

La Kaz, a threatened Reunionese habitat

It is not always easy to represent a country and its people when their representation has been marked by slavery, colonialism and racism. Indeed, the slave and colonial outlook has long dominated representations of Reunion Island, its landscapes, its people and its culture. Between racism and paternalism, these images have absented the Reunionese. From the 1960s onwards, other images appeared that were intended to reflect a social reality - poverty, work, working-class rituals. In the 1980s, tourism imposed the image of "the island of all mixings" and "the intense island", which once again masked the complexity and multiplicity of the Reunionese people and the form of modernisation imposed by the French state. Then more and more Reunionese artists took up photography and explored this form of representation.

With *La Kaz*, Fabien Vilrus and Nicolas Guichard offer a look at a youth and a habitat that are often invisible. A youth whose practices, desires and aspirations we know little about, and whose individuality is very often ignored. 21% of the population of Reunion Island is young, but this youth is more affected by school failure than in France (31% of young people leaving the school system do not have a diploma) and has an unemployment rate twice as high as in France. But what do these figures do in a text accompanying a photo exhibition? Certainly these figures say nothing about individual lives and differences due to class, gender, sexuality, racialization, but they do point to a reality, that of coloniality in the 21st century.

La Kaz is a habitat that is disappearing, to be replaced by buildings that have very little to do with the climate and whose architecture usually disregards the requirements of daily life of a population whose majority lives below the poverty line. By photographing this habitat identified as belonging to a tradition that would be inferior to a modernity, Fabien Vilrus and Nicolas Guichard revalue a local architecture, born of an economy and a culture. Because if *the kaz* deserved to be developed, its disappearance contributes to an accelerated francization of the island. *To live* is not only to have a roof, it is to build a space that welcomes, that does not close in, that does not split. In Reunion Island, as elsewhere, housing has been, and remains, a social, racial and cultural marker. What used to be part of a collective and supportive life is being marginalized in favour of a strongly individualistic life where the shopping centre has become a meeting place for young women and men. A new sociability remains to be invented.

The exhibition by Fabien Vilrus and Nicolas Guichard invites us to take a fresh look at the youth of Reunion Island.

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