while increasingly more is discovered about McPhee and the narrator. Urale brings to the screen what Pacific Island author Albert Wendt brought to the world of literature when he wrote in 1976 that much canonical writing about Pacific Islanders from outsiders merely provided a forum for “papalagi fantasies and hang-ups, dreams and nightmares, prejudices and ways of viewing our crippled cosmos, than of our actual islands” (15).

By the film’s end the narrator candidly reaches his own self-realization by admitting that he is chasing a fantasy, largely the creation of others. But, like the average “Joe Bloggs” in his charmingly un–politically correct manner, by the end of the film he cares little for the deconstruction of his fantasy that has taken place on both theoretical and practical levels. His joy remains in the visual pleasure received from viewing a beautiful and seductive island maiden. This titillation is encouraged by Urale’s filmic technique as the camera’s eye seems to stroke each tactile image, caressing from top to toe brown, curvaceous bodies, gliding in tune to mellifluous island harmonies. To return to the question of who is watching whom and plunge into the ironic, here is a brown woman watching, filming, and ultimately deconstructing the voyeuristic creations of a white male who paints brown women.

Audiences tire quickly when being preached at. This film is both witty and playful, moving beyond the obvious and into the ironic. It both celebrates and critiques attractive, paradisiacal images of the Pacific Islands and their women and proceeds to playfully investigate fantasies surrounding the stereotype of the South Seas dusky maiden. Urale does so, not with the righteous anger of a politicized Pacific Island woman, but in the spirit of Cook Island artist Ani O’Neil (who reappears throughout the film), which laughs at itself, playing upon itself with a complicit audience.

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Kava: The Drink of the Gods, 90 minutes, VHS-PAL, color, 1998. Research, photography, and editing, Thorolf Lipp; producers, Aseela Ravuvu, William C Clarke, and Bob Maclay; produced by the Institute of Pacific Studies and the Media Centre, University of the South Pacific, Suva; distributor, Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, PO Box 1168, Suva, Fiji; US$20 plus postage.

The video cover is not wrong. This film provides a wonderful “journey through Oceania with its stunning cultural and natural beauty and richness,” consistently taking advantage of the compelling visual attractiveness of the region. A few quibbles might arise: some “live” shots are a little stilted, having been acted for the camera, and the pronunciation of some Pacific words in the narration is a little anglo, but these are minor distractions. The images, color, and sound quality cannot be faulted, and overall the video is a superb technical production.

The subject matter also holds enormous intrinsic interest for students of the Pacific. This interest has been fueled by definitive publications like Kava: The Pacific Elixir (Lebot, Mer-
lin, and Lindstrom, 1997), and now this video review of kava is a welcome addition. The audiovisual medium is so evocative that the olfactory and tasting senses of experienced kava drinkers may also be stimulated as they watch.

The video is largely documentary, incorporating much historical, cultural, and factual material and then raising contemporary issues. The videomakers have drawn on expertise from regional organizations, government departments, and knowledgeable people. At times though, the coverage is uneven: while tackling important and complicated issues relating to the international kava trade, it can also be touristy, including peripheral descriptions of food preparation methods that inform viewers that “coconuts must be grated before the cream can be extracted.”

The title of the video suggests that the religio-cultic associations of kava have particular significance, but too much is made of this theme. The important role of kava in traditional religious practice is undoubted, and these associations are reflected in its widespread ceremonial use today, but more overt spirituality than is warranted is attributed to both formal and informal use of kava in modern Pacific societies, which have been Christianized for around two centuries. The use of eerie new-age background music and ominous shots of fruit bats may heighten these mystical overtones in the mind of western viewers, but one wonders if this accurately represents the worldview of modern Pacific Islanders enjoying a kava-drinking session with their friends.

The 90-minute duration of the video is perhaps a little lengthy for many potential viewing contexts, but allows for a well-paced survey of kava from a range of perspectives. (Thorolf Lipp reports that a 58-minute version, focusing on the ethnographic aspects, has now been produced.) The first hour includes three 15-minute segments from three locations. The first covers kava growing and preparation in a village in Vanuatu; the second highlights the ceremonial role of kava in the context of a chiefly visit to a Fijian village; and the third includes a narrative of a kava-origin story while focusing on formalized kava-drinking at a meeting of village leaders in Samoa. The final half-hour of the video takes kava out of its traditional ritual and ceremonial context, and kava-drinking in informal contexts is described for Fiji and Samoa. At this point the lack of any coverage in the video of kava-drinking in Tonga is most felt, as there, more than elsewhere, social kava-drinking has taken on pervasive and elaborated functions. For example, the informal faikava (kava circle) provides a locus for courting of the young woman making the kava, and the organized kalapu (kava club night) is an important fund-raising event for church and community activities, both in Tonga and among the diaspora.

The long-recognized psychotropic and social merits of kava-drinking, whereby it enhances both individual mental states and shared feelings of empathy, are often mentioned (although there is little detail about the kava plant as a traditional medicine), and there is good discussion of the linkage between modern kava-drinking and national identity, especially in Vanuatu. The downside is
also recognized: negative physical
effects resulting from kava overuse
are mentioned, although not a lot is
made of the negative social effects of
kava abuse, which result in a serious
anti-kava stance being adopted by
some women’s and church groups.

However, the critical modern issue
results from the evolution of kava
from a recreational narcotic beverage
into a commercial pharmaceutical
product of incredible potential. Kava
has long been a cash crop serving
domestic markets, but its further
development into an international
commodity, which accelerated into a
boom market in the late 1990s (and
then crashed, perhaps temporarily, at
the end of 1998), has raised impor-
tant matters relating to intellectual
property rights and associated ques-
tions of the export of kava plant
stock and the development of kava
growing outside the Pacific. While the
claims of the kava-growing nations of
the Pacific to some kind of propri-
etary ownership of kava are given
expression in the video, they are
drowned out by the more numerous
voices of kava entrepreneurs and
traders, as well as the representa-
tives of the pharmaceutical sector, who
persuade the viewer that a natural plant
can never be protected as an item of
intellectual property.

Having been convinced, viewers
may have second thoughts. Have the
idyllic scenes and mystical sounds
romanticized nature’s soporific, and
entranced them into concurring with
the Pacific region losing control over
the production and marketing of this
commodity? This nagging suspicion
is enhanced by the realization that a
somewhat psychodramatic subplot
has been interspersed throughout the
video, involving footage from Ger-
many. This hails the beneficial effects
of a particular named brand of kava
tablet, and highlights the ground-
breaking scientific work of the partic-
ular named pharmaceutical company
that has produced it, and whose
experts are given the final word on
numerous occasions. Has an attrac-
tive, appealing survey of the role of
kava in Oceanic society been sub-
verted into a commercial promotion
for the German laboratory, its prod-
uct, and its plans to develop huge
kava plantings outside the Pacific?
This possibility, and the fact that my
own university sponsored it, is a little
troubling, so I think I’ll find a local
kava bar and have a shell to set my
mind at rest.

ROBERT EARLY
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Kilim Taem. 50 minutes, vhs, color, 1998. In Bislama, with English sub-
titles. Directors, Anthony Mullins,
Randall Wood; producer, Jan Cattoni;
distributor, unicef, Fiji. Email:
UNICEF@is.com.fj

Kilim Taem (Killing time) is a docu-
mentary based on interviews with
young people in Vanuatu’s capital,
Port Vila. It addresses the problems
young ni-Vanuatu are currently fac-
ing, especially in urban areas. Fifty
percent of the population of Vanuatu
is under eighteen; half of them have
been born since Vanuatu achieved
independence in 1980. The problems
young people now face did not exist
even ten years ago, and, until this film
was made and screened, most people
in the country had not noticed the