

thinking, and shows that the Welsh-English distinction is “usually framed, and often experienced, in terms of *internal* divisions within Wales” (p. 56, emphasis in original).

An important emphasis in the book is that ethnicity is both a discourse and a series of experiences. One way in which Welsh individuals’ experience of their ethnicity is demonstrated is through a discussion of their participation in a range of performance events. Perhaps the most important of these are the local and national *Eisteddfodau* (festivals where musicians and poets perform competitively). This focus on performance provides a context for the author’s exploration of the conflict between opposing cultural self-images. The Welsh devalue the social and class hierarchy that they label “English,” and think of themselves as living in an egalitarian society. This image will often be framed in terms of downplaying the competitive and judgmental aspects of performances of Welsh music and poetry, so that people will say “taking part is the important thing” (p. 106). An opposing view and recognition of the significance attached to winning competitions is expressed with the statement “everyone in Wales is an adjudicator” (p. 106).

This study is a significant addition to the ethnography of Western Europe, to anthropological studies of language and ethnic politics and to research on personhood, emotions and performance. It will be of particular interest to those who work in non-state nations where the maintenance of a minority language is a focal point for self-definition and cultural activism.

### **The Possessed and the Dispossessed: Spirits, Identity and Power in a Madagascar Migrant Town**

Lesley A. Sharp

Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. 345 pp. N.p.

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This stimulating account of spirit possession in Madagascar’s Sambirano Valley begins with familiar premises: that individual, social or even cultural identities are never static or monolithic, but rather are fluid, malleable and multilayered; that the body provides a readily accessible medium for dealing with social contradictions; and that, rather than confining itself to sacred practice, ritual is a determinant force in society.

The ostensible object of the book is to describe the role and significance of spirit possession—of which the most important form is *tromba*—in mediating problems associated with Malagasy women’s experience of urban life and migrant labour in a plantation economy. This does not mean, however, that participation in *tromba* implies marginality. That much is suggested by the title: the “possessed,” who enjoy a legitimate and profitable lifestyle as mediums, are contrasted to the truly “dispossessed,” who have opted out of mediumship. Unlike ethnographies that portray female mediumship as providing only temporary or symbolic relief from the pressures of the workplace or the tensions of marital life, Sharp analyzes *tromba* as a crucial component of Sakalava culture that permanently empowers its participants.

The book is divided into three parts. Part 1 provides a social, historical and political-economic backdrop for the analysis of *tromba*. Part 2 discusses how mediumship is implicated in local conceptions of identity, community and history. Part 3 explores

how possession and exorcism shape the boundaries of "selves" that are, by definition, shifting and permeable. Key to Sharp's approach is an effort to go beyond the ceremonial aspect of mediumship and examine how *tromba* actively mediates women's everyday struggles. Some of the most interesting aspects of the book deal with practices that transform *vahiny* (outsiders) into *tera-tany* (insiders), such as post-partum rituals and *tromba* support networks, which operate on kinship-based principles to incorporate non-kin migrant women.

The experience of urban life, capitalist labour and Western education seems to have bred a heightened concern with "tradition" that often drives mediums to undermine development projects or resist economic changes. Sharp offers fascinating hints of how this concern becomes expressed in the disturbing possession of adolescent girls whose pregnant bodies—a sign of precocious and thus problematic fertility—are made to speak of the contradictions of migrant life.

Yet, there is very little on the Malagasy conception of bodiliness and the "bodily" ways in which mediums re-enact history, engage in their culture and act upon the world. This is not to fault Sharp's excellent analysis, but rather to suggest possible paths for further research on how mediumship as a bodily, sensuous and kinesthetic practice is implicated in the making of the Malagasy lived world. Refreshingly free of jargon and alive with tales of women's daily struggles, Sharp's study convincingly illuminates the central role of mediumship in local definitions of power and identity.

### **Knowledge and Practice in Mayotte: Local Discourses of Islam, Sorcery, and Spirit Possession**

Michael Lambek

Anthropological Horizons Series

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993. xix + 468 pp. \$70.00 (cloth), \$24.95 (paper)

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How might anthropologists understand the cultural basis of knowledge? This is Michael Lambek's task in this detailed and often engrossing study from Mayotte, an island of the Comoro archipelago in the Indian Ocean, between East Africa and Madagascar. Based on careful field research spanning approximately 20 years, Lambek argues for an understanding of the interrelatedness of three traditions, each with its own conception of knowledge: Islam, cosmology and spirit possession. These traditions may be viewed, at times, as interlocking or even indistinguishable; at others they compete with or contradict one another. Key issues concern the question of knowledge as power and whether Islam is hegemonic in self-proclaimed Muslim communities. In turn, a unifying theme is: how does one obtain knowledge and who has access to it? Can we speak of a morality of knowledge? Sociologist Alfred Schutz provides a helpful framework: there are varying degrees of knowledge, represented by the expert, the "well-informed citizen" and "the man on the street" (or what Lambek refers to as "the person on the path"). Levels of knowing in Mayotte are best understood in times of crisis (most often sickness), where the "master, scholar, [or] expert" (p. 3) for all three traditions is the *fundi*, whose clients fall into Schutz's two other categories.