

of Waitangi until the end of the last century is not lost on Babadzan, who footnotes Karl Marx's quip for another document: it was subject to the "rigorous critique of the mice" (222n173). One can see that treaty, so crucial today and displayed in monumental proportions, serving as the centerpiece of the cathedral-like core of the innovative New Zealand National Museum, Te Papa, in Wellington.

The final chapter derives from a 2007 essay analyzing the transformation of the Pacific Islands from sites of romantic nostalgia to their present condemnation as "failed" or "weak" states. By way of summary of the themes throughout the book, Babadzan seeks to examine what has been the outcome of more than three decades of independence for those places, particularly Papua New Guinea, the Solomons, Vanuatu, and fractious Fiji. Joining this are brief footnote references to West Papuan struggles against Indonesia and the institutionalization of the FLNKS (Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste) in New Caledonia.

In spite of some of the texts (or parts) having been published previously, this series of essays reads as a book rather than a collection, a coherent, sustained, and ordered argument, each piece reflecting on the other or anticipating a later and related argument. I am surprised, given the revisions for republication, that at least a minor chord in Babadzan's theme is not the influence of tourism on cultural politics. For the foreign visiting audience, people rehearse identity positions as a commodity to literally sell themselves, as each Pasifikan is at once the subject and the object of

a scrutinizing gaze. Curious tourists watch the spectacle of culture, as do the critical locals.

More could have been said about that. Perhaps that is the subject of the book Babadzan is composing at the moment.

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*Shiro's Head*. DVD, 81 minutes, color, 2008. Languages: English, Chamorro. A Rockford Images Production. Produced, written, and directed by Kel and Don Muña. Distributed by AKTIV8 Promotionals (e-mail: SHdvds@aktiv8promotionals.com). Currently available through Borders Books and Music. US\$19.99. Also available at <http://www.shirosheadthelegend.com/shirosheadvd.htm>. US\$14.99.

Don and Kel Muña's debut feature film *Shiro's Head* is an engaging tale of revenge set in the landscape of modern-day Guam. Don Muña offers a compelling performance as Vince, a sinister antihero haunted by his role in the accidental death of his father. Seeking to redeem himself, Vince tries to avenge the brutal murder of his half brother Jacob, who is killed by a rival Japanese clan in his quest to recover an ancient Samurai sword held by Vince's family for generations. The holder of this sword controls the island. Helped by family friend Noah (played by Matt Ladmiraault), Vince struggles to uphold his family's legacy.

*Shiro's Head* is the first feature film to be produced on the island of Guam by Chamorros. The film has played at festivals throughout the world, includ-

ing the Philadelphia Asian American Film Festival, the Hawai'i International Film Festival, and the Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival. In addition, the film was a finalist for the "Best Narrative Feature" prize at the Los Angeles Film Festival.

Written, directed, edited, and shot by Chamorro brothers Don and Kel Muña, this film stands out as one of the better examples of the new Pacific wave of independent films to emerge on the international film festival circuit. Produced on a micro budget with family and friends, *Shiro's Head* is an outstanding example of independent filmmaking. In fact, the Muña brothers literally use this film as a textbook example of do-it-yourself production in their self-published book, *Why Go to Film School?*

But producing is not their only talent. The Muña brothers also have a brilliant sense of style. Their cinematic use of wide-angle panoramas juxtaposed with long-lens, handheld shots give the film a frenetic aesthetic that matches the feverish journey of the protagonist. The inventive use of Tarantino-esque western cowboy credits coupled with brilliant punk rock music (partially composed by the brothers themselves) grounds the film in a modern world of tattoos, piercings, and blood. And Don Muña's gritty, world-class performance as Vince immediately pulls us in as he struggles to balance his quest to avenge the murder of his brother while maintaining a sense of personal integrity.

The problem with *Shiro's Head* is in the story. The film quickly falls into confusion by repeatedly shifting perspectives between Vince and Noah,

the Caucasian "local" kid who returns home after a four-year trip abroad. Awkward voice-overs attempt to ground the narrative in Vince's plight, but Noah's romantic involvement with Alena, the love interest in the film (played by Aleta Borja), quickly overshadows the story. Our protagonist Vince, after making a brilliant appearance in the first two minutes of the film, literally disappears for the next sixteen minutes. The awkward plot structure attempts to manipulate time and perspective in a *Pulp Fiction*-type approach, but in the end this only succeeds in further confusing the audience. This confusion is exacerbated when we cut to a seven-minute animation sequence that attempts to explain the film's title and Vince's motivation. This animated historic epic is so long and stylistically detached from the rest of the story that it seems like an independent short film inserted into the feature narrative. In truth, the story doesn't really start until fifty minutes into the action, when we discover the significance of the Samurai sword in the present-day world.

Perhaps the most disappointing aspect of *Shiro's Head* is the story's focus on the character of Noah, whose presence in the narrative only distances us from the true protagonist, Vince. Furthermore, Noah's character plays into the same cliché as the heroes in Pacific-based features such as *North Shore*, *The Ride*, *Beyond Paradise*, and even *Fifty First Dates*, where the charismatic Caucasian hero falls in love with the beautiful native girl and in the process helps the locals out at the same time. But what does this have to do with Vince's quest for redemption? In the end, *Shiro's Head* is divided

between two separate stories, resulting in neither being told effectively.

Nevertheless, given the film's modern stylistic look and affinity for violence, *Shiro's Head* will surely find considerable success with younger viewers. In addition, the story invites a more sophisticated and mature audience by focusing on a man who seeks to defend the legacy of his ancestors. Indeed, *Shiro's Head* is a terrific example of indigenous filmmaking. By casting local people from Guam, the Muña brothers immerse us in a richly textured, seemingly true-to-life world. Characters often switch back and forth between the Chamorro and English languages, further filling the

story with a unique authenticity. In addition, the Muña brothers draw attention to the physical place of Guam by highlighting locations such as the Inarajan Pool, the Agat Cemetery, and the Yigo Race Track. Yet at the same time, *Shiro's Head* embraces an inventive modern aesthetic that pushes the boundaries of culturally specific storytelling. Although this is the first feature film to be produced on Guam by Chamorros, it is certain not to be the last—if the Muña brothers have anything to do with it.

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