

Introduction

“WE ARE NOT DROWNING —
WE ARE FIGHTING”

Saving the environment never means saving people who
come from environments like mine.

.....

Addressing climate means admitting that it starts and ends with us.

—TERISA TINEI SIAGATONU, “Layers”

Floating Islands, Doomsday Dreams

In 2008, in the midst of a financial crisis, two venture capitalists argued that economic deregulation could be the solution to environmental collapse. These two men were Patri Friedman, grandson of the late economist Milton Friedman, and Peter Thiel, Facebook Inc. director and PayPal cofounder. Together, they founded the Seasteading Institute, an organization aiming to build artificial floating islands as sustainable refuges in the age of rising sea levels. These “floating startup societies,” as they dubbed them, were to function

as independent nation-states, with “innovative government models” offering their citizens an escape from taxation.¹ Backed by Thiel’s personal fortune (estimated at nearly US\$3 billion), this science-fictional solution to rising sea levels soon became a concrete proposal. In 2017, Seasteading partnered with the start-up company Blue Frontiers and signed a Memorandum of Understanding with French Polynesia, the country also known as Mā’ohi Nui, to begin investigating potential partnerships. Engineers explored Tahiti’s lagoon and selected a location for a floating island prototype.² The organization soon persuaded the Polynesian government of Tahitian president Édouard Fritch to commit to creating a “special governing framework” for an “innovative special economic zone”—in other words, a new type of tax haven for the wealthy residents of a small floating island.³ With housing units estimated to sell at no less than US\$5 million apiece, this doomsday prep project clearly catered exclusively to the world’s financial elite.

Despite his fervent message of environmental concern, Thiel’s donations to the campaign of the US president who called global warming “a Chinese hoax” speak to his indifference to climate collapse. This indifference stems from the fact that, for the world’s richest entrepreneurs, the climate crisis is synonymous with lucrative opportunities—what Canadian journalist Naomi Klein has called “disaster capitalism.”⁴ Thiel and Friedman’s conceptualization of the ocean as the next frontier of neoliberalism draws from a long capitalist tradition, water having long been seen by Western investors as an open space ideally suited to support the free circulation of capital.⁵ What is unique about Thiel and Friedman’s project is that they envisioned building their neoliberal utopia on lands and seas that have been a primary locus of Western utopianism for centuries. The floating island prototype was to be built nowhere other than in the Atimaono lagoon, in the district of Mataiea, a few miles away from the bay in which, more than 250 years ago, French circumnavigator Louis-Antoine de Bougainville popularized the idyllic myth of the South Seas. Seasteading capitalizes on the market value of the legendary tropical island of Tahiti, while endangering the Tahitian environment and barring Indigenous Mā’ohi people from their traditional fishing grounds.⁶ The project simultaneously commodifies and erases Pacific cultures.

Yet the systematic erasure of Pacific peoples at the heart of Seasteading’s venture is also precisely what brought this project to its demise. As investors were negotiating with the government of French Polynesia, people of the Mataiea district organized an association, No tō’u here ia Mataiea (Out of my love for Mataiea), to protest the environmental and social impact of the floating island. Its members were primarily local fishers and their families, as well as

prominent figures of the pro-independence movement such as Tina Cross and Steve Chailloux. The association's president, Antoine Matetei, highlighted that the prototype would deprive fishers of their primary source of income and sustenance and would destroy the surrounding coral. Interviewed by the local state TV station, Matetei joked that the project should be transferred to Moruroa, the nearby atoll in which France conducted 178 nuclear and thermonuclear tests between 1966 and 1996.⁷ The language used by the Seasteading Institute, promising that the floating islands project would have a low environmental impact, was indeed reminiscent of the tropes used by the French government, assuring Tahitians in the 1960s that the nuclear testing center presented “no danger” for the population and would bring modernity, economic development, and technological know-how to the island.⁸ After 193 nuclear tests, French officials were still claiming that the bomb was so clean that “one can't even call this a bomb. It's nuclear physics.”⁹ The Seasteading Institute asking Mā'ohi people to relinquish their coastline so that people threatened by rising sea levels can “find a refuge in the future” was also disturbingly reminiscent of the United States government asking the residents of Bikini Atoll (Bikini) to turn their island into a nuclear testing site “for the good of mankind and to end all world wars.”¹⁰

The uncanny parallels to be made between the nuclear tests and the floating island projects rang true to many residents. On January 30, 2018, a hitherto little-known Tahitian man, Sam Amaru, posted a video on Facebook lambasting the complicit Polynesian government:

Aren't you sick and tired of destroying the country? During the nuclear era . . . , you told everyone that nuclear testing was safe. We all know that nuclear fallout was nefarious. Many Polynesian people became sick. . . . And now, with the floating islands, you continue this destruction. . . . You talk about COP21, you talk about global warming. But the basis of the food chain rests on coral, and you want to build an artificial island here, in the lagoon? How much coral is it going to destroy? And can you imagine the scene? An immense floating island, right in front of our eyes, with rich people strutting in thongs and jewelry, with all their money . . . not paying taxes . . . , while people here are fucked?¹¹

His video went viral. It marked a turning point in the campaign against the floating islands, as it was viewed within a few days by more than 100,000 people (more than a third of the population of the country).

All over the island, Mā'ohi antinuclear activists joined the fight against the Seasteaders. Later in 2018, Mā'ohi antinuclear writer-activist Chantal T. Spitz

took a public and remarked stance against the floating island project. Spitz has a large audience in the country, having risen to fame in 1991 for becoming the first Tahitian to publish a novel—a best-selling book denouncing nuclear imperialism at a time when French bombs were still detonating in Moruroa and Fangataufa. Mobilizing her literary talents against this new assault on Tahitian lands, Spitz published a short story in French about the Seasteaders’ project, titled “J’eus un pays” (I had a country). The title constitutes a dystopian parody of a famous poem in Tahitian by antinuclear activist Turo a Raapoto, “E fenua to ù” (I have a country), which proclaims the resilience of Mā’ohi people whose land is “not yet conquered” (aore ā i riro).¹² In her work of science fiction inspired by current events, Spitz imagines the reality that would await Tahiti if the Seasteaders were to accomplish their plans. Her story begins in present times:

*des morceaux de lagons du pays sont sélectionnés par NoFrontiers avec l’aval
du gouvernement
protection contre la montée des eaux innovation technologique énergies
renouvelables développement économique emplois assurés sont les atouts lan-
cés en appât*¹³

bits of the country’s lagoon are selected by NoFrontiers with the benediction of the government
protection against rising sea levels technological innovation renewable
energies economic development guaranteed employment are the assets
thrown as bait

Renaming the aggressor “NoFrontiers,” Spitz underscores the hypocrisy of the start-up launched by the Seasteaders, named “Blue Frontiers.” Indeed, seeing the ocean as a frontier to be trespassed means continuing to refuse the idea of limits—the very ideology that led to the current environmental crisis in the first place and is condemning most of life on earth to cataclysmic suffering. As British marine biologist Helen Scales notes, “the frontier story has always been one of destruction and loss, and increasingly it’s becoming a desperate tale of the race to grab what’s left.”¹⁴

Under Spitz’s pen, the reader is invited to reflect on what “technological innovation” and “economic development” have brought to Mā’ohi Nui:

*plus de la moitié de la population sous le seuil de pauvreté
échec scolaire et illettrisme galopants
addictions multiples alcool sucres drogues violences
chômage massif*

richesses bedonnantes pauvretés bouffies
violences physiques sexuelles contre les enfants les femmes
obésité morbide cancers diabète maladies cardio-vasculaires en explosion
déracinement des populations
*conséquences de trente années de bidouillage nucléaire de l'état d'invasion*¹⁵

more than half of the population under the poverty line
school dropouts galloping illiteracy
multiple addictions alcohol sugar drugs violences
massive unemployment
paunchy wealth swollen poverty
physical sexual violence against the children the women
morbid obesity cancer diabetes cardiovascular diseases exploding
uprooting of the populations
consequences of thirty years of nuclear diddling by the invading state

This is the material reality behind the money and the technology brought by “nuclear diddling” done by the French Centre d’expérimentation du Pacifique (CEP, Pacific Experimentation Center). People throughout the country suffer from high incidences of cancers, leukemia, stillbirths, and other radiation-induced illnesses. The incidence of thyroid cancer and acute myeloid leukemia in Mā’ohi Nui is the highest in the world.¹⁶ Mā’ohi women are particularly affected: a comparative study conducted in 2000 reveals that women in Tahiti are ten times more likely to contract thyroid cancer than women in Hawai‘i.¹⁷

Yet it is very telling to see that Spitz places radiation-induced diseases at the very end of her litany of issues brought by the CEP. In addition to spreading death and diseases, the French nuclear testing program brought dramatic social changes that shook Mā’ohi society to the core. While the CEP brought hefty contracts to private French enterprises and the Tahitian business elite, most Mā’ohi people did not benefit from the economic windfall. After a brief period of economic boom during the construction of the nuclear bases (during which Mā’ohi workers were still paid less than the French minimum wage), the nuclear economy soon left many families uprooted from their islands, isolated in insalubrious urban housing, without access to traditional fishing and farming. Mā’ohi geographer Gabriel Tetiarahi denounces that Mā’ohi people quickly became unable to afford buying land on which to maintain communal life since “land prices in central Pape’ete are higher than those on the Champs Élysées in the center of Paris.”¹⁸ With the weakening of traditional agricultural knowledge and the poisoning by irradiation of many food sources, most people

became dependent on a wage economy that left many unemployed, underemployed, or exploited.

The French educational system in place in Mā'ohi Nui, far from offering social mobility, failed to respond to the educational needs of the country and still leaves 40 percent of the nation's youth without a high school diploma.¹⁹ In fact, the French schooling system exacerbated the deculturation brought by nuclear money by foregrounding in its curriculum French language, literature, and history, at the expense of Pacific knowledges and epistemologies. France has also failed to provide the country with an adequate social safety net. While unemployment rates are skyrocketing (less than half of working-age people have an official job), Mā'ohi people do not have access to French unemployment benefits, nor to the French basic solidarity income (*revenu de solidarité active*, or RSA). The Tahitian, French, and Chinese political and business elite were able to benefit from France's millions in nuclear subsidies, but many working-class Mā'ohi families were impoverished by the new economy. "Our people are more and more divided between those who take advantage of the bomb's money and the others, more and more impoverished," denounced antinuclear activist John Taroanui Doom as early as 1971.²⁰ The islands' high rates of incarceration, substance abuse, teenage suicides, school dropouts, and domestic violence cannot be separated from France's nuclear program. This other facet of nuclear colonialism seeps deep into the hearts and souls of the Mā'ohi people born with the bomb. "Tormented and lost for having forgotten the very name of the moon that saw their birth. Shorn of their memory. Stupefied by abhorrent, foreign beliefs, they will wander, orphaned from the breast and the placenta that nourished them," accuses Mā'ohi novelist Titaua Peu.²¹

In an island thus already violently shook by nuclear imperialism, Spitz envisions a bleak future for the fight against the new stealers of land. Her story paints an apocalyptic scenario vividly reminiscent of recent history:

NoFrontiers prend possession de mon pays-île

beaucoup des nôtres ont fui les affrontements armés

beaucoup sont morts sous les assauts des milices meurtrières
dans une vaillante volonté de résister à la nouvelle invasion
histoire qui se répète

nous avons disparu de notre pays
parqués dans des camps d'habitation

entourés de grillages électriques

esclaves emprisonnés sur notre terre

*qui . . . nous éradique du monde des vivants*²²

NoFrontiers takes possession of my country-island

many of our people fled the armed confrontations

many of our people died under the assaults of murderous militias
in a valiant attempt to resist the new invasion
history that repeats itself

we have disappeared from our country
penned up in concentration camps
surrounded by electric wires

slaves imprisoned on our land

that . . . eradicates us from the world of the living

Again, her story resonates with survivors of the nuclear testing era and their descendants. The “electric wires” separating Mā’ohi people from the parts of their islands seized by the French military are still standing today. The more than ten thousand Mā’ohi people diagnosed with a potentially radiation-induced cancer know in their bodies that the “invading state” will not hesitate to “eradicate [Indigenous people] from the world of the living.” Spitz’s not-so-fictional climate fiction simply notices that history “repeats itself”: as Potawatomi philosopher Kyle Powys Whyte famously denounced, “some indigenous peoples already inhabit what our ancestors would have likely characterized as a dystopian future.”²³

And yet, despite its apocalyptic tone, Spitz’s fiction tells a story of persistence and survival. While reminiscing about the nuclear apocalypse, Spitz’s aesthetics are inspired by millennia-old Tahitian traditions. Her story’s chant-like metrical units are rooted in the ancestral Tahitian art of *’ōrerora’a parau*, a form of poetic and creative public speaking. Freed of punctuation marks and capital letters, her text lends itself to being performed orally, the speakers’ tone and creativity advantageously substituting itself for written punctuation. The anaphoras (“many of our people”), the juxtaposed oppositions (“paunchy

wealth swollen poverty”), and the neologisms (“nuclear diddling”) that structure her story are all additional markers of Indigenous oral aesthetic.²⁴ In sharing this story of past and future imperialist destruction, Spitz displays the cultural resilience of Mā’ohi people, who, even after a nuclear apocalypse, still nurture transgenerational aesthetic and values. Spitz’s story speaks of disaster, but her style sings of survival, vitality, and regeneration.

And Mā’ohi people won. In the wake of the Seasteaders’ announcement that they would build an island prototype in Tahiti’s lagoon, activists simultaneously drew from their collective memory of the nuclear apocalypse and the collective faith in Mā’ohi culture’s vitality and resilience. They multiplied protests, in the streets, on the sea, and online. They denounced the latent racism of the Seasteaders’ techno-utopianism, pointing out that in Oceania, scientific discoveries and technological experimentation have long been synonymous with environmental racism, dispossession, displacement, disease, and death. Through speeches, stories, songs, and digital activism, Mā’ohi people also lauded the land they love and asserted their refusal to be erased from it. Away from the world’s mainstream media cameras, they performed what Candace Fujikane has called the “Indigenous economies of abundance” to oppose “capitalist economies of scarcity”: they reminded the world and each other that the island was strong and bountiful and did not need to cater to a multi-billionaire’s anxieties.²⁵ In the face of this sustained grassroots opposition, Seasteading eventually abandoned its Tahitian project and was forced to search for other locales in which to install its floating tax h(e)aven. A protest initiated by a few fishers in the commune of Mataiea had defeated a capitalist venture backed by one of the richest men in the world. The ousting of the Seasteaders perfectly illustrates the slogan chosen by the Pacific Climate Warriors across all of Oceania: “We are not drowning—we are fighting.”

To better understand Pacific activists’ attitude in the face of climate collapse, it is important to remember that the issues perceived as imminent threats in mainstream climate discourse have already been experienced to their fullest deadliness by Oceanians. Climate scientists warn of an apocalyptic future of climate refugees, global pandemics, and mass extinction. It is horrifying to think of the deadliness that carbon-fueled capitalism is unleashing on a global scale. But it is often forgotten that Pacific people have already undergone multiple occurrences of forced migration, massive waves of death and diseases, and alienation from biodiversity. Since the sixteenth century, entire islands were seized by colonizers, claimed for settlers, or wiped off the map by thermonuclear blasts. Entire communities became sick due to introduced viruses and radioactive fallout. And as fish and plants became overexploited,

then irradiated, the multispecies societies in which humans and nonhumans had been entangled were abruptly torn apart. Many Oceanians already live in an apocalyptic world—a world of ecosystem collapse, species loss, mass displacement, and cultural disintegration.²⁶ Without minimizing the scope of the devastation that an increasingly unstable climate will bring on a global scale, it is nevertheless important to point out that environmental collapse is not beginning only now that the West is becoming structurally affected by it. In the poignant words of American literary scholar Elizabeth DeLoughrey: “The apocalypse has already happened; it continues because empire is a process.”²⁷

In a context in which too many people throughout the world oscillate between climate apathy, apocalypse fatigue, and ecoanxiety, it is more important than ever to (re)discover Pacific (post)apocalyptic narratives. First, because this history deserves to be known and passed down from generation to generation, in Oceania and beyond. But also because Pacific (post)apocalyptic literature can help to apprehend climate collapse on a global scale. Indeed, these stories eschew the major pitfalls of the mainstream climate discourse on the intensifying environmental chaos. Pacific literature does not feature simplistic messages calling on individuals to go green, which so often seem futile in the face of military and industrial devastation and leads to widespread climate apathy. Rather, Pacific (post)apocalypse stories describe environmental collapse under nuclear imperialism and climate change in all their social and political complexity, as a consequence of racism, militarism, and carbon-fueled industrialization. Pacific (post)apocalypse stories’ calls to action are calls to radical political change and testaments to the power of collective action.

Pacific stories also eschew the melancholic tales of dystopian loss that lead to the apocalypse fatigue trapping so many people into despair and climate inaction. While Pacific storytellers lament the devastation brought by colonial pandemics and nuclear fire, they also take great pains to highlight the “resilience and dignity of our communities” in the aftermath of pandemics, nuclear fallout, and king tides.²⁸ Samoan scholar Albert Wendt famously claimed that Oceanians “have performed and are performing one of the most heroic feats of survival in the history of colonized people,”²⁹ and Pacific people’s fight against climate collapse is rooted in this transgenerational feat of survival through multiple apocalypses. Heeding these stories may fill readers with much-needed examples of the need to keep on mobilizing against environmental destruction, even after tipping points toward environmental chaos have already been reached.

Finally, Pacific (post)apocalyptic stories are also bereft of the tropes pervading blockbuster climate fiction, such as hyperviolent males fighting to sur-

vive through feats of physical strength and technological breakthroughs. These mainstream apocalypse narratives simply reiterate the myths that have enabled industrial capitalism in the first place: materialism, techno-utopianism, competition, individualism, and estrangement from other-than-human forms of life. They portray an environmentally and socially bleak future, spreading debilitating ecoanxiety.³⁰ Pacific (post)apocalyptic stories, by contrast, showcase “the enduring ties that hold people together” in times of catastrophic change.³¹ They narrate (post)apocalyptic examples of mutual assistance, cultural resilience, and South-South transnational solidarities. They teach how to mourn for what has been lost and how to find the strength to keep fighting for that which remains. If the stories analyzed in this book carry some hope, it is the hope that the climate apocalypse may not necessarily take the form of the hopeless fight of all against all.

This does not mean that Pacific suffering should be instrumentalized by readers who are simply consuming it for entertainment or inspiration. The value of Pacific creative discourse does not lie in its ability to be appropriated and instrumentalized by global environmental movements. Rather, Pacific stories of (post)apocalyptic regeneration can function as a global moral compass—or star path—for the rest of the world. To put it in the words of Mā’ohi antinuclear philosopher Richard Ariihau Tuheiava, the love that unites Pacific people and their land can radiate outside Oceania: “We should be able to promote it and affirm it on a universal scale.” He asserts, “Our Indigeneity ties a geographic area to a spiritual connection. It ties the universal to a specific place; it lets our ancestors speak in the name of the universal.”³² Long marginalized, Pacific epistemologies should be recognized for their foundational contributions to human knowledge.

Pacific stories by nuclear survivors and climate activists are not modern instantiation of the noble savage narrative—this Western myth that elevates Indigenous peoples to a state of timeless purity by presuming that Indigenous communities are immobilized in an original state of nature. Indigenous peoples are sometimes idealized by ecoanxious foreigners as the last people living in Holocene conditions—what Kyle Whyte ironically calls “Holocene survivors.”³³ Instead, Pacific people have long entered the twenty-first century era of man-made, militarized, global environmental collapse. As Indigenous people are claiming the world over, “our history is the future.”³⁴ In this sense, Pacific stories of nuclear testing and climate change are (post)apocalyptic in the etymological sense of the word: they help *uncover* (ἀποκαλύπτειν) alternative modes of being in the world, beyond the hackneyed fetters of imperialism, capitalism, and petro-fueled modernity. Oceania was the first continent to see

its environment destroyed by nuclear fire on a previously unimaginable scale. It is also the first continent to imagine a new world emerging from the ashes of the old one.

The Nuclearized Anthropocene

After the United States detonated the first nuclear bombs, very few people realized that humanity had entered a new era. The conventional bombing of German cities had generated more casualties than Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the longer-term effects of radiation were not yet known to the wider public. The atomic bomb, presented to the public as the weapon that had put an abrupt end to World War II, led many people to hope that the mastery of the atom was going to bring the end of all wars.³⁵ Yet the invention of nuclear warfare, followed by the development of the thermonuclear bomb, brought the world into the era of the nuclearized Anthropocene.

For the first time, a handful of men had created the tools not only to destroy humanity but also to obliterate the whole planet. The destructive scope of the atomic bomb cannot be understated. The largest nonnuclear weapon in the contemporary United States arsenal, the Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB) dropped on Afghanistan in 2017 to much international outrage, had a destructive power of “only” 0.009 kilotons.³⁶ By contrast, Castle Bravo, the largest US thermonuclear bomb detonated on Bikini (Bikini) in 1954, had a yield of 15,000 kilotons. For the Pacific people whose lands were obliterated by the blast of the bombs, the difference between conventional and unconventional weapons is not a discursive abstraction. In addition to their sheer blast power, nuclear weapons also eradicate life through long-lasting nuclear fallout. Some irradiated areas, such as Bikini Atoll, are off-limits for hundreds of thousands of years. Atomic bombs thus completely transformed the scope of (some) humans’ power over the planet. While the beginning of modern ecology is often dated to 1962 and the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, it should really be dated back to the understanding of the interconnectedness of the world brought by the first nuclear bomb.³⁷

Nuclear testing is also the starting point of a new age of imperialism. After World War II, the power of a country became more dependent on its nuclear strike capacity than on the size of its empire. But the nuclear industrial complex—the interconnected network of uranium mines, uranium shipping infrastructure, nuclear power plants, nuclear bombs, advanced army bases, and radioactive waste dumps—is transnational. Countries in search of a nuclear arsenal have always depended on other nations’ resources: uranium is mined on

foreign land, bombs are tested on colonies, and radioactive waste is dumped on poorer countries. As political science scholars Shine Choi and Catherine Eschle underscore, there is a “material colonial relationship at the heart of the global nuclear order.”³⁸

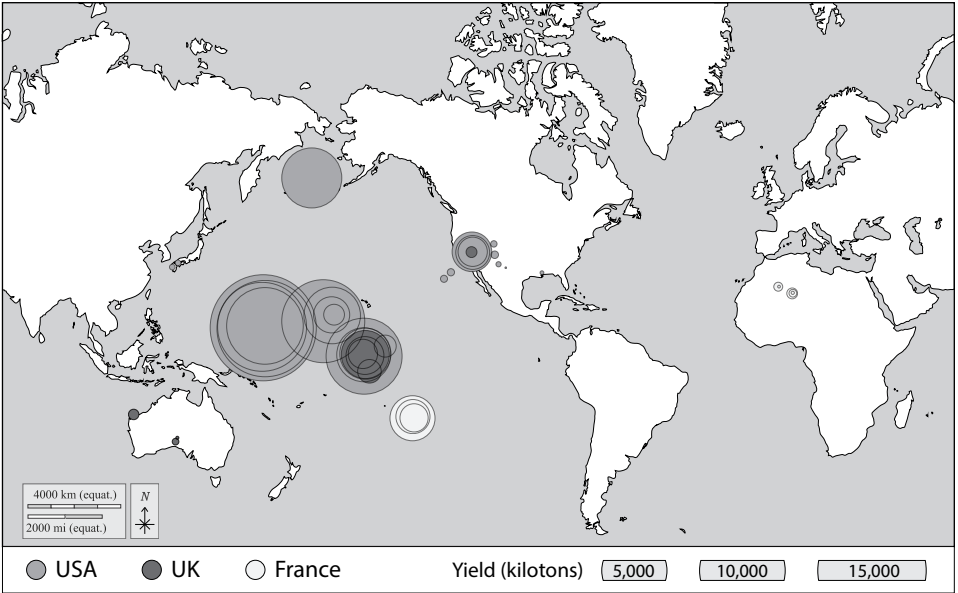
This type of colonialism, however, is different from pre-1945 forms of colonial oppression. When imperial powers began coveting strategic territories in which to deploy their nuclear strike capacity, large-scale colonialism was replaced by different structures of imperial oppression, taking the form of imperial webs of smaller nuclear colonies the world over. Amid international pressure to decolonize in the 1960s, nuclear colonizers went even further, negotiating for countries like Algeria or the Marshall Islands to become independent on the condition that their former colonizer would remain in control of circumscribed sites such as In Ekker or Kuwajleen (Kwajalein) to be used as nuclearized bases. These comparatively small areas of militarized lands in independent countries make up what American historian Daniel Immerwahr has called a “pointillist empire,” which today extends all over the planet.³⁹ This forms the special basis of *nuclear imperialism*: the state-sponsored, systemic mode of oppression of current or former sites of empire through any use of the nuclear complex.⁴⁰ In fact, decolonization may have happened on such a wide scale after 1945 in large part because imperial countries got hold of smaller territories in which to develop their nuclear strike capacity.

Marking a new age in both ecology and imperialism, the nuclear bomb can therefore be seen as the starting point of the global environmental crisis that now threatens life on earth on an unprecedented scale. With the A-bomb, the whole world entered an era in which apocalypse became a permanent horizon—no longer a fantasized religious eschatology but rather the very real knowledge that the current social world (dis)order can collapse at any moment. It also marks the moment when (some hu)man(s) became convinced that it was possible to truly become master and possessor of nature. While I do not wish to contribute here to the heated debates about the starting point of the Anthropocene, it should be noted that the “bomb spike” that followed the dramatic increase in thermonuclear weapons testing in the 1960s has left a very tangible geological record in the planet’s sedimentary layers. The appearance in the atmosphere, the soil, and the bodies of all living species of new man-made radioactive elements has led some scientists to suggest that a mid-twentieth-century boundary level is a possible benchmark to define the beginning of the historic period in which (some hu)man(s) have acquired the power to geologically alter the planet.⁴¹

In Western countries, antinuclear activists and climate activists tend to fight in separate trenches, barely talking to each other. In the United States and France, many environmentalists are in fact pronuclear, on the grounds that nuclear power is low carbon.⁴² France's number one best-selling book in 2022 thus claims that nuclear power is the only technology standing between humanity and climate collapse.⁴³ Yet nuclear issues and climate issues are inextricably linked. Climate instability increases the chance of nuclear accidents and of an all-out nuclear war. Nuclear power plants are all located near water sources, such as rivers and oceans. As sea levels rise and rivers are more and more frequently subjected to droughts, it becomes clear that "the climate is antinuclear."⁴⁴ Conversely, the nuclear arms race itself has a tremendous carbon footprint and largely contributes to the environmental crisis.⁴⁵ Moreover, both nuclear imperialism (the outsourcing of nuclear pollution) and carbon imperialism (the outsourcing of the adverse consequences of CO₂ emissions) make racialized people bear the brunt of contemporary environmental devastation. And of course, both proponents of the atom and believers in fossil-fueled infinite growth believe in man's ability to control nature, and they trust that more technological breakthroughs can solve the issues created by technological innovation in the first place. Instead of conceiving of nuclear war and climate collapse as two distinct scenarios that could threaten most life on earth, it would be more generative to think of them as inextricably linked in the nuclearized Anthropocene—and to challenge them both simultaneously.

Oceania First

In the mad rush toward extinction of life that characterizes the past seventy-five years, Oceania has always been on the front lines. The Pacific Islands have been the site of the majority of nuclear weapons tests throughout history—a "nuclear playground," to use Australian political scientist Steward Firth's expression.⁴⁶ The United States, the United Kingdom, and France have all tested their nuclear bombs in the Pacific Islands: on Pikinni, Kalama (Johnston Atoll), Kiritimati (Christmas Island), Terapukatea (Malden Island), Amchitka, Moruroa, and Fangataufa. While these nuclear powers also irradiated other Indigenous lands on the continents, their most powerful and most dangerous weapons were all launched in the Pacific (see map I.1). The 106 American bombs detonated in the Pacific accounted for 73.5 percent of the yield of all 1,054 U.S. tests.⁴⁷ In the Marshall Islands alone, the bombs' blast represented the equivalent of 8,580 Hiroshima-sized bombs, or 1.47 Hiroshimas each day



MAP I.1. Western nations' nuclear tests' yield. Map by Anaïs Maurer and Rose Sullivan.

over the twelve years of the tests.⁴⁸ The largest bomb detonated in Bikini, Castle Bravo, would have killed 90 percent of the populations of the District of Columbia, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York City within three days if it had been detonated in Washington, DC.⁴⁹ Together, the United States, the United Kingdom, and France have detonated a blast equivalent to dozens of thousands of times that of Hiroshima in the skies and under the reefs of the great Pacific Ocean.⁵⁰

The effects of nuclear imperialism did not stop with the last nuclear test in Oceania in 1996. The French, American, and British armies have left heaps of contaminated waste, both on the atolls where nuclear tests were conducted and on rear operating bases where nuclear experimentation centers had their headquarters.⁵¹ Pacific waters have been used as toxic and radioactive waste dumping sites for decades, even after the United Nations' London Convention prohibited such practices in 1972. Japan still "outsources" 300 tons of water contaminated by its Fukushima nuclear plant daily.⁵² The Pacific Islands are also targeted as dumping sites for nuclearized countries' radioactive waste—a phenomenon that American sociologist Valerie Kuletz has called "second order nuclearism."⁵³ While the global imperial mindset commonly associates nuclear

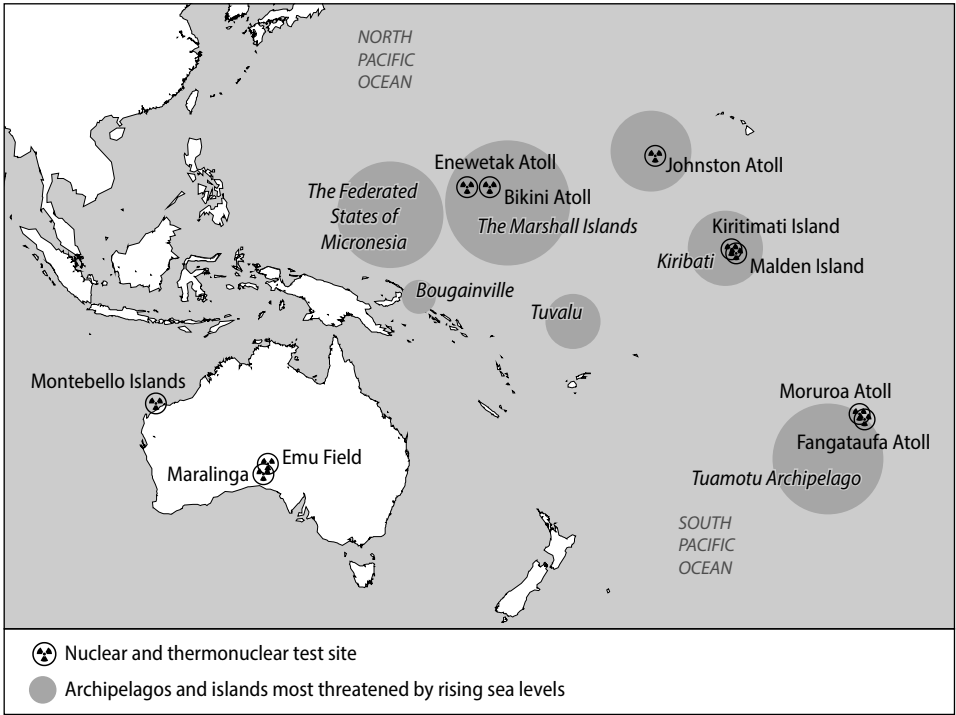
devastation with the red buttons on desks in Washington, Beijing, and Pyongyang, it would be more accurate to recenter the nuclear apocalypse in the vast ocean where it actually took place.

After having been used as “natural” laboratories on which to experiment with radioactive weapons of mass destruction, the Pacific Islands are now being used as showcases of forthcoming climate change. Outsiders began referring to Oceania as the proverbial canary in the coal mine; not valuable in and of itself but rather in service to a larger (global) environmental purpose.⁵⁴ As British anthropologists Tony Crook and Peter Rudiak-Gould have argued, climate change as a discourse and steering concept has particular resonance in the Pacific “because here the discourse takes some of its most arresting and intense forms.”⁵⁵ The Pacific Islands in general, and low-lying atolls in particular, evoke some of the most imminent and irreversible threats caused by climate change in the global public imagination. Coral ecosystems and atolls threatened by rising sea levels have been used internationally as symbols of the reality of climate change, through a form of climate porn that Australian geographer Carol Farbotko has identified as “wishful sinking.”⁵⁶

The archipelagoes most threatened by rising sea levels are often islands formerly used as nuclear testing sites because nuclear colonizers systematically located their testing sites in low-lying atolls (see map 1.2). As a result, contemporary resistance to climate collapse benefits from an already established framework of pan-Pacific solidarities, developed in the past century during the fight for a nuclear-free and independent Pacific. Nuclear imperialism made some islands uninhabitable for the next hundreds of thousands of years. The climate crisis adds another cataclysm onto communities still struggling to recover from the last imperial assault on their lands.

It is in this context that Pacific environmental activists refuse to be reduced to the harrowing symbol of the drowning Islander, a word I capitalize throughout to emphasize its nature as a social construct. Pacific people’s disappearance has been forecast by imperial observers for the past five hundred years. According to Western colonizers, Oceanians were to disappear in contact with the white race, wiped out by imported diseases. Pacific cultures were then to be annihilated by the “modern” lifestyle brought by nuclear imperialism. And today, the Pacific Islands are to be erased by rising seas. Yet, despite half a millennium of alleged imminent disappearance, Pacific cultures are still vibrant, and Pacific people continually reassert the vitality of the ever-regenerating Pacific seascape.

It is important to put the consequences of ecocide in historical perspective because these various forms of environmental aggression are underpinned



MAP I.2. Low-lying atolls and nuclear testing sites. Map by Anaïs Maurer and Rose Sullivan.

by the same ideology: annihilation racism. Annihilation racism, as defined by French anthropologist Alban Bensa, is an ideology that “presupposes not so much the inferiority of the colonized people but rather their inevitable disappearance as a prehistoric race.”⁵⁷ Annihilation racism is the ideological backbone informing Westerners’ continued legitimization of—and apathy toward—epidemiological, nuclear, and climate cataclysms in Oceania. Pacific opposition to climate collapse is grounded in a centuries-long history of struggle against this annihilation racism. Pacific stories of multigenerational resistance to biopolitical change can thus move mainstream environmental discourse from speculative narratives about climate collapse to historically informed reflections on environmental racism.

Positioning Pacific (Post)apocalyptic Stories:

Corpus, Methodology, Translation

The beginning of antinuclear art and literature in the Pacific is often dated to the publication, in 1959, of Māori poet Hone Tuwhare’s antinuclear piece “No Ordinary Sun.”⁵⁸ This poem marks the beginning of what Marjorie Tuainekore Crocombe has called a “creative revolution” in the 1970s, when Pacific activists fought for a nuclear-free and independent Pacific in widely diffused printed and visual works.⁵⁹ Yet the turn to oral tradition and multilingual archives shows that Oceanians have opposed nuclear technology in creative discursive practices *ever since the first nuclear bomb was detonated*. Consider, for example, the songs performed in ‘Uvea, the largest island of the French colony of ‘Uvea mo Futuna (Wallis and Futuna), as early as 1945. With no major transshipment infrastructure, no television, and radio access reserved to the island’s elite, one could be tempted to assume that ‘Uvea was far removed from the detonation of Little Boy on Hiroshima, thousands of miles away. Yet that year, a group of men interpreted a *foi lau* (traditional informational song) that would usher the island into the Atomic Age.

Koeni te pule-tau foou
Osi ina fakaoisi te tau
Ko Tuluma ae ne’e na fau
Si’i foi pulu fakamataku
.....
Koeni te foi pulu ka oho
Kolo tona tatau mo te temonio
Au loto ke puli aupito
Saponia he e tau fakapo

Talavou tou fakafafia
Kua tokalelei te Pasifika
Kua hiki nima lava Saponia
*Ki te foi pulu a Amelika.*⁶⁰

Here comes the new war chief
The one who put an end to the war
It is Truman who built
This dreadful bomb
.....
Here is the bomb to be launched
It is like the devil

I want the complete annihilation
Of Japan, the ruthless fighter

Young people, let's rejoice
Peace is back in the Pacific
Japan signed the peace
Because of the Americans' bomb.

Uvean fo'i lau function as a collective news report, sharing contemporary events through ritualized singing.⁶¹ Here, the message of this news report cannot be mistaken: nukes are bad news. Uveans immediately gauged in negative terms the impact of this “dreadful bomb” (“pulu fakamataku”) from the moment its existence was revealed. The Uvean singer who composed the chant, Reverend Father Soane Vahai, learned about the nuclear bomb through Western propaganda relayed by the few dozen American military men present on the island at that time. Back then, the specifics of nuclear weapons were not yet fully understood by the global public, and their dangers were downplayed by politicians and journalists alike.⁶² As a result, the news of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was first met in many places with “relief and jubilation.”⁶³ The bomb is presented in this song through this American perspective as a device to bring back peace, while Japan is pictured as an evil enemy that should be annihilated (“puli aupito,” translating literally as “very disappeared”). Nevertheless, Vahai managed to transcend American disinformation. While presenting it as a tool for peace, he also notes: “Kolo tona tatau mo te temonio” (It is like the devil).

The word *temonio* was introduced in the Uvean language in the 1830s by the French missionaries who established the first Catholic mission on the island.⁶⁴ Adapted from the French noun *démon*, *temonio* encapsulates the major antagonism structuring Christian faith, opposing God to the devil, heaven to hell, and salvation to damnation. The use of such a loaded comparison by a Christian composer like Reverend Soane Vahai is highly subversive and renders the whole stanza entirely oxymoronic. How can peace and salvation come from a weapon likened to the devil? This skepticism toward American propaganda must be analyzed in Uvea's larger historical context.

In 1945, Uvea had already been invaded twice in the name of peace and salvation. The first time was in 1837, when French missionaries settled on the island and began talking about saving the souls of Uveans. Within three years, a large-scale epidemic from a new virus brought by a European man wreaked havoc on the island. While French settlers could write in the 1830s that Uveans were in extraordinarily good health and that even “the elderly were not missing a single tooth,” they would bemoan a few decades later that Uveans were “sickly, of

poor constitution, prone to all sorts of diseases.”⁶⁵ Taking advantage of the fact that the traditional religious and political elite was weakened by the epidemiological crisis, French missionary Father Bataillon pressured the islands’ Aliko (leaders) and the Lavelua (high chief) to adopt a new legislation that would put traditional values under further stress. The code of laws that bears his name, adopted in 1851, forced Uveans to abandon their traditional houses to live in concentrated communities more easily surveilled by the Church, forbade people of opposite genders to socialize outside of church-sanctioned activities, and transferred the political power from the Lavelua and the Aliko to the Catholic mission.⁶⁶ The code was applied for 110 years, and the local police severely sanctioned and fined the people who tried to preserve precolonial practices well into the second half of the twentieth century.⁶⁷ As Uveans’ first encounter with Western salvation discourse resulted in unprecedented death and destruction, Reverend Soane Vahai may have apprehended with caution the foreigners’ claim that these new weapons of peace were any different.

As the island was beginning to recover from the major epidemiological and sociopolitical trauma of evangelization and colonization, it would soon face another threat. In 1942, the United States used the island as a military base for its Pacific theater, stationing massive contingents of American soldiers and quickly outnumbering the local population (without Uveans’ consent). The American military instructed the entire valid population to dig trenches across the island (perpetuating a tradition of forced labor initiated by the French administration), recruited against their will hundreds of young Uvean men to participate in military operations in the Coral Sea, and impregnated numerous Uvean women who had to rely on communal networks to raise their unrecognized children.⁶⁸ When preparing to evacuate the island in 1944, the US Army destroyed its own military materiel, tanks, and cars by sinking them in ‘Uvea’s lagoon, durably polluting the island’s waters.⁶⁹ Given that America had thus transformed the daily lives of Uveans, it is no surprise that the explosion of the most powerful American weapon was mentioned in circumspect terms in ‘Uvea’s oral literature. Even though American occupiers controlled the technological means of information, Vahai and his choir still interpreted the invention of the nuclear bomb in ambiguous terms, mobilizing the central binary opposition at the heart of Christianity to locate nuclear technology on the side of evil.

THIS BOOK ANALYZES PACIFIC (post)apocalyptic nuclear stories from the time of Vahai’s choir’s performance in 1945 to today. I define the word *stories* in its broadest sense, as print, oral, digital, embodied, and visual literature. Many

of these stories defy genre classification. Literary scholar Caroline Sinavaiana-Gabbard suggests that given the problematic role Western literary categories have played in imposing hegemonic norms on Pacific orators, artists, and writers, it may be more adequate to avoid generic labels when analyzing Pacific creative discourse.⁷⁰ In all their diversity and fluidity, these stories are best described in the words of ri-Majeļ poet-scholar Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner as “the different ways in which we have expressed ourselves.”⁷¹ Sunnie Kaikala Mākua, Manulani Aluli Meyer, and Lynette Lokelani Wakinekona describe it as the act of “listening to the operating vibrational truth of one’s own life, and then expressing it. This can take any form: writing, singing, speaking, praying, dancing, etc.”⁷² Thus understood, Pacific literature has been flourishing ever since Pacific people sailed to the islands on double-hulled canoes millennia ago.

While I focus on nuclear stories created from 1945 onward, this does not mean that World War II marked an aesthetic rupture in Pacific creative discourse. As literary scholar Brandy Nālani McDougall underscores, “our ancestral literature constantly informs and guides our contemporary literature and our contemporary selves.”⁷³ My analyses of Pacific (post)apocalyptic stories consider the importance of transgenerational Indigenous aesthetics and practices as a source of inspiration for the antinuclear literature and visual art analyzed in this book. Following Craig Santos Perez’s guidelines to Indigenize literary theory, I highlight how Pacific antinuclear literature draws from older and deeper Indigenous aesthetics—from both a rich oral tradition (encompassing cosmogonic stories, genealogies, and tales) and a vast visual tradition (from tattooing to weaving and dancing).⁷⁴ Retracing how customary Indigenous orature and visual technologies persist and flourish in the age of the atom reaffirms the strength of Pacific cultures in the face of past, future, and ongoing apocalypses. This is not necessarily to be celebrated as the power of storytelling; it is simply the current reality of the Pacific environmental movement. As Wendt notes, Pacific literature, anchored in multigenerational aesthetic practices through its content as well as its style, declares Pacific peoples’ “marvelous endurance, survival, and dynamic adaptation” in the face of imperial violence.⁷⁵

Since nuclear pollution and climate change issues know no borders, this book’s analytical framework is transnational and multilingual. I explore literatures in English, French, Hawaiian, Spanish, Tahitian, and Uvean as well as visual arts by painters from across the region. Readers may find in these pages heretofore untranslated nuclear stories from the French-occupied Pacific, as I offer English translations of influential texts and songs from imperial and Indigenous languages of these archipelagoes. By discussing all these works in English, I hope to contribute to breaking down the linguistic boundaries

threatening to compartmentalize environmental and decolonial movements in the Pacific. As American literary scholar Julia Frengs explains, literature from non-Anglophone Pacific countries has been significantly undertranslated, whether these works are in colonial or Indigenous languages. For example, only 3 percent of Oceanian printed novels written in French have been translated into English.⁷⁶ This creates linguistic boundaries between activists otherwise united by similar forms of colonization, militarization, deculturation, environmental racism, and/or calls for Indigenous sovereignty. It is important to make translations of these works into English available because English is an official language in the majority of Pacific countries and the most-taught foreign language in the region. It has long stopped being the language of colonizers and is now a language in which people throughout the Pacific communicate with each other.

There are, however, potential issues with discussing translated works. As Kanaka 'Ōiwi poet-scholar Jamaica Heolimeikalani Osorio warns, a translator may “contain and domesticate” others’ work and rob it of its subversiveness, its literariness, or its cultural referents. The translation of Indigenous languages is particularly problematic as it “leaves certain languages and people visible and recognizable, and others not.”⁷⁷ While wary of these limitations, I am offering this modest contribution to multilingual dialogue because it responds to Pacific Francophone authors’ expressed desires. The dozens of anti-nuclear writers and orators I consulted in current or former French colonies of the Pacific unanimously expressed a desire to be translated into English. When I interviewed the president of Mā'ohi Nui, Moetai Brotherson, about his anti-nuclear novel, *Le Roi absent* (The absent king), he joked that he wished he had written the book in English in the first place: “I would be much more read!”⁷⁸

Despite their inevitable structural limitations, translations from French, Spanish, Tahitian, and Uvean respond to non-Anglophone Pacific writers,’ singers,’ and orators’ explicit desires to have their stories put in conversation with those of English-speaking artists “who came with us on their great canoes, born of the same dream of freedom.”⁷⁹ While many Pacific countries have been or are currently occupied by colonizers such as Spain, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, the United States, Chile, and Indonesia, imposing various languages onto the islands, my hope is to contribute to mitigate the ensuing linguistic compartmentalization. When translating Indigenous languages already shaken by centuries of settler colonialism and decades of nuclear imperialism, I grant them visible priority to the original text, situating the source text first and paraphrasing Indigenous concepts in my analyses. I hope that the stories translated here can contribute to facilitate dialogue be-

tween nuclear survivors and climate activists across linguistic boundaries, in Oceania and beyond.

Pacific countries are sometimes referred to as “the hole in the doughnut”—an ironic jab at the exclusive focus on Pacific Rim countries in mainstream political discourse and academic studies. While it is widely recognized that nuclear testing, overfishing, coral bleaching, microplastic biomagnification, extreme weather patterns, and rising sea levels have greatly impacted Pacific societies for more than half a century, local writers, singers, and artists are rarely acknowledged as leaders of twenty-first-century environmental movements. They are, rather, portrayed as the unfortunate first victims of the climate crisis. To put it in the words of CHamoru poet and scholar Craig Santos Perez, Pacific peoples are “the new polar bears: We sport a vulnerable-yet-charismatic-species-vibe, an endangered-yet-resilient chic, a survive-and-thrive swagger.”⁸⁰

This book participates in the growing movement calling for an analysis of Pacific arts from new disciplinary perspectives. For too long, Pacific cultures have been primarily analyzed by anthropologists and historians; and Pacific studies remained marginal in fields such as philosophy, literature, and art history. As denounced by Pacific studies scholar Teresia Teaiwa, Pacific literature in particular has remained “a global literary backwater.”⁸¹ The implicit assumption underpinning this hypervisibility in social sciences and underrepresentation in the humanities is that Pacific cultural production is a relic of the past. It is denied the quality of being pioneering artwork on a global scale, addressing the main cultural questions of the twenty-first century. In fact, the academic marginalization of Pacific art and literature correlates with the geopolitical marginalization of the Pacific Islands as expendable nuclear testing grounds and of the Pacific Ocean as expendable carbon-dumping grounds.

The origins of this problem in the field of Pacific studies can be traced back to its institutional beginnings after World War II. In the postwar decades, universities, wealthy donors, and secret services cooperated to create, fund, and develop various subfields of area studies. The stated objective was to study areas that the United States feared might succumb to communism to better control them. As American historian Agnes Quigg documented, the rare institutions to offer a degree in Pacific Islands area studies were structured by this Cold War agenda, which promoted social sciences at the expense of the humanities.⁸² In Francophone universities, the field of Pacific studies was similarly initially created to serve the French imperial agenda. The main institution offering courses in Pacific languages and cultures, the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales in Paris, was founded to train imperial diplomats and businessmen. It took repeated interventions by Pacific Islands studies scholars such

as Albert Wendt, Vicente M. Diaz, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, Teresia Teaiwa, and Haunani-Kay Trask to challenge the disciplinary divisions and hierarchies instituted during the Cold War.⁸³

Even when Pacific creative discourse is acknowledged as an important perspective on global environmental and sociopolitical issues, as has been the case in the field of environmental humanities, it is not always given the centrality it deserves. Consider, for example, Rob Nixon's 2011 canonical book, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. In this work, Nixon transformed the environmental humanities by underscoring the key role played by disenfranchised communities in the environmental movement. His book highlights how decolonial writer-activists have combined demands for racial, environmental, and economic justice by fighting against the environmental disasters that affect primarily the world's poorest communities. Making a compelling case to bridge environmental humanities and postcolonial studies, Nixon's groundbreaking book demonstrates that environmental movements are bound to remain inefficient if they exclude the voices of the poor. However, his central concept of slow violence is not corroborated by Pacific stories of environmental collapse. In fact, the nuclear narratives discussed in this book challenge the validity of the concept of "slow violence."

Nixon argues that nuclear contamination and climate change are emblematic of slow violence, "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all."⁸⁴ Yet for many Oceanians, the violence of nuclear imperialism and carbon imperialism is neither slow, nor delayed, nor out of sight. On the contrary, Pacific stories convey a sense of urgency, of baffling rapidity in the turn of events. Such is the narrative of the people of Roñlap (Rongelap) and Utrök (Utirik) who saw the light of the Bravo nuclear bomb on the morning of March 1, 1946. Within a few hours, they were burning, vomiting, and losing their hair and skin. Three days later, when a US military ship came to take them away (as objects of scientific study), they were stolen from their island without even having the time to realize it. Darlene Keju-Johnson, a ri-Maje] antinuclear activist, recalls: "Some American soldiers came and said, 'Get ready. Jump in the ocean and get on the boat because we are leaving. . . .' That's your home and you have to decide, with your husband and children, whether you are going to leave or not. But there was no time. People had to run fast."⁸⁵ Her sentences, made of a juxtaposition of monosyllabic words, and the staccato rhythm of her narrative underscore the rapidity of nuclear violence. Keju-Johnson would later develop two tumors within her lifetime. She died of cancer at forty-five years old. This radio-induced vio-

lence never seemed attritional or delayed to her, nor to anyone who loved her. Throughout her lifelong struggle as an antinuclear activist, she always highlighted the instantaneous brutality of nuclear imperialism.

As this book shows, contemporary Pacific climate activists often narrate the violence of climate collapse as a sequel to nuclear imperialism and mass epidemics, thereby emphasizing not only the immediacy of its devastation but also its historical continuities with older forms of environmental racism. The term *slow violence* fails to encapsulate this reality. This violence is neither slow nor dispersed across space. It is *slowed down* as it travels through space. It is slowed down as it moves from Roñlap to the academic centers of nuclearized nations. It is slowed down as it is transformed from oral testimony to written scholarship. It should therefore be referred to as slowed violence.

The (post)apocalyptic stories analyzed in this book may therefore inspire environmental activists worldwide, particularly in other Indigenous-led front lines against petrocapiatalism. Global environmental movements are bound to remain incomplete and polarizing if they continue failing to consider the perspective of the Pacific theorists, writers, artists, and activists who are among the most affected by, and the most active against, global climate collapse.

Listening to Pacific (post)apocalyptic stories may also help avoid repeating mistakes that were made in the past. Focusing on Pacific (post)apocalyptic stories today can help address the roots of the problems behind the current climate crisis, which remains, as Amitav Ghosh famously diagnosed, a crisis of imagination.⁸⁶ Nuclear colonizers not only ignored the pain and destruction they inflicted on Pacific land and people; they also never acknowledged the disjuncture between their worldviews and that of nuclear survivors. Nuclear colonizers extolled the ideal of becoming master and possessor of nature; nuclear survivors continued to feel connected to the land even after it was blasted by nuclear fire. Pacific (post)apocalyptic stories can help retrace these major differences in worldviews between those who think they can remove themselves from the land as they destroy it and those who nurture the land even after it has been destroyed. While the Pacific antinuclear movement was largely ineffective in putting an end to the proliferation of weapons of mass annihilation, it succeeded in reaffirming the importance of protecting a two-way nurturing relationship between people and the land that sustains them. This worldview resonates today louder than ever as this relationship continues to be under ever-growing stress on a global scale.

Personal Background

This book stems from my upbringing in the nuclear colony of Tahiti, the largest of the 118 islands of Mā'ohi Nui (French-occupied Polynesia). Mā'ohi Nui is one of the Pacific nations that stands out for its strength in the face of repeated imperial assaults. Despite an epidemiological apocalypse that killed 90 percent of Mā'ohi people throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and a nuclear apocalypse that brought deadly radiation-induced diseases to the archipelagoes in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Mā'ohi Nui is still a Mā'ohi country. While France prohibits statistics identifying people by race, it is generally understood that three-quarters of the population is Indigenous, identifying as either Mā'ohi or “Āfa” (“Demi” or mixed race), while Hakka Chinese and French settlers each make up about half of the rest. I belong to the latter category.

My family is a pure product of French imperialism. I grew up in Tahiti, yet this is only the latest stage in my family's journey through France's former and current colonies. My mother is a white woman born and raised in Senegal. My adoptive father is a white man born in Morocco. On my biological father's side, my forebears were settlers in French-occupied Algeria. My brother studied in the French-occupied Caribbean and in French-occupied Guyana before returning to Tahiti. This is characteristic of many French families, for which job opportunities in current and former colonies are provided by homogeneous institutions—what French journalist Léopold Lambert calls “the French colonial continuum.”⁸⁷ This phenomenon transcends class divisions: my grandparents were waiters and railroaders, while my parents and I work in the privileged strata of academia. Regardless of their income, however, my family members were (and still are) able to move across France's sites of empire because their (neo)colonial institutions favor settler migration. Today, my family is still in Tahiti. I'm grateful to be able to spend several months every year with them on the island. We do not have strong ties to hexagonal France, in which none of us have lived for long; and we are profoundly attached to Mā'ohi Nui. We have all supported the main pro-independence party for decades.

In Tahiti, a racially diverse minority benefits from the oppression and dispossession of a primarily Mā'ohi majority. Nuclearized Tahiti is an extremely segregated place: the people who benefited from the nuclear center's economic fallout and those who lost everything under the CEP rarely mingle. I was raised among Tahiti's beneficiaries of the CEP, befriending mostly the Tahitian, Hakka, and French people for whom the nuclear center brought financial, professional, and romantic opportunities. This was the case for my mother and adoptive father, who both teach at the University of French Poly-

nesia—an institution built in the 1980s with nuclear money by a pronuclear Tahitian government. But in my childhood, this was rarely talked about—especially in those circles. France only officially recognized that the tests could potentially have had any environmental impact on the country in 2010, a half century after the first French nuclear bomb. Nevertheless, growing up in a country contaminated by the fallout from 41 atmospheric tests and the irradiation from 152 underground tests, it was hard not to wonder about the potential impact of France’s alleged “clean bomb.” I saw many loved ones struggle with health issues. Some of our closest friends passed away from a generalized cancer at a wrongfully young age. I am still moved by their strength and their courage while they lived with the disease, and I still miss them. I frequently worry about my parents’ health, wondering how the consequences of eating irradiated food will manifest in their senior years.

This background shaped my experiences when I left Tahiti to attend university in France and later in the United States. Throughout the past decade, I am infinitely grateful to have been welcomed back by family, friends, artists, scholars, and activists on each of my returns to the island. I share the antinuclear stories presented here with their guidance and their help, as they pointed me toward universities’ collections, local bookstores, personal libraries, museums, archives, and digital activism, first in Mā’ohi Nui, then in other Pacific countries.

Throughout the writing of this book, I frequently returned to the question of ethical story sourcing. Who retells stories? To whom? And why? These are important questions, as story sourcing too often takes the form of the extraction of “raw material,” to be profitably “processed” in Western academic centers without any benefit for the original storytellers.⁸⁸ Such an approach, as denounced by Potawatomi philosopher Kyle Powys Whyte, “treats Indigenous peoples as resources that can be used for better or worse purposes for the advancement of humanity.”⁸⁹ The stories featured in this book are not the result of invasive fieldwork preying on Indigenous pain. They were made accessible because their authors wanted them to be known and shared.

In a groundbreaking article offering potential frameworks for conducting research on Mā’ohi Nui, Vehia Wheeler and Pauline Reynolds invite scholars working on French-occupied Polynesia to pay attention to “the value of *hōro’a mai*, *hōro’a atu* (to give and to receive),” foundational in the building of community and kinship in the country.⁹⁰ This book is immensely indebted to the value of *hōro’a atu*, as I have learned everything from the many activists, artists, and scholars who first challenged nuclear colonizers’ narratives in Mā’ohi Nui and beyond. By translating, analyzing, and sharing some of these stories into English,

I offer my modest contribution to nurturing the transnational solidarity that has characterized the Pacific antinuclear movement since its inception. My wish is to help facilitate conversations on nuclear and climate justice across continents, disciplines, and languages. Writing between Tahiti and New York, I think of my role as a scholar as relational. My work seeks to highlight common tropes in (post)apocalypse narratives of Oceania, to help identify strategies of resistance that have been used across different cultural and linguistic contexts, and to put them in relation across languages, genres, and oceans.

This book is one of many calls for change coming from Mā'ohi Nui, and I hope that it will contribute to building up international outrage at nuclear-armed and carbon-addicted countries. I particularly wish to inspire new readers to put pressure on the French, British, and American governments to provide meaningful reparations to all the people who developed radiation-induced cancers because of nuclear imperialism. Finally, by analyzing the complex role played by some Indigenous leaders in the nuking of their own land, I hope to foreground the importance of class struggle and feminist struggle within the movement for environmental justice so that the next generation of climate activists can learn, as I did, from its shortcomings as well as its victories.

Charting Chapters

This book honors Pacific Indigenous activists. The writers and artists discussed here identify as CHamoru, Fijian and i-Kiribati, Kanak, Kanaka Maoli, Mā'ohi, Māori, ni-Vanuatu, ri-Majeļ, Samoan, and Uvean.⁹¹ There are many ways of analyzing such a vast corpus. One is to treat literary and artistic works as the product of creative geniuses at odds with their community's trends. Another is to envision bodies of literary work as sociological documents revelatory of a society's cultural preoccupations at any given moment. This book alternates between these two approaches. I foreground the work of trend-setting artists such as Julian Aguon, Alexandre Moeava Ata, Ra'i Chaze, Cronos, Bobby Holcomb, Witi Ihimaera, Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, André Marere, Craig Santos Perez, Terisa Tinei Siagatonu, Chantal Spitz, Paul Tavo, Teresia Teaiwa, THS!, Soane Vahai, and Albert Wendt. But this book also presents general trends in a corpus understood as a sociological archive revealing of broad cultural tendencies. Analyzing transnational leitmotifs, I argue that these writers, artists, and activists all give voice to the collective trauma of nuclear imperialism and carbon imperialism.

Each chapter tackles a specific issue presented as an imminent threat in mainstream climate discourse. Mainstream environmentalists in overindustri-

alized countries tend to focus on imminent and looming threats: the threat of mass extinction, the threat that entire countries will become uninhabitable, and the threat that a changing climate will bring more deaths and diseases. I show that each of these threats has already been experienced by Pacific communities during the period of nuclear imperialism and that Pacific activists today draw from their experience of the nuclear apocalypse to mitigate each of these threats in times of climate collapse. Each chapter also analyzes how nuclear storytellers draw inspiration and strength from older and deeper Indigenous customary practices. Contemplating the loss of land in the wake of nuclear imperialism, the stories shared in this book all seek to (re)build multi-species community even after land, people, and other-than-humans have been violently separated from each other.

I begin by exploring “Isletism,” the ideology that underpins the ongoing assault on Pacific peoples. For centuries, Westerners have seen the Pacific Islands as isolated islets, outside of modern history. Imagining the tropical island as marooned at the earliest stage of a supposedly unilinear path to “progress,” Western narratives have denied Oceanians both the right to history (through claims of ahistorical primitivism) and the right to a future (through speculation about an inevitable annihilation in contact with the white race). Indigenous Pacific people were contaminated with viruses and irradiated by nuclear bombs because of this annihilation racism that considered Pacific cultures as always already doomed to disappear. Today, the very same imperial obliviousness structures Western nations’ responses to the climate crisis, which range from compassionate apathy to downright indifference. The Pacific is still conceived as being outside history, outside the realm of the biopolitical, making it easy to downplay Westerners’ responsibility in the Pacific epidemiological, nuclear, and climate genocides. While such ideological representations are pervasive among foreign writers, I highlight that they occur even in the works of progressive intellectuals invested in the struggle for racial justice and anti-imperialism in other contexts. Looking in particular at Denis Diderot’s writings on Tahiti and Pablo Neruda’s poetry on Rapa Nui (Easter Island), I show how even the best-intentioned foreigners who never lived in Oceania are likely to blindly perpetuate Isletist tropes when writing about the Pacific.

In the second chapter, I present the counterhegemonic ideology to Isletism: “Oceanitude.” Coined in 2015 by ni-Vanuatu novelist Paul Tavo, Oceanitude refers to a literary, philosophical, and political current theorizing Pacific collective identity in times of nuclear imperialism and carbon imperialism. This chapter explores Oceanitude as a movement that challenges the Cartesian definition of humanity as the master and possessor of nature. When first defining

Oceanitude, Tavo suggests that in the Pacific, collective identity stems from the consciousness of sharing a genealogical relationship with the ocean, which can only be protected collectively. Exploring then the genealogy of Oceanitude itself, I highlight its links to the anti-Cartesian Black liberation movement known as Negritude. I show how Tavo's Oceanitude draws from concepts developed by Negritude philosophers Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor but goes further in its dismantling of Cartesian hubris. I also ask how the concepts underpinning the philosophy of Oceanitude illuminate a contemporary Pacific struggle: the fight against settler desecration on Mauna Kea. The political, philosophical, and artistic scope of Oceanitude suggests that this movement has the potential to reaffirm the importance of nurturing relationships between each other and the (is)lands that sustain us.

The subsequent three chapters shift from a theoretical analysis of ideologies to a close reading of Pacific (post)apocalyptic stories. I organized these three chapters according to what I perceive as the global urgency of the issue explored. The third chapter thus focuses on alienation from biodiversity, a problem already well underway on all continents. This sixth mass extinction is not the first instance of a collapse of multispecies relationships. Under nuclear imperialism, the relationships developed between humans and marine creatures were brutally shattered as fish became irradiated. Close-reading stories by Mā'ohi writer Ra'i Chaze, Māori author Witi Ihimaera, and CHamoru poet Craig Santos Perez, this chapter analyzes what new solidarities may be forged in times of multispecies societies' collapse. Drawing from the ongoing relevance of customary oral and visual arts such as Mā'ohi cosmogonic stories, the ancestral koru motif in Māori tattoo, and the CHamoru traditional *lisāyo* mourning prayer, all three writers find strength and inspiration in transgenerational customary practices to help them fight for the other-than-humans of the Pacific. While writing about the suffering and the disappearance of animals assaulted by atomic bombs and climate change, their style suggests the regenerative power of stories, visual motifs, and art forms honoring multispecies societies.

In the fourth chapter, I turn to the threat of increased deaths and diseases brought by climate change. New viral pathogens, global warming, and widespread pollution have begun to lead to the recrudescence of scores of diseases, particularly devastating in a Global South already weakened by neoliberal economic policies. In this respect, too, Pacific nuclear stories put in perspective the perceived novelty of the threat. Pacific nuclear victims have already experienced the spread of nuclear-induced diseases, threatening the living and their descendants for generations. Analyzing visual arts and fiction by Bobby Hol-

comb, André Marere, Cronos, THS!, Alexandre Moeava Ata, and Albert Wendt, this chapter explores how antinuclear artists and writers have addressed this plague from Tahiti to Samoa. Departing from the canonical antinuclear artists who have told the story of nuclear imperialism in tragic, doleful, and angered tones, these storytellers substitute acerbic irony to pathos. They stand out in their choice to talk about death and diseases by turning to humor, parody, and caricature. Drawing from traditional forms of Indigenous humoristic genres such as Ari'oi theater in Tahiti and fale aitu in Samoa, these creative artists and writers perpetuate an ancestral tradition to ridicule the myths propagated by people in power, thereby suggesting the cultural vitality of traditional clowning in the face of the apocalypse.

Finally, the last chapter analyzes the threat of mass displacement for climate refugees. Once again, it is important to remember that Pacific people have already experienced forced displacement and permanent exile as their islands became nuclear testing sites. Mā'ohi, ri-Majeļ, and i-Kiribati people can all testify to what it is like to see your home become off-limits for thousands of years. This chapter explores the forms of resistance and resilience developed in Oceania during periods of forced displacement, analyzing how songs and literature can help rebuild a home away from one's homeland. I analyze performances by ri-Majeļ spoken-word artist Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, a novel by Mā'ohi writer Chantal Spitz, and songs by Teresia Teaiwa, who traces her lineage back to Fijian, Banaban, Tabiteuean, and African-American heritages. Once again, transgenerational Indigenous cultural practices such as aj (traditional Marshallese weaving), eorak (Marshallese funeral ritual), and papara'a tupuna (Mā'ohi genealogy) are central sources of inspiration for this literature. Together, Jetñil-Kijiner, Teaiwa, and Spitz present inspiring tales of solidarity in the face of forced migration, while offering a valuable contribution to the survival of dislocated cultures in contemporary arts.

To conclude this book, I wondered how to reckon with the threat that the fight against global warming may not succeed. The window to curb greenhouse gas emissions and limit catastrophic climate change is closing right now. How to keep on fighting when carbon-fueled capitalism keeps winning? Reflecting on the words of wisdom proposed by CHamoru human-rights activist Julian Aguon, the conclusion to this book interrogates the importance of mourning in the fight for climate justice. Perhaps the (post)apocalypse nuclear stories analyzed here deliver a most important lesson in the "arts of living on a damaged planet" and encourage us to search for love and beauty even in nuclear ruins.