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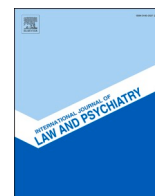
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## Diagnosing psychopathy in an intercultural setting: Applications and implications in postcolonial contemporary Mayotte

Elie K.N. Letourneur<sup>a,\*</sup>, Erwann Gouadon<sup>b</sup>, Malika Mansouri<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Université Paris Cité, PCPP Laboratory, Clinical Psychologist, France

<sup>b</sup> Université Sorbonne Paris Nord, UTRPP Laboratory, Clinical Psychologist, France

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### ABSTRACT

International scientific research has extensively studied psychopathy, but few studies focus on an intercultural and postcolonial context. Mayotte, a French overseas collectivity located in East Africa, offers a unique opportunity to study the application and effects of psychopathy diagnosis in the criminal justice field within a social context shaped by colonial legacy.

This research uses a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data, to show that in Mayotte, the majority of individuals diagnosed with psychopathy are young, low-income individuals who act in groups. Among them are minors, and the majority have no prior criminal history.

This article provides a complementarist reflection on this phenomenon, informed by immersive field anthropology and theoretical contributions from psychology, sociology, and criminology. Through an inductive research process, this study posits the hypothesis that diagnoses of psychopathy in post-colonial contexts may be influenced by complex determinants rooted in collective history and contemporary power relations.

### 1. Introduction

Psychopathy has been extensively studied since its introduction in nosography a century ago. Historical and current links between psychopathy and the criminal justice system have prompted research on the moral and legal responsibility of those diagnosed as psychopaths (Duff, 1977; Fischette, 2004; Fox et al., 2013). The interplay between nature and nurture being a central subject in this research field, the scientific community has been exploring the influences of various factors on the development of psychopathy, including traumatic history (Traynham et al., 2019), environment, genetics (Bezdjian et al., 2011; Schulsinger, 1972), and neurobiological dimensions (Blair, 2008; Kiehl and Hoffman, 2011). Socio-economic status and ethnicity are documented to compare psychopathy scale metrics across different groups (Skeem et al., 2004; Walsh, 2013) and to assess the effects of diagnosis on professionals working with convicts (Sarah and Skeem, 2007). The topic of curability is widely discussed in international literature through studies conducted to measure the effects of pharmaceutical treatments (Caldwell, 2011) and to evaluate the potential for change in individuals who have been labeled as psychopaths (Polaschek, 2014). While the issue of sexuality is addressed to a lesser extent, scientific authors have studied sex offenders

who have been diagnosed as psychopaths (Abracen et al., 2008; Mokros et al., 2011).

Despite abundant scholarly output, research on the concept of psychopathy in intercultural or postcolonial settings is limited, and there has been little involvement from clinical psychology. As a psychological expert in the legal system of Mayotte<sup>1</sup> - an insular French dominion on the Southeast African coast - we have encountered the term psychopathy to describe the most marginalized and vulnerable individuals, including street children. Our observations are drawn from our professional activities and also arise in the broader frame of a Ph.D. research that explores perceptions of Justice and the State in Mayotte. Despite our role as expert witness during clinical interviews, our positioning as a researcher can facilitate relationships with the people we encounter. This often results in valuable insights being offered by them that nurture and guide our research. The current study gathers abundant research material on the violence that has submerged this French island for over a decade, providing an innovative and contemporary perspective.

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [elie.letourneur@gmail.com](mailto:elie.letourneur@gmail.com) (E.K.N. Letourneur).

<sup>1</sup> First author.

## 2. Review of prior literature

### 2.1. History and semantics of the psychopathy concept

The concepts underlying the term ‘psychopathy’ emerged in the 19th century, with Pinel introducing the “mania without delusion” and Esquirol the “pathology of the will” (Corbobesse, 2012). In the history of nosology, the creation of psychopathy diagnosis was associated with both moral and innate aspects. During this era, several concepts emerged that attempted to explain abnormal behavior. These included “moral insanity” (introduced by Prichard, 1837), “moral lunatic” (introduced by Falret, 1866), “born criminal” (introduced by Lombroso, 1876), and “constitutional imbalance” (introduced by Magnan and Legrain, 1895). The term ‘psychopathy’ was eventually coined between 1923 and 1933 by Emil Kraepelin and one of his students, Kurt Schneider (Marcu, 1956; Pirlot and Cupa, 2019).

More recently, since the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), psychopathy has been integrated into the broader category of antisocial personality disorders (ASPD). A 2005 study (Blair et al., 2005, p. 19) suggests that while 50% to 80% of incarcerated individuals may meet the criteria for ASPD, only 15% to 25% exhibit characteristics of psychopathy. Hare, 1999 regarding the potential risks of relying solely on quantitative measures to assess psychopathy. He argued that using only quantitative criteria may lead to classifying most repeat offenders as psychopaths while leaving aside relevant qualitative data (Hare, 1999, p. 25). The concept of psychopathy has maintained tight connections with the judicial system since its inception, eventually carving out a place for itself. The idea of psychopathy has entered everyday language, but it can still raise concerns at the highest echelons of the State. For example, the UK Mental Health Act of 2007 decided to remove the term “psychopathy” from legal vocabulary due to its lack of clinical usefulness and stigmatizing effects (Malatesi and McMillan, 2010).

In contrast, some French psychiatrists avoid using the term antisocial personality, which they perceive as a “doxa” that might hinder distinguishing borderline states from acting psychoses<sup>2</sup> (Pirlot and Cupa, 2019). It is important to note the differences between French and American definitions of psychopathy. In the United States, the term mainly refers to arranged narcissistic personalities (Lemothe, 2001), whereas, in France, it commonly describes individuals with borderline personality, early attachment issues, and a history of abandonment experiences (Guedeny, 2005; Jeamment, 2005). The American approach tends to classify behaviors and prioritizes a quantitative methodology to limit biases. On the other hand, French clinicians often prefer a qualitative and discursive analysis, primarily focusing on psychological functioning and relational dynamics (e.g., Bergeret, 2010; Pirlot and Cupa, 2019; Wilmes, 2014; for comparative discussion: Lemothe, 2001). Despite these differences, psychopathy is generally viewed as a continuum, a set of traits forming a tendency, and assessed by clinical evaluation and psychometric scales (Decety, 2020; Fekih-Romdhane et al., 2020).

### 2.2. Multidisciplinary perspective on youth violence

The concept of psychopathy was developed during the joint rise of modern psychiatry and criminology (Senon, 2005). Understanding this concept and related subjects requires knowledge from various fields, including psychiatry, psychology, sociology, anthropology, criminology, and law. There is a current agreement in the clinical sciences to limit the diagnoses of psychopathy and ASPD to adults only (APA, 2013, p. 662; Marcelli and Cohen, 2005; Moyano, 2007; WHO, 1994). In line with the international classifications, minors’ violent behavior is primarily described through the concept of ‘pathological aggression’ (e.g.,

Austerman, 2017; Berger, 2005; Fraiberg, 1993; Sterzer and Stadler, 2009), and literature privileges the term ‘conduct disorder’ when addressing children and teenagers (e.g., Barzman & Patel, 2017; Larkby et al., 2011; Morel, 2005; Murray and Farrington, 2010).

Donald Winnicott’s contribution to the study of deviant children has laid the foundation for a fair and humane approach to addressing anti-social tendencies<sup>3</sup> (Golse and Braconnier, 2012). He viewed adolescents as uncertain beings, prone to trial and error, and needing to be recognized for the debt they feel the world has toward them. More recently, Stryckman (2001) wrote on the transactional nature of child-parent relationships, considering that parents are the recipients of this feeling of indebtedness. During adolescence, individuals experience a tangible confrontation with previously only symbolic elements, including physical changes, due to developmental restructuring (Lesourd, 2001). The onset of puberty leads to conflicting emotions and positionings, fostering actions influenced by bodily impulses and affect (Assoun, 1996; Gutton, 2013; Marty, 2010). Acting out can help adolescents express anxiety (Marty, 2013) and cope with conflicts beyond their abilities, influenced by psychological and environmental factors. Adolescent violence can be seen as a magical solution<sup>4</sup> (Kammerer, 2006), a way for young people to solve problems quickly and forcefully. It is a way to express internal conflicts and helps them exercise and understand the limits of their freedom. By causing destruction and chaos, adolescents familiarize themselves with the consequences of their actions and their impact on others (Votadoro and Piot, 2015).

Adolescent violence is a concern that is frequently discussed in the media, public opinion, education, medico-social, and judicial circles (Bergami and Barbosa, 2014). Since the era of Alienists and even today, juvenile delinquency has been examined through the lens of innate characteristics, often labeling deviance from the norm as a manifestation of psychopathology (Dayan, 2012). During the proto-psychiatry era in the mid-19th century, modern societies began to develop a pervasive normative assessment of behaviors, according to Michel Foucault (Bert, 2004). On the other hand, Walter Benjamin distinguished two types of violence: violence-as-mean that grows or protects human rights and pure violence that jeopardizes them (Michaud, 2023). Hannah Arendt emphasized the rarity of these pure and extreme forms compared to the everyday entanglements between violence and power relations (Arendt, 1969, p. 47). Around the same time, Frantz Fanon suggested that most brutal and irrational forms originate from complex domination systems; however, these forms of violence are often disqualified and stripped out of meaning by the legal endorsement for maintaining order<sup>5</sup> (Fanon, 1961, p. 76). Behind youngsters’ acts of violence, often reduced to their impulsive dimension, there may be a message, a request, or a meaning to be elucidated.

Context plays a significant role in the emergence of juvenile violence. According to a study conducted by Shapland and Bottoms (2019), juvenile offenders were often victims themselves and were exposed to environments that had a higher likelihood of victimization. The DSM-5 also highlights the importance of considering the living context when diagnosing individuals. It urges clinicians to consider socioeconomic factors and avoid applying psychopathy or ASPD “to individuals in settings in which seemingly antisocial behavior may be part of a protective survival strategy” (APA, 2013, p. 662). In disadvantaged environments, perceived deviant or antisocial behaviors may represent a functional adaptation to socially shared, albeit marginal, normative frameworks (Mucchielli, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Translated from French: « une compréhension juste et humaine de la tendance antisociale ».

<sup>4</sup> Translated from French: « une solution magique ».

<sup>5</sup> Translated from French: « la caution légale du maintien de l’ordre ».

<sup>2</sup> Translated from French: « psychoses avec agirs ».

### 2.3. Mayotte's contemporary context

Mayotte (Maore) is the easternmost island of the Comoros archipelago, located in the Mozambique Channel between the African mainland and Madagascar [Fig. 1]. Maorais are the native inhabitants, and Shimaore is the predominant local language. The culture is Bantu, with Swahili influence, Sunni Muslim tradition, and historical ties to Madagascar. (Alpers, 2001; Barrière, 1974; Ralser et al., 2022). Mayotte was sold to France in the 19th century during military conflict within the archipelago (Dumont, 2005). Eventually, the island became the latest overseas *département*<sup>6</sup> after a long and complex legal process that began during decolonization (Hachimi-Alaoui, 2016; Idriss, 2013).

The island of Mayotte is a place where Western and African cultures intersect. It became a *département* in 2011 and a European Outermost Region in 2014 (Temporal, 2015), which resulted in an increased presence of Western workers and more intercultural situations. Although the population of Mayotte and surrounding areas is notoriously Black, ethnicity-related data is not included in this study because French law prohibits it. While this prohibition stems from the humanistic principles of equality and universalism, it also makes it difficult for researchers to address specific sensitive issues, such as the impact of colonial history on ethnic relations. However, qualitative field data and literature suggest that skin color plays a role in Mayotte's social dynamics (Girard et al., 2022; Hachimi-Alaoui et al., 2013). Therefore, this study addresses this matter qualitatively to overcome legal limitations on ethnicity-based statistics.

Mayotte faces significant and multi-level precarity compared to mainland France. According to health authorities (ARS, 2020), the infant mortality rate is twice as high as in mainland France, and the aging index is seventeen times lower. 75% of households in Mayotte live below the poverty line (Audoux et al., 2020), and 59% of homes lack access to water (Chaussy and Merceron, 2019). The education level in the area is below national standards, with one-third of the population never accessing school (Fabre and Rivière, 2014) and half of the 16–18-year-olds being functionally illiterate (ANLCI, 2014). Mayotte has a deeply unequal socio-economic structure (Audoux et al., 2020), where one's origins - and skin color - can predict access to education, qualifications, and employment (Fabre and Rivière, 2014). In a context where power dynamics shape human interactions, statistics show exceptional rates of delinquency, criminality, and violence, leading to an increased sense of insecurity (Grangé, 2021). These indicators provide context for challenging on-ground realities and situations of profound suffering. Many express a lack of perspectives and feelings of hopelessness and abandonment by the French State (Blanchy et al., 2019; Lehuger, 2022). The youth, who represent a demographic majority (Balicchi et al., 2014), significantly contribute to local delinquency and criminality. Gangs are widespread, as are wandering minors, sometimes left to fend for themselves following their parents' expulsion<sup>7</sup> (Sakoyan and Grassineau, 2015). Adolescents join territorial gangs to fulfill their need for identity and belonging, often in opposition to family structures and the State. Doing so, they express a psychological pain that takes root in a history of exclusion and devaluation (Morano, 2022). Similar to the surviving children from the Terezin camp, studied by Freud and Dann (1951), these adolescents have a history marked by instability and may exhibit aggressive, cohesive, and defensive behaviors without necessarily showing psychiatric disorders or impairments (Feldman et al., 2016). Mayotte's wandering minors' past and history often contain vivid sources of suffering and identity issues, possibly reinforced by local relationships of domination and lack of fatherly presence (Dehon et al., 2022; Thibault, 2020; Vizy, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> French administrative division.

<sup>7</sup> Many of Mayotte's inhabitants are undocumented immigrants (Marie et al., 2017; Chaussy and Merceron, 2019).

### 3. Data and methods

#### 3.1. A grounded complementarist approach

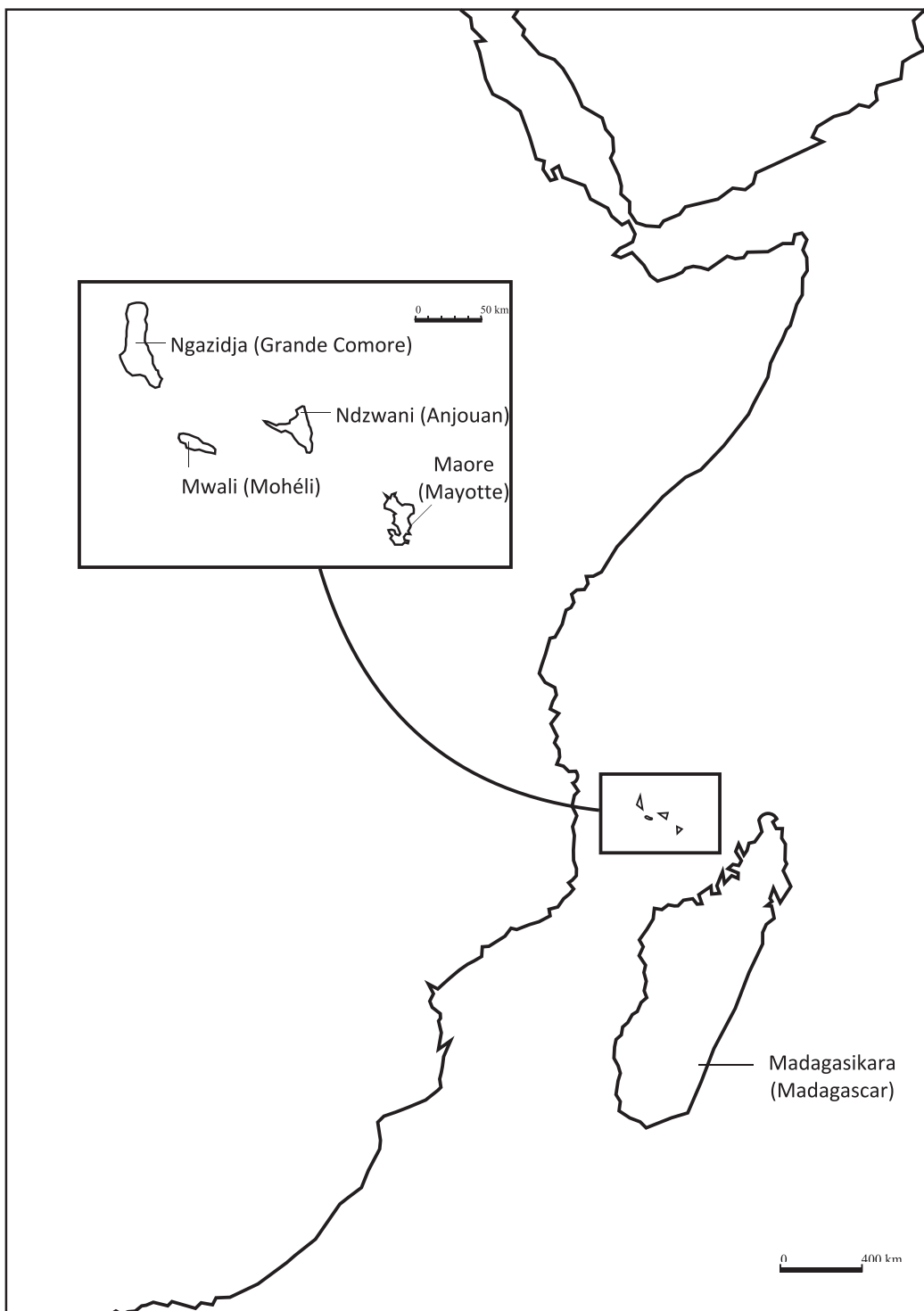
As part of a Ph.D. research program designed to generate modern insights into how justice and the State are perceived on the island of Mayotte, this study employs an inductive methodology that blends Georges Devereux's complementarism (1972/1993) with Glaser and Strauss' grounded theory (1967/1999). The research is based on two different types of data. Firstly, it involves semi-structured interviews conducted with thirteen professionals from law enforcement and court systems. The analysis uses the iterative grounded theory method, which requires coding, categorizing, relationship-building, integrating, modeling, and theorizing (Couture, 2003; Lejeune, 2019; Paillé, 1994). Secondly, a study is conducted on nearly a thousand case files and clinical notes for quantitative and qualitative purposes. Based on the complementarist approach, we utilize diverse sources and incorporate insights from various disciplines, including psychology, sociology, and law. These theoretical domains are complemented by anthropological fieldwork, ongoing monitoring of current events, and supervised analysis of the researcher's subjectivity (Devereux, 1994; Gounongbé, 2008; Lachal, 2007). The current study will analyze quantitative data from case files, while another article will examine qualitative data from research interviews and clinical notes.

The research team followed an inductive process, starting with data collection and concluding, after analysis, with substantiated hypotheses. First, variables such as age group, psychiatric diagnosis, and type of offense were selected for descriptive analysis. Then, univariable analyses were conducted. This method seemed appropriate to compare the dispersions due to the ordinal and nominal nature of the chosen variables (Bugeja-Bloch and Couto, 2021). Such analysis is helpful in the humanities to compare subject groups based on specific factors (Delacroix et al., 2021). Multiple distinct variables were analyzed, followed by significance tests to quantify variance differences. The results presented in the findings section are enlightened by literature to provide a mixed perspective with qualitative and quantitative elements. The interplay between quantitative and qualitative approaches provides complementarity in studying social phenomena (Pithon, 2018) and tends to be necessary when research addresses cultural issues (Silverman, 2006).

#### 3.2. Beginnings

The case files and data presented here relate to clinical fieldwork, and the interviews we conduct as psychological expert<sup>8</sup> are part of our research material. Although we must take an expert stance during report writing, we strive to maintain a learner's perspective when interacting with the individuals we encounter. By adopting an inductive approach and adhering to its principles, the researcher keeps an open-minded relationship with the research subject and participants. This allows room for unexpected information to arise from the field (Paillé, 1994; Raymond and Forget, 2020) and for the researcher to experience a reversal of expertise (Marion, 2012). By positioning themselves in this approach, researchers benefit from its relational effects. This creates a unique bond beyond essential clinical collaboration and enables access to personal truth. During an interview at work, a young adult addressed us: "Sir, every time people like you come to see us from the court, they all say we are psychopaths." He spoke these words with a slight attitude of defiance but without disrespect, remaining open to discussion. We clarified the vocabulary differences between psychology and psychiatry before continuing the interview. It revealed a significant attachment issue with early, frequent, and repeated experiences of abandonment, a complete absence of a fatherly figure, a childhood marked by violence,

<sup>8</sup> First author.



**Fig. 1.** Description: This figure shows Mayotte’s location in the Western Indian Ocean, between mainland Africa and Madagascar. True toponyms are used, with Western names in parentheses.

and an entry into alcohol and substance abuse at eleven, right after his mother definitively abandoned him in the streets. After that, violent behaviors appeared, and he began committing thefts to purchase food, alcohol, and clothing. He recalls the need to have clean and fashionable clothes, hygiene products, and other consumer goods, all intended to conceal the extreme precariousness of his existence. During the interview, the young man confides with deep emotion, presenting psychological pain, a lack of hope, a sense of abandonment, and the need for nurturing and protective figures. After our meeting, when crossing paths

with another scheduled youngster, he told him free speech was authorized here without risking being labeled a psychopath. Later, we consulted the file and the psychiatric conclusions, which indeed described them both in these terms. Touched by this encounter and driven by clinical practice to investigate the concept of psychopathy, we began to explore the data presented here. Although quantitative, they originate equally from the voice of a young man met in a judicial context and from the researchers’ desire to convey it.



### 3.3. Current study

Each case explored in this study is related to a criminal case and to a psychological expertise mission for which a judicial authority has appointed us.<sup>9</sup> In French criminal proceedings, a typical psychological assessment involves one or more meetings with a victim or an individual under investigation. French psychiatric and psychological experts are independent clinicians solely asked to conduct evaluations. They are not responsible for providing mental care to litigants, if required. Furthermore, no specific training course is required to become an expert witness. The state's justice system does not mandate particular reference theories or tools to evaluate individuals (Ballouard, 2016; Bouchard, 2006). Expert witnesses are tasked with assessing the individual's mental capacity; noting any potential disorders or deficiencies; determining the level of intelligence; describing the personal history and personality development; collecting and analyzing the statements regarding alleged actions, and identifying, if any, the factual and biographical factors that may have led to them; assessing prospects and methods of rehabilitation and determining the potential need of psychological follow-up; analyzing the relationship with the victim(s); and providing any relevant observations to establish the truth. After conducting their investigation, expert witnesses provide a comprehensive report with their findings to the relevant authority.

Starting from the field, we developed a protocol for searching, coding, and compiling data mined in the files we had worked on. This study is based on 373 criminal files, from which we excluded those related to victims, retaining 235 offenders' files. We eventually kept and selectively examined the 98 files containing a psychiatric report. We collected relevant data such as age, alleged offense,<sup>10</sup> mode of offense,<sup>11</sup> employment and educational status, legal situation,<sup>12</sup> prior convictions, if any, and the conclusions of the psychiatric report.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Descriptive analysis

The selected sample includes 31 second-degree murder cases (31.6%); 23 armed robbery cases (23.5%); 17 first-degree murder cases (17.3%); 14 rape cases (14.3%); 7 attempted second-degree murder cases (7.1%); 2 cases of abduction, kidnapping, armed robbery by organized groups (2%); 1 case of aiding and abetting rape (1%); 1 case of property destruction by a harmful mean (1%); 1 case of aiding and abetting first-degree murder (1%); and 1 case of attempted first-degree murder (1%). Eighty-one cases (82.7%) involve group-committed offenses, while 17 (17.3%) relate to offenses by one or two individuals. Within the sample, 26 individuals (26.5%) are aged 17 or younger; 60 (61.2%) are between 18 and 25 years old; and 12 (12.2%) are 26 years old or older. 55 (56.1%) are unemployed; 26 (26.5%) are students; 11 (11.2%) work legally; and 6 (6.1%) work illegally.<sup>13</sup> Eighty-five individuals (86.7%) were incarcerated during the assessment, and 13 (13.3%) were under judicial supervision, freely attending the interview. Twenty-five files (25.5%) showed prior conviction by a court, while 73 (74.5%) had none. Among the 98 psychiatric reports studied, 62 (63.3%) were neutral<sup>14</sup>; 31 (31.6%) concluded psychopathic and antisocial tendencies; and 5 (5.1%) mentioned psychotic disorders. The studied population exhibits homogeneous characteristics with an average age of 20.9 (sd = 5.99) and subjects born on island territories on

the Southeast African coast.<sup>15</sup> Like Mayotte's general population, they predominantly came from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. All of them underwent psychiatric and psychological assessments during the judiciary proceeding.

### 4.2. A majority of inmates

In the current study, 86.7% of psychiatric reports were based on observations conducted in prison. Out of the individuals evaluated in this context, 31.8% were described as having psychopathic tendencies. It is worth noting that the scientific literature on this subject is limited in France. The government and institutions in the country only began showing interest in the mental health of prisoners in the early 2000s (de Beaupaire, 2012). According to institutional studies led by psychiatrists, about 10% of psychopathy diagnoses were reported in French prisons (Falissard et al., 2006). On the other hand, a sociological study conducted among 102 incarcerated criminals observed a psychopathic tendency rate of 13% (Mucchielli, 2004). In the United States, estimated rates of psychopathy in prisons range from 15% to 30%, depending on the publication (Blair et al., 2005; Decety, 2020; Wacquant, 2003).

According to numerous studies, how prisoners are viewed in society is often influenced by stereotypes and stigmas associated with specific personality traits and binary morality (MacLin and Herrera, 2006; Madriz, 1997; Moore et al., 2013). However, these stigmas can vary in negativity and effects depending on individual criteria (Moore et al., 2013; Ortet-Fabregat et al., 1993). For instance, research has found that individuals working closely with prisoners tend to view them less negatively than those further from the rehabilitation process (Melvin et al., 1985). When expert witnesses visit and assess prisoners, they face various contextual, emotional, attitudinal, and moral factors. Psychiatrists and psychologists, in particular, grapple with their subjectivity (Ballouard, 2016), past experiences, and personal values. This subjective element of an objectivity-oriented task can result in positioning biases such as rejecting prisoners and adopting an authoritarian attitude or siding with them and colluding (Casoni, 2007; Thiry, 2016).

The environment in which prisoners live can significantly impact their behavior when interacting with people from outside the prison. While in prison, when expert witnesses evaluate them, individuals are currently impregnated with certain norms and values that may influence their attitudes and behaviors. Haney (2002) explained how prisoners internalize prison culture through socialization as they interact with other inmates and the legal system. The author observes that inmates often adopt hypermasculine attitudes, prefer dominant postures, withdraw socially, distance themselves psychologically, and reduce emotional investment, all to protect themselves from the unpredictability of relationships within the prison. These behaviors may artificially suggest the presence of psychopathic tendencies when exhibited in combination.

According to the data studied, the percentage of inmates defined as psychopaths is higher than in the few French national sources that were consulted. However, it does not go beyond the upper limits of interna-

**Table 1**

Distribution of subjects by type of diagnosis and legal status (incarcerated vs. judicial supervision).

	Incarcerated (n = 85)	Judicial Supervision (n = 13)	n	p	test
Neutral	53 (62%)	9 (69%)	62	1	Fisher
Psychopathy	27 (32%)	4 (31%)	31	–	–
Psychotic disorder	5 (5.9%)	0 (0%)	5	–	–

<sup>9</sup> First author.

<sup>10</sup> When multiple offenses, we kept the one resulting in the highest penalty.

<sup>11</sup> Individual commission vs. group commission.

<sup>12</sup> On judicial supervision vs. incarcerated.

<sup>13</sup> For imprisoned subjects, we referred to the pre-incarceration situation.

<sup>14</sup> i.e. devoid of clinical diagnosis.

<sup>15</sup> Mayotte, Comoros, Madagascar.

tional estimates. Surprisingly, there was no significant difference in the rates of psychopathy among incarcerated and free individuals [Table 1]. A recent meta-analysis (Sanz-García et al., 2021) estimated the prevalence of psychopathy in the general population to be between 1.2% and 4.5%, depending on the measurement tools. This result suggests that factors beyond clinical, criminological, and contextual considerations may shape the use of the concept of psychopathy in Mayotte.

#### 4.3. Youth poverty and psychopathic traits

In the current study, young adults<sup>16</sup> are the most affected by unemployment, with 68.3% of them neither holding a job nor participating in training [Table 2]. Also, subjects designated as psychopaths are found to be significantly more affected by inactivity, with 83.9% of them being unemployed or inactive, compared to 43.5% of those with a neutral psychiatric assessment. On a social level, the COVID-19 crisis also impacted Mayotte's already high unemployment rate, which increased by four percentage points between 2018 and 2022 (Jonzo, 2023). Currently, only 30% of the population has jobs, marking the lowest rate in Europe. People we encounter daily express their desire for a regular life, work, and a real<sup>17</sup> home, especially young adults. In our sample, 32.5% of 18–25-year-olds have been diagnosed with psychopathy, with 30% of them associated with theft-related offenses. Moreover, 41.9% of the subgroup of 18–25-year-olds diagnosed with psychopathy are prosecuted for theft-related offenses.

A significant portion of Mayotte's young population lives in highly disadvantaged conditions. Due to a lack of solid bearings, they adopt a hybrid lifestyle that blends elements from local traditions, the imagery of South African gangs, and broader representations of global youth culture. During their early adolescence, it is common for youth to build small, independent cabins called 'bangas'. When they have a family, they generally live there with their approval (Airault, 2007). In recent times, the traditional practice of tying 'bangas' to family groups has changed. They are now often shared among underprivileged youth, serving as a base for illegal activities. These bangas are referred to as 'petits ghettos' and may be given names after historically significant places in South African culture, such as Soweto, District 6, and Robben Island. Alternatively, they may be named after American racial history archetypes like the KKK, Tulsa, and Atlanta. 'Petits ghettos' are often associated with a particular gang or group of young individuals. This segment of young individuals may involve themselves in various criminal activities such as theft, drug trafficking, or the reselling of stolen goods. In some rare cases, they may also procure and exploit adolescent girls who are typically socially isolated and distressed.

Many young people are undocumented due to a specific, local, and derogatory *jus soli*,<sup>18</sup> which is a direct legacy of the colonial administration (Blanchy et al., 2019; Saada, 2007). This law does not allow them to obtain an official status despite being born and raised on the island (Hachimi-Alaoui, 2016; Roinsard, 2019). Their social position exposes them to exclusion and rejection phenomena (Halasa et al., 2021; Morano, 2022; Roinsard, 2022) that marginalize them and have effects on their subjective well-being, self-efficacy, self-esteem, emotional security, self-control, and mastery of social norms.

In the files we analyzed, we found that despite the precited anthropological elements, a majority (73.3%) of individuals aged 18–25 had no previous convictions mentioned [Table 2]. Within this same age group, 42.9% of individuals identified as psychopaths also had no prior record. This apparent contradiction strengthens the hypothesis that incidental factors might influence the establishment of psychopathy diagnosis in intercultural situations.

#### 4.4. Minors wandering and imprisoned

In the present study, 69.2% of individuals under 18 faced incarceration. Additionally, 30.8% of minors aged 13 to 17 were unschooled or unemployed [Table 2].

The issue of minors without access to education and living on the streets is prevalent and well-documented in Mayotte (e.g., Gros, 2019; Hébert and Hébert, 2011; JDJ, 2008; Mathon Cécillon and Séraphin, 2023; Ralser et al., 2022; Sakoyan, 2013). Thousands live on the island, coming from Comoros, mainland Africa, or Madagascar (Morano, 2022). Their living conditions can be challenging and upsetting for Western professionals who encounter them. Most of them have unstable and painful life trajectories, which have caused severe attachment disruptions, traumatic memories, and repeated experiences of social rejection. A recent study indicates that there are approximately 244 million unschooled children globally, increasing in sub-Saharan Africa (Antoninis et al., 2022). The consequences of this exclusion are multiple and cast these wandering minors as socially despised, feared, and rejected ominous strangers (Bernichi, 2013). Street children are viewed and categorized as outsiders, disconnected from their families and society (Cavagnoud, 2014; Morelle, 2007). This perception only further marginalizes them and diminishes their chances of being included in society. During adolescence, exclusion from the education system can lead to violent behavior and the formation of gangs. Without conventional spheres, the gang becomes primary to fulfilling individual socialization needs (Breugnot, 2011; Esterle-Hedibel, 2007). According to a study by Rendón (2014), it is suggested that cohesive peer ties in disadvantaged environments can lead to academic failure. Moreover, Bryant and Zimmerman (2003) have found that the absence of a paternal male role model also decreases the probability of a positive educational outcome.

In the studied sample, the diagnosis of psychopathy is used for different age groups, including minors [Table 3]. Among them, seven individuals aged between 12 and 17 years were identified as having psychopathy. Surprisingly, six had no previous criminal records, yet four were imprisoned. 19.3% of all psychopathy diagnoses relate to minors without a criminal record, and 85.7% of minors designated as psychopaths have no previous convictions in their records. These findings were unexpected, as they go against the established criteria of international classifications that limit the diagnosis of psychopathy to adults only.

#### 4.5. Group offenses, young black offenders

Most of the collected data (82.7%) pertained to group-committed offenses. They tend to involve younger individuals with an average age of 19.9 years, significantly lower than the average age for individual offenses [Table 4]. Furthermore, the study revealed that group offenses significantly correlate with psychopathy diagnoses [Table 5]. This result had not been anticipated, for it contradicts the traditional interpretation of psychopathy, which suggests a failure in social functions.

Groupings among young people are formed to fulfill their need for socialization and are generally based on age, socioeconomic status, and shared activities (Collins and Steinberg, 2007). They help young people become familiar with norms and values external to their family and teach them social hierarchy (Smetena et al., 2014). These groups become more flexible in early adulthood, allowing for easier turnover and multiple affiliations (Brown and Klute, 2008). The role of peers in adolescent behavior is well-established and documented in various domains (e.g., Albert et al., 2013; Du Roscoät et al., 2016; Hernandez et al., 2014; Reed and Rountree, 1997; Vargas, 2011). At all stages of adolescence, peer influence can condition deemed deviant behaviors (Bryson et al., 2023). However, as Coleman and Farrell (2021) showed, peer influence can also have a moderating effect on violent behaviors.

Professionals find it challenging to understand gangs because they operate independently from adult society (Le Run, 2006). As a result, clinicians may view themselves as outsiders to the youth group or perceive it as external to standard norms and values. In an intercultural

<sup>16</sup> Aged 18 to 25.

<sup>17</sup> In Mayotte, sheet metal dwellings without basic amenities are very common (Girard, 2014; Balicchi et al., 2014; Dehon et al., 2022).

<sup>18</sup> Right of soil.

**Table 2**  
Distribution by age group based on diagnosis, employment and education status, and criminal history (incarcerated vs. judicial supervision).

		Age class 18–25 (n = 60)	Age class ≤17 (n = 26)	Age class ≥26 (n = 12)	n	p	test
Diagnosis	Neutral	36 (60%)	18 (69%)	8 (67%)	62	0.84	Fisher
	Psychopathy	21 (35%)	7 (27%)	3 (25%)	31	–	–
	Psychotic disorder	3 (5%)	1 (3.8%)	1 (8.3%)	5	–	–
Occupational status	No activity	42 (70%)	8 (31%)	5 (42%)	55	<0.001	Fisher
	Student	8 (13%)	18 (69%)	0 (0%)	26	–	–
	Legal work	9 (15%)	0 (0%)	2 (17%)	11	–	–
	Illegal work	1 (1.7%)	0 (0%)	5 (42%)	6	–	–
Previous convictions	No	44 (73%)	23 (88%)	6 (50%)	73	0.046	Fisher
	Yes	16 (27%)	3 (12%)	6 (50%)	25	–	–

**Table 3**  
Psychiatric reports diagnoses, categorized by age group.

	Diagnosis Neutral (n = 62)	Diagnosis Psychopathy (n = 31)	Diagnosis Psychotic disorder (n = 5)	n	p	test
18–25	36 (58%)	21 (68%)	3 (60%)	60	0.84	Fisher
≤17	18 (29%)	7 (23%)	1 (20%)	26	–	–
≥ 26	8 (13%)	3 (9.7%)	1 (20%)	12	–	–

**Table 4**  
Subjects' distribution by age and mode of offense (individual vs. group).

	mean (sd)	median [Q25–75]	min	max	n	p	test
Group	19.9 (4.18)	19.0 [17.0–23.0]	12.0	33.0	81	<0.01	Mann-Whitney
Individuals	26.0 (9.86)	21.0 [20.0–35.0]	13.0	49.0	17	–	–

**Table 5**  
Distribution of diagnoses based on the mode of offense (individual vs. group).

	Neutral Diagnosis (n = 62)	Psychopathy Diagnosis (n = 31)	Psychotic disorder Diagnosis (n = 5)	n	p	test
Group	51 (82%)	28 (90%)	2 (40%)	81	0.036	Fisher
Individuals	11 (18%)	3 (9.7%)	3 (60%)	17	–	–

and postcolonial context, it is essential to consider the history of the different groups of people and their relationships with each other. This includes examining how the portrayal of armed and violent young Black men can influence the perspective of Western experts who are evaluating them. It begs the question of how this representation affects the subjectivity of these experts. In his works published in 1992 and 2006, Suman Fernando highlights the need to examine the personal biases of psychiatrists and psychologists and the historical and ideological origins of their professions. The author examines how power dynamics between Western clinicians and Black populations have resulted in biases and misunderstandings, often caused by cultural distance and stereotypes. According to Fernando, the medicalization of social issues can be a counterproductive drift, as modern society lacks a proper understanding and appreciation of the subjective and collective experiences of Black individuals in Western societies.

**5. Discussion**

*5.1. Youth, violence, and social behavior*

Adolescent violence, mainly when perpetrated by gang-affiliated youths, often follows patterns of socialization (Mucchielli, 2005). Within these patterns, issues of identification, belonging, hierarchy, territoriality, reputation, and group protection play an important role.

Compared to family and established structures, peer groups offer some concurrent socialization<sup>19</sup> to adolescents, which has benefits (Benazeth, 2019). Wilson and Daly (1985) sheds light on the influence of ancient associations between masculinity and risk-taking behaviors in shaping competition for social status. Their study reveals how engaging in masculine displays and taking risks can create opportunities for attracting potential partners and how the presence of peers can further support such behaviors. According to Wilson and Daly's model, the majority of homicides can be explained through the lens of social competition, with perpetrators being mostly young and unemployed

single men coming from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>20</sup> In this perspective, delinquency can be viewed as a means to an end, not as senseless deviancy. For young men, it may be a way to protect or enhance their self-esteem, especially if they feel constrained by their devalued social status (Warr, 2002). We retrieve those aspects in the judicial field, where we predominantly encounter single and resource-deprived young men prosecuted by the justice system. In Mayotte, where issues related to migration and postcolonialism are prevalent (Blanchy, 2002), competition among individuals and groups is amplified (Walker and Fouéré, 2022). Possession of a residence permit or French nationality is a potent means of distinction, highly valued, and often used to establish a person's standing in the social hierarchy. The lowest social class, consisting of isolated foreign minors, may be more likely to seek attention and symbolic existence than other groups. Excluded from citizenship, they are not acknowledged administratively by the State. Unrecognized by their father at legal and emotional levels, they suffer massive identity issues. They are deprived of a socio-professional role and are rejected by society and its members. Instead of being considered anti-social, their violent behavior may have a very social purpose: to be recognized for something, to have a role, and to exist in the eyes of others. By acting violently, they are countering the experiences of invisibility they are subjected to and are offering themselves the possibility of a place that, even though unfavorable, remains tangible and identifiable within society. These young people were excluded and marginalized for various reasons, leading to their abrupt or gradual isolation. Ultimately, and based on different exceptional law regimes (Blanchy and Moatty, 2012; Geisser, 2016), an excepted body<sup>21</sup> structured, forming an ostracized segment of the population, automatically leading to a specific mechanism of administrative and police control

<sup>19</sup> Translated from French: « socialization concurrente ».

<sup>20</sup> Wilson and Daly underline that victims' profiles are mostly identical to authors'.

<sup>21</sup> Translated from French: « corps d'exception ».



(Barkat, 2003). In a context already influenced by historical power relations, pronouncing psychopathy could reinforce the perceived righteousness of judicial decisions. This would add a scientific guarantee to public action while conferring “a justifiable hold not only on offences, but on individuals; not only on what they do, but also on what they are, will be, may be” (Foucault, 1995, p. 26).

### 5.2. The opportunity for desistance

In Mayotte, many young individuals are incarcerated for criminal acts committed in groups, mostly without prior convictions on their record. Even when leading a marginal life, they are generally well-adjusted within their interpersonal environment and capable of navigating its codes. During psychological assessment interviews, we typically encounter<sup>22</sup> polite and respectful young people. Although they lack exposure to formal structures, their behaviors are adapted, and they willingly engage in conversation. When provided with a secure and supportive space for dialogue, we can see their need for expression and mentoring figures. Despite references to psychopathy and records documenting serious acts, our fieldwork leads us to believe that this violence among youngsters is not natural or personality-driven but rather the result of complex interactions between interpersonal, group, contextual, sociological, and existential factors.

The concept of psychopathy, because of its deterministic rigidity, proves useless to consider pacification and detachment from violent behavior. However, the notion of desistance offers valuable insights. The theoretical field of desistance explores how individuals stop engaging in delinquent behavior, following a gradual and non-linear process (Loeber and Le Blanc, 1990). Social resources such as citizenship, religion, or employment hold more significance than the work of institutions alone, and interpersonal resources are often more critical to the process (Benazeth, 2019, 2023; Gaïa et al., 2019; Laval, 2005). Subjective experiences play a central role in the desistance journey, and a turning point can occur following a passage through the justice system, its consequences, or a high-quality relationship with a professional capable of transcending mere institutional connections (Gaïa, 2017).

However, to desist, one must first feel capable and worthy. For young Black individuals, that journey is marked by multiple challenges, yet insufficiently studied in mainland France and its overseas territories. One of the main challenges is the lack of positive role models who are valued by society. Additionally, Black youths are often presented with limited and restrictive identities in media and popular culture, which further exacerbates the problem (Ezembe, 2013; Vizy, 2018). Growing up as a young Black person requires surpassing these ascriptions and constructing oneself despite racial assumptions. As early as age five, Black children have already identified the lower social status associated with their skin color, and by around six years old, they have acknowledged and internalized the stereotypes related to their group (Chavis and Johnson, 2023; Clark and Clark, 1947). Other studies conducted among racialized youth reveal the normalization of the oppression systems, strong beliefs in favor of racial inferiority, and early internalization of self-hatred (Graham et al., 2016; Hipolito-Delgado, 2010; Thompson et al., 2000). In Mayotte, postcolonial legacies compound identity issues (Meloche, 2022) in a composite but compartmentalized society where power relations and daily violence intensify thoughts and actions.

### 5.3. Possible assessment biases

The results of this study suggest that the establishment of psychopathy diagnoses could be biased in Mayotte. Several factors could explain the widespread use of the psychopathy concept in Mayotte’s judicial practice. Naturally, the island’s poverty leads to a focus on theft-related

offenses, which are more common and violent here than in other French overseas territories (Grangé, 2021; Vizy, 2018). Furthermore, France’s poorest territory exposes youngsters to a particularly harsh living environment and to daily suffered, enacted, or witnessed violence. In such conditions, the precautions of DSM-5 to consider the living context should be viewed with interest.

In Mayotte, different cultures meet, and the judicial system is one of the few contact points. However, because local socio-cultural groups do not interact much, misunderstandings can arise between professionals from the mainland and the native inhabitants. The locals only partially understand Western law and its reasoning, partly due to the recent and unprepared application of common law in the area (Blanchy, 2018; Blanchy and Moatty, 2012). During our doctoral research interviews, we observed that judicial police officers and magistrates often underline the honesty of litigants from the archipelago. They perceive this honesty as a sign of religiosity and a lack of familiarity with Western justice. Working in Mayotte is an intercultural experience for many professionals, just like facing the State’s Justice is an intercultural encounter for most regional natives. This interaction usually involves white professionals and Black litigants. Due to the territory’s colonial and postcolonial history, the past violence and present power relations may influence law-related interactions. During clinical forensic operations, these historical and interpersonal specificities expose assessed individuals to strong determinants that could affect their behavior beyond the sole phenomenon of “double consciousness” theorized by W.E.B. Du Bois (Dufoix, 2006; Reed, 1997). Young people sometimes confide to us about the discomfort they felt in psychiatric interviews and the stress it caused them. Like others, the young man who interpellated us and inspired this work was worried about the effects of stigma on what others might think and say of him. Research has shown that stereotype threat can negatively affect the performance of young Black individuals, especially regarding verbal abilities (Hines Shelvin et al., 2014). In a forensic clinical setting, where the verbal dimension is critical, communication failures might exacerbate suffering and lead to impulsive behavior, manifesting through masculine display and defiance. Also, these postures may align with the codes and values of peers from a disadvantaged environment (Wilson and Daly, 1985) and be reinforced by the prison environment when interviews are conducted in detention (Haney, 2002).

The human situations behind the examined cases may lead us to question how much people understand the judicial impact of their attitudes and behavior during expert witnesses’ clinical interviews. Fieldwork suggests that many young people who face legal proceedings do not fully understand the French justice system and its workings. As previously mentioned, this can be due to the lack of preparation for entering the French common law or to the cultural differences between traditional modes of dispute resolution and Western justice (Bourin, 2014). On social and conscious levels, these explanations give context to help understand why inappropriate behaviors can occur among people facing the criminal justice system in Mayotte. On an unconscious level, such reactions from prosecuted youngsters orient reflection on the role of perceived stigma and potential adhesion to it. Clinical diagnoses such as psychopathy can also reinforce the “sense of differentness” among labeled individuals and limit the potential for intervention due to the idea of irreversibility it conveys (Corrigan, 2007).

Moreover, the implicit assumption of homogeneity stemming from representational mechanisms of stereotypes can lead to solely base the consideration of individuals on their diagnosis. As Goffman mentioned in his work (1963/1975, p.155), stigmatized individuals are generally long aware of their unfavorable societal position. Still, the perceived immobility of the stereotyped assignments they are subjected to generates suffering. Just like the young man who lit our interest on the matter, youngsters diagnosed as psychopaths in Mayotte are likely aware of the stereotypes they may encounter before the expert witness interview. The discomfort they experience may lead to a reaction that reinforces the stigma (Le Yondre, 2016) and exaggerates traits perceived as part of the

<sup>22</sup> First author.

interlocutor's prejudices.

In French law, group commission is considered an aggravating circumstance. However, in Mayotte, which has a collectivist African culture (Abels-Eber and Baron, 2002), a group does not necessarily indicate strict organization but reflects a daily habit and a way of life. Indeed, despite the prevalence of group-committed offenses in our sample and the everyday judicial fieldwork, Mayotte faces little organized crime. In the present study, the subjects identified as psychopaths were mainly involved in group-committed offenses, which inherently involve a social dimension. This aspect contradicts the diagnostic conclusions and encourages consideration of the psychological functions of group action. When an expert witness and the subject being assessed meet in clinical interviews, it happens in a standardized environment that an individualistic culture has conceptualized. This codified interaction occurs between two individuals with varying levels of understanding of the current framework, which may lead to imbalance and mutual incomprehension. One challenge they may face is explaining to a Western expert why a particular act was committed when its origin lies in group dynamics.

Psychopathy and ASPD are Western-centric psychiatric concepts. Comparative research recommends caution in using them outside of the United States, as they may fail to account for cross-cultural variations (Cooke, 1998; Cooke and Michie, 1999). With youngsters still caught in the adolescence process and living in impoverished and dangerous environments that daily expose them to the idea of death, diagnosing psychopathy could, at best, result from a cultural misunderstanding. The psychiatric reports we analyzed did not refer to the use of psychometric scales for assessing psychopathy. Diagnoses were mainly based on the subjects' behavior during interviews, clinical impressions, and the presence of deemed deviant elements in their history. Thereby, adolescent traits exacerbated by contemporary social issues and a violent context may have been misinterpreted as psychopathy.

#### 5.4. Judicial and operational implications of diagnoses

Since the 1990s, the field of forensic psychiatry has increasingly been declaring individuals as dangerous, while criminal irresponsibility conclusions have been continuously decreasing (Protais, 2016). The concept of psychopathy is closely related to the notion of dangerousness that psychiatrists are required to assess. Perhaps it is even the primary goal of this diagnosis, as it refers to a condition mostly said incurable and lacking treatment options. A study conducted with 1000 young individuals under the care of the French juvenile social and justice system (Laval, 2005) revealed that psychopathy diagnosis contributes very little to the practice of social work with individuals designated as such. The heavy social labeling and stigma associated with the term 'psychopath' not only affect those who carry it but also people interacting with them. This terminology effectively categorizes the person and somehow simplifies the reflection on guilt. This might be even more potent to people unfamiliar with behavioral sciences, such as jurors or magistrates. In one of our research interviews,<sup>23</sup> a magistrate expressed feeling more comfort and less responsibility when scientific elements support the justice decision.

Psychiatric diagnoses are influenced by the cultural and historical context in which they are made and by the professionals who make them (de Becker et al., 2015). In other words, they are rooted in a culturally situated present. Psychiatry plays a role in sanctioning behaviors, contributing to the political construction, maintenance, and enforcement of social and cultural norms (Gori, 2010). The use of highly charged terms like 'psychopath' can limit our understanding of complex issues. For example, in Mayotte, discussions of psychopathy have hindered efforts to understand the underlying causes of youth violence. Confrontations with law enforcement involving groups of dozens of

young people are a common occurrence on the island, highlighting the tense relationship between local youth and the French State. However, postcolonial questions are rarely raised in the media, the judicial system, or public opinion. The diagnosis of psychopathy not only negates the meaning of violence but also has the potential to affect young people in various ways. It can impact their self-esteem, identity formation, and emotional state or lead to self-fulfilling prophecies. Although often perceived as disorganized and eruptive, youngsters' violence is nearly ever meaningless. As Frantz Fanon demonstrated, opposition to a system of domination is generally acted through violence, far from "a rational and universal discourse, but as the unruly assertion of an absolute uniqueness"<sup>24</sup> (1961, p. 9). When (very) young individuals with no prior record and living in unworthy conditions confront authorities, institutions, and the perceived privileged part of society on a massive scale, they may be expressing the pain they feel, the needs that drive them, and the lack of social justice they experience.

Using the diagnosis of psychopathy on minors can foster a tendency to address youngsters' violence in a repressive way rather than a preventive one (Cohen de Lara, 2004). Additionally, the concept of psychopathy does not take into account the changing nature of behavioral disorders (Moyano, 2007), which is particularly problematic when dealing with adolescents who are still developing. As Donald Winnicott (1989) suggested, it is essential to distinguish between adolescent crisis and adolescent pathology to avoid negative impacts on development. Labeling can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies and affect adolescents' developing sense of self and emotions (Smith, 1990). Labeling can also create distance between adults and young people and cause anxiety to the former. This anxiety often leads to explosive reactions among young people due to overinterpretation and amplification phenomena (Le Clère, 2019). Stigma hurts the self on a collective and familial identity level, potentially leading to subjective reactions that border on self-hatred (Le stigmaté et la haine de soi, 2013). Young people may start to self-stigmatize due to being repeatedly rejected and objectified (Eriksson, 2019). Additionally, the postcolonial context of Mayotte, which exacerbates power dynamics, could reinforce self-stigmatization or even self-hatred, as Frantz Fanon suggested during the colonial era (1961, p.262).

#### 5.5. Merits and limitations

This research provides contemporary insights into Mayotte's youth and its relations with the judicial system. It offers a mixed perspective in which quantitative data supports a grounded and complementarist clinical reflection, addressing diagnostic practices in intercultural and postcolonial contexts. Explicitly focusing on psychopathy, the protocol in place has yielded statistical data that resonates with fieldwork but does not encompass all potentially relevant dimensions. It would be particularly pertinent to investigate the specific effects of a psychopathy diagnosis, either on individuals bearing it or on the judicial professionals who establish it. Furthermore, the impacts of the postcolonial context on interpersonal and intergroup relationships should be further investigated to determine the role of psychosocial representations in the clinical relationship and the diagnostic decision process. Finally, the voices of psychiatrists themselves are lacking in this study. It would be interesting to gather their insights in the future.

## 6. Conclusion

In the early 1950s, Etienne de Greef believed that criminals should be treated like any other person with interest. He suggested approaching them "with a complete sense of sympathy which, without necessarily approving actions, momentarily permits to get rid of preconceived

<sup>23</sup> First author.

<sup>24</sup> Translated from French: « Elle n'est pas un discours sur l'universel, mais l'affirmation échevelée d'une originalité posée comme absolue ».

frameworks and tendencies to diagnose the case or categorize the subject »<sup>25</sup> (1950). In 1951, Carl Rogers introduced the client-centered approach, a humanistic perspective on individuals and clinical proposition where clinicians' insight faculties serve their neutrality. In 1952, when the first DSM was published, psychiatry was more oriented toward human sciences and hoped that early international classifications would help distinguish psychopathological symptoms from those related to poverty and suffering (Andreoli and Foresti, 2011). Since its inception, psychiatry has changed significantly and progressively shifted toward a primarily descriptive approach. This phenomenon can have its pitfalls, especially in criminal proceedings, since clinicians establishing diagnoses are never those responsible for providing treatment, if any. While adhering to descriptive objectivity requirements and listing criteria, professionals distance themselves from critically examining their subjectivity. This distancing goes against the still relevant principles of psychodynamic tradition and its successors, which recommend thorough self-scrutiny to protect both the patient and the practitioner. Since the initiative to categorize individuals with mental disorders as essentially different may relate to a subjective need (Gekiere, 2006), it is prejudicial that the rigor of international classifications coexists with so little self-analysis, supervision and transdisciplinarity as additional tools to limit biases.

When working in intercultural contexts, clinicians must navigate and interface at least two different representational and normative worlds (Costa Fernandez, 2011). To support this positioning, they must draw upon complementary fields and work collaboratively (Théodore, 2014). The situation in Mayotte is critical, with a high level of need and persistent extreme violence but few perspectives of long-term solutions. Moreover, public policies are insufficient or unadapted, and the State's investment fails to meet the actual needs of the youth. A collective and multidisciplinary approach must be taken to understand better the youth, their experiences, and what they express.

In an insecure insular context, the mind seeks soothing and emotional regulation paths. The young people in Mayotte may resort to violence as a means of addressing Justice and its institutions for the security they are supposed to provide. Meanwhile, clinicians on the island may use the diagnosis as a way to distance themselves from the unrepresentable violence and exclude it from the normative spectrum. Although the methods differ, the goal is the same: finding a reference point through something tangible - either violence or scientificity. Both violence and diagnosis bypass the thinking process by providing an outlet through action in situations where subjects fail to acknowledge alterity for its uniqueness. With psychopathy, distance is reinforced by emphasizing the incurability and lack of possible amelioration of the subject's dispositions. Both devoid of symbolic significance, these coping mechanisms emerge when reflection falters and anxiety prevails.

The use of psychopathy diagnosis on minors is contrary to all scientific and institutional guidelines. Clinicians who diagnose it in children as young as thirteen may be reacting to the disturbing violence they witness by labeling it as pathological. It could indicate a strong urge to exclude upsetting representations from their normative framework. This need to cast them out may stem from the complexities of collective history and the psychological aftermath of past violence, all the more active that they are systematically silenced.

### Authors' contributions

EL designed the study protocol with field-grounded data, conducted the analyses, drafted the tables and figures, and wrote the manuscript. EG contributed to the conceptualization and writing of the discussion,

<sup>25</sup> Translated from French: « dans un élan de sympathie complète qui [...] permette, sans l'approuver d'ailleurs, [...] de se débarrasser momentanément de tout schéma préconçu, de toute tendance à résoudre le cas en portant un diagnostic ou en rangeant le sujet dans une catégorie ».

enriching it with a clinical-oriented perspective. As EL's thesis supervisor, MM advises on every production, constantly participating in theoretical orientations and guidance. Additionally, MM contributed substantially to the interpretation of findings and manuscript revision.

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### CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Elie K.N. Letourneur:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft. **Erwann Gouadon:** Writing – review & editing. **Malika Mansouri:** Supervision, Validation.

### Declaration of competing interest

This article is not under consideration in another journal. The manuscript and publication choices have been approved by all authors and tacitly or explicitly by the institution where the work was carried out. If accepted, it will not be published elsewhere in the same form, in English or any other language, including electronically, without the copyright holder's written consent.

### Data availability

[Dataset for research on psychopathy diagnoses in post-colonial context \(Original data\)](#) (OSF)

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### Appendix A. Supplementary data

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