

Book and Media Reviews

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kitschy representations of the Pacific, while marginalizing actual peoples abroad and in their homelands.

Huihui breaks new ground in exploring rhetorics and aesthetics, while holding fast to traditional elements of Pacific Islands literary and cultural studies. The body of the text opens and closes with poetry, a genre that buttresses most forms of expression in the region and that is also understood in its fullest context only when spoken aloud. Along with the inclusion of several speeches, the emphasis on orality in the anthology speaks to the indigenous storytelling techniques that undergird the rhetorical and aesthetic strategies of the contributors. It also strengthens the editors' commitment to community, the pooling and collecting of "huihui," which is the theoretical and organizational foundation of the book. The range of authors and texts places newer voices in conversation with prominent writers. Contributors' biographies contain information about their work and in some cases geographical context, valuable to instructors and students alike in an anthology encompassing so many regions of the Pacific.

Many of the pieces in *Huihui* draw on the interconnectedness of Pacific peoples and the ways these bonds are forged through travel and voyaging traditions within Moana Nui, from its center to its so-called peripheries. This anthology points toward future collections that could more fully address diasporic movement. However, as the first book dedicated to the rhetorics and aesthetics of the Pacific, *Huihui* has certainly moved forward

the fields of Pacific Islands literary and cultural studies.

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In Football We Trust, 87 minutes, DVD, color, 2015. Directed by Tony Vainuku and Erika Cohn; produced by Erika Cohn, GERALYN DREYFOUS, MARK LIPSON, and GAVIN DOUGAN. Distributed by IFWT Productions, LLC; Idle Wild Films Inc; and the Independent Television Service, in association with Pacific Islanders in Communications.

In Football We Trust is a documentary feature film that follows the lives of four Tongan student athletes: Harvey Langi from Bingham High School, Fihi Kaufusi from Highland High School, and brothers Leva and Vita Bloomfield from Hunter High School. Directed by first-time documentary filmmakers Tony Vainuku and Erika Cohn, *In Football We Trust* was an official selection in the 2015 Sundance Film Festival and is set against the backdrop of the class, race, and religious context of Salt Lake City, Utah, the epicenter of both the "Polynesian Pipeline to the NFL [the National Football League]" and also Polynesian immigration to the United States of America via the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. The film leads with the stunning statistic that while Tongans and Samoans in the United States number only 240,000, they are twenty-eight times more likely than any other ethnic group to play in the NFL.

With snappy editing and smooth transitions by editors Ericka Concha, William Hauge (Oscar-nominated editor of *Hoop Dreams* [1996]), and Ken Schneider, the film rolls like the swells of the ocean itself. The first swell introduces the young men in situ: in high school bleachers hanging out, in classrooms practicing the Māori haka, on the field at Friday night football games. We are immediately entranced as the film introduces us to major influences in their lives: coaches, teammates, parents, siblings, friends, and girlfriends. The film begins to weave in clips with professional Polynesian athletes, who, like “ancestors,” illuminate the journey for these “NFL hopefuls” and provide a chorus-like commentary on family pressures, cultural background, and the odds of making it. These professional athletes include Vai Sikahema (the first Tongan to play in the NFL), Haloti Ngata and Star Lotulelei (both also from Utah), and Troy Polamalu. Their cautionary voices balance the optimism and high expectations of these young athletes while confirming that the statistic has absolute veracity—although the four young players are focused only on playing at the college level, their families have high hopes that the athletes will lift them out of poverty.

The next “swell” adds another complication: the theme of generational trauma. Leva and Vita’s storyline brings Utah’s minority cultures to the fore as they deal with a family legacy of violent youth fraternities, or gangs. Their father and uncles founded a youth gang in the 1990s, and through their story the film is able

to explore the parallels of violence and sports to fraternity and masculinity. Like the generation before them, the Bloomfield brothers (who constitute a third generation of Tongan immigration) become subject to the systemic policing and juridical processes that contributed to the majority of the older males in their bloodline being dead, in prison, deported, or otherwise subject to State custody. Leva finds himself incarcerated for his senior year and misses out playing football altogether, while Vita completes probation, and we witness the struggle of their second-generation parents to cope with the ongoing fallout of a family history of street and State violence.

The statistical peril of incarceration is juxtaposed with a series of scenes with recruiters from top schools like Stanford and the University of Southern California who hotly pursue Harvey, who out of all the young men holds the highest grade-point average. Yet just as we think he is the one who will score, he is caught allegedly trespassing and smelling of cannabis, and this throws light onto the undeniable undertow of youth and class struggle they face. Further misplaced courage both on and off the playing field is shown through Fihi fearlessly playing in spite of a painful knee injury, which eventually leaves him recuperating in a wheelchair. As these different waves crest, we wonder whether any of them will make it out of high school with body and freedom intact, let alone make it to the college or NFL draft.

The film glows with authenticity that comes from the connection that first-time documentary filmmaker

and first-generation Tongan American Tony Vainuku builds with the boys and their families. All in all, the film's strength lies in its capacity to go beyond a cinema vérité ("fly on the wall") approach. The flowing editing features mobile graphics from newspaper articles heralding the heroic triumphs and heroic pitfalls, including TV evening news clips that emphasize the hyper-surveillance of Polynesians, whether for good or bad. The editing is accompanied by the sonic beats, hooks, and melodies of Derek Van-Scoten and a score by Justin Melland that gives us an auditory sense of the mundane yet somehow perilous nature of the urban grid, the school-to-prison pipeline, and the football pipeline.

Vainuku's eye favors tracking organic actions and discerning undervalued or otherwise silenced moments. As a gifted cinematographer, Vainuku reaches into his cultural and embodied archive and effectively achieves through cinematic language a "polyswag": a uniquely Polynesian mobile aesthetic drawing from a deep Oceanic and "blues" epistemology, making the camera a dynamic player in the game. Vainuku's lens follows body movement and allows the subjects' agency to speak and move fluidly enough to cocreate an active *mise-en-scène* that reveals relation, or *vā*, even as it simultaneously conceals and reveals filmmaking as performance. His work can be categorized in a way similar to that of New Zealand-born Samoan choreographer Parris Goebell's choreography: both employ a fused mobile "polyswag" aesthetic that comments on the working-class politics of, in particular, Polynesians and racial Others in white settler-dominated

nation-states, whether New Zealand or the United States, which are major twentieth-century hubs of Polynesian migration. Culturally, Vainuku has unprecedented access to male spaces that an outsider—or a female for that matter—would not have found: kava circles, youth parties, locker rooms, pregame pep talks, church events, and family home evenings. Moments in which he breaks the fourth wall are the most engaging, and this creates a multi-politics of storytelling that gives the film ample swag.

While a thin discourse on Polynesians and sports has been emerging in recent years, the connective tissue between the class politics and racial hierarchies involved in the dual pipelines of sports and prison has not been adequately treated, and both pipelines are more than overdue for academic, filmic, and documentary engagements. In this sense, *In Football We Trust* is a groundbreaking and important film. While it does not intend to be an inquiry into the legislated marginalization of Polynesians in the racial-spatial order in the United States, it does lead us to question the mythologies surrounding the "Polynesian savage" and its recent iterations, in sports as well as in the public discourse surrounding Polynesian youth gangs. This film would make an ideal resource for teaching and teach-ins in community centers, sports and youth camps, high schools, universities, and youth or adult detention facilities, as well as in the ivory tower classrooms of anthropology, sociology, and cultural, ethnic, and gender studies. But *In Football We Trust* is not an academic inquiry; it does not take sides or attempt to provide sociological commentary, and

it is all the more refreshing for its non-invasive and non-diagnostic approach.

We need more films with the empathetic heart of *In Football We Trust*, which resonates with authenticity and refuses to pathologize our success or failure, unlike so much other discourse that treats similar themes of masculinity and Polynesian men. *In Football We Trust* adds an important dimension to the discourses on Polynesian men in sport and on the American immigrant story in a post-civil rights era. For the relatively unexamined query about where Pacific peoples fit in, it offers an answer: Pacific peoples narrating their own stories. Simply stated, *In Football We Trust* challenges the film's subjects, and Polynesian youth at large, to "Make your own history!" It is Fihi who yells this war cry (among others) from the field of battle: "Make your own his-

tory! Make your own history!" For the directors, this film represents a rallying call for Polynesian youth to become, as Malcolm X urged, subjects in, rather than objects of, the struggle. The film has been picked up by Independent Lens and will be aired during spring 2016 in the United States on Public Television. The filmmakers, Tony Vainuku and Erika Cohn, have planned an educational outreach program coinciding with this debut that will aim to bring this film to a number of communities to generate dialogue around the themes and issues it represents and create a space to discuss the politics of empowerment, passion, and purpose in growing up Polynesian outside of Oceania.

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