

have been so massively devastated in the last century, they could not find a single tree large enough. Another gift saved the day—two massive logs of spruce from the Tlingit and Haida people of Alaska. In a dramatic scene, one of these trees is felled, and as it tumbles groaning to the ground one feels the reason why both Hawaiians and Native Alaskans propitiate spirits of the forest whenever taking life.

The drama of the voyage carries one along. Will Tua overcome his fear to find land? Will all the canoes make the perilous voyage safely? There is poetic writing here to guide viewers through what could have been a clogging sea of detail. There is also ample and venturesome use of the words of the voyagers themselves to allow viewers to enter their own personal worlds, more so than is common in television documentaries. If this reviewer has a caveat it only that this strength is occasionally a weakness—in a few cases difficult concepts might have been better explained by the more precise words of a narrator.

In the end, though, it is the power of naturally spoken words that conveys the meaning of the film. "I think," says navigator Tua Pittman in the last scene, "our children need to know who they are and where they come from. So when they grow up, they can talk about Karika and Tangiia first and then Columbus later. And that a lot of them when they do grow up, hopefully will look back at us and what we do and say thank you. Thank you very much for letting us know who we are. That's why we're here."

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Sam Low is a Hawaiian anthropologist and filmmaker. He produced the PBS documentary The Navigators: Pathfinders of the Pacific in 1983, and is working on a book to celebrate Hōkūle'a's twenty-five years of voyaging.

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OTHER PEOPLE'S NOSTALGIA, OTHER PEOPLE'S PRIDE

Lieweila: A Micronesian Story, 58 minutes, VHS, color, 1998. Filmmakers: Beret E Strong and Cinta Matagolai Kaipat; distributor: First Run/Icarus Films. Sale, \$390; rental, \$75.

Cinta Matagolai Kaipat, a lawyer and filmmaker, has made an interesting video, presenting the history and present circumstances of her family and her people, the Refalawasch (also known as the Carolinians) of the Northern Mariana Islands. Probably it is too long and too richly detailed for easy classroom use (at least outside the Marianas), but after all it is the first such documentary (so far as I know), just as Ms Kaipat is the first Refalawasch woman to become an attorney (so the film states). But what to make of it?

First things first. Two people are listed as producers of *Lieweila*: Beret E Strong and Cinta M Kaipat. Beyond this, though, Strong's role is not made at all explicit. The film is narrated by Kaipat in the first person, highlighting her story, her family, her people. Rather than trying to sort out the relative contributions of each, I will simplify matters and focus on Kaipat as the creator of this work.

As Kaipat informs viewers, the Refalawasch are the “poor people” of the Northern Marianas (an American commonwealth, formerly part of UN-mandated Micronesia). Making very creative use of rich archival material, she illustrates the history of this minority community from its nineteenth-century beginnings, when people from the Caroline Islands, in what is now the Federated States of Micronesia, migrated north to settle on Spanish-ruled Saipan. Told with a strong narrative voice, with arresting images and intriguing music, this is a tale of relocation, resistance, and culture change. Intertwined with this history is the more personal story of Kaipat and her family. Viewers learn of the murder of her father, shot during a confrontation twenty years or so ago on the remote island where he and his family (including the filmmaker) had attempted to carve out a semi-subsistence life for themselves, far from the complexities of rapidly modernizing Saipan. Then, after ten years on the mainland, Kaipat returns to the Marianas and is astounded at the incredible changes the inflow of investment has made to this society and economy.

The title of the film translates into English as “listen to our story.” That story, as told here, is characterized by several themes, the most important of which seem to be nostalgia for an idealized past and an assertion of communal pride. Interestingly, both themes seem to reveal strongly American cultural premises at work.

Nostalgia is for two lost worlds—first the ancestral Caroline Islands, then the remote islands north of Saipan where the filmmaker grew

up. Both are presented as Edenic settings of environmentally sensitive, mutually cooperative communities. In other words, the ideology of “ecologism” permeates their description. Both were shattered by natural disasters (storms and earthquakes) and, more to the film’s point, by human failure. Greed, jealousy, envy led to the violent wreckage of these near utopias as prelapsarian virtue was subverted first by the imperial powers (Spain, Germany, Japan, America) and then, finally, by factionalism within the community itself, which is apparently what led to the murder of Kaipat’s father.

This sad tale is not all pain and loss, though. There are flashes of humor and of hope. A scene in which an elderly Refalawasch laughs in disbelief when told that she is now an American (citizenship having been granted when Saipan and the other Northern Marianas were brought into the American constitutional system) is marvelously warm and appealing. Signs that the Refalawasch are beginning to achieve the kind of respect and acceptance so long denied them by the majority Chamorro population are highlighted, as are attempts to document and preserve Refalawasch traditions and customs. Indeed some of that documentation, or at least illustration, is present in the film itself, in service to a call to preserve and take pride in the special Refalawasch heritage. This is Kaipat’s second major theme. Here too, American, or perhaps by now global, understandings of ethnicity, language, respect, and pride echo loudly.

Three grounds on which to evaluate *Lieweila* are: as a film, as a teach-

ing tool, and as a political statement. In my opinion, it both succeeds and fails on all three counts.

As a film it possesses many virtues. Pioneering and comprehensive, it really is very easy to watch. It is full of highly evocative sounds and images, subtly edited. For example, a pairing of images of Caroline Island canoes with a Spanish-looking galleon is accompanied by what sounds like first a Carolinian and then a Gregorian chant. Poignant and informative interviews with eloquent and thoughtful Refalawasch are strategically located throughout. Yet the film suffers from the serious problem of being much too full. The narrative gets lost among the details—especially the various distracting gestures made to document emblems of current Refalawasch identity.

The murder of Kaipat's father is by far the most dramatic event in the film, yet it is told in a curiously muted and nonspecific fashion. The viewer is provided with very few details about the events leading up to the shooting, and even less about its aftermath. Who committed the murder, and with what motivations? What, if any, consequences did they face for this act? These are only some of the questions for which no answers are provided. The constraints of documentary realism that seem to have governed much of the film seem disconcertingly absent here. In short, as a film this video has many virtues but it would be improved with a re-edit, in which it is tightened and shortened.

One possible use of this film is in university courses. It covers material very appropriate for courses on Pacific ethnology, history, and politics. My

students who have viewed the film found it less than compelling, for many of the reasons mentioned, but this does not mean that they cannot learn from it.

A particularly good use of *Lieweila*, I think, might be in courses dealing with American culture. Current American beliefs about pre-industrial ecological wisdom, ethnicity, and cultural heritage pervade this film. Such ideas can be difficult to teach in an American classroom due to their "naturalness." In this very exotic setting (for non-Micronesian audiences, of course) they seem to stand out, and along with the many signs of the ubiquitous presence of American material culture, clearly demonstrate the organizing power of such ideas, at least in the hands of an American-trained lawyer and filmmaker.

Another classroom use of this video might well be in courses dealing with ethnographic film in general. Here it could be contrasted with *Trobriand Cricket: An Ingenious Response to Colonialism*, and could well lead to interesting discussions of genres, representation, reception, and political agendas in films made by outsiders and by insiders.

For a reasonably well-informed outsider, such as this reviewer, *Lieweila* proved theoretically challenging and provocative. One imagines that Refalawasch, Chamorro, and other "insider" audiences will find much more to respond to, especially in terms of the cultural and identity politics of the Marianas. *Lieweila*—"listen to our story"—which families and which stories are included in that possessive pronoun? This may well prove to be a very

interesting topic for such audiences. They may also find it interesting to wonder (as I did) to whom that directive "listen" is pointed.

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Kasis Road. A Wan Smolbag Theatre and Pasifika Communications production. Directors: Dale Hermanson and Peter Walker. Producer: Peter Walker. 87 minutes, VHS: NTSC or PAL, color, 1997. Distributor: Pasifika Communications, Suva, Fiji. US\$24.95.

Kasis Road is a film made jointly by Wan Smolbag Theatre, a small non-governmental agency in Vanuatu, and by Pasifika Communications. The film is a drama, set in a poor settlement on the periphery of Port Vila, Vanuatu, about an unwanted pregnancy. The hero (or perhaps, anti-hero), Tony (Kami Robert), is a charming, feckless young man, totally without any sense of responsibility, who, in the Vanuatu idiom, gives a baby to his girlfriend. The film is about the impact of this pregnancy on his family, especially on his father, Philip (Silas Toa), his hard-pressed sister-in-law, Netti (Lucy Sere-sere), and on the girl herself, Rachel (Yvette Vatu). Rachel and her baby are made to feel largely unwanted by both families, and by Tony himself, who, unable to accept the responsibility of fatherhood, takes off in pursuit of a more sophisticated young woman who works in a trade store in town. Woven into this are several minor stories that expand on the themes of contraception and illegitimacy and the pressures on resources

caused by an expanding population. The film depicts people with dignity and self-respect, most of whom are trying to live decently under increasing pressures. Although the acting seems a little uncertain at the very beginning of the film, any awkwardness soon recedes into the background: the performances are heartfelt, the problems clearly problems that the actors know and identify with. The film is well made, and most competently directed. It is a film with a message, aimed at community leaders and government in Vanuatu, advocating contraception.

In Vanuatu, as in a number of other Pacific countries, population growth is an extremely serious problem. Fifty percent of the population is under eighteen. The settlements around Port Vila are full of small children, many of whom are *pikinini lo rod* (children of the road), that is, children without a place, children without a father. Community leaders find it difficult to deal with the issue of contraception. As the film shows, there is church opposition to it; there is also inertia in the government. Only in the last three or four years have the old begun to feel overwhelmed by the young in Vanuatu, but already the pressures on the old are becoming more and more difficult to bear. Netti struggles to feed and care for the family; Philip struggles to uphold the standards and practices he grew up with.

Jo Dorras, one of the members of Wan Smolbag Theatre, who wrote the screenplay, addresses many of the problems of life in the settlements. The film discusses the problem of getting enough food—the depletion of fish and shellfish stocks around Port