

life for everyone will be affected and new adaptations will ultimately be required. Humanity clearly faces a critical juncture. As the first film reviewed here eloquently concludes, “We are ALL Tuvalu.”

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The Land Has Eyes: Pear ta ma 'on maf, 87 minutes, DVD/35mm, color, 2005. Writer and director: Vilsoni Hereniko; producers: Jeanette Paulson Hereniko, Corey Tong, Vilsoni Hereniko; executive producer: Merata Mita; distributors: Te Maka Productions (world, except Australia) and Ronin Films (Oceania); languages: Rotuman with English subtitles; Te Maka Productions, Pacific Islanders in Communications in association with Ora Digital. Information on price and ordering is available at <<http://www.thelandhaseyes.com>>.

The phrase “Pear ta ma ‘on maf” is taken from an ancient Rotuman proverb that translates as “The land has eyes and teeth and knows the truth,” and extols the virtues and reliability of justice, indigenous style. This belief is ultimately based on a holistic relationship with the land as provider and caregiver of its human dependents. It is a belief central to Vilsoni Hereniko’s feature film, *The Land Has Eyes*, shaping the thoughts and actions of Viki, a Rotuman schoolgirl (played by newcomer Sapeta Taito), its main character and the film’s centrifugal force.

Indeed, Viki and the land are intimately connected, as her eyes come to

represent the land’s eyes and symbolize an ancient watching, one that the land supernaturally follows through with action. Viewers follow Viki’s life as she embraces the stories of Rotuma’s past told by her father, who quietly resists colonial religion and its other ideological influences. Clearly she is her father’s daughter, rather than her conformist mother’s. This underlying tension between traditional and Western influences is emphasized when the central crisis of the film arises: her father is falsely accused (and convicted) of stealing by his greedy and corrupt neighbor. Viki then acts to clear the name of her beloved father and restore her family’s reputation.

She represents the new generation of Pacific Islander who is able to bridge two often conflicting worlds: one represented by traditional island-based wisdoms and ways of doing things (she would rather listen to her father’s stories of Rotuma than attend what she views as a hypocritical church); and the other represented by the Western world of knowledge (as a student she is contending for a scholarship and, with her father’s support—also demonstrating an ongoing negotiation with the West—fervently pursues the individualistic pursuits of higher education). The inner strength and resolution she needs to fight corrupt Rotuman officials and face paternalistic colonial authorities is “unearthed” from Rotuma’s principal myth, passed on to her by her father. The story of Tafate’masian (played by Rena Owen) is one of a wronged woman who found the courage and fortitude within herself and in her relationship with the land to become Rotuma’s warrior woman and found-

ing ancestor. It is her story that Viki draws on during the most daunting of times, through visions and flashbacks of the warrior woman filmed in surreal, blurred, slow motion. She becomes a source of comfort and strength that Viki needs to face the resistance to her difference, from within and outside of her family.

Since the movie's world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival in 2004, most reviews have duly acknowledged the significance of this film as a first voicing—and hailed it as Fiji's first feature film, the first written and directed by a Rotuman, about Rotuma, set in Rotuma, with Rotuma-based Rotumans speaking the Rotuman language! Undeniably such first voicings are of tremendous importance, culturally and politically as well as creatively. Both personally (as a longstanding playwright), and professionally (as a university lecturer and now professor), Hereniko is well known throughout the Pacific for advocating the need for indigenous tongues to tell their own stories. His venture into dramatic feature film was preceded by a documentary, *The Han Maneak Su in a Rouman Wedding* (1989) and a short film, *Just Dancing* (1998). Both have screened internationally. His winning of the Hubert Bals Fund for the screenplay of *Land* cemented its destiny as a bona fide feature film. Who better qualified, equipped, and skilled for the task?

But the film provokes one particular question for me as a Pacific critic of Pacific literature: How might an insider viewpoint play with and against those familiar postcolonial specters of authenticity (to play with a phrase of Margaret Jolly's) and cul-

tural essentialisms? Is the film good because a Rotuman made it, because most of its actors were "real" Rotumans, and so on? Clearly, in the context of colonialism and a history replete with outsiders speaking for insiders, of indigenous peoples being othered within their own cultural contexts by colonial experts objectifying them, these issues are pertinent in the critical reception of Pacific arts. This seems particularly so in the medium of film, a genre prone to the visual seduction of cultural exoticization and eroticization. One reviewer noted with relish how Taito "always manages to appear as if she has just stepped out of a Gauguin canvas" (Aleksandra S Stankovic, *Harvard Crimson*, 24 Feb 2005, www.thecrimson.com/article.aspx?ref=505983). According to the Eurocentric lens of that reviewer, Taito couldn't possibly have stepped out of her own cultural, historical, or political frame of reference—which is ironic, considering the film goes to pains to explicitly set up Rotuma and Rotuman worldviews as the primary frame of reference, from the cinematography serving to highlight that the land indeed has eyes (apparent from the point-of-view opening shots), to the story itself where the colonial presence is marginal (although ideologically dominant), and to the use of the Rotuman language. Insider perspectives are paramount, but they are not bulletproof, and should not be sacred cows in the world of criticism and reception.

Amid the overwhelming praise and validation for the film among Rotuman friends I talked with after the film was one common criticism concerning the incongruent casting of Māori Rena Owen as the Rotuman

warrior woman. The most important aspect about the exchange among a group of Pacific Islanders in Aotearoa was the issue of indigenous representation and accountability. Like all good works of art, this film created dialogue within its own community and its point of reference, like that in the film, was indigenous.

Generally, I found any essentializing and claims to authenticity came from outside receptions of the film. And who can control that? Hereniko makes it clear from the very first headline that this is “A film for Rotuma.” As such, it serves a variety of purposes. It is pragmatic in terms of its stated ethnological purposes in creatively archiving cultural practices of the day for posterity. It is political in terms of indigenous selves representing and seeing themselves on screen as active subjects rather than as native objects, an outcome preceded by the observation of Rotuman protocol both inside and outside of the filmmaking process. Finally, it is creative; we see Rotuman myths, legends, and local stories enacted and their universal threads unraveled.

Whatever medium Hereniko uses, his tireless love for storytelling permeates his work and saves it from being reduced in filmic circles to the purely ethnographic. The opening sequence of the film reveals one of humanity’s oldest and universal scenes: stories being told over the fire, stories handed down from one generation to the next. This film, while situated in a specific cultural and geographical context (as noted by the headline locating Rotuma “300 miles north of Fiji”), works so well as a story because it crosses cultural divides and because of the centrality of its universal themes:

corruption and injustice wrought upon an innocent, the often uneasy negotiation between traditional values and Western colonial values, the weaker eventually overcoming the stronger, the strength of a girl-child and the power of a woman warrior.

The Land Has Eyes has its own informative Web site at <<http://www.thelandhaseyes.com>>. This is a film of high quality, a labor of love, and a work of art. It is a huge step for filmmaking, particularly indigenous filmmaking, and one that adds to the films before it, as it continues to shift critical paradigms and create new ones.

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Pacific Regional Order, by Dave Peebles. Canberra: Australian National University Press and Asia Pacific Press, 2005. ISBN 0-7315-3733-5; xvi + 322 pages, tables, figures, notes, bibliography, index. A\$40.00.

Pacific Islands Regional Integration and Governance, edited by Satish Chand. Canberra: Australian National University Press and Asia Pacific Press, 2005. ISBN 0-7315-3739-4; xiii + 266 pages, tables, figures, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. A\$40.00.

These two books are timely additions to the available literature, since both optimism and apprehension mark current initiatives designed to enhance regional cooperation in the Islands Pacific. Central here has been the Pacific Islands Forum Pacific Plan, underway since 2004, and comprising