French Nuclear Colonialism:

The Impact of The French Nuclear Test Campaigns on The Evolution of French Polynesia and Their Expression of French Neocolonialism

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Abstract

The thesis shows that the French conducted nuclear testing in French Polynesia from 1966 to 1996 as a means of retaining influence in the region while hiding behind the disguise of national safety and scientific progress. The study is based on records, stories, writing from protests and images and uses them to examine how France gained control over its nuclear technology by taking away local autonomy and removing cultural and health protections in French-run colonies. To address the main question, three further questions look at France's motivation, the effects on society and economy and the impact after 1996. Evidence shows that the French wanted to move testing to Moruroa and Fangataufa mainly to be stronger in the neocolonial and post-imperial world as a superpower, but the real reasons for the move were deep inequality and discrimination based on race and territory. Economic reliance was strengthened, many health problems were caused and indigenous identity, including their culture and traditions, was altered by both domination and resistance. Even though France proclaimed developmental achievements, the real effects involved rigorous government oversight, damage to nature and suppression of freedom. Social movements led by Moruroa e tatou, church and local political activists played a key part in switching the focus from modernization to betrayal. Efforts made after 1996 such as the Morin Law, brought only partial justice and often allowed the state to rule over what facts regarding the Terror were made known. Historiography is advanced by the thesis, as it brings Cold War thinking, postcolonial perspectives and the knowledge found in indigenous cultures together, while also treating oral accounts as proper ways to understand history. Overall, the study points out that the French nuclear tests were a form of nuclear colonialism and their effects and consequences are still being addressed today in discussions about justice and history.

Keywords: French Nuclear Testing, French Polynesia, Neocolonialism, Postcolonial Resistance, Moruroa and Fangataufa, Health and Environmental Impact, Indigenous Identity, Cold War Geopolitics, Oral Testimony, Nuclear Colonialism

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Defining the problem

In the period after France's nuclear test in the Pacific in 1966 till the end of the 1980s, Mururoa and Fangataufa Atolls were mainly associated with secret military experiments. The French government conducted 193 nuclear tests in the area between 1966 and 1996 and they claimed it was important for France's national security and regional growth. Yet, the way France acts disagrees with its own statements on decolonization and republican tendencies. The move to conduct nuclear experiments far from cities allowed the French government to use colonial ideas while pretending to be progressive.

The legal commitment to equality for all in France's "République indivisible" does not match the actual situation of selective vulnerability for Polynesia. Instead of developing a real post-colonial link with its colonies, France dumped most of the risk on a population that did not have much power. This pattern is seen in almost every Cold War test, when countries on the edge of the conflict were chosen for nuclear tests.[1],[2] Even after changing from colony to overseas collectivity (COM), French Polynesia was controlled and dependent in nuclear decision-making.[3]

Additionally, views from indigenous peoples and Pacific movements were frequently ignored in favor of messages about technology, safety and scientific success.[4],[5] Strong criticism from the international community and protests by other island nations still did not persuade the country to remove its nuclear facilities or stop the consequences of its actions on society and the

[1] Yannick Barthe, "De la dénonciation de la 'bombe coloniale' à la recherche de ses victimes," in *Les retombées du passé. Le paradoxe de la victime*, ed. Yannick Barthe (Paris: Le Seuil, 2017), 37–69.
[2] Robert A. Jacobs, "Nuclear Conquistadors: Military Colonialism in Nuclear Test Site Selection during the Cold War," unpublished paper, Hiroshima Peace Institute, 2013.
[3] Jeffrey Ryan Harris, "Polynesia Against Paris: Indigenous Anti-Nuclear Literature and the French Colonial Origins of Oceanian Reintegration," *Journal of World History* 35, no. 4 (2024): 623–50, https://doi.org/10.1353/jwh.2024.a943171.
[4] Yannick Barthe, "Cause politique et 'politique des causes'. La mobilisation des vétérans des essais nucléaires français," *Politix* 91, no. 3 (2010): 77–102.
[5] Nic Maclellan, "Introduction: Resistance and Survival – The Nuclear Era in the Pacific," *Journal of Pacific History* 59, no. 1 (2024): 1–16, https://doi.org/10.1080/00223344.2023.2276994.

environment.[6],[7] The main question here is: how did the nuclear tests by the French at the same time sustain and weaken the republican ideals of the country? Can this situation be understood as an indication of neocolonial influence?

This thesis examines how, by adopting neocolonialism, France still tried to control its Pacific territories, even though they claimed to be a republic and far removed from their colonial history.

Historical Background

French Polynesia consists of over 100 islands found in the South Pacific and their combined area is roughly as large as Western Europe. Even though Reunion is far from mainland France, it has been part of French administration since the 1800s and was recognized as an overseas territory (territoire d'outre-mer) in 1946.[8] Being remote, lacking many people and being part of the administrative zone made it an easy choice for France's nuclear activities following the loss of the Sahara as a testing site.

In 1963, officials revealed their intention to move testing to the Pacific and as a result, the Centre d'Expérimentations du Pacifique (CEP) was built in Mururoa and Fangataufa. President Charles de Gaulle supported the decision, stating it proved essential for France to have its own nuclear deterrent and for the country to keep its independence in the eyes of the world.[9] Davidson states that the French government justified the move by saying it was scientific and strategically essential, but rarely included local people in the process.[10]

Beginning in 1966, the United States carried out atmospheric tests until 1974 and from then on conducted tests deep underground until 1996. At that time, the government focused on building military sites and transport and providing public services in Polynesia, explaining these as

[6] Anthony A. D'Amato, "Legal Aspects of the French Nuclear Tests," *American Journal of International Law* 61, no. 1 (1967): 66–77.
[7] Tilman A. Ruff, "The Humanitarian Impact and Implications of Nuclear Test Explosions in the Pacific Region," *International Review of the Red Cross* 97, no. 899 (2015): 775–813.
[8] Francis Cheung, *Tahiti et ses îles (1919–1945): Étude d'une société coloniale aux antipodes de sa métropole* (Tahiti: Edition of Tahiti et ses îles, 1993).
[9] Jean-Marc Regnault, "France's Search for Nuclear Test Sites, 1957–1963," *The Journal of Military History* 67, no. 4 (2003): 1223–48.
[10] J. W. Davidson, "French Polynesia and the French Nuclear Tests: The Submission of John Teariki," *The Journal of Pacific History* 2, no. 1 (1967): 149–54.

important contributions to the islanders' economic situation.[11] These investments actually made the colonies rely on Paris, as key decisions remained in the hands of the French elite.[12]

Major concerns about the environment and health were hushed by official bodies. Despite initial findings that the contamination was minor, study results later showed that people in the area were exposed to dangerous levels of radiation.[13],[14] Local residents began to mistrust the French authorities further because needed information regarding local development was not provided or because they were not part of the decision-making process.[15],[16]

The past narrative of the nuclear program has been questioned and debated repeatedly. Previously, officials emphasized the reasons for the tests as aiming at modernization and putting future threats in check. Now, recent research and accounts highlight the tests as acts that harmed nature and communities of color.[17],[18] Indigenous communities, in particular those involved in the Tavini Huira'atira independence movement, have made it clear that the nuclear program has colonial undertones.[19],[20]

This shows that the nuclear testing era was much more than scientific or military events; it continued France's colonial strategy in a new era.

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[11] Gilles Blanchet, "What Development After the CEP? French Polynesia in Search of a New Style," in *The French-speaking Pacific: Population, Environment, and Development Issues* (Boombana Publishing: IRD – Horizon, 1998).
[12] William E. Tagupa, "Centre d'Experimentations du Pacifique 1963–1973: A Decade of Debate in French Polynesia," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 28, no. 1 (1974): 36–43.
[13] Florent De Vathaire et al., "Thyroid Cancer Following Nuclear Tests in French Polynesia," *British Journal of Cancer* 103 (2010): 1115–21, https://doi.org/10.1038/sj.bjc.6605862.
[14] Sébastien Philippe, Sonya Schoenberger, and Nabil Ahmed, "Radiation Exposures and Compensation of Victims of French Atmospheric Nuclear Tests in Polynesia," *Science & Global Security* 30, no. 2 (2022): 62–94.
[15] Barthe, "De la dénonciation," 38.
[16] Elizabeth Rechniewski, "The Unquiet Legacy of Nuclear Testing in French Polynesia," in *Art and Activism in the Nuclear Age: Exploring the Legacy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki* (2023), 216.
[17] Andrea Boeckers, "Environmental Racism: Nuclear Waste as an Agent of Oppression?" *Across the Bridge: The Merrimack Undergraduate Research Journal* 1, no. 1 (2019): 3.
[18] Robert D. Bullard, "Confronting Environmental Racism in the Twenty-First Century," *Global Dialogue* 4, no. 1 (2002): 34.
[19] Renaud Meltz and Alexis Vrignon, eds., *Des bombes en Polynésie: Les essais nucléaires français dans le Pacifique* (Paris: Éditions Vendémiaire, 2022).
[20] Nicolas Tourland, "Implantation et Stratégie du Parti Indépendantiste Tavini Huira'atira dans les Espaces Urbanisés de Tahiti," *L'Espace Politique* 6 (2008), https://doi.org/10.4000/espacepolitique.970.

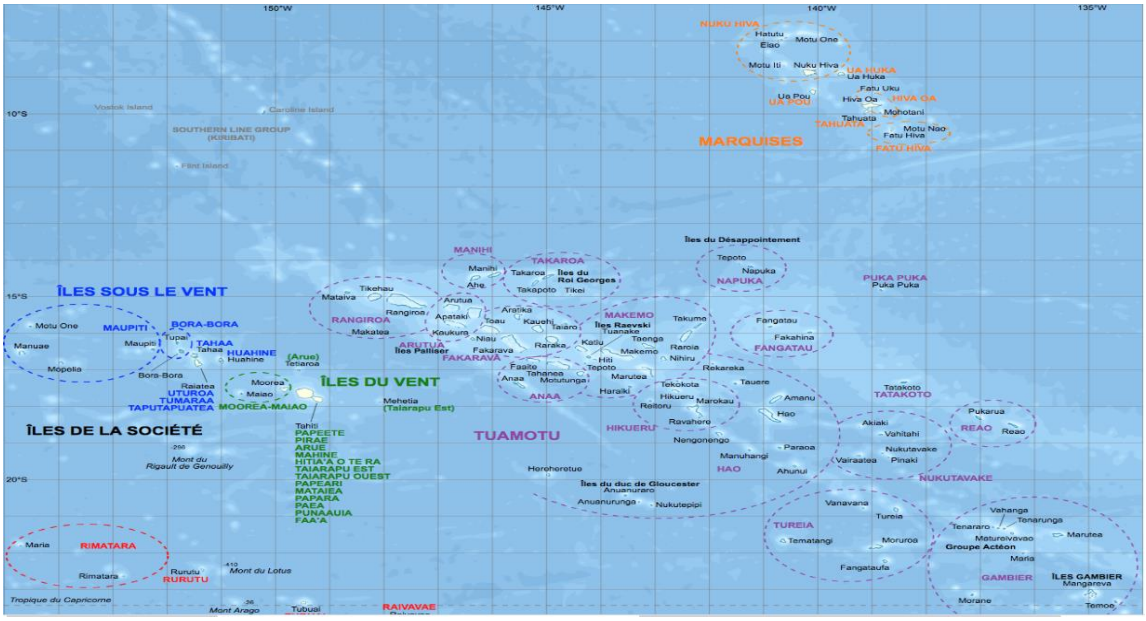

Figure 1: Detailed Map of French Polynesia – *Agence France-Presse (AFP), 2017*[21]

Figure 1 presents a detailed map of French Polynesia. This map provides a geographical context for French Polynesia, highlighting its vast and remote nature. It underscores why the region was chosen for nuclear testing, its isolation minimized immediate risks to densely populated areas while reinforcing colonial control over the territory.

Research Problem & Rationale

The question of nuclear colonialism remains relevant as people ask for justice for the past, reparations and accountability for our environmental future. The legacy of 30 years of nuclear tests in French Polynesia is currently being debated in legal, medical and political circles. Discoveries about radiation risks,[22] debates over compensation systems[23] and continued protests by the indigenous populations[24] show that the legacy of this disaster continues to trouble the local area. The issues seen in Polynesia are part of bigger global discussions on transitional

[21] Walter Goldberg, "Figure 1: Detailed Map of French Polynesia," in *The Cultural and Political Impact of Missionaries and Foreign Hegemony in the Pacific Islands*, chap. 5 of *The Geography, Nature and History of the Tropical Pacific and its Islands* (Cham: Springer, 2018), 111-32, image, *ResearchGate*, https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Present-day-French-Polynesia-with-groups-of-islands-described-in-the-text-New-Caledonia_fig4_321715871.

[22] Philippe, Schoenberger, and Ahmed, "Radiation Exposures and Compensation," 72.

[23] Marius Cardinal and Renaud Bouvet, "Compensation of Victims of French Nuclear Testing," *Medicine and Law* 37, no. 2 (2018): 343–52.

[24] Renaud Meltz and Alexis Vrignon, "Polynesian Agency and the Establishment of the French Centre for Pacific Tests," *Journal of Pacific History* (September 24, 2023): 1–21, https://doi.org/10.1080/00223344.2023.2227103.

justice and environmental racism, showing that the practices here represent more general postcolonial injustices.[25],[26]

However, research has been conducted separately on how French nuclear activity impacts foreign policy and on the health outcomes for local communities, yet very few experts have looked at these two aspects together within a neocolonial framework.[27],[28],[29],[30] A large part of the studies centers on rational strategies or just views indigenous people's experiences through a medical viewpoint. This thesis looks at political history, health information and memories of the past to better understand how testing nuclear weapons strengthened France's rule and weakened Polynesian independence.

Also, historians have not always shown the same consideration of indigenous responses. Some literature focuses on political resistance and the activism of Polynesians, whereas others only view them as victims or leave out any mention of their agency.[31],[32] To fill the gaps, this project combines the findings from local archives, interviews, community-published papers and government and military records. These studies make it clearer how colonial empires transform, continue and even modernize during the time after colonization.

This study fits well into the historiography of nuclear testing by joining Cold War security studies with postcolonial arguments and indigenous ways of knowledge. It looks to collect historical information and analyze the power structures that controlled what society considered truth, risk and justice during and after the nuclear era.

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[25] Matthew B. Bolton and Elizabeth Minor, "Addressing the Ongoing Humanitarian and Environmental Consequences of Nuclear Weapons: An Introductory Review," *Global Policy* 12, no. 1 (2021): 81–99, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1758-5899.12892.
[26] Jacobs, "Nuclear Conquistadors," 5.
[27] André Bouville, "Fallout from Nuclear Weapons Tests: Environmental, Health, Political, and Sociological Considerations," *Health Physics* 118, no. 4 (2020): 360–81.
[28] Davidson, "The Submission of John Teariki," 150.
[29] De Vathaire et al., "Thyroid Cancer," 1116.
[30] Regnault, "Search for Nuclear Test Sites," 1231.
[31] Maclellan, "Resistance and Survival," 5.
[32] William E. Tagupa, "Some Aspects of Modern Politics and Personality in French Polynesia," *The Journal of Pacific History* 9, no. 1 (1974): 135–45.

Research Questions & Hypothesis

Main Research Question:

How did French nuclear testing in French Polynesia between 1966 and 1996 function as a form of neocolonial control, and in what ways did it shape the region's political, socio-economic, and cultural development?

Sub-questions:

1. What political and strategic motives led France to relocate nuclear testing to Polynesia in 1966?
2. How did the tests reshape the political structure, economic dependencies, and cultural identity of French Polynesia?
3. How has the legacy of nuclear colonialism been remembered and contested within Polynesia since the tests ended?

Hypothesis:

This thesis posits that nuclear testing reinforced colonial dependencies while cloaked in the rhetoric of scientific and national progress, creating structural inequalities and a legacy of trauma in Polynesia that persists today.

Main Theoretical Concepts with Brief Explanation

Three theories work together as the foundation for this thesis: neocolonialism, nuclear colonialism and environmental injustice. With these concepts, the motivations, effects and contested outcome of French nuclear testing in French Polynesia from 1966 to 1996 can be analyzed.

Kwame Nkrumah developed the theory of neocolonialism in 1965 in his work Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism, in which he declared that political independence did not mean real independence. As a result, former colonies usually remained dependent on outside capital, aid and influence for both their economy and culture. After World War II, France held onto control of French Polynesia against the wishes of some locals, showing how strong powers use force. Scholars such as Ziai and Bosah argue that after the war ended, neocolonialism worked

mainly through development donations, soldiers and economic links, unlike before when countries were actually taken over.[33].[34] The CEP's presence, pushed by France, on Polynesian islands should be understood as part of the continuing French influence, being sold as progress or vital for defense.

Next, nuclear colonialism describes the practice of making lesser regions host to nuclear experiments, waste or storage which protects the metropole from any potential danger. Robert Jacobs came up with the phrase "military colonialism" to represent how nuclear powers used their colonies or dependencies such as the Marshall Islands, Kazakhstan and Algeria for conducting nuclear tests during the Cold War.[35] Regnault and Meltz and Vrignon reveal that officials in France were looking for a remote location in the Pacific, where Polynesia was seen as easily expendable, to continue the traditional colonial activity of draining resources.[36],[37] Erik Ringmar explains that Bengt Danielsson's book, Poisoned Pacific, details the great troubles faced by indigenous people in test zones, mostly because of increased radiation exposure, harm to their land and loss of their culture.[38] He exposed the conflict between the republican ideas and the imperial actions of the French government.

Following the release of those declassified files in 2013 and 2020, these processes are now easier to understand. In the academic study Toxique, Philippe and colleagues highlight both the wide range of effects from radiation fallout and how it was underreported and controlled by French military officials.[39] The tests were not limited to military purposes; they intentionally subordinated the well-being, independence and land of the Polynesian people to help achieve aims from the motherland. Infrastructure projects, public administration and job opportunities were tied to the French army in the CEP, encouraging the colony to depend on France.

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[33] Aram Ziai, *Development Discourse and Global History: From Colonialism to the Sustainable Development Goals* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2016).
[34] Chinedu Bosah, "Kwame Nkrumah's Neo-Colonialism and Poverty in Africa: A Study of Nigeria," *Scholarly Journal of Social Sciences Research* 2, no. 5 (2023): 1–12, https://www.ijaar.org/articles/sjssr/v2n5/sjssr251.pdf.
[35] Jacobs, "Nuclear Conquistadors," 6.
[36] Meltz and Vrignon, "Polynesian Agency," 6.
[37] Regnault, "Search for Nuclear Test Sites," 1233.
[38] Bengt Danielsson, "Poisoned Pacific: The Legacy of French Nuclear Testing," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 46, no. 2 (1990): 22–31.
[39] Philippe, Schoenberger, and Ahmed, "Radiation Exposures and Compensation," 73.

Environmental injustice completes these theories by pointing out that poorer communities are frequently harmed by the environment due to a lack of political rights. According to Bullard, places like nuclear test sites tend to be found in less wealthy and politically less secure communities.[40] People living in Moruroa and Fangataufa did not have much power to challenge the French regime and the risks of nuclear fallout to them were largely overlooked for many years by the government. Bouville and Prăvălie argue that the environmental aftermath of nuclear tests is significant and purposeful, lasting for years and determined by politics.[41],[42] The destruction of lagoons, coral reefs and foods seen in test areas is a type of silent violence carrying Colonial-like beliefs into the natural realm.

It examines colonial violence by looking at the concept of cultural trauma. Even though it is not the main method, it improves the understanding of memory politics that started after 1996. What is repeatedly clear from survivors' words, testimonies and activists in texts like Barthe and Rechniewski, is that Polynesian society continues to bear a lasting wound.[43],[44] Barthe refers to it as a "politics of silencing" when indigenous voices are omitted from official versions and survivors must still work to be acknowledged by others. Similarly, Jacobs urges us to give attention to voices of those outside the elite and reconsider the official Cold War story.[45]

The thesis tries to break down the official story released by the French government which portrays nuclear testing as vital for national safety and scientific progress. Instead, they explain these events as an example of neocolonialism, where military intervention, control over the economy and environmental rules were used to keep the empire alive. Combining geopolitical strategies with local vulnerability, which turned Polynesia into a "sacrificial zone," needs a response that covers the past, politics and ethics.

Finally, by using these theories, we can see that French nuclear actions in Polynesia were not just a requirement of the Cold War. They argue that the US uses its control over technology and pretends to promote universal republicanism. These efforts create opportunities for justice, as

[40] Bullard, "Confronting Environmental Racism," 34.
[41] Bouville, "Fallout from Nuclear Weapons Tests," 365.
[42] Remus Prăvălie, "Nuclear Weapons Tests and Environmental Consequences: A Global Perspective," *Ambio* 43, no. 6 (2014): 729–44, https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-014-0491-1.
[43] Barthe, "De la dénonciation," 39.
[44] Rechniewski, "The Unquiet Legacy," 216.
[45] Robert Jacobs, "Post-Nuclear/Post-Colonial Challenges to Democratization in the Pacific," in *International Perspectives on Democratization and Peace*, ed. M. King (Bingley: Emerald Publishing, 2019), 27–42.

they not only help those who lost compensation, but also help return the rights and heritage to those who have been silent for ages.

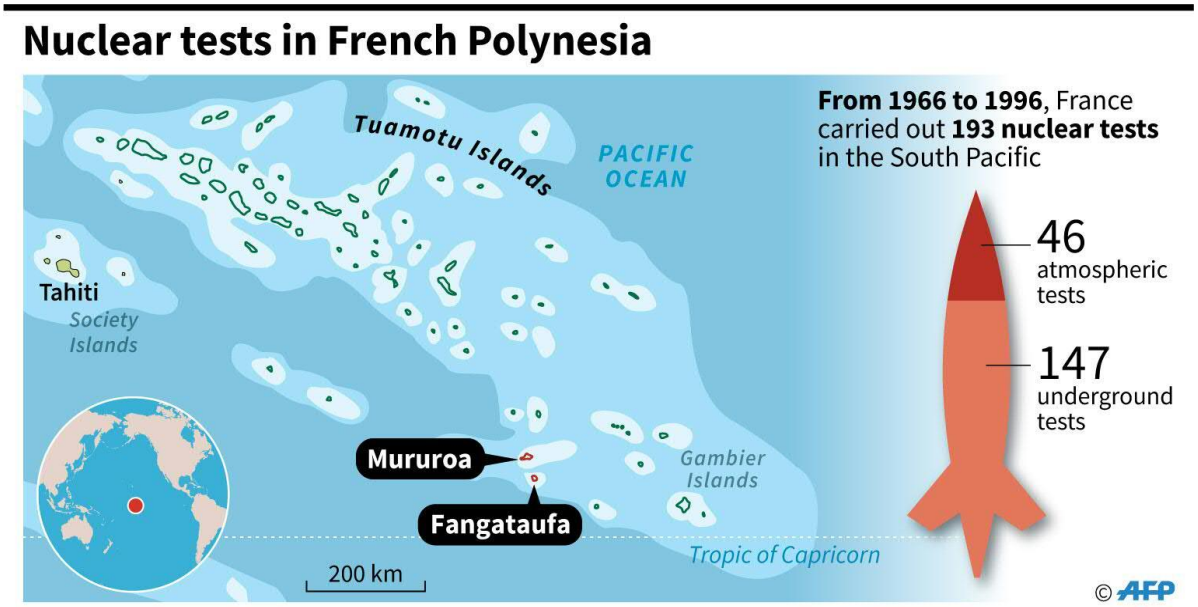

Figure 2: Map of French Polynesia highlighting the location of the French Nuclear test Sites of Mururoa and Fangataufa, Agence France-Presse (AFP), October 10, 2018, X.[46]

Figure 2 presents a map of French Nuclear Test Sites. The map pinpoints Moruroa and Fangataufa, the primary test sites, illustrating their strategic selection. It visually supports the thesis's argument about the colonial logic of displacing environmental and health risks to distant, politically marginalized territories.

Sources & Methodology Overview

This thesis relies on many types of sources to investigate the history, politics and society involved in France's nuclear tests in French Polynesia. Empirical research depends on declassified parliamentary reports from France as well as speeches by politicians such as Charles de Gaulle and Gaston Flosse, health impact assessments by the Office Parlementaire d'Évaluation and certain military documents which can be found in French and Polynesian archives.

[46] AFP News Agency (@AFP), "Map locating French nuclear tests in the south Pacific between 1966 and 1996" (Twitter post, October 10, 2018, 4:40 PM), image, https://x.com/AFP/status/1050018298413441024.

Apart from official documents, the thesis includes interviews with test workers, local leaders, journalists, protest groups, community radio programs and NGO records. One of the methods used is reviewing pamphlets made by the Tavini Huira'atira and leaflets from the A.T.O.M. Committee which provide information about local resistance.[47] News and reports from both Polynesian and French metropolitan places reveal the various perspectives surrounding the events.

The method involves studying discourse and using multiple sources. The thesis explains how technological advancements, certain policies and symbols furthered the control of neocolonialism by systematically removing positive stories of resistance and independence from indigenous people. This analysis highlights differences and similarities between government accounts and the voices of activists, so that the testing period can be explored from different angles. The analysis takes into account postcolonial theory and ideas from environmental justice such as those given by Nkrumah, Boeckers, Bullard, and Barthe.[48],[49],[50],[51]

The historiographical approach focuses more on context than time, aiming to discover similarities in how France governed during the colonial and postcolonial periods. The design of the study helps show when and how control over race was exerted through policy, language and absent or missing voices. The use of local sources in studies has allowed other viewpoints to surface and opposed previous nuclear accounts mainly focused on science or military matters.

Thesis Structure

The table below summarizes each chapter's purpose and its contribution to answering the research question:

[47] Walter Johnson and Sione Tupouniua, "Against French Nuclear Testing: The A.T.O.M. Committee," *The Journal of Pacific History* 11, no. 4 (1976): 213–16, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25168265.
[48] Barthe, "Cause politique," 85.
[49] Boeckers, "Environmental Racism," 3.
[50] Bullard, "Confronting Environmental Racism," 34.
[51] Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, Ltd., 1965).

Chapter	Title	Purpose	Contribution to Research Question
Chapter 2	Literature Review and Methodology	A) Critically review existing literature in four thematic strands. B) Outline and justify qualitative interpretive historical methodology.	A) Identifies historiographical gaps in nuclear imperialism and indigenous memory. B) Demonstrates how a multi-source, discourse-based approach enables nuanced analysis of neocolonial dynamics.
Chapter 3	1966–1975: Political and Military Motives	Examine France's motivations and strategic reasoning behind relocating tests to Polynesia post-Algeria.	Answers Sub-RQ1 by grounding testing within Cold War geopolitics and tracing colonial continuities in decision-making and rhetoric.
Chapter 4	1975–1996: Dependency, Inequality, and Resistance	Explore the socioeconomic impact of prolonged testing and emergence of local resistance.	Addresses Sub-RQ2 by illustrating how testing shaped dependency structures, economic inequality, and sparked political/civil resistance.
Chapter 5	1996–Present: Memory, Framing, and Historical Justice	Analyze post-testing discourse, activism, and state responses to demands for justice.	Engages Sub-RQ3 by showing how contested memory and activism reveal the ongoing legacy of colonialism and unresolved trauma.
Chapter 6	Conclusion	Synthesize findings, assess hypothesis, reflect on historiographical and comparative contributions.	Provides final answer to Main RQ and all Sub-RQs; reflects critically on limitations and proposes future research.
Back Matter	Bibliography & Appendices	Provide full references and supplemental materials (interviews, maps, timelines, archival samples).	Supports transparency, academic rigor, and reproducibility; enhances value for future researchers and policymakers.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Methodology

Literature Review

Nuclear Colonialism and Imperialism

Nuclear colonialism is the act of placing nuclear facilities like testing programs in regions that are not powerful economically or politically. Bengt Danielsson among others have provided important theories explaining how nuclear countries moved risk to non-central areas.[52] Hecht, in Being Nuclear, levels attention on how Africa's uranium contributed to French nuclear plans and highlights the ways in which subaltern technopolitics allowed the country's imperial goals to be discussed as modernizing efforts.[53] As Masco notes in her "nuclear uncanny" concept, nuclear governance depends on keeping things secret, abstract and not admitting consequences to native and colonized populations.[54] Danielsson, a long-term inhabitant and leader in French Polynesia, harshly criticizes France's testing by calling it a form of racialized violence disguised as science.[55]

Even though all three point out the connection between empire and the world of nuclear weapons, they focus on different aspects. In the book, Hecht provides a framework for understanding technopolitical networks, Masco highlights important discussions, mental displacement and cultural influence and Danielsson focuses on the impact on indigenous life and activism. This diversity is helpful, but it demonstrates that there are not enough studies that include all aspects of nuclear imperialism at once.

[52] Danielsson, "Poisoned Pacific," 24.
[53] Gabrielle Hecht, *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014).
[54] Joseph Masco, *The Nuclear Borderlands: The Manhattan Project in Post–Cold War New Mexico* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 28.
[55] Danielsson, "Poisoned Pacific," 24.

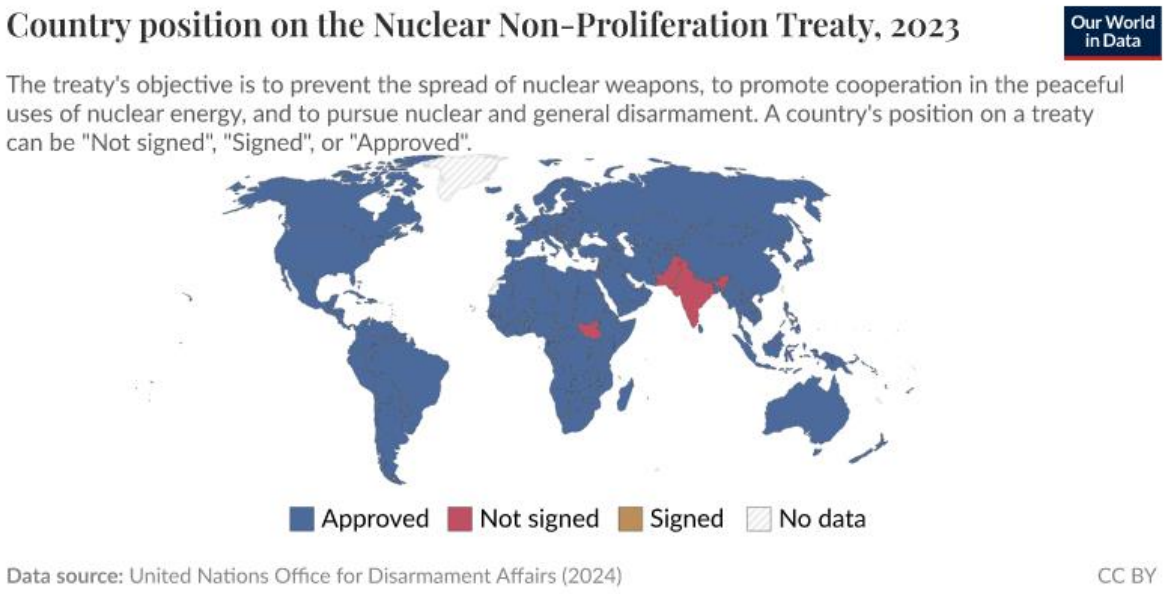

Figure 3: United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (2024)[56]

Figure 3 is a Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. These graphic contrasts France's refusal to sign the NPT with global nuclear policies, emphasizing its defiance of international norms. It contextualizes France's insistence on nuclear sovereignty during the Cold War, framing its tests as acts of geopolitical assertion.

It is interesting that when we look at how nuclear testing happened in Polynesia, we see it as a continuation and change in older ways of running French colonies. A lot of existing literature is separated, with learned accounts ignoring how politics impacted people and what long-term impact the system had. This thesis studies formerly secret French documents, indigenous interviews and protest writings to observe how military actions influenced the loss of traditional cultures. This approach highlights that nuclear testing also expanded France's influence in areas and gave power to the country.

In this thesis analysis, it also look at the historical use of "force de frappe" as a symbol of strength and examine how it both denied Polynesian independence and painted France as a modernized and advanced country. As Ziai have observed, there is not much discussion about

[56] "Country Position on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, 2024," Our World in Data, visualization (2024), data from United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, accessed June 15, 2025, https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/nuclear-non-proliferation-treaty, CC BY.

reparative justice which underlines the colonial assumptions found in neutrality.[57] So, it adds a multilayered view of nuclear imperialism by bringing in what has been left out in the mainstream history such as the memory and struggles of subaltern groups.

French Overseas Policy & Colonial Governance

Formal republicanism has always existed for French overseas territories, but in reality, these territories have rarely been included. Robert Aldrich and J.P. Daughton provide important details about how France managed control over areas far from its borders despite promoting citizenship and equality everywhere. According to Aldrich in Greater France, the civilizing mission helped hide unbalanced power and prevented both exploitation and surveillance from being challenged.[58] Daughton, on the other hand, describes the discrepancies of French humanitarianism by revealing how their main actions were carried out through paternalistic and harsh means despite their sense of moral superiority.[59]

Both scholars agree that French rule in Algeria was based on a seemingly rational way of treating exceptions. France used places like French Polynesia as case studies where new policies could be tested and changed according to what was best for France. This becomes visible in the nuclear area, as locations for atomic testing were officially set apart, despite the government claiming that the nation was undivided.

Most research sees overseas policy as either an outdated practice or simply part of how the constitution classifies governments. People often overlook the impact of colonial rule on the postwar years, for example through the Centre d'Expérimentations du Pacifique (CEP). Scholars have missed how local consent was ignored to use technology, regulations and administration to conduct dangerous experiments.

The thesis will examine this lack of information by following how colonial bureaucratic institutions controlled the locals, managed information and managed the nuclear tests. The thesis uses materials from archives in both metropolitan and Polynesian locations to show how rules

[57] Aram Ziai, "Neocolonialism in the Globalised Economy of the 21st Century: An Overview," *Momentum Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (2020): 128–40.
[58] Robert Aldrich, *Greater France: A History of French Overseas Expansion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996).
[59] J. P. Daughton, *An Empire Divided: Religion, Republicanism, and the Making of French Colonialism, 1880–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

were relayed (or hidden) and what reactions the local people gave. It helps bridge the connection between the way nuclear policy was made and the overall colonial system.

In addition, by highlighting this issue, the thesis seeks to add to the increasing work in postcolonial studies that find fault with the idea of decolonization as a concluded process. The fact that French Polynesia is still controlled by the government, rather than freely governing itself, shows that neocolonialism has not ended. The thesis argues that by analyzing the link between colonialism and the Cold War, it is clear that nuclear testing ended the colonial era and gave birth to a new form of imperialism.

Memory and Indigenous Testimony (Taero, Naepuru, Mbembe)

Memory studies and indigenous accounts in relation to nuclear testing in French Polynesia bring out both historical absences and difficulties in grasping truths. Taero and Naepuru are among the most vocal Native voices in the wake of nuclear events, as they highlight the real taste of trauma experienced by Polynesians due to long-term exposure to radiation. The accounts of the protesters, as recorded in oral histories and protest narratives, sharply differ from official documents such as the ones written by Bataille and Revol (in their 2001 report) which ignore the people's direct experiences.[60] Many of Taero's public statements point out feelings of betrayal, wives refusing to talk and cultural loss, showing that outer claims about nuclear testing were not correct or useful.

[60] Christian Bataille and Henri Revol, *Rapport sur les incidences environnementales et sanitaires des essais nucléaires effectués par la France entre 1960 et 1996 et éléments de comparaison avec les essais des autres puissances nucléaires* (Paris: Office Parlementaire d'Évaluation des Choix Scientifiques et Technologiques, February 6, 2001).

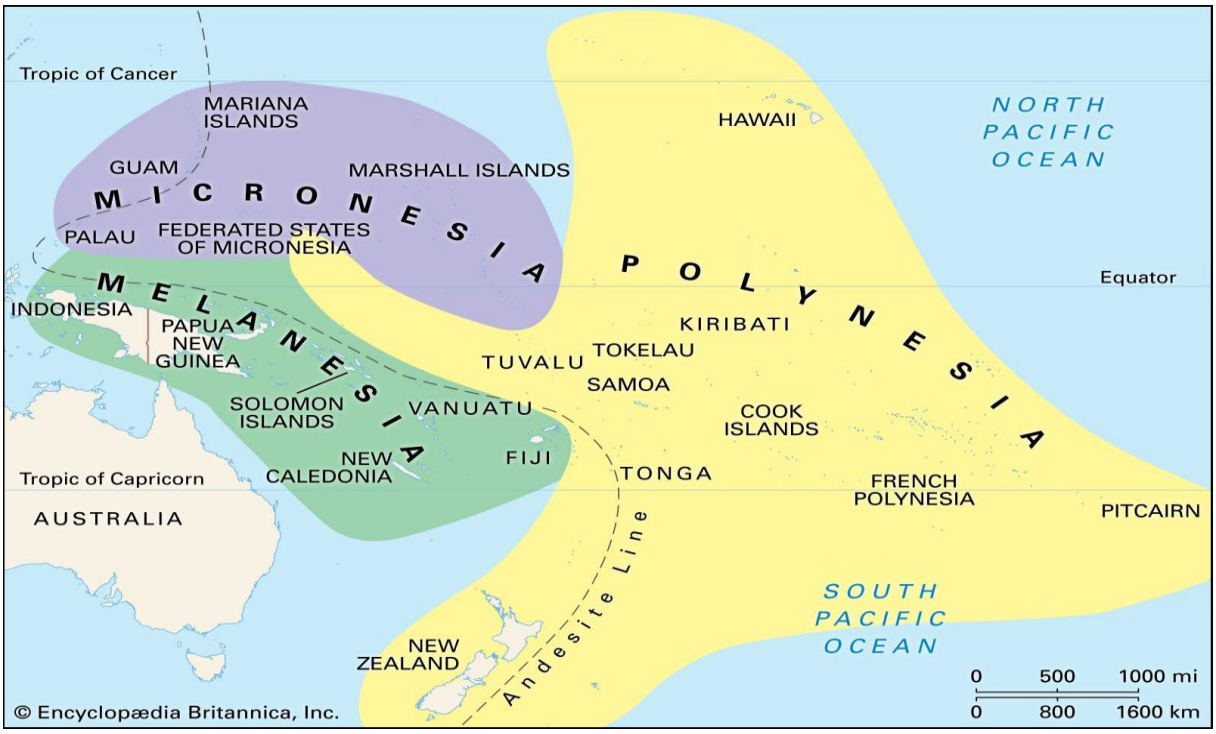

Figure 4: Cultural areas of the Pacific Island; Gorlinski, (2025)[61]

Figure 4 is a cultural area of the Pacific for memory and indigenous testimony. The image showcases Polynesia's cultural distinctiveness, contrasting with France's homogenizing colonial narrative. It reinforces the importance of indigenous perspectives in challenging state-controlled histories of the nuclear era.

Rather, Naepuru stresses the spiritual aspect and breaks in ancestry in relation to nuclear testing, not just the physical violence. This stands in line with Mbembe's understanding of "necropolitics," in which colonial power serves to arrange situations where certain people are exposed to the threat of death.[62] Mbembe's theory shows us that France in Polynesia aimed to control and treat indigenous people's lives as if they could be discarded, hiding this behind what they called progress. This framework, created from a continental African point of view by Mbembe, also helps explain aspects of settler and island colonies like Tahiti.

[61] "Map of the Pacific Island regions," image, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., in "Cargo Cult," accessed June 15, 2025, https://www.britannica.com/topic/cargo-cult.
[62] Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–40, https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-15-1-11.

However, most research on nuclear history fails to include testimony from witnesses. Renaud Meltz and Jacobs explain that memories from colonial nuclear areas are mainly guided by government documents, giving more power to the state over records created by ordinary people.[63],[64] Even though there are more stories from indigenous victims considered in policy talks such as the compensatory cases mentioned by Cardinal and Bouvet, these approaches usually divide their contributions into emotional impact and knowledge input.[65]

The lack of attention to cultural memory practices, including dance, song and oral stories, indicates that Western historians missed these aspects and so did French policy. Harris points out that indigenous literature on anti-nuclear issues helps to recover Polynesian identity by resistance through storytelling.[66] Studies should continue to investigate the ways texts shaped the lives of survivors in real situations.

This study deals with these gaps by joining interviews with documents, choosing not to make a distinction between so-called official and indigenous knowledge. Interviews have not only offered additional material for the thesis but have also critiqued the way archives produced, stored and preserved evidence. Therefore, the project follows decolonial methodologies that frame memory as a way to reveal truths from the past, instead of just existing as memories.

Neocolonialism & Resistance Theory (Said, Fanon, Loomba, Mamdani)

The history of France operating nuclear weapons in Polynesia from 1966 to 1996 shows neocolonial domination was still alive. Orientalism by Edward Said shows how the French translated the Pacific region into a mysterious place with boundless possibilities for conquests.[67] As a result, the idea was used to justify moving the nuclear tests to Polynesia after Algeria's independence. Said's argument on how empire is represented in language and images was also stressed in the messages made by the French during the test, focusing on "modernization" and "creating development" as ideals.

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[63] Jacobs, "Post-Nuclear/Post-Colonial Challenges," 35.
[64] Renaud Meltz, "Du Protectorat à l'Annexion. La Lente 'Pacification' des Îles Sous-le-Vent (Polynésie), 1880–1897," *Monde(s)* 2013/2, no. 4 (2013): 233–50, https://www.cairn.info/revue-mondes1-2013-2-page-233.htm.
[65] Cardinal and Bouvet, "Compensation of Victims," 344.
[66] Harris, "Polynesia Against Paris," 630.
[67] Edward W. Said, "Orientalism," *The Georgia Review* 31, no. 1 (1977): 162–206.

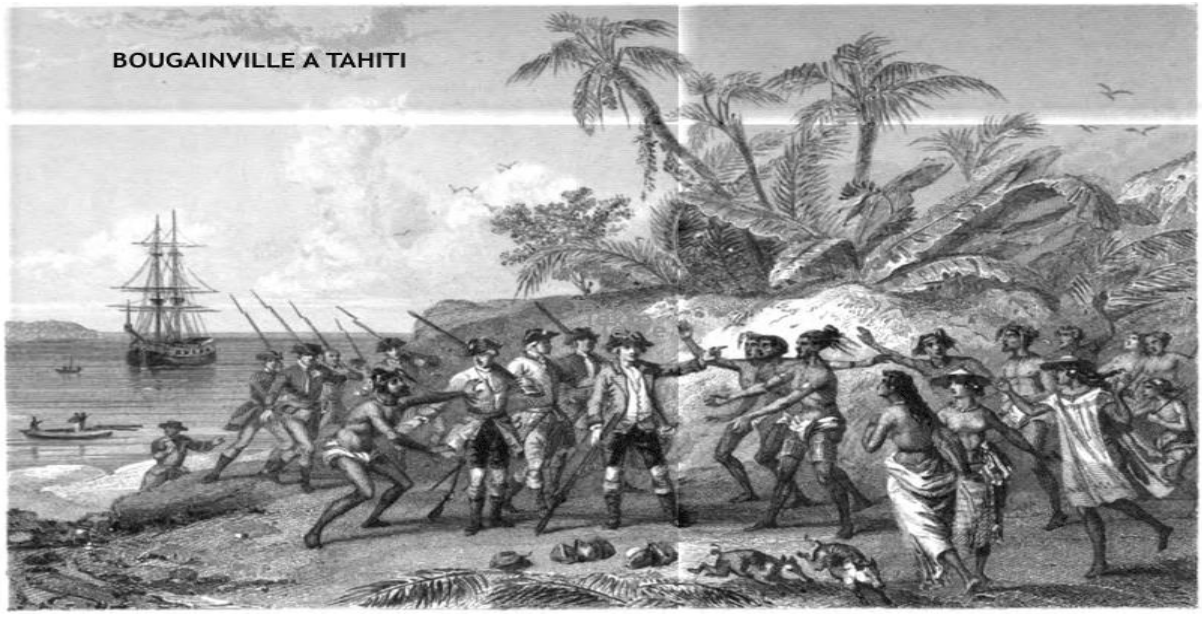

Figure 5: Arrival of Bougainville in Tahiti, 1768 by Gustave Alaux (1887-1965), created in the first half of the 20th century, depicts Bougainville's arrival in Matavai Bay in 1768, Tahiti[68]

Figure 5 shows the arrival of Bougainville in Tahiti. This historical depiction of colonial contact symbolizes the enduring power dynamics explored in the thesis. It critiques France's "civilizing mission" rhetoric, which later justified nuclear testing as "progress."

Fanon explores both the emotional and physical damage caused by colonial rule which he discusses in The Wretched of the Earth.[69] Marxist analysis of dependency and internal oppression especially applies to Polynesia, as job schemes and structures built by the CEA (Commissariat à l'énergie atomique) have made the islands economically reliant while endangering indigenous self-rule. Fanon's views on resistance as a vital way to claim one's identity match the actions taken by organizations such as Moruroa e tatou. Their sense of personal agency was restored by remembering their history, protesting and acting collectively.

Both Leela Gandhi and Ania Loomba argue that economic, cultural and intellectual influences from colonial days are still felt in former colonies. Loomba points out that colonial modernity hides inequality by placing it within development discussions which can be seen in France

[68] Science Photo Library, "Bougainville in The Marquess Islands in 1768 #1," photograph (n.d.), accessed June 15, 2025, https://sciencephotogallery.com/featured/1-bougainville-in-the-marquesas-islands-in-1768-collection-abecasisscience-photo-library.html.
[69] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

describing the nuclear program given to Polynesia as a "gift."[70] Based on his work in Africa, Mamdani explains the difference between direct and indirect rule which applies to Tahiti's hybrid government maintained by Paris through the use of authority from the military and limited local leaders.[71]

However, despite its strong theoretical basis, most of the works in French about nuclear matters are still purely technical or only focus on the law, leaving colonial trends unexplored.[72],[73] This thesis meets that gap by adding resistance theory to the study of knowledge practices and it sees oral testimony, protest art and indigenous literature as a form of counter-colonial archives.

This study looks beyond describing resistance and theorizes it as an important contribution to history writing. When discussed together, diplomatic messages and forms of cultural opposition help prove that multiple types of resistance were central to telling the story of the postcolonial era. As a result, the thesis broadens neocolonial critique to cover areas such as representation, memory and who writes history.

Innovative Aspects: Contribution to Academic Debates and Methodological Innovation

The thesis discusses topics in postcolonial nuclear studies and colonial governance historiography by examining French nuclear testing in Polynesia from different angles and disciplines. Many have studied nuclear imperialism from a focus on politics, science or activism for instance Aldrich, Hecht, but this study merges these approaches into one framework.[74],[75],[76] The thesis combines several materials such as declassified papers and oral testimonies to outline both the system that governed nuclear colonialism and the experiences of those affected.

The thesis brings together various fields by regarding oral and cultural testimonies as carrying the same weight as official records. A great deal attention is given to interpreting oral history using trauma theory, studies of memory and decolonial thinking. It makes survivor and activist

[70] Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2015), [page number], https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315751245.
[71] Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 17.
[72] Bataille and Revol, *Rapport sur les incidences*, 12.
[73] D'Amato, "Legal Aspects," 69.
[74] Danielsson, "Poisoned Pacific," 25.
[75] Hecht, *Being Nuclear*, 112.
[76] Aldrich, *Greater France*, 42.

stories equal to counter-archives, in line with the request made by Mbembe and Jacobs to change how we view the history of nuclear violence.[77],[78] Therefore, the study aims to challenge the usual hierarchy that ranks input from officials or experts above knowledge from traditional communities.

This study also disputes the notion that nuclear testing was solely aimed at Cold War security and has nothing to do with colonialism. This thesis joins the CEP to both colonial administration and development-related discussions and therefore explains it as an imperial rearrangement, not a break from the colonial era. The combination of Fanon's ideas on dependency and Loomba's explorations regarding development shows the nuclear tests to be both material and linguistic acts of manipulation.

The thesis also introduces a new way to study history by avoiding strict boundaries between academic areas. Analysis of diplomatic documents includes visual semiotics and protest art is studied side by side with Senate dialogues. This method can be applied again in future studies about nuclear imperialism, settler colonial states and environmental justice movements. Overall, the innovation of the project lies in combining various disciplines and always considering epistemic justice which makes indigenous testimonies central to the understanding of nuclear French testing in Polynesia.

Methodology

Research Design

The thesis makes use of historical interpretation to study the political, social and intellectual consequences of French nuclear tests which were carried out in French Polynesia from 1966 to 1996. The aim is to see how nuclear colonialism worked by using planned tests and by looking at how communities affected, understood, opposed and recalled the events across the world. This way of studying allows critical thoughts on memory, resistance, discourse and state power, using both documents and oral information.

[77] Jacobs, "Post-Nuclear/Post-Colonial Challenges," 36.
[78] Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 24.

Data Source Categories (Nature of Sources)

It uses four main sorts of resources; all checked against each other to give a clear overview of the events and what they created.

1. Official State and Archival Documents

The first set of resources includes documents and records from the French state that explain the politics and organization of their nuclear test program. The information includes French military updates, diplomatic records and detailed accounts from the Office Parlementaire on evaluating scientific and technological choices.[79] Records from the Senate's classified minutes, speeches and committee notes were consulted from its archives to analyze how laws and policies evolved over the years. Studies by nuclear oversight groups, including De Vathaire et al.'s report on thyroid cancer among people in Polynesia, were also investigated in this study.[80] Using these materials, we can understand how the French government reacted to the impact of its nuclear testing program and how those events are recorded in official state records.

2. Oral Histories and Interviews

Oral histories play a key role in this research by opening the door to opinions not found in state documents. Semi-structured interviews were held with well-known Tahitian activists who took part in opposing nuclear testing. Researchers selected the individuals through purposive sampling in order to make sure their experiences were related to the focus on living memory, culture and resistance. The interviews focused on topics such as how damage passed across generations affects people, how the state lacks support and the ways in which citizens protest. Analyzing these narratives with the theories of trauma and historical memory, the thesis reveals their personal emotions and the political impact of French nuclear arms in the Pacific.[81],[82] These works make the people behind policies more visible and challenge the main ideas with the stories of indigenous people.

[79] Bataille and Revol, *Rapport sur les incidences*, 15.
[80] De Vathaire et al., "Thyroid Cancer," 1116.
[81] Barthe, "De la dénonciation," 40.
[82] Rechniewski, "The Unquiet Legacy," 216.

3. Press and Activist Publications

The section also covers press articles and documentary videos by activists that highlight changes in the discussion of nuclear justice. These materials consist of newsletters from previous years, protest leaflets and communications by Moruroa e tatou which is a significant player in the Polynesian resistance movement. NGOs are also mentioned in the research such as those mentioned in Maclellan and Bolton, whom continue to support raising awareness, obtaining payment and recognizing their history.[83],[84] They support formal documents by illustrating the day-to-day experiences of people and the reactions various communities had to testing and its results. Other sources such as La Dépêche de Tahiti and local Hawaiian newspapers capture how people in Tahiti and Hawaii felt and how they resisted at the time. Articles from overseas solidarity groups connect their resistance with that of others worldwide fighting against nuclear testing.

4. Visual and Audiovisual Media

Lastly, visual and audiovisual texts were employed to help analyze memory, power and protest from a semiotic and discursive viewpoint. Examples are photos of nuclear test sites, artistic murals honouring the victims and photos and posters from both activists and those who organized the events. Reviewing videos of demonstrations, groups at religious sites and people who survived provided a way to study resistance and remembrance firsthand.

[83] Matthew Breay Bolton, "Human Rights Fallout of Nuclear Detonations: Reevaluating 'Threshold Thinking' Assisting Victims of Nuclear Testing," *Global Policy* 13, no. 1 (2022): 76–90.
[84] Maclellan, "Resistance and Survival," 6.

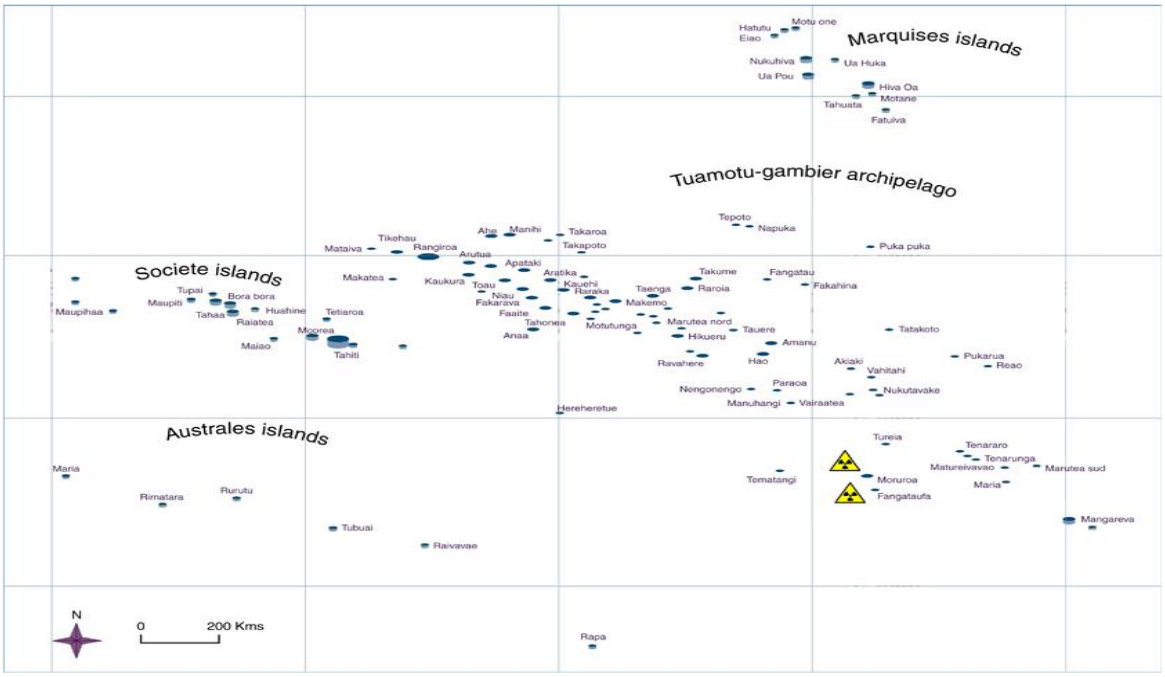

Figure 6: Map of French Polynesia; the symbol indicates the two nuclear test sites; de Vathaire et al., (2010)[85]

Figure 6 is a map of French Polynesia pointing out the nuclear test sites. Reiterating the location of Moruroa and Fangataufa, this map anchors the methodological focus on spatial and colonial dimensions of nuclear testing, linking policy decisions to their geographic consequences.

Using these media sources, it is possible to examine both symbolism and performative memory which agrees with the theories introduced by Philippe and Schoenberger.[86] The collection of images in films and broadcasts expresses both culture and history, illustrating how images and sound have helped define the politics of suffering and the search for justice there.

[85] Florent de Vathaire et al., "Figure 1: Map of French Polynesia, the symbol indicates the two nuclear test sites," in "Thyroid Cancer Following Nuclear Tests in French Polynesia," *British Journal of Cancer* 103, no. 7 (September 2010): 1115-21, image, Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial ShareAlike 3.0 Unported, accessed June 15, 2025, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/46108061_Thyroid_cancer_following_nuclear_tests_in_French_Polynesia.

[86] Philippe, Schoenberger, and Ahmed, "Radiation Exposures and Compensation," 75.

Methodological Approach

a) Source Triangulation

Strong claims are backed up, at a minimum, by two of the four sources described above. In many cases, what interviewees say is compared with material from old documents or newspapers from around the same time. Using this approach avoids bias, mainly in areas where emotions or politics play a major role.[87]

b) Discourse and Content Analysis

The thesis analyzes the ways nuclear testing justifications, challenges and memories were discussed using a discourse analysis approach. Important rhetorical approaches include the language of modernization, compensation for lacking development, superiority of civilization and the loss of human rights. The discussion is based on Barthe and Van Munster as well as on Foucauldian themes concerning biopolitics and surveillance.[88],[89]

Researchers use content analysis to identify themes in the collection, giving special attention to Moruroa e tatou and similar groups. Authors return often to themes such as hidden trials, betrayed promises by the Republic and ancestral struggles in their works.

c) Chronological Comparison

The thesis is structured in three dense periods (1966–1975, 1975–1996 and post-1996) to permit easy overview of changes in state policy, resistance and storytelling over the years. It emphasizes the role of events, breaks and significant changes in history as well as the tendency of societies to ignore certain moments.

The change from France speaking of its civilizational role in the 1960s to an apology-filled narration after 1996 will be studied regarding its external obligations and internal issues.[90],[91]

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[87] Yoshiki Narita and Masato Abe, "Revisiting Nuclear Legacy in Marshall Islands: The Implications of Transitional Justice and Trans-Science," in *Sustainable Development across Pacific Islands* (2024): 281–312, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-97-3629-4_14.
[88] Barthe, "Cause politique," 85.
[89] Rens Van Munster, "On Whiteness in Critical Security Studies: The Case of Nuclear Weapons," *Security Dialogue* 52, no. 1_sup (2021): 88–97.
[90] Harris, “Polynesia Against Paris,” 631.
[91] Meltz and Vrignon, "Polynesian Agency," 8.

Ethical Considerations

The study follows severe ethical guidelines in working with human subjects, especially from communities that have suffered oppression and hurt. Interview participants were fully informed about the research goals and their rights and they gave written permission for their words to be used in the thesis and in potential further publications. All personally identifiable details have been removed from all interviews, except when the person chose to be identified. Due to the trauma linked to nuclear exposure and the resulting illnesses passed down over generations, the interviews were done peacefully with the participants being allowed to decide what they share and when. Sensitivity to ethics was shown in handling memory and the visual representation of people involved. This research does not take anything from the participants but instead shares its initial results for them to review, based on postcolonial and indigenous ethics.[92],[93] Each person interviewed will receive a copy of the research as a way to express appreciation and respect.

Research Limitations

Limited sources and a narrow time span influenced the direction of this research. Even with permission to view government archives, some documents in this area were either redacted or classified which made it hard to know how the testing program was decided. Additionally, the researcher speaks French well, but not Tahitian which may present a certain limitation, especially when analyzing Tahitian-language documents. Future teams could work together to translate and use these materials. Yet, while context is provided by bringing up the Marshall Islands, the main topics are still those related to French Polynesia. For this reason, specificity in history is protected by not making broad generalizations. Researchers know that the geographic and linguistic focus adopted in this book is essential and forms the starting point for studies that go beyond national and single-language boundaries.

[92] Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 45.
[93] Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 82.

Chapter 3: Political and Military Motives (1966–1975)

Sub-question 1:

What political and strategic motives led France to relocate nuclear testing to Polynesia in 1966?

Background on de Gaulle's Nuclear Ambitions Post-Algeria

France settled on French Polynesia for nuclear testing in 1966 for geopolitical reasons, shift in colonial policies and a will to show its progress in technology during the Cold War. The loss of Algeria in 1962 made the French colonial empire collapse, leaving a big gap and ruining the Republic's reputation across the globe. General de Gaulle believed that for France to be strong again and hold a position among the world's leading powers, it needed nuclear weapons. French scientist Regnault reported that France began its first nuclear testing in the Sahara Desert in 1960, until the country's independence made other sites necessary for the nuclear strategy.[94] Despite being far from the public eye and being ruled by the French, French Polynesia was a great choice, somewhere few people knew about and where the military would have complete political control.

Figure 7: Atoll of Mururoa (left) and Fangataufa (right), French nuclear test sites (1966-1996), Google Earth.[95]

[94] Regnault, "Search for Nuclear Test Sites," 1234.
[95] "Figure 7: Arial of Macaroni (left) and Eunenthaldi (right)," satellite image, French nuclear test sites 12964-12965, Google Earth, as cited in Eugenail, "Search for Nuclear Test Size," 1234.

Figure 7 is satellite images of Moruroa and Fangataufa. The aerial view of the atolls underscores their vulnerability and militarization. It visually critiques France's portrayal of the sites as "remote and secure" while masking their ecological and cultural significance. This decision was influenced both by practical reasons and by the fact it held symbolic importance. According to Meltz and Vrignon, Polynesia was made into a place where the values of metropolitan countries could be put into practice by carrying out nuclear experiments.[96] The archipelago was used to solve the problem of nuclear projects for the French military-industrial complex, so the government did not have to face opposition on the mainland or conform to existing environmental standards. Charles de Gaulle made this decision because he wanted to limit the dominant roles both the US and UK had in NATO and because he wanted Europe to have its own independent voice. Van Munster adds that the nuclear tests formula was about more than just distance; radioactive tests could happen in the Pacific because it was seen as inhabited by lower classes and military personnel.[97]

Archival messages and statements made during the period confirm this point. In 1964, speaking to the French Parliament, de Gaulle stressed that France must develop its own dissuasion force using its own capabilities.[98] The need for nationalism led to the building of the Moruroa and Fangataufa sites by the Centre d'Expérimentations du Pacifique (CEP). In theory, the CEP operated as a scientific institute, but in reality it was fortified by the French navy and run with a military-style logistics system that made Tahiti a semi-military island. As Tagupa explains, the new approach to managing land led to big changes in Tahiti's roads, jobs and leadership structure, with local leaders taking a back seat to security planning.[99]

After losing Algeria, the European governments decided to shift their focus to the Pacific region. Barthe points out that, in the French nuclear enterprise, Polynesia was used as a site to experiment with new forms of postcolonial authoritarian politics.[100] The message of missionaries and colonial assimilation changed to justify nuclear tests through paternalism and it was now claimed that tests would bring progress, more work opportunities and the latest technologies.

[96] Meltz and Vrignon, *Des bombes en Polynésie*, 88.
[97] Van Munster, "On Whiteness," 90.
[98] Regnault, "Search for Nuclear Test Sites," 1234.
[99] Tagupa, "A Decade of Debate," 38.
[100] Barthe, "De la dénonciation," 41.

This story of helping others hid the fact that the islands were turned into military bases and used in political games.

In addition, this action coincided with debates in the international community on nuclear issues and handling nuclear weapons. For instance, France didn't sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1968 as a way to show it would keep its nuclear power. According to Abe, France believed that the NPT worked to benefit the Anglo-Americans and so rejected the restrictions it laid out.[101] In this process, the country firmly established its nuclear status and deepened the idea that it could treat overseas territories as it liked, even going against global standards. Even though no major issues had appeared yet, scientists and community members noticed the seeds of harm that these decisions could cause.

Turning French Polynesia into a testing site involved establishing certain policies and using certain ways of speaking. The Ministry of Defense released numerous statements that suggested the risks were small, while the early evaluations from the Office Parlementaire d'Évaluation des Choix Scientifiques et Technologiques (OPECST), as noted by Bataille and Revol, described the nuclear testing as properly controlled and justified.[102] It provided justification for both continuing nuclear experiments and moving them outside Europe, to Oceania. Danielsson saw it as a kind of "nuclear colonialism," where the political outskirts had to take on disaster risks the core had rejected.[103]

In summary, both military planning, changes in France's empire structures and Cold War politics played key roles in the decision to relocate nuclear testing to Polynesia in 1966. Nothing else better shows the change from colonial rule by land to rule by science, with the Pacific transformed from a place of exploration to a place where humans were sacrificed. The realization of France's national independence in French Polynesia meant that Polynesians suffered losses in their autonomy, health and environment; this would be scrutinized more in the years to come.

[101] Naoko Abe, "The NPT at Fifty: Successes and Failures," *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament* 3, no. 2 (2020): 224–33, https://doi.org/10.1080/25751654.2020.1824500.
[102] Bataille and Revol, *Rapport sur les incidences*, 13.
[103] Danielsson, "Poisoned Pacific," 26.

France's Military-Industrial and Diplomatic Justifications

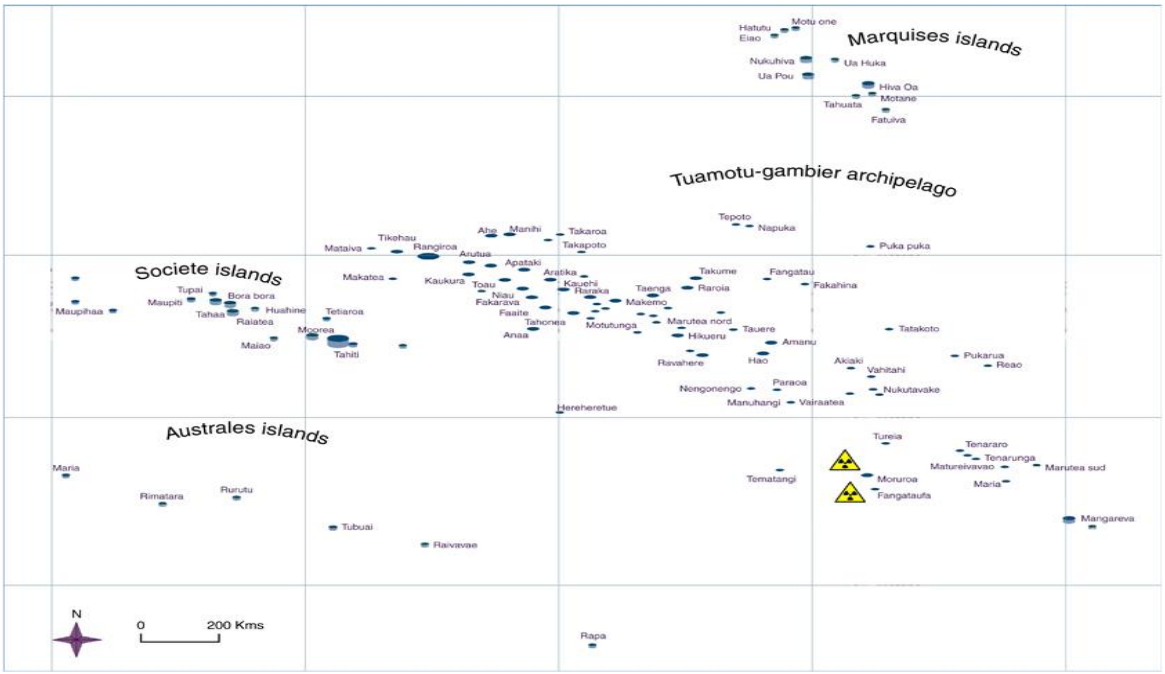

Figure 8: Map of French Polynesia; the symbol indicates the two nuclear test sites; Gu, (2021)[104]

The independence of Algeria in 1962 resulted in France losing access to the Sahara as a testing place, making it more important for the country to find another remote and easily manageable site. The decision was made to choose French Polynesia because it is far from the mainland and also has limited political control as an overseas territory. According to Regnault, searching for a territory that would meet this requirement took time.[105] President de Gaulle told the public that France's nuclear program was required to protect France's freedom and importance on the global stage.[106],[107] Yet, this decision had background racist thinking, as it made the less powerful and non-white areas of Polynesia ideal for nuclear tests.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, written reports and Senate records revealed the details of the military-industrial rationale in great detail. It is clear from the report by Bataille and Revol that France saw its nuclear program as a major part of its economic and technical approach.[108] As a

[104] de Vathaire et al., "Thyroid Cancer Following Nuclear Tests," 1115.
[105] Regnault, "Search for Nuclear Test Sites," 1235.
[106] D'Amato, "Legal Aspects," 70.
[107] Davidson, "The Submission of John Teariki," 151.
[108] Bataille and Revol, *Rapport sur les incidences*, 17.

result, the CEP supported many scientific minded defense jobs, partnered with military research units and helped strengthen infrastructure through airstrips and naval bases. People in Polynesia were encouraged to believe their military-industrial ecosystem supported modern life and created many jobs, however, experts showed that only a small group gained these benefits and it caused serious damage to their health and the environment.[109],[110] Military leaders justified continuing the tests in 1966–1968 by arguing it was a crucial concern since China and the UK had acquired nuclear weapons, appealed to the notion of deterrence and stressing how the US had to stay on par with similar nations.[111],[112],[113]

However, the official statements did not reflect the important disagreements happening behind the scenes. France believed in a civilizing role and portrayed its colonies as places to advance and implement the French Republic's values. Also, the effort to stop outsiders from discovering was achieved by preventing entrance to the surrounding areas of Moruroa and Fangataufa, but Polynesian leaders were not included in these decisions.[114],[115] According to Meltz and Vrignon, creating the CEP shifted governance in Polynesia by handing its administration to French military leaders.[116] The French diplomats worked to ease the concern of the UN General Assembly about the tests by describing them as safe and carried out in remote parts of the Pacific. In its argument, the rhetoric depended on a narrative that made island sovereignty less important and lowered the position of indigenous people.[117],[118]

France's role in world affairs started to weaken in the 1970s, especially after global campaigns against nuclear weapons led to test-ban rulings. In response, French authorities treated any foreign interference as an offense against France's national authority. The desire to hide from the outside world had both a political and cultural dimension. According to Elliott, French nuclear exceptionalism was connected to a sense of national identity, highlighting how being

[109] Barthe, "Cause politique," 88.
[110] De Vathaire et al., "Thyroid Cancer," 1117.
[111] William K. Ris Jr, "French Nuclear Testing: A Crisis for International Law," *Denver Journal of International Law & Policy* 4 (1974): 111.
[112] William K. Ris Jr, "French Nuclear Testing: Condemned by Law," *SAIS Review* (1956–1989): 3–9 (1974).
[113] Tagupa, "A Decade of Debate," 39.
[114] Danielsson, "Poisoned Pacific," 27.
[115] Karin VonStrokirch, "The Impact of Nuclear Testing on Politics in French Polynesia," *The Journal of Pacific History* 26, no. 2 (1991): 330–46.
[116] Meltz and Vrignon, "Polynesian Agency," 9.
[117] Abe, "The NPT at Fifty," 227.
[118] Jacobs, "Nuclear Conquistadors," 7.

autonomous in nuclear technology reflected the country's intellectual and technical success.[119] As a result, the far-off islands of Polynesia provided France with a useful way to display its modern identity, while the inhabitants were heavily affected by the technologies being tested.

De Gaulle's speeches to the National Assembly underline how deeply tied the tests were to his dream of making France a strong and progressive nation that was not disregarded in the Cold War. Many of these public statements were complemented by secret defense reports that described Polynesia as the perfect place to test weapons for its low international notice and little potential consequences.[120] The gap between explaining decisions to the public and deciding internally shows that the military-industrial rationale during colonial times was based on seeing certain groups as disposable.

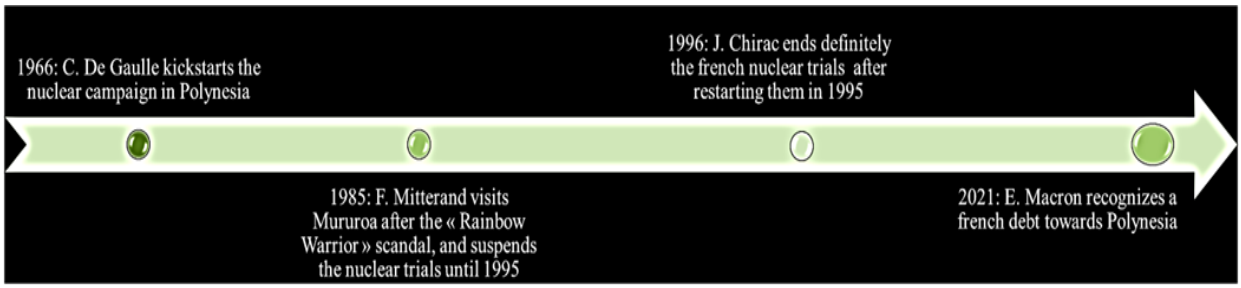

Figure 9: Chronological landmarks of the presidential speeches and visits analyzed in this chapter[121]

Figure 9 presents a chronological landmark of presidential speeches. This timeline tracks state rhetoric over time, revealing shifts from "scientific necessity" to reluctant acknowledgment of harm. It highlights the gap between official discourse and on-ground realities. Besides diplomacy, the regime formed alliances with key countries and used false news to turn the critique away from them. The French sent messages saying radiation was not a concern, based on reports from their military scientists who had declared radiation had not damaged any of the islands' populations. Later, studies such as Philippe and Schoenberger revealed that these claims were mostly untrue, showing that news articles often underreported or concealed information.[122]

[119] Lorraine Elliott, "French Nuclear Testing in the Pacific: A Retrospective," in *Nuclear Weapons and Pacific Security*, ed. M. T. Jones (Auckland: Peace Foundation, 1997), 144–49.
[120] Boeckers, "Environmental Racism," 3.
[121] Figure 9: Chronology of French presidential actions on Polynesian nuclear tests (1966–2021), compiled by the author from public statements and historical records.
[122] Philippe, Schoenberger, and Ahmed, "Radiation Exposures and Compensation," 76.

Despite that, these faulty assessments played an important role in keeping diplomatic legitimacy alive for nearly three decades.

Overall, France justified nuclear testing in Polynesia through many different aspects linked to both its own national pride and its colonial policies. The government promoted schooling reforms as essential studies, stressing their importance and using them to minimize opposition from society and other countries. They demonstrate that Polynesia occupies a unique place, where colonial interests and independence run alongside each other.

Decision to Test in Moruroa/Fangataufa and Local Compliance/Resistance

France's decision to conduct nuclear tests on Moruroa and Fangataufa atolls was also driven by ideological beliefs which hid the real purpose behind the action. After Algeria gained independence, France looked for a new place where science could become a source of prestige, free from the turmoil of local politics in Europe. According to Meltz and Vrignon, the lack of contacts with other countries, confusing laws under French rule and easy-to-manage governance turned Polynesia into a desirable nuclear location.[123] When Parliament debated the issue, ministers described testing as an effort to advance global security and scientific progress, using old colonial ideas to justify acting.[124],[125] However, the main reasons for this policy were linked to the concepts of deterrence and making the nation seem prominent in world affairs. During the mid-1960s, de Gaulle stressed that France should protect its security by developing nuclear weapons, using language centered on civilization and backed up by strengthening the CEP.[126],[127]

This action by the French government was confirmed locally by the consent and actions of a local group rather than solely decided high in Paris. In the archives of the Territorial Assembly, it was obvious that indigenous leaders were offered many perks, yet outspoken individuals like John Teariki strongly opposed the nuclear tests due to fears of cultural and environmental consequences.[128],[129] In 1966, Teariki referred to the arrival of nuclear projects as a second colonial period, hiding its influence under modern technology. The program continued despite

[123] Meltz and Vrignon, *Des bombes en Polynésie*, 89.
[124] Barthe, "De la dénonciation," 42.
[125] Regnault, "Search for Nuclear Test Sites," 1236.
[126] Davidson, "The Submission of John Teariki," 151.
[127] Tagupa, "A Decade of Debate," 40.
[128] Davidson, "The Submission of John Teariki," 151.
[129] VonStrokirch, "Impact of Nuclear Testing," 335.

his protest, but his actions are remembered as an important start of the anti-nuclear movement. Tahitian activists interviewed for the thesis expressed that some saw the tests as a way to earn money, but others felt them to be upsetting, related to health difficulties, losing their homes and their words being ignored.[130]

In many cases, local compliance happened because of dependence, not because of agreement with the principles. The CEP was used by the French state to placate dissent and encourage people to support them.[131] As a result of this strategy, local workers had insecure jobs at testing areas and the islands experienced a boom in construction projects that depended on nuclear activity.[132] According to Barrillot and Doom, those who mentioned this dependence out loud might lose their jobs in an economy dependent on the military.[133]

Still, resistance did not cease just because there was no open talk. According to Johnson and Tupouniua, early protests included student marches, statements from churches and peaceful demonstrations by women, all of which were often broken up by local security forces.[134] Even though the French media usually ignored these local protests, archives from Moruroa e tatou include flyers, letters and manifestos that demonstrate the growth of an indigenous counter-narrative.[135] Protestors often used the same civilizational messages as France, only to criticize them for acting hypocritically and destroying the environment.

People's actions influenced by visual culture helped advance the resistance. Using murals, posters and art on stage, activists worked to restore lost stories to memory. As Philippe and Schoenberger suggest, these visual narratives do not only reveal resistance, but also challenge history by describing events from the angle of indigenous pain and strength.[136] Pictures of protests in Tahiti that feature French and military symbols illustrate the competing ideals of submission and opposition.

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[130] Rechniewski, "The Unquiet Legacy," 216.
[131] Blanchet, "What Development After the CEP?" 42.
[132] Barthe, "Cause politique," 90.
[133] Bruno Barrillot and John Taroanui Doom, "Response to Regnault," *The Contemporary Pacific* 17, no. 2 (2005): 373–77, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23722065.
[134] Johnson and Tupouniua, "Against French Nuclear Testing," 214.
[135] Meltz and Vrignon, *Des bombes en Polynésie*, 90.
[136] Philippe, Schoenberger, and Ahmed, "Radiation Exposures and Compensation," 78.

Therefore, the decision to test nuclear weapons in Moruroa and Fangataufa was backed with a justification using strategic views, colonialist thinking and a few economic advantages. The decision also led to mixed reactions from the local community: some cooperated when needed, but people kept resisting continuously, as seen in their stories, political commentary and community art. According to the documents and testimonies explored in this thesis, opposition to French nuclear colonialism in Polynesia existed even early on, taking the form of protests as well as the acts of not cooperating, being silent or offering alternative explanations.

Immediate Fallout: Protests, Suppression, and Job Programs

In 1966, France's decision to test its nuclear weapons on Moruroa and Fangataufa island caused a sudden but mixed response among Polynesians. The first people to resist were divided and acted only in their communities, often not knowing much about the large-scale testing or not willing to stand up to the colonial government because they needed it for their economy. Intensified testing and people's health concerns led many to join the opposition movement. Press articles and protest pamphlets stated that people felt uneasy, especially when pictures of nearby clouds and military training appeared in the press for Tahiti's inhabitants. Johnson and Tupouniua mention the appearance of the A.T.O.M. group which was among the first organized protests against nuclear weapons.[137] Many demonstrations outside the Assembly in Papeete were frequently interrupted by French gendarmes, underlining that the colonial government saw peaceful protest as a challenge.

[137] Johnson and Tupouniua, "Against French Nuclear Testing," 215.

Figure 10: The Against Testing on Mururoa (ATOM) committee protests on the streets of Suva, Fiji, in the 1970s. / Photo by Graham Baines[138]

Figure 10 shows the ATOM committee protest. The photo of Pacific Islanders protesting in Fiji exemplifies transnational resistance. It contrasts with France's narrative of local compliance, showing how indigenous and regional solidarity challenged nuclear colonialism. The French administration used a range of ways to suppress the increasing demonstrations. According to the records, intimidation, observation of protest leaders and in some cases, removal from jobs were part of the state's efforts. According to Barthe, people who took part in anti-nuclear demonstrations were often singled out by the state and not allowed to travel freely.[139] Sometimes, governments did not need to use full force since repression could be found in official paperwork or media reports that depicted those protesting as radicals. Strategies used in the Algerian war were similar in having experienced military intelligence officers moved to Papeete

[138] Graham Barker, "Figure 10: The deposit facility on MADINGA (ATOM) committee protest on the streets of Fiji in the 1970s," photograph, in "The Transnational Struggle Against Nuclear Colonialism in the 'Sea of Islands,'" by Talei Luscia Mangioni, The Funambulist, December 14, 2021, https://thefunambulist.net/magazine/the-ocean/the-transnational-struggle-against-nuclear-colonialism-in-the-sea-of-islands.
[139] Barthe, "Cause politique," 77.

for nuclear oversight.[140] This kind of surveillance created an atmosphere of fear and quiet, especially on the far-away islands, where close supervision made dissent more difficult.

Figure 11 :Nuclear Explosion During Centaure French Test in French Polynesia; AFP/Getty Images, (1974); Duval Smith, (1996)[141]

Figure 11 shows nuclear explosion of the Centaure Test, the 58th test which occurred on the 17th of July 1974. The mushroom cloud symbolizes the visceral impact of testing. Paired with protest narratives, it underscores the disconnect between France's clinical justifications and the lived trauma of Polynesians. However, even with this clampdown, people did not give up, as these movements were often included in what Blanchet describes as "developmental pacification strategy." It required the integration of Polynesians into testing by creating jobs, offering social services and building more infrastructure.[142] The CEP gave thousands of jobs, paying well and providing subsidized housing, so people from Europe became more dependent and less likely to unite in protest. According to Von Strokirch, this situation resulted in the creation of what she calls a dual political economy which depended on support from the French and also retained the original Polynesian social system.[143] As a result of this, families had to rely on the CEP for more than money, so the protests became scattered.

[140] Danielsson, "Poisoned Pacific," 27.
[141] "Figure 11: Nuclear explosion mushroom cloud," photograph, in "Russia's Tsar Bomba: World's Most Powerful Nuclear Weapon of Mass Destruction," WION News, March 10, 2022, https://www.wionews.com/photos/russias-tsar-bomba-worlds-most-powerful-nuclear-weapon-of-mass-destruction-460924/460925.
[142] Blanchet, "What Development After the CEP?" 45.
[143] VonStrokirch, "Impact of Nuclear Testing," 341.

Governing officials made it clear that job programs were mainly created as ways to suppress dissent. It changed local development policies, deliberately linking them to nuclear power to represent French strategic interests.[144] Roads were mostly made to help the army move quickly, even though the government told the public they were beneficial for the community. Health clinics were built near places where nuclear tests were carried out, primarily for radiation monitoring and not for full medical care. Using development projects to satisfy competing needs for military control and peace with locals was necessary to handle unrest. Philippe and Schoenberger also mention that official French broadcasters emphasized the positive benefits of these nuclear facilities, hiding their important roles in nuclear energy.[145]

On the other hand, resistance was able to reappear in different forms. In the 1970s and 1980s, women, churches and students started demonstrating, often choosing cultural performances, songs and storytelling to make their voices heard. This thesis highlights that archival images and protest signs from the 1950s used both indigenous images and messages opposing colonization. These efforts weren't formalized into movement until years later, but their beginning was this period of quiet, though active, protest. In Maclellan's opinion, the cultural aspect in protest art was important because it reminded Polynesians that they were still autonomous amidst being under nuclear occupation.[146]

Overall, this era of protest and suppression highlights the range of reactions to French nuclear testing: while some individuals accepted jobs or other help, others organized demonstrations, used art and culture and joined partnerships abroad. It became obvious that France did not practice the same values in Polynesia that they promoted back home. These difficulties led the way to the stronger resistance movements of later years, where communities became more concerned about ongoing economic and health effects. Later on, Barthe described Polynesia during the nuclear period as a place where people were made to suffer, but that suffering was also denied and used by both the colonizers and eventually local groups for their own purposes.[147]

[144] Bataille and Revol, *Rapport sur les incidences*, 20.
[145] Philippe, Schoenberger, and Ahmed, "Radiation Exposures and Compensation," 80.
[146] Maclellan, "Resistance and Survival," 7.
[147] Barthe, "De la dénonciation," 43.

Chapter 4: 1975–1996: Dependency, Inequality, and Resistance

Sub-question 2:
How did the tests reshape the political structure, economic dependencies, and cultural identity of French Polynesia?
Health Crises (Thyroid Cancer, Miscarriages—ISPF Stats)

Many health issues resulted from France's nuclear tests in French Polynesia from 1975 to 1996, including thyroid cancer, problems with reproduction and congenital defects. Researchers De Vathaire et al. showed a significant increase in thyroid cancer cases among children exposed to debris from nuclear tests on Moruroa and Fangataufa.[148] According to this research and radiological review by Bouville, people living on populated islands suffered radiation exposure through contaminated water, food and air carrying radioactive iodine (I-131).[149] Official data from the Institut de la Statistique de la Polynésie Française (ISPF) indicate there are significantly more cases of miscarriages, stillbirths and developmental issues in the Tuamotu and Gambier groups which are downwind of the test sites.

Apart from medical evidence, the recollections of survivors demonstrate how much suffering people went through together. Interviews with survivors who had been children in the 1970s revealed that they developed lasting thyroid health issues, suffered from exhaustion and dealt with difficulty in reproducing themselves. Evidence from local groups such as Moruroa e tatou and documents compiled in the 2006 colloquium of the Scientists and Nuclear Tests Consequence on Health, agree with the accounts from people about sickness and radiation exposure. Many times, the story of suffering involves trauma passed down through generations such as when women fear their children may be harmed by pollutants absorbed during pregnancy. According to Rechniewski, trauma theory shows that these cases are connected to the ongoing effects of colonial experimentation.[150]

The official dismissal of the health risks by the French government makes the experience of victims even more traumatic. Barthe explains that government denial and the complexities of state work usually mean that people who experience violence, though still suffering, are ignored

[148] De Vathaire et al., "Thyroid Cancer," 1117.
[149] Bouville, "Fallout from Nuclear Weapons Tests," 366.
[150] Rechniewski, "The Unquiet Legacy," 216.

in the government's discussions.[151] Before the 2000s, there were almost no compensation schemes or they were available to only a few people because of the strict requirements. Even in the present day, it is challenging for victims to show that illness and exposure are connected, meaning the victims must prove their claims. According to Philippe, Schoenberger and Ahmed, the practice of medical colonialism is part of the state's overall control over health data and stories.[152] Forgetting to monitor health regularly and destroying the history of exposure to danger are ways of structural violence that stop affected communities from being acknowledged and repaired.

Public health issues involved both health problems and misinformation issues. Both Danielsson and Barthe reported that the local communities were rarely notified about atmospheric tests and the threats they may cause.[153],[154] Most of the radiation protection information distributed in Tahiti was written in technical French, making it hard for the Tahitian population to get. People in rural areas consumed contaminated water and food because they lacked sufficient information about health and risks. It was years after their symptoms developed that victims recognized that radiation had caused them harm, only after NGOs and foreign science experts began sharing information and carried out separate studies.

It is especially important to consider how these health crises affect people differently by gender. Besides dealing with many reproductive challenges and infertility, women were mostly responsible for taking care of sick or disabled children and elderly relatives. Barrillot and Doom found that most women suffered emotional damage from feeling that they had not protected their families.[155] The secretive nature of these incidents, caused by social and formal restraints, has only just been challenged through recent oral history projects and activism. According to Bolton and Minor, focusing on human rights is crucial for dealing with nuclear matters and these narratives demonstrate that reparative justice should address gender as well.[156]

The health issues caused by nuclear testing were planned because the colonial system undervalued the lives of local people. Both Boeckers and Bullard indicate in their writings about

[151] Barthe, "De la dénonciation," 40.
[152] Philippe, Schoenberger, and Ahmed, "Radiation Exposures and Compensation," 81.
[153] Barthe, "Cause politique," 89.
[154] Danielsson, "Poisoned Pacific," 28.
[155] Barrillot and Doom, "Response to Regnault," 375.
[156] Bolton and Minor, "Addressing the Ongoing Consequences," 82.

environmental racism that these experiments were often carried out on non-white, remote communities.[157],[158] The levels of radiation exposure decided on in France were based solely on Euro-American models without considering local foods, climatic differences and how the population is affected. When mainstream science ignores or overwrites the truths of indigenous peoples, it is important to examine this in order to seek historical justice.

According to these findings, health crises in French Polynesia were not only due to biology but also tied to the politics and culture of French nuclear empire in the archipelago. They disturbed the continuity of families, affected the ways people had children and changed the connection between communities and nature. Today, the effects of radiation on people are noticed both in illnesses and in memories, so at the core of postcolonial justice is the effort to achieve recognition, provide compensation and remember those harmed. This next section will illustrate that these health effects were matched by newly created situations of economic reliance and resistance which both supported and eventually challenged the unequal power that existed through the testing procedure.

Local Dependency on Test-Related Economic Aid

The French government gave a lot of financial aid and developed infrastructure in Polynesia starting in the 1960s to calm protest and make locals more cooperative. After CEP was created, the French state devoted large amounts of money toward the region which had a major impact on its society and economy. Now, community activities related to the tests were seen as vital, part of the new postcolonial deal and Polynesian people's daily lives. As Barrillot indicates, the placement of aid strategically by the French aimed at changing the country's political outlook, where nuclear presence promised better health care, more education and a stronger economy.[159] However, these incentives achieved two things at once: they helped the country in the short run and also kept it tied to the U.S. for years to come.

Employment increased in many places as a result of test-era aid, mainly within and around the CEP infrastructure and its services. Tourland indicates that the increased job opportunities

[157] Boeckers, "Environmental Racism," 3.
[158] Bullard, "Confronting Environmental Racism," 34.
[159] Bruno Barrillot, "Qualifier les atteintes aux droits des victimes des essais nucléaires," in *Quelle justice pour les victimes des essais nucléaires?* (2007).

caused more people from rural areas to settle in cities like Papeete.[160] Local employees worked as security guards, assistants, cleaners or on the sites almost always knowing their roles offered limited chances to advance once the test ended. According to Meltz and Vrignon, the flood of jobs gave Polynesian youths a feeling of economic hope, but also made a group of short-term workers disconnected from key policy decisions.[161] In addition, the contracts could easily be broken, resulting in unfair treatment for Polynesian workers.

Migration to the islands of Tahiti and Moorea rose rapidly as nuclear tests were carried out in the 1970s and 1980s. According to Blanchet, between 1970 and 1990, the urban population increased by more than 60% and many people chose to live in informal housing found around test sites.[162] This change brought about a new form of economic behavior driven by levels set by government, but also resulted in increased stress for cities, causing overcrowding, dirty conditions and strain on health and education systems. According to Johnson and Tupouniua, the arrival of many nuclear workers changed traditional power systems by making modern payroll the new source of influence.[163] The French state continued to provide money for schools and hospitals in the cities, but spent less on outlying islands, leading to more gaps between different territories.

The positive effects of CEP on the economy created a challenging situation. The primary reason behind Polynesia's high GDP per capita in the Pacific was the support from the government and the income from nuclear power plants. It also struggled to have sustainable industries apart from military and government organizations. According to Barthe, due to this dependency, political support for parties in favor of nuclear energy led to greater financial backing.[164] Those in power in Tahiti were chosen to manage the aid, making it difficult for organizations to question the government and significantly reducing any possibility of resistance. Davidson reports on the first parliamentary debates that show local leaders having difficulty reconciling money from testing with the public's growing concerns about radiation danger.[165]

[160] Tourland, "Implantation et Stratégie," 2.
[161] Meltz and Vrignon, *Des bombes en Polynésie*, 91.
[162] Blanchet, "What Development After the CEP?" 49.
[163] Johnson and Tupouniua, "Against French Nuclear Testing," 215.
[164] Barthe, "La 'bombe coloniale'," 51.
[165] Davidson, "The Submission of John Teariki," 152.

Many critics have argued that although the French government claimed its policies were designed to help and modernize, their overall system actually kept France in control. Danielsson points out that even if France backed the Vichy government, its assistance was linked to acceptance and the restraint of Paris rebels.[166] The issue of demanding evidence and delays in receiving state aid continued well after the ban on testing in 1996.[167] After the testing era ended, the developed economic systems lasted and resulted in nations being economically dependent but not truly independent.

Artists explored how this dependency also created many contradictions. Moruroa e tatou films display French-built hospitals side by side with illustrations of polluted fish and water. This illustration highlighted that the Polynesian nations had to choose between new infrastructure and long-term problems with both health and the environment. Maclellan explains that through such icons, advocates successfully shifted the idea of aid from a gift to an act of compensation for something wrong.[168]

Similarly to the Marshall Islands and other nuclear test sites, Polynesia's connections with its past colonizer form patterns recognized in comparative studies. Narita and Abe highlight that both Fukushima and Chernobyl cases featured a back-to-back pattern of using national energy facilities and economic crash after the test, suggesting that nuclear colonialism also deals with restructuring of national institutions.[169] According to Nkrumah, these cases suggest that neocolonial powers tend to use economic practices rather than political methods to maintain influence.[170]

Overall, the test program implemented by France made Polynesian development largely depend on the metropolitan country's goals. Initially, seeing more jobs was a good thing, but they did not last long and were not shared equally. The increased movement from rural to urban life brought positive and negative effects, including unrest and that made it challenging for autonomy groups to gain real independence. After the end of testing, French Polynesia was a prime example of a region that saw progress with aid but was still under the control of the conditions

[166] Danielsson, "Poisoned Pacific," 29.
[167] Cardinal and Bouvet, "Compensation of Victims," 345.
[168] Maclellan, "Resistance and Survival," 7.
[169] Narita and Abe, "Revisiting Nuclear Legacy," 290.
[170] Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism*, 47.

set by France. The main problem now is to separate economic progress from military occupation and create a future built on peaceful, conscious development.

Shifting Discourse: France as Provider vs. France as Colonizer

At the beginning of nuclear tests, French officials said their presence in Polynesia was justified by republican and civilizing missions, often relating the testing program to progress and development. Speeches and official documents from French parliament during the 1960s through the 1980s mainly highlighted growth in the economy, improvement of the country's infrastructure and social services. However, in Polynesia, there was growing criticism of these views and new framings described France as an ungenerous colonizer using the land and people of the archipelago for colonial defense.

There is a noticeable change in the discussions in the Assembly from the late 1980s and 1990s, where pro-autonomy and independence advocates started attacking the CEP for representing nuclear colonialism. According to Barthe, speakers in state legislative assemblies began moving past mild comments on the environmental damage of testing and started making connections to a broad system where race and economics were influential.[171] Oscar Temaru's Tavini Huira'atira party largely brought about this rhetorical change by repeatedly describing nuclear dependency as a form of ongoing colonial rule. Temaru claimed in an Assembly speech that the French government's supply of aid and jobs was simply a method to hide wider problems such as damage to the environment and the erosion of culture.

Besides official talks, the way discussions shifted was noticeable in the written material produced by anti-nuclear activists during the later part of testing. The slogans featured on the archived posters such as "Moruroa: terre sacrifiée" and "La bombe ou la vie," referred to these actions as sacrilegious and required people to choose between saving lives and allowing the testing. As a result, the mentality of French colonialism changed to see it as spoiling, rather than uplifting, Africa. According to Maclellan, this form of propaganda helped to present the war in new ways, both there and in other nations.[172] Rituals such as prayer vigils, funerals and facade trials by the activists underlined grief and loss instead of the expected support for modernization

[171] Barthe, "Cause politique," 100.
[172] Maclellan, "Resistance and Survival," 8.

and partnership. This debate brought up the question if development brought real change or simply covered the real reasons behind colonial extraction.

As the 1990s continued, thinking about politics became more organized with the rise of new civil society materials and articles. Journalists in La Dépêche de Tahiti and activists started publishing op-eds that opposed the idea of France giving aid to Polynesia. The materials they produced began to describe thyroid disease, issues with infertility and dirty fish, making it clear to the public that the French government still did not ensure safety. As Barthe points out, the rhetoric often adopted the tactic of showing Polynesians as both witnesses and people who opposed mistreatment.[173] This perspective fitted with international opinions that condemned neocolonial practices, mainly in regions where post-war aid was used to take resources.

To the start of the 1990s, the French continued to dismiss this shift. The government said that unclear statistics and completed public work projects showed its goodwill. According to Bataille and Revol and other parliament reports, the main approach should be cost–benefit, as no place had given more attention to its "overseas citizens."[174] However, Barthe points out that when local groups resisted and the movement became known internationally such narratives lost their impact.[175] As transnational advocacy networks, including various NGOs, Pacific Islander coalitions and environmental lawyers, were established, Polynesian leaders found fresh ways to describe the situation as one connected to injustices happening all over the world.

During this time, politicians adopted new labels for political ideas. At the beginning, neutral titles such as "Centre d'Experimentation du Pacifique" and "zones de retombées" were used, but after protests, people used phrases such as "bombe de la colonie," "silent sickness," and "military occupation" instead. These changes had a significant importance. They moved the French state's image from one of assisting development to one of being responsible for what Boeckers calls environmental racism and what Danielsson refers to as nuclear imperialism.[176] Basically, the change was from using technical terms to focusing on morality.

[173] Barthe, "De la dénonciation," 45.
[174] Bataille and Revol, *Rapport sur les incidences*, 22.
[175] Barthe, "Cause politique," 101.
[176] Boeckers, "Environmental Racism," 3.

Changes in language also affected beliefs and customs in many cultures. The Mā'ohi Protestant Church which had been cautious about engaging in politics, decided to include topics related to nuclear resistance in its sermons and public meetings. As a result, opposing nuclear weapons came to be linked with a broad system of ethics inspired by indigenous guardianship and religious reasons against military actions. According to Maclellan, the church's endorsement of criticisms of French rule gradually changed people's view of France from a devil-like figure to a self-serving one.[177]

In the early part of the 2000s, things had moved decisively on the local narrative. The majority of speeches and resources presented the nuclear period as a time when Polynesians' sovereignty was lost for the gains of the French and others in power. The compensation and official statements from French authorities were not fully accepted by many, since they did not deal with the real extent of the harm.

Overall, there was no sudden or straightforward shift from France serving as an ally to France as a conqueror. It advanced through actions in national lawmaking bodies, demonstrations, independent news media and involvement by activists worldwide. Both Barthe and Maclellan conclude that this movement emphasized gaining storytelling authority as well as seeking fair treatment.[178],[179] Instead of viewing nuclear testing as an unavoidable part of progress, the documentary presented it as a colonial act covered up with the language of helping the community. Therefore, there is an ongoing disagreement over the meaning of "development," and the claims of activists, survivors and politicians still try to shape how we remember these events.

International Pressure: UN Resolutions, Greenpeace, and Legal Advocacy

In the mid-1970s, France faced more criticism from countries globally over its nuclear testing in Polynesia. The subject became much more significant in the final years of testing, with both diplomats and civilians describing it not only as a French problem, but also as violating rules against nuclear spread, harming the environment and disrespecting indigenous peoples' rights.

[177] Maclellan, "Resistance and Survival," 9.
[178] Barthe, "Cause politique," 104.
[179] Maclellan, "Resistance and Survival," 9.

Various actors, including the United Nations, Greenpeace and legal specialists worldwide, led the international effort to challenge such decisions.

General Assembly resolutions from the United Nations urged several times for an end to nuclear testing in the Pacific. Even though they held little power, these resolutions helped shape people's views and showed how withdrawn France had become. The author explains that instead of signing the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT) like the United States or USSR, France kept testing and defied the trend toward restraint among world powers. At the UN, Fiji, Papua New Guinea and New Zealand repeatedly spoke up, pointing to the risks against the environment and humanity from extra nuclear testing. As a result, France became known for not joining the rest of Europe in finding a middle ground in the dispute.

In the late 1970s, Greenpeace took on a major and recognizable part in the movement. Direct actions from Greenpeace ships, for example the Rainbow Warrior incident at Moruroa, made Polynesia a well-known beacon of resistance against nuclear tests. Bolton and Minor state that Greenpeace's use of media made people understand the situation as one where human victims were suffering because of French nuclear tests in the Pacific.[180] The French agents' actions in harming the Rainbow Warrior in New Zealand in 1985 did not achieve their diplomatic goals, rather intensifying criticisms against them in the Pacific and receiving widespread criticism from international courts.[181],[182]

Law experts and activists were also important in helping to present France's actions in the context of human rights. According to D'Amato and Ris, atmospheric testing affected the environment and human rights both in international law and in the domestic laws of countries.[183],[184] Academic institutions and UN-related working groups started giving more attention to these critiques in the 1990s. According to Bolton (2022), nuclear test survivors and their advocates insisted that applying transitional justice frameworks was necessary, as having reparations, being recognized and receiving healthcare was a right, not just a gesture.[185] As a

[180] Bolton and Minor, "Addressing the Ongoing Consequences," 84.
[181] D'Amato, "Legal Aspects," 71.
[182] Ris Jr., "Crisis for International Law," 113.
[183] D'Amato, "Legal Aspects," 72.
[184] Ris Jr., "Crisis for International Law," 114.
[185] Bolton, "Human Rights Fallout," 78.

result, international discussions about victims' rights and the responsibility of former colonizers took a new direction.

France kept rejecting foreign criticism until the late 1990s. It appears from Parliamentary documents and foreign policy papers that Paris viewed the criticism as trying to undermine its authority and the place it holds among nuclear states. According to Harrison, France chose not to halt atomic tests during the Cold War because it wanted to be independent from American and NATO influence.[186] Even after the global focus shifted to disarmament, France remained resolute, keeping up tests until 1996 despite the fact that almost all other nuclear nations had changed to underground or computerized simulations long before then.

Overall, the combined pressure from UN action, the work of Greenpeace and legal arguments did not terminate French nuclear testing, but it did make it less acceptable. It brought the sufferings of Polynesians to the attention of the world and placed France in a position where it faces strong calls for responsibility and justice within the ongoing discussion.

Resistance Movements: Moruroa e tatou, Church Activism, and Women-led Protests

Both external pressure and internal resistance played a role, but the strongest opposition to French nuclear tests came from Polynesians. Domestic criticism was complex and evolved over years, appearing in different ways and representing a wide range of issues, including health problems, ownership of territory, moral and religious beliefs and women's rights. The motivation for resistance came not only from events like radiation-related illnesses but also from loss of power, forced dependability on others and censorship of indigenous voices. This section examines three main forms of resistance in French Polynesia: the group Moruroa e tatou, protests organized by churches and movements by women and mothers.

[186] Michael M. Harrison, "French Nuclear Testing: Acquitted by Politics," *SAIS Review* (1956–1989): 10–19 (1974).

Figure 12: Anti-nuclear protest organized by association 193, Papeete, French Polynesia, 2012[187]

Figure 12 shows the anti-nuclear protest in Papeete. This image of a 2012 protest demonstrates the longevity of anti-nuclear activism. It ties local resistance (e.g., Moruroa e tatou) to broader struggles for environmental justice and decolonization. Moruroa e tatou was formed in 2001 and soon become a well-known and effective group representing various test-victim communities and anti-nuclear activists. Using the activism that came before, the group chose to focus on restitution, learning the truth of history and seeking justice in medicine. Moruroa e tatou used stories and statements collected from people involved as well as protest writing to bring about what Barthe calls a "politics of the victim," which made their pain and trouble into a powerful tool for political change.[188] Instead of making demands just to Paris, the group linked their call to justice on a global scale, comparing radiation exposure to an infringement of human rights.[189] It drew on statements from witnesses, protest art and remembrance ceremonies to relate personal experiences to wider history. Spaces used by the Catholic Church and by traditional Tahitian meeting houses displayed photographs and symbols, turning them into places of both recollection and resistance which showed the amalgamation of culture and political activism in the movement.

Besides secular organizations, church groups were also heavily involved. Theological opposition to nuclear testing by Pacific leaders came from Protestant and Catholic groups, long present in Polynesian society, in the 1980s and 1990s. Sermons and records from local congregations reveal that people protesting nuclear arms began speaking in a spiritual way. The dropping of the

[187] "Anti-nuclear protest organized by Association 193, Papeete (2012): 'En mémoire de nos femmes décédées ou malades' listing 24 illnesses covered under the Morin Law," photograph, Tahiti, French Polynesia, July 2012.
[188] Barthe, "La 'bombe coloniale'," 65.
[189] Bolton, "Human Rights Fallout," 85.

bomb here insulted the creation of God and was a blow to the honorable work of native peoples. According to Harris, indigenous believers in Polynesia saw the test sites as desecrated spaces, believing the French nuclear tests worked as acts of spiritual warfare.[190] Churches gathered people for talks, supported activities like sit-ins and made their buildings available for discussion and reflection. Activists in the Church endorsed the anti-nuclear movement which strengthened the cause and offered support for revolt in less urbanized areas.

Polynesian women were particularly involved in an area of resistance that was hardly ever explored. Many women were the ones who first observed and recorded that their families experienced miscarriages, birth defects and thyroid problems over many generations. Instead of being just stories, these first-hand accounts were used to understand disease trends, an informal form of epidemiology due to the lack of openness from the government.[191] Handmade banners, painting of images of mothers with children and pictures of women taking part in vigils all showed this form of represented witnessing. Feminist scholars refer to this as "embodied protest," by which the female body stands in for the evil experienced. According to Barthe, by using this lens, anti-nuclear politics were relocated from global politics to the domestic problems experienced by families and across generations.[192] Women fighting for peace also criticized France's emphasis on secrecy and military heroism in its nuclear policy, bringing up alternative concepts for keeping their country safe, caring for people and considering the environment.

Notably, these movements addressed both specific actions against them and the systems that made such actions possible. The systematic spread of false news, the colonial government's dependence on financial power to silence protests and France withholding complete health details were some of these factors. Bolton and Minor state that collecting and controlling health data as risk statistics acted as "slow violence," causing slow and lasting harm that is tough to track.[193] Traditional cultural practices also played a role in this: people reclaimed history, told different tales and demanded to be known in places where they had not previously been noticed.[194]

[190] Harris, "Polynesia Against Paris," 632.
[191] De Vathaire et al., "Thyroid Cancer," 1118.
[192] Barthe, "De la dénonciation," 47.
[193] Bolton and Minor, "Addressing the Ongoing Consequences," 89.
[194] Meltz and Vrignon, "Polynesian Agency," 10.

In conclusion, the opposition to nuclear testing in Polynesia during the late period was divided and based on the local population's own willpower. Moruroa e tatou, church organizations and gendered protest networks each opposed French nuclear imperialism using different, and occasionally similar, ideas and strategies. They stood up to both immediate dangers for the environment and for themselves and also engaged with the deeper issues of neocolonialism, removing knowledge and social-economic dependence. What they did formed the starting point for later discussions on justice and memory and it is still important for understanding how nuclear testing impacts Oceania.

Chapter 5: 1996–Present: Memory, Framing, and Historical Justice

Sub-question 3: How has the legacy of nuclear colonialism been remembered and contested within Polynesia since the tests ended?

Chirac's Final Tests and Aftermath

Following President Jacques Chirac's nuclear tests in 1995 after a global moratorium, more people started taking sides in the discussion of France's involvement in Polynesia. The conduct of tests 544 to 549 at Moruroa and Fangataufa from September 1995 to January 1996 caused instant criticism from the local public as well as internationally. Officials at the Élysée Palace described the move as required by science so that France's defense could switch to simulations in the future. In Polynesia, however, people regarded this explanation as a disrespectful action by the colonial powers. Many people, both citizens and experts, joined forces to express their long-held concerns and the will to act jointly.[195],[196]

Official communications reveal that Chirac described French nuclear independence as necessary for stability in global affairs and for upholding the prestige of France, ideas used by politicians in the Cold War period and borrowed from Gaullist leaders. However, what the government said was soon criticized by many in the public. International organizations such as Greenpeace conducted famous actions, including the Rainbow Warrior II voyage, after which Pacific Island nations presented clear resolutions to the United Nations stating that the tests were both morally unacceptable and dangerous to nature.[197],[198] The country's rejection of global arbitration and not permitting external reviews of nuclear safety worsened its standoff with the international community.

Resistance to Chirac's tests rose above political parties on Tahiti and in the other outer islands. La Dépêche de Tahiti reported on massive rallies, prayer vigils, numerous fasts and school demonstrations that opposed the French government's decisions. According to Harris and Rechniewski, these activities were meaningful to more than just opposing nuclear plants, they

[195] Maclellan, "Resistance and Survival," 10.
[196] Meltz and Vrignon, *Des bombes en Polynésie*, 92.
[197] Abe, "The NPT at Fifty," 228.
[198] Bolton and Minor, "Addressing the Ongoing Consequences," 86.

also helped develop statements of indigenous sovereignty.[199],[200] Oscar Temaru and other Tavini Huira'atira leaders used the incident to argue that the nuclear legacy was against Polynesian values and health and this increased pressure for self-determination.[201],[202]

Both eye-catching and symbolic, the protests in 1995–1996 were remarkable. Demonstrators used uniforms and shared posters that shouted "Colonial bombs have no place here!" and "Moruroa is our land, it is not your research center." Many churches hung banners with crosses on top of pictures of mushroom clouds and memorial murals began to show up on public buildings, portraying sad oceans, crying women and destroyed islands. They functioned as more than statements of protest; they were also attempts to influence history and culture. Barthe states that such symbolic actions opposed the official story by highlighting their own trauma and values over the propaganda of the government.[203]

Events that followed the tests contributed to changing the structure of state institutions. As a result of diplomatic demands and domestic turmoil, France introduced the Loi Morin in 2010 which provided compensation for some participants in the trials, even though the rules for receiving this compensation were strict.[204] Only after years of pressure from survivors and groups supported by Moruroa e tatou were the hidden consequences acknowledged in 2005, stemming from the testimonies about untold illnesses, silence and lack of help.[205],[206] Critics say while the law was symbolically important, it caused new injustice by having victims prove what happened and by omitting steps to collectively repair the environment.[207],[208]

[199] Harris, "Polynesia Against Paris," 632.
[200] Rechniewski, "The Unquiet Legacy," 216.
[201] Tagupa, "A Decade of Debate," 41.
[202] Tourland, "Implantation et Stratégie," 3.
[203] Barthe, "De la dénonciation," 47.
[204] Cardinal and Bouvet, "Compensation of Victims," 346.
[205] Barrillot and Doom, "Response to Regnault," 375.
[206] De Vathaire et al., "Thyroid Cancer," 1118.
[207] Barthe, "Cause politique," 92.
[208] Philippe, Schoenberger, and Ahmed, "Radiation Exposures and Compensation," 79.

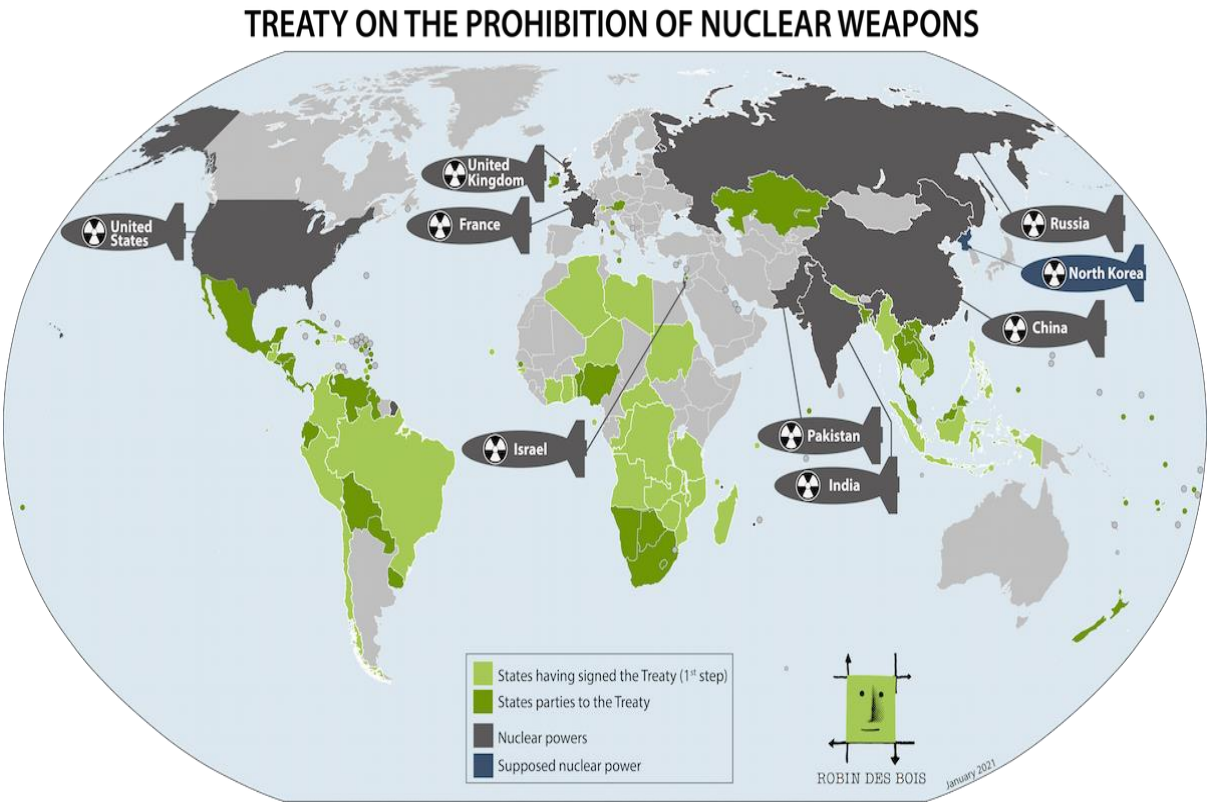

Figure 13 : Risks and Accidents » Nagasaki, Hiroshima, Nada; (2021)[209]

Figure 13 is a "Nagasaki, Hiroshima, Nada!" Poster showcasing nuclear powers and their exceptionalism regarding the treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons. The protest art links French tests to global nuclear violence, rejecting state exceptionalism. It reflects how Polynesian activists framed their struggle within international anti-nuclear movements. As a result, Chirac's steps did not only spark political actions, but also changed how nuclear colonialism was discussed. They clashed the famous "Grandeur" of France with the real acts of sacrifice experienced by Polynesians. They made it clear that assimilationist republicanism was not enough to overcome the long-term problems of inequality after colonialism. This work formed the basis for later discussions about memory, justice and recognition in both local and worldwide forums.[210]

Overall, the 1995–1996 tests signaled both the last nuclear tests in Polynesia and the start of a lasting challenge to deal with its consequences. This statement should be seen in the context of

[209] "Figure 13: Röks and Accidents + Nagasaki, Hiroshima, Nadai™ Poster," digital image, in "NAGASAKI, HIROSHIMA, NADAÏ," Robin des Bois, January 22, 2021, https://robindesbois.org/en/nagasaki-hiroshima-nada-2/.
[210] R. Meltz, M. Taiarui, and A. Vrignon, "Pour une histoire globale et comparée des essais nucléaires," *Relations internationales* 194 (2023): 3–10, https://doi.org/10.3917/ri.194.0003.

indigenous activism, environmental justice and postcolonial reactions to slavery and colonization. This is why Chirac's departing moments left a powerful mark on the nation's history and led to important political changes.

State Recognition Efforts: Timelines, Speeches, Reparation Attempts

After nuclear testing ended in 1996, there was still a lot of damage to society and health in French Polynesia. As a result, it led to a decades-long fight for official notice, restitution and truth about what took place. Passing the Morin Law (Loi no. 2010-2) in January 2010 played a key role in this process. The law was intended to demonstrate France's responsibility by promising compensation to people affected by ionizing radiation during their atomic tests in the Sahara and the Pacific. According to Cardinal and Bouvet (2018), the law struggled with unclear standards, strict rules and an approach that made refusals more likely.[211] The organizations observed that it fell on the victims to show how their sicknesses were linked to the chemical exposure the state concealed and changed data on which was almost impossible.

The role of reviewing compensation cases after the Morin Law was given to the Comité d'Indemnisation des Victimes des Essais Nucléaires (CIVEN). The low success rate for claims at the beginning made many think the law was meant more for appearance than actual work. As reported by Philippe, Schoenberger and Ahmed, out of 1,160 requests in a related study, only 20 were first approved during the years 2010 through 2017.[212] The authors claim that this happens because there are few diseases recognized as eligible, certain zones are used and a strict timeline is used for determining compensation. The use of this system drew sharp criticism from both victims' supporters and medical experts, especially in French Polynesia, where thyroid cancer, miscarriages and problems with newborns were widely reported but were rarely looked into by the industry.

Unsatisfied with the law, many reforms were introduced to address its problems. The "Borne Amendment" of 2017 took away the causality clause that had mandated proof of a relationship between radiation and health problems for victims. Now, the government needed to prove there was a good reason to deny someone citizenship. Even though procedures have improved,

[211] Cardinal and Bouvet, "Compensation of Victims," 347.
[212] Philippe, Schoenberger, and Ahmed, "Radiation Exposures and Compensation," 84.

Philippe et al. argue that other problems remain, especially through continued delays, shortage of expert professionals and difficulties in including descendants who suffered from intergenerational radiation exposure.[213] Also, compensation was often insufficient and did not fully address the social damage, loss of land and impact on livelihood experienced by Polynesian communities.

Apart from adopting laws, the government took symbolic actions to address its actions during the colonial period. In Papeete in 2016, President François Hollande apologized for the first time, saying that the nuclear tests had an ongoing impact on French Polynesia. Even so, not everyone agreed with the statements in the speech. Some people welcomed it as part of the restoration process, but others and many survivors felt that it failed to promise more resources, clean-up efforts or openness of military records. The French government did not say sorry officially or pass any strong laws which made many consider whether France was truly admitting its nuclear guilt.

Both cultural recognition and institutional strategies went hand in hand such as when Meltz and Vrignon discussed the plan to build a memorial museum in Tahiti.[214] However, these projects did not happen regularly and usually did not help people at the grassroots level. The fact that state commemorations are often different from how people remember shows that justice is not being addressed as a whole. Authors from each group showed different views, with the state focusing on sovereignty and modernity and local communities pointing to colonial violence, loss of spiritual beliefs and ongoing fear for future generations. The lack of agreement on nuclear matters can be noticed clearly through the testimonies and creative pieces of Moruroa e tatou.

Many disagreements centered on the legal definition of nuclear waste zones and what could be done with testing site information. Among environmental researchers, Bouville insisted on fully cleaning up the site and offering long-term medical support, but these recommendations were put off for years by French institutions.[215] Limited access was given to these archives, as many of the CEP (Centre d'Expérimentations du Pacifique) records were blacked out or kept top secret. Therefore, both survivors and experts found it difficult to prove any harm had occurred,

[213] Ibid.
[214] Meltz and Vrignon, *Des bombes en Polynésie*, 93.
[215] Bouville, "Fallout from Nuclear Weapons Tests," 367.

validating the epistemic edge the state already held. The persistent problem known as the "politics of denial" made it difficult to gain reparative justice.[216] Limiting access to data and describing nuclear harm as not yet understood enabled the state to avoid taking responsibility while pretending to acknowledge the issue.

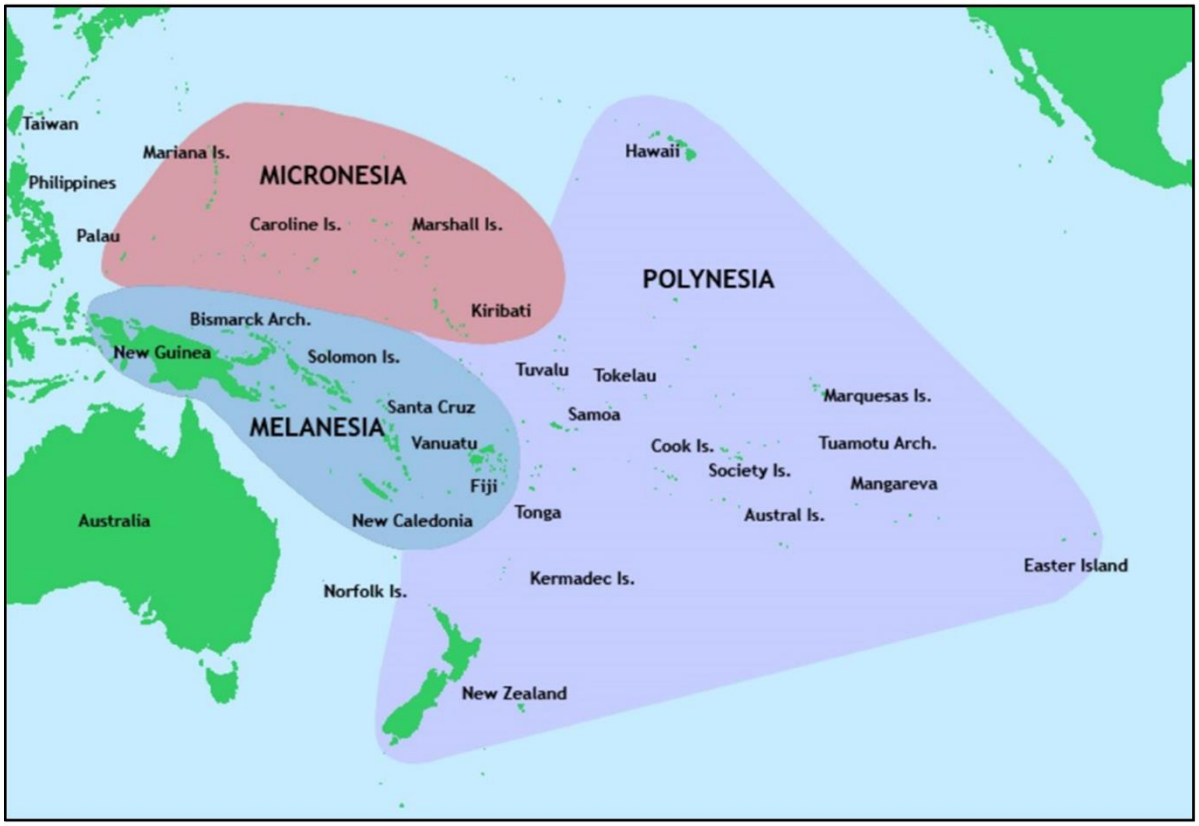

Figure 14: Main islands in the Pacific Ocean; Map of the MPM Scheme (Micronesia/Polynesia/Melanesia) (Image credit: Pavljenko, CCBY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons)[217]

Figure 14 is a Pacific Islands Map. The map contextualizes Polynesia within the Pacific, emphasizing shared regional trauma (e.g., Marshall Islands which also experienced nuclear tests from the USA). It critiques France's isolationist policies and highlights demands for transnational accountability. Over the past few years, organizations working around the globe have urged France to make its actions and decisions more transparent and just. Polynesian voices have gained strength in global disarmament forums thanks to information from the United Nations Human Rights Council and NGOs such as ICAN and Reaching Critical Will. Bolton and

[216] Barthe, "De la dénonciation," 43.
[217] Kahuroa, "Pacific Culture Areas," map, Wikimedia Commons, November 9, 2010, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pacific_Culture_Areas.jpg.

others have changed the discussion to involve human rights and environmental racism, highlighting why France should confront the problem.[218] Van Munster points out that the way recognition is granted in France is intertwined with racial ideas, as white veterans are recognized despite the fact that colonized populations suffered greatly from the effects of the bombs.[219]

In conclusion, even though the Morin Law and later policies recognized that nuclear activities can harm people, they have still not met the hopes of Polynesian groups. The divide between symbols that represent racial equality and actual justice for all people is broad. Payment systems are still slow, limited and do not fit the real-life problems of victims. The effort for reparative justice should address laws as well as the fundamental structure of society, helping to clear the past record, include all groups and strengthen political will. As long as these elements are apart, French nuclear colonialism continues to be a source of historic contention debated in society and politics alike.

Cultural Memory: Museums, School Curricula, Oral Traditions

The impact of nuclear tests in French Polynesia is passed down through the memories of people, as well as in creative works, schools and told stories. These traditions of remembrance are sometimes side by side with and on other occasions in contrast to, the state's history. Even though many years have passed, nuclear memory is often strengthened by events of commemoration that protect its memory and underline the tests' impact on culture.

Museum exhibitions are one of the best stages for remembering. While the nuclear issue is officially recognized there, there isn't a national museum on the subject, in keeping with the 'politics of invisibility' argued by Barthe. Usually, temporary exhibitions in the Maison de la Culture in Papeete and those arranged together with Moruroa e tatou are guided by activist curatorship.[220] Many of them have pictures of mushroom clouds over Moruroa and Fangataufa, detailed schedules of tests conducted, images of forested areas showing raised radiation and medical research on cancer. On the other hand, their short existence and small budgets are not nearly as impressive as how much the French government invests in saving its military history or

[218] Bolton, "Human Rights Fallout," 80.
[219] Van Munster, "On Whiteness," 92.
[220] Barthe, "De la dénonciation," 49.

supporting scientific achievements. Missing a dedicated nuclear museum demonstrates that this subject is not permanently commemorated.

Community-led murals, protest art and sculptures recalling memories have emerged as alternatives in places where the government has not led any remembrance efforts. According to Rechniewski, artists in Polynesia are now using public walls to paint "memory murals" featuring portraits of victims of radiation, iconic images of the sea and their ancestors, encouraging people to remember and fight.[221] A central Papeete mural portrays a Polynesian woman guarding her child from a mushroom cloud, using both Christian symbols and elements of native art to criticize both France and the involvement of colonial institutions in the country. They make common ground into places where people reflect on the effects that the tests have left.

Education has become an area where debates about memory take place. Schools in French metropolitan areas ignored or almost did not teach about nuclear testing for decades. French Polynesia has history books that reference the bombs, but their portrayal is brief and is usually integrated with messages about new development or actions by the main power at the time. According to Harris, hiding the damage of atomic warfare is called "curricular silencing" because it is done by ignoring the colonial legacy and bureaucratic language.[222] Only in the 2010s did increased activism result in nuclear history being slowly added to secondary school curriculum. These subjects are not typically main topics; they are most often included in more general colonialism or science advancement units.

In the recent past, some Tahitian teachers and scholars have used oral stories and works from their community to fill the same gap. Actions such as singing, reading poetry and listening to stories from old people now play an important role in handing down memories. Barthe points out that using this approach, educators are actively challenging the state's attempt to rewrite history in a clean manner.[223] The personal accounts of survivors, like those of former radiation workers or women who lost their babies because of radiation, are now being used in classrooms, youth groups and churches. These accounts stress the problems of losing faith, injuries to people and

[221] Rechniewski, "The Unquiet Legacy," 216.
[222] Harris, "Polynesia Against Paris," 633.
[223] Barthe, "De la dénonciation," 49.

damage to nature, issues that cannot be described well using rational and science-based words used by defense plans pushed forward by the French authorities.

Oral tradition is still the strongest method Polynesian people use to transfer memories within their culture, even if it is slowly starting to change. Instead of just remembering history, storytelling in Polynesian culture shows how identity, clan and justice are part of a larger cosmic view. They used to talk about "the time of the big sun" to describe the period when the sky would flash suddenly at dawn due to atomic tests. Such stories were taught using body movements, are performed during group rituals and are often listened to while singing or drumming. Rechniewski states that these oral traditions act as reminders of the state's weaknesses and urge authorities to pay attention.[224]

At the same time, oral memory also poses certain risks. Since witnesses are growing old and youth tend to adopt French-speaking city culture, there is a risk that the memory of the tests could fade. Groups such as Moruroa e tatou, and independist political party Tavini, have made an effort to save these things by establishing digital museums, gathering people's experiences, protest activities and musical pieces. However, the archives are affected by slow internet in the countryside, limited financial support and mostly volunteer workers. Barthe expresses concern that if these are not incorporated in general educational and cultural plans, they could turn into isolated spaces full of important memories that are pushed to the sidelines.[225]

French authorities' remembrance rituals frequently do not mean much to Polynesians. Sometimes ceremonies are held to commemorate the end of nuclear testing or the adoption of the Morin Law, but they are usually centered on important moments or laws rather than on survivors' experiences. It points to what Harris describes: when the government's official view of time rejects people's personal grief.[226] Using only "mainstream" languages in statements and labeling nuclear testing as necessary for the good of the French and Polynesian nations only serves to separates local people further.[227]

[224] Rechniewski, "The Unquiet Legacy," 216.
[225] Barthe, "De la dénonciation," 53.
[226] Harris, "Polynesia Against Paris," 634.
[227] Ibid.

Figure 15: Cultural Gathering for Heiva (traditional dance banned by the French authorities until the 1990s) in French Polynesia: A Traditional Celebration of Polynesian culture and ancestral religion[228]

Figure 15 shows a Cultural Gathering on the island of Tahiti at the event of the Heiva, a traditional dancing competition throughout the islands of Polynesia. This photo of traditional dance aims to embody indigenous resilience. It contrasts state erasure with grassroots efforts to reclaim identity, showing how cultural practices archive memory and resist colonial narratives. Yet, differences in how history is remembered locally and nationally have led to lively cultural activity. Trauma is often worked out and agency asserted in literature, dance and theater. According to Harris, Polynesian writers present anti-nuclear works as a genre that redefines the narrative of joining the French republic.[229] In their work, Chantal Spitz and Moetai Brotherson rely on their personal experiences and essays to highlight their experiences of bodily pain, being overlooked because of their race and seeking validation in their knowledge. They keep memories from fading and underline the way people fight cultural injustice with their minds.

[228] "Figure 15: Cultural gathering in French Polynesia," photograph, in "Celebrating 180 Years of the Church in French Polynesia," The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Newsroom, April 29, 2024, https://news-pacific.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/celebrating-180-years-of-the-church-in-french-polynesia?imageView=1T9A5832_2160px_200ppi_preview.jpg.

[229] Harris, "Polynesia Against Paris," 635.

Overall, people in French Polynesia remember nuclear testing differently due to various and sometimes differing memories. Although state-sponsored memory follows rules, uses symbols and has distance from daily life, local and indigenous memory is easy to feel, actively used and has political weight. Schools and museums have acknowledged this change, but there are still many unmet needs. Memories expressed in words and artworks support the preservation of the nuclear issue and make sure it is not left unnoticed. Barthe and Rechniewski maintain that the influence of memory in postcolonial nuclear regions plays a role in both recalling the past and being a space for struggle.[230] Preserving memory involves teaching it in schools, displaying it in public spaces and passing it across generations.

Interview Analysis: Survivor Testimony and Activist Voices

Incorporating oral interviews into the study of French testing in Polynesia is extremely important to include opinions from those who lived through it and to face the one-sided narrative put out by the French government. Five interviewers talked at length with four Polynesian representatives as well as one French veteran who participated directly in the nuclear test campaigns: a woman who began opposing nuclear tests after the 1981 events, a Polynesian entrepreneur who grew in a Polynesian society marked by the socio-economic changes caused by the nuclear tests, a young Tahitian anthropologist who decided to study further the extent of the nuclear tests and French colonialism in Polynesia in order to understand the divided legacy of the French influence over Polynesia, a community leader whose grandfather played a role in test-related work and a French veteran of the army, once a conscript during the nuclear test campaigns, who was sent and cluelessly exposed to the dangers of the nuclear tests and its fallouts. All interviews were handled with a semi-structured method and formatted by critical oral history approaches.[231],[232] Instead of considering them as side stories, these accounts are seen as contributions that point out lacking perspectives and better inform us about memory, identity and acts of resistance. These interviewees all share a personal connection to the nuclear test campaigns in French Polynesia and highlight a recurring pattern of a neglect by the French authorities to acknowledge the extent

[230] Rechniewski, "The Unquiet Legacy," 216.
[231] Barthe, "De la dénonciation," 45.
[232] Rechniewski, "The Unquiet Legacy," 216.

and the gravity of the consequences of these tests over French citizens, whether Polynesians or not.

In her interview, Participant A, recollected the memory of the nuclear tests, how it influenced her family directly by pushing them to move out of their home island and said it later affected her political ideas. Between fear, fascination and confusion, her memories alternated, showing the interrupted relationship between the past and present according to trauma theorists.[233],[234] Her memories were more about dialogue and mole-like activity than simple recall. Her memories, as the ones of Participant C were marked by a societal change in Polynesia directly caused by the arrival of the CEP and the nuclear test campaigns which participated to a certain rupture between generations throughout the Polynesian society. As narrative memory theory points out, people remember things through their own emotions and through the traditions and beliefs passed down by previous generations.[235],[236]

Essentially, Participant A offers an insight into a wider movement, outlining how personal suffering was changed into political resistance. Her part in Moruroa e tatou, especially by joining women's protests, was an example of what Elisabeth Rechniewski (2023) refers to as critical testimonials, where people recount their own experiences to bring about changes for the whole society.[237] She explained that women took part in peaceful marches, carrying pictures of deformed infants and water, turning their inner sadness into protest against the companies. She mentions how ideas she presents also appear in Harris (2024), who talks about how cultural memory in Oceanian texts and protest art functions as a means to challenge colonial ideas.[238]

In the second interview, Participant B talked about a memory shaped by family not mentioning the war and finding political awareness much later in his life. Raised by his father, a test site laborer, he described how the father's thyroid issues, anxious moods and silences always appeared at the mention of the camp. Barthe (2017) refers to this silence as "politics of latency," because even though victims are hurt, their pain is not yet acknowledged by public or legal

[233] Barthe, "Cause politique," 96.
[234] Rechniewski, "The Unquiet Legacy," 216.
[235] Barthe, "De la dénonciation," 46.
[236] Harris, "Polynesia Against Paris," 636.
[237] Rechniewski, "The Unquiet Legacy," 216.
[238] Harris, "Polynesia Against Paris," 636.

institutions.[239] Participant B found out about the CEP and its impact from a campus module on environmental justice and not from his father. Akbar et al.'s (2022) description that people can now see how volunteering results in a unified sense of community where everyone starts seeing political issues in the same way.[240]

When looking at this through critical oral history, the interview makes it clear how nuclear colonialism has affected people for a long time. He claimed that his work improving the school curriculum and public events was his personal way to repair his country's troubled memories. His words match what is called counter-archives, where orally passed knowledge tries to resist the erasing of records by official sources (Meltz & Vrignon, 2023).[241] Most importantly, he helps youth by teaching them to use digital storytelling, preserving the truth and standing against French claims about their good intentions in the past.

All of the interviewees did not trust what they described as the government's version of facts, since it usually did not paint all the risks. Participant A considered the Morin Law (2010) to be an "insult in the guise of recognition," which is also supported by Philippe, Schoenberger and Ahmed (2022). Likewise, Participant C pointed out that compensation plans are not consistently applied, so certain groups had to prove their suffering themselves, although De Vathaire et al. stated that thyroid cancer is more common in the area.[242] It is also a vision by Participant E which considers that the French army not only lied to its conscripts in order to promote Polynesia as a "safe" destination for their military service but also failed to inform them that the consequences of their exposure would result in an intergenerational contamination that still kills French citizens today, considering that the effects of radioactivity continue to poison their descendants, provoking cancers and malformations. They position their stories by referring to criticism from Barthe (2010) and Cardinal & Bouvet (2018) regarding France's lack of justice in dealing with such situations.[243],[244].

[239] Barthe, "De la dénonciation," 55.
[240] Heena Akbar et al., "'Food Is Our Love Language': Using Talanoa to Conceptualize Food Security for the Māori and Pasifika Diaspora in South-East Queensland, Australia," *Nutrients* 14, no. 10 (2022): 2020, https://doi.org/10.3390/nu14102020.
[241] Bolton, "Human Rights Fallout," 88.
[242] De Vathaire et al., "Thyroid Cancer," 1118.
[243] Barthe, "Cause politique," 89.
[244] Cardinal and Bouvet, "Compensation of Victims," 347.

An important aspect of all those accounts was that memories were passed through visual and performed acts. In her interview, Participant A mentioned murals inside churches that showed red, burning skies and islands that were bleeding. They allow people to express their feelings on issues and function as mini-protests, right from their political statements. On the other hand, Participant C has added stories and oral commentary to their digitized family photos which reminds me of the concept of "memory assemblage" proposed by Maclellan (2024).[245] They oppose what Rens Van Munster (2021) refers to as "white epistemic silence" by making clear the relationship between race and the effects of nuclear weapons.[246] This relates to the choice of location for the nuclear testing grounds and highlights a pattern of institutional disdain from the French authorities towards the Polynesian citizens, legally French but considered as "second-class" citizens when it comes to the recognition of their suffering. As pointed out by Participant C in his interview, the reason why the nuclear trials were carried out in Polynesia and not closer to the French metropole cannot be only summarized to the geographical issues, it is directly linked to the idea that Polynesia, as a French overseas territory did not deserve to be treated with the same respect and care for their population than mainland France.

Trauma was considered as a main focus in the study and not only an element in the background. The participants talked about having issues with rest, their skin and repetitive dreams well before it was recognized that their exposure could be harmful. The interview of Participant E revealed another form of trauma by directly pointing out the sacrificial aspect of conscription during the nuclear test campaigns where young French men were sent to Algeria and then to Polynesia to participate in the nuclear test campaigns, completely oblivious to the risks they were facing due to the exposition to the radiation. This proves Bouville and Ruff right: besides the obvious effects, nuclear violence leaves its mark culturally and emotionally as well.[247],[248] The evidence from interviews helps understand that unacknowledged trauma might stay in the community, coming up as protest, rituals or learning. The testimony of French veterans such as Participant E also brings out an interesting aspect regarding the aftermath of the nuclear tests by bringing Polynesians and mainlander French together in protestation against the actions of their government. This highlights a different aspect of the legacy of the nuclear test campaigns by

[245] Maclellan, "Resistance and Survival," 10.
[246] Van Munster, "On Whiteness," 94.
[247] Bouville, "Fallout from Nuclear Weapons Tests," 368.
[248] Ruff, "Humanitarian Impact," 780.

bringing individuals from different ethnicities, cultures and socio-economic backgrounds together as protesters in search of a harmonious narrative that puts forward the memory of the victims and questions the official narrative put forward by the French authorities

Both productions open a window into shaping collective memories in the years ahead. Participant A is producing a podcast to highlight what women think about the tests, Participant E is engaged an association of victims dedicated to the veterans of the nuclear tests called AVEN, Participant D dedicated his studies and his life's work to the valorisation of Polynesian traditions, Serge continues to educate young Polynesians by promoting the Polynesian language and the importance of the Polynesian narrative as a unifying factor and Participant C is working with NGOs to include learning about nuclear history in local schools. Their initiatives follow the traditions of applied public history, changing real-life stories into useful tools for instruction and decision-making. Here, their memories take on the role of resistance and justice which Barthe describes as "politicized healing."[249] This directly relates to the interview of Participant D and his researches in Polynesian anthropology which points out that the Polynesian identity was directly affected by the implementation of a westernized lifestyle in Polynesian consequential to the nuclear test campaigns. This dissociation between the French history taught to Polynesians and the reality of the French colonialism in this territory created a form of distortion for the younger generations of Polynesians which are being thorned apart between their French nationality, the history they learned at school and the narrative pushed forward those last few years by independent researches regarding the extent of the impact of the nuclear test campaigns on the evolution of Polynesian society.

These interviews do more than add details; they reexamine and challenge what is already known. They highlight how individuals, scholars and victims of territories formerly colonized, used and abused by colonial powers use memory to challenge the western narrative of history and refill the historical archive of their nation with new knowledge, less influenced by a colonial and imperialist perspective. Grounded in trauma, narrative and imagery studies, these personal testimonies give a central role to the voices of Polynesians and French veterans in the history of nuclear politics, lifting them from decades of neglect. By showcasing them throughout this last chapter, the purpose is to put forward the individual stories that together form the legacy of

[249] Barthe, "De la dénonciation," 66.

France, Polynesia and its complex, violent and neglected history. These testimonies constitute a glimpse into the cost of acquiring nuclear weapons for the sake of France's geopolitical power on the international stage.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand how French nuclear testing on French Polynesia between 1966 and 1996 acted as neocolonial control and affected the region's political, economic and cultural development. Using a method that took into account archives, oral interviews, images and protest writings, the study has uncovered that France and French Polynesia had an unbalanced and multilayered connection. Every one of the sub-questions is described thoroughly in its own chapter and the answers given here repeat the main points.

Initially, the reasons for France's actions in Polynesia were related to its ailing empire, Cold War efforts and a new plan to shape colonial governance by shifting away from direct administration toward military interference. As a result of losing Algeria, France wanted to exercise its nuclear power in an area it deemed would be secure and easy to govern. French Polynesia was seen as a place for testing new weapons, an area to avoid close observation by the public at home and a place that protected the environment in the mother country. Based on the evidence in de Gaulle's speeches, Senate reports and military messages, locating testing outside France allowed France to hold onto its influence abroad.

Secondly, the effects on society, the economy and culture because of all the testing were extensive. Reliance on nuclear activities gave jobs to the military and started certain infrastructure developments, while curbing local control and interrupting the daily routines of the people. Many citizens dealt with thyroid illnesses and reproductive issues, but the government bureaucracy minimized these crises. The lack of attention from institutions, combined with a new description of nuclear presence as progress, promoted a politics that pushed aside the problems experienced by indigenous groups. Besides being active in politics and on the streets, people standing up against oppression involved remembrance work, protesting gender rules and organizing in churches, with these efforts showing up in murals, oral accounts and books from indigenous communities. These movements helped change how the common people saw France, moving it from being a giver to being an colonizer, thus challenging established accounts and making subaltern figures more important.

The post-1996 period is also defined by the debated way victims are remembered and the fact that recognition is incomplete. Elections from the Chirac-era period encouraged people to protest

and resulted in acts of symbolic state support such as the Morin Law of 2010. However, as this thesis highlights, most of these efforts have failed to give justice in its fullest sense. Both restrictive procedures and lack of knowledge stop compensation programs from reaching their full capacity and they make it difficult for people to use government archives. It is cultural memory that fills the gaps where institutions fail, as projects that record oral history and activist documentaries provide new archives. Women, youth and the children of survivors show that the problem of nuclear colonialism is still present today.

When examining the hypothesis again, it is shown that the main findings confirm that French nuclear testing was a form of neocolonialism disguised as a scientific and republican advancement project. It increased colonial power over indigenous communities such as the Polynesians, took away their control and dispersed injury among groups in ways repeated by other forms of environmental racism and excessive technology use. Yet, this confirmation can only be considered tentative. Certain issues became clearer, especially the way some communities followed local rules, the benefit of economic assistance and the difficult balance between resistance and relying on others. For this reason, the hypothesis grows stronger—nuclear testing played a part in colonialism, but it also led to the formation of different identities, acts of resistance and examinations of postcolonial themes within Polynesian culture.

When it comes to historiography, this thesis makes four major contributions. It begins by connecting geopolitics of the Cold War with colonial ways of governance, proving that the nuclear program helped advance France's imperial goals instead of changing course. Second, it gives importance to Native accounts and cultural history, showing that they should not be considered below scientific and official documents. Third, it proposes a new approach in history that lets in multimedia evidence and trauma narratives to analyze state power. Furthermore, it redefines harm to the environment as connected to concepts of sovereignty, justice and how knowledge is shared.

While this research was specific to French Polynesia, it also offers a chance to compare it with other DOM-TOM regions like Mayotte, Guadeloupe and New Caledonia. These territories, even though they did not host nuclear tests, are said to have similar problems of neglect, a reliance on the French economy and a republican, neocolonial rhetoric that hides deeper inequalities and perpetuates a model of oppression from the French government towards its overseas territories.

In Mayotte, like in Polynesia, security policing and poor infrastructure are used to control the population. The persistence of independence movements in New Caledonia, even today, clearly indicates that assimilation and previous colonial ways of ruling are not enough to keep independence movements at bay. Therefore, exploring the similarities and differences in postcolonial governance among the French overseas territories would provide a clear picture of how this governance is designed across territories but continues to follow the same ideology.

Many obstacles have prevented the project from being completed as originally intended. Archives are accessible not equally for all users. Important documents from both French military and defense ministries are either still classified or partially redacted which makes it difficult to understand the full process of deciding between action and reaction. Next, the influence of language on the court process led to Tahitian testimonies being left out despite how vital they are to the study of knowledge. Effectively connecting French and English sources was achieved, but future studies should make sure to involve and listen to local scholars to prevent cultural flattening. The thesis concentrated on French Polynesia; future research could improve the understanding by comparing it with other sites used for nuclear testing (e.g., Marshall Islands, Kazakhstan).

Overall, it is clear from this thesis that French nuclear testing in Polynesia should be viewed as nuclear colonialism, rather than only the result of Cold War strategies. Testing was carried out by moving people, using race as a basis for determining risk and strengthening control in the system. However, it inspired long-lasting words and actions that opposed the state's morals and influence on history. Reminders of testing are found in contaminated areas, disputed accounts and cases not yet closed by courts, as well as in those affected who demand the truth. Even now, the effort to part from nuclear memory continues and it offers chances for history to be told truthfully, for people to be held responsible and for rebuilding what was lost.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Timeline of Testing in French Polynesia (1966–1996)

Year(s)	Key Events
1966	First atmospheric test at Moruroa (July 2); relocation from Algeria post-independence.
1966–1974	Series of atmospheric tests conducted at Moruroa and Fangataufa.
1974	France shifts to underground testing following international pressure.
1975–1985	Increased underground tests; protests from Polynesian churches, activists.
1985	Greenpeace's *Rainbow Warrior* bombed in Auckland while opposing tests.
1995–1996	Final round of tests ordered by President Chirac; widespread global protests.
1996	France declares end of testing; signs Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

Appendix B: Annotated Archival Document

Document Title: Extract from General Charles de Gaulle's Speech to the French Parliament, March 4, 1964

Archival Source: Archives de l'Assemblée nationale, Débats parlementaires, 4 mars 1964, séance matinale, pp. 1227–1230.

Original Text (Translated Excerpt):

"To maintain our sovereignty and our independence in a world divided by the blocs of great powers, France must develop its own strategic force, independent of all alliances, based on the nuclear deterrent. We shall not rely on foreign guarantees, for no nation has ever secured its future by the will of others. Our chosen testing sites in Polynesia are remote, secure, and fully under the jurisdiction of the Republic, and thus serve our strategic interests."

Annotations:

1. **Strategic Rationale and Nuclear Sovereignty:**
    - This excerpt reveals de Gaulle's emphasis on a sovereign nuclear deterrent force, reflecting the Gaullist ideology of strategic autonomy. The phrase "independent of all alliances" underscores France's distancing from NATO nuclear policies dominated by the US and UK (Van Munster, 2021).
2. **Colonial Jurisdiction as a Justification:**
    - The mention of Polynesia as "fully under the jurisdiction of the Republic" justifies its selection not only for strategic remoteness but also due to colonial legal control. This reveals a key political motive for nuclear relocation: overseas territories were deemed legally accessible and politically manageable (Meltz & Vrignon, 2023).
3. **Language of Necessity:**
    - De Gaulle's assertion that "no nation has ever secured its future by the will of others" appeals to nationalist sentiment and echoes Cold War rhetoric, justifying exceptionalism in nuclear decisions (Regnault, 2003).

4. **Omission of Local Consultation:**
    - There is no mention of Polynesian consultation or consent, reflecting the top-down nature of decision-making. This supports critiques that the choice of Moruroa and Fangataufa was unilateral, rooted in colonial disregard for indigenous agency (Danielsson, 1990; Barthe, 2017).
5. **Ambiguity and Control in Terminology:**
    - Terms like “remote” and “secure” imply both safety and secrecy. These euphemisms were later used to downplay environmental and health risks, framing the tests as necessary and harmless (Bataille & Revol, 2001).
6. **Rhetorical Function:**
    - As an official parliamentary speech, this document functioned both as a political directive and a symbolic act, reinforcing the legitimacy of nuclear colonialism under the guise of republican defense.

Use in Thesis: This archival document was used in Chapter 3 to support the argument that France’s nuclear relocation was politically framed as both a strategic necessity and a republican right. It confirms how rhetorical strategies masked the colonial implications of the decision and situates the testing within broader Cold War ideologies.

Appendix C: Interviews

Interview 1: Participant A – Women's Protestor (Conducted in December 2024)

Interview Setting: Zoom Meeting

Interviewer: Pierre Cherfils
Interviewee: Participant A (Name anonymized as requested by the interviewee)
Consent Obtained: Yes
Duration: 42 minutes

Pierre: Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today. I'd like to begin by asking what you remember about the tests when you were a child?

Participant A: I was about eight or nine at the start of the nuclear test campaigns. We moved to home island on the island of Tahiti when I was 12 but my parents are from the island of Ravahere in the Tuamotus archipelago. I remember the beginning of the CEP in Polynesia because it was the moment where everything started to change in Tahiti. The capital city, Papeete never stopped getting larger and more and more developed, we started getting cars, roads and more and more Polynesians started moving to Tahiti, including my family. When I was younger, I thought we moved there only for a better life but growing older, and realising the extent of the nuclear tests I also think in some way that my parents probably made a wise decision to not stay in the Tuamotus archipelagos so close to the testing islands of Moruroa and Fangataufa.

Pierre: **When did you start connecting those early memories with politics or activism?**

Participant A: Much later. In the 1980s, I heard that some women were protesting outside the Assembly. I had thyroid problems then, and miscarried twice. A nurse from Moruroa e tatou said, "You should come speak." That's when I knew—my pain was not mine alone. I joined them. We painted placards with deformed fish and babies, and I carried one with a bleeding ocean. It was not just protest—it was mourning.

Pierre: **Do you feel your activism gave you a sense of healing?**

Participant A: Not healing, but direction. Every time I speak or paint, I remember what we lost, and I fight so no one forgets. I still don't sleep well. I have rashes that come and go. But I tell my daughters: Our silence fed their bombs. Our voices can bury them.

Pierre: **What do you think of the Morin Law and compensation programs?**

Participant A: Insulting. They make you prove what they already caused. They want documents, but most of us just had memories and illness. If you don't die with paperwork, they say you're not harmed. My suffering needs no certificate.

Pierre: How do you preserve memory?

Participant A: I've started a podcast with two other women, where we tell our stories—not as victims, but as witnesses. We use music, old church chants, protest art. My daughter helps me record. It's our resistance in sound.

Interview 2: Participant B (conducted in March 2024)

Interviewer: Pierre Cherfils
Interviewee: Participant B
Consent Obtained: Yes
Duration: 1 hour 49 minutes

Pierre: Hello sir, thank you for agreeing to participate to this, I'm going to ask you to introduce yourself before we start the interview.

Participant B: Hello, my name is Participant B, I'm 52 years old, soon to be 53. My mother is Polynesian. My father is a "pied noir" (expression designating the French citizens born out of the French immigration to Algeria during its colonization) who met my mother here in 1966. My family left Polynesia for my father's military assignments, then we came back here. So I was born in 1971, we came back here in '79, and the nuclear tests were still ongoing. I spent my entire adolescence up to now in Polynesia and haven't returned to France. I'm the only child who hasn't gone back to France. So, I've spent almost my entire career in a large Polynesian company, which is if not the biggest. For 27 years, and since then, I've changed my professional framework, I've become, well, I wear three hats. Today, I'm a business consultant, I'm a trainer coach for the Moka Academy, and also a shareholder in that company. And I'm the manager of an IT company, renting interactive equipment and NAS PCs for businesses, and also a manager. So, I'm going from agribusiness to human and microprocessors.

Pierre: My first question is about how, for you, did the nuclear tests in Polynesia affected your life or your family's life, relatively closely or distantly ?

Participant B: I'll take the case of my mother's siblings, since my mother is from the Australs, from the island of Ana, which is a small island, about 26 km in circumference, so you can imagine, it's very small. And when the CEP, the Pacific Experimentation Center, arrived, those who were in the remote islands were drawn to everything related. It's not just the nuclear tests, so it was an opening to any kind of job related to the nuclear experiments. So, I had a lot of people who came to work for the CEP in different capacities, not specifically military, but mostly as personnel, and their lives were transformed. They went from a rather subsistence lifestyle, self-sufficient on their island, to a consumerist behavior. I mean, before, when they wanted to eat, it was simple, they went fishing, they went to their taro patch, and that was more than enough. And suddenly, their lives changed because they found themselves having to handle money, having a salary in return for their work, which also changed their eating habits. Because I want to

emphasize that before, they were consuming products directly from nature, and afterward, they found themselves eating processed foods. So, that's already a first psychological effect. The economic effect is that the islands emptied out a bit because there was an influx of population to work for the CEP.

And obviously when they arrived on the main island, exposed to modernity, it's like they just came out of Plato's cave. I'm using the metaphor of the cave where they were living quite well in that cave, but then they're exposed to all that modernization. So, it's a change, a radical change, psychologically, economically, and socially. So, I can understand that these people appreciated that change just as much today. So, in early January, we all went back to the island as a family, and I found, well, there aren't many of my mom's siblings left. Because today, out of the 14 children, only 3 are left. One of my uncles, who is the reference uncle, so to speak, is a wise man. He worked first on Makatea when there was phosphate mining, so he also experienced that, and he worked a bit for the CEP, but in the end, he decided to return to his homeland and to return to, metaphorically speaking, the cycle of life he had known. So today, as I saw him, he is completely self-sufficient, meaning he goes fishing, he grows what he needs, you know, and he's in good shape. I draw the parallel with food because it's also good to point out the diversity of new products that the CEP brought to French Polynesia, all this processed food, and so on, which is linked anyway to globalization.

And he said a rather symptomatic phrase to me that reflects his view on the world. He said people are sick from their diet. That's to say, on the island of Hae, for example, before, way before a long time ago, so when I was there, I was 12 years old, so it's 40 years ago. There wasn't a single obese person, okay? It was still in the 1990s, around 1980 as well. There were no obese people when we were there, he tells me, look around you, they eat sweet, they drink sweet, they don't want to eat taro (local fruit), they don't want to eat fish anymore, they want chicken. It is this shift in consumption is now passed on to the new generations, that's an undeniable fact. For people of my generation, it's something we can explain, for those who are from the 2000s, it's something they were born with. So, they don't understand the old system, the one I knew of self-sufficiency and the system where you need to have money in your pocket to eat. So that's a first fact.

The second thing is that all the major Polynesian groups here, for example, the group I worked for and if you want, there's the Martin group, there's the Wan group. There are all those in petroleum, they're families of notable Polynesians who have made a fortune. Today, if they are where they are, it's largely due to the financial effects, the financial levers of the CEP. We must remember that it was the biggest financial windfall for Polynesia. It's also thanks to the CEP that Faa'a airport was built. It wasn't originally built for tourism as it was presented by the French officials, there are traces you can find, but it was mainly to have a tool to be able to accommodate more personnel for the CEP. There was a mass of military personnel, so I couldn't tell you the exact numbers, the increase in the number of military personnel. But it was huge because when I arrived in Tahiti in 1979, where the current Polynesian presidency is, it was the military quarter. It was military. There was where the gendarmerie of Faa'a is now, it was the second military site, it was the army, and the third was at Taravao. Okay, so there were already 3 military sites for the army, the army, that is, the air force. You had BA 190 where the airport is now, which was much bigger than it is today because they've reduced the staff, and regarding the

navy? Well, you had the naval base in Papeete which hasn't changed, but there were a lot more boats. The army, it was a big source of immigration to Polynesia. First, they also hired locally, but they also brought in a lot from the mainland. There was also the Foreign Legion which was in Moruroa, so it was a lot, a lot of people who arrived, they had to be fed, they had to be housed. So all these big groups benefited from this massive influx of population, plus those from the islands who came to work. With salaries at the time that were, when they told me the numbers, especially for those who worked on the nuclear sites, so to speak, it was incredible. So, it shows the money, the financial windfall that was circulating. So, the groups I mentioned, those in food, well, there was what was called before Sao, it was the army supply service and everyone went shopping there. Well, everyone, all those who knew military personnel, so to speak, went there to do their shopping. It was the precursor to Carrefour or others. It was the ancestor of a supermarket. And basically, it wasn't expensive. Well, from my childhood memories, it wasn't expensive. It was incredible.

What you are saying underlines something quite endemic to Polynesia, compared to other territories that were colonized by France, for example. It's that this introduction to modern capitalist system, to modern consumerism, was very late, due to Polynesia's isolationism. Do you think that this French policy reflects a form of neocolonialism in the way that Polynesia was treated by France during the nuclear tests?

Participant B: During that period, I'll tell you about my personal experience, from 1979 until the end of the last nuclear test in 1995, there was a lot of money in Polynesia, a tremendous amount of money. I mean, we weren't talking about unemployment, we weren't talking about difficulties and the high cost of living. Well, the increase in the cost of living is a discourse that everyone holds, but for me, it doesn't make sense, but we were talking about it, there wasn't, well, everyone loved nuclear testing. I'll tell you one thing, everyone had a photo of the nuclear mushroom in their living room, a photo of the first Aldébaran test. So you can imagine, it was something, people of my parents' age, so today my father's parents at 79, they all had the photo of the nuclear bomb in their house because they didn't realize that it was, they connected it through imagery or symbolism. Well, it's the nuclear fact that brought them there, so to speak, where they were financially. You see. Whereas our generation, it's not us who are going to hang a nuclear mushroom in our living room. Because we're aware of the nuclear effects, so when we're not protected, etc., on the environment, on food, etc., we're aware. So, we have a different approach to nuclear power than you do in mainland France, you have to try to imagine. When Charles de Gaulle came here and said, "Here you go, dear Polynesians, I've chosen you." Yeah, it's as if we were the chosen people, chosen for France's future by the representative of the French Resistance and the victory in World War II. Polynesians didn't mistrust, they were proud to receive the President of the Republic and to be the focus of France's attention. When you have some knowledge about things, I'm not questioning the nuclear fact or the need for France to acquire nuclear weapons. I'm just saying that when you lack knowledge and skills in a field, they'll tell you, "Here's what we'll do, we'll build an airport, we'll modernize, we'll bring work, money." Well, everyone will say yes, everyone will sign the check, it's blank, you sign the check and only much later, well, many, I mean, much later, that we measured the social, economic, and environmental impacts.

At the time, everyone applauded with both hands. Well, there was just one person who stood up, that's Pouvana'a O'opa, a symbol of the fight against nuclear testing in Polynesia. The French government came up with a nice scheme to expatriate him and lock him up in France. Well, today, his honor has been restored. We must also remember what France was capable of doing to prevent Greenpeace from coming to Polynesia to support protests against the resumption of French nuclear testing. It's the famous "Rainbow Warrior" affair. Sending French commandos to sabotage a Greenpeace ship. So it shows that they didn't want to be bothered in what they were doing. After. What bothers me the most is from all that I've heard, it's the atmospheric tests. You see when there were the aerial tests? Well, there are several videos circulating where you see guys on a boat with helmets. A little scarf to protect themselves and they're about, I think maybe like 200 km from the aerial test and they're watching it, you, see? The second thing that was reported to me was in Fangataufa, so there was the prefect or the commissioner. I don't know what it was called back then and in fact, they had done an aerial test. And according to the weather, there were several personalities who were on the island and they told people, no, you have to go into shelters, you have to protect yourselves because the radioactive cloud is going to pass over you. So tell me, only the senior officials were sheltered and everything else they were. Well, they were told to be careful, get into their houses but without telling them the risks, you see? So that's what bothers me, it's that at a certain decision-making level, the decision-making chain knew the risks and they transmitted them depending on the level you were at, with a different degree of intensity.

Pierre: What you are saying is very interesting because it also connects with the fact that there had already been accidents that occurred during the tests in the Algerian desert where we have multiple cases of irradiation of local populations, who are present near the test sites, or not warned of the dangers involved, as well as conscripts at the time, who are not informed of the danger.

Participant B: There is still a notion that repeats itself a little bit with at least at the time in the way nuclear testing was carried out, it's that effectively there is a notion of testing in every sense of the term, with even tests on populations. That's kind of it and then when you reread everything that circulates. Well, the declassified documents. Well, they always told you that the nuclear clouds, they passed all around the French comedy, but not over it. Well, in the era of computers today, we know perfectly well that this was impossible. What, that, that goes back to the idea when there were the events of Chernobyl where the cloud, it passed over all of Europe, except over France. Is there a policeman in the sky who says stop to radioactive clouds? Well, that bothers me, you see, the lies and the lack of transparency. The second thing is that about the environment, even though today we don't have material evidence, we are still if we look at the population ratio and the number of triggered cancers, I believe we are above the French norm, okay?

Pierre: This is the case for thyroid cancers and breast cancers in particular. The two cancers that are most likely to result from exposure to dangerous levels of radiation and which are effectively with higher data in Polynesia compared to the French average.

Participant B: You have to know that the fact that previous generations had high rates of radiation-induced diseases like cancer increases the probabilities of cancer in the local genetic heritage. This hereditary nature of the risks of developing cancer, increased by exposure to radiation, leads us as Polynesians to ask ourselves questions. So this means that there is a large proportion of people today who are likely to develop cancers so who are followed medically, which generates costs. Today, the cost of public health in Polynesia is an important part of the Polynesian national budget. Today, the consequences for public health of nuclear testing cost more. Why? Because when nuclear testing stopped, well, there were what we call state transfers which were of the order, I'm not saying nonsense, 15 billion Pacific francs per year (around 130 million euros).

The Polynesian state did not know how to compensate for the sudden cessation of these nuclear tests and of all the financial windfall that this brought to Polynesia. You have to take into consideration that many people had built houses rented to the military, etc., etc. And the day this population decreased, well, the opposite effect is. Well, there was less money, there was a lot less money. The economy wasn't in a recession, but it was running less strongly, you see? You can see it and today we are hyper-dependent on this financial windfall. Because if one day France was to stop transferring it, she's in Polynesia, right? You'll all go back to fishing? We're playing a trick on you, right? Because it's not with the tertiary sector that Polynesia will survive, we don't have resources. There are no resources of value easily accessible or in large quantities. Polynesia's resources are not sufficiently economically viable, whether it's tourism, pearls, or exports (vanilla, monoi, fish) I won't even mention them because they represent nothing at all. But there you go, tourism, it was just starting, we had COVID when the machine stopped, everyone drowned.

Pierre: As a Polynesian and a French citizen, what are your feelings towards the actions of the French State? And the link between French Polynesia and France in light of what we know today about nuclear testing.

Participant B: So I see this from two angles. The first is that we're the only ones in France to have a status of internal self-government. That means we have a president, which doesn't exist anywhere else in the overseas territories or countries. Okay, and it was somewhat initiated through the nuclear tests. Through Gaston Flosse and Jacques Chirac, because it was during this period that this specific status was granted. Even if we have a president, we still have a high commissioner right next door. So for me, it's like they're saying, "Okay kids, you make your decisions, but there's someone to make sure what you're doing is okay." So that's it. It's a status of internal autonomy that has its advantages and disadvantages. So I would say it's good because we are still, ah, we are, we are masters of our decisions, but we're not completely since when we need money, who do we go to? Well, we go to France, we make ministerial visits and ask for additional budgets because we're dependent on the overseas budget. Ultimately, we're not that autonomous.

Second point, from another perspective, I just regret that France, in fact, has not been recognized as America did with the Marshall Islands, I think. The nuclear issue, that is to say, recognizing yes what we did was not good, it's harmful, you see. And when we know that today at Mururoa, the coral base is cracked. And they did all their tests inside the lagoon. So, it weakened the

geological structures of the atolls with each nuclear test. The thing is, if you take an atoll, it's a mass of sediments with a reef. And so there were videos that were taken by people who should never have circulated, showing the cracks and the damages made to the structure of the coral foundation of the atoll. So tomorrow, if these damages cause the atoll to sink into the sea, I hope I won't be here anymore because the radioactive materials that might spill out represent a ticking-time bomb for the Polynesians, so maybe nothing will happen and that's what I wish for us. And the way they isolated the nuclear, it was. It's probably not like that now, you see, they didn't concrete it, they might have treated it differently but well, we have something in the sea with I don't know if it's more than 70 tests on strong movements that are on the atolls. And the fact that the French State just says no, everything's fine, don't worry. “Radio-induced diseases, would not be caused by the fallouts, it's not the fault of the French”. I would have liked a bit of honesty; it would have pleased everyone.

So, it gave us a stick to chew on, an internal fire for the independence movement because it also feeds into the narrative that, by saying this, France owes an eternal debt to us, they gave us a stick to be beaten with. We always say that Freud said you're half forgiven, you see? Well, I don't know if they've forgiven me completely, but. That's how it gave us a stick to chew on because when there were a lot of roundtables, discussions, and local representatives came, they changed, it's always the same discourse, you see, it's us, we do clean tests. I'm sorry, nuclear testing was never clean, that's it, it can't be clean.

Pierre: Who is ultimately responsible in your opinion ? Does the French government not acknowledge its wrongdoings on many points, or does it not acknowledge them at all?

Participant B: Well, that's what bothers me in our relationship with France. First, thank you for the internal self-governing status. But well, it has its limits, it deserves to be refined, acknowledged, to recognize its mistakes and to say it openly, to ask forgiveness from the Polynesian people. I think the president who does that will be adored, you see, and sending us people who are, in quotation marks, there to defend interests and pretend that they listen, but they have a very mechanical, very oiled discourse. No, studies show that well, okay, these are studies conducted by whom? Are they independent labs? Or are they labs? And all that is disturbing, and there's still an omertà, that is to say, there are documents that are not available. And we understand why. Because they would highlight the responsibility of the French State regarding atmospheric nuclear tests. Especially I think I talk a lot about atmospheric tests because there is an indirect contamination of soils, of the sea, etc.

Regarding the underground nuclear tests, are the test also linked to the destruction of the coral ring of Mururoa and the geological destabilization of the atoll ?

Participant B: When you wanted to go because civilians could go, they would tell you to not eat the fish, don't eat the coconut, you know. But everything's fine, they said, don't worry. So, they would tell you it's just as a precaution, it's like the guys because they also sent planes, and that's what my father used to tell me. So, when the planes came back because they passed through the then I don't know if it's just after through the cloud to take measurements, I don't know what. And then when they landed, the guys didn't clean with foam, you know, the plane? They certainly rubbed the plane, I don't know the precautions they had, but it's certainly not like now.

Now when you see a nuclear plant, the guys, there isn't a single space of their human flesh that's available outside, you see. And that's a bit. It's dramatic. So I always say they maybe didn't have the competence at that time, you see, but even so, just that, a plane, you clean it, you unload it, even if you clean it at some point. The radioactive material, it goes somewhere, it goes into the coral ring where it slips into the sea, the fish then eat it, then the small fish is eaten by a bigger one, and so on until the, until the biggest one. There are effects that bother me and not acknowledging your responsibility is disrespectful to the Tahitians in their broad, in their great latitude. I mean, you can't just tell people, well what we did was great, huh. Look, you had a lot of money, look, it's clean, we don't have that on the mainland. No? Because if you look at Algeria, Algeria, when Algeria gained independence, it's because the French did so much crap there. Tests and bam, they got kicked out, you see?

Pierre: This leads me to ask you how you would characterize nuclear testing, whether in Tahiti or more generally, given the possible comparisons with other countries like the Marshall Islands, Kazakhstan for the USSR, or Australia for Great Britain? How would you characterize nuclear testing in terms of international relations? Do you consider it a crime against humanity or against the environment, or other divergent notions?

Participant B: I speak to the genesis of the creation of nuclear technology. I think the scientists who invented it started with good intentions, I don't think originally it was meant to be made into a deterrent weapon. I take the scientific case where the guy found an energy that consumed less matter, okay. Obviously, man in his great benevolence, we find other uses. You have to remember that in World War II, it was thanks to the Hiroshima bomb that it calmed everyone down. Okay, and so all the countries that were, it was also the race to find a deterrent weapon, huh? That's why it's called a deterrent weapon. And the day that bomb was dropped, all the countries claiming to be world powers entered this frenzied race to master the nuclear bomb, in quotes, to have their deterrent weapon and thus be recognized on a global level. So for those countries, it was a way to be recognized, not for their economic power or for their nuclear military power. It was about placing countries in a classification and that was important. I say this, it's my vision, my belief. It was important for them to have. So yes, it's a crime against the environment, sometimes to the detriment of certain populations who didn't ask for anything. But it's not for me to judge the crime, you see. One day things will be declassified because so much time will have passed that it will only be memories. But I just take America, I say America, okay, you can say what you want about this country that's not always exemplary but just as much when it makes mistakes, it also knows how to recognize them. Regarding the nuclear issue, they acknowledged it. I don't know about other countries because I've never been interested in other countries that have nuclear deterrent weapons, at least not me. I just say that France, compared to our very fragile environment, we are fragile, you see. So we are as big as Europe, but if we gather all the land, I don't even know if we make Spain, Portugal, everything together it's nothing if we take the areas of all our workshops. Yeah, but if.

It's as big as Europe, but it's so fragile because of its fragile ecosystem. We know that the ecosystem today, well it's being mistreated by humans, not just by nuclear, but that's what scares me. So when I talk about nuclear, I'm mainly talking about movement, about fragility, about movement. If one day it, it, it, it, how should I say, if the atoll were to open because of the crack, you see, because if it's cracked, they knew it would be like this, it would be a catastrophe, but on

a global scale it would be even worse, it wouldn't just be us, you know. I mean, it's the Pacific Ocean, so you have the entire American coast facing it, then the oceans also communicating with each other, what a catastrophe. It would mean that we could never. How should I say, eat fish again? We'd have to wait decades for things to regulate. So there you go, for me, yes I could say it's a crime against the environment, but those people at that time, those who had the power to decide.

Interview 3: Participant C – Grandson of Test Site Worker and Cultural Educator

(Conducted in September 2024)

Interview Setting: Zoom meeting
Interviewer: Pierre Cherfils
Interviewee: Participant C* (Name anonymized as per requested by the interviewee)
Duration: 58 minutes

Pierre: Thank you for agreeing to this interview, Participant C. Can you describe your earliest knowledge of the CEP or nuclear testing in Polynesia?

Participant C: Honestly, my first real knowledge of it came quite late. My grandfather worked near Moruroa during the nuclear trials. Whenever I started to get curious about this subject, he remained quiet while my grandma preferred to focus on all the positive things brought on by the French colonization and the nuclear tests such as the economic development of Tahiti, the access to more money, more jobs, a western style of living. We never truly talked about it until I had enough knowledge of it through my own researches to oppose a discourse that was more nuanced and by asking tougher questions, focused more on the consequences on my grandpa's health, showing my family the independent researches such as the Disclose report in 2021 and documents that actually prove that the French state did not have our interests and safety at heart.

Pierre: How did those researches on the nuclear tests in Polynesia affected your relationship with your polynesian heritage as well as your relationship with parents and grandparents ?

Participant C: It really made me angry at first because I felt like I was suddenly uncovering a big lie. I was angry that I didn't know, that I wasn't taught this part of my history, my parents and grandparents history and how much they suffered, somehow without even realizing it, or even worse, accepting it and being thankful for it. Then sad, realizing my family either protected me by withholding the truth or had so little knowledge of what truly happened that they could not even be outraged about it. This is what hurt me the most because I then realized that this lack of knowledge combined with a relativization based on the logic of "no, but this also had positive aspects by improving Polynesia's economy and infrastructures" was a way for us Polynesians, and mostly the generations that lived it, to be manipulated by the French government into accepting a narrative that somehow denied the extent of our suffering. A truth that was also

covered by the history I learned at school which neglected the suffering of my family and my people. I began collecting stories, documents, even graffiti from old protest murals, not only in Polynesia but also from Australia, the Marshall Islands and New Zealand. It was like piecing together my family's history from what they were afraid to say.

Pierre: You mentioned you now work on public education?

Participant C: Yes. I collaborate with local Polynesian associations to develop school modules on nuclear history; I also participate in conferences at the local university. We include oral stories, photos of protest art, and digital exhibitions. My work was inspired by what I saw travelling to New Zealand and their connection to Maori culture through an education process that also showcases the violence of British colonialism and I felt like when it comes to the Polynesian legacy and our history, there is a profound lack of education and sensibilisation in French Polynesia. I also ended up researching the protestations led by Greenpeace and the incident of the Rainbow Warrior because it truly helped me to understand how Polynesians were gaslighted by the narrative of the French government, some of our elders could not even see that other people throughout the Pacific Ocean and throughout the world were already strongly protesting against nuclear testing. My goal today is to keep going further than the sanitized, and "colonial" history dispensed by a metropolitan French vision by pushing forward the local and modern history through real voices and testimonies, like my grandfather's, helping our elders to understand and accept the trauma they suffered without searching for justifications as well as educating our younger generations to the true history of Polynesia and our complicated relationship towards France. I think the only way to pursue this kind of work is to accept that our territory was scortched in search of the French nuclear power, which benefits all of us, but still the question I'm still trying to ask is, was it worth irradiating my homeland and if it was, why not decide to irradiate French metropolitan territories ? I think the answer is clear, even if it still remains a point of conflict, it is based on a colonial perspective, where Polynesian lives were not worth the same as French metropolitan ones to the eyes of the French authorities throughout the nuclear test campaigns.

Pierre: Do you see your work as political?

Participant C: Completely. I call it memory justice. Every file we digitize, every student who hears the terms "bombe coloniale", "colonialisme nucléaire", pushes back against France's clean narrative that still continues to deny the extent of the consequences of the nuclear tests on French Polynesia, and furthermore on the Pacific Islands of Polynesia. Our memory when it comes to the nuclear tests isn't just about trauma, it's about survival, recognition and truth. It still amazes me to see how little Polynesian people know about the extent of the consequences of the nuclear trials and I am not even talking about metropolitan French where it feels like the knowledge of what the French government did and the cost of developing nuclear weapons for France is still relatively unknown.

Pierre: Any final thoughts on the consequences of the nuclear trials in Polynesia ?

Participant C: I believe every child in Polynesia should hear our stories before they hear Paris' version. That's what my digital work does. It's not just archiving; it's defending the soul of this land.

Pierre: My last question concerns the educational field in Polynesia. What do you think of the French education you received, in terms of history, about Polynesia, the shared history between France and Polynesia, the French colonial history in Polynesia, and the history of the nuclear tests?

We realize that there are more and more young Polynesians who ultimately identify with values that are not Polynesian values. They identify with French values. So, the problem is how to reconcile these two identities. This is also a problem that arises in other colonized societies. So, the history of Polynesia is taught from a French perspective, through a French prism. And the specificities of Polynesian history are overlooked. It's a history that is much more complex and much richer than what is taught in schools. So, the problem is the phenomenon of self-denial that results from the history taught in schools. Thus, there is a problem of recognition of Polynesian identity. This also results in the cultural fatalism we talked about earlier.

Interview 4: Participant D (conducted in February 2024)

Interview Setting: In-person meeting
Interviewer: Pierre Cherfils
Interviewee: Participant D
Duration: One hour and 25 minutes

Pierre: Hello Mr. Bordes, thank you for joining us for this interview. Could you please introduce yourself briefly, and then we'll move on to the questions.

Participant D: Hello, my name is Participant D, I am 25 years old. I am a young Polynesian, a cultural educator. The issue of nuclear testing is particularly significant to me because I am Polynesian. It has always interested me due to my political views and my involvement in politics.

Pierre: So, my first question is about how the French nuclear tests in Polynesia and their legacy have affected your life, that of your family, and the people you know here in Polynesia, as far as you are aware?

Participant D: I would say that in my family, nuclear tests are a cause of illness. I have family members who are quite close to me and who have leukemia, for example. I have a cousin with leukemia, and an uncle with cancer. That's how it manifests concretely. But more broadly, nuclear testing is an issue that profoundly affects Polynesians and is a source of friction. Even though today there is a consensus, people are fairly unanimous in saying that it was a dark period in our history and that it constitutes a problem.

Pierre: Have you heard any stories from your relatives, your parents, or your grandparents about the nuclear testing period? Is it something you've discussed with your family?

Participant D: Yes, but it's not something that is freely discussed. You have to ask for our elders to speak about it. My paternal grandmother worked at the CEA (Commissariat à l'Energie Atomique). She worked as a secretary and received all the documentation from Mururoa, from the military at Mururoa. She worked with materials from Mururoa. My great-grandmother, my paternal grandmother's mother, also worked at the CEA. In fact, many members of my family worked at the CEA, including my uncle.

Pierre: Are you referring to the CEA (Commissariat à l'Energie Atomique) or the CEP (Centre d'Expérimentation du Pacifique)?

Participant D: No, the CEA. My grandmother and her mother. Then, my paternal grandmother's brother, my great-uncle, worked directly on the Mururoa site. He is quite discreet about his activities there. I don't know if it's something common in his generation, but he tends to downplay it, despite the fact that he is currently ill. It seems to me that there is a minimization of the consequences of the tests.

Pierre: Do you think this is specific to the generation that lived through the nuclear testing period? Does your great-uncle blame his time at Mururoa for his illness?

Participant D: It seems he takes responsibility for what happened to him. He is quite ill. I don't know exactly what kind of illness he has, but I know he is quite ill. And he takes it upon himself. He doesn't blame anyone else. He doesn't say that his illness is due to his work at the nuclear test sites, at Mururoa, or anything like that. It's a bit complicated to talk about family.

Pierre: How do you think nuclear testing has impacted the evolution of Polynesian society?

Participant D: Nuclear testing generated too rapid an advancement within Polynesian society. We transitioned from a rural society with people practicing subsistence agriculture, fishing, and farming, to a highly modernized consumer society, and this happened in a short period of time. Yes, with the establishment of the CEP, it was really an express implementation. There was such a societal upheaval that even today, we feel the consequences. Indeed, today there is immense poverty. There are vast disparities between the very rich and the very poor, much greater than in mainland France. Polynesia is a land of extremes, where everything is exaggerated. The introduction of nuclear tests and their numerous consequences have caused a societal upheaval, that's what I can say.

Pierre: Do you think, going back to what you said earlier about a certain generation of Polynesians, there is a tendency to reject or not fully acknowledge the consequences of nuclear testing?

Participant D: We were talking earlier about this generation, those who were already adults or just starting their adult lives during the nuclear tests, in the 60s and 70s, and during the second wave of tests as well. Do you think this is because nuclear testing is a difficult subject to address in Polynesia? Do you think it's due to trauma among Polynesians? Yes, trauma in a sense, but there is really an omerta because Polynesia was subjected to intense propaganda from the French state and the local political elite throughout the nuclear testing period. They dared to speak of "clean tests."

Pierre: So, my next question is, according to you, how does the colonial past of French Polynesia and the nuclear tests influence Polynesians' perception of their relationship with France and their national identity?

Participant D: I would be inclined to say that the most logical answer would be to acknowledge that, given our past and the shared history we have with France, or at least with the French State, it's a conflictual relationship. It's a conflictual relationship. However, it depends on, how should I say, the different layers, it depends on each person's perception. Today, we've reached an age, an era where French assimilation is such that we are losing our language, losing our cultural landmarks, even though, on the surface, the local folklore with the heyva and all that still seems alive. But precisely, that's the problem, culture becomes folklore. Culture and folklore are not the same. Folklore is what we show others; it's a culture of contact, a dominated culture. True culture is not thought about; it is lived. So, we have reached a point where Polynesians are no longer truly Polynesians. It's a bit controversial to say that. Indeed, Polynesians are Polynesian. We are born in Polynesia. That's the argument that will be opposed if we go down this road. In fact, it encompasses many things. It involves colonization, colonial events, and all that. But from these events, from this process of colonization, another phenomenon emerged. It's the acculturation of Polynesians, or even worse, their deculturation. We are becoming, like all peoples of the national entity, like the Bretons, like the Auvergnats, or any other people. We are being emptied of what makes us a people to integrate into the national whole. This is France's policy. France is a highly centralized country. It is a country where communities have long been assimilated, where differences have been leveled out. This is the process that Polynesia and Polynesians have been part of since the establishment of the protectorate in 1842, but more particularly with the implementation of nuclear tests in 1966. The CEP (Centre d'Expérimentation du Pacifique) changed everything in terms of rapid modernization of Polynesia, and consequently, brutal societal changes. After that, the relationship between Polynesians and national identity, I don't know if it's really a matter of concern. If Polynesians really see themselves as part of a French whole. In any case, the question is not raised from a cultural point of view.

Pierre: There is no identity opposition between Polynesians and French, is that what you mean? Or is that not what you mean?

Participant D: There is no identity opposition. In any case, there are community frictions. There are frictions. We are still in a context where a dominated people are dominated on their own land by another civilization. So, there are frictions. I feel that a significant part of the population is not aware of this process of French assimilation. We have been told so often that Polynesians are a welcoming people, that we have a culture of hospitality that is the foundation of our civilization.

It's not wrong to say that. But we have so often essentialized Polynesia by saying, yes, we are like this, we are like that. Today, I feel that Polynesians have a hard time breaking free from this schema and do not know how to critically assess their current situation and show common sense. So, we prefer… What I mean is that we prefer… I feel that Polynesians prefer… They are fatalistic. We are fatalistic. That's also what I mean. What happens to us, we can't do anything about it. We can't change anything. This is typical of colonized societies.

Pierre: My last question concerns the educational field in Polynesia. What do you think of the French education you received, in terms of history, about Polynesia, the shared history between France and Polynesia, the French colonial history in Polynesia, and the history of the nuclear tests?

Participant D: This is also an important point to raise because I don't think that the French education, we received in Polynesia was adapted to our reality, simply because there was a great misunderstanding. To this day, in schools, the period of French colonization is taught through a French prism. This is normal. The colonizer is in a position of power, so they impose their own vision of history. Actually, I feel, this is a phenomenon that happens in all colonized societies, where the colonized tend to adopt the point of view of the colonizer. And this process of identification with the dominant culture, the dominant culture of the colonizer, creates a situation where the colonized ultimately identify with the values of the dominant culture. This phenomenon was particularly visible during my schooling. What I mean is that history as it was taught, especially the history of Polynesia, wasn't taught in a way that considered the particularities of Polynesia. History in schools is French history, the national narrative, which is ultimately the narrative of the colonizer. And so, all the layers of the local population identify with the dominant culture, the dominant French culture. Thus, it creates a form of self-denial, ultimately. Because people do not recognize themselves in this narrative. They are told they are French, but their experience shows them another reality. But since this dominant discourse is hammered home, it's imposed on us, people ultimately end up adopting it and seeing themselves as French, without questioning themselves. The issue is the phenomenon of self-denial that results from the history taught in schools. So, this is a problem that arises in Polynesia.

Interview 5: Participant E, French veteran from the military (Conducted in January 2025)

Participant E is a former sailor from Brest who was sent to French Polynesia in 1968 as part of his military service. His service began in August 1967 when he joined the barracks in Brest, hoping to be assigned to Corsica to explore new horizons. However, he was ultimately sent to the Pacific Experimentation Center (CEP) for a thirteen-month mission—a duration he found particularly long and grueling. Trained as an electrician since the age of 14, he was integrated into the Navy, which was seeking specialists in various trades essential for the operation of military bases and vessels.

Interview Setting: In-person meeting in Rouen, France
Interviewer: Pierre Cherfils
Interviewee: Participant E
Duration: 2 hours and 22 minutes

This semi-structured interview aims to document his personal testimony regarding the nuclear tests in Polynesia, highlighting his experiences on-site, the impact of this deployment on his life and perception of the tests, as well as the potential health consequences.

Pierre: Can you tell us about your assignment in Polynesia and your role there?

Participant E: I arrived in Polynesia in September 1967, after joining the barracks in Brest for my military service. Initially, I had requested an assignment in Corsica, but I was ultimately sent to the Pacific Experimentation Center (CEP). To be honest, I had no idea what to expect. At that time, we didn't have the internet or easy access to information like today. News about the nuclear tests was not widely publicized, and I had never even heard of Mururoa before setting foot in Polynesia.

Once I arrived, I was assigned to the Dives, a supply ship responsible for transporting equipment, provisions, and construction materials to the various atolls where the tests were being conducted. My duties alternated between maintenance and repairs on the ship, as well as daily operational tasks. Life on board was tough, the ship had a flat bottom, which made it incredibly unstable in rough seas, earning it the nickname "big swing." We were constantly dealing with intense heat, humidity, and challenging conditions. The officers were strict, and the discipline was rigorous.

We would sometimes go ashore on different atolls, though always for logistical purposes. The sites where the nuclear tests took place were restricted, and lower-ranking personnel like myself were not given much information about what was happening. We were simply expected to do our jobs without asking too many questions.

Pierre: Did you witness any nuclear tests firsthand?

Participant E: Not directly in the sense of seeing a detonation happen in front of me, but I was present in the vicinity of several tests. In May 1968, I was transferred to the Verdon, a tanker responsible for refueling ships and facilities near Mururoa and Fangataufa, where the nuclear tests took place. This meant that, while I never witnessed an explosion with my own eyes, I was in the area during multiple test campaigns.

I lived through five nuclear tests up close: Capella, Castor, Pollux, Canopus, and Procyon. Our ship would usually be stationed nearby in the lead-up to a test, delivering fuel and supplies to the crews responsible for the operations. We would then move away before the actual detonation, and once the test was completed, we would return to the site. I remember seeing the sky light up from a distance and later noticing an odd, metallic taste in the air. At the time, we thought nothing of it.

There's one particular moment that, looking back, seems absolutely surreal to me. One day, a radiation specialist came aboard with Geiger counters. He instructed us to monitor certain areas of the ship, and as soon as he turned the device on, it started crackling wildly. The readings were off the charts. But instead of being concerned, we treated it as a joke. We started playing around, seeing who could get the needle to move the highest. We were completely unaware of the risks. There we were, standing around in shorts and barefoot, laughing, completely oblivious to the invisible danger surrounding us. Nobody warned us.

Pierre: How did you and your fellow soldiers feel about the nuclear tests at the time?

Participant E: For most of us, it was just a job. We weren't given much context or explanation about what we were involved in. We followed orders, did our work, and rarely questioned anything. There was an unspoken rule: you don't ask questions about things that don't concern you. That being said, we did have some concerns—especially after the explosions. We would see strange clouds in the distance, sometimes tinged with unnatural colors. We noticed that metal surfaces felt warmer than usual after a test. Some men developed skin rashes or irritation, but we were told it was due to the sun or the salty air. We had no idea that radiation could be responsible.

Pierre: How did you perceive Polynesia at the time?

Participant E: In 1967, French military presence in Polynesia was overwhelming. The construction of the nuclear testing facilities had completely transformed the region. Before, these atolls were isolated and sparsely populated. But with the arrival of the military, engineers, and technicians, entire villages sprang up from nothing.

Papeete, the capital of Tahiti, was a city in full expansion. The bars, restaurants, and shops were booming, fueled by money from the CEP. But it was a very artificial kind of prosperity. The local Polynesian population was largely excluded from the real economic benefits. Many worked low-paying jobs as laborers or did odd jobs around the military bases, but they were never truly integrated into the decision-making process. It was a world built by the French, for the French.

Some locals were welcoming, while others resented our presence. We were young soldiers, far from home, often spending our free time drinking in bars. This sometimes led to tensions between the military personnel and the local population.

Pierre: When did you become aware of the dangers of nuclear testing?

Participant E: I didn't fully understand the risks until many years later. In 2014, I came across articles about AVEN (Association of Veterans of Nuclear Tests). I started reading testimonies from other veterans, and for the first time, I realized the extent of the radiation exposure we had all been subjected to. The reports detailed abnormally high cancer rates among former personnel and local populations. That's when it hit me: we had been lied to. The French military never told us about the dangers of radiation. We were sent into contaminated areas without any protective gear, without any warning. We weren't given medical check-ups, and nobody followed up with us after we left service. It was as if our exposure never happened.

Pierre: Have you experienced any health issues since then?

Participant E: So far, I've been lucky. But many of my former comrades haven't been. Some have died of cancer, others have developed unexplained illnesses. The worst part is that many of them never made the connection between their health problems and their time in Polynesia. It wasn't until AVEN started fighting for recognition that the truth started to emerge.

Pierre: What are you doing today to raise awareness?

Participant E: I am now one of the representatives of AVEN in Vendée. My goal is to spread awareness about what happened, so that history doesn't forget the sacrifices we made. We're fighting for recognition, medical support, and compensation for those affected. The French government benefited from these nuclear tests. It built its nuclear deterrence capability thanks to our work, but it must also acknowledge the consequences. Justice must be done.