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1. Introduction

Sikiri is a semi-religious dance style practiced mainly by certain East African Muslim societies. Among these societies *sikiri* dance has been an integral part of Muslim Yao culture for about a century; however only a few published sources mention it without giving any comprehensive definition. The distinctive characteristic of *sikiri* dance stems from a close association to Islamic religion, within which its performative elements are determined. The history of this dance style and the societies in which it is performed are not exclusively known. Thus with this study it is aimed to introduce *sikiri*'s historical and structural features through implementing specific methods drawn from the disciplines of ethnomusicology, anthropology, theology, ethnology and history.

For many scholars it is righteously believed that *sikiri* dance was a discrete version of Islamic *ḍikr* practice, which has idiosyncratic performative and contextual features that can also be found in *sikiri*. In order to prove a relation between the two, both genres must be evaluated carefully and their common grounds as well as differences should be taken into consideration. If there is a usable association between them, then it will be relatively easier to construct a background for the *sikiri* dance style; since *ḍikr* here can function as a reference point in the task of writing about *sikiri* for the first time. Thus in the following chapters the religious frame of *sikiri* dance will be drawn in accordance with *ḍikr* practice and in addition to that, its historical development processes will be evaluated as part of significant socio-religious events of the region where it has been practiced many years.

It is legitimate to suggest that Islam, like other belief systems, has a paramount impact on society, i.e. it enjoins its adherents to follow certain rules in daily life, which can be both spiritual and physical.¹ With this information at hand, it can be said that, in a Muslim society, dance as a stylized and preferred version of the motions of daily life, or as Royce puts it, as “intensification or exaggeration of ordinary behavior”², has an important relation with the religion of Islam. Therefore when studying *sikiri*, as a performance and/or as a

¹ For example, when somebody steps in a place or steps out it should be done with the right foot; or when two people meet on a foothill, the one who goes downhill should greet the other before the one who goes uphill etc... There are very detailed chains of rules for many different situations; but they can easily be re-interpreted and transformed according to the host culture and ruling order, namely *tariqa*.

² Anya P. Royce, *The Anthropology of Dance*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1977, p. 27.

dance style tied to religious ritual, taking the religious aspect into account becomes an inevitable act.

Thus, the first section of this paper will consist of a short historical and structural investigation of Islam in East Africa and Malawi. In addition to this, along with the international scientific literature on Islam and various religious scripts, I will evaluate my personal field experiences by considering their non-objectivity. This cross-cultural approach is understood as a communicative, reflexive and dynamic process, in which emic and etic perspectives are alternated repeatedly. Secondly Islam's frame of diffusion in the example of *sikiri* will be drawn, which gives this study a reversible feature: at the end it aims to achieve detailed knowledge of the impact of Islam on cultural production processes and of characteristics of *sikiri* dance among Yao people.

Due to lack of research on the subject, namely *sikiri*, findings of a short fieldwork trip carried out between 16 March and 4 April 2013 under the supervision of Univ. -Prof. Mag. Dr. Regine Allgayer-Kaufmann, Ass. -Prof. Mag. Dr. August Schmidhofer and Mag. Dr. Moya Aliya Malamusi in Malaŵi have formed the basis of this work, together with personal interviews and recorded materials.

2. Islam

2.1. Some Aspects of Islam in Africa

Analyzing Islam in Africa is a very complex and multidimensional process. In this chapter, for an easier orientation, instead of a complete analysis of Islam only some aspects of it, which might be related to *sikiri* dance, will be referenced. Thus this chapter, with the contribution of its critical approach, will function both as an active background and discussable reference point in terms of *sikiri*'s socio-religious aspect.

2.1.1. Spread of Islam

The history of Islam on the East African coast is still partly obscure. Muslim areas of East Africa often show slight discrepancies in terms of religious practices which create one of the many redundant obstacles to a comprehensive study of Islam in the given geography. The transforming effects of Islam on a society, and vice versa the society's influence on it, has only been recently in detail studied, except countless works on Swahili culture (see Salim, 1985; Kaeppler, 2000; Prins, 1967; Mazrui & Shariff, 1994; Ibn Battuta c.1330). The complexity of Swahili culture as a carrier of two radical idiosyncrasies, e.g. Muslim and Bantu African identity is the motive behind such studies. On the other hand, as Islam moved from the east coast inland into the African continent and caused new hybrid structures, it kept transforming the societies it encountered as in the Swahili case and at the same time expanded its own doctrines, which end up with mutually new perspectives on cultural productions.

In the context of making cultural products in a Muslim society and its relation with religion, scholars can choose between a variety of study topics; among them music and dance can be seen as the two of the most controversial ones. Especially music has always been a heated debate among *mullahs*³: whether it is legitimate or not, if yes, which instruments or singing style and what kind of content should be allowed, etc. From the early days of Islam until now, except for among fundamentalists, there has been no full consensus on the issue yet. This is why music has never lost its ambiguous position in the value system of Islam, but rather has kept its importance for researches as a considerable

³ (Ar.) Muslim religious scholar and teacher.

indicator of not just cultural, but also sociopolitical and economic relations. In addition to music, as a result of the above mentioned ambiguity, dance has also become the subject of lasting discussions in terms of its symbolism, scope and utilization, while offering another significant source for ethnomusicologists and anthropologists.

In certain communities, where dance and/ or other performing arts are an important part of the local tradition, conversion into Islam usually does not end up with radical alterations. The form mainly remains untouched, while the dress code, calendar and other cultural content is Islamized. This is valid not only for dance, obviously; but also for many other cultural products of the host community. In this case Robinson characterizes the spread of Islam in Africa: “No significant effort was made to change local religious practices, especially outside of towns”.⁴ Yet it is dangerous to generalize subjects in this manner, since their various parameters change on almost a daily basis.

During these processes it is also crucial to know what kind of Islam is being practiced and what certain peculiarities this version has outside of its orthodox environment. It is now in the present day clear that Islam in Mecca and its neighborhood shows both major and minor differences in scope and utilization compared to Islam in Iran, Turkey, Malaysia or Malaŵi. Therefore in the quest for a better understanding of Islam in Africa some scholars such as Trimingham (1964) and Haynes (2007) made distinctions of Islamic culture areas, which will be examined in the following chapters. The reader might ask why the religious aspect plays an indispensable role in the context of a dance style. Qureshi suggests an answer that considers anthropologic and linguistic perspectives; for her “music is based on culture-specific principles and must be analyzed according to the culture’s own criteria. Hence a culture’s own conceptualizations about music can best serve to build a framework for the analysis of specific musical genres or idioms within that culture area”.⁵

When the expansion pattern of Islam is considered, the doctrine of *jihad* is regarded as the prime motivation for Muslims. This is obviously one aspect of it, namely spreading the word of God with the sword; but on the other hand *jihad* does not only mean to fight or war; it literally means to struggle or to strive excessively.⁶ Thus any activity to convert

⁴ David Robinson, *Muslim Societies in African History*, Great Britain: Cambridge University Press 2004, p. 28.

⁵ Regula B. Qureshi, *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan: Sound, Context and meaning in Qawwali*, Great Britain: Cambridge University Press 1986, p. 6.

⁶ For example struggling against cancer can also be seen as a *jihad*.

somebody to Islam, whether peacefully or not can be seen as an act of *jihad*. The question is, whether it is performed by sword, spiritual persuasion, socio-economic warrant or a kind of mixture of all of these; a proper answer to this question can provide insight regarding culture contact. Concerning the expansion of Islam across the whole of the African continent, giving one inclusive answer to this question is impossible; since it has permeated a great number of geographies in many different times, for various reasons and from several different directions (see Figure 1). In some cases “it seems that Islam is spreading steadily and considerably through informal propaganda among neighbors, and so on.”⁷ And in the others through war, trade or intermarriage. Hence, as mentioned above, some scholars classify the expansion areas of Islam mainly by considering geo-political position.

Trimingham’s organization consists of seven zones and offers mainly a geographic classification:

1. **Egyptian:** Basic Near-Eastern Islamic culture.
2. **Maghrib:** North African Mediterranean culture.
3. **Western Sudan:** Negro Islam.
4. **Central Sudan:** Negro Islam.
5. **Eastern or Nilotic Sudan:** Hamitic-Negro.
6. **North-Eastern Hamitic (Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia):** The Islam of the nomads of the plains of the Eastern Horn.
7. **Coastal East African:** Swahili Islam.⁸

On the other hand, Haynes’ version gives more detailed information about the Muslim population and their situation in the given area:

“Differing manifestations of Islam point to the fact that the faith in Africa covers a variety of interpretations if what it means to be a Muslim. Away from the Arab countries of the north, Islam south of the Sahara can be divided into distinct categories corresponding to extant social, cultural and historical divisions. The first includes the dominant socio-political and cultural position of Islam in the emirates of northern Nigeria, the lamidates of northern Cameroon and the sheikdoms of northern Chad. In each of these areas, religious and political power is fused in a few individuals; over time a class structure developed based on religious differentiation. Secondly, there are the areas where Sufi brotherhoods predominate, generally in West and East Africa, and especially in Senegal, The Gambia, Niger, Mali, Guinea, Kenya and Tanzania. Thirdly, in a number of African states, Muslims, fragmented by ethnic and regional concerns, are politically marginalized. This is the situation in a number of African countries, including: Ghana, Togo, Benin and Côte d’Ivoire.”⁹

⁷ Joseph Schacht, “Notes on Islam in East Africa”, in: *Studia Islamica* 23(1965), p. 92.

⁸ J. Spencer Trimingham, *Islam in East Africa*, London: Oxford University Press 1964, p. xi.

⁹ Jeffrey Haynes, *An Introduction to International Relations and Religion*, Harlow: Pearson Education Limited 2007, p. 305.

A visible characteristic of Islam in Africa and globally is its ongoing adaptation to local conceptions and norms of life, which means the 'passive role' of a community under the effect of Islam is only a misrepresented side of the culture contact. These processes of adaptation and mutual interaction have always occurred in unequal degrees and mostly within the terms of host cultures. As a result of these contacts, while mainly preserving the basic doctrines of Islam, a new idiosyncratic order might have been formed. This can be seen as one of the many reasons for the emergence of mystic Islamic orders and their varied scope of mysticism from region to region.¹⁰ But on the other hand in some certain areas, especially in the periphery, where centralized and organized administrative settlement is not the case, the emergence of new orders occurs rarely or discrepancies in the interpretation between orders are generally ignored, since there is no authorized organization governed by an headquarter such as Cairo, Zanzibar or Mecca to control people as to whether they follow the established rules or not.

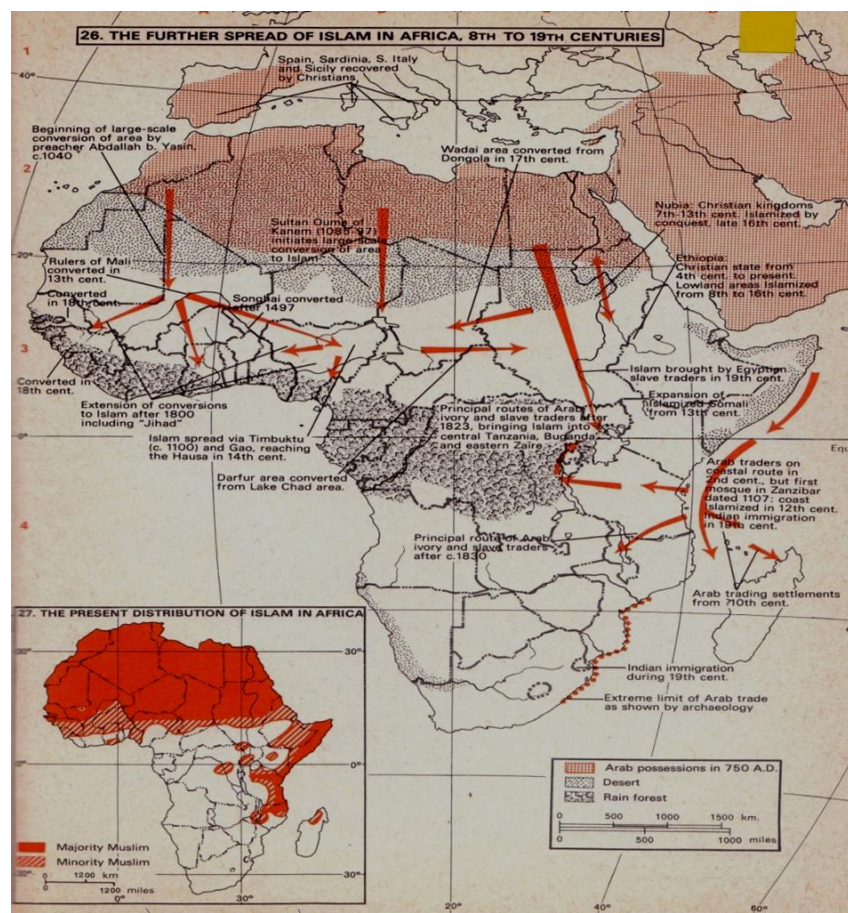


Figure 1: The spread of Islam in Africa, between 8th and 19th Centuries. (From Freeman-Grenville & Hausman 1976: Nr. 26)

¹⁰ For more information see: Robinson 2004: Chapter 4.

Schacht writes concordantly that, in the big cities of Kenya the majority of Muslims are of Indian and other Asian origin, which are mainly *hanafīs*; those in the villages were mostly Africans and *shāfi'īs*. And he adds that, unlike in coastal regions, the distinction between the several schools of religious law was hardly of any importance in the interior.¹¹

From an historical point of view many scholars indicate that Islam started its expansion into the African continent around the 7th century (see: Levtzion & Pouwels [ed.]: 2000; Esposito [ed.]: 1999; Holt, Lambton & Lewis [ed.]: 1970) and has been effective since then. However, it is legitimate to say that not just the duration of its presence, but also the characteristics of its expansion politics and the state of the host have determined the effectiveness of Islam in the continent. Simply, to be able to take root in the host community over the long term, a mutual accord was required, occurring mostly in case of two different systems matched well with one another, which depends upon many variables. When the adjustment process between them works well, the conflicting factors can be avoided easily; if not, then a wide range of problems might occur and complicate the process. When viewed from this simple point of view, the historical background achieves greater dimension and so serves better for a thorough understanding.

2.1.2. Oral Tradition

While analyzing the state of Islam in Africa from an historical point of view a careful emphasis should be placed on oral tradition. As a practical tool for transmitting intangible cultural heritage such as songs, riddles, performing arts or unwritten religious doctrines, oral tradition gains an important role in the dissemination and transformation of Islam in East Africa. Through oral tradition Islamic knowledge has been transferred as well as transformed repeatedly and in this way protected its validity by orienting itself to changing circumstances even among illiterate societies. Robinson also refers to orally transmitted Islamic doctrines in his book *Muslim Societies in African History* as follows “(...) but Islam was typically taught orally through Swahili explanations. Beginning about 300 years ago some scholars and writers began to adopt the Arabic alphabet to the language and thereby create a written literature alongside the older oral one. The written corpus

¹¹ Joseph Schacht, “Notes on Islam in East Africa”, in: *Studia Islamica* 23(1965), p. 91-136.

contained the same stories, chronicles, and poetry as the one that had been transmitted orally down the generations”¹²

In all Islamized communities whether they are highly literate or not, transferring the religious material orally is not a foreign act. One of the two primary reference points of *shari'a*¹³, namely *ḥadīth*, is a collection of knowledge originally based on attitudes, sayings and acts of the Prophet Muhammad.¹⁴ After the death of Muhammad (A.D. 632) all of these were transmitted orally and some used early Arabic poetry¹⁵ as the carrier of information, and from around the 8th century on they have been written down. Even today orally transmitted *aḥādīth*¹⁶ can be found mostly in the form of sayings among Muslim societies. For instance, Topan states that “the story of *mi'rāj* has been re-told countless times in Muslim traditions; its commentaries and interpretations range from literal to mystical and esoteric perspectives.”¹⁷ Another strong indicator of the importance of oral tradition in Islam is the existence of *ḥāfiẓ* people. These are the people who memorize the Koran completely and thus gain a highly appreciated new title, *ḥāfiẓ*, and beyond that a respected place in the value system of Islam. Its literal meaning in Arabic, “guardian,” demonstrates the importance of this title. The main difference is, while *ḥuffāẓ* memorize the Koran verbatim and must avoid including their own interpretation, this is generally not the case with oral tradition.

In the context of music and religion or religious music, a relatively more positive reception of it in Africanized Islam in comparison to scriptural orthodox origin can be explained by the utilization of oral tradition, which characteristically benefits from vocal utterance as its carrier platform.¹⁸ The articulated religious verses, in relation with personal or cultural preferences, could gain musicality over time and/or be transmitted through a rhythmic formula developed from the linguistic features of language. Thus this musicality could

¹² Robinson 2004: 34.

¹³ *Shari'a* is a law system based upon Islamic doctrines. Its rules and sanctions cover a wide range of topics such as portion of the inheritance, imposition of penalty, trade agreement, duties of Muslims etc... The Koran and *sunna* (including *aḥādīth*) are both the primary sources of *shari'a* therefore it requires a strict obedience.

¹⁴ See also *sunna*.

¹⁵ For more information see: Macdonald, M.C.A., *The Development of Arabic as a Written Language*, Oxford: Achaeopress 2010.

¹⁶ Pl. *ḥadīth*.

¹⁷ Farouk Topan, “Projecting Islam: Narrative in Swahili Poetry”, in: *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 14 2001, p. 110.

¹⁸ There are different versions of these platforms such as sayings, songs, riddles, tales etc... and any of them can be assigned properly for the sake of religion.

achieve a certain level of acceptance; maybe not as a way of cultural expression, but as a tool for transportation.

2.1.3. *Dikr*

Regarding the musicality of religious acts the notion of *dikr* (*dhikr*, *zikr*, *dhikiri*)¹⁹ must also be emphasized. In addition to this, many scholars such as Bone, Brenner, Kubik, Sicard and Thorold consider *dikr* a possible predecessor of *sikiri* and this is why both similarities and points of conflict, between *sikiri* dance and *dikr* practice necessitate a deeper look with respect to both formal and functional aspects.

As a genre, *dikr* consists of repetitive rhythmic chanting of divine names, i.e. of certain words or formulas in praise of God, which often accompanied by body movement, accelerating to a climax, and possibly leading to an ecstatic mental state, *wajd*.²⁰ Most of *ṭuruq*²¹ make use of *dikr*, literally meaning remembrance, recollection or mentioning (of God), as a medium to reach God. Its ritualized versions that include dance, singing/reciting, ecstatic trance conditions etc. designate the ceremonial sections of *ṭuruq*. These religious communities, generally named after their founder, whose *tariq* is pursued by *murīdun*²², can be found throughout the Muslim world from India to the Balkans and Morocco to South Africa. In order to ask for God's blessing, praise for the Prophet and the *ṭarīqa*'s saints and/or ethereal guidance, ceremonial *dikr* is practiced strictly according to *ṭarīqa*'s established traditions, generally for weekly devotional liturgies as well as for certain communal religious occasions highlighted in the Islamic calendar, such as “der Geburtstag des Propheten, das ‘īd al-aḏḥā (Opferfest), der zehnte Tag des Monats *Muḥarram*, die Nächte des Fastenmonats *Ramadān* – vor allem die 14. und 27. Nacht -, das ‘īd al-fiṭr (Fest nach dem *Ramadān*-Fasten), Pilgerfeste usw.”²³. And commonly under the guidance of a leader, *ṣaiḥ* (also spelled *sheikh*, *shaikh* or *shaykh*). With regard to content of the practice Frishkopf rightly puts forward that “Alongside *dikr*, religious poetry may also be performed, often composed by *ṭarīqa* founders in local languages, including

¹⁹ These are the orthographical variants of *dikr*. They may indicate variations in pronunciation.

²⁰ According to *al-Ġazzālī*, *wajd* is an expression of what is found through audition.

²¹ Pl. *ṭarīqa*. The term *ṭarīqa* originates from its Arabic root *ṭarīq*, which can be translated as path. *ṭarīqa*, in essence, is a gathering of people with the aim of reaching the God. None of them denies the validity of the Koran; but each has certain paths to achieve the task of being a good Muslim along with following the Koran.

²² Pl. *murīd*. The term literally means adherent, follower; willing and desirous. A *murīd* is someone who follows the ideas of a teacher especially a religious leader (*murshid*: guide, mentor) of a *ṭarīqa*.

²³ Habib Hassan Touma, *Die Musik der Araber*, Wilhelmshaven: Noetzel, Heinrichshofen-Bücher 1998, p. 38.

coded mystical expressions, and standard themes of praise, devotion, and supplication to God and the Prophet, but also localized to the *ṭarīqa*'s saints and regional musical styles.”²⁴

The validation of *dīkr* practice and its assignment as a duty for Muslims are provided by the Koran. In certain *sūra*²⁵ of the Koran *dīkr* is commanded as a positive deed that a proper Muslim should incorporate into her/his belief²⁶:

«تَكْفُرُونَ وَلَا لِي وَاشْكُرُوا أَذْكُرْكُمْ فَادْكُرُونِي»

The Koran 2:152 *So remember Me; (and) I will remember you. And be grateful to Me and do not deny Me.*

«الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ مَفْئِدُهُ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ أَلَا ذِكْرَ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ»

The Koran 13:28 *Those who believe and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah. Verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest.*²⁷

There are two divergent forms of *dīkr*: the first, widely accepted one is practiced in solitude and consists of silent repetition of the divine name(s) of God mostly in Arabic language, along with certain optional formulas. According to the scholars mentioned below, immobility and sensory deprivation, in other words lack of auditory/musical accompaniment, constitute the characteristic features of solitary *dīkr* and on account of these, a kind of experience arises that differs from the ritualized version. While Gilbert Rouget²⁸ denominates this experience as ecstasy, Mircea Eliade²⁹ named it and similar contemplative experiences as ‘enstase’, arising as a consequence of meditational techniques which withdraw the practitioner from the world and from awareness of the self. Additionally this term, analogous with *samādhi* in Hinduism, points a state of

²⁴ Michael Frishkopf: “Islamic Music in Africa as a Tool for African Studies”, in: *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 42(2008), p. 496.

²⁵ *sūra* designates one of the 114 chapters of the Koran and/or a part of the chapter.

²⁶ For more examples see the Koran 43:36-37, 58:19, 33:41, 20:124, 29:45, 2:152, 4:103 etc...

²⁷ These translations in English are combinations of different translations of the Koran made by Saheeh International, Marmaduke Pickthall and Yusuf Ali.

²⁸ Gilbert Rouget, *Music and Trance*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1985.

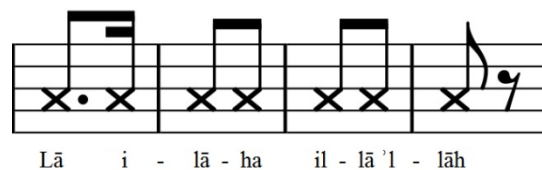
²⁹ Mircea Eliade, *Techniques du Yoga*, Paris: Gallimard 1948, p. 93.

consciousness in which the experiencing subject becomes one³⁰ with the experienced object.

Even though solitary *dīkr* originally does not include any musical element, repetitively recited phrases can be evaluated as such to a certain extent in terms of their prosodic characteristics. A person who recites the 99 names of God or phrases from the Koran for her/his *dīkr* is inevitably obliged to implement rhythmic formulas stemming from the stress-timed Arabic language; and since formal Arabic (*al-fuṣḥá*) has been functioning as the *lingua franca* in many regions of the world where Islam dominates, its phonological properties and idiosyncratic rhythmic characteristics are used in the course of *dīkr* performance. Throughout the Muslim world particular formulas are recited repetitively along with the names of God in the practice of *dīkr*; among them the most frequently used are:

- *lā ilāha illā 'llāh* (لا إله إلا الله)
- *allāhu akbar* (الله أَكْبَرُ)
- *al-ḥamdu li-llāh* (الحمد لله)
- *subhan'allāh* (سُبْحَانَ الله)

As an example, the most recited formula and its rhythmic structure, independent from the pitch values of five-line staff, can be represented as follows:



Example 1: Rhythmic outline of *lā ilāha illā 'llāh* formula.

In addition to this, the usage of *misbaḥa*³¹ -to keep track of the number of recitations that make up *dīkr*- is also common, which can be seen as the simplest type of rhythmic accompaniment. When counting the formulas 33, 99, 999 or however many times necessary until ‘enstase’ occurs, each bead of *misbaḥa* indicates the beginning of a new

³⁰ What is meant here is becoming one with God through self-annihilation, which is named in Sufi mysticism as *fanāfillāh*.

³¹ It is a tool similar to rosary used in the Roman Catholic Church. Muslim version is often made of wooden, amber, plastic or ivory and consists of 33, 99 or 999 beads.

formula without giving an exact number of counts (some types have additional, different shaped beads to help the user count, mostly in groups of eleven). Moreover while reciting the formulas; gliding a bead with the finger necessarily makes a low but distinctive snap-like sound, which also helps to keep the tempo, opposing the notion of absolute sensory deprivation as a characteristic feature of solitary *ḍikr*. In light of this information it is now clear that whether in solitude or not, a *ḍikr* practice requires a certain extent of auditory stimuli in order to keep regularity and later on retain it; otherwise it could also be practiced without using formulas or *misbaḥa*, in other words just by ‘remembering’ God as the radical Islamists suggest.

Unlike the solitary *ḍikr* the second form is practiced in groups, with other adherents of *ṭarīqa*. Whereas practicing solitary *ḍikr* does not entail any membership to a certain *ṭarīqa*, for the collective version it is practically a must; since one of the main duties is invocation of the *ṭarīqa*’s founder through applying predetermined ceremonial forms. On the other hand, along with general religious dates, each *ṭarīqa* has a particular calendar to perform certain rituals or celebrations, which differ from other *ṭuruq* by containing additionally its founder’s and prominent saints’ dates of birth, the establishment date of the *ṭarīqa* etc. To participate in these celebrations one must become a *murīd* through internalizing the doctrines of *ṭarīqa* and devote herself/himself³² to the privileged organization. As in celebrations of *ṭarīqa*’s specific occasions, the scope and content of *ḍikr* practice also vary from order to order.

While for some *ṭuruq*, following the orthodox rules of *shari’a*, the use of musical instruments, texts reminiscent of secularity and/or getting an earthly pleasure from sonic genres performed for religious reasons, are strictly prohibited, restricting not only the way of producing sounds but also their reception by the listener; for other *ṭuruq*, following mainly prominent Sufi mystic *al-Ġazzālī*, music and dance have the utmost importance in spiritual experiences. Countless treatises have been written concerning the legality of music in daily life and at religious gatherings, but *Al-Ġazzālī*’s work *Bawāriq al-ilmā’ fī al-Radd ‘Alā Man Yuḥarrimu al-Samā’* (The Lightning Flashes of Indication Concerning the Refutation of Those Who Declare Audition Forbidden in General) is considered the most important manifesto in defense of music. Here he gives validation to musical

³² Even though being a member of a *ṭarīqa* is not limited with gender, for the most part it is a male-dominated attitude.

instruments, dance and states of ecstasy of human by correlating them with their divine functions:

“The tambourine is a reference to the cycle of existing things; the skin which is fitted on to it is a reference to the absolute existence, the striking on the tambourine is a reference to the descent of divine inspiration from the innermost arcana upon general existence to bring forth the things pertaining to the essence from the interior to the exterior...And the voice of the singer is a reference to the divine life which comes down... The flute is a reference to the human essence... and the breath which penetrates the flute is a reference to the light of Allah (Exalted is He!) penetrating the reed of man's essence...And the dancing is a reference to the circling of the spirit round the cycle of existing things on account of receiving the effects of the unveilings of the revelations; and this is the state of the Gnostic...And his leaping up is a reference to his being drawn from the human station to the unitive station and to existing things acquiring from him spiritual effects and illuminative helps...Then when he is detached from what is other than Allah...he takes off his clothing...Then if he rises to a higher station and the singer is speaking in a lower station ... he takes someone else and circles with him that their states may be united and his bond may be loosed. Then when he becomes thirsty and ask for a drink of water, it indicates that he is overpowered., and he has returned to the station of the body, since the station of the spirit is [that of] getting nourishment from the unseen.”³³

Thus it is possible to come across *dikir* performances throughout the world accompanied by particular musical instruments, generally a tambourine-like percussive instrument to keep the tempo at a certain level and orient the performers accordingly. Apart from that there may be some other instruments, which have never been written about or depicted in early literature; but over time gain relevance to *dikir* performance. This situation emerges especially in places where the strict Islamic law of the Arabian Peninsula has less impact on society, in other words in the peripheries of the Islamic world. In Senegal, for example, Frishkopf³⁴ comes across the presence of tuned kettle-drums (*tabala*) accompanying religious rituals and local *dikir* performances; in addition to this, during a Mawlawīyya ritual from Turkey a wide range of instruments, from end-blown flute *ney* to large zither *qanun*, are played in order to reach transcendental state of mind. On the other hand, even though for a variety of reasons the usage of musical instruments is not allowed, alternative auditory elements such as guttural voices, clapping, stamping of the feet etc. have become part of the activity to signalize cornerstones of performance.

Sikiri dance within this context clearly reveals the appropriation of the human body and its potential as a sound generator that undertakes certain functions of musical instruments. During my short fieldwork trip on March 20, 2013 in Liganda Chididi village, Mangochi,

³³ James Robson, *Tracts on Listening to Music and Ancient Arabian Musical Instruments*, Glasgow: University of Glasgow 1941, pp. 98-101.

³⁴ Frishkopf 2008: 497.

T.A. Nankumba, and on March 30, 2013 in Issa village, Blantyre, T.A. Kunthembwe, no musical instruments accompanying the *sikiri* dance were observed, but what is important here is that, as mentioned above, instruments were substituted with guttural voices and stamping of the feet, to provide most likely an orientation mechanism for dancers. This being so, there nevertheless has been, and still is, a great deal of uncertainty in the use of the terms *sikiri* and *dikr*.

Another distinctive feature of collective *dikr* is its association with movement and dance. Unlike the key feature, immobility, of the solitary version, collective *dikr* contains specific movements as well as dance-like body motions, often along with excessive expressions of an altered state of mind. Collective *dikr* generally comprises rhythmically coordinated movements of the body, hymns and songs, jumping, leaping, hopping, whirling, bending forward and then straightening up, twisting and shoving with organized steps and synchronized movements. As in musical accompaniments for *dikr* practices, each *ṭarīqa* has developed its own particular form, content and manner of application of movements, since there had been no fixed regulation of the practice of *dikr* until the emergence of mysticism-oriented Sufi orders. At some performances adherents of order may reach a trance state signified by transcendent actions such as walking on burning coals, perforating the flesh (generally cheek and tongue) or extinguishing fire in the mouth. Rouget describes these actions as “visible proof of invulnerability”³⁵ of people who are in a trance state and he continues by explaining that “these practices were introduced into *dhikr* at a relatively late date, sometime around our twelfth century”³⁶. On the contrary for Qādirīya and Rifā‘īya orders, to which the above-mentioned excessiveness has the utmost importance, these practices have already been a part of *dikr* from the time of the Prophet Muhammad as a way to express their absolute love for the Prophet and God.

In comparison to the severe performances of the Qādirīya and Rifā‘īya orders there are also other, relatively less ‘violent’, *dikr* forms, particularly practised by ‘Alawīyyah, Bektashi and Mawlawīyya adherents, with a strong emphasis on mysticism. Within the case of last three orders these *dikr* forms transformed over time into more controlled dance performances such as *samā* and *djem* rituals, in which a strict control mechanism is implemented by the leader of the order. Massignon also shares the same opinion, writing the following explanation in *Encyclopédie de l’Islam*, “The masters of mysticism gradually

³⁵ Rouget 1985: 263.

³⁶ Ibid.

abandoned free musical séances for fixed recitations of litanies based on the Koran.”³⁷

Although these renewed versions do not include any similar excessiveness as in the case of their predecessors. They have the feature of leading some performers to a state of trance, which can be seen as, in comparison to earlier versions, a bit more ‘courtly’ and ‘earnest’; but still inheriting the context of absolute love as well as ‘visible proof of invulnerability’.

During *djem* rituals of the ‘Alawīyyah and Bektashi orders, for example, shortly after the beginning generally a slow-paced music is performed with the accompaniment of *saz* or *bağlama*. It is the basic rule, that only *saz* or a plucked stringed instrument, long- or short-necked, or another similar instrument can be used. The number of instruments can be varied from 2 up to 12 in different sizes; nevertheless percussive instruments, which can be seen in the Mawlawīyya rituals, are not welcomed and allowed since they disrupt the divine atmosphere of the whole ceremony. After some certain prayers have been recited, firstly musical performance and only following to that dance performance can begin.

Rouget and Trimingham³⁸ rightly put that this two-part organization is a constant feature of all *dīkr* performances; in common with the ‘Alawīyyah and Bektashi *djem* rituals each *dīkr* performance begins with reading of specific prayers (*sūra*) from the Koran and/or reciting some parts of it.

To emphasize the context of the occasion, during which *dīkr* is practiced, some certain prayers that are normally not recited can be added to the upcoming event. This opening episode essentially does not include any sort of music or dance; but rather an atmosphere filled with divinity, in which the adherents, who is going to embody *dīkr* in the following section, can concentrate and get into the mood for their performance. The length of this first episode varies from order to order and occasion to occasion; it may last some minutes as well as hours. When reciting is done and thus a divine atmosphere is provided, the second episode begins, either with a short pause in between or uninterruptedly.

It is this second part when music and dance become parts of the activity; although it is not obligated to use any musical instruments to create a basis for imminent dance performance, since ‘musical’ accompaniment could also be made through the recitation of formulas or reading some parts of the Koran. But there is a recognizable transformation in this part, in which the body and vocal accompaniment work together to carry the ritual to the next

³⁷ Louis Massignon, “Tarīka”, in: *Encyclopédie de l’Islam*, 1934.

³⁸ Rouget 1985: 271; Trimingham 1971: 204-5.

phase. As another characteristic feature of *ḍikr* practice, music, in the global sense of the term, is represented by auditory phenomena, generally composed of guttural voices, rhythmically emphasized half-chanted half-shouted formulas and sometimes stamping of the feet to the ground. From the beginning of the second part on, the tempo, volume and concordantly speed of dance movements gradually increase while the basic rhythmic pattern remains unchanged. This pattern is borrowed either from the Koranic formulas, such as *lā ilāha illā 'llāh*, or from locally practiced music forms. When the latter is the case, it is mainly appropriated to the recited formulas. After a certain point gradually accelerating music provokes adherents to accompany it with particular body movements. It does not matter, whether it is performed in a sitting or standing position, typically the upper part of the body is being used in the same manner all over the world. When *ḍikr* is practiced in a standing position, performers' lower half of the body is apparently less active than the upper half. Except for the stamping of the feet to the ground, legs do not have a predetermined or organized function; most likely their duty is to stabilize the whole body as much as possible, while the torso sways back and forth. On the contrary, swinging motion of the upper part of the body, including the head, gradually accelerates in accordance with auditory accompaniment and the tempo. Arms are occasionally bonded to body crosswise, with hands on the shoulders (left hand on the right, right hand on the left shoulder) or caused by frenzied energy of torso they might oscillate freely as well. There is no prespecified regulation for the arms; but in order to avoid unrestrained motions especially mysticism-oriented Sufi orders either give preference to the first option (arms bonded to body) or ensure that the both arms are kept wide open and integrated to dance as a functioning figure.



Figure 2: Dance in a *djem* ritual of 'Alawīyyah.³⁹



Figure 3: Crosswise arms figure from *Mawlawīyya*.⁴⁰

The head as well does not have a described positioning; in general, following torso's motions, it complementarily sways back and forth.

During long-lasting *dīkr* performances several adherents may be entranced, lose consciousness, faint and/or get into a trance (*wajd*); even though some orders are in no way seeking to produce such 'ecstatic phenomena'. What causes the occurrence of trance situation is not known in detail yet, but there are three basic elements in a *dīkr* performance that may be associated to this phenomenon:

- repetitive rhythmic sound and/or movement organization
- hyperventilation
- divinity - mystical devotion - self-motivation

Any of these can trigger trance in certain situations, but this aspects of *dīkr* will not be comprehensively analyzed within the context of trance; since it is a multidisciplinary subject and thus requires some level of knowledge in different fields such as neuroscience, psychology and many more. In addition to this two *sikiri* dances that were filmed in

³⁹ Source: <http://www.festivaldelimaginaire.com/CHANTS-ET-DANSES-DU-DJEM-ALEVI-LE-CHANT-DU-SEMAH-ALEVI.html> (14.08.2013)

⁴⁰ Source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/architectureoflife/5161186848> (14.08.2013)

Malaŵi in March 2013 and constitute the basis of this study, do not end up with any trance circumstance and there has been no report written yet that suggests the opposite.

On the other hand, when all the specialties of *dikr* practice that were referred above are taken into account, it becomes visible that there is an obvious commonality between *dikr* and *sikiri* dance both in theory and in practice; but in order to have an extensive understanding of *sikiri* with its complex background processes, before identifying, categorizing and analyzing it structurally, a set of other features needs to be explained. These features are mainly composed of historical and socio-cultural contacts and thus shape certain qualities of *sikiri* dance. Even though there is no precise information regarding the adoption of *sikiri* as a dance style by Yao people, within next chapter it is aimed to establish a framework that consists of not just religious matters but also socio-political and economic affairs. In addition to this, empirical evidences dependent on observations during the fieldwork in Malaŵi will be evaluated in the following chapters.

2.2. East Africa and Islam

Before the rise of new reform movements' ca. in the late 1970's, there were visible nuances between East African Islam and global scripturalist Islam. Even though both meet at the same core, these nuances designate the specific qualities of East African Islam. The reason why the difference was more visible before the revival of standardized Islam can be seen in the Malaŵi case: when new generation young Muslims, i.e. members of the Muslim Association of Malawi (MAM), gained chance to get in touch with the global Islamic world through different instruments, they "realized how far the worship and practice of most Malawian Muslims fell short of the orthodox Islamic ideal as prescribed in the Shariah"⁴¹ and so they felt obligated to adjust their version to worldwide-valid orthodox Islam and 'purify' it by gathering different practices redolent of old customs, under a single roof. This ended up with the standardization of Islam after the 1980's, which constitutes a complication when someone aims to find out a subject related to nuances between religious practices (see also Mumisa 2002). But before coming to present day, some processes of spread and adoption of Islam should be highlighted in order to reveal the characteristics of local socio-religious relations.

⁴¹ Bone 2007: 8.

While for some researchers the history of Islam in Africa dates back to the seventh century, when early Arab Muslim refugees of Arabian Peninsula ask for asylum from the Kingdom of Aksum around 613 A.D.; for the others, real history of Islam in Africa begins between the eighth and ninth centuries (see Horton & Middleton 2000: 48), when Muslims started to settle, build mosques and convert local people along the coasts of East Africa. Before its penetration through inlands around the 19th century, Islam was predominantly effective on the coastline. From Somali to northern parts of Madagascar and to Mozambique, where the most important trade centers of the Indian Ocean are located (such as Mombasa, Zanzibar and Kilwa), Islam expanded itself from north to south and maintained its existence up to the present day. One of the reasons for the settlement of Arab and Persian (*Shirazi*) Muslims along the coastline was that the trade opportunities provided by this area: under favour of coast's advantageous position at the one edge of the Indian Ocean, they obtained wider commercial connections with the coastal trade centers of India and of the Far East.⁴² In one of the consequences of growing economy eastern coast of Africa has become an intersection point of various communities and attracted traders and travelers from various places. The main commercial items were ivory, gold, metals, leather goods and slaves. Trading such materials and long-distance commerce was carried out in various parts of the African continent and linked regions also beyond the orbit of Muslim penetration. From about 1450 on, however, Islam has become an important mediator and provided the major external contact between sub-Saharan Africa and the world.

While taking advantage of East Africa's shipping trade centers, Muslims were also establishing relationships with local people on both economic and cultural level. On the other hand it is yet unknown what kind of religious contact between coastal Arabs and local groups took place at the earliest phase. What is important here that as Islam provided new influences and contacts mainly without amalgamating African culture(s) as a whole to

⁴² Though within this context the notion of "far east" loses its meaning, it has been used because of the established terminology. On the other hand when considering "the West" as an idealization of certain geographies the usage of this terminology falls into a very problematic situation: The question is where are "the West" and "the East" in social sciences? To sum up shortly, since this debate requires a whole essay or a book, the East and the West are invented concepts to define the *self* and the *other*. The myth of the *exotic* East has not only been created one-sided, it has also been accepted by the subject of it. All the books, paintings, fashions and the music that were/are produced within this 'tradition' had/have a controlled agenda, which is still valid. The characteristics and the image of "the East" are still the same for many studies and this sustained attitude forms inwardly our viewpoints. It should be kept in mind that these conceptions are extremely relative and their validity can change from different viewpoints. It is almost impossible to have a work place away from these conceptions, so what can a social scientist do, is to be aware of and avoid using that directed viewpoint in her/his works; unless otherwise aimed.

the Middle Eastern core; new religious, economic, and political patterns developed in relation to the Islamic surge, but great diversity remained. In addition to this, for local people being part of the Arab-Islam synthesis has been generally perceived as a crucial access to the above mentioned trade relations and, in conjunction with it, as a ‘civilized’ and ‘modernized’ way of life. Azumah writes that:

“the lifestyles of Muslim merchants in the forms of dressing and the textiles they introduced into indigenous Africa impressed many Africans. Imitation of Muslim way of dressing, seen more as a higher level of social standing, gradually ended up in conversions.(...) In most areas of pre-European Africa, the distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim almost always corresponded to urban-rural or trader-peasant divide (...)”⁴³

Unlike in the case of Christianity and Christian missionaries, a relatively more positive attitude towards Islam in East Africa might be one of the reasons of the lack of well-organized propaganda methods among Muslims until the 19th century. It does not mean that Muslims were accepted peacefully at all events. In certain areas/times there were also hostile attitudes towards Arab Muslims, since “whereas the west coast provided the main source of supply for Christian slave traders the east coast was primarily an Arab preserve.”⁴⁴ An example that illustrates this point is given by Klamroth. He writes that by the end of the 19th century among the people of Usambara, a mountainous terrain in North-East Tanzania, Islam was not welcomed because of Arab-Muslims associations with the slave trade.⁴⁵

In the early times of penetration, or in other words until the arrival of Europeans, Muslims generally did not need to propagandize their religions and customs or at least it was sufficient to do what they were already doing: trade. On this point Trimingham cites from Sir Alfred Sharpe, Commissioner of the British Central Africa Protectorate between 1896 and 1907; and Governor of Nyasaland from 1907 until 1910, that ”The (Muslim) movement has grown of itself, there has been nothing in the shape of propaganda.”⁴⁶ There were for sure *madrasas*,⁴⁷ mosques and other Islamic institutions across the area, which functioned intentionally or not, as propaganda tools; but only with the arrival of Europeans as a threat to settled norms of Muslims, the first during the 15th and later around the 19th

⁴³ J.A. Azumah, *The Legacy of Arab-Islam in Africa*, Oxford: Oneworld Publication 2001, p. 30.

⁴⁴ Trimingham 1964: 23.

⁴⁵ Martin Klamroth, *Islam in Deutsch-Ostafrika*, Berlin: der Berliner Evang. Missionsges. 1912, p. 23.

⁴⁶ Trimingham 1964: 29.

⁴⁷ An Islamic institution for teaching theology and religious law. It is mainly combined with a mosque and provides student lodgings, library etc...

century, these Islamic institutions have turned into an effective propaganda media. Robinson emphasizes a change of Muslim attitude in relation to the arrival of Portuguese explorers and states that: “(...) with the coming of Portuguese explorers (...) the period of great Swahili prosperity was over. The Muslim communities now thought of the military *jihad* as a way to defend themselves from non-Muslim attacks.”⁴⁸ During the second half of the 19th century this coincides with the establishment of European rule. One of the results of it was the occurrence of the mass conversions of local groups like The Yao, The Nyamwezi (Wanyamwezi) and the Makonde. Even though the background of these mass movements from one belief system to another is connected to a multifaceted process, it can be said that the primary impulsion for East African groups was not a need for a better ethereal belief system or deficiency of the existing one; but most likely a more secular approach, in other words, a strategy of orienting oneself to new socio-economic circumstances. Further to that the perception of European missionaries by local people was also an important factor within the context of mass conversions to Islam (see Augustini 1974; Rangeley 1963). Many conversions after 19th century took place as a reaction to European penetration into interior. But also in some certain episodes, Muslim clergymen like Shaykh Uways b. Muhammad al-Barawi (1847-1909) gained important roles as protagonists by converting masses, recruiting manpower and conducting *jihad* against Europeans. Trimingham regards this attitude towards Islam as an alternative way to Europeans and writes that “(...) Islam provides an element of opposition to Westernism”.⁴⁹ By using the term ‘Westernism’ Trimingham indicates the relation of two religions and the perception of them by local communities in East Africa; in other words such incidents were not only religious in nature, but also highly related to socio-economic and politic developments.

During the mass conversions some tribal chiefs played an active role as mediator and leaders. Through developing their monetary relations with Muslim traders and religious representatives, they also have become an important part of ivory, gold and slave trade in East Africa. The chiefs’ major motivation for conversion to Islam was to possess a closer relationship with their Muslim trade partners and thereby gain access to high-tech materials like firearms and armors brought by Muslims. With the advantages of new technologies chiefs could easily administer their communities and so have a powerful position among

⁴⁸ Robinson 2004: 36.

⁴⁹ Trimingham 1964: 42.

the others. Besides the socio-economic orientations made by local chiefs there were also some significant customary arrangements. In the case of Yao chiefs, for example, some certain strategies have been utilized and common grounds between their old customs and Islamic rituals have been highlighted. By incorporating certain Islamic elements into their boys' circumcision ceremonies they have connected the new and the old customs, so both the reactions of elders who identify themselves with old religious doctrines and a potential alienage among the youth could be avoided (see Thorold 1995: 99-133). Another but comparatively more evident reason for the mass conversions was that the Islam does not have a complicated ritual process of conversion, while accepting Islam, the new convert simply has to recite a short testimony: "There is no god but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God." (*lā ilāha illā 'llāh muḥammadun rasūlu-llāh*) And with the combination of this easiness and Islam's inclusive attitude towards local religious practices, far-reaching mass conversions have quickly emerged across East Africa.

2.3. Islam among the Yao

According to Abdallah⁵⁰ and many other scholars who have studied Yao people, the place of origin of the Yao is an eponymous hill, 'Yao', near Muembe (Mwembe), between Lujenda and Rovuma Rivers in Portuguese Mozambique; but most likely because of Zulu and Ngoni raids towards the north during the first half of the 19th century, a large number of Yao had migrated from their first settlements in all directions. Abdallah also considers some disagreements between sub-sections of the Yao as another cause for the large-scale of migrations. Even though the main reason is unknown, these migrations took place rather expeditiously and as a result even today some numbers of Yao sub-sections have become visible along the southern banks of Lake Malaŵi. The groups that came to then British Nyasaland were the Achisi-, the Amasaninga-, the Amachinga- and the Amangoche-sections and these had the most prominent roles regarding expansion of Islam across the region.⁵¹

The genesis of Islam among Yao people, especially among foregoing sub-sections, is traceable from primarily two different aspects: in the first place by asking how the religion of Arab-Muslims has been carried from the coast to the area that is now Malaŵi; and secondly the process of reception of Islam by Yao people and their conversion. Some of

⁵⁰ Yohanna.B Abdallah, *The Yaos*, London: Frank Cass 1973, p. 8.

⁵¹ J.C. Mitchell, "The Yao of Southern Nyasaland", in: *Seven Tribes of British Central Africa*, London: Oxford University Press 1951, p. 306.

the background information has already been given; but, although the above mentioned processes in relation with East Africa and African continent (in general) are non-negligible parts of Yao conversion (as in the case of other communities), a closer look at the Yao's case should be taken:

Firstly, the arrival of Omani Arabs around the 19th century had a deep impact both on the coastal trade centers and the interior. David Bone writes that Omani Arabs have affected not only Yao people, but also some other groups in and around today's Malaŵi. He relates 'the catalyst for the eventual establishment of Muslim communities' in this area with the domination of the Omani dynasty in Zanzibar (see Bone 2007: 2). Furthermore Robinson also states: "the new Zanzibari system of trade resulted in more active contact between the coast and hinterland, and the spread of Islam and the Swahili culture to the interior."⁵² Conversely Desmond D. Phiri predicates that some communities in Malaŵi were already in contact with Islam as far back as the sixteenth century and exemplifies it with the Arab establishment at Tete on the Zambezi River around 1530 (see Phiri 2004: 195). And lastly some researches of Rhodes-Livingstone Institute put forth that Yao people had been colonized by the Arabs as early as 700 A.D. and regard the Yao as the founder of Kilwa (see Colson & Gluckman [ed.] 1951: 304).

There were several trade routes along the East African coast that move towards the interior; but the two of these, the first follows the Rufiji and the second along the Ruvuma (or Rovuma) River through Lake Malaŵi, had the importance of being cultural and economic contact areas of Swahili Arab and Yao traders (see Figure 4). These routes caused the establishment of new cities functioning as transfer points between inland and the coast. Towns like Karonga at the north-west shore and Nkhota Kota at the central-west of Lake Malaŵi became prominent trade and Islamization centers and maintained their function until the arrival of Europeans, who abolished and prohibited the slave trade in East Africa. There were also smaller villages established for freed slaves, which almost entirely Muslims⁵³. These villages were not as effective as the bigger trade centers regarding the spread of Islam; but they certainly constitute a realm of existence for Islam, even in the deep interior. This area was not the main settlement of the Yao; but it attracted

⁵² Robinson 2004: 37.

⁵³ Due to the Islamic law a Muslim cannot enslave another Muslim and this is why many Africans, who were captured by Muslim slave traders, converted to Islam and have become Muslims to be able to get free from the slave trade.

many of them from different places and by gathering various groups in the same area, quickened conversion rate of Yao people (and also included Chew̃a people).

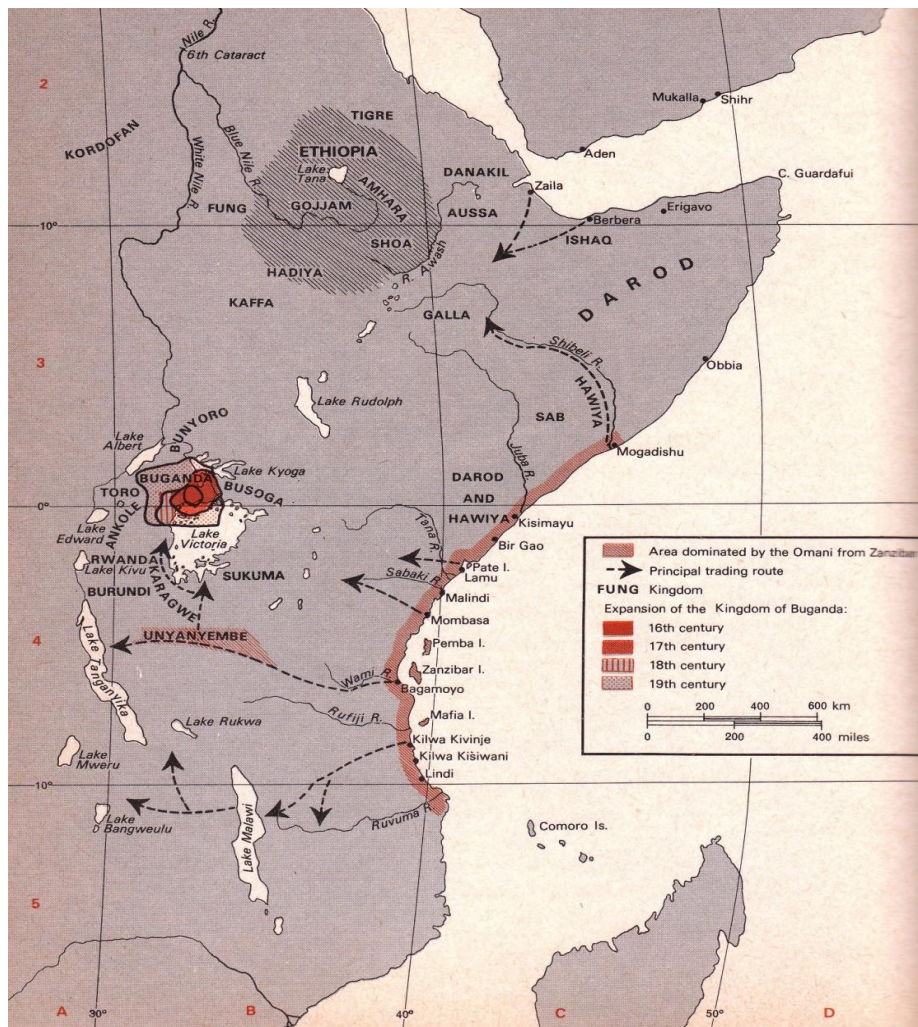


Figure 4: Trade routes in East Africa. (From Freeman-Grenville & Hausman 1976: Nr. 46)

The presence of some known Muslim traders around the shores of Lake Malaŵi was also another reason for the attraction. Salim bin Abdullah was one of the most prominent ivory and slave (besides copper and salt) trader who is also the first *Jumbe*⁵⁴ of Nkhota Kota (ca. 1840's). His motivation to convert local people and to get involved in local politics by setting up a kind of government is unclear; but his successors handed down the tradition of trade in Nkhota Kota while maintaining their religious and economic contacts with Zanzibar. Apart from Abdullah there were also Muslims with African origin, who have more interest in extension of Islam and might get in contact with Salim bin Abdullah or with one of his successors. According to D. D. Phiri (2004), the two of them Abdullah bin

⁵⁴ *Jumbe*, Swahili for 'governor'. The Swahili rulers of Nkhota Kota claimed to recognise the suzerainty of the Sultans of Zanzibar. Bone 1982: 137.

Haji Mkwanda and his pupil Thabit (Sabiti) bin Muhammad Nganjue taught the principles of Islam along the shores of Lake Malaŵi and played an important role by introducing Islam to non-Muslim communities, especially to Yao people (see Rangeley 1963; Langworthy 1971; Phiri 2004).

During the second half of 19th century there was an observable religious dynamism in the area. It can be said that this dynamism was triggered by the arrival of Europeans, which led to very first simultaneous contacts of different customs and a deeper expansion of Islam among Yao people. From 1860 on, there are reports about Muslim presence both at the northern and southern end of Lake Malaŵi: ca. late 1860's David Livingstone visited the area and observed "how the Yao chose to copy the 'coastalists' in their way of dressing, their style of building and even the crops they planted"⁵⁵ and also the White Fathers missionary society came across settled Muslim communities in the area. Phiri cites from them that: "there were the Koranic schools or *madāris*⁵⁶ everywhere and Ramadhan was being observed as were other Islamic festivals"⁵⁷ around the last decade of 19th century.

The Yao chief Makanjila is considered as the first Yao chief who adopted Islam in early 1870's (Sicard 2000; Bone 1982), which can also be seen as the beginning of large scale conversions of other groups and the penetration of both Swahili Arab's life style and Islamic practices into old Yao customs. From this date on Islamic influence has become visible in respect to rituals, marking life's most important events: coming of age, death and marriage. Sicard divides and analyses Islamic penetration into the area around Lake Malaŵi, which also covers the transformation of Yao people's customs, mainly into five categories:

1. the dress code, which brought about the use of *mkanjo* (Swahili *kanzu*), the *chikofiya* (Swahili *kofia*) and the *malapa*, which clearly came to distinguish Muslims from non-Muslims;
2. the dietary code, which led to the distinction between 'halal' and 'haram' foods, but also led to differences between 'observers' and non-observers;
3. closely related to the dietary code was the introduction of new foods, e.g. mango, coconut, cassava and rice;
4. terminology influenced by Arabic through Swahili being incorporated in the languages of the country, e.g. *haki* to mean 'true', or 'sure', *kafiri* to designate a non-Muslim (unbeliever), *sawabu* 'reward', *wadi* derived from Sudanese Arabic and *bunn* to designate 'son of' (*ibn*); *biti* for 'daughter of' (*binti*), etc; and

⁵⁵ Bone 2007: 3.

⁵⁶ Singular: *madrasa*.

⁵⁷ Phiri 2004: 197.

5. transformation of such customs as marriage 'ndowa', initiation 'jando', funerals 'sadaka'.⁵⁸

However with regard to norms of daily life, practicing Islam with all its aspects and a total utilization of the *shari'a* instead of the customary law was not the case, therefore this adjustment process between Islamic and customary law resulted in an idiosyncratic organization of customs. The Yao people converted to Islam have continued using the tribal practice to safeguard their identity from external effects. Especially among the new converts the doctrine of the Koran was not central at all. Moreover, they were surrounded largely by non-Muslim communities and ethnic groups those that were gradually becoming Christianized; so they find themselves as Muslim minority cut off from the global scripturalist Islam and started developing their own version, which accommodated to customs and traditions. The guidance of the *shari'a* about the regulation of practices surrounding birth, marriage and death tended only to be followed where it was compatible with that of traditional tribal custom.⁵⁹ The leading cause for resumption of tribal customs was that they had already taken an inevitable part in relation with code of behavior and another one was the insufficiency of a rooted Islamic control mechanism. This is why newly converted people continued consulting old customs when Islamic perspective falls short. In addition to this, the ambiguity of Islamic terminology has led newly converted people to interpret the terms in accordance with the old customs, while attaching new dimensions to them. Apart from what is written about them in the Koran⁶⁰, the scope of *halāl*, *ḥarām* and *makrūh*, namely the basic algorithms of Islamic law, is still being discussed by Muslim scholars and based upon the personal and/or denominational interpretations of *aḥādīth* and *sunan*⁶¹. There is no consensus on these subjects yet, thus their implementation still varies from region to region. This indicates that local communities which adopted Islam as their belief system were not utterly passive. Through adding recent socio-cultural contexts to Islamic doctrines and thus transforming them into conceivable notions, they played an active role concerning the specific characteristics of Islam in East Africa.

⁵⁸ S.V. Sicard, "The Arrival of Islam in Malawi and the Muslim Contribution to Development", in: *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 20(2000), pp 302-303.

⁵⁹ J.N.D. Anderson, *Islamic Law in Africa*, London: Frank Cass 1970, p. 166.

⁶⁰ For example in the Koran 2:173, 6: 118-119-121, 5: 5-90 some basic rules for the dietary code is explained; but there is still no agreement on, i.e., the validity of Hippopotamus flesh etc... "He hath only forbidden you dead meat, and blood, and the flesh of swine, and that on which any other name hath been invoked besides that of Allah. But if one is forced by necessity, without willful disobedience, nor transgressing due limits,- then is he guiltless. For Allah is Oft-forgiving Most Merciful." The Koran 2:173, Abdullah Yusuf Ali (trans.).

⁶¹ Singluar: *sunna*.

2.3.1. *Turuq*

Starting with the establishment of British missionaries and consequently the institutionalization of Christianity around Lake Malaŵi, the Yao, especially the slave traders, became a main target of the British Protectorate, which Mitchell verifies as follows: “From 1885 until the close of the century, Britain followed a militant policy against all slave-traders and amongst them were the Yao”⁶². The aim was to suppress slave-trade and cut the economic interaction between the Yao people and Muslims. Therefore during the last decade of 19th century many armed conflicts took place in order to

1. Stop the slave-trade and seclude the Yao from their co-religionists and
2. Stop the ‘white’ invasion, which is seen as a threat to settled norms.

But in the end defiant Yao chiefs Jalasi, Makanjira, Kawinga and Matipwiri were defeated. From this moment on, with the failure of protagonist chiefs, British Administration started to pacify the Yao through disarming them and taking control of the area.

The declaration of British Central Africa Protectorate in 1891, which was subsequently transformed into Nyasaland in 1907, was a political act; but its lasting influence on local Muslim groups, especially on Yao people, triggered a religious reaction over the period of time, which might have resulted in a tendency towards Islamic mystical *turuq* like the Qādirīya and Shadhiliyya. This orientation also coincides with the Witchcraft Ordinance in 1911 passed by British Administration that prohibits the practice of witchcraft “which was fundamental to the social life of the Yao.”⁶³ With the implementation of this ordinance practicing witchcraft and any similar act was prohibited. It is possible that in order to fulfill these ‘fundamental’ spiritual experiences, mysticism that is brought by mystical orders might have become a substitute of the esoteric world of witchcraft among Yao people; since both offer a privileged status to their ‘insiders’ by providing a sacred environment out of commonly practiced belief system. In order to highlight the importance of mystic orders as a legit social organization within the doctrines of Islam, Frishkopf writes that: “Sufi orders have been ubiquitous and socially mainstream throughout much of Islamic

⁶² J.C. Mitchell, “The Yao of Southern Nyasaland”, in: *Seven Tribes of British Central Africa*, London: Oxford University Press 1951, p. 308.

⁶³ E. Colson & M. Gluckman (ed.), *Seven Tribes of British Central Africa*, London: Oxford University Press 1951, p. 310.

history as a means of facilitating spiritual growth beyond what is required by the exoteric ritual and belief of *shari'a*, and as a means of providing a supportive social organization.”⁶⁴ Thus this new trend to Sufi orders among Yao people during the first decades of 20th century can be seen as one of the results of British Protectorate’s political aims, as well as a need for a platform to retain some elements of past experiences, which had no concern with orthodox Islam.

While W. v. Kol⁶⁵ and S. v. Sicard⁶⁶ consider this date as the second phase of Islamic penetration into the groups settled along and south of Lake Malaŵi; Thorold names this period as “appropriation and accommodation of Islamic change”⁶⁷. It is this second phase where crucial practices emerged or, in other words, partial Islamization⁶⁸ of pre-Islamic religious practices took place on a regular basis.

New generation of Muslim-born Africans, who have received both scriptural and denominational education in East Africa’s Islamic religious centers such as Zanzibar and Mombasa, have become the leading actors of Islamization of tribal practices. Up to that time sectarian Islam was popular only among a certain elite class, which is composed of Arab Omanis and Hadhramis, Indians and Comorians. Nevertheless with the efforts of rising African Sufis this privilege has taken from them and scattered across the proselytism routes. Sufis became influential advisors not just for religious life but also for daily routines by opening new Koran schools and *madāris* throughout the region. These schools gave the local Muslims “a sense of spiritual and moral orientation, which contributed to their cultural identity”⁶⁹ and thus made the introduction of sectarian Islam to society relatively easier than before. Mumisa draws attention to this issue through writing:

“The setting up of a system of *madrassah* education was a feature of the spread and consolidation of Islam among the Yao in southeastern Malawi as well as helping in their upliftment of general education so that they could relate to the Muslim world. The driving force behind this were the

⁶⁴ Frishkopf 2008: 495.

⁶⁵ Willemijn Van Kol, “Ummah in Zomba: Transnational Influences on Reformist Muslims in Malawi”, in: *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 28(2008), p. 437.

⁶⁶ Sicard 2000: 303.

⁶⁷ Alan Thorold: *The Yao Muslims: Religion and Social Change in Southern Malawi*, Dissertation Churchill College 1995, p. 70.

⁶⁸ On the other hand there was also Christianization of some certain practices, with the special effort of Vincent Lucas, Bishop of Masasi. “(...) he was eager to turn the elements connected with paganism to the ends of Christianity.”

Terence Ranger, “Missionary Adaptation of African Religious Institutions. The Masasi Case”, in: *The Historical Study of African Religion*, Great Britain: Heinemann Educational Books 1972, p.238.

⁶⁹ A.J. Matiki, “The Social and Educational Marginalization of Muslim Youth in Malawi”, in: *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 1999, p. 250.

sheikhs, the learned scholars of Islam who with enthusiastic backing from the chiefs set about establishing Islam by promoting education by building mosques, Islamic schools, teaching basic literacy in Swahili, Arabic and local languages, disseminating literature, giving instruction in Islamic beliefs and practices, and perhaps most significantly training promising young men as *mwalimu*, teachers and even *sheikhs* in their own right”.⁷⁰

In spite of their rising popularity in the region, the Yao were almost the only Muslims, to whom these orders and their practices are widely known. Because the main settlements of orders were not close to the interior and so it was only possible for those who can travel to the coast to get in touch with orders and interact with them. The Qādirīya and Shadhiliyya orders are the most influential ones among all the Sufi orders in East Africa. Each order has dominated different parts of East Africa, but the Qādirīya way was more effective than Shadhiliyya, especially after 1920’s and around the Lake Malaŵi. Referring to the reasons of expansion of sectarian Islam through inland, Alpers points out three main developments:

- “The presence after 1916 of more than six thousand British colonial troops, most of them Muslims;
- the advance of Muslim Indian commerce beyond the coast; and
- the construction of the railroad inland from Lumbo, on the mainland opposite Mozambique Island, from 1913.”⁷¹

One of the most interesting aspects of Alpers’ reasoning is that none of the developments is religious in nature, which strengthens the idea of emerging of religious changes as a reaction to socio-economic events. Thus it is legit to assert that even the strictest version of any belief system is in a close relationship with societies’ external and internal affairs, either as an opposition or affirmation mechanism.

It should be noted that the sectarianism here not only functioned as an opposition to ‘Westernism’, but also as a probable option alongside of rigid orthodox Islam; since orthodox Islam is more often practised individually and so destructs the notion of fundamental characteristic of collectivist local belief systems. Within the context of some certain rituals like *dikr*, it can be said that Sufi orders offered a familiar way of collectivism and led East African Muslims to experience their belief again in groups. For this reason Thorold states that the adoption of Islam in such way should not be considered as

⁷⁰ Michael Mumisa, “Islam and Proselytism in South Africa and Malawi”, in: *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 22(2002), p. 281.

⁷¹ Edward A. Alpers, “East Central Africa”, in: *The History of Islam in Africa*, Ohio: Ohio University Press 2000, p. 312.

syncretism, “implying that one is dealing with two different systems, when in fact what was happening was merely the transformation and addition of a few practices.”⁷² That means the Sufi practices adapted to local customs are specifically chosen in accordance with these practices’ consistency in old belief systems and in the course of time they either meet the demands of society; or become obsolete and undergo a transformation based on society’s needs.

2.3.2. Different Periods of *Turuq*

The practices introduced and/or modified through Islam, such as *jando*, *ziyala* and *sikiri* (or *sikili*, similar local pronunciations of *dikr*), also became the subject of transformation processes and showed unique specialities in the recent history of Yao people. Throughout the last hundred years of the Yao these Islamic practices have been appropriated to local customs and gained/lost some certain contexts in accordance with religious views of the rulers. With ‘the rulers’ it is meant a new emerging class among Yao society that is composed of Muslim local chiefs, *mwaliimu*⁷³ and religiously well-educated representatives from various sectarian brotherhoods. This new class has become influential especially after the arrival of various *turuq* into the region. Where one *tariqa* outweighs the other, there they shape the rules and lead above mentioned practices in their own terms. Concerning these different approaches toward Islamic practices among Yao people, Thorold highlights three major phases within which various concepts and approaches toward religion can be found:

- *twaliki* [followers of Sufi *turuq*]
- *suquti* [quietists, anti-Sufi]
- new reformists [followers of global scripturalist Islam]

What Thorold uses as his reference point while constructing this three-staged model is the role of the Koran and its influence on different phases. Each phase can be marked by the level of utilization of the Koran. The majority of Islamic practices were introduced to Yao people during the first phase, *twaliki*, during which a radical influence of the Koran was not the case. As it was said before, within this phase the adoption of new religious practices was not a replacement, rather an elaboration and appropriation of old and new customs. The distance from the Koran as well as Islamic centers concentrated in the

⁷² Thorold 1995: 134.

⁷³ Ar. The one who teaches, i.e. Islamic doctrines.

Middle East, has led the Yao, use certain practices in a way that only they can give shape. As an example to that indigenous boys initiation ceremonies involving partial circumcision has transformed into '*jando*', deriving from the coast, which entailed full circumcision and functions as an introduction to Islam for initiates."⁷⁴

During the first phase especially the Qādirīya and Shadhiliyya were the prominent protagonists of the movement. With their widely known and appreciated sheikhs and *mwali* they were able to disseminate their doctrines and perspectives among newly converted Yao Muslims. On the other hand the mysticism of these brotherhoods was not similar to the ones that were shortly explained earlier. Even though there are few sources providing comprehensive information about the inner-mystic organizations and/or 'paths' of these brotherhoods; the lack of middle-eastern mysticism among them is clearly visible.

The first phase is primarily significant with the implementation of ritualistic practices. In relation to this, development of *suquti* movement can be seen as a reaction to these ritualized Islamic practices, particularly to the form and context of *sikiri*. But before the *suquti* adherents started to oppose such forms, there were also minor disputes between two major *ṭuruq* among the Yao in both Malaŵi and northwestern Mozambique; since according to Trimingham,

"each group has its own religious outlook compounded from the parallel action of Islam and the spirit world upon their lives. Each centre, quarter and social class has its own recitals of *qasīda* and *maulidi*, its own dances, music and amusements; in short, its own special atmosphere."⁷⁵

This ambiguous situation of *sikiri* indicates a hermeneutic problem between two *ṭuruq*, since "each order is marked by its particular ritual, far more than by any discrimination of doctrine"⁷⁶. This means that even though *sikiri* fundamentally has the same meaning and serve for same interests of different *ṭuruq*, its performative conditions are dependent on variables settled by orders.

From a wider perspective it can be seen that emergence of *suquti* movement also corresponds to an awareness and closer contact with the global scripturalist Islam. Adherents of this new trend were in favor of relatively more restricted versions of rituals; although they were not fundamentally against all the practices with ritualistic elements.

⁷⁴ Alpers 2000:313.

⁷⁵ Trimingham 1964: 74.

⁷⁶ Arthur J. Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam*, London: Unwin Paperbacks 1979, p. 89.

Simply a regulation should be brought in order to have a more proper way to perform them. One of their primary oppositions was the implementation of *sikiri* at funerals. There is no tangible information to evaluate the whole process of *sikiri* practice and what exactly *suquti* adherents were opposing, but regarding this discussion there is a short explanation in Thorold's work that underlines a focal point: "(...) doing *sikiri* at the funeral is a huge sin. The Lord does not like dancing at the funeral. But to pray silently and grumble in the heart alone, until they bury the body."⁷⁷ Alpers also points out that *sikiri* at those times (during the first phase) was composed of "loud chanting, drumming and waving *tariqa* flags"⁷⁸; but the only information concerning the calendar suggests that it was mainly practiced at funerals. With this information at hand it can be said that *suquti* adherents might have aimed to disseminate the scripturalist Islam by opposing the usage of above-stated ritualistic elements "and argued strenuously for a more dignified, quietist approach to such ceremonies, and to Islam in general."⁷⁹ Following the doctrines of orthodox Islam, negative approach of *suqutis* towards mystic rituals has most likely become influent among Yao people and as a result certain elements of *sikiri* practice might have been omitted in the course of time. From this point on concerning the characteristics of *sikiri* dance some new questions to be answered arise. What has happened to it in the last hundred years or what are the similarities/differences between today's *sikiri* and the *sikiri* of *twaliki* era is not extensively known, thus making a comparison between the two becomes a formidable task.

Taking into consideration what Alpers said, the primary difference could be the usage of drums in a *sikiri* performance. It is reasonable if *suquti* adherents considered drumming as an accompaniment to a religious practice as *haram*⁸⁰ and insisted that drums must be excluded from the rituals. This attitude clearly draws parallels with orthodox Islam's approach to musical instruments used in religious rituals. But it is still unknown to what extent *suquti* adherents managed to exclude musical instruments from rituals or whether they were the only reason of a *sikiri* practice without instrumental accompaniment. Consequently, with the emergence of the third phase, new reformist era, which has many similarities with the preceding one as well as differences concerning the nature of

⁷⁷ Alan Thorold, "Metamorphoses of the Yao Muslims", in: *Muslim Identity and Social Change in Sub-Saharan Africa*, London: Hurst & Company 1993, p. 86.

⁷⁸ Alpers 2000:313.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ar. Sinful in Islamic law.

opposition, global Islam has strengthened its scripturalist influence on local Muslims and ensured that the religious practices are performed in accordance with the holy Koran, in other words, without instrumental accompaniment.

The new reformists did not define themselves as an anti-Sufi movement as in the case of *suqutis*. Their influence on Yao society was to bring a new, well-defined Muslim identity and make it the foremost model for all the Yao Muslims. This approach imposed a supra-identity, which was strictly founded on religious doctrines of Islam. According to new reformists being Muslim is now considered necessary and sufficient condition to define the Yao. Thorold states that “the new reformists not only identify themselves as Muslim first and foremost, but they also model their behavior and Islamic practice on that of an ideal type imported directly from the Middle East.”⁸¹ With the implementation of new Muslim identity their primary aim was to avoid marginalizing themselves and instead of that be part of Muslim world at large. From this perspective some idiosyncratic local elements as well as Sufi multiplicity were considered as discriminators and thus, in order to find a common ground, locally practiced Islam must be associated to global one. At this point, within the context of Islam, tribal and/or religious differences have become ignorable and only Muslim identity has been emphasized. One slogan, frequently heard at meetings of new reformist Muslim Students’ Association demonstrates a good example to this: “No Qadiriyya! No Sukutiyya! Islamiyya!”⁸²

It is clear that new reformists are strictly hinged upon the holy Book and scripturalist doctrines; this is why their approach to *sikiri* is not obvious as in the cases of *twaliki* and *suquti* movements. But when their relations with *suqutis* and in addition to that scripturalist Islam’s approach on performing *ḍikr* are considered, it can be said that *sikiri* is still a matter of debate for Muslims of Malaŵi and its performative aspects, except the rule on the usage of drums, are not fixed yet.

Regarding these three distinct approaches on *sikiri* it is highly possible that this dance style has been a major subject of transformation throughout the history of Islam in Malaŵi and practiced in significantly different ways. With respect to this, one should be aware that the two *sikiri* dances recorded in Mangochi and Blantyre Districts in March 2013, which will be thoroughly explained in the following chapters, indicate certain periodical and local

⁸¹ Thorold 1993: 80.

⁸² Ibid: 87.

features and provide limited information. The aim of this study is not to give a comprehensive explanation and reasoning about *sikiri*; but to show potential connections, relations and diversities of it. Thus instead of trying to classify this dynamic and ever-changing dance style, the primary aim is to underline its structural and contextual transformation patterns. In order to put that into practice some explanations on dance in general must be given.

3. Dance

There are a few methods to analyze dance styles of foreign cultures. As one of the least studied forms of ‘art’, it has not been comprehensively analyzed and valid methods of analyzing different dance styles are scarce. Throughout the last century different theories and approaches have emerged in order to put the motions of dancing human body in a written form; but none of them provided an inclusive method yet that can be utilized for all dances. On the other hand, considering the inadequacy of musical notation systems when it comes to write down the music of unfamiliar cultures, one should also not expect to have an all-inclusive dance notation system. Main problem is the practicability of invented methods for a new dance style that differs culturally and contextually from that method’s original usage area. The widely accepted notation systems that are in use today can only cover certain aspects of dances and generally must be adopted afresh in accordance with the unknown dance style. Among all these system of notations especially *Labanotation* invented by Rudolf von Laban; *Benesh* notation by Joan and Rudolf Benesh; *Choreometrics* by Alan Lomax; and *Effort-Shape* notation which is an expanded version of *Labanotation* developed by Laban and his pupils are the most prominent ones; but each comes with its difficulties: some have an emphasize only on particular aspects of movement organization or do not cover cross-cultural varieties and others are too detailed to utilize. On this issue Anya P. Royce quotes from Juana de Laban in her book *The Anthropology of Dance*: “They are either too idiosyncratic to be applicable to all types of dance, or too complicated to be easily memorized and used, or too simple to record details of dances with precision”⁸³ This is why in order to find a proper method to transcribe and analyze an unknown dance structurally as well as contextually, one should either (re-) invent a new way or adopt existing methods in association with culture’s own terminology, classification and value system where the dance occurs.

For a researcher who aims to analyze a dance style it is inevitable to use some features of above mentioned systems, thus a proper mixture of them can constitute a legit basis for analysis. On the other hand using only analytical tools can be insufficient for a comprehensive understanding, since culture-related phenomena must be understood within that culture’s own value system. An anthropologist, ethnomusicologist or ethnologist can collect data or corpus material of a dance style as well as its movement patterns, place in

⁸³ Anya P. Royce, *The Anthropology of Dance*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1977, p. 44.

social organization and context to a certain extent; but real problem occurs when he/she starts to describe, categorize and analyze such product of a foreign culture. Without knowledge of inspected culture's own language, terminology and internal sense of aesthetics, acquired information about its products, e.g. dance, cannot reach beyond the standards of encyclopedic data. The main reason of the occurrence of the problem is that the researcher generally tends to explain unknown phenomena through his/her own cultural background, consciously or not tries to define it in association to his/her own cultural semantic field. Thus to avoid the same predicament, in the prior chapter cultural and historical factors that build the background of *sikiri* dance were emphasized. As to this chapter and the following ones, structural and functional features of *sikiri* will be examined and by using certain features of foregoing dance analyze methods a frame pertain to *sikiri* will be drawn.

3.1. Function and Structure of Dance and Different Theoretical Approaches

According to Snyder "dance functions in some cultures, with as broad a spectrum of functions as the written word includes for others."⁸⁴ In addition to this, when dance is considered as a stylized and designed mode of communication, the set of meanings shared through it and the systems that provide transmission as well as reception of information take on a new significance for researchers. The information desired to transmit through dance is always equipped with host culture's historical and social features and so it can only be understood (fully) by people who take part in and/or are exposed to these processes. From this perspective it can be said that visible elements in a dance performance show only one dimension of the total range of dance activity. This is why to be able to comprehend all the aspects of a dance including its grammar, terminology and style "that is composed of symbols, forms and underlying value orientations"⁸⁵ one should also take non-occurrence of certain elements, possible shifts between particular body parts and many other un-mentioned but performed features into consideration. But for a researcher who is an outsider of the given culture and its dance, fulfilling such assignments necessitates a close relation, through which internal dynamics of dance performance and its distinctive environment can be revealed. This is possible to a certain extent by implementing various anthropological methods and self-experimentation of the dance. Kaepler argues that in

⁸⁴ A. Snyder, "The Dance Symbol", in: *New Dimensions in Dance Research - Anthropology and Dance*, New York: Committee on Research in Dance, 1974, p. 213.

⁸⁵ A. P. Royce, *Five Centuries of Dance Notation*, Manuscript, 1975: 54.

order to notate dance accurately “it is helpful (indeed almost necessary) for the notator to be able to perform the movements himself in order to analyze exactly what the various parts of the body are doing and in what sequence they are done.”⁸⁶ This approach correspond to a certain type of data collection method, i.e. participant observation, used and developed by known anthropologists such as Frank Hamilton Cushing, Bronisław Malinowski, and Margaret Mead. When viewed from this perspective a dance analyst and an anthropologist share a considerable common ground, therefore when studying a foreign dance, the analyst is obliged to use the methods of anthropology and some other disciplines.

3.2. Functions of Dance

Besides the formal and structural specialties of a dance style, a dance analyst should also look at the function of dance. Starting from this point researcher can unfold the scope of the inspected dance, the way of perception of the dance in the given society and what exactly it addresses in complex social pattern. Functionalist approach in this context and in general (by itself) is not enough to expose all the essentials of a dance and should be reinforced with additive information; since it inherently ignores particular elements of change such as independency, contradiction and individual choice; but it deepens different dimensions of dance research, where structure and form give limited information regarding the context. Moreover with the contribution of dance’s probable functions one can better interpret the building elements of the structure and their underlying meanings. The second part of this study was to point out the possible reasons that brought *sikiri* into the region as well as its adoption processes by people and in addition to that external factors that gave shape to functionality of *sikiri* dance among Yao people. In this section, the range of this dance by using settled functional typologies of various scholars will be examined and in the following chapter in accordance with these typologies the possible usage areas of *sikiri* will be explained.

Regarding the functionality of dance Gertrude Kurath (1949) makes distinction of fifteen different occasions where dance may serve a particular function⁸⁷:

⁸⁶ Adrienne Kaeppler, *The Structure of Tongan Dance*, Ph.D. diss., University of Hawaii, 1967: 32.

⁸⁷ Gertrude Kurath, “Dance: Folk and Primitive”, in: *Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*, Funk and Wagnalls, pp. 277-296.

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|--------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| • Puberty | • Occupations | • Battle Mime |
| • Initiation | • Vegetation | • Cure |
| • Courtship | • Astronomical Dances | • Death |
| • Friendship | • Hunting | • Ecstatic Dance |
| • Weddings | • Animal Mime | • Clown Dances |

The main problem with this classification is the cross-cultural validity of such categories. While in one culture puberty and initiation can be evaluated as two different notions; but in others they may coexist and even include hunting, cure and ecstatic notions all together. One possible solution for such problematic classification may be the usage of culture's own point of view and classification instead. Another problematic area is the historical, regional or individual shift of context dependent on numerous varieties: it is possible that a dance which carries a certain information or emphasizes a significant occasion may lose or gain meanings in the course of time, while keeping its idiosyncratic motion organizations, figures and gesticulation. This means a dance once celebrating puberty might turn into a wedding or vegetation dance and so move beyond the borders of above mentioned categories. For this reason Anthony Shay (1971) constructed a more general typology of categories, which is composed of six parts:

- dance as a reflection and validation of social organization,
- dance as a vehicle of secular and religious ritual expression,
- dance as a social diversion or recreational activity,
- dance as a psychological outlet and release,
- dance as a reflection of aesthetic values or as an aesthetic activity in itself,
- dance as a reflection of economic subsistence patterns, or an economic activity itself.

Shay's organization is seemingly classifying the functions of dances on a larger scale with relatively lesser problematic points than Kurath's proposal; but at the same time sharing similar drawbacks. In this manner Royce draws attention to incommmodity of such classifications as follows, "the first problem we encounter is how to determine which function is predominant in situations where the dance has more than one function. A multiplicity of functions tends to be the rule rather than the exception."⁸⁸ It is clear that the

⁸⁸ Royce 1977: 83-84.

same difficulty must be faced in all attempts to classify a dance according to its functions. This is why instead of creating functional categories of dances dependent on mainly personal biases and generally valid only for one specific culture, one should aim to locate a dance within the investigated culture's own perspective, where interviews gain a certain importance to collect solid data.

Among all the articles of Shay's classification, the fourth one, 'dance as a psychological outlet and release' is current and common almost in all functional classifications. Paul Spencer validates this opinion by writing "the literature on dance frequently emphasizes its cathartic value, releasing pent up emotions."⁸⁹ and additionally he gives valuable examples from various scholars: According to P. Spencer this notion has evolved in the writings of Herbert Spencer who explored the variety of emotions that expressed themselves in muscular action – music, laughter and then dancing. For H. Spencer emotion was a form of nervous energy, which had to have a natural outlet. If that was denied, then it would get intense and had to be released through some other channel. In a similar vein anthropologist Evans Pritchard suggested that Azande Beer dance (South Sudan) served among other things 'to canalize the forces of sex into socially harmless channels' while Margaret Mead suggested that the informal dances of Samoan children provided a release from their rigorous repression and subordination by adults in other spheres.⁹⁰

The range of Kurath's, Shay's or Spencer's articles can easily be widened and so be evaluated with broader perspectives. For example a further functional aspect of dance that is not clearly mentioned in Shay's classification is the usage of dance as an educational and pragmatic device, which can also be discussed within the compass of the first article, 'dance as a reflection and validation of social organization'. However such interventions to settled classifications seem like personal interpretations of them and consequently fall into a problematic area. When combined with interviews, insider's viewpoints and methods like participant observation, these typologies can also serve as a reference point in the context of functionality of dances.

There are also some other types of typologies and classifications regarding the functionality of dances but each of them is descriptive of certain practices, thus they are

⁸⁹ Paul Spencer, *Society and the Dance*, Cambridge University Press 1985, p. 4.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

not applicable to all. For more information, especially for the classification of African dances one can check various essays in the book “African Dance” edited by Kariamu Welsh Asante. Within this study these classifications that are not closely associated with *sikiri* will be left unexplained in order to protect the unity of the text.

4. *Sikiri*: Its Socio-religious Context and Function

According to Blacking, “movement, dance, music and ritual can usefully be treated as modes of human communication on a continuum from the nonverbal to the verbal. All four modes can express ideas that belong to other spheres of human activity: social, political, economic, religious and so on.”⁹¹ What gives *sikiri* dance its idiosyncratic features that (are) greatly differ from Malaŵi’s other dance styles, also makes eccentric to analyze for comprehensive understanding of it: the socio-political disintegration of Yao people from other communities of Malaŵi. One of the most compelling issues is here to evaluate *sikiri* whether as an African dance equipped with Islamic socio-religious extensions or as an Islamic semi-ritual dance originated in African sphere. As a dance style which incorporates these two dominant features at the same time *sikiri* must be handled with extreme care; and furthermore contribution as well as influence of each property must be cautiously examined. For this reason, within the context of *sikiri*, as in the functional typologies above, the generalizations made by various scholars such as Alfons M. Dauer and Helmut Günther on African dance(s) coincides with a problematic area when both put forward that “Polyzentrik ist das Grundphänomen der gesamten schwarzafrikanischen Tanzkultur. Sie ist typisch und spezifisch für das afrikanische Bewegungsverhalten.”⁹² This approach, for example, seemingly does not fit to *sikiri* dance in total; since in *sikiri* the main stress generally is on the legs along with feet, while the upper part of the body, including the head, shoulders, torso and pelvis, does not have a clear, organized utilization. Thus polycentric division of the body is hardly the case, which is also validated by Dr. Moya Aliya Malamusi during a personal conversation with him. This is most likely because of *sikiri*’s Arab-Islamic background that it contains certain features unlike other dances in the

⁹¹ John Blacking, “Movement, dance, music and Venda girls’ initiation cycle”, in: *Society and the Dance*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 64-65.

⁹² Helmut Günther, *Grundphänomene und Grundbegriffe des afrikanischen und afroamerikanischen Tanzes*, Wien: Universal Edition 1970, p. 54.

Alfons M. Dauer, “Zum Bewegungsverhalten afrikanischer Tänzer”, in: *Musik in Afrika*, Berlin: Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin 1983a (40), pp. 234-235.

same region or African dances in general. On the other hand, arms do have an ambiguous utilization in *sikiri* dance. Whereas in men's performance of *sikiri* in Issa Village arms were rarely in use, approximately %5 of whole performance; in Liganda Chididi Village their usage (in a relatively more controlled and organized way) was discernable almost more than %50 of the whole performance. This aspect will be examined in detail in the next chapters.

As Blacking puts it various 'socio-political, economic etc.' circumstances are highly determinant of non-/occurrence, content and structure of any dance genre and this is why the marginal situation of Yao people as a Muslim minority in Malaŵi and their cultural products with background processes, e.g. *sikiri*, necessitate a special approach beyond the foregoing generalizations, even though such attempt might be legit for great numbers of African cultures.

Regarding the context, structure and the function(s) of *sikiri* among the Yao, Islamic features of it are seemingly more dominant and decisive than the generalizations made for African dances. In other words, with respect to *sikiri* dance Islamic conception of the human body becomes an inevitable reference point, from which it is concluded that the body must be handled in a way faithful to Islam's fundamental moral codes. This moral issue will be elaborated and discussed later in relation to ablution and dress code in *sikiri*. At the level of law, Islam conceives of the human body mainly in terms of its rights and duties. It attaches great importance to the overall health, welfare, and well-being of the body. A normal and healthy body may serve as a perfect instrument for either virtues or vices. This is also in accord with the explanations of Yao informants regarding *sikiri* dance: they affirm that *sikiri* is performed when they feel mentally as well as physically healthy and strong enough. In Islam, the idea of having a perfectly healthy body is so that it may act as a perfect instrument of the soul to realize the very purpose for which it has been created.

Contextually the occurrence of *sikiri* dance is solely associated to Islamic calendar and religious occasions, which as well designates the scope of it. As in the case of *dikr*, *sikiri* is performed primarily for the observance of the birthday of Prophet Muhammad, known as

mawlid or *maulid*⁹³; if not, according to Yao informants, occasionally one can also perform it irrespective of predetermined events, in short, when he/she feels like to do it and when mentally as well as physically ready. For instance, the two *sikiri* dances that were recorded during the short fieldwork in Malaŵi were performed independently from their ordinary calendar, i.e. as a staged performance for the observers, which obviously distort their original performative meaning and as a result constitute only limited information.

Besides *maulid* there are other determined days in Islamic calendar, during which *dikr* and/or *sikiri* performances along with particular rituals might occur. *Lailat al-Qadr* (the night of majesty), the twenty-seventh night of Ramadan, indicating the first revelation of the Koranic verses to Prophet Muhammad, is being celebrated throughout the Islamic world. It is also observed by Muslim Yao people in Malaŵi, and according to the informants, Sheikh Yunus Wasikisi and Sheikh Rabika Arab, *sikiri* is primarily performed during this special day; presumably after *iftār*, the evening meal that ends each day's fast during Ramadan. Other than *Lailat al-Qadr* a *ṭarīqa* may also execute certain rituals on any day of Ramadan with regard to its specific calendar. *ʿĪdu l-Fiṭr* (feast of breaking the fast), marking the end of Ramadan, is another special day to perform rituals as well as *dikr* and among the Yao, *sikiri*. The third, and one of the most important day for celebrations throughout the Islamic world and “in many parts of Africa is *ʿid al-adha* [or *ʿĪdu l-Aḍḥā*], the feast of the sacrifice, also known as *ʿid al-kabir*, the greater feast, or Tabaski in many African countries, commemorating the sacrifice of a lamb by Abraham, marking the end of the hajj that takes place several months after Ramadan.”⁹⁴ Further there are occasions celebrated with similar performances, but independent of Islamic calendar. Within the context of performing *sikiri* among Yao people on particular occasions, Thorold writes that “The Yao followers of the *tariqa* (Qadiriyya) perform *sikiri* on occasions such as *ziyala* (founder's anniversary), funerals, weddings and other festivals.”⁹⁵ To perform *sikiri* on a *ziyala* (*syala*, *zyara*, *ziara* etc...), a pious visit to the tombs of ancestors, to the sheikh and the important members of a brotherhood, one does not have to be a *ṭarīqa* member

⁹³ *Mawlid* falls in the month of *Rabi' al-awwal*, which is the third month in the Islamic calendar. Shias observe the event on the 17th of the month, coinciding with the birth date of their sixth imam Ja'far al-Sadiq and the Prophet Muhammad, while some other *ṭuruq* observe it on the 12th of the month. As the Islamic calendar is a lunar calendar, the corresponding date in the Gregorian calendar varies each year.

⁹⁴ Eric Charry, “Music and Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa”, in: *The History of Islam in Africa*, Ohio: Ohio University Press 2000, p. 552.

⁹⁵ Alan Thorold, “The politics of mysticism: Sufism and Yao identity in Southern Malawi” in: *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 15:1, 110.

nowadays. It is because under the influence of late Muslim movements, from *twaliki* to new reformists until today, *turuq* have lost their ascendancy among Malaŵian Muslims and as result being a member of a *ṭarīqa* has now less importance than being a Muslim. As to informants, *sikiri* performances do not exclude non-Muslims neither as audience nor as participants. Moreover Christians and/or members of other religions have also access to the dance; “unless they are drunk.”⁹⁶

One prominent feature of *sikiri* dance, as it was mentioned before, its possible kinship with *ḍikr* practice. *Sikiri* and *ḍikr* resemble each other in many ways. On the other hand, certain contextual and structural distinction between them was made by the head of Issa Mosque, Sheikh Yunus Wasikisi, during a personal conversation in Malaŵi. In light of these information *sikiri* dance can be better understood when these two opposing routes are followed. By this way usable facts regarding *sikiri* dance might come into light.

4.1. Kinship between *sikiri* and *ḍikr*

While many theologians and scholars consider *ḍikr* primarily as a ritualistic form, some other may see it as ‘sacred dance’. Even though partially organized body movements implemented in a *ḍikr* practice can be seen as the motions that form a dance style; contextually *ḍikr* is not a dance. In the example of *ḍikr* the movements executed in a performance have no special meaning or any descriptive feature. Thus *ḍikr* practice drifts apart, for instance, from Isadora Duncan’s following approach on dance: “If I could tell you what it meant, there would be no point in dancing it”. Because in *ḍikr* it is the word that has meaning and accompanying movements do not convey any particular content. In addition to that none of the performers or religious authority would call it dance. On the other hand, hypothetically, it is likely that the motional patterns of *ḍikr* might have an expanded utilization area as dance movements in *samā* of the Mawlawīyya and/or of *sikiri* and consequently gain particular meaning over time (Figure 5 & Figure 6). In this way the inalterable solid religious doctrines can be stretched out for the creation of a new form, which can be named as dance; but there is no tangible proof yet that whether these forms, e.g. *samā* and *sikiri*, can be evaluated as the extensions of *ḍikr* or not.

⁹⁶ Sheikh Rabika Arab, during a personal conversation.



Figure 5: Movement of hands have a particular meaning in *samā* of *Mawlawīyya*: right hands are opened upwards, take blessing from God; and left hands look downward, transmit God's blessing to the earth.⁹⁷

Leaving aside the consanguineous analogies of *sikiri* and *ḍikr*, one can still argue the functional commonalities between them. From this perspective three main association can be stressed: firstly, both provide an alternative place of existence for ethereal feelings, out of settled rules of scriptural (Koranic) doctrines, in which participants express their devotion to God, the Prophet Mohammad and/or particular saints of *ṭarīqa*; secondly they enable, as Paul Spencer puts it, 'release of pent-up emotions' for their practitioners (see Spencer 1985: 4); and thirdly, both constitute a symbol of Muslim identity that can also be seen as a mechanism building up a group solidarity. Apart from these there can be further functional relations between *sikiri* and *ḍikr* and considering the typologies above, these commonalities can also be widened and attributed to further classifications.

⁹⁷ Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dervishes_Avanos.JPG (17.10.2013)



Figure 6: Arm figures of the leader and the other participants during a *sikiri* dance performance in Issa Village, Blantyre District. According to participants and Sheikh Yunus Wasikisi, these arm figures do not have any meaning. Photo taken by Lisa Padouvas, 2013.

The first putative function of *sikiri* can be better understood when the functions of *ṭuruq* in southeast Africa are taken into consideration. As mentioned in the previous pages, under the title of *ṭuruq*, when local people adopted Islam as their religion, a need occurred to adjust it according to their former belief system. In this respect *ṭuruq* provided an alternative way for practicing religious liturgies, while including both scriptural doctrines and remnants of old belief system to a certain extent. Moreover, particular dates celebrated by Muslims around the world, in which new ritual forms come forward, for example *Mawlid* or *ṭarīqa*'s leader's birth- and death anniversaries, are absent from the Koran, because such activities historically supervene upon it. Therefore practices like *sikiri* and *dīkr* gain an importance as carriers of blooming hybrid rituals, which are not referred in the

Koran. Since scriptural Islam does not clearly manifest how to perform these practices, application of them have been organized in many different ways up to this day. One common ground of almost all these practices is that they constitute an alternative setting in order to fulfill people's connection to the divine in a ritualistic way and so give chance to practitioners to express their ethereal feelings with different forms.

The second probable function of *sikiri* is associated to dance in general. According to Spencer "the notion that dancing may have some therapeutic value is at least as ancient as the dancing epidemics of the Middle Ages"⁹⁸, in addition to that, he borrows the findings of other scholars such as Edward E. Evans-Pritchard and Margaret Mead, which attach an anthropological dimension to his point, to consolidate his approach on dance as a 'safety valve'. The influence of dance on its practitioners as a psychological relief medium is controversial, since it can also be the reason of such nuisance and so create a conflict that it supposed to solve. From the perspective of *sikiri* and *dikr* one should argue the level of relief and conflict relation separately. While in *dikr* such conflict might be created intentionally and so during the whole process of a *dikr* performance it is aimed to be resolved through reaching a state of trance, e.g. *fanāfīllah*; on the other hand in *sikiri* apparently there is no such strategy; but this does not mean that *sikiri* dance cannot function as a psychological relief medium as well. The scope of religious symbolism in *sikiri*, in which conflict and resolution occurs, is not comprehensively known as in the case of *dikr*; however in association to dance in general, as a common feature of almost all dances, applying certain body movements might be helpful to externalize oppressed energy in common with doing physical exercise. To sum up shortly, although *sikiri* and *dikr* respectively show differences regarding their relieving function, it can be said that both possess this feature inherently.

The third assumed function of *sikiri* dance as a mechanism building up group solidarity is plausible, when the Yao taken consideration as a Muslim minority among many groups in Malaŵi. To be able to understand the collective self-identification of the Yao as a Muslim community, it is again necessary to refer Islamic terminology. The Arabic word *umma* (short version of *al-Umma al-islāmīya*) is a term that designates a supra-national Muslim community. *Umma* incorporates all the practitioners of Islam around the world irrespective

⁹⁸ Spencer 1985: 5.

of their nations, languages or any other descriptive hallmark. Being a Muslim community, the Yao also rightly consider themselves a part of *umma*. At this juncture Sheikh Yunus Wasikisi's comments on *sikiri* dance come into prominence: during the personal interview, he puts forth that the prayers read before and/or after a *sikiri* practice are not just for their own community; but also for the sake of entire *umma*. (See the interview) This obviously strengthens the idea of togetherness with the worldwide community of Islam, while *sikiri* dance itself apparently reinforces the Muslim identity among Yao people.

Besides this situation specific to Yao people, there are numerous aspects of dance that might be related creating a group solidarity. At the basic level a dance performance gathers people, both its practitioners and audiences under the same roof of collective activity. Among different genres, especially recreational dances mingle people without discriminating them as audience or performer. Anya P. Royce classifies such recreational dances as *informal*, which "usually require no more skill than the average and normally allow for improvisation"⁹⁹, thus participation to them is not limited by any rule and creating a group synergy is relatively more likely. On the other hand, as opposition to recreational dances, she puts *formal* dances, in which a certain level of technical skill is expected from the performers and an in-/visible border between them and audience is particularly drawn. These formal dances, according to Royce, "are those used explicitly as a symbol of identity on occasions [...] when there is a desire to create a feeling of group solidarity."¹⁰⁰ Apparently *sikiri* dance can be evaluated in either of Royce's categories; since, depending on the occasion, it might include the features of both; or one might rightly think of *dikr* as a formal practice with its symbolic background and *sikiri* as informal/recreational. However, main discussion is here, is not categorizing *sikiri* whether as formal or informal; but no matter which, if it provides any level of togetherness for the Yao and how.

As there are consanguineous analogies and functional commonalities between *sikiri* and *dikr*, in some respects they differ from each other greatly. The most prominent difference is, as it was mentioned in the previous chapters, they do not share or aim the same 'end product', e.g. the state of trance, which evidently differs their process, content and also determinant of their scope as well as participants. While in many *dikr* performances such

⁹⁹ Royce 1977: 165.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

phenomena might be the case, but ‘the two sikiri dances that were filmed in Malaŵi in March 2013 do not end up with any trance circumstance and there has been no report written yet that suggests the opposite.’ On the other hand according to some scholars such as Anderson, Kubik and Thorold, *sikiri* with a close association to *ḍikr*, once had such feature, in the form of spirit possession and/or ‘religious ecstasy’. In this respect Kubik cites from Thorold that “Among the Yao, *sikiri* has lost some of its original traits such as spirit possession, but it maintains the use of ecstatic guttural sounds produced by the participants, possibly inducing hyperventilation.”¹⁰¹ As Kubik puts it, guttural sounds and a kind of hyperventilation is still present in accompanied vocal music of *sikiri* dance; but without aiming any kind of state of trance. Anderson also identically suggests that “this (*chindimba* dance) has been partially islamised by the *dhikr* (*sikiri*), which is locally regarded purely as dance. Fervour in performing this is evidence of enjoyment of rhythm rather than religious ecstasy, for its true purpose is quite forgotten.”¹⁰²

Strictly associated to Islamic doctrines and as a result of the Koranic order; but at the same time partly opposing the behavioral codes of it, *ḍikr* practice, clearly falls into the category of religious forms and thus functions as a religious ritual expression vehicle. Within the Islamic terminology one can put *ḍikr* into *ḥalāl*¹⁰³ category of Islamic law and thus consider it as a way of worship. *Sikiri* in other respects additively includes a recreational feature for its practitioners, a facility that accommodates both earthly and divine emotions, which draws it away from *ḍikr*’s strict religious atmosphere, and thus it might be evaluated either as *makrūh*¹⁰⁴ or as *mubah*¹⁰⁵. Through the act of dancing *sikiri* the participants express not only their devotion to God; but, unlike in *ḍikr*, also joy of being healthy and strong. For this reason at the very beginning of this study *sikiri* was named as a semi-religious practice instead of as an absolute religious attitude and/or worship.

¹⁰¹ Gerhard Kubik, “Malawi” in: *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol.15. 2nd edition, 2001, p.656 & Thorold 1993: p. 84

¹⁰² Anderson 1970: 169.

¹⁰³ Any action and/or object that is permissible and lawful according to Islamic law.

¹⁰⁴ According to the Hanafi's is a command for abstinence from something established by a speculative proof. It is divided into two categories, namely, *makruh tahrīm* and *makruh tanzih*. The latter is closer to *haram* and can also be defined as being in diametrical opposition to a *wajib*. *Makruh tanzih* is closer to *mubah* and in diametrical opposition to a *mustahab*.

¹⁰⁵ In Islamic law this is an action neither forbidden nor recommended; but religiously neutral.

4.2. Other Islamic Aspects of *Sikiri*

4.2.1. Recited ‘Song’: *qaṣīda*

The most crucial aspect regarding the validation of *sikiri* as a religion associated dance and also as a form reminiscent of *dīkr* can be evaluated through observation its accompanied ‘songs’, namely *qaṣā'id*¹⁰⁶. All around the Islamic world *qaṣā'id* are being recited as accompaniment in *dīkr* performances as well as in various other religious occasions. *Qaṣīda* is a lyric poetry form originated in Arabian Peninsula (for some scholars also Persia) and dates back to pre-Islamic period in the given region. Abdulaziz shortly describes *qaṣīda* as follows: “The word *qaṣīda* came to mean specifically panegyrics eulogizing the Prophet, and also strictly religious poetry which is sung or chanted at religious occasions”¹⁰⁷ It is this religious panegyric nature that designates not only *sikiri*’s function in Yao society, but also its content and contextual sphere. When asked about the content and the main reason for performing *sikiri*, almost all the informants in Malaŵi gave a similar answer: to express their gratitude to God as well as glorification of Him. Concerning the panegyric nature of *qaṣā'id*, the usage of them in *sikiri* performances as the carrier of religious symbols seems legit.

As to content of *qaṣā'id* recited in Liganda Chididi Village, interestingly they are not necessarily only in Islamic context, there are as well stories and extracts from the Bible. Approximate¹⁰⁸ names and the meanings of *qaṣā'id* recited by men in Liganda Chididi Village are shown below (see Figure 7 for original hand written version):

- ***Adali(la) Wangalimoga***: The story of Samson from the Bible.
- ***Amaliama Akukama Kulambibi***: Maria has a child. Depicts Jesus as a miracle child.
- ***Suleimana akwete upileooo***: A story of Prophet Solomon ‘the wise’, who can communicate with animals.
- ***Chiwacho Islamu/ Poko Poko***

¹⁰⁶ Pl. *qaṣīda*.

¹⁰⁷ M.H. Abdulaziz, “The influence of the qasida on the development of Swahili rhymed and metred verse“, in: *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia & Africa*, Brill 1995, p. 413.

¹⁰⁸ Even though Dr. Moya Malamusi was there to translate the names, there might be spelling errors of the names. For this reason a picture of the list of *qaṣā'id*, written down by one of the performers or Sheikh himself, is taken and attached to the text.

- **Patuma Numalilaga Waliga:** A story of Fatimah, a daughter of the Prophet Muhammad.
- **Kuwandichira kwa Kiyamaku:** A story about the judgment day in Islamic perspective.
- **Amusa walepile kachilila Chiwa:** A story of Moses from Bible.

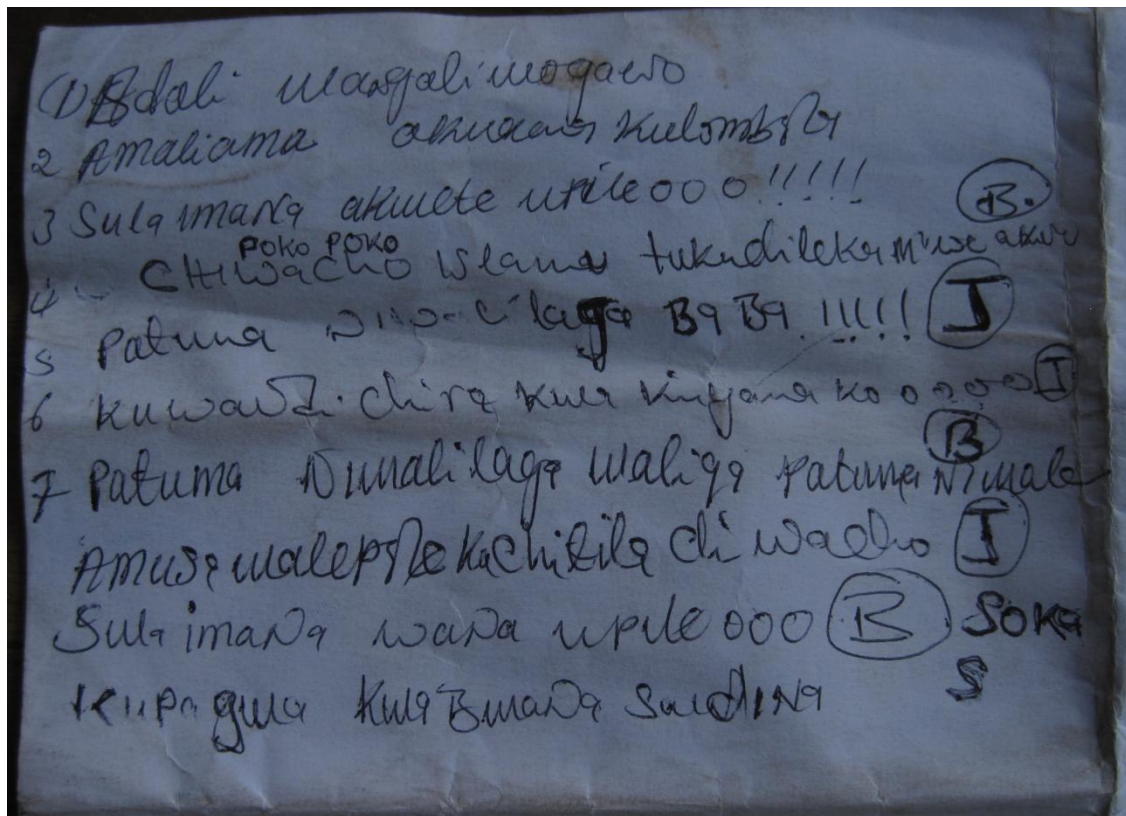


Figure 7: Hand-written version of recited qasā'id in Liganda Chididi Village.

Qasā'id recited by women in Liganda Chididi Village:

- **Kul-huvallahû**
- **Bibi Patuma**
- **Apatuma Mwanangu**
- **Asifati wa usyaga**
- **Chiwa changalanga**
- **Tinjile ulime katame**

Furthermore, Yao informants made it clear that they do not name recited *qaṣā'id* as 'songs' in the global sense of the term, nor as poems that can be 'sung'.¹⁰⁹ This means that, if they named the recited *qaṣā'id* as song in its global sense, they might vitiate the divine features of it; thus it can be said that the Yao were also under the influence of orthodox Islamic *shari'a* and in this context they adjusted their cultural products in accordance with it, at least for a certain amount of time and to a certain extent. On the other hand they nevertheless use the term 'dance' significantly to describe *sikiri*, even though it as well falls into a problematic area in *shari'a*'s value system. This can be related not only to Yao's non-Islamic background, but also the status of dance in African socio-cultural systems in general.

This religious corpus of *qaṣā'id* and dance, the building blocks of *sikiri*, is never accompanied by musical instruments, neither locally constructed ones nor the ones that have association to music of Islam and/or Arabs; but rather by guttural voices and stamping of the feet to the ground. Such guttural voices and stamping of the feet have remarkable roles in *sikiri* dance; predominantly both of them function as structural components of the dance itself and in addition to that as auditory rhythmical orientation unit for the dancers.

When the core features of *qaṣā'id* are mentioned under the title of "Determinants of Qasida Genre" in Sperl & Shackle's book *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa*, monorhyme appears to be an important characteristic of them. The recited *qaṣā'id* in *sikiri* dance are essentially composed of the repetition of one or two lines (couplet) and/or formulas. This repetitive feature compromises with the idea of evaluating *qaṣā'id* according to their rhymes; since repetition of certain formulas and/or short sentences with minor alterations inevitably create identical rhymes. When this is not the case, due to alternating start- and end-points of sung lines, a special function of the second singer come forward, who supports the lead singer with specific endings such as "aaa", "eee", "ooo" and attunes the ending parts of each line in order to secure a kind of monorhyme. With reference to *dīkr* Qureshi highlights the importance of rhymed verses/lines and their repetition in *qaṣā'id*, which is also discernible in vocal accompaniment of *sikiri* as a primary feature, as follows: "the repetitive monorhyme or *radīf* can serve to reiterate a central word, phrase or concept,

¹⁰⁹ The reason why Yao informants avoided using such terminology can be found in the previous chapters of this study.

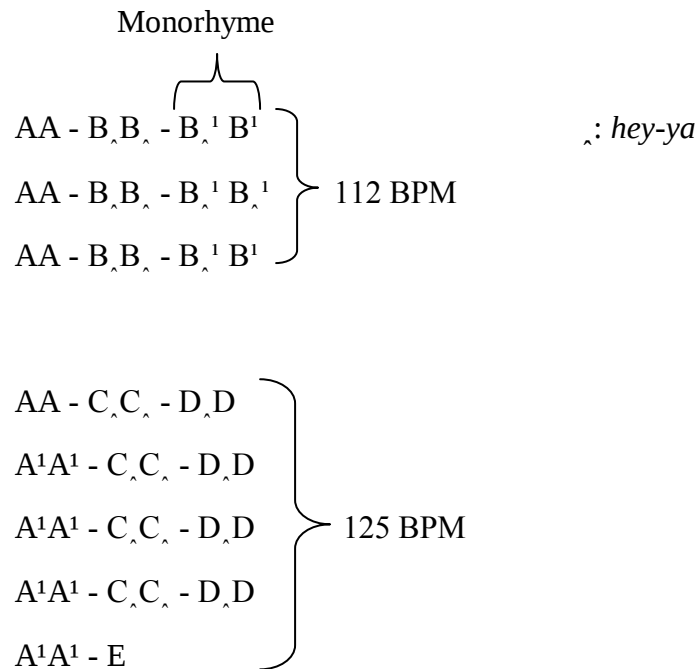
in the manner of the *zīkr* principle.”¹¹⁰ From this perspective one can put forward that along with the content of *qaṣā'id*, their structure also indicates an association between *sikiri* and *dīkr*. In addition to this, there is one *qaṣīda* recited by women in Issa Village (Recording Session 9/ Camera K1/ Sikiri [20:50-24:00]), which can serve as an example for both monorhyme and increasing tempo¹¹¹. Regarding the tempo, A.M. Jones and L. Kombe suggest in their cooperative work “The Icila Dance, Old Style” that: “(in African music) there can be no sort of *accelerando* or *rallentando*. Such variations in speed are totally unknown to the African (...)”.¹¹² While remaining distant to this claim, if it is postulated, then such acceleration in tempo can be accounted as a non-African (also non-Western) influence on *sikiri* accompaniment; in other words a further possible kinship between *sikiri* and *dīkr* can be revealed, since same kind of acceleration of the tempo is a primary feature of *dīkr*.

Below a formal outline of the mentioned *qaṣīda* is shown. It should be kept in mind that this form is not necessarily similar to other *qaṣā'id* recited for *sikiri* dance, this is why it cannot be considered as a template. Seemingly there are various forms of *qaṣīda* recitation incorporating different features from both local and external sources. However for this paper, except certain parts of some *qaṣā'id* related to dance movements; these are not comprehensively examined in order to keep the focus on their relation to dance.

¹¹⁰ Qureshi 1986: 86.

¹¹¹ Even though the rate of acceleration is not high; it is nevertheless discernible in both music and dance.

¹¹² A.M. Jones & L. Kombe, *The Icila Dance, Old Style: A Study in African Music and Dance of the Lala Tribe of Northern Rhodesia*, Cape Town: African Music Society 1952, p. 10.



Example 2: A schema for the formal construction of a qaṣida including guttural sound hey-ya at specific points. Here monorhyme appears both within the cycles and at the end of each line.

In the following chapters primarily the association between repetitive formulas, guttural voices and the dance movements will be inclusively explained.

4.2.2. Ablution and the Declaration of Intent

Apart from the content of recited *qaṣā'id* in a *sikiri* performance, there are two distinct features that give *sikiri* (and also *ḍikr*) its religious peculiarity: firstly, according to Sheikh Yunus Wasikisi and Sheikh Rabika Arab, all the participants are obliged to perform an ablution¹¹³, *wuḍū'* in Arabic (see Figure 8), in order to take part in the performance. This is demanded before practicing all the religious activities and worship in Islam; if not executed, according to the belief, the performed rite will not be accepted. In this context Ian R. Netton shortly explains the importance of ablution as follows:

“There is an emphasis on the ritual purity which results from the normal ablutions the worshipper undertakes before the five-times a day prayer. As an adjunct to this it is necessary to wear clean clothing which constitutes, as it were, an outer mirror or symbol of inner purity of mind and heart.”¹¹⁴

¹¹³ The act of washing or cleansing the body, or some part of it, before practicing a religious rite.

¹¹⁴ Ian Richard Netton, *Sufi Ritual*, UK: Curzon Press 2000. pp. 35-36.

The second feature can be named as the declaration of intent. It is executed before the beginning of performing all kinds of ritual prayers, including five-times *ṣalāt*. It has the same importance as the ablution for religious activities in Islam. The declaration of intent is simply telling what you are going to do and for what reason. It is mostly accompanied with particular formulas or just reciting the name of God at the beginning, mostly in Arabic language; but among Yao people the declaration of intent is read also in colloquial language, that is to say in Chiyao. This declaration of intent can roughly be translated as:

“In the name of Allah, the most gracious, the most merciful, I hereby declare that I intend to perform [...]”

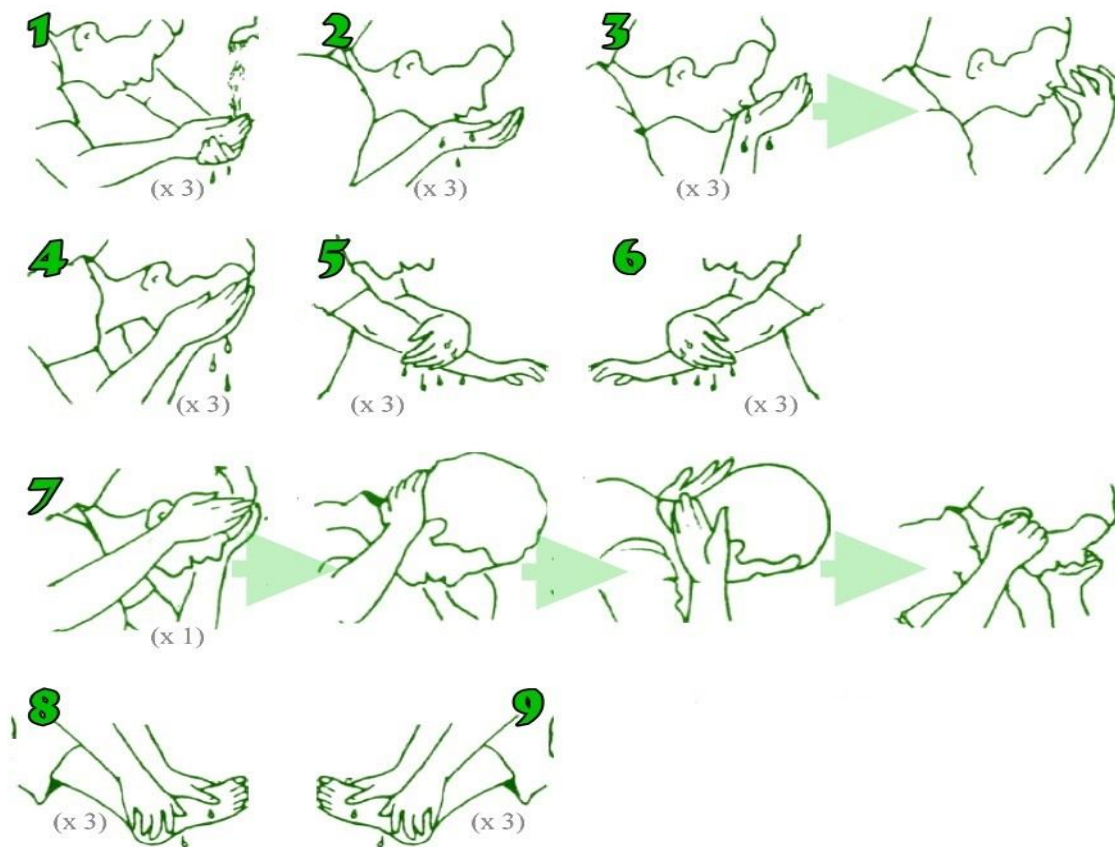


Figure 8: The method of ablution in general order.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Source: <http://www.planetislam.de/praxiswudu-die-gebetswaschung.htm> (17.10.2013)

The ablution and the declaration of intent in relation to local environment can be varied from region to region. The ablution, for example, can also be executed without water, especially where water is scarce and must be used for vital necessities. In this case soil or sand can be used instead of water; but either way in order to have a proper performance both the ablution and the declaration of intent must be executed.

4.2.3. The Dress Code

Dresses and uniforms worn in *sikiri* performances can be seen as further indicators of the Islamic influence on Yao people. The *sikiri* dance in Issa Village was performed with casual clothes. Male practitioners first attended to a Friday's prayer in mosque, during which females were in a separated room under the same roof and were able to hear sermon (*khutbe*). Thereafter, upon request of Sheikh Yunus Wasikisi, male group formed a square-shaped layout to perform *sikiri*. They did not change clothes or attached any additional component to their daily dresses. The male's dress of the Muslim Yao's is generally composed of two different parts: *khofiya* (Chicheŵa) and *thawb* (Ar.)/ *nkanjo* (Chicheŵa) (Figure 9). A similar dress-code is discernible throughout Muslim countries and regions around the world. *Khofiya* (Ar. *ṭāqīyah*) is a short hemispherical or platter-shaped cap worn by Muslim men mostly for religious purposes. However its usage is not restricted to religious activities, it can also be worn during daily routines. The usage of cap, whatever the name it has in the given region, is regarded as *mustahabb*, a recommended, favored or virtuous action in Islamic law; but not a must. It is believed that the followers of Prophet Muhammad were wearing a similar cap and mostly kept their heads covered with such materials. This is why the usage of suchlike caps has become an indicator of commitment to Islamic religion and a sign of respect to God during religious activities. Identically *thawb* can be used both in religion-related events and during daily routine for Muslims. Worn both by men and women the name and the style of this ankle-length, long-sleeved garment varies from region to region. According to the belief during Prophet Muhammad's time his followers were wearing this garment to prevent, at least, visual differences between rich and poor. By wearing it the followers of Prophet were meeting at the same level of wealth and simplicity.

In the case of Muslim women, headscarf is a piece of square fabric to cover the head, especially the hair (Figure 10). In certain societies where Islamic law is relatively stricter than others, wearing a headscarf and covering the head along with the entire body down to ankles is a must for women. Many theologians, however, are still discussing, whether such covering of the entire body is ordered by the Koran or it is an interpretation of early Muslim scholars; since regarding this issue, there are regional differences. Essentially for women headscarf must be worn during religious activities such as *ṣalāt*. Seemingly among the Yao the usage of headscarf (*duku* in Chicheŵa) is not rigorously implemented and in addition to that Muslim women are not obliged to wear *burqu* ' or *burqa* as in some orthodox Muslim regions where *shari'a* dominates. Nevertheless the Islamic dress code is followed to a certain extent.

During the two *sikiri* recording sessions both in Issa Village and in Liganda Chididi Village, the performing women were wearing headscarf. The ones, who had untidy coverings, first regulated their dresses along with their headscarves, and only then started performing.

Besides the headscarf and covering the body in some degree, one can say that there is no specific dress code for Muslim women among the Yao.



Figure 9: Khofiya and thawb worn by Muslim Yao men during a sikiri performance in Issa Village, Blantyre District. Photo taken by Lisa Padouvas, 2013.



Figure 10: Headscarf and long dresses worn by Muslim Yao women during a *sikiri* performance in Issa Village, Blantyre District. Photo taken by Ferhat Arslan, 2013.

The most particular and idiosyncratic dress code was recognizable in men's *sikiri* performance in Liganda Chididi Village. As a troupe, by name Chididi Rikaba, the members were wearing a special outfit reminiscent of military uniforms. This outfit was composed of largely blue-colored shirt and trousers with additional red and white stripes, ornamented with crescent & star¹¹⁶, a symbol generally attributed to religion of Islam. In addition to that most of them (but not all) were also wearing *khofiya* or a similar cap to cover the head and a colorful waistband along with army boots (Figure 11).

The uniforms of *sikiri* performers in Liganda Chididi Village clearly indicate a group identity: beyond ordinary and daily clothes, wearing such standardized uniforms give an important clue regarding the aimed togetherness and self-identification. When asked about this, Sheikh Rabika Arab replied that their troupe is regularly attending *sikiri* dance contests throughout East Africa, where various troupes from different regions meet and compete with each other. From this aspect one could find some relations between *sikiri* and *beni* dances of these region. T.O. Ranger writes in his extensive book, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa 1890-1970: The Beni Ngoma*, that:

¹¹⁶ This symbol was also in use at the top of the Issa Mosque in Issa Village.

“Among the Yao of the border area between Mozambique and Tanzania, where Beni had probably originally been associated with the spread of ‘tribal’ Islam, the dance was performed on a competitive basis. The competitions were run on a divisional basis (each division: three villages). And in fact these differences represented clan differences. (...) In this sort of competitive context Beni songs were ‘self-praise songs which praised your own clan and denigrated another clan...patriotic songs, praising particular norms of the clan’”.¹¹⁷

Such parallels (competition, patriarchal attitude, self-praise) between the two dance styles have also been stressed by Dr. Malamusi during a personal conversation with him. He puts forward that “Foot stamping, for example, can also be seen in *beni* dance, although it is not emphasized as strong as in *sikiri* dance.”¹¹⁸ It is highly possible that particular notions of these dances are meeting on a common ground. Although within this paper such probable relation will not be examined thoroughly, being aware of these parallels might be helpful for the future researches.



Figure 11: The outfit of men *sikiri* dancers with significant elaborations in Liganda Chididi Village, Mangochi District. Photo by Ferhat Arslan, 2013.

¹¹⁷ T.O. Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa 1890-1970: The Beni Ngoma*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1975, p. 110.

¹¹⁸ Personal conversation with Dr. Moya A. Malamusi, Vienna, 11.11.2013.

Beyond the contextual dimension of the dress code, Gerhard Kubik, after Helmut Günther, puts forward that certain way of clothing, i.e.,

“(…) binding a cloth round the hips, serves as a visual marker highlighting the body area prominently used in the dance. (…) and through an observation of a dancer’s body decorations, a student of choreography may often obtain important clues to the structural analysis of a particular dance style. That is to say, by looking at the type of dance costume and body decoration, the researcher may discover where the motional centres of the body are in a particular dance, as well as how many motional centres there are that generate the polyrhythmic movement patterns.”¹¹⁹

On the subject of the dress code, in order to have an idiosyncratic appearance, seemingly troupes have specific outfits. At this point one can say that, besides the style of the outfit, these troupes might as well have their own dancing styles, which means there might be different *sikiri* styles performed by different troupes. For a researcher, attending these contests could be very useful to recognize such variables for future/comprehensive studies on *sikiri*, since the data collected for this paper cover only a limited part and aspect of *sikiri* dance.

For this reason, within this paper the socio-religious background processes along with decisive Islamic doctrines on the possible functions and characteristics of *sikiri* dance have been predominantly emphasized and besides these, the most visible and accessible aspects of it have been particularly stressed, thus this paper can be used as a starting point for the future studies.

¹¹⁹ G. Kubik, *Malawian Music: A Framework for Analysis*, Zomba: Centre for Social Research, Univ. of Malaŵi 1987, p. 50.

5. Structural Analysis

The discussion made about evaluating *ḍikr* whether as a dance or not; or *sikiri* as a religious practice does not necessarily concern structural analysts. When it comes to analyze a *ḍikr* practice structurally, in order to find out, e.g., its probable influence on *sikiri* dance movements, one inevitably implements analysis methods of various dance theoreticians. This is a legit approach since the dance analyst primarily deals with a specific dimension of these ‘motional organizations’, that is to say a relatively more neutral aspect of them. To be able to demonstrate a credible affinity between *sikiri* and *ḍikr*, beyond the functional similarities one may need to compare their structural organizations, which requires a sort of transcription of both.

Here the problem is that there is no *ḍikr* recording available from the regions where *sikiri* is being performed¹²⁰. For this reason, considering the differences between local and global *ḍikr* performances, it would be reasonable to exclude an analysis of *ḍikr* which bound up to elsewhere; since it might misguide the researcher. This is why in the following chapter only some certain motional organizations of *sikiri* dance will be transcribed and in addition to this, when appropriate, specific steps, movements of the body parts, ‘motional centres’, and the primary building units of the whole dance, will be highlighted.

As it was mentioned at the beginning of the third chapter, there are various methods to analyze human movements and dances. Transcribing dance movements may be an initial step, so researcher can evaluate the data through a written form and gain chance to see it from an another angle. At this point the question of ‘which dance notation should be implemented?’ inevitably arises, because the methods and notation systems at hand are scarce and in addition to this it is not easy to find a proper system that can be adapted to different dance styles of non-uniform cultures. Furthermore during the second step of analysis more detailed questions and complexities occur. For example what kind of staff/platform can be used suitable to the given dance or how the symbol substitution should be for the demonstration of specific motions etc. These are some of the many issues that a

¹²⁰ Except one short 4-minute-recording taken in Issa Mosque. Here mentioned *ḍikr* was performed by children under the directorship of Sheikh Yunus Wasikisi, to show the difference between *ḍikr* and *sikiri*. After explaining the difference(s) between the two, Sheikh gathered around 16 boys, aged 6 to 12. Sheikh said that he saw this kind of *ḍikr* in Republic of South Africa. Even though it was performed in a short period of time, the accelerating tempo (one of the characteristics of *ḍikr* in general) and the content of the accompanied vocal music (*lā ilāha illā 'llāh*) were discernible; however it cannot be evaluated as a genuine *ḍikr* practice that is performed by Yao people.

researcher must handle when a proper dance notation system is aimed. According to Royce “an adequate system of dance notation must deal with successfully three different elements:

- movement through space
- movement through time
- stylistic variations and idiosyncrasies that comprise what we may call ‘performance’”¹²¹

Movements through space and time are the crucial aspects of every dance and thus of the aimed dance notation system. In order to evaluate and analyze a dance style structurally one should first disassemble these movements and differentiate the most basic motional units, sequences of them and more complicated recurring cycles. By use of the terminology of Linguistics various scholars such as Kaeppler (1967, 1972, 1993), Martin/ Pesovar (1961), Royce (1977), Kubik (1987) have attempted to designate basic movements employed in all dances as a common point. Two of those, *kinemes*¹²² and *morphokines*, are the most widely used terms of Linguistics to differentiate various motions in dance research. In this regard Kaeppler’s *Studies of Tongan Dance* (1993) offers a significant example for its usage of *kinemes* and *morphokines* in order to designate particular movement organizations in Tongan Dance. In the case of such methodology and terminology one has to have a certain level of ‘grammatical’ knowledge of the given dance, otherwise it is almost impossible to notice and differentiate ‘meaningful movement structures’ from the meaningless ones and/or *kinemes* from *morphokines*. For this reason and additionally due to lack of solid information on the grammatical features of *sikiri* dance, these terms will not be implemented in this study.

On the other hand Gerhard Kubik uses a different point of view on the muscular motions: in his study of *mukanda* initiation and accompanied dance, namely *Patterns of Body Movement in the Music of Boys’ Initiation in south-east Angola* (1977), Kubik analyses the movement by considering the ‘use of body energy’ and defines it in terms of *corner-points* or *points of inflexion*. He explains these as follows:

¹²¹ Royce 1977: 39.

¹²² After Kaeppler (1993:112 & 120), *Kinemes* are analogous to the *phoneme* level of language structure and they are those actions and positions which, although having no meaning in themselves, are the basic units from which all dance of a given tradition is built. *Morphokines*, on the other hand, are analogous to the *morpheme* level. A *morphokine* can be defined as the smallest unit that has meaning in the structure of the movement system. *Morphokines* are combinations of *kinemes* and only certain combinations are meaningful.

“Corner-points are those extreme positions in the evolution of a motor pattern at which a phase of movement is aimed. Corner-points are something like marks at the end of a section of movement. (...) What I call corner-points, corner positions, turning points, or points of inflexion, are those moments in a movement pattern where kinetic energy reaches zero intensity and where new energy has to be injected by the dancer to keep the movement going. The employment of a new energy often results in a change of direction, hence the name corner-points.”¹²³

Kubik’s approach is legit and can be implemented various dance styles of different regions throughout the world; since this method focuses on a common motional feature. Within this study the most basic constructive structural units of *sikiri* dance will be compared through Kubik’s method of movement analyze and transcription along with Labanotation system. Besides analyzing the movement organization(s) of *sikiri* dance, one another aim is to find out the most suitable way to analyze this dance and additionally crosscheck the possibilities of the two mentioned systems.

Labanotation records every movement the body makes, thereby giving the researcher an ‘etic’ inventory of movement. Not all of these movements are meaningful to dancers performing within their own tradition. So with the utilization of Labanotation the distinction between *kinemes* and *morphokines* vanishes. In Labanotation each symbol used for body parts, level of movement etc. carries four different types of information:

- the body: the specific parts that move;
- space: the specific direction, level, distance, or degree of motion;
- time: meter and duration, such as the time value of a whole note, a quarter note, a sixteenth etc.; also relative timing;
- dynamics: the quality or ‘texture’ of the movement, whether it is strong, heavy, elastic, accented, emphasized, etc.¹²⁴

One important drawback of Labanotation is its complicatedness. In order to demonstrate all the visible aspects of a dance style Labanotation offers a wide variety of symbols and figures with additional ornamentations; thus when a researcher aims to transcribe/ analyze a dance in detail through Labanotation she/he might get lost between dozens of different symbols. Moreover, even a whole transcription is successfully made by the researcher there is just a few who can read such notation and mostly they are not the owners/ practitioners of the given dance. On the other hand, as in the case of *sikiri*, when the dance is substantially not complicated the utilization of Labanotation appears to be the best

¹²³ Gerhard Kubik, *Patterns of Body Movement in the Music of Boys’ Initiation in south-east Angola*, p.270.

¹²⁴ A. H. Guest, *Labanotation*, p. 10.

option. Nevertheless as A.H. Guest puts it, “a complete record of any choreographic work should include both film/video and notation as well as explanatory text.”¹²⁵

5.1. *Sikiri* Dance Occasion

Besides the above mentioned settled dates for *sikiri*, according to local informants, it can be performed in its collective form at any time of the day and for any reason. *Sikiri* performances that were recorded in March 2013 were not associated to any specific occasion and this is why they were performed out of their original context, namely as ‘staged performance’ only for a group of ‘foreign’ students. For that reason upcoming study of analyze will not cover an entire *sikiri* dance occasion as if it was a genuine performance; but rather particular sections of it, which are seemingly indicative of *sikiri*’s common motional grammar and as well constitute structural units of the whole dance.

To begin with, there is no special stage to perform *sikiri*, but according to Moya A. Malamusi, two recordings made in Malaŵi also confirm that, mosques are not the places to do it. Both of the *sikiri* dances were performed outside the mosque, either next to the on outer wall of the mosque (Issa Village), which restricts group’s collective radius of action to a certain extent (see Figures 7, 9, 10, 12 and 13), or at a distance from it (Liganda Chididi Village). Since there is no any determined stage or specific setting for it (performing it around a fire, under a special tree, in a square room etc.) the form of the dancing group is as well not clear. Thorold gives short explanation about the arraying form of *sikiri* performing group in his *The politics of mysticism: Sufism and Yao identity in Southern Malawi* (1997) as follows: “The ceremony took place outside the mosque on a Sunday afternoon, (...) the wedding ceremony began with a procession moving from the east to the west of the mosque in a semi-circle.”¹²⁶ Such semi-circle group formation was only visible in women’s *sikiri* performance, which is from time to time organized and regulated by the Sheikh in Liganda Chididi Village. Men’s *sikiri* formation, on the other hand, was seemingly more organized than women’s group in the same place and as well than men’s group from Issa Village. It is because male performers in this village are the members of troupe and so group’s organization is worthy of notice. Depending on number of performers, their organization was mainly composed of a 4x3 rectangular shape, which occasionally evolves into either a 3x4 rectangular or a 3x3 square form (Figure 13).

¹²⁵ Ibid: 6.

¹²⁶ A. Thorold. *The politics of mysticism: Sufism and Yao identity in Southern Malawi*, p. 111.

The groups, male or female, might begin to perform *sikiri* either with a procession or on the very spot. Thorold mentions such procession in his above mentioned article within the context of *sikiri* performed during a wedding; but it is not certain yet, whether this procession is an integral part of *sikiri* or it occurs only on particular occasions. Similar to Thorold's explanations, in Issa Village the women's group (along with children) first walked around the mosque and came to the place where they performed their *sikiri*; and in Liganda Chididi Village men's group began dancing their *sikiri* and simultaneously moved about 20 meters to a place, which has a certain distance from mosque, and performed their dance over there. After the dancers take the place to perform, men's group usually form a rectangular or square shape while women and children mainly standing in lines (depends on number of performers and amount of them in each row, there can be up to 3-4 row, see Figure 12).

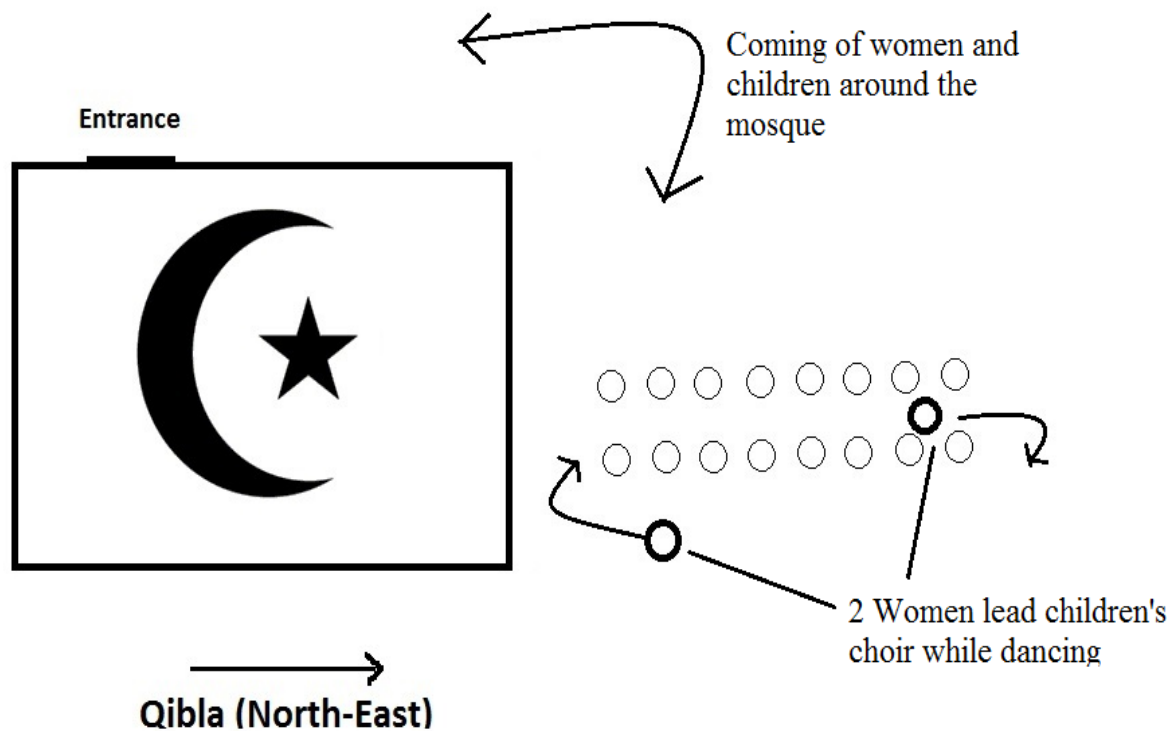


Figure 12: Plan for directions of women's and children's *sikiri* performance in Issa Village.

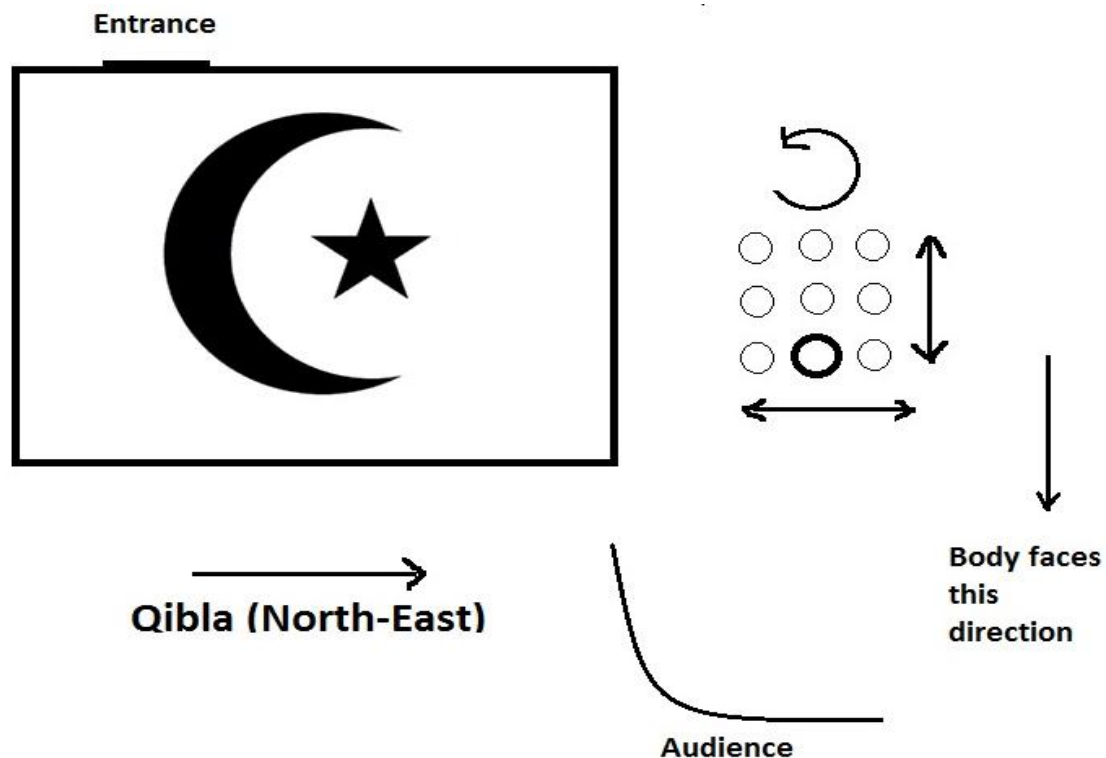


Figure 13: A roughly drawn plan for directions of men's sikiri performance in Issa Village. Here the bold circle is the leader and the arrows around the dancers indicate the directions and counterclockwise turns.

5.2. Formative Elements

In *sikiri* dance the main stress is particularly on the legs, which means emphasized movements of the legs are the most crucial constructive units of the whole dance performance. At first glance such statement might be considered as if there would be an association with the stressed leg movements of *Gule wa Nkulu*, in other words the bilateral relation of drums and leg movements occurring within this masked dance style; but in *sikiri*, motions of the legs are not connected to any musical instrument or a pattern created by additional sound generator, rather, on the contrary, their stamping to the ground in differing intensities creates a solid rhythmic reference point for the performers. Other parts of the body including the head, torso, arms, shoulder and pelvis seemingly have less importance and application than the legs. This does not mean that they are altogether excluded from *sikiri*'s motional repertoire or never implemented as a part of the dance; but it can be said that their usage is mostly dependent on the kinetic energy created by the leg movements. Generally their motions in space are the result of the displacement of the body weight and change of the body balance point. Moreover, following the accentuated leg

movements they swing from one direction to another. However besides the leg movements, some specific and occasional implementations of torso, arms and pelvis in relation with body position and posture must be mentioned, even though such moments are scarce:

Posture: During the performance of *sikiri* body is generally held in an upright position and supported only by the feet. For the implementation specific degrees of leg movements, knees are bent slightly, thus minor changes might occur in posture of the whole body. Following positional direction of the legs and knees, it mostly bends forward and/or sideward in order to perform certain steps. In addition to that, even though rarely, there is another posture, in which the knees are bent either fully or partially that ends up with a squatting posture.

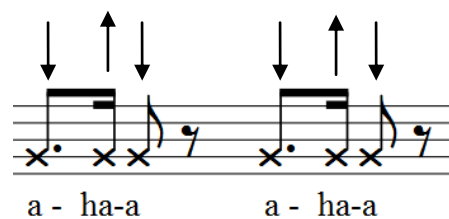
Arms: Arms are as well included in *sikiri* dance in different ways, either they are kept wide open sideways (in all likelihood to maintain the balance of the body), or in front of the body showing the ground while bending forward or indicating a specific direction for the next movement. At the beginning of dance mostly they are held down at the side of the body, as in a normal standing position; but throughout the dance performance, following the waving of leg movements they move up and down at the sides of the body, mainly at elbow and shoulder level. Besides that, at certain moments, which occur 2-3 times in the whole performance, arms are being used as part of a special pattern that seems like an imitation of a quick wing-flap movements of a bird-like animal, followed by well-organized leg and feet movements.

The most significant and organized usage of the arms can be seen in women's *sikiri* dance of both villages. While they are reciting their *qaṣīda*, women move their both arms up and down in accordance with *a-ha-a* pattern throughout the piece. Unlike men's *sikiri*, arms in women's performance are for the most part adherent to body and bent at elbow level (Figure 14). These *a-ha-a* sounds are produced by a certain breathing technique. The first and the second *a* are sounded through exhaling the air from the chest without interruption, during this process the torso leans forward and the arms sway at the sides of the body up and down. On the other hand, the *ha* is sounded through inhaling the air vigorously in a very short span of time (Example 3).



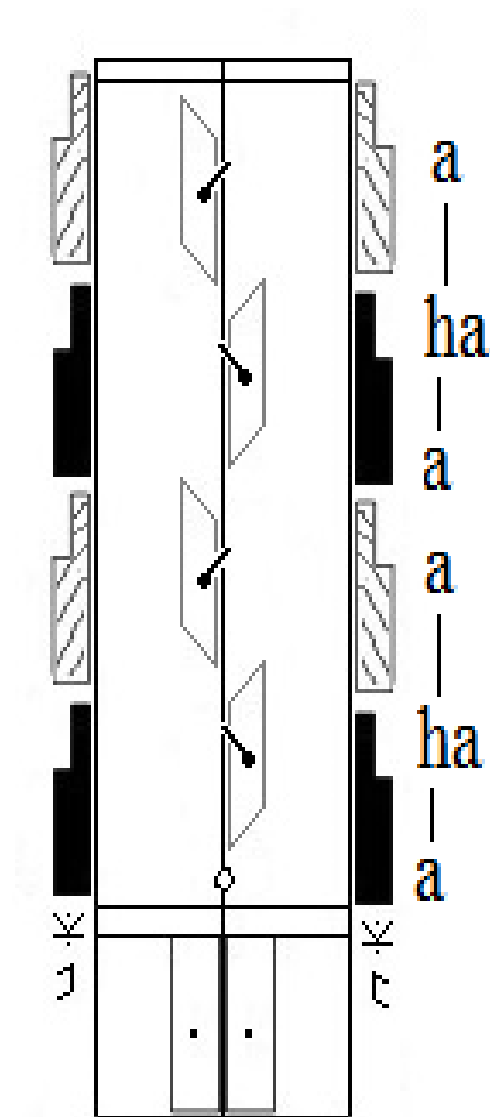
Figure 14: An extract from women's *sikiri* practice in Liganda Chididi Village, Mangochi. Here the feet leave the ground rarely and so they are not considered as steps or stamps. On the other hand they do transfer the body weight from one to another and consequently change the body direction, which will be shown with a notation in the following pages. Video by Magdalena Springer, 2013.

These movements of two arms are generally simultaneous with each other; but there are moments that they move in sequences as well. There is a close association between these arm movements of women and their repetitive, guttural breathing technique. As it can be seen in various *dikr* performances throughout the Muslim world and especially in women's *sikiri* practice in Malaŵi, such guttural accompaniment functions as rhythmical orientation mechanism, notably where instrumental accompaniment lacks for various reasons. From this perspective one can assert that there is a considerable rhythmical relation between the arm movements of women and their guttural accompaniment (Ex. 4), while in men's *sikiri* it is the legs, namely their stamping to the ground that provides a rhythmical backbone for performers.

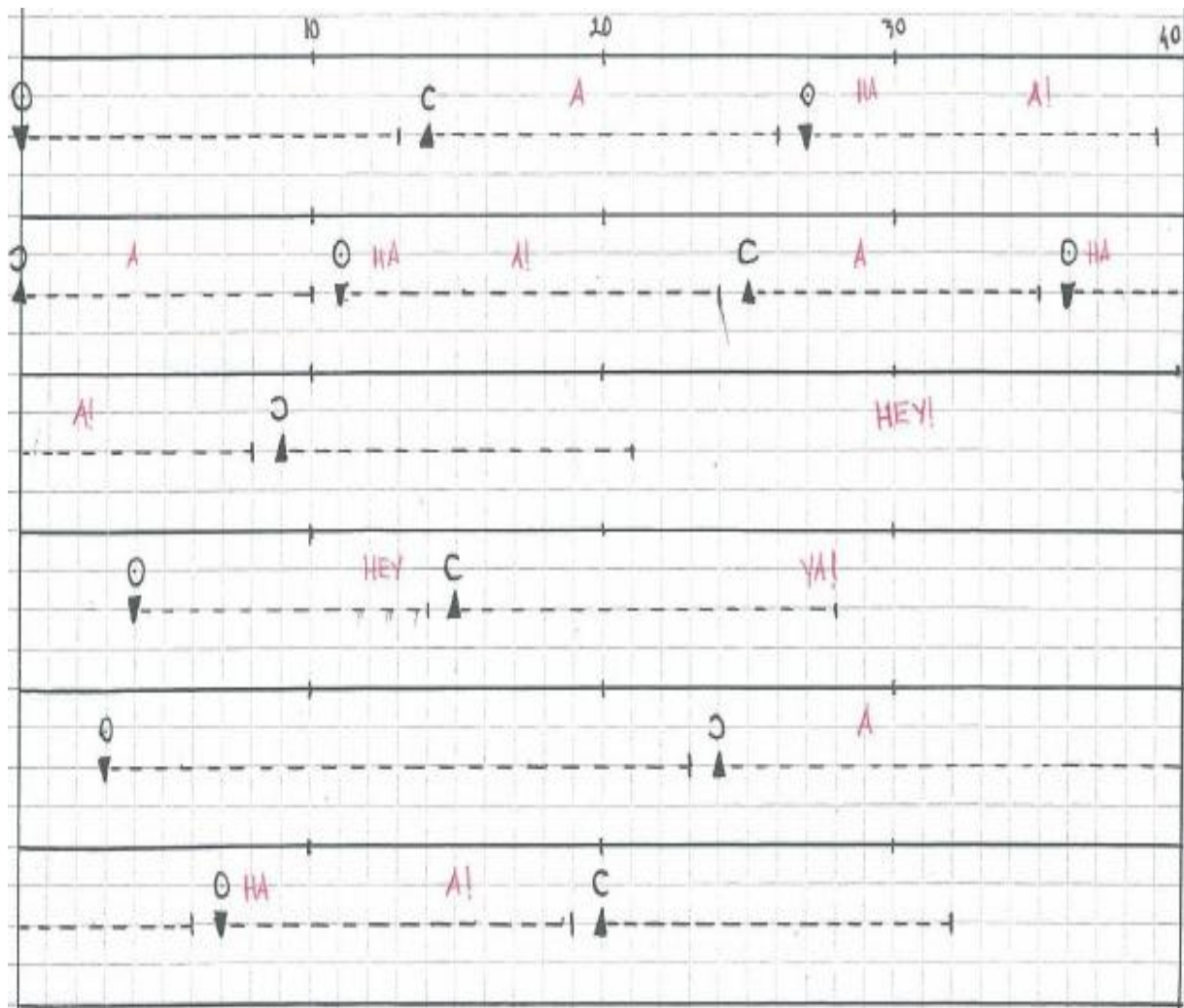


Example 3: Rhythmic outline of a-ha-a pattern and breathing points.

In addition to this, in men's *sikiri* both in Issa Village and Liganda Chididi Village there is a specific employment of the arms; either only the leader or all the participants raise their arms up high momentarily in order to signalize a new, repetition or stressed pattern of movements, which is always accompanied by an high-pitched stimulant outcry. Such situation and the following movement pattern will be shown in the following pages.



Example 4: Labanotation example for women's arm movements and body turns, accompanied by a-ha-a pattern. This motional organization continues throughout the recited qasīda. Minor differences are possible.



Example 5: A designed frame-notation based upon Gerhard Kubik's corner points system for motional grammar of sikiri dance. Explanations for the used symbols are available in appendix.

Torso: The torso mainly follows the leg movements and turns to a direction when a specific leg movement obligates it. It is generally held bent forward with an acute angle. When a performer stamps her/his feet in the place, then the torso might turn circa 30 degrees to left and right respectively. This is visible especially in women's *sikiri* performances, where they have relatively less movement area than men. Again in women's *sikiri*, while producing the rhythmic guttural sounds like "a-ha-a" and "hey-ya" their torso might swing back and forth in accordance with the timing of these formulas.

Pelvis: Like the other parts of the body, pelvis as well follows the leg movements. In order to make some high and/or low steps possible either left or right part of pelvis might be raised or lowered respectively. For example during a relatively slow and wide steps are being taken in forward direction in men's *sikiri* in Liganda Chididi Village, there occurs a

circular pelvic movement, though only for a couple seconds. In addition to that, there are also circular movements of pelvis that occur essentially when women and men disconcertingly perform *sikiri* all together in the same village; but this time as a structural member of the dance.

Even though most of the performers are “binding a cloth round the hips, serves as a visual marker highlighting the body area prominently used in the dance”¹²⁷, the pelvis has a rare utilization in *sikiri*. This is why the fabric bound to the pelvis part for *sikiri* performance might have another meaning than highlighting a prominent area of the dance.

Legs: As it has been said throughout this study, the legs are the most crucial structural members of *sikiri* dance. All recited *qaṣā'id* are accompanied by specific leg movements, either simultaneously or alternately. The most substantial question here is, whether there should be distinction between the leg and feet movements. Are they discernible? If yes, to what extent? Seemingly all movements that occur at the lower-body level accommodate both the feet and the other parts of the leg all-together, as if they were not different parts, but an entire unit; so to speak, the feet are functioning as dependent extensions of the legs, although there are minor differences regarding to performer’s personal choices. When the term “foot stamping” is considered, one might find the above explanation problematic; since the leg and the foot can easily be separated into two different divisions and each can function on an individual basis; but it should be kept in mind that, in order to execute a foot stamp, one must activate the necessary (kinetic) energy from his/her upper legs. If not, such stamp would be just a tapping of the ball of the foot or of the heel to the ground. This is why in this paper, within the context of *sikiri* dance, the feet and the legs will be considered as a whole and their notation will be written down accordingly.

In *sikiri* dance the movements of the legs are organized mainly in duple motion. There are also occasional triple motions, occurring as part of specific motifs within the dance and as well some other compound patterns, which are consisting both triple and duple motions along with squatting, jumps, kick-like leg swings and twisting of the knees in different orders. Both in Issa and Liganda Chididi Village, and additionally in Niassa Province of

¹²⁷ G. Kubik, *Malawian Music: A Framework for Analysis*, Zomba: Centre for Social Research, Univ. of Malaŵi 1987, p. 50.

Mozambique¹²⁸ the leg movements are essentially composed of stamping of each foot twice to the ground in regular turn:

right foot (2x) - left foot (2x) - right foot (2x) - left foot (2x) etc.

According to the recordings made in two villages, the dance generally begins with the stamping of the left foot to the ground or the left foot one step ahead of the body as the starting position. In comparison to the left, the right foot is also being used on occasion to start the dance; but seemingly quite rare. When the dance officially begins, usually there is a constant repetition of left-right foot stamping to the ground for a length of time.

As mentioned above, this recurrent stamping occurs in duple motion: in the beginning either the left or the right foot stamps to the ground twice; at the second stamp the body weight is transferred to the foot in action, that is to say at the second stamp of the left foot it begins to carry the body, thus the other foot (here it is the right) can perform its first step. This is the case for men's *sikiri* dance. In women's performance the feet and the legs are hardly lifted off from the ground, thus no stamp or a visible step to a certain direction occurs. This is why in women's *sikiri* the performers usually do not leave their starting position as men do. On the other hand, even though women do not move around while dancing *sikiri*, they transfer their body weight recurrently from one foot to another. Such transposition of the body weight between the feet mostly conduces toward a change in body rotation between the range of 75 degrees (occasionally up to 150 degrees) from left to right or vice versa. When the performer stamps her/his certain foot to a specific place the body turns to a pre-planned direction:

- right foot to the front: body turns left
- right foot to the back: body turns right
- left foot to the front: body turns right
- left foot to the back: body turns left

¹²⁸ According to a *ziara* festival recording made by August Schmidhofer in 2005.



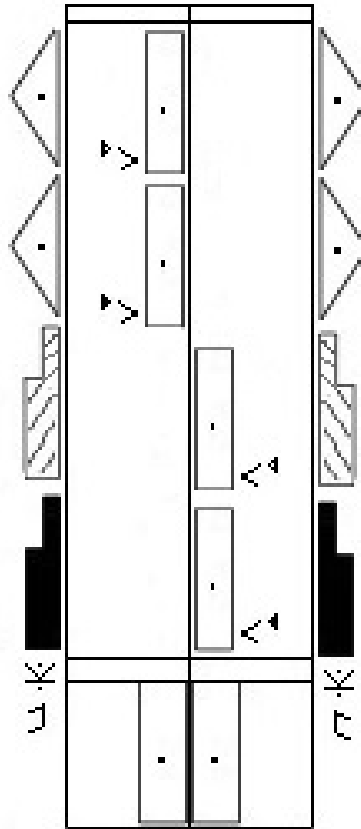
Figure 15: A photo of a *sikiri* dancer, who makes turns from right to left or vice versa as a result of a) transfer of body weight from one foot to another, b) stamping a certain foot (right or left) to the ground. Photo taken by Ferhat Arslan.

While doubling each step, performers always put a stress on the first one and the second is occurring relatively at a lighter level than it. In short, the division of 2 beats of the foot is basically strong and weak (Example 6). The other foot which carries the body weight during this process is generally stable and held on the ground.

In men's *sikiri* dance the direction of these strong-weak steps can be variable. Steps might be taken either in the place where the dance begins; to left and/or right sideways; to forward and/or backward; or to a diagonal direction; but whatever the direction they may go or turn, the ending position along with the direction is always the same with the starting one.

One another aspect of the leg movements is their usage in different heights. This variety in height is only visible in Liganda Chididi Village. Basically in *sikiri* dance, when taking a step or stamping, these activities are occurring at the lower half of the body, generally at

the knee level. In addition to that there are some moments or patterns in *sikiri*, in which a leg gesture can be seen at a shoulder-level-high. Such leg movement always comes to an end with a notably strong foot stamp as a result of discharging the collected energy while lifting the leg so high. (Session 31/K4/00009 – 00:56)



Example 6: Labanotation example for the recurring foot stamps in the place, 2x right + 2x left. Here the first stamps are stressed, while the seconds are relatively weaker.

5.3. Movements Specific to Vocal Accompaniment

The vocal accompaniment, in other words the recitation of *qaṣā'id* fundamentally differs from monophonic 'origins' of Islamic religious music. Unlike many other Muslim regions where such *qaṣā'id* are being recited mainly by one lead singer and, if any, by a choir that reinforces the lead singer's vocal part through multiplying it in unison; in Malaŵi, to be more exact especially in Mangochi District, various styles of reciting are distinguishable. There are as well regional differences within Malaŵi; for example, in Issa Village, the vocal accompaniment is performed by the dancers themselves, while in Liganda Chididi apart from the dancers, there is a 6-men-choir (Figure 16) that recites all the *qaṣā'id*. In

addition to this, as a common feature, emotive responses and stimulant cries such as ‘hey’, ‘hey-ya’ in women’s *sikiri*, and many other variations in men’s, are routinely taking part as an inseparable element of vocal accompaniment. They also function as the trigger factor for a certain set of motional patterns and postures.



Figure 16: An excerpt from video recording of 6-men-choir in Liganda Chididi Village while reciting a *qasida*.

In Issa Village, in order to protect the integrity of the dance steps, all the dancers sing/recite a common text or formula in parallel with each other, which inevitably causes a unison singing style. Even though it is the primary feature of singing, that is, in Kubik’s terminology homophonic multipart style, consists not only parallel movement of two parts (leader and choir); but also alternating musical phrases and overlapping of two parts, which are reminiscent of call & response style of singing. On the other hand, in women’s recitation in both Issa and Liganda Chididi Villages, such a call & response schema comes into prominence as the major characteristic of singing.

In Liganda Chididi Village almost all the *qasā'id* are performed in three parts. Different parts are formed through separation of 6-men-choir into three semi-dependent sub-groups as follows: 2+2+2, 3+2+1 or 4+1+1. In the last two formations 1 person alone indicates the lead singer, who introduces the *qasida* and sets the rhythmic structure along with the tempo. When the choir is divided as such, emerging new layers and their relation to each other defines the characteristic of multipart singing. Apparently there are different styles of

with regard to recited *qaṣīda*; but one peculiar feature is clearly perceivable in all of them as a common technique. It is the repetition of one formula or part of the text throughout the *qaṣīda*, which can be done by one of the sub-divisions of choir or by all. When a formula is held as ostinato melody by one sub-group, the rest gain chance to alter the same melody slightly, add new sounds in order to enrich the texture, or sing certain parts of the formula alternately and so to create an idiosyncratic multipart organization. Simha Arom suggests from his area of research in the Central African Republic that such usage of ostinato “based on the constant repetition of a relatively short musical phrase in one or several parts, functions as a point of reference both for the melodic and the metro-rhythmic development of the song”¹²⁹ A similar analogy can also be drawn for the organization of the dance steps in *sikiri*, that is to say a repetitive ostinato implemented by one of the sub-groups, can function as a point of reference not just for the recited *qaṣīda* but also for the dance steps. Below an example regarding the repetitive ostinato and related dance steps is shown:

Adalila Wangalimoga [Session 31/Z5/Sikiri 10:39-12:50]

I.	<i>Adalila</i>	<i>wee</i>	<i>Wangalimoga</i>	<i>o - o - ooo</i>	<i>Adalila</i>	<i>wee</i>	<i>Wangalimoga</i>	<i>o - o - ooo</i>
II.	<i>Adalila Wangalimoga ee - o - eeeeeeee</i>				<i>Adalila Wangalimoga ee - o - eee</i>			
III.	<i>Iyeee ~~~~~</i>		<i>~~~~~</i>		<i>~~~~~</i>		<i>~~~~~</i>	
Steps:	x	x		x (x) ¹³⁰	x	x		x (x) x

Example 7: A demonstration of multi-part organization through 3 vocal parts and likely accompanied steps.

In the preceding outline of the vocal parts, leader’s voice is shown with III at the bottom actually obtains the highest pitch level, while I and II stand for the sub-groups consisting of two and three members. In both villages the introduction of all *qaṣā'id* is invariably made by the lead singer and then the choir either responds or repeats the leader’s part at the second turn. Here, after the introduction of the leader (III), Group-I hold the ostinato melody at the lowest pitch level throughout the *qaṣīda*. Group-II joins shortly after the first word (*adalila*) recited by Group-I and both keep it in the same manner until the end of the piece. It should be kept in mind that above mentioned ostinato melodies frequently occur with variations; however the rhythmic base does not change. For instance, at the beginning of *qaṣīda* a melody can be interpreted in an ascending manner, while later on it is possible to hear the same progression in a descending way; or a call & response schema can

¹²⁹ Simha Arom 1991:39.

¹³⁰ The step between parentheses’ takes place only occasionally, as part of a triple-step pattern.

transform into a simultaneous singing of different parts through overlapping. The leader, on the other hand, joins in the performance at various times, mainly to keep the three-part organization undisturbed. Considering the dance steps, it appears that, as in the case of *Adalila Wangalimoga*, they do not necessarily coincide with the corner points of recited *qaṣīda*; but there is mostly an occurrence of a step in the middle and in the end of the formula and also sometimes in between the repetitions. The same trait can also be seen in the two examples shown below (*Amaliama Avuvama* and the *ki-ca* pattern) and various others.

Amaliama Avuvama [Session 31/Z5/Sikiri 13:05-16:10]

I.	<i>Mariama apey tema taa</i>					<i>Mariama apey tema taa</i>
II.						<i>Mariama apey tema taa</i>
	<i>Mariama...</i>					
III.	~~~~~	~~~~~		<i>a – a – a</i>	~~~~~	~~~~~
Steps:	x	x	x	x	x	x

Example 8: A demonstration of vocal parts and accompanied dance steps.

In *sikiri* dance starting posture is generally a standing position, either both feet stand next to each other or the left foot is one step ahead of the body. However, when the choir of 6 men reciting the *qaṣīda* named *Kuwandichira kwa Kiyamaku*, dancers take a peculiar posture, a mixture of crouching and squatting. This posture clearly differs from all the others. In this posture, the right knee held on the ground with the left foot next to it, while the torso lean to the left knee and the body faces towards the left. Moreover in this part of the dance, when still on the ground, one of the dancers, most likely the leader of the troupe, shouts a simple two-syllable word (*kica*) six times, to which the group response with a guttural repetition of the same two-syllable; but a prolonged version of it :

Kuwandichira kwa Kiyamaku [Session 31/ Z5/ Sikiri 16:25-19:50]

Leader:	“ <i>kica - kica - kica – kica - kica - kica</i> ”	“ <i>kica - kica - kica...</i> ”
Group:	“ <i>kiiiiii - caaaaa</i> ”	

Example 9: Kica pattern in call and response schema.

and then while rising from the ground, he and rest of the group turn right. When they reach a normal standing position with the arms wide open, the leader alters the pattern slightly and they all dance according to the rhythmic order of this newly organized pattern:

Leader's syllable pattern: [*kica - kica - ki - kica - ki*] - [*kica - kica - ki - kica - ki*] - ...

Strokes : [x . x . x .. x . x..] - [x . x . x .. x . x..]

Dance steps : x x x x x x x

Example 10: Altered Kica pattern and dance steps.

Apart from men's various recitation styles, there is a particular vocal feature in women's *sikiri*. It is the usage of a long-note-vowel at the end of each line. This is mostly made by a second singer, who joins only at the end with generally a major 2nd distance from the lead singer. Almost every line of women's *qaṣīda* is concluded with certain vowels, such as '-*eee*', '-*aaa*' or '-*ooo*' produced by the second singer. Regarding the additional long vowels, the choice is not left to the performer, that is to say they must be chosen in accordance with the lead singer's ending syllable. For instance when the lead singer recites the text '*ali gatame*', the second singer should implement '-*e*' vowel at the end. The same or similar feature has been noticed by Gerhard Kubik in the singing style of Lomue and Shirima women, and also the girls' songs of the Kisi at Lake Nyasa. In 1964 Kubik writes that:

"In the singing styles of girls and women of the Lomue, and particularly of the Shirima it is striking how often syllables are used for the text instead of words, such as *ee-*, *-ee-*, *-aye-*, *-ye-*, *-hehe-*, etc. Normally every line of Shirima girls' song is concluded with a long note to the vowel *-eeee-*. This is very characteristic of the singing in this area."¹³¹

It does not mean that there is a kinship between these styles or they influenced each other; but such feature has been attributed to an Arabic influence on the singing styles in this area. Considering the relations of Yao Muslims and Islamic-Arabic community in East African coast, one can suggest that this singing style can be seen as one of the results of Arabic influence on Yao vocal music. The above mentioned feature can be found in all women's recitation. Among them the *qaṣīda* named *Bibi Patuma* provides a usable example:

¹³¹ Gerhard Kubik, Recording and Study in Northern Moçambique, in: *African Music*, 3/3 (1964): 87.

Bibi Patuma [Session 31/ Z5/ Sikiri 24:33-26:40]

- I. *Ali ga-ta-meee eeee Ali ga-ta-meee ~~~~~~Bibi Patumaaa*
- II. *Ali ga-ta-meee eeee*
 aaaaaa
- III. *a-ha-a a-ha-a a-ha-a a-ha-a a-ha-a a-ha-a a-ha-a a-ha-a a-*
 ha-a

Example 11: Demonstration of the ending vowels.

During the recitation of *Bibi Patuma* all the women dance relatively free from each other; but still keeping the tempo of *a-ha-a* pattern and stressed *hey-ya*'s at the end of each line. However, as in the case of other women's *qaṣā'id*, dancers are allowed to come forward and carry out the recurring pattern in an emphasized manner, while the rest continue moving their arms up and down on their place. The same situation takes place in various *dīkr* practices, especially when a participant reaches an excessive state of mind; but no such excessive attitude was observed during these *sikiri* performances.

In the context of the function of shouts and stimulant cries, one can assert that, whether they occur in an organized manner as shown above or just as a momentary referential sound, they have vital roles for the realization of a *sikiri* performance. In the absence of accompanied musical instruments a researcher who aims to analyze *sikiri* dance, must take these features into consideration rather seriously. These references denote specific moments both in music and in dance, especially when the *qaṣīda* is formed on a constant repetition of a formula or a sentence. As in the case of *Sulaimana wana upile ooo* (Recording Session 31/ Camera K4/ Video 00007 [02:15-03:28]) and *Adalila wangalimoga* (same recording [04:31-06:39]), such shouts indicate the inner dynamics of dance movements. In these two *qaṣā'id* when these sounds are in the form of momentary shouts, they usually indicate a beginning of a new motional pattern; otherwise, reminiscent of various *dīkr* practices around the world, they mainly function as an emotive response to fervent moments of the dance. When the choir of six men recites the *qaṣīda* named *Poko Poko* (Session 31/ Z5/ Sikiri [20:10-24:02]), which is sung with a very peculiar multipart organization, the leader of the dancers gives a sign of a specific dance pattern through a high-pitched shout. This pattern occurs 4-5 times as an integrative element throughout the

dance and each lasts approximately 16 seconds. A detailed explanation of this pattern and an attempt to notate it with two different notation systems are shown below¹³²:

Poko Poko [Session 31/ Z5/ Sikiri 20:10-24:02]

[1 second = 30 frames]

When the signal is given by the leader [22:14]:

The left foot moves/stamps to the left (first touch to the ground on 14th frame); during this process the body weight is shifted to the left foot, right after the first touch, in approximately 4 frame (until the 18th frame); at this point (when the body weight is fully transferred to the left foot) a new energy is implemented to lift the right foot off the ground and so the right foot moves to the left from the back (cross) and hits the ground on 33rd frame and stays there for 8 frames.

From 41st frame to 54th frame (touch) the right foot moves from back to the diagonal front-right and the body weight is transferred to this (right) foot which happens extremely quick, in 1 frame.

On the 55th frame a new energy to the left foot and so it moves from back to the (diagonal) front-left [a lengthy distance]; the body entirely turns to the left direction and the left foot hits the ground on 74th frame. At this point the body weight again quite quickly transferred back to the left foot as a result of the strong stamp.

Because of the high power that is used for a strong stamp, the right foot is dragged on the ground and leaves it for a couple frames; but apparently the aim is to hold it on the ground as much as possible.

Between the 85th and the 94th frame the right foot turns and moves right direction (and the body turns with it) and start to carry the body weight on 96th frame. At this point the left foot starts moving from left to diagonal front-right and hits the ground (crossing the right foot from its front) on 115th frame.

From the 116th frame to 135th the right foot moves next to the left foot at a lower level from back-left to the diagonal front-right and hits the ground on 135th.

¹³² In order to acquire an accurate system, the timing is based on the frames of the video recording.

136th-154th: the left foot at a very high level (~shoulder) from back to the front and stamps (Figure 17). Strong jump & stamp causes an inevitable move of the right foot to the front, right back to the left foot.

170th-174th: the right foot, low, about 10 cm. to the back.

175th-194th: the left foot, high, to the back.

197th - 214th: the right foot, low, to the back.

217th - 233rd: the left foot, high, to the back, next to right foot.

250th - 255th: the left foot, low, to 10cm. back and the body weight transferred to the left foot.

254th - 273rd: the right foot, middle level, clockwise back-turn on the left foot (including the body [90 degrees])

296th - 313th: the right foot stamps high to the ground, in the place.

313th - 331st: the right foot stamps high in the place, the second time.

331st - 351st: the right foot stamps, middle-high, to the right. (3rd stamp)

355th - 364th: the right foot moves back, held in the air at the knee level,



Figure 17: An extract from the video recording that shows a high-level foot stamp in sikiri dance.

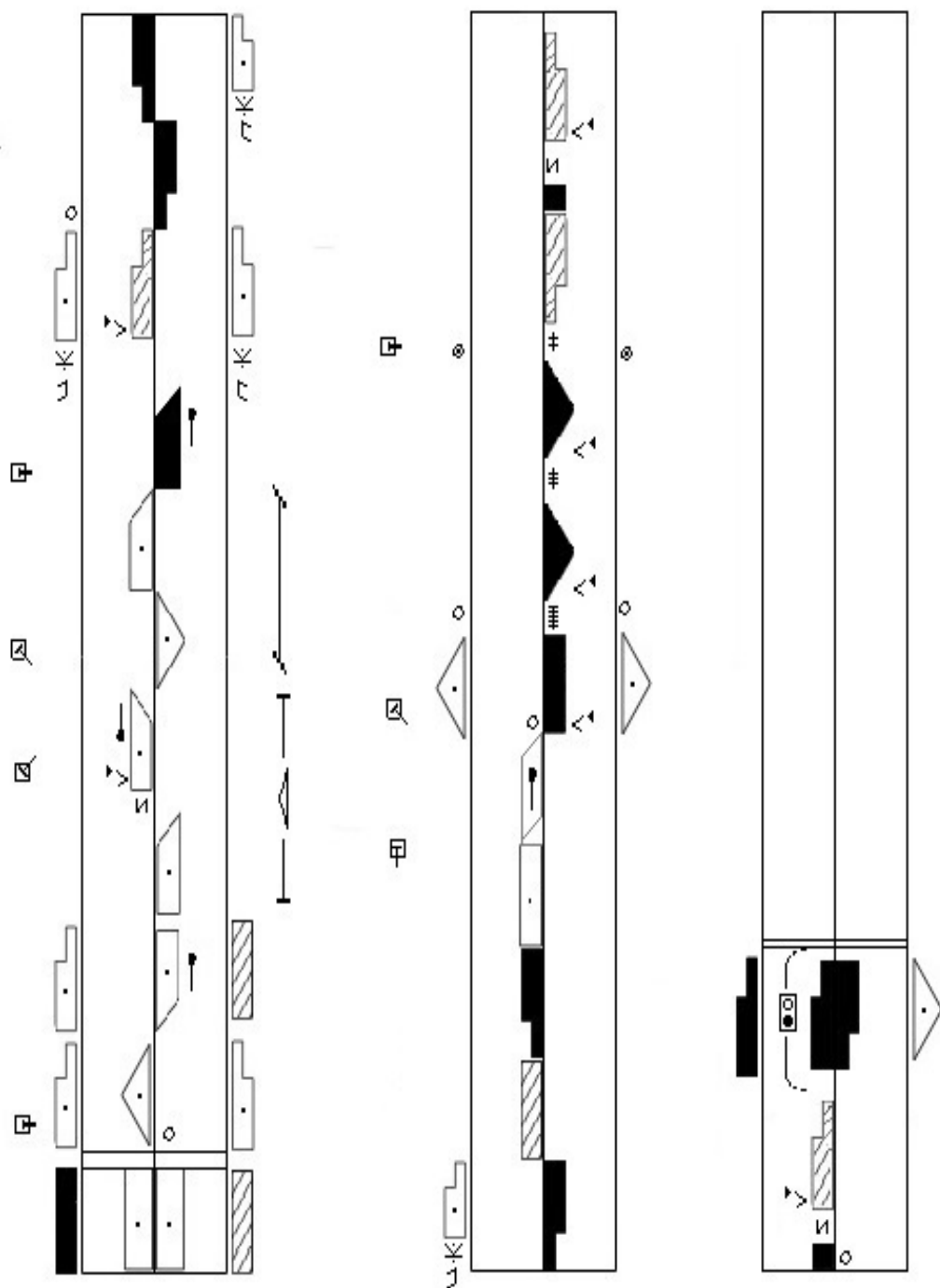
365th - 383rd: while the foot is in the air, the whole right leg swings from back to forward up to shoulder-level-high, in front of the body.

384th - 392nd: and stamps to the ground.

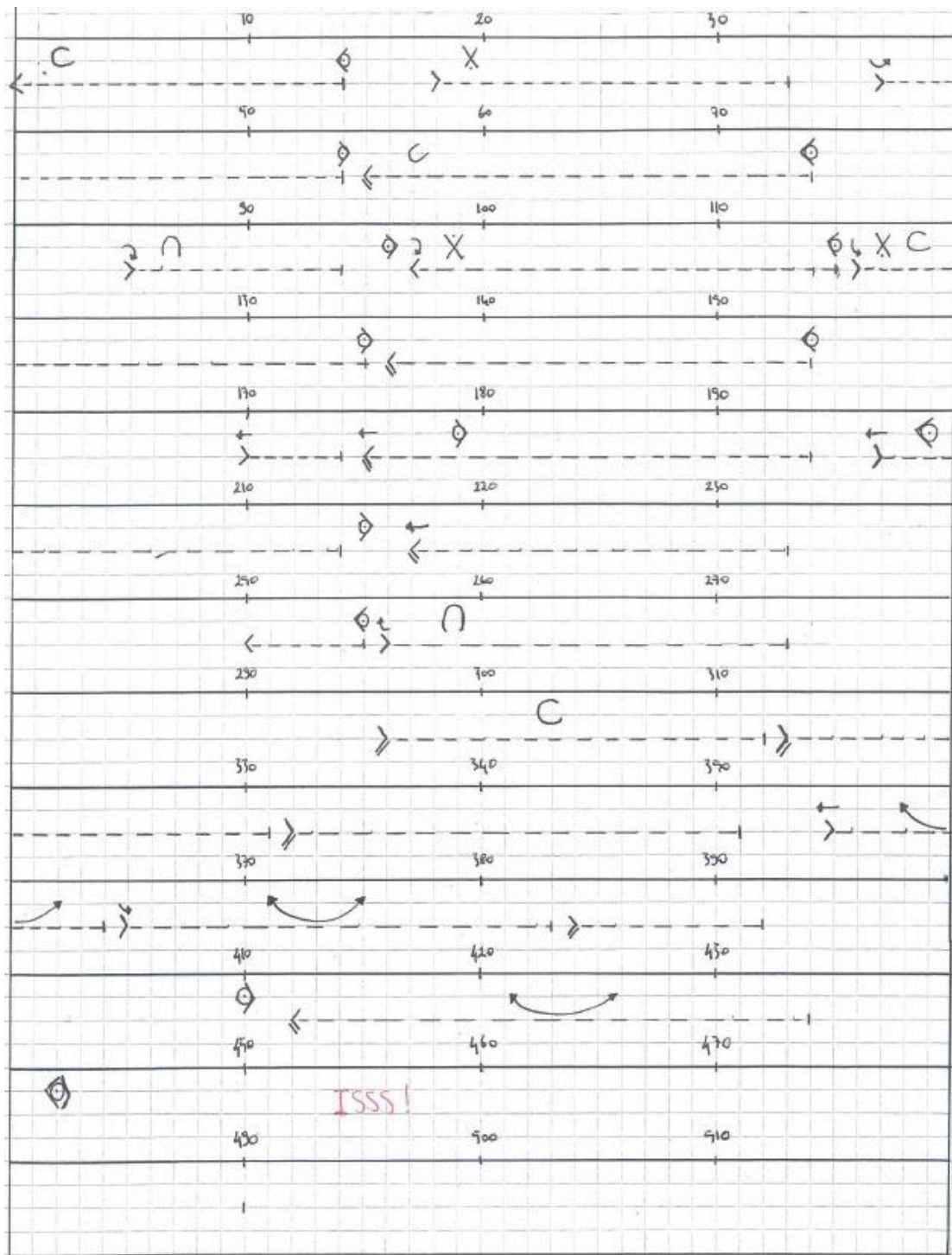
412th - 434th: the left leg swings from back to forward up to the shoulder-level-high, in front of the body.

434th - 480th: in the place, the legs and feet do not move, torso moves just a little bit forward, with the arms open at the sides of the body, bent from the elbows. All the dancers make the sound of “*issss*” and the pattern ends.

[22:30]



Example 12: Labanotation example for the 16-second-long movement pattern from Poko Poko. Here no bar-lines are used in order to avoid a false separation of the whole pattern.

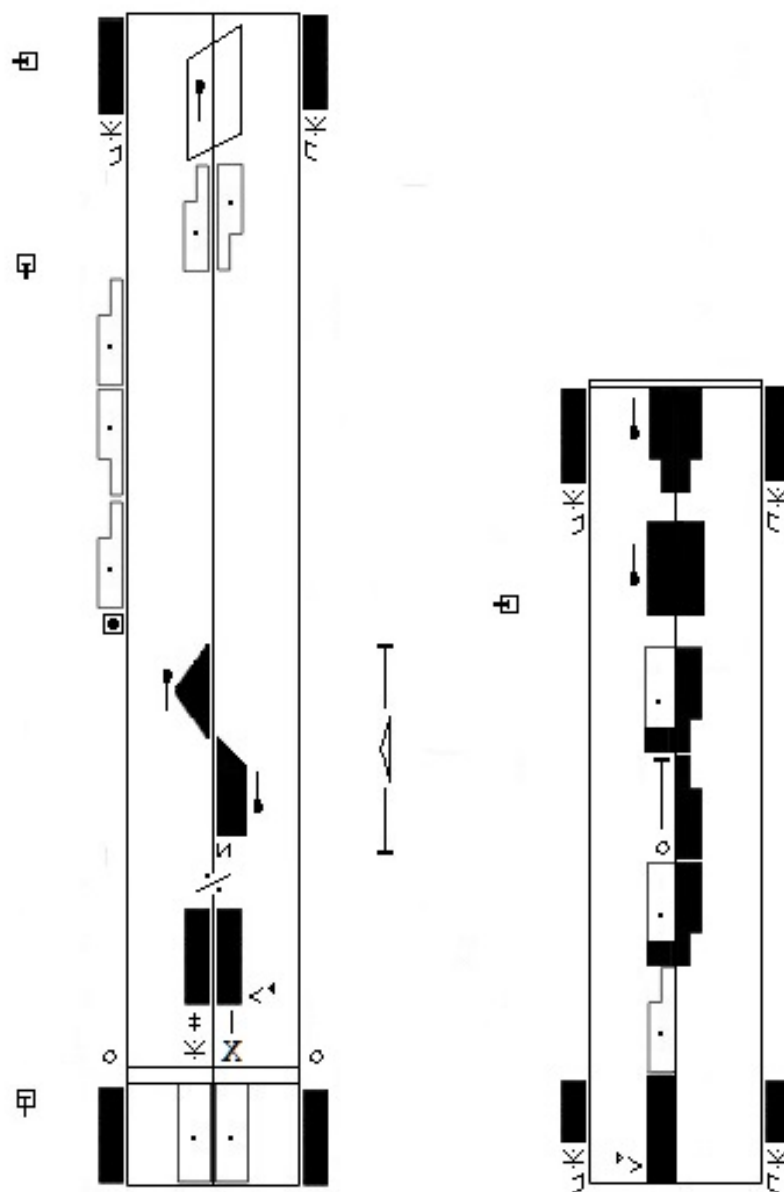


Example 13: Movement pattern from *Poko Poko* with Gerhard Kubik's notation system.

5.4. Another Peculiarity

One another special situation that took place in Liganda Chididi Village was the collective performance of women and men during one of the *qaṣīda* recitation. It is not known if this togetherness has connection with the content of the *qaṣīda*, the matrilineal history of the

Yao or something else; but one thing is certain that it belongs to African soil. Except for some mystic brotherhoods, suchlike collectivity of men and women is simply ‘inappropriate’ in terms of puritanical Islam. Apparently both women and men knew the recurring dance pattern (Ex. 14) by heart and have the ability to perform it well synchronized. To be able to explain the formation processes of the case, it should be thoroughly examined. According to the information at hand, it can nevertheless be said that *sikiri* is not radically a religious dance, thus it is defined as semi-religious dance style at the very beginning of this paper.



Example 14: Labanotation example for the recurring movement pattern in collective *sikiri* dance.

Men & Women's *sikiri* in Liganda Chididi Village, Session 31/Z5/ZO010014

A dance pattern, combination of stamps, jumps, turns and a stressed pelvis movement; lasts about 8 seconds.

Each cycle includes a 90 degree-clockwise turn.

[01:05]

[beginning of the 1st cycle]

The right foot stamps to the ground twice: first stamp on 9th frame and the second on 21st frame (the foot stays on the ground 3 frames, which makes the duration of stamps for each 9 frame). The knees are bent.

21st - 38th: There occurs a movement that looks an elastic spring-back in the place / the dancers straighten themselves up.

39th - 59th: The right foot moves diagonal forward-left, crossing the left foot from the front of it. Until the 64th frame the body weight is transferred to the right foot.

65th - 79th: The left foot moves to the left, behind the right foot. Body weight is on the left foot.

80th - 108th: The feet stay in the same position, the body swings back and forth in the place, while swinging the body weight is being transferred from one foot to another. At this point the dancers move their pelvis back and forth 3 times [01:09]. And the whole body turns to the right direction (clockwise), about 90 degrees.

109th - 119th: The direction of the body and the feet turn another 90 degrees clockwise; now the right foot is in front and the left is on the back.

119th - 126th: The left foot moves from back to next to the right foot (both in the place), hits the ground for only 1 frame.

127th - 138th: The left foot moves forward. Body weight is on the left foot.

139th - 150th: The right leg swings from back to forward, up to the knee level and reach the top point.

151st - 163rd: The right foot moves from forward to back, behind the left foot.

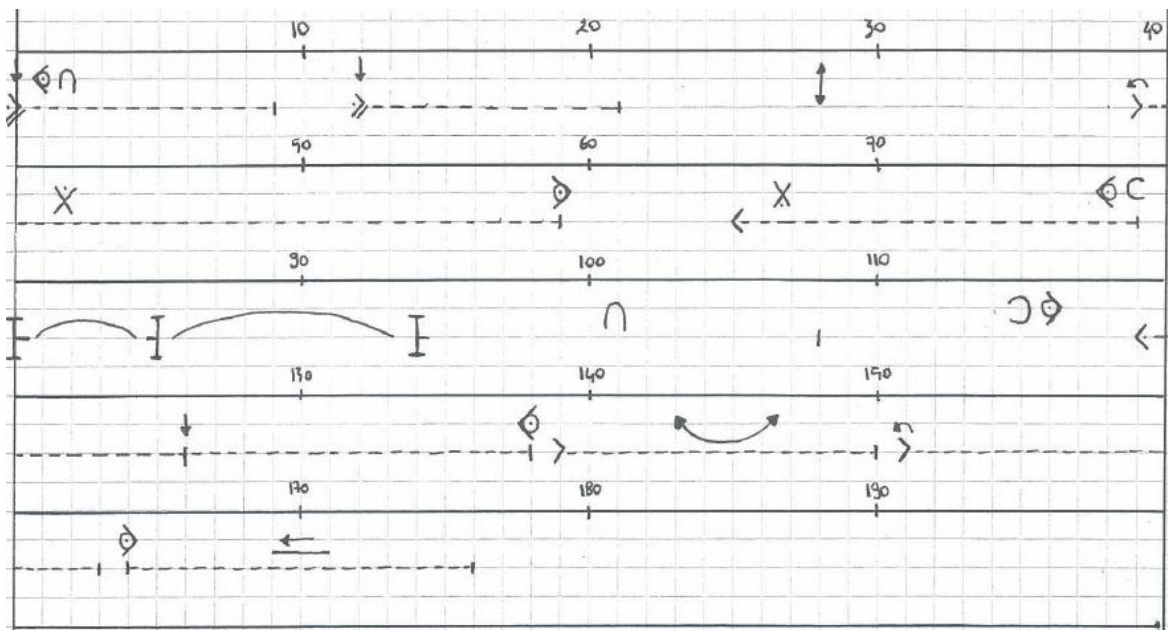
167th - 176th: A backward jump, low level, with both feet. The torso bent forward.

[end of the 1st cycle]

[01:12]



Figure 18: An excerpt from the video recording of the collective dance of women and men in Liganda Chididi Village.



Example 15: The recurring movement pattern from the collective sikiri dance.

5.5. Explanations and Gains from Analysis

As Hutchinson Guest writes “recorded music has not made the printed sheet unnecessary”.¹³³ This means a written form of music can be useful for various reasons. In order to write the musical and motional acts down, one needs distinguish various measurable units and determine their relations with each other as well as with the entire structure. Apart from technical difficulties such as categorization and symbol substitution etc. there are also interpretational issues. Regarding dance movements, for instance, occurrence of a foot stamp is related to different parts and muscles of the body. While for one analyst it is crucial to include all these body parts and their functions to the notation, for another only the most active parts can be chosen. Depending on the aim of the researcher both approaches can be legit.

The main obstacle regarding notation and analysis is, the above mentioned step-patterns cannot be attributed to all the dancers, since there are differences in various degrees between the dancer’s steps. In *sikiri*, one can come across with such variations in intensity, length and place of steps considerably often. This can be explained by dancer’s potential personal interpretation of step organizations, in other words with a dependent improvisation. Both in Liganda Chididi and in Issa Village the dancers are free to alter their dance steps through multiplication and/or reduction of the quantity as well as the quality of steps, but it must be done always in tune with the basis rhythmic structure. To what extent is this improvisation allowed, is yet unknown; but apparently such phenomenon constitutes a drawback for a reliable transcription and notation of the dance. For this reason, instead of an attempt to make a total transcription and notation of the whole *sikiri* performance, which inevitably covers numerous variations to mention, for this study only specific parts of the dance are notated and explained.

To be able to acquire globally valid data and avoid interpretational differences as far as possible, in this paper, two different notation systems are used. Thus some structural features of *sikiri* dance and its formative elements have become visible.

Body Direction: Primarily turns and rotations of the body occur in clockwise direction. The body direction in *sikiri* dance is not fixed, it frequently changes. Most of the turns take place on the foot that carries the body weight and within the range of 90 degrees. The

¹³³ A. H. Guest, *Labanotation*, p. 6.

number of turns during a recitation is variable; it is possible to come across a 360 degree-turn in one cycle or only one 90 degree-turn during an entire recitation. The direction of the head is generally same with rest of the body.

Body Weight: The body weight is carried and transferred from one foot to the other frequently. As in normal walking movement, the body weight is carried by each foot respectively. The length of the transfer varies depending on the intensity of the prior and following steps. Especially, when a stamp is made, the body weight is transferred considerably fast, over 1-2 frames (1/30 or 2/30 of a second); or it might last up to 10-12 frames in different phases of the dance.

Steps and Stamps: There is not a specific rule to take the steps. They can be in various shapes, length and intensities. An ordinary step generally lasts approximately 13-18 frames. Additionally, in certain moments, particularly following the stamps, steps might last about 5-8 frames. During a dance performance one of the foot is always in contact with the ground, except for rarely occurring jumps. There are minimum three different kinds of stamps which diverge from each other according to their intensities. The strongest stamp generally occurs when it follows a shoulder-high leg movement, while the other two occur mostly at the knee level and consequently weaker in intensity. A stamp approximately lasts between 8 and 19 frames. When it is strong and the following move does not require speed, it might last up to 16-19 frames.

Arms: As it is mentioned earlier, the arms have a controlled implementation only in certain parts of the dance and additionally in women's performance. Regarding the weight of the body and the direction, seemingly the arms are in relation with them. In women's performance, while the arms are ascending from the lowest level upwards, the body weight is being transferred from one foot to the other. Conversely, when the arms descending the direction of the body changes. Each arm movement (upwards or downwards) lasts approximately 12 frames, but also there are moments in which the arm movement is combined with a swing and so lasts about 20-22 frames.

Explanations of the symbols used in Labanotation can be found in Guest's book *Labanotation* (2005), while the explanations for the other symbols are as follows:

In the second notation style the vertical lines stand for the frames, horizontal lines for body parts.

➤ : right foot step ➤➡ : right foot steps/moves forward

➤ : left foot step ➤➡ : left foot steps/moves backward

➤↖ : right foot steps/moves diagonal-backward

➤↗ : left foot steps/moves diagonal-forward

≡ : right foot stamp ≡ : left foot stamp

⊙ : body weight

⊙ : body weight is on the right foot

⊙ : body weight is on the left foot

I : pelvis moves right

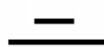
I : pelvis moves left

× : crossing move, from the front

× : crossing move, from the back

 : body direction, faces right

 : body direction, faces left

 : jump

 : backwards jump

 : elastic spring-back in the place

 : swing

In women's sikiri:

 : arms at the low level (goes up)

 : arms at the high level (goes down)

6. Conclusion

The study was set out to explore the concept of *sikiri* dance and has identified the nature and form of this dance style in Malaŵi, the reasons and motivation for performance, the type, the extent, resources required for performing and the role and impact of it among the Yao. The study has also sought to know whether *sikiri* is performed with different contexts, particularly in the given region. The general theoretical literature on this subject is inconclusive on several vital questions within the functional discourse. Thus the study sought to answer several essential questions:

1. What is *sikiri* dance? Who performs it? On what occasions it is performed? For what reason?
2. Is *sikiri* a religious dance style? To what extent?
3. Is there any kinship with Islamic *dikr* practice? In what ways?
4. How to analyze *sikiri* dance?

Due to lack of comprehensive works on the subject, in this study, it is aimed to construct a background frame, in which the *sikiri* performance takes place. In addition to that, its potential relations with local and global sources have been indicated. Besides the written materials of various scholars from several disciplines such as anthropology, theology, dance etc., fundamental data is gathered through a short fieldwork trip carried out in Malaŵi. To be able to find out the transformative influence of Islam on local people in the region and to what degree it shapes a *sikiri* performance, the participant observation method was applied, however not to dance itself; but to religious deeds like Friday's prayer. Consequently the acquired data is evaluated through both audio and video recordings, semi-formal interviews and consultations. In so doing, various contextual and functional aspects of *sikiri* dance along with structural characteristics have been revealed.

In the very first chapters, with the purpose of providing a solid frame, the history of Islam in the given region and certain global as well as local Islamic features associated with *sikiri*'s performative content are referred. Apart from the religious context, with regard to dance in general, potential functional typologies of *sikiri*, in which recreational and sacred qualities come into prominence concurrently, have been drawn. Regarding functional and structural relationships between *sikiri* and *dikr*, based upon the claims of various scholars

such as Brenner (1993), Bone (1982, 2007), Kubik (2001), Sicard (2000) and Thorold (1993), in the following chapters an attempt has been made to reveal the mentioned possible kinships. Combined with empirical findings stemmed both from the fieldwork trip in Malaŵi and personal background, a kinship to a certain extent between the two notions has been confirmed.

The main empirical findings are chapter specific and were summarized within the respective empirical chapters: *Sikiri* - Its socio-religious context and function; Kinship between *sikiri* and *ḍikr*; and Other Islamic aspects of *sikiri*. This section will synthesize the empirical findings to answer the study's two research questions:

1. Is *sikiri* a religious dance style? To what extent?

It shows the features of both religious and recreational dance styles. "Through the act of dancing *sikiri* the participants express not only their devotion to God; but, unlike in *ḍikr*, also joy of being healthy and strong." Besides, in order for a deed to be properly executed, certain acts, like the ablution and the declaration of intent, must be performed with respect to Islamic fundamental moral codes and the conception of the human body. The content of recited *qaṣā'id* is also another indication of religious characteristic of *sikiri* dance. On the other hand, its welcoming nature to non-Muslims and permissibility for a co-existence of women and men in the same performance give *sikiri* an earthly dimension.

2. Is there any kinship with Islamic *ḍikr* practice? In what ways?

There are both functional and structural relationships, which can be evaluated from various aspects. Functionally, potential kinships split in three primary parts:

- a. "both provide an alternative place of existence for ethereal feelings, out of settled rules of scriptural (Koranic) doctrines, in which participants express their devotion to God, the Prophet Mohammad and/or particular saints of *ṭarīqa*"
- b. "they enable, as Paul Spencer puts it, 'release of pent-up emotions' for their practitioners" (Spencer 1985)
- c. "both constitute a symbol of Muslim identity that can also be seen as a mechanism building up a group solidarity."

All of the above mentioned commonalities are placed as so, after observing the dance in the field and personal conversations with some of the practitioners and sheiks.

On the subject of structural kinships between *sikiri* and *ḍikr*, the usage of repetitive guttural sounds as rhythmic orientation mechanisms and swaying body parts including the torso, arms and the legs come into prominence. One incommodity regarding the structural kinship is that, there is no visual recording of a *ḍikr* performance from the given region and eventually such association can only be made through globally valid features of *ḍikr*; however, the acquired data still constitutes scientific value.

The theoretical cases, for the kinship between *sikiri* and *ḍikr*, therefore need to be revisited in order to reveal the proofs of such association.

While for Bone *sikiri* is “a form of *dhikr* widely practiced at weddings and festivals” (Bone 2007); according to Kubik, after Thorold (1993), it is “the local pronunciation of *dhikr*, which has lost some of its original traits such as spirit possession” (Kubik 2000).

Additionally, Sicard and Van Kol do not make any specific distinction between the two practices; for instance Van Kol writes, “*dkhir* or *sikiri* is a ceremony held at funerals, weddings (...)” (Van Kol 2008, Sicard 2000).

With this study it is aimed to contribute existing theories through revealing mentioned associations in depth. Since this, as far as is known, is the first comprehensive work on the subject, there are only few pre-existing theories to depend on or conflict. For this reason, under the influence of lacking solid background, inevitable speculations are kept limited in number and an attentive attitude is constantly targeted. Furthermore, one another aim of this study is to call attention to the subject for future researches, which is partly achieved through the cooperation of a disciple who is currently writing a paper about *sikiri*’s different aspects.

Other main findings on *sikiri* regarding the concept of dance can be sum up as follows:

Even though at first sight *sikiri* dance seems composed of simple steps and stamps in a certain order, a thorough analysis exhibits a more complex organization. Apart from the stamps and steps, basically *sikiri* dance is built upon a variety of leg and feet movements including swings and springs elaborated with specific usages of the torso and the arms. According to the data obtained through analysis all the mentioned movements occur in

variable length, intensity and heights. In addition to this, the usage of “the stage” (diagonal, forward, backward etc.) and countless signals produced through high-pitched calls and announcing different movement patterns, are other prominent elements of the dance. With reference to vocal accompaniment, it apparently requires another study. The vocal accompaniment of *sikiri* contains peculiar multi-part organizations and discernible features that are related to neither Islamic nor local practices. These performative discrepancies carry most likely considerable data not only regarding their structures but also socio-religious contexts.

Within this study the main stress was on the Islamic influences on *sikiri* dance; but the scale of this subject is extensive and multifaceted even at the local level. Therefore, exploring the following as future research strategies can facilitate the attainment: a research concentrated on the local influences along with local terminology of the dance, performances specific to certain dates, interviews with female performers and potential regional styles. To generate achievable strategies and development targets with regards to structural and stylistic variations of *sikiri*, there is need for more case studies at the local level to allow further assessment of local dimensions of the subject.

**Interview with Sheikh Yunus Wisikesi (35) - 22.03.2013 at Moya Aliya Malamusi's
Hause in Chileka**

Ferhat Arslan: Can you tell me your name again?

Sheikh Yunus: Yunus Wisikesi

F.A.: How old are you?

S.Y.: 35.

F.A.: And where were you born?

S.Y.: Mphalombe, Mulanje.

F.A.: Can you read Koran?

S.Y.: Yes I am.

F.A.: Where did you learn it? Here in this neighborhood or did you go somewhere else?

S.Y.: (He nods his head and telling in this neighborhood)

F.A.: Who teach you Koran?

S.Y.: My Seikh.

F.A.: What is his name?

S.Y.: The Sheikh who teach me?

F.A.: Uh-huh!

S.Y.: (He writes) Abubakar Said.

F.A.: And he was from?

S.Y.: From the district where I was born, Mphalombe, Mulanje.

F.A.: Did you go any other countries?

S.Y.: South Africa for three months only. And to Mozambique.

F.A.: Can you speak Arabic language?

S.Y.: No.

F.A.: But you can read Koran?

S.Y.: Just a little.

F.A.: In your mosque is there anybody else who can read Koran except you?

S.Y.: There is another one.

F.A.: Have you been to Zanzibar before?

S.Y.: No.

F.A.: When you do sikiri, at the beginning of it or before do you read anything?

S.Y.: Sometimes a little bit (?), sometimes no.

F.A.: When do you read, what is it?

S.Y.: Just a little bit *ayah*¹³⁴ from the Koran.

F.A.: And which ones?

S.Y.: Sometimes, mostly the *sura*¹³⁵ *Al-Fatiha*¹³⁶ is very good before *sikiri*.

F.A.: Can you read *Al-Fatiha* for me?

S.Y.: (He recites) [00:01:24 - 00:02:33]

F.A.: And at the end of *sikiri* dance, do you read anything?

S.Y.: We make *dua*¹³⁷.

F.A.: How is it?

S.Y.: *Dua*? You know if you want to do *dua* we start to praise Allah (...) and then after we pray (...) for *dunia*¹³⁸ and *akhirat*¹³⁹ and to protect (...) and pray for the *hidayah*¹⁴⁰ for the *ummah*¹⁴¹.

F.A.: Is it possible if someone else comes from another country and join your *sikiri*?

S.Y.: No problem, they are most welcome.

F.A.: Did anything like this happen before?

S.Y.: No, not yet.

F.A.: How did you become a sheikh? What are the requirements?

¹³⁴ Verses of the Koran.

¹³⁵ One of the 114 chapters of the Koran.

¹³⁶ This *sura* is the first chapter of the Koran and contains seven *ayah*. *Al-Fatiha* is considered as one of the most important *sura*.

¹³⁷ Ar. Prayer.

¹³⁸ Ar. Earth.

¹³⁹ Ar. A place for after-life, where heaven and hell reside.

¹⁴⁰ Ar. Path to Allah.

¹⁴¹ Ar. Community. Here the meaning is *ummat al-Islamiyah*, whole nation of Islam.

S.Y.: Ambition. That time I was glad to be a sheikh. I make (...) to learn some...I learned from my sheikh then I tried to go somewhere to learn...the knowledge. Sometime I was happy to see the one who is teaching the children, so that was also pray to Allah. Allah makes us to be sheikhs to teach the children, because to gain the happiness.

F.A.: And how old were you when you become a sheikh?

S.Y.: Five years ago. (when he was 30)

F.A.: What is the name of your mosque?

S.Y.: Issa.

F.A.: And who built this mosque and when was it?

S.Y.: Jamnatu from South Africa, who has passed away. It was ten years ago.

F.A.: Is there any other Muslim society in Malaŵi or in any other country that you are in contact?

S.Y.: No.

F.A.: You said we also read *qasida*, what is it?

S.Y.: It is like a music. *Qasida* sometimes is sang by the readers.

F.A.: How do you learn singing *qasida*?

S.Y.: Sometimes the readers teach you.

F.A.: Can you sing me a *qasida*?

S.Y.: He sings. [00:10:19 - 00:10:49]

F.A.: Thank you. What was it about?

S.Y.: We ask Allah to assist us, because we struggle in the path of Allah.

F.A.: How many *qasidas* do you know?

S.Y.: Many, more than twenty.

F.A.: And everybody in your town knows these *qasidas*?

S.Y.: Yes, if you are a Muslim you know.

F.A.: And children are learning to sing these *qasidas*...

S.Y.: Learning from *madrasas*.

F.A.: Once you told me that some people don't like *sikiri*, who are these people and why they don't like it?

S.Y.: In our country the majority of Malaŵians like Fulemazi don't like. When we are doing the ceremony both local and in international countries, Fulemazi don't like it and I don't know the reason, but they are poor (?) and *sikiri* is about being strong.

F.A.: You said *sikiri* is a dance. There are some movements in this dance, is there a meaning of these movements?

S.Y.: In *sikiri* there are two leaders, he (they?) stand in front to guide, make a sign. Then the others, friends can see what this guy is doing and follow him. Sometimes he also says "let's return", "raise your hands" etc...and lead.

F.A.: Have you ever seen someone who lose the self-control or faint while doing *sikiri* dance?

S.Y.: No.

F.A.: When doing *sikiri* you are reciting from Koran in Arabic language, do you use any other languages?

S.Y.: Arabic, Chiyao and Chicheŵa. And also English.

F.A.: And what is it about when you sing in English?

S.Y.: For example there is another *sikiri*. (and he sings but not in English)

F.A.: And how long a *sikiri* dance can last?

S.Y.: It might take up to 5 hours; but not all the time. During the month of Ramadan, after 'Īd ('Īd al-Fiṭr) people sing *sikiri* and it takes a long time.

F.A.: Who is not allowed to do *sikiri*?

S.Y.: Anybody can do *sikiri*, even non-Muslims and Christians can join the dance.

F.A.: When doing *sikiri*, sometimes dancers produce some (guttural) voices and shout, what is the reason for that?

S.Y.: It's chorus. These voices don't mean a thing; it is just a beautiful attitude so others can see it.

Protocols (Partly in German)

Recording Session 31:

Sikiri Dance by Chididi Rikaba Dance Group

Date: 30.03.2013/ Saturday

Place: Mangochi District, Liganda Chididi Village, T.A. Nankumba

Aufgenommene Personen/Ausführende: Chididi Rikaba Dance Group, Leiterin der Frauengruppe: Mrs. Amina Ganiza

Zeit: Nachmittag

Aufnehmende: Ferhat, August, Leni

Aufnahmetechnik: Z1: Leni, Z5: Ferhat, K4: August

Protokollantinnen: Ferhat

Instrumente: keine

Urheber der Musik: unbekannt

Genre: Sikiri Dance

Weitere Informationen:

Ablauf:

As we were arriving to the Village on foot, a group of women started to call each other to set up a group form. Before we sit and prepare our recording devices these women (ca. 10, with children around) had already formed their group and started to sing qasidas . All of the women had headscarf. They sang one or two qasidas , accompanied by dance movements while a group of men were waiting their turn at the back. At the end of each line of the qasida there was a short pause followed by a stressed syllable “hey-ya” (twice).

Just after the women finished their performance, men’s group started to sing and dance, and moved to the place where women sang by dancing. Unlike the women’s group men formed a certain order, a rectangle (4x3). Men were wearing blue-white-red coloured uniforms elaborated with Islamic symbols crescent & star, military boots, khofiya and waistband. While 6-7 men (including Sheikh Rabika Arab, 25) were singing/reciting ca. 12 men danced through these recited qasidas. Their dance was reminiscent of the Sikiri dance that we had recorded before; but relatively ‘better’ organized. As the main difference, the upper part of the body was more active.

Sequences:

- 1- Women’s sikiri
- 2- Men’s sikiri
- 3- Women’s sikiri
- 4- Men’s sikiri

Women's qasidas:

Leader of Women – Mrs. Amina Ganiza

1. Kul-huvallahû
 2. Bibi Patuma
 3. Apatuma Mwanangu
 4. Asifati wa usyaga
- Chiwa changalanga
Tinjile ulime katame

Men's qasidas:

1. Adalila Wangali mogaero
2. Amaliama akukama kulombibi
3. Sulaimana akwete upileooo!!!!!!
4. Chiwacho islamu tukudilekam' we akere
5. Patuma Numalilaga Waliga (Patuma Nimale)
6. Kuwandichira kwa kiyamakooooo
7. Amusa walepila kachilila chiwa....(?)

Session 9: Sikiri Dance

Datum: 20.3.2013

Ort: Issa Village, T.A. Kunthembwe

Allgemeine Info: Yunus bezeichnet Sikiri als einen Tanz mit Lesungen aus dem Koran (u.a. Fatiha); normalerweise praktiziert man Sikiri am Tag des Todes von Mohammed, hier allerdings war es eine staged performance.

Es kann zu jeder Zeit stattfinden und auch unterschiedlich lang dauern.

Immer von unterschiedlich vielen Leuten ausgeführt.

Sprache: Chiyao, sie verstehen aber auch Chichewa

Lesungen aus dem Koran tlw. Arabisch (Zit. "La ilahe illallah, Mohammeden Resullullah")

Kinder werden im Alter von 4 bis 17/18 Jahren unterrichtet, ab dann geben sie selbst ihr Wissen weiter.

Kleinkinder werden zusammen unterrichtet, später werden sie getrennt (wann??).

Alle tragen eine Kopfbedeckung (Frauen /Mädchen Schleier, Männer/Buben "Kappe").

Umgebung: Wir kommen zu Fuß im Dorf an, die Aufnahmen finden am Platz hinter einer Moschee statt, Kinder, Frauen und junge Männer stehen neben uns und schauen zu.

Zeit: ca. 13.00 - 14.00

Aufnehmende: Ferhat, Lisa, Helga, August, Clara, Matej, Leni

Aufnahmetechnik: K1 Matej, Z2 Helga, Z5 Ferhat, F2 Lisa, F3 Leni

Protokollantinnen: Ferhat, Clara, Leni

Zusätzliches Material: Fotos (Lisa F2, Leni F3)

F2: IMG_4806.JPG – IMG_4856.JPG

F3: DSCN 3145 - DSCN 3197

Aufgenommene Personen/ Ausführende:

- Junge Männer, Frauen und Kleinkinder des Dorfes
- Ethnische Gruppe: Yao
- Sprache: Chiyao aber auch Chichewa und vereinzelt Englisch. Lesungen aus dem Koran tlw. Arabisch (Zit. "La ilahe illallah, Mohammeden Resullullah")

Instrumente: keine

Urheber der Musik: unbekannt, Texte zum Teil aus dem Koran

„Genre“: Sikiri

Weitere Informationen: Wir sprachen mit Yunus, einem Mitglied des Dorfes. Yunus bezeichnet Sikiri als einen Tanz mit Lesungen aus dem Koran (u.a. Fatiha); normalerweise praktiziert man Sikiri am Tag des Todes von Mohammed, hier allerdings war es eine staged performance.

Es kann zu jeder Zeit stattfinden und auch unterschiedlich lang dauern, sowie von unterschiedlich vielen Leuten ausgeführt werden.

Kinder werden im Alter von 4 bis 17/18 Jahren unterrichtet, ab dann geben sie selbst ihr Wissen weiter.

Kleinkinder werden zusammen unterrichtet, später werden sie getrennt (wann??).

Alle tragen eine Kopfbedeckung (Frauen/Mädchen Schleier, Männer/Buben "Kappe").

Ablauf:

1) Insgesamt 10 junge Männer (davon 2 sehr junge, die keine Kopfbedeckung tragen)

Sie stehen in 3er Reihen, 1 Bub allein hinten

Sie stampfen einen bestimmten Rhythmus, Klatschen ab und zu, dazu wird gesungen /gerufen, dazwischen Gezischt; es gab immer einen Vorsänger; anscheinend haben manche Bewegungen symbolische Bedeutung.

Laut Yunus heißen diese Gesänge "Qasida".

Der Tanz besteht aus Vorwärts und Rückwärts- Bewegungen, Gruppe bewegt sich in einer Formation, der Vorsänger gibt die Richtung an.

3 Männer treten abwechselnd in den Vordergrund als Vorsänger oder - tänzer.

Die Gruppe folgt oder antwortet verbal und physisch.

2) 12 Frauen singen, "Fauchen" (das Wort: „heya“), stoßen Laute aus („ah“), Treten mit Füßen hin und her, Arme werden mit bewegt.

Es gibt eine oder zwei Vorsängerinnen, Call and Response- Schema (Vervollständigung der vorgesungenen Phrasen)

Bewegungen: Streichen mit den Händen über das Gesicht, Falten Hände wie zum Gebet
-> typische abschließende Bewegung , die beim Beten verwendet wird

3) Ca. 20 Kinder werden von 2 Frauen nach vorne gebracht. Die Kinder stellen sich zuerst als Gruppe auf, werden später von Frauen in 2 Reihen getrennt.

Frauen gehen zwischen den Reihen durch.

Frauen als Vorsänger. Kinder singen Frauen nach, dazwischen "heya" geflüstert von Kindern. Kinder laufen winkend hinaus.

Recording Session 13a-f

Interview with Sheikh Yunus Wisikesi + Friday's Prayer + Adhan + Dhikr + Sikiri

Group: Ferhat

Address: Singano Village, Chileka; Issa Mosque

Event: Personal Interview with Sheikh Yunus Wisikesi + Friday's Prayer + Adhan + Dhikr + Sikiri

Language: English, Chichewa, Arabic

Place: Moya Aliya Malamusi's House; Issa Mosque

Date: 22.03.2013, 09:30 – 14:00

Subject:

1. Interview Moya's House (01:20:33)
2. Interview Issa Mosque (00:06:58)
3. Adhan (00:03:11)
4. Friday's Prayer (00:52:56)
5. Dhikr (00:04:11)
6. Sikiri (00:04:52)

1. Interview Moya's House (Interview Beginning & Interview Continuing 01:20:33)
Sheikh Yunus has arrived to Moya's house around 9 am, as we have arranged on Wednesday. After breakfast with Moya and his sons, interview has begun. It was both

formal and semi-formal. Sheikh openly answered all the questions I asked (c. 17), where we had troubles with question-answer style, we continued the interview as if we had a normal conversation, elaborated with personal stories. During the interview Sheikh sang/recite Adhan, Fatiha and one or two Qasida.

2. Interview Issa Mosque (00:06:58)

We had a short Interview about Sikiri and Dhikr inside the Mosque.

3. Adhan (00:03:11)

Outside, in front of mosque. The Adhan was read to call the society to Friday's prayer around 12:20. It lasted 3 min. 11 sec. The person who read Adhan was Islam Chakwana (21), a member of the Mosque who wears a one-part long white dress and Khofiya (cap). There were almost no melisma during the read of Adhan. However one of the maqams of ezan reciting was partly hearable. According to Sheikh each Adhan, five in total, is sang in the same style. There is no difference between morning, afternoon or evening Adhans, unlike in Turkey.

4. Friday's Prayer (00:52:56)

Inside the mosque. After c. 20 min. Vaaz/Sermon of Sheikh Yunus, Adhan (length: 02:35) was read again by the same person (I. Chakwana). Right after that Khutba was being read by another Sheikh (name unknown, c. 40), which begins with "Elhamdülillah (2x) Elhamdülillah El-Lezi...". Khutba was high probably in Arabic language. After around 9 minutes of fast reading from Koran (?), a new episode has started (32:30); following to that a short pray was read by the Sheikh and the group joined him at the end of each part of the pray with the word "Amin". Moreover some parts of Fatiha was also read with the mix of some other Arabic prays (?), which concluded by the group. During Khutba, fast reading parts was high probably in Chichewa and the following seemingly more "sung" parts was in Arabic language. In terms of musical differences in between these two parts, one could observe some characteristics of maqam techniques in Arabic parts; and in fast reading parts in Chichewa, the usage of pentatonic (?) scale that we have heard around Chileka, which has an idiosyncratic ending.

After Khutba we started to perform Namaz/Salat which lasted much shorter than the ones I know. First the obligated part of Namaz, namely Farz, has been performed. It consists several short prays from Koran and Fatiha. When the obligated part was over 3-4 people have left the mosque and the rest continued to perform the second phase of Namaz, namely Sünnet/Sunnah. This part is not obligated.

5. Dhikr (00:04:11)

After explaining the difference between sikiri and dhikr, Sheikh Yunus gathered around 16 boys, aged between 6-12, to show how would they perform dhikr. Sheikh explained that they do not perform dhikr as group; but rather in solitude by calling different names and

“adjectives” of Allah (i.e. La ilahe illallah). The gathered boys only showed what Sheikh saw as dhikr when he was in South African Republic. Even though it was performed in a short period of time, the accelerating tempo characteristic of widely-known dhikr could be observed. As another basic performance practice of dhikr, the group was led by Sheikh with some certain body and hand gestures to control the unity of the performance as a whole.

6. Sikiri (00:04:52)

During the interview Sheikh described sikiri as a showdown. He said that one who wants to perform sikiri should not be hungry or feel weak. This attitude (showing off?) was visible during the two sessions of recordings. For the performance more than 15 people has been gathered; out of which only 9-10 people were forming the core of the dance, while the rest joining them only occasionally.

The accompanied vocal music can be described as “homophonic multipart singing” (Kubik) and in additional parts as call & response. Vocal part is sung by the front line of group, including Sheikh (not Yunus) and three other people. Seemingly Sheikh was the leader (both in singing and dancing) of the three and the whole group. Each line that is sung has a certain beginning and an end. Sheikh begins singing the line and following to that the group repeats the Sheikh’s part and then all (the front singing group) continues singing the rest of the line together.

The second part of line, “hele-yo - (mama) - i-ya-yiii”, has been repeated from the half of the performance on, around 20-30 times, until the end.

As Sheikh described sikiri dance, it is seemingly a demonstration of power (of what? Manhood? Islam? Sect?) with strong kicks to the ground. Movement of feet was like: 2x left (one front – one back) + 2x right (one front – one back) (or vice versa). Arms were relatively freer than feet, only occasionally they were used to show the direction for the group. During the interview, Sheikh Yunus mentioned that these movements have no special meaning. In addition to that periodically heard “stressed syllables”, i.e. hrrrrr bum! Hey-ya! etc. have also no meaning. Towards ending the group turned first 90 degrees to the left, continued dancing in this direction around 30 sec. and then with another 90 degrees of turning they finished dancing.

Abstract

This work describes and analyses certain aspects of *sikiri* dance with respect to its functional and structural associations with Islamic doctrines, which are exceptionally decisive on *sikiri*'s current performance practices. This study is an initial attempt to investigate the history and the scope of *sikiri* along with its present status among the Yao in East Africa, and to draw a contextual frame in which *sikiri* shows its idiosyncratic features.

Therefore in the first part, the state of Islam and significant transformative events occurred during its adoption processes in East Africa and Malaŵi is primarily illustrated. The work then, in the second part, highlights a potential kinship between *sikiri* and Islamic *ḍikr* practice through examining their contextual commonalities as well as similar performative features. The empirical data for this part of the study was obtained from a short fieldwork in Mangochi and Blantyre Districts of Malaŵi.

In the following section, the study is specifically concerned with the structure and various formative motional elements of *sikiri*, and furthermore two transcription methods are used in order to reveal an outline of *sikiri*'s motional grammar.

On the basis of the results of this research, it can be concluded that *sikiri* dance possess a great variety of traits different from both its local and global precedent forms, and consequently requires further studies.

Keywords: *sikiri*, *ḍikr*, Islam, the Yao, participant observation, Labanotation, frame by frame analysis

Abstract

Die vorhergehende Arbeit beschreibt und analysiert gewisse Aspekte der *Sikiritradiation*, unter Berücksichtigung funktionaler und struktureller Assoziationen mit der islamischen Glaubenslehre, welche maßgebend ist, für die aktuelle Ausübung dieser Tanzform. Diese Studie, ist ein erster Versuch die Geschichte und den Wirkungsbereich von *sikiri*, gemeinsam mit seinem aktuellen Status bei den Yao in Ostafrika zu untersuchen und einen kontextuellen Rahmen zu skizzieren der die idiosynkratischen Eigenschaften von *sikiri* aufzeigt.

Demzufolge werden im ersten Teil, die Beschaffenheit des Islam und signifikante religiös-transformierende Ereignisse, die während seiner Adaption in Ostafrika und Malaŵi auftraten, illustriert. Im zweiten Teil, beleuchtet die Arbeit eine potentielle Verwandtschaft zwischen *sikiri* und der islamischen *dīkr* Praxis, durch Untersuchung sowohl ihrer kontextuellen Gemeinsamkeiten, als auch ähnlicher performativer Merkmale. Die empirischen Daten dieses Teils der Arbeit, entspringen einer kleinen Feldforschung im Mangochi und Blantyre Distrikt von Malaŵi.

Im darauffolgenden Abschnitt, beschäftigt sich die Studie speziell mit der Struktur diverser formativer Bewegungselemente von *sikiri* und weiteres wird mittels zweier Transkriptionsmethoden versucht ein Bewegungsmuster von *sikiri* zu darzustellen.

Basierend auf den Ergebnissen dieser Forschung lässt sich festhalten, dass der *Sikiritanz* eine große Vielfalt an Eigenschaften besitzt, die sich wiederum von lokalen als auch globalen Formen des Tanzes unterscheiden und folglich weitere Erforschung verlangen.

Schlüsselwörter: *sikiri*, *dīkr*, Islam, die Yao, teilnehmende Beobachtung, Labanotation, Bild für Bild Analyse

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Sprachkenntnisse

Türkisch	Muttersprache
Deutsch	B2.2 Zeugnis
Englisch	Fließend in Wort und Schrift

Besondere Kenntnisse

Edv	Sehr gute Kenntnisse in MS Office; Finale, Sibelius [Notationprogramme]; Pinnacle, Edius [Videoschnittprogramme]; Internet
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