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**Comorians despite themselves: political identities and cultural identities on the island of Mayotte**

The Comorian island of Mayotte has been a French department since 2011, the culmination of more than 50 years of political agitation aimed both at remaining a French possession and at avoiding independence as part of a Comorian state. This political project has required a distanciation from the other islands, culturally and socially as well as politically, giving rise to various contradictions, not least of which cultivating the pretence that Mayotte is culturally distinct from the three independent islands.

Now that the political status of the island definitively precludes any possibility of incorporation within the Comorian state, Maorais are increasingly realising that processes of social and political change in the run-up to and following departmentalisation, aimed amongst other things at implementing French legislation on the island, have undermined certain fundamental aspect of Maorais social and cultural practice. If the Maorais are French citizens, the are also Comorian. In this paper I look at how they negotiate contradictions between the two statuses with specific attention to how they reassess and confront their Comorian-ness within the contemporary French state.

Iain Walker works on various aspect of social practice in the Comoro islands and on mobilities and identities in the western Indian Ocean with a particular focus on Comorian and Hadrami communities in East Africa and the Arabian peninsula. He is currently leader of a DFG-funded project on identities and memory in Mayotte based at Martin Luther University, Halle, and research associate at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology.