

What development for Wallis and Futuna?

Or,
*from the Tavaka Migration
to the emigration to Metropolitan France*

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Résumé

Le développement de ce minuscule Territoire d'Outre-Mer passe par un nouvel équilibre entre les migrations de travail et l'auto-développement. Aussi, l'on étudiera tout d'abord le souhait des élus de réduire le flux migratoire vers la Nouvelle-Calédonie au bénéfice de la France métropolitaine. Puis, on analysera le rapport de la commission chargée d'envisager toutes les pistes d'auto-développement. Apparaît alors la question du développement durable des microcosmes insulaires et de l'intégration éventuelle de la religion ou de la coutume dans la réflexion politico-administrative.

Abstract

The development of this tiny overseas territory is conditioned by a new balance between workers' migrations and self-development. We will thus study first of all the wish of local politicians to reduce migration flows towards New Caledonia in favour of Metropolitan France. Then, we will analyse the report of the committee set up to consider all tracks that might lead to self-development. What emerges then is the question of sustainable development in island microcosms and the possible integration of religion or of custom in political and administrative reflection.

EVOKING THE POSSIBLE FUTURE OF WALLIS AND FUTUNA implies knowing the past (Angleviel, Lextreyt and Boyer, 1994; Malau, Takasi and Angleviel, 1999; Roux, 1995) and the current situation (Collectif, 2001; Institut d'Émission d'Outre-Mer, 2002; Angleviel, 1994) of these two tiny remote islands, in the midst of Oceania and separated by 230 km. For a long time a land of emigration towards New Caledonia (Likuvalu, 1979; Connell, 1990; Rallu, 1982; Roux, 1985; O'Reilly, 1963), this Overseas Territory has the peculiarity of having generated a second generation expatriate community representing 10 per cent of the New Caledonian population.

Today, Wallisian (Uvean) and Futunian elected representatives are concerned about the possible closing of the New Caledonian job market following the Noumea Agreement signed in 1998. Nevertheless, in view of scant local possibilities, the future of the 49.9 per cent of Wallisians and Futunians under the age of 20 remains linked to their ability to get out of a rural environment incapable of absorbing without conflict all the fruit of traditional politics, which consists of ensuring its 'pension' via its descendants.

Having presented the current developments, we may wonder if there would be any other ways of achieving the wish of the majority of Wallis and Futuna's population, which is to live in the country while enjoying and gaining from the main benefits of the nation's consumer society.

New Caledonia remains a land that welcomes newcomers

The signing of the Noumea Accord on 5 May 1998 could have faltered on several articles concerning, to a greater or lesser extent, New Caledonia's relations with its former administrative dependency. Article 225 is significant of a late consideration of the possible problem that this agreement could lead to, both in the relations between the two territories and in the treatment of the Wallis and Futuna community living in New Caledonia.

New Caledonia's relations with the Wallis and Futuna Islands territory will be clarified by a special agreement concluded at the latest on March 31st, 2000. The Government of the Republic will participate in the negotiations and in the signing of this agreement.¹

In spite of a theoretically inflexible calendar, this agreement had still not been signed in October 2002, when the New Caledonian elected members wanted a reassuring but scarcely binding framework agreement, whereas the Wallis and Futuna elected members wanted firm commitments regarding the perpetuation of work migration for their nationals.² At the same time, the elected members of the overseas territory of Wallis and Futuna desired the financial implication of Metropolitan France, to diversify expatriation destinations and to allow future generations to remain in place thanks to actions leading to real self-development. Actually, the fear of Wallis and Futuna's authorities was based on the issue of priority for local employment and on its consequence, the 'country law' vote authorising New Caledonia to practise various forms of positive discrimination. It must be noted that the majority of Wallisian and Futunian migrants can avoid being negatively affected by these potential measures, simply by acquiring 'New Caledonian citizenship', because they have been present in New Caledonia for more than ten years. As for new migrants, their French passport assures them, like the Metropolitan French or 'Domiens' (inhabitants of French Overseas Departments), of always being able to work in New Caledonia.

It thus seems that at least in the medium term work migration can continue, with some symbolic limits being added for public relations and media image purposes in the twelve to seventeen years preceding the three consultations on New Caledonia's possible accession to sovereignty. The migrants have not been mistaken and continue to arrive in Greater Noumea on the Boeing 707s of the regional airline Air Calédonie International. Now, the construction site of the hydrometallurgical factory of the Canadian giant Inco in the little-inhabited southeast of the mainland has begun, and if 2000 Filipinos with temporary work permits are expected to set up the factory, it seems that many opportunities for direct or induced hiring will come up for people with few qualifications. At the same time, with the world nickel market flourishing at least in the medium term, the Falconbridge-SMSP mining project in the northwest of this same mainland is well advanced, while the Société Le Nickel (SLN) is planning to enlarge its factory in Doniambo.

What is mainly curbing the emigration of Wallisians and Futunians to New Caledonia goes 'unspoken'. They already represent ten per cent of the

population there and some ninety per cent of them vote against independence. So, for that reason and because they are often in competition with Kanak for unskilled jobs, relations between this community of migrants and the first inhabitants are often tense. Recently, a conflict that was both symbolic and physical arose near Saint Louis, a composite suburb situated on the outskirts of greater Noumea. Indeed, when the administration reacquired its Saint Louis property from the Roman Catholic Church, it largely allocated it to the neighbouring tribe while settling a Wallisian 'village' on a 57-acre plot of land, which was quickly named Ave Maria. Today, repeated incidents between the young people of both communities led to the request from the Kanak of Saint Louis for the departure of the whole Polynesian community of Ave Maria. At the end of 2001 road blocks were set up on the territorial road, then stone throwing and fighting erupted between the young people. A young Melanesian, Jean-Marie Goyetta, was killed in January 2002. Four work groups (schooling, facilities, land tax and safety) were set up on 9 April to find solutions. Out of the 127 listed Polynesian families, 39 were relocated to social housing in May. On 12 June a 36-year-old Futunian, Petelo Motuku, was killed while driving his car to work. A Wallisian customary, Alain Palagaloa, echoed the silent majority by declaring during the funeral of the second victim of these confrontations: 'If Petelo's murder is the price to pay for peace to return to Saint Louis, then he won't have died for nothing'.

The political authorities want to diversify the lands of expatriation. All the competent authorities (elected officials, civil servants, customary chiefs, clergy in charge of five parishes, and company managers) are in favour of promoting new migrant flows while aware that the majority of migrants will continue to go to New Caledonia (for its open job market, employers who appreciate Wallisian and Futunian labour, and the easier reception offered by the resettled community). A certain number of measures, though, have already been taken to diversify destinations. In 2001 the work and social affairs inspectorate signed an agreement with the National Agency for the Integration and Promotion of Overseas Workers (ANT) allowing 50 young job-seekers to leave Wallis and Futuna every year. Scholarships to the University of French Polynesia or in Metropolitan France are preferred by the elected members and the administration. The Wallisian branch of the IUFM of the Pacific

reorganised its activities towards the University of French Polynesia (DAEU, teaching diploma).

As regards French Polynesia, some consider that the elected members of this overseas territory favour this tendency, which contributes to the regional dimension inherent in the 'Polynesian Triangle'. As regards integration into everyday life, belonging to the same linguistic family is not enough, as Wallisian and Futunian migrants compete directly with low-qualified job-seekers from 'the archipelagos' [of French Polynesia].

Metropolitan France offers much more promising possibilities for emigration. Indeed, Wallisians and Futunians, as they have done for fifty years in New Caledonia, can without false modesty move up in the markets of building and civil engineering, the protection of goods and persons, professional sports and more generally in all domains requiring physical prowess.

Every year, about 200 people arrive on the job market. If we consider that the local market can absorb half of them, as long as they go into the administration or into the (formerly autarkic) food-producing agriculture of their elders, the other half could easily be absorbed into the national job market in France provided that a dynamic and joint policy of expatriation was set up. Recently, the Frenchman running one of the four small hotels in Wallis wrote a very significant note intended to foster reflection by the local elected members:

Economic development, new business start-up, job creation, the future of young people, well-worn thematic words. In the Territory, the demand for jobs widely exceeds the number on offer. Thus a policy to instigate expatriation towards France must be implemented. Every applicant settled in France, practising a profession, will every year be entitled to a Paris–Wallis plane ticket as paid leave for him and his family. (Bilco, 2002)

His pragmatic analysis was based on the principle that young people, if supervised and assured of being able to return regularly to the *fenua*, would begin this new migration, which would allow them to open up to the world and to improve their vocational training. Besides, most would settle down permanently in Metropolitan France and those who returned after a few decades could participate in the development of their little homeland thanks

to their pension and to their status as passive consumers. This unorthodox project has the merit of being explicit: Polynesian migration has always been a necessary phenomenon in limited island surroundings.

This raises the problem of conciliation between the will of the families to remain set in a rustic Polynesian and Christian tradition, and the fact that this system can only continue, in view of the impossibility of finding new farmlands for all, by bringing its most enterprising elements to emigrate permanently.

Now, when the migrant flow towards New Caledonia began to take shape at the beginning of the 1950s, young volunteers generally returned to the *fenua* after a three-year contract. Their mentality had then changed as a result of being in contact with urban realities and they were completely out of touch with customs and the binding rules of morality common to most micro-societies. Thus in 1951 Mgr Poncet advised the President of France to give priority to young people accompanied by their families. And actually, migrants' families took root in New Caledonia, with the great majority of second and third generation children never having been to their archipelago of origin.

Today, the difficulty seems greater as it is a question of finding a controlled way of increasing work migration towards Metropolitan France. Indeed, the cultural and climatic differences turn out to be much more marked, but it must be noted that the appearance of television over the last ten years has made the grasping of far-off realities much easier.

The most perceptible problem concerns former migrants who decide to come back and live in Wallis and Futuna. They all return with apparently eccentric and often disturbing ideas, which they learn to moderate if they want to fit into their village and more generally into the social fabric of the island, where the socially correct remains the counterpart of a true rustic solidarity. Similar conflicts appear between the generations of those maturing before and after compulsory schooling (1961) or even before and after television (1986).

To give priority to hypothetical self-development

Since 1998, the debate on the self-development of Wallis and Futuna has been reactivated by the negotiations concerning the special agreement. On the one hand, as New Caledonia could attain independence in less than two decades, it was quite natural to try to anticipate not only the possible closing of this

migrant route, but also the possible and very problematic return of part of the expatriate community to their original home. On the other hand, the Wallisian and Futunian elected members used these negotiations first, to ask New Caledonia and then, before the refusal of its leaders, to ask the State, for a grant allowing productive economic activities to develop.

Indeed, when Wallis and Futuna's protectorate became an Overseas Territory in 1961, the State undertook to bring modernity to these two tiny archipelagos. Forty years later it had been achieved: a completely free comprehensive educational system, satisfactory medical coverage, a suitable road network (in relation to regional standards), the trilogy of water, electricity and telephone at a reasonable price, port and airport facilities allowing regular communications with the outside, and a local radio and television station (RFO). Modernity, such as it was conceived of in the sixties, is thus very present in Wallis. And in fact, if Wallis and Futuna is the least developed of the French communities in the Pacific, its level of infrastructure and standard of living are much higher than of all the other island countries of central Oceania.

Today, the elected members are asking for exceptional aid from the State so as to make possible the implementation of production activities such as a fish canning factory or farm produce processing plants. To give itself time to consider the question, the State had an assessment mission carried out by the Institut de Recherche pour Développement (IRD) in February 2001. The main results were presented to the elected members in November 2001, during the visit of Christian Paul, the Secretary of State for Overseas Territories (IRD-SEOM, 2001). Certain elected members were disappointed with the contents of the IRD report, because in the main, it was no more than a statement and because it did not take into sufficient account the Oceanian approach to the problems, the only way of proposing original solutions.

This lucid and explicit report begins with a statement showing that economic constraints largely exceed advantages: the geographic remoteness, the limitations of size and natural resources (Gabrie, 1995; Guiot, 1998), the importance of custom³ and religion, the disproportionate public employment, the high unemployment rate (or rather the non-active wage rate), the excessive youth of the population, the absence of significant exports, and the dependence

of imports on the various financial transfers of the State (i.e. partial subsidy of the local budget, structuring works, the budget of services and public salaries).

Then the six experts from the IRD looked at the areas where development was possible. As regards the primary sector, they insisted on a possible intensification of food-producing agriculture, the creation of export crops (notably flowers and *kava*) and the streamlining of coastal fishing activities (Angleviel, 1997, 1999). In the manufacturing sector, they evoked the possibility of creating a tuna canning factory to exploit the shallow waters of the Exclusive Economic Zone or to set up, after research, fish farming plants. Finally, for the service industry, they reiterated the possibility of developing religious tourism (focused on the Saint Pierre Chanel basilica in Futuna) or family tourism (targeting families of expatriate civil servants).

In the report, Jean-Claude Roux concluded: 'the most logical idea is to relaunch the search for local economic solutions allowing new conditions to be satisfied, those of an activity centred on its own resources. The assessment presented here shows the narrowness of this course with regard to the size of the problems in question' (Roux, 2001).

In the absence of a project that could upset the economic and social factors of Wallis and Futuna, it would seem that this Territory is dedicated to progressive development, which will grow off micro-businesses (such as extensive breeding of pigs or poultry, creation of cold storage plants for fishing products and the purchase of some tuna boats from shipyards in French Polynesia), off sporadic measures intended to facilitate investment (notably banking loans taking into account the absence of a Western-style land registry,⁵ by the creation of an advantageous fixing of a price scale for a Paris–Wallis tourist plane ticket, (or even the late use of the tax-removal law) and off a greater integration of Wallisians and Futunians into the job market, in both the public and private sectors (the '40 executives' plan facilitating professional progress by temporary expatriation, and an improvement of local competence in the English language).

At the same time, the reform of the 1961 statutes, often evoked and never put into effect, should allow the empowerment of the local elected members, whose competence is at present much less than in French Polynesia (autonomy

of 1984) or than in New Caledonia (Matignon Agreements in 1988). In the meantime, the State, the elected members and the chieftaincy signed on 22 January 2002 a document of economic orientation defining the framework of a respectful development of the environment, and presenting itself as anxious to bring together all the local authorities, i.e. the elected members and managers, but also the customary leaders and the executives of the diocese.

Among other things, this document provides for the implementation of a development council, an Interprofessional Chamber and a territorial committee for social and economic reflection. It refers to national (AFD, OGAF) as well as European (ADIE) institutions able to provide grants for future structuring projects (modernisation of the landing strip in Futuna, creation of a fishing port, creation of a cultural centre–library–museum). And its authors conclude: ‘Here are thus explained the main directions which the Territory wishes to give to its development. The State’s commitment to participate in their application will allow for Wallis and Futuna’s harmonious modernization in the years to come’ (Collectif, 2002).

It thus seems that the two major stakes in the overseas territory of Wallis and Futuna are the perpetuation of a voluntarist policy of emigration and the implementation of a certain degree of self-development taking into account the strong constraints of an island micro-society.

Another option to be hoped for would be a reasoned reduction of births, but this possibility is rarely considered in public because of the importance of custom and Catholic religion in Wallis and Futuna. Nevertheless, as the female demand for it is strong, some family planning is accepted by all, as long as it is discreet.

Since the time of the first arrival of residents from France, the expatriate community living in Wallis and Futuna has only partially understood and accepted the tremendously strong influence there of custom and religion. These factors are in fact emanations of a dynamic rural society (Deckker, 1998; Angleviel and Moysse-Faurie, 2002), eager to maintain its cohesion in the face of individualisation and the new social stratification offered by modernity.⁵ Perhaps the new structures of consultation sought by the State will allow the emergence of synergism from the combination of religion and improvement of the domestic structures, as well as custom⁶ and development.

Notes

1 Loi n° 99–209 du 19 mars organique relative à la Nouvelle-Calédonie, in *Journal Officiel de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, Imprimerie administrative, Nouméa, 24 March 1999: 1182–1211, at p. 1208.

2 It must be noted that, to the surprise of its Wallisian and Futunian partners, the New Caledonian government offered to contribute financially to the reorientation of the migrant flow (Senator of Wallis and Futuna, pers. comm., 25 September 2002; Angleviel, 2000, 2002).

3 Not only do land disputes depend on the chieftaincy, but the life of the natives is governed by customary rules. This fact can lead to the occasional lack of understanding, even conflict. Thus in 1999 judgment was not passed on the president of the Territorial Women's Council, in spite of her having embezzled 35000 euros, because she had put herself under the protection of the king of Wallis or because in 2002 the customary justice had the local weekly *Te Fenua Fo'ou* closed by force. 'Toutes autorités confondues devront s'employer à expliquer aux coutumiers qu'à l'avenir ils devront laisser le pénal à la gendarmerie et à la justice de droit commun' (Simete, 1999: 8).

4 'Le Droit Coutumier de Wallis et Futuna interdit toute cession de biens fonciers à des étrangers, sous réserve des exceptions déjà décrites (Mission et État) et les litiges demeurent réglés par la Chefferie' (Simete (n.d.): 12).

5 'Make no mistake about it, the Futunian is not this unpolished and uncultured being, crushed by the "progress of the Whites"; here, this modern world is treated like the manioc from which we extract starch: we crush it, dilute it, obtain a thick mash, then we sieve it, with a lot of waste, but what remains is the standard fare of many a meal' (Moulin, 2002: 110).

7 Any custom being evolutionary, it seems, for example, indispensable to consider the modalities allowing the classic characteristics of salaried work to be taken into account more and more. Thus, a department head noticed recently that the agents of his department: 'have almost all been recruited, without competition and in the course of time, under the customary or domestic pressure of intervention, sometimes without even having been personally consulted. We can consider that for many of them, one day, they learnt that, because of their political implication, or for a favour they did to an "influential" person, or for the "placing" which a candidate thought of getting from his intervention, this "godfather" had obtained a contract of employment in the department for them. This frequent practice means that they do not in the least feel involved in the position they are occupying because they had sought "income" from their "benefactor"—which they were given but in fact, they had never sought "work" and nobody dares to repeat the idea that income corresponds to actual work' (Guegan, 2001: 2).

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