

Chapter 8

Migration and change in Wallisian society

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After twenty years of very rapid migration, 11,000 Wallisians and Futunians form a solid minority group in the Territory of New Caledonia. This group represents 55 per cent of the total population of Wallis and Futuna. The islands themselves (210 sq. km) and the remaining 9,192 inhabitants (1976 census) are increasingly feeling the effects of this situation.¹

In the history of this archipelago, three periods can be distinguished:

- . Pre-European traditional society where settlement dates back as far as 2000 BC. Origins are not well defined, but population came mainly from Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and probably the Marshall Islands.
- . Contacts with Europeans began in 1616, following visits to Futunians by Lemaire and Shouten; Wallisians encountered Europeans for the first time in the eighteenth century. From 1825, with the arrival of whalers, Futunians were employed on vessels. There was exploitation of resources including copra and seaslugs,
- . Immigration to New Caledonia and New Hebrides. After a period of isolation from 1890 until World War II, there was some migration to New Caledonia in 1947-48 and to the New Hebrides in the 1950s. With the expansion of the mining economy from 1960 to 1972, there was a rapid increase in immigration from Wallis to New Caledonia.

¹Census of New Caledonia, 1976, Institut National Statistique et Etudes Economiques, Paris - Noumea.

From 1842 to 1933, the influence of the Marist Mission was crucial (Poncet 1972) and exceeded the authority of the French administration which was small and without the means for generating development. With the French Overseas Territory statutes of 1959, the impact of external migration and the 'Wallisianization' of the clergy, one can perceive a growing crisis of conscience.

Migration to New Caledonia and New Hebrides

In 1924, the *Bulletin of Commerce* referred to the interest of Wallisians in migration to New Caledonia.² At that time there were thirty Wallisians there (twenty at Takedji, Ouvea), most of whom had been exiled. In 1940 there were sixty Wallisians in Noumea.

It has been suggested that warfare was a factor in pre-contact depopulation on Futuna (Chanel 1960). However, from the mid-nineteenth century, the Futunian archipelago was one of the few in the Pacific to show a population increase (Table 1). Contributions of population from outside, for example the Tokelau Islands, played a role in this.

From 1946 to 1960, the net annual increase was 160 persons. In 1956, population densities on Wallis were 70 per sq. km at Hihifo, 48 per sq. km at Hahake, and 169 per sq. km at Mua.³ In 1959, an ORSTOM agronomist named Tercinier calculated that in the absence of net emigration at the rate of 200 per year, population density could reach an intolerable level of 170 per sq. km in 1970.

An administrative report of 1959 stated:

In 1938, the annual income per inhabitant from copra was for Wallis and Futuna, around 200 CFP. It is at present 100 CFP for Wallis and 1500 CFP for Futuna. The total income earned from export products which in 1938 was around 12 or 13 million F., was 5 million in 1959.⁴

²*Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, no.19 on Wallis and Futuna, 1963.

³Archives de Wallis-Futuna, Haut Commissariat, Noumea.

⁴*ibid.*

In Wallis, the rhinoceros beetle (*Oryctes*) caused copra production to fall from an average of 596 tons in 1930-35 to 135 tons in the 1946-50 period, and again to 53 tons per year from 1956-59. In Futuna, although the island was saved from the beetle, copra production fell from 597 tons per year in 1936-40 to 344 tons per year in 1956-59 because the coconut plantations were not renewed during World War II. Overseas migration represented the most attractive alternative for the population of Wallis and Futuna to their limited and uncertain subsistence living.

Table 1

Evolution of Wallis-Futuna's population, 1842-1969

Year	Wallis	Futuna
1842	2,600	
1881	—	1,092
1885	—	1,635
1928		6,202
1935		6,542
1953		9,507
1960		8,313
1969		8,446

Source: Archives de Wallis-Futuna, Haut Commissariat, Noumea.

Only Melanesian island countries would accept the outflow of Wallisians, and, until 1960, only French territories could legally accept these 'protected citizens' who then became French citizens in 1961. There was a need for manpower in Noumea for the nickel mines, in construction work and in agriculture, as the flow of Asian workers had ended and the New Caledonians were eager to find replacements.

There were, however, obstacles to this migration. Religious and traditional authorities regarded young Wallisians and Futunians as the basis of their economic power, and important to the hierarchy system in customary insular society. Migration would also mean a loss of free manpower for the church and the heads of clans. In 1947, Monseigneur d'Armancier expressed the fear of the church for the Futunians and Wallisians, until then protected, once they came in contact with the 'realities of the world', and with 'civilization'. He expected administrative authorities

Table 2
History of migration from Wallis and Futuna
to New Caledonia, 1947 to 1962

Year/Direction	Departure (+)	Return (-)	Balance
1947	109	—	+109
1948	14	21	-7
1949	131	85	+46
1950	25	74	-49
1951	89	67	+22
1952	106	52	+54
1953	171	60	+111
1954	247	62	+185
1955	187	86	+101
1956	600	92	+508
1957	404	194	+210
1958	378	257	+121
1959	168	156	+12
1960	366	213	+153
1961	560	326	+234
1962	519	331	+188
Total	4,074	2,076	+1,998

Source: *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, 1963, no.19, p.177.

Table 3
Arrivals of migrants in New Caledonia from 1969 to 1977

Year	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	Total 69-77
Numbers	+314	-77	+784	+315	-4	+228	+58	-219	-196	+1203 ^a

^aArrivals 1,679 and departures 476.

Source: Census of New Caledonia, 1969, 1974, 1976.

in New Caledonia to take appropriate precautions on behalf of the migrants. There were other difficulties as well: few Wallisians or Futunians had much formal education or could speak French.

Patterns of immigration

The first departures from Wallis and Futuna were the enlisted soldiers in the regular army and a few ordinary seamen. In 1947-48, the first employed had contracts with their employers (Ballande: trading, Lafleur: settlers.⁵ Food, salary, housing, work schedule, holidays etc. were all specified by the employers. There were, however, mutual disappointments in these first experiences.

From 1951, Wallisians and Futunian migrants took employment on the Yaté dam site and in the mines (Table 2), but it was the nickel boom that gave the impetus to the strong second wave of migration to New Caledonia (Table 3). Recent assessments show the distribution of Wallisians by activity (Table 4) to be similar to that of Europeans except for a lower proportion active. The pattern of Wallisians in employment (Table 5) shows the skilled category to be the most important, with the unskilled and public sector categories also significant.

Noumea has remained the most important single destination for migrants, but there are a number of other significant concentrations in Dubmea, Païta and Thio (Table 6).

The socio-cultural situation

Standards of accommodation in New Caledonia were for a long time very bad for Wallisians and Futunian migrants. At first many were squatters, then they were given temporary accommodation by companies (S.L.N., Ballande), often in pitiable conditions. Others lived in old buildings at low rental rates, which, with average family size at seven, gave rise to many hygiene problems. In 1962, 65 per cent of

⁵In the New Hebrides, Wallisians and Futunians were welcomed in the 1940s as their productivity in copra shelling was three to four times that of the local Melanesians. (*Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, no.19, and Archives françaises des Nouvelles-Hébrides).

Table 4
Employment of Wallisians in New Caledonia

Activities	Wallis (%)	Whole ethnic group (%)	Europeans (%)
Students	11.9	9.5	10.1
Without profession	21.7	25.5	22.2
Retired	2.8	3.6	5.5
Active	40.9	55.0	55.6
Looking for work	5.6	4.5	4.0
Army	1.5	1.4	—
Others	15.6	0.5	2.5

Source: Census of New Caledonia, 1976.

Table 5
Distribution of Wallisians in employment, by occupation

Occupation	Numbers	%
Public employees	51	2.6
Public workers	39	2.0
Army, police	27	1.4
Private sector employees	358	17.9
Foremen	13	0.7
Skilled workers	800	40.0
Unskilled workers	394	19.7
Staff on duty	178	8.9
Clergy	18	0.9
Others	121	6.0
Total	1,999	100.0

Source: Census of New Caledonia, 1976.

Wallisians were classified among those with very bad accommodation in Noumea and its suburbs (McTaggart 1963).

Table 6

Wallisians and Futunians by location in New Caledonia

Recording centre	Wallis and New Hebrides 1956 ^a	Wallis and New Hebrides 1963	Wallis 1974	Wallis 1977
Noumea	586	1,976	1,065	4,336
Canala	90	44	74	
Dumbea	14	51	526	810
Koumac	123	15	30	
La Foa	11	66	238	234
Païta	75	240	920	833
Poya	28	5	124	164
Thio	73	128	510	499
Yaté	132	1		0
Houailou			61	102
Total	1,227	3,016	9,920	9,571 ^b

^aIncludes a few dozen only from New Hebrides.

^bOut of a total of 11,000 from Wallis and Futuna (those not accounted for being somewhere in the bush).

Source: Census of New Caledonia, 1956, 1963, 1974; and for 1977 special census of Haut Commissariat of Noumea (unpublished).

Up to 1960, this situation was a result of economic and social causes. Many migrants were unmarried and were not used to European accommodation and health requirements. In 1956, the sex ratio for Wallisian-Futunians was two men for every woman though from 1957 to 1962 there were twice as many women as men among immigrants. This reversal came about as the migrants recognized the need for family cohesion and realized the attraction of family allowances. The arrival of many female migrants proved a very positive influence for the resettlement of islanders in New Caledonia. From 1965, a social housing policy was adopted in New Caledonia which encouraged the purchase of houses and flats and further enabled the Wallisian community to settle in. In 1976, 48 per cent of Wallisians had been born in New Caledonia, and 60 per cent were less than 20 years old, a

demographic record.⁶

Problems and prospects

The more important factors that will influence the future of Wallisian society include:

- (a) for youth, the decline of customary authority with the growing independence of individuals with money incomes;
- (b) the questioning of the importance of religious observance, accompanying the release of restraints on migration;
- (c) reassessment of the customary pattern of family life under the impact of modernization, e.g. with restriction of family size;
- (d) disturbance to Wallisian social structure with the effects of salaries, modern standards of accommodation, modern attitudes to the role of women, dualism of language, and the consumption-oriented society;
- (e) acculturation of Wallisian youth and the hostility of Melanesians and some Caledonians being shown to their presence; and
- (f) political significance of immigrants and their voting patterns within the French political movements in Noumea.

Economic consequences for Wallis-Futuna

Because of the past migration of working age individuals and families to New Caledonia, and the aspirations of young people to go to work in Noumea, these islands have become holiday islands and havens for the retired. There is, in addition, a new monetary linkage between families in Noumea and in Wallis-Futuna in the form of important transfers of remittances (Table 7). These are clearly important sums in Wallis and Futuna, where about 300 wage earners are employed. The economic crisis in New Caledonia that commenced in 1977 and slowed down the amount transferred has caused some anxiety on the two islands. Migrants have returned without

⁶Census of New Caledonia, 1976.

any resources, and taken lands back that were cultivated in the meantime by parents or relatives.

Table 7
Money transfers from New Caledonia to
Wallis-Futuna, 1970-78

Year	Amount (million CFP)
1970	98.84
1971	118.20
1972	114.20
1973	133.70
1974	167.70
1975	150.00
1976	164.00
1977	101.00
1978 ^a	26.36
Total	1,073.92 ^b

^aFirst 4 months of the year only.

^bExcludes a further 33-50 per cent as 'free remittances' in the forms of consumer goods, plane tickets and important money collections for churches. The total sum equals about A\$10,000.

Source: Office des Postes, Mata-Utu, Wallis, 1978.

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