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See table of contents

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Mayotte, an island of the Comoro Archipelago north of Madagascar, is already known to us through Dr. Lambek's previous book, *Human Spirits: An Account of Trance in Mayotte* (1981). The present work is about how knowledge on Mayotte is unevenly apportioned and inconsistently applied by three parallel and not entirely "commensurable" discourses: orthodox Islam (or what passes for it locally, also a debatable matter), cosmology (astrology/numerology/divination), and spirit possession (a discourse largely restricted to women).

The idea of "incommensurability" figures large in Lambek's story, because — following the general drift of post-modern thought — he finds that Mayotte "culture" is not an integrated whole, but rather a situationally applied set of sometimes competing practices. There are three groups of experts (*fundis*) who make it their official business to deal with public morality and private misfortune: literate and semi-literate specialists in Islamic holy writ, the "cosmologers" with their astrological and divinatory texts, and the spirit mediums with their "embodied" relationship to a supernatural world which has at best a peripheral relationship to official Islam. The spirit realm is made up of bygone Malagasy royals and various local entities living on the bottom of the sea, in tree stumps, and in the bush. Each of these systems of knowledge has its own range of application and own criteria for legitimacy, and so they can persist in relative harmony even though one might expect that their mutual inconsistency would lead to overt conflict between them. On the whole, it does not, and this fact motivates much of the book.

Lambek relates how, when his fieldwork began in the mid 1970s, he was hampered by a reified concept of "culture." He became aware of the complexities of the situation on Mayotte while following the various *fundis* around, questioning them, and seeing how their knowledge was applied in given situations — learning in doing so that there are many possible local interpretations of the same set of circumstances. Which range of knowledge is applicable is, in short, quite circumstantial. Only God knows for sure when someone will die, but yet it is possible to interpret a given illness in terms of the position of the stars, or the presence of a troublesome spirit, or the machinations of a sorcerer. Opinions differ, and the opinion of a given expert is one among others. Likewise, interpretations may change over time as the meaning of events is fitted into a broader context.

Evans-Pritchard's study of Zande witchcraft is an important influence here, in that it showed how a set of beliefs may persist in spite of what, to an outside observer, seem manifest logical contradictions. According to Lambek, rather than being an integrated system, formal knowledge on Mayotte as applied to specific situations is composed of "fragments drawn from various traditions and reproduced in various disciplines, fragments that are brought together rhetorically in moments of narration or conversation" (p.391).

Knowledge is therefore bound to particular "disciplines"; this knowledge is applied piecemeal to situations where the meaning of events is problematical; there is no ultimate orthodoxy or unity in any discipline or discourse, or of course in the "culture" as a whole. The stress is on multivocality, relativity, conversation and narrative. Lambek makes much of the distinction between knowledge embedded in texts and knowledge embodied in persons such as spirit mediums (where the medium *is* the message); he deploys Austin's views concerning the creative power of illocutionary acts (as in the incantation of Arabic scripture), and reflects on the gender distribution of spirit possession. Each of his points is backed up by detailed and illuminating accounts of specific practices and situations.

Knowledge and Practice is also the author's colloquy with himself about the nature of anthropology as he has seen and practiced it. It is an anthropologist's book, in the tradition of *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande*. However, unlike Evans-Pritchard, who avoided jargon and overt theorizing, the present work is itself thoroughly and, to my way of thinking, excessively embedded in the academic controversies and reflexive self-doubt of the present, thus contributing to its great length at the expense of economy of argument.