

77 Arthur Circle, Forrest,
A.C.T. 2603, Australia,
29th July, 1975.

Mr George Knapp,
External Development Services,
22 ~~Warling~~ Cross Road,
LONDON WC2H 0HR, England.

Dear Mr Knapp,

Thank you for your letter of the 4th July, and for a copy of the Rabi Island Council's Address to the CHIC delegates, which I read with much interest.

I agree with you that simplistic slogans have their political value, particularly when dealing with representatives of the third world nations, but I prefer not to be associated with them myself as an academic, since taken out of context and without the many provisos and qualifications which they normally require to render them accurate they are apt to convey an erroneous impression.

I gather from your letter that your firm has prepared, or is preparing, a memorandum on the lines of the penultimate paragraph of my letter of the 17th May to Mr Tebuke Rotan. In view of statements being made by others with regard to the opinions of Sir Albert Ellis and Sir Arthur Grimble you may care to know that Sir Albert, a friend of mine until his death, was not a student of Banaban or Gilbertese ethnohistory or qualified to make pronouncements on that subject, as he would have been the first to admit.

Sir Arthur was so qualified, but I am not aware that our views differ on the subject; indeed much of the source material which I quote is based on oral tradition collected by him. In particular I would recommend your perusal of his research paper 'From Birth to Death in the Gilbert Islands' where on p.52 he states that the descendants of the Taburimai and Auraria folk who left Banaba never returned there, the island being 'now populated by descendants of those who did not take part in the migration to Samoa', unlike the Gilbert Islands. Again on the following page he says: 'As for Banaba, it was never invaded by the returning swarm; its original faith was therefore never corrupted; its dead continued to be despatched upwards'.

You will also notice that on p.5 of his 'model' Colony Annual Report for 1924-1926, Sir Arthur speaks of: 'Ocean Island, of which the inhabitants are of a racial type and speak a language closely allied to the Gilbertese'. It can hardly be maintained, in the face of these statements, that Sir Arthur considered that the Banabans and Gilbertese were ethnically, or even linguistically, identical.

On the other hand, and with reference to my statement that the Banabans and Gilbertese are 'kinsmen', so far as I am aware all anti-Gilbertese agree on this point: including Sir Arthur, Silverman and myself. If one defines kinship as 'blood relationship' there would be more Gilbertese than autochthonous blood in the average Banaban; or if one defines it as 'similarity in character' while there could be greater differences here due to cultural determinants and more recent divergencies there are still marked similarities.

It seems to an historian curious that so much stress is laid on degrees of similarity and difference, based on a whole host of variables none of which are quantifiable, and so little on the geographical and political position of Ocean Island prior to its incorporation in the Protectorate in 1900.

Being solely concerned with the clarification of factual points at issue I shall be interested to see the eventual outcome of all this 'kauntaaka'.

Yours sincerely,

EXTERNAL DEVELOPMENT
SERVICES

22 CHARING CROSS ROAD
LONDON, WC2H 0HR

TELEPHONE: 01-836 6713
TELEGRAMS: EDSLOND LONDON WC2

Economic and Political Consultants

Mr. H.E. Maude, MBE
77 Arthur Circle
Forrest
A.C.T. 2603
Australia

4th July 1975

Dear Mr. Maude,

The Rev. Tebuke Rotan has asked me to reply to your kind letter of 17th May and to thank you for the attached exposition on Banaban pre-contact ethnohistory.

This firm has been advising the Rabi Council for some months on the conduct of their negotiations for the independence of Ocean Island and he therefore felt we might be able to throw some light on the relevance of Banaban and Gilbertese ethnohistory to the independence issue.

The Rabi Council's own views on this question have already been put to the Gilbertese Chief Minister prior to a meeting which took place in London last month. A copy of the Council's address is enclosed*in case you have the time to follow these developments.

I should say first of all that the whole question of how alike or unlike the Banabans and Gilbertese are was raised by the Gilbertese, evidently on the advice of HMG. In political terms, the reason for this is fairly clear.

By allowing the Ellice Islands to secede from the GEIC the "territorial integrity" of the Colony as it moves toward independence was breached. An internationally acceptable reason has therefore had to be put forward why Ocean Island should not also be allowed to separate. The contention that "the Banabans are Gilbertese" was therefore asserted in some detail before the United Nations Committee of 24 in November last year (together with a strong implication that Ocean is geographically one of the Gilbert Islands). It is unfortunate if, in resisting this contention, the Council may have unwittingly caused you embarrassment.

While I hope the foregoing explains the bearing of "ethno-historical reconstructions" on the Banabans' claim to independence, I do agree with the view you express in your letter to the Rev. Rotan that "an academic head-count" is never likely to prove conclusive. Unfortunately, remarks by the Gilbertese Chief Minister to the Committee of 24 such as, "... to say that the Banabans should not be called Gilbertese would be like saying that the people of Kent or the people of the Isle of Wight

* Because of the weight I have sent this by 2nd class air mail under separate cover.

should not be called English.", have had to be countered, particularly in view of the accompanying contention that the Banabans have invented a claim to a separate identity simply in order to grab the remaining phosphate deposits. In the course of the continuing world-wide debate concerning the opposing principles of self-determination and territorial integrity the words 'Isle of Wight' conjure up the far-fetched, but oft quoted, hypothesis of greedy islanders raising the flag of rebellion at Newport within hours of the discovery of rich oil deposits beneath Cowes.

Simplistic though such notions may be, they do not fail to get a sympathetic hearing, particularly from Nigerians, Abyssinians and, indeed, some Englishmen in the light of the resurgence of Scottish nationalism.

What are the Banabans to do when, also at the U.N., they are confronted by this reference to you made also by Mr. Ratieta:

"I respect Mr. Maude because he was once Resident Commissioner in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, but he seems to change his mind so far as his anthropological beliefs are concerned. I have here his book, written by him in 1946 and called The Future of the Banaban Population of Ocean Island with Special Reference to Their Lands and Funds, by H.E. Maude, MBE. In the last paragraph on page 25 of this book he refers to us and the Banabans as "kinsmen". He said:

'In conclusion I would state that in my view of the Banaban situation the Administration has perhaps been over-cautious in granting them control over the administration of their funds in contrast with a remarkable degree of local political self-government reached by them in common with their kinsmen in the Gilbert Islands.' "

I do not know who it was who conducted, on Mr. Ratieta's behalf, the painstaking search of your writings which resulted in the discovery of one word which could be so slickly presented to the world out of context. I mention it, however, as an example of what the Banabans have been up against.

In conclusion I would like to thank you, on the Rev. Rotan's behalf, for your suggestion as to the commissioning of a comprehensive memorandum documenting the Banaban case. To an extent this has been done, and, in addition, we are fortunate in having not only your published works but also Scarr and Silverman. I think we have also reached the stage, in so far as ethnohistory is concerned, where the Banabans' own conviction as to their separate identity is widely accepted and HMG's contention that the Banabans are merely a 'greedy bunch of Gilbertese' is also widely understood to be a departmental ploy to conceal their true objective, which is to avoid the charge on the Treasury which would be involved by allowing the Banabans full control of their remaining phosphates.

Yours sincerely,



George Knapp