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Ethnic Identity as a Reconfigured Resource: Banaban Strategies in Today’s Fiji

Given the increased stress now placed on ethnicity by the societies of multicultural Fiji, this paper looks at specific modes of deploying ethnic identity as evidenced by a particular Fijian minority. Asserting their interests in the name of ethnic identity is identified as a key strategy of Fiji’s Banabans. After reviewing how ethnicity was historically formed in this community, whose origins lie in the Micronesian island of Banaba, the author argues that ethnic identity does constitute a resource from the past, albeit one that is not taken over unchanged; rather it is repeatedly reconfigured in various fields of specific power relationships. As an example of such a resource that is indefinitely reconfigurable, the ethnic identity of the collective Banaban self and its plural forms of individual selves are deployed by Banabans for purposes of shaping their socio-political relationships and shoring up their communal rights to Rabi Island.

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