

Selo! Selo! Bigfala Canoe, 26 minutes, VHS (PAL and NTSC), color, 1998. Directed and coproduced by Randall Wood, coproduced by Gabrielle Jones, Axis Productions, SBS Independent, and the Pacific Film and Television Commission. Available from Axis Productions, 33a Logan Road, Woolloongabba, QLD 4102, Australia. A\$100 including air postage and handling.

“Sail Ho!”—that welcome or warning cry sparked by the first glimpse of a ship sailing up over the horizon—is an old nineteenth-century term in Bislama, Vanuatu’s Pidgin English. It once signaled the arrival of whalers, labor recruiters, missionary vessels, and trading ships at Vanuatu’s ports and passages. Today, the sail has been superseded by global shipping and air connections and, as this film depicts, the occasional cruise ship. This is a documentary of the first visit, in 1997, of the *Fair Princess* sailing out of Sydney to Lamén Bay, Epi Island. The cruise business is a competitive one and operators, such as P&O Holidays, attempt to enhance their offerings with the addition of a little cultural tourism to the usual mix of onboard eating, drinking, dancing, and gambling.

The filmmakers used two crews—one cruising in comfort, we might suppose, on the *Fair Princess*—and the other camped out at Lamén Bay during the month before the ship arrived. The film has no voice-over narration. Rather, scenes and voices from Epi (subtitled in English) and from the *Fair Princess* are effectively edited together and juxtaposed to tell the story. This story, at heart, is a

moral tale about the consequences of what is nowadays called globalization. The film focuses on misunderstandings and problems that this touristic encounter generates—the troubles and conflicts that follow when the global invades the local. It also teases out some of the perceptions that Epi Islanders and cruising tourists have of one another. (The filmmakers, however, favor island voices over Sydney-siders.)

P&O Holidays offered to pay \$5,000 for the rights to offload its 1,000 or so cruisers at Lamén Bay. For the money, the locals would provide various sorts of entertainment and cultural experiences. The deal, made first it seems with a local leader, incited considerable interest in this rural hinterland where cash is scarce. Although the Australian dollar circulated in Vanuatu until the early 1980s, people since have forgotten its value. There was much confusion about just how much A\$5,000 was worth in local vatu—was it 500,000 or 5 million? Considerably disappointed to learn it was the former figure, people wondered if they could also demand a head tax from visitors, but backed down when the P&O agent brought up the original umbrella site license payment.

Nonetheless, villagers hoping for a windfall formed a committee to oversee preparations for the visit. Women wove mats and baskets and gathered food to prepare. Men spruced up outrigger canoes to sell rides to tourists. The local pastor preached, “God gave us the *Fair Princess*” and the necessity of hard work to obtain wealth. One entrepreneur ordered 1,200 bottles of beer for his thatched bar. And, nota-

bly, numerous dance groups formed. Epi Islanders took it for granted that tourists would pay to see *kastom* (custom) of which dance nowadays is the epitome. They organized some fifteen sites for dance performances by men, women, and schoolchildren. P&O's agent, who flew to the island to meet the ship, shocked them when he requested that these be reduced to only three.

On board the *Fair Princess*, the captain (who "understands the natives are friendly") looks forward to the upcoming encounter with "Polynesian culture." The happy cruisers dance too—jiggling to aerobic exercise—parade about in plastic grass skirts, and hoot at a male strip show. They feast on shrimp cocktails and wear fancy dress. A boozy tourist jokes to the camera that, when he arrives at Epi, he plans to go get circumcised at the "circumcision dance."

The *Fair Princess* drops anchor. Its tourists are lightered ashore, welcomed by the Lirua stringband strumming on the dock, a ritual opening ceremony on the village football field, and a troop of dancing, decorated schoolboys. Some wander about the village snapping pictures ("I come from big ship"), some bargain to buy bamboo flutes, and others strip down to sunbathe on the beach. Hardly anyone, however, bothers to watch those carefully selected and rehearsed custom dances. Instead, a football game between the ship's crew and local youth commands all the attention. Bikini-clad young blond cheerleaders jump and yell for the P&O team. The entrepreneur at the other

end of the bay sells only 11 of his 1,200 bottles of beer.

Selo! Selo! deftly illustrates the impacts of contemporary tourism in the Pacific, including themes of tourist as cargo, island needs for cash, and the evergreen marketability of primitive Edens. (P&O planned to limit ship voyages to twenty a year in order not to "spoil" arcadian village life.) The film would work well in the classroom, even though its points are often subtly or fleetingly made. With some guidance, students could explore the variety of issues that the *Fair Princess* leaves in its wake: juxtaposed moralities, nudity, and decorated bodies (Epi dancers versus Australian sunbathers); tourists who play at going native; dashed village dreams of riches; the commercialization of island culture; the transformation of ritual performance into spectacle; tourists' inexplicable preference for football over men's *kastom* dances; and the political effects of lump-sum cash payments on small village communities.

The sun dropping, the *Fair Princess* loads up its thousand passengers and sails away. The folks at Lamén Bay, dazed and somewhat overwhelmed, take stock of the day. They look ahead with mixed feelings at the proposed nineteen more visits of the ship. The film does not tell if the *Fair Princess* has continued to call at Epi. If not here, *Selo!* cries and floods of tourists will increasingly wash into Melanesia.

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