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## Knowing Nuclear Weapons Tests

### Witness Activism and Oppositional Knowledge in the Cold War Colonial Pacific

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# Knowing Nuclear Weapons Tests

WITNESS ACTIVISM AND OPPOSITIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN THE COLD WAR COLONIAL PACIFIC

*Anton Öhman*

How are nuclear weapons tests made knowable – and by whom? *Knowing Nuclear Weapons Tests: Witness Activism and Oppositional Knowledge in the Cold War Colonial Pacific* examines how knowledge about nuclear weapons testing in the Pacific was produced, contested, and rendered credible from the 1950s to the early 2000s. Centred on French Polynesia, it develops the concept of “witness activism” to analyse how activists transformed testimony, archival labour, and transnational circulation into epistemic interventions against state secrecy, scientific uncertainty, and colonial governance. Drawing on archival ethnography, testimony theory, and the history of knowledge, the study traces how oppositional actors assembled counter-archives, translated lived experience into evidence, and negotiated authority across legal, scientific, and humanitarian domains.

The dissertation argues that nuclear testing and colonialism must be understood as a single historical formation – nuclear colonialism – in which the management of the tests’ consequences was inseparable from the management of knowledge. By reconstructing the practices through which this order was challenged, it shows that the politics of nuclear testing was not only a dispute over facts, but a struggle over what could count as evidence, who could speak, and how harm became legible. In doing so, it repositions Pacific anti-nuclear activism as a site of epistemic production and offers a more unsettling history of the nuclear age: one in which truth was neither given nor revealed but laboriously made under conditions structured to prevent its emergence.

Anton Öhman, born in 1990, is a historian at Lund University, Sweden. *Knowing Nuclear Weapons Tests* is his doctoral dissertation.



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## KNOWING NUCLEAR WEAPONS TESTS



# Knowing Nuclear Weapons Tests

Witness Activism and Oppositional Knowledge in the  
Cold War Colonial Pacific

Anton Öhman



**LUND**  
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**Abstract:**

This dissertation examines how actors in the Pacific produced, mobilized, and circulated oppositional knowledge about nuclear weapons testing from the 1950s to the early 2000s, with French Polynesia as its primary focus. At its core is witness activism: coordinated practices of testimony, document retrieval and annotation, archiving, publication, and transnational circulation through which activists contested state secrecy, scientific uncertainty, and colonial power. Witness activism is developed both as an analytical category and as a lens for understanding how non-state actors claimed epistemic authority under conditions of institutional opacity and contested expertise.

Methodologically, the study combines archival ethnography, testimony theory, and a critical-realist history of knowledge. It treats activist archives as dynamic sites of counter-agnetology, where alternative histories of nuclear colonialism and environmental harm were assembled and sustained. Empirically, it focuses on two transnational nodes, the Danielssons' collections and the Obsarm network, tracing how situated knowledge was translated into metropolitan and international arenas, challenged dominant epidemiological frameworks and safety claims, and informed debates on recognition, compensation, and disarmament. The dissertation advances three interrelated claims. First, activist archives function as ongoing epistemic practices in which fragments of secrecy, testimony, and documentation are transformed into durable evidence. Second, witness activism shows how oppositional actors constructed epistemic authority by mobilizing documentary, scientific, and experiential knowledge to contest official narratives. Third, these practices reveal shifting repertoires of anti-testing epistemic labor, from documentarian and structural critique in the early 1970s to an increasing reliance on testimony in the 1980s and 1990s.

In this respect, the dissertation engages Didier Fassin's argument on the rise of humanitarian reason. It shows that while testimony gained institutional authority in the 1990s, it did not emerge ex nihilo but was embedded in earlier oppositional epistemologies. The shift toward testimony thus marks a reconfiguration of epistemic authority, as witnessing came to mediate claims about harm, responsibility, and justice. By foregrounding these transformations, the study situates Pacific anti-nuclear activism within broader histories of decolonization, environmental justice, and human rights, and contributes to debates on how marginalized actors contest secrecy and produce credible knowledge under conditions of structural inequality.

**Key words:** Cold War, French Polynesia, nuclear colonialism, witness activism, oppositional knowledge, epistemic authority, agnetology, decolonization, testimony

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Witness Activism and Oppositional Knowledge in the  
Cold War Colonial Pacific

Anton Öhman



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# List of Abbreviations

**ABCC** – Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission

**AEC** – United States Atomic Energy Commission

**ANZUS** – Australia-New Zealand-United States Defense Treaty and Council

**AVEN** – Association des vétérans des essais nucléaires

**CEA** – Commissariat à l'Énergie Atomique (Commission for Atomic Energy)

**CEP** – Centre d'Expérimentation du Pacifique (Pacific Experimentation Centre)

**CIVEN** – Comité d'indemnisation des victimes des essais nucléaires

**CND** – Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

**CR** – Critical Realism

**CTBT** – Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty

**FOA** – Försvarets forskningsanstalt (Swedish Defence Research Agency)

**IAEA** – International Atomic Energy Agency

**ICAN** – International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons

**ICJ** – International Court of Justice

**ICRC** – International Committee of the Red Cross"

**KTM BD** – Kon Tiki Museum, Bengt Danielsson Archives

**LSS** – Life Span Study

**LTBT** – Limited Test Ban Treaty

**NATO** – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

**NCT** – Marshall Islands Nuclear Claims Tribunal

**NFIP** – Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific

**NGO** – Non-Governmental Organization

**NNWS** – Non-Nuclear Weapon State(s)

**NPT/TNP** – Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons/Traité sur la Non-Prolifération

**NWFZ** – Nuclear Weapons Free Zone

**NWS** – Nuclear Weapon State(s)

**NZ** – New Zealand

**Obsarm** – Observatoire des armements

**PCRC** – Pacific Concerns Recourse Centre

**RDPT** – Rassemblement démocratique des populations tahitiennes

**RPF** – Rassemblement du Peuple Français

**SIPRI** – Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

**START 1** – Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty 1

**STS** – Science and Technology Studies

**TA/AT** – Territorial Assembly/Assemblée Territoriale, shorthand for the local parliament of French Polynesia in Papeete, Tahiti

**TPNW** – Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

**UN** – United Nations

**UNGA** – United Nations General Assembly

**UNSCEAR** – United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation

**WHO** – World Health Organization

**WWII** – World War II



# Chapter 1. Challenges of Knowing Nuclear Weapons

*We know – in ways very few others do – why nuclear weapons must be eliminated.*

Tony de Brum (1945 – 2017) together with the people of the Marshall Islands, Laureate of the Right Livelihood Award 2015.<sup>1</sup>

## 1.1 Introduction

*When you are asked to go to the safety shelter, you will first have to carry out a certain number of operations. This paper is prepared to help you remember everything.*<sup>2</sup>

On 24 August 1968, France detonated a 2.6-megaton thermonuclear device suspended over Fangataufa atoll in French Polynesia as part of Opération Canopus. Publicly presented as a remote military-scientific feat, the test secured France's place as the world's fifth thermonuclear power. It also dispersed radioactive contamination across Fangataufa and neighbouring islands, rendering large areas uninhabitable. In metropolitan and military accounts, these consequences were rendered administratively invisible through the language of distance, dose, and statistical insignificance.

Four hundred kilometres away, on Mangareva, the test was registered differently. Residents received a two-page leaflet instructing them how to shelter, handle food and water, and prepare for radioactive fallout. This document reveals a central contradiction of this thesis: while official knowledge practices publicly minimized exposure and risk, internal and localized information tacitly acknowledged the

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<sup>1</sup> See The Change Makers, "Tony de Brum/the People of the Marshall Islands." Retrieved 25 March 2024, from <https://rightlivelihood.org/the-change-makers/find-a-laureate/tony-de-brum-the-people-of-the-marshall-islands/>

<sup>2</sup> Obsarm archives, Steel case, *Précautions pratiques à cause de l'explosion imminent de la première bombe H. le 24 aout 1968*. CEP Mangareva note, 1968, from BD. Practical precautions due to the imminent explosion of the first H-bomb 30 July 1968. My translation.

presence of danger. The preparatory leaflet that the Mangarevans received thus occupies an ambiguous epistemic position, simultaneously part of nuclear state risk management and evidence of what metropolitan governance and science sought to deny.

In the 1980s, this document was copied, annotated, and recirculated by the Swedish anti-nuclear-testing activist Bengt Danielsson (1921–1997).<sup>3</sup> Danielsson treated the leaflet not merely as historical remains, but as testimonial material. By preserving, marking, and forwarding it to Bruno Barrillot (1940–2017), it entered the archives of the Observatoire des armements in Lyon (Obsarm) as part of a broader oppositional knowledge practice.<sup>4</sup> Detached from its original administrative function, it was transformed into evidence. This thesis conceptualizes that process as *witness activism*: the coordinated mobilization of testimony, documentation, and archival labour to challenge secrecy, contest authorized ignorance, and reconfigure epistemic authority.

Read through this lens, the leaflet exemplifies how activists transformed fragments escaping military secrecy into counter-agnostological claims. It reveals how witnessing operated not only as personal suffering or moral appeal, but as an epistemic practice oriented toward adjudicating truth under conditions of scientific uncertainty, colonial asymmetry, and institutional power. This thesis begins from such archival artefacts to ask how oppositional actors in the Pacific produced credible knowledge about nuclear testing, and how archives became sites where the dead angles of official nuclear knowledge were rendered visible.

The quoted leaflet, a document of precautions, reads almost like a Cold War civil defence document on nuclear war preparedness, stating what to do in case of a nuclear attack, a genre that historians of Western civil defence have analysed from various approaches and sources.<sup>5</sup> However, *Practical precautions due to the*

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<sup>3</sup> Presented in detail in chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>4</sup> Observatoire des armements was founded in 1984 under the name *Centre de documentation et de recherche sur la paix et les conflits* as a non-profit, independent research, expertise, and documentation organization working with military and armaments issues. The organization was renamed in 2008, and I will henceforth use the term Obsarm if nothing else is specified. Historian Clémence Maillochon in her dissertation thesis maps the organization's instigation in a context of French anti-militarism and peace movements in the late 1900s, Clémence Maillochon, "Les réseaux de militants contre les essais nucléaires français (1959–1996)" (Ph.D. Université de Haute-Alsace, Université de Strasbourg, 2023), pp. 138–147. It was preceded by the action-oriented Lyon group Groupe d'Action et de Résistance à la Militarisation (GARM) of antimilitarists, Christian women, conscientious objectors, and feminists, formed in 1967 and radicalized in aftermath of May '68.

<sup>5</sup> See for instance Marie Cronqvist and Matthew Grant, "Remembering Desirable Futures?: Civil Defence Memories and Everyday Life in Sweden and the United Kingdom" in *Cold War Civil Defence in Western Europe: Sociotechnical Imaginaries of Survival and Preparedness*, eds. Marie Cronqvist, Rosanna Farbol, and Casper Sylvest (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022); Peter Bennesved and Casper Sylvest, "Embedding Preparedness, Assigning Responsibility: The Role



*imminent explosion of the first H-bomb* survives as a fragment of the material programs through which nuclear weapons states in the global North planned and executed real nuclear detonations. The document introduces a managed nuclear incident, a planned state of exception, while remaining silent on the political motives, colonial conditions, and human agency that made the test possible. It registers risk without responsibility, danger without accountability.

Originally issued as a military-administrative order, the leaflet was later reworked into an oppositional testimony. As examined in this thesis, such archival processes produced evidence that French authorities anticipated real risks even as they publicly framed the tests as safe, technical exercises conducted in supposedly empty spaces. Through practices of copying, annotation, and archival preservation, activists transformed this instruction into a claim about what the nuclear state knew, when it knew it, and what it chose not to acknowledge.

This thesis investigates the archives and oppositional knowledge practices of witness activism against nuclear weapons testing in the colonial Cold War Pacific, focusing on French Polynesia as a case and the work of activists Bengt and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson (1924–2003) and Obsarm. It examines how fragments escaping the secrecy of the tests, such as *Practical precautions ...*, were mobilized to contest official ignorance, and challenge dominant scientific and historical narratives.

The *Practical precautions ...* document thus exemplifies the core puzzle of this study: how did activists use archival materials and testimonial authority, under conditions of secrecy, scientific uncertainty, and colonial power, to produce credible oppositional knowledge about nuclear testing?

In answering this, I make three central claims:

**Methodological:** I argue for the fruitfulness of a method for the history of knowledge rooted in archival ethnography and critical realist epistemological and ontological presuppositions. Archives of anti-test groups – their actual form as much as their content, letters, field reports, leaked orders, recorded oral histories, and metadata registers – are not peripheral sources of history but foundational sites where critical histories of nuclear colonialism and environmental harm were documented.

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of Film in Sociotechnical Imaginaries of Civil Defence” in *Cold War Civil Defence in Western Europe: Sociotechnical Imaginaries of Survival and Preparedness*; I. M. Harris and C. F. Howlett, “‘Duck and cover’: The Evolution of Peace Education at the Beginning of the Nuclear Age,” *Journal of Peace Education* 10, no. 2 (2013); Matthew Grant, *After the Bomb: Civil Defence and Nuclear War in Britain, 1945-68* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Samuel F. Stack Jr, “Duck and Cover: Civil Defense Education as Emotional Management,” *Journal of Philosophy & History of Education* no. 70 (2020); Oline Eaton, “‘We must be ready every day, all the time’: Mid-Twentieth-Century Nuclear Anxiety and Fear of Death in American Life,” *Journal of American Culture* 40, no. 1 (2017).

**Theoretical:** I introduce witness activism as a theoretic framework for understanding how actors claim epistemic authority in relation to testimony studies, practices of documentation, scientific observations, and moral outrage to challenge official secrecy and, over time, reshape global debates on disarmament. This also relates to critical realist adjudication, that the oppositional knowledge has increasingly come to be regarded as the better knowledge of the test site compared to official knowledge production of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Empirical:** The methodological and theoretically informed analysis of the archives and documents and how they were used to make claims renders a description of the (case specific) practice of witness activism, which in turn informs the evaluation of said claims. A central question is how the opposition could and/or could not generate better knowledge than the official accounts it opposed.

This thesis centres on activists' archives and the practice of witness activism to show how critics of nuclear testing transformed fragments into enduring challenges to the state and military's control over nuclear knowledge. In doing so, witness activism forged new forms of political knowledge, linking Pacific decolonization struggles to global campaigns for environmental justice and disarmament. Documents such as *Practical precautions...* are remnants of this intellectual and activist work.

From the late 1950s through the early 2000s, affected communities and cosmopolitan activists together generated and circulated counter-narratives to official accounts of nuclear testing. This oppositional work not only exposed the human and environmental costs of the bomb but also provided the foundations for much of our contemporary understanding of nuclear history. At the same time, some of these archives and claims remain silenced or are sites of ongoing contestation.<sup>6</sup>

I argue that witnessing and testimony should be understood here as evolving practices of knowledge production within both the international disarmament discourse and local test-site opposition. Over time, this practice shifted – reflecting but not entirely overlapping with – broader historical trends such as what anthropologist-historian Didier Fassin and others describe as an increasing emphasis on individual experience and suffering as grounds for political claims.<sup>7</sup>

Nuclear tests, conducted in so-called remote areas of the Pacific – French Polynesia, the Marshall Islands, Kiribati, and Western Australia – by France, the United States,

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<sup>6</sup> See Sébastien Philippe and Tomas Stenius, *Toxique: Enquête sur les Essais Nucléaires Français en Polynésie* (Paris: PUF, 2021); Jean-Marc Regnault, "Pouvana'a a Oopa: La Révision du Procès de 1959 en Marche," *Bulletin de la Société des Etudes Océaniques* no. 334 (2015).

<sup>7</sup> Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2012); Samuel Moyn, "Human Rights and Humanitarianization" in *Humanitarianism and Human Rights: A World of Differences?*, ed. Michael N. Barnett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Richard Wilson and Richard D. Brown, *Humanitarianism and Suffering: The Mobilization of Empathy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

and the United Kingdom, displaced populations, destroyed ecologies, and disrupted local knowledge systems.<sup>8</sup> Yet they also produced new knowledge, both military-scientific and as local communities and activists documented, testified, and organized against these tests. I examine how such oppositional practices of witnessing and testimony constituted forms of practical activism, such as gathering information on the consequences of nuclear testing, mobilizing publics, and confronting the institutions that sought to obscure its impacts.

Following the 1963 closure of its Saharan test sites in Algeria, metropolitan France transferred its nuclear weapons program to French Polynesia, establishing the Centre d'Expérimentation du Pacifique (CEP) in a non-self-governing colonial territory. This relocation imposed a militarized scientific infrastructure onto an island society that had little political capacity to refuse, contest, or independently assess the risks involved. Nuclear testing was publicly justified through tightly staged presidential visits and official assurances, which framed the program as both technologically controlled and nationally necessary, while systematically marginalising local knowledge and consent. Between 1966 and 1996, France conducted 193 nuclear tests in the territory.<sup>9</sup>

Atmospheric and surface detonations carried out until 1974 released radioactive fallout that exposed local communities and dispersed contamination across the wider Pacific. As international criticism intensified, France shifted to underground testing from 1975, becoming the first nuclear power to conduct nuclear explosions within coral atoll substrates. These tests were presented as safer and scientifically contained, yet they introduced new forms of uncertainty: the behaviour of radionuclides in porous coral geology, the long-term stability of test cavities, and the cumulative effects of repeated detonations. Official claims of cleanliness thus rested not on the absence of risk, but on the management of uncertainty through classified data, selective monitoring, and asymmetrical access to expertise – conditions that rendered both harm and responsibility difficult to assess.

This framework structures my analysis of the political knowledge work that articulated *nuclear colonialism* as a critical concept.<sup>10</sup> It traces the evolving roles of

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<sup>8</sup> Bernard Dumortier, *Les Atolls de l'Atome: Mururoa & Fangataufa* (Rennes: Marines édition, 2004); Keith M. Parsons and Robert A. Zaballa, *Bombing the Marshall Islands: A Cold War Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Robert Jacobs, "Nuclear Conquistadors: Military Colonialism in Nuclear Test Site Selection during the Cold War," *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding*, no. 2 (2013).

<sup>9</sup> Sonya Schoenberger, "Radiological Risk Imposition as Environmental Violence: A Case Study of Nuclear Harms and the Limits of Legal Redress in French Polynesia/Mā'ohi Nui" in *Exploring Environmental Violence: Perspectives, Experience, Expression, and Engagement*, eds. Richard A. Marcantonio, John Paul Lederach, and Agustín Fuentes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024).

<sup>10</sup> Nuclear colonialism is developed as a concept both in scholarship and as a political articulation of a system through which governments disproportionately target indigenous peoples, communities

oppositional activism and protest as concrete forms of “the art of the possible” in the struggle over what counts as knowledge about the tests, what is preserved, and what is archived. By doing so, it challenges historical and present discourses that cast nuclear weapons as unspeakable or exceptional – as symbols of an existential rupture that required, in Lewis Mumford’s words, “the art of the impossible”,<sup>11</sup> and problematizes historical claims that nuclear experiences are intrinsically defined as problems of humanitarian consequences and victimization.<sup>12</sup>

The fact that the nuclear weapons tests were conducted in colonies, Collectivities/Territoires d’Outre-Mer, and UN trusteeships, points to the crucial element of colonial power. While some have argued that the test sites, at least in French Polynesia, enhanced economic development,<sup>13</sup> the colonial aspect of knowledge and ignorance production and the problem of keeping conflict and

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and their land for the nuclear production process. Valerie L. Kuletz, *The Tainted Desert: Environmental Ruin in the American West* (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 1998); Quito Swan, *Pasifika Black: Oceania, Anti-colonialism, and the African World* (New York: New York University Press, 2022); Schoenberger, “Radiological Risk Imposition as Environmental Violence: A Case Study of Nuclear Harms and the Limits of Legal Redress in French Polynesia/Mā’ohi Nui”; Anaïs Maurer, “Interroger le discours officiel sur la Bombe nucléaire: Lecture croisée de *Toxique* et *Repenser les choix nucléaires*,” *Cultures et Conflits* no. 129 (2023); Barbara Rose Johnston, *Half-Lives and Half-Truths: Confronting the Radioactive Legacies of the Cold War* (Santa Fe, N.M.: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> In Rens van Munster and Casper Sylvest, “Reclaiming Nuclear Politics? Nuclear Realism, the H-bomb and Globality,” *Security Dialogue* 45, no. 6 (2014), p. 539.

<sup>12</sup> See Alexander Kmentt, “The Development of the International Initiative on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons and its Effect on the Nuclear Weapons Debate,” *International Review of the Red Cross* 97, no. 899 (2015); Nina Tannenwald, “The Humanitarian Initiative: A Critical Appreciation,” in *Non-Nuclear Peace Beyond the Nuclear Ban Treaty*, eds. Jorg Kustermans, Tom Sauer, and Barbara Segart (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020). Laura Considine, “The ‘Standardization of Catastrophe’: Nuclear Disarmament, the Humanitarian Initiative and the Politics of the Unthinkable,” *European Journal of International Relations* 23, no. 3 (2017); Richards Shorna-Kay, “TPNW, the Caribbean and the Disarmament Politics of Small Island States,” *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament* 5, no. 1 (2022).

<sup>13</sup> See Gregory Viscusi and Thomas Jaffe, “Un-ban the bomb?” *Forbes* 150, no. 5 (1992), Blanchet Gilles, “Quel venir pour la Polynésie Française?,” *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 102, no. 1 (1996). This is in line with an official story of development and technological civilizing mission of the colonial post-war world. The free association of the Marshall Islands UN trusteeship, for instance, is completely dependent on US funding and the Polynesian critique of the dependent relationship of subsidies and trade to mainland France. The political effects on local party politics in French Polynesia has been immense, shown by, for instance, Karin von Storkirch, “The Impact of Nuclear Testing on Politics in French Polynesia,” *Journal of Pacific History* 26, no. 2 (1991); Maillochon, “Les réseaux de militants contre les essais nucléaires français (1959–1996)”; Jean-Marc Regnault, *La France à l’opposé d’elle-même: Essais d’histoire politique de l’Océanie*, (Papeete, Tahiti: Api Tahiti Editions, 2016).

critique alive in writing history is not sufficiently addressed in the historiographies of the test site.<sup>14</sup>

Over the years, this came to be expressed as nuclear colonialism, a specific form of long-lived and far-reaching continuity of imperialism that extends into future generations, imaginations, and environments. This concept frames a crucial argument for the anti-testers in Tahiti, exemplified by their recurring question: *If the tests are safe, why not conduct them in metropolitan France?* This question underscores the potential of the historical material of oppositional knowledge production, with significant implications for the treatment of the legacy of nuclear tests today.

## 1.2 Why Study the History of Testifying Nuclear Weapons Tests

*In an historical sense – and especially as seen from the South – the Cold War was a continuation of colonialism through slightly different means.*<sup>15</sup>

Odd Arne Westad

In the Pacific, Western powers treated atolls and islands as convenient laboratories for more than 50 years of nuclear weapons tests, veiling their operations in a Cold War logic of empty space while exporting risk, destruction, and uncertainty onto colonized populations. As Barbara Rose Johnston observes, these activities “in the name of national security have profoundly shaped biophysical nature and sociocultural identity of host communities”. Yet, in official narratives, the very places most affected – French Polynesia, the Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Maralinga – were constructed as distant, and presented with negligible risks.<sup>16</sup> Gabrielle Hecht’s concept of nuclearity reminds us that what counts as nuclear depends on social and political framing; in this frontier of Cold War deterrence, indigenous and marginalized lives were deemed expendable, and their concerns officially submerged beneath secrecy and restricted archives.<sup>17</sup> In the following, I outline the

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<sup>14</sup> Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso, 2019).

<sup>15</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 396.

<sup>16</sup> Johnston, *Half-Lives and Half-Truths: Confronting the Radioactive Legacies of the Cold War*, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Gabrielle Hecht, *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2012). There are distinct race, class, and gender dimensions to the logic of expendability that structured the nuclear fuel cycle, and military applications encompassing test-site workers and conscripted soldiers. Young, racialized, proletarianized men were systematically consigned to the most hazardous and devalued labour of the nation-state, tasked with performing its “dirty

broader motivations for studying oppositional knowledge production on nuclear testing in the Pacific. I begin with the politics of nuclear risk measurement, focusing on secrecy, epistemic friction, and scientific ambiguity. I then examine the ideological exceptionalism of the nuclear Pacific. Finally, I address experiential authority and the status of recorded experiences from and around test sites within nuclear discourse.

### 1.2.1 The politics of measuring nuclear test consequences

In addition to official secrecy and the restriction of documentation – such as the requirement for CEP employees to sign contracts prohibiting them from discussing the tests, classified health data and restriction of archives – there are other critical factors of measuring the consequences of nuclear tests. These include the conceptually opaque timescales of genetics, and environmental impact, combined with the unpredictability of radioactive material dispersion resulting from the tests. At the same time, the scientific community remained divided over the hazards of low-level radiation. Toshihiro Higuchi's term *epistemic friction* describes how study design, disciplinary traditions, and political imperatives shaped divergent assessments of fallout risks.<sup>18</sup> For instance, the U.S. Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission's Life Span Study – focused on blast and external exposure in Hiroshima and Nagasaki – became the global standard, rendering invisible the internal radiation and long-term impacts, both political and health related<sup>19</sup> that test critical actors and downwind communities documented.<sup>20</sup> If the Life Span Study paradigm is invoked as the standard for explaining health effects of radiation, as Robert Jacobs claims it is rather universally, this institutionalizes an invisibility of

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work" in the service of military and geopolitical objectives. By contrast, the Hiroshima Maidens were publicly framed through televised humanitarian campaigns, while the hibakusha were transformed into subjects for scientific inquiry within ABCC research. These disparities illuminate how gendered and classed bodies were differentially instrumentalized under nuclear regimes: some were rendered disposable labour, others recast as objects of spectacle or instruments of scientific extraction. Amanda Jane Graham, "Re-Covering the Hiroshima Maidens." in *Medicine, Healing and Performance*, ed. Effie Gemi-Iordanou (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2014); Susan M. Lindee, *Suffering Made Real: American Science and the Survivors at Hiroshima* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>18</sup> Toshihiro Higuchi, "Epistemic Frictions: Radioactive Fallout, Health Risk Assessments, and the Eisenhower Administration's Nuclear-test ban Policy, 1954-1958," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 18, no. 1 (2018); Susanne Bauer and Tanja Pentter (eds.), *Tracing the Atom* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022).

<sup>19</sup> Robert A. Jacobs, *Nuclear Bodies: The Global Hibakusha* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022), pp. 33-42; Lindee, *Suffering Made Real: American Science and the Survivors at Hiroshima*.

<sup>20</sup> Toshihiro Higuchi, *Political Fallout: Nuclear Weapons Testing and the Making of a Global Environmental Crisis* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2020). Johnston, *Half-Lives and Half-Truths: Confronting the Radioactive Legacies of the Cold War*.

those who have suffered health effects and radiation exposure since Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>21</sup>

In relation to these perilous conditions for knowing the consequences of nuclear weapons tests, testimony and witnessing function as both powerful and precarious knowledge claims, whose meanings and epistemic weight have shifted throughout the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This underscores the consequences of nuclear testing as a matter of politics of knowledge, extending beyond the recognition and visibility of lived experiences to testify to phenomena that are inherently difficult to perceive, scientifically ambiguous, and far-reaching, such as the long-term consequences of nuclear tests. Furthermore, as nuclear security scholar Laura Considine argues, the effects of nuclear weapons are often framed in international politics as unrecognizable or even impossible to know and imagine.<sup>22</sup> The practices of oppositional test-site knowledge can thus be understood as historically conditioned efforts to inscribe nuclear tests – and, more broadly, nuclear weapons – into the social world, making their impacts legible and contestable.

In the mid-1960s, an increasing number of workers were exposed to low doses of plutonium, while public concern over environmental contamination was on the rise. Both fallout from nuclear weapons tests and the use of plutonium in the nuclear fuel cycle posed uncertain but potentially significant risks. In response, environmental organizations and public interest groups for peace in the West began advocating for the rights of workers and civilians affected by environmental contamination. Their efforts led to a series of legal victories, highlighting the growing attention to nuclear safety and environmental protection that the collective of radiogenic communities interact and relate to on various levels and scales.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, to address the interplay between knowledge and power as a political question, anthropologist Barbara Rose Johnston underlines that the ability of communities facing this nuclear apparatus to comprehend, confront, and articulate consequential environmental health issues is constrained by their relative status in society.<sup>24</sup> This inequality, combined with the strong interest of the nuclear war machine to control information and convince the public of the minimal risk of the tests while still not undermining the bomb's credibility as deterrent, had effects on

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<sup>21</sup> Jacobs, *Nuclear Bodies: The Global Hibakusha*, p. 42.

<sup>22</sup> Considine, "The 'Standardization of Catastrophe': Nuclear Disarmament, the Humanitarian Initiative and the Politics of the Unthinkable" (2017); Nahda Anisa Rahma, "From Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to the Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW): Shifting Paradigm and Its Implementation's Obstacles," *IJUM Law Journal* 29, no. 2 (2021).

<sup>23</sup> Lindee, *Suffering Made Real: American Science and the Survivors at Hiroshima*; Higuchi, *Political Fallout: Nuclear Weapons Testing and the Making of a Global Environmental Crisis*; Toshihiro Higuchi, "Tipping the Scale of Justice: The Fallout Suit of 1958 and the Environmental Legal Dimension of Nuclear Pacifism," *Peace & Change* 38, no. 1 (2013).

<sup>24</sup> Johnston, *Half-Lives and Half-Truths: Confronting the Radioactive Legacies of the Cold War*.

access to information and relative power in decision-making processes, a fact that witness activism inherently takes into account.

Typically, the communities living nearby and downwind from the nuclear complexes of the Cold War were marginal, indigenous, and other social and political minorities. For instance, Johnston underlines that some 70 of the world's uranium mines are located on lands inhabited by indigenous peoples and that the majority of atmospheric tests were conducted on colonized grounds, ancestral homeland for indigenous people, tribal groups, and ethnic minorities.<sup>25</sup>

Johnston further argues – aligning with my own analysis – that the disproportionate burden of fallout and nuclear contamination was not incidental but systematically enforced. This logic capitalized on affected communities' relative isolation and marginalization, positioning them at the bottom of social hierarchies. Their social status was both rationalized and reinforced through economic, cultural, and ethnic structures and histories.<sup>26</sup>

In line with Johnston's argument, the production of scientific knowledge about the consequences of nuclear testing was in constant tension with the political imperatives of nuclear militarism. This tension resulted not only in overt efforts to withhold information from the public but also in structural biases that skewed research to align with predetermined conclusions. The US AEC sought to affirm that nuclear tests posed no threat to humanity and that radiation exposure had no significant intergenerational genetic effects. Findings that contradicted these claims were suppressed: dissenting results were censored, researchers were discredited, and funding was withdrawn.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, the two institutions that were to assess the impact of global fallout in the 1950s came to different conclusions on the existence and definition of dose thresholds, due to them basing their evaluation on health impact of fallout more in either geneticist or biological approaches.<sup>28</sup> The non-unified voice of science here resulted, and to some extent is maintained, in an apparent lack, with no way to account for local effects in global measurements or internal effects from external effect studies, and vice versa. Citizen science, as well as testimonial, experiential knowledge claims, hereby became an alternate possible route to knowledge about

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<sup>25</sup> Johnston, *Half-Lives and Half-Truths: Confronting the Radioactive Legacies of the Cold War*, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Johnston, *Half-Lives and Half-Truths: Confronting the Radioactive Legacies of the Cold War*, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> See for instance the ABCC scientist Earle Reynolds, who later went on to protest the testing via direct action testimonial method; Johnston, *Half-Lives and Half-Truths: Confronting the Radioactive Legacies of the Cold War*, p. 9; Barton C. Hacker, *Elements of Controversy: The Atomic Energy Commission and Radiation Safety in Nuclear Weapons Testing 1947-1974* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1994); Bauer and Penter (eds.), *Tracing the Atom*.

<sup>28</sup> Higuchi, *Political Fallout: Nuclear Weapons Testing and the Making of a Global Environmental Crisis*.



the nuclear tests and practices connected to them, that took form in relation to this far-reaching uncertainty and secrecy.<sup>29</sup>

The struggle to confront the radioactive legacy of nuclear tests is also a struggle over who controls access to information and knowledge production. As Johnston notes, this raises questions about the nature of science, its political uses, and the ethical dimensions of scientific work.<sup>30</sup> Such questioning has, at times, sparked social movements and political projects that challenge the existing power structures. In the Marshall Islands, for example, Barker and Johnston's *Consequential Damages of Nuclear War: The Rongelap Report* highlights how local effects were obscured, how personal accounts subsequently became vital as local data were classified, and how decisions about acceptable risk reveal deep inequalities.<sup>31</sup>

Nuclear test sites are still contested places, contaminated and often closed off; hereby one could conceptualize them as post-industrial landscape scars or colonial landscape scars.<sup>32</sup> It is still dangerous and prohibited to visit the test locations, and they could be described as radioactive ruins. However, such alluring and perhaps aesthetically appealing descriptions might cement a view of the place/territories/test zones as exceptional and Other.<sup>33</sup>

### 1.2.2 Ideological exceptionalism and the nuclear Pacific

For most of the world, nuclear weapons first entered the imagination abstractly rather than through direct material experience. As science and technology scholars like Sheila Jasanoff and Sang-Hyun Kim, John Krige, and Gabrielle Hecht argue,

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<sup>29</sup> Joseph Masco has argued the experiences of tests by Manhattan Project scientists and technicians was central for actors who would become involved in disarmament projects and scientific collaboration across the Iron Curtain, such as the Pugwash conferences, and that the later underground and computer modelled test regimes occlude such moral stances based on experience. Joseph Masco, "Nuclear Technoaesthetics: Sensory Politics from Trinity to the Virtual Bomb in Los Alamos," *American Ethnologist* 31, no. 3 (2004).

<sup>30</sup> Johnston, *Half-Lives and Half-Truths: Confronting the Radioactive Legacies of the Cold War*, p. 13.

<sup>31</sup> Barbara Rose Johnston and Holly M. Barker, *Consequential Damages of Nuclear War: The Rongelap Report* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>32</sup> Anna Storm, *Post-Industrial Landscape Scars* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Anton Öhman, "Vittnesarkivet: En ekofenomenologisk kartläggning av arkivmaterial från motståndet mot atombombsprovsprängningarna i Franska Polynesien." MA thesis. Lund: Lund University, (2018).

<sup>33</sup> The nuclear sublime as an aesthetically appealing imaginary in contrast to messy particles of everyday relationships is an analytical dichotomy based on a comment made by Ele Carpenter in the introduction to *The Nuclear Culture Sourcebook*, which I was introduced to during the exhibition and conference on nuclear aesthetics, *Perpetual Uncertainty*, in Malmö 2018. Ele Carpenter, ed., *The Nuclear Culture Source Book* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2016).

the post-WWII first world nuclear imaginary evolved into a form of ideological exceptionalism, structuring political possibilities by linking nuclear technology to nationhood, science, and power.<sup>34</sup> In nuclear weapons states, the Pacific – epitomized by US nuclear use in Japan – was discursively produced as both *real and unreal*, an exoticized, isolated testing laboratory where nuclear explosions existed in the political imagination as projects of Cold War control, deterrence, and so-called development.<sup>35</sup> The risk of objectifying nuclear test sites is further tied to the ideological construction of the Pacific Islands as paradisiacal and untouched. Miriam Khan and other postcolonial scholars, building on Said's *Orientalism*, describe *Pacificism* as a discourse that has shaped anthropology, literature, and tourism, while also justifying Pacific Islands use as a testing ground and military base for imperial powers, which is related to the *militourism* concept by Teresia Tiarewa, conjoining imaginary heroic adventures and paradisiacal leisure as an ideological selling point for the actual, everyday military life and presence in the Pacific.<sup>36</sup> This ideological exceptionalism intersected with a colonial logic accustomed to seeing indigenous and marginalized lives as expendable.

Axel Jansen, John Krige, and Jessica Wang argue that from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onward, empires relied on systematic information-gathering – about customs, resources, and social hierarchies – to legitimize governance. According to Jansen, Krige, and Wang, such forms of knowledge enabled governance by involving local elites, as comprador classes, in the colonial project, supplanting existing political authority, extending surveillance and control systems, or otherwise expanding the reach of

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<sup>34</sup> Sheila Jasanoff and Sang-Hyun Kim, "Containing the Atom: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and Nuclear Power in the United States and South Korea," *Minerva* 47, no. 2 (2009); John Krige and Jessica Wang, "Nation, Knowledge, and Imagined Futures: Science, Technology, and Nation-Building, Post-1945," *History & Technology* 31, no. 3 (2015); Gabrielle Hecht and Michel Callon, *The Radiance of France: Nuclear Power and National Identity after World War II* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009).

<sup>35</sup> Monica Emond, "La Polynésie imaginée, ou, une Bombe au paradis" (MA Thesis Montréal: Université du Québec à Montréal, 2008). See also Elizabeth DeLoughrey, M., "The Myth of Isolates: Ecosystem Ecologies in the Nuclear Pacific," *Cultural Geographies* 20, no. 2 (2013). Robert Jacobs in line with DeLoughrey points out the centrality of global fallout for the development of ecosystems science where, through the myth of isolation, it made the dynamics of the experimental ecosystem "visible to inquiry" as the traces of nuclear testing and accidents can be tracked. Jacobs, *Nuclear Bodies: The Global Hibakusha*, p. 68.

<sup>36</sup> See Emond, "La Polynésie imaginée, ou, une Bombe au Paradis," who analyses the bomb in Polynesia as a Western (French) imaginary heterotopia. Miriam Kahn, "Tahiti Intertwined: Ancestral Land, Tourist Postcard, and Nuclear Test Site," *American Anthropologist* 102, no. 1 (2000); Anaïs Maurer and Rebecca H. Hogue, "Introduction: Transnational Nuclear Imperialisms," *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 11, no. 2 (2020). Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945–1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Teresia Teaiwa, "Postscript: Reflections on Militourism, US Imperialism, and American Studies," *American Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (2016).

imperial rule.<sup>37</sup> In the U.S. Manhattan Project, Alex Wellerstein notes, secrecy itself became a PR strategy where limited transparency both allayed public fear and structured the narrative of risk.<sup>38</sup> In the Pacific, similar structures of secrecy and selective disclosure framed nuclear tests as technical necessities, obscuring human and environmental costs.

### 1.2.3 The communities of irradiated: Close experiences of nuclear weapons (tests) as knowledge production

The perhaps most compelling reason for studying nuclear tests through oppositional knowledge production is that those with direct experience, along with documents and artifacts from the testing complexes, have come to hold a special position of gravity and authority within nuclear disarmament and abolitionist discourse. This is underscored by the globalized Hibakusha (nuclear explosion survivor) identity, which evolved from Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivors to include irradiated communities across the world, addressing justice and the ethical implications of the nuclear condition.<sup>39</sup>

A central motivation for my work is the recognition that this specific use of testimonial first-hand sources and authority should not be taken for granted but appears socially and historically situated. The practices of oppositional knowledge production are integral to a certain conception of knowledge that is rooted in historical contexts and ways of relating. Conflicting claims regarding the consequences of nuclear tests are not fixed but can be analysed and contextualized

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<sup>37</sup> This draws from STS scholarship on late-20<sup>th</sup> century elements of participatory science, citizenship, and knowledge or a critical inclusion of scientific counter-expertise in democratic government, widened to a humanistic/social scientific critical knowledge making with testimony/witnessing, drawing on the literary traditions of autobiography, as well as history, anthropology, and ethnography as methods. See: Michel Callon, Pierre Lascoumes, and Yannick Barthe, *Acting in an Uncertain World: An Essay on Technical Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009); Brian Wynne, "Public Engagement as a Means of Restoring Public Trust in Science – Hitting the Notes, but Missing the Music?," *Community Genetics* 9, no. 3 (2006); I. Welsh and B. Wynne, "Science, Scientism and Imaginaries of Publics in the UK: Passive Objects, Incipient Threats," *Science as Culture* 22, no. 4 (2013); Alan Irwin, *Citizen Science: A Study of People, Expertise, and Sustainable Development* (London: Routledge, 1995); Adriana Petryna, *Life Exposed: Biological Citizens after Chernobyl* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

<sup>38</sup> Alex Wellerstein, *Restricted Data: The History of Nuclear Secrecy in the United States* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2021).

<sup>39</sup> See Lisa Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). She writes a history of the occurrence of the hibakusha identity in Japan, the testimonial telling of experiences from Hiroshima and Nagasaki and its later connection to specific "world peace" projects in Japan and beyond. Hibakusha is Japanese, from *hi* 'suffer' + *baku* 'explosion' + *sha* 'person'.

to understand how testimonial authority became politically viable, and what this meant over time.<sup>40</sup>

### 1.2.4 Summary: Historizing the counter-agnetology of the test site

One motivation for the study, which reaches beyond the immediate field of history, is the contentious and politically charged nature of scientific ambiguity regarding the long-term effects of low-level radiation from nuclear tests, particularly during the Cold War. This uncertainty, deployed for varied political reasons, can be understood through the lens of history of knowledge and *agnetology*, the study of how ignorance is produced and maintained.<sup>41</sup> In the nuclear context, agnetological strategies have been used to downplay, delay, or fragment understanding of the consequences of testing, ensuring that critical questions remained unsettled. Such cultivated ignorance resulted in divergent assessments among scientists, institutions, and disciplines, and contributed to the absence of comprehensive knowledge about radiation risks at local levels.

The reliance on the Life Span Study paradigm, which prioritizes external radiation effects from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, has further obscured the impacts of internal radiation and localized fallout for communities – often under conditions of colonial rule – in the vicinity of test sites, such as the Marshall Islands and the Gambier Islands. This institutionalized invisibility necessitated alternative approaches to knowledge-making. Citizen science, locally organized monitoring, and personal testimonies emerged to fill the gaps left by official studies and state secrecy. The thesis investigates these oppositional knowledge practices and the conditions under which they were generated and situates them in the broader Cold War colonial politics of knowledge pertaining to nuclear exceptionalism and Pacificism, both in official and unofficial narratives.

In this context, *witness activism* emerges as a crucial mode of knowledge reduction in the form of counter-agnetology. It links personal testimony to broader political struggles over epistemic legitimacy, transforming individual experiences of harm into collective knowledge claims. Drawing on archival ethnography, testimony theory, and a critical realist reading of the history of knowledge, this concept captures how survivors, activists, and their allies sought to reframe the nuclear narrative – from the abstracted models of state science to the lived realities of fallout

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<sup>40</sup> See Jacobs, *Nuclear Bodies: The Global Hibakusha*. Jacobs makes an ethnographic exposé of experiences of nuclear technologies, and the scientific evaluation and downplaying, managing people and discourse after long-term low-level radiation impacts.

<sup>41</sup> Robert N. Proctor and Londa Schiebinger, *Agnology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2008); Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010).

and displacement. By mobilizing their own bodies, memories, and locally gathered evidence and constructed archives, these actors challenged both the technical authority of official expertise and the political structures that sustained ignorance. In doing so, witness activism not only produced oppositional knowledge but also reconfigured the terms under which nuclear harms could or could not be recognized and addressed.

This leads to the final key motivation for considering nuclear weapons tests through the lens of oppositional knowledge production: the unique authority held by those with direct experience of these events, as well as the documents and artefacts from the testing complexes. This authority is evident in the now increasingly globalized Hibakusha identity, which has expanded from Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivors to encompass broader irradiated and radiogenic communities advocating for justice and the ethical consideration of nuclear impacts. The study recognizes that the reliance on testimony as evidence should not be taken for granted, as it emerges from specific historical contexts and social practices.

It is against this backdrop of ideological exceptionalism, scientific opacity, and colonial power that this thesis locates its central problem: how oppositional actors produced claims under conditions of secrecy and uncertainty. By examining the archival traces left by grassroots networks practices of witness activism – leaked orders, documentarian reports, annotated leaflets, oral testimonies, and grey literature – this study reveals how critics of nuclear testing asserted epistemic authority, found arguments, and sought to dismantle the infrastructures of ignorance that surrounded the bomb.

## 1.3 Historical Context: Continuous Epistemic Contention in French Polynesia

### 1.3.1 The choice of the nuclear weapons test site: Why French Polynesia?

The following will not give full investigation into why the French chose French Polynesia as a site to test nuclear devices. However, a background is valuable to understand the historical context of anti-testing activism based in the area, especially since this history is contested. Polynesia had been a French protectorate since 1842; first called *Établissements français d'Océanie*, it became an overseas territory in 1946 (*Territoire d'outre-mer* or TOM), and an overseas collectivity of the French Republic in 2003.<sup>42</sup> In 1977, the country was granted some autonomy in

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<sup>42</sup> For a history of the EFO during WWII, siding with De Gaulle's Free French forces on 2 September 1940, see Yacine Benhalima, "Free France and the Free French in the Établissements

internal affairs, which was extended in 1984.<sup>43</sup> After political work in the UN, French Polynesia was relisted in the United Nations list of Non-Self-Governing Territories in 2013, making it eligible for a UN-backed independence referendum.<sup>44</sup>

France was, before the Second World War, a pioneering nation in nuclear technology.<sup>45</sup> French scientists had helped develop nuclear weapons in the Manhattan Project.<sup>46</sup> After 1945, there were plans for a national nuclear weapons program and, in the early stages, France had an intimate nuclear cooperation with Israel.<sup>47</sup> The Suez Crisis of 1956–57 is widely seen as a turning point in accelerating France’s nuclear program. The crisis underscored the declining influence of the old imperial colonial powers and revealed that the new superpowers could dictate international rules. However, France’s nuclear plans had been set in motion earlier. France, through CEA, initiated its nuclear program on 30 November 1956, and the first test was conducted at the CSEM test centre in Reggane, Algeria.<sup>48</sup>

The first formal decision to proceed with testing was made in 1957, and the inaugural test, *Gerboise Bleue*, took place in February 1960, after de Gaulle’s return to power in 1958. From that point on, nuclear weapons became a crucial element of

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Français d’Océanie (1940–1947). A History of the Margins’ Resistance in the Pacific Space” (PhD Diss., Wellington: Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington, 2025).

<sup>43</sup> Dumortier, *Les Atolls de l’Atome: Mururoa & Fangataufa*.

<sup>44</sup> This section can be compared to and included in a wider history of the choosing of nuclear test sites in Oceania. Jacobs, “Nuclear Conquistadors: Military Colonialism in Nuclear Test Site Selection during the Cold War” (2013).

<sup>45</sup> The Curies, Marie, Pierre, their daughter Irène and her husband Frederic Joliot-Curie, were all prominent figures in the developing field of nuclear physics. Denis Brian, *The Curies: a Biography of the Most Controversial Family in Science* (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2005).

<sup>46</sup> Gabrielle Hecht and Michel Callon, *The Radiance of France: Nuclear Power and National Identity after World War II*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2009). Hecht and Callon argue that nuclear technology came to be deeply associated with the French national identity. The most prominent French scientists contributing to the Manhattan Project were Lew Kowarski, Hans von Halban, Bertrand Goldschmidt, Pierre Victor Auger, and Jules Guéron, see Wellerstein, *Restricted Data: The History of Nuclear Secrecy in the United States*.

<sup>47</sup> Binyamin Pinkus and Moshe Tlamim, “Atomic Power to Israel’s Rescue: French-Israeli Nuclear Cooperation, 1949–1957,” *Israel Studies* 7, no. 1 (2002).

<sup>48</sup> In the Saharan desert region of Tanezrouft. Underground testing in In Ekker in the Hoggar Mountains followed the four atmospheric Reggane tests. Jean Allman, “Nuclear Imperialism and the Pan-African Struggle for Peace and Freedom: Ghana, 1959–1962,” *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture & Society* 10, no. 2 (2008); Samia Henni, “Nuclear Powers: Nuclear Bomb Tests Carried out by the French Colonial Regime in the 1960s Caused Irreversible Contamination of the Algerian Sahara’s Landscape and Lives,” *The Architectural Review*, 1492 (2022); C. R. Hill and C. Maillochon, “‘Stealing Fire from Heaven’: Odette du Puigaudau and French Nuclear Colonialism in the Algerian Sahara,” *International Review of Environmental History* 9, no. 2 (2023).

French defence policy, both for de Gaulle and subsequent governments.<sup>49</sup> The first tests in Algeria were carried out during the Algerian Coup and War of Independence.<sup>50</sup> Three additional atmospheric tests were conducted before Algeria gained independence in 1962, after which underground tests continued at the In Eker (CEMO) site until 1966, when testing was relocated to French Polynesia by a decision made in the French Defence and National Security Council, 27 July 1962.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, before the decision was made public to establish CEP in Polynesia, the US conducted hydrogen bomb tests 2,000 km north of Tahiti on what is now Kiribati. The Tahitian Senator elected in 1958, G  rald Coppenrath, filed a complaint, warning that prevailing wind and ocean current patterns posed a risk of contamination to the Society Islands. According to Maillochon, Coppenrath highlighted these popular worries about the tests to the senate, that he saw as foreshadowing dissatisfaction in the territory:

All that France has spent, in both money and heart, for the territory I represent risks being permanently compromised if, as recently suggested by the Minister of Defense, a nuclear testing site were to be established in Polynesia. [...] This would involve relocating populations, as it is evident that at least several hundred people would need to abandon their lands. These are not nomads who can simply be asked to move a little further; these are people deeply attached to their land. [...] The construction of a nuclear testing site at any location would face real resistance from the local populations.<sup>52</sup>

Coppenrath, according to historian Cl  mence Maillochon, thus prefigured the notion of the anti-test site rhetoric of a connection between indigenous populations and the environment.<sup>53</sup> At the time, the French authorities had constructed the three larger airports needed for the tests, one on Tahiti, in Fa'a'a on the outskirts of Papeete, one at Anaa atoll, and one in the Tuamotus on the Hao base atoll.<sup>54</sup> Two

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<sup>49</sup> Regnault, *La France    l'oppos   d'elle-m  me: Essais d'histoire politique de l'Oc  anie*, p. 141.

<sup>50</sup> Bruno Tertais, *A "Nuclear Coup"? : France, the Algerian War, and the April 1961 Nuclear Test* (Carlisle Barracks: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2013).

<sup>51</sup> Renaud Meltz, "Pourquoi la Polyn  sie ?" in *Des Bombes en Polyn  sie. Les Essais nucl  aires fran  ais dans le Pacifique*, eds. Renaud Meltz and Alexis Vrignon (Paris:   ditions Vend  miaire, 2022), p. 43.

<sup>52</sup> From Sen. Coppenrath's original address to the French senate in 1962, Maillochon, "Les r  seaux de militants contre les essais nucl  aires fran  ais (1959  1996)," p. 107.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Michel Lextrety, "De l'  veil    la vie politique    l'  chec de la premi  re exp  rience d'autonomie interne 1945  1962. Les combats de Pouvana'a a Oopa" in *Une Histoire de Tahiti: Des origines    nos Jours*, ed.   ric Conte (Papeete, Tahiti: Au vent des   les, 2019), 249  73. Sylvain Mary and Alexis Vrignon, "Implantation:   tat, pouvoirs locaux et opinion." in *Des Bombes en Polyn  sie: Les essais nucl  aires fran  ais dans le Pacifique*, eds. Renaud Meltz and Alexis Vrignon (Paris: Vend  miaire, 2022).

atolls, Moruroa and Fangataufa, were chosen as test sites and were without direct permission by the Polynesian territorial assembly expropriated by the French military, who promised to restore them and return them after use.<sup>55</sup> The locating of the proving ground to French Polynesia can, according to historian Jean-Marc Regnault, explain the tight grip France was holding on the region, for instance by removing or undermining the independence and leaders, such as Pouvana'a a Oopa.<sup>56</sup> On 2 July 1966, France exploded its first plutonium fission device in a test codenamed Aldebaran, in the Moruroa lagoon.<sup>57</sup>

France conducted atmospheric nuclear tests, detonating thermo-/nuclear charges in the open air, until 1974. The tests caused global concerns for contamination and led to widespread protests outside of Polynesia, since the other Pacific countries also had deep concerns about the fallout risks.<sup>58</sup> The USA, USSR, and the UK had officially abandoned atmospheric testing in accordance with the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (LTBT) of 1963, but continued testing with other methods.<sup>59</sup>

The decision to locate the nuclear test site in French Polynesia appears to have been driven by a combination of technical and political considerations. Other small island nations and colonies were also considered, but French Polynesia, being a remote, strategically important territory under formal French control with independence-autonomist movements that were seen as manageable, presented an appealing option. According to Regnault, one significant factor was the consideration of global public opinion, particularly with the nuclear disarmament peace movement in mind.

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<sup>55</sup> Maclellan, Nic, and Jean Chesneaux, *After Moruroa: France in the South Pacific* (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1998).

<sup>56</sup> Regnault, "Pouvana'a a Oopa: La Révision du procès de 1959 en marche."

<sup>57</sup> See Jean-Marc Regnault and Catherine Vannier, *Pouvana'a et de Gaulle: La Candeur et la Grandeur* (Papeete, Tahiti, Polynésie Française: 'API Tahiti, 2016). Ch. XXVII. The official decision to implement nuclear testing in the territory dates to 27 July 1962. Regnault's work, however, demonstrates that the idea was older than this, emerging in 1957. The reasons that the testing commenced in Algeria instead of French Polynesia were provisional. Compared to the other nuclear weapons states and the thermonuclear revolution, the time of the idea of a French Pacific test site concurs with US and UK testing of H-bombs in the Pacific.

<sup>58</sup> Lawrence S. Wittner, *Confronting the Bomb: A Short History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009). Atmospheric testing had been prohibited by US USSR and UK nuclear powers, in the Limited Test Ban Treaty (LTBT) of 1963.

<sup>59</sup> For nuclear technology exchanges and regulation of knowledge in diplomacy between the US and France suggesting deeper connections in crucial security issues, based on American pre-eminence, than was acknowledged in the early 1970s. See Richard H. Ullman, "The Covert French Connection," *Foreign Policy* no. 75 (1989); John Krige, "Technodiplomacy: A Concept and Its Application to U.S.-France Nuclear Weapons Cooperation in the Nixon-Kissinger Era," *Federal History* 12 (2020).



He cites General Jean Thiry's<sup>60</sup> statement from the time of the site selection in the summer of 1962:

Polynesia is least exposed to hostile campaigns or *worldwide emotional reactions*, though we should harbor no illusions in this regard. In view of the test method, we plan to use (contamination of the “worldwide” type) Réunion appears to be the most practical and least complicated site. New Caledonia should still be considered as a substitute site.<sup>61</sup>

The French military planners were acutely aware of global reactions to atmospheric nuclear testing, often dismissing such concerns as emotional or irrational. Their stance reflected the ongoing Cold War-era debates on radiation risks and global fallout, which regularly surfaced at the UN and in diplomatic exchanges, culminating in the LTBT 1963. Although France did not sign, the political climate it created prompted the French military to conduct tests in locations perceived as remote and “out of sight” from the global public.

As historian Austin Cooper notes, this strategy materialized the intertwined logics of subjugation, exploitation, and racialization that underpinned empire; structures that could later be repurposed as resources for liberation and postcolonial nation-building when challenged.<sup>62</sup> In French Polynesia, nuclear testing became not only a symbol of nuclear colonialism but also a catalyst for political mobilization, cultural assertion, and regional solidarity, particularly through the South Pacific Forum and among local intelligentsia. By the late-1970s and early-1980s, opposition to French nuclear policy had moved from the political margins toward mainstream traction. This background has been a wider outlining of the context and research on the nuclear test issues in French Polynesia, which is specified with a narrower discussion on research on opposition to the tests in the following chapter.

### 1.3.2 Continuous epistemic contention on the tests' legacy

Recent debates in Mā'ohi Nui/French Polynesia illustrate how the politics of measuring the consequences of French nuclear testing remain deeply contested.

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<sup>60</sup> Inter-Service Commander of Special Weapons to the Ministerial Delegate for Armaments.

<sup>61</sup> Regnault, “France’s Search for Nuclear Test Sites, 1957-1963,” p. 1235 (my italics).

<sup>62</sup> Austin R. Cooper, “*The Argentella Scandal: Why France Abandoned Plans to Make Corsica a Nuclear Test Site in 1960*”, Conference Presentation. Colloque: Des Essais au desert? Pour une histoire comparée et transnationale des sites d’essais nucléaires. 19-21 January 2022. Austin R. Cooper, “The Argentella Scandal: Why French Officials did not Make Corsica a Nuclear Test Site in 1960,” *The Nonproliferation Review* 29, no. 1-3 (2022).

Clémence Maillochon notes a revitalization of these issues following the 2021 publication of *Toxique: Enquête sur les essais nucléaires français en Polynésie* by physicist Sébastien Philippe and journalist Thomas Status, coinciding with a high-profile presidential visit by Emmanuel Macron.<sup>63</sup> *Toxique* directly challenges the French Ministry of Defence's 2006, 500-page report, which – drawing on military archives – concluded that atmospheric fallout caused only limited contamination and would not produce detectable excess thyroid cancers in Polynesia.<sup>64</sup>

Reinterpreting declassified military archives from 2013, Philippe and Status document far higher exposure levels than officially acknowledged, linking specific tests, such as the 1974 *Centaure*, to radiation doses over 10 times greater than those used by the Committee for Compensation of Nuclear Test Victims (CIVEN) to assess claims since 2010. They argue that the French nuclear program relied on secrecy, selective disclosure, and flawed methodologies, and call for a paradigm shift in compensation criteria. Their critique targets CIVEN's lack of transparency and reliance on incomplete data, as well as its invocation of IAEA "validation", despite the absence of independent access to the underlying French datasets.<sup>65</sup> These critiques of official methods to assess test consequences were, as we shall see, foregrounded in the works of the Danielssons and Obsarm.<sup>66</sup>

According to scholar Anais Maurer, *Toxique* is significant not only for its counter-expertise but also for its accessible communication, combining technical modelling with testimonies to convey the human, political, and ecological dimensions of nuclear colonialism. While the French government questioned its conclusions publicly, Maurer observes that it nonetheless influenced legal interpretations of exposure in compensation cases.<sup>67</sup> Maurer suggests that reading *Toxique* alongside works authored by Polynesians themselves on the subject would be highly beneficial for readers. In this she endorses sociological studies and artistic expressions, many taking the form of testimony, from figures like John Taroanui Doom, Roland Oldham, Gabriel Tetiarahi, Bruno Barrillot, Chantal Spitz, Mililani Ganivet, Marie-

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<sup>63</sup> Maillochon, "Les réseaux de militants contre les essais nucléaires français (1959–1996)," p. 23; Philippe and Status, *Toxique: enquête sur les essais nucléaires français en Polynésie*.

<sup>64</sup> "Les 250,000 examens anthropogammamétriques et radiotoxicologiques effectués sur le personnel pendant la période des essais n'ont révélé qu'un nombre limité de cas de contamination qui n'ont conduit qu'à de faibles ou très faibles doses" Ministère de la Défense, *La Dimension radiologique des essais nucléaires français en Polynésie* (2006), p. 295, retrieved 8 August 2023, from [https://www.francetnp.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/La\\_dimension\\_radiologique\\_des\\_essais\\_nucleaires\\_francais\\_en\\_Polynesie.pdf](https://www.francetnp.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/La_dimension_radiologique_des_essais_nucleaires_francais_en_Polynesie.pdf)

<sup>65</sup> Philippe and Status, *Toxique: Enquête sur les essais nucléaires français en Polynésie*, p. 95.

<sup>66</sup> See chapter 7 *Formats and Tactics in Anti-Nuclear Testing Activism*.

<sup>67</sup> Maurer, "Interroger le discours officiel sur la bombe nucléaire: Lecture croisée de *Toxique* et *Repenser les choix nucléaires*," p. 103.

Hélène Villierme, and the administration of Oscar Temaru, who in various forms offer narratives of irradiated Mā'ohi communities.<sup>68</sup>

The contest between nuclear weapons state-sanctioned epidemiology and data and oppositional counter-expertise exemplifies the central concern of this thesis: how, under conditions of secrecy and scientific uncertainty, oppositional actors in the Pacific developed alternative epistemic practices to challenge official knowledge claims. Situating *Toxique* within this longer history allows for a historical analysis of how such epistemic practices rooted in testimony, archive work, and transnational advocacy, gain authority and mobilize political change. Over time, personal narratives from those affected by nuclear testing have become a central feature of disarmament advocacy, evolving into an almost obligatory component of the communication and knowledge production preceding the humanitarian initiative for disarmament.<sup>69</sup>

## 1.4 Ethics, Method, Sources, and Limitations

### 1.4.1 Ethics and positionality

The scientific indeterminacy surrounding low-level radiation effects has long served as a political instrument, one that defers responsibility, restricts compensation, and marginalizes those most affected. To study the contestation of this uncertainty is therefore both a methodological and an ethical act. My focus on oppositional claims treats witness activism as a form of counter-agnostology: a collective labour of making visible what sanctioned ignorance seeks to suppress. Testimonies, activist archives, and citizen-led investigations not only contest official silence but produce new epistemic authorities that redefine what counts as credible evidence.

Critical Realists Danermark et al. remind us that any intellectual project aspires, whether consciously or not, to transform the very concepts by which we perceive reality.<sup>70</sup> My position, methods, and interpretive moves constitute part of the historical field I seek to understand. To render this explicit is not a gesture of self-display but a methodological necessity. Only by situating myself as a historically

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<sup>68</sup> Maurer, “Interroger le discours officiel sur la bombe nucléaire: Lecture croisée de *Toxique* et *Repenser les choix nucléaires*.”

<sup>69</sup> Kmentt, “The Development of the International Initiative on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons and its Effect on the Nuclear Weapons Debate”; Considine, “The ‘Standardization of Catastrophe’: Nuclear Disarmament, the Humanitarian Initiative and the Politics of the Unthinkable”; Tannenwald, “The Humanitarian Initiative: A Critical Appreciation.”

<sup>70</sup> Berth Danermark, Mats Ekström, and Jan Ch. Karlsson, *Explaining Society: Critical Realism in the Social Sciences* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), p. 19.

and institutionally produced observer can I clarify how this thesis proposes a qualitatively new way of grasping test-site history – one that links epistemology, ethics, and method.

Key figures in this oppositional landscape such as Bengt and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson, Obsarm, Bruno Barrillot, and political actors such as Oscar Temaru and the *Tāvini Huira'atira* party, worked across local and transnational circuits, translating Pacific experience into forms legible to international institutions and fora. Yet the very archives that preserve their work also potentially reproduce Cold War asymmetries: European and metropolitan voices are over-represented, while indigenous and community-based oppositions remain partially undocumented. Local civil society groups such as *Moruroa e tatou* or *Association 193* enter this study largely through mediated traces, not direct archival presence. The unevenness of this record is therefore not simply a limitation but a historical datum in its own right, which is evidence of the unequal conditions of preservation, circulation, and recognition that structure oppositional knowledge.

This project's epistemic horizon is consequently delimited by what can be known through activist archives. By centring these materials, I illuminate how oppositional claims were produced, authenticated, and mobilized, but I also risk occluding other modes of meaning-making such as songs, oral traditions, remembrance, or practices of deliberate silence. My choice to focus on the textual and archival is deliberate as it resists extractive synthesis and avoids violating closed archives, but it narrows the aperture of representation. The analysis that follows should therefore be read as an inquiry into (oppositional) *epistemic practices* rather than a total social history of nuclear testing's consequences. A perhaps obvious, but nonetheless noteworthy, limitation is that the archival record is historically conditioned, which constrains my claims. Activist collections, published campaign materials, and accessible NGO dossiers are over-represented here because they were produced for circulation, preservation, or advocacy; private records, oral histories held by communities, internal administrative files, and classified state documents remain partially or wholly inaccessible. This produces a consequential bias: the archive privileges metropolitan and European actors – those better resourced to mobilize, publish, and deposit records – while many local, indigenous, and community-held knowledge practices are under-documented or absent. The demonstrated transnational linkages therefore may partly reflect differential preservation and circulation capacities rather than the totality of oppositional activity in the Pacific.

As Clémence Maillochon's work demonstrates, local activist networks within Polynesia require other archives, other languages, and often other permissions to study; her research thus serves as a complementary vantage point that partially compensates for the silences that this study cannot fill.<sup>71</sup> Methodologically, I read

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<sup>71</sup> Maillochon, "Les réseaux de militants contre les essais nucléaires français (1959–1996)," p. 23.

these oppositional archives doubly *along and against their grain*: critically but not cynically, attentive to the purposes, audiences, and material forms that shaped their production.

Following Ariella Azoulay's decolonial historiography, I treat conflicting histories not as noise to be reconciled but as distinct, plural, and incommensurable political projects to be held in tension.<sup>72</sup> This stance aligns with the critical-realist orientation of the thesis: it accepts the existence of a real world of harm and secrecy, yet insists that knowledge of it is mediated, partial, and structured by power. Rather than juxtaposing "official" and "unofficial" accounts, I read official non-knowledge, secrecy, denial, bureaucratic opacity, through its traces in oppositional knowledge, as *absence* and distortion.<sup>73</sup>

This non-reconciliatory method refuses to adjudicate between competing truth claims on the empirical level; instead, it seeks to expose the generative mechanisms by which certain forms of knowing become authoritative. Evaluation thus takes place at the level of mechanism. Such an approach aims toward a more just epistemology, one that foregrounds the right to be heard and the conditions that make hearing possible.

This can be compared to an alternative application and understanding, for instance applying archival anthropologist Trouillot's framework to the anti-test archives would highlight how silence is produced in multiple, mutually reinforcing stages.<sup>74</sup> State secrecy generates an initial lacuna in the documentary record; activist archival practice, then, addresses certain absences (e.g. classified medical records, non-disclosure agreements for workers) by producing testimony, reports, and campaign literature. Yet the very choices activists make – what to preserve, how to format evidence for international advocacy – create new silences, themselves also products of hierarchies of knowledge.<sup>75</sup> The narratives that activists publish determine which voices are heard in political fora, and over time these counter-archives can become the primary basis for how the history of testing is retrospectively understood. Thus, the oppositional archives that are most "audible" both contest official silencing and occlude other knowledge forms through their selection, presentation, and circulation practices. This double dynamic of witness activism, simultaneously giving voice and producing silences, informs my historical analysis and description of the figure

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<sup>72</sup> Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*.

<sup>73</sup> Danermark, Ekström, and Karlsson, *Explaining Society: Critical Realism in the Social Sciences*, p. 13.

<sup>74</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2015).

<sup>75</sup> See for instance Anaïs Maurer's argument on the environmental NGO media-complex silence on local agency and advocacy. Maurer and Hogue, "Introduction: Transnational Nuclear Imperialisms"; Anaïs Maurer, "Snaring the Nuclear Sun: Decolonial Ecologies in Titaua Peu's Mutismes: E 'Ore te Vāvā," *Contemporary Pacific* 32, no. 2 (2020).

of witness activism to describe what it does and how it changes over time relative to various paradigmatic ways of making claims, but it is not understood as corrective to silence as such.

Finally, ethical constraints guide every empirical choice. I do not engage or reproduce sensitive medical data about identifiable individuals; where possible, I rely on publicly accessible materials. Legal restrictions and the ethical imperative not to re-expose vulnerable witnesses necessarily limit the scope of the study. My analysis of witnessing thus operates at the level of epistemic form and political function rather than individual biography.

My own position as a researcher trained within European academic traditions, working primarily with archives and materials accessible through transnational activist networks, means that I engage sources already shaped by unequal colonial and geopolitical relations. Epistemically, this approach is feasible because oppositional claims themselves, as documented in accessible archives, already illuminate the witness activist practices entangled in dynamics of secrecy, uncertainty, and colonial power in nuclear governance, as remains. By situating these claims in relation to the broader silences, I seek to write a history that is attentive both to the potentials and to the limits of the surviving records.

### **1.4.2 Scientific uncertainty and cross-disciplinary limits**

A central empirical concern of the thesis is the counter-mobilization around scientific uncertainty regarding the consequences of nuclear testing. Rather than treating uncertainty as an unfortunate by-product of limited data, I analyse it as a political and epistemic resource. In the colonial test sites of the Pacific, uncertainty was not merely endured; it was actively produced, managed, and instrumentalised. As historians of science have demonstrated, doubt can function as a political technology – a means of distributing ignorance unevenly, deferring liability, and shielding strategic and metropolitan interests. In this sense, uncertainty operated as a form of governance: it structured who could claim harm, whose knowledge counted, and whose exposure remained officially unproven. Within this configuration, radiation effects are not merely a biomedical problem but a social and epistemological one: who may speak about harm, in what register, and with what evidentiary force.<sup>76</sup> However, this thesis is not an epidemiological or dosimetric study and I do not perform original radiobiological measurements or epidemiological causal inference. Still, scientific claims are used to adjudicate some historical claims made by the test opposition, for instance when documentation becomes de-classified and retrospective public health studies are made.

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<sup>76</sup> In line with Hecht's concept of *nuclearity* see above and Hecht, *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade*.

For the historian, the consequence is profound. Sources are saturated with the rhetoric of expertise and the performative authority of quantification. To work critically within such material requires treating uncertainty itself as a historical variable, produced, circulated, and institutionalized. The anti-testing movements and actors under study did not simply contest specific facts; they contested the epistemic architecture through which facts were recognized. Their archives preserve this struggle for epistemic legitimacy; how activists translated lived exposure into data, linked personal testimony with scientific citation, and thereby reconfigured what could count as evidence. The archive thus becomes a site where the politics of uncertainty are materially enacted.

### 1.4.3 Sources, method, and the epistemological stance of critical realism

Critical realism offers a philosophical vocabulary for understanding this entanglement of knowledge, power, and materiality without collapsing one into the other. It insists that reality exists independently of our perception, but that our access to it is mediated by historically contingent epistemic forms. For this project, that distinction between ontology and epistemology is crucial. The physical reality of radioactive contamination is not in question; what is in question are the mechanisms that structure who can know it, how, and with what authority.

This perspective allows me to analyse witness activism not as a substitute for science but as a parallel epistemic practice oriented toward the same real phenomena under different conditions of access. Activist documentation, therefore, becomes a window onto the *mechanisms* – institutional, discursive, and affective – that generate both knowledge and ignorance. Critical realism also provides the justification for methodological pluralism<sup>77</sup> where textual analysis, archival ethnography, and historiographical reflection operate at different strata of the real and can be combined without succumbing to relativism. The aim is explanatory adequacy rather than total synthesis – a mapping of how epistemic structures emerge and persist.

A leading figure in critical realism, Roy Bhaskar, distinguishes between *Empirical knowledge*: observations and perceptions; *Actual knowledge*: events and processes, whether observed or not; and *Real knowledge*: the underlying structures and mechanisms that generate events.<sup>78</sup> In this study, the real mechanisms of interest include the bureaucratic, archival, political, social, and activist infrastructures that shaped the possibility, limitations, and impossibility of making oppositional claims

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<sup>77</sup> Danermark, Ekström, and Karlsson, *Explaining Society: Critical Realism in the Social Sciences*.

<sup>78</sup> See Roy Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 1998); Ruth Groff, *Critical Realism, Post-positivism, and the Possibility of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2004).

about nuclear testing. Moving between these levels involves the use of conceptualization and theorization; a critical realist method that works from within a given discourse or practice (not a closed system) to expose its contradictions and the conditions that make it possible, rather than applying an external normative standard.<sup>79</sup>

#### 1.4.4 Archival ethnography as method

The sources can be differentiated into three levels. This reflects my methodological treatment of the archive as both a source and a subject matter: the documents within provide empirical data, but their organization, metadata, and provenance also constitute historical evidence of how opposition was institutionalized. Catalogue structures, access restrictions, and preservation choices are not neutral; they record the shifting relationship between activism, surveillance, and international advocacy.

1. Activist archives: the Danielssons' collections (KTM BD, Oslo, and Tahiti holdings), Obsarm archives (Lyon), with Bruno Barrillot's dossiers and publications and documents of Association des vétérans des essais nucléaires (AVEN). These archives are described more in detail via archival ethnography in Chapter 5, which is based on the other two levels.
2. My own archival fieldnotes and photographs from archival research in 2019–2022 documenting material form, order, and presentation of the archives. Discussed in the following section.
3. Published activist outputs: *Moruroa, mon amour* (1974 first published in French in 1974, and subsequently in English and Swedish in 1977), *Poisoned Reign* (1986), Obsarm reports, Greenpeace booklets, Action Alerts, and contemporaneous press coverage. These sources exist both in the activist archives and outside. They are primarily examined in Chapters 6 to 8.

The question is what kind of epistemic testimonial practices takes place vis-a-vis testing of nuclear weapons? There are books, studies, memory-spaces, reports, pamphlets, and court cases, as well as collections of testimonies made by local organizations collaborating with wider NGO-projects and printed in pamphlets. As Didier Fassin suggests, the categories, epistemic weight and forms of witnessing evolved over the later decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a shift that will be examined in the empirical sections. The anti-test archives contain a range of materials, including activist documents, reports, and grey literature from witnesses. These sources reveal the processes of recording the narratives and perspectives of those who have been

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<sup>79</sup> Danermark, Ekström, and Karlsson, *Explaining Society: Critical Realism in the Social Sciences*, see especially chapter 5, "Generalization, Scientific Inference and Models for Explanatory Social Science", 96–134, and chapter 6, "Theory in ...", 135–164.



silenced, displaced, fallen ill, or faced hardship and uncertainty due to nuclear testing.

In addition to testimony, these archives often include biographical and historical syntheses, along with other elements such as statistics, chronologies, photographs, maps, letters, and test documentation.

To operationalize this stance, I adopt an *archival ethnography* hybrid of historical and anthropological techniques that treats archival practice itself as a social process. Archival ethnography is used at the outset in the research design process and as the first empirical chapter of describing the archives. It entails both immersion in and analytical distancing from the archive, and merits further description.<sup>80</sup> This involves three analytical moves: (1) observing and recording the institutional praxis and culture of archives (the rules of access, informal hierarchies, and material arrangements); (2) analyzing the documentary practices of activists (their logics of classification, publication, and evidentiary formatting); and (3) reflecting on my own epistemic entanglement within these systems. I describe archives and records, and my personal experience of being in the archives, not only in terms of their content but also their materiality (boxes, files, type of storing methods, shelves, buildings, climate), order, access protocols, and the circumstances of my encounter with them.

I worked as an archivist for two months in the Bengt Danielsson archives in Oslo in the summer of 2017, making it searchable and traceable, before I started my actual research on it. Thereby I have insight into how the material came to take the form of archive that it has today, and the way it looked before. I also have an archival ground for looking at records, what is sorted, and how it is sorted out that will be elaborated on in the chapter on the structure and history of the two main archives of the study, the Bengt Danielsson archive and Obsarm's collections. However, I understand the source material throughout the thesis as remnants of practices that I attempt to make sense of, so that for instance published works also fall under this category of archive. The central source materials are consequences and products of the activist efforts against nuclear weapons testing, and part of oppositional knowledge production. The broad take on the general meaning of anti-testing efforts for the wider nuclear disarmament project is specified with exemplifying activities in the anti-nuclear network of circulating information and knowledge. In practice, the method unfolds through fieldnotes, provenance mapping, and interpretive triangulation. Each interpretive claim is traceable to an archival event, an encounter, a catalogue reference, or a material observation – thus maintaining a transparent chain of inference. The goal is not ethnography *of* people, but ethnography *of*

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<sup>80</sup> Comparable methods are used in studies made in Antoinette M. Burton, *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005).

*epistemic infrastructures*: the human and material networks through which witness activism made its claims legible.

I am a trained ethnographer, usually taking fieldnotes that become part of the material that I base the description on.<sup>81</sup> I do this in several stages of analytic extensive and intensive work of refinement, meaning that in the first instance I go through a lot of documents and describe them and the situation in the archive quite quickly, and then go back to central documents and describe them more meticulously. In the following I make a description of my mode of operation. To work ethnographically in an archive is to enter an institutional field that produces, curates, and withholds knowledge; it is to perform a particular kind of participant observation whose site is stacks, registers, accession files, catalogues, reading-room practices, and the quotidian protocols of custody. Methodologically, participant observation properly understood teaches us to attend to practices, routines, and tacit knowledges as data, and to treat the researcher's notebook as an instrument whose outputs are interpretive inferences, not neutral transcriptions.<sup>82</sup>

I was at the Danielsson archives in Oslo at the Kon-Tiki Museum for 10 days in November 2020 and the Obsarm archives for two weeks in June 2021. Archives in Tahiti were consulted during my stay there in March-April 2022. I took notes at the archive, when working with the material. The fieldnotes are not digitized in their entirety but dated and time stamped for reference. I have used paper-notebooks and pen, and most often photographed the material at an early stage (see below). In the notes I wrote: what repository I worked with, the main contacts who made the archives available, if I could be in the archive myself and go through the material (which was the case in the Danielsson archive in Oslo), the shelf-mark, type of shelf or case, mark on archival box, and the folder name and ID/item number when applicable. I also briefly noted my purpose, if specific, e.g. if I wanted to trace a specific argument or testimony, and the conditions of access, if certain documents were restricted or if I had to get permission from someone to look at the files. Further, I noted the material conditions for my note-taking and work.

At this stage, if I was allowed to take photographs of the documents, which was almost always the case, I usually photocopied the documents with my smartphone and directly stored them on my hard drive. The photos were structured in a system that mirrors the structure of the respective archive/repository, and here I also had the opportunity to name the specific image files. Some larger documents such as

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<sup>81</sup> This approach to archives is based on Caroline Gatt, *An Ethnography of Global Environmentalism: Becoming Friends of the Earth* (New York: Routledge, 2018); O.E. Johannes Stenberg, Anton Öhman, and Reidar Solsvik, *Bengt Danielsson Archive. Preliminary Catalogue, August 2017* (Oslo: The Kon-Tiki Museum, 2017). On archival material and classifications of it as a site of contestation over history and acknowledgement in French colonial contexts, see Marc Andre, "Algeria in the Archives," *New Left Review*, no. 149 (2024).

<sup>82</sup> James P. Spradley, *Participant Observation* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2016).

pamphlets, reports, and books were copied in an application called Adobe Scan, directly to PDF. The other formats were TIFF and JPEG. This digitized archive/data set was based on curatorial decisions guided by my analytic principles and methods; meaning that I look for documents relating to the tests and oppositional knowledge production on the tests in a wider sense. This meant that, for instance, a newsletter on coral research could be of interest due to its archival context in a folder. A way of limiting this digitized mirror archive was contextual, and dependent on the primary description of the document above (where a specific document is located; if it is sorted within a box or folder, for instance labelled *essais nucleaires*; the purpose of me retrieving it, for instance if I was looking at it to reproduce<sup>83</sup> an argument found in a published work).

These somewhat practical notes and photocopying, and extensive work with the archive, are followed by a more intensive stage of note taking. Here I make a more detailed physical description of the archive, such as its built structure, order of documents, how it looks and feels, and the materiality of certain documents.<sup>84</sup>

I conduct a close material and spatial analysis of archival documents, attending to their placement, ordering, and proximity to other materials, as well as to classificatory markers in boxes and catalogues. Physical features – such as paper stock, format, staples, marginalia, stamps, stains, and other traces of handling – are treated as evidence of circulation, use, and institutional control rather than as incidental attributes. Archival access protocols, including request procedures and rules governing physical handling, are recorded as part of the epistemic infrastructure of the archive, shaping what can be consulted, reproduced, and known.

This material analysis is complemented by close attention to paratextual elements, annotations, and marginalia, including handwriting, corrections, inserts, and signatures, which are documented and selectively transcribed. Interactions with archivists, curators, activists, and other researchers are also recorded where they bear on provenance, interpretation, or access, alongside references to external events, organizations, and related archival sites.

Reflexive fieldnotes capture initial interpretive moves, moments of uncertainty or surprise, and emerging hypotheses, as well as the situated conditions under which particular documents are encountered. Together, these practices treat the archive not as a neutral repository but as an active site of knowledge production, aligning with

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<sup>83</sup> In critical realism retrodution is “a thought operation involving a reconstruction of the basic conditions for anything to be what it is ... what properties are required for a phenomenon to exist”. Danermark, Ekström, and Karlsson, *Explaining Society: Critical Realism in the Social Sciences*, p. 224.

<sup>84</sup> This approach takes further inspiration from the works of Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Arlette Farge, *Le goût de l'archive* (Paris: Seuil, 1989).

Catherine Trundle's analysis of how nuclear veterans and activists mobilize archival materials to construct and legitimate claims to harm and recognition.<sup>85</sup> Trundle views the archives of Fijian, British, and New Zealand nuclear test veterans as significant *practices* in their own right, not merely as raw material for reconstructing historical events (though that remains important), but also as sites for examining the material conditions, processes of compilation, agency, and the remnants that shape claims about nuclear test sites, justice, and victimhood. Thus, the archive is not just a repository for retrieving knowledge but a dynamic space of knowledge production.<sup>86</sup> I am aware that this is a relatively unorthodox understanding of the archive in historical research. However, this understanding amounts to an analytical distance compared to a conventional approach, as the unproblematized archive and document risks hiding contradictions rather than foregrounding them. The ethnographic method of descriptions of materiality and the ability to recontextualize practices adds analytical depth as the archives themselves become part of the problem of knowledge production. I argue that the closeness and distance to the material combining historical and ethnographic method, respectively, reinforce each other.

Images reproduced in this work function on multiple, intersecting levels. They are illustrative, documenting material and archival evidence for descriptive clarity, while simultaneously serving as analytical tools that instantiate and support the arguments being made. Each image is not merely decorative: it compresses spatial, temporal, or procedural information, evidencing practices, relationships, or interventions that would otherwise require extended textual explanation. In this sense, images operate both as methodological instruments – allowing the researcher and reader to trace archival and epistemic practices – and as referential claims, concretizing abstract analytical moves and demonstrating the processes by which knowledge, testimony, or oppositional claims were produced, circulated, and validated.

#### 1.4.6 Strengths and constraints of archival ethnography

Every methodological gain incurs a corresponding limitation. Treating archives as active sites of practice and using fieldnotes, photographs, and a reconstructed digital

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<sup>85</sup> Catherine Trundle, "Searching for Culpability in the Archives: Commonwealth Nuclear Test Veterans' Claims for Compensation," *History & Anthropology* 22, no. 4 (2011).

<sup>86</sup> Catherine Trundle, "Searching for Culpability in the Archives: Commonwealth Nuclear Test Veterans' Claims for Compensation,"; Catherine Trundle and Brydie Isobel Scott, "Elusive Genes: Nuclear Test Veterans' Experiences of Genetic Citizenship and Biomedical Refusal," *Medical Anthropology* 32, no. 6 (2013); Catherine Trundle, "Translating Proof: Contested Illness, Radiation Exposure, and the Health Claims of Nuclear Test Veterans" in *Personhood in the Age of Biolegality: Brave New Law*, eds. Marc de Leeuw and Sonja van Wichelen (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020).

archive produces rich evidence about materiality, provenance, and the processes of authentication. Yet the ethnographic encounter itself is performative and situated: the presence of the researcher, the access protocols imposed by repositories, and the selective digitization or copying practices shape what is seen and recorded. Fieldnotes are necessarily interpretive; photographs and photocopies collapse contextual layers (shelf order, ambient environment, or unrecorded provenance conversations) into images and files. The reconstructed archive on my hard drive is a curated representation created through specific selection and ordering choices that cannot fully replicate the embodied experience of local custodians or the original provenance contexts.

A central methodological risk attends this approach: ethnographic proximity to the archive can harden into intellectual collusion. The habits learned in the reading room, the affective orientations, the persuasive rhetoric of an activist report, the authority embedded in a carefully curated dossier may incline the researcher to adopt, uncritically, the archive's own epistemic commitments. Left unmarked, that tendency potentially converts both emancipatory and depoliticizing materials into new orthodoxies; the oppositional archive, in short, may become the historian's unquestioned authority. Trouillot's account of how silences are produced at different moments of source-making and historiography might again be instructive here; counter-archives amplify certain voices precisely because they fill gaps, but they also instantiate new absences by privileging formats, languages, and actors that circulate effectively in metropolitan and international fora.<sup>87</sup> To leave this reflexive problem unarticulated is to risk reinscribing the very power geometries the analysis seeks to unsettle. A critical realist position is therefore necessary: it allows us to maintain that materially grounded, more adequate accounts of nuclear harm were in fact produced, and that, from a historical adjudicative standpoint, some claims were better warranted than others. Acknowledging this does not entail romanticising anti-testing archives or treating activist knowledge as epistemically pure. Rather, it requires analysing how witness activists operated within asymmetrical epistemic fields, where access to instruments, data, and institutional authority was unevenly distributed. Their claims were situated, strategic, and sometimes partial, yet they could nonetheless approximate the real conditions of exposure more closely than official accounts structured by secrecy and colonial governance.

## 1.5 Aim and Research Questions

This thesis investigates how witness activism functioned as an epistemic response to nuclear testing in the Cold War colonial Pacific (c. 1950s-2000s). It examines

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<sup>87</sup> Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*.

how activists transformed testimony, documentation, and archiving into tools that challenged state secrecy and expert monopoly, thereby producing alternative regimes of truth over the test period and its immediate aftermath. Theoretically, the project combines critical realism (to conceptualize the generative mechanisms of knowledge and ignorance), testimony theory (analysed through the epistemic modalities *testis*, *superstes*, *auctor*, and *history*), the history of knowledge, and archival ethnography (to treat archives as living sites of practice rather than static repositories).

The overarching inquiry is not merely descriptive – how activists documented nuclear harm – but explanatory: what conditions made witness activism possible, what contradictions it revealed, and what epistemic forms it created. The questions can thus be stated as follows:

*Emergence and Conditions:* How, when, and under what social, political, and epistemic conditions did witness activism emerge in the Pacific as a form of oppositional knowledge production? Which actors, resources, and infrastructures enabled its interventions?

*Techniques and Practices:* By what rhetorical, evidentiary, and material techniques did activists produce, authenticate, and circulate oppositional claims, and how did these practices reshape the boundaries between expert, witness, and historian?

*Limits and Contradictions:* What epistemic limits and internal contradictions did witness activism itself reveal – between advocacy and documentation, local and transnational frames – and how can recognizing these inform more collective, critical, and decolonial approaches to reckoning with nuclear harm and the reality of nuclear weapons at large?

Together, these questions operationalize the theoretical problem that drives the thesis: how oppositional knowledge on nuclear weapons tests in the Pacific is made credible under conditions of secrecy and inequality. Addressing them requires moving between different levels of analysis – archival ethnography, textual interpretation, and circulation studies – to reconstruct the epistemic and political life of test site testimony.

On the basis of these materials and methods, the methodological and theoretical chapters develop witness activism as both an analytical figure and a theoretical tool. The empirical chapters on the Danielssons and Obsarm do not merely apply this concept but test and refine it by reconstructing the concrete practices, publics, and institutional effects of oppositional knowledge-making over time.

As an analytical figure, witness activism denotes a historically identifiable actor-type whose documented practices – such as field reports, maps, testimonies, annotated publications, etc. – can be traced across multiple archival sites and political contexts. As a theoretical tool, it functions as a bridging concept that links testimony theory, the history of knowledge, and critical realism, enabling an

explanation of how these practices operated simultaneously as modes of knowledge production and as forms of political contention under conditions of secrecy and contested expertise.

## 1.6 Disposition

To examine this the structure of the thesis, described in detail below, is as follows: Chapters 1 to 3 develop the problem and position the study in relation to existing literature and conceptual tools Such as critical realism, testimony theory, history of knowledge and archival ethnography approaches. Chapters 5 to 8 apply those tools in archival ethnography and close readings that in turn refine the theoretical account. Throughout, the witness activist position and its modalities of testimony – testis, superstes, auctor, and histor – are deployed analytically. Chapter 9, finally, synthesises findings, discusses implications of witness activism and the study of it for memory and disarmament debates and reparations, and points toward collective, critical, and decolonial frameworks for addressing the slow violence of nuclear testing.

Chapter 1, this chapter, *Challenges of Knowing Nuclear Weapons*, introduces the central puzzle: how knowledge about the tests was constructed and contested and why the analysis of testimony and experiential authority matter in this.

Chapter 2, *The Global Cold War Witnessed from an Anti-Nuclear-Testing Perspective*, situates the thesis within scholarship on the Cold War Pacific, nuclearity, and transnational anti-nuclear protest. It reconstructs the relevant historiography and state of the art, with particular attention to debates over military and scientific knowledge production, secrecy, and the role of civil-society actors in generating oppositional knowledge under conditions of uncertainty and control. In doing so, the chapter identifies the analytical problem to which the thesis responds: how nuclear weapons tests became knowable, contestable, and politically actionable outside state and military institutions. The chapter further develops the methodological and conceptual framework of the study. Drawing on the history of knowledge, archival ethnography, and testimony studies, and operationalized through critical realism and retroduction, it elaborates how the archives are read through *witness activism* as an analytical figure. Witness activism is introduced both as a historically identifiable actor-type and as a theoretical tool for analysing the epistemic and political work of oppositional knowledge-making. The chapter thus establishes the conceptual apparatus that guides the empirical analyses in the chapters that follow. Before this, however, a theoretical elaboration on testimony and knowledge is made.

Chapter 3, *Witness Activism as a Theoretical Tool to Explain Oppositional Knowledge Production*, develops a theoretical account of how testimony and

individual experience is transformed into politically consequential knowledge. Drawing on testimony theory – particularly the differentiated modalities of *testis*, *superstes*, *auctor*, and *histor* – alongside scholarship on humanitarian knowledge politics and archival practice, the chapter specifies the mechanisms through which testimony, documentation, and strategies of circulation acquire epistemic authority. In doing so, it clarifies how witness activism operates analytically to connect practices of witnessing to broader regimes of credibility, recognition, and contestation.

Chapter 4, *Archival Ethnography and Description of Sources*, turns to the material conditions of this knowledge production by examining the two primary activist archives. Based on fieldnotes from sustained engagement with the Danielsson and Obsarm collections, the chapter treats activist archives as dynamic and contested sites in which knowledge is assembled, ordered, and made available for use. Temporally grounded in the present of the archive, it reflects on how archival organization, access practices, and researcher encounter shape both interpretation and historical possibility.

Chapter 5, *The Danielssons' Trajectory: From South Seas Ethnography to Anti-testing Testimony*, traces Bengt and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson's evolution from post-Kon-Tiki ethnography to early interventions against the CEP, showing how publications such as *Moruroa, mon amour* (1974–77) emerged from fieldwork, archival engagement, and transnational networks. It analyses how their positionality as long-term residents, bilingual mediators, and ethnographic interlocutors enabled them to claim authority as *histor*s, transforming documentary and bureaucratic materials into tools of oppositional knowledge. By situating these practices within the political and constitutional debates surrounding the CEP's inauguration, the chapter demonstrates how their archival and narrative labour rendered local dissent legible beyond the colony.

Chapter 6, *Witnessing the Fait Accompli: The Danielssons' Histor Mode and the Territorial Status Debate*, examines the Danielssons' later works, mainly from the later 1980s and early 1990s – revised editions of *Moruroa, mon amour*, activist journalism, and polemical publications – to show how they systematically wove testimony, parliamentary records, and archival materials into counter-narratives of the CEP. Focusing on their historiographical strategies, rhetorical techniques, and scale-shifting between local and transnational audiences, the chapter highlights how the *histor* mode both mobilized publics and contested institutional secrecy. Together with Chapter 5, it shows how documentary authority and epistemic work enabled anti-CEP activism to operate as both historical inquiry and political intervention, prefiguring later testimonial practices by organizations like Obsarm.

Chapter 7, *Formats and Tactics in Anti-Nuclear Testing Activism*, maps the everyday epistemic work of anti-test networks – newsletters, use of UN reports, contestation of medical and ecological expertise (debates around ciguatera, a type



of food poisoning from ingesting fish contaminated with ciguatoxin) – and the scale-shifting tactics that translated local experience into international advocacy and international frameworks into local counter-agnostology. This chapter articulates the practical repertoire of witness activism. The temporal focus here is the 1980s and early 1990s, where test critical arguments were constructed and the practice of witness activism was cemented in the Danielsson's work.

Chapter 8, *Witnessing, Testimonial Activism, and the Humanitarian Politics of Nuclear Harm*, examines how testimonial archives and human-rights framings shaped debates over recognition and compensation after nuclear testing. Focusing on the 1990s and early 2000s – when testing ended and the post-CEP legacy became juridically contested – the chapter explores how nuclear victimhood was constructed and disputed. Testimony is treated as epistemic labour, translating embodied experience into claims legible within medical, legal, and humanitarian frameworks. Tensions emerge between personal narrative, scientific proof, and legal recognition, showing how compensation regimes privileged harms that could be documented according to metropolitan standards. Rather than a linear story from denial to recognition, the chapter highlights how oppositional knowledge navigated asymmetrical power structures shaped by colonial governance and NGO-politics. The post-testing era reconfigured earlier struggles over uncertainty, accountability, and the politics of harm, demonstrating how humanitarian and scientific framings both enabled and constrained claims, leaving legacies that continue to shape knowledge production and justice efforts around the nuclear tests.

Chapter 9, *Conclusions: Witness Activism and Oppositional Knowledge Production in the Context of French Nuclear Testing in the Pacific*, synthesises empirical and theoretical findings: what witness activism achieved related to the temporally shifting conditions for forms of testimony and testing regimes, where it was constrained, and how its methods can inform decolonial, collective approaches to recognition, memorialization, compensation, and disarmament. The chapter reflects on implications for the historiography of nuclear testing, the politics of measurement and attention, and proposes avenues for further research and public engagement.



# Chapter 2. The Global Cold War Witnessed from an Anti-Nuclear-Testing Perspective

*The Cold War was not simply a unique historical era defined by the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. It is better characterized as a chapter in the “ongoing process of globalization” and so it was as much about creating an economically, politically and militarily integrated ‘free world’ as it was about waging a war of attrition against the soviets.*<sup>88</sup>

This chapter has three sections: a background sketch of the Cold War in the Pacific, an overview of nuclear humanities, and a section that covers the state of the existing research and my contribution to it.

Even though superpower conflict might seem distant from local claims of environmental destruction and testimonials of the test site, the Cold War cannot be ignored in an investigation of knowledge about nuclear weapons. During the recent decades, there has been suggestions and contributions to broaden historical research on the Post-WWII era, understanding the Cold War and the superpower struggle as a global phenomenon with regional characteristics.<sup>89</sup> Analysts of the Cold War’s nuclear condition such as Joseph Masco and Robert Jacobs claim that the testing was part of an unconventional hot war between the superpowers, who were calculating fallout to hit the enemy at the same time as fighting over initiative and ideological advantages with the nuclear armament and deterrence credibility connected to the testing.<sup>90</sup> The French *force de frappe* was not comparable to the

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<sup>88</sup> Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945–1961*, p. 16.

<sup>89</sup> Lorenz M. Lüthi, *Cold Wars: Asia, the Middle East, Europe* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (New York: Basic Books, 2017); Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*; Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Cold War’s Killing Fields: Rethinking the Long Peace* (New York, NY: Harper, 2018).

<sup>90</sup> Masco, “Nuclear Techno-aesthetics: Sensory Politics from Trinity to the Virtual Bomb in Los Alamos”; Joseph Masco, *The Future of Fallout, and Other Episodes in Radioactive World-Making* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).

superpowers' forces, and from the outset it was years behind the US, USSR, and UK. Until the 1970s, it did not function as credible deterrence.<sup>91</sup>

However, both overseas territories and nuclear capabilities were important for French national identity and independent policy, after the Second World War, towards the US or the Anglo-American world (comprising also the UK, the Commonwealth, and the ANZUS<sup>92</sup> pact in the Pacific) as French historians such as J-M Regnault and Sarah Mohamed-Gaillard describe.<sup>93</sup> The post-war period saw a Gaullist mistrust toward these allies regarding the recognition of French sovereignty in Oceania.<sup>94</sup> Nonetheless, in North-South dynamics, I argue nuclear weapons testing of both the old and newer empires were connected under what has been described as the global Cold War. The French bomb and the Cold War can thus be argued to have dual meanings in the Pacific and in Europe: on the one hand projecting independence and strategic autonomy, on the other as part of a consonant nuclear empire.

In recent scholarship, of global historical scope, peace and disarmament studies have mapped broad institutional processes and high-visibility events – most notably Greenpeace's campaigns and the *Rainbow Warrior* bombing – but have paid comparatively little attention to grassroots, anti-nuclear test activism as a transnational phenomenon. Works such as Lawrence S. Wittner's formulate a three-wave framework of nuclear protest (as reactive to Hiroshima/Nagasaki, atmospheric testing and fallout, and the late-Cold War missile crises), and Holger Nehring's account of shifting organizational forms in the peace movement provide invaluable overviews of national and institutional dynamics of the nuclear disarmament

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<sup>91</sup> Westad, *The Cold War: A World History*; Krige, "Technodiplomacy: A Concept and Its Application to U.S.-France Nuclear Weapons Cooperation in the Nixon-Kissinger Era"; Benoît Pelopidas and Sébastien Philippe, "Unfit for Purpose: Reassessing the Development and Deployment of French Nuclear Weapons (1956–1974)" *Cold War History* 21, no. 3 (2021).

<sup>92</sup> ANZUS Australia-New Zealand-United States Defence Treaty and Council is a military alliance signed in September 1952. New Zealand was suspended in 1986 for implementing a nuclear free zone in its territorial waters but maintains the treaty combined with its nuclear free foreign policy. The nuclear connection to the French tests in the 1970s in popular anti-nuclear sentiment in NZ underscores a longstanding national identity factor that nuclear issues in the Pacific have a potential to sway domestic opinion. The AUKUS treaty of 2021 highlights the maintenance of this split over the nuclear issue. See Michael Pugh, *The ANZUS Crisis, Nuclear Visiting and Deterrence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) especially chapter 6, "Anti-Nuclear Politics"; Lyndon Burford, "National Identity and Nuclear Disarmament Advocacy by Canada and New Zealand" (PhD Diss, Auckland: The University of Auckland, 2016); L. Tamamizu, "The Losing Battle of Goliath: The Failed Management of an American Alliance and the Asymmetric Intra-Alliance Negotiation under the ANZUS Dispute (1984–1986)," *Political Science* 75, no. 3 (2023).

<sup>93</sup> Sarah Mohamed-Gaillard, *L'Archipel de la puissance?: La Politique de la France dans le Pacifique Sud de 1946 à 1998* (Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2010); Regnault, *La France à l'opposé d'elle-même: Essais d'histoire politique de l'Océanie*.

<sup>94</sup> Regnault, *La France à l'opposé d'elle-même: Essais d'histoire politique de l'Océanie*.

movements.<sup>95</sup> The global perspective tends to treat the Pacific anti-testing struggle as a backdrop to larger waves of Northern activism, privileging mass-mediated moments over the everyday work of documentation, testimony, and local-global translation.

My contribution is to bring these oppositional knowledge-production practices into dialogue with existing frameworks, treating activist archives not as ancillary footnotes but as primary sites where local evidence, moral witnessing, and anti-colonial solidarity were forged and transmitted. Through a critical-realist lens, I trace how these archives instantiate relational structures between agency and power: how observers on site made witness activism, how their data and narratives undermined official accounts, and how their transnational networks negotiated scales from atoll to the United Nations. In doing so, I both complicate Wittner's wave metaphor – revealing continuities of testimony across chronological ruptures – and unsettle Nehring's local vs. global binary, demonstrating that Pacific-based anti-testing archival practices were simultaneously rooted in place and constitutively transnational. This archival focus thus opens new pathways for understanding the disarmament peace movement's epistemic politics and the enduring legacy of anti-nuclear test activism in relation to wider societal shifts and trends.

## 2.1 Naming and Timing the Cold War in the Pacific

Providing an overview of the Pacific during the Cold War is necessarily selective: the period extends roughly from 1945 into the 1990s, but its political, environmental and social consequences reach well into the present. While the dissertation extends into the 2000s, it treats the Cold War not as a closed period but as a durable regime of nuclear governance, secrecy, and colonial power in the Pacific. This section sketches the historical, strategic, and juridical landscape against which anti-testing oppositions formed, circulated claims, and sought recognition. Its purpose is not a comprehensive history of the region, but a focused orientation to the geopolitical and colonial conditions that made the Pacific a laboratory for nuclear weapons and a site for sustained contestation.

After 1945, the Pacific was signified by emergent Cold War rivalries: the oceanic expanse and its island chains became theatres for military basing, alliance-building and, centrally for this thesis, weapons testing. Nuclear powers located atmospheric and underground tests on atolls and deserts that were politically peripheral to

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<sup>95</sup> Holger Nehring, "Peace Movements" in *The History of Social Movements in Global Perspective A Survey*, ed. by Stefan Berger and Holger Nehring (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017); Lawrence S. Wittner, *Confronting the Bomb: A Short History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009).

metropolitan publics. This was not because those sites were empty, but because they sat in colonial or dependent jurisdictions whose inhabitants had limited political voice. Major test programs include the United States in the Marshall Islands (Bikini, Enewetak), the United Kingdom in Australia (Maralinga) and Kiribati, and the French program in Polynesia (Moruroa, Fangataufa). These programs were embedded in webs of alliance, colonial administration, and strategic calculus that treated remoteness as an operational advantage.

Calling this era simply the “Cold War in the Pacific” risks masking continuities of imperial governance and local dispossession. Peace researcher Johan Galtung’s characterization of the Pacific as a “hidden backyard” of Cold War politics is instructive, as the region was peripheral in many Cold War narratives, yet central to practices of risk displacement and resource extraction.<sup>96</sup> From a decolonial perspective, the Cold War operated as a continuation – by other means – of imperial logics as the tests were often carried out on territories whose sovereignty was constrained, and whose peoples bore disproportionate environmental, health, and socioeconomic burdens. These features shaped the conditions of oppositional knowledge-making.

The Pacific Cold War was not merely a geopolitical theatre but a set of layered, long-term relationships, colonial administration and independence struggles, alliance politics, scientific practice and local life-worlds, whose interactions produced both the tests and the oppositional archives that contested them. Understanding that nexus is essential for reading how witness activism emerged, why certain claims were possible, and why others remained occluded.

Postcolonial scholar Jini Kim Watson understands the recent Cold War entangled histories of East and Southeast Asia through the bipolar rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union as triangulated. The region experienced the Cold War not merely as a historical epoch or event, but as a knowledge project.<sup>97</sup> As noted, the term “Cold” War is also a misnomer when describing the violent conflicts in Asia and other parts of the Third World or Global South. Still, the actual events connected to the Cold War merits its use in the analysis and background of the protests and mobilization against the tests. Similarly, the designation of 1989 or 1991 as the end of the conflict pertains to the Western hemisphere’s temporality

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<sup>96</sup> Johan Galtung, *Pax Pacifica: Terrorism, the Pacific Hemisphere, Globalisation and Peace Studies* (London: Pluto, 2005).

<sup>97</sup> Jini Kim Watson, *Cold War Reckonings: Authoritarianism and the Genres of Decolonization*; Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2010). Kwon also addresses the limitations of postcolonial theories that attempt to provincialize Europe by neglecting the significant influence of Cold War dynamics on postcolonial elites and their political environments. Kwon suggests that the efforts of theorists like Dipesh Chakrabarty and Partha Chatterjee to disrupt Western modernity overlook how the Cold War’s political imperatives shaped postcolonial states and independence movements.

with the US-USSR conflict and not the more specific contexts in the Pacific such as national liberation and colonial projects. Jini Kim Watson argues that the US Cold War imaginary and strategy tried to “resolve ideological contradictions by distinguishing tolerable Third World right-wing regimes from the “true” enemy of communist totalitarianism via the notion of transition”.<sup>98</sup> France’s colonial territories fitted into this logic of containing attempts at liberation built on a form of Oceanian Gaullist ideology, while simultaneously under a policy of French sovereignty that the militarization of the test sites and administrative integration facilitated, to keep US/ANZUS and rising Chinese influence at bay.<sup>99</sup>

The transnational work of actors such as the Danielssons, Obsarm and Greenpeace demonstrates that Pacific nuclear test opposition was rarely an isolated local phenomenon: rather, it belonged to multiple Cold War(s) trajectories that bridged metropolitan centres and colonial peripheries.<sup>100</sup> In particular, the French case – the Gaullist metropole and its overseas Collectivité of French Polynesia – exemplifies how an old empire reconfigured as a nuclear power produced specific conditions of secrecy and political dependency. At the same time, activists of the time often evoked transnational and regional resources by origin or practice (through travel, migration, culture and transnational networks), and they moved evidence, testimony, and counter-expertise across borders.<sup>101</sup> This thesis therefore treats the Pacific test-site mobilizations as one node in a wider web of anti-testing activism, connected, for instance, to the Nevada-Semipalatinsk movement campaigns and it further reads witness activism as a transnational practice of knowledge production and circulation that should be understood in relation to other test-site contestations.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Watson, *Cold War Reckonings: Authoritarianism and the Genres of Decolonization*, p. 6.

<sup>99</sup> Regnault, *La France à l’opposé d’elle-même: Essais d’histoire politique de l’Océanie*.

<sup>100</sup> See Lüthi, *Cold Wars: Asia, the Middle East, Europe*; Chamberlin, *The Cold War’s Killing Fields: Rethinking the Long Peace*, on the conception of questioning and decentering the grand narrative of the Cold War as a duopoly interaction in Europe with the superpowers as sole historic agents.

<sup>101</sup> For instance, in Sahara. Rob Skinner, “Bombs and Border Crossings: Peace Activist Networks and the Post-colonial State in Africa, 1959–62,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 50, no. 3 (2015). See also Robert Gildea and Andrew Tompkins, “The Transnational in the Local: The Larzac Plateau as a Site of Transnational Activism since 1970,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 50, no. 3 (2015).

<sup>102</sup> See George Gregory Rozsa, “The Nevada Movement: A Model of Trans-Indigenous Antinuclear Solidarity,” *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 11, no. 2 (2020); Jacobs, *Nuclear Bodies: The Global Hibakusha*. For the legacy and frictions concerning the nuclear test through biomedical radiation science projects see Susanne Bauer, “Radiation Science after the Cold War: The Politics of Measurement, Risk, and Compensation in Kazakhstan” in *Health, Technologies, and Politics in Post-Soviet Settings Navigating Uncertainties*, eds. Olga Zvonareva, Evgeniya Popova, and Klasien Horstman (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018); Bauer and Penter (eds.), *Tracing the Atom*. The Semipalatinsk test site was the primary testing location of

An example of this convergence and cross-referencing between the issues of international politics and grassroots initiatives is expressed in a conference itinerary from autumn 1991 of Marie-Thérèse Danielsson, found in her archives in Tahiti. First, she went to the *Nevada-Semipalatinsk Conference* 14-20 October in Semipalatinsk and Kourchatov, to which she had invited Oscar Temaru to share experiences of the anti-test struggle in Polynesia with Kazakh and West Shoshone anti-nuclear leaders. Second, she took part in a *Conference on the arms trade*, organized with SANE and the FREEZE movement 1-2 November in New York. And thirdly she went to *World women's congress for a healthy planet* 8-12 November in Miami.<sup>103</sup> Considered together, these engagements indicate the extent to which anti-nuclear activism by the early 1990s operated through transnational circuits that connected different sites of testing and advocacy. Across these settings, testimony appears not only as a form of witnessing but as a recurring mode of articulating claims, enabling experiences from distinct geographical and political contexts to be presented in comparable terms.

In this respect, the material suggests a shift from earlier decades. While activism in the 1970s relied more on locally situated documentation and protest, by the late Cold War period testimonial practices were increasingly coordinated across organizations and events, and more frequently situated within NGO and conference-based formats. This development corresponds to what Valgerður Pálmadóttir describes as the institutionalization of international movements, and to Didier Fassin's observation that forms of testimony became more central within humanitarian and advocacy-oriented politics.<sup>104</sup>

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the Soviet Union. It was located in what is now Eastern Kazakhstan, 150 km west of the town of Semipalatinsk which is now called Semey. The test site was also referred to as "The Polygon" and between 1949 and 1989, the Soviet Union conducted 456 nuclear tests there. See further Togzhan Kassenova, *Atomic Steppe: How Kazakhstan Gave up The Bomb* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2022). The Nevada test site is located in southern Nevada, 105 km northwest of the city of Las Vegas. The site was the main testing location of American nuclear devices from 1951 to 1992, 928 announced nuclear tests occurred there. See Joseph Masco, *The Nuclear Borderlands: The Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006).

<sup>103</sup> MTH archives, box of files dated 1991, Tahiti.

<sup>104</sup> Valgerður Pálmadóttir, "Perplexities of the Personal and the Political: How Women's Liberation Became Women's Human Rights" (PhD Diss. Department of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies, Umeå: Umeå University, 2018). Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*.



## 2.2 The Nuclear Humanities at Issue

*It is often our mightiest projects that most obviously betray the degree of our insecurity.*<sup>105</sup>

The study of test oppositional knowledge production draws on and contributes to the growing field of nuclear humanities, which applies historical, anthropological, and critical theory approaches to challenge conventional, strategy-oriented understandings of the nuclear. Instead of treating nuclear issues solely in terms of deterrence, proliferation, or arms control, nuclear humanities investigates how nuclear technologies shape – and are shaped by – cultural imaginaries, political orders, and moral frameworks.<sup>106</sup> Knowledge and secrecy concerning the development and testing of nuclear weapons is a subject of concern in international relations studies and history today, something that historical research on anti-testing activism has the potential to develop.<sup>107</sup> Hereby the present work of connecting the practices and archival remains of witness activism to wider structures and ideas on what is possible to know about the nuclear condition fills a lacuna of what previous studies have not highlighted, and develops a novel path for addressing critical knowledge production in this context.

In exploring witnesses of the so-called remote test sites and their significance in creating knowledge of the nuclear, I further develop works dealing with nuclear criticism and the unimaginable/imaginary nuclear condition and its moral

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<sup>105</sup> W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2011), p. 14, where the titular character Jaques Austerlitz describes the Antwerp Centraal Station designed by Luis Delacanserie for Leopold II of Belgium.

<sup>106</sup> Hecht, *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade*. See also Christian Dayé Mark Solovey, eds., *Cold War Social Science: Transnational Entanglements* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021); Bauer, “Radiation Science after the Cold War: The Politics of Measurement, Risk, and Compensation in Kazakhstan.”

<sup>107</sup> See for example the research programs Nuclear Knowledges at Sciences Po, RADIANT at the Danish Institute for International Studies, and Alex Wellerstein, “*Knowledge and the Bomb: Nuclear Secrecy in the United States, 1939-2008*” (PhD Diss. Cambridge: Harvard University, 2010); Wellerstein, *Restricted Data: The History of Nuclear Secrecy in the United States*; Donna M. Goldstein and Magdalena E. Stawkowski, “James V. Ned and Yuri E. Dubrova: Cold War Debates and the Genetic Effects of Low-Dose Radiation,” *Journal of the History of Biology* 48, no. 1 (2015); Magdalena Stawkowski “*Radioactive Knowledge: State Control of Scientific Information in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan*” (PhD Diss. University of Colorado, Boulder: Colorado, 2014). For a nuclear policy and security research overview, see Michael Nacht, Michael Frank, and Stanley Prussin, *Nuclear Security: The Nexus Among Science, Technology and Policy* (Cham: Springer, 2021).

implications such as Axel Anderson's, Jacques Derrida's, and Jean-Pierre Dupuy's thinking on the humanities disciplines' relevance for nuclear thinking.<sup>108</sup>

In his 1984 lecture, *No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)*, Jacques Derrida famously framed the nuclear as a primarily textual phenomenon: an object constituted through signification, symbolic exchange, and anticipatory discourse rather than through material aftermath. While this insight captures an important dimension of nuclear deterrence and Cold War semiotics, it risks marginalising the lived, local, and cumulative realities of nuclear weapons testing. Such readings have contributed to an enduring tendency to apprehend the nuclear as abstract, virtual, or perpetually deferred and thereby obscuring the concrete histories of colonial exposure, injury, and environmental transformation at test sites themselves. I here depart from that tradition by foregrounding the material and testimonial dimensions of nuclear experience as they emerged in places subjected to testing.

To begin with, it is necessary to interrogate what nuclear "tests" were understood to be. These events were not simply experimental answers to discrete scientific questions, but deeply ambiguous exercises in military, political, and epistemic control. The term "test" – or *essai* in French – operates as a linguistic passivation, recoding detonations as provisional, technical, and ostensibly non-final. By naming explosions as "tests" of devices and associated technologies, nuclear violence was rhetorically contained: imagined as bounded in time and space, governed by expertise, and insulated from broader consequence. As has been repeatedly shown, this containment was illusory. Fallout travelled, bodies absorbed exposure, and environments were altered irreversibly. Yet the language of testing sustained the fiction that these were not "real" events – no sharp rounds fired, no wars fought – thereby deferring responsibility and muting recognition of harm and the structural coordinates of social reality conditioning the tests.<sup>109</sup> The nuclear devices exploded were, however, real and can be said to function as strategic communication of force.<sup>110</sup>

In global historical scholarship, nuclear weapons testing has been interpreted variously as a Cold War mode of communication, a form of low-intensity warfare, and an expression of a distinctive Cold War rationality embedded in nationalist

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<sup>108</sup> My analysis of their theoretical contribution to nuclear humanities is expanded in the theoretical chapter. Axel Andersson, *Absolut Farmakon: Kärnavfall och Evighet som Tanke och Konst* (Linderöd: 2019); Jacques Derrida, "No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)," *Diacritics* 14, no. 2 (1984); Jean Pierre Dupuy, *The Mark of the Sacred* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2013).

<sup>109</sup> For discussions on passivation, euphemism and metaphor in official nuclear language, see Hugh Gusterson, *Nuclear Rites: A Weapons Laboratory at the End of the Cold War* (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 1996); Crispin Aubrey, *Nukespeak: The Media and the Bomb* (London: Comedia, 1982).

<sup>110</sup> Itty Abraham, "The Ambivalence of Nuclear Histories," *Osiris* 21, no. 1 (2006).

narratives of technological progress and geopolitical power.<sup>111</sup> Nuclear tests functioned as performative demonstrations of state capacity, staging the ability to produce and manage large-scale violence while signalling scientific modernity and strategic resolve.<sup>112</sup> At the height of atmospheric testing in the early 1960s, however, radioactive fallout precipitated a global environmental crisis that exceeded national borders and military intent.<sup>113</sup> As environmental historian Higuchi has shown, this crisis enabled the articulation of “the global environment” as both a coherent object of knowledge and an entity deemed worthy of protection.<sup>114</sup>

The extensive monitoring of radioisotopes in the atmosphere and lithosphere, conducted alongside and in service of military test programs, contributed decisively to the development of Earth system science and integrated biospheric thinking. These efforts fostered ecological models that conceptualized the planet as an interconnected, measurable, and, at least in principle, governable system, an epistemic orientation that Masco and others identify as characteristic of Cold War science.<sup>115</sup> Yet this aspiration to control carries internal contradictions. As the

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<sup>111</sup> Jacobs, *Nuclear Bodies: The Global Hibakusha*; Joseph Masco, “Terraforming Planet Earth: The Age of Fallout,” in *The Politics of Globality since 1945: Assembling the Planet*, Rens van Munster and Casper Sylvest, eds. (London Routledge, 2016).

<sup>112</sup> Benoît Pelopidas, Kjølvs Egeland, and others argue that a dominant deterrence paradigm in security studies circumscribes critical analysis of nuclear weapons by privileging security state-centered epistemic authority. Under this paradigm, the priorities of the non-proliferation regime and national security systematically take precedence over archival availability and transparency. Kjølvs Egeland and Benoît Pelopidas, “European Nuclear Weapons? Zombie Debates and Nuclear Realities,” *European Security* 30, no. 2 (2021). Paul Erickson et al., *How Reason Almost Lost its Mind: The Strange Career of Cold War Rationality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Pelopidas and Philippe, “Unfit for Purpose: Reassessing the Development and Deployment of French Nuclear Weapons (1956–1974)”; Ryan Snyder and Benoît Pelopidas, “New Era or New Error? Technology and the Future of Deterrence,” *International Security* 43, no. 3 (2018); Benoît Pelopidas, Hebatalla Taha, and Tom Vaughan, “How Dawn Turned Into Dusk: Scoping and Closing Possible Nuclear Futures after the Cold War,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* (2024); Benoît Pelopidas, “The Unbearable Lightness of Luck: Three Sources of Overconfidence in the Manageability of Nuclear Crises,” *European Journal of International Security* 2, no. 2 (2017).

<sup>113</sup> Joseph Masco, “The Crisis in Crisis,” *Current Anthropology* 58, no. 15 (2017).

<sup>114</sup> Masco points out that the LTBT was the first arms control agreement as well as the first environmental agreement on a global scale, and that the LTBT mitigated global fallout worries. It made the threat of thermonuclear testing and consequential escalation of levels of ionizing radiation on earth decrease. Masco thus argues for understanding the LTBT as a successful example of how to handle a crisis through international cooperation and treaties. For diplomatic work in dealing with environmental crises, instead of (as he sees being the case now) to freeze or destabilize supra-national political action, see Masco, “The Crisis in Crisis”. The politics of globalizing fallout from the height of atmospheric testing is detailed in Higuchi, *Political Fallout: Nuclear Weapons Testing and the Making of a Global Environmental Crisis*.

<sup>115</sup> Masco, “The Crisis in Crisis” p. 5; Jesse J. Emory, “Radiation Ecologies: Bombs, Bodies and Environment During the Atmospheric Nuclear Testing Period, 1942–1965” (PhD Diss. Bozeman: Montana State University, 2013); Brian Sewell Lindseth, “From Radioactive Fallout to

philosopher physicist Jean-Pierre Dupuy has argued, the nuclear arms race and its enduring radioactive legacies fundamentally undermined the very conditions of control they presupposed. This paradox echoes Günther Anders' earlier warnings about technological development proceeding at a scale and speed detached from democratic deliberation, producing consequences that exceed human foresight and political responsibility.<sup>116</sup>

Scholar Elisabeth DeLoughrey observes that the human capacity to alter the planet on a traceable, global scale emerged alongside the conceptualization of colonies and territories as laboratories, visually and conceptually produced as isolated and distant, for both ecosystem science and nuclear modernity. In conventional histories, nuclear test sites have often been framed as sacrificial spaces for science and power.<sup>117</sup>

Indeed, tests were not conducted in isolation, and the human ecologist and Pacific expert Thomas Malm makes an uncanny equation that the island societies of the Pacific were experimental aquariums for Western anthropological scholarship in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which extends to and crystallizes with the nuclear weapons testing later on.<sup>118</sup> These military-technoscientific spectacles yielded unintended scientific breakthroughs, which have often been narrated separately from the strategic purposes of the tests themselves. As Paul A. Erickson et al. observe, anthropological projects aimed at classifying, mapping, and documenting Pacific societies continued alongside nuclear weapons testing, often without acknowledging their material and political entanglement with it. This epistemic compartmentalization – wherein cultural knowledge production proceeded as if insulated from militarized transformation – was not incidental but constitutive of Cold War knowledge regimes. It is also visible, for example, in the early ethnographic work of the Danielssons prior to *Moruroa, mon amour* (1974), as well as in the writings of other mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century European and American Pacificist scholars and public intellectuals. Such work did not merely overlook nuclear testing; it helped sustain a form of structured non-knowledge by rendering the profound disruption of testing analytically external to the study of acculturation and “primitive culture”, thereby delimiting what could be known, named, or

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Environmental Critique: Ecology and the Politics of Cold War Science” (PhD Diss. San Diego, University of California, 2013); DeLoughrey, “The Myth of Isolates: Ecosystem Ecologies in the Nuclear Pacific” (2013).

<sup>116</sup> Dupuy, *The Mark of the Sacred*.

<sup>117</sup> DeLoughrey, “The Myth of Isolates: Ecosystem Ecologies in the Nuclear Pacific” the concept of the ecosystem emerged from late nineteenth-century scientific research on metabolism, nutrient cycling, and the complex interrelationships between organisms and their physical environment.

<sup>118</sup> Thomas Malm, *De svarta pärlornas ö: Tahiti i centrum och periferi* (Lund: Arkiv, 2003). Teaiwa, “Postscript: Reflections on Militourism, US Imperialism, and American Studies.”

problematized within authoritative scholarly frameworks.<sup>119</sup> While some atoll communities were evacuated due to fallout, others became the focus of anthropological fieldwork that informed particular theories about “human nature”.<sup>120</sup> The case of the Danielssons as witness activists, critical knowledge actors, and their archives provides the possibility to adjust or develop these separations between the anthropological endeavours and nuclear weapons testing.<sup>121</sup> The anthropological gaze was, by political cultural expert/elite actors such as the Danielssons, turned toward the epitomizing weapon of the era and the local expressions of the nuclear project. Although this critique perhaps aligned with other national-strategic interests of the US and the UK, as Sarah Mohamed Gaillard suggests of the anti-CEP efforts, it still contained an element of potential collective generalization against wider imperial-made and maintained disasters.<sup>122</sup>

Within international relations and Cold War studies, scholars such as Itty Abraham have reframed nuclear weapons tests as extended processes of meaning-making rather than discrete events.<sup>123</sup> This aligns with my approach: to view testing not only as a technical or military act, but as a long-duration socio-political process involving institutions, technologies, environmental transformations, and sustained opposition.

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<sup>119</sup> Paul Lyons, *American Pacificism: Oceania in the U.S. Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945–1961*.

<sup>120</sup> Erickson et al., *How Reason Almost Lost its Mind: The Strange Career of Cold War Rationality*; Charles King, *Gods of the Upper Air: How a Circle of Renegade Anthropologists Reinvented Race, Sex, and Gender in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Doubleday, 2019). David H. Price highlights an important connection between post-war anthropology, the Cold War, counterinsurgency and the advent of area studies. Price argues that anthropologists’ collaborations with Cold War military and intelligence agencies significantly influenced mid-century American anthropology. This involvement was fuelled by governmental and private funding for anthropological research, linking both willing and unaware anthropologists with research relevant to security state agencies. Price extensively discusses the CIA’s engagement with the American Anthropological Association (AAA), the emergence of post-war Area Studies programs, and the development of new funding initiatives aligned with Cold War objectives. David H. Price, *Cold War Anthropology: The CIA, the Pentagon, and the Growth of Dual Use Anthropology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

<sup>121</sup> The concept of ‘knowledge actor’ is linked to an expanding view of agency that I build upon in the thesis, and which is developed in the defining central concepts section. See also Johan Östling, David Larsson Heidenblad, and Anna Nilsson Hammar (eds.), *Knowledge Actors: Revisiting Agency in the History of Knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2023).

<sup>122</sup> Sarah Mohamed-Gaillard “Contestations océaniques”, in *Des bombes en Polynésie: Les essais nucléaires français dans le Pacifique*, Renaud Meltz and Alexis Vrignon, eds. (Paris: Éditions Vendémiaire, 2022); Mohamed-Gaillard, *L’archipel de la puissance?: La politique de la France dans le Pacifique Sud de 1946 à 1998*.

<sup>123</sup> Itty Abraham, *South Asian Cultures of the Bomb: Atomic Publics and the State in India and Pakistan* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2009).

I understand that this conception of the testing is relevant to utilize in my study, so as to not focus too much on the test event, the explosion as such, but instead analyse it as an extended process through the opposition to it.

By situating witness activism within nuclear humanities, Pacific colonial history, and broader Cold War trajectories, this thesis addresses a gap in existing scholarship: the relational and transnational production of critical knowledge on nuclear testing. In doing so, it seeks to integrate empirical histories of activism with theoretical debates on testimony, authority, and the epistemic politics of the nuclear age. The following state of the art section goes through the scholarship on oppositional epistemologies, and test-site politics in connection to the nuclear issue, to further specify my argument.

## 2.3 State of the Art: From Nuclear Humanities to Anti-testing Knowledge Production

Researchers in the nuclear humanities and STS have shifted attention away from abstract deterrence debates toward the material, epistemic, and political effects of weapons testing. They show that nuclear programs remade scientific disciplines, global environmental knowledge, and political imaginaries.<sup>124</sup> Rob Nixon's account of slow, dispersed harms, what he terms "slow violence", explains why contamination in disadvantaged communities and long-term health effects are hard to dramatize and therefore easily marginalized in public debate.<sup>125</sup> STS and agnotology literatures foreground how states and institutions manufacture or exploit uncertainty – producing strategic ignorance through secrecy, selective measurement, and institutional framing.<sup>126</sup> These conceptual frames make visible the temporal and epistemic asymmetries that structure nuclear controversies, but they leave open the question of how grassroots actors convert fragments of evidence into durable claims under conditions of secrecy and political inequality, which I here contributes to further.

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<sup>124</sup> Masco, "Terraforming Planet Earth: The Age of Fallout."; Masco, "Nuclear Technoaesthetics: Sensory Politics from Trinity to the Virtual Bomb in Los Alamos"; Masco, *The Future of Fallout, and Other Episodes in Radioactive World-Making*; Hecht, *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade*; Higuchi, *Political Fallout: Nuclear Weapons Testing and the Making of a Global Environmental Crisis*; DeLoughrey, "The Myth of Isolates: Ecosystem Ecologies in the Nuclear Pacific".

<sup>125</sup> Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>126</sup> Oreskes and Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*.

These broad frames (nuclearity, slow violence, (counter-)agnotology) are indispensable for the wider understanding of the nuclear test legacies, but the field needs a finer account of the micro-practices through which oppositional actors make slow harms visible and contest institutional ignorance. Through developing the history of knowledge with testimonial studies and a critical realist perspective, this thesis will demonstrate how these practices took shape and were constituted by socio-historical conditions.

### 2.3.1 The thesis location in the field of history of knowledge: Regimes, circulation, and ignorance

Recent field-defining work in the history of knowledge frames knowledge as historically contingent, materially mediated, and politically contested. One strand (Philipp Sarasin and more Focauldian inclined colleagues) foregrounds epistemic regimes, genealogy, and discourse: knowledge is *made* within power-saturated orders that also produce non-knowledge (silence, secrecy, erasure).<sup>127</sup> Another strand (Johan Östling and the Lund University Centre for the History of Knowledge, LUCK) privileges circulation and practice: formats, infrastructures, and arenas through which claims travel and acquire authority.<sup>128</sup>

Conceptually, both strands reject monolithic *Knowledge* and insist on plural knowledges; methodologically, they urge attention to material carriers (in my case, books, pamphlets, reports, statistics, witness files), arenas (media, inquiries, courts, conferences), and gatekeeping (archives, funding, peer review, classification, editorial norms). Building on Sarasin's attention to epistemic regimes and Östling's focus on circulation and practice, I adopt a critical realist stance that treats nuclear harms as real yet fallibly known through oppositional knowledge production. By integrating testimony studies (moral witness, testimonial regimes) and agnotology (organized non-knowledge, secrecy) with a critical-realist concern for comparative adequacy, the framework explains both how oppositional claims were staged and why some of them better tracked the reality and consequences of the tests.

Critical realism (CR) here gives two indispensable resources. Ontologically, it treats radioactive exposure and its mechanisms, such as uptake, pathology, and population

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<sup>127</sup> Philipp Sarasin, "Was ist Wissensgeschichte?" *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 36, no. 1 (2011); Philipp Sarasin, "More Than Just Another Specialty: On the Prospects for the History of Knowledge," *Journal for the History of Knowledge* 1, no. 1 (2020).

<sup>128</sup> Johan Östling, "Vad är kunskapshistoria?" *Historisk Tidskrift* 135, no. 1 (2015); Johan Östling, Erling Sandmo, David Larsson Heidenblad, Anna Nilsson Hammar, and Kari H. Nordberg, (eds.), *Circulation of Knowledge: Explorations in the History of Knowledge* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2018); Johan Östling, Niklas Olsen, and David Larsson Heidenblad, *Histories of Knowledge in Postwar Scandinavia: Actors, Arenas, and Aspirations* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020); Östling, Larsson Heidenblad, and Nilsson Hammar, *Knowledge Actors: Revisiting Agency in the History of Knowledge*.

effects, as real strata in the world that may be hidden, mismeasured, or politically occluded. Epistemologically, CR is fallibilist (knowledge is provisional) and pluralist: knowledge is historically situated but claims can still be judged *more* or *less* adequate, meaning the alignment of sociopolitical structure, historical claims, testimony, material traces, measurement, and explanatory causal pathways. This lets me evaluate competing claims about reality without abandoning an anthropological understanding of knowledge as what actors at a given time recognize as such. By integrating testimony studies, I conceptualize witness activism as a historical knowledge practice that operates across arenas, mobilizes artifacts (documents, measurements, images), and confronts organized non-knowledge (secrecy, methodological omission). Methodologically, I extend circulation-focused approaches with published material, testimonial records, and protest repertoires. This synthesis advances the field beyond descriptive eclecticism while retaining a fine-grained account of how knowledge moves, is blocked, and sometimes becomes truer in specific situations. It can be schematically represented in a simplified table of two history of knowledge positions and my synthesizing approach (see Table 1 below).

**Table 1. Two history of knowledge positions and my synthesizing approach**

| <b>Dimension</b>             | <b>Sarasin &amp; genealogical strand</b>                       | <b>Östling &amp; pragmatic strand</b>                               | <b>My synthesis: critical realism and testimony studies</b>                                                                             |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Core aim</b>              | Diagnose epistemic regimes and power/knowledge                 | Trace knowledge in circulation across actors/arenas                 | Explain how witness activism produces/contests knowledge and when it is <i>epistemically strong</i>                                     |
| <b>Theoretical backbone</b>  | Foucauldian genealogy, discourse, regimes of truth             | Eclectic, practice-oriented; cultural history, minimal theory       | <b>Critical realism</b><br>(ontological realism + epistemic relativism) + testimony studies<br>(narrative/ethical dimensions of truth)  |
| <b>Ontology of the world</b> | Suspended/agnostic (emphasis on discourse)                     | Pragmatic/agnostic (emphasis on practices)                          | <b>Stratified reality:</b><br>radioactive harms exist regardless of recognition; mechanisms can be known fallibly                       |
| <b>Epistemology</b>          | Strong constructivism; knowledge as contingent effect of power | Heuristic pluralism; knowledge as what circulates and is recognized | <b>Judgmental rationality:</b><br>some knowledge claims are <i>more adequate</i> given evidence, mechanisms, and corroborated testimony |
| <b>Unit of analysis</b>      | Discourses, problematizations, ruptures                        | Actors, formats, infrastructures, arenas; flows                     | <b>Witness activism</b><br>as a knowledge practice linking actors –arenas–artifacts–claims–counterclaims                                |

Between these conceptual frames and empirical studies lies an emerging literature on testimony, witnessing, and moral authority. Carolyn J. Dean's work on the moral witness shows how testimony is not merely a report of suffering but a historically contingent political and ethical technology that negotiates credibility, genre, and



public effect.<sup>129</sup> Testimonial studies thus unsettle simplistic hierarchies of evidence: first-hand accounts may disrupt expert regimes but can also be absorbed into them. Didier Fassin has shown how humanitarian testimonialism is inflected with power, often constrained or instrumentalized by institutional logics of compassion and recognition.<sup>130</sup> This is elaborated in the theoretical and methodological chapter below.

Here, the history of knowledge perspective offers a powerful supplement. Sarasin insists that the field's task is to historicize knowledge categories themselves, to decipher the ever-changing historicity in notions such as suffering, victim, or violence.<sup>131</sup> Svenja Goltermann has demonstrated this concretely in her history of the "victim", showing how the term carried negative connotations of co-responsibility and pathology until the 1970s.<sup>132</sup> Works such as Fassin's and Goltermann's reveals how testimonial figures – "the victim", "the survivor", "the activist" – cannot be treated as timeless roles, but must be understood as historically contingent epistemic positions that confer, or withhold, authority.

My approach brings these strands together. By integrating testimony studies with agnotology and "slow violence" frames, I analyse not only why oppositional testimony matters but also how it is staged, credentialed, translated, and contested across scientific, legal, and activist arenas. A critical realist perspective allows me to acknowledge testimony as historically contingent and socially constructed (in line with Fassin and Goltermann), while also sustaining the claim that some testimonial and activist knowledge practices track the real more effectively than state-sponsored silences or agnotological regimes. In this sense, my proposed concept of *witness activism* captures the historically specific ways in which oppositional actors forged epistemic authority under conditions of secrecy and colonial power, while also engaging with wider debates on how categories of truth, victimhood, and knowledge themselves shift over time. Integrating perspectives from the history of knowledge and testimony studies with agnotology and the slow-violence frames helps explain not only *why* oppositional testimony matters but *how* it is staged, credentialed, translated in the archives, and contested across public, scientific, and legal arenas.

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<sup>129</sup> Carolyn J. Dean, *The Moral Witness: Trials and Testimony after Genocide* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019).

<sup>130</sup> Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009); Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*.

<sup>131</sup> Sarasin, "More Than Just Another Specialty: On the Prospects for the History of Knowledge" (2020).

<sup>132</sup> Svenja Goltermann, *Victims: Perceptions of Harm in Modern European War and Violence*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024).

### 2.3.2 Contestation, secrecy and contested science around Pacific nuclear weapons tests and test sites

Engaged anthropologists and historians like Barbara Rose Johnston, Holly Barker and Robert Jacobs have documented how scientific uncertainty and political power intertwined to marginalize exposed communities.<sup>133</sup> Johnston and Barker (and the edited volume *Half-Lives & Half-Truths*) foreground how “half-truths”, secrecy, and institutional priorities shaped which harms were rendered visible and which were silenced.<sup>134</sup> Scholars of knowledge infrastructures on nuclear testing and nuclear risk such as Susan Bauer and Benjamin Furst show how states’ research often aims to manage public fear and political aims rather than to prioritize independent verification.<sup>135</sup> Other studies track how institutional paradigms – e.g. the Life Span Study – structured what counted as acceptable evidence, thereby occluding internal-exposure harms that plagued downwind communities.<sup>136</sup>

### 2.3.3 Politics, memory, and knowledge-making in Pacific nuclear activism

In turn, political historians and regional specialists emphasize that the Pacific was not simply a remote testing ground but a contested Cold War arena where imperial and geostrategic rivalries played out in relation to nuclear testing and regional

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<sup>133</sup> Johnston, *Half-Lives and Half-Truths: Confronting the Radioactive Legacies of the Cold War*; Johnston and Barker, *Consequential Damages of Nuclear War: The Rongelap Report*; Robert Jacobs, “Post-nuclear/Post Colonial Challenges to Democratization in the Pacific.” in *International Perspectives on Democratization and Peace*, ed. Narayanan Ganesan (2020); Jacobs, “Nuclear Conquistadors: Military Colonialism in Nuclear Test Site Selection during the Cold War”; Jacobs, *Nuclear Bodies: The Global Hibakusha*; Holly M. Barker, *Bravo for the Marshall: Regaining Control in a Post-Nuclear, Post-Colonial World* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2013).

<sup>134</sup> Johnston, *Half-Lives and Half-Truths: Confronting the Radioactive Legacies of the Cold War*, p. 2.

<sup>135</sup> Furst, “Following Radioactivity in the Pacific Waters. Environmental Surveillance of the French Nuclear Tests (1966-1974)”; Bauer, “Radiation Science after the Cold War: The Politics of Measurement, Risk, and Compensation in Kazakhstan”; Bauer and Penter, *Tracing the Atom*. Susanne Bauer, “Beyond the Nuclear Epicenter: Health research, knowledge infrastructures and secrecy at Semipalatinsk,” *Cahiers du Monde russe* 60, no. 2/3 (2019); Mae-Wan Ho, Alexey V. Nesterenko, Odile Gordon-Lennox, and Peter T. Saunders, “Nuclear Disaster, Trauma, and the Rituals of Scientific Method,” in *Coping Rituals in Fearful Times: An Unexplored Resource for Healing Trauma*, ed. Jeltje Gordon-Lennox (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022).

<sup>136</sup> Emory, “Radiation Ecologies: Bombs, Bodies and Environment During the Atmospheric Nuclear Testing Period, 1942 – 1965”; Robert Jacobs and Mick Broderick, “United Nations Report Reveals the Ongoing Legacy of Nuclear Colonialism in the Marshall Islands,” *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, no. 47 (2012); Jacobs, *Nuclear Bodies: The Global Hibakusha*; Anaïs Maurer, “Bonded by the Bomb: Asian-Oceanian Alliances against French Nuclear Tests,” *Critical Ethnic Studies Journal* 7, no. 2 (2021).

identities.<sup>137</sup> Scholarship on local and transnational protest shows a complex ecology of actors: veteran organizations, local parties, regional networks (Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific), and transnational NGOs mobilized different, sometimes competing, claims about harm, independence, sovereignty, and compensation.<sup>138</sup> Studies of French Polynesia in particular map how anti-test sentiment and legacy of the test site was folded into local politics and decolonial struggles,<sup>139</sup> and how metropolitan politics and geopolitics (ANZUS–French tensions, etc.) shaped responses.<sup>140</sup>

Anaïs Maurer, researcher on nuclear test legacy and opposition in culture, warns that high-visibility campaigning (e.g. Greenpeace’s mediated actions studied by Frank Zelko) can eclipse slower, ground-level claim-making and local channels of justice.<sup>141</sup> Others note that expert or scientized activism on socio-technical issues such as radiation-harm may be co-opted into technocratic “co-management”, losing its critical edge.<sup>142</sup> Sociological critiques by Fassin and Barthe, discussed more fully

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<sup>137</sup> Mohamed-Gaillard, *L’Archipel de la puissance?: La Politique de la France dans le Pacifique Sud de 1946 à 1998*; Regnault, *La France à l’opposé d’elle-même: Essais d’histoire politique de l’Océanie*; Nic Maclellan, “Nuclear Testing and Racism in the Pacific Islands.” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Ethnicity*, ed. Steven Ratuva (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2019); Sarah Mohamed-Gaillard, “Contestations océaniques.”

<sup>138</sup> Lorraine Elliott, “French Nuclear Testing in the Pacific: A Retrospective” *Environmental Politics* 6, no. 2 (1997); Catherine Giraud, “French Nuclear Testing in the Pacific and the 1995 International Court of Justice Decision” *Asia Pacific Journal of Environmental Law* 1, no. 1 & 2 (1996); Ramesh Thakur, “The Last Bang before a Total Ban: French Nuclear Testing in the Pacific” *International Journal* 51, no. 3 (1996); von Stokirch, “The Impact of Nuclear Testing on Politics in French Polynesia”; Swan, *Pasifika Black: Oceania, Anti-colonialism, and the African World*; Maillochon, “Les réseaux de militants contre les essais nucléaires français (1959–1996)”; Gabriel Tetiarahi, “French Nuclear Testing in the South Pacific, or When France Makes Light of Its Duty to Remember,” *The Contemporary Pacific* 17, no. 2 (2005). See also Richard M. Price, “Transnational Civil Society and Advocacy in World Politics,” *World Politics* 55, no. 4 (2003).

<sup>139</sup> Maillochon, “Les réseaux de militants contre les essais nucléaires français (1959–1996)”; Renaud Meltz and Alexis Vignion (eds.) *Des bombes en Polynésie. Les essais nucléaires français dans le Pacifique* (Paris: Éditions Vendémiaire, 2022); Lis Kayser, “Nuclear Nostalgia: Remembering the Nuclear Age at the Hao Atoll, French Polynesia” (PhD Diss. Aarhus University, 2023); Jean-Marc Regnault, *La bombe française dans le Pacifique: l’implantation, 1957–1964* (Tahiti: Scoop éditions, 1993).

<sup>140</sup> Mohamed-Gaillard, “Contestations océaniques.”

<sup>141</sup> Frank S. Zelko, *Make it a Green Peace!: The Rise of Countercultural Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Maurer and Hogue, “Introduction: Transnational Nuclear Imperialisms” (2020); Anaïs Maurer, “Océanitude: Repenser le tribalisme occidental au prisme des nationalismes océaniques,” *FrancoSphères* 8, no. 2 (2019); Maurer, “Snaring the Nuclear Sun: Decolonial Ecologies in Titaua Peu’s Mutismes: E ‘Ore te Vāvā” (2020).

<sup>142</sup> Sezin Topçu, “From Resistance to Co-Management?: Rethinking Scientization in the Contestation of the Technosciences,” *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society* 8, no. 1 (2022); Sezin Topçu, “Atome, gloire et désenchantement: résister à la France nucléaire avant Mai 1968.” in

in the theoretical chapter, complicate the humanitarian and victimhood vocabularies that I hypothesize – and critically test – and have increasingly mediated recognition. Their analyses show how what Fassin terms the *politics of compassion* and Barthe’s notion of the *victimisateur* transform suffering into both a moral resource and a political instrument: legitimizing harm by individualizing it, and instrumentalizing empathy as a mode of governance.<sup>143</sup> As testimony and bodily suffering became central idioms through which recognition and compensation were pursued, witness activists found themselves navigating the double bind of humanitarian politics, mobilizing compassion to make harm legible, yet in doing so risking the translation of collective, structural violence into individualized narratives of victimhood.

A growing but still uneven literature addresses how archives, testimony, and veterans’ records are used to make claims. Catherine Trundle’s work on British/Pacific test veterans demonstrates how archival practices themselves are acts of advocacy: archives can be sites of counter-hegemonic knowledge production and evidentiary work that prompt recognition.<sup>144</sup> Historian Clémence Maillochon’s prosopographic mapping of Polynesian anti-test networks reconstructs the social architecture of the opposition.<sup>145</sup> Together with regional projects<sup>146</sup> and case studies,<sup>147</sup> these works document protests, disclosure struggles, and epistemic contention – yet they rarely theorize the specific practices through which oppositional actors transformed fragments and lived experience into durable claims.

### 2.3.4 Summary and contribution

Research has shown that nuclear weapons testing produced planetary science, generated epistemic crises, and produced long-term, uneven harms. It has also shown how secrecy, institutional paradigms, and geopolitics shape what counts as

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*Une autre histoire des “Trente Glorieuses”. Modernisation, contestations et pollutions dans la France d’après-guerre*, eds. Topçu S. Pessis C., Bonneuil C. (Paris: La Découverte, 2013).

<sup>143</sup> Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*; Yannick Barthe, *Les retombées du passé: Le paradoxe de la victime* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2017).

<sup>144</sup> Trundle, “Searching for Culpability in the Archives: Commonwealth Nuclear Test Veterans’ Claims for Compensation” (2011); Trundle, “Translating Proof: Contested Illness, Radiation Exposure, and the Health Claims of Nuclear Test Veterans.”. See also Fiona Jayne Bowler, “The British Nuclear Test Veteran: Radiation, Activism, and the Soldier’s Body, 1952–2002” (PhD Diss. University of Southampton, 2022).

<sup>145</sup> Maillochon, “Les réseaux de militants contre les essais nucléaires français (1959–1996).”

<sup>146</sup> Meltz and Vrignon (eds.) *Des bombes en Polynésie. Les essais nucléaires français dans le Pacifique*; Mary and Vrignon, “Implantation: État, pouvoirs locaux et opinion.”

<sup>147</sup> Johnston and Barker, *Consequential Damages of Nuclear War: the Rongelap Report*; David Robie, “The Rainbow Warrior, secrecy and state terrorism,” *Pacific Journalism Review* 22, no. 1 (2016); Nic Maclellan, *Grappling with the Bomb: Britain’s Pacific H-bomb Tests* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2017).

evidence. Researchers have mapped networks of protest and memory in the Pacific and begun to study archives and veterans' evidentiary work. However, what remains under-examined is the concrete, practice-level process by which oppositional actors – transnational activist, NGOs, veteran groups, local movements – procured documents, annotated and authenticated fragments, circulated leaflets and maps, combined testimonial and technical claims, and thereby constructed epistemic authority under conditions of secrecy, agnotology, and colonial power. In short, scholars have documented *that* contestation happened; fewer have explained *how* oppositional knowledge was materially produced, preserved, and mobilized as evidence across scales.

My work in this study addresses that gap. I propose witness activism as both an analytical figure (an actor-type, visible in archives) and a theoretical tool (linking testimony studies, history of knowledge, and contentious politics). Empirically, I trace these practices through activist archives – most centrally the Danielssons' papers and the Obsarm collection – and through key documentary artifacts and arguments. Methodologically, I combine archival ethnography, close readings of published materials, and knowledge circulation analysis to show how documents and testimonies were transformed into claims that could travel from local atolls to metropolitan parliaments and international fora. Framing oppositional archives and testimonial practice as core sites of epistemic production helps us understand how invisible, long-duration harms (the “slow” effects emphasized by Nixon) become politicized and legible under varied conditions over time. It also exposes the mediatory infrastructures – translators, metropolitan intermediaries, legal thresholds – that both enable and limit oppositional claims. By placing Trundle's archival insights and Maillochon's network mapping in conversation with history of knowledge, testimony theory, and the political ecology of the Pacific, my work clarifies how witness activism negotiated secrecy, science, and sovereignty – and what that implies for accountability, reparations, and decolonial historiography.

Existing literatures supply powerful framings like planetary science, slow violence, secrecy, and regional political contestation, but they stop short of a detailed, practice-based account of oppositional epistemic work. That is precisely the lacuna this thesis fills by historicizing and theorizing the archival, testimonial, and circulation practices that produced counter-knowledge about nuclear testing in the Pacific.

## 2.4 Witness Activism as an Analytical Figure

This section operationalizes my analytic framework. I develop witness activism as both an actor-category and a practical tool for reading oppositional archives. Thus, this section sets out the core conceptual tools and the methodological logic I use to describe and explain oppositional knowledge production about nuclear weapons

testing in the Pacific, with focus on French Polynesia and the Danielssons' and Obsarm archives. My move is theoretical and practical at once. I translate the historiographical insights of history of knowledge into a working analytic for archives and testimony, combined with the explicit epistemological position of critical realism that lets me evaluate historical, testimonial, and documentary claims and historicize them without collapsing into either naïve realism or unconstrained relativism.

Two claims organize the section: 1) that *witness activism* is a specific knowledge practice: a cluster of actors, formats, and repertoires that together produce, stabilise, and circulate claims about exposure, harm, and responsibility under conditions of secrecy, colonial rule, and epistemic inequality; and 2) that the history of knowledge, archival ethnography, and the critical realist application of it supplies the analytic lenses needed to read oppositional archives not as passive repositories but as active sites where credibility, genre, and authority are invented, negotiated, and contested.

This relates to my problematization of recent work on moral authority in civil society by Fassin and Barthe's study process of victimization of test-site experiences that underscores the historization of how discourses have come to increasingly privilege the immediacy of suffering, elevating personalized testimony to the forefront of political action.<sup>148</sup> This leads to the historical and conceptual problem of the epistemic status of testimony, and direct experiences of nuclear material and political fallout, and how, over time, testimonial accounts from test-affected populations became not only moral imperatives but also evidentiary tools.

### **2.4.1 Knowledge in motion: Witness activism and the processual history of knowledge**

Rather than approaching the history of knowledge as a high-level metatheory, this study operationalizes it as a set of *archive-facing heuristics* that treat documents as dynamic, processual evidence. Each item, e.g. leaflets, reports, maps, transcribed interviews, and books, is read not only for its propositional content but for its physical form, provenance, and circulation history. Using witness activism as an analytic figure, I trace how these materials were edited, annotated, translated, and reissued across time to meet different evidentiary genres and institutional expectations.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*, p. xi–xii; Barthe, *Les Retombées du passé: Le Paradoxe de la victime*.

<sup>149</sup> For explorations of the dynamics between form and content where form(ats) has consequences for how knowledge circulates and is authorized (or not) see Anne Eriksen and Ellen Krefting, "Formens makt og materialitet: Om studiet av kunnskapens former i katekismer og skipslogger,"

With witness activism as an analytic figure, this perspective attends equally to the pathways through which items travelled – from local meetings and parliamentary sessions to metropolitan NGOs, international fora, and mass media – and to the practical mechanisms that shaped knowledge production: classification, redaction, note-taking, storage, and editorial practices. These markers instantiate epistemic authority and reveal how knowledge was curated, contested, and circulated. In the empirical chapters, I operationalize this approach by cataloguing variables such as actors, references, authorizations, formats, routes, arenas, and corroborations, allowing abductive reasoning to reconstruct the mechanisms that made these documents visible, credible, and actionable.<sup>150</sup> Also, I make a contribution to the field of history of knowledge with my analytical claims to investigate how knowledge actors, fields, circulation and conflict *intersect* in the analytical figure and theoretical tool of witness activism.

By integrating testimony studies into the history of knowledge, I further expand the field's analytical repertoire, conceptualizing witness activism as a knowledge practice that operates at the intersection of circulation, conflict, and legitimacy in contentious politics. By foregrounding activist practices with the history of knowledge, I shift away from a scientist-bureaucrat-technology centric account toward one that recognizes organized, political epistemic labour.

In practice, this means that the Danielssons' and Obsarm collections are read as workshops of evidentiary practice of a specific kind (activistic): items are dated and interrogated for edition history and marginalia, routes of circulation are reconstructed, gaps and silences are treated as evidence of power rather than simple absence, and testimonies are evaluated as ethically charged epistemic signals whose probative force is assessed through triangulation with material traces, contemporaneous reports and, when possible, medical or environmental data.

A fundamental question from this perspective is how knowledge becomes knowledge through processes of repetition, circulation,<sup>151</sup> and different forms of authority on various arenas (such as media platforms, conferences, debates), and by practices of actors such as scientists collecting data, journalists writing, or activists organizing.<sup>152</sup> Knowledge is here understood as an anthropological and historical

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*Slagmark*, no. 81 (2020); John Krige, *How Knowledge Moves: Writing the Transnational History of Science and Technology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019).

<sup>150</sup> Danermark, Ekström, and Karlsson, *Explaining Society: Critical Realism in the Social Sciences*.

<sup>151</sup> Östling et al., *Circulation of Knowledge: Explorations in the History of Knowledge*, p. 71.

<sup>152</sup> Östling, Larsson Heidenblad, and Nilsson Hammar, *Knowledge Actors: Revisiting Agency in the History of Knowledge*. On authority, temporality and history in the case of disarmament, and nuclear testing and its role in the developing critical security theory see Rens van Munster and Casper Sylvest, "On History and Authority: The Cold War Nuclear Arms Race and its Importance for Critical Security Theory," *Critical Studies on Security* 10, no. 3 (2022);

category; what people of a certain time and place consider to be knowledge. This might ostensibly seem contradictory to critical realism's claim or goal of *better knowledge*; however, as epistemic relativism is a tenet of critical realism, one can still argue that some regimes or systems create knowledge closer to reality in specific situations.

This knowledge is facilitated via networks of people with access to arenas with varied forms of knowledge artifacts, such as texts and documents, trust and authority, and non-access or secrecy and non-knowledge (agnotologically constructed or structural invisibility) in relation to this. History of knowledge engages in questions of how knowledge moves, flows, is communicated, and shaped in these processes, how it is produced and reproduced, and how this relates to people, power, and institutions. Peter Burke in his introduction *What is the history of knowledge?* demonstrates entry points, concepts, and problems associated with the perspective.<sup>153</sup> Ignorance and non-knowledge should likewise be considered as historical analytical categories.<sup>154</sup> Hence, there are histories of (non-)knowledge(s).

The nuclear state, and the broader techno-political rationality underpinning its authority, sustained its dominance through a deliberate strategy of non-responsiveness: intelligence-gathering, secrecy, the management of uncertainty, agnotology, and the selective deployment of ignorance to serve political ends. Scholars such as Burke, Verburgt, and Balmer have sought to historicize these dynamics as a *history of ignorance*, highlighting how secrecy, information control, and the structuring of knowledge – or its absence – intersect with societal institutions, citizen science, and the work of whistle-blowers as active knowledge agents.<sup>155</sup> Their scholarship underscores the importance of analysing ignorance alongside knowledge: the two are inseparable in understanding epistemic formation.

Within the context of nuclear weapons testing, this framework is particularly salient. It allows us to interrogate the epistemic conditions under which claims were made, received, and contested: who knew what, who was deliberately kept in the dark, in which instances, and with what authority or credibility?

This practice-oriented approach thus puts focus on the material modes of knowledge, concrete formats, and paperwork. According to historians of

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Pelopidas, Taha, and Vaughan, "How Dawn Turned Into Dusk: Scoping and Closing Possible Nuclear Futures after the Cold War" (2024).

<sup>153</sup> Peter Burke, *What is the History of Knowledge?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016).

<sup>154</sup> Johan Östling and David Larsson Heidenblad, *The History of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

<sup>155</sup> Lukas M. Verburgt and Peter Burke, "Introduction: Histories of Ignorance," *Journal for the History of Knowledge* 2, no. 1 (2021); Balmer Brian, "Intelligence, Ignorance, and Diplomacy in the Cold War," *Journal for the History of Knowledge* 2, no. 1 (2021); See also Peter Burke, *Ignorance: A Global History* (Yale University Press, 2023).



knowledge, a productive history of knowledge rests on three working principles: knowledge is material and medial; it is processual rather than originating from a single source; and it is distributed unevenly through politics of access and authority.<sup>156</sup>

Studying infrastructures of authority and authentication such as scientific, social, and technocratic regimes is central to probing conditions for what counts as knowledge in the late-20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>157</sup> The methodological approach I adopt situates history of knowledge imbued with archival ethnography in dialogue with science and technology studies (STS). STS has long emphasized that knowledge is not merely discovered but produced through material practices, inscription devices, imaginaries, and circulatory networks.<sup>158</sup> Archival ethnography of the anti-testing advocates extends this insight to historical materials, treating archives not as neutral repositories but as field sites that register and are traces of the bureaucratic routines, formatting conventions, and silences of power.<sup>159</sup> Both traditions foreground how authority is secured and ignorance organized, whether through classification regimes and redactions,<sup>160</sup> or through the systematic and historically contingent qualification and disqualification of certain forms of knowledge, testimony, and experience.<sup>161</sup> Archival documents, like notebooks or technical reports, are

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<sup>156</sup> Burke, *What is the History of Knowledge*; James Secord, "Knowledge in Transit," *Isis* 95, no. 4 (2004); Östling and Larsson Heidenblad, *The History of Knowledge*; Östling et al., *Circulation of Knowledge: Explorations in the History of Knowledge*.

<sup>157</sup> Hecht, *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade*; Krige, *How Knowledge Moves: Writing the Transnational History of Science and Technology*; Jansen, Krige, and Wang, "Empires of Knowledge: Introduction" (2019); Krige and Wang, "Nation, Knowledge, and Imagined Futures: Science, Technology, and Nation-Building, Post-1945" (2015).

<sup>158</sup> Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1986); Karin Knorr-Cetina, *Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences Make Knowledge* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999); Sheila Jasanoff and Sang-Hyun Kim, "Containing the Atom: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and Nuclear Power in the United States and South Korea," *Minerva* 47, no. 2 (2009).

<sup>159</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*; Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression" *Diacritics* 24 no. 2 (1995).

<sup>160</sup> Geoffrey C. Bowker, *Memory Practices in the Sciences* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005); B. Balmer and B. Rappert, *Absence in Science, Security and Policy: From Research Agendas to Global Strategy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015).

<sup>161</sup> Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991); Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*.

components of knowledge production as they are worked with, archived, annotated, translated, circulated, and reclassified across institutional arenas.<sup>162</sup>

In this case one can talk about two forms or regimes of knowledge: one official and one unofficial, or semi-official, that relate to and shape each other, without being commensurable as epistemic practices. This involves thinking of knowledge as something that grows out of contradiction and conflict. This links to questions about different *forms* of knowing. In my case there is a scientific/technical knowledge regime captured by reasons of military/national security complexes and the logic of terror balance realism: the way to contain independence efforts in strategically important locations of France in the Pacific. The logic of this form renders itself incapable of accounting for the other form of more universalistic scientific knowledge, which can describe the ecological and human consequences of the former logic.

For instance, regarding the export of techno-militarist risk to dependent, colonial territories in a racial logic Robert Jacobs highlights the underlying attitudes of the testing authorities in the following quote:

In a meeting of the Advisory Committee on Biology and Medicine of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), in January of 1956, Merril Eisenbud, the Director of the AEC's Health and Safety Laboratory in New York, spoke about the useful information to be gleaned through the study of the Marshalllese who had just been returned to their homes on Utiirik Atoll after the 1954 Bravo test, a place he referred to as "by far the most contaminated place on Earth". Eisenbud made plain his view of the dignity and humanity that he afforded to the Utiirikese: "While it is true that these people do not live, I would say, the way Westerners do, civilized people, it is nevertheless also true that these people are more like us than mice" (cited in Johnston, 2007b, 25). Eisenbud's insinuation was that their race, their ethnicity, their religion, their class, and their lack of technological modernism made them unlike us enough that their integrity and welfare could be trivialized and ignored.<sup>163</sup>

This showcases the foundation of US official ideology at the time of locating and conducting the tests in the Pacific. Jean-Marc Regnault and Nic Maclellan have respectively shown similar ideas behind the UK's and France's decisions to locate

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<sup>162</sup> Annelise Riles, *Documents: Artifacts of Modern Knowledge* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006); Annelise Riles, *The Network Inside Out* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2000); Mario Biagioli, "Documents of documents: Scientists' names and scientific claims." in *Documents: Artifacts of Modern Knowledge*, ed. Annelise Riles (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 127–57. Paul N. Edwards, *A Vast Machine: Computer Models, Climate Data, and the Politics of Global Warming* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010).

<sup>163</sup> Jacobs, "Nuclear Conquistadors: Military Colonialism in Nuclear Test Site Selection during the Cold War" (2013), p. 160.

their hydrogen bomb proving grounds to the Pacific.<sup>164</sup> As we will see, anti-nuclear actors in the Pacific frequently grounded their opposition in the constitutional status of the territories subjected to nuclear testing, exposing how colonial governance structured not only political exclusion but epistemic subordination. The designation of test sites in non-self-governing territories revealed a foundational asymmetry in nuclear governance: decisions about acceptable risk, scientific uncertainty, and national security were made by metropolitan institutions, while those most exposed were systematically excluded from the production, evaluation, and validation of knowledge about harm. The democratic deficit of nuclear testing thus operated not only through law and sovereignty, but through the unequal distribution of epistemic authority.

The local effects of national nuclear programs should therefore not be understood as isolated outcomes of government agendas or idiosyncratic epistemological cultures. Rather they were produced within a transnational regime of nuclear knowledge in which militarized science, imperial administration, and Cold War security rationalities were mutually constitutive. International Relations theorist Shampa Biswas has proposed a conception of the global that accommodates such historical specificity while recognizing a shared, though unevenly distributed, nuclear condition.<sup>165</sup> French Polynesia thus appears not as a peripheral case, but as a site where the global order of nuclear expertise was materially enacted and contested.<sup>166</sup>

It is in this context that witness activism emerges as both an analytical and nomothetic category. The thesis examines how practices of witnessing, documentation, and testimonial circulation crystallized as historically situated means of producing oppositional knowledge about nuclear testing and its effects. These practices developed within earlier disarmament discourses and regional critiques of nuclear imperialism in the Pacific, well before the consolidation of contemporary humanitarian disarmament frameworks such as the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. They thus illuminate forms of epistemic and political labour that preceded – and in important ways exceeded – the moral vocabularies of late-20<sup>th</sup>- and early-21<sup>st</sup>-century humanitarianism.

The cases analysed here therefore carry more than descriptive or regional significance. They reveal how activist archives and lived experience became sites where claims to recognition, responsibility, and repair were articulated under

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<sup>164</sup> Maclellan, *Grappling with the Bomb: Britain's Pacific H-bomb Tests*; Jean-Marc Regnault, "France's Search for Nuclear Test Sites, 1957–1963," *The Journal of Military History* 67, no. 4 (2003).

<sup>165</sup> Shampa Biswas, "Nuclear Harms and Global Disarmament" in *The age of Hiroshima*, eds. Michael D. Gordin and G. John Ikenberry (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020).

<sup>166</sup> Biswas, "Nuclear Harms and Global Disarmament"; Kjölvi Egelund, *The Road to Prohibition: Nuclear Hierarchy and Disarmament, 1968–2017* (University of Oxford, 2017).

conditions of secrecy and unequal authority. At the same time, they expose more general epistemic mechanisms through which marginalized actors convert experience into knowledge capable of political traction. In doing so, the study contributes to a broader understanding of epistemic (in)justice in contexts of nuclear violence, demonstrating how the global order of nuclear knowledge is shaped not only by what is known, but by whose knowledge is rendered credible, transmissible, or actionable.

#### **2.4.2 Knowledge and mobilization: Historizing activist epistemological agency in the post-war period**

In the following I contextualize the *activism* element of the witness activist. The witness and testimony aspect of this analytical figure and theoretical tool are presented in the following theoretical chapter.

“Activism” refers here to the practical dimension through which acts of testimony or witnessing acquire theoretical articulation. The witness-activist embodies a historically situated mode of practice which, through a retroductive reading of the material, can be traced as developing over time and across shifting contexts. Activism itself is not a self-evident category and is therefore treated as historically produced in the analysis that follows. Positions that might appear to arise from seamless slippages between roles, sites, and platforms are better understood as the outcomes of structural conditions, forms of intellectual labour, networked modes of organization, and contingent encounters – of which only partial traces remain in the archives.<sup>167</sup>

*Activism* and *activists* are, however, essential terms to tentatively define, rich in meaning and connotations as they are. As phenomena attracting increasing scholarly interest, they have not yet, according to Stefan Berger and Sean Scalmer, been “registered in detailed historical scholarship”.<sup>168</sup> Social theory has grappled with ‘social movements’ as political actors of significance in contentious politics and activism. In a preface to the series *Palgrave Studies in the History of Social Movements*, social historians Berger and Holger Nehring outline a broad definition of ‘social movements’, which encompasses social formations, from formal organizations to protest events, with the aim of historicizing notions of political and

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<sup>167</sup> See the section on “Epistemic Inertia” in Chapter 7, for an example.

<sup>168</sup> Stefan Berger and Sean Scalmer, *The Transnational Activist: Transformations and Comparisons from the Anglo-World Since the Nineteenth Century* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 1; Jackie Smith and Dawn Wiest, *Social Movements in the World-System: The Politics of Crisis and Transformation* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2012); Donatella Della Porta and Sidney G. Tarrow, *Transnational Protest and Global Activism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005); Sidney G. Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

social activism.<sup>169</sup> The creation of knowledge within social movements, in relation to academic knowledge, is studied in a special issue of the journal *Moving the Social*.<sup>170</sup> The editor, historian Susanne Schregel, argues that knowledge production within contentious mobilization, social movements, and activist contexts is often overlooked by both scholars and the movements themselves. This disregard of the historical conditions for oppositional knowledge production can be a problem when activism and research overlap and integrate, which was the case in activist practises against nuclear weapons tests. Exploring the separation and boundaries between activism, political advocacy, and academic research is of significant interest in this context. It involves examining where the critical, mobilizing, knowing gazes are directed, and exploration of the zone between objectivity and participation, individual moral stances, activism, intellectual work, and expertise.<sup>171</sup>

I view activism (as in witness activist practice) as a phenomenon closely tied to political practice, distinguishing it from simply supporting a cause, as it carries a sense of political duty that goes beyond mere concern. In her auto-ethnographic study of the environmental NGO *Friends of the Earth*, anthropologist Caroline Gatt characterizes the process of becoming an environmental activist as one of internal mobilization and radicalization. Gatt's insider perspective highlights the individual conditions of activism, although the activism examined here is more fluid and amorphous. She emphasizes an understanding of the activist as an individual with agency, or political potential, a concept referred to as "agentic individuality". Agentic individuality understands the subject as shaping its own path through critical, self-reflexive engagement with the way of life, employing what Gatt, drawing on Foucault, calls "technologies of the self".<sup>172</sup> Within Fassin's work on an emergent humanitarian logic and Barthe's notion of the victimisateur role of anti-testing activists, the actor relates to and contains a dynamic of victimhood and sacrifice in an ambiguous state that the individual is not able to control entirely, since it is part of a wider social reality.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Berger and Scalmer, *The Transnational Activist: Transformations and Comparisons from the Anglo-World Since the Nineteenth Century*. Introduction to series, p. V.

<sup>170</sup> See the special issue of *Moving the Social*, 60 (2018), on social movements and knowledge production.

<sup>171</sup> Susanne Schregel, "Social Movements, Protests and Academic Knowledge Formation: Interactions since the 1960s", *Moving the Social*, 60 (2018), pp. 5–26.

<sup>172</sup> Gatt, *An Ethnography of Global Environmentalism: Becoming Friends of the Earth*, p. 92. This links to ideology and subjectivity formation in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and can, I think, be fruitfully related to "the scientist" as a public figure informing policy.

<sup>173</sup> Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*.

### 2.4.3 Competing internationalisms and the historical epistemic terrain of testimony

Witness activism around nuclear testing was shaped from the outset by opposing forms of internationalism. Over time, varied forms of internationalisms had influence and sway over movements for social progress, and therefore the way its claims and epistemic authority was formatted and practiced. In the 1960s and 1970s, anti-imperialist internationalism gained dominance across much of the North Atlantic left. Drawing on Leninist categories of the right of nations to self-determination, activists interpreted wars of decolonization and US interventions as struggles against a global imperialist system understood simultaneously as an **act** (military domination), an agent (the United States), and a structure (capitalism). Historian Quinn Slobodian writes that in the 1960s Third Worldist networks linked postcolonial leaders with metropolitan student movements, feeding radical ideas back into Europe and North America.<sup>174</sup> As historian Leyla Belle Drake shows in her doctoral thesis, the Russell–Sartre International War Crimes Tribunal (IWCT) embodied this logic: through investigative missions and public hearings, it translated anti-imperialist critique into the idiom of international law, with Sartre insisting that the judges are everywhere: they are the peoples of the world.<sup>175</sup>

Drake notes that by the end of the 1960s, anti-imperialism had largely eclipsed rival visions of international change. Marxism and Leninism permeated political culture in France and shaped how radicals across Western Europe and North America conceptualized solidarity.<sup>176</sup> According to Bracke and Mark, even those who never read Lenin nonetheless adopted his framework imperialism explained Vietnam, Cuba, and Angola, and anti-imperialism provided the grammar of solidarity.<sup>177</sup> Yet this framework was never uncontested. Activists of various political inclination, understanding of solidarity and imperialism, experimented with alternative internationalisms such as feminist, ecological, pacifist, and humanitarian frameworks.

A competing *human rights cosmopolitanism* should, according to Scalmer, Berger, Drake, and other historians of internationalism, be written in here as both preceding

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<sup>174</sup> Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front: Third World Politics in Sixties West Germany* (Durham, [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2012).

<sup>175</sup> Leyla Belle Drake, *Any Witness Competent to Testify: Witnessing Practices at the 1967 Russell Tribunal on American War Crimes in Vietnam* (PhD Diss. Uppsala: Department of History of Science and Ideas, Uppsala University, 2024).

<sup>176</sup> Drake, *Any Witness Competent to Testify: Witnessing Practices at the 1967 Russell Tribunal on American War Crimes in Vietnam*, p. 81.

<sup>177</sup> Maud Anne Bracke and James Mark, “Between Decolonization and the Cold War: Transnational Activism and its Limits in Europe, 1950s–90s,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 50, no. 3 (2015).

and following the Leninist understanding of imperialism and solidarity.<sup>178</sup> Amnesty International, founded in 1961 by Peter Benenson, narrowed the expansive post-Bandung rights agenda by redefining rights around the *individual victim of state repression*. Amnesty's category of the "prisoner of conscience", like the Quaker and Gandhian influenced peace actions against nuclear weapons tests, deliberately excluded violence and social-economic claims, and sought to present the organizing as apolitical.<sup>179</sup> This human rights internationalism, later reinforced by humanitarian NGOs such as Médecins sans Frontières, promised not to overthrow empires but to alleviate suffering by mobilizing global publics in defence of threatened individuals. Berger and Scalmer's emphasis on *knowledge production* in their description of transnational activism is crucial here: like anti-imperialist campaigns, these organizations worked to bring hidden atrocities into visibility, but they did so in a way that prioritized victimhood and transparency over revolutionary agency.<sup>180</sup>

The two frames were not hermetically sealed. The Russell Tribunal, for example, oscillated between portraying the Vietnamese as heroic agents of liberation and as suffering victims of US atrocities – an ambiguity that presaged later human rights discourse of victimology and heroism.<sup>181</sup> Many activists worked across partially overlapping idioms, invoking the universality of rights in some contexts while foregrounding critiques of imperial domination in others. These languages were not neatly opposed: anti-imperialist claims were often articulated through the language of rights, while universalist appeals were frequently grounded in experiences of colonial violence. Still, tensions between more cosmopolitan and more explicitly anti-imperialist framings formed an important historical dynamic. This dynamic helps explain why nuclear testimony itself emerged from – and was subsequently pulled across – these different political registers: framed alternately, and sometimes simultaneously, as evidence of colonial domination and national subjugation, and as the suffering of individuals seeking recognition, compensation, and humanitarian protection. Historically, as we shall see in the empirical chapters the relationship between these languages was not static but shifted over time: documentary forms of anti-colonial nuclear testimony that emerged in the 1970s and early 1980s

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<sup>178</sup> Berger and Scalmer, *The Transnational Activist: Transformations and Comparisons from the Anglo-World Since the Nineteenth Century*; Swan, *Pasifika Black: Oceania, Anti-colonialism, and the African World*; Drake, *Any Witness Competent to Testify: Witnessing Practices at the 1967 Russell Tribunal on American War Crimes in Vietnam*, pp. 112, 116, 128.

<sup>179</sup> Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012); Lawrence S. Wittner, *Confronting the Bomb: A Short History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009).

<sup>180</sup> 'The Transnational Activist: An Introduction' in Berger and Scalmer, *The Transnational Activist: Transformations and Comparisons from the Anglo-World Since the Nineteenth Century*, p. 27.

<sup>181</sup> Drake, *Any Witness Competent to Testify: Witnessing Practices at the 1967 Russell Tribunal on American War Crimes in Vietnam*; Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History*; Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*.

increasingly intersected, and at times gave way, to more humanitarian framings that became prominent in the 1990s and 2000s.

## 2.5 Chapter Conclusions

In this chapter, I have situated oppositional knowledge production within the Cold War history of the Pacific and the emerging field of nuclear humanities. I reviewed the state of the art in the history of knowledge and in studies of Pacific anti-testing activism, with particular attention to testimonial registers and the archive as a site of knowledge production. On this basis, which is grounded in the archives, I have developed *witness activism* as an analytical figure and practical guide for the analysis that follows.

I argued that knowledge should be approached not only as abstract ideas but as material artifacts – pamphlets, reports, books – that mediate protest and claim-making. Knowledge in this sense is always entangled with power and ideology, shaped by accessibility, authority, and contestation. To study oppositional knowledge production, therefore, requires attending to its conditions, contradictions, and conflicts: how claims are produced, contested, silenced, or re-circulated. Drawing on both the history of knowledge and critical realism, I proposed that archival fragments be read as evidence of practice, situated within arenas of struggle and trajectories of circulation. This means that while I investigate specific knowledge claims to determine their basis and conditions, I also acknowledge that some knowledge is better suited to describing the empirical, the real, and the actual.<sup>182</sup>

Applied to the Danielssons' and Obsarm archives, this means that I read documents not only for their propositional content but also for their position as oppositional, and the "life-histories" of such documents: how archives, and archival materials as fragments and traces of the work of oppositional knowledge production such as pamphlets, maps, and oral testimonies were dated, referred, annotated, translated, and reissued; how information circulated from Pacific island communities to metropolitan NGOs, then into parliamentary debates and UN reports and then back to the local level; how these documents gained and lost epistemic authority through immediacy, signature, vouching, framing, shifting scales; and how gaps, redactions, or classification regimes shaped what could count as knowledge. Archival items are thus treated as evidence of practice: witness activism.

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<sup>182</sup> Simply put in Critical Realism the term 'real' refers to objects, their inherent structures, and their capacities for causing effects or being subject to them. The 'actual' pertains to the outcomes that occur when these capacities are activated and bring about change. The 'empirical' represents the portion of the real and actual that is directly experienced by individuals.



Describing witness activism as an analytical figure falls short if historization is at loss; this is where retroduction, temporality, and theorization come into play. The methodological implications outlined here, particularly retroduction (asking what had to be in place for an item or claim to occur), temporality (an item's past, present, and future orientation) are used to understand three interlinked concepts – actors, arenas, and circulation. This specifies the operational core of this framework. Actors (scientists, activists, journalists, workers, NGOs) generate and authorize claims; arenas (courts, parliaments, NGOs, the press, international forums) impose distinctive rules of evidence and legitimacy, and circulation traces how claims travel across these sites. This relational mapping helps capture the practical work of witness activism as both an actor-category and an analytical tool.

Such a framework foregrounds the precarious position of oppositional knowledge in contexts of secrecy and colonial rule. Testimonies could be dismissed as anecdotal, absorbed into technocratic categories, or instrumentalized in humanitarian terms. Yet they also revealed contradictions between what institutions claimed to know and what affected communities experienced. From this epistemic tension witness activism emerged as a cluster of practices through which activists, nuclear veterans, workers, inhabitants, intermediaries, and sympathetic experts converted lived experience and fragmentary documentation into credible, circulated claims. The following chapter deepens this analytical move by theorizing testimony and witnessing as evolving epistemic practices. There, I extend to develop witness activism as both a theoretical tool and a means of analyzing the archival traces of anti-testing activism.



# Chapter 3. Witness Activism as a Theoretical Tool to Explain Oppositional Knowledge Production

*Trauma thus conveys veracity, as long as it is placed in a certain general frame-work or presented in experts' terms. As soon as one returns from the general to the particular, however, the evidence weakens. Recognizing its importance at a collective and abstract level, the officers of OFPRA as well as the judges of the Commission of Appeal, however, find claims to trauma less convincing than marks left on the body when deciding on individual and concrete cases.*<sup>183</sup>

*We're going to die a little earlier than expected, it doesn't matter if we don't suffer too much. But it is in the damage in the head that we suffer. This sadness and this grief that we constantly carry is reflected in society.*<sup>184</sup>

## 3.1 How Witness Activism Relates to Nuclear Weapons Testing

This chapter theorizes witnessing through the analytical figure of *witness activism*, framing it as a historically produced form of epistemic authority. It develops an abstracted approach to the relation between claim-making and knowledge, positioning witness activism as a theoretical tool for analyzing the conditions under which oppositional knowledge is produced and validated. I pursue this in three steps: first, by situating testimony within its historical and historiographical contexts, with particular attention to experiential authority in relation to nuclear testing; second, by elaborating Agamben's modalities of witnessing, as reinterpreted by Didier Fassin in his work on humanitarian reason; and third, by engaging wider

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<sup>183</sup> Didier Fassin, "Critical Evidence: The Politics of Trauma in French Asylum Policies," *Ethos* 35, no. 3 (2007), p. 325.

<sup>184</sup> Bruno Barrillot, Marie-Hélène Villierme, and Arnaud Hudelot, *Témoins de la bombe: Mémoires de 30 ans d'essais nucléaires en Polynésie française* (Editions Univers Polynésiens, 2013). Published testimonial interview with author Chantal Spitz, p. 88.

strands of testimony studies to explore the possibility and epistemic position of testimony in testimony studies. Ontologically, Agamben's and to some extension Fassin's and Hållander's thinking and the critical realist stance might be hard to reconcile. However, a methodological combination is, I argue defensible in this case. While Agamben's work provides conceptual tools for analysing the political logics through which testimony becomes legible, the analysis proceeds in a critical realist mode, using retroductive reasoning to reconstruct the historical conditions and mechanisms through which such forms of witnessing emerged.

Together, these parts provide the conceptual foundation for witness activism as both a theoretical contribution and an analytic tool. This framework, I argue, is essential for understanding how nuclear testing has been known, contested, and archived, and for historicizing the forms of authority through which testimony has shaped political claims.

Didier Fassin's *Humanitarian reason* diagnoses a structural shift over the late-20<sup>th</sup> century, a mode of moral-political reasoning in which *personalized suffering* becomes the central vehicle for public judgement, governance, and policy. Fassin's humanitarian reason is not a neutral epistemic posture but a structural logic that renders certain forms of knowledge viable – above all the singular, affective, first-person account that mobilizes compassion.<sup>185</sup> In practice this logic and the historical advent of it does three things: it elevates testimonial narratives as politically salient evidence; it standardizes genres and arenas in which testimony circulates (NGO reports, tribunals, media); and it can depoliticize structural causes by emphasizing individual suffering and proximate remedies rather than systemic responsibility. If and how humanitarian reason matters for the archives and claims I study in these three qualities of the logic, is tested throughout the analysis.

Epistemologically, testimony is an exemplifying form of knowledge. This allows for an oscillating move between agent-centred history and modelling sociology, working with case-examples that stand not for something more abstract than themselves but besides, and related to, other examples. The method of example and exemplification put into action and used by Fassin and Hållander, respectively, reflect Agamben's theorization of the testimony *as such* as an example. The example is not an anti-classificatory method but expounds on the relation between the specific example and the general class and is thus "more than a method" simultaneously encompassing epistemological (way of knowing), ethical (freedom from presupposed categories), and ontological (the potential of knowing) stances.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*.

<sup>186</sup> Marie Hållander, *The Pedagogical Possibilities of Witnessing and Testimonies: Through the Lens of Agamben* (Palgrave Pivot, 2020); Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*.

Yannick Barthe, in *Les retombées du passé: Le paradoxe de la victime*, suggests a process of victimization of test sites, with actors (victimisateurs) influencing how individuals are defined and identify themselves as victims, regardless of the individual(s) understanding of the test site as phenomenon.<sup>187</sup> Victimization, which Didier Fassin theorises in relation to testimony and NGO-politics, and which Barthe also draws on, is not only a technology of the self, but also social and productive from an ethical standpoint. Hereby understanding or portraying oneself as a victim is connected to the so-called subjectivation process: how the subject is formulated in relation to its constituting exteriority.<sup>188</sup> I attempt to problematize the decoupling that Barthe suggests of a victim (constituted) with the figure of the victimisateur (constitutor), through the analysis of the history of oppositional claim making.

In his book, Barthe talks to veterans and organizers of the l'Association des Vétérans des Essais Nucléaires Français et leurs Familles (AVEN) and records the context of their testimonies. Barthe examines the current portrayal and articulation of test-site victimology but overlooks the longer political history of persistent anti-nuclear struggles in Tahiti and French Polynesia. Thus, a historical investigation of test opposition, which is my contribution here, calls for a longer term historicization of testimony, as a co-production or participatory history that challenged official narratives throughout the testing period. This requires a nuanced understanding of time, acknowledging that testimony as an epistemic genre itself has a complex history filled with contradictions that must be addressed. The increasing trust in testimony during the late-20<sup>th</sup> century should be critically examined and not taken as the sole explanation. Barthe's argument of a discovery of forgotten voices of the nuclear tests – claiming that a different, corrective history emerged with an appreciation of experiences and the founding of AVEN in the late-1990s and early-2000s – is, with my theoretical suggestion in this chapter and the following analysis, nuanced by examining the evolving role of testimony and experiential claim-making in oppositional knowledge production at the time of testing.<sup>189</sup>

In a sense, Barthe's historiography of the *victimisateur* purports an eradication of the long-standing struggles over truth and knowledge. Instead, I argue that the test site as a “discovered” problem after the fact of its ending and successful victimization hides the continuous opposition and its knowledge production. The conflict around the test site, knowledge, and legitimacy if not specifically termed as a process of victimization was present at the start of the tests and is still significantly so, long after the CEP exodus.

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<sup>187</sup> Barthe, *Les retombées du passé: Le paradoxe de la victime*, p. 14.

<sup>188</sup> Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*; Barthe, *Les retombées du passé: Le paradoxe de la victime*, p. 15.

<sup>189</sup> Barthe, *Les retombées du passé: Le paradoxe de la victime*, p. 13.

Testimony and experiential account has an ambiguous status as knowledge, simultaneously containing a strong claim to truth, and an epistemological fragility in that it is often conveyed as merely a subjective account without much merit outside of itself.<sup>190</sup> In social movement research, Sofia A. Villenas investigates witnessing as a strategy for action-research with the term *testimonio*, gearing towards an active involvement of the researcher with the object of study. The term entails the double meaning of witnessing as an *eyewitness* with first-hand knowledge, and *bearing witness* to what cannot be seen, raising demands for the imagination as well as having political intent, informing people outside of the immediacy.<sup>191</sup>

In heritage studies, archival theory, and international human rights, testimony has increasingly been understood as a possible pathway to dealing with historical wounds, trauma, and victimhood.<sup>192</sup> In research on environmental justice similar notions have been at the forefront to redistribute knowledge production and its results from the elite-alien-perpetrator to the local-inhabitant-sufferer. In this, attempts are made to re-evaluate and validate embodied ways of knowing consequences of pollution (slow violence) and exploitation in people's daily lives.<sup>193</sup>

This is not neutral or innocent but influences our understanding of specific phenomena such as radioactivity and technology. Testimony and experiential authority can, in this, be even more elusive and at the same time paradoxically authoritative. As an informant testified to Svetlana Alexievich in her book on Chernobyl: "Something occurred for which we do not yet have a conceptualization,

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<sup>190</sup> One expression of this is made by J-P Sartre in the Russel tribunal, an International War Crimes Tribunal in 1967, against US war crimes in the Vietnam War: that strength is dialectically located in the weakness of testimony. See Drake, *Any Witness Competent to Testify: Witnessing Practices at the 1967 Russell Tribunal on American War Crimes in Vietnam*.

<sup>191</sup> Sofia A. Villenas, "Pedagogies of Being With: Witnessing, "Testimonio," and Critical Love in Everyday Social Movement," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education (QSE)* 32, no. 2 (2019); Celia Haig-Brown, "Creating Spaces: Testimonio, Impossible Knowledge, and Academe," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education (QSE)* 16, no. 3 (2003).

<sup>192</sup> Michal Givoni, *The Care of the Witness: A Contemporary History of Testimony in Crises* (New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Wilson and Brown, *Humanitarianism and Suffering: The Mobilization of Empathy*. Trundle, "Searching for Culpability in the Archives: Commonwealth Nuclear Test Veterans' Claims for Compensation" (2011); Hariz Halilovich, "Reclaiming Erased Lives: Archives, Records and Memories in Post-war Bosnia and the Bosnian Diaspora," *Archival Science* 14, no. 3/4 (2014); Eric Ketelaar, "A Living Archive, Shared by Communities of Records" in *Community Archives: The Shaping of Memory*, ed. Jeannette Allis Bastian and Ben Alexander (London: Facet, 2009).

<sup>193</sup> Thom Davies and Alice Mah, *Toxic Truths: Environmental Justice and Citizen Science in a Post-truth age* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020); Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*.

or analogies, or experience, something to which our vision and hearing, even our vocabulary is not adapted.”<sup>194</sup>

### 3.1.1 A temporal overview of events and institutional shifts

From the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century onward a handful of institutional transformations – organized environmental activism and international environmental governance (late-1960s to early-1970s),<sup>195</sup> the rise of medicolegal and humanitarian NGOs in the 1970s to 1980s,<sup>196</sup> dramatic mediatized nuclear accidents and the 24-hour news revolution in the 1980s,<sup>197</sup> and, finally, the slow juridical and compensatory framing in the late-1980s to 1990s<sup>198</sup> – constituted the causal machinery by which testimonial claims about nuclear harms gained legibility, authority, and sometimes material redress. These changes produced testimonial genres. Those genres’ archival footprints and practical traces are precisely the traces that archival ethnography should map to demonstrate the epistemic weight of witness activism. Figure 1 below shows a rough timeline that highlights central events and the institutional shifts in nuclear testimony over time.

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<sup>194</sup> Svetlana Alexievich, *Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster* (New York: Picador, 2006). p. 20. The quote highlights the famous split into visible realities and invisible dangers creating a jarring unheimlich while bridging structural and direct violence.

<sup>195</sup> Zelko, *Make it a Green Peace!: The Rise of Countercultural Environmentalism*; Scott Frickel, Rebekah Torcasso, and Annika Anderson, “THE ORGANIZATION OF EXPERT ACTIVISM: SHADOW MOBILIZATION IN TWO SOCIAL MOVEMENTS,” *Mobilization* 20, no. 3 (2015); Swan, *Pasifika Black: Oceania, Anti-colonialism, and the African World*.

<sup>196</sup> Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*.

<sup>197</sup> Jean Baudrillard and Marie Maclean, “The Masses: The Implosion of the Social in the Media,” *New Literary History* 16, no. 3 (1985); Manuel Castells, *Communication Power* (Oxford University Press, 2009); Andrea Lombardinilo, “Baudrillard Between Benjamin and McLuhan: ‘the Narcissistic Seduction’ of the Media Society,” *Italian Sociological Review* 7, no. S1 (2017); Eckart Conze, Martin Klimke, and Jeremy Varon, *Nuclear Threats, Nuclear Fear, and the Cold War of the 1980s* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Patrick Burke, “European Nuclear Disarmament: Transnational Peace Campaigning in the 1980s,” in *Nuclear Threats, Nuclear Fear, and the Cold War of the 1980s*, ed. Eckart Conze, Martin Klimke, and Jeremy Varon (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>198</sup> Trundle and Scott, “Elusive Genes: Nuclear Test Veterans’ Experiences of Genetic Citizenship and Biomedical Refusal” (2013); Bowler, “The British Nuclear Test Veteran: Radiation, Activism, and the Soldier’s Body, 1952–2002.”

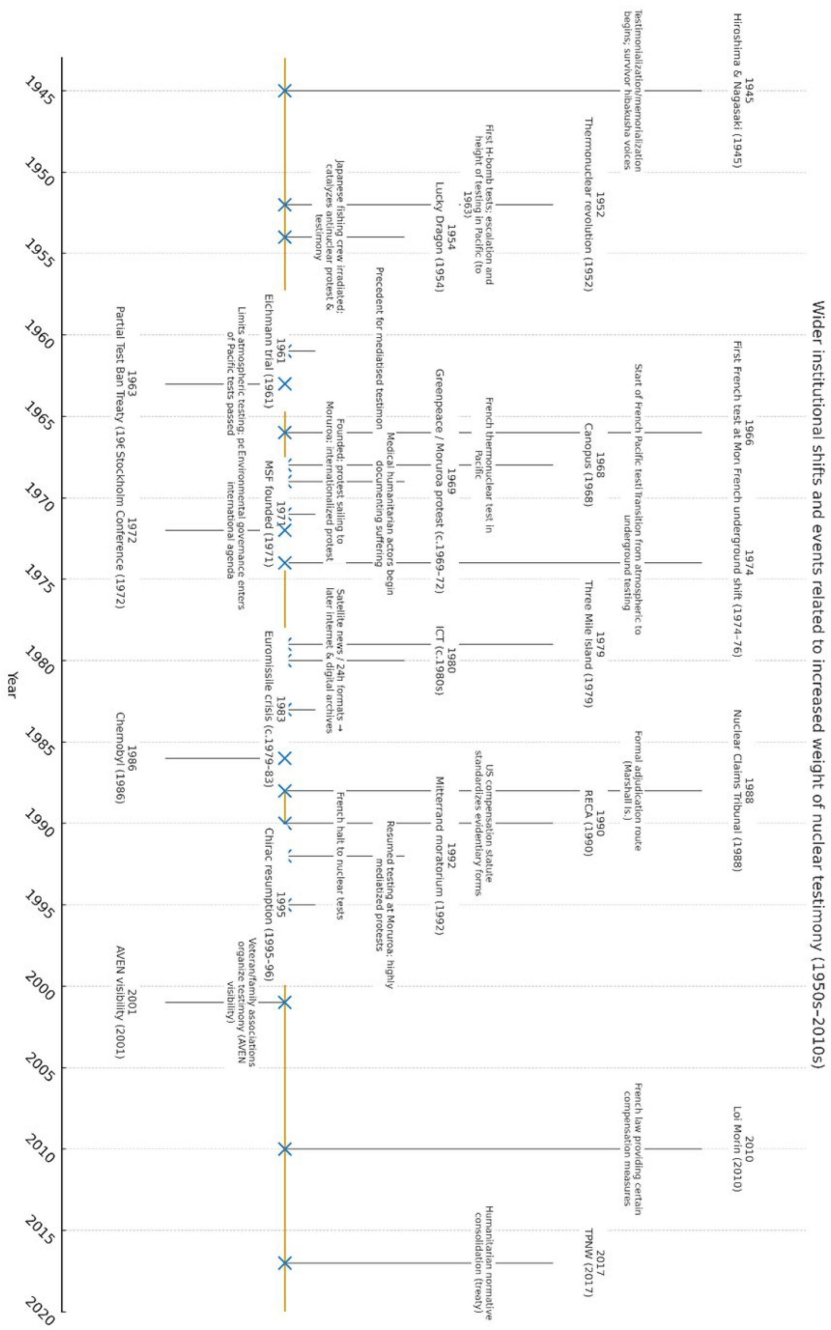


Figure 1 Institutional Shifts and Events: Nuclear Testimony



## 3.2 A Historization of Experiential Authority in Relation to the Nuclear

The conditions and consequences of witness activism in relation to nuclear weapons testing connect to broader notions of ethical and political value of testifying about what has left traces in bodies, human subjectivity, and the environment. Nuclear test-site testimonies, besides their direct claims to knowledge, also reveal a lack of knowledge – both known unknowns (uncertainties about effects) and unknown knowns (hiding information, biases, and structural ignorance) in their pursuit of transparency and hope for change.

My central claim in this is simple: the experiential authority of witnesses to nuclear tests – who counts as a credible knower, what is credible knowledge, in what arenas, and with what effects – must be historicized. I ask how testimonial forms, genres, and institutions emerged, how they gained moral and evidentiary force, and how they interacted with regimes of secrecy, science, and power. I recognize the need to maintain a critical historical perspective on these testimonial practices throughout the analysis, not taking them for granted. However, I simultaneously, in line with Fassin, understand that testimony can be used strategically and tactically, underscoring the agency of the critics of nuclear testing.<sup>199</sup> Here follows a description of how I understand witnessing-testimony as a concept in relation to knowledge and history.

What follows is not an attempt at an epistemic critique of testimony, which has been conducted by others elsewhere,<sup>200</sup> but a historical one, exempting the evaluation of the object of inquiry as either ethical or political.<sup>201</sup> Testimony as a subject in history has in turn been of interest for understanding epistemological political or ethical thinking. According to Marie Hållander, the twentieth century has been described

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<sup>199</sup> Didier Fassin and Toby Matthews, “Moral Economy and Local Justice,” *Revue française de sociologie* (English edition) 53, no. 4 (2012); Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*.

<sup>200</sup> Anat Ascher, “Thinking the Unthinkable as a Form of Dissensus: The Case of the Witness,” *Transformations* no. 19 (2011). Roger Simon maintains that testimonies enable one to feel the past in the presence. Roger I. Simon et al., “Witness as Study: The Difficult Inheritance of Testimony,” *Review of Education, Pedagogy & Cultural Studies* 22, no. 4 (2000). Jonathan Adler describes testimonies as “epistemologically fragile”. Jonathan Adler, “Testimony, Trust, Knowing,” *Journal of Philosophy* 91, no. 5 (1994).

<sup>201</sup> This draws on the long tradition of historically understanding and critiquing testimony of traumatic events from the beginning of its rise after the First World War by Norton Cru, Marc Bloch, Hannah Arendt, and Annette Wieviorka. Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006); Bruce Reis, “How Deep the Sky: Discussion of Special Issue on Evolution of Witnessing,” *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* 51, no. 2 (2015); Jean Norton Cru, *Témoins: Essai d'analyse et de critique des souvenirs de combattants édités en français de 1915 à 1928* (Paris: Les Etincelles, 1929).

as the century of the witness, while in the twenty-first century the word (and world) of the witness appears to be virtually everywhere. Testimony has become central not only in public culture and memory politics, but also within historical scholarship and, perhaps even more prominently, in pedagogical contexts. The growing prominence of witness narratives and victim testimonies, however, raises important epistemological and historiographical questions about the role of such voices in the production of historical knowledge.<sup>202</sup> As historian Jonas Ahlskog has argued in his discussion of history, testimony, victimhood, and epistemic reparations, the increasing emphasis on victims' voices introduces a tension between moral claims and scholarly epistemic principles. Drawing on Jennifer Lackey's concept of a victim's epistemic right to be known, Ahlskog demonstrates how such claims may conflict with the critical and methodological foundations of historical scholarship, particularly regarding questions of epistemic authority and standards of evidence. The problem is not that victim testimony lacks importance, but that framing the victim's voice as possessing epistemic privilege risks undermining the critical evaluation that constitutes historical knowledge. Ahlskog therefore proposes that the victim's right should not primarily be understood as an epistemic right to define historical truth, but rather as a moral and political right to be heard.<sup>203</sup>

Taken together, these perspectives highlight a broader shift in contemporary historical culture, in which testimony and victim narratives increasingly function not only as sources but also as moral claims on history. This development requires historians to navigate carefully between ethical responsibility toward victims and the epistemic commitments of critical historical scholarship.

Philosopher Giorgio Agamben, in his work on testimonial texts of Holocaust survivors, understands the subject as coming into being in the impossibility of witnessing, that a complete overlap of teller, told, listener, and possibility never exists, and that this paradoxical (im)possibility is conditional for the subject. For Agamben, this also holds true if the witness is anonymous or a person testifying for someone else, as it is still a personal narrative implying a witness-remnant.<sup>204</sup> Agamben's account of the paradoxical (im)possibility of witnessing, that the witness is constituted in the very impossibility of fully capturing an event, helps explain why testimonial authority is both existentially compelling and epistemically contested. However, witnessing as a form of dissensus rather than of the unthinkable impossibility has been suggested by Anat Ascher, building on Jacques Rancière as

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<sup>202</sup> Hållander, *The Pedagogical Possibilities of Witnessing and Testimonies: Through the Lens of Agamben*.

<sup>203</sup> Jonas Ahlskog, "Do Victims Have the Right to Be Known? Epistemic Reparations and Historical Knowledge." *Synthese: An International Journal for Epistemology, Methodology and Philosophy of Science* 206, no. 5 (2025).

<sup>204</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (New York: Zone Books, 1999).

a critique of Agamben's impossibility of testimony of the Holocaust, where the testimony (a situation in which it can be heard) becomes a form of political act, when a group that was thought of as not having a voice begins to speak.<sup>205</sup>

After the US bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a body of testimonial atomic-bomb literature – later known as *genbaku bungaku* – began to emerge in Japan. Initially censored by the US occupying forces, it resurfaced in the mid-1970s amid a national re-evaluation of those events. Visual theorist Gabrielle Decamous traces this genre's evolution and cultural impact, showing how survivors' personal testimonies are woven into broader historical and political narratives. She highlights the parallel urgency found in Holocaust testimony and illustrates this with the case of Hara Tamiki, whose diary entries reveal profound survivor's guilt after enduring Hiroshima and who took his own life in 1951. Decamous credits Nagaoka Hiroyoshi's 1973 anthologies with bringing *genbaku bungaku* to international attention, arguing that its authenticity remains vital to understanding the human cost of nuclear weapons.<sup>206</sup> However, Decamous does not go into detail about what this kind of authenticity means and its roots.

Still, Decamous argues that the persistent invisibility of radiation's human consequences owes less to the material imperceptibility of radiation itself than to an active "obliteration of voices" produced through censorship, suppression, and institutional silencing. She underscores the distinctive epistemic force of testimonial writing, in which the narrative "I" functions not simply as a stylistic choice but as a mode of knowledge production irreducible to documentary evidence alone. Testimony, in this sense, does not merely transmit information about past events; it addresses the reader through the survivor's voice, whose urgency and situated authority compel recognition in ways that impersonal records cannot.<sup>207</sup>

Decamous' work on *genbaku bungaku* read alongside Lisa Yoneyama's scholarship on occupation-era censorship and Hiroshima memorialization in Japan thus show how survivor literature was edited, suppressed, and later re-framed within national memory politics; a process that directly informs how nuclear testimonies do or do not travel into public and policy arenas.<sup>208</sup>

Decamous also addresses the broader sociopolitical ramifications of A-bomb literature. She draws attention to the ways in which Hiroshima has been recast as a unifying national symbol in post-war Japan, particularly in recent commemorations.

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<sup>205</sup> Ascher, "Thinking the Unthinkable as a Form of Dissensus: The Case of the Witness" (2011).

<sup>206</sup> Gabrielle Decamous, *Invisible Colors: The Arts of the Atomic Age* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2018).

<sup>207</sup> Decamous, *Invisible Colors: The Arts of the Atomic Age*, p. 94.

<sup>208</sup> Decamous, *Invisible Colors: The Arts of the Atomic Age*, p. 115. Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory*; Lindee, *Suffering Made Real: American Science and the Survivors at Hiroshima*.

This shift in the national consciousness connected to the Hiroshima memory, according to Yoneyama, reflects a deliberate political reframing of memory, one that both acknowledges and, at times, obscures the more difficult aspects of Japan's and the US' past.<sup>209</sup> Anais Maurer has contributed to this by analysing the literature in the wakes of nuclear testing in the Pacific by Maohi authorship, where experiences of the CEP is recounted.<sup>210</sup>

In the context of witnessing nuclear weapons tests, there are three central aspects that the history of *genbaku bungaku* underscore: firstly, the relationship and overlaps with Holocaust literature, secondly the relevance of testimony for political production of memory, and thirdly that control and censorship was directed toward the more politically powerful combination of scientific critique and testimony.

The Holocaust and Hiroshima/Nagasaki are often regarded as exceptional historical events, with survivors bearing witness to experiences that defy complete testimony, that still shape both history and historiography over the late-20<sup>th</sup> century, especially since the 1960s. However, as Michael Rothberg has noted, Holocaust survivor testimonies, even before the advent of what Wieviorka calls the "Era of the Witness", were juxtaposed with testimonies of colonial violence and played a role in articulating anti-colonial struggles. The testimony of violence in the colonies and the Holocaust was thus intimately connected from the start. This connection is evident in news reporting of the time, where Rothberg highlights comparisons and similarities in media reports between testimonies of atrocities committed by the French military during the Algerian War of Independence and Holocaust testimonies emerging in the early-1960s.<sup>211</sup> Throughout his career, Swedish writer Sven Lindqvist has highlighted the ideological and structural foundations of Holocaust violence as embedded within the colonial project. Testimonies from the peripheries of empire underscore this connection, serving as critical documents that reveal the intertwined nature of colonial and Holocaust atrocities.<sup>212</sup>

Further, testimony does not lend itself to quantification, representing a personal perspective or example. However, it is possible to trace patterns, forms, and conditions from multiple testimonies, especially when considering the contexts

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<sup>209</sup> Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory*.

<sup>210</sup> Maurer, "Bonded by the Bomb: Asian-Oceanian Alliances against French Nuclear Tests" (2021); Maurer, "Snaring the Nuclear Sun: Decolonial Ecologies in Titaua Peu's Mutismes: E 'Ore te Vāvā" (2020).

<sup>211</sup> Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009); Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*.

<sup>212</sup> Sven Lindqvist, *Exterminate all the Brutes* (New York: The New Press, 2007). For a history of testimonies in trials of enslavers see Teresa Göttl, "Trials of Enslavers in Former French Colonies in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: Testimonies of the Enslaved between Gratitude and Fear," *Slavery & Abolition* 45, no. 1 (2024).

from which they arise. The interpretation or understanding process within the receiver or listener makes testimony a relational form of knowledge, inherently involving an intended audience, if one will; experiential rather than experimental knowledge. Thus, the act of testifying includes the listener. The testimonies of nuclear witness activism, therefore, are not isolated accounts but resonate with others. They form, in a sense, a choir of testimonies, even though the knowledge produced is not quantified. Each voice is distinct, yet they stand together, contributing to a collective understanding.<sup>213</sup>

The recorded voices repeatedly testify not only to exposure and harm, but to insecurity, uncertainty, and not knowing: to secrecy, guilt, the absence of protective equipment, inadequate safety measures, and a lack of transparent governance at the test sites. Much of what is testified, in other words, concerns what was missing – information, safeguards, accountability. This absence gives testimony a particular epistemic charge. As Agamben and scholars of *genbaku bungaku* have argued, testimony often operates at the limit of knowledge, articulating experiences that cannot be fully known or rendered visible, whether due to imperceptible hazards or structurally obscured forms of violence. In the context of nuclear weapons testing, this potentiality is intensified: testimony becomes a means of bearing witness not only to material harm, but to regimes of non-knowledge in which radiation, responsibility, and risk were simultaneously present and denied.

Investigating witnessing – and its inherent (im)possibilities – requires attention to the social, epistemic, and positional conditions under which testimony is produced. The act of bearing witness is never neutral; it is shaped by the situated practices, institutional affiliations, and asymmetries of those who speak and record. Many of the historical actors examined here as *witness activists* within the anti-testing movement were Europeans or Westerners operating within, and often reproducing, a colonial logic of representation – speaking *for* the affected. Positioned as authors, *auteurs*, brokers, and translators of knowledge, they mediated Pacific experiences of nuclear testing through epistemic frameworks. The implications of this intermediary position and its entanglement with the construction of “test-site victimhood” and its possible reinterpretations are examined in the following section.

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<sup>213</sup> Here developed from Svetlana Alexijevitch’s method of documenting voices in nuclear history. See Svetlana Alexievich, *Chernobyl Prayer: A Chronicle of the Future* (London: Penguin Books, 2016).

### 3.3 Developing the Conceptual Framework of the Witness Activist Position

In this section the conceptual framework of witness activist position is developed.

#### 3.3.1 *Testis*, *superstes*, *auctor*, *histor*: Agamben's epistemic modalities of testimony as analytical tools

This section makes an etymological exploration of classic modalities of testimony which has proven valuable for understanding the epistemology of the witness activist position and practice: *testis*, *superstes*, *auctor*, and *histor*. These epistemic modes build on Agamben's reading of testimony in Roman law, of an archive of literary Holocaust testimonies in his work *Remnants of Auschwitz*, and the work of two successors of Agamben that from different perspectives adopts and develops these theories, the anthropological historian Didier Fassin and his critique of humanitarian reason, and the pedagogic philosopher Marie Hållander and her project on the pedagogic (im)possibility of testimony and witnessing in the classroom. This is then compared to how works of human rights scholars such as Michal Givoni integrate and understand witnessing and testimony through Agamben. Following the classical distinctions between *testis*, *superstes*, *auctor*, and *histor*, I treat these not as fixed roles but as modalities of witnessing shifting positions through which actors authorize, translate, and historicize experience.

Agamben's thinking on survivor testimonies contains an etymological conceptual discussion central to my work with anti-testing knowledge production, which is expanded in the following. In this, the concept of testimony (*testimonio*) in Roman law traces back to the *testis*, which is the position of a third (*terstis*) person in a trial, who is meant to give a neutral account of an event. The *testis* bases its authority on closeness to the event and not having a stake in the trial. This dynamic of evaluation is a longstanding, continuous concern in history, as Annette Wieviorka puts it, leaning on Marc Bloch's understanding of all historical sources as testimonials in this sense, as traces (*remnants*) that have been arranged in an archive and can be systematically analysed. We can make a comparison to the world of documents and source criticism; a remnant of a certain situation rather than a narrative source, which is possible to examine critically.<sup>214</sup> In French the words *témoign* and *témoignage* stem from the same Latin root as *testis*, *testimonium*, standing for a third, *testis*, position between two parties.

Another epistemic modality of testimony is the *superstes* position. It contains the formulation of having lived through something from the beginning to end and then

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<sup>214</sup> Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, p. xiii.

telling about it, which gives it a narrative character (to speak in traditional terms of source criticism). The survivor, with Primo Levi as example, is evoked as a *superstes* by Agamben. The testimony Levi gives does not have to do with acquiring facts for a trial situation. Importantly, in regard to this, Hållander points out that the *superstes* does not have to testify, having the possibility of remaining silent, and that likewise witnessing in the testis-sense can be made without testifying what was seen/experienced.<sup>215</sup>

Agamben is cautious about making the legal framework for defining rights and ethics too rigid, recognizing a common mistake of conflating ethical and juridical categories as the survivor's testimonial action withdraws from the realm of law. He exemplifies this with Levi, who highlights that: "You can be tried, condemned, and punished without even knowing why." Witnessing in this capacity therefore enters an extralegal level of significance. In this context, one (or a nuclear weapons testing nation) cannot be judged responsible in a strictly ethical sense but must acknowledge and take responsibility as an act. Agamben finds that trials can potentially make it possible to think through atrocity, allowing victims to come to terms and at peace with legal judgments. However, he argues trials are non-exhaustive and that responsibility in a sense becomes contaminated by law, and leave ethical considerations aside. Witnessing activism and testimonies of oppositional test-site knowledge potentially carry this ambiguity of justice as well, pointing to a responsibility behind the tests and attempting to get this acknowledged, on an ethical and political level as well as a judicial one.

There is also the element in testimony of *auctor* according to Agamben; "Auctor signifies the witness insofar as his testimony always presupposes something that pre-exists him and whose reality and force must be validated and certified."<sup>216</sup> The witness by this becomes "the author" of testimony and witnessing a literary gesture, if only so in grey literature or with a limited audience. Testimony is an act of "author" referring to both authority and authenticity, as the auctor here is guaranteeing the correctness, for instance validating a document with a signature, and assures that everything is referring to something else, that nothing is created out of nothing. These modalities are part of the witness activism as a theoretical tool, used to analyse the archives.

Considering my period and focus of research, it is noteworthy to highlight the etymological root of "protest" in the Latin word *testis*, which denotes a public assertion or declaration of witnessing. The concept of parrhesia is also significant here, as it involves "speaking truth to power", which connects to the activist position and sensibility. This approach frames critique from below, registering dissent in the

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<sup>215</sup> Hållander, *The Pedagogical Possibilities of Witnessing and Testimonies: Through the Lens of Agamben*.

<sup>216</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, p. 150.

public sphere. It encourages individuals to publicly critique what they perceive as unjust, and importantly so without possibility of verification. Parrhesia centres on subjective truth, which is inherently deniable and places the speaker in danger, involving an element of sacrifice.<sup>217</sup>

Agamben examines the relationship between sovereignty and bio-politics, revealing how states of exception and the suspension of law create conditions where individuals can be excluded from legal protections and subjected to arbitrary power. Through historical and philosophical analysis, Agamben demonstrates how this dynamic underpins modern political structures and practices.<sup>218</sup>

The relation between human and inhuman becomes visible as perhaps two rivers, floating next to each other but still in the same situation, zoe as bare life, and bios as qualified political life.<sup>219</sup> Hereby, Agamben explores the structure of human subjectivity as separated, before human social practice and action, as contingent on potential inhumanity and an inability to fully understand this as an (im)potential. Agamben understands the camp founded on the state of exception, to “appear as the hidden paradigm of the political space of modernity, whose metamorphoses and disguises we have to learn to recognize”.<sup>220</sup> He mentions the nuclear holocaust in *The State of Exception* concerning the paradigm of governance by exception (with the criteria absolute necessity and temporariness), arguing with Clinton Rossiter and his work *Constitutional Dictatorship in the Atomic World* from 1949, that the exception in the atomic world has become the rule and thus is no longer an exception, quoting the final sentence of the text as a grotesque prophecy: “No sacrifice is too great for our democracy, least of all the temporary sacrifice of democracy itself.”<sup>221</sup> There is thus, I argue, a potential overlap in the colonial test-site testimonial knowledge production between camp experiences as a genre and nuclear security politics in connection to the limits of democracy.

In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Agamben addresses the impossibility of fully imagining Auschwitz and precisely recounting its experiences. A complete testimony is therefore impossible, and the ethical point for him is to recognize and confront this impossibility. Correspondingly, he argues that while the material mechanics, historical, and bureaucratic elements of the Holocaust have been sufficiently clarified, its ethical and political aspects remain inadequately explored. He views the Holocaust as a reality that exceeds its factual components, irreducible to the sum

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<sup>217</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discourse and Truth: The Problematization of Parrhēsia* (Berkeley, CA.: S.N, 1983).

<sup>218</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*.

<sup>219</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, pp. 82 ff.

<sup>220</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 72–73.

<sup>221</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 315.



of its elements.<sup>222</sup> This points to a central ambiguity for Agamben, one that I explore in the investigation of the conditions for oppositional knowledge production on the test sites, of a non-concurrence of distinct facts and truth (epistemology and ontology in critical realist terms), and the integration of this in political claim-making (adjudication and evaluation) on the test site over time.

Building on the work of the linguist Émile Benveniste, whom Agamben refers to in his elaboration on testimony, Didier Fassin introduces another aspect of the witness: the *histor* as a recorder of events. The *histor* does not adhere to the same demands for direct closeness that are integral to the roles of *superstes* or *testis*, or the direct authority of the *auctor*. Instead, the *histor* records what has been heard or read, rather than seen, through a testimonial chain that historians often refer to as second-hand, third-hand, and so on. This means that a different form of authority is granted to the *histor* based on what they have heard and read. Simultaneously, the *histor* authorizes this information and acts as both a mediator and an author.<sup>223</sup>

Taken together, the etymological aspects and epistemic modalities here interact and open an understanding of the witness as multiple. According to Hållander, testimonies are hereby not stories of everyday life, but of traumas or wounds, traces of an injustice that has been done to the witness or someone else. Testimonial knowledge thus becomes interrelated to political and ethical claim-making as well as to pedagogy and understanding.

### 3.3.2 Summary and application in the archival analysis

Building on Agamben's etymological reading of testimony in *Remnants of Auschwitz*, following Fassin's pragmatic deployment of those categories, and Hållander's reading of pedagogical potential of testimony, I use four *modalities* as instruments for archival analysis: first, *testis*, as the proximate, third-party observer (close to the event but nominally neutral). In the archives this map onto on-site inspectors, technicians, and journalists. Analytically I note provenance and claims to direct observation. Second, *superstes*, as the survivor who has lived through the event and decides whether to speak, is a figure of embodied experience. In the archives this is represented by oral histories, recounted stories of life, workers and veterans' accounts, and residents' narratives. What I look for here is patterns, repetition, and affective registers. Third, *auctor* is the authorising mediator whose certification or signature confers authenticity (experts, physicians, NGOs, and signatures that vouch for authenticity). In practice this aspect is found in endorsements, credentials, co-signatures, and processes of verification. Finally, the *histor* is the recorder or mediator of second-hand accounts (historians, journalists,

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<sup>222</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, p. 12.

<sup>223</sup> Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*, p. 215.

translators). In the archive this includes synthesized reports, compilations, and biographies.

Importantly, all the analyses of these modalities probe the conditions for their possibility, looking to understand what had to be in place for them to occur as such. These modalities are not mutually exclusive means of testimony; they function as analytic holds for *retroduction*: asking what institutional, technical and rhetorical conditions had to be in place for a given claim to appear, function, and travel.

Drawing on Agamben's account of the Holocaust testimony, Fassin's critique of humanitarian reason, and Hållander's study of the pedagogic limits and possibilities of witnessing, these categories illuminate how Holocaust testimonies, Hiroshima aporias, and nuclear-test-site survivor accounts occupy overlapping positions of authority, voice, and mediation – highlighting the ethical, legal, and political tensions of giving, withholding, or ignoring testimony.

### 3.4 Affirmative and Critical Strands in Testimony Studies as an Analytical Approach

Witness/testimonial studies is a disparate field, as witnessing is not only a widespread practice in coping with political atrocity but an epistemic problem as well. Here follows an overview of what some scholars in the field say and disagree about, to be able to formulate my own position at the end of the chapter.

A key work in testimony studies from 1992 is Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, which offers a psychoanalytic perspective on testimony, particularly in relation to Holocaust survivors.<sup>224</sup> Their work emphasizes the act of listening to and recording testimonies, framing testimony as an event that incites a crisis – whether in clinical or pedagogical contexts – thereby opening the mind to transformation. Trauma in the psychoanalytical sense is a broken shield, where the inability to master trauma is the inability to verbalize it. It relates to history in that it is not simultaneous to events but experienced belatedly. The events become traumatic if language does not provide sufficient symbolic tools and terms to integrate them in meaningful schemes and thus a sort of narrative vacuum exists where experience and discourse fail to integrate. In terms of the test site, the trauma could possibly be seen at a collective level. Carl Cassegård has argued in terms of social empowerment and activism as potentially responsive to collective trauma, that this is not simply trauma shared by a number of people but “damage sustained by discursive systems that hold

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<sup>224</sup> Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (London: Routledge, 1992).

collectives together”, a tear in the social web that gives cohesion and orientation to collectives.<sup>225</sup> In this context, one can argue for the witness activism as an attempt to resolve, handle, and articulate the trauma of the test site and nuclear colonialism. However (whether this deduction holds or not), my non-reconciliatory approach to the methodology puts this (psycho)analytical framing both to the test and aside from my own method.

Furthermore, the psychoanalytical resolving of trauma in Felman and Laub’s understanding of witnessing as a transformative narrative crisis also contrasts with Giorgio Agamben’s approach. Agamben focuses on the ethical dimension of witnessing but emphasizes the limits of testimony and the subject’s inability to fully bear witness. These differing views reflect distinct conceptions of human subjectivity. Felman and Laub regard subjectivity as unified, highlighting survivors’ capacity to articulate their experiences as part of a forward-looking process of treatment, and remembrance as a form of prophylaxis. Agamben in contrast challenges the notion of the subject as a sovereign recorder of experience, suggesting that the potential for transformation lies in the very incapacity to fully witness.

Fassin and Hållander understand testimony as a productive structure or mechanism of knowledge and subject formation on a social level, particularly in pedagogical and humanitarian contexts. They relate testimony to its structural function across different historical contexts and understand its reception as historical.<sup>226</sup> Hållander examines the pedagogical context of primary and secondary education, where history as a subject has become increasingly entwined with testimonial forms of teaching, highlighting both the challenges and the potential of this approach to learning.<sup>227</sup> In contrast, Sibylle Krämer and Sigrid Weigel, in an anthology, present testimony as a situated and relational intersubjective event, but rather distinct from the broader social fabric and situation in which it occurs.<sup>228</sup> They conceptualize testimony as comprising three key elements: the testimony itself, the witness, and the addressee. They also identify two primary strands in the academic discourse on testimony: the discursive and the embodied, aligning themselves with the latter. This separation seems somewhat reductive, as it overlooks the possibility that the discursive can also be embodied, and vice versa, and goes against the critical realist

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<sup>225</sup> Carl Cassegård, *Youth Movements, Trauma and Alternative Space in Contemporary Japan* (Leiden: Global oriental, 2014), p. 14.

<sup>226</sup> Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*; Hållander, *The Pedagogical Possibilities of Witnessing and Testimonies: Through the Lens of Agamben*.

<sup>227</sup> Marie Hållander, *Det omöjliga vittnandet: Om vittnesmålets pedagogiska möjligheter* (Malmö: Eskaton, 2017); Hållander, *The Pedagogical Possibilities of Witnessing and Testimonies: Through the Lens of Agamben*.

<sup>228</sup> Sybille Krämer and Sigrid Weigel, *Testimony/Bearing Witness: Epistemology, Ethics, History and Culture* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017).

analytical stance of *both and* in the object-subject division.<sup>229</sup> The binary division of Krämer and Weigel potentially limits the exploration of testimony in contexts beyond academic debate. I argue that this overlooks the complexity of testimony, especially in historical contexts of conflict like nuclear weapons testing, where the boundaries between discursive and embodied forms are blurred.

Another distinction Krämer and Weigel make, related to their separation between discursive and embodied testimony, is between the subjective and objective registers. The subjective register involves processing violence, while the objective register concerns the attainment of legal-historical knowledge. They advocate for testimony as a speech-act, arguing for its potential for actual representation. This stance is, by Krämer and Weigel, loosely contrasted against “poststructuralism”, which, in their reading, exhibits a scepticism toward the witness’ ability to represent actual violence, which they argue is found in the works of Agamben and Derrida.<sup>230</sup>

Fassin, however, critically reviews and develops Agamben’s thinking from another angle. He does this by interweaving Agamben’s theory with anthropological-historical empirical cases where testimony and witnessing play significant roles. Addressing the Agambian aporia of the impossible witness with these case studies, Fassin describes a “testimonialization” of the humanitarian logic, from the perspective of how it has played out over the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His presumption is that humanitarian witnessing does something to a situation, and he develops a critique of humanitarianism (and its epistemic foundation) that implicates its obscuring of contradictions and injustices in the world.<sup>231</sup> Fassin sees this as having become increasingly powerful as a mode of structuring social relations globally, and that moral sentiments have been gaining force in a compassion politics where emotions direct attention to the suffering of others and make us want to remedy these emotions rather than looking to the root causes of the problem.

Fassin argues for a historical development where humanitarian language forms a link between affect and value, which has deep consequences for what people are able to do and how governments express power over life. He takes the example of the double figure in Palestinian youth as heroes and martyrs throwing stones, and at the same time victims of trauma. This centres a possible strategic use of position and several possible figures such as passive victim and active agent in the same person, which is not of individual choosing, as it transpires in the social world. Still, one or the other can be preferred, unconsciously integrated or attempted to be taken by the individual. What is interesting for Fassin is thus not the “I” of action/

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<sup>229</sup> Danermark, Ekström, and Karlsson, *Explaining Society: Critical Realism in the Social Sciences*.

<sup>230</sup> Krämer and Weigel, *Testimony/Bearing Witness: Epistemology, Ethics, History and Culture*, p. XVff.

<sup>231</sup> Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*; Fassin and Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood*.

testimony, or the individual conscious or unconscious deliberations as such, but political subjectivation, the production of subjects (in the public) within social interaction.<sup>232</sup>

Furthermore, Fassin maintains both a critical distance and empathetic engagement with humanitarian efforts, critically examining them while still acknowledging their significance.<sup>233</sup> While Fassin investigates when morality becomes articulated as politics, my research here operates on the contrary, with politics and knowledge production before it is designated as moral, or is in the process of being implemented as such in a contentious struggle.

Yet another academic approach views testimony as an ethical practice with the potential to advance justice and institutional human rights. Michal Givoni exemplifies this approach through examining the meta-testimonial discourses that emerged in response to the Holocaust and disasters in the Global South. She builds on the theoretical and ethical redefinitions of witnessing found in the works of Lyotard, Felman and Laub, and Agamben, but reframes testimony as having potential as a Foucauldian *practice of the self*, one that "...binds individual autonomy to institutions, technical innovations, and reflexive procedures".<sup>234</sup> This parallels Caroline Gatt's autoethnography on environmental activist work as imbricated with reflexive technologies of the self, and the concept of parrhesia, in a form of historical progressivist perspective of an ostensibly increasing influence of the individual against state violence, and the activist witness as an ultimate form of subjectivity.<sup>235</sup>

Givoni argues that the individual witness, and the practice of self that testimony entails, represents the most significant response to a contradiction she identifies within contemporary testimony. On one hand, she contends that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the witness had become an unparalleled source of authority in making political and ethical claims of knowledge. On the other hand, testimony is continually subjected to scrutiny, embodying what she terms the paradoxical "success of a failure".<sup>236</sup> This, Givoni claims, stems from testimony's adaptability in concrete applications, and its aligning with a paradigm that promotes the creation of autonomous subjects, where freedom is equated with autonomy in a somewhat circular manner. Through this arguably progressivist historical process, Givoni argues, testimony has evolved

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<sup>232</sup> Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*, p. 202.

<sup>233</sup> Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*, Introduction.

<sup>234</sup> Michal Givoni, "The Ethics of Witnessing and the Politics of the Governed," *Theory, Culture & Society* 31, no. 1 (2014), p. 123.

<sup>235</sup> Gatt, *An Ethnography of Global Environmentalism: Becoming Friends of the Earth*.

<sup>236</sup> Givoni, "The Ethics of Witnessing and the Politics of the Governed" (2014), p. 123.

into a widely accepted “practice of freedom”, a means by which the governed can exert influence.<sup>237</sup>

In contrast to Fassin’s incisive critique that political claims risk being individualized and occluded within the moral registers of testimony and the politics of compassion, Givoni presents a more optimistic account of witnessing as a form of resistance to government intrusion. Yet this affirmation is deeply problematic. It relies on an overly empiricist logic that treats testimony as an almost self-evident and ahistorical site of subject formation, without critically interrogating the material and institutional conditions in which it arises. The later apparent success of witnessing is contingent upon the structures of NGO politics such as funding regimes, organizational infrastructures, platforms, and technologies – that are themselves vulnerable to cooptation by imperial, state, or corporate interests. By neglecting these dynamics, Givoni risks overstating the autonomy and emancipatory power of witnessing, rendering invisible the ways in which such practices can be disciplined, instrumentalized, or rigidified. In contrast, Fassin’s stance maintains a critical approach attuned to how effective and legitimate moralized forms of testimony can obscure the structural conditions of injustice, highlighting the tension between affective visibility and the deeper mechanisms of power that shape what counts as legitimate knowledge or credible harm.<sup>238</sup>

In agreement with Givoni, the sociologist Fuyuki Kurasawa elaborates on witnessing as a transnational ethical political work with an affirmative outlook. Kurasawa views testimony as a practice of developing responses to dangers, encompassing giving voice, interpretation, empathy, remembrance, and the prevention of future harm.<sup>239</sup> So, what Fassin would term a politics of compassion, Kurasawa understands as a desirable path and mode of action. Wanting “politics of compassion” to function, Kurasawa poses the question, why are reactions to testimonies of mass suffering not stronger?

According to Givoni and in line with arguments of Samuel Moyn,<sup>240</sup> testimony and acts of bearing witness connect to a wider historiography of humanitarianism, and a process of conflation between humanitarianism and human rights that, they argue, from the beginning were separated concepts that were increasingly integrated from

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<sup>237</sup> Givoni, “The Ethics of Witnessing and the Politics of the Governed” (2014), p. 127. This is further developed also in more activist-oriented research as a practice of love. Villenas, “Pedagogies of Being With: Witnessing, “Testimonio,” and Critical Love in Everyday Social Movement” (2019).

<sup>238</sup> Givoni, “The Ethics of Witnessing and the Politics of the Governed” (2014), p. 128.

<sup>239</sup> Fuyuki Kurasawa, “A Message in a Bottle: Bearing Witness As a Mode of Transnational Practice,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 26, no. 1 (2009).

<sup>240</sup> Moyn, “Human Rights and Humanitarianization.”; Wilson and Brown, *Humanitarianism and Suffering: the Mobilization of Empathy*.

the 1970s, with the examples of NGO-institutions such as Amnesty and MSF.<sup>241</sup> Greenpeace, for example, can be read as an actor that integrates legal advocacy with environmental justice campaigns and testimonial knowledge production. Anti-nuclear archives reveal how activists enact testimony as a political practice: a form of witness activism that both bears witness to violence and produces oppositional subjectivity.

The field of testimony studies spans a range of approaches: Felman and Laub analyse psychoanalytic “crises of witnessing”, Agamben emphasizes the impossible voice of the concentration camp survivor, Krämer and Weigel explore the tension between discursive and embodied forms, while Givoni frames testimony as Foucauldian practices of the self, and Kurasawa advocates for a transnational politics of compassion. In this analysis, I follow Fassin and Hållander, who problematize testimony structurally and socially as epistemically ambiguous: tracing how humanitarian logics, pedagogical imperatives, activist strategy, and entrenched inequalities shape whose knowledge circulates and to what ends. Their framework provides the tools to read anti-testing archives as sites of testimonialization, political subjectivation, and contested knowledge.

Within testimony studies, I adopt a historicizing, mixed approach: I recognize that testimony can be politically efficacious and ethically transformative, yet I treat its authority as historically produced – shaped by institutional mediation, genre conventions, and the material processes of circulation, all of which structure the possibilities and limits of what can be known and acted upon. In the following section, these conceptions are applied to practices at nuclear test sites to develop witness activism as a theoretical tool.

### 3.5 *Witness Activism* as a Theoretical Contribution

Following the perspectives of Fassin, Hållander, and Agamben, I investigate an archive of testimonial practices – remnants – and the historical process by which they emerged through contestation. This approach shifts focus to inscription, editing, translation, and documentation, in the registers of the varied analytical modes of testimony such as *testis*, *superstes*, *auctor*, and *histor*. It also underlines the empirical traces and mechanisms of structures that shape possible knowledge claims, rather than viewing testimony as an already set, defined epistemic category as such, or an inherently progressive development within increasingly institutionalized humanitarian frameworks.

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<sup>241</sup> This is also a line that Fassin argues for, see Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*.

### 3.5.1 Humanitarian reason and international human rights law in relation to nuclear weapons consequences

Fassin traces the rise of a humanitarian logic that, through intertwined discursive and institutional shifts, became a dominant mode of political mobilization in the late-20<sup>th</sup> century, despite its internal contradictions. This logic reoriented political discourse away from interests and structural injustice toward compassion, suffering, and moral urgency, elevating civil society, trauma, and individual agency within what he terms NGO politics. Central to this transformation was the increasing epistemic authority accorded to testimony and the singular voice as sources of moral and historical truth. The period and materials and methods examined – oppositional knowledge production around nuclear testing – intersect with this broader revaluation of testimony, though only partially, a tension that the concept of witness activism is designed to capture.<sup>242</sup>

By the late-20<sup>th</sup> century, according to *humanitarian reason*, testimony had moved from suspicion to conditional legitimacy, even as that legitimacy remained shaped by specific formats, mediating institutions, and arenas of circulation. This pattern closely, though not perfectly, maps onto the history of anti-testing opposition examined here: humanitarian and environmental organizations mobilized testimonial repertoires to translate local suffering into transnational claims – such as global Hibakusha framings and memorial practices – while simultaneously delimiting which experiences could gain traction and how they were interpreted.<sup>243</sup>

I argue further that the logic of humanitarian reason has had effects as either a hope for the future abolition, as a way to stifle and discredit such demands, or as an institutionalization of nuclear exceptionalism<sup>244</sup> in the ideology of the global nuclear order. Therefore, these processes merit historical investigation.<sup>245</sup> At this stage, evaluating the extent or effects of a hypothesized humanitarianization of nuclear weapons in Fassinian terms is beside the point. The aim here is not to measure the content or magnitude of such effects, but to analyse how nuclear testing

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<sup>242</sup> Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*. See also Moyn, “Human Rights and Humanitarianization”; Michael N. Barnett, *Humanitarianism and Human Rights: A World of Differences?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Wilson and Brown, *Humanitarianism and Suffering: The Mobilization of Empathy*.

<sup>243</sup> Kmentt, “The Development of the International Initiative on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons and its Effect on the Nuclear Weapons Debate” (2015); Tannenwald, “The Humanitarian Initiative: A Critical Appreciation.”; Jacobs, *Nuclear Bodies: The Global Hibakusha*; Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory*.

<sup>244</sup> See Tannenwald, “The Humanitarian Initiative: A Critical Appreciation.”

<sup>245</sup> The global nuclear order, according to Egeland, is the evolving set of institutions, norms, and practices governing the development and use of nuclear technology worldwide that can, and should, be put to critical scrutiny. Egeland, “*The Road to Prohibition: Nuclear Hierarchy and Disarmament, 1968–2017.*”



and its opposition were shaped by – and in turn contributed to – the broader emergence of humanitarian reason as it came to be applied to the nuclear world.

Samuel Moyn’s account of the humanitarianization of rights complements Fassin: humanitarian idioms and NGO politics became central vehicles for registering and mobilizing suffering.<sup>246</sup> Yet international human rights law has to date largely failed to provide robust remedies for nuclear test-related harms. In the US, the fallout class action suits from the late-1950s were not based on human rights law.<sup>247</sup> The Nuclear Claims Tribunal (established 1988 for the Marshall Islands) and isolated human rights petitions (e.g. cases brought by Tahitian plaintiffs under Articles 6 and 17 of the ICCPR)<sup>248</sup> illustrate efforts to translate testimonial claims into legal recognition, while also exposing the structural limits of such avenues. The Tribunal itself ultimately ceased operations when its funding was exhausted.<sup>249</sup> More broadly, legal frameworks confront two persistent obstacles: first, weak enforcement mechanisms and limited institutional capacity; and second, the reliance on epidemiological and evidentiary standards – such as those derived from the Longitudinal Studies of Survivors paradigm – that struggle to accommodate dispersed, low-dose, and long-term harms, rendering many forms of nuclear injury legally ambiguous or intractable.<sup>250</sup>

Legal scholars likewise debate the fit between nuclear effects and existing law. Stuart Casey-Maslen argues that nuclear weapons are not inherently incompatible with International Humanitarian Law (IHL), but that IHL’s weak enforcement limits redress; he also notes that legal analyses tend to foreground acute, high-dose injuries

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<sup>246</sup> Moyn, “Human Rights and Humanitarianization”; Jan Eckel and Samuel Moyn, *The Breakthrough: Human Rights in the 1970s* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History*. See also Wilson and Brown, *Humanitarianism and Suffering: The Mobilization of Empathy*.

<sup>247</sup> Higuchi, “Tipping the Scale of Justice: The Fallout Suit of 1958 and the Environmental Legal Dimension of Nuclear Pacifism” (2013).

<sup>248</sup> See OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHT SELECTED DECISIONS OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE under THE OPTIONAL PROTOCOL, Volume 6, Fifty-sixth to sixty-fifth sessions (March 1996 – March 1999), UN 2005. Retrieved 23 July 2024 from <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/SDecisionsVol6en.pdf>

<sup>249</sup> Johnston and Barker, *Consequential Damages of Nuclear War: The Rongelap Report*.

<sup>250</sup> Jacobs, *Nuclear Bodies: The Global Hibakusha*. These issues are well known and noted by several experts addressing nuclear test effects as a justice issue. See Tilman A. Ruff, “The Humanitarian Impact and Implications of Nuclear Test Explosions in the Pacific Region,” *International Review of the Red Cross*, Issue 899 (2015); Sue Rabbitt Roff, “Puff the Magic Dragon: How our Understanding of Fallout, Residual and Induced Radiation Evolved over Fifty Years of Nuclear Weapons Testing,” *Medicine, Conflict and Survival* 14, no. 2 (1998); S. Yamada and M. Akiyama, ““For the Good of Mankind”: The Legacy of Nuclear Testing in Micronesia,” *Social Medicine* 8, no. 2 (2014).

(burns, blindness) rather than protracted, low-level harms.<sup>251</sup> Louise Doswald-Beck stresses that fallout implicates rights against cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment (ICCPR; Convention Against Torture), observing that “radiation adversely affects the immune system so that the injured will not recover in the way they could have from weapons without this effect. In addition to causing more deaths than otherwise, this prolongs suffering”.<sup>252</sup> Yet this logic of proportionality and suffering has not been extended to testing regimes in practice.<sup>253</sup>

For the archive-based study I make, these theoretical points imply specific empirical moves. I treat testimonial materials as formatted evidentiary practices – shaped by editing, translation, endorsement, and brokerage – and I track how they are brokered into legal, media, and NGO arenas. If testimony and experiential accounts become authoritative through circuits of collection, editing, and circulation, then these practices are not peripheral but constitutive of nuclear witness activism. To broker is here to make testimony come into being, and thereby to co-produce the genres, audiences, and evidentiary forms through which oppositional knowledge acquires force.

On the CEP tests, French lawyer François Roux attempted to use human rights avenues to evaluate the testing and its consequences, a path also explored by witness activist Bruno Barrillot in his work and publications. This work related to testimony and collection of experiences will be investigated in Chapter 8, on Obsarm and AVEN. The humanitarian line has in later decades thus been stronger than the related human rights based one and is perhaps a condition for further addressing and recognizing issues of nuclear test consequences.

### **3.5.2 Applying testimony-theory to oppositional knowledge production on nuclear weapons testing**

Applying witness activism as a theoretical tool to the archives of nuclear testing – pamphlets, reports, and testimonies about fallout, radiation exposure, and related health effects – we find that test sites have been only partially “humanitarianized”. Humanitarian reason has never been fully applied to the aftermath, memorialization, or governance of nuclear testing. Debates continue over how to interpret and remember these tests in terms of environmental damage, colonial injustice, and

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<sup>251</sup> Gro Nystuen, Stuart Casey-Maslen, and Annie Golden Bersagel, *Nuclear Weapons Under International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>252</sup> Louise Doswald-Beck, “Human Rights Law and Nuclear Weapons” in *Nuclear Weapons under International Law*, ed. Gro Nystuen, Stuart Casey-Maslen, and Annie Golden Bersagel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 436.

<sup>253</sup> Stuart Casey-Maslen, “The use of Nuclear Weapons under Rules Governing the Conduct of Hostilities” in *Nuclear Weapons under International Law*, ed. Gro Nystuen, Stuart Casey-Maslen, and Annie Golden Bersagel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

reparations. These contested legacies differ across decommissioned and non-decommissioned test sites, all marked by militarized economies and ongoing nuclear colonialism, places where testimonies in varied degrees shape reality and knowledge. Ultimately, witness activism is not a single discourse, institution, or set of actors, but an ephemeral ensemble of practices and performances, found in and used to analyse the archival material. This is a position and form of knowledge and claim making that the following empirical chapters seek to elucidate, between international NGO politics and immediate experience and victimization processes.

The theoretical elaboration of testimony studies outlined here forms the basis for the analysis of witness activism as a historical position and phenomenon, as a historical enquiry into the roots of the *victimisateur* and Global Hibakusha articulations. Throughout the thesis, the modalities of *testis*, *superstes*, *auctor*, and *histor* will be used to identify the types of testimonial oppositional knowledge that emerge and how they function. Hereby, I am not advocating for or against the deployment of testimony but rather using it as an analytical category to describe practices and develop a deeper understanding of nuclear test knowledge claims.

**Table 2: Epistemic modalities of testimony and analytical application**

| <i>Witness modality</i>                                    | <i>Typical archival traces</i>                                                                     | <i>Archival-ethnography move (what to look for/do)</i>                                                                                                 | <i>Key analytic question</i>                                                                                              | <i>Methodological note</i>                                                                                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Testis (proximate, third-party observer)</i>            | Inspection reports, field logs, on-site photographs, journalist dispatches, technical logs         | Trace provenance, authenticate closeness to event, check contemporaneity, cross-check timestamps and signatures                                        | How does contemporaneous third-party observation manifest itself or not, and relate to the other modalities of testimony? | Institutional interests of inspectors; check redactions; use of subjectivity and tense in published material |
| <i>Superstes (first-hand survivor)</i>                     | Oral histories, recorded interviews, personal letters, veterans' testimony transcripts             | Read for affective registers, narrative patterns, repetition across interviews, performative elements, map temporality and longitudinal change         | What embodied knowledge and patterns of recounting recur, and how do they evolve over time?                               | Anonymization and sensitivity around trauma; translation issues; temporality                                 |
| <i>Auctor (authorizing mediator)</i>                       | NGO endorsement letters, medical certificates, expert reports, co-signed documents, press releases | Track brokerage: who vouches, how validation is produced, what credentials matter; analyse genre conversion and argument scale shifts                  | How does mediation confer legitimacy, and into which arenas is authority translated?                                      | Account for brokers' agendas; note power asymmetries in who can vouch                                        |
| <i>Histor (recorder / second-hand)</i>                     | Syntheses, histories, newspaper compilations, translated compilations, museum texts                | Map chains of transmission, editorial interventions, omissions and paraphrase; compare versions to source testimonies and different editions over time | How are second-hand accounts authorized, reframed, or silenced in later assemblages?                                      | Mark editorial interventions and translation choices                                                         |
| <i>Circulation &amp; arena (cross-cutting)</i>             | NGO reports, newsletters, media coverage, exhibitions, letters, and sent items                     | Trace mobility of accounts across arenas; note format shifts                                                                                           | Through what brokers and formats do testimonies gain public/policy traction?                                              | Track consent/permissions when analyzing public circulation; note archival usage restrictions                |
| <i>Silence/presence/ archive structure (cross-cutting)</i> | Redaction marks, missing files, embargoed collections, unprocessed boxes                           | Read absences and presentation structure of material as evidence                                                                                       | How do gaps, redactions, and material invisibility shape historical knowledge and testimony?                              | Consider what is missing, how it is organized, and how this shapes epistemic interpretation                  |

In sum, witness activism is not a synonym for testimony but a historical position and a set of archival practices through which oppositional knowledge about nuclear testing is forged, mediated, and contested. The conceptual instruments (modalities) – *testis*, *superstes*, *auctor* and *histor* – are meant as analytic holds that direct attention to position, provenance, mediation, genre formation, and circulation.

These four modal positions of testimony are not philological or pedagogic ornaments; properly deployed, they provide a finely grained epistemic anatomy of witness activism. To make them analytically operable within the theoretical frame of this thesis, I map each modality onto Roy Bhaskar's critical realist stratified ontology (empirical – actual – real), showing how testimony moves from immediate experience to institutionalized knowledge and how each modality both discovers and occludes different strata of the past.

The *superstes* here relates to the empirical as it names survival: the embodied, lived residue of an event. It is the domain of sensations, perceptions, and affective memory – precisely the register Bhaskar calls the empirical. The *superstes* hereby supplies the raw, phenomenological data of harm: pain, recollection, sensory trace, without being falsifiable or verifiable. These are what can be observed, reported, and felt, and they anchor any further epistemic work. *Testis* on the other hand relates more to the actual strata being the act of attestation: reporting that an event occurred, specifying what was seen, done, or suffered. As such it addresses the *actual* – the events and processes that happen whether or not they are observed. Testimony as attestation attempts to convert lived perception (empirical) into claim about events (actual), and in doing so it negotiates evidentiary forms (dates, places, sequences) that can be corroborated or disputed in comparison to other data (other *testis* testimonies for instance). The *superstes* cannot be verified or disputed in this sense.

The *auctor* modality informs the retroductive analytical move toward the *real* by performing interpretation and authorization: selecting, framing, and giving causal or moral purchase to experience. This modality is the epistemic engine of retroduction, the inferential work that seeks underlying mechanisms, structures, or causal logics. In Bhaskarian terms, the *auctor* aims at testifying the *real*: the institutions, bureaucracies, techno-political rationalities, and epistemic regimes that generate events and make certain experiences possible or invisible.

The *histor* in this relates to the institutionalization of the real into history and temporality. The *histor* thus orders, narrativizes, archives, and uses the archive: it is the modality through which mechanism becomes narrative, and narrative becomes part of a historically transmitted record of events (thus a product that likewise is a mechanism). The *histor* mediates between the real and the collective record, translating mechanisms and events into durable historical forms (archives, press, historical books, legal records). In this sense the *histor* is the mechanism by which underlying structures are inscribed into public memory and disciplinary knowledge.

This mapping is not rigid taxonomy but a heuristic for analysis. In practice, single actors and documents instantiate multiple modalities at once. A survivor may be *superstes* in one passage, *testis* in another; an activist report may function simultaneously as *auctor* and *histor*. The value of aligning these modalities with Bhaskar's strata is that it clarifies the distinct epistemic moves at stake, from lived sensation to eventhood to causal explanation to institutional inscription, and it makes visible where archival practice and witness activism as found in the archive can capture evidence, and where it necessarily falls short.

When coupled with an archival-ethnographic sensibility – one that reads formats, marginalia, metadata and non-textual traces alongside testimonial accounts and brokered endorsements – witness activism becomes a practical lens for explaining when, where, and how testimonial claims achieve traction and count as knowledge. The following empirical chapters apply this lens to the Danielssons' and Obsarm collections: tracing how particular testimonies were produced, brokered, and made legible (or illegible) across political, legal, humanitarian, and media arenas. Finally, I do not claim that witness activism exhausts the politics of nuclear knowledge; instead, I claim it offers a historically grounded, methodically explicit tool for making sense of oppositional knowledge production within the archival record.

### 3.6 Chapter Conclusions

In this chapter, I have developed a theoretical framework for understanding how testimony generates oppositional knowledge in the context of nuclear testing. The following empirical chapters show how witness activism both produces epistemic claims and shapes subjectivity, tracing the ways in which personal accounts of the test-site's consequences, fallout and radiation, have entered disarmament debates despite enduring uncertainties.

This lays the framework for historicizing testimonial authority through archival ethnography: close reading of provenance, format, marginalia, and circulation in the Danielssons' and Obsarm collections, which will reveal how critical claims were produced, packaged, and brokered across arenas. Epistemologically, I work within a critical-realist frame: testimony, as any knowledge, is historically situated and fallible, yet it can be judged more or less adequate via mechanism-consilience – the coherence of testimony with material traces, contemporaneous reports, and plausible causal explanations. This allows a middle path between uncritical credulity and wholesale scepticism.

Drawing on the works of scholars such as Giorgio Agamben, Didier Fassin, and Yannick Barthe, I have argued that testimony as epistemic genre has evolved over time, becoming a more trusted yet paradoxically weaker form of knowledge production. This highlighted the relationship between testimony, victimization, and

subjectivity, suggesting that the process of witnessing nuclear tests involves complex dynamics of truth, knowledge, and power, and that opportunities and possibilities for critical knowledge production on nuclear tests changes over time.

In the chapter, I have formulated a constructive critique of Barthe's portrayal of nuclear test victimology, and his *victimisateur* figure, by arguing that this narrative of victimization overlooks the longer history and changing conditions over time of anti-nuclear struggles for knowledge. Testimony as it is understood here, in the context of nuclear testing, is not merely a personal narrative but also a socio-historically contingent instrument for challenging official histories and creating collective memory not only as a victim.

In analysing witness activism, I draw on the classical lexicon purported by Agamben and followers: *superstes*, *testis*, *auctor*, and *histor* – understood here as four epistemic modalities of witnessing. These modalities describe not discrete persons but shifting relations between the social world, experience, narration, and authority. The *superstes* embodies the existential modality of survival: the one who has lived through the event and whose continued presence constitutes the possibility of testimony. The *testis* enacts the evidentiary modality, bearing witness to what has been seen, suffered, or endured, often on behalf of others. The *auctor* assumes the interpretive modality, authorizing meaning and transforming experience into claim and argument. Finally, the *histor* performs the narrative modality, ordering testimony into history and time, and thereby mediating between memory, archive, and collective understanding.

In the context of witness activism, these modalities frequently overlap. Activists may operate as *superstes*, *testis*, *auctor*, and *histor* at once – surviving, testifying, interpreting, and inscribing their experiences within transnational circuits of oppositional knowledge on the test site. Framing witness activism through this quadripartite schema illuminates how epistemic authority is produced and circulated under conditions of secrecy and uncertainty, and how this becomes a political and archival act. The archive, in this sense, is not only a repository of testimony but a site where the modalities of witnessing are continually re-enacted, negotiated, and transformed into the material infrastructures of memory and contestation.

I then situated these insights within broader scholarly debates, contrasting affirmative or normative approaches (exemplified by Givoni and Kurasawa's emphasis on testimony's emancipatory promise) with critical and historicizing perspectives (as in Fassin's and Hållander's critiques of testimony's social construction and humanitarian instrumentalization). Psychoanalytic readings by Felman and Laub highlight trauma's narrative void, while Agamben underscores the intrinsic impossibility of fully representing atrocity.

Building on Didier Fassin's critique of humanitarian reason – its tendency to forge consensus at the expense of structural critique – I explored how this might or might not overlap with witness activism and has been used by NGOs and human-rights

advocates to “humanitarianize” nuclear testing, pressing for legal reparations and reframing test sites as humanitarian crises, which is a further empirical question to be investigated in the following chapters.

Additionally, I have connected testimony to broader debates about knowledge, power, and activism, especially in the context of environmental justice and global threats like climate change. This highlights how testimony as a genre has become central to NGO politics and social movements, influencing how we understand and mobilize against issues like nuclear colonialism, imperialism, and the broader consequences of nuclear testing over time.

To illustrate how claims of oppositional knowledge, by the analytical use of modes of testimony, relate to each other in this, I have made a two-dimensional model presented in figure 2.

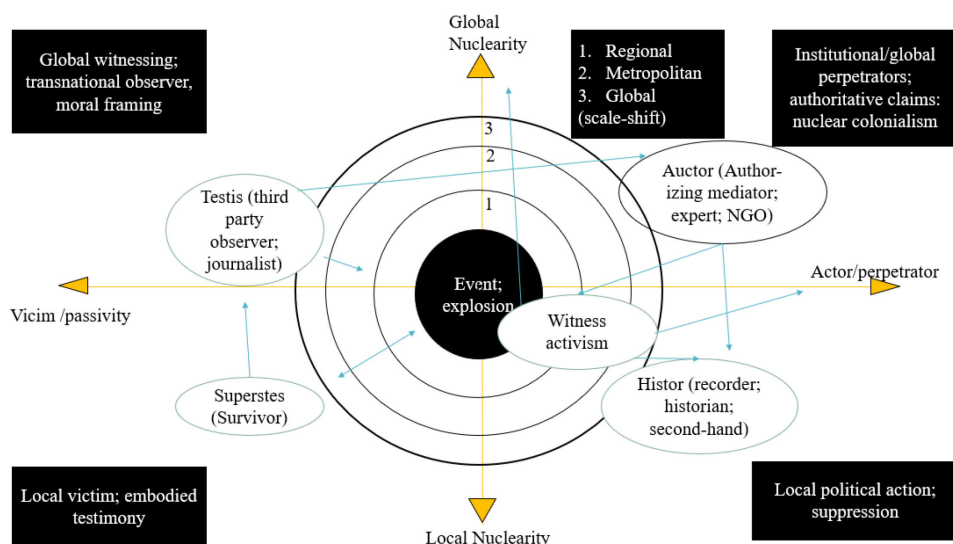


Figure 2. Model of witness activism and oppositional knowledge.

The arrows represent ways of making critical knowledge claims, that evolve and change over time, which I discuss in more detail in the empirical chapters. The points in the matrix are not dichotomous but related, which is useful when connecting the theoretical development of the witness activist position to the empirical analysis of anti-testing archives and practical oppositional knowledge production. It also involves the concepts from Chapter 2 on the history of knowledge and research on activism as a historical category. The x-axis refers to violence and the y-axis to scale. Modal points (superstes, testis, auctor, histor) map typical testimonial positions; arrows indicate common translational pathways by which embodied experience is brokered and institutionalized.



This model provides the conceptual bridge to the empirical chapters, where I will examine how archival material and activist practices together have transformed critical claims into transnational demands for justice. It instructs the archival ethnography about *what to look for* (sensory traces and affective markers for the empirical; chronological anchoring and corroboration for the actual; discursive framing and causal claims for the real; provenance, circulation, and inscription for historical institutionalization). The figure operationalizes how testimonial modalities and political positions cluster within a two-dimensional moral-epistemic field. Local, embodied testimonies (superstes) typically begin in the bottom-left; third-party contemporaneous observation (testis) occupies adjacent positions; brokers and mediators (auctor) tend toward institutional and transnational arenas; and historians and institutional narratives (histor) aggregate claims in global registers. The concentric rings denote temporal and geographic scales through which testimony travels; arrows indicate translation pathways, losses, and re-codifications. The diagonal certainty gradient highlights how “knowing” often changes its character as claims move from lived uncertainty to apparent institutional certainty – a shift witness activism both contests and exploits.

To conclude, witness activism finally, as developed here, should be read as an exploratory tool which has its necessary focus and limitations. Framing witness activism as a circuit of circulation can occlude agency and affect. The model’s emphasis on movement, longer time periods, and mediation might read survivors as raw inputs processed by brokers rather than as strategic actors who occasionally occupy auctorial and historian roles themselves. Equally, a circulation-centred analysis can reduce testimony to transportable objects and underplay rhetorical force, performative urgency, and the ethical valence of testimony. Methodologically, the framework is strong for mapping infrastructures and genres but weak on explaining macro-political shifts, audience reception dynamics, or the long durational afterlives of memory without supplementary methods.

Normatively, the framework remains largely agnostic about the truth claims themselves (not the practice that is the object of study), which can flatten distinctions between coercion, fabrication, and authenticity, and thereby risk undermining the political urgency of survivors’ accounts. That agnosticism guards against naive verificationism but can also flatten crucial distinctions between coercion and consent, fabrication and strategic rhetorical performance, if not paired with careful triangulation and ethical judgement.

Read together, the fourfold schema and its critical realist alignment give the study a disciplined ontology: they allow us to say, where historical knowledge is produced, where it is lost, and where intervention is possible. It also insists, and this is the chapter’s final critical point, that every archival recovery is a partial one. The record shows the *how* of knowledge-making while necessarily leaving gaps in the *who* and the *what* that must be attended to by other methods, collaborations, and ethical commitments in future work.



# Chapter 4. Archival Ethnography and Description of Sources

## 4.1 Archival Ethnography and the Authority of the Archive

In the following, I frame my approach to investigating different kinds of activist archives and material for producing and circulating knowledge to identify the development of counter-narratives and testimonial accounts. A short overview of the method of archival ethnography as a development and contribution to conventional historical writing is presented, followed by a description of the two main archives used as analytical examples.

This method builds on Caroline Gatt's ethnography of the environmental NGO *Friends of the Earth*, built on eco-phenomenology and archival science, where emphasis is put on the organization's archives as important for the identity and coherence of the organization, and on archival research which is described more in the following.<sup>254</sup> Gatt thoroughly describes the structure of the archives, the orientations of documents, and her experience of them, based on being present, speaking with people about the collections, and taking detailed notes. Laura Ann Stoler has theorized this approach in the context of colonial archives to be read "along the grain" of their existence and Cathrine Trundle has followed her impetus through analyzing personal archives of nuclear test veterans, describing a work and practice of archiving that is utilized throughout the analysis.<sup>255</sup>

By suspending (not banishing) the historian's customary detachment to the archive, my method incorporates personal perceptions and experiences as analytical resources, drawing on autoethnographic technique, field journaling, photography, and discussions with those who curate and use the archives. This combined, embodied reading and description allows me not only to trace the orientation and

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<sup>254</sup> Gatt, *An Ethnography of Global Environmentalism: Becoming Friends of the Earth*; Farge, *Le goût de l'archive*.

<sup>255</sup> Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*; Trundle, "Searching for Culpability in the Archives: Commonwealth Nuclear Test Veterans' Claims for Compensation" (2011).

materiality of the records but also to surface the social relations and power dynamics that underlie their production and preservation. Unlike conventional history, which often privileges text over context and maintains a distance to the situated archive, my approach follows Fassin's socio-graphic tradition – built on Bourdieu's reflexive sociology, Wacquant's ethnographic fieldwork, and Boltanski's pragmatic sociology – to treat the archive itself as social practice.<sup>256</sup>

This method contrasts with conventional text-focused history: whereas official (colonial) archives are often mistrusted for purportedly “silencing the marginal”, witness activist archives deliberately counter this by surfacing excluded narratives and claims from the test sites. This builds on long-standing debates about the nature of historical fact: as Michel-Rolph Trouillot argued in *Silencing the Past*, history is not simply “out there” waiting to be extracted from the archive but is actively produced through power-laden processes that generate both narratives and silences.<sup>257</sup> The result is a more nuanced account of how knowledge and history are constructed, authorized, and contested within and through archives. As Salah Punathil notes, archival ethnography yields a “rich, historical anthropology” by overcoming the idea that archives are merely extractive sources of data.<sup>258</sup>

In this context, authority refers to something that a statement or document invokes or is ‘signed with’. Swedish intellectual historian Michael Azar, in an essay on testimony, argues that authority always points beyond the immediate statement – toward experience, scripture, law, the archive, or another author.<sup>259</sup> In history as a genre, the source of authority is often the archive – the place where evidence is found and referenced by the historian. What is said is validated and authorized by this external reference; without it, authority risks becoming a mere synonym for force. In history as a genre, the archive often functions as this external source: by citing it, the historian simultaneously legitimizes the archive itself. As Derrida reminds us, without such processes of authorization, the archive could be reduced to a mere collection of documents, devoid of meaning.<sup>260</sup> Azar further complicates this: if facts are themselves forms of testimony, then historians must grapple with “an infinite regress”, where every witness testifies to another witness without ever reaching an ultimate origin. Testimony, he argues, is doubly constrained by norms:

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<sup>256</sup> Fassin and Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood*; Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*.

<sup>257</sup> Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*.

<sup>258</sup> Salah Punathil, “Archival Ethnography and Ethnography of Archiving: Towards an Anthropology of Riot Inquiry Commission Reports in Postcolonial India,” *History & Anthropology* 32, no. 3 (2021), p. 318.

<sup>259</sup> Michael Azar, *Vittnet* (Göteborg: Glänta, 2008).

<sup>260</sup> Compare to the accounts of archive in Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*; Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*.

first, by the expectation of what can be witnessed at all; and second, by what can be rendered into legible testimony.

The functions of the archives examined here are central to the selection of source material – specifically, how they are mobilized in knowledge production to address perceived silences and suppression. The archives investigated were not constructed as identity archives, memorial archives, or community archives, but as *working archives*, repositories created for practical activist use, closely tied to the witness activist position I conceptualize.<sup>261</sup>

These archives were not intentionally developed to produce history or institutional memory (though they may have been formatted as such at later dates), but rather to support activist work and opposition, including the creation of historical and testimonial accounts.

The Danielsson archives in Oslo and the Obsarm archives in Lyon, for example, were not curated by professional archivists but generated through authorship and contentious activism. Deliberate decisions about what to preserve, where to store it, and how to organize it – even when ad hoc – give these archives a discernible intentionality. Such choices can be recontextualized and retroducted today through their material form, cross-references, and the application of source criticism. Yet intention often remains opaque, as archival practices might reflect private memory work, bureaucratic technologies, mimic institutional protocols, or simply result from coincidence.<sup>262</sup> Seen through the lens of the history of knowledge, these practices of archiving are integral to establishing claims, defining degrees of “nuclearity”, and developing strategies of mobilization.<sup>263</sup>

Annelise Riles, in *Documents: Artifacts of Modern Knowledge*, emphasizes the ethnographic study of documents less as historical traces and more as social artifacts. She shows how documentation – particularly in humanitarian and human rights practices – establishes regulatory frameworks, legitimacy, and accountability, turning archives into institutions of control and power over knowledge. In her view, documents are ubiquitous in modern life: “documents appear at every turn in the constitution of modern bodies”, whether biological, organizational, or legal.<sup>264</sup> They

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<sup>261</sup> This can be compared also to non-professional community and organizational archives. See Alexander and Bastian, *Community Archives: the Shaping of Memory* (Facet, 2009); Ketelaar, “A Living Archive, Shared by Communities of Records”.

<sup>262</sup> For the private archives of test veterans purposefully adapting to and copying state archiving practices see Trundle, “Searching for Culpability in the Archives: Commonwealth Nuclear Test Veterans’ Claims for Compensation” (2011).

<sup>263</sup> Agamben’s work with remnants as a historical concept is here informative and extends the source critical tradition. The remnant is connected to trauma and memory beyond technopolitical instrumentality.

<sup>264</sup> Riles, *Documents: Artifacts of Modern Knowledge*, p. 5.

are central to statecraft and governance. Witness activists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many of whom were academics or politicians, were familiar with such documentation practices and imported them into their activist work. Their recordkeeping, writing, pamphleteering, and archiving were shaped by traditions of scholarship, politics, and organizational routines.

The archiving processes and historical principles of collection and selection are not at hand, but the archives as they exist can still tell something of the situations and conditions from which they emerged. This is why the following section explores and describes the two main archives that are analysed in more detail.

#### 4.1.1 Methodological examples of working archives

Compared to individual activist collections, organizational archives typically contain larger volumes of documentation, greater material resources, and more formalized regimes of selection, editing, and curation. In examining both the Obsarm and Danielsson archives, I observed that certain document series were more carefully safeguarded, foregrounded, and systematically indexed than others. In the Obsarm archive, for example, a steel cabinet containing materials deemed most critical was prominently positioned and explicitly identified upon my arrival. This cabinet houses, among other items, documents declassified in 2013-2014 and later forming the evidentiary basis of the *Toxique* report, as well as extensive reproductions of materials originally held in military archives, duplicated to mitigate risks of fire, material degradation, or potential reclassification.<sup>265</sup>

The cabinet also contains three pivotal scientific reports – the Tazieff, Atkinson, and Cousteau reports, named after their lead authors – along with associated correspondence, reception materials, and records of public and scientific debate. Together, these curated holdings not only trace the history of organized opposition to nuclear testing but also make visible the ongoing difficulties faced by activists and the public in accessing, stabilizing, and preserving authoritative documentation of nuclear harm.

Obsarm's archival hierarchy, established by activists and volunteers in Lyon under Bruno Barrillot's and Patrice Bouveret's leadership, thus reflects a clear distinction between more central documents, which are better protected, registered, and displayed, giving them certain weight and authority in the process of making knowledge claims. As we will see, and as Trundle has noted in the context of veterans of the UK tests in the Pacific, documents that have been retrieved through

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<sup>265</sup> Philippe and Status, *Toxique: Enquête sur les essais nucléaires français en Polynésie*. This report received a lot of attention in 2021 criticizing the CEP's legacy and the way in which the French authorities handled the tests.

non-official paths (i.e. not released officially) might contain even greater weight.<sup>266</sup> Similarly, the steel cases in the Danielsson archives contain what might be considered central documents, selected by the Danielssons to be close at hand, well-protected from insects and the climate, and systematically sorted by themes relevant to their work.

The Obsarm archive stands out as more systematically organized and following a more continuous archiving process compared to the Danielsson archives, likely due to greater resources and the involvement of multiple volunteers. Obsarm's archive is organized into distinct sections, extending from Bruno Barrillot's personal working archives. It also houses records from related organizations, such as *Moruroa e tatou* and AVEN, both of which Barrillot helped establish. The presence of these archives in Lyon, rather than in Tahiti, warrants further study. While one might expect them to be housed in the upcoming memorial centre in Tahiti, their location in Lyon under Obsarm's independent care could be seen as a safeguard, particularly given the organization's scepticism toward the French government's handling of sensitive materials.

Additionally, having the archives under Obsarm's care ensures greater accessibility for independent research. If these records were housed in, for instance the Service du Patrimoine Archivistique et Audiovisuel (SPAA) in Papeete, access might be more restricted due to the tight controls exerted by the institution over its documentation. Thus, their current location offers both security and research access that might not have been possible in Tahiti.<sup>267</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the documents' placements and relationships within the archives influence their weight in interpreting the witness activist position. For example, a fragment or brief note attached to a map, copied and cross-referenced, that was widely circulated and debated, provides insight into the practices of witness activism as we will see below. Attention to both form and content is crucial for an in-depth understanding of the subject, to then discern the underlying processes and mechanisms of the oppositional claim making. Hereby the following work is based in archival ethnography, underlining the importance of description and note taking in the archive, so that the archive itself is a field of study, connected to the historical interpretation.<sup>268</sup> An analytic ethnographic description of the two main archives of this study and how they are structured thus follows.

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<sup>266</sup> Trundle, "Searching for Culpability in the Archives: Commonwealth Nuclear Test Veterans' Claims for Compensation" (2011).

<sup>267</sup> My access to working documents and records of the *Assemblée territoriale* dating back to the 1960s was for instance restricted since the administrative status of the territory at this time was more tightly tied to France.

<sup>268</sup> See the above section on the method of archival ethnography as a way of writing history of knowledge.

## 4.2 The Danielssons' Archives, KTM BD in Oslo, and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson's Archive in Tahiti

The first archive, the *Bengt Danielsson Archive*, covers materials from 1935 to 1997. It consists of documents organized into boxes sorted by categories, steel cases with files named and structured primarily by Bengt Danielsson, and office binders housed in the back rooms of the Kon-Tiki Museum on the Bygdøy peninsula in western Oslo.<sup>269</sup> Some small objects and a library of Bengt Danielsson's book collection are also part of the archives.<sup>270</sup> The collections remain, to a great extent, in the state it was received by the Kon-Tiki Museum in Oslo, sorted into Bengt and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson's own categories. I, along with the museum's curator Reidar Solsvik and OEJ Stenberg, have catalogued the documents.<sup>271</sup> In 2017, I worked as an archivist to organize unsorted materials, moving them into archival boxes and registering their contents while taking field notes.

The archive includes research materials, manuscripts, correspondence, and publisher contacts. The most relevant materials for this investigation are the documents in the steel cases and the files under section 11.2, which relate to nuclear tests and politics in French Polynesia. These materials are highly organized, likely reflecting their importance to the Danielssons themselves. My focus excludes other subjects covered in the archive, such as Polynesian anthropology, Paul Gauguin, expeditions, and James Cook. Despite this limitation, the selected material amounts to approximately eight shelf metres of steel cases and archival boxes, with additional content in office binders and books on nuclear issues.

Following my method of archival ethnography, priority was given to analyzing the material in the steel cases, which had been stored in the Danielssons' home office and which were frequently mentioned by politicians and anti-nuclear activists I spoke with in Tahiti during my 2022 visit.<sup>272</sup> In my analysis, I consider that the documentation in steel cases was curated with greater attention than the material shipped to the museum in banana boxes or similar containers. While this does not make the steel case material inherently more important, it suggests a more deliberate

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<sup>269</sup> The museum was headed from the start in 1949 by the Norwegian resistance champion, Kon-Tiki radio operator and intelligence officer Knut Haugland. Haugland had during the Second World War worked with US and British intelligence which proved useful when the Kon-Tiki expedition acquired funding and equipment from the Pentagon. The story behind the expedition and its subsequent media success is covered in Axel Andersson, *A Hero for the Atomic Age: Thor Heyerdahl and the Kon-Tiki Expedition* (Witney: Peter Lang, 2010).

<sup>270</sup> See O.E. Johannes Stenberg, Anton Öhman, and Reidar Solsvik, *Bengt Danielsson Archive. Preliminary Catalogue, August 2017*, The Kon-Tiki Museum (Oslo, 2017).

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Field notes, March-April 2022. Private possession.



approach to this documentation by the archive's producers and the practice of witness activism.

This was regarded almost as a legendary archive, where the Danielssons could quickly retrieve documents related to the CEP, nuclear tests, and Polynesian history for their work. The steel case material has been thoroughly organized by the original creators, Bengt and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson (referred to as BD and MTD in the catalogue), and consists of 17 drawers containing hanging files, each holding around 20-40 named folders.

I was invited into the archives in Oslo; I had worked with them before, and I could sit next to the steel cases and pull drawers out to find material that corresponded to manuscripts and published works to trace methods, claims, provenance, and link documents to certain quotes and arguments. This meant the opportunity to re-track arguments quite easily, but also to understand the methodology behind their claims, texts, and note references. It was in this situation that the term *witness activism* occurred to me for the first time to understand the material trace of their work.

The steel cases thus represent an everyday material-bank offering the ability to practice witness activism, and the Danielssons' writing. The manuscript piles of editing and rewriting, newspapers, and magazines further constitute remnants of their work. The following images illustrate a section of the archive (the sorted steel cases following the archive's creators' own systematization) and the desktop work that generated and utilized the archive.



*Figure 3. My work with the steel cases, transported to the museum in the early-2000s. Photo by A. Öhman, November 2021.*



*Figure 4. Photo of Marie-Thérèse Danielsson working with typing and parts of the library in Papehue, in the 1970s. Source: The photo is part of a large collection of Bengt Danielsson's photographs stored at Kon-Tiki Museum. Photograph, probably by Bengt Danielsson.*

The Danielsson library is an integral part of the Kon-Tiki Museum's collection. This extensive library encompasses a wide range of topics, including Pacific ethnography, general sociology, and literature on nuclear testing in French Polynesia and elsewhere. The library section of the archive comprises 6,540 books, journals, and offprints. Before Bengt Danielsson's passing, portions of the collection were sold, while another segment was donated to the Service du Patrimoine Archivistique et Audiovisuel (SPAA) in Papeete. The library section of the Danielsson collection was catalogued in 2003 by Olaug Irene Andreassen using a FileMaker Pro 5.0 database. Bengt Danielsson's photo archive is another significant component of this collection, documenting his extensive research and travels across the Pacific and other parts of the world. This archive contains 158 standard boxes (each holding 100 slides) and 471 smaller boxes (each holding 36 slides), all carefully numbered and organized.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Stenberg, Öhman, and Solsvik, *Bengt Danielsson Archive. Preliminary Catalogue*, August 2017, p. 13.

The published materials in SPAA have been reviewed; however, some of it was restricted.<sup>274</sup> The restricted material mostly concerned the debates, speeches, and proposals in the territorial assembly in the early days of the testing and installation of CEP. Thus, I have instead chosen to analyse and discuss the same documents that were copied or held in original publication format in the steel case shown above in figure 3 in the Bengt Danielsson archives. The restriction of material produced before 1984 suggests a strategic relocation of the rest of Bengt Danielsson's material to the Kon-Tiki Museum, protected by its location in Norway and the popular appeal of the Kon-Tiki story, documented by the Swedish historian Axel Andersson.<sup>275</sup> Danielsson might, as he had during his years as an adventure-writer and ethnographer, have seen the communicative force of the Kon-Tiki story as an asset linked to his public persona, where its public appeal and fame carries the contents of the archives to a potentially broader public.<sup>276</sup> In 1995, Danielssons correspond on the donation of the Danielsson archives to the *Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries* (SAREC) for stewardship. Upon learning that this government agency was joining with Sida, the larger Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Bengt Danielsson suggested selling his collection for 0.5 million Swedish crowns, that would fund a Polynesian Cultural Institute. However, this did not come to fruition.<sup>277</sup>

The archive was thus donated to the Kon-Tiki Museum following Bengt Danielsson's wishes. The reasoning behind this decision is not explicitly stated in the material, but it may have been to keep the documents out of French official hands and to safeguard them for the future in an institution the Danielssons trusted. The Kon-Tiki Museum, with its ability to attract funding and interest, was also a place where people familiar with Swedish worked. Additionally, the museum provided proper facilities for conserving the documents and photographs, offering the necessary conditions to preserve the material – dry storage with stable climate and humidity. In conclusion, the archives appear to have been organized to meet the Danielssons' primary goal: gathering material for books. This endeavour, which supported the household quite comfortably, eventually evolved alongside their growing awareness of the scope of French nuclear testing and CEP.

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<sup>274</sup> Material from before 1984 (the territorial internal autonomy reforms) is restricted and access must be requested by the archival manager of SPAA, a French official.

<sup>275</sup> Andersson, *A Hero for the Atomic Age: Thor Heyerdahl and the Kon-Tiki Expedition*.

<sup>276</sup> Andersson, *A Hero for the Atomic Age: Thor Heyerdahl and the Kon-Tiki Expedition*. The basis for Heyerdahl's fame is somewhat similar to that of Bengt Danielsson's or vice versa, as a popular, heroic individualist, who believes in himself, based on portions of primitivism and romanticism coupled with broad ecological and environmental thinking.

<sup>277</sup> KTM BD 2622. Item 10. Correspondence with Margot Wallström, 1995.

### 4.2.1 The structure of the Bengt Danielsson archives

Bengt Danielsson's archives consist of 68 boxes and 158 files, which retain the original classification system established by him and Marie-Thérèse. Additionally, organized materials occupy two archival shelves, arranged within a filing system using binder maps, and four full shelves of 50 larger boxes; these and their contents are described in the catalogue: *Bengt Danielsson Archive. Preliminary Catalogue, August 2017*. As my work with this archive forms the foundation for my exploration of the witness activist figure – an analytical approach rooted in practices of documentation and communication – I describe the archive's organization in greater detail below.

The less organized materials were removed from large boxes and re-sorted into numbered archival boxes and files according to thematic categories. These materials were originally stored in approximately 50 large boxes of various shapes and sizes, each averaging dimensions of 30 x 40 x 50 centimetres.

Danielsson's book collection, bequeathed to the Kon-Tiki Museum in 1979, was not physically transferred until the fall of 1998. The archives and photo collection were donated by Marie-Thérèse Danielsson in the same year, arriving in 208 numbered boxes. These were initially categorized using a system that, while modified over time, has been largely preserved.

The categories were: 1. Books/reports, 2. Serials, 3. Images/photos/maps/objects, 4. Dictionaries, 5. Articles/offprints/correspondence, manuscripts/notes/newspapers/magazines/press cuttings, 6. Brochures/info/catalogues, 7. Nuclear issues, 8. Economics/statistics, 9. Gauguin, and 10. Bounty. This system designates the categories based on form, with some categories more topical and based on content. Albeit that this categorization follows a logic, in that the thematic categories encompass large quantities, and that it was important as representing separate issues that Bengt Danielsson worked on, the categorization was modified as follows for greater coherence in a second sorting:

1. Book manuscripts
2. Article manuscripts
3. Lectures and speeches
4. Film manuscripts
5. Drawings
6. Personal notes
7. Diaries
8. Expeditions
  - 8.1. Preparations
  - 8.2. Members
  - 8.3. Equipment
  - 8.4. Finance
  - 8.5. Log books
  - 8.6. Radio messages
  - 8.7. Reports
  - 8.8. Media (communications, press brief, etc.)
  - 8.9. Communications etc. during the expedition
  - 8.10. Communications etc. after the end of the expedition proper

- 8.11. Etc.
- 9. Science and academics
  - 9.1 Anthropology, ethnology, archaeology
  - 9.2 History
- 10. Environment
- 11. Politics
  - 11.1 General
  - 11.2 Nuclear tests
    - 11.2.1 Journals and magazines
    - 11.2.2 Press clippings
    - 11.2.3 Correspondence
    - 11.2.4 Governmental papers
    - 11.2.5 Reports
    - 11.2.6 Nuclear resistance movements
    - 11.2.7 International nuclear issues
    - 11.2.8 Health and environment
    - 11.2.9 Own writings and the Bengt Danielsson affair
    - 11.2.10 Miscellaneous
  - 11.3 Independence movement in French Polynesia
- 12. Prizes, awards, and honours
- 13. Membership (associations, unions, clubs etc.)
- 14. Correspondence
  - 14.1 Editors and publishers (countries, company name)
  - 14.2 Film companies, newspapers, TV, and radio (countries, company name)
  - 14.3 Friends (surname, date)
  - 14.4 Scientists (surname, date)
  - 14.5 Nuclear testing
  - 14.6 General correspondence
  - 14.7 Fan mail
  - 14.8 Reviews, discussions
- 15. Miscellaneous
  - 15.1 Book reviews
  - 15.2 Pamphlets etc.
  - 15.3 Economy (tax statement, bills, bank accounts etc.)
  - 15.4 Not classifiable
- 16. Newspapers and Journals <sup>278</sup>

The material relevant to this thesis is primarily the content sorted by the Danielssons themselves, specifically focusing on nuclear tests. This is detailed as 75 steel case folders (out of a total of 521) from the, covering nuclear testing, peace, and disarmament projects. These folders range from containing only a few to over 180 documents each, with folders like 2621 – *Le moratoire des essais et la reprise en 1995* and 2620 – *Articles and Photos after the Publishing of Moruroa, notre bombe coloniale (2nd edition 1993)*, containing the most documents.<sup>279</sup> Additionally, 68 boxes categorized under section 11.2, registered as “Level 3” in the catalogue, are also analysed. Each box is marked with folder numbers ranging from 2600 to 2668

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<sup>278</sup> Stenberg, Öhman, and Solsvik, *Bengt Danielsson Archive. Preliminary Catalogue, August 2017*, p. 15–16

<sup>279</sup> The comparative magnitude of this later material indicates a noted increase in the interest of French testing over the later years, something which is addressed and analytically related to witness activism as a developing practice throughout this thesis.

(2999), and every document is individually numbered, classified, and briefly described in the searchable catalogue. Document information was recorded systematically, considering availability and appearance according to the following information:

- Number given within the folder
- Type of document (letters, original, copy, magazines, news clips, notes, court proceedings, assembly minutes etc.)
- Date of the document
- Language
- Short summary of the contents based on who appears in the document as addressee, central quotes

The material under category 11.2 *Nuclear tests* and 11.3 *Independence movements in French Polynesia* in many ways overlap, and 14.5 also contains correspondence on nuclear testing. 11.2.1 contains single issues of journals and magazines that Danielssons either wrote in or that take up nuclear issues that were of interest to them, and this category can be understood in terms of knowledge circulation.

Furthermore, some documents were present in the folders and boxes, material sorted and present but not described in detail. Relevant sources from this are also included in the material and include among other things two notebooks from the summer of 1995 on nuclear testing and popular reactions in Tahiti (item 42-43).

In a suggested knowledge hierarchy, ranging from “raw” to “cooked”, the steel case material is assigned a higher value based on its greater degree of organization and, consequently, its refined accessibility of information. The less ordered material, while containing more drafts, copies, and unsorted notes, holds important knowledge but is less refined. For instance, an early-stage manuscript draft with many manual edits would fall into this less ordered category. For this work, I utilize both categories and attempt to trace the processes between them. Using the critical realism approach, I recontextualize how documents move between these categories, as some steel case materials are frequently referenced in unsorted draft materials. To take an example from the description in the catalogue, the folder numbered 2603 is summarized:

Summary: several confidential documents showing POU’s inconvenience to the French administration. BD refers to a “friend in the administration” that has procured him, even with some originals....<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Stenberg, Öhman, and Solsvik, *Bengt Danielsson Archive. Preliminary Catalogue, August 2017*, p. 41.

And exhibit no. 5 in folder 2603 is described as follows:

TYPE: Confidential security report. DATE: Undated. LAN.: French. CONTENT: Accompanied by BD handwritten note “CONFIDENTIAL, handed over to me by my friend in the administration” these 4 typewritten pages give a strongly negative account of POU’s activities in 1947.<sup>281</sup>

The contents of folder 2603 provide an example of how testis-type documents operate as institutional traces. Labelled “Confidential” and annotated in Bengt Danielsson’s hand as “handed over by my friend in the administration”, exhibit no. 5 bears several provenance markers, a faded stamp and BD marginalia, that together claim contemporaneity and inside access.<sup>282</sup> Cross-referencing this page with photocopies preserved in Obsarm reveals how a proximate account was brokered outward:<sup>283</sup> the original remained guarded in the Danielsson working archives while reproduced copies entered activist circulation, thereby converting a private administrative trace into public evidence. Analytically, the document’s movement demonstrates the critical role of duplication and brokerage in converting testis evidence into oppositional knowledge.

POU stands for Pouvana’a a Oopa (looking back, the logical shorthand would be PaO, but this mistake demonstrates and keeps the unstable and contingent process of archiving part of the analytical development and reflexivity), the names in the catalogue have been abbreviated to shorthand homonyms, which function as a way of working with the material; the actor BD, Bengt Danielsson and Resare-Bengt, for instance, refer to the same person but in different functions and positions.<sup>284</sup> The “BD” is the desk-work and paperwork shorthand representing bureaucratic intellectual work, writing, editing, and giving directions, as key for the witness activist position as the “Bengt Danielsson” who stands as author of books, or the formal “Dr. Danielsson” who corresponds with government agencies, and the “Consul Danielsson” who gets invited to the foreign legion’s official functions in Papeete. These different positions are developed in chapters five and six on the Danielssons as witness activists, as ways of understanding the actions and agency

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid. This description is thus an account of what is in the folder and on the exhibit.

<sup>282</sup> KTM BD 2603, Item 5.

<sup>283</sup> Obsarm B66E, Box marked *Archives BB*.

<sup>284</sup> For a similar name-analysis of a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship officer navigating institutional obstacles and establishing transnational networks in Latin America, see Michael J. Barany, “The Officer’s Three Names: The Formal, Familiar, and Bureaucratic in the Transnational History of Scientific Fellowships.” in *How Knowledge Moves: Writing the Transnational History of Science and Technology*, ed. John Krige (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

of Danielsson(s) as multifaceted and non-stable. BD is the shorthand most referred to in the activist work with documents in the archives.

The archives of Marie-Thérèse Danielsson, consisting of her own work and documents collected after Bengt Danielsson was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, primarily cover the 1980s and 1990s. These materials are currently administered by family friends in Tahiti (the Koenigs). I was granted limited access to this collection, which is intended to be donated to a memory site institution once the necessary arrangements are finalized.

This archive documents the later stages of the Danielssons' lives as activists, highlighting Marie-Thérèse Danielsson's connections with the international peace movement, women's movements, and figures such as Bruno Barrillot and the Obsarm organization. Despite not being included in the Kon-Tiki Museum's holdings, Marie-Thérèse Danielsson's archive holds comparable significance to Bengt Danielsson's archive in relation to the witness activist position and the French nuclear testing program (CEP). It also includes records of activism following the final tests, as well as protests against President Chirac's decision to resume testing in the mid-1990s. I was graciously invited to the home of the Koenigs and was able to go through some of the material, but not all of it.

## 4.3 The Obsarm Archive and B. Barrillot Papers in Lyon

Second, the archives of Bruno Barrillot and Obsarm (*Observatoire des armements*) in Lyon are analysed. Obsarm is a larger organizational node of independent research, collecting peace and arms research and NGO-anti-nuclear testing material, from several nuclear disarmament and peace organizations.

I had attempted to go there for some time, but Covid-19 had made it impossible, so I was thrilled to visit in the summer of 2021. My first contacts with the custodians had been a little reserved but on mentioning Bengt and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson I was quickly welcomed. The Danielssons thus held a symbolic role as archival door openers, given their close collaboration with Bruno Barrillot, who worked alongside them as their friend and confidant, as evidenced in the correspondence preserved in the archive.<sup>285</sup> This was also true when I visited Tahiti and encountered anti-testing people there.<sup>286</sup>

The Obsarm archive is a storage building without much climate control and when I went there it was an extremely hot summer. However, I was kindly welcomed to sit

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<sup>285</sup> Obsarm B66E, Box *Archives BB* containing letters and CD-ROMs of copies of the personal archive of Bruno Barrillot.

<sup>286</sup> Field notes, June 2021, from my stay at the Obsarm locale in Lyon. Private possession.



at a desk in the archive so that I could go through the boxes on the shelves. One of the founders of Obsarm, Barrillot, whose reports and collected testimonies I had read had by that time passed away. His portrait hung on the wall in the main hall.

Useful materials can also be found in connecting organizational archives of the CND in the UK and in Greenpeace International's archives at HIIS in Amsterdam; these organizations worked with a more international anti-testing scope. Human activists and supra-human organizations are joined by the form of protest and claim in the sub-human and fragmented archives.<sup>287</sup> They connect on both general and specific levels, with actors knowing each other and working simultaneously, sharing information from the localities of the test site, and furthermore extending to an internationalized opinion application.<sup>288</sup>

As a hub for witness activism and ongoing anti-nuclear testing efforts from the late-1980s into the 2000s and beyond, Obsarm played a pivotal role in collecting information, generating documentation, and shaping public opinion – primarily in France and French Polynesia – regarding nuclear weapons testing in the region. Obsarm functions as a centre for independent research and a non-profit NGO supported by a committed membership base in Lyon and the Francophone world. It collaborates with sister organizations addressing various aspects of nuclear testing and its impacts.

The peace movement milieu in Lyon has been vibrant since the 1960s, driven by pacifist organizers and conscientious objectors. Obsarm was founded in 1984 as the *Centre de documentation et de recherche sur la paix et les conflits* by Bruno Barrillot, Patrice Bouveret, and Jean-Luc Thierry. According to Yannick Barthe, the idea of establishing an independent centre for defence expertise, modelled after American think tanks, was beginning to take shape within local anti-militarist circles at the time.<sup>289</sup> The organization built on Lyon's tradition of resistance and intellectual engagement, as well as the networks established by Garm (*Groupe d'Action et de Résistance à la Militarisation*), a group of conscientious objectors formed in 1967 that remained active throughout the 1970s.<sup>290</sup> I was able to gain access to their vast collections of material, including organizational documentation, bulletins from activist organizations in mainland France and Polynesia, as well as

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<sup>287</sup> Gatt, *An Ethnography of Global Environmentalism: Becoming Friends of the Earth*.

<sup>288</sup> Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism*.

<sup>289</sup> Barthe, *Les retombées du passé: Le paradoxe de la victime*, p. 40.

<sup>290</sup> Maillolochon, "Les réseaux de militants contre les essais nucléaires français (1959–1996)," pp. 138, 146. Garm was a group of activists who, according to Maillolochon, consisted of people who saw and resisted the French crimes of torture and internment in the Algerian war of independence and were inspired by Lanza del Vasto's catholic implementation of Gandhi's resistance. Their anti-testing stance and actions were inspired by the campaigns of the local branch of the Mouvement Contre l'Armement Atomique.

correspondence, flyers, and posters. These documents are carefully preserved and made available for the public and researchers under activist stewardship.

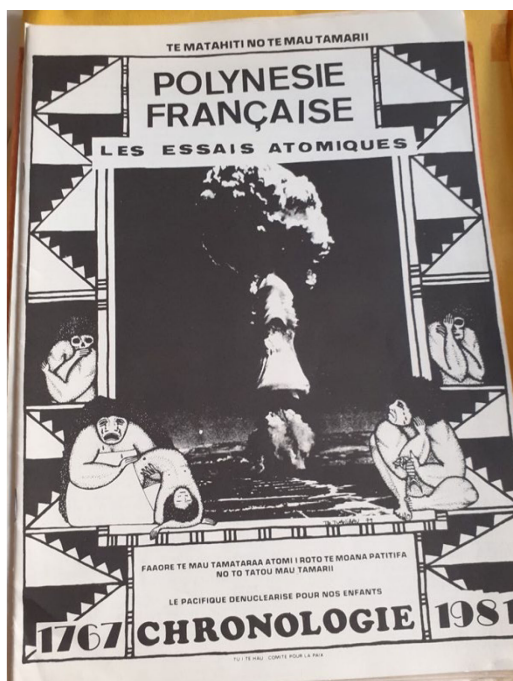


Figure 5. Photo showing a pamphlet detailing a chronology of the tests in Polynesia published by the Comite pour la paix in the early-1980s. Copies of the pamphlet is found both in Obsarm archives and in Danielsson's steel case, file marked "Moruroa, mon amour" There are many copies and iterations of this document in Danielsson's archives, Photograph by Anton Öhman. Courtesy of KTM.

The papers of Bruno Barrillot, along with materials from several NGOs connected to anti-nuclear testing activism and the history of French nuclear testing in Polynesia and the Sahara, are housed in the archives at the Obsarm facility in Lyon. Organizations such as *Moruroa e tatou*, which documents the consequences of the tests and advocates for the rights of workers and local inhabitants, and AVEN, a nuclear veterans' organization, maintain substantial portions of their historical and documentary archives at this location.

Barrillot, who passed away in 2017, was a central figure in these efforts, serving as a advocate for the recognition and compensation of damages caused by CEP. The reviewed materials provide a record of attempts to gain access to key documentation, as well as efforts to verify and authenticate information. They also reveal the processes of disseminating this information and synthesizing it into educational and advocacy materials, books, and reports. The archives and library at Obsarm are open to the public and researchers. During my stay, people dropped in

and out to leave and borrow books or look at documents. Within the context of witness activism, the archive here plays a crucial role as a facilitator, enabling access, preservation, and the strategic use of historical records to support activism and public education.<sup>291</sup> Barrillot wrote books and articles that serve as, and utilize, eyewitness accounts, framing the tests as crimes against humanity. Educational material shows how testimonies were transmitted and used in lectures and collaboration with public schools.

#### 4.3.1 Barrillot's witness activism

Bruno Barrillot's work constitutes a prominent expression of French opposition to nuclear testing in the late-20<sup>th</sup> century and early-2000s. The leader of French ICAN, Jean-Marie Collin, residing in the Obsarm locale when I was there to visit the archives, said that without Patrice (Bouveret) and Bruno (Barrillot) much of the information on the nuclear testing would not exist, and French society's knowledge about the tests would be much lower.<sup>292</sup>

Barrillot travelled to French Polynesia to verify information for the French translation of a key pamphlet, *Témoignages* (originally published in English as *Testimonies* by Greenpeace in 1990). Green Party EU parliamentarian Solange Fernex, with whom the Danielssons collaborated, was deeply impressed by the English edition and regarded its translation and dissemination in France as essential.

According to sociologist Barthe, this publication illustrates a pivotal shift in the nuclear testing contestations of the 1990s, marked by a dual movement. First, the critique increasingly focused on the health effects of nuclear tests, making the visibility of victims a central issue. Second, it spurred actions centred on gathering testimonies, conducting interviews, and distributing surveys, generating a repository of personal accounts, understood as containing both documentary and evidentiary value.<sup>293</sup> That the conditions were right for such an epistemological approach, highlighting testimonies of superstes and testis character and individual victim voices at this time, is in line with Fassin's arguments.<sup>294</sup> During his first visit to French Polynesia, including Mangareva near Moruroa, Barrillot described feeling profound shock and anger at his country's actions. This experience ignited a deep commitment to understanding the situation, which he felt was a moral obligation to

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<sup>291</sup> Material such as Bruno Barrillot, *Les irradiés de la république: Les victimes des essais nucléaires français prennent la parole* (Bruxelles: GRIP, 2003); Barrillot, Villierme, and Hudelot, *Témoins de la bombe: Mémoires de 30 ans d'essais nucléaires en Polynésie française*; Bruno Barrillot et al., *Quelle justice pour les victimes des essais nucléaires: Pour l'adaptation du principe de présomption légale* (Lyon: Observatoire des armements, 2007).

<sup>292</sup> Discussion at Obsarm, 25 June 2021. Field notes, June 2021. Private possession.

<sup>293</sup> Barthe, *Les retombées du passé: Le paradoxe de la victime*, p. 39.

<sup>294</sup> Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*.

the Polynesian people.<sup>295</sup> Thus, the authority of being there as an author and expert is evoked at the same time as testimonies were being produced.

In line with Barthe's notion of the *victimiseur*, I suggest that Barrillot's own experiences, as recollected here, shaped his later methods of organizing and writing. His work increasingly revolved around gathering, reproducing, and circulating testimony, framing it within a human rights and humanitarian register. Within the framework of *witness activism*, such testimony is not merely evidentiary but reproductive: once an actor participates in it, they often become compelled to testify further, extending its reach across time and space. In this sense, testimony operates as a mobilizing moral practice that both generates and sustains collective opposition. These dynamics can be read as expressions of oppositional knowledge production, revealing how epistemologies of the test sites were shifting.

The *Témoignages* pamphlet was, concomitantly, among the first documents presented to me at Obsarm, an act I interpret as an introductory eye-opening gesture, reflective of its testimonial-documentary nature.<sup>296</sup> This aligns with Barrillot's account of meeting filmmaker Michel Daëron in the early-1990s, who, "with his camera and *Témoignages* in hand", went on to produce the 1993 Arte documentary, *Moruroa, Le Grand Secret*.<sup>297</sup> Barrillot and his like-minded colleagues intensified their efforts around the time Marie-Thérèse and Bengt Danielsson began to withdraw from the issue in the mid-1990s. Their work focused on documentation, the collection and dissemination of educational materials, and advocating for the French military to declassify its archives and secret records. Additionally, they supported individuals who suffered various consequences due to their involvement at the test sites, embodying what Barthe refers to as *victimisateurs*.<sup>298</sup>

This work involved inscribing the nuclear tests as historical facts within the archive through multiple processes, including writing, interviewing, editing, and translating accounts, as well as organizing and engaging with individuals who had worked or lived near the test sites. Against this backdrop, humanitarian reason as understood by Fassin became the more practicable register for mobilization: NGOs and advocacy networks have used humanitarian framings to secure international attention and to press for instruments.<sup>299</sup> That same humanitarianization, however, is ambivalent, and an issue that needs to be concretized and tried in the historical record of the witness activist and victimisateur. It can make testimony politically

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<sup>295</sup> Barthe, *Les retombées du passé: Le paradoxe de la victime.*, p. 38. Bruno Barrillot, *Victimes des essais nucléaires : histoire d'un combat* (Lyon: Observatoire des armements/CDRPC, 2010). p. 30.

<sup>296</sup> Field notes, 22 June 2021. Private possession.

<sup>297</sup> Barrillot, *Victimes des essais nucléaires: Histoire d'un combat*. p. 30.

<sup>298</sup> Barthe, *Les retombées du passé: Le paradoxe de la victime*.

<sup>299</sup> Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*.

legible and open routes to recognition and solidarity, but it can also depoliticize structural causes – privileging individualized suffering over colonial, geopolitical, and institutional accountability – and thus channel oppositional knowledge into formats that are easier to absorb than to act upon. I understand humanitarian reason here as an overarching logic that informs witness activist practices: framing nuclear tests as a humanitarian crisis and using testimony to mobilize international solidarity and translate local suffering for global audiences. From an NGO-politics perspective, framing reparations as a humanitarian issue – and deploying witness activism accordingly – transforms nuclear testing into a recognized humanitarian crisis. This logic “humanitarianizes” the problem, perhaps making legal claims possible but also potentially hampering them, as Trundle has suggested.<sup>300</sup>

Obsarm’s activism developed within this contested terrain. Emerging from peace-research networks, the organization combined research, advocacy, and public education, publishing reports, opinion pieces, and the newsletter *Damocles*, and today styles itself as an independent centre of expertise. Obsarm positions itself within transnational disarmament networks such as ICAN while retaining a distinct emphasis on French civil society, grassroots outreach, and democratic oversight of military affairs. According to its founding documents, Obsarm’s remit includes transparency and democratic control of defence and security policy in France and Europe.<sup>301</sup>

During my stay at Obsarm in the summer of 2021, I encountered a committed, convivial workplace culture, marked by enthusiasm for the work constrained resources. Practically, Obsarm operates in two principal areas: monitoring arms transfers and the security industry (led by Tony Fortin) and researching nuclear weapons and their consequences (coordinated by Patrice Bouveret). Its archives and library function as an accessible resource centre and a crucial conduit for journalists, civil-society actors, and researchers, both in France and abroad.

#### 4.3.1 The structure of the Obsarm archives

The Obsarm archive is organized thematically into numbered boxes and shelf locations according to a working order established by Bruno Barrillot and shaped by the organization’s campaigns and institutional partners. Like the Danielssons’ fonds, Obsarm functions as a *working archive*: materials actively used in ongoing projects are prioritized, annotated, and filed with greater granularity than passive deposits.

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<sup>300</sup> Trundle, “Translating Proof: Contested Illness, Radiation Exposure, and the Health Claims of Nuclear Test Veterans”.

<sup>301</sup> “À propos” retrieved 11 November 2024 from <https://www.obsarm.info/spip.php?rubrique1>

The overall filing logic is straightforward and programmatic. Boxes are labelled by program, campaign, or theme, and folders are bundled within those boxes. For instance, on shelf B67D the section labelled “*Nuclear Tests – Polynesia*” contains four boxes marked *Polynésie Hiti Tau*, three marked *Polynésie: Solidarité Europe Pacifique (ECSIEP)*, one of which carries the chronological tag *fin du programme 1992–2006*, and two boxes in the series *Églises et essais*. The result is a thematic mixture in which topical and chronological ordering coexist. Locating an individual item therefore requires some familiarity with these hybrid logics.

An analytical point follows from this structure and function of the archives. The thematic/chronological hybridity of organizing the material is not merely accidental, as it reflects activists’ need to mobilise materials across campaigns and audiences. Archivization here is a performative act that makes certain uses such as public advocacy easier and others like historical reconstruction harder. The fact that I could immerse myself in the archive and go through the boxes freely made this easier. A rudimentary online catalogue offers entry points, but detailed retrieval depends on hands-on work in the stacks. A steel cabinet at the archive’s front contains the material Obsarm elects to display publicly, the organization’s front stage, while deeper layers of documentation reveal the quotidian traces of activist labour and practical project work.



Figure 6. Obsarm files, in marked boxes Photograph by Anton Öhman, June 2022.

The archives at Obsarm are well-organized, but there are concerns about preservation due to the quality of the storage boxes, the condition of the materials, and the environment in which they are housed – an older warehouse lacking climate control. As previously noted, trust issues may partially explain why the archive is in Lyon, emphasizing the importance of safeguarding these materials. This approach aligns with the endemic rationale of anti-test organizations and oppositional

movements, which view such documentation as critical historical remnants requiring protection.

The documents are not merely records; they are seen as resources that generate influence through their documentality and historical significance, underpinning the identity and efficacy of anti-testing projects and organizations. This archival orientation is shared by several other initiatives that pursue claims, seek compensation, and address the consequences of nuclear weapons testing.<sup>302</sup>

One related example of the importance and conflicts concerning access to documentation and archives on nuclear weapons tests is the Nuclear Claims Tribunal (NCT) of the Marshall Islands and the documentation it generated. It relied on testimony from survivors and input from scientific experts to promote transparency and recognition, and gained access to newly declassified archival materials in the early-1990s. Following the Marshall Islands' entry into a Compact of Free Association with the United States in 1986, the nation's parliament, the Nitijela, established the NCT to adjudicate claims for compensation related to the health and environmental impacts of nuclear testing.

In 1993, U.S. Secretary of Energy Hazel O'Leary declassified portions of the Cold War nuclear archives, enhancing access to critical information. Additionally, the Clinton administration established the Office of Human Radiation Experiments to address ethical concerns and investigate past radiation experiments conducted on human subjects. The release of documents provided evidence of much wider contamination than previously acknowledged. The documents were reclassified after 9/11.<sup>303</sup>

Historian Alex Wellerstein argues that openness became increasingly seen as a political liability as it drew attention to past misdeeds without appeasing the critics.<sup>304</sup> When the openness initiative ceased and turned back to secrecy policy, Wellerstein created a database site preserving access to about 13,700 documents relating to the Marshall Island tests.<sup>305</sup> As Nic Maclellan notes, the testimonies collected by the NCT during the 1990s and 2000s were recorded for both future litigation and historical preservation in the Marshall Islands. However, due to limited resources for safeguarding these materials and possibly copies of reclassified documentation, Marshallese addressing the legacy of US nuclear testing sought external assistance. Trudy Huskamp Peterson, a prominent US archivist,

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<sup>302</sup> Trundle, "Searching for Culpability in the Archives: Commonwealth Nuclear Test Veterans' Claims for Compensation" (2011); Trundle, "Translating Proof: Contested Illness, Radiation Exposure, and the Health Claims of Nuclear Test Veterans."

<sup>303</sup> Johnston and Barker, *Consequential Damages of Nuclear War: The Rongelap Report*.

<sup>304</sup> Wellerstein, *Restricted Data: The History of Nuclear Secrecy in the United States*.

<sup>305</sup> Marshall Islands Nuclear Document Database retrieved 4 may 2022 from <https://data.nuclearsecrecy.com/mindd/>.

played a key role in ensuring the preservation of these records for future generations. Working alongside NCT Public Advocate Bill Graham, Huskamp Peterson arranged for the records to be securely stored in Girona, Spain, in 2012.<sup>306</sup>

## 4.4 Connection between the Obsarm and the Danielsson Archives

Barrillot and the Danielssons were in contact over the years, especially in the late-1980s and early 1990s when their interests converged in attempting to testify, produce testimonies and opposition to the CEP, and through converging their networks. They updated each other on news and ideas as well as people of interest and interesting texts and documents that they had read or heard about.

For instance, on Christmas Day 1990, from her home in Papehue, Marie-Thérèse Danielsson writes and gives thanks for a copy of the new issue of *Damocles*, the Obsarm newsletter, and the Danielssons continuously update Barrillot on their whereabouts.<sup>307</sup> On 14 June 1994, Marie-Thérèse Danielsson wrote to Bruno Barrillot to broker a potentially valuable contact. She had recently met a young man named Fabrice, a neighbour of their mutual acquaintances “Little Teki” and his adoptive mother. Fabrice was serving in the military as an instructor specializing in nuclear issues. Marie-Thérèse mentioned that she had introduced Fabrice to their work, giving him the latest issue of *Damocles*, and noted that he might reach out to Barrillot once his service ended. She further vouched for him, describing Fabrice as “very sympathetic and serious”, adding that Barrillot could share additional relevant information with him if they connected.<sup>308</sup>

This letter highlights a potential new source of information, someone working in the military near the test site, and a possible ally for the cause. It also illustrates the general practice of knowledge brokering among witness activists. Contacts were exchanged via fax, as demonstrated when Barrillot mentions three key figures in the Lyon network: Jean-Pierre Lanvin, and Edoard and Thérèse Haond. These contacts were shared after Marie-Thérèse Danielsson had requested their details in a previous letter,

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<sup>306</sup> Maclellan Nic, “Preserving Nuclear Memories.” *Inside Story* (2023).

<sup>307</sup> Obsarm B66E BB archives CD. Handwritten postcard from MTD and BD to BB. Papehue, Tahiti 25 December 1990. See also: Letter from MTD to BB about BD’s passing, 17 April 1997; Fax from BD to BB. Bengt is happy with the *Stop essais* bulletin, letting BB know the address of MTD in Stockholm if they need contact, 28 June 1993; Copy of letter from BB to BD and MTD wishing them a happy new year and an update on the work, Lyon, 3 January 1994.

<sup>308</sup> Obsarm B66E BB archives CD. Handwritten letter from MTD to BB Papehue, Tahiti. 14 June 1994.



as she was planning to travel to Kazakhstan to observe anti-nuclear efforts related to the Semipalatinsk test site, which was beginning to gain attention at the time.<sup>309</sup>

In a letter dated 25 July 1994, Marie-Thérèse Danielsson provides an update on Bengt Danielsson's deteriorating health and the practical arrangements they were making, while also commenting on a book that Barrillot was writing. This letter reflects the close relationship between friends. Marie-Thérèse also mentions sending documents to Oscar Temaru. During their stay in Papehuet, the Danielssons were visited by two young women to whom they entrusted some important documents. This interaction further exemplifies the connection between the Danielssons and Barrillot, as well as the broader network of anti-test activists, where documents were exchanged, copied, and circulated. While the letters discuss the sending and receiving of "interesting documentation", they provide few details about the specific contents of these materials, suggesting that the letters were likely subject to scrutiny and censorship.<sup>310</sup>

Marie-Thérèse Danielsson further asks Barrillot to send some important issues of the *STOP essais* and *Damocles* newsletters to a person working with Radio Tefana in Fa'a'a, the largest and most socioeconomically disadvantaged commune in the Papeete. This person was reportedly working on building a library for the radio station, which would include, among other materials, the collected volumes of these newsletters, and they required additional examples to complete the collection. The correspondence between the two witness activists is rich with similar references to procurement of documentation.<sup>311</sup>

François Roux is mentioned as a central advocate, a human rights lawyer who had worked the case of the Polynesian people against the CEP in collaboration with Oscar Temaru.<sup>312</sup> Marie-Thérèse Danielsson finally wrote from Stockholm at the beginning of August 2000, that she was happy with Barrillot and confident that he could continue the work, with his capability and the organization in Lyon. She also

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<sup>309</sup> Obsarm B66E BB archives CD. Handwritten original of fax from BB to MTD, Lyon. 24 March 1993.

<sup>310</sup> Obsarm B66E BB archives CD. Handwritten letter from MTH to BB. Papehuet, Tahiti. 25 July 1994.

<sup>311</sup> Obsarm B66E BB archives CD. Handwritten letters and postcards from MTH to BB, and some copies of returning letters.

<sup>312</sup> Obsarm B66E BB archives CD. Handwritten letter from MTH to BB. Papehuet, Tahiti. 29 August 1994. Roux is exemplified by Maillochon as a form of mediator, distributing contacts and creating circulation in the wider networks. He was involved in the struggle against nuclear tests from 1979 onwards. He connected his Polynesian clients with Kanaky independence advocacy, Larzac activists, trade unions, and environmental activists. Maillochon, "Les réseaux de militants contre les essais nucléaires français (1959–1996)," pp. 33, 125.

brings up John Doom in relation to this, whom Barrillot would continue to work together with in the forming of *Moruroa e tatou*.<sup>313</sup>

At a general level, anti-test advocates aimed to reveal the consequences of nuclear testing by presenting testimony, claims, and scientific arguments, focusing their efforts on holding an authoritative entity and master discourse accountable. However, this entity neither acknowledged nor shared the advocates' assumptions. Instead, it denied, minimized, or ignored their claims, as admitting fault would mean accepting responsibility for a grave injustice. Collectively, the documents illustrate a persistent effort to highlight an injustice that the responsible party refuses to address.

This archival-ethnographic reading of the Danielsson and Obsarm collections reframes anti-testing archives not as passive repositories but as arenas of oppositional knowledge production. In these sites activists accumulate symbolic-epistemic capital – curating, annotating and mobilizing “counter-archives” to contest official narratives and the mechanisms of occlusion that sustain them. Treating the archive as an active field permits us to trace how protest is materially worked into being through pamphlets, grey literature, zines, oral testimonies, and the mundane apparatus of filing, labelling, and circulation and to see, in the grain of those practices, which memories are amplified, and which are elided.<sup>314</sup>

The empirical chapters that follow deploy this posture to show how witness activism operates as both a tactical repertoire and an epistemic project: making claims legible, negotiating audiences, and producing durable traces that travel transnationally while inevitably containing absences that reflect power, selection, and preservation logics.

## 4.5 Chapter Conclusions

This chapter has presented an archival-ethnographic approach to functionally show how anti-nuclear activists treated archives not as passive repositories but as active instruments of knowledge production and contestation. Drawing on autoethnographic fieldwork, detailed description of material form (steel cases, folders, pamphlets, photographs), and conversations with custodians and users, I examined two linked but distinct activist collections – the Bengt and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson papers (Kon-Tiki Museum, Oslo/Tahiti holdings) and the Obsarm/Bruno Barrillot archive (Lyon). Rather than attempting a traditional

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<sup>313</sup> Obsarm B66E BB archives CD. Handwritten postcard from MTH to BB. Dated Stockholm, Sweden, 6 August 2000.

<sup>314</sup> Claudio E. Benzecry, Andrew Deener, and Armando Lara-Millán, “Archival Work as Qualitative Sociology,” *Qualitative Sociology* 43, no. 3 (2020).

reconstruction of institutional history, the method foregrounds how activists intentionally created, curated, copied, sheltered, and circulated documents, testimony, and “grey literature” to build counter-narratives to official secrecy and agnotology. Paying attention to organization, preservation practices, and the relative visibility of certain document series reveals how archival form and placement confer authority, index claims, and enable mobilization.

Empirically, the Danielssons’ and Obsarm archives functioned as complementary nodes in a transnational witness activist network: the Danielssons’ highly personal work-bank of material, deliberately organized steel-case collections, served as a bank of evidence and argument, while Obsarm’s broader, volunteer-curated holdings amplified, safeguarded, and redistributed testimony, declassified reports and leaked material for public education and advocacy. The archival traces document recurring practices – knowledge brokering, translation, duplication, and strategic storage – accumulated symbolic-epistemic capital and shaped what could be said, who could speak, and which claims gained traction. At the same time, the archives reveal tensions: humanitarian framings made testimony legible and mobilizing but risked depoliticizing structural accountability; curated counter-archives contested official narratives while remaining vulnerable to censorship, reclassification, or dispersal.

Methodologically, archival ethnography here contributes to and complements historiography by refusing strict detachment: treating the archive as social practice opens analytic access to the social relations, power dynamics, and intentionalities embedded in record making and preservation. The chapter thus reframes the figure of the witness activists as active knowledge actors – historians, brokers, victimisers, and pedagogues – whose documentary work both produced evidence and performed moral claims. Building on this descriptive foundation, the chapter prepares the ground for the subsequent empirical analysis, which exemplifies how activist archives through witness activism as a practice convert material traces into contested historical authority.

Building on the archival-ethnographic portrait developed in this chapter, the next chapter turns from the archives themselves to the *writings* that emerged from one of them – a close reading of Bengt and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson’s published and unpublished texts to show how those documents were translated and transformed into argument, testimony, and public intervention.



# Chapter 5. The Danielssons' Trajectory: From South Seas Ethnography to Anti-testing Testimony

## 5.1 Introduction: The Danielssons in the South Seas

Where the preceding chapter examined archives as active sites of knowledge production, this chapter turns to the Danielssons as *histor*-witness activists who mobilized documentary traces – minutes from the *Assemblée territoriale*, correspondence, and leaked materials – not simply as evidentiary sources, but as rhetorical and moral instruments. *Histor* functions here both as a descriptive category and as a methodological claim: the Danielssons practised historiography as a form of political intervention directed against the Centre d'Expérimentation du Pacifique. Their writings did not merely record events; they actively shaped public memory, framed legal and moral claims, and contested official narratives of nuclear testing.

This and the following chapter (6) trace the techniques through which the Danielssons selected, framed, and narrated archival materials; how they braided bureaucratic records with personal testimony; and the textual strategies by which they performed authority, mobilized audiences, and navigated the unstable boundary between scholarly argument, report and activist witnessing. By following passages, claims, and source-networks retroductively, the analysis demonstrates that these documents operated in a dual register: they substantiated historical assertions while simultaneously functioning as instruments of persuasion and accountability. The argument thus moves from the material labour of archiving to the discursive labour of history-making, showing how archives are transformed into texts, and how texts, in turn, become tools of political contestation.

To understand how such documentary practices became possible in the first place, however, it is necessary to pause before the archive and attend to the conditions under which the Danielssons acquired the authority to practise history as opposition. This chapter therefore situates their work within the broader analytical problem that

animates the thesis: how oppositional knowledge is produced under conditions of colonial power, epistemic asymmetry, and institutional secrecy. The guiding question of this opening section is deliberately programmatic: how did Bengt and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson's conjunctural positionality – as long-term residents of Polynesia, as European interlocutors, and as transnational critics of French nuclear policy – shape their capacity to convert lived experience, ethnographic expertise, and archival practice into a method of witness activism? Addressing this question requires reconstructing not only their biography, but the epistemic arenas they inhabited, to show how their life-worlds became instruments of oppositional knowledge production.

When Thor Heyerdahl's balsa raft *Kon-Tiki* ran aground on Raroia in August 1947, a young Swedish crewman named Bengt Danielsson was among those who disembarked. Although officially listed as the expedition's cook, Danielsson joined the voyage as a participant-observer, having already travelled widely and formed intellectual ties with figures such as Rafael Karsten. The encounter with atoll life on Raroia proved formative, marking the beginning of a sustained engagement with Polynesia that would shape both his scholarly trajectory and his later political commitments. Through studies in Seattle from the autumn of 1947, Danielsson produced the sociometric thesis "Some Attraction and Repulsion Patterns among Jibaro Indians" published in *Sociometry* (Vol. 12 no. 1) in 1949.

Marie-Thérèse Saily, a French national whom Bengt met in Lima in 1947, became his lifelong partner in residence and work in Polynesia. Born in the Vosges region of eastern France, near the German border, she brought with her a metropolitan education and linguistic competence that would later prove crucial in navigating colonial and bureaucratic arenas. Following their marriage in April 1948 and a brief honeymoon in South America, the couple settled on Raroia in November 1949. From the early-1950s to the late-20<sup>th</sup> century, they lived primarily in French Polynesia, with intermittent stays in Sweden. During these decades, Bengt Danielsson completed fieldwork for his doctoral thesis, defended in Uppsala in 1955, and established himself as a popular historian, anthropologist, and interpreter of Polynesian societies. Over time, the Danielssons transformed this ethnographic expertise into a sustained public intervention; documenting and contesting French colonial rule and nuclear testing, they emerged as regionally prominent critics and as producers of archives designed not only to record harm, but to contest the terms under which it could be known.

As fieldwork for his thesis, Bengt Danielsson interviewed island residents, documented everyday life, and recorded the stories of local knowledge holders such as the storyteller Te Iho, while also participating in subsistence activities such as fishing and copra production. These experiences were first published in *Den lyckliga ön* (1951), later reissued as *Raroia: Happy Island of the South Seas* (1953; 1963). The book became a bestseller in Sweden and consolidated Danielsson's public image as an adventurer-anthropologist working within a romantic and

eroticized vision of Polynesia – an image that would later sit uneasily alongside his role as a critic of nuclear colonialism.<sup>315</sup>

Danielsson's works, such as *Söderhavskärlek* (*Love in the South Seas*, 1954), reached international audiences, and drew heavily on a modernist repertoire of South Seas exoticism.<sup>316</sup> As historian Matt K. Matsuda has argued, such representations – rooted in the cultural imaginaries of figures like Gauguin and Pierre Loti, both of whom Danielsson later wrote about – functioned to obscure histories of warfare, colonial violence, and imperial domination in Polynesia.<sup>317</sup> Read critically, this mode of cultural production did not merely romanticise island life; it actively displaced violence from view, rendering the South Seas as a space of timeless innocence rather than historical conflict. Danielsson's livelihood was sustained through authorship. The success of *The Happy Island* and *Love in the South Seas*<sup>318</sup> launched a career encompassing travel writing, anthropology, and popular histories of exploration, including works on the *Bounty* mutiny and James Cook.

Yet this early phase of romantic writing also shaped Danielsson's later position in more contradictory ways. The commercial success of these works established his

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<sup>315</sup> This imaginary of exotification and othering is rather generally present throughout the so-called First World at the time. It has been described as Pacificism, and is covered in for instance Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945–1961*; D. Elie Serge, "The Production of Social Science Knowledge beyond Occidentalism: The Quest for a Post-exotic Anthropology," *Third World Quarterly* 33, no. 7 (2012); Lyons, *American Pacificism: Oceania in the U.S. Imagination*; Serge Tcherkézoff, *Vous avez dit troisième sexe?: Les transgenres polynésiens et le mythe occidental de l'homosexualité* (Pirae, Tahiti: Au Vent des Iles 2022).

<sup>316</sup> Bengt Danielsson, *Söderhavskärlek: En skildring av polynesiernas sexualliv och familjeförhållanden* (Stockholm: Forum, 1954); Bengt Danielsson, *Love in the South Seas*, trans. F. H. Lyon (New York: Reynal, 1956). See also Bengt Danielsson, *Work and life on Raroia: An Acculturation Study from the Tuamotu Group, French Oceania* (Almqvist & Wiksell, 1955).

<sup>317</sup> Matt K. Matsuda, "Four Society Islands: Tahitian Archives." in *Empire of Love: Histories of France and the Pacific* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 91–112.

<sup>318</sup> Bengt Danielsson, *Den lyckliga ön* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1953); Bengt Danielsson, *Work and life on Raroia: An Acculturation Study from the Tuamotu Group, French Oceania* (Almqvist & Wiksell, 1955). When the couple visited Sweden in november 1951, this was widely publicized, with at-home-reportages and reports on how they celebrated Christmas as celebrities. This was at a time when South Sea romanticism was in bloom and few Swedes had resources and ability to travel. In a radio interview Bengt Danielsson describes himself as a travelling salesman of South Sea-articles and lectures, and that this was a lucrative business on his visits back home. This, he argued meant that he was not forced to take up tenure at a university or seek employment at a museum like other ethnographers. Instead, Danielsson explained, he ordered his life so that he could live in his research field and make "guest appearances" at universities and museums, see "Kon-tiki: Färden som förändrade livet" retrieved June 12 2022 from <https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/5481272>. Bengt Danielsson wrote humorous, adventure and historical fiction pieces weekly in *Lektyr*, a men's magazine in the 1950s, under the headline *Resare-Bengt berättar*. These texts are together with illustrations by Mark Sylwan collected in Bengt Danielsson, *Resare-Bengt berättar* (Stockholm: Saxon & Lindström, 1955); Bengt Danielsson, *Aloha: Resare-Bengt berättar* (Stockholm: Tiden, 1964).

reputation, audience, and relative financial independence, furnishing him with the cultural capital and autonomy that would later enable a sustained and increasingly confrontational critique of French colonial rule and nuclear testing. In this sense, the Danielssons' trajectory complicates any simple opposition between romanticism and critique: the former became one of the material conditions of possibility for the latter.<sup>319</sup>

Alongside his writing, he participated in numerous expeditions beyond *Kon-Tiki*, including the Tuamotu Expedition (1949–51), the Pacific Science Board Expedition (1952), and the Vanderbilt Foundation Expedition to the Society Islands (1957), among others. He later held institutional positions of curator at the Bernice P. Bishop Museum in Honolulu, Hawaii, from 1952 to 1966, extra director of Sweden's National Ethnographic Museum (1966–71) and, from 1972, as director of the Centre Culturel on Tahiti, where he played a central role in establishing a new museum and cultural centre.<sup>320</sup>

From the early-1970s onward, the Danielssons' anti-nuclear commitment came to dominate their intellectual and political lives. They emerged as public intellectuals deeply rooted in local political contexts, combining ethnographic authority with sustained activism. This shift is reflected in the extensive documentation preserved in the Bengt Danielsson archive, complemented by notebooks held in Östra Tollstad, which together form the empirical foundation for this chapter. These materials offer a rare view into the backstage labour of anti-nuclear activism, revealing the multiple roles the couple inhabited – as authors, researchers, cultural brokers, and political actors – and the intimate, collaborative nature of their work as a writing partnership.

Bengt and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson collaborated closely on their anti-nuclear activities, co-authoring numerous articles and books to shed light on and critically analyse the tests conducted in French Polynesia.<sup>321</sup> Taken together, this trajectory situates the Danielssons at the intersection of romantic ethnography, institutional authority, and oppositional knowledge production. Their later witness activism did not emerge from outside these cultural and epistemic formations but was forged through them, reworking earlier modes of representation into instruments of critique, documentation, and political intervention against nuclear colonialism.

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<sup>319</sup> Bengt Danielsson, *What Happened on the Bounty* [Med Bounty till Söderhavet], trans. Alan Tapsell (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1962); Bengt Danielsson, *Gauguin in the South Seas* [Gauguins söderhavsår, 1964], trans. Reginald Spink (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1965); Bengt Danielsson, *I James Cooks kölvatten* (Höganäs: Wiken, 1991).

<sup>320</sup> Stenberg, Öhman, and Solsvik, *Bengt Danielsson Archive. Preliminary Catalogue, August 2017*, p. 9.

<sup>321</sup> Marie-Thérèse Danielsson and Bengt Danielsson, *Förgiftat paradiset*, 2nd rev. ed. (Wiken, 1986); Bengt Danielsson and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson, *Moruroa, mon amour* (Stockholm: Trevi, 1977).



Although the couple consistently presented their anti-nuclear work as a joint endeavour, and frequently co-authored publications and letters, their collaboration was structured by a gendered division of labour that shaped both the production and circulation of oppositional knowledge. Marie-Thérèse played a central yet often less publicly visible role in sustaining the everyday infrastructures of activism: managing correspondence, translating between French and Scandinavian contexts, navigating bureaucratic and legal institutions, and maintaining relationships with local actors, officials, and international networks. These forms of labour were indispensable to the Danielssons' ability to mobilise testimony, assemble archives, and intervene in metropolitan arenas, yet they rarely conferred the same symbolic authority as Bengt's public authorship and scholarly persona. This points to the deduction that historically specific witness activism depends on a division between *visible authorial authority* and *less visible epistemic infrastructure*. Gender was one of the historical mechanisms through which that division was organized. Rather than reading this division primarily through individual biography, it is analytically more productive to treat it as an instance of how epistemic work was historically organized. The distinction between authorial voice and infrastructural mediation, between history/testimony written and history/testimony made possible, was not accidental but structured by broader conventions governing credibility, expertise, and political legibility. Attending to these differentiated roles clarifies how witness activism functioned as a collective practice whose effectiveness depended on multiple, unevenly recognized forms of knowledge work.

### 5.1.1 Meeting with Pouvana'a and the early autonomist movement

The materials preserved in the steel cabinets of the Bengt Danielsson archive reveal a sustained orientation toward writing for broad publics. Alongside personal papers, the archive contains carefully organized documentation prepared for book projects, lectures, film scripts and other forms of public dissemination. Bengt Danielsson supplemented his income from publishing by working as a lecturer on cruise ships, and the steel cabinets include extensive materials related to these presentations. Many of these lectures were later consolidated into a glossy volume, *Bengt Danielsson i Söderhavet* (*Bengt Danielsson in the South Seas*).<sup>322</sup>

From the late-1950s to the 1970s, Bengt and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson were recurring figures in the Swedish press, publishing columns on travel, expeditions, and life in the Pacific. Bengt – often referred to as “Resare-Bengt” (“Travelling Bengt”) or “Kon-Tiki Bengt” – came to personify a particular ideal of adventurous, leisured living for a generation of Swedish readers. During his years as honorary consul to French Polynesia (1961-1978), he received large volumes of correspondence from Swedes disenchanted with what they perceived as the grey

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<sup>322</sup> Bengt Danielsson, *Bengt Danielsson i Söderhavet* (Höganäs: Bra böcker, 1986).

monotony of northern Europe, asking how they might relocate to the Pacific and adopt an island life. Danielsson typically responded by tempering such aspirations, emphasising the gap between postcard imagery and everyday realities.<sup>323</sup>

The publication of the CEP-critical *Moruroa, mon amour* (1974) marked a decisive shift in the Danielssons' international orientation and political engagement with French Polynesia. The first edition appeared in a relatively restrained form, followed by an expanded and more sharply critical English-language version in 1986 (analysed below). The differences between these editions register a gradual radicalization of the couple's position, as continued nuclear testing, colonial governance, and the regime of secrecy surrounding the CEP increasingly shaped their work. Over time, Bengt and Marie-Thérèse came to occupy a dual position as authors and witness activists. This position – marked by their status as outsiders and, in Bengt's case, as a non-French observer who nonetheless commanded some local respect – enabled them to act as conduits for voices that might otherwise have remained marginalized or inaudible. Their academic credentials and extensive international networks lent authority to claims that could not easily be dismissed.

Their engagement with Polynesian political life began early. During their year living on Raroia, the Danielssons encountered the emerging independence movement when its leader, Pouvana'a a Oopa (1895–1977), arrived aboard a copra schooner touring the Tuamotu archipelago.<sup>324</sup> A veteran of the First World War whose son had also fought alongside French forces in the Second World War, Pouvana'a campaigned for greater autonomy while addressing social issues such as widespread alcohol consumption.<sup>325</sup> Reflecting on his later trial and political marginalization, Pouvana'a reportedly remarked that “if there had been more Europeans like the Danielssons, my trial would never have happened”.<sup>326</sup> Their encounter with Pouvana'a a Oopa also foregrounded the Danielssons' emerging approach to political witnessing and archival intervention. Pouvana'a's political marginalization in the late-1950s – culminating in the framing of his activities as a threat to local stability and his trial for arson – became a focal point for the Danielssons' early analytic efforts. Through meticulous documentation and contextualization, they

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<sup>323</sup> KTM BD 2634 and KTM BD 1019 contains correspondence of this type.

<sup>324</sup> Pouvana'a a Oopa was born 1895 on Huahine in the Leeward Islands group. He had fought for France in 1916 and returned with several medals proving his capabilities and courage. Upon return to Papeete he became a carpenter and later endeavoured on a political trajectory for increased independence. His son Marcel Oopa engaged in the Pacific battalion and fought in the Second World War in North Africa, returned home decorated but badly wounded. Regnault and Vannier, *Pouvana'a et de Gaulle: La candeur et la grandeur*.

<sup>325</sup> First *Notae Vitae* 23-24 July and 27 August 1950, pp. 135–139.

<sup>326</sup> In the debates of the *Moruroa, mon amour* first edition in 1974 where the book was attacked by prof. Guiart who was supported by French secret services. KTM BD 2628, Folder 2 titled “Professor Guiart-fight” contains a response by Pouvana'a, articles, letters, drafts. Dated April 1975 and 1978.

sought to undermine the official narrative portraying him as a destabilizing actor, instead highlighting his potential to articulate critical alternatives to colonial governance and the looming nuclear program (see below).

In their view, Pouvana'a's repression was not an isolated political act but intimately connected to the construction of the Moruroa test site: by sidelining or eliminating local critics, the colonial authorities could secure the territory for nuclear experimentation with minimal opposition. These interpretations, initially formulated as part of the Danielssons' witness-activist interventions, anticipated arguments that later received support from conventional historical scholarship, including the work of Regnault and others.<sup>327</sup> This episode thus bridges the ethnographic and the political: it demonstrates how the Danielssons' archival and testimonial practices extended beyond mere documentation, actively contesting colonial and nuclear authority, and setting the stage for their later interventions around the CEP nuclear tests.

### **5.1.2 Fomenting anti-testing sentiments linked to independence: Documentarian tiers-mondisme in the Pacific**

In Tahiti, the Danielssons became increasingly embedded in local political life – a process catalyzed above all by France's decision to establish a nuclear weapons testing site in the territory, finalized in 1966. Although their most visible public opposition to the tests crystallized in the 1970s, Bengt Danielsson later recalled – most explicitly in a 1985 interview – that he and Marie-Thérèse had gradually come to perceive an ethical obligation to scrutinize, document, and disseminate information about the testing program.<sup>328</sup> This obligation was grounded in a conviction that Polynesians were structurally denied a public voice within the colonial polity. What Bengt articulated retrospectively was thus not merely a political position but a narrative of political becoming: the Danielssons' transformation into testimonial agents whose interventions were shaped by, and entangled in, the asymmetries of colonial power.<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> Jean-Marc Regnault, *Pouvanaa a Oopa: Victime de la raison d'état. Les documents parlent* (Papeete, Tahiti: Editions de Tahiti, 2003); Bruno Saura, *Pouvanaa a Oopa, Père de la culture politique tahitienne* (Pirae: Au vent des îles, 1998).

<sup>328</sup> *Moruroa, mon amour*, the first French edition came out in 1974 (Danielsson & Danielsson *Moruroa, mon amour* Paris: Stock, 1974). In Sweden it came out in 1977. In the preface, Servan-Schreiber writes regarding the 'Danielsson affair' of expulsion and French government counteraction to anti-test-site activities: "Who else but Danielsson would not only dare, but also have the ability to speak? Indeed, no one. In this lies *the affair*. How so? To testify, one must first be white. Teariki (John), Pouvana'a and Sanford (Francis) (all anti-test advocates) and the other elected Polynesians are rejected in advance", p. X.

<sup>329</sup> Interview by the Swedish journalist Olle Hägg retrieved 16 May 2022 from <https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/5481272>.

Their position also provoked direct administrative resistance. The French authorities attempted to expel Bengt Danielsson from the territory, an effort thwarted only because of his marriage to Marie-Thérèse, a French national. At the same time, the couple continued to write prolifically on Polynesian history and culture and to produce children's fiction, most notably the Villervalle series depicting a boy's adventures in the South Seas. Widely translated and adapted into a television series in 1963, these works circulated within popular media circuits that stood in marked tension with the increasingly confrontational political critique that the Danielssons were in the process of developing.<sup>330</sup>

Over their time in Polynesia, Marie-Thérèse Danielsson developed a passionate commitment to independence and became a staunch critic of French colonial policies. In 1977, she was elected as a municipal representative in the district of Paea, Tahiti. She also served as a local leader in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), where she advocated not only against nuclear weapons but also for women's liberation.

As Margot Wallström who spent time at the Danielssons' home in her early political life later recalled, Marie-Thérèse functioned as an "embodied social conduit": simultaneously writer, spokesperson, organizer, host, and political interlocutor.<sup>331</sup> Wallström herself travelled to Polynesia to join the protests against the resumption of French nuclear tests in the mid-1990s.<sup>332</sup> As historian Emma Rosengren has observed, this engagement exemplifies a broader lineage of Social Democratic women in the late-20<sup>th</sup> century – Alva Myrdal, Inga Thorsson, and Maj-Britt Theorin among them – who forged connections between anti-militarism and an incipient feminist foreign policy.<sup>333</sup>

At the same time, the Danielssons' trajectory illuminates the structural ambiguities of NGO politics and transnational knowledge circulation. While financial independence from state funding is often invoked as a marker of credibility in debates over nuclear testing and colonial governance, the couple's early expeditions were funded by major American philanthropic foundations, including Carnegie and Vanderbilt. This alignment placed their work – at least structurally – within Cold War circuits of influence and opened for possible critique of promoting anti-French influence, as their later interventions sharply criticized French nuclear policy. The

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<sup>330</sup> Bengt Danielsson and Pierre Heyman, *Villervalle i Söderhavet* (Stockholm: Saxon & Lindström, 1957); Bengt Danielsson and Pierre Heyman, *Villervalles ökenäventyr* (Stockholm: Saxon & Lindström, 1958).

<sup>331</sup> Margot Wallström, 1 March 2003. SvD. Retrieved 12 June 2019 from <https://www.svd.se/marie-therese-danielsson>.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

<sup>333</sup> Emma Rosengren, *Gendering Nuclear Disarmament: Identity and Disarmament in Sweden during the Cold War* (PhD Diss. Stockholm: Department of Economic History and International Relations, Stockholm University, 2020).

familiar asymmetry persisted: governments command resources but lack moral credibility, while civil society commands credibility but depends on external funding. The problem of “epistemic laundering”, meaning the circulation of influence through ostensibly independent actors, thus shadows even oppositional knowledge production, whether such accusations are true or not.

Further tensions in the Danielssons’ knowledge production have been foregrounded by later scholars, most notably Serge Tcherkézoff and Jean-Marc Regnault. Tcherkézoff has been particularly critical of Bengt Danielsson’s popular writings, arguing that the authority derived from his doctoral credentials was later mobilized to sustain exoticizing representations of Polynesia. This critique underscores a persistent slippage between ethnography and exoticism, scholarly authority and market demand, a slippage that complicates the moral authority of Danielssons’ witness activism itself.<sup>334</sup>

Taken together, the Danielssons’ shared intellectual and political journey – documented extensively in their archive – reveals a complex interplay of personal conviction, scholarly practice, institutional mediation, and political risk. Their anti-nuclear critique cannot be disentangled from independence politics, nor from the conditions under which oppositional knowledge was made credible, mobile, and contestable. Through their writing and activism, they challenged the technocratic and developmentalist narratives that legitimized the CEP test site, positioning themselves as dissenting witnesses to the entanglement of science, empire, and environmental violence.

The anti-testing archives further testify to the couple’s deep collaboration. Correspondence frequently addresses them jointly; responses are often signed “we”; and their major polemic against French nuclear testing and colonial rule – *Moruroa, mon amour*, later expanded as *Poisoned Reign* (1986) – was the product of sustained co-authorship. These materials reveal witness activism not as an individual stance but as a relational practice, forged through shared labour, negotiated authority, and collective political commitment.<sup>335</sup>

### **5.1.3 The nuclear future in advance: De Gaulle’s vision, Fa‘a‘ā airport, and witness activism**

This section shifts from the Danielssons’ political becoming to the technopolitical landscape in which their anti-testing critique took form, using the construction of

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<sup>334</sup> Serge Tcherkézoff, *Tahiti – 1768. Jeunes filles en pleurs. La face cachée des premiers contacts et la naissance du mythe occidental* (Tahiti, French Polynesia: Au vent des îles, 2004).

<sup>335</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Förgiftat paradiset*; Bengt Danielsson and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson, *Moruroa, mon amour* (Stockholm: Trevi, 1977).

the Fa'a'a airport as a lens through which competing claims about nuclear colonialism can be read.

In 1956, Charles de Gaulle delivered a speech in Papeete, then the capital of French Oceania (renamed French Polynesia in 1957), a territory administered under French colonial rule. Speaking during his self-described *traversée du désert* – the period between his resignation and the establishment of the Fifth Republic – de Gaulle used the occasion to articulate a forward-looking vision of France's global role as a mid-sized power.<sup>336</sup> According to Bengt and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson, de Gaulle was widely admired in the territory in the post-war years; yet this admiration co-occurred with an increasingly articulate independence movement. Veterans of the Polynesian volunteer battalion to the free French forces, trained and politically mobilized through wartime service, were among those pressing such claims.<sup>337</sup>

With his visit and speech, de Gaulle possibly wanted to prove the grounds for expanded presence in the territory. Although the speech is notably absent from his memoirs, the Danielssons attended the event, retained a copy of the text, and later cited it extensively in *Poisoned Reign* to frame their oppositional account of nuclear testing. For them, the speech functioned less as retrospective justification than as a prospective disclosure – a moment in which the outlines of a nuclear future were already discernible.

De Gaulle identified three global tendencies that, in hindsight, read as technopolitical promises with profound consequences for Polynesia. The first concerned decolonization, framed in terms that simultaneously acknowledged aspirations for self-determination and warned against political isolation:

Primarily, we have all people and nations' aspirations of preserving their character and desire to decide their fate. At the same time, every new state must belong to a larger economic, cultural, and political sphere so as not to get into material and spiritual emergency and become a battleground for the imperial powers fighting over world domination.<sup>338</sup>

De Gaulle continued with a second tendency, with the post-war period meaning: "the appearance of ever-growing, world-encompassing networks of flight routes and boat lines which constitute necessary conditions for all human intercourse, exchange of thoughts and trade."<sup>339</sup> The Danielssons' claims that the local business life

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<sup>336</sup> Charles de Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971); Jacques Foccart and Philippe Gaillard, *Foccart parle: Entretiens avec Philippe Gaillard* (Paris: Fayard, 1995).

<sup>337</sup> The battalion was nicknamed the Guitarists' Battalion and fought in Italy and North Africa. For a historical overview of the relationship between De Gaulle and French Oceania, see Regnault, *La France à l'opposé d'elle-même: Essais d'histoire politique de l'Océanie*.

<sup>338</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Förgiftat paradiset*, p. 25. My translation.

<sup>339</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Förgiftat paradiset*.

interpreted this as de Gaulle being on their side in developing Tahiti's tourist industry following the Hawaiian example. However, the construction of airports also meant a possibility of larger military deployments. Historian Renaud Meltz in the work edited by Alexis Vrignon and himself from 2022, argues against this that the largest territorial airport in Fa'a'a was exclusively built for reasons of touristic exploitation, relating to economic and political reasons beyond the bomb.<sup>340</sup> Meltz's argument locates the CEP on a different level than what Jean-Marc Regnault claims, what Michel Lextreyt suggests, and what the Danielssons, in their earlier works, sought to establish – namely, that the construction of the Fa'a'a airport and the establishment of the CEP were interconnected. The construction of the large airport, they argue, can be seen as a pretext embedded in the decision to begin nuclear testing in Polynesia.<sup>341</sup> Meltz disagrees with the Danielssons' and Regnault's assertion that the start of the Fa'a'a airport construction signalled that a decision on the CEP's location and inauguration had already been made in Paris by 1957. Instead, Meltz contends that what Regnault presents as causality in *La France à l'opposé d'elle-même: Essais d'histoire politique de l'Océanie* is merely coincidental, and that the economic and political reasons for the airport's construction were more influential, occurring before de Gaulle had consolidated power.<sup>342</sup>

The economic and political reasons for the airport were, according to Meltz's argument, that France wanted to remain present in the territory, that the tourist industry should remain in control of the French, and that US investments and capital/influence was a threat to the Pacific world as a whole that should be kept at bay (echoing the geopolitical argumentation of keeping a French presence that is prevalent at the time of writing).<sup>343</sup> Meltz argues further that an international airport would also keep independence struggles at bay since it would integrate French Polynesia with the world markets and was seen as weakening a growing Maohi Pacific identity.<sup>344</sup> The historical debate surrounding the airport construction is just one example of how the Danielssons' testimonial methodology of producing oppositional knowledge, which I explore in the following chapters, has fuelled conflicting claims. Although this debate continues, it holds relatively minor

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<sup>340</sup> Meltz, "Pourquoi la Polynésie?" pp. 51–56.

<sup>341</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Förgiftat paradiset*, pp. 40–41.

<sup>342</sup> Regnault, *La France à l'opposé d'elle-même: Essais d'histoire politique de l'Océanie*, pp. 164–165. Lextreyt, "De l'éveil à la vie politique à l'échec de la première expérience d'autonomie interne 1945–1962. Les combats de Pouvāna'a a Oopa." Michel Lextreyt, "Les années CEP 1963–2004." in *Une Histoire de Tahiti: Des origines à nos jours*, ed. Éric Conte (Papeete, Tahiti: Au vent des îles, 2019), pp. 273–311.

<sup>343</sup> See for instance Macron's speech in Tahiti in July 2021 "Discours du Président Emmanuel Macron depuis Papeete" retrieved October 15 2024, from <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2021/07/28/discours-du-president-emmanuel-macron-depuis-papeete>.

<sup>344</sup> Meltz, "Pourquoi la Polynésie?" p. 52.

significance in light of the broader arguments of witness activism. The Danielssons' perspective, increasingly overtly critical of the CEP and French presence in Polynesia, is encapsulated in their assertion of a tsunami of French workers – both military and civilian – arriving during the establishment of the nuclear test site, leading to a change in the population structure which cemented French presence in a way not seen before.<sup>345</sup> However, the Danielssons were also involved in promoting tourism and American investments in Tahiti in the early-1960s. Bengt Danielsson, in particular, served as a liaison, guide, and consultant to a US airline and hotel company, reflecting his personal connections to the US, where he had maintained friendships since his university studies.<sup>346</sup>

The third tendency de Gaulle highlighted in his speech was “the growing dependency on atomic energy, a new source of energy, at the same time possibly contributing to our prosperity, and threatening us all with destruction”. He added that there was no reason to worry, as: “... in the atomically threatening world of tomorrow, Tahiti, with its advantageous location in the middle of a protective ocean, could be a refuge and centre for innovation for all our civilization.”<sup>347</sup> A few years on, Gaullist foreign policy would encompass a lessening of the dependence on the UK and US in a strategy to distance France from NATO. This policy coincided with the tendencies in the speech and formed a fundament to France's establishment of the new testing ground for nuclear weapons.

In 1966, France began detonating nuclear devices on the Moruroa Atoll, located in the Tuamotu archipelago. Beginning testing in 1960, France's nuclear weapons program had conducted tests in Algeria, but it was relocated due to Algerian independence, resistance from neighbouring nations, and plans to conduct hydrogen bomb tests, following the precedent set by the US and the UK in the Pacific. Bengt and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson, who had settled in Polynesia, witnessed the establishment of the CEP and its far-reaching consequences, including alongside health and environment, a significant military presence and an economic boom.

The Danielssons also noted the official denial of the dangers posed by the tests, suppression of independence movements, widespread contamination, and resulting health problems. Deeply committed to resisting the nuclear tests and the colonial conditions underlying them, their political activism became their foremost concern, surpassing their other cultural and scholarly contributions. Bengt and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson, driven by a strong sense of purpose and armed with extensive knowledge of Oceania, a vast collection of documents and books, sharp irony, a

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<sup>345</sup> Bengt Danielsson and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific* (Ringwood, Vic. Australia: Penguin Books, 1986).

<sup>346</sup> KTM BD Steel case 4, Correspondence with Charles G. Braden in the Honolulu office of *Eastern Airlines*, 1966.

<sup>347</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Förgiftat paradis*, p. 26. My translation.



wide transnational network of disarmament advocates, and relentless effort, persistently posed two central questions: *If the bomb is not dangerous to people, why bother making it?* and *If the tests are not dangerous, why not conduct them in metropolitan France?* Their resistance, documented in the Danielsson archive, reflects a legacy of sustained tension.

The Danielssons shared journey, which began in South America as they searched for meaning in the disillusioned aftermath of World War II, unfolds through the documents in the archive. It chronicles their mission to resist the supremacy and militarism of nuclear-armed governments and their techno-militaristic activities worldwide. This work led them to pose questions and investigate the official narratives of progress and modernist development related to the test site.

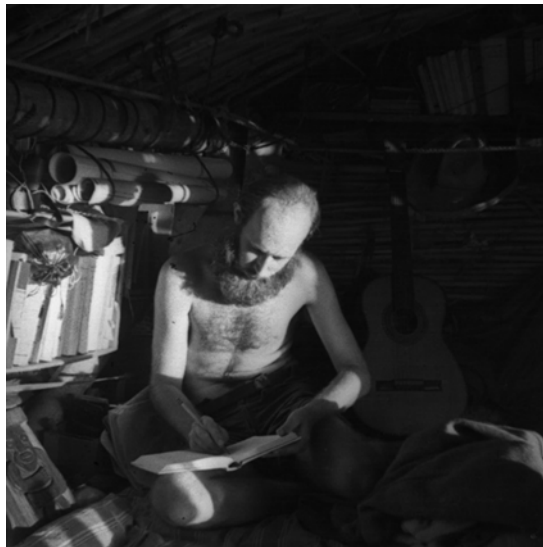


*Figure 7. Photo of Bengt Danielsson as he came to be known in 1950s and '60s Swedish popular imagination, on the Kon-Tiki Raft, reading and taking notes. Photograph by unknown. Courtesy of KTM.*



Figure 8. Photo showing a young Marie-Thérèse. Photograph by unknown. Courtesy of KTM.

#### 5.1.4 Section summary

Bengt and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson, equally renowned for their adventurous lifestyle and anti-nuclear activism, lived much of their lives in French Polynesia, where they became prominent critics of French colonialism and nuclear testing. Bengt, a Swedish anthropologist and adventurer, gained fame as a crew member of Thor Heyerdahl's *Kon-Tiki* expedition in 1947, which sparked his enduring fascination with Polynesia. From the 1970s onward, they authored critical works like *Moruroa, mon amour* and used their academic and literary influence to amplify Polynesian voices and challenge French policies. Their intertwined writing and activism rooted in French Polynesian political life, combined with Bengt's role as an author, Sweden's honorary consul, and public intellectual, and Marie-Thérèse's leadership in local politics, women's and peace organizations, solidified their legacy as advocates for rights and anti-nuclear resistance.

This section's biographical and contextual re-reading of the Danielssons' work and archive has revealed how the couple's lives became intertwined in the CEP-test site, from their positions as primitivist popular ethnographers (1950s) to anthropological experts on colonial interaction, to documentarian political-historical writers (early

1970s) revealing how infrastructures – like de Gaulle’s airport – served as geopolitical linchpins for both colonial consolidation and nuclear-test logistics.

Charles de Gaulle’s 1956 visit to Polynesia and his speech reflected a temporal modernist alignment of the early-CEP plans and establishment, with a complex mix of colonial, economic, and military intentions, emphasizing trends such as decolonization, globalization, and the growing dependency on nuclear energy. The General’s remarks, according to the Danielssons’ critical historical text of the early-1970s, appealed to diverse local audiences, including colonists, independence leaders, and business elites, while embedding the promise of progress within France’s geopolitical strategies. While the president-general’s advocacy for large-scale infrastructure, such as the airport in Fa’a’ā, was framed as a step toward economic integration and tourism, critics like the Danielssons viewed it as a pretext for consolidating French military and nuclear ambitions. By documenting the construction and operation of Fa’a’ā airport alongside Moruroa’s test site, they demonstrated how technopolitical promises of decolonization, connectivity, and “atomic progress” masked military imperatives and suppressed indigenous sovereignty. Historians like Renaud Meltz, however, further dispute whether the airport was primarily linked to nuclear testing, suggesting instead that its construction was part of broader economic and political calculations tied to France’s global positioning and colonial governance. These developments, particularly the establishment of the nuclear testing site at Moruroa, led to profound environmental, social, and health consequences, as well as the suppression of independence movements in the region.

Bengt and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson were thus, since the early-1970s, in the process of consolidating themselves as central figures in the regional anti-testing movement. Through their writings and activism, including works like *Poisoned Reign* and *Moruroa, mon amour*, they explored the impacts of French nuclear tests on local communities and ecosystems, critiquing official narratives of safety. Their efforts, part of a broader transnational disarmament and anti-colonial struggle, highlighted the ethical and political contradictions of the test sites in general through the specific case of CEP critique. Their activism and writing not only bridged local resistance with global peace movements but also underscored the colonial dynamics underlying nuclear testing in Oceania.

Their dual roles exemplify the witness-activist position as analytical figure. Moving and translating between social fields and languages (French, English, Swedish, Reo Tahiti, and Tuamotuan), they gathered, preserved, and transmitted counter-archives that challenged official narratives and forged transnational solidarity. Through meticulous filing, cross-referencing declassified reports, and irony-laden reportage, they surfaced the power relations hidden within folders and protective cabinets. Their work thus bridged local testimony and global disarmament discourse, complicating the structure of reaction of social peace movement wave-based models of nuclear disarmament activism presented by the nuclear disarmament historian

Laurence Wittner<sup>348</sup> by showing how opposition to testing mediated between anthropological expertise, Kon-Tiki fanning, community trauma, testimonial critique, and Cold War politics.

Recurring tensions, between fieldwork and advocacy, insider knowledge and public testimony, colonial privilege and anti-colonial solidarity, were not merely obstacles but constitutive conditions that enabled the Danielssons' opposition to nuclear weapons testing. Positioned between Tahiti and metropolitan France and further anchored in the ostensibly neutral yet nuclear-adjacent milieu of Cold War Sweden,<sup>349</sup> they were able to mobilise a well-established disarmament infrastructure to operate as intellectual and political intermediaries. In this capacity, they bridged Anglophone and Francophone spheres, linking Oceania, Europe, and the Americas. This multilingual, multi-scalar practice allowed them to demonstrate both *that* and *how* French Polynesia's nuclear tests initially escaped sustained international scrutiny, obscured by the global preoccupation with the US–Soviet duopoly. The tests later provoked fierce transnational opposition following Chirac's decision to resume testing in the mid-1990s.

Throughout the 1970s and '80s, as protests in French Polynesia persisted, the Danielssons came to characterize the test site as a military invasion “a tsunami of soldiers, technicians, naval forces, and Foreign Legionnaires” and denounced France's arrogant, and dismissive treatment of the Polynesian population.<sup>350</sup> They contended that France's treatment of the Polynesian population during the accelerated imposition of modernist militarism was marked by a profound disregard for local well-being, and systematic opacity. In articulating this critique, the Danielssons emerged as prominent opponents of nuclear testing, a position that has since assumed historical significance.

Their influence extended across the Pacific, Sweden, and the broader transnational arena, where they functioned as a crucial node for the collection, interpretation, and dissemination of information to publics and activist networks alike. The materials they left behind – now preserved in their archives – are examined in greater detail in the remainder of this chapter and in the one that follows.

The next section of this chapter turns to the Danielssons' seminal contributions to the public anti-CEP discourse, *Moruroa, mon amour* (1974) which was followed by *Poisoned Reign* (1986). It analyses how the backstage labour of archival

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<sup>348</sup> Wittner, *Confronting the Bomb: A Short History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement*.

<sup>349</sup> Thomas Jonter and Emma Rosengren, “From Nuclear Weapons Acquisition to Nuclear Disarmament: The Swedish Case,” *Medicine, Conflict and Survival* 30 (2014); Thomas Jonter, *The Key to Nuclear Restraint: The Swedish Plans to Acquire Nuclear Weapons During the Cold War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Rosengren, *Gendering Nuclear Disarmament: Identity and Disarmament in Sweden during the Cold War*.

<sup>350</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Förgiftat paradiset*, p. 7.

accumulation, documentation, and the tensions inherent in their positionality shaped these works. The following thus delves into the first iteration of the work and its use of reportage-testimonial history of the CEP in its initial planning and above-ground testing period (until 1975).

## 5.2 Knowledge and the Testimony of Nuclear Uncertainty: Struggles over the History of CEP in Documentarian Terms

*Nous sommes dans l'incertitude.*<sup>351</sup>

*We know that the Pacific Ocean is not a deserted and solid terrain like Nevada, the Sahara and the vast regions of Siberia where radioactive fallout, becoming immobile after its fall, present no danger.*<sup>352</sup>

This section offers a close examination of the first iteration of the Danielssons' writings, placing their texts and arguments in critical dialogue with their archival materials, including sources and references left unacknowledged in the published works concerning CEP, between 1973 and 1994. Rather than merely describing these texts, the analysis interrogates the epistemic foundations upon which the Danielssons constructed their claims about the nuclear test site.

Rejecting any treatment of their writings as transparent testimony in a strictly *testis* sense, the section situates them within broader historiographical debates on documentation, evidentiary construction, and the fraught positionality of the witness-historian. The Danielssons are thus approached as exemplars of a particular historical modality of knowledge production within activist practice: figures who oscillate between witness, advocate, and historian. It is precisely this oscillation,

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<sup>351</sup> Quote by Elie Salmon on scientific uncertainty regarding consequences of the tests, from the Territorial assembly Minutes protocols, KTM BD Steel case 1, Folder marked *P.V. de l'A.T.* 1963. Containing collected protocols of the AT. CEP was discussed under *Questions prealables*, on the fourth session, 16 May 1963, p. 129. Translation: "We are in a state of uncertainty"; KTM BD Steel case 1, 2123. Referring to both debates on the status of Polynesia in /of and under France government, the competence and reach of the territorial assembly, and the actual consequences of the test site in terms of costs, health issues and fallout. Ceran-Jerusalemly had previously asked: If the test site is a question of national defence, as Gérald Coppenrath noted, then what should we (the AT) be of use for? The population of the country will "carry the cross", p. 235.

<sup>352</sup> KTM BD Steel case 1, *P.V. de l'A.T.* Fourth session, 16 May 1963. Address by Céran-Jerusalemly, demanding independent scientific inquiry into the biological consequences of the NWTs in the territory, p. 118.

where moral indictment, reportage, and historical method converge, that demands sustained analytical scrutiny.

This section thus examines the Danielssons' annotated copies of the Assemblée territoriale (AT) minutes in order to show how their testimonial practice (writing to question CEP) was constructed through close, interpretive engagement with official documents. The aim is not simply to note that they used these records, but to demonstrate how their underlining, marginal notes, and selective emphases reveal the epistemic questions they considered central to understanding the establishment of the CEP. By tracing which passages they marked as significant, especially those concerning the unresolved political status of the territory, and hereby retroducting foundational claims in their published work, this analysis shows that the Danielssons effectively *re-enacted* the debates as if they were recording observers within the plenary room. Their annotations and text make visible the structural ambiguity in which the nuclear test site was imposed: French Polynesia occupied a constitutional limbo, neither a département fully integrated into France nor an autonomous territory with the power to refuse. It is this historically specific uncertainty that the Danielssons identified, highlighted, and mobilized as the foundation of their counter-historical argument. In other words, the archival markings themselves show how their witnessing position was formed through reading practices that illuminated the political conditions that made the CEP possible.

Central to this inquiry is the dual function of the archival sources on which the Danielssons rely, notably the minutes and records of the AT. These documents are not merely evidentiary supports; they are mobilized to authorize the Danielssons' own testimonial authority. In their critical documentarian books, *Moruroa, mon amour* (1974) and *Poisoned Reign* (1986), such materials become instruments through which the authors craft a reflective counter-history of the CEP's establishment, casting it as a structural injustice.<sup>353</sup> Their intervention is significant less because they were "first" to document the CEP than because they articulated one of the earliest attempts to wrest narrative control from the apparatus of the French military governance.

Yet the counter-history that the Danielssons construct is hardly static. It participates in a protracted contest over historical meaning, one that continues to reverberate in subsequent reinterpretations, ranging from state-sanctioned revisions to scholarly re-evaluations. The belated official recognition of the Pouvana'a affair in 2015-2016 exemplifies this shifting terrain. Here, the "counter" is not an abstract oppositional

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<sup>353</sup> *Moruroa, mon amour* discusses certain elements that to a high degree are historically contended. We know now how, in the mid-1950s, the decision was made of a military nuclear program, accelerated by de Gaulle as soon as he came to power in 1958. Historical details of the choice of sites and the role of political actors from that time is still an ongoing study, addressed in Mary and Vrignon, "Implantation: État, pouvoirs locaux et opinion."

posture, but a historiographical strategy forged in real time against contemporaneous official narratives of the nuclear tests and the context in which they were made, especially during moments of political and discursive recalibration (in the early 1970s, 1985-86, and 1993). Jean-Marc Regnault's *Pouvana'a a Oopa: Victime de la raison d'État. Les documents parlent* (2003) further illustrates the extent to which these contestations have become embedded within the archive itself, complicating any easy separation between evidence, narrative, and authority.

Thus, the Danielssons' historical practice emerges not as a neutral chronicle but as a product of sustained conflict – both discursive and political – over the meaning of the CEP and, by extension, over the epistemic foundations of nuclear colonialism. Their work demonstrates how historiography, testimony, and activism can converge to destabilize officially sanctioned narratives and expose the structural injustices that subtend the nuclear project in Oceania. What is at stake is not merely the recovery of a silenced past but the contestation of the very apparatus that renders certain histories legible and others illegible.

Having traced the biographical condition of their intervention, this chapter now turns to the broader struggle over the history of the CEP itself – a struggle that shaped, and was shaped by, the questions the Danielssons repeatedly posed through their testimonial oeuvre. Shifting focus from authorial intent to epistemic formation, the analysis interrogates how their position as witnesses was constituted: not only the physical and social location they occupied but also the epistemological standpoint from which they claimed the authority to speak. Such a move requires examining the enabling conditions that made their witnessing possible, as well as the justificatory logic through which they presented testimony as both necessary and urgent.

Methodologically, this involves scrutinizing their corpus of books, articles, and the wider constellation of anti-test writings, not for their factual content alone but for the conditions of possibility that allowed these texts to emerge and circulate as knowledge. In this respect, the chapter adopts a critical-realist orientation within the history of knowledge. This perspective enables an analysis of how the Danielssons navigated institutional constraints and archival practices, exploited documentary fissures, and mobilized their own positionality to craft a mode of historical pronouncement that was simultaneously evidentiary and political.<sup>354</sup>

As a central concern, the Danielssons examined the democratic competence, influence, approval, and consent of the Polynesian parliamentary body regarding France's establishment of the CEP test site. They also considered the implications of knowledge, and/or lack thereof, surrounding these factors. This inquiry raised a historically significant question with political consequences: to what extent, if at all, did the Polynesian assembly, political representatives, and the public voluntarily

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<sup>354</sup> See Introduction on Methodology, 1.3.

and deliberately accept the CEP site? Or, conversely, was the test site imposed by France as a *fait accompli*? The Danielssons explored the complexities and nuances between these interpretations.

Crucial to their analysis were questions of who knew what, and when, as these inquiries were essential for documenting and testifying to the implementation and impacts of the test site. By bringing these issues to light, their work sought to expose the possibility of a crime or injustice, prompting the reader or audience to critically engage with the historical and political dimensions of nuclear colonialism in Polynesia.

Another related set of issues the Danielssons examined involved secrecy, the systematic suppression of knowledge, and the use of force, dynamics exemplified in incidents like the Pouvana'a affair and the early ambitions of De Gaulle's cabinet for establishing the site for the eventual testing of the hydrogen bomb. After the Second World War, when electoral politics were being opened to Polynesian participation, Pouvana'a became the leading politician of championing the rights and wellbeing of the local population. RDPT, the party of Pouvana'a, varied in its stance for independence, increased autonomy, and integration with France over the years before the test-site implementation. RDPT is translated to the Democratic Rally of the Tahitian People (French: Rassemblement démocratique des populations tahitiennes). De Gaulle's reason for banning the party in 1963 was that it threatened national integrity.<sup>355</sup>

This underlying dynamic of non-knowledge production and coercive practices informed the Danielssons' broader inquiry into the structures that enabled the test site's establishment. Their account challenges several key aspects of the official history at the time, particularly concerning when the decision to establish the test site was made in actuality. Was it decided as early as 1957 or 1958, without consultation with the Polynesian assembly? Or, as official narratives claimed, was the decision made during a meeting between Polynesian representatives and De Gaulle in early 1963?

Further contradictions articulated in the Danielssons' historical documentary work concern the extent of the dangers posed by nuclear testing, the level of nuclear and radiological knowledge available at the time, and the awareness of the individuals involved in decision-making and debates. Their work interrogates not only the nuclearity of the test site but also the processes of information control, pedagogy, and the deliberate maintenance of (non-)knowledge.

Over time, answers to these questions have, in some ways, become "known", though they remained obscure during the Danielssons' period of testimonial activism (circa 1974–1994). The CEP test sites were effectively established by decree, through de

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<sup>355</sup> See Regnault and Vannier, *Pouvana'a et de Gaulle: La candeur et la grandeur*, pp. 145ff.; Saura, *Pouvana'a o Opa, Père de la culture politique tahitienne*.



Gaulle's exceptional sovereign power, exercised during the Algerian War of Independence, and justified on the grounds of national defence. While France had the legal, sovereign, and military authority to impose its will, the political legitimacy and ethical basis of these actions were contested. The historical challenge to the fairness of the CEP's establishment remains a point of contention, presenting a counter-narrative that directly challenges the authoritative account and prevailing regime of knowledge.

While acquiring the atolls for military use (and sealing off the area) France thus had projected a semblance of Polynesian choice, by having the test site endorsed by, according to Danielssons and other critics, a show consultation (the January 1963 meeting of assembly members and the president). France and the governor furthermore dissolved RDPT, Pouvana'a's independence party, before the atolls were acquired officially.<sup>356</sup> These precautions engendered the CEP-opposition with an authority of stolen land and decolonial critique that rose to force in the 1970s and 1980s in many of Oceania's states.<sup>357</sup> After October 1958, Pouvana'a, the leader who could have united the nation against the CEP, was exiled to France in a colonial scheme that largely escaped international public scrutiny. The Danielssons' documentary work sought to bring this injustice to light and reframe its significance. The 1958 referendum, which posed a yes/no question on accepting de Gaulle's constitution and, by extension, whether French Polynesia should remain within the French Community, took place just before Pouvana'a was falsely accused of arson and imprisoned.<sup>358</sup> The struggle over the history of the test program was therefore – and I would argue remains – a struggle to recognise and articulate the extent to which the CEP was intrinsically bound up with wider demands for independence and debates over territorial status (what during the 20 years 1974–1994, of Danielssons publication and reworking of their critical testimony increasingly came to be articulated as nuclear colonialism). Questions of who would, should, and could be sacrificed on the nuclear altar of imperial power had, prior to sustained efforts to publicly link colonial governance with nuclear force, remained largely unspoken and analytically underdeveloped.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> KTM BD 2604, *Historique du R.D.P.T. 1947-1958*, document showing the RDPT's writing of its own first ten years in the party magazine *Te Aratai*.

<sup>357</sup> Swan, *Pasifika Black: Oceania, Anti-colonialism, and the African World*.

<sup>358</sup> Saura, *Pouvanaa a Oopa, Père de la culture politique tahitienne*. The historian Jean-Marc Regnault over the years came to recognize the importance of the Povana'a affair and the suppression of the leader, that the Danielssons throughout their *Moruroa* project had sought to highlight.

<sup>359</sup> Similar dynamics can be observed across the nuclear weapons states, where testing programs were routinely sited in territories represented as "remote", "empty", or marginal on strategic maps, often oceanic or desert spaces that were, inhabited by Indigenous populations. As noted in the introduction, historians have shown how such spatial imaginaries rendered colonial and peripheral subjects disproportionately exposed to nuclear risk. See, for example, Chandra

### 5.2.1 Regarding testimonial history and the method of *Moruroa, mon amour/Poisoned Reign*

The Danielssons' archive contains numerous traces of the reception and debate generated by the various iterations of their major work on nuclear testing. These include *Moruroa, mon amour* (first published in French in 1974, and subsequently in English and Swedish in 1977), an updated and more explicitly critical reworking of it under the name *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific* (1986) – published, extended, and revised in English and French under the name *Moruroa, notre bombe coloniale: Histoire de la colonisation nucléaire de la Polynésie française* (1993) incorporating 15 additional chapters.

Taken together, these archival traces illuminate the labour and methods that underpinned the public debates surrounding the works and the actual work of writing and integrating these claims: the accumulation of cross-referenced sources, the deployment of historical materials, and the evolving modes of critique through which arguments were sharpened over time. At the same time, they reveal how the authority of the witness-activist was constructed through a historical mode of testimony, a process that will be examined in greater detail below.<sup>360</sup>

The exhibits in the archive reveal that several historical events are associated with, and referenced in, the 1994 debate surrounding the new French edition of the book, henceforth *Moruroa, notre bombe coloniale*. Among the documents present are those related to what the Danielssons termed the “Danielsson Affair”, in which the Governor of the Territory at the time, Pierre Louis Angeli, revoked Bengt Danielsson's honorary consulship in 1973, not because of any misconduct but purportedly due to Danielsson's anti-French public opinions. For instance, Exhibit No. 20, in the box containing documents on the 1994 debate over the new edition of *Moruroa, notre bombe coloniale* includes a letter from Bengt and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson to President Giscard, protesting both the withdrawal of Bengt's consular status and the subsequent threat of expulsion.<sup>361</sup>

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Bhimull et al., “Systemic and Epistemic Racism in the History of Technology,” *Technology and Culture* 63, no. 4 (2022); Hecht, *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade*; Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*; Kate Brown, *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>360</sup> Bengt Danielsson and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson, *Moruroa, notre bombe coloniale: Histoire de la colonisation nucléaire de la Polynésie française* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1993).

<sup>361</sup> KTM BD Box 2623, item 1, copy of Letter from Danielssons to Giscard, November 29, 1978. The original is present in another box KTM BD 3032, letter to Valéry Giscard d'Estaing dated November 29, 1978, showing the method of reference where earlier debates and claims re-emerge during the years and reinforces the testimonial authority of having been there and lived through the CEP events and debates for two decades.

In the 1994 debate, the Danielssons also expressed their disappointment in François Mitterrand, whom they described as hypocritical on the CEP and colonial issue. Signing a petition to halt nuclear testing in 1966, Mitterrand's stance toward continued testing upon his ascendancy to presidency resurfaced as a point of contention in the materials and references related to the early-1990s debate.<sup>362</sup> This recurring references to history, experiences, and archival documentation from Bengt Danielsson's consular revocation to Mitterrand's inconsistent stance, was a source of historical authority for the Danielssons, as it underscored their lived experience and collected archive of long-time critique to the CEP. The Danielssons were furthermore adept at strategically and consciously promoting their work via contentious debates and events. Their book-signings became media events in themselves as shown in an example from the launch of *Moruroa, notre bombe colonial* in Tahiti, where they elaborated their position, an event which was then reported in the local news.<sup>363</sup>

The heavily expanded English edition of *Moruroa, mon amour*, published in 1986 under the title *Poisoned Reign*, explicitly framed nuclear colonialism as a distinct modality of colonial rule. Significantly, this English-language publication preceded the revised French edition, reversing the order established with the original *Moruroa, mon amour*, which had appeared first in French. This inversion is analytically revealing.<sup>364</sup> It points to the strategic imperative of addressing an international, non-Francophone audience at a moment shaped by highly mediatized events such as the European missile crisis of the early-1980s and the *Rainbow Warrior* affair in 1985. Together, these episodes contributed to what might be described as a nuclearized media conjuncture in the mid-1980s – a period in which intensified media attention to nuclear issues generated a distinctive window for public mobilization and contestation. In the terms of contentious politics scholarship, this conjuncture constituted a set of structural opportunities that rendered transnational advocacy both timely and potentially effective.<sup>365</sup>

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<sup>362</sup> KTM BD Box 2626, Items 1, 9, and 20. Reviews of *Moruroa, notre bombe* (1993); in the local news in French Item 23 and 24, the book is described as “not neutral, but of interest for everyone concerned with the future of French Polynesia.” See also below on the 1990s debate with Regnault debate.

<sup>363</sup> KTM BD Box 2626, Items 23 and 24, copies of articles dated April 26, 1993, and April 29, 1993.

<sup>364</sup> In opposite order of the first edition of the work in the 1970s.

<sup>365</sup> The conjuncture of media and opportunity structure are tied to a longstanding post-war western nuclear culture and its associated controversies, such as the mid-1950s scientific debate over radiation effects, the Three Mile Island incident in 1979, the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, and the Euromissile Crisis in Europe during the early-1980s. See Aubrey, *Nukespeak: the Media and the Bomb*. Spencer R. Weart, *The Rise of Nuclear Fear* (Harvard University Press, 2012); Jonathan Hogg, *British Nuclear Culture: Official and Unofficial Narratives in the Long 20th Century* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016); Kyle Harvey, *American Anti-Nuclear Activism, 1975-*

Further, the prioritization of the English language aligned with the Danielssons' and other anti-nuclear advocates' ambitions for transnational and regional mobilization at the time – a transoceanic, nuclear-free, and independent Pacific shaped by networks, international pressure, and the significant interests of English speaking New Zealand, Australia, and the United States in the smaller Pacific countries.<sup>366</sup> Having first published their book in French in the early-1970s, the Danielssons soon recognized that their ability to influence local opinion both in Polynesia and in metropolitan France might be limited. As a result, they saw potential for their testimony to have a greater impact elsewhere, particularly in New Zealand, Australia, Japan, and the Nordic countries, while still maintaining close ties with local anti-nuclear and independence movements.

The preparation of the 1994 French edition of *Poisoned Reign*, published as *Moruroa: Notre bombe coloniale*, appears to have acquired renewed urgency as the Danielssons became aware of historian Jean-Marc Regnault's dissertation and its critical assessment of their methods – critiques that carried the potential to shape both the historiography of the CEP in Polynesia and the wider Francophone debate.

Over time, the Danielssons' mode of testimonial history evolved in response to the persistence of nuclear testing and the French state's continued assertions of its legitimacy. This trajectory can be traced from their initial public intervention with *Moruroa, mon amour* in 1974, an act that inaugurated their testimonial activism and sought to mobilise collective opposition to the tests, to the more expansive and elaborated critique they developed in the mid-1980s and 1990s.

The 1974 publication of *Moruroa, mon amour* emerged during a period of intense diplomatic international conflict over French atmospheric testing of the CEP, leading to the decision to shift the method of nuclear testing from atmospheric to underground detonations. This decision was preceded by debates, and deliberation in the ICC.<sup>367</sup>

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1990: *The Challenge of Peace* (Houndsmill, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Decamous, *Invisible Colors: The Arts of the Atomic Age*.

<sup>366</sup> See for instance the issue of the treaty of Rarotonga and Pacific Islands Forums in relation to geopolitical influence in Swan, *Pasifika Black: Oceania, Anti-colonialism, and the African World*; Bob Breen, *The Good Neighbour: Australian Peace Support Operations in the Pacific Islands 1980–2006. The Official History of Australian Peacekeeping, Humanitarian and Post-Cold War Operations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Ingrid Jaugietis, *Cultural Imperialism and Mass Media Development in the South Pacific Island States: Fiji - a case study*, University of Canberra. Communication, Media & Tourism (1993); Mohamed-Gaillard, "Contestations océaniques."

<sup>367</sup> For an overview of French and Anglo-American Pacific power-politics related to the tests, see Mohamed-Gaillard, "Contestations océaniques." Mohamed-Gaillard, *L'archipel de la puissance?: La politique de la France dans le Pacifique Sud de 1946 à 1998*.

On 28 June 1973, the navy frigate HMNZS *Otago* set sail to waters near Mururoa, with NZ Prime Minister Norman Kirk framing the mission as a “silent accusing witness with the power to bring alive the conscience of the world”.<sup>368</sup> The frigate’s rhetorically invoked silence functioned as a form of performative force-backed testimony, a state-sanctioned “testis” documenting nuclear violence while rendering the presence of human and ecological harm legible to the international community. In parallel, the Danielssons’ archival and activist work sought to make visible the same dynamics from the standpoint of those most affected, connecting lived experience, colonial status, and political sovereignty. Against this backdrop of transnational protest and documentation – spanning grassroots mobilization, the *Rainbow Warrior* affair of 1985, and France’s shift to underground testing – *Moruroa, mon amour* was updated and expanded into *Poisoned Reign* (1986) and, ultimately, the French edition *Moruroa, notre bombe coloniale* (1993), consolidating the Danielssons’ testimonial project. This period spans the peak of the, by Wittner, identified final wave in grassroots peace organizing and mobilization over the early- to mid-1980s, and the 1985 *Rainbow Warrior* affair, which rendered the French tests in the Pacific a global news item.<sup>369</sup> The published works of the Danielssons (particularly the 20-year-spanning (re)editions from *Moruroa, mon amour* to *Moruroa, notre bombe coloniale*, that encapsulate their anti-nuclear testing and pro-independence testimonial efforts) will, in the following, serve as a gateway to the material preserved in their archives. These works guide the following analytical focus toward the central conflicts that the Danielssons identified, the knowledge and gaps in knowledge they addressed, and the ways they constructed oppositional claims. Their efforts highlight the temporal dimensions of their witness activist methodology, shaping how their activism unfolded and was communicated over time. These works are here, thus, read together with the archival material as conditioning the statements. The Danielssons’ body of work and its foundational working materials are understood here as traces of a practice of witnessing. This approach can be seen as a triadic relationship of claims and reference points, involving the authors, the documentary archive, and the historical-testimonial text itself – each influencing, constraining, and shaping the others. Within transnational peace organizations and networks, these efforts were framed as pursuits of justice and rectification, what activists and academics of the time called “peace work”.<sup>370</sup> This work encompassed various forms of knowledge work,

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<sup>368</sup> Quoted in “HMNZS *Otago* sails for Mururoa test zone”, retrieved June 10, 2025, from <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/hmnzs-otago-sails-for-mururoa-test-zone> (Manatū Taonga – Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 17 Jul 2023.

<sup>369</sup> Lawrence S. Wittner, *The Struggle against the Bomb. Vol. 3, Toward Nuclear Abolition: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1971 to the Present* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003).

<sup>370</sup> See May Bass and Mark Derby, *Peacemonger, Owen Wilkes: International Peace Researcher* (Auckland: Raekaihau Press, 2022).

such as pedagogy, informational leaflets, recorded testimonies, and documentary materials.

The *Moruroa/Poisoned Reign* publications represent the Danielssons' final positionality as histor witnesses, embodying a role distinct from either the survivor (superstes) or the third-party observer (testis).<sup>371</sup> This specific histor role combined elements of documentary reporting, journalism, biography, sociology, and historical narrative. While not academic history in the strict sense, their work intersected with "history", blending historical assertions with contentious politics and an ethical pursuit of justice.

The Danielssons' witness activism was not confined to the production of polemical texts but operated through a deliberately cultivated, networked infrastructure of correspondence, circulation, and strategic address. Their work was actively promoted to individuals occupying positions of political, journalistic, and moral authority, indicating a conscious effort to shape not only public opinion but also elite interpretive frameworks. *Moruroa, mon amour* and its subsequent iterations were written for a broad readership, with the explicit aim of mobilising attention and indignation around the problem of nuclear colonialism. In pursuit of this objective, the Danielssons eschewed the conventional scholarly apparatus of endnotes, indexes, and exhaustive citation, privileging instead a testimonial mode capable of translating complex historical processes into accessible and morally charged narratives.

This testimonial practice documented the social, political, cultural, and economic consequences of the nuclear tests, effects that, as the Danielssons suggested, bore a more emblematic and enduring significance for colonial relations than radiological harm alone. While the Danielssons unequivocally identified and sought to prove reckless exposure to nuclear fallout as a criminal act, their analytic emphasis fell on the colonial governance structures that rendered such exposure administratively permissible and politically defensible. In this sense, the force of their testimony lay less in forensic demonstration than in its capacity to reframe nuclear testing as a problem of imperial power, sovereignty, and expendability.

The reach of this witness activism was materially sustained through extensive networks of dissemination. Copies of *Moruroa, mon amour* and *Poisoned Reign* circulated widely among journalists, politicians, and activists during the peak years of anti-CEP mobilization. The works were translated into Japanese, French, English, Swedish, Danish (1990), German (1983), and Russian (1983, 1989), facilitating their integration into transnational circuits of protest and debate. Strategically dedicated copies were sent to figures such as François Mitterrand – both during his tenure as a member of the Assemblée nationale and following the publication of the updated *Moruroa, notre bombe coloniale* in 1993 – as well as to Foreign Minister

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<sup>371</sup> See Chapter 3.

Roland Dumas and the human rights lawyer Michel Tubiana, all of whom acknowledged receipt. These gestures underscore that the Danielssons' testimony functioned not merely as critique, but as an intervention calibrated to circulate within, and potentially unsettle, established structures of political authority.<sup>372</sup>

### 5.2.2 The material in the steel cases as a fundament of the Danielssons' *histor* accounts

What follows is an analysis of selected folders and documents from the steel cases of the Danielsson archives, materials that are foundational to the epistemic position the Danielssons articulate in their published work. Documents detailing pre-test-site political conditions in French Polynesia are extensively reproduced, commented upon, and quoted in *Moruroa, mon amour*, *Poisoned Reign*, and *Moruroa, notre bombe coloniale* in order to expose what the Danielssons identify as a democratic deficit within the territory at large and the local parliament, the Assemblée Territoriale, in relation to de Gaulle's decree-driven establishment of the CEP test site. These archival materials matter for two analytically distinct but related reasons.<sup>373</sup> First, they underpin the Danielssons' testimonial authorship as *histor*s: figures who produce historically reflective accounts grounded in documentary evidence while operating outside conventional academic historiography, reflecting what they see in the material, arranging and repeating significant aspects. In *Moruroa, mon amour* and *Poisoned Reign*, the documents function not merely as sources but as argumentative anchors, enabling the Danielssons to frame the implementation of the test site as a fundamental injustice. The 'counter' in this counter-account refers to its simultaneous existence – at the moments of writing and re-writing in the 1970s, mid-1980s, and early-1990s – alongside official narratives produced by the French state and CEP proponents. The Danielssons' historical practice thus emerges relationally, in sustained conflict with these official accounts.

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<sup>372</sup> Among others: KTM BD 2626, Item. 2. Letter, October 4, 1974, from Mitterrand thanking Danielsson for the book. The book was also received by Swedish evening newspaper, *Aftonbladet*'s Jannike Åhlund and Madeleine Gedin at the Women's conference in Copenhagen 1979. Referred in a letter from Åhlund asking for an update on the issues, October 20, 1983; KTM BD Steel case 4 *Correspondance anti-nucleaire recente*, folder 2189-2190. Eskil Block recommended the book in an SvD Review, March 23, 1973. KTM BD 2628 *Moruroa, mon amour*, Items, 2, 12; KTM BD 2626, Item 6, Envelope with card. March 24, 1993. President Mitterrand thanking for the new edition of the book; item 7, Envelope with letter, March 17, 1993 where the French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas thank Danielssons for book; Item 8. Undated. Handwritten drafts of dedications; Item 9. 1994, correspondence with Bruno Barrillot on the book launch, of the revised French edition, copies of articles.

<sup>373</sup> See Regnault, "Pouvanaa a Oopa: La révision du procès de 1959 en marche" (2015). Jean-Marc Regnault, Regnault, *Pouvanaa a Oopa : Victime de la raison d'etat. Les documents parlent* Jean-Marc Regnault, *Pouvana'a a Oopa: Victime de la raison d'etat. Les documents parlent* (Papeete: Tahiti: Editions de Tahiti, 2003).

Their epistemic mode is forged through contention over time, operating as a critique of the CEP specifically and of nuclear colonialism more broadly.<sup>374</sup>

Second, these documents (read in relation to *Moruroa...* and *Poisoned Reign*) reveal the method by which such critique is constructed: through the careful juxtaposition of archival materials against an identifiable official narrative that framed the nuclear test practices as non-colonial, neutral, technically safe, and broadly accepted at the time of implementation. The claim of “broad acceptance” functions here as a foundational assertion to be dismantled. Against it, the Danielssons argue that the tests were unjust from the outset, imposed without meaningful local deliberation, and indifferent to articulated resistance. However, my analysis does not aim to present a comprehensive overview of all presented arguments for or against the CEP test site. Instead, it focuses on examining the positions, interpretive practices, and methods of claim-making that shaped and evolved within the Danielssons’ activism and knowledge work as witnesses.

Central to their challenge of the ab initio acceptance narrative is documentation from the Polynesian territorial assembly and, in particular, material relating to the Pouvana’a affair. Folder *Pou. 1945–1956* contains several documents marked confidential that identify Pouvana’a a Oopa as an inconvenience, and later a threat, to the French administration. Bengt Danielsson notes that these materials were obtained through a personal contact within the colonial administration. The folder includes correspondence indicating collusion in 1946 between Governor Orselli and Alfred Poroï, then mayor of Papeete, in which Pouvana’a is identified as an anti-French actor. It also contains security reports and hostile assessments of Pouvana’a’s political activities from 1947, as well as a 1951 letter from Governor Petitbon to the Minister of Overseas Territories accusing him of subversive conduct. Further documents indicate attempts by Petitbon to secure funding, via contacts with a French bank, for a counter-candidate, referring obliquely to “the big boss”, possibly De Gaulle, and requesting the destruction of the letter after reading. Read together, these materials undermine claims of consensual governance and illuminate the administrative practices through which dissent was managed, marginalized, and retrospectively erased.<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>374</sup> The concept of “nuclear colonialism” rose to prominence in the 1980s in tandem with the institutionalization of regional solidarity among newly independent Pacific states, reflected in the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific movement and the consolidation of a South Pacific Forum identity. Mohamed-Gaillard, “Contestations océaniques.”; Swan, *Pasifika Black: Oceania, Anti-colonialism, and the African World*; Maurer and Hogue, “Introduction: Transnational Nuclear Imperialisms” (2020).

<sup>375</sup> KTM BD 2603, Folder *Pou. 1945-1956*, Items 2-7. This mode of archival–testimonial practice resonates with scholarship on *testimonio* as a form of politically situated knowledge production aimed at intervening in dominant publics rather than merely recording experience as well as with work on counter-archives that foregrounds how subaltern histories are assembled against official documentary regimes. See John Beverley, *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth* (Minneapolis:



The references of the Danielssons' writing are presented as "in this and that article one can read..." or "in the parliament on that and that date parliamentarian X said this ...".<sup>376</sup> I consider such mode of reference semi-distinct, on a scale from the footnote with a full and detailed account of the sources, and claiming something without any references at all, and this is perhaps best described as a "popularizing adaptation".<sup>377</sup> In the kind of documentarian and journalistic text that the Danielssons produce this is the common mode of referral. It is disclosed that the claims refer to some texts, but the detailed accounts of exactly where the reference is to be found are not always present.

The documentary work and record keeping of the Danielssons as witness activists are continually brought to life, in the *histor* epistemic modality, when their archives serve as accessible sources for research and inquiry throughout their writing. This archival resource not only allows one to trace their work but also embodies a unique function that combines its documentary character, the witness activist stance, and the emphasis they placed on both recording and transparency.

A critical issue, however, arises with certain documents present in the Danielsson archives, which were restricted to me for my access as a researcher by the Service du Patrimoine Archivistique et Audiovisuel (SPAA) in Papeete, the Tahitian heritage institution. Although these documents are officially available for review in the Danielsson archives, their access is controlled on-site. The institutional hierarchy means metropolitan French and not territorial formal authority over papers dated prior to the constitutional status change that granted greater autonomy to French Polynesia in 1984.<sup>378</sup> This restriction, combined with the persistent unevenness in access to records and the rationales invoked for state control over

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University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*; Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*.

<sup>376</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*; Bengt Danielsson, Marie-Thérèse Danielsson, and Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, *Moruroa, mon amour* (Stockholm: Trevi, 1977).

<sup>377</sup> In his PhD dissertation and academic articles, Bengt Danielsson wrote and referenced through an academic authority with footnotes, sociometric tables, etc., but with the popular works on island life a more story-telling documentary voice was used, however still with the authoritative address of a popular humanist intellectual "sharing insights" in sweeping terms to the public. Östling et al argues that the public humanist popularizer was a prominent knowledge actor in Sweden at the time, identifying the development of the public intellectual humanist scholar, who could translate academic merit and cultural status to a kind of public knowledge and authority. See Johan Östling, Anton Jansson, and Ragni Svensson Stringberg, *Humanister i offentligheten: kunskapens aktörer och arenor under efterkrigstiden* (Göteborg: Makadam, 2022).

<sup>378</sup> Field notes, private possession March-April 2022. For the institution of the French Polynesian archival and heritage institution (SPAA), see: Délibération n° 84-71 du 07/06/1984 and Arrêté n° 1966 CM du 7 décembre 2011 portant création, organisation et fonctionnement du service du patrimoine archivistique et audiovisuel (Te piha faufa'a tupuna) retrieved 29 October 2024 from <https://lexpol.cloud.pf/LexpolAfficheTexte.php?texte=179533>.

documents and archives, underscores a form of functional inertia and structural obstruction that the Danielssons explicitly foreground through their archival work. These conditions reflect the enduring imprint of colonial governance on the production, circulation, and availability of historical knowledge,<sup>379</sup> an imprint the Danielssons repeatedly sought to render visible and contest. In this sense, the delays, absences, and fragmentations that mark the archival record are better understood as silences actively produced through regimes of classification, national security, and administrative discretion.<sup>380</sup> The tension between transparency and opacity that structures the historiography of the CEP thus reflects not a failure of historical method, but the unequal power relations that determine the conditions under which history itself is made.<sup>381</sup> Thus, secrecy compounds the already inherent uncertainties surrounding nuclear activities, creating what Proctor and Schiebinger have termed agnotology, or a systematic obscuring of certain information and knowledge.<sup>382</sup>

Steel case File Box No. 1 in the Danielsson archive contains the official minutes of the Assemblée Territoriale from 1961 to 1964, materials that were not accessible through SPAA, covering the period when the French military and the CEA were preparing to implement nuclear testing in Polynesia.<sup>383</sup> These minutes are in the archival steel cases juxtaposed within a broader assemblage of photographs of Polynesian historical figures, documents on explorers, and records of the Pomare dynasty, the Tahitian royal family during the era of colonization. The placement of these parliamentary records at the forefront of the most meticulously indexed and organized section of the archive reflects the Danielssons' own methodical archival practices and signals the particular importance they attributed to these documents in their testimonial work.

Through the annotations and highlights the Danielssons applied, one can discern a consistent argument threaded throughout their publications: the establishment of the CEP test site could not be construed as a voluntary act on the part of the Polynesian population, despite the territory's formal integration into the French state. This argument forms a throughline in their testimonial practice, which seeks to render visible the asymmetries of power and consent inherent in nuclear colonialism, as will be shown in the following sections.

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<sup>379</sup> For a historical review of French state archival policy and conceptions of colonial history connected to the Algerian war see Andre, "Algeria in the Archives" (2024).

<sup>380</sup> See Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*.

<sup>381</sup> For a wide ranging analysis on the US case of secrecy, security and restrictions regarding nuclear documentation as integrated with the nuclear weapons state from the outset of the Manhattan Project, see Wellerstein, *Restricted Data: The History of Nuclear Secrecy in the United States*.

<sup>382</sup> Proctor and Schiebinger, *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance*.

<sup>383</sup> KTM BD steel case no 1, 2123.

### 5.2.3 Territorial status and Césaire's voice: The CEP implementation and conditions for testimony against the tests

A key factor highlighted and brought to the fore in the Danielssons' account of CEP was the 1958 referendum on whether French Polynesia would remain part of France, or, more specifically, if the Polynesian people would approve the new constitution and thereby become part of the restructured French community. This vote was part of the broader constitutional referendum that established the Fifth Republic. According to the Danielssons' testimony, this referendum lacked democratic rigor, a criticism also directed at the subsequent Pouvana'a affair following his arrest on 11 October 1958.<sup>384</sup> Within a brief two-year span, six significant referendums were held on the territory's status and governance. The French historian Regnault in later years took upon himself to study the hypotheses presented by CEP critics and the Danielssons, to find evidence of the cabinet of de Gaulle's deliberate stopping Pouvana'a to take part in political life. The access to private archives of grey eminence of colonial France, Jaques Foccart (opened by Hollande's administration to Regnault in 2012), provided key insights for the further investigation into the issue. The Foccart archives show collusion between local personalities and the de Gaulle's cabinet in the complot framing Pouvana'a, and hereby Regnault and Vannier argue that Pouvana'a was sacrificed for the "grandeur" of the president. Regnault wrote a report on Pouvana'a's treatment authorized by the territorial assembly, arguing that he was still seen as legally guilty even though he was exposed to a state-ordered complot amounting to a conflict between law and history.<sup>385</sup> Notably, Pouvana'a was allowed to return from exile in November 1968, just a few months after France had successfully tested its first thermonuclear device in Opération Canopus, on the Fangataufa Atoll. Though he was in poor health, he remained a revered figure and was elected senator in 1971.<sup>386</sup>

With the yes result of the territorial vote on the new constitution making Polynesia a part of the French community in September 1958, the Tahitian King Pomare V's gift of Tahiti to the French in June 1880, was represented by Gaullist members of the assembly as confirmed. RDPT party députés and other autonomists, during the early years of CEP implementation, argued against the existing arrangements and called for these referendum results to be reconsidered in light of the "democratic evolution" and movements for liberation and decolonialization occurring across the globe. Between 1946 and 1958, French constitutional control and colonial

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<sup>384</sup> Saura, *Pouvanaa a Oopa, Père de la culture politique tahitienne*.

<sup>385</sup> Regnault, *Pouvanaa a Oopa: Victime de la raison d'état. Les documents parlent*; Regnault and Vannier, *Pouvana'a et de Gaulle: la candeur et la grandeur*, pp. 19, 20. For the rapport between government officials such as Foccart and the AT opposition to RDPT and Pouvana'a, and the plans for "using all measures necessary" to stop his project, see Regnault and Vannier, *Pouvana'a et de Gaulle: la candeur et la grandeur*, pp. 276–77.

<sup>386</sup> Saura, *Pouvanaa a Oopa, Père de la culture politique tahitienne*.

governance had been relatively relaxed, allowing the territory a degree of autonomy.<sup>387</sup>

In the debate on territorial status, the voice of J-B Heitarauri Cérans-Jérusalémy (192–2014) is frequently highlighted and underlined in the minutes, by either Bengt or Marie-Thérèse Danielsson. For example, Cérans-Jérusalémy is noted as stating, “there is no contract of association in fact”, referring to an incomplete 1885 decree that ostensibly grants autonomy to the “chief” of the territory (though it is unclear to whom this title specifically refers).<sup>388</sup> On 14 November 1958 the question of territorial status was postponed, and no final decision had been made by 1963 on the territorial status issue which reoccurred with the CEP establishment plans.<sup>389</sup>

The copies of the official AT minutes preserved in the Danielssons’ archive bear clear evidence of their interpretive labour. Central passages – including *Statut du Territoire* and *Retrait de la question préalable... sur l’implantation d’un Centre d’expérimentations dans le Pacifique* – are meticulously underlined, bracketed, and annotated in ballpoint and pencil. These markings are not incidental; they reveal how the Danielssons used the minutes not as passive records but as material through which they reconstructed the debates of the Assemblée Territoriale as if they themselves were present in the chamber. The documents became a site of analytical immersion, allowing them to identify what they understood as the pivotal questions of knowledge and power surrounding the establishment of the CEP<sup>390</sup> and the status of the territory.<sup>391</sup> The argument emerging from their annotations and published in their work, is a focused interest in the political status of the territory at the precise moment when the nuclear test site was instituted. As the delegate Cérans-Jérusalémy indicated, as noted and underlined in the minutes, two competing formulations of

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<sup>387</sup> The French constitutional referendum of 28 September 1958, which also functioned as a referendum on the creation of the French Community in the colonies, was designed to maintain France’s influence and control over its territories. Presented under the guise of equality, the new constitution significantly limited the sovereignty of its members. However, the French Community was short-lived and effectively ceased to function with the wave of African states gaining independence in the early 1960s. See Benjamin Rivlin, “De Gaulle’s French Community,” *Current History* 36, no. 213 (1959); Regnault, *La France à l’opposé d’elle-même: Essais d’histoire politique de l’Océanie*.

<sup>388</sup> KTM BD Steel case 1, 2123, *P.V. de l’A.T.* Session administrative de 1963, 28 mai, p. 239

<sup>389</sup> KTM BD Steel case 1, 2123, *P.V. de l’A.T.* Session administrative de 1963, 28 mai, pp. 222, 223, 233–237.

<sup>390</sup> This is an issue of to what degree the Polynesian representatives and people at large a) knew what the CEP meant, and b) what actual influence they had over the decision.

<sup>391</sup> In essence this regulated what decisions can be made by whom in the governing bodies, the Assemblée territoriale Polynésie Française (ATPF), French authorities, Governor/ high commissioner, president, military branches and institutions, or the senate.

status were under consideration: French Polynesia could be governed as a French département or as an independent territory associated with France.<sup>392</sup>

This liminal status, exacerbated by the suppression of independence aspirations following the 1958 referendum and Pouvana'a's arrest, constituted a key condition under which the CEP was imposed. Danielssons' notes repeatedly draw attention to this undecided constitutional arrangement, underscoring the territory's position as neither fully incorporated nor fully autonomous. This created a structural ambiguity that critical historical analysts could make a point of highlighting after the fact.

By highlighting these passages, the Danielssons were not merely documenting historical events; they were identifying and drawing attention to (witnessing historically) the epistemic fault lines and political conditions that made the nuclear project possible. Their annotated readings expose how the political indeterminacy of the territory was instrumentalized, rendering the implementation of the CEP both administratively feasible and historically contestable. In this sense, the marginalia illuminate the foundations of their testimonial position: their counter-history is built on the recognition that the test site emerged within, and depended upon, a governance structure suspended in limbo, a form of strategic ambiguity that precluded accountability over time. Read through a critical-realist lens, the Danielssons' marginalia do more than mark facts: they expose the institutional mechanisms and epistemic gaps that rendered Polynesia politically liminal and therefore vulnerable to being treated as a site of exception. In testimony terms, the Danielssons act in the *histor* epistemic modality as part witnesses and part historians, mobilizing documentary traces to transform local uncertainty into a justified counterclaim against official knowledge.

Accordingly, the territorial assembly also debated the implications of the status before agreeing to the extensive French infrastructural interventions planned for 1963. As the Danielssons underscored, in an argument which echoed throughout their critique of nuclear colonialism, these investments had been framed as economically beneficial for the territory. However, in the Danielssons' trademark ironic style, they noted that the investments were also essential for the operation of the CEP. Projects like the construction of airports, the establishment of the main CEP base on the Hao Atoll, and the expansion of telecommunications and postal services were, according to the Danielssons' argument, prerequisites for the nuclear testing program.<sup>393</sup> There were different positions in the parliament on this. The

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<sup>392</sup> KTM BD Steel case 1, 2123, *P.V. de l'A.T.* Session administrative de 1963, 28 mai, pp. 222, 223, 233–237. This was not the case in the French African colonies who even though voting for staying in association with France gained more or less/nominal independence in the early 1960s. Hecht, *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade*.

<sup>393</sup> KTM BD Steel case 1, 2123, *P.V. de l'A.T.*, pp. 222, 223–229; Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, p. 80.

autonomist deputy Frantz Vanizette<sup>394</sup> (1927–2001) pointed out that there was no choice to be an associated territory available in the constitution.<sup>395</sup> The lines drawn out in the assembly between the different positions of the politicians is recounted in *Moruroa/Poisoned Reign* through a critical a posteriori lens, where temporal links of opposition to the test site in connection to territorial competence and autonomy are upheld by characters such as Puovana'a and the later leaders, John Teariki and Francis Sanford, who are presented below. The Danielssons introduce the French nuclear strike force and its rapid deployment as follows:

Although the French nuclear strike force (*force de frappe*) was still in its embryonic stage and lacked any real military value, it was nonetheless capable of causing great harm to the innocent civilian population of French Polynesia – primarily due to the speed with which it affected the islands. Now, twenty years later (1986), as nuclear testing continues at a leisurely pace with no end in sight, it is undeniably difficult to understand why there was such urgency in establishing all these bases and deploying thousands of technicians and military personnel. ... The explanation for this reckless haste, which exacerbated the problems tenfold, is sadly simple: de Gaulle had unilaterally decided that the first nuclear explosion in Polynesia would take place as early as 1966.<sup>396</sup>

Throughout *Moruroa, mon amour* and *Poisoned Reign*, the Danielssons posed sustained moral and political questions about specific actors, decisions, and institutional arrangements. These interrogations became foundational to their testimonial critique, which was constructed through the strategic use of documentation. At the core of their historical intervention was the production of an alternative account that explicitly challenged established authority and dominant narratives surrounding the CEP. Rather than beginning from an assumption of official legitimacy, their testimony proceeds from a position of inquiry: it asks how legitimacy was produced and maintained, and whether French Polynesia should be understood as a polity pursuing political self-determination or as one structurally constrained by financial dependence on France – a dependence repeatedly invoked through references to budgetary deficits to justify the nuclear testing program.

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<sup>394</sup> Vanizette was born in metropolitan France and died in Tahiti. He married the sister of Cérant-Jérusalem and was a committed and active member of the Christian socialist trade union CFTC. He was a long-standing member of the Polynesian parliament from 1957 to 1982 and president of the assembly several times. Since 1975 he was close to the autonomists and became one of their leaders. See Regnault and Vannier, *Pouvana'a et de Gaulle*, p. 404.

<sup>395</sup> Cérant-Jérusalem wanted to stay in association with France for budgetary reasons (not civic), while John Teariki wanted independence. Compare to Danielsson's summary of the events around the establishment of CEP in Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, pp. 48–49.

<sup>396</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, p. 79.

Competing positions on this question predated the initiation of nuclear testing and have continued to structure debate into the present.

Parliamentary deliberations over political status at the time were shaped in part by comparisons with contemporary decolonization processes, particularly in French Africa, where newly independent states retained varying degrees of political, economic, and military association with the metropole.<sup>397</sup> Within these debates, a recurrent position advanced by French loyalist representatives framed metropolitan investment in infrastructure, technological development, and commercial activity as safeguards against external geopolitical influence. Such arguments proposed that intensified economic integration with France could coexist with, or even underpin, a managed form of political autonomy. This arrangement the Danielssons treated with sustained scepticism, especially in light of the nuclear testing program.<sup>398</sup> The French governor to Polynesia at the time of CEP's inauguration, Aimé Louis Grimald (1903–2000), in his opening address to the assembly in 1963 presented the test site as a project along these developmentalist lines as seen in the annotated minutes in the Danielsson archives.<sup>399</sup>

The Danielssons, in their account, highlight that during these debates, a Polynesian public-school teacher and RDPT representative in the *Assemblée territoriale*,

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<sup>397</sup> The Algerian French colonists, the *pied noirs*, could take refuge in Tahiti and was seen as threatening the Maohi populations and work. KTM BD Steel case 1, 2123, Collected protocols of the AT, 1963, see also p. 364, p. 140, remark by Elie Salmon on the local workforce's lack of education. Danielsson further underscores Cérans-Jérusalem's critical, and forewarning observations in the assembly on the consequences of proletarianization resulting from the test site and the availability of well-paid work in Papeete, issues that would ultimately need to be addressed upon the site's closure, p. 142.

<sup>398</sup> KTM BD Steel case 1, 2123, Folder marked *P.V. de l'A.T.* Collected protocols of the AT. Session, 16 May 1963, pp. 4–13 contain the opening address of the assembly held by governor Grimald. Grimald's speech was later rebutted by Cérans-Jérusalem speaking on the "minimizing" of risks in the address. Steel case 1, 2123, *P.V. de l'A.T.* Collected protocols of the AT p. 118–119. Cérans-Jérusalem's speech was in turn commented on by the deputy Jean Tumahai, purporting the much-needed investments in a new high school, and that the "uncertain risks" of the test site could be worth taking, p. 120. The ensuing debate is recounted in Chapter 10 "*Ingenting att oroa sig för*"/*Nothing to worry about* of Danielsson and Danielsson, *Förgiftat paradiset*, pp. 57–63.

<sup>399</sup> KTM BD Steel case 1, 2123, Folder marked *P.V. de l'A.T.* pp. 8–10 heavily annotated by Danielsson as the first time the assembly officially are informed of the concrete plans of a nuclear test site at Moruroa.

Jacques-Denis Drollet (1923–2015),<sup>400</sup> on 21 June 1962, read an article<sup>401</sup> to the assembly by the radical independence leader of the Caribbean French territory of Martinique, deputy Aimé Césaire (1913–2008). Césaire’s voice, reiterated through Drollet’s reading, articulated a forceful argument: that de Gaulle’s granting of independence to African colonies was not a benevolent concession but a response to organized liberation movements and the credible threat of insurgency that even the Fifth Republic could not fully contain. Césaire further drew an explicit link between France’s continued tight control over Polynesia and its nuclear ambitions in the region. As reconstructed through the Danielssons’ minutes-based testimony, this intervention carried a particular authority, given Césaire’s standing as a leading figure of anti-colonial struggle speaking from direct political experience. His argument appears to have resonated within the territorial assembly in 1961–62, contributing to a moment in which elected representatives collectively confronted French government officials – the governor and his administration – by questioning how the political and legal framework governing the CEP had been established, and why decisions were presented as *faits accomplis* rather than as matters open to deliberation.<sup>402</sup> Mediated through Drollet’s reading and subsequently sedimented in the assembly minutes mobilized by the Danielssons, Césaire’s intervention enacted a transfer of anti-colonial authority from one colonial periphery to another, forging a periphery-to-periphery testimonial relay that resonated with South-South solidarities articulated in Black Atlantic and Black Pacific thought.<sup>403</sup>

The Danielssons characterize the response of the assembly as politically naïve, reflecting their own assumption that Polynesian politics were less developed than their European counterpart.<sup>404</sup> This assumption is itself open to critique. Given the Assemblée Territoriale’s long-standing asymmetry of information and resources vis-à-vis the French administration, such action can instead be read as a strategic

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<sup>400</sup> Born in Papeete, Jacques-Denis Drollet served in Free France’s naval forces before becoming a union leader and joining the RDPT in 1956. He aligned with Pouvana’a during the 1958 split with Cérant-Jérusalémy over the constitutional referendum, though, according to his own account, he spent the referendum day fishing rather than voting against Pouvana’a’s position. Regnault and Vannier, *Pouvana’a et de Gaulle: La candeur et la grandeur*, p. 258. He served in the territorial assembly until 1966. Although he opposed Pouvana’a’s “No” campaign in the 1958 referendum, he nevertheless resisted the CEP’s terms under De Gaulle. Later, believing Polynesia deserved greater compensation for its service, he proposed a report offering Moruroa on a free lease to France. In the documentary *Pouvana’a Te Metua: L’él du Peuple*, Drollet claims he helped establish the CEP and, as one of five AT members, secured Moruroa’s lease without charge thereby preventing direct military rule of the territory. See also Regnault, *La Bombe française dans le Pacifique: l’implantation, 1957–196*, pp. 96–114.

<sup>401</sup> Reported in the daily newspaper *Minute*, 1 July 1962.

<sup>402</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, p. 45.

<sup>403</sup> Swan, *Pasifika Black: Oceania, Anti-colonialism, and the African World*.

<sup>404</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, pp. 48–49.



appeal to transcolonial solidarity, grounded in the belief that anti-colonial claims articulated elsewhere might acquire force when relayed across connected sites of imperial governance.

The French Polynesian senator G rald Coppenrath,<sup>405</sup> upon the challenge from the assembly, turned to Jacques Foccart (1913–1997), de Gaulle’s close advisor and long-time orchestrator of French colonial and neocolonial governance. Foccart functioned as the operational linchpin of metropolitan control over Africa and the Overseas Territories, translating political authority into mechanisms of surveillance, patronage, and intervention that shaped the structural conditions enabling projects like the CEP.<sup>406</sup> The Danielssons report that a letter from Foccart to Coppenrath also was read in the territorial assembly on 28 July 1962. Here, Foccart denounced C saire’s statements about de Gaulle’s nuclear ambitions.<sup>407</sup> In public, mostly unconfirmed rumours about the CEP-installation circulated, and both the nuclear nature of it and its location were unclear until the governor Grimald launched it in a speech in the AT, definitively declaring the test site in the spring of 1963.<sup>408</sup>



Figure 9. Photo of G rald Coppenrath whom was senator before the business-oriented mayor of Papeete, Alfred Poroi, was elected to the position. Wikimedia commons.

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<sup>405</sup> Coppenrath (1922–2008) was born in Papeete, participated in the French resistance movement, studied at the University of Poitiers and took up work as an attorney in Papeete upon his return in 1948. He was part of the local branch of the Tahitian Gaullist UNR party. Coppenrath was succeeded as senator by the Papeete businessman Alfred Poroi. See Regnault and Vannier, *Pouvana’a et de Gaulle: La candeur et la grandeur*, p. 395.

<sup>406</sup> See Regnault and Vannier, *Pouvana’a et de Gaulle: La candeur et la grandeur*, p. 396. Gabrielle Hecht examines how Foccart established uranium export firms and mines in Franc afrique (notably in Gabon and Equatorial Guinea), negotiated cooperation accords with individual African states, and wove informal, family-style networks between French and African leaders and thereby underpinning France’s nuclear capabilities. Hecht, *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade*. See also Kaye Whiteman, “The Man Who Ran Fran afrique,” *The National Interest*, no. 49 (1997).

<sup>407</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Moruroa, mon amour* 1974 (Fr) pp. 45–46.

<sup>408</sup> KTM BD Steel case 1, 2123. Collected protocols of the AT. May 16, 1963, pp. 4–6. Opening speech of the assembly by governor Grimald.

According to historian Lextreyt, following Pouvana'a's imprisonment, RDPT became increasingly fractioned. The split was finalized with the territorial assembly election in October 1962. Pouvana'a's successor as party leader, his son Marcel Oopa, had fought in the Second World War with the Polynesian brigade of Guitarists.<sup>409</sup> He had been a volunteer for France in North Africa and Italy. In July 1961, while serving as a deputy in the French national assembly, he succumbed to poor health. Following this, the farmer and waterage entrepreneur John Teariki (1914–1983) from Moorea<sup>410</sup> took over his mandate. Both Teariki and the former RDPT president, now independent politician Cérán-Jérusalémy, were beginning to gain ground. Cérán-Jérusalémy advocated for the yes-side of the 1958 constitutional referendum and had started his own party, Pupu Tiama Maohi.<sup>411</sup> According to historian Maillochon, Teariki, during this critical time when Polynesia was debated and launched in the national assembly as a site of a new test site polygon, had asked for an audience with de Gaulle but was refused.<sup>412</sup>

#### **5.2.4 A testimony to the conditions for deliberation on the CEP's implementation**

As argued by the Danielssons, the CEP question in the early-1960s was foregrounded by a political struggle on the territorial status question of independence between left and right wing forces of the community, with significant complications.<sup>413</sup> Historians Regnault and Vannier show that the plans for moving the test-site operations to Polynesia was construed by General Ailleret and confirmed early on in de Gaulle's presidency in the summer of 1958.<sup>414</sup> In French Polynesia, the right, RPF-de Gaulle aligned parties, had the support of the French administration and were regularly loyal to French rule and commercially/business oriented. This cohort was angered by the introduction of income taxes suggested by RDPT to manage the territorial finances. RDPT had proposed this income tax

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<sup>409</sup> Lextreyt, "De l'Éveil à la vie politique à l'Échec de la première expérience d'Autonomie interne 1945–1962. Les combats de Pouvana'a a Oopa."

<sup>410</sup> He was a farmer who led a successful shipping company, ferocious opponent of the CEP. In 1965–66 Teariki founded the party *Here ai'a*, which he was of leader until his death. He had been re-elected as leader of the AT just before a fatal accident in 1983, Regnault and Vannier, *Pouvana'a et de Gaulle: La candeur et la grandeur*, p. 403.

<sup>411</sup> Lextreyt, "De l'Éveil à la vie Politique à l'Échec de la Première Expérience d'Autonomie Interne 1945–1962: Les Combats de Pouvana'a a Oopa."

<sup>412</sup> Maillochon, "Les réseaux de militants contre les essais nucléaires français (1959–1996)," p. 103.

<sup>413</sup> Independence and anti-CEP struggles came to be intertwined from the start, but were not entirely overlapping. Some politicians wanted to stop the tests but keep the status. See specifically the Sanford-Flosse political battles over the late 1970s and 1980s. Lextreyt, "Les années CEP 1963–2004."

<sup>414</sup> Regnault and Vannier, *Pouvana'a et de Gaulle: La Candeur et la Grandeur*.

continuously in order to gain funds for an independent Polynesian nation state.<sup>415</sup> There were thus two major opposing groups in the debate on the territorial status in 1962–63, which had crystallized from the more fragmented positions of the 1958 constitutional referendum. The increasingly radical RDPT who were for independence and pro-autonomy reforms, consisted of socialists, farmers, and protestant Christian elements.<sup>416</sup> The RDPT was still fractioned generationally, with the older reformist supporters of Pouvana’a, who himself communicated via correspondence from forced exile in France, and a younger generation wanting to move faster on the issues of independence.<sup>417</sup>

The public debate on nuclear testing in early 1962 thus did not concern the French territorial status, but nuclear testing in the British colony of Gilbert and Ellice Islands (since 1979, Republic of Kiribati) with the Christmas Island (Kiritimati) atoll test site of US and UK, located around 2,000 km north of Tahiti. There, a new test series was being prepared by the US.<sup>418</sup>

Teariki and Cérán-Jérusalémy (who had split from the RDPT) represented two contrasting visions regarding the territory’s status since the ’58 referendum and Pouvana’a’s framing and imprisonment. Teariki’s hard-line stance against CEP and on the issue of territorial status garnered the most seats, while Cérán-Jérusalémy’s more moderate approach secured only one. Following the 1962 elections, Teariki and his allies held 21 of the 30 seats in the territorial assembly, signalling strong prospects for increased Polynesian autonomy or independence.<sup>419</sup>

On 27 June 1962, a letter was sent by the Chairman of the territorial assembly to then Prime Minister Pompidou, requesting confirmation that a nuclear test site was

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<sup>415</sup> See Regnault, “Pouvanaa a Oopa: La Révision du Procès de 1959 en Marche” (2015); Ben Finney, *Tahiti: Polynesian Peasants and Proletarians* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>416</sup> French Polynesia holds a confessional split in Protestants and Catholics with political implications, also for the anti-CEP struggles, see Maillachon, “Les réseaux de militants contre les essais nucléaires français (1959–1996),” p. 288–89.

<sup>417</sup> Lextrety, “De l’Eveil à la vie Politique à l’Échec de la Première Expérience d’Autonomie Interne 1945–1962: Les Combats de Pouvana’a a Oopa.”

<sup>418</sup> In operation *Dominic*, 31 nuclear test explosions were conducted at the Johnston atoll and Kiritimati. This test series was made amid high Cold War tensions between the Soviet Union and the US, with the failed Bay of Pigs invasion and breakdown of the tacit moratorium between the superpowers that had been in function between 1958 and 1961. British H-bomb tests had been officially protested in the Polynesian AT already in 1956. See KTM BD Steel case 5, Folder “Christmas tests”, minutes from the AT session 23 October 1956. See the account of this official protest in Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, p. 40–44.

<sup>419</sup> Donald Denoon and Stewart Firth, *The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 397.

not to be constructed in Polynesia,<sup>420</sup> a document the Danielssons in their latest, 1994, French account use to underline the debated CEP approval in the assembly.<sup>421</sup>

According to Danielssons' account, RDPT leaders now demanded the pardoning of Pouvana'a, seeing him as a potential leader for an independent Polynesia upon release from exile, much like other postcolonial leaders of newly independent republics.<sup>422</sup> However, Pouvana'a rejected the idea of a pardon, insisting he had committed no crime. Historian Regnault notes that Teariki shared this sentiment, respecting Pouvana'a's principled stand.<sup>423</sup> The Danielssons' critique of the framing and mistreatment of Pouvana'a, their depiction of the nuclear test site as an imposed project amid ongoing political struggle, and their analysis of the arrogance, deliberate manipulation, and misleading statements directed at the Assemblée Territoriale (AT) when the test site was about to be constructed, have subsequently been both confirmed and critically nuanced by historians such as Regnault and Vannier. Yet, understood as a sustained counter-narrative, one advocating for independence and contesting the test site, the Danielssons' focus on key conflicts and actors reveals a specific temporal positionality: their analytical lens is shaped by the unfolding political and social tensions of the 1960s through the time of their writing, and by the exigencies of activist-historical witness work, which structures both what they highlight and how they interpret the historical record.

Through their archives, access to documentation, and lived experiences, the Danielssons were thereby able to challenge the status, identity, and competence of various powerful groups and actors, framing these processes as crimes, injustices, and wrongdoings. Their work was not merely an act of documentation but an effort to articulate and counter the invisibility of what Ariella Azoulay terms *ongoing regime-made disasters*.<sup>424</sup>

Lextrety has further argued that the Gaullist (UNR-UDT) consolidation of power following the victory in France's November 1962 legislative elections, which resulted in an absolute majority in the Chamber of Deputies, stalled the push for

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<sup>420</sup> KTM BD 2626, Item 30. The sending of this letter was reported to Teariki and Coppenrath by letter from the Chairman of the Territorial Assembly see 2626, Item 31 and 32.

<sup>421</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Moruroa, notre bombe coloniale: Histoire de la colonisation nucléaire de la Polynésie française* see chapter 7. Why it was not in the earlier, Swedish or English editions, remains an object of speculation, perhaps this documentation was not available, or Danielssons to strengthen their argument of conflict and resistance in the territorial assembly to the CEP installation.

<sup>422</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*. p. 52.

<sup>423</sup> Regnault and Vannier, *Pouvana'a et de Gaulle: La candeur et la grandeur*, p. 353.

<sup>424</sup> Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*, pp. 360–370.

independence.<sup>425</sup> In the autumn of 1963, de Gaulle, with support from Governor Aimé-Louis Grimald, dissolved the RDPT and Cérán-Jérusalémy's party under a law permitting the dissolution of organizations that "threatened national integrity".<sup>426</sup>

According to the Danielssons' account, based on territorial assembly proceedings, matters came to a head on 6 June 1963. In this initial year of the CEP (marking the beginning of test-site construction), the territorial assembly unanimously raised the question of whether a change in the territory's status was even possible.<sup>427</sup> Gérald Coppenrath, argued in the assembly that the decision on the test site had already been taken and could not be revoked, while Cérán-Jérusalémy argued that the conditional promised but not delivered investigations into the possible consequences of the test site made the previous decision untenable, and RDPT called for a popular referendum on the issue.<sup>428</sup>

In a similar manner, the question of a new constitution/status of the territory was deferred and refuted by the French authorities. Louis Jaquinot, Minister of Overseas France 1961–66, on receiving the AT's unanimously posed question of possibilities for changing the constitution, decided to visit Tahiti. There he had a closed meeting with the governor on 29 June 1963. He delivered the message to the assembly, on 1 July, that any remission of the question would be totally excluded. Cérán-Jérusalémy called for a public debate on the matter, while RDPT deputy Jacques-Denis Drollet requested the press to be invited and that the debate should be recorded. However, this open meeting was not granted, and the assembly's response to the installation of the CEP was ultimately considered belated, which the Danielssons see and invoke as one of many instances where possible democratic debate was sidestepped. In the documentation of this closed meeting, Bengt Danielsson's handwritten question appears: "Were Drollet, Teariki, and Cérán even invited?"<sup>429</sup> Such probing questions shaped the Danielssons' testimonial work and

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<sup>425</sup> Lextreyt, "De l'éveil à la vie politique à l'échec de la première expérience d'autonomie interne 1945–1962. Les combats de Pouvana'a a Oopa."

<sup>426</sup> Lextreyt, "Les années CEP 1963–2004" Grimald was the governor of French Polynesia from late 1960 to early 1965. He had previously been the governor of New Caledonia, from 1956 to 1959. He was present throughout the CEP implementation and has written two memoirs of the period. Regnault and Vannier, *Pouvana'a et de Gaulle: La candeur et la grandeur*, p. 397. As protagonist of the French administration Grimald was one of the antagonists in Danielssons' account of the events. Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, pp. 61–62.

<sup>427</sup> KTM BD Steel case 1, 2123, this question was also detailed in Danielsson and Danielsson *Poisoned Reign*, p. 53.

<sup>428</sup> KTM BD Steel case 1, 2123. Collected protocols of the AT, p. 157.

<sup>429</sup> KTM BD Steel case 1, 2123, Collected protocols of the AT 1963. Notes by Danielsson on pp. 367–368. See also collected protocols of the AT, June 27, 1963, pp. 682–84.

the critical texts they wrote, infusing their accounts with a polemical and contentious gesture toward an officially purported ostensible deliberation.

Such fragments of the Danielssons' work were particularly valuable for their sustaining claims about organized opposition to the test site, including figures such as John Teariki, and for documenting the presence of parliamentary resistance at the time of the CEP's implementation – an issue that later and contemporary historians continue to debate. In their critical review of historian Jean-Marc Regnault's work, activist-researcher Bruno Barrillot and scholar and anti-nuclear leader John Taroanui Doom challenge Regnault's representation of widespread local support for the test site. They argue that such portrayals function to retrospectively neutralize the political conflict surrounding the establishment of the testing program. As they note:

This representation is contrary to reality, to which one is astonished that Regnault judged it useless to refer. On 7 September 1966 in Papeete, Deputy of Polynesia John Teariki pronounced a very virulent indictment against the nuclear tests in front of General de Gaulle, who came to “push the button” of the next blast over Moruroa.<sup>430</sup>

### 5.2.5 Section summary

This section has detailed the Danielssons' testimonial activism, as captured in their work(s) *Moruroa, mon amour* and *Poisoned Reign*, which trace their evolving critique of French nuclear testing in Polynesia as a specific form of colonialism. Drawing on archival materials, parliamentary minutes, and their lived experiences, they constructed a counter-narrative that challenged the legitimacy of the tests, emphasizing the colonial governance structures that facilitated them. Drawing these strands together, the section argues that witness activism functions as a distinct epistemic formation within the history of knowledge: it links actors-arenas-artifacts-claims-counterclaims so that testimony, archival fragments, and material evidence jointly instantiate fallible but warrantable knowledge.

Originally published in French and later strategically translated into English to engage an international audience, the Danielssons' writing combined documentary, journalistic, and polemical elements to mobilize public opposition. They used key archival documents, particularly those revealing the democratic deficit in Polynesian governance during the establishment of the Centre d'Expérimentations du Pacifique (CEP) which was a fundamental claim in their critique. The Danielssons highlighted the coercive nature of the tests, framing infrastructure investments not as development for local populations but as support for the nuclear program. Their accounts interwove historical testimony with contemporary debates,

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<sup>430</sup> Bruno Barrillot and John Taroanui Doom, “Response to Regnault,” *Contemporary Pacific* 17, no. 2 (2005).

referencing figures such as Pouvana'a a Oopa and Aimé Césaire to underscore the connections between colonialism and nuclear ambitions.

The restricted access to archives and France's control over key documents underscored the ongoing struggles for transparency and the systemic obfuscation of nuclear history. An orienting and guiding question in their work thus concerns the basic political conditions within the territory, extending to issues of justice and rights. Specifically, it examines the degree to which the Polynesian population (through its representatives) could have been considered informed and consulted – a stance that the official, heroic narrative during the period of the Danielssons' critical writing claimed to have fulfilled.<sup>431</sup> Through their work, the Danielssons carved out a distinct role as *histor witnesses*, blending activism with historiography to interrogate the historical conditions for, and at the same time articulating nuclear colonialism in, the Pacific, a theme that will be further explored in the following.

### 5.3 Chapter Conclusions: The *Histor* Epistemic Modality

This chapter has shown that the Danielssons' intervention is best grasped not primarily as moral exhortation or isolated advocacy but as an epistemic formation: a *histor* mode of witness activism that actively reads political problems as structural problems. Where later testimonial modes of knowledge on the tests would individualize harm centring on bodily suffering, affective witness statements, and the temporality of illness, the Danielssons' 1970s and 1980s writing sought to make visible the institutional mechanisms that rendered such suffering probable and politically illegible. Their account is therefore less a catalogue of individual wounds than an anatomy of rule: infrastructures, legal-administrative arrangements, economic incentives, and deliberate secrecy. In short, they argue that nuclear testing in Polynesia is not merely an episode of technological harm but an ensemble of colonial practices that produce and sustain ignorance, redistribute risk, and foreclose democratic judgment.

This structural critique in epistemic work was possible because the Danielssons operated from an intermediary position: long-term presence in Polynesia, familiarity with local political actors and archives, linguistic and institutional mobility, and standing as public intellectuals able to translate local claims to metropolitan and transnational audiences. Their authority was built through brokerage – filing, annotating, translating, and recontextualizing documents – and through what I have called their counter-archival labour. Brokerage here is not a neutral technicality but

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<sup>431</sup> For a discussion on the heroic-to-victim narrative of CEP history, see Barthe, *Les retombées du passé: Le paradoxe de la victime*.

an epistemic operation: it converts dispersed traces into an argument that names mechanisms (fait accompli, economic leverage, epistemic monopoly) rather than simply aggregating instances of suffering. That conversion is the procedural heart of the *histor*: it is how fragments become causal stories about power.

It is important, however, to be candid about what this epistemic posture can and cannot do. The *histor* mode excels at revealing the conditions of possibility for harm; it excels at diagnosing regimes, such as colonial policy, military planning, infrastructural logistics, and forms of measurement that make certain harms thinkable and distributable. What it less often supplies are the proximate, clinical linkages that quantify exposure and attribute individual pathologies to specific releases of radionuclides. In other words, the Danielssons' documentary synthesis prepares the terrain for claims of harm but does not substitute for the forensic – in the sense of toxicological measurement, epidemiological causation, or clinical certification – that courts, public health inquiries, and humanitarian agencies frequently require. This epistemic gap is not a moral failing of the Danielssons so much as the structural difference between two ways of knowing: mechanism-focused historicity versus measurement-focused forensics.

Yet the binary should not be overstated. The Danielssons do not ignore toxicological questions; they repeatedly foreground concerns about strontium-90, cesium-137, food-chain uptake, and cumulative exposure. But they treat these questions as evidentiary levers within a broader causal narrative, as elements that instantiate a colonial logic, rather than as the decisive, laboratory-certified proof that would resolve disputes over individual causation. Their repeated invocation of toxic risks is therefore both predictive and rhetorical: predictive insofar as it identifies plausible mechanisms of harm, rhetorical insofar as it pressures public and scientific authorities to account for what those mechanisms would mean in social and political terms.

This epistemic architecture accounts for the Danielssons' historical power and their vulnerability. Their mode was highly effective in mobilizing publics, shaping NGO agendas, and reframing the CEP as a question of governance and colonial accountability. At the same time, when historical contestation hardened into juridical or clinical adjudication, the *histor*'s mechanism-driven evidence was exposed to demands for measurement and individual attribution that it could not by itself meet. The subsequent decades – when survivor recordings, medico-epidemiological reports, audiovisual documentation and forensic dossiers became central – should therefore be read as a complementary and contested reconfiguration of epistemic authority: forensic methods and individualized testimony did not simply replace the *histor*; they translated, pressured, and at times displaced it.

The analytic payoff of reading the Danielssons in this way is double. First, it preserves the historian's unique comparative purchase: by treating testimony as an instrument for diagnosing structures, we can see how archives, protocols and public



rhetoric function as sites where power and non-knowledge are produced. Second, it situates later testimonial and forensic practices as historically conditioned responses – not natural successors but epistemic forms that emerge when publics, NGOs, and technoscientific institutions demand different kinds of proof. Thus the *histor* is best understood as an antecedent and interlocutor to the forensic and survivor-centred testimonies that will take on increasing prominence in the 1990s and 2000s.

The chapters that follow take up that transformation. They examine how recorded survivor accounts, medico-scientific assemblages, and NGO dossiers – forms I group loosely as testimonial practices – were collected, certified, brokered and circulated. My aim is to trace how these later modalities developed through the Danielssons' structural framing even as they reoriented the grammar of proof toward bodies, biomarkers, and court-ready reports. Doing so will allow us to see not a teleology of evidentiary improvement but a plural, contested epistemic field in which history, testimony, and forensics compete and co-produce oppositional claims on the CEP.



# Chapter 6. Witnessing the Fait Accompli: The Danielssons' Historical Mode and the Territorial Status Debate

## 6.1 The Danielssons' Position as *Histors*

The types of questions and the historical accounts derived from the Danielssons' working archives takes on the form of *histor* testimony, documenting, recording, and addressing an audience. This form of testimony and historical writing on the test-site implementation and constitutional debates differs from a direct, subjective eyewitness account or a lived experience narrative (*superstes*) which would later become a central epistemic modality in mobilizing against the test site. The *histor* approach is also distinct from the ostensibly neutral, "objective" third-party perspective (*testis*) – a modal register that, while often adopted in later *superstes*' lived through testimonies, does not consistently capture the Danielssons' standpoint of critical knowledge production.<sup>432</sup> The *histor* carries the ability not to be a first-hand witness, but instead working by reference, to recount what others have told, and with this also provide authority to these statements, such as those destabilizing official accounts of an unproblematic implementation of the test site and continued subservience to France. The *histor*, through this recounting, can construct a more comprehensive picture of the meso-level character, as proposed by Fassin building on the sociological work of Boltanski and Bourdieu.<sup>433</sup> This approach bridges micro perspectives and structural macro analyses, drawing on the epistemological foundations of anthropology, journalism, and documentary practices to reframe the formation of knowledge about the tests and their history.

The archival practices central to the Danielssons' method gradually established their capacity and authority in testimonial terms where 20+ years of collecting information on the test site was assembled in their archives. The conditions enabling

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<sup>432</sup> Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*, p. 215.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid.

their specific form of witnessing, referred to here as the *histor* position, are examined more closely in the following sections. This position serves as both a rhetorical register and a mode of claim-making, suited to articulate the test site as a problem. It depends on mechanisms of political mobilization and knowledge production. Studies in contentious politics and the history of knowledge describe mechanisms such as brokerage where claims propagate through networks, and scale shifts, which connect domestic and international arenas.<sup>434</sup> Both of these mechanisms align with the ways claims about the test site and its impact have been made over time.

The following section analytically focuses on the period during which the Danielssons produced their two major works, an integrated, evolving work of reporting testimony that was edited, updated, and amended over time. Also considered here is their contribution to *PIM*, an English-language magazine where the Danielssons wrote a recurring column from the late-1970s to the late-1980s.<sup>435</sup> The *histor* stance in the Danielssons' protest emerged and became active in the 1970s and 1980s, aligning with broader tendencies in knowledge production and political activism, and at key moments of convergence between the history of the CEP nuclear test site and anti-colonial movements in the Pacific. First, the early-1970s saw international cases brought against French atmospheric testing.<sup>436</sup> Second, in the early to mid-1980s, several significant events coincided. A general rise in anti-nuclear and disarmament efforts paralleled multiple independence movements in the Pacific, the *Rainbow Warrior* incident, and the opening of the Treaty of Rarotonga on 6 August 1985 (Hiroshima Day). When it came into force in December 1986, this treaty established the South Pacific as a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone.<sup>437</sup>

The mid-1990s marked another peak in anti-nuclear testing campaigns, particularly against France, as global protests erupted in response to President Chirac's resumption of testing at Moruroa in 1995. Documentation from this period of

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<sup>434</sup> See the method section on analysing the anti-CEP struggle and claims as contentious knowledge politics and Östling, Larsson Heidenblad, and Nilsson Hammar, *Knowledge Actors: Revisiting Agency in the History of Knowledge*, p. 13.

<sup>435</sup> The Danielssons column *Postmark Papeete* was withdrawn as it was seen as too "radical" when Rupert Murdoch's conglomerate took over control of *PIM*. See undated letter from Danielssons to peace researcher Owen Wilkes in KTM BD Steel case 5, *Correspondence anti-nucleaire recente*, folder 2189-2190.

<sup>436</sup> The Anglophone international movement against nuclear weapons had a foothold in New Zealand and Australia via CND, WILPF and other organizations. See Ralph V. Summy, "Militancy and the Australian peace movement, 1960–67," *Politics* 5, no. 2 (1970); Kate Laing, *Sisters in Peace: The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in Australia, 1915-2015* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2023).

<sup>437</sup> See the "Treaty of Rarotonga" retrieved 23 March 2023 from <https://www.un.org/nw/fz/fr/content/treaty-rarotonga>.

intense activist witnessing – incorporating superstes, as well as histor and testis perspectives, often in complex combinations and contradictions – is available in both the Obsarm and Danielsson archives. These include the works of Bruno Barrillot, as well as the materials and practices of NGOs like Greenpeace. The Danielssons remained active in these protests, attending global peace conferences, but Bengt’s health was deteriorating. Around the work with the revised French edition of *Moruroa, mon amour* in 1994, Marie-Thérèse, particularly, played a central role within the global peace network through her work with WILPF Tahiti.<sup>438</sup>

## 6.2 The Danielssons’ Account of the CEP-Debate

Gérald Coppenrath was the senator for Tahiti in Paris until 1962. Simultaneously, as the test site was planned in de Gaulle’s cabinet, he debated with the autonomist politician and Pouvana’a disciple J-B. H. Cérans-Jérusalémy on the differences between departmentalization and territorialization of the French Polynesia.<sup>439</sup> Their reasoning returns in the Danielssons’ accounts in *Moruroa, mon amour* and *Poisoned Reign* as a way of setting the stage and relating the account to the political conditions for the implementation.<sup>440</sup> As noted, the CEP implementation occurred precisely at this time, when demands for constitutional changes that had re-emerged since Pouvana’a’s forced exile from the Tahitian political scene.

As mentioned, there was no income tax in the territory, leading to budgetary shortfalls, and the economy was entirely dependent on France. The RDPT had proposed implementing an income tax, but the issue remained stalled. To address the budgetary gap, the Governor suggested relying on gifts or loans from Paris. A delegation, including the elected deputy Teariki and newly elected senator Poroi, was sent to Paris, where they received an unexpectedly warm and generous reception. The Polynesian representatives and especially Teariki began to suspect a motive behind this generosity, which included subsidies for copra,<sup>441</sup> developments

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<sup>438</sup> Archives of Marie-Thérèse Danielsson, Tahiti. Box: 1993, *Divers, concernant les voyages de l’année*. Pamphlets, correspondence, travel programs and tickets to conferences.

<sup>439</sup> Lextrety, “De l’éveil à la vie politique à l’échec de la première expérience d’autonomie interne 1945–1962. Les combats de Pouvana’a a Oopa”.

<sup>440</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, pp. 27 ff.

<sup>441</sup> Dried coconut meat, main export of the territory at the time.

of Papeete Harbour, increased hiring of public servants, and other financial support.<sup>442</sup>

The Danielssons put emphasis on a meeting on 3 January 1963, when some of the territorial assembly representatives and the senator met with President de Gaulle. Rather than addressing their request for greater parliamentary influence over internal matters, De Gaulle immediately focused on promises of economic relief and then swiftly announced the decision to establish a military base in the Gambier Islands.

I have decided – and in and through me the public of France – to install a military base in the Gambier Islands. Such a test site (centre d’experimentations) helps France to make military progress, as it will result in new significant economic incomes for your territory.<sup>443</sup>

The Danielssons note that the test-site inauguration was thus framed to history as an act of benevolence and continued to be so.<sup>444</sup> Alfred Poroi, the Papeete businessman-mayor who had become senator, expressed his gratitude. The delegate Jaques Tuaraa expressed that they were against nuclear weapons testing in the territory, and Teariki added that the priests of the protestant church saw that Christianity was incompatible with such weapons. De Gaulle quickly ended the audience.<sup>445</sup>

The Danielssons recount this situation from a fly-on-the-wall perspective in the chamber of De Gaulle, as if witnessing the exchange of words, but do not refer to specific sources. This might have put them in trouble. The Danielssons knew the delegates, and were probably told about the meeting, but there are no documents of this in the archive. This follows the journalistic-documentarian standard mode of authority and representation, pointing to the Danielssons’ own voices and credibility. There have been several accounts of this meeting, attesting that de Gaulle pulled a trick on the deputies and representatives since he expressed himself so ambiguously (not telling what kind of military base it would be), and used his personal political force and grandeur so that the territorial assembly representatives

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<sup>442</sup> Maillochon, “Les réseaux de militants contre les essais nucléaires français (1959–1996),” p. 119, 122–123. Teariki’s commitment against CEP, with his visits to the metropole in 1963 over time evolved into a more structural and systematic critique.

<sup>443</sup> Based on notes from the meeting in Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*. The Danielssons describe the meeting from notes and descriptions from individuals who were present.

<sup>444</sup> The “inevitability” of the CEP implementation and the role of Teariki in questioning this is further taken up in Mary and Vignon, “Implantation: État, pouvoirs locaux et opinion,” pp. 173–174. They highlight that the possibility of contestation, while fruitless, shows that critique was imaginable.

<sup>445</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, p. 53.

ultimately could not protest forcefully enough.<sup>446</sup> This is part of a pattern in the anti-test material in general and the account put forward by the Danielsson testimony specifically: the ambiguous status of the test site, the obscurant political process, and the economic “compensatory” rhetoric render testimonies important as a way of making claims.

### 6.2.1 *Fait accompli*: Delivering a (non-)democratic decision to the territorial representatives

The archival record shows a repeated pattern: metropolitan actors present the CEP as an inevitable technical-economic measure while local representatives are forced to confront its consequences under conditions that make genuine deliberation impossible. In Mailllochon’s terms, the colonial relation magnified asymmetries of authority so that the Assemblée Territoriale encountered a *fait accompli*: an imperial defence policy that exceeded the legal and epistemic remit of the territorial parliament.<sup>447</sup> The group representatives are presented as doubtfully convinced in the meeting with De Gaulle by the CEP as short-term relief to an orchestrated economic deficit. The deputy Franz Vanizette became the conduit emissary carrying the missive that the critical reactions in the territorial assembly in Papeete would be met with economic sanctions. In the exchanges recorded, metropolitan emissaries and local intermediaries deployed economic incentives and veiled threats as instruments of governance. Vanizette’s role as conduit for a conditional funding message of ‘smooth process or economic sanctions’ makes explicit how material dependency was used to secure consent. The immediate effect was the opposite: rather than cowing the assembly, the threat produced a demand for risk assessment; representatives insisted on evaluation before assent. That reaction shows that the assembly’s resistance was not merely rhetorical but epistemic: members sought authoritative knowledge about hazards and consequences before they would endorse the plan.<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>446</sup> Pieter de Vries and Han Seur, *Moruroa and Us: Polynesians Experiences during Thirty Years of Nuclear Testing in the French Pacific* (Lyon: Centre de Documentation et de Recherche sur la Paix et les Conflits, 1997); Regnault, *La Bombe Française dans le Pacifique : L’Implantation, 1957–1964*; Mailllochon, “Les réseaux de militants contre les essais nucléaires français (1959–1996),” p. 109. Here Mailllochon describes that Teariki demanded a new audience with De Gaulle in February 1963, but that this was refused by Foccart. In a commission report interview with Jaques Denis Drollet made in 2006, Drollet testifies that a threat to place French Polynesia under military government if the elected did not accept CEP was uttered see *Rapport de la Commission d’Enquête sur les Conséquences des Essais Nucléaires en Polynésie Française*, by the assembly of French Polynesia, 2006.

<sup>447</sup> Mailllochon, “Les réseaux de militants contre les essais nucléaires français (1959–1996),” p. 109.

<sup>448</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, pp. 54–56.

Governor Grimald in a response further highlighted economic advantages, and infrastructural investments that would follow. General Thiry, the army chief of the special weapons unit, and Phillippe Giscard d'Estaing, CEO of SODETEG, a major French technical building company, had anonymously visited Polynesia. This information was revealed in a *Les Nouvelles* article of 25 February 1962, describing that Thiry had already known of the test-site establishment in 1959 or earlier, and with the visits had proved the grounds for it.<sup>449</sup>

Local press coverage was selectively critical but not uniformly oppositional and furnished the Danielssons' account with a public chronology of what was "known" and by whom. The Danielssons read these threads together to show not simply that competing claims existed, but that control over what counted as valid knowledge (expert testimony, classified plans, economic accounts) resided predominantly with metropolitan actors.<sup>450</sup> The assembly is presented as fuming at the systematic deception uncovered, and most angered were those who had previously trusted de Gaulle, the territorial assembly's Gaullists. Consequentially, on 16 May 1963, all members of the territorial assembly motioned to say no to the nuclear tests in Polynesia.<sup>451</sup>

*Poisoned Reign's* summary of the territorial assembly's arguments<sup>452</sup> presents that there was a wide consensus against the test-site establishment in the AT when it was finally clearly stated in 1963.<sup>453</sup> The Danielssons thus highlight the far-reaching implications of de Gaulle's strategy of ambiguity, emphasizing how the circulation of knowledge was tightly controlled between the metropole and the local parliament.<sup>454</sup> Through the Danielssons' testimony, made in the context of the historical mobilization against the CEP order, statements from the Polynesian parliament are reproduced, giving voice to some assembly members. This reproduction serves not to validate an ostensibly democratic process but to foreground critical voices within the historical record.

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<sup>449</sup> "Sicurani, adm. Thabaud, gen. Thiry and Yves Lancien" *Les Nouvelles de Tahiti*, the article is a cut-out found in KTM BD 3045 Folder 1/6. The article is referred to in Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, p. 59.

<sup>450</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, p. 59.

<sup>451</sup> KTM BD. KTM BD. steel case 1, 2123, minutes from AT, pp. 120–130. When the CEP plans had been laid out clearly by Grimald, most representatives protested.

<sup>452</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, p. 60.

<sup>453</sup> Regnault's nuancing academic historical account goes more into detail on the thinking and motivations of the various parliamentarians. Regnault, *La bombe française dans le Pacifique: L'implantation, 1957–1964*; Regnault, *La France à l'opposé d'elle-même: Essais d'histoire politique de l'Océanie*.

<sup>454</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, p. 60.



Notably, the Danielssons do not engage in a critical historical analysis of the motivations or ideas behind these statements. Instead, the act of presenting them demonstrates the presence of dissenting expressions. By framing these reproduced statements in this manner, and with this the ability, in the *histor* mode of testimony, to raise questions of the text to the present (whether 1974, 1986 or 1994), the Danielssons challenge the assumption that the assembly was supportive of the CEP. Furthermore, the testimony raises questions about the claim that test-site knowledge was not a point of contention at the time of its inauguration. The parliament representatives' reactions to the CEP formally introduced were thus quoted from the minutes of the assembly as widely against the test site:

Why not conduct the tests in France if they are harmless? (F. Tefaatau, RDPT)

We cannot trust the military specialists, as we can be sure of their answers, thus we need to turn to unbiased scientists who are not on someone's pay check. (G. Coppenrath, Gaullist)<sup>455</sup>

This expresses a formal conclusion that had to be considered in the conscious and expressed uncertainty of the assembly about the integrity of military specialists concluding that the tests would be safe, and that the science always had financing that risked eschewing results.

If war breaks out, the bases in Polynesia will be attacked. What has the government done to protect the civil population. (Tetuanui Ehu, Gaullist)

Like all French in the motherland we say no to nuclear weapons. (Elie Salmon, Gaullist)<sup>456</sup>

As the representatives are grouped, the Gaullists' arguments against CEP to a higher degree reoccur in later CEP critiques, while the RDPT and independence party arguments seem to dissipate more over time. Perhaps this is a strategy of moderation, or to communicate critique to the Mitterrand government at the time of *Poisoned Reigns/Moruroa's* re-publication, making the anti-test attempts of 1986 and the early 1990s seem more reasonable, given that old time Gaullists in Polynesia already supported anti-test arguments in 1963.

Céran-Jérusalémy, the independence politician who according to the Danielssons had an ability to see around corners, argued that "The military will hire people from the surrounding islands to work in Papeete, with unavoidable, far reaching polarization as a result".<sup>457</sup> This echoes the socio-economic argument, highlighting

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<sup>455</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific* p. 60.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid, p. 61.

the imperial developmentalism that the Danielssons' interpretation has made us familiar with at this point, witnessing the general level of injustices, not the traumatic events of the explosions but the whole military establishment machinery as a social problem. Céran-Jérusalémy further predicted that at the end of the CEP establishment it would be necessary to find new employment for the people who were moved into the capital. If this did not succeed, urban unemployment would become rampant while the countryside (all the islands) depopulated, and the production of the only export products (copra, mother of pearl, coffee, and vanilla) diminishing drastically. "... this nuclear base will enable thousands of French from North Africa eager to find new refuge in French Polynesia" was another point of population-politics articulated by F. Tefaatau of RDPT and reproduced in the Danielssons' account. The *pieds noirs* from Algeria were, at the time, a highly controversial group of colonists. Tefaatau continued that:

Their intention is to make themselves our masters, and already at the next election gain majority in the parliament. We who are born here must beware of all who come from the outside and only stay here as long as it serves their own selfish interests.<sup>458</sup>

The prolonged issue of the status of the territory had to be decided before the assembly could even say no, so the delay and protraction of this meant that the AT had no mandate to do anything. John Teariki summarized what he had learnt during a year (1961) in Paris in a motion to the territorial assembly, as a pedagogical testimony from the metropole on nuclear properties – the knowledge he had acquired and spread as enlightenment to the uncertain parliamentarians. Among other things, he informed the AT about strontium 90's half-life of 28 years, which was portrayed by generals and technicians as a short period. The Danielssons' quote, and with this according authority to the statement, that Teariki highlighted for the assembly that:

... strontium 90 has the same properties as calcium and thus is absorbed by our skeleton. A millionth of a gram of strontium 90 causes four million instances of fragmentation per second and can harm the bone marrow with deadly leukaemia as consequence. One can hereby see the reasoning why our lecturers, until now, not with a single word have mentioned the occurrence of strontium-90 and cesium 137, radioactive substances, that when they fall apart in ocean water, not only radiates the fish, but also and foremost the plankton, which is the starting link in the oceanic chain of life.<sup>459</sup>

This central quote, reproduced by the Danielssons, highlights knowledge and the production of non-knowledge regarding risks, that Teariki had shared with the anti-test movement and the TA before the test site was built, though, as the Danielssons

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<sup>458</sup> Ibid, p. 61.

<sup>459</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, p. 61.

argue, only after the decision had already been made in Paris. Teariki's argument itself stands as a form of testimony, referencing his travel and stay in the metropole, and underscores the uneven distribution of critical information at the outset of the process. Read historically, Teariki's science based testimony performs two functions: it contests official assurances of safety by introducing plausible mechanistic knowledge, and it reveals the asymmetry of access to such knowledge in the assembly. The quote shows how local actors sought to instantiate judgmental rationality – provisionally adjudicating between competing claims by appealing to scientific mechanism even as much specialist data remained withheld from them.

By 15 May 1966, authorities were prepared to begin testing and had officially released a map delineating a danger zone within a 200–400 -kilometre radius around Moruroa. Teariki noted that seven islands within this zone were inhabited. In response, the military revised the map to reflect a radius of 222 kilometres, though this still included Tureia, with the Mangareva islands just outside the perimeter. The Danielssons accord strong relevance to Teariki's critical claims by quoting in full a critical address that Teariki gave as deputy in the AT, in the presence of the president-general when he visited the opening of CEP. This was on 6 September 1966, 10 years after his first visit to the islands. This excerpt shows the central problem of knowledge and propaganda that Teariki addresses in the assembly and what the Danielssons, in quoting him as historical testimony, want to highlight:

Let us now examine the second issue that makes us opponents: your decision to build nuclear bases and conduct nuclear tests in our region. This is a decision you have made without consulting us Polynesians, despite the fact that it is our lives and our health, as well as our children's, that are at stake. This is a serious violation of the French Constitution and France's commitments to the United Nations.

Your propaganda machine denies basic facts when it tries to claim that your nuclear tests, including experiments with hydrogen bombs, are completely harmless to us. I unfortunately do not have time to refute all the lies being spread. So, I will simply point out that the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation has clearly stated in its reports from 1958, 1962, and 1964:

Firstly, even the smallest dose of radiation can harm current and future generations. Secondly, any increase in environmental radioactivity should be avoided. Finally, there is no effective protection against the harmful radiation caused by radioactive fallout from A- and H-bombs.

These reports therefore conclude that it is absolutely necessary to put a stop to all further nuclear tests. I remind you of these simple scientific facts without for a moment imagining that you will share these concerns or halt the grand experiments you have come here to witness – or those that will follow.

No government has ever been so honest or cynically open-hearted as to admit that its nuclear tests could possibly be dangerous. No government has ever hesitated to

expose other peoples – especially small, defenceless peoples – to acknowledged life-threatening nuclear tests:

The Americans irradiated the inhabitants of the Marshall Islands.

The British did the same to Polynesians on islands near Christmas Island.

The Russians to the Siberian peoples.

The Chinese to Mongolians and Tibetans.

The French first to North Africans and now to us.

However, I cannot refrain from emphasizing, on behalf of the entire population, how bitter and disheartening it is to see the country of Pasteur, the homeland of human rights, France, dishonoured and sunk to the same level as the other ‘nuclear gangsters’, to use Jean Rostand’s expression.<sup>460</sup>

Plans for the hydrogen bomb tests proceeded regardless. By then, the residents of Tureia, the closest inhabited island, had already been evacuated to Papeete. The exchanges in the assembly therefore illustrate both the political and epistemic dimensions of the *fait accompli*: metropolitan actors imposed a decision while simultaneously monopolising the very knowledge necessary to justify it. The Danielssons’ archival reading exposes and reframes that double bind. With this, a closer investigation on the local conditions at the time of the update and republication of their work in the 1990s is also pertinent, as historical and historiographic problems and questions were debated at this time.

### 6.3 Renewed Territorial Status Debates and Re-editions: *Poisoned Reign*, 1986 and *Moruroa, Notre Bombe Coloniale*, 1993

This section examines the recontextualization and retrodution of the re-editions of *Moruroa, mon amour* (1974–1977) that was made in the late-1980s and early-1990s. The character of the Danielssons’ book-report was still, and perhaps more so in the later editions, both a moral testimony with a clear judgement, and a documentary account rooted in immediacy. It adopts a form of authority akin to journalism, photography or audio recording, emphasizing materiality, historical records, and presence. The ironic indignation expressed in the text operates within an objective

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<sup>460</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, pp. 112–113.

mode of documentation, presenting critical perspectives without overtly disrupting the observational tone. Positioned at a distance yet firmly grounded in the context of Tahiti, the Danielssons offer a fly-on-the-wall perspective as perceived by the authorities of the time, shaped by an anti-French stance. Their presence enabled them to engage with what they identified as injustices, adopting a *histor-testis* positionality that blends testimony with historical reporting, shaped by their presence in the audience of the assembly *séances*.

The anti-nuclear testing argumentation at the time was not explicitly articulated within a humanitarian register, yet it remained and continued to be articulated and increasingly connected to humanitarian discourses prevalent at the time of writing (1988–1990s). This connection included frameworks of victimology, conceptualizing the tests as slow genocide, and the oppression of the weak territory by the strong metropole. Additionally, the narrative critiques the naturalization of Cold War technological violence manifested through “Nukespeak”, inevitability, and path dependency. These critiques, while nuanced and layered with contradictions, form the preliminary suppositions of the Danielssons’ later writings.

In 1984, 10 years after atmospheric nuclear tests ceased and the first French edition of *Moruroa, mon amour* was published, French Polynesia underwent a significant political transformation, marked by an increase in self-governance and a change in its status. The long-time deputy to the French National Assembly, Francis Sanford (1912–1996)<sup>461</sup> who had long worked for autonomy, asked for a revision of the regulating laws under his territorial vice-presidency in 1981. The Gaullist central figure Gaston Flosse (1931)<sup>462</sup> who succeeded him also supported a revision in 1982 into an “internal (to France) autonomy”.<sup>463</sup> The Danielssons’ account upholds the link between constitutional status and the test site problematic over time, since the

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<sup>461</sup> Sanford had during the Second World War been a Free France liaison officer to the Americans at their South Pacific supply base on Bora bora. He later served there as a teacher and became director of primary education of Polynesia in 1956. In 1965 he was elected Mayor and beat Teariki in the 1967 election to the National Assembly in Paris, a position he held until 1978. See Regnault and Vannier, *Pouvana’a et de Gaulle: La candeur et la grandeur*.

<sup>462</sup> Flosse led *Tahoera’a Huiraatira*, a conservative party for over twenty years. From 1982 to 1984 he was vice-president of the Government Council, then served as its President from 1984–1987 and again from 1991–2004. Regnault has since authored two books on the territory’s political history, focusing on its rivalling “big men”, Temaru and Flosse. See Jean-Marc Regnault, *Gaston Flosse: Un Chirac des tropiques ?* (Papeete, Tahiti: Api tahiti, 2004); Jean-Marc Regnault, *Oscar Temaru: L’océanie au coeur* (Papeete: Api tahiti, 2020). On 27 February 2004, French Polynesia saw another significant expansion of autonomy, and Flosse assumed the role of President of French Polynesia (*Le président de la Polynésie française*). However, shortly thereafter, his party lost the parliamentary elections, and on 15 June 2004, he was succeeded by pro-independence leader Temaru, who was elected by the Assembly of French Polynesia (*Assemblée de la Polynésie française*).

<sup>463</sup> KTM BD Steel case 5, 2188, document “Projet de Loi: Portant statut du territoire de la Polynésie Française, p. 1.

first coinciding debates over CEP and territorial status, which some memorials of the relationship between the metropole and territory wanted and still want to keep separate. The analytical inseparability of the two is part of the general argument that frames the Danielssons' works and position.

The change meant that formal autonomy was to be granted the territory, while it would remain a part of France and French communality. The French government retained the sovereign right to absolve the assemble territoriale, over law and order, land ownership, the economic system (XPF currency was based on the Franc), foreign relations, media, secondary education, exploring and exploiting natural resources, immigration, and military matters,<sup>464</sup> as well as financial control by liquid preponderance.<sup>465</sup>

French Polynesia and other French overseas territories (DOM-TOMs) have been repeatedly removed from and re-inscribed on the UN decolonization list. This reflects ongoing UN-level debates over whether French Polynesia qualifies as a territory needing decolonization – a discussion distinct from that surrounding other colonies. Historian Jean Chesneaux attributes this difference to the French insistence on exceptionalism, viewing their overseas territories as integral parts of the Republic. This perspective has, consequentially, necessitated a potentially exceptional approach to liberation and autonomy at the foundation of political life in Tahiti.<sup>466</sup>

The 1984 change in status is at present officially celebrated as a step towards independence or, at the very least, as an achievement of increased autonomy. Bengt Danielsson's notes on the issue, found in a folder in the archive, provided the basis for the argument presented in the 1986 edition of *Poisoned Reign*. He suggests that the Left's common program of self-determination, negotiated over two years in Paris and Papeete, was diluted beyond recognition by the Gaullist strongman Flosse. Earlier, in the summer of 1976, autonomists led by Francis Sanford had occupied the assembly building to pressure the French Minister of the Interior into dissolving the dysfunctional territorial parliament, which had stalled over the question of extended autonomy.<sup>467</sup> Danielsson noted on the documents that Gaston Flosse's loyalists, who constituted 29% of the assembly (while 71% of members were absent by protest) represented the territory. The prevailing sentiment was that "the present constitution does not allow locals to change it". Francis Sanford and his group, in

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<sup>464</sup> KTM BD Steel case 5, folder 2188, document "Projet de Loi: Portant statut du territoire de la Polynésie Française, pp. 10ff.

<sup>465</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, pp. 191f.

<sup>466</sup> Nic Maclellan and Jean Chesneaux, *After Moruroa: France in the South Pacific* (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1998).

<sup>467</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, pp. 270–271.

turn, “had discovered that they were mere puppets, ruled by French bureaucrats acting in their name”.<sup>468</sup> A comparison is also drawn to the, in 1977, “old” autonomists, such as Pouvana’a a Oopa and Teariki, who had looked to the Cook Islands as an example. The Cook Islands had developed their own constitution under a model of free association with New Zealand. These leaders argued, “Why can’t we be granted the same charter?”<sup>469</sup>

In these papers, Bengt Danielsson records observations from the territorial assembly (AT), taking notes in a mix of English, French, and Swedish – likely for personal use in the writing process. These notes appear quickly jotted down during the sessions, later typed out on a typewriter with additional annotations added in ink. Some of the notes were amended and written in the margins of the official assembly protocol. Danielsson attended the assembly as a member of the public and a local inhabitant (but never as a French citizen) to observe discussions on the new status, as documented in the session held on 13 April 1984.<sup>470</sup> The authority of testimony here grounded his position as a first-hand witness blending the recording *histor* and third party *testis* epistemic modalities: “I was there and saw with my own (critical) eyes.” These notes, written during the session, became a reference point for his subsequent work, connecting journalism with anthropological field-note practices that Bengt Danielsson had experience in. This approach reflects an engagement with the democratic (or non-democratic) processes under observation. Danielsson’s mode of writing suggests a unique set of conditions; while he had the opportunity to document events in real-time, it also shaped the problematizations within the text. The method of gaining information shifted from excavating past debates (in the historical argument on the CEP-implementation) towards real-time reporting, lending immediacy and authenticity to his observations of events that were closer in time to the publication.

With this, the author is also by presence taking part in the debate and taking live notes to control that nothing gets lost in the protocol, which in all probability was also noted by the assembly deputies and delegates. This work constitutes a condition for later claims and information sharing with other individuals and organizational actors in the wider anti-test and independence movement. Hereby the position as witness is also one of observer with a specific agenda, producing a specific position and type of knowledge.

Bengt Danielsson identifies several key issues that, in his view, are critical for achieving real independence but are absent from the revised constitutional document. Among these, he emphasizes the importance of sovereignty over the sea

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<sup>468</sup> KTM BD Steel case 5, 2188, document “Notes by BD, typed”.

<sup>469</sup> Arguments countered by the Flosse’s constitutional platform, presenting himself as the “true autonomist”. See Regnault, *Gaston Flosse: Un Chirac des tropiques ?*

<sup>470</sup> KTM BD Steel case 5, 2188, document “Notes by BD, typed” and “AT session April 13, 1984.”

and its resources, including fishing and emerging opportunities like seabed mineral extraction. He also highlights land tenure, which remains governed by the French legal system, and immigration, which France uses to control the body politic. Danielsson notes the increasing immigration from France and New Caledonia (Kanak) during this period as a deliberate strategy to neutralize independence movements.<sup>471</sup>

This demographic shift represents a double-edged struggle over the population, as France's policy of inclusive citizenship rooted in the revolutionary/republican ideal of universal equality ("we are all French") stands in contrast to the expressions of nuclear colonialism, specificities, and realities of the local population.

The Danielssons in their writing observe that this contradiction enables French colonialists to portray a form of strategic essentialism of the independence movement as racism. This framing complicates the independence struggle by introducing a form of hybridity; where universalist ideals, material justice, and local connections to the land coincide. Danielsson's witnessing activism in the observations, notetaking and writing, positions him to explore this tension, raising questions about how testimonial activism and authority operate in the intersection of universalism and local specificity.

A causal connection that the Danielssons hereby can make and argue for is the link between continued colonization, despite the broader global trend of decolonization, and the nuclear testing site in French Polynesia. Bengt Danielsson writes, in an indignant note that encompasses a general mode, that without the nuclear testing program, France's sustained control over the territory would be illogical. In bold and capitalized letters, he notes that the form of internal autonomy pushed by Flosse does not recognize the meaning of this connection: **"A RESULT OF THE NUCLEAR TESTS... a fall-out on the social level and a political cancer."**<sup>472</sup>

This renders French Polynesia, according to the Danielssons, a de facto persisting colony which is then presented as such in the *Poisoned Reign: Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific* of 1986. The Aia Api party announced that their assembly members would not participate in the vote on the new status-law proposal. This decision led to confusion, and the debate quickly went off the rails. The disagreement arose between the majority and the Te Mana (Independents) party over the introduction

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<sup>471</sup> KTM BD steel case 5, 2188, document notes "AT session 13 April 1984."

<sup>472</sup> Ibid. see also KTM BD Steel case 5, 2188, draft for new statute discussed 21 September 1983, in an extraordinary session. This document is the protocol of the AT with notes by Bengt Danielsson on; KTM BD Steel case 5, 2188, a report by AT chancellor's advisors Franklin Brotherson, T. I. Sanford, and Georges Kelly on the new Statute (10 April 1984), responding to the draft debated in the Assembly on 21 September 1983. The trio delivers a strongly negative assessment of the statute's provisions on power-sharing between the State and the Territory and criticizes its failure to grant the Territory sufficient authority to pursue and manage its own path to independence.



or preface to the status document. The contention centred on whether it should state that “the territory was to remain within the framework of the French Republic” or guarantee the opposite.<sup>473</sup> According to Bengt Danielsson’s notes, Francis Sanford intervened to refocus the discussion, stating that they were arguing over nothing, as independence was already embedded in the French Constitution and in the course of history.<sup>474</sup>

In his speech addressing the draft statute, Gaston Flosse also linked its design to the CEP and the French state’s intention to maintain it. Danielsson’s handwritten notes highlight this connection, though whether Flosse portrayed this as a positive or negative aspect remains unspecified.<sup>475</sup>

The Danielssons’ revised work in 1986 documents this political struggle for independence and autonomy in French Polynesia, with a focus on the intersections of nuclear colonialism, political status, and local sovereignty. Notes, taken during territorial assembly sessions, on the shifts toward increased autonomy reveal a critical documenting engagement with debates on autonomy, highlighting issues such as sovereignty, control over natural resources, land tenure under French law, and immigration policies designed to neutralize independence movements. The Danielssons critique France’s policy of inclusive citizenship, which masks demographic shifts and settler-colonial control, framing independence efforts as both a fight for material justice and an uneasy coexistence of republican ideals with local specificities. They link continued colonization to the nuclear testing program, asserting that without the CEP, France’s control would lack justification. This argument forms the basis of the revised 1986 English language version of *Poisoned Reign*, where the Danielssons position French Polynesia as a de facto colony. Through real-time observations, this witness-activist approach now intertwines the historical document with journalism and political anthropology, creating a detailed critique of the territorial status law debates, including the tensions between autonomy supporters and the French government’s control mechanisms.

What is at stake in the Danielsson’s interventions and this analysis of them is therefore not only the content of the new territorial status, but also the *form of authority* through which knowledge about that status was produced and contested. The Danielssons real-time recording, note-taking, and activist documentation establish a mode of epistemic authority grounded in presence, testimony, and

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<sup>473</sup> KTM BD steel case 5, 2188, document notes “AT session 13 April 1984”, which can be compared to accounts in von Strokirch, “The Impact of Nuclear Testing on Politics in French Polynesia” (1991); Semir Al Wardi, *Tahiti et la France: Le partage du pouvoir* (Paris, France: L’Harmattan, 1998).

<sup>474</sup> KTM BD Steel case 5, 2188, document notes “AT session 13 April 1984.”

<sup>475</sup> KTM BD Steel case 5, 2188, draft for new statute discussed 21 September 1983, extraordinary session: document of the protocol of the AT with notes by Bengt Danielsson.

political engagement rather than in archival reconstruction or institutional validation. This raises a broader question that becomes central in the 1990s: whose knowledge counts as legitimate history of the CEP and French Polynesia? The shift from debates over autonomy in the territorial assembly to later disputes about how the nuclear past should be narrated (through suffering, conflict, etc) thus marks a move from struggles over political status to struggles over epistemic status. It is to this latter tension between different historical practices and modes of authority that the next section now turns.

### 6.3.1 A historian's critique of the Danielssons' *histor* approach at the time of the later editions

This section stages an explicit epistemic adjudication between two distinct historical practices in the CEP case: Jean-Marc Regnault's archival-professional history and the Danielssons' *histor* (witness-activist) interventions. However, this is not an issue of delivering a simple verdict of "right" or "wrong". Rather, guided by the thesis' theoretical framework, I evaluate *types of knowledge* against shared, transparent criteria: the plausibility of causal mechanisms invoked, the degree of corroboration across independent sources, the transparency and traceability of references, and the extent to which each account makes visible or occludes the institutional processes that produced ignorance. This approach treats historical claims as fallible: some accounts are more epistemically adequate than others given the standards of mechanism, evidence, and argumentative integrity that critical realism and testimony scholarship set out.

The year 1993 saw the launch of a second, heavily extended, edition of *Moruroa* in French (first edition 1974); it remained *Moruroa (notre bombe Coloniale)* while the English language edition was renamed *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, and in Swedish *Förgiftat paradis*. In the early 1990s, the book was still controversial. The French historian and lecturer Jean-Marc Regnault defended his thesis in 1994 on the history of CEP and the political life and institutions of French Polynesia at the time of test site implementation. Regnault commented on the new edition of *Moruroa*... and argued for a somewhat different history of the tests in his dissertation and in the book *La Bombe française dans le Pacifique: L'implantation 1957–1964*.<sup>476</sup> This prompted Bengt Danielsson to reply.<sup>477</sup>

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<sup>476</sup> See Regnault, *La bombe française dans le Pacifique: L'implantation, 1957–1964*, Annexe 10, *Le Système Danielsson*, pp. 172–181, where the article and parts of the debate are recounted by Regnault.

<sup>477</sup> Regnault, *La bombe française dans le Pacifique: L'implantation, 1957–1964*, p. 171.

In the early 1990s, there were thus competing and complementing accounts of the history of the CEP. One took the form of academically sanctioned history, supported by some access to state military archives (albeit limited). The other, represented by the Danielssons, can be described as a *histor* position; popular critical historians and journalists whose approach, even if this was not explicated by them but by historians, was fundamentally at odds with academic history. Their work embodied a critical perspective, arguing that the French state-sponsored historical narrative of the test procedures was inherently biased and flawed. Between these two perspectives was a broader contest over the boundaries of legitimate knowledge, a struggle involving claims, counterclaims, and the pursuit of truth regarding the tests.

Jean-Marc Regnault at the time delivered specific criticism on a number of points wrongly recounted by the Danielssons.<sup>478</sup> The Danielssons, in turn, replied that Regnault's version of the history was lacking essential parts, especially regarding the Pouvana'a process that was left out of his doctoral thesis.<sup>479</sup> *Le système Danielsson* is a criticism in the form of an errata review appended to the published dissertation, of the Danielssons' new edition of *Moruroa, mon amour*. Regnault states that the Danielssons' anti-nuclear and anti-French views at the time were widely known and respectable.<sup>480</sup> However, the Danielssons did not accept the term anti-French.<sup>481</sup> Regnault further notes that the Danielssons had already published extensively on this subject, particularly for an Anglophone Pacific audience, with *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific* (Penguin Australia, 1986) standing as a prominent example.<sup>482</sup>

Regnault observes correctly that the Danielssons did not operate as historians in the conventional, professional sense – a point he makes from the standpoint of his own historical training. The Danielssons' work emerged during a period of growing trust in testimony and oral evidence, and has often been read less as conventional historical scholarship than as polemic and critique. Nonetheless, Regnault acknowledges the practical value of their corpus given the relative scarcity of studies

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<sup>478</sup> See Regnault's refutation: Regnault Jean-Marc, "Moruroa et le 'système Danielsson'," *Journal de la Société des océanistes* 99, no. 2 (1994); Regnault, *La Bombe française dans le Pacifique: L'implantation 1957-1964*, annexe.

<sup>479</sup> There is a new official history story developed by Meltz and Vrignon, 2021, which to some extent circumvents Danielsson's and Regnault's work. Regnault later came to be convinced that Pouvana'a's imprisonment and arrest were politically motivated and that he could have mobilized the population to stop CEP. Regnault, "Pouvana'a a Oopa: La révision du procès de 1959 en marche" (2015); Regnault, *Pouvana'a a Oopa: Victime de la raison d'état. Les documents parlent*; see KTM BD 2626. Item 1, 13 documents on the debate, articles and letters between April 1993 and February 1994.

<sup>480</sup> Regnault, *La bombe française dans le Pacifique: L'implantation, 1957–1964*, p. 171.

<sup>481</sup> Reply, a copy of letter in French. See KTM BD 2625, Folder 3; KTM BD 2627 *Présentation et diffusion de notre livre en France*.

<sup>482</sup> Regnault, *La bombe française dans le Pacifique: L'implantation, 1957–1964*, p. 171.

on mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century and post-war Polynesian history: he recommends the Danielssons' books to the public and notes that four of their works are taught to undergraduate history students at the University of French Polynesia (UFP).<sup>483</sup> For Regnault, however, such usefulness does not replace the methodological requirements of history as a discipline: verifying sources, applying a disciplined method of source-criticism, and observing deontological norms governing source use.<sup>484</sup> The question of whether a neutral position is possible, as well as how temporality itself is theorized, remains contested within the field.

Regnault and the Danielssons are therefore not merely in dispute over facts; they represent two epistemic strategies. Regnault's corrections of the Danielssons (chronology, archival replications, specific responses to telegrams) are the work of a historian operating under the methodological commitment to verifiability and source-critique. The Danielssons, by contrast, operate as *histsors*: they assemble documentary traces, press items, and lived testimony into a public argument intended to reveal institutional wrongdoing and to mobilize moral outrage. Both projects generate historical knowledge, but in different registers: Regnault builds micro-historical accuracy; the Danielssons assemble a contested public account designed to expose mechanisms of coercion and secrecy. Fair evaluation of their disagreement therefore requires applying transparent criteria, such as the plausibility of causal mechanisms, cross-source corroboration, and traceability of references, that transcend mere genre conventions.

In his review of the new edition of *Moruroa, notre bombe coloniale*, Regnault argues that the Danielssons fall into two principal traps associated with traditional historical expectations. The first is a tendency to rely on preconceived frameworks, most notably, the assumption that the CEP was imposed on a uniformly hostile Polynesian population.<sup>485</sup> This critique (delivered in the early-1990s), however, risks simplifying the Danielssons' argument: their primary concern is less a claim of universal hostility than a critique of democratic deficit and the denial of meaningful local consent.<sup>486</sup> Regnault's categorization thus places the Danielssons' work outside the type of history he defends, even as it acknowledges the substantive political issues they raise. This tension illustrates a wider historiographical shift in which testimonial and activist practices interact uneasily with, and sometimes challenge, the disciplinary standards of academic history.

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<sup>483</sup> Regnault, *La bombe française dans le Pacifique: L'implantation, 1957–1964*, pp. 171f.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid.

<sup>486</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*.

The second, more serious charge Regnault levels is that the Danielssons selectively used sources and at times manipulated documentary evidence.<sup>487</sup> There is some basis to this critique. In the annex to his published dissertation, he reproduces an article from *La Dépêche* (29 April 1993), “*Tricher pour convaincre*”, and reports detailed archival checks: he examined the territorial assembly minutes and protocols, interviewed witnesses, and consulted private archives (notably those of Gérald Coppenrath) to contest specific claims. Regnault contends that the Danielssons presented material “without the scientific rigor they have demonstrated elsewhere”, a formulation he uses to suggest that selective sourcing undermines the credibility of an otherwise principled argument.<sup>488</sup>

Regnault’s critique is focused on the period prior to the implementation of the tests, a limitation I also adopt in my analysis of *Moruroa/Poisoned Reign*. He subjects the Danielssons to meticulous, page-by-page scrutiny. Before weighing the significance of Regnault’s specific corrections, it is useful to set out the standards by which corrections are evaluated: does a correction merely refine a chronology, or does it alter the causal narrative through which the CEP became possible? Both types of correction are relevant, but they carry different epistemic weight.

As an illustrative example, Regnault draws attention to a passage on page 14 of *Moruroa, notre bombe coloniale*, where the Danielssons cite a 23 October 1956 telegram from the territorial assembly expressing concern about nuclear tests on Christmas Island and state that “the minister did not respond”. Regnault challenges this claim, pointing out that a response was, in fact, documented and recorded in the minutes of the 2 November meeting. He also identifies a chronological error in the Danielssons’ account of Pouvana’a’s electoral history: the Danielssons present Pouvana’a’s first candidacy as occurring in 1957, whereas Regnault notes that he stood for election in 1953 (unsuccessfully).<sup>489</sup>

Regnault quotes and reconstructs what he presents as the method and systematic argumentation of the Danielssons:

Page 71. One has the feeling that after the return of the delegation which heard de Gaulle announce the establishment of a nuclear base, the assembly protests. A careful reading of the minutes (of which the Danielssons report only what interests them) shows that the advisers are resigned and try to obtain above all financial advantages. Hostile reactions will come later. On 16 May 1963, Coppenrath also criticizes the

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<sup>487</sup> Regnault, *La bombe française dans le Pacifique: L’implantation, 1957–1964*, p. 172.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid. p. 173.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid. p. 174.

parliamentarians and deputy Teariki for reacting too late: “it was a year ago ... that it was necessary to act before the French parliament.”<sup>490</sup>

Here, Regnault may himself be doing what he accuses the Danielssons of: extracting sentences from their account in ways that simplify their argument. Gérald Coppenrath, whose private archives Regnault had access to, is consistently framed by Regnault in this period as a voice of political realism and reason. My reading is that the Danielssons in this section are not claiming that the territorial assembly immediately protested in a unified manner; rather, they are attempting to explain the *delay* in reaction to de Gaulle’s announcement and acknowledge that effective opposition came too late.

Regnault highlights another factual error on pages 75–76 of *Moruroa, notre bombe coloniale*. In 1961, a delegation of eight territorial assembly representatives visited the Reggane test site in the Sahara. The Danielssons state that, upon their return to Tahiti, all representatives opposed the construction of a test site at Moruroa. Regnault disputes this, citing J.B. Cérans-Jérusalémy’s account in *Te Aratai* (the RDPT party organ):

I am not reassured by my impressions ... but we understand that the installation of an atomic base at Moruroa corresponds to an important aspect of *France’s international politics* and are ready to cooperate ... to the success of this enterprise of *high importance for president de Gaulle and for his politics*.<sup>491</sup>

Cérans-Jérusalémy’s formulation carefully avoids open confrontation with French authority. While it does not express outright opposition, it also does not constitute enthusiastic endorsement; it reflects scepticism combined with acceptance of a political *fait accompli*. A subtextual critique of locating the test site in Polynesia therefore remains a plausible reading rather than a definitive one.

Regnault further cites contemporary newspaper articles by Gaullist figures such as Bambridge and Coppenrath, who argued that the local population faced no danger from the tests.<sup>492</sup> These claims help explain why some assembly members adopted a more conciliatory stance. Regnault thus usefully complicates the Danielssons’ portrayal of unanimous opposition within the territorial assembly and criticises their method; however, I would argue that this does not warrant accusing them of dishonesty in their interpretations.

In his rather polemical annex to his dissertation, reproducing the article “Tricher pour convaincre” from *La Dépêche* (29 April 1993), Regnault accuses the

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<sup>490</sup> Regnault, *La bombe française dans le Pacifique: L’implantation, 1957–1964*, p. 175.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid. p. 176. My italics.

<sup>492</sup> Regnault, *La bombe française dans le Pacifique: L’implantation, 1957–1964*, p. 176.

Danielssons of systematic misuse of sources. His interventions are important where they close factual gaps and improve traceability, particularly through his use of territorial assembly minutes and private archives (notably those of Coppenrath). Yet these corrections do not in themselves refute the broader claim that institutional secrecy, economic pressure, and selective disclosure limited the possibility of genuinely informed Polynesian consent to the CEP.

In other words, Regnault strengthens the empirical record at the level of detail, while the Danielssons foreground structural mechanisms of colonial power. These are not mutually exclusive critiques; they operate on different epistemic registers.

Regnault also makes a valuable historiographical point by calling for further study of internal divisions within the RDPT and the UTD (the Tahitian Gaullist party that split in 1962), as well as religious cleavages between Protestants and Catholics and their political consequences. He identifies these fractures as central to understanding why resistance to the CEP was fragmented rather than unified.<sup>493</sup>

This agenda is pursued in *La Bombe française dans le Pacifique: L'implantation 1957-1964*, and in his later career more broadly, including work on Pouvana'a, J.B. Cérans-Jérusalémy, Oscar Temaru, and Gaston Flosse.<sup>494</sup> His continued engagement with the topic is illustrated by his public boycott of the 2022 book by Meltz and Vrignon, which he accused of softening the historical record of the tests – particularly regarding claims about the airport's construction for tourism, which he disputes.<sup>495</sup>

Taken together, this exchange reveals not simply a disagreement over facts but a tension between two modes of epistemic authority. Regnault privileges archival verification, chronology, and internal political complexity, while the Danielssons foreground testimony, structural power relations, and colonial mechanisms of non-knowledge. Each corrects a blind spot in the other: Regnault guards against factual distortion, whereas the Danielssons insist that factual precision alone cannot capture the coercive conditions under which the CEP was established. The epistemic stakes of this dispute therefore lie less in determining a single “correct” history than in understanding how different historical practices produce different, yet complementary, forms of knowledge about nuclear colonialism in French Polynesia.

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<sup>493</sup> Ibid. p. 178. Which perhaps he saw as a guiding light into his studies into the exiling of Pouvana'a, that later got him closer to the Danielssons' line on the CEP implementation issue.

<sup>494</sup> Regnault, *Gaston Flosse: Un Chirac des tropiques?*; Regnault, *Oscar Temaru: L'océanie au cœur*.

<sup>495</sup> Schmitt, Dominique 'Nucléaire: Écœuré, Jean-Marc Regnault boycotte le colloque de l'UPF!' 9 May 2022, *Pacific Pirates Media* retrieved 4 November 2024 from <https://www.pacific-pirates-media.com/nucleaire-ecoecure-lhistorien-jean-marc-regnault-boycotte-le-colloque-de-lupf/>.

## 6.4 Nuclear Exceptionalism and Externalization: Scale Shifting Anti-CEP Mobilization

The following account supplies the specific historical context for my reading of the Danielssons' witness activism in the 1970s-1980s and clarifies what my own investigation adds. It foregrounds the conditions that made the Danielssons' epistemic interventions possible and shows how their archival-work, public publishing strategy, and transnational networking turned local testimony into a broader contest over knowledge and justice. Nuclear testing at Moruroa was interpreted and contested through two overlapping registers.

First, as nuclear exceptionalism: nuclearity was framed as *sui generis* imbued with mystique, secrecy, and an assumed imperative of state necessity.<sup>496</sup> This cultural framing insulated weapons programs from ordinary political scrutiny and helped justify extraordinary administrative practices. This sub-notion of nuclearity becomes relevant here. It can be leveraged to contextualize the risks associated with nuclear waste at test sites and, as Teva Meyer suggests, to distinguish between legal and symbolic nuclearity in assessing the status of such waste.<sup>497</sup>

Second, as nuclear colonialism: the tests exploited peripheral geographies, institutional asymmetries, and regimes of secrecy, a form of extraction and dispossession distinct from classical resource economics because it depended on remoteness, containment, and strategic externalization of risk. My archival readings show the Danielssons gradually articulated this second framing: they moved from documenting incidents to diagnosing a structural pattern that made Polynesia an expendable testing ground.<sup>498</sup>

Two contemporaneous shifts amplified the reach of anti-CEP claims. The 1970s-1980s saw a renewed global anti-nuclear conjuncture, Euro-missile controversies, high-profile NGO actions (notably Greenpeace and the protest sailings by David McTaggart), the mediated fallout of events such as Chernobyl, and episodes like

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<sup>496</sup> Bhimull et al., "Systemic and Epistemic Racism in the History of Technology" (2022); Schoenberger, "Radiological Risk Imposition as Environmental Violence: A Case Study of Nuclear Harms and the Limits of Legal Redress in French Polynesia/Mā'ohi Nui"; Hecht, *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade*; William J. Kinsella, "One Hundred Years of Nuclear Discourse: Four Master Themes and Their Implications for Environmental Communication," in *The Environmental Communication Yearbook*, ed. Susan L. Senecah (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>497</sup> Teva Meyer, "Vestiges et déchets. Les héritages matériels," in *Des bombes en Polynésie*, ed. Renaud Meltz and Alexis Vrignon (Paris: Éditions Vendémiaire, 2022), 519–48.

<sup>498</sup> As argued in *Moruroa/Poisoned Reign*, and Bengt Danielsson and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson, "Tahiti: In Bondage to the Bomb" in *TU GALALA - Social Change in the Pacific*, ed. David Robie (Wellington & Sydney: Bridget William Books & Pluto Press, 1992), and in David Robie, *Blood on Their Banner: Nationalist Struggles in the South Pacific* (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1989).



the *Rainbow Warrior* affair.<sup>499</sup> However, the narrative of superpower détente and the relative decrease in disarmament initiatives during the 1970s, overlooks the ongoing struggles in Oceania what Johan Galtung terms the construction of a “backyard blind spot” of the Cold War.<sup>500</sup>

These developments in turn created a media opportunity structure saturated with the nuclear in which local testimony could be transposed onto transnational publics. Tarrow’s concept of scale-shifting captures this process: local grievances (contamination, dispossession) were reframed as global claims about human rights, environmental justice, and imperial responsibility, generating solidarities and incipient forms of a Global Hibakusha identity, that linked Pacific experience to wider anti-nuclear campaigns.<sup>501</sup>

Crucially for my argument, binding this chapter to the next, witness activism emerged as a distinct epistemic practice in this context. It combined: (a) translation of local experience into causal claims about mechanisms (radiological pathways, population displacement); (b) tactical use of media and NGO networks to circulate those claims beyond Polynesia; and (c) archival-documentary work that sought to corroborate testimony and expose institutional non-knowledge. The Danielssons exemplified this triadic practice: their annotated minutes, strategic multilingual publishing (notably the 1974 *Moruroa, mon amour* and the 1986 *Poisoned Reign*), and engagement with NGOs show a deliberate attempt to convert partial, contested evidence into warrantable public knowledge.

In the early 1970s, opposition to French nuclear tests at Moruroa remained intense, and anti-nuclear testing activism became integral to Greenpeace’s original mission, combining ecological and peace-oriented counterculture thinking in campaigns along the Canadian West Coast and in the outermost Pacific islands of Alaska. The Danielssons, since the protest sailings of David McTaggart in the early-1970s, *Fri* and the *Batallion de la paix* of non-violent objectors in 1973, and McTaggart and Brice Lalonde in 1981, cooperated with and saw Greenpeace, and the protest vessel-civil disobedience method it promoted, as akin to the project of articulating the test critique to wider audiences. Over time, however, they came to feel that the 1985

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<sup>499</sup> Burke, “European Nuclear Disarmament: Transnational Peace Campaigning in the 1980s.”; Wittner, *The Struggle against the Bomb. Vol. 3, Toward Nuclear Abolition: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1971 to the Present*.

<sup>500</sup> Lawrence S. Wittner, *The Struggle Against the Bomb. Vol. 1, One World or None: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement Through 1953* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993); Galtung, *Pax Pacifica: Terrorism, the Pacific Hemisphere, Globalisation and Peace Studies*.

<sup>501</sup> Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism*; Sidney G. Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

*Rainbow Warrior* affair overshadowed the ongoing issues surrounding the test sites themselves.<sup>502</sup>

On the other hand, I argue that nuclear colonialism, as a more inclusive conceptualization related to nuclearity, links the threat posed by nuclear weapon states (NWS) – holding global security hostage – to the lived insecurity and existential uncertainty experienced on nuclear test sites. Nuclear exceptionalism thus becomes a self-concept for nuclear powers, an idea that, as Itty Abraham warns, is perilous to internalize.<sup>503</sup>

In the mid-1980s, the conflict around environmental and human consequences of nuclear weapons and nuclear power was at a critical popular high-point in what was increasingly forming as world popular opinion and its correlation to and sway over, more or less, local politics, related to globalized Cold War issues over threats of annihilation and its handling.<sup>504</sup> Such discourse shapes and constrains society's understanding of nuclear power, while also influencing how nuclear power views itself as distinct and self-contained. As Abraham notes, this is exemplified by the discrepancy between official narratives and documented historical records: national nuclear histories often depict each country's nuclear development as independent and autonomous, despite the reality that no nuclear program has ever been entirely self-sufficient. This notion of autonomy is rarely acknowledged as a myth and continues to be perpetuated in nuclear discourse.<sup>505</sup>

The tests at the proving grounds came to be, in line with the 1970s and 1980s changing outlook on the nuclear,<sup>506</sup> increasingly (re)presented as individual “real

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<sup>502</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, p. 367. The book's final words emphasize that the numerous reports and debates on the *Rainbow Warrior* affair fail to acknowledge the true sufferers – the Polynesian people at the heart of the crisis. The Danielssons suggest that readers of these reports might imagine the islands to be uninhabited, as the writers neglect to mention local leaders like Pouvana'a, Teariki, Sanford, Temaru, and the *Ia Mana* leaders, who spent 30 years fighting for independence and protesting the CEP and military presence that accompanied it.

<sup>503</sup> Itty Abraham, “Who's Next? Nuclear Ambivalence and the Contradictions of Non-Proliferation Policy,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 45, no. 43 (2010), p. 51.

<sup>504</sup> Wittner's waves of nuclear disarmament protest also relate to mitigation by international treaties, with programs and projects such as Atoms for peace and The Non-proliferation Regime. See Wittner, *Confronting the Bomb: A Short History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement*; Egeland, “*The Road to Prohibition: Nuclear Hierarchy and Disarmament, 1968–2017*.”

<sup>505</sup> Abraham, “The Ambivalence of Nuclear Histories” (2006); Itty Abraham, “What (Really) Makes a Country Nuclear? Insights from Nonnuclear Southeast Asia,” *Critical Studies on Security* 4, no. 1 (2016).

<sup>506</sup> A gradual shift occurred in the general nuclear culture and political economy of nuclearity from techno-utopian dream to apocalyptic thinking and risk. Weart, *The Rise of Nuclear Fear*; Hogg, *British Nuclear Culture: Official and Unofficial Narratives in the Long 20th Century*; Burke, “European Nuclear Disarmament: Transnational Peace Campaigning in the 1980s.”; Eaton, “‘We must be ready every day, all the time’: Mid-Twentieth-Century Nuclear Anxiety and Fear of

time” encounters with the nuclear contamination and long-time exposure. This was an alternative to the explosive direct exposure that was reproduced via the Hiroshima and Nagasaki view of direct impact, as a predominant nuclear representation in culture.<sup>507</sup> In this way, the experiences of nuclear test sites gained significance and relevance for environmental justice and the future, resonating beyond their immediate geographic and political contexts.<sup>508</sup> The lived experience of nuclear test sites held (though did not guarantee the fulfilment of) the potential to contribute to a universal anti-nuclear movement, with the ability to transcend national and cultural boundaries. Although global fallout effects were critically recognized in the mid-1950s and partially addressed by the Limited Test Ban Treaty, local impacts were less acknowledged as a collective, global problem for humanity. Over time, however, world peace initiatives began to integrate the victimization of nuclear test-site populations, contributing to a Global Hibakusha identity, an articulation of solidarity with nuclear survivors worldwide.<sup>509</sup>

However, the long-term, and difficult-to-measure destruction resulting from nuclear weapons tests was largely overlooked, gradually coming to light over the years, as a human experience through the work of the Danielssons. This nuanced reality stood in contrast to the dominant narrative of superpower competition, an eschatological nuclear discourse fixated on an apocalyptic future, deterrence stances, and with this some integrated acceptance for distant suffering, the sacrifice of certain populations as deemed necessary.<sup>510</sup> The stance instead aligned with humanitarian values and international solidarity, critiquing colonialism while envisioning a redefinition of the superpower duopoly.<sup>511</sup> As many have observed, the 1970s saw the growing prominence of anti-militarism and environmentalism. The independence movements in Oceania were no exception; a regional identity opposing nuclear testing, nuclear militarization, colonialism, and imperialism developed in parallel

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Death in American Life” (2017); Lindseth, *From Radioactive Fallout to Environmental Critique: Ecology and the Politics of Cold War Science*.

<sup>507</sup> Jacobs, *Nuclear Bodies: The Global Hibakusha*.

<sup>508</sup> The test sites’ relevance was first recognized as important in global political imagination when the nuclear became a commonplace symbol for a contaminating human relationship to the earth.

<sup>509</sup> Higuchi, *Political Fallout: Nuclear Weapons Testing and the Making of a Global Environmental Crisis*; Egeland, “*The Road to Prohibition: Nuclear Hierarchy and Disarmament, 1968–2017*”; Jacobs, *Nuclear Bodies: The Global Hibakusha*, p. IX.

<sup>510</sup> Derrida, “No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)” (1984).

<sup>511</sup> Edward Palmer Thompson and Dan Smith, *Protest and Survive* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1981); Stefan Berger and Christian Wicke, “A Very Rooted Cosmopolitan: E.P. Thompson’s Englishness and His Transnational Activism.” in *The Transnational Activist: Transformations and Comparisons from the Anglo-World Since the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Stefan Berger and Sean Scalmer (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

with these more Western tendencies which have been described as post-material by some social theorists.<sup>512</sup>

This shift further brought a “personalization” or humanitarianization to how nuclearity could be interpreted and understood. What had once symbolized utopian modernism transformed as anti-nuclear movements reframed the issue, bringing ethical and moral concerns about the use and possession of nuclear weapons to the forefront, fundamentally altering thinking about the future. In short: the 1970s-1980s conjuncture turned Moruroa from a regional controversy into a node in a global anti-nuclear epistemic field; the Danielssons exploited that shift by combining archival excavation, testimonial publication, and transnational mobilization to make nuclear colonialism visible.

#### 6.4.1 Suspicion, secrecy, and the mediation of testimony

The formation of mass-mediated anti-nuclear testimony in 1980s Oceania cannot be understood without considering the *Rainbow Warrior* affair, the decade’s most visible Pacific protest. When DGSE agents bombed Greenpeace’s flagship in Auckland Harbour in July 1985, Bengt and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson, operating from Papeete, transformed their home into a regional information hub: collecting eyewitness accounts, liaising with journalists, and circulating critical documents.<sup>513</sup> Their archive preserves detailed materials on the bombing and its immediate political and diplomatic consequences, offering a unique record of how state secrecy and counterintelligence operated around the CEP.<sup>514</sup>

One infiltrator, Christine Cabon, who spied on Greenpeace under the alias Frédérique Bonlieu (a fact she only admitted in 2017), sought to stay at the

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<sup>512</sup> See Mohamed-Gaillard, “Contestations océaniques”; Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton U.P., 1977).

<sup>513</sup> KTM BD 2624, Item 16, undated list and reports from Greenpeace NZ of attempts to sail into the Moruroa danger zone; Item 18, letter of recommendation; 2616, Item 30, Letter to Mother and Ingeborg 9 November 1983, noting that their Swedish Editor Sven Gunnar Särman to visit, that the Greenpeace boat was confiscated near Moruroa by the French navy, and that a protest march would be held in Papeete; KTM BD 3023, Folders 3/10 and 2/10 contain notes on Greenpeace ship *Vega*, 1982, *Fri* and protest cruises 1973. KTM BD 3021, Folder 5/10 contain copies of plans for a Greenpeace campaign for a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone in the Pacific; KTM BD 3019, Folder 1/5 holds correspondence with Greenpeace NZ, Australia, and Pacific Islands offices, with D. Robie, on TV and press 1979–1984; KTM BD 3018, Folder 9/11 holds documents and notes on Greenpeace and *Stop essais!* 1981–1995.

<sup>514</sup> KTM BD 97, Shelf F 9 C-5, *Rainbow Warrior*, Les sequelles en 1986 “Hao are you?”; 98 Shelf F 9 C-5, *Rainbow Warrior* affair, English & Swedish articles; 99 Shelf F 9 C-5, L’affaire *Rainbow Warrior* coupures francaises I. 14. Jan.– 25. Sep. 1985; 100 Shelf F 9 C-5, L’affaire *Rainbow Warrior* coupures francaises II. 26.Sep.–6. Dec. 1985; KTM BD. 2608, Item 2, a plan for action on 6 July 1995, the French Commemoration of 10 years since *Rainbow Warrior* was sunk.

Danielssons' house before the attack.<sup>515</sup> Her presence illustrates the pervasive suspicion in both pro- and anti-test circles: infiltrations, accusations of foreign collusion, censorship, and data restrictions were endemic to nuclear politics. As Kinsella observes, secrecy and espionage are core tropes of nuclear discourse, and the Danielssons' correspondence shows how deeply these dynamics infiltrated even grassroots networks.<sup>516</sup> In terms of individuals, the anti-testing milieu in Polynesia was somewhat limited. In European anti-nuclear networks, where the number of people was higher, it was difficult to know everyone by name.<sup>517</sup> Thus, in the transnational contacts it was hard to confirm intentions.

#### 6.4.2 Transparency, trust, and the politics of accusation

The witness activist position that the Danielssons cultivated depended on practices of openness, verification, and trust – norms diametrically opposed to the official regime of secrecy, agnotology, censorship, and suppression surrounding CEP. Within the small, multilingual anti-nuclear networks of Polynesia, credibility was built through personal interaction, repeated encounters, and shared documentary work. This pragmatic trust-building was essential for circulating sensitive information in the face of state efforts to suppress, discredit, or fragment activist networks.

The Danielssons themselves became targets. Ethnologist Jean Guiart accused them in the 1970s of feigning activism to protect their elite status; yet recent findings by Maillochon reveals that Guiart was in fact on Jaques Foccart's payroll, corresponding with him as early as 1963 and warning that Bengt Danielsson was the territory's most dangerous foreign researcher.<sup>518</sup>

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<sup>515</sup> KTM BD 3033; KTM BD 3016; KTM BD 3004, Folder 5/6. See also the New Zealand news webpage *Stuff*, that dug out the whereabouts of Cabon in 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/94404471/were-the-terrorists-calls-to-bring-rainbow-warrior-undercover-agent-to-justice-after-32-years>, 12 July 2024. Cabon /Bonlieu was on 3 April 1985 recommended to Danielssons by GP maritime expert Jean-Marie Vidal, KTM BD 2624, Item 18, see also the 1994 ed. of *Moruroa, notre bombe...* p. 16–18.

<sup>516</sup> Kinsella, "One Hundred Years of Nuclear Discourse: Four Master Themes and Their Implications for Environmental Communication".

<sup>517</sup> Where new contacts had to be recommended by someone trusted, for instance.

<sup>518</sup> Regnault 1994, article and a review response republished in *La bombe française dans le Pacifique: L'implantation, 1957-1964*, pp. 172–181; Jean Guiart, "Danielsson, Marie-Thérèse et Bengt. Moruroa, mon amour," *Journal de la Société des océanistes* 30, no. 45 (1974) ; Serge Tcherkézoff, "Moruroa, Danielsson et le musée de Tahiti: Les déceptions de Jean Guiart dans la Polynésie française des années 1970," *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 154 (2022); Bengt Danielsson corresponded with Roland Dumas, an ally of Mitterrand to see if he could help him reply to Guiart's accusations. KTM BD Box 2628, items 2-3. Dated April-October 1975; Maillochon, "Les réseaux de militants contre les essais nucléaires français (1959–1996)," p. 118.

I argue that the Danielssons' rhetorical strategy further amplified these tensions. Their polemical, Zola-style register – linking the CEP to systemic injustice and historical precedents from Dreyfus to Morel – was a method for creating newsworthiness, urgency, and public pressure. Bengt's detailed notes from Assemblée Territoriale sessions, written with a quasi-ethnographic 'fly-on-the-wall' sensibility, became the basis for a broader indictment of nuclear colonialism. For them, documenting isolated bureaucratic actions mattered less than exposing the structural configurations of power, complicity, and imposed ignorance that underpinned the testing program.<sup>519</sup>

### 6.4.3 Knowing, not knowing, and the conditions of testimony

An argument the Danielssons set out as a condition for their histor-testimony in *Moruroa/Poisoned Reign* is that the Polynesian parliament (though effectively without actual say in the issue) did know certain things about the nuclear siting's implications and dangers and, with this, had initial doubts. The Danielssons identify the local politicians worries of pollution that the Christmas test series had stirred, via warnings by the French bio-anthropologist, Louis Molet (1915–1992), who was the local director of the ORSTOM office at the time.<sup>520</sup> After his warnings, Molet was, according to Danielssons, hastily sent back to Paris by the territorial Governor Grimald.<sup>521</sup>

However, as the account of *Moruroa, notre bombe colonial* and *Moruroa, mon amour* contends, the territorial assembly as a whole lacked the necessary knowledge to make an informed decision and lacked the formal political power to prevent its implementation. The Danielssons consistently argued this between 1974 and 1986, and again in 1993, by referencing the parliamentary debate on the 1962–63 implementation and the general circulation of information in the Tahitian newspapers *Les Nouvelles* and *Les Débats* at the time, which, according to the Danielssons, the representatives had read.<sup>522</sup>

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<sup>519</sup> There are different styles of polemics: ironic, satire, historic etc. “polemic” (s.v.) in Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster 2005); *Förgiftat paradis* (Swedish edition of *Poisoned Reign*), p 44. These minor facts, however irrelevant for the major point, makes their account sensitive to a certain kind of historical criticism that Regnault employs in his critique of *Moruroa* in 1993–94. Regnault hereby evaluates the book as an academic/scientific historic account, perhaps unfairly attributing the overlooking of detail to illicit intent.

<sup>520</sup> Office de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique Outre-mer (Office of Overseas Scientific and Technical Research).

<sup>521</sup> *Moruroa* (French edition) 1974, pp. 40ff.

<sup>522</sup> *Moruroa* (French edition) 1974, p. 43.

The Danielssons did not expect the general population to be aware of potential radioactive contamination, which indicates a democratic deficiency. The potential dangers of long-term, low-level radiation remain a pressing (bio)political issue today, ultimately tied to the history of measurement and accepting increased mortality rates among different populations.<sup>523</sup> A lack of certain knowledge and positive associations with nuclear progress could be leveraged for worker recruitment or as a public relations strategy. However, according to the Danielssons' account, elected officials in Papeete were assumed to be informed and, at a minimum, sceptical about the safety of the test site, despite differing interpretations of the facts and views on the status of the territory and its economy.

The Danielssons emphasize that Polynesian news outlets often reproduced and referenced reports from the French press, which discussed radiation risks. This recognition occurred even before the French government established the test site under the CEP. Consequently, the risks were not entirely unknown and were at least acknowledged in both local and national media, a factor that warrants consideration.<sup>524</sup>

A collected advice, based on the Christmas Island's testing by the UK and US, to the public from the press and in the territorial assembly was thus summarized:<sup>525</sup>

Do not eat too many vegetables, fruit or milk. It is widely known that even though the amount of strontium would be equally distributed around the globe, people whose calcium intake is based on vegetables take up more of this lethal substance in their bodies.<sup>526</sup>

These claims align with what environmental historian Toshihiro Higuchi describes as the political globalization of fallout risks, which in the early-1960s was emphasized by anti-nuclear organizations, public intellectuals and scientists, as well as the press. The framing of nuclear fallout from weapons tests as a global crisis, one in which "the globe" itself appeared vulnerable, represented both an externalization of risk and a problem of scale that could obscure or marginalize the

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<sup>523</sup> See Introduction on the discussion on the LSS paradigm and Higuchi, *Political Fallout: Nuclear Weapons Testing and the Making of a Global Environmental Crisis*.

<sup>524</sup> *Förgiftat paradiset* pp. 46 ff, the French edition *Moruroa* 1974 p. 43 quoting the *Les Débats* article *Dangereuses inconnues des Expériences de Christmas*.

<sup>525</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, p. 47.

<sup>526</sup> Newspaper article quoted in the assembly by John Teariki who took upon himself to spread information on the issue of nuclear weapons and their consequences. Teariki also distributed issues of *La menace radioactive* by the CND biochemist Antoinette Pirie throughout the territory, and frequently quoted Jean Rostand, Bertrand Russel and Albert Schweizer in his arguments. Mary and Vignon, "Implantation: État, pouvoirs locaux et opinion," 150–151.

local consequences experienced near testing sites.<sup>527</sup> However, these global warnings were accompanied by forms of local consideration or concern, as advice and responses were adapted to specific conditions. This is particularly evident in relation to dietary practices and water collection systems, which were shaped by distinctive Polynesian human-environment relationships at the time of the CEP nuclear tests.

Also, be careful in terms of fish consumption. Fallout that has ended up in our rivers and seas is concentrated in certain organs in the fish. Limit drinking rainwater. A nuclear explosion causes tens of different nucleoids of longer and shorter life-spans, and a major portion of these dangerous elements are concentrated in rainwater. Rainwater collected and stored in cisterns often contain great quantities of radioactive substances.<sup>528</sup>

This was, according to the Danielssons' account, good advice, with the ironic remark "if not for the fact no one followed any of them".<sup>529</sup> A crucial point for the argument is that the *Les Debats* texts were only read by a couple of hundred people in Papeete.<sup>530</sup> The Danielssons argue that the traditional Polynesian lifestyle was diametrically opposed to such advice. Since ancient times, the Polynesians primarily subsisted on a diet of vegetables and fish. Those living on coral islands, which constituted most of the population in the early 1960s, exclusively relied on rainwater stored in cisterns. However, the constitution of these cisterns led to the accumulation of radioactive particles.<sup>531</sup>

Bengt Danielsson's earlier analyses and conclusions on local dietary shifts, cultural habits, and lifestyle changes might appear to contradict these observations. For instance, the purported adoption of a corned beef diet could be interpreted as beneficial in mitigating fallout risks with the traditional diet based in the local biosphere. This apparent inconsistency might reflect a rhetorical strategy, but it could also be understood as a reinforcement of Danielsson's broader argument: the traditional, ecologically sustainable lifestyle he championed was rendered unviable due to the economic and environmental consequences of the nuclear test site. This aligns with Johnston and Barker's report on the fallout's impact in the Marshall

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<sup>527</sup> Higuchi, *Political Fallout: Nuclear Weapons Testing and the Making of a Global Environmental Crisis*.

<sup>528</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, p. 47 quoting the *Les Debats* article *Dangereuses inconnues des Expériences de Christmas*.

<sup>529</sup> Ibid.

<sup>530</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, p. 45

<sup>531</sup> These notes on the Mangareva case reoccurs in Philippe and Statius, *Toxique: Enquête sur les essais nucléaires français en Polynésie*.



Islands, which highlights how nuclear testing made subsistence economies and livelihoods untenable.<sup>532</sup>

The Danielssons determine, in the 1986 edition of *Poisoned Reign*, that if these recommendations had been translated into Tahitian and spread across the islands, this could have alerted the islanders who were “happily ignorant on everything concerning radiation dosage and radioactivity”.<sup>533</sup> This testimonial history can be framed as inspecting through Pacificist glasses but with the point being to determine where agency, knowledge, and responsibility is located. Thus, the Danielssons’ historical work from 1974 to 1994, concerning the implementation and what the population and representatives knew in the early-1960s, has the form of a testimony of a past crime that was ongoing at the time.

The relevance of this is that it practically links the local way of life that Bengt Danielsson as an ethnographer was an academic expert in (and presented in his more romantically tinged popular works as preferable to Western modernist ways of life), as particularly sensitive to radioactive contamination by fallout. This can be related to an ontological turn in anthropology, but the Danielssons’ method here, instead of purporting a romantic pre-modern lifestyle that Thor Heyerdahl and Bengt himself earlier had made a primitivistic selling point of adventure-literature,<sup>534</sup> focused on turning the specific anthropological gaze toward modern institutions and challenged technoscientific (self-) imaginaries and hierarchies of knowledge.<sup>535</sup>

This method is central for the witness activist position of a local knowledge production by testimony that points to a specific violation of the test instalment connected to a general pattern of colonial relations. It also highlights the imperious attitude of technical progress and prime position of the military and security considerations over specific life contained in the testimony. A similar line of argument is again found in Barbara Rose Johnston and Holly Barker’s work, where the nuclear claimants in the US Marshall Island trust territory saw a way of life in effect destroyed and that this loss should be compensated and accounted for.<sup>536</sup>

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<sup>532</sup> Johnston and Barker, *Consequential Damages of Nuclear War: The Rongelap Report*.

<sup>533</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, p. 48.

<sup>534</sup> See discussion above of Andersson, *A Hero for the Atomic Age: Thor Heyerdahl and the Kon-Tiki Expedition*.

<sup>535</sup> For instance, as represented in Jasanoff and Kim, “Containing the Atom: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and Nuclear Power in the United States and South Korea” (2009); Krige and Wang, “Nation, Knowledge, and Imagined Futures: Science, Technology, and Nation-Building, Post-1945” (2015).

<sup>536</sup> Johnston and Barker, *Consequential Damages of Nuclear War: The Rongelap Report*; Barker, *Bravo for the Marshallese: Regaining Control in a Post-Nuclear, Post-Colonial World*. See also Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*.

The testimony presented by the Danielssons from a histor perspective highlights the role of (non-)knowledge, agnotology, and the ways varying degrees of knowledge and nuclearity were leveraged to deflect, obscure, and evade responsibility. This perspective asserts that the injustice in question is shaped by a complex relationship between consent and coercion within the colonial power dynamic, distilled in the statement: “We did not know, but the French knew.”<sup>537</sup>

## 6.5 Chapter Conclusions: Between Documenting Nuclear Colonialism and Humanitarian Reason

In this chapter, I have shown how the Danielssons’ witness activist testimony from 1974 to 1994, through the publications and re-editions of their published works on French nuclear testing, recast French Polynesia’s CEP site as emblematic form of contaminating militaristic colonialism. By chronicling democratic deficits of colonial governance, radioactive fallout, and militarization, they exposed how nuclear exceptionalism and deliberate ignorance masked Moruroa’s true purpose: a base for deterrence and geopolitical power projection, not development. The concept of “nuclear colonialism” wove together environmental harm, racialized governance, and strategic power, linking local testimony to debates on sovereignty, non-proliferation, and security regimes.

Throughout the 1970s and ’80s, Polynesian resistance remained vigorous and became central to Greenpeace’s protest-vessel campaigns. Although the 1985 *Rainbow Warrior* bombing captured global headlines, the Danielssons cautioned that sensational coverage risked eclipsing everyday injustices in the territory and the CEP vicinity. Through scale-shifting, bringing Pacific testimonies into transnational media, they reframed local fallout and consequences of the site as a universal humanitarian crisis, forging a regional identity that united anti-colonial, environmental, and peace concerns.

Their dual vantage in their text, as histor and first-hand observers, addressed the stark knowledge asymmetry around nuclear testing. From indignation in the 1970s, through hopes for independence in the 1980s, to NGO-driven activism in the 1990s, their writings both mapped and made the discursive field in which a battle over truth unfolded. They confronted nuclear colonialism head-on, contributing to a critical archive that challenged official narratives.

While Didier Fassin’s “politics of compassion” valorises personal stories to humanize suffering, the Danielssons’ work and the milieu it was conditioned on transcended this model. They never assumed the role of “victimisateurs”, nor did

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<sup>537</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, p. 60.

they foreground individual trauma above systemic critique. Instead, grounded in ethnographic reportage and polemical reporting, they demanded international scrutiny of the Polynesian people's plight and the structural injustices of nuclear colonialism. Though their later collaborations adopted more explicitly humanitarian testimony, they consistently insisted that true change depended on dismantling the colonial and military frameworks that underlay the tests.

As we move to Chapter 7, we will trace the background work of witness activism: how these evolving strategies – archival exposés, transnational networking, and testimonial practices – continued to shape anti-nuclear advocacy and deepen the witness activist understanding of Moruroa as a potent symbol of global inequity and imperial militarism.<sup>538</sup>

### 6.5.1 Documenting French nuclear colonialism in Polynesia

*Poisoned Reign* and *Moruroa, mon amour/Notre bombe coloniale* constituted a decisive rupture in the complacent narrative that, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, cast France's Pacific nuclear test sites as benign laboratories of modernization. The Danielssons' intervention begins in 1957, when Paris first designated Polynesia as its new testing ground, and rises to a bleak crescendo in 1966 with the inaugural atmospheric detonation, by which time soldiers, scientists, and administrators had refashioned Papeete into a militarized node of the French state. At the heart of their activism lay a forensic exposure of how France's colonial prerogatives, its control over political status, its monopolization of information, its suppression of independent scientific evaluation, produced the epistemic conditions that enabled nuclear experimentation. Their archive, analysed above as a precondition for their texts, assembled over decades through both meticulous documentation and the evidentiary weight of 'being there', remains a sustained challenge to the official record.<sup>539</sup>

The first edition of *Moruroa, mon amour*, appearing in the early 1970s, coincided with France's attempt to legitimize a shift toward underground testing.<sup>540</sup> Anti-test and pro-independence movements remained distrustful of President Giscard d'Estaing's promises of underground test safety, mindful both of his Gaullist pedigree as Finance Minister and of the persistent anxieties surrounding atoll instability and radioactive leakage. These debates ultimately energized the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific movement, founded in Suva in 1975, which situated

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<sup>538</sup> Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*. p. 3. See also Fassin and Matthews, "Moral Economy and Local Justice" (2012).

<sup>539</sup> See Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*.

<sup>540</sup> Even though the precise reasoning behind this decision is hard to determine, mobilization of popular opinion might have had some influence.

nuclear testing squarely within the global history of colonial domination, countering de Gaulle's earlier rhetoric of development and decolonization.<sup>541</sup>

During the same period, François Mitterrand, in challenging Giscard, promised referenda on self-governance for overseas territories and an immediate halt to nuclear testing. His position found support among Polynesian leaders such as John Teariki, Pouvana'a, and Francis Sanford, who urged local endorsement of his campaign, even though his proposals primarily targeted French metropolitan voters.

Yet electoral dynamics proved decisive: strong Catholic support for Giscard and institutional backing from military and colonial administrators secured his victory in French Polynesia. By the 1980s, when Mitterrand failed to fulfil his earlier commitments, anti-nuclear and independence organizations, including Tāvini Huira'atira, the CDRPC (later Obsarm) in Lyon, and international activists such as Greenpeace, voiced sharp disappointment at the persistence of the testing regime.<sup>542</sup>

Earlier, the critique was primarily directed at France's actions and inactions. By the mid-1980s, however, the argument had been broadened to frame nuclear colonialism within a wider epistemic context shaped by the growing environmental, de-colonial, national, liberation, and transnational peace movements. This period marked a shift toward a more comprehensive critique of nuclear testing and its consequences across the Pacific, aligning with the rise of regionalism and Pacific movements advocating for greater independence.<sup>543</sup> The Danielssons hereby came to document the fate of the independence movement and issues of internal autonomy status that was granted French Polynesia in 1984.

The couple persistently underscore the human cost of nuclear weapons policy, emphasizing the plight of those most directly affected. While not in the epistemic mode of "voice-giving" that Fassin and others have identified to be occurring at the time, they highlight the critical stance of elected representatives. They write, "Our hope and aim with this book is to contribute to and enlighten the surrounding world that the French nuclear policy's most wretched victims have always been and remain the innocent and defenceless Polynesian people".<sup>544</sup> This call to remember and recognize the agency and resistance of Polynesian leaders and communities is a

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<sup>541</sup> Mohamed-Gaillard, *L'archipel de la puissance?: La politique de la France dans le Pacifique Sud de 1946 à 1998*; Schoenberger, "Radiological Risk Imposition as Environmental Violence: A Case Study of Nuclear Harms and the Limits of Legal Redress in French Polynesia/Mā'ohi Nui."; Walter Johnson and Sione Tupouniua, "Against French Nuclear Testing: The A.T.O.M. Committee," *The Journal of Pacific History* 11, no. 4 (1976).

<sup>542</sup> See Maillochon, "Les réseaux de militants contre les essais nucléaires français (1959–1996)."

<sup>543</sup> Swan, *Pasifika Black: Oceania, Anti-colonialism, and the African World*.

<sup>544</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*, p. 367.

central thread in their critique, highlighting both the enduring injustices of nuclear colonialism and the resilience of those who resisted its impositions.

The peace researcher Johan Galtung in 1989 reviewed *Poisoned Reign* as one of three central works of the 1980s documentation of Pacific nuclear colonialism.<sup>545</sup> He claimed that the act of sending professional killers to destroy *Rainbow Warrior* might have marked a first decline of French nuclear arrogance in the Pacific, with all the negative attention it got “because it struck at white people in a white nation”.<sup>546</sup>

### 6.5.2 Towards an epistemology of resistance: Brokerage and transnational contestation

This chapter has shown, through an examination of the Danielssons’ method of knowledge production, that struggles over the history of the *Centre d’Expérimentations du Pacifique* (CEP) reveal the entanglement of counter-knowledge, witness practice, and anti-nuclear activism. Rather than merely correcting the official archive and narrative, Bengt and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson’s works, *Moruroa, mon amour* and *Poisoned Reign*, also constitute a specific epistemic intervention that is analytically described. Drawing on archival fragments, parliamentary minutes, press reports, and the evidentiary force of embodied presence, the Danielssons translated partial, contested traces into public knowledge. Their books, first written in French and then translated into English to reach an international audience, combined documentary excavation, journalistic exposure, and polemical urgency to reframe French nuclear testing as a specific modality of colonial rule. In doing so, they turned local testimony into a transnational claim about dispossession, secrecy, and institutional production of ignorance in a form of counter-agnetology.

Two analytical moves explain the significance of their contribution. First, the Danielssons developed what I call witness activism as a distinct epistemic figure: a practice that links testimony, archival corroboration, and material evidence in the service of warrantable, but fallible, knowledge. This practice here translated micro-episodes (dietary advisories, ethnographic knowledge, assembly minutes, medical warnings) into plausible causal claims about mechanisms of radiological pathways, administrative coercion, and demographic engineering that explained how French Polynesia became an expendable testing ground. Second, their work enacted a deliberate scale shift from the local to the global. By channelling Polynesian grievances through NGOs, alternative media, and sympathetic publics, they

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<sup>545</sup> The other two works were *Nuclear Playground* by Stewart Firth, 1987 and *American Lake: Nuclear Peril in the Pacific* by Hayes et al., 1986.

<sup>546</sup> Galtung, “The Pacific: A Poisoned Nuclear Lake”, p. 177.

repositioned Moruroa from a regional controversy to a node within a global anti-nuclear and decolonial field.

Confronting nuclear states posed challenges as acknowledgement of wrongdoing threatened their legitimacy, prompting French authorities to manage narratives and restrict information. In this context, framing became decisive. Activists had to render “nuclear colonialism” intelligible beyond the Pacific, linking local harms to wider anti-colonial struggles. Yet the NWS governments continued to shape which claims circulated, via media, scientific institutions, census regimes, unions, and religious organizations, while development subsidies tied to the test program constrained political dissent.

Because governments and anti-nuclear movements often but not always pursued divergent aims, activists and NGOs engaged different targets in different contexts such as Sweden in 1960, New Zealand in 1985, and France over the decades. Media environments varied and reading patterns, too, altering the terrain for claim-making. It is here, in mediating between these national and international arenas, that Bengt and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson and their archives stand out. It is here that the Danielssons’ role as mediators is most consequential. They acted as *linguistic and cultural brokers*: they bridged Francophone/Polynesian languages, the Anglophone Pacific, and Nordic Europe, ensuring that testimony and documentation flowed beyond colonial borders. Second, through *inter-epistemic brokerage* combining historical scholarship, anthropological fieldwork, and journalistic reporting, the Danielssons could render nuclear testing simultaneously a social, colonial, and epistemic injustice that became intelligible across diverse audiences and institutions. By the mid-1980s, these transnational representations of Pacific testimony converged with the Europe-US peace movement sparked by the Euromissile Crisis, nuclear-free-zone campaigns, and the Five/Six Nations Initiatives, a new upsurge of global anti-nuclear solidarity.<sup>547</sup>

Several further themes emerge as central to the chapter’s synthesis. First, testimony is politically charged. The Danielssons’ rhetorical register was designed to create newsworthiness and moral urgency. Such a register risks polemical excess, but it also succeeds in translating bureaucratic opacity into public scandal. Second, the contested terrain of territorial status and autonomy (Flosse, Sanford, Pouvana’a a

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<sup>547</sup> Burke, “European Nuclear Disarmament: Transnational Peace Campaigning in the 1980s.”; David S. Meyer, “How the Cold War Was Really Won: The Effects of the Antinuclear Movements of the 1980s” in *How Social Movements Matter*, edited by Marco Giugni, Doug McAdam, and Charles Tilly (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Anton Öhman, “Peace Actions and Mainstream Media: Framing Nuclear Disarmament Protests in Welfare Sweden.” in *Social Movements in 1980s Sweden: Contention in the Welfare State*, ed. Andrés Brink Pinto Helena Hill (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023).

Oopa; the Aia Api and Te Mana disputes) demonstrates how debates over governance, population policy, and infrastructure investments were inseparable from the CEP's logic. When Flosse linked the status law to the state's desire to preserve the CEP, he was articulating precisely the causal connection the Danielssons had insisted upon for a long time: the tests were not a side-effect of colonial rule but an intertwined justification for a continuing form of domination. And finally, the politics of knowledge – agnotology – remains central as differential access to archives, control of media narratives, and administrative secrecy coalesced into a regime of non-knowledge that muted democratic judgment even when facts were formally recorded.

In conclusion, the struggle over the history of the Centre d'Expérimentations du Pacifique is simultaneously a struggle over genres of historical truth. The Danielssons' witness activism exposed institutional mechanisms of dispossession and created transnational pressure; Regnault's archival scholarship tightened the empirical record and corrected errors that matter for scholarly verification. A historically responsible assessment must therefore retain both lessons: verify the facts relentlessly and interrogate the structures that render facts politically inconsequential. The Danielssons taught us how the authority of local testimony, when combined with corroborative archival work and transnational mediation, can convert moral outrage into a form of public knowledge worthy of critical scrutiny. The immediate task for the following chapter is thus to describe, more practically, and based on back-stage paperwork, the institutional and media conditions that made such knowledge production possible, and to ask when, how, and to what effect local experience of nuclear weapons becomes history rather than mere spectacle.





# Chapter 7. Formats and Tactics in Anti-Nuclear Testing Activism

## 7.1 Introduction: Newsletters, UN Reports, and Fish Poisoning

This chapter examines anti-CEP activism through three concrete arenas of knowledge-making found in the Danielssons' and Obsarm archives: activist newsletters, engagements with UN scientific reports, and debates surrounding the Gambier ciguatera outbreak. Rather than treating activism as primarily moral protest, I approach these materials as forms of *knowledge-work*, meaning ongoing practices of collecting, interpreting, circulating, and contesting evidence traces that become the raw material of oppositional claims, statements, and archives in contexts of secrecy, scientific opacity, and institutionalized non-knowledge. To sharpen what is at stake analytically, I introduce two closely related concepts building on the empirical analysis and make explicit how I use them in this chapter.

Epistemic tactics, being patterned interventions by actors designed to generate, stabilize, or displace knowledge claims under conditions of constraint. Tactics are not media formats themselves but practical, purposive moves such as, for example, selective republication, formatting testimony, scale-shifting (reframing a local case as a transnational moral claim or transnational data into local agnotology made visible), or documentary appropriation (the strategic citation and recontextualization of UNSCEAR or White Paper passages). Tactics operate *through* formats and infrastructures (newsletters, pamphlets, NGO briefs, parliamentary questions, press), but they are analytically distinct: formats are the communicative genres and material media; tactics are the actors' problem-solving strategies enacted via those formats.

This is mirrored in the politics of ignorance as, in the archive, an empirically absent but actually present set of institutional practices, rhetorical manoeuvres and epistemic transactions that produce, maintain, or exploit not-knowing. Drawing on agnotology and salvage, I treat ignorance as neither accidental nor neutral; instead, it is an effect of bureaucratic classification, secrecy protocols, selective monitoring, and discursive framing. Where testing states stabilized narratives of safety, anti-

testing actors deployed epistemic tactics to expose silences, reassign evidentiary weight, and contest the authorized distribution of credibility.

Analytically, then, the chapter asks: how did anti-CEP actors translate fragmentary material into warrantable claims? How did they deploy tactics through specific formats and infrastructures to renegotiate epistemic authority? And how did these practices interact with institutional processes that produced ignorance?

To answer this, I reconstruct three interlocking domains of practice, based on analysis of archival material:

1. Newsletters as a kind of networked format: where *tactics* is apparent by how serialized, mostly low-budget publications sustained translocal communication, created shared vocabularies of harm and resistance, and acted as distributed sites of archival production within anti-testing circuits.
2. Documentary appropriation (format: reports, white papers, UNSCEAR assessment): where *tactics* is shown in the practical mechanisms by which activists procured, translated, and recontextualized scientific reports – UNSCEAR analyses, French White Papers – and the interpretive manoeuvres unmasking agnotology, through which they transformed state and intergovernmental documents into weapons of critique.
3. Public-health contention in the archive (format: correspondence, expert statements, footnotes; and empirical case: the Gambier ciguatera episode). Here identified *tactics* are causal scale-shifting, expert-brokerage, and tactical uncertainty (foregrounding plausible causal mechanisms while acknowledging evidentiary limits). The ciguatera section illustrates how activist claims moved between embodied superstes testimony, contested epidemiological evidence, and rhetorical strategies intended to compel institutional investigation.

Viewed together, these examples illuminate the broader ecology of oppositional knowledge production, highlighting its uneven successes, its internal contradictions, and the shifting alliances that made such work viable. By tracing how civil society actors accessed and repackaged official science, and how they mobilized local ecological knowledge to challenge technocratic assurances of safety, the chapter exposes the epistemic fault lines separating grassroots evidence from classified expertise, and shows how these tensions were managed, amplified, or strategically reframed across local, regional, and international arenas.

A crucial analytic move is to keep tactic and format distinct but interdependent where a tactic (e.g. scale-shifting) can be instantiated through multiple formats (newsletter, NGO brief, parliamentary question, pamphlet), and the efficacy of a tactic depends on the affordances and limitations of its format.

The chapter thus aims to be both descriptive and diagnostic: descriptive in reconstructing workflows, editorial decisions, and the infrastructures of circulation; diagnostic in explaining why certain tactics emerged, why they worked (or failed), and how they illuminated or obscured the politics of ignorance.

In the sections that follow I first analyse newsletter networks as distributed sites of archival production; second, I examine documentary appropriation and the interpretive manoeuvres used to unmask agnotology; and third, I probe the public-health controversies around ciguatera to show how epistemic tactics operated under heightened evidentiary strain. The ciguatera case exposes cross-cutting tensions between embodied experience and epidemiological evidence, between local ecological knowledge and global scientific protocols, and so serves as a site to test the analytical distinction between tactics and formats. Throughout, I read both presences and absences as evidence: the traces of practice (marginalia, translations, anonymized testimonies, redactions) are treated as starting points for abductive and retroductive inferences about the mechanisms that produced non-knowledge and contested knowledge alike.

### 7.1.2 Method and analytical approach

This chapter approaches anti-CEP activism as a set of situated epistemic practices rather than as primarily actor-centred politics. As informed by the new history of knowledge of Östling et al., and Catherine Trundle, the analysis begins from doing and materiality as in the documents, infrastructures, and practices that both enabled and constrained oppositional knowledge-making and that now constitute the archive itself.<sup>548</sup> To sharpen this practice-centred perspective, I work within a critical-realist framework developed in earlier chapters. Ontologically, this assumes that radioactive exposure, uptake, and health effects are real processes, even when they are mismeasured, hidden, or politically obscured. Epistemologically, it is fallibilist and comparative as claims about testing and its consequences are historically situated and contestable, but they are not equally adequate.

The chapter therefore focuses on how anti-testing actors sought to articulate nuclear colonialism, attribute responsibility to the testing state, and challenge official claims of safety in contexts of secrecy. A recurring tension – clearly visible across the archives – concerns whether testing states exercised reasonable care toward exposed populations and what they actually knew about the consequences of the tests. Activists, veterans, and local communities repeatedly confronted a situation in

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<sup>548</sup> Östling, Olsen, and Larsson Heidenblad, *Histories of Knowledge in Postwar Scandinavia: Actors, Arenas, and Aspirations*; Catherine Trundle, “Biopolitical Endpoints: Diagnosing a Deserving British Nuclear Test Veteran,” *Social Science & Medicine* 73, no. 6 (2011); Trundle, “Translating Proof: Contested Illness, Radiation Exposure, and the Health Claims of Nuclear Test Veterans.”

which official accounts minimized harm, while lived experience, local knowledge, and dispersed documentary traces suggested otherwise.<sup>549</sup>

In response, testing states stabilized their narratives through classified reports, selective radiation monitoring, expert assessments, epidemiological studies, UN diplomacy, and strategic media communication.<sup>550</sup> Activists in turn, as we shall see, mobilized alternative evidentiary practices to contest this authority, assembling testimonies, re-reading official documents, and circulating counter-interpretations. This dynamic resonates with Catherine Trundle's work on test veterans, where struggles for compensation were simultaneously struggles over who gets to define risk, evidence, and truth. In this sense, downwind populations were not only victims of radiation but also unwitting research subjects in a dispersed, politically controlled experiment on the long-term effects of nuclear fallout:

Nuclear test veterans ... remember a much riskier, less ordered military operation that bears little resemblance to its official archival record. They have their own genetic studies, nuclear physicist, supporters, legal experts, and archival documents that suggest an alternative telling of history. Test veterans mobilize narratives, documents, experiences, and evidence to tell a story of governmental neglect, indifference, and even a concerted cover-up.<sup>551</sup>

Methodologically, the analysis treats activist archives not as neutral repositories but as active sites of knowledge production shaped by debate, conflict, and silence.<sup>552</sup>

The methodological approach here treats absences and silences as evidence in their own right. Building on Cassegård's iteration of "salvage", and in dialogue with Trouillot's account of silencing, I read not only what is present in the archive but

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<sup>549</sup> Brown, *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters*; Jacobs, *Nuclear Bodies: The Global Hibakusha*; J. R. McClelland, *Royal Commission into British Nuclear Tests in Australia*, Australian Government Publishing Service (Canberra, A.C.T., 1985), <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-2150998790>; Lorna Arnold, Katherine Pyne, and Lawrence Freedman, *Britain and the H-bomb* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001); Schoenberger, "Radiological Risk Imposition as Environmental Violence: A Case Study of Nuclear Harms and the Limits of Legal Redress in French Polynesia/Mā'ohi Nui."

<sup>550</sup> For instance, the French White book, *Livre blanc*, on the tests and the UN reports that are discussed below in this chapter.

<sup>551</sup> Trundle, "Translating Proof: Contested Illness, Radiation Exposure, and the Health Claims of Nuclear Test Veterans." p. 77. See also footnote 551, and Sue Rabbitt Roff, "From "Negligible" to Negligent: Seventy-Five Years of Ignoring the Genetic Consequences of Nuclear Tests" *Australian Outlook* (2026) retrieved 2 February 2026 from <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/from-negligible-to-negligent-seventy-five-years-of-ignoring-the-genetic-consequences-of-nuclear-tests/>.

<sup>552</sup> For reflections on the destruction of archives see Regnault, *La France à l'opposé d'elle-même: Essais d'histoire politique de l'Océanie*; Verne Harris, "'They Should Have Destroyed More': The Destruction of Public Records by the South African State in the Final Years of Apartheid, 1990-94," *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa*, no. 42 (2000).

what is withheld, redacted, or rendered inarticulate. From a critical-realist standpoint I treat such absences as analytically consequential: they point to unobserved mechanisms, institutional practices, and power that generate epistemic gaps. In short, I use salvage contradictions where official rhetoric declares the effects unknowable or negligible while dispersed practices and residues indicate otherwise, and treat those contradictions as the starting point for explaining how consequences of CEP were enacted, hidden, and recorded.<sup>553</sup>

It would be misleading to treat *Moruroa, mon amour* or other published interventions by the Danielssons and their allies such as Barrillot's *Les Irradiés de la République* (see below), as somehow detached from the networking practices and knowledge-work examined here. As noted earlier, anti-testing activism is inherently cumulative and integrative: protests, texts, critique, lived experience, and transnational interpersonal ties continually reconfigure one another over time.

Crucially, this chapter works outward from the material remains of practice such as newsletters, correspondence, annotated reports, and everyday infrastructures of circulation, whereas the previous chapter began from polished, public-facing texts such as *Moruroa, mon amour*. The two are inseparable, but they operate in different registers. Here the focus is on the backstage labour of witnessing, documenting, and mediating rather than on finished advocacy.

Seen in this light, the Danielssons and their archives appear less as authors/*historians* alone than as embedded documentarians within a wider transnational peace milieu. Newsletter production, engagement with UN reports, and debates around ciguatera are treated not as retrospective commentary on a closed past but as dispatches from an ongoing epistemic conflict, a conflict that renders nuclear testing a continuing problem of epistemic (in)justice rather than a settled historical episode.

## 7.2 The Newsletter as a Practice of Network-Knowledge

We begin by examining a practical form for claim-making, neither a distinct arena nor a singular actor, but rather a concrete format of disarmament-knowledge work: the newsletter as a practice of networked knowledge.<sup>554</sup> Newsletters functioned as a key organizational tool, operating at the intersection of networks, activism, and

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<sup>553</sup> Carl Cassegård, "Ideologi och utopi i katastrofens sken: Om begreppet 'bärgning'." in *Ideologikritik*, ed. Tomas Wedin, Evelina Johansson Wilén, and Carl Wilén (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2021).

<sup>554</sup> Eriksen and Krefting, "Formens makt og materialitet: Om studiet av kunnskapens former i katekiser og skipslogger" (2020); Evelina Kallträsk, *Att skola entreprenörer: Ung företagsamhet och den svenska skolans omvandling 1980-2011* (PhD Diss. Lund: Historiska institutionen, Lunds universitet, 2025).

media. Strategic considerations included whether they should be internally or externally oriented, aimed at broad visibility and frequent publication, or whether they should prioritize information-sharing over polemics. Often, newsletters positioned themselves in opposition to mainstream media narratives.<sup>555</sup>

A small but important body of social-movement and communication research treats newsletters, bulletins, and other forms of grey literature as integral activist media rather than peripheral ephemera. Scholarship on alternative, grassroots publishing and dissident media shows how movements use low-circulation formats to build collective identity, counter official narratives, and sustain transnational ties.<sup>556</sup> Studies of communication activism and movement-produced media emphasize how newsletters operate as tools of coordination, reflection, and mobilization, while work on movement communication and content analysis demonstrates how such self-published texts function alongside mainstream media in shaping political claims.<sup>557</sup> Historical cases, from peace and disarmament movements to Latin American solidarity networks, similarly highlight newsletters as infrastructural devices that stitch together dispersed actors, circulate oppositional knowledge, and document ongoing conflicts. Together, this literature provides an analytical precedent for treating newsletters as a distinctive genre of movement knowledge production, central to the epistemic and organizational life of activist networks.

In the 1970s and 1980s, newsletters were frequently connected to universities, student groups, and activist movements. A historical example from the Columbia School of Journalism, the *Black Alumni Newsletter* (BAN), drew inspiration from pop-futurist John Naisbitt and his concept of networked power in *Megatrends*. BAN provided black journalists with a platform for self-expression within their own professional network, counterbalancing their employment in a predominantly white

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<sup>555</sup> Hannah Guenther-Wexler and Julia Smith, “Feminist Newsletters and the History of Women's Labour Activism in Manitoba,” *Prairie History*, no. 6 (2021).

<sup>556</sup> E.g. John D. H. Downing, *Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements* (Thousand Oaks, Calif. Sage, cop., 2001); Chris Atton, *The Routledge Companion to Alternative and Community Media* (London: Routledge, 2015); Chris Atton and James Frederick Hamilton, *Alternative Journalism* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2008).

<sup>557</sup> Kevin M. Carragee and Wim Roefs, “The Neglect of Power in Recent Framing Research”, *Journal of Communication*, 54 no. 2 (2004); Kevin M. Carragee, *Communication Activism Research for Social Justice: Engaged Research, Collective Action, and Political Change* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2024); Alice Mattoni, “Practicing Media—Mediating Practice: A Media-in-Practices Approach to Investigate the Nexus Between Digital Media and Activists’ Daily Political Engagement” *International Journal of Communication* 14 no. 1 (2020); Alice Mattoni, *Media Practices and Protest Politics: How Precarious Workers Mobilise* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012).

mainstream media landscape. It facilitated mutual support, information exchange, and resource sharing.<sup>558</sup>

Existing analyses of newsletters typically focus on specific publications within activist networks. For example, Hannah Guenther-Wexler and Julia Smith examine the *Winnipeg Women's Liberation Newsletter* (WWLN), a socialist feminist initiative from the 1970s and 1980s. Managed by volunteers, WWLN reached a peak circulation of over 300 recipients. As former organizers Ellen Kruger and Linda Taylor recall, it played a crucial role in mobilizing the local feminist movement, spreading awareness of feminist issues, and fostering activist networks.<sup>559</sup>

In the following analysis, however, I approach newsletters within the anti-testing archives not as isolated publications but as a broader format and category – an assemblage of source materials that collectively represent a methodology of activism. By doing so, I aim to describe the general characteristics of newsletters as an epistemic practice rather than focusing on individual publications.

An example from the archive is a newsletter issue and call to action of the *Third World Network* (11 July 1989). This issue takes up Moruroa and elucidates the circulation of a Moruroa map and worries of the structural integrity and permeability of the geology of the atoll. The *Third World Network Newsletter* was published out of Penang, Malaysia, and this issue focused on CEP apropos the bicentenary celebrations of the French Republic, ironically depicted as turned into a “mockery” with the French colonial exploitation in the Pacific.<sup>560</sup> The Third World Network started in 1984 in Malaysia. It still functions as a not-for-profit international advocacy and research network, according to its own statute to strengthen cooperation between civil society and groups in the South, for development and developing countries.<sup>561</sup>

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<sup>558</sup> Wayne J. Dawkins and Todd Steven Burroughs, “The Black Ivy Influencer: How an ‘Outsider’ Black Newsletter Became an Inside Force at the Columbia University Journalism School,” *Journal of Pan African Studies* 9, no. 1 (2016).

<sup>559</sup> Guenther-Wexler and Smith, “Feminist Newsletters and the History of Women's Labour Activism in Manitoba” (2021)

<sup>560</sup> KTM BD Steel case 9, 2281-2304. *Documents supplémentaire*.

<sup>561</sup> “Third Word Network Berhad” retrieved 11 October 2023 from <https://www.twn.my/>

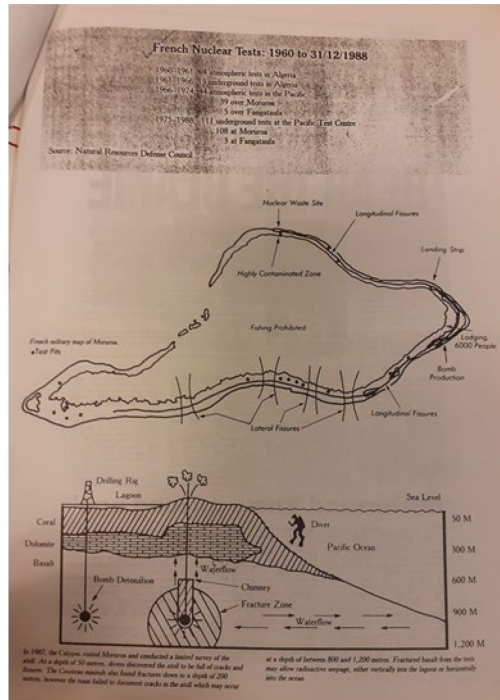


Figure 10. Photo of the map reproduced in Third World Network action alert Newsletter of July 1989. Commenting on the publicized scientific missions of Cousteau, and its limitations. Source: KTM BD: Steel case 9. 2281-2304, folder name: Documents supplémentaire. Photograph by Anton Öhman.

While some newsletters in the archives are specialized and internal, a large proportion have an externally oriented format. Concerning their contents, the newsletters had varying objectives, but as a rule, they both informed and had mobilizing functions. Most newsletters of the anti-test archives can be characterized as small-scale and low-budget newspapers made by relatively small groups with specialized information and publicity needs, and a presumed wider readership than the immediate printing organization. Some are just one A4-sized sheet of paper of copied typewritten text, while others have several pages with glossy material and colour images.

The role of newsletters as both claim-making and networking platforms renders their function as points of brokerage, facilitating connections and enabling communication.<sup>562</sup> Through them, ideas, information, coordination of campaigns,

<sup>562</sup> See e.g. Charles Tilly and Sidney G. Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Doug McAdam, Sidney G. Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Mario Diani and Doug McAdam, *Social Movements and Networks: Relational Approaches to Collective Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).



and resources can flow between otherwise isolated networks. In the case of the anti-testing activity, brokerage played a crucial role in maintaining the network. Newsletters acted as an intermediary format, more structured and wider in scope than individual correspondence yet more focused and intimate than mass media, thus allowing the anti-test networks to reach a broad but targeted and engaged audience.

For instance, issues of Obsarm's newsletter *Damocles* were frequently referenced in the correspondence between Marie-Thérèse Danielsson and Bruno Barrillot, who acted as brokers, facilitating connections. Among other things, the newsletters functioned in their networks to identify suitable local rapporteurs and writers who could testify their experiences of the tests.<sup>563</sup> This reflects a broader documentary approach aimed at generating archival information while simultaneously reading and disseminating content through newsletters.<sup>564</sup> The role of newsletters as tools for campaign direction and management is evident. For example, *Peace News*, published by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), played a crucial role in mobilizing volunteers and securing funding for the protest expeditions against the British Grapple test series in the late-1950s.<sup>565</sup>

Newsletters appear throughout the witness-activist archives, with a marked concentration in the 1980s. Using a strategy of analytic exemplification, this section examines selected issues, attending both to what they articulate and to what they leave unsaid. Given their volume and recurrence, newsletters must be treated as a distinct format of anti-testing knowledge if we are to grasp the wider ecology of anti-nuclear discourse.

The Danielssons' archive contains a diverse collection of newsletter series, including *Nucleonics Week* (which provides updates on the nuclear power industry, technology, research, and development), *Action Alert* (which mobilizes events across the peace movement), *Peace Wave News* (the newsletter of the 1980s Peace Wave campaign organized by Gensuikyo), *Gensuikin News* (published by the Japanese anti-nuclear disarmament group Gensuikin), and *Stop Essais!* (a French anti-nuclear and peace-focused newsletter).<sup>566</sup> *Damocles* was and, at the time of

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<sup>563</sup> See above, and Obsarm Shelf B66E.

<sup>564</sup> See Claire Scopsi, "The Documentality of Memory in the Post-Truth Era," *Proceedings from the Document Academy* (2018).

<sup>565</sup> CND, 2018: 2, folder 1; CND, 2018: 2, folder 2. Correspondence between *Peace News* editors and readers/volunteers. London School of Economics Library and Archives.

<sup>566</sup> At the resumption of testing at Moruroa in 1995 Danielssons corresponded extensively with Gensuikin who wanted information on the French tests and their consequences in French Polynesia. Gensuikin sent some money supporting the cause and requested information about incidence of cancer in French Polynesia, which Bengt Danielsson provided. The group then sent 47 Japanese activists to protest in Tahiti, see KTM BD 2622, Item 15. Correspondence dated November 1995.

writing this dissertation, continues to be the newsletter of Obsarm, occurring in yearly volumes in their archives. Occasional issues also occur, for instance of *Coral Reefs*, a newsletter of ecological conservation;<sup>567</sup> *Environment Watch*, an English language environmental watchdog newsletter; various newsletters of IPPNW and Swedish PPNW;<sup>568</sup> the Swedish Pacific group bulletin (*Svenska Stillahavsgruppen*);<sup>569</sup> US Quaker news pamphlets of the *American Friends Service Committee*; the *Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society's* (SPAS); and the Japanese national association for Hibakusha, *Hidankyo* newsletters.<sup>570</sup>

The newsletters in the archives are typically modest in format and printed in small runs, they occupied the liminal space of grey literature – materials produced within activist networks and rarely circulated through mainstream media or academic channels. Yet those emerging from peace and anti-nuclear groups often adopted the bulletin form with an explicitly open address, signalling their dual function as internal organizers and public communicators. Their flexibility reflected a collective ethos as much as a resource constraint.

The content of these newsletters was centred on campaigns, coordination, calls to action, and the dissemination of situational knowledge. In this sense, newsletters operated as instruments of activist reflection, orienting readers, amplifying claims, and sustaining momentum. Together with pamphlets, bulletins, and periodicals, they constituted a crucial communicative infrastructure of the anti-testing movement, shaping attention, framing nuclearity, and enabling ongoing deliberation within and beyond the networks that produced them.

These newsletters follow a varied yet coherent format of short bulletins, compiling brief notes, reports, articles, and plans for future campaigns and events. They are issued at different intervals, with a standard frequency of at least six issues per year. However, additional issues, such as *Action Alert* from Pacific Concerns Resource Center, were published as needed to coordinate and plan campaigns.<sup>571</sup> The newsletters are often simple in print and production, serving as platforms for assembling events, actors, and references to a broader network of information and knowledge. They frequently cite and quote texts, articles, and bibliographies of interest, acting as condensed hubs of information akin to community bulletin boards

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<sup>567</sup> KTM BD 2623, Item 30. Issue on the pollution of Moruroa and its reef investigations during the 1980s. March 1990.

<sup>568</sup> KTM BD Box 3004, 2620, Item 98.

<sup>569</sup> KTM BD Box 3024, 7/7.

<sup>570</sup> KTM BD Box 3025, 4/7, Box 3034, 2/5.

<sup>571</sup> Scattered issues of *Action Alert* are present throughout the archive. For example, in KTM BD Box 3018, 4/11, 7/11, 9/11 and Box 3017, 2/6.

within activist networks.<sup>572</sup> For some organizations, such as the Pacific Concerns Resource Center mentioned above, producing and disseminating newsletters appears to have been one of the primary objectives, with many issues containing direct calls to action and to join and coordinate efforts of other groups.

Compiling, printing, and distributing newsletters required significant resources, especially for smaller organizations. However, newsletters proved to be an effective means of organizing, informing, and mobilizing supporters, members, and the public.

The conditions for producing anti-nuclear, Pacific independence, and peace movement newsletters varied widely. Newsletters such as those published by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), *Peace Wave News* (by Gensuikin/Gensuikyo), *Action Alert*, and Obsarm's *Damocles* were produced by smaller, volunteer-driven organizations.<sup>573</sup> In contrast, the *Nucleonics Week* newsletter served as a specialized source of nuclear industry information, offering business analysis with market authority comparable to the *SIPRI Yearbook*'s expert authority on nuclear arms. Unlike activist newsletters, *Nucleonics Week* was (and still is) a professionally produced, weekly publication, like a traditional journal.<sup>574</sup> Meanwhile, the bulletin of the Polynesian government health institute, *Centre d'Hygiène et de Salubrité Publique's Bulletin d'Informations Sanitaires, Épidémiologiques et Statistiques* (BISES), was published sporadically and included, among other things, data on cancer incidence in French Polynesia.<sup>575</sup>

However, most newsletters in these archives adopted a non-conformist or critical stance, actively (re)producing critical information, counter-narratives to global and Pacific mainstream media, and mobilizing dissent. The Danielssons also used newsletters as conduits for information. In a letter to prominent peace researcher and *Wellington Pacific Report* editor Owen Wilkes,<sup>576</sup> they praised the publication and wrote that they regularly forwarded copies of it to Oscar Temaru's radio station in Fa'a'a.<sup>577</sup>

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<sup>572</sup> An action alert is, as such, not a newsletter but a call for a single specific action, like a protest or vigil. However, the newsletter in the archive called *Action Alert* combine calls with reports from actions and other relevant information.

<sup>573</sup> It is difficult to assess the exact financing and production of newsletters.

<sup>574</sup> *Nucleonics Week* still exists and is now made by the business analytics corporation S&P Global Inc (Standard and Poor's credit rating agency).

<sup>575</sup> KTM BD Box 3028, 11/13.

<sup>576</sup> See Bass and Derby, *Peacemonger*, Owen Wilkes: *International Peace Researcher*. Wilkes had worked on the Anti-US bases campaign in New Zealand and successfully mobilized against US presence there, he also researched with OPRI and SIPRI in the early 1980s, was monitored and interrogated by Swedish secret service and had to leave Sweden on suspicions of espionage.

<sup>577</sup> KTM BD Steel case 5, *Correspondence anti-nucléaire récente*, Radio Tefana.

### 7.2.1 The Peace Wave campaign: Mobilizing global nuclear knowledge, *Peace Wave News* and Japanese peace movements

In 1988, *Peace Wave News* issued a special edition featuring a global appeal. The Peace Wave campaign and its newsletter were coordinated from Japan by Gensuikyo (the Japan Council Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs), which worked closely with Hibakusha organizations representing survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings.<sup>578</sup> During the 1980s, *Peace Wave News* derived its authority from its appeals for general, universal disarmament and its knowledge production, which was deeply connected to Hibakusha testimonies. The authority of these testimonies played a crucial role in mobilizing transnational disarmament efforts, particularly in shaping and reproducing at various scales the historical and political memory of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

As anthropologist Lisa Yoneyama describes, there were conflicting historical definitions between groups in Japanese society in memorialization of the bombings, divided between one communist peace movement that highlighted the crimes of Japanese empire and the US occupation, and another aligned to US interests, which articulated a vision of liberal world peace and disarmament, advocating for a globalism that sought to project a vision beyond Cold War-era nuclear militarization.<sup>579</sup> This articulation contrasts with the framework of nuclear colonialism, which emphasizes ongoing injustices and persistent conflict.

However, the first Peace Wave global campaign event took place on 24 October 1987, after delegates of the Soviet and US peace movements at the World Conference against A- and H-Bombs jointly called for an international event in support of a total ban and elimination of nuclear weapons. Naming and describing the action as a wave highlights its reflexive global appeal for people's movements to protest nuclear weapons publicly, generating what was referred to as a wave of peace action to move across the globe. The Peace Wave of '87 had, according to the *Peace Wave News* of July 1988, swept:

[...] through the five continents, and the islands of the Pacific, starting from New Zealand west of the international date line through Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and proved to be a great success as an international joint action from the grassroots, calling for the elimination of nuclear weapons.<sup>580</sup>

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<sup>578</sup> Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory*.

<sup>579</sup> For an elaboration on the conflict between the groups of nuclear disarmament activists (Gensuikin and gensuikyo) in Japan along the Cold War divide from the 1960s, and the relationship to the historical experience, opinions on US occupation, and Japanese empire versus views on the communist nations see analysis in Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory*.

<sup>580</sup> KTM BD Box 3029, File 2/8, *Peace Wave News* no. 5. 30 July 1988. Special Issue. Cover page.

This newsletter is characteristic of the “wave” of peace-movement activism that intensified in the 1980s in response to renewed Cold War militarization. Rather than framing opposition primarily in terms of East-West conflict, this period of activism increasingly presented itself as an internationalist, cross-bloc mass movement – coordinated through transnational grassroots networks that claimed to transcend the Iron Curtain. The document exemplifies how this historiography of the peace movement relied on the epistemic authority of *superstes* testimony – that is, lived, first-person experience of those who had “been there” – as a privileged mode of political and moral knowledge.<sup>581</sup> The same issue of *Peace Wave News* further highlights the previous year’s high numbers of participation in their appeal (30 million signatures were collected in the appeal in 1987’s Peace Wave action).<sup>582</sup> The notion of how social movements try to frame their protest and collective action, WUNC (*Worthiness, Unity, Numbers, and Commitment*) as it is developed in Contentious Politics Studies as a strategy used in social movement organizing in the early-20<sup>th</sup> century, is with the Peace Wave deployed to full capacity.<sup>583</sup>

The globally oriented peace movement and its mass rallying around internationalist values carries a dual meaning. On one hand, the Peace Wave was framed as an apolitical appeal to common sense, invoking specific notions of “global peace” as a universal cause. This appeal, over the 1980s increasingly voiced by victims of nuclear bombings, was directed at the idea of a global mass to halt the insanity of the arms race, a combination of two forms of ethical and testimonial knowledge. However, on closer examination and re-contextualization, inherent contradictions emerge. Despite aligning with progressive anti-militarist values, these calls for world peace often lacked in analysis of the underlying realities and historical mechanisms at play. This omission was particularly evident in contrast to the articulation of nuclear colonialism in the Pacific and the consequences of late 20<sup>th</sup>-century hot wars in the Global South.

These contradictions potentially became apparent in the practical work of anti-nuclear activists at and close to the test sites, as they sought to reconcile the idealist, globally oriented vision of world peace with the localized realities of the consequences of nuclear testing and militarization. Notably, by the time these Peace Wave calls for disarmament were at their peak, the Euromissile arms race had already begun to decline following the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. Moreover, the surge in the peace movement mobilization during the early

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<sup>581</sup> See background above and Wittner, *Confronting the Bomb: A Short History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement*.

<sup>582</sup> KTM BD Box 3029, File 2/8, *Peace Wave News* no. 5. 30 July 1988. Special Issue.

<sup>583</sup> Meyer, “How the Cold War Was Really Won: The Effects of the Antinuclear Movements of the 1980s.”

1980s was undergoing a process of assimilation into the broader frameworks of multilateral disarmament and/or non-proliferation structures.<sup>584</sup>

By reading these late 1980s messages through a historically critical lens and incorporating Yoneyama's analysis of the ideological utility of bomb experiences, one can identify potential contradictions in the vision of world peace being pursued. The framing of horrific past experiences – situated, by the 1980s, in a historical horizon – was used to mobilize mass action against the looming threat of nuclear apocalypse. This narrative positioned the “nuclear duopoly” as the antagonist of an imminent “global peace”, fostering a sense of urgency and emphasizing the power of individual action within a collective mass movement.

However, while the global peace discourse was prevalent in the witness archives, not all newsletters and materials subscribed to this idealized contradiction of world peace as a force field.

Over the 1980s, a transformative shift in epistemic paradigms, as described by both Fassin and Yoneyama in different terms, with roots in the 1968 movement and the shift from articulation of class based conflicts to conflicts between masses consisting of individuals and states, reshaped the validation of experiential knowledge and testimonial accounts.<sup>585</sup> This shift in nuclear knowledge, reliant on the profound struggles of nuclear victims, most notably the Hibakusha and *downwinders* (those affected by nuclear tests in downwind areas), led to a gradual (yet incomplete) recognition of them as authoritative voices on nuclear issues. By sharing their experiences and suffering with an international(ist) audience, these individuals challenged some but not all dominant narratives and asserted their place in a specific global discourse.<sup>586</sup>

This transformation was closely linked to the ethnographic revival within political discourse, as discussed in Chapter 2 on the shifting meaning of testimony. As Yoneyama explains, many Hibakusha had previously remained silent, avoiding public testimonies and appeals due to feelings of shame and misfortune associated with their connection to the atomic bombings and the personal tragedies that followed. In contrast, a distinct subset of survivors, such as the “Hiroshima Maidens”, followed a different trajectory. They became subjects of sensationalized guilt acknowledgement and television entertainment for western audiences, their reconstructive surgeries marketed as symbols of recovery, while their stories were

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<sup>584</sup> Egeland and Pelopidas, “European Nuclear Weapons? Zombie Debates and Nuclear Realities” (2021); Kjølsv Egeland, “Who Stole Disarmament? History and Nostalgia in Nuclear Abolition Discourse,” *International Affairs* 96, no. 5 (2020).

<sup>585</sup> Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*. Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory*.

<sup>586</sup> See the introducing discussion the on epistemic evaluation of testimony and personal accounts of traumatic events.

used to frame the apparent reconciliation between the US and Japan a decade after the bombings.<sup>587</sup>

### 7.2.2 Coordinating and reporting 1980s activity in *Action Alert*, of the Pacific Concerns and Resource Center, and *Pacific News*

The *Action Alert* newsletter from the Pacific Concerns and Resource Center is interesting from the perspective of mobilizing collective action, as it encouraged, reported, and coordinated direct actions, directing its readers toward action. Thus, when informed, the presumed readers are encouraged to *do* something. This involved, for instance, letter writing, signing petitions, participating in demonstrations, picketing, and rallies at trials. The format of the *Action Alert* newsletter was flexible and adapted to the content. Several organizations used it to communicate and organize events, like *Peace Wave News* but on a more regional and smaller scale.<sup>588</sup> In this, it mirrors the coordinating umbrella structure of the organization behind the newsletter, Pacific Concerns Resource Center (PCRC) operating from Suva, Fiji.<sup>589</sup> Most of the messages and items are concise, yet they convey ample information about the events, actors involved, and what further action the reader can take. One excerpt from a text in *Action Alert* in 1982 reads as follows:

On 20 July (Tuesday) at 9:00 AM, Jim Albertini, Dave Gierlach, Mary (“Kit”) Glover, and Wally Inglis will go on trial in U.S. District Court in Honolulu for attempting to pray for peace on 9 April (Good Friday) at the West Loch nuclear weapons bunkers. The charge is criminal trespass – with a possible maximum sentence of six months in jail and a \$500 fine. Scheduled to preside at the trial is newly appointed Judge Harold Fong. The four defendants would like to invite friends and supporters to attend the trial and join in a pre-trial potluck supper and celebration on the eve of the trial.<sup>590</sup>

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<sup>587</sup> See Graham, “Re-Covering the Hiroshima Maidens.”

<sup>588</sup> KTM BD Box 3018, Folder 4/10.

<sup>589</sup> Some leaders of the Pacific increasingly formalized the connection between independence and anti-nuclear work. For instance, Temaru, Walter Lini and Uregei collaborated with the churches and the civil community in Nuclear free and independent Pacific and PCRC following a conference in Honolulu 1978. Mohamed-Gaillard, *L’archipel de la puissance?: La politique de la France dans le Pacifique Sud de 1946 à 1998.*) p. 337 f.

<sup>590</sup> KTM BD 3017, Folder 2/6 *Action Alert* (1982). Jim Albertini and Wally Inglis had together with Nelson Foster and Gil Roeder, published a book, *The Dark Side of Paradise: Hawaii in a Nuclear World* in 1980 with Peace Education Project Publishers. Open access here, retrieved from <https://malu-aina.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/The-Dark-Side-Of-Paradise-book.pdf> 23 September 2020. The book delineates the militarization and nuclearization of Hawaii and the potential for citizen non-violent action as a measure to counter this, and for peace work, in its documentary form, that for instance Owen Wilkes in New Zealand exemplifies in the book. This meant mapping and researching information on nuclear facilities, accidents, transports and

In tone, this message is both hopeful and factual, providing an air of confidence and triumphant trust in the morality of the cause of action. The textual tone prevalent in activist communication, which often invokes a sense of optimism and rallying among individuals already engaged in the cause, stands in contrast to the more formal, problematizing, and instructional tone adopted in messages intended for external audiences. This distinction becomes particularly evident when comparing this approach to the ominous and outwardly directed communication style of the *Bulletin for Atomic Scientists*' "Doomsday Clock", which emphasizes impending catastrophe, as well as the first-hand witnesses' accounts detailing the effects of nuclear tests.

The internal communication strategy prioritizes mobilizing individuals who are already committed to the cause, rather than attempting to persuade those who remain unconvinced or to assert an unrecognized truth. By naming the activists in the *Action Alert*, the text provides readers with practical information while also highlighting these individuals as engaged in a principled struggle against accusations (of civil disobedience). This identification carries heroic connotations and serves as a means of imbuing significance and continuity to the primary protest vigil, culminating in a celebratory event, all before the outcome of the trial is known. The newsletter *Action Alert* thus functions as a materialization of a network, connecting events and people to specific places and times. It is more convoluted than the *Peace Wave News* special issue analysed above, has a more concrete and narrower, local, format with more precise directions for action in the Pacific region. The *Pacific News* newsletter, exemplified by an issue from the late-1980s analysed in the following, falls somewhere in between *Action Alert* and *Peace Wave News* when it comes to scale.

### 7.2.3 The NFIP newsletter *Pacific News* framework: Reproducing and reporting protest action

The following analysis is based on a detailed investigation of an issue of *Pacific News*, from the organization Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific (NFIP), namely Vol 4, no. 8 of August 1989. It was a special issue on protests in French Polynesia that had taken place during the summer.

At that time, *Pacific News*, made in Suva, Fiji, was one of the most important English language news bulletins on independence and anti-nuclear advocacy, and Pacific regional opinion and organization. Fiji had gained independence in 1970 and, according to historian Mohammad-Gaillard, mostly connected with the larger

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military bases. Brian Martin of the Canberra Peacemakers reviewed the book in *Bogong magazine* in (December-February 1980 issue Vol. 1 no 7-8, p. 15) stating that Australian peace activist should be inspired and make this kind of efforts.



Commonwealth Pacific nations.<sup>591</sup> Historian Maillochon interviews a Polynesian anti-nuclear activist who reports that they began going to NFIP conferences when it started in 1975, and that before that, there had not been an anti-nuclear network in French Polynesia.<sup>592</sup> The conferences were at a place where anti-nuclear actors could convene and build alliances outside of French Polynesia, in a sense scale shifting by going above ground, one year after the publication of *Moruroa, mon amour* and the decision of the French to move the testing underground.

*Pacific News* from August 1989 contains reports on a protest event, and some accounts of the situation in French Polynesia. Other contentious events, such as the *Rainbow Warrior* and Papeete riots of 1987 have, for various reasons, been more publicized, but these accounts show a continuous and persistent struggle for independence that went on outside of global media attention. The *Pacific News* special issue reported that a hunger strike had been organized by Tāvini Huira‘atira<sup>593</sup> (*Tavini*). It was reported as successful. In response, the territorial assembly president, the old protégé and later competitor of Gaston Flosse,<sup>594</sup> Alexandre Léontieff (1948-2009), agreed to hold a special session concerning the tests.

The session that the *Pacific News* issue mobilizes around was held on 17 August 1989, and had on the agenda, as were the often-repeated demands of the anti-CEP claimants:

- 1-- the organization by the local government of a poll on local public opinion on the French test continuation.
- 2-- organizing a special commission for reviewing economic social and cultural effects of the testing.
- 3-- the creation of a scientific investigation into the health effects of the 23 years of testing.<sup>595</sup>

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<sup>591</sup> Mohamed-Gaillard, “Contestations océaniques.”

<sup>592</sup> Maillochon, “Les réseaux de militants contre les essais nucléaires français (1959–1996),” p. 26.

<sup>593</sup> Tāvini Huira‘atira translates to ‘People’s Servant’ or ‘Serve the People’, also known as Tāvini huira‘atira nō te ao mā‘ohi. According to Maillochon, Temaru came to political awareness in 1976, during a mission to Moruroa: “I saw the signs prohibiting going into the lagoon and eating fish, and in the coconut grove ... I made statements about what I witnessed. And that’s when the Danielssons called me. Then they became my mentors”. The Danielssons had, before the founding of the party, introduced Temaru to NFIP see interview quoted in Maillochon, “Les réseaux de militants contre les essais nucléaires français (1959–1996),” p. 216.

<sup>594</sup> Flosse is described in the *Background*, together with Temaru and other political figures.

<sup>595</sup> KTM BD Box 1008, *Pacific News* from NFIP, movement for a Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific. Vol 4 no. 8 August 1989, p 3.

This session, which the protestors claimed a success, was achieved by conducting a contentious event in the form of a public fast that was framed in religious terms rather than the more labour-conflict connoting hunger strike. An account of the public fast was narrated in this issue of *Peace News*. The public fast was reported as having started on the steps of the cathedral in Papeete, on 2 July, the symbolic date when the first device had been tested in 1966 (codename Aldébaran). The *Peace News* report noted that the 15 first protestors were joined by 18 more and were said to have attracted attention abroad. From a contentious politics studies perspective this is a framing of a scale shift, with the representation of international attention circulating back to the Pacific. International attention was thus gained and subsequently re-framed and used for epistemic authority locally, as important for affecting the assemblymen, politicians, and the public. Another element of the successful outcome purported in the narrative of the public fast was that the actors taking part in the collective action were represented as young, which connects the event to a recurring youthful motif in the wider peace and anti-nuclear protest actions at the time. The hunger strike was presented as an embarrassment to the local French government and French authorities. "... the media were daily reprinting the *Tavini's* press statements and letters addressed to Mitterrand and the high commissioner."<sup>596</sup>

As an assessment of collective action in anti-nuclear test internal communication, the *Pacific News* special issue underscores the crucial role of media attention in shaping the perceived success of such efforts. Media responses were actively monitored and incorporated into an evaluative process, serving as a means to gather insights on how to conduct effective protests. Greater and broader media coverage of an event was generally viewed as a positive outcome. Accordingly, the newsletter's coverage of the fasting protest serves a dual purpose: it provides a (positive) evaluation of the collective action and simultaneously reports on how the event unfolded.<sup>597</sup>

The spokesperson of the public fast collective action, Vito Maamaatua (later director of Temaru affiliated Radio tefana) claimed that the Maohi people had not been consulted in the establishment of CEP and neither were they heard when politicians, leaders, and trade union leaders protested, but rather they were ignored (see the discussion in Chapter 5 above on the similar argument presented by the Danielssons, built on their *histor* epistemic modality account of the test-site implementation).<sup>598</sup> The protest's historical date on the bicentenary celebration of the French Revolution and its declared rights of man is explicitly connected to a hypocrisy of refusing a popular vote, which they highlighted with their action. This was hard to endure for

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<sup>596</sup> KTM BD Box 1008, *Pacific News* from NFIP. Vol 4 no. 8 august 1989, p. 3–4.

<sup>597</sup> KTM BD Box 1008, *Pacific News* from NFIP. Vol 4 no. 8 august 1989, p. 3–4.

<sup>598</sup> Ibid.

the local government and AT representatives in power at the time. The standing epithet of “opportunistic Flosse”, leader of the conservative branch in the assembly, who had previously been supporting the protests, was reported to have jumped the wagon when things heated up.<sup>599</sup> Oscar Temaru from the Tavini party in the territorial assembly had purported the same agenda as the fasting action, and presented himself as squarely on the side of the protesters.<sup>600</sup>

The president of the AT, Alexandre Léontieff, is explained to have had doubts about the agenda for the special session. These doubts were in the *Pacific News* issue, contextualized with historic reference to the struggle of RDPT and John Teariki’s attempts to organize a popular vote in 1963 on the plans to install CEP<sup>601</sup> and that the then governor (Angeli) had threatened to dissolve the territorial assembly for meddling in defence matters “out of the AT’s jurisdiction”.<sup>602</sup> This historical reference to the conflict is a typical Danielsson line of argument, even if it is unclear who was the writer of this report.<sup>603</sup> The writer could have been one of the Danielssons, or someone who collaborated with them and read their work. As the Danielssons signed another text in the same special issue, the editors must at least have been familiar with their work.

In the same newsletter is a report by Bengt Danielsson and the campaign director of PCRC, Jane Cooper, commenting on the meaning of European market integration related to the independence question. Here follows a quote of this text from the pages of *Pacific News*, highlighting the critique.<sup>604</sup>

The fighting spirit of Polynesia’s leaders was revived by the French government’s badly timed transmission to the territorial assembly on 26 May (1989), a series of documents relating to the final steps soon to be taken to realise a fully integrated European Common Market by 1993. Very revealing of the colony’s totally dependent status, the various matters the 41 Polynesian assemblymen were asked for their opinion on had already been discussed in Brussels and agreed to by France ... this meant among other things that the 300 million citizens in the twelve countries forming this in many respects ill-defined European federation, would soon be freely allowed to settle and work in the French overseas territories.<sup>605</sup>

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<sup>599</sup> Ibid.

<sup>600</sup> Ibid.

<sup>601</sup> KTM BD Box 1008, *Pacific News* from NFIP. Vol 4 no. 8 august 1989, p. 6f.

<sup>602</sup> KTM BD Box 1008, *Pacific News* from NFIP. Vol 4 no. 8 august 1989, p. 8.

<sup>603</sup> See the previous chapter on the Danielssons’ work as anti-test historians.

<sup>604</sup> KTM BD Box 1008, *Pacific News* from NFIP. Vol 4 no. 8 august 1989, p. 8.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

Again, the social effects and control of immigration and population was advanced as an issue for the critiques of nuclear colonialism. Another issue, continually taken up and returning in the later literature on the CEP is that of broken promises. For instance, it is highlighted by Maclellan and Chesneaux that the French, in 1964 upon annexing the atolls for CEP use, signed a document to return them to the territory in the same condition as they were given.<sup>606</sup>

The text by Bengt Danielsson and Jane Cooper addressed the people who subscribed to the newsletter, thus making use of an internal movement resource contributing to a “Pacific wide” scope and claim against France’s domination of Polynesia. It was not so much directed to a public forum, but to people already on board with the connection between a nuclear-free and independent Pacific region as an idea. Further, the texts were in English and so spreading information on the Tahitian protests and problems to a wider Pacific Anglophone community critical of the tests. The Danielssons through their Pacific networks encouraged journalists at the time of the public fast to publicize it.<sup>607</sup>

#### **7.2.4 Epistemic tactics in action: Newsletters as infrastructures of scale, brokerage, documentation, and mobilization**

Newsletters in the anti-CEP corpus are more than ephemeral publicity tools; they are a durable format of knowledge-work that materially shaped how evidence, testimony, and political claims circulated between local sites and transnational arenas. Operated on thin budgets and by small editorial teams, these publications nonetheless performed four interlocking epistemic tactical functions: brokerage, documentation, scale-shifting, and mobilization, making them indispensable to witness activism. Together, these functions help contextualize newsletters as tools for Pacific anti-nuclear organizations in the 1970s and 1980s. As STS historian John Krige points out, knowledge does not circulate freely. Counter-hegemonic knowledge such as anti-nuclear discourse in nuclear colonial contexts, encounters numerous barriers, including censorship, media control, secrecy, dismissal, silencing, and repression.<sup>608</sup> These are largely practice-based categories of *politics*

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<sup>606</sup> Maclellan and Chesneaux, *After Moruroa: France in the South Pacific*.

<sup>607</sup> KTM BD Steel case 4, *Correspondence recente anti-nucleaire*. Correspondence with Kazuo Yabui and Editor-in-Chief Hiroshi Ishi took place between December 1988 and August 1989. Several letters were exchanged between Tahiti and Japan, referencing images and articles. These included photographs of the Mangareva shelter, the Moruroa base building, and other related sites, as well as references to texts. One notable reference is Chapter 34 of the English translation of *Poisoned Reign*, titled “Extraordinary Safety Measures”, which discusses the inadequacy of protection and safety measures at Mangareva following the 1968 hydrogen test Canopus, and testimonies from Mangarevans that confirm that the tests were both heard and felt. See also Introduction.

<sup>608</sup> For instance, the Danielssons’ letters were openly surveyed, and there were attempts to expel the couple. Other figures in the independence and anti-nuclear movements, faced similar repression –

of ignorance that the archive documents indirectly through traces of opposition. In contrast, more structural mechanisms of trivializing or naturalizing the effects of nuclear testing are primarily visible in discourse rather than in the archival records themselves.<sup>609</sup>

To analyse these newsletters effectively, one must consider the peace-media conjuncture of the early-1980s, which created opportunity structures for information circulation.<sup>610</sup> The circulation of information in newsletters was a part of this.<sup>611</sup> The Western and Japanese peace movement surge provided a political opportunity that allowed Pacific activists to connect with a broader network, bringing in external allies such as journalists, scholars, and activists, who could potentially re-witness nuclear colonialism.

First, newsletters operated as brokers. Editors curated, translated, and routed items – maps, eyewitness statements, annotated excerpts of official reports – into networks that linked islands, regional hubs, and metropolitan publics. The repeated appearance of *Damocles* in correspondence between Danielsson and Barrillot, and the reprinting of a Moruroa map in the *Third World Network* alert, are exemplary as such acts of curation of redistributed epistemic authority by selecting which traces to amplify and by matching local authors to receptive external audiences.

Second, they performed archival and documentary mechanics. In contexts where state documents were classified, dispersed, or redacted, newsletters aggregated fragments into retrievable dossiers. Reproduction and republication turned transient

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Pouvana'a was exiled, Charlie Ching was imprisoned, and demonstrators were beaten in 1987. Beyond direct political repression, broader forms of suppression targeted traditional land-use practices and communal approaches to environmental stewardship. Anthropologist Lis Kayser highlights how military infrastructure on Hao exemplifies this dynamic, "camouflaged" as a generous gift from the French military, Kayser, "Nuclear Nostalgia: Remembering the Nuclear Age at the Hao Atoll, French Polynesia." This aligns with the concept of *gift-farmakon* – a gift that, lacking true reciprocity, functions instead as a tool of control.

<sup>609</sup> See Higuchi, *Political Fallout: Nuclear Weapons Testing and the Making of a Global Environmental Crisis* for the early fallout debates.

<sup>610</sup> Wittner, *Confronting the Bomb: A Short History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement*; Robert D. Benford, "'You Could Be the Hundredth Monkey': Collective Action Frames and Vocabularies of Motive within the Nuclear Disarmament Movement," *The Sociological Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (1993); Robert D. Benford, "Frame Disputes within the Nuclear Disarmament Movement," *Social Forces* 71, no. 3 (1993); Burke, "European Nuclear Disarmament: Transnational Peace Campaigning in the 1980s." For an analysis of this peace movement-media conjuncture in Sweden see Öhman, "Peace Actions and Mainstream Media: Framing Nuclear Disarmament Protests in Welfare Sweden."

<sup>611</sup> This aligns with the concept of political *opportunity structure* in Contentious Politics Studies (CPS), where favourable political and social conditions enable mobilization. In this case, the convergence of social movement upsurges in Europe with independence struggles in the Pacific created a unique window of opportunity for internationalist solidarity. McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*.

witness activist accounts into citational material that could be referenced in NGO reports, parliamentary questions, or legal complaints. In this sense the newsletter is both circulatory medium and repository: it converts oral and informal traces into durable documentary form.

Third, newsletters were tools of scale-shifting. Editors routinely reframed parochial incidents like hunger strikes, water advisories, fishermen's reports, coral reef research etc. as evidence of broader processes. By repositioning a local event within regional or global frames, newsletters enabled claim-makers to contest the bounded authority of testing states and to solicit international pressure. *Peace Wave News* and *Action Alert* illustrate different tactical deployments of the same format: one projects outward, seeking mass moral identification; the other organizes inward, producing concrete instructions for action.

Fourth, and finally, newsletters sustained mobilization and internal cohesion in the anti-testing and wider peace/disarmament networks. They synchronized activity across wide geographies, kept active constituencies informed, and reproduced movement identity and morale. Thus, newsletters' dual register of internal logistics and external advocacy enabled groups to remain coordinated in daily work while simultaneously projecting coherent narratives to international allies.

These affordances, however, were shaped and limited by material and political constraints. Small runs, volunteer editors, and colonial controls over media and transport constrained circulation; geographic distances in the Pacific amplified these limitations even as new communication technologies modestly mitigated them. Moreover, the rhetorical strategies that succeeded in metropolitan publics sometimes created tension with local credibility: scale-shifting that gained international attention could be read locally as grandstanding, and the choice to anonymize testimony for safety could obstruct later verification. Comparative analogies (for example to *Solidarność*) are informative for understanding tactics.<sup>612</sup> *Solidarność* was, according to Tomasz Kozłowski's analysis of their early media mobilization practice, unofficially official. This meant that their protests and media were illegal, but the authorities still allowed and engaged with them.<sup>613</sup> However, while Polish strikers were illegal but tolerated, Pacific anti-nuclear movements faced an officially unofficial status as formally permitted but actively and actually repressed, thereby necessitating international outreach. The Pacific's vast geography limited underground media circulation, though communications technology helped mitigate this.

Kozłowski further, in his history of the early *Solidarność*'s mobilizing practices, emphasizes audio and cassette recordings of meetings and speeches as a medium of

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<sup>612</sup> Tomasz Kozłowski, "From Strikes to Solidarity: The Diffusion of Protests in Poland in the Summer of 1980," *East European Politics & Societies* 35, no. 4 (2021).

<sup>613</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1164.

mobilization, on par with the printed newsletters. Such material has not been readily available in the anti-test archives, but audio-protest material circulated for instance with Polynesian language reo ma'ohi Radio Tefana, broadcasting out of Fa'a'a, played a significant role in the test-opposition in French Polynesia during 1990s campaign as other radio channels in Tahiti were loyal to the French.<sup>614</sup> The newsletter's role should also be read against the politics of ignorance. Far from merely rebutting official narratives and organizing campaigns, newsletters made agnotology visible as they republished redactions and collected dispersed evidence that exposed gaps in state monitoring. In doing so, they enacted an epistemic tactic documentary appropriation through low-visibility media that used circulatory infrastructures to pressure institutions that otherwise controlled knowledge production.

Finally, caution is needed about causality and significance. The archival footprint of newsletters shows that they contributed to internationalizing the Pacific question and to coordinating material actions; but whether external or internal interest translated into substantive change, or whether external actors opportunistically reused Pacific knowledge for their own agendas, remains an empirical question. In tracing these circulations, it is thus interesting to ask whether broader geopolitical rivalries, and intelligence interest in independence movements and French nuclear testing played a role.<sup>615</sup> Mohamed-Gaillard's analysis of French policy in the Pacific does suggest moments where Anglo-US attention to French actions appears in the archival record.<sup>616</sup> What remains, though, is a question worthy of further study: how external actors noticed, interpreted, or reused Pacific knowledge practices during a period marked by heightened global contention over nuclear testing and geopolitical upheaval. Only careful archival triangulation across US, French, and regional sources could clarify whether such dynamics amounted to strategic intervention or merely reflected the converging interests of local activists and global observers.

In this context, newsletters became essential tools for both countering and generating narratives, documenting resistance, coordination, and sustaining activist morale. The nuclear-free Pacific movement's confidence in eventual success was evident in its language, framing struggles as winnable battles rather than futile resistance or a testimony of victimization. However, the heterogenous anti-nuclear groups also had to navigate the risks of overexposure of some issues, balancing local

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<sup>614</sup> KTM BD 2622, Item 52, mass fax call to action dated 1993 in French, with a call to demonstrate in favour of extended test moratorium in Paris signed by 56 organizations. Intended for Radio Tefana and Bruno Barrillot.

<sup>615</sup> See Jeffrey Richelson, ed., *U.S. Intelligence and the French Nuclear Weapons Program*, vol. 184, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 184 (Washington, DC: National Security Archive, 2006).

<sup>616</sup> Mohamed-Gaillard, *L'Archipel de la puissance?: La Politique de la France dans le Pacifique Sud de 1946 à 1998*.

credibility with global visibility. Ultimately, newsletters were more than informational tools, they were instruments of testimony, of resistance, and mobilization, in a more active than victimized political register, to speak with Fassin and David A. Chappell.<sup>617</sup> They provided a means for activists to connect across vast distances, articulate nuclear colonialism, and to assert a place in international disarmament discourse.

Newsletters functioned as a distinct format through which concrete epistemic tactics (brokerage, scale-shifting, mobilization) were enacted. They should therefore be understood as a primary site of witness activism's practical epistemology: the place where testimony is curated, evidence is procured, and local claims are translated into transnational pressure. This conclusion prepares us to turn, in the next section, from the media infrastructures that carried claims, to a documentary object of those claims – the UN and French technical and medical reports – to examine how activists repurposed those texts as instruments of critique under conditions of institutional non-knowledge.

### 7.3 Local Fallout, Global Frames: Knowledge Circulation, Measurement Disputes, and UNSCEAR's Reliance on French Data

The consequences of nuclear testing for public health have been and are still debated. The nature of the problem starts with what to measure: the external impact of direct explosions following data based on ABCC and the Hiroshima and Nagasaki explosions, which have been used to describe effects of tests and accidents,<sup>618</sup> or the internal dose, low-level, long-term consequences where particles spread out of vast areas?<sup>619</sup> This raises the perennial challenges of determining when to begin measuring radiation exposure, whether a dose threshold exists, and, if so, where it should be set – specifically, at what point increased radiation becomes dangerous or whether there is a direct, linear relationship between dose and health risk.<sup>620</sup>

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<sup>617</sup> Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*; David A. Chappell, "Active Agents versus Passive Victims: Decolonized Historiography or Problematic Paradigm?," *The Contemporary Pacific* 7, no. 2 (1995).

<sup>618</sup> See the discussion in the introduction on the LSS paradigm. Jacobs, *Nuclear Bodies: The Global Hibakusha*. This is why the Chernobyl accident can amount to only a couple of hundred deaths in the official numbers, or 32 as some estimates have shown.

<sup>619</sup> For instance, the milk example where two people can drink out of the same package and one ingests radioactive particles while the other doesn't, and years after there is a physical reaction.

<sup>620</sup> Higuchi, *Political Fallout: Nuclear Weapons Testing and the Making of a Global Environmental Crisis*.



These issues are further complicated by the lack of available data, often due to security restrictions and ethical concerns. This chapter section investigates how critical claims and oppositional knowledge are made by looking at critical reviews of UN reports and the cross-referencing between data on French and UN levels to obfuscate local fallout consequences.

Recently, with the release of some data on French Polynesia, at least some scientific studies have been conducted.<sup>621</sup> The problem of measurement – and its implications for issues such as eligibility for compensation – is addressed in the *Toxique* report, which examines the increasingly bureaucratic nature of France’s official 1 mSv dose threshold.<sup>622</sup> In anti-nuclear advocacy, one of the most pressing concerns was how knowledge about the consequences of nuclear testing was produced, formulated, and scrutinized. The systematic suppression, obfuscation, and containment of information constitution was argued to constitute a violation in itself.

The Danielssons’ archive contains illuminating correspondence on nuclear knowledge between Bengt Danielsson and various actors in positions of authority, highlighting who had the expertise and ability to withhold or disclose information on such issues. This correspondence reveals the processes of gathering information, documentation, and data, as well as the networked practices involved in seeking knowledge on matters that remained obscure in French Polynesia.

### 7.3.1 FOA contacts and Swedish detection expertise

In the 1980s, Bengt Danielsson corresponded with nuclear physicist (and astrophysicist) Ingemar Vintersved (b. 1938) at FOA, the Swedish National Defense Research Institute.<sup>623</sup> Their initial meeting took place in the early-1970s when Danielsson sought access to French UNSCEAR reports (see below) and visited

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<sup>621</sup> Vladimir Drozdovitch, Florent de Vathaire, and André Bouville, “Ground Deposition of Radionuclides in French Polynesia Resulting from Atmospheric Nuclear Weapons Tests at Mururoa and Fangataufa Atolls,” *Journal of Environmental Radioactivity* 214-215 (2020); V. Drozdovitch, F. de Vathaire, and A. Bouville, “Radiological Impact of Atmospheric Nuclear Weapons Tests at Mururoa and Fangataufa Atolls to Populations in Oceania, South America and Africa: Comparison with French Polynesia,” *Asian Pacific Journal of Cancer Prevention* 22, no. 3 (2021).

<sup>622</sup> Philippe and Statius, *Toxique: enquête sur les essais nucléaires français en Polynésie*.

<sup>623</sup> For an overview of Cold War military research in Sweden see Eric Bergelin, Per Lundin, and Niklas Stenlås, *Det dolda universitetet: Militär forskning i kalla krigets Sverige* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2025). The book argues that during the Cold War, Swedish military research operated as a semi-hidden knowledge infrastructure: heavily funded, only partially visible to the public, and producing outputs that shaped broader scientific and technical fields beyond defence. As we shall see this system also underwrote, through personal networks and informal connections, the anti-CEP archival and advocacy work, even if such support remained indirect and publicly invisible.

FOA's airborne radiation detection facilities. At the time, these facilities were particularly relevant to opposition efforts against the atmospheric tests conducted by CEP. In the years that followed, Vintersved advanced to the position of department director at FOA.<sup>624</sup>

Sweden at this time maintained an advanced system for detecting nuclear explosions so as to confirm and stabilize the regimes of control that were foundational for the international non-proliferation order and arms-control verification mechanics. With the Social Democratic Party (SAP), and disarmament diplomats such as Alva Myrdal, Inga Thorsson and Maj-Britt Theorin as guarantors,<sup>625</sup> and as an at least formally acknowledged Cold War neutral,<sup>626</sup> Sweden or at least Swedish data could, in listening for and detecting nuclear explosions, wield a certain authority regarding verification measurements and controls of treaty protocol compliance.<sup>627</sup> In the late 1980s correspondence with Danielsson, Vintersved refers to their early 1970s contacts, stating that indicative particles were no longer air-traceable (as underground tests had become the preferred method), but that FOA still had a device collecting data on a Sydney-Hong Kong freight ship.<sup>628</sup> Underground explosions were recorded by geo-seismic stations, observatories that register explosions.<sup>629</sup>

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<sup>624</sup> KTM BD Steel case 4, Folder 2189-2190. Letter dated 2 February 1988, from FOA 215 dir. Ingemar Vintersved to Bengt Danielsson. No. E 18 Ursvik E4, FAO. The letter is also annotated with Bengt Danielsson's hand referring to the UNSCEAR documents that he had wanted to acquire, and the contact to Dr. Erlandsson and his telephone number; Letter copy from Bengt Danielsson, 12 March 1988, to Vintersved, welcoming him to Papehøe.

<sup>625</sup> Rosengren, *Gendering Nuclear Disarmament: Identity and Disarmament in Sweden during the Cold War*. Alva Myrdal led the Swedish delegation on disarmament at the Eighteen-Nation Disarmament Committee and the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (CCD) in 1962. Inga Thorsson served from 1974 to 1982, participating in the CCD (1969–78) before its reformation as the Conference on Disarmament (CD) in 1979. Maj-Britt Theorin headed the Swedish delegation from 1982 to 1991. The discontinued Swedish nuclear program was “rediscovered” by the public in the mid-1980s, and Rosengren and Jonter argue that internal conflicts within the Social Democratic Party (SAP) over these extensive plans helped shape Myrdal and Thorsson's expertise in disarmament issues. Jonter and Rosengren, “From Nuclear Weapons Acquisition to Nuclear Disarmament: the Swedish Case”.

<sup>626</sup> Sweden's Cold War neutrality is ambiguous, not constitutional as in Austria or Switzerland. A central part of the Swedish Cold War neutrality was that it did not rule out its abrogation, a critical component being that Sweden retained the right and freedom to make decisions it judged to be in its own interest. It was thus a dualistic concept of neutrality, flexible and inflexible at the same time.

<sup>627</sup> See also, Philip G. Schrag, *Listening for the Bomb: A Study in Nuclear Arms Control Verification Policy* (London: Routledge, 2018) and its analysis of the arms control initiative of Natural Resource Defence Council.

<sup>628</sup> KTM BD Steel case 4, Folder 2189-2190. Letter dated 2 February 1988 from FOA Department 215 director Ingemar Vintersved to Bengt Danielsson. No. E 18 Ursvik E4 FAO.

<sup>629</sup> Seismic observatories became the foundation for the verification regimes of the Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). The Hagfors Observatory in Värmland, Sweden, was a pioneering station for such observations, actively promoted by Alva

In April 1988, Vintersved sought to visit the Danielsson household in Papeh ue on a four-day stopover while travelling to the Seventh Congress of the International Radiation Protection Association in Sydney. He was welcome, even though the Danielssons were not sure whether they would be home, and the correspondence reads that the visit should not only be business oriented but pleasurable as well.<sup>630</sup> Vintersved mentioned wanting to see some of the Danielssons' documents, and exchange information on the ambitions for building a detection network (suggested by Sweden under Maj-Britt Theorin's leadership of the Swedish UN Disarmament delegation, in Geneva 1983), with the guidance of the Danielssons' local expertise. This contact was an informal information/knowledge brokerage-trade-off between people interested in arms control, and detection possibilities. Their intentions were unverifiable to either of them, even though the letters indicate some level of mutual trust.

### 7.3.2 UNSCEAR reports and dissolving data on atmospheric test fallout

In the following, I analyse the critical elaborations on the work to procure central UNSCEAR (UN Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation) reports quoted in a *Livre blanc* on the tests that the French had produced in 1973 in response to international complaints and the case in the ICJ.<sup>631</sup> The 1973 *Livre blanc* and the critiques surrounding it should be understood in the context of test-site opposition

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Myrdal in the 1960s. The first observations were conducted in 1967 from a small croft estate. At the time of nuclear testing, seismic and radionuclide monitoring stations were in operation in the Pacific such as those in the Cook Islands, which were run by New Zealand, see Ingvar Nedg ard *H agforsobservatoriet, seismologisk verksamhet*, FOI. FOI-R – 1651 (2005); *Sipri Yearbook* (s): *World Armaments and Disarmament*, 1984, 1985, 1989, 1990. Civil society played some role in the establishment of verification regimes before the end of the Cold War notably NRDC cooperation with Soviet scientist associations Schrag, *Listening for the Bomb: A Study in Nuclear Arms Control Verification Policy*; see also I. Vintersved and L-E. De Geer report from 1975. It was translated to English in 1982 by the UN as *The Swedish Air Monitoring Network for Particulate Radioactivity* quote "after entry into force of the partial test ban treaty the main focus has been on the verification issue in point 1. Sweden has since long tried to contribute to the international disarmament efforts going on in for a such as the UN Committee on Disarmament in Geneva. To support the Swedish standpoint in the negotiations of nuclear weapons and nuclear test ban issues, the Foreign Office has decided to pay for a seismological observatory and the surveillance of airborne activity presented in this paper", p. 827. Found in KTM BD 3012, 11.2.5 Folder 7/10 , Vintersved, Ingemar and Lars-Erik De Geer, *The Swedish Air Monitoring Network for Particulate Radioactivity*; "IEEE Transactions on Nuclear Science," *Nuclear Science* 29, no. 1 (1982) 827–31. The Swedish merchant ship sampler is further mentioned in table III, p. 830.

<sup>630</sup> Ibid. KTM BD Steel case 4, Folder 2189-2190, Letter copy from Bengt Danielsson, 12 March, 1988 to Vintersved, welcoming him to Papeh ue.

<sup>631</sup> *Le monde*, 'Un  chec psychologique' 24 July 1973. The *Livre blanc* can be found here: <http://moruroa.assemblee.pf/medias/pdf/Livre%20Blanc.pdf> retrieved 2023-10-14, and in Bengt Danielsson archive: KTM BD 3009 11.2.4 7/8 with some notes by Bengt Danielsson.

from newly independent Pacific nations, as well as from larger Pacific Rim countries such as New Zealand, Australia, Chile, and Peru, all of which questioned France's atmospheric nuclear tests. Australia and New Zealand had brought the issue before the ICJ, arguing that radioactive fallout had affected their territories.

The Danielssons' networked investigation into the reports on the consequences of nuclear testing is significant, as it reveals the conditions that shaped the circulation – or suppression – of knowledge, including issues of access and the role of personal connections. This case also highlights how concerns about local fallout risks were mitigated or downplayed, while anti-nuclear activists consistently accused France of deliberately producing uncertainty and even fostering non-knowledge. The following section traces how the Danielssons obtained UN documents on French nuclear tests, documents that reproduced data collected by France and were subsequently referenced in the *Livre blanc* regarding the atmospheric testing and its consequences.<sup>632</sup>

Among other things, this analysis highlights the resources provided through their Swedish connections. The investigative practices examined demonstrate how the arguments presented in the first edition of *Moruroa, mon amour* were developed over time. To challenge the nuclear testing practices that were justified by France referencing to UNSCEAR reports (cited in the *Livre blanc*), the anti-nuclear activists needed access to these reports, as well as the underlying sources and references on which they were based. A key issue in obtaining and reading the UN reports was that they were found to rely on material produced by the French government, an aspect that itself became a point of critique.

The analysis of the Danielssons' efforts to obtain these documents in order to critically assess them reveals a practical process of claim-making and argument qualification at a pivotal moment in time. This period saw heightened international mobilization within the Pacific community to halt atmospheric nuclear testing, with the CEP at the centre of these debates. To substantiate claims of CEP's lack of transparency, access to fundamental documents was essential.

While drafting the first version of *Moruroa, mon amour* in the early-1970s, the Danielssons, through their archival research, formulated a critique of UNSCEAR reports for uncritically reproducing French data. For example, they pointed out that key studies – such as those on bonito and tuna, large migratory fish at the top of the oceanic food chain, as well as plankton research that could clarify the risks of consumption following atmospheric tests – were omitted from the French reports on which UNSCEAR relied.

Military physician Leguen, in *La Dépêche de Tahiti*, acknowledged that the early Moruroa tests were “dirty”, a point reinforced by the English edition of *Moruroa*,

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<sup>632</sup> KTM BD 3009, Folder 7/8 *Livre blanc sur les expériences nucléaires*.

*mon amour*. The following quote from the English edition further illustrates this point.<sup>633</sup>

A few days after the first explosion (Aldebaran) of the 1966 testing series, it actually became necessary to prohibit the eating of all lagoon fish because they had become so contaminated that they were no longer fit for consumption. This explosion took place at sea level on board a barge. Despite its feeble strength, it seems to have been quite poisonous for the submarine fauna. It caused massive destruction at point zero and various fission products led to secondary contaminations. Three explosions of this type occurred in 1966 and 1967.<sup>634</sup>

For the Danielssons, these accounts exemplify a broader pattern in which local, embodied forms of evidence such as fish toxicity, ecosystem collapse, and islander exposure were systematically displaced by the global frame adopted in French reports to the UN.

Next to the test sites themselves, the most exposed islands are Tureia, Marutea, Matureivavao, Mangareva, Vahitahi, Pukarua and Reao inhabited by populations varying between 50 and 500 persons. None of them figures in the reports either.<sup>635</sup>

The Danielssons argued that such omissions were not merely bureaucratic oversights but reflected a deliberate knowledge strategy: sampling locations and reporting categories were selected in ways that minimized detection of local fallout. In this sense, the reports did not fail to capture harm; rather, they were structured to produce ignorance, aligning with what agnotology and STS studies identify as practices of *strategic non-knowledge*. In this, knowledge was not absent but curated, rendering certain forms of exposure visible to the global arena while erasing the more politically consequential evidence of local contamination.<sup>636</sup>

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<sup>633</sup> Leguen quoted from *La Dépêche de Tahiti* in Bengt Danielsson and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson, *Moruroa, mon amour: The French Nuclear Tests in the Pacific* (Ringwood: Penguin Books Australia, 1977), p. 181.

<sup>634</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Moruroa, mon amour: The French Nuclear Tests in the Pacific*, p. 181. The construction of such arguments highlights the histor-method of layering and montage in the use of documentation, as well as the authors' voice within the investigation.

<sup>635</sup> Ibid. and KTM BD Steel case 2, Folder 2126 notes on UN report, fascicle paper noted: *Rapports Unscear, Notre critique, les Autres îles*. This section is particularly interesting as it combines copied excerpts from the book with the material to which they refer, alongside handwritten annotations, such as underlining, highlighting, and arrows. Together, these elements reveal how the argument was constructed, preserving the material traces of how sources were gathered, selected, and arranged in the process of reconstruction. The reports to the UN are located in KTM BD 3011, Folder 1.

<sup>636</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Moruroa, mon amour: The French Nuclear Tests in the Pacific*, p. 181ff.

The central critique emerging from the Danielssons' analysis of strategic non-knowledge is that French reporting to the UN, later reproduced arguments in the *Livre blanc*, operated through 1) scalar, and 2) thematic epistemic reorientations that systematically obscured local effects. By privileging a globalized frame of fallout assessment, these reports effectively redefined what counted as legitimate knowledge about the tests. This epistemic shift, repeatedly noted by critics, displaced attention from lived exposure patterns toward abstract indicators that were often irrelevant to the Polynesian context.

A telling example is the emphasis placed on the absence of milk consumption in French Polynesia, offered as evidence that internal contamination risks were minimal. This focus not only misframed the problem but diverted attention from the actual pathways of exposure, such as the routine and often unavoidable reliance on rainwater, which carried far greater risks of contamination. In this way, the reporting practices did not merely omit certain forms of harm but actively structured ignorance by substituting inappropriate metrics for context-specific vulnerabilities.<sup>637</sup>

The Tuamotu islands' inhabitants were, as the atolls lack freshwater, dependent on rainwater stored in cisterns as a freshwater source. In these water tanks, a higher concentration of radioactive materials was measured. The *Toxique* investigative forensic report from 2021 formulates an updated version of this critique, launched following some of the Polynesian health statistics and information were declassified in 2013-14.<sup>638</sup> According to *Toxique*, New Zealand's national radiation laboratory collected water samples for its annual reports on the French tests and increased fission products and beta radioactivity in rainwater tanks were occurring every year in connection with the French atmospheric test explosions.<sup>639</sup> The metrological data that the Danielssons had the opportunity to retrieve were comparatively incomplete,<sup>640</sup> while the authors of *Toxique* were later able to make digital reconstructions of weather (crucial aspects of wind and rain), during and after the atmospheric tests.

France's museum of natural history made biological surveys before the CEP was put in operation, surveying the islands most likely to receive fallout, aiming to find out what marine species were most susceptible to radioactive contamination. This material remained open, accessible to critics such as the Danielssons, and was

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<sup>637</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Moruroa, mon amour: The French Nuclear Tests in the Pacific*, p. 182; KTM BD 3009, Folder 7/8. *Livre blanc sur les expériences nucléaires*.

<sup>638</sup> Philippe and Stâtius, *Toxique: Enquête sur les essais nucléaires français en Polynésie*.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid.

<sup>640</sup> KTM BD Steel case 2, Folder 2126. Metrology and fallout, notes and article clippings from the early 1980s. Chronology of important events 1963–1964.

quoted in the *Livre blanc*.<sup>641</sup> However, one professor in the museum survey team, the ecologist Bernard Salvat, who Danielsson highlighted, expressed that these species were staple foods of the atoll dwellers' diet.<sup>642</sup> All these local species of coconut, crab, fish, squid, and sea birds were omitted from the reports to the UN, which the Danielssons note and question.<sup>643</sup>

### 7.3.3 Dissemination of *Livre blanc* critique to the University of the South Pacific, Fiji networks

In a long letter addressed to two Fijian biologists,<sup>644</sup> Danielsson expressed the argument related to the *Livre blanc* as follows: in French Polynesia, the radiation monitoring and protection agency was run by the testing organization, CEP. Given this, the accused functioned as its own judge on this issue. The territorial assembly representatives had pointed this out on several occasions from the beginning of testing. However, "... their requests remained refuted or left unanswered".<sup>645</sup> The data collected by the CEP were then transmitted to UNSCEAR, which, by reproducing and thereby endorsing the reports' data and findings, effectively authorized and validated them as knowledge that could be circulated back to verify the arguments of relative harmlessness of the tests in the *Livre blanc*. The Danielssons observe and critique this circular process of knowledge production and verification. It creates a mirroring pattern to the anti-nuclear mobilizing scale shift

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<sup>641</sup> KTM BD 3009, Folder 7/8. *Livre blanc*,

<sup>642</sup> Incomplete copies of this survey material are found in the KTM BD archive and information was circulated in reports throughout the test decades. KTM BD, 3011 Folder 2/8, *Reconnaissance geologique des atolls de Mururoa et Fangataufa. Etudes realisees: Principaux resultats*, rep. by CEA-DAM. At SPAA in Papeete, Tahiti, copies of the Dircen and Service mixte de control biologique report publication *Mururoa*, are present DIRCEN – SMCB, *Mururoa*, Paris, *Les Cahiers du Pacifique* 12 & 13, 1970. This report collected scientist at the Museum of Natural History in Paris and researched atolls from 1965. It shows an official scientific story of the test site, where the test centre meant an opportunity to study the "living atolls". The results of Service Mixte de Controle Biologique looking at the effects on the atoll over the test campaigns are presented in the foreword by the president of the Museum of Natural History and member of the SMCB, dr. Fontaine. In the introduction acknowledgement is directed to the French military army general of CEP Thiry and the CEP operation commander, Admiral Lorrain. Specialists responsible for each chapter are presented: Chevalier, Denizot, Mougins, Plessis and Salvat. On p. 48 of the report Bengt Danielsson's work from 1954, on the Puamotu language etymology of the word 'hoa' (reef ocean channels) is mentioned.

<sup>643</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Moruroa, Mon Amour: The French Nuclear Tests in the Pacific*, p. 181 ff.

<sup>644</sup> One of which had in 1970 been part of forming ATOM (against testing on Moruroa) in Fiji which organized the first NFIP conference. Johnson, Walter, and Sione Tupouniua "Against French Nuclear Testing: The A.T.O.M. Committee", *The Journal of Pacific History* 11, no. 4 (1976): 213–16.

<sup>645</sup> KTM BD Steel case 2, Folder 2126 letter to USP biologists, dated 1981.

to international arenas, where UN reports, in the end, could be epistemically scale-shifted back to the territory to dismiss local claims of risk.

Bengt Danielsson further notes in the letter that these UN reports were neither presented nor readily accessible to senators, the territorial assembly, deputies, or chancellors. This lack of transparency meant that the reports were not in open access to the Polynesian public representatives or local media, preventing independent scrutiny and verification.<sup>646</sup> Neither did the French embassies at Canberra and Wellington send report copies to New Zealand biochemists when requested to do so. The UN documents were not officially secret or classified, but neither were they widely circulated, in a kind of institutional gatekeeping or hindrance of this grey matter. Mimeographed versions were, however, distributed to national delegations<sup>647</sup> and kept in restricted access.

Bengt and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson could, however, in their position as knowledge brokers retrieve documents<sup>648</sup> and get them to Polynesia and the environment of the data's origin, through contacts in Sweden with civil society, defence, and the Swedish UN delegation. The Danielssons then forwarded the reports to technical experts/specialists and USP biologists from Fiji for evaluation and dissimulation.<sup>649</sup> In the task to get the reports, Bengt Danielsson had corresponded with FOA director of research, department 4, Kay Edvardsson (1925–2006).<sup>650</sup> Edvardsson remarked on the UNSCEAR reports and *Livre blanc sur les expériences nucléaires*:

UNSCEAR has always avoided making evaluations whether the nuclear tests are justifiable from the environmental (and surrounding environment) perspective. What

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<sup>646</sup> KTM BD Steel case 2, Folder 2126, letter to USP biologists, dated 1981, p. 2.

<sup>647</sup> KTM BD Steel case 2, Correspondence. Letter, by Kay Edvardsson from FOA answering B. Danielsson in Swedish, translation by me April 2, 1974. Bengt Danielsson had previously sent a request for the reports to Edvardsson. Dr. Edvardsson reported that the documents were not available on site, but since he planned a visit to UNSCEAR at the end of May 1974, he could then procure and forward the documents. Edvardsson also referred Danielsson to contact the UN directly for a speedier process and said that he could be used as reference for this request.

<sup>648</sup> See for example KTM BD 3011, 11.2.5, Folder 1/8, *UNSCEAR: Radioactive Fallout after the Nuclear Explosions in Polynesia, May-December 1970* (translated from French); and information on nuclear tests collected by Swedish authorities in KTM BD 3011, 11.2.5, Folder 4/8, Report, *Seismological Recordings of Nuclear Explosions in 1976 Obtained at the Hagfors Observatory in Sweden* (FOA) November 1978, English; KTM BD 3011, 11.2.5 5/8, Report by L-E. De Geer, R. Arntsing, I. Vintersved, J. Sisefsky, S. Jakobsson and J-Å. Engström *Particulate Radioactivity, mainly from Nuclear Explosions, in air and Precipitation in Sweden mid-year 1975 to mid-year 1977* (FOA) November 1978, English.

<sup>649</sup> KTM BD Steel case, 2 Folder 2126, letter to USP biologists, 1981, p. 2.

<sup>650</sup> Edvardsson was a medical physicist, who held the position as director of research at FOA 4 from 1966–1976. See Bergelin, Lundin, and Stenlås, *Det dolda universitetet: Militär forskning i kalla krigets Sverige*, p. 84.



has been done instead is a compilation aggregate processing of available data to count on the dose burden on the earth's population from different sources, compiling and evaluating data on biological and medical effects of ionizing radiation.<sup>651</sup>

Thus, the globalized fallout data perspective is presented to Danielsson as UNSCEAR's analytic modus. The UNSCEAR global radiation outlook does not infer that the French tests were harmless; however, the global-perspective evaluation instead necessarily puts focus on the relatively small contribution of the French tests on global fallout/contamination, in comparison to the US and USSR atmospheric test series during the 1950s and '60s. This contrasts to the witness activist position of claimed danger and non-knowledge practices on the local level, an observation that the Danielssons aim to testify and problematize.<sup>652</sup>

Edvardsson discloses his own position, in all probability not very far from that of FOA's official standpoint. As a Swedish military authority, FOA was in some sense officially neutral toward the Danielssons' project of critiquing the tests by providing information without clear evaluation, but perceiving the issue of French testing on the other side of the globe as of limited interest at the time. However, Edvardsson notes that the *Livre blanc* is wrong in its claim that the UNSCEAR verifies the harmlessness of the French tests.<sup>653</sup>

Once again, the circulation of authority and the hierarchy of knowledge – shaped by epistemic friction between institutions and knowledge artifacts concerning danger and risk – were redirected toward a global scale, thereby minimizing the relevance of local effects. Edvardsson's position was instrumental in constructing claims against the nuclear tests, contributing to a globalized discourse that relativized specific consequences, despite him not being directly quoted in the Danielssons' work. He advised Danielsson to contact UNSCEAR's Secretary-General, Francesco Sella, directly to request the relevant documents. Edvardsson also stated that Danielsson could use him as a reference and provided specific names and document numbers that he was aware of:

*République Française, Retombees radioactives a la suite des tires nucleaires en Polynesie.*

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<sup>651</sup> KTM BD Steel case 2, Folder 2126, Letter answering B. Danielsson from K. Edvardsson, FOA April 2, 1974.

<sup>652</sup> This globalization of atmospheric fallout as a large-scale environmental disaster was an epistemic process that had been ongoing in scientific evaluations, and anti-nuclear thinking since the mid-1950s. This process paved way for political opinion to control testing and the superpower non-proliferation regime of the 1963 LTBT and 1968 NPT treatises. Higuchi, *Political Fallout: Nuclear Weapons Testing and the Making of a Global Environmental Crisis*.

<sup>653</sup> KTM BD Steel case 2, Folder 2126 letter from K. Edvardsson, FOA answering B. Danielsson, April 2, 1974.

Juin-décembre 1966 (UN document A/AC.82/g/L. 1240)

Années 1967–1968 (UN document A/AC.82/g/L. 1276) 1269<sup>654</sup>

Mai-décembre 1970 (UN document A/AC.82/g/L. 1381)

Juin-octobre 1971 (UN document A/AC.82/g/L. 1407)<sup>655</sup>

A complete copy of report 1381 in English, *Radioactive Fallout after the Nuclear Explosions in Polynesia May-December 1970*, was appended to the letter to the USP biologists.<sup>656</sup> Thus both the critique of the report procedure, and the actual knowledge artefacts were spread through the Danielssons' networks.

The first 12 pages describe the methods whereby the fallout is measured. "The next 22 pages (2ème partie), describes how the radioactive clouds, produced by the eight explosions, travelled round the world."<sup>657</sup> However, the letter which comments on the UNSCEAR reports continues: "... the only exact measurements given, however, are the average annual amounts of strontium 90 in the milk in South America and Africa!"<sup>658</sup> underlined, probably by Bengt Danielsson. He further notes in the margin: "Well, Tahiti also figures in this table, but of what value is it to know the average annual value for an island, situated 800 miles from Moruroa, particularly if you keep in mind that nobody drinks any fresh milk in French Polynesia?" The conclusions of the report are correspondingly mainly on milk in South America and Africa.<sup>659</sup>

The letter reflects an intra-advocate stance, critiquing and disqualifying the French reports on nuclear fallout submitted to the UN. The Danielssons' work highlights and testifies to a lack of reliable information, exacerbated by the manipulation of scale and presentation. Although the Danielssons' opposition to the tests may initially appear to stem from a default distrust of the authorities' assurances of safety, later studies – based on declassified material – validated their concerns. These studies revealed that their critique was well-founded, particularly in highlighting the uncertainty and risks associated with the CEP tests, which were downplayed in official reports.

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<sup>654</sup> "1269" is noted with pencil in the margin, probably referring to another relevant report.

<sup>655</sup> KTM BD Steel case 2, Folder 2126 letter from K. Edvardsson, FOA answering B. Danielsson, 2 April 1974.

<sup>656</sup> KTM BD Steel case 2, letter to USP biologists dated 1981, describing the previous ten years.

<sup>657</sup> Ibid.

<sup>658</sup> KTM BD Steel case 2, letter to USP biologists, 1981, p. 21 of the enclosed report *Radioactive Fallout after the Nuclear Explosions in Polynesia May-December 1970*.

<sup>659</sup> Ibid.

For instance, analyses of declassified documentation in later years expanded dose estimates and indicated that a larger population had been exposed to fallout levels exceeding 1 mSv. While this threshold is somewhat arbitrary, it is the exposure limit defined by French law for compensation eligibility.<sup>660</sup>

In current research on the declassified French data, scientists note that “For national security reasons, (UN) reports included only summarized data that impacted the credibility of results”.<sup>661</sup> The Danielssons noted that the data in the reports to the UN were collected by stations for measurement situated at a maximal distance from Mururoa, hence highlighting a lack of immediacy, as these far-away stations would presumably not truthfully generate data of the general local exposure. The Danielssons further note that the reports did not mention the construction and constitution of the measuring stations.<sup>662</sup> So, the information provided was not seen as living up to standard, and simultaneously this information, and subsequently the information about the information such as metadata and protocol, was difficult to obtain due to layers of restriction, and national security concerns. However, it was also highlighted that the arguments from the reports were circulated back locally, in the form of UNSCEAR reports used in the *Livre blanc* to produce and disseminate this test (non-)knowledge locally.

Other points that Danielssons highlight in the French report of 1970 sent to the UN and subsequently used in UNSCEAR reports, recirculated locally in the *Livre blanc*, were the following:

- Atolls where food samples are taken are not mentioned by name, and the time of the samples varied, some long before and some long after tests had taken place.
- No data on rainwater (used for drinking).

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<sup>660</sup> F. de Vathaire et al., “Thyroid Cancer following Nuclear Tests in French Polynesia,” *British Journal of Cancer* 103, no. 7 (2010); Drozdovitch, de Vathaire, and Bouville, “Ground Deposition of Radionuclides in French Polynesia Resulting from Atmospheric Nuclear Weapons Tests at Mururoa and Fangataufa Atolls” (2020); Drozdovitch, de Vathaire, and Bouville, “Radiological Impact of Atmospheric Nuclear Weapons Tests at Mururoa and Fangataufa Atolls to Populations in Oceania, South America and Africa: Comparison with French Polynesia” (2021); M. Tubiana et al., “La Controverse sur les effets des faibles doses de rayonnements ionisants et la relation linéaire sans seuil,” *Radioprotection* 42, no. 2 (2007); Steven Simon and André Bouville, “Radiation Doses to Local Populations Near Nuclear Weapons Test Sites Worldwide,” *Health Physics* 82 (2002).

<sup>661</sup> Drozdovitch, de Vathaire, and Bouville, “Radiological Impact of Atmospheric Nuclear Weapons Tests at Mururoa and Fangataufa Atolls to Populations in Oceania, South America and Africa: Comparison with French Polynesia” (2021).

<sup>662</sup> KTM BD Steel case 2, letter to USP biologists, 1981, p. 2.

- No data on the nutritive animal species noted by the natural history museum survey (Salvat) as prone to absorb radioactivity, high radioisotope concentration.
- No data on plankton, and nothing about the “dirtier test of 1966”, and no health statistics.<sup>663</sup>

These deficiencies intersect with observations on milk consumption, underscoring the relevance of ethnographic insights in demonstrating the non-transposability and non-generalizability of certain exposure factors.<sup>664</sup> Local conditions significantly shaped risk profiles, rendering the data, if not strictly incomparable, at least highly resistant to comparison with other measurements of test effects. These factors further constrained the possibility of drawing reliable inferences, as conditions lacked both global and local uniformity; moreover, customs and habits remained dynamic, perhaps even more so than the ecological interactions.<sup>665</sup>

The Danielssons encourage the recipient biologists of the letter to elaborate and observe this in relation to the reliability and value of the UN reports.<sup>666</sup> One of the letter and report recipients, in a cut-out from the daily newspaper *Fiji Times* on 10 October 1981, presents himself as a “concerned scientist who has tried, without success, to approach the French government to obtain access to the scientific data which it uses as a basis for its claim that there is no health hazard”.<sup>667</sup> The biologist mentions the French report data reproduced in the UNSCEAR report of 1970 that the Danielssons had sent to him (without mention of the Danielssons), and that the additional data that was lacking could not be retrieved. Baines here describes the report as an “appallingly sloppy, unscientific record of an inadequately small number of radioactivity measurements from widely scattered sites”.<sup>668</sup>

Before corresponding with Edvardsson regarding the reports and the Livre blanc-knowledge issue of epistemic friction of scale, Bengt Danielsson communicated

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<sup>663</sup> KTM BD Steel case 2, letter to USP biologists 1981, p. 21–22 of the enclosed report *Radioactive Fallout after the Nuclear Explosions in Polynesia, May-December 1970*.

<sup>664</sup> For an elaboration of the relationship between lived life and nuclear measurement, see for instance Shannon Cram, “Becoming Jane: The Making and Unmaking of Hanford’s Nuclear Body,” *Environment and Planning* 33, no. 5 (2015); Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*.

<sup>665</sup> This can be compared to the statistically correct but ultimately absurd human model used to estimate and count future exposure near the Hanford plant, see Cram, “Becoming Jane: The Making and Unmaking of Hanford’s Nuclear Body” (2015).

<sup>666</sup> KTM BD Steel case 2, letter to USP biologists 1981, p. 2.

<sup>667</sup> KTM BD Steel case 2, cut out of newspaper, *Fiji Times*, 10 October 1981.

<sup>668</sup> Ibid.

with the SIPRI expert, and later leader, Jozef Goldblat.<sup>669</sup> Goldblat was an influential actor in the disarmament knowledge sphere. Having worked as head of the Polish delegation to the UN-affiliated Committee on Disarmament in Geneva, he wielded influence. On 23 February 1974, Danielsson wrote to Goldblat about the *Livre blanc* starting to formulate an argument, focused on the lack of knowledge, knowledge inertia, and agnotology present in the environment around the nuclear testing. In his letter to Goldblat, Danielsson quotes the *Livre blanc*, whose sources were unavailable to scrutiny by the territorial politicians:

“Le resultat de nos mesures et de celles qui sont communiquees par les pays etrangers au Comite scientifique des Nations Unies pour l’etude des effets des rayonnements ionisants permet de verifier l’innocuite de nos experimentations. (underlined (Sic!) in the *Livre blanc*)”<sup>670</sup>

Strangely enough, none of the elected representatives of the Polynesian people – meaning the senator, the deputy, the 30 assemblymen – have ever been able to obtain a copy of these UN reports, I cannot find any clear reference to these reports in the minutes you sent me. Could you therefore be kind enough to answer the following questions:

How voluminous and detailed are these reports? What sort of information do they present? Is it possible to obtain copies or have copies made of the most relevant pages?

In addition, I should also like to know how to contact the Swedish representative Dr. K. Edvardsson.<sup>671</sup>

The Danielssons uphold that even though the French Pacific tests’ international and global<sup>672</sup> effects were not significant according to the *Livre blanc* (and UN reports),

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<sup>669</sup> Goldblat was born in Lwów (now Lviv, Ukraine) in 1923 and passed away in 2012. During The Second World War, he fled to the USSR and later worked for the Polish government as a diplomat and disarmament expert. In 1969, he began a two-decade-long career with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), where he served as Director of Arms Control and Disarmament, becoming a key figure in SIPRI’s research team. Goldblat remained dedicated to the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones, actively keeping the concept alive in intergovernmental discussions.

<sup>670</sup> KTM BD Steel case 2, folder 2126 copy of letter from Bengt Danielsson to J. Goldblat 23 February 1974.

<sup>671</sup> Ibid. See above for the contact with Dr. Edvardsson.

<sup>672</sup> Measurable radioactive fallout from atmospheric nuclear tests was not confined to the immediate test sites but could be detected transnationally and globally. In the early 1970s, Pacific states and regional actors increasingly pressured France to end atmospheric testing, contributing to the eventual relocation of tests underground. These tensions unfolded within a broader international context of alliance politics and diplomatic friction between France and Western allies, particularly the United States, during the transition to the Giscard d’Estaing presidency. At the same time, concerns about the global circulation of fallout underscored the material reality that

the local effects on public health, ecology, democracy, and human dignity merited a stance against the test site. To reiterate the argument: UNSCEAR reports primarily addressed the aggregate, global impacts of nuclear testing on an annual basis rather than documenting or evaluating site-specific, local consequences. Nonetheless, these reports were mobilized in the *Livre blanc*'s re-circulated claims about the safety of the CEP test sites. Even when questions of scale remained ambiguous or unspecified, the *Livre blanc*'s representation of UNSCEAR's findings as demonstrating the negligible significance of the tests carried epistemic authority within broader debates. In this way, global scientific assessments were strategically recontextualized to legitimize localized assurances of safety, which the Danielssons, through their witness activist practice and tactics came to show.<sup>673</sup> The relative isolation of French Polynesia further obstructs the circulation of critical knowledge about the test site and its governance. This process is marked by inertia and inaccessibility of the reports, meaning that while central information may ostensibly be available to certain segments of the population close to the metropolitan centre, it is neither freely accessible nor widely distributed or easy to obtain by anyone.

The Danielssons and anti-test groups actively engaged with and exposed this disconnect between the formal availability of information and its actual inaccessibility. In practice, crucial documents remained out of reach for those most in need of specific knowledge. At this point, the Danielssons' role as knowledge actors became both pivotal and precarious – they wielded expertise from their position, enabling them to make informed claims, yet this also placed them under surveillance.<sup>674</sup>

### 7.3.4 Epistemic inertia and the counter-scale shift

Across the archives a persistent pattern emerges, as official forms of transparency such as reports, white papers, UN assessments, coexist with a practical opacity. Access to the documentary apparatus is constrained by classification, redaction, institutional gatekeeping, and the procedural labour required to obtain what appears to be 'open' material. I characterise this slowed, uneven availability as epistemic inertia: the combined effect of archival control, bureaucratic friction, and disciplinary expertise that stabilizes a particular distribution of knowledge and non-knowledge. Where power over the archive is a locus of authority, the

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radioactive clouds were not territorially contained but circulated through atmospheric systems on a planetary scale.

<sup>673</sup> Especially in its direction towards the larger Pacific Rim nations that were not involved as much in determining the local consequences.

<sup>674</sup> Maillochon, "Les réseaux de militants contre les essais nucléaires français (1959–1996)."

technoscientific assessment of risk becomes both a shield and a source of silencing.<sup>675</sup>

But there is a way of working around this for the witness activists and documentarians who had connections in several locations and the resources to exploit them, by examination and problematizing the sovereignty of the archives/documents in a knowledge economy, where most of the material is classified /restricted and the open material in practice constrained.<sup>676</sup>

Here, inertia is met with a reflective resolve in a method that does not only stop at a block-absence but instead questions it. For example: *Why does the territorial assembly not have access to the reports referenced in the Livre blanc?* Understanding the Danielssons' and other activists' positions through the lens of knowledge inertia aligns with broader developments in social movements and civil society over the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As historian of science and technology Topçu argues, technoscientific expertise increasingly internalized critiques, which in turn become increasingly professionalized and dependent on specialized expertise.<sup>677</sup>

Anti-CEP activists thus responded to this inertia not simply by demanding more data but by changing the terms on which evidence could travel. The chief epistemic tactic I highlight here is counter-scale shifting where the Danielssons could reframe global, aggregate findings (UNSCEAR's annualized totals; the *Livre blanc's* emphasis on global rather than local fallout) so as to represent local exposure pathways and consequences that the official scales rendered invisible. Rather than disputing the raw measurements on their own terms, they redeployed the same documents to show how a globalized framing could be used to occlude site-specific contamination.

This tactic required work, such as translation across languages and genres, brokerage between local actors and metropolitan publics, and a speculative inferential method that reads absences as evidence. It also depended on uneven resources and networks which were precisely the capacities that made figures like the Danielssons effective mediators of oppositional knowledge. Their interventions reveal how witness activism functioned as an infrastructural correction to institutional non-knowledge: producing retrievable traces where official channels

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<sup>675</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. For instance, arguing that control over the archives is a central point of power, where the house of the ruler is one of documentation, the place where power and knowledge emanate from.

<sup>676</sup> These efforts can be compared to the origins of nuclear secrecy and scientific endeavours to work around it in the time of the Manhattan Project, as described in Wellerstein, *Restricted Data: The History of Nuclear Secrecy in the United States*.

<sup>677</sup> Topçu, "From Resistance to Co-Management?: Rethinking Scientization in the Contestation of the Technosciences" (2022).

withheld them, and re-scaling evidence so that local harm could be heard in transnational arena.<sup>678</sup> However, the material also highlights a corresponding counter-movement: from international politics and disarmament initiatives – centred on global concerns such as fallout and the UN’s universalist ambitions – toward local effects. This shift was mediated in some sense (not in all senses) through what Fassin describes as *humanitarian NGO politics*, as well as transnational networks and a growing global interest in nuclear issues, framed as existential questions of humanity’s future survival and later, the human consequences of the post-testing life-worlds.<sup>679</sup>

Within this broader trend, where producing and refining critical knowledge became increasingly important as a means of making political claims, the significance of the test-site experience grew in parallel. This can be linked to events such as the European missile crisis and the Chernobyl disaster in the 1980s, which shaped public consciousness and provided recognizable, relatable reference points for knowledge claims.<sup>680</sup> The transnational movement of opposition knowledge and disarmament practices, however, was not without friction. Activist practices were constrained by material realities and were never entirely free-floating, even as archival materials and witness activism embodied ideals of unrestricted information, transparency, and democratic deepening through knowledge exchange.<sup>681</sup>

To summarize, this section has examined the critique of CEP related to the reports submitted to UNSCEAR in the 1970s, which were reworked and returned to the territory in the *Livre blanc*. In response to mounting international pressure over atmospheric testing, France’s 1973 *Livre blanc* sought to reassure the UN by emphasizing global fallout while sidestepping local exposure pathways. The Danielssons challenged these claims by seeking access to the UN reports and comparing them to the *Livre blanc*, arguing that the reports relied on selective data that omitted key Polynesian realities such as contaminated rainwater, locally sourced food, and the absence of population-specific health statistics. They further noted that restricted access to UN documentation reinforced these omissions, limiting the ability of local representatives and critics to contest official narratives.

Through their correspondence and research networks, the Danielssons demonstrated how a global framing of risk could obscure the lived consequences of testing,

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<sup>678</sup> Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism*.

<sup>679</sup> Fassin and Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood*; Fassin and Matthews, “Moral Economy and Local Justice” (2012).

<sup>680</sup> By the mid-1980s, the escalation of nuclear fear and the nuclear winter debate brought the possibility of apocalypse to wider publics; as Axel Andersson argues, this thinking may have paradoxically rendered the nuclear more human by framing imminent catastrophe through shared vulnerability. See Andersson, *Absolut Farmakon: Kärnavfall och Evighet som Tanke och Konst*.

<sup>681</sup> Krige, *How Knowledge Moves: Writing the Transnational History of Science and Technology*.



revealing the ways institutional gatekeeping shaped what counted as authoritative knowledge. Their critique underscored how the minimization of local effects had direct implications for public health, ecology, and accountability. Finally, this section's analysis leaves two analytic stakes open for the following section. First, it shows that contesting official claims was as much a matter of tactical circulation as of empirical proof: success often hinged on whether activists could get materials into the right formats and in front of sympathetic audiences. Second, it prepares us to test these moves under evidentiary strain. The Gambier ciguatera debates that follow offer just such a test case, where embodied superstes testimony, contested epidemiological methods, and strategic scale-shifting intersect, and will allow us to examine how effective these epistemic tactics were in compelling institutional inquiry and reconfiguring authoritative knowledge about the CEP.

## 7.4 Ciguatera as Epistemic Controversy: Ecology, Testimony, and (Non-)Nuclear Causality

Ciguatera (fish poisoning) is a foodborne illness caused by consuming seafood contaminated with ciguatoxins. It is widespread in French Polynesia, where it significantly affects local communities. Ciguatoxins are produced by small marine organisms, *Gambierdiscus toxicus*, which grow on reefs in tropical and subtropical regions. Ciguatera poses both a health and economic burden on communities that rely heavily on reef fisheries for their subsistence.<sup>682</sup>

French Polynesia has been the site of active Ciguatera research since the 1960s when an outburst of cases occurred. The causes behind the outbreak have been debated over the years, but it coincided with the CEP establishment. Disturbances in coral reefs, whether man-made or natural, are considered a significant factor in exacerbating the proliferation of ciguatoxic microalgae, leading to subsequent outbreaks of the disease. The algae responsible for ciguatera was first identified in 1977 (Yasumoto, tentatively classifying it as *Diplopsalis* sp.) and later described in 1979 in the Gambier Islands by Adashi and Fukuyo.<sup>683</sup>

### 7.4.1 Ecological, social and moral concerns: Ia Ora Te Natura

The Tahiti-national independence poet Henri Hiro (1944-1990) had, together with a proficient Tahitian marine biologist, Marie-Thérèse Danielsson and others, in

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<sup>682</sup> M. Chinain et al., "Ciguatera Poisoning in French Polynesia: A Review of the Distribution and Toxicity of *Gambierdiscus* spp., and Related Impacts on Food Web Components and Human Health," *Harmful Algae* (2023).

<sup>683</sup> Ibid.

1973 founded the environmental organization *Ia Ora Te Natura* (the living nature) to combat the testing on ecological grounds.<sup>684</sup>

Hiro wrote an open letter to the CEP-CEA (Commissariat à l'Énergie Atomique), questioning whether they could identify and investigate the direct or indirect causes of ciguatera related to the nuclear tests. This inquiry suggested that disproving the connection could serve to absolve CEP activities from any health-related accusations. While Hiro acknowledged that contamination from each individual test did not directly manifest as ciguatera, he pointed to the presence of strontium-90 and cesium-137 as contaminants. Despite the lack of established causality, Hiro argued that the temporal correlation between the onset of testing in 1966 and the ciguatera outbreaks made it a relevant concern.<sup>685</sup> Hiro exemplifies with the inhabited atolls Rikitea and Mangareva where all the fish had become inedible due to ciguatera poisoning, *indirectly* consequential from the tests, with the infrastructural works of CEP disturbing the oceanic coral reef environment.<sup>686</sup>

Historian Maillochon's research into anti-testing networks has found that during the 1980s, French intelligence services were concerned about the influence of *Ia Ora Te Natura* and intellectuals and political personalities of the younger pro-independence generations like Henri Hiro (1944–1990), Jean-Paul Barral (1944–2025), Turo Raapoto (1948–2014), and Jaqui Drollet (1944– ) within the cultural sector, viewing it as too closely aligned with the anti-nuclear and independence ideals of the *Ia Mana te Nuna 'a* (Power to the People) party.<sup>687</sup> This independence movement emphasized cultural heritage, language, and history, alongside the protection of the environment and the people. Hiro, being a poet, holistically expressed environmental sentiments, directly comparing them to the social effects of the testing. His work was consistent with local claims, aligning with the Danielssons' efforts to highlight and connect the sociology of colonial relationships with the environmental consequences in their popular works and also arguing that the testing had caused social fractures and immorality. A translated quote from Hiro's open letter reads:

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<sup>684</sup> See KTM BD Box 2620, Item 132 Article cut out from Nov. 12, 1979, where organisation *Ia Ora Te Natura* accuse an official delegation for not having fulfilled their duties when inspecting CEP; *Les Nouvelles* 3 April 1981, "A propos de Ciguatera et du CEP"; KTM BD Box 2623, folder 32, *We want to know*, folder prepared by FP ecologist organization "Ia Ora Te Natura", Cover and Introduction page, undated; KTM BD 3029, 11.2.8 Folder 1/8. "Ia Ora Te natura a l'assemblee: Ne votez pas le rapport de la commission d'enquete," 1979, article from *Les Nouvelles*; KTM BD 3029, 11.2.8 Folder 4/8 *Ia Ora te Natura*, document by Henri Hiro dated 1981, in Tahitian; KTM BD 3029, 11.2.8 folder 5/8 *Entretien de Monsieur Gauvenet avec le Ia Ora te Natura*, interview transcript, 1979.

<sup>685</sup> KTM BD Steel case 3, folder 2158 "Ciguatera". "A propos de Ciguatera et du CEP" *Les Nouvelles* April, 3, 1981.

<sup>686</sup> Ibid.

<sup>687</sup> Maillochon, "Les réseaux de militants contre les essais nucléaires français (1959–1996)," p. 164 f.

One could thus compare this poisoning of the natural environment to what is happening in the social realm: crimes and juvenile delinquency are not new phenomena, but if they have today reached extremely alarming proportions, it is certainly because of the upheavals caused by the establishment of the CEP-CEA.<sup>688</sup>

Through interviews with senior activists in Polynesia, Maillochon finds that there was an experimental mode of trying new methods of protest in these groups, which centred on cultural resistance and collective action. In this she finds the Danielssons' home on the coast of Tahiti is frequently mentioned in interviews as a key meeting place. It served as a hub for gatherings, discussions, and the exchange of knowledge, as the couple made their vast library available to opponents of nuclear testing. Activists also relied on support from countries opposed to the tests, such as New Zealand, where campaigners set sail to engage in acts of civil disobedience at Moruroa.<sup>689</sup>

#### 7.4.2 Poisonous or nuclear fish?

Disturbance and destruction of coral reefs with the test projects is said, by activists, to have caused a wide outbreak of ciguatera.<sup>690</sup> Fish poisoning is further interesting as an element of testimony as some internal debates occurred about how to handle its uncertainty and the (non-)nuclearity of it. There is a tension in claims and language concerning whether to consider ciguatera nuclear or non-nuclear that is interesting in relation to degrees of nuclearity, and how it is experienced and produced socially, according to anthropologist-historian Gabrielle Hecht.

A basic argument was framed as follows: the mortality rate of ciguatera is low, but the testimonies of deceased friends could be linked to either ingesting radioactive fish or succumbing to deadly ciguatera infections. Similar processes of accumulation occur with radioactive particles and ciguatoxins, where animals higher up in the food chain contain higher concentrations. Consuming both radioactive and ciguatoxins-contaminated fish would, therefore, have similar effects. A counter-argument raised was that such direct symptoms would require excessive ingestion of radioactivity. These connections between ciguatera algae and radioactive fish poisoning were made simultaneously by Temaru and his party comrades. In response, the French Ministry of Defence issued a denial, asserting that the patients were "suffering from viral hepatitis; there are also people suffering

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<sup>688</sup> KTM BD Steel case 3, folder 2158 "Ciguatera". "A propos de Ciguatera et du CEP" *Les Nouvelles* April, 3, 1981.

<sup>689</sup> Maillochon, "Les réseaux de militants contre les essais nucléaires français (1959–1996)," p. 169.

<sup>690</sup> Maillochon, "Les réseaux de militants contre les essais nucléaires français (1959–1996)," p. 218.

from ciguatera”.<sup>691</sup> This was a way to decouple ciguatera from the testing and to make it less nuclear by pointing to its non-nuclearity.

Testimonies in some of the material highlight the occurrence of fish poisoning, but often without attributing it to ciguatera. The diagnostic procedures determining what kind of disease or condition had been contracted are not described in testimonies; symptoms are described, but, not by everyone. Obsarm and Barrillot’s position on ciguatera is not clear, probably due to this uncertainty, and they focus instead on more obviously test-related consequences.

The Danielssons, however, argue that ciguatera, albeit not radio-induced, is a direct consequence of and clearly linked to the nuclear tests and associated geological disturbances. Ciguatera affects around 1,000 people each year. It is difficult to determine which fish are poisonous, as there are local variations within the same lagoon; the same species of fish can be toxic and taboo in one area, but edible in another.<sup>692</sup> This unpredictability mirrors the consumption of radioactive materials.

Dr. Raymond Bagnis, a medical doctor at the Malardé Institute in Papeete, conducted comprehensive studies on ciguatera outbreaks and concluded that disturbances or damage to coral reefs often preceded such outbreaks. After studying ciguatera for three decades, his suggestion in 2004 was that when reefs are damaged, whether by natural or man-made causes, toxic micro-algae proliferate on the newly exposed coral surfaces.<sup>693</sup>

In the 1960s, this was not an unequivocally accepted description. However, the data of Bagnis et al. that was publicly available pointed to probable causal chains between mechanic damage and toxicity.<sup>694</sup> As seen in the following, this was something that Bengt Danielsson and others sought to explore and investigate as a potential approach to expose them as test consequences, and something that needed to be studied deeper to understand (as a perhaps unknown consequence, or a lack in public knowledge regarding the tests).<sup>695</sup>

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<sup>691</sup> Ibid.

<sup>692</sup> Chinain et al., “Ciguatera Poisoning in French Polynesia: A Review of the Distribution and Toxicity of Gambierdiscus spp., and Related Impacts on Food Web Components and Human Health” (2023).

<sup>693</sup> *Marine Biotoxins. Food and Agriculture Organization, 2004. Chapter 7.* Retrieved from <https://www.fao.org/3/y5486e/y5486e0q.htm> January 16, 2023.

<sup>694</sup> KTM BD Steel case 3, folder 2158 Report by US AEC, AEC TID 57-48 *Health and Safety. A Study of the Possible Relationship Between Radioactivity and Toxicity in Fishes from the Central Pacific*, May 1960, Philip Helfrich.

<sup>695</sup> Documents concerning ciguatera, its causes and consequences, among others mentioned: KTM BD shelf C4, folder no. 90 (a whole folder named ‘Ciguatera’ with various copies and clippings); KTM BD 2621, Item 75. Excerpt from scientific journal, cut out, Dec 1967, in French. Defining ciguatera as a pathology from fresh fish; KTM BD 2623, Item 28 Copies de documents sur la colonization nucleaire de la P.F., containing two copies of an article of unknown publishing site

A US AEC report by the Hawaii Marine Laboratory sought to investigate and determine if there existed a relationship between radioactivity and toxicity of the fish, and established that such a relationship could not be found.<sup>696</sup> According to the AEC report, Marshallese test-affected communities at the time (1960, around the height of atmospheric testing) seemed to believe a relationship existed. However, on closer examination it was rather the relationship between test sites and intoxication that was closer to the actuality, given linguistic estimations of how these communities designate *radioactivity*, *nuclear testing* and *poison* with similar words.<sup>697</sup>

The report, in stating its aim, adjusts the focus of its study. Rather than examining the relationship between the US Pacific test site and fish poisoning, an issue of particular concern to residents living near the test site, it narrows the scope to explore the connection between radioactivity and toxicity.<sup>698</sup> By doing so, it arrives at a potentially reassuring conclusion: radioactivity is not linked to the poisoning. The report's findings thus function as a reassuring headline in the communicative power struggle and epistemic friction surrounding claims of (non-)nuclearity in fish poisoning, with the investigation's framing influencing the outcome. This reassuring tone, intrinsic to the inquiry's aim, made the AEC report valuable to the French testing authorities, providing them with a basis to validate and reinforce claims of safety without looking at the relation between the tests mechanical impact on reefs and ciguatera incidence.

An ecological study is in the report said to be published separately, which would elucidate the general causes of the fish toxicity.<sup>699</sup> Essentially, this AEC report says that radioactive fish were not poisonous.

Other contaminating qualities were, however, not researched, and arguments that are repeated in the following decades by test-advocates and official claims of safety

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quoting a CEP Admiral speaking in front of the AT: "It is dishonest to claim that ciguatera (fish becoming poisonous) is caused by nuclear tests."; KTM BD 3021, 11.2.6 1/10 Article copy, 1985, *Le Fléau de Mangareva: La Ciguatera*; KTM BD 3027, 11.2.8 4/5 Article copy, September 1958 in English. A review of ciguatera, with a tentative explanation of its cause, by ichthyologist John E. Randall. KTM BD 3028, 11.2.8 2/13, Copy of article in journal 1993 by R.J. Lewis & T. Ruff "Ciguatera: Ecological, Clinical, and Socioeconomic Perspectives", in *Critical Reviews in Environmental Science and Technology* Volume 23, Issue 2.

<sup>696</sup> KTM BD Steel case 3, folder 2158. Report name: AEC TID 57-48 *Health and Safety*. Introduction, p. 9.

<sup>697</sup> KTM BD Steel case 3, folder 2158. Report name: AEC TID 57-48 *Health and Safety*. Introduction, p. 2. A point regarding these misconceptions in official knowledge (reports) based on linguistic confusion on nuclearity, radioactivity, and the tests are taken up in Barker, *Bravo for the Marshallese: Regaining Control in a Post-Nuclear, Post-Colonial World*.

<sup>698</sup> KTM BD Steel case 3, folder 2158. Report name: AEC TID 57-48 *Health and Safety*, Introduction, p. 2.

<sup>699</sup> Ibid.

were presented.<sup>700</sup> Furthermore, these arguments had been raised before and were reiterated by Dr. Raymond Bagnis, who emphasized that the symptoms of radiation sickness and fish poisoning differ, and that species caught near test sites with high levels of radioactivity had not been reported to cause ciguatera-type poisoning. The report thus sought to completely dissociate the nuclear tests from fish toxicity, even though its scope and findings were too limited to support such a conclusion.

Over time, these claims were increasingly questioned, with Bengt Danielsson promoting further investigations. Links began to be drawn between ciguatera and the test sites. New investigations into the role of radioactivity were also called for, with questions raised about whether it could have caused the toxin to develop earlier than the cases investigated in the AEC's 1960 report. Dr. Tilman Ruff, an Australian medical doctor from Monash Medical School, wrote to Danielsson in a letter dated 28 November 1989. Some recurring arguments about the direct and indirect effects of the tests on the occurrence of ciguatera were also highlighted in an article by Ruff published in *The Lancet*, a public health journal.<sup>701</sup> The article was also presented and discussed at a conference at the Peace Research Centre at the Australian National University's Research School of Pacific Studies, where it circulated as Working Paper No. 63. In this version, Dr. Bengt Danielsson – alongside Nic Maclellan and David Robie – was explicitly acknowledged for supplying reference materials and commentary. This acknowledgment illustrates Danielsson's instructive role, if not a decisive one, within civil-society-based expertise on nuclear testing and in the production of knowledge surrounding the ciguatera controversy.<sup>702</sup> In figure 1 of this working paper (fig 11 below), we also find a reoccurring visual representation of ciguatera poisoning and its association with reef disturbance.<sup>703</sup>

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<sup>700</sup> KTM BD Steel case 3, folder 2158. Report name: AEC TID 57-48 *Health and Safety*, p. 13.

<sup>701</sup> Tilman Ruff. 'Ciguatera in the Pacific: A Link with Military Activities', *The Lancet* 28 Jan 1989.

<sup>702</sup> KTM BD Steel case 3, folder 2158. *Working paper no. 63*. Canberra, February 1989. Ruff here refers to *Poisoned Reign* and David Robie for their coverage of the test-site instalments, building projects, waste dumping in the Mangareva lagoon and the occurrence of fishing despite prohibition in some of the more contaminated environments.

<sup>703</sup> KTM BD Steel case 3, folder 2158. Ruff. *Working paper no. 63*. Canberra February 1989.

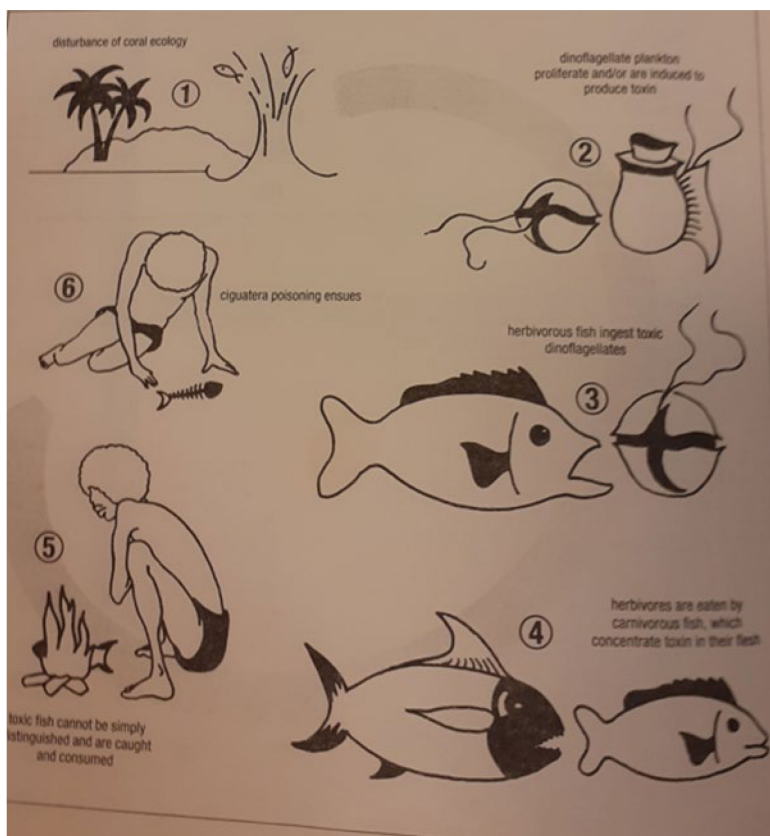


Figure 11. From Tilman Ruff, Working paper no. 63. Canberra February 1989 describing bio concentration leading to poisoning when consuming fish.

At the time, the mechanism by which dinoflagellates produce the toxins responsible for fish poisoning was still poorly understood. According to Tilman Ruff, the ciguatera outbreaks, which were linked to disturbances in coral ecology, were probably not caused by ionizing radiation. He argued that more primitive organisms, like the dinoflagellates responsible for the toxin, have a stronger resistance to radiation. “Sensitivity decreases considerably as we move down the phylogenetic tree”, he explained.<sup>704</sup> Instead Ruff argued that the coral death causing ciguatera outbreaks around Mangareva in the 1970s and 80s, and perhaps mechanics of

<sup>704</sup> KTM BD Steel case 3, folder 2158. Letter from Ruff, Tillman, quoted and type-copied by Danielsson. 28 Nov 1989. In map named “CIGUATERA”. Handwritten original in the same folder. Ruff would become a longstanding advocate for nuclear abolition and have leading positions in IPPNW and was one of the founders of ICAN Australia in the 2010s.

diffusing dinoflagellates in the ocean, generating global effects in the spread of the disease, could be attributed to “construction and shipping activities”.<sup>705</sup>

At the time of the letter exchange between the Danielssons and Ruff around 1989, fish poisoning was an element in nuclear critical testimony and bodily proof experience<sup>706</sup> but had an unclear position due to lack of consensus on what caused it to develop. Ruff and the Danielssons’ connections are illustrated in the letter, where several relations between key actors are mentioned.<sup>707</sup> Thus, they noted that a discussion on strategy emerged within the anti-test network regarding whether to emphasize ciguatera as a factor in opposition materials related to test-site experiences or not. Ruff, for instance, had discussed the issue with activist Philippe Siu, from the ecological organization *Ia Ora Te Natura*<sup>708</sup> and the Polynesian anti-testing politician Patrick Howell.<sup>709</sup> Danielsson and other advocates saw this as a clear public demand for further study, given the widespread and significant impact of the poisoning.

When Howell met Ruff in Hiroshima for the 6 August commemoration, he appeared willing to abandon the pursuit of ciguatera in the anti-testing advocacy. In a letter to Danielsson, Ruff noted that anti-test advocates had been influenced by Dr. Bagnis’ arguments. For example, Bagnis dismissed the argument that a collapse on the Moruroa Atoll had caused reef damage that facilitated the spread of ciguatera as a rather “facile and spurious” line of thinking. And Ruff counters this with the following lines:<sup>710</sup>

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<sup>705</sup> Ibid.

<sup>706</sup> *Testimonies*, booklet analysis, see below.

<sup>707</sup> KTM BD Steel case 3, folder 2158. Letter from Ruff, Tillman, quoted and type-copied by Danielsson. 28 Nov 1989. In map named “CIGUATERA”.

<sup>708</sup> KTM BD Steel case 3, folder 2158. Letter from Ruff, Tillman, quoted and type-copied by Danielsson. 28 Nov 1989 p. 2. In map named “CIGUATERA”. See also *Les Nouvelles* 3 April 1981, ‘A propos de Ciguatera et du CEP’. Open letter by H. Hiro. Marie-Thérèse Danielsson and Hiro was among the founding members of *la ora te natura*, a Tahitian nature conservation ecological organization, in 1973.

<sup>709</sup> Howell campaigned against the French nuclear tests in the 1980s and worked to establish a health register for test-site workers. In a 1988 article in *PIM*, Howell is quoted by David Robie, highlighting how the anti-nuclear movement was perceived in different ways at various points – sometimes seen as anti-French or independence-driven, but not always: “Speaking about nuclear issues is not being anti-French; it’s about taking responsibility for the future of our country and our children.” The political demand for the collection of test-site health data was central. The classification of health data became a significant issue that anti-test advocates sought to highlight and expose. *PIM* September 1988 Robie, ‘Mururoa Moves Shock Paris’ p. 33, retrieved 26 October 2023 from <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-338243883/view?sectionId=nla.obj-341703919&partId=nla.obj338280060#page/n32/mode/1up>.

<sup>710</sup> KTM BD Steel case 3, folder 2158. Letter from Ruff, Tillman, quoted and type-copied by Danielsson. 28 Nov 1989 p. 2. In map named “CIGUATERA”.



- that ciguatera has occurred in other places, and before the testing, does not rule out the testing (mechanics) as ONE of the causes.
- that it is related to port improvements, coral dredging, construction activities, etc. more (except at Moruroa and Fangataufa) than to the bomb blasts themselves “in no way absolves the extensive military infrastructure from causing outbreaks...”.
- the fact that ciguatera is not exclusively caused by testing in no way explains the dramatic rise concurring with the test implementation.<sup>711</sup>

Thus, ciguatera was, according to Ruff’s letter, one of few health effects of the tests that had been well documented, with data from the military personnel themselves, e.g. Dr. Bagnis, which clearly demonstrates the falsehood in the repeated claim that “the tests have no adverse health or environmental consequences”.<sup>712</sup> Ruff recognized that ciguatera was an important issue to highlight, but he also identified a broader strategic concern: that the focus on French testing risked diverting activist attention from the actions of Washington and the AEC, thereby diluting scrutiny of their own histories of nuclear testing and use. In this light, the evidence complicates Mohamed-Gaillard’s argument that anti-test activism primarily expressed an anti-French, Pacific ANZUS-Americanism, suggesting a more differentiated set of concerns and strategic orientations among activists.<sup>713</sup>

This debate on the consequences of the test site represents a wider view of the local effects of testing that connect military activities and practices to local health problems and destruction of sustainable environment, in line with earlier articulations of nuclear colonialism. In the same letter, Ruff refers to having sent a copy of Danielssons’ account (presumably the book *Poisoned Reign*) to Nic Maclellan (journalist and anti-nuclear writer concerned with the Pacific) and to other people who would be interested, such as the journalist Helen Fraser of *Pacific Report*, and the branches of professions against nuclear weapons organizations.<sup>714</sup>

A transcription of the ciguatera-related element of Ruff’s letter, made by Bengt or Marie-Thérèse Danielsson, highlights its utility in supporting the activist witness position that the Danielssons constructed. The transcription reflects a practice of keeping relevant information readily available, allowing them to easily retrieve it when inquiring, writing, or reading about the ciguatera phenomenon. Ruff, as a public health expert, embodied authority, and his account of Dr. Bagnis’ position

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<sup>711</sup> Ibid.

<sup>712</sup> KTM BD Steel case 3, folder 2158. Letter from Ruff 28 Nov 1989, p. 3. In map named “CIGUATERA”.

<sup>713</sup> Mohamed-Gaillard, “Contestations océaniques.”

<sup>714</sup> Original letter, from p. 3 of the handwritten letter (beginning with the second paragraph, “with regards to ciguatera ...”) is transcribed to a typewritten note.

could be seen as more effective than Danielsson's evaluation, despite Ruff referring to his observations on Bagnis' views as "personal observations", in contrast to his more scientific explanation of the bio-mechanism behind the increase in ciguatera.<sup>715</sup>

### **7.4.3 Section summary: Ciguatera, contested causality, and epistemic tactics**

The ciguatera controversy crystallizes this chapter's central argument about how oppositional knowledge is produced under conditions of scientific opacity and institutional gatekeeping. The surge in clinically reported ciguatera cases coincided with the inauguration of French nuclear testing in the Pacific, prompting prolonged debate among local clinicians, international researchers, activists, and state authorities over causal responsibility. That debate did not resolve into a single empirical truth; rather, it produced a set of competing framings shaped as much by definitional choices and disciplinary boundaries as by data.

Nuclear Weapons State-linked inquiries such as the US AEC study narrowed the question to whether ionizing radiation rendered fish toxic and concluded, within that restricted frame, that radioactivity was not causally linked to ciguatera. This framing was consequential, but perhaps not coincidental. By confining the object of investigation, the report produced a reassuring headline that could be mobilized by testing authorities across the nuclear colonial Pacific even while leaving other plausible causal pathways unexamined. In contrast, clinicians and field researchers, most notably Dr. Raymond Bagnis at the Malardé Institute, documented temporal correlations between reef disturbance and outbreaks, arguing that mechanical damage (dredging, construction, shipping, and other infrastructure works associated with testing) promotes the proliferation of toxin-producing dinoflagellates.

Activists, including Bengt Danielsson and groups such as *Ia Ora Te Natura*, deployed a set of epistemic tactics in response. They practiced documentary appropriation (reprinting, reproducing technical reports, circulating working papers), expert brokerage (soliciting public-health endorsements from figures like Tilman Ruff), and debated internally whether these links would obfuscate or support their wider goals and ambitions. These tactics aimed not to claim definitive causal proof, as the activists generally acknowledged scientific uncertainty, but to make visible the institutional silences, to widen the investigatory frame, and to compel further inquiry into locally salient mechanisms (reef ecology, food chains, infrastructural impacts).

The archival record of letters exchanged, Working Paper No. 63, reprinted figures associating reef damage with ciguatera, and repeated republication of clinical

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<sup>715</sup> KTM BD Steel case 3, folder 2158. Letter from Ruff, 28 Nov 1989, p. 2.

observations show how oppositional actors converted ecological observation and testimony of increased cases into retrievable evidentiary resources. At the same time, tactical choices carried costs: emphasizing ciguatera risked diverting attention from other culpable actors, and scale-shifting that attracted metropolitan sympathy sometimes strained local credibility.

Analytically, the ciguatera case is diagnostic. It demonstrates how contested causal questions are resolved less by single decisive studies than by a politics of framing, like who defines the question, which scales are permitted, and which institutional channels are opened or closed. The episode therefore tests the durability and limits of the chapter's central argument: that witness activism comprises a set of epistemic tactics deployed to overcome both specific and general instances of epistemic inertia, and to reconfigure what counts as authoritative knowledge about the CEP.

## 7.5 Chapter Conclusions: Networked Knowledge and Epistemic Scale-Shifting in Anti-CEP Activism

This chapter has examined how opponents of the CEP produced oppositional knowledge under conditions of secrecy, scientific uncertainty, and colonial asymmetry. Working from the Danielsson archives, I traced the backstage practices of claim-making in the 1970s–1980s – newsletters, documentary appropriation of UNSCEAR and state reports, and contestation over ciguatera – that together composed an ecology of oppositional knowledge production. The analytic aim has been to show how oppositional claims were fashioned, not merely that they were made. Methodologically, the chapter has treated activist archives as active sites of knowledge production (see above: Chapter 4. Archival Ethnography and Description of Sources). Theoretically, I have developed witness activism as a set of practical tactics such as brokerage, documentary appropriation, and counter-scale-shifting, that operate through formats (newsletters, briefs, working papers) to contest the NWS's epistemic authority (building on STS work and on testimonial theory).

Across the chapter, the analysis reveals a gradual, reflexive sharpening both analytically and strategically, within the Danielssons' work and their broader networks: the insight that a “global peace movement” could not be politically effective unless anchored in local struggles. The slogan “think global, act local”, circulating widely in the 1980s, was not simply a moral injunction but an epistemic one. It pointed to the necessity of grounding universal claims in situated knowledge, lived experience, and site-specific evidence.

This insight unfolded alongside the growth of mass anti-nuclear and disarmament movements in Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and the United States. These

movements strengthened and internationalized the call for a nuclear-free Pacific, a development clearly reflected in the Danielsson archives and in transnational activist correspondence. Yet this global momentum also generated new tensions: local claims risked being subsumed within broader disarmament narratives that did not always prioritize Polynesian sovereignty, ecological integrity, or historical accountability.<sup>716</sup> The confidence of the 1980s peace movement, as seen in *Action Alert* newsletter, reflected both a reflexive grasp of this moment and opportunities for scale shifts and internationalization. Within this moral media economy, peace researchers and advocates welcomed growing public attention to nuclear weapons yet recognized risks, especially for newly independent Pacific states vulnerable to external geopolitical influence. One persistent risk was that global rhetoric, including Greenpeace campaigns, could overshadow local demands for transparency and decolonization, reframing them as merely another front in a generalized struggle against nuclear weapons. This tendency became especially visible after the *Rainbow Warrior* affair and during the 1990s protests at Moruroa.

Three principal and interrelated conclusions follow from the chapter analysis. First, we have a methodological claim that the opposition archives were methodological laboratories. Newsletters, correspondence, annotated reports and working papers were not merely communicative instruments but instruments of epistemic production: they assembled dispersed traces into retrievable dossiers, sustained translocal networks of testimony, and institutionalized fragments into usable evidence. Reading these materials with a salvage logic allows historians to treat absences (redactions, embargoes, inaccessibility) as produced effects and therefore as analytically significant.

Second, this leads to the conclusion that witness activism in this context consisted in practicable epistemic tactics, and that scale-shifting was both a central and ambivalent tactic. Activists enacted scale shifts and counter-scale shifts: they reframed global aggregate findings to reveal local exposure agnotology; they brokered expert endorsements and translated technical material for metropolitan publics and appropriated official documents to reveal omissions. Scale-shifting is not simply rhetorical: it is procedural, requiring reformatting, aggregation, and endorsement to render testimony legible to international fora. That procedural work creates epistemic gains (visibility, institutional leverage) and epistemic costs (abstraction, potential attenuation of local specificity), a tension that explains both the successes and limits of anti-CEP claims. As Manuel Castells reminds us, such

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<sup>716</sup> This is a general conclusion drawing on the whole chapter on the newsletters, UNSCEAR reports and ciguatera-debates: KTM BD 3032, 11.2.9 5/6; KTM BD 3034, 11.2.6 2/5; KTM BD 3044, 1.1 3/3; KTM BD 3046 1.1 1/5; KTM BD 3046, 1.1 3/5; KTM BD 2632, A and B, two folders. Chronologie de M.-T. Danielsson (chronology of protests against French nuclear tests in FP); KTM BD 2623, Copies of documents concerning the nuclear colonization of French Polynesia; KTM BD 2623, Item 31, 2 articles, 16 June 1989. On French governor expulsion of the ecologist activist Dorothee Piermont from French Polynesia.

networked communication can challenge hierarchical institutions, but it is never outside power; it can also be co-opted, instrumentalized, or redirected by the very systems it seeks to contest.<sup>717</sup>

The chapter has reconceptualized epistemic scale-shifting as a core tactic of witness activism. Rather than merely moving claims upward or downward between local and global arenas, activists shifted between the concrete and the abstract, reframing what counted as “nuclear”, what constituted risk, and whose knowledge mattered. By casting an issue as *nuclear*, they connected it to international demands for recognition and action. This enabled local claims about contamination and “slow violence” to travel to the UN, UNSCEAR, the IAEA, the ICJ, and global peace forums.<sup>718</sup> Scale-shifting thus operated not only rhetorically but procedurally as a double mode of operations where, for instance, the pointing to NWS’ epistemic scale-shifting, which resulted in obscured test consequences, was a counter-agnostological tactic. However, without scale-shifting contention would remain confined to one level. Taking grievances up to the Sénat, to UN fora, or to international courts brings new actors, new norms, and new instruments into play, and in many cases initiates processes of institutionalization. Scale-shifting therefore operates as converting embodied experience into forms of evidence that are legible to transnational institutions (explored in more detail in the next chapter).

Third and finally this leads to an empirical claim that the ciguatera dispute exemplifies the politics of ignorance and how witness activist practice dealt with this, and uncertainties concerning causality strategically. The debates over ciguatera and its (non-)nuclearity make visible how definitional choices and investigatory frames determine outcomes. Reports that confined inquiry to radioactivity produced authoritative, reassuring conclusions even where broader ecological mechanisms (reef damage, dredging, infrastructure) remained unexamined. Activist combinations of field observation, expert brokerage (e.g. Ruff), and documentary juxtaposition sought to widen the investigatory frame and to render institutional silences visible. The archive thus documents a politics of ignorance: classification, restricted access, monitoring regimes, and disciplinary limits structured what could be known, and who could count as a credible epistemic actor (agnostology). The ciguatera controversy makes a temporal politics of knowledge especially visible. Official investigations, narrowly confined to radiological parameters, treated the absence of detectable radionuclides as evidence of safety. Activist counter-claims, by contrast, operated through a broader ecological temporality, linking reef

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<sup>717</sup> Castells, *Communication Power*.

<sup>718</sup> Conflicts over the meaning of the nuclear occur at every level. See Hecht, *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade*; Higuchi, *Political Fallout: Nuclear Weapons Testing and the Making of a Global Environmental Crisis*; Elisabeth Roehrlich, *Inspectors for Peace: A History of the International Atomic Energy Agency* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2022).

disturbance, food-chain disruption, and long-term toxicity. Here, agnotology was not simply a matter of concealment but of methodological narrowing: by defining the issue solely as radiation, institutions rendered other modes of harm epistemically irrelevant.

Rather than assuming a linear expansion from local protest to global recognition, this chapter has shown that anti-CEP activism unfolded through a series of uneven temporal adjustments to the epistemic conditions of nuclearity itself. In the 1970s and early-1980s, opposition emerged in a context where nuclear testing was not only geographically remote but epistemically insulated: harm was delayed, probabilistic, and institutionally mediated through classified measurements and expert-controlled thresholds. Under these conditions, the problem activists confronted was not simply how to make suffering visible, but how to render *absence*, latency, and uncertainty politically legible.

The Danielssons' work crystallizes this middle phase of anti-CEP witness activism as a form of epistemic improvisation. Before individualized survivor testimony or humanitarian moralization became available genres, activists operated through what might be termed infrastructural knowledge work: assembling newsletters, circulating annotated reports, extracting fragments from scientific assessments, and preserving testimonies that could not yet function as proof. These practices did not bypass scientific authority; they shadowed it, revealing its exclusions and temporal deferrals. In critical realist terms, activists worked to identify generative mechanisms of harm that were real but not yet fully manifest, while simultaneously documenting the institutional mechanisms through which ignorance was stabilized.

Through their knowledge networks, the Danielssons contested official narratives of safety and circulated counter-interpretations via newsletters, correspondence, and selective republication of scientific reports. Taken together, these findings reframe the history of anti-CEP activism: opposition was not only protest but sustained epistemic labour. Witness-activism in the 1970s-1980s was a backstage, infrastructural project – assembling, translating, and circulating evidence – that made later public and juridical forms of testimony possible. This reveals a structural paradox of civil society organizing: the need to remain locally accountable while operating within global arenas of legitimacy.

This tension mirrors broader late 20<sup>th</sup>-century transformations in humanitarian and activist politics, comparable to debates within Amnesty International, UN women's movements, and the shift toward testimonial humanitarianism described by Didier Fassin.<sup>719</sup> At the same time, scholars of science and technology such as Topçu and

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<sup>719</sup> Valgerður Pálmadóttir, *Perplexities of the Personal and the Political: How Women's Liberation Became Women's Human Rights* (Phd Diss. Umeå: Department of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies, Umeå University, 2018); Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*.

Callon highlight how technoscientific critique becomes entangled with processes of institutionalization and co-optation. This suggests that activist knowledge work of this kind is always double-edged: it can democratize expertise while simultaneously becoming dependent on it and subsequent technocratization.<sup>720</sup> In the case of the opposition to nuclear tests, this tension appears to consolidate in the early 1980s, perhaps as networked globality became more tangible with the rising communication technology and mass media activism by organizations like Greenpeace.

Compared to eyewitnesses and affected communities, framed as victims and innocent bystanders, the internal communications of anti-testing networks display a striking tone of forward motion, strategic optimism, and political boldness. This productive contradiction is central to the intellectual labour of witness activism and is taken up further in the following chapter through the work of Obsarm and Barrillot.

Although the Danielssons in their focus on sociopolitical critique, were not actors of humanitarian reason in Fassin's sense, they operated through a proto-humanitarian epistemic logic: they mobilized moral authority, testimony, and expert validation to make harm visible and politically actionable. Their approach diverged from state humanitarianism while anticipating the testimonial politics that would come to dominate NGO activism in the 1990s.

Internationally, French testing remained marginal in public debate for many years, overshadowed by Cold War nuclear politics. Only with Chirac's 1995 resumption of testing did a major backlash erupt, cutting across linguistic and geopolitical boundaries. This moment reactivated the universalist moral resonance of nuclear weapons – rooted in Hiroshima and Nagasaki – while also consolidating the post-Cold War non-proliferation regime, which fused strategic reasoning with ethical condemnation. Activist testimonial knowledge helped prepare the ground for this shift toward a humanitarian framing of nuclear weapons.<sup>721</sup>

The *histor*'s role in this context resembles a witness before an imagined future tribunal. The violence of nuclear testing was slow, uneven, and suffused with uncertainty. By foregrounding that uncertainty, the practical work of the Danielssons challenged narratives that sought to render the consequences of CEP as negligible or unknowable. Here, the test sites transformed the immediate

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<sup>720</sup> Callon, Lascoumes, and Barthe, *Acting in an Uncertain World: An Essay on Technical Democracy*; Topçu, "From Resistance to Co-Management?: Rethinking Scientization in the Contestation of the Technosciences" (2022).

<sup>721</sup> See Wittner, *The Struggle Against the Bomb. Vol. 1, One World or None: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement Through 1953*; Considine, "The 'Standardization of Catastrophe': Nuclear Disarmament, the Humanitarian Initiative and the Politics of the Unthinkable" (2017). See also Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory*; Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*.

environment into a precarious zone where bodies, ecosystems, and knowledge itself were entangled in regimes of secrecy and non-knowledge.

Following Leyla Belle Drake, to understand witness activism, we can imagine an epistemic geometry of testimony. At the centre stand victims and eyewitnesses; further out are field scientists and inspectors; further still are historians, lawyers, and international experts.<sup>722</sup> As claims move outward, they become more abstract, standardized, and institutionally digestible but also potentially less faithful to lived experience. Scale-shifting is therefore both generative and constraining: it creates pathways for justice while reshaping the evidence it carries. That movement is double, as it can amplify local harm by making it internationally visible, but it can also dilute or diffuse it, especially when institutional metrics privilege global indicators.<sup>723</sup>

Taken together, the three empirical domains examined in this chapter – newsletter networks, engagements with UNSCEAR, and the ciguatera controversy – reveal an ecology of oppositional knowledge production. Newsletters provided the infrastructure of circulation through which dispersed testimonies, documents, and interpretations could be serialized and preserved. The contestation of UNSCEAR reports exemplified documentary appropriation and counter-scale-shifting, where activists re-read global scientific assessments to expose their local blind spots. The ciguatera debate, in turn, demonstrated public-health contention under uncertainty, where activists combined ecological observation, expert brokerage, and tactical ambiguity to challenge institutional framings of safety. Across all three arenas, anti-CEP actors did not merely protest, they practiced knowledge.

The archival practices analysed here also set the stage for a later epistemic transformation. In the 1990s and 2000s, witness activism shifted. The archives analysed in this chapter document a formative but transitional phase of witness activism. They precede the humanitarianization stages of nuclear testimony observable from the late 1980s onward, and in line with Fassin's analysis of humanitarian logic that he identifies as commencing a decade prior or so. What these analyses reveal instead is a backstage epistemic labour: the slow construction of credibility in the absence of victims recognized as such, the accumulation of documents without an assured forum, and the cultivation of future-oriented claims addressed as much to an imagined tribunal as to contemporary institutions. It is this temporal orientation, toward delayed judgment and deferred recognition, that distinguishes early anti-CEP witness activism and prepares the ground for the

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<sup>722</sup> Drake, *Any Witness Competent to Testify: Witnessing Practices at the 1967 Russell Tribunal on American War Crimes in Vietnam*.

<sup>723</sup> Here Radkau's contrast between occupational/compensation frameworks and environmental/global narratives of harm/pollution is instructive, see Joachim Radkau, *Nature and Power: A Global History of the Environment* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 268.



testimonial turn examined in the following chapter. Chapter 8 thus traces that shift: how the practical, archival labour of the 1970s–1980s was transforming into testimonial formats that acquired new moral legibility and juridical purchase in a post-Cold War humanitarian idiom.



# Chapter 8. Witnessing, Testimonial Activism, and the Humanitarian Politics of Nuclear Harm

## 8.1 The Genesis of the Global Hibakusha as an Identity, Concept, and Category

Whereas Chapter 7 examined the backstage epistemic labour of anti-CEP activism in the 1970s and 1980s – through newsletters, archival fragments, leaks, and tactical contestation of scientific authority – this chapter turns to the emergence of public testimonial politics in the 1990s and 2000s. During this period, witness activism became increasingly centralized and legible, moving from dispersed epistemic fragments toward consolidated forms of advocacy such as publications, exhibitions, and curated testimonies. Here, the epistemic problems that had structured earlier oppositional knowledge such as the uncertainty of causal links, the opacity of nuclear testing, and the contestation of expertise were increasingly reframed as the authority of suffering itself. As Didier Fassin’s framework of humanitarian reason suggests, the moral and procedural legitimacy of harm could now serve as a form of epistemic leverage, shaping international debates over nuclear testing, disarmament, and environmental justice.

This transformation also involved a shift in the material and rhetorical infrastructure of activism. Where newsletters, internal correspondence, and selective documentary appropriation had constituted the backbone of earlier backstage knowledge production (and remained central), new forms of witness activism relied on internationally disseminated testimonial publications, curated exhibitions, and transnational networks of testimony. As such, what had once been counter-epistemological work of documenting CEP as injustice, strategic interventions to expose silences and contest official knowledge was increasingly integrated into humanitarianized knowledge production, combining affect, moral authority, and historical documentation.

These shifts are heuristic rather than rigid, as the suggested dichotomies: backstage epistemic labour versus public testimonial politics; archival fragments versus consolidated global witness publications; uncertainty as problem versus suffering as

authority; contested science versus centralized testimony – serve to analytically clarify the evolving conditions and epistemic modalities of witness activism. They highlight the ways in which temporal, technological, and political contexts shape both the production and circulation of oppositional knowledge, and how activists navigated new forms of moral and epistemic authority in the post-Cold War era. This chapter therefore traces the consolidation of witness activism as a structured, globally oriented practice, building on, but also transforming, the tactical and epistemic work documented in the previous chapter.

This chapter explores the evolution of more directly testimonial (eyewitness, *superstes*, *testis* and *auctor*) epistemic modalities surrounding nuclear test sites, focusing on how personal narratives became tools for awareness, resistance, and the correction of epistemic injustices. Building on the Danielssons' earlier knowledge work, it examines how Obsarm and other actors transformed testimony into political leverage and the meaning of this. To operationalize this, I ask how the Obsarm and AVEN activist archives document the concrete processes of collecting, framing, and circulating testimonies – through interviews, hearings, and human-rights submissions – and what these archival traces reveal about the changing praxis of “witness activism” as a method for contesting nuclear colonialism, shaping nuclear victimhood, and renegotiating epistemic authority in the Pacific anti-nuclear movement.

In May 1989, Kazuo Yabui, a journalist from *Chugoku Shimbun* in Hiroshima, reached out to the Danielssons, seeking to expose “France’s crime against the people of French Polynesia”. His project aimed to connect Hiroshima’s atomic legacy with contemporary nuclear struggles, fostering solidarity between Japanese Hibakusha and victims of French nuclear tests. This effort paralleled broader movements, including the *Global Radiation Victims’ Conference* in 1987<sup>724</sup> and initiatives like *Nevada-Semipalatinsk movement*, which amplified local voices in a globalized anti-nuclear discourse.<sup>725</sup> At the conference, Bengt Danielson held a session with the French Polynesian independence leader Charlie Ching on the situation in the territory. Kazuo Yabui’s letter contained an appeal from the Asia Pacific Radiation Victims conference, and quoted information from International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War.<sup>726</sup> Kazuo’s journalistic project aimed to “tell the

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<sup>724</sup> KTM BD Steel case 5, in the folder *Global radiation victims conferences*.

<sup>725</sup> KTM BD Steel case 5, correspondence recente anti-nucleaire 2189-2190. 22 May 1989, letter from Kazuo Yabui of *Chugoku Shimbun*. The Hiroshima bomb on 6 August 1945 had killed 113 employees of the newspaper and destroyed the building and equipment. See also Rozsa, “The Nevada Movement: A Model of Trans-Indigenous Antinuclear Solidarity” (2020).

<sup>726</sup> KTM BD Steel case 5, correspondence recente anti-nucleaire 2189-2190. 22 May 1989, letter from Kazuo Yabui of *Chugoku Shimbun*.

Japanese people about the present nuclear situation of the world from the standpoint of human suffering”.<sup>727</sup>

This statement of anticipated solidarity has links to the World Peace and Disarmament Conferences taking place in Japan. The Peace Wave collective action and the *Peace Wave News* newsletter, that was analysed in the previous chapter, emerged from this context. Further, it parallels Lisa Yoneyama’s account of Hiroshima and Nagasaki’s memory culture within the political history of Japan, particularly regarding the ideological struggle over nuclear disarmament, world peace, and over the history of the bomb. Japanese journalists and activists helped popularize the term Global Hibakusha, expanding its meaning beyond Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivors to encompass test-site workers, downwinders, and those exposed through nuclear production. The Danielssons embraced this broader identity, positioning themselves also within a global network of radiation victims advocating for recognition and justice.

This globalized approach to nuclear victimhood, combining localized suffering with transnational solidarity, contrasts with the earlier Cold War discourse on globally dispersed radiation exposure in the 1950s and 1960s as analysed by Higuchi, and in the critical analysis of the reports from UNSCEAR in the previous chapter above.<sup>728</sup> Instead of emphasizing statistical dispersion, it elevates direct experiential testimony as a privileged form of knowledge, shaping the humanitarian disarmament agenda of the post-Cold War period.<sup>729</sup>

Two Japanese journalists, Kazuo and Hiroshi Ishu, sought to develop a special project titled *Hibakusha of the World*, encompassing not only direct survivors but also residents near nuclear plants, production workers, engineers, test-site employees, and downwinders.<sup>730</sup> In a letter to the two newsmen, the Danielssons include themselves in a collective “us” alongside the Hibakusha and global radiation victims. They refer to people affected by nuclear tests as belonging to the category of radiation victims, individuals who can share their subjective perspectives and express a certain authority.<sup>731</sup> However, this is not the globally dispersed radiation exposure that Higuchi describes as being articulated in the late-1950s and early-1960s. Instead, it emerges through solidarity within a global network of locally

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<sup>727</sup> Ibid. My italics.

<sup>728</sup> Higuchi, *Political Fallout: Nuclear Weapons Testing and the Making of a Global Environmental Crisis*.

<sup>729</sup> KTM BD Steel case 5, correspondence recente anti-nucleaire 2189-2190. 6 December 1988, letter from Hiroshi Ishu to Dr. Danielsson.

<sup>730</sup> For an ethnographic exploration of the term, how it shapes identity on “nuclear places” and of nuclear victims today see Jacobs, *Nuclear Bodies: The Global Hibakusha*.

<sup>731</sup> KTM BD Steel case 5, correspondence recente anti-nucleaire 2189-2190. 14 January 1989, typed letter from the Danielssons addressed to Kazuo Yabui and Hiroshi Ishu.

affected communities. If Chapter 7 examined the backstage practices through which oppositional knowledge was painstakingly assembled under secrecy and uncertainty, this chapter follows how that dispersed knowledge coalesced in the late-1990s into a more openly humanitarianized, testimonial form of nuclear witnessing. This following chapter examines the epistemic and discursive practices through which such testimonies became political and legal instruments.

### 8.1.2 The role of testimony in *The Road to Abolition of Nuclear Weapons*

In the early summer of 1994, as the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II approached, *Asahi Shimbun* launched an extensive series titled *The Road to Abolition of Nuclear Weapons*, later collected into a book. This publication coincided with concerns about nuclear proliferation in South Asia, particularly in India and Pakistan, which was seen as the most feared form of horizontal proliferation by the five established nuclear-weapon states (NWS) and the broader non-proliferation regime. Bruno Barrillot commented on, edited, and reviewed the work.<sup>732</sup>

In 1999, *The Road to the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons* circulated to organizations in 107 countries, universities, and public institutions, positioning itself less as a campaign pamphlet than as a transnational reference archive for a post-Cold War anti-nuclear public. Rather than addressing a single national debate, the booklet sought to reorganize the field of who counted as a “nuclear witness”, weaving together the testimonies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivors with those of downwind communities, nuclear veterans, Pacific islanders affected by testing, and populations exposed to nuclear accidents. This archive of suffering thus linked various nuclear experiences from the rather immediate and “unwritten” Cold War historiography. In this sense, the project exemplifies a late-1990s shift toward the humanitarianization of nuclear politics: suffering, rather than deterrence theory, becomes the central evidentiary and moral frame.

Visually, the booklet simultaneously constructs what might be called a proof regime of disarmament. Images of dismantled B-52 bombers and musealized missiles do not merely illustrate compliance with the first Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty START I, (1991) between the US and USSR; they materialize a narrative that the nuclear age had already been superseded in the early-1990s. Yet this narrative is haunted by its own instability and ideological blindness. The book’s preface reflects on the 1998 nuclear testing in India and Pakistan, highlighting concerns that the world had ‘gone back’ or devolved into the past nuclear age – implying that this era had ostensibly ended in the early-1990s and thus these images of dismantled bombs transform from emblems of progress into relics of interrupted future evidence, not only of reduction but of how contingent and reversible that reduction proved to

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<sup>732</sup> Obsarm B66E, Box *Vétérans de essais la ora na*. Folder: *The Road to Abolition of Nuclear Weapons*.

be.<sup>733</sup> However, the book's authors take an ambiguous stance, blending reporting with an essayistic style, posing the question: "Have we learned nothing since Hiroshima and Nagasaki?"<sup>734</sup> The booklet thus stages a conflict between two temporalities: a post-Cold War narrative of closure and a persisting nuclear reality marked by proliferation, testing legacies, and unresolved harm.

The series urged readers to critically examine the state of nuclear weapons worldwide, not from the perspective of national security logic but from that of ordinary yet global citizens.<sup>735</sup> However, as Barrillot noted, the interviews primarily featured politicians, strategists, military officials, scientists, and peace activists – not the people more directly involved in the day-to-day work with nuclear testing.<sup>736</sup>

Across the Obsarm archives, worker testimonies from the test sites appear regularly in reports, books, pamphlets, and campaign materials. By the early-1990s, such personal accounts had become a central feature of NGO documentation and oppositional knowledge production. A 1992 campaign leaflet advocating a French nuclear test moratorium, for example, cited local Polynesian resistance and included the testimony of a former Moruroa worker (employed 1976-1985), interviewed by an unnamed researcher in 1991. This integration of first-hand experience into advocacy materials reflects the growing prominence of testimony as a political and epistemic tool.

The eldest one, born before I worked at Moruroa, did not have any problems. The second and third had health problems (the liver, cerebrum-spinal). The fourth died of miscarriage. The fifth, Pierre-Emile, was born in 1986. He was born without an anus and a kidney had to be removed. He was operated on four times in Necker (Paris). In 1987 I had a little girl who is fine.<sup>737</sup> I had to stop working on Moruroa due to the health problems of my boys. I worked with garbage there. After every explosion, we collected dead fish from the lagoon, there were also turtles and sharks. After this, everything was set on fire and we had to collect and dump the ashes in the ocean. Of course, it was forbidden to eat the fish from the lagoon. It was forbidden to eat coco. We had to cut the coconut trees, and we burnt everything on the motus (small atoll islands). I wanted to take back a coconut to Tahiti to analyse it, but it was a very risky operation, as the gendarmes were searching for us every time ... they said to us that we could not say or write anything to our women about what was going on there.

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<sup>733</sup> Obsarm B66E, Box *Vétérans de essais la ora na*. Folder: *The Road to Abolition of Nuclear Weapons*.

<sup>734</sup> Obsarm B66E, Box *Vétérans de essais la ora na*. Folder: *The Road to Abolition of Nuclear Weapons*, p. 8.

<sup>735</sup> Ibid.

<sup>736</sup> Ibid.

<sup>737</sup> Obsarm B66E, Box *Vétérans des essais la Ora Na*. Campaign planning leaflet by the organizations *Stop essais!*, *Solidarité Europe Pacifique*, and *Agir ici*.

When the vehicles had driven in the “forbidden zone” they were painted blue and then once worn out they were thrown into the lagoon. I also have health problems. Often, I have bad headaches and my hands itch ... I go to see the doctor, but he does not give me any particular treatment.<sup>738</sup>

The effects and consequences of witness testimony regarding historical events at the test site are shaped by the structure of the testimony itself. However, health consequences are not explicitly described as entirely established. Secrecy and lack of information are woven into the narrative, leading to a situation where a connection between hazardous work and illness can be inferred but not definitively proven through testimonial accounts alone. Establishing such claims requires scientific, objective measurement.

Genetic issues related to reproductive health and hereditary conditions are often introduced as initial concerns. In the scholarly edited work *Personhood in the Age of Biolegality: Brave New Law*, Trundle explores these themes in a chapter titled “Translating Proof”. She examines genetic personhood and the challenges of proving injury among British and New Zealand nuclear test veterans, arguing that:

Such a case allows us to understand how emergent genetic knowledge transforms how we understand the body and illness through the lens of genetic personhood, and how these translate or fail to translate into legal understandings of injury and deservedness. It also reveals how genetics creates opportunities to transcend the ethical limits of epidemiological research and its post hoc focus, as well as its reliance of death certificates and deceased subjects.<sup>739</sup>

Trundle further argues that proving claims of contested environmental illness fundamentally requires a process of translation. Personal and collective experiences must be converted into biomedical evidence and narratives of harm, while evidence of harm is, in turn, translated into ethical and relational assertions about human intentionality, responsibility, and blame.<sup>740</sup>

This process is neither linear nor predictable but unfolds through complex contradictions. Expanding on Trundle’s work on British test veterans, my analysis examines the conditions and consequences of testimonial claims in the nuclear weapons testing contexts. The framework draws from Fassin, Hållander, and Agamben, as developed in the theory chapter, linking testimony theory with my critical realist version of history of knowledge.

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<sup>738</sup> Ibid.

<sup>739</sup> Trundle, “Translating Proof: Contested Illness, Radiation Exposure, and the Health Claims of Nuclear Test Veterans.”, p. 75.

<sup>740</sup> Ibid.



In the late 1980s and early 1990s, global conditions enabled the formation of a broader Hibakusha identity and a surge in testimonial knowledge production, which increasingly influenced legal debates on health consequences and compensation. During this period, testimonies from test-site workers and affected residents were systematically collected and became central to advocacy for addressing the consequences of nuclear colonialism.

In *Les retombées du passé*, Yannick Barthe analyses what he terms a “paradox of victimhood” in the mobilization of former test-site personnel and affected communities seeking recognition and compensation. He argues that figures such as Bruno Barrillot of Obsarm acted as *victimisateurs*, meaning actors who, in his reading, reoriented public discourse away from narratives of technical competence, national service, and masculine heroism toward frameworks of vulnerability, bodily harm, and state responsibility.<sup>741</sup> While Barthe’s account is valuable for revealing how claims were institutionally formatted through organizations such as AVEN, Moruroa e Tatou, and through sociological instruments like *Moruroa and Us*, his concept of the *victimisateur* risks over-simplifying both the politics and epistemology of witnessing. It treats “victimhood” primarily as a rhetorical position rather than as a historically produced condition emerging from secrecy, occupational exposure, colonial governance, and epistemic uncertainty about radiation.

More importantly, Barthe’s framing underplays the practical labour of testimony: the painstaking work of assembling archives, linking dispersed experiences, translating bodily symptoms into recognizable medical categories, and confronting the state’s production of non-knowledge. What appears as a shift from agency to passivity can also be read as a strategic reconfiguration of credibility in a nuclear field where technical expertise, military authority, and colonial power had long delegitimized lived experience.

Seen historically, the “paradox of victimhood” is less a contradiction within activism than a symptom of a transformed nuclear regime in the 1990s: as testing receded, claims moved from battlefield logics of honour and duty toward post-Cold War regimes of accountability, health rights, and humanitarian recognition. In this sense, Barrillot and similar actors did not simply manufacture victims; they constructed a new evidentiary grammar through which nuclear harm could become publicly legible.

Victimization, as Barthe correctly acknowledges, is an imprecise term.<sup>742</sup> Barrillot, veterans, and test-site workers did not set out to cast themselves as passive victims; the framing of their claims as “victimhood” is often the product of subsequent discursive work. Barthe’s diagnosis – that counter-claims can end up producing a

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<sup>741</sup> Barthe, *Les Retombées du passé: Le Paradoxe de la victime*.

<sup>742</sup> Barthe, *Les Retombées du passé: Le Paradoxe de la victime*. p. 16.

paradoxical figure who is simultaneously agent and object – raises an important question about interpretation. My concern about the witness activist position is less with labelling than with process: I examine the concrete practices through which testimony was collected, translated into claims, and circulated in surveys and campaign literature. Doing so rescues veterans' self-representations from being preemptively refigured as passive and shows how claim-making itself is political labour that negotiates recognition, redress, and memory.

This procedural focus also illuminates the institutional counter-strategy. As Trundle shows for the British case – and as comparable tactics appear in US and French responses – official denial is not simply a refusal but a sustained evidentiary program: gamma records, safety protocols, selective epidemiology, and expert testimony are marshalled to construe exposures as negligible and to close debate. Reading veterans' testimonies alongside the documentary practices highlights a contest not only over facts but over what counts as admissible evidence, legitimate injury, and proper bearing of responsibility.<sup>743</sup>

Trundle finds that nuclear test veterans recall and describe a far riskier and less orderly military operation than that depicted in the official archival records.<sup>744</sup> Written testimonies from test-site life, which at the time were epistemically valued for their authenticity and immediacy, became central to activists' efforts to assert authoritative knowledge. These accounts functioned both as tools and as strategic counters to official narratives framed in technical terms. At the same time, many first-hand accounts adopted a measured, technical tone, creating evidentiary distance that enhanced credibility, *testis*-like. This move toward an objective, third party, *testis*, register is evident in the *Testimonies* pamphlet produced by Greenpeace, with which Barrillot was closely involved, and which will be examined in detail in the following section.

## 8.2 Texts of *Testimony*: Retroactive Uncertainties and Radioactive Experiences

This section examines testimonial texts produced by transnational anti-nuclear testing advocates, documenting experiences of those who lived or worked near test sites. It highlights how these actors generated forms of knowledge from below, centring lived experience as a legitimate source of authority in critiques of nuclear weapons testing. The accounts, often translated, edited, and compiled into coherent

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<sup>743</sup> Trundle, "Translating Proof: Contested Illness, Radiation Exposure, and the Health Claims of Nuclear Test Veterans."

<sup>744</sup> Trundle, "Searching for Culpability in the Archives: Commonwealth Nuclear Test Veterans' Claims for Compensation" (2011).

pamphlets or booklets, bear witness not only to the human consequences but also to the physical and symbolic presence of the test sites themselves, ground zeroes, evident throughout the Danielsson and Obsarm archives. In this context, printed testimonies functioned as activist tools, rendering the tests visible and tangible to audiences far removed from the sites. Their mobilizing power was amplified by broader cultural frameworks, including the nuclear sublime, the ethnographic/testimonial turn, and the pervasive societal anxieties surrounding nuclear fear.<sup>745</sup>

The Danielssons, Barrillot, and other activists with international networks also came to act as witnesses in a broader sense such as the *histor* position discussed in previous chapters, working to communicate the significance and regimes of secrecy around nuclear tests, not just for themselves, but for the communities and environments directly impacted. This section focuses specifically on personal accounts from non-activists presented in anti-test contexts that emerges as a category in the 1980s and 1990s.

Within an economy of credibility, these non-activist (while activist produced) testimonies from workers, displaced residents, and individuals embedded in colonial hierarchies, carry a perceived neutrality that strengthens their evidentiary authority. Facilitated by NGOs and networks such as Obsarm, Greenpeace, and the Danielssons, they bridge affected communities and transnational activist knowledge circuits. Archival records document both the accounts and the intermediaries who curated them

These texts operate in the *testis* register as retrospective, “objective” recordings of experience, while also performing the role of *superstes*, survivors reflecting on prolonged exposure to nuclear testing. A paradigmatic example is *Testimonies*, a late-1980s Greenpeace pamphlet compiled by Swiss physician Andy Biedeman, which foregrounds workers and residents rather than military personnel. Drawing on frameworks from Agamben, Hållander, and Fassin, the booklet privileges lived experience over simplistic victimhood, documenting chronic and structural harms, what Nixon would term “slow violence”.<sup>746</sup> It functions both as historical record and as a tool for transnational activist knowledge production.

By framing witnesses as survivors with analytic distance rather than as immediate victims, these accounts enhance evidentiary credibility while acknowledging potential epistemic fragility. Maps, photographs, and thematic organization situate

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<sup>745</sup> See Masco, *The Future of Fallout, and Other Episodes in Radioactive World-Making*; Conze, Klimke, and Varon, *Nuclear Threats, Nuclear Fear, and the Cold War of the 1980s*; Weart, *The Rise of Nuclear Fear*; Barthe, *Les Retombées du passé: Le Paradoxe de la victime*; Goltermann, *Victims: Perceptions of Harm in Modern European War and Violence*; Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*.

<sup>746</sup> Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*.

experiences within broader patterns of exposure and harm, transforming individual memory into durable knowledge artifacts. Across multiple editions in the Danielsson and Obsarm archives, these documents exemplify late-20<sup>th</sup>-century witness activism: mobilizing lived experience to contest secrecy, shape transnational awareness, and anticipate the moral frameworks that define humanitarianized nuclear discourse. Yet nuclear victimhood never fully entered a humanitarian framework.<sup>747</sup>

In witness activist practices, the central concern is the communication and validation of knowledge derived from direct, embodied experience of nuclear tests. A thematic analysis of these texts considers how they are constructed, what they convey, and how they function as knowledge artifacts within the broader archival record of nuclear testimonies. The *Testimonies* booklet first appeared to me in multiple editions in the Danielsson archive, in both French and English, and is also preserved in the Obsarm archive – where Patrice Bouveret, a key figure in the organization, introduced it during my research stay. Produced by NGOs and academic actors, these documents frequently incorporate maps and photographs to facilitate understanding. While situated within the genre of documentary literature, they employ specialized terminologies, thematic structures, and registers specific to their activist and historical contexts.

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<sup>747</sup> Fassin, “Critical Evidence: The Politics of Trauma in French Asylum Policies” (2007); Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*.

## 8.2.1 Testimonies: Witnesses of French Nuclear Testing

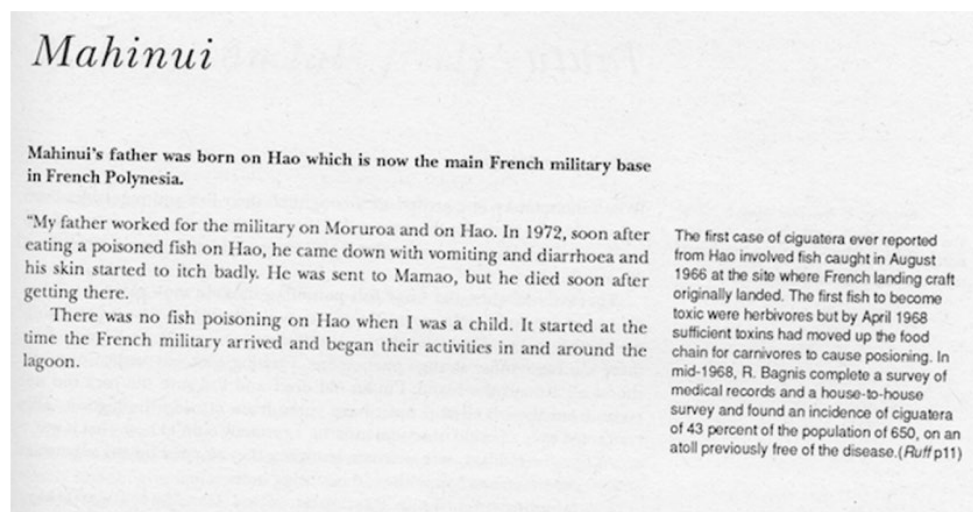


Figure 12. Excerpt from *Testimonies: Witnesses of French Nuclear Testing*, 1990, first edition (hereafter *Testimonies*), p. 26. Source: KTM BD: 3018. 8/11. Scanned by Anton Öhman.

In this case from *Testimonies*, the witness testifies on behalf of his late father, speaking in place of someone who has lost both his life and his voice. His testimony becomes part of a collective narrative of such short testimonial sections in the booklet, representing individuals affected by nuclear tests in Polynesia in various ways. The testimony appears in a booklet produced by the environmental peace organization Greenpeace, alongside 25 other similar accounts. The booklet states its purpose as shedding light on and raising awareness of the nuclear tests conducted at Moruroa and Fangataufa.<sup>748</sup> Through these accounts, the presence of the French military in the region, along with the associated risks and consequences, is articulated and documented in an experiential epistemic modality.

The *Testimonies* booklet serves as a medium for witnessing nuclear tests, contributing to a broader archive of testimony. By documenting how life and death in proximity to nuclear weapons testing were experienced and described, these testimonies functioned as arguments against nuclear testing and weapons programs more broadly.

A comparable example within this broader tradition of personal testimonies addressing uncertain nuclear conditions is Svetlana Alexievich's *Chernobyl Prayer*.<sup>749</sup> The act of bearing witness to exploitation and suffering has deep

<sup>748</sup> KTM BD 3018, 8/11. *Testimonies: Witnesses of French Nuclear Testing* (1990), p. 26.

<sup>749</sup> Alexievich, *Chernobyl Prayer: A Chronicle of the Future*.

historical roots, but it took on a distinct role as a form of knowledge in the late-20<sup>th</sup> century. This shift coincided with the rise of universalizing human rights discourses, the solidification of judicial states, the emergence of a global sense of justice, and also a certain Cold War-era (post)political opposition to governmental power over individual lives.<sup>750</sup>

The introduction of the *Testimonies* booklet establishes the framework and explicit intent of its message. According to this introduction, the testimonies consist of edited interview transcriptions conducted by the Swiss medical doctor, Andy Biedermann. For anonymity, the names of the interviewees were altered.<sup>751</sup> By analyzing its introductory and orienting features, the booklet can be read as designed to inform, evoke emotion, raise awareness, and spur action. It achieves this by centring the witnesses – presented as largely anonymous yet tangible individuals – whose experiences embody the human consequences of a cold, military-scientific apparatus. This focus on personal testimony marks a notable shift from earlier activism, which emphasized perpetrators and institutional responsibility. I interpret this as an epistemic reorientation within transnational anti-nuclear activism, reframing local experiences of the tests in a documentarian mode that privileges human voice alongside, or even over, structural or environmental critiques.

The booklet pairs these testimonies with visual elements – walls, geological cracks, maps, and the iconic mushroom cloud – creating a symbolic universe that reinforces the narrative. Footnotes and informational boxes underscore its pedagogical intent, aligning with Marie Hållander’s analysis of testimony as a medium for opening the subject to learning. In this context, the educational function is central, positioning the booklet not only as a record of experience but also as a tool for knowledge transmission and activist engagement.<sup>752</sup>

A notable point emphasized in the introductory text of the booklet is the cultural devastation caused by nuclear weapons testing, in addition to the environmental and health risks. The Danielssons also highlight this as a crucial counterclaim, arguing that the tests not only contaminate the environment but also disrupt local cultures. The military presence is presented as seeping into everyday life, and that the influx of currency and consumer goods profoundly transformed the islands’ social fabric.<sup>753</sup>

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<sup>750</sup> Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*.

<sup>751</sup> KTM BD 3018, 8/11. *Testimonies*, p. 3.

<sup>752</sup> Hållander, *Det omöjliga vittnandet: om vittnesmålets pedagogiska möjligheter*.

<sup>753</sup> Danielsson and Danielsson, *Förgiftat paradiset*; Danielsson and Danielsson, *Poisoned Reign: French Nuclear Colonialism in the Pacific*. This argument has also been inverted and in modernizing terms used to defend the establishment of the CEP test site, as it meant rapid economical growth in the territory.

### 8.2.2 Excerpts from *Testimonies*

The first dozen testimonies are from men working or having worked on the test facilities on the atolls. They describe working conditions and accidents, as well as how the tests were prepared and conducted. The workers' worries concerning themselves and their families are also vital elements of the testimonies. The first testimony is significant, as setting a tone and, furthermore, including several elements found in following testimonies:

My first job was in waste management. After each explosion, when the specialist with their Geiger counters had gone, we had to go round the atoll and clean the dead fish and other rubbish off the beaches. It was usually two to three days after the explosion. Depending on which way the wind was blowing, the fish would be swept ashore on different places, several tons of dead fish at a time. Once, not very long after a test, three dead whales were swept ashore, on the ocean side. They were very big, and we had to get cranes to move them away.<sup>754</sup>

This quote contains elements commonly found in testimonies critical of nuclear activities. Similar themes appear in Alexievich's chronicle of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. Recurring motifs include the under-protected worker and the soldier or local labourer performing hazardous tasks after the experts have declared an area safe for work.<sup>755</sup>

A pervasive sense of the uncanny and unnatural is another frequent element, something incomprehensible yet profoundly affecting the environment. This goes beyond common sense, as seen in the testimony describing dead whales that had to be removed from the shore with cranes. A crucial issue raised in these testimonies is the discrepancy between official maps and data, and the lived reality of contamination. Witnesses point out that wind, water, and marine life do not conform to the designated danger zones established by test authorities, yet these maps and calculations continue to shape testing practices.

Since environmental radioactivity constitutes a form of slow and lingering violence, witnesses often carry a capacity to testify about their own suffering and illnesses.<sup>756</sup> While they do not always explicitly claim a causal link, the implications are clear from the context. Some accounts recount the loss of friends, co-workers, and family members. Many testimonies describe how, at the start of testing, workers were unaware of the risks but soon realized that experts, officials, journalists, and politicians had access to vastly superior protective equipment and decontamination protocols – such as designated showers and specialized soap – when leaving test

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<sup>754</sup> KTM BD 3018, 8/11. *Testimonies*, p. 13.

<sup>755</sup> Alexievich, *Chernobyl Prayer: A Chronicle of the Future*.

<sup>756</sup> Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*.

sites.<sup>757</sup> Ruta, a test-site worker, says that after protests in 1983, workers stopped going unprotected into the forbidden zones. He had been working on the Morurora atoll for 12 years at the time of the testimony in 1988.<sup>758</sup>



*Figure 13. Photo showing protests in Papeete, French Polynesia, against the nuclear tests and the dangerous working conditions at the test sites. Source: Image from the publication Testimonies p.14. KTM BD: 3018. 8/11. Scanned by Anton Öhman.*

Figure 13 displays popular opposition and collective action against the low safety standards of work at the atolls; such imagery was juxtaposed with testimonial accounts in the booklet. The manifestation and the image display political successes and a hope that the situation will improve. An important theme that the testimonies bring up is consumption of contaminated foods, fish, and consequences following this.<sup>759</sup> Ruta testifies:

People died from eating contaminated fish. One of my friends ate a crab and became ill. His skin started to itch, and he scratched himself so much that he started to bleed but they couldn't stop scratching. Then he got problems with his eyesight and soon afterwards, he died.<sup>760</sup>

<sup>757</sup> KTM BD 3018, 8/11. *Testimonies* p. 13.

<sup>758</sup> KTM BD 3018, 8/11. *Testimonies* p. 18.

<sup>759</sup> Compare to chapter 7 on ciguatera.

<sup>760</sup> KTM BD 3018, 8/11. *Testimonies* p. 18.



This testimony about the death of a friend echoes many others in the collection, situating the nuclear tests within a once familiar and trusted environment where harvesting food from the ocean was not only essential for survival but integral to Polynesian subsistence and culinary culture. The accounts convey an almost dehumanized and exceptional existence, in which the test site and its consequences violently disrupted the rhythms of everyday life and death.

Following Trouillot, these testimonies also point to the productive tension between presence and absence in historical knowledge. Each account is necessarily partial – never fully capturing the entirety of lived experience – yet it holds the potential to resonate with readers, bridging gaps left by institutional silences and official omissions.

“When people die on Moruroa they are put in metal coffins, and the seams are welded so that nobody can open them anymore.”<sup>761</sup>

In this sense, the welded metal coffins at Moruroa, described in one account, do more than attest to the physical consequences of testing; they exemplify the ways in which official practices generate absences in the historical record while simultaneously producing new sites of knowledge and moral reflection, echoing the dynamics of witnessing explored by Alexievich in the aftermath of Chernobyl.

This quote highlights a world where the usual order is suspended, and where the causes of death and contamination are deliberately obscured. Work at the test sites is depicted as radically distinct from ordinary labour – almost surreal – particularly in relation to fundamental human experiences such as death and the handling of bodies. For the anti-testing advocacy, the containment and concealment of bodies symbolizes the inhumanity of nuclear testing programs. Through such testimony, the hidden injustices of the tests are revealed, showing how radioactive fallout permeates daily life, extending even into rituals of death.

The pamphlet also emphasizes the perspectives of the workers themselves. By the later stages of testing, many were aware of the risks – the deaths of colleagues, potential long-term effects on their families, and reproductive health concerns – yet they continued to take on this work, highlighting the complex interplay of necessity, coercion, and complicity within the nuclear testing apparatus and nuclear colonialism.

The primary reason was widespread unemployment, as the region underwent a rapid transition from subsistence-based livelihoods to a militarized capitalist economy. Working for the CEP and the French military provided comparatively high wages and a higher standard of living. The most hazardous jobs – those in the most contaminated areas, where the risks were undeniable – offered even greater pay for

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<sup>761</sup> KTM BD 3018, 8/11. *Testimonies*, p. 21.

shorter working hours. This economic incentive led workers like Manutahi, one of the witnesses, to accept these dangerous conditions despite the known risks.<sup>762</sup>

The information workers received is closely tied to the issue of consent within the employer-employee relationship, which is also highlighted. This dynamic underscores the nature of the relationship between workers, local inhabitants near the test sites, and the test administration. Through the testimonies, a clear power imbalance emerges, pointing toward systemic injustice.

Notably, the witnesses refer to the French military and the institution responsible for conducting the tests, the CEP, in a vague and impersonal manner. They frequently use the term *them*, referring to an ambiguous authority, and their accounts often follow a similar pattern: *We were told to do this and that*, or *They informed us about (...)*. As employees, the workers were permitted to do certain things while being restricted from others, effectively placing them under CEP's control during their time at the test sites. However, despite this control, safety measures in daily work were described as inadequate. This creates an image of an external, anonymous force dictating actions while failing to ensure protection.

The threats and risks described in the testimonies are not always portrayed as dramatic but rather as the result of minor mishaps in daily work – particles ending up in the wrong place, a small mistake, or simply an unknown danger lurking in the background. Harm is often described as something that *just happens*, while the broader context – why the tests were being conducted, why the workers were there, and who exactly was in control – remains largely unarticulated in *Testimonies*.<sup>763</sup>

As will be demonstrated later, these patterns align with findings from the section on imagery. Both anti-nuclear imagery and testimonies tend to focus on material phenomena – concrete, observable objects – even when some, like radioactive particles, are invisible to the naked eye. While elements such as the iconic mushroom cloud in anti-nuclear imagery or the radioactive particles described in testimonies are treated as discrete and identifiable, the human systems and activities that produce them often remain obscured.

One witness describes a pervasive culture of silence at the test sites. Self-censorship was a common practice, driven by fear of repercussions – an issue echoed in other testimonies. Hopu, the chief engineer on the ship *Marara*, which collected water samples for the CEP after test explosions, directly witnessed their immediate effects. He stated:

Half an hour after the tests we sailed closer to Moruroa to collect water samples. The water did not look like water anymore. It was thick and looked like wax. We stayed

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<sup>762</sup> KTM BD 3018, 8/11. *Testimonies*.

<sup>763</sup> *Ibid.*

there between 24 to 48 hours and took samples and investigated them in the laboratory onboard the ship. We had to wear protective equipment all the time to protect us from the radioactive dust. It was really hard to wear the equipment for 24 hours. We also had to wear a tablet measuring the amount of radiation. Of course, they never told us what the results showed.<sup>764</sup>

Hopu's testimony reveals the immense pressure and pervasive risks faced by test-site workers. After each explosion, heightened tension reflected the threat of contamination in air, land, and water. Although Hopu never received health check-ups, he recalls meticulous cleaning of ships and equipment following each test. He links these working conditions to his long-term struggles with fertility, underscoring the profound sense of insecurity nuclear testing instilled in the local community.

The secrecy surrounding test results and the broader lack of knowledge about the tests' consequences fuelled widespread uncertainty. Hopu also notes that samples from atolls and islands hundreds of miles from Moruroa indicated radioactive contamination in fish and water. Yet the French government's 1973 *Livre blanc* attributed such fallout incidence to global nuclear testing rather than the regional tests – a position the Danielssons' history account, as analysed above, critically interrogates.<sup>765</sup>

Hopu goes on to testify of CEP-secrecy through an incident in which he was suspected of being an infiltrator because he was unionized and translated instructions from French for his non-French-speaking colleagues. This suspicion arose after a test had gone wrong, causing part of the atoll to be blown away. His colleagues, eager to understand what had happened, turned to him for information. As a result, Hopu testifies to being immediately forced to leave his position. However, he was later reinstated due to a connection within the *Commissariat à l'Énergie Atomique* (CEA) who vouched for him. He was allowed to return to work on the condition that he never spoke about the events at Moruroa.<sup>766</sup>

A program of obscurity and non-recognition has been the French government's strategy for handling the nuclear tests and their consequences through CEP and CEA. This strategy forms the backdrop to the testimonies and is reflected within them and highlighted by the *Testimonies* booklet. Such obscurity stands in direct contrast to the activism and archival documentation efforts of Obsarm and Bengt and Marie-Thérèse Danielsson, which aimed to establish and clear the ground for transparency to reveal the reality of the tests to the world. As a result, the testimonies serve as acts of bearing witness, attempting to make visible what has been deliberately concealed. In doing so, they highlight a key characteristic of the

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<sup>764</sup> KTM BD 3018, 8/11. *Testimonies*, p. 65.

<sup>765</sup> See chapter 7, KTM BD 3009, 7/8. *Livre blanc*; KTM BD 3018, 8/11. *Testimonies*.

<sup>766</sup> KTM BD 3018, 8/11. *Testimonies*, p. 65.

collected materials: they are directed at an authority that remains unresponsive and refuses acknowledgment.

### 8.2.3 Taking voice, speaking for whom?

The *Testimonies: Witnesses of French Nuclear Testing* booklet presents first-hand accounts from individuals affected by French nuclear tests at Moruroa and Fangataufa. These testimonies highlight the environmental, health, and cultural consequences of nuclear testing, emphasizing the risks faced by local communities and workers. Many accounts describe exposure to radioactive fallout, unexplained illnesses, and the French government's secrecy regarding contamination. Witnesses recall the devastating impact on marine life, including fish poisoning and the deaths of large sea creatures, which disrupted subsistence practices. The booklet serves as both an argument against nuclear testing, for the recognition of the workers and veterans, and as a broader call for nuclear disarmament, shifting activism toward centring personal narratives of those directly affected by nuclear colonialism.

The testimonies also highlight a systemic imbalance of power and ability to speak, where workers – often unaware of the exact dangers – were subjected to hazardous conditions, while officials had access to protective measures. Some workers, despite recognizing the risks, continued out of economic necessity, illustrating the exploitative nature of the tests. The accounts further reveal a culture of enforced silence and secrecy, with the French military and government withholding critical health data for decades. However, as literary historian Anaïs Maurer critiques, framing this silence as an inherent cultural trait of Pacific Islanders, as some scholars have done, risks reinforcing colonial narratives that depict them as a silent people weakened by the erosion of oral traditions. Instead, silence should be understood not as an absence of speech but as both a symptom of nuclear colonialism and a strategy of resistance.<sup>767</sup> The issue is not the inability of Pacific Islanders to speak but rather the French administration's refusal to acknowledge or respond – a wall of non-acknowledgment that has stifled dialogue despite ongoing protests and resistance. Through its personal stories, imagery, and recording efforts, the booklet ultimately functions as both an educational tool and a challenge to official histories.

The *Testimonies* booklet also serves as an argument in a debate and a tool for awakening public opinion and mobilizing sentiment. The testimonial sequences function as a means of giving voice to those affected – an idea that resonates with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's critical notion of voice-giving from her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Spivak critiques the assumption that dominant intellectuals or institutions can give voice to the marginalized (subaltern) without inadvertently

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<sup>767</sup> Maurer, "Snaring the Nuclear Sun: Decolonial Ecologies in Titaua Peu's Mutismes: E 'Ore te Vāvā" (2020).

reproducing the very power structures that silence them. She also acknowledges the possibility of intentional silence as a form of resistance.<sup>768</sup>

In this sense, testimonies perform a dual role: they amplify the voices of those directly affected while revealing the tension between transnational NGO discourse and local struggles for independence – a tension the *Testimonies* booklet only partially engages in, echoing Maurer's argument that large NGOs often regarded such issues as too politically sensitive. I interpret the booklet's primary aim as twofold: to restore agency to the inhabitants and sacrificed subjects of the nuclear test zones, and simultaneously to legitimize and spread broader campaigns for nuclear disarmament and the construction of a Global Hibakusha identity. A prescient question that the Tavini party has aimed to carry forward in the parliaments and political arenas, becomes if and in what way the ability to listen and capacity to let the testimonies from the test site have effect.

Anaïs Maurer examines the dilemmas of silence and articulation in her ecocritical literary analysis of Tahitian author Titaua Peu's debut novel, *Mutismes: E 'Ore te Vāvā*. It was published in 2003 by the publishing company of Denise and Robert Koenig, long-time collaborators of the Danielssons. It was one of the first novels to grapple with the challenge of narrating nuclear colonialism, with Peu's expression of a Maohi taking the pen and turning it into a sword.<sup>769</sup> This links to the historiography of a self-imposed silence that Maurer problematizes, often stemming from shame, as a recognized phenomenon in historical traumas, as seen in Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and the Holocaust, where survivors often only began speaking collectively after several decades.<sup>770</sup>

Drawing on Spivak, Maurer notes that subaltern voices are often only acknowledged when expressed through imported conceptual paradigms – at which point, they cease to be subalterns and become spokespeople, potentially complicit in turning local knowledge into intellectual currency for elite consumption. This argument is in line with Fassin's on the politics of compassion in NGO discourse. In this light, Maurer argues that victimhood is not merely (and mistakenly) equated with passivity but can also be a source of empowerment.<sup>771</sup> A recurring theme in the testimonies in the analysed booklet is the persistence of silence and suppression, manifesting as secrecy enacted by the military, administration, and the CEP. The

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<sup>768</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*. ed. Rosalind Morris (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

<sup>769</sup> Maurer, "Snaring the Nuclear Sun: Decolonial Ecologies in Titaua Peu's *Mutismes: E 'Ore te Vāvā*" (2020).

<sup>770</sup> Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory*; Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*.

<sup>771</sup> Maurer, "Snaring the Nuclear Sun: Decolonial Ecologies in Titaua Peu's *Mutismes: E 'Ore te Vāvā*" (2020).

*Testimonies* booklet gains its significance against this backdrop: when atmospheric testing began in the 1960s, the French government halted the publication of health statistics and regional data, and it was not until 1983 that any official investigations into health impacts were undertaken. Even then, the resulting data remained classified and difficult to access. In this context, the booklet serves as a counter-narrative, challenging official assurances of safety and asserting the authority of first-hand experience.

This thread of documenting suppressed knowledge continues in the work of test activist Bruno Barrillot. In the 1990s and early-2000s, Barrillot published a series of books and articles compiling testimonies from individuals who had interacted closely with the CEP test sites. A former priest from Lyon, born in 1940, Barrillot had previously led the Rural Movement of Christian Youth in the 1970s, supporting conscientious objectors and Larzac farmers, before gradually turning his attention to nuclear testing. His work represents a continuation of civil society's efforts to make visible what the state sought to conceal, bridging testimonial practice with broader activist documentation.<sup>772</sup>

### 8.3 Les Irradiés de la République: Witness-Making, Documentation, and the Problem of Victimization

In 1990, with funding from Greenpeace, Brono Barrillot embarked on his first mission to French Polynesia, to investigate and corroborate data of the *Testimonies* booklet for the translation of it into French. There he forged ties with the local activist community. In 1998, he moved to Tahiti to help establish the Direction au Suivi des Conséquences des Essais Nucléaires (Department for Monitoring the Consequences of Nuclear Testing (DIRCEN), solidifying his commitment to the cause.<sup>773</sup> The *Testimonies* booklet, a collection of first-hand accounts analysed in the previous section, functioned as an eye-opening document for Barrillot, according to Barthe.<sup>774</sup> Barrillot later adopted similar methods of knowledge production in his own work, aiming to generate and disseminate information about the test site. He recognized the power of this format of testimony as a genre and understood the necessity of ensuring that such test-site testimonies were heard.

As noted, I first encountered the *Testimonies* booklet in 2017 while researching the Danielsson archives, and it struck me as a compelling document for understanding knowledge production related to nuclear testing. This positioning of testimonies –

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<sup>772</sup> Maillolchon, "Les réseaux de militants contre les essais nucléaires français (1959–1996)," p. 146.

<sup>773</sup> Ibid.

<sup>774</sup> Barthe, *Les retombées du passé: Le paradoxe de la victime*.

both the booklet and testimonies more broadly – as an entry point to knowledge about the test site is a significant phenomenon. It aligns with the pedagogical insights of Marie Hållander, whose Agambian analysis of the possibilities of testimonies in the classroom highlights how the personal narrative of trauma has the potential to open the reader or listener to learning.<sup>775</sup>

Following Barrillot's passing in 2017, the Obsarm has continued its work with a smaller team, now consisting of full-time member Patrice Bouveret, researcher Tony Fortin, and a small group of volunteers. Obsarm/CDRPC has played a key role in establishing organizations and connecting individuals who worked at or were otherwise affected by the test sites. In her thesis, Maillochon describes Barrillot as a particular kind of activist, drawing on Sezin Topçu's concept of the autodidact – the educated layperson – someone who acquires knowledge and expertise gradually over time, ultimately gaining legitimacy within a community that recognizes them as an expert.<sup>776</sup> Within activist networks, Barrillot remains regarded as an independent expert or independent researcher.

One of the books he authored in his role as a compiler of test-site knowledge is *Les Irradiés de la République: Les victimes des essais nucléaires français prennent la parole*.<sup>777</sup> It contains testimonies, information, and critical arguments. The following section examines documents stored in the Obsarm archives that were used in the book's production, shedding light on the research and editorial process behind it.

*Les Irradiés* was published in 2003, two years after the CEP closed down its test site activity in 2001. At this point, the anti-nuclear movement's knowledge claims began to transition from addressing an ongoing crisis to a historical endeavour, focused on uncovering the nuclear past and addressing injustices in this way.

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<sup>775</sup> Hållander, *The Pedagogical Possibilities of Witnessing and Testimonies: Through the Lens of Agamben*.

<sup>776</sup> Maillochon, "Les réseaux de militants contre les essais nucléaires français (1959–1996)."

<sup>777</sup> Barrillot, *Les Irradiés de la république: Les Victimes des essais nucléaires français prennent la parole*. He also wrote *Victimes des essais nucléaires: Histoire d'un combat*, Observatoire des armements, 2010. With Marie-Hélène Villierme and Arnaud Hudelot, *Témoins de la bombe: Mémoires de 30 ans d'essais nucléaires en Polynésie française*, Éditions Univers polynésiens, 2013.

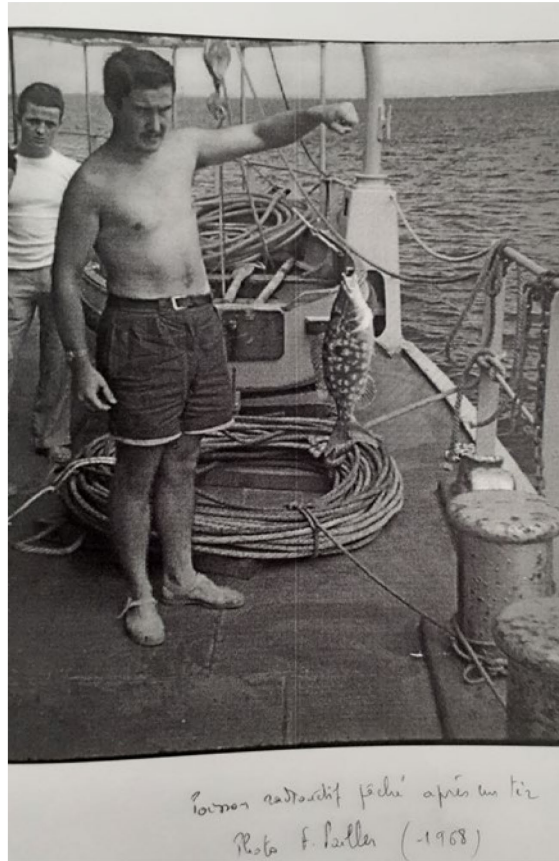


Figure 14. Image from the Obsarm B66E, Box Les irradiés, from the draft manuscript, with text : 'poisson radioactif pêché après une tir', (1968) transl. Nuclear fish caught after a test. A service man on a ship holds a fish caught after a nuclear test for the camera. Photographer unknown.

### 8.3.1 Barrillot and the reflection of testimony in “broad daylight”

From a draft of the foreword to *Les Irradiés*, one can discern how Barrillot framed the text as both a historical account and a narrative of the work for truth on behalf of the victims of French nuclear tests – a mission he saw as central to his efforts. A translated excerpt reads:

After the years of secrecy imposed on the personnel of the tests, today the testimonies of veterans and former workers is made in “broad daylight” – *se font au grand jour*



– through the printed press and television media. The fear of speaking out no longer paralyzes the witnesses.<sup>778</sup>

This shows how testimonies acquire authority within specific discursive conditions, emerging as credible knowledge against the backdrop of prior silences. Scholars such as Hållander, Fassin, and Wieviorka note that since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, testimonial accounts of the *superstes* kind have carried significant epistemic weight, shaped by evolving historical and truth discourses. Testimony thus functions both as a revelation of suppressed experiences and, paradoxically, as a potential constraint on critique of structural injustice.

Barrillot demonstrates how organizations in which he was deeply involved, like AVEN and *Moruroa e Tatou*, navigated this tension with media coverage, simultaneously amplifying public awareness and reinforcing narratives of radio-victimology. This interplay between media visibility and testimonial production profoundly influenced how experiences at nuclear test sites were framed and collectively understood.<sup>779</sup> The structure of Barrillot's books on the test-sites' human consequences consistently follow a similar pattern of argumentation. They begin with a presentation of straightforward facts, with a particular emphasis on data related to the nuclear tests themselves. This information is treated as the most important, prioritized, and undisputed element. Often, these sections resemble the format of technical reports.<sup>780</sup>

### 8.3.2 Organizational work for recognition of the connection between health issues and the test site

AVEN and *Moruroa e Tatou*, both founded in 2003, aimed to document nuclear test experiences at the grassroots level: *Moruroa e Tatou* focused on workers, while AVEN represented veterans and military personnel from both the Saharan and

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<sup>778</sup> Obsarm B66E, Box *Les Irradiés*. Preface draft. Similar argumentation is found in Bruno Barrillot, "Human Rights and the Casualties of Nuclear Testing," *Journal of Genocide Research* 9, no. 3 (2007); Barrillot, *Victimes des essais nucléaires : histoire d'un combat*; Bruno Barrillot, *Essais nucléaires français : L'Héritage empoisonné* (Lyon: Observatoire des armements, 2012), p. 273 ff.

<sup>779</sup> For analysis of the framing perspective and the nuclear disarmament movement relations to media see: D. A. Snow et al., "The Emergence, Development, and Future of the Framing Perspective: 25+ Years since 'Frame Alignment'," *Mobilization* 19, no. 1 (2014); David A. Snow, Rens Vliegthart, and Pauline Ketelaars, "The Framing Perspective on Social Movements: Its Conceptual Roots and Architecture." in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* eds. David A. Snow, Sarah Anne Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2017).

<sup>780</sup> Barrillot, *Les Irradiés de la république: Les Victimes des essais nucléaires français prennent la parole*; Barrillot et al., *Quelle justice pour les victimes des essais nucléaires: Pour l'adaptation du principe de présomption légale*; Barrillot, *Victimes des essais nucléaires: histoire d'un combat*; Barrillot, *Essais nucléaires français : L'Héritage empoisonné*; Barrillot, Villierme, and Hudelot, *Témoins de la bombe: Mémoires de 30 ans d'essais nucléaires en Polynésie française*.

French Polynesian test sites. Early archival materials from these organizations are now housed at Obsarm.

In *Les Irradiés de la République*, Barrillot situates the recent history of anti-nuclear activism within broader political developments: the resumption of testing in 1995 under President Jacques Chirac mobilized global public opinion and the French left. In Parliament, Marie-Hélène Aubert and Michèle Rivasi championed the issue, introducing a 1999 bill to assess the health and environmental consequences of nuclear tests – an initiative that ultimately contributed to the passage of the *Loi Morin* in 2010.<sup>781</sup> Around the year 2000, and still today, health concerns were central to the claims, as establishing the link between nuclear tests and their health effects was crucial for former test-site personnel and their families, to gain recognition for the proof of suffering presented, as Trundle has demonstrated with her analysis on British test veterans' claims.<sup>782</sup>

AVEN's first president was Dr. Jean-Louis Valatx (serving until 2008), a director at the *Institut National de la Santé et de la Recherche Médicale* (INSERM). Alongside AVEN members and with support from Barrillot, Valatx conducted a study of 700 former *Centre d'Expérimentations du Pacifique* servicemen. The collection of testimonies that this involved is discussed below. Barrillot's writing highlights this study's findings: cancer rates among nuclear veterans were more than twice as high as those of men in the general population of the same age. These anomalies were also observed in the two generations following the veterans. Barrillot further describes that severely ill nuclear veterans applied for pensions, and in some cases, their claims were approved. This success encouraged further organizational efforts for large-scale mobilizations demanding justice and reparations.<sup>783</sup> Compiled findings from this survey study were compiled into a pamphlet, which was distributed to political representatives. This effort sought to bridge NGO-generated data with legislative advocacy, clarifying the legal and policy changes the groups wanted politicians to support.

A 2002 bill (No. 3542) introduced by Marie-Hélène Aubert was described in the AVEN pamphlet that was sent to lawmakers to garner support:

This law concerns all individuals who participated in French nuclear tests from 13 February 1960 to 27 January 1996. Groups and associations representing these individuals report a high incidence of health problems, primarily cancer, as well as ophthalmological and cardiovascular conditions. These issues affect military

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<sup>781</sup> *Loi Morin*, retrieved 13 June 2024 from <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000021625586>.

<sup>782</sup> Trundle, "Translating Proof: Contested Illness, Radiation Exposure, and the Health Claims of Nuclear Test Veterans."

<sup>783</sup> Obsarm B66E, Box *Les Irradiés*. Preface draft.

personnel, civilian employees of the CEA, subcontractors from mainland France, as well as the inhabitants of Polynesia and the Sahara.<sup>784</sup>

The bill's first article established a presumption of causality between work at the test sites and radiation-induced diseases. However, this provision applied only to personnel directly involved in test-site operations, excluding populations in surrounding areas. In practice, since the law's adoption in 2010, this presumption has frequently been inverted in its application, with claimants effectively required to disprove alternative causes, an interpretation reflected in the persistently high rejection rate of claims, which has hovered at around 98 percent.<sup>785</sup>

In the early-2000s, this campaign was coordinated between three key organizations: Moruroa e Tatou, Obsarm, and AVEN. This collaboration built upon existing connections, as AVEN and Moruroa e Tatou had organizational roots within Obsarm.<sup>786</sup> In the pamphlet the connection between AVEN and Moruroa e tatou (Moruroa and us) is noted, that the groups do not work entirely separately. Moruroa e tatou organizes the inhabitants and local people living in French Polynesia. The fact that other nuclear testing affected populations were also beginning to seek and get recognition and compensation is also presented as an important argument when AVEN asks for signatures and help from people in established positions.<sup>787</sup>

### **8.3.3 Campaigning for a law: Collecting, documenting and organizing veteran testimonies**

AVEN sought to document as much as possible, collecting testimonies from both military and civilian servicemen. This material, housed at Obsarm, constitutes a central part of their archives and served as a foundation for Barrillot's books. In addition to conducting interviews, Barrillot also organized the collection of survey forms within the organizations to gather data.

One such survey collection is found in a box labelled *AVEN – Enquêtes*, which contains 127 completed survey forms from an investigation conducted by AVEN.

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<sup>784</sup> Obsarm B66E, Box *Vétérans des essais Ia Ora Na*. Pamphlet of AVEN.

<sup>785</sup> Boda Jean-Sébastien, "Les modalités de renversement de la présomption de causalité posée par la loi Morin pour les victimes d'essais nucléaires," *Revue Juridique de l'Environnement* 42, no. 1 (2017); Schoenberger, "Radiological Risk Imposition as Environmental Violence: A Case Study of Nuclear Harms and the Limits of Legal Redress in French Polynesia/Mā'ohi Nui."; 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.

<sup>786</sup> Obsarm B66E, Box *Vétérans des essais Ia Ora Na*. Pamphlet and Campaign planning leaflet.

<sup>787</sup> Ibid.

These documents detail the experiences of 127 veteran members from the Finistère department in northwestern France.<sup>788</sup>

The broad scope of this effort is significant and highlighted in the material promoting the campaign. A comparison is made with the 1988 decision by the US Senate to recognize 18 radiation-induced diseases as presumptively linked to nuclear test-site service, allowing affected personnel to qualify for compensation automatically.<sup>789</sup>

The goal of AVEN's campaign was to pass a law enabling legal scrutiny of the health effects of nuclear weapons testing. Their primary strategy involved letter-writing campaigns directed at deputies and parliamentary representatives across France. This outreach was reinforced by distributing documents to family members, friends, journalists, and regional media, ensuring wider public awareness and political pressure.<sup>790</sup>

Anthropologists Catherine Trundle and David Scott have shown how the private archives of Fijian veterans of British nuclear testing became key sites of contestation over evidence, health, and state responsibility within academic debates. By contrast, the history of French nuclear testing in the Pacific has attracted comparatively limited sustained attention outside France.<sup>791</sup>

Similarly to Trundle's and Scott's, AVEN's campaign pamphlet foregrounds documenting, witnessing, and victim recognition, linking these directly to demands for legal acknowledgment and compensation. By centring recorded personal experiences – often in lieu of trustworthy official data – claimants become witnesses to their own histories, granted epistemic authority in narrating suffering. While correspondence with politicians and testimonial advocacy were not novel strategies, AVEN's framing “reflects a significant shift: political claims were increasingly individualized, formalized, and anchored in documented testimony. The pamphlet even included a tear-out card for supporters to send to policymakers, exemplifying the convergence of activism, documentation, and legislative engagement. The title reads: “NON, les conséquences des essais nucléaires de la France ne sont pas négligeables: Nous en sommes témoins.” (NO, the consequences of France's nuclear tests are not negligible: We are witnesses.)<sup>792</sup>

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<sup>788</sup> Obsarm B66E, Box AVEN *Enquêtes*. Introductory document.

<sup>789</sup> Ibid.

<sup>790</sup> Obsarm B66E, Box AVEN *Enquêtes*, Introductory document.

<sup>791</sup> Trundle and Scott, “Elusive Genes: Nuclear Test Veterans' Experiences of Genetic Citizenship and Biomedical Refusal” (2013).

<sup>792</sup> Obsarm B66E, Box *Vétérans des essais Ia Ora Na*. Pamphlet and Campaign planning leaflet.

The cover features stylized images of veterans' faces presented in a film-reel format, evoking the documentary genre. These men, at the time in their 40s and 50s, serve as authoritative witnesses to the CEP, having worked directly on-site. Their testimonies are explicitly linked to a proposed law, appealing to politicians' sense of responsibility to secure support in parliament. The formalization of individual claims and their connection to rights violations extended across the three preceding decades of nuclear testing. Within a short time after testing ceased in 2001, discussions of the test site began surfacing in French parliamentary debates – not yet fully articulated and officially acknowledged as a humanitarian crisis but increasingly being framed as such.

Those working to get recognition as victims of French nuclear testing were not alone in their struggle for rights and recognition. In 2002, Australian Senator Lynn Allison established an international network for nuclear test victims in Paris, fostering a global approach to victim advocacy.<sup>793</sup> This initiative underscores the significance of activist knowledge in sharing experiences across borders, making international comparisons, and leveraging legal systems to secure recognition, transparency, and accountability from nuclear states.

Fiona Jayne Bowler's research on British nuclear test veterans examines the experiences of servicemen stationed at nuclear testing sites in the South Pacific and Australia during Britain's nuclear program. She explores how perceptions of radiation exposure shaped a distinct community of British nuclear test veterans in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By forming the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association (BNTVA) in the 1980s, these veterans and their families have drawn attention to the legacy of Britain's Cold War nuclear policies. Their use of personal narratives of suffering as a political tool reveals a story of hardship but also one of resilience, reinforced by the authority of lived experience.<sup>794</sup>

Bowler's work highlights the strength of community within British test veteran activism, a historical account that offers a slightly different and, to my analysis, more prescient understanding of co-creation of knowledge than the *victimisateur* position Barthe uses to describe the French test veteran victimology case. These veterans built a support network aimed at understanding, discussing, and gaining recognition for their experiences. Their activism has included scientific research, political advocacy, and legal action, fostering a sense of solidarity that has grown in direct response to their marginalization.

Consistent with my findings, Bowler emphasizes that servicemen testify to having, at the time of service, limited knowledge of radiation, as scientists and military

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<sup>793</sup> Trundle, "Translating Proof: Contested Illness, Radiation Exposure, and the Health Claims of Nuclear Test Veterans."

<sup>794</sup> Bowler, "The British Nuclear Test Veteran: Radiation, Activism, and the Soldier's Body, 1952–2002."

leaders failed to provide adequate education on the subject. As a result, veterans have relied on their own sensory memories of nuclear tests to assess contemporary radiation risks, reflections that are well-documented in activist materials but obscured in official reports.<sup>795</sup>

Maillochon, discussing the CEP military personnel's awareness of test-site conditions, notes that enlisted personnel rarely challenge defence policies, as doing so could mean exclusion from the military institution. Dissent has little space in an army that enforces secrecy and strict hierarchy. Additionally, recreational activities on test sites – such as bars, windsurfing and diving clubs, and tennis courts – helped to deter potential dissent.<sup>796</sup>

### **8.3.4 Geographies of compensation and the humanitarian reframing of French nuclear test veterans**

A comparison to the United States is particularly relevant, given its role as an ideological leader in what with Fassin can be termed humanitarian reason in its applied form.<sup>797</sup> The arguments in the AVEN campaign pamphlet draw comparisons to the US system for test-site compensatory recognition, linking it to relative proximity to the point zero. One comparative argument is that in the US, compensation eligibility was determined by a concentric zone stratum extending 530 miles (approximately 700 km) from the Pacific atmospheric test sites. This is contrasted with France's designated danger zone at the time of testing, which was set at 400 km. The campaign argues that if the same geographic standards were applied to French nuclear testing, all of the Sahara and around 20 inhabited islands in French Polynesia would qualify for compensation. However, the argument also emphasizes that nuclear fallout does not simply stop at an arbitrary 700 km boundary.<sup>798</sup>

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<sup>795</sup> Bowler, "The British Nuclear Test Veteran: Radiation, Activism, and the Soldier's Body, 1952–2002."

<sup>796</sup> Maillochon, "Les réseaux de militants contre les essais nucléaires français (1959–1996)," p. 153–154.

<sup>797</sup> Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*.

<sup>798</sup> Obsarm B66E, Box *Vétérans des essais la Ora Na* Campaign planning leaflet.

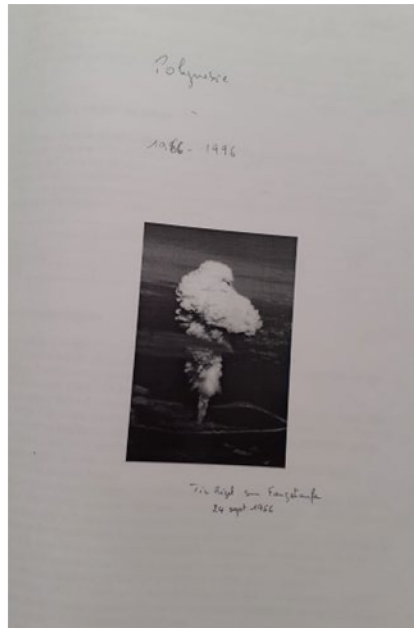


*Figure 15. A picture, photograph of the Rigel Test (125 kt), the first test at Fangataufa atoll, 24 September 1966. From the working-document Les Irradiés de la République Obsarm B66E. Photocopied by Anton Öhman.*

The contrasting geographies of compensation between the United States and France reveal how humanitarian recognition of nuclear harm is not merely technical but fundamentally epistemic and political. Concentric compensation maps present themselves as objective translations of radiological risk into space, yet they operate as instruments that produce knowledge of danger by bounding it. In the US case, the 530-mile zone constructs proximity to ground zero as the primary criterion of truth about exposure, privileging a model of immediacy that equates risk with distance from detonation. France's even narrower 400 km boundary intensified this logic, effectively spatializing ignorance by rendering large populations and environments epistemically outside the zone of concern. In both cases, cartography does not neutrally reflect radioactive reality; instead it actively stabilizes a particular epistemology of harm, that treats fallout as measurable, containable, and geographically discrete, despite scientific evidence that contamination is dispersed, uneven, and temporally extended. Compensation geographies thus function less as mirrors of environmental danger than as technologies that align humanitarian recognition with NWS interests by translating complex ecological and biological processes into administratively manageable space.

This mapping of danger also reveals a deeper tension between experiential immediacy and institutional legibility. For affected communities, exposure is lived as a diffuse, ecological, and long-term condition which is manifest in landscapes,

bodies, and livelihoods rather than confined to a perimeter.<sup>799</sup> Yet humanitarian regimes require harm to be rendered spatially punctual and legally locatable in order to become compensable. The AVEN argument: pointing out that applying US standards would encompass the Sahara and numerous Polynesian islands exposes the arbitrary nature of these borders while simultaneously remaining trapped within the cartographic logic it critiques. The problem is not simply that French zones were too small, but that compensation regimes depend on a mode of knowledge that converts slow, uncertain, and relational radiation effects into clear-cut maps of eligibility. In this sense, geographies of compensation exemplify how humanitarian reason translates lived, indeterminate exposure into simplified spatial facts making some harms visible and actionable while systematically displacing others into the realm of the unknowable. This logic persists in France's current 1 mSv compensation threshold, which, like the earlier 400 km zone, translates complex, uneven exposure into a single administratively legible metric, rendering many affected communities invisible despite radiological and ecological uncertainty.<sup>800</sup>

This strategy mirrors the broader approach of NGOs and witness-activist networks, which deliberately weave technical data together with personal testimony to illuminate what might be called the unknown knowns of nuclear testing – facts that are established but marginalized, rendered publicly invisible through political silence and institutional omission. It rests on a largely accurate assumption: that the general public knows little about nuclear testing yet remains receptive to accessible, well-packaged information.

A central, though implicit, claim in this knowledge mobilization is that these facts – historical, geographical, and scientific – are absent from formal education and civic curricula, and thus must be inserted into public consciousness through civil-society channels. Although the presentation is clearly shaped by advocacy aims, the facts are framed as neutral and incontrovertible. This rhetorical move is strategic: by establishing a stable baseline of shared knowledge, the materials prepare readers for more contentious questions concerning responsibility, health effects, and state secrecy.

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<sup>799</sup> See Jacobs and Broderick, “United Nations Report Reveals the Ongoing Legacy of Nuclear Colonialism in the Marshall Islands” (2012); Hecht, *Being Nuclear: Africans and the Global Uranium Trade*; Johnston, *Half-Lives and Half-Truths: Confronting the Radioactive Legacies of the Cold War*.

<sup>800</sup> See Maurer, “Interroger le discours officiel sur la bombe nucléaire: Lecture croisée de *Toxique et Repenser les choix nucléaires*” (2023); Schoenberger, “Radiological Risk Imposition as Environmental Violence: A Case Study of Nuclear Harms and the Limits of Legal Redress in French Polynesia/Mā’ohi Nui.”



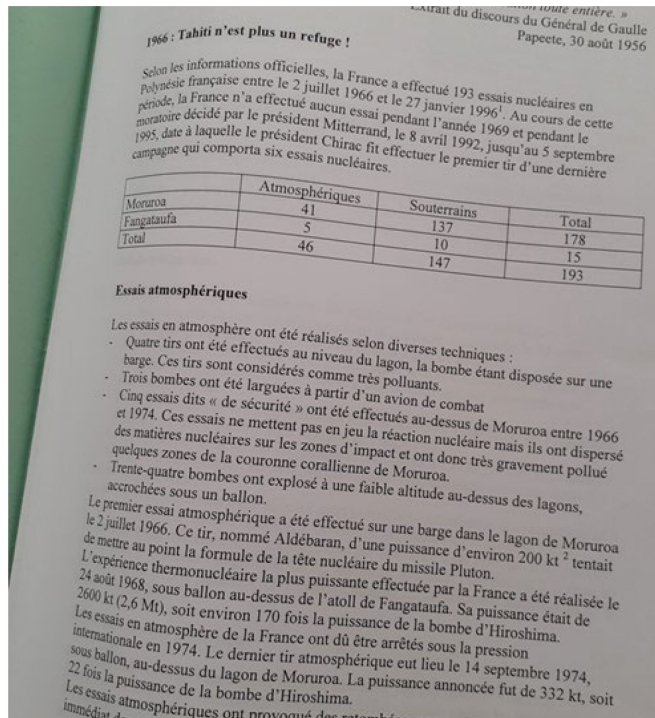


Figure 16. Photo showing a preface draft with information on the tests. Obsarm B66E /Les Irradiés box. Photograph by Anton Öhman.

Within this architecture, testimonies and factual sections mutually reinforce one another. Personal accounts offer an emotionally resonant entry point into the technical landscape of nuclear testing, while technical data lend credibility and epistemic weight to individual narratives. Together, they construct an alternative archive of nuclear knowledge, one that challenges official accounts and seeks to make concealed histories legible to wider publics.

Following the basic facts, in *Les irradiés*... John Teariki is presented as a local, rational politician who had the courage to protest directly in front of De Gaulle in Polynesia in 1966. Teariki's speech links the issue of the CEP to both the United Nations and the French Constitution, which guarantees national liberty to the colonies – particularly relevant for the locations of nuclear weapons test sites.<sup>801</sup>

<sup>801</sup> The speech by J. Teariki on September 7, 1966, delivered ahead of De Gaulle's visit to an atmospheric nuclear test on September 11, marks a significant moment in the knowledge production of test-site opposition. This test, codenamed *Bételgeuse*, was conducted hastily under unfavourable weather conditions to accommodate De Gaulle's impatience and tight schedule. As a result, radioactive fallout spread over American Samoa, Fiji, and the Cook Islands, while data on contamination in Tahiti remained classified, an issue also occurring in Danielssons argument.

To frame the documentary, testimonial part of the work, Barrillot highlights the centrality of testimonial accounts and voicing to gain knowledge of what happened close to the tests, asking: *What did people actually do on these atolls?* In *Les irradiés*, he allows former workers to present their testimonies, emphasizing that they were often young men, poorly informed about the realities of nuclear exposure.<sup>802</sup>

Barrillot argues that, at the time of service, the risks of low-level radiation exposure were not widely understood. Since the Chernobyl accident had not yet occurred, and the experiences of Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivors were largely unknown in France before the 1980s, the long-term dangers of radiation were not part of common knowledge during the early years of nuclear testing. These later, highly mediatized nuclear disasters played a crucial role in shaping public awareness and the discourse on nuclear exposure. The absence of such knowledge at the time contributed to a climate of negligence in safety measures. Uninformed workers and veterans faced heightened risks due to this asymmetry of knowledge, where military and scientific authorities possessed critical information that was not shared with those most directly exposed to radiation.<sup>803</sup>

Barrillot highlights what he frames as some of the most shocking elements of testimony: personnel recounting how they returned to test sites just hours after detonations, with some quartered near point zero or in areas officially designated as contaminated. A significant number of these individuals did not carry dosimeters. According to *Les Irradiés*, the work of Barrillot and organizations such as Moruroa e Tatou and AVEN in Polynesia was directly inspired by efforts conducted by veterans and residents near the Marshall Islands test sites.<sup>804</sup>

Claimants in these situations must navigate questions of proof across scientific, legal, medical, bureaucratic, archival, and embodied domains of knowledge and practice, each of which constitutes proof differently. The archival efforts of veterans' and workers' organizations can be situated within a humanitarian and "righting the wrong" perspective, embracing action research that expands the archive of test-site critical knowledge.<sup>805</sup> The AVEN and other test-veteran

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See Danielsson & Danielsson, *Förgiftat paradis*, p. 115–116 and Statius & Philippe, *Toxique*. Obsarm B66E, Box *Les Irradiés*.

<sup>802</sup> Obsarm B66E, Box *Les Irradiés*, draft note. See also Barrillot, *Les Irradiés de la république: Les Victimes des essais nucléaires français prennent la parole*.

<sup>803</sup> Obsarm B66E, Box *Les Irradiés*, draft note and Barrillot, *Les Irradiés de la république: Les Victimes des essais nucléaires français prennent la parole*.

<sup>804</sup> Barrillot, *Les Irradiés de la république: Les Victimes des essais nucléaires français prennent la parole*.

<sup>805</sup> Michelle Caswell, Ricardo Punzalan, and T. Kay Sangwand, "Critical Archival Studies: An Introduction," *Critical Archival Studies* 1, no. 2 (2017), p. 19.

archives, therefore, are not merely intended as humanitarian archives – structured and curated by academics – but as living archives aimed at documenting, informing, and providing self-knowledge for affected communities.

## 8.4 The AVEN Enquetes: A Survey from 2004

AVEN conducted a new data collection drive between February and October 2004 to preserve and safeguard the claims and experiences of veterans from the French nuclear testing programs. This initiative aimed to document and steward key information from past nuclear testing regimes, particularly as the veterans and witnesses, especially those who had been present at the atmospheric tests before they ended in 1975, were ageing.

A quote from the introductory text to the survey underscores the lasting impact of these tests, describing them as a form of historical haunting for those involved. It highlights concerns about fallout contamination, the handling of the tests, and, crucially, what the experience meant for the individual bodies of those providing testimony. A translated quote of the text states: “There is nothing worse than the ignorance of not knowing.”<sup>806</sup> This notion of a *known unknown*, where certainty remains elusive and uncertainty ever present, and individuals are denied epistemic authority, suggests a profound violation.

The inability to trust the information produced by the governing bodies of the tests, coupled with being systematically excluded from access to truth, deepens the sense of injustice. The epistemic ethos of the survey, of reclaiming knowledge over time, is central to justifying the organization’s work and its perceived function. The introductory text then presents statistical overviews of the previous questionnaire-testimony results from other regions, revealing how some testimonies were completed by surviving family members on behalf of deceased individuals. These findings correspond with presented data indicating heightened mortality, laying out the framework and direction of the survey.<sup>807</sup>

Following the established pattern of other Obsarm documents, such as *Les Irradiés*, the report provides an overview of nuclear test statistics, stating that 17 tests were conducted at the Sahara site – four atmospheric and 13 subterranean – while 193 took place in French Polynesia, with 46 atmospheric and 147 underground.

Beneath these figures an implicit attribution of responsibility is presented, underscoring the relative culpability of different administrations. A striking contrast emerges when comparing Mitterrand and Chirac: while Chirac faced severe

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<sup>806</sup> Obsarm B66E, Box AVEN, *Enquêtes*: Introductory Document.

<sup>807</sup> Ibid.

international criticism for resuming nuclear testing in the mid-1990s, Mitterrand – whose administration oversaw a significantly greater number of tests – was not subjected to the same moral condemnation. The statistical breakdown of tests per administration further illustrates this discrepancy

De Gaulle: 31 tests (14.77%)

Pompidou: 23 tests (10.95%)

Giscard d'Estaing: 62 tests (29.53%)

Mitterrand: 88 tests (41.90%)

Chirac: 6 tests (2.85%).<sup>808</sup>

This pattern reflects a broader historical tendency to selectively distribute culpability, a theme also presented in the Danielssons' documentation, where disappointment in Mitterrand's realpolitik approach to nuclear testing is evident. A form of *moral economy* emerges, wherein the legitimacy of different presidencies is assessed predominantly through their nuclear policies. This perspective was particularly entrenched in post-1968 peace movements and test-critical organizations linked to Obsarm, whose ideological framework shifted the discourse away from Cold War geopolitics to a more general critique of government/state policies affecting individuals.<sup>809</sup>

The AVEN archives contain the original survey documents, comprising completed forms submitted by veterans. The structure of the survey is methodical, beginning with general personal information such as name, address, and details of the individual's assignment during the tests. The second section presents a comprehensive table of nuclear tests, each listed with its code name and date. Veterans are asked to indicate which tests they were present for and whether they were ordered to participate or did so voluntarily. At the end of the survey, respondents are explicitly invited to provide personal testimonies, further reinforcing the document's function as both a historical record and an instrument of activist knowledge production.<sup>810</sup> Next to the names of the tests to be ticked, there are questions to be specified:

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<sup>808</sup> Obsarm B66E, Box AVEN, *Enquêtes*: Introductory Document.

<sup>809</sup> Katsuya Kodama, *The Future of the Peace Movements* (Lund: Lund Univ. Press, 1989).

<sup>810</sup> Obsarm B66E, AVEN Series. Selected testimonies are held in the AVEN and Obsarm collections. Access is restricted; copies were consulted under the archives' terms and reproduced here in anonymized form. The testimony material analysed in this chapter was handled with specific protections. To minimize re-identification risk and to respect the privacy of claimants, I paraphrase most testimonies and use composite vignettes where appropriate. Archival references

During your stay at the sites, did you receive any information on protection? (Please specify)

Then follows a couple of yes/no questions:

Have you been irradiated?

Do you estimate that you have been irradiated?

Have you been contaminated?

Do you estimate that you have been contaminated?<sup>811</sup>

These questions encourage and leave space for differentiated experiences, interpretations, and degrees of certainty here, highlighting the subjective personal aspect of the survey; it was not designed as an epidemiological group-study, but as a question-led testimony. The survey continues:

Have you been hospitalized?

Did you have a dosimeter?

Did you have any other means of protection?

Have you been subject to medical examination?

At the beginning of your stay at the test site: did you take/get a medical examination?

Were you given precise information on nuclear risks?<sup>812</sup>

Followed by the same questions for multiple test postings and assignments, then follows a section of questions concerning the present health status of the veteran-informant:

Do you have any diseases related to your function and role at the experimentation sites?

Any unproven or presumed diseases?

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are given at the collection level rather than by file number unless the documents are openly published.

<sup>811</sup> Obsarm B66E.

<sup>812</sup> Ibid.

Any documentation or medical certificates to document these problems?<sup>813</sup>

The survey proceeds with a structured inquiry into health conditions, categorizing illnesses into major themes such as cancer, cardiovascular diseases, and disorders of the digestive system. This is followed by a section on reproductive health and hereditary concerns, where veterans are asked to report issues related to sterility, reproductive complications, and any congenital health conditions or disabilities observed in their descendants. Additional questions address the number of children, their birth years, and their relation to the veteran's periods of service at nuclear test sites.

Subsequent sections expand on general health and lifestyle factors, including alcohol consumption, smoking habits, and physical activity, with a question specifically inquiring whether the respondent has ever been an athlete. These lifestyle indicators, while ostensibly medical, also implicitly engage with broader debates over risk attribution and causality, raising the question of whether health complications can be exclusively linked to nuclear exposure or whether other factors might be invoked to complicate claims for recognition and compensation, in a sense pre-empting legal enquiry.

The survey also includes questions on the veteran's engagement with AVEN, probing their awareness and assessment of the organization's role. Respondents are asked how they first learned about AVEN, whether they are satisfied with its actions, and whether they are aware that AVEN can provide legal representation. Additionally, a question addresses whether the respondent knows their personal compensation number, reinforcing the survey's dual function as both a repository of testimony and a bureaucratic instrument for navigating claims.<sup>814</sup>

The survey form included a dedicated free-text section titled *suite témoignage libre*, inviting respondents to narrate experiences beyond the questionnaire. Roughly half of submitted forms contained entries in this section. These narratives are not merely supplementary: they convert a standardized data collection instrument into a patchwork archive of lived experience, registering patterns, complaints about inconsistent protective practice, accounts of premature illness among colleagues, enduring uncertainty about causal links, and appeals for compensation that recur across the dataset.<sup>815</sup>

Several respondents described a common sequence: service at a support vessel or atoll in the late-1960s, routine tasks that involved entering lagoon waters and handling equipment unprotected, the later onset of serious illness among multiple

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<sup>813</sup> Ibid.

<sup>814</sup> Obsarm B66E.

<sup>815</sup> Ibid. "Space for free testimony" (translation by me).

members of a cohort, and the family's subsequent struggle to find documentation or official recognition. These convergent accounts, here synthesized to protect individual anonymity, illustrate how occupational exposure, secrecy, and the absence of accessible records combined to create long-term epistemic vulnerability for veterans and their families.<sup>816</sup>

In one form, a respondent reported that a long-serving colleague had been diagnosed with prostate cancer in middle age and that several others from the same tour had died prematurely. The respondent framed the cluster of deaths as the spur for seeking compensation and described the absence of preserved medical records as a major barrier to establishing causality.<sup>817</sup>

Several of these free form testimonies highlight issues related to drinking and washing water, a concern also emphasized in the *Toxique* report. Given the scarcity of fresh water on the atolls, the environment was particularly vulnerable to contamination.<sup>818</sup> In the following section, an aggregate from the AVEN survey and its corresponding testimonial account will be presented and analysed to examine how these concerns were articulated.

#### 8.4.1 Format of enquetes testimony

The following is an aggregate of documents analysed, to show the structure of the collection of materials and what the veterans filed.<sup>819</sup>

Firstly, the personal information was stated, then CEP assignments were presented regarding details of service. This could be that roles entailed both direct operational involvement and managerial oversight at critical junctures of the nuclear testing program. A statement of authenticity is then made qualifying the testimony in an auctor modality. This reads as a standardized declaration of truthfulness, as an oath-like assertion gains particular significance within the testimonial format. It signals an awareness of potential scepticism toward the testimony and an effort to pre-emptively counteract it. The phrasing reflects a tension between personal memory and the necessity of presenting an objective, factual account, implicitly acknowledging the weight of official recognition and the potential contestation of individual experiences.<sup>820</sup>

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<sup>816</sup> Obsarm B66E.

<sup>817</sup> Obsarm B66E.

<sup>818</sup> See the water contamination aspect in Johnston and Barker, *Consequential Damages of Nuclear War: the Rongelap Report*; Philippe and Statius, *Toxique: enquête sur les essais nucléaires français en Polynésie*.

<sup>819</sup> Obsarm B66E.

<sup>820</sup> Obsarm B66E.

The veteran then in open format recounts experiences at CEP sites such as Moruroa, particularly during the period of atmospheric testing. Key recurring themes in accounts of nuclear testing include inadequate protective measures, routine exposure to risk, and a bodily experience marked by discomfort and uncertainty. It reflects a fundamental dissonance, an operational environment where radioactive exposure was a known risk but where protective protocols were inconsistently enforced.<sup>821</sup>

The descriptions highlight a troubling contrast between the realities of daily work and the scientific understanding of radioactive contamination. The casual exposure – bare skin in a potentially contaminated marine environment – suggests a degree of institutional negligence, or at the very least, a prioritization of logistical efficiency over individual safety.

The discomfort of these recollections is amplified by hindsight. At the time, these tasks were routine, but as historical and scientific knowledge about radiation hazards expanded, largely through media reports and advocacy efforts, these memories became focal points of concern. They represent moments where veterans, in retrospect, locate a breach in protocol, an indifference to risk, or a failure of institutional responsibility. One veteran's account concludes with an observation on post-detonation procedures where, on returning to shore, they were no longer required to wear dosimeters. The dock was covered in plastic, and the dock staff wore SMSR uniforms with plastic overshoes.<sup>822</sup>

Further details emphasize the inconsistencies in protective measures. While some personnel were outfitted with specialized protective gear, others were left exposed. The selective application of safety measures suggests memories of a hierarchy of risk, where some were deemed more worthy of protection than others, reinforcing the broader sense of institutional neglect.

In sum, these testimonies provide first-hand accounts of operational practices but also serve as a lens through which we can analyse the intersection of collecting personal memory of experiences, occupational exposure, and the evolving historical consciousness of nuclear testing's consequences.

#### **8.4.2 Retrospective awareness and the struggles for recognition**

This raises critical questions: was the radiation screening a public reassurance measure, or did it reveal undisclosed contamination? The veterans' uncertainty mirrors a broader hierarchy of risk, where distance from the nuclear test site correlated with stricter radiation controls. This hierarchy becomes central to

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<sup>821</sup> Ibid.

<sup>822</sup> Ibid.



testimony, illuminating discrepancies in safety protocols and their selective enforcement.

Such testimonies shift the nuclear narrative from the grand spectacle of scientific triumph (as seen in nuclear scientists' accounts, analysed by Masco) to the mundane yet insidious exposure of workers.<sup>823</sup> Where nuclear scientists often narrate moments of awe, technical mastery, or controlled fear, test-site veterans describe something markedly different: discomfort, anxiety, and a sense of betrayal. Their accounts foreground bodily exposure, inconsistent safety procedures, and the long-term uncertainty surrounding contamination – dimensions of nuclear work largely absent from official histories.

The shift from atmospheric to underground testing, and later to computer simulations, transformed the technical landscape of the French program. Yet in veterans' testimonies, one critique recurs with striking regularity: why were protective measures not implemented for ordinary workers when they were standard practice elsewhere in the nuclear sector? This question destabilizes official claims of rigorous safety and instead exposes a pattern of uneven protection, negligence, and institutional disregard. These lived experiences became the foundation for organized advocacy after the tests were over, particularly through AVEN. The association's demands coalesced around four objectives:

- a) securing access to personnel records from the test sites
- b) obtaining declassification of relevant medical files
- c) establishing a presumption of causality for radiation-related illnesses, mirroring policies adopted in other countries
- d) creating a structured system of compensation and pensions for affected veterans.

This struggle encapsulates a broader problem in nuclear justice: the systematic sidelining of first-hand knowledge and the absence of institutional accountability. In the face of administrative silence, veterans turned to alternative arenas – journalists, NGOs, legal advocates, and international bodies – to make their claims legible. Although activism did not always yield immediate reparations, it reshaped public understanding of France's nuclear legacy and helped generate the political pressure that culminated in the 2010 Morin Law.

The British Nuclear Test Veterans Association (BNTVA) provides a parallel case that Trundle and Bowler have investigated.<sup>824</sup> Dissatisfied with epidemiological studies of the 1980-90s, which relied on Hiroshima/Nagasaki data and overlooked

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<sup>823</sup> Masco, "Nuclear Technoaesthetics: Sensory Politics from Trinity to the Virtual Bomb in Los Alamos" (2004).

<sup>824</sup> Trundle, "Translating Proof: Contested Illness, Radiation Exposure, and the Health Claims of Nuclear Test Veterans."; Bowler, "The British Nuclear Test Veteran: Radiation, Activism, and the Soldier's Body, 1952–2002."

long-term, low-dose radiation effects, UK veterans challenged both the scientific framework and its political translation. They argued that the absence of data on ongoing injury was misinterpreted as proof of safety, rather than as a failure to investigate. By shifting focus to genetic effects, they reframed their suffering as a continuing biological legacy, pushing for a broader, more inclusive evidentiary standard. Similarly, French test veterans struggled with restricted military archives, limiting their ability to trace exposures and claim compensation. The testimonies they provided were not merely personal recollections but counterclaims against official narratives, positioning bodily experience as legal evidence.

Read through the lens of testimony studies of this dissertation's theoretical framework, French and British veterans mobilized all four testimonial modalities. They acted as *superstes* by recounting embodied experiences; invoked *testis* through contemporaneous documents and photographs; relied on *auctors* – NGOs, sympathetic scientists, journalists – to translate their claims; and were repeatedly reframed by and as *histsors* in syntheses and reports.

The conflicts over exposure, health effects, and archival access thus become intelligible not only as political struggles but as contests over the production, mediation, and authorization of knowledge. Veterans confronted systems in which the absence of information was routinely interpreted as the absence of harm, and they responded by elevating bodily experience, informal knowledge networks, and testimonial archives to the status of counterevidence. In doing so, they exposed the epistemic asymmetries that structure nuclear governance and challenged the state's monopoly on defining risk. Their activism thus operated simultaneously as a political claim and a knowledge practice – one that compelled institutions to reconsider how nuclear harm is recognized, what forms of testimony are admissible, and whose understanding of exposure counts. Through these interventions, witness activism shifted the epistemic landscape before it achieved legal reform.

#### 8.4.3 Archiving testimony: A counter-history of nuclear testing

Organizations like AVEN, Obsarm, and advocates like Barrillot have worked to compile testimonies as an alternative historical record. *Moruroa and Us*, a sociological study backed by NGOs and religious groups, exemplifies this approach – documenting oral histories to construct a collective memory of nuclear colonialism.<sup>825</sup>

Yet, as Barthe critiques, these testimonial surveys, while powerful, are vulnerable to scientific scrutiny. The tension between institutional knowledge and personal experience remains unresolved. British test veterans, as Trundle shows, faced

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<sup>825</sup> de Vries and Seur, *Moruroa and Us: Polynesians Experiences during Thirty Years of Nuclear Testing in the French Pacific*.

similar epistemic barriers: personal suffering was seen as anecdotal, while state-sanctioned studies dismissed lived realities. Fassin's *humanitarian reason* framework further explains this dynamic, where bureaucratic recognition of harm is contingent on predefined categories, limiting justice for those who fall outside official definitions.

In the *Moruroa and Us* report foreword, the Polynesian evangelical church leader Rocky Matai'e Meuel articulated the project's core mission was: "To restore the dignity of former site workers and islanders, ensuring they are both heard and acknowledged."<sup>826</sup> This encapsulates an essential aspect of the 1990s' nuclear witness activism knowledge production, not only as a means of documentation but as a demand for recognition, redress, and historical accountability.

Despite tensions, collaboration between local activists and committed non-Indigenous allies has played a crucial role in advancing the anti-nuclear and decolonial struggle. In Tahiti, figures like Bruno Barrillot and Antoine W. Du Prel, alongside Mā'ohi activists like Jacky Bryant, John Taroanui Doom, and Roland Oldham, dedicated their lives to documenting nuclear injustice and advocating for those affected, demonstrating that solidarity can transcend identity barriers when rooted in shared political commitment.<sup>827</sup> The *Moruroa e Tatou* movement, emerging alongside the publication of *Moruroa and Us*, exemplifies how testimonial work can serve as foundational tools for organizing.<sup>828</sup> However, the exclusion of directly impacted voices from dominant nuclear debates – whether through scientific institutions, state narratives, or even environmental organizations – remains a persistent issue. As the sociologists and authors of *Moruroa and Us* de Vries and Seur highlight, those most exposed to the risks of nuclear testing had rarely been given the space to speak for themselves.<sup>829</sup> This presentation of ongoing marginalization underscores the need for a more inclusive approach to nuclear justice, one that not only acknowledges the lived experiences of affected communities but also actively integrates their perspectives into global conversations on disarmament, nuclear harm, and reparations.

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<sup>826</sup> de Vries and Seur, *Moruroa and Us: Polynesians Experiences during Thirty Years of Nuclear Testing in the French Pacific*, p. 1.

<sup>827</sup> See Maurer, "Snaring the Nuclear Sun: Decolonial Ecologies in Titaua Peu's Mutismes: E 'Ore te Vāvā" (2020), p. 382.

<sup>828</sup> de Vries and Seur, *Moruroa and Us: Polynesians Experiences during Thirty Years of Nuclear Testing in the French Pacific*, p. 66, p. 165.

<sup>829</sup> de Vries and Seur, *Moruroa and Us: Polynesians Experiences during Thirty Years of Nuclear Testing in the French Pacific*.

## 8.5 Chapter Conclusions: Testimonial Activism and the Politics of Witnessing

This chapter has investigated how testimonial narratives emerged as a crucial form of knowledge production and advocacy surrounding nuclear test sites, linking the experiences of affected individuals to broader global disarmament discourse over the 1990s and 2000s. It examines the efforts of journalists, activists, and organizations – particularly Obsarm and figures like Bruno Barrillot – to historicize and document testimonies of the CEP. Central to this is the historical investigation of the roots of the concept of the Global Hibakusha, expanding the term beyond Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivors to include all victims of nuclear testing, from workers and residents to downwinders.<sup>830</sup> The chapter has highlighted how personal testimony became a central mechanism in shaping understandings of nuclear victimhood, mediating the strategic framing of suffering within emerging human-rights and humanitarian discourses. This emphasis on lived experience signals a deliberate epistemic reorientation within transnational anti-nuclear witness activism: local accounts of exposure and harm were documented in a structured, documentarian mode that elevated individual voices alongside, or even above I would argue, earlier emphases on perpetrators, institutional responsibility, or environmental critique. In doing so, witness activism reframed the production of knowledge itself, demonstrating how affective, testimonial, and evidentiary registers could be mobilized to contest secrecy, and generate claims under conditions of scientific uncertainty and colonial power.

Activist Bruno Barrillot is shown to have played a key role in collecting testimonies and advocating for nuclear test victims, particularly through his book *Les Irradiés de la République* and the following oeuvre. His work, alongside organizations like Obsarm, AVEN, and Moruroa e Tatou, helped shift the discourse from secrecy to recognition, leading to legislative efforts for victim compensation. This transition paralleled broader global movements where testimonial knowledge became central to nuclear victim advocacy, influencing legal battles, media attention, and the opportunity for collective action. Barrillot's books and related documentation on French nuclear testing follow a structured approach that prioritizes factual data while incorporating testimonies to highlight the overlooked consequences of nuclear exposure. His work aligns with activist strategies that seek to raise public awareness, particularly emphasizing how early test-site workers were uninformed of radiation risks. Testimonies reveal inconsistencies in safety measures, institutional negligence, and long-term health effects among veterans and their families, often without official acknowledgment.

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<sup>830</sup> See Jacobs, *Nuclear Bodies: The Global Hibakusha*.

The analysis of testimonial activism within anti-nuclear movements suggests that “humanitarian witnessing” does not naturally or automatically emerge from nuclear test legacies; rather, it depends on historically specific regimes of credibility in which testimony is socially authorized as a form of truth. Drawing on Fassin’s reworking of Agamben and Benveniste’s figures of the *testis*, *superstes*, *auctor*, and *histor*, I treat testimony not primarily as moral expression or memory work, but as a mode of political subjectivation produced within particular institutional, media, and legal infrastructures. Witnessing here is not simply expressive. Instead, it is performative in the sense that it reorganizes the discursive field by reclassifying certain experiences as publicly legible harms. Yet this performativity is uneven and contingent as the capacity of nuclear victims to appear as humanitarian subjects hinges on whether their accounts are recognized as credible, transferable, and institutionally actionable.<sup>831</sup>

Consequently, testimony neither guarantees justice nor straightforwardly “humanitarianizes” the nuclear question. Individual accounts can open pathways into legal and policy arenas, but they also risk being isolated, individualized, or depoliticized if they are not coupled to structural analyses of governmental responsibility, colonial power, and radiological uncertainty. The problem, therefore, is not whether testimony matters, but under what epistemic and political conditions it is allowed to matter, and to what ends.

Subjectivation, as Fassin argues, is not simply the emergence of personal victimhood but the production of political subjects through relations of power, recognition, and contestation.<sup>832</sup> In this sense, in French Polynesia, subjectivation around the CEP was not the emergence of individual victimhood but the reconfiguration of political subject positions within a field structured by colonial power, nuclear secrecy, and the biopolitical and ideological management of risk. Testimonial activism thus operated as a mode of *counter-subjectivation*: it disrupted the nuclear regime’s framing and naming of Polynesians as manageable populations rather than rights-bearing political actors. Rather than a melancholic return to injury, testimony in this sense mobilized affect – grief, anger, and frustration – as a form of epistemic and political energy that unsettled dominant nuclear narratives of safety, modernization, and national necessity. In this sense, witness activism functioned simultaneously as a struggle over recognition and over what counted as legitimate knowledge of the CEP.

This form of activism also draws from a wider repertoire of direct-action traditions, in which bodies are placed deliberately in harm’s way – whether on protest lines or in the retelling of exposure – to render visible forms of risk that institutions obscure. The “proof of the body” in nuclear witnessing stands in sharp contrast to the

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<sup>831</sup> Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*, p. 202.

<sup>832</sup> *Ibid.*

sanitized, abstracted representations of nuclear tests found in military, scientific, and bureaucratic discourse. In this sense, bodily presence – whether at test sites or in testimonial archives – functions as a form of civil disobedience, a refusal to cede interpretive authority to the nuclear weapons state.<sup>833</sup> While the campaign for legal recognition did culminate in France in the 2010 Morin Law, which formalized a framework for considering individual experiences of suffering, this achievement also exposes a tension. The emphasis on individualized harm enabled compensation but may have constrained the horizon of collective acknowledgement, leaving broader structural, environmental, and intergenerational consequences insufficiently addressed. This underscores a central paradox of humanitarian recognition: to become legible within the law, testimonies must conform to individualized frameworks that risk narrowing the political imagination precisely when a wider, collective reckoning is needed.

In this sense, subjects of nuclear colonialism, whether Moruroa workers, veterans, residents near test sites, or anti-nuclear activists, occupy a dual social position akin to Fassin’s analysis of the media portrayal of resisting Palestinian youth in the early-2000s: simultaneously heroic and victimized, both agents and objects of political struggle. This duality highlights the conditions under which testimonial subjects can speak and the consequences of such categorizations for their authority and recognition. Drawing on Althusser’s concept of interpellation, nuclear witnesses are hailed into a particular subjecthood be it by state institutions, humanitarian actors, or media discourses, yet this positioning is neither neutral nor uncontested.<sup>834</sup>

A critical issue arises in the way anti-nuclear testimony is mediated and appropriated. Anaïs Maurer and Maohi writers have critiqued the tendency of foreign NGOs to frame Pacific nuclear activism primarily through a humanitarian lens while side-lining its decolonial dimensions. The exploitation of Pacific suffering within the global anti-nuclear discourse risks reproducing imperial dynamics, wherein local voices are instrumentalized for external agendas. This is particularly evident in the rise of what Maurer through Beam terms the “Green Inc.” phenomenon, where large NGOs sustain themselves by perpetuating a marketable narrative of nuclear resistance, often at the expense of the more radical, aspects of decolonial struggle.<sup>835</sup> This process of depoliticization, as Maurer argues, reduces nuclear colonialism to an environmental and humanitarian issue while obscuring the broader imperial power structures at play.

The crisis of testimony, therefore, is not merely a matter of bearing witness to nuclear violence but of ensuring that such witnessing does not become an instrument

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<sup>833</sup> Ibid.

<sup>834</sup> Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*, p. 202.

<sup>835</sup> Maurer, “Snaring the Nuclear Sun: Decolonial Ecologies in Tituaa Peu’s Mutismes: E’Ore te Vāvā” (2020).

of colonial governance. As Hållander notes, witnessing has developed into a pedagogic position of trust over the late-20<sup>th</sup> century, shaped by prior frameworks of atrocity memory,<sup>836</sup> particularly Holocaust and Hiroshima/Nagasaki testimonies. However, while the sublime imagery of nuclear explosions has been central to official nuclear narratives, the accounts of Moruroa workers, military veterans, and island communities disrupt this aestheticized vision of the unthinkable bomb. Unlike scientists who describe nuclear tests as technological or even poetic phenomena, these testimonies foreground the slow, material, psychological, and bodily effects of radiation exposure and test-site work conditions, offering a counter-discourse rooted in lived experience.

My analysis thus points to the importance of anchoring anti-nuclear critique within a colonial framework. The testimonial figure – situated between lived experience and imposed silence – has the capacity to illuminate the contradictions of nuclear colonialism, particularly the interplay between resistance, epistemic violence, and potential re-appropriation. While humanitarian discourses have often shaped anti-nuclear activism, they risk rendering testimony into a consumable narrative within the circuits of global advocacy, diluting its political charge.

Yet testimonial activism also faces limitations. The framing of harm primarily through individual suffering within legal and human rights frameworks often narrows the scope for systemic critique. Drawing on Toshihiro Higuchi's work on the USSR's legal approach to environmental contamination, it becomes clear that relying solely on individual legal claims fails to address the full extent of harm wrought by nuclear regimes.<sup>837</sup>

Trundle's analysis of British nuclear test veterans' compensation cases underscores this point. In legal battles beginning in 2008, veterans were compelled to navigate a paradox of knowledge production. The very history of testimony they had worked to assemble – building communal narratives, mobilizing media attention, and asserting their claims – was reinterpreted in court to undermine their claims. As Trundle notes, the Ministry of Defence argued that the veterans possessed actual or at least constructive knowledge of the harm they suffered, implying they should have initiated legal action much earlier. In effect, the epistemic labour of decades – once used to validate their experiences – was turned against them. Veterans, who had long insisted that something was wrong, were now forced to argue the opposite: that they could not have known. The proof they had worked to produce became, in

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<sup>836</sup> See Masco, "Nuclear Techno-aesthetics: Sensory Politics from Trinity to the Virtual Bomb in Los Alamos" (2004).

<sup>837</sup> Higuchi, "Tipping the Scale of Justice: The Fallout Suit of 1958 and the Environmental Legal Dimension of Nuclear Pacifism" (2013); Higuchi, *Political Fallout: Nuclear Weapons Testing and the Making of a Global Environmental Crisis*.

the legal context, a liability, a mistranslation of grassroots knowledge into a judicial idiom that ultimately served the nuclear weapons state's interest.<sup>838</sup>

This reversal illustrates a danger of testimonial discourse when it is isolated from broader political and structural critique. Without mechanisms that embed testimony within decolonial and systemic frameworks, there is a risk that narratives of suffering will be recognized only in ways that leave the underlying structures of violence intact. To avoid this, anti-nuclear activism must resist the pull of individualized victimhood and instead cultivate forms of testimony that speak to collective harm, and the enduring legacies of nuclear colonialism. Only then can the act of bearing witness serve not just as a call for recognition, but as a demand for transformation.

The challenge, then, lies in moving beyond a framework that individualizes harm toward one that recognizes nuclear violence as a structural issue. Testimony, while powerful in exposing injustices, must be embedded in legal and political mechanisms that transcend personal narratives, integrating systemic critiques of nuclear colonialism and environmental devastation. Without such a shift, testimonial discourse risks reinforcing the very power structures it seeks to challenge, as offering recognition without the means for substantive transformation.

The humanitarian reframing of nuclear testimony (and perhaps also the humanitarian turn in disarmament) carries real gains such as visibility, affective authority, and new avenues for advocacy – but it also entails distinct epistemic and political hazards. As Maurer (and the “Green Inc.” critique) warns, the global humanitarian gaze can depoliticize nuclear colonialism by translating systemic, decolonial claims into marketable narratives of suffering; Hållander and Fassin remind us that testimonial authority itself is socially produced and requires institutional recognition to matter. Trundle's legal case studies show the perverse effects of such processes in practice: archival testimony and communal histories that once validated claims can be juridically reinterpreted as evidence of prior knowledge, thereby undermining compensation. Put bluntly, humanitarianization can convert resistance into a consumable register that is legible to international publics yet ill-suited to challenge the structural relations, like sovereignty, and bureaucratic classification, that produced the harms in the first place.

For scholars of the CEP and of post-testing sites this diagnosis demands specific methodological and political corrective measures. Research should historicize testimony as mediated practice – tracing its chains of translation (NGO framing, media circulation, legal inscription) and interrogating who accrues epistemic authority at each node. Comparative work on compensation geographies and threshold regimes (400 km zones, 1 mSv rules) must be paired with long-term

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<sup>838</sup> Trundle, “Translating Proof: Contested Illness, Radiation Exposure, and the Health Claims of Nuclear Test Veterans.”



ecological and epidemiological study to avoid reducing harm to administratively convenient metrics. Ethnographic archival work must be combined with participatory methods that centre indigenous and local epistemologies, and with legal and policy analysis that connects testimony to collective, reparative remedies rather than individualized claims alone. Ultimately, scholarship must refuse the quiet politics of recognition as an endpoint: bearing witness should be linked to analyses and demands that expose and transform the colonial and institutional structures that made the CEP possible. Only then can testimony move from symbolic recognition to substantive redress.



# Chapter 9. Conclusions: Witness Activism and Oppositional Knowledge Production in the Context of French Nuclear Testing in the Pacific

This thesis set out to explain how witness activism against French nuclear testing in the Pacific emerged, how it produced credible oppositional knowledge, and what its trajectory reveals about the relationship between secrecy, expertise, and political recognition. It asked three interrelated questions:

1. Under what historical conditions did witness activism become possible?
2. By what techniques did activists construct and circulate authoritative counter-claims?
3. What epistemic limits and contradictions structured those efforts?

The overarching inquiry was not merely descriptive – how activists documented nuclear harm – but explanatory: what conditions made witness activism possible, what contradictions it revealed, and what epistemic forms it created. These questions have guided the investigation along three axes:

*Emergence and Conditions:* Witness activism emerged under conditions of structural secrecy, scientific uncertainty, and institutional disregard for local experience. Actors such as the Danielssons, Obsarm, and AVEN over time leveraged resources ranging from transnational networks, multilingual publications, and newsletters to archival collections, building infrastructures that made personal narratives and technical observations legible in public and policy spheres. This demonstrates that the production of oppositional knowledge is not spontaneous, but historically situated and contingent on social, material, and institutional conditions.

*Techniques and Practices:* Activists employed a range of rhetorical, evidentiary, and material strategies to authenticate and circulate claims. Using testimony in the modalities of testis, superstes, auctor, and histor, they positioned personal

experience as legal evidence, ethical argument, and political intervention. The Danielssons' histor approach exemplifies the capacity to aggregate individual and structural accounts, linking micro-level recordings to meso- and macro-level analyses, bridging local and transnational frames, and challenging dominant narratives of progress, safety, and technological rationality.

*Limits and Contradictions:* Witness activism revealed inherent tensions. While it over time secured a formal recognition of harm – most notably through the Morin Law of 2010 – it also highlighted the risks of individualizing systemic injustice. Testimonial forms, when incorporated into legal or humanitarian frameworks, can depoliticize structural critique, privileging discrete, verifiable narratives over collective, long-term harms. Moreover, the selective amplification of voices demonstrates persistent inequalities in epistemic authority, raising questions about whose experiences are recognized, and whose remain marginalized.

The preceding chapters have answered these questions empirically, methodologically and theoretically. This conclusion draws those answers together, situates them in relation to existing scholarship, and clarifies the study's conceptual contribution. This thesis has asked how oppositional knowledge about French nuclear testing in Polynesia was generated, circulated, and contested. Rather than writing yet another descriptive history of the tests, I have analyzed the practices through which activists, witnesses, and mediators produced knowledge from below: compiling counter-archives, circulating testimony in newsletters and pamphlets, brokering expert authority, and reframing local suffering as evidence in transnational arenas. I call this ensemble witness activism: an analytical figure and method that links modes of testimony (testis, superstes, auctor, histor), archival practice, and history of knowledge. The result is a reorientation of the literature: the politics of nuclear testing is not only a dispute over facts, but a sustained struggle over what counts as evidence, who is authorized to speak, and which scales of harm are legible to law and policy.

This thesis has examined how witness activism functioned as an epistemic and political response to French nuclear testing in the Pacific from the late 1950s to the 2000s. It has analyzed the ways in which activists transformed testimony, documentation, and archiving into tools that challenged state secrecy and scientific monopoly, producing alternative regimes of truth over the period of testing and its immediate aftermath. The project has combined critical realism, testimony theory, archival ethnography, and history of knowledge to examine how these practices operated both as modes of knowledge production and as interventions in broader political, ethical, and social debates.

Through archival ethnography, this thesis has shown that the very form, organization, and curation of activist archives shaped the authority and accessibility of knowledge claims. Archives were not neutral repositories; they functioned as political instruments mediating who could speak and what could circulate, from the

atoll communities to international forums. Obsarm's systematic collection of testimonies exemplifies this: the careful structuring of forms, the categorization of exposure, and the circulation of findings enabled the translation of personal narratives into credible evidence for advocacy, policy, and legal recognition.

A central insight of the thesis is that witness activism is both an analytical figure and a theoretical tool. As an actor-type, it is identifiable through recurring practices and documented methods across archival traces; as a theoretical tool, it links testimony theory, history of knowledge, and critical realism to explain how these practices produce knowledge, shape political subjectivity, and contest epistemic authority. This dual perspective allows us to see testimonial practices not only as acts of documentation or memory, but as interventions that generate political subjects, challenge institutional authority, and reshape collective understandings of nuclear harm.

This thesis demonstrates that witness activism in the context of French nuclear testing functioned as a distinct epistemic practice, producing knowledge and authority through strategic curation, translation, and circulation of testimony. Activists did more than protest; newsletters, NGO pamphlets, and bilingual publications served as infrastructures of knowledge production, enabling scale shifts from local experience to international claims. Testimonial modes – first-hand survivor accounts (*superstes*), contemporaneous observation (*testis*), authoritative mediation (*auctor*), and historian-syntheses (*histor*) – were deployed tactically to negotiate recognition, compensation, and legal standing, making testimony both a form of evidence and an instrument of political subjectivation. State reporting practices, including CEP, CEA, and UNSCEAR reports, produced what I term UN-washed narratives: data reframed and rescaled to obscure proximate risks, generating institutional silences that activist archives later sought to fill. The materiality of archives – their form, location, language, and curation – further shaped which voices travelled, and which remained marginal, as shown by the Danielssons' multilingual documentarian *histor-ism* and Obsarm's testimonial registers.

In this thesis, oppositional knowledge refers not to an external realm of truth standing outside power, but to a historically situated and materially mediated mode of knowing that emerged through contestation with state secrecy, technocratic authority, and colonial governance. In this respect, it belongs to the terrain mapped by the history of knowledge: it was produced through the slow labour of witnessing, archiving, translation, comparison, and expert brokerage, and took form in counter-archives and testimonial practices that rendered dispersed and often suppressed experiences of harm legible across local and transnational arenas. At the same time, the analysis proceeds from a critical realist premise that such knowledge cannot be reduced to discourse, circulation, or recognition alone. Radioactive exposure, environmental contamination, and embodied injury constitute real strata of the world whose effects may be hidden, mismeasured, or politically occluded, but not

thereby negated. Oppositional knowledge is therefore best understood as a historically contingent yet potentially more adequate mode of apprehending these realities under conditions of organized non-knowledge. Its force lies in this double character: it exposes the limits of official knowledge while remaining oriented toward a material world that exceeds and resists official description. What this thesis calls witness activism is the practical form this tension took – an epistemic labour that did not merely denounce ignorance but worked to reconstruct the conditions under which hidden harm could be rendered knowable, comparable, and politically recognizable across domains of science, law, and public debate.

Theoretical and methodological contributions flow directly from these findings. Witness activism is advanced here as an analytical lens that synthesizes testimony studies, history of knowledge, and critical realism, making four key moves: legitimizing testimonial labour as epistemic work; mapping modalities of testimony and their archival traces; theorizing scale-shifting as a methodological practice; and identifying mechanisms of counter-agnetology aimed at dismantling state-sanctioned ignorance. By engaging Fassin's critique of humanitarian reason alongside Agamben, Trouillot, and STS approaches, the thesis demonstrates how humanitarian recognition can simultaneously empower and constrain: testimony opens legal and moral avenues while risking depoliticization of structural critique.

Methodologically, archival ethnography proves essential as a development of the traditional historical method, with careful attention to the form, format, and circulation of activist documents as evidence.

Limitations of the study include its reliance on activist and NGO archives; although triangulation with official archives and scientific studies was pursued where possible, fuller access to French defense, diplomatic, and regional records would strengthen causal claims about institutional intent. Moreover, the focus on oppositional testimony highlights contestatory voices rather than providing an exhaustive epidemiological or legal adjudication of harms, which remain complementary to understanding the broader consequences of nuclear testing.

The study further highlights the importance of temporality. Nuclear testing is often framed as a discrete historical event, yet its consequences, such as nuclear colonial governance, radioactive contamination, intergenerational health effects, and environmental disruption extend across decades. Witness activism functions to bridge these temporalities, connecting immediate experiences to long-term, ongoing consequences. Testimony thus becomes a mechanism for maintaining epistemic continuity, ensuring that past harms inform present and future debates on nuclear governance, environmental stewardship, and humanitarian intervention.

The theoretical framework developed here also foregrounds the interplay between subjectivation and testimony. Drawing on Fassin, this thesis has argued that witness activism does not merely assert victimhood but forms political subjects capable of contesting institutional power. Activists and witnesses whether they are veterans,

local inhabitants, or anti-nuclear protesters, occupy dual positions: both agents of intervention and objects of structural marginalization. Their embodied presence, whether in direct action or in testimonies of exposure, contrasts sharply with the sanitized, aestheticized, and often dehumanized representations of nuclear testing in official and scientific discourse. The proof of body, in these contexts, functions as both ethical and epistemic evidence, disrupting (some) dominant narratives while asserting moral and political claims.

Empirically, the thesis has traced the evolution of witness activism through distinct historical phases. The Danielssons' work in the 1970s–1980s exemplifies documentarian, history-oriented activism, aggregating multiple sources to reveal systemic patterns of nuclear colonialism. Obsarm and AVEN, in the 1990s, built on this approach but shifted epistemic modality to systematic collection of personal narratives and exposure data, to mobilize these testimonies in legal and policy arenas. Both cases illustrate how testimony can function as both counter-knowledge and advocacy, translating local experiences into transnational debates on nuclear safety, environmental justice, and human rights.

This analysis also illuminates broader epistemic contradictions. The pursuit of scientific and legal legitimacy often clashes with the inherently qualitative, affective, and context-specific nature of testimony. Where epidemiological studies and military archives provide technical authority, they frequently fail to capture the lived and intergenerational impacts of exposure. Testimonial activism intervenes in this gap, producing knowledge that is both evidence and ethical claim. Yet this very strength carries limitations: humanitarian and legal frameworks may co-opt testimonies, reducing complex histories of harm to individual cases, thus obscuring systemic and structural dimensions.

## 9.1 The Conditions of Emergence

Witness activism did not arise simply from moral outrage. It emerged at the intersection of three historically specific and shifting conditions over the decades of CEP and post-CEP activity. First, French nuclear governance in the Pacific was organized around secrecy and technocratic authority. Knowledge of fallout patterns, health consequences, and environmental exposure was concentrated within military-scientific institutions. This epistemic monopoly did not eliminate competing interpretations; it generated structured ignorance and thus a terrain of contestation.

Second, the material persistence of harm and colonial governance created experiential contradictions that could not be indefinitely contained. Radiation exposure, illness, ecological disruption, and bureaucratic denial produced a gap between official assurances and lived reality. That gap constituted the social basis for witnessing.

Third, activism became durable only when connective infrastructures were built. Individuals such as the Danielssons and Barrillot, together with organizations including Obsarm and AVEN, aggregated dispersed fragments of testimony, leaked reports, medical observations, correspondence, etc. into newsletters, translated dossiers, and counter-archives. These infrastructures enabled scale-shifting: local experiences were reframed as evidence of systemic nuclear colonialism. Where such infrastructures were absent, witnessing remained politically inert. Witness activism, therefore, was historically contingent. It required secrecy, contradiction, and documentary labour.

## 9.2 Techniques of Epistemic Construction

The thesis has demonstrated that oppositional knowledge was not spontaneous but produced through practice. Activists relied on a socio-historically contingent but reproducible epistemic toolkit. They republished, quoted and annotated official documents to expose internal official inconsistencies. They curated testimonial archives that positioned experience within recognizable registers of credibility. They translated materials across linguistic and political boundaries. They engaged in expert brokerage, linking lay testimony to scientific and medical authority. They produced comparative frames that situated Pacific experiences alongside other nuclear test sites.

Through these techniques, testimony moved across modalities – *testis*, *superstes*, *auctor*, *histor* – and acquired a layered authority over local-global scales. Experience alone did not suffice. It had to be documented, translated, and embedded within structures legible to courts, journalists, and audiences. From the late-1980s onward, a significant shift occurred. Testimony increasingly entered juridical and humanitarian frameworks, compared to earlier where more 1. social, 2. anti-nuclear, and 3. direct action activist claims dominated CEP critical knowledge production. Harm was with this shift reframed as compensable injury; workers and veterans potentially became victims who became claimants. This shift expanded recognition but could also be said to narrow the register of admissible suffering. Its effectiveness depended on strategic translation rather than pure autonomy, and this logic of humanitarianization of the issue was never fully deployed locally

## 9.3 Epistemic Limits and Structural Contradiction

Witness activism as analysed here exposed the colonial architecture of nuclear knowledge, but it did not transcend it. Counter-archives redistributed authority without eliminating hierarchy. Technically literate actors, metropolitan



intermediaries, and veterans frequently travelled more easily across epistemic regimes than many island communities. Credibility remained unevenly distributed.

Humanitarianization occurred belatedly and unevenly in the Pacific context. In contrast to the cases analysed by Didier Fassin – where testimony rapidly became institutionalized within NGO politics – Pacific nuclear testimony entered humanitarian discourse more slowly. With this, Bathe's paradox of the victim and victimisateur narrative is problematized. Several historically plausible factors help explain this temporal lag and partial victimization: sustained metropolitan suppression of information; the geopolitical marginalization of Pacific territories during the Cold War; limited integration into global NGO networks; and the displacement of indigenous testimony by highly visible metropolitan controversies, such as the *Rainbow Warrior* affair. All this can be collected under what was articulated by anti-nuclear and pro-independence Pacific groups as nuclear colonialism. Juridical recognition (instead perhaps) required individualization. Structural and collective harms became fragmented into case files of historical harm. This translation produced compensatory regimes but constrained broader political critique

This temporal unevenness complicates linear narratives of the rise of humanitarian victimhood. The figure of the “nuclear victim” was not immediately available as a globally legible subject position. It was historically assembled.

## 9.4 Positioning the Argument

This study intervenes in three principal historiographical conversations. First, in relation to scholarship on victimization and moral subjectivity, it historicizes the emergence of the humanitarian witness in relation to CEP, especially after the last tests were conducted. Rather than assuming a stable victim category, it demonstrates the contingent and uneven construction of that figure within colonial nuclear governance.

Second, in dialogue with Fassin's analysis of NGO politics and testimony, the thesis shows that humanitarianization is temporally and geopolitically differentiated. The Pacific case reveals a delayed incorporation of testimony into humanitarian frameworks and highlights the infrastructural preconditions required for such incorporation.

Third, building on work on agnotology, the thesis advances the concept of counter-agnotology as generative mechanism. If agnotology studies the production of ignorance, counter-agnotology analyses the practices through which actors convert absence, suppression, and uncertainty into public evidence. Witness activism here

emerges as a form of historical epistemic labour directed at the dismantling, or at least destabilization, of structured ignorance.

## 9.5 Broader Implications and Future Research

Several avenues follow from these findings. Comparative research across nuclear test sites such as Algeria, Kazakhstan, Nevada, Australia, and the Marshall Islands would clarify why humanitarianization and juridical recognition developed (or did not develop) at different times. Such comparison is in some sense made by Robert Jacobs, but a historical deep ethnography into local archives could illuminate how geopolitical centrality, racialization, and colonial status shaped testimonial legibility.

Further theoretical development of counter-agnetology could refine our understanding of contemporary struggles over climate data, military secrecy, and environmental contamination. The Pacific case demonstrates that ignorance is not merely imposed; as knowledge it is activated in struggle and conflict.

Finally, this history bears contemporary resonance. As states recalibrate civil defence infrastructures and strategic communication in renewed security environments, the Cold War experience underscores that credibility and legibility is never purely technical. It is relational and historically conditioned. Secrecy may stabilize institutions in the short term, but it generates epistemic debts that resurface when lived experience contradicts official assurance.

Witness activism in the Pacific did more than oppose a sequence of nuclear detonations. It confronted the epistemic architecture that made those detonations administratively routine, socially and culturally acceptable, and politically defensible. French nuclear testing, as other colonial military projects in the Pacific, relied not only on military capacity and strategic doctrine, but on a regime of managed visibility: controlled information flows, scientific monopolies, selective disclosure, and the compartmentalization of risk. What activists challenged, therefore, was not simply policy but the conditions under which policy could claim legitimacy.

By assembling counter-archives, translating technical materials, curating testimony, and linking local experience to transnational networks, activists intervened directly in that regime of knowledge. They did not merely “give voice”. They produced documentation. They compared data. They exposed inconsistencies. They accumulated evidentiary weight over time. In doing so, they redistributed – though never fully equalized – epistemic authority. Official secrecy was not immediately dismantled, but it was rendered contestable.

At the same time, this study has shown that oppositional knowledge was shaped by the very structures it sought to disrupt. To become credible, testimony had to conform to juridical and scientific expectations. Collective and intergenerational harms were frequently reframed as individualized medical injuries. Technical literacy and metropolitan intermediaries often mediated which claims travelled and which stalled. The epistemic order proved permeable but not easily overturned. Recognition required translation into the language of the institutions being challenged.

The broader implication is methodological as much as substantive. Nuclear history cannot be reduced to high politics, strategic doctrine, or diplomatic manoeuvre. Nor can it be understood solely through moral narratives of victimhood. It must also be written as the history of knowledge regimes: how harm is rendered measurable or dismissed as anecdotal; how ignorance is organized; how archives are constructed; and how evidentiary standards are negotiated. In this perspective, nuclear governance appears not only as a matter of force and deterrence, but as a struggle over credibility, authority, and the distribution of doubt.

The Pacific case underscores that ignorance is not a void but a structured condition. It is maintained through classification systems, jurisdictional fragmentation, and the privileging of certain forms of expertise. Yet it is also historically contingent. Sustained documentary labour, often slow, cumulative, and unglamorous, can narrow the space within which ignorance operates.

If there is a restrained critical lesson to draw, it is this: the governability of existential risk depends as much on epistemic discipline as on strategic calculation. Nuclear testing required not only technological capacity but a credible narrative of safety and necessity. Once that narrative fractured under the pressure of accumulated evidence and persistent witnessing, the political terrain shifted. Not decisively, not uniformly, but measurably.

This thesis has sought to reconstruct that shift without romanticizing it. Witness activism neither fully displaced state authority nor dissolved colonial hierarchies. It operated within constraints, adapted to dominant evidentiary norms, and achieved partial victories. Yet those partial victories matter. They remind us that the history of nuclear weapons is inseparable from the history of how their consequences were known, denied, documented, and contested.



# Afterword: Politics of Pastness, Memory, and Legacy

In this afterword, I situate witness activism in relation to the ongoing politics of memory and the making of nuclear heritage at former test sites. In French Polynesia, as in U.S. sites such as Bikini Atoll, processes of memorialization are increasingly formalized through official and institutional frameworks that risk sanitizing or depoliticizing the histories of nuclear colonialism they seek to preserve. Against this, witness activism foregrounds the local, the contested, and the unresolved, drawing attention to the enduring struggle over whose voices are authorized, whose suffering is rendered legible, and whose experiences remain marginal. In this sense, the study contributes to a historiography of nuclear opposition that moves beyond the recovery of silenced voices to examine critically the conditions under which such voices are archived, circulated, and institutionalized. The memorialization of nuclear testing in the Pacific thus appears not as a settled past, but as an ongoing process in which memory, history, and heritage are actively negotiated, producing what may be understood as a nuclear heritage in the making.<sup>839</sup>

With the following, I endeavour to locate my research as a history dealing with this “pastness” as a problem, that an analysis of oppositional knowledge production has critical potential to destabilize, in line with how Ariella Azoulay sees a potential in photography for unlearning imperial history.<sup>840</sup>

The heritage-making of the tests is distinctively local but still concerns the wider world since the techno-political spectacle of the NWTs and their aftermaths. The sociotechnical imaginary<sup>841</sup> of “globality” or the Anthropocene today are all deeply connected to the test sites and the periods of testing as *point zeroes* in environmental, disarmament, and Cold War discourses and imagination of a Nuclear Age.<sup>842</sup> In

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<sup>839</sup> Aleida Assmann, *Memory, Individual and Collective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>840</sup> Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: a Political Ontology of Photography* (London: Verso, 2012).

<sup>841</sup> Jasanoff and Kim, “Containing the Atom: Sociotechnical Imaginaries and Nuclear Power in the United States and South Korea” (2009).

<sup>842</sup> The global mark that the thermonuclear tests meant on the geological scale has been suggested as the starting marker of the Anthropocene as it can be clearly identified as human generated influence. Jan Zalasiewicz et al., “When did the Anthropocene begin? A mid-twentieth century boundary level is stratigraphically optimal,” *Quaternary International* 383 (2015); Masco,

popular visual representations of “history”, or world history and the history of humanity, a characteristic mushroom cloud image of a nuclear test is ubiquitous. One example of a production of heritage connected to this is that the ships sunken as targets for nuclear testing outside the Bikini Atoll, the first place where people were forcibly removed from their homes due to nuclear testing in 1946, and the test facilities in Marshall Islands, are formalized as a UNESCO world heritage, a site that is a symbol of “outstanding universal value” under Criteria VI:

Ideas and beliefs associated with the Bikini nuclear test site, and more generally with the escalation of military power which characterized the Cold War, are of international significance. These events gave rise to a large number of international movements advocating nuclear disarmament; they gave rise to powerful symbols and to many images associated with the “nuclear era”, which characterized the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>843</sup>

The Bikini test site as a remnant was thus inscribed on the world heritage list in 2010, with hopes of the local government to gain tourist revenues from visitors and divers visiting the reefs on the sunken ships. It is in this context noteworthy that the UNESCO text highlights the symbols of international disarmament movements. As Robert Jacobs and Mick Broderick<sup>844</sup> highlight: in the United Nations report considering the Bikini Atoll World Heritage nomination, the evaluation committee reported that Bikini and other testing grounds around the world were subjected to “a type of nuclear colonialism which is specific to nuclear weapons”.<sup>845</sup>

They argued in 2012 that while there has been some comparative epidemiological work in the past on nuclear test-site populations, this colonial nuclear mind-set is essential to understanding the social, cultural, and economic impact on these communities across generations.<sup>846</sup> Official statements about the heritage and values worth protecting at nuclear test sites – Bikini Atoll arguably being the most mediated – are thus far more complex and ambiguous than the UN’s motivational text suggests. I observe an incongruity between the process of turning these sites

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“Terraforming Planet Earth: The Age of Fallout.”; Colin N. Waters et al., “The Anthropocene is functionally and stratigraphically distinct from the Holocene,” *Science* 351, no. 6269 (2016); Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg, “The geology of mankind? A critique of the Anthropocene narrative,” *The Anthropocene Review* 1, no. 1 (2014).

<sup>843</sup> *UNESCO Advisory Body Evaluations: Bikini Atoll (Marshall Islands) No 1339*. Retrieved 5 August 2021 from <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1339/>.

<sup>844</sup> Jacobs and Broderick, “United Nations Report Reveals the Ongoing Legacy of Nuclear Colonialism in the Marshall Islands” (2012).

<sup>845</sup> *UNESCO Advisory Body Evaluations: Bikini Atoll (Marshall Islands) No 1339*.

<sup>846</sup> Jacobs and Broderick, “United Nations Report Reveals the Ongoing Legacy of Nuclear Colonialism in the Marshall Islands” (2012).

into heritage or memorials, and the justice and transparency sought by opposition movements during the time of testing.

While historical testimonies are valuable for knowledge creation, a critical historical approach must also scrutinize the occurrence of these test-site experiences and how they are transformed or not transformed into heritage or historical knowledge. This includes critically examining the processes of witnessing and ethnographic methods that risk blurring conflicts and diluting contentious knowledge claims into a universalizing narrative of progressive history and compassion for the “other” of the past. These ideas build on my connection of theory of testimony to witness activism. In relation to silencing and voicing of allegedly lost or under-represented stories, the theorist Arielle Azoulay, states that:

Historians are interpellated to overcome those alleged silences and are made (or invent themselves as) rescuers and saviours salvaging voices from oblivion. Rescuing those voices, however, as isolated relics of the past and presenting them as historical pearls detached from the necklace of claims through which they have persisted, these historians take part in subordinating those voices to the regime of the archive, perpetuated by their own discipline.<sup>847</sup>

As Yannick Barthe has argued, there is an ambiguity in the shifting French/Western narrative of the test sites, from a heroic adventure to a victimizing misconduct.<sup>848</sup> I argue that witness activism and testimony has had a central role in this. By investigating oppositional knowledge production of the nuclear test sites through a historical and methodological approach that critically engages with the categories of hero, victim, perpetrator, agent, and subject – and their relationship to history and time – I hope to overcome the inherent always already existing subordination of lost voices that Azoulay describes. This approach views source material not as static relics but as part of an ongoing struggle for more accurate, better knowledge.

The idea of a critical assessment of humanitarian narratives as hiding or replacing more conflictual issues with a politics of compassion developed in Fassin’s sense can be informative and productive as an outset to maintain the critical perspectives in memorialization processes related to the testing. It is hereby central not to see the NTS and people living nearby as passive victims of history, or for that matter, of the later struggles over definition of bodily harm and medical knowledge as well, but as potential historical actors forming and articulating said struggles.<sup>849</sup>

I identify a trend towards humanitarianizing nuclear issues over the post-Cold War decades, particularly following the entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban

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<sup>847</sup> Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*, p. 355.

<sup>848</sup> Barthe, *Les retombées du passé: Le paradoxe de la victime*.

<sup>849</sup> Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (2012).

Treaty (CTBT) in 1996 and its impact on consolidating the legitimacy of the non-proliferation regime. This period saw a shift towards focusing more on individual suffering and rights within the international institutional framework, as opposed to either a structurally informed critique or moral condemnation. The Fassinian inspired hypothesis that I set out to probe: that testimony should become increasingly important, is with the conclusions of this thesis nuanced and corroborated.

I argue that this shift is linked to the evolving status of testimonial knowledge production and to what might be described as a scaling down in order to scale up dynamic. In this sense, recent efforts in nuclear humanitarianism, have reoriented their scale: while operating from above, they increasingly centre local experiences as the basis for global claims-making.<sup>850</sup> This thesis suggests that such a reconfiguration rests on a longer historical process in which witnessing at nuclear test sites was expanded, aggregated, and rendered legible across domains, thereby laying the groundwork for contemporary humanitarian frameworks. At the same time, these processes have transformed forms of nuclear indigeneity into contested objects of knowledge and advocacy, endowed with a degree of voice and claim-making capacity, yet not always positioned as primary subjects of those claims and often mediated through the agendas and infrastructures of large-scale international organizations.

Furthermore, the memory sites or lieux de mémoire<sup>851</sup> of the CEP years in Tahiti are in a protracted process of formation and ongoing political struggle.<sup>852</sup> This process indicates conflicts of interests over the history of the testing with

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<sup>850</sup> This interplay between humanitarian politics, human rights law and nuclear disarmament is covered from different perspectives in IR, peace studies and in legal research. See for example: Considine, “The ‘Standardization of Catastrophe’: Nuclear Disarmament, the Humanitarian Initiative and the Politics of the Unthinkable”; Bonnie Docherty, “A ‘Light for all Humanity’: The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and the Progress of Humanitarian Disarmament” *Global Change, Peace & Security* 30, no. 2 (2018); C. P. Evans, “Questioning the Status of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons as a Humanitarian Disarmament Agreement” *Utrecht Journal of International and European Law* 36, no. 1 (2021); R. D. Gibbons, “The Humanitarian Turn in Nuclear Disarmament and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons,” *Nonproliferation Review* 25, no. 1-2 (2018); Rebecca Johnson, “Linking Humanitarian Law and Nuclear Disarmament Action: The Case for a Nuclear Weapons Convention,” *Austrian Review of International and European Law* 15 (2010); Kmentt, “The Development of the International Initiative on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons and its Effect on the Nuclear Weapons Debate” (2015); Shorna-Kay, “TPNW, the Caribbean and the Disarmament Politics of Small Island States” (2022).

<sup>851</sup> *Lieux de mémoire* “sites of memory” is a type of memory-museum-archive of collective significance, an object or place that contains memory, based on the theories of Pierre Nora. See Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de mémoire*,” *Representations* 26 (1989).

<sup>852</sup> See Charlie René, 12 March 2024. *Radio 1*, “Le Centre de mémoire du nucléaire à la recherche d’un nouveau souffle”, retrieved from <https://www.radio1.pf/le-centre-de-memoire-du-nucleaire-a-la-recherche-dun-nouveau-souffle/> 4 March 2024.



negotiations and delimitations of what it will contain, how it will be financed, and the actual control over the memory production.<sup>853</sup> Members of the Polynesian territorial assembly have aired suspicion regarding the free ceding of a French navy military base to hold such a memorial place/museum.<sup>854</sup>

Another example is a monument of memory, *Place du 2 juillet 1966* (the date of the Aldébaran, the first test at Moruroa), created in Papeete, Tahiti in 2006. It related to the other test sites, from which ground-materials are been gathered in a community of test affected, what in the US have been termed downwinders, meaning people being/living downwind from nuclear explosions.<sup>855</sup> In 2014, this monument site was threatened to be demolished or moved as it was seen as a detriment to touristic interests by the then president of the assembly Gaston Flosse, who had been a supporter and ally of the French president Jacques Chirac and his resumption of tests in the mid-1990s.<sup>856</sup> This memorial monument carries different connotations and meanings than the UN inscription and the proposed *lieu de mémoire*, as it emerges from the anti-testing movement itself and its expressed solidarity with other downwinders and NTS-critical organizations, rather than as an initiative imposed from above.

To frame a central tension that drove my inquiry into uncertain knowledge and nuclear colonialism: heritage imposed from above often implies passivity, that the subject receives it rather than actively shapes it. Yet heritage remains capable of being constructed and reworked as identity-history; it always contains the present, conflict, and the potential for reformulation. As social categories, heritage and memory – like knowledge – are conditional, contested, and analyzable. While my thesis does not undertake a full analysis of these conflicts, I highlight the potential of this work to inform processes of memory-making.

This approach resonates with Ariella Azoulay's concept of *potential history*: a history of struggles that is not merely corrective or alternative but actively shapes how knowledge claims and testimonies about nuclear weapons testing are remembered, interpreted, and mobilized. The monument thus exemplifies how

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<sup>853</sup> Groups of volunteers like *Association 193* and *Moruroa et nous* are still working in Tahiti for compensation to people who associate illness such as cancer with the consequences of the testing.

<sup>854</sup> A report of the highest French official, the High Commissioner presenting the memory project 2010 to the Assemblée de Polynésie Française is present at this URL: [https://www.service-public.fr/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/NOTE\\_OCT2010\\_HC\\_m%C3%A9thodo-lieux-m%C3%A9moire-1.pdf](https://www.service-public.fr/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/NOTE_OCT2010_HC_m%C3%A9thodo-lieux-m%C3%A9moire-1.pdf), retrieved 14 February 2024. On the continued debates and deliberations of costs and place of the memory space see, <https://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/polynesie/tahiti/lieu-memoire-essais-nucleaires-maina-sage-interpelle-annick-girardin-768363.html>, retrieved 2 February 2024.

<sup>855</sup> Jacobs, *Nuclear Bodies: The Global Hibakusha*.

<sup>856</sup> Jacobs, "Post-nuclear/Post Colonial Challenges to Democratization in the Pacific."

grassroots memory practices can assert agency within broader frameworks of inherited or institutionalized heritage.

I recognize the analytical importance of the test sites/places and *where they are located*, in a region that during later centuries has been shaped by imperialism and colonialism, enabling the test-localization to the Oceanic archipelagos, out of sight but still threatening. As a European scholar, the tradition of extractive epistemic practices has been key to reflexively consider for me in this thesis and my further work. This is why I have decided to critically examine processes and mechanisms behind claim making connected to the production of testimonies, rather than trying to describe the history of Pacific testing. Therefore, again, I have not written the history of the tests or their opponents/anti-nuclear history as a corrective to narratives that hide them as such. Rather, I see that a historical critique of the method of this claim making is missing in the disarmament history. This is something I want to contribute to, to forward thinking and question prevalent assumptions of nuclear knowledges.

These findings carry important implications for policy, archival practice, and scholarship. From a policy perspective, compensation regimes should move beyond individualized redress to incorporate systemic, ecological remediation and collective reparative measures; while for instance the Morin Law represents progress, it remains limited in addressing long-term environmental and intergenerational harms. In terms of archival practice, improving public and research access to military, health, and environmental data is crucial, and where official access is restricted, civil-society archives function as vital corrective resources that require ethical and material support. For scholarship, the work done here underscores the need for comparative, transnational approaches, linking French, British, and US test-site records to better trace causal and institutional narratives. Future research should pursue longitudinal studies that integrate activist archives with declassified monitoring data and contemporary sampling, examine how test-site memorialization reproduces or contests archival silences, and explore whether contemporary geopolitical tensions re-activate nuclear colonial logics in places like French Polynesia. Together, these directions emphasize the intertwined stakes of knowledge, justice, and memory in understanding both historical and ongoing nuclear practices.

Finally, the thesis points to the ongoing relevance of witness activism for contemporary nuclear politics. As nuclear proliferation expands in multipolar contexts and French nuclear strategy adapts to new global dynamics, the epistemic and political strategies developed by Pacific activists remain instructive. They demonstrate how local knowledge, testimony, and counter-archives can challenge secrecy, reshape public understanding, and inform more equitable, ethical, and structurally aware approaches to disarmament and environmental stewardship. Witness activism did not merely narrate harm; it altered the epistemic landscape in which nuclear harm is recognized and contested.

In conclusion, this thesis affirms that witness activism is simultaneously a political practice, a site of epistemic production, and a framework for critical reflection. It emerges from conditions of secrecy, marginalization, and scientific uncertainty, leveraging testimony and archival practice to produce credible knowledge and challenge state authority. At the same time, it illuminates the tensions between individual recognition and structural critique, local experiences and transnational circulation, as well as memory, heritage, and the ongoing legacies of nuclear colonialism. The object of analysis in this thesis is not testimony of the tests or testimony of colonialism as separate domains, but testimony of nuclear colonialism as an integrated historical formation. In this sense, nuclear colonialism is not an external context but the condition that binds together the material practices of testing and the epistemic struggles over how their consequences were witnessed, known, and contested. By integrating theory, method, and empirical analysis, this thesis contributes a model for understanding how oppositional knowledge is generated, mediated, and contested. I hope this has offered both historical insight and a conceptual tool for future scholarship, advocacy, and policy.



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# Sources and Bibliography

## Archives

### **Bengt Danielsson Archives – Kon-Tiki Museum, Oslo, Norway**

**Location:** Kon-Tiki Museum, Bygdøy, Oslo, Norway

**Consulted Materials:** Correspondence, newsletters, personal diaries, photographic collections, annotated publications

Ref. code: NO KTM 1998-001

Level II: Steel case folders 2100 – 2399

Level III: 2600-2999 numbers, folders with contents sorted in detail.

Level IV. Material sorted in detail by category and catalogued. Boxes numbered. 3000 and up.

NOTAE VITAE, Bengt Danielssons journal, beginning in 1949, is located at Östra Tollstad församlingsgård, Sweden

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### **Marie-Thérèse Danielsson Archives (private holding) – Papehuet, Tahiti, French Polynesia**

**Location:** Papehuet, Tahiti, French Polynesia

**Consulted Materials:** Correspondence, personal papers, manuscripts, photographs

Documents and boxes dating 1990–1996 .

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### **Observatoire des Armements (Obsarm) Archives – Lyon, France**

**Locations:** Lyon, France

**Consulted Materials:** Newsletters, field reports, correspondence, photographs, compiled testimonies, campaign publications, surveys, AVEN material, manuscripts

Series: Shelves B65-B68.

Steel cabinet

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**Service du Patrimoine Archivistique Audiovisuel (SPAA) – Papeete, Tahiti, French Polynesia**

**Location:** Motu Uta, Papeete, Tahiti, French Polynesia

**Consulted Materials:** Library holdings, publications

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**Greenpeace International Archives – International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam, Netherlands**

Ref. code ARCH02597

**Location:** International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands

**Consulted Materials:** Correspondence, internal reports, newsletters, photographs, campaign materials

Collections on Pacific campaigns, correspondence with Greenpeace New Zealand

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**Archives of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) – London School of Economics, London, UK**

**Location:** Special Collections, London School of Economics, London, UK

**Consulted Materials:** Newsletters, organizational correspondence, internal reports, campaign literature

CND /1/6 to CND 1/69

CND 5/19 to CND/10/2

CND/ADD/1/1 to CND/ADD/9/1-16

CND/2018/1 to CND/2008/8

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