

The Cultural Production of Maore (Mayotte Island - The Comoros)

The new status of the island of Mayotte (*Maore*) as the fifth French Overseas Department means that Mahorais culture is now officially part of the Francophone world, and will remain so for the foreseeable future. Has this change in status provided a boost to cultural production intended for audiences beyond Mayotte's coral reef? Perhaps. Indeed, officially becoming part of France has resulted in renewed tension between French and Mahorais cultures, the latter now trying to carve out a space within a society where local cultures lack official status of virtually any kind. At the same time, traditional French society is struggling to understand how to integrate Mahorais culture into its own fabric, in much the same way as it attempts to embrace the many immigrant cultures already present in the Hexagon.

In recent years, performances of island dances have gained in popularity in metropolitan France, a full-length film was produced on the island that was broadcast on the *RTBF* network in August 2013, and French-language literature, mostly penned as yet by *Wazungu* – natives of metropolitan France living on the island – is beginning to emerge. Some strides have been made in setting the stage for a future literature in *Shimaore* and *Kibushi*, but for the most part, creative work in the island's indigenous languages remains limited to music, dance, and oral narrative. In this talk, I survey existing cultural production and point out some recent developments.

Short List of Selected References

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Poem by Yazidou MAANDHUI *Dessine-moi des rêves* (Palimpseste du silence, 2005)

Dessine-moi des rêves
D'enfants
Ces mêmes rêves
Qui mûrissent en chagrin
Et tombent dans les souvenirs
D'antan
Entendent-ils la berceuse
Que murmure la mère
Comprennent-ils ces vœux
Confiés à l'encens
Résident-ils encore dans ces ruines
Dessine-moi leur rêve
Aujourd'hui
Serait-ce celui d'un enclos
Où éternel est le jeu
Où la mémoire peut se souvenir
Qu'ils nous pardonnent

Sketch for me
Children's dreams
The same dreams
That mature in sadness
And tumble into the memories
Of long ago
Do they hear the lullaby
Whispered by their mother
Do they understand those wishes
Entrusted to incense
Do they still reside in those ruins
Sketch for me their dream
Today
Would it appear as an enclosure
Where eternal is the game
Where memory can remember
That they forgive us

(Translation: Dan Golembeski)

Poem from the Association TAMA (Written by prisoners in Mayotte's detention center, À l'ombre des mots, 2004)

D'Anjouan à Mayotte

J'étais à Anjouan.
Je souffrais là-bas
J'étais seul, orphelin.
Je suis venu à Mayotte
Pour trouver du travail
Trouver une nouvelle vie
En fin de compte
Je me retrouve en prison
Sans mère, sans père.
Je souffre autant ici
Sans famille, sans amis
Personne ne vient me voir...

--Issiaka

From Anjouan To Mayotte

I was on Anjouan.
I suffered there
I was alone, an orphan.
I came to Mayotte
To find work
To find a new life
In the end
I find myself in prison
Mother-less and Father-less.
I suffer as much here
Without family, without friends
No one comes to see me...

--Issiaka

(Translation: Dan Golembeski)