

## The ludic side of Islam and its possible fate in Mayotte

by  
Michael LAMBEK

In his preface to the second edition of *Islam in Tropical Africa*, I.M. Lewis remarks on the paucity of research concerning "the relationship between actual beliefs and ritual, in the sens of practical religion, in Muslim societies in sub-saharian Africa"(1). The present paper is intended as a contribution to this

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1. I.M. Lewis, ed., *Islam in Tropical Africa*, 2nd edition, London, International African Institute in association with Hutchinson, 1980, p. IX.

subject. It describes the performance in Mayotte of various sacred forms of music and dance, some of which are linked to Islamic orders (sometimes referred to as "brotherhoods" in the literature, although in Mayotte women are members as well). The link with the orders is nominal in the sense that the orders themselves have virtually no significance for the majority of participants in Mayotte except insofar as they provide a means to organize musical performances. The performances articulate social relationships, playing a role in both the ceremonial exchange system that links and constitutes Mayotte villages and in the formulation of family ties through various life crisis rituals. More than this, the musical events may be considered "cultural performances" since they elicit tremendous interest, support, and appreciation, provide a significant symbol of Mayotte social and religious identity, and are a vehicle by which the people of Mayotte conceptualize and interpret their experience to themselves. Performances are significant for the quality of experience they provide, an experience which is at once deeply religious and extremely pleasurable. However, it is precisely the nature of this experience, I will argue, that has undergone change in recent years.

Like much ethnographic research, the paper reports from a highly localized context, in this case a community of Malagasy (*Kibushy*) speakers on the French-controlled island of Mayotte. Mayotte is the southernmost island of the Comoro Archipelago, situated in the Mozambique Channel, about half-way between Madagascar and the swahili coast of East Africa. Although the Malagasy speakers are not the majority linguistic group on Mayotte they are relatively well integrated with the majority Shimaore speakers. Much of what follows holds true for the island as a whole; in particular, speakers of both languages participate in the ceremonial exchange system. Moreover Islam in Mayotte combines many of the institutions found elsewhere in coastal East Africa (2). Hence the pattern of Islamic practice to be described has numerous parallels, and, in particular, the process of change has general implications. At the same time, the configuration present in Mayotte is in some regard unique. The significance of the aesthetic contrasts in the performances of the various brotherhoods and the virtual absence of any political consequences of brotherhood membership are particularly to be noted.

Over the last few years anthropologists have come increasingly to recognize that they must situate their descriptive accounts historically. The data in this paper were collected during three field trips of varying duration (14 months in 1975-76, 6 weeks in 1980, 4 months in 1985). Through much of the paper I write in a vague ethnographic present which can be taken to refer to the decade as a

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2. J. Spencer Tringham, *Islam in East Africa*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1964

whole and in particular to the earliest period of fieldwork. It does not, however, refer to a timeless past and it is noteworthy that although Islam has a long history in the region, the brotherhoods themselves do not (3). Mayotte has also experienced a good deal of change over the last decade. During this period the Comoros gained independence from France in 1975, while the Mayotte separatist movement also achieved its ambitions -- to stay apart from the new republic and to develop closer political and economic affiliation with France. In the last sections of the paper, where I specifically address the issue of change, I take greater care to specify which period of fieldwork I am drawing from at any given moment.

### Islam in Mayotte

Islam has been present in Mayotte since at least 1566, a conservative estimate for the date of the old mosque at Tsingoni, and probably several centuries earlier (4). But the population of Mayotte has not been constant, and many of the families of Malagasy speakers I studied in a pair of villages had not been Muslim for more than two or three generations (5). Mayotte has far less of the outward appearance of Islam than the other Comoro islands: little substantial Muslim architecture, though virtually every village has a mosque; no seclusion or veiling of women; and far fewer learned men wearing elaborate versions of Middle Eastern dress. Nevertheless, the entire indigenous population, some 60000 in 1985, is composed of strongly committed Muslims (Sunni Sha'fite), and indeed Islam forms a primary referent for group definition. The islanders call themselves interchangeably *zahay silamu* 'we Muslims' and *ulu mainting* 'black people' as opposed to the *vazaha* 'Europeans' (6). Islam unifies people of different languages, origins, regions, villages, and families.

At the same time, this basic identification as Muslims is not unproblematic. Villagers idealize Islam, yet they view their adherence to it modestly. At the end of Ramadan 1975 the story spread that a note had been found in the *Ka'ba* at

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3. G. Martin, *Muslim Brotherhoods in 19th Century Africa*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976

4. This is the figure reported by A. Gevrey, *Essai sur les Comores*, Pondichery, A. Saligny, 1870, reproduced by l'Association malgache d'archéologie, Antananarivo. Others, e.g. Claude Allibert, *Mayotte: Plaque Tournante et Microcosme de l'océan Indien occidentale. Son Histoire avant 1841*, Paris, Anthropos, 1984, would place the mosque much earlier.

5. Islam has much firmer traditions in the villages of Shimaore and Antalaotsi speakers than in those in which I worked. Many of the Kibushy speakers were actually descendants of indentured East African Labourers.

6. This is a highly simplified version of the ethnic picture in Mayotte. South Asian Muslims (*hindy*) are not included in *zahay silamu*. For an excellent overview analysis of society in Mayotte see Jon Breslar, *L'habitat mahorais*, Paris, Editions A.G.G.

Mecca ordering an extra nineteen days of fasting because people had been so lax in their observance. Although I doubt whether many fasted the extra days, many people felt the message had specific reference to Mayotte. More significantly, Islam is a body of knowledge toward which people must situate themselves. Villagers pray and learn in a language which is foreign to them. People commit the texts to memory to varying degrees, but no one knows or understands them as well as he or she would like, as well as the leading *fundis* 'masters', 'scholars' of the island, or the even more impressive *fundis* from elsewhere. As one teacher said, "learning is like news : everyone is eager for it." Native Malagasy speakers can acquire the informational content of the sacred texts and other literary sources only third hand: via Shimaore, the Bantu language (closely related to Swahili) into which Arabic is first orally translated. Thus, Islam in Mayotte is characterized by a vitality counterposed with a feeling of inadequacy.

Every village of any size in Mayotte has a mosque, and the larger villages, two or more. The mosques are usually among the most substantial buildings in the community, but simple nonetheless, sometimes of stone with metal roofs, but often of wattle and daub with concrete facing and palm thatch roofs. The floors are laid with local mats or stiff plastic sheets, and the interiors are simple and relatively unadorned. Many mosques include a smaller room for women, along the left side as one faces *kibula* (Ar. *kibla* ), although most women who perform the daily prayers do so at home. Mosque attendance varies among communities and with the season. Each congregation has a core of loyal men who try to attend all five prayers. The mosques, and especially the Friday prayers in those communities that run them, are a matter of group and individual satisfaction and an expression of communal cohesion, even though in the disputes over their management one may find manifested all the factionalism of village life.

Respect is granted to those especially learned in Islam, but it is not unequivocal, and the distribution of Islamic knowledge and authority does not in itself lead to significant inequality at the community level. The generally egalitarian tenor of Islam in village Mayotte may be contrasted with Islamic practice in Lamu, at the far northern end of the Swahili coast, so well analyzed by El Zein (7). The two competing ideologies of hierarchy and purity which form the central theme of much Lamu ritual and myth are present in Mayotte, but currently only in a very subdued manner.

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7. Abdul Hamid M. El Zein, *The Sacred Meadows: A Structural Analysis of Religious Symbolism in an East African Town*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1974.

## The performance Genres and their Associated Orders

One of the most characteristic features of Islam in Mayotte is the frequent performance of religious music and dance. The three most popular forms are the *Daira* (lit. 'circle'), the *Mulidi*, and the *Maulida Shengy*. The latter in which the majority of performers are women, is a version of a text commonly recited in East Africa in honour of the Prophet's birth, whereas the former, performed by men, is based on recitations of the *dhikr*, "the 'remembrance' of God by the repetition of [God's] name and attributes ... coordinated, when recited in congregation, with breathing techniques and physical movements" (8) and is associated with a particular Sufic order. However, despite these apparently different origins, the three types of performance are closely linked in function and intent. The *Mulidi*, performed by men, is associated with a Sufic order yet contains the story of the Prophet. In fact, both of the Sufic performances are preceded by the recitation of the *Maulida* (Ar. *mawlid*; Sw. *maulidi*) of al-Barzanji (d. 1764), which is considered to be the most important, sacred part of the performance, and the *Maulida Shengy*, like the *Mulidi*, incorporates drumming and dancing characteristic of Sufism (9). Further similarities are functional: the genres may be performed interchangeably and each may be used to commemorate past religious figures, including those of local historical significance. The origins of all these performances in East Africa may possibly be traced back to similar tendencies in Hadrami Islam (10), although they also have adapted well to the common African institution of dance exchanges.

The *Daira* (*Da'ira*) and *Mulidi* are associated with the Sufic *twariqa* (*tariqa*, 'orders') Shadhili (Shadhiliyya) and Qadiri (Qadiriyya), respectively. The original *tompin* ('owner', founder) or *shehu* of the *Daira* was Abd al-Hassan Shadhili (d. 1258); that of the *Mulidi*, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (d. 1166). Both men are referred to as *Arabu kitaluha* ('Arabs of long ago'). The orders were introduced to the Grande Comore during the 19th Century and spread from there (11). A third Sufic performance, said to be similar to the *Daira* only slower, is associated with the Rifa'i (Rifa'iyya) order (founded by Ahmad al-Rifa'i, d. 1182) and is considerably more popular on the neighbouring island of Anjouan. But as in Egypt, and to an

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8. Trimmingham, *op. cit.*, page 96.

9. However the text followed in the *Maulida Shengi* is not the *Barzanji* but the *Sharaf al Anam*. The latter is also recited in mosques and homes during the month of the Prophet's birth, but it is the *Barzanji* that children learn first and as a matter of course. On the different versions of the *Maulida* in East Africa see Jan Knappert, *Swahili Islamic Poetry*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1971, especially Vol. I, pages 41 ff.

10. See El Zein, *op. cit.* on the evolution of musical and ecstatic forms of *Maulida* in Lamu. Trimmingham, *op. cit.*, combines his discussion of the *Maulida* and the religious brotherhoods as well.

11. Martin, *op. cit.*, Chapter 6.

even greater degree, "what originated as an arduous ritual often associated with total dedication to the mystic life, became a popular means of arousing collective religious enthusiasm" (12). Nevertheless, the fact that the performances have tended to become ends in themselves rather than the means to fulfil an explicit, specific mystical goal (13) is no reason to suppose that they lack cultural significance or religious value.

Some of the major annual *Daira* performances in Mayotte are held in memory of leading local figures of Islamic learning of the early part of the century who were Shadhili and who may have introduced the *Daira* to Mayotte. These men may be called "saints", since their tombs are also the object of optional pilgrimage (14). The village of one of them produces a small *Daira* twice a week throughout the year. Adults in their sixties remember another coming to Lombeni village and pledging virtually the entire adult population (men and women) to Shadhili. This may have been the medium for conversion to Islam itself, as is reported for the Muslim frontier in northern Madagascar in the 1950's (15), and may, in part, account for the continuing significance of the performances in Mayotte religious life. However, the learned figures are remembered more for their knowledge and advancement of Islam in general than for their adherence to a particular order. Each village may also commemorate its own local men of learning through smaller performances.

Apparently contrary to Trimmingham's conclusion for the Swahili that the Sufic orders have little direct effect on the majority of the population (16), most older adults in Mayotte are pledged to either Shadhili or Qadiri. The numbers of each appear to be approximately equal and membership is voluntary but exclusive. One informant likened pledging to marriage as a serious commitment and sign of social responsibility.

However, the orders are no longer recruiting so actively. In 1985 most young people did not even know what the verb *mkubain* 'to pledge in an order' meant. Others said they could not pledge as long as they still wished to enjoy the pleasures of youth: drinking palm wine, illicit love affairs, sports, etc. Yet these same youths often did join in the dances. Those who had joined an order would

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12. Michael Gilsenan, *Saint and Sufi in Modern Egypt*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1973, p. 157. The Egyptian performances, described so superbly by Gilsenan, are similar in many respects to the *Daira* in Mayotte.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 158.

14. Nevertheless, it is true for Mayotte, as Trimmingham, *op. cit.*, suggests for East Africa in general, that the saint cult is of little importance.

15. Fulgence Fanony et Noël Gueunier, "Le mouvement de conversion à l'Islam et le rôle des confréries musulmanes dans le nord de Madagascar", *Asie du Sud-Est et Monde Insulindien* XI, n° 1-4, 1980, pp. 151-168. Compare Martin, *op. cit.*

16. Trimmingham, *op. cit.*, p.97.

often refer to it by the name of the associated musical performances -- performances which everyone, regardless of membership, enjoys. In fact, children may receive training in the various performance modes and begin performing long before they pledge to an order. Everyone learns the *Barzanji* from an early age and it is essential to have knowledge of at least one form of recitation in order to be an adult worthy of ordinary respect. As one woman said, referring to women, if your mother died and you didn't know the *Maulida*, who else would start the singing for you? But to be able to demonstrate one's social competence it is not necessary to join one of the orders. In other words, knowledge of a performance form is considered far more important than joining the order it represents, and appreciation of the performance is far more widespread than membership in the order.

The orders maintain no control over their members, hold no meetings outside performances, do not expect particular fellowship among members or devotion to a single Sheikh, and are not distinguished, so far as I know, by particular doctrines (17). Thus, the orders have little significance in themselves, their existence being realized largely through the performances, which are open to everyone (that is, for the *Daira* and *Mulidi* to any male who wishes to perform or watch and any female who wishes to watch). And the performances, with the exception of those that mark particular deceased men of learning, whose contributions, in any case, are respected by everyone and not merely the members of a particular order, are interchangeable. A village may decide to hold a *Mulidi* one year and a *Daira* or *Maulida Shengy* the next, depending on such matters as when the last one was held and the availability of expert performers in the village. All members of the village, whichever order they are personally associated with, will actively support the event. On some occasions a short version of each may be performed. Some people say that performance expresses trust in the founder of the order or after death each *tompin* will lead away his or her adherents (Fatimah is said to be *tompin* of the *Maulida Shengi*), and there are various stories associated with the *tompin*. But all this is distinctly secondary to that which unites the various genres of performance, that in the first instance they all serve to honour God.

How an individual decides which order to join depends on two major factors today: the adherence of his religious teacher (*fundi*) to a particular order and, even more important, his own particular aesthetic taste or inclination. Most young boys dance in both the *Daira* and the *Mulidi* as training is available, though as they grow older they tend to express a preference for just one. This preference

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17. Compare Gilseman, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-68. Of course Islamic brotherhoods have also had political significance in other parts of Africa, such as Senegal and Sudan.

is aesthetic and not political or theological. Fathers and sons, brother and brother, often prefer different dances. For example, Dauda was a young man who had not yet pledged to an order but his father, who was Shadhili, was certain that his son would choose Qadiri since he had observed that Dauda enjoyed *Mulidis* more than *Dairas*. Thus in the 1970's adherence to one major order as opposed to another has been a personal decision which has neither great social nor theological nor ideological significance from the point of view of the villagers.

Although the orders are not centrally organized, each has a rough hierarchy of officials. At the lower tier is the village *halifa* (*khalif*) usually an elder, who is responsible for conducting local performances and for training students. However the execution of his tasks is often carried out by skilled and more enthusiastic junior adepts. Invitations to performances between villages must be carried out and received by the official *halifas* and it is the *halifas* who are responsible for leading local dancers to performances in other villages. Each village has the authority to select or replace its *halifa*. On the occasion when it hosts an island-wide event the village can introduce new specialists who thereby gain recognition by the order and, if well respected, the title *Shehu*. In the island as a whole, one or two men are recognized as the leading *halifas*, or *shehus*, as a result of their age, order in which they become active, descent, reputation, learning, performance skills, and enthusiasm. They take a central role in the large-scale performances. In general, the success of a performance depends largely on the energy of the *halifas*, although other people can also take turns conducting. The *Maulida Shengi* is not associated with a Sufic order yet it too has its *halifas*.

In 1975 the scheduling of all island wide performances of any kind was arranged through the leading *fundi* 'man of learning' of the island, who, however, was too old to put in regular appearances at each event himself. This man, Shehu Adinan of Tsingoni, also organized the (small) annual hadj from Mayotte and had the authority to censure a village and prohibit its participation in inter-village performances. Succession to this post is based on learning and age rather than descent, although it is often, but not always, held by a sharif. Shehu Adinan's predecessor, Shehu Ali of Accua, who was not a sharif, is one of the figures whose death is commemorated with an annual *Daira* attended by people from all over the island. One of Shehu Ali's sons is the leading *halifa* of the *Daira* in Mayotte, conducting most of the major performances held on the island with great skill and energy.

The individual orders are not characterized by distinct political stands or activities and are not opposed to one another on political grounds. Nevertheless, political significance is found in the ability to amass large numbers of people



rapidly through the call to a performance. The French were wary enough of the effect of such gatherings that apparently (18) they once imprisoned a Shehu in order to put a stop to *Dairas*. The attempt did not work, but in any case, in the 1970's performances of the *Maulida Shengy* were being used by women to mobilize support for the pro-French forces. During this time of political ferment membership in the political party rather than the particular order was the critical factor underlying participation. The various performances of *Daira* and *Mulidi* were often identified with one or the other political party (19).

### The Social Contexts of Performance

Because performances are distinct from the *fixed* liturgical order, supererogatory rather than required, yet sacred and unquestionable, production of and participation in them can express changing and relatively immediate social relations as well as those which refer to more basic elements of Mayotte social structure. Performances articulate and substantiate the social relations as well as those which refer to more basic elements of Mayotte social structure. Performances articulate and substantiate the social relations between the groups of hosts and guests and among both sponsors and performers, and they provide a major occasion for socializing. Performances are sponsored by individuals, families, village sections, villages or village clusters (and *not* by the brotherhoods, which are in no sense corporate groups); invitations may be issued within the village, through family and friendship networks beyond the village, to teams from other villages, to whole communities, or to the entire island. Visiting dancers represent their villages. Hospitality is an essential part of all non-spontaneous performances; in each case there is a prescribed manner in which the cost of the feast is shared among the sponsors, the labour of preparation is divided, hospitality is offered to guests, and the festive meals are redistributed. These modes of exchange are expressive of basic social notions in Mayotte and of course are also contingent upon the social circumstances of the specific event. Performances may be impromptu or planned, in commemoration of an ancestor or religious figure, in celebration of a religious holiday, or at any time, associated with a funeral, to express thanks or fulfil a pledge, or simply out of joy or generalized social obligation. In particular, the performances form a key vehicle for the expression of village identity and inter-village cycles of exchange.

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18. This information comes from a single informant. I have not checked the French archives.

19. On the impact of political divisions on ritual see M. Lambek and Jon H. Breslar "Funerals and Social Change in Mayotte" in C. Kottak, J.-A. Rakotoarisoa, A. Southall, and P. Vérin, eds, *Madagascar: Society and History*, Durham, N.C., Carolina Academic Press, 1986, p.393-410.

## Sanctity and Style

Although Islamic performance is thus made consistent with social structure, it would be an enormous mistake to restrict analysis to this social structural level. Participation also brings blessing upon the deceased and the living, pleases God, and shows one to be a good Muslim. One informant linked the origins of the performances to the Islamic precept of giving alms to the poor. Since there was not enough money to give to all the needy, it was decided to hold a general feast where everyone could get at least something to eat. (And, in fact, the cakes brought back from a performance and often subdivided into tiny portions, transfer the blessing to those who remained at home). But even these intentions are secondary and peripheral (20). Performances draw on enduring sacred values and have a tremendous immediacy in their own right, bringing people an experience of the beauty and power of their own and the collective faith. As one person put it, performance is a means of gaining strength from God.

Within the performances themselves there is no reference to the external social world. Even without explicit reference to the mystical ideas associated with similar rituals elsewhere, the performances can be seen to be attempts at divine communion. I cannot state the matter better than Gilson: "Liturgy is performed by men in what are viewed as their primordial, 'total' identities set off from the identities and contingent situations of the everyday social world. These identities are part of what is taken to be the 'ground', or ultimate context of significance for the participants' *being* rather than their *behaviour*. The ritual unfolds inside a framework of an 'eternal', transcendental order at the greatest degree of independence from the on-going individual biographies of the actors, yet penetrating those biographies in repeated acts of re-creation" (21).

Performances of the *Daira*, *Mulidi*, and *Maulida Shengi* are intense, vivid, total experiences, syntheses of sacred words, music, and movement. In Trimmingham's words, "the governing motive of the collective *dhikr* is the attainment of spiritual effects through rhythmical physical actions (control of the breath and physical repetitions) accompanied and regulated by vocal and sometimes instrumental music which frees the physical effort from conscious thought" (22). The power adhering in the words themselves reinforces this effect. Performances may be considered liminal phenomena (23), held in specially demarcated spaces and in a time out of time. Serious performances always take place at night, creating an

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20. Gilson, *op. cit.*, p. 168, points out that in terms of its manifest content the *dhikr* is noninstrumental and primarily otherworldly: "No action by God is requested, or expected in, the *dhikr*. No material blessings will follow".

21. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

22. Trimmingham, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

23. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Chicago, Aldine, 1969.

island of energy and light in the surrounding darkness and building up an intensity that might easily be dissipated in the profane time of day (24). The texts are also sung (but not danced) during the watch around a corpse, when secular time and activity are superceded. Without being a Muslim myself, and like many of the performers, without fully understanding the words, I found the performances tremendously moving because of the collective energy which created and totally filled the space with rhythmical sound and movement, blocking off the everyday world. The performances are exhilarating; Gilsenan speaks of the "feeling of freedom, luxury, and expansiveness" the Egyptian ones induce (25). Performers and spectators often reach a state of euphoria, and occasionally some lose consciousness.

For all this, the three genres we have been considering are outwardly very different from one another. The *Daira* is performed outside, under an awning, or else in the mosque, and lasts, on significant occasions, from around midnight until dawn. Following a *fatiha*, the *Daira* begins with a measured reading of the *Barzanji*, with *fundis* taking turns reading from the book which rests on a cushion in front of the row of seated men. Then, in a smooth transition, all rise, breaking into song and forming a large circle or rectangle. The dancers hold hands with those on either side, their numbers doubled or trebled from those who attended the reading, and bounce up and down on the soles of their feet (26), swaying their bodies and shaking their heads as they chant the *tahlil* (repetition of the phrase "there is no God but God") or, in other passages, the single word "Allah" faster and faster. The movements are vigorous and tiring and can last for hours, although there are also slower passages, during some of which the participants sit or rock on their knees, and there is a break during which tea and cakes are served. The conductor, who moves constantly inside the circle, leads the singing and regulates both the tempo and the shape and symmetry of the circle. At a large *Daira*, which may include over 300 people dancing simultaneously, he forms lines of singers inside the main circle or creates circles within circles and may call upon one or two other performers to join him inside the circle to help maintain order. Men and boys join or leave the line of dancers at will. Occasionally a man breaks into the ring and circulates inside it at his own pace. Many members of the audience, which includes women, hum or sing along, and some men dance on the sidelines.

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24. The day/night opposition does not apply in this manner during Ramadan.

25. Gilsenan, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

26. Counter to what Trimingham, *op. cit.* reports for the *Shadhili* performance in East Africa, in Mayotte one is not supposed to lift the feet fully off the ground during the *Daira*. Many tiny angels come to dance too and a man who jumped would risk stepping on them. However, people have grown careless, says an informant, and many dancers do jump nowadays.

There are no musical instruments in the *Daira*; the sound and rhythm is entirely coordinated by the conductor, who gives different sections the responsibility for various singing parts, chanting, or loud breathing. He allows things to get faster and more intense until they are virtually out of control and then abruptly changes the pace and pulls everyone back together. As the *Daira* progresses there are a series of climaxes "at once physical, expressed in the increasing violence of the bodily movements and the vocal crescendo; and emotional, intensified by the other elements such as the hymns, and the changing rhythms" (27).

The *Mulidy* is quite different. Here, after the recital of the *fatiha* and the *Barzanji*, teams of about 10 to 25 dancers take turns dancing in a single line facing the rest of the participants, who sing, recite, beat drums, or merely watch and sway in time to the music. The drums are shallow and open-ended; due to the use of drums the *Mulidi* cannot be held inside the mosque. The dancing is performed on the knees, on mattresses specially laid out for the purpose. Each member of the team must coordinate the movements of his hands, arms, head, and torso with those of the others. The movements are precise, refined, graceful. A good team of *Mulidi* dancers performs as a single, perfectly symmetrical unit, the movements of each member identical and exactly timed with those of the others. Such polished dancing requires great control and practice. The artistry also comes in the particular new movements which a team develops. After dawn, when the senior learned men retire, the dancers may perform these more creative routines for entertainment and informal competition. The gestures can be symbolic of objects and activities from the everyday world. The team leader, who creates the routines, may dance in the centre of the line, giving subtle cues to those on either side, or else dances out in front. The teams are formed village by village and according to age; adolescents, young men, and children dance much more frequently than their elders.

The music at a *Mulidi* is somewhat more constant in speed than at a *Daira*, never reaching the frenzy of the latter, and there are more frequent breaks as the teams replace each other (though sometimes two will dance simultaneously each performing its own particular movements). There is greater functional as well as temporal separation of the parts at a *Mulidi*. The leader of the dancers is not necessarily the person who maintains the pace of the musicians. Tasks are somewhat distributed according to age and there is a spatial separation between the dancers on the one hand and the drummers on the other. In a particularly well performed piece the older men will rise and sway along with the dancers. *Mulidis* can also include virtuoso singers.

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27. Gilsenan, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

Between the line of active dancers on the one side and the seated musicians, *fundis*, and other adepts on the other, is a narrow passage in which move one drummer and one man beating a cymbal. One or two other men may feel moved to dance back and forth in this space as well; occasionally one of them reaches a state of ecstasy and pierces himself with long sharp iron prongs. I have seen a man repeatedly pierces himself over each shoulder blade and in the forearms, and have heard about those who have pierced the tongue, cheeks, and even, it is said, the eyes. In the legendary Islamic past a dancer at a *Mulidi* might have slit open his stomach, lifted out his internal organs with his hands and then replaced them -- all with no ill effects. One informant likened this achievement, expressive of deep faith and extreme courage, to such contemporary European (*vazaha*) developments as inventing and riding in airplanes. The comparison refers to a heightened sense of possibilities and the breaking away from ordinary physical constraints. The one man I have seen pierce himself at the *Mulidi* likens the pain to that of a mosquito bite and points out that there is no blood. He considers his practice to be a form of 'medicine' (*audi*) and pleasing to God, as well as a matter of style. The man is said to be possessed by a spirit known as *jathiba* which helps, but is not necessary to the practice. Like certain other devotees of the *Mulidi* he is visited in his sleep by Abd al-Qadir. The absence of bleeding is a sign of purity, and there is a sense in which the dancer is likened to the legendary figures of the Islamic past. However, this particular man's performance is greeted with some ambivalence by his fellow villagers, many of whom have difficulty suppressing their amusement.

A further feature of the *Mulidi* is the consumption of a mixture of salt, pepper, sugar, and ground ginger, whether in dry powdered form or suspended in water. The condiments are brought out on platters in a procession (28) and are mixed by the *halifa*, who holds the mixture over incense and recites a *dua* and then offers a taste of this *sharba* to the various performers and members of the audience (including the women). The *sharba* is said to increase strength and, in particular, to be a prophylactic against the effect of centipede bites, which are quite severe in Mayotte. As a unification or confounding of ordinary physical sensations it also appears, in its effects, to overcome the constraints of corporality.

Where the *Daira* is robust, the *Mulidi* is delicate, yet both provide highly stimulating environments for their adherents. One young man explained his attraction to the *Mulidi* in the following way. The row of kneeling dancers is aesthetically pleasing (*matavy*) since all wear the same colour *kanzu* (long gown) and the same style hat and are arranged according to height. By contrast to

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28. Sugar cane, sweet bananas, and, as in the *Daira*, cakes and tea, are also carried out in the procession and later served to the company.

such proportion, he says, the *Daira* appears to be disorderly, every man for himself and in his own particular costume. Like many others, he remarks that the *Mulidi* is less tiring (and less likely to bring on that common male complaint in Mayotte, hernia). A middle-aged man says that ever since he was a child he has felt like crying at the *Mulidi*. He attends all *Mulidis* that are held and hopes one day to be able to pierce himself during a performance.

Similar support can readily be elicited for the *Daira*. Each genre creates a particular balance between the individual and the group. In the *Daira* the individual performer is gradually absorbed into the circle of dancers and loses himself in the dance; in the *Mulidi* the individuality of the young dancers is eclipsed by the team from the start, but each must maintain great control throughout. Mutilation, too, is a discipline and many are unsuccessful. Both *Daira* and *Mulidi* are considered to be profound, moving experiences by all. They are performed joyously, yet they can bring tears. One man said that both a good *Daira* and a good *Mulidi* evoke sadness; one thinks of one's own death and of those who have died before. But individual men tend to express intense devotion to only one of the two forms. The choices seem to follow roughly along the recognized personality differences between those who are *tsantsana* 'active', 'assertive', 'outgoing', and those who are *malemy* more 'passive' and 'gentle' (lit. 'soft'). The contrast between the two forms, *Daira* and *Mulidi*, may thus be significant in its own right.

The *Maulida Shengi* is different again and it too has its particular devotees, although association here is not exclusive. The *Maulida Shengi* is led by male *fundis* who recite the *Sharaf al Anam*. Rhythm is provided by a few male drummers using both double and single-sided drums. However the vast majority of the performers are female. The *Maulida Shengi* is held at night under an awning which is divided by a curtain near the northern end. The men sit in the smaller section, towards Mecca. A lantern provides light to read the text by; this also casts the men's shadows upon the partition separating them from the women. The women sit or stand in the larger section, many of them holding their babies in their arms, and sing loudly the verses of the *Maulida*. In contrast to the *Mulidi* and *Daira* the women are not arranged in any particular pattern, nor I believe, do they have a particular leader. However some of the women possess transcribed copies of the *Maulida*, have learned the text by heart, and take on the major vocal roles. These are women who have good voices or who feel particular devotion to the genre; the others sing the chorus. At dawn the women often do a dance with graceful movements of the hands and arms.

As with the *Daira* and *Mulidi* some of the performers reach states of ecstasy. Occasionally, a woman is visited by her *patros* spirit (29) which is inappropriate for the occasion. Other women might be possessed by spirits of the *Maulida*, the manifestations of significant indigenous political leaders from the past. This is more common among Shimaore than Malagasy speakers, and most women are not possessed during a *Maulida* performance (30). The *Maulida* is also recited (not sung) by men in the mosques and in private homes during the month of the Prophet's birth.

### Experience and Meaning

For the actors, the experience of a good performance may be described as "flow" -- "the holistic sensation present when we act with total involvement... a state in which action follows action according to an internal logic which seems to need no conscious intervention on our part ... and in which there is little distinction between self and environment" (31). Among the attributes of flow according to Csikszentmihalyi are: 1 - action and awareness are experienced as one ; 2 - made possible by a centring of attention on a limited stimulus field ; 3 - the actor is immersed in the flow and thus the ego or self becomes irrelevant ; 4 - a person in flow finds himself in control of this action and environment which 5 - presents him with non-contradictory demands for action and with clear feedback; thus 6 - producing an experience which is "autotelic", requiring no goals or rewards outside itself (32). These criteria appear to give a good account of the experience of the *Daira*, *Mulidi*, et. al., but such an account is somewhat incomplete since it neglects the appeal for the audience and since, as Turner himself admits (1979: 59), it neglects the specific meanings of any particular genre of performance at hand. It is these we will turn to next.

Gilsenan mentions "the theme of the bearer of holiness as a model for existence" (33). In the *Maulida* story, or in such fragments of it whose informational content is known by the performers and audience, and in the reference, direct or indirect, within the *Mulidi* and *Daira* to the saintly figures

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29. See M. Lambek, *Human Spirits: A Cultural Account of Trance in Mayotte*, New York and Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 1981.

30. I have also heard of a man who has been possessed by a spirit on the model of the *patros* (Lambek, 1981) but called a *rauhani* (Ar. spirits), which demanded a *Mulidi* to be held on its behalf. The *Maulida* spirits and the *rauhani* provide interesting examples of the creative synthesis of normally quite separate forms and ideologies.

31. Victor Turner, *Process, Performance and Pilgrimage*, New Delhi, Concept Publishing, 1979, p. 55, quoting the work of Csikszentmihalyi and McAloon.

32. Paraphrase of Turner's paraphrase of Csikszentmihalyi, *op. cit.*, 1979, p. 56-8 and 112-113.

33. Gilsenan, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

associated with each of them, we may see this paradigm applied. In the invocation of these figures from the past there is return to beginnings and a consequent cosmogony, revitalization, and ethical renewal. The language of the performances suggests the juxtaposition of multiple time : the fixed Quranic words in the eternal time of God, the archaic texts and hymns from the charismatic figures of early Islam, the invocations of local saints from the recent historical past, the innovations from the present (34). The compression of historical time through language matches the experience of flow or *durée*, "pure duration" (35), evoked by the rhythmical music, breathing, and dance in which chronological time is bracketed from consciousness. In this way, and through the repetition within and between performances, there is created a circularity whereby the contemporary performers are one with the saints and heroes of the past.

But to focus on Muhammad or the saintly figures of the brotherhoods as the main objects of the performances is to miss the main point. The key symbol of the *dhikr* is, to cite Gilsenan once more, "the word, God's own name for Himself, *Allah*; the dominant purpose the 'saturation' of the self in the Name of the All Powerful Being who sent down His revelation... to the Prophet Muhammad" (36). And, if the Name represents God, so too does the entire language of the Quran. In Islam it is not simply the informational content of the Quran which is significant. The Quran cannot be translated, since the signifiers are that which they signify (37). Language here is less an instrument of reason than a manifestation of being : to a significant degree the word of God is God. Therefore, to speak God's language is to make God manifest. In their attempt at "absolute harmony of [Quranic] sound, breath, and movement" (38), more explicit in the *Daira*, perhaps less so in the *Mulidi* and *Maulida Shengi*, the performers attempt a dissolution of self into sacred language. Piety is ultimately submission to God as *logos*; communion is the attempt of the performer to become one with the words he utters. God, word, and world are brought together in performance and their indissoluble unity made manifest.

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34. Compare A. L. Becker, "Text-Building, Epistemology, and Aesthetics in Javanese Shadow Theatre, in A. L. Becker and A.A. Yengoyan, eds., *The Imagination of Reality: Essays in Southeast Asian Symbolic Systems*, Norwood, N.J., Ablex, 1979.

35. Bergson, cited by Gilsenan, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

36. Gilsenan, *op. cit.*, p. 167. In *Malagasy*, of course, the gender of God (Ndranahary, Andriamanitry) is unspecified.

37. Compare Gilsenan, *op. cit.*, p. 185

38. *Ibid.*, p. 175.



### The "Ergic" and the "Ludic"

The elaborate recitations of the *Daira, Mulidi* and *Maulida Shengi* exemplify central features of Islam: respect for, and even glorification of, the texts; the enunciation of sacred text to create shifts in experience; the expression of piety. Yet although the performances seem to provide paradigmatic instances of Islamic experience, they are not the critical acts of Islam. Unlike the observation of daily prayers or the other "five pillars", participation is not required; it is, in theory, purely a matter of personal choice. Nevertheless, the performances have a tremendous appeal in Mayotte and are more faithfully attended, and in larger numbers, by a broader cross-section of the population than are the daily prayers. People were uncertain whether to classify the performances as *asa* ('work', 'ritual', collective moral endeavour') or as *soma* ('play', 'entertainment'). The village *imam* referred to them as the *soma ny diny* ('the playful side of religion') rather than its 'root' (*vua*). A schoolboy explained them as *jeux musulmans*. Others emphasized the serious side. Perhaps it is in their radical inter-linking of piety and pleasure that the attraction of the performances can be found. In this, they exemplify the form of ritual that Turner (39) finds characteristic of small-scale preindustrial societies, a kind of earnest and clearly bounded play in which the "ergic" and ludic are indissolubly connected.

Islam is sometimes viewed in Mayotte as a series of rules and prohibitions. Especially during Ramadan, but at other times as well, when a pleasurable activity or easy solution must be forsaken people remark ruefully that *Silamu mahery* 'Islam is hard, difficult' (but also 'solid', 'unbending'). After a rapid and exhausting series of prostrations (20 rak'as) of the *tarawhih* (supererogatory prayers performed after evening prayers nightly during Ramadan), one elderly man chuckled that Muslims sometimes act "like crazy people" (*kara adala*). Others liken Islam to a prison (*lajoly*): once you enter it you are bound by rules and requirements. But the *Daira et. al*, make manifest the joyful side of such submission. In them too, people work hard and earnestly, but they produce something they experience as uniquely beautiful.

To be sure, the pleasurable and anti-structural elements do not fit so easily with Muslim canons of order. There is, as Gilsenan, too, notes "a high degree of internal polar tension: between freedom and control, between unrestrained emotional ecstasy and formal regulation, between the individual and the group experience which must be one, though the first always threatens the second" (40). Almost all the performances begin with highly structured readings of the texts.

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39. Turner, 1979, *op. cit.*

40. Gilsenan, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

And although the *Mulidi* and *Maulida Shengi* often end after dawn in amusement, the *fundis* may leave as soon as the serious part is over. But in the heart of each performance, the normative structuring principles are dissolved and the full potentiality of the religious experience comes to the fore: the depths of seriousness are reached simultaneously with the heights of pleasure.

We may conclude that the *Daira, Mulidi* and *Maulida Shengi* can be said to be "cultural performances" in the full sense of the term as employed by Singer (41) and elaborated by Geertz, ceremonies "in which a broad range of moods and motivations on the one and of metaphysical conceptions on the other are caught up [and] which shape the spiritual consciousness of a people" (42). The people of Mayotte can barely imagine a world without them. "Don't you have them at home?" they would ask me with astonishment. Moreover, appreciation of the performances is universal in Mayotte, linking people of all degrees of Islamic knowledge and commitment, from the most learned and pious scholars of sharif descent to those who attend for the sheer enjoyment of the occasion.

### From Religion to Art

That people in Mayotte themselves view their religion "as encapsulated in these discrete performances which they ... exhibit to visitors and to themselves" (43) became especially clear to me in 1980 when I found that by far the most popular and common material broadcast on the new radio station was performances of the *Daira, Mulidi*, and *Maulida Shengi*. In fact, the station played performances recorded in each village. In listening to the radio the pleasure and importance of the performances was explicitly reinforced.

However, despite the apparent continuity in cultural forms and social structural patterns (the "exchange" among villages), there may be radical change here. It is not that the performances existed hitherto unchanged as the frozen manifestations of some abstract "tradition". Their introduction into Mayotte has been relatively recent, and the songs and dance movements have been, and are, subject to continual elaboration. Nor is it that the recordings themselves freeze

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41. Milton Singer, *When a Great Tradition Modernizes*, New York, Praeger, 1972. Singer left the term "culture" intentionally ambiguous, thereby linking the artistic (as in "high culture") with the religious (as in the normal anthropological usage of "culture"). "I shall call these things 'cultural performances' because they include what we in the West usually call by that name - for example, plays, concerts, and lectures. But they include also prayers, ritual readings and recitations, rites and ceremonies, festivals, and all those things we usually classify under religion and ritual rather than with the cultural and artistic", p. 71.

42. Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System", in his *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York, Basic Books, 1973, p. 113.

43. Singer, *op. cit.*, p. 71 and cited by Geertz, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

tradition. The changes that occur may be illustrated by what took place when the radio production crew came to record in Lombeni Be and Lombeni Kely villages. The women dressed elaborately in anticipation of the event. But they performed the *Maulida Shengi* in broad daylight, unseparated from the male drummers, and more according to the direction of the young radio producers than of the learned *fundis*. Moreover, it was said afterwards that the singing had not been up to par. The women of one section of Lombeni alleged that those of the other section had deliberately failed to chorus well during the verses in which singers from the first section were highlighted. Competition rather than solidarity and the affirmation of common religious sentiments came to the fore. The radio broadcasts themselves serve as a means by which the members of each village can critically evaluate the merits of the performances of the others. Quality of technique rather than overall experience becomes the significant issue (44). Religion is being reduced or transformed to art.

The scope of this kind of change has been brilliantly analyzed by Walter Benjamin. He wrote of the way in which mechanical reproduction creates a "decay of the aura" (45), that is, a distortion of the real distance between both the performers and the audience and the object of production. The uniqueness of the event is lost and "substantive duration ceases to matter" (46), replaced by a critical and often distracted distanciation. As the work of art is reproduced so the context of human production in ritual is lost. The work's fitness for exhibition rather than its sheer existence comes to determine its value: the work of art "becomes... designed for reproducibility"; "separated... from its basis in cult, the semblance of [art's] autonomy disappeared forever" (47).

These changes have begun in Mayotte. The radio's broadcasts can be overheard at any time, while one is performing the most mundane activities. They can be switched off at will and they must compete with conversation. Although listeners still treated the broadcasts with greater respect than these comments imply, the fact remains that they take place in ordinary space and durational time. Neither the listeners nor the performer is transported to a sacred space or a time out of time, to the paradigmatic roots of Islam. Live performances will continue, but the experience of participants cannot fail to be cheapened by the knowledge that these are no longer unique events, nor necessarily the achievement of a

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44. Evaluation of technique has, of course, always been present, especially in the comparison of the various *Mulidi* teams, but it has been of secondary importance.

45. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", in Hannah Arendt, ed., *Illuminations*, New York, Schocken Books, 1969, p. 222 (original published in 1936).

46. *Ibid.*, p. 221.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 224 and 226.

collective will. As the performances become objectified and compartmentalized from other spheres of activity their relevance must necessarily diminish (48). It was striking that on the occasion of the recording in Lombeni the women provided a festive meal only for the radio crew; they themselves, as the performers, did not participate, as if their own actions were no longer of particular value.

### Village Performances Today

The change that I am speaking of is profound. Yet it is also subtle, something of which the participants themselves may be only dimly aware. Moreover, its progress is not necessarily continuous. The argument depends on the presence of a medium of mechanical reproduction, but access to such a medium or to its products is not necessarily universal or consistent. In 1980 the radio station was newly instituted. Enthusiasm for Mayotte's new political status and optimism for the future supported feelings of cultural pride which were expressed through cultural performance and the avid listening to such performance, which, paradoxically, was perhaps serving to undermine its very grounds (49). It was as if people couldn't hear enough of themselves. Not merely an objectification of tradition, the radio broadcasts were an outpouring of that tradition at a critical point in Mayotte in history. The sudden influx of money that accompanied the solidification of the French presence also enabled a large number of people to purchase radios. There was a positive sense in which everybody participated in the new medium (50).

By 1985 the amount of radio time devoted to the local performance of Islamic music had declined. And, at least in the village, fewer people were able to listen to the radio anyway. The excitement generated by the installation of the radio station had worn off and spending power had declined. Most radios sat broken and unrepaired. Those people with functioning radios listened to the news, announcements of deaths, invitations to ceremonies, weekly lectures on Islam, and to European-style popular music.

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48. Compare Gilsenan, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

49. Such paradoxes in the "post-modern" objectification of tradition are not uncommon. For a well-argued case study see Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1988.

50. Radio was not a completely new phenomenon in Mayotte. Prior to the installation of a local transmitter and service people with short-wave radios could receive broadcasts from Moroni and elsewhere. But few villagers could afford such radios. Moreover, they could only understand Moroni with difficulty and when they did so, they usually experienced it as an instance of domination.

Live performances have continued in Mayotte and they continue to be attended with great enthusiasm. In four months of field work conducted during the dry season (thus, the period of greatest ceremonial activity) of 1985 I counted 16 inter-village performances at which at least some members of Lombeni villages participated. Thus, there was an average of almost one major musical event a week. Many of these were events to which the entire population of the island were invited and some were quite distant from Lombeni. However, my count does not by any means include all inter-village performances held in Mayotte during that time. In Lombeni itself a large *Maulida Shengy* was performed with approximately 200 visiting women representing some 14 villages. In addition, the boys who danced the *Mulidi* invited teams from two neighbouring villages one evening, a small impromptu *Mulidi* was held on *Id al-Adha*, and another small one was organized to welcome back from the pilgrimage a man who had numerous kin in the village. Five local events (2 *Mulidis*, 2 *Maulida Shengys*, 1 *Daira*) were held in memory of deceased kin. During this same period, one of the largest and most prosperous villages on the island held a large public ceremony attended by at least some people from Lombeni.

There have been some changes in organization. Coordination of scheduling was no longer in the hands of a single man. Invitations were extended not between *halifas*, but over the radio, and those performances which did not fall on a fixed annual date tended to occur on weekends in order to accommodate the emergent wage labour sector. Villages were more easily reached on the new roads and perhaps more people travelled, but rides in bush taxis increased the expense and distorted the experience of the actual distance travelled. A youth club in one of the large villages organized in turn both *Dairas* and *Mulidis* and *bals*, dances with western style music.

More important, it also seemed as though there were shifts in the relative importance of the various styles. In Lombeni, the *Mulidi* had become far more common than the *Daira*. This may be simply a highly localized phenomenon, a product of the availability of personnel. The expert in the *Daira* had been busy commuting to his carpentry job in town for a number of years while the *Mulidi* teachers, with less work, were available for regular training. But it is also a fact that the *Mulidi* is in some ways less demanding of its performers than the *Daira*. Patient refinement of technique is more critical in the *Mulidi* but the *Mulidi* does not demand as great a physical or spiritual immersion as does the *Daira*. The *Mulidi* is tamer (mutilation is not an intrinsic part); moreover the emphasis is on the performance of boys and youths rather than on men of all ages. Boys in Lombeni practiced the *Mulidi* in the evenings and during the school holidays. They earned or begged the taxi fares from their parents and were escorted off to one *Mulidi* after another by their leaders.

If the participation of boys relative to adult men was marked in 1985, so too was that of women. Of the 16 inter-village performances noted 8 were *Mulidis* and 2 were *Dairas*. The remaining 6 were women's performances – 3 *Maulidis* and 3 *Debas*. Moreover, in some vilages women were learning the *Daira* and beginning to schedule their own performances.

For many women, singing the *Maulida Shengy* is still a profound experience. However, the night-long performances are linked to more secular activities which immediately follow and perhaps overshadow them. These are either political meetings, a practice started by the women when they were building mass support for the movement to keep the French in Mayotte, or the *mkubadza* a dance performed to the *Maulida* music which emphasizes delicate movements of the hands. The *mkubadza* is distinguished from the main portion of ther *Maulida* in a number of ways. It takes place well after dawn, when the women have had the chance to eat a meal and also, more significantly, to change into beautiful clothes and make themselves up in elaborate ways. During the main portion of the *Maulida* the women are mostly seated while they sing and they perform collectively; individuals rise spontaneously and selflessly only when particularly moved by the music (51). For the *mkubadza* the women stand. They also dance in teams, rather like the *Mulidi* except that the teams dance simultaneously. The members of each village are distinguished by their particular vivid pattern of clothing and style of makeup, designed for the occasion and again a difference from the *Mulidi* where physical appearance is not a distinctive marker and most dancers wear the simple white gowns and hats of young men. During the *mkubadza*, everyone is evaluating everyone else (although while actually performing the dancers avert their gaze) and informal decisions are reached as to which village puts on the best show. Although women form each other's chief critics it is evident to all that the men too are watching from the sidelines and appreciating the women. The women's dress and the proximity of the men make this a spectacle which speaks more to the profane world of sex and gender than to the sacred one of God. In fact, it is clear that a basic rule of Islam, segregation of the sexes during religious activity, is being breached.

In the *Deba*, associated with the Rifa'i order but officially frowned upon by the senior clerics, the profane element outweighs the sacred throughout. The contents of the songs are not completely in Arabic, the women dress up, only the young women dance, and men attend purely to admire the women. Performances of the

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51. After the invitational *Maulida* in Lombeni a number of women said it had not been as pleasurable (*matavy*) as it might have been because many women "showed off" (*nanan mpwary*) by rising deliberately and too frequently.

*Deba*, which also involve team singing and hand movements in unison, break up with everyone in very high spirits. The women sing, beat rhythm, and ullulate all the way home and the bush taxis are decorated with flowers. The *Deba* is a product of women's culture, and it should probably be analyzed as an expression of their collective strength and identity. However, it is modelled after the Islamic ceremonies we have discussed, has a good deal of Islamic content, and, to the degree that it absorbs village resources and interest and replaces the more Islamic ceremonies as the substance and medium of inter-village exchange, its increasing popularity is relevant to the present argument.

In the context of the pervasive French presence in Mayotte, the *Deba* continues to be a celebration of local, albeit "modern" identity, a cultural performance, but it has lost the depths found in the heart of the *Maulida Shengy*. That it speaks to the present is a testimony to the creative vitality of Mayotte women, celebrating changes that have come about largely due to their own efforts in orchestrating the battle to strengthen ties with France and repudiate the Comoros. Nevertheless, the *Deba* illustrates, perhaps more vividly than the other genres because it expresses a more conscious acceptance of the process and a turning of it toward positive ends, the disarticulation of Islamic society. In Turner's terms (52), the performances are becoming acts of *leisure*, the compartmentalized form of play characteristic of capitalist societies which is no longer dignified by its intrinsic association to ritual work.

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52. Turner, 1979, *op. cit.*

## RESUME

Parmi les représentations musicales des textes musulmans à Mayotte, le *daira* et le *moulidi* (chantés par des hommes) et le *maulida shengui* (chanté par des femmes) sont les plus populaires. En de nombreuses occasions, ces danses sont exécutées ou par des familles ou par des villages entiers et non pas par les confréries, groupes qui manquent d'importance sociale et politique. Les représentations constituent la substance d'un système d'échange villageois comprenant l'île entière. Dans les danses, qu'on appelle les "jeux musulmans" ou le *soma ny diny*, le sérieux et le plaisir forment une totalité. Ces spectacles fournissent les expériences esthétiques et religieuses les plus profondes à Mayotte, provoquent la saturation dans, et par, le langage sacré, ainsi qu'ils symbolisent l'identité mahoraise. Pourtant, leur signification est peut-être en train de se transformer pour, et par le moyen de, la radio. On voit apparaître les "loisirs", c'est-à-dire, la forme compartimentée de jeu qui caractérise les sociétés modernes et capitalistes et qui n'est plus dignifiée par son association intrinsèque avec le travail rituel.

## FAMINTINANA

Anisan'ny tonon-kira voarakitra ao amin'ny lahatsoratra silamo any amin'ny nosy Mayotte ary maro mpankafy tokoa ny *daira*, izay hirain'ny lehilahy sy ny *maulida shengui*, izay hirain'ny vehivavy kosa. Matetika tokoa mantsy dia ny mpianakavy rehetra na ny mpiray tanana rehetra aza no mandihy amin'izany hira izany fa tsy ireo fikambanam-pivavahana, izay antokon'olona tsy manam-pahefana eo amin'ny lafiny ara-piaraha-monina sy ara-pitondrana. Fototra ijoroan'ny fifandraisan'ny mponina amin'ny tanana manerana ny nosy izany dihy izany. Fahamaotinana sy fahafinaretana no mirindra tanteraka eo amin'ilay dihy atao hoe lalao silamo na *soma ny diny*. Ny dihy toy izany izay itorian'ny tsirairay avy ny finoany sy ny fiheverany ny atao hoe "tsara" no tena ahitana ny mampivavaka ny mponin'ny nosy Mayotte. Ankehitriny anefa noho ny asan'ny fampielezam-peo dia toa miova tsikelikely ny hevitr'ireo dihy ireo. Misy ny atao hoe "fialam-boly" izany hoe ireo karazan-dalao fahita amin'ny fiaraha-monina anaty rafitra kapitalista sy izay manaraka ny toetr'andro ankehitriny. Lalao tsy mirindra, tsy misy ifandraisany koa tsy manan-kasina intsony na dia mifandray amin'ny fivavahana aza.