

Lambek, Michael, *Island in the Stream: An Ethnographic History of Mayotte*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018, 376 pages.

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Michael Lambek's latest book on Mayotte, one of the Comoros Islands, offers a fascinating depiction of what it is to struggle with time. It brings to mind the famous title of Anthony Powell's *Dance to the Music of Time*, which Lambek uses as the title for Part 3 on how the Mahorais (the Mayotte people) have been dealing with profound changes since 1975. Lambek's challenge is in how to deal with 40 years of fieldwork comprising no less than 11 – longer and shorter – stays on the island. Not only has Mayotte undergone an extensive transformation, but so has Lambek, both through his confrontations with all the changes on the island but also through his exposure to the equally rapid succession of theoretical fashions in his discipline – maybe less vital, but at least as stormy.

Lambek's deep involvement and the impressive historical depth of his fieldwork on the island makes the question of how ethnographers deal with time a particularly urgent one. What to do with the idea of an “the ethnographic present,” a subterfuge so dear to many ethnographers, when rich fieldwork notes from 1975 somehow need to be combined with notes written in 2015? Lambek's solution to this problem is an original one. He chooses to undertake an “ethnographic history” by selecting a series of cuts (or slices), which he presents in chronological order. Originally, the idea was to compose the book on the basis of a series of texts that he had already published at different moments in time. But while working on the book, he found himself partly rewriting these older texts. Moreover, Lambek added three new chapters to the beginning and three at the end. Thus, more than two thirds of the book were written after 2015.

The challenge is all the more fraught because of the tremendous change the island has undergone. In 1976, the Mahorais voted not for independence, as the other Comoros did, but for remaining with the French Republic. One can see this as one of the few successes of a colonial power that uses the classic *divide et impera* rule to block formal decolonisation. But Lambek emphasises, rather, the conscious choice of the Mahorais, afraid that independence would mean being overruled by elites from the other islands. The results were indeed spectacular. In less than 30 years, the island became integrated into France as a full-fledged department, the Mahorais making it from colonial subjects to citizens of the French Republic, and Mayotte, once the poorest of the Comoros group, changed into a prosperous hub and a gateway to Europe. Consequently, the island now attracts illegal and often quite desperate migrants from the other islands.

Lambek's ethnographic history tries to capture these deep changes as “living history.” He does so by retaining some of the ethnographic present of his cuts, since it is precisely by juxtaposing cuts from different moments in time in their synchronic tenor that he hopes to grasp how Mahorais have lived their dynamic history. The result is a chronological chaos of sorts. Particularly in the recently rewritten parts of earlier cuts, one does not know who is speaking: the Lambek of then or the Lambek of now? This may shock some historians. But for the author, this is an innovative way of exploring

*Die Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitlichen* (the contemporaneity or the non-contemporaneous – a concept borrowed from Reinhart Koselleck). The main idea behind Lambek's ethnographic history project seems to be that of avoiding a linear history, which would serve to highlight one line perceived by an outsider through the dramatic changes his friends lived through. Rather, his cuts and their juxtaposition highlight how his friends perceived and tried to deal with these changes.

Lambek is clearly taken by the way Mahorians have succeeded in assuming their history. As in his other work, he is also deeply inspired by German philosophers in his struggle with time, notably Hans-Georg Gadamer. Lambek borrows Gadamer's motto to open the book with the notion of historical thinking as having “its dignity” – also that “there is no such thing as ‘the present’ ... rather constantly changing horizons of future and past” (xxi). It is this view that Lambek identifies as the way the Mahorians try to cope with such deep changes in an orderly way. Appropriately, the last phrase of the book is about “the seizure of new opportunities ... with the ethical charge of past commitments” (282). History for Mahorians has never been a one-sided process of victimisation. On the contrary, Mahorians have gone to great lengths to remain agents of their own history. Lambek illustrates this through vivid ethnographical detail on how the older complex of *shungu* exchanges was gradually superseded by new forms of ceremonial exchange. These new forms are just as festive and dignified but also deeply marked by increasing commoditisation. The *shungu* cycles consisted mainly of ceremonial exchanges between members of age groups and these groups. During the 1980s, they became ever more out of touch with the increasing involvement of Mahorians with education, new economic opportunities and growing wealth. But they did not disappear abruptly. Even while the older forms of exchanges occurred less regularly, the cycles were properly finished and were gradually replaced by other forms of ceremonial exchanges, each also included dance and music. In Lambek's book, Mahorians are the ones who have pride of place as agents of history, not the French and their interests in allowing for the island's spectacular emancipation.

An interesting side-effect of Lambek's ethnographic history project is that one can follow how his increasing interest in “ethics” took shape over the course of his work in Mayotte. Lately, he has been a leading protagonist of the “ethical turn” in our discipline. As Michael Jackson notes in his inspired foreword, for Lambek “the ethical dimension of life” has become as critical “as the jural, the material or the political” (xii). Indeed, the ethical, both as an aspect of his relationship with the Mahorians and in the dignity they assume in their exchanges, protecting their community in changing times, is found throughout the book. It may remain implicit in the earlier cuts but is ever more explicit in the later cuts.

In Chapter 11, again on changing ceremonial exchange, Lambek recognises that “relative to other places ... Mahorians have been enjoying what one could call a run of moral luck” (241). This raises the question as to what extent his emphasis on ethics is also influenced by the particular circumstances of his fieldwork and Mayotte's quite exceptional story of growing prosperity. Yet, even in the earlier chapters, when this success story was not yet so clearly outlined, the ethnography is marked by notions like reciprocity and balanced exchange à la Sahlins. It is only in the last two chapters, Chapters 12

and 13, that more attention is focused on tensions and unbalances. There, one reads about tensions between Islam and the role of spirit mediums of old – central to these societies – which put some mediums in a rather desperate situation. And even kinship turns out to have its shady side. One learns, for instance, that earlier in this life, Lambek's benevolent hosts had to live elsewhere because of fears of jealousy and witchcraft (261). Here, Lambek clearly notes that "kinship as actually lived is different from the ideal of 'mutuality of being'" (276). Apparently Sahlins's more recent characterisation of kinship (replacing reciprocity) is one bridge too far, after all.

For me, reading the book brought to mind Stephen Palmié's seminal metaphor for fieldwork as a "membrane" between the "knower" and the "known," between the researcher and the field. Palmié (2013) uses the image to counter the current idea – mostly among people who have never done fieldwork – of the researcher (the knower) controlling the known through his or her ethnography. Palmié rather tries to show that during his several decades of fieldwork on Afro-Cuban religions, both in Cuba and Florida, he was as much shaped by what he sought to know as his ethnography was shaped by him. The difference with Lambek's horizon is that in Palmié's case, the process was much more violent. Palmié felt constantly overtaken by the changes of his topic, as fixing a name for it proved to be illusive; current names were constantly superseded by new takes on history and the true core of the beliefs. Apparently, the difference with Lambek's more peaceful ethnographic history has to do with the field and the Mahorians' "run of moral luck." But it is possible, also, that some anthropologists are more sensitive to ethics than others.

However, it is clear that Lambek's way of relating to "his" islanders – giving full scope to emotions and mutual efforts toward understanding – and his special talent in relating such small-scale events to wide philosophical horizons have produced another beautiful book, opening up new perspectives on time and how people – both anthropologists but also "their" people – can deal with time. To end on a personal note, Lambek is rightly proud of the precision of his notes from the very beginning of his fieldwork, which now dates 40 years (75). I recently looked at my messy field notes from my research in Cameroon, which date back to 1971, and I had to concede that I would never be able to rewrite my early texts with such precision and so much feeling.

## Reference

Palmié, Stephan. 2013. *The Cooking of History: How Not to Study Afro-Cuban Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

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Michel Callon, *L'emprise des marchés. Comprendre leur fonctionnement pour pouvoir les changer*. Paris, Éditions La Découverte, 2017, 504 pages.

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Michel Callon est un ingénieur et sociologue français connu pour l'Actor-Network Theory (aussi appelé théorie de l'acteur-réseau

ou sociologie de la traduction). Dans ce dernier ouvrage, Callon invite son lecteur à déconstruire la définition de marché au sens économique pur et propose un modèle socio-évolutif : celui des agencements marchands. L'objectif principal de l'auteur se résume à « comprendre les marchés pour pouvoir les changer » (27). Pour se faire, Callon critique d'abord les représentations classiques du marché en y apposant sa définition du modèle « marché-interface », lequel résume les différents traits qui caractérisent les organisations marchandes (38–39). Ensuite, le cœur du livre se structure autour des cinq cadrages qui détaillent chronologiquement la transformation du marché comme un processus lent et intentionnel. Enfin, les deux derniers chapitres résument théoriquement l'agencement marchand choisi par l'auteur. Pour finir, une section est dédiée aux réactions positives et négatives de chercheurs (dont l'identité demeure anonyme) à l'égard de l'ouvrage de Callon. L'auteur apporte des réponses, tout en clarifiant sa pensée et en justifiant ses choix théoriques et empiriques. Cette section n'est pas à négliger par le lecteur qui y trouvera des éclaircissements sur le cheminement intellectuel de Michel Callon.

Dès l'introduction, l'auteur met son lectorat à l'épreuve en effectuant une mise à jour de sa définition minimale des marchés. Il procède par l'examen des définitions du passé depuis la « main invisible » jusqu'au modèle, développé par l'auteur lui-même, du « marché-interface ». Ce modèle met en exergue l'importance des mécanismes concurrentiels des marchés ainsi que les relations des agents (vendeurs ou acheteurs) prêts à accepter toutes formes de transactions pour acheter ou vendre un bien, peu en importe la nature. Selon lui, toutes les parties prenantes de l'activité marchande doivent être prises en compte dans l'analyse, car elles sont le résultat d'un agencement marchand plus large que le modèle du marché-interface. En effet, l'activité marchande qui s'insère dans l'agencement marchand constitue une action collective au sein de laquelle les biens sont échangés entre les vendeurs et les acheteurs :

Les agencements constituent des machineries dont la finalité est d'apporter de manière régulière et satisfaisante une solution à un problème stratégique, celui de l'instauration et de la multiplication de transactions bilatérales marchandes. [...] Les agencements sont en mouvement permanent. Ils sont animés par des forces dont certaines tendent à renforcer et à reproduire les cadrages existants tandis que d'autres contribuent au contraire à le renforcer. (415–416)

Pour défendre cette thèse, l'auteur propose cinq cadrages : 1) la *passiva (c) tion* marchande des biens (chapitre 2), 2) les agences et leurs équipements *qualculatoires* (chapitre 3), 3) l'organisation des rencontres marchandes (chapitre 4), 4) l'attachement et le détachement aux biens (Chapitre 5), et 5) la formulation des prix (chapitre 6).

Les chapitres 2 et 3 visent à expliquer les deux principaux cadrages d'où vont découler des dispositifs encadrant les biens. Pour expliquer la *passiva (c) tion* marchande des biens, Callon reprend les travaux d'Antoinette Weiner (1994) sur la « densité sociale » des choses (71), ceux de Nicholas Thomas (1991) sur la notion de « dés-intrication » (75) ou encore ceux de Georges Simondon (1958) sur le « milieu associé » (75). La *passiva (c) tion* est à considérer comme un processus continu qui implique le mouvement d'un bien depuis sa pénétration dans la vie de