PLURIVERS

Plurivers #1 — Décoloniser le changement climatique

Climate justice for overseas territories

Decolonizing climate change by action from France

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Translated from French by Marguerite Morley

I was born in Martinique and lived there until I was 18 years old, in the towns of Rivière-Pilote and Schœlcher. Martinique is a former French colony. Its society and countryside are marked by the history of colonial conquest, genocide of Indigenous peoples, transatlantic slave trade, colonial slavery and other forms of forced labor. I have also lived in several European countries. I now reside in Paris. As a Black man from a middle-class family, I have experienced situations of dominance stemming from structural racism and from the colonial relationships that the French state maintains with its former colonies. At the same time I have been spared certain types of gender and class violence. My life experience in Martinique and in the postcolonial patriarchal and Christian societies of Europe, structured by social and racial domination of some over others, have shaped my civic commitments and the themes of my academic research. I am presently a researcher at the French National Center for Scientific Research (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, CNRS), and cofounder and president of the Third World Observatory. My research converges at the intersection of the philosophy, history and politics of contemporary environmental and ecological issues, and the philosophy, history and politics of the colonial legacy of the modern world. Some of my work has been published in Une écologie décoloniale: penser l'écologie depuis le monde caribéen *(Seuil, 2019). Today my research focuses on the history of environmental thinking and political ecology, and on various environmental conflicts in Caribbean countries, from the use of pesticides to climate change.*

1 A portion of this article is drawn from an earlier article published in 2018. Ferdinand, Malcom, "Subnational Climate Justice for the French Outre-mer: Postcolonial Politics and Geography of an Epistemic Shift," *Island Studies Journal,* 2018, vol. 13, p.119-34.

2 From the United Nations Framework Conference on Climate Change in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (UNFCCC) and the Kyoto agreement in 1997, to the Paris Agreement of 2015 and the annual Conferences of the Parties (COP), the scientific community, political ecology movements and the representatives of Indigenous peoples have unceasingly enjoined nation-states to limit their global emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG). These pleas cannot be dissociated from the call for recognition of the historical discrepancies of emissions, notably between the global North and the global South, and of the unequal and unjust consequences of climate change.[1] The reports issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) show that climate change has a particularly strong impact on the countries of the South, on poor countries and on women.[2] Likewise, in her report to the General Assembly of the United Nations on

[1]Roberts, Timmons and Bradley, Park, *A climate of injustice: global inequality, North-South politics, and climate policy*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2006; Roberts, Timmons et al., "Climate justice and inequality" in Dunlap, Riley and Brulle, Robert (eds.), *Society and climate change: sociological perspectives,* New York, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 127–165.

[2]Field, Christopher et al. (eds.), "IPCC, 2014: Summary for Policymakers, in *Climate change 2014: impacts, adaptation, and vulnerability. Part A: global and sectoral aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 3.

25 October 2022, Tendayi Achiume, special reporter to the United Nations Human Rights Commission, underscored that racism is a central element underlying climate injustice and more broadly the global ecological crisis.[3]

3 In this paper I raise the question of climate injustice and inequality recognized around the world, from the vantage point of France. France likes to cultivate its image as the birthplace of human rights, and as a country on the front lines of the battle against climate change, citing its key role in the Paris COP 21, or Emmanuel Macron's retort to Donald Trump, "Make our planet great again" in 2017, among others. And yet France is also a country sanctioned in October 2021 for failing to fulfill its climate commitments.[4] France is also regularly singled out for police racism and violence, by both the national advocate for citizens' rights,[5] and by the United Nations.[6] In this context I particularly want to examine the meaning of climate justice toward and emanating from the territories of this country that have been marginalized nationally and masked internationally, i.e. the overseas lands, the *Outre-mer*.

4 "Climate justice" as used here does not refer to a body of national or international laws to be enforced with respect to the climate. The notion of justice is above all the demand for political, social, moral and legal equality, for fair redistribution and for dignity in the face of the global imbalance regarding the causes of anthropogenic warming and the unequal burden of the consequences of this warming. What is the place given to the overseas territories in the reports issued by French authorities on climate change and in the conceptual theory and politics of climate justice?

5 Following a brief presentation of these territories, two main threads run through this article. I highlight a number of situations of inequality and injustice with respect to climate change cited in reports from overseas territories to central authorities in France, and I emphasize the need for an approach to climate justice that addresses the overseas dimension, namely *infranational climate justice*. Secondly, I defend the idea that the nonsovereign entities of the world such as the French Outre-mer reveal a theoretical and political impasse in the thinking of climate justice. A more radical policy is necessary, for overseas territories, for France and the rest of the world, to *decolonize climate change*.

The Outre-mer or the unseen colonial visage of France

6 Today as in the past, the imaginary territory from which France projects its thinking, not only about climate change, but the very essence of France, remains the six-sided bit of European land—the Hexagon—plus the island of Corsica. The Eurocentric geographical and political representation of France is the heritage of its colonial and slave-driven empire, and is apparent in various domains of the country's national and international politics. Try this experiment: ask anybody in the world (including in metropolitan France and in its overseas territories) to locate France on a map. It is taken for granted that the "correct" answer is the hexagon on the European continent. Even if the French overseas territories are mentioned or pointed out on the map, they are paradoxically referred to ways that reinforce the Eurocentric representation of France: it is said that France "has" or "possesses" territories in the Indian Ocean, the Pacific and the Atlantic oceans. Once again, the singular possessing subject "La France" is naturally found in Europe and embodied by the people who live there. It is never specified that France "possesses" a

[3] Achiume, E. Tendayi, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, E. Tendayi Achiume - Ecological crisis, climate justice and racial justice*. United Nations General Assembly, 77th session, 25 October 2022.

[4] *Jugement n° 1904967-1904968-1904972-1904976 du Tribunal de Paris*, 14 October 2021, http://paris.tribunal-administratif.fr/content/download/184990/1788790/version/1/file/1904967BIS.pdf.

[5] Défenseur des Droits (France), *Rapport. discriminations et origines : l'urgence d'agir,* 2020.

[6] "*UN rights office calls on France to address 'deep issues' of racism in policing,*" ONU Info, 30 June 2023, https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/06/1138247.

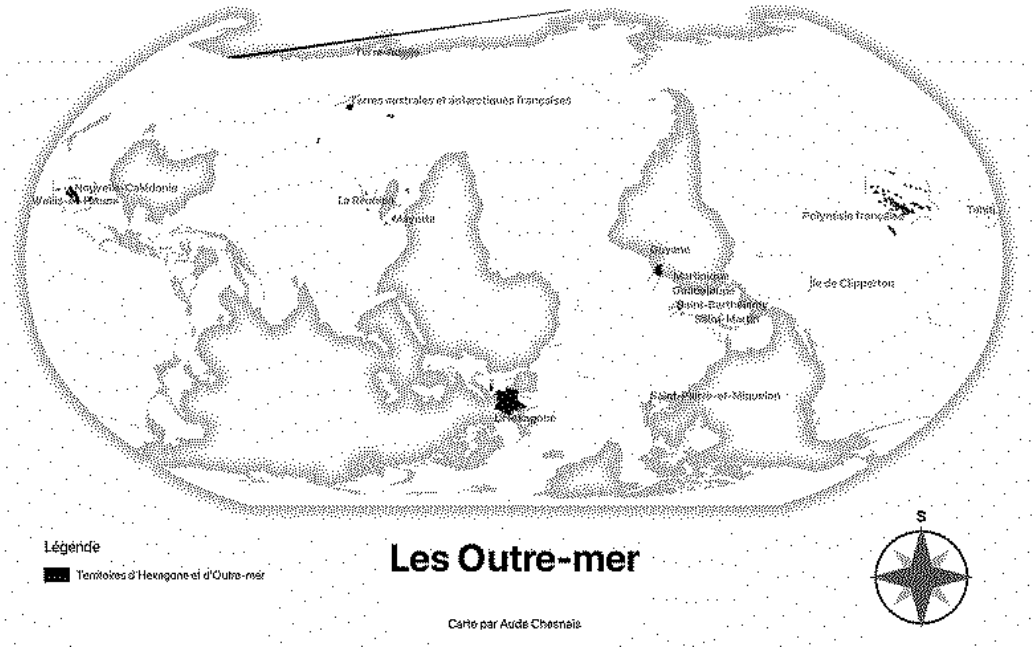

Figure 1: Map of the French overseas territories, produced by Aude Chesnais in 2021. voir l'original

European territory. This is one way to illustrate the geographic and political marginalization of the Outre-mer in France.

7 A bit of history: after World War II the French colonial empire was dismantled under the pressure of political and military action by colonized people in Africa and Asia who fought for their independence, starting with Vietnam (1945), then Guinea (1958), Senegal (1960), Madagascar (1960) and Algeria (1962). The French *Outre-mer* designates primarily—but not exclusively—the former colonies of the French colonial empire that has persisted in the national territorial configuration via a form of decolonization without sovereignty. These territories are no longer colonies, nor are they independent countries.

8 In addition to its territory on the European continent, France comprises today 12 territories located in the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific oceans, where some 2.6 million people live, making up 3.8% of the country's total population of 68 million.[7] Most of these territories are small densely populated islands no larger than 2,500 square kilometers, with the exception of New Caledonia (18,575 sq. km.). Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyane (French Guiana), Saint-Barthélemy and Saint-Martin (shared with the Netherlands) are located in the Caribbean Sea in the Atlantic, while Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon sits just off the coast of Newfoundland in Canada. La Réunion and Mayotte are in the Indian Ocean. Polynesia, New Caledonia and Wallis-et-Futuna are French archipelagos in the Pacific. The islands of these archipelagos are more widely scattered than those of the Caribbean. Polynesia is made up of 118 small volcanic islands with mountainous terrain in their center and low plains on the coast. Other than these islands, Guyane is a territory of 86,000 sq. km. on the northeastern coast of South America.

9 The French Outre-mer also includes a set of uninhabited territories called the French Southern and Antarctic Lands (Terres Australes et Antarctiques Françaises, TAFF). They are for the most part occupied by scientific bases and military outposts. Four French archipelagos are found in the Indian Ocean: the Crozet archipelago, the Kerguelen Islands, the Scattered Islands (les Îles Éparses) and the islands of Saint-Paul and Amsterdam. This ensemble also includes the immense territory of Terre-Adélie (432,000 sq. km.) in Antarctica. Last among these territories is the uninhabited and very remote island of Clipperton in the Pacific Ocean. Leaving Terre-Adélie aside, these overseas territories make up 18% of the land area of France. In addition,

[7] "Chiffres du ministère des outre-mer", *Le ministre de l'Outre-mer*, 21 July 2023, https://www.outre-mer.gouv.fr/.

since the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1982, these lands account for 97% of French maritime territory, also called the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). This zone of roughly 11 million square kilometers makes France the second-ranking maritime power in the world, after the United States.

10 Distinct administrative statuses are attributed to these territories under the French constitution. The four "old colonies" of Martinique, Guadeloupe, La Réunion and Guyane, plus Mayotte, are designated as "Départements et Régions d'Outre-Mer" (DROM) according to the principle of legislative identity set forth in article 73 of the constitution. This article states that "the legislation and regulations [of France] are fully applicable by law" in these territories, while specifying that some adaptations are possible.[8] The DROM are considered to be an integral part of the European Union (but not the Schengen Space) under the 1992 Maastricht treaty, and are counted among the EU's Outermost Regions, where the laws, requirements and treaties of the EU are automatically applicable. The "Collectivités d'Outre-Mer" (COM) include Wallis-et-Futuna, Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, Saint-Martin, Saint-Barthélemy and Polynesia, and are attributed a special legislative status that "takes into account the particular situation and needs of each [entity] within the framework of the Republic" as stipulated in article 74 of the constitution.[9] Other than certain sovereign domains of state authority (nationality, civil rights, freedoms, justice and security) national legislation and regulations are not automatically in force, unless specified otherwise. These territories are given greater legislative autonomy than the departments, in matters such as taxation and maritime customs duties, among others. Polynesia, for instance has its own legislative assembly, government and president. Since the 1957 Treaty of Rome these territories have been designated as Overseas Countries and Territories within the European Union. Although these entities are part of EU member countries, they are not considered to be part of the European Union. As a result, the laws and regulations of the EU are not applicable. Nonetheless, as the inhabitants of these countries are French citizens they are also European citizens, and elect representatives to the European Parliament. Consequently, EU law applies to persons in these territories.[10]

11 A long series of conflicts between the Kanak people of New Caledonia and French authorities culminated in 1988 with the abduction of hostages held in a cave in Ouvéa. In the wake of these events agreements were concluded to set up a gradual process toward independence for the territory. The accords, known as the Matignon-Oudinot Agreement (1988) and the Noumea Agreement (1998) attributed a unique status to New Caledonia, neither DROM nor COM. The governance of New Caledonia is set forth in Title XIII of the Constitution. This independence process, which stipulated three successive referendums, is now in deadlock because of fundamental differences with the French central government under President Emmanuel Macron. The central authorities required that the third referendum on independence be held in 2021, during the lock-down imposed in France due to the COVID-19 pandemic, flouting the wishes of the advocates of Kanak independence to honor the dead, and to postpone the referendum in order to allow campaigning without pandemic-related sanitary and health restrictions. This final referendum was boycotted by many, and voter participation was half that of the previous referendums. The final result, against independence, has not been accepted by the population of New Caledonia. New Caledonia is also an Overseas Country and Territory of the European Union.

12 The composition of the group of French overseas territories has been in flux since 1946, and further changes are possible in the future. Political change may come from the peoples of these territories themselves, as seen in Polynesia, where a pro-independence government under

[8] Article 73 of the French Constitution (4 October 1958).

[9] Article 74 of the French Constitution (4 October 1958).

[10] Faberon, Jean-Yves and Ziller, Jacques, *Droits des collectivités d'outre-mer*, Manuels, Paris, 2007; M'Saïdié, Thomas and Ziller, Jacques, *Les pays et territoires d'outre-mer dans l'Union européenne*, Bruylant, Bruxelles, 2013.

President Moetai Brotherson was elected on 12 May 2023. Historically, it is due to the struggles of local independence movements led by Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Oscar Temaru, among others, that New Caledonia and French Polynesia were officially (re)listed by the United Nations as nonautonomous territories to be decolonized.[11] Furthermore, French sovereignty over certain territories is disputed. Comoros lays a claim to the island of Mayotte, considering it to be one of the four islands of its archipelago. Mayotte was separated from the other islands by France when Comoros became independent in 1975. At the time this action by France was condemned by the General Assembly of the United Nations which declared that "the referendums imposed on the inhabitants of the Comorian island of Mayotte constitute a violation of the sovereignty of the Comorian State and of its territorial integrity." The assembly called upon the government of France "to withdraw immediately from the Comorian island of Mayotte, an integral part of the independent Republic of the Comoros, and to respect its sovereignty" (21 October 1976).[12] Regarding uninhabited territories, Madagascar lays a claim to four of the five islands among the Scattered Islands (Les Glorieuses, Europa, Juan de Nova and Bassas da India). Mauritius claims the fifth island (Tromelin).

13 This brief overview of the geographical and political horizons of France shows that, in contradiction with a colonial and Eurocentric vision, today France is a territory of multiple locations, spread across three oceans, and hence cannot be reduced to its continental European entity alone. The marginalization of the territories situated elsewhere than on the continent of Europe is not merely the consequence of the geographic discontinuity of these lands, with distances of several thousand kilometers between some territories. This marginalization follows and perpetuates a colonial split, both historical and contemporary, which distinguishes the hexagonal territory—the former Metropole—from the overseas lands. The population of "metropolitan" or "mainland" France, consequence of the structural whiteness of the construction of the nation forged by the history of the colonial Empire, continues to be thought of and represented as primarily White.[13] The overseas territories, former colonies, are home to people in their majority thought to be and represented as non-White. The asymmetrical nature of this configuration is flagrantly visible when the sociopolitical status of individuals in the socially and racially White group, with their origins in "metropolitan" France—the so-called "Metros"—who live or visit the overseas territories, is compared with the status of the racialized individuals, people of color, with their origins overseas, who live or visit the European "Metropole." On the one hand, we note the comfortable economic status of the Metros overseas, their dominant position in local businesses and markets, their access to high-level public jobs and over-representation in government administration, in cultural institutions and scientific research. On the other, we find discrimination in housing and employment for people of color in metropolitan France, police harassment on the basis of skin color, structural racism in the courts, leading to over-representation of people of color in prisons, to discrimination in access to positions in higher education, and to the invisibilization of people of color in the arts, culture and media.[14] Despite the equal

[11] "United Nations and Decolonization; Non-Self-Governing Territories," United Nations, https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/nsgt (updated 4 August 2023). See Ferdinand, Malcom, "Entretien avec Oscar Temaru et Moetai Brotherson," in Manglou, Mélissa and Ferdinand, Malcom (eds.), *Écologie et Politique : Écologies politiques depuis les outre-mer,* vol. 63, Latresne, Le Bord de l'eau, 2021, p.137-148.

[12] Resolution A/RES31/4 adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 21 October 1976 during its 31st session, on the question of the Comorian island of Mayotte. See Idriss, Mamaye, *Le combat pour Mayotte française : 1958-1976,* Paris, Khartala, 2018.

[13] Quijano, Aníbal, "Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina," in Lander, Edgardo (ed.), *La colonialidad del saber: eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales,* Buenos Aires, CLACSO, 2000, p. 202; Morrison, Toni, *Playing in the dark: whiteness and the literary imagination,* Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1999.

[14] Léobal, Clémence, *Ville noire, pays Blanc : Habiter et lutter en Guyane française*, Lyon, Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2022. Brunetaux, Patrick and Pulvar, Olivier, *Les Métropolitains à la Martinique : une migration de confort,* Fort-de-France, K. éditions, 2022. Zecler, Michel, *Rester debout,* Paris, Plon, 2021. Beauvallet, Willy, Célestine, Audrey and Roger, Aurélie (eds.), "L'État outre-mer. La construction sociale et institutionnelle d'une spécificité ultramarine," *Politix*, vol. 116, n° 4, 2016, p. 139-161. Marboeuf, Olivier, *Suites décoloniales : s'enfuir de la plantation,* Rennes, Éditions du Commun, 2022. Niang, Mame-Fatou, *Identités françaises : banlieues, féminités et universalisme,* Leiden, Brill-rodopi, 2020.

rights of citizenship promised by the 1946 legislation granting the status of *département* to certain territories, one can only observe the great social inequality and infrastructure deficit in the overseas lands that persist today, perpetuating the fault lines of the colonial period. The inhabitants of the overseas territories have become citizens of another class.[15]

14 The very term of "overseas" is quite literally a French colonial fabrication, and continues to be contested today. Beginning with historical variation in the gender accorded to "overseas"—*le* or *la outre-mer*—and designation as a singular or plural entity—*l'outre-mer* or *les outre-mer* —this term raises political and epistemological issues. The political issues are tied to the fact that it is difficult, and even violent, for some people in these territories to hear their homeland called "beyond" the seas, far from the center, or worse, identified by the associated adjective "ultramarin" or "ultramarine". The epistemological problem arises in that by using these terms without questioning them people risk adopting the colonial perspective they embody. There is also the risk of obscuring other languages and other ways of naming these lands, i.e., reference frameworks other than the historical French colonial framework, in which people speak of Madinina, of Karukera, Te Ao Ma and Kanaky, rather than of Martinique, Guadeloupe, Polynesia or New Caledonia, respectively. At bottom, nowadays only the French state and government continue to take the term "overseas" for granted. This absence of questioning is sometimes cloaked in a thick veil of condescension and derisive allusion to an "exotic" other.[16] Nonetheless, this notion remains an administrative category in the governance of these territories, and as such structures certain aspects of the daily life of their inhabitants. Even though the appropriateness of the term is disputed, I use it here, not to accept the underlying view, but rather to reveal the blind spots and limitations of the term, and the situations of domination experienced by the inhabitants of these territories, who, whether they like it or not, are confronted with global climate change in the context of the legal and political configuration inherited from the French colonial empire.

Low greenhouse gas emissions, high exposure

15 When faced with climate change, the overseas territories are often caught in a two-pronged vise of marginalization, at the national and international levels. At the national level, the marginalization of the overseas in the imagination of France gives rise to discrimination in many domains—politics, the economy, cultural affairs, and social, legal and legislative matters. This discrimination, whether hypocritical or careless, is prejudicial to these territories which give France a foremost position on the world chessboard. They support, among others, a military and political presence in three oceans; the development of France's nuclear power via 193 nuclear tests carried out on the Moruroa and Fangataufa atolls in Polynesia from 1966 to 1996 (after those conducted in Algeria); and a strategic position in space exploration with the Centre Spatial Guyanais (CSG) in Kourou, which serves all of Europe. And yet, from the 1970s to today, the overseas territories continue to be a blind spot within the organizations, political parties and intellectual production of the political ecology movement in metropolitan France, particularly regarding climate issues. The overseas territories receive relatively little attention in metropolitan climate movements such as Youth for Climate and Alternatiba.[17] But, while deadly heat waves recur in Europe and in metropolitan France, the overseas territories are undoubtedly the places in France that are the most exposed and vulnerable to the consequences of global warming.

16 Internationally, most climate action and climate justice movements have focused on the discrepancies between the contributions of individuals or countries to global warming, and the

[15]Larcher, Syliane, *L'autre citoyen : l'idéal républicain et les Antilles après l'esclavage*, Paris, Points, 2022 [2014].

[16]Garde, François, *Petit éloge de l'outre-mer,* Paris, Gallimard, 2018.

[17]Manglou, Mélissa, and Ferdinand, Malcom, "Penser l'écologie politique depuis les outre-mer français" in Manglou, Mélissa and Ferdinand, Malcom (eds.), op. cit., p.11-26.

geographic and sociopolitical consequences incurred.[18] Small Island Developing States (SIDS) have rightly called for distributive justice, as expressed by the powerful voice of Mia Mottley, prime minister of Barbados.[19] With the exception of Puerto Rico, academic publications on climate justice in the Caribbean have looked primarily at the small insular states, despite the fact that half of the islands in the region are nonsovereign territories attached to European states.[20] Although these islands represent only 12% of the population in the Caribbean, and 5% of Caribbean land area, they make up 29% of its maritime territory.[21] To address climate change from the standpoint of these overseas territories, marginalized within their national sphere and invisible on the international stage, we must look at climate justice from a new angle, with an *infranational* approach, and we must pay attention to inequalities across the whole of the national territory as configured by its colonial history, in this case the Hexagon of metropolitan France and its overseas.[22]

17 The French Overseas faces profound climate injustice. These territories, which have contributed very little to global warming, are over-exposed to its consequences. At the same time they suffer from great vulnerability, constructed over the long term through what I call "the colonial lifestyle."[23] By this expression I designate a way of living on the land and the relationships between the humans and nonhumans of its ecosystems that have been imposed by modern colonization; a way of life that exploits all living things and determines the infrastructure of these territories in order to enrich a handful of shareholders, in the headlong pursuit of capitalistic endeavors in the service of metropolitan consumer markets. The table below shows GHG emissions of French overseas territories (DROM and COM) and of metropolitan France, and their respective shares in total GHG emissions for France over the past 30 years.[24]

20 Table 1: GHG emissions in France, 1990-2020 (based on CITEPA data)[25]

21 The overseas territories do contribute to global warming. But the level of emissions is low compared to the rest of France. In 1990, the reference year for most international climate agreements, the French overseas territories represented only 2.4% of total emissions for France. The share of the overseas territories in French emissions has grown steadily since 1990, and now represents 5.6% of total emissions for France. As of this writing per capita emissions are higher in the overseas territories than in metropolitan France: 7.8 metric tons CO2eq/inhabitant compared to 5.5 metric tons CO2eq/inhabitant. If we look no further, one might exclaim, "See, the people in the overseas territories are those who contribute the most to climate change!" It must be remembered, however, that GHG emissions are the consequence not only of final consumption, but also of modes of land use, energy infrastructure and production facilities.

[18]Gardiner, Stephen, "Climate justice" in Dryzek, John, Norgaard, Richard, and Schlosberg, David (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Climate Change and Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

[19]Schlosberg, David, *Defining Environmental Justice: Theories, Movements, and Nature*, Oxford, Oxford University Press. 2007, p. 79–99.

[20]Baptiste, Karen, and Rhiney, Kevon, "Climate justice and the Caribbean," *Geoforum*, vol. 73, 2016, p. 17-80. Perry, Keston, "(Un)Just transitions and Black dispossession: The disposability of Caribbean 'refugees' and the political economy of climate justice," *Politics*, vol. 43, N°2, 2023, p.169–185. Sheller, Mimi, *Island Futures: Caribbean Survival in the Anthropocene,* Durham, Duke University Press, 2020. Sealy-Huggins, Leon, " '1.5°C to stay alive': climate change, imperialism and justice for the Caribbean," *Third World Quarterly,* vol. 38, N°11, p. 2444–2463.

[21]Data obtained from the Flanders Marine Institute (2016). *Maritime boundaries geodatabase: maritime boundaries and exclusive economic zones (200NM)*, version 9. http://www.marineregions.org and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). (2018). *The World Factbook*. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bb.html.

[22]Barrett, Sam, "Subnational climate justice? Adaptation finance distribution and climate vulnerability," *World Development*, 58, 2014, p.130-142.

[23]Ferdinand, Malcom, *Penser l'écologie depuis le monde caribéen*, Paris, Seuil, 2019, p. 51-68.

[24]This data does not include emissions due to international air and maritime travel and shipping (as agreed under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change). This means that travel and shipping between metropolitan France and its overseas territories are not counted for the purposes of emissions reduction targets. Likewise, emissions from the COM territories and New Caledonia are not included in the official total of French GHG emissions. In this article they are counted.

[25]My own compilation based on inventories of GHG emissions and atmospheric pollutants, and atmospheric emissions data from CITEPA (2022 and 2023), available at https://www.citepa.org/fr/publications/.

CO2eq/yr (metric tons) (UTCATF)	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
DROM	9.5	15.2	14.2	15.3	16.5	16.3	15.2
% of total	1.8	2.9	2.7	3.0	3.5	3.9	4.0
COM+ New Caledonia	3.3	3.9	3.0	4.7	5.1	6.9	5.8
% of total	0.6	0.8	0.6	0.9	1.1	1.6	1.5
Overseas	12.8	19.1	17.3	20.1	21.6	23.2	21.0
% of total	2.4	3.7	3.3	4.0	4.6	5.5	5.6
Metro France	512.5	496.8	511.8	484.7	449.5	400.7	355.8
% of total	97.6	96.3	96.7	96.0	95.4	94.5	94.4
Total for France (Metro + Overseas)	525.3	515.9	529.0	504.7	471.1	423.9	376.8

By this measure, in 2020 the overseas territories account for close to one-fifth (18%) of total national land area, while their GHG emissions represent only 5.6% of total emissions.

22 Furthermore, while the increase in GHG emissions overseas contrasts with the slow decrease in total emissions for France, this increase is not so much due to different behavior on the part of residents overseas and those living in metropolitan France, as it is due to distinct types of energy production. Some ten years ago a parliamentary report had already drawn attention to the dependence of the overseas territories on fossil energy.[26] Another parliamentary inquiry reached the same conclusion in 2023.[27] Despite a recent trend away from fossils fuels, all the overseas territories still depend on fossil resources such as coal and oil for over 80% of their energy use: 83% in Guadeloupe (2021); 82% in Martinique (2020); 98% in Mayotte (2020); 81% in French Guiana (2020); 94% in Polynesia (2019); 86% in La Réunion (2022); 96% in New Caledonia (2021).[28] All these fuels are imported, and the dependency on fossil fuels is simply another facet of energy nonsovereignty. Although environmental conditions are favorable for the exploitation of hydraulic, solar, wind and geothermal resources, the development of renewable energy is still lagging in these territories. Fossil energy use is much lower in metropolitan France, at 46% of total consumption (2021) due to the dependency on nuclear power (40% in 2021).[29]

23 With under 6% of total GHG emissions for France, the overseas territories are on the front lines when it comes to the consequences of global warming, due to geographic factors. Most of these territories are islands in tropical latitudes and have already seen a significant increase in average temperature. For example, in New Caledonia and in Martinique, and from 1970 to 2009, the average temperature increases observed are 1.3°C and 1.44°C respectively, nearly twice the average global increase for the same period.[30] During the same time period the sea level rose at the pace of 3 mm per year.[31] It is estimated that the sea level in these lands will rise by between

[26] Bareigt, Ericka and Fasquelle, Daniel, *Rapport d'information sur l'adaptation du droit de l'énergie aux outre-mer*, Paris: Assemblée Nationale, 2014.

[27] Rimane, Davey and Ratenon, Jean-Hugues, *Rapport d'information sur l'autonomie énergétique en outre-mer*, Paris, Assemblée Nationale, 2023.

[28] Figures from the following sources: Observatoire de l'énergie — Direction de l'Industrie, des Mines et de l'Energie de la Nouvelle-Calédonie — 2021. Belfort, Amélie, *Bilan de l'Énergie 2021,* Observatoire Régionale de l'énergie et du climat de Guadeloupe, 28 September 2022. Sylvestre-Baron, Teiki, *Bilan énergétique polynésie française : édition 2019,* Observatoire Polynésien de l'énergie and ADEME Polynésie française, 28 February 2021. Hoarau, Mathieu, *Bilan énergétique Réunion : les chiffres clés 2022,* SPL Horizon Réunion, 2023. "Bilans énergétiques des départements d'outre-mer de 2013 à 2020," *Données et études statistiques*, Ministère de la transition écologique, 14 April 2022.

[29] Andrieux, Virginie, Meillac, Christophe and Mesqui, Bérangère (ed.), *Chiffres clés de l'énergie : édition 2022*, Services des Données et Études de la Statistique, November 2022.

[30] Observatoire National sur les Effets du Réchauffement Climatique (ONERC), *Les outre-mer face au défi du changement climatique : Rapport au premier ministre et au parlement*, Paris, La Documentation française, 2013, p. 28.

[31] ONERC, op. 32.

40 centimeters and 1 meter by the end of the century.[32] The landscape of these two territories are flat plains with low slopes, and a slight vertical elevation of the sea level is sufficient to cause a significant horizontal retreat of the coastline, and loss of a substantial amount of land area. In Martinique it is common to hear the elders of the towns of Vauclin in the south or Le Prêcheur in the north say that their childhood homes or the fields where they played soccer are now in the sea. The consequences of global warming are not limited to the overseas territories, and the average temperature has risen by 1°C in metropolitan France. The island geography and small size of these lands, however, makes loss of land area highly problematic for the social and economic life of their inhabitants, threatening to submerge roads, marketplaces, town squares and homes along the coast.[33]

24 Geographic factors are also important in relation to hurricanes. While the overall frequency of hurricanes has not increased with global warming, the presence of a larger mass of water vapor in the atmosphere produces heavier rainfall when hurricanes make landfall. The same relationship holds for rising temperature and higher winds during tropical storms. We are experiencing not more hurricanes, but more intense hurricanes.[34] The dramatic consequences of this trend have already been seen, with the category 5 hurricanes Irma and Maria that swept through the Caribbean in 2017, causing particularly heavy damage in Saint-Martin and Saint-Barthélemy. The increased intensity of hurricanes also brings a greater storm surge, the temporary rise in sea level along the coast during hurricanes, such as the surge that caused destructive flooding in New York City in October 2012.[35]

25 Rising sea levels and receding coastlines also have major political consequences for the peoples of the Pacific. The Fiji writer Epeli Hau'ofa reminds us that for the many peoples of the Pacific they inhabit an ocean sprinkled with islands, and not islands surrounded by ocean.[36] Receding coastlines can also lead to loss of maritime space. The maritime domain of countries is determined by measurements drawn from the coastline, and a receding coastline will shrink the maritime domain that is so important for these peoples. For this reason, among others, the Taputapuatea Declaration of the peoples of Polynesia denouncing the dangers of climate change (July 2015) calls for the lines of maritime domains to be permanently set, to ensure the future maritime activity of these territories in the face of climate change.[37]

26 These territories are highly exposed to the impacts of global warming, and their ecological systems are highly vulnerable. The endemic ecosystems of these territories are located in critical zones for biodiversity, augmenting the risks associated with climate change. On the scale of France as a whole, the overseas territories are home to some 80% of the fauna and flora that constitute natural biodiversity.[38] The biodiversity of France is found in the extensive Amazon forest of Guyane and in the mangroves of Martinique, Guadeloupe and Mayotte. The largest contiguous forest of the European Union is in Guyane. Guyane is six times smaller than

[32] ONERC, op. cit., p. 34.

[33] "Le réchauffement climatique observé à l'échelle du globe et en France," *Météo France*, 7 August 2015, http://www.meteofrance.fr/climat-passe-et-futur/le-rechauffement-observe-a-l-echelle-du-globe-et-en-france.

[34] Walsh, Kevin et al., "Tropical cyclones and climate change," *WIREs Climate Change*, vol.7, N°1, p. 65-89. Knutson, Thomas et al., "Tropical Cyclones and Climate Change Assessment: Part II: Projected Response to Anthropogenic Warming," in *Bull. Amer. Meteor. Soc.*, vol.101, 2020, p. E303 – E322.

[35] Ayyad, Mahmoud, Hajj, Muhammed, and Marsooli, Resa, "Climate change impact on hurricane storm surge hazards in New York/New Jersey Coastlines using machine-learning," in *npj Climate and Atmospheric Science,* vol.6, N°88, 2023.

[36] Hau'ofa, Epeli, *Notre mer d'îles,* (translated by. G. Colombani, T. Isselé and S. Massau), Arue, Pacific Islanders Éditions, 2013.

[37] Lallemant-Moe, Hervé Raimana, "Les défis territoriaux et spatiaux des changements climatiques pour les territoires du Pacifique," in Manglou, Mélissa and Ferdinand, Malcom (eds.), op. cit., p.125-131.

[38] Gargominy, Olivier, and Boquet, Aurélie, *Biodiversité d'outre-mer*. Paris, Comité Français, UICN, 2013. The measurement and metrics of biodiversity are much more complex than simple percentages, and merit discussion in a separate article. The figures given here are not meant to slight the importance of France's European ecosystems, but to underscore the richness of ecosystems in the so-called overseas territories.

metropolitan France and is home to three times as many vertebrate species.[39] The endemic biodiversity of France is for 97% found in the overseas territories. Biodiversity is also preserved in marine locations. The 11 million square kilometers of France's overseas marine domain are home to 10% of the coral reefs and 20% of the atoll habitats on Earth.[40] The warming of sea water and acidification of the oceans endanger these delicate ecosystems.

Vulnerability induced by the colonial lifestyle

27 Far from being a natural phenomenon, the vulnerability of these territories in the face of climate change is the result of the historical, socioeconomic, geographic and political construction of the colonial lifestyle.[41] Since the beginnings of the historical and colonial edifice, the territories' economic structures have registered the most alarming social indicators in France, for instance the unemployment rate, which is two to three times higher than in metropolitan France. When unemployment reached 7.1% in metropolitan France in 2022, the rate stood at 13% in Martinique and Guyane, 11% in New Caledonia, 18% in Guadeloupe and La Réunion, and 34% in Mayotte.[42] Only Polynesia has a comparable rate of unemployment, at 9% in 2022.[43] In 2018 39% of the residents of Mayotte and 77% of the people in La Réunion lived below the poverty level.[44] Furthermore, the calculation methods used by the INSEE statistics bureau tend to underestimate the problem.[45] The cost of living is quite a bit higher overseas than in metropolitan France. A study in 2020 found that a typical food basket cost between 39% and 46% more overseas than in metropolitan France.[46] In addition there are numerous shortcomings in the organization of public services that in effect block access to certain social benefits, as was noted by France's public rights advocate in 2023.[47] The persistent inequality between the overseas territories and metropolitan France was one of the grievances behind the general strikes in Guadeloupe, Martinique and La Réunion in 2009, in Mayotte and New Caledonia in 2016, and in Guyane in 2017.[48] The 2017 legislation to promote equal treatment for the overseas territories notwithstanding, inequality continues to be marked.[49] The quest for "real equality," sustaining the decolonization process, remains a core issue in civil society.

28 The colonial lifestyle maintains local economies that are structurally founded on nonsovereignty in terms of food supply for the inhabitants of overseas territories. The absurdity of the colonial lifestyle with respect to climate change is most glaring in the cultivation of bananas in the Antilles islands. Banana plantations suffer heavy damage with each hurricane of even modest intensity. This sector of agriculture depends on the resistance of these giant herbaceous plants

[39] ONERC, *Les outre-mer face au défi du changement climatique : Rapport au premier ministre et au parlement*, Paris, La Documentation française, 2013, p. 49.

[40] Initiative française pour les Récifs CORalliens (IFRECOR), "Récifs coralliens les joyaux de l'outre-mer," *Ifrecor*, 3 Juy 2011, http://www.ifrecor.com/recifs-coralliens.html.

[41] Ferdinand, Malcom, *Une écologie décoloniale*, p. 51-68.

[42] "Taux de chômage localisés par sexe et âge en moyenne annuelle en 2022 Comparaisons régionales et départementales," INSEE, 25 May 2023, https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2134411#tableau-TCRD_087_tab1_regions2016 . Jonzo, Anne, "2000 emplois de moins qu'avant la crise sanitaire et forte hausse du chômage Enquête Emploi 2022 à Mayotte," INSEE, 9 February 2023, https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/6798031 . Dukunengo, Annette, "Synthèse, Enquête force de travail 2022," *Institut de la Statistique et études économiques Nouvelle-Calédonie (ISEE*), août 2023, https://www.isee.nc/emploi-revenus/emploi-conditions-de-travail/emploi-chomage.

[43] "L'emploi progresse en 2022, le nombre d'inactifs ne souhaitant pas travailler également,", *Institut de la Statistique Polynésienne (ISPF*), 30 December 2022, https://www.ispf.pf/publication/1359.

[44] Grangé, Claire, "Le taux de pauvreté reste stable en 2018 à La Réunion," *INSEE Flash Réunion,* 28 January 2021, www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/5016838.

[45] Patent, George, "Sincérité des taux de pauvreté en outre-mer," *Sénat : questions écrites,* 28 February 2019, https://www.senat.fr/questions/base/2019/qSEQ190209202.html.

[46] Méjean, Caroline et al. (ed.), *Alimentation et nutrition dans les départements et régions d'outre-mer*, IRD Éditions, Marseille, 2020, p. 106.

[47] *Rapport: Service public aux Antilles : garantir l'accès aux droits*, Paris, Défenseur des droits, 2023.

[48] William, Jean-Claude, Reno, Fred, and Alvarez, Fabienne (eds.), *Mobilisations sociales aux Antilles : les événements de 2009 dans tous leurs sens*. Paris: Karthala, 2012. Odin, Pierre, *Pwofitasyon : luttes syndicales et anticolonialisme en Guadeloupe et en Martinique,* Paris, La Découverte, 2019.

[49] Loi n° 2017-256 du 28 février 2017 de programmation relative à l'égalité réelle outre-mer et portant autres dispositions en matière sociale et économique.

that are battered by winds of over 200 km/hour, year after year. Likewise, the Global Footprint Network estimates that the island of La Réunion, with an economy based on sugar exports, exceeds its annual biocapacity (the capacity of ecosystems to replace the resources withdrawn by human activity) by some 3,200% each year, making this island the territory with the third largest ecological deficit in the world.[50] Martinique and Guadeloupe rank respectively 18th and 21st in terms of ecological deficit, exceeding their biocapacity by 680% and 590% respectively. The Antilles islands and La Réunion export thousands of metric tons of bananas and sugar, but are not able to feed their inhabitants or ensure the biological renewal of their ecosystems. The colonial lifestyle also stands out for its nonsovereignty in terms of energy use—these territories depend on fossil fuels for over 90% of their consumption.[51] This means that when hurricanes or other events prevent oil tankers from reaching the islands, their infrastructure is plunged into complete paralysis. As seen on Saint-Martin after the passage of hurricane Irma, the fragility of water supply infrastructure, nonsovereignty in food and energy supply, compounded by precarious economic circumstances and poverty, are the ingredients of a catastrophe waiting to happen with the occurrence of any severe or intense environmental event.[52]

29 Lastly, these territories are exposed to multiple environmental risks in addition to the consequences of global warming. The emergence of an underwater volcano off the island of Mayotte has caused the island to subside, in conjunction with rising sea levels due to global warming. Martinique and Guadeloupe are also volcanic islands, located in a subduction zone with regular seismic activity. The two islands have been durably marked by the chlordecone contamination scandal. This insecticide compound, officially in use from 1972 to 1993 in banana plantations, has caused long-term generalized harmful contamination of ecosystems in the Antilles and damage to human health and habitat.[53] The heavy rains of tropical storms and hurricanes often damage water ducts, allowing chlordecone to infiltrate into water supply systems and contaminate drinking water.[54]

Can the overseas territories speak up in the face of climate change?

30 In the words of Gayatri Spivak with reference to the subaltern, do the inhabitants of overseas territories have the political option of speaking up in the face of climate change?[55] Are they considered to be political subjects in their own right, endowed with speech, capable of expressing their own cosmologies and conceptualizations of climate issues and their right to participate in national and international debates? Along with their high exposure to the consequences of global warming and their ecological and sociopolitical vulnerability, the French overseas territories are also politically ostracized within the Republic of France. First, in electoral terms the 2.6 million inhabitants of these lands have but little weight in French national politics. More fundamentally, the notion that French overseas citizens might speak out on national topics other than their own social and political issues (and even that is not sure) is met with surprise, or is not readily accepted, in the minds of the residents of metropolitan France. Inversely, it is taken for granted that the inhabitants, representatives and elected officials of metropolitan France have every right to hold forth on the situation in the overseas territories. This political

[50] Footprint Data Foundation, York University Ecological Footprint Initiative, and Global Footprint Network: National Footprint and Biocapacity Accounts, 2023 edition, data.footprintnetwork.org/#/.

[51] Bareigts, Ericka and Fasquelle, Daniel, op. cit., p. 9.

[52] Pastel, Audrey and Saffache, Pascal, "Le plan de prévention des risques naturels (PPRN) : frein ou catalyseur de l'adaptation des territoires insulaires au changement climatique ? Exemple de Saint-Martin suite à l'ouragan Irma," *Études caribéennes*, vol.48, April 2021.

[53] Malcom, Ferdinand, "Toxic Time-scape & the Double Fracture of Modernity: Chlordecone Contamination of Martinique and Guadeloupe," in Muller, Simone and Nielsen, May-Brith (eds.), *Toxic Timescapes Examining Toxicity across Time and Space*, Ohio University Press, 2023 p. 253–284.

[54] Feuillet, Nathalie et al., "Birth of a large volcanic edifice offshore Mayotte via lithosphere-scale dyke intrusion," *Nature Geoscience*, vol.14, 2021, p.787-795.

[55] Gayatri, Spivak, "Can the subaltern speak?" in Nelson, Carry and Grossberg, Lawrence (eds.), *Marxism and the Interprétation of Culture*, Champaign, University of Illinois Press, 1988, p. 271-31.

and symbolic asymmetry is one of the ongoing aspects of the colonial relationship between the Metropole and the Overseas. It is an underlying principle of the Ministry of the Colonies, renamed Minister of Overseas Territories in 1946, a government office that continues to be physically located in metropolitan France. This asymmetrical relationship is also at work in the appointment of ministers and deputy ministers who have no ties with the overseas territories, as is the case with the ministers serving under President Macron since 2022.

31 In epistemic terms, this structural, political and symbolic ostracism is perpetuated in the theoretical understanding of the stakes of global ecology issues, as they are understood from the vantage point of metropolitan France, by the activists and militants of French political ecology movements, environmental movements and in national environmental policy and politics. The history of the intellectual production of political ecology movements and of environmental philosophy in France is notable for its silence on colonial issues and its exclusion of the voices of overseas scholars. In addition to relegating these voices out of hearing, out of sight and mind, this latent epistemic racism induces the failure to recognize other ways of approaching, thinking about, analyzing, writing about and narrating climate change.[56]

32 The singular status of the overseas "collectivités" (COM) in the French Republic and the ambivalent nature of their attachment to the European Union replicates these forms of exclusion, at the national and international levels. On the international stage the overseas entities are not entitled to their own voice in the climate change debate. Despite their ecological significance the overseas territories do not have their own voice at the UNFCCC. Unlike their neighbors —Fiji, Vanuatu and Tuvalu in the Pacific, Comoros and Mauritius in the Indian Ocean, Sainte-Lucie, Dominica, Surinam and Haiti in the Caribbean, the French overseas territories are neither parties to the convention nor recognized as observers. Officially they are represented by France.

33 When France signed and ratified the UNFCCC accords in 1992 and 1994 its agreement included all emissions of its overseas territories. In other words, France must inform the other parties to the convention of its progress in GHG reductions for all its territories, including the overseas "collectivités." At the same time, France's signature of the Kyoto Protocol was given as a member of the European Union. Thus, as the COM entities are not included within the European Union, the agreements and provisions of the Kyoto Protocol do not apply to the overseas "collectivités" or to New Caledonia, but do apply to the overseas departments. This means that the reference figure for GHG emissions in 1990—the level from which France must reduce its emissions—does not account for and does not include emissions from Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, Mayotte, French Polynesia, Wallis-et-Futuna or New Caledonia. These territories are excluded from the Kyoto Protocol and its associated programs regarding emissions. As was the case at COP 21, the COM entities and New Caledonia must individually agree to respect the agreements, but their commitment is formulated as part of their affiliation with France, and not on the international level.

34 This exclusion from the international scene has consequences for access to certain sources of international funding such as the Green Climate Fund intended for Small Island Developing States (SIDS). This fund was created in 2010 under the UNFCCC to finance projects in developing countries, in small insular states and in African countries facing the consequences of climate change. Unlike independent states, the French overseas territories do not have access to this funding.

35 Caught in a political limbo, the overseas territories, like other nonstate entities, try to influence international decision-making on climate change by participating in side events at COP meetings

[56] Fricker, Miranda, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007. Grosfoguel, Ramon, "The structure of knowledge in westernized universities: Epistemic racism/sexism and the four genocides/epistemicides of the long 16th century," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, vol. 11, N°1, 2013, p. 73–90.

and in informal forums.[57] They follow two principal strategies. The first is to use their national and EU affiliation to press for financial resources to confront and adapt to climate change. To this end in 2015 three members of the French Parliament representing overseas territories submitted a report to the National Assembly prior to the COP 21 meeting. The authors, Serge Letchimy from Martinique, Ibrahim Aboubaca from Mayotte and Maïna Sage from Polynesia, described the particular status of these French territories that suffer the same consequences of climate change as neighboring countries, but do not have access to the same types of funding to address the issue.

36 "Climate change knows no borders! Our Nation is to be praised for its commitment in favor of the most deprived and vulnerable of independent States, and thus it is inconceivable that the overseas territories of France should be deprived of the same support, considering both the extreme environmental and economic vulnerability of these territories, and the exceptional benefits derived from their terrestrial and marine biodiversity! These lands, which have served the space missions and military forces of France, are a major geostrategic asset that deserve the full attention of our Country."[58]

37 The overseas territories have attempted to obtain the necessary funding on the basis of their position as French territories. A Green Fund set up in 2023 to channel 2 billion euros to local authorities in France is also open to the overseas territories. Among the first 150 projects selected for funding, 18 involve overseas territories, for a total of 8.5 million euros (Guadeloupe, Martinique, La Réunion, Guyane, Mayotte and Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon).[59]

38 Other initiatives have been taken at the European level. The Association of Overseas Countries and Territories of the European Union has formed a working group on the environment to further dialogue on climate change between the overseas countries and territories and the European Commission. At the initiative of the French committee of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), a dedicated program for overseas entities called *Biodiversity and Ecosystems Services in EU Overseas Countries and Territories* (BEST) was launched in 2011 and funded by the European Union. While several local projects have been completed under this program, the necessary work of conservation requires greater financial resources. The French Economic, Social and Environmental Council, whose members are drawn from civil society, and which is the third representative body in France, after the National Assembly and the Senate, came to the same conclusion in a report on climate justice in 2016. Among its proposals the council calls for the creation of a dedicated climate justice fund for all the overseas territories, and adoption of specific targeted solutions when possible.[60]

39 The second strategy of the overseas territories is to build and participate in alliances and regional coalitions with other independent countries to gain access to international forums. Since 2006 New Caledonia and Polynesia have participated in the Pacific Islands Forum. Martinique is a full-fledged member of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). La Réunion and Mayotte have joined the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC). The Pacific Islands Forum, CARICOM and IOC have observer status at the UNFCCC Conferences of the Parties.

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[57] Schroeder, Helke, and Lovell, Heather, "The role of non-nation-state actors and side events in the international climate negotiations," *Climate Policy*, vol.12, N°1, 2012, p. 23–37. Nasiritousi, Naghmegh, Hjerpe, Mattias, and Linnér, Björn-Ola, "The roles of non-state actors in climate change governance: understanding agency through governance profiles," *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics*, vol. 16, N°1, 2016, p. 109–126.

[58] Sage, Maina, Aboubacar, Ibrahim, and Letchimy, Serge, *Rapport d'information sur les conséquences du changement climatique dans les outre-mer*, Paris, Assemblée Nationale, 2015, p. 54.

[59] "Découvrez les premiers lauréats du fond vert dans vos régions," Ministère de la transition écologique, 4 April 2023, https://www.ecologie.gouv.fr/decouvrez-premiers-laureats-du-fonds-vert-dans-vos-regions.

[60] Jouzel, Jean, and Michelot, Agnès, *La justice climatique : enjeux et perspectives pour la France*, Paris, Conseil Économique, Social et Environnemental and Les Éditions des journaux officiels, 2016, p. 7-8.

40 The low proportion of overseas emissions in total emissions for France, the high exposure of overseas territories to the consequences of global warming, and their poor representation in international decision-making bodies and instances that oversee environmental protection are the motives of this call for infranational climate justice. Referring to the 27 principles set out in the Bali Principles of Climate Justice in 2002, I would like to draw attention to three fundamental aspects of true climate justice for the overseas territories.[61]

41 Principles 3, 19, 20 and 21 "affirm the rights of indigenous peoples and affected communities to represent and speak for themselves" and "to participate effectively at every level of decision-making." The principles "demand that public policies be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples, free from any form of discrimination or bias" and recognize "the right to self-determination of Indigenous Peoples and their right to control their lands, including sub-surface land" and "the right to say 'No'" to any action that threatens their territory, culture or way of life. At present the French overseas territories are not adequately or specifically represented with respect to the issues of climate change, whether in scientific forums or political institutions. These territories' right to sovereignty over their lands remains contingent on the goodwill of central government in Paris. To ensure climate justice **the power and right of decision-making must be recognized** for communities and their land and marine spaces, in each of the overseas territories.

42 Secondly, principle 7 of the Bali Principles calls for recognition of "a principle of ecological debt" owed by industrialized countries and transnational corporations to the rest of the world for their appropriation of the planet's capacity to absorb greenhouse gases. In this regard climate justice for the overseas territories would entail that **France recognize the ecological debt** incurred with these formerly colonized territories and with its former colonies that are now independent. In the course of France's long colonial history these lands have been subject to incessant and extractivist exploitation of their soils and subsurface resources, biodiversity, ecosystems, and human and nonhuman living beings.

43 Thirdly, principles 11 and 22 of climate justice call for the development of renewable energy alternatives to fossil fuels, and for the recognition of women's rights in the overseas territories. Climate justice in these territories rests upon **a radical change in energy policy and for specific measures in favor of women's rights**. These three points are in my view essential to reaffirm the sacred nature of Mother Earth and to safeguard the rights of future generations.

Climate justice or decolonizing climate change?

44 The quest for infranational climate justice in overseas territories comes with some problems of its own. The singular form of decolonization without sovereignty and the assimilationist model of *département* status granted after 1946 for the purposes of full integration into the country's administrative structure imposes loss of memory and total silence regarding the history of slavery and the colonial relationship.[62] Does the cause of climate justice for overseas territories necessarily rest on an implicit validation of the political relationship between these territories and metropolitan France? Are the demands underlying the call for climate justice tantamount to acceptance of the postcolonial relationship? Do they mean all criticism of this relationship must be muted? Are we obliged to "love France" in order to insist upon justice in the face of climate change?[63] Do the overseas territories and their representatives have no political perspective or alternative here on Earth other than to forever intone the mantra of their vulnerability and

[61]International Climate Justice Network, "Bali Principles of Climate Justice," *Corpwatch*, 28 August 2002, https://www.corpwatch.org/article/bali-principles-climate-justice.

[62]Cottias, Myriam, "L'oubli du passé contre la"citoyenneté": troc et ressentiment à la Martinique (1848-1946)," in Daniel, Justin and Constant, Fred (eds.), *Cinquante ans de départementalisation*, Paris, Harmattan, 1997, p. 293-313.

[63]Diallo, Rokhaya, *La France tu l'aimes ou tu la fermes ?,* Paris, Textuel, 2019.

dependence on metropolitan France? Must they renounce any desire for sovereignty?[64] The doubt induced by the idea that the claim of climate justice for the overseas territories implies acceptance of the top-down narrative of metropolitan France and its domination of the overseas lands is compounded by a general notion that the environmental history of the world and the colonial roots of the modern world are two separate stories. In this perspective climate justice is caught in a double bind, which I call the "double environmental and colonial division of modernity."[65] This separation makes it possible to continue to address the three aspects of infranational climate justice for overseas territories in a purely technical manner. Accordingly, it is important to distinguish between the demand for climate justice and the demand for decolonization of climate change.

45 In an environmentalist or technicist perspective climate change is nothing other than the physio-chemical process driven by rising GHG emissions, which are increasing unequally around the globe; it is not connected to historical and contemporary unequal conditions around the world. The "political" responses to climate change are similarly technicist in conception, measured in emissions reductions calibrated in parts per million, in degrees of temperature, and not in terms of the nature of relations between human and nonhuman living beings in the Earth's ecosystems. This is the language used in the COP accords, reducing the political problem of global warming to an economic policy for the distribution of emissions quotas authorizing the holders to continue to release emissions. Paradoxically, even the slogans of climate movements like "Save the climate!" are underpinned by a de-politicized understanding that projects the climate as the main actor on the political stage. In this conception climate justice is reduced to the arithmetic of emissions weighted by territory, obscuring the political principle of justice. These emissions equations and slogans have no political content in relation to feminist, anticapitalist or anticolonial analyses, nor do they describe the socio-environmental relationships that link human beings among themselves and with nonhuman beings. In other words, the injunctions to "save the climate" or to more equitably distribute GHG emissions contain no political proposal based on a vision of the future world. This means that climate justice can continue to be framed in terms that would in no way change the world—the domination of a group of countries (always the same ones) over others.

46 In this technicist perspective the colonial reflex shows through in recurring comments such as: "Fortunately, to deal with climate change the overseas territories are French," or "What would they do without France?" This reaffirms the posture of the entity "France," which after having plundered the ecosystems of these lands and committed numerous colonial crimes against their inhabitants, men and women, takes the stance of a great liberator, and continues to treat the people of the overseas lands as deficient beings, whose defining trait is to be saved by the white and innocent hand of France.[66] Where the overseas territories are concerned, the aid furnished in the wake of severe climate events such as hurricanes is not seen as international cooperation or the solidarity habitually manifested between countries in the event of natural disasters, large-scale wildfires for instance. On the contrary, this aid can turn into a reiterated argument to justify the continuing colonial relationship with the overseas territories and the representation of their inhabitants as only semi-French underlings who live in the nether parts of France.

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[64]Reno, Fred, "Dependancy as strategy," in Henke, Holger and Reno, Fred (eds.), *New Political Culture in the Caribbean,* Kingston, The University of West Indies Press, 2022, p. 17–37. Constant, Fred, *Géopolitique des outre-mer : entre déclassement et (re) valorisation*, Paris, Le Cavalier Bleu, 2022, p.187-196. Bonilla, Yarimar, *Non-Sovereign Futures: French Caribbean Politics in the Wake of Disenchantment*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2015.

[65]Ferdinand, Malcom, *Une écologie décoloniale,* op. cit., p.11-49.

[66]Célestine, Audrey, *La fabrique des identités : l'encadrement politique des minorités caribéennes à Paris et New York*, Paris, Khartala, 2018. Verges, Françoise, *Le ventre des femmes : capitalisme, racialisation féminisme*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2017. Paris, Myriam, *Nous qui versons la vie goute à goute : féminisme, économie reproductive et pouvoir colonial à la Réunion,* Paris, Dialloz,
2020. Sptiz, Chantal, *L'île des rêves écrasés*, Papeete, Les

Éditions de la Plage, 1991. Césaire, Aimé, *Discours sur le colonialisme,* Paris, Présence africaine, 2004 [1950].

47 The unspoken colonial attitude and the unease it generates show the limits of classical approaches to climate justice. These fault lines demonstrate the necessity not only to achieve climate justice, but, even more urgently, to decolonize climate change. "Decolonizing climate change" means first recognizing the colonialism underlying the unequal contributions of human activities around the world to climate warming, and the inequitable distribution of the consequences. It means recognizing the inequitable nature of the place, voice and possibility of action accorded to different protagonists nationally and internationally. The call for decolonized thinking about climate change is a call to join together economic and political measures for emissions reductions and for building adaptation capacity. It is a call to reconfigure the politics of the world and to leave behind the period of modern colonization, and to establish relations between the former colonizers and colonized peoples, between their social groups, between the global North and the global South, founded on principles of equality, justice and dignity. This decolonial movement was first outlined in the statement of environmental justice principles adopted at the People of Color Environmental Justice Leadership Summit held in Washington D.C. in 1991, and which served as a template for the Bali Climate Justice Principles.[67] This claim, by its essence, reaches beyond national borders.

48 Pending possible changes in the composition of the overseas territories, decolonization of climate change in the context of France implies a double epistemic and political shift so that another world can emerge from the history of colonization and slavery. Two preliminary remarks are called for here. Firstly, decolonization of thinking about climate change in France is not an appeal of the so-called "overseas-ers" of France to be interpreted as a request for assistance or an appeal to charity. This interpretation would create the impression that once again this aid or assistance would be of secondary importance in French climate policy, or could perhaps be dispensed with entirely. Decolonized thinking about climate change is fundamental to address the social and economic circumstances of the overseas territories, in the same way that metropolitan France must address unequal conditions across its own mainland territory, the divergence between urban areas and rural regions, the discrimination against women, poor people and people of color in low-income neighborhoods and towns. Decolonized climate change is a requisite condition for the development of French climate policy that can address the stakes of global climate change. Secondly, the practice of *tokenism* must be banished. It will no longer suffice to place a handful of people of color in institutional positions to project a positive image, while preserving intact the historical structure. For example, although it is symbolically important to have a person of color and resident of an overseas territory as minister for said territories, such an appointment in no way alters the structure of postcolonial relations between metropolitan France and its overseas territories.

49 Decolonization of thinking about climate change from the vantage point of France involves a radical and double epistemic shift, in the comprehension of climate change and in the perception of the French territory from which and for which its policy is developed. The first epistemic shift is to reshape the conception of the French national territory. Far from being a monolithic hexagonal chunk of Europe, France is country of multiple lands spread across three oceans. Without recognizing the place, voice and dignity of the overseas inhabitants, we only perpetuate the hypocritical premises of colonial thinking that situate the territory within the confines of the mainland, and praise and uphold the wonderful biodiversity of the overseas lands as well-deserved trophies. Recognition of the dignity of these men and women can only come with a strong political and legal engagement in light of the colonial history and enslavement at the origin of the relations and situations as they exist today. This recognition must rest on rest on "the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples" set forth in Article 1 of the United Nations Charter, and hence on the possibility accorded to overseas territories to modify their status, if they wish, and to accede to full independence and sovereignty. Recognition that

[67] "Principles of Environmental Justice," Washington DC, 1991, https://www.ejnet.org/ej/principles.pdf.

France is state of multiple locations, built upon a colonial empire of slavery and enslavement, is key to understanding the geographic situation of France around the world and the ways in which the country inhabits and lives on Earth, in its terrestrial dimensions. The question of coming "Down to Earth" is the title of a well-known work by the late Bruno Latour, philosopher of science; this line of questioning will always be biased if we ignore the colonial history which is the point of departure of our world.[68] We cannot become terrestrial beings or come "down to earth" without first establishing a different relationship with the territories which were subjected to violence that allowed metropolitan France to keep some of its lands.

50 The second epistemic shift involves remodeling the political relationship between the mainland and the overseas lands to take into account the ecological importance of the latter, and to recognize the overseas inhabitants as political subjects in their own right at the regional, national and international levels. The call for a new political relationship was expressed in the Fort-de-France Declaration issued by the conference of the presidents of the French regions Martinique, Guadeloupe, Saint-Martin, Guyane, La Réunion and Mayotte. These elected officials underscored the "urgent need to enter into a new stage of history" for the overseas territories and called for "reshaping the relations between our territories and the French Republic as a whole, under a newly defined framework for the implementation of public policies that are aligned with the actual conditions in each of the territories."[69]

51 Along with the economic redistribution necessary to improve living conditions and respect the fundamental right of overseas inhabitants to basic services such as access to water and better healthcare infrastructure, a political relationship must be invented to reflect the ecological importance of these territories. Considering that the 2.6 million overseas residents have the prime responsibility for 80% of the ecosystem biodiversity of France, a form of political representation—environmental democracy or even climate democracy—must devised that is commensurate with this ecological resource, if climate change is to be effectively addressed. Many forms of renewed representation are possible: creation of a parliament of environmental and ecological matters with a time frame longer than that of today's institutions; localization of the environment and ecological transition ministry in Guyane; new parliamentary seats created for representation devoted to environmental and ecological issues; greater legislative autonomy for overseas territories; representation of overseas territories in COP meetings.

52 Scientific production and access to research must also be rethought and redistributed under a remodeled relationship. For too long the overseas territories have been the spaces and objects of colonial and scientific extractivism, in which scientific research has been carried out neither by nor for the inhabitants.[70] Once again, in light of the ecological significance of these territories and their exposure to climate risks, these territories and **above all their inhabitants** have fully legitimate grounds to develop within their territories advanced scientific facilities in all disciplines to lead research on environmental and ecological issues. A foundational starting point would be to provide local residents with automatic funding for Master's degree studies and doctoral theses in areas of ecological importance, targeting students from those territories that have suffered from ecocide—massive and potentially irremediable destruction of ecosystems —as the result of nuclear weapons testing, mining in New Caledonia and Guyane, pesticide pollution in Martinique, Guadeloupe and La Réunion. This would be a step to leave behind the colonialism that continues to underlie the science of climate change and the status of overseas territories. In addition to funding, the type of research and scientific work needed must be rethought, to build research on the principle of epistemic justice that recognizes the

[68] Latour, Bruno, *Où atterrir : comment s'orienter en politique,* Paris, La Découverte, 2017. Translated as *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*, Polity Press, Cambridge/Oxford (UK) 2018.

[69] "Appel de Fort-de-France," *France Info,* 18 May 2022, https://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/appel-de-fort-de-france-des-elus-d-outre-mer-appellent-l-etat-a-changer-sa-politique-d-aide-1284920.html.

[70] Smith Tuhiwai, Linda, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, third edition, Bloomsbury, London, 2022.

various sources and forms of production of knowledge.[71] Revamped research institutions would recognize the fundamental political and epistemic role that nonprofit groups and collectives have played in these territories for over 40 years, in the defense of ecosystems and the conceptualization of ecological issues. Examples are *Zéro poison—zéro chlordecone* and *Assaupamar* in Martinique, *Vivre* and *Envie-Santé* in Guadeloupe, *193* in Polynesia, *Ensemble pour la Planète* in New Caledonia, *Sillages* in La Réunion and *La Jeunesse autochtone de Guyane* in Guyane.[72]

53 Lastly, to decolonize thinking on climate change from the vantage point of France also means developing these measures in the broader framework of justice and reparations for the crimes of slavery and colonization. The African American philosopher Olúfémie Táíwò has shown that a policy of reparations for slavery and colonization cannot be implemented without some form of climate justice.[73] The other side of the coin is just as important. Following through on earlier proposals, I think climate justice cannot be envisioned without reparations for the historic crimes of colonization and slavery.[74] Before they came to be presented as areas of ecological importance for France, these spaces were sacrificial zones for France, where ceaseless exploitation of human and nonhuman beings knew no limits.[75] Let us remember that the last round of nuclear weapons testing in France was conducted in 1996, four years after France had signed the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.[76] To this day France as never had to answer for these colonial and postcolonial crimes. How can the country loudly and proudly claim, with white innocence, its oversight of the ecosystems of these territories, without at the same time recognizing the long colonial history of predatory and dehumanizing acts perpetrated on the people of these lands?[77] The logical conclusion is that we cannot decolonize climate change or climate justice in France without at the same time decolonizing France itself, without reinventing the political image of the nation, and its cultural, scientific and political institutions, and its very ways of living on Earth. The stakes are quite literally to build a new world in the wake of colonization and slavery.

A world beyond overseas

54 We address one final, and fundamental, issue in our conclusion. As mentioned above, the term "overseas" in itself expresses the perspective of the historical colonial empire of France. Likewise, the necessary decolonization of change cannot be confined within the national borders of the country. It would be inconsistent to propose a decolonial politics of climate change delimited by the geographic boundaries decreed by a former colonial power. In the face of global warming metropolitan France and the French overseas territories are subject to unequal and discriminatory degrees of contribution, exposure and vulnerability. This characteristically imbalanced relationship, the heritage of the long colonial history of modernity, is found all around the world. Decolonizing the politics of climate change from the vantage point of France means, paradoxically, moving beyond the infranational channels of communication and exchange between the overseas territories and metropolitan France. Decolonizing climate change politics **from** the various overseas territories is a process that must necessarily pursue

[71] Médina, José, *The epistemology of resistance*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012. De Sousa Santos, Boaventura, *Epistemologies of the South: justice against epistemicide,* London, Routledge, 2016. Solbiac, Rodolphe, *La destruction des statues de Victor Schoelcher en Martinique : l'exigence de réparation et d'une nouvelle politique des savoirs*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2020, p.109-113.

[72] Cabanes, Valérie, *Un nouveau droit pour la Terre,* Paris, Point, 2021 [2016].

[73] Táíwò, Olúfmi, *Reconsidering reparations: worldmaking in the case of the climate crisis,* New York, Oxford University Press, 2022.

[74] Ferdinand, Malcom, *une écologie décoloniale,* op. cit., p. 390-400.

[75] Lopes de Souza, Marcelo, " 'Sacrifice zone': The environment-territory-place of disposable lives,"*Community Development Journal*, vol. 56, N°2, April 2021, p. 220—243.

[76] See le nonprofit "193" : https://www.oneheart.fr/assos/association-193-1014 . Philippe, Sébastien and Statitus, Tomas, *Toxique : enquête sur les essais nucléaires français en Polynésie,* Paris, Presses Universitaires de France/humensis, 2021. Larbi Benchiha, *Bon baiser de Murora*, documentary film, 53 min, 2016, http://www.film-documentaire.fr/4DACTION/w_fiche_film/47636_1.

[77] Wekker, Gloria, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2016.

dialogue, talks and alliances among at least four distinct types and forms of nonsovereign territories around the world.

55 Far from being a singular feature of France, the French overseas territories belong to an ensemble of overseas territories around the world that were, wholly or in part, appropriated in the course of colonization and armed conquest led by a host of countries: the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the United States, Denmark, the United Kingdom, Finland, Norway, China, South Korea, New Zealand and Australia.[78] These "overseas" lands include: Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Samoa, the Mariana Islands and Guam (United States); Aruba, Bonaire, Saint-Eustache, Saba, Curaçao and Sint-Marteen (Netherlands); Anguilla, Montserrat, the Cayman Islands, the British Virgin Islands, Turks and Caicos, Bermuda, the Pitcairn Islands, the Falkland Islands and Saint Helena (United Kingdom); the Faroe Islands and Greenland (Denmark); the Cook Islands and Tokelau (New Zealand). Most of these nonsovereign territories are situated in tropical latitudes, and are characterized by exceptional biodiversity, and also by high exposure to the consequences of climate change. Certain territories, such as Greenland, have become strategic locations for scientific work to track and understand climate change. But it is rarely, if ever, mentioned that Greenland is a nonsovereign territory of over 50,000 inhabitants, including the Tunumiit people. Like the French overseas territories, these territories have contributed little to climate change, and are subject to similar constraints of territorial inequality and political and juridical marginalization within their tutelary states. These relationships are described by Daphina Misiedjan for the overseas territories of the Netherlands.[79]

56 Secondly there are also territories inhabited by Indigenous peoples under governments with varying degrees of political and legislative autonomy. These territories include those of: the Lakota and Sioux Nations in the United States; Guarani, Krenak and numerous maroon communities in Brazil; the Kalina and Boni people in Guiana: the Saramaka in Surinam; the Walpiri and Mangala in Australia; the Lenka in Honduras; the Baks and Twa in the Republic of Congo; the Ogoni in Nigeria; the Sami in Norway; the Nun First Nations in Canada; the Kanak in New Caledonia/Kanaky; and the Maohi in Polynesia. These territories can be visualized on a global scale in the map published by Native Land Digital.[80] These peoples who have done little to contribute to climate change are today exposed to its consequences, even as they struggle with precarious social conditions in their countries, and are marginalized by their tutelary governmental authorities and on the international scene.

57 A third group is composed of territories that are nominally independent and sovereign states, but which are mired in various forms of dependence and economic and political domination in relation to their former colonial central power. This domination takes of the form of secret pacts such as the ties of "France-Afrique" that bind former French colonies in sub-Saharan Africa to the countries of the North and international bodies such as the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).[81] As decolonial and anticolonial thinkers Anibal Quijano, Walter Mignolo, Catherine Walsh, Arturo Escobar, Walter Rodney, Macarena Gomez and many others have shown, the colonial relationships forged in the times of colonization and slavery persist even in the wake of independence, in the ways people and governments relate to each other, in the understanding of power, in knowledge, in ways of being and of living on Earth, and even in ways of protecting the environment.[82] These

[78]Ferdinand, Malcom, Oostindie, Geert and Veenendaal, Wouter, op. cit. Constant, Fred, op. cit.

[79]Misiedajn, Daphina, "Separate but equal in the protection against climate change? The legal framework of climate justice for the Caribbean part of the Kingdom of The Netherlands," in *The Geographical Journal,* vol. 22, December 2022.

[80]Map available here https://native-land.ca/

[81]Thomas Borrel, Amzat Boukari-Yabara, Benoît Collombat (eds.), *L'empire qui ne veut pas mourir : une histoire de la Françafrique*, Paris, Seuil, 2021.

[82]Walsh, Catherine and Mignolo, Walter, *On decoloniality: concept, analysis, praxis,* Durham, Duke University Press, 2018; Mbaria, John, and Ogada, Mordecai, *The big conservation lie,* Auburn, Lens & Pens Press, 2017. Escobar, Arturo, *Sentir-penser avec la* Terre *: l'écologie au-delà de l'occident*, (translated by. A. Bonvallot et al.), Paris, Seuil, 2018. Blanc, Guillaume, *L'invention du colonialisme vert : pour en finir avec le mythe de l'éden africain*, Paris, Flammarion, 2022.

territories are independent by statute, with their own political and legislative organization. The neoliberal regime of international markets and government by debt impose constraints on these countries that in effect impinge on their sovereignty. This situation is particularly problematic for Small Island Developing States (SIDS). From Barbados to Tuvalu, from Mauritius to Samoa, the small island states of the second wave of decolonization in the second half of the 20th century are also caught up in a situation of political and economic disadvantage and inequality on the international capitalist chess board, even as they are among the first to confront the impacts of climate change.

58 Finally, poor urban neighborhoods and districts in the so-called North countries are particularly exposed and vulnerable to the consequences of climate change, e.g. heat waves. These territories—often home to people of color who themselves or whose families emigrated from former colonies in the postcolonial period—are representative of another form of nonsovereignty. Ostracized by a sort of environmental apartheid, these residents, exemplified by the population of the Seine—Saint-Denis *département* adjacent to Paris in the Île-de-France region in France, are not seen as political agents in their own right, able to elaborate their own conception of the world and of the Earth, and their own environmental and ecological vision.[83]

59 These overseas entities—overseas territories within sovereign countries, Indigenous peoples' lands, small island countries, and poor neighborhoods—can for the most part be characterized as follows. Although historically they have contributed little to global warming, they are disproportionally exposed to the consequences of climate change. Additionally, they are more economically, socially and ecologically vulnerable than other countries. These territories have historically been colonized under the former empires of Western countries, and remain marginalized within their own states and on the international scene of climate change talks. The inequalities of climate change impacts follow, to some extent, the fault lines of the colonial fracture in the modern history of the West, both in the causes and consequences of climate change and in the national and international bodies and forums where climate policy is constructed. Recognizing this history would constitute a profound modification of how climate change is perceived and how we respond to it.

60 In short, the global climate crisis cannot be resolved without full decolonization of the Western world. We cannot invent a shared world to face the disruption that is already under way without full, equal and respectful participation accorded to all the innumerable voices of the Earth. These voices are raised day after day to remind us of the existential failure of the colonial vision of the West, and they carry the powerful and exigent song of the quest for equality, liberty and dignity.

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[83]Jones, Terry, "Apartheid Ecology in America. On Building the Segregated Society," *Black World*, vol. 24, N° 7, mai 1975, p. 4-17. Ouassak, Fatima, *La puissance des mères : pour un nouveau sujet révolutionnaire*, Paris, Découverte, 2020. Ouassak, Fatima, *Pour une écologie pirate : et nous serons libres,* Paris, La Découverte, 2023.