

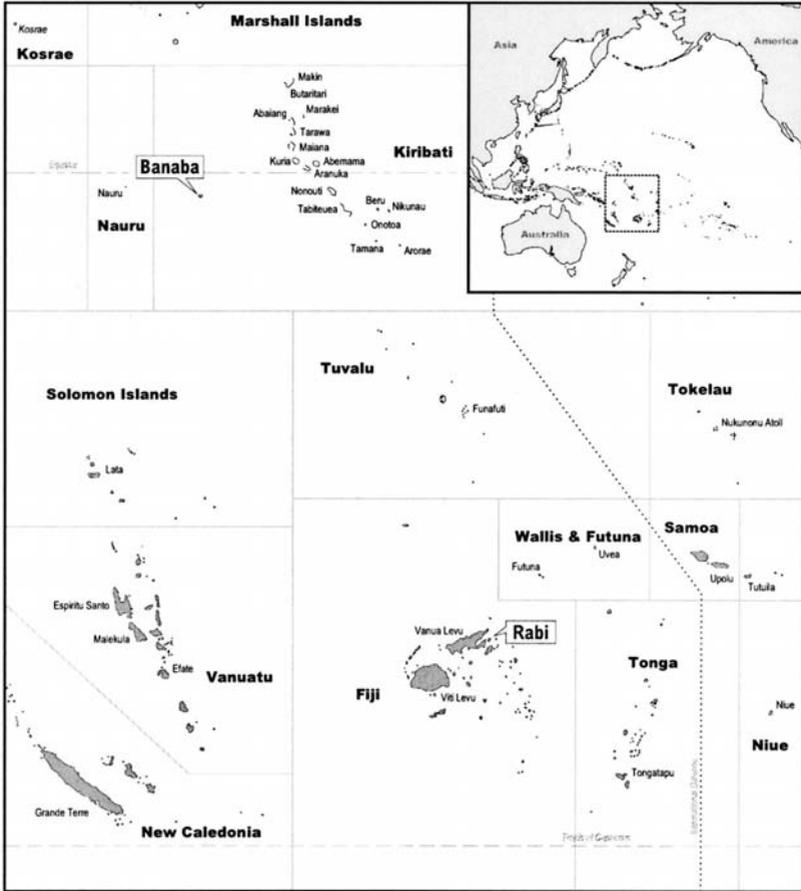
“SONGS CANNOT DIE”: RITUAL COMPOSING AND THE
POLITICS OF EMPLACEMENT AMONG THE BANABANS
RESETTLED ON RABI ISLAND IN FIJI

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Music and its performance are very important political instruments in the process of constituting place and homeland among the Banaban diaspora, a Micronesian community now mostly living on Rabi Island in Fiji. The central issue I address is how Banabans link locally created, contemporary music to the historical praxis of ongoing emplacement in their new Fijian island home. Music was at best marginal, in my original research project. My primary focus was on the historical dimensions and the more recent experiences and everyday practices associated with the re-localisation of a displaced community in Oceania. But from the very beginning of my 15-months stint of fieldwork on Rabi Island between 1997 and 1998, there was no escaping the evidence that for Rabi Island Banabans singing, dancing and performing dance theatre are of enormous social and political importance—something they share, incidentally, with other mobile and displaced peoples in Oceania (see e.g., Donner 1992, 2002:23-24, Howard and Rensel 2001:81, Thomas and Tuia 1995:110). The argument I develop in this paper is that Banabans deploy these genres of performing arts in order to spatially anchor, preserve and communicate to others the history, culture and identity of their community on Rabi Island.

The Banaban community has now been in the Fijian island of Rabi for more than 50 years and Banabans create, perform and disseminate to coming generations music underscoring their spatial and ethnic distinctiveness. This Micronesian population originally stemmed from Banaba (“Ocean Island”), an island in the Central Pacific of about 16km². Like the neighbouring but much larger island of Nauru, the island of Banaba happened to possess extensive phosphate deposits. Mining operations were initiated on Banaba in the year 1900 and grew rapidly and lucratively in the ensuing decades. At the end of the Second World War, the British colonial administration decided to relocate the indigenous Banabans to Fiji, in order to extend mining operations to all remaining untapped phosphate deposits. Since their resettlement in 1945, for the overwhelming majority of Banabans, Rabi Island, situated in the northeast of the Fijian Archipelago, has become a second home.



Banaba Island, which is today part of the neighbouring state of Kiribati, continues to figure as an identity-conferring place of origin to which Banabans feel bound through their ancestors, traditions and land ownership. At the same time, however, as a place to which they might one day collectively return, their original home has receded to a great distance. Banaba has been ecologically largely ruined by the inroads of phosphate mining over the decades and the available land on Banaba is much too small to absorb the present Banaban population. Moreover, the Banabans have built Rabi Island into a geographical, political and cultural base for their community life within Fiji, and have been unrelenting in making their

new island home a place that guarantees their survival as an autonomous group with an unmistakable culture and ethnic identity of its own.¹

This dialectic of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation renders the Banaban experience a promising ethnographic case for an approach in ethnology committed to rethinking the ties between people and places, past and present (see Appadurai 1996, Clifford 1997, Gupta and Ferguson 1997). The Banaban experience is of particular interest given the recent dynamic of globalisation, with its transnational flows and interplay of forces, that contributes in no small degree to eroding old anthropological discourses asserting the stability and unity of place, culture and identity, and to effecting a paradigm change favouring greater attention to fluidity, mutability and movement. This reorientation in anthropology is reflected in the current interest in topics such as borders, hybridity, journeys, migration, exile, transnationalism and diaspora. It combines well with a currently prolific analytical perspective that addresses the interrelatedness of roots and routes or dwelling and travelling (Clifford 1997:2, 36, Gilroy 1993:19, 190), displacement and localisation or emplacement (Brah 1996:180-82, 204, Malkki 1995:515-17), movement and fixity (Rappport and Dawson 1998:33), deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:50, Hastrup and Olwig 1997:7) or even de/territorialisation (Inda and Rosaldo 2002:12). Such varied conceptualisations of the reciprocal conditionality of movement and stability share a theoretical concern aimed at exploring historical and political processes and projects in connection with the ongoing constituting of homeland, place, tradition, community, identity, ethnicity and nation that unfolds in a context of global interweavings. Such a decentred and processual view of how specific people come to identify with specific places or territories allows for a depicting, comparing and interpretative probing of the naturalising presence and normative effect of essentialising representations. Likewise, it alerts the analytic gaze to the existence of constituting contacts and flows, relations and interconnections that transcend the local (see Appadurai 1988, 1996, Clifford 1997, Gupta and Ferguson 1997, Lavie and Swedenburg 1996, Malkki 1997, Massey 1994).

Against the backdrop of an anthropology increasingly turning to decentred, processual, global, interwoven conceptualisations of the local, and consequently less to exoticising and essentialising ones, it is worth asking what role music plays in this trend. Recent studies show that interest in how music, place and identity interrelate is by no means declining, but that their analytic approaches diverge widely. On the one hand, there are quite ambitious, phenomenologically inspired studies of social practices regarding the musical-poetical evocations of spatiality that continue, however, to suggest seemingly timeless, self-contained cultures removed

from colonial and/or postcolonial influences (see e.g., Feld 1995, 1996, Weiner 1991). On the other, there are also studies informed by idealised notions of a transnational and hybrid music that, because of their ostensive inherent flexibility and global mobility, seem to put behind them existing power orders and social emplacements (see the critical analyses of Schade-Poulsen 1997). Rather than ignoring or transfiguring global currents, however, I align my work with more viable studies that view music as a contributing factor in historical processes and day-to-day politics of constructing ethnicity, identity and locality, without losing sight of global entanglements and movements as integral components of continuity and change in local cultures (see e.g., Bottomley 1992, Coplan 1994, Gross, McMurray and Swedenburg 1996, Hoffman 2002, James 1999, Narayan 1996, Stokes 1997, Waterman 1990).

Movement and displacement as constituting forces of place and homeland are basic postulates for understanding the Banaban diaspora and its emplacement on Rabi Island. Whenever resettled Banabans seek to keep alive, through their music, their historical awareness of their origins and their displacement, they draw on the musical score, as it were, of the dynamic of movement and displacement by harnessing it to their continued relocalisation on Rabi Island. Self-composed songs, dances and dance theatre performances are strategically staged and artfully devised by Banabans to remind themselves of the spatial, cultural and historical dimensions of Banaba, their original island home, and to routinise these dimensions as inviolable co-ordinates of the embodied Banaban identity on Rabi Island. Even though this practice is closely connected to existing political competition and rivalries among Banaban composers, I argue, that this musical landscape is nevertheless pivotal to the process of emplacement in the community's new island home. The musical landscape helps, for example, to rally the community around an imagined focus of promised togetherness and of a homeland and future on Rabi Island. Singing and dancing, therefore, contribute significantly to the historical praxis of existential entwinement between Banaba and Rabi.

Since the time of resettlement on Rabi Island, music has increasingly become an element in Banabans' ongoing political struggle to claim both Banaba and Rabi as lawful island homes. Therefore, I will begin by giving a brief account of how the founding of the contemporary three representative dancing groups on Rabi Island relates to specific historical phases in the struggle for the two home islands over the past decades. This will provide the historical and political context for my case study that will focus on one composer in the Banaban community, Nenem Kourabi, as well as on the singing and dancing group, *Te Kananraoi*, which he founded and whose

composer and artistic director he is. My concerns are the circumstances under which this youngest of the three established dancing groups was founded and the body of ritual power-knowledge of Kiribati provenance that Nenem Kourabi introduced to this group. I will closely examine three selected songs which Nenem Kourabi composed and for which he has also kindly provided me with interpretations, and I will show how he deploys such imported power-knowledge for the purpose of constituting and underpinning the spatial and ethnic distinctiveness of the Banaban community on Rabi Island. He does so not only in competition with the two other dancing groups on the island, but also in reaction to ethnic-nationalist currents in Fiji that generate existential insecurities among the Banaban diaspora. Nenem Kourabi's saying "songs cannot die" in the title to this paper reflects his belief that songs and dances are well suited to recording Banaban culture and history for future generations and to assuring, thereby, Banabans' continued identification with both Rabi and Banaba Islands as homes.

THE FOUNDING OF DANCING GROUPS AS CULTURAL IDENTITY POLITICS

Constituting Rabi as the new Banaban homeland involved an arduous process of emplacement that has continued under changing political constellations to the present day. When Banabans first disembarked at Rabi on 15 December 1945, they had not come of their own accord. During the Japanese occupation of Banaba Island in the Second World War, the Japanese deported Banabans and dispersed them among various islands in the Central Pacific. Immediate after the end of hostilities, the British colonial government gathered the surviving Banabans in the island of Tarawa in the then Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony, but refused to allow them to return to Banaba where plans for further phosphate mining were afoot. Instead, the British administration persuaded them to move to a new island, Rabi (see Ellis 1946:236-43, Maude 1946:12-13, Silverman 1971:147-48, Williams and Macdonald 1985:324-45). This initial phase of total displacement in a provisional camp on a strange island was marked by desperation and a deep-seated uncertainty as to where Banabans and their survival as a community now stood. None of their ownership claims, neither to Rabi nor to Banaba, were being resolved to their satisfaction. Since the colonial administration was strongly interested in getting the Banabans settled on Rabi, it was decided to guarantee them land ownership on both islands and to support the political process of spatial appropriation of Rabi (see Kempf 2001, 2003a). The transfer of the four traditional villages on Banaba to their new island in Fiji, mapping the former old home onto the new, certainly helped Banabans inscribe their links with their original home onto the landscape

of Rabi Island. Articulating an unbroken relationship with the homeland is characteristic of diaspora cultures in general (see Brah 1996:190-95, Clifford 1997:251-52, Cohen 1997:28, 184-85, Gupta and Ferguson 1997:39, Lavie and Swedenburg 1996:14). The Banabans' specific articulation enabled them to conceive of Rabi as a vehicle of differentiation, a vehicle for constituting an autonomous Banaban identity.

This initial phase of spatial and social consolidation on Rabi Island lasted until the late 1960s when Banabans intensified their political struggle for securing Banaba's economic and symbolic resources, a struggle that by the early 1970s culminated in their case being heard by the High Court in London (see Binder 1977:146-67, Macdonald 1982:268-69). It was at this time that "The Banaban Dancing Group", the first representative dancing group in the community, was set up.² Instigated and supported by the Banaban political leadership of the day, its goal was to make use of the musical-dramatic repertoire, and of a neo-traditional image promoting the cultural, historical and geographic uniqueness of the Banaban community, in order to mark them off from Gilbertese/I-Kiribati people (see Kempf 2003b). This distinction was vitally important to Banaban demands for commensurate financial compensation for their loss of Banaba soil, because representatives of the British colonial government, the phosphate company on Banaba and the Gilbert Islands' political elite all argued that Banabans were in fact Gilbertese on the grounds of their kinship, linguistic and cultural ties, and therefore any additional compensation to their community was not necessary. They countered Banaban claims by arguing that their Banaban independent ethnic identity was assumed after phosphate deposits were first discovered on Banaba, and that they had assumed this identity for economic gain. Creating a representative dancing group, which performed a new dance style adept at blending³ into its programme highly dramatic performances relating to Banaban culture and history, was thus one aspect of the Banaban political strategy to promote ethnic difference. As one of their political leaders expressed it to me in the course of a conversation: "to show to the world that we Banabans have our own culture" (cf. Dagmar 1989:209, Shennan 1981:193). Not long after the founding of "The Banaban Dancing Group" another group, "The Rabi Dancing Group", emerged to contest the first group's claim to solely represent the Banaban community. This development reflected the familial and political rivalries within the community, and initiated much competition over who possessed the strongest claim to represent Banaban culture, history and identity in all its uniqueness, both within the community and to the world outside the community. Both performing groups became centrally involved in a Banaban politics of strict demarcation from the Gilbertese/I-Kiribati that in the 1970s culminated in

Banabans advancing vehement demands for the political independence of their original homeland in association with Rabi Island in Fiji (see Dagmar 1989, Hermann 2001, also Timiti and Teweï 1979:118).

When phosphate mining on Banaba ceased in 1979, the island was assigned to the new State of Kiribati against the expressed will of the Banaban community and led to it refocusing on the development of Rabi Island during the first half of the 1980s (Dagmar 1989:206-7). In this period *Te Kananraoi* was created, the singing and dancing group founded by Nenem Kourabi that I will discuss in more detail below. This focus on further developing Rabi Island as a homeland for Banabans was overshadowed, however, by the 1987 military coups and the rise of ethnic-nationalist discourses by autochthonous Fijians (see Kelly and Kaplan 2001, Lal 1992, Lal (ed.) 1990). Since then, autochthonous Fijians have claimed political primacy to the exclusion of all other ethnic groups and, in particular, have argued that all local resources on land and sea can traditionally only be owned by ethnic Fijians. These are the claims and demands that Banabans on Rabi Island need to address in the wider society in which they live (see Kempf 2001, 2003a), and one that creates a context of tension between the Banaban diaspora and the autochthonous people of the host country that, of course, is a frequent and indeed constituting feature of many diaspora communities (see Clifford 1997:252-53, Cohen 1997:26, 186). The performative evocation of Banaba expressed in both new and old songs, dances and dance theatre performances by each of the various groups on Rabi needs to be understood in this context. The artistic practice of ongoing emplacement, now closely linked to the profound uncertainty afflicting Banabans, and the spatial identification with Rabi is supported by the politics of contemporary Banaban composers, such as Nenem Kourabi who draw on their ritual power-knowledge to compose new songs and dances⁴ that they believe will secure a future for the Banaban community on Rabi Island.

THE CULTURE OF COMPOSING ON RABI ISLAND

Since the 1970s three official and representative dancing groups have been founded and firmly established on Rabi Island—"The Banaban Dancing Group", "The Rabi Dancing Group" and *Te Kananraoi*. In addition, there are numerous more or less permanent local singing groups (*kuaea*), creating a situation that since resettlement in 1945 has been characterised by a repetitive cycle of group establishment and dissolution. A primary factor behind this proliferation of dancing and singing groups is, paradoxically, the importation of ritual power-knowledge from Kiribati. As indicated above, the notion that Banabans are ethnically different from inhabitants of the Kiribati Islands is a constituting moment of Banaban identity,

notwithstanding a common language, close kinship ties and the many cultural concepts and practices Banabans share with I-Kiribati. It is in this context of being “same, but different” (Hermann 2001:244) that one should understand the Banaban practice of drawing on powerful *kainikamaen* knowledge from Kiribati. They do so in order to create their own songs, dances and dance theatre pieces that are directed to the ongoing process of constructing and emplacing a specific Banaban identity.

A person possessing such secret power-knowledge, as well as the know-how to deploy it effectively, is able to compose songs with the help of spirits. The ritual expert, who frequently undergoes special training to hone his expertise, is normally referred to as *te tia kainikamaen*⁵ (see Bataua 1985:126, Hughes 1957, Kirion 1985, Lawson 1989:184ff.). In Rabi Island, this creative empowerment goes hand in hand with the selective appropriation of songs, idiomatic expressions, dances, costume elements and dramatic sequences from their Pacific neighbours (e.g., from Fiji, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Samoa, the Cook Islands or Aotearoa-New Zealand).⁶ Thus Banabans not only fit into a general picture of ongoing intercultural exchange among Oceania’s music and dance cultures and the concomitant processes of change (Moulin 1996), they also give weight, by virtue of providing a concrete case, to Stuart Hall’s suggestion (1990:235, 1995:47) that diaspora communities produce and reproduce their specific collective identities by resorting to a multiplicity of cultural configurations and resources.

Appropriation of I-Kiribati *kainikamaen* knowledge by Banaban composers raises the question of whether some similar domain of power through ritual composition was a feature of their former culture. Anthropological research to date on Banaban culture does not suggest this (e.g., Grimble 1952, 1989, Maude and Maude 1932, Maude and Maude (ed.) 1994, M. Silverman 1971). The Maudes (1932:287) mention the autochthonous Banaban stick dance, *te karanga*, that was revived on Rabi Island in the 1970s (Dean 1976, Kempf 2003b). Whether there was genuine power-knowledge associated particularly with composing and its challenges in precolonial times is not documented. In any event, the key point to note is that Banabans themselves do not invoke their precolonial tradition in relation to the *kainikamaen* complex. From historical narratives told by older Banabans on Rabi Island, apparently at the time when phosphate was being mined on Banaba, the island was a place of interchange for different cultural conceptions and practices. Workers from the then Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony (see e.g., Shlomowitz and Munro 1992) were brought to Banaba and this resulted in cultural contacts and exchanges between Banabans and migrant workers that had at least a partial influence on the development of musical and dancing culture as it is performed on Rabi Island today.

The most prominent case in point is that of the late Banaban composer Tawaka Tekenimatang. He was born on Banaba. During his time working as a foreman in the phosphate mine, he acquired *kainikamaen*-knowledge from a migrant worker of the Kiribati island of Maiana. In December 1945 he moved to Rabi Island and in the first post-war decades set up a number of singing groups for whom he wrote a great number of songs that continue to be sung to this day. Then, between 1969 and 1970, he founded “The Banaban Dancing Group” in close collaboration with the political leadership of the Banaba community at the time. The charter of this group was to use their newly created songs, dances and dance theatre performances to highlight not only ethnic differences between Banabans and I-Kiribati but also those between Banabans and Fijians.

In seeking to clarify the origins of the ritual knowledge possessed by the composers for the three principal dancing groups as well as for the various other singing groups (*kuaea*) on Rabi Island, it became apparent that many composers received their *kainikamaen* knowledge from ritual specialists from that same Kiribati island, Maiana, as did the late Tawaka Tekenimatang mentioned above. This applies to the current head of “The Banaban Dancing Group”, to Nenem Kourabi of *Te Kananraoi*, and similarly to a whole series of other composers who indisputably possess or possessed *kainikamaen* knowledge. The reason for this is, I believe, that I-Kiribati and Banabans alike have long held the composers and singing groups from Maiana Island in high regard. The Maiana people are said to have at their disposal an extremely powerful body of *kainikamaen* knowledge (see Bataua 1985:127, Kirion 1985:48, Lawson 1989:274, 279). Having said that, Taranuea Abetai, the composer and founder of “The Rabi Dancing Group”, obtained his *kainikamaen* knowledge from a ritual specialist named Tekewa, who originally came from Tarawa in Kiribati and was adopted into a Banaban family and subsequently lived on Rabi Island.

The general point to note is that for Banabans on Rabi Island, Kiribati is the primary source for ritual power-knowledge suitable for creating songs and dances. In this regard, Fiji plays no discernible role, although some few Fijian songs have been translated into the Kiribati language and have found favour with Banaban singing groups.

In the musical landscape of Rabi Island, however, it is important to note that one widespread aspect of Fijian culture Banabans have very much made their own—drinking kava (*Piper methysticum*). For the official dancing groups, kava rounds are a fixed part of regular rehearsals and of socialising after performances. Indeed, members of the groups on Rabi are mainly being paid with kava for invited performances. Even when committing new songs to memory and when regularly rehearsing their existing repertoire of songs,

all of the singing and dancing groups on Rabi Island usually meet in the evenings for informal kava sessions. When a new song is being studied, the composer usually dictates the text to the members of the singing group and it is rehearsed until all individual voices have mastered both text and melody. Incidentally, the use of cassette recorders to commit melodies and rhythms to memory is not admissible. In sum, singing songs and drinking kava are very frequently associated on Rabi Island. Teresia Teaiwa (1997:13) argued that the drinking of kava is at one with Banaban needs to put down roots on Rabi Island. Given that kava drinking is so closely associated with composing and singing songs, I argue that music is pivotally implicated in this process of anchoring and emplacement.

Banaban composers on Rabi Island are frequently asked to turn out songs marking special occasions, such as birthdays, marriages, deaths, dedications of new buildings or new means of transport (e.g., ships), occasions of safe return from trips off the island or visits by political dignitaries. Songs are composed for local rugby teams and for particular villages on Rabi. Biblical tales can also be worked up into songs. Additionally, there are countless love songs that feature in each singing and dancing group's repertoire and that were often composed at the request of some young man wooing his girl (possibly in vain). Ritual power also permits composers to address social problems in their songs—a song composed to reunite estranged spouses or to overcome jealousies, to give up drinking or to atone for neglecting the Christian faith. In the context of competition among singing and dancing groups, songs conferring on individual groups protection against their rivals' attacks are particularly important. Likewise, songs written as ripostes to songs previously composed by rival *kainikamaen* and extolling the superiority and skill of one's own members and performance are significant to the dancing groups themselves.

Among the considerable pool of composers active on Rabi Island, I focus in this paper on Nenem Kourabi (from now on simply *Ten Nenem*⁷). My choice was taken because he was the only composer of all the three established singing and dancing groups living on Rabi Island during my fieldwork in 1997-98, and because of his willingness to talk to me about his composing activities and his songs. At the time of my stay on Rabi Island, Taranuea Abetai, the founder of the "Rabi Dancing Group", lived in the town of Labasa on Vanua Levu and Tawaka Tekenimatang, founder of "The Banaban Dancing Group", had died some time earlier. By providing a portrait of a single composer from the Banaban community, I hope to contribute to a range of studies that highlight the specific role of an outstanding, creative personality and of his/her motivation, intentions and goals within the musical landscape of a Pacific society (see Thomas and Tuia 1995:109). This focus

on a single composer is linked to the crucial influence on an artistic engagement exerted by displacement and movement, especially when songs contribute to securing emplacement for Banabans on Rabi and Banaba alike (cf. Nero 1997).



Figure 1: Composer Nenem Kourabi

IMPORTED POWER-KNOWLEDGE

Nenem Kourabi was born on Rabi Island in 1946, but as a young man he worked on Banaba Island in the administrative department of the phosphate company. At the end of the 1970s, he was active in the Banaban resistance, working for a stop to phosphate mining. After returning from Banaba, he became a member of the Rabi Council of Leaders and subsequently headed the delegation sent to negotiate recognition of rights for Banabans in the new constitution of Kiribati (see Alexander *et al.* 1985). Although *Ten* Nenem always looked on music as an indispensable part of his life and was particularly fond of singing songs, he told me that when he initially turned to composing he possessed no ritual knowledge. But as time passed and when as a member and representative of the Rabi Council of Leaders in Fiji he had many occasions to make trips to Kiribati, the friendly ties he had built up with a certain singing group brought him in contact with a man who was willing to induct him into *kainikamaen* knowledge and its associated practices. This man was *Ten* Tiare, a ritual specialist from the village of Tebanga on Maiana Island.⁸ In talking to me, *Ten* Nenem repeatedly alluded to the fact that such powerful knowledge could, as a principle, only be entrusted and passed on in full to carefully chosen persons of good character. Moreover, he explained, a person's suitability for any transfer of knowledge not only required careful checking in ritual terms by the specialist, but also the specialist's assessment, when it was given, had to be approved by senior Tebanga village elders.

The power-knowledge from Maiana, which *Ten* Nenem has been deploying for over a decade now on Rabi Island, belongs to a specific branch of *kainikamaen* knowledge known as *Tebukaneiakang*. According to what he told me, this particular branch of knowledge is caught up in a permanent state of rivalry with other branches such as *Neibanerere* and *Tebukaneitei*. *Ten* Nenem firmly believes that *Tebukaneiakang* represents the most powerful branch of knowledge among these various schools of ritual composition. In particular, it is a reliable protection whenever contending composers with their singing groups and ritually replete songs attack their opponents, using the power intrinsic to their own magical knowledge. These alignments of ritual knowledge, explained *Ten* Nenem, indicate the prevalence in Kiribati of an edifice of *kainikamaen* knowledge that is widespread and complex as well as constantly transforming.

H.G.A. Hughes documented in 1951 for the village Tebabu in Abaiang, an island in the central part of what is now Kiribati, the existence of a mythical narrative regarding the origins of *kainikamaen* knowledge indicating that it stemmed from the neighbouring island of Marakei (Hughes 1957). In this narrative the various dimensions of *kainikamaen*

knowledge were personified. The story tells of a basket that Nareau, one of the paramount creator gods in Kiribati mythology, let down by a cord from the sky. Concealed in the basket were composers who were skilled at creating songs and dances by ritual means. The composers were called *Te Buka Nei Akang* ‘He-who-was-first-born’ and *Te Buka Neitei* ‘He-who-was-second-born’. They had with them their two sisters called *Nei Banerere* and *Nei Kamatuatawa* (Hughes 1957:173). In her perceptive ethnographic record of music and dance on Kiribati, Mary Lawson points out that a *kainikamaen* specialist on the island of Marakei also goes under the name of *tebukaneiakang* (Lawson 1989:222). The village of Tebabu on Marakei likewise features prominently in the narrative she relates concerning the origins of *kainikamaen* knowledge and its distribution in contemporary Kiribati (Lawson 1989:189-94). In addition, she notes various versions of *kainikamaen* knowledge that she had happened to hear about in North Tabiteuea. Likewise, these are *Tebukaneitei*, *Nei Kamatuatawa*, *Tebukaneiakang* and similar variants assigned to the different cardinal directions (Lawson 1989:221-22). By virtue of receiving *Tebukaneiakang* from *Ten Tiare* of Maiana, *Ten Nenem* had come into possession of a branch of *kainikamaen* knowledge that is widely practiced in Kiribati. This knowledge is now also firmly integrated into the local musical and ritual landscape of the Banaban diaspora on Rabi Island in Fiji.

The power-knowledge *Ten Tiare* passed on to *Ten Nenem* went well beyond the ritual composition of songs. In what *Ten Nenem* told me, he carefully dwelt on matters concerning the protective and healing components of *kainikamaen* knowledge. *Ten Nenem* attaches great weight to the extremely powerful nature of the knowledge complex he acquired from Kiribati. At the same time, he leaves no doubt about his concern to show that this importation of ritual knowledge from Kiribati poses no danger to Banaban society, whose members largely attribute their physical and cultural survival in the diaspora to their allegiance to Christianity (see Silverman 1971:147-48). It is this conflicting terrain—of practical deployment of *kainikamaen* knowledge and the condemnation of such ritual practices by Christian teachings—that *Ten Nenem* attempts to bridge by emphasising the protective and healing aspects of his work. But he cannot entirely overcome the tension.

Referring to his specific power-knowledge, he therefore speaks chiefly about a domain of good powers, of positive knowledge, of “white medicine”, of salvation from evil, noting that “I was trained to build a shield; and this is not against God’s will”. Given his prominent social position as a composer, he argues, he has no choice but to protect himself, his family and his dancing

group from baleful attacks launched by potential rivals. In addition, he draws on his power-knowledge when offering help to anyone on Rabi Island who is being pursued by sorcery (*wauwi*). The redemptive qualities of this ritual knowledge, which is not only conducive to composing songs, but also to conferring protection, healing and salvation from evil and death-dealing powers,⁹ permit *Ten Nenem* to integrate the imported *kainikamaen* knowledge into the Christian discourse of survival maintained by Banabans. Such cultural incorporation of introduced power-knowledge into the discursive universe on Rabi Island is a significant condition for *Ten Nenem*'s project of securing through his songs the continued emplacement of Banabans in Rabi as well as in Banaba.

COMPOSITION AND SURVIVAL

“Composing is an art in itself”, says *Ten Nenem*, even while emphasising that suitable induction and training by a ritual specialist alone holds the key to the ability to compose new lyrics and melodies. Apart from correctly wielding ritual power-knowledge, there are rules that have to be observed which reach far into the composer's daily life. Among these are: maintaining a modest bearing in public, abstaining from sexual activity during intense phases of ritual activity; avoiding all contact with menstruating women which includes avoiding contact with objects of daily use, for example kitchenware or mats, that may have been handled by menstruating women (cf. Hughes 1957:173-74, Lawson 1989:247).

The art of composing consists mainly in making up songs with the help of rituals. This involves securing the continuing support of spirits known to be associated especially with composing, e.g., Nareau or Rurubene. The ritual procedure by which these particular spirits (*anti n te kai*) are induced to assist in the composition process *Ten Nenem* speaks of as “cleansing” the supplicant from any possible contamination resulting from day-to-day living, and he compares this process with Christian baptism. The procedure requires a supply of freshwater, fetched as early as possible in the day from a river or well. The vessel containing the water must be placed so that it cannot be overshadowed by other objects, such as roofs or trees. Shortly before dawn (*te tai rua rerei*) and shortly after sunset (*te tai borua*)—times when the spirits are considered to be especially active—small hollowed-out coconut shells (*te binobino*) are filled by pouring water through an opening made on the vessel's upper side.¹⁰ The composer then sprinkles water from all three *binobino* over his head, all the while pronouncing ritual formulas calling on the spirits from all the cardinal directions and from Heaven and from the Underworld to lend their assistance. The ritual acts assure the continuing support of the spirits and enable the supplicant after a

short time to receive words and melodies and to weave them into a new song. “If you are well trained, everything [comes] automatically,” *Ten Nenem* assured me. Nevertheless, songs thus obtained have to be completely refined and polished, from start to finish, so as to exclude any potentially negative repercussions for the composer and his group.¹¹

Taboo prescriptions, ritual practices and axioms of song composition are all integral parts of the complex code of the *kainikamaen* power-knowledge with which *Ten Nenem* intends, according to his own statements, to contribute all he can to the Banaban community’s future on Rabi Island. The objective and challenge for him is to use the ritual power-knowledge he obtained from Kiribati to compose the kinds of songs articulating and supporting the culture and history of Banabans on Rabi Island.

[When] I got a skill in composing then I can do the song that can revive my custom or whatever. To keep the history in composing the song. That is important. That’s why I am interested in it... I think that I am being honest in saying that the skill for composing comes originally from Kiribati. That is completely true. So I make use of it. To form a dancing group where I can revive my culture in the form of song, in the form of dancing.

Ten Nenem composes for the singing and dancing group he founded, *Te Kananraoi*. This group began in the early 1980s, in conjunction with an agricultural project that *Ten Nenem* instigated on Rabi Island. As a councillor who had received training in the agricultural sector, he was at the time preoccupied with “making use of the soil”, as he put it. In order to use the agricultural potential of Rabi Island, he bought a chainsaw and gathered around him a group of about 25 men as a workforce. By growing both cash and subsistence crops, he hoped that they would be able to boost the incomes and general livelihood of Rabi Island’s households, especially in Uma, his home village.¹² Working groups cleared a patch of bushland for each member. Then they planted kava with the explicit purpose of providing a future income, and taro and cassava as subsistence crops. At the end of a working day, the group would frequently spend the evenings relaxing together, drinking kava and discussing the activity programme and goals of the project. Singing held a firm place in these evening kava rounds. It is out of this troop that the singing group *Te Kananraoi* eventually emerged. Initially it was an all-male group, but later, when it expanded from just singing into a dancing group, women were added. *Ten Nenem* translates the group’s name, *Te Kananraoi*, as ‘a place for peace and happiness’. He leaves open whether ‘place’ refers to a place between the two oldest, strongly rival groups, “The Banaban Dancing Group” and “The Rabi Dancing Group”, or whether he is evoking his programmatic vision of a future Rabi as a secure homeland for Banabans.



Figure 2: *Te Kananraoi* Dancers

By composing songs and dances to underwrite the future viability of a diaspora community such as this one, in all its cultural and historical uniqueness, *Ten Nenem* seeks to play his part in a multi-pronged strategy of appropriating Rabi Island, with the aim of creating and building a better, shared and permanent homeland for Banabans.

That is the idea—we want to express and explain it to our generations. We must have a future.... I work for the community as an agricultural officer. That is part of my contribution. And part of it is using my talent to compose songs for the benefit of the community in the future.... Why I am doing this? The answer is: because songs cannot die. From generation to generation they will keep on singing the songs.... All future efforts are achieved if they think of what I explain in the song.... At the end of the story, I always blessed the community. The Banaban community.

It is of no small importance to *Ten Nenem* that his songs should reach the younger generation, inspiring them to press ahead with further developing

the local community, yet without drawing a veil over their historical origins or over the values of communality and co-operation as cornerstones of a traditional Banaban way of life. Between the lines, I suggest, a carefully calibrated politics of protection and emplacement may be detected. It is designed to counteract the gnawing uncertainty Banabans have about their future existence as a community on Rabi Island in the context of contemporary claims to ethnic-nationalist hegemony by autochthonous Fijians (see Kempf 2001, 2003a). Here the efficacy of *Ten Nenem*'s ritually composed songs rests on a strategy of setting and projecting goals that have binding force for the future. The specific and powerful poetics of the lyrics are said by *Ten Nenem* to strengthen the standpoints, perspectives and goals expressed in the songs on the way to future implementation and realisation.

The more we sing, the more we use it and the more truth will come out of this. I mean, the benefit will come out truly.... I expect the spirit of my word to work. The word to me is effective. Meaningful, powerful and effective. I expect that my intention will come true.

Ten Nenem wields this ritually empowered form of anticipation in an effort to sustain the Banaban diaspora as a community, to assure the continuity of their ties with Rabi Island as well as Banaba Island, and to guarantee the future survival of this displaced group with its unique culture and history.

In what follows, I analyse three of *Ten Nenem*'s songs. He personally selected them, set them down in writing, translated them into English and interpreted them for my benefit.

Rongorongon abau aio: "This is the Story of my Homeland"

The first song I consider was commissioned by the headmistress of Rabi High School. Composing for Banaban schoolchildren on Rabi Island has been very close to *Ten Nenem*'s heart, second only to writing songs for his own dancing group. *Ten Nenem* explains this by pointing out that all Banaban generations have to pass through the school system. He wishes to influence this obligatory stage in each person's passage along the road of life, the better to perpetuate the Banabans' sense of collective autonomy of identity and culture: "We don't have archives. The only archives we can just invest something in are with the children in school. The school remains there. New students come and they still use the same song. And then it cannot die out." *Rongorongon abau aio*, a song dwelling on the island of Banaba as the ancestral homeland, illustrates well how he "preserves"

through his songs the traditional culture and history of the Banaban community, so that this culture and history can be passed from generation to generation.

Stanza 1

*Rongorongon abau aio
Banaba inanon te iango
abaia tamau ma tinau
au bakatibu ma ngkoa
e kakateke tarana n timronron
rikiana te ba te nari te matoatoa
ea tei n onoti i nukani marawan
te betebeke*

This is the story of my homeland
Banaba in the memory
the home of my father and my
mother
and my ancestors from days of old
it is a well-proportioned island
created from rocky corals that are so
solidly set
isolated in the middle of the Pacific
Ocean

Chorus

*O Banaba ae ko rerei
Ko teretere imra
e bukamaru atongan aram
ba nen te kabaia
a tikubaraia te nanai ni mai*

O my beautiful Banaba
you are so lonely
you are so familiar by name
and well-known for your wealth
that all the world likes to visit

Stanza 2

*Bon aio katein aroarora
ti te akawa n te bongi nako
te itiran
unouno irouia ainen
abaka te kabara
te roa, te tei
te kabae
te kaota irouia ara unimane
kukurein nanoia te bobonnano
te maiu n ti teuana*

This is our old custom
fishing daily
fetching water,
the ladies picking almonds
stone fishing
fishing with rod, fishing with net,
tying snares
our elders fishing by long line
their striving for inner unity
and togetherness

In this song, *Ten Nenem* is invoking the memory of an archaic Banaba, with its kinship ties and genealogical rootedness, combining it at the same time with a Banaban homeland imagined geographically. The lyrics extol the aesthetic of the well-proportioned (*timronron*) contours of this island jutting from the ocean, praise its solid rocky foundations and its isolated location in the middle of the Pacific, both establishing and underscoring the uniqueness of Banaba and the cultural life of its deeply-rooted indigenous population. This retrospective glance at a far-away home island makes clear

that Banaba is first and foremost a remembered place. The song's underlying mood of nostalgia continues in the refrain. Here the process of differentiating Banaba is emotionally strengthened and at the same time historically expanded. *Ten Nenem* achieves this by stressing the extent of its renown, its natural richness and its great appeal for visitors, extolling the industrial and colonial-administrative importance of the phosphate-rich island, albeit without undermining the idealised image of a traditional homeland.

Ten Nenem devotes the whole second verse to describing the ancient and authentic traditions of Banaban subsistence, fishing being the most important. Gender specific activities that were once so typical of this island culture are evoked: women fetching water from the limestone caves and harvesting wild almonds,¹³ and men fishing using distinctive techniques.¹⁴ The song ends by referring to a traditional Banaban way of life, portrayed as characterised by solidarity, reciprocity and collective unity.

In this song *Ten Nenem* seeks to transmit to coming generations on Rabi Island a sense of what traditional life was on precolonial Banaba at the time of their forebears. For the benefit of Rabi Island's schoolchildren, his song portrays the small, remote central Pacific island of Banaba as an archaic and timeless place of origin before, and apart from, all colonial or national attachments. In other words, it is a place of both cultural significance and emotional attachment and therefore figures as the central and unshakable lodestar of cultural identity in the Banaban diaspora. *Ten Nenem* celebrates such songs as archives of Banaban culture and history, as well as of their continued efficacy in respect to emplacement on Rabi. As long as new generations of Banabans can be persuaded to sing them, these songs will not die. Rather, they will ring out forever, and proclaim and underwrite both the origins and the ongoing presence of this diaspora community.

Banaba ao Rabi: The Song for the "15th of December" Celebrations

The 15th of December—the day in 1945 when the first Banabans went ashore on Rabi Island—is commemorated each year by celebrations lasting several days. The principal events of the official celebrations for the "15th of December" take place at the festival ground (*te marae*) in Nuku, the administrative centre in the island's northwest. This festival ground is for Banabans also a memorable historical place. Here is where the pioneering generation of Banabans spent their first months on the island in tent housing and under difficult climatic, hygienic and medical conditions. Older generations of Banabans still associate this period with the critical space-time between extinction and survival, with the loss of homeland and the acquisition of new land, with hopelessness and new beginnings.

The commemorations for the 15th of December turn the festival ground into a stage on which a regularly recurring showdown between the three rival dancing groups is enacted. The groups vie with each other in performing their carefully rehearsed programmes. This is where the unremitting competition between the groups for reputation, popular acclaim, political influence and privilege moves to its annual climax. To supplement *Te Kananraoi's* repertoire for this important occasion, *Ten Nenem* composed for this group a song dedicated to the "15th of December" that he called "*Banaba ao Rabi*" ("Banaba and Rabi"). His choice of title is somewhat unusual, because on Rabi Island it is standard practice for the opening words of a song to double as the title. But *Ten Nenem* made his song an exception, titling it with a statement of "its essential meaning". His intention in choosing this particular title, he stated, was to represent the Banaban community as a whole.

Banaba ao Rabi

Banaba and Rabi

Stanza 1

*E ria maerere te bong
e kakukureia te nano ni bane
ana bong te roro-n-rikirake
te unimane ma te unaine*

Immediate appearance of the day
which makes everyone rejoice
day of remembrance for the new
generation
the old men and women

Chorus

*Tebwima ni maua n ritemba
ea roko bongina ngkai
tina kukurei
kanuringan te moan aeraki iaon
Rabi
motirerein nanoia bakatibu ake ma
ngkoa*

The 15th of December
has come
let us rejoice together
and commemorate the first arrival on
Rabi
reflecting a carefully taken decision
by our forefathers

Stanza 2

*Kataua ngkoe nanom te roro ni
Banaba O
tabeka Rabi ma Banaba i moa
ea tio ara man te man e tokanikai
Rabi, Banaba O iriam te tekeraoi*

Rejoice, O youth of Banaba
praise Rabi and Banaba
praise our flag signalling victory
Rabi, Banaba O may you for ever
be blessed

The first verse, *Ten Nenem* told me, evokes the joy all people feel in eager anticipation of a holiday and a day of commemoration whose importance cuts across the generations. *Ten Nenem* implicitly associates the approach of this day with the *Kananraoi* dancing group, which would of course be performing for the celebrations. The refrain celebrates the 15th of December as a day for shared rejoicing. It points to the Banabans' first arrival on Rabi Island, a step that, though fraught with the utmost consequence, the older generation had been inspired to take. Finally, the second verse looks to the future and addresses "the youth of Banaba", chiefly enjoined them to devote all their energies and efforts to Rabi and Banaba. *Ten Nenem* evokes the flag as signalling that the next generation of Banabans will succeed in reaching their goals, that it will be to them that the "victory" goes. The poetical projection of Banaban ambitions into the future is a ploy to bring them closer to fruition. But if things are to take this appointed course, according to *Ten Nenem*, it is essential for Banabans to achieve insight into their own origins.

We shouldn't forget our home island [Banaba]. [This] home island is our identity. Our origin. We are members of the Banaban [community] that has been living on the island of Rabi in the Fiji group for many years.... And that is the most important thing that I always put in my songs. When I compose a song I always think about my community. And future generations.

Central to *Ten Nenem*'s song about the 15th of December is his desire to memorialise the Banabans' first arrival on Rabi Island and to assure at the same time that their home island of Banaba remains fresh in remembrance, representing as it does their *fons et origo*. The two islands, Banaba and Rabi, are singled out as Banaban places, their twin memory being evoked in the younger generation in order to point Banabans to a better and, above all, a more secure future as a community.

Ariran angin au kai aio: The Power of Composing

The third and last song by *Ten Nenem* discussed here refers directly to his particular *kainikamaen* knowledge, belonging to *Tebukaneiakang* branch, and hence to the source of his power and competence as a composer. In this song he introduces himself and celebrates the *Te Kananraoi* singing and dancing group that he was instrumental in setting up. What sets this song apart from most Rabi Island compositions is that it does not adhere to the scheme most commonly used: a chorus following an opening verse and one or more other verses, depending on the length of the composition, appended to the chorus. For *Ten Nenem* this song is "just one whole story", consisting of three interconnected "parts"—to use *Ten Nenem*'s own names for them.

First part

Ariran angin au kai aio

Inspire the spirit-power of my knowledge

*ba na kaekea imoan te runga
teiteina ma tonutonuna e katika
matan te no*

so as to expose it publicly
its makeup has attracted a large audience

*taraia be kakia rereina ba te
bararaina*

check to see it is beautiful just like a flower

e ria maerere ni bauna ieta

which appears on the highest level to show

ba uen te Kananraoi

that it is the flower of *te Kananraoi*

Second Part (often repeated)

Uen te Kananraoi

Flower of *te Kananraoi*

are mamaten nanou

which is my favorite

e timutimuaki arona nako

its splendor and elegance

tina taua ni kamatoa

let us clasp it firmly

ba te tima ni mamaie

because it is the best entertainment group,

tai kubateraia

don't be surprised

ngaia uen abau

that it is the flower of my homeland,

are mamaten nanou

which I love so dearly

Third Part

O!O! ai kamira O!

O! O! what a surprise O!

angitan au kai ni mamaie

the action of my dancing

kam mataku o ngkami ni kabane

everyone of you are watching

tai maninganako bea runga ieta ieta

don't lose yourself while it is in full flow

tangiraoin te bana tina kukurei iai

the lovely melody that makes us happy

This song must be seen from within the culture of rivalry between Rabi Island's three leading dancing groups. *Ten Nenem* in this composition extols to the audience his own branch of *kainikamaen* knowledge as the true and authoritative power-knowledge. He asserts that by drawing on this power-knowledge, he is able to attract a large number of spectators and to bring to life his dancing group in all its colourful, vibrant beauty. *Te Kananraoi* is elevated in this song to the status of a flower whose magic allure, thanks to the superior skill of the composer, far transcends anything the other groups produce. "Don't let your group down", was how *Ten Nenem* interpreted his

song, “you have to praise your group”. In line with this maxim, the second part of the song is repeated several times whenever it is performed, the better to underscore and celebrate the unparalleled prowess, inimitable charm and high standing of *Ten Nenem*’s own group.

In addition to highlighting *Te Kananraoi*’s power to captivate audiences, the composer points out that the group is also ideally suited to representing his homeland. *Ten Nenem* makes clear in this song that, apart from showing off his own power-knowledge as a composer and apart from parading the outstanding abilities of the dancing group, what is really special about the group and matters most is their attachment to the Banaban homeland. However, in this song no island names are mentioned.

Wolfgang: So if you follow that song—“that is the flower of my homeland”—the interesting thing is: what homeland do you actually mean, when you refer to that?

Nenem: It’s broad in mind.... While we are on Rabi, we talk about Rabi. If you talk about Banaba, that’s the flower of Banaba. But you can’t separate them. You can’t put one and disregard one. *Uen abau*—we got two lands. Everybody knew that. We got two homes. Homeland. One Banaba and one Rabi. Regarding the *abau*—is “my homeland”. So you ask me the question: “Where is your homeland?” “Banaba and Rabi!” That’s easy to answer!

W: But still difficult to understand.... *Abau* actually means “my land”.

N: Well, that can refer to Rabi. What about Banaba? It represents Banaba as well.

W: That means, you put “homeland” and you put the two in one?

N: In one. Right. Mhm—we are known in Fiji that we got two homelands. One Banaba, one Rabi.... Very hard to say: “*Abau Banaba ao Rabi*.” That’s the correct form. But the word *abau* can represent both lands—both homelands.... [The song] is about the skill, about the club and the land. You identify yourself. You identify your homeland. You identify your dancing group.... [To] compose the song is to put things into order. If you relay the picture to the people by the action, with the song, the melody and then they got something in their memory: “Yes, we understand.”—That we are the Banabans.—“This is a new dancing group and they still love their homeland”.

The order of an interlocking trilogy of identification that is constructed in this song takes the ritual power-knowledge of the composer, combines it with the efficacy unfolded by the singing and dancing group he had called into existence, and links both to the notion of homeland, which is being defined as the relational terrain of Rabi and Banaba Islands in their capacity as primary points of reference for the Banaban diaspora. In this song *Ten Nenem* is clearly not just confining himself to displaying the power of his *kainikamaen* knowledge and to singing the praises of *Te Kananraoi*. Such a

locally specific constellation of recent identity constructions must, at the same time, be integrated into the discursive context of the Banaban community and its dual spatial anchoring in order to be effective within that frame of reference and to retain its permanence. It is only within the context of these reticulations that *Ten Nenem* is able to combine ritual composition and the singing and dancing group *Te Kananraoi* with his ongoing project of documenting authentic Banaban culture and history along with strengthening the sense of belonging to both home islands.

* * *

The cultural constituting of difference, identity and homeland is an ongoing historical and political project for the resettled Banaban community of Fiji. In the course of this process, locally composed music evolved into a key instrument both for preserving the memory of and identification with Banaba Island as well as for articulating such memory and identity within practices of continuous emplacement on Rabi Island. That the four traditional villages were spatially transferred to the Fijian island highlights the extent to which belonging to Rabi Island is virtually inconceivable for Banabans without this primal reference to their original homeland. At different times in the history of their political struggles with colonial and postcolonial powers across the past decades, the emphasis of Banaban political interests shifted between Banaba and Rabi, depending on the particular political cause pursued at the time. Yet I suggest, it is exactly the accumulated entwining of the two islands Banaba *and* Rabi that has evolved into the fulcrum of collective identity for Banabans in contemporary Fiji. Their dual spatial identification permits Banabans to emphasise their distinctiveness, separating them equally from Fijians and from Gilbertese/I-Kiribati. Different from Fijians, Banabans on Rabi Island own a phosphate-bearing home island in the Central Pacific, while Banabans set themselves off from I-Kiribati by pointing to a home island in Fiji. Especially since the 1970s, music has been increasingly integrated into this political process of constructing place and identity. While it has been developed into a performative instrument within a lived practice of spatial and ethnic differentiation, it is now an instrument whose purpose is to anchor locally the embodied memories of the distant space-time of the Banabans' original Banaba home (see Connerton 1989).

Against this historical and political background of displacement and relocalisation, the composer Nenem Kourabi represents one of the leading creative voices in the multi-vocal terrain of recent constructions of locality, homeland and identity (cf. Rodman 1992:646-47). Even the story of how *Te Kananraoi* came to be points to an associative field that includes

rootedness, tilling the soil, consuming kava and singing songs. Both the composer's songs and his interpretations of them repeatedly remind us of the extent to which the ties Banabans feel for their present home on Rabi Island in Fiji are predicated on their culturally and/or personally remembered knowledge of their former home on Banaba, and the traditions and history that are such an integral part of it. By the same token, Nenem Kourabi sees ritual composing as a suitable way to keep alive the image of a lost and remote insular space of pristine beginnings and authentic ways of living, especially for the benefit of a younger generation of Banabans on Rabi, and thus to bestow on them a shared focus for the future. By acquiring *kainikamaen* knowledge from Kiribati, he has at his disposal powerful ritual practices and skills for composing songs which allow him, on behalf of the whole Banaban community, to devise long-term social "visions" based on his historical and cultural "versions", and to anticipate their realisation. But such an aspiration, i.e., to co-opt the Banaban collective past in the present and use it to build the future, invariably also fires the competition for social influence and political control which is reflected in the rivalry among local composers and in the keenly waged competition among the singing groups on Rabi Island. It is for good reason, therefore, that *Ten Nenem* always emphasises the positive fields of power emanating from the *kainikamaen* knowledge in his charge, such as protection, healing and salvation. In doing so, he is able to protect himself and his dancing group from ritually empowered attacks of his opponents. At the same time, I argue, he skilfully gives legitimacy to his specific project of ongoing emplacement of Banabans on Rabi (and on Banaba), particularly in the politically very sensitive situation in which the Banaban diaspora community exists.

Rather than immutable *faits accomplis*, places and identities are processes (Massey 1994:155). They are continuously being created and negotiated, and they are associated with emotions (see e.g., Kahn 1996:168). The rigours of their life over the past two decades in Fiji are testimony to the unforeseeable risks and uncertainties that the imperative of constructing and negotiating a sense of homeland and identity entails for a resettled community such as the Banaban diaspora. In a Fijian state marked by a succession of coups and constitutions, and by the rise of ethnic-nationalist discourses and acts of violence, Banabans realised with growing concern that their status and their rights of ownership on Rabi Island may be contested and reversed (see Kempf 2001). In such a politically delicate *modus vivendi*, it is not wise to proclaim openly that ritual knowledge can serve to protect the Banaban community. But the claim that songs can be performed in the service of anticipating a more secure Banaban future certainly suggests that the power of *kainikamaen* knowledge is being subtly drawn upon in order

to effect a lasting emplacement for the Banaban diaspora on Rabi. Under these political circumstances, when open and sustained protest may not be opportune, music remains a prime creative form of empowerment. In this way, composing songs and having them performed by singing and dancing groups to the public represent a political practice (cf. Nero 1992). Precisely in times of political disquiet and crisis song contributes to consolidating a sense of connectedness and identification with Rabi Island. By referring to the community's historical and cultural roots on the home island of Banaba, the practice also seeks to secure the future survival for the Banaban diaspora as an independent community.

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NOTES

1. Rabi Island has an area of approximately 68km² (cf. Maude 1946:11). According to the *Rabi Council of Leaders*, in August 1998, 3898 members of the Banaban community lived on the island. Smaller groups of Banabans are also to be found in other parts of Oceania, primarily in various parts of Fiji, and in Kiribati and Nauru.
2. This official Banaban singing and dancing group was first known as “The Banaban Dancing Club”, but was subsequently renamed “The Banaban Dancing Group”. The group built principally on the existing musical culture among Banabans on Rabi; even in previous decades this culture had frequently taken a decidedly political turn (see Silverman 1971:171-72, 182-84, 188). The “Banaban Dancing Group” was, however, the first dancing group on Rabi to conceive of its mission as representing the entire Banaban community to the outside world.
3. The dancing theatre of “The Banaban Dancing Group” crystallised in the context of preparations for the First South Pacific Festival of Arts, held in Suva in 1972. Since then its repertoire has been systematically expanded, including now selected episodes from precolonial Banaba history through the Second World War to Banabans' resettlement on Rabi Island (see Kempf 2003a).

4. Unlike “The Banaban Dancing Group” and—as of recent times “The Rabi Dancing Group”—*Te Kananraoi* does not have a dancing theatre that presents dramatic scenes from precolonial or colonial history.
5. In Kiribati, a composer is also called *te tia kario* or *te tia ototo* (Koch and Christensen 1980:276). Chiefly used on Rabi Island, besides the term *te tia kainikamaen*, is the term *te tia ototo*. However, the extent of special training, *kainikamaen* knowledge and skill in the related ritual practices on the part of composers varies considerably in contemporary Kiribati (see Lawson 1989:185, 264ff.). This has not been without consequences for the composing practices adopted on Rabi Island.
6. Of primary importance in this connection are the tours by the dancing groups inside Fiji and the wider world. “The Banaban Dancing Group”, especially, can now look back on a number of trips abroad, mostly in order to attend various South Pacific Art Festivals, though some for occasions such as the inauguration of the Sydney Opera House (see Kempf 2003b).
7. Here, in putting the prefix *Ten* before a male name, I am borrowing a linguistic convention from the vernacular. For female names, the prefix *Nei* is used.
8. *Ten Nenem* is not, as it happens, the only person to have had *kainikamaen* knowledge passed on to him by *Ten Tiare*. Regarding contemporary training and ritual practices undertaken by Mannara Betero of Kiribati, Mary Lawson (1989:274-79) has documented the case of another composer who, it seems, also received his ritual power-knowledge from *Ten Tiare* of Maiana.
9. Mary Lawson, in her study of traditional ritual specialists in Kiribati, also stressed the role of the *tia kainikamaen* as protector of the community (1989:197-98).
10. In Kiribati culture, these *binobino* coconut shells find use in a host of ritual activities (see e.g., Grimble 1989:112-13, Laxton and Kamoriki 1953:65-67).
11. A successful composer, insists *Ten Nenem*, should adhere to a series of basic rules. Thus the words of a song must be chosen to assure that the composer’s intentions are in fact realised. Thus it is important for the composer not to be “tied down”, *Ten Nenem* said, by his choice of words. Words like “knot” or “bind with a string” should therefore be avoided if possible, but especially when it is not the case that the “solution” follows immediately, pointing the way out.
12. *Ten Nenem*’s planning originally also included the construction of outriggers. His idea was to make the island’s maritime resources available to local households. But according to what he told me, there was no great interest in such an activity. Before long the group decided to concentrate exclusively on the agricultural part of the project.
13. *Ten Nenem* uses the term *unouno* in this connection for wild almond nuts, however, in the Rabi Island vernacular they are usually referred to as *te kunikum*. The term *unouno* is recalled by the Banabans on Rabi Island as belonging to a postulated ancient Banaba language that was replaced, as missionising and colonising took their toll, by the Kiribati language that is still in use. The ancient tongue is thought by and large to have now been lost.

14. The various fish-catching techniques as reviewed here by *Ten Nenem* include the following practices. For *te kabara* ‘stone fishing’, hooks, bait and a stone weight are packed in a large leaf around which a fishing-line is then wound in such a way as to be suddenly released when the bundle is thrown in the water and sinks. *Te roa* involves catching fish with a rod. In *te tei* flying-fish are caught in a net. *Te kabae* is a method of catching fish by dangling a noose that, *Ten Nenem* assured me, was able to entrap kingfish. Finally, *te kaota* uses a long line studded with many hooks—the method was deployed on Banaba, he said, to catch such denizens of the deep as the red *kauraurau* fish.

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