

FOLKTALES OF MAYOTTE, AN AFRICAN ISLAND

LEE HARING





<https://www.openbookpublishers.com>

©2023 Lee Haring



This work is licensed under an Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0). This license allows you to share, copy, distribute and transmit the text; to adapt the text for non-commercial purposes of the text providing attribution is made to the authors (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work).

Attribution should include the following information:

Lee Haring, *Folktales of Mayotte, an African Island*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0315>

Copyright and permissions for the reuse of many of the images included in this publication differ from the above. This information is provided in the captions and in the list of illustrations. Every effort has been made to identify and contact copyright holders and any omission or error will be corrected if notification is made to the publisher.

Further details about CC BY-NC licenses are available at

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

All external links were active at the time of publication unless otherwise stated and have been archived via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine at <https://archive.org/web>

Any digital material and resources associated with this volume will be available at <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0315#resources>

Every effort has been made to identify and contact copyright holders and any omission or error will be corrected if notification is made to the publisher.

World Oral Literature Series, vol. 10 | ISSN: 2050-7933 (Print); 2054-362X (Online)

ISBN Paperback: 978-1-80511-004-0

ISBN Hardback: 978-1-80511-005-7

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-80511-006-4

ISBN Digital ebook (EPUB): 978-1-80511-007-1

ISBN XML: 978-1-80511-009-5

ISBN HTML: 978-1-80511-010-1

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0315

Cover image: Mayotte (2016). Foto by Martine at <https://bit.ly/3odGEZL>.

Cover design by Margarita Louka

Foreword

Mark Turin

Folktales of Mayotte is the tenth publication in the World Oral Literature series and the second monograph by Lee Haring that our partnership with Open Book Publishers has seen into press. Now running for a decade, the series was designed to preserve and promote the oral literatures of Indigenous people by publishing materials on endangered traditions in innovative, responsive, ethical and culturally-appropriate ways. Situated at the intersection of anthropology, folklore, linguistics and information studies, the study of oral genres is an exciting and fast-developing field, but one with few publishing outlets.

Haring's 2013 publication in our series, *How to Read a Folktale*, offered the first English translation of Ibonia, a captivating tale of old Madagascar.¹ Containing African-style praise poetry for the hero replete with Indonesian-style riddles and poems, Ibonia elevates the form of folktale to epic proportions and in so doing, asserts the power of the ancestors in resistance to European colonial settlers. With Haring as our guide, through the lens of Ibonia, readers are invited to rethink the very nature of folktales, and the author's expert analysis raises fundamental intellectual questions that engage with anthropological theory as well as literary criticism.

Building on the success of this earlier monograph, and through a long professional career devoted to the careful study and analysis of folklore and verbal arts, in *Folktales of Mayotte* Haring sets himself a particularly curious challenge — a conceit more than a constraint — to offer a contextually rich and vivid description of an oral tradition that he has never witnessed. That Haring succeeds in realizing this ambitious goal is a testament to the sophistication of his analysis and the enormous comparative knowledge of folklore on which the author is able to draw.

This book provides a compelling story about folktales in Mayotte, an island in the Indian Ocean about 1,000 miles east of the African coast, through the perspective of the oeuvre of three French ethnographers who worked there in the 1970s and 1980s: Claude Allibert, Noël Gueunier and Sophie Blanchy. Focusing on the storytellers and their oral performances, Haring makes a strong case for the value and utility of such an approach — which he charmingly refers to as ‘a relatively polite kind of eavesdropping’ — by effectively showcasing the verbal dexterity of Mayotte storytellers and the impressive narrative techniques and ancient symbols on which they draw.

A multicultural island neglected by the French colonial regime, Mayotte has a folktale repertoire that links it to Madagascar through many common threads. The cultural hybridity of Mayotte is particularly distinctive, with a repertoire of verbal arts that draw from and have been transmitted from Persia, India, Europe and Africa. The storytellers themselves take inspiration from the widely divergent traditions of their island, blending elements of the past with objects from everyday life in creative and engaging ways. As Haring so elegantly puts it, the stories from this underrepresented island ‘amount to a network of the metaphors traditional to Mayotte.’ The author asks us to consider a deceptively simple question: how much can a reader at a distance expect to appreciate these translated stories from Mayotte? Thanks to Lee Haring, the answer is: a great deal.

Dr Mark Turin
 Director, World Oral Literature Project
 Institute for Critical Indigenous Studies
 University of British Columbia

Vancouver, Canada
 January 2023

Endnotes

- 1 Lee Haring, *How to Read a Folktale: The ‘Ibonia’ Epic from Madagascar* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2013). <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0034>.