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Réunion in the 1960s and 1970s: A Population Policy Against the Current?

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Abstract

Réunion has been a French Overseas Territory since 1946. It is located in the south-western Indian Ocean near Madagascar and Mauritius. Because of its history, the contemporary demographic dynamics of Réunion Island is in no way comparable to metropolitan France. The first objective of this paper is to trace the population policy in Réunion since the 1950s, mainly in the areas of migration and birth rate. We shall see that this policy evolves over time, but in form rather than substance. The second objective of this paper is to examine whether in the long term we can truly speak of population policy in Réunion. The third objective is to analyze the interrelationships between demographic measures taken in Réunion and the broader goals of the French state. This may be an item for reflection in a context of globalization where there is considerable mobility and national population policies are increasingly linked to other countries.

Keywords

Réunion, population policy, family planning, migration policy, overseas department

Introduction

Réunion, which has been a French department since 1946, is situated in the Indian Ocean between Madagascar and Mauritius. In terms of its history, and particularly the way in which it was populated from the 17th century onwards, the demographic dynamics of Réunion, just like that of the other overseas departments, is not at all comparable with that of metropolitan France. While the demographic transition of mainland France was spread out over 150 years on either side of the 19th century, that of Réunion took place in the second half of the 20th century and was one of the most rapid in the world.

In the 1960s the French state, continuing the politics which it had pursued for at least two decades on the territory of metropolitan France, encouraged the birth rate there by various measures. On the other hand, the strong demographic growth observed in the overseas departments worried the public authorities, particularly because it could be a destabilizing factor in achieving the integration of the overseas departments in the French Republic, in a national and international context of decolonization. The public authorities were, therefore, confronted with what could be described as a politico-demographic paradox: How could they on the one hand encourage the birth rate in mainland France and slow it down in the overseas departments, while at the same time practicing a general political approach aiming to draw the legal statutes and frameworks of the overseas departments closer to those of mainland France? The object of this article is to analyze certain paths followed in order to resolve this apparent paradox in order to outline better the nature of the population politics pursued in one of the overseas departments in the 1960s-70s: Réunion Island. This will particularly involve bringing to light salient and constitutive elements of the mutual interests of mainland France and this department in the population politics developed over the course of these two decades.

In order to do this, we will begin with a reminder of the demographic and economic context of Réunion at the time of its departmentalization, and we will see the progress made over the second half of the 20th century, which will highlight the role of political action in the development of the island (section 1). The demography of Réunion is interesting in that it has been “organized” since its peopling, and in that the issue of population is still relevant there in the contemporary era, particularly since its departmentalization. The weight of the demographic variable, whether in the political sphere or in public opinion, can be explained both by national and by local considerations (section 2). If these national and local preoccupations are to be considered collectively, the measures taken in Réunion relating to population are nonetheless not simply modeled on those in mainland France – far from it. They are even most often against the current of those of mainland France. Hence, in the 1960s and 1970s, the demographic policy in Réunion was characterized by the desire to reduce fertility, and encouragement was provided for citizens to emigrate away from the department, whereas mainland France encouraged its own birth rate and favored immigration (section 3). It would not be sufficient to speak only of the demographic, economic, social and political context of Réunion as a French department in order to explain the demographic measures which were adopted there. The more general objectives of the French state, in its overseas territories but also in its own internal dynamics, also cannot be excluded from the analysis (section 4). By highlighting internal and external contingencies (Réunion/mainland), this exemplary case may form a part of more general reflection in a context of globalization where the politics of population are conceived increasingly according to political orientations in the wider sense and in connection with other countries (the European level, the notion of co-development, etc.).

1. Dynamics of the population of Réunion

Due to its geographical situation and the way in which it was populated, in the long term the demography of Réunion Island has had very different dynamics from those of mainland France (1.1). More recently, departmentalization has brought in its wake some profound translations in the demographic landscape of Réunion Island (1.2).

1.1. Populating and growth in the long term

It was in 1638 that Réunion, which was uninhabited at the time, was annexed by France. For several decades, the island was only one stop on the route to India. It was at the beginning of the 18th century that economic dynamics truly began to be established with coffee plantations. With a population of several hundred inhabitants in 1714, the labor requirements of the island were provided for by recourse to slavery. Over the course of the 18th century, the slave population accounted for over 80% of the total population of the island (Combeau and Maestri 2002). In the 19th century, the cane sugar culture which had supplanted that of coffee still needed an abundant workforce. After the abolition of slavery in 1848, it was free workers, primarily of Chinese and Indian origin, who were recruited.

This immigration, which was in accordance with short-term economic objectives, was regulated by the local authorities and the large land-owners. With this mode of recruitment of labor and the absence of economic activities other than plantation, for a long time the dynamics of the demography of Réunion was based on immigration more than natural growth.

This situation would have been able to be reversed in the second half of the 19th century, but at the time the island was faced with a disastrous economic and sanitary situation (Catteau and Catteau 1999). The mortality rates oscillated around 50 per thousand. It was not until the 1920s that the number of births regularly exceeded the number of deaths, so that natural population dynamics took over from population growth by immigration. However, this first step towards demographic transition was to be counteracted by the Second World War and several devastating cyclones.

1.2. Departmentalization and its demographic consequences

In November, Paul Demange, Prefect of Réunion, launched a “Call to the inhabitants of Réunion” with these words: “Throughout my visits to the communes, I have been moved by the lamentable physical state of too many of our children and orphans. By a first series of measures, we have tried to provide a remedy to their misery. For several weeks, medicines against malaria have been distributed regularly free of charge to 40 000 children at our schools and orphanages. Moreover, the school canteen allocation has been raised from 5 to 8 Francs per day and per child, which will allow our little ones to gain more substantial nourishment” (quoted in Combeau and Maestri 2002, p.121, own translation).

In a report on the sanitary situation of the island, Inspector General J. Finance (1948) criticizes in turn a noteworthy lack of doctors and qualified personnel, the poverty of the hospitals, and the virtual inexistence of a hygiene service, and the absence of any medical transport, factors “which explain in part the general deficiency of the health of inhabitants of the island, aggravated by the unfavorable economic conditions which Réunion has to fight against” (p.9, own translation).

The economy of Réunion in this period was indeed still oriented towards agricultural activity. The droughts of 1938-39, the food rations from 1941 onwards, several cyclones in 1944, in 1945 and particularly one in 1948 (which caused 165 deaths) were to plunge the population of Réunion into a deep economic and sanitary mire.

While the departmentalization dates back to 1946, it was only around fifteen years later that truly consistent efforts to promote the socioeconomic and sanitary development of the island were undertaken by the French state, in the framework of the legal program of 30 July 1960. From this date onwards, the results in all areas were spectacular, and the indicators in equipment, infrastructure and health spoke for themselves (table 1).

This socioeconomic modernization, which was largely driven by the public authorities (Squarzoni 1986), was accompanied by an epidemiological and demographic transition which was one of the most rapid ever recorded. The total fertility rate went from 6.77 children per woman in 1964 to 3.12

Table 1 : Trends in socioeconomic indicators between 1946 and 1996, Réunion

| | 1946 | 1996 |
|---|------|-------------|
| Percentage of workers in agricultural sector | 65% | 2% |
| Percentage urban | 20% | 86% (1999) |
| Number of Senior High Schools* | 2 | 24 (1997) |
| Number of High School Graduates per year* | 43 | 4600 |
| Percentage of permanent dwellings | 8% | 98% (1999) |
| Number of medical doctors per 1.000 inhabitants | 0,14 | 1,74 |
| Percentage of dwellings with electricity | 12% | 99% |
| Percentage of dwellings with running water | 10% | 97% |
| Number of teachers in Junior and Senior High Schools* | 100 | 6514 (1997) |
| Life expectancy at birth (years) | 48 | 74,6 |
| Infant mortality rate | 160‰ | 6,5‰ |
| Number of cars per 1.000 inhabitants | 5 | 260 (1994) |
| Kilometers of paved roads | 131 | 2724 (1994) |
| Number of phones per 1.000 inhabitants | 10 | 333 |

* population increased approximately threefold between 1946 and 1996

Source : Various publications (in Sandron 2007b)

children per woman in 1979, amounting to a drop of 3.5 children per woman in only 15 years. Infant mortality, which was 164.4 per thousand in 1951, dropped to 15.5 per thousand in 1980. At the same time, infectious and parasitic diseases were replaced by cardiovascular disease and cancers as the principal causes of death. Life expectancy, which was 50 years and 53 years for men and women respectively in 1950, reached 69 and 78 years in 1990.

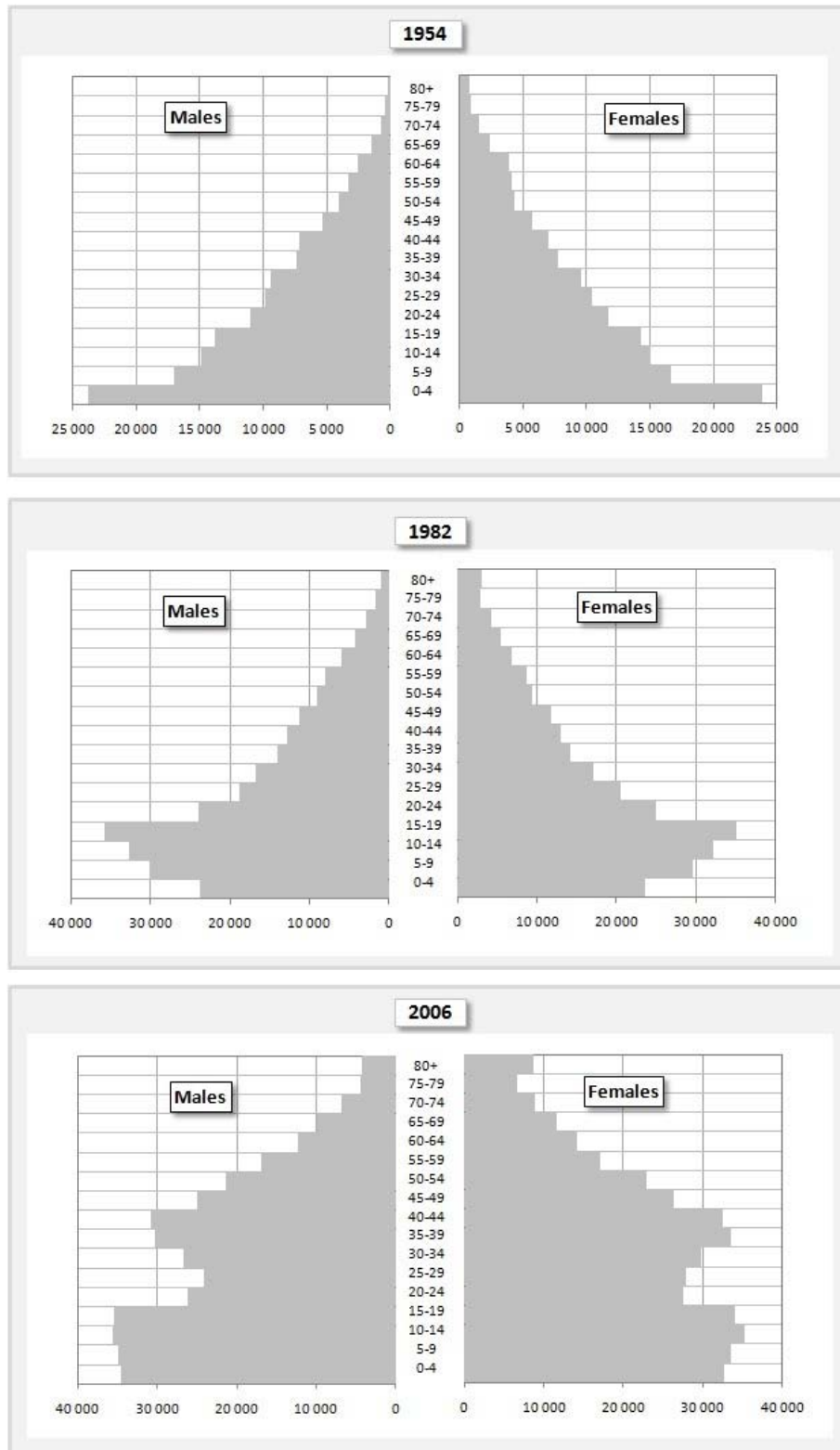
As a consequence, the population of Réunion experienced a significant structural modification, as the age pyramid, which in 1954 was typical of developing countries, was to evolve over a period of fifty years into a configuration closer to that of developed countries, as indicated by the pyramid for 2006 (figure 1). In the decade following the year 2000, if the fertility index had still not reached replacement rate, it was a new issue which worried the local authorities: the rapid aging of the population, which can be identified by comparing the peaks of the three pyramids. We will return to these points.

Although natural growth has been diminishing for half a century, one should nonetheless not forget the extremely high rates at the beginning of the transition. With a rate of 3.5% per year in the period from 1954 to 1961, Réunion reached world record rates (table 2). It is in the context of this unprecedented growth in population numbers in the 1950s and 1960s (table 3) that the global orientation of policy adopted in the area of demography in Réunion should be studied.

2. The issue of population on the agenda

In France, while the issue of population has been a public matter since at least the 19th century, it was at the time of the Second World War that a real population policy was to be developed (2.1). In Réunion, since the peopling of the island, the management of the immigration of agricultural labor had been the only demographic concern of the authorities. With departmentalization, the economic, social, political and demographic changes were such that new preoccupations were to emerge relating to population (2.2). A number of factors can be highlighted to explain this situation (2.3).

Figure 1 : Age pyramids, Réunion (1954, 1982, 2006)



Source : INSEE, Censuses

Table 2 : Population growth rates, Réunion (1954-1999)

| | 1954-1961 | 1961-1967 | 1967-1974 | 1974-1982 | 1982-1990 | 1990-1999 |
|----------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Annual growth rate | 3,5% | 3,0% | 2,0% | 1,0% | 1,9% | 1,9% |
| Annual natural growth rate | 3,5% | 3,3% | 2,3% | 2,0% | 1,8% | 1,6% |
| Annual net migration rate | 0,0% | -0,3% | -0,3% | -1,0% | 0,1% | 0,3% |

Source : INSEE, Censuses, Civil registration

Table 3 : Population size, Réunion (1954-1999)

| Census year | Population |
|-------------|------------|
| 1954 | 274 400 |
| 1961 | 349 300 |
| 1967 | 416 500 |
| 1974 | 476 700 |
| 1982 | 515 800 |
| 1990 | 597 800 |
| 1999 | 706 300 |

Source : INSEE, Censuses

2.1. The emergence of a French population policy

In France, the political economy has long been involved in the issue of population, as were pronatalist groups from the end of the 19th century onwards. The defeat at the hands of Prussia in 1870, which was attributed to an insufficient population, had given rise in France to the idea that a low fertility rate could question the very foundations of the state (Teitelbaum and Winter 1985). It was during the First World War that the first wide-ranging national measure was taken aiming to support the birth rate. This was the creation of family allowances for civil servants, a measure which was to be followed by a law in 1920 forbidding all forms of advertisement and proselytism in favor of methods of contraception and abortion, and then in 1932 by the extension of family allowances to the private sector (Chesnais 2006). However, it was not until just before the Second World War that France introduced an ambitious family policy. In 1939, under the aegis of the new *Haut comité de la population* (High Committee on Population), the Family Code, a decree law of 29 July 1939, was introduced, bringing with it a bundle of measures aiming to support families with at least three children, and hence the birth rate in France.

Is this, however, a true “population policy”? Stycos (1977) indicates a disagreement in terminology between Hope Eldridge, who mentions that at the end of the 1960s, France, with Sweden and India, is one of the few countries to have a coherent population policy, and Jean Bourgeois-Pichat, who opposes this argument. Stycos (1977, p.106) suggests defining population policy as “a statement of important goals, accompanied by a specified set of means to achieve them. A well-elaborated set of means constitutes a program”. This definition is in opposition to a larger understanding of the term according to which population policy includes both explicit and implicit aspects, and both intended and unintended effects. This last understanding of the term is often preferred by demographers, according to Johansson (1991). A middle way is the approach adopted by Teitelbaum (2006), who places the emphasis on the desire of the state to influence demographic developments, without necessarily articulating this as such. If the French population policy did not explicitly have the principal objective of supporting fertility, on the other hand a guiding line exists through the first half of the 20th century according to which the need to financially support large families was constantly reiterated (Watson 1954).

After the Second World War, a consensus was created around the idea of a more proactive population policy, reinforced by the creation of a grouping of actors and institutions: soaring growth of the support services for mother and child, the support sector for maladjusted children, the extension and professionalization of social services, development of family law, creation of the French National Institute for Demographic Studies, organization of a representative body for families, setting up of a family allowance fund, and creation of a Ministry of Population (Lenoir 1991). This was a real institutionalization of the population policy in France (Reggiani 1996), or indeed an “institutional overproduction”, but one which would need to find the path between all of the various actors (Rosental 2003).

In its support for large families, if the “golden age” of the family policy in France may be situated in the period between 1938 and 1958 (Prost 1984), and if this policy followed a relatively clear course, it is nonetheless the case that its ramifications have always been situated either in the more neutral domain of population, or in social issues. The interference of the state in private or even intimate affairs indeed encountered some misgivings on the part of individuals and pressure groups. From the 1960s onwards, this family policy was to become less and less explicit, and was to be integrated into a more general policy of reduction of inequalities by social security benefits. It became less of a “family” policy and more of a “social” policy. With the economic crisis of the 1970s, the changes in mentality regarding the family and the appearance of environmental problems, the pronatalist arguments lost their force. Despite some occasional resurgences pronatalist movements in the 1980s, several ministers and administrations diluted measures which could be considered pronatalist, and thereby weakened their visibility (King 1998). In addition to this dispersion, the multiplication of actors and objectives surrounding the topic of birth rate became an obstacle to the coherence of even a policy specifically dedicated to the area (McIntosh 1986).

2.2. Awareness of the “demographic problems” in Réunion

A short time after the departmentalization, at the request of the Prefect and the General Council of Réunion, Inspector General J. Finance drew up a report on the application procedures in Réunion of the legislation of mainland France with respect to public health, welfare and population. In the words of this report, “...one should therefore admit: the current overpopulation; the fact that the young demographic profile, particularly in the regions of an altitude above 200 meters, may remain for a long time to come; the impossibility of increasing the cultivated land area, due to the relief of the island itself; the virtual impossibility of increasing resources in parallel with the rate of demographic growth” (Finance 1948, p.5, own translation). In the conclusion to this report, the writer notes that “it is necessary to occupy oneself without further delay with finding appropriate means to solve the overpopulation the consequences of which may suddenly become grave”.

In 1955, another report on the population of the four overseas departments, created by the *Haut-Comité consultatif de la population et de la famille* (High Consultative Committee on population and the family), places the emphasis on the imbalance between the population and the resources of the island (Pellier 1955). The observation and the recommendations for the department of Réunion are the following: “It is already the case that the current population subsists only, and with a very low living standard, with the financial aid of mainland France. In order to avoid this burden becoming greater, all means must be used to confront the certain growth of the population: limitation of births, expansion and better distribution of employment and resources, and emigration of surplus population” (p.229, own translation). For his part, in 1956 Prefect Philip wrote in the review *Marchés coloniaux du Monde* (Colonial Markets of the World) an article whose title summarizes its contents: “*Le problème réunionnais est d’abord d’ordre démographique*” (The problem of Réunion is primarily of a demographic nature). Later, in 1972, in a document entitled “*Evolution générale de l’économie des D.O.M.*” (General development of the economy of overseas departments), the Secretary of State in charge of overseas departments and territories stipulates that “whatever the measures taken or envisaged for demographic regulation and the creation of employment, these will not be able even in the best case to the problem of employment in the overseas departments over the course of the VI^e

plan: however worrying it may be in its human implications, migration will remain necessary” (quoted in Maison and Millet 1974, p.352, own translation).

These official stances were to be relayed by analyses published in scientific reviews. For instance, Isnard (1953, p.628) concludes in an abrupt manner in his article on demographic, economic and social problems in Réunion that “under current conditions, it seems that the problem of overpopulation in Réunion cannot be solved” (own translation).

However, it was above all the politicians of Réunion who had a decisive influence on the dominant standpoints in the social debate on the issue of demography. The first was Michel Debré, the son of the paediatrician Robert Debré, who was the creator of the project which was to give birth to the French population and family policy (Rosental 2003). Michel Debré, who also took part in this project, occupied the highest political and ministerial functions from 1948 to 1973, including that of Prime Minister under General de Gaulle from 1959 to 1962, and was also Deputy for Réunion Island from 1963 to 1988. While occupying a pronatalist stance in mainland France, he was instead concerned by the demographic expansion in Réunion (Martinez 2001). In his writings on Réunion, Michel Debré (1974, p.31, own translation) wrote: “The relationship between production capacity and the number of inhabitants is not a fixed relationship. It is of primary importance to know that even if French solidarity is developed to an extreme extent, the island is too heavily populated to be able to experience a long-term rise in living standards.” Other political personalities of the island were also to speak in this vein, such as Paul Vergès, mayor, deputy, and senator, as well as President of the regional council of Réunion Island, who throughout his career never stopped slipping mentions of demographic considerations into his speeches and reflections with relation to socioeconomic issues (Vergès 1993).

2.3. Factors governing the preoccupation

We have already had an opportunity to highlight the factors explaining this preoccupation for the issue of the population of Réunion (Sandron 2007a). Let us recall them here briefly.

First of all, Réunion inherited a French tradition in the matter. Rosental (2003, p.11, own translation) introduced his work on population policies in France in the following manner: “Demography haunts the political culture of France. Its media enthusiastically report rises or falls in births. The importance of a population policy is discussed in electoral campaigns. This is entirely normal, the French believe, without imagining that this sensitivity for demographic issues generally stuns visitors from abroad.” The characteristic is reaffirmed by a personal acute interest in demography shown by several great local political figures.

Moreover, the scope of the demographic transformations from the 1940s onwards was an incontestable reality. Under the classic effect of the drop in mortality and improvements in sanitation, fertility initially rose to reach record values: the birth rate in 1952 was 51 per thousand, and the total fertility rate is around 7 children per woman. The growth rates, which were over 3% per year in the years 1950 and 1960, resulted in a doubling of the population in around twenty years. The same phenomenon was seen on a planetary level, with the establishment of family planning policies for developing countries in the 1970s, while the demographic growth of these countries was at a maximum at the end of the 1960s (Picouet and Sandron 2002).

To the above we must add the specific factor of Réunion being an island, as well as a series of variables were thought to place limits on the population figures: the small size of the territory, its distance from mainland France, the saturation of agricultural areas, the absence of minable resources and energy sources, and the weakness of its economic market. In speeches and writings, both political and scientific, the concepts of “carrying capacity”, “overpopulation”, or “maximum population” are frequently used. As we have previously seen, it is a Malthusian vision of demographic growth which dominates.

Fourthly, demographic discourse cannot be separated from its ramifications on economic and social issues. Departmentalization transformed the agricultural economy into a tertiary economy, particularly in the public sector, but left a significant section of the active population unemployed. Demographic factors were then often presented as a scapegoat, as the active population entering the labor market every year was of greater numbers than the jobs created. This biased if not inaccurate representation neglected the non-demographic causes of the unemployment, which however exerted a significant influence. It should not be ignored that the demographic measures in Réunion explicitly or implicitly targeted the poorest layers of the population and/or those representing a threat for social order for the public authorities.

Finally, it would be futile to try to understand the population policy on Réunion Island without taking into account certain considerations specific to metropolitan France. In order to understand why this policy was “against the current”, we will focus on this point.

3. Demographic measures in Réunion

With regard to the objectives, the methods employed and the results of the population policy of Réunion, two large programs coexisted: the promotion of a limiting in the number of births (3.1) and of emigration away from the department (3.2). These two essential components in the demographic history of Réunion having arisen in the 1960s and 1970s, we will see whether or not, as in metropolitan France, the population policy of Réunion crumbled away over the years (3.3).

3.1. Family planning

If French policies were guided by the desire to integrate the overseas departments as well as possible into metropolitan France, it nonetheless remains the case that the public authorities had to come to terms with specific local conditions. In the island overseas departments, a lower level of economic development and lower living standards combined with strong demographic growth to justify certain accommodations being made in the application of laws and national ordinances. According to Michalon (2003), the post-departmentalization vision strictly based on assimilation quickly developed towards a policy adaptation consisting in an evaluation of the socioeconomic impact of the new legal texts, particularly with regard to the demographic situation of the overseas departments.

Hence, while they were intended to promote the birth rate in metropolitan France, the family allowances were not supposed to encourage the inhabitants of Réunion to have more children (King 2001), as the total fertility rate at the beginning of the 1950s was around seven children per woman. The solution adopted from 1956 onwards was to adapt this legislation and to create a particular system of family allowances for Réunion. Hence there was a strong degression in the allowances from the fifth child onwards, and the allowances were paid in proportion to days worked, which reduced their scope in the context of underemployment and unemployment. The calculation of the allowances on the basis of average earnings also reduced their amount progressively over the course of the years in Réunion compared with metropolitan France. Birth allowances and allowances for households with a single wage-earner were no longer paid in Réunion. Next, the degressive payment of the family allowances was applied from the fourth child onwards (Maison and Millet 1974). The system called “global parity” which stipulated the equality of treatment to citizens of the overseas departments and metropolitan France was not interpreted at the level of households, but collectively; family allowances were paid in part to families, and in part used for collective investments such as school canteens or family planning centers. All of these measures, according to Jourdain (1978, p.81), led to the “systematic cancellation of all the pronatalist elements of the law”. This attenuation of the pronatalist effect of family policies may indeed be interpreted as an indirect action in favor of the policy of limiting births (Bertile 1987).

In an even more explicit manner, the departmental fund which was responsible for paying family allocations transferred a surplus to the *Fonds d'Aide Sociale Obligatoire* (FASO; Obligatory Social Aid Fund), a body in charge of child support and family planning, whose role was to be important in the fall of the birth rate in Réunion in the 1960s and 1970s. One of the first steps taken by Deputy Michel Debré in 1963 was the raising of awareness among families in Réunion to issues relating to contraceptives, through associations and campaigns in various media. After the sending of a workforce of doctors from metropolitan France to Réunion Island, the *Association Réunionnaise d'Education Populaire* (AREP; Réunion Association for Popular Education) played this role of raising awareness, which is then continued in 1966 by the *Association Réunionnaise d'Orientation Familiale* (AROF; Réunion Association for Family Orientation). Its director, Pierre Lagourgue, a doctor and President of Réunion General Council from 1967 to 1982, was to be a political personality in the front line of the program of birth limitation. The AROF had the following statutory mission: “The study of the problems of maternity and of birth rate, of their familial, social and national repercussions, research to find scientific information relative to these problems from France or other countries, the study of all solutions allowing maternity and birth conditions to be improved; the implementation of initiatives for improvement in this area” (Morlas et al. 1992, own translation).

It can be seen that the program of birth limitation goes by a different name. With regard to its motivation, its concrete realizations and the methods used, we must agree with the following statement of Jourdain (1978, p.81, own translation): “Officially, there is no program aimed at limiting births as a precise objective, but nonetheless this denial, frequently repeated by local leaders, cannot conceal the facts: the numerous official recommendations and the measures adopted in this area have an essentially Malthusian aim.” Despite some resistance from the Communist Party and the Catholic Church, this program of family planning was received in a very positive manner by the population of Réunion. It simultaneously made the idea of birth limitation socially acceptable, and made its effective realization possible, by means of widespread distribution of modern methods of contraception. On this last point, it was necessary to adapt the legal texts once again. If French law did not authorize open sale of contraceptives until 1967, and abortion in 1974, some ways of “bypassing” this were available in Réunion at the beginning of the 1960s, allowing the open sale of condoms to combat sexually transmissible diseases and disseminating natural methods to find out periods of fertility (Péron 1966).

3.2. Migration towards metropolitan France: *Bumidom*

Since the Second World War, if the public authorities were worried about the demographic situation, in other words the “overpopulation”, in island overseas departments, French Guiana was instead thought to be underpopulated. In order to solve this “population surplus”, the successive plans dating from the years 1946-1962 mention some paths such as emigration to French Guiana or towards the abandoned villages of the South of France, they advocate recruiting inhabitants of the overseas departments in the public sector, and some experiments of organized migration of families from Réunion to Madagascar are even attempted in 1952 (de Palmas 1999). However, faced with the challenges and the consequences, which were thought to be extremely grave, of this assessment, it was a strategy of waiting with respect to population policy for the overseas departments which prevailed in politics up to the 1960s (Gautier 1988). The national efforts expended in after-war reconstruction and a difficult international context in a period of decolonization may explain in part this state of affairs.

The situation from the 1960s onwards was entirely different. As well as the policy of family planning already mentioned, a great undertaking of encouraging citizens to emigrate away from the overseas departments and into Metropolitan France additionally began. The *Bumidom* (*Bureau pour le Développement des Migrations Intéressant les D.O.M*; Bureau for the Development of Migration relating to the Overseas Departments) was therefore created, in the form of a state-owned company, in 1963. In addition to its assignment of providing information, it had the role of providing financial and administrative assistance to willing parties who wish to move to Metropolitan France, which at the time was characterized by a lack of labor in industry and in the public sector, even in a context of sustained economic growth. The public activity of *Bumidom* was supplemented by the private sector,

particularly the textile and automobile industries, which widened their recruitment policy of workers from the Maghreb to include the overseas departments. Some large companies even had their recruitment office in Réunion.

Operation *Bumidom* was massive. From 1962 to 1981, it had dealt with 72 500 young people from Réunion, up to 6 000 people in certain years (Bertile 1987). Almost all of the inhabitants of Réunion who moved to metropolitan France, at least until 1975, had enjoyed the help of *Bumidom* (Festy and Hamon 1983). The balance of migration towards Réunion was generally negative during this period (table 4) and the recess from the age classes 20-24 years onwards in the age pyramid of 1982 is a witness of the great scope of this phenomenon (figure 1). The fact that these young generations did not have any children in Réunion, together with the actual departure of a section of the students and the young active population, explains the deficit in the age groups from 20 to 35 years in the age pyramid in 2006.

Table 4 : Net migration, Réunion (1954-1982)

| | 1954- 1961 | 1961- 1967 | 1967- 1974 | 1974- 1982 |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Net migration | -965 | -7 951 | -11 719 | -33 481 |

Source : INSEE, Censuses, in Festy and Hamon 1983

From the 1980s onwards, migration becomes more and more spontaneous, benefiting from help from the first generation of migrants who are present on French mainland. Against the background of unemployment and an economic crisis in mainland France, the government applied the brakes to this policy of emigration. In 1982, *Bumidom* was replaced by the *Agence pour l'Insertion et la Promotion des Travailleurs originaires d'Outre-Mer* (ANT; Agency for the Integration and Promotion of Workers originating from Overseas), which, as its name indicates, placed the emphasis more on integrating the existing migrants, rather than attracting new ones.

In this vast undertaking of organized migration, the official discourse collectively focussed on the potential consequences of overpopulation in terms of social problems and unemployment (Célestine 2008), and individually on the opportunity to find a better professional career. The migrants were young people, with roughly equal proportions of both sexes, who were not highly qualified, and whose departure for metropolitan France, while gaining a job in the public or private sector, offered them an opportunity for social advancement which would not have been available had they stayed where they were (Condon 2008).

One step which involved much lower numbers, but nonetheless very instructive in the way in which it was carried out, was the transfer of around 1600 children from Réunion to metropolitan France between 1963 and 1982. This measure taken by the *Direction de l'action sanitaire et sociale* (Department of Sanitary and Social Action) was also able to be presented by the decision-makers as an opportunity for a better life for orphans, abandoned children, those who had been entrusted to the program by the parents, or those taken from them by court order. The care structures *in situ* being insufficient for these children, metropolitan France was to offer them better perspectives. According to Jablonka (2007), *Bumidom* and these transfers of children were part of the same approach as that of Michel Debré: "get the island out of its archaism, and bring it step by step to the level of metropolitan France" (p.14). On the other hand, with respect to the relationship between metropolitan France and Réunion which concerns us here, it was often written in the press that this particular migration also had the role of repopulating the departments which were losing their population, such as the department la Creuse. In the light of the low numbers of children, approximately 80 per year, and the number of departments concerned, this hypothesis does not seem to be convincing.

3.3. Prolonging of the population policy

From a demographic point of view, the reasons for which the population policy was actively pursued in Réunion in the 1960s and 1970s were the same, in reverse, which were to allow its slackening from the 1980s onwards. The birth rate had dropped considerably, as had the demographic growth rate, the socioeconomic indicators were progressing remarkably, and metropolitan France had come to the end of the *Trente Glorieuses*, a thirty-year period of growth, and no longer had any need for a massive immigration of workers from overseas territories/departments or from abroad (Childers 2009). As in metropolitan France, although with a time delay, the population policy of Réunion from the 1980s onwards became more and more combined with social policy and employment policy.

If the birth rate has dropped greatly, today it still remains slightly above replacement rate, and has done for over a decade. From a formal point of view, the demographic transition is therefore not yet completely finished. Or to be more precise, there are two different fertility “models”. One is similar to the model of metropolitan France, and the other includes individuals who are in a situation of exclusion and who adopt a course of early and high fertility. This coexistence makes Breton write (2007, p.68) that in Réunion the “reproductive division” is the image of social division. Today sanitary and social measures target these vulnerable groups to a greater extent.

With regard to mobility, from this time onwards the incitement to emigrate on a temporary basis to other countries was to concern primarily young graduating students who wished to complete their studies. The survey Démo97, which was carried out in 1997, shows that young migrants come from rather privileged families, and that their selection according to social class has changed in nature (Dion and Bellot 2004). From a quantitative point of view, the direction and the bulk of migrations nonetheless remain determining variables in the formulation of long-term population projections (Mekkaoui 2002, Monteil 2008) and it is these which will specify the time of the fateful day when there will be one million inhabitants, expected around 2030.

Until then, new demographic issues are emerging, such as the population ageing and dealing with dependence. The population ageing of Réunion was to be just as rapid as the demographic transition. This entails that it will represent in the future and now already represents a major challenge in the domain of public health (Breton et al. 2009). Under the double effect of the transformation of family structures and the demographic growth, another burning issue is the need to double the housing stock between 2000 and 2030 (Actif et al. 2002).

4. Réunion and metropolitan France: reconciling respective interests

Non-demographical factors are considered here in order to explain the difference between the policies regarding population in metropolitan France and in Réunion. Initially, we will provide an outline of the historical context of these policies, which is that of decolonization (4.1). Next, we will deal with the position of France on the international scene concerning the emergence and then the installation of family planning in the less developed countries (4.2). Finally, we will review the population policy of Réunion in the light of what has gone before (4.3).

4.1. Integration into the Republic

After the Second World War, and up to 1962, France lived by the rhythm of decolonization, which was sometimes accompanied with conflicts, in various degrees according to the countries. For Constant (1987), another policy “against the current” was that of the departmentalization and the integration of the overseas departments into the French nation from 1946 onwards, while the French colonies and those of other colonizing countries were on their way towards independence. The experiences of the Indochina War and Algerian War influenced the way in which French overseas policy was determined (Jablonka 2007).

It was, therefore, after the independence of Algeria in 1962 and under the deputyship of Michel Debré from 1963 onwards that the policy of integration was reinforced in Réunion.¹ According to Simonin (2002, p.84), behind every ambitious political action, particularly over the course of the 1960s, the French state and the individual action of Michel Debré aimed to “make Réunion a department ‘like the others’, to make the people of Réunion French citizens ‘like the others’”. Gauvin (2006) shows clearly the desire of Michel Debré to avoid speaking of “emigration” or “immigration” in the case of migrations from the overseas territories to metropolitan France within the framework of *Bumidom*, as these terms were reserved for foreigners. Later, he did not even use the term “migration” or “migrant” any more, replacing them with the terms “coming to metropolitan France” and “citizen of Réunion in metropolitan France”. Hintjens (1992) even proposes a demographic metaphor, considering the relationship between metropolitan France and the overseas departments as being like a parent-child relationship, and noting that the overseas departments had to enter fully into the “French family”. The nature of this paternalist relation explains the relatively subdued nature of the calls for independence and self-government on the part of the inhabitants of the overseas departments.

Hence, in this period, as well as the concern of social justice and integration into the Republic, social and family benefits became one of the items of negotiation, a means of exerting pressure against the urges for independence (King 2001). It is in this sense that Gautier (1988, p.399, own translation) wrote that “many of the meanderings of family policy in the overseas departments can be explained by the interaction between the desire to retain an overseas part of France and the action of local pressure groups.” In fact, protest movements at the beginning of the 1960s in the overseas departments led to a revaluing of family allowances between 1962 and 1966, a phenomenon which was to be identifiable again at the end of the 1970s with a series of harmonizations and extensions of the social and family benefits granted to the inhabitants of overseas departments (Constant 1987). The concern of integration into the Republic being the key driving force of public measures taken, the political and legislative differences between the overseas departments and metropolitan France could only recede, which took place to a great extent over the two decades of the 1960s and 1970s.

4.2. The position of France on the international scene

Openly displaying its desire to reduce the birth rate in the overseas departments in the 1960s would have been considered as an inconsistency on the part of the French government with regard to the stance it took in the international debate on family planning. Under the aegis of particular foundations and NGOs of the United States, then of the American government and subsequently of the United Nations and the World Bank, one can date the emergence of these policies to the beginning of the 1960s (Demeny 1988). This was in fact the era in which the demographic growth of the world population was the strongest, essentially driven by the less developed countries, and various scientific and political figures were concerned about this.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) was created in 1967, financed by countries’ voluntary contributions. In 1971, while the United States donated 14.5 million dollars and Sweden 3 million dollars, France accounted for only 50 000 dollars, five times less than Pakistan or the Philippines (Bourgeois-Pichat 1974). With a contribution of this kind, France was not represented in the bodies of

¹ We emphasize in several places the personality and the role of Michel Debré in Réunion, which may seem exaggerated with regard to his action and his powers. Let us quote Jablonka (2007, pp.99-100, own translation) on this point: “Michel Debré belongs to the most influential men of state of the 20th century in France. [...] Given such a career path, the appointment of Debré to the post of deputy for Réunion may seem to be a small detail, and his migration policy may seem a detail. This is far from the truth. The former colony, which had been left to abandon, was the backdrop against which Debré was able to fight the great battles of his life: the modernization of political and economic structures, social advancement for all, the territorial continuity of the Republic, and the status of France”. Of course, this influence does not exclude the role of numerous other actors, public, associative and private, in the modernization of Réunion and in actions related to the population, but these are not detailed here.

the UNFPA. From the 1960s onwards, it belonged to an informal coalition whose members had various reasons for opposing policies aiming to reduce the birth rate of the less developed countries, whether the USSR, non-aligned countries such as Algeria, or Catholic countries on the African, South American and European continents, including the Vatican (Chasteland 2006). Without dwelling on the reasons for the French position, let us mention the explanation of Chasteland (2006), for whom France was practicing a kind of “demographic Gaullism”, taking into account the size of the French-speaking population across the world, notably that of its ex-colonies, whose legislative systems were often modeled on that of France, which at the time was hostile to contraception and abortion. Sala-Diakanda (1991) notes that the first nine countries from Sub-Saharan Africa to implement family planning programs at the beginning of the 1970s were all English-speaking.

4.3. The nature of the population policy of Réunion

In the 1960s-70s, the population policy of Réunion was multifaceted, with multiple objectives, and concerned a department whose degree of economic and sanitary development was well below that of the departments of metropolitan France. The policy had to take into account the particular characteristics and interests of the island and those of France, as well as the position of the latter on the international scene. In this context, it would be over-simplifying matters to consider the population policy of Réunion as being only a demographic policy in the strict sense even if, from this point of view, the results were rather positive in terms of the objective of reducing the natural growth rate.

Several measures led to this goal. Confronted with what could be considered as internal incoherencies in French policy with regard to its position on family planning at a national and international level, the public authorities made a set of decisions in the direction of reducing demographic growth in Réunion. However, the important point is that these population-related initiatives, particularly those concerning family planning and migration policy, were not taken in isolation, but in combination with a group of other measures in the economic, sanitary and social domains, which remain the true motor of demographic transition. It is from the perspective of the desire to develop the overseas territories that one can find the overall coherence of the population policy of Réunion as opposed to the positions occupied by France in the matter. Here we agree with the point of view of Gautier (1988) who, oscillating between “demographic policy” and “family policy” when talking about this population policy, concludes that above all, the notion of “public policy” is of primary importance.

According to this perspective, the role of the political elites was predominant in raising the awareness of their citizens (Lush et al. 2000), at a period when the population policies in developed countries could no longer be repressive, but could only provide encouragement or motivation (Livi-Bacci 1974), the latter method incidentally often being more effective than the former (Sen 1997). Even if the dividing line is not always clear (Stycos 1974, Bertile 1996) and if certain political opponents from Réunion criticized the authoritarian nature of the migration operations from Réunion towards metropolitan France which were organized by *Bumidom*, the majority of analysts considered this policy as being incentive-based. The transfer of children from Réunion to metropolitan France between 1963 and 1982 had only attracted a few commentaries until it was given considerable media coverage from 2002 onwards after the filing of a complaint against the French state. Between the conception of a remedial action by the state for the good of abandoned or mistreated children, an action in direct historical line from previous actions of the French state in the matter (Jablonka 2007), and those of “deportation” or “enslaving”, to cite the most virulent terms used, the historical debate is still in progress. For its part, family planning was primarily based on a campaign of awareness-raising and information. It should be recalled that in the 1960s in France, social policy began to take priority over family policy, and that, in a context of the rise of individualism, the debate tended towards the issue of the choice of couples with respect to reproduction (Chesnais 2006). This debate was also to be that of the international community from the 1980s onwards, with an orientation towards the less developed countries, replacing the policies of family planning by policies concerning health and reproductive choices.

Conclusion

What lessons can be drawn from the nature of the population policy of Réunion pursued in the 1960s-70s?

First of all, we can certainly state that it was a true population policy, in the sense that there was a manifest desire to have an influence on the growth rate of the population and on population figures. The decision-makers and institutional actors were more or less unanimous in their open expression of concern relating to the imbalance between a large, fast-growing population on the one hand and the economic and natural resources of the island on the other hand. This political will was in agreement with the expectations of the population with respect to birth control and departure towards metropolitan France. With considerable financial means being devoted to these operations, it is unsurprising that this policy was successful with relation to the realization of these objectives in demographic terms.

Finally, if this population policy is apparently against the current of that of metropolitan France, it is also because, in the 1960s, the socioeconomic conditions in Réunion and metropolitan France were so different that their development policies could not take the same paths. The position of Michel Debré, when he explained his pronatalist stance in metropolitan France and antinatalist stance in Réunion, was typical of this approach: “There is no contradiction. Two situations may be considered as normal. One is to have no children or only a few, and the second is to have too many children. [...] The balance, both of the family and in a general manner of the population, is in households of between three and five children. Hence, advising an increase in birth rate in one place, and a reduction of birth rate in another represents the expression of an identical policy. When a doctor successively sees a thin person and an obese person in his surgery, he prescribes them remedies which appear to be contradictory, but which in fact are motivated by the same desire to return to a state of normality” (quoted in Gauvin 2006, p.45, own translation). French population policy, guided by these normative aspects, therefore features adaptations according to the current situation.

Beyond the bare demographic variables and their interactions with the economic and environmental variables, other factors became relevant in the history of this kind of population policy. Confronted with a difficult social situation, made worse by a very high level of unemployment, the French state in fact played the integration card by deploying substantial economic and political means, but also by facilitating the circulation of men and women between the department and metropolitan France. The divergences between the population policy of Réunion and that of metropolitan France are to be explained above all by its inclusion in an overall policy of socioeconomic catching up, in the name of a certain idea of the French nation.

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