

**Exploring dance as a subject of knowledge for cultural identity in Papua New Guinea:  
Issues from the 2010 National Dance Symposium**

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Image 1: Participants at the National Dance Symposium held in PNG, 2010.

Photo by Naomi Faik-Simet.

This project dialogue discusses how dance is perceived in schools as a tool for learning, as well as a tool for maintaining cultural identity. The discussion summarizes outcomes of the first National Dance Symposium held in Papua New Guinea (PNG) in April 2010. The symposium was held at the University of Goroka and attracted participation from those concerned with dance, including students, academics, artists, and representatives from the government. The aim of the symposium was to create a forum for all persons concerned with dance to come together and discuss issues on the current status of dance in PNG, addressing the theme “Sustaining Dance as an Important Art Form Through Education.” Presentations were made in nine topical areas: education, advocacy, traditional dance, protection, preservation, safeguarding, contemporization, dance as intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO’s 2003 Convention), and dance and the church. The Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies has published a book titled *A Focus on Dance in Papua New Guinea: Papers from the 2010 International Dance Day Symposium, Held at the University of Goroka*, which is based on the papers presented at the symposium.

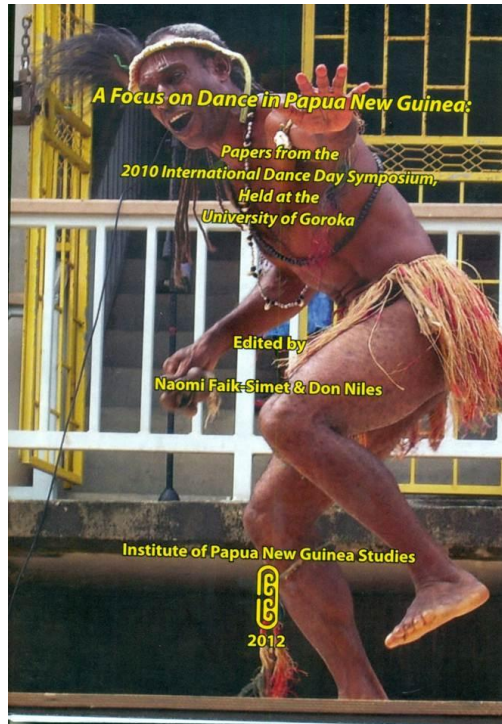


Image 2: Front cover of book emanating from the symposium held in PNG, 2010.

Given the diverse culture of Papua New Guinea, an emphasis is placed on dance as a form of knowledge in its transmission across generations. The main question asked of the symposium was, “Is dance seen as a separate set of knowledge or is it a way of knowing?” In summing up the resolutions reached at the end of the symposium, it was suggested that more research needs to be done in PNG’s education system to differentiate between the issue of dance as knowledge and dance as a way of knowing other knowledge.

The recent development in the Pacific includes the presentation of the Pacific Regional Culture and Education Strategy at the Pacific Cultural Ministers’ meeting in Honiara in 2012. The presentation was done by the South Pacific Council (SPC), with the principal objectives to: 1) Raise the profile of culture in education at all levels, 2) Increase the opportunities for training and education for the culture sector, and 3) Raise the level of priority given to culture by governments. This action by SPC comes at a time when many Pacific Island countries’ cultures, including dance, are threatened by globalization and other external forces.

While there is significant progress in the recognition of culture and the arts at the regional level, more work needs to be done at the national and community level promoting inclusive (informal and formal) education for all. Papua New Guinea is blessed with immense cultural diversity and the needs remain for this culture to be properly transmitted across generations. Education plays an important role in the transmission of knowledge and the maintenance of culture.



Image 3: Papua New Guinea dances. Photo by Naomi Faik-Simet.



Image 4: Papua New Guinea dances. Photo by Naomi Faik-Simet.

*Keywords:* culture, identity, knowledge transmission, education, learning

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**Naomi Faik-Simet** is currently a dance researcher at the Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies. She joined the Institute in 2001 and has conducted research on Papua New Guinea's traditional and contemporary dance forms. She specializes in researching and documenting the changes associated with traditional dances that are performed outside of their contexts. Her present research investigates the processes of developing cultural pedagogies to improve the standard of dance education in Papua New Guinea. She holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Performing Arts and a Bachelor of Arts Degree (Honours) in Literature from the University of Papua New Guinea.

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