

Lieweila: A Micronesian Story. 1998. Video, 57 min., color. A film by Beret E. Strong and Cinta Matagolai Kaipat. New York: First Run/Icarus Films (32 Court Street, 21st Fl., Brooklyn, NY 11201; fax: 718-488-8642; <info@frif.com>; <http://www.frif.com/>). US\$390; \$75 rental.

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Micronesia's rich traditional cultures and long and complex histories of colonization and change have only rarely been the subject of ethnographic film. *Lieweila*, "listen to our story," very effectively tells a small part of that history.

The film focuses on the migration and adaptation of the Refalawash (people

of our homeland) to the Northern Mariana Islands. More widely known there as the Carolinians, these are the descendants of peoples from tiny atolls spread over a thousand miles of ocean between Chuuk and Yap. Regarded as some of Micronesia's most skilled seafarers, they had traveled throughout the region, and occasionally beyond, long before the arrival of the Europeans. Early sixteenth-century Spanish observers on Guam recorded visits by Carolinians who had traveled over the northern sea route, called *Metawal*, to trade with indigenous Chamorro peoples. The Carolinians came to fear the Spanish, and most stayed away from the Marianas for decades at a time. But following a devastating typhoon and earthquake in the early 1800s that flooded atolls in the area, some Carolinians sought refuge in the Marianas. They were welcomed by the Spanish as a potentially valuable source of trade, converts to Christianity, and as a medium for transport and communication to the farther-flung islands in the colony. They were invited to settle the Northern Marianas Islands, which had remained largely empty since the Spanish conquest and forced resettlement of the indigenous Chamorro people to Guam one hundred-fifty years earlier.

In narrating this history of Carolinians in the Northern Mariana Islands, the film effectively weaves together images from early lithographs and photos, information from archival sources, recent film footage of the islands in Chuuk and the Marianas, and interviews with contemporary Carolinians.

The story told is one of the immigrant Carolinian community's struggle to maintain their identity and values over two centuries of contact and change. For almost one hundred years, the Carolinians kept their distance from both the Spanish and Chamorros in Guam and thus were long able to maintain their own language and culture. But the turn of the century ushered in a series of rapid and dramatic changes that would test their cultural resilience: German colonization and privatization of land in 1899; Japanese colonization and large-scale plantation production in 1914; World War II in 1941, including the Battle of Saipan; American liberation and their internment of indigenous peoples in 1944; and the establishment of the United States Trust Territory government in 1947. By mid-century, the Carolinians had begun a process of acculturation and an erosion of their cultural esteem. Furthermore, they had become outnumbered and outcompeted by repatriated Chamorros. They had become the Northern Marianas' minority poor.

The voice that narrates this film—literally and figuratively—is that of one of the first Carolinian attorneys, a woman whose family has been at the center of political ferment in the past several decades. Her father served as the representative of the Marianas' northern islands to the Congress of Micronesia and was a community leader on the remote island of Pagan. He had been influential in introducing social services to this more traditional setting—

Peace Corps teachers, a dispensary, an airstrip, and an agricultural exchange program. With these came the monetization of the Pagan economy, seen as a source of greed and envy within the community. He was killed in 1972 while mediating a dispute. The family's move to Saipan, followed by the forced relocation of the entire community because of an eruption of Mount Pagan, landed them in the midst of rapid political and social transformations. The Northern Marianas had just elected to become a U.S. commonwealth, they had developed their first constitution, and the islands had begun a period of economic boom. Then, the Carolinians were faced with the very difficult task of trying to take the best of both worlds.

The film documents the Carolinians' efforts to maintain what now remains of their language and expressive culture and to renew that which has faded. Two centuries after their separation, they have reestablished ties with those who remained on the atolls of Chuuk and Yap. As elsewhere in the Pacific, canoes and voyaging have been vehicles for their reidentification with their past.

Viewers who are unfamiliar with the cultures of Micronesia and the history of the Northern Marianas may find the early minutes of the film a bit vague about the identity of the people portrayed. Those who are familiar may object to sometimes brief or spotty historical coverage. In addition, the film's fifty-eight minute length may make it a tight squeeze into some classroom periods. Given the filmmakers' ambitious agenda, the beautiful film sequences included, and the overall quality of the production, however, these faults are easily forgiven.

Lieweila fills a real void in the library of ethnographic film on the Pacific. The issues raised within it will resonate with the voices of other Pacific Islanders reasserting their identities in the postcolonial world. The film was recently screened at the Honolulu International Film Festival, where it was well received. It will undoubtedly be of continued value for courses in anthropology, cultural studies, and the Pacific Islands.