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Faces of the Spirits: The Sulka People of Papua New Guinea
(review)

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The Contemporary Pacific, Volume 15, Number 1, Spring 2003, pp. 229-231
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Published by University of Hawai'i Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/cp.2003.0020>



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country has become independent, we have had one problem after another. Prices of things have gone up. There's theft and burglary everywhere. You can't even trust your neighbours." Ghurau asks, "And the land problem? How will that be solved?" "Another girmit," Fiji Lal replies matter of factly, "There is little hope" (306).

Dauka Puran is an important novel and a significant social and cultural text. I hope it will inspire others to record their own impressions and recollections in a language whose enormous creative possibilities Subramani has laid before us.

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Faces of the Spirits: The Sulka People of Papua New Guinea. 27 minutes, VHS, color, 2001. Produced and directed by Caroline Yacoe. Distributed by Pacific Pathways, Honolulu. US\$95.00.

Filmed in Wide Bay, East New Britain Province, Papua New Guinea, in the Sulka villages of Taimtop, Guma, Kilalum, and Wawas, producer-director Caroline Yacoe's film highlights the magnificent red Sulka spirit-being masks. The film appears to be a collaborative work with a (scripted) voice-over narrative and (unscripted) comments and descriptions of the masks and their meanings provided by Sulka villagers. Yacoe's artistic collector's eye focuses on the masks as objects expressive of Sulka identity and way of life in a changing world. The film assumes a chronological structure: the first part looks at

"traditional" masks and ceremonies in Taimtop village; then, with a brief nod to Papua New Guinea's colonial history as a source of change, it segues into part two in Wawas village, where the opening of a new church and a mortuary ceremony exemplify "contemporary" syncretic expressions of masks and Sulka identity.

The film shows effectively the breathtaking, intricately carved and woven spirit-being mask (*hemlaut*) with its mushroom shaped "hat"—nearly two meters in diameter—made of barkcloth (*tapa*) or, nowadays, cotton sheeting. The hat is decorated on its top and underside with designs depicting clan affiliations, nature spirits, or dreamed symbols, which the dancer shows off by bending and rolling the hat's edge on the ground. The mask's full-length green coconut frond skirt rustles and swishes to great effect visually and aurally as the dancer twists from side to side. The whole ensemble, easily a meter taller than the tallest person, is judged according to the brilliant sheen of artfully painted designs, the fresh and brightly colored leaves, and the masked dancer's performance. The beauty of the whole experience prompts onlookers to leap and dance and shout their exuberant appreciation.

This aesthetically pleasing whole (splendid masks, dancing, singing, drumming, feasting) is indicative of the harmony present between human and supernatural beings. The masks represent a "unique expression of order" whose presence restores community balance by (re)affirming and (re)establishing social roles. Narrator Titilia Babour explains that the masks

dance the tension between good and evil, renew ties of kinship and friendship, and oversee critical rites of passage such as circumcision and nose-piercing, social adulthood and marriage, death and mortuary. Images of women carrying baskets of food and men carrying pigs emphasize the many months of preparation required. Traditional foods such as taro, yams, coconuts, pigs, and imported rice, tinned fish, and beef are essential feast food during the masks' presence in the village. Outside influences are represented by scenes of Rabaul, the provincial capital, and images of crowds and traffic, trade stores, and the ubiquitous cola advertisements and ice-cream cones. The history of these social and cultural changes is identified in a quick succession of still photos depicting German and Australian colonialists, missionization, and independence in 1975. Informative ethnographic scenes accompany a discussion of local self-sufficiency, and clean running water attests to a healthy existence except for endemic malaria, pneumonia, and birthing complications. Requirements not produced locally—fuel, medical supplies, biscuits, tea—are shown being unloaded from a ship anchored offshore. Village copra production is identified as a source of income for these commodities, which are now a necessary part of daily life and ceremonial feasts.

These images and narration segue into part two, filmed in Wawas village, where there is a “comfortable combination of traditional ways and Christian influences.” The syncretism of traditional beliefs and Catholicism, of supernatural beings and Catholic

saints, bishops, and priests, is beautifully depicted as the *hemlaut* masks celebrate the opening of a new Catholic church concurrent with a village leader's mortuary ceremony. The church's place in village life is never mentioned but, like the structure itself, lurks in the background as “new” masks are danced. No longer representing spirit beings such as the *masalai*, these masks symbolize other powers in the shape of Catholic bishops with white faces, white mitres, white robes, and shepherd's crooks; of the Archangel Michael displaying the severed head of Satan; of the Last Judgment of God the Father and the Holy Spirit with two angels holding scrolls inscribed with the life of the deceased. Religious syncretism is well presented visually. Indeed, as narrator Baulon Maibala wonders, have “the Sulka become Christianized or the Catholics Sulkanized?”

This film has much to recommend it. It is a pleasure to see and hear Melanesians talk about their culture and traditions. The narrative voice-overs are informative but obviously scripted, thus reminding us of the invisible hands behind the camera. However, the Sulka interviewed speak from their knowledge without scripting and reminded me of thoughtful discussions I have had with Bariai villagers (West New Britain) about their own spirit-being masks. Indeed, the film evoked in me the sights and smells and sounds of daily life and the excitement of ceremonial occasions when spirit-beings dwell in Bariai villages. The film is an excellent vehicle for the resplendent Sulka masks, which are breathtaking structurally and aesthetically. The narrative and

visuals portray an exotic culture and society, although context is thin in scenes of the new church, which stands mute on the relationship between mission and masks. The complicated relationship between self-sufficiency, development, and global capitalism is merely hinted at, and despite their indispensable participation, women's voices are left out. I recommend this film for introductory anthropology or Melanesian ethnography courses to explore the integration of art, religion, and daily life; concepts of tradition and change; globalization and development; religious syncretism; gender relations; urban-rural connections; and issues around "doing" ethnography and making ethnographic films.

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Ke Kūlana He Māhū: Remembering a Sense of Place, 67 minutes, VHS (Digital Video), color, 2001. Written by Kathryn Xian; directed by Kathryn Xian and Brent Anbe; produced by Kathryn Xian, Jaymee Carvajal, Brent Anbe, and Connie M Florez; distributed by Zang Pictures, Inc., Honolulu. Individuals US\$39.95; institutions US\$195.00.

This documentary relates a tale of how colonialism profoundly transformed Kanaka Maoli (indigenous Hawaiian) society and the forms of love that are acceptable in "the land of aloha." By contrasting the diversity of gender and sexual practices in pre-colonial times with the stigmatization and marginalization of transgendered

and gay people in Hawai'i today, the film asks us to ponder a question posed by Kanaka Maoli activist Ku'u-mealoha Gomes at the beginning of the film: "Where did the change come from?" The question is a rhetorical one, and the film does not provide any explicit answers; rather, it forces us to draw our own conclusions by making sense of the montage of testimonies, interviews, dance performances, old photographs, artistic renderings, and scenes of ocean and landscapes presented to us.

The film can be divided roughly into three sections. The first part examines *kūlana* (place, station, status, rank) in Kanaka Maoli society and culture of the *māhū*, a term that was originally used for both "hermaphrodites" and for transgendered males and females. Kanaka Maoli and non-Kanaka Maoli scholars, activists, archivists, and *kumu hula* (Hawaiian dance instructors) all affirm the acceptance of *māhū* in traditional society. *Māhū* are interviewed and featured as important cultural educators and practitioners, and they perform *oli* (chants) and *hula kahiko* (traditional dance). Interviewees then relate a familiar story of colonial decay as they describe the ways that the adoption of western law, Christianity, and a cash-based economy, along with the widespread loss of life and land (caused by disease and foreign intrusion), threatened to wipe out Kanaka Maoli communities and ways of life. Although *Kānaka Maoli* did survive, many today struggle with their identities—none more than the *māhū*.

The second section, entitled "modern times," looks at the drag queen community in Honolulu. Between