



Environmental Justice and Postcolonialism in Reunion Island : The Case of the Shark Attacks

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Oral Presentation

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Abstract

This communication proposes to study, with the theoretical framing of the environmental justice in a postcolonial context, how a culturally majority population struggle with what they considered as environmental degradation.

To fight against the repeated prohibitions on accessing "their" environmental amenity, some surfers build their sport as a risk and stuck out, despite themselves, their privileged access to one of the most valued seaside resort of this short island. As a result, the prevention of shark attack is seen as a community struggle to maintain their privileges. But these surfers oppose a desire for environmental justice that would not discriminate its beneficiaries according to their social origin. This instrumentalizations of environmental justice asks two questions.

First is the question of distributive justice: in the name of what principles to help or not a population to maintain access to environmental amenity, access that does not would, in theory, deprive another population of its rights? Distributive justice would mean less helping this "favored" population because they would have the resources to solve the problem on their own. This would require a public acknowledgment of the majority status of the surfers who are not constituted as an ethnic group, despite the exogenous designations. French Republican values prevent from saying that a privileged ethnic group seizes a territory. The postcolonial context thus imprints its first stigmata: the impossibility of saying a form of social inequality on a territory which is experiencing deep inequalities.

Then is the question of the ethics : must the environmental justice necessarily be pro-environmentalist? One of the solution applied shows the desire to exert "preventive" fishing pressure on sharks. This anthropocentric positioning is challenged by eco-centered arguments: "killing sharks" for the development of "leisure" seemed to be unfair. We will also study the polemics around the solutions of prevention.