WORLD ORAL LITERATURE PROJECT

FOLKTALES OF MAYOTTE, AN AFRICAN ISLAND

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https://www.openbookpublishers.com

World Oral Literature Series, vol. 10 | ISSN: 2050-7933 (Print); 2054-362X (Online)

ISBN Paperback: 978–1-80511–004-0

ISBN Hardback: 978–1-80511–005-7

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978–1-80511–006-4

ISBN Digital ebook (EPUB): 978–1-80511–007-1

ISBN XML: 978–1-80511–009-5

ISBN HTML: 978–1-80511–010-1

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0315

Cover image: Mayotte (2016). Foto by Martine at https://bit.ly/3odGEZL.
Cover design by Margarita Louka

2. Varieties of Performing

That Difficult Girl

Noël Gueunier's collecting visits to Mayotte began in 1975, when he was teaching in Madagascar, and continued until 1983. Knowing the language kinship of the two, he could expect that the folktales he would find would be related to tales already collected. He engaged Madjidhoubi Said as a student to teach him Kibushi, the island dialect of Malagasy. Presently the positions were reversed, and as his collaborator, Said interviewed, recorded, transcribed, and helped to annotate Gueunier's translations of their 136 tales. Their information about local references and code-switching helps the reader imagine the diversity of performances by the sixty-five narrators. We see storytellers tossing in a word to help their hearers, listening for their reactions, and keeping ever close to their audience. We also see them telling the same tale over and over. At first we think, this is what I was afraid of, this is why 'folklore' is boring, endless repetition of some not very interesting story.

Admittedly the first twenty-three of Gueunier's texts are versions of the same plot. Then on examination it turns out to be the most interesting story of them all. A heroine refuses eligible men (thus disobeying custom: a woman is expected to marry, period). She marries a man she chooses, who turns out to be an animal or *djinn*, and must be rescued. Admittedly again, it is not a favorite plot in Europe, but it is a favorite of audiences in Africa, Madagascar, and the Indian Ocean islands. I heard it in in Mauritius.[1] Gueunier and Said heard it from seventeen different narrators in six villages of Mayotte: nine old women, three not-so-old women, three young men, a little girl, and one old man.[2] Why is it so popular there?

 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0315.02

First, because it features the interaction of a woman with a *djinn*. Second, because it treats the most important of all social topics — marriage, which secures the position of a woman as child bearer and assures the continuation of family and village. Third, because its insistence on making a correct marriage evokes the pattern Mahorais have inherited from their earliest settlers, the Bantu-Swahili from east Africa. The pattern of tracing kinship through your mother is what anthropologists call *matriliny*. (There is no word for assigning storytelling to women; 'it's traditional'.) After Islam was brought to the Comoros by the Shirazi arriving from Persia, matriliny survived, through conversion through the centuries of plantation slavery and colonial neglect. In the controversies over independence in the 1970–80s, matriliny was still doing its best to survive. The tales collected by Noël Gueunier, Claude Allibert, and Sophie Blanchy rely on a complex based on matriliny: marriage, mother, home, identity, and indigenousness. The oft-told tale has been studied by a team of French folklorists, who call it the *fille difficile*, the difficult girl.[3] They side with her parents.

One version comes from an old lady, one of many accomplished storytellers in the Kibushi-speaking village of Kany Kely. Gueunier conceals the names of all his storytellers:

> I have deliberately avoided giving their names, and most often I have concealed the names of the real persons whom the taletellers like to introduce more or less maliciously into their narrations. Naturally folktales are not, as a rule, matters of moment for Comorans; they are lies. But these lies are sometimes the occasion to get off criticism, even satire..., and I would not have wanted to risk seeing the written texts come back on their authors.[4]

Village storytelling in Mayotte happens among people who know one another well. As the old lady narrates to her neighbors, one occasionally interrupts her Kibushi with whispered French words. She organizes her version around the girl's rescuer, her young brother, who is *Betombokoantsôro*, Covered-With-Ulcers. After a classic opening formula, she describes the members of the family.

I insert captions in italics for the segments of her story.

> Kings were living Rich ones were living
> Viziers [ministers] were living Poor ones were living
> There was a man with children, girls, boys

The last-born was a boy
There was the first-born, the middle one, the next, the last-born.

The family's equilibrium is about to be menaced.

Her Excessive Marriage Demand: And this girl, the eldest, whoever came to ask for her in marriage, she didn't want him. All the ones coming to ask for her in marriage, she didn't want any. Her father said, "Who do you like?"
She said, "If somebody comes that I like, I'll tell you".
"Oh?"
"Yes".

A *kaka* (cannibal ogre) arrives from a village he has devoured, disguising himself in ceremonial Arab dress. A *kaka* is not sharply distinguished in Kibushi language from a *lolo*, and Shimaore speakers tend to call all these dangerous creatures *gini*, *djinn*s. They are to be distinguished from the spirits that sometimes possess people.[5]

His Disguise: He put on his *djoho*, put on his shirt, put on his big tunic, put on all his jewelry, you would have said a handsome young man.

Acceptance of the Suitor: As soon as he came in, she said to her parents, "That's the one! He's the one I like".
"He's the one you like?"
"Yes".
"He's the one you like?"
"Yes".
"For sure?"
"Yes".

The repeated dialogue emphasizes this young woman's stubbornness. That's why the Africanist scholars call her a *fille difficile*.

The Marriage: They received him, they celebrated the marriage.

The cannibal, having only one motivation, takes her to his place, imprisoning her, her sisters, and her ulcerous little brother. In real life, men move in with their wives, because it's women who own the houses. Listeners would have spotted this counterfactual as identifying the *kaka*. But in case they didn't, the narrator reminds them, all the people, he'd eaten them.

Revelation of His Original Nature: The *kaka* goes out every day, returning at midnight and bringing with him storm, darkness, rain — it was terrible. He means to devour his victims, expecting them to be asleep, but their brother wasn't asleep. A listener says, 'The sick one wasn't asleep?' 'No, he wasn't asleep. He said to himself, "If I keep quiet, maybe he won't eat me".' The *kaka* inspects the sleeping sisters: 'Who's this?' He has to ask three times before the boy figures out, 'If I don't answer, isn't he going to eat me?' and sings,

> "That's First-Born
> First-Born getting her pay.
> She's sleeping, *kaka*, she's resting".

Both sing in a dialect of Kibushi slightly different from the narrated parts. 'Getting her pay', Gueunier notes, means that being eaten by the *kaka* is what she deserves for disdaining other men and disobeying her parents, but the boy smears himself in the same words.

> "So who are you?"
> "I am Betombokoantŝôro,
> Betombokoantŝôro getting his pay,
> He's sleeping, *kaka*, he's resting".

That happens three times. Evidently, he thinks his sores are divine justice.

Next day, the boy said to his sisters, 'You know this husband you have here is a *kaka*?' The sisters refuse to believe him until the *kaka* returns the next night and they repeat the sung dialogue until the *kaka* swallows the boy. But just when he swallowed him, the [boy] had his knife with him, and he cut him from here [narrator gestures to her throat] to his gut. The *kaka* began spinning around, he raised a storm *Ooo-ooo*, he tried to catch the sisters but didn't… 'Ay-ee! You've got pepper, huh? You've got pepper! Ay-ee, ay-ee, ay-ee!' As the *kaka* bangs around, the boy cuts his way out, gets swallowed again, and keeps cutting till he has slain the *kaka*. It is the narrator's distinct touch that the boy, like the heroes of certain Indian tales, does not forget to cut off its fingernails and toenails.[6] Now her hero has taken center stage.

Breaking of the Marriage: Then he went to his sisters, still in the house. 'So, what about you getting turned down? What if I hadn't come? You'd be dead right now.' No reply from them, except 'Well, come on, let's go back now'.

'Go back how? He's not alone, there are others like him. So first we'll do divination. Wait till I look at the stars for the day, the hour, the minute we can leave'.

Destiny of the Characters: Finally, on a day he deems auspicious, he leads them back to their mother, where at last his sisters praise him, with another word for his ailment. 'If not for Letekinga, we were dead!' They tell their adventures. So they performed the *shidjabu* ceremony [against misfortune] for them. They got a scholar, put them in the middle of a circle to recite the *shidjabu*, and then broke up. I left them there, I don't know how it ended.[7]

When Noël Gueunier recorded it, the *fille difficile* was not yet known to be the most popular of all folktales in Africa. Researchers asking for stories in Cameroun have been offered this one first, as I was in Kenya.[8] It is the most oft-told story, much better known than Uncle Remus's tarbaby. How the *fille* got to Mayotte is not obscure: most Comorans are of African descent. But, you say, what happened to that unruly young woman, who was supposed to be the heroine? Well, Mayotte is not the only island where males are allowed to dominate. Indeed in most versions, the rescuer is female — a sister, a sister surrogate, or the wife's little daughter, but in this variant the rescuing hero is named for his scars, which look as if he's been hit with a spade. They cause him to be scorned by his family, but why wouldn't an audience love him? A deformed or defective hero triumphs in the end of so many tales. So this version of the *fille* tale, featuring him, is not irregular; probably it was the one the narrator's audience already knew. That doesn't mean it is 'the' Kany Kely version: Gueunier recorded dozens of storytellers in that village. It means that even within a relatively small community, a recognizable tale is told in variant forms.

He's a *djinn*, or a *kaka*, or a *lolo*

The remembered parts of Gueunier's twenty-one versions are traditional; so are the differences. All the narrators show the girl refusing all suitors. Sometimes he is disguised as an Arab, sometimes she just picks him out (an instant crush). Always he takes her to his place, which is often the forest, Africa's locale for wildness. The discovery of his *kaka*, *lolo*, or *djinn* nature varies according to the teller.[9] One will have him refusing human food: a *kaka* prefers a rotten diet, which listeners will recoil from. Others have him detected by the girl's brother for killing geese and

ducks. Another has a talebearing shepherd tip off the king about him. The marriage is broken when the wife escapes in various ways, with whoever has accompanied her. Three narrators give them a lift home on the back of a *Kirombo* bird, singing and pursued by the *kaka*, who will soon meet his destiny in a burning house. One young man in Hakoa allows him to escape to the neighboring island, Anjouan.

For several narrators, marrying the cannibal husband is their chance to sing a dialogue. It is a moment in the narrative when they blend the sister's discovery of the *kaka*'s true nature with her moment of initiation into the true nature of males.

> Now that man was a *kaka*. When he worked, he had horns sticking out, a tail sticking out, eyes sticking out. So when she called "Hey, brother-in-law," he snapped back "*Chiria chair nyonga, chiria nihonga mshia, chiria mashie!*" [Back in, horns, back in, tail, back in, back in].

'Comoran ogres [Gueunier explains] resemble a monstrous bird: they have feathers (*volovolo*) and wings like a bird, but also a tail (*mokla*) and horns (*ampôndo*) like an animal', which they can retract if discovered.[10]

> She got there with the plate she was carrying to him. But he started asking — he held his head like this:
>
> "What's this, sister-in-law?
> What's this, sister-in-law?"
> "That's my head for carrying
> my head for carrying, brother-in-law
> my head for carrying."
> "What's this, sister-in-law?
> What's this, sister-in-law?"
> (It was the *kaka* asking.)
> "That's hair for weaving baskets
> hair for weaving baskets, brother-in-law
> hair for weaving baskets."
> "What's this, sister-in-law?
> What's this, sister-in-law?"
> (He's asking her about her face.)
> "That's my face, to make up
> my face, to make up, brother-in-law
> my face to make up."
> "What's this, sister-in-law?
> What's this, sister-in-law?
> What's this, sister-in-law?"

"That's ears to hear with
ears to hear with, brother-in-law
ears to hear with."
"What's this, sister-in-law?
What's this, sister-in-law?"
"That's eyes to see with
eyes to see with, brother-in-law
eyes to see with."
"What's this, sister-in-law?
What's this, sister-in-law?"
(He's asking her all the parts of her body, he's asking what it is.)

The two continue their dialogue down her body till they get to the part she calls the work of the world (*mambo ya dunia*). Her skill with euphemism wins the debate. 'Well, my sister-in-law, you know how to talk. Goodbye, sister-in-law, goodbye. *Ewa*!'[11]

Many tales show that all a woman needs to assert herself is to be able to talk back to a man, but this one's command of language also asserts human power over the *kaka*. The main attraction is doubtless the verbal striptease, which is featured by six of Gueunier's narrators.

The plot of the *fille*'s tale is always recognizable; the differences and localizations lodge it in memory. It has no 'original', no hallowed or canonized form. Its only existence is in the performances of storytellers, which differ from one another as performers and audiences do. Folktales have no 'original'. Performers learn by listening to other performers. Their performance of the *fille* comes into existence by their absorbing and transforming of other performances. In Mayotte, the Middle East, and nearly every other place in the world, 'stories may be offered as entertainment, but they are selected for reasons particular to the audience at hand, and often interpretable as interpersonal comment, critique, or admonition'.[12] Gueunier's many texts, indeed all verbatim folktale texts, reveal folktale style to be a mosaic of quotations. Phrases, images, and rhythms recur. Formulaic openings and closings are repeated in fixed phrasings. The cannibal husband is always disguised; the *fille* always escapes. What the academy calls plagiarism is the heart and soul of the storyteller's practice. Little knowing he was describing oral folklore, the playwright Jean Giraudoux said, 'Plagiarism is the basis for all literature, with the exception of the very first, which is unknown anyway'.[13]

What about language? Western people always want to know what language is spoken in an island like Mayotte. The answer is plural. As you travel across Mayotte, Gueunier remarks, you go from one village speaking Shimaore, supposedly the old Comoran, to another speaking Kibushi, their dialect of Malagasy, and then back again.[14] Both nowadays have to cope with Ndzuwani, which is spoken by immigrants from Anjouan looking for work, immediately spotted by their accent, trying to avoid deportation because they are illegal. Kibushi, coexisting with Shimaore, blends Malagasy with Makhuwa, a language from Mozambique. What an embarrassment of riches. So, it is no surprise that Gueunier notes plenty of code-switching; his narrators use it as a strategy for characterization. A *kaka* switches into some unintelligible language of his own, or a woman character gains recognition through singing in a different language from what the narrator has used up to then. Mayotte's cultural mix is honored by the switching.

He Demands What Anthropologists Call Uxorilocality

In the tale, the girl's desire and the cannibal's devouring appetite both are forces. To achieve a proper marriage, to fit into society, she must temper her desires and learn obedience. A man's animal nature can't be erased by a disguise of Arab costume and gold teeth.[15] The depth of social obligation is signaled when the *kaka* says he will take his newlywed to his place. Custom expects a wife to reside with or near her parents. Anthropologists call this custom 'uxorilocality'. Sophie Blanchy points out its advantages.

> Since in the Comoros every marriage must end someday, is not uxorilocality at first sight a guarantee for the woman, who will certainly be repudiated or abandoned, but not thrown out into the street? It also means that parents are always there, close by, always taking care of their daughter, sister, her children. Husbands come and go, the family remains.[16]

The fille's story takes her back to her parents. In a few versions she dies, but commonly that fate is reserved for the *kaka*. Uxorilocality (you have to love that word, that's why I repeat it) is the antithesis of the matriliny of early history days, the identification of a mother with her house, and the identification of a daughter with her mother. With metaphor, irony,

ambiguity, and figurative language, the narratives preserved actors and incidents from old stories whose coded language of resistance conveyed messages about the present. So, when they narrate the fille, Gueunier's twenty-one storytellers say less about sexuality than about the need to recognize a person's identity. Hence, they all emphasize the image of the suitor's disguise. Putting it more broadly, the meanings of Mahorais tales are not undecidable; they are variable, because from Africa and Indonesia, the storytellers inherited a virtuosity with secret languages.[17]

One young narrator makes that point by pushing the girl's defiance into absurdity. He departs from convention by making the girl's father the initiator of the marriage. To the man in the robe and fez this poor fellow imposes one condition on the marriage: '*MAHARY NY ZANAKO TY* [WHAT SHE BRINGS TO THE MARRIAGE; HER DOWRY] IS *TSY MANGERY AÑATY NY HERIN*ANDRA ANEKY*, NO SHITTING FOR A WEEK.' The husband-to-be agrees, forgetting he is part human and urged on by his *kaka* appetite. They have the wedding that same day. For five days he holds out; then, under the feeble, human-sounding lie that his mother is ill, he goes to the forest, fills a crab hole with his shit, and immediately goes back to Hakoa, where the tale was being performed.[18] By making the *kaka* ridiculous, the narrator exaggerates the contrast between a 'real' marriage and what is conceivable with this foreigner. The fille tale, with its comments on marriage and the sex-gender system, is popular because it points to life's unresolvable ideological contradictions. If its popularity would be incomprehensible outside some social context, listeners in Mayotte might see that *djinn* husband as an agent of the colonizing power.[19]

The *fille* tale is astonishingly adaptable, ever popular when told straight. Part of it can be attached to another tale; parody is always an option for the clever artist commenting on power differentials.

The Crustacean Campaigner

The skeleton of a story, says a great folktale scholar, 'sometimes as a whole, sometimes only as rudiments, appears as the most stable, oldest and most tenacious element in the tale tradition'.[20] In an oft-told tale like the *fille*, the skeleton is always visible even if most of the body is missing. Several of Gueunier's storytellers use the head — the girl's refusal of suitors — to begin other, wildly unrelated tales. That young man telling the 'no shitting' story in September 1976 was using the familiar opening

to comment on the Comoran independence movement. The girl's refusal is not central to his piece; probably he knew the folktale collector would recognize it. His most important character is neither that nubile girl nor her rescuer, but a talking animal. A singing crab will campaign for his party. It's into the crab's hole that the *kaka* deposits his shit. Already the girl is offstage. The crab will proclaim the *kaka*'s real nature — like the little sister in more standard versions, but more loudly.

Coming out of the hole, the crab picks up the turd, dries it in the sun, and parades it through all the villages from Kombani to Mrowali (a trip well known to the audience). He sings in Shimaore about finding it. *Bengava* is the husband; if *pingiri* means anything, it is the crab's name.[21]

> Pingiri, pingiri, pingiri,
> Bengava shit in front of my door,
> Mine! pingiri.

The offended villagers tell him to go away, but having now taken the stage, the crab will sing the information again and again. Like any campaigner in the wrong place, he is despised and rejected. At Mrowali, he is still carrying the turd and still singing. The chief, a true colonial administrator, sends him on to the next village, Mtsangamuji. There, the self-important chief Hoseny Be (Big Husain) throws him out, more angrily than the other one. Is this any more than local satire?

Fig. 5 'Mayotte is Comoran and will always remain so'. Photo by David Stanley, CC BY 2.0, Wikimedia Commons, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/64/Mayotte_is_Comorian_%2810896486873%29.jpg

In fact, it is, because of the political position the narrator is taking. The crab speaks for him and his audience of September 1976. They agree that Mayotte should remain attached to France. The independence movement they reject was not new. Two years earlier, independence for the four Comoros had been proclaimed by the first president, Ahmed Abdallah, but soon it was torpedoed when the mercenary Bob Denard ousted him. Then in 1975 Mayotte seceded from the Comoros. A few months later, a referendum confirmed that Mayotte would be a 'territorial collectivity' of France, but conflicts continued raging, right there in Hakoa. Anyone, even a crab, speaking for the *Serelame* party, which favored Comoran independence, was bound to get thrown out of every village, because the dignitaries were afraid of making trouble with the French authorities. In the tale they keep ejecting the crab and trying to hush him up, because they hear his song as insulting the king's son-in-law. What with the political partisanship and the continual singing — the audience gets to hear the crab's song eleven times — the young narrator's political position will have made a hit with the men listening, who were ready to march against the *Serelame* party.[22] His comment on local events even sounds the ownership theme, of the place legends in the previous chapter, when the crab assails the alien who shit on Mayotte's land. Ultimately, the *soroda* party won: it did fasten Mayotte more closely to the metropole. The narrator, attaching a piece of the *fille* story to the current conflict, enacts a dialectic between the past of inherited tradition and the present of 1976 politics. His tale is a miniature of the blending beloved of creole storytellers.

A Magic Drum

Another use for the *fille*'s first move is to attach it to the classic fairytale plot of a young man going in quest of a wife. Offhand that trajectory would not seem to match up well with the story's fierce lesson about cannibal husbands, but in a tale from Kany Kely (yes, another from Kany Kely), the young woman refuses all suitors except the one who can fetch the *ngoma la mshindro wa saba*, the seven-beat drum. 'But that drum', says the young narrator, 'you couldn't grab it so easily. That drum was kept by *lolo*s [spirits]. The spirits kept it in a house, they guarded the house, to get there you had to go through one room, then another, a third, and like that to the seventh room, before you

REACHED THAT DRUM, AND IN EVERY ROOM, THERE WERE SPIRITS STAYING THERE, SLEEPING THERE, GUARDING IT'. Several men try and fail. Young Mady (pronounced MAHdee) vows to capture it and marry the girl. It seems even a rebellious woman requires a man to fulfill her destiny. From then on, every move Mady makes is traditional folktale stuff, which the narrator adapts.

Life tokens, for instance, signal the welfare of a departed hero. Mady leaves his two mysteriously named dogs with his mother as a life token. If she hears them scratching and howling, or if the grass withers, she is to unleash them. As a mother should, she gives him cakes (*makary*) and water for his journey. Another favorite device is the charm he is to speak when he reaches a rock. It opens only when he recites the charm (remember 'Open, Sesame!'). The donor he finds happens to be an old woman covered in feces. Graciously he bathes her (thus passing a hero's test). Her advice, and the charm she gives him, will enable him to get the magic object. He is to travel alone to the *lolo*s' house and listen for them; some, she says, will be talking strange phrases in their sleep, while others lie awake watching for thieves. Only on a second visit does he hear their surrealist talk: 'HEY MADY, I SAW YOU! I SAW YOU! GIVE ME THAT DRUM, GIVE ME THAT BED, EH, THE RAT, THE CHICKEN, THE BANANA-TREE!' Reciting the charm, he gets past the sleepers, dons a cap of invisibility, quietly picks up the drum and escapes back to the old woman.

The magic of that drum is that it will beat itself if touched.[23] Sure enough, a leaf falls on it and it beats, awakening the *lolo*s. As these unusually potent characters pursue him, they clear their path by felling coconut trees with their testicles (this is a young man narrating, remember). He is rescued by his dogs, but his return home is a false ending. The narrator, or his source, delays the real ending with a few more flourishes an audience will recognize. The mother, thinking her son already dead and mistaking him for a deceptive intruder, faints and must be revived with water. Next day an old woman, coming for fire, thinks she recognizes Mady; she runs to tell the king the news. At last the complete hero, with his task accomplished, Mady marries the king's daughter. 'SO MADY BECAME KING, HE TOOK THE KING'S PLACE, THE GREAT KING OF THAT VILLAGE'. Thenceforward the drum survives, to announce everything that happens in the village. 'I LEFT THEM THERE,' says the narrator. It's better to follow his example and not attach some

mythical meaning to the drum. He has followed the fairytale sequence: the hero's struggle with *lolo*s, his victory over them, his pursuit and rescue, his unrecognized arrival, his final ascent to the throne.[24] Whoever devised this blend — either the young narrator or those he learned it from — has created a new structure by joining the *fille*'s refusals to the fairytale skeleton. Creole style loves such convergences of traditions and unpredictable novelty.

Back to Madagascar for a digression, actually a radical adaptation and shift of genre: the first move of the *fille difficile* story shows up in a pseudo-historical myth-legend. Three young men build a canoe, paddle for three months, and reach an island, where they find an Indian, an Arab and a Somali merchant. 'Back in their own country, they are rejected by the princess whose hand they sought. She prefers a fourth man who has brought her an unknown plant', namely *manioc* (cassava), which becomes a staple for that region of Madagascar.[25] The *fille* is recognizable in that princess; the origin myth about the local diet conforms well enough to expectations; but the whole plot is modeled on the widespread tale of The Four Skillful Brothers, who compete unsuccessfully to win a princess's hand by finding her something very rare. Because they fail the competition, she remains unaffianced, and no one lives happily ever after.[26] The piece yokes together seemingly unrelated traditions in a creole blend.

Recognition Is Vital

Back to Kany Kely and the fundamental issue of the *fille*, how to make a proper marriage. Narrators generally create suspense around discovering the suitor's real nature. Knowing their audiences will recognize the handsome suitor as both human and *kaka*, they make a point of his disguise: a ceremonial robe, a beautiful fez, Arab costume, gold teeth. Recognition is the very point of playing up the half-gluttonous, half-incestuous relation between the cannibal *kaka* and the sister-in-law who will rescue the wife. The naming-of-parts dialogue between them turns on the same theme.

For a narrator in Wangani, the *fille*'s story was not enough. 'Sometimes it happens', Denise Paulme writes of Africa, 'that a first theme, complete in itself, is not enough for the narrator. He passes immediately to a

second part, which is in fact another story conforming to a different formal type from the first'.[27] Having begun with the six familiar moves and having shown the sister-in-law's verbal skills, the Wangani lady (probably remembering her source) changes the wife from victim into a folktale heroine, who immediately takes control in a larger plot ('Do as I say'). The sisters will set forth and have adventures.

Departing from home, they find a 'good ogress' mother surrogate, who summons the legendary *Firikombe*, a magic bird 'as big as an airplane', to provide their transport. He first demands and instantly devours ten kilos of rice (cannibal *kaka*s are not the only gluttons). Then he flies them to the *djinn* husband's house, where they spit and defecate. How many women in the audience identify with that gesture? But in the story it's magic. They load onto the bird everything of the *lolo*'s that they need. Securely in folktale country now, they mount the bird and are taken home. *Firikombe*'s magic allows a realistic touch: when the two women land on the roof of the house, it almost collapses. Once they are deposited on the ground, they reassure their mother and turn into *bourgeoises* in a postcolonial country: taking all the *lolo*'s goods, they open a shop.

Anyway that's what the old liars say.
(Audience member: — Like you!)
Naaah! Audience laughter.

On his return, the *lolo* has not changed character. Knowing his gang is coming to eat, he digs a hole to hide in. Only his giant teeth are visible. A baby *lolo* from his gang spots them as a toy, but the adult *lolo*s dig the villain out and start some water boiling, while he pleads with them in vain.

No, no "sorry", we came from home to eat here, you want us to go back hungry?
He can't escape; they throw him into the boiling water, and each *LOLO* starts cutting off a piece.
(Audience member: They didn't even cook him?)
Oh, you think they need their meat cooked?
So, then they said, "What a fool, trying to trick us, we get married, we invite everybody to eat our wives and he lets them run away!" They

FINISHED HIM OFF. THEY ATE THE *LOLO*, AND I CAME HERE, THEY DIDN'T GIVE ME [ANY].[28]

The energy and narrative skill of this lady from Wangani, evident in print, were encouraged by her audience's reactions to her blending familiar plots. They were never slow to interrupt her.

She may also have been the narrator of a different sort of blend, a tale dictated in Wangani a year earlier, which retells a very well-known literary source, under the name of Avonà. The Beauty with Golden Hair (*La belle aux cheveux d'or*) is one of the *contes des fées* written by Countess Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy in France at the end of the seventeenth century. She was the initiator of the French fashion for fairy tales, indeed was the inventor of that term. Evidently the woman of Wangani learned it orally while living among a French-speaking family.[29] Knowing the source, Gueunier discerns what makes Avonà a distinctly Mahorais tale. In Mme d'Aulnoy's story, three suitor tasks are required of the hero, whereas for the Wangani narrator, he need only conform to a more popular pattern and slay a dragon on the path. On the way, the narrator was about to list the places Avonà would traverse but wasn't sure Gueunier would know them. Avonà, being a blend of Europe and Mayotte, must have not only a donkey, a sword, and two sacks, but also those two necessaries of a Mahorais hero, water and *mokary* (bread). The dragon, though pleased to see three meals coming (I FORGOT THE DOG; HE HAD A DOG TOO, the narrator interjects), is slain, and the marriage is celebrated — on condition of satisfying one trace of the *fille difficile*. This new queen now sets Avonà two more tasks. He fulfills them, but one proves fatal: the king breaks the bottle containing the 'water of death' and dies from touching the liquid. Should we have foreseen her reaction? 'NO ONE CAN MARRY ME BUT YOU, AVONÀ'.[30] The blend succeeds, the tale is told. This movement from a French literary source to a creole retelling, so nicely documented, is characteristic of a colonized society, where oral and literary narration have fed each other throughout history.[31] Produced within a situation of social subordination, the Wangani narrative blends traits from markedly dissimilar cultures.

Enough of the *fille* tale for the moment. Mayotte's outstanding version will be presented, with its teller, in chapter 3. We turn back to Bwanawasi.

Fig. 6 A *pirog*. Photo by Perrine Pépin, CC BY-SA 4.0, Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pirogue_1_Mayotte.jpg

Bwanawasi Wants to Take the King's Throne

Code-switching, so easy in Mayotte, seems especially appropriate for a tale about a trickster. Judging from newspaper accounts in Mauritius and street talk in Seychelles, bringing codes together is the Indian Ocean rule; judging from Gueunier and Said's fieldwork, storytellers easily and casually display their multilingualism. Isn't code-switching the real native language of Mayotte? One narrator mixes 'lexicons of Arabic origin (*ezy*, power, *serikaly*, state, policy, *ubati*, people, nation) and French origin (*prezidā*, president, *pour*, *contre*), without counting [Shimaore] words (*mrumwa*, slave, *shiri*, seat, throne) and authentic [Kibushi] ones (*ampanjaka*, king, *hasa*, work, forced labor)'.[32] His story is worth digressing into, though it repeats incidents we've already seen. Early in the performance, Madjidhoubi Said asked the narrator, in Kibushi, 'This Bwanawasi, what kind of person was he?', and the narrator replied in Shimaore, HE WAS THE SMARTEST ONE OF [THE KING'S] *MRUMWA* [SLAVES, IN KIBUSHI]. Later, again switching codes, he says, 'YOU

know, in *serikaly* [politics, Arabic] *toujours* [always, French] there always have to be some people with the president, some people to be *contre* [against, French] the president. *Toujours* like that in *serikaly*. Okay! So he begins with a king, his only daughter, and Bwanawasi as one of his workers.'

> He had a good time playing, did Bwanawasi. Every time the king ordered a job, he said to his relatives, "Let's not do it! He thinks he's something."... Well, *yaani* ["that is" in Kibushi], what he wanted was to get hold of the king's throne. He didn't like that that fellow occupied it. That's what he wanted...
>
> There was one guy who was *pour* the president, *yaani*, agreed with him. He went to tell [the king] everything Bwanawasi said, whatever Bwanawasi said when he put out an order.

The king decides to have Bwanawasi stuffed into a sack and thrown into the sea, but his slaves leave him on the shore because they've forgotten their paddle. Papa Saidy comes by with some cattle, and the audience laughs at what will come next. Well, the guy in the sack, Bwanawasi in the sack, heard Papa Saidy coming. He tries to convince Papa Saidy to let him out.

> Papa Saidy said, "What did you do to — ?" *Non, non, non!* He didn't say that. I forgot.
>
> Interviewer: Think, it'll come back.
>
> Narrator to audience member: "Come, come closer if you want to talk. We'll both talk it over...." (they confer, he resumes) "Come and let me loose and you go in. Because the reason they put me in the sack, they told me to marry the king's daughter, and I didn't want to. So, they put me in this sack." There.
>
> Interviewer: Okay, keep going.

Papa Saidy falls for the trick and is drowned, while Bwanawasi makes away with his cattle. When he is discovered alive, he runs his next trick of changing places and gets the king drowned.

> He went back with the *pirog*, came back here, married... who? the king's daughter. The king was dead! he stayed there he was the one who ruled, and he used the money he'd got from selling the cattle and gave orders.
>
> Interviewer: He took the place of...
>
> Narrator: He was the one who took the place of the king. Positively!
>
> You see he was a *pôlitiky* [cunning one, in Shimaore]. He succeeded in taking the king's place, and he stayed *makini* [well-behaved, Shimaore],

> stayed with the king's daughter. They were both there, and he was the one who commanded the *umati* [people, Arabic and Shimaore].[33]

A more engaging, witty, or politic performance of this classic power reversal would be hard to find. It is totally deliberate, says Gueunier. 'Political power of kingly times is assimilated to that of the French colonial administration. For the narrator (and doubtless generally in Comoran ideas) the two powers have the same character: arbitrary forced labor, and especially acting as informer — presented here as the regular way of keeping power in place.'[34] The narrator has no fear of being recorded. Claude Allibert's schoolboys were subtler, or more cautious.

Varieties of Switching

There's not much difference or effort for these storytellers between switching languages and switching channels. A few minutes on YouTube will remind you that moving between speaking and singing is essential to African and African American performance style. In Madagascar and the Comoros, channel-switching conveys meaning. 'In all Malagasy folktales and myths', writes the ethnographer Philippe Beaujard, 'song... represents the "normal" mode of communication in the beyond, whether that means Heaven or the world of the dead, or between the beyond and the world of the living'.[35]In Gueunier's texts there is little communication with the dead, but plenty of singing. Even if a Mahorais narrator launches into her story without an opening formula, or summarizes it instead of giving it full performance, she will give the songs in full, as many times as needed. As inseparable as the many languages is song from spoken narration.

For an old lady of Mtsangamuji, song dominates speaking. A cannibal *kaka* typically eats all the villagers but for a mother and child he didn't notice. Seeing no more to eat, he and his gang leave. The boy identifies himself as a hero by asking his mother for cakes (*mokary*) and telling her to plant a *hintsa* (basil) as a life token; then he sets out to kill the monster. Most of the rest of the piece is sung dialogue between mother and son, mixing Shimaore and Kibushi. He drags back a monster.

Here it is,
Here it is, Mama,
Here's the Nyoka [snake],
Here it is, Mama,
Here's the Nyoka,
Here it is.

Exclaiming 'There's my son', the mother repeats his song, examines the snake, and rejects it.

That's not the Nyoka,
That's not it, my son,
That's not the Nyoka,
That's not it, my son,
That's not the man-eating Nyoka.

He throws away that monster, sets out again, and comes back with another monster; they sing the same dialogue. On his third try he succeeds, and the narrator's performance ends as the hero and his mother again exchange verses, her accepting his victory: 'Ah, *that's* the man-eating Nyoka.'[36] More impressive than the old lady's linguistic skill is her channel-switching.

Indian Ocean storytellers often seem to think song is the essence of their story. They feature song to convey important information. In Seychelles (where few songs were recorded before the age of music videos), song has ever been the privileged channel for revealing truth in tales. The word Nelzir Ventre in Mauritius used for his narratives was *séga*, which otherwise means a kind of song, sometimes with dancing. In Mayotte, even a seemingly incomplete narration will not omit a needed song, sung in toto. If the defiant girl sings her refusal of suitors, her narrator can rely on her audience's memory of the story, but she gives the songs in full. A woman returning to the sea sings goodbye to her mortal husband. Birds sing the identity of a persecuted heroine, or she herself gets recognized by her song, sometimes after being transformed to a bird. A *kaka* sings such enticing songs, in an obscure language, that his gang members dance to the seaside and drown. A gentler *kaka* teaches a child a song he can use to protect himself from other *kaka*s. A song can require the performer to include onomatopoetic imitation of the beating of a bird's wings.[37] Sometimes a song is so obscure that the narrator will explain it to the collector, but sometimes it is untranslatable.

Codes, Channels, Contact

All these devices exist to establish and maintain closeness between narrators and audiences. Opening and closing formulas function like quotation marks in print. When a storyteller says, *Nipetraka ampañarivo, nipetraka holo be ny taloha, nitarimy, teo reo, teo reo, teo reo*, [there lived the rich, there lived the great ones of old times, they brought up children, they were there, were there, were there], he or she is reminding his audience that a certain kind of discourse is coming. The familiar tale will end with a familiar formula: *Rango zavan'io Moaro ndreky Voalavo tsy fandey tandriky ñany*, [after that, Rat and Cat did not get along, up to today].[38] A favored closing formula in Madagascar marks the line between fiction and fact: 'Not I the liar, but the ancients who invented this tale.' With this nod at how easy it is to break taboo, the storyteller excuses himself or herself; the same formula sometimes opens a tale. In other islands a formula begins a dialogue. A Mauritian storyteller says, '*Sirandann!*' His audience must answer '*Sanpek!*' In Réunion, Gérose Barivoitse would say, '*Kriké!*'; to continue recording him, Christian Barat had to answer, '*Kraké mesyé! Kraké*, sir!' When Daniel Fontaine, also in Réunion, brought in birds to help his hero, he would ask his audience, 'What did he say to the birds?' and answer his own question. Relying on audience awareness reinforces the connection. Also, a parody relies on memory of its source.

Formulas themselves can be tailored to a particular audience. Here is a woman in Mbuini, tossing a bit of genre criticism to the investigator:

> There were kings, there were rich people, there were poor people, there were *oaziry* [viziers, ministers], there were the big ones of old times. They were living, they were living there — things in stories happen fast — there was a king in a village, and a rich man and a poor man.[39]

A more tradition-minded old lady in Poroani makes the same remark, but adds an older dialogic formula.

> Kings were living, rich people were living, viziers were living, they were there, they were there. It's an *angano*, doesn't take long.
>
> — Who shrank your waist, Wasp?

— Wearing a belt to go to the ceremony.
— Who made your bottom red, Spider?
— Sitting on the red ground.[40]

The switch of verbal registers is a signal or courtesy to the audience, to help them frame the fiction. An opening formula invites them into the world of metaphor; a closing formula will bring them back to their everyday world. One supremely accomplished narrator is especially free with her opening formula.

Hale halele [tale from old times]

The audience responds with the untranslatable '*Gombe!*'

There was a man among men.
Waka [Yes]!
There was a man and a woman. Yes. And a child, like my little Maridja here.[41]

This is Anfiati Sufu, of Mtsapere village, drawing her home life into her story and blending its realm with the 'real' world.

Even when being recorded, narrators remind their audiences of familiar names and places they share. The most skillful narrators set their stories in the most recognizable territory. One young woman narrator does it firmly: 'There was a great king [*ampanjaka*], he lived in a village like, let's say, this place named Poroani. Now there was another king in a place like, let's say, Bandrele. And the Bandrele one had two daughters…'[42] Another narrator leads her characters along the southwest coast of the island so as to name every village and charm her listeners by imitating all the local accents.[43] A third gives to one of those old donor women, who live in caves to escape the *kaka*, the name of a celebrated local healer — the person you would go to for talismans — so that the woman who consults her acquires magic resources, which assure her security and food.[44] Gueunier himself, as editor, can't resist stepping into the story realm: 'The parents settled their infirm daughter in the forest near Mavingoni, very far (on Mayotte scale: about 6 km) from Poroani [where the story was being told]. When she marries, she will settle in the properties of her princely husband in Dembeni, not far (2 km) from Mavingoni.'[45] All this place-dropping is not 'local color'; it draws the audience in.

Listen to another of those old ladies from Kany Kely telling her *fille* tale: when the wife's brother has convinced her of her husband's true nature;

> as soon as he left for the bush, they quickly started packing their things, *kutshu katsu kutshu*. Like when Zakia was at Malamani with Mady Hely and she went to follow her husband to Sohoa, that day she ran away and came back to Kany. (Good story, yes? True or not?)

Gueunier explains: the narrator 'is recalling an incident... known to her listeners: it happened to [Zakia], as to the heroine of the story, to follow a husband to another village, and finding herself miserable there, to flee and return home to Kany'.[46] The common memory brings her closer to her audience and crosses the boundary between narrative levels, as she does again in the closing formula ending her story. It's finished. Earlier we noticed a narrator commenting on a particularly fanciful moment, 'That's what the old liars said,' only to be interrupted by somebody alluding to the formula, 'Like you!' She snaps back, 'No!' In Mayotte as in West Africa, the dialogue gives the narrator 'some assurance that he [or she] is being heard, that his [or her] word is getting through, and that it can be given back... Even when [formulas] are no longer understood, they are never forgotten'.[47] Some narrators know perfectly well how conventional a fixed phrase can be: '*Zaho tsy hivolana "olo be ny taloha,"*' [I won't say 'the great men of old times'].[48] Mahorais audiences feel comfortable interrupting and helping the narrator; they often know both the story and the devices of narrators, so that performance is collaborative.

In literary theory, crossing between fiction and fact has been regarded as transgressive and elegantly christened *metalepsis*.[49] Not so in oral narration, where it is a convention of style available to any storyteller and is welcomed by audiences. In creole culture it fits well with people's delight in incorporating heterogeneous materials into a single performance.

Two Heroes, One Self

The narrator of the first tale Gueunier collected in Mayotte puts much effort into staying close to his audience. His conception of performing

ignores the boundary between fact and fiction. By stating the title of his tale — not a frequent practice of Mahorais, African, or Malagasy performers — he announces himself as a storyteller. He mixes languages as so many others do, but he also declares himself and his friend to be the real-life counterparts of the story's main characters and inserts topical references into traditional story features. He starts his story with himself as he is and ends it by awarding his other-self hero a successful, conventional folktale marriage. Perhaps that is his fantasy for his future: an individual whose inheritance is his tool for living in a new dispensation without forgetting the old. He blends traditional incidents with projections of his own identity.

To begin with, he calls his heroes by familiar Islamic names. Hasan and Husain ibn Ali were the two grandsons of the Prophet; after Hasan's death, Husain became a martyr, killed in the battle of Kerbala in 680 C. E.[50] Their names are often given now to male children, as guarantees that they will enter Paradise. For a pair of heroes who are almost clones of the storyteller, the names are aspirational.

> There's a story called Hasan and Husain. They are two friends, say like me and Zakaria. We're very good friends. If I'm away from him for a minute, I get sad. If somebody gives me a little something, anything, I won't eat it alone, he gets some of it. So — two brothers, from the same father and mother, don't love each other like that.

Not brothers, then, but like sworn brethren or blood brothers: best friends, at first indistinguishable and inseparable. They contrast with the twin tricksters in Madagascar tales, who are barely distinguishable, whose disputes or separations are always ephemeral, and who always end up together. Hasan and Husain are young men like the narrator and Zakaria, inseparable up to a point when Husain outgrows Hasan and becomes a folktale hero. Husain's father was a big *moalimo*, a man with power in the invisible world.

> Well, in that village, people didn't play the drums, they didn't party. So, one day they went to look for somebody who could make drums, like Mady Mary in Mronabeja [a real craftsperson].

Inseparable rebels, the ones who build themselves the small, fantastically decorated mud houses called *bangas*, where Mayotte's boys hole up during adolescence and reinforce their rebelliousness. They order three

drums to be made and vow to play them, defying the king. Nothing bizarre or fanciful here. The village, and its drum-maker using trees from the forest, are quite realistic.

> Like if me and Zakaria went — and they said, "We want you to make us some drums, but secretly". So, when they came, he said, "Drums? The king doesn't allow us to do that stuff." We said, "We want them anyway". The drum-maker said, "*Justement* it's Friday, *justement* today is Friday. You come back tomorrow, come early tomorrow. I'll leave my tools outside, you go by the forest, and leave without going through the village". So, they said, "OK". Next morning they went straight there. They didn't go to his house; one of them went through the forest, on a winding road coming out farther off.

Conventionally folktales remove their hero from a family background. That happens to Hasan and Husain only after they have (formally) left home and taken the father character with them. Then they polarize.[51] The making and breaking of their friendship is a solidly African pattern; their deceptive agreement to kill fathers is definitely Malagasy; the *moalimo* father may be simply another local person. Blending is the rule.

Ten days later, 'there they were, pounding the drums, *tritrim, tritrim, tritrim*, and the people in the mosque came out and started dancing, some of them started boxing'. An evocation of former times, when boxing (*morengy*) went together with drum-beating.[52] Listeners might recall that magic folktale instrument that causes monsters or ogres to dance. Soon, as the worshippers emerge, their embroidered go-to-mosque clothes will show the dust from the boxing matches. A few days later, the boys resume playing, against the king's order; they even lie (as any villager might do) to protect their drum-maker. The king's intervention is realistic enough; so is their only punishment, the destruction of their instruments.

Now the narrator moves his boys from the ordinary world into the folktale world, blending together two well-known trickster motifs. To declare their independence, Hasan and Husain go off on their own in the roles of trickster and dupe. Firstly, they agree to farm a piece of land together; when only Hasan's rice fails to grow, the audience will recognize the fragility of a contract like this.[53] Then, leaving behind the making-and-breaking pattern, the teller goes into a deceptive agreement to kill their fathers. Husain's *moalimo* father has probably

heard deceptive-agreement stories himself; anyway, his narrator knows them well enough to get him out of danger and blend in a deception by substitution.[54] The *moalimo* saves the friendship by supplying a remedy to make Hasan's rice grow, and the teller prepares to separate the two pals, who will leave home after harvest. But not without this excellent father. Stowed away in a trunk on board, he retains divine power, and 'every day at midday God put Hasan to sleep (he was a *moalimo*), God put him to sleep. Then Husain went and waked up his father, opened [the trunk], gave him food. Like that, midday and evening'. Guided by the father's foreknowledge, they sail on to a point where Hasan is left ashore, with his father's blessing and ample food.[55]

Firmly in the land of fiction, and needing the old man to provide also for his son, the narrator remembers the roc in the Arabian Nights, the giant bird who carries off men in its claws.

> Then he said, "Husain, I'm going to die (it's his father speaking), I'm going to the other world now. After I die, you wash me, you take me and put me in that trunk and leave me under a rock. After that a monster will come [*havy*, literally something sinister from the left], carrying a big ox — it will come here with the ox, and when it gets here, you hide under a rock while it eats the ox, and when it's done (it is a *lolo*) get up on its wings and you'll go." And then he said, "You have received my blessing in this world and the next." Just then he died. It was all over.

He could be remembering the roc without ever having read the *Nights*: recollections of it often recur in all Islamic countries. As predicted, along comes a flying *raha*, monster, with a big bull it will eat. Husain jumps on the monster's back, it gives him needed transport to his next place, and as it spies its next meal, Husain escapes.

Quickly he encounters a donor woman, who cries;

> "You're dead! That's it! You are the one stealing my cattle!"
>
> He said, "Grandmother, I didn't steal your cattle." And he had a little book with him, from his father. So, he said, "I didn't steal your cattle. But me, this and that is what's happened to me", and he told her everything. If I told it, it would be too long.

At this point, if Husain went back to the top of his story and told it again, a Comoran audience would probably welcome the repetition. Recapitulating is conventional; anyone who attended a Qur'an school

knows how to do rote memorization. But this narrator lacked patience for the reprise, which would retard the plot and lengthen the performance. Telling his story, Husain passes the donor's test and gains recognition as a *moalimo*'s son.

> He told her his whole story, what happened to him. Then he said, "If you don't believe me, sit here and you'll see it come back and grab an ox. Let's hide here."
>
> As soon as he said that, the thing came. It looked, looked, till it found one, picked it up and left. Now the grandmother believed him. Well. He knew divination, he knew books.
>
> They moved the cattle and went back to the house. At the house the grandmother made *MOKARY* [cakes], made tea.

At this point, a folktale hero should search for a king's daughter we (and maybe Husain) didn't know he should set out to find. The narrator combines the classic folktale plot with the forbidden chamber (which conceivably he could have heard from Bluebeard[56]). The *dady* (grandmother) takes him in to a house belonging (like everything else) to the king, where there are sheep he can eat. The grandmother trusted him. She gave him all the keys to the house, but said, 'See this key, the key to that room? Don't open it!' That was the room the king's daughters stayed in. She said, 'Don't open that one!' He said yes.

Tempted though he is to violate the interdiction (thus following folktale tradition), he resumes a realistic self. He takes up the bachelor life *à la manière française*, living alone, eating mutton chops from the sheep outside, and studying. Graciously he suggests the *dady* move her cattle away, lest she lose them,[57] but knowing life is more interesting if he plays fairytale hero in real life, he violates the interdiction.

> So, one day he said, "Ts! What's the story here? Why did the *DADY* tell me not to open that room?" He was a man, see, he was lucky. He said, "Why did the *DADY* want to stop me from opening that room? I'm going to open it and see what's inside". He took the key, opened it. When it was opened, he fell over. Beautiful girls, oooh! The girls were just bathing, he looked at them, wondering which one to go for. He looked hard at them, took one by the hand, led her. He locked the door and had her climb up to his place up above. When they got up there, he first went to get a pot [for her] to cook with.

No, they're not going to have sex; setting up housekeeping in a trial marriage marks him as an adult.

> Then one day the *dady*, the day after, the *dady* said, "Husain, you don't come down to eat any more? What's going on?"
>
> He said, "Oh, I just get a sheep and roast it, so I'm not hungry".
>
> "Really?"
>
> "Yeah".
>
> It went on like that, until "But Husain, sheep every day, how is that? When you came here you didn't roast sheep every day".
>
> He said, "I got into the habit, I got the habit. I get one that doesn't look good, I roast it. I'm tired of eating rice every noontime, tired of always eating like that".
>
> "Really?"
>
> "Yeah".

Such realistic dialogue between grandmother and grandchild registers changing times in the 1970s. Rice every day was the old Malagasy diet; meat every day is seen as French. Only a few years after the story was recorded, an elder said, 'Rice, we don't do it anymore, nobody raises it, no woman would crush it'.[58] The *dady* has to play a nurturing, maternal role on discovering he has hidden away the king's daughter. At her remonstrance he takes her back to the king, making her again the object of his search. Still talking like a modern lad, he is bold enough to seize the magic object he will need next.

> But after five days, Husain said, "*Dady*, make me some *mokary*, I'm going to go, going to go get my wife".
>
> "To get your wife?"
>
> "Yes".
>
> "But you know that passage is forbidden to go into. There are guards everywhere. If you go there from here, you'll run into the guards."
>
> "Just make the *mokary*, I'm going". She made the *mokary*. He had his father's blessing, so… she made the *mokary*, she gave him the *mokary* and he left.[59]
>
> He went till he met two men. He asked, "How are you?"
>
> They said, "Fine".
>
> "Fine?"
>
> They said, "Yes". Well, he went away from them, distance *cinq mètres* [five meters], and began looking at them the way someone does who knows magic. He looked at them, stopped them, saying, "Stop a minute". He came up to them and asked, "Tell me, those sticks you carry, what

do they mean?" They said, "What they mean, whoever carries this stick, like if you're being arrested by the *ÎANDARMO* [gendarmes], you just hit the ground with it and they're all tied up!"

"Ah?" They said yes. "Why don't you give me one, since you're already here?" They talked it over, finally agreed. He bought it and went off. As he went, he didn't bother to ask the way.

With the magic stick he ties up the king's guard (who look very much like *gendarmes*), then the king himself, and demands his wife. The king knows to stay in character: he poses a suitor test.

But he put all the girls in a line. They'd lined them up, and he inspected them, and — he inspected them, but he said, 'Aha, my wife isn't here! Have her come out!'

They said, "There aren't any more women, they're all here".

He said, "Uh-huh, a woman I slept with, I wouldn't recognize her?" He kept saying, "She's not here!" Then they got her, had her come out, saying, "Okay, come out!" She came out, but they seized her and put her in the middle of the rest. But he, as soon as she came out, he went and took her by the hand. He saw her, took her, and led her away. He said, "This is my wife".

So, they did the wedding right away.

I left them there and came to stay here.[60]

The quest for a wife ends the story rather hastily, contrasting with the detail the teller provided about acquiring the drums or voyaging by sea. The teller makes little of the oft-told test of identifying one woman from others. For him to project himself and Zakaria into such a fantasy, to make metalepsis the organizing principle of his narrative, demonstrates the creole aesthetic, which appropriates whatever real-life elements are at hand into the fairytale model. This method of performance enacts the mental habit the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss calls *bricolage*; it animates the creativity in creolization.[61] The young man of Kany Kely — the village that gave Gueunier forty-five other pieces — performed a new narrative, created in Mayotte and unclassifiable in an existing tale type. Yes, he is an author.

Fig. 7 Market in Mayotte. Photo by Msire, CC BY-SA 4.0, Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:March%C3%A9_Mayotte.jpg

Quest, Displacement, Recognition

The grandest of Gueunier's translated narratives was recorded from a fast-talking young man in the village of Mronabeja, in a relaxed, expansive manner. His theme is recognition, or identity. His piece has three big chapters: a hero's quest for a wife, her displacement by a false bride and rescue, and the persecution of her daughter, who finally vanishes into a continuity with her mother. The narrator keeps his audience with him through a long performance; for instance he gives a walk-on role to a well-known musician whom the audience will recognize. His characters use strange words; an essential song is almost omitted until a hearer prompts the narrator; but his panoply of traditional motifs holds their attention. Knowing with regret that the main character's name is awkward for a foreign reader, and that a verbatim translation would be too much for your patience, I summarize his story, with direct translations in small capitals.

His first chapter closely follows the model of a Sakalava story; the rest looks more improvised and original. The hero-of-a-difficult-name is a *jeune homme difficile*, who refuses girl after girl summoned by his kingly father. 'It was the same thing like that till they'd made the tour of the whole island of Mayotte'. Hearing of his desire, a champion harpoon-thrower goes to the king and says, 'There's a girl in Majunga [Mahajanga, the closest Malagasy town], as soon as your son sees her, he'll be attracted to her'. Such news-bearers always get quick action. The king finds his son four extraordinary companions: Harpoon-Thrower the messenger, Squints-to-Aim the marksman, Arm-Stretcher of the long arm, and Far-Seer, who sees great distances.[62] Since these wonderworkers don't, in the end, help find the lad a wife, they are only a flourish of the narrator — the first of many.

The wearisome trip to Majunga is entertained by the Harpoon-Thrower's singing, which pleases the audience and speeds up the boat. Only now does the narrator give his hero his difficult name, Ndramohamiñy, something like 'Jack Armstrong'. On their arrival, things still move fast. When Ndramohamiñy explains their intentions to the local king, he promptly sends for his daughter upstairs, and she promptly faints as soon as she sees the hero.[63] Ndramohamiñy sprinkles water on her face, revives her with a magic charm, and now it's his turn to faint and be revived. The scene demonstrates that she is his equal in rank and hence a suitable wife. The first chapter ends as the marriage is agreed on and celebrated.

The second chapter, often told as an independent tale, is a false bride story: the newlywed wife is displaced and mistreated by her treacherous slave.[64] The king agrees to let Ndramohamiñy take his daughter back to Mayotte, and asks her which slave she wants to take along. 'The slave I want is this one, Tangarira'. Audiences can recognize the name Tangarira from other tales: she is a *kaka* in disguise. When they arrive at a sandbar and Tangarira suggests they go for a dive, she also audaciously proposes a false-friendship wager, as if they were equals: 'After we dive, the one who comes out first will take half her father's lands and give them to the one coming out last'. 'Oh, yes?' 'Yes.' She agreed. The narrator's skillful use of dialogue underlines the absurd presumption of this would-be slave and the innocent submissiveness of the newlywed. Tangarira comes fast out of the water, dons the wife's fine clothes, and commands, 'Let's go, let's go, let's go!' The pathetic abandoned wife

wonders why her new husband didn't at least take her back to Mayotte and set her on a higher rock, which would be the place of exile for a cast-out heroine.

Instead of leaving his heroine in danger, the narrator gives her a sequence of suspenseful scenes. She resigns herself to God's will. The tide rises, bringing sharks. 'At first it was low tide, she was dry, then the tide came up to her ankle, then her leg, then her thigh, then when it came up to her waist she pulled herself up like this, and she saw a thing like an almond leaf floating down, it fell at her feet'. Keep your eye on that almond leaf.

Fig. 8 Almond leaf. Photo by Renjusplace, CC BY-SA 4.0, Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Terminalia_catappa,_country-almond,_Indian-almond,_Malabar-almond,_sea-almond,_%E0%B4%A4%E0%B4%B2%E0%B5%8D%E0%B4%B2%E0%B4%BF%E0%B4%A4%E0%B5%8D%E0%B4%A4%E0%B5%87%E0%B4%99%E0%B5%8D%E0%B4%99._Leaf_.jpg

Instantly she knows this magic object will give her powers. She picks up the almond leaf, pronounces a charm over it, strikes it, puts it under each armpit in turn, and transforms into a bird. Thus, she is able to follow her husband's boat and perch atop its sail. From there she sings to him, but is recognized by Tangarira, who orders a stick thrown at

her. It misses. Their contest has begun, made suspenseful by the wife's transformations.

Now, transformed into the almond leaf, she follows her husband back to Mayotte and transforms herself into a pineapple. Tangarira, ever the hungry *kaka*, sends a man to pick the fruit four times, but always it transforms back to the almond leaf. Spitefully Tangarira must give up that round. Next the wife re-transforms into a bird, follows them, perches aloft, and again sings her identifying song; she avoids a stone they throw at her, and transforms herself into ripe bananas. Again, when they try to pick the fruit, she transforms back into the almond leaf. Tangarira gives up the chase, and the party returns to their village.

The next scene, another gesture to the audience, will reveal the *kaka*'s true nature. The king sends for a musician named Langa, 'the surname of a musician, celebrated all over Mayotte and even in the other Comoros, who is a specialist in this kind of music'.[65] Ordinarily the word denotes a musical genre rather than a performer. People are suspicious of Tangarira: 'Look at that face, that face, it's like a donkey's face.' Not her unusual diet of locusts, but the huge amount of them she demands, now draws the attention of an unexpected new character, a boy who calls the hero *zama*, Uncle.[66] As she devours her locust feast, he discovers her *kaka* horns, tails, feathers, and big eyes, but she catches him. Then in a tale-within-a-tale scene, the boy goes to his grandmother (*dady*) and recounts his exploit in detail. The narrator uses this convention of embedding to pause and let his audience review the events up to this point.

Two or three months go by, with no fear of losing the audience. We learn the heroine's name, Cow's Daughter (which links her with other heroines we shall meet).

> That Farananomby, first she stayed in the forest, then she went into in a tree near the river, she stayed there, she had become as beautiful as the fourteenth-day [full] moon. So, while she was there, the girls dipping their gourds saw her shining face reflected in the water and [thinking it's their own and remembering Tangarira's] said, "Oh no! I'm not drawing water for that ugly thing. That face like a donkey's. Sss! huh!"

The young man knows how well this scene, recounted in many a tale, evokes women's enviousness, but it's his innovation that girl after girl

mistakes Farananomby's aristocratic face for her own slave visage. Breaking their gourds, the slave girls refuse to work for Tangarira. They return to the village and hide without telling what they saw. Every time one comes for water, another gourd gets broken; at last, an old woman comes, knows that face is not her own, and becomes the agent of the reconciliation. Farananomby asks her to speak to Ndramohamiñy and bring back all her things so she can go home, 'BECAUSE WHAT HE DID TO ME, IT'S WORSE THAN ANYTHING HE COULD DO TO ME, AND YET I'M STILL ALIVE, I'M STILL IN THIS WORLD'. The old woman breaks her gourd, takes her stick and goes running and falling, running and falling, running and falling, back to the village; she finds Ndramohamiñy and beats him with a stick, *pan, pan, pan*! because he mistreated that beautiful girl (another innovation). Wanting the marriage to be celebrated, people go to Farananomby and beg her, and she refuses. Finally, Ndramohamiñy agrees to set Tangarira on the threshold of their house, where Farananomby can tread on her as she goes in. Langa plays his music, an ox is slaughtered, at last the marriage is done.

That punishment, plus the restoration of wife to husband, feels like an ending. Is the story over?

No, this young narrator is in no hurry. He will repeat the punishment when he finishes, but now he knows Farananomby's trials have to continue. In his third episode, which again resembles other tales told separately, her baby daughter will be kidnapped and then rescued. At the point where his Sakalava forerunner said, 'TWO YEARS LATER, FARANANOMBY GOT PREGNANT', the Mahorais storyteller wants to hold his audience: 'THEY WENT ALONG, WENT ALONG, WENT ALONG, SHE GOT THROUGH THE FIRST MONTH, THE SECOND, THE THIRD, THE FOURTH MONTH, THE FIFTH, THE SIXTH, THE SEVENTH MONTH, THE EIGHTH, AND THE NINTH, AND AFTER NINE MONTHS AND NINE DAYS, SHE GAVE BIRTH — SHE GAVE BIRTH TO A FINE LITTLE GIRL'. That kind of flourish takes confidence. But Farananomby is not yet safe. Inexplicably, a pseudo-donor lady puts a strand of palm in Fara's hair, and while she is briefly absent, the old lady grabs the baby, removes one of its eyes, and absconds with it. Farananomby, as before, weeps at her misfortune, resigns herself, transforms into a bird, and goes into the forest, from which she repeats her earlier attempt to be recognized in song. Just then, the narrator has to be reminded by one of his audience members which song to sing.[67]

Marriage and secrecy are inseparable throughout. The transformed wife hears of her husband's return, falls to earth, retransforms to a woman, dies, and is buried. The baby in the forest, being her mother's daughter, is clairvoyant: she knows the secret of who her real parents and grandparents are. Still with one eye, she is sent to Qur'an school, but when she gets home, the old lady covers her with fat and won't let her bathe, without explanation of the disguise. Then, from some other tale, arrives a magic object that looks like candy, named by a word no one knows: 'THAT THING WAS CALLED A *VAKOROMANGA*.' Trying it, the little girl divines that it is a gift from her dead mother, so she visits her mother's grave and buries pieces of *vakoromanga* (whatever that is) at the head and foot. Gold-bearing trees grow there, another secret, discovered by a honey-gatherer. When the king tries to pick the golden fruit, it turns into an almond leaf every time, echoing the earlier segment. (You wonder where to get these almond leaves.) He announces a suitor test — to pick the fruit — for which the little girl at last is summoned. Only she succeeds.

Foreshadowing the end of the tale and acting as her mother, she sings an identifying song and orders a new golden throne. The power of her song causes the tomb to start trembling; people start to run away in fear, but they are stopped by the king. The tomb opens and out comes Farananomby. 'THERE SHE SAT [ON THE THRONE], AND NO ONE COULD TELL WHICH WAS THE DAUGHTER AND WHICH WAS THE MOTHER. AND THE GIRL'S EYE, THE MISSING ONE, IT CAME BACK LIKE BEFORE, GOD GAVE IT BACK TO HER.' With this variation on the identical-women motif, beloved of Malagasy storytellers, the Mronabeja narrator brings his tale around to mother-daughter identity. A stinging fly provides the answer by lighting on the girl. Instantly, ironically, Farananomby says, 'DAUGHTER, I AM DEAD', and kills the fly. The assembled people accept a bit of divination never seen before; mother and daughter are recognized, restored, and merged. The king's daughter, who was to be the prize in the suitor test, must remain unmarried, not that anyone remembers.

Yet the narrator is not done, for he gives Farananomby's husband the last word:

> 'AND THAT OLD WOMAN, THAT TANGARIRA CAME, AND I TOLD HER, "LOOK AFTER MY DAUGHTER," SHE TOOK MY DAUGHTER WHEN I WENT TO THE TOILET, AND WHEN I CAME BACK, I DIDN'T SEE MY DAUGHTER. I WAS SO SAD, I DIED FROM

> it, and today God and the Prophet, with my little girl, have come to bring me back to life. I want to go right now into that tomb, or else I'll go back to my mother's in Majunga'. She agrees to stay only on condition Tangarira is again tied hand and foot and placed where she will tread on her. 'After that her throat is to be cut. When I've seen you cut her throat, then I'll stay, but otherwise I'm not staying, I'm going home'.

Perhaps hearers recognize her threat to play the legendary woman who returns under water because her husband broke her taboo. Anyway, she is now in charge. Once her order is carried out, there is another banquet and more dancing, 'and I left them there and came here'. Finale.[68]

Seldom indeed does an oral storyteller dictate to an investigator a story so packed with precise, fascinating, sometimes mysterious details. The dimensions and elaboration of his story bring him to the fore among Gueunier's narrators. From one point of view, the whole text 'is organized in such a way that at its strongest points, the meaning remains *undecidable*; from then on the signifier no longer lets itself be traversed, it remains, resists, exists and draws attention to itself.'[69] To an audience in Mayotte, however, the meaning is decidable in many ways. They may even debate it. Multiple possible interpretations constitute one excellence of the performance; the other is the narrator's creativity. His combination of innovating with repeating what he has learned defines his creativity.

My Tail

Spotting Tangarira as an impostor in that story is easy, since we feel automatic sympathy for the young bride. A surprising amount of a storyteller's tone, humor, irony, and allusion — most of what makes an oral performance entertaining — can be felt from print. But there are puzzling moments. It's clear that the cannibalism of *kaka*s or *lolo*s subsumes their libido, but one of Gueunier's narrators gives us a puzzling *lolo*. The master storyteller this time is Dady ny Saidy, of Kany Kely (uniquely identified; *dady* means grandmother, remember).[70] She tells a Hansel-and-Gretel-type story: the children fall into the ogre's power, the ogre is deceived, and they escape. Hunger and destitution are realistic details, but her main character is outlandishly contradictory. How can a *lolo* be both a threat and a help? Which is the oddity, the *lolo* or the narrator?

Her tale begins conventionally: a boy and girl are abandoned by their destitute parents. Abandoned children are so common in folktales that you wonder whether they are only fantasy, and how many times they have been abandoned in this island, where families are so cherished. The boy makes his way to the house of a *lolo*, an old spirit-lady in the donor role. Gueunier comments, 'This ogress acts like a good Mahorais housekeeper', making her food in advance and heating it for the table. When she blandly goes out to pick flowers, he reacts as any prisoner should and sneaks some of the food out to his starving sister. When the *lolo* comes back, ominously bringing wind and rain (Dady's sound effect 'Oooooh!'), she spreads her flowers nicely on the bed, and goes to wash and change her clothes. Preparing to eat, she opens the rice pot — nothing there. She opens the sauce pot — nothing there. She knows whom to blame: not the boy. 'Ah! [it was] my tail!', as if her tail could voluntarily emerge from hiding and steal her food. When she becomes angry and excoriates herself, the narrator switches from Shimaore into Kibushi: '*Tabu! Tabu* goes to pick flowers and my tail comes from behind and eats my rice!'

What does that name say about her character? Being both jailer and helper is certainly ambiguous. It would be hard to find another case of a folktale character so conflicted internally, a cannibal who 'gathers flowers in the woods to perfume her house before eating the refined meals she has cooked by the book', a *lolo* who 'continually shifts between flattery and ridiculous cajolery and the most violent threats'.[71] Her name translates as *tourment* — agony or torture. Usually a *lolo* is punished by a victim's family, but Tabu (once the boy has gone off with her food) builds a sizable fire. Taking revenge on her tail, she burns herself to death. She is not the first stupid ogre one has met, only the clumsiest. Once out of danger, the boy recounts his adventures to his sister — these characters do like to give accounts of themselves — and moves them both into the empty house to enjoy the plentiful stocks of food Tabu left behind.

Why isn't the story over, as it was when told in Madagascar?[72] Dady ny Saidy's priorities are those she shares with Mayotte's other storytelling women: get the sister married off and include an episode in praise of her own craft. So, to move the story forward, a slave of the king reports the girl's beauty to him; seeing her, the king faints (that keeps happening),

then marries her. Wedding guests arrive from four named villages. Among them (surprise) are those destitute parents who first cast out the brother and sister. All along, the children's identities could have been known, but what finally gets these two to recognize their children is a storytelling event: the boy wordily narrates all the adventures up to that point. Dady ny Saidy, ever the performer, makes the telling of a story her climactic moment. Such embedding, says a great critic, 'is an articulation of the most essential property of all narrative. For the embedding narrative is the *narrative of a narrative*.'[73] The parents ask forgiveness, the son says it was all God's will, they all set up house together, and the family founds a large village.

Dady ny Saidy ends her story by personalizing the conventional formula 'I left them there' with acknowledgment of being recorded.

> I left them there. I stayed with them a while. I told them, "I'm going back [home], my grandchildren are waiting for me". I went back and come here. "See", I told them, "I'm going to see my grandchildren." I have a grandson, see, who just came from Madagascar. My grandchildren in the village are upset: "What happened, grandma? What happened, grandma?" So, I'm going, I'll talk with my little husband.[74]

It is a classic old woman's joke. Both the grandson and the little husband are Noël Gueunier, who had just arrived from Madagascar. Old ladies, not only here but in Africa, like to play at pretending a young man will be a husband or lover.[75]

Dady misses no opportunity to blend past convention with present circumstance. Her story is a new creation on the stupid ogre model. Whom could she be satirizing, in that portrait of a mother figure both nurturing and stupid? Could she be doing what African Americans call signifying, i. e. telling a story as criticism of someone present to hear it? Signifying, says Roger D. Abrahams, 'can mean any of a number of things:... the propensity to talk around a subject... making fun of a person or situation... to stir up a fight between neighbors by telling stories...'.[76] What connects African American signifying to the verbal art of the Indian Ocean is that speakers in both cultures habitually use indirection, metaphor, and irony. Her story is a new creation, like The Dog's Daughters in the next chapter.[77]

Some Versions of Parody

Many folktale performances (for instance the ones Claude Allibert translates) are serious, modest attempts to hand on to the interviewer a narrative the informant has heard. Parodies are likely to be playful. They rather complicate the old image of African folklore as simple and monochromatic. Some storytellers in 1970s Mayotte liked to parody old styles as a means of commenting satirically on present realities. One of them starts her story conventionally, contrasting a king's daughter with her friend, a poor girl, at the seaside. The poor girl loses her doll, which she calls *zanako*, 'my child', into the water. Ignoring her friend's mockery, she goes in after it; under water she meets kind, generous foster parents. 'They gave her her child, they gave her clothes, they gave her lots of things, put them in a chest and gave them to her'. An old lady donor (still under water) gives her a test, which she passes, and magically arranges her flight home with all her presents. Then her rich, jealous girlfriend tries for the same rewards without success. The narrator is relying on well-known models: a young woman is helped by a generous surrogate mother; her unkind sister fails at imitating her good fortune; rich and poor have contrasting fates. Still, the rich girl's defeat is a Mayotte touch: she is devoured by cannibals, not named as *lolo* but with the same diet. Once she is eaten, they toss a thigh bone to that kind lady. Then the narrator gives us 'a veritable parody of the classic story motif wherein a bird of good omen [the roller-bird *Leptosomus discolor*] comes to restore the lost daughter to her parents'.[78] First a series of birds refuse to carry the word of her fate to the girl's father as he prepares her *grand mariage*. Then the bat, ironical in the role of bird of truth, reaches the village, sings an identifying song five times, and drops the bone. The king recognizes it, and the *mariage* turns into a funeral ceremony ('Indeed, my lord, it followed hard upon,' as Horatio remarks at a similar double bill). The tale ends in tears. 'These abrupt conclusions [says Gueunier] are much appreciated by the juvenile audience; young narrators seem to prefer them to any other'.[79] A taste for parody bonds the younger generation the whole world around.

Similarly abrupt, inclusive, and parodic is a legend about the village of Mtsamangamuji. The younger of two orphaned girls catches and raises a fish, which in time grows to full size and invites her to visit him under the sea. Though she is fearful, the fish reassures her and

plays foster father; indeed he protects her from being devoured down there. The main feature of the performance is his boastful song, which we hear five times before the narrator gives us her sudden, unexpected conclusion. The fish finds her a young man to marry, but the two don't stay under water. *Niteraka, niteraka atà ndreky tanàna navy be, izy kamo Mtsangamuji-tsika ty* [They had children, so many that they made a big village, and that is exactly our village of Mtsamangamuji].[80] Isn't this a parody of the Ranoro legend of Madagascar, which we saw in the previous chapter? Both tale and legend explain a present population as having been engendered by the lady from the sea. Blending folktale and legend, the piece is a serious, non-mocking parody.

Ranoro plus parody plus satire gives a Kany Kely narrator an allegory. Ordered by the king to cut the leaves from a wild date tree (*morandra*), a man sees a beautiful woman emerge from the tree. She protests this violation of the environment: 'Who are you, destroying my house?' Yet she agrees to come out of the forest and marry him, on the same condition as Ranoro: he is not to say her name Morandra, which is the tree's name too. When he reveals the name to a friend, consequence is immediate. *Fa nehey tôpony ato*, she knew right away. Four times she taps the ground with a stick, calls back the children, and takes them back into the tree.[81] Secrecy is precious. Giving away the island's secret destroys its posterity. The satire is clear, but it's not a funny story. Parody is not always playful or mocking.[82]

The general rule these storytellers follow is stated by the anthropologist Pierre Maranda: 'the life of myths [or folktales or jokes] consists in reorganizing traditional components in the face of new circumstances or, correlatively, in reorganizing new, imported components in the light of tradition'.[83] Storytellers in Mayotte have faced new circumstances many times: Islamization, colonization, enslavement, immigration. They have responded by reorganizing traditional plots, characters, and even genres, sometimes seriously, sometimes comically. The creativity in Morandra's story, and many other tales, lies in how successfully the teller (or a predecessor) reorganizes, parodies, or remodels existing components. A novelty like Hasan and Husain feels traditional because the teller inserts his local references among components from the African-Malagasy repertoire (for instance the deceptive agreement to kill fathers). At bottom it is remodeling that makes oral folktales so different from one another,

and social-political circumstances that shape them. Parodies are a game of the powerless.[84]

Parody in that vein ridicules contemporaries by disguising them as characters from the past. Kings of old Madagascar, says Gueunier, were no longer of interest in 'a society founded on fidelity to the village community, under the more or less arbitrary sway of a foreign authority'.[85]In his tales, the characters called 'kings' are caricatures of colonial civil servants, district chiefs, or local administrators. One is some kind of treasurer or paymaster. 'The master of that Treasury is still a king, necessary so that the narrative will conform to the conventions of the folktale, but the disguise is rather transparent'.[86] He is far away from the grandiose figures of traditional sovereigns who are encountered in the older Madagascar tales. Social contestation delivers its jab in the form of disillusioned satire, as if to say it's in the nature of power to be corrupt. As the impact of alien language and tradition liberates creativity in American immigrant narrators, so it does for Mahorais narrators under colonization.[87] The storyteller's game is to participate ironically in tradition.

Other parodies of Ranoro affirm people's attachment to the land they own. For instance, a woman of Mbuini (who commented, *zanaka angano tsàre hela* [Things go fast in stories], made sure to follow tradition: she performed the required song all seven times, while telling of a poor man who catches and dries octopuses. While their captor is out, they open the door of their cage and make their way back to the sea as their leader sings, 'Boss doesn't eat me, doesn't send me away'. His job was to eat them. To the delight of the audience, they trek all the way through the villages Bweni, Bambu, Mzuazia, Bweyanatsa, Kany Kely, Kani-Be, and Bandrakuni, with local villagers looking on. The narrator's recitation of the village names and her imitation of local accents are simultaneously entertainment and celebrations of the home place.[88]

The parodist likes to mix genres. Take that string of trickster episodes ending so oddly with Bwanawasi marrying the princess and ascending the throne. Doesn't that ending belong to a different model? Surely marrying the princess belongs to the fairytale pattern. Isn't a trickster like him supposed to violate all the social rules and get punished? Evidently not in a poor colony, where new circumstances demand that storytellers reorganize old material and the poor aspire to riches. The anonymous reorganizers who create 'tradition' allow the message

that it's now time for the enslaved to take power. As code-switching reflects the linguistic history, so genre-mixing reflects and negotiates the cultural convergence.

Mockery of serious tales could well have come to Mayotte from Sakalava ancestors. They tell of an ambiguous hero, the opposite of the hero in quest of something valuable, who is yet rebelling against a disapproving father. The parody keeps the quest structure of a hero tale but changes the values. He acquires an undesirable necessity of human life, *loza* (trouble, a buzz word in innumerable proverbs). Determined to find trouble, the hero encounters bees, steps on a snake unharmed, and kills a boar, but these petty victories don't satisfy him. Saying to his father, 'I STILL DON'T SEE TROUBLE; I'LL GO SEE WHERE DAY IS BORN,' he takes eight loaves of bread (a heartier lunch than those *mokary* cakes most heroes get) and leaves home. At the end of the day he meets the son of God, a caricature who challenges him, 'WHERE ARE YOU GOING, AND WHAT ARE YOU CARRYING IN THAT BASKET?' He changes the loaves into goat heads and accuses the boy of stealing; the boy disingenuously ransoms himself by promising to go home and fetch a silver vessel. Having turned his moment for heroic struggle into cowardly retreat, he admits to his father, 'THAT TIME WAS REALLY TROUBLE!' But his ending is ironic. As an unintended result of his quest, he does bring his people something desirable — honey. His successful quest has yielded only a product anybody could have fetched out of the forest.[89] That 'son of God' character gives the game away: the parody is targeting Christianity, as well as storytelling style itself. Anyway, Mayotte has its own reasons for satirizing power figures.

How much 'tradition' does a hearer or reader know? The audience may know the storyteller's sources vaguely; perhaps some recall tellers of the last generation; the western reader is uninformed. The complexity of Mayotte's past might discourage us. Anthropologist Paul Ottino refuses to simplify. Malagasy and Comoran symbols reflect 'Indian and Muslim religious, philosophical, and political representations. From the 13th century on, these converged across India on the Malay peninsula and the Insulindian archipelago, at the same time as Islam and the Bantu [African] world were encountering each other on the shores of the east coast of Africa, producing what was to become Swahili civilization and culture'.[90] Complex enough? It's simpler to picture Mayotte as having four coexisting 'presences': Africa (history, physiognomy, customs,

ideology), Islam (ever hovering over people's consciousness), Europe (colonization, mixing, convergence), and Madagascar (language, custom).[91] These presences converge in expressive culture. Responding to that multiplicity by imitating and remodeling, storytellers, dancers, and singers of Mayotte build their heterogeneous, hybrid repertoire. Ranoro becomes an octopus. A myth of the creation of the first woman from a tree is reduced to a caricature: an old man carves a woman, to replace a wife the king has stolen from him.[92] Remembering India, they award a king's daughter to a snake born of woman, to be his wife.[93] Now, in whatever oral performances survive French television, the accumulated stories have become 'a chain or network of texts in dialogue with each other'.[94] Formal and stylistic imitation, transformation, remodeling and parody of sources now unknown or irretrievable, as well as allusion to tales audiences will recognize, survive as tools of the powerless.

Bako the Ventriloquist

Remodeling an inherited narrative to comment satirically on a present reality is a potent way to build a close relation to your audience, especially of the young. Style and genre in parody are means of bringing the past to bear on the present. Take the motif of a child sold or promised to an ogre. Many traditions know it — France, India, Indonesia…. Who would think of parodying this motif to portray a mother who 'delivers her child to her lover to get rid of him, as he is proving to be an obstacle to their liaison'?[95] Who but an old grandmother in an African island, surrounded by her grandchildren and their friends under a tree, unembarrassed at the triangle in her modern melodrama? I summarize her piece.

Bako (Little Guy) has never seen his father, who is so uninterested in parenting that he stays out at work all day. One day Bako learns another reason. Accompanying his mother taking lunch to his father, he asks why the dish is so small. His mother doesn't explain to him, but the performer explains it, because her grandchildren are listening. There's a third dish for the mother's secret lover, who soon comes to complain, 'Why didn't you bring me more to eat the other day? I'm dying of hunger'. She explains Bako's interfering, and he says, 'What are we going to do with this boy?' We don't expect her to say, 'Kill him'.

She hides her lover, with his sword, under the bed and calls the nimble but reluctant Bako. As she is about to beat him, he says, 'Oh, oh! How

BIG THEY ARE!' Not the coconuts she wants him to bring, but her lover's eyes: 'LOOK UNDER THE BED, THIS MAN, WHAT BIG EYES HE HAS!' The lover flees. With his sword the mother chases Bako into the forest. One of the listeners has to make sure: 'EVEN THOUGH THAT'S HER SON?' The narrator repeats her words in reply. In the forest Bako finds another scandal: his father is mounting the cows, one after another. 'SO, BABA [POP], THIS IS WHAT YOU DO HERE? THIS IS WHY YOU ARE IN THE FIELD SO LONG?' The father chases him back to the mother; they agree, '*TSY MANJARY*, HE'S NO GOOD'. Rejected by parent figures, Bako leaves home. Where is the old lady getting her material — from the movies? She is modernizing African or Malagasy tradition.

That melodramatic episode is only the first. Hiding shirtless in a tree, Bako falls in with three thieves and introduces himself to them as *Ampangalatra Bengy*, the Goat Thief. After they share meat and go to sleep, the boy enacts his new name by stealing their food and makes his way to some king's big garden. 'THE KING WAS THERE, IN HIS STONE HOUSE, HIS DAUGHTER WAS THERE TOO'. Bako doesn't yet know what the audience guesses, that he will be a suitor for the king's daughter. The watchman's wife suddenly boasts to her husband by quoting two Qur'anic words: 'FROM WHERE I SIT, I CAN SEE THE THRONE AND THE FOOTREST,' i. e., I know all the mysteries of the universe, and the other world as well.[96] Hearing her quote scripture, perhaps noting its irony in this context, Bako challenges her to find his lost shirt, but instead the couple take him to the sleepy king, a cynical portrait of authority. He would be obliged to listen to the boy's story if he didn't assign him a task. He is to bring back a rather unusual lion, on loan to another king's pasture in nearby Shungi. (Yes, Shungi is a real place nearby. No, the only lions in Mayotte are in these stories.) Of course he succeeds (he's a hero now); with time the lion grows fat. The king sends over one girl, then another and another, trying to get Bako so drunk he will kill the animal. Bako has a much better plan: he deflowers each girl and sends her back. Only the last one resists. He kills the lion, and the rival king tauntingly says, 'I TOLD YOU YOUR HERDER WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO BRING THAT ANIMAL TO PASTURE, AND NOW IT'S DEAD!' Bako has not told his king that news.[97]

Now comes the aged storyteller's tribute to the arts of the word. This is the only ventriloquist dialogue in Mayotte's folktales, but it fits both the theme of disguise and the practice of storytelling, in which a narrator can speak through one of her characters. The boy, to respond to

the king's questions, carves a dummy of himself to present to the king, under the Arabic name *'Adjabu-l-fikira*, Mental Marvel. He debates with the dummy what to tell the king; only the truth will draw a laugh.

> "Mental Marvel, what are you going to tell the king to explain you killing that animal?"
>
> "He sent his daughters so I would get drunk and kill it. He sent his first girl, and when she got there I deflowered her, and he sent another, I deflowered her, and he sent the others up to the last, who did succeed in getting me drunk. And if he doesn't believe me, let him examine his girls and he'll see, there's only one who's still a virgin." Audience laughter.

The rival king claims the gold and is outraged that the girls have been deflowered.[98]

What ends the performance is the most pointed parody of all. Now that Bako has accomplished his task, he can marry the princess, as expected of a folktale hero, but the rival king insists that the boy take his daughter as well. Bako's last word to his prospective father-in-law takes him out of ancestral polygamy into the world of French law and secular custom.

> I never liked your daughter. It was you who pushed me into killing the lion. You didn't wish me well, you wanted me dead. Well, it's your six daughters who are dead. Your [last] daughter, I never liked her, you forced me to marry her. So, I'm not doing it, I'll stay here with my other wife, I don't like your daughter.[99]

If a true trickster is one who overturns all social norms, a truly creole narrator is one who plays with story conventions, mixes folktale with *bande dessinée* (a comic strip), and mocks accepted attitudes. This old lady is playfully acquainting her grandchildren in Kany Kely with irony, infidelity, and violence. Inheriting and inventing metaphor is the best imaginary vengeance of the oppressed.

The final narrator of this chapter brings all these varieties of parody into a single performance.

The Virtuoso: Comedy, Trickery, Melodrama

> Each evening is a re-creation: ephemeral or durable, its success depends wholly on the genius of the artist.[100]

> In ethnographic societies, narrative is never assumed by a person but by a mediator, shaman, or reciter, whose 'performance' (i.e., his mastery of the narrative code) can be admired, but never his 'genius'.[101]

Genius or performance? It all depends on the criteria of your society. There's no such thing anymore as a non-ethnographic society. Roland Barthes, himself a performer, would have admired a performer captured by Madjidhoubi Said, one evening in the village of Hakoa (also spelled Acoua), on Mayotte's west coast, in August 1976. Had he heard his innovations and watched his interactions with his audience, Barthes might have tolerated the word genius for his mastery of Mayotte's narrative code. He was surrounded by a religious celebration, which drew quite a crowd from outside the village for the rites and singing of the Sufi religious practices called *daira*.[102] A small group of men were entertaining one another with stories. 'The atmosphere was unusually steamed up [says Gueunier]... They all had time, and no one wanted to cut the [performance] short. In that situation several stories, which otherwise could be independent, got strung together for over an hour and a half.... The narrator stands out first for the verve with which he modernizes the situations'.[103]

Fig. 9 Fallen baobab, Sazilé beach. Photo by VillageHero, CC BY-SA 2.0, Wikimedia Commons, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/26/Fallen_Baobab_at_Salizey_Beach_%28Mayotte%29_%2830578354034%29.jpg

His Prologue

At first the young narrator is a little hesitant to ask for a turn: 'I'd like to tell my story'. Knowing his audience, he has already chosen an indecent parody, but is confused over how to introduce it. He begins with a mistake of attribution, which he then corrects: 'Well, I lived there a long time… in fact I wasn't there, it's a story from my grandfather's grandfather. There was a man called *Waziri Kana-mpundra*,' Minister No-Ass. The vizier's quaint practice is to kill every boy born in his village, with his own fashion of abusing power: his farts are fatal. (So that's the kind of story it'll be.) The villagers, for their safety, pen him up at the edge of town, and the storyteller starts again. 'There was a young woman in that village who was pregnant, she didn't know by whom'. She gives birth to a son, who grows supernaturally fast, like many an African hero. Despite being warned against the poisoned farts, the boy decides to fare forth. 'He was a boy! You know, you can't trust him, any more than an ox, anyway a boy and an ox, it's the same thing'. After watching No-Ass fart every three days, he returns home, tells his mother he's setting out like any classic hero, and soon she thinks he must be dead. But he is hiding in the weeds, to encounter his adversary. He was the same size as Mukadasi, says the narrator, pointing to a boy in the village. Instead of the combat we expect, the fart nearly kills the boy, and he yells like a newborn. To save him, the porters intervene: 'It's your fart, Waziri No-Ass, that made the child'.[104] The baby is adopted and raised as the *waziri*'s son. 'That kid's name was — ach, I don't know, wait, the name will come back to me'.

Is the storyteller forgetting or faking? He covers for himself: 'You know what they're like, people who never had a child.' He is feeling energized. The farting demagogue promises to kill anyone his son tells him is an enemy, so the boy gets the vizier's wife beheaded and finishes off the vizier himself. The unnamed son takes possession of all his riches, and for a happy ending he installs his mother on the throne, thus proving that a young man who manages deception, fraud, and murder can find a high place in society.[105] That risky lesson would not escape the attention of a colonized audience, but that night, the listeners doubtless enjoyed the cynicism that emerges from drinking a lot of palm wine.

Kôto vs. Rhampsinitos

Evidently some time elapsed before the storyteller of the evening launched his longer performance. Perhaps he took the first piece to warm up, and then, noticing Mr. Said recording him, saw an opportunity for virtuosic display. He seems to admit that the story he told just now is separate from what's coming. His next hero looks like the same generic boy, but he is ready to give this one a name and put him into one comic situation after another, linking recognizable plots together. He blends unexpected material with the familiar, especially in his last piece. And he is the only Indian Ocean narrator who tells a tale from Herodotus.

Anchoring his piece in Mayotte's oldest tradition, he names the clever lad Kôto (Boy, in Kibushi), instead of the Muslim name a boy would normally be given. Kôto lives at his mother's house (a man's real home), with a father who soon will be proud of him. Already he is a composite character. The right word for him is *staârabo*,

> the word that precisely translates into [Shimaore] the idea of a 'civilization,' which etymologically was 'Arabness' (*ustaârabu*), covering all the qualities of good education, urbanity, and refinement that Comorans attribute to their Arab-Muslim heritage. But since colonization, the word has somehow slid from Arabness into Frenchness; it designates those whom colonial typology called assimilated, i. e. those who have been able to stick to the colonizer model.[106]

Kôto is the trickster hero of a satire, which the Hakoa narrator (or his source) bases on an old tale. Known to Europeans as Rhampsinitos, it was written by Herodotus in the fifth century BCE and is probably older.[107] It depicts the contest for power between a clever thief and king Rhampsinitos. First the thief robs the king's treasury; then he escapes detection so well that he finally attains high office and marries the king's daughter. Some time in the last six centuries, this 'charming sociopath', already known since antiquity, was recognized and accepted by African storytellers as one of their tricksters. Major elements of Herodotus's narrative were performed in Hakoa that night: theft, a trap, a decapitation, a weeping test, and the theft of the corpse.

Kôto is ambitious: 'I want to go work for the king [*ampanjaka*]'. This is no Grimm or Andersen king, not even a village chief, but a twentieth-century bureaucrat, who often absents himself from his colonial-style office, leaving a deputy in charge. His treasury (*bureau*) has a security

system, which the narrator calls *courant* (electricity). It gets plugged into two old trickery motifs, trapping a victim and a magic object that holds a victim fast. The editor comments,

> The storyteller has only rough ideas about the effects of electric current. His village, Hakoa, never had electricity, and even Mwamoju or Mwomoju, the principal city in Mayotte (French spelling Mamoudzou), got its permanent installation only in 1978, two years after the tale was collected. For him it's a useful trickster trap: if you touch a wire, you get stuck without being able to get loose, but without being harmed otherwise.[108]

The Theft: Having won the king's confidence, he steals bags of money from the treasury, to his father's delight.

> Kôto's father started dancing, didn't need *azolahy*, didn't need *ambio* [instruments], didn't need a thing, he danced to see that money, and said, "Truly, I've fathered a winner for a son, a real worker, I don't need any other child but you, I don't want any other children, only you, you are a blessing, if I have others it might be bad for me, it might ruin me". So Kôto's father couldn't contain himself, he'd gotten rich!

All that wealth makes him crazy enough to disown his other children, who don't appear in the story. He becomes Kôto's henchman, and we begin to notice the narrator's penchant for dialogue as the father insists on accompanying Kôto to execute the theft. 'This very day, take me with you, we'll both go there together, tonight. We'll take ten bags and the same tomorrow, then done. We'll stock up on rice, and if you get fired later, well, our future is assured'.

But (the trap) he gets caught by the *courant*.

> Kôto's father got trapped. Kôto came back, he was gone to get [the money], he came back and found his father stuck there.
>
> "Ah, didn't I tell you, papa? I told you not to follow me, it's a dangerous place, and now what I told you has happened. So, what are we going to do now?"
>
> "Go on with what you're doing, then come back and cut off my head".
>
> "But you'll die!"
>
> He said, "Oh, it's nothing. 'Cause there's no other *moyen* [thing to do]".

That decapitation motif has been part of the story since antiquity. Kôto cuts off his father's head and removes it, so he won't be recognized when they drag him through the village. Kôto's mother duly weeps. The narrator advances his tale with more and more dialogue.

> He told her, "See, what I said to my father is what happened, and this is his head, see?"
>
> She said yes and began crying.
>
> "Quiet, you're making matters worse. I'm telling you, mama, tomorrow around *saa ya vili* [seven o'clock], his body, we'll take it out, and I'll be one of the people doing that. Be careful, they'll go through the whole village looking for the family it belongs to, whoever starts crying, they'll arrest them, so be careful". So, he went in, organized things, got his father's head, took it and buried it, that same night in their yard… Well, Kôto stayed there, and at *saa ya vili* he left, went there, opened the doors, got there, went to work and ran to the king.

The Weeping Test: While his mother weeps in grief, Kôto convinces the soldiers that it's because she has cut her hand with a knife. *The Theft of the Corpse*: He assumes responsibility for watching the body overnight, steals the body, and buries it in that treasured place, his mother's house. Then the narrator shifts genres for Kôto to reveal his true trickster identity.

> So Kôto went back and found the guys asleep, when he got there he saw them asleep, Kôto picked up a coconut shell, picked up a coconut shell, took and filled it with shit, that shit, he stirred it so it would be sticky like rice, and he got a tuft of coconut, he took the men's clothes off, he made the tuft all shitty and spread it on the first one's ass, then the next one, right to the last one asleep. He gave them all the same treatment…. When they woke up, they felt their clothes all cold, felt with their hand, and when they smelled it they knew it was shit. "*Allahu akbar* [Great God], what's all this?" [Audience laughter] "Gee, it smells like shit".

Is it the inspiration of the moment, or his audience's responses, that prompt the narrator to echo scenes where trickster pollutes a house? The soldiers catch on, but Kôto stays in charge. He orders all the houses inspected to search for the body, but ingeniously diverts the inspectors away from his house. In a touch from the business world, he also makes sure he hasn't lost his job with the king. Having proven his worth, Kôto

remains the trusted servant. Do the men listening anticipate that he'll marry the king's daughter?

Kôto Tricks the King

Now against his mother's fears, Kôto vows to marry the king's daughter. His riches will take the place of high rank.

> "*Ke bôko zaho mahampy ampanjaka*, I'm as strong as a king, I have lots of money, all the money we have at home, I'm as strong as a king". After he said that, Kôto went and said to the king, "King, I am telling you I want to marry".
>
> The king asked, "How will you arrange to marry? Who do you want to marry? I myself will *garanti* to get that woman for you".
>
> He said, "*Holo hilàkao io, zanakanao iñy, areky helihely iñy*, the one I want to marry is your daughter, the youngest one. There is an older one and another after her, but she's the one I want".
>
> The king had no words to answer Kôto, he was embarrassed, he looked at Kôto: "Kôto, a poor man like you wanting to marry my daughter? Hey! Tie up Kôto, come tie him up fast, he has insulted me!"

This is the narrator's ingenious transition to a string of tricks familiar to the audience. Kôto is sewn into a sack and taken to the forest, where with much talk he persuades a passing herdsman to take his place and get thrown into the sea. Then he sells the dupe's cattle. The dupe recounts the adventure to the king, who is unconvinced and sends him into the sea, weighed down with a rock. Does he drown? Need you ask? At length Kôto reappears and persuades the king to follow the herdsman.

> The King of the Sea gave me a message to bring you. Here is the letter I'm carrying from the King of the Sea, it's an invitation to a big feast, king. Such splendor, king, such splendor, such splendor at the bottom of the sea! They want you there, you have to make a reply to this letter, I came back just for you. The King of the Sea sent me to you, I have to go back right away!

Once the king has agreed to go, and take all the villagers with him, Kôto gets a stack of old sacks, marks them for royal occupants, puts a stone in each, and distributes them.

> Kôto took [the king] and all his relatives, his children and his wife, except only the girl he wanted to marry, she wasn't going to go, because

> if she were to go, he wouldn't want to stay in the village, and what he wanted was to become king of the village. They all drown. Back in the village he was the only man. Kôto was the only man in the village. So, he untied the king's daughter: "Let's go live in your father's house, because from now on I'm the king of this village. Your father is with the King of the Sea, he won't be coming back here."

Not much of a courtship.

Now that he has the king's money, he wants to marry above his station. He has become more authoritative: seeing no need to court the daughter, he merely states his plan of marriage to her. The narrator has used the drowning-the-dupe motif to replace the king's attempts, in older versions, to catch the trickster. But instead of a happy fairytale ending, he needs a transition to his next piece, because a trickster must always be allowed to escape. 'They ate up the king's riches, they ate up the king's riches, ate it up till nothing was left. Kôto ran out [of everything], Kôto saw he'd run out, he left the village'. Blending the favorite African theme of rebuking a king's absurdity with satire of colonial civil servants, the Hakoa narrator has transformed an ancient comic tale.[109] Don't ask where he got it: the history of a tale as ancient as Rhampsinitos is untraceable.

A Succession of Tricks

'The [African] storyteller [Denise Paulme writes] who judges a one-movement story to be too short, or who wants to conserve his effects, will resort to his memory. He will add a second motif to the first, and — why not? — a third or fourth. The resulting story will be a success to the extent it remains plausible and two successive sequences hang well together'.[110] That is what the Hakoa storyteller does: fluently he adds six scenes in which he can show off with wordy exchanges of dialogue, surprises, and familiar tricks. The first is the old trick of convincing people 'The mosque is going to fall down, come, let's hold it up, the mosque is going to fall down!'[111] That frees him to steal everybody's food and shit all over their houses. For his second trick he sells a nonexistent bull. He ties a rope to a tree and leaves the end out, telling people, 'that is one nasty bull'. The prospective purchasers discover the trick and yell, '*La haula la kuwati la billahi*! That guy is a thief! What the hell! It was

Kôto!' Next (third) he crashes a party in Labatoara (in Pamandzi) and outwits the unwelcoming locals who try to get him drunk. He poured some, drank one mouthful, threw three glassfuls on the ground. One mouthful, three glassfuls on the ground. He escapes out the back.

For trick no. 4 the narrator gives Kôto magic powers.

> Now Kôto, a long time back in Ndzaudze, had made a bow that could throw him as far as Mwomoju. Nobody knew about it. He got as far as [the little island of] Funguju before the others saw he'd gone: "Kôto isn't here, Kôto's gone!"

Of course they pursue him.

> And they got to Firasho, and he was at Funguju. He saw them coming from far off. He ran like crazy and reached his bow and stopped and watched the ones coming after him. He let them get close, then he drew the bow and got thrown all the way to Mwomoju.[112]

All the tricks are part of the African-Malagasy stock. Mentioning the place names is a surefire device for plausibility. Tsangamôzy is a village not far from Hakoa; Labatoara is the principal village of the island of Pamandzi, which carries on a rivalry with the main island, Grande Terre. Equally familiarizing is the way the trickster Kôto imitates behavior his hearers must know well, like dropping in at parties and dances (trick no. 5). Some revelers give him a demijohn of liquor which he sells, steals, sells again, and steals again, each time drinking a bit and filling the jug with water. Discovering he has stolen their liquor, they think of pursuing him but decide he must be a *lolo*. Kôto goes back to the village to live with the king's daughter. He makes the other women his concubines.

Perhaps Kôto's escape and victory had a special force in 1976, when Mayotte was deciding how to maintain its dependency on France. Or perhaps neither narrator nor audience would care. Any trickster rebels against authority figures.

Fig. 10 Barbara Stanwyck and Fred MacMurray in Billy Wilder's 'Double Indemnity' (1944). Public domain, Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Double_indemnity_screenshot_8.jpg

Kôto Goes to Hollywood

The pseudo-happy ending launches the narrator's final story. In an unexpected bit of narrative metalepsis, the storyteller reveals the ending he will use: 'Kôto — FINALLY THE KING'S DAUGHTER IS GOING TO KILL HIM, BUT HE DOESN'T KNOW ABOUT THAT'. What? No teller of even the most familiar trickster tale gives away the ending (which is often already known to the audience anyway).[113] To launch his final, 4,000-words-long number, the Hakoa storyteller switches genres into something like screen melodrama. A switch in genre is a typical creolizing move, the kind that loves to form 'fresh cultural forms from the ready-to-hand debris of old ones'.

Folktale and *film noir* are not far apart. Generically, the trickster in oral narratives — ever marginal, ever the social critic, endangered but never destroyed — is the father of Maigret or Philip Marlowe in films. Perhaps some zealous *cinéaste* will uncover a specific source for this part of Kôto's story in the combination of pessimism and romance of the Popular Front films, or the dialogue style of post-World War Two thrillers by Henri-Georges Clouzot or Yves Allégret. We don't know what films he might have seen, or what popular magazines or romances were circulating in 1970s Mayotte, but in the middle of

this religious celebration, the young man has mastered dialogue and character relations in the manner of those sources. The first unexpected touch is Kôto's wife coming angrily onstage. 'I'm warning you, Kôto, you have mistresses, you're not a good husband. Can you marry the whole village? I want some explanations, Kôto!' Also unexpectedly, the teller reveals the ending he will use: 'Kôto — finally the king's daughter is going to kill him, but he doesn't know about that'. Betraying himself in their dispute, Kôto admits that he exterminated all the village men under pretext of sending them to the King of the Sea. The angry shouting dialogue of the couple, a staple of film and television dramas, is foreign to the speaking style of other Mahorais storytellers or their characters. Equally foreign is the wife's aggressive verbosity, so different from the abstract stylization of most folktale characters. That must have impelled the male listeners to identify with Kôto more than ever. The husband and wife can't stop arguing: 'They kept on, they kept on, they kept on'.

Melodrama's next contribution is an interior monologue, which leads to a slowing of the narrative pace.

> The wife thought only of her plan, she wanted to kill him. She thought about what means she would use to kill him. But if she killed him, where would she go? She wanted to go get her father and mother back. So, she wanted to find a way to convince Kôto to show her the path to get to the King of the Sea's place... So, the king's daughter begged Kôto, 'Take me there, take me there, take me there, otherwise I'm leaving!'

Kôto's wife steps out of her folktale role to assert herself. Her reversal of power and gender is nominally prohibited in Muslim law, but real-life Comoran women do manage it, because they own the houses into which men marry. They can oblige their husbands to return to their mothers, but only in shame. In style, the narrator is firmly in control of both old folktale and contemporary melodrama.

Once Kôto confesses all the deaths, his wife turns to the classic folktale grandmother (*dady*) for what she needs. Unlike her folktale predecessors, but like the Hakoa audience, the *dady* is partial to the trickster hero. She plays donor by suggesting several impractical methods of murder.

> Finally the king's daughter realized that the *dady* was trying to protect Kôto, and said to herself, "What I have to do is kill Kôto without

delay, because otherwise the old woman is going to change her mind and go warn him, then he'll kill me". She always had her knife on her.

The women's melodramatic dialogue deepens the texture, causes the wife the kind of severe inner conflict never portrayed in oral narrating, and retards the movement of the narrative towards the catastrophe. Kôto and his wife meet again at home; still she is indecisive.

When Kôto was asleep, the wife began watching him sleep, waited till he began snoring, then she went out quietly and went into the other room to get her knife, one of those very long knives... She was there all alone wondering, "Am I going to cut his throat? No, I'll plant it in his chest. No, I'll do it like this... like that..." Kôto was still asleep, not suspecting anything, the lamp was still lit. She came very close, pretending to stroke him, kiss him, massage him to sleep. She took the curtain and pulled it back to see where she would hit. She lowered the knife, placed it, then stopped, thinking, "How'm I going to get along in this village with nobody in it?" She took back the knife, took it back, thinking, three times. The fourth time, she cut his throat. She pushed, pushed some more, pushed and pushed, and when she drew the knife out, his throat was cut. She was very upset at that cut throat, she stayed alone.

She thought about what to do, if she took the knife to cut her own throat, she wouldn't have the courage. So, she took a rope, fastened it around her neck, fastened it to the roof, took a chair, placed it, got up on it, tightened it around her throat, and then she kicked away the chair and was hanged, and that's how she died.

At this point we recall this narrator is a male, who is allowing his story to punish the woman and let the trickster escape.

As the performance in Hakoa nears its end, the narrator begins to lose focus and energy. Instead of dramatizing the burial in a cinematic scene, he curtails his story to misquote, or rework, a classic closing formula.

The village women were still there, the village women were still there... they came and called, nobody answered, called, nobody answered.... What to do? They were only women. They opened the door, went in, found the wife all stiff, hanging from the rope, and him stretched out on the bed with the bed all covered in blood and his head cut off. The women were stunned. "What is all this?"... They cut down the wife, took her down, looked at one another saying, "What are we going to do? We are only women! Let's bury them".

> I left them there, I left them there, I went along. I don't know what happened to that village with no men in it. So, I left them there, with no men, I don't know if other men came there, or — nothing.

Abruptly he ends the tale, we hope with tumultuous acclaim from the men listening.[114]

All the good Mahorais narrators bend old folktale plots and characters to the concerns of their time and place. This one is especially good at blending popular fiction into the trickster tale. Consider the setting: the crime happens at night in a house of melodramatic despair, where nothing good can be hoped for. Also notable is the slowing of the plot: trickster tales like those he had already told, which move swiftly towards a predictable ending, know nothing of the Hitchcockian suspense he manages in his last segment. The most prominent *film noir* touch is making the wife the new central character, a woman too weak to stand alone except as a Barbara Stanwyck murderess, 'fate's emissary, a siren leading the man to ruination'.[115] Knowing that her crime will deprive her of redemption, she seeks only revenge. For her — as for many women in Mayotte — the world is a dangerous place. Modernizing gives the listener an exaggerated vision of dangers that don't show up in most stories about an innocent persecuted woman. Kôto's wife, instead of being permanently separated from him, joins him in death for the sake of her family.

Recorded, transcribed, translated, and read, the Hakoa performance is surprisingly novelistic. Perhaps the young narrator constructed his performance merely by adding a second piece, then a third, then a fourth. But in print, his disconnected, picaresque story has a unity, because through his adventures, Kôto grows. At the beginning he is ambitious; he begins maturing when he cooperates with his father and then does away with him. In another Oedipal move, Kôto wins out over the king by getting him drowned. Having spent all the late king's money, he makes a rational decision to play tricks on the neighbors. Each time, his success takes him to a higher position. 'That way he finally made about a million with that one demijohn'. His final defeat, inevitable for a folktale trickster, comes in a surprising way; listeners might have wondered if it could apply to corrupt, deceitful civil servants. Since his main objective has been to entertain, the narrator avoids the direct topical commentary we saw in the tale about the crab (incidentally also a Hakoa

product). Finally, both Kôto and his narrator have a great deal to say on all subjects. They and their characters are talkative, communicative, verbose, loquacious, garrulous, longwinded, prolix, fluent, and voluble, if you see what I mean.

Still, the narrator is producing a wholly oral performance. He honors all his sources, putting his memory and skills into practice in response to the social-religious-celebratory mood of the *daira*. His memory, skill with dialogue, and humor stand out there as much as they would at a wake, where again a storyteller would be expected to entertain. The music and dancing around him, what he knows about the men listening to him, the changing status of Mayotte — all are forces motivating him to remodel old features of oral performance. Drawing energy from being among friends, he frees them from any weight the religious ceremony has put on them. They can enjoy an hour and a half of fun. Such improvised assembling of sources has probably been the normal practice in Mayotte.

When men are the narrators, they tell tales about men. When this narrator speaks about Kôto, isn't he often referring to himself? For example, '[Kôto] knew a lot of things the people in that village didn't, he knew things'. People flatter him: 'You are an expert at parties like this, you are a good dancer'. Here is a subtler model of self-referentiality than Husain, in the previous chapter. Both Kôto and his narrator are skillful keepers of secrets, practiced at concealing what they know. The trickster hides his intentions or changes his clothes; the storyteller uses words to reveal and conceal at the same time. The female storytellers we shall meet in the next chapter have an equally self-referential subject. Apparently Mayotte is not much different from places we know. After studying the island for many years, the anthropologist Michael Lambek ventures to say, 'relations between the sexes are not without their contradictions and their inequality'.[116] Imagine that.

A Note on Creolization

The tales and storytellers in this chapter have been treated as products of creolization; here is the theory behind that treatment. Linguists, beginning from the assumption that languages change slowly, discovered with surprise that in certain situations, new pidgin

and creole languages develop rapidly out of the necessity for one language group to communicate with another. Invasions, conquests, resettlements, and enslavements have forced together peoples carrying different languages and traditions. Members of each group, dominant or subordinate, drew linguistic and cultural forms from the other group. Confronting power differences and conflicts, both groups learned to blend or amalgamate features of language, to negotiate language and culture, and jointly to create something new. What linguists discovered about these modifications of ordinary talk shows up all the more in people's proverbs, riddles, and narratives. Hence *creolization* is the name for the process whereby people in situations of unequal power renegotiate not only language but culture. Through that process they create new art, music, and literature.

Creolization is not just another word for culture change or cultural mixing. It is a consequence of class conflict, if not class struggle. In Mayotte's early history, the ethnic mix we see today resulted from the convergence of peoples — Arabo-Persian Shirazi, Swahili, Malagasy, and Europeans — whose arrivals were seldom peaceful. From the tenth century on, these peoples renegotiated their older models into an Islamic environment. All were sources for social structure, beliefs, cookery, and stories. Indian Ocean Island societies, Noel Gueunier insists, are the result of slavery and maritime trade.[117] Such harsh regimes virtually require renegotiating culture. So does colonization. Centuries of French influence have brought French material and intangible products to Mayotte for selecting and refashioning. Like other dependent cultures, Mayotte has appropriated and remodeled those products in a spirit of ambivalence and sometimes play. The contradictions of the social situation foster ambivalences: matrifocality vs. male-dominated Islam, dependence vs. independence, strict discipline vs. rebellion, sociability vs. concealment. By making ambiguity a feature of style, creole narrative turns silence into speech and makes its figurative language a subversive activity. As we see from that evening in Mayotte, the best storytellers blend diverse imported and new elements to create narratives that are discontinuous and new. The next chapter contains more samples of these new narratives. Neither accidental nor deteriorated assemblages of foreign influences. Kôto's story and others are new creations, which points at the most enduring feature of Mayotte's history: differential identity, differential power — what is sometimes called class struggle.

Endnotes

1 *Stars and Keys*, pp. 147–67.

2 The Index of tellers and locations (below) gives fuller information about the collecting in the 1970s–80s, and lists Aarne-Thompson-Uther tale types for the pieces discussed.

3 Veronika Görög-Karady and Christiane Seydou, ed., *La fille difficile, un conte-type africain* (Paris, CNRS Éditions, 2001).

4 Noël J. Gueunier, *La belle ne se marie point: contes comoriens en dialecte malgache de l'île de Mayotte* (Paris: Peeters, 1990), p. 23.

5 Non-fictional, personal-experience narratives about the spirits that rise up in Mahorais people have been extensively studied by Michael Lambek in *Human Spirits.*

6 Motif H105.5.2, Teeth and fingernails of slain cyclops taken as proof. Stith Thompson and Jonas Balys, *The Oral Tales of India* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1958), p. 216.

7 *La Belle*, pp. 162–72. Motifs: T118, Girl married to a monster; G82, Cannibal fattens victim; G512.1, Ogre killed with knife.

8 The tale is known in many West and Central African languages, for example Raymond Boyd and Richard Fardon, 'La Fille Difficile Tchamba, Sauvée par un Chanson (Nord-Cameroun)', in Görög-Karady and Seydou, *La fille difficile*, pp. 139–66. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Daniel P. and Brunhilde Biebuyck analyzed thirty-six distinct versions, in an article, 'We Test Those Whom We Marry', now difficult to access. East African versions are sampled in Ngumbu Njururi, *Agikuyu Folk Tales* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 4–10; Rose Gecau, *Kikuyu Folktales* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1970), pp. 92–99. I discuss Southwest Indian Ocean versions in *Stars and Keys*, pp. 147–67. Three texts from Mauritius, all following the same outline, were published in Charles Baissac, *Folklore de l'île Maurice* (Paris: G. P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1887), pp. 146–79, and it is a favorite plot in Madagascar (*Malagasy Tale Index*, pp. 271–72, 363–71, 473–74).

9 Horns and tail identify the *lolo*. Cannibalism is the mark of the *kaka*. A *djinn* is often disguised.

10 *La belle*, p. 67 n. 3.

11 Ibid., pp. 68–74. Motifs: G81, Unwitting marriage to cannibal; T118, Girl married to a monster; H509, Tests of cleverness or ability (cf. H509.4, Tests of poetic ability); K1710, Ogre overawed.

12 Margaret A. Mills, *Rhetoric and Politics in Afghan Traditional Storytelling* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), p. 123.

13 The line is said by a character in Giraudoux's play *Siegfried* and is quoted in Jacques Body, *Jean Giraudoux: The Legend and the Secret* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1991), p. 57.

14 *La belle*, p. 11.

15 Detailed studies of the story, with this interpretation, are presented in Görög-Karady and Seydou's *La fille difficile*. From the innumerable versions the authors derive, not an 'original', but a skeleton, or *modèle matriciel*, of the story, containing six narrative essentials. 1. A girl shows herself excessively demanding for marriage. 2. A suitor appears, hiding his real negative nature under a positive appearance, say a fat *lolo* in Arab dress, with gold teeth. 3. She declares her intention to unite with him. The union is concluded. 5. The husband's true nature is revealed. 6. The union is broken. Thus they define a 'tale type', a hypothetical form abstracted from transcribed performances. To confirm the importance of multiplicity, Seydou concludes,'The ensemble of tales produced by a society forms a system in which each constituent yields its total meaning only when compared with others and the play of constants and variables they deploy' (p. 52).

16 Sophie Blanchy and Zakaria Soilihi, 'Le tambour', *L'Espoir* (Réunion), 2 (August 1989), 20–31.

17 Ottino, 'Un procédé littéraire'; Anne Storch, *Secret Manipulations: Language and Context in Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

18 *La belle*, pp. 182–83.

19 Slavery aggravated the fear of being forced to marry outside one's ethnic group (exogamy). Yves Blandenet, 'La diaspora des contes africains dans les mythologies de l'Océan Indien', *Notre Librairie*, 72 (1983), 21–31.

20 Linda Dégh, *Narratives in Society, a Performer-Centered Study of Narration* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 37.

21 Noël J. Gueunier and Madjidhoubi Said, *La Belle ne se marie point* (Paris: Peeters, 1990), p. 192, n. 4.

22 'The political struggle between those two parties, much alive in 1975–76, was manifested in actual internal blockades: 'Hakoa people could not set foot on the opposite party's territory, notably Mtsangamuji and Shembenyumba. Sometimes the villages confronted each other in veritable armed expeditions led by prominent men and veterans of the French army'. Gueunier, *La belle*, p. 192, n. 8.

23 A drum plays itself also in an Antankarana tale from Madagascar's east coast. Renel 1:224–27.

24 *Contes comoriens*, pp. 206–19. Motifs: D1601.18.3, Self-beating drum; G512.2, Spirit woman in rock; F455.5.3, Cap of invisibility; B421, Helpful dog; B524.1.2, Dogs rescue fleeing master from tree refuge.

25 Pierre Vérin, *The History of Civilisation in North Madagascar* (Rotterdam: A. A. Balkema, 1986), p. 36.

26 ATU653, The Four Skillful Brothers, known among Sakalava: Dandouau, pp. 373–76.

27 Denise Paulme, 'Morphologie du conte africain', *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 12, 45 (1972), 131–63 (p. 156). Her description applies even more closely to the Hakoa narrator's string of trickster stories below, provoked by the joviality around him.

28 *La belle*, pp. 138–61. Motifs: G81, Unwitting marriage to cannibal; H509, Tests of cleverness or ability (cf. H509.4, Tests of poetic ability); K1710, Ogre overawed; G551.2, Rescue of sister from ogre by another sister; N825.3, Old woman helper; B450, Helpful bird; B552, Bird carries man; D1101, Magic spittle; D1002, Magic excrements; G510, Ogre killed.

29 Noël J. Gueunier, *Le coq du roi: contes comoriens en dialecte malgache de l'île de Mayotte* (Paris: Peeters, 2001), pp. 146–55. Motifs: B11.6.2, Dragon guards treasure; H335.7, Suitor task: to kill treasure-guarding snake lying around the princess' chamber; H1174.2, Overcoming dragon as task; H105.1, Dragon tongue proof; B375.1, Fish returned to water: grateful.

30 *Contes comoriens*, pp. 22–26, 146–55.

31 Caroline Levine's phrase 'a series of local network clusters' accurately describes an island where one village speaks Kibushi, the next one Shimaore, and both are trying to practice Islamic marriage under French law. The folktales take up 'the daunting challenge of understanding life in a world organized by multiple networks… [They are] sites where multiple forms cross and collide, inviting us to think in new ways about power'. Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton:

Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 122. Each network is self-contained yet connected with many other networks. Actors, objects, and incidents of stories, not being independent entities, get their meaning from the relations among them and their networks. Storytellers exercise that competence in mixing and blending them which characterizes all creole societies. Their performances go beyond clarifying people's understanding, to give an answer to the conflicts between networks. Plenty of linguistic energy is prominent in the collectors' transcriptions that are the sources for this book. Even more potent than the networks image, traditional storytelling looks to be the kind of system defined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: 'Must it not be admitted that every system is in variation and is defined not by its constants and homogeneity but on the contrary by a variability whose characteristics are immanent, continuous, and regulated in a very specific mode (variable or optional rules)?' Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 93–94).

32 *Contes comoriens*, p. 116, n. 2.

33 *Contes comoriens*, pp. 110–17.

34 *Contes comoriens*, p. 116, n. 2.

35 Beaujard, p. 493.

36 Gueunier, *Le coq*, pp. 42–47. In other Comoran versions the hero gets some reward, but no impostor tries to rob the hero of it, as happens in European dragon-slayer stories. Language is awkward: 'The teller seems to disregard the meaning of *Nyoka* in Shimaore, speaking only of a *kaka* or a '"being", *raha*' (47, note 5). Paul Ottino's brilliant and detailed study of the swallowing monster's versions and variants is titled 'Le Thème du monstre dévorant' (1977).

37 Investigators in Africa have been bound to observe the performers' habit of alternating speech and song, e. g. Bird, Charles, 'The Heroic Songs of the Mande Hunters', in *African Folklore*, ed. Richard M. Dorson (Garden City (NY): Doubleday, 1972), pp. 275–93, 468–77. In situations of convergence or display, the channel draws attention as much as the content of the message. Attention to creolized societies has revealed their delight in multiplying channels of artistic communication: Roger D. Abrahams, *The Man-of-Words in the West Indies* (Baltimore, M.D.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).

38 *Contes comoriens*, pp. 246–48.

39 Gueunier, *L'Oiseau*, pp. 66–67.

40 Because certain possession rituals 'are more or less ostracized by orthodox Islam, the wasp's tiny waist can be interpreted as a punishment', and there is indeed one species of spider with a red bottom. *La belle*, p. 100, n. 1.

41 Blanchy et al., *La maison*, p. 65.

42 *La belle*, pp. 310–11.

43 *L'Oiseau*, p. 130, n. 7.

44 *L'Oiseau*, p. 19, n. 2.

45 *L'Oiseau*, p. 130, n. 7.

46 *La belle*, p. 204, n. 9.

47 Marie-Paule Ferry, 'Telling Folktales — Why?' trans. Lee Haring, *Southwest Folklore* 6, 1 (1986), 1–16. The transgression of narrative levels is analyzed for literary fiction by Gérard Genette in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).

48 *L'Oiseau*, pp. 260–61.

49 A related literary notion is *deixis*, the set of devices whereby literature, or any other act of reference, anchors itself in or refers to a context. Ducrot, Oswald, and Tzvetan Todorov, *Dictionnaire encyclopédique des sciences du langage*, Points (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972), p. 323.

50 Annemarie Schimmel, *Islam: An Introduction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 21.

51 Polarization like what Hasan and Husain next experience is a 'law' of folktale structure, part of the abstract stylization regulating folktale style. Axel Olrik, *Principles for Oral Narrative Research*, trans. Kirsten Wolf and Jody Jensen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 50: Max Lüthi, *The European Folktale: Form and Nature*, trans. John D. Niles (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 24–36. If Persian mythology had the influence in Mayotte that Claude Allibert asserts, any duality like this, or the inseparability of the tricksters Ikotofetsy and Imahaka in Madagascar, would be a relic from Zoroastrianism. Allibert, *Mayotte*, pp. 195–226.

52 *Contes comoriens*, p. 365, n. 6.

53 Conventional, but also quite specific to Mayotte: 'It is an occult test: it is known that prosperity comes from parental blessing.... Hasan understands that his rice is not thriving because of the curse weighing on him for killing his father. And he suspects Husain has not killed his [father], since his rice is still flourishing' *Contes comoriens* p. 365, n. 8.

54 The deceptive agreement to kill mothers is traditional among Sakalava or Tsimihety: Dandouau, pp. 339–46. Thompson's motif K1840 comprises a number of deceptions by substitution; the father's trick here is to substitute an animal's blood as proof of the execution, which deserves but does not have its own motif number (cf. the Indian motif K512.2, Compassionate executioner).

55 'Hasan, pursued by his curse, will sail without ever reaching land, and will finally die on his boat' *Contes comoriens*, p. 366, n. 10.

56 A chamber full of human skulls is part of one of M. Gueunier's *fille difficile* stories (*La belle*, pp. 82–101). Another shows briefly in Allibert, *Contes mahorais*, pp. 57–61.

57 'Thanks to the magic knowledge he has inherited from his father, Husain can indicate to the old lady a place where the *djinn* will not come and raid her herds' *Contes comoriens*, p. 366, nn. 12–13.

58 Sophie Blanchy, 'Changement social à Mayotte: transformations, tensions, ruptures', *Études Océan Indien*, 33–34 (2002), 165–95 (p. 169).

59 'We recognize the formula indicating the hero's departure, even if as in this case he will not go far' *Contes comoriens*, p. 366, n. 17.

60 *Contes comoriens*, pp. 348–66. Motifs: P311, sworn brethren, P312, blood brothers; Q2, kind and unkind; K1400, Dupe's property destroyed; D1415.2, Magic musical instrument causes person to dance; K1840, Deception by substitution; D2157.1, Land made magically fertile; D1812.0.1, Foreknowledge of hour of death; D1960, Magic sleep; B31.1, Roc; H324, suitor test. The line about recognizing a woman he has slept with might be the most 'modern' touch of all, updating one of the motifs most often used in the repertoire, H161.1, Recognition of person among identical companions. Other versions: Renel 1: 65–76 and 3: 19–21; Dandouau, pp. 149–53.

61 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Wild Thought: A New Translation of 'La Pensée Sauvage'*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman and John Leavitt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), pp. 20–26.

62 ATU513A, Six Go Through the Whole World. Dandouau's text, pp. 255–71, though a powerful forerunner, is not 'the source' for M. Gueunier's narrator, nor is it unique: a version from Madagascar's east coast is in Renel 1: 254–60. A Malagasy prototype for a hero who, rejecting local girls, travels over water to fetch a wife is the legend of Rasoanor, which is summarized in Étienne de Flacourt's 1661 history book: Paul Ottino, *L'étrangère intime: essai d'anthropologie de la civilisation de l'ancien Madagascar* (Paris: Éditions des Archives Contemporains, 1986), pp. 51–52.

63 This favorite moment in Malagasy tales (T24.2.3, Fainting from seeing an extraordinary beauty, evidently of Indian origin) is prominent in a Sakalava tale, The Two Brothers (ATU303: *Stars and Keys* pp. 206–20). I discuss charms in 'Verbal Charms in Malagasy Folktales', in *Charms, Charmers and Charming: International Research on Verbal Magic*, ed. Jonathan Roper (London, 2004), pp. 246–59.

64 *Slave* is the correct word. Slavery persisted longer in the Comoros (in a thinly disguised form under the French autocrat Léon Humblot) than in any other island of the region, as late as 1909: Jean Martin, *Comores: quatre îles entre pirates et planteurs* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1983).

65 *La belle*, p. 372, n. 9.

66 'Several more or less direct relations can be grouped by the term *zama*, maternal uncle. Hence this very common expression, which avoids exactly stating the genealogical relation between the two relatives' (Gueunier, *La belle*, p. 372 n. 11). Matrilineal societies give special honor to maternal uncles.

67 This entire episode replaces a more rapid and linear ending in another version Gueunier summarizes, in which Farananomby's baby son vows he will grow up to marry a daughter of Creator. He succeeds.

68 *La belle*, pp. 334–74. Motifs: T131.1.2.4, Son refuses to marry father's choice; F636, Remarkable thrower; F642.8, Person sees enormous distance; F516, Person unusual as to his arms; F642, Person of remarkable sight; E52, Resuscitation by magic charm; T100, Marriage; K2252, Treacherous maid-servant; K1934, Impostor forces heroine to change places with her; S145, Abandonment on an island; D955, Magic leaf; D150, Transformation: man to bird; H12, Recognition by song; D211, Transformation: man to fruit; D451.3, Transformation: fruit to another object; R351, Fugitive discovered by reflection in water; H1212.4, Quest assigned because of longing of pregnant woman; S165, Mutilation: putting out eyes; R10.3, Children abducted; G440, Ogre abducts person; D1461.0.1, Tree with golden fruit; T68, Princess offered as prize; H509, Tests of cleverness or ability; D1654.4.1, Sword can be moved only by right person; H541, Riddle propounded with penalty for failure; Q461, Impalement as punishment; Q499, Other humiliating punishments; D475.1, Transformation: objects to gold; F785, Extraordinary throne; H12, Recognition by song; H162, Recognition of disguised princess by bee lighting on her.

Three Malagasy texts are clear forerunners; one, classifiable as a version of The Three Oranges (ATU408), begins with the oft-told false bride motif and continues into repeated self-transformations by the real bride, while the false one reveals her identity by asking for insects to eat and then showing her *kaka* tail. The rest is as straightforward as this kind

of storytelling can be. André Dandouau collected two Sakalava versions that resemble our tale very closely indeed, pp. 255–71. The differences are charming. The intermediary who offers to lead the hero's party demands a price: his foot sores (consequence of syphilis) must be cured; the girl's grandmother, having taken in the hero, suspects he is a king's son when he won't eat (H71, Marks of royalty). Food becomes important: he refuses food twice, then the third time, Farinañomby, cooking offstage, changes the menu to milk, rice, and coconut, and the grandmother herself serves it. Wanting to keep his face concealed, he asks her to leave the room; because she is unwilling, he has her cover the walls and windows and unveils his face, which causes the old lady to faint and knock over the food (H41, Recognition of royalty by personal characteristics or traits). Revived, the old woman tells Farinanomby, who invites him to dine with her family, but he refuses. At last Farinanomby is reinstated as the true bride, the chameleon false bride is killed in front of her, and she proceeds to the palace by walking first on the chameleon's body and then on a herd of oxen. Then the Sakalava narrator starts a new episode. Farinanomby gives birth to a son, so troublesome that she stops speaking until at last he forces her. Wanting to marry, he goes to Creator's house and asks for his youngest daughter. She must be chosen from among her identical sisters; the boy succeeds at that test and at three more tests Creator assigns him. So he marries this divine creature, and 'everything they asked for was granted them by Creator's daughter, to whom her father could not refuse anything'.

69 Jacques Derrida and Derek Attridge, *Acts of Literature* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1992)

70 Dady ny Saidy was brought out from Gueunier's anonymity in Blanchy's *La maison*, pp. 99–130. The tale belongs to type ATU327, The Children and the Ogre; two dozen versions of this 'supertype' were recorded in Madagascar in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (*Malagasy Tale Index*, pp. 380–91).

71 *La Maison*, pp. 6–7.

72 Émile Birkeli, 'Folklore sakalava recueilli dans la région de Morondava', *Bulletin de l'Académie Malgache,* n. s. 6 (1922–1923), pp. 234–39. Renel 1: 243–46, 2: 35–36.

73 Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 72.

74 *Le coq*, pp. 96–121. The tale was also published by Blanchy in *La Maison*, pp. 99–133, with the text transcribed in Arabic alphabet. Motifs: S301, Children abandoned; S321, Destitute parents abandon children; G406,

Lost person falls into ogre's power; G501, Stupid ogre; R311, Tree refuge; G512.3.2, Ogre burned in his own oven.

75 *Le Coq*, p. 121, n. 19. Anthropologists have observed, indeed have been part of, many such 'joking' relationships.

76 Roger D. Abrahams, *Deep Down in the Jungle: Negro Narrative Folklore from the Streets of Philadelphia* (Hatboro, PA: Folklore Associates, 1964), pp. 51–52. On this capacity for verbal ambiguity Henry Louis Gates, Jr., has built his compelling theory, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

77 Gérard Genette develops a major literary theory around this practice, without referring to the most obvious place where it occurs, oral narrating (*Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), pp. 24–30. An equally accurate term would be *pastiche*, in Proust's sense, if readers did not so often think it means collage.

78 *L'Oiseau*, p. xix. The birds' refusal to carry a message happens in a Betsimisaraka tale: Soafara's message to her parents is refused by the guineafowl, the umbrette, and the crow, because all have been insulted by her; the roller-bird accepts the errand and takes the message (Renel 1: 282–87).

79 *L'Oiseau*, p. xix.

80 *L'Oiseau*, pp. 208–15.

81 *L'Oiseau*, pp. 50–55. The myth is found in Jacques Faublée, *Récits bara* (Paris: Institut d'Ethnologie, 1947), pp. 257–59. Although the story bears some resemblance to ATU400, The Man on a Quest for His Lost Wife, it is a textbook example of the cyclic type of tale in which a man satisfies his hunger or gets a wife, only to lose her by violating a prohibition. Motifs: T543.1, Birth from tree; C31.2, Tabu: mentioning origin of supernatural wife; C952, Immediate return to other world because of broken tabu.

82 Serious parody, in fact, is recognized in musicology as a kind of novelty: '[I]n the 18th century "parody" was understood primarily as the fashioning of a new poem on the model of an extant one. It is now taken to mean the retexting of a vocal composition, and more generally *the production of a new vocal work* based on the music of another piece' (Daniel R. Melamed, 'Parody', in *J. S. Bach. Oxford Composer Companions*, ed. Malcolm Boyd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 356–57 (p. 356), emphasis LH. Bach's practice of reusing secular materials in sacred pieces is analogous to what oral storytellers do with the materials they have inherited, and also to Gérard Genette's subgenre of serious imitation.

83 Pierre Maranda, ed., *Mythology, Selected Readings* (Harmondsworth (England): Penguin Books, 1972), p. 8.

84 I take this brilliant phrase from Bengt Holbek, 'Games of the Powerless', *Unifol* 1976 (1977), 10–33.

85 *Le Coq*, p. xvii.

86 *Contes comoriens*, p. 4.

87 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 'Studying Immigrant and Ethnic Folklore', in *Handbook of American Folklore*, ed. Richard M. Dorson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), pp. 39–47 (p. 40).

88 *L'Oiseau*, pp. 66–71. By honoring the locality, the piece reverses the values of motif C952, Immediate return to other world because of broken tabu.

89 Birkeli, pp. 198–203.

90 Ottino, *L'Étrangere intime*, p. 576.

91 I derive the idea of multiple presences from Stuart Hall, 'Créolité and the Process of Creolization', in *Créolité and Creolization. Documenta 11 Platform 3*, ed. Okwui Enwezor et al. (Ostfildern-Ruit (Germany): Hatje Cantz, 2015), pp. 27–41.

92 *L'Oiseau*, pp. 84–94.

93 *La Belle*, pp. 282–98.

94 Caryl Emerson and Gary Saul Morson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 16. Richard Bauman, 'Conceptions of Folklore in the Development of Literary Semiotics', *Semiotica* 39 (1982), 1–20.

95 *Contes comoriens*, p. 8. Motif S211, Child sold to an ogre.

96 *Contes comoriens*, p. 151, n. 10.

97 Real lions do not require being sent out to pasture. This one is rather bovine.

98 This same narrator, in a second performance of this piece recorded six months later, here inserted a new episode: 'We have to understand that the king (the girls' father) had bet [the other king] two casks of gold that the boy would not succeed in taming the lion' (Gueunier, *Contes comoriens*, p. 165, n. 7).

99 First version recorded December 1977 (pp. 138–51), second version recorded May 1978 (pp. 152–65). Motifs: T465, Bestiality; S12.1.1, Treacherous mother and paramour plan son's death (Indian); S11, Cruel father.

100 Paulme, *La Statue*, p. 97.

101 Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), pp. 49–55 (p. 49).

102 'Salafi Muslims derogate these practices by calling them simply dances' (Noël Gueunier, personal communication). The narrator makes the *daira* setting part of Kôto's story.

103 *Contes comoriens*, pp. 16–79, quotation from p. 6. The performance was witnessed, recorded, and translated to French by Madjidhoubi Said; Noël Gueunier collaborated with him on the Kibushi transcription and the French translation. M. Gueunier notes, 'The name of the language, as its speakers know it, is Kibushi ('Malagasy'), or more accurately, Kibushi *kimaore* ('Mayotte Malagasy').' I am grateful to these colleagues for permission to translate the text and include their ethnographic information.

104 Translating his name as No-Ass is my most outrageous liberty, since *mpundra* means donkey. The image appears also in Gueunier's *fille* who insists on a husband who won't defecate for a week. This piece was recorded by Madjidhoubi Said the same night as Gueunier's #92 and #118. Here, the same narrator gives Kôto's adversary the titles *waziri* (vizier or minister to a king) and *ampanjaka* (king) indifferently. The latter term means something like *chief* of a village. A member of the audience asks if *Kana-mpundra* could really be his name; the narrator confirms, adding an attempt to enhance its realism, 'but I don't know that village, don't know if it's in Africa or some place else' *Contes comoriens*, pp. 316–17. The porters intervene at the point where a folktale hero encounters a donor. By getting him adopted, their action redirects his future more effectively than any magic object a donor might provide him. Motif T615, Supernatural growth.

105 *Contes comoriens*, pp. 316–23. Motif S22.1.1, Adopted son plots death of parents, usurps the throne.

106 *Contes comoriens*, pp. 6–7.

107 ATU950, Rhampsinitos, might even be of African origin, '[d]ocumented in the 5th century B.C.E. by Eugammon of Cyrene in northern Africa' (Uther *Types*, p. 589). William Hansen discusses its history and variant

forms, provides labels for the components, and calls the hero a 'charming sociopath': *Ariadne's Thread: A Guide to International Tales Found in Classical Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 363–71).

108 *Contes comoriens*, p. 76, n. 5.

109 'Serious imitation', Gérard Genette's term from literary study, denotes most folktale performances, such as the ones from Allibert's schoolboys. Most informants, making honest attempts to pass to the interviewer a narrative the informant has heard, are producing a serious imitation. In Genette's terms, the Hakoa narrator's additions produce a serious transformation (*Palimpsests*, pp. 24–30).

110 Paulme, *La Statue*, p. 95.

111 In African and Malagasy versions, trickster is holding up a rock. Examples: Gerhard Lindblom, *Kamba Folklore, with Linguistic, Ethnographical and Comparative Notes* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1928–1935), p. 29; L[ars] Dahle and John Sims, *Anganon'ny Ntaolo* (Antananarivo: Trano Printy Loterana, 1971), pp. 49–50. African versions use animal characters, the Malagasy one uses the twin tricksters Ikotofetsy and Imahaka. Motif K1251, Holding up the rock.

112 Motifs: K130, Other worthless animals sold; H950, Task evaded by subterfuge; D1524, Magic object enables person to cross water.

113 *Bricolage* is the term promulgated by Claude Lévi-Strauss for 'the formation of fresh cultural forms from the ready-to-hand debris of old ones' Richard Werbner, 'Afterword', in *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis*, ed. Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw (London: Routledge; 1994), p. 215. In poor countries *bricolage* often remodels imported commercial things, in effect making them traditional. What Lévi-Strauss sees as a habit of the universal mind has long been the practice in creole societies annexing the global or the foreign. Anyone can hear the result by calling up Mauritian or Jamaican music on YouTube. If a world language like English or French, translating island folklore, perpetuates colonial domination, then a creole language and the artistic use of it become instruments of counterhegemony. Through mediation and negotiation the global becomes local.

114 *Contes comoriens*, pp. 16–79. Motifs: I. J1113, Clever boy; K346, Thief trusted to guard goods; D1413, Magic object holds person fast; K730, Victim trapped; K365, Theft by confederate; N511.1, Treasure buried by men; K407.1, Thief has his companion cut off his head so that he may escape detection; J1142.4, Thief's corpse carried through street to see who will

weep for him; cf. K1875, Deception by sham blood; E752.10.1, Corpse must be watched carefully before burial; K355, Trickster pollutes house so that he is left in possession.

II. L101, Unpromising hero; K842, Dupe persuaded to take prisoner's place in sack; K1970, Sham miracles; K1919, Marital impostors, miscellaneous; L11, Lowly hero marries princess.

III. K1251, = ATU1530, Holding up the rock, ATU1737, The clergyman in the sack to heaven; K130, Sale of worthless animals; K1839, Other deceptions by disguise; K347, Cozening; K2030, Double dealers.

IV. T230, Faithlessness in marriage; Q241, Adultery punished; J494, Death and revenge preferred to life; P214.1, Wife commits suicide at husband's death.

115 Wes D. Gehring, *Handbook of American Film Genres* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), p. 66.

116 *Human Spirits*, p. 25.

117 Personal communication.