

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

PETER BLACK
George Mason University

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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

Vila, the difficulty of planting gardens over and over again on the same ground, the search for firewood. It illustrates the inadequacies of plumbing and other services. It alludes to the problems at the hospital caused by inadequate staffing and facilities and by indifference. It shows young men drinking homebrew, and watching pornographic videos screened in the settlements. And it shows how escalating frustration is leading to escalating violence. At times it feels a little as if every major issue of poor urban life in Vila is being raised, and yet in general the plotting is tight and the narration good-humored, so that overall the film absorbs the viewer in its story.

It is not clear what audience the filmmakers expect. The film is in English, and some concessions are made to non-ni-Vanuatu (currency is expressed in dollars, not in vatu), suggesting that the film is designed for distribution overseas. At other points explanations are lacking. Netti is helped in the house by a young girl, Jane (Janet David), whose relationship to family members is never made explicit. Only a local audience could interpret her as a "housegirl," a member of the extended family brought in to help with the domestic work. Some of the humor is aimed squarely at a ni-Vanuatu audience, being in the style that Wan Smolbag Theatre has used so successfully in the plays it takes around Vanuatu. More particularly, there are also some sections aimed specifically to provide information—a talk about contraceptives given by a nurse is clearly designed to educate a ni-Vanuatu audience.

As yet, there is very little published information on what has been happening in Vanuatu in the last

decade. Urban growth, the population explosion, pressures on land and other resources, and the human costs involved in these developments have hardly been discussed in publications, at least in part because of the research moratorium that was imposed by the Vanuatu government from 1985 to 1994. For those interested in what is happening in Vanuatu, the film is well worth watching, especially in combination with the sobering documentary *Kilim Taem*, made in 1998 at the initiative of the Vanuatu Young People's Project, which discusses problems facing youth in Port Vila. *Kasis Road* would make a very illuminating and entertaining contribution to the teaching of any course about the contemporary Pacific. It is also a film worth seeing for itself.

LISSANT BOLTON

Australian National University

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Mabo: Life of an Island Man. Filmmakers: Trevor Graham, Denise Haslem, and Sharon Connolly. 87 minutes, VHS, color, 1997. Distributors: Film Australia and First Run/Icarus Films. Sale video US\$440; rental video US\$100. Awards: Australian Film Institute, Best Documentary, 1998; Sydney Film Festival, Best Documentary, 1998; New South Wales Premier (Literary) Script Writing Award, 1997; Brisbane Film Festival, Most Popular Film, 1997.

In June 1992, the High Court of Australia handed down its decision in what is commonly known as the Mabo case, ending a ten-year battle for Eddie Koiki Mabo and four other Mer elders. They claimed that the