

Mayotte: French or Comorian?

The Peculiar Case of “Recolonization”

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Chapter I: Overview of the Comoros Islands

Introduction

Situated between northeastern Mozambique and northwestern Madagascar, the Comoros Islands are easily overlooked. The four islands that make up the archipelago – Grande Comore, Anjouan, Mohéli, and Mayotte – share a history marked by contact with the Arab world, French colonization, secession, and coups d'états. However, it is their postcolonial situation that makes them unique relative to other African countries. In December 1974, the four islands voted on whether or not to become independent from France. The results revealed a stark contrast among the islands, with nearly 100% of Mohélians, Anjouanais, and Grande-Comorians voting for independence and over 60% of Mahorais voting to remain within the French Republic.¹ Still, the postcolonial status of the four islands was unclear given that France had not announced whether independence was decided by an island-by-island vote or an archipelago-wide vote. Meanwhile, in July 1975, Ahmed Abdallah Abderemane, president of the Government Council and Chief Minister of the Comoros, declared independence unilaterally. Mayotte nonetheless rejected his declaration. France accepted the archipelago's independence and subsequently organized two rounds of voting for Mayotte in 1976.

In early 1976, over 99% of Mahorais voted in favor of Mayotte remaining part of the French Republic and a few months later, 80% of Mahorais asked for it to be fully integrated into France as a *département d'outre-mer* (DOM: overseas department).² Ultimately, France only granted Mayotte the status of *Territoire d'outre-mer* (TOM:

¹ Namira Nahouza, Indépendance et partition des Comores (1974-1978) (Moroni, Grande Comore: KomÉdit. 2005) 27.

² Robert Aldrich and John Connell, The Last Colonies (Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1998) 229.

overseas territory), citing a lack of economic development and a society and culture different from that of France. That same year, a draft United Nations Security Council resolution recognized the Comorian state's sovereignty over Mayotte but France vetoed the resolution and subsequent resolutions on the status of Mayotte. Over the next few decades, movements developed for and against the return of Mayotte to the archipelago. In 2001, France changed Mayotte's status to *collectivité départementale* (departmental collectivity), a status meant to highlight that Mayotte was similar to a French *département* (department) but not yet an overseas department. Nevertheless, in a March 2009 referendum, over 95% of Mahorais voted in favor of departmentalization. In March 2011, Mayotte officially became a French overseas department.³

Given the history, language, and culture that the four islands share, one would expect them to choose the same path – that of independence. How can we explain the decision of Mayotte to maintain its ties with France? The main reasons often cited by scholars are the following: (1) Mayotte's feelings of difference from the other islands, (2) the dominance of Grande Comore stemming from the transfer of the administrative center, and (3) economic and social benefits. I contend that these factors indeed played a role in Mayotte's decision but I will argue that Mayotte's feelings that it would function better within the French Republic also stemmed from its historical relationship with France that dates back to the nineteenth century. I will also add a fourth factor – the trend of political instability and chaos in the archipelago following independence in 1976. This peculiar case raises the question of whose right prevails: territorial integrity of the Comorian state or the right of self-determination of Mayotte? Mayotte has consistently

³ "Mayotte becomes the 101st French Department," [France.fr](http://www.france.fr/en/knowning/geography/overseas-departments-and-territories/article/mayotte-becomes-101st-french-department), 27 Nov. 2011
<<http://www.france.fr/en/knowning/geography/overseas-departments-and-territories/article/mayotte-becomes-101st-french-department>>.

requested departmentalization since the late 1950s and there is evidence of events that legitimize the Mahorais' feelings of mistreatment and that they are benefiting economically from remaining within France. Still, geography and history demonstrate that the island belongs to the Comorian state.

Prior to French colonization, the four islands shared a distinct pre-colonial culture. The islands belong to the Swahili group that extends over the east coast of Africa. The populations of the four islands were the result of contact between great Arab families and islamicized African populations.



Source: CIA World Factbook, 2011

Situated favorably between the African mainland and the large island of Madagascar in the Mozambique Channel, the archipelago was a popular stopping place for traders. The common language of East Africa is Swahili, which is still commonly used in the

archipelago, along with local languages, French, and a variety of Malagasy, spoken especially in Mayotte.⁴ A significant portion of the Comorian language's vocabulary originates directly from Arabic. Islam is the religion of the majority of the islanders, with approximately 99% of them practicing the religion.⁵ The Mahorais that speak Malagasy have been assimilated into the Comorian environment for a long time. Furthermore, Mayotte's dialect, Mahorais, is very close to Anjouanais, the dialect of Anjouan.⁶

It is evident that the Comorian culture is predominantly Islamic and that France's arrival is of very recent origin. Although the French abolished the system of slavery put in place by the Arabs in 1846⁷, France's presence in the islands seemed futile. Given that the archipelago is small, it was unclear what France's interest was in colonizing the islands. In the nineteenth century, France and other European colonial powers started interfering in the affairs of the archipelago.⁸ France saw Britain and the Zanzibar – the Arabs that were closest to Comorian origins – as threats.⁹ In 1841, Andriantsoly, the sultan of Mayotte, ceded the Mahorais territory to France in exchange for military support and the guarantee of political stability and security. The other three islands were officially annexed to the French empire in 1912. The Comoros islands were a poor outskirts of the French empire that attracted few settlers. The islanders refused Christian evangelization and earned small profits. France did not decolonize the islands at the

⁴ Peter Hawkins, The Other Hybrid Archipelago (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007) 148-149.

⁵ Claude Allibert, Mayotte: Plaque Tournante et Microcosme de l'Océan Indien Occidental. Son Histoire Avant 1841 (Paris: Éditions Anthropos, 1997) 133.

⁶ Nahouza 16-17.

⁷ Mahmoud Ibrahim, État Français et Colons Aux Comores (1912-1946) (Paris: CEROI-INALCO, 1997) 23.

⁸ Hawkins 149.

⁹ Ibrahim 21.

beginning of the 1960s, when other African colonies became autonomous. There was little nationalist pressure for France to leave the islands. The archipelago appeared to be too small and poor for sovereignty.¹⁰

Namira Nahouza, a Comorian specialist who wrote one of the leading works on the events leading up to independence, said that in 1974, the islands found themselves without real roads, and electricity and industries were scarce. Relations between the four islands were almost nonexistent. There were barely a few planes flying from one island to another and there were no regular boats. The islands exported vanilla, scented plants and pepper. They produced rice from the mountains, manioc, potatoes, corn, and bananas. Nonetheless, they remained extremely dependent on imports. The islands found themselves relying heavily on France for survival, buying their rice from the French because they sold it to them at an affordable price. Thanks to grants from the Metropolis (mainland France minus its colonies), the Comorians were able to buy their rice at a reasonable price, knowing that they imported up to 15,000 tons per year. The deficit of its payment balance was fixed at 100 francs in 1961, and reached 600 francs in 1972.¹¹

The question of the status of Mayotte sparks a contentious debate with two sides – the territorial integrity of the Comorian state over Mayotte and Mayotte’s right to secede from the archipelago. David Raič, the Deputy Director and Programme Coordinator for the Hague Institute for the Internationalisation of Law, argues that the right of self-determination refers to the development and preservation of individuals’ collective identity and human rights. If the actions or policies of governmental authorities of the parent state pose a menace to the collective identity, existence, and freedom of

¹⁰ Aldrich and Connell 229.

¹¹ Nahouza 17.

individuals, individuals have the right to pursue self-determination through secession.¹² The two opposing sides have been described in terms of two theories on secession. Statists argue that secession involves taking territory from an existing state whereas nationalists stress that a nation's health affects the wellbeing of its members.¹³ Despite Mayotte's decision to remain under French rule, the Comorian state continues to claim Mayotte as part of the archipelago.

I will examine the issues, events, and circumstances that influenced Mayotte to choose to remain under French rule as well as the arguments for and against the territorial integrity of the Comorian state and the right of self-determination of Mayotte. I will execute this task by looking at the works of historians and political scientists on colonization, independence movements, decolonization and secession; first-hand accounts of the Comorian independence movement and the Mahorais insularity; historical analyses by Comorian experts; media coverage of the referenda leading up to independence as well as the outcome of departmentalization, and UN resolutions on the question of Mayotte.

In the next section, I will examine the primary factors noted by scholars as influencing Mayotte's decision to remain part of France.

¹² David Raič, Statehood and the law of self-determination (Leiden, Netherlands: Universiteit Leiden, 2002) 395-396.

¹³ Don Harrison Doyle, Secession as an International Phenomenon: From America's Civil War to Contemporary Separatist Movements (Athens, GA: University of Georgia, 2010) 19-20.

Competing Explanations

Historians and political scientists have posited three different factors which may have affected Mayotte's decision to remain under French rule: (1) Mayotte's feelings of difference from the other islands, (2) the dominance of Grande Comore stemming from the transfer of the administrative center, and (3) economic and social benefits.

Some scholars argue that the Mahorais have always viewed themselves as different from the other islanders. The Mahorais believed that they had a Creole character that made them more European, similar to that of Réunion and Seychelles.¹⁴ There was indeed an elite composed of Creole families in Mayotte that was to later support the Mahorais in their fight for departmentalization.¹⁵ Following the 1974 referendum, the population of Mayotte – with support from a small but vocal lobby in France – protested, saying that they had no desire to join the Comorian state. They contended that they were ethnically and culturally different from inhabitants of the neighboring islands. They insisted that Mayotte had joined with the other islands into one colonial territory for strictly administrative convenience and that France could not legally or morally reject the results of the referenda.¹⁶

Other scholars argue that Grande Comore's tendency to view itself as the face of the archipelago influenced Mayotte's decision, citing the transfer of the administrative center in 1958 as the beginning of tensions between Mayotte and Grande Comore.¹⁷ In

¹⁴ Helen Chapin Metz, "Comoros: A Country Study," 1994, 21 Oct. 2011 <<http://countrystudies.us/comoros/7.htm>>.

¹⁵ Julien Pierrot, "Entretien avec Jean Martin, historien : Les élus de Mayotte ont fait preuve d'une infinie ténacité," *Hors Série N°7* 10 Dec. 2011.

¹⁶ Aldrich 230.

¹⁷ Philippe Boisadam, *Mais que faire de Mayotte? Analyse Chronique de l'Affaire de Mayotte 1841-2000* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009) 92.

addition to being the largest state in the archipelago, Grande Comore is also the most economically developed of the three independent islands. Grande Comore wields the most political power of the three islands given that it is home to the archipelago's administrative center.¹⁸ According to an article published in *Le Figaro* on June 27, 1975, some Mahorais said, "I would prefer to depend on France than to become, ten years from now, the colony of Grande Comore or the domination of Anjouan."¹⁹ And Mayotte is not the only island that felt this way. Anjouan and Mohéli seceded from the archipelago in August 1997, though a new constitution was passed in 2001, assuring equitable power sharing between the three islands.²⁰

However, some scholars say that the decision ultimately has to do with the economic benefits that come with French integration. These scholars say that the Mahorais felt that since they had a smaller population, greater natural resources, and a higher standard of living, the island would have more economic stability within a French union. Though Mayotte initially suffered following its secession from the archipelago, the CFA franc was replaced with the metropolitan franc, and the standard of living was ameliorated.²¹ With the economic disparity increasing between the archipelago and Mayotte, many Comorians have immigrated to Mayotte. The standard of living in the other islands declined considerably due to years of political instability.²² As a result of becoming a French overseas department, Mayotte will receive the same social benefits as

¹⁸ David Andrew et al., *Madagascar & Comoros*, (China: Lonely Planet, 2008) 235.

¹⁹ Nahouza 19.

²⁰ Hawkins 147.

²¹ Institut d'émissions d'outre-mer, "Février 1976, le franc remplace le franc CFA," *Institut d'émissions d'outre-mer*, 1976, 9 Dec. 2011.

²² "Comoros: Hope is a boat to Mayotte," *IRIN Africa*, 16 Jan. 2008, 26 Sept. 2011. <<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=76277>>.

French citizens, pay the same taxes, and become an outermost region of the European Union. Furthermore, polygamy will be banned, the age for marriage will be increased, and the powers of the Islamic justice will be reduced.

I argue that all three factors – Mayotte’s feelings of difference, the domination of Grande Comore, and economic and social benefits – contributed to Mayotte’s decision to remain under French rule. However, I will take the explanation a step further and argue that Mayotte’s feelings of difference stemmed from its special relationship with France that developed instantly in the nineteenth century. Mayotte was not only the first island to become a French colony but also the only island to skip protectorate status – hence, this is the starting point of the Mahorais’ belief that they would function better within the French Republic. I also introduce a fourth factor that may have influenced Mayotte’s decision to remain under French rule – the trend of political instability and chaos in the archipelago. The Mahorais were concerned for their future if they joined the Comorian state not only because of longstanding problems with neighboring islands but also because of the direction in which Comorian politics was going. The post-independent Comorian state was plagued by multiple coups d’état, economic and political instability, secession, and challenges in power sharing.

In the next chapter, I will explain the four main factors motivating Mayotte’s decision to remain under French rule within the context of the events leading up to independence in 1976 as well as the results of French rule for Mayotte. Subsequently, I will draw conclusions about whether Mayotte should be returned to the archipelago or continue to be a French overseas department.

Chapter II: Comorian Islands Choose Postcolonial Status

Part I: Why did Mayotte choose to remain under French rule?

Historical Relationship with France

Though the four islands share a pre-colonial culture, Mayotte's relationship with France began somewhat earlier. In 1841, Mayotte was the first of the four islands to become a French colony. Unlike the other islands, Mayotte did not begin as a protectorate. Since 1838, Mayotte was in the midst of a civil war provoked by Anjouan, resulting in the overthrow of Andriantsoly. By the end of the 1830s, Andriantsoly felt that he had no other choice but to find military support outside of the archipelago, in the form of none other than the French. The French, however, were reluctant to give him the military support he was seeking. Instead, the French proposed that Mayotte and France unite. Overwhelmed by years of war, the population of Mayotte put pressure on Andriantsoly to pursue a union with France. The treaty authorizing the cession of Mayotte to France was signed on April 24, 1841. France added another country to its empire; Mayotte would finally be able to restore civil peace and political stability. For the Mahorais, France became synonymous with liberty and peace.²³ Though France issued a royal ordinance on December 9, 1846 outlawing slavery and enfranchising the slaves, numerous limitations were imposed on them, including the rejection of universal suffrage.

It is not until the end of the Second World War that the Mahorais began to receive the same rights as French citizens. In 1946, the Constitution of the Fifth Republic creates the French Union and grants citizens in France's overseas territories the status of "French

²³ Said Ahamadi, Mayotte et la France : De 1841 à 1912, (Mayotte: Éd., Du Baobab, 1999) 153-155.

citizen,” which includes the right to vote, freedom of association, the right to strike, and the right to work, to name a few. The law of May 9, 1946 granted the archipelago administrative and political autonomy vis-à-vis Madagascar. The September 24 decree constituted the Territory of the Comoros, with Dzaoudzi as its administrative center. The four islands used this newly gained right to elect a deputy, Said Mohamed Cheikh, to the Constituent National Assembly for the first time. The constitutional decree of October 25, 1946 created a General Council comprised of representatives for each island according to its demographic weight. The framework law of June 23, 1956 extended to universal suffrage and allocated the archipelago with a Territorial Assembly.²⁴

This unique historical relationship indeed explains Mayotte’s belief that it has cultural ties to France. Richard Cornwell, the head of the Operational African Security Information Service (OASIS), confirmed that Mayotte’s somewhat longer relationship with France relative to the other islands did bring French culture to the island: “There was also an appeal to cultural sensibilities – the longer association with France and the subsequent Creolisation and Christianisation of much of the Mahorian population.”²⁵ Jean Martin, the leading expert on the history of Mayotte, said that there were Creole families living in Pamanzi, or Petite Terre (“Little Land,” an island just off of Mayotte) from Sainte-Marie and Nosy Be (islands off the coast of Madagascar) who had settled in Mayotte long before the independence of Madagascar in 1960. They were French-

²⁴ Zaïdou Bamana, Les consultations de la population mahoraise : Une volonté toujours réaffirmé, (CITY: Meso Editions, YEAR) 57-58.

²⁵ Richard Cornwell, “Anjouan: A Spat in the Indian Ocean,” African Security Review, 1998, 20 Oct. 2011 <<http://www.iss.co.za/pubs/asr/7no3/AfricaWatch.html>>.

speaking families, he said, who formed a kind of elite, many of whom studied in good schools in Madagascar.²⁶

Transfer of the Capital

Given the rights that the archipelago received as a part of the French Republic, there did not appear to be any reason that the islanders would have any problems with one another. The islands were all on good terms within the framework of the Parti de l'entente comorienne (PEC), which enabled each island to have its own president.²⁷ However, tensions began to rise between the islands. Following the law of 1946 and the introduction of democratic norms in the archipelago, Martin argued, "it is clear that the law of numbers will play a large role, for the islands of Mayotte and Mohéli find themselves in a position of domination by the other two neighboring islands."²⁸ During the legislative elections of 1957, Marcel Henry and Younoussa Bamana were elected deputies for Mayotte. They claimed a particular lot for Mayotte in the Comorian ensemble, calling Mayotte "the eldest daughter of France." The decree of July 22, 1957 reinforced the capabilities of the Territorial Assembly and created the Council of Government. The state thus institutionalized an autonomous government that always reunited in Dzaoudzi.

However, on May 14, 1958, the Territorial Assembly passed a motion principle requesting the transfer of the administrative center of the archipelago from Dzaoudzi to Moroni, with the representatives of Mayotte voting against the transfer.²⁹ Martin stated

²⁶ Perrot 2011.

²⁷ Boisadam 92.

²⁸ Perrot 2011.

²⁹ Bamana 58.

that it was obvious that Grande Comore would prevail, given the “law of numbers” – Grande Comore had anywhere from 50,000 to 80,000 habitants while Mayotte had 12,000 to 15,000.³⁰ The transfer provoked a brutal rupture between the elected representatives of Grande Comore, Anjouan, and Mohéli and the elected representatives of Mayotte. Cheikh, the author of the proposal, proposed the transfer for two reasons. First, if circumstances required resorting to partisans from Mitsamiouli, a former Arab sultanate from the north of Grande Comore, this could take place more quickly if the administrative center were in Moroni. Second, Cheikh wanted to distance himself from the elected representatives of Mayotte who were already discussing French departmentalization. The territorial assembly – in which 18 out of the 30 deputies are Grande-Comorian – considered Moroni to be the leading center of the archipelago. The run-down state of the administrative buildings of Dzaoudzi was another motivation for this decision.³¹

The transfer alienated a number of the residents of Mayotte, who deemed their island worthy of special regard because of the duration of its attachment to France. They felt threatened by the political domination of leaders from the other islands.³² Zaïdou Bamana, a journalist for *Mayotte Hebdo*, said, “Although minorities, the occasion was given to them to mark solemnly their difference from the other three islands.”³³ The Mahorais felt insulted and betrayed by this “decapitalization” – Martin argued, “In selecting Moroni rather than another community, the influence of Said Mohamed Cheikh

³⁰ Perrot 2011.

³¹ Boisadam 92-93.

³² Aldrich and Connell 229.

³³ Bamana 58.

and weight of largely-elected Comoros, which accounted for half of the assembly, seem obvious. For the Mahorais, who consider their island as ‘the eldest daughter of France in the Mozambique Channel’, this ‘capitalization’ had hints of denial, betrayal, and was seen as a humiliation.” The Creole families in Mayotte were also displeased with the transfer – they were outspoken critics of the transfer and spearheaded the Mahorais claim.”³⁴

Movement for Departmentalization Crystallizes

The referendum of September 28, 1958 called on the ensemble of the French Union to vote “yes” or “no” on the Constitution of the Fifth Republic. The concerned territories were given three options – to remain within the Republic (departmental status), choose the status of member state of the French Community (replacing the French Union), or secede (independence). Anjouan, Mohéli, and Grande Comore voted “yes” on the Constitution and opted for the status of member state of the French Community. Mayotte, however, voted “no” on the Constitution, with 95% of Mahorais preferring the status of overseas department. The four Mahorais advisers submitted a motion to the Territorial Assembly demanding the departmentalization of Mayotte.³⁵ On November 2, 1958, hundreds of notables met in Tsoundzou to establish the Congrès de Mayotte (Congress of Mayotte) and the Union pour la Défense des Intérêts de Mayotte (UDIM: Union for the Defense of the Interests of Mayotte).³⁶ On December 11, 1958, the motion was rejected. On December 21, the elected representatives of Grande Comore, Mohéli,

³⁴ Perrot 2011.

³⁵ Bamana 58.

³⁶ Perrot Histoire de Mayotte de 1946 à 1977: Un combat à rebours de l’Histoire 2011.

and Anjouan chose the status of Overseas Territory, while the Mahorais voted against it. The Territorial Assembly became the Chamber of Deputies in early 1959 and adopted a motion requesting more autonomy for the archipelago on December 1, 1960.³⁷

At the end of 1962, Yves Daruvar, the High Commissioner, along with the services of the archipelago, left Dzaoudzi for Moroni. The management of finances eventually moved to Moroni as well. As a result of the transfer, jobs were removed from Dzaoudzi, stores became busier, and the hospital lacked trained staff and medicine. Women found themselves without the resources necessary to feed and raise their children. In 1966, these women found a spokeswoman in the form of Zena M'déré. That same year, the Mouvement Populaire Mahorais (MPM: Mahoré People's Movement) was established. The Congress of Mayotte protested against the transfer of the administrative center and passed a motion calling for departmentalization of Mayotte for the first time. Slogans such as "Maori farantsa!" ("French Mayotte") and "Stay French to be free" became popular. On August 2, 1966, Cheikh came to Mayotte to meet with community leaders. The women of Pamandzi (commune located in Petite Terre) demanded to participate in the meeting. However, only M'déré was admitted. The women attempted to throw stones at Cheikh, who escaped.³⁸ On December 23, 1972, the Chamber of Deputies passed a motion requesting that the archipelago be granted independence before 1976, with the Mahorais deputies voting against the motion.

³⁷ Bamana 58.

³⁸ Julien Perrot, "Histoire de Mayotte de 1946 à 1977: Un combat à rebours de l'Histoire," Hors Série N°7, 10 Dec. 2011.

Comorians seek independence while Mahorais choose French integration (1974-1976)

On October 3, 1974, the French government submitted a bill seeking to organize the consultation of the Comorians. The Senate, anticipating an island-by-island vote, adopted an amendment organizing a consultation for self-determination of the people of the Comoros on November 23, 1974. However, the self-determination ballot of December 23, 1974 leads to quasi-unanimity of the archipelago in favor of independence – 95.4% of inhabitants of Grande Comore, Anjouan, and Mohéli. Mayotte declared a majority of 63.2% in favor of remaining within the French Republic.³⁹

<u>1974 Referendum Results</u>	Grande Comore	Anjouan	Mohéli	Mayotte
Independence	99.98%	99.93%	99.92%	36.78%
Remain with French	0.02%	0.07%	0.08%	63.22%
Total Number of Votes for Independence	84,123 votes	58,897 votes	6,054 votes	5,110 votes
Total Number of Votes for remaining with French	21 votes	44 votes	5 votes	8,783 votes

Source: African Elections Database, 2011

Comorian leaders accused the MPM and its leader, Marcel Henry, of making up the idea of the Mahorais' distinctiveness in an attempt to preserve the power of Mayotte's non-Muslim, Creole elite.⁴⁰ Given Mayotte's vote in the 1974 referendum, the French government presumed that the referendum was an island-by-island vote. Thus, the French legislature voted in June 1975 to postpone independence for six months and hold a second referendum. Following this consultation, the law of July 3, 1975 organized the accession of the archipelago to independence. Abderemane went to Paris and asked the

³⁹ Bamana 58.

⁴⁰ Metz 1994.

French government to yield, but the French government had not yet decided on sending someone to Mayotte. As a result, on July 6, 1975, Abderemane declared independence unilaterally without consulting the elected representatives of Mayotte, who preferred an island-by-island vote.⁴¹ He became the first president of the independent islands. On July 11, 1975, Olivier Stim, Secretary of State of the *Départements d'outre-mer – Territoires d'outre-mer* (DOM-TOM: overseas departments and territories of France), stated that Mayotte is still under French law.

On July 26, the inhabitants of Mohéli residing in Paris established the Coalition de Mohéliens de France (Coalition of Mohélians in France) and condemned Abderemane's declaration. On August 1, militants besieged the administrative buildings of the MPM. The few officials who did not join them and those who were part of the detachment guard left for Moroni and were later incorporated into the police as special constables. The regime of Ali Soilih, who came to power in 1975 following a coup d'état that overthrew Abderemane, issued a decree placing an embargo on goods from Mayotte. At the same time, the government proceeded to Moroni to expel Mahorais who were opposed to independence. Bamana, along with his colleagues, responded by expelling a number of Comorians, especially Anjouanais. On November 21, 1975, Soilih, accompanied by unarmed young activists, tried to convince Mahorais to join the new Comorian state, but to no avail.⁴²

The law of December 31, 1975 ended the affiliation of Grande Comore, Anjouan, and Mohéli with France, and organized two consultations in Mayotte. The first

⁴¹ Bamana 58.

⁴² Perrot Histoire de Mayotte de 1946 à 1977: Un combat à rebours de l'Histoire 2011.

consultation took place on February 8, 1976, leading to a nearly unanimous vote with 99.4% of Mahorais voting for Mayotte remaining within the French Republic. The second took place on April 11, 1976.⁴³ The French government asked the Mahorais what status they wanted but they only give them one choice – that of overseas territory: “Do you want Mayotte to become an overseas territory of the French Republic?” Local officials and notables fabricated fake ballots saying: “I request that Mayotte be granted the status of overseas department anticipated by articles 72 and 73 of the Constitution.”⁴⁴ The majority of Mahorais – 79.59% – voted massively with these ballots, which were counted as blank or spoiled. The elected representatives asked certain voters from offices in the West Coast to vote “no,” so 97.47% of Mahorais rejected the status of overseas territory.⁴⁵ The Mahorais were thus able to show the French government that they did not want a consultation of this nature.

Economy of Mayotte in 1976

Though Mayotte affirms its historical and cultural ties to France, it is evident that the Mahorais believed they would benefit economically from remaining within the French Republic. Cornwell said that Mayotte had more natural resources and a smaller population so it felt that “independence would condemn its people to share the poverty of the other three islands.”⁴⁶ Robert Aldrich, a history professor at the University of Sydney, said that integration protects three benefits of colonial status – aid, migration, and

⁴³ Bamana 58.

⁴⁴ Perrot 2011.

⁴⁵ Bamana 58.

⁴⁶ Cornwell 1998.

security.⁴⁷ Wendy James, an anthropology professor at the University of Oxford, said that becoming independent like “every other African state” would “run down” Mayotte’s economy and force people “to rely on the most local of their products.”⁴⁸

In 1976, Mayotte adapted to new conditions. The administration sought to address the most urgent problems: feeding the population with food and water; electricity; generating funds to ameliorate sanitation; building housing for newly arrived officials; organizing transports from Pamandzi to the Grande-Terre (“Big Island,” the main island of Mayotte), and stimulating activity to the extent of available resources. Furthermore, negotiations were conducted to ensure the opening up of the island by air, sea, and radio. In its 1976 report on economic activity in Mayotte, the Institut d’émission d’outremer stated the following: “For the Mahorais economy, 1976 was a much better year than the previous one. The products of its export agriculture sold better in the ensemble.” In the monetary domain, the decree of February 19, 1976 replaced the CFA (Communauté Française Afrique: French Community of Africa) franc with the metropolitan franc. Money supply surged in Mayotte by 65% between late February and December 31, 1976, which can be explained by the development of credits to the economy. The assistance of the Metropolis, the article concludes, “has contributed significantly to support economic activity and living standards of the population.”⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Aldrich and Connell 250.

⁴⁸ Wendy James, *The pursuit of certainty: religious and cultural formations*, (London: Psychology Press, 1995) 268.

⁴⁹ Institut d’émissions d’outre-mer 1976.

Post-Independence Comorian State

Given the unstable nature of the political situation in the archipelago, it is possible that the Mahorais anticipated that remaining under French rule would prevent them from being affected by the instability and chaos. Though each island had their own governor and governing council, the archipelago was controlled by a political elite in Comoros. James Minahan, an independent researcher, captured the situation perfectly: “The Comoros suffered a brutal reign of terror, which French-protected Mahore [Mahoré: the native name of its main island] escaped.” Coups and countercoups formed several unstable governments who agreed only on the return of Mayotte to the archipelago. Increasing dissatisfaction with the plundering of natural resources by a small oligarchy led to “separatist, pro-French sentiment, particularly on Anjouan.” Rivalries between the islands became “more important than ethnic differences or the Mahorais issue, with accusations of power and development among islands.”⁵⁰

Though Soilih hired foreign mercenary Bob Denard to help him overthrow Abderemane in 1975, Denard helped Abderemane overthrow Soilih in 1978. However, in November 1989, members of Abderemane’s presidential guard assassinated him. Said Djohar was elected president in 1990 but his government was quickly toppled by a coup in September 1995. Though Mayotte was the only island to vote against independence, it was not the only island to secede from the archipelago. Both the central government of the Union of the Comoros and the French government rejected requests by Anjouan and Mohéli to return to France and have the same status as Mayotte. On August 3, 1997, Anjouan seceded from the archipelago unilaterally and declared its independence,

⁵⁰ James Minahan, *Encyclopedia of the Stateless Nations: Ethnic and National Groups around the World*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002) 126.

followed by Mohéli eight days later. Secessionists were fed up with economic decline and Grande Comore benefiting the most from the distribution of the annual French aid budget. Finally, in February 2001, a national reconciliation agreement, known as the Fomboni agreement, was signed between the Comorian government and Anjouan. The federal structure of the government was replaced with a decentralized union of three autonomous islands and a rotating presidency with a four-year term.⁵¹

After Mohamed Bacar refused to step down as president of Anjouan in the June 2006 elections, African Union and Comorian troops recaptured the island.⁵² There were also challenges in choosing a timetable for the 2010 presidential elections. Former president Ahmed Abdallah Mohamed Sambi's rivals accused him of illegally clinging to power. His mandate had expired on May 26, 2010 after the Constitutional Court annulled a law extending his term. Sambi said that he formed an interim government made up of his old administration and representatives who were allies of the governor of Anjouan and did not want to step down until "the practicalities of funding and logistics" were determined.⁵³ Finally, Ikililou Dhoinine, a pharmacist by training from Mohéli, won the election in December 2010 with 61% of the vote.⁵⁴

Mayotte becomes a French Overseas Department

Since the late 1950s, Mayotte has fought for the status of French overseas department. The first step was to avoid inclusion in the new Comorian state following

⁵¹ Graham Booth, G.R. McDuell, Bob McDuell, and John Sears, World of Science, Book 2, (USA: Oxford University Press, 1999) 66-67.

⁵² "Comoros profile," BBC, 19 Jul. 2011, 23 Oct. 2011 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13229685>>.

⁵³ Reuters, "Comoros election talks fail," News 24, 28 May 2010, 19 Oct. 2011 <<http://www.news24.com/Africa/News/Comoros-election-talks-fail-20100528>>.

⁵⁴ "Comoros islanders elect Ikililou Dhoinine as president," BBC, 29 Dec. 2010, 11 Dec. 2011 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12089809>>.

independence in 1975. They accepted statuses as arbitrary and vague as “territorial unit of the French Republic,” “departmental collectivity,” and “overseas community.” As Didier Béoutis, president of Cercle Alexis de Tocqueville (Alexis de Tocqueville Circle) put it, these “were many steps, too slow for them, to achieving the status of [overseas] department.” And their wish finally came true. On March 29, 2009, the French government gave the Mahorais a referendum on whether or not they wanted Mayotte to become a French overseas department. The results were no surprise – 95.24% of Mahorais voted in favor of departmental status for the island.⁵⁵

In March 2011, Mayotte officially became a French overseas department. As of 2010, familial allocations, the special allocation for elderly people, and the allocation for handicapped adults increased. Starting in 2012, the Mahorais will receive the Revenu de Solidarité Active (an allocation that grants beneficiaries a minimum revenue), the allocation for public housing, and the single parent allocation. The housing allowances, the increase in social insurance and labor law reform should appear at the same time. Over the course of twenty years, the benefits will increase progressively to reach the level of those of the Metropolis. Starting in 2014, all taxes will be applied to the islanders. A fund for economic, social, and cultural development will help further its development. The departmentalization of Mayotte will enable it to claim the status of *région ultrapériphérique* (RUP: outermost region, OMR) of the European Union, giving the island access to European development funds.⁵⁶ The French Institute for Research on

⁵⁵ Didier Béoutis, “Mayotte-la-Française enfin département ! Le Combat De Pierre Pujo a Abouti,” Action Française, 5 Mar. 2011, 01 Dec. 2011 <<http://www.actionfrancaise.net/2011/03/05/mayotte-la-francaise-enfin-departement-le-combat-de-pierre-pujo-a-abouti/>>.

⁵⁶ Le secrétaire d’Etat chargé de l’Industrie et de la Consommation, Porte-Parole du Gouvernement, “La départementalisation de Mayotte,” 30 Mar. 2009, 15 Oct. 2011

Administrations (IFRAP) projected that France will transfer over one billion euros to Mayotte in 2012. Mayotte's GDP is nine times higher than that of its immediate neighbors. Polygamous marriages will be banned. The minimum legal age to get married will be raised from 15 to 18 years of age. The matrimonial guardian ("wali") will be eliminated, and the powers of the "cadi" (Muslim judge) will be reduced.⁵⁷

Part II: How is Mayotte doing under French rule?

Mayotte's decision to remain under French rule indeed angered the Comorian state and many in the international community – both nations and international organizations like the UN – deemed France's rule over the island unlawful. Given the reasons stated above, Mayotte felt that French rule would be good for them in the long run, and experts agree. According to Minahan, over 20,000 Anjouanais immigrated to Mayotte between 1975 and 1995 in order to escape poverty. Unemployment in Grande Comore and Anjouan hovered around 90%, while Mayotte had a guaranteed wage, free education, and modern healthcare. When Anjouan and Mohéli seceded from the archipelago, they preferred "independence or a return to French control" over returning to "the coup-prone, impoverished Comoros."⁵⁸ Richard Werbner, Director of the International Center for Contemporary Cultural Research, said that since the late 1980s, France has funded infrastructure and subsidized housing, and social security benefits are received by most of the population. The island shifted from subsistence rice cultivation to wage work and welfare benefits. More students are receiving their baccalaureate, social

<<http://www.mayotte.pref.gouv.fr/depot/departementalisation/100Cles-ACTU-departementalisationMayotte.pdf>>.

⁵⁷ BÉoutis 2011.

⁵⁸ Minahan 127.

mobility is on the rise, and more white-collar jobs are available.⁵⁹ Roads, schools, and clinics have been constructed.⁶⁰

Economic Situation in Mayotte

According to the CIA World Factbook, Mayotte's economic activity is based mainly on the agricultural sector. Mayotte's economy and future development are contingent upon French financial assistance. In 2005, the GDP (purchasing power parity) was \$953.6 million. The GDP per capita (PPP) was \$4,900. Revenues totaled \$394 million. Exports totaled \$6.5 million and imports totaled \$34 million.⁶¹ In an article published on April 11, 2011 in *The Guardian*, Benoît Hopquin and Laurent Canavate stated that France has paid out 680 million euros (\$960 million) in annual subsidies since its first development scheme in 1987. They cited numerous examples of transformations due to French integration: "The kebabs that used to cost one franc each have shrunk and the price has increased sixfold to one euro ... Mobile phones, satellite TV, air conditioning, and traffic jams are becoming increasingly commonplace." Public records are being reorganized and a comprehensive land registry is being set up.⁶² Mayotte saw a progressive alignment of the Salaire minimum interprofessionnel garanti (SMIG: guaranteed professional minimum wage), social benefits on the metropolitan levels, and fiscal reform. Funds were also created for economic, social, and cultural development,

⁵⁹ Richard P. Werbner, Postcolonial subjectivities in Africa, (London: Zed Books, 2002) 26-27.

⁶⁰ James 268.

⁶¹ "Mayotte," CIA World Factbook, 8 Mar. 2011, 20 Oct. 2011 < <http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mf.html>>.

⁶² Benoît Hopquin and Lauren Canavate, "Mayotte Moves to Modernity," 19 Apr. 2011, 19 Oct. 2011 < <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/19/mayotte-votes-modernity-france-hopquin>>.

with an endowment of 30 million euros over three years as of March 2011.⁶³ As of September 2011, the consumer price index rose by 0.1%.⁶⁴ In seven years, the minimum salary doubled, now representing 80% of the metropolitan Salaire Minimum Interprofessionnel de Croissance (SMIC).⁶⁵

Mayotte's economic success has led to an increase in illegal immigration. In an article published by *RFI* in March 2009, Sarah Elzas wrote that over 16,000 illegal immigrants arrive each year and that roughly one-fifth of Mayotte's 200,000 residents are illegal. This number is expected to rise once the island becomes official French territory and thereby part of the EU. It is for this reason that France imposed a visa requirement in 1995 on all Comorians seeking to migrate to Mayotte.⁶⁶ In an article published by *Deutsche Welle* in March 2011, Elise Cannuel wrote, "In the Comoros, Mayotte is viewed as a blessed island. It enjoys a much higher standard of living than the other islands. Every third inhabitant of Mayotte is either a foreigner or a refugee, and new immigrants arrive every day. Every year, the island expels some 24,000 illegal immigrants, one reason why France has sent hundreds of extra police to Mayotte."⁶⁷

It appears to be the opposite for the archipelago. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the gross domestic product (GDP) has fallen 0.5%

⁶³ Yves Barroux, "Mutations et Évolutions de l'économie mahoraise à la veille de la départementalisation," *Institut D'Emission Des Départements D'Outre-Mer*, 29 Nov. 2010, 23 Sept. 2011 <http://www.iedom.fr/IMG/pdf/iedom_cerom_mayotte_11_2010.pdf>.

⁶⁴ C. Forgerou and V. Daudin, "Indice des prix à la consommation – En septembre, les prix progressent de 0,1 %," *Institut National De La Statistique Et Des études économiques*, Sept. 2011, Web. 11 Dec. 2011 <http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/document.asp?reg_id=27>.

⁶⁵ Rémie Carayol, "A Mayotte, une révolte au goût d'outre-mer," *Libération*, 10 Oct. 2011, 15 Nov. 2011 <<http://www.liberation.fr/economie/01012364675-a-mayotte-une-revolte-au-gout-d-outre-mer>>.

⁶⁶ Sarah Elzas, "The fight over the island of Mayotte," *RFI*, 26 Mar. 2009, 15 Oct. 2011 <http://www.rfi.fr/actuen/articles/111/article_3288.asp>.

⁶⁷ Elise Cannuel, "EU shores spread to Indian Ocean Island," 31 Mar. 2011, 11 Dec. 2011 <<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,14957924,00.html>>.

annually since 1990 to just \$640 per capita in 2005. As of 2008, Comoros had a debt of \$297 million, making up 63% of its GDP.⁶⁸ If the other islands were poorer, why did they not consider remaining under French rule for economic stability? In comparison to the other French colonies, the other islands found that they received barely a tenth of the sums allocated to these territories.⁶⁹ Numerous incidents took place as discontent arose among many Comorians but there existed no mandate for change until the election of Abderemane, a pro-independence politician, in 1973, whose concerns were territorial integrity of the archipelago and the promotion of a Comorian national sentiment.⁷⁰ The other three islands felt that the Mahorais sold out when they chose to remain under French rule – they referred to them as “the spoilt children of the republic.”⁷¹

Was departmentalization worth it?

Even with all of the evidence of how much Mayotte has benefited from being a French overseas department, maintaining ties with France is not strictly beneficial. Mayotte has certainly faced some disadvantages and conflicts in its relationship with France. Werbner said that despite the economic benefits, “in the background remain all those people who did not achieve the mobility, the education, the white collar jobs, the consumer items, and the respect that comes with them.”⁷² In 2009, the Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques (INSEE: the French National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies) led an investigation on employment for the first time in Mayotte – an official measure of employment defined by the Bureau International de

⁶⁸ IRIN Africa 2008.

⁶⁹ Nahouza 20.

⁷⁰ Aldrich Greater France: A History of French Overseas Expansion 304.

⁷¹ Andrew 255.

⁷² Werbner 26.

Travail (BIT: International Labor Office). As of 2009, Mayotte counted nearly 43,000 people in the working population. The rate of activity is relatively low – 41% within the age group of 15-64 years of age relative to that of the other overseas departments – 60.5% in Réunion and 70% in metropolitan France. The gap between the activity rate of women and that of men was 18 points, compared to 14 points in Réunion and 9 points in the Metropolis – this is due to factors such as an insufficient level of education and a lack of structure in children's homes.

The employment rate was 32.4% for the occupied active population, which stands at 35,600 people among those aged fifteen and above. The proportion of employed men was 43.4%, compared to 22.4% for women and 7.8% for young people. In 2009, the number of unemployed people was roughly 7,614 people, or an unemployment rate of 17.6%, compared to 27.2% for Réunion. The gap is linked to criteria for the definition of unemployment for Mayotte. Unemployment concerns men, women, young people, and non-graduates. 64% of unemployed people are women. Their unemployment rate stood at 28.2% compared to 10.7% for men. The unemployment rate of people aged 15 to 24 reached almost 32% compared to 16.7% for people aged 25 to 49. Ultimately, the diploma played a significant role since the unemployment rate of college graduates is almost void whereas that of people without a diploma or without a certificate of primary education reached 23.3%. A total of 36,900 unemployed people and non-workers wanted to work, compared to 35,600 occupied active workers.⁷³

Mayotte is currently experiencing problems with the high cost of living and is in the midst of negotiations with the French. After 45 days of strikes against the high cost of

⁷³ Institut d'émissions d'outre-mer 1976.

living in Mayotte, on November 22, Marie-Luce Penchard, the overseas minister, announced that the state would restart Mayotte's economy with 50 million euros in 2012 after a meeting with elected representatives of Mayotte, according to a November 23 article in *Le Monde*. On November 9, the inter-union and consumer groups on the island agreed to suspend the strike. Penchard said that the 50 million euros would be used to "save hundreds of jobs at serious risk" and that the French government "wants to invest heavily to implement the plan to mobilize public funds, in close consultation with the elected." The meeting resulted in the creation of an authority to monitor the departmentalization that will meet at least once a year.⁷⁴ However, the unions are not satisfied with Penchard's solution. For the unions, a solution would entail a significant and long-lasting drop in prices. They argued that Penchard is emphasizing employment issues and the resumption of economic activity instead. Penchard proposed the financing of a study by an outside provider on the price structure.⁷⁵

And the problems go beyond economics. Aldrich pointed out that "there are conflicts between their traditional culture and French culture," citing, for example, the prohibition of polygamy in France. He cited another conflict – the small number of Mahorais that actually speak French and the disadvantages that France itself faces in ruling Mayotte: "The population numbers 100,000 people, but only one-third speak French. Paris spends far more on the island than it recoups in profits. Two thousand metropolitan French men and women live there, almost all of whom are public servants.

⁷⁴ *Le Monde* and Agence France Presse, "L'Etat prêt à débloquer 50 millions d'euros pour Mayotte," *Le Monde*, 22 Nov. 2011, 11 Dec. 2011 <http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2011/11/22/l-etat-pret-a-debloquer-50-millions-d-euros-pour-mayotte_1607791_3224.html>.

⁷⁵ "Mayotte: Le plan de relance de Penchard ne convainc pas les syndicats." 24 Nov. 2011, 27 Nov. 2011 <http://www.zinfos974.com/Mayotte-Le-plan-de-relance-de-Penchard-ne-convainc-pas-les-syndicats_a34532.html>.

The strategic importance of Mayotte, despite a detachment of the Foreign Legion, remains minimal.”⁷⁶

Part III: Should Mayotte return to the archipelago or remain French?

Mayotte should return to the archipelago

The Comorian state, the international community, and even some Mahorais argue that culturally, geographically, and historically, Mayotte is Comorian and should therefore return to the archipelago. States deny that there can be any unilateral right to secede grounded in self-determination. Legitimate states enjoy a privileged position of moral authority over their territory. The argument that a state can give up a portion of its territory if it treats its citizens unfairly implies only a counteractive right to secede – in other words, a minor right to escape justice.⁷⁷ Daniel Philpott, a political science professor at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, argued that there is no right to self-determination outside the colonial context strong enough to elicit outside recognition for a people seeking federal autonomy or independence from a state.⁷⁸

Allen Buchanan, a philosophy professor at Duke University, evoked the concept of rectificatory justice, which is the notion that “a region has a right to secede if it was unjustly incorporated into the larger unit from which its members wish to separate.” This had to have occurred in either of two ways: “The seceding area may have been directly annexed by the currently existing state, or it may have been unjustly acquired by some

⁷⁶ Aldrich and Connell 231.

⁷⁷ Doyle 19-20.

⁷⁸ Margaret Moore, Self-Determination in Practice, *National Self-determination and Secession*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 7.

earlier state that is the ancestor of the currently existing state.”⁷⁹ In the case of Mayotte, this does not apply. The four islands have a separate pre-colonial culture prior to French colonization. Hawkins argued that though the Mahorais society is becoming increasingly Europeanized, the roots of Mahorais society are deeply Islamic. The local population speaks a variety of local languages more easily than French. The French institutions, in other words, appear to be forced upon a society whose traditional values are Muslim ones. Throughout the Comoros, there has been a strong and longstanding custom of Sunni Islamic holy men whose cultural ties were stronger with the Zanzibar than with France.⁸⁰

At the 39th plenary meeting on October 21, 1976, the UN General Assembly met to discuss the status of Mayotte. The resolution, entitled *Mayotte Resolution 31/4. Question of the Comorian island of Mayotte*, stated that the people of the Republic of Comoros as a whole expressed by an overwhelming majority its desire to become independent in 1974. It also stated that the occupation of Mayotte by France constituted a “flagrant encroachment on the national unity of the Comorian State” and that France is violating the principles of relevant resolutions, particularly resolution 1514 (XV) of December 14, 1960 that guarantees the national unity and territorial integrity of former colonies. It condemned and considered invalid the 1976 referenda that organized Mayotte by the French government. It called on all member states to intervene, both individually and collectively, to persuade the French government to forgo its plans to detach Mayotte from the archipelago. Future resolutions similarly called for the return of Mayotte to the archipelago and called on the French and Comorian governments to come up with a fair

⁷⁹ Allen Buchanan, *Secession: The Morality of Political Divorce*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991) 367.

⁸⁰ Hawkins 148.

and reasonable solution to the question of the status of Mayotte.⁸¹ France was the only member state to veto the resolutions.

On September 12, 2011, the Comité Mahorais (Mahorais Committee) called for the return of Mayotte to its “natural bosom.” Only 100 days after Dhoinine came to power and the day before the 66th General Assembly of the United Nations, the committee denounced “the incapacity of the Comorian diplomacy to obtain a firm and vigorous denunciation of France during the African summit in Malabo, the first after the ‘French departmentalization’ of the Comorian Island.” In the formal letter of engagement that Dhoinine sent to the Ministry of Exterior Relations, the committee complained, “the issue of Mayotte figures prominently but does not give rise to any development, no concrete objective had been fixed.” France has to be “condemned by the International Criminal Court for a crime against humanity” because it “depends on its force and its power to make the occupation of Mayotte seem like a fait accompli.” The committee asked for a new UN resolution because “in the eyes of the world, Mayotte will never be a French department. Mayotte is Comorian and will always remain Comorian...”⁸²

On September 24 2010, in a speech before the UN General Assembly, Sambi said that France refused to comply with numerous resolutions confirming the legitimacy of Comoros’ claim to Mayotte. For years, Comoros had appealed to the international community and encouraged a fair solution to the problem but the response had been weak. He highlighted unlawful measures taken by France, including the imposition of a

⁸¹ “Resolution of Mayotte,” Permanent Mission of the Union of the Comoros to the United Nations, 29 Sept. 2011 <<http://www.un.int/wcm/content/site/comoros/cache/offonce/pid/7426;jsessionid=3C4487191896FEC4614477626083382A>>.

⁸² “Déclaration Du Comité Mahorais : Quelle Stratégie Pour Avancer?” Al Watwan, 12 Sept. 201, 14 Oct. 2011 <http://www.alwatwan.net/index.php?home=archives_detail.php&actu_id=3434>.

visa requirement in 1995 on Comorians seeking to go to Mayotte. Comoros had agreed to form a working group to discuss reasonable solutions to these issues and Mayotte had developed a proposal called "One Country, Two Systems" – a compromise guaranteeing respect for international law, enabling France to administer Mayotte during a particular period deterred by common consent, and allowing the Mahorais to maintain their social status and standard of living. France did not respond positively to the proposal.⁸³ In an article published by *Al Watwan*, the Comorian daily, on November 3, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that France once again rejected an offer of dialogue by the Comorian authorities. The turbulent situation reflects not the Mahorais' reaction to the high cost of living, the Ministry argued, but "the profound malaise of our fellow Mahorais to the non-recognition of their cultural identity and their specific institutional changes engaged by France." Departmentalization of Mayotte, they concluded, "will not erase the Comorianity of Mayotte, an integral part of the nation-archipelago Comoros."⁸⁴

Mayotte should not return to the archipelago

However, there are others who think that Mayotte is too deeply integrated with France and would risk ruining its economy by returning to the archipelago. Despite UN resolutions recognizing Comoros' claim over Mayotte, Buchanan said that the UN in fact officially endorses the right to self-determination in several documents. For example, General Assembly Resolution 1514 "bravely declares that 'all peoples have the right to

⁸³ "Comoros, H.E. Mr. Ahmed Abdallah Sambi, President," General Assembly of the United Nations, 24 Sept. 2010, 15 Oct. 2011, <<http://www.un.org/en/ga/65/meetings/generaldebate/View/SpeechView/tabid/85/smld/411/ArticleID/137/reftab/227/t/Comoros/Default.html>>.

⁸⁴ "La France et l'Union européenne doivent savoir que la départementalisation et la rupéisation unilatérales de Mayotte, n'effaceront pas la Comorianité de Mayotte, partie intégrante de la Nation-archipel des Comores.," *Al Watwan*, 3 Nov. 2011. Web. 20 Nov. 2011. <http://www.alwatwan.net/index.php?home=actu.php&actu_id=3564>.

self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.” Given that the phrase “freely determine their political status” lacks “any qualifying language,” self-determination can be interpreted “as requiring or at least allowing complete political independence.” In other words, every group of people has the right to secede if they believe that it is “necessary for achieving complete political independence.”⁸⁵

Indeed, some dare to argue that the archipelago is not as united as it appears to be – geographically speaking. Martin said that there has never been a true Comorian nation, given that the archipelago was an administrative unit between 1945 and 1975. Martin says, “In this area, in 1975, the Comorian nation did not exist. It may exist today or is being formed. We can use the words of Mirabeau, which defined France in 1789 as ‘an aggregate of unconstitutional disunited peoples,’ and this could apply to Comoros in 1975. This archipelago has never had any other unity than the one that the French power kindly gave them. There were sultans, governments in each of the islands. In Grande Comore, there were several.” The archipelago is now a nation marked by irredentism of some islands. The federal government, he argued, will face challenges in keeping all three islands. Anjouan broke away for a few years, and Mohéli has little clout because it is small and sparsely populated. The power of the archipelago is concentrated in Grande Comore and Anjouan. Though the boundaries that the colonial powers have drawn are clearly visible, Martin argued, “Do you think those who have traced the borders of Europe were more concerned people?”⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Buchanan 350-351.

⁸⁶ Perrot 2011.

Nationalists place more of a premium on group self-determination. They stress that a nation's health directly affects its members' welfare and that political self-determination allows nations to bolster their health. Nationalists believe that individuals can pursue satisfying projects and develop significant interpersonal relationships solely within a healthy culture.⁸⁷ In article published by *The Guardian* on August 13, 1997, Charles Lambroschini wrote: "It is not just because of the minimum wage that France still has an influence in the region [Africa]. France continues to represent freedom – a quality which it is impossible to put a price on."⁸⁸ Cornwell said that remaining under French rule became synonymous with "relative economic prosperity and political stability."⁸⁹ On March 29, 2009, the Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs released a document in which it states that the Mahorais would live in a reliable civil state that guarantees their identity and rights. All citizens of Mayotte would benefit from the same rights and guarantees as French citizens before the justice.⁹⁰ In an article published on June 30, 2009, the BBC stated that Mayotte's economy hugely outperforms that of its neighbors and that it "has avoided the recent history of coups and instability that have blighted the other islands."⁹¹

⁸⁷ Doyle 19-20.

⁸⁸ Charles Lambroschini, "France must listen to the mouse that roars," *The Guardian*, 13 Aug. 1997, 10 Nov. 2011.

⁸⁹ Cornwell 1998.

⁹⁰ Luc Chatel, "La départementalisation de Mayotte," *Prefecture de Mayotte*, 30 Mar. 2009, 15 Oct. 2011 <<http://www.mayotte.pref.gouv.fr/depot/departementalisation/100Cles-ACTU-departementalisationMayotte.pdf>>.

⁹¹ Joe Boyle, "Ties that bind: Comoros and France," *BBC*, 30 June 2009, 11 Dec. 2011 <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8126370.stm>>.

Which side has a more valid case?

Raič argued that the right to self-determination may be exercised through unilateral secession and that the right of territorial integrity subsumes the right of a state to preserve the territorial *status quo*. While international legal rules recognize the sovereignty of the state, states are obligated to show respect for and promote the right of self-determination. The right of self-determination seeks to provide a guarantee for the effective development and preservation of the collective identity of people and for the enjoyment of the individual human rights of its members. A group of individuals has the right to secede if their collective identity, existence, and freedom are threatened as a result of the actions or policies of the governmental authorities of the parent state. However, changing the contemporary territorial arrangement of states is risky without grounds for secession.⁹²

On the one hand, Mayotte saw that it would benefit economically from remaining within France and avoided coups and political instability that marked the Comorian state following independence. Despite the protests against the high cost of living, Mayotte will gradually receive the same social benefits as French citizens and will be in a more favorable position as an outermost region of the European Union. Practices such as polygamy and marrying individuals at a very young age will be put to an end – Mayotte will get to experience the equality and liberty that characterizes the French system. And most importantly, the Mahorais have consistently requested that they remain within the French Republic. Vallery-Radot wrote the following to Stim: “Need I remind you that the people rejected Mahorais independence with a majority of 65%? ... We renew our appeal

⁹² Raič 394-396.

to the Government of two assemblies to adjure to not deny us the right to remain French.” Indeed, it has to be recognized that, since the transfer of the administrative center in 1958, Mayotte has been pursuing French departmentalization.

However, geographically and historically, Mayotte belongs to the Comorian archipelago. Though Mayotte has been persistent in pursuing the status of French overseas department, France is violating numerous UN resolutions that recognize Comoros’ claim to Mayotte. As stated earlier, Mayotte has more similarities with the other islands than it does with France. France did not specify whether the 1974 referendum was an island-by-island vote or an archipelago-wide vote. Naturally, Abderemane would assume that the four islands would be united against the colonial power. Regardless of Mayotte’s claim that it identifies more with France, Mayotte is Comorian. Martin emphasized that the French were not very familiar with the situation in Mayotte: “There had been newspaper articles that were completely aberrant in some periodicals ... saying that the population of Mayotte that is composed of Malagasy Christians would be massacred by the Muslims of other islands...” It is not the French that attached themselves to the Mahorais but “it is rather the Mahorais who clung to France.”⁹³ The elected representatives of Mayotte showed an infinite tenacity – the Mahorais do not share cultural values with the French but rather admire the cultural values of the French.

⁹³ Perrot 2011.

Chapter III: Conclusion

Though scholars emphasize Mayotte's feelings of difference, the domination of Grande Comore, and economic and social benefits as the three main factors influencing Mayotte's decision to remain under French rule, I emphasize the historical relationship between Mayotte and France dating back to the nineteenth century and include the trend of political instability and chaos in the archipelago as a fourth factor contributing to Mayotte's decision. I further argue that a case can be made for both the return of Mayotte to the archipelago and Mayotte remaining within the French Republic.

Despite the presence of Creole families and its early ties to France, Mayotte is and always will be Comorian. The four islands speak the same language and practice the same religion. The French took an interest in the islands due to a perceived threat from other colonial powers. The UN has had multiple resolutions recognizing the sovereignty of the Comorian state over Mayotte. The Mahorais protested against the French government because of the high cost of living – having an economy dependent upon that of another country entails risks, too. Still, the Mahorais have consistently requested and voted for departmentalization since the 1958 transfer – France was initially unwilling to grant them a full departmental status. They have explicitly stated that they wanted to be “free” like the French and escape the domination of Grande Comore and Anjouan. Their historical and cultural ties to France, the transfer of the administrative center, economic stability, and the political situation in post-independent Comoros collectively strengthen Mayotte's decision to leave the archipelago. Despite the ongoing protests against the high cost of living, Mayotte will now receive the same social benefits as French citizens and is now an outermost region of the EU. Age-old practices such as polygamy and marriage at the age of fifteen years will be put to an end.

The case is well-known in the French and Francophone world but relatively new in the United States. This study is the first attempt, within the American political science framework, to scrutinize the factors influencing Mayotte's decision to remain under French rule, evaluate the impact of French departmentalization on Mayotte, and provide an analysis of the arguments for and against Mayotte's return to the archipelago. Given that Mayotte's status as French overseas department is recent, few scholars have explored the effects – especially economic – of this departmentalization. This work provides an analysis of the ongoing negotiations between the French government and Mahorais unions concerning the high cost of living. Most importantly, the case of Mayotte makes a significant contribution to the secession literature – in particular, the grounds for seceding from a state. During the 1960s and 1970s, most French colonies were becoming independent. Grande Comore, Mohéli, and Anjouan were no exception to that phenomenon. However, Mayotte differs tremendously from the norm. With other colonies, it was simple: sovereignty was the goal. Mayotte, however, chose to secede and subsequently join another state. Should secession be restricted exclusively to becoming a sovereign nation, or can it extend to joining another state?

Mayotte recently became a French overseas department, which has essentially rendered its citizens French – economically and socially speaking. Still, Mayotte belongs to the archipelago. Each side has a legitimate case, thereby leaving negotiations at an impasse. The question remaining is how the Comorian state, Mayotte, and France will find a solution that prevents Mayotte from losing its departmental status – which would cause it to suffer dramatically – but still maintain the Comorian state's right to territorial integrity from France.

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