



**FIGURE 4.** Rabbi Beryl Epstein, in tallis and tefillin, prays at Congregation Chevra Shas, Crown Heights, Brooklyn. (Photo by Steven Loring)

There are really two intertwined themes in the film. The first is the ritual that the film is named after: *Shacharit*. As the raw, unexplained events unfold, they appear to reveal an underlying emotional intensity. We are shown men wrapping themselves in the tallis, covering their faces while reciting the Shema, and rocking back and forth while in prayer—all acts that appear to be spontaneous manifestations of that emotion. But could they be prescribed behaviors? Can they be both? The casual observer has no way of knowing. Why is the gartel wrapped around the waist? Is it to keep the pulled down coat from flapping open, or does it serve some other more esoteric purpose? In fact, this is a Hasidic practice that serves during prayer to separate the genitals from the heart and brain.

The second theme, really the story in this short documentary, is Rabbi Epstein's personal journey of Jewish identity: "I'm originally from the 'holy land' of Chattanooga, Tennessee, and just grew up like any American kid. . . . When I was a teenager, I heard a very dynamic rabbi speak. . . . For me it was finding out about being more Jewish. And expressing it." It is only in the context of this journey that he discusses the ritual we have been viewing: "So God has given us very specific details—how He wants to be approached. That's what those black boxes are, that's

what the beard is, that's what the *yarmulke* is. That is what every ritual that you see. . . . It's about how God wants to be communicated with. Now I have to dig within myself and actually be there, rise up to that level, emotionally and intellectually. To be there."

As an aesthetic piece, there is something satisfying about *Shacharit—A Morning Prayer*, despite its limits as a short documentary. However, I cannot honestly imagine what a viewer wholly unfamiliar with the subject would take from this. For this reason, it presents a challenge as a didactic tool. I would use it in some of my classes; in fact, I am already making plans to do so. It is certainly compelling in a manner that will grab the attention of students.

However, the film is challenging and perhaps even troubling because of the very limited and narrow definition of "being Jewish" that it presents. This issue hit me from the very beginning when I recognized the location. Just two miles away from Crown Heights is another community, the Satmar in Williamsburg. To the outsider, there might appear to be no difference between them and the Chabad Lubavichers. Yet animosity exists between these two groups, and to a member of either group, the lines are distinct. The gulf is greater when both are compared to other, non-Hasidic and non-Orthodox Jews. And in addition to these different religious approaches to Jewishness, there are secular Jewish organizations, Secular Yiddishists, and other nonreligious forms of Jewish identity and affiliation.

Jewish identity goes way beyond religion and religious practice. In the film, Rabbi Epstein talked about "being Jewish," not "being religious" or pious, although he clearly sees them as one and the same. This opens the door to an in-depth discussion and exploration of both the specific issue of Jewish identity and the general issue of ethnic identity. There is a "culture war" within the general Jewish community over what "Jewishness" is. I must admit to partisanship within this conflict; as both an insider and an anthropologist, I am concerned with the issue of defining Jewishness, which has long been problematic. An instructor who is not familiar with these issues may not even know they exist. For this reason, I would like to see this documentary distributed with additional study materials that address this issue from all sides, particularly those that may balance the position presented in the documentary.

## Returning Souls

Hu Tai-Li, dir. 85 min. Taipei, Taiwan: Institute of Ethnography, Academia Sinica, 2011.

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Anthropologist and filmmaker Hu Tai-Li's *Returning Souls* is an intricate portrait of indigenous Taiwanese cultural re-

vival and postcolonial negotiation of identity, religion, and the politics involved in the "return" of cultural heritage to its place of origin. The film chronicles the institutional and community negotiations and practices initiated by indigenous Amis residents of the village of Tafalong in the northeastern



FIGURE 5. *The Amis shaman in a trance.* (Photo by Hu Tai-Li)

county of Hualien and their almost decade-long efforts to bring the souls of their ancestors back to the village from the Institute of Ethnography, Academia Sinica, in Taipei.

Hu Tai-Li, an ethnologist at the Institute of Ethnography, began to document this process after a schoolteacher named Fuday Kumud Menale from Tafalong contacted her about the possibility of returning a set of carved wooden pillars depicting Amis oral tradition and mythology that had been removed from the village in 1957. Through a series of interviews and Hu's narration, viewers learn that the pillars had been central elements of a house once owned by a powerful Amis family called Kakita'an. Although the Kakita'an House had been the village's central site for ancestor worship and Amis religious and shamanic practice (incl. headhunting), its use and occupation had become contested during the Japanese colonial period (1895–1945). Along with the Amis people of the Tafalong village, the family had been relocated, Amis ritual traditions suppressed,

and the house appropriated by Japanese officials. In 1957, the house was destroyed in a typhoon, leaving the pillars vulnerable to rapid deterioration. At that time, they were recovered by museum director Liu Pin-Hsiung and have been conserved in the institute's museum collections ever since.

In 2003, delegates from Tafalong village began a process of negotiating the repatriation of the pillars, believing that they were needed to rectify ongoing political unrest within the village. In a fascinating twist, however, Amis elders advised the advocacy group to leave the original carved pillars in the museum and to focus instead on repatriating the souls of ancestors that had been taken along with the pillars to the museum in Taipei. What unfolds is a remarkable exploration of the revitalization of intangible cultural expression that can be facilitated by access to tangible cultural heritage in museum collections. Significantly, the film draws attention to the difficult political and postcolonial conditions that

contemporary indigenous Taiwanese peoples must negotiate in the repatriation process. Hu's camera documents many years of this process: from Amis shamanic ritual conducted inside the museum to the recreation of the original poles and reconstruction of the Kakita'an House in Tafalong village; from struggles to unite villagers and politicians around questions of land ownership and colonial histories to the grave spiritual consequences of bringing the souls of their ancestors to a home different from the one they had left.

*Returning Souls* weaves observational footage of this long-term process with interviews with key stakeholders in the story, creative retellings of Amis mythology, and occasional narration by Hu to provide additional context in a complex chronology of events. In doing so, several key themes emerge. First, the film articulates a common tension between ideologies of heritage conservation and informed consent, particularly under postcolonial conditions. Museum Director Liu Pin-Hsiung describes how he had informed local villagers that he would bring the carved pillars to the museum, while Fuday Kumud Menale recounts that village elders felt that the pillars had been taken away—implying theft—from Tafalong village. Interviews with descendants of the original Kakita'an family communicate the experience of Amis people under Japanese occupation, when shamanic traditions and rituals were discouraged, Amis land was appropriated for official use, and the Kakita'an house was removed from everyday cultural practice and listed as a heritage structure. This dynamic is echoed again at the end of the film, when the only way to rescue the newly reconstructed Kakita'an House from politically motivated demolition is to register it as a national "cultural landscape" and reembed it in a tourism-oriented heritage complex.

The film also exemplifies an increasing willingness of heritage institutions and curators to open up museums and

collections to members of source communities and to embrace rituals and practices that go against principles of conservation. Hu documents Amis shamanic ritual in the museum that involves the blowing of water on the pillars and the sacrifice of a pig on the museum's entrance. Significantly, museum officials create conditions in which Amis shamans can use the museum space to channel and communicate the wishes of their ancestors inhabiting the museum, thereby guiding the process of repatriating souls to Tafalong village.

*Returning Souls* also makes visible a spectrum of elements of intangible cultural expression that reconnection to tangible cultural heritage can facilitate. The film chronicles the recarving of the Kakita'an pillars and the reconstruction of the Kakita'an House using traditional architectural methods, alluding to the relearning and innovation that was required to do so; it also records the songs sung by carvers as they do their work and performances of the oral traditions and mythologies that the Kakita'an pillars depict. Perhaps most forcefully, the film depicts a strong shamanic tradition of spirit-mediums who both conduct and revitalize rituals that they determine are necessary to safely repatriate ancestral souls to the village (see Figure 5). All of these practices are inspired by the original request by a few villagers to gain access to the Kakita'an pillars and discuss their return to Tafalong. The film demonstrates the significance of collaboration between museum institutions and the communities from which the museum's collections originated while drawing attention to the long-term complications and challenges at the local level that such collaboration can unleash. *Returning Souls* represents an important contribution to the increasingly intertwined disciplines of museum, media, and visual anthropology and will be of great interest to scholars, curators, and students.

## Stori Tumbuna: Ancestor's Tales

Paul Wolffram, dir., with Paul Wolffram, Patrick Toarbusai, Kosmos Toalami, Bartholamul Toinniatwa, Brigata Apia, Nerus Toding, Toru Thadeus, Nerus Patrick, and Leni Toarbusai. In English as well as Tok Pisin and Siar with English subtitles. 83 min. Wellington, New Zealand: Handmade Productions Aotearoa, 2011.

### Mark Eby

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Writer and filmmaker Fatimah Rony discusses the links between ethnographic film and the horror film, which seems particularly apt when considering Paul Wolffram's *Stori Tumbuna: Ancestor's Tales*:

The audience follows the narrative until it discloses all the secrets of the monster. This knowledge is arrived at only by observation. It is this desire for proof by observation that links the ethnographic

film to the horror film. . . . this logic linking vision to knowledge, producing an incessant desire to see, is not without its attendant dangers. [Rony 1996:170]

The dilemma at the heart of Wolffram's film is the desire to see, not only for ethnographic documentary purposes but also in pursuit of a mythical monster, which leads to unforeseen consequences.

Wolffram's film begins as another self-reflexive tale about a young ethnographer's exploration of "one of the most isolated and unique corners of the earth" to get to