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## Session 1D Green Imperialism in French Polynesia

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# Avoiding "Green Imperialism": Examining the Relationship Between France and French Polynesia

Sara Mills

## Background

- French Polynesia (FP) is a collection of 118 islands in the South Pacific and a former French colony (Vieux et al. 4)
- The islands are considered "autonomous" and not independent of the French Republic (8)
- FP has a booming tourism industry and relies heavily on the sea for hydropower and fishing (Vieux et al. 9, Opeskin and MacDermott 355)
- For 30 years, FP was the site of a French nuclear testing site, causing environmental and health problems for residents (Malogne-Fer, Kweon 592-593, Walker et al. 713)
- There exists a political and cultural divide pertaining as to what FP's relationship with France should look like moving forward.



## Policy Problems (cont.)

- As a result of colonization, three political parties have appeared based on FP's relationship with France ("Quatrième Commission", Malogne-Fer):

### 1. Tavini Huiraatira

- Pro-independence
- Led by Oscar Temaru
- Emphasize France's exploitative nature

### 2. Tahoera'a Huiraatira

- Pro-autonomy
- Led by Gaston Flosse

### 3. Tapura Huiraatira

- Pro-autonomy
- Break off from Flosse's party
- Led by President Eduoard Fritch
- Emphasize France's aid and development projects

## Historical French development projects in FP (Walker et al. 708):

1. *Le Pacte de Progrès*:
  - Introduced towards the end of the nuclear test site period (1990s)
  - Heavy funding on tourism projects and less on agricultural development

↳ This furthered environmental degradation and made the FP economy dependent on few sectors, making it more vulnerable to change.

### 2. *Plan de Gestion de l'Espace Maritime*:

- Mapped lagoon areas and restricted fishing for environmental regulation purposes
- Mapping and quantification failed to take into consideration indigenous spiritual meanings associated with natural resources

## Potential Solutions

- While sustainable development projects are not entirely negative, perspectives regarding France and FP's relationship must shift in order to avoid "green imperialism"
  - Developed countries using global environmental agenda to impede economic growth of developing countries (Scholtz 288)
- France currently exploits FP resources under the provision that the country has claim to them since FP is an entity of France

↳ This reinforces the perspective of the "common heritage of mankind" (CHM) (273-275)

- CHM was first proposed by Malta's representative to the UN in fear of technologically advanced countries being able to exploit resources from the sea as stronger competitors
  - Developing countries sought CHM to have a space in international management of these resources (274-275)
- CHM, however, assures developed states' ideas of freedom regarding their right to resources, thus promoting resource exploitation for commercial gains.

## Policy Problems

- Due to FP's position as a small island developing state (SIDS), the islands and their economy are particularly vulnerable to sea level rise and ocean acidification.
- Victims of the effects of the historical nuclear imperialism in the region have failed to receive compensation for their illnesses (Malogne-Fer)
- Prior to colonialization, society was organized into **mobile** small tribal groupings
  - Colonialization has made migration more difficult, despite its necessity as an adaptation measure (Opeskin and MacDermott 365)
- **Current adaptation measures rely on:**
  1. Integrated Coastal Management (ICM)
  2. Sustainable tourism ("Plan Climat Énergie", Vieux et al. 12-13)

↳ This allows French resource interests to continue in FP, while promoting sustainability.



## An alternative to CHM is the "common concern of mankind"(CCM)

- Reorients international law around "consequences", rather than "survival" through economic means (i.e., resource extraction) (283-284)
  - Draws focus away from the economic side to one of worry about climate change and its impacts
- Furture policy must orient around the CCM principle to prevent the exploitation of resources. Spatial and temporal contexts must also be considered to ensure the incorporation of local knowledge and attitudes about the environment to encourage effective adaptation projects as well as compensate for past colonial injustices.**

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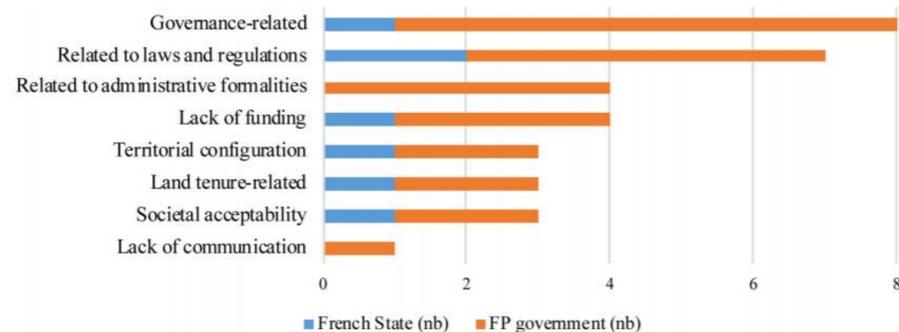
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Do you face difficulties carrying out adaptation to climate change action in which you are involved? If yes, what kind of problem?

FIGURE 9 | Barriers to projects of adaptation to climate change in French Polynesia (multiple responses are possible).