often hear that! Up there in the church! (August 8, 1998).¹⁰

What the woman from Tabwewa was doing here was reconstructing, first on a purely ad hoc basis, the outlines of the biblical narrative; she then proceeded to link this template to the foundational narrative on the Banaban past. As can be seen, this process of stabilizing and transmitting collectively shared knowledge by reference to Holy Scripture does not necessarily exclude a flexible form of narrative ascription. In the version before us here, Egyptian bondage is associated with exploitation of Banaba's land and its people by the British colonial powers—not with enslavement by the Japanese occupiers during World War II. This variant is not at all uncommon, because it allows the injustice wrought by decades of phosphate mining on Banaba to be brought into focus. Nor does this break in any way with the cultural schema on which Banaban mnemonic praxis is predicated. The basic pattern of historical sequencing can be stated thus: Banabans were repressed and exploited on their original island; therefore, they had to leave it; yet they were able to survive as an ethnic group, despite the profound dislocation sustained, because they found in Rabi Island a second homeland. In this linkage forged with the archetypal narratives from Holy Scripture, two intentions can be discerned: to retain the narrative of stemming from Banaba and arriving on Rabi Island as the hub around which diasporic Banaban identity turns; and to permanently inscribe this narrative in the community's memory.

"You often hear that! Up there in the church!" The church mentioned by the woman is the Methodist church of the village of Tabwewa. This building is in Nuku,¹¹ the island's nearby administrative center; it sits on a hill overlooking the island's main showground, where all Banaban festivities are held. Members of the pioneer generation are said to have placed stones on the site and to have sworn to build a church there at a later date in commemoration of their arrival. These stones are also said to have been

used when laying the church's foundations. The building, therefore, not only recalls the praxis of symbolically taking possession of Rabi; it is also an expression of the settlers' resolve to give to their vision of the past a fixed spatial mooring, to assign to it a fixed place in the landscape. This was a conscious act, an attempt to justify and (literally) "put in place" a memory deemed constitutive and binding alike. By erecting a public monument in stone, the founders sought to inscribe in Rabi's landscape a token of remembrance, one that would outlast their own day and age and serve future generations as a reference point of shared diaspora identity (compare J. Assmann 2005; A. Assmann and Harth 1991). Today, the church's exposed position and its name—Te Kanuringa ("Remembrance")—indicate how central it is to the social memory of the whole Banaban community.¹² Te Kanuringa is a clear case of official representation of the past being doubly stabilized and renewed. The memorial church simultaneously localizes, authorizes, and supports the narrative construction of past events in association with the Old Testament, and it does so in the same way as the narrative that is constantly reiterated within the ritual setting of divine service, validating and filling with meaning the church as a place of remembrance. Localization and monumentalization, in tandem with the linkage to Holy Scripture, help to enshrine in Banaban social memory this twofold narrative of origin and arrival on Rabi Island.

We should note that it is primarily members of the Methodist Church who equate the Israelites and Rabi Island with the Promised Land (compare Benaia 1991; Hedstrom 1995). They do this, I think, for historical and political reasons. At the time when they reached Rabi Island after the war, most of the Banaban settlers were members of the London Missionary Society (LMS).¹³ However, in 1960 the LMS Church on Rabi was absorbed into the Methodist Church of Fiji (Benaia 1991, 67). Therefore, Rabi's Methodist Church, the direct successor organization, now represents the earlier church of a large portion of the settler generation. From this fact, Banaban Methodists not only derive their claim to seniority over all the other religious denominations on Rabi; they also lay claim to interpretive sovereignty over a segment of recent history that is vital to the collective identity of this diasporic community.¹⁴ Thus the historical narrative represents a part of social memory not explicitly endorsed by the other religious denominations on Rabi, which is not to say that they dispute it in any way.

The Festival of Commemoration

Every December 15, Banabans hold an official ceremony commemorating the historic event they refer to as *te moan roko* (the first arrival). The

ceremony recalls December 15, 1945, the day the pioneer generation first went ashore on Rabi Island. The settlers originally marked this important anniversary with a religious service, the point being, as an interlocutor once told me, to thank “God for his safe-keeping in difficult times.” In later years, however, this day of commemoration gave way to a festival of celebration spreading over several days, with an opening ceremony, guests of honor, march-pasts, dances, sporting competitions, games, and shows.

The annual festival of celebration is held at the sportsfield cum fairground (*te marae*); it is situated directly below the hill on which memorial church Te Kanuringa now stands. This choice of location is historically significant, as it was in this general area that the settlers, immediately after their arrival, were accommodated in makeshift tents, pending construction of more permanent housing. The site, therefore, is a reminder of the difficult circumstances and the many hardships attending the early years on Rabi. The resettled Banabans, weakened and traumatized by the perils and violence of wartime, came to see themselves in this provisional camp as poised between annihilation and survival, between the hopelessness of the past and the promise of a new beginning. Hence it is that at this place, which can be described as a pivotal point in their fortunes, the Banabans of Rabi Island gather every December 15 to recall, especially for sake of the younger generation, their foundational narrative of painful deprivation and hardship followed by the enormous achievements of the first settlers in turning Rabi into what it is today. The extent to which this festival of celebration has become a constitutive feature of the Banaban ethnic group as a whole can be gauged from the fact that December 15 is also now marked in other parts of the Banaban diaspora and even on the ancestral island of Banaba itself. Hence, the identity that Banabans living in the diaspora have built for themselves is predicated on this annual act of ritual remembrance, recalling the historic disruption wrought by war, dispersal, and resettlement.

On Rabi Island, the official opening ceremony on December 15 always follows the same basic format. After the guests of honor and councilors have taken their seats in the covered pavilion, local groups representing clubs, schools, and churches march out onto the fairground waving flags and banners. A clergyman opens the festivities with words of welcome and a short prayer. Immediately afterward, a local policeman hoists Fiji’s national flag, as a brass band strikes up Fiji’s national anthem; then follows the singing of the anthem—it is at one and the same time a hymn—of the Banaban community: “Te Atua Buokara” (God [Is] Our Help). Next come welcoming speeches by the chairman of the Rabi Council of Leaders and by high-ranking guests of honor. Then the various groups assembled on the

fairground march past the pavilion in a colorful spectacle. Offerings of various kinds, performed by Rabi's many dancing groups and choirs, bring to a close this official part of the opening celebrations. The idea underlying the festive display is that the four original villages on ancestral Banaba (Tabwewa, Uma, Tabiang, and Buakonikai), which were re-created on Rabi following resettlement, should gather together on the fairground. During the entire week of festivities the four villages, represented by various groups (sports teams, game players, dance troupes, choirs, etc.), engage in competitions. When the final day arrives, the points won by each village are tallied and the results announced: the victorious village is then honored at the closing ceremony, winding up that year's commemoration. It is via this leitmotiv of the four villages that the islands of Rabi and Banaba are invoked, recalled, celebrated, and remembered as intrinsically linked, as shared points of reference for Banabans everywhere. In sum, this annual festival of commemoration and celebration held on Rabi's fairground is pivotal to Banaban self-awareness.

I want now to look at one festival in particular, held in 2004, because it was marked by a series of reconfigurations.¹⁵ The focus then shifted to rediscovering the original meaning of December 15. The clergyman officiating that year (the various denominations take turns at this) happened to be a Methodist. The flyer setting out the program broke with past practice: this time the clergyman would not confine himself to a few introductory words and offer up a brief prayer; rather, he would be holding a devotion "with a message of God's deliverance and Salvation of the Banaban Race." Also, the organizing committee would be reviving the former custom of asking an elder from each of the villages to speak publicly, at the opening ceremony, about how he or she had experienced the war and resettlement. Under the heading of "Rongorongon te Bwimanimaua" (The Story of [December] 15), the core historical narrative was divided into four segments, with a representative of each village being assigned a segment to reminisce about. In the program this was set out in tabular form:

Rongorongon te Buaka ("Story of the War")	Tabwewa
Kamaeakinako ("Dispersal")	Uma
Mananga nako Rabi ("The Voyage to Rabi")	Tabiang
Te Roko i Rabi ("Arrival on Rabi")	Buakonikai ¹⁶

What was also special about the new program was that it would now move beyond the usual fare of dance spectacles and include songs thematizing the events of December 15.

From the welter of festivities in that year, two episodes shed light on my topic of choice: Banaban appropriation of the Exodus motif. One is the meditation by the minister of the Methodist church Te Kanuringa in Nuku. In a sermon given at the opening ceremony, he talked primarily of the foundational narrative of the Banaban community, again relating it to the biblical Exodus story. First, he established a reference to what the pioneer generation had been through, with their experience of wartime dispersal; then he dwelt on the protective hand God had shown during that time of existential imperilment:

Te buaka ma uotana aika arangin maiti nakoia ara ikawai. N tain te rongo ao e kanganga te amaraake iai, te kamaeaki nako nakon aba aika a maiti iai aika a roko i Nauru iai aika a roko Kosrae, eng! E taku te kantaninga teuana ba ea bua te botanaomata aei. Abua kaain Banaba, ma ngke a bane n rikorikoaki bon te Atua naba ae e rikorikoia man tabo nako, nikiran mwin te buaka aika a taku temangina ba ai akea kaain Banaba ma n tain te buaka ao tain te rongo ara ikawai a karakina aika ti ongora irouia ba ngkana e baka te boum ao a taromaui te Atua kawakinira. Amaiti aika a bobotaki n taromaui te Atua! Te Atua! Te Atua! Te Atua n tain te rongo, Te Atua n tain te buaka, te Atua n tain te kangakanga ao ti nang kaitau nte ingabong aei ba kabaian te bota n aomata boni mairoun te Atua. Ngaia ae kawakina ara bota n aomata ni karokoa raioiroin te ingabong aei.

(During the war our elders really had to go through a lot. In the time of hardship with little food, they were dispersed to many islands. There were some who went to Nauru; and there were some who went to Kosrae, yes they did! From time to time, it was said that this group of people was lost. That they were the lost people of Banaba. But when they were finally all brought together again, it was the Lord who had collected them from all those places. Other wartime survivors said there were no more people of Banaba left. But during the war and during the famine, so our elders tell us and so we have heard it from them, when the bombs were falling they prayed to the Lord: "Protect us." There are plenty who gathered to pray: The Lord! The Lord! The Lord! The Lord in time of famine, the Lord in time of war, the Lord in time of hardship. And we are really thankful this morning that the people back then received the blessing of the Lord and that He has continued to protect us down to this very day.)

After thus relating the trials and tribulations of wartime dispersal, the pastor turned to the arrival of the pioneer generation on Rabi Island:

Kain abara aika ti bane n roko nte ingabong aei. Ti roko iaon abara ae bou ae anganira te Atua, te taeka ae moan te kakawaki nte baibara ngkana kam roko i Kanaan, kam na aki mamananga taekan te Atua ae kaotinakoi ngkami mai Aikubita ni baina aei aroraki ni karokoa kam roko i Kanaan ba Kanaan e ranga nako iai karewen te maniberu ma ranin mama te tabo ae e mari. Kain abara ngkana tia roko n abara ae bou mairoun te Atua ae angania ara ikawai tina aki mamananga ba kabaian te bota n aomata aei bon mairoun te Atua n tainako.

(People of our land who have assembled (here) this morning. We arrived on this land of ours, newly given to us by the Lord. The word that really matters in the Bible goes like this: when you reach Canaan you should not forget the Lord who brought you up out of Egypt by His hand and who stretched His arm out over you until you finally reached Canaan. For out of Canaan flows honey from the bee and milk from the breast. A place that is fruitful. People of our land, if we are now here in this new land of ours that the Lord gave to our elders, let us not forget that the well-being of our people is truly from the Lord and always will be.)

This passage clearly shows the Methodist pastor using the occasion—the celebration of the arrival of the pioneers—to recall the metaphorical relationship between Rabi Island and the biblical Canaan of the Israelites'. By linking the story of the settlers freshly arrived on Rabi to that of the Israelites' own arrival in the Promised Land, he reiterated that Rabi Island was given to Banabans by God and that it therefore now belongs to them.

The second episode involved the public singing of songs at the end of the opening ceremony. I have chosen a particular song, "A Mananga Ngkoa" (They Traveled in the Past), that was composed by Burentau Tabunawati and performed at the festival by his wife Nei Toaningeri. In this song, Israelites and Banabans are depicted as travelers who have entered the Promised Land (the actual Exodus itself from Egypt is skirted over). "A Mananga Ngkoa" accentuates the local discourse of the diasporic Banabans, its chief aim being to foreground their arrival on Rabi and to compare the latter to the Promised Land. When Nei Toaningeri stepped up to the microphone, she introduced her song with the following words:

Aia te kuna ae na aneneia aio, moan manangaia tibun Iteraera nakon te aba are Kanaan. Ao ngaira kain Rabi kanga ti boni mananga ke ti bon aranaki naba ba kain tibun Iteraera ae ti kamanangaki ni kitana Aikubita nako Kanaan. Ao ngkai kam nang ongora.

(Now this song I'm about to sing is about how the Israelites traveled to the land known as Canaan. And we people of Rabi, we had to travel too, just like the Israelites when they left Egypt for Canaan. So please listen to my song.)

She then sang the first two verses of her song along with the refrain (repeated after each verse). According to my later reconstructions, there was actually a third verse, but she had to drop it for reasons of time. The full lyrics of the song are set out below:

A Mananga Ngkoa

I.

A mananga ngkoa tibun Iteraera	They traveled in the past, the Israelites did,
Nakon te aba ni berita	To the Promised Land
E angania te Atua ngkoa	Which the Lord had given them.
Tai kan nakoim, ibukira	Don't go [for] yourself, [but] for [the good] of us all

Chorus:

Ko raba, ko raba	Thank you, thank you,
Te Uea ibukin abara	Lord, for our land
Ko katauraioia ibukira	You prepared it for us.
Kona mena iroura	You will be with us,
Iesu ara kukurei	Jesus our joy,
Ue ue ueen te kukurei	Flower of happiness.

II.

E kakenato iroura te bong aio	Today is an important day for us,
Tebwi ma nimaua n Ritemba	The 15th day of December.
Tia roko raoi iaon Rabi	We arrived safe and sound on Rabi.
Mai iroun Iesu te kabaia	From Jesus Himself the blessing.

III.

Aua matan n taratara nako ngkai	Four eyes are looking now
Rabi te aba ni berita	At Rabi the Promised Land.
Aranga iai kaubai ma kukurei	Pouring out prosperity and joy
Mai iroun Iesu te kabaia Amen	From Jesus Himself the blessing. Amen.

The metaphorical linkage is forged in three short steps or, more accurately, verses. The first verse tells of the Israelites arriving in the Promised Land. The second focuses on the festive and commemorative events within which context diasporic Banabans now recall to (social) memory the pioneers' arrival on Rabi Island. The third verse rounds out the song by explicitly equating Rabi Island with the Promised Land (*te aba ni berita*). The refrain is the connecting link binding the verses together, driving home the message that the Promised Land was given to them by God.

Conclusion

It is only by systematically including religion in the study of contemporary diasporas that we can hope to achieve a firm understanding of the practice and politics of diasporic communities. This is also, indeed especially, true of the Pacific diaspora. In terms of this particular study—how religious discourses and practices are used by diasporic Banabans living on Rabi Island—I wish to draw attention to three interlinked areas in which religion unfolds its agency on the culture and lifestyle of diasporic groups. These areas are identity, place, and memory.

First, religion exerts influence on the ongoing construction of ethnic identity in the diaspora. For Banabans, being Christian is a constituting feature of their identity as an autonomous ethnic group. The reference to Christianity allows them not only to retain their self-image as victims and survivors of colonial exploitation, repression, and displacement but also to formulate a moral claim to fair compensation for the injustice sustained. The articulation of Christian religion and ethnic identity forms the crucial precondition for the narrative equation of Banabans with the Israelites. Banabans use this metaphoric link to interpret past events in terms of religious redemption and being chosen by God. In this connection, they construe Rabi Island as the place of their collective salvation via divine intervention.

Second, religion is of great importance whenever a diasporic community is concerned to create sites of belonging and identification in the diaspora. To be sure, Banabans use the Christian religion to link their community to Rabi Island, but in this process of place making, they are also reconfiguring their ethnic identity in the diaspora. By linking their specific view of the past to biblical narratives, they authorize a teleology of displacement, recasting Rabi Island as their Promised Land in the diaspora. When diasporic Banabans take their archetypal narratives from the Old Testament, it is to underwrite their presence on (and ownership rights over) Rabi as manifestations of God's will. In today's postcolonial context in Fiji, where

Banabans are confronted with Fijian claims to Rabi Island, they are able, by equating Rabi with Canaan, to reply to Fijians in terms of shared Christian belonging. Banaban incorporation in the Christian organizations of Fiji thus supports their discourse of cautious empowerment and positioning in the diaspora. Against a background where metaphoric linkage is conveyed by everyday and ceremonial communication alike, an important role is played by theological texts, sermons, narratives, and songs addressed to younger generations, who need to be permanently reminded that Banabans, as victims and survivors of repression and displacement, equate Rabi Island with the Promised Land of divine providence.

Third, religion authorizes the social memory of a diasporic group. When Banabans cite the biblical narratives of Exodus from Egyptian bondage and deliverance into the Promised Land, they are condensing and preserving for future generations the manner in which they officially represent origin and arrival, displacement, and settlement. The linking of this foundational narrative to Holy Scripture hinges on a spatial anchoring, in this case building a memorial church. Such mnemonic devices, Holy Scripture on the one hand and a monument on the other, are intended to stabilize and give longevity to this identity-conferring Banaban narrative. It is by tying the narrative to a historical site and by architectonically consolidating memory that past events are articulated with Rabi Island, the better to build a second homeland there. Linkage between place and social memory helps Banabans to shape for themselves and perpetuate their collective identity in the diaspora. Thus, the Christian religion forms an integral part of the historical practice and politics of Banabans in constituting place, memory, and identity in the diaspora.

NOTES

1. A striking example of this theoretical insistence on deconstructing, or opening up, prevailing categories is Avtar Brah's "diaspora space," which is based on the concept of Third Space: "My argument is that diaspora space as a conceptual category is 'inhabited,' not only by those who have migrated and their descendants, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous. . . . The diaspora space is the site where the native is as much a diasporian as the diasporian is the native" (Brah 1996, 209).

2. On issues surrounding the definition of diaspora (and diasporas), see especially Safran 1991, 2004; Clifford 1994; Cohen 1997; Baumann 2000; Dufoix 2008.

3. To this Katerina Teaiwa added the aspect of the dispersal of Banaba's land (2005).

4. On this issue, see Hermann and Kokoria 2005, 129. When last carrying out research on Tarawa in Kiribati (in September 2009), I was able to raise the matter with younger Banabans from Fiji. A schoolboy, with whom I have remained in e-mail contact, has

revealingly chosen “rabifella” as his e-mail address. On the role of electronic communications in network building and identity formation in a Pacific diaspora, see Howard and Rensel 2012 (this issue).

5. See Kiribati 2005 Census, Vol. 2: Analytical Report, 104 (2007).

6. Concrete calls for Rabi’s return have been heard from a number of Fijian families now living on the neighboring island of Taveuni, who consider themselves the traditional holders of Rabi. For recent demands raised from the Fijian side, see “Villagers Want Rabi Island Back” on fijilive.com, June 5, 2007.

7. On the history of mission work on Banaba, see Binder 1977: 23–27; Silverman 1971: 88–94.

8. On the importance of the traditional creator god Nareau for Kiribati and its inhabitants, see Beiabure, Teraku and Uriam 1984: 1–6; Grimble 1989, 302; Maude and Maude 1994.

9. On the representation of original autonomy on Banaba, compare also Hermann 2005.

10. I wish to thank the interviewer here, Elfriede Hermann, who has kindly let me excerpt this passage.

11. The original village of Tabwewa on Banaba was traditionally expected to take the lead, a role then devolved on the eponymous village on Rabi. For this reason, close ties have existed between Tabwewa and Rabi’s adjacent administrative center in Nuku.

12. The church known as Te Kanuringa was completed in December 1979. Since 1963, religious services for the Methodist congregation in Tabwewa have been held there, initially in the assembly hall Emanuera—*Atua irovua I-Banaba* (God is with the Banabans), which was built next to the present church building (Benaia 1991: 69–70).

13. As mentioned earlier, the population of the island of Banaba was converted by ABCFM missionaries. In 1917, the LMS Church took over the work of the ABCFM on Banaba (on this point, see also Benaia 1991: 26, 31–32, 54, 58f.)

14. Exactly how far back in time the historical narrative goes in the specific form in which it is presently communicated has not been unequivocally resolved. One indication derives from the former administrative official and later professor of Pacific history at the Australian National University, Henry E. Maude, at the time a leading player in planning and overseeing Banaban resettlement. As Maude later recalled, the then leader of the Banabans, Rotan Tito, had been described to him on Rabi—as early as 1947—as the “new Moses” who had led his people into the Promised Land (see the Maude Papers, Part I. F. Papers on the *Banaban Action v. the Crown*. 6. Personal Correspondence and Documentation on the Action, “Recollections of Mr. Rotan during the 1930s,” Barr Smith Library Collection, University of Adelaide, Australia). In the historical documents from the early years of Rabi’s settlement, especially those written by Banabans, to date no other indications have come to light on such equating of Banabans and Israelites.

15. My insights into the historical changes undergone by Rabi Island's festival of commemoration are primarily based on my own ethnographic documentation of the festivities in 1997, 2004, and 2005. Surviving programs from earlier festivals (drawn up each year by the Council Office for distribution) enabled me to form an idea of the order of proceedings in earlier years, the 1980s and 1990s.

16. See "15th December Programme—2004," Rabi Council of Leaders, Youth and Sport Department, 1.

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