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Lon Marum—People of the Volcano. Soraya Hosni, Chief Filip Talevu, dir. 43 min.

Distributed by Furtherarts Vanuatu (<http://www.lonmarum.com>), 2012.

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In June 2013, the Vanuatu National Cultural Council, the regulatory body for research in the Republic of Vanuatu, introduced a one-year moratorium on social research in the country. The moratorium restricts new outside researchers from undertaking social research in Vanuatu and asks current researchers to submit a report on their research projects. Its purpose is to take stock of research being undertaken and to develop appropriate policies for research in Vanuatu.¹ It is a response to exploitation of cultural knowledge and is an initiative by Vanuatu to take ownership of their cultural stories and knowledge, as well as the responsibility to conduct their own research.

Lon Marum—People of the Volcano is an exploration of different understandings and ways of presenting and owning knowledge. The film tells the story of communities on the Vanuatu island of Ambrym and their connection to one of the most active volcanoes in the world. The film begins in the community, where we learn, through mythical stories and community narratives, how the fire came to the island and the volcano came into being. Community members reenact scenes from ancestral times. For example, Chief Stanislas da Mangkon reenacts the magic song for controlling the fire. He explains how the fire was discovered and brought from Malakula island to Ambrym using the Magic Transport. The fire was eventually moved further up to the center of the island, where it is today. The first part of the film sets up the fact that local chiefs have control over the volcano as well as have ownership of the story of the volcano. “If someone wants to go up the volcano, and have good weather, they should ask me first for permission,” comments one of the volcano chiefs.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Filmmaker and anthropologist Soraya Hosni worked with the people of Ambrym for over two years, co-directing *Lon Marum* with Chief Filip Talevu, who is featured throughout the film linking the narratives of various leaders. The directors worked collaboratively with the community, recording stories in different vernaculars and in Bislama. The filming process involved about 200 people in various roles. We can feel this collaboration in the storytelling of the film—the ways that characters are introduced and that community members participate in the scenes and at times even interact with the camera. The soundtrack creates a rhythm that engages with mesmerizing visuals of sand drawings on black ash, representing the story of the volcano through this art form unique to Vanuatu.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

The film juxtaposes the local stories with the journey of European scientists who have been visiting the island since the 1960s to research the story of the volcano scientifically. Their understandings are in contrast to local understandings. The scientists' main goal is to “measure the volcano” via devices such as infrared spectrometers. The locals, whose lives are directly impacted by the volcano, are concerned about the relationship they have with the volcano. The contrasting perspectives on what it means to “know” something is commented on by a local man: “We already have special men who know how to talk to the volcano. This means we

have our own scientists.” In addition, the filmmakers present significant historic events of the volcano eruptions on the island and explore the communities’ resourcefulness in dealing with the destruction of their land and gardens. While the scientists believe that machines could protect the local community by warning them of eruptions in advance, the locals are not convinced. To them, scientific machines are unnecessary because their chiefs can read and interpret the movements of the volcano.

[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

The juxtaposition of local owners versus “intruders” is not a new theme in ethnographic film, but unlike, for example, the tourists in Dennis O’Rourke’s (2008) film *Cannibal Tours* on the Sepik of Papua New Guinea, the documentary *Lon Marum* does not include any scenes where the community members meet the scientists. Filmmaker Hosni appears to be the link between both groups, exploring their attitudes toward each other while presenting the local community’s voices and stories in more depth. Although one of the scientists admits that they should learn more about the local residents, we never see them make an effort and are reminded through brief interviews with the scientists that they are there to do a job.

Lon Marum—People of the Volcano is visually stimulating. Viewers get a good sense of the community through the visual story telling. The music soundtrack creates an enjoyable energy. The film could benefit from exploring various characters and their roles further. We do not always understand their links to and roles in the community. Moreover, women’s voices are absent in the film, as the story of the volcano in the documentary is presented by the male chiefs of the community.

Those interested in Pacific cultures and stories will enjoy this film and the way the story unfolds through the exploration of various perspectives. The European scientists' attitude and ignorance of local *kastom* (custom) makes one feel uncomfortable and clearly raises the question of whose knowledge matters and who should benefit from research, questions that have increasingly been raised in Melanesia and the Pacific region (see Gegeo and Watson Gegeo 2002). The film does not offer a solution but seems to call for more collaborative research, incorporating traditional knowledge with scientific knowledge. But even more so, it encourages sharing ideas and information, as well as respecting the stories of the people living with the volcano day to day.

The Vanuatu National Cultural Council and the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, for whom Chief Filip Talevu has been a field researcher, have spearheaded collaborative research in the areas of social, cultural, linguistic, and anthropological research (Taylor and Thieberger 2011) while collaboration with scientific research has been less accepted and practiced. With *Lon Marum—People of the Volcano*, Hosni and Talevu have created a strong, thought-provoking film that, while standing as a record of traditional stories of the communities, encourages further dialogue around the values of science and culture and different ways of knowing.

NOTE

1. <http://www.rnzi.com/pages/news.php?op=read&id=77560>, accessed September 6, 2013.

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FIGURE CAPTIONS

Figure 1. Bongmalip Talevu posing after seeing the lava lake of Benbow Crater for the first time. (Photo courtesy of Soraya Hosni)

Figure 2. Sand drawing representing one of the messages the spirit of the dead would have to complete to reach its destination, by storyteller Chief Bambu Maseing, Yatutilie village, West Ambrym, Vanuatu. (Photo courtesy of Soraya Hosni)

Figure 3. Dr. Patrick Allard using the infrared spectrometer inside Benbow volcano. (Photo courtesy of Soraya Hosni)