

An example of a rather lengthy paper by Dr. Edward L. Powe (14 pages – nearly twice the recommended length) is as follows:

“The Mrengé Combat Dance Tradition of Moheli”

Country Briefing – The Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoros (“a necklace of pearls set in a turquoise sea”) is an archipelago which rises abruptly from the ocean floor equidistant from the coasts of Madagascar and Africa slightly above the northern entrance to the Mozambique channel. The archipelago consists of four main islands (Grande Comore, Moheli, Andjouan and Mayotte) and numerous smaller islands and coral reefs with a total land area of 2,236 sq. miles. Though African in appearance, Comorians are actually a mixture of African, Arab, Malagasy, Melanesian and Malay-Polynesian peoples unified by Islam, common customs and traditions, dress, and the Shikomoro language (a Bantu language said to be a dialect of Swahili). The combat song and dance tradition discussed here appears in all of the islands, but I provide only examples from the island of Moheli, where the tradition best thrives. Lying southeast of Grande Comore, Moheli is composed of a single rugged mountain range rising 790 meters above sea level with an occasional volcanic cone and the accompanying lava flow. The island, which is approximately 31 miles long and twelve miles wide, is very fertile and has good beaches, numerous coconut palms and many rivers. The population of the island is roughly 22,000 and its capital is Fomboni.

The Martial Art - Mrengé is only one of the many danced “combat games” of African origins. Others, which I have written about, include: Capoeira from Brazil; Congo from Panama; Moringue (from Reunion); and Ladjia (from Martinique). The “what? where? when? who? how? & why?” of this tradition on the island of Moheli is briefly summarized in the following chart:

What?	A Bantu combat dance called <i>mrengé ntsi</i> that possibly originated in Mozambique and spread, with the African diaspora, to Comoro, Madagascar (Morengy) and Reunion (Moringue). The combat involves a ritual challenge, strutting, drumming, dancing, singing, and a brief “anything goes” combat mostly characterized by punching, kicking and head-butting. However, in some places (in Mayotte for instance) kicking is limited or non-existent. The reliance on “magical medicines” is also a feature of the tradition as well as the characteristic clenched fist with the protruding middle knuckle known as <i>ntsoma</i> .
Where?	All over the archipelago (Andjouan, Moheli, & Mayotte), but particularly (in Moheli) in the villages of Fomboni, Ziroudani, Wanani, and Nioumachoua.
When?	Practiced from time immemorial, the sport can be played any time in the evening; but especially after the harvest or for organized celebrations.
Who?	Small boys, adolescents, and young and middle aged men of daring participate as fighters.
How?	Mostly punching, but kicking, head-butting, and grappling also occur.
Why?	For amusement, entertainment, honor and prestige more than for prizes.

Origins – While conducting research in Moheli, I asked my host (the late Nafoundine Attoumane) what was the origin of the word used to designate this tradition and he informed me that *mrengé* derives from the Shikomoro verb *urenga* meaning “to take.” Mrengé, he went on to say, means “take him!”

Interestingly enough, Nafoundine also provided a Bantu root for “ringa” (the term used in western and southern Madagascar for wrestling). In Shikomoro, *utria ringa* means “to cause a trip” and *ringa* is “a tripping move.” Later, upon checking various entries for “renga” in Bantu languages, I discovered that that very word (or something similar to it) constantly appeared with meanings associated with combat. For instance, *mdenga* in the Ovambo language of Southwest Africa means “strike him.” Since the words *morengy* and *ringa* have no etymology in Malagasy (the language of Madagascar), I concluded that both these traditions are of African Bantu origin. I might add here that in other parts of Madagascar (particularly the highlands), the word used for wrestling is “*tolona*”.

The characteristic *ntsoma* fist of *Mrengé* (as well as *Morengy* in Madagascar and *Moringue* in Reunion) is formed by: 1) first opening the hand extending all fingers; 2) then folding the little finger into the palm; 3) then folding the second finger into the palm; 4) then folding the middle finger half way such that the tip of the nail of the middle finger lies midway between the first and second joint of the second finger; 5) then folding the fourth finger; and 6) then covering the first joint of the middle finger with the upper joint of the thumb. This fist is very important because it is not only used to punch with but is also utilized while strutting and dancing, as well as in challenges and acceptances of a challenge.

According to Salim Djabir (a local historian), Moheli was first populated – well before the sixth century – by black Africans, probably of Bantu origin, some of whom practiced the cult of the eel and shark. Salim further asserts that the Bantu (whose cradle was the Congo river basin and the Guinea coast) had even at that time a well-developed civilization with respect to social organization, agriculture, animal husbandry, and fishing and came to the Comoro islands between the second and the sixth centuries. Not only did they have three types of boats capable of reaching the Comoros (*ngawa*, canoes with side balances; *shampa*, rafts; and *dou*, large canoes with many paddles or a sail), but also the currents and proximity of the islands facilitated such early arrivals.

With respect to *Mrengé*, Djabir says, it was a very important sport when he was a small boy. In those days there were village, regional, and all island competitions to determine who the champions were. Though big prizes were given to the winners and bulls were slaughtered to animate the tournaments, the most important aspect of the festival to many was the honor and respect a victorious champion brought to his home village. Indeed, the villages of Nioumachoua, Hoani, and Wala in Moheli became well known – he says - more for their champion fighters than for anything else.

Djabir believes that *Mrengé* was possibly a Bantu tradition brought to Moheli by the Washenzi (“uncultured” people), and asserts that from the earliest times it was considered to be a “**dance of slaves**”; for they were the only ones who practiced it.

According to Aboubakar (a young resident of Moroni, Grande Comore, the only island where the tradition no longer exists in full bloom), *Mrengé* derives from *nkode za miorsyani* or *nkode za itsoni* (ritual neighborhood fights of Grande Comore). He affirms that this game was in vogue some 50 years ago and consisted of organized fighting between the youths of one neighborhood against those of another.

Little by little, according to Aboubakar, this was transformed into *Mrengé*, which was organized in the evening and matched opponents by weight and age. He added that in Grande Comore the tradition died away; but that in 1995 a certain Mr. Buzini Naridjiduzé tried to resuscitate the lost art there.

My observance of a Performance – My first exposure to *mrengé* was on February 8th, 1995 in Fomboni (Moheli) when at around 8:00 in the evening I proceeded with my guide to a poorly lit intersection where drumming had been sounding for about thirty minutes in order to attract would-be fighters and spectators. There were four musicians: one playing a single headed drum, two playing double-headed drums, and a fourth playing a metal bucket with two slits. The lead musician was a man named Mahole – the organizer and chief animator of the event.

In a lot adjoining the intersection, a circle of spectators soon formed around the drummers. Those responsible for the match then delineated the field of combat and instructed the spectators to stand behind the lines. Whenever the crowd encroached on the imaginary lines and refused to respect the demarcation, these men (respecting neither women nor children) viciously struck at the perimeter with long sticks or switches often striking those who reacted too slowly. This would cause the crowd to recede; but it quickly returned to its original position.

The drumming continued as two small boys entered the fighting arena and squared off. As they furiously went at one another with fist and feet, the spectators cheered. If the going got too rough, however, they were quickly separated by referees who then stopped the fight and replaced them with two other youths. These first boys were “the testers of the ring” and were, of course, not the reason why the crowd had assembled.

After this “testing of the battlefield”, older youths appeared and danced to the drumming at either extremity of the arena. Sometimes they pranced into the middle and issued a challenge by raising the *ntsoma* fist (with the middle finger of the fist protruding as described above) and pointing it at a possible adversary. When a challenge was accepted, the two adversaries would go to opposite extremities of the arena, take off their shirts, roll up their trousers, and smear themselves with sand or dirt from the ground near them. All the while, the drummers would keep up a frenzied beat and the principal animator would sing songs accompanied by a group of young boys who provided enthusiastic choral responses.

There was apparently no shame attached to refusing the challenge of a larger adversary, but no one was entitled to remain in the ring dancing if he refused the challenge of someone who appeared to be a near or equal match. Sometimes it took a long time for a challenge to be accepted and, when the prancing and dancing continued unabated without fisticuffs, the enthusiasm of the crowd dissipated. To retain spectator interest, a person who had danced for a long time, though he felt he was outmatched, was sometimes obligated to accept a challenge from anyone who was approximately the same size and age. That is, when the challenged dancer tried to flee the arena, he was pushed back in by the referees.

As far as the actual competition was concerned, when two boxers agreed to a match they were given three rounds of approximately three to five minutes each to demonstrate their virility. The referees, typically older and respected villagers, intervened when one boxer was clearly being dealt hard blows without landing any himself or when the fighters became tangled up either standing or on the ground.

There were apparently few rules to the game, as everything from head-butting to biting was permitted. Though kicking was restricted, this did not stop an overheated combatant from employing his feet effectively. Sometimes a fighter even resorted to outright treachery by either throwing sand into an opponent's face and then attacking the blinded adversary, or sneaking up - while his adversary's back was turned - and dealing a devastating blow. This type of fighting could only be classified as vicious with intent to maim or even kill.

If one of the boxers was clearly outmatched, there was no need to continue beyond the first round, and a fearful outmatched person could run from the ring to avoid punishment. If that occurred, the crowd would laugh at him and cheer his adversary. After a match, other males would enter the arena, dance, and issue challenges, and the cycle continued thusly until early morning. Typically, the older and stronger fighters appeared last. There were apparently no prizes to be had by the fighters other than the sheer enjoyment of the competition and the opportunity to impress the men and women in the crowd with one's fearlessness and / or prowess.

During an interval in the game, I spoke to Mahole, the chief animator of the competition, and asked for an interview the following day. He asked where I was staying and told me he would come the next morning. After having seen what I felt was sufficient (about two hours worth of fighting) I returned to my quarters to rest. At 11:30 PM, however, I was summoned by a youth to return to the site, because the champions would soon be competing.

Upon my arrival at the arena, Mahole gave me a chair within the battlefield from which to get a better view and take photos. The competition of the champions was truly memorable and caused a deep impression in my psyche. I doubt if even the formidable Sugar Ray Leonard would have been able to keep his cool in such a situation. After all, there were no Queensbury rules, and fighting was not restricted to punching above the belt. Moreover, these champions were more muscular and often as large (if not larger) than Leonard and were really out to kill. Unfortunately, because of the darkness, not a single one of the many exciting photos I snapped of the fighting came out.

I remained at the competition until 2:00 AM and then returned home where (because this was the month of Ramadan) I had a late evening (or should I say early morning) meal consisting of muscles cooked in coconut milk, rice, fried fish, and ginger tea. Needless to say, Mahole did not show up for the interview in the morning and my subsequent search for him proved unsuccessful.

That evening (2/9/95) Libo (a youth I met on the *Arrahman*) summoned me to witness another mrenyé match organized by Mahole. That Wednesday night competition (which lasted from 8:15 PM to 1:15 AM) was even more spectacular than the first and I witnessed several dirt in the face techniques and treacherous attacks from behind. The young men grimaced fiercely in issuing their challenges and they assumed a truly frightening appearance.

During the fighting (unlike in Nigerian traditional boxing), the drummers played with increasing enthusiasm and the crowd enunciated grunts and shouts with each blow that landed. When children entered, during lulls in adult performances, and attempted to imitate the treachery used by the older males, they were immediately reprimanded and stopped. Moreover, in the competitions involving young boys (8 – 10 years old), the referees obliged the adversaries to shake hands after the match was over, a practice not resorted to when adults were involved.

I asked Mahole where he was that morning and he explained that he “was otherwise occupied.” Nevertheless, he said he should be available in the afternoon. I then retired for the evening without bothering to eat. I was so impressed by the even that I resolved then and there that it would be the centerpiece of the third volume of my Black Martial Arts series.

An Interview with Mahole – In the evening, I finally had my interview with Mahole [See photo of man with hat in top photo on page 142] who provided me with a lot of interesting information as well as the lyrics to several of the songs in his vast repertoire. These songs are so well known in the locale that children sing them from memory, often laughing at the meaning of the words. Responding to my questions during the interview, Mahole said:

My real name is Saindu Bakari and I was born in Mjimbia (Fomboni) about 30 years ago. I worked together with Toaimina in a *Mrenyé* group in the Haute Plateau for several years and started my own group here in Fomboni about two years ago. We are twelve performers all together and we call our group “*Kalao*” – a name which has no meaning.

As for our musical instruments, they are five in number: 1) the **dori**, a small drum worn around the waist that is played with one hand and a stick producing a sharp sound; 2) the **fuba**, a large drum also played with one hand and a stick; 3) the **shingangwa**, a medium-sized drum played on the ground with two sticks; 4) the **gadza**, grains enclosed within two plates made from fiber; and 5) the **garando**, a bucket played with wooden sticks. In the old days there used to be a **ndjumari** (a three-holed flute); but since no one uses it these days it has become a thing of the past.

We hold these competitions when a celebration is organized or to amuse ourselves whenever we wish. The only preparation necessary is to advise the members of the group of the event and find a water gourd and a place for the competition. The people who clear the arena with the sticks are members of our group as are the referees. The boxers are people attracted by the sound of the drum and they may stand on any side of the arena that they choose.

Mrengé, or *Mrengé wantsi* as it is also known, originated in Comoro when a king of Fomboni desirous of amusement assembled his fighting men in the courtyard and, wishing to see who was the strongest, selected one of them and said to another: “*mrengé* (You take him)”! After that fight took place, he would say to another: “Now you take him”! He kept on like this until he was sufficiently entertained. The competition goes on even today. In Grande Comore, boxing is called *Kwedé*, and when two groups fight it is called *Shitso*.

The best place to see traditional *mrengé* is here in Moheli and also in Mayotte – especially in a village after the rice harvest when a bull is killed and the invited guests are served meat and rice. Sometimes the competition is so animated and unrestrained that deaths may result.

Here in Moheli there are several animators like me. There’s Jencleau (Bamari), a carpenter, who hold competitions at Wanani (Haut Plateau); Hamadu Isufu (a chauffeur), who holds competitions at Howani near the port; and Sokoba, who does the same thing at Wala in the south.

As to why people call me Mahole, it’s a funny story. You know what Mahole means, don’t you? Well it’s a coconut whose meat is not yet hard. When I was a young boy, I liked to eat *mahole* a lot. One day we boys went with the *fundi* [teacher] to the fields to work. When he went away for a short while, instead of working, I climbed a coconut palm and ate a lot of the nuts. When the *fundi* returned he saw my bloated stomach and, knowing what I had been up to, asked me to look up at the tree. When I did as he asked, he kicked me in the stomach and I vomited the coconut all over the place. From that time onward all the other children called me Mahole.

With regards to the fighting, there are no rules and you can hit your adversary anywhere. You can kick, bite, throw sand, and spit; anything goes. However, it is considered bad form if you use anything but your hands to win. If a fighter has had enough, he can stop the fight at anytime by raising his arms in the air with the palms showing. Between rounds a fighter indicates he is ready to resume by clapping his hands. If someone is badly hurt or killed during a competition neither he nor his relatives have a right to seek redress.

As for the fighters, there is no training involved; but they do use magic charms which they get from a *fundi* to protect themselves. *Mrengé* was once like a game. When you heard the drumming, **you danced and went into a trance**. When you got hit, you sometimes didn’t even feel it. Women come to cheer and support their friends and relatives as well as to inform the referees if anyone has a weapon; when females are there, the boys are even more motivated to fight.

As far as songs are concerned, I have composed many; but I’ll give you five now. Since you asked me particularly about the song I do where I untie my collar and pretend to be hot while the young boys sing and fan me, I’ll begin with that one.

Mahole then went on to provide the Shikomoro lyrics and the translation in French for the following five songs. The Shikomoro lyrics appear to the left and my prose English translation to the right.

I

<i>Boina Mahole, Kiyama utswenda wa babuliwe.</i>	<i>Mr. Mahole on Judgment Day, you'll be punished.</i>
<i>Walisha Iswara; walisha na Kurani.</i>	<i>You've abandoned prayer; you've abandoned the Koran.</i>
<i>Uarenga ndjumari wai fanya dini ya shetani.</i>	<i>You've taken up the flute and followed Satan's religion.</i>

II

<i>Mahole alewa nao mwezi wa tsumu!</i>	<i>Mahole is drunk during the month of fasting!</i>
<i>Wadjemazangu na mtsemeta, Mlemewe mwa lale!</i>	<i>My people, talk as you will Until you get tired and sleep!</i>

III

<i>Aska wa Shetwani, Tahimida amuwononi.</i>	<i>Aska and Shetwani, Tahamida has seen you</i>
<i>Musendra mbiyo mbiyo na ukuhu muhononi</i>	<i>Running with a chicken in hand!</i>
<i>Aska ashitikiwa, aruku mraba ha Mbabena</i>	<i>Aska was accused and jumped over the fence of Mbabena.</i>

IV

<i>Kamaria na mnyahe wakwenda rema kuni;</i>	<i>Kamaria and her friend went to fetch firewood;</i>
<i>Na udjandja awufanya ka shuka mdjini.</i>	<i>But by pretending she was lost, Kamaria deceived her friend and didn't return to town.</i>
<i>Na militera nama pendarmu ya lala Hawani.</i>	<i>The soldiers and police spent the night looking for her in Hawani.</i>
<i>Ya hipara sa ya shenda atolwa koperan.</i>	<i>At 3:00 AM she was found in a house in a neighborhood where foreign workers live.</i>
<i>Mapapraper yatsambalia! Owa!</i>	<i>The bricks are dispersed; the truth is known! O yes!</i>

V

<i>Boina Asika shuka rena rihungalie</i>	<i>Mr. Asika, descend a little and be seen</i>
<i>Ampa wawe udjuwa!</i>	<i>To see if you know how to fight!</i>
<i>Tafadoili ushuke rena</i>	<i>Please descend</i>
<i>Ringalie amba wawa udjuwa uwana.</i>	<i>To see if you know how to fight!</i>

As can be seen, these are very short songs dealing with negative happenings in the community. The first two criticize the un-Islamic behavior of Mahole during Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting and purification. The third song reveals the identity of two boys who stole a chicken (at least one of which – Shetwani - is a member of his group); the fourth reveals the secret of a promiscuous girl; and the fifth questions Boina Asika's willingness to fight.

They may all be called “songs of ridicule” in which the singer pokes fun at various personalities, a theme that is also found in other Black Combat Dances like *Capoeira* (from Brazil), *Dambe* (from Northern Nigeria), *Ladjia* (from Martinique), and *Kalenda* (from Trinidad). A possible reason for such words is to cause anger, an emotion leading to a disposition quite appropriate for fighting.

With respect to artistic qualities we note in the lyrics of the first song the vivid opposition of **leaving off** the good (prayer and the Koran) and **taking up** evil (the flute and the Devil's religion). The second song produces this same vivid opposition: “you talk”, “I ignore.” In the third song note the clever rhyme of *amuwononi* (“she saw you”) and *muhononi* (“in hand”). That is “you two were caught red-handed.” In the fourth song note how the first three lines all end in “ni” (*kuni, mdjini, Hawani*). Note also the repetition of “descend” in the fifth song.

Interview with Boina Rizik - In 1999 I returned to Fomboni and met Boina Rizik, whose battle name is Shiongo (“the mean one”). He is also a boxer and composer from Fomboni who began to participate in *mrengé* as both a fighter and musician at the tender age of eight. During those early boyhood days he played the *kabosy* (a stringed instrument resembling a ukulele, for which see top photo on pg. 143) to excite spectators and boxers alike. By the time he reached the age of 21 he was a feared competitor. After our interview, he offered me an original composition called *Shamsi na Mwezi* (“The Sun and the Moon”) for publication in this text - the English translation of which is:

<p><i>You two (the sun and moon) are in competition. Every day you are lighting up. And the sun verily sets Such that its light is lost to it. Mr. Sabi, what you have done is not reasonable. Mr. Rizik knows what you have done. He knows you have become the leader of another band.</i></p>

This song is actually an allegory in which Boina Rizik identifies himself with the sun and his treacherous understudy (Mr. Sabi) with the moon. The first time Rizik ever sang this song was when he and Mr. Sabi were playing together at a function. Needless to say, Mr. Sabi was not only surprised that his master had discovered his secret, but was also greatly embarrassed by the public disclosure.

More Mrengé Songs - While traditional *Mrengé* songs are still in vogue, modern music (played by orchestras) has made its way into the competitions. Two of these modern songs (both composed in Wanani by Mzi Kungou) are *Msarabiyo* (Complicity) and *Mharadzo* (Refusal). Thanks to Haddad Salim Djabir (who transcribed both songs and translated them into French for me), I can present the original lyrics and my English translation of the French, below.

Msaribiyo

<p><i>Iye! Oh! Ho! Ho! Ho!</i> <i>Assalama salimina na mayesha</i> <i>Awladi li watwani amina he!</i> <i>(x3)</i> <i>Leo woussiku wa mayoye</i> <i>Mwenye shiliyo naliye salimina he!</i></p>	<p><i>Ah, oh, oho, oh!</i> <i>May God give his protection and a long life</i> <i>To our combative & patriotic youth, amen!</i> <i>(x3)</i> <i>Today is a journey of conflict.</i> <i>He who has it, let him plant his foot and be</i> <i>on his way!</i></p>
<p><i>He Wangu! Mwahima vavo! Ale nkombé!</i></p>	<p><i>Hey! You who are posturing in the circle!</i> <i>Go champion!</i></p>
<p><i>Ne hika kamsiwana ale ngombé,</i></p>	<p><i>If you don't box, go Champion!</i></p>
<p><i>Hairi mdedzagnu mwalalé.</i></p>	<p><i>It is preferable to go and sleep.</i></p>
<p><i>Na mlawe vavo wanzani, ale ngombé</i></p>	<p><i>Abandon the ring, my friends! Go</i> <i>Champion!</i></p>
<p><i>Na ilo beya laho?</i></p>	<p><i>Are you equal in force with that one there?</i></p>
<p><i>Kadjo hushinda harimwa kombe lazio.</i></p>	<p><i>After a customary feast you would eat</i> <i>many more plates of rice than him.</i></p>
<p><i>Hayzo mgaliye hauzuri!</i></p>	<p><i>Look at him well!</i></p>
<p><i>Ah! simama! Ale nkombé!</i></p>	<p><i>Oh! Let's go Champion! Fight!</i></p>
<p><i>He! Nahika kamsiwana, bora mde dzagnu</i></p>	<p><i>Hey, get out of this place! If you don't box</i></p>
<p><i>Na mwende mwalalé!</i></p>	<p><i>It is preferable to leave and go and sleep.</i></p>

<p><i>Ouno mrengé!</i> <i>Hounou, wandruouwana TV.</i></p> <p><i>He Bamari usimnzigariye, mlegedzemwani!</i></p> <p><i>He Bayecha vinga wandruwaho hulé</i></p> <p><i>Nehika kamsiwana!</i></p> <p><i>He Nusufani, vinga wandruwaho hulé!</i></p> <p><i>Ah simama! Ale nkombé!</i></p> <p><i>Nehika wawe oudjouawanantsoma,</i></p> <p><i>Ritso houwona lewo!</i></p> <p><i>Ah! simama! Ale nkombé</i></p>	<p><i>This is Mrengé!</i> <i>Here we box like on television!</i></p> <p><i>Oh Bamri, don't go into a clench! Release him so he can box with you!</i></p> <p><i>Hey Bayecha, go back with your boy</i></p> <p><i>If you don't want to box!</i></p> <p><i>Hey Nusufani drive the spectators backwards!</i></p> <p><i>Oh, let's go champion! Fight!</i></p> <p><i>If you really know how to box,</i></p> <p><i>We will see it today.</i></p> <p><i>Oh, let's go Champion! Fight!</i></p>
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Unlike Mahole's songs of ridicule, this song (though the teasing element is still present) is an encouragement to fight. We note also that it is much longer and that the accompanying music is played with modern instruments introduced from France. Its structure and artistic merit is also more developed than Mahole's compositions. We note particularly that nearly every line ends in the vowel "e" (pronounced like the "ay" in "day") and that each line is divided into two hemistiches, the first possibly counting 12 syllables and the second possibly counting 8, but sung in such a way (i.e. prolonging vowel length) that both line are of nearly equal duration. Note, also, the persistent recurring metaphor in which the word *nkombé* (bull) is used to denote a Champion boxer.

Mharadzo

<p><i>Zino piya, tsi ouhambia! Ridje rilangadze ne ouharaya djira.</i></p> <p><i>Namoudjeni! Muringaliye mama!</i> <i>x2</i></p> <p><i>Kussoudi rikodja wano eikodja oulangadza.</i></p> <p><i>Koulamoinagnahe kavendze nande dzahe na lawe!</i></p>	<p><i>All that! I invited you my neighbor to box but you refused.</i></p> <p><i>Come admire us Mama!</i> <i>x2</i></p> <p><i>The reason for our being here is the game.</i></p> <p><i>This one doesn't want to go before his sister. Go! Desist!</i></p>
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<i>Koulamshe wahekassidjiviwa nande dzahe alale!</i>	<i>This one, well his wife isn't happy. Let him go to sleep!</i>
<i>Allahu, ya Naswiru, ya Allahu ya Ne'ama!</i>	<i>May God bestow His Victory and Blessing!</i>
<i>Mtheso vilingovo diya.</i>	<i>The clan song and dance rivalry will soon take place.</i>
<i>Mwenzangoma nafe!</i>	<i>Let the jealous drop dead!</i>
<i>Mungu tsimusinde watu kariva karivoshea. Amin he!</i>	<i>God gives and takes away. Amen!</i>
<i>Mungu tsi musinde watu, amina, kariva karivoshea. Salimina he!</i>	<i>God does not deceive people. Amen! He gives and takes away. Peace!</i>
<i>Etc.</i>	<i>Etc.</i>

This song, by the same composer is also quite long and not presented here in its entirety. It, too, is played with modern instruments. We note in this song a clever reversal of rhyme relating the first stanza (with lines ending in the pattern “a, a, a, e, e”) to the second (with lines ending in the pattern “a, a, e, e, e”) – that is, 3 lines ending with “a” in the first stanza, and three lines ending in “e” in the second with both stanzas having their two beginning lines rhyming in “a.” Note also the references to God (Allah) in this and the previous song even in genres of this type. God is, indeed, omnipresent and there is no place he doesn't venture.

In order to discover a bit more about the instrumentation and rhythms employed in these songs I travel to Wanani (in 1999) where these last two songs originated. While there, I interview Ayouba M'Homa, a member of the UMZIKUNG band. Ayouba is 33 years old and plays guitar accompaniment in the band. In my interview with him he says:

Our band is part of UMZIKUNG, a village association that was founded in the 1970's and that now has nearly 90 members. Of these only 20 or so members are involved with our electrical musical band. UMZIKUNG is an acronym, in which each letter represents a word. Thus:

U = utamaduni (tradition)
M = murwa (patriotism)
Zi = zifavi (devotion)
K = (Comores)
NG = ngwan (independence).

In the past, the musical instruments played during Mrengé competitions here in Moheli were traditionally limited to drums and flutes. Beginning in 1994, however, the electric band began to become popular at these competitions.

Our band has three traditional drums, 3 guitars, a modern drum ensemble (*batterie*), sound equipment, microphones, a synthesizer, three amplifiers, and neon lighting. We have 6 singers in the group; two of them are lead singers and the other four sing the chorus.

The rhythms we play are the same as in the past but they sound better because of the amplification and the greater variety of instrumentation. Many of our songs were written by members of the group; but we still sing a number of traditional songs.

When asked to transcribe and translate one of the traditional songs, a group effort produced the following. Note here that the bold italics constitutes the chorus which is sung after each two line verse:

<i>Bakomdala tsio napare beya Nakila kasimriya nashukeriwoné</i>	<i>Bakomdala, there he is. He is looking for a match. And he who doesn't fear, come down so you can be seen!</i>
<i>Ruwa ruwa mwananya rudwadzaho Usiliye deheli ya duniya.</i>	<i>Don't cry! Don't cry, my friend, don't cry! That's the way the world is, my friend.</i>
<i>Bua mrengé, bua mrengé! Bakomdala asiwana na Marita he!</i>	<i>Open the boxing! Open the boxing! Bakomdala will box with Marita.</i>
<i>Ruwa ruwa mwananya rudwadzaho Usiliye deheli ya duniya.</i>	<i>Don't cry! Don't cry, my friend, don't cry! That's the way the world is, my friend.</i>
<i>Nahika ufuritsohu dziha rihuremeye Mrengué deheli ya dunyia.</i>	<i>If you die, we will bury you and organize A boxing match to honor your death. That's the way the world is.</i>
<i>Ruwa ruwa mwananya rudwadzaho Usiliye deheli ya duniya.</i>	<i>Don't cry! Don't cry, my friend, don't cry! That's the way the world is, my friend.</i>

In singing this song, I was told, the names of actual present day boxers can be substituted for *Bako mdala* (“an old man”) and *Marita* (“the name for a kind of bird”). Note how this song captures the emotion of both sadness and resignation.

Performance with an Electric Band - What follows is a description of a *Mrengé* performance in Nioumachoua on October 13th, 1999 taken from pgs. 56-59 of my Black Martial Arts, Vol 2: The African Indian Ocean. The event, which was organized as a fund-raiser by the youth of that village, started at 9:00 PM and ended at 12:00 midnight.

“The match took place on what looked like a cement volley ball court and you only had to pay admission if you wanted to sit down. Knowing the night would be long, I chose to pay for a seat.

Seating consisted of a single string of chairs and benches lined up on the long sides of the rectangular terrain. The UMZIKUNG (Mzi Kungu) electric band from Wanani with its battery, microphones and amplifiers was present and accounted for [See photo at top of pg. 144]. The band was located on a portable stage directly in back of my seat near the front end of one of the long sides of the rectangular court; whereas the large night lights were located on the same side, but on the opposite end.

The two opposing teams were seated along the short sides of the rectangle facing each other. Here the performance started with boxers doing dance moves involving characteristic graceful movements of both hands and feet. Occasionally they would raise both fists in the air, sometimes one, as a challenge. Another move involved bending low at the knees [See photo at bottom of pg. 144] while making repeated thrusts with both arms (one at a time). When the left arm was extended the right arm was pulled back and vice-versa.

Although some of the boxers feigned acceptance of a challenge from a potential adversary, to the point of taking off their shirt and sandals, they would melt into the crowd at the last minute when the challenger was not looking. Others accepted a challenge but were snatched from the terrain by friends before the combat could start. Still another boy accepted the challenge of one fighter but, when he emerged in the center of the ring to fight, another stronger boy (not the original challenger) came out and the match did not take place.

Competition began with two opponents squatting in the center of the terrain facing each other. Although the combatants used their feet occasionally, none of their kicks seemed to hit their target. Nevertheless, it was obvious that the fighters knew what they were doing and employed many interesting techniques and strategies. They were not punching wildly and I was quite impressed.

One young fighter defeated his opponent, and when he pursued him to mock him, one of the defeated boxer's senior friends delivered a painful blow to the victorious boy's right rib cage. In apparently great pain, the boy asked his attacker why he was struck, and he was told that it was not permitted to pursue a defeated opponent nor to insult him.

However, another fighter, who was knocked over the benches of the spectators opposite me, was continually punched as he lay helplessly among the spectators standing in back of them. I took many photos, some of the spectators, some of the controllers, and some of the dancing, but most were focussed on the combatants themselves [for which see pgs. 57 – 60 of my [Black Martial Arts of the African-Indian Ocean](#)].

Conclusion - That ends my discussion of *mrenyé*, an explosive “combat dance” from the Comoro islands. The “combat dance” tradition is not unique to Comoro, however, for it exists in different forms in Madagascar (Morengy), Reunion (Moringue), Northern Nigeria (Dambe), Brazil (Capoeira), Panama (Congo), Martinique (Ladjia), Guadeloupe (Mayolé), Trinidad (Kalenda), and elsewhere. For more details about the “combat dance” tradition in Comoro, Madagascar and Reunion see my Black Martial Arts II; for *Capoeira* and *Congo* see my Black Martial Arts IIIa; for *Dambe* see my Black Martial Arts I; and for *Ladjia* see my Black Martial Arts IIIb. Though these dances differ from one another in significant ways, all of them have Black ancestral roots.
