

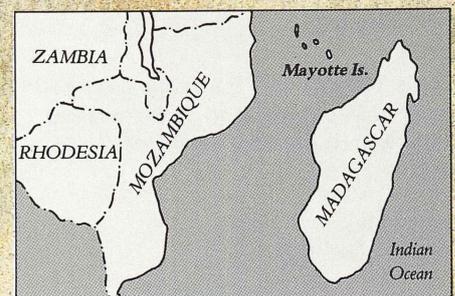
BANGAS

Self-Built Houses in Mayotte

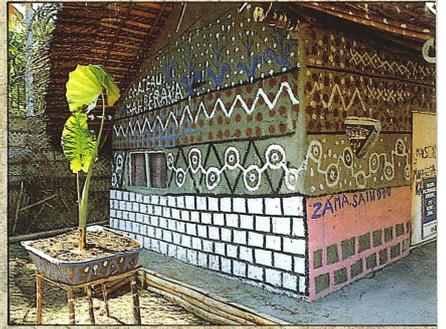
A *banga* is a small, one-room dwelling built of earth and decorated and lived in by young boys on the Indian Ocean island of Mayotte. The population of the island is a mixture of races, with a predominant number coming from Southern Africa. Ninety percent of the citizens are Muslim. Women are powerful and influential in the organisation of Mahorais society.

Starting from the age of 11 or 12 years old, boys are allowed, even encouraged, to construct their own *banga* outside the family compound, often on the edge of the village, in order to avoid promiscuity between the children of different sexes living at home. Although mothers and sisters continue to care for the young man's needs, cooking, sewing, washing for him, the *banga* becomes his own private space, where he studies, entertains and sleeps. A garden with both plants and flowers is cultivated next to the hut.

In this quite permissive society there is ample opportunity for the young, adolescent boys to indulge in forms of self-expression that are normal and compatible with this period in their development. *Bangas* are highly individual, astonishing repositories of young men's tastes, desires, fantasies, ideals, associations revealed through the images created by hand or collected and affixed to walls. Photographs, posters, pages from catalogues, drawings of all sorts decorate the interiors, while signs and emblems painted on the exterior walls of the *bangas* assert differing claims to identity, both personal or collective.



Photographs by Christian Lignon.
Text by GBWI Association,
Nathalie Barthes and Christian Lignon.



Top: Colourfully inventive painted decoration on the exterior of a self-built banga.

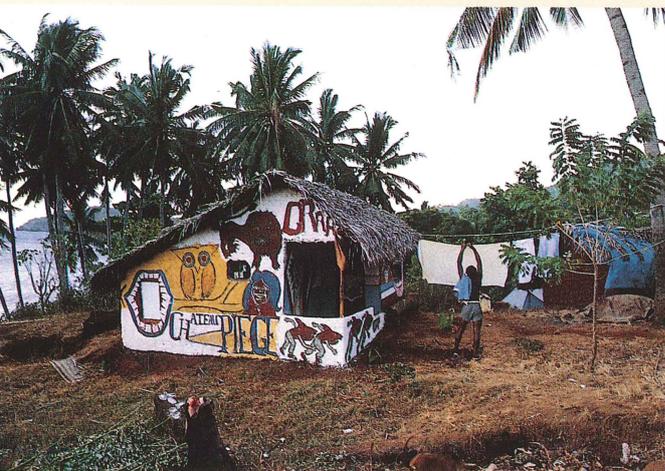
Above: Mothers and sisters contribute to furnishing a boy's banga, with such items as this embroidered curtain.



Exuberance and raw force characterise the various forms of expression depicted on the *bangas*, be it slogans, affirmations of faith (e.g. “Allah/Maximum”), love, hygiene, etc. or purely abstract “action-painting” ... Yet, just as the age-span of adolescence when the *banga* is created is transitory — from youth into manhood — so, too, are the *bangas* ephemeral shelters, lasting approximately 2 or 3 years because of their precarious nature.

Traditional as they have been in Mayotte for many years, the construction and ingenious decoration of *bangas* is a cultural phenomenon which has been dying out recently. In order to try to reinvigorate the custom, a competition was held in Spring 1987 to determine the most beautiful *bangas* on the whole island. Three Grand Prizes were awarded for the three best *bangas* among the 17 communities on the island.

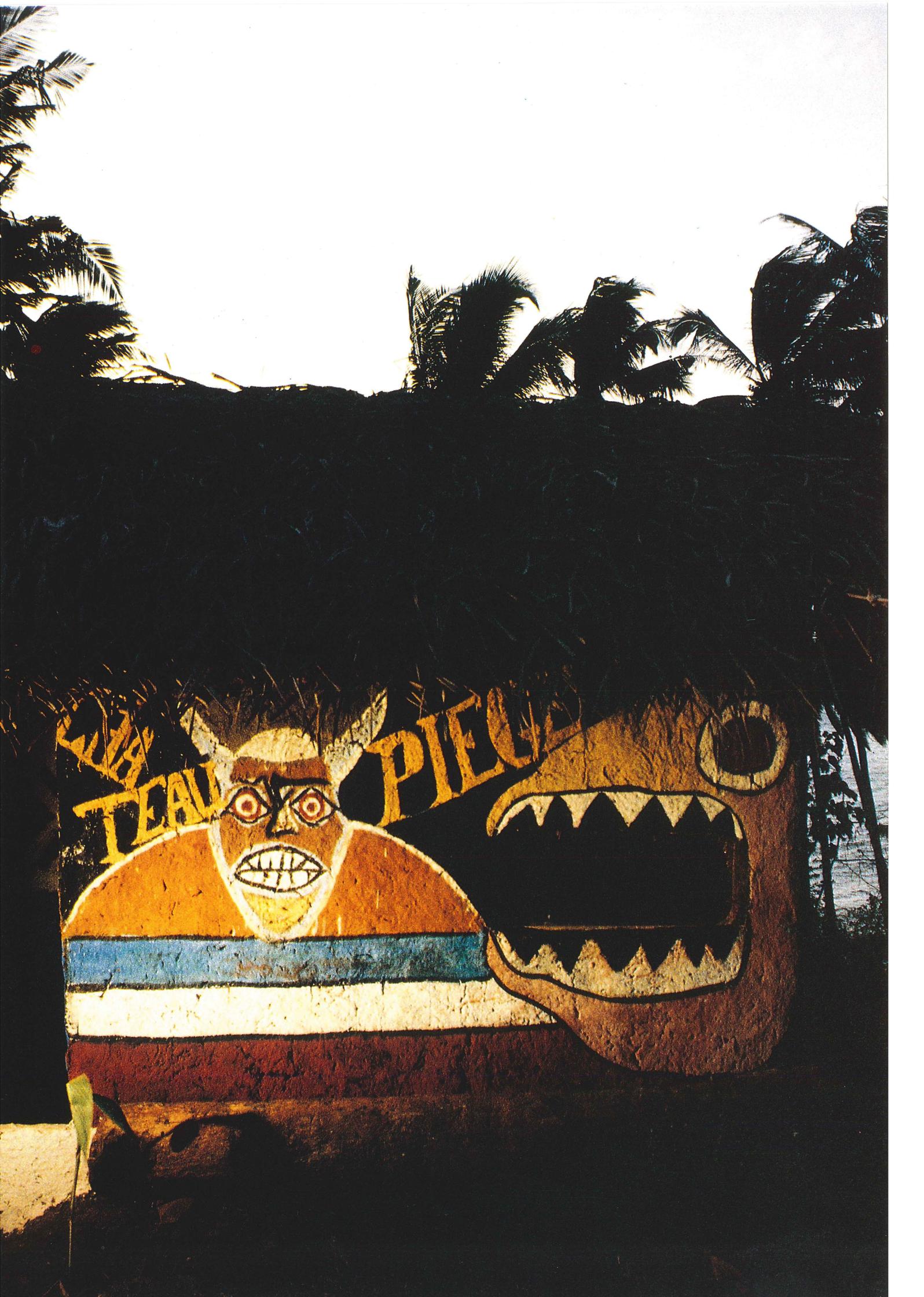
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Top: Typically bangas are located on the outskirts of the village or at some distance into the countryside, as here at Mtsamoudou Bay.

Above: Figurative representations, human or animal, are often depicted on the facades, as well as names or slogans. Here the abode is called “chateau-trap”.

Right: Some wall-paintings have an almost hallucinatory character to them. This is a seductive “trap” of Papa Djama at Mtsamboro.







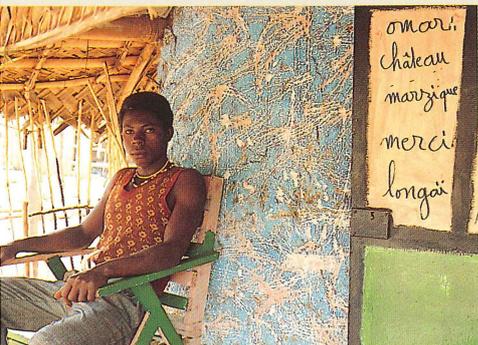
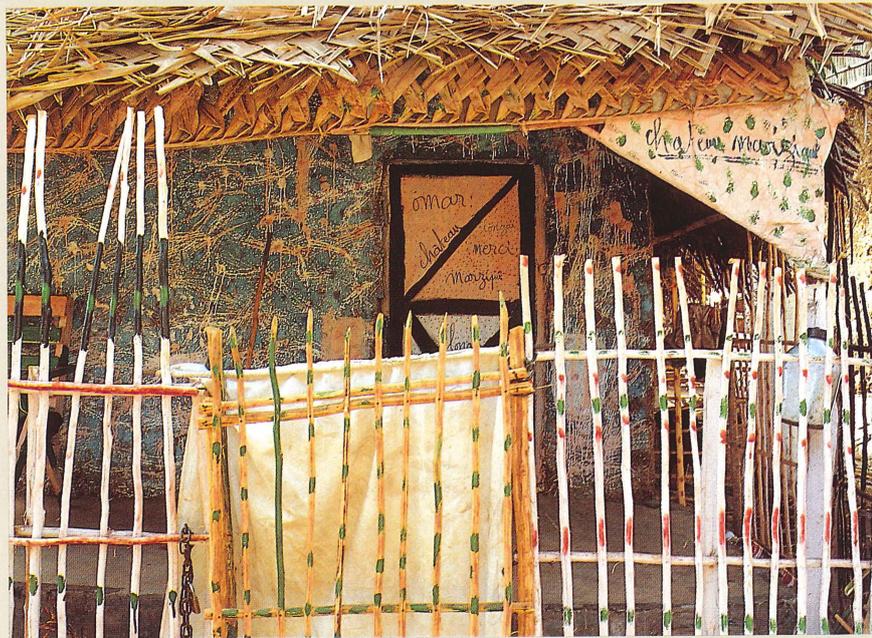
Left: Occasionally, entire walls are covered with rigorously geometric shapes and patterns.

Above: Detail of a painted facade and door.

Below: An adolescent proprietor sits in front of the banga he has built and decorated.

It is called "Omar's lucky chateau".

Right: The same "lucky chateau" banga, with painted ornamentation carried out onto the enclosing fence.







Left, above: On the front of his banga Ziadi Abdou has written: "Palace of the year 2000", "Home of the Director of Impossible Affairs", and "Allah TSISCABAR (instead of 'Allah al Akbar, God is Great') or "Allah Maximum?"

Left: Detail of a wall-painting whose abstract nature reminds one of action painting in Western art in the 1950s.

Above: One of the most remarkable interiors was literally hand-decorated by the owner with the imprint of his hand in paint.

Below: Styrofoam chips used for packing have been 'recycled' as beads on strings for this window.

Right: Adolescent inhabitants of the bangas amass collections of objects of all sorts, including telephones or electric fans that have no power supply.

