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A Socio-Historical and Contextual Analysis of Popular Musical Performance Among the Swahili of Mombasa, Kenya

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Abstract

This paper discusses a genre of Swahili popular music—taarab—by focusing on its historical development, context of performance, and relation to gender and religion. Using case studies and interviews with musicians and audience members at taarab performances, I analyze the structure and organization of taarab music performance. These performances reveal that the gender divide assumed by many scholars is in fact far from characteristic of Swahili musical performance. By examining the context and meanings of producing and consuming taarab, I demonstrate that, rather than occupying two distinct worlds of men and women, Swahili musical practices engender both competitive and complementary realities, thereby fostering a complexity that would be easily missed if the meanings of gendered interaction and behavior were to be taken at face value. Consequently, I highlight how the analysis of popular musical expression can contribute to an understanding of socio-cultural practices, reproduction and change of cultural norms, and local units of self-assessment among the Swahili in particular and other communities in general.

Introduction

Taarab is the Swahili equivalent of the Arabic word *tarab*, which implies the concept(s) of entertainment, enchantment, emotion-filled movement, and delight (Anthony 1983; Askew 1992; Topp 1992). As used among the Swahili, taarab denotes the performance and singing of *mashairi* (poems) with instrumental accompaniment (Campbell 1983; Knappert 1979) and also carries the connotations of entertainment and expression of emotions. The Swahili are an African people of mixed descent living along the East African coast as well as in the interior. They are mainly Muslim and lead an urban lifestyle characterized by a mercantile economy. With a language that has become world-known, the Swahili have an elaborate cultural practice that draws from Arab, African, Indian, and European cultures. Taarab music is indeed a reflection of this complexity with its characteristics reflecting influences from Arabia, Africa, India, Europe, and the Americas. However, when one speaks of Swahili music, there is no doubt that taarab is a major part of that music.

Although taarab is often performed at Swahili weddings, the performance itself has very little to do with the bride and groom at the specific wedding. Rather, taarab performance is a social space in which local values, concerns, and relations are mobilized, discussed, evaluated, and reconfigured. Thus, apart from a song or two advising the groom and bride on how to live harmoniously in marriage, most taarab

songs performed at a wedding will touch on different topics of life relevant to social contexts outside of the wedding. Some songs will touch on the concerns of humans in general, while other songs will touch on specific social issues of the local community. For instance, in one performance, one can hear a song about the human quest for control over the earth, a song about the beauty of Swahili women, a song about a changed political economy, or a song about the pain of losing a loved one. Whatever theme each taarab song represents, however, no performance is identical to another. At each performance, a song's meaning expands or changes depending on the images it expresses or the inferences the audience members may make from it. Given the use of metaphor and other symbolic tropes in song texts, a single taarab song may elicit numerous meanings and interpretations.

Taarab is unique among Swahili musical genres in that it is the only genre in which men and women now perform music together in public. In the words of Sheikh Ahmed Nabhany,¹ "these changes [of men and women performing together] come due to contexts. You will find women teaming up with men to sing but this is not Swahili culture or tradition. Indeed, it is against the teachings of Islam. These performers know it but still ignore it."² Sitara Bute, one of the prominent women taarab musicians in Mombasa, shared the same sentiments raised by Nabhany about Islam and gendered practices but saw the practice as part of a process of development. Thus in answer to the same question that I had

posed to Nabhany on women and men performing together, she stated, "When we look at women's participation in singing, we find that if we strictly follow customs or religious practice, a woman is not allowed to sing. But now due to certain advancements or changes in social relations, we can now sing. In the past men did not mix with women publicly as they do nowadays. These days we see that just as the man has a job in the office so does the woman. So you see there are changes and I expect that they will continue in the days to come."³

Many Swahili people in the community have noted the social changes that Sitara mentions. In June 1997, I talked to one of the caretakers at the Muslim Women's Institute at the Islamic Center in Mombasa about the use of their large hall for social events. She mentioned that the hall is often hired out to individual families who use it for wedding receptions instead of holding them in the makeshift sheds made of canvas that are quite common in Mombasa. One of the reasons that she gave for many families choosing the hall (besides the fact that they could afford it) was that it enabled them to monitor who would come into the function. When asked if there were taarab performances that occurred in the hall, Sitara said that they do not allow taarab bands to come into the hall because they include both men and women performing together, which was contrary to what the center was promoting. Instead, the Institute may invite a female taarab musician who will lip-synch to her recorded music played on a cassette player. This is one

way of trying to deal with the now common practice at Swahili performances in which men and women participate.

For Zuhura Swaleh, another prominent taarab musician based in Mombasa, these social changes are directly linked to taarab music, since she feels that “taarab lyrics give advice and encouragement to do things. They encourage [women] to believe that they can do that which another person can do.”⁴ To see this music genre in these terms is to associate expressive culture with the social change that competes with the established tradition of expecting gender separation at Swahili weddings. Throughout my fieldwork I gathered information from men and women who, although agreeing that taarab performance was going against the expected gender practice, saw it as indicative of the changes the society was undergoing. To many, these changes were unstoppable, although some felt that there was a need for things to go back to the “good old days.” I thus saw a dichotomy between culture as stated and culture as practiced. In this paper I try to foreground the importance of taarab not only as a forum wherein social practices are crafted, represented, and challenged but also as a way of interrogating the social processes of using music as an arena to understand a community’s cultural and historical realities.

The Structure and Organization of Taarab

Performance of poetry among the

Swahili has a long history dating as far back as the sixteenth century when written historical records for Swahili literary practices first appear (Allen 1981). That poetry is an important component of Swahili cultural identity and practices has been well documented (e.g., Allen 1981; Anthony 1983; Harries 1962; Knappert 1972, 1977; Mulokozi 1982; Mazrui and Shariff 1994; Shariff 1983). Indeed, much of Swahili’s expressive culture is centered on this poetry. The Swahili divide their poetry into three categories- the *shairi* (a poem that has four lines in each verse), the *utenzi* (a long poem of three or four lines in each verse and mainly composed as an epic) and the *wimbo* (a three-versed poem composed to be sung).

However, these categories are not entirely distinct, as there are many overlaps between categories; indeed, if we heed the thoughts of earlier Swahili scholars, then we agree that Swahili poetry is composed to be sung (Abedi 1965; Harries 1962), and hence place all Swahili poetry under the *wimbo* genre. It is only after we include notions of the content of poems, where they are performed, and their length, that we are able to group them into various categories. Nevertheless, taarab technically falls under the third category of *wimbo*, with three lines in each verse and a fourth one that is usually the refrain (locally referred to as *kiitikio*, *kipokeo*, or *kibwagizo*). The composition of taarab texts adheres to the tradition of rhyme and meter that is followed in other forms of Swahili poetry. Here is an example of a taarab song that fol-

lows rhyme and meter that is present in much of Swahili poetry. The first verse of the song, “Singetema” by Zuhura Swaleh is as follows:

*Takusema takusema tasema
sitonyamaza*

*Na lawama na lawama waja
mnganilemeza*

*Singetema singetema yamenishinda
kumiza*

The first line of this verse can be divided into 16 syllables of two hemistiches of 8 syllables each:

1. *Ta ku se ma ta ku se ma* 2. *ta se ma si to nya ma za*

Also note that all the end syllables in each hemistich have a rhyming sound (**ma** in the first and **za** in the last).

When sung, taarab may fit into the larger realm of African music through its performance and musical style despite the aforementioned influences from other cultures. The singing of many taarab songs does, however, betray its Arabic influence. Thus the majority of taarab singers have what Lomax calls “the bardic style of the orient” (1961, 443). Their voices oscillate between the spectrum of rubato, melisma, and tremulo with a clear emphasis on nasal singing, which is also present in Indian songs.

Overall, the four major qualities cited in definitions of African music can be equally useful in analyzing taarab. These are: a) call and response, b) percussiveness, c) syllabic singing, and d) short musical units that are repeated in small variations (Chernoff 1979; DjeDje and Carter 1989; Merriam 1982). For

purposes of consistency let us use the same song by Zuhura Swaleh to exemplify the performed structures of taarab. The song “Singetema” represents the style of taarab that incorporates local rhythmic patterns often used in chakacha and msondo performances:⁵

*Takusema takusema tasema
sitonyamaza*

I will talk about you I can't keep quiet

*Na lawama na lawama waja
mnganilemeza*

Even if people castigate me

*Singetema singetema ya-menishinda
kumiza*

I would not have talked, I can't take it any more

Refrain:

*Mtu lake ni kusema nami tasema
sitonyamaza*

A person ought to speak up and thus I won't keep quiet

*Singetema singetema kweli
yamenishinda kumiza*

I wouldn't have spoken, I can't take it any more

*Nakusema nakusema nasema japo
sitaki*

I'll talk about you though I don't want to

*Penye wema penye wema wajua
hapafitiki*

Good deeds can't be concealed

*Singetema singetema kumiza
hayamiziki*

I wouldn't have talked, I can't take it anymore

*La kutengwa la kutengwa hutengwa
lisofwatika*

Bad things have to be shunned

Lingapangwa wenye kupanga huchoka
Even if one tried to mend it they
would be tired

*Nimeshindwa nimeshindwa kumiza
yasomizika*

I am unable to take it any more

*Nimekoma nimekoma umechoka moyo
wangu*

I have had it, my heart is tired

*Nakusema nakusema ingawa sio dawa
yangu*

I will talk about you though it's not
my style

*Nayasema nayasema heri apendayo
Mungu*

I talk in God's will

When we look at the four key points for analyzing African music mentioned above, we find that this song "Singetema" fits and illustrates them

very well. First, the vocal part of the song includes a soloist and a chorus who both exemplify the call and response quality with the soloist being the lead voice as the chorus responds to his/her text. Second, the instrumental accompaniment includes the harmonium, *tabla*, bongos, an electric guitar, a *chapuo* drum, and a tambourine, thus forming the major percussive ensemble. Third, when this poem is sung, the singer pronounces the syllables as singular short sounds that cannot be extended as one would in English words. Thus the singer will sing the first word in the first verse as follows: *si nge te ma* as opposed to *siiingeeehhteehmaaah*, which would be possible in English words. Poetically, the song is divided into four stanzas of three lines each and a chorus that is repeated after every stanza. And fourth, the instrumentalists play a basic tune that they repeat over every stanza but with slight variations. All these parts for the song "Singetema" can be illustrated as follows:

Structure of "Singetema" by Zuhura Swaleh												
Instrumentation	34			25			25			25		
Vocal		33/a	12/b		34/a	12/b		34/a	12/b		34/a	20/b
Texts		vs.1	Ref.		vs.2	Ref.		vs.3	Ref.		vs.4	Ref.
Melodic phrase	A	A'	A	A	A'	A	A	A'	A	A	A'	A

Note: Numbers denote time in seconds; **a** denotes vocal part sung by soloist and **b** the choral part; **vs.** denotes a verse in the poem; **Ref.** denotes the responsorial refrain; **A** is the melodic phrase; and **A'** is the second melodic phrase.

Where **A** is the melody played by the harmonium which in this song marks the beginning of the song and the beginning of each subsequent stanza, **a** denotes the vocal part that constitutes the singing of a single stanza by the soloist, and **b** the responsorial chorus sung after the instrumentation and soloist sections. Throughout the song, there is a drum pattern with a polyrhythmic texture of triples and duples. The first drum pattern, performed on a tabla, plays the triple, while the second, performed on a *dumbak*, plays the duple. A tambourine completes the rhythm with a triple pattern that also acts as the pulse marker.

In the entire song, the harmonium not only plays the accompanying melody along with the soloist, but also the response that comes after the soloist, just before the chorus joins in the repeated response. This responsorial chorus is sung in unison with the soloist and the other members of the group and is repeated after every stanza. Each stanza in the song carries a meaningful idea. This is divided into lines that are broken into two hemistiches of eight syllables whose divisions are repeated end sounds (e.g., in the first line **ma** and **za** are the end syllables of the two hemistiches respectively and are repeated in the whole stanza and the choral part). The choral part is distinct in the number of syllables it carries. Certain speculative conclusions can be made to account for this variation in length between the chorus and the other lines in the stanza. First, the chorus cannot be strictly considered part of the technical composition of the whole poem. The poem falls under the

wimbo genre that, as a rule, comprises three lines in a stanza. Therefore, the chorus lines need not conform strictly to the rules governing the other lines. Secondly, since the chorus marks the end of one sung part before the accompanying harmonium plays the basic theme, it is lengthened to prepare for change into the next stanza.

The melodic phrase, which is repeated in the different parts of the song, expresses the key idea of the line and follows a similar pattern of subsequent lines and stanzas. Musically speaking, the first part of the song that is performed by the harmonium **A** can be represented as follows:

A
 1 2 1 2 3 3 3 4

1, 2, 3, and 4 represent distinct melodic sections in this musical part. 4 marks a descent in the melody that ushers in the next part of the song, which is the section sung by the soloist. In this part the melody, which is represented by **A'**, follows a pattern in which the harmonium plays along with the soloist's sung part, repeating the same melody (as that of the soloist) after each line in each verse, except in the last caesura of the second line in which the melody of the first line is repeated. Marking each caesura off with a letter, I represent this second melodic phrase (**A'**) as follows:

Takusema takusema [1]
tasema sitonyamaza [1]

Na lawama na lawama [2]
waja mnganilemeza [1]

Singetema singetema [1]
yamenishinda kumiza [1]

Since the middle line has a low pitch compared to the other two, the assumption here is that the adoption of 1 instead of 2 in the repeated part of the second line is intended to create a smooth blend between this second line and the subsequent third, hence ensuring a harmonious melody throughout the song. Note that the letters of illustration correspond with those issued in illustrating the first melodic phrase performed by the harmonium. Both these melodies are similar to each other.

One general characteristic of taarab songs is that their melodic structure is dictated by the poetic construction of the text as well as by the style of taarab that the musician wishes to follow. In the example above, the chorus or refrain is responsorial and is performed in unison by the soloist, other back-up singers, and the harmonium, and it is repeated after each stanza. The song begins with a drum pattern followed by the harmonium that plays the choral melody which is then followed by the soloist. Some structural differences may be noted between different bands. Taarab bands that make claims to an Arab musical identity will emphasize stringed instruments such as the oud and the violin, over percussive instruments such as drums and tambourines. Bands that tend more towards local African musical styles emphasize per-

cussive instruments over string instruments.

Despite these specific differences, most, if not all of the taarab songs that I have listened to include an electric keyboard or harmonium, a set of drums, and a tambourine as the basic instrumental accompaniment. The keyboard plays a major role in not only providing the song's melody but also in acting as an accompanying "voice" by repeating the soloist's sung part or the refrain. Further, the keyboard, playing this role of another "voice," often indicates the end of one song and the introduction of another, especially at live performances where a single song may incorporate parts of more than three songs. One notable characteristic of chakacha music is the repetition of short phrases which are sung in a call and response pattern where the leader sings a single line to which the audience responds with another line or two. Whenever a taarab band chooses to incorporate chakacha melodies in its performance repertoire, the keyboard acts as the leader by "singing" the first line of a well-known song to which the audience members respond with the appropriate lines. Indeed, according to Swahili oral history on the development of taarab music in Kenya, foreign instruments were adopted into the local music ensembles due to these instruments' ability to "sing" with the musicians.⁶

Taarab Music in Kenya

In Kenya, the popularity of taarab is

widespread both in urban centers, where the sale of audiotapes thrives (Campbell 1974, 38) and in rural areas, where the music is performed at weddings and other social functions. Furthermore, there are weekly programs devoted to taarab music on Kenyan radio and television. Weddings, however, remain the most prominent arena for the performance of taarab in Kenya.

For a long time now, taarab has seemingly remained a musical style associated with Swahili people and has often shown little following among communities other than the Swahili.⁷ In 1993, Malika Mohammed's taarab performance for three consecutive sessions in fully packed auditoriums to Nairobi residents suggested that this seeming lack of a following in other Kenyan communities (outside of the Swahili area) may be attributed to the poor distribution and marketing of the music rather than its intrinsic value and popular appeal. Mombasa Swahili taarab groups mostly record and distribute their music through Mbwana Radio Service in Old Town, Mombasa. This distribution network limits their market to Mombasa residents and others who know about the Mbwana Radio Service. The limited distribution network is evident in Kenya today given the fact that there are no taarab records in the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation's music library in Nairobi that are dated beyond the mid-1980s, when major record labels stopped cutting Swahili songs on vinyl records (except for Malika, who ventured outside of Mbwana Radio Service and recorded with a popular music band called

Them Mushrooms in Nairobi in 1993). The recording of music on audiotapes rather than vinyl records is important because Kenyan radio stations, like many other radio stations in East Africa, only play music recorded on vinyl records or compact discs, not on audiotapes. Therefore, music that is recorded on audiotapes is never available to its listeners via radio, leading to a decline in the playing of taarab music (especially new releases) on radio.

Besides the marketing problem that makes it unavailable to larger audiences, much of taarab's text is composed in Kiswahili that draws from archaic vocabulary and often employs metaphors to disguise and hide meanings (Askew 1997, 7). For one to clearly understand the meanings of these texts, one needs to be well acquainted not only with the language but also with the basic modalities for deciphering obscure underlying meanings. Some of my friends and colleagues in Kenya were curious to know how I was able to understand the texts in taarab songs, which they often found inaccessible. However, not all taarab songs elicit such complexity in meaning and thus some songs have become national hits in Kenya given their easily understandable message and good marketing strategies.

Just as taarab music seems to have been neglected by music promoters in Kenya as part of the national repertoire of local music, it is only recently that this music has caught the interest of researchers. When I started working on popular music in my graduate work at

Kenyatta University in Nairobi in the late 1980s I had very little to fall back on in terms of literature on popular music. Indeed, I had to try and fit popular music research into a literary course of study, something that had not been done before in the department of Kiswahili and African Languages in which I was enrolled. Furthermore, research carried out in the music departments in the public universities in Kenya was mostly centered on 'traditional' music.⁸ As we shall see in the next section, this neglect of popular music was a reflection of the development of music research in much of Western scholarship, which in turn influenced scholars in Kenya, who had received that same Western training.

Taarab within a Context of Swahili Music Ethnography

In the past decade, ethnomusicological research among the Swahili of the east African coast has progressed from an analysis of musical practice as a distinct social phenomenon (Campbell 1983) and as a historical performance (Franken 1986) to a process of localization through women's participation (Topp 1992), as a language of communication (King'ei 1992), as political history (Fair 1996, 1997), and as a producer of national culture (Askew 1997). This progress has often reflected advances in ethnomusicology, anthropology, and other disciplines, which increasingly utilize performance as an important analytical device. The absence of an analysis of taarab music in the works of both Campbell and Franken reflects

the primary concerns of ethnomusicology and anthropology of music in the late 1970s and early 1980s when both these authors were in graduate school. At that time, much ethnomusicological research was geared towards "traditional" and "folk" music rather than popular music wherein taarab fits.

Yet Swahili musical practices, like Swahili cultural identity, are a reflection of the complexity that surrounds their social and cultural activities and the meanings they carry. Looking for "traditional" music genres leads to two challenges. The first lies in the attempt to retrieve "traditional" music among a community whose multicultural identity would not elicit a musical tradition devoid of influence from other cultures.⁹ In such a situation one would have to depend on informants' memory or would have to study performances that do not reflect that traditional nature of music in its strict sense. Secondly, an attempt to categorize musical practice into independent entities is an exercise that is futile in a multicultural society such as the Swahili. Embodying African, Arabic, Indian, and Western styles of singing and composition, Swahili musical styles today cannot fit into bounded categories of definition. Rather, they reflect the contextuality, fluidity, and transformations that have become the defining factor of Swahili cultural activities and processes.

I discuss taarab's musical performance here bearing in mind that it has borrowed heavily from other local musical genres, as has been well dis-

cussed by other scholars (e.g., Campbell 1976, 1983; and Franken 1986). In its performance, taarab incorporates styles associated with other musical genres of the Swahili such as *vugo*, *msondo*, and *chakacha*. *Vugo* is a musical genre that is centered around the procession that moves from a groom's home to the bride's to present the *mahari* (dowry). The musical performance entails the hitting of buffalo horns (locally known as *vugo*, hence the title of the genre) with sticks in triple rhythms that compliment the duples played by the accompanying drummers. Short lines of folk songs mixed with excerpts from taarab songs are repeatedly sung in these processions (Franken 1986, 149).

Like *vugo*, *msondo* derives its name from a local drum that is used in this genre. Mainly in Mombasa and Pemba both men and women perform it as part of wedding celebrations. Participants will form a semi-circle facing the drummers and leave space between them for dancers. Short musical lines are sung repeatedly as the women in the audience often dance the popular hip gyration dance associated both with this genre and with *chakacha*. The drummers perform triple rhythms that have a pattern of twelve pulses. *Chakacha* is second to taarab in popularity within the realm of Swahili music. It is performed during the all-night session that marks the climax of a Swahili wedding. Many Swahili families nowadays invite taarab bands to perform at these all-night sessions instead of having *chakacha*. In *chakacha*, the *msondo* drum is one of the key in-

struments that is used and is accompanied by other instruments such as the cone-shaped *vumi* drum, a two-sided drum that resembles an hour-glass called *chapuo*, a trumpet, and brass plates. Interlocking rhythms of duples and triples constitute the performance of *chakacha*. Fast beat rhymes with the intense hip gyration dance movements are the notable characteristics of this performance. These genres are rarely performed in isolation, as much of their rhythms are incorporated in taarab. During my field research in Mombasa, many of the musicians with whom I spoke agreed that taarab combined different rhythmic and melodic structures from these Swahili musical genres as well as from other musical traditions from other continents such as Latin American, Indian, and Arabic styles.

Taarab Music in Historical Perspective

Taarab developed in East Africa out of the local musical styles of people living along the Swahili Coast as well as the musical styles of other people from cultures in Asia, Europe, and America, with whom the Swahili interacted. Even in cases where very little cultural influence was visible between the Swahili and members of these other cultures, their musical styles found their way into taarab. Thus, despite the absence of close cultural contact between Indian populations and the Swahili, for instance, major Indian cultural influences are evident in taarab and in other forms of Swahili popular

culture. Indian films, which form a strong basis for the tunes in some taarab songs, are a major attraction in Mombasa. Writing about this phenomenon, Janet Topp rightfully says, “some taarab musicians copy the melodies and rhythms of Indian *ghazal*-like film songs. This Indian-style taarab is most prevalent in Mombasa, where the two main exponents are Juma Bhalo and Maulidi Juma” (1992, 288).

The disadvantage of such a practice, as some Swahili informants explained, is that the popularity of the songs only lasts as long as the movie does. Indeed, Maulidi Juma was quick to tell me that he was working towards reducing the number of Indian tunes he included in his compositions, because he “needed to maintain [his] own style.”¹⁰ Another common practice I noted during my field research in Mombasa, is that some of the taarab musicians in Mombasa have taken to copying musical tunes and styles performed by prominent taarab groups in Tanzania. Some of these Mombasa musicians include Sitara Bute and her Diamond Star Group, Rukia Mohammed, and Mohammed Yusuf Tenge. Taarab styles associated with Tanzanian groups usually feature guitar rhythms and dance tunes that are common among Tanzanian dance bands (Askew 1997) rather than the usual organ or keyboard tunes associated with taarab in Mombasa and Zanzibar (Ntarangwi 1995, 1998).

Many scholars who have written on the history of taarab have said that it was first introduced to Zanzibar in 1870 by Sultan Barghash, who had invited a

troupe of Egyptian musicians to play at his court (Graham 1992; Saleh 1980; Topp 1992). At the time, Zanzibar was the center of a significant commercial empire, controlled by Omani Arab Sultans, which linked India, the Persian Gulf, Arabia, and East Africa with European and U.S. traders.

The story states that Barghash was so impressed with the Egyptian musicians that he decided to send Mohammed bin Ibrahim, a musician from Zanzibar, to Cairo to learn to play the *ganuni* (zither), one of the key taarab instruments. After accomplishing his mission, Mohammed returned to Barghash’s palace, where he became Barghash’s personal poet. Mohammed also taught a few of his friends how to play the *ganuni*, a skill that they later put to work when they teamed up to start the first taarab group, Nadi Ikhwani Safaa, which was formed in 1905 in Zanzibar (Topp 1992). Possibly, some of the members of the group that performed in the Sultan’s palace played with Nadi Ikhwani Safaa when performing at friends’ and relatives’ places (*ibid.*, 72). From Zanzibar, taarab is said to have spread to other parts of the East African coast, including Mombasa and Lamu. Over a long period of time, taarab music was gradually modeled to fit local musical styles and taste, hence explaining the often notable differences in taarab performance and production among various Swahili communities spread along the East African coast and its environs.

That taarab has often been defined as an importation of Arabic music from Egypt (see, for instance, Saleh 1980 and

Khatib 1987) follows from what Askew (1997) calls a “Zanzibar-centric” approach to Swahili culture, which seeks to locate all the “civilized” Swahili cultural phenomena to Zanzibar or its Arab settlers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In my discussion of taarab music I wish to show that taarab in Zanzibar is one among other styles of Swahili music in East Africa. Each style developed following the musical context of each area. Thus Tanga, Mombasa, Zanzibar, and Dar es Salaam have styles of taarab that reflect the specificity of their local musical contexts. For instance, Mombasa taarab clearly reflects the fast, rich rhythms of local *ngoma*¹¹ such as *chakacha* and *vugo* performed in and around Mombasa. Tanga taarab has a clear emphasis on guitar rhythms, following the *beni* (brass band) tradition of the area (see Ranger 1975 for a discussion of this music tradition); and Zanzibar taarab has a clear emphasis on Egyptian orchestra-style ensemble with more string instruments than percussion. Granted these regional differences, attributing the “origin” of taarab music to Zanzibar is erroneous. Indeed, taarab as a Swahili musical genre dates further back than mentioned in this historical account. A popular Swahili musical practice associated with the *kibangala* (a seven-stringed lute) was performed in Lamu for a long time prior to the beginning of taarab music in Zanzibar.¹² The *kibangala* was used in the performance of a music genre referred to as *kinanda* that also included drums and string instruments (specifically, two drums and a lute) as part of

its ensemble. Although this kind of music was regarded as provocative in the Muslim world, it was very popular among the local Lamu people. A picture taken around 1907 in Lamu, by a British photographer, shows women dancing to *kinanda* (Graebner 1991, 187) which Nabhany says was usually danced by men in pairs in front of an audience until they were very tired.¹³

One of Zanzibar’s earliest musicians and founding member of the first taarab group to perform at the turn of the century (Nadi Ikhwani Safaa), Shaib Abeid (1890-1974) remembered having been taught taarab songs in the Lamu style (Topp 1992, 73). Mohammed Kijumwa, a poet and performer from Lamu, started with performing the *kibangala*, which he carried with him to Zanzibar when he was invited by the then Sultan of Zanzibar to go to the island and train and lead an orchestra and dancers. A photograph taken in Zanzibar in 1907 shows Kijumwa playing the *kibangala* (Graebner 1991). Given these stories, it is doubtful that taarab started in Zanzibar; one can only speculate that the earlier historical account was in keeping with a “Zanzibar-centric” account of Swahili musical history. If anything, the term taarab used to designate a musical style does not enter the Swahili vocabulary until the 1930s, through the English-Swahili dictionaries (Graebner 1991, 181). This is the same time that Egyptian musicians such as Mohammed Abdi-Al-Wahhab and Umm Kulthum were quite popular and had influence on taarab. In short, a musical style whose current name only

enters into the musical scene in the last sixty years shows the possibility of different musical styles developing in different regions with different names. Thus the term taarab is only a recent reference to musical performances that existed before the late seventeenth century in which some scholars have placed the development of taarab music in East Africa. Kinanda or kibangala are some of the terms previously used to refer to musical performances that are now commonly referred to as taarab.

Taarab music may have been associated with interaction among different cultural groups, but the most influential mark it has created in East Africa is its ability to bring many women to the limelight in popular music. Indeed, most of the successful women musicians in East Africa in this century have been taarab musicians. For a society that not only discourages women from singing in public but also from mixing with men in public, to be successful in taarab music is quite an achievement for women. Much of taarab's history rests on women musicians. Siti binti Saad is one such musician whose involvement and contribution to the shaping of Swahili popular music is a well-known historical fact.

Taarab and Islam in Kenya: Are They Compatible?

One of the major defining factors of Swahili culture is Islam. In the absence of a tradition of adherence to Islam, the Swahili would no doubt be defined

quite differently. It is a truism that Islam is a way of life for those who practice. That notwithstanding, we find an interesting divide in perceptions about taarab between conservative Muslims and their liberal counterparts in Mombasa. The former are openly opposed to the performance or consumption of taarab by Muslims, while the latter will condone taarab as long as it does not interfere with their religious practices. In this latter case many of the people I talked to in Mombasa about this tension stated that only when taarab was instrumental in moving people away from their concentration upon Allah, especially during Ramadan and prayer time, was it considered negative. When I asked Amina Faki, a radio program producer with Kenya Broadcasting Corporation's Swahili Service, to tell me something about taarab, she said she had nothing to say about it. She gave me the analogy of asking a Muslim to talk about alcohol—it would all be negative. She conceded that she dislikes taarab because it is not in keeping with religion. I consider these to be sentiments that represent those of conservative Muslims in Mombasa. Liberal Muslims, on the other hand, often see nothing wrong with taarab music. Again one must look at culture as stated and culture as practiced to understand the tension that may ensue between groups against and for taarab music. These views can best be understood when juxtaposed with the general views expressed about music in Muslim communities. Citing Lois Ibsen al Faruqi's delineation of the hierarchy of perfor-

mance genres in Muslim societies, Marjorie Franken says the following about music and religion in Muslim societies:

Some forms of [music] are considered halal, that is, legitimate and even beneficial, but there are also forms of music that are haram [polluted] and these are to be avoided. Muslim law, scholarship, and popular consensus all agree that some musical forms are acceptable without question, but below these come forms which are permitted, but not necessarily beneficial. At another level below this type of music is an unnamed category that represents a “gray area” where individuals are allowed to make their own judgments. Finally come the haram categories of music at the very bottom of the hierarchy, where the bad context(s) and associations at this kind of music are positively harmful (Franken 1991, 164).

From this hierarchy we have ten examples of performance genres that I will list here as given by Franken:

- a) Qur’anic chant (*qira’sh*)
- b) Religious chants (*adhan, tahlil/talbiyyah, takbirat madih, tasbith, and tahmid*)
- c) Chanted poetry with noble themes (*shi’r*)
- d) Family/celebration music (lullabies, women’s songs, wedding songs, etc.)
- e) “Occupational” music (caravan

chants, shepherd’s tunes, work songs, etc.)

f) Military music (*tabl khanah*)g) Vocal/instrumental improvisations (*layali, avaz, taqasin, istikhbar, etc.*)

h) Serious metered songs (*dawr, muwashshah, tasnif, etc.*) and instrumental music (*bashraf, da’irah, sama’i, dulab, etc.*)

i) Music related to pre-Islamic or non-Islamic origins

j) Sensuous music associated with unacceptable contexts

From this list of performance genres we can place taarab music in different levels because it does not fit in any one restrictive category. As I have shown, taarab incorporates many styles from multiple cultural contexts and would thus partly be placed in categories d), g), h), i), or j), but to categorize it as either halal or haram depends on the perception of the person involved. This is why there are differing views on the relationship that taarab has with Muslim culture among many Swahili people in Mombasa. For those who hold with conservative Islamic ideology (like Amina Faki), there is hardly any relationship between taarab and religion. For one, taarab includes the playing of drums (ngoma) and other percussive instruments that are usually associated with evil spirits. Again, some of the lyrics found in taarab are sensuous and hence likely to make people have undesirable thoughts.

Thus instead of people concentrating on God, taarab lures them to think of things that are not godly.

Sometimes, however, taarab may serve as a precursor to a religious function, as was the case on January 10, 1997, when Sitara Bute was entertaining Muslims in Majengo-Msaji in Mombasa to usher in the holy month of Ramadan. This performance drew opposition from conservative Muslims. About twenty Muslim youths led by the local Imam, Sheikh Mohammed Idris, disrupted the performance amid shouts of “*takbir! takbir!* (God is great).” The youths, who had come from the nearby Sakina Mosque after *twareh* (special prayers before the beginning of Ramadan), had the music stopped, as the Imam grabbed the cordless microphone seeking to know why Muslims were enjoying music during the eve of the month of Ramadan. As the youth group got rowdy, threatening to lynch the participants if they did not stop, Sitara Bute abandoned the performance and ran off-stage. Later the next day, Sitara Bute was quoted as seeking to know the Muslim law that was used as the basis for stopping her musical performance. She said that they were all Muslims and that when the moon is sighted nobody is allowed any form of entertainment after midnight. But their performance was scheduled for the hours between 7 and 11 p.m. and thus was not contravening any law (*Sunday Nation*, 12 January 1997). According to strict rules stipulated by Islam, however, it does not matter what time the performance was scheduled to take place; the fact is that for Mus-

lims to perform taarab is undesirable. This intolerance of performance or consumption of taarab has led many Muslim leaders to continually campaign against the airing of taarab music on radio and television. Some of the people I talked to about this campaign stated that the erratic airing of taarab music on Kenyan television pointed to the success of this campaign. Others felt that it was due to a lack of interest in Swahili cultural practices that can be discerned in many of the national cultural programs. So far, three radio stations have weekly programs dedicated to taarab music that reach most of the country’s population.

A Description of Taarab Performance in Mombasa

As in many other Swahili communities, weddings in Mombasa provide the best stage for the performance of taarab. Due to financial constraints, many Swahili families are unable to have wedding celebrations that last more than two days. In the past, Swahili wedding celebrations would last up to seven days, and on each day there was a form of celebration that involved feeding and entertaining guests at the wedding home. It is thus common to find a taarab band hired to perform both for the afternoon session after the formal marriage ceremony at the mosque as well as at the all-night session (*kesha*) when the bride is to be shown to the crowds. The choice of a taarab band to be hired for these performances may reflect the host families’ musical taste (including their own cul-

tural identity), the fame of the band in the community at the time, or the band's affordability. Many informants I talked to agreed that when a host family hires an expensive taarab band, they are making a public statement about their social status.¹⁴ For example, a family that identifies itself with Arabic culture will have a taarab performance that not only concentrates on Arabic musical styles but also entails listening rather than dancing, especially if the guest list includes both men and women, whereas a family that identifies itself with African culture based on the various groups living in Mombasa will have an audience more given to dancing than listening. Whenever a taarab band is invited to perform at an individual family's home, the band members know in advance the cultural identity that the hiring family articulates and thus the band is ready to perform music that is appropriate for that particular context.

Afternoon sessions usually last about three hours, while night sessions last about eight hours and start around 10:00 p.m. Each band has a performance calendar in which the bandleader marks the days they are scheduled to perform each month. After practice sessions (usually held at the homes of bandleaders), the band members are reminded where and when to meet for the performance sessions. Transportation to and from the venue where the band is to perform is organized and paid for by the host family or their representative. If the band arranges for its own transportation, the costs incurred will be included in the

overall charge made to the host family for the entire performance.

When the band arrives at the venue of the performance the members are welcomed into the home by a person appointed as an usher for the day's celebrations. Usually, the band members, along with other guests and relatives, are served a meal of spiced rice mixed with beef (*pilau*). Children sit together on a mat spread under a shed made of jute sacks, while men and women sit separately and are served in large trays from which all eat. Young men and women are frequently the servers and older women cook the food. When everybody has eaten, the band members start to position themselves at their designated places at a special spot facing the host family's main house. If it is an all-night performance session the band is stationed adjacent to the bride's seat so that as people dance and listen to the music, they can see the bride clearly.

People, mostly women, trickle in and sit in a semi-circle next to the band with some space in between them and the band. This space is reserved for dancing. Soon the organist starts the day's performance with some testing of the instrument before following it with a short instrumental interlude, usually called *bashraf*. After the interlude, other members of the band take their positions and the band starts to play one of the songs on schedule. The lead singer, in consultation with the organist/keyboard player, decides what song to sing, although during the performance there are numerous requests made by members of the audience for specific songs. This perfor-

mance also gives the band an opportunity to introduce some of its new compositions as well as advertise other releases, which are usually available on audiocassettes at Mbwana Radio Service.

Whenever the singer wants to introduce a new song in the existing schedule, he/she notifies the other members by just mentioning the title. Many times the scheduled list of songs to be performed is changed when audience members make special requests for songs. Other times the singer and the instrumentalists will gauge the mood of the crowd and perform certain songs that they deem appropriate for that particular context. At the end of the day, a successful taarab performance is one that has been able to balance the choices of the band with the needs of the audience members. Thus, although the performance is for the celebration of a wedding, very little focus, if any, is projected onto the bride and groom. The taarab band has the mandate to entertain the audience, although at times some musicians may overstep the boundaries of that mandate.¹⁵ Most songs are composed from poems written by people not part of the taarab group. Thus each taarab group has a poet/composer who will write their poems and their names are hardly known to the public.

Compared to recorded songs available on audiocassettes, taarab songs at weddings are usually longer and often the band tends to play more dance rhythms—depending on the audience members' reaction to the music. At many of the taarab performances I ob-

served in Mombasa, whenever a song drew a large crowd of dancers, the musicians would elongate the parts of the songs to which the people were dancing. Such parts would include a 3-5 minute guitar and drum ensemble that is not included in the recorded version of the song. Thus a song at a live performance is usually longer (up to 10 minutes long) than one recorded in the studio (usually about 4 minutes long). There are two major reasons for this difference in song length. First, at the live performance, the taarab band's performance is centered on the musical interaction it has with the audience members; thus, a song has longer instrumental sections that the audience dances to compared to the studio recordings. Second, in the studio, where most Mombasa taarab bands record their music, the instruments and studio equipment are owned and controlled by the studio owner. This allows very little room, if any, for musicians to influence the length of a recording. Furthermore, the musicians only use the recording studio to make recordings and not for rehearsals. Some musicians own instruments that they may use at live performances but not during studio recordings where the studio equipment prevails. As mentioned above, at live performances some taarab songs combine melodies from other genres such as chakacha and msondo. Music from these other genres is usually recorded and sold as distinct, which further shows the difference between live performances and studio recordings.

Live performances also feature

songs by other local or international bands, which may be special requests from members of the audience.¹⁶ When such a song is performed, the audience members sing in unison with the band singers. Sometimes, the performance of another band's song may include just portions of the original composition with the rest of the song being on-the-spot innovations to blend with that specific context. Thus as the music tempo picks up, the instrumentalists may insert other local song melodies to the delight of the audience members. Occasionally, a member of the audience will dance towards the band and give money to one of the performers and then dance back to her original spot. This act of tipping is important in any taarab performance for a number of reasons: first, it is one way that the band can make some extra money; second, it shows that the person tipping likes the lyrics sung by the musician s/he tips; and, third, it is a way of sending a message to another person in the audience. I discuss these reasons at length later in the paper.

The women in the audience are elaborately dressed in shiny dresses; some have their heads covered, while others do not. Some are in dresses of similar color or pattern. Others have wrapped themselves in *leso/kanga* with the words that usually are printed on these cloths conspicuously visible. These cloths are also used in dancing when tied around the hips to enhance the dancer's hip gyrations. Sometimes the dancing turns into a display of one's prowess in the style or mirrors the instructional dance performed by

young women of marriageable age in preparation for correct hip movement during coitus. During a hip-gyration dance the performer stands with her feet slightly apart, knees bent, arms bent at the elbows and held up close to the torso with the head pushed back slightly. Then she gyrates her hips whose movement is enhanced by the *leso* tied around them. She may do this while lowering her body closer to the ground and slowing down the tempo to the delight of the onlookers.

Men hardly dance at these performances, always staying in the periphery and watching as the women dance and get involved in the performance. At some of the performances I attended in Mombasa and the surrounding area I observed a few occasions in which a man would go up to the musicians and tip them while another would be dancing at the periphery. Many of the rhythms used during these taarab performances draw from women's dances and musical genres, which might explain partly the overwhelming majority of women dancers at such functions. Moreover, in Swahili communities in Mombasa the part of wedding celebrations that includes cooking, entertaining, and cleaning up is reserved for women and men often feel odd participating in these performances. Moreover, much of traditional Swahili music is divided along gender lines and thus men and women have songs and performances specific to their gender. Taarab as a popular musical genre, however, does not clearly reflect this dichotomy. Yet due to the association taarab has with that part of a wedding

where women are mostly involved, dancing and participation is often seen as entirely dominated by women. Further, none of the dance rhythms in the taarab music performed at many weddings corresponds to songs associated with men, but rather clearly incorporates rhythms found in many women's musical performances. This may thus explain why women form the majority of audience members at taarab performances as well as being the prominent dancers.

After each performance, members of a taarab band count the money that they have accumulated through tips from the audience members and share it out according to each band's procedure. The larger amount paid to the band by the host family for the performance is shared later after the whole amount has been paid to the band. According to some of the musicians I interviewed, the money is shared equally with all the members after the band has paid for any hired equipment and other miscellaneous costs. Others said that the money is shared out according to positions in the band, where the owner or bandleader gets a larger share. I found that this arrangement entirely depends on the kind of relationship the band members have with each other. Some members may have standing fees that they charge for each performance while others share whatever remains after the band's costs of performance have been paid.

Given the monetary benefits that come with such a performance for a taarab band and especially since there are few families who can afford to hire

a taarab band, competition for invitations to perform at weddings is part of Mombasa's taarab culture. In many cases band members will accuse rival groups of trying to curtail their chances of getting invited to perform at weddings. Occasionally I heard of cases where some members of taarab bands would state that a member or members of another band had put a spell on them so that they would not perform at weddings. Individual musicians would also claim that a rival musician had been to the *mganga* (witch doctor) to bewitch the musician so that s/he could lose his/her voice or be unable to play his/her specific instrument. How then do so many bands in Mombasa conduct their business given this precarious context of operation? Let me now turn to the taarab groups in Mombasa and the relationships among them.

The Relationship Among Taarab Groups in Mombasa

One notable quality about taarab groups in Mombasa is that despite their large number, there are few musical instruments. This small number means that the few instruments there are serve all the Mombasa taarab bands. Some groups, such as Zein Musical Party, Mohammed Khamis Juma Bhalo, and Zuhura & Party, have their own instruments. The rest of the groups usually hire their instruments from Mbwana Radio Service, where they also make the recordings of their music that are sold at the same premises. At times members of these different groups team up and perform together, espe-

cially on foreign tours as has been the case in the past few years. During this period, Maulidi (of Maulidi & Party), Sitara (of Diamond Star), Zuhura (of Zuhura & Party) and Mohammed Adio Shigoo (of Maulidi & Party) have teamed up and made tours to Europe in 1992, 1994, and 1996 under the management of taarab promoter and researcher Wenner Graebner of Germany.

This teaming-up does not necessarily reflect an existing healthy working relationship among these groups since there is always a spirit of competition with outright animosity expressed in public through their songs. For instance, Sitara and Maulidi in some of their compositions have engaged in this kind of tension where they attack each other. The following songs, "Wembe wa kutu" by Sitara and "Nataka sema" by Maulidi are such examples (translations by author).

NATAKA SEMA (I WANT TO TALK) by MAULIDI

Refrain:

Today I want to talk

I want to talk

Today I want to talk

I want to talk today, my friends,

I have words to say, listen residents
About a wise person whose needs
are unending
S/he is inside a well but begs for a
mouthful of water

Surely this world is full of surprises
Do not blame me people I wish to
tell you
There are ten people sleeping in one
bed

The person is full of greed s/he
doesn't know what s/he is doing
That's why s/he is always blaming
for lack of the right thing
S/he has abandoned steak for 1/4
kilo of bone

When this happens there is an up-
roar
And two are running away
The one being chased is behind the
chaser ahead

There is a witch who is never repu-
table
For lack of mercy people are perish-
ing
When they are well the sick com-
plain

WEMBE WA KUTU (BLUNT RA-
ZOR BLADE) by SITARA

Let them talk about me I do not re-
ally care
I don't want anything from any one
and I don't copy their style
I have chosen a blunt one and that
is their blade

Refrain:

A pot sits on three stones I will cook
their tongues¹⁷
That blunt one I know their blade
On three stones I see their pot
They mix everything, concocting
their instigation
But whatever they wish will never
happen

Nasty words is their business
Ridicule and laughter is their char-
acter
What's bad to you is good to others

You see them searching in their
meetings
They talk and disrespect others
There is one God and ours is not
theirs

Maulidi's song (released after Sitara's), talks about Sitara, who was a member of his group until late 1994. He apparently regards her as greedy for leaving his group (which he compares to steak) to form her own group (which he calls 1/4 kilo of bone). Sitara, for her part, says that what Maulidi and his group do is talk about her and that she has a blunt blade for them (meaning they are so low they are not worth a sharp blade to be shaven or cut to size). This competition and the singing of songs that challenge other individuals or groups is in the Swahili tradition of expressive culture, but many taarab bands use these songs to express their rivalry. This rivalry is intense, at times leading to accusations of witchcraft and bad blood. In 1994, I attended a taarab performance in Mwatsafulu in Likoni (the hometown of New Star taarab group), Mombasa, where Maulidi & Party were performing. As the group started playing, there was general consensus among the musicians that their instruments were not producing the kind of music that the group normally performs. This was immediately attributed to witchcraft by the local band, New Star. Individual players and singers may also blame each other for any misfortune befalling their performance. For example, there was a rumor in Mombasa in 1996 that both Sitara Bute

and Malkia Rukia, who once performed with Maulidi & Party, put a spell on each other's voices and thus were not singing as well as before.¹⁸ Such allegations indicate the rivalry that exists among taarab groups and musicians.

When it comes to making recordings, many taarab musicians in Mombasa may ask the few well-known instrumentalists available to play the accompanying rhythms for them. This may mean that Mohammed Adio Shigoo, an organist, and Rajab Omar, a rhythm guitarist, may give instrumental accompaniment to Sitara and Diamond Star, Maulidi and Party, and Mohammed Yusuf Tenge. This sharing of instrumentalists may thus account for the consistent use of one particular person's name (especially the singer) to identify the musical group. Apart from New Star, Diamond Star, and Johar Orchestra, the rest of the groups are identified by the names of the main singers and who are usually the bandleaders. The name of the poet who composed the lyrics and those of the instrumentalists are never mentioned on the audiocassettes of their recorded music, which may also account for the common practice of singing songs done by other groups. It is my argument that this individualistic practice of identifying the group with a singer's name is influenced by commercialism, where the audiocassette, as well as the invitation to perform for a social function for a fee, are identified with a single person.

Taarab, Performance, Voice, and Social Commentary

During the performance of taarab music, members of the audience as well as the musicians themselves pay a lot of attention not only to the music and textual message but also to the context of the performance. Therefore, the way the music is performed (be it in a slow or fast tempo, for instance), the implicit interaction between singer and text, the interaction between musicians and audience members, and the interaction between audience members, are crucial in expressing the different meanings and interpretations the songs are given. By highlighting this performative notion of taarab, I extend the analysis of taarab performance beyond textual analysis so as to include that part of the performance that “communicates non-textual messages” (Askew 1997, 13). This is particularly important because at a single taarab performance multiple messages are often communicated through multiple media. As Askew puts it, “meaning [in a taarab performance] is located at the intersection of text, performance, embodied action (e.g., tipping audience members), and the intimacies of local knowledge . . .” (1997, 17).

When a singer performs the text of a taarab song, s/he is not confined to rendering a specific message because the symbolic and metaphorical nature of the text subsequently opens the song up to numerous meanings and interpretations. It is this nature of multiple meanings that makes taarab particularly popular and relevant in numer-

ous contexts because a single song can be used by many people to comment or reflect upon numerous social events. Thus while I agree with Kelly Askew that “texts and performance lose some layers of meaning when heard and viewed in isolation, at a distance from the community that provides performers, context, audience, and communal norms against which behavior is measured . . .” (1997, 18), I extend my argument to note that given the non-specific reference in taarab texts, the meanings given those texts are always emergent and relational. Therefore, it is not necessarily the local knowledge of who composed the song, why it was composed, when it was composed, and what the song is supposed to mean, that constitutes the richness of the meanings of its performance. It is the association between events in any community or household with the interpretations of the meanings carried by the song (independent of previous interpretations) that gives taarab songs their power and meaning. Thus an audience in Nairobi can interpret a taarab song sung and composed in Mombasa to fit that particular Nairobi context with no reference to any meanings associated with the song in Mombasa. I argue that it is the potential of Swahili taarab songs to be “read” and “heard” differently not only at different places (contexts) but also at different time periods, that makes Swahili songs such an important cultural repertoire. Malika’s song, “Vidonge,” had a large appeal to upcountry Kenyans to the extent that it numbered among the top ten songs in the country for two months in 1993.

In my opinion this is despite a lack of knowledge of the song's original context of composition or the specific nuances carried in the lyrics. The audience members at any taarab performance are thus able to continuously use the songs by manipulating them to fit their specific social contexts. For instance, for a song entitled "Chungu" by Zuhura, one can make multiple interpretations of the intended message. Here is an example of the first stanza in which Zuhura says:

To ask is not taboo please tell me
I have exhausted my knowledge I
do not know what to do
how does a pot without a crack leak?

The general message relayed in this stanza is that of a situation, a person, or object that is meant to be without fault, complete, and well guarded, but which is actually faulty. This song has been interpreted variably in Mombasa. There are interpretations that equate the pot with a woman who was secluded but who became pregnant out of wedlock; others equate it with a company/firm whose operations were meant to have been top secret yet many people knew about those operations; and others equate it with a highly respected politician who was rumored to have been involved in questionable business transactions. It is this boundless nature of the meanings that can be generated from a single song that makes taarab a crucial tool for social commentary. Even in situations where a song's composition is triggered by real life situations of which the community is aware, that initial meaning

competes with other meanings that are constantly generated from the same song. The essence of a taarab song is in what it "says" to a consumer rather than the meanings it retains from its original composition.

Indeed, many taarab songs do not make specific reference to people or events and thus are suitable for these multiple interpretations. In view of this multiplicity of interpretations, a taarab performance is therefore a "dialogic process between and among performers and audience members" (Askew 1997, 17). Through such a process, both men and women are able to reflexively and actively comment on and review their social interactions, expectations, aspirations, and practices (see, for instance, Abelmann 1996; Turino 1995; and Bruner 1984, for a discussion of how history, identity, and textual meanings are contested in everyday cultural interactions).

Besides the interpretation that is accorded the song text, other facets of the performance are crucial to a better understanding of it. For instance, even when the message does not specifically refer to a person or episode, the words in the text may beg for a particular meaning or interpretation, as seen in the following song entitled "Jana Nilala" ("Yesterday I Slept") by Sitara:

Yesterday I slept, dreamt of you, and
thought about you,
because your love torments me.
Don't walk provocatively, you torment me
Don't look at me provocatively, you
torment me

Many of the people in Mombasa whose opinion I sought regarding the possible interpretations of this song in Mombasa agreed that the song should have been sung by a man because the message is directed to a woman.¹⁹ Indeed, one of my informants mentioned that the song as sung by Sitara, a woman, suggested a lesbian relationship since “normally” a woman would not tell another woman she is walking or looking at her provocatively. This particular interpretation shows that in singing a taarab song there is a close relationship between the singer (voice) and the message of the song. The singer’s voice is thus not neutral but situated and gendered.²⁰ The singer’s voice represents a male or female perspective, which often directs the reading of the song. The voice also serves as an identity marker for a taarab group. In Mombasa out of about eleven taarab groups, eight use the name of the lead singer to identify their recorded music and the group’s name. Although there is a notable degree of consistency in the vocal style of Swahili taarab singing that emphasizes nasal singing, a singer’s voice is expected to reflect his/her gendered voice mode. Thus, for instance, some informants consistently stated that Mohammed Yusuf Tenge was not a good singer because of his use of a high pitched voice that these informants called a “female” voice (*sauti ya kike*). Such an observation clearly shows a knowledge of certain cultural stipulations of voice types suitable for men and women; whenever one does not follow his or her stipulated type, then one is deemed as

deviating from the norm.

On a performance level, voice acts both as a social medium of communication as well as a musical instrument, and plays an important role in constructing the meanings and interpretations of Swahili taarab songs. During a live performance, a taarab song’s message is heightened by the way that the singer uses her/his voice, such as in variation of pitch and tone. I noted for instance that while performing her song “Vidonge,” Malika used her voice craftily to enhance the meaning of the song. She would pause between syllables and words in the song to emphasize the meaning of the previous or subsequent line. In the third line of the song Malika states, “*jamani wivu mwaona mi silali peke yangu*” (you are jealous I do not sleep alone). She sang this line in a slightly higher pitch than that used in the rest of the verse. Such a pitch is one that resembles the phrasing of a question in a regular conversation, and was so used in order to emphasize the act of jealousy and to subsequently tell off those involved. She also occasionally repeated certain lines in the song to emphasize their meanings.

The singer often brings out the extra-linguistic meanings of the song by inserting non-linguistic sounds and nuances (cf. Erlmann 1996; Sugarman 1997; Turino 1995; Watermann 1990). The singer’s body language during the performance also contributes to the meaning of the song as s/he gestures with the hands, the entire body, or just the face. Thus performance is a communicative process that could not be

fully grasped from a textual analysis of the song.

Audience members also contribute to this meaning construction in the performance as they sing along, dance, request particular songs, or tip the performers.²¹ By tipping and dancing, audience members at taarab performances inject and display the various meanings attributed and attributable to each of the songs. Usually, an audience member will stand and either dance for a while and then proceed to tip the musician of her/his choice, or stand and go straight to tip the musician then return to one's spot. The most common practice is the former through which the audience members, especially women, display their clothes, jewelry, and hairstyles. Moreover, when a person stands to dance to a song or to tip a musician, that person is either showing their preference for that song, taking the opportunity to register her/his presence at the performance, or is identifying with the message entailed in the lyrics. In many instances all the above situations intersect.

Identifying with the lyrics of a taarab song and the subsequent relaying of its message to a person present in the audience is what makes taarab performance a rich metaphor for social commentary. Other members of the audience will often "read" this message, as this practice is one well-known way to make use of the common Swahili practice of indirect social confrontation. The singer becomes the voice of the listener stating what the latter wants relayed to another. The lis-

tener will make the intended message clear by repeating or singing loudly particular lines in the text or by throwing an accusing glance at the target person. For instance, if person **A** has a disagreement with person **B**, a taarab song with a message that corresponds to that disagreement may be used by **A** to express to **B** her feelings and opinion on that particular disagreement. If the disagreement were based on an action that could be interpreted as driven by jealousy, a song that castigates jealous people (*mahasidi*) would be appropriate for the above-mentioned communication. To relay this message expressed in the song, **A** will stand up, make sure that **B** sees her (either by turning and looking in **B**'s direction or by drawing attention by dancing), then proceed to tip the musician singing the corresponding lyrics. **A** may also sing along loudly some particular words in the song that castigate the actions of **B**. In this way, **A** is using the musician as a medium/mediator to communicate with **B**.

There are many songs whose messages directly castigate unbecoming social practices. Age is an important indicator of one's expected social practice among the Swahili, as it is among other communities in Africa. There are social rules that govern one's behavior in respect to one's age. For instance, since age comes with different responsibilities for both men and women in Swahili communities, whenever an individual behaves in a way deemed out of step with his/her age category, s/he is castigated. This is exactly what Zuhura's song entitled "Nyanya"

(grandmother) represents; it is a castigation of older women who are struggling to be young. In part, the song states:

You are cutting off your ear lobes
what have they done to you?²²
You want youth and it's not possible
You are cheating yourself Hassan's
mother

Your days are over yet you don't
seem to realize
You force yourself to be young
But you can't bring back your past

Zuhura performed this song at a wedding in Kisauni in February 1997 to a capacity crowd that included many women of all ages and a few men who as usual stood or sat behind the women who were seated in a semi-circle next to the band. On hearing the melody that marked the beginning of the song a group of young women seated together in the middle of the audience ululated and cheered in unison. As Zuhura sang the text of the song, these young women were singing along and waving their hands in the air, making it clear that they were in agreement with the message. Someone from the crowd shouted above the singing, "*Afadhali Zuhura uwaeleze, wamezidi!*" (Tell them Zuhura, they are too much!). One young woman got up and danced her way to Zuhura and danced around for a while before tipping her and dancing back to her spot amid cheers from her colleagues with whom she had sat. An older woman shouted from one corner, "*Hakuna moyo kongwe!*" (There is no old heart!) when Zuhura sang the

last stanza of the song that states:

Many girls of great worth can't get
partners
Forcing them to mess themselves up
Why can't you accept you are old?

As the song came to an end, the young women who were cheering requested for the song to be played again. Before Zuhura could decide whether to play it or another song, the hostess came and whispered something to her. Then Zuhura announced that the song was not aimed at every grandmother but rather to those who were unbecoming (*wenye vishindo*). It was evident that someone had complained to the hostess about the meaning of the song, and for the hostess to ensure that her wedding party was not marred by controversy she requested Zuhura to clarify the specific person(s) targeted by the song. This episode clearly shows how taarab songs can create immediate forums for social contest on practices and their meanings.

Besides the texts of songs that make reference to a social practice that is seen by some of the musicians and their fans as unbecoming, the melodic structure of a song may point to the nature of the song's meaning as well. Songs that castigate unbecoming social behavior are usually performed in fast beats with more emphasis on the drumming patterns of triples and duples that are played in interlocking patterns. This style is similar to that of "women's taarab" in Zanzibar (Topp 1992; Topp Fargion 1993). Here musical rhythms associated with women's songs and

performances are incorporated into taarab accompanied with texts that “use strong and often abusive language with the intention of hurting and degrading the subject in the eyes of the public” (Topp Fargion 1993, 118). In contrast, songs with messages about God or about a person’s lover, where sentiments of endearment are expressed, are performed in slow rhythms. Other scholars have shown how music structure and performance has been used to investigate social structure (Feld 1984) as well as to show distinct social identity (Turino 1995). In this way, therefore, we can see that one can draw certain conclusions about a society from an observation not only of the content of its music, but also of the structure of its music. Such an observation cannot, however, be made independent of other factors such as context, social meanings, and the processes of making music in that particular culture.

Conclusion

Ethnomusicologist Veit Erlmann states that “performance with its potential for ambiguous representation and expression, mediates between the transformative action of everyday consciousness and the socio-cultural form” (1996, 28). Swahili taarab music is performance that enables both men and women to express and represent the relationship between socio-cultural form and social practice by using it as an arena where the social is performed in order to analyze and reconstitute the cultural. Each participant at these performances is

positioned in such a way that whatever s/he does contributes to the creation of socio-cultural meaning of the relations that exist between performers. Thus, whereas the song lyrics may be referring to some ambiguous event, person, or trait, they are used as diagnostic of larger cultural structures within the society. I have thus shown through this paper that popular music is a useful tool in exploring and analyzing a community’s culture and history because music is considered an important window into a culture. Also by using music, I am taking up analytical tools used by the Swahili themselves, and have thus avoided objectifying Swahili culture.

Notes

¹ Sheikh Ahmed Nabhany is a well-known scholar of Swahili culture. He is also of the Nabhany lineage that ruled Lamu in the nineteenth century and whose most enduring social identity is an emphasis on religious scholarship.

² Sheikh Nabhany. Interview by author. Mombasa, March 12, 1992.

³ Sitara Bute. Interview by author. Mombasa, June 18, 1994.

⁴ Zuhura Swaleh. Interview by author. Mombasa, June 21, 1994.

⁵ Both Chakacha and Msondo are traditional musical performances of the African communities commonly referred to as Mijikenda who live in close contact with the Swahili of the Kenyan coast.

⁶ Sheikh Ahmed Nabhany. Interview by author. Mombasa, June 3, 1994.

⁷ In 1996 and 1997, for instance, two national music festivals were held in Nairobi at which representatives of the various musical genres in Kenya performed at national

stadia. Taarab music was conspicuously unrepresented despite Malika, a taarab musician, having won the coveted Kenyan Artist of the Year Award in 1993.

⁸ Other than Paul Kavyu's (1978) paper no other material known to me had attempted to present popular music as a research enterprise in Kenya.

⁹ I am using the concept of traditional music to refer to music that was deemed indigenous to people before any contact with other cultures of the world. See Nettl (1983) for a discussion of how ethnomusicological research tended to avoid popular music genres in non-western cultures in the last three decades. In the last ten years, there has emerged an interest in studies of popular performance under the rubric of "Cultural Studies" in England and the U.S.; hence many scholars have now started critically looking at popular music as cultural phenomena but have also intensified studies of music of the Western world (cf. Grossberg 1997a, 1997b; Grossberg et al. 1992; Hall and Gay 1996)

¹⁰ Maulidi Juma. Interview by author. Mombasa, June 10, 1994.

¹¹ The word *ngoma* in Kiswahili denotes multiple referents including a drum, a dance, or a performance. I use it in this particular context to refer to a musical performance.

¹² Sheikh Nabhany. Interview by author. Mombasa, June 3, 1994; also Graebner 1991. I am grateful to Agnes Brugger for translating Graebner's paper from German to English.

¹³ Sheikh Nabhany. Interview by author. Mombasa, June 3, 1994.

¹⁴ In 1997 Juma Bhalo's band was the most expensive to hire for an all night session. Bhalo usually charged between 40,000 and 50,000 Kshs. for such a performance while the other bands would usually charge between 30,000 and 40,000 Kshs. for the same

performance. This amount is equivalent to ten months' salary for an office clerk in Mombasa in a government office or seven months of food supplies for a family of four. In December of 1997, one U.S. dollar was equivalent to 63 Kshs.

¹⁵ At one *taarab* performance in Lamu in 1990, for instance, Juma Bhalo performed a song entitled *Gunia* (sack) that the audience members interpreted as a direct reference to the bride who was fat.

¹⁶ In 1994 during one performance in Mombasa by the Maulidi and Party group, Sitara Bute was keen to mention to me which songs were the band's recordings and which were not. She did this on noting that I was making recordings of the performance.

¹⁷ The locally used form of stove in Swahili and other African communities (who do not use the modern stove) consists of three stones arranged in a triangle where the cooking pot is placed.

¹⁸ This discourse on putting a spell on another musician is part of what is locally called *ushirikina*, which refers to a belief in evil and destructive powers. Such beliefs, although grounded in local African traditional beliefs, especially among the Mijikenda communities, also blend with Islamic beliefs in evil spirits or jinn, locally referred to as *majini*.

¹⁹ One should note that such an interpretation also makes reference to the cultural context of the speaker that reveals a socio-cultural training that associates sensuality with heterosexuality.

²⁰ Susan Hirsch (1990) discusses the concept of voice and its relation to gender and power among the Swahili of Mombasa and Malindi, Kenya. She states that both men and women use their voices as projected devices to reflect their socially expected gender identities. For instance, men's speech is characterized by short sentences

while women's speech is characterized by long narrative sentences.

²¹ See Topp (1992) and Askew (1997) for examples of these practices at taarab performances in other Swahili communities as well.

²² This cutting of one's ear lobes refers to the practice among many African groups to pierce ear lobes and insert objects to enlarge the hole. This practice has since ceased and been replaced with ear piercing and the wearing of conventional earrings. To "cut ear lobes" is thus to try and hide the fact that the person involved is old, having worn traditional earrings that stretched the ear lobes. It is, indeed, an open rejection of "tradition" and an embracing of "modernity."

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Responses

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Ntarangwi's piece provides a rich and comprehensive overview of the history, performance, culture, and sociology of taarab. Those unfamiliar with this genre of East African music will find that this article provides them with a wonderful introduction to the topic. Ntarangwi is extremely well versed in the literature on coastal history, African music, and the role of performance as a space in which cultural codes and mores can be contested and perhaps even transformed. The author makes wide use of extensive interviews with numerous producers and consumers of taarab music in Mombasa. In addition, through his description and analysis of taarab performances at weddings, Ntarangwi is able to provide the reader with a wonderful image that nearly brings one of these concerts to life.

This article does a fabulous job of outlining the historical development of taarab along the East African coast, making an important contribution to the growing literature on the topic by analyzing taarab's development in Mombasa and, to a lesser extent, the neighboring island of Lamu. Ntarangwi echoes recent challenges to the "Zanzibarcentric" approach to Swahili culture (Askew 1997; Fair 2001) and provides concrete examples and illustrations of the ways in which taarab music developed distinctive styles that were reflective of the vari-

ous social, cultural, and musical contexts found in various Swahili settlements along the East African coast. Mombasa taarab, for instance, makes extensive use of drumming rhythms borrowed from other forms of local music performance, thus giving this branch of taarab a distinctive sound when compared to that of the towns of Tanga, Zanzibar, or Tabora, in Tanzania. Ntarangwi makes another important contribution to the history of taarab by providing evidence of the existence of local precursors to taarab, known by other names, that were played on instruments different from those popular in Zanzibar.

At the heart of this article is an argument about the potential for performance to open up critical cultural spaces in which artists and their audiences can challenge dominant ideologies and cultural practices, and it is here that I would like to see Ntarangwi expand his work. In this piece he provides numerous, rich illustrations, based on interviews and participant observation of performance, about the complex debates taking place within Mombasa about the place of taarab in relation to Islam. Over the last decade, Mombasa has been home to some of the most vocal, and at times violent, debates amongst various groups of Muslims about the meanings of Islam in East African life and politics. I would love to see Ntarangwi provide us with another piece that goes into more detail about the specifics of the ways in which taarab producers and consumers have figured in, and contributed to, these debates. This article is full of examples

of the various ways in which particular taarab songs have been interpreted by various audiences and put to use to “create immediate forums for social contest on practices and their meanings.” Implicit in this article is an argument about the ways in which popular female performers and their largely female audiences are challenging the conservative orthodoxies regarding “women’s place” in Muslim societies, as expressed by some religious and cultural leaders in Mombasa, including several individuals interviewed by the author. I look forward to reading more by Ntarangwi in which his analysis focuses more explicitly on the issue of performance as a space for contesting and transforming socio-cultural “givens,” particularly those regarding women and gender. It is clear that the author has a lot of rich data that speaks to these topics and that he himself has a great deal more to say on this topic.

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I had an opportunity to read the entire manuscript of Mwenda Ntarangwi’s doctoral dissertation on which the current article is based. I am therefore especially pleased to be asked to respond to this article as part of the larger work on *taarab* music by artists of the Kenyan Coast. Ntarangwi’s “A Socio-Historical and Contextual Analysis of Popular Musical Performance Among the Swahili of Mombasa, Kenya” is both an important contribution to the emerging perspectives on anthropological, gender, and literary issues in Africa, and to the study of African music. Of particular significance is the centrality that Ntarangwi gives to female artists in this genre and it is on this particular aspect that I wish to make a few observations. One is especially struck by the strong emotions that taarab music, and particularly women’s participation in its performance, provokes in some members of the community keen on preserving some kind of crude “traditionalism,” that is, an appeal “to rules and customs—even when they have been drained of their meaning and content by time and changed circumstances—simply because this is the way things have always been done” (Ngugi wa Thiong’o 1994, 7). At least this is the tenor of Sheikh Nabhany’s, a renowned Swahili scholar, observation that “it is against Swahili culture or tradition, it is against the teachings of Islam.”

That the presence of women goes against what is considered religiously permissible or culturally appropriate speaks to the way in which art can function as a formal instrument of cultural invention and re-invention in tandem with new socio-cultural and economic realities. Furthermore, Swahili poetry tends to be conceived of as an exclusively male genre although historical evidence shows otherwise. For how does one account for the poetry of Mwana Kupona Binti Mshamu of Pate appearing as early as the later half of the 19th century (see Jahadhany 1994)?¹ While the exclusion of women is not something totally peculiar to Swahili society, part of the problem lies with critics and researchers who do not pay enough attention to women artists, a problem the editors of the 1994 special issue of *Research in African Literatures*, the foremost journal in African literary criticism, illustrate so well. Thus observe Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie and Carole Boyce Davies: “[T]he exclusion of women from theory and research is often responsible for [this] ‘apparent predominance’ of males as artistic producers” (1994, 1) which in turn results in the tendency to “iconize the traditional artists as the town crier, the male drummer and other male archetypes” (Ogundipe-Leslie and Davies 1994, 1). Given the “conceptual blind spot that has allowed the construction of field of African oral literature to develop without major consideration of the women as oral artists” (2), Ntarangwi’s work finds its place among recent works that have taken it as their mission to correct this concep-

tual blind spot, such as Aissata Sidikou’s *Recreating Words, Reshaping Worlds: Verbal Art of Women from Niger, Mali and Senegal* (2001), Thomas Hale’s *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music* (1998), among others.

But what exactly do Davies and Ogundipe-Leslie mean by “traditional” artist? One is left with a feeling that there is an uncritical assumption that the traditional artist is a reference to creator of oraliture whose activities belong to a past. For how do we explain their use of this term, knowing full well that these art forms continue to thrive in our societies, and that the oral word still remains a principal means of social and political discourse in our contemporary African cultures (Njogu 2001)? This then is part of the problem that Ntarangwi poses with reference to the taraab genre, the dichotomy that exists between “culture as stated and culture as practiced,” an ethnographic observation which invites a comment, especially if we agree with Christopher Miller that “gender is not merely a supplementary issue that can be ‘added on’ to a critical approach, like the caboose on a train; gender as an issue and feminist criticism in particular invites a reappraisal of literature and culture from the ground up” (1990, 246).

Ntarangwi correctly postulates that taarab plays an important role as a forum for self-articulation. I take self-articulation to mean among other things, a way of inserting oneself into the social discourse that determines what can be known about that person as an individual and as a member of a social

constituency. Art forms such as taarab therefore become important tools for shaping contemporary Swahili culture; a function not only inherent in the fluidity of the performance context but also arising out of the flexibility of the meanings and interpretations that people extract from these songs. Thus, taarab functions as a critique of social configurations that impact on the way people live, that is, how they perform socially sanctioned roles while simultaneously offering an avenue through which certain gender norms are challenged and reconfigured especially in performance. The very appearance of women in public to sing and perform is therefore more than just an “achievement.” It is an act of violation and of agency; violation of a space that is considered a preserve of male artists and concurrently an act of women artists inserting themselves into the discourse about the social construction of femininity. But Helen Mugambi has recently reminded us of the ambiguity involved in women’s attempt to gain voice in the context of performance. She correctly argues that, although “the term ‘song’ simultaneously evokes voice, story, storyteller, performance, as well as images of musical instruments” (62), this alone does not in any way minimize the control that men exert over women in the context of performance because they control the women’s dancing by virtue of having control of the musical instruments which in turn control the dance. Moreover, the text of the song is itself as important, if not more important than the act of performance.

I wish to pursue this issue a little bit further by way of problematizing the question of agency with specific reference to two excerpts of songs by the female artist Zuhura. As a point of departure, let us start with what Cornel West calls the existential challenge: “how does one acquire the resources to survive and the cultural capital to thrive as a critic or artist? By cultural capital (Bourdieu’s term), I mean not only the high quality skills required to engage in critical practices, but more important, the self-confidence, discipline, and perseverance necessary for success without undue reliance on the mainstream for approval and acceptance” (1993, 214). In other words, public performance for these women is only part of the problem. How does the message encoded in their songs challenge or reinforce normative gender even as it seeks to contest it? There is no better example than two excerpts from Zuhura’s songs:

You are cutting off your ear lobes
what have they done to you?
You want youth and it’s not possible
You are cheating yourself Hassan’s
mother

Your days are over yet you don’t
seem to realize
You force yourself to be young
But you can’t bring back your past

* * *

Many girls of great worth can’t get
partners
Forcing them to mess themselves up
Why can’t you accept you are old?

From these two excerpts, it seems to

me that Zuhura's ridicule of a woman who seeks to beautify herself panders into the absolutization of the socially-sanctioned values as they pertain to women and into the conflation of womanhood with motherhood. Does age, for instance, write off whatever a woman should or should not do with her own body?

Ntarangwi's essay also raises several problematic issues unrelated to gender and I wish to comment on only one. Ntarangwi's essay revisits, without giving any new direction to the debate, the long-standing contested question of the identity of Swahili people. Ntarangwi observes: "The Swahili are an African people of mixed descent living along the East African coast as well as in the interior." I am quite prepared to be persuaded to see the issue otherwise if there is carefully analyzed and judiciously contextualized evidence to support any of these competing claims about Swahili identity. So contestatory are the various theories of Swahili origin that as recently as 1994, two eminent scholars of Swahili descent, Ali Mazrui and his cousin, Al Amin Mazrui, have correctly observed:

The problem of identity and the quest for origins in the particular manner applied to the Swahili case is not a very usual scholarly engagement compared to the way it occurred with other African nationalities (17).

Nowhere is this controversy much more heightened than in the Mazruis's claim that the East African coast may, after all, have been part of the "Red Sea

civilization" that only later metamorphosed into a separate social organism. Of course, to Ali Mazrui's detractors, this is part of his Islamo-centric view of African historiography. Nevertheless, it is an issue that Ntarangwi's essay needs to refer to if not attempt to offer a different perspective or explain why he agrees with one particular explanation. To be sure, Ntarangwi, like the Mazruis, is revisiting a controversy that was sparked by earlier ethnographic studies by Dutch-Flemish scholars about Swahili language, society, and culture, which has since been the subject of very animated scholarship in the last two decades. By revisiting this issue in his paper, Ntarangwi's method invites a comment on the side with which he aligns himself in this debate. It is precisely for this reason that it is important, given the nature of the audience for his paper (and I am convinced it is a widely western audience—I could easily be argued out of this if accessibility to the internet were not an issue in East Africa). As recently as January of 2000, I attended a conference called "African Languages and Literatures into the 21st Century" in Asmara, Eritrea, where the issue of the status of Swahili, as a foreign language, a language of "slave masters," become such a thorny issue that the panel ended in disarray. The combatants? Mainly respected African(ist) and African-American scholars. And it is precisely for this reason that a comment on the origins of *Waswahili* must always be accompanied by at least a footnote that explains how one is entering into this debate.

Notes

¹ Mwana Kupona died around 1860 and wrote this poem on her death-bed as a will to her daughter on how to survive in a feudal society.

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“Es Sind Zween Weg”: Singing Amish Children into the Faith Community¹

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Abstract

The world's largest Amish settlement straddles Ohio's Wayne and Holmes counties. The majority of the Amish prefer an agrarian lifestyle of steady, hard work, preserving a community-oriented, Reformation-era theocracy. The Amish are a "plain" people who define themselves by their differences from the dominant culture. Associating in small groups of 25 to 40 families, "districts," or "affiliations" within geographical areas known as "settlements," they biannually decide by vote of adult members how to modify the rules of behavior (Ordnung). Seeking to be faithful to biblical directives, the members commit themselves to live simply by accepting or rejecting specific technological advances which they believe will enhance or disturb community life. People who break the rules are subject to shunning (Meidung), the primary purpose of which is to bring the transgressor to repentance.

An Amish adult's primary function is to prepare children for heaven by shaping an attitude of "yieldedness" (Gelassenheit) to God. Through vigilant contact, parents teach their children to respect and submit to authority, to work cheerfully, and to be kind to and to help others. Singing is one way parents transmit their cultural values.

They sing lullabies, Amish church hymns, and songs to children from infancy. This paper analyzes several Amish nursery songs and investigates their role in Amish children's socialization.

Introduction

The Amish present a classic case of traditionalist resistance to assimilation. The tradition dates from 1525 when rebaptizers (Anabaptists) broke with the Swiss Brethren led by the priest-reformer Ulrich Zwingli (Klassen 1973, 3). These "Radical Reformers," headed by another priest named Menno Simons, held that adult baptism into a community of believers met God's requirements as set forth in Christian Scripture (Keeney 1968, 14). The Anabaptists grounded their "distinctive knowledge and language of God" in a salvation history (*Heilsgeschicht*), but they did not have a theology (Oyer 1996, 281). As Robert Friedmann explained, the Anabaptists practiced "an existential not a theological Christianity, where witnessing [by lifestyle] comes before arguing. Anabaptists have a church of order and not so much a church of doctrines" (Friedmann 1950, 24). To the Amish, belief is only real when embodied in a community of believers.

In 1693, a further division occurred between the "Mennonites," those aligned with Menno Simmons, and a group of dissenters led by the preacher/tailor Jacob Amman, who would become known as the "Amish."

Disagreements centered on how often to hold communion, whether to practice the ritual of foot washing, and the proper extent of church discipline, particularly whether the shunning of unrepentant, erring members was too severe (Baecher 1996, 48-9).

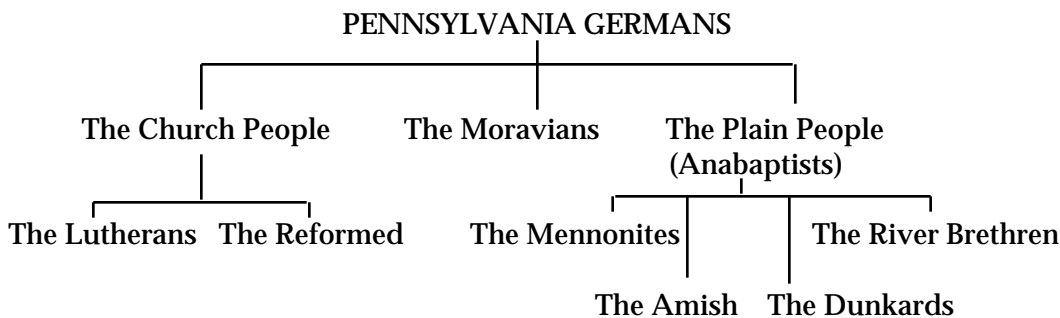
Choosing the simple peasant life, Amman’s group rallied around the scripture-based practice of social avoidance (*Meidung*). Early Anabaptist writers described a threefold purpose for *Meidung*: to bring the sinner to repentance, to protect the rest of the community from possible contagion, and to maintain the community’s reputation (Keeney 1968, 159). The Amish based their “purer” fellowship on the core values of pacifism, i.e., non-violent non-resistance, and separation from the world in obedience to God by means of voluntary adult baptism (Hostetler and Huntington 1992, 8-13). These choices left them open to further persecution. Like the Hebrews, enduring persecution sharply defined their uniqueness and solidified their identity. As Jean Séguy asserted, “Persecution did not arise out of occasional circumstances; it sprang from ontological necessity” (1982, 35). Being at odds

with those around them assured the Amish of their faithfulness to their bible’s separation mandate.

Mennonites first ventured to America by 1640, but nothing is known of their fate. Puritan colonies rejected Mennonite settlement. In 1683 fifty Mennonite families founded a “Deutschstadt” in the Quaker colony of Pennsylvania (*Wir lesen und sprechen Deutsch* 1984, 187). Meanwhile, Amish groups emigrated to the Netherlands, Poland, and Russia (Nolt 1992, 52), with the first Amish, also part of William Penn’s Holy Experiment, settling in Berks County, Pennsylvania in 1736 (Hostetler 1996, 257). (see Fig. 1, below.)

In the decades after their arrival, seeking good and plentiful farmland, the Amish moved west. The first Amish in Ohio were the preacher Jacob Miller and his family, who reached the fertile farmlands of Tuscarawas County in 1809, and in 1813 the first Amish settled in Wayne County (*Wir lesen und sprechen Deutsch* 1984, 93).³ By 1862, this settlement was strong and vocal enough to host a national meeting for Amish leaders (*Diener-Versammlungen*). Today, of the approximately 180,000 Amish in the United States, over one-

Figure 1:²



quarter live in a settlement straddling Wayne and Holmes counties in Ohio, making it the world’s largest settlement, surpassing Lancaster, Pennsylvania (Kraybill and Bowman 2001, 103-5).

Resisting Assimilation

Struggling to maintain their values and identity in the New World, the Amish fellowships chose a functional, non-ornamented or “plain” lifestyle. Over the generations they found themselves divided over whether to build churches in which to gather or to worship in members’ homes; whether their children would attend school past the elementary grades; whether to allow buttons or pockets; and whether or not one could vote or become involved in public life. Occasionally, doctrinal differences caused divisions. One splinter group decided to practice “stream” baptism. Joseph Yoder of McLean County, Illinois, precipitated another division by advancing the doctrine of universal salvation. Yoder wrote poetry that proclaimed the power of love to embrace all and denied the existence of hell. The majority denounced his ideas and reaffirmed that only the righteous would receive eternal joy, while the rest would receive eternal punishment (Yoder and Estes 1999, 155-6)

There was also much discussion about how much change would or could be allowed before they lost their identity. The tradition-minded or Old Order Amish rejected industrial society and opted for simplicity, noncon-

formity, nonresistance, and nonviolence. Today their lifestyle continues to include German-language worship services, horse-drawn transportation, face-to-face business and social interactions, and no established church bureaucracy (Hostetler 1992, 6, 25).

Language serves as a good example of loyalty to tradition. Unlike many other immigrant groups in America, the Amish preserve their native language in both the home and in religious ritual (Gallagher 1987), where High German and Pennsylvania Dutch, or *Deitsch* (a German derivative), serve as important uniting factors. Among the *Swartzentrubers*, an ultra-conservative Amish order, children learn no English until beginning school in the first grade. The adherence to their language, along with intentional community living, isolates the Amish from dominant American education, mass culture, politics, and economic forces. The use of *Deitsch* cements the Amish into a community better able to resist the forces of assimilation.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, legal, social, and political forces opposed the speaking of other languages besides English. The underlying belief of the “perfect union” ideology argued that uniformity of language would produce a single morality, deep-seated patriotism, and even a capacity for logical thinking. From 1917-1923 some states repealed laws that tolerated instruction in languages other than English (Jottíni 1988, 26). In spite of these legal decisions, the Amish taught their children Pennsylvania Dutch and used it as their secular and

sacred language. In *Meyer v. State of Nebraska* (1923), the Supreme Court ruled that states could require English instruction but could not restrict secondary language instruction, a right ensured by the Fourteenth Amendment (Riger 1977, 463).

The Socialization of Children

The Amish have never proselytized to recruit members, as proselytizing was banned from their inception. Thus, nurturing their own children in the faith has been a prime mechanism for membership. Indeed, the Amish highly value children as “the only possession we can take to heaven with us.” Children have both emotional and social significance in the Amish community. As parents strive to be good examples for their children, they become better Amish themselves (Huntington 1981, 380). The Amish believe that their children, born with sinful natures, will become loving and teachable in the proper environment. Parents, specifically fathers, are morally accountable to God for providing this training so that their children will yield themselves to God (Hostetler and Huntington 1992, 14-16). As Keith Thomas points out, “The Reformation, by reducing the authority of the priest in society, simultaneously elevated the authority of lay heads of households,” including the accountability for the religious and moral education and conduct of both wife and children (qtd. in O’Day 1994, 39). Children also contribute economically to the family. One Amish informant estimated that his children

earned about \$75,000 a year working in the community. He invested their money in land or production supplies, or, if necessary, used it for the family’s expenses, so that each of his children had built up a large savings by the time they were ready to marry.⁴

The Amish generally agree that “babies,” as children are called from birth to the time they begin walking, are a gift from God and are not responsible for their willfulness. Amish parents bear full responsibility for their training, as reflected in the proverb, “As a twig is bent, so the tree is inclined.” Ministers at the Amish Ministers’ Meeting of 1873 admonished parents, “Take very great care, you to whom the care of your children is so highly and preciously commanded, that you bring them up from youth in the admonition of the Lord; for this is the greatest and most noble duty of the Christian” (Yoder and Estes 1999, 180).

Amish toddlers or “little children” are taught to be honest, to respect and obey authority as it is invested in their parents and church leaders, and to recognize that these adults have deep concerns about the child’s welfare (Kline 1999). Amish parents act firmly and consistently in their discipline. Thus, they do not moralize to their children with platitudes such as: “It is God’s will that you follow my orders.” Rather, they require obedience matter-of-factly. And when a child “knows what a comb is for, he’s smart enough to know what a whipping’s for” (Stoll 1976, 56). In the May 2001 *Family Life*, a magazine for Amish families, a story for children, “Abner and His Cookies,” tells about

a boy who, in stealing extra cookies from the cupboard, gets his finger caught in a mousetrap. The didactic tale ends with the boy’s mother telling him: “You will have to be punished. I’m sure that after this you will think twice before disobeying” (E., J.H. 2001, 27-28).

Amish parents teach their children to work steadily and to fulfill their work responsibilities agreeably and without expecting thanks. The pleasure in accomplishing a task is seen as its own reward. “The dishes are clean and put away,” a parent might observe (Huntington 1981, 385). Amish parents socialize their children to accept Amish norms by constantly monitoring and guiding them; molding them to be “quiet, friendly, responsible, conscientious, devoted workers, patient with details and routine, loyal, considerate, and concerned with others’ feelings even when they’re in the wrong” (Smucker 1988, 220). Parents do not expect any other institution, neither school nor church, to take the responsibility for raising their children.

Adults welcome their children’s questions about the physical world, such as “When will these seeds come up?” However, parents discourage intellectual curiosity, believing that innovation promotes sinfulness. Children learn to be interdependent, to look out for all younger children and to accept help from those who are older (Huntington 1981, 386). A four-year-old might wait for an older sibling to help with a coat or shoelaces while younger children are required to obey an older child in the absence of a parent.

Amish children imitate their parents. Young children follow their fathers around the farm, patiently observing and helping with chores. Where possible, the Amish maintain small-scale farms of about eighty tillable acres (Kline 1990, xvi). But the high cost and diminishing availability of farmland make it necessary for men to seek work away from home. David Kline, an Amish farmer and author, estimates only 35% of Amish are full-time farmers, down from 70% “a few years ago” (1999). As a result of these social and economic changes in the Amish community, family life has also been affected. Researchers have found that non-farm Amish children are “less respectful, more defiant and rebellious, more self-centered and more confused about who they are and what [is] their future role in the Amish community” (Smucker 1988, 231).

The question of what long-range effects this will have on the Amish community is thus clearly raised. Recognizing early effects of this trend, many Amish are trying to recover the lifestyle associated with family farming, the legacy of slow change, and close parent-child relationships. In the absence of farming opportunities, for example, many establish cottage industries or work in groups doing carpentry to minimize contact with outsiders.

Amish Singing

The place of singing in Amish home life deserves to be studied to determine its role not only in the parent-child rela-

tionship, but also as a vehicle for transmitting cultural values. According to Jeff Todd Titon, “[e]arly childhood music is not simply functional, e.g., for entertainment or to quiet a child, but it teaches the musical taste and orientation of a particular group. Lullabies not only lull but promise, praise and teach cultural values” (1996, 496).

Historically, singing has played an important role in Amish life. Imprisoned in Passau castle in southwestern Germany, and awaiting their fate at the stake or chopping block, sixteenth century Anabaptist martyrs spent their time singing and writing hymns (Nolt 1992, 21-2). As many of those persecuted had been priests, and thus well acquainted with Gregorian chant melodies, these, along with traditional folk melodies, provided the background for their lyrics. When other prisoners danced to their singing, the Anabaptists slowed it down until there was no danceable rhythm left. Collected in the *Ausbund*, these hymns became and remain the most important music of the Amish tradition. They are sung in unison in each worship service, before meetings, at work, and in leisure.

In articulating his theory of “cantometrics,” a music analysis system for understanding and classifying types of cultures, Alan Lomax argued that if a culture uses monophonic texture (i.e., one line of melody sung without harmony), it follows that that society will be primitive and undeveloped (Nettl 1983, 92-5).⁵ But this ethno-centric and value-laden presumption is

contradicted by the Amish, who employ monophonic melodies and are not backward or uneducated. The fact that they teach children within the community and avoid many aspects of modernity is a conscious choice on moral grounds. Marc Olshan has labeled theirs a value-rational culture, meaning they have carefully formulated the “ultimate” values which serve to guide behavior within the community. The Amish continually and self-consciously evaluate alternative modes of action and make specific decisions which enable them to live lives consistent with these core values (Olshan 1980). This evaluation takes place in district church meetings preceding biannual communion celebrations, and through this process the *Ordnung* is regularly reconsidered and reconfirmed. The Amish singing style, thus, results from “intentional interaction by processes of decision-making by individuals” (Blacking 1981, n.p.), and the intentional decision to prohibit the use of harmony and musical instruments reflects this process, rather than signalling a “primitive culture.”

The Amish indicate that their singing serves to “soothe, uplift and encourage” those who sing, but they also believe that their songs must always take a form that “glorifies God and does not spotlight humans” (Brunk n.d., 3). Brunk, an Ohio Amish who advocated “divine simplicity” in songs, noted that musical instruments were not allowed because the Protestant reformer Zwingli had rejected their use in church, along with other non-bibli-

cal trappings such as candles, incense, crucifixes, and altars. According to Zwingli, “God ordained vocal music, the wicked added the instruments” (ibid.). Most districts today do not allow instruments even at home. Ada Lendon, an “ex-Amish,” or one who has chosen to leave the tradition, remarked that her mother (who remains in the tradition) “liked to play the harmonica . . . I remember a boy in another district had an accordion. Boy! Could he play! He had to get rid of it to join the church, however.”⁶

While the Amish have borrowed songs from surrounding cultures, there are many types of songs and styles of singing they reject. John Paul Raber, also from an Ohio Amish settlement, wrote disapprovingly of the use of choruses and quartets, considering them to place undue attention upon the singers. He did, however, approve of the use of gospel tunes and texts when they spread the teaching of Christianity. Nevertheless, he cautioned that gospel “would not be so popular today” if it were truly preaching Christ, suggesting that popularity equaled worldliness. Raber further remarked that the founder of gospel music, “half God-fearing Thomas A. Dorsey and half good-time Georgia Tom,”⁷ had merged the “earnest fervor of spirituals with the Blues’ swinging beat” into “rocking tunes,” and because of this, Dorsey was expelled from the church by the leaders (Raber n.d., 5-6). Thus, while the Amish employ gospel tunes, they do so in a way that could never be accused of “swinging” the beat.

Methodology

To gather information on how Amish view the issue of singing, I interviewed Amish men and women and a few ex-Amish in a variety of settings in northeastern Ohio. From 1999-2000, three undergraduate assistants—Andrea Lucas, Patrice Trudell, and Esther Diehl—and I conducted short, five- to twenty-minute interviews at Amish-frequented auctions in Mt. Hope, Kidron, and Farmerstown, and on the street on market days in Charm, Berlin, Walnut Creek, and Sugar Creek, Ohio. We interviewed individuals and families in their homes through second order (or snowball) sampling, by first talking with Amish who were contacts of our “English” (non-Amish) friends. Some of these Amish were involved in public forums and advisory groups or participated in programs in the Ohio State University Extension Program; some worked as nannies, house cleaners, or other service providers for “English” employers. These Amish, in turn, recommended other neighbors and friends for us to interview. For example, an Amish woman might say, “I don’t sing well, but Esther Miller loves to sing. She lives down Geyers Chapel [in a house] with a big white barn.” When I would visit these women and identify myself as an acquaintance of one of their friends, they would stop whatever project they were involved in, ask me in, and, in general, seemed happy to converse. We also attended a weekend workshop at an English inn in Amish country, eating meals and

talking at length with an Amish bishop, his wife, and two other Amish couples. Patrice Trudell (one of my research assistants) attended the Former Amish Reunion (FAR), a biannual gathering of ex-Amish, which serves as an extended family support for individuals and families who have left the Amish community, and there she engaged in lengthy person-to-person and group interviews.

Some Amish were hesitant to answer questions, especially when we took notes. A few, particularly more conservative Amish, declined to talk with us at all. Others were glad to talk at length, some inviting us to walk a little out of the way so they could sing less conspicuously. For the lengthier interviews, researchers asked a variety of questions about child-rearing practices, the kinds of songs sung to young children, the importance of singing in Amish life, and interviewees were also asked to sing on tape. Such questions often led to other areas of discussion, such as wedding or funeral practices, women's roles, reports of abuse in Amish families, "Brauch"⁸ Johnny healers, and other health issues. In their own homes, the Amish were very happy to talk about their experiences raising children and offered us refreshments, inviting us to come back when they could gather some of their friends to talk with us.

Three Nursery Songs

When we began gathering nursery songs in this protected ethno-religious

community, Amish informants enjoyed bringing out songbooks (with lyrics only) they had collected from bus rides to Iowa or Kentucky. Then, they sang for us their favorites, "Mockingbird Hill," and a Swiss ballad about a young lover lying in the graveyard. One informant insisted that we record an "important" song and began to sing the camp song, "Found a Peanut." We persisted, asking them to sing only songs they would sing to babies. After considerable thought, Amish parents explained that they sang English nursery songs, such as "Ten Little Indians" and "Mulberry Bush," as well as Christian children's songs, such as "Fishers of Men" and "Jesus Loves Me" to their children in both Pennsylvania Dutch and English. Amish adults also sing "fast" songs—hymns which they learn in school, at Sunday night sing-alongs, and other Amish gatherings. The Amish began to collect these hymns in the late nineteenth century into songbooks such as the *Unparteiische Liedersammlung*. These are not sung particularly fast, but are distinguished from the "slow" or church songs from the *Ausbund*. Like all traditional Amish music, these songs are monophonic, that is, one melodic line without accompaniment.

Of all the songs we collected, three songs in particular seemed to express the values that Amish parents seek to impart to their children: "Raddy, Raddy, Gally," "Schlof, Bubeli, Schlof," and "Es sind zween Weg." Each of these songs underscores the importance the Amish place on the extended family and on farming as the preferred

livelihood which includes everyone in the community/family regardless of gender or age. Among the Amish, the ideal is that individuals know their roles, and unite to build an effective, harmonious community. The repetition of songs to children is seen as a powerful way to effect the internalization of the notion of such social harmony in children from an early age. Children who daily hear soothing, gentle words and melodies of songs such as “Schlof, Bubeli, Schlof,” which emphasizes the emotional well-being brought about by such social harmony; “Es sind Zween Weg,” which describes the clear choices that the Amish person faces between

worldly, materialistic conformity to the values of the surrounding culture or devotion to the separated fellowship; and “Raddy, Raddy, Gally,” which evokes the sheer joy of parental love and the desire to hold children close and give them pleasure, are thus thought to be pleasantly and lovingly socialized into the Amish way.

Parents sing the unpitched, sing-song “Raddy, Raddy, Gally” while bouncing a toddler on a knee. In contrast to the American nursery song, “This is the way the gentlemen ride,” which echoes gender and class status distinctions, “Raddy” refers to agricultural life with an emphasis on work-

Ex. 1: “Raddy, Raddy, Gally”—Ada Lendon’s version

(“Ride-y, ride-y horsie/Half an hour a mile/Tomorrow we have to thrash oats/For the horsie to eat food/Then we go over the bridge/And the bridge breaks down”).¹¹

Ex. 2: “Raddy, Raddy, Gally”—Harvey Troyer’s version

(“Ride-y, ride-y horsie/A mile’n’a half an hour/Drive over a ditch/And dump off”).¹²

ing in fields. In Ada Lendon’s version (ex. 1),⁹ the bridge simply breaks, while in the Harvey Troyer’s version (ex. 2),¹⁰ an inexperienced driver and too much speed cause the upset.

In both the above versions, the singers sang at the same, uncharacteristically quick speed (quarter note = 176). This surely gives the impression that thrilling the child is one of the song’s major purposes. The rhythm, somewhat uneven despite the racing pace, follows speech patterns, and resonates with the rhythm of clapping horse hooves. Klassen’s version (= 76) in 2/4 meter is slower, as is the version sung by Barbara (= 96), a young Amish woman working in a community business. Barbara agreed to have her song recorded,¹³ unusual, given that the Amish consider recordings as well as photography to be vain practices, and thus discourage them.

“Schlof, Bubeli, Schlof,” was the most familiar of the nursery songs to

all the Amish we interviewed. Women and men alike greeted the song title with huge smiles accompanied by laughter. They explained that “Bubeli” is a term of endearment for babies, whereas for older children it can be used in a negative or teasing sense: “Stop being a baby (“Bubeli”) and grow up.” The agrarian theme in the songs emphasizes the security and regularity of tending the farm animals nearby in the corral. *Mammi* (Grandma), lives next door, and is both a role model and a caretaker. Despite her age, she is very productive: Out chasing the skinny cows, she runs all night, “and don’t come till tomorrow morning.”¹⁴

Klassen noted many lyric variants in “Schlof, Kjintje, Schlof,” brought to Canada from Russia by Mennonites (ex. 4), but related that “melodic differences were minimal” (1989, 29-31). The Amish in Holmes county, on the other hand, sang a version that differed significantly from Klassen’s. The

Ex. 3: “Schlof, Bubeli, Schlof”—Barbara’s Version, Walnut Creek, Ohio¹⁵

Shlof, bubeli, shlof Der Dadi hiet die Schof. Die Mammi hiet die dottie Kieh
 Bott im a drecht Un kommt
 bis nuf in di gnee net ham bis miah früh Shlof, bubeli, shlof

(“Sleep, baby, sleep/Grandpa tends the sheep/Grandma brings in the skinny cows/She wades in mud up to knees/She don’t come home until tomorrow morning/Sleep, baby, sleep.”)

Holmes county version is exemplified by Barbara’s tune (ex. 3), which more closely resembles a Pennsylvania ver-

sion brought from Germany in the 1780s and recorded by Hausman (ex. 5) (1953, 66-7).

Ex. 4: “Schlop, Kjintje, Schlop”—Canadian Russian Mennonite Version

$\text{♩} = 76$

Schlop, Kjin-tje, schlop, Dien Fo-da heed't de Schop, Die-ne Ma-me sched't en

Boom - tje, Doa felt e-rauf en Droom - tje, Schlop, Kjin - tje, schlop.

(“Sleep, baby, sleep/Your father herds the sheep/Your mother shakes a little tree/There falls down a little dream/Sleep, baby, sleep” becomes, in another version, “Sleep, baby, sleep/Outside stand the sheep/A black one and a white one/And if the baby won’t sleep/Then the black one will come and bite it,” while a third version has “Sleep, little child, sleep/Your father herds the sheep/Your mother shakes a little tree/There fall down a little dream/Sleep, little child, sleep;” Klassen 1989, 29-31).

Ex. 5: “Schlof, Bubeli, Schlof”—Lancaster, Pennsylvania Version

Dreamily

1. Sleep, lit-tle one, sleep.— Your fa-ther watches the .

sheep.— Your moth-er, the lit-tle calves will tend; Thru mead-ows green their

way willwend. Sleep, lit-tle one, sleep.

Barbara begins in 2/4 and switches into 6/8 meter when she gets warmed up and into full swing. The 6/8 meter gives a swing-like sound. Hausman’s version is in a regular 6/8 meter with the same scale pattern as the Canadian Russian Mennonite version of Klassen. Klassen’s and Hausman’s are sung much higher than Barbara’s, which is sung in Db. Klassen’s version is in the key of F major; the Hausman, G major. Barbara uses a three-note, *do-re-mi*, scale while Klassen has *do-re-mi-fa-sol* with an additional *sol* below *do*.

The three versions differ widely in melodic material. Comparing the intervals, there is a preponderance of major seconds, neighboring notes, in each, but a larger variety of intervals in the Canadian Mennonite version (table 1). Like “Mary Had a Little Lamb,” the Ohio Amish version is the essence of simplicity, a quality highly valued in Amish culture, using only three notes, all major seconds. Like most of Amish singing, all the notes are diatonic, conforming to the Western major scale and using no additional “accidental” notes.

“Es sind zween Weg,” on the other hand, offers an example of a church hymn sung to babies and little children to calm them and to teach them loyalty to spiritual over worldly claims. The text of this martyr’s song speaks clearly of choosing between two ways, one narrow, one wide, and proclaims that daily actions lead to eternal consequences (ex. 6).

Ex. 6: “Es sind zween Weg”—Troyer

(“There are two ways in this our day/
One narrow and the other broad/
Who now will go the other way/
Will be despised by all abroad;” Overholt 1987, 60).

Table 1: Comparison of Intervals

Interval	Canadian Russian Mennonite (Klassen)	Walnut Creek, Ohio (Barbara)	Lancaster County (Hausman)
Minor 2 nd	2	—	1
Major 2 nd	6	All	12
Minor 3 rd	4	—	4
Major 3 rd	1	—	—
Perfect 4 th	3	—	4
Major 6 th	1	—	1
Minor 7 th	—	—	1

Shape Note¹⁶

The traveler at the crossroads is a metaphor found in many cultures. Wolfgang Harms dated its use to the fifth-century writings of Prodikos, the Greek Sophist, “Hercules must choose between Vice and Virtue” (1970, 40-43).

Similarly, in Deuteronomy 30:15-16, 19, God instructs:

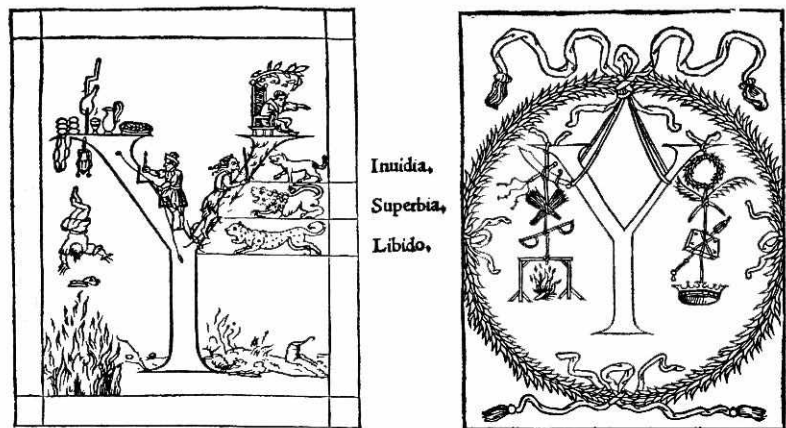
See, I have set before you this day life and good and death and evil; In that I command you this day to love the Lord your God, to walk in God’s ways, and to keep God’s commandments and God’s judgments, that you may live and multiply . . . I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your children may live.

In Matthew 7:13-14, in the Sermon on the Mount, Christ also invokes the metaphor:

Enter in at the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many there be which go in there; Because narrow is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto life, and few there be that find it.

In addition to appearing in philosophical and religious texts, as

Figure 2: Y-Signum¹⁷



well as the Amish hymns, this theme is also featured in the visual art of German woodcuts of the twelfth century (fig. 2). The theme is the “Y,” with one thick arm and one thin arm, symbolizing the wide and narrow roads (Harms 1970, 85). By the fifteenth century, the “Y”-shaped symbol was familiar enough to be used as a crucifix and a sceptre. (fig. 3)

Figure 3: Y-Signum Sceptre¹⁸



Choosing between the wide road that leads to punishment and fire and the narrow, which leads to glory and reward, is a fundamental concept for the Amish. (fig. 4) They frequently must interact with others who claim to be Christians but who are not following the narrow way. If the Amish are to survive, they need to draw “a clear cut boundary between the kingdom of the world and the kingdom of God. . . . The Amish sense of order, from their very beginnings, included a decisive need

for boundaries” (Meyers 1996, 40-53). The women singing the FAR version

Figure 4: Two ways¹⁹



(ex. 7) left out one line of melody, the third, and sang the text of the third to the fourth line of melody. Ethnomusicologist John Blacking has observed that, in his experience,

Ex. 7: “Es sind zween Weg”—Former Amish Reunion

Es sind zween Weg in die ser Zeit,
 Der ein ist schmal, der ander weit.
 Wer jetzt will gehn die schmal-e Bahn.

some striking dissimilarities. Each is collected in a different Amish community, but the differences make one wonder how much the melodies have changed. The span of notes which fit comfortably in general group singing ranges from the smallest of a major sixth to the largest of an octave and a fourth in the Troyer edition and an octave and a fifth in the Yoder edition. While both use the shape note tradition, Yoder gives specific pitches for his songs, while Troyer only provides the notes in relation to each other.

Yoder prefaced his 1942 edition with directness:

Since the singers of the [Mifflin County, Pennsylvania] Valley feel that they still have these hymns as near or nearer the old ways of

singing them, than any other community, it was only natural that the writer should go back to the Valley to get these songs and hymns in their early forms (v).

Yoder also explained that his publication was meant to help families to learn and use the slow hymns for daily home worship. Troyer made no such claims, merely acknowledging and thanking those who had helped him transcribe the songs (1997, i) .

Performance practices include the use of scooping and sliding on a new syllable and between two syllables and the consistent use of anticipation. The final note is barely held a full beat, then is chopped off quickly. As in nearly all Amish singing, a song leader (*Vorsinger*) sings an *incipit*, typically the melody for the first syllable of text, in

Table 2: Comparison of Cadences

	Troyer's <i>Ausbund and Liedersammlung</i> Songs		Yoder's <i>Amische Lieder</i>	
Upper neighbor tone, anticipation, final	71	70.3%	40	51.9%
Upper neighbor, lower neighbor, final	19	18.8%	4	5.2%
Final, upper neighbor, final	1	1.0%	20	25.9%
Descending notes to final	0	0	5	6.5%
Other	<u>10</u>	10.0%	<u>8</u>	10.3%
TOTAL CADENCES	101		77	

this case three-notes (ex. 7), then pauses briefly, waiting for the others to join her. Generally, whether in a schoolroom, at home, or in worship, the Amish are singing with people they sing with often, and so, like a well-rehearsed marching band, they match their stride to the group’s norms and maintain their uniformity. As in other Christian traditions, a few tunes may be used for a multitude of texts. A version of the lyrics to “Es sind zween Weg” was sung to a gospel melody, “I’m Building a Home.” Likewise, the same text may be sung to a variety of tunes (ex. 9).

Amish education guides a child to live humbly, and to be satisfied with simple living in resignation to the will of God (Hostetler and Huntington 1992, 14). The music of the dominant culture manifold, varied, simple, or complex reflects a culture of difference. Imbedded in the singing of the Amish, in contrast, is the simplicity, conformity, and unity of a single line of melody, sung together as one voice, for the purpose of praising God. Singing confirms norms of behavior and “sentiments that [pre-]exist”

Ex. 9 : A second melody²⁰

D. 2. 156

1. Es sind zween Weg in die - ser Zeit, Der ein ist schmal der an - der weit,
 2. Dies zeigt uns an des Her - ren Wort: Geht ein durch die - se En - ge Fort,
 3. Dar - nach hat er e - wi - ge Ruh, Da - rum, o Mensch, schied dich da - zu,

The Role of Nursery Songs in Socialization

In his *Venda Children’s Songs*, Blacking proposes that “[c]ultural analyses of music sounds may help us towards an explanation of th[e] relationship between life and music” (1967, 198). In Amish culture, religion and way of life are inseparable (Kingston 1953, n.p.). While education in the dominant American culture promotes self advancement, independence, and the acquisition of power over others,

(Blacking 1967, 31). The Amish focus is on contentment in a life of work and family, and in living spiritually, committed to worship and praise of God with a pure, humble voice, in contrast to a trained, self-conscious voice, singing for self-aggrandizement.

The Amish want their children to choose this more simple way of life, but they believe that submission should be encouraged, not forced. As each teenager becomes an adult, he or she chooses whether to stay under the authority of the church or to leave

(Klassen 1973, 35, 44-5), and today, nearly 80% choose to remain Amish. Amish parents disciple their children into becoming mature adults dedicated to the Amish way of life by shaping their young children’s thoughts and actions. They teach *Gelassenheit* (yielding and submission) and *Demutigkeit* (humility) to their children when they are infants and preschoolers, with the goal of their becoming ideal Amish adults who are sincere, honest, cordial, content, and well-mannered (Wittmer and Moser 1974, 270).

Blackboard Bulletin is a publication for Amish teachers that also finds its way into the homes of many Amish parents, and fosters interaction and cooperation between parents and teachers. The Bulletin’s columnist, “Teacher Arlene,” observes:

A normal child’s attitude toward God begins in his own home. His parents are molding and shaping his attitudes as a reflection of their own. This also is true of a child’s attitude toward work and his own abilities and talents. If we excuse a child from doing something he doesn’t want to do or thinks he can’t do good enough, are we helping him? (Teacher Arlene 2000, 4)

“Teacher Arlene” believes parents should encourage their children to participate and work diligently at developing their skills regardless of ability. This includes singing in the home and at school. The Amish we interviewed told us that singing is a significant part of their family life (table 3).

Table 3: How important is singing in your family?

Very important	5	33	58.9%
	4	12	21.4%
	3	6	10.7%
	2	2	3.6%
Not Important	1	3	5.4%
TOTAL		56	100.0%

They agree singing makes work easier, transmits values, spreads the gospel, and adds joy to the day. It helps them to be more the person they are meant to be. Many sing as much as two hours a day with their children while engaging in a variety of family chores and activities (table 4). One Amish grandmother talked about the birth of a granddaughter who had a rare health disorder. The doctors cautioned that the child would not live six months. “We took turns rocking her and singing to her. We had so little time to show her love,” the woman explained. “The doctors were amazed that she lived nearly eighteen months,” she added.

The Amish we interviewed expressed the opinion that home singing promotes a yielding spirit and brings one closer to God. It encourages “togetherness,” keeps the “thought-life in check and gives you a spirit of gratefulness.” Church songs in

Table 4: When do you sing?

	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Cooking	6	10	5	1
Doing Housework	8	12	2	0
Gardening	1	10	10	3
Bathing Child	4	13	6	4
Buggy Riding	5	9	6	2
Playtime	6	7	4	5
Other: while sitting on the porch in the evening to relax, sewing, milking, bedtime, rocking, Sunday evening, mowing the lawn	3	1	0	0

particular were reported to have great value. Parents tell martyr stories to their children often, including when singing *Ausbund* hymns.

On the other hand, not all Amish children or adults enjoy singing. When a few Amish teachers reported that some of their students were less than enthusiastic about singing in school, “Teacher Arlene,” stressing the importance of singing, wrote back:

I think there are many reasons why we should teach our children to sing. . . . if we wish them to spend eternity in heaven, there will undoubtedly be singing there, and won’t we be expected to help sing, regardless how our voices are? . . . Singing should be a devotion, a way of worshipping God, and we all should help sing no matter what our ability is. . . . We should instead teach our children that their voices are needed in our homes, in our schools and in our churches—not because of their talents but because they are part of

our fellowship. . . . Let’s not deny our children the opportunity for singing to allow them to develop the feeling of expressing their devotion and reverence in their hearts to God. (2000, 4)

“Teacher Arlene” sought to persuade Amish families that singing is an appropriate behavior that will lead to stronger adherence to the community’s values. Full participation in the life of the community is expected. “She” equated singing with true worship and reinforced its importance in preparing children, and by inference adults as well, for eternity in heaven.

Conclusions

The Amish we interviewed sing to their children. Fifty-four out of fifty-six informants stated that they sang daily or often with young children. In fact, 30% sang two or more hours per day. Amish report singing to soothe

themselves and their children. When asked how many hours he sang with his children, one man replied, “It depends on how many babies you have to rock.” Singing, the Amish in our study agreed, does transmit the values of yielding, humility, and closeness to God. It is especially important and valuable while working.

In analyzing Amish home singing we found consistent performance practices. First, monophonic vocal music was the norm. Second, as documented in Amish literature, our research reaffirms the role of the *Vorsinger* (song leader), the one who sets the pitch and, often, the tempo, by singing the first syllable of a song (Durnbaugh 1999, 25). We found that in home singing the first syllable of each verse and each chorus is intoned by the *Vorsinger* and that many share the role of song leader. One leads for one song with another leading for a second song. No one person is identified as the “expert.” Even in the schoolroom, children take turns leading, and learn songs from each other. Except when it is her turn, the teacher neither leads nor instructs although her enthusiasm for singing is “catching.” Third, “fast” and gospel songs, such as “Wo ist Jesus mein Verlangen,” are sung nearly as slowly as Amish church chants. Fourth, all participate heartily regardless of ability, and most are capable of staying on pitch. Fifth, the tone quality may be light and pure or a nasal, country *twang*, but the phrasing is invariably *legato* except for the final note, which

is cut off quickly rather than held, despite the fact that one Amish hymnbook notated the final as a long note (Yoder 1942, 13). Sixth, as a rule, the hymnbooks the Amish use do not have musical notation. Tunes are sung from memory. Several men have reported that they get together with other men to practice singing outside of the worship setting and some report using books with shape notes in those gatherings.

The Amish sing English and Pennsylvania Dutch lullabies, such as “Shlof, Bubeli, Shlof,” entertainment and teaching songs, such as “Alds Butter Fas” and “Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush,” religious children’s songs such as “Jesus liebt mich” and “Jesus liebt de kleine kinder,” “fast” gospel songs such as “At Calvary” and “Amazing Grace,” and church slow songs from the *Ausbund*, such as “O Gott Vater, wir loben dich.”

The Amish core values of respect for elders and other figures of authority; mutuality and equality; strong self-discipline and conformity to church discipline; separation from the world; *Gelassenheit*; and *Demutigkeit* evidence themselves in several ways. First, the Amish family carefully chooses texts that feature farming and spiritual themes. Second, they use a measured, thoughtful pace. Voicing the words deliberately, the song is a vehicle for reinforcing important messages. Third, singing reinforces family time and togetherness. Families enjoy singing after a full day of work. Fourth, singing regularly reconnects them with their

history, especially as they sing hymns written by martyred women and men.

In *Music, Culture and Experience*, John Blacking proposes that

[M]usic is non-referential and sensuous, and no claim can be made that it is directly political. But some music can become and be used as a symbol of group identity, regardless of its structure; and the structure of the music can be such that the conditions required for its performance generate feelings and relationships between people that enable positive thinking and action in fields that are not musical. (1995, 198)

Throughout the centuries of persecution and, perhaps more so, during the years of tolerance, the Amish have monitored the musical practices of its members, then prescribed and proscribed certain types of songs and singing. Like the ban on musical instruments, these choices have been made by the community to unite them in their insistent simple way of life, which they believe to be redemptive. Other forms of singing, if tolerated, might lead their children to prefer the vain, pride-filled, consumer- and achievement-oriented lifestyle of their English neighbors. Amish singing reflects the culture of “divine simplicity” and conformity reinforced by their belief that their lives are to be dedicated to nurturing children who will be obedient to God.

Notes

¹ The writer gratefully acknowledges the National Endowment for Humanities and The Ohio State University Office of Research for their support of this research.

² Jottíni 1988, 33.

³ For more information about the customs of the Amish of Wayne and Holmes Counties, see Kreps, Donnermeyer, and Kreps 1997; and Donnermeyer, Kreps, and Kreps 1999.

⁴ Amish man. Interview by author, Millersburg, Ohio, 11 March 1999.

⁵ Alan Lomax claimed that his system of analysis, cantometrics, was “objective science . . . [which] supplied us with certain incontrovertible proofs regarding the role of musical style as a reflection of certain fundamental truths” (Grauer 2001, 3).

⁶ Ada Lendon. Interview by author, Wooster, Ohio, 26 July 1999.

⁷ Thomas A. Dorsey (1899-1993), American songwriter known as the father of gospel music; pianist for blues artists Bessie Smith and Gertrude Ma Rainey.

⁸ Meaning “pow-wow.” Some Amish frequent healers; others disapprove.

⁹ Ada Lendon. Interview by author, Wooster, Ohio, 26 July 1999.

¹⁰ Harvey Troyer. Interview by Patrice Trudell, at the Former Amish Reunion, Ashland, Ohio, 31 July 1999.

¹¹ Translated by an Amish informant. Pennsylvania Dutch is a spoken language. Several groups in Holmes County have recently tried to regularize spelling. A local group published a book with about half of the songs of the *Ausbund* written in the Pennsylvania Dutch dialect rather than High German. One man who worked on this said they started with the “songs we sing most.” Another group is working on a dictionary.

¹² Translated by an Amish informant.

¹³ Barbara. Interview by author, Walnut Creek, Ohio, 26 January 1999.

¹⁴ Emily Gerstner-Hirzel documented many versions of this song in German language folksong from “Ruh, Kindlein, ruh/der Wächter tutet: uh” to “Schloop Kinneke schloop/in Marias Schöötje” and “Schlaf Babel schlaf/und scheiss mer net aufs Wendele.” The earliest “Slaap Kindken slaap/dien Vader is een Aap/dine Moder is een Etterlin/slaap du verwesseld Horenkind” from Bremen was published in 1767. Another “Schlaf Büble schlaf” dated from 1853 in Tirol. The most similar texts related to agriculture come from Basel (1894), “Schlof Chindli schlof/di Muetter huetet d Schof,” from Lower Franconia (n.d.), “Schlaf Kindlein schlaf/dein Vater hüt die Schaf/dei Mutter hüt die dürra Küh/kommt nich heim bis morgen früh,” and from Lancaster, Pennsylvania (1915) “Schlof Bubbeli schlof/der Dawdy hüt die Schof/die Mommy hüt die rote Küh/un steht im Dreck bis an die Knie.” A Yiddish version, “Schlof schlof schlof/der Tate wet fohren in Dorf/wet er brejngen an Epele/wet sain gesund die Kepele,” was recorded in Munich in 1918 (Gerstner-Hirzel 1984, 243, 271-2, 275, 323). The Swiss still sing this song, an ex-Amish physician who visited there recently reported.

¹⁵ Barbara. Interview by author, Walnut Creek, Ohio, 26 January 1999. Translated by an Amish informant.

¹⁶ Troyer 1997, 6.

¹⁷ Geofroy Tory. 1529. *Champ Fleury*. Paris. Cited in Harms 1970, 321.

¹⁸ Cesare Ripa. 1603. *Iconologia*. Rome. Cited in Harms 1970, 344.

¹⁹ Daniel Sudermann. 1622. “The choice between the wide and narrow way.” In *Schöne ausserlesene Figuren*. Frankfurt a.M. Cited in Harms 1970, 348.

²⁰ Yoder 1942, 94.

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Responses

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Many of my own preconceptions and beliefs concerning the Amish stem from having grown up in an Amish area where many families, including my own, hired young Amish women as live-in domestic helpers. Although I later became an ethnomusicologist with a strong interest in North American orally-transmitted religious singing, I did not persist enough to overcome the many obstacles of ethnographic research among the Amish to have actually done it. This frustrated interest is apparently widespread, for the literature on Amish singing—one cannot really say “music” because of its instrumental associations—is quite sparse. Few articles on Amish singing have been published since the early and mid-twentieth century, when John Umble’s “The Old Order Amish, Their Hymns and Hymn Tunes” (1939), George Pullen Jackson’s “The Strange Music of the Old Order Amish” (1945), Charles Burkhardt’s “The Church Music of the Old Order Amish and Old Colony Mennonites” (1953), and Bruno Nettl’s “The Hymns of the Amish: an Example of Marginal Survival” (1957) were published.

Elder’s work, based on extensive and continuing field investigations, demonstrates that with persistence and creative approaches scholars can do excellent field-based research with the cooperation of the Amish. I believe it important that we continue such field-

work, partially because it is embarrassing that so little is known about Amish singing, despite the fact that such singing often takes place right in the midst of numerous colleges and universities. At my own institution, Kent State University, we know and teach far more about Thai classical music, Chinese “silk and bamboo” music, and West African drumming than Amish singing; indeed, Amish singing barely merits mention in spite of the large populations of Amish in the nearby communities of Geauga and Holmes counties.

Elder’s careful work brings us closer to the hearts and minds of contemporary Amish people and begins to break down the thick wall of cliché and mystique that we have built up around them. More than that, though, her approach is multi-disciplinary. While the article is written with sensitivity to anthropology, folklore, and ethnomusicology, it should be of special interest to music educators as well, for its core is an explication of not only how the Amish teach their children singing but how they transmit their values and their identity in song as well. We all have much to learn from societies such as the Amish who have demonstrated long-standing success in passing their musical traditions from one generation to the next.

Elder’s study is one step in the long overdue process of “rehumanizing” the Amish. Although Amish and non-Amish societies live together and mingle in public arenas such as shopping centers, the latter have little first-hand and much stereotyped knowledge of the former. Because of how the

Amish dress, live, and travel, they are automatically the “exotic other” in our midst, one of our own “national minorities” (to use the Chinese term), a kind of “aborigine” (to use the Australian and Taiwanese term), perhaps a rural equivalent to Brooklyn’s Hassidic Jewish community. We tend to know them through the clichés of “Pennsylvania Dutch” commercialism, reduced to aphorisms in peculiar English, and through artistic motifs portraying barns, buggies, and straw hats. We admire their traits of hard work, craftsmanship, and old-fashioned values which give them, in our minds, a Romantic Herderian mystique of the pure and uncorrupted “peasant,” unaffected by the pollution and alienation of the Industrial Revolution. They embody an ideal of the simple life, infused with spirituality, dignity, and “old fashioned family values.” We also become confused upon encountering “wild” Amish youth filling up on “junk food,” engaging in PDA, and driving buggies fitted with huge, booming speakers powered by batteries through the countryside.

Clearly Amish life is much more complex, self-contradictory, and open to change than many of us may realize. While their singing does not seem comparable in terms of technical complexity to the Euro-American classical musics studied in the conservatory, it is certainly quite complex in its meanings and connections to many aspects of Amish life and culture. From Elder’s article we learn that this singing is also both archaic and modern, for the Amish sing both the ancient chorale melodies to the hymn texts in the

Ausbund as well as recent English nursery songs. From my own experience, I know that some “liberal” Amish listen to Country-Western songs on the radio, and many of the youth are clearly well aware of current trends in American popular music. In spite of shopping among the non-Amish at ordinary malls and supermarkets where they hear Muzak and see everything materialistic the world has to offer, many seem to valiantly strive to maintain a separate existence from the mainstream, perhaps living what could be seen as the original “alternative” lifestyle. They have chosen to be separate, to be different, and their singing expresses this distinctness as much as anything else in their lives. Elder has recognized the significance of song in maintaining Amish life and values, and by focusing on children and how they learn song she has begun in the right place.

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I remember many weekend afternoons from my Ohio childhood when my family would take a trip to “Amish country,” and I would be regaled with parental nostalgic stories of “this is how it used to be.” My memory of these “plain” people, as they are still often and stereotypically referred to, gained mainly from a car window through the dust of unpaved roads, is now as faded as the 8mm movies my Dad faithfully took way back in the 50s. That the Amish might sing in addition to their stereotyped image of riding buggies, wearing old-fashioned clothes, and shucking corn never occurred to me four decades ago. It is thus with a mix of nostalgic curiosity, my own desire for *Gelassenheit*, and scholarly demeanor that I read Elder’s “Es Sind Zween Weg” as a lyrical account of a self-proclaimed rustic sect.

Elder starts with the perfunctory “classic case” scenario the Amish have come to represent: the earlier “American passage” flight from socially activated doctrinal persecution in Europe, a transplanted rural *Gemeinschaft* so fearful of assimilation that it preached the shunning of loved ones to keep them from straying, a group intent on finding meaning by mitigating the change everyone else defined as progress. Thanks in part to the Quakers, the Amish eventually found a Zion in the American wilderness, and were

no longer hated by most for their difference. Instead, through that peculiar American admiration of individualism and uniqueness, they progressively became commodified as nostalgia and tourist machines. In Ohio’s Holmes and Wayne counties, the loci of this ethnographic study, there are still dirt roads and corn shucks: yet, these have long since been reinscribed by neon “Amish Cooking” signs beckoning the busloads of tourists to take stock by buying (into) mementos of an American rural idyll.

Sociological analyses of Amish society have tended to focus on the regulatory functions of a group, which, to most Americans, represents a past thought of as a far better world. Yet hardly anyone would want to return to such a mentally constructed nostalgic world in the everyday, except as a tourist on a bus for a brief weekend gaze. What is interesting about Elder’s research is the focus on socialization through the very specific mechanism of song. Providing a historical survey of the importance of role singing as a form of resistance to torture, Elder is able to demonstrate through her ethnomusicological analysis that it would be foolish to dismiss the monophonic form of most Amish singing as a product of their so-called “backward” or “primitive” state. As a vehicle for inculcating the young with moral values, whether consciously or not, the form as well as the content of the songs shape a will to grow up and remain Amish.

I am intrigued by the author’s comments on the theologian Zwingli, who

privileged, and in fact insisted upon, the purity of voice unencumbered by musical instruments. Although not explored in further detail here, I am curious if this idea might not itself reinforce the return-to-nature economic drive of the society, a kind of Eden-esque innocence in which the naked human voice resonates as the culture-free Adam who knew no distraction from his creator? As a specialist on Islam, I should note that the human voice alone is mandated for reciting the Quran, so as not to call attention to itself. In this latter case, God’s words can only be properly echoed by man’s voice and not something created by man himself.

Elder is to be commended for bridging the interdisciplinary gap that often widens when music is analyzed both as a technique and at the same time is contextualized as a social act of symbolic power to shape socially shared values. After reading this study, we have a sense of what some contemporary Amish actually do and how they view what to them is no doubt a natural part of living. There are a number of areas for further research. I am especially interested in the role of the *Vorsinger*, described here not as an expert who determines the pitch, but as a necessary guiding role that is shared by community members. To the extent that children can “lead” elders, there appears to be a powerful metaphor for developing agency. How this developing agency steers the child to stay within the community or allows him

or her to slide into a parallel religious or even secular community is worth exploring.

Reading through the article, both informative and enjoyable, I am also inspired to read beyond it. There is much more I would like to know about the role music plays as a conscious symbol in promoting Amish social cohesion. Given the chosen isolation from the globalizing world around them, what role does singing in a “mother-” or even “Ur-” tongue play in reinforcing a desired otherness? What role do singing and humming play in everyday work tasks? What is the power of a musical tradition that is not abetted and shaped by recording but—if I understand the context correctly—must be passed on in actual performance? Imagine, if you can, how modern symphonies would sound if we did not usually have a “classic” recorded performance to judge by. I also wonder to what extent the aural overshadows the visual as the sense of choice in Amish upbringing. American culture, in its present commodified euphoria, fixates primarily on the visual. The Amish, it seems, simplify their visual world to harmonize as closely as it can with “nature,” while our broader media-mediated trend has been to out- and overdo nature. There is some irony, then, in the fact that the Amish as a withdrawn cultural group have come more and more to represent, as they did for me many years ago, what modern culture seems to be missing out on.

The Amazonian Ox Dance Festival: An Anthropological Account¹

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Abstract

The Ox Dance (**Boi-Bumbá**) festival, held yearly during the last three evenings of June in the town of Parintins, Amazonas, is the most spectacular folk festival staged in Northern Brazil. In recent decades, it has assumed massive proportions, combining traditional cultural themes with spectacular visual qualities, thematic innovations, and many sociological changes.

This paper analyzes the festival from an anthropological perspective, suggesting its interpretation as a contemporary cultural movement that, while enhancing regional indigenous roots, expresses a positive statement of a Brazilian *caboclo*, or *mestizo*, cultural identity.

The festival is a peculiar development of a folk play that has existed in Brazil since the 19th century and is based on the motif of the death and resurrection of a precious ox. An historical examination of the early records and studies of this play is undertaken in order to position the Parintins Ox Dance in this wider context. A brief ethnography focuses on its evolution from a small group of street players to the spectacular arena presentations of today's festival and on the basic structure of the current performances.



Pa Frank, the Ox, and Ma Katie in one Garantido's performance, 1997. (photograph by Evandro Teixeira)

Parintins is a small town on the island of Tupinambarana, in the Northern state of Amazonas, close to the border of the state of Pará. Every year the spectacular Ox Dance festival (*Festival dos Bois-Bumbás* in Portuguese), held in the last three evenings of June, transforms the quiet town. The festival is organized around a contest between two Ox groups: *Garantido* [Secure], represented by a white ox with a red heart on its forehead, and *Caprichoso* [Capricious], represented by a black ox with a blue star on its forehead. The performances are basically free sequences of danced dramatic actions, enacted by a set of characters, loosely related to a traditional motif of the death and resurrection of a precious ox.

In the past few years, this festival has grown to massive proportions, exhibiting an unexpected and creative blend of traditional cultural themes with spectacular visual qualities, thematic innovations, and other changes of sociological significance. Today, it attracts tens of thousands of fans, coming not only from Manaus (the state capital) and nearby towns, but from all over the country. As the most spectacular folklore festival in

Northern Brazil, it has also become a badge of regional cultural identity. The taut relationship between permanence and change, as well as the beauty of the festival, draws attention to the celebration's deep-rooted cultural meanings.

The analysis of this festival also raises wide-ranging questions concerning the study of folklore and popular culture. In the Ox Dance's recent development, the Brazilian national media, the culture industry, tourism, government agencies, and different social groups have all participated in an expansion that, until now, has managed to preserve strong traditional characteristics. From a romantic standpoint, folk culture is often seen as the lost haven of a harmonious universe, threatened by the modern world. From this nostalgic perspective, widely publicized shows tend to be regarded as deviations from an original authenticity. In this analysis, on the contrary, I examine the evolution of the Ox Dance festival as an extraordinary example of the capacity of Brazilian folk culture to transform and update itself, not unlike the Carnival parade of the Rio de Janeiro samba teams (Cavalcanti 1994, 1999).

I argue that the Parintins Ox Dance is an integral part of a single ritual cycle that encompasses different forms of a very traditional and widespread Brazilian folk play. This play, designated as ox-play in what follows, is based on the mythical motif of the death and resurrection of a precious ox, and has been enacted in different regions of the country since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Although fragmentation and diversity pervade this universe, a con-

siderable unity derives from the always-present allusion to the same mythical motif. I propose an understanding of the Parintins Ox Dance having as background this ample horizon open to comparative analysis.

My aim is to understand the festival as it appears today, with an intense capacity for cultural integration but also with problems and contradictions inherent in its growth. My starting point is an anthropological perspective based on studies of symbolism and rituals (Durkheim 1968; Turner 1967, 1974; Bateson 1965; Da Matta 1979; Gennep 1960; Peacock 1974; Tambiah 1985). The festival is considered as a total fact (*fait total*), that mingles different dimensions of social life in a process that must be grasped in its entirety (Mauss 1978). As such, the Parintins Ox Dance is a diffuse ritual process that interconnects popular and elite cultural realms (Bakhtin 1987), as different artistic forms and social groups are all part of it, and it keeps pace with the historical evolution of its social context. Like carnival, soccer, music, and religious festivals, it is a fascinating forum for the tense and intense cultural exchanges characteristic of Brazilian culture.

In the first section, I consider briefly the history, early records, and study of the ox-play in Brazil, sketching its main features and defining some important research guidelines. I also review the available literature on its Northern version, called *Boi-Bumbá*, that is, the Ox Dance. In the second section, I present a brief ethnography of the Ox Dance held in the town of Parintins, focusing on its evolution from a small group of street

players to the spectacular arena performances of today's festival. Sketching the basic structure of the Parintins contemporary performances, I propose lastly an interpretation of the Parintins Ox Dance as a cultural movement that, while enhancing its regional indigenous roots, expresses a positive statement of Brazilian *caboclo*, or mestizo, cultural identity.

I. The *Brincadeira do Boi* in Brazil

Brincadeira do boi, or the merrymaking of the ox, is the Brazilian term that designates different forms of the widespread ox-play. This expression illuminates the dual meaning of the English word "play." The participants of a *brincadeira* not only perform and appreciate a play (the theatrical performance) but all of them—performers and spectators—play a lot, that is, they enjoy themselves singing and dancing throughout the performance.

The *brincadeira do boi* has fascinated and challenged generations of scholars. It has been called by many different names, roughly corresponding to existing regional variations,² and its insertion in the annual calendar of Catholic festivities varies. In the Northern states, it occurs by the end of June, continuing through July, in the context of the celebrations of Saints Peter, John, Anthony and Marçal. In the Northeast, it happens more frequently during the Nativity celebrations, in December and January. In the Southeast, especially in Rio de Janeiro, it tends to occur during Carnival.

In the plays, the ox is represented by

a carcass of bamboo or similar material, covered with fabric and with an ox-mask as its head, animated by a player, and accompanied by other characters. The Portuguese words *bumba* or *bumbar* (sometimes corrupted to *bumbá*), which appear frequently in the regional names of the ox-play, have different suggestive interpretations. Borba Filho (1966, 10) offers two meanings: one is *bumba* as derived from the expression *Zabumba meu boi*, that is, the ox dancing to the beat of the *zabumba* drum (a large drum in an upright position played with only one drumstick). Thus, *bumba-meu-boi* would mean Dance-my-Ox. However, we also have the verb *bumbar* in Portuguese, which means to hit or beat something strongly. Borba Filho prefers the second meaning, owing to certain slapstick scenes in the farce. The great folklorist Câmara Cascudo adopts a similar interpretation: *Bumba* would be the same as an interjection giving the idea of a clash or brawl. To say *bumba-meu-boi* would be like exclaiming: "Strike! Gore them, my ox!" An excited refrain repeated in the dance (1984, 150). The relative merits of these arguments notwithstanding, it is unnecessary to resolve the question here; as Freud (1965) has suggested, ambivalence and over-determination are characteristic of this kind of symbolic processes.

The variety of names indicates many different developments as well as changes in context and meaning that are important issues in the research. Despite this diversity, all forms of the merrymaking display a certain unity. All of them allude to the mythical motif of the death and resurrection of a precious ox.

Mythmaking activity is everywhere associated with the brincadeira. In many cases, oral narratives have developed around the basic motif of the death and resurrection of the ox. This theme, sung in many songs, is also enacted and danced in the performances. However, the relationship between myth and rite is not a mechanical one. The numerous variations of the legend are not necessarily present as explicit verbal narratives in the different forms of the merrymaking. But the action of the main characters always suggests the core of a plot that alludes to the legend.

In one abridged Northern version, taken here as my main reference, the legend goes as follows: A rich farmer gave a favorite ox as a gift to his beloved daughter, entrusting it to the care of a faithful ranch hand (*Pai Francisco*—Pa Frank—represented by a black man). *Pai Francisco*, however, kills the ox to satisfy his pregnant wife's (*Mãe Catirina*—Ma Katie's) craving for the ox tongue. The farmer notes the disappearance of the ox and sends the ranch foreman to investigate. The crime is discovered and, after some adventures, local Indians are called to help capture *Pai Francisco*, who has hidden in the forest. He is brought in before the farmer and threatened with severe punishment. In despair, he tries to resuscitate the ox and finally succeeds in doing so, with the help of a physician and/or a priest and/or a witchdoctor.

The long history and the current vitality of the brincadeira do boi in Brazil suggest a depth in this apparently simple legend warranting a specific analysis not undertaken here. The basic ethnic and social categories of the white, black, and

Indian figures from Brazilian history interact intimately and in a highly ambivalent way in the play. The resurrection of the ox, in its turn, always appears to symbolize the start of a new social order.³

Historical records

The first written reference I have found to the merrymaking of the ox is from São Luis (the capital of the Northern state of Maranhão), where the variety section of a daily newspaper mentions the wanderings of “dance-my-ox” groups in the city's streets in July, 1829.⁴ The first known description dates from January 1840, in Recife (the capital of the Northeastern state of Pernambuco). The article, “The Ox Dance folly,” by the Benedictine friar Lopes Gama, appeared then in the newspaper *O Carapuceiro* (Lopes Gama 1996). The friar disdained the performance as a “bunch of stupidities.” As the title suggests, the article was rather a collection of indignant comments (extremely biased but also very smart and amusing) on the pretext of offering a sermon against the play's mockery of a priest's character. According to the friar, this was a recent, and unwelcome, addition to the plot.

A second description dates from 1859 and comes from Manaus (the capital of the Northern state of Amazonas). The traveling physician Avé-Lallemant described a Bumba in that city, a pagan procession inserted into a celebration of St. John, in June.⁵ His description emphasizes the characters of the ox and the witchdoctor dancing to the percussion beat, the death of the ox, and the won-

derful lighting effects from the torches during the dance around the “dead” ox. The priest’s character had been banned. The physician was also very impressed by the audacity displayed by the costume of a male player dressed as one of the “wives” of the *tuxáua* [Indian chief]. Avé-Lallemant acknowledged that there was, in the Ox Dance, “with its choirs and carefully harmonious soaring song, something attractive, something of a wild and pure poetry” (1961, 106).

In the interval between these two descriptions, Vicente Salles (1970, 27-29) came across reports about the Bumba in newspapers from Belém and Óbidos (both in the Northern state of Pará).

These facts reveal that the diversity of the *brincadeira do boi* dates from its early days and suggest its simultaneous dissemination in Northern and Northeastern Brazilian provinces during the nineteenth century. They also permit one to characterize this diversity. First, there is its diverse insertion in the annual calendar of popular Catholic celebrations, suggesting compatibility with different Christian cosmological motifs. Then, there are the variations of its characters, with the recent addition of the priest in the Recife version and the witchdoctor in the Manaus record. This indicates the openness of the ox-play’s symbolic universe to its cultural surroundings. There is also the impression of plot looseness, especially implied by the word “bunch” used in the friar’s description. Two basic structural features can be inferred from these facts: the fragmentary nature of the performance’s plot and its flexibility and responsiveness to social context.

The study of the merrymaking

When anchoring the unity of the merrymaking in the motif of the death and resurrection of a precious ox, I follow a path suggested by many scholars. Many studies see this theme as providing a “central” or “basic structure,” a “fixed nucleus,” a “basic unit,” in short, an “axis” that characterizes one single, though complex, symbolic universe. Nonetheless, all previous writers also point out that this “basic structure” cannot fully explain the merrymaking. This relative unity is always accompanied by fragmentation, improvisation, and variety (Andrade 1982; Queiroz 1967; Galvão 1951; Meyer 1990; Monteiro 1972; Borba Filho 1966; Cascudo 1984; Salles 1970). The point here is that these last characteristics are mostly seen as negative traits, very frequently considered as an impoverishment or even a clear sign of the merrymaking’s decay, due to “modern times.” In my interpretation, the fragmentary nature and flexibility of the plot are fully integrated in the merrymaking’s general pattern, indicating dimensions that are essential for the understanding of its symbolic nature. These traits derive, at least partially, from the fact that the merrymaking’s focus is on action.

In this vein, one should observe that the mythical ox, around which a vast symbolic universe revolves, is also a badge for organizing the competing groups of players and instilling rivalry between them. The performing groups are called “Oxen,” and each is given its own special name: “Mysterious Ox,” “The Last Word,” “Young Sugarcane,” “St. John’s Favorite,” “Faith in God,” and

so on, all over the country. The ox group is a local, rural or urban organization based on a neighborhood and its outskirts, and the existence of one ox group anywhere attracts others, as rivalry is at the basis of the performances.

Scholars have defined the merrymaking in different ways, but some care is required in selecting the terminology employed to capture its nature. Very often it has been defined as a folk play—an initial definition that I kept—alluding to the allegorical forms of the medieval theatre and to the folk theatrical forms staged in the streets or public squares. Some prefer to categorize it as a farce, pointing to the burlesque, buffoonery, and grotesque elements of the performances. Between 1930 and 1940, the renowned folklorist and writer Mário de Andrade (1982) placed the merrymaking of the Ox in the context of the “dramatic dances” (dances that enact specific plots), an expression coined by him to demonstrate the formal unity underlying various cultural manifestations. In the 1950s, other folklorists considered it as a revelry (*folgado* in Portuguese) highlighting the festive nature of the performances that display a mix of music, dance, and drama.

The search for origins, generally more speculative than historical, has also attracted scholars. Câmara Cascudo mentions the powerful figure of the bull in worldwide mythical domains. Nevertheless, when dwelling on concrete historical origins, he mentions the *tourinhas*, a light version of bullfight, and the popularity of the ox figure in a number of Catholic processions in the Iberian Peninsula. Nonetheless, the Brazilian mer-

rymaking would be an original “ingenious creation of the mestizo. . . . The Portuguese humpbacked ox appeared at the peak of rural slavery, waltzing, leaping, and scattering the revelers, without the slightest resemblance to a bullfight” (1984, 150).

Câmara Cascudo described the merrymaking as “a play of breathtaking beauty with reminders of the past and deep social feeling” and as “the only Brazilian festivity in which thematic renewal dramatizes popular curiosity, making it contemporary. Its constant transformations are in no way detrimental to the dynamic essence of folklore that is of interest, but rather revives it in an incomparable expression of spontaneity and reality” (*ibid.*, 153).

The Ox Dance in Amazonia

The permeability of the *brincadeira do boi* to the cultural milieu takes significance from concrete situations. It is therefore important to place each variant of the merrymaking in its own sociological background. In Amazonia, the merrymaking is called *Boi-Bumbá*, Ox Dance. The relative historic and cultural unity of the region provides the context in which the Parintins Ox Dance reverberates, alluding to many aspects of a troubled history (Souza 1994; Daou 2000; Reis 1931). The Parintins festival intentionally refers to this background, and this originality is surely one of the reasons for its contemporary popularity. Parintins is situated at almost equal distance from Manaus (upstream) and Belém (downstream) in a region known

as Médio Amazonas, because of its position in the middle of the river's course. The Ox Dance's evolution in the two major Amazonian capitals helps to illuminate the Parintins development.

Research by Salles suggests that the Amazonian Ox Dance spread from the city of Belém, where it took shape at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In Salles's interpretation, it could be linked to the African-Brazilian regional population, who practiced an "aggressive and strange revelry" that would wander through the streets, often culminating in a brawl among the *capoeira* (dance-cum-martial art) groups. The violence would provoke heavy police repression and the local legal codes several times forbade the revelry in the streets (Salles 1970, 28-33). In the mid-nineteenth century, the Ox Dance groups of Belém came under the influence of a different kind of folk theatre, developed in the festival of Our Lady of Nazareth.⁶ Libretto poets, especially contracted to compose the annual play for the Nazareth festival, influenced the Ox Dance presentations in the direction of a type of operetta, keeping, however, "their original elements . . . and the whole court of traditional players intact" (ibid., 33) This new pattern was preserved when, after the Second World War, the Ox groups returned to their more exclusively popular environments, and it was revived in the 1960s, when tourist agencies and authorities began to organize other festivals with contests and prizes.

The mutual influence among different social realms resulted, in the case of Belém, in an artistic sophistication of the Ox Dance performances and in the ex-

pansion of its public. The evolution of the Parintins Ox Dance, with its spectacular quality and middle class artists occupying important roles in its making, displays some analogies with that of Belém.

The evolution of the Manaus Ox Dance followed a different path, where this kind of cultural exchange is absent. Between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, at the time of the economic rubber boom in the region, the elite groups of the newly affluent city of Manaus especially insisted on their distinction from other social groups. The Amazonas Theatre, with its European operas, was the ultimate symbol of their aspirations (Daou 2000). The Ox Dance, however, has been documented there among popular groups since the mid-nineteenth century (Avé-Lallemant 1961; Monteiro 1972, 5).

The writer Márcio Souza (interview, 1999) recalls the Ox Dance groups in Manaus in the 1950s:

The Ox groups would rehearse in the enclosures and would go into the streets, performing at homes in response to the requests of the politicians, or at the invitation of wealthy townspeople; or the community would put some money together to pay for the presentation. A complete performance would last for four to five hours, with a maximum of two shows per evening. . . . And they were like warriors, they would not only roam the streets but would quarrel with each other. . . . This would cause the biggest fights in town and everyone would end up at the police station. . . . When the

folklore festivals began in the 1960s, their rivalry was controlled and the performances were shortened.

Belém, at the mouth of the Amazonas River, and Manaus, on the left bank of the Rio Negro far upstream, are at either end of a route along which flows the extensive river traffic of the region. The Ox Dance has certainly found its way to many riverside towns between the two largest Amazonian capitals. The field is open for future investigation.

In the last decade of the twentieth century, one of the Amazonian Ox Dances, the Parintins Ox Dance, captured the attention of researchers. Anthropologist Sérgio Teixeira (1992) remarked on its “magnificent breathtaking show.” Poet João de Jesus Paes Loureiro (1997, 396) considered it one of the important landmarks in contemporary Amazonian culture, commenting on “a rich and lively cannibalizing and carnivalizing process” in progress. In recent decades, the Parintins Ox Dance has clearly been providing Manaus, the state capital, with an unprecedented site of cultural exchange and integration.

II. The Festival's Ethnography

The town of Parintins, located in the Tupinambarana Island in the middle course of the Amazonas River, has a population of around 42,000, and the surrounding county of the same name around 60,000.⁷ In the sixteenth century, local groups were driven out or subordinated by the sweeping migrations of the Tupi Indians, who had

fled up the Amazonas River, escaping from Portuguese invaders. When the Jesuits arrived in the mid-seventeenth century, building special villages to convert the Indians, a group of Tupi Indians, the Tupinambás, dominated the region. Speaking a common language, this group would trade and mix with the Portuguese, helping them to capture other Indians. Tupinambarana, the name of the island where the town is located, means “false Tupi Indians,” and Parintins, the town's name, derives from another Tupi group, the Parintintins (Cerqua 1980).

In the mid-twentieth century, Parintins economy was based especially on sisal production and processing, which sustained regional economic development between 1940 and 1960. Nowadays the main economic activity is cattle and buffalo farming.⁸ On the whole, the area is poor, with little infrastructure and few job opportunities, as formal employment is primarily in local government, retail trade, and small-scale business. Even the cattle are taken to slaughterhouses in Manaus. Few cars, many bicycles, and, more recently, motorbikes circulate in the town's streets.

Nevertheless, Parintins shelters extraordinary cultural wealth and, from this viewpoint, it is outstanding as a kind of local capital.⁹ The town is the seat of an active Catholic diocese,¹⁰ basic public utilities, good schools, and an advanced campus of the Federal University of Amazonas. Town leaders organize a large number of festivities, especially the pilgrimage of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, the town's patron saint, between July 6 and 16, and the Parintins Folklore

Festival in the last week of June. This festival, which includes the presentation of square dance groups, is nowadays known as the *Festival dos Bois-Bumbás* or Ox Dance Festival, due to the great recognition achieved by the Ox groups' performances in the last three evenings of June.

The closeness of these festivals indicates that the dry Amazonian "summer" season, when the rivers are at low levels, is the highpoint of the calendar of regional events. The two festivals combine to attract diverse visitors to the town. A mass is always celebrated in the cathedral in the week before the festival of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (that is, during the Ox Dance festival). During the Ox performances, the two rival groups render homage to the patron saint with refrains and scenes in the arena, asking for her blessing and protection. After the festival, the Ox groups decorate the saint's carriage. Only on July 17, after the end of the Carmel festivities, will the Ox groups hold their merry barbecues and stage the "escape of the ox," concluding their annual activities.

Father Gino Malvestio, the local bishop, observed, "The Ox Dance festival finishes, and July 6 is the start of Our Lady of Mount Carmel's festival, in which everyone is interested with equal fervor" (interview, 1996).

Deputy mayor Osvaldo Ferreira commented:

There are 180 rural communities in the county and its surroundings, all with their own patron saints, and commemorations on their own

patron saint's day. Between July 6 and 16, most country folk swarm to Our Lady of Mount Carmel's festival. Here it gets quite busy, not as much as during the Ox Dance, which attracts around 50,000 visitors, but last year [1995] 15,000 people came to the procession. The visitors are mainly folk from the hinterlands, rural communities, and the Parintins parishioners. (interview, 1996)

While Our Lady of Mount Carmel's pilgrimage is an "inland festivity" that draws participants or visitors from the region, the Ox Dance is a festival that draws people from the whole country and overseas.

The Ox Dance arena

The festival is held in a stadium, commonly called the *Bumbódromo*, in a clear allusion to the *Sambódromo* (the Samba Carnival parade venue built in 1984 by the Rio de Janeiro state government). Amazonino Mendes, the local state governor at the time, built the Ox Dance arena in 1988, on the site of the town's old airport. The concrete structures for the stands, seating 40,000, were built around a circular arena. Normally, the stadium is used for sporting events, and it houses a grammar school underneath its stands. On the festivity days, the classrooms turn into the Ox players' dressing rooms.

The stadium is in the middle of town, forming an imaginary line with the cathedral of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and the local cemetery that separates Parintins into east and west. This is

significant because in all matters relating to the Ox Dance the town is divided into two parts. The stands of the stadium are divided into the western, red-painted half, belonging to the red fans of *Garantido* (the Safe Ox), and the blue-painted, eastern half, belonging to the blue fans of *Caprichoso* (the Capricious Ox). The fans are organized in *galeras*, informal youth groups with a strong sense of group identity and intense rivalry towards other groups (for instance, soccer or funk *galeras*).

The stands have only four neutral areas, located at the northern and southern ends of the stadium. To the south, between the two large gateways leading into the arena, there is a group of seats for the local government and eminent members of the community. The three other neutral areas are at the northern end at the arena, with an area for journalists and, at the top of the stadium, a long row of cabins especially built by Coca-Cola for its guests (socialites, actors, business VIPs, journalists, and Brazilian politicians). Since 1995, Coca-Cola has been one of the festival's sponsors, along with the state government, the Brazilian Ministry of Culture, and the Ox groups themselves, who now run their own businesses.

The town area outside the stadium is also divided into two parts. *Garantido*'s enclosure (the rehearsal court) and its general headquarters, including the workshops for manufacturing the floats and costumes, are to the west of the arena, in the so-called upper town. *Caprichoso*'s enclosure and general headquarters are to the east, in the lower

town.¹¹ This division is taken to such lengths that to walk “up” (west) or “down” (east) in the streets of Parintins always means to enter the networks of one or the other of the Ox groups.

A brief history of the Ox groups

According to oral tradition, the Ox groups appeared in Parintins in the 1910s. Lindolfo Monteverde, whose parents were from the Azores, created the *Garantido* Ox in 1913. The *Caprichoso* Ox followed in its wake, some even say in the same year and others a year later, made by the brothers Roque and Antônio Cid (natives of Crato, Ceará) and by Furtado Belém, an eminent Parintins citizen.¹²

The Ox groups played in the local squares and roamed the streets, where they would challenge each other and quarrel at each chance encounter. Nor would they let the other pass or turn back: “It was really brutal, that was how it was, there was no middle term; when they met they would fight, and the policemen would come and put the fighters in jail” (Raimundo Muniz, interview, 1999). The wealthier townfolk would pay the groups to play in front of their homes, and others would give them a meal. Lindolfo Monteverde, the owner of the *Garantido* Ox, had a very good voice. His ox was “secure,” “guaranteed,” and would always leave the fights unscathed: “His head was unbreakable.” Consequently, the rival Ox would try to excel in singing and dancing. Other Ox groups existed, but only *Garantido* and *Caprichoso* survived. The reason was the gradual

and close association of each of them to the “upper” and “lower” halves of town, which enabled them to embody an important contrast in the social morphology and organization of Parintins. Their strong rivalry was soon able to represent the town as unified.

The shape taken by today’s Ox Dance is a result of the creation of the Parintins Folklore Festival in 1965. A group of friends from the local Catholic youth organization—Xisto Pereira, Lucenor Barros, and Raimundo Muniz—started the festival. Raimundo Muniz (interview, 1999) tells of how “we were three friends and Father Augusto, and we had a meeting on June 1, 1965. We left with the idea of getting the folklore groups together.” At that time, he says, the festivities were waning: “No one wanted to play any more. People would criticize and say, Oh! I don’t like the Ox Dance; it’s only for the poor, *caboclos*, fishermen, people like that, charcoal burners. So we thought of organizing a folklore festival to present the square dances.”

The festival was a watershed in the history of the Parintins Ox groups, which gradually became the stars of the show. When the festival was created, the focus was on the square dances: “The festival would start on June 12, and last for ten evenings, taking advantage of the weekends and Wednesday evenings. As a result, the country folk would arrive and there were, say, 20 to 22 groups of square dances. The Ox groups appeared only as a finale to the festivities” (Raimundo Muniz, interview, 1999). And even then, each Ox group arrived at its scheduled time to avoid the terrible street brawls. Raimundo Muniz explains

(interview, 1999):

The beginning meant a lot of sacrifice for us. We did not have the resources and everything was done with an amateur’s heart. The stands were called *perches*. Timber had to be bought, and we did this each year, we had to buy on credit and pay later. From 1965 to 1971, the festival was held in the cathedral square. We sold tickets to the seats at bar tables. The money was invested in the folk-groups and a part went towards the expenses of the festival, because the music was all to our own account. It had a different rhythm from today’s, but we didn’t record it, and we had no photographers at this time.

The festival soon became a big success. This success was due to the popular appeal of the two rival Ox groups, closely associated with the town’s image, and the cultivation of competition between the fans of the rival groups. In the words of Raimundo Muniz:

At the third festival, the town folks had already made up their minds. You could feel who was for Caprichoso and who was for Garantido, because when the former won, no Garantido fan would go down there from the Cathedral, they would rip the others’ clothes, that old quarrel. So we decided to separate the supporters: a stand for each group.

The cohesion of the Ox groups themselves was strengthened by the institution of a festival contest:

In 1965, it was a free show, while 1966 was the start of the contest. We

thought to ourselves, “What can we do for the Ox groups to get them together to enjoy themselves?” So we invented a trophy, a jury with judges, a lawyer. . . . And step by step came the first champion, then the second, and it caught on. (Raimundo Muniz, interview, 1999)

For a contest to be respected and successful, the contestants must basically agree on a common set of rules and criteria for judging. Such agreement tends to strengthen the leadership of associations and clubs representing the groups. The popularity of the Ox groups grew with the festival’s contest, as did the prominence of the Ox Dance show, giving the rival groups a powerful vehicle to express their traditional rivalries. Nowadays, for example, the square dances, which still precede the Ox Dance show, are less and less in the limelight, with much more attention directed to the festival’s main attraction.

The festival’s expansion led to the arrival of new social groups in its organization. Raimundo Muniz, for instance, stepped down in 1983 when the town hall, with the support of the Ox groups, took over the coordination of the festival.¹³ He says of this move:

In 1970 and 1972, folks from Manaus made their first visits to our festival, not to the extent that they do today, but the Ox Dance has always been an attraction. . . . In 1980, I visited Manaus to ask Emamtur [the local tourism authority] to support the festival; they kept putting me off for three days. . . . Then they called me back: “Look, pal, the State doesn’t have any money. It only has money

for the festival here because, you know, this is the capital and ours is a very big festival.” So I invited one of the Emamtur directors to come and watch the Parintins festival. On the first evening, when *Caprichoso* came in, he turned to me and said: “My friend, I bow to you!” . . . We had here off-campus departments of the University of Rio de Janeiro, and there were always many visitors from Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo. . . . The dean played a major role here, as part of the jury. People came, enjoyed, and kept talking about it. Then the press and television helped a lot. In 1987, governor Amazonino came to watch, where the arena is today, but then it was just a wooden stage. He enjoyed the festival, and decided: “I want to get a proper place for the Ox!” and ordered the stadium to be built in 1988.

In brief, the festival began as a community festivity in 1965, linked to the local Catholic youth organization and traditional Catholic commemorations. Early in the 1980s it developed to include the county authorities, and by the end of the decade it was already attracting local state investment. In the 1990s the federal Ministry of Culture and powerful sponsors (such as Coca-Cola) would arrive, bringing the festival to the nation’s view.

This growth also brought new dramatic elements to the ox-play and transformed its artistic components. The aesthetic and thematic innovation accomplished during the 1970s is worth mentioning. Odinéia Andrade (local researcher and active player in the festival, interview; 1996) mentions a

“decline” in the motif of the death and resurrection of the Ox at that time: “We added to it themes from the Amazonian culture: legends, myths and regional traditions.” Raimundo Muniz (interview, 1999) recalls other new features:

The original ox [he means the plastic representation of the ox in the play] did not have all this swing when it danced. The ox didn’t move its ears; it was an ox from the old folklore. The first to move its head, ear, and tail was Garantido. Its owner attached some wires to make them move. That’s how it began, Caprichoso was folksier. That was Jair Mendes, a very smart artist, who worked for Garantido. He was the one who gave this whole artistic drive to Garantido and later to Caprichoso, because after disagreeing with Garantido, he spent two years with Caprichoso. They also started doing everything Garantido did. And so it carried on.

Jair Mendes, the Parintins artist mentioned above, had worked in Rio de Janeiro’s carnival from 1970 to 1972. He tells us (interview, 1999):

I really enjoyed Rio’s carnival. Because I love all the new things . . . and when I came back to my hometown, Parintins, I wanted to do here what I had learned. But there was no carnival whatsoever in Parintins, nor in Manaus at that time. But they had the Ox Dance. I was a *Garantido* fan; it was in my area up here. So what did I do? I started adding some carnival features. Floats about regional legends such as Yara, the Giant Snake, River Dolphin, for instance. Before that, the Parintins Ox

Dance had nothing out of the ordinary, just the same as all the other towns still have: percussion, ox, ox owner, cowboys and all that.

From the beginning, cultural borrowings from Rio de Janeiro’s carnival have been adapted to local requirements and meanings. The Ox Dance floats, for example, express local themes based on regional legends. They also adapt themselves to what Jair Mendes calls the “public taste,” the anticipation that something must “happen.” In the huge warehouse where the Garantido floats are made, he pointed to a large alligator that, in his opinion, would certainly be a success in 1999, since its feet, head, and tail would all move at the performance. He even boasted of once having made a sculpture smile! In 1975, acting as “owner of the ox” in the performance for the first time, Jair was in a position to introduce other innovations. He told me about his revolutionary insight that corresponds to his finely tuned understanding of the dramatic nature of the Ox Dance:

Something incredible at that time, something very simple that suddenly came to my mind: what do people like? They like happenings. It’s not just something good to watch, like the splendor of a carnival parade passing by. Something has to happen. . . . I was the ox owner. So I decided to brand the ox. I designed a “brand iron” with the letters “JM” (his initials), and used black ink to make a mark. . . . There I went with the iron, branding the ox and the ox went “Moo!”

He explained that he had had to coordinate that the sound of the ox be made by someone else each time he “branded” it, since there was no tape recorder. “Well, there was an uproar, people loved it, and it was just a very simple idea. You see, I know what people like here.”

Another important change occurred early in the 1980s. In the merrymaking’s traditional pattern, each Ox group belonged to an owner, respected by his comrades and in charge of the performances. This social role overlapped with the play’s character of the ox owner (*amo do boi*). In the 1980s, the Ox groups became formal organizations, each run by a board of directors. They had no individual owners anymore. In Garantido, however, the traditional owner Lindolfo Monteverde continued to act as the ox owner character in the play until his death in 1979. The Monteverde family kept this role until 1995; since then, new talents, especially good singers, have taken it on.

In the 1990s, another major change brought us to the festival’s current pattern: the growing emphasis on the indigenous and regional elements in the theme’s development. In the opinion of Simão Assayag, art director for Caprichoso, the forest Indian from Amazonian folklore would inevitably have to play a role somewhere, and that came to be in the Parintins Ox Dance. In 1995, a new dramatic scene, called the “ritual,” was included, continuing the same trend. The main character of this scene, the witchdoctor, became the main star of each evening’s presentation of the Ox groups.

Marketing and the Ox groups as organizations

Today both Ox groups are formal organizations. Not only do they run the artistic aspects of the festival, but they are also responsible for its production and marketing. Their main sources of income are: (1) the official patronage of the state and federal governments, the latter through the Ministry of Culture, (2) Coca-Cola sponsorship since 1995 (which, in exchange, may advertise its products in the arena and in specially built booths),¹⁴ (3) the sale of the arena rights to television networks,¹⁵ (4) the sale of festival CDs, with its annual music, (5) ticket sales for the festival in Parintins and for the rehearsals held in Manaus.¹⁶ Their symbols have become registered trademarks at the federal Patent and Trademark Office. Fundraising associations have been created in Manaus for the festival. Garantido and Caprichoso have created fan clubs, setting up dancing spaces, called the mainland enclosures, to hold shows and rehearsals in Manaus.

Their influence has also extended up and down the middle-Amazonas river, to small towns close to Parintins, such as Maués, Nhamundá, Barreirinha, and even Santarém, located downstream, and mainly to Manaus, upstream. “The folk come here, see how it is, and go away with the ideas for themselves,” comments a Parintins hotel owner. The Parintins Ox Dance has clearly achieved a regional hegemony. At festival time, Manaus’s role as a capital is subverted, and it becomes, in the words of a Parintins citizen, “a kind of

neighborhood of the island of Tupinambarana.”

The Manaus-Parintins relationship, entwined around the Ox Dance, causes some rivalry. Manaus has its own, and older, folklore festival.¹⁷ Its players talk about the past revelries, now “suffocated by the festival of Parintins.” The Manaus festival stops and the capital’s streets become empty during the last three days of June. However, the Manaus fan clubs, with their mainland enclosures, also ensure a vast network of collaboration between Manaus and Parintins. Today, even at the preparatory stage, Manaus youth “prefer to go to the rehearsals of *toadas* (the typical music of the Parintins Ox Dance) for the Parintins festival than to the rehearsals of the local Ox groups.”

As highlighted by the preference of Manaus’s population, the *toadas* are at the front line of the festival’s increased popularity. The *toadas* are a social fact in their own right; they anticipate, participate in, and surpass the Ox Dance festival. For some years now, they have been the top regional hits. In 1996, they burst onto the national and international scene as hopeful candidates to become a new national hit, following the example of Bahia’s *axé*-music.¹⁸

The river steamers (*gaiolas*) sailing up and down the Amazonas River generally have a bar on the top deck, flanked by two enormous speakers constantly playing the Ox Dance *toadas* on their voyages back and forth. As the festival draws nearer, small groups of passengers rehearse their dance steps while drinking and chatting. The visitor arriving in Manaus at this time is also immediately caught up in the characteristic festival

musical environment, with the town resounding to the music playing incessantly on the radio and in local stores.

At the old Parintins harbor, the visitors are greeted with *toadas* blasting from powerful speakers beside the river steamers and small canoes, shortly to be moored alongside motorboats and modern yachts. The town resonates with the music’s beat and melodies. Silence is no longer, nor the gentle murmur of the river. Everything is immersed in an overwhelming chaotic musical atmosphere, since even the smallest bars (some makeshift, and multiplying as the festival approaches) and households constantly play their favorite *toadas*.

The success of the *toadas* has increased the number of bands in Manaus. In addition to independent bands, each Ox group has its own officially accredited band and its own local radio program. Every year the bands travel through Northern Brazil contracted to play at special events and festivals.¹⁹

The mainland enclosures in Manaus must be seen in this context. After Easter Saturday, at the end of Lent, the Ox groups begin to hold events and rehearsals in their enclosures and in Manaus neighborhoods, raising an important part of the funds necessary for the Parintins festival. On the eve of the last rehearsal, one week before the festivities, the Ox groups organize an electric bandwagon, jokingly called the “electronic Ox-cart,” with bands playing *toadas*. Their activities culminate in a huge party in the enclosure. This is the start of the “Ox caravan” towards

Parintins, a procession of large and small river craft carrying thousands of people to the island and “to the biggest folklore festival in Brazil.”

The geographic location of Parintins, at the far eastern tip of the Tupinambarana Island, is well positioned to showcase the festival. As one looks upstream, the vast river stretches to the horizon. From that distant line, all the vessels sailing down the river appear like specks on the water. On the eve of the festival, river steamers and yachts approach, sailing round the island and displaying their blue or red pennants, sputtering fireworks before they anchor in the harbor. Wealthier tourists arrive in catamarans, with food and accommodation guaranteed. Tourist agencies, which previously would only become busy in June, now begin selling their package deals in October of the prior year. Local people arrive mostly on the traditional steamers, with their hammocks. Everyone is looking forward to *brincar de boi* (that is to play the ox, in the sense of enjoying themselves, singing and dancing).

Cars and motorbikes are off-loaded from barges from Manaus. The state military police and health department set up special operations. The harbor authorities increase the supervision of river traffic, concerned about overcrowding, a recurring cause of shipwrecks. Flights between Manaus and Parintins increase in frequency.

The people of Parintins get ready to welcome the visitors. The local town hall distributes the winning festival poster, the result of a contest organized in March and April among local artists. They clean

up the streets. Traffic police close and open the streets to the traffic of the few cars, the many bicycles, and the growing number of motorbikes. Street vendors are in profusion, setting up their stalls of food and handicrafts in the square near the harbor, between the town hall and the marketplace. Some of them are also members of indigenous groups from nearby, whose stalls are visited at the last minute by the Ox artists for the final touches to this or that adornment of their groups. Many of the residents of Parintins set up food stalls along the main street.

The Caprichoso and Garantido Ox groups, in turn, have been at work for some time. An art director is in charge of the design and supervises the festival arrangements. The preparations are basically made in the enclosures, the central headquarters, and the many other workshops. At the central headquarters, a team of artists works, making the floats.²⁰ Other headquarters are scattered throughout the town. The youth groups that compose the basis of the Ox performances are called tribes. Each tribe has its own costume and rehearses its own choreography. The artist in charge of the tribe’s rehearsals and the making of its costumes is called the tribe’s chief and organizes its own tribe’s headquarter. The *toadas* are composed in January and February, and house competitions decide which eighteen *toadas* are to be included on the groups’ official CDs. These selected *toadas* are then going to “animate the Ox” (Ronaldo Barbosa, composer for Caprichoso; interview, 1996). At the enclosures, the band, percussion, and

lead singer rehearse, and the fans show off and rehearse the different dance steps of each toada.

As festival time approaches, the two Ox groups avoid each other more than ever. The collective behavior is full of prohibitions and taboos: the name of the other Ox group is never mentioned; it is merely called “the other.” The strong colors representing each Ox are blue (Caprichoso) and red (Garantido). It is unimaginable (or pure provocation) to attend the rehearsal of an Ox wearing the other’s colors, even if discreetly. Anything that is a reminder of the other Ox group must be avoided. The Portuguese verbs *garantir* (to guarantee) and *caprichar* (to elaborate something very carefully, trying to excel) are each banished from the vocabulary of the other group.²¹ The townspeople joke and comment that, at this time, husbands and wives who cheer for opposing Ox groups separate. When it is time for the festival, the townspeople and fans mark out their territories, decorating the streets with flags and paintings in their Ox colors.

Behind the scenes and at rehearsals, this rivalry means secrecy. Nothing must be disclosed to the other group, especially the surprise effects that are shared exclusively within the Ox’s art director’s team, to be revealed only at the performance.

On the eve of the festival, representatives of each group sign a document with the contest’s rules. When the square dances have ended at the arena, the Ox groups offer a small preview of their display to test the sound and light equipment.

Rivalry and differentiation between the Ox groups

On the evenings of June 28, 29, and 30, Caprichoso and Garantido confront each other in a renewed contest. Each Ox has around 3,500 players, and every evening, the costumes, floats, and legends are varied in performances that last no more than three hours. Around 45,000 people fill the arena’s stands. A great part of them belong to the Ox groups’ *galeras* (each with about 15,000 fans), who have free seats in the red (western) or blue (eastern) painted halves of the stands. The *galeras* arrive early in the afternoon and wait with strong anticipation for the performance to begin. They will sing, dance, and produce many visual special effects throughout the show. While one *galera* is intensely participating in its Ox group performance, the other will be seated very quietly. It will of course lose important points if it disturbs the opponent’s presentation.

From the *galera*’s viewpoint, each evening brings alternating experiences of passion towards its own Ox group and attentive and lucid observation of the opponent’s performance. A famous toadas composer, Chico da Silva, says very perceptively, “In Parintins, people will always love one Ox group and appreciate the other” (interview, 1996). The best observer of an Ox performance is likely to be a member of the opponent *galera* who, watching quietly, carefully, and very critically the other’s presentation, becomes, in spite of himself, the other’s greatest admirer. Knowledge and admiration are, however, part of the strong rivalry that

links one Ox group to the other, and these will be transformed into the deep humiliation of the loser when the winner is announced. On July 1, after the announcement of the contest's result, when the tourists and visitors are already gone, the winning group gathers at its enclosure from whence it starts an informal parade through the streets. At the central street that divides the town into the two Ox groups' moities, fights and quarrels occur. The parade's destination is the stadium arena, which then belongs entirely to the winner, whose victory celebrations consist basically in humiliating and offending the absent loser with jokes and degrading allusions to their players, and in subverting their toadas' poetry with joking motifs.

At the evening performances, however, rivalry is controlled by formal rules and is mediated by artistic expression. The competition's limitation to two contesting groups is countered by repetition—each Ox group presents itself three times—and has resulted in the expansion and elaborate internal sophistication of the performances. The Parintins Ox groups have added another annual theme to the traditional motif of the death and resurrection of a precious ox. In doing so, they have expanded and opened the performances to incorporate the vast symbolic universe of Amazonian myths, the modern ecological banner, and a new look at the native Indian groups. From the 1980s onwards, this new approach, especially with the enhancement of the indigenous elements and the ecological banner, has joined the contemporary trends that now

pervade Amazonian environmentalism and indigenist policies.²²

This superposition of motifs is the basis of the performance's artistic richness. The sequence of scenes, composed by different dramatic actions, work as fragments of meaning loosely connected to each other, relating the multiplicity of motifs that find their way into the performance. Roughly speaking, the scenes can be divided in two ideal types: those that relate to the Ox mythical motif and those that derive from the annual slogan based on regional and indigenous motifs. A very clear example of this second type is, for instance, a scene called "Amazonian legend" that enacts each evening a different legend, bringing to the arena its respective characters.

The content of the annual variable theme, emphasizing regional and indigenous motifs, expresses therefore an agreement between the Ox groups. Nevertheless, their way of doing this greatly distinguishes their respective styles today. Where Garantido defends "tradition," Caprichoso adopts a more innovative discourse. Garantido has, however, been demanding a freer rein in addressing the annual slogan. In their view, "People must understand that one of the Ox Dance features is not to adopt one single theme uniting the three evenings' performances." Or: "We want to play; we are committed not to the theme but rather to the toadas and to the folklore characters. . . . The Ox Dance is not concerned with logical sequences. We perform freely, we . . . are in the context of the merrymaking tradition . . ." (Emília Faria, Art Director for Garantido; interview, 1996). Caprichoso,

on the other hand, has been innovating specifically toward more unity in the three-evening sequence. Art Director Simão Assayag wrote an elaborate libretto for the 1996 show, naming it a “*caboclo* (mestizo) folk opera,” in which each evening’s performance was conceived as a different act integrating one single story.

It would, however, be misleading simply to interpret the history of the Garantido Ox group as more “traditional” and that of Caprichoso as more “modern.” The current opposition is to be understood as a particular moment in the Ox Dance’s evolution. In previous years, the “traditionalist” and “modernizing” positions had actually been inverted. In the festival’s context, these terms are mainly discourse devices, serving to create separate identities for the two Ox groups, who must remain opposed, no matter how closely linked they are to each other. The stabilization of new aesthetic standards and thematic emphases also requires the construction of differences in style.

The Ox Dance performances

It is interesting to contrast the Ox Dance to another awesome festival, the samba schools’ parade in Rio de Janeiro (Cavalcanti 1994, 1999). Both festivals are magnificent contests and displays of massive proportions. They do, however, differ greatly in their structure and symbolic meaning.

The carnival parade is a danced procession: A samba school passes in a continuous linear flow before the

spectator, who participates freely, singing and dancing together with the schools, cheering them on, or merely appreciating the show. It is an open championship, as befits a large urban center. There are five rankings, gathering together around 60 samba schools coming from different neighborhoods. Each year the winners and the losers of each ranking are promoted or demoted one level up or down. The parade’s narrative pattern is organized by a specific theme, renewed each year, sung to a samba tune and visually represented by floats, costumes, and special parade components. The combination of the unvarying formal elements with the yearly-renewed theme makes the parade a rich and flexible event. The samba school parade has accompanied the changes in the city of Rio de Janeiro throughout the twentieth century, spreading to many other Brazilian cities.

The Parintins Ox Dance is a June festival, with deep roots in the region and in the Catholic religious calendar around it. It is a radical contest between two contenders in a small Amazonian town. One will win and the other must lose. Parintins, however, intends to address all Brazil, and has organized a festival of rare beauty and complexity that follows its own original pattern.

On the first night of the festival, a speaker announces, “Brazil will judge the Ox Dance.” The phrase indicates how the jury is composed. Presided over by representatives of each Ox group, it consists of six members, appointed after a lottery among the Brazilian states, excepting Northern ones and those drawn in the previous year.²³ The jury is

presented to the public, and the show of the first group opens with the entrance of the master of ceremonies, followed by the lead singer and the percussion orchestra that accompanies all the toadas, who take positions on the side of the arena that belongs to its Ox group.

The master of ceremonies plays a key role requiring a communicative and charismatic personality. He will stay in the arena throughout the show, mediating the relation of the Ox group players to the public in the stadium. He introduces all the play's characters and the different scenes that compose the performance. Together with the lead singer, he establishes a very intense and close communication with the galera, fully integrating it into the Ox group presentation, inviting the singing of the appropriate toadas for both characters and scenes. With the three elements of master of ceremonies, lead singer, and percussion orchestra, the artistic background for the performance's development is set.

The performance consists of a loose sequence of scenes of danced dramatic actions, built around specific motifs, centered in certain characters, and always accompanied by appropriate toadas. These sequences have no necessary order except for the ritual scene that always closes the performances. Different allegorical floats (6 in each evening) compose the visual background for the different scenes. Brought on in separate parts that are assembled in the arena before the spectators' eyes, these floats also provide for many surprises and visual effects. Youths in colorful costumes, divided into

male and female "tribes" (100 members of each tribe, 30 tribes in each Ox group, and fifteen tribes per evening) enter the arena displaying their own choreography. They continue entering the arena until it is totally filled up with the entire Ox group. Their constant and gradual entry fills the intermissions between the different scenes, in which they also participate. Similarly, the *galeras* activities in the stands assist in the arrival of mythical creatures or important characters that may sometimes enter the arena from the stands.

The characters in the performance are in accordance with the diversity of motifs that underlies the composition of the scenes. There are the constant characters, related to the Ox mythical motif, such as the farmer's daughter (*Sinhazinha*), the ox itself, the ox owner (*amo do boi*), Pa Frank (*Pai Francisco*) and Ma Katie (*Mãe Catirina*), the witchdoctor, and even the recently renamed *Cunhã Poranga* ("beautiful girl" in the Tupi language). Some of the group characters like the cowboys (*vaquejada*), the Indian tribes, and the Indian chiefs (*tuxáuas*) may also be rooted in this traditional motif.

Other characters, however, derive from the variable annual motifs drawn from the wide universe of Amazonian legends and history. These different levels of meaning frequently interweave, never coinciding totally with each other. For instance, in 1996, one long scene (of about an hour and a half) presented by Caprichoso had Brazil's discovery by the Portuguese as its central motif. The Tupinambarana Island, where Parintins is located, was the imagined site of the first encounter of the Portuguese with the

native Indians. In this context, the characters of Pa Frank and Ma Katie, coming from the Ox motif, appeared as the jesters of the Portuguese royal family. Finally, characters like the Queen of Folklore or the Flag Bearer seem to be derived simply from the festival's expanding artistic needs.

The arrival of individual characters is always designed to elicit surprise. They may arrive from the stands, from the sky as if hanging in the air, or from the interior of an allegorical float. They are greeted with fireworks, special effects, and specific toadas. Major events and high points, one after the other, punctuate each sequence they enact. Some, such as the marvelous tuxauas, come on stage, parade, and soon leave. Most of the players, however, stay in the arena. The ritual is performed when the whole Ox group has gathered. It is the culmination of each evening's performance, a climax that marks the witchdoctor's main appearance, and a wonderful dance. After that, the Ox group moves in circles as it leaves the arena.

Well-defined scenes revolve around the Ox motif. Dancing and swaying to the music, the appearance of the ox is one of the evening's highpoints. Manipulated by its *tripa* (that is, the dancer who manipulates it from within the "entrails"), it is accompanied by a set of characters appearing in the legend's versions. The cowboys dance around it; the owner of the ox (*amo do boi*) calls his ox to play in the arena with a special *toada*; Pa Frank and Ma Katie appear as clowns, falling and stumbling around the ox; the farmer's daughter (*Sinhazinha da*

fazenda), a darling young lady, performs a graceful dance.

But the native characters relating originally to this group have gradually come to the fore, gaining in importance. Their roles and actions have been enhanced and transformed by other levels of meaning brought to the performance by the annually varying motifs related to the different regional legends and historical accounts. This is very clearly the case with the witchdoctor, who has become central to new scenes (especially the ritual climactic scene). In a different way, this is also the case of the tuxáuas (Indian chiefs) who, divided into two categories, luxury and originality, multiplied to fifteen tuxáuas in each category. The tuxáuas were cut off from any specific scene, and now simply parade exhibiting their huge and wonderful costumes, each representing a different regional legend. This is also the case of the young men and women of the tribes, whose names, costumes, and dances are inspired by native history and legends.

Locally invented old-time characters have been transformed by this new trend, as in the case of the old "Miss," a winner of beauty contests in the region, who is now the *Cunhã Poranga*. The *Cunhã* is a wonderful and sensual dancer who accompanies the witchdoctor and can be related to the female Indian character that appears in some variants of the merrymaking. The themes of the toadas have undergone a similar transformation. In 1992, one toada referred to the Indian as the "humble partner of the ox." There would be no room for this today, when the toadas'

poetry gives much more emphasis to indigenous and regional motifs.

During the 1990s, the gradual but firm and conscious emphasis on regional elements of the play has created a new atmosphere. An emerging nativism, that is, a valorization of the indigenous and caboclo cultural elements, is present in the Parintins Ox Dance. This enhancement has created a new symbolic universe, which implies significant changes in relation to the traditional pattern of the play. This new universe, although linked to the ox theme, corresponds to major displacements. The motif of death and resurrection has faded in the scenes that center around the ox theme, and has come to seem like an allusion to something that was once part of the play. There is no enactment of the ox death and resurrection in the performance. Interestingly enough, the death and resurrection motif migrated to the newly created indigenous symbolic universe, and gave new life to the Ox Dance.

This movement has also altered the nature of the Ox Dance as an art form. All previous descriptions of the merrymaking stress the burlesque features of the play. This comic trait is still present in the Parintins Ox Dance, basically in the satirical performance of Pa Frank and Ma Katie, the couple of workers who are represented as buffoons in the ox theme sequences. But the tragic and solemn character of the ritual scene (the witchdoctor's main performance) nowadays outmatches this naïve humor. This scene is always a chanted plea for the dead Indians and their survivors, "those who once owned the land,"

according to one *toada* from 1996. The sad recognition of the destruction of many native Indian groups is, however, accompanied by regional pride, by the valorization of the rainforest and the survival of current Indian groups, the caboclo type and culture, and the richness of Amazonian history and its mythical universe. Festive joy is here linked to tragic worldviews in a unique mixing of feelings. Maybe something new and different really comes to life through the Parintins Ox Dance. As in the Durkheimian original rite (Durkheim 1968)—the realization of society's consciousness of itself—the Parintins Ox Dance festival seems to be engaged in the making of a contemporary vision of an Amazonian and caboclo Brazil on its more conscious levels of meaning.

The open, fragmentary, and malleable character of the merrymaking of the ox, a key feature since its early descriptions in the nineteenth century, is very clear in this new development. The Parintins Ox Dance is an integral part of this wider traditional universe, a fascinating chapter in the long history of the *brincadeira do boi* in Brazil. Its evolution emerges as a cultural movement that has adopted indigenous images as metaphors stressing a regional caboclo identity. Through this powerful ritual process, the small town, and with it the whole Northern region, has quite successfully achieved its objective of displaying itself to Brazil and the world.

Notes

¹ This is a first account from research in progress. CAPES/Fulbright, the Institute for Latin American and Iberian Studies/University of Columbia, the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, and the Brazilian Folklore Museum supported this study. The people of Parintins and Manaus and the directors, players, and artists of the Ox Dance groups offered me generous assistance. Roberto Da Matta, José Reginaldo Gonçalves, and two anonymous referees provided welcome comments. My warmest thanks to them all. The data presented here are the result of my research from 1996 to 1999.

² *Boi-Bumbá* in the Amazonia (Salles 1970; Monteiro 1972; Menezes 1972; Bordallo 1981); *Bumba-meu-boi* in Maranhão (Azevedo 1983; Pinho de Carvalho 1995) and Pernambuco (Borba Filho 1966); *Boi Calemba* in Rio Grande do Norte; *Cavalo-Marinho* in Paraíba (Carvalho 1971) and also in Pernambuco (Murphy 1994); *Bumba de reis* or *Reis de boi* in Espírito Santo; *Boi Pintadinho* in Rio de Janeiro; *Boi de mamão* in Santa Catarina (Soares 1978).

³ For an analysis of the “Myth of the three races” as a foundation of the Brazilian nationality, see Da Matta 1987.

⁴ *O Farol Maranhense* [The Maranhense Lighthouse]. 1829. 7 July.

⁵ Avé-Lallémant (1812-1884), physician, was born in Lübeck, Germany. He practiced medicine in Brazil between 1838 and 1855, and made two reported trips, one to the province of Rio Grande do Sul and the other to the Amazonia. Cf. Cascudo 1965, 137-140.

⁶ For the idea of a “Brazilian Catholic nationality” and a discussion of the importance of the festivals for the “aesthetic melting pot” in the formation of nineteenth century Brazilian culture, see Abreu 1998.

⁷ Current official data is 41,591 inhabitants in the urban zone; 17,192 inhabitants in the

rural zone, totaling 58,783 inhabitants in the county. The neighboring town to the North is Nhamundá; to the South, Barreirinha; to the West, Urucurituba; and to the East the state of Pará.

⁸ Parintins has the largest herd of cattle and buffaloes in the Amazonas state, with 120,000 heads. Wood production and fishing are also major activities. Wood and furniture firms are the highlights of the small industrial sector, considered to be the most developed upstate. Parintins has around 700 retail and wholesale stores selling a wide range of goods. Source: Parintins Town Hall.

⁹ Slater (1994) chose the town as the basic center for her research on the Amazonian legend of the dolphin.

¹⁰ The importance of the Diocese is related to the provision of formal education by local Catholic schools and by the priests’ activities in the hinterlands. Protestant denominations, especially Baptists, are also present.

¹¹ Although the terrain is completely flat, the citizens refer to the area upstream in this way, taking the Amazonas river course as the main reference of direction.

¹² The precise dates vary in a history that is basically oral and in which there is a rivalry factor.

¹³ Raimundo Muniz was elected town council member three times. He comments, with his lively eyes sparkling with emotion: “I don’t have any resentment at all for what the town hall did, I think that I did my duty, and I am rightfully proud of what I did, making a festival that is known all over the country today. When my eyes close, I shall be leaving everyone dancing and singing” (interview, 1999).

¹⁴ From 1995 onward, a few other industries joined in the patronage of the festival.

¹⁵ In 1995, the Ox groups sold the arena rights to TV Amazonas, local broadcaster for the

Globo network (the main television broadcaster in Brazil) until 1999. The contract was then renewed.

¹⁶ In 1996, the budget for the festival was around one million dollars. The state government gave \$250,000; the Federal Ministry of Culture gave \$250,000; TV Amazonas, \$80,000; and Coca-Cola, \$100,000. Other Brazilian corporations, such as Suvinil Painting Industry and Havaianas Footwear, and the Ox group themselves provided the rest.

¹⁷ In 1997, Manaus held its fiftieth festival and Parintins its thirty-second.

¹⁸ For an overview of contemporary Brazilian folk music, see Vianna 1998. Despite the publicity in 1996, the toadas remain a regional beat.

¹⁹ The bands generally consist of a solo singer and musicians who play the synthesizer, ukelele, guitar, bass, drum, *caixetas*, and rattle. In 1997, in the wake of the toadas' success on the national and international market, Polygram bought the recording and marketing rights to the Ox groups' official CDs.

²⁰ Approximately one hundred and fifty-five people work for two months at the central headquarters, in addition to another fifty who push the floats to the arena during the festival days.

²¹ Coca-Cola itself, whose brand color is red, had to bow to these taboos. Its advertising on the Caprichoso side of the arena is blue.

²² Discussing contemporary indigenist policies in the Amazon region, Conklin (1997) has pointed out how the election of visual exoticism (nudity, body paint, colorful ornaments), as a kind of political badge for transnational audiences, implied a commodification of indigenous images, and could ultimately work against Brazilian Indians' interests. The use of Indian images, motifs, and costumes by the Parintins Ox

Dance should, however, be considered in the context of another wider and older trend. Brazilian folklore has included representations of Indians since at least the eighteenth century. The Romantic Brazilian Movement, dating from the nineteenth century, has also made the Indian a kind of a cultural hero.

²³ The jury grades twenty-two items: Master of ceremonies; Lead singer; Percussion; Ritual; Standard bearer; Owner of the ox; Farmer's daughter; Queen of the folklore; *Cunhã Poranga* (pretty girl); Ox; Toadas (lyrics and music); Witchdoctor; Male tribes; Female tribes; Tuxaua (Indian chief) luxury; Tuxaua (Indian chief) originality; Typical regional figures; Allegoric floats; Amazon legend; Cowboys; Galeras; Ox group.

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Responses

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By way of response to Maria Cavalcanti's vivid ethnography, I would like to compare the Amazonian Ox Dance Festival to a ritual feast practiced by a South Asian community known as *Bhats*. *Bhats*—literally, “Bards”—are semi-nomadic entertainers of low status from the Indian state of Rajasthan; I have conducted nearly three years of ethnographic research with members of this caste community.¹ On the birth of sons, though not daughters, *Bhats* offer gifts to the Hindu god *Bhaironji*, a pan-Indian “boss” of the underworld. Any number of Indian castes mark the births of children with gifts to this god, who is believed to place child-spirits in wombs of mothers. But *Bhats* do so in a manner particularly grotesque to those not familiar to the ritual. They extract a goat's stomach, slice it open, and pass their wailing newborn through the dripping slit seven times. All this takes place over a “well” (*kund*) dug into the ground in which the goat's blood and entrails—the goat's throat is ritually slit before disembowelment—are dumped. This “well” is symbolically equated with the *Bhaironji*'s stomach; and *Bhaironji*, ruled by his stomach, is said to scream for the blood of animals and children. The child, who is passed over and at times into this well-stomach, is believed to be “digested” by *Bhaironji*, symbolically satiating this god's ravenous

hunger for human flesh, and assuring that the deity will not actually “eat” the child.

This birth ritual is framed by a myth describing the birth of the god *Bhaironji* himself—or at least one local incarnation of this god referred to as *Malasi-Bhaironji*. As the story goes, *Malasi-Bhaironji* was a *Jat*, a member of a Rajasthani agricultural caste. He was visiting his wife's sister in the town of *Malasi*. He was in a lustful mood, teasing the women of the village, and especially his sister-in-law, with sexual innuendo. He also touched his sister-in-law's body in “dirty” ways, caressing her genitals through her clothing, thus hoping to entice her into intercourse. In one version of the story, he successfully seduced his sister-in-law, and the two engaged in consensual sex. In another, he raped her. In either case, the two were caught in the act—and in some versions of the tale, the woman became pregnant. The enraged men of the village of *Malasi* subsequently grabbed the lecherous man, hung him upside-down in a well, slammed him forcefully against the well's walls, and bludgeoned him to death. After his untimely death, however, the murdered man's spirit lingered, haunting the villagers' dreams. Though terrifying, this spirit would inform the women of *Malasi* when they could expect to become pregnant. As many of the predictions proved to be true and the spirit's fame grew, a temple was set up next to the well where this man was killed. Infertile women hoping to be blessed with offspring now travel from afar to

make offerings to the shrine of this murder victim, worshipped as a kind of fertility god.

This Bhat ritual, and especially in its underlying myth, seems to me reminiscent of the Amazonian festival described by Cavalcanti. In the Brazilian case, a pregnant wife—Ma Katie—craves a forbidden food object—the tongue of an ox owned by her husband’s boss. Such craving leads Ma Katie’s husband, the black ranch hand Pa Frank, to steal and then kill his employer’s ox. Pa Frank subsequently flees into the forest, but is hunted down by local Indians hired by his boss. However, with a magical helper, and after a few misadventures, Pa Frank manages to resuscitate the slaughtered ox, thus avoiding punishment from his boss’s cronies. In the Bhat case, the lusty Jat—and in some cases his wife’s younger sister—craves forbidden sex. Such desire leads to illicit intercourse and an unwanted pregnancy. The Jat man, who like Pa Frank is described as black, presumably tries to flee from the town of Malasi into the Rajasthani jungle—taking refuge in the jungle is a common motif in local folk-tales. But, unlike Pa Frank, the unlucky Jat is caught and murdered. The Bhat tale, then, concerns a desire for forbidden sex rather than for forbidden meat as in the Brazilian example. But, in the Bhats’ ritual sacrifice to the god Bhaironji, such desires get jumbled. As an example, the young Bhat mother is said to be perceived by the god Bhaironji as “tasty”—sexually and thus metaphorically as well as literally.

Moreover, this young mother is said to be herself ravenous for food, and sometimes for sex, like the god Bhaironji; she thus demands the choicest items from the sacrificial goat—its testicles, eyeballs, and *tongue*—thus bringing this Bhat ritual even closer to the Brazilian festival.

Each of these myths seems to comment on the dangerous nature of human desire—dangerous, perhaps, because such desires do not respect social boundaries of class (Brazil) and kin (India). In the Amazonian tale, sexual desire leads to a pregnancy which in turn sets in motion a series of transgressions—a forbidden theft of an ox for its tongue, and the hunting down of poor Pa Frank. In the story of Bhaironji, likewise, sexual desire leads to forbidden intercourse, unwanted pregnancy, murder, and the birth of a dangerously unpredictable if alluring god of the underworld—who, I might add, is seen by Bhats as almost humorous in his grotesquely forward expressions of desire, “howling” for food and sex as he does. But, however dangerous, human desire also figures in each of these mythic contexts as essential to social and biological reproduction. The two tales along with their ritual contexts, then, are not simple condemnations of desire. Rather, each comments—in a vocabulary of pregnancy, race (blackness), craving for tongues, animal sacrifice, and murder—on the way human desire inevitably brings death as well as rebirth. These, then, are myths of transformation in which beginnings bring ends which in turn

lead to new beginnings.

The ambivalent commentary of the tales on human desire would seem to explain, at least in part, the multiplicity of tone characteristic of these two celebrations. For example, the dances, songs, and processions of the two neighborhood Ox Dance groups—the red fans of Garantido (the Safe Ox) and the blue fans of Caprichoso (the Capricious Ox)—are not mere merrymaking. Rather, the desires, pleasures, and skills of one group are always pitted against the desires, pleasures, and skills of an opposing group—manifested, for example, in playfully taunting songs and provocative dances. In the festival, then, as in the underlying myth, the expression of desire is inextricably bound up with danger and violence—and, according to Cavalcanti, the two groups do sometimes come to blows. One might imagine, moreover, that similar conflicts emerged historically between Amazonian Indians and the Catholic Church—especially given that local festivities such as the Ox Dance sometimes explicitly parody Christian personages. The Bhat feast, too, on many levels, is a bawdy and raucous celebration of desire—the gift of the goat-stomach is offered in a chaotically revelous atmosphere, replete with kisses dripping with saliva and sweat, monumental over-eating, passing out, bone-crushing hugs, and occasional vomiting. Even closer to Bhaironji's expression of desire, Bhats engage in flirting and even groping of other persons' wives and husbands—behavior which on this particular

occasion is sanctioned (it imitates the model of the god), though not always tolerated, leading in some cases to rock fights. This Bhat feast, though in some sense a celebration of desire, is therefore also encircled by a dangerous undercurrent of violence. This is seemingly exacerbated by the fact that the Bhat feast violates certain dominant codes of propriety related to bodily impurity—for example, bringing Bhats and their progeny into intimate contact with, by Brahmanic standards, the most disgusting substances, not the least of which, a disembodied goat stomach coated with partially digested grasses and garbage (goats scavenge), feces, and blood. As an affront to dominant sensibilities—perhaps akin to the Ox Dance Festival's mockery of Catholic morality—this feast, however celebratory of desire and pleasure, is further tainted by danger.

But here the similarities between the two ritual celebrations would seem to end. With all the new innovations in the Ox Dance, Cavalcanti suggests that the underlying myth of the death and resurrection of the ox has been for the most part lost. Instead, the festival has become a slickly organized mass spectacle, modeled loosely on Carnival, which in some way is perceived as emblematic of national Brazilian—that is, mestizo or caboclo—identity. Bhats, too, market their “folk” culture in various ways. Working now as so-called “traditional” puppeteers (though this work is relatively new for them), they pose for tourists in state-organized folklore festivals; they hawk puppets to tourists in five-star hotels

throughout India; and some Bhats record traditional folk ballads for All India Radio, even making their own cassettes and CDs for sale in the market. Bhats, like the Ox Dance Festival, have thus become emblematic of a “traditional” national identity; they are sold, and sell themselves, as living artifacts of the nation’s past. Bhats, however, do not allow their ritual offering to the god Bhaironji to be used in such a manner. Bhats do not even let outsiders (besides the occasional anthropologist) view it. It is an eminently private, even secret, affair. As a result, its intricate relationship to the underlying myth—and thus to the themes of desire, death, and birth—remain central to the festivities.

As to why these two feasts which undoubtedly share many features have been used so variously in the national arena, I do not have an easy answer. I might suggest that we return to themes of desire, so central to each of these feasts, as they have been uniquely figured in Brazilian and Indian national stereotypes. In Brazil, as I understand it, the celebration of physical desire has become the very emblem of national identity, especially as it is sold to outsiders such as tourists. It is not surprising to me that the Ox Dance Festival, commenting as it does on bodily desire, is drawn into such a discourse; nor is it surprising that the more ambivalent commentaries on desire, the underlying theme of the dangers associated with human want as expressed in the death and resurrection of the ox, for example, drop out in order to bring the ritual

more in line with the national stereotype of libertine excess. India, however, is sold to tourists and Indians alike as a place with an ancient history. Such a history, moreover, is said to be rooted in ancient religions—in various local ethics of restraint and moral uprightness. To simplify, tourists visit India for enlightenment rather than sex. This explains why Bhats, when they are used to market India to outsiders, put on puppet plays describing ancient battles between upright Hindu kings and outsider invaders (Muslim and Christian)—that is, dramas describing the moral defense of a culturally rich and religiously unique homeland. It would also seem to explain why the Bhats’ ritual offering to Bhaironji, given its ambivalent and typically bawdy commentary on human desire, would not be so used. Bhats, not wishing to reveal how out of sync with dominant morality they might be, would not allow it; the Indian state, for similar reasons, does not desire it.

Ritual performances are languages through which groups establish their character by identification and opposition with other groups. Such languages are undoubtedly in part universalistic—articulating, for example, a certain relationship to the universal theme of human desire, be it for meat, sex, or the blood of others. But these languages seem to be culturally specific: after all, Pa Frank survives the threat to his person brought on by his and his wife’s transgressions (at least in one Northern version of the Brazilian Ox Dance tale), while the young Jat

from Rajasthan is not so lucky. Such cultural specificity becomes even more pronounced when one takes into account the projects of the world's various nation-states—reworking folk traditions either to celebrate debauchery or to condemn it. Cavalcanti's description of the Amazonian Ox Dance Feast, and hopefully my description of a similar Bhat celebration, then, would seem to point to a kind of double elaboration which may be characteristic of myth and ritual in each of these contexts. The human body provides a fertile reservoir of images and themes which are elaborated into culturally specific myths and rituals. Such myths and rituals, in turn, can be further manipulated by the nation-state to say new kinds of things. Nature becomes culture, and then culture again. And, in the process, myth and ritual, already fertile languages, yield even more bounties.

Notes

¹Articles on Bhat religion and ritual practice by the author may be found in forthcoming issues of the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (December 2001), *Cultural Anthropology* (February 2002), and *American Ethnologist*.

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In this stimulating article, Maria-Laura Cavalcanti proposes to understand the Boi-Bumbá festival in relation to the dynamics of its sociological background in a specific context, the Amazonian town of Parintins. Rightly implying that a romantic standpoint concerning folk culture tends to miss what is actually out there, Cavalcanti uses her own ethnographic inquiry to show the capacity of Brazilian folk culture to transform and update itself. The author acknowledges that the festival has managed to preserve, through and despite changes, strong traditional characteristics; and she states that, in the overall development she studies, “the taut relationship between permanence and change . . . draws attention to the celebration’s deep-rooted cultural meanings.” Moreover, refusing to consider such meanings “as the lost haven of a harmonious universe, threatened by the modern world,” Cavalcanti suggests that they are put to use, through symbolic action, to promote cultural identity in a changing context.

Arguably, the two notions of symbolic action and cultural identity provide the main unifying thread to Cavalcanti’s essay. One basic idea in her article is that, although an original “mythical motif of the death and resurrection of a precious ox” provides an axis to the Parintins Ox Dance, the “fragmentary nature and flexibility of the plot” allows for the integration of

local requirements and meanings. More precisely, Cavalcanti suggests that the festival's evolution has broadly consisted in, on the one hand, the gradual incorporation of locally pertinent themes—"the vast symbolic universe of Amazonian myths, the modern ecological banner, and a new look at the native Indian groups"—to the constant framework of rivalry between two oxen; and, on the other hand, in the institutionalization of this rivalry into a festival contest, so as to "embody an important contrast in the social morphology and organization of Parintins." Hence, Cavalcanti argues, this festival has become a badge of regional cultural identity as well as a badge for organizing competing groups of players. Indeed, she maintains, the festival is able to represent the town as a unified whole by embodying an important contrast in the social morphology and organization of Parintins. Cavalcanti aptly summarizes this trend of her analysis by invoking "the Durkheimian original rite"—"the realization of society's consciousness of itself"—before going on to suggest that the overall evolution of the Parintins Ox Dance "emerges as a cultural movement that has adopted indigenous images as metaphors stressing a regional caboclo identity. Through this powerful ritual process, the small town, and with it the whole Northern region, has quite successfully achieved its objective of displaying itself to Brazil and the world."

This overall argument seems to me very plausible as far as it goes. Through it, we do get a clear idea about the

function of the festival in terms of the assessment of a caboclo regional identity. My one regret is that we are left with but scarce clues as to how the present-day integration of local elements fits within the traditional theme that still gives the festival its framework—for this theme itself is scarcely considered in the first place. Although Cavalcanti acknowledges that "the Parintins Ox Dance is an integral part of a single ritual cycle that encompasses different forms of a very traditional and widespread Brazilian folk play," and adds that in this wider universe "a considerable unity derives from the always-present allusion to the same mythical motif," she explicitly foregoes a specific analysis of this motif. I am not sure that this is a productive option, for it amounts to considering details while disregarding their thematic context. Cavalcanti herself allows that, through the momentous changes she describes, "the death and resurrection motif migrated to the newly created indigenous symbolic universe, and gave new life to the Ox Dance." Which amounts to saying that a fundamental connection of the Ox Dance to a theme of death and resurrection prevails despite, or rather through, changes.

To my mind, this raises the possibility that what Cavalcanti calls "a new symbolic universe" of emerging nativism need not be opposed to "the traditional pattern of the play"—that, in other words, the "new symbolic universe" could be best seen as a local transformation of the traditional pattern that still frames it. In what follows, I wish to explore briefly this

possibility. Not being a specialist in Brazilian folklore, I will rely on both ethnographical data provided by Cavalcanti and on a homeopathic use of comparative elements. I have to stress that what I am about to offer is assumedly speculative; no more than a preliminary venture into the symbolic possibilities of some leads left unexplored in Cavalcanti's rich article.

Let me start from the author's clear assertion that the "mythical motif" of the death and resurrection of a precious ox "always appears to symbolize the start of a new social order." Here I would note that, since the festivities associated with it throughout Brazil happen at such liminal times as solstices and Carnival, a cosmic dimension seems to be involved. In this light, the death and resurrection of an ox, of all animals, might start to make sense. On a transcultural scale, the ox's horns make this animal singularly apt as a symbol of the lunar process of cyclic rebirth through death (Briffault 1927, 3: 191–95; Gimbutas 1982, 91–93; 1989, 265–72; cf. Chassany 1989, 194–96; Gaignebet and Florentin 1974, 135–36, 158–61; Ginzburg 1991, 226–49). Thus, in African ritual for example, transitions between the old and a new social order famously involve the sacrifice of oxen (Kuper 1961, chap. 13; cf. Beidelman 1966; Heusch 1985, chap. 5; Kuper 1973); and African data suggest the identity, in a cosmological setting, of the dead king with the sacrificed ox, from the grave of which the new king will mystically arise along with a new social order (Cartry 1987; cf. Fortes 1967, 12, 15). In this light, could the killing and resuscitation of

the ox by African characters, as well as the involvement of Indians—"those who once owned the land," standing for the regenerative land itself—in the process leading to rebirth, make some sense? At any rate, this parallelism calls attention to the link between Indians and a liminal phase of death ending in regeneration in the "myth," of which the "sad recognition of the destruction of many native Indian groups . . . accompanied by . . . the valorization of the rainforest and the survival of current Indian groups" is, seemingly, a thematic transformation in the modern play.

The comparative hypothesis of a death and rebirth with cosmological implications may be furthered, in strictly local terms, by exploring the link between the "mythic" theme of the dead and resuscitated ox and the ritual play consisting of a fight between oxen. Apparently, violence was always a part of the Amazonian Boi-Bumbá, the very name of which evokes the idea of a clash or brawl, and—as Cavalcanti puts it, in short—"rivalry is at the basis of the performances." In order to understand how this all-important clash between oxen in praxis corresponds to the background theme of the death and resurrection of the ox, note that in this theme of death and resurrection the usual biological axis: life (youth) → death (old age) is reversed into the metaphysical axis: death → new life. Let us consider, in this light, some coherent features of the rival oxen in Parintins. Note that their very opposition is keyed to that of East and West—the quarters, that is, of the rising and setting of heavenly bodies.

This being so, it might be significant that the ox associated with the East is “Capricious” as a youth would be, is associated to blue as a young star should be, and is linked to “lower” (the “lower” section of town) as a rising star would be; whereas the ox associated with the West is “Secure” as a senior would be, is linked to red as an old star should be, and is associated to “upper” (the “upper” section of town) as an ascended star would be. Whatever other social dimensions may be involved, these attributes are mutually supporting in suggesting an overall model of young stars rising in the East and setting in the West, oldish, in order to rejuvenate and rise again in the East. Again, this background model corresponds to the “mythical” idea of the death and resurrection of the precious ox, for both involve the same theme of death leading to new life. In other words, the possible cosmological connotation of the oxen helps to explain how a seemingly prosaic brawl between rival oxen enacts the “mythical” theme of death leading to new life, in an overall image of cyclic renovation that is essentially in tune with the seasonal setting of the Ox Dance.

Let me explore this. If I am right, the indispensable annual victory of one ox over the other reenacts the prototypical theme of the death of the precious ox leading to his rebirth, on the model of a star disappearing in order to reappear with a promise of rejuvenation. Note that, for the Indians in the Amazonian region, the Pleiades—that most constant astronomical marker of season change in South America, as elsewhere

(Lévi-Strauss 1964, 222–29)—would disappear in May, staying supposedly hidden for a short period of time at the bottom of a well, to reappear in June (the time of the Ox Dance, at the height of the dry season) “announcing the rains, the molting of birds, and the renewal of vegetation” (224). The annual brawl reenacts, therefore, the death and rebirth of the ox at the very time period in which the reappearance of the Pleiades announces the renewal of life on a cosmic scale. Maybe, in this perspective, the contrastive marking of the two oxen with respectively a blue star and a red heart could be associated to the conceptual opposition of the Pleiades and Corvus, sometimes conceived as a heart-shaped constellation (236), in a common role of seasonal markers (224–37)? Whatever the answer to this particular question may be, the setting of the oxen brawl at a time of dramatic seasonal changing would seem to confirm the cosmological symbolism of the ox image as proposed, above, in a comparative perspective.

But then, beyond the visible celestial axis in which stars go from Eastern “birth” to Western “death,” the blue and the red oxen together would represent in their clash the invisible, antipode/underground (cf. Krappe 1944), process of seasonal regeneration through death into new life. Note that the two oxen are interchangeable insofar as, in any given year, either one can be the defeated party; and Cavalcanti comments on the overall reversibility of their positions by saying that what matters is that they “must remain opposed, no matter how closely

linked they are to each other.” Moreover, the association of blue and red with death (whence springs new life) is widespread on a transcultural scale. For example, in a Japanese tale, a mountain woman standing for her dead mother gives an orphaned girl riches conducive to marriage. The girl must, however, feign being a rotten corpse with worms swarming out of her mouth when the old woman’s sons, a blue and a red *ôni* (a kind of troll), go by her (Seki 1963, 130–34; cf. Mayer 1984, 44–46). In Japan, these red and blue *ôni* are clearly reminiscent of the classical blue and red dragons connoting *mizuchi*, or water spirits (Mauclair 1991, 71; cf. 1982, 89, 106 n. 3); and the image of worms swarming in a rotten corpse evokes that of the primordial goddess Izanami, from the netherworld impurity of which her husband Izanagi brings about a fundamental spurt of creation (Aston 1990, 1:24, 29–30; Mauclair 1982, 94; Philippi 1992, 61–63). Let me take my second example from Europe. Here, for instance in Burgundy, red and blue would be the colors for mourning (Verdier 1979, 138 n. 4). And a group of Danish tales presents an old woman, standing for a dead mother according to two versions and dressed in blue and red according to a third, who assists a bride into marriage (Holbek 1998, 460–75). Taken together, these examples chosen from faraway parts of the world present a constant association of red and blue to death and renovation—the very same “mythical” theme that the red and blue oxen of Boi-Bumbá enact, in Brazil, every year.

Here my speculations come to a term. Overall, I have argued that to forsake viewing the festival as a “superposition of motifs” falling into “two ideal types”—the “Ox mythical motif” and the “regional and indigenous motifs”—may be of some help in perceiving an overall coherence that informs the ever-creative adaptation of the “mythic” theme in the terms of contemporary local culture. As I proposed, there is arguably a fundamental continuity between the “traditional” theme that associates death and renewal to the Indian population on the one hand, and the present-day “festive joy . . . linked to tragic worldviews” on the other. The very time of the festival is one of death and renovation according to native Indian conceptions (which are actually compatible with the Christian association of the June solstice to the wane of Saint John the Baptist in preparation for the redeeming birth of Christ; Gennep 1949, 1809, cf. 1733). And, of course, the witchdoctor “ritual” that always closes contemporary performances refers back to the same encompassing motif of death and resurrection. The “mythic” story, in turn, blends into this coherent frame the very three ethnic elements that seem to have contributed elements to the Boi-Bumbá festival, as we know it today thanks to the rich analysis of Maria-Laura Cavalcanti.

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Symbols and Images of “Evil” in Student Protests in Sofia, 1997

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Abstract

This article analyzes Bulgarian student protests in 1990 and 1997 in their political, sociological, and cultural dimensions. Beginning with an overview of the Bulgarian political situation in the 1990s, the article goes on to consider student protests as cultural expressions of a semi-closed community. The focus is primarily on the cultural and ideological aspects of the protests, and seeks to illustrate the peculiar forms of cultural synthesis that such protests represent.

Political protests are more than interesting forms of contemporary culture, showing how new communities are created, how they express themselves in cultural forms, and what their real impact on the social reality might be. Bearing in mind the fact that these are syncretic forms, I present them in their social, ideological, political, and cultural dimensions. Furthermore, having participated in the protests, I present them from the viewpoint of the "insider."

The crisis marched in front, dressed in a gown reaching down to the ground, its hair loose, and side by side with it, stepping like a cat, in a light dance-like manner there moved the spectre of communism.¹

Setting the Stage: Political Protests and Political Situation in Bulgaria in 1990 and 1997

Communism in Bulgaria collapsed in 1989. However, the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP), aspiring to stay in power, made some cosmetic changes to try and secure its political position. As part of these changes, the BCP changed its name and became the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), thereby asserting that they no longer were communists. They argued that the communist period of the party had lasted a very short 45 years, and had ended, while the whole history of the Socialist Party had lasted for more than 100 years. Renaming the party was an important move in an attempt to seek legitimacy within the new political context and, if possible, to retain power. Along with the new name, the leaders of the BSP also tried to make some changes in the party's ideological and economic platforms, but because of mass political protests organized against them, these could not be realized.

In 1990, because of these protests, a coalition of opposition parties called the UDF (Union of Democratic Forces) temporarily gained political control. Due to a deepening economic crisis, however, the BSP was able to regain control shortly thereafter, maintaining it until 1996. In the fall of 1996 the economic situation in the country became critical. Inflation increased by the hour, and there was a shortage of basic goods. The bank system collapsed in November as a result of the many unsecured credits that had been extended over the previous years,

and at the same time the political crisis deepened. On December 21, 1996, the socialist government of Jan Videnov resigned, and on January 8, 1997, Nikolay Dobrev, the next socialist leader, was authorized by President Petar Stoyanov to form a government. New political protests sparked by President Stoyanov's unwelcome and unpopular authorization began in early January 1997, but they were transformed into a massive national strike after January 10, when the Bulgarian Parliament building was attacked. These protests lasted for 30 days, and the BSP was forced to hand over the government. On February 4, 1997, Dobrev returned the authorization of the socialist party to President Stoyanov, and new elections were scheduled ahead of term. Since then, the Bulgarian government has been formed by representatives of the UDF.

In short, the 1990 and 1997 protests were successful in terms of achieving their political goal of removing the former communists (now socialists) from the Bulgarian government. Students were key to the success of both protests. As a result, students now believe in themselves and know, for future purposes, that they can have a real impact on political decisions.

I was a participant in both protest movements as protester and observer. As a result, my account is naturally influenced by my own positionality. The members of the BSP presumably would describe the same events in another way. For me, these protests were not only an object of analysis, they were also part of an important time full of high hopes, emotional and intellectual experiences,

and real actions and communications.

I will not, however, speak about myself in this paper, but rather about my students, their colleagues, and friends. My position will nevertheless be an implicit part of the text, presented in the descriptions and in the interpretations of the events in question.

This paper, then, addresses the 1997 student protests—which took the forms of ritualized and theatricalized processions, and mock funerals, all to some extent influenced by Bulgarian folklore—in light of the theoretical construct of a semi-closed community rallying around one cause. The protests will also be juxtaposed with mock funerals from 1990 and 1997, theatricalized expressions of the same protest causes.

Setting the Stage Theoretically: Student Protests and the Cultural Expressions of a Semi-Closed Community

We have to reveal the genuine image of evil, so that people can see it and banish it forever from our lands for good. Its manifestations may pass unnoticed by the mind, but not by the eyes, or by the heart. I don't want anyone to tell me later that I was deluded, for . . . here! That's it!

These are words of a student from St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia. While speaking with me, he painted the portrait of an old and ugly witch finishing her snack with blood dripping from her hands. Above her head there was a red-lettered halo-like inscription: BSP. The text on the backside of the poster read: "It is time for the one aged 100 to retire! Off you go to the woods!"

Responding to my question of why the image of the BSP had to be visualized in such a way, the same student said, "In this way our protest is more powerful and has greater impact. Otherwise people cannot feel it deeply enough." Then he added,

We should not be aggressive, but we should not be afraid of the truth, either. When you depict evil in this way, it is no longer scary. It is also, how shall I put it, a little funny, and you can believe that you are stronger and you can defeat it. Isn't this better than talk, talk, talk, and getting lost in the mountain of words until you forget what you are talking about. This spoils the magic, you get tired and you are ready to give it all up, isn't it so?

The metaphorical use of the concept of magic by this student should not prevent a folklorist from seeing that the overall statement is an expression of the need to exert a synthetic impact by means of words, sounds, and plastic movements. The mechanism of conveying the message by simultaneously employing such means as voice, body, or molded objects, familiar to folklorists working with older forms of folk culture, is set in operation whenever there is a need, and when the requisite socio-cultural environment is in place.

I have elsewhere (1991) defined a semi-closed community as one which closes up around a certain idea and whose members feel the need for artistic self-expression within that community. If a closed community can be defined as a small and limited one with a strong net

of social relations into which the individual is well integrated (Bogdanov 1989), and if an open community can be defined as a large one with mostly written means of communication, then a semi-closed community such as a political protest movement is something in between. It emerges from the social environment of the open community and it is closed only around a specific cause for a particular moment. People who want to identify themselves with such a semi-closed community come from different walks of life. They have different social, educational, and professional backgrounds, but they belong to that community because they share a common idea that unites them.² Thus, in the semi-closed community of the protesters, we can expect verbal, musical, or ritual expressions of only one political idea.

Within this semi-closed community, students expressed their identity not only as being against the political establishment, but also underscored the prestigious status of their university community. They shared a common political idea, but they considered themselves to belong to the intellectual elite, a very prestigious and authoritative community in Bulgarian society. Intellectuals are considered and consider themselves to provide mental and behavioral models to be followed. To give an example: in the last few years, people who accrued wealth without an education were ridiculed in many jokes. These jokes implied that such people were rich because they were dishonest, and that they would always remain stupid. It should therefore be clear why it was so important for the

students to identify themselves as part of the intellectual elite. Being identified with the intellectual elite was one more reason for the closeness of the students' community—"we, students" and "they, the other people." One of my students said:

We are educated, intelligent people and we understand very well what is going on. Communists can delude the ordinary people, as they always have done, but not us. Communists can try to hide themselves behind new names or new words, but we know their real names and their real faces. People have to see the truth before it is not too late. We want to demonstrate this truth, we will do this every day, and we hope that the people will support us and throw away this political garbage. It is high time for that!

Two types of leaders could be found among the protesting students: those engaged with organizing, and those engaged with the different performance activities. Organizers coordinated participants spatially and temporally. The main performers not only performed, but also gave creative directions about the performance and costumes to the performing student protesters. The performance leaders set a general example to be followed. All the rest was a question of improvisation by the participants. Political issues, because they were taken for granted as the main topic, were not *overtly* brought up by the student performance. Their aim in conversation was only to show what they already knew. For the sake of illustrating, here is an excerpt of such a discussion between a

leader and a performance participant:

"And what about tomorrow?"
"Why not something with black and white"
"Why black and white?"
"Death and Life."
"You will be Death" [laughter!]
"And you will be my victim."
"Why me? I am not a communist."
"No, if I am Death, I will be the communist. And you will be the fool—the victim"
"Please, stop with this! This is not a bad idea. Black clothes and white faces. And the funeral march."
"No, silence will be more effective. . . ."

Folklore, too, can be found in such a semi-closed community where social interactions provide a specific impetus for doing, narrating, playing. Naturally, I should emphasize that in this case I am not talking about a formal comparison between traditional village folklore and contemporary urban culture, nor am I speaking about "survivals." Rather, I am concerned with the reproduction of certain traditional cultural patterns in present-day social and cultural reality. These are the very types of situations that give rise to phenomena in which we can identify various forms of intertwining, coexistence, and mutual influence between elements of traditional and contemporary culture.

In what follows, I will discuss further the ways in which participants in the protests used some elements of rituals—well known symbols of human gestures, words, songs, material signs—and how they wove them into new syncretic forms of protest performance.³

The Idea of Being “Against”: The Image of Evil as a Social Integrating Factor

At first glance it seemed a bit odd that the demand for “good” in the protest, e.g., an end to communism, was expressed mostly through negation, the negation of what was no longer wanted. This created the impression that some balance had been upset.

There are different types of protests, but in the majority of them the protesters know the concrete “good” that they want to achieve: free elections, higher salaries, environmental protection, or other equally important causes. In the case of the student protests, what could be seen and heard in streets and squares was merely different names and images of evil—an “evil” that had to be chased out. “Good” seemed to imply only absence of evil, and there was no need for it to be portrayed, performed, and named, and therefore it was not represented anywhere in the protest. If someone asked protesters “What will happen if you succeed with the protest?” they would answer immediately: “What? Of course, freedom, democracy, a good standard of living, everything will be better . . .”

At times, one was left with the impression that the protesting students were participants in a magic ritual for driving away evil spirits and dark forces rather than people involved in a rally with definite political demands for a concrete “good.” This did not alter the essence of the political demands, which were sufficiently clear, specific, and definite, but the diverse means of express-

ing dissent also created an additional semantic field, where social, political, and artistic meanings of doing and talking were intertwined.

It is probably natural that a protest arguing “against” something should articulate and demonstrate in a multitude of ways what was being protested against, what had driven people out into the streets in the first place and united them in a polyphonic utterance of “no.” The idea of “being against” was the very idea that was needed to serve as a focal point for the creation and unification of the community of protesters, as well as for its self-perception as a single entity. It served as a vehicle for the protesters’ separation from other communities. As a unifying conceptual center, the idea of being against had to be diversified through a multitude of semantic variants, and reiterated by various means, so that the newly created quasi-closed community could undergo secondary consolidation.

The declared political stance and awareness that social actions were needed—the latter best expressed by the slogan: “Who, if not me? When, if not now?”—were reflected in rather interesting ways when evil was discussed or when a certain aspect of its image was shown. The students protested and depicted evil by using verbal, musical, and plastic signs. They wove the idea that united them—the idea of being “against”—into alternatively more static or more dynamic forms. They talked, sang, danced, drew and painted, performed symbolic actions with various objects, and in diverse ways created an overall picture of evil: a picture, where

every element was but a detail, a piece of the whole, providing yet another opportunity to see what it looked like and where it was.

“Evil” was understood and interpreted within quite a broad semantic range. There had been a quest for varied means of presenting its multiform manifestations. There were different ways in which these manifestations passed from the abstract figure of the woeful and feeble “Crisis” or the undying “Specter of Communism,” still haunting the “Back Yard of Europe,” through the extremely rich and colorful images of the “Bulgarian Socialist Party,” to the interplay of cartoons featuring specific political figures. The students were playing both on the overall harsh economic, political, and spiritual situation in the country and on single events that had become emblematic of bad governance, immorality, or simply the stupidity of individual politicians.

The various expressions, manifestations—in the form of ritualized and theatricalized performances, and mock funerals—made up a unified performance of heterogeneous improvised elements depicting evil.

Ritualized Forms of Protest: Expressions of a Semi-Closed Community Rallying Around the Concept of Evil

The demarcation of cultural territory, the shared community experience surrounding the events at hand, the rhythmic reproduction of certain symbolic actions, and the repetition of the key message at different semantic levels not only ex-

pressed the will of the protesters, but simultaneously converted what was a desired future into the actual present. The fact that the desired future was mainly associated with a description of the undesired past did not change the fundamental meaning of the ritualized actions. Chasing away evil was transferred from a social situation to a ritualistic one, in order to guarantee the planned social effect through a ritualistic vehicle. Hence the protest action of the university students should be considered from the perspective of the mode of their ritualization and of seeking a specific social result given the overall interconnection of the ritual components.

In this case we are not concerned with plain cultural continuity but rather with the replication of efficient cultural models in line with the requirements of the cultural situation that has ensued. The ritualization of the protest was needed for recreating the feeling of its significance and empathy with more general human values. By means of the ritual, *the occurrence* of the desired event was realized.

The student protests lasted for 30 days. Until January 10, these mostly took the form of processions around the BSP headquarters at 20 Pozitano Street, and rallies organized by the UDF in the square in front of St. Alexander Nevski Cathedral. The first organized procession around the National Assembly took place on the morning of January 10. It started from St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia and circulated around the building of the National Assembly in silence. In the evening of that same day

dramatic events took place in the Bulgarian Parliament. People gathered in front of the Parliament in silent protest, but the police came and some of the protesters suffered violence at the hands of policemen. An attempt was made to burn the Parliament, while frightened representatives hid out inside (to this day, no one knows who was responsible). The next day students from different higher education establishments gathered in the building of St. Kliment Ohridski University, and commenced the organized protest processions, conducted on a daily basis until the key political demands were ultimately fulfilled.

The procession started from St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia, passing along V. Levski Boulevard to reach the monument of Patriarch Evtimiy, referred to simply as “The Priest” (*popa*) by citizens of Sofia. At that point the procession was joined by students coming from the students’ village in the neighborhood of Darvenitsa or from the Higher Institute of Architecture and Civil Engineering (HIACE) to continue along Patriarch Evtimiy Street, then turning at Vitosha Street to Sveta Nedelya Square. The march then proceeded along the Liberator King (Tsar Osvoboditel) Boulevard. Taking successive turns at Rakovski Street and Moskovska Street, the procession ended up at St. Alexander Nevski Square, where it merged with the afternoon rally of the UDF just about to begin.

There was yet another route setting off from St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia. It proceeded along the Liberator King Boulevard up to Eagles’ Bridge (Orlov Most). Next the march followed

the canal up to the building of the Small City Theater of the Canal, taking a turn at Yanko Sakazov Street (formerly Vladimir Zaimov Boulevard) to reach the monument of Vasil Levski. Next it passed by the State Musical Theater turning at Dondoukov Boulevard. The last stage was along Rakovski Street. Once again the final destination was St. Alexander Nevski Square.

There were also some single processions, such as the BSP burial, which pursued different routes. The marches lasted from 1 or 2 p.m. until 5 p.m., when all the processions ended up at St. Alexander Nevski Square and flowed into the UDF rally. The participants in these processions were mostly university students from Sofia, but at times they were joined by other people.

One naturally draws an analogy with the mechanism of semantic and axiological segmentation of space known from traditional folklore rituals and the principles of assuming command of and consolidating one’s “own” cultural territory. The reproduction of this old cultural mechanism in today’s cultural context is a result of the communal need for position in social space and a manifestation of the desire of the community to demonstrate its importance within a socially heterogeneous society (Ivanova 1993).

The University of Sofia and St. Alexander Nevski Square constitute both the starting and finishing points of the procession. This is important because the University of Sofia is the biggest and most prestigious university in the country, and because St. Alexander Nevski Square has been a well-established cen-

ter of political opposition ever since 1990. The combination of these two spaces is key, as the protests were particular both for the student and for the UDF communities.

It is significant that the places chosen for the protest activities were alternately positively and negatively signified. The University of Sofia and St. Alexander Nevski Square were markedly positive spaces, while the former mausoleum of Bulgaria's first communist leader G. Dimitrov and the new official building of the BSP on Pozitano Street had negative connotations. The University of Sofia, as the biggest and most prestigious university in Bulgaria, became a symbol of the student community and a center of the students' activities during the protests. Conversely, St. Alexander Nevski Square is home to the biggest orthodox temple in Sofia, and was chosen by the opposition as a center for political activities in 1990 as a symbol of their rejection of the communists' atheism.

The route between the two positively designated spatial points delineated a larger center, for the route not only marked the central city area but also crossed locations that already had specific meanings for the city of Sofia. In other words, we no longer moved from the periphery to the center as in the protests of 1990 (Ivanova 1993, 41-43), but rather delineated our own space starting from the center and going in an outward direction, finally to circulate back to the center. Our home was in the center and we gradually expanded the diameter of the "tame" space around us. We had our own center and we gradually chased away the evil surrounding it

until we cleared an ever-larger territory around us. How? By identifying one of the faces of evil, by revealing it in symbolic images and actions and by reiterating a chant whose essential meaning was "Get Out!"

Each procession visualized evil in its own unique way. Evil was symbolically expressed by words or by silence, as well as by definite actions and objects. Images of evil were taken from Bulgarian folklore and literature, ancient history or contemporary political events. All of these images were chosen because of their popular currency, and because of the ease with which their symbolism could be connected to the topic at hand, connections that could be made by everybody. "We want our message to be transparent, to be . . . for anyone who wants to understand it. But we want to put it in an expressive and impressive form, . . . let people feel the future if they do not want to understand the present!"

The first few processions were more disorderly and their principal idea was not initially sufficiently clear. The students toured the city whistling and hooting with drum accompaniment. Among others, the figures of "Death," "Bouratino" (an allusion to the politician Zhorzh Ganchev)⁴ and "Ruined Bulgaria," "the Crisis," "the Specter of Communism," and "the Exhausted Red Warrior" put in an appearance. Later marches displayed a more comprehensive idea and more extended forms of its presentation gradually took shape. The examples that follow illuminate the shape and form that the protest took, and should underscore how a semi-closed community of university students ef-

fect change by rallying around a unifying theme: “evil” and getting rid of that “evil.”

A procession depicting the warriors of King Samouil marched blindfolded with red bands over the eyes, thus invoking legendary Bulgarian history—the capture of King Samouil by the Byzantine Emperor Vasilii II, known as the Killer of Bulgarians. The Emperor had Samouil’s warriors blinded, and only one in every hundred warriors retained a single eye. In the procession, one Cyclops for every ten blind warriors marched along. At the end of the march, their bands were simultaneously removed. The idea behind this procession was that the red blindfolds had to be removed so that people would be able to see and realize the truth about the essence of communism. Clearly, they had previously been blind to the truth, and the red color of the blindfolds referred to the culprits.⁵

Portraying a similar message, a procession of scarecrows and drummers marched along, shouting “Wake up, Bulgarian brothers! Wake up Bulgarians!” Another procession made its way through the streets in pajamas, carrying alarm clocks that went off continuously, while students shouted, “Bulgarians, wake up!” and sang an old song from the Bulgarian National Revival, “Arise, arise thou valiant Balkan hero, wake up from your sound sleep.” This procession underscored that it was time for the sleeping nation to wake up and shake off the yoke of communism. There is an implicit reference in this to the period of Bulgarian history when Bulgarians struggled for independence from the

Ottoman Empire. The message was that a similar effort was required for them to emancipate themselves from communist rule. In history textbooks for secondary schools the Ottoman rule is described as a great hardship and is usually referred to as the “Turkish Yoke.” Some of the conceptions of that period of Bulgarian history are revised in newer editions of these textbooks, but even now Bulgarians very often speak of the Ottoman period in their history as a “yoke.” The students merely drew an analogy between one yoke and another.

In another procession, people carried bags full of “red garbage,” which was later ostentatiously thrown into dustbins. While marching the students chanted, “No to the red Mafia!” “Down with red terror!” “It has no mouth, yet it eats, it has no hands, yet it steals. What is it? BSP,” “Put the reds out into the cold!” They carried posters reading “An appeal to the Cleanliness Municipal Company: Gentlemen, let us clean the red garbage,” or “Clean home, healthy people. Red garbage. Mafia.” Here, too, the message was against communism: the country was to be cleaned up after the communists, who had converted it into a big dustbin.

One procession marched under the motto “Clean Hands Operation.” The students carried water, metal mugs, soap, and towels to help the communists wash their hands of the blood of the people beaten on the fatal night of January 10, as well as of the dirt of their entire known and unknown criminal acts. There were silent marches as well. A procession of black clothes and white faces at times slowed down at crossroads, at

times broke into a quick run. It was an attempt at wrathful silence expressing protest, but simultaneously declaring the quick power of the black army wearing white masks.

A procession with umbrellas invoked the vile assassination of the famous Bulgarian novelist George Markov, killed with an umbrella in London. Another procession carried white, green, and red banners, the colors of the national flag, burning torches turned upside down in an attempt to show signs of war or national calamity, and thereby to describe the current situation in Bulgaria in a highly emotional manner. A procession with suitcases, bags, and even an airplane model chanted “Don’t banish us!” “We want to live in Bulgaria,” “We want our Bulgaria,” “The homeland is for us and the guillotine is for you,” alluding to mass emigration out of Bulgaria in 1990 and subsequent years, making an urgent plea against allowing the communists to keep banishing citizens from the country.

A related phenomenon which may be considered a ritualized form of protest was the piling up of a “cairn.” In older tradition, when an individual was singled out as guilty of an unconscionable crime, it was customary for villagers to throw stones into a pile near the village and curse the guilty party with every stone. The cairn in this case represented a curse, anathematization and damnation of the communists and all their sympathizers. The students amassed a cairn at the end of a “fiery procession” with torches, and every time a stone was thrown they said, “Damn Videnov [the leader of the BSP at that

time] and all his people!” This is a form of collective damnation readily recognizable from traditional folklore. It seeks the symbolic elimination of the person whose name is mentioned.

The general sound of “no” articulated by the protesters was constantly iterated and reiterated, and negation, whether overt or not, was found in every procession. Yet, each procession revealed different transformations of the “evil” against which the students protested, which they wished to banish with their magic, in a highly picturesque and emotional way.

Theatricalized Forms of Protest: Continued Rallying Around the Concept of Evil

Another form of protest took the form of theatricalizing the same ideas represented in the processions. The students often called them “sketches” and each sketch had its own specific name. Again, examples can best illustrate the potency and vibrancy of the sketches and the meaning that protesters attached to them.

In a sketch called “Firemen’s Operation,” the students wore cardboard firemen’s helmets and carried metal mugs full of water. They stood on the steps in front of the BNB (Bulgarian National Bank), spilled water on the steps and chanted “Foo-foo!” (blowing with their mouths) to “liquidate Bulgaria’s domestic and foreign debt,” as though it were on fire. Key here is the fact that the Bulgarian word for “liquidate”—as in liquidating debt—is the same as “extinguish,” so the students played the pun.

Students from the Krastyo Sarafov Academy of Theatrical and Film Arts acted out a sketch called “The Events of January 10th.” Some of them played the part of the members of Parliament hiding in the Parliament building (in this case the building of the Theater Academy), while others were outside demonstrating the clashes that took place.

Similar to the red garbage procession, in the sketch “Sweeping the Red Garbage Away” or “For an Environmentally Clean Country,” students swept garbage piled up in the yard of St. Kliment Ohridski University in the direction of Parliament. This symbolized the “sweeping” of the red (i.e., communists) garbage out of the country. In connection with this sketch the following announcement had been posted in advance: “Today, 01/15/1997—to show support for the students’ demands from the yard of Sofia University to the Parliament, please bring plastic cups and bottles or other light things! Let them be left by the fence. They will be symbolically swept away!”

These sketches can be viewed as miniature spectacles. They were prepared as individual performances and the elements that constituted them were not ritualized, nor were they converted into regularly recurring symbolic actions. Their language was not the language of ritual, but the language of theater, an alternative to the more ritualistic processions. Using both ritual and theatrical languages, the protesters thus presented recurring images of the “evil” that had to be thrown away.

We see reflected in these images the complex and shifting meaning of “Bulgarian” in national and international

contexts. The protesters implicitly presented “the Bulgarians” as complex and non-monolithic. The protesters were Bulgarians, the “other” people were Bulgarians, and the communists, too, were Bulgarians. Nevertheless, the appeal “Wake up, Bulgarians!” was addressed only to “the others” not yet awake, and not to the communists, who were to be thrown away when the people awoke. The “others” essentially had to become part of the “us,” the protesters. They had to become part of the good Bulgarians, to prevent bad Bulgarians from harming Bulgaria in the future. This was a national task, not only because in this way Bulgarians would become part of a democratic world, but also because they would become part of an international community unified by ideals such as freedom and democracy. In this way “we, the good Bulgarians” were nationally and at the same time internationally committed.

The explicit image of the communists was much more detailed and colorful, and had more dimensions in terms of artistic presentation. All of the examples revealed a new facet of the same evil associated with the Party, whose actions were the catalyst of the protests. Unlike that of the Bulgarians, the image of the party was monolithic.

The Inherited and the New in Expressions Carrying Social Meaning: The Mock Funerals of 1990 and 1997

In 1990, the students “buried” Success (*Spoluka*) at the Central Graveyards of Sofia to lay bare the demagoguery of the communist election slogan—“Success

for Bulgaria” (*Spoluka za Bulgaria*)—against the background of the crisis that hit the Bulgarian people immediately afterwards. In 1997, the students “laid the one-hundred-years-old BSP in the grave.” A comparison between these two mock funerals highlights once again how a semi-closed community rallies around a single cause, but each also reveals its own specific temporal concerns and problems

The 1990 funeral procession was headed by several people carrying wreaths and girded with red bands, inscribed with “Success for . . . ?” Following them was a red pyramid with a red five-pointed star on the top carried by two students. Behind this, another two students marched, one of them carrying a black pillow girded with a red band, and the other one a box full of medals and military crosses. The medals were honorary decorations of the deceased, “Success”, an eminent communist. All these people were followed by a brass band playing a funeral march, traditional or jazzed up. Close behind them a hearse with the deceased was moving very slowly.

The deceased Success was represented by parodic dummies of sugar, butter, cheese, pork-chops, and flat sausages, all symbolizing “Success” for Bulgaria. All of these representations were situated around a black coffin. Just right of the dummy’s head stood two student honor guards. They had toy guns and black and red mourning bands on their sleeves. Next to them were two students, actresses from the Theater Academy, tearfully grieving for the deceased person:

Oh, my Lord!
To whom have you left us, dear “Success”?
We are now poor orphans,
We are down-and-out without you!
What will we do without you?!
What will we do alone and sad?!
To whom have you left us?!
To this damned Democracy!
Oh, my Lord!
Who will look after our children?!
Oh-oh-oh . . . !
Poor us, poor orphans!

Behind the hearse, Success’s closest friends followed in mourning attire. Here also were Grave-diggers followed too, dressed as proletarian workers with picks and spades. Guards protected the sugar, cheese, meats, and other ingredients of the dummy from the people trying to steal them. In the center of the procession was a huge obituary of the dead Success with an inscription:

After a long and very painful illness
Success was dead and gone.
We will remember You forever!

Around the obituary, there were huge models of coupons with captions like “The last hope for Success perished today!” “Success! No more!” and so on.

The funeral itself took place at the Central Sofia Graveyard. The black coffin was slowly lowered into the grave. Again, mourning and cries were heard. The red pyramid and the wreaths—a few thorns instead of flowers—were all placed on the grave, and several candles were lit. There was a solemn funeral oration and announcements for the wreaths: “A wreath from the Bulgarian Musical Academy!” “A wreath from the Bulgar-

ian Theater Academy!" "A wreath from the Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski!" Each announcement was accompanied by a short orchestral performance. Finally, the participants piled everything on the grave and began to dance the *hora* around it.

The funeral obviously was a parody, but of what type of a funeral? This was not a traditional village funeral rite, regardless of some of the traditional elements that were included. This was a parody of a funeral from the socialist period, a funeral of a communist. That is why the black was combined with red in the mourning dresses. That is why there was a red pyramid with a five-pointed star, but no funeral service with a priest. This was the communist version of the funeral rite. People wanted to bury communism itself, to bury the evil, and through the ambiguous form of parody these funerals lay somewhere in between the abstract notion of socialism and the concrete political situation in Bulgaria in 1990.

The second funeral, in 1997, was of the one-hundred years-old BSP.⁶ In the days prior to the funeral itself, certain notices and slogans on this topic appeared: "St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia. Theological Department. Students against the one-hundred-year-old one," "Let's bury the one-hundred year-old one." At the same time, the following slogan also appeared at the UDF rally: "Mournful joy. On this day, the winter of 1997, after a prolonged, one-hundred-year-long meaningless existence, the final death agony of our party of many names began. Public prayers for an easy and quick death will be held in

the square in front of the Alexander Nevski Cathedral. In the name of the people. Amen!"

The funeral procession began with four students bearing a coffin, which had been made by a skilled coffin maker, containing a red banner representative of the body of the deceased person. One of the four carriers was dressed like an evangelical priest, the second like a party leader, and the remaining two wore black mourning clothes. They marched with stony faces and an air of utmost solemnity. A despondent widower walked in front of the coffin; a soldier wearing the battle uniform of the royal army was carrying a banner, his appearance suggesting complete exhaustion. The coffin was followed by a brass-band continually playing funeral marches or party hymns. There was a group of howling wailers wearing mourning attire including lace, veils, and hats with small veils. "This was a disgusting black group which emitted odious wails, and when people heard them for the first time they were startled and fearfully turned to see what was going on but then they laughed and some of them joined the procession." The participants in the procession were mostly students, but as they marched on, their numbers increased as other people joined. There were individual masked figures: soldiers with Cossack hats decorated with bands bearing the inscription "WYU" (an abbreviation standing for Workers' Youth Union) or "Excellent Student" (a typical communist distinction). The latter wore the old uniform students' caps from the socialist period.

The marchers gathered at the University of Sofia, but from there they made

their way to the former Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov (Bulgarian communist leader from the first years of the communist government), which was the actual starting point of the funeral procession. At the outset it was a quiet procession, but gradually it changed, and cries were heard that merged with the howl of the mourning women. The cries actually turned out to be actually chants against the BSP; they were not particularly expressive of any profound grief.

They proceeded from the Mausoleum to the Central Department Store and along Vitosha Street in the direction of the National Historical Museum and the National Palace of Culture. Then they continued along Patriarch Evtimiy Street. At times the mourners would throw themselves on the coffin. A student pretending to be a member of the Workers' Youth Union wept. When the students reached the Monument of Patriarch Evtimiy, they made a turn and walked along V. Levski Blvd. in the direction of the Sofia University and returned to the Mausoleum.

The funeral itself took place in the Mausoleum. The coffin was solemnly brought up to the stand where party leaders had stood in socialist times and had greeted the rally passing by. During this long demonstration of grief, solemn speeches (expressed only in gestures and mimic) imitated those of Georgi Dimitrov, recognizable from documentary photos. All this was accompanied by an orchestra. The funeral itself took place as the coffin was taken down from the frame of the stand to a spot that was not seen from the square. The end of the funeral was marked by the lively reel-

like *hora* dances typical of the Danubian region and performed in the square in front of the Mausoleum. The irony here was that *hora* dances were usually performed during communist elections and other communist celebrations. Both the participants in the mock funeral and the audience that had gathered in the square took part in the dance.

The two funerals—of 1990 and of 1997—can be compared in many ways but I shall content myself by listing some of the major factors of interest. The 1990 Funeral of Success was a far more metaphorical expression of a political position, while the 1997 Funeral of the Centenarian (the one-hundred-year old party) provided direct guidance to the goal of the political protest. The theme of Success was developed in 1997 as well, but it was not the dominant theme, nor did it figure prominently in the protests led by the students. Numerous inscriptions and slogans related to this topic appeared, such as: “No more Success, so that we remain here!” “The party of destruction ruined Success,” “Who has brought us to this plight? Who has inflicted this Success on us, so that we have already drawn the moral: BSP in the garbage-bin!”

The burial of Success in 1990 was a parody of a socialist funeral, so that even the mourning attire was not conventional: “Our appearance had to be such as to suggest that we were burying a notorious Mafia boss.” “That is why most of us were dressed in black suits and black ties, and we wore yellow chains on our wrists. One of us had a toy mobile phone showing from his pocket.” These displays of conspicuous wealth

conveyed the notion that communist profiteers had stolen the Party's and the people's money.

The 1990 procession began at the neighborhood of Darvenitsa, the so-called Student City, far from the center of Sofia. It ended at the Central Sofia Graveyard, enacting a symbolic move from the periphery to the center. The 1997 funeral started and wound up at the former Mausoleum of G. Dimitrov, closing a circle. Both in 1990 and in 1997 the Mausoleum and the space around it was the home of evil, it was the "alien" center. During the 1997 funeral, however, the protesters were "going in there to destroy even its last remnants, to prevent it from coming to life again and from moving among us like an evil spirit." Therefore, the funeral of 1997 was more definite, and more explicitly linked to the major political demands of the protesters. It was a direct reference to their goal and even though the ludic form of presenting these demands was retained, this burial was already a manifestation of a changed social position of its participants. This was probably the result of the greater social self-confidence of the student community and of its awareness of its own significance at decisive moments in Bulgaria's modern history. The fact is, that they were again successful and achieved the main goal of their protest.

Notes

¹ Unattributed quotes throughout the article convey the words of demonstrators, recorded by the author and stored in the Archive of the Institute for Folklore, Bulgarian Academy of Science. Most of the interviews with students were taken incidentally, among other things during the protest, so they sound like individual voices rather than an exhaustive recounting of events.

² Recently I heard a paper presented at the California Folklore Society Annual Meeting, Berkeley, April 14-15, 2000 by Pauline Tuttle, entitled "Whose Streets? Our Streets! Whose World? Our world! Narratives & Negotiation after the WTO." She spoke about a completely different type of protest, but she also spoke in general about this peculiar community created in the time of protests. She said: "In the ritualized and transformative performance of protest, the participants experience a reduction in difference (both social and ideological), and an enhanced sense of community." And she considered the narratives as performances and as performative, constituting political subjects.

³ See also a special volume in Bulgarian with articles on the 1997 protests by folklorists, linguists, sociologists, historians, and political scientists (Yordanova 1997). Of related interest is a website on "Language Change in Bulgaria after 1989," maintained by a team of researchers and students at the Institute for the Bulgarian Language at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (<http://www.language-change.ibl.bas.bg>).

⁴ The name of Zhorzh Ganchev is often associated with the students' idea of a communist under cover, while the nickname Bouratino refers to Ganchev's own words to the effect that "even if my name were Bouratino, I would still be a great Bulgarian."

⁵ All these "ideas" were explained to me by

students who took part in the performances. Not all of them were understood by people observing in the same way, but the general sense did come through. One woman observing the procession with the alarm clocks commented: "I do not know what they [i.e., the students] want to say, but it is true that we have to wake up. It is high time to do that!"

⁶ For the concise general presentation of the event, as well as for the explanations concerning its original ideas and their alteration, I would like to extend special thanks to Petrinel Gochev, third-year student at Krastyo Sarafov Academy of Theatrical and Film Arts, majoring in dramatic theater stage production. I am also obliged to him for the descriptions of a part of the events that I did not observe myself and for the explanations regarding their symbolism and means of expression.

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Responses

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I am familiar with the events discussed in Iveta Todorova-Pirgova's article. I too was a participant in the protests against the Communist Party from the very first rally held some 11 years ago at the square in front of St. Alexander Nevski Cathedral in Sofia. This square is the center of the city, its heart. St. Alexander Nevski Cathedral is in close proximity to St. Kliment Ohridski Sofia University, which, in turn, was the starting and ending point of the 1997 university students' protests. Even a superficial comparison of the 1990 events and those that occurred in 1997 would be indicative of the long path traversed in search of a new place under the sun, which was no longer the "sun of militiamen's socialism" (as it was referred to in some of the feuillets broadcast by Radio Free Europe).

But at this first rally and at the numerous ones that followed people thronged from all directions, from all quarters, with their own handwritten slogans: "Down with the BCP," "Todor Zhivkov Stalin," "Take the plunge and you will be free!" Blue banners fluttered, and one could come across caricature masques of the recently toppled party and state leader, Todor Zhivkov. Given my own participation in the protests, I would like, first, to offer a remark regarding the ritualized forms of the protests against the communist/

socialist rule in Bulgaria in the period 1990-1997, and second, to articulate some thoughts regarding the parallel between the initial protests and the university students' protests in 1997. The parallel to which I'm referring involves the notion that the driving force and foundation of these protests were the university students, the educated young people, Bulgaria's elite, as Todorova-Pirgova also points out in her article. During the early rallies, one of the frequent chants initiated by the youth nucleus was "he who doesn't jump is red!" Jumping was a right and privilege of the young, of the living and vigorous, who swept with them the adherents of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) with their enthusiasm and energy. The "red" represented the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) = the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) = Centenary Party = infirmity = death.

Starting with the first rally all the way down to the events of 1997, the most frequent chant besides the "UDF!" slogan was "Down!" This "Down!" had both direct and indirect resonance. It could be seen on building walls, it could be heard in song lyrics: "45 Years Suffice," "We want no communism, down with the BCP!" Personified in the BCP, "Evil" was depicted on posters as well. Pictured as a multitude of skulls with crossed bones, indicating the locations of the communist camps, Evil was condemned verbally, by means of a gesture known since ancient times (a fist with a thumb turned downwards), unequivocally spelling out "Death!" The meaning of

its semantically opposite sign “V” was not simply “Victory!”, but victory over the big Evil. Victory was once again conceived of as death, in accordance with the old formula of “the end as a beginning,” “death as life.” I find it interesting that Todorova-Pirgova has drawn a parallel between two similar events: the burial of “Success” (*Spoluka*) in 1990 and the funeral of the Centenary BCP. The second funeral—around and at the Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov—was already the burial of Evil at the home of Evil, with clearly declared intolerance articulated with enhanced social self-confidence.

The parallel between the two funerals brought to my mind an association with rituals (for example in the case of long lasting drought), where the absence of an expected result from the performance of certain ritual actions entails their repetition. Actually, prior to the 1997 funeral the space around and in front of the Mausoleum was repeatedly “domesticated,” “humanized,” and “reclaimed.” Silent candle-light vigils were held there for evenings on end, evenings in which people protested in silence, prayed in silence with radiant faces and eyes. Viewed from above, Sofia resembled an enormous temple wrapped in silence. It was in this square that the “Town of Truth” emerged at the “Dawn” of democracy and each of its tent-homes represented the idea and the great hope of living with and in Truth. It was in this same square, which kept the memory of thousands-strong rallies in honor of socialist red-letter days, that people chose to celebrate Christmas and Eas-

ter. The space around and in front of St. Alexander Nevski Cathedral was not accessible to everyone at any time: on great Christian holidays a hedge of militiamen allowed only people with passes across the barrier. This long process of humanizing and reclaiming common meeting grounds in the center of the city not only marked an integration into the heart of the city, but also indicated a return to normal day-to-day life. To my mind this process of humanizing and reclaiming grounds was in reality a process of humanizing the very participants in these activities. An old/new way of communication was (re)born in the course of dozens of vigils and rallies. The need for adequate social communication was manifested in the desire to be part of another and yet another rally, where we wished to chant together, to sing together, to talk to each other, to share minutes of silence.

I find it interesting that the author has drawn a parallel between the initial protest marches and the 1997 marches of the university students as regards the route of the latter, when the pressing vital need for one’s own place in the social space was emphatically stated. The lyrics of one of the hit songs of that time went as follows:

I shall not walk with my head bent,
I shall find a reason to stay,
I am still here, am I not?
I haven’t run away.

“I want to stay” is tantamount to “I want to have a home,” “I want to have a job,” “I want to have future in Bul-

garia.” What is new here? What is new is the claim on “one’s own [university students’] space,” not a movement from the periphery to the center, as it was in 1990. As Todorova-Pirgova points out: “‘Our’ home was in the center and we gradually expanded the diameter of the ‘tame’ space around us.” The following question can be asked now: is “the new” really new? Perhaps it is as new as are magic rites performed in a circle, common in folklore, that aim for and achieve definite results.

I find Todorova-Pirgova’s article engaging not only because it testifies to the rapid reaction of the folklorist—of her skill to collect and document phenomena from “yesterday” and “today”—but also because this article is provocative in identifying cultural models of behavior in a post-communist society seeking new ways for itself.

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Todorova-Pirgova’s article “Symbols and Images of ‘Evil’ in Student Protests in Sofia, 1997” provides an intriguing insider’s glimpse into the powerful performative language used by the Bulgarian student protest movement in its efforts to celebrate, in the guise of satirical mourning, the 1990 demise of Bulgaria’s monolithic one-party political system and the subsequent ousting of the communist/socialist government in 1997. Her article is written against the backdrop of the increasingly difficult and tumultuous 1990s in Bulgaria—a time that saw wave after wave of expectation and hope pitted against disillusionment and struggle in the lives of the vast majority of the Bulgarian population. During these years, the country was immersed in the painful transition to a democratic multi-party political system which was coincident with massive environmental degradation resulting from heavy industrialization during the years of communist rule, exponential inflation, a shortage of basic goods, the collapse of numerous banks and a failing economic system suffering from the abrupt transition to privatization, the closure of two sub-standard nuclear power plants, social stress from reforms in internal and foreign investment policy, the introduction of a new constitution, as well as the rejection of rigidly articulated nationalistic performative parameters in theater, music, the arts, etc. In

retrospect, these factors seem to have mitigated many of the goals of the 1990 and 1997 protests “free elections, higher salaries, environmental protection” that “good” which was to fill the void left by the eradication of “evil,” the focus of the protests.

Whether we are speaking of the student protest movements in Sofia; *Canboulay* in nineteenth-century Port of Spain; the musical street theater of Trinidadian Carnival revelers protesting South Africa’s apartheid in the 1980s in the streets of Toronto, London, Port of Spain, New York, and beyond; the WTO protests in Seattle which began in 1999 and have now entered their “third anniversary collaborative protest” in what has become known as the “annual battle of Seattle;” or any number of other social, religious, political, and cultural protest movements around the world, the collective focus of protest is often the glorification, through sheer overt attention, of that which is corrupt and objectionable, rather than the promotion of that which may provide a viable alternative model for sustainable development in the future.

With this backdrop in mind, Todorova-Pirgova explicitly frames her study in relation to the dichotomous imagery drawn on by the students in their evocation of that which they perceive needs to be eliminated, replaced, obliterated, signified simply as “the evil.” Curiously, she defines “good” from a point of negation rather than as a goal to be achieved. Good, she notes, is “the absence of ‘evil’” rather than evil being the absence of good. Good is de-

finied in terms of the imagery of evil, as highlighted in conversations and performances Todorova-Pirgova has recorded from the protests. From these, Todorova-Pirgova draws on the symbolic dichotomy of “good” and “evil” value-laden terms that are difficult to attain a conceptual grasp of outside of the context in which they are given voice and form through performative, ritualized, and theatrical enactment. An example of this is the simple but powerful use of contrastive color – black costumes offset by red props, against painted white faces – as an evocation of literal and subliminal markers of “the good” and “the evil.” “The evil” is, not surprisingly, linked to the color black, to death (of the BSP), the old and outworn, the oppressor, silence (absence of music), the Bulgarian Communist Party, the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), and sites of political power – BCP and BSP physical landmarks and administrative centers. On the other hand, for the Bulgarian students the white painted faces symbolize “the good” a new life supported by the vibrant strains of jazz and marching band music, and given credence by their association with the intellectual centers of power and reform – the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), the Universities, and St. Alexander Nevski Square.

In their symbolic representation of “the evil,” the Sofia students draw on their belief that if feelings can be engaged through visual and aural graphic images of “evil” this will allow the observer to see that “evil” (the BSP) needs to be extricated and made invisible. The

paradox of making invisible or banishing by means of making visible jumped out at me as I read the explicit descriptions of the dramatic props drawn on. Realizing that I am immersed in an entirely different culture, I nevertheless had to ask myself: would not the memory of vivid graphical images of witches and blood, of black suits, red arm bands, and white faces, of coffins, slogans, songs, red five-pointed stars and pyramids, umbrellas (signifying the assassination of Markov with an umbrella), red garbage, torches, suitcases, etc., all leave potent impressions on the mind and heart that would not be easily forgotten? If such images and vocalizations of "the evil" are entrenched in the collective memory, how then can they be purged to make way for "the good"? In light of this, it would have been helpful if she had offered more historical depth into the rich political, cultural, religious, and social history underlying the protest movements and the age-old symbology she speaks of. Curiously, also, the student protestors have turned the identity of the victim inside out and drawn on it as a symbol of empowerment and action, as a means of drawing others to their cause. According to Todorova-Pirgova, by satirizing and mocking, the protesters have removed the mystique and power from "the evil" and transferred it to the viewer. Rather than being powerless, the viewer is thus energized through a magical transformation of horror into humor.

As a reader, I expected to learn more about what these ideas look like in relation to the performative enactment of symbols of "evil" in Bulgarian student

protest dramatizations. Instead, Todorova-Pirgova embarks on a discussion of her methodology, whom she interviewed, and the core idea that united and served as the identity-marker and maker of the "semi-closed community" she both studied and was part of. This unifying idea based on negation—that of being "against" communism, particularly the BCP and the BSP—somehow would result in the "magic" of the transformation of a named and imaged "evil" into an unnamed, unarticulated, and seemingly unimaged "good," beyond the absence of evil that was the desired end product of the protests, i.e., the literal ousting of the socialist government and the societal changes expected to result from this process of purging. Unfortunately, I could never quite figure out who was an insider in the semi-closed community of the student protestors and who was not, or if there were peripheral lingerers and onlookers who reside in the ephemeral space demarcating the boundaries of closed and open communities, or what happened to the community that had defined itself in relation to being against "the evil" once this entity was laid to rest during the elaborate mock funeral held by the protestors. Curiously Todorova-Pirgova presents the community members she works with, the student protestors, as being simultaneously representative of the peoples' voice and the intellectual elite within the social framework of a tripartite system of "we, students," "the other people" those who the "we" aim to convert, to "awaken," to empower—and the "communists."

Students are unnamed and identified only by place of study, giving them the stamp of authority that privileges the voices of the intellectual elite—the very factor that allowed the protest movement to succeed in its goals. Todorova-Pirgova in fact uses a modified multi-vocal approach in which she does not privilege her own voice but rather sets the voices of her students and consultants side by side with hers, an approach I have also drawn on in previous attempts to place my own voice on more equal footing with that of my consultants, to decenter the perceived notion of the authority of the ethnographer (Tuttle 2001).

As my reading came to a close, I was left somewhat confused as to what Todorova-Pirgova meant by her use of the term “performance” and would have preferred to see her problematize this more directly in relation to the subject matter. I also wondered who is the audience? What role do they play? We rarely catch a glimpse of who the audience—the potential convert—is and never what their reaction and role is in these street dramas that provided the spark for revolutionary social action and interaction. The article, I found, lacks a coherent framework that would provide the reader with easier access to the important points Todorova-Pirgova raises. With some tightening up and a clearer articulation of the links between traditional symbology and its current application, this article could provide us with a much deeper insight into the Bulgarian expression of the powerful role played by music, art, theater, and voice in the shaping of new governments and

emergent power structures in this historically volatile area of the world, particularly in the post-1997 years. As it stands, Todorova-Pirgova offers an insightful look into the intersecting pathways that map the multi-faceted layers embedded in symbolic performative protest and the powerful societal results of the complex and evocative multi-vocal threads running from one protest dramatization to the next and culminating in a massive funeral for “evil” that was duplicated in social and political life with the resultant ousting of the communist regime and the subsequent institution of the Union of Democratic Forces as the ruling party. In closing, one of the most refreshing aspects of this article was the opportunity it gives the reader to gain a deeper understanding of the Bulgarian voice in that it was written by a scholar who is not only intimately familiar with Bulgarian culture but is actively involved in both the political reformation of her nation and the performative enactment of generations of ancestral knowledge, symbology, and life-ways in contexts that speak to the exigencies of contemporary experience and needs and performance practices.

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Responses to Previous Issues

“The Pleasures of the Ear: Toward an Ethnography of Listening”

Regina Bendix,
University of Pennsylvania, USA
Cultural Analysis, Vol. 1, 2000.

Abstract

Collection and research on expressive culture had its beginning in scholars' deep and often emotional and sensory attraction to folk song, narration, and craft. Writing and print were the customary 19th-century media of learning and communicating knowledge, and the growing scholarly habit of screening out emotional vocabulary further impoverished our understanding of the sensory and sensual totality of experience. While students of culture have long since begun to critically examine their fields' legacies, the more intimate, affective linkage between burgeoning scholars and their disciplinary subject has not been fully considered. It is this implicit attraction and its marginalization, if not disappearance from scholarly purview, that contributed to the equal marginalization of sensory experience, affect, and emotion from ethnographic work. To comprehend the marginal place of what I would like to term an “ethnography of listening” (as one example within a larger ethnography of sensory perception), this essay sketches the implications of the successive exclusion of sentimentality and sensuality from scholarship concerned with folklore, before turning to a discussion of why such marginalization is increasingly untenable and how ethnographers are beginning to recover sensuality and corporality as a vital part of understanding expressive culture.

Response

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“Listen!”—a traditional framing device for countless forms of verbal expression, and as it happens, an appropriate admonition to readers of this fine essay. In “The Pleasures of the Ear: Toward and Ethnography of Listening,” Regina Bendix claims our attention with a voice both seductive and urgent. She stands in worthy succession to Hermann von Helmholtz and Ernst Mach, whose nineteenth-century experiments in sensory perception laid the groundwork for an ethnography of listening.

Bendix offers here an introductory fanfare, not a final “word.” She invites us to examine both the historical implications and consequences of the tension between listeners' delight and investigators' objectivity, corporeality and textuality, in our ethnographic disciplines—and then calls on us to transcend these distinctions in our own work. I find irresistible the succinct summary of “reception, writing, and rapture” offered by Donald Brenneis, offering up a new primer to replace the old alliterative trilogy of “three ‘R’s.” I have only a few comments to add to his excellent response, suggesting a few further areas of pursuit—a kind of desecant to Bendix's melodic line. First among these areas is the role of listening in relation to the supernatural, especially the numinous. This property of sound is intimately related to the affective power so movingly adduced

by Bendix, but deserves attention in its own right. The special authority of the voice is embedded etymologically in the very language of devotion: the English term “obedience” derives from the Latin *ob audire*—“to hear while facing [someone].” Comment in this area extends from Walter Ong’s virtual theology of listening to cross-cultural investigations of auditory hallucination.

A second area for further investigations is the metonymic relationship between voice and memory. Recollection as an act of listening is an image that pervades all levels of discourse in Western and other cultures, and powerfully informed much of the work of early Romantics cited by Bendix, such as Herder, von Arnim, and Brentano. And finally, what of the ethnographic implications of technical means of recording, both as media that have modified perception of sound in itself, and as tools that have transformed especially the disciplines of folklore and ethnomusicology? Glossing Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s pithy observation “the tool is the topic,” Bendix remarks that “the technologies available to us as researchers have fundamentally shaped the way in which we are

able to conceptualize our discipline’s subject.” These technologies have likewise fundamentally shaped the subject itself, certainly in those areas relating to the acts of listening, speaking, singing; perhaps feeling and recalling as well.

In *A Spiral Way: How the Phonograph Changed Ethnography*, I addressed the above issues in a cursory fashion, with some discussion of the history and sources pertaining to them (see esp. 27-88). I am delighted to return to these questions in this excellent article and in Donald Brenneis’s elegant response. In closing, I can do no better than to repeat the tried and true formula with which I opened, asking readers, for the sake of the discipline and for the sake of the work of each of us within it, to please listen—and listen well.

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Reviews

Imagination. Popular Images of Genetics. By Jose Van Dijck. (New York: New York University Press, 1998. Pp. vii + 235, bibliography, index.)

In *Imagination. Popular Images of Genetics*, Jose Van Dijck makes an important contribution to the emerging literature on the media and to cultural analyses of molecular biology and society. Those who witnessed the remarkable press conference at the White House in the summer of 2000, where President William Clinton brought together Francis Collins from the government-funded Human Genome Project with Craig Venter, CEO of Celera Genomics, the key private sector rival to the publicly funded venture, will appreciate Van Dijck's work as she attempts to unpack the mythology and metaphors deployed since the 1950s in the "gene race" to unlock "the book of life" (21). Van Dijk sets out to challenge the schools of thought subscribed to by many in the scientific and journalistic communities who espouse theories of technology diffusion which are essentially teleological narratives: scientific progress gradually wipes away layers of ignorance to reveal a broader understanding and acceptance of scientific claims and technologies. She correctly points out that these narratives do not come to terms with the "polyvalent struggles for the meaning of genetics" (5) which move in fits and starts as diverse actors contest competing truth claims and control over science and its representation.

Van Dijck views these struggles over meaning through the lens of theater, or in her words, "the theater of representation" (16) which plays out as a drama complete with metaphors, stages, scripts, and actors assuming various roles. Central to the theatrical presentation of truth and meaning would be the images deployed by actors and how they shape perceptions of what counts, who can speak, and the place of gender in the construction of representations. Throughout the book she examines the leading scientists, journalists, artists, writers, and political activists engaged in the drama. She does not attempt to describe these groups as unified categories. Among the ranks of feminists, for example, there are important differences in the underlying assumptions of the constructions of nature and culture and how these terms are deployed in the rhetoric of criticism. Many feminists share the fundamental assumption that nature and culture comprise a dyad or accept a strict separation between science and society, while others have sought to transcend such traditional grounds for criticism.

The book is organized by chronological periods, each marking a new script and set of roles in the drama in which actors play against each other. However, often these actors carry over metaphors from previous times or works of fiction and science while giving them a new valence in any given historical moment. She begins her narrative with the 1950s as scientists attempted to refashion biology by distancing it from the discourse

of Nazi eugenics. They accomplished this through new images and the “New Biology” which sought to situate molecular biology in a neutral political space. She highlights the role of one of the leading scientists or “founding fathers,” James Watson and his own account of the discovery of the DNA molecule. His narrative deployed religious imagery for the “code of life” as well as a patriarchal view of knowledge production in the biological sciences. The journalistic actors largely viewed the New Biology with “awe and mistrust” (50) while strictly enforcing the separation between science and society.

The 1960s marked a shift in the cultural politics affecting both journalism and science. A more apocalyptic view of science emerged in science fiction. By the 1970s a more oppositional role for journalists emerged as they increasingly rejected any claims to objectivity while frequently assuming the roles of judge, prosecutor and jury. This accompanied a shift in the image of the gene. Originally viewed as neutral, genes became endowed with agency. In the journalistic and science fiction mediums we find images of scientists as negligent, selfish, and capitalistic. Both genes and geneticists become marked as enemies of nature. The same dyad of science and nature played a role in bringing together seemingly oppositional sides as both genetic and social determinists jostled for control of the meanings of genetic sciences. Important critics such as Jeremy Rifkin found a voice in the 1970s as a more activist journalism emerged. A new regulatory discourse in the form of bioethics began assuming a larger role in the

debate through the deployment of the discourses of compassion, justice, and responsibility while simultaneously advocating ethical training for scientists. The Human Genome Project was perhaps the largest funder of bioethics research, yet, many would argue, an ineffective one. Van Dijck correctly points out that bioethicists could become part of the debate as long as the way scientists worked remained untouched. We might use some of her observations here to call into question the role of bioethics in contemporary debates over the politics and ethics of technology. The Asilomar Conference of 1975 is presented as a first attempt by scientists to regulate their own profession while managing the journalistic discourse at the same time. The conference thus marks a point of growing tension among scientists themselves.

The late 1970s and early 1980s mark a new era in the discourse as biotechnology firms emerged on the scene as an outgrowth of university and private sector collaborations and networks. The public relations discourse assumed new meaning in the rise of biotechnology in constructing the image of the scientist as heroic doctor struggling for the cure. Throughout the 1980s and 90s criticism of genetics became more dispersed through the media, artists, academy, and science fiction. The most interesting examples provided here compare the fictional works of Robert Pollack and Richard Powers and feminist writers such as Octavia Butler. Here we find more powerful musings over the role of metaphors and images to visualize DNA, genes, genomes, and the future. Throughout this work, Van Dijck chal-

lenges us to rethink the linear notions of technology diffusion in favor of her metaphor of circular transformation of knowledge and a more complex understanding of knowledge production and representation—powerful metaphors in the continuing contest of meaning as biotechnology assumes greater importance in our everyday lives.

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La mort en direct. Les snuff movies [Death “Live.” Snuff Movies]. By Sarah Finger, with the collaboration of Kevin Boissezon. Documents. (Paris, Le Cherche Midi, 2001. Pp. 217.)

It is well-known that the proliferation of imitations, parodies, and hoaxes makes it problematic to decide on the reality of many phenomena in the realm of anomalies, as well as that of contemporary legend. The term “ostension,” created by Umberto Eco and first used by Dégh and Vázsonyi (“Does the Word ‘Dog’ Bite? Ostensive Action as a Means of Legend-Telling,” *Journal of Folklore Research* 20, 1983:5-34), seems appropriate to summarize these copying and reproductive appropriations. The concept of “memes” also comes to mind, suggested by Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976). My approach to the theme will be oblique, my examples successively touching on the frivolous and then focusing on the unpalatable: first Lovecraft’s *Necronomicon* and then “snuff movies.”

The *Necronomicon*, H.P. Lovecraft’s best-known fictional manuscript, started to exist in the 1960s as a fictitious library catalog reference (located at Miskatonic University), then developed when hoax editions began appearing in the 1970s. Soon video games and web pages complicated and expanded the picture. Thus in July 2001, a wide “Necronomicon” web search (using Google) gave around 40,000 web pages, reduced to 9,000 with the exclusion of games, limitation to English, and recent (one-year) updating (see <http://www.hplovecraft.com/cre->

ation/necron/). National libraries such as Bibliothèque Nationale de France, the Library of Congress, and the British Library each keep about four or five of these hoax books. Most of them are still on sale. Can the *Necronomicon* still be considered not to exist in 2001?

In 2001, French journalist Sarah Finger published *La mort en direct. Les snuff movies* [Death “Live.” Snuff Movies]. This investigative book discusses the belief in snuff movies’ existence that has been with us since the mid-1970s, when the first accusations put forward by anti-pornography crusaders appeared and generated unsuccessful investigations by the FBI. The existence of snuff movies is debated—and debunked—on most urban legend sites (for example, urbanlegends.com, urbanmyths.com, urbanlegendsabout.com, and totse.com/en/conspiracy/institutional_analysis/folklore.html—corresponding to the disappeared pioneer alt.folklore.urban). This “dark legend,” which presents some analogies to the organ theft narratives that were widespread in the early 1990s (see, e.g., my article “Organ Theft Narratives” in *Western Folklore* 56, 1997:1-37), enjoys widespread belief among the general public, but finds little credence among professionals aware of the realities of the field, pornographers as well as police (cf. <http://www.apbnews.com/media/gfiles/snuff>). As was the case for organ theft narratives, a motley bunch, mostly moral crusaders and feminists, defend the reality of snuff films’ existence. An old acquaintance and staunch defender of the reality of organ thefts, Renée Bridel (of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers, a

human rights organization in Geneva) is the author of a December 1981 report entitled “La traite des enfants” [The Trade in Children] that presented one of the early fictional films, *Hardcore*, as evidence of the existence of snuff movies.

The belief builds upon several factors. One is the fascination with serial killers, the new ogres which attract abundant rumors of trophy films of victims. In rare cases, such films existed, as in the Leonard Lake and Charles Ng case, in which the films were shown to the California jury during Ng’s 1999 trial, 14 years after Lake’s arrest, but they were not marketed by their makers. Another factor is the shocked reactions which stress that horrendous evil accompanies the industry of pornography. Figures in the porn industry such as Larry Flint (*Hustler*) and Al Goldstein (*Screw*) openly express their skepticism as to the existence of snuff movies. Goldstein even offered \$100,000 to anyone who could “come up with an American film showing a death that was made in America that was commercially distributed” (cf. <http://www.apbnews.com/media/gfiles/snuff>). A third factor is the existence of an array of “death films” (cf. David Kerekes and David Slater: *Killing for Culture. An Illustrated History of Death Films from Mondo to Snuff*. London: Creation Books, 1995). These films include shock documentaries, imitations of snuff movies and mainstream fictions.

Shock documentaries appear in series, and the 1980s *Faces of Death* has followed in the line of the Italian pioneers *Mondo* (1960s) and *Cannibal* (1970s). The latest isolated ones quoted by Sarah Finger are *Death Scenes*, released in the US

in 1989, and *Executions*, released in the UK in 1995. Their appeal is based on their supposed authenticity, though it is well known that they include a rather large proportion of made-up documents. Their number and persistence indicates they are marketable items with their own specialized audience.

Imitations of snuff movies are fairly rare, but present on the pornography market. The first one, *Snuff*, released in 1976, actively sought to create scandal by its aggressive marketing (see Scott Aaron Stine: "The Snuff Film. The Making of an Urban Legend," *Skeptical Inquirer* 23(3), May-June 1999:29-33). Its producer was very pleased when feminists of the National Organization of Women and Women Against Violence Against Women picketed the theaters showing the film. Its story is lengthily told in all documents on the subject (*ibid.*, Finger 38-43). More complicated is the story of *Guinea Pig*, a Japanese series, one episode of which, *Flower of Flesh and Blood*, provoked FBI investigations. It was concluded that the tortures and dismemberment shown (of a young female held captive by a man clad in a samurai attire) did not correspond to real murders. The same conclusions were reached for *Seppuku*.

Snuff movies have also inspired numerous mainstream fictional movies and "It is safe to say that there are more films about snuff films than there are actual snuff films in existence" (Stine 33). It would be a futile exercise to describe them here; *Killing for Culture* and Finger (57-68) both already list them from 1978 *Hardcore* (Paul Schrader) to 1999 *8mm* (Joel Schumacher). Finger mentions a

little known film, the Spanish 1996 *Tesis*, which presents the classic scenario (first seen in *Candyman* and developed in the *Urban Legends* series) of the folklore student who discovers facts that match the legend she is studying and becomes a victim. In *Tesis* she is kidnapped by a sadistic fellow student who tortures and kills in front of a camera. The videos are processed in the university's underground by an accomplice who is a university professor. Some of these films are rumored to be "based on fact" just as the 1974 *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* was said to refer to the Ed Gein case. This supposed authenticity was also the case for the (non-gore) 1999 *Blair Witch Project*, whose slick online marketing, launching the movie as the report of a true event, is now being imitated by all major movies.

Fictional books are also abundant, both in the mainstream (Brett Easton Ellis's *Less Than Zero*) and the roman noir genres (Gregory McDonald's *Rafael*). Their links with films are close; the two titles quoted have become films (*Rafael* inspired 1997 *The Brave*, starring Johnny Depp). These fictions alternate between two types of killers: psychopaths and profit-minded businessmen of the porn industry.

The really original part of Finger's book reviews the accusations regarding snuff movies that have surged in Europe since the shock created by the discovery of the multiple murders of Marc Dutroux in Belgium (161-177). These rumors only concern child victims. In the unfinished investigation into the Dutroux case unbalanced witnesses asserting the existence of snuff movies have long been heard by the authorities, but they are

now totally discredited. Police investigations of these accusations have so far not found solid evidence of murders, but videos from Russia showing ill-treatment of children have been seized in Italy.

Reading about snuff movies is an unbalancing experience. There are so many closely imitative products that one ends up wondering whether they can still be said not to exist. In the review of all expressive forms close to the snuff movies, the most disturbing one is not discussed in Finger's book, but on a page maintained by British Matthew Hunt under the title *Censorship: Bad Taste and Extreme Culture* (<http://members.tripod.co.uk/mathunt/censored.html>). In this extensive list of avant-garde art, the successive sections, "Literature," "Theatre," "Music," "Photography," "Cinema," "Art," and "Performance Art," are each more nauseating than the last. The performance art section alone catalogues on-stage or filmed acts of copulation, masturbation, fellatio, bestiality, vomiting, excretion, coprophagy, disembowlement, dismemberment, genital mutilation, self-trepanation, and plastic surgery. After reading this summary, even the non-censorship-oriented student of contemporary culture (and I count myself one) gets the feeling that the numerous "imitations" abundantly attest to the fact that snuff movies are already with us.

Will the snuff-movies legend turn into fact? The unending quest has perhaps generated a profit motive which was not there at the outset.

Snuff is a means by which the media can prick public morality. Despite no such film ever being found, in any place, anywhere, the media continues to indiscriminately nurture and promote the myth as fact. Perhaps in so doing—reiterating its potential monetary value and projecting potential markets—it will one day succeed in making snuff a true commercial reality (Kerekes and Slater, *ibid.*).

But also, probably more importantly, a general voyeuristic tendency will perhaps bring into existence the sci-fi short stories of the 1950s. The connection was suggested by Josh Tyrangiel in *Time* magazine (Eur. ed., July 23, 2001:64):

Snuff fans had to be cheered last week as the inexorable march of network television toward live-murder broadcasts took another step forward. Justin Sebik, 26, a contestant on the CBS reality snoozefest *Big Brother 2*, was tossed from the show after he really wielded a butcher knife, really held it to the throat of a fellow contestant he was kissing and really asked, "Would you be mad at me if I killed you?"

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Folklore, Heritage Politics and Ethnic Diversity. A Festschrift for Barbro Klein. Edited by Pertti J. Anttonen in collaboration with Anna-Leena Siikala, Stein R. Mathisen, and Leif Magnusson. (Botkyrka: Multicultural Center, 2000. Pp. 278+ 7 ill.)

This book is at the same time a collection of symposium papers and a festschrift for Barbro Klein, who recently turned sixty years of age. Klein graduated from Stockholm University in 1961 and studied folkloristics with Richard M. Dorson at Bloomington, Indiana, where she also took her Ph.D. in 1970. For several years she taught at different American universities, including the University of California at Berkeley and the University of Pennsylvania. In the 1980s she returned to Stockholm University, where she was appointed professor in 1996. She is now a director of the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences in Uppsala. The first essay in the collection, by Anna-Leena Siikala, is a sketch of Klein's life in folklore on both sides of the Atlantic. The symposium, held in June 1998 in Botkyrka, Sweden, was organized by a Nordic research project sharing the same name as the book. The purpose of the project is to "investigate the role of folklore and folkloristics in the reshaping of Nordic life that is now taking place as a result of the recent extensive transnational migrations and related changes in the political maps of the world" (23). In a short essay Roger D. Abrahams elaborates on some of the themes of the research project and exem-

plifies how other folklore scholars have treated them.

In his contribution, Pertti Anttonen, the book's leading editor, gives an outline of some such political map changes. He demonstrates that the allegedly homogeneous national cultures should be described more appropriately as homogenized. The production of homogeneity is an historical and political process, constantly challenged by heterogenizing forces. The population of Finland, which is the example Anttonen chooses, has always been mixed. The political call for national unity, however, has demanded rhetoric of a genetically coherent Fenno-Ugric ethnicity constructed in opposition to the surrounding Indo-European ones. A central symbolic position has been attributed to Karelia, an area most of which has never even belonged to the state of Finland, but whose language, folk poetry, and customs have been regarded as representing the most ancient and genuine layers of Finnish culture. The Sami, on the other hand, whose languages are closely related to Finnish, and who presumably have inhabited northern Scandinavia at least as long as any other group, have consistently been denied any role in the shaping of the national culture of Finland.

In her article, Regina Bendix discusses one of the project's key words—heritage—a "strange, neutralizing word" that "has the power to disempower, to hide history and politics by putting everything into a collective pot of 'culture' and 'past,' possibly adding the adjective 'important' to it" (42). Early modern society created its modernity by inventing

a contrasting past that was to be collected, preserved, and put on display in museums. Hierarchical patterns, power systems, economic structures, and excluding mechanisms were effectively wiped away from the ideal image of a genuine, authentic national culture. Bendix illustrates how the concept of heritage in today's late modern society plays the same role in hiding aspects of power and diversity. To clarify her point, she compares the terms "heredity" and "hybridity," semantically precise, biological concepts that highlight such structures instead of concealing them. Heredity emphasizes legal inheritance and hereditary privileges as well as political and military struggles. Hybridity underscores the existence of class differences and conflicts, diversity, injustice, prejudice, multi-culturality, and heterogeneity.

Kjell Olsen discusses how the exhibits of Alta museum in northernmost Norway take part in constructing ethnicity. Olsen regards the story told by the museum as a master narrative inviting tourists to interpret Alta's ethnically mixed situation (locally represented groups include Sami, Norwegians, Kvens, Russians, Finlanders, and Tamils) in terms of Western European ideas about First World (civilized) and Fourth World (indigenous) peoples. Locally told stories question this picture by telling of geographical boundaries between coastland Norwegians and inland Sami, of blurred or non-existent ethnic boundaries, and by adding all kinds of individual reactions to the exhibition.

Using examples from Swedish museums, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett

shows how heritage is constructed in an interplay between exhibited objects, the words of the museum curators, and the responses of the visitors.

In her article, Anna-Leena Siikala follows the development of ritual during the last decade in the Republic of Udmurtia, west of the Ural Mountains. During Soviet times, this area was strictly closed because of its military industry. Sacrificial rituals were performed secretly. Today, the region is well connected to the rest of the world, and the religious rituals have been transformed into national festivals, broadcast on television, where international artists perform. A thorough understanding of contemporary heritage production can only be reached against the backdrop of globalization. Furthermore, in contrast to a scholar from the social sciences, Siikala argues, "the folklorist is in a position to identify not only the means of constructing and manifesting the individual self, but also the shared models of thinking, feeling, and experiencing" (82).

Frank J. Korom illustrates the idea of tradition as a symbolic process, previously explored by Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin ("Tradition: Genuine or Spurious." *Journal of American Folklore* 97: 273-90), with examples of politically contested traditions in Trinidad.

Karin Becker reports from her joint fieldwork with Barbro Klein in a multicultural area of municipal garden lots outside Stockholm, claiming that photographs should reconstruct the experience of being in the field (105). She also discusses how photography is a process of negotiation with the informants, and how the photographs can be used

ethnographically. In line with the present context, Becker exemplifies how gardening maintains links to the past, and at the same time literally establishes new roots. In gardening, emotions and traditions are territorialized and embodied in highly visual forms.

Using Gotland's Medieval Week festival as her example, Lotten Gustafsson shows how medieval buildings, play with identity, and negotiations between local inhabitants and newcomers are used in a process of reconsideration of identity.

Stein Mathisen shows how in early collections of Sami folklore, collectors and publishers tended to characterize Sami culture as homogeneous. However, a closer look at two of the main Sami spokespersons shows that while one of them acted as a translator and mediator in a multicultural fishing and trading community, the other had taught reindeer herding to Eskimos in Alaska and met with African Americans and Native Americans in the U.S.A.

Mikako Iwatake describes how Kunio Yanagida (1875-1962) constructed a form of folkloristics that was uniquely Japanese but lay within the framework of German philology, which, according to Iwatake, is tainted with "Aryanist racism, Eurocentrism, nationalism and sexism" (207). Yanagida's ethnography put rice-cropping farmers at the cultural center, while mountain peoples and itinerant groups were regarded as culturally peripheral. The Ainu people, mostly inhabiting the northern island of Hokkaido, were denied a place in Japanese culture, while Okinawans, occupying the southernmost group of islands,

were supposed to preserve some traces of ancient Japanese culture.

Orvar Löfgren illustrates how different attitudes to "the national" (an abstract noun not defined in the article, but which seems to mean a discourse about national culture and symbols) mirror transformations in society. During the 1960s and 1970s, national rhetoric was seldom used in Sweden, which at this time became both more cosmopolitan and more homogenized. The debate preceding Sweden's entry into the European Union, the influx of immigrants from different countries, and the emergence of neo-fascist organizations generated new attitudes towards national symbols. The Swedish flag can be used as decoration on birthday cakes or as a racist symbol excluding certain ethnic groups.

A festschrift for Barbro Klein would of course not be complete without the participation of the jubilee-celebrator herself. The enthusiastic, ever-present Barbro would certainly not let such minor details as her own sixtieth birthday stop her from taking part in the intellectual discussion. Her contribution to this volume summarizes the history of the project and its first symposium. Not least important, she hints at some points of discussion that were not followed through at the Botkyrka symposium. A central question appears to be how heritage is actually produced in processes of, on the one hand, hiding and concealment, and on the other, dramatization and exoticization (29). The common denominator of the authors is perhaps less a joint stance on questions concerning heritage politics and ethnic diversity than an open-minded curiosity and de-

sire to grasp and understand what goes on in the world around us. Several of the authors use intellectual tools borrowed from our scholarly neighbors, mainly sociologists and anthropologists, but they borrow critically. They seem to be convinced, and I certainly am, that our own field of science, folkloristics, carries with it more than sufficient intellectual potential to vastly expand our research into, in Barbro Klein's words, "tradition worlds that have never before entered our scholarly horizons" (35). This anthology can be regarded as an attempt to outline some daring, challenging, oppositional, politically conscious roads into the future for tomorrow's folkloristics.

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Spectacular Nature: Corporate Culture and the Sea World Experience. By Susan G. Davis. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997. Pp. xii + 313, 18 maps/figures, notes, index.)

The multi-faceted discipline of cultural studies examines the theories and practices of everyday life that we use to explain and make sense of the world around us. Gender, sexuality, race, nationhood, and society are the specific but arbitrary products of social construction. Language, identity, politics, and culture all contribute, mold, reflect, and reproduce these models and frameworks in which we live. But what exactly are the influences of corporate culture? To what extent are our lives and experiences mediated by profit-driven corporations and organizations? Susan Davis, in *Spectacular Nature: Corporate Culture and the Sea World Experience*, examines these questions in the context of a particular form of recreational consumption in our consumer culture: the nature theme park. She deconstructs Sea World in San Diego, exposing the extensive influence of the economic forces underlying this privatized, commercialized space. As the title of her book suggests, *Spectacular Nature* offers a comprehensive examination of Sea World, its creation, its meaning, and its nature spectacle as mediated by corporate culture.

Public and commercialized space has long been subjected to analysis by numerous academics in fields as diverse as sociology, history, political economy, anthropology, communication, and more recently, cultural studies. In this respect, studies of the commodification of pub-

lic space and its commercialization are nothing new. However, using a more contemporary, multi-disciplinary approach to Sea World, Davis focuses her analytical gaze on the multiple “texts” that make up the theme park as a whole in order to examine the underlying social orders that shape, influence, and control our experiences within the park. With an eye of a folklorist, the patience of an anthropologist, and the shrewdness of an economist, she unpacks the carefully constructed nature theme park as a “consumer good [intended] for a contemporary mass market” (4) that hides behind a façade of scientific research, animal conservation, and environmentalism.

Reducing Sea World to a purely profit-making machine exposes an interesting text for analysis. Or, as Davis posits, “to unpack the meanings of places like Sea World, it is useful to speak of theme-parked nature as an industrial product and to look closely at the industry that produces it” (19). With meticulous detail, Davis traces how Sea World’s early beginnings evolved with the commercialization of San Diego’s tourism identity. In so doing, Davis reveals how the park has thoroughly integrated itself into the geographical and social history of San Diego, thereby ensuring an inextricable association with the local vernacular culture. This alliance provides the basis for much of the park’s success, not only as a site for controlled (read “segregated”) public recreational and educational space, but as an emblem of Southern California’s tourism trade. Situating the park in this way, Davis underscores the status that Sea World has in

relation to other types of tourist attractions in the community. Sea World not only provides thousands of low paying jobs, but it also draws in millions of tourists that feed the local tourist industry.

After having established Sea World’s history and locality within this commodified public space, Davis delves into the machinations behind the park’s theme: the nature spectacle. Relying on nearly a decade’s worth of repeated visits, in-depth interviews with park employees, photographs, architectural analysis, and countless field trips with local schoolchildren, Davis articulates the process by which Sea World continually defines and refines its experience to the consumer. Sea World creates and displays versions of nature that are modeled on our expectations, hopes, fears, and fantasies. For instance, Davis found that in creating the ARCO sponsored Penguin Encounter, “designers thought they had to keep the penguins from appearing overcrowded to their public. People are made uncomfortable by the sight of swarming animals. Crowding might indicate mistreatment in captivity, and just as bad, . . . it might remind viewers themselves of feeling bunched up” (108)—this despite the intense crowding in natural environments. This reinterpretation of reality “connect[s] customers to nature . . . and gives the domination of nature a gentle, civilized face” (35). At the same time, these manufactured spectacles create “a process of reflecting on our own experiences” (108). This displacement of what we see is used to manipulate our perceptions of and about nature, our relationship with nature, and our concerns about our inter-

actions with nature and the environment.

But as popular culture changes with the ebb and flow of our consumer driven, material lives, so must the image of Sea World be packaged and re-packaged to accommodate growing concerns about animal extinction, dwindling natural resources, and polluted environments. Sea World, in Davis's words, "profits by selling people's dreams back to them" (244). The beautiful landscapes, the carefully scripted shows, the trained and anthropomorphized animals, the multi-ethnic workforce, the family-oriented themes, and the contrived conservatism all contribute to the promotion and production of a site for mass consumption that simultaneously reinforces certain ideological beliefs and reinterprets the harsh world around us. Clearly, Sea World's success lies in its ability to change and re-invent itself with the ever-changing cultural climate by selling that which we want to see, need to see, and hope to see.

Spectacular Nature is the culmination of tremendous dedication and research. Logically organized, easy to read, Davis employs a number of multi-/interdisciplinary approaches to make sense of the theme park's messages: anthropology, sociology, folklore, and media studies just to name a few. The importance of this approach cannot be overstated. The complexities of popular culture in today's contemporary, multi-faceted, consumer-driven society require all of the above and more. Equally important is recognizing one's positioning. Constantly reminding us of her own changing perceptions, Davis foregrounds how her own ideology and political beliefs have influenced her interpretations. In-

deed, the evolution of her initially indifferent analysis into her subsequent cynicism warrants considered attention. But as Davis guides the reader through precise and detailed analysis in clear and eloquent prose, one can neither deny the compelling logic of her arguments regarding the power and pervasiveness of corporate capitalism nor fully fathom the ramifications of such a reality. *Spectacular Nature* may be a fascinating study of the nature theme park Sea World, but it also demands that we question the more mundane constructions of our everyday lives.

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Sami Folkloristics. Edited by Juha Pentikäinen, in cooperation with Harald Gaski, Vuokko Hirvonen, Jelena Sergejeva, and Krister Stoor. NNF Publications, 6. (Turku: Nordic Network of Folklore, 2000. Pp. 280.)

When the great botanical systematizer Carl von Linné (Linnaeus) visited Lapland on a collecting expedition in 1732, he was fascinated by the indigenous population. Their simple reindeer-herding lifestyle, as he saw it, put them in a golden age, on an Elysian field lacking the complications of a society based on agriculture. Had he been inured to constant cold since childhood, Linné famously said, he would quite readily have changed place with one of the reindeer herders he observed on his journey. Linné even planned a book on these people, to be called *Lachesis Lapponica*, a work that never saw the light of day. But there was already a long tradition of informed writings about this indigenous population of Fenno-Scandia, going back to the Middle Ages in Iceland (in sagas placed in Norway) and even the Viking Age in England (interpolated into the translation of the *Historia adversus Paganos* undertaken at the court of King Alfred the Great). Description of the Sami people—an endeavor known in its earlier stages as “Lappology”—stretches back to humanism and shared Linné’s view of the people as an exotic other. Besides description of the material culture, the emphasis was on religion, a religion lost or driven underground by the conversion of the Sami to Christianity and, one sus-

pects, state and church vigilance and recidivism.

The research picture of the Sami has to some extent continued to emphasize the pre-Conversion cult and religion and has therefore been based on the older written sources. Although much folklore was collected and published over the years, and a type index of legends was produced by J. K. Qvigstad in 1925, Sami folkloristics has not exactly been a growth industry. Perhaps it is because many of the best workers in the field enter it, as do four of the eight authors represented in this book, from the discipline of history of religion. Certainly, as the essay by Stein Mathisen shows, even the folklorists recording Sami material in the earlier part of this century—a classic collecting period in Scandinavia—thought little of the originality and future of the materials they were documenting. For this and many other reasons a book on Sami Folkloristics is to be welcomed.

In the Preface, Juha Pentikäinen writes:

This book bearing a programmatic title *Sami Folkloristics* is an indication of a new era both in the discipline of folkloristics in general and in a new field recognized as Sami studies in particular. (8)

The book consists of ten articles divided into two parts, “Sami research history” and “Sami folklore interpreted.” Part 1 includes Håkon Rydving, “The Missionary Accounts from the 17th and 18th Centuries—The Evaluation and Interpretation of Sources,” Juha Pentikäinen,

“Lars Levi Læstadius as Sami Mythologist and Mythographer,” Stein Mathisen, “Changing Narratives about Sami Folklore—A Review of Research on Sami Folklore in the Norwegian Area,” Pentikäinen, “Finnish Research on Sami Folklore,” and Jelena Sergejeva, “The Research History of Kola and Skolt Sami Folklore.” Part 2 includes Harald Gaski, “The Secretive Yoik—Yoik Lyrics as Literature and Tradition,” Vuokko Hirvonen, “How to Make the Daughter of a Giant a Sami—a Myth of the Sami People’s Origin,” Sergejeva, “The Sun as Father in the Kola and Skolt Sami Tradition,” and Thomas A. DuBois, “Folklore, Boundaries and Audience in *The Pathfinder*.”

As a glance at these titles suggests, and as a reading of the articles will bear out, the claim of the indication of a new era in the discipline of folkloristics is overstated. The articles of greatest theoretical interest are by the two trained folklorists, Mathisen and DuBois. Following Edward M. Bruner (“Ethnography as Narrative” *The Anthropology of Experience*, ed. Victor W. Turner and Edward M. Bruner, 139-55. Urbana and Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 1986), Mathisen traces the development of Sami folklore scholarship as a narrative in itself, which is to say that he situates scholarship over the years within master narratives about the Sami within Norwegian culture. DuBois invokes theory toward the end of his article by placing the film *Pathfinder* in Barth’s “middle level” of ethnic interactions, but the article in general constitutes a common-sense separation of elements in the film that would appeal to the inside (Sami) and

outside audiences, and he shows how these elements work together.

The claim of the indication of a new field recognized as Sami folkloristics is not justified. Certainly there has been growth in Sami studies lately, however one chooses to define the concept, but part 1 focuses essentially on Lappology, and the four studies in part 2 lack a unifying theme.

There is, indeed, a kind of inherent contradiction between the first half of the book, focusing largely on the older materials and the corresponding older research and accepting a split into national research histories, and the second half, with its emphasis on the vale of interpretation that is internal to the Sami community and not immediately informed by the older research materials or the sensibilities of the nation states which facilitated such research. But one reads both parts with interest, rather as one reads through a favorite research journal, and there is much to be learned from and react to in each article.

As with any collaborative project, there are inconsistencies, occasional repetition, and the odd linguistic misstep. My favorites are the calque “learned to know” for “became acquainted with” (11), and the legend “Sami dresses” beneath an illustration showing both a man and woman in traditional costume. More vexing is the editorial decision to stick with dialect orthographies, a decision, wholly unassailable on both ideological and scholarly grounds, that might nevertheless confuse precisely the audience of non-specialists for whom the book is presumably intended. This confusion extends to the index, which I would as-

sume to be an entry-point for some users. A student seeking information on, for example, Sami Shamanism, would find an entry on “Sami shaman,” just beneath “Sami drum,” which s/he might realize was related. But there is also an entry on “Shaman drums,” one on “Shamanic” and one on “Shamanism;” as if this were not confusing enough, there are also entries for “Noaidi,” where many people with some prior discipline knowledge might look, and cross-references to that entry from “Nåjd” and “Nyõdd.” The careless index typifies what I fear will be the difficulty and perhaps frustration of students and researchers looking for a thorough and systematic treatment of Sami folkloristics instead of a volume of loosely related individual pieces.

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Difficult Reputations: Collective Memories of the Evil, Inept, and Controversial. By Gary Alan Fine. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001. Pp. xi + 267, acknowledgments, chapter references, index.)

Gary Fine has given us an illuminating study of historical and literary figures from Colonial to mid-twentieth century America. His subjects are varied and sometimes unexpected, including not only individuals who once lived but also a pair of literary characters (Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita* and Humbert Humbert) and a place (Sinclair Lewis’s *Sauk Centre*, represented in *Main Street* as Gopher Prairie). Although Fine approaches his material sociologically, his inclusion of literary texts underscores his point that the construction of reputation, like the construction of a work of fiction, involves an imaginative shaping of character and plot. Thus Benedict Arnold, subject of his first chapter, is constructed as a villain with the sinister duplicity of Shakespeare’s Richard III, another figure who would lend himself beautifully to such reputational analysis.

Reputational analysis inevitably raises an epistemological question: in what senses do we “know” Richard III, or Benedict Arnold, or O. J. Simpson? In his introduction Fine touches on the fact that we may “recognize the thinness of our knowledge of [celebrity] figures” even as the fact of their celebrity connects us to them and affords us opportunities to “converse about vital social matters” that their lives illustrate. Celebrity, in fact, confers a fictive familiarity so that we

respond to celebrities “as if we knew their motivations and values” (4). Thus even at the outset we see how equivocal the term “knowledge” is as applied to the subject of reputation, since Fine himself gets caught in the slippage between “thin” knowledge (of the obscure and arguably unknowable “actual” individual) and the “thick” knowing that we construct as we engage in the fiction-making that surrounds celebrities. At times, Fine’s attention to explaining his theoretical stance—a social constructionism modified by “cautious naturalism” (15-17)—actually hampers his analysis, since reputation, unlike the individuals possessing (or masked by) reputation, has no possible existence apart from its constructed one.

The eight chapter titles give a good overview of the nature and scope of the book: “Benedict Arnold and the Commemoration of Treason,” “Warren Harding and the Memory of Incompetence,” “John Brown and the Legitimation of Political Violence,” “Fatty Arbuckle and the Creation of Public Attention,” “Henry Ford and the Multiple-Audience Problem,” “Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*, and the Creation of Imaginary Social Relations,” “Herman Melville and the Demise of Literary Reputation,” and “Sinclair Lewis, *Main Street*, and Community Reputation.” Each chapter, as well as the introduction, ends with an extensive list of references.

The “difficult reputations” to which the book’s title refers are reputations that are not positive and stable. Fine examines three types: reputations that are negative because the individual has violated the society’s canonical values; repu-

tations that are contested, that is, in the process of being formed or re-formed; and reputations that are divided along the lines of differing subcultural viewpoints and values. These three categories are useful as an initial approach to the subject, but because of their overlap, they have a certain conceptual awkwardness. Contested reputations are identified as those of a specific category, yet contestation is also a process to which any sort of reputation—positive or negative, singular or plural—may be subjected—in other words, contestation is a potential attribute of the whole.

Fine’s cases effectively show how the processes of reputation formation and revision exhibit certain common characteristics regardless of historical period. Such a study could be augmented by an examination of the particular effects of current journalistic/communications practices and media. For instance, how has the Internet, with its capacity to facilitate the contestation and proliferation of multiple reputations, increased reputational “difficulty”? What are the consequences of the American appetite for tabloid journalism (and its televised counterpart), with its increasingly shameless invasions and inventions of private lives, so that would-be heroes are reduced to buffoons by being caught, literally or figuratively, with their pants down? At the same time, public relations has fostered the reverse phenomenon, a sort of preemptive strike whereby the managers of a public figure glorify that individual, for instance as a “compassionate conservative,” which of course invites contestation but also shapes the terms that the contestation will take (not

compassionate? not a conservative?). However, since these current problems and practices fall outside the scope of Fine's book, it can hardly be faulted for not covering them. Indeed, one of the book's merits is that it invites just this sort of extension and speculation.

Fine's work exemplifies how biography provides us with a form of history, the individual standing in synecdochally for the period or sequence of events with which he or she is associated. Reputation, difficult or otherwise, gives us "a shorthand way of conceptualizing a person, and it is a powerful metaphor for thinking about a period or set of events" (7). Since indeed it is precisely the individual as characterized by reputation—not the irretrievable, unmediated individual—that is exhibited in our historical narratives, the first point is perhaps tautological, but the second is a useful reminder about the operation of historical tropes. In these pages we glimpse the power of visual images, anecdotes, poetry. For example, Fine quotes a poem by John Greenleaf Whittier on the occasion of John Brown's execution. This "beatific image" (105) of a violent man transformed by tenderness was apparently invented by an anti-slavery journalist and became part of Brown's legend:

John Brown of Osawatomie,
They led him out to die;
And lo!—a poor slave-mother
With her little child pressed nigh.
Then the bold blue eyes grew tender,
And the old harsh face grew mild,
As he stooped between the jeering ranks
And kissed the negro's child! (105)

When reading this poem, I was reminded of e.e. cummings's eulogy to President Harding, another of Fine's subjects:

the first president to be loved by his
bitterest enemies" is dead

the only man woman or child who
wrote
a simple declarative sentence with
seven grammatical
errors "is dead"

(*Collected Poems*, 1926, no. 200)

Moving from substance to style, Fine's approach is somewhat vitiated by the problem of voice—an authorial "I," which is used frequently (though not throughout) and is most noticeable when theory or method is being discussed. Yet much of the book was composed collaboratively, so this singular voice leads to occasional uncertainty as to whose views are being represented. In his acknowledgments, Fine explains that five of the eight studies comprising the book were coauthored with former graduate students, and that in these five (two of which were master's theses), "the students are properly first authors" (ix). Although Fine is careful to give credit where it is due, we are left with a rhetorical problem that leads to a bit of a structural problem as well.

Given the multiple authorship, the volume might more usefully be evaluated as a collection of essays, were it not for that controlling voice. In his introduction Fine remarks that "the eight case studies do not by themselves make for an intellectually coherent argument; my task in this introduction is to sketch what a broader approach to the analysis of dif-

ficult reputations might entail.” Here we have the essence of the problem. We would expect that these case studies, given their multiple authors, would not have such coherence, so why not turn an admitted shortcoming into an advantage by emphasizing rather than downplaying the variety of viewpoints? More diversity of voice—unedited and unrevised by Fine—would perhaps have given this volume more richness in its approaches to the subject of reputation.

Perhaps as a consequence of the multiple authorship, the book occasionally bogs down in what seems a repetitive discussion of theory and method—a discussion that could have been developed more thoroughly in the introduction and then referred to only briefly within the chapters. At the same time, several apologetic-seeming disclaimers might be eliminated. For instance, Fine disclaims the title of historian, explaining that as a sociologist he has other goals and standards: “To suggest that in five years I could write conscientious historical essays on eight different periods from the 1780s to the 1950s would be laughable. Instead, I must describe how I perceive the methodology” (23). The first of these sentences again raises the problem of voice, since we already know (if we have taken the time to read his acknowledgments) that he did not in fact author all eight essays. His words also point ahead to one aspect of the methodological problem. He proceeds to explain that most of the research in this book depends on secondary sources: “I did not feel it necessary to travel to dusty archives, although my coauthors and I spent much time reading the accounts of those who had. In essence literary, economic, cultural,

and political historians served as research assistants” (23). We may feel uneasy about the dismissal of those “dusty archives” and the reduction of other scholars to the functional status of “research assistants” (not to mention that ubiquitous “I”) but surely there is a more intellectually defensible (and clearer) way to determine and justify the method. This book examines not a number of individuals who are hidden behind or beneath a layer of texts, but rather a number of very visible reputations that are constructed by and recorded in texts which cumulatively had wide enough circulation to shape public opinion. Thus the research logically would be directed toward those texts. If some of them are now housed in “dusty archives,” then they must be sought there; otherwise not.

By expounding his theoretical approach at several points in the book, Fine not only weakens the coherence of the whole work but also sometimes foregrounds the discussion of general principles to an extent that the particulars of the individual case recede from view. Yet Fine’s “cautious naturalism” does not seem in itself to warrant much discussion, indeed affording undesirable opportunities for semantic or conceptual slippage. The proof of its utility lies in the application, and his ideas find their best expression when he focuses on “the process by which reputations are made or unmade” (259). His close readings of reputation entertainingly support his concluding observation: “History is filled with stories and with storytellers” (259) and with a rich cast of characters—heroic, villainous, and ambiguously “difficult.”

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Cultural Analysis:
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Cultural Analysis

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