INTERPRETING TUKULOR ORAL LITERATURE: 
THE MYTH OF ORIGIN OF THE NINE MABUFÉ CLAN NAMES

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This paper is an attempt to develop some themes in my own work on aspects of mabufé oral texts, and these have been stimulated particularly by the recent publication of the volume by K. Barber and P. de Morias Farias entitled *Discourse and its disguises*, which calls for a simultaneous acknowledgement of the textuality of oral texts, a sociology of textual production, and a poetics of oral literature. Such a project requires contextualization of performance, a concern with textual meanings as well as a formal analysis (*explication de texte*). This latter part of my project is without doubt limited by my competence in Pulaar, the Tukulor vernacular. As Barber and Farias point out, the texts with which we concern ourselves inhabit and engender a ‘web of indigenous discourses’ whose constructs require interpretation and whose narrators are prompted by hermeneutical intent. Any concern, therefore, with the textuality of the myths under study here should not obscure from view the fact that these texts are utterances, and hence constitute a ‘species of social action’.

The mabufé, an occupationally specialized social category among the Tukulor of the Senegal river basin, are primarily known as

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1 Where single letters within a Pulaar word are marked by either italic or bold script, this indicates implosive voiced consonants, of which there are four – b, d, g, y. A similarly marked letter ‘n’ denotes a nasal velar as in the English word ‘song’.


4 Ibid., 1–10.
weavers, poets and praise-singers, although numerous secondary social functions are attributed to them. Members of this social category bear distinctive patronyms, the most characteristic of which are Gisse, Jong, Kasse, Keneme, Kiide, Kume, Kundul, Sangot and Saare. These nine patronyms are said by the mabube to be the oldest and most authentic, and all of them are related back to the weavers' mythical ancestor, Juntel Jabali. These nine names do not exhaust the list of specific mabu patronyms, and two in particular – Sokom and Daabo – are the focus of some discussion among the mabube. Sokom is a reasonably well represented patronym among the mabube today, and some narrators include this name in the original list of nine by omitting one of the others. Most agree, however, that Daabo is a little-known though exclusively mabu name, and they explain its omission from the original list by elaborating the origin myth of these names (see below) to suggest that Daabo, although a descendant of the mythical ancestor, stayed at home during the period of drought and famine portrayed in the myth. In addition, the name is said to have no meaning, unlike the other nine.

The myth studied below is known as the myth of the nine patronyms (yeetoode jeenayi), and hence emphasizes the limited inclusion of names in the myth to this particular number. Why the number should be so limited I do not know. The only significance I could elicit for the number nine was a rather sophisticated explanation that nine was the last in the serial order of numbers before a new concept 'ten' (sappu) was introduced. (Numbers up to ten are counted on a recurring order based on five; that is, nine is a compound of five and four.)

The common setting for the narrative in all versions is the mythical past during a year of severe drought and famine. Nine brothers, said to be the grandsons of the weavers' mythical ancestor, go out into the bush in search of food. They come upon a hyena, capture it, gather around the animal, and then each brother in turn makes a suggestion as to what should be done to prepare it for a meal. After each brother steps forward to make his suggestion, the captured hyena lying in the middle of the group makes a reply by announcing the brother's patronym. These names are more or less loosely derived from key phrases or words which are part of the suggestions uttered by the nine brothers. Although there is some correspondence across the various versions of the myth I collected between specific patronyms and particular phrases, there appears to be a degree of latitude and licence for the narrator over the choice of phrases and suggested derivations he embroiders. The patronyms themselves have no inherent meaning in Pulaar, but through word-play, consonant and vowel

shifts, allusion and so forth, the narrator indicates putative etymologies and suggestive derivations for these names. It would appear then that the attribution of authenticity to one’s origins in the mabube social category inheres in the definition of meaning and the embroidering of a semantic content for a particular patronym.

When first looking at these myths, I had envisaged creating a sort of dictionary or lexicon of patronyms accompanied by their specific linguistic derivations. That this exercise was neither possible nor fruitful came to light as I collected more versions of this myth, and I realized that there was a wide diversity of putative etymologies. Questions about strict linguistic correctness or incorrectness in patronymic derivations were concerns I had created for myself as a fieldworker trying to come to grips with an alien tongue. Instead, what seems to be crucial is the degree of latitude and ‘poetic’ licence the narrator draws on in producing his own version of patronym derivations. Although each individual narrator will eventually define his own personal version of the myth, there is also an appreciation of other possible versions devised by other narrators. This appreciation seems to rest on criteria such as plausibility, inventiveness of wordplay, allusion and so on, as well as on the possibility of multiple readings of the text.

Before considering the question of multiple readings a note is necessary on appreciation and performance of these myths, since my own position as fieldworker has no doubt introduced an artefact in relation to these issues. First, this particular myth (classified as a tarikh) is never recited as part of a public performance, but is considered to be part of a secret body of lore (gandal) which is transmitted exclusively among the mabu&e themselves, primarily between master and apprentice, but it also informs discussions and debates between master weavers. This contrasts sharply with dalle – a form of praise-song and poem – performed in a highly stylized manner at naming and marriage celebrations for example.6 This particular myth, then, forms part of a conversation the mabube conduct among themselves, and is not produced as a spectacle for public consumption or performance. My own collection of numerous versions of the myth, which I later played back on my tape-recorder to other mabu friends and contacts for comment and criticism, broadened and systematized the informal and diffuse ‘conversation’ that normally takes place. The arena of textual appreciation and criticism was hence broadened and formalized by my method.

I present below three versions of the origin myth of the nine mabube patronyms by three different narrators. These three have been selected because each one consistently provoked a particular type of

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6 See Dilley, ‘Tukolor weaving origin myths’, and ‘Performance, ambiguity and power’ (see n. 2 for bibliographical details).
critical response and level of appreciation from my indigenous critics, ranging from a generally disdainful view of the first version through to critical acclaim in the case of the third.

THE MYTH OF THE NINE PATRONYMS

First Version

No derivations are given and the patronyms are merely explained. Also, although the story is known as yeetoode jeenayi (nine patronyms), the narrator in fact brings ten figures into the story.

1. Kume: 'to tie up the hyena'
2. Gisse: 'to turn the hyena over and cut its throat'
3. Jong: 'to lay it down and remove the skin'
4. Kiide: 'to hold it tight and tie it up'
5. Saare: 'to divide it up into parts'
6. Keneme: 'to separate meat from fat'
7. Kundul: 'to take dry wood and make a fire in order to cook the hyena'
8. Sokom: 'to do something in one place'
   'to cut the whole animal up in pieces'
   'to prevent it from escaping'

(Commentary - while the group of men were talking the hyena tried to escape, and a man cried 'sokomo' – 'prevent it from escaping'. I have no idea what the derivation is here.)

9. Kasse: 'to dig a hole under the hyena'
(Commentary – by resting the hyena on the digging stick, its skin can be removed without sand getting on the carcass.)

10. Sangot: 'to find other things'
(Commentary – Sangot said the hyena was unclean to eat and that they should let it go free; instead they should search for other meat or fruits which they may eat.)

The next two versions are more explicit in that they give the actual words that each of the brothers spoke. Embedded in these phrases are the putative etmyologies or suggestive derivations for the nine patronyms. More specifically, some of these phrases are sufficiently 'Pularized' as to sound as though they are derivative of a more common vocabulary, particularly so when an extended commentary is supplied as well.
Second Version

1. Gisse: ‘Mbatten ko ngiseeru’
   This phrase can be translated as ‘Let us cut its throat’
   The hyena replies ‘ngise’ (‘Gisse’).
   Ngiseeru is a deformation of kirsandu – ‘cut its (the hyena’s) throat’ –
   from the verb hirsude and its related form kirse meaning ‘to massacre’.

2. Jong: ‘Mbatten ko njon gineendu kutten’ (‘Let us bind and skin it’)
   The hyena replies ‘Jong’.
   Njon gineendu is here derived from the verb jonginde, and the verb ‘to
   skin’ is huttude, which can also be transformed to produce the
   substantive ‘kuttinaado’ – ‘one who skins an animal’. See the third
   version for a different variation.

3. Saare: ‘Ngardee, carenndu, nyaamen’ (‘Come here, cut and divide
   it up, eat’)
   The hyena replies ‘Saare’.
   Carenndu is derived from the verb sarde, meaning simply to ‘cut and
   divide up’.

   The hyena replies ‘Kume’.
   Kumeendu is derived from the verb humde meaning ‘to tether’ (as a
   goat).

5. Kasse: ‘Mbatten ko kassendu’ (‘Let us dig a hole [for it]’)
   The hyena replies ‘Kasse’.
   Kasse is derived from the verb asde meaning ‘to dig a hole’.

6. Kundul: ‘Kunden heen hudo nduppen’ (‘Lay straw and grass to
   cook [it]’)
   The hyena replies ‘Kundul’.
   The verb is hundude meaning ‘to lay straw’, usually when covering a
   roof. Hudo is straw or grass.

   off the fat and drink’)
   The hyena replies ‘Keneme’.
   The verb hentude, giving the verbal form kenter, means ‘to skim off
   that which floats’.

   The hyena replies ‘Kiide’.
   The verb is hiidaade.

9. Sangot: ‘Ngoppen fowru, kuccen sanre nyaamoyen jaabe e mu-
   rootoode’ (‘Free the hyena, and let us fast eating only fruits and berries’)
   The narrator adds at this point that the hyena sings a praise song for
   Sangot, who was not able to eat the animal himself. The hyena refers
   to Sangot as ‘lelel jeeri’, a diminutive form meaning ‘bush gazelle’, and
is a eulogy often used in praise-poetry for members of the Sangot clan. The hyena also refers to itself in this song by a number of sobriquets, such as 'son of Demba Beeli'. Meanwhile the other brothers cut the throat of the animal and eat it until they are sated. Sangot then goes off into the bush in search of fruits and berries but returns empty handed. The narrator notes that there is a difference of opinion as to what happens next: for some say that Sangot returns, on the point of starvation, to find some meat remaining which he then eats; while others say he returns with an unclean substance which again he eats. Due to this fact, the narrator explains, the remaining brothers would not take Sangot as their chief or elder as he too had reduced himself to their level; hence 'the mabube have no chief as it was not the will of Allah to separate the names'. (Other versions state that only the hyena's diaphragm remained and it was this that Sangot ate.)

Third Version

1. Kume: 'Mbatten ko kumeendu' (‘Let us tether it’) The hyena replies ‘Kume’. The verb form here is the same as that used in the second version.

2. Saare: 'Care cate de' (‘Cut and divide up the branches’) The hyena replies ‘Saare’. The same verb ‘sarde’ is used here as in the second version, but rather than cutting and dividing up the hyena’s body the speaker refers to branches. He also adds a commentary: the four went off to gather branches from the yelooki tree in order to make a litter for the hyena.

3. Jong: ‘So en kirseendu, njon gineendu’ (‘When we cut its throat, sit it down in a squatting position’) The hyena replies ‘Jong’. 

Njon gineendu is a form of the verb ‘jonginaade’ meaning ‘to sit’ but in a very specific position: that is, with the limbs folded against the body and the hands at shoulder level. This contrasts with the suggested derivation in version two.

4. Gisse: ‘Ndgismen ndu kisu’ (‘Let us get a move on then’) The hyena replies ‘Gisse’. This translation is the narrator’s own, but I am not sure what the infinitive of this verb is. Another plausible interpretation which was suggested to me by a native speaker was that the term ‘ndgismen’ derives from the verb ‘yeesumbde’, meaning ‘to swing’. The narrator’s commentary, however, clarifies his own interpretation in that he adds that since the brothers found they were wasting time, they wanted to throw the hyena on to a fire to cook it immediately.

5. Sangot: ‘Cangen ndu’ (‘Dress it’) The hyena replies ‘Sangot’. The verb referred to here is sangitaade – ‘to wear a cloth draped over
the shoulder’, a style usually adopted by women. A commentary adds that a piece of cloth was brought in order to clothe the hyena.

6. Kiide: ‘Kiïdoden ndu haa ndu tiïda’ (‘Hold it tight until it is solidly bound’)
   The hyena replies ‘Kiide’.
   The verb is the same as that used in the second version, that is hiïdaade meaning ‘to tighten’.

7. Kasse: ‘Munye, haa mi hasa ndu, ko ndu solima’ (‘Wait, until I circumcise it, for it is not initiated’)
   The hyena replies ‘Kasse’.
   To initiate a youth into esoteric lore (incantations, spells, secret language etc.) in Pulaar is ‘hasde’ and its related form ‘hasaade’ means ‘to circumcise’. Moreover, the body of lore given to initiated youths is called ‘kasi’.

8. Kundul: ‘Kunden ndu hudo, kan e ledde, nduppen’ (‘Lay it on straw and wood, cook [it]’)
   The hyena replies ‘Kundul’.
   The verb is the same as that used in the second version.

9. Keneme: ‘Ndefen ndu, mbele eden kenter kajam mayru’ (‘Let’s cook it, then we will skim the fat off the broth’)
   The hyena replies ‘Keneme’.
   Again, the verb is the same as that used in the second version.

On the subject of Tukulor oral literature M. Delafosse once expressed the following view: ‘Au point de vue littéraire, je n’hésite pas à dire que cette valeur est nulle; parfois incorrect, souvent obscur, généralement sec, le style de l’auteur revêt en certains passage une allure amphigourique qui est de fort mauvais goût et qui nuit à la clarté du texte’.7

Such a view highlights Furniss’s and Yai’s points8 about the incongruence of European textual criticism to African oral texts, and the disjunction between performed oral texts and judgements on the one hand and literary conventions on the other. The offence these texts gave to Delafosse’s Gallic sensibilities are not echoed in indigenous critical practices; and an attempt is made below to plot a provisional course towards Furniss’s ‘as yet uncharted sea’ of indigenous aesthetics and evaluations of oral texts.9

These myths as texts, I would suggest, can be read at three different levels which correspond to the levels of critical evaluation

7 M. Delafosse, Chroniques du Fouta sénegalais, traduites, de deux manuscrits arabes inédits de Siré-Abbâs Soh (Paris: Leroux, 1913), 5.
supplied by critics. The first is at the level of ‘manifest images’ which refers to the consumption by the nine brothers of the hyena, whose meat is considered to be unclean by all contemporary Tukulor. It is this association of the mabufce and hyena that other Tukulor as well as the mabu&e take to be ‘the reason’ for the latter’s low social position, as well as for their characteristic moral constitution. This detail of the mabufce consuming the hyena is one that is known widely throughout society, although other details of the myth are virtually unknown to non-mabu Tukulor. The phrase ‘omo namii fowru’ (‘he ate the hyena’) is a common marker of mabu identity current in this society. The second level of the text is a reading of the variation between each version seen in terms of the suggested etymologies and derivations, which indicate an element of individual creativity on the part of the narrator. The third level is a reading of the broader creation of metaphor in the text as a whole, where it recapitulates or figures aspects of social contexts outside that referred to by the myth. If by playing on figures of speech the narrator suggests putative etymologies in his derivations of the patronyms, then at this third level, by playing with the images conjured up in the text it is possible to create a figure which can be read off the text as a whole.

These myths as texts are, therefore, susceptible to multiple readings as I have indicated. Furthermore, beyond this aspect of the myth, the text also becomes action, for the intentionality and creativity of the narrator are also embodied in its very construction.

The association of the hyena with a particular social category is not necessarily specific to the mabufce alone among the Tukulor, nor is it an association that is unknown outside this society. For instance, C. Rivière notes that similar artisanal groups (eg. blacksmiths) are thought to be capable of transforming themselves into hyenas. Among the Kuranko of Sierra Leone, people who are believed to have similar abilities of transformation are described by M. Jackson as ‘shape-shifters’. Indeed, the hyena also features strongly in Kuranko narratives, and Jackson reviews many of the moral characteristics attributed to the animal in their oral literature. We find many echoes in Kuranko literature of Tukulor attitudes towards the hyena: for both it is voracious, greedy, ill-disciplined, stupid and lacking insight, as well as symbolizing moral depravity and perversion. These images are also impressed upon the Tukulor through popular tales (tindi) often told to children and others for entertainment in the evening. In Jackson’s view such narratives are a means by which customs and values not ordinarily talked about can be brought into discussion; in other words, a discourse or discussion of ethics is mediated by the

11 M. Jackson, Allegories of the wilderness: ethics and ambiguity in Kuranko narratives (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1982).
characterizations given to animal species endowed with moral qualities, and through these terms people make and remake their world.\textsuperscript{12} The question, however, arises in this context as to why the mabube should so closely associate and be consubstantive with such a morally dubious and unclean species through myths that are not rendered publicly. The natural calamity which is portrayed in the myth (compare \textit{During a time of great hunger}\textsuperscript{13}) is not simply a means to invert or subvert the 'normal moral order' or to 'suggest images of social disorder' whereby the listener can ponder the problems of justice and morality in everyday life; nor is it simply that through the fictional annulment of basic ethical principles people are inspired to share in the process of reconstructing them. Instead, I would suggest in this case there is also the element that the myth embodies an indigenous idiom of similarity and difference articulated through the identification of human categories with animal species. To rework Lévi-Strauss's formulation: it is both the resemblances as well as the differences that resemble each other.\textsuperscript{14}

I have detailed elsewhere some of the correspondences and resemblances between the perceived attributes of the hyena and the social characterizations of the mabube as a social category.\textsuperscript{15} It is sufficient to note here that both are conceived as wandering scavengers (\textit{nyaagotoobe} means literally 'those who ask'; it also embodies the pejorative connotation of begging), potentially threatening and sinister, voracious and greedy (their demands know no ends). On the other hand, the attention given to the hyena and its pairing with other animal species (\eg lion and hare) in different genres of Tukulor oral literature thereby creates powerful metaphors of human society which juxtapose and oppose one social category to another, just as one moral and ethical position is opposed to another. 'The resemblance is thus between two systems of difference'.\textsuperscript{16}

The use of this manifest image of the hyena in the myth sets up dimensions of similarity and difference, whereby an internal mabube discourse is built around a consubstantial relationship with the hyena; yet an external marker of difference between the mabube and other Tukulor is also denoted through the animal's juxtaposition to other possible species. My point here diverges from Jackson's since he argues that narratives 'rehearse the values upon which communitas is built'.\textsuperscript{17} Rather, I would argue that whilst setting up notions of similarity and difference, such narratives open an arena of discourse which not only defines the mabube's own sense of cultural

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 71.
\textsuperscript{16} Lévi-Strauss, \textit{Totemism}, 150.
\textsuperscript{17} Jackson, \textit{Allegories}, 262.
distinctiveness, but also provides an open-ended conversation which knows no interpretative closure, and it achieves this through an inventiveness and creativity in suggesting putative etymologies and derivations of the patronyms.

The minimal appreciation by the mabu critics of the first version of the myth recorded above is accorded to it by virtue of its definition of the dimensions of similarity and difference, yet it is suggestive of nothing beyond that. In other words, it is lacking in those elements of linguistic suggestiveness that the mabufce consider to be part of their creative art in the rendition of this myth. It does not engage, therefore, with the other potential readings of mythical discourse, levels on which both the second and third versions of this myth register.

The Pulaar used at various points in these myths, as in other oral forms too, is considered to be archaic in form, and I had difficulty in finding translations for certain passages. Indeed, conveying to the intended listener the precise meaning or a full understanding of the linguistic derivations is not necessarily part of the rendition, but rather it is the construction, in some cases, of plausibly sounding word-plays, phoneme shifts and allusions which is sought. The mabufce are, then, not simply craftsmen weavers but are also wordsmiths and poets who are acknowledged as such, and moreover they regard themselves in a similar manner. ‘The language of the mabufce is beautiful and many can speak it wonderfully’, one mabu told me; and this same uneducated man once gave me a sound lecture on archaic and modern forms of Pulaar, and in this he ranged over such topics as broadening the semantic content of words to encompass new introductions (eg. ‘mosquito net’ = fabiyon, derived from paabordo = ‘saviour’) and linguistic contraction (eg. maayii = ‘dead’, derived from maayiitu = ‘you will see’; that is maayiitu golle maa ine wonnoo do = ‘you will see your deeds there’).

This and other forms of self-conscious manipulation of language are part of a much wider creation and use of special languages and codes found among the Tukulor, and especially among craftsmen-like (nyeenybe*) groups. For instance, circumcision and initiation sets (fedde) create their own codes whose rules change from one year to the next; the old use codes to talk of private matters, vendettas, sorcery and the like. Common formulas in such codes involve inserting combinations of consonants after which one repeats the vowel stem, or the swapping of the syllable order of words and adding an ‘i’ prefix. These instances suggest that language is a potentially malleable form that can be manipulated for various purposes.

It is this aspect of language to which the narrators of the second and third versions appeal in their respective derivations of the patronyms.

Obvious vowel or consonant replacements account for some derivations; in others an allusion is simply made either to suggest the meaning of the key phrase or to provide a root form from which the patronym is derived. This, however, does not imply a linguistic free-for-all, for plausibility also rests on appropriate contextualization in which the hyena and a time of great hunger are the central issues. Suggested derivations have to carry a storyline. Furthermore, it should be noted that all the root terms are derived from verbal forms rather than substantives, perhaps because the various tenses and moods of verbal forms present a greater linguistic flexibility.

Beyond the manifest image of the hyena is, therefore, another reading of the text which is significant for mabu narrators and commentators, namely that of inventiveness and creativity in concocting plausible and suggestive derivations of the nine patronyms. The second and third versions of this myth engage with this register in mabube discourse, and hence they are both attributed higher evaluations than the first in the eyes of indigenous critics. This linguistic creativity is akin to bricolage in which 'the bricoleur creates a context in which new meanings are realised' (Rosaldo and Atkinson, quoted in McCaskie, 1989); that is, meanings are realized out of hitherto meaningless signs. As McCaskie argues in relation to Asante texts, these myths are not primarily suggestive of a dictionary that has to be consulted, but rather they indicate a range of possible meanings susceptible to hermeneutical articulations. The hermeneutical intent of text production precludes constraint and resists interpretative closure, implying an 'open-ended conversation'. Perhaps, like the Asante, mabube intention is 'simply to keep the conversation going' through an 'essay in promiscuous possibility'. By defining a discourse which relies on convoluted yet relatively unconstrained linguistic derivations, the mabube create for themselves a sense of power inhering in their own distinctiveness through invention and creativity. Moreover, it is a discourse which, through its focus on the nine patronyms (whichever are chosen), initiates an open-ended conversation of multiple possibilities and defies definitive and authoritative interpretation.

We have seen above that with the figuring of speech there is created an image which is central to the suggested derivation of a particular patronym. In addition there is another possible reading of these texts in which each of the individual patronymic images combines to form a larger portrait suggestive of a completely different ritual context. This concern only arises in relation to the third...
version of the myth included here, and it could be suggested that, because of this figuring of a broader image, it is this version of the myth which received wide critical acclaim among the indigenous commentators.

The nine individual images of this last version portray the larger figure of the male circumcision rite, a ritual in which mabube, as well as members of other nyeenybe (craftsmen etc.) categories, play an active role as initiators and circumcisers. Each of the images highlights one aspect or episode of this rite, culminating in the seventh image in which Kasse volunteers to circumcise the uninitiated hyena. This is an obvious reference to the ritual, yet seven of the remaining eight images allude more tangentially to it: the second image refers to the collection of branches from the yelooki tree, small sticks from which are carried by boys after circumcision to afford them mystical protection; the squatting position in the third image is the posture adopted by initiates when they gather to eat around the communal food bowl; if yeesumbde – 'to swing' – is a possible derivation for Gisse in the fourth suggestion, then this refers to a form of punishment for boys under the strict régime of the bush settlement, whereby they are swung backwards and forwards and thrown into the river; the reference in the fifth image to clothing the hyena in a female style of dress is reminiscent of the smocks male initiates wear during ritual separation; the sixth image could well refer to the mental preparation undergone by the initiates before the operation which occurs in the next, the seventh, image; the eighth image is a regular event in the bush settlement when boys are expected to gather their own firewood and kindling to prepare their own food; and finally the removal of the fat from the broth refers to an important interdiction on newly-circumcised youths against eating fat for fear a white pinguid discharge forms around the end of the penis.

The critical acclaim which greeted this version of the myth when recounted to other mabube can be explained by the fact that it fulfils the three formal and aesthetic criteria. First, it establishes a consubstantial relationship between the mabube and the hyena, an idiom through which notions of similarity and difference are articulated. (Consubstantiality is a recurrent idiom of similarity in other genres of myth, particularly those referring to pacts of fictive cousinhood known as dend in a yaaal hoo seere [a 'piece of meat' is taken from the thigh of a companion] or in Paulme's general terminology 'blood pacts'). Second, it suggests plausible putative etymologies and derivations for the nine patronyms; and, finally, it constructs a sub-text that images the male circumcision rite in which the mabube play important ritual functions.