

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)

Reviewer: Lesley A. Sharp
Barnard College

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.

In part 1, "Introductions," Lambek explores the historical roots of knowledge on Mayotte, showing how the three traditions were brought by seafarers of many origins. French colonization further complicates the picture; thus Lambek gives a brief-yet-informative recent history of Mayotte, as well as an overview of village social structure. The remainder of the book is divided into three sections, each focussing on one of the traditions. A central theme is whether knowledge is embedded in texts or embodied, and this is reflected in the three respective section headings: "The Social Organization of Textual Knowledge," "Counterpractices: Cosmology and the Ins and Outs of Sorcery" and "Embodied Knowledge and the Practice of Spirit Mediums."

As Lambek explains early in this work, Islamic knowledge is open to all members of Mayotte society, but mastery is another question altogether. Children begin learning to recite the Qur'an at a young age by sounding out Arabic letters (a task that was given to, and frustrated, Lambek early in his field work, when he expressed his desire to *learn* about local culture). Boys and girls who show promise are sent to other villages to study with *fundis* who specialize in '*Ilm fakihi*, knowledge of Islam's sacred texts and rituals. Learning proves difficult, for the inquisitive student is quickly frustrated by the lack of instructional texts or teachers well-versed in Arabic. Here Lambek reveals an important dimension of Islam: words, when uttered, are sacred; but, when translated, they lose their power. Furthermore, being Muslim in Mayotte is a performative experience: it is through such actions as recitation, prayer and fasting that one asserts Muslim identity.

In contrast, knowledge associated with '*Ilm dunia*, the cosmologist's art, hinges on the ability to read (that is, translate) and interpret a host of astrological texts. I found this section to be the most compelling, for the cosmologist is simultaneously a valued healer and a potentially dangerous sorcerer. For example, through this knowledge one can predict auspicious times to hold important rituals, as well as to harm one's adversaries. Thus, cosmology defines a spectrum of healers and sorcerers, whose work may be viewed as good or evil. Much of this knowledge is secretive and is acquired only through apprenticeships with established masters that span decades. The danger associated with the *fundi's* work is expressed through common beliefs that one must kill close kin and/or dance on graves to acquire power. Here Lambek's treatment goes beyond many other anthropological studies of sorcery: rather than simply making note of such beliefs, he interviews self-professed sorcerers. He also explores the morality of power, as well as ethical dilemmas associated with reporting secret knowledge.

In Mayotte, interpretations of knowledge are flexible: Islam, cosmology and spirit possession are not discrete domains. This point is illustrated by reference to two brothers who are both Islamic *fundi* (pp. 170ff.). One rejects the legitimacy of the two other traditions; the other's ambivalence allows him to offer a complex critique of, for example, the social significance of cosmology. Conversation and polyvocality define the dynamics of village-based knowledge, a theme cleverly represented on the book's cover, which shows an Islamic *fundi* and possessed medium deep in conversation.

The final section concerns knowledge of the spirits, '*Ilm ny lulu*, on which Lambek has written extensively. Here, as in previous works, Lambek draws from the lives of two healers, Tumbu and Mohedja. Yet again we witness the blurring of boundaries between traditions. Tumbu, skilled at sorcery extraction, acquires knowledge from a host of teachers: Islamic and cosmologist *fundis*; personal possessing spirits that appear in his dreams; and his wife Mohedja's spirits that speak through her in trance or transmit knowledge through dreams she must interpret. The one weakness here is a need for a

more detailed discussion of the process through which villagers—and anthropologists—interpret such dreams.

The conclusion is brief and to the point. In addition to providing a re-encapsulation of this volume's overall purpose, it also contains an intriguing and amusing episode: a heavily laden granary falls on a respected, wealthy man who is sleeping beneath it. Lambek—guided, of course, by Evans-Pritchard's writings on the Azande—searches in vain for special meanings local villages assign to this event. He finds the sorcerer is irrelevant: the granary fell, the man was hurt. Upon returning to the field, interpretations have changed, but only after the man has experienced tragedies that leave him emotionally and financially weakened. There is an important lesson here: interpretations of knowledge—and associated power—change over time.

Overall, this is a strong and detailed study of three traditions that define the core of community life. There are, perhaps, a bit too many excerpts from Lambek's field notes. Yet among the book's greatest strengths is the care with which Lambek has documented each of the traditions, rooting his examples in everyday events. As noted, Lambek occasionally includes himself as a character in these narratives, carefully straddling what has become thorny territory in anthropology. The push for greater self-reflexivity has far too often produced heavily egocentric texts that attempt to pass as ethnographies. Lambek, in contrast, uses his own experiences—as observer, apprentice and, at times, the confused, young anthropologist—to reveal the manner in which an understanding of knowledge unfolds with experience. This is the work of a gifted field worker, whose new study offers theoretical contributions that extend far beyond the societies of the Indian Ocean. This book will prove useful to anyone interested in the cross-cultural study of Islam, sorcery and/or spirit possession; the dynamics of power in small-scale communities; the relationship between religion and healing; or knowledge as a cultural construct.

Living on the Land: Change among the Inuit of Baffin Island

John S. Matthiasson

Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1992. 172 pp. N.p. (paper)

Reviewer: Derek G. Smith

Carleton University

Matthiasson reports research, undertaken during a long visit in 1963 and a short one in 1973, that has already been represented in a series of scholarly articles. The present work is intended as a "personalized ethnography," a "reflexive and extended" treatment of "the Tununermiut camp life that disappeared shortly after [Matthiasson] encountered it" (p. 10). It is the work of someone who cares deeply for the people whose lifeways he describes.

It is valuable for its concentration on camp life, for most Northern ethnographic work by the 1960s had an intensive concern with settlement life and its social problems, in part because "contact-traditional" camp life was much attenuated by 1960. The volume deals with social-problem issues, but emphasizes contact-traditional camp life.

The work intentionally shies "away from discussion of anthropological issues of theory and methodology" (p. 158), which permits a fairly pleasing plain-language