

to, but to weave in and out of the background, with a familiar melody being heard now and then.

Many Pacific pop lyrics focus on melancholy subjects, such as the loss of a lover or one's separation from home. Hence, perhaps the muzak-like arrangements of such songs will evoke nostalgic sentimentality in the listener. Rahari and the other musicians deserve credit for beginning to explore some of the possibilities of panpipes. If you prefer easy-listening music, soothing you into memories of the past, you'll probably find much to like about this CD.

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*Kuo Hina 'E Hiapo: The Mulberry is White and Ready for Harvest.*

27 minutes, VHS, Color, 2001.

Directors and producers: Melinda and Joseph Ostraff; writers: Joseph and Melinda Ostraff and Michael Van Wagenen; English narrator: Loa Niumeitolu Saafi, with English subtitles for Tongan interviews.

Distributor: Documentary Educational Resources, Watertown, MA.

<<http://www.der.org/films/kuohina-harvest.html>>. US\$145.00.

*Kuo Hina 'E Hiapo* is a process-oriented documentary about how Tongan women's identities in their communities are tied to their role as makers of ngatu, or barkcloth. The narrator begins by merging historical and contemporary narratives about ngatu when she states, "After centuries of use, ngatu has literally become

the fabric of Tongan society." The film documents the process of ngatu-making and highlights women's roles, their personal stakes, and their voices in this collaborative work. Using insightful commentary, vivid imagery, and steady, focused camerawork, the film nicely interweaves three main narratives: one about ngatu-making by women in groups called kautaha toulanganga, another about women finding voice and power through the social relations nurtured in the kautaha, and a third about how they fulfill their expected societal roles by teaching these skills to younger generations of Tongan females. Through clear English narration and Tongan interviews with accurate subtitles, the film effectively communicates its claim that "all the comments made in [the] film are the thoughts and words from the women of these kautaha organizations who have joined together for the making of ngatu."

The film's strength is its privileging of women's roles in, and impressions about, the kautaha. It introduces several women by name and strongly suggests that kautaha is a microcosm of ideal Tongan society, evidenced in the pride with which the women from one such group describe their kautaha as an organization with a constitution and laws. They describe the enforcement of these laws through fines and the strict discipline of work schedules and the sharing of the burden of work. The continual return to beautiful and intimate shots of numerous pairs of women's hands and the range of interviews with them as they work together further illustrates this point. The main tension in the film seems to be between women who make ngatu

in the kautaha and those who buy it at market, thereby depleting the nation's natural plant resources. Ultimately, this illuminates local concerns about negotiating between living the traditional way and participating in modernity through the monetization that threatens the "stability of the community and maintenance of its tradition, [which] finds its roots within [the] kautaha."

The gendered work of ngatu is also suggested when an elderly woman is shown harvesting hiapo (paper mulberry plants) for making ngatu's material base and her son-in-law is shown scraping koka bark for dye-making. Whereas agriculture is generally men's work throughout Polynesia, ngatu-making in Tonga, as the film rightly emphasizes, is women's work. Therefore, it is particularly striking that men's interest in helping with ngatu production is contextualized in connection to the monetary value of the textiles. Indeed, other instances throughout the film emphasize the commodity status of ngatu—its price at the market having risen from T\$50–70 in the 1980s to T\$1,000 in the 1990s, when the research and footage for the film were carried out. In one scene, a young woman who helps her mother to paint a ngatu says, "I think it is a good way for me to support my family financially and carry the burdens socially." What becomes apparent through scenes such as this is the central role of western-style money in Tongan practices of identity-making. Throughout the film, the narrator and interviewees explain that money is used for ceremonial purposes, to pay for a child's school fees, to buy daily supplies and foods,

and to purchase raw materials or finished ngatu at the market. Working together to provide cloth wealth or cash wealth testifies to the shared shouldering of the burden of fulfilling a family's obligations. These obligations are referred to, in the film, as kavenga, and explained toward the middle of the film as "one's obligations to family and community. . . the burdens and responsibilities each member of the society bears in order to sustain the Tongan way of life."

Thus the film provides a launching pad for discussions about the tensions between economic development and a traditionalist strain of nationalism—tensions that continue to be widespread concerns in many Pacific territories. The theme or threat of a radicalizing westernization—variously referred to as "financial pressures," "progress," "economics," and "technology"—arises repeatedly throughout the film. This leaves viewers with questions: If westernization is a threat to what the women call "the old ways," and if women's ngatu-making activities are a mainstay of these ways, are Tongan women socially and economically dispossessed? How can they retain or invent arenas of power based on the all-important social relations of the kautaha? From a nationalist standpoint, the film could be seen as asking: If Tongan nationalism were gendered, what role would ngatu play? The answer to such questions is unfortunately elided by the non-attention to another encompassing arena, that of societal rank and status. The contested nationalist discourse about noble and royal Tongans as the keepers of salient "traditions" and exemplars of key symbolic

practices—however ancient or new-fangled—is glossed over in this focus on cloth production activities, which today are the domain of commoner women.

While the film does mention the increasing global relevance of Tongan barkcloth, which is responsible for a large part of the demand for Tongan ngatu and the consequent depletion of plant raw materials, it elides the underlying topic of Tongans' economic dependence on overseas-based Tongans. In order to contextualize Tongan modernity, the filmmakers might have explained that Tonga has been a Christian nation with a top-down motivation toward national modernization for almost 200 years. This would also have provided some context for the prayers and hymns that women say continually throughout the film. I do, however, acknowledge that a major difficulty in narrative history is that it is entirely possible to lose important context available from other sources—history books, elite Tongans, diasporic Tongans. A map or the geographical coordinates of the Kingdom of Tonga (or both) would also have been helpful in situating Tonga geographically and historically in the world.

The film's penultimate scene is touching and visually impressive, panning outward from its focus on an elderly Tongan noblewoman, as she says a Christian prayer, to reveal several large ngatu spread outdoors on the ground before her. Her prayer is that "Tongan will remain for Tongans . . . so that Tonga may continue to be Tonga . . . lest we stray in the face of progress. . . . may we not be lost."

In the final scene, the narrator reiterates the film's title: "The old women say, 'Kuo hina 'e hiapo'" (The mulberry is ripe and ready for harvest). She emphasizes a generational rift by stating that younger people are rarely heard using this saying. The message of generational tensions resonates, echoing the sentiments of an older kautaha woman who confidently states that ngatu-making "will never end in this land" and a younger woman who says, "It seems like the younger generation will forget." Thus the filmmakers provide a well-balanced presentation of these differing opinions, even as the film ends on a positive note: "Like the beating of a heart as long as the beating of tutu can be heard . . . the culture and traditions of Tonga will live on." I commend the filmmakers for not attempting to make any firm predictions about the future of ngatu and ngatu-making and for letting the women, and their cloth, speak for themselves.

PING-ANN ADDO

*California College of the Arts*

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*The Songmaker's Chair*, a play by Albert Wendt. Directed by Nathaniel Lees, Auckland Theatre Company, Maidment Theater, Auckland, 11–27 September 2003.

The world premier of *The Songmaker's Chair* played to sold-out audiences in September 2003 at the Maidment Theatre in Auckland. In the program, Robert Nash called it an "evocative, delightful work that only New Zealand can produce; a play