



Very long flippers, a head more than a third long and bumps with sensitive hairs as big as golf balls are the characteristics of this baleen whale.

September in Polynesia is the whale season. Since a few weeks, “Yo !” sails with megapteras or humpback whales. On the leeward side of Tahiti, Moorea, Huahine or Tahaa, these giants (15 meters and 30 tons average) come to frolic, seduce or give birth before departing to the very rich waters of the Antarctic for austral summer.

Protected shores, warm waters, cool climate conditions, remoteness, scarcity of predators, will offer to their mating the best success rate and to new born, the best survival odds.

Coming from the great south, whales go through the Austral archipelago where some will stay (Rurutu). Others will go north. The last ones to leave are mothers and calves and can be seen till November. Suckling females have lost 30% of their weight but 4 or 5 months old whale calves are strong enough to make the 6 000 km long trip and go from tropical waters to Austral Ocean whose temperature is barely of a few Celsius degrees.

The way that these animals orient themselves remains unknown: hypothesis like magnetite cells in the brain that makes them “feel” earth magnetic fields or vocal signals sung by the great males are numerous but remain unsatisfactory.

The presence of these animals in French Polynesian waters is relatively new, less than 200 years. To the contrary of turtles, rays, sharks which are abundant, one finds no whales in any myth, no artisanal craft to their effigy. Is this absence the expression of the population frustration not to be able to capture those monsters? Or is it a testimony of their absence in French Polynesian waters?

This last hypothesis is confirmed by occidental whalers tales who from the 19th century raid, prospect, exploit without any restriction almost towards extinction the smallest part of the Pacific (150 000 specimens in 1880, 12 000 at best nowadays). At that time, Tahiti is a logistic base famous for its pleasant life and not a hunting place. The causes of why this population had chosen French Polynesian waters for a new reproduction field are still unknown.

Human migrations



Oceania – The « Invisible Continent » and the Polynesian triangle.

The reasons that lead « Lapita » populations to move from one island to another in audacious sailing trips to explore, colonize and make them the most dispersed people of the planet are hypothesis that cannot be verified. Despite its extreme dispersion, the “Invisible Continent” which lies across millions of km² of ocean presents ethnic homogeneity, close societies organization systems, a language unity and similar exposition to recent history even if decolonization process were different.

As a convention, the « Invisible Continent » is divided in 3 blocs:

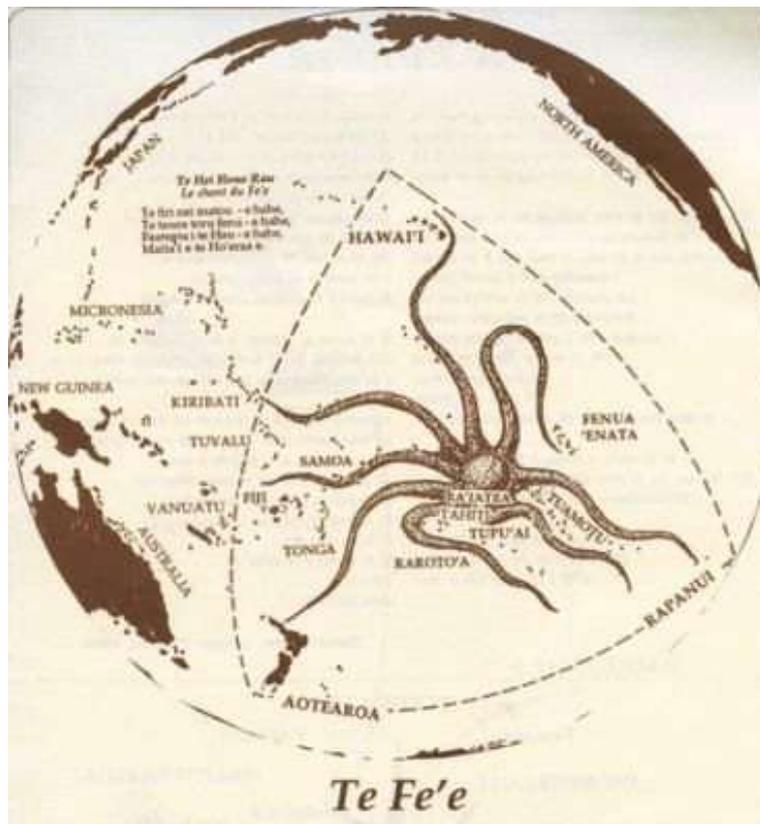
- Micronesia : from Mariannes to Gilbert Islands located North of the Equator,
- Melanesia : New Guinea, Salomon islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji,
- Polynesia which represents the Maori identity: from Hawaii to New Zealand, from Easter island to the kingdom of Tonga with Tahiti in the middle of the triangle.

Such a meticulous settlement of the smallest land (a way to solve demographic exceeds) demonstrates nautical skills, a knowledge of the sky and the sea and a passion for exploring that the first Europeans navigators could not believe, being used to go from one continent to another and who entered the Pacific ocean looking for the Austral Continent.

These qualities were lost progressively at the very far ends of the triangle: in New Zealand where the existence of a great rich land made navigation skills unnecessary – the nowadays expertise is to link to the Navy performances- and Easter island where great trees were destroyed to build high stone statues (that jealous neighbors quickly brought down) to the extent that people would forget how to build canoes. They remain significant in Tahiti where the most famous sport event is the Hawaiki Nui Va’a race which regroups a hundred dugout canoes with 6 rowers’ teams for a 3 days race between Huahiné, Raiatéa, Tahaa and Bora Bora.



Tag at Papeete – From the Tikis of Polynesia or Hawai'i to the Moai of Rapanui.



*Island migrations in the Pacific
(Centre Polynésien des Sciences Humaines Te anavaharau)*

Before Europeans arrived, the two key concepts of the religious and politic Polynesian life were MANA and TAPU. Mana was the sacred power that the god has and enables him to act. It can be transmitted to men: a powerful tribe chief had a great Mana. But he could also lose it, and thus justify his defeats.

TAPU became Tabou in French or taboo in English. Something which was Tapu could be sacred or under a malediction, or a royal census. This concept was used, among other things, as a social control tool to discard some subjects. Today, in everyday life, it means forbidden. A poster on a motu in Huahiné reads: “Tapu 10h – 14h”, during this period, tourists are brought to the island for lunch. They are to remain undisturbed!

Despite 200 years of fierce evangelization, superstition is still present everywhere in everyday life. Tales of malediction brought down to workers that moved a tiki are numerous.



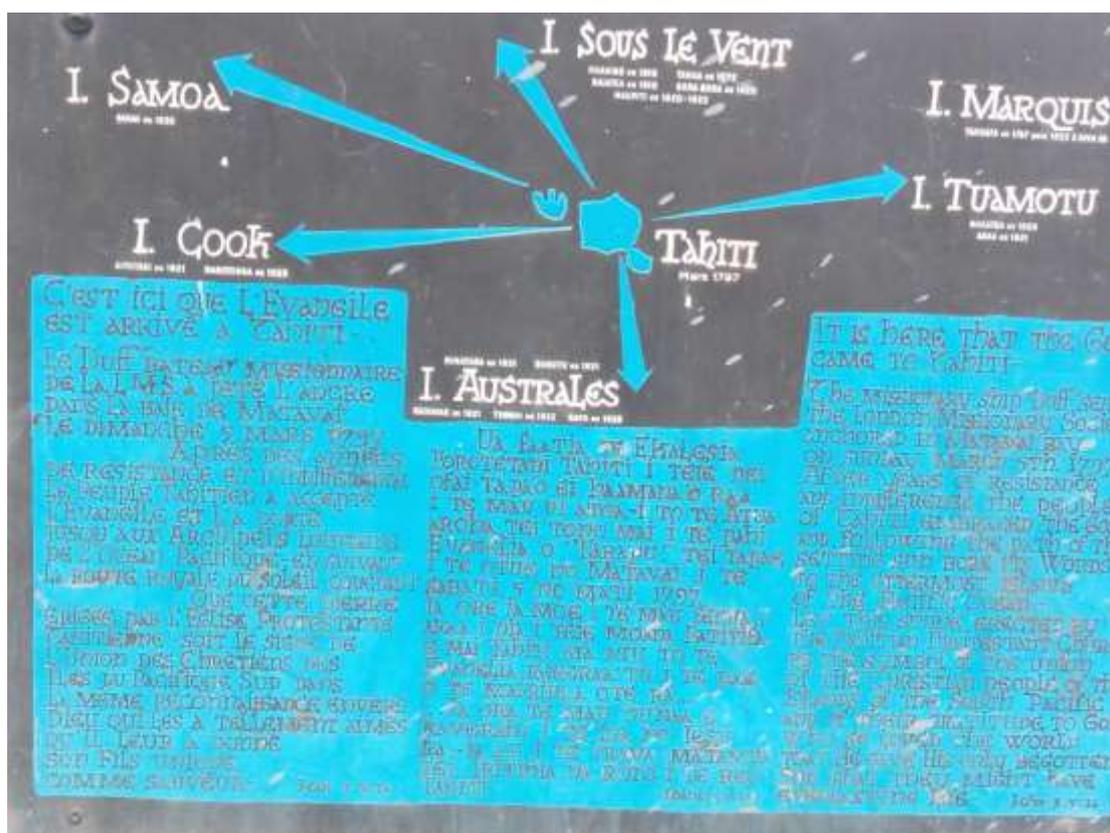
The Marae Arahurahu in Tahiti: both ancestors and god worship place and center of political network. This one was built between the 15th and 18th centuries. The Castle of Chenonceau (Chateau de la Loire – France) was built in 1513!

The discovery of Tahiti by Bougainville in 1760, with its many natural resources and its inhabitants apparently welcoming and pacifists (once the cannons had established a new power scale) at a period where philosophical politics was reflecting on “the State of Nature” will for long centuries pertain the romantic image of a land of paradise.

But, all navigators were not as magnanimous as Captain Cook which came for the first time to observe the passage of Venus and thus contribute to the calculus of longitude dear to sailors. To the contrary, after him came riotous dealers, pleasure and food famished, convicts and mutineers, from which the most famous are those of the Bounty, beachcombers and missionaries.

They will all come: Catholics, Protestants, Adventists, Pentecotists, Mormons... They will settle more or less easily once the initial suspicion of their motives has been raised, that is their strategy of soul conquests thought as negligible.

Used by kings (Pomare II) to reach politic goals, they obtain in exchange the conversion of people. At the same time, they become the only comfort for a population distressed by all the changes it overcome, insisting on education (traducing of the Bible and teaching of reading).



Commemorative slab of the arrival of the Duff, ship of the London Missionary Society on a monument close to the point Venus lighting house.

Missionaries also cured people using western medicine. It's the least they could do considering that infectious sicknesses killed many among an estimated population of hundreds of thousands of people at the period of the first encounter (Tahiti 1767 65 000; 1797 16 000; 1830 9 000; it will again be over 10 000 only at the beginning of the 20th century; it is now 183 000 or 2 French Polynesians out of 3).

Of course these actions go along preaching, and moral conduct enforcement through the redaction of codes of laws; some very nice ways to impose models of tolerant theocracy!

Religious games won't prevent Tahiti from becoming a French possession in 1842. France (still traumatized by its Napoleonic defeats) leaned on the Catholic Church impatient of competing with the Protestants already well established.

Neglected by the English, occupied by their dirty war in New Zealand, the king Pomare V had no choice but to give up to France its sovereignty over all the islands dependent of the Tahiti Crown. These possessions form with the other archipelago (including the Catholic theocracy of the Gambiers), the “French Establishments of Oceania”.

In the 19th century, European powers had already shared between themselves the world into colonial empires, but their position towards the Pacific territories remains ambiguous. They prefer to maintain the half-fiction that these States are independent without giving status equivalent to theirs. Above all they are reluctant to leave other nations to get political, economic or strategic advantages even in places where stakes were still imperfectly identified.

During the next years, differences of treatment increase according to the attraction land would have on colonies, the existence of resources including human ones and above all, the way these powers will define their responsibility towards the people they control.

From a Polynesian / Maori population initially homogenous six systems will be issued:

Hawaii (American model) : Maoris are parked in reserves, are forced acculturation, become a minority, the islands group is like any other state, multi-ethnic, 40 % from Asia, 25 % Europeans, 25 % half breed, 10 % Maoris.

Tonga (local model): the Kingdom was extremely smart and kept its independence, playing with the rivalry between great powers (France – Great Britain then Germany). A small free country never colonized. They are the only Pacific people that do not have a passport to a developed country, and therefore have very few remittances.

Easter (local model): the Moais breeding on a large scale leads to the devastating of the land, starvation and auto destruction.

For the English, very early it was admitted that indigenous people have a fundamental right to a fair treatment and to the possession of their resources; but men propose, History disposes, it results 2 models that show the difference between theory and practice :

New Zealand (English model #1): A large part of the Maoris having eliminated themselves thanks to the firearms given to them during the first part of the century, the English crown (being at first reticent), starts colonization on a large scale during the period 1840 – 1850, leading to the Maori wars of 1860 and 1872 and the confiscation of land; actually the Maoris represent 15% of the population.

Cook and Fiji/Samoa, etc. (English model #2): on an ethnic basis, Melanesians Fiji/Samoa have very Polynesian cultural, linguistic and religious structures. Development of local structures of government under the considerate supervision of the Crown (Kiwis being at the fore position), Fiji was the country of the first Pacific university but its population was diluted by half with massive immigration of workforce from India which represents nowadays 45 % of the population... welcome

French Polynesia (French model): for the French, it was sufficient to put an autocratic regime to guarantee main administrative functions and to collect taxes. This leads to neglect Polynesia. We are going to measure some consequences in the following (the treatment of New Caledonia, that have important mining resources was different). Ethnic repartition: 68 % Polynesians, 12 % Europeans, 15 % half breed, 5% from Asia.

French Polynesia nowadays.

(Gambier / Australes unexplored)

For the « Yo ! Team » it remains simple on the emotional side:

A magnificent cruising basin, rich waters in the Marquesas / Tuamotu, fair weather at least 6 months a year (beside the cyclonic season), anchorages with low frequentation and generally well protected : once in the lagoon, no problem.

The security of property and persons is assured, high level infrastructures (administration, transport, wealth), correct provisioning, well, one does not feel like being in the middle of the Pacific.

Yachties do not get it wrong that stay for the maximum authorized time.

Locals do not get it wrong either, cool, smiling, considerate, living well even if sometimes modestly, and largely do not think of living elsewhere.

We will be back.



Motu Murimahora in Huahiné. Paradise !

For the « Yo ! Team », on the side of livelihood it is not brilliant: (For simplification, Francs CFP were converted in Euros at a rate of 120 FCP/€).

During the process of decolonization after WWII, the French position is particular. She never considered its islands as colonies but as Oversea Territories that can undergo reforms: indigenous people get French nationality but are not represented in the Parliament, and independence is non-negotiable. This position is even stronger after the referendum instigated by the General de Gaulle, where the association with France is voted with a comfortable majority. The independence movement hardly finds any legitimacy. This will not prevent it until 2013 to constitute a systematically opposed minority making impossible serious governing, already stained with corruption.



Papeete Harbor.

There are 43 airports on all the territory, supposed to solve the territorial and social discontinuity, but very often synonym of abuse.

The « Etablissements Français d'Océanie » took the name of French Polynesia in 1957. The intern autonomous status attributed in 1984 was once reinforced in 1996, the year when the nuclear tests stopped, then in 2004: the authorities of French Polynesia are competent in all fields that are not the core attributes of the State which will keep these competences: defense, foreign affairs, immigration control, and currency. The “Haut-Commissaire de la République” is the Government’s representative of the French Republic.

The great political instability (11 governments) and the progressive withdrawing of the CEP (Centre d’Essais de Polynesie) during the period of 2004-2013, mainly explain the economic deterioration, the lack of territorial development strategy and the absence of free individual enterprise spirit which we see today.

The last modification of the voting system dates from May 2013. The Gaston Floss party won the elections, “because with him it is less worse” over the party of Oscar Temaru the independentists leader. Co-founder of the RPR, Gaston became President for the 5th time since 1984, but just left because of a condemnation for fictional employments. There was no presidential pardon this time....

Bankrupted in 2009, French Polynesia has an objective of going back to account balancing to increase its debt capacity and thus finance its development (mmmh ?): it is a bit late in fact as debts have already rocketed in 10 years : + 60% between 2000 and 2009, or from 3 to 12 years of reimbursement (it is nonetheless true that moneylenders believe that France’s guaranty will play).

This situation, and the level of the indicator that measure income disparities (Gini coefficient) close to that of South American states makes the local press to write that French Polynesia is “a developing country”.



Any visitor in French Polynesia is surprised by the prices; the common complaint is «it's all so expensive ».

A survey of 2010 shows that on average, prices are higher by 26% than in Mainland; it can reach 75 % for food, as they represent 25% of a family budget compared to 15% in Mainland. Every time, we get the same answer: it is because the CEP introduced over evaluated salaries which led to high inflation and whose withdrawal had to be compensated with PPN (Prime Necessity Products)

But in real life, one must not forget that prices reflect the taxation structure and it is different from on the Mainland : taxes come are 71% indirect (VAT 13%, importations taxes 30% and wines and spirits 250%...) there is no income taxes and wages do not have any social contributions, well... let's look at some figures:

€uros	French Polynesia	Mainland
Gross Monthly Income (average)	2583	2830
Net Monthly Income (average)	2325 (estim / no Income Taxe)	2128 (Income Taxe)

As a first approximation (even a second one), it is better to be a salary man in French Polynesia than in Mainland, and you get reduced heating invoices... Interesting.

The GDP (Gross Domestic Product) per capita is 17 500€ (2009). It represents 64% of the GIP in Mainland and is close to those of the Reunion or French Guyana. It is well lower than in New Caledonia, as it has the highest wealth level produced by capita of French Overseas Territories. The net State subsidiaries, the survival perfusion, represent 24% of this same GIP (they represented 50% at the time of the CEP), or 1.1 billion €. [it represents 2 days of net income (no social taxes, income taxes, rent, heating, food) per mainland worker. To make it short, need to wake up on the 2nd and 3rd of January when it's cold, dark, raining, take the tube to go to work... to sustain French Polynesia].



To accompany the predicted reduction of financial transfers from the Mainland (planned as diminishing post-CEP subsidiaries) and to reinforce its economic autonomy, French Polynesia chose to develop replacement industries to get value out of natural advantages (fishing, tourism, pearl, coprah, vanilla, noni...).

All these industries are in crisis and 2008 cannot be the only explanation. The lack of encouragement towards investments and individual initiative, the setting of protectionist barriers to stay isolated from competition, and high taxes are also responsible:

- Coprah (dry coconut from which coconut oil is extracted and perfumed with Tiaré makes monoï) is cultivated on 2/3 of the surface, the whole production is bought by “l’Huilerie de Tahiti” at a price fixed by the government (1100€/ton) which compensate “l’Huilerie de Tahiti” for the difference with the international price (460€/ton). The annual production is of 10 000 tons, the coconut tree of French Polynesia represents 7 million Euros subventions.
- Aquaculture technologies developed with IFREMER are being used in New Caledonia for a long time, but locally they can produce yearly only a few tons... what a performance; fortunately, the project is of some interest to Chinese investors that could transform an atoll in the Tuamotu in a huge farm → one atoll is sufficient to fulfill the needs in protein of all Polynesians, but sure let the Chinese do it.
- 5 million km² of ocean under direct control and professional fishing can only produce 16 000 tons a year; the local model is such, that it is cheaper to buy frozen chicken than fresh tuna. Strange. It is difficult to understand how one can export fish to the US and import back beef or chicken...



Parrot fish fished at night with lights in the Huahiné lagoon. They are coral eaters. Their length does not exceed 25 cm. There is nothing else left. Turtles, groupers have all already been eaten.

- Fruits and vegetables: local production 14 000 tons a year – Importation: 10 000 tons a year, despite the islands looking so green...
- The annual meat importation is of 25 000 tons a year (only 1 000 tons locally); the local myths attribute the meat consumption to tourists and Europeans, or 25 000 people, each of them eating the modest amount of 1 ton a year or 2.5 kg a day. so much for local myths.
- Experiments with wind energy were made in the Australes and Tuamotu. They failed because of the weakness of the winds and the risks of cyclones. Everybody knows, trade winds are so irregular...
- Tourism... one picture is enough.



The 9000 inhabitants of Bora Bora are all employed in the tourist business. From Sofitel to Four Seasons, all chains are here. The average occupancy rate is hardly of 60%. All projects were financed with taxpayback, between 35 and 65 % of the investment. It represents to this day, a total loss of income of 1 billion Euros, a nice present to the international hotel business.

Consequently, the unemployment rate is close to 25% (10% in Mainland). The tertiary sector produces 85% of the total added value in 2009, more a third of it is produced by non-commercial services (administration, education, wealth, social warfare).

Under the direct control of the local government to the baccalaureat, the performance of the education system is low: success rate at the bac is 90%, but only 35% of a generation get the diploma at 20.

Despite the published rate, the situation of education traduces a deep disinterest in the future of the young generations. The lack of support to intern pupils because of the distance leads them to quit school at 16, the vicious circle goes on... sad tropics.

Created in 1995, just before the withdrawal of the CEP, the health security system covers 99% of the population. It is under the menace of structural factors (the aging population) and conjectural (the diminution of contributions because of the economic crisis). One Polynesian out of 8 is in long sickness (high blood pressure, diabetes, the diseases of the 21th century), but only one third of the villages offer drinkable water to inhabitants... search for the mistake.

Until 2008, French State contributed to the financing of the PSG (General Social Protection) and conditioned its later support to the setting of significant reforms. But the per capita deficit of this regime is of the same level as in the Mainland with the highest life expectancy in the whole Pacific.



Rautoanui pass in Raiatea with strong swell from the South.

Helicopter vision

For the French State

- what is at stake, is the control of the Economic Exclusivity Zone, the 5 million km² that makes France the second country (after the US) in term of maritime surface,
- a large envy to diminish the costs of maintaining French Polynesia as it is today.

For Bruxelles

- an outpost in the Pacific supporting the potential diplomatic projections towards China and a background to the “Euro zone”,
- a rising irritation seeing the French incapacity to control its deficit.

For Mainlanders

- the dream, the beach, the coconut trees, at least virtual,
- 1 billion Euros a year, is a lot, remember the Pentecost Monday...

For Popas (the funny name Polynesians give to Europeans, we suppose the malicious suggestion of English people referring to Papists i.e. Catholics, that is the French...), so for Popas, nothing must change, the adventure is at your door, clean, safe, secure, and at no expenses.

For Demis (half breed from mixed marriages between colons and Polynesian aristocracy to secure advantages and power), they keep a great part of the administration and government... they speak two languages, act as mid men between Paris and locals, prioritising their personal interests.

For Tinto (people from Asia, mainly Chinese): they already control the main businesses and trade, a loosening of regulation would increase profit and investment. Beijing is never too far away.

For Polynesians (the 68% of the population living in the valleys or remote islands, the poor parents in each family, those who between American series dream of past time of Maori glory), the stake is about mixity, preserving cultural identity, entering in a world of productivity and alienation from subsidiaries. Apart from the barking of a charismatic Temaru, the reflection has not gone very far. The notion of Polynesian people does not exist, especially across frontiers (no question to share anything with Tonga or Cooks). Because the population is so low (200 000 people in French Polynesia), the language is less and less practiced from generation to generation. Associated with Maoris from Kiwiland, Tonga, Hawaiï, that could be different, but they would need to work for it.

Feel free to imagine strategic visions of the US, China, Kiwis and others....

Best wishes, Sanity, Sobriety

Stephanie / Christophe

Bora Bora – French Polynesia.

30 September 2014

www.yodyssey.com

Photos baleine : www.baleinomane.com, observations de baleine en Polynésie

TOHORA, baleines en Polynésie. Editions Téthys

I.C. Campbell – J.P Latouche. Les insulaires du Pacifique

Rapport annuel 2013 - IEOM (Institut d'Emission d'Outre-Mer)