

ENVIRONMENTAL TRANSITIONS: OCEANIC WORLDS AND NUCLEAR APPROACHES IN THE ARCHIPELAGOS (TE MOANA)

Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme / University of Haute-Alsace
Research Project 2026 - 2028

On March 28th 2025, on the eve of the United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC 3, 9–13 June 2025 in Nice), French Polynesia, through its president, signed Te Reo o Te Moana declaration ("The Voice of the Ocean"). This declaration recalls the ancestral ties between Pacific peoples and the ocean and calls for its collective protection. It resonates particularly strongly in French Polynesia, which was chosen by France as the site of the Pacific Experimentation Centre (CEP), extending what Meltz (2024) calls the **"nuclear stigma of the Pacific"**, already inflicted by U.S. and British tests in the Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Australia, and Kalama Atoll. Beyond the test atolls of Moruroa and Fangataufa, where France conducted 193 nuclear tests between 1966 and 1996, the CEP operated from 1963 to 2000 across the whole of French Polynesia. **The environmental damage to the ocean caused** by the tests themselves, by the infrastructures required for them, and by the modernizing project for Polynesia implemented by French authorities, is only now beginning to be studied systematically, linking these impacts with **the political, social, and cultural transformations of the territory**. Meanwhile, **social concerns about ocean conservation are intensifying**, in the context of global change and increasing exploitation of the oceans. These studies have revealed **a tension between the material, destructive consequences of the CEP on the marine environment and the development of knowledge and representations of the ocean as a space of science, memory, and struggle**.

Our mission

To understand the **complex interactions between knowledge, representations, and material impacts** on the transformations of the Pacific ocean and environmental degradation during the nuclear testing era:

- To document the **construction and circulation of knowledge** about the Pacific ocean, formed in parallel with the **degradation of the marine environment** ;
- To disseminate knowledge about the ocean's environmental changes within the school system;
- To **illuminate current social debates on the relationship to the oceans** and nuclear testing in French Polynesia, in the Pacific, and globally.

Our approach

To move beyond the issue of radionuclides and situate it within a **broader framework of oceanic transformations and degradation**, based on three key themes :

- **Ciguatera** : examining the environmental impacts of pollution on the food chain ;
- **Waste** : questioning the varied forms of deliberate pollution of the marine environment across different spatial and temporal scales ;
- **Fish** : comparing the sociocultural importance of fish in Oceanian societies with its incorporation into economic or scientific systems during the CEP period.

Our Research Team



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The project also benefits from the participation of **Florence Mury** (CNRS, cultural geography of French Polynesia), **Marie Brualla-Challet** (U. Paul Valéry, history of Health), **Daisaku Yamamoto** (Meiji University, geography of nuclear spaces), **Teva Meyer** (UHA, geopolitics of nuclear issues), **Renaud Meltz** (CNRS, political history of the CEP and French Polynesia) and **Mélanie Edeline** (UHA, communications officer).