

# ‘Wallis and Futuna Have Never Been a Colony’: A Non-sovereign Island Territory Negotiating Primary Education with Metropolitan France

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## ABSTRACT

*Wallis and Futuna are a French overseas collectivity in Oceania. In 1969, the French state formally ceded responsibility for the territory’s primary education to the Catholic mission and reimburses related expenses. Against this backdrop, this article uses the negotiations about primary education between these two non-sovereign island territories and their colonial metropole to explore islanders’ views of the relationship. We conducted interviews with eight representatives of local institutions associated with primary education and we analyzed relevant official agreements. Our analysis suggests that, from the islanders’ perspective, the negotiations with metropolitan France about policies and funding for primary education are driven by different identities located within a shared national identity. We find these identities are not merely different, but complementary in a non-hierarchical fashion. We also find that these identities seem to be mutually constituted between metropolitans and islanders through negotiations that are often adversarial and—from the islanders’ view—predicated on detailed knowledge of the history of these negotiations. In addition, the resulting education policies regularly see primary schools receiving unequal treatment in comparison to schools in metropolitan France. However, in counterweight, islanders can also succeed in giving unequal treatment to metropolitan regulations by bending them to suit local interests or values.*

Keywords: sovereignty, islands, education, Oceania, policy, identity, decolonization, Catholic mission.

## INTRODUCTION

The UN has overseen the transition into independence of more than 80 colonial territories (United Nations 2016). However, since the mid-1980s, transitions from colonial territory to sovereign nation have ceased, particularly for islands. In 1983, the Federated States of Micronesia voted in a referendum to continue their relationship with the USA by opting for a Compact of Free Association instead of full independence. In the decades that followed, there have been several referendums on independence in remaining colonial territories—virtually all of them islands—and all these referendums resulted in rejections of independence (Baldacchino 2013; Prinsen 2018). With the passage of time, the material benefits of these rejections became obvious; the non-sovereign island territories’ continued direct

access to metropolitan resources and opportunities improved their socio-economic indicators at a much faster pace than islands who chose independence (Armstrong and Read 2000; Bertram 2004; Dunn 2011; McElroy and Parry 2012). The metropolises' financial flows to non-self-governing islands purchase geo-political benefits. For example, weighing up the costs and benefits of its Compacts of Free Association with Palau, the US State Department perceived a net benefit because the compact 'gives us access to Palau and its waters, along with the critical authority to deny such access by military forces and personnel of other nations' (US Department of State 2012).

By now, after more than three decades of analysis of current developments we come to the conclusion that it is unlikely that any of the forty-odd non-sovereign island territories remaining from 19th and early 20th century colonialism by Denmark, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand the UK, and the USA will choose to become independent nations (Prinsen 2020). Instead, these islands and their metropolises are developing frameworks that are no longer driven by a need to define the terms of separation but rather by the terms for engagement, or as Houbert far-sightedly suggested in 1986 for France's Pacific territories, 'decolonizing without disengaging' (1986:145).

As non-sovereign island territories chose to remain connected to their colonial metropolises, we have only a limited understanding of the dynamics that drive relationships and negotiations between the two parties. We looked for and found rather few case studies looking into these relationships—*e.g.*, Grydehøj on Greenland (2016), Harmer, Gaskarth and Gibb on the Virgin Islands and St Helena (2015), Pigman on the Cook Islands (2012), or Prinsen, Lafoy and Migozzi on New Caledonia (2017). Instead of case studies, we mostly found comparative studies on non-sovereign island territories that categorize islands into different groups or types. Such comparative analyses generate important insights, but they also tend toward an epistemologically limited 'from the outside inwards' perspective of Foucauldian governmentality, the study of power projected by metropolises over 'territories': 'Territory is no doubt a geographical notion, but first of all a juridico-political one: the area controlled by a certain kind of power' (Foucault 2007:176). In his time, Foucault was criticized for underplaying the colonial legacies and agency of people living in what he had labelled 'territories' (*e.g.*, Legg 2007), and such criticism continues to be levelled against researchers studying non-sovereign island territories. For example, a book on the 'non-independent territories of the Caribbean and Pacific' (Clegg and Killingray 2012) led one reviewer to conclude 'a top-down perspective' persists and tends 'to minimize and gloss over the complex ambivalence that many of these [island] territories and their peoples may have in relation to their administrative powers' (Monnig 2014:208).

This article seeks to understand the relationships between non-sovereign island territories and their former colonial metropolises by looking for the 'from the inside outward' views predicated on the agency of islanders. We seek not to stand on the deck of an arriving vessel looking at the islands, but to stand on the beach searching the horizon (Denning 1980). We explore island perspectives on the negotiated relationship with a metropole by reflecting on interviews held with eight representatives of local institutions involved in the negotiations or management of primary education on Wallis and Futuna—an overseas territory of France, northeast of Fiji. These representatives had personal and often long experience, sometimes going back decades, negotiating with representatives of metropolitan France about the management and resourcing of primary education on the two islands. In addition, we studied the multi-annual agreements regarding these negotiations on primary education, as they were made accessible to us in Mata-Utu, the territory's capital at different moments between 2014 and 2016. The interviews were rather open. We asked just two questions: what have been successes and difficulties in negotiating primary education with Paris in the past, and what successes and challenges do you expect in the years ahead?

We begin this paper with an outline of our research methodology, followed by a background on Wallis and Futuna, the Catholic mission, the French state, and the islands' primary education as the arena that brings them all together. We then present our findings, and our analysis of the interviews and agreements. This analysis suggests that islanders' views on the relationship and negotiations with metropolitan France are predicated on and driven by two distinct perspectives; one of complementary identities and one of diverging legalities. Each perspective comprises a number of constituting elements. To each of these constituting elements we add a couple of examples of similar views held by people in non-sovereign island territories of other metropolitan powers such as the UK, USA, Netherlands, and Denmark, in support of our conclusion that many non-sovereign island territories seem to be developing a distinct form of sovereignty.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of our research was to explore the views of the local leaders in non-sovereign island territories, views that underpin or motivate their negotiations and relationship with their former colonial metropolises. As an example, we zoomed in on the negotiations about primary education in Wallis and Futuna between representatives of relevant local institutions and representatives of metropolitan France since the islanders voted in a referendum in 1959 to become part of France rather than seek independence. Our research is qualitative and the principal sources are a series of individual interviews with eight representatives of four institutions involved in negotiations with metropolitan France about the education sector in Wallis and Futuna or in the management of primary schools. We identified and approached these interviewees as officials, a process that can be described as purposive sampling (Etikan et al. 2016). In the public sphere, our interviewees were the local politician elected as the senator representing the islands in the French Senate and the civil servant who is the secretary of the Education Committee of the islands' Territorial Assembly. For the Catholic mission, we interviewed the Bishop of the Catholic Church who runs primary education under contract with the French state, and the head of the Catholic Education Department responsible for the management of all schools. For the work force, we interviewed two trade union leaders and two teachers. Due to political tensions within the traditional kingdom of Wallis at the times of our research, we were unable to talk to officials of this traditional authority. However, we do not think this impairs our research purpose because we understand the traditional authority has formally delegated the negotiations with Paris about formal primary education matters to the Catholic mission.

We must note that all our interviewees represent to varying degrees local governing elites educated in metropolitan France or New Caledonia. This means the views of parents and a general population of the two islands may not be captured in this research. Moreover, and more importantly, while our interviewees are involved in negotiations with Paris about primary education in both islands of Wallis and Futuna – as a co-joint administrative entity – all our interviewees are Wallisians or reside in Wallis. Futunian institutions – the two traditional authorities (*chefferies*) of Futuna – have no representation as such in these negotiations. Thus our research findings may not echo views held in Futuna. This matters because the two island communities have different histories, and because there are ongoing tensions between the two islands about political representation and the distribution of resources coming from metropolitan France. Below, two quotes illustrate these tensions. The first one is taken from a complaint written by one of the traditional authorities in Futuna to French authorities and the second quote is from one of our interviews.

Financial autonomy ... decision-making that is independent from Wallis ... We have been talking about 'balancing' for years and years. And we now realise that does not really exist (Customary Council of Sigave, Futuna, cited in: Lataste 2015).

The two islands are very different. Futunians believe that Wallisians want to do everything their way without taking account of Futunians. I am against it; I am the Bishop of both islands. But it goes on continuously. Futunians now demand to have their own Catholic Education Department. – Catholic Bishop

However, we conclude that our interviews with people from Wallis do capture much of the relationship between metropolitan France and Wallis and Futuna as an overseas collectivity, considering that our interviewees formally represent both islands.

Because most of our interviewees are *ex officio* engaged in negotiating with representatives from Paris about the islands' primary education, we needed to mitigate the potential risks resulting from the loss of full anonymity. We therefore sent all interviewees a draft selective transcript of 4,000 to 5,000 words, noting we might cite them by official function from this transcript, and we invited them to correct or delete text. Four of the eight interviewees made some adjustments. Once we had transcripts of the interviews agreed by the interviewees, we analyzed the transcripts for recurring issues in an inductive content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005; Moretti et al. 2011). When at least two of our eight interviewees talked in a similar fashion about a success or difficulty in negotiating with metropolitan France, we deemed that to be a shared view or experience rather than one individual's personal experience. We often found three to five interviewees alluding in a similar fashion to aspects of the islanders' relationship with Paris. When reviewing these clusters of shared views and experiences, we found they could be considered elements of the two perspectives detailed in the introduction: complementary identities and diverging legalities.

Our secondary source is a series of written multi-annual contractual agreements ('conventions' in French) regarding primary education between the French state and the Catholic mission after 1969, in which the state leaves all primary education in the islands in the hands of the Catholic mission and reimburses the mission's expenses. These documents were provided by the Catholic bishop, the trade union, and the education committee of the territorial assembly. We analyzed seven of these agreements and 38 associated official amendments, notes, or minutes ('avenant', 'note' or 'procès-verbal' in French) both to triangulate the interviews and to understand the historical changes between 1969 and 2016 as they were recorded, and their purposes for the intended audience and users (McLennan and Prinsen 2014:82). All quotes in this article are translated into English from French or Dutch by the authors.

The islands of Wallis and Futuna are a French territory of 12,000 inhabitants, northeast of Fiji. Backed by Catholic missionaries, the islands' three kingdoms signed treaties with France between 1887 and 1888 creating a single French protectorate. For a long time, France barely established an administrative presence. France's presence only grew after 1959, when 94% of the islanders voted 'yes' in a referendum to the question, 'Do you want Wallis and Futuna to become an integral part of the French Republic as an Overseas Territory?' A 1961 legal statute officially established Wallis and Futuna as a French overseas territory. In 1962, now as citizens, the islanders elected their first senator to the French Senate and the first members of the newly established Territorial Assembly as their local government. With this, the question of education in the islands became important. In the early 1960s, the kings considered raising local taxes to pay the Catholic mission for the expansion

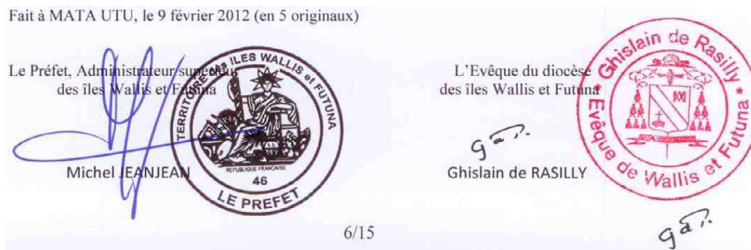


Figure 1: Part of the 2012–2017 agreement between the French state and the Catholic mission.  
Source: Jeanjean and de Rasilly (2012:6)

of the education system. However, talks about education-for-all between kings, missionaries, and the French State eventually resulted in a remarkable contract in 1969.

In 1969, the French state—whose current 1958 Constitution’s first article proclaims, ‘The Republic is indivisible, secular...’ (Legifrance 1958) and whose 1905 Law on the Separation of Churches and State reiterates that ‘the Republic neither recognizes, nor salaries, nor subsidizes any religion’ (Legifrance 1905)—signed the first of a continuous series of agreements with the Catholic mission to finance the expansion of the mission’s primary schools, placing primary education exclusively in the hands of the mission while reimbursing the mission’s expenses. In 1969, the agreement saw the French state finance nine Catholic primary schools. By 2012, this list had grown to 16 primary schools and early-childhood centers, enrolling about 1,750 pupils, and employing about 170 personnel (IEOM 2017:83). The fundamental principles of the agreement of 1969 continue today as Article 1 of the current 2012–2017 agreement (Fig. 1):

The state concedes to the Catholic mission of Wallis and Futuna the responsibility for the organization and operation of primary education (...) The state, guarantor of the proper functioning operation of the public service of education, takes responsibility for the expenses of the Catholic mission related to the responsibilities conferred to the mission in this agreement (Jeanjean and de Rasilly 2012:2).

#### FIRST PERSPECTIVE: COMPLEMENTARY IDENTITIES BETWEEN WALLIS AND FUTUNA AND FRANCE

In the first perspective in Wallis and Futuna on their negotiations with metropolitan France about primary education, the islanders underscore that these negotiations are predicated on, or fuelled by, what can be described as ‘complimentary identities’. These complementary identities have four particular elements: (1) a shared nationality, which is the framework for complementary identities that are (2) mutually created, but often in (3) an adversarial process, and shaped by islanders’ (4) historical knowledge. We identify and illustrate each of these elements as they emerge around primary education in Wallis and Futuna, followed by an example relating to another non-sovereign island territory.

##### **A nationality that is shared**

Throughout the conversation about the negotiations with metropolitan Paris about the islands’ primary education, most interviewees in Wallis and Futuna made reference to the

fact that such negotiations took place within the framework of a shared nationality. Of the three core principles of the French republic—liberty, equality, fraternity—the latter two principles are often mentioned as pillars of the nationality that the people of Wallis and Futuna share with the people of metropolitan France.

In comparison with the Cook Islands, Tokelau or Niue; we are a 100% within the state. This is not about cooperation, but this is a whole. There is national solidarity. (...) The French constitution has something very sensible ... we are all equals.  
– Senator

The population on our two islands is profoundly French and Francophone.  
– Director, Catholic Education Department

In other instances, interviewees illustrated their shared French nationality by pointing out that they felt part of France's national bureaucracy and administrative systems:

The national Ministry of Education ... manages Wallis and Futuna as if it were any other town in France. – Education Official, Territorial Assembly

Generally speaking, we have the same resources as [schools] in the metropole.  
– Catholic Bishop

It has been clearly marked out; we [as teachers] are integrated as metropolitan civil servants. – Trade Union leader

We found classrooms on Wallis carefully adorned with educational material, often handmade, that very clearly express a continental French nationality without making any reference to colonization or local and regional history. For example, a timeline of history in a classroom starts with Prehistory in which people made cave paintings in Lascaux, passing through the Middle Ages where in 987 'Hugues Capet is elected king of France', before starting 'Modern Times' with the 'religious wars between Catholics and Protestants' and listing French kings from Henri IV to Louis XVI. As far as we could ascertain in the interviews with teachers, there is no mention in the official curriculum of Oceania's pre-European contact history (*e.g.*, Kirch 2017) or the Pacific conflicts in the 17th and 18th century, for example the rivalry between Tonga and Samoa which left Wallis more closely associated with Tonga and Futuna more within the Samoan sphere of influence (Sand 2006) (Fig. 2).

Elsewhere, in the Dutch non-sovereign island territories in the Caribbean, islanders also comment in a very similar fashion when reflecting on their negotiations with metropolitan Netherlands:

But we are all Dutch, with the same passport (Marijnissen 2017).

### **Complementary identities that are created by mutual agreement**

The shared nationality between metropolitans and people of non-sovereign island territories does not lead to a shared identity. Instead, while islanders refuse to decolonize and establish sovereign states, they strengthen local identities that are equal but distinct from or complementary to a metropolitan identity.

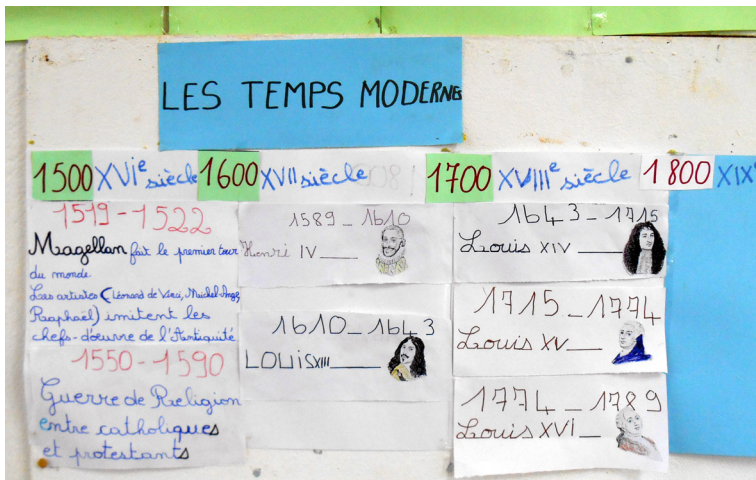


Figure 2: Section of a history timeline on a classroom wall in Wallis. Photo taken by author Prinsen in August 2015.

We are French as the others. But even taking that into account, we also say to ourselves: “We are still masters of our own lands. This is not an annexed land.”  
– Director, Catholic Education Department

The central government of France has always been very clear in its hard approach, its Cartesian framework. However, the chiefs and the Catholic mission ... they like the fuzziness. – Senator

Moreover, our interviewees also commented in detail about their engagement with metropolitan authorities in working out administrative frameworks that facilitate or further development of a complementary identity for the islands. In general, the mutually sought engagement in the creation or strengthening of complementary identities—or at least a distinct local identity on the side of Wallis and Futuna—seems to be driven by two different motives. First, the drive shown by both sides to work together is seen as the logical consequence of a shared nationality. Second, both sides see and seek financial or material gain for themselves in the engagement.

First, the people in the education sector on the islands strongly underscore the value they attach to engagement with metropolitan authorities as an expression of their desire to be part of the metropolitan education system, implicitly rejecting an ethno-centric approach. As a matter of principle, they seek to work ‘in full collaboration’ (Catholic Bishop) with the metropolitan authorities and be ‘co-architects’ (Official of the Territorial Assembly) of local education systems, while insisting that work is ‘verified’ (Director, Catholic Education Department) by metropolitan authorities and meets metropolitan standards.

However, this desire to collaborate very closely does not mean the education program in Wallis and Futuna is a copy of metropolitan education programs. Both sides are very aware that the curriculum in the schools guides pupils towards an identity that is not a secular French identity, but a complementary identity predicated on being a Catholic Wallisian or Futunian. The 1969 foundational agreement elegantly hints at the complementary character of the collaboration by stating the schools’ curriculum will be ‘inspired by’ French standards, not ‘compliant with’ French standards.

The general rules regarding the programs and methods will be inspired by those of the public metropolitan education, to which the necessary adaptations will be made by agreement between the parties (Darmancier and Bach 1969:2).

In the ensuing decades, each new agreement added intricate details about the close and continuous administrative collaboration to create a school environment that enables the development of a distinct Wallisian or Futunian identity within the framework of—or arguably as a counterpart to—the French metropolitan secular education structures. One illustration of this continuous close collaboration in the 2012–2017 agreement revolves around adapting metropolitan legislation about access to education for children with disabilities to local circumstances:

The Catholic mission will undertake to put into practice the objectives of the education law with regard to the organization and progress of the schooling of students referred to in Article 2 [*i.e.*, disabled children and adolescents]. The time tables and programs of the provided education will be those of the metropole, subject to the adaptations decided jointly by the Vice-Rector of Wallis and Futuna and the Director of Catholic Education to take into account the specificities of the Territory (Jeanjean and de Rasilly 2012:3).

The 2000–2005 agreement followed a period of marked disagreements and an adversarial engagement (see next section) and seems to mark quite a clear step up in detailing how the two parties resolved their disagreements over some diverging values. Whereas the preceding agreement has two annexes and 16 pages, the 2000–2005 agreement has four annexes and runs over 32 pages. In the disagreements over values, both parties seem to negotiate and collaborate a way forward on the basis of give-and-take. The French state now allows education in the local languages *faka uvea* and *faka futuna*, and the Catholic mission accepts that corporal punishment is now explicitly forbidden. Classes in customary practices are to be included in the curriculum, but the Catholic mission must accept metropolitan teachers' labor rights by establishing Teachers' Councils in every school (Dors and Fuahea 2000).

Our interviews confirmed increasing collaboration between metropolitan education authorities and the Catholic Education Department to integrate locally relevant elements in school curricula. Both parties seemed to express appreciation for developing the distinctly local identity within what continues to be a local school 'inspired by' metropolitan education.

There is also another three-party agreement ... between the Ministry of Education, the University of New Caledonia, and the Department of Catholic Education for the training of personnel ... in specific matters such as catechesis and our language. There is a trainer of the Department of Catholic Education and they invite someone from the traditional authority ... to talk about anything in the training that has got to do with culture. – Trade Union leader

The second motive for both sides to collaborate closely in an education administration that creates complementary identities is that both perceive a financial or material gain in doing so. Islanders made it clear they sought collaboration with metropolitan authorities to increase the number of islanders employed in primary education and improve their training and salaries.



It is not a matter of doubting the competence of the inspectors of the French State ... but generational change is necessary ... so that the young ones find their place and put fulfil their potential. – Civil Servant, Territorial Assembly

In the past, we had trainers who were sent from the metropole ... now they are local people. – Teacher

The goal was that all teachers would ultimately have a CAP [teacher's diploma], so there were training programs after school hours ... Having the CAP has enabled us here to benefit from the French salary scales. – Trade Union leader

On the other hand, all our interviewees also made it clear they understood metropolitan authorities could also be collaborating with them for their own financial gain, seeking to make savings in the metropole's public expenditure or shifting financial burdens in primary education towards the Catholic mission because it is calculated to be the cheaper option.

Because of the economic situation, the French state is reducing its personnel for pedagogy advice, its inspector ... Everything connected to these people is now transferred to the team of pedagogy trainers of the Catholic Education Department. – Director, Catholic Education Department

In France, the state pays a part of the education ... and the remainder, maintenance personnel, the canteen, *etcetera*, is taken care of by the local and regional councils. Here ... there is no local council. We have a big problem with that ... Someone has to pay and right now we can no longer pay. – Catholic Bishop

The French State actually benefits by signing the agreement. It spends less than if it were to put in place a public education. – Senator

Similar dynamics of complementary—rather than hierarchical—identities being developed in mutually agreed processes have been noted in other non-sovereign island territories. For example, in the British Virgin Islands, Harmer *et al* concluded that 'Islanders exhibit considerable agency in ... their relations with the mainland to describe and define their own preferred forms of self-identity' (2015:528). Grydehøj also found comparable dynamics in the relations between metropolitan Denmark and its non-sovereign island territory of Greenland. His case study of the relationship between Denmark and Greenland led him to speak of a 'collaborative construction of Greenlandic and Danish identities' in which administrators and opinion-makers such as artists and writers on both sides interactively develop different, complementary, identities (Grydehøj 2016:106). For example, Greenlandic activists push for a Greenlandicisation process predicated on an identity that appears complementary to the urban Danes in the metropole. 'Greenlanders are a people of nature', a well-known Greenlandic biologist blogged in 2015 (cited in: Grydehøj 2016:106).

### **Complementary identities are created in an adversarial process**

The above-described collaboration between local stakeholders in the education and the metropolitan education authorities should not be seen as a largely harmonious or agreeable collaboration. On the contrary, many of our interviewees believed this collaboration only comes about after or with disagreement, struggle or outright conflict and is quite adversarial. One particular issue brought up by several interviewees was disagreement with the Ministry

of Education's decision to separate responsibilities for primary and secondary education; the former as a responsibility of the Catholic mission, but the latter as responsibility of the secular metropolitan Ministry of Education.

In Wallisian, our word [for education] is 'ako' and when one reviews those early texts, we clearly see that concept was meant to be comprehensive. There would be a next step with secondary education ... In the mind of Wallisians, they had signed something [with the French state] for *ako* in a comprehensive sense ... But I see that the moment secondary education is established, the state pretends this is some new entity. – Director, Catholic Education Department

Disagreements between islanders and metropolitans about the character of the education system on Wallis and Futuna—either Catholic or secular—surface in many interviews.

My personal point of view is that the French state tries to apply the national education regulations, and notably the principle of secularity, to the detriment of that what is appropriate for the territory. – Civil Servant, Territorial Assembly

At that point [in the early 1980s], the agreement began to collapse. Officials who represented the French state here saw a danger in that the Ministry [of Education] was spending too much in Wallis and Futuna and especially on Catholic education. – Senator

Many interviewees perceive the relationships with Paris as sour, particularly at the highest level when it comes to people in Paris, or negotiations taking place in Paris. Islanders' characterization of the metropolitan 'other' reflect their experiences of anger, frustration or alarm.

I can go directly to Paris to talk with the French state. But I think they are deaf! – Catholic Bishop

The [new] Vice-Rector cannot just arrive and challenge the signature of someone else ... They take us for idiots. – Trade Union leader

The relationship with the metropole; I am fearful too. – Teacher

The adversarial character of the collaboration in the education sector became rather acrimonious in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s. Several times, the negotiations between representatives from the education ministry in Paris and stakeholders on the islands came to a halt. Within months after signing new agreements, complaints emerged or protests erupted among local stakeholders about the new agreement or about non-compliance by metropolitan authorities with the terms of the new agreement. Historical documents such as letters, reports, minutes, and public announcements often reflect the adversarial character of the relationship. A few selected quotes illustrate this. In 1988, for example, the islands' Territorial Assembly—a non-signatory to the agreements—conducted its own investigations into the non-compliance of metropolitan authorities with the agreements and the amendments. The Assembly report lists a series of 'anomalies':

Anomalies in the area of human resources ... teachers who do not have a CAP [teaching degree] are subject to the provisions of the 1974 Amendment for their

career progression and remuneration. The Ministry of National Education has not recognized this text since 30 November 1981 ... situations of injustice and disparity hitherto endured by local primary education staff (Assemblée Territoriale 1988:1, 3).

Anomalies in the area of funding ... It is regrettable, however, that for several years now a new interpretation of the funding method has been given by the Ministry of National Education. They now abandoned the notion of responsibility for that lump sum grant (Assemblée Territoriale 1988:3).

Early 1994, in another example, a special delegation of the Territorial Assembly travelled to Paris in an attempt to avert further escalation of conflicts in the education sector on the islands. They met with high-ranking officials and reported on the series of strikes over several years:

In 1990, teachers, tired of seeing their demands unanswered, went on strike for a month. Following this strike, a new agreement was signed in 1991 ... for a year ... this convention was renewed in 1992 ... In 1993, a further extension of the agreement: teachers called a 24-hour warning strike. In 1994 ... the teachers lost patience and intend to launch an indefinite strike at the start of the school year normally scheduled for 22 February (Assemblée Territoriale 1994b:1).

In December 1994, the Territorial Assembly wrote to the Minister of Education in Paris and presented the people on Wallis and Futuna as a 'victim' of metropolitan attitudes and policies:

The question of education is crucial for our territory ... the special commission for education ... becoming even more aware of the lack of consideration by the state of which the territory is victim. As a result, a real frustration gradually spreads among the population (Assemblée Territoriale 1994a:2).

The complaints and protests about agreements often led to renegotiations and five-year agreements were regularly expanded with amendments within months of their official signing. Apparently, the practice of amending recently signed five-year agreements within months was deemed so disruptive that the 2000–2005 agreement included a specific article to regulate it:

No demand for modification [of the agreement] can be presented by any of the two parties for a period of two years, counting from the date of signing this agreement (Dors and Fuahea 2000).

Nonetheless, many stakeholders on the islands seem to consider these agreements not so much the conclusions of negotiations but rather the closely regulated stepping stone for perpetual ongoing adversarial negotiations. A trade union leader commented in 2015:

We make amendments when we want to improve the text [of an agreement]. We have to wait two years before we can put an amendment in place. Since the 2012 agreement, we have already had two amendments. These amendments show the drive to move things forward. – Trade Union leader

Remarkably, when it comes to relationships and negotiations taking place on the islands or with metropolitan representatives residing on the islands – instead of negotiating in Paris or with representatives flying in from Paris – it seems the complementary identities are somewhat less adversarial, or the islanders feel in a much stronger positions.

When they [newly arriving metropolitan representatives] come, they have to learn ... that is a problem when he is smart, it is not a problem when he is weak.  
– Catholic Bishop

The Vice-Rector was dismissed ... they send his successor ... but the local staff then chased him away. – Director, Catholic Education Department

The sometimes acrimonious or adversarial character of the development of complementary identities is notable in many other non-sovereign island territories. In Greenland, Grydehøj noted how colonial echoes can be heard in the metropole. 'Danes cast their paternalism as nursing Greenlandic society to the point where it can stand on its own two feet', Grydehøj writes, before citing a Greenlandic commentator with juxtaposed views: 'The Greenlandic people were oppressed and exploited in the colonial era, and also in the time after 1953 when Greenland was opened up and received the status of a Danish municipality' (Grydehøj 2016:107). Very similar adversarial processes can be seen in the Dutch non-sovereign island territories. One well-known Dutch Caribbean expert noted: 'The Dutch Caribbean on its own two feet; that is really asking too much' (Oostindie 2015). In juxtaposition, a well-known businesswoman in Bonaire publicly vented as follows: 'These incomprehensible rules and these 'white-man' things need to stop ... They want to take the little money that we have' (Osepa 2013).

### **Historical knowledge of the relationship is a driver for islanders**

Most islanders squarely placed their contemporary negotiations with metropolitan authorities about education in the framework of decades or even centuries of engagement and negotiations with metropolitans.

It is difficult to make progress in these aspects [of funding, management, curriculum, employment], even though we have more than 40 years of making agreements with the state. – Civil Servant, Territorial Assembly

In the beginning of the mission, teaching was done in Wallisian and Futunian. Only later did we integrate a little bit of French. From 1969 onwards we began to do everything in French. – Catholic Bishop

There is a risk that we portray our ancestors a little bit as idiots. As if they followed like sheep. I want to look a bit farther, because if my ancestors succeeded to live for thousands of years in this vast Pacific with all its challenges, then they must have been as intelligent as I am ... My ancestors discovered that with these people, they can live better than they did before. This is my way to see this, otherwise I would make my ancestors look stupid. – Director, Catholic Education Department

In addition, most interviewees also displayed in a conversational tone a very detailed knowledge of events, numbers, and agreements that had taken place in decades past, which framed and guided their engagement with today's metropolitan authorities.

You state the agreement on Wallis and Futuna is unique, but I'm not sure about that; maybe the New Hebrides have copied Wallis, or the other way around ... In 1961 ... the French state did not have a school here but there had been attempts to establish a public school in 1933 ... that public school was operational for about three years... There was a second attempt after the war, but that did not last either ... In 1961 it was said that education was the responsibility of the French state ... I remember reading a government paper... about the French administrator working with the three kings ... In 1962 or 1963 the king of Wallis said, 'We will take care of the schools'. They demanded the French state establish Catholic schools. – Senator

The trade union started in 1985, and was strengthened in 1987 ... In 1994, we had 34 teachers with a certificate in primary education [CEP, France's lowest teaching qualification] and 7 who had acquired the elementary teaching certificate [CEAP, the qualification for teaching assistant], and 13 with the elementary college qualification [BEC, one level up]. – Trade Union leader

Again, islanders in other non-sovereign island territories have also used their detailed knowledge of past negotiations and agreements with their metropolises as an effective lever in today's negotiations with metropolitan officials. Often these metropolitan officials have limited information about their counterparts and are tasked to negotiate with the islanders for only a few years before they move on making room for the next inexperienced, often junior, official. For example, when the people of the British non-sovereign island territory of St Helena had disagreements over citizenship with London in the 2000s, they based their position on a royal decree of Charles II of 1673, stating the islanders were 'subjects to all intents and purposes ... within this our kingdom of England' (Royle 2010:206). Metropolitan negotiators admitted their 'ignorance' when it came to the legal consequences of such historic agreements. One of them freely disclosed: 'I know that I am not the only [one]' (Moore 2000:10).

## SECOND PERSPECTIVE: DIVERGING LEGALITIES BETWEEN WALLIS AND FUTUNA AND FRANCE

The second perspective in Wallis and Futuna that drives their relationship and negotiations with metropolitan France is the phenomenon that we define as 'diverging legalities'. Our interviewees often commented on how policies or the enforcement of policies can differ markedly between the metropolitan territory and their islands. This contradiction has two distinct elements: first, an unequal treatment of islands by the metropole and, second, the unequal treatment of metropolitan regulations by islanders. Both ways are visible in the education policies and practices between Paris and Wallis and Futuna.

### **Unequal treatment of Wallis and Futuna by the metropole**

All interviewees expressed complaints about Paris giving the education sector in Wallis and Futuna unequal treatment in comparison with the education sector in metropolitan France. Our review of the agreements and the amendments over nearly 50 years suggests two

recurring bones of contention. One is the question of how the primary school teachers should be categorized and how their professional development, career path, and salaries should be defined. For a long time, there was no formal teacher training in Wallis and Futuna and many teachers were professionally unqualified or underqualified and relied on occasional workshops for their training. However, being unable to obtain formal qualifications, most teachers were excluded from career and salary progression. This was one of the drivers for conflicts after the late 1980s. After prolonged multi-party negotiations, the University Institute for Teacher Training (UFM) opened a branch on Wallis in the mid-1990s to enable teachers in Wallis and Futuna to acquire professional teaching qualifications. The 1995–1999 agreement between the Catholic mission and the French state now explicitly expects newly recruited teachers to acquire formal qualifications:

Candidates must hold a bachelor's degree. At the end of the recruitment process, the successful candidates undergo initial training at the University Institute for Teacher Training of the Pacific (Wallis and Futuna branch) for 3 years (Bayrou and Fuahea 1995:4).

However, this door to professional qualification and thereby entitlement to be registered and remunerated as a comparably qualified teacher in metropolitan France closed again in 2009 when disagreements among the involved institutions – none of them from Wallis and Futuna – could not be resolved and the Wallis branch of the Institute for Teacher Training was closed.

Since 2009, local branches of the Teacher Training Institute became schools within the university [of New Caledonia], so after that, there was nothing here. No more professional training after the closure of the local office. – Trade Union leader

Most interviewees felt teachers on Wallis and Futuna were not only worse off than their colleagues in metropolitan France, but also worse off compared to colleagues in other French overseas territories.

We wanted to be at the same level as our colleagues on New Caledonia and French Polynesia ... and even the metropole ... They adapt French laws at will. – Trade Union leader

We wanted to align with New Caledonia and French Polynesia. But we never managed to get to the same level. – Teacher

The second continuous topic of acrimony between Wallis and Futuna and Paris is the question of what is actually meant when all agreements state that the French state assumes the responsibility for expenses of the primary schools managed by the Catholic mission. Throughout the decades, the documents reveal a tug-of-war in which the Catholic mission wants the French state to reimburse expenses for maintenance of buildings, food and lodging in the boarding schools, teaching material and equipment, and a general increase in the costs of living and running the facilities. The French state, on the other hand, seems to want to keep reimbursements limited. Over the decades, in a process of two-steps-forward-one-step-backward, it seems the Catholic mission saw its reimbursements very gradually increase. Until the mid-2000s, the agreements indicated the Catholic mission, as the owner

of the school buildings, was also responsible for their maintenance. The 2000–2005 agreement, for example, noted:

The Director of Catholic education is responsible for the management of chattels and real estate used by primary schools located in the Territory (Dors and Fuahea 2000:3).

However, after decades of contentious debates, a 2006 study by the Vice-Rectorate – as the representative of the French state on the islands – acknowledged for the first time that expenses for education might be higher than norms used to determine expenses in metropolitan France.

In spite of a declining enrolment [of students], the structural costs remain the same ... The price of electricity ... we find, although not having heating expenses, a level of expenditure identical or superior to that of what it is in a school of metropole ... Given the particular climatic conditions (hot and very humid climate), equipment is severely tested. Its life span is therefore less than that of an identical product in the metropole... (Vice-Rectorat des Iles de Wallis et Futuna 2006:5, 7).

The 2007–2011 agreement is the first agreement in which the French state agreed to make a contribution to costs of maintenance and consumables, through an annually negotiable process:

Each year, the State allocates to the Catholic Education Department a single grant for the maintenance and operation of the schools and the boarding school for which it is responsible; for the acquisition of pedagogical tools and materials (Didier and De Rasilly 2006:5).

However, even with this new arrangement, several interviewees still conclude the Catholic mission is effectively subsidizing the French state's responsibilities in the education sector, instead of the other way around:

Practically we have about the same sum per pupil ... but when we look at the costs per pupil, there is no indexation. So, in comparison with the metropole, there is less to keep the school running ... the French state believes this is sufficient, but it does not take account of the situation. Life is twice as expensive. To give you an example, electricity in the metropole is €0.30 le KWh, here it is €1.  
– Catholic Bishop

In three months, there will be no money left. One could say it is up to the French state, to the Vice-Rectorate, to take its responsibility, because education is a citizen's right. – Senator

This situation is really unique because in France, private schools are subsidized by the French state, but they remain private schools. Here, the private school is the school of the Republic because there are no other schools. The French State must pay in full for this school, which many people in Paris do not understand.  
– Director, Catholic Education Department

Interestingly, this islanders' view that they were being short-changed by Paris was sometimes shared by representatives from Paris stationed on the islands. The

aforementioned 2006 study by the Vice-Rectorate on the costs of primary education on the islands concluded:

The current amount of the subsidy does not allow for all repairs or renewals of equipment as they should be under normal operating conditions (Vice-Rectorat des Iles de Wallis et Futuna 2006:4).

In other non-sovereign island territories across the globe, similar unequal treatment of islanders by their metropole can be seen. One not uncommon way of unequal treatment is in the field of citizenship rights. American Samoans, for example, hold a US passport. However, it has a singularly unique imprint: 'The bearer is a United States national and not a United States citizen' (Aleinikoff 2000:201). As a US 'national', American Samoans can settle in the USA, but are excluded from many civil service jobs, cannot vote, and cannot sponsor the immigration of family members. Samoan protests have been increasing, but even taking the matter to court proved fruitless (US Court of Appeals 2015) and American Samoans complain bitterly: 'This second-class status continues to exist' (Morrison 2013:1).

### **Unequal application of metropolitan legislation by Wallis and Futuna**

Many of our interviewees felt at ease arguing that some metropolitan laws on the secular character of state services do not apply to Wallis and Futuna. Two particular practices stood out. First, as detailed earlier, the islands' education sector does not separate church and state—in this case an essential state service like primary education—and thereby seems to be at odds with the French constitution. Reviewing negotiations between the islands and Paris, Fazi concluded, 'Wallis and Futuna ... where national legislation applies only when there are explicit provisions to that effect' (2012:141).

In France, there is the separation of church and state. That is a law that was never enacted on Wallis and Futuna. – Director, Catholic Education Department

[Minister] Pierre Joxe said [in 1991] that the French state was a secular state ... But I can tell you that is not the case ... the statute for Alsace-Lorraine establishes that priests are state officials and paid by the French state. I think there was nobody in the room who knew Wallis and Futuna. The French state has ceded the public education to the Catholic mission. It is history, like in Alsace-Lorraine ... Wallis and Futuna have never been a colony. – Senator

I had the impression that the French state wanted to take the catechesis out of the agreement. But we have wanted to keep the catechesis because the French state has given the education to a Catholic organization. It is therefore normal that religious teaching is a part of the education. – Civil Servant, Territorial Assembly

The key stakeholders in the education sector in Wallis and Futuna continue to be successful in upholding local practices of integrating religion into education even when more recent laws reinforce the secular character of the state and public services in France. In particular, France's Law 228 of 2004 was explicitly enacted to reiterate that it was forbidden to display religious symbols in public schools. While nicknamed 'the headscarf ban' for allegedly targeting Muslims, it is remarkable that this law's second article starts by explicitly noting it applies to overseas jurisdictions such as Wallis and Futuna and Mayotte. Nonetheless,



with support of parents and the Catholic mission, classrooms retain crucifixes and are also adorned with portraits and words of wisdom from the Pope and saints.

Second, when it comes to recruitment and employment practices in the education, several interviewees talked about employment practices that meet local values but are unlikely to be in line with legal metropolitan requirements.

The Catholic education system of Wallis and Futuna has its own pedagogical team. There are seven or eight people employed to assist teachers to do their work ... In France, it does not work like this ... In a department where there can be 200 schools, there are five or six pedagogy advisers. We have eight for 16 schools.  
– Catholic Bishop

If there is a call for applications for vacancies then, with equal qualifications, the positions must go to young Wallisians or Futunians and not to metropolitans.  
– Trade Union leader

Positions of female cleaners and laborers could be abolished, but at the same time there is also a hiring. We do not hire just anyone, we hire those people who are in need, those who do not have any source of income. – Teacher

Other non-sovereign island territories show a comparable practice in ignoring or actively circumventing the equal application of metropolitan law, particularly when such laws or regulations collide with islanders' different, complementary identity. The Cayman Islands, for example, are one of several British Overseas Territories that resist the application of metropolitan legislation in the field of homosexuality and same-sex marriages. When the UK decriminalized homosexuality in 1967, the Cayman Islands refused to comply and kept homosexual acts as a criminal offence. Decades of negotiations between London and the islands were unfruitful and in 2000 the UK resorted to imposing decriminalization, overruling local authorities. Next, the islanders recast their resistance by adopting a new Bill of Rights in 2009, which establishes 'the right to marry a person of the opposite sex'; endeavouring to deflect future calls to legalize same-sex marriages (Vlcek 2013:357). The Cayman Islands are not unique. In 2012, the UK government determined that six UN conventions on Human Rights still needed 'full compliance' in all overseas territories 'by the end of 2013' (Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2012:52). A progress report on the efforts found only three of the fourteen territories had shown full compliance in 2016 (Clegg et al. 2016:53).

## CONCLUSIONS

Since the mid-1980s, the overseas territories, mostly islands, of former colonial powers no longer seek decolonization through independence from their metropolises. Instead, the colonial relationships between these non-sovereign island territories and their former colonial metropolises are being transformed into entirely new relationships: 'decolonising but not disengaging' (Baldacchino 2013:53). Both sides take an active role in negotiating the transformation of these relationships and these are ongoing, continuous processes. For example, between 2001 and 2012, at least 12 of the 14 Overseas Territories of the UK have had legal and financial agreements on their relationship with London renegotiated (Hendry 2012). Because these agreements appear to be 'complex ... fragmented, and remarkably personalized, ad hoc governance arrangements' (Hintjens and Hodge 2012:190), it can be argued

that agreements more reflect the interests and views of islanders than of metropolitan parties. Similarly, Mrgudovic concludes for the 11 French overseas territories that ‘there are as many statuses as there are overseas territories’ (Mrgudovic 2012:95). The same pattern is notable in the six Dutch overseas territories (Veenendaal and Oostindie 2018). While it is clear that most communities in non-sovereign island territories succeed in imprinting their interests on their agreements with their metropolises, less seems to be known how the islanders view these relationships and the negotiations.

To offer some insights, this article presents a case study of the negotiations about primary education between Wallis and Futuna as a French Pacific territory and metropolitan France. The case study rests on interviews with islanders who have been involved in these negotiations as representatives of four relevant institutions (a politician, a civil servant, church officials, and trade union workers) and a review of the resulting formal agreements between 1969 and 2017. Our analysis of the interviews and the agreements suggests that these islanders negotiate with Paris with two perspectives in mind. First, the islanders seem to view the relationship with Paris as one of complementary identities. This is perhaps best captured in the statement, ‘We are French as the others. But even taking that into account, we also say to ourselves: We are still masters of our own lands’. Two of the four key elements of these complementary identities for the islanders are the shared nationality and the explicit acknowledgement that both parties have complementary identities that are developed with mutual agreement. For example, the foundational agreement of 1969 stipulates that education in Wallis and Futuna will be ‘inspired ... by metropolitan education’ but that ‘the necessary adaptation will be made by agreement between the parties’.

The other two key elements to the islanders’ perspective of complementary identities are more reflective of tensions in the relationship. First, while the engagement with the metropole is continuous, it is also experienced by many as quite adversarial. One islander exclaimed, ‘They take us for idiots!’ Second, islanders view and shape the relationship with detailed knowledge of the history of negotiations and agreements since the 1959 referendum in which they voted to become ‘integral part of the French Republic’ and use this knowledge as a lever in negotiations with metropolitan representatives who seldom stay for more than a couple of years.

The second perspective with which islanders view their relationship with metropolitan France can be characterised as one of diverging legalities. Here, two elements are in play. On the one hand, Paris can decide to withhold some legal entitlements to islanders. This happens for example in salary pay for teachers. On the other hand, local stakeholders in Wallis and Futuna succeed in not applying some metropolitan legal principles in the islands. For example, the various stakeholders on the islands have ensured that all children are educated as Catholics in primary schools managed by the Catholic mission—quite a feat considering metropolitan France takes the secular character of the state and public services such as education as a fundamental value of the republic.

In a wider theoretical framework, we wonder how these findings speak to our understanding of identity and citizenship in a postcolonial context for communities in far-flung overseas territories of former colonial metropolises. The findings suggests that Said’s classic analysis of hierarchical relationships—‘symmetrical to, yet diametrically inferior to a European equivalent’ (Said 1978:72)—does not quite apply. However, the findings also suggest that the other classic analysis by Anderson of identity and citizenship as one of a spatially imagined community of insiders—‘conceived as a deep, horizontal, comradeship’ (Anderson 1983:7)—is also not applicable. We would argue that this case study of negotiations between Wallis and Futuna and metropolitan France confirms the direction and dynamics that have also been seen in other non-sovereign island territories. It suggests contemporary decolonization processes are driven largely by people at the far ends of the

former colonial empire, moving towards more complex, unique and intertwined ties with the metropole on terms that islanders are actively shaping. This is a ‘practiced sovereignty’ based on, or rooted in, a colonized people’s territoriality that Prinsen and Blaise defined as ‘Islandian sovereignty’ (2017) and Le Meur and Mawyer identified as essential to ‘Oceanian sovereignties’ (This volume). In the eyes of islanders, that may be the most historically grounded, appreciated, and fruitful form of decolonization.

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