

Extract from review of Ongka's Big Moka by Jerry W. Leach in Royal Anthropological Institute Newsletter, (RAIN) March/April 1975, pp.7-8

[The film was shot in June-August 1974 among the Kawelka tribe north of Mt. Hagen.... Various comments and then....]

It is unfortunate that the speech could not have been sub-titled.

The place of pigs in achieving status is another strong feature of the film. Concerning status, though, the commentator's background-setting statement that the 'moka' is the 'only way' to get status in Kawelka society leaves one very uncomfortable. The effect of Ongka's moka efforts on his wives provides insight into the pressures on women of men's political careers. It is not clear what, if anything, they get out of it all.

The main weakness of the film is twofold. It is not possible to get a clear idea of how the moka works, even in its barest fundamentals, because the commentary fails to link what is viewed with a model of moka sufficiently detailed to make sense of the visual and spoken information presented. For example, how does Ongka have many supporters when he is said to 'invest' largely in his father-in-law? Does Ongka come at some point to own the 600 pigs he hopes to give away or are they the total for all Kawelka givers? How do moka cycles 'start' with deaths and wars, when the system seems to be one of perpetually on-going exchanges? Is Ongka's moka receiver, Peruwa, to receive the entire range of moka gifts or only a part? Is Peruwa beaten or shamed by this or does he receive a kind of status from receiving Ongka's moka, the largest ever in the region.

Questions like this will not leave practised anthropologists and readers of Strathern's book blank, yet they do multiply in the minds of other viewers. One must conclude, therefore, that there has not been sufficient communication between the film team and the consultant to push this film to the first-rank of ethnographic documentaries, where it might have been.

The last point concerns the ending. The major moka to which the events of the film lead is not shown at all because of the departure of the film crew.... The film-making question raised is whether or not tightly-scheduled crews can best shoot subject matter of a 'once only' kind....