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# Constitutional Reform: Decolonization in the Comoros Islads

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**Constitutional Reform:  
The Decolonization Process in the Comoros Islands**

**By: Nicholas Daou**

**PIM 74**

A Course-linked Capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Masters of Arts in Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation, at SIT Graduate Institute, Brattleboro, Vermont, USA

December 2017

Advisor: Tatsushi Arai

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## 1.1: Table of Contents

Title Page .....	1
Consent to Use of Capstone .....	2
Acknowledgements .....	3
<b><u>Section 1</u></b>	
1.1 Table of Contents.....	4
1.2 Abbreviations and Terms.....	6
1.3 Abstract .....	7
1.4 Introduction.....	8
1.5 Geographic Information .....	9
<b><u>Section 2: Literature Review</u></b>	
2.1 The Colonial Period and 1974 Referendum .....	10
2.2 Ali Soilihi's Revolution.....	12
2.3 The Mercenary Regime.....	14
2.5 The Post-Mercenary Regime Power Consolidation and Tension.....	16
2.6 The 1997 Crisis .....	18
2.7 Time of Two Colonels .....	21
2.8 The First Two Elections.....	23
<b><u>Section 3: Inquiry Design and Findings</u></b>	
3.1 Structure of the Literature Review and Data Analysis.....	25
3.2 Quantitative Surveys.....	26
3.3 Limitations .....	27
3.4 Researcher Subjectivity .....	29
3.5 Inquiry Findings .....	30
<b><u>Section 4: Through the Lens of Vamik Volkan and Johan Galtung</u></b>	
4.1 Large Group Identity Theory and Regression.....	35
4.2 The Three R's Applied to the Fomboni Accords.....	39

**Section 5: Conclusions**

5.1 Comoros Moving Forward.....	41
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**Section 6: Appendices and References**

6.1 Appendix A: Full Text of the Survey Form.....	44
6.2 Appendix B: Full Text of Confidentiality Agreement.....	46
6.3 Appendix C: Aggregate Information Collected Through Surveys .....	48
6.4 Works Cited.....	53

## 1.2 Abbreviations and Terms

English	French	Comorian
<p>AU/OAU: African Union/ Organization of African Unity</p> <p>UN: United Nations</p> <p>UNGA: United Nations General Assembly</p> <p>UNSC: United Nations Security Council</p> <p>LAS/AL: League of Arab States/ Arab League</p>	<p>Tournante: Rotating presidency established by 2001 Constitution</p> <p>CENI: Conseil Electorale Nationale Independante</p> <p>CTOM: Collectivite Territoire d'Outre Mer</p> <p>TOM: Territoire d'Outre Mer</p> <p>DOM: Départements d'outre- mer</p> <p>OIF: Organisation Internationale de la Fracophonie</p> <p>ICO: Indian Ocean Commission/ Commission l'Océan Indien (COI)</p> <p>DGSE: Directorate-General for External Security, French intelligence agency</p>	<p>Ngazidja: Grande Comore</p> <p>Ndzwani: Anjoaun</p> <p>Mwali: Moheli</p> <p>Maore: Mayotte</p> <p>Wakabaila: nobles/aristocracy of Arab descent</p> <p>Wamatsaha: peasants, farmers, lower classes predominantly of Malagasy or Bantu descent</p>

### 1.3 Abstract

Since its independence in 1975 the Union of Comoros has seen a great deal of political upheaval as a part of its decolonization process. This study examines the period between 1975 and 2001 with special emphasis on the 1997 Secession Crisis and the methods by which that crisis was resolved. The literature review is composed of predominantly native Comorian authors, supplemented by several French authors and information from international organizations. The events and literature are also examined through the lenses of the psychoanalytical group identity theory of Vamik Volkan and the Conflict Transformation work of Johan Galtung. Data regarding attitudes and general knowledge of this period in Comorian history was obtained through a qualitative study conducted with forty participants from across Comoros. The findings suggested that the majority of responses from the island of Anjoaun showed a greater knowledge and personal connection to the events of 1997, while many Grande Comoriens were either not aware of or had forgotten about the crisis. The findings also indicated that Anjoaunese participants were more likely to believe there was a tension or conflict between the islands than their Grande Comorien counterparts. The literature review findings indicated that Comoros is in a period of relative political stability and has begun the establishing political norms regarding free and fair elections which can be directly attributed to the 2001 Constitution.



## 1.4 Introduction

The latter half of the twentieth century saw many former colonial territories of European powers gain independence, many through bloodshed. The Comorian Archipelago's bloodless 1974 referendum marked it apart from the conflicts seen by other former French territories but that did not guarantee an easy transition into sovereignty. The Comorian state has weathered almost two dozen *coup d'etats*, some led by internal actors and others by a core group of mercenaries. The urban/rural divides, typified by subtle ethnic distinctions and historical class roles have split elements of Comorian society against each other for decades. The international community has intervened multiple times to ensure the appropriate transition of power and to offer meditative solutions to the political tensions between the islands.

This research project will first present a timeline of the general events and actors involved in the first twenty years of Comorian independence. By using a literature composed of predominantly Comorian authors and their often-disparate views on the importance of different events the author has blended them in with a smaller selection of reports published through the African Union, the United Nations, and several academic articles detailing the time period. After the literature review to establish a timeline and context for a relatively unknown case study the project will use those works to supplement the quantitative analysis obtained through the authors interviews and then the totality of the work will be analyzed through the lens of Vamik Volkan's Large Group Identity Theory and Johann Galtung's 3R's. Volkan's work will be used to analyze some of the psychological and cultural markers between the islands and some of the potential causes for disparity in the responses to the survey questions. Galtung's work has been useful in evaluating the different stages of how the 2001 constitution was written. Furthermore, this study has compared the texts of the five distinct Comorian constitutions and constitutional charters. In analyzing those texts against the established timeline light can be shed on some of the historic tensions between islands and autonomous groups.

The interviews associated with this study have been used to collect a small sample population of attitudes towards the actions of France in the Comorian decolonization process. Due to the ages of most candidates the questions focused less on the events immediately after independence but rather on the opinions and *a priori* knowledge regarding the new constitution.

### 1.5 Geographic Information



Located in the Mozambique Channel between the Tanzanian coast and northern Madagascar the Comorian archipelago has been influenced by Bantu settlers from the African continent, Arab traders and missionaries, Malagasy pirates, and finally English and French colonizers (Chami-Allaoui et al, 1997) Approximately the same size as the American state of Rhode Island, the archipelago most notable for its coral reefs surrounding the island of Moheli and Karthala, the largest active volcano in the world, located in the center of Grande Comore.

The islands only deep-water port is found in Anjoaunese capital of Mutsamudu where imported goods are rerouted to Grande Comore on smaller ships. Said Sheikh Mohammed Airport

in Hahaya, Grande Comore, is the only international airport in the country; however occasionally regional companies like AB Aviation will offer special flights from Anjouan to Mahajanga, Madagascar.

## Section 2: Literature Review

### **2.1 The Colonial Period and 1974 Referendum**

It is unclear exactly when the Comorian archipelago was settled and by who. The archaeological record seems to show that each island was settled at different times by different groups (Chami-Allaoui, 1997.) Arab traders knew of the islands, dubbing Mayotte “Jizr al-Mowt,” Arabic for the “Island of Death” for its treacherous reefs. Some time in the seventh or eighth centuries missionaries introduced Islam and gradually established small sultanates among the islands (Chanfi Ahmed, 1994). The island of Mayotte was the first of the four to be formally colonized in 1841 when France purchased the territory from a local king (Hassani el Barwane, 2015). Over the following decades the remaining three islands were colonized and the entire archipelago was incorporated as a French territory in the province of Madagascar in 1912 (ibid.) Comorians fought for France in both world wars and many of those veterans moved to the metropolises. Current estimates place roughly 200,000 Comorians in France, many descended from the “tirailleurs” (sharpshooters) who moved to Marseille after their service (Halifa, 2009). This population base in France has proven hugely influential to contemporary Comorian politics, especially in the era immediately following Comoros’ unilateral declaration of independence in 1975.

Although the archipelago had been granted autonomous rule in the 1950’s the independence movement built up steam throughout the entirety of the autonomous period. Prominent figures like Prince Said Mohammed Cheikh and future President Ahmed Abdallah Abderemane pushed the French government for a definitive timeline on ending French rule, eventually agreeing in 1973 that

Comoros would gain independence in 1976. However, the deaths of both Said Mohammed Cheikh and Georges Pompidou in the early 1970's led to the derailment of the process. On December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1974 a referendum on independence was held across the four Comorian islands. The clear majority of voters chose to leave French rule, but of the 12,390 recorded votes on Mayotte 8,091 chose not to leave France (Mattoir, 2004). It is the results of that initial vote that resonates with Comorians to this day. However the various political and cultural reasons surrounding Mayotte's decision to remain with France is outside the scope of this research.

Although the Comorian archipelago was administered as an autonomous entity consisting of four islands the French government decided to interpret the results of the vote island by island- thus nullifying the overall results and keeping Mayotte as a CTOM. This division of territory has a shaky legal foundation. Article 53 of the French constitution states "No ceding, exchanging or acquiring of territory shall be valid without the consent of the population concerned." (Constitute Project) This clause was used to argue that Mayotte voted independently and thus would be judged independently. This goes against statements made by high-ranking French officials like Olivier Stern, French *secrétaire d'état à l'Outre Mer*, from 1974 to 1978. When asked about the territorial integrity of Comoros Stern responded

*"... because in the terms of international law, a territory retains the same frontiers it had as a colony... and finally it is not the role of France to foster in Comoros people one against the other; on the contrary [France's] role is to facilitate coming together between the two to find an appropriate legal solution." (Mattoir, 2004)*

Factors specific to intra-Comorian relations as well as French objectives led the majority of Mahorais to vote the way they did. A more detailed analysis of those influences will be discussed in section 4 through the lens of Vamik Volkan's work on group identity theory.

## 2.2 Ali Soilihi's Revolution

The aftermath of the initial referendum in 1974 led Comoros to unilaterally declare independence from France on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1975. French officials were expelled from Comoros while the security of Mayotte was placed under heavy scrutiny. Ahmed Abdallah Abderemane, one of the chief architects of the vote, was elected President of the young federation. Within a month of Abdallah taking the mantle of the presidency, he was usurped by Prince Said Mohammed Djaffar and exiled to France (Mattoir, 2004.) Djaffar's claim wouldn't last long as he was quickly deposed by his Minister of Defense, Ali Soilihi.

While Abdallah and Djaffar did not hold office long enough to pursue any sort of agenda or establish a doctrine Ali Soilihi moved to hastily cement himself in the presidential palace, Beit-Salam. Envisioning a Marxist revolution Soilihi passed a new constitution reflecting his own brand of socialism, without seeking support, ideological or otherwise, from the Soviet Union or China (Said Abdillah, 2011). Soilihi's constitution was unique amongst the various iterations in Comorian history. The voting age was lowered to fifteen and the role of Islam was greatly diminished within the government (Digitheque-MJP, 2012). Soilihi attempted to entrench his power with the youth, the largest demographic group, promising to stimulate development projects and increase gender and social equality. Of the sixteen members of the National Popular Committee, all were in their last year of secondary school (Mattoir, 2004).

One of Soilihi's most difficult undertakings was trying to eliminate the *Anda* or "*Grande Marriage*" ceremony. As mentioned in the authors earlier writings on Comoros, the *Anda* is a dearly held but extremely controversial subject within Comoros where the wealthiest members of society on Grande Comore will spend tens of thousands of euros on an elaborate marriage ceremony. Current estimates (2016) put the average cost between 20,000-100,000 euros. This was yet another

iteration of the conflict between the *wakabaila* and *wamatsaba*. The wealthy Moroni elite, as well as the significant Comorian population in Marseille, conspired with Bob Denard to remove Soilihi from office (Halifa, 2009). Soilihi's pseudo-socialism jeopardized the financial dominance of the elites and their way of life, and as such, this period saw the exodus of many wealthy Comorians to France and Madagascar.

While many of Soilihi's policies were ill advised and hastily implemented he has been cast in an extremely negative light in contemporary Comorian literature. His willingness to move away from the deeply rooted Islamic heritage of the islands was viewed as a betrayal to the islands culture. Even the Comorian flag of the Soilihi period attempted to subvert the influence of Islam. The red bar representing the revolution was made larger and placed above the green bar that past and future flags used to represent Comoros' attachment to the color of the prophet (Halifa, 2009). The common thread throughout all the available literature is that Soilihi betrayed something essential to the Comorian identity. In the terms Vamik Volkan's Group Identity Theory, Soilihi insulted the shared reservoirs of images and traditions that many Comorians consider integral to their identity as not only Muslims, but the specific traditions of Comorian Chaifite Islam.

Landing on Itsandra beach with a small but highly trained force in the middle of the night on May 12<sup>th</sup> 1978, Bob Denard once again seized control of Comoros. This time however he was in for the long haul. Changing his name to Said Mustapha, converting to Islam, and marrying a Comorian woman, Denard set out to disguise his *de facto* power within the Comorian government (Mattoir, 2004). Ahmed Abdallah went through the streets of Moroni with his accomplices proclaiming "Vive l'amitie franco-comorienne" and "Vive l'Islam!" (Mattoir, 2004). Within two weeks Ali Soilihi had been caught, allegedly assassinated by order of the newly restored council of ministers. Ahmed

Abdallah reclaimed the title of president and named Bob Denard as commander of the 500 strong Presidential Guard.

### 2.3 The Mercenary Regime

Abdallah's new regime immediately nullified Soilihi's constitution in a dramatic reversal. Islam was again paramount in Comorian society- at least on the surface. A few of the key changes made to the ruling structure of Comoros were changing the voting age back to 18, set up autonomous governorships, and set in place a mechanism by which to secure the power of the presidency. The 1978 constitution made sure that the supreme court, national council, and island councils were staffed with enough loyalists to maintain control. The president not only selected his own Prime Minister but also had a great deal of influence in selecting the Supreme Court and National Council. Functionaries nominated by the president had a disproportionate amount of power to the governors and the elected legislative councils on each island. Section II Article 10 states that those functionaries are embedded into the island's government to insure "the direction of federal services." (Digitheque-MJP, 2012).

The constitution of 1978 is markedly different than Soilihi's 1977 in that it very clearly delineates the powers and topics administered by federal or regional jurisdiction. The federal government's roles were numerous, with each island being predominantly responsible for their own budget. Between 40% and 60% of each islands revenue was due to the federal government "*It divides the remainder among the islands in proportion to the population of each, without any being able to receive less than a tenth of this balance.*" (Digitheque-MJP, 2012) Obviously with Grande Comore having the largest population and being the seat of federal power, this clause was viewed as an overreach by the President.

The reign of Abdallah and Denard was fraught with political intrigue both inter and intranational. Though it is impossible to know the exact number there were roughly a dozen *coup* attempts against the mercenary regime between 1978 and 1989. Over the years dozens of civil service members, military personnel, and even foreign nationals were arrested or killed trying to overthrow the president and his guard (Caminade, 2010). But Abdallah's actual role during his tenure as president is up for debate. Abdallah returned to power with the assistance of a French trained mercenary and his troops. Within a year of Abdallah's return Comoros had signed three military treaties with France, going so far as to allow a French military base on Comorian soil (Caminade 2010). Overtures were made to Arab states as well as the Apartheid regime in South Africa, international hotels were built in Moroni and Mitsamihouli (Perri, 1994)

Denard's connection to apartheid South Africa is pointed to by Comorian authors like Said Abdillah, Fatouma Halifa, Nakidine Mattoir and others as proof that Denard was actively working for the French government. Comoros did not participate in the embargo on South Africa, on the contrary the island nation would import Iranian petrol which would then be immediately sold to Pretoria (Perri, 1994). South African airlines, lacking refueling stations between Europe and South Africa were limited to Malawi and Comoros (Bakar 1988). The severe lack of economic partners led South Africa to invest heavily into Comoros to compensate. South Africa's regional strategies in Mozambique and Angola were also hugely controversial and the published literature regarding South African clandestine activities will be addressed in the conclusion of this paper.

Once it became apparent in the late 1980's that the end of apartheid was approaching Denard himself worried about the financial ramifications to his regime. In an interview with a journalist from Figaro, Denard confided that "since last year [South Africa's] minister of foreign affair won't finance us anymore. Then, the minister of defense began to reduce his contribution. For 1990, the Comorian budget has had to take over from South Africa." (Mattoir, 2004).



While Denard claimed simply to be an anti-communist mercenary who decided to settle down in Comoros the larger picture is much more sinister. Even though the Constitution of the mercenary period reaffirms Comoros' claim over Mayotte the Comorian government worked closely with France militarily and economically. With Denard conducting business and diplomacy with political entities off limits to official French diplomats, e.g. those in Tehran or Pretoria, those diplomats were a half hour flight away. This arrangement was not to last however. With the imminent regime change in South Africa and Ahmed Abdallah Abderemane's paranoia reaching its zenith Denard's tenure came to abrupt end in 1989.

Worried that Denard was going to assassinate him, Ahmed Abdallah had been plotting to remove Denard and replace him with a more easily controlled loyalist. Pik Botha, the South African Minister of Foreign Affairs, confirmed that President Abdallah had reached out to him in 1987 seeking to dismiss Denard (Mattoir, 2004). It wasn't enough to save him, on November 26<sup>th</sup> 1989 President Abdallah was shot to death while in a private meeting with Bob Denard (Perri, 1994). Although Denard was in the room at the time he claimed not to have fired the shots that killed the president, instead Denard claimed that the assassin was former commandant Ahmed Mohammed who held a personal grudge against Ahmed Abdallah Abderemane for his dismissal (Mattoir, 2004). The accounts given by Denard loyalists varied in regards to the murder weapon and the exact details of the assassination. It is the widely held belief in Comoros that if Denard didn't pull the trigger himself but that he gave the order.

## **2.5 The Post-Mercenary Regime Power Consolidation and Tension**

The aftermath of Abdallah's death was a hectic scramble for the Comorian power structure. Denard was extradited to South Africa within days by French paratroopers, eventually making his way back to France. Supreme court judge Said Mohammed Djohar, the brother of former President Ali Soilihi, took the presidency for himself the day after President Abdallah's death

(Mattoir, 2004). The early 1990's realigned global attitudes to South Africa and to communism, severely diminishing the interest larger international actors had in the Comorian archipelago.

Thus, President Djohar began the process of ruling a Comorian state that had been under the despotic rule of President Abdallah and his mercenary cohort. Djohar legalized the formation of political parties, reversing Abdallah's 1982 decree that had established the *Union Comorien de Progress* (Comorian Union for Progress) (UCP) as the sole party (Perri, 1994). Djohar also spearheaded a constitutional referendum with the goal of redistributing power from the executive-centric model under Abdallah. The constitution was largely the same as under Abdallah with the key distinction of establishing a bi-cameral legislature to replace the national council of the previous regime (Digitheque-MJP, 2012).

Regardless of President Djohar's intentions or the monumental undertaking he attempted, his presidency was plagued with unrest and instability. Between his official election in 1990 and the Denard-led coup that ousted him in 1995, Said Mohammed Djohar changed parliaments seventeen times (Caminade, 2010). In a country accustomed to efficient and often bloody responses to attempted *coups*, Djohar had a comparable number to Abdallah in less than half the time.

Said Mohamed Djohar was the last Comorian president to be removed from office by Bob Denard. On September 28<sup>th</sup>, 1995, Bob Denard quickly deposed Djohar with a small contingent of loyalists and established a temporary military government (Halifa, 2009). However, the international community quickly condemned the mercenary and French paratroopers took Denard and his top lieutenants into custody by October 5<sup>th</sup> (Ibid.) Djohar had weathered the *coup* on nearby Seychelles and was reinstated as president late January the following year. Lacking the support and mandate to rule, Djohar lost the presidential elections held in March of 1996 to his former Prime Minister Taki Abdulkarim.

## 2.6 The 1997 Crisis and the Time of Two Colonels

Bob Denard's long and illustrious career in personally leading coups in Comoros came to an end in October of 1995. After Djohar's loss to Mohammed Taki Abdulkarim in 1996, Taki set out with a single goal in mind: solidifying his control of the presidency. A high-ranking official under both Abdallah and Djohar, Taki had had ample opportunities to learn how to quell dissent. Bob Denard and his cohort had deposed and/or killed all his predecessors and Taki was keen not to suffer the same fate. On October 20<sup>th</sup>, 1996 Taki pushed a new constitution through the supreme court and legislature. Going further than Djohar or Abdallah ever did on paper, Taki's constitution flagrantly consolidated all available political mechanisms to be under his control.

Article 20 of the 1996 document details that the president may, in a state of national emergency or interruption of regular government function may, with the approval of the prime minister, governors, federal assembly, and national council, be allowed sweeping powers necessary to the operation of the state. Article 45 then states that a state of emergency may technically only last for more than 15 days except under "exigent circumstances" and refers itself back to article 20. The main ethical qualm to this system is then that the President personally appoints four of the ten members of the national council (Article 49) as well as handpicking the island governors (Article 60) (Digitheque-MJP, 2012). Taki also incorporated an "Ulema" Council composed of religious leaders to advise the government on spiritual matters. In this it seems that Taki was taking the next step with Abdallah's conservative policies to boost his support among the religious community. It also marked the first time that such a group was written into a Comorian constitution.

Taki's monopolization of power did not go unnoticed. The wealthy Anjoanese, who had enjoyed their pick of top administrative posts under the Domoni, Anjoun, born President Abdallah, began to feel marginalized by Taki's Ngazidja centric policies. Taki's supporters rallying cry "Yinu

nde yezi ya hatru!” or “our power for us” set the clear goal of using Ngazidja’s larger population and land mass to claim the dominance it felt it was owed (Halifa, 2009). Salaries for civil servants on Anjoaun and Moheli fell into arrears and a general teacher’s strike was called. Anjoaunese radio stations and newspapers began pushing a hardline anti-Ngazidja position.

On July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1997, Anjoaunese political leaders under the leadership of Fundi Abdallah Ibrahim, a respected religious leader from Mutsamudu, called for reattachment to France. Despite waving the *tricolore* flag on Bastille Day every French statement reaffirmed Comorian sovereignty and condemnation of the separatist movement. The situation became even more complex on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1997 when Abdallah Ibrahim declared himself president of an independent Anjoaun, unilaterally seceding from the union (Halifa, 2009). The OAU sent Ambassador Pierre Yere as an independent observer to Moroni within the week (Said Abdillah, 2011) It quickly became evident that President Taki underestimated the resolve of the Anjoaunese separatists. On September 3<sup>rd</sup> an initial attempt to send a small force from Ngazidja into Mutsamudu and restore order led to a violent clash which left more than fifty dead in two days (Ibid.)

With that bloody clash it quickly became apparent that this crisis was not going to have a simple solution. When Mayotte voted to remain with France in the 1970’s the language used focused on the French culpability and influence. The Anjoaun crisis in 1997 saw the introduction of the word “secession” to the Comorian national dialogue. Violence changed the dynamic and reinforced negative stereotypes between the islands. The challenges of this crisis to the group identities of Grande Comore and Anjoaun will be discussed in detail in section 4.1b.

The Arab League, OAU, and international community at large denounced the Anjoaunese separatists. Mohammed Ahmad Khandazar, an Arab League mediator, attempted to resolve the burgeoning crisis but his efforts fell on deaf ears and an Anjoaunese referendum held on October

26<sup>th</sup> had a 99% vote in favor of independence (Halifa, 2009). The OAU effected sanctions against the Anjoanese separatists on November 1<sup>st</sup> and officially condemned them on November 7<sup>th</sup> (Ibid.) The following year would only exacerbate tensions between the islands. The French government, hoping to avoid embarrassment, distanced themselves from the crisis. French ambassador to Comoros, Gaston le Paudert claimed that France had no interest in annexing Anjoan “*We want to maintain the unity of the federation of Comoros*” (Caminade, 2010).

After the initial attempts by the LAS failed to contain the situation and OAU sanctions did not deter the Anjoanese separatists the internal politics of Comoros took a turn for the worse. President Taki accused France of supporting and leading Abdallah Ibrahim’s government. Internal divisions began within the separatists, with more militaristic elements beginning to coopt the movement. Throughout 1998 the OAU pushed for a diplomatic solution and a joint commission with representatives from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Burkina Faso, Tanzania, Madagascar, Mauritius, and Kenya facilitated a negotiation with representatives of Taki’s regime and the separatist movements from Anjoan and Moheli from March 18 to the 20<sup>th</sup> (Said Abdillah, 2011). Although the Anjoanese delegation participated in the talks they rejected the agreement, the Mohelien representatives agreed to return to jurisdiction of the Moroni-led government (Caminade, 2010).

On November 6<sup>th</sup>, returning from a state visit to several European and Arab states, Taki Abdulkarim allegedly died of a heart attack (Said Abdillah, 2011). Because of issues with transporting his body and his piety, Taki was never autopsied. Accusations and rumors of a French assassination plot persist to this day. Tajiddine Ben Said Massound, president of the constitutional court, assumed the title of interim president the following day. (Ibid.)

## 2.7 The Time of Two Colonels

Massound, born in the Anjoaunese city of Domoni, was immediately plagued with suspicions that he would be too pro-Anjouan to represent Grande Comore and Moheli. He did little to assuage those fears and immediately nominated an overwhelmingly Anjoaunese cabinet (Ibid.) Massound never truly convinced his constituents on Moheli and Grande Comore that he was going to represent their interests. On April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1999, Massound was deposed in a *coup* led by Colonel Azali Assoumani who established a military junta to oversee the islands.

Before Azali had deposed Massound another round of reconciliation had taken place in Antananarivo, Madagascar April 19<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> 1998 (Caminade, 2010). While the Anjoaunese delegation again refused to sign the brokered agreement, it built on the previous mediative attempts and solidified several key negotiating points. The imbalance of power was acknowledged, and the agreement mandated restructuring term limits and representation in an equitable manner. Though the 1999 document did not offer any permanent solutions it did choose the name that Comoros would adopt at the resolution of the crisis: The Union of Comorian Islands. This name is significant considering that the Anjoaunese delegation fervently pushed for several variations of the “United States of Comoros” (Said Abdillah, 2011). Overseen by the UN, LAS, and OAU, the talks were an instrumental step in setting the framework required to move forward.

Colonel Azali wasted no time in cementing his power during the remainder of 1999. Nullifying President Taki’s 1996 constitution Azali passed a constitutional charter on May 6<sup>th</sup> in which he claimed immense personal power (Digitheque-MJP, 2012). Condemned by the international community at large, Comoros came under sanction by the European Union and United States of America.

The OAU appointed Francisco Madeira, a former ambassador from Mozambique, as special envoy, replacing his predecessor Ambassador Yere, in August 1999. Madeira attempted to hold another round of negotiations in late October but made no headway past what had been agreed in Antananarivo earlier that year. In response to the failed round of talks the separatist government on Anjoan held another independence referendum on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2000 (Said Abdillah). Over 60% of voters chose independence. However, the vote's legitimacy was immediately questioned. Fearing that the negotiations were not productive the OAU joined the international community in sanctioning Anjoaun on February 1<sup>st</sup> which degraded into an embargo as of March 1<sup>st</sup> (Caminade 2010).

Bowing to the pressure of the sanctions representatives from Azali's regime and the Anjoaunese separatist's new leader, Lt. Colonel Abderemane Said Abeid, an agreement was reached for reconciliation between the islands. Mediated by Francisco Madeira and OIF special envoy Andre Salifou, the *General Agreement on National Reconciliation*, or Fomboni Accords, on February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2001. The Accords set the timetable for the drafting of a new constitution and holding new elections. A tripartite commission consisting of Azali's regime, Abeid's representatives, and a collection of civil servants from across the islands, each consisting of the same number of representatives ratified the Accords (UN Peacemaker, 2001).

The Fomboni Accords established several submissions authorized to not only hold referendums but also set out to collect weapons and reintegrate potentially radicalized youths. While there was a limited amount of direct conflict the multi-year crisis had seen several violent clashes in Anjoaun. A constitutional referendum was held on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2001, working within the framework of the Fomboni Accords to create what is known as the "Tournante," or rotating

presidency. Roughly 75% of voters approved the 2001 constitution. Col. Azali temporarily stepped down as president to win the second round in the election on April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2002 (Said Abdillah, 2011).

## 2.8 The First Two Elections

With the establishment of the Tournante the territorial integrity of Comoros had been restored. However, the leaders of the two largest islands were Colonel Azali, who gained power in a military *coup*, and newly elected Anjoanese vice-president Colonel Mohammed Abou Bacar, who had taken over from Lt. Colonel Abeid in a *coup* shortly before the election. With two French trained military men at the helm, Comoros gradually normalized relations between the islands. The Tournante guaranteed a higher degree of autonomy to each island and the fragile union progressed with close supervision of the newly rebranded African Union. On December 20<sup>th</sup> 2003 the *Agreement on the Transitional Arrangements in the Comoros* or “Beit Salam Agreement,” was a final step in solidifying how the Tournante would be carried out. The Beit Salam Agreement created a “Harmonization Committee” chaired by representatives of the international community to harmonize “customs norms and structures as well as economic data.” (Beit Salam Agreement, 2003) Considering how one of Anjouan’s chief accusations against Grande Comore was the unequal allocation of resources, the codification of such norms went a long way to solidifying the Tournante.

The initial terms of Azali and the island presidents concluded without major incident. The AU’s military observer mission and the direct diplomacy of AU chair and former South African President Thabo Mbeki tried to smooth the way for free and fair elections in 2006/2007. As set out by the Tournante, Azali Assoumani represented Grande Comore for the first round of the Tournante. As mandated in the new constitution, the president in the 2006 constitution was to be selected from Anjoan. Under the supervision of the AU Mission for Support to the Elections in



the Comoros (AMISEC) roughly 450 military and police personnel and 60 election observers from nine countries were deployed to ensure free and fair elections (Svensson, 2009)

On May 14<sup>th</sup> 2006, Ahmed Abdallah Sambi was came to power as arguably the first democratically elected President in Comorian history. The following year each island held their independent elections to determine the island presidents. Mohammed Abu Bacar was re-elected as the president of Anjouan but the constitutional court declared the islands election as invalid on June 18<sup>th</sup> 2007, claiming Bacar had stuffed ballot boxes and intimidated voters (Mmadi, 2014). After clashes between government troops and Bacar's security services resulting in two deaths, the islands once again settled into a stalemate (Svensson, 2008). The following year on February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2008, the AU Mission in Comoros deployed around 1,300 hundred military personnel to assist Sambi's government to oust Bacar in "Operation Democracy in Comoros" (Ibid.) The junta quickly fell and Bacar himself fled to Mayotte where he was intercepted by French forces and extradited first to Reunion and eventually Ghana. Despite coming under criticism from the Comorian government for refusing to turn over Colonel Bacar the French government cited Comoros' position on capital punishment to as a justification. Some have posited that Bacar was a French agent throughout his tenure as Anjoanese president but there is no proof of these allegations.

Although Bacar still has a cadre of supporters on Anjouan his ouster in 2008 has marked a turning point in Comorian politics. Sambi relinquished power at the end of his term to Mohelien candidate Ikililou Dhoinine, completing a full cycle of the Tournante. Azali Assoumani was reelected in May of 2016. All of these elections, as well as the staggered elections for island presidents, have been deemed (for the most part) free and fair by international observers and CENI officials. As discussed in the Inquiry Findings section below, the Tournante has been effective in reunifying the country and establishing a precedent for transitions of power. However, as remarked upon by

several interview candidates the current system has some potential drawbacks in the middle and long-term.

One interesting note regarding Sambí's election and eventual victory over Col. Bacar is the notable class divide between the two men. Mohammed Bacar was born in Barakani, a medium sized agricultural village in the north of Anjouan. Throughout Bacar's career in the Comorian gendarmerie he became police chief and eventually used that power to take control of the entire island. Contrast that to the political career of Ahmed Abdallah Sambí, born as a scion of a rich and influential family of preachers in the heart of Anjoaun's capital city Mutsamudu, Sambí was a born and bred *kabaila*. Sambí's biography attempts to distance him from the trappings of wealth and influence he was born with and instead focuses on his extensive studies in religion and starting his own political party (Mmadi, 2014). However, Fatouma Nassour's research on the rift between the two men points to a degree of class resentment as a part of the rift between the men. The same can be said of Azali Assoumani's relationship with Sambí and other elements of the higher classes in Comoros. Azali is famous for being one of the only major political players in Comorian politics past or present not to have had a *Grande Marriage* ceremony. The class divides are rooted in the sultanate period of Comorian history and cannot be explored further, yet remain fascinating in their manifestations.

### **Section 3: Inquiry Design and Findings**

#### **3.1 Structure of the Literature Review**

The literature review of this paper set out to collect Comorian voices on the struggles surrounding the decolonization process. Although there exists a limited amount of available information on the Comorian independence referendums and subsequent challenges the author has collected as many diverse relevant narratives as possible. However, there is a distinct lack of information from Comorian voices available in English. The published Francophone literature has been paired with UN reports, AU reports, scholarly articles, and newspaper articles to establish a

context and timeline for the analysis of the collected data. Works on group identity theory and conflict resolution were also utilized to provide additional lens by which to view the subject material. The literature is also instrumental in allowing for Comorian voices and opinions on topics that were not possible to conduct surveys on for both security concerns and the unavailability of suitably aged participants. The full text of the survey question are attached in section 6.1 Appendix A.

In analyzing the collected data, the author will present the information in two sections. Questions from section one are formatted on the Likert scale and the aggregate information will be divided into several demographic groups. Through this division differences in public opinion can be quantitatively reviewed based on age, gender, location, and education. Section two of the survey form is predominantly qualitative and seeks more personalized responses to questions specifically concerning methods of receiving information as well as opinions regarding tensions between the islands. Data from section two will be reviewed by the researcher and divided into groups based on the similarity of responses. With participant approval the researcher will translate and use relevant quotations to supplement written sources.

### 3.2 Quantitative Surveys

<p><b><i>Quantitative Survey Framework</i></b></p> <p><u>Projected number of participants:</u> 40</p> <p><u>Locations:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grande Comore: 20 total, 10 male/10 female, 10 urban/10 rural (ex. 5 rural males/ 5 urban males) Age and education information will be averaged</li> <li>• Anjoaun: 20 total, 10 male/10 female, 10 urban/10 rural (ex. 5 rural males/ 5 urban males) Age and education information will be averaged</li> </ul>	<p><u>Final number of participants:</u> 40</p> <p><u>Locations:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grande Comore: 20 participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 12 Men/8 Women</li> <li>○ 12 Rural/8 Urban</li> <li>○ Average age: 32.5</li> <li>○ Average Male age: 32</li> <li>○ Average female age: 33</li> <li>○ Age range: 22-73</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Anjoaun: 20 participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 9 Men/11 Women</li> <li>○ 10 Rural/10 Urban</li> <li>○ Average age: 40.6</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Average Male age: 42.5</li> <li>○ Average Female age: 38.9</li> <li>○ Age range: 24-49</li> </ul>
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### 3.3 Limitations

The researcher acknowledges several key limitations to the efficacy of the study. Translation issues, security concerns, transportation, and most importantly the small scope possible in this study have limited what has been possible for the author to address. This project was self-funded by the author and travel expenses to the island of Moheli proved too high to conduct firsthand work. However, because the project focused mainly on the tensions between Grande Comore and Anjoaun the author believes that the lack of Mohelien voices does not compromise the validity of the work. That lack does however deprive the work of insights from a portion of Comorian society and cannot be ignored.

The scope of the project and selection of participants presented difficulties on several fronts. Participants were selected on several criteria: French fluency was not required but basic literacy was for the consent form, participants were to be at least 18 years old, participants had to agree to the confidentiality waiver. While the author approached a number of Comorians who matched the demographic criteria as set out in the proposal a number of Comorians were suggested by Peace Corps volunteers and other community members based on their lived experience through many of the events described. These volunteers and suggested candidates were then assessed for suitability based on the initial lack of rural and female candidates.

Firstly, many of the participants in the surveys viewed the questions as a sort of exam and several interested candidates refused to fill out the forms, not for any security concern but rather that they were embarrassed to take an exam they were worried about failing. Because of the authors role in the community as an educator many participants often had difficulty separating him from

that role and his role as a researcher. There was also the persistent issue on the island of Grande Comore, especially in rural communities, where candidates would accuse the author of being a French or American spy and refuse to speak to him. The author had predicted that this might be an issue and in his proposal for candidate selection decided to reach out through Peace Corps volunteers already in those communities.

Relying on other Peace Corps volunteers to help find interested candidates in Grande Comores presented several difficulties. First, roughly half of the interviewees requested that the volunteer from their community remain present throughout the interview. Second, this resulted in a potentially disproportionate number of more highly educated Comorian participants with 40% of Anjoanese and 35% of Grande Comorien interviewees having university degrees. Another Grande Comore specific issue was the linguistic difference between the dialects between Grande Comore and Anjoaun. As stated in his proposal the author simply used French, however it did negatively affect the author's ability to interview elderly candidates on that island.

Regarding the challenges presented by transportation the author was unfortunate in that one of the two operating airlines between the islands shut down and made travel costs and schedules prohibitively expensive. The rainy season of 2017 also compromised the authors ability to move around the island of Anjoaun due to the severity of the damage to the island's main road. Comoros also suffers from longstanding issues with reliable electricity and internet/cellular connections which provided a series of challenges to arranging suitable times to meet with and contact interested candidates.

### **3.4 Researcher Subjectivity**

The author acknowledges his biases and unique position in his community as both a Peace Corps volunteer and a researcher. Throughout his service the author tried his utmost to integrate

into his community through language, cultural events, and community engagement. However, this does not change the fact that he is a white American man who was hosted for two years by a Comorian family and community. His role as an educator, both in his English clubs and his work at the secondary school, affected how he was viewed in his community and the connections he could establish in his own community and across the country.

As a member of the first Peace Corps cohort in Comoros the author had to not only explain what the mission of Peace Corps was he then had to explain his justifications for collecting data on the Comorian political system and history. As mentioned earlier, the author dealt with many skeptics and accusations of being involved in an intelligence agency. While the author was able to mitigate many of these suspicions based on his integration and personal connections on Anjoaun there was a higher level of scrutiny and skepticism on his work on Grande Comore. Furthermore, the author must acknowledge his own personal bias towards Grande Comore after so long on Anjoaun. In discussions with colleagues on Grande Comore the author realized that he had framed several of the questions regarding the 1997 crisis in a more pro-Anjoaun light than he had intended. He does not believe this has negatively impacted the quality of responses to those questions and received no comments from interviewees that those questions were unfairly worded.

### **3.5 Inquiry Findings**

The survey questions were designed to obtain information mostly about the differences in subgroups opinions regarding the other islands, Comorian government, and France. The survey contains 12 total questions, three Likert scale responses, three yes/no questions, and 6 written response questions. These questions were designed in consultation with Peace Corps staff, the authors Comorian colleagues, and his Capstone advisor to a mix of qualitative and quantitative data. Although the author included one question about post-2001 topics (Question 2 Section 1 “How do

you feel about France's actions in Comoros post-2001?) The author took care not to include any questions regarding controversial topical events. One of the main goals of the research was to see what the differences in how people learned of the events of 1997 and the emotions behind those responses. The author had initially planned to include more detailed questions regarding the 2008 African Union military intervention, however that proved potentially risky for the author and candidates and that topic was relegated to the literature review.

The full results from the surveys can be found in appendix one, however certain statistics and quotations relevant to the findings will be offered in this section to contextualize some of the differences and similarities between the two surveyed groups. Demographically the groups from Grande Comore and Anjoaun varied in several ways. The average age of Anjoaunese participants (40.6) is almost a decade older than Grande Comore's (32.5.) The surveyed populations had similar levels of education with 40% of Anjoaunese candidates and 35% of Grande Comoriens holding university degrees. Both groups had 35% who had not completed Middle School level, however the Anjoaunese group had one participant who had not studied after primary school and another who reported no structured education whatsoever.

The cumulative response to the Likert Scale questions of Section One were generally the same across both groups. Unsurprisingly, a higher percentage of the Anjoaunese group reported having been to France or Mayotte with 45% of the Anjoaun group responding "yes." Interestingly the rural and urban subgroups on Anjoaun responded nearly identically with 40% and 50% respectively reporting yes. This is starkly different to the numbers on Grande Comore where only 10% of rural participants reported visiting French territory contrasted to 62% of the urban population. The author does not believe that the response of those urban subjects is representative

of the larger urban population outside of the wealthier upper-class that were the majority urban research participants.

Questions asking about the average sentiment to France on the 1-10 Likert Scale model received predominantly low responses with an occasional higher outlying response. For example, the first question in section 1 “How do you feel about France's actions in Comoros from 1975-2000?” had an average response of 3.55 on Anjoaun but 30% of participants indicated scores of 5 or higher. Most participants on both Anjoaun and Grande Comore selected responses to section one that were between 1 and 4 on the Likert Scale.

Of the forty participants interviewed the author was only able to work with two elderly women who had voted in the original independence referendum. Considering the ways in which the French and Comorien authors approached this topic it was valuable to be able to include their voices. The author had been hopeful of attracting more elderly participants to the project, but this demographic group was especially reluctant to sign the confidentiality agreement.

The author was unsurprised to see that question four in section 2 (How did you hear about the 1997 secession crisis of Anjoaun and Moheli?) received drastically different responses between the islands. While only 20% of Anjoaunese reported unfamiliarity with the 1997 crisis, 45% of Grande Comoriens had no idea that anything of import had happened. More than half of Anjoaunese participants (60%) indicated on question 6 that they believed the secession attempt was justified as opposed to 15% of Grande Comore's group. It must be noted that 20% of the Anjoaun group was unfamiliar or chose not to respond to question five while 40% of the Grande Comore group were unfamiliar and 45% voted no.

It is unsurprising that the majority of responses to question five section one were negative given the overall low scores on the Likert Scale question gaging general opinions on Franco-



Comorian relations. Consistent across both islands and separate demographic groups the many responses showcased some very strong emotions and claims.

The following excerpts are solely from participants who gave explicit verbal and written consent for their submissions to be included in the final study and associated with their names.

Massondi Chamussidine, an Anjoaunese university student, felt that there was a bad relationship between the French and Comorian governments because “the *French government treated Comorians as slaves.*”

Patrice Keldi, an Anjoaunese chauffeur, feels that Comorian instability is attributable to France

*Since it seized the independence of Comoros, France has pursued us with coup d'etats without end. For Maborais people who wanted independence but were not allowed to because of the French military which is also surrounding our borders. All of the coups were able to progress unchallenged because they were led by the French and the French citizen Bob Denard.*

Allaoui Said Tourqui, a Peace Corps employee from Moroni, decried French interference as well

*“France is such a hypocrite country and the Comorian government knows it. Wherever we have political instability France is always behind it.”*

Despite reaching out to several elderly Comorians old enough to have voted in the original independence referendum only two participants accepted and gave the requisite permissions on the confidentiality form. These women came from the same city as Ahmed Abdallah, the first president following that vote. Both reported that they were forced to vote for independence under threat of violence from the government. Interviews with both women were conducted in a mix of Shindzwani and French at the participants request. However, when pressed for more details on the ways in which they were pressured to vote and what they remembered of the immediate aftermath of the vote neither woman offered much elaboration.

In regards to the disparity of knowledge surrounding the events of 1997 between the surveyed groups from Anjouan and Grande Comore the author has selected certain quotations from participants who authorized the inclusion.

Mohammed Moutui, a professor from Mutsamudu (capital city of Anjoaun), responding to how he heard about the events in 1997 responded

*I participated in the radio and tv debates on TV Uburu Anjoaun. I lived through the demonstrations and the rumors of the strike and everyone who signed the separatists petition. I participated in the protest that saw two men killed by Commander Mataba.*

Daroussi Abdallah, a school administrator in the rural southern Anjoaunese town of Moya, reported that he found out about the situation through a family tragedy.

*I have an uncle who was assassinated during the crisis. I was in school and my school master was told over the phone and came in and told me/us what happened.*

As compared to those from Anjouan, the Grande Comorien responses were far less personal. Most participants reported either unfamiliarity with the subject or learning about it in school.

Anturia Mihidaji, a nurse working in Moroni, responded that

*I was young but I lived through the crisis. The crisis was however involving the island of Anjouan only and what I lived here in Grande Comore was seeing people from Anjoaun being chased out of their homes in Moroni by Ngazidja people.*

The above response was unusual in several ways. As mentioned earlier, 45% of the Grande Comore group reported either having forgotten or being unfamiliar with the 1997 crisis in general. On Anjoaun only 20% reported unfamiliarity and those participants were elderly women who freely admitted that they didn't pay attention to politics. Even those Anjoaunese who did not know about the new constitution (see below) had some sort of personal connection or general knowledge about the crisis.

When asked about the efficacy of the new constitution and the establishment of the Tournante the results on Grande Comore were split with 40% believing that the 2001 Constitution was an equitable, if temporary, solution and 10% believed it wasn't. There were just as many people

surveyed on Grande Comore that weren't aware of the new constitution's existence as supported it. On Anjouan the results were divided into thirds without a single sentiment taking precedence. However, on both Anjouan and Grande Comore there was a clear divide between the urban and rural populations with roughly 50% of surveyed urban participants on both islands choosing "yes." Retired Anjoanese businessman Hamid Abasse remarked "at that period it was actually very good but the situation has evolved so it [the Tournante] must change." It must be noted that while numerous interviewees called for the adjustment of the Tournante, none offered any potential changes to it.

The last question on the survey, "do you believe there is conflict between the Comorian islands," yielded some fascinating discrepancies of opinion. An overwhelming 85% of Anjoanese participants believe there is conflict or tension, more than double the 40% of surveyed participants from Grande Comore who believe the same. Responses from Grande Comore were also less likely to paint a single side as an aggressor or solely at fault and instead focused on France or the structure of the Tournante itself. Salim Chanfi, a student at the university of Comoros, responded

*In my opinion I think we must first move away from France on an economic level and secondly eliminate the Tournante and vote between islands for each candidate based on his strength and not his island.*

Halima Miradji, an English language instructor in Moroni, likened the situation to a family "*just like brothers and sisters, people argue and have its opinions*" however she continued on to say "*Though I don't think there is conflict between the islands.*"

These responses are in stark contrast to those elicited from Anjoanese participants. One rural Anjoanese participant who identified herself simply as Charfia responded as follows

*There has never been stability because of problems with employment. These render us permanently unhappy [Anjouan and Moheli] Also our language [Shindzواني] is insulted across the islands as they*

*are separated. The Grande Comoriens violated the women of Anjouan in Moroni's port and that insult stays in our hearts. There will always be issues between us.*

Arlette Kaembi, a shop owner in the southern Anjoaunese town Mremani simply wrote “*the Grande Comoriens must consider us [Anjoaunese] as Comorians too. They always treat us as lesser.*”

Daroussi Abdallah, an Anjoaunese school administrator, blamed the structure of the Tournante itself

*There is always conflict because of political intrigues. Written into the Tournante is a course that pushes those in power to benefit their own island at the expense of the others. This is what makes the Tournante so fragile. Basically, the Tournante exists to give the chance to each island governor to alleviate some of the hate between Comorians.*

These quotations have been drawn solely from the written responses to the questions in Appendix A, and many of those responses would have been significantly longer had the author allotted more space to write. Almost every survey also resulted in a longer one on one talk with the participants where they expanded on their opinions. The level of negativity against France was unsurprising, however the author was surprised at the disparity of the responses between islands regarding the other islands. It seemed that to participants from Grande Comore the events on Anjouan were so distant they may as well have been in a different country. This is in stark contrast to the Anjoaunese responses which brought about strong emotions and several times noticeable anger.

#### **Section 4: Through the Lens of Vamik Volkan and Johan Galtung**

##### **4.1 The Division of Comorian Group Identity**

Geographically, culturally, and linguistically, all four islands in the Comorian archipelago share a high degree of homogeneity. In the author's lived experience on the islands he heard countless times that the island dialects are mutually intelligible and that the Chaifite Islam binds Comoros together. Even Shimaore, the native dialect of Mayotte, is easily understood by advanced speakers of the other dialects. But in the forty years since Grande Comore, Anjouan, and Moheli left France, the three islands have held a lingering resentment about Mayotte. However there exists a

historical power disequilibrium between the larger islands, Grande Comore and Anjouan, and the smaller of the four, Moheli and Mayotte.

Colonized by France over the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Mayotte was the first to come under the French flag in 1841. Although all four islands were ruled as an extension of the prefecture of Madagascar, Comoros was granted semi-autonomous rule after the Second World War. Dzaoudzi, Mayotte's capital, was chosen as the seat of the Comorian presidency and legislature. However, in 1960, the capital was shifted to Moroni (Halifa, 2009). This perhaps is the single most significant event in pinpointing when and where public sentiment on Mayotte pulled away from the Comorian identity and sought protection in the French identity. Mayotte's historical fears of subjugation by Grande Comore were realized in the power grab by the Moroni *wakabaila*. In his work *Blind Trust*, Vamik Volkan posits that large-group identity as it incorporates ethnic, religious, or national identities is irrevocably linked to a "core" identity which include the totality of an individuals lived experiences (Volkan, 2004). Volkan goes on to say that most of the time "we are not even aware of this link until our large-group identity is threatened..." (Volkan, 2004).

In stereotypes and prejudices that date back to the pre-colonial Comorian sultanates there exists a divide between those of Arab descent and those of Bantu origin. The *Wakabaila* claim Middle Eastern heritage and those noble houses have dominated Comorian religious and bureaucratic posts for generations. The *Wamatsaba*, predominantly of East African origins are farmers and craftsmen. The *Wamatsaha* are the descendants of slaves and after decades of work have begun forming a commercially oriented middle class. But it is the historic domination of *Wakabaila* in the urban centers of Anjoaun and Grande Comore that have maintained dominance first through their connections to the Arab world and then through the connection to the French metropole beginning after the First World War. Ethnicity, according to Volkan "incorporates

religion as well as *language*; connected with shared images of the groups history, it establishes an especially sharp sense of “us” and “them.” (Volkan, 2004). The language surrounding the divisions between the islands is one

But the manifestation of inter-island prejudices has evolved beyond colonial roots. Each island holds negative stereotypes of the others. Anjoanese are crazy and violent, Grande Comoriens are arrogant and lazy, Mohélien are just lazy. And while Grande Comore and Anjouan fought for dominance over the archipelago throughout the 1960's, Mayotte and Mohéli were fearful of that domination (Halifa, 2009). So, while the present-day Union of Comoros has experienced a resurgence of fundamentalist Islam, Mahorais have spent decades moving towards the secularism so long embraced by France. Polygamy was outlawed in Mayotte in 2004 while the island was still considered a TOM under its own unique set of laws (Bouhet, 2017).

The idea of a collective Comorian identity cannot be looked at without acknowledging the loss of Mayotte. The trauma to the other three islands has perversely morphed from the initial outrage of the 1970's. Mayotte is seen as a sort of El Dorado and tens of thousands of Comorians, especially Anjoanese, have attempted the perilous voyage for a better life in Mayotte. There exists a disconnect between the stated desire to reintegrate Mayotte into the Comorian Union and the desire for a higher standard of life. On the Mahorais' side of the equation there exists a very real fear of domination by Comoros. However, that fear has evolved from a fear of suppression by Moroni to a fear of being overwhelmed by Anjoanese immigrants. This fear led nearly half of Mahorais to vote for Marine Le Pen in the 2016 French presidential election (Le Monde, 2016). Le Pen visited the island early that year, campaigning on promises of a crackdown on illegal immigration.

Volkan distinguishes seven threads that compose large group identity:

1. *Shared, tangible reservoirs for images associated with positive emotion*

2. *Shared “good” identifications*
3. *Absorption of others “bad” qualities*
4. *Absorption of (revolutionary or transforming) leaders’ internal worlds*
5. *Chosen glories*
6. *Chosen traumas*
7. *Formation of symbols that develop their own autonomy* (Volkan, 2004)

Within the framework of these threads one of the most damaging elements of Mayotte’s “Frenchness” is the failure to adhere to the mythic past narrative of Comorian Islam. The adoption of French secularism and the abandonment of the powerful symbol of Mtsa Mwandze traveling to Saudi Arabia and bringing back the holy Qur’an is an insult to Comorian heritage.

The geopolitical realities of the Mayotte situation, from Cold War fears to shipping lanes, have made the Comorian demand of a four-island state impossible. Since Mayotte’s upgrade to the 101<sup>st</sup> *département d’outre-mer*, Dzaoudzi is just as French as Lyon. But the continued separation will continue to exacerbate relations between the other islands simply because of the damage to the integrity of the Comorian identity. The islands have been forced to see themselves not as members of a single group, but as a single group that has been forcibly divided. And when the unifying bonds have been so definitively injured they can be exploited by internal and external forces against themselves and each other.

#### **4.2 The Three R’s Applied to the Fomboni Accords**

The 1997 secessionist crisis was unusual in not only the goals of the separatists but also the conduct of all parties involved. After the initial foray by government forces where fifty soldiers were killed in Mutsamudu, there was a distinct absence of direct violence in the form of armed conflict. In his work on reconciliation Johan Galtung observes that “it is the failure to transform conflict that leads to violence.” (Galtung, 1998). This research has addressed some of the structural violence that

Anjouan and Moheli used to justify the secession attempt. But why was there such a lack of direct violence considering the length of the crisis and the willingness to use violence? And considering the stressors to the process, what successes can be attributed to these processes?

Of the three “R’s” put forth by Galtung (reconstruction after direct violence, reconciliation of conflict parties, and resolution of underlying root conflict) the 1997 Comorian crisis and its ramifications up through the 2008 AU intervention to remove Mohammed Bacar, the most relevant are the latter two. Because of the lack of direct violence there was effectively no post-conflict reconstruction that the parties deemed necessary. The reconciliatory process as led by ambassadors Yere and Madeira took the almost six years to finalize the fine details in the Beit Salam agreement. With the commitment of the OAU, OIF, LAS, UN, and other international partners the appropriate economic pressures were applied to bring the disparate Comorian parties to the table.

Once Ahmed Abdallah Sambi was elected and the 2008 Anjoaun crisis was resolved via AU military intervention it could be argued that a lasting negative peace had been achieved. Galtung categorizes peace to generally mean “the capacity to handle conflicts with empathy, nonviolence, and creativity” (Galtung, 1998). But it would be difficult to assert that there has ever more than a negative peace, absence of direct violence, between Anjouan and Grande Comore.

*“When violence breaks out there are usually two structural causes: too much dominance... or too much distance... Combine the two and we get the phenomenon known as (social) exclusion or marginalization.” (Ibid.)*

The relationship between the Comorian islands since the final days of their colonial period has been one of fearing marginalization by the others. Thus, it is only with the acknowledgement of this struggle for dominance that progress can be made. The Tournante began to address this issue, and in Galtung’s 3R theory the best way to address the perceived inequality is to use a structure-oriented perspective:



*converts the relation from inter-personal, or inter-state/nation, to a relation between two positions in a deficient structure. If the parties can agree that the structure was/is deficient and that their behavior was an enactment of structural positions rather than anything more personal, then turning together against the common problem, the structural violence, should be possible. (Ibid.)*

The different stages taken in drafting the Antananarivo Accords, the Fomboni Accords, the 2001 Constitution, and the Beit Salam Agreement, all focused on finding a way to reintegrate the Comorian islands into a single system where it never felt that one was preeminent over the others.

In the sixteen years since the establishment of the Tournante a several important shifts must be taken into account. While the legitimacy Azali Assoumani's first election in 2002 may be debated the fact that since the election of Ahmed Abdallah Sambi Comoros has transitioned power twice without accusations of voter fraud or any direct violence. For a country plagued with instability and long stretches of autocracy, the process by which the average Comorian can start to feel that their vote matters has begun. The long process of ratifying the newest constitution has offered a potential avenue forward to the next chapter in Comorian politics: the conversation has been reoriented so that faults are distributed around islands and local leaders rather than solely at France. Even if leaders take advantage of the Tournante and constitutional framework to push policies more amenable for their native island they are using the legal framework as set out in the Tournante. The amount of progress cannot be denied, and as the Tournante begins its second cycle through the islands it may become necessary to adjust the framework once again. Despite this, Comoros is finally beginning to establish precedents for non-violent solutions and fair elections. And as the islands continue to develop and seek economic opportunities that foundation will prove invaluable to overcome whatever political hurdles present themselves.

## Section 5: Conclusions

### 5.1 Comoros Moving Forward

Between the months of August and November the entire island of Anjouan smells of cloves. Known as nkarafou, the spices are left to dry on tarps until they are ready to be bagged in old rice sacks and sent by bus to an exporter in Mutsamudu. Every evening fishermen are greeted by a crowd of children who help them pull their fiberglass boats up the beach for the evening. Those same children will then run down the street pulling scuffed red sardine cans they have fixed wheels to on a little string. Men of all ages will sit in the local *bangwé* and play dominos with so much enthusiasm they run the risk of shattering the tiles. The mosque will sound the call to prayer and old men will stroll with their arms clasped behind their back, animatedly chatting with their companions.

The islands of the moon. Home to the largest active volcano in the world and a marine park that surrounds almost the entire circumference of Moheli. These are islands that have seen colonizers and traders from every corner of the world. From Malagasy pirates to Portuguese explorers in days past to Chinese engineers and American Peace Corps volunteers. A culture that insists on hospitality and generosity. Comoros is an oft-forgotten and little-known nation but it is one that is unforgettable.

But these idyllic islands have tension beneath the surface that will not dissipate any time soon. The cultural trauma of losing their sister island of Mayotte and the indignities suffered under the mercenary regimes have left the tensions between the islands simmering just under the surface. The author vividly remembers tensions running high in early 2017 when Anjouan accused Grande Comore of withholding parts from the Saudi donated generators. While even remote villages in Grande Comore had twenty-four hour a day electricity, the capital of Anjouan would be lucky to see the lights turn on at all on a given day. The author heard many genuinely concerning rumors throughout the island about Anjouan's place within the union.

In attempting to provide not only a detailed timeline and context to the 1997 secession crisis the author hopes that the limited scope of the in-person surveys conducted has shed some light on the attitudes of everyday Comorians. The author believes that the divide between Grande Comorien and Anjoanese surveys responses is indicative of a larger trend in which Anjoan still holds a grudge against Grande Comore while those on Grande Comore do not understand the potential reasons for Anjoan's ire.

This is not to call into question the strides forward taken in the last sixteen years nor the successes in the mediative processes in establishing the Tournante. While the period between 1975 and 2001 was rife with structural violence and political instability Comoros is currently in a period that has seen some marked improvements. With the end of the Cold War and Apartheid the interferences of France and South Africa have drastically declined. The Tournante has completed a full cycle, and since the ouster of Mohammed Bacar there have been no military *coups* and the last three elections are recognized by the international community as legitimate.

Since Mayotte became a full-fledged *department* the likelihood of a four island Comorian state is effectively impossible. Despite this, thousands of Comorians attempt the perilous voyage to Mayotte seeking economic opportunities. Accusations of corruption plague every state-run agency and civil servant salaries often go months in arrears. Identity politics are more relevant than ever with the island of Anjoan seeing a resurgence in conservative Sunni Islam, a consequence of which has been the targeting of the small Shia minority. President Azali has been accused of trying to stifle opposition parties and neglecting the needs of Anjoan and Moheli.

So, what can be done moving forward? In the authors opinion the Tournante is the most effective solution to inter-island power dynamics. The number one concern needs to be the invitation of international investors and offering economic incentives for Comorians to stay within

the archipelago rather than move to France or West Africa. Telma, a telecom company based in Madagascar, began offering services in Comoros in mid-2016 and began a massively successful campaign which lowered rates and increased services. Social services, if they are offered equally, will help alleviate interisland tensions. As mentioned above the delay in getting Anjouan's new generators had the potential to escalate dramatically. But once the generators were installed and the three islands were once again on a level field the general sentiments became less hostile. The class resentment between *wakabaila* and *wamatsaba* is unlikely to change anytime soon, but if more civil servants are paid on time then the establishment of a middle class can help to offset that. Comoros is a victory for mediative diplomacy, and the processes used took time and patience. But it is only through taking the time and being patient that progress is made.

## Section 6: Appendices and References

### 6.1 Appendix A: Questions on the Survey Form (Modified)

#### Section 1

1. How do you feel about France's actions in Comoros from 1975-2000? (1 is very negative, 10 is very positive) Que pensez-vous des actions de la France dans les Comores de 1975 à 2000? (1 est très négatif, 10 est très positif)  
1...2...3...4...5...6...7...8...9...10
2. How do you feel about France's actions in Comoros post-2001? (1 is very negative, 10 is very positive) Que pensez-vous des actions de la France dans les Comores après 2001? (1 est très négatif, 10 est très positif)  
1...2...3...4...5...6...7...8...9...10
3. Have you ever been to France or Mayotte? Avez-vous déjà été en France où Mayotte?  
[ yes / no ] [ oui / non ]
4. How do you feel about the relationship between the French government and the Comorian government? (1 is very negative, 10 is very positive) Que pensez-vous de la relation entre le gouvernement français et le gouvernement Comorien? (1 est très négatif, 10 est très positif)  
1...2...3...4...5...6...7...8...9...10
5. Please provide one or two reasons for how you responded to the previous question. Veuillez fournir une ou deux raisons pour lesquelles vous avez répondu à la question précédente.

#### Section 2

1. Did you vote in the 1975 referendum on independence from France? Avez-vous voté lors du référendum de 1975 sur l'indépendance de la France?  
[ yes / no ] [ oui / non ]
2. How did you hear about the results of the referendum? Comment avez-vous entendu parler des résultats du référendum?
3. If you are too young to remember the referendum or were born afterwards, how did you learn about it? (For example at school or through a family member) Si vous êtes trop jeune pour vous souvenir du référendum ou est né après, comment avez-vous appris à ce sujet? (Par exemple à l'école ou par l'intermédiaire d'un membre de la famille)
4. How did you hear about the 1997 secession crisis of Anjoaun and Moheli? Comment avez-vous entendu parler de la crise de sécession de 1997 de Anjoaun et Moheli?

5. Do you think the Anjoanese and Mohelian separatists were justified in their goals? Pensez-vous que les séparatistes Anjoanais et Mohéliens étaient justifiés dans leurs objectifs?

[ yes / no ] [ oui / non ]

6. Do you feel that the 2001 Constitution was a fair and balanced way to resolve the issues between the islands? Considérez-vous que la Constitution de 2001 était une manière équitable et équilibrée de résoudre les problèmes entre les îles?

7. Do you believe there is conflict or tension between the Comorian Islands? If yes, please write what you believe the major issues to be. Croyez-vous qu'il y ait conflit ou tension entre les îles Comoriennes? Si oui, écrivez ce que vous croyez les grands problèmes à résoudre.

[ yes / no ] [ oui / non ]

## 6.2 Appendix B: Full Text of Confidentiality Agreement

### Consent Form/Formulaire de consentement

Constitutional Reform: The Decolonization Process in the Comoros Islands

Nicholas A. Daou, SIT Graduate Institute, Brattleboro, Vermont, United States

#### Instructions:

*Please read the following statements carefully and mark your preferences where indicated. Signing below indicates your agreement with all statements and your voluntary participation in the study. Signing below while failing to mark a preference where indicated will be interpreted as a negative preference. Please ask the researcher if you have any questions regarding this consent form.*

*Veillez lire attentivement les énoncés suivants et indiquer vos préférences, le cas échéant. La signature ci-dessous indique votre accord avec toutes les déclarations et votre participation volontaire à l'étude. Le fait de signer ci-dessous tout en omettant de marquer une préférence lorsque cela est indiqué sera interprété comme une préférence négatif. Veillez demander au chercheur si vous avez des questions concernant ce formulaire de consentement.*

---

I am aware that this interview is conducted by an independent graduate researcher with the goal of analyzing opinions about Comorian history and the Comorian Constitution of 2001.

Je sais que cette interview est menée par un chercheur diplômé indépendant dans le but d'analyser les opinions sur l'histoire comorienne et les constitution Comorien de 2001.

I am aware that the information I provide is for research purposes only. I understand that my responses will be confidential and that my name will not be associated with any results of this study unless I give my explicit approval to the researcher.

Je suis conscient que les renseignements que je fournis sont uniquement à des fins de recherche. Je comprends que mes réponses seront confidentielles et que mon nom ne sera associé à aucun résultat de cette étude à moins que je donne mon approbation explicite au chercheur.

I am aware that I have the right to refuse to answer any question and to terminate my participation at any time, and that the researcher will answer any questions I have about the study.

Je sais que j'ai le droit de refuser de répondre à toute question et de mettre fin à ma participation à tout moment, et que le chercheur répondra à toutes les questions que j'ai sur l'étude.

I am aware of and take full responsibility for any risk, physical, psychological, legal, or social, associated with participation in this study. Please feel free to ask the researcher any questions you may have on the possible risks associated with this study.

Je suis conscient et je suis entièrement responsable des risques physiques, psychologiques, juridiques ou sociaux liés à la participation à cette étude. N'hésitez pas à demander au chercheur toutes les questions que vous pourriez avoir sur les risques éventuels associés à cette étude.

I am aware that I will not receive monetary compensation for participation in this study, but a copy of the final study will be made available to me upon request. (The final project will only be available in English)

Je suis conscient que je ne recevrai pas de compensation monétaire pour participer à cette étude, mais une copie de l'étude finale sera mise à ma disposition sur demande. (Le projet final ne sera disponible qu'en anglais)

I [ have / have not ] read and understood this document.

[ J'ai / Je n'ai pas ] lu et compris ce document.

I [ do / do not ] give the researcher permission to use my name in the final study.

Je [ donner / ne pas donner ] au chercheur la permission d'utiliser mon nom dans l'étude finale.

I [ do / do not ] give the researcher permission to use my age, gender, location, occupation, and educational information in the final study.

Je [ donner / ne pas donner ] au chercheur la permission d'utiliser mon âge, sexe, location, occupation, et information éducatif dans l'étude finale.

Date/Dat : \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's Signature:**  
**Signature de Participant:**

***Thank you for participating!***  
***Merci pour votre participation!***

*Questions, comments, concerns,  
and requests for the final written  
study can be directed to:*

*Les questions, les commentaires,  
les plaintes et les demandes  
d'étude écrite finale peuvent être  
adressées à:*

Nicholas Daou

Telephone 360-01-37

Email: nicholas.daou@mail.sit.edu

pcvnadcomoros@gmail.com

**Participant's Printed Name:**  
**Nom Imprimé du Participant :**

**Researcher's Signature:**  
**Signature de Chercheur :**



### 6.3 Appendix C: Aggregate Information Collected Through Surveys

#### Grande Comore

Permission 1 Granted: 100%

Permission 2 Granted: 65%

Permission 3 Granted: 90%

#### **Education Levels:**

University: 35% (7 Participants)	Some Primary School: 0%
BAC (High School Completed) 15% (3 Participants)	None: 0%
Some High School: 15% (3 Participants)	N/A: 15% (3 Participants)
Some Middle School: 20% (4 Participants)	

#### **Section 1**

##### **Question 1 [How do you feel about France's actions in Comoros 75-01 (Likert Scale)]**

Average: 3.25	Rural: 2.8
Men: 3.5	Urban: 3.9
Women: 2.8	

##### **Question 2 [How do you feel about France's actions in Comoros post-2001 (Likert Scale)]**

Total: 3.2	Rural: 2.6
Men: 3.25	Urban: 3.9
Women: 3	

##### **Question 3 (positive responses only) [Have you ever been to Mayotte/France]**

Total: 35%	Rural: 10%
Men: 50%	Urban: 62%
Women: 12%	N/A: 5%

**Question 4 [How do you feel about the relationship between the French and Comorian governments?]**

Total: 3.5	Rural: 2.25
Men: 3.6	Urban: 5
Women: 2.8	

**Section 2****Question 1 [Did you vote in the 1975 Independence Referendum?]**

Total: 0%	Urban: 0%
Men: 0%	Rural: 0%
Women: 0%	

**Question 2 [(If yes to question 1) How did you hear about results?]**

Government: 0%	N/A: 100%
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**Question 3 [(If no to question 1) How did you hear about results?]**

Family: 35%	School: 40%
Radio: 5%	Community: 10%
Participated: 0%	N/A: 0%
Unfamiliar: 10%	

**Question 4 [How did you hear about 1997 Crisis?]**

Family: 15%	School: 0%
Radio: 15%	Community: 15%
Participated: 0%	N/A: 10%
Unfamiliar: 45%	

**Question 5 [Do you think the actions of separatists were justified?]**

Yes total: 15%	No Total: 45%
Yes Urban: 12.5%	No Urban: 62.5%
Yes Rural: 16.6%	No Rural: 41.6%

Unfamiliar: 40%	N/A: 0%
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**Question 6 [Do you think 2001 Constitution is a fair way to resolve issues between islands?]**

Yes Total: 40%		No Total: 10%	Temporary Yes: 15%
Yes Urban: 50%		No Urban: 12.5%	Unfamiliar: 25%
Yes Rural: 16.6%		No Rural: 8%	N/A: 5% Forgot: 15%

[Temporary yes averaged in with total yes]

**Question 7 [Do you believe there is conflict between islands?]**

Yes Total: 40%	No Total: 60%
Yes Urban: 25%	No Urban: 75%
Yes Rural: 50%	No Rural: 50%
Yes Male: 33%	No Male: 66%
Yes Female: 50%	No Female: 50%

**Anjoaun**

Permission 1 Granted: 100%

Permission 2 Granted: 95%

Permission 3 Granted: 95%

**Education Levels:**

University: 40% (8 Participants)	Some Primary School: 5% (1 Participant)
BAC (High School Completed) 20% (4 Participants)	None: 5% (1 Participant)
Some High School: 10% (2 Participants)	N/A: 5% (Participant)
Some Middle School: 15% (3 Participants)	

**Section 1**

**Question 1 [How do you feel about France's actions in Comoros 75-01 (Likert Scale)]**

Average: 3.2	Rural: 2.8
Men: 4	Urban: 3
Women: 2.5	

**Question 2 [How do you feel about France's actions in Comoros post-2001 (Likert Scale)]**

Total: 5.8	Rural: 3.1
Men: 3.5	Urban: 2.2
Women: 1.9	

**Question 3 (positive responses only) [Have you ever been to Mayotte/France]**

Total: 45%	Rural: 40%
Men: 66%	Urban: 50%
Women: 27%	

**Question 4 [How do you feel about the relationship between the French and Comorian governments?]**

Total: 3.4	Rural: 4.1
Men: 4.8	Urban: 2.3
Women: 2.2	

**Section 2****Question 1 [Did you vote in the 1975 Independence Referendum?]**

Total: 10%	Urban: 20%
Men: 0%	Rural: 0%
Women: 18%	

**Question 2 [(If yes to question 1) How did you hear about results?]**

Government: 10%	N/A: 90%
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**Question 3 [(If no to question 1) How did you hear about results?]**

Family: 30%	School: 40%
Radio: 5%	Community: 5%
Participated: 10%	N/A: 20%
Unfamiliar: 0%	

**Question 4 [How did you hear about 1997 Crisis?]**

Family: 25%	School: 10%
Radio: 0%	Community: 20%
Participated: 20%	N/A: 5%
Unfamiliar: 20%	

**Question 5 [Do you think the actions of separatists were justified?]**

Yes total: 60%	No Total: 20%
Yes Urban: 60%	No Urban: 5%
Yes Rural: 60%	No Rural: 10%
Unfamiliar: 15%	N/A: 5%

**Question 6 [Do you think 2001 Constitution is a fair way to resolve issues between islands?]**

Yes Total: 35%	No Total: 30%	Temporary Yes: 10%
Yes Urban: 50%	No Urban: 5%	Unfamiliar: 30%
Yes Rural: 10%	No Rural: 25%	N/A: 5%

[Temporary yes averaged in with total yes]

**Question 7 [Do you believe there is conflict between islands?]**

Yes Total: 85%	No Total: 10%
Yes Urban: 80%	No Urban: 20%
Yes Rural: 95%	No Rural: 0%
N/A: 5%	

## Notes:

- Question 6 Section 2 averages temporary yes with total yes because of prevalence of the response
- The author only found two participants who had voted in the initial referendum in 1974 willing to declare their age
- Several participants who declined to give full permissions agreed to provide some general info while withholding name and location
- Urban and Rural results are averaged from within that subsection rather than the total sample population from the island group

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