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A Genealogical Approach to Military Presence in French Polynesia

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I take full responsibility for my work and its outcome, and I hope to have honored the stories that were shared with me. All the names of those who were interviewed for this thesis, unless specifically asked, have been changed in the interest of anonymity. Individual views do not necessarily represent current French Army policy. All errors, stylistic choices and interpretations are entirely my own. Likewise, I'm responsible of all translations, unless indicated otherwise.

INTRODUCTION
Tracking Military Traces

Tahiti is unmade as it is made.
(Le Malentendu Pacifique, Jean-François Baré)[1]

« Fill up on supersonics[2] » titled the 24 June 2021 newspaper, accompanying the headline with a picture of a refueling fighter jet. The caption read (Fig. 1):

> Three fighter jets were deployed from mainland France to the Pacific in less than forty hours as part of Operation Heifara. Yesterday, the three fighter jets and a refueling jet took part in a reconnaissance operation over Tahiti, Bora Bora, and Rangiroa[3].

The mission commander, General of the French Air Force, stated to the local television:

> [The mission's] vocation is to reassure the Polynesian population by telling them « even if you are 17 000 km away from France, if someone threatens you, we will come and protect you. At 17 000 km from the metropole, it is as if you were Parisians, we will come to protect you » [and] that's what we did in thirty nine hours and eight minutes[4].

At the end of June 2021 three fighter jets, two refueling planes, and two other military planes landed on the airstrip in Faʻaʻā, their deafening thunder reminding the islanders of the lasting military presence in Tahiti. Besides their acoustic pollution, their visual impact did not pass unnoticed; when they were not training in the air, they were visibly parked at the military airport, next to the commercial one, with its airstrips adjacent to the water. Having arrived in Tahiti only a few days before this episode aired, I had the feeling that the militarization process that I came to study was blatantly unfolding right before my eyes, in a spectacular way. And yet, besides this extraordinary

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[1] « *Tahiti se défait à mesure que Tahiti se fait* ». Jean-François Baré, *Le Malentendu Pacifique* (Paris: Edition des Archives Contemporaines, 2002), p. 99.

[2] « Le plein de supersoniques », Tahiti Infos, June 24, 2021.

[3] « Trois Rafales ont été déployés de la métropole vers le Pacifique en moins de quarante heures dans le cadre de l'opération Heifara. Hier, les trois chasseurs et un ravitailleur ont participé à une opération de reconnaissance au-dessus de Tahiti, Bora Bora et Rangiroa », Tahiti Infos, June 24, 2021. The fighter jets stopped in French Polynesia before moving on to Hawai'i for a joint mission (Mission Heifara-Wakea), an example of the deep-seated colonial connections throughout the Pacific Islands.

[4] « [La mission] a d'abord la vocation de rassurer tout le peuple polynésien en lui disant bien "même si vous êtes à 17 000 km de la France, si quelqu'un vous menace, nous viendrons vous protéger. À 17 000 km de la métropole, c'est comme si vous étiez Parisiens, on nous viendrons vous protéger" c'est ce que nous avons fait en trente neuf heures et huit minutes », Polynésie la Première, June 21st, 2021. See: https://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/polynesie/les-rafale-sont-arrives-a-tahiti-1041115.html

episode, in Tahiti there was no sign of the military presence nor the soldiers as if these episodes of hyper visibility were at the same time producing invisibility (DeLoughrey 2020)[5].

Fig. 1
First page of the local newspaper Tahiti Infos.
June 24, 2021. © Claudia Ledderucci

Walking along the main road that connects the calm towns of Tahiti's northern coast, it is possible to observe the main military infrastructures of the entire territory. I, therefore, decided to dedicate the first days of my fieldwork to a phenomenological analysis of the military infrastructures, noting that the bases seemed to blend in with the surrounding landscape, yet remained inaccessible[6]. There was no visible security check at the gates, even if the entrance is restricted to military personnel. According to my fieldwork notes from that day, the entrance could have been mistaken as inactive, if not for the army's white cars that continually entered or exited the *base de défense* in Arue. My notes read: « Everything is calm and lush: the grass is well mowed, there are frangipanis everywhere, coconut palms, banana trees, 'uru and mangoes. It is a small paradise on the paradisiac island *par excellence* ». Browsing the very first pages of my fieldwork diary, a few notes written before leaving for Tahiti were returning to thought in those first days:

What would you do if...?
- Military bases are not fortresses as you thought

[5] Interestingly, the French fighter jets that I interpreted as traces of an underlying process of militarization were yet bearing different meanings for local inhabitants. Facebook, the most widely used media platform in French Polynesia, was a privileged point of observation: for instance, in many local groups people were asking where to go seeing the jets' air training and if they were open to the public for guided tours. They were not perceived as intruding by the wide majority, on the contrary, they were causing awe and excitement in many.

[6] The infrastructures in question are the *Cercle Mixte Interarmée de Tahiti* (CMIT) in Pirae, the *base de défense* in Arue and the ex-headquarter of the *Centre pour l'Energie Atomique* (CEA) in Mahina. A thorough analysis of these places will follow in Chapter 3 and 4.

- If the militarization is not visible, if there are no soldiers

Not only did such questions go unanswered during those first days, but these interrogations seemed to endorse my initial fears of not finding the army and continued to keep me company throughout the fieldwork, precisely because, after my first survey, very little in Tahiti seemed to be militarized. Talking to my first interlocutors, I had the impression of being too late: everyone was telling me that, with the end of nuclear testing in 1996 the French military epic in the Pacific had come to an end. Yet, as I was learning, military presence is so pervasive that most of the time it passes unnoticed. Militarization is in fact a multi-scalar and permeating process, with material and immaterial influences on societies and places. Militarization entails financial investments and has long-lasting economic impacts on targeted territories; it presupposes spatial and territorial upheavals engendered by the construction of military facilities and the repurposing of particular spaces. At the same time, and at a different level, militarization is also a cultural and inter-subjective phenomenon involving 'host' communities as well as military personnel and their families.

The goal of this thesis is to analyze military presence and its changing functions in French Polynesia in the aftermath of the nuclear testing era (1966-1996), with particular attention to the administrative and statutory history that continually links this overseas collectivity to the French Republic, and to how this political and administrative configuration shapes sovereignty practices in the everyday life. Investigating these relationships is crucial in order to understand what they could reveal about the instantiation of sovereignty claims, sovereignty practices, and the construction of political subjectivities in a non-sovereign territory. Given the tentacular nature of militarization, and to better frame military functions and the extent of their mutations, I framed militarization as an administrative, territorial, and interpersonal process requiring specific political decision-making, and creating mobility of persons and ideas. As an administrative process, militarization needs infrastructures and well-trained cadres to make it function. As a territorial process, militarization has been the propeller of Indigenous land dispossession and restitution of polluted sites. Finally, as an interpersonal process, militarization and the coloniality that structures it promote the social role of the army which is influencing future aspirations and life trajectories of local inhabitants. Consequently, local communities, their lifestyles, needs, and desires are deeply impacted by the coming of military facilities and such encounters often engender frictions and co-existence. How do these processes work? Who is involved in them and since when? Where are these processes located? How did they change over time?

French scholars have been particularly attentive to studying the application and flaws of French institutions and devices in overseas dependencies, specifically to reorient the debate about colonialism and its contemporary legacies (Lemercier, Muni Toke, Palomares 2014; Saläun, Trépied 2020). In French Polynesia, this has been done with particular attention to the educational system (Maurice, Saläun 2020; Vernaudon et al. 2011) and justice (Gagné, Guyon 2020; Gagné 2018), yet the military institution has been widely neglected and only the RSMA, given its hybrid figure, has recently gained moderate attention on the part of French scholars (Mary 2016; Milia-Marie-Luce 2019; Mora 2022; Salomon 2020; Sierra-Paycha, Mora, Lelièvre 2023). I believe that considering the Army as tantamount to these other national institutions is particularly interesting to expand scholarship and contribute to debates on the study of non-self-governing territories. In fact, during the last decade, we have witnessed the emergence of an anthropological turn to sovereignty and

more generally an attention to the study of overseas dependencies and sovereignty practices in non-self-governing territories. Therefore, I aim to expand these original perspectives by taking into consideration two angles that have been neglected by this kind of scholarship so far: first, I aim to investigate the link between widely debated terms, such as colonialism and decolonization, and the concept of sovereignty; second, I intend to explore the almost intimate bond between processes of militarization and the consequent military presence, and their relation to sovereignty.

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When I first arrived in Tahiti, I was hosted by a retired French couple who were about to return to France for holidays. In exchange for accommodation, I had to take care of their cat, Decibel, and house. The house was located in an exclusive and upward-expanding neighborhood in Puna'auia. Later on, many interlocutors that I met would tell me that they had lived in that area: at Lotus, a luxurious residential complex built in the 1970s, or at the ninth *dos d'âne* (speed bump). Speed bumps, that I've never bothered counting, were used by *métro*[7] living in the neighborhood as a measurement to orientate in a place where no official address system is established. I would learn soon after that the higher you go on the hill, the more exclusive the houses are. And there was nothing higher than the house I was taking care of except for the bare neighboring hills, eaten away by bulldozers and being prepared for new, even more exclusive housing projects (Fig. 2). What I didn't know at the time, is that such projects were being incessantly criticized and contested by a descendant of the Tahitian royal family, the Pomare, vindicating possession of the estate and implying the land had been improperly appropriated by French colonizers, completely bypassing the local history and land tenure system. As Joinville Pomare, a descendant of the royal family, would state in one of the many interviews released to the local tv:

> Joinville Pomare: When justice dictates that, for example, the Pomare are not landowners [...] it's like ignoring the history of our country and our people. Those who signed the treaties with France were the Pomare. So, when the French justice says that such properties, in my country...
> Journalist: but they [real estate agents] bought it [the land]!
> Joinville Pomare: They bought it from who?! From those who grabbed it! They should have checked [the documentation] ahead![8]

Miri, the name of the estate where my temporary house was built in the early 2010s, and defined by Mr. Pomare as « cité dortoir des blancs »–a dormitory town for white people–, revealed to be a contested space, indicating a deeper history and positioning with regards to the land tenure system in Tahiti as well as the French presence on the island. While I was aware of the contested nature of such a presence, I was not expecting to witness it firsthand upon my arrival. The emplacement of

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[7] *Métro* stands for the French metropolitan population and it is widely used to refer to this particular category throughout the French overseas territories and departments. For an original analysis of reciprocal French-Tahitian gazes see Saura 2021, 1998.

[8] « Quand la justice dit, par example, que les Pomare ne sont pas propriétaires [...] c'est un peu ignorer l'histoire de notre pays et de notre peuple. Ceux qui ont signé des traités avec la France, ce sont les Pomare. Alors quand la justice française dit que des propriétés qui sont dans mon pays... [Journalist: mais ils les ont achetés!] Mais ils les ont achetés à qui?! À ceux qui les ont spoliés. Ils auraient dû bien regarder au départ ». Available at: https://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/polynesie/lotissement-miri-qui-est-vraiment-proprietaire-423755.html

my temporary accommodation, which I learned to position within a broader context of social geography of segregated division of urban planning, contributed to my understanding of the dense context and helped me in critically re-thinking my positioning in Tahiti.

Fig. 2
View from my accommodation, overlooking Miri residential estate.
Puna'auia, August 19, 2021. © Claudia Ledderucci

Given the isolation of the house and the island's urban layout (Bon 2005), in those first days in Tahiti I realized a means of transport was needed to move around. Taking for granted the validity of my European driving license and the French jurisdiction over road traffic regulations, the best option fell on a second-hand scooter that someone posted online. Yet, living in a territory where sovereignty is shared and the space contested means that there are different rules and laws which sometimes contradict or conflict with the national one. I would experience it myself right after having bought my scooter: with great shock, I found out that I wasn't allowed to ride it, as the Polynesian Ministry for Terrestrial Transport differs from the metropolitan one. Therefore, my license wasn't recognized as valid to ride that kind of scooter, as is the case in the rest of the European Union. Before making this discovery, on a Wednesday morning, I hitchhiked to reach Maël's, the owner of the scooter in Pirae. I started to hike down the hill and as soon as a car was passing I stuck my arm out, thumb up. Soon after, a gentleman stopped and agreed to give me a ride to the nearest bus stop so that I could catch a ride to Pirae. We began chatting and soon after the driver offered to take me all the way to the house. Together we ventured, kilometer after kilometer, through Fa'a'ā, into Papeete and up the Belvedere Road to Pirae, talking about the bomb and the contemporary benefits that the army offers to the Polynesian youth. Once arrived, I thanked the driver for his kindness and went to Maël's house. After showing me the scooter, he invited me into his house to fill out and sign all the documents needed for the purchase. It would be

on this occasion, unexpectedly, that I would meet the first soldier, the category at the center of my work but at the same time so volatile and hard to identify at this stage of the research. Perhaps prompted by my research topic, Maël told me in passing and just to let the conversation flow, that his wife is in the army. Indeed that same morning Coraline was flying in one of those fighter jets that I often saw darting through the sky from the terrace of my exclusive house. Upon entering the house « all prejudices and superstructures collapse. [Coraline] is tall and thin, blond, blue-eyed, with gentle features and a calm demeanor and she is holding a baby. She gently welcomes us and helps us fill in the documents. Her uniform is on a chair: beret, short-sleeved shirt, and military pants. [...] The fridge is full of pictures: their wedding, baby pictures, pictures of them on vacation[9] ».

Only later, and looking back at this first *military* encounter, would I realize the ingenuity of my initial expectations. I will never face the army as an institution, and I will never witness the militarization process as I had imagined it. On the contrary, what will I meet would be people, like Coraline. Or Gabriel, in charge of the *Régiment du Service Militaire Adapté* (or RSMA) recruitment section. The RSMA is a civil-military program designed to help young Polynesian people to obtain professional diplomas and to find a place in the job market. Met the day after I bought the scooter, Gabriel is the first soldier I would meet in a proper military environment: the open-to-the-public recruitment section of the military base in Arue. After giving me some welcome presents with the RSMA coats of arms, he explained to me how the RSMA functions and the program's goals. Gabriel also discussed the prerequisites that young people need to be chosen. In my fieldwork notes, I wrote: « I have no problems in trusting Gabriel, or in believing in his goodwill in helping boys and girls unable to find a job. As I follow his explanations, the reasoning makes perfect sense. But I struggle [...] it is the same feeling I had yesterday with Coraline. And it is the same mechanism through which people look at *les rafales* [the fighter jets] with admiration[10] ».

Such a dilemma questioned me for a long time as I was navigating the ambivalence of the military phenomenon. How was I supposed to conciliate the advertised 'benevolence' of the French army and the opportunities it represents for Polynesian youth with my critical thinking?

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Traces of this subcutaneous yet tentacular military presence also come to life in environments of open criticism of France's presence in French Polynesia. Motu Uta, an islet sitting just in front of Papeete's waterfront, once hosted Queen Pomare IV's residence. Today it is home to Tahiti's commercial port and it is such an urbanized space that the bridge which connects it to the main island blends in with the surrounding streets, rendering its original morphology undetectable. It is on this island that Fa'afaite, a traditional canoe (or va'a) captained by my Italo-Tahitian friend named India, is docked at one of the numerous piers. While India was telling me how navigating is for her an act of protest, a way to rebel and disagree with the French colonization, a detail caught my attention: I realized that Fa'afaite and all it represents (tradition, culture transmission, the highly symbolic meaning of having a woman as captain), is docked right in front of a massive naval

[9] From my fieldwork notes, notebook #0, June 23, 2021, p. 39.

[10] From my fieldwork notes, notebook #0, June 24, 2021, p. 44.

shipyard[11] (Fig. 3). Papeete's naval base is right in front of us as if to remind Fa'afaite that this is a contested place and that its vindication of traditional knowledge clashes continually with different regimes of truth operating on completely different levels, and what is more, deemed to be superior.

Fig. 3
Fa'afaite, traditional Polynesian canoe (va'a) docked in front of the Navy's shipyard. Papeete, June 18, 2021. © Claudia Ledderucci

Military presence in French Polynesia is not aggressive, nor does it make the news (with a few exceptions such as the coming of the fighter jets demonstrated). Differing from what is happening in other Pacific Islands hosting military bases, where Indigenous people from Guam, Hawai'i, and Okinawa are protesting against the U.S. military presence (Tanji 2006; Tanji, Broudy 2017; Ginoza 2012; Shigematsu, Camacho 2010; Davis 2020; Trask 1993; Goodyear-Ka'ōpua 2018), many Polynesians are instead (and paradoxically) fascinated by the army[12]. In French Polynesia, military presence reveals itself slowly and in a diffused way; this tentacular characteristic of the military presence, which will be broadly analyzed in the following chapters, echoes its intangible pervasiveness, and yet it is well present in the individual and family lives of so many of my

[11] On Fa'afaite see Leu 2021. On the signification and symbolism linked to the canoe, Tiara Naputi and Sylvia Frain (2023:8) observed that « in its various forms, [it] is a symbol of the seascape as central to life and identity throughout Oceania. More specifically, the canoe serves as a 'symbol of cultural revitalization and identity in relation to their unique canoe cultures' (Tu, 2017). Beyond this important symbolism, the canoe also represents voyaging values that are central to survival and sustainability ».

[12] A similar situation is observable in Micronesia, more specifically in the Federated States of Micronesia, where the U.S. Army recruits Micronesian youth at a very high rate (Aguon 2008); and in American Samoa (Toft 2018).

interlocutors. This expansive capacity is grafted on the geographic fragmentation of the Polynesian territory, articulating itself in ever-changing forms through island horizons and often resulting in what at first glance may seem a paradox: the army, an institution that more than any other embodies the French presence, is seen by the majority as a respectful neighbor, a friend to share a drink in company, an animator of the local market, or even a resource for accessing hard-to-find goods on outer islands.

For a long time, I questioned the meaning of such a paradox that accompanied me throughout the fieldwork, without necessarily finding a satisfactory response. Later on, I learned to consider such paradoxical situations as the products of tensions and ambivalences: the militarization process does not reveal itself through the presence of tanks or the construction of fortresses but through a diluted and continuous presence of soldiers and functionaries. These figures, modern-day colonial agents, are able to influence the local market as well as the needs and tastes of the local population. I came to witness this pervasiveness myself, as the majority of the people I met in Tahiti, with some exceptions, were French *expatriates* whose invisible impacts would result in the uncanny lack of bewilderment I, as well as newly arrived functionaries, experienced. Soldiers stationed in Tahiti, Tubuai, or elsewhere, are in fact only some of the many French functionaries that are temporarily transplanted in French Polynesia and other French overseas departments and territories every year. As a nurse I met during one of the first field trips around the northern coast of Tahiti explained to me, « it is great to be able to travel and work throughout the French overseas departments and territories! ». She was indirectly expressing the implicit disavowal that brings her and many others to unrelate themselves and their mobility not only to the French colonial past but also to modern-day mechanisms of imperial formations. Such mobility is indeed deemed to be well-deserved and to represent a once-in-a-lifetime working opportunity for the majority of those who decide to move overseas. In this uneasy and dense situation, metropolitan social actors take up a privileged position while indirectly reproducing over time a colonial imbalance of power (see Hirshberg 2022 for a similar account in Kwajalein Atoll, Marshall Islands). Moreover, mobility engenders not only the movement of French functionaries and their families but also of their ideas, imaginaries, and expectations. Traveling ideas and different lifestyles contributed to molding the geographical space in French Polynesia, creating new familiar and ideal places for French-qualified and/or unskilled workers to recreate their home away from home.

The geographical space, intended here as a form of political relation, has been and still is continually remade following non-Polynesian or external aesthetics standards able to meet the ideal paradisiac and tropical stereotype that many Western inhabitants are trying to reproduce through their working and living experience in French Polynesia. As the example of the scarred landscape of Miri estate sketched above testifies, the political relations that inform the expropriation of land and construction of new houses is but one of the many facets of the French presence in contemporary Tahiti, allowing French businessmen and qualified workers to purchase land while clustering Indigenous families in overcrowded and poorly served areas.

It is said that fieldwork should bewilder the researcher, because only this kind of disorientation would allow the anthropologist to step away from its horizons of meaning, allowing them at the same time to absorb the new ones (Fabietti 1999; Pavanello 2010). For me, such a bewilderment happened in reverse: when I decided to carry out fieldwork in French Polynesia, I assumed that the French presence was a colonial one, very visible even today that French Polynesia has been reframed

as an Overseas Collectivity with a nominally wide autonomy status, its own government and assembly. The roots of such a presence date back to the 1800s, and deepened in the 1960s with the implementation of the French nuclear testing program, to finally mutate into a lasting military presence. Having fallen into the fieldwork's exotic trap, I was expecting to find a foreign place, hostage to the military presence which I was trying to map. In reality, once there I felt bewildered because this strong military presence didn't broadcast explicitly resulting in military fortresses and a massive deployment of soldiers. In fact, as in every other French overseas territory or department, I barely felt disoriented. The geographical displacement and cultural differences don't have to discourage the figurative army of functionaries that every year are transferred overseas. Teachers, doctors, nurses, and soldiers feed on the colonial administration and local economy and it is therefore impossible to distinguish the army's economic, social, or cultural influence from the others'. The traces, more or less visible, of the military presence in French Polynesia, are yet reflected in everyday life: they are clearly visible in supermarkets, where for instance on the shelves of the French giant *Carrefour*, one can find products such as Camembert, Chardonnay or Syrah, butter, *foie gras* and so on; or the secondhand market, as the scooter trading has taught me. If starting from the 1960s the economy revolved around the nuclear military epic, today the perversity of this system means that not only can French products be found on the shelves of local supermarkets, but the population itself, now composed of Polynesians and French, is clamoring for them[13].

Civil aviation has for years been a gateway for part of the French working class: among them Simon, the now retired gentleman who hosted me in Puna'auia, who moved to Tahiti at the beginning of the 2010s as an air traffic controller; and Mr. Guettaa, who moved to Tahiti with all his family in 1991 to perform the same task. Florence, his daughter and one of my very first interlocutors in Tahiti, could be considered the product of such a highly mobile administrative system. She was nine years old when she moved and Tahiti is more of her home than Alsace, her birth region, will ever be. Besides being a good example of colonial mobility, Florence is also a key figure in my initial fieldwork experience, a fundamental gatekeeper who will introduce me to Tahiti's military world. It will only be thanks to her, whom I met at the minimal military parade on July 14, 2021, in honor of Republic Day, that I will learn to read the military presence and its traces in Tahiti in a different way, through the hints she provided me. Florence owns a military badge, obtained in particular circumstances: her father, an air-traffic controller of Algerian origins, was also in the Military Reserves. Florence implied that he had military assignments during his civilian career, but she doesn't know if he was working undercover. It is through this link that she was able to obtain her *carte militaire*, although she is keen to explain that as the daughter of a former reservist, she shouldn't be entitled to the badge. This is why, reading her *carte militaire*, she figures as her father's widow. As she will recall on other occasions, the man from whom she had purchased a second-hand computer, a high-rank military at the end of his tour of duty in French Polynesia, forged the badge for her by altering her kinship. This military pass allows her to enter different military sites, among them the *Cercle Mixte Interarmée de Tahiti*, a military club that hosts a *bistrot*, a

[13] In his 1989 article, Jean-François Baré demonstrated that this was true well before the 1960s and the nuclear testing era. In fact, after the Protectorate and then Annexation of the Pomare kingdom, respectively in 1842 and 1880, local chiefs and the Queen herself began to gain a salary paid by the French colonial regime, engendering a new consumerist economy on the island.

boutique mostly selling touristic paraphernalia (Fig. 4), and organizes leisure activities for the soldiers and their families. Florence has also access to a private military restaurant, the *centre de détente* Moana. Not only did she receive this privileged access, but was able to bring guests as well. We would frequently meet at the *centre de détente* Moana for lunch, granting me access to take a closer look at the soldiers I was unsuccessfully searching for elsewhere.

Fig. 4
The 2022 calendar starring 'Girls of the South Seas' found at the CMIT military boutique.
Pirae, December 8, 2021. © Claudia Ledderucci

I had heard of this restaurant before from Adélie, a French girl whom I had met at the local university (*Université de la Polynésie française*). I was advising Adélie as she prepared for her exchange semester with my old university in Rome[14]. It was during this conversation that she recounted a story about when her aunt had visited. Her aunt is a military doctor and came to visit Adélie's retired grandparents, who had been transplanted to Tahiti for years. Whenever her aunt visited they would always eat *chez les mimis*, the military restaurant at the *centre de détente* Moana, because of the cheap prices offered: another privileged prerogative that comes with the military fatigues and is precluded to Polynesian families and individuals. Although the sign at the entrance bears the now-familiar words « accès réglementé », no one will check Florence and me, and the entry always seemed to be unattended (Fig. 5). Florence will later tell me that everyone knows her because she goes there very often and indeed will begin a partnership with the restaurant manager; the military pass is, therefore, unnecessary in such occasions because the identification occurs through other, intimate aspects. Inside the club, there are tennis courts, a diving school, a little marina with

[14] Adélie's situation is somewhat exemplary of the perversity of the colonial system. She was able to freely move to Tahiti (formally part of the French Republic) and enroll in the local university from a metropolitan privileged position (both economic and social). As a 'local' student she was then able to apply for a European exchange program (Erasmus+) and had the possibility to spend a semester abroad while funded by the University of French Polynesia. While this possibilities are offered to Polynesian students as well, very few of them are able to leave because of economic constraints.

numerous kayaks, traditional canoes (va'a), and tiny sailboats used by the RIMaP-P[15] soldiers for various training; and the restaurant where we would have lunch. Customers are mostly soldiers on lunch breaks, military families, or family members visiting Tahiti, and especially at night, the atmosphere resembles that of a tourist resort with animation and activities, such as karaoke or theme parties.

Fig. 5
Entrance of the centre de détente Moana.
The sign reads « Membership card mandatory ».
Arue, December 7, 2021. © Claudia Ledderucci

The circumstances through which Florence obtained her military pass and the environment I will experience with her, made me reflect on how much the process of militarization is, in reality, a social process reproducing itself in everyday life through inter-subjective relationships. If at first, I struggled to identify a strictly military sphere and its encroachment in the civilian one, it was precisely because I was trying to frame a tentacular process that could not be ascribed to a single sphere or situation. In such a militarized context, the soldier's role is played as much by the warrant officer wearing their uniform as by the neighbor. It is precisely by such informal and inter-subjective relationships that militarization reproduces itself incessantly. Militarization is the belief that soldiers can help young Polynesians by supporting their applications in the regular army, or thinking that enrollment in the army is the best option for these young Indigenous people's futures. These ambivalences work on different levels: people join the army « to help others », as well as French soldiers spending their tour of duty in French Polynesia are happy and proud to help Polynesians to join the army for their own sake. A similar tension is revealed with greater impetus when one considers that these functionaries-soldiers not only contribute to such a colonial project passively, through their presence but also actively and with genuine benevolence, serving as a bridge to all those young volunteers whom each year decide to continue the path they have taken at the RSMA

[15] As it will be explained later, the RIMaP-P is the *Régiment d'Infanterie de Marine du Pacifique - Polynésie*, the regiment on duty in French Polynesia.

by enlisting in the army to secure a job and salary. It is precisely through these young people that militarization is reproduced daily and that the values of a militarized society can expand undetected and become familiar and normalized (Enloe 2000). The sentence that so much will be repeated to me during the second part of my fieldwork, and that was used during the 1960s as a rhetorical weapon by Charles De Gaulle himself, « mais ici *c'est* la France! », gains a deeper meaning if interpreted in such a perspective: when the second-in-chief of the military facility I would visit in Tubuai told me that the island is part of the national territory and that he didn't feel « aux marges de l'empire » he was referring not so much to the legislative and political status of the island, but to a colonial/historical and perceived cultural affiliation that supposedly bond the Polynesian territory to the metropolitan one.

Such a link is reiterated yearly during the ceremony in honor of Republic Day, on 14 July. On such occasions, the various army corps parade and position themselves along Avenue Pouvana a Oopa[16], with their back to the High-Commission building and facing the war memorial, adorned with flower wreaths for the festivity (Fig. 6). The components of the armed forces are gradually introduced by the speaker, interspersed with a recorded drumroll and the national anthem. This trivial element, the pre-recorded music, deprives the ceremony of all the solemnity it is supposed to bear, making it a mimicry of the Parisian military parade, especially when the drumroll is set off at the wrong time, giving space to moments of embarrassed comedy. Despite moments of veiled tension, during which a no-vax group composed of middle-aged ladies, among them Florence, tried to protest the introduction of the vaccine obligation, the July 14, 2021 ceremony ended peacefully, in the name of the *communauté d'union* proposed by the High Commissioner. Once the ceremony ended, the small crowd began to rapidly disperse and soldiers started to walk towards their families and friends.

In such an intricate context, I had the impression that the different parties involved, the local government in agreement with the High Commission on the one hand, and the pro-independence party on the other, were competing in a tug-of-war of commemorations and anniversaries: the 14 July ceremony, the French national holiday and a symbol of its presence in French Polynesia takes place just two weeks after the commemoration organized by the pro-independence party to commemorate the loss of Polynesian sovereignty, which occurred in 1880 with the annexation of the Pomare kingdom (see Chapter 2). In turn, both of these ceremonies are lost among the festivities of *Tiurai*, the July holidays instituted in the mid-1980s by Gaston Flosse's government precisely to celebrate the newly acquired local autonomy (Al Wardi 1998; see also Saura 2015a). These mirror games, some of which will be recalled in the next chapters, help us reconstruct the dense ties that bind today's French Polynesia to France, as well as the military presence in Tahiti and the rest of the islands that make up this overseas collectivity.

[16] Once called Avenue Bruat, after Armand-Joseph Bruat, Governor of colonial French Polynesia, the avenue was renamed to honor Pouvanaa a Oopa, considered the father of the Polynesian political culture, after the Temaru Presidency in 2006.

Fig. 6
Military parade in honor of Republic Day.
Papeete, July 14, 2021. © Claudia Ledderucci

The Army: A Peculiar Interlocutor

This thesis is the result of fieldwork research I conducted in French Polynesia from June 2021 to December 2021 and then from January 2022 to the end of May 2022. More specifically, during my first stay in 2021 I mainly lived in Tahiti and spent a month in Moʻorea while during my second journey, I mainly lived in Tubuai, Austral Islands.

My interest in French Polynesia's nuclear history was initially sparked by a particular attention and sensitivity concerning the environmental issue and climate change in Oceania (Ledderucci 2021, 2021a). Moved by the actions of Pacific activists who were shedding light on the political causes of both climate change and post-nuclear toxicities in the area (see, for instance, Jetñil-Kijiner 2017), I aimed at designing a research project that could link such issues and explore the symbolic importance of ancestral land. My focus on the intersection of environmental issues, militarization, and colonial presence made clear the strategic position occupied by these non-sovereign islands in the Pacific Ocean and pushed me to dig deeper into understanding the Western presence in contemporary Oceania. Getting ready to go to French Polynesia to study the aftermath of the nuclear testing period and how the environmental disruption was influencing the link Indigenous Polynesian people entertain with the land (*fenua*), I started to realize how different processes were entangled one to the other, at the expense of local Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. Other than the initial political colonization established in 1880, and today considered a non-issue by the French government since the Polynesian people voted to become an overseas territory in 1958

(for a thorough analysis see Gonschor 2013), two other consequent processes unfolded at the turning point represented by the 1960s: the militarization and touristification of the territory. The militarization process that took place in the 1960s and prepared the road to the implantation of the nuclear testing industry on Polynesian islands, especially through the construction of many infrastructures, paved the way for the coming of international tourists visiting what they considered a paradise land (on the commodification of Polynesian bodies and culture see Desmond 1999). Similar entanglements were observed by Teresia Teaiwa, who coined the term *militourism* to refer to particular situations in which a « military or paramilitary force ensures the smooth running of a tourist industry, and that same tourist industry masks the military force behind it » (1999:251). As observed elsewhere by the same scholar (1994), the discursive shift operated by the army allowed tourists and the general public to focus on the paradisiac imaginary while at the same time hiding the nuclear hell. In the same vein, the large autonomy given to French Polynesia in 1957, with the promulgation of an innovative decentralizing law, was withdrawn during the testing years, implying a strong link between the colonization/militarization of French Polynesia and its autonomous status. Moreover, as I was learning prior to my departure, in the past ten years much of the land used in the nuclear testing era for military purposes was being given back to local municipalities following a French administrative reform and budget cuts to the public sector.

Fascinated by the similarities I found between the many studies published about the meaning of living along the fence lines (Kirk, Hoshino 2011; Shigematsu, Camacho 2010; Ginoza 2012; Aguon 2006, 2008, 2022; Davis 2015, 2021) and what was going on in French Polynesia, I aimed to study what were the consequences of such dwelling in contemporary Tahiti, where not only people lived next to military infrastructures but also where military land was being given back, and where the army was still one of the main employers for Polynesian youth. I, therefore, started to question myself about the meaning of living in a non-sovereign territory. What does it mean to bear a heavy bond with the old colonizer while living next to the same military barracks that in the past hosted the soldiers who were bombing your ancestral land but were often and at the same time your colleagues? I wanted to witness the historical moment in which military land was finally given back following what I thought were local vindication claims to have this land restituted.

And yet, the beginning of my doctorate, and consequently the research design, were highly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic that aggressively disrupted in February 2020 and which led to the imposition of a national lockdown at the beginning of March of the same year. Imagining a distant fieldwork became, in those first months, an impossible utopia given the growing restrictions to movements and face to face interactions aimed at containing the fast spreading of the disease. During those long months of lockdown and while so many other people were lonely quarantining in their homes, I started to redesign my research project, imagining a more feasible angle to tackle given the restrictions in place. I explored the possibility of studying the representations of French Polynesia in the French archives, and started a preliminary survey using the material available online. This challenging phase of the research helped me to better frame the context I wanted to study and deepened my understanding of colonialism and the extent of its tentacles. It also helped me in the deconstruction and reconstruction of my subject of study, a methodology that I widely used in reference to the military traces I started collecting once in Tahiti. In fact, given the loosening of travel restrictions, and testifying the economic dependence over international tourism, I was finally able to travel to French Polynesia at the beginning of June 2021.

Once in Tahiti, I found out there were no protests linked to the restitution of military land, nor any particular attention attributed to the new projects about to be developed by local municipalities, or signs of strong local movements that came into life in other non-sovereign territories elsewhere in the Pacific, where military presence was being literally fought and kicked out as in Okinawa, Japan (Tanji 2006; Davis 2020, 2015; Vine 2019). In Tahiti, the last parcel of land was officially given back in 2021 and most of the town councils involved in such processes had a business plan ready to revitalize local economies using old military land. I found myself deceived by what I first thought was a lack of popular interest, especially because the social actors and activists I was expecting to be in conversation with were not so easy to approach. And yet, what I thought at first to be a big research failure, revealed itself to be the perfect outcome of a militarization process that often goes unnoticed because normalized. The restitution of this military land was nevertheless symbolizing the willingness of the French state to literally erase traces of its passage, giving back useless land that would soon be re-signified by the local administration and transformed into commercial hubs or parks, materially erasing their historical memories while at the same time reiterating the politics of togetherness sponsored by the French government. What I was witnessing was the management, construction, and erasure of space in a non-sovereign territory. And still, it seemed to me that while on the one side, France was giving back military land aiming to « turn the nuclear page[17] » and reinstate its benevolent presence, on the other side, it was encroaching even more in the everyday intimacy of Indigenous people's lives, subtly reinstating its presence in different forms. In fact, not only the army is still present in Tahiti with the explicit goal of protecting French sovereignty on the territory, but it is also very present on the outer islands, where a volunteering program is active and expanding. The *Régiment du Service Militaire Adapté* became a good counter-example to show how notwithstanding the restitution of military land, the French army is still very present in French Polynesia, a territory deemed of strategic importance not only for its position in the Pacific Ocean but also because of the natural resources that it brings along (Le Meur et al. 2016). Reflecting on this dense interplay, I started to question why people that are usually against the French presence in French Polynesia were also so willing to join the French army. This second research question was developed between the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022, when I was awarded with a research grant by the *Maison des Sciences de l'Homme du Pacifique*, a French-funded locally-based research institute, which allowed me to expand my research and travel to Tubuai to carry out further ethnographic observations from February to May 2022. By the end of my fieldwork experience, I came to understand that most of the time enlisting in the army means self-expression for the Polynesian youth: Polynesians join the army to seize opportunities that are unavailable under other circumstances, even if this means following new rules and ways of thinking and behaving.

On Methodology...

During my fieldwork, it became clear that approaching my sources as evidence and proof to confirm or discard my main hypothesis, i.e. that the army is very well present in contemporary French Polynesia, revealed itself to be misleading. Interpreting the situations I was witnessing and the conversations and encounters I was having as traces, helped me to better define the goals of my

[17] Here I refer to President Macron's will that Polynesian people let go of any bitterness and anger linked to the three decades of nuclear testing, turning the page of history. His expectation, upon the presidential visit in July 2021, were confronted by local activists' requests for just compensation and official apologies that still have to be made.

research and to navigate the ambivalences that became the norm during the ethnography. Building on Donna Haraway's approach, I started to pay attention to « What matters we use to think other matters with; [...] what stories we tell to tell other stories with; [...] what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. [...] what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories » (2016:12). Similarly, the image of spiderwebs as « Images of the nonlinear, of the many directions in which something might go, the many sources for it » (Solnit 2014:80) prompted me to start tracing and re-tracing the contemporary colonial military presence in Tahiti, and its historical presence and present to better understand the dense interplay that today informs the intersection between colonial-military presence, sovereignty and performances of citizenship.

As shown throughout this work, not only have the functions carried out by the army changed over the years; they were broadly enlarged. Classically, the quintessential function of the army was to defend the nation and its people, maintaining the national sovereign power over its territory. While this is still one of the main functions of national armies, their missions extend well beyond defense and overflow the social and political realms. Paying attention to the uncanny and odd intersections of military and non-military activities, or between the sovereign and defense functions of the army and its 'social mission' allow the researcher to understand and make sense of concomitant and ubiquitous phenomena, such as colonialism and sovereignty. The presence of military facilities in non-self-governing islands and territories tells us about their colonial pasts and presents as well as the moralizing and regimenting extent of the army's 'social mission'. It is precisely on such a presence and colonial *longue durée* that local sovereign efforts are deeply rooted today.

Embracing an anthropological perspective, this work aims at considering the army as a cultural institution daily crafted by women and men working within its facilities, as well as by other social actors such as local and national politicians, functionaries, and the civil society more broadly[18].

The present work stands at the intersection of different fields and literature branches, among them Pacific studies, political anthropology, studies on non-self-governing islands, critical militarization studies, cultural, and post-colonial studies. My methodological approach is nevertheless inclined to study societal transformations, even more so in a non-sovereign French territory whose status was shaped by the long-lasting relationship it entertains with the metropole. Considering the many waves that have informed the relationship between French Polynesia and France, going from the annexation of the Marquesas Islands and the imposition of a Protectorate on the Pomare kingdom (1842) to the official political colonization (1880) and then to the territorialization and institutionalization of the overseas territory (1958), the expansion of French sovereignty in these Pacific islands allowed the government to develop a nuclear testing center while encroaching more and more into Polynesian lives. On the other side of the specter, French Polynesia was also able to negotiate a broad autonomy statute that gives it the faculty to rule over many competencies and to be represented in regional meetings. Given these continuities in the definition of the contemporary socio-spatial-political situation, periodically interspersed with sudden eruptions (for instance, the riots of September 1995), how are we to define change in French Polynesia?

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[18] On the concept of 'civil society' in colonized societies see Mamdani 1996. Originally, in the English African colonies, civil society was crafted as a colonial invention whose aim was to involve colonizers and British functionaries in the public discourse without considering the local communities. Here, I intend civil society more broadly, as the entirety of private citizens, families and individuals, organizations and associations that are not tied to national and/or local institutions.

What I aimed to do throughout my fieldwork was to understand what people make of such changes and continuities in the administration of their daily lives and how these changes and continuities shape their futures and expectations, considering that change, as well as continuity, are never uniform and pre-established processes, nor are they visible in the everyday life; on the contrary, they are « Experienced through the articulation of past and present conditions » (Berriane et al. 2021:14) as well as through sudden eruptions (Stoler 2016). What became clear throughout my ethnography, is that changes and continuities in social and cultural practices, as well as in contemporary colonial situations, are complex processes entailing ambivalences and apparent paradoxes that are nevertheless navigated as the norm by many social actors. This is a very important aspect of the research, reminding the researcher that such definitions are informed by different perspectives and that the emic perspective and the etic one do not always coincide or are informed by the same reasons or thought processes.

My approach is contextualized, relational, and actor-oriented and my sources are made of phenomenological and participant observation and encounter with my interlocutors, with particular attention to the observation of specific actions, situations, practices, and emotions, especially inside the military base fence lines, but also online sources and archival material. Using participant observation as my main methodology, I committed to carrying on lasting relationships with some of my interlocutors, having in mind that such a research strategy was (and still is) fundamental to giving back the results and extent of these conversations, as well as their meanings, in the most accurate form possible. At the same time, this approach was meant for my interlocutors to feel at ease and to be able to express themselves in the form they thought was the best for them.

As I decided to collect the traces I could find on the military presence, tracing and retracing local histories and reconstructing historical episodes, I learned that many aspects were often blurred or diminished, others went completely under the radar. Using such an approach throughout the length of my fieldwork, I let these traces guide me through their stories of encounters, connections, and paradoxes. Studying the official colonial and nuclear history of French Polynesia and its strategic use as a testing ground during the 1960s, I was at first persuaded to consider the RSMA as designed and then implanted in French Polynesia to smoothly incorporate Indigenous young people into the nation, to mold the citizens of tomorrow. While I am still convinced that this is true to some extent, collecting this kind of sources (military traces) I soon realized that the RSMA itself is a means for young Polynesian people to emancipate from their families or to sort out difficult living situations, often by joining the French army.

The research questions were built around the specificities of the military program, such as the peculiarities that made the RSMA such a successful program in French Polynesia; the personal, cultural, and social reasons that encourage Indigenous young people to join the program; the role that social and familial history have in influencing the choice of whether or not to join the RSMA; finally, how young people's social roles change after participating in the military and professional training offered. To what extent is the RSMA, as well as the soldiers who work in it, carriers of new ideas, concepts, and practices? And how are these new ideas welcomed, molded, transformed, and acted upon by young Polynesians? How are interpersonal relationships weaved over and through sovereign relations that are negotiated through this republican device?

The interviews on which the following chapters are mostly based represent, together with the participant observation, the substantial corpus of data of this fieldwork research. Interviews

concerning the RSMA program were conducted at the *Troisième Compagnie de Formation Professionnelle* (CFP3) in Tubuai from February to May 2022, often extemporaneously and with no recording given the nature of the encounter and the activities in which I participated. Unfortunately, the research context, i.e. a military facility, didn't always allow me to organize semi-structured interviews with the technological support of a recorder. The reason for this is mostly because I was very often involved in the training activities that took place every day, but also because sometimes I preferred, in order to better adjust to the situations, not to embarrass my interlocutors by asking weird anthropologist-like questions, such as « Do you mind if I record this conversation? ». These extemporaneous interviews were nevertheless extremely valuable to get closer to my interlocutors, the military personnel, as well as the volunteers, and such continuous and quotidian conversations allowed me to create intimate relationships with my informants.

Throughout my stay in Tubuai, my interlocutors were the young volunteers, as well as their trainers and the other professional figures working at the military Unit. Other interlocutors (mostly met in Tahiti) were the military functionaries working at the Commandment Unit; the responsible soldiers working at the Recruitment and Integration Units; the support personnel (psychologist, nurse, teachers, social assistant); the branch chiefs, trainers in particular trades offered by the program.

To better understand the roles of these different figures, I organized multiple thematic sessions/days during which I followed the trainers' activities and/or the teaching sessions offered by them, and the procedures fulfilled by the functionaries/soldiers responsible for the recruitment and the integration of young volunteers. The goal of these sessions was to understand their roles and functions within the institution, as well as to listen to and know their personal and professional experiences in and outside the army. As briefly noted above, the main methodology has been participant observation, carried out during the entire period of my stay in Tubuai, to meticulously observe the everyday activities at the Regiment and in its different trades; as well as during off-base activities with the volunteers and the military personnel.

While carrying out fieldwork in Tubuai I was required to ruminate on the situational nature of my research experience. If during the foundational years of anthropology as a discipline (roughly from the beginning of the 20th century until the 1950s), ethnography was mostly considered as a classificatory survey of different people's, i.e. colonized 'tribes', set of specific and supposedly immutable traditional cultures to be defined and classified to fit colonial administrative categories; since at least the 1960s, contemporary anthropology has continually challenged such an approach by questioning the very nature of the colonial encounter (Stocking 1991; Asad 1973). The premises of my fieldwork were deeply rooted in the dynamism and high mobility prompted by overseas contexts. As it soon became clear in Tubuai, my interlocutors were highly mobile social actors and my research took shape in a particular temporal conjuncture allowing the interaction with a specific cohort of volunteers and soldiers. Yet, all of them left the island a couple of months after I did, and new volunteers and soldiers replaced them, with the result that if I was to go back to Tubuai, I wouldn't meet the same people, yet a different *institutional* ethnography would be possible by interviewing different social actors.

...and Access to Fieldwork

The majority of my research having focused on the military presence in French Polynesia, my main interlocutors have therefore been military institutions, as well as soldiers. To carry out fieldwork in

such a context was not an easy task, mostly because of the reciprocal distrust and distance between the institution and the researcher. I felt this mutual wariness since my first official encounter with military officials, the meeting I had with Gabriel sketched above: at the time, I didn't know that my research would later closely focus on the RSMA and I was looking for military interlocutors to further my knowledge about the military presence in Tahiti, with particular attention to the restitution of land. Lacking any other contacts and waiting for responses that eventually never came, I found the RSMA to be a helpful and accessible interlocutor. This is mostly true as the Regiment is very conscious of its public figure and particularly fond of advertising its program. The recruiting Officer was indeed curious about my research and well-disposed to help answer my questions. Despite his helpfulness, during our second meeting, he didn't hesitate to point out to me that after my first visit, his superior asked him for further explanations about who I was and what I was doing there. He also remarked quite sarcastically that I had too many questions and always wanted to know everything. As said, at the time I was interested in the restitution process concerning military land in Tahiti and I contacted the RSMA Recruitment section lacking any other military contact. In my eyes, the RSMA program was an integral part of the French army, nevertheless from an administrative and working point of view, the RSMA and the regular army are two separate entities ruled over by two different Ministries (Ministry of Defense and Ministry of the Overseas), as Gabriel will point out to me. This was just a taste of the possible critical issues of entering the military field and indeed common features of any fieldwork research.

The distress I encountered increased exponentially as my research project about the RSMA was later formalized and ready to be carried out with the support of the *Maison des Sciences de l'Homme du Pacifique* (MSH-P), a French-funded research institute. The discomfort was twofold: on one hand, with the research institute that financed my project; on the other, with the army. The frictions I encountered with the research commissioner could be identified as one of the many backlashes of the marketization of academic research (Brown R. 2011), resulting in the unfortunate restriction of academic critical thinking. In fact, once my work was approved and financed, I was made aware that the research was not supposed to criticize, at least in principle, the work the RSMA carries out in French Polynesia since 1989. This required me to reassess my positioning while witnessing first-hand the reach of what I came to define as *discreet*[19] forms of coloniality: the normalization and consequent erasure of the French presence, as well as the embellishment of the army and the long-lasting consequences that such presence foster.

Nevertheless, it would be thanks to the intercession of this same research institute that I would be able to meet with the military hierarchies of the Regiment, interested in getting to know me and better understand my work, before officially approving my research project. The lunch I was invited to was organized at the teaching restaurant inside the military base in Arue, where the volunteers enrolled in the restaurant, wait staff, and reception branches of the RSMA learn how to cook, serve, and greet customers/superiors, respectively. I was so intimidated by the meeting and the whole situation that I did not mention to the wait staff or to the lieutenant colonel that I follow a vegan diet. The pedagogical restaurant provided only one menu with no further options. Reluctantly, I would eat sashimi and taste the raw duck, pretending to have eaten too much to break up the meal. Beyond such anecdotal details, that nevertheless challenge the researcher with unexpected situations

[19] Here I refer to Bono 2021 when she defines the discreet ways of making politics as unrecognized practices.

developing their ability to navigate the unknown, the meeting was an opportunity for introductions with the various figures who make up the Regiment, as well as for approval of my research[20]. Yet, the meeting did not sanction the endorsement of my ethnography, nor that I could go to Tubuai and visit the RSMA Unit (with whose second-in-chief I was in contact[21]). Not only « The researcher in the field begins by improvising awkwardly, until [they] become, little by little, capable of improvising competently. One needs to have wasted time, an awful lot of time, in the field, in order to understand that these slack times were necessary » (Olivier de Sardan 2015:4).

To proceed through the bureaucratic process, I was told to make arrangements with the Regiment psychologist who then told me to send her my research project (which had already been sent to the Commander by the MSH-P). Once the document was sent, the psychologist told me that the format did not conform to the RSMA standard and I was therefore asked to rewrite the project following the proposed standards. After these nit-picky requests, which both my superior at the research institute and I found to be a ploy to keep me out, I was told that the research proposal had to be approved by an ethics committee, without which I could not carry out fieldwork in the Tubuai Unit. In the meantime, though, I was using the contacts that were given to me during that official lunch at the RSMA and I contacted both the social assistant and one of the RSMA trainers present at lunch, Noa. He invited me to go visit the RSMA unit in Arue, as well as his teachings and I accepted (see also Chapter 5). Notwithstanding the anger I provoked in the psychologist, who felt bypassed by this encounter, I was able to spend three mornings at the RSMA facility in Arue[22], interviewing young volunteers as well as soldiers and beginning to become familiar with the organization and military environment. For three mornings I would be given a military temporary badge, allowing me to enter the base and would be escorted in and out of the RSMA facility by a young and shy volunteer training in the program. These episodes also allowed me to observe how my contacts with the military institutions were stratified and tentacular, spanning from the RSMA hierarchies, to my research institute and back to the psychologist and the trainer who genuinely invited me to observe his teaching activities. After being lost in this administrative maze for months[23], it would only be with the intercession of the research institute director that I would finally receive the approval to carry out research inside the military fence. The time initially allotted to me was only one week though and I knew how impossible it was to conduct an ethnographical research in one week. Eventually and paradoxically, through negotiations and tenacity on my part, and thanks to the trust I gained during that first long week, I managed to negotiate a more reasonable timetable. In fact, after the initial one-week full immersion (as they called it, see Chapter 7), I would be allowed to go to the base 'as needed', which would be then determined (by the second-in-chief and me) to be twice a week, within the four months I spent on the island.

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[20] Other people/professional figures would take part in the meeting/lunch: the regiment psychologist, a branch chief, the social assistant, and the teacher (these last two are not part of the army).

[21] The first contact with the Tubuai military hierarchies was established on October 3, 2021 before the research institute officially solicited authorization for my research with the RSMA hierarchies. On November 26, 2021, after the official meeting with the RSMA hierarchies in Arue, it was decided to wait until the new year (2022) to organize my fieldwork.

[22] On December 6, 7 and 8 2021.

[23] The preliminary meeting at the pedagogical restaurant in Arue took place on November 16, 2021, after which it was decided to wait until the new year to start preparing for my trip to Tubuai. This triangulation between me, the Tubuai hierarchies, and the Arue hierarchies continued in 2022 and spanned from January 4 until my fieldwork started on February 4.

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Other critical issues would yet emerge during the four months I spent in Tubuai. My initial empirical difficulty in seeing people instead of soldiers would be echoed by a second fear which will accompany me throughout my fieldwork experience: that of the legitimacy of my research and my presence on the island. One of the first evenings I spent on Tubuai, I had dinner with my host Yolande and *tonton*, a middle-aged man whom Yolande never called by his name (*tonton* indicates their kinship and means uncle). Seated at the table under the front porch, Yolande and *tonton* raised their heads and stretched their necks as soon as a car was passing down the main road in front of our gate, as to monitor the languid traffic of the island. *Tonton* asked me why I specifically chose Tubuai as my research destination: « Déjà Italie-Tahiti c'est long! Mais Italie-Tupua'i! ». Yolande would join our conversation, exclaiming « On est un tout petit grain de sable! », mimicking with her thumb and pointer finger an infinitely small measuring unit. Both of them praised my courage in traveling there by myself and worried about me, asking if I was missing my family. This was probably one of the reasons why Yolande decided to host me throughout my stay. When I told them about my research, focusing on something I deemed to be very present in their everyday lives, i.e. the military presence on the island, they didn't seem to understand what I was referring to, nor my curiosity. In response, *tonton* asked me why I didn't stay in Italy and carry out fieldwork in, say, Venice, a city that apparently fascinated him. Such a conversation will keep coming up and occupy our evening talks quite often and will be echoed by another conversation I had with a local middle school teacher whom I interviewed in the following months[24].

Gabriella teaches mathematics at the local middle school. She's a *popa'a*, a metropolitan French who moved to French Polynesia with her parents some forty years ago when she was only a child. Of these forty years, she spent about twenty teaching on Tubuai. Differing from Florence, my other *popa'a* interlocutor, Gabriella partially identifies with the Polynesian culture which welcomed her years ago. Seated by the seashore right in front of *chez Yolande*, Gabriella asked me referring to my research: « And so what? [...] At the end, what do you use it for? [...] Actually, we already know all these things[25] ». Then she continued, sarcastically: « [...] That's an Italian who tells us, to us!, our habits! [...] We don't see the interest, you know[26] ». These dreads would dissipate as I was going along the fieldwork experience, interviewing volunteers and metropolitan soldiers at the military facility, and I started to understand the implications of an intimacy built on and through the military presence in French Polynesia, and on Tubuai more specifically.

Once this difficulty was overcome, I aimed at considering the military institution and the personnel working in it (both metropolitan and local) as a social institution: I started to observe and interact with them to understand their jobs and purposes, as well as their language and cultural codes (Williams et al. 2016). How were they seeing their experience in an 'isolated' military unit[27]? How were they interacting with the surrounding islandian population? After mingling with the soldiers

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[24] Gabriella, interviewed on March 3, 2022, Tubuai.

[25] « Et alors? [...] Au final ça sert à quoi? [...] En fait tout ça on le sait déjà ».

[26] « [...] C'est une italienne qui nous raconte, à nous!, nos modes de vivre! [...] On voit pas l'intérêt, en fait ».

[27] Isolated military unit is the standard definition with which soldiers refer to the Tubuai and Hiva Oa RSMA facilities.

during my first week, I also befriended young volunteers participating in the program and the trainers' assistants orbiting around the base.
Yet, the relationship with the military, which at the time I saw as a negotiation, was increasingly shaping up as a power game. Indeed, I would be asked for a written document reporting the results, albeit preliminary, of my investigation. I would instead present the table of contents of what that document will be, not without having to assert my position, again. My interlocutor was once again the second-in-chief of the Tubuai Unit. A few passages from the fieldwork diary are exemplary in this regard. I wrote:

> I spent a couple of hours in Jay's office, although I have the impression that he does most of the talking. He reads the paper I put on his desk. He stumbles on the term *imperial* [...] it refers, according to him, to a hierarchy of vassals and empire-states, and he tells me that's not how he sees France's relationship with Polynesia and the other overseas departments and territories. [...] He tells me that, as an officer, he believes in his flag and defends it, he would give his life to defend it, that's his job[28].

Once again, certain things cannot be said. I realize today how naïve I had been to think that I could negotiate with someone who absolutely does not see my own reality, whose regime of truth plays on completely different levels than mine. Such conversations would be echoed regularly. Jay will almost go so far as to threaten me in a 'good-natured' tone: if I want to stay and do research at the Unit, I must avoid using certain terms or making certain connections. On another occasion, off-base (if this can be dissociated from 'military' life), he would attack me personally. Quoting from my diary:

> He calls me *Sonia* and even though I laugh and play along, saying that actually, my name is *Gloria*, I know that this name-playing is a way of belittling me: as a woman, [...] as a researcher who has totally different ideas from his. He also belittles me by saying that my research sucks and that the table of contents I submitted is shit, as is my research. He belittles me, saying that 'this is not how you do research' referring to the fact that I spend time on the beach [...]. He also makes fun of me because I am Italian: he says that his dream is to invade Italy to get revenge on Materazzi (the 2006 World Cup and the quarrel between Materazzi and Zidane just don't sit well with him). He mocks me because according to him my use of the word Marxist is equivalent to saying that they, the soldiers, are all Marxists [i.e. communists]. [...] When I speak, he doesn't let me finish. [...] The Commander of the RSMA asked him for a written document on my part, but he won't send him what I showed him. He explains that the Commander [chef de corps] didn't want me to come, exactly to avoid situations like this. [...] I represent a political dilemma to them [the military]. [...] At the same time, they are my political dilemma. [...] How do I illustrate these difficulties, and make them explicit? [...] How do I reconstruct the militarization process or the shifting military functions from these discussions?[29]

To conclude with the distress that carrying out fieldwork in such a context entails, I would like to ruminate on some details that for a long time made me feel quite uncomfortable. My one-week full immersion at the Unit preceded the official visit of the Commander (responsible for the RSMA-Pf)

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[28] From my fieldwork notes, notebook #11, March 25, 2022

[29] From my fieldwork notes, notebook #11, March 26, 2022. The reference to the beach refers to the fact that this conversation happened an afternoon, at the beach, during a get-together party organized by the soldiers.

visiting from Tahiti, which at the same time preceded the official visit of the General (responsible for the entire RSMA), coming from Paris. Of course, both of these events were carefully organized and followed by the local military administration (the Tubuai Unit) as well as by the central administration (in Tahiti and Paris). Teaching activities were often put aside, to give space to cleaning activities, aesthetic attention to the place, and dance rehearsals that the volunteers had to perform to greet the military hierarchy. Yet, I had the feeling that all this had taken place *en cachette*, in secret almost, at least towards me. In fact, on the one side, I was becoming friends with many of the soldiers, to the point that I was constantly invited to parties and get-together occasions but on the other, nobody ever thought about inviting me to official events such as the Commander's visit. Neither the Commander nor the General, who yet was accommodated in the guesthouse where I was living, were introduced to me by the Captain, nor was I invited to the receptions that were held in their honor. This is strongly contrasted by the scrutiny exercised over me and my research on an almost weekly basis. Not only did my project pass the scrutiny of my research institute, but it also had to be evaluated by the military hierarchy. All this, at the request of the very Commander that was not interested in meeting me in Tubuai, but who apparently followed the affair quite closely. I have often wondered why I was being ignored during formal events yet the outcome of my work was closely monitored. The second-in-chief told me more than once that he would not have sent my table of contents to the Commander unless I changed some undesirable nouns, such as colonialism, imperialism, and partnership. He was equally concerned that my work might end up in the wrong hands and then be used against them by pro-independence activists. After having conceded me to go to the Unit 'as needed', the Captain would explain the delicate situation to me, saying that I was there carrying out fieldwork thanks to their goodwill, and mostly because I was nice and innocuous (after all, a woman), despite not having obtained the official authorization that the psychologist was so determined to have at the beginning of the process. These *unspoken*, hidden, and sliding positioning within the base warned me about the stratifications in play in such a dense context.

Unvoiced Violence

The methodological approach described above led me to speculate about different ways of theoretically understanding violence and empirically constructing traces able to document it. In this paragraph and the next, I aim to describe the numerous shapes that violence–even when unvoiced or discreet–can take.

« 3, 2, 1... feu! » exclaimed President Charles de Gaulle on July 2, 1966, a few seconds before the first nuclear weapon ever detonated in Moruroa, French Polynesia, exploded in front of his well-protected eyes and figure. Since the first detonation in Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, followed a few days after by a second nuclear bomb launched over the Japanese town of Nagasaki (August 9, 1945) which controversially ended the Second World War, the mushroom cloud has undeniably been defined as *the* symbol of the nuclear age (roughly coinciding with the Cold War era, see Rosenthal 1991). Broadly, nuclear science and nuclear energy (whether used for military or civilian purposes) have dominated cultural imaginaries and imagery for over twenty years, spurring a positivist scientific rhetoric grounded in the sublimation of nuclear technology and the rising of a particular 'technoaesthetics', while giving rise to nuclear fear and apocalyptic scenarios (Weart 2012, 1998;

Masco 2004; Hughes 2012; see also Freeman 2019 for an autobiographical account). According to Jane Caputi (1993), since at least 1945 the 'patriarchal' nuclear metaphor has often been sexualized and linked to the sacred, ascribing powerful and almighty characteristics to the new technology able to cause death but also to prevent war and maintain peace[30]. Similarly, as noted by Elizabeth DeLoughrey, the militarization of the environment became so embedded in everyday life that « These weapons of mass destruction were naturalized by likening them to harnessing the power of the sun, and their radioactive by-products were depicted as no less dangerous than our daily sunshine » (2011:236), making the acceptance of global militarization and nuclearization as an unconscious yet pervasive process (on the militarization of the environment see also Marzec 2015). The pervasiveness of nuclear technology is as such that Joseph Masco referred to contemporary times as the Age of Fallout (2015), in which we are living the nefarious reverberations of a nuclear-informed world order. Moreover, the metaphorical formulation of nuclear weapons and their detonations, a real transfer of images and meanings, contributed to eclipsing the violence inscribed in such a technology and promoted the invisibleness of nuclear risks, paradoxically representing nuclear weapons as guarantors of world peace (DeLoughrey 2011; for a similar analysis linking tourism to this metaphorical rhetoric see Teaiwa 1994). The intangibility of radioactive fallout and the metaphorical and rhetorical shift veiling the deadly potential of nuclear technology are yet traces of what Rob Nixon has called slow violence, i.e. « 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 » (2011:2, emphasis mine).

During the Cold War era, nuclear testing and the advancement of nuclear technology in maintaining world peace were not 'out of sight', on the contrary, they were often on newspapers' front pages, yet presented in a positive light as the latest scientific trend or discovery for « the good of mankind », as Commodore Wyatt explained to the Bikinian population before they were moved to let the U.S. Army carry out their testings (Hirschberg 2022:54). Nuclear blasts and mushroom clouds were well visible, loud, and even colorful (Rosenthal 1991), their destruction was immediate, not delayed in time. Nuclear testings were drawing worldwide attention, yet what was out of sight were the ephemeral traces of such explosions, the nuclear fallouts dispersed across time and space, as well as the lives of those that not only were dispossessed of their land, forcibly moved elsewhere and whose existence was changed indefinitely but whose bodies and minds were moreover contaminated and suffered for generations the consequences of radiation-induced diseases. The long-lasting toxicity of nuclear testing, paired with the precariousness in which nuclearized communities are structurally forced to dwell, are the result of epistemic and political domination of specific narratives imposed over 'disposable' communities (Petryna 2002; MacLellan 2017; Sefton MacDowell 2017; Alexis-Martin 2019; Barker H. 2004). And yet, the violence I came to observe was configured as an unfolding process « Exerted systematically [...] by everyone who belongs to a certain social order » and is deemed to « Inform the study of the social machinery of oppression » (Farmer 2004:307). For instance, in modern-day French Polynesia, years after the ending of French nuclear testing, radioactive slow violence has been recognized by the French government and

[30] Put very simply, this is the functioning mechanism of deterrence politics, defined as the use of implicit or explicit threats intended to dissuade (deter) an actor from taking actions while maintaining the status quo.

rendered quantifiable through a specific compensation mechanism sanctioned by the *loi* Morin[31]. Yet, many local associations accused such a mechanism of being insufficient in recognizing nuclear victims and the extent of the trans-generational consequences brought about by the exposition to nuclear fallout. In this configuration, leading narratives are part of a broad imperial governing mechanism informing political entities and their colonial functioning to these days, even if in less obvious ways (Stoler 2016). Oppression and violence are often dislodged and renamed, disguised in a neoliberal paternalist fashion that ascribes them to individual faults and personal lacks. As I came to witness during my fieldwork, and notwithstanding the territory's nuclear past, in French Polynesia colonial violence didn't express itself blatantly as it was observed in other French colonies, such as in Africa or the Caribbeans. Before proceeding to the analysis of these kinds of violence, two concepts that are broadly used throughout my work–colonialism and coloniality–need some further clarifications.

On Colonialism and Coloniality

By definition, colonialism could be identified as a period notable for the imposition or expansion of an exogenous form of governmentality, administration, and/or normative authority over civil and political life. The process of colonization, entailing two unequal political entities, often starts with a violent take-over or military act over a foreign territory, followed by a long process of acculturation and transformation of an often Indigenous society resulting in the alignment of local laws, political structures, and cultural codes with the colonizer's one (Bayart, Bertrand 2006). Colonialism is then a configuration of power relations originating from particular historical, political, commercial, and social conjunctures (Balandier 1951; Saura 2015). French anthropologist Bruno Saura defined this process as « colonial times »:

> Whether they concern religious or military events [...] colonial times can globally be understood as a time when societies of unequal size and power were suddenly brought into contact. This contact led to the establishment of more sustained relations which in most cases led to political colonization[32] (Saura 2015:80).

Colonial times as illustrated by Saura coincide with what another French anthropologist, Georges Balandier, defined as « colonial situation », whose main characteristics are:

> The domination imposed by a racially (or ethnically) and culturally different foreign minority, in the name of a dogmatically affirmed racial (or ethnic) and cultural superiority, on a materially inferior indigenous majority; this domination allows the confrontation between two radically heterogeneous civilizations: a technologically advanced civilization, with a powerful economy, a fast rhythm and of

[31] The law n° 2010-2 of January 5, 2010, on the recognition and compensation of nuclear victims of French nuclear tests (*loi Morin*), created a legal framework of victim's compensation based on the presumption of causality (Boda 2017; Lahana 2020). Then President François Hollande was the first French President to recognize, during his 2016 visit to French Polynesia, the health and environmental impact of thirty years of nuclear testing.

[32] « Qu'ils concernent des faits religieux ou militaires [...] les temps coloniaux peuvent s'entendre globalement comme d'une époque où des sociétés de taille et de puissances inégales furent soudain mises en contact. Ce contact engendra l'établissement de relations plus entretenues qui débouchèrent dans la plupart des cas sur une colonisation politique ».

> Christian origin imposing its values on technologically inferior civilizations, with a 'backward' economy, a slow rhythm and radically 'non-Christian'; the fundamentally antagonistic character of the relations existing between these two societies, explained by instrumentalization of the colonized society; the need, in order to maintain such domination, to use not only 'strength' but also a self-sustained system of pseudo-justifications and stereotyped behaviors, etc.[33] (Balandier 1951:75-76).

The importance of such an approach in the study of colonialism lies in the enlargement of the anthropological subject: highlighting the importance of colonial conflicts originating in power imbalances and power struggles inscribed in the colonial encounter, Balandier started to take into consideration the colonial situation as a totalizing social fact[34]. Shifting away from the many exoticizing ethnographies carried out by colonial anthropologists of the time, Balandier sanctioned the importance of studying not only colonial conflicts and changes but also the numerous interactions elapsing in the colonial encounter (for a similar analysis see Cooper, Stoler 1997).

In French Polynesia, colonization started in 1842 with the annexation of the Marquesas Islands and the proclamation of a French Protectorate over the Pomare kingdom (comprising the Leeward Islands, the Tuamotu archipelago, and Austral Islands), officialized in 1880 with a formal annexation. Even if this political colonization could be seen as the result of a unitary and precise will on the part of the French monarchy to expand its territory, such a process was more the consequence of different historical conjunctures than an official French colonial politics in the Pacific (Baré 1989; Mohamed-Gaillard 2010; Fisher 2013). The quick reconfiguration of global geo-strategies and political entities in the aftermath of WWII meant a shift in French relations with its overseas dependencies, resulting in independence for many African colonies and the stipulation of new agreements over political competencies for other territories, such as French Polynesia. The reshaping of the French colonial empire, intended here as a classical historical regime, meant the formal disengagement in many overseas territories while retaining a certain degree of influence over them. In French Polynesia, this has meant the continuous change in status within the French Republic and the constant negotiations over sovereign competencies shared with the central government.

Notwithstanding the nominal and administrative shift in the management of French colonial politics, I argue that modern-day French Polynesia, officially an overseas collectivity, is yet informed by ongoing coloniality, i.e. a structure of principles, practices and attitudes which not only shaped ways of being, behaving, thinking and desiring during colonial times but still permeates modern-day postcolonial governing practices[35]. If the concept of colonialism is usually intended as temporally

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[33] « La domination imposée par une minorité étrangère, racialement (ou ethniquement) et culturellement différente, au nom d'une supériorité raciale (ou ethnique) et culturelle dogmatiquement affirmée, à une majorité autochtone matériellement inférieure ; cette domination entraînant la mise en rapport de civilisations radicalement hétérogènes : une civilisation à machinisme, à économie puissante, à rythme rapide et d'origine chrétienne s'imposant à des civilisations sans machinisme, à économie 'arriérée', à rythme lent et radicalement 'non- chrétienne' ; le caractère fondamentalement antagoniste des relations existant entre ces deux sociétés qui s'explique par le rôle d'instrument auquel est condamnée la société colonisée ; la nécessité, pour maintenir la domination, de recourir non seulement à la 'force' mais encore à un système de pseudo-justifications et de comportements stéréotypés, etc. »

[34] Balandier contributed to the development of what Max Gluckman was studying in the anglophone anthropological field: the study of conflict theory and dynamic anthropology (Eriksen, Nielsen 2013).

[35] French Polynesia is usually not considered a postcolonial context, given the effacement of its colonial history in the French public and political debate and its absence in the historiography of French colonialism (see also Al Wardi 2018; Gagné, Salaün 2017).

and geographically bounded, coloniality refers more to an ongoing condition inscribed in the governing system itself, be it post-colonial or not (for a discussion on the concept of coloniality see Mignolo 2007, 2007a; Quijano 2007; Maldonado-Torres 2007). This work considers modern-day French Polynesia as a French territory informed by ongoing coloniality and acknowledges, as noted by French anthropologist Bruno Saura, that « The present situation of French Polynesia remains unquestionably that of a territory financially dependent on its 'metropole' and economically integrated to it within the framework of a reciprocal articulation of interests that leads all actors in the system to work towards its reproduction » (2021:50). Such a *consensual* colonial situation, as the author defined it, is the result of a profound acculturation and integration of the Indigenous people of French Polynesia into the French colonial apparatus. Therefore, my use of the term 'colonial'–which is not necessarily derogatory or old-fashioned–refers to eras or institutions « Pertaining to particular values, which have not entirely disappeared, of a specific period of time » (Saura 2021:37). Building on this theoretical positioning, my research aims at considering the army as a social institution, as well as the militarization process in French Polynesia as an inter-subjective process, taking as main interlocutors French and native soldiers, and their interactions.

The Emergence of Non-Sovereign Subjectivities

As already mentioned, the violence I was expecting when I first arrived in Tahiti was the one brought not only by decades of nuclear testing but also by land dispossession and restitution, the daily brutality of living along the military fence lines. Yet, during my fieldwork experience, I came to know the subcutaneous violence inscribed in the social structure itself, linked to familial, social, and moral inclusion and exclusion crafted by the long-lasting coloniality that informs and shapes everyday life in French Polynesia. Anthropologist Yarimar Bonilla referred to *non-sovereign politics* to frame the underlying lack of a « Conceptual language with which to describe plausible (or even utopian) alternatives to the modernist projects of decolonization and national sovereignty » (2015:xiv). Expanding her conceptual/theoretical framework, throughout my work I use the term non-sovereign subjectivities in reference to all those political subjectivities that bloom in the colonial (and military) encounter and yet structurally lack alternative opportunities and/or imagination.

The brutality of such a configuration, as well as the precariousness from which it derives, are thought to be actively severed from a long and deeper history of domination. The occlusion of such histories, which Ann Stoler (2016) defined as a condition of *colonial aphasia*, in which both the loss of access to colonial history and the active disassociation from it are emphasized, resulted in the inexplicableness of apparent paradoxical and ambiguous contemporary situations, among which stands the enlistment of Polynesian youth into the French army. While this subcutaneous form of violence will be widely explored in Part III of this work, here it is worth recalling that this subtle violence embedded in everyday struggles for 'more' rights was hard to locate as it usually passes undetected. In order to express its reach and importance, such violence and history need social, moral, and theoretical categories that are yet made inaccessible and rendered unavailable. For instance, social problems–such as poverty, early school drop-out, unemployment, and criminality–as well as their management, are periodically placed at the center of political debates on how welfare policies may better govern the intrinsic revolutionary potential and lurking uncertainties inscribed in

such precarious living conditions. Yet, the root causes of social marginality are repeatedly bypassed if not actively hidden in these policymaking processes. Moreover, such welfare strategies are often crafted to regiment marginalized and potentially threatening members of the population. The implementation of such strategies reverberates in people's lives and perceptions, giving rise to particular processes of subjectification which, in turn, entail the construction of new political belongings. In French Polynesia, and broadly in the French overseas dependencies, governance of youth has been progressively delegated to a (para)military State apparatus, the *Régiment du Service Militaire Adapté* (or RSMA), functioning as a vocational boarding school whose aim is to help struggling youth, frequently framed as inherently lacking the attributes to thrive in the contemporary Polynesian society, severing from such a discourse the embedded coloniality that informs young people's everyday lives.

When I first talked to my young interlocutors in Tubuai, asking them why they were participating in the RSMA training and were so willing to join the French Army in the very near future, I thought their answers were somewhat naive, yet at the same time materially pragmatic. They needed a job, a salary to support their families, and who was I to blame them? But the more I talked to them, the more I realized the extent of that discreet violence whose traces I was collecting to track the role of the army in a non-sovereign context. Therefore, the emergence of non-sovereign subjectivities is intended as the result of this underlying non-sovereign condition that intimately links Polynesian people to national devices, such as the army.

French Polynesia, Mā'ohi Nui, French-occupied Polynesia, and more

The following paragraph aims to clarify the terminology I use throughout my work, to refer to the non-sovereign territory I studied, as well as in reference to its native population.

Although widely used locally and internationally, the official name of this French Overseas Collectivity, French Polynesia, is yet contested and biased by a certain nominal domination. French Polynesia was acquired as the official nomenclature in the aftermath of WWII and right before the 1958 referendum that will set the stage for the territorialization of this Pacific colony. The initial name, *Établissements français de l'Océanie*, as well as the actual one, French Polynesia, both imply the French domination over what is another contested term: Polynesia means in fact 'many islands' in ancient Greek and was used by the first explorers to ethnically classify the still unknown eastern Pacific Islands; while the Western Pacific was renamed Melanesia, due to the darker skin color of its inhabitants; and the northern islands were called Micronesia, given their limited terrestrial land expansion. Over the years, many suggestions have come to abandon such classification, and today it is common practice to talk about near and remote Oceania, although even such names bear the limit of all classifications (Jolly, Tcherkézoff 2009; Jolly 2007; Gnecchi Ruscone 2009).

Indeed many scholars have used different names to refer to what is officially called French Polynesia and to its Indigenous inhabitants. Pro-independence sympathizers and to some extent Protestant Church exponents proposed to talk about Mā'ohi Nui (or Māòhi Nui using the *Église Protestante Māòhi* conventional grammar). Such a name is used in local gatherings as well as in international meetings such as those organized at the United Nations Headquarters, by Mā'ohi intellectuals and politicians, mostly exponents of Tavini Huira'atira (the pro-independence party), the *Église Protestante*

Māòhi (or EPM), and activists from Moruroa e Tatou, a grassroots association linked to the EPM. Scholars have also used terms such as French-occupied Polynesia (for instance, see Maurer, Hogue 2020), implying a strong assertion against the UN-sanctioned colonial occupation of Māʻohi land; or France entangled Oceania (Le Meur, Mawyer 2022), to stress the bond that still today links French Polynesia (and more generally New Caledonia and Wallis and Futuna) to the French Republic.

As for the Indigenous people of French Polynesia, some clarifications are as well in order. While the term Polynesian is very broad and may refer to Indigenous people from the wider Polynesian Triangle, Tahitian reflects the locally-perceived center-periphery logic and domination imposed by the Tahitian administrative and economic center on the other outer-islands and archipelagos (for a discussion on inter-island relationships, see Prinsen et al. 2021; Favole, Giordana 2018). To avoid reproducing such colonial logics and to stress the « Lived plurality and diversity among Oceania's Indigenous peoples and local communities » also means to be aware of the « Sometimes significant differences in identities and political ambitions between the peoples living on the various islands that together form a single nation-state or overseas territory » (Prinsen et al. 2021:224). In French Polynesia/Mā'ohi Nui, people also refer to themselves with other referents, most of which are in the different locally spoken vernaculars. For instance, the term Māʻohi is used since at least the 1970s–a period filled with the rediscovery of ancestral culture in opposition to the nuclear testings–as a political vindication and to highlight indigeneity and ancestral heritage. A more neutral term is that of *ta'ata* (lit. human being) with the addition of a geographical location, i.e. *ta'ata Tahiti*, *ta'ata Tupua'i* (for a discussion of these ethnonyms, see Saura 2004, 2009).

Throughout my work I will use both the official name French Polynesia and Māʻohi Nui (or Māòhi Nui), reflecting the terminology used by my interlocutors. Similarly, Indigenous people from French Polynesia/Mā'ohi Nui will be addressed as Māʻohi/Māòhi and/or Tahitians, Polynesians.

Thesis Outline

The assumption at the core of this ethnography is that French Polynesia as a whole, and the RSMA facilities as well, are remainders of an ongoing colonial presence. Throughout my research, I aim to consider the army as a social institution, as well as militarization as an administrative, territorial, and intersubjective process that entails political choices and social mobility. In doing so, the goal of this work is to enhance « The human and material face and frailties » of contemporary imperial formations, « to make challenges to [them] more likely » (Lutz 2006:594).

The thesis is divided into three main parts, each focusing on different aspects of the ongoing French presence in French Polynesia. Part I focuses on militarization as an administrative process, setting the base for the effervescent debate over sovereignty while providing the bureaucratic context to the military dislocation in the bases of the empire, and showing how the military presence and the administrative assets of French Polynesia have influenced and still influences the territory's autonomy and the many negotiations over sovereignty. In the French context, this is particularly interesting because such a process is complementary to the administrative dislocation that regulates the functioning of the overseas territories and departments. This translates into the mobility of French functionaries (both civilians and military) from the metropole to the islands and in French

Polynesia also means the consequent mobility from the outer islands to Tahiti, the administrative center of the archipelago.

The opening Chapter–Sovereignties in Practice–explore the concept of sovereignty from different angles, starting from the effervescent literature about nuanced notions of sovereignties. New hypothesis are taken into consideration, such as late sovereignty (MacAmlaigh 2013) and islandian sovereignty (Prinsen, Blaise 2017), and their limits, with regards to the context I aim to study, are discussed. Next, the concept of sovereignty is analyzed as a bundle of relations that shape daily life and the result of political struggles, forwarding a different strand of literature focusing on the confines of living in a non-sovereign polity. The Chapter then turns to French scholarship studying the application of national institutions on overseas entities within the French Republic, to stress the need of conceptualizing the army as one of these national devices. Lastly, literature about American overseas dependencies and COFA States is mobilized. The notions of imperial formations (Stoler 2016) and baseworld (Johnson 2004; Davis 2015) are used in reference to the French presence in Oceania, and more specifically French Polynesia, to highlight the extent of contemporary assemblages of power thriving thanks to their numerous overseas territories, dependencies, and satellites in which sovereignty, citizenship, and basic rights are suspended or conceded following a fluctuating trajectory.

Observing the continuous negotiations that occurred between the French government and the Polynesian government, Chapter 2–Linking Military Presence to Sovereignty Claims–unravels how and why, over many years, the military presence, as well as the non-sovereign condition of Polynesian women and men, has changed in response to international fluctuations and geopolitical strategies. The Chapter historicizes the shifting relationship between the military presence and sovereignty vindications, while seeking to assess the role that military presence had in the instantiation of sovereignty claims. Ethnographic episodes are mobilized to sketch the contours of a particular way of advancing political struggles 'by proxy', i.e. to illustrate how contemporary military presence per se doesn't directly trigger any particular sovereign vindication. What has been contested over the years is in fact military action and its consequences, mostly linked to the atomic blasting and the vaccination campaign linked to the Covid-19 pandemic, during which the virus has been creatively used as an analogy to nuclear testing and as a metaphor for the negative outcomes of the French presence.

Part II aims to describe military facilities and infrastructures while at the same time exploring the territorial dimension of the militarization process. This spatial dimension entails the expansion and contraction of military presence in French Polynesia through the acquisition and restitution of land for military/defense purposes, spanning from the 1960s to the 1990s, and in the aftermath of the nuclear testing program. This territorial process is still visible today through the infrastructures built in the 1960s to sustain the nuclear testing program; more specifically it is visible in the recent restitution process that reallocated some of this land to the respective town halls.

By mapping the contemporary and past military presence and army functions in French Polynesia, Chapter 3–Baseworlds: Past and Present–helps the reader to position themselves geographically and phenomenologically, retracing the implant of military infrastructures in French Polynesia to set the stage for the following discussion. Distinctions will be made between three of the main subjects of this work: the pervasive process of militarization, military bases, and the Army as an institution. A

brief history of French militarization and implanting of its nuclear testing facilities in French Polynesia (1966-1996) will be retraced.

Chapter 4–Living Ruinations–engages the formal disengagement of the French army in the aftermath of nuclear testing, which resulted in the restitution of former military land in Tahiti. This was a paradoxically top-down decision instead of being the result of local vindications. Such land, officially given back to local municipalities, represents a heavy heritage for both the local towns and the French government. Examples from the municipalities of Arue, Mahina, Pirae, and Fa'a'ā will be illustrated. The restitution of ex-military land, I argue, is contributing to the well-orchestrated French will to erase the military/nuclear history of the territory while at the same time, its will to re-engage in the Pacific given the contemporary historical conjunctures.

Part III revolves around militarization as a social and intersubjective process, referring to the entangled relations that were made possible in the everyday interactions between French and Polynesian people, military personnel, and civilians. It focuses on the ethnography I carried out inside the military fence lines, highlighting the social and cultural role of the army in the contemporary world, taking soldiers on- and off-base as subjects and interlocutors of the research. The third part of this thesis aims to analyze the tension between the RSMA as a colonial device, and the RSMA as an opportunity for Polynesian youth.

Chapter 5–Learning with the French Army–aims at exploring the shifting and expanding role of the army through a genealogical reconstruction of the RSMA history while investigating the inner logic that led to the transformation of core military and defense functions into civic and socio-cultural ones. The Chapter further investigates the expanding social functions carried out by the army, entailing moral and redemptive functions in terms of cohesion of the social entity, as well as economic tasks in terms of inclusion of marginal categories and which are uncannily similar to neoliberal paternalist politics and mechanisms. Particular attention will be given to the role of the educational system in French Polynesia, whose jurisdiction was acquired and then withdrawn by the local government, in a continuous negotiation over sovereign competencies. Throughout the Chapter, I will elaborate on the perceived role and importance of the program for young Polynesian people, which has its roots in a mythical imaginary hovering over the army and that was built in the aftermath of WWII.

Continuing the discourse initiated in Chapter 5 and revolving on the shifting functions of the army and the enlargement of its moralizing and racialized functions, Chapter 6–Inculturating Bodies and Minds–goes on to investigate in what ways are the young volunteers profiled following neoliberal paternalist and market-oriented categories and mechanisms, as well as the reasoning behind the choice and enlisting process of Polynesian volunteers, delineating an essential power relation among the figures working inside the regiment and its units. Engaging with a 'grassroots politics' perspective, Chapter 6 explores the everyday experience of citizenship and analyzes the military program rebranding effort in offering knowledge that most often volunteers already have but nonetheless fail at being recognized as valuable. The Chapter further aims at describing the military life I came to observe in French Polynesia, its internal organization and functioning, and a short presentation of all the figures that work within the RSMA to assure its operativeness.

Chapter 7–Imperial Intimacies within and beyond the Baseworld–illustrates an ethnographical example based on four-month fieldwork in the RSMA military facility in Tubuai, Austral Islands. Retracing the everyday life at the base and following the future aspirations of my interlocutors, I aim

to show how the non-sovereign condition experienced today by the Polynesian youth and the coloniality in which they live influence the life trajectory of young Indigenous people, often resulting in engagement in the regular army. Such a dynamic situation helps analyze the emergence of new forms of belongings experienced by the volunteers participating in the military program. Through the recollection of familiar and personal histories, Chapter 7 investigates the meaning of living in a non-sovereign condition while at the same time trying to build everyday sovereign tactics to navigate such a situation. Based on the ethnographical observation of the enlistment process, this Chapter demonstrates that, far from hindering Indigenous agency, the enlistment process paradoxically results in overseas mobility and a performed act of citizenship: it is only by joining the army that Polynesian youth can exercise their rights and obtain privileges that otherwise can't be performed at home, given the non-sovereign condition of French Polynesia. The RSMA could then represent for the struggling young Polynesian population a new way to experience and express their identities and belonging, trying in this way to overcome the contemporary challenges that trouble modern-day Polynesian society. This approach is fundamental to understanding the tug-of-war between institutional and administrative power on one side, and the creative drive that comes from the everyday experience and action of these same institutions, on the other.

Through the recollection of a familial history, the Conclusions investigate the meaning of living in a non-sovereign condition while at the same time trying to build everyday tactics to navigate such a situation. In this perspective, the RSMA and the army more generally could then be considered as detectors for the precarious situations that affect the Polynesian youth, one of those « Protracted imperial effects that saturate the subsoil of people's lives » (Stoler 2013:5), those corrosive processes that leave histories unfinished. In this sense, I argue that the precarious situations that Indigenous youth have to live in, and the rampant racialized unemployment, are forms of ruination, symbols of the ongoing colonial *presence*.

PART I

Militarization as Administrative Process: On Institutionalizing and Regimenting

CHAPTER 1
Sovereignties in Practice

L'independence c'est le seul bonheur d'un peuple.
(Tehau, Papeete, 30 July 2021)

When talking about military outposts in overseas territories, sovereignty plays the role of the elephant in the room, implying a spatial discontinuity between metropole and colony, i.e. France and French Polynesia, as well as a national-political continuity that bonds the two entities. A preliminary and meager definition of sovereignty considers it as « the capacity to determine conduct within the *territory* of a *polity* without external legal constraint » (Humphrey 2007:418). In other words, as « the way to politically exist in the world [...] the capacity of a collective subject to having a say », according to the Italian political philosopher Carlo Galli (2019:26-28). Born with the peace treaty signed in 1648–also known as the Peace of Westphalia–that ended the 30 Years War, sovereignty is today considered by other scholars to have been crafted through the colonial encounter: for instance, overseas and internal colonies were used as laboratories to experiment different techniques of government deemed important for European countries, while at the same time binding it to a nation-state static model (Bonilla 2017; Stoler 2016:176-77; Hansen, Stepputat 2006:301; Mamdani 1996). After World War II and with the ongoing process of decolonization of most non-self-governing territories, sovereignty started to be considered not only as a national feature but also as the right of Indigenous people to self-determination, as stated by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (2007). National sovereignty results then as the internal arrangement of a State, how it works internally and represents itself facing other political entities, « the ability to determine how to stand in the world and history, how to organize interdependence among multiple political subjects » (Galli 2019:25).

In the French Pacific, such an ability is not a given: French Polynesia and New Caledonia are the two major overseas territories still held by the French Republic and administratively organized with particular autonomous statutes. The relational nature of sovereignty was clearly highlighted by Jean-Marie Tjibaou, Kanak pro-independence leader[36], who knew that to achieve political independence one has to first obtain sovereignty, which he defined as: « the right to choose our partners [...] It is sovereignty that gives us the power and the right to negotiate interdependencies » (Tjibaou 1985).

The concept of sovereignty has interrogated and continues to interrogate scholars from different disciplines and originating from quite different contexts and latitudes, especially regarding non-self-governing territories. While focusing on the juxtaposition of an ever-changing but also rigid and idealized belief on the concept, Chapter 1 analyzes modern forms of sovereignties in non-self-governing territories, as well as the functioning of national/metropolitan institutions in these overseas dependencies. At the same time, the Chapter engages with the ambiguous link between sovereignty (or the lack thereof) and the militarization of a myriad Pacific Islands. The abundant literature on American overseas territories (American Samoa, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands) and COFA States (Republic of the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, and

[36] Kanaks are the Indigenous people from New Caledonia. Jean-Marie Tjibaou was prematurely killed in 1989.

the Republic of Palau) in the Asia-Pacific region will be analyzed arguing that not only the role of these islands is fundamental for contemporary international politics, but also that notwithstanding the differences in colonial history and context between France entangled Oceania and the U.S. Pacific, this literature can shed light on the non-sovereign condition of contemporary French Polynesia.

Towards Nuanced Notions of Sovereignty

Analyzing the literature on sovereignty and non-self-governing territories from an interdisciplinary point of view, one cannot overlook the important corpus of studies that has emerged within the social sciences and which deals with sovereignty intended as a fluid analytical frame in non-sovereign territories. Embracing the 'sovereign turn' within the social sciences, it seems that the full sovereignty of states is more of an ideological construct than a real concentration of power (see Favole 2021 for a thorough analysis). Baldacchino and Hepburn (2012) corroborate such an idea noting that since the end of WWII and for a variety of reasons, many territories have become independent, yet analyzing the decolonization trends, the last territories to gain independence achieved it in the 1980s. After that time, referendums and consultations for independence have always seen the no-vote prevail. This applies to the French Polynesian context as well: while the French African colonies were gaining independence at the beginning of the 1960s, French Polynesia decided to remain within the French orbit in a period in which the rest of the region was gaining formal independence[37]. According to Baldacchino and Hepburn (2012), the majority of overseas territories demonstrate today a different appetite for sovereignty, i.e. they prefer to negotiate innovative statutes of autonomy rather than seek independence and rise to the role of a sovereign state. From a non-sovereign territory's point of view, the rhetoric goes, this choice could be explained by a search for security: the benefits of keeping a link or form of association with the metropole are deemed to outweigh the risks that a new sovereign state has to face, primarily economically.

Yet, the achievement of such a wide autonomy does not necessarily mean that independence is not on the local agenda anymore and that all overseas territories gave up the emancipation effort. There are territories–especially where native people with a particular identity and distinct historical and cultural characters identify with a neglected or threatened minority from an economic, linguistic, cultural, or ethnic perspective–that are still trying to emancipate themselves and avoid discrimination and repression by the metropole. Indeed, the presence of pro-independence parties could represent a good lever for the national government and the local élite to negotiate more and more privileges, such as territorial recognition to support the political, socioeconomic, and cultural capacity of the native people (see also Prinsen, Blaise 2017). The dynamism of such partnerships between the State and overseas territories (as well as the elasticity of the concept of sovereignty and its negotiations) lies in the compromise that overseas territories have to accept if they want their

[37] See Chapter 2 for a detailed analysis. It is worth noting that the will to remain part of the Republic is often structurally encouraged through the promulgation of particular laws and the performance of specific politics of togetherness favored by the metropolitan government. From the beginning of the 1960s, France had specific interests in holding on to its colonies in the Pacific region to maintain its strategic geopolitical strong hold over the area (Fischer 2013; Le Meur, Mawyer 2022).

requests to be taken into consideration. These compromises are presented as the only way to survive, to thrive even, because independence, in the nationalist rhetoric, holds dangerous surprises such as poverty and/or new and potentially dangerous economic dependencies (for an example see Smith, Wesley Smith 2021). These forms of soft imperialism (Baldacchino, Milne 2006) allow the metropole to maintain a strong influence over its territories and acquire advantageous geo-strategic positions, while at the same time granting non-sovereign territories a supposed privileged and high economic status. This is, according to Baldacchino and Hepburn (2012), a classic territorial administration strategy that aims to keep non-sovereign territories under metropolitan aegis by granting privileges in exchange for national unity (for example, the granting of national passports and the mobility that comes from these documents).

French Polynesia is not immune to this kind of mechanisms, as the following example concerning the atoll of Hao shows. During the nuclear testing era, Hao hosted the headquarters of the nuclear program and from the 1960s to the 1990s housed thousands of soldiers and technicians. Big waves were made in 2013, when a Chinese company proposed to build a fishing farm in the atoll's lagoon, promising to contribute to the dynamism of the local job market and island's income, highly impacted by the disengagement of the army after the end of the nuclear testings. If on the one side, the local administration agreed to the Chinese project, seeing in it the possibility for its inhabitants to provide for themselves and their families while creating jobs and attractions for the local population; on the other side, the French government has been very critical towards the fishing farm, highlighting the environmental risks and subtly discouraging the Chinese presence from *its* island and territorial waters (see also Maclellan 2021, 2020). To counter the project while also creating new jobs, President Macron promised, during his speech in July 2021, the opening of a new military facility on the island, feeding local nostalgia in the population (Kayser 2023). Inaugurated in July 2022 as promised, the new RSMA facility is now operating in Hao, symbolically contrasting the Chinese presence in French Polynesia. This example shows that more freedom and the accommodation of particular demands, e.g. the creation of a local job market in this case, could be granted by the metropole, which will benefit by presenting itself as a benevolent entity. Such negotiations are made between the central government and the local ruling classes, both in favor of the greater interests represented by these continuous compromises than the unknowns possibly brought by independence.

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During the 20th century, the very nature of the post-Westphalian system changed: globalization and the speeding up of particular processes–among them, the creation of supra-national entities–have challenged the validity of national sovereignty (Hansen, Stepputat 2006). State sovereignty is today eroded from below, because of the decentralization of the State; and from above, with the transfer of responsibilities to supra-state organizations. For non-sovereign territories, this represents an opportunity to negotiate autonomy above, below, and between these new entities (Favole 2020). These agreements and statutes seem to be part of government practices aimed at increasing decentralization, granting more sovereignty, or asymmetric forms of federalism for ethnic minorities, while still retaining national interests. Recent years have witnessed the emergence of new forms of territory-less, Stateless, and intermediate sovereignties, as well as other effects of

globalization such as the dissolution of borders and the impossibility of a sovereign state to control its borders or citizens, challenging the classic meaning of the concept and contributing to the dynamism of the field.

Numerous scholars have tried to find new definitions to expand even further the meaning of sovereignty in the contemporary world. Among them, the idea of 'late sovereignty' proposed by Mac Amhlaigh (2013) is particularly noteworthy in that he refers to the transfer of some sovereign functions to non-state apparatuses. Late sovereignty represents a rethinking of the concept along a continuum that sees the latter changing and evolving into dynamic and fluid forms that somewhat circumvent the classical sovereignty model. These new territory-less and state-less forms of sovereignty are exercised by supra-state bodies operating in various extra-territorial sectors, such as the economy and justice. A familiar example of this transfer could be the one operated by European nation-states, which have transferred their sovereignty (or part of it) to the European Union, a supra-state body. In this regard, Favole (2020) explored the multiple degrees in which sovereignty is combined within the European overseas territories in the Caribbean, Pacific and Indian Oceans. Furthermore, in the wake of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous sovereignty has made its way into the debate, laying the foundation for a new kind of sovereignty: an Indigenous sovereignty by which Indigenous peoples can negotiate their recognition and rights within the nation state, in a country-to-country relationship, while remaining within the sovereign power of the nation (Barker J., 2005 offers a thorough analysis and understanding of sovereignty from the point of view of many Indigenous communities).

Stretching even more the concept of modern sovereignties and considering that most of the remaining overseas territories are islands, Prinsen and Blaise (2017) propose to talk about an islandian sovereignty. The authors propose an analysis of contemporary trends that characterize non-self-governing islands and identify several mechanisms that support the sovereignty practices of non-sovereign territories. Answering the question of *how* these territories negotiate forms of autonomy with their metropoles, the authors suggest five mechanisms or characteristics: islands voted NO in referendums for independence; islands are continually negotiating constitutional exceptions, either to gain more autonomy or to obtain special statuses within the national constitution; islands are always trying to circumvent national laws or their application[38]; islands administer their own finances, yet when there are deficits they receive substantial funding from the metropoles; islands can sign regional agreements that bring them benefits but do not necessarily represent the metropole's interest. For these territories, sovereignty is expressed not so much in demands and negotiations for independence but in the ability to negotiate relations with the metropole. To the five mechanisms proposed by Prinsen and Blaise (2017), Favole and Giordana (2018) add a sixth: the existence or otherwise willingness to create archipelagic networks through migrant communities and diasporas and the activation of exchange networks with neighboring islands and territories. Criticizing the fractal center-periphery model to which non-self-governing territories are often confined, the sixth mechanism highlights the importance of local forms of leadership and the socio-cultural organization of the communities in question.

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[38] Some of them negotiated a special constitutional exception to accommodate their demands/needs, but still (and despite constitutional exceptionalism) they are bound to abide by national law (or so one would expect). Yet, many of them do not, continuing to circumvent, ignore, or postpone the application of national laws in a way that is unconceivable for the metropole.

To these scholars, it seems that local communities seeking emancipation have realized the limits of the classical concept of sovereignty and the state model, and instead of demanding independence, they prefer to negotiate new forms of recognition and autonomy. Sovereignty is then supposed to equate the many privileges granted by nation-states to non-sovereign territories, which are deemed to outweigh the risks associated with independence: economic support, territorial protection, democracy, national passports, and the ability to move and work freely in the state of affiliation (Ferdinand et al. 2020; Prinsen, Blaise 2017; Baldacchino, Hepburn 2012). Following Prinsen and Blaise's analysis, it seems more likely for overseas dependencies, such as French Polynesia, to remain under the French aegis and to negotiate ever-expanding privileges (2017).

Beyond the Sovereign Privilege: Tensions and Struggles

One could argue that today pro-independence vindications are fading away, corrupted by the continuous metropolitan presence on overseas territories. But is this true for French Polynesia? The result of the last territorial elections seems to go in the opposite direction: in fact, the three elected deputies at the National Assembly for French Polynesia all come from the pro-independence party, Tāvini Huiraʻatira, as well as the new territorial government elected in 2023. While the six mechanisms presented above (Prinsen, Blaise 2017) fully apply to the French Polynesian context, I argue that beyond these privileges and opportunities, the non-sovereign condition experienced by Polynesian people represents a restraint of options for the struggling classes, contributing to shaping young Indigenous' lives in deeper ways than the large autonomy negotiated and obtained by such territories.

To make anthropologically good use of the concept of sovereignty, one must, according to anthropologist Caroline Humphrey, pay attention to the « actualities of relations within the ways of life that exist under conditions of sovereignty » (Humphrey 2007:420), or quasi-sovereignty. In other words, one must take into account the different ways of living and understanding sovereignty and the relationships that are created between these different modes. The very meaning of sovereignty, which consists of a bundle of practices (Le Meur, Mawyer 2022), has to be rethought not only as a set of political capacities (a supreme power and authority) but as a configuration within society that takes on its proper characteristics and temporalities. My understanding of sovereignty and non-sovereign territories, and therefore my use of both, builds on the definition given by Le Meur and Mawyer, according to whom « these [non-sovereign] states and territories may exemplify the contemporary status of 'everyday sovereignty'–that is, not as a singular political essence, possessed or not possessed, but as an assemblage of governance practices, legal regimes, political ideals and affects, and articulating institutions actively contested and negotiated, resisted and desired, deployed and refused, and endured by Indigenous people and local communities across island worlds » (2022:10). Moreover, to define the daily practice and pragmatism enshrined in this particular understanding of sovereignty, anthropologist Yarimar Bonilla refers to sovereignty « as a native category for the bundle of relations that shape daily life, including access to goods, the valuation of labor, the prestige of vernacular forms, and the ability to forge culturally distinct landscapes, soundtracks, aesthetics, visions of the future, and testaments to the past » (2015:xi).

The result of such a configuration are various 'degrees of sovereignty', defined by Ann Laura Stoler as a « principle of governance that convenes a *contested political relation*. It resituates focus on an *embattled space* and a *longer temporal stretch*, in which gradations of rights, deferred entitlements, and incremental withholding or granting of access to political and economic resources shape the very conditions that imperial formations produce and productively sustain » (2016:177, emphasis mine). According to Stoler, « temporary exclusions, partial inclusions, and legal exemptions are not occasional and ad hoc strategies of rule but the radicalized modus operandi of imperial states » (ibid.). I argue that Tahiti, and more broadly French Polynesia, are embattled spaces in which sovereignty, autonomy, and independence alternatively articulate on a long temporal stretch, entailing the articulation of different powers and influences. It is precisely through the analysis of localized forms of sovereignty (Humphrey 2007) that important contemporary political processes can help us understand political life at what are deemed to be its margins.

Building on the work of Puerto Rican anthropologist Yarimar Bonilla, I suggest the use of *non-sovereignty* while referring to « this topography of power and [...] the political relationships that characterize the region as a whole » (2015:10). While Bonilla is describing the political relationships that link Caribbean islands to a plethora of different European and American metropoles, I argue that a similar situation can be located in Oceania as well. Contemporary conjunctures and international geopolitical challenges in the Pacific urge France to restate its presence in the region: the Sino-American confrontation in the Pacific and the now-lost possibility of independence for New Caledonia have represented good reasons for France to subtly reengage in French Polynesia, mostly through the militarization of civilian tasks, as it will be explained in the following chapters. Moreover, it seems that France is well determined and prepared for the scramble over mineral resources, of which the Polynesian sea-bed is apparently very rich. As Le Meur and Mawyer noted, at stake are geopolitical as well as economic resources centered around the maritime environment entailing a shift in « the 'content' of French sovereignty in the Pacific and renewed French interests for this region of the world » (2022:23). This pattern of continuous disengagement and re-engagement of the Republic in French Polynesia makes it hard to define whether Franco-Polynesian relations are today colonial, postcolonial, or neocolonial. The recursiveness of this history and the long-lasting French presence does not define the formal statute of the territory but the quality of its life. One of the goals of this work is precisely to inquire the relationship between the national exercise of sovereignty and the manifold localized forms of non-sovereignty or quasi-sovereignty, that are intended here as the result of never-ending tensions (see also Bonilla 2015). The study of sovereignty and state apparatuses are therefore both essential to explaining how political life emerges and takes shape in sovereign and non-sovereign conditions. Building on Aretxaga's work, I intend the State as an entity « often figure[d] as being actively involved in creating 'imagined (national) communities', cultural intimacies through narrative, media, ritual, pageantry, and public works that link the public sphere to the domestic and local scenes » (2003:396); as well as sovereignty as a « lived experience, and active negotiation, series of negotiations, or assemblage of orienting imaginations within specific communities and their social and cultural contexts » (Le Meur, Mawyer 2022:14). Contributing to this effervescent literature, I intend sovereignty as the result of continuous tension and aim to show what are the limits of only viewing the privileges linked to the autonomous condition for non-self-governing territories. To do this, I argue it is important to review another set of literature, focusing on a few Pacific Islands and the relations that link them to the United States.

Before expanding the analysis to wider contexts it is worth focusing, however briefly, to the work of French anthropologists and social scientists working on *l'outremer français*.

Sovereign Institutions in Non-Sovereign Contexts

French scholars have been particularly attentive to study overseas departments and territories, and specifically the application and flaws of French institutions and devices in overseas dependencies, i.e culturally, socially and economically different contexts and latitudes, in the hope of rewriting the French colonial and post-colonial historiography (Saläun, Trépied 2020; Lemercier, Muni Toke, Palomares 2014; Trépied, Guyon 2013; Gagné, Saläun 2017; 2013).

As it has been noted above, the French decision of retaining overseas territories–however voluntary this decision might have been presented through popular referenda–was against the decolonizing tide of the 1960s. It is precisely in the aftermath of WWII, and specifically in 1946, that the term *outremer* replaced the classical concept of *colonie* and its political vocabulary in the French overseas dependencies (Bayart, Bertrand 2006; Trépied, Guyon 2013). Even more so, the decision of centralizing and absorbing overseas dependencies through a process of nationalization was aimed, according to these scholars, at effacing the territories' colonial past in the public discourse (see also Stoler 2016:122-170). One of the main results of such politics is the lack of awareness about the social histories of French overseas territories, the fault in taking responsibilities for colonial pasts that are systematically hidden and forgotten, and towards an unachieved and post-colonial present (see also Amara 2023). Clearly, French overseas dependencies don't share a common past, as their colonization happened for different reasons, in different historical periods, varied geographical spaces, and culturally dense environments. Yet, what they have in common is the political categorization that defines them, as well as the economic and social dependency, let alone the political one, that links them to their metropole. Therefore, studying non-self-governing territories, and specifically the French ones, forces researchers to confront the colonial/imperial nature of such asymmetrical bonds, and stresses the limits of considering overseas territories as chronologically precolonial, colonial, and post-colonial (Trépied, Guyon 2013). The aim is that of redefining the terms of the debate in the French public discourse and academia (Saläun, Trépied 2020). French scholars have widely inquired the application of the educational system (Maurice, Saläun 2020; Saläun, Le Plain 2018; Saläun 2020; Vernaudon et al. 2011) and justice (Gagné, Guyon 2020; Gagné 2018; Gagné, Guyon, Trépied 2018) in French Polynesia, showing the intricacies and flaws of Republican devices when imposed on overseas contexts. The military institution has been widely neglected and only the RSMA, given its hybrid figure, has recently gained moderate attention on the part of French scholars (Mary 2016; Milia-Marie-Luce 2019; Mora 2022; Salomon 2020; Sierra-Paycha, Mora, Lelièvre 2023).

My thesis is inscribed in this field of study and advances scholarship by illustrating the material and practical everyday socio-historical transformations of these colonially-informed relationships, eventually demonstrating their colonial roots and the coloniality that still informs them. In fact, while many scholars and prominent figures endorse the post-colonial situation of French Polynesia, backed by the 1958 referendum results which sanctioned the supposedly popular will to territorialize the *Établissements Français de l'Océanie*; I argue, as many others have done, that the mechanisms,

ideologies, and politics that assure the functioning of supposedly post-colonial contexts, such as the French Polynesian one, are molded upon inherently colonial patterns and uncanny colonial reanimations (Al Wardi 2018; Gagné, Salaün 2017; Stoler 2016; Bayart, Bertrand 2006; Gonschor 2013).

Sovereignty as a Form of Control: Militarization

In order to highlight tangible practices crafting the quotidian non-sovereign condition of French Polynesia, I argue it is important to shed light on a different strand of literature focusing on militarization and more specifically on militarization processes in the vast Pacific region. Notwithstanding the differences between the French Polynesian context I aim to study and the examples that will be discussed in the following paragraph, I believe there are fundamental similarities that can help to deepen the discussion not so much about different degrees of sovereignty that link non-sovereign territories to their metropoles, but on those tangible practices that limit life horizons and possibilities resulting in non-sovereign future aspirations.

As will be widely explained in Chapter 3, far from being used only to prepare troops for war, military bases are indeed seen as real industries, social institutions that organize the lives of people and workers (military and civilian personnel), on a global, social, and intimate level. This contradictory social process called militarization (Geyer 1989; Lutz 2007)[39] refers to the monopoly of legitimate violence, an often neglected aspect when discussing sovereignty, and yet a sovereign prerogative *par excellence*. Such State prerogative concerns both the internal and external spheres in that the task of the sovereign is to maintain internal order and ensure the security of its borders. Security, whether internal or external, is provided through a military/police apparatus to which the sovereign transfers the monopoly of violence and ensures the normal course of daily life[40]. Through the intensification of labor and resources allocated for military purposes, civil society is consequently organized to produce different kinds of explicit and untold (because unthinkable) violence. Catherine Lutz defines militarization as « a simultaneously discursive process, involving a shift in societal beliefs and values, in ways necessary to legitimate the use of force, the organization of large standing armies and their leaders, and the higher taxes or tribute used to pay for them » (2007:320). Militarization is linked not only to the obvious but also to less visible influences, such as the creation of a national history that glorifies and legitimizes military action and the highlighting of hierarchies of power, race, gender, and sexuality. The widespread system of militarization and consolidation of imperial power shaped every aspect of social life during the 19th and 20th centuries, including social institutions that had little to do with war or the military. As several scholars have noted, support for military operations is not so much due to state funding or the establishment of a war economy, but to the ability to control popular ideas about the army, military bases, and war, feeding public opinion through ideological influence such as ideals of freedom and security. For instance,

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[39] It is important to distinguish militarism from militarization: although they are often used synonymously, the term militarism refers more to martial values, adopted by a given society. Militarization, on the other hand, is the material and discursive nature of military rule (Lutz 2007).

[40] While this work focuses on the national apparatus securing borders and external order, i.e. the army, others have focused on police as enforcing internal social order (Fassin 2013).

throughout the 19th century, American military bases in the United States and abroad helped to shape American culture and national politics, including organizing the consumption of cultural products and supporting the political rhetoric of national security, influencing a myriad of non-military aspects of daily life (Enloe 1990; Freeman 2019; Lutz 2006, 2007, 2009). In this sense, militarization is not only a martial and combat-preparation device, it strongly structures local life and sociality, building dependence and acceptance of the military ideals even in civilian circles. By hiring local personnel and providing wages to civilian workers, the U.S. troops stationed in Okinawa, Japan as well as the French army in Tahiti have presented themselves as benefactors, as institutions allowing local inhabitants to buy food and basic necessities for their families in a fast-changing and market-oriented world (Ginoza 2012; Shigematsu, Camacho 2010). Militarization ultimately creates knowledge: scientific research funded and carried out for strictly military reasons, of which atomic weapons are a prime example, are often funded to expand national sovereignty or maintain one's hegemony.

Critical Militarization Studies, an emerging field in the social sciences, have focused on the role of gender within military bases, and some analyses, including those of Cynthia Enloe (2000), have highlighted how processes of militarization and demilitarization have coincided with related crises of masculinity. Other works are more attentive to the spatial influence that military presence exercises on places, environments, and landscapes (Woodward 2004); as well as on the exponential growth of paramilitary groups, founded on the politics of terror and international alliances based on the exchange of arms, and contributing to the erosion of national sovereignty (Lutz 2007). In the Asia-Pacific region, the burgeoning field of militarization studies has considered such a process as « an extension of colonialism, [...] linked with residual and ongoing effects of colonial subordination » (Shigematsu, Camacho 2010:xv). Given its pervasive characteristic, it seems that the army is today assuming more and more responsibilities and tasks that used to be performed by civilian personnel, resulting in a shift in military functions. First-aid units, disaster relief, and operations of various kinds to help people in distress, which have little to do with securing national borders or the use of legitimate violence are today performed by specialized military corps. The army is encroaching more and more into the civilian realm, normalizing functions that were once considered State's prerogatives. The expanding role of the army is precisely at the core of the definition of the militarization process itself, entailing the increasing influence exercised on formerly non-military aspects of society, culture, and economy (Shigematsu, Camacho 2010). How can such universal tendencies be linked to the historical contingency of sovereignty? Before applying these concepts to the Polynesian context, it is useful to reconstruct a map of military bases in the Pacific region. Indeed, as it will be shown, the use of satellite islands as strategic military bases is not only a French prerogative.

Our Sea of Militarized Islands

The Pacific region is today a transnational space deemed highly strategic for Western nations, first of them the U.S. carrying out quite aggressive politics in the area mostly to deter China. Many Pacific Islands were colonized because of their strategic position and military bases were implanted on native land with no restrictions to military operations, given their intrinsic political

subordination. This also means that native people and communities are particularly vulnerable not only from a political point of view (the occupation of their islands and formal sovereignty hindering their freedom) but also because of the presence of the army (meaning land grabbing, environmental disruption, health risks, pollution, and casualties). Historically, military power was shown through military bases and their presence as defense outposts, not least in Oceania. Yet, today their role and goals changed: these infrastructures represent a chain of worldly dislocated outposts, that not only protect borders but irradiate national values in metropolitan territories and overseas dependencies, while at the same time ensuring the State's hegemony. Considering that French Polynesia is only one of the many French overseas dependencies of this kind[41], I argue that it could be considered one of the numerous « bases of empire » (Lutz 2009), implying its military and commercial strategical position in the Pacific Ocean. To substantiate this idea, I broadly use the term baseworld, first coined by Chalmers Johnson, political scientist and one of the first to critically analyze the consequences of what he termed the American empire, to refer to a collection of (U.S.) military bases, training areas, and support facilities spread all over the globe (Johnson 2004; see also Lutz 2009). Baseworlds are contemporary outposts whose goal is to irradiate national values through the exercise of military power and cultural influence (Davis 2015).

From a global point of view, baseworlds allow the researcher to analyze the « archipelago of empire » (Cumings 2009) composing modern-day political entities; but what is more interesting is that telescoping down to the everyday life and located history of each of these polities, it becomes clear that they are heterogenous in their forms and relations while retaining some common similarities between them. To this end, Davis (2015) used the term to refer to his multi-sited fieldwork around the many American bases spread in the Pacific Ocean (Okinawa, Kwajalein). These outposts, as the functionaries and soldiers that work in them, are interchangeable in their roles and locations, be it in the Pacific Ocean, off the east coast of Africa, or in the Caribbeans. Indeed, unlike in the past, contemporary geopolitics is not based on continuous competition between States, rather it is made up of the interpenetration of economic and power networks and on knitted relations with sovereign and non-sovereign nations and territories.

As we have seen, contemporary forms of sovereignty comprehend not only territorial sovereignty but the capacity to negotiate with other entities. Some of these islands and territories are formally independent yet, multiple degrees of sovereignty link them to other nations, downplaying the concrete exercise of independence because of their position or resources and values. Outposts and military infrastructures are in fact the product and the producer of different kinds of political and social processes that have worked and continue working to keep them in place. A thick description (Geertz 1973) of such realities is then fundamental to unsettling imperial formations and their functionings and to eventually analyze the difficulties of recognizing the « colonial histories of the present » (Stoler 2016:7). Looking at the contemporary situation, Davis (2015) observed the strong and complementary link between colonialism and militarization that nurtures contemporary geopolitics (see also Shigematsu, Camacho 2010). The murkiness that hovers over these places, and

[41] France still retains overseas departments or collectivities and is virtually present in every ocean. Martinique and Guadeloupe in the Caribbeans, as well as French Guyana in the Southern American continent, La Réunion and Mayotte in the Indian Ocean are all French overseas departments. Saint Martin and Saint Barthélemy in the Caribbeans, Saint Pierre et Miquelon in the Northern Atlantic Ocean, and French Polynesia and Wallis and Futuna in the Pacific Ocean are overseas collectivities. Another French overseas collectivity in the Pacific region, New Caledonia, has yet a unique (*sui generis*) statute.

ultimately their spatial and cognitive marginality is in fact not a mistake; rather, it is an intentional and sought omission, a discursive erasure of islanders' lives (Davis 2015). At the foundation of such dreams of power and domination lays what Davis (2015) defined as imagined geography, i.e. a spatial construction allowing Pacific Islands to be seen and crafted by the colonizer as places with no value in themselves, if not as military playgrounds or targets. These place-myths, as they are defined by Davis, are the premises to tell different stories about the Pacific Islands, stories that craft them as useful because expendable. Their importance doesn't lay in any material production, as was the case with ancient European colonies in the Caribbeans or Africa. Their value lies in the capacity to project power from these *marginal* and *remote* outposts. The supposed marginality and remoteness are crafted by the national government exactly for this purpose, i.e. to shy away their importance, cultures, and values, denying the vividness of their lives (Aguon 2022) to make the implant of military facilities acceptable. The Western imaginary built around the presumed remoteness and isolation of this part of the world had two major outcomes: on the one hand, the perception of these islands as pristine gems made possible the metaphor of the garden of Eden, which had the precise goal of distracting people's attention, hiding the real nature of colonial/imperial presence. On the other hand, their remoteness and emptiness condemned them as expendable, precisely because they were considered far from any continent, contributing to the creation of a nuclear hell. This particular rhetoric of isolated islands goes hand in hand with that of finite spaces as perfect island laboratories, making possible the American, English, and French nuclear projects during the Cold War (DeLoughrey 2012, see also Chapter 4).

Analyzing the work 'Archipelagic American Studies' by Russel Roberts and Stephens (2017), Favole observed in his recent book on European overseas territories that « through Puerto Rico the U.S. border with the Dominican Republic and with the British Overseas Territories; through American Samoa, they border with Samoa and Niue. Through Guam, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands (a sort of Pacific Commonwealth) they are present in a vast part of Oceania! » (2020:XLI). I would add that such overseas territories, linked to the U.S. through different agreements, allow the U.S. to be present in the region because that is exactly their purpose: to provide the U.S. with overseas military bases all over Oceania, a strategic region halfway between the U.S. and Asia. Oceania is in fact considered a center stage on which different nations show their power and influence at the expense of the islands and their inhabitants. The result of this asset is the non-sovereign or quasi-sovereign militarized islands that makeup part of the Pacific region today and that entertain different relationships with their respective metropole. The Federated States of Micronesia, as well as the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Republic of Palau, gained their independence by signing a Compact of Free Association with the U.S. The agreements establish the extent of the free association and are in general similar among them: the main features are self-governance following the local constitution and the possibility to receive financial budgets from the U.S.; notwithstanding their citizenship status, native inhabitants cannot vote in the presidential elections nor can they be represented in the Senate (Levine 2012). These privileges are accorded in return for other favors: following the strategic denial doctrine, none of these territories can host foreign armies and indeed have to cede their lands to the wishes of the Department of Defense. Such relationships are of course the origin of a hard-to-fight economic dependence. The U.S. hegemony expands even more, to the Northern Mariana Islands whose inhabitants signed a Commonwealth establishing a permanent (therefore irreversible) political union between the two

entities. Guam, geographically and ethnically linked to the Mariana's, has still another status, as well as American Samoa: they both are unincorporated territories. This means that, unlike the aforementioned territories, Guam and American Samoa are not formal sovereign States and their inhabitants are not fully recognized by the American Constitution[42]. These islands, which I consider non-sovereign entities, have been outposts of imperial formations since the end of the 1800s, yet the contemporary process of militarization increased exponentially in the first decade of the 2000s. To counteract the supposed Chinese threat, President Barack Obama decided to promote a different defense strategy, known as the Pacific Pivot, admitting that the U.S. has a vital interest in East Asia and is therefore determined to continue playing a determinant role in the region. Consequently, this means that today overseas territories such as Guam and Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands, to name only a few, are even more important to the national defense strategy. For instance, the Pacific Pivot meant a military expansion started in 2016 on Guam, where soldiers were relocated after being forced to leave Okinawa, Japan (Tanji 2006; Tanji, Broudy 2017). Firing ranges and training facilities have been built on native land, sanctuaries for local and endemic flora and fauna, as Julian Aguon masterfully depicted in his latest book 'No Country for Eight-Spot Butterflies' (2022); at the same time, the Mariana Training and Testing Area (or MITT) has been created, permitting the U.S. Navy to exclusively use a large part of the EEZ of the Northern Mariana Islands for training purposes (Genz et al. 2018; Naputi, Frain 2023). These 'repeating islands'[43] (Benítez-Rojo 1997) were transformed from the very first moment of possession: not only the colonial rhetoric was incessantly perpetuated but also, and most importantly, the militarized landscape and the modalities of colonial administration. To ensure the effectiveness of such a discourse, the social histories of militarized and colonized islands were systematically erased and made unavailable, instead taking for granted their affiliation to the army and its metropole. Kwajalein, an atoll in the Republic of the Marshall Islands that hosts a U.S. military facility, is a good example of such a relationship. Davis (2015) and Hirschberg (2022) argue that the geographic remoteness of the atoll and the consequent bewilderment of the military personnel is structurally overcome by the crafting of an artificial place, re-created in the image and likeness of any U.S. suburban town; but also through the cultural influence (that can be seen in the local store selling American goods to the American personnel), and the taming of a foreign landscape through the use of a familiar architecture. Kwajalein is part of the U.S. not only from a political point of view (because the atoll hosts a U.S. military base) but also from a cultural and trivially aesthetic point of view. Living within the base, it is difficult to locate oneself on the globe, not to mention the inexistent connections with the outside world, that *de facto* erase the local dimension of life.

If baseworlds can be observed from a global-history point of view as a strategic system, they can also be localized military facilities. Each of these bases is linked to the particular and local history of the place that hosts them. One could think that this is possible because of the special agreements that Pacific Islands have signed with the U.S. but indeed this was the case in sovereign nations as well, such as the Philippines and Okinawa (for the Philippines see Vicuña Gonzalez 2010). For

[42] Hawai'i could as well be part of this list of non-sovereign territories. Yet, formally being an American State, its case won't be analyzed here.

[43] The concept was first coined in reference to the standardized modalities with which Spanish colonies in the Caribbeans and South America were administered and re-created following Spanish ideals. Land was prepared for a plantation economy and colonial facilities/structures were the same all over the world. Using such a concept with regards to imperial formations/empire, colonial administration acquires military implications.

instance, Okinawa was militarily occupied by the U.S. since WWII and access to the island was granted to the U.S. Army by the Japanese government until 1972 (Akibayashi, Takazato 2009). The fluidity of borders and the continuous foreign administration of the island, be it Japanese or American, has meant for the native population the modeling of their life and identities. According to Ayano Ginoza (2012), everyone in Okinawa is intimately linked to the U.S. Army as the military base and its contractors employ a large number of local inhabitants, not to mention the cultural influence that the presence of American soldiers has meant. One of the consequences of living along the fenceline[44]–but also an essential condition for the good functioning of every army–is the manipulation of civilian everyday life and social relationships following military needs, which in turn inhibit native culture and more generally a different mode of conceiving the world, be it in the Marshall Islands, Okinawa or Tahiti (Davis 2015; Ginoza 2012; Lutz 2006, 2007). As explained above, military bases are not only spaces where military power is created, reproduced, and projected outside. As Cynthia Enloe (2000) reminds us, they are places of encounter between the personnel and local inhabitants but also encounters with new and different cultural environments. The literature on the impact of military bases on hosting communities has evidenced some common consequences, among them the rapid and abrupt economic fluctuations, strong cultural influence, environmental and acoustic pollution, and sexual harassment. On the other hand, host communities and local inhabitants are deemed to benefit from a certain economic comfort linked to the artificial economy based on personnel spending and the employment of local labor force, all elements that create a hard-to-fight economic dependence (Davis 2015; Lutz 2006, 2007; Ginoza 2012).

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Defining contemporary political configurations, as those mentioned above, many scholars have written about imperialism and Empire intended as an entity that expands beyond national borders and historical periods, and therefore as something radically different from the empire conceived as a historical regime based on territorial conquests (Hardt, Negri 2000). If to a certain extent, contemporary imperialism is indeed configured as a virtual presence whose main strength is the influence exerted on subjugated nations, the main flaw of such a concept is yet the immanent trait that supposedly characterizes the Empire as a totalizing entity capable of suspending history and fixing the status quo for eternity. As anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler suggested, the ahistorical and immanent fixity of the concept never really characterized 19th and 20th-century empires (see Stoler 2016:192-194). To replace the term Empire, Stoler proposed the idea of imperial formations that, « unlike empires, [...] are processes of becoming, not fixed things » (Stoler 2013:8). Imperial formations are configured as « macro-polities whose technologies of rule thrive on the production of exceptions [...][whose defining figures are] territorial ambiguity, legal categories of belonging that produce quasi-membership, and geographic and demographic zones of partially and indefinitely suspended rights » (ibid.). In a similar vein, but still using the debated term of imperialism, anthropologist Catherine Lutz referred to such a process as « a complex of concrete social relationships entailing culturally constructed emotions, ambivalences, ambiguities » (2006:595),

[44] I refer to the documentary 'Living along the Fenceline' by Gwen Kirk and Lina Hoshino (2011).

stressing on the intersubjective and co-constituent character of such political entities[45]. Building on Stoler's premise that exceptionalism is the fundamental feature of imperial formations, I believe that the particular relationship that links French Polynesia to its metropole perfectly exemplifies the « modus operandi of imperial states » (2016:177), perpetuating a never-ending colonial situation (Balandier 1951; see also Gagné, Salaün 2017).

Throughout my work, I use extensively the concept of imperial formations to refer to the contemporary political ties that bond these non-self-governing territories, specifically French Polynesia, to their mainlands, and that organize everyday life in these Polynesian islands, where French functionaries and specialized workers are continuously recruited to work for short-term positions and spark their presence and cultural influence. At the same time, unspecialized Polynesian youth move in the opposite direction, to join the army which represents their only possibility to have a career and a monthly salary. As the result of contemporary imperial formations, French Polynesia and its political status could be considered as « supremely mobile polities of dislocation, dependent not on stable populations so much as on highly moveable ones, on *systemic recruitments and 'transfers' of colonial agents*, on *native military*, on a redistribution of peoples and resources, on relocations and dispersions, on contiguous and overseas territories » (2016:192-93, emphasis mine). Imperial formations can also be seen as a complex of social relations involving culturally constructed emotions, ambivalence, and ambiguities, and capitalist processes of expansion and extraction (Stoler 2016; Lutz 2006), functioning in a subcutaneous manner.

As mentioned in the Introduction, the slow violence perpetrated in the name of contemporary imperial formations is subcutaneous and concealed (Nixon 2011). Slow violence is intended here as the result of epistemic and political domination, and its well-constructed invisibility is crafted precisely to prevent us from paying attention to what is in front of us, enacting a true regime of imperceptibility (Murphy 2006). Violence is embodied by social actors, it becomes normalized and colonial histories, that many think forgotten, are made inaccessible, voluntarily hidden, and displaced. Stoler (2016) refers to this process as colonial aphasia, implying both the voluntary blockage of knowledge and the loss implicit in the occlusion. It is precisely by playing with this ambivalence–presence, disappearance–that several political entities have decided to use distant territories at the edge of their borders to carry out technological experiments such as nuclear testing. Distant islands or isolated deserts at the margins of empires have always been represented as real laboratories within which imperial power was tested and crafted (DeLoughrey 2012) and where infrastructural, environmental, and socio-political transformations were very often caused by empires' undaunted hunger for power (Hurley 2020).

Conclusions

What do formally independent countries such as the Marshall Islands or the Federated States of Micronesia have in common with an overseas territory such as French Polynesia? As it should be

[45] The contemporary debate about imperialism and empire is very wide and it is not the goal of this chapter to examine them. However, I think it's useful to quote at least another reference to imperialism coming from the Pacific. Haunani-Kay Trask defines it as « a total system of foreign power in which another culture, people and way of life penetrate, transform, and come to define the colonized society » (1993:41). Notwithstanding the truth and the implications of such a definition, I find it to be too strict and with little space to explore details.

clear by now, military presence, be it American or French in formally independent or non-sovereign territories, hinders life possibilities and future horizons despite the agreements that the national government has with the territory in question. Notwithstanding the originality of new concepts, such as that of archipelagic logics (Favole, Giordana 2018), late sovereignty (Mac Amhlaigh 2013), or islandian sovereignty (Prinsen, Blaise 2017) to study contemporary dynamics and relations in Oceania, they seem to fail in recognizing the nature of such connections. These islands are connected by commercial, kinship, and exchange relations, in other words by what Davis (2015) defined as affinity geopolitics but they remain nevertheless hyper-militarized territories, bases and outposts of their metropoles' transnational politics. The contemporary situation of many Pacific Islands, comprising the political ambiguities and fuzziness of dependencies, trusteeships, protectorates, mandates, and unincorporated territories as well as territorial ambiguity and legal categories of belonging that produce quasi-membership, are defining features of imperial formations (Stoler 2016). In such contexts, and far from the granting of privileges supposed to link overseas territories to their respective metropoles, non-sovereign practices are reinstated every day.

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> Do you know what the right to sovereignty is? [Silence among the crowd] Mr Macron has the sovereign right to me and my children. The right to sovereignty is the right to life and death [...] France... Macron has the right to come here looking for your youth and send them to Mali to fight in a war. [...] Our right to sovereignty is sacred. It is not for sale[46].

It was June 29th, 2021. In Faʻaʻā a humble ceremony was taking place on the street, right in front of a singular monument adorned with flowers' necklaces and woven coconut branches (Fig. 1.1). Unlike the nearby capital city of Papeʻete, Faʻaʻā is a densely populated town and it is known to be the headquarters of Tāvini Huiraʻatira nō te Ao Māʻohi (Māʻohi Liberation Front), the local independentist party, whose president Oscar Temaru has been the mayor since the 1980s. As I will learn that same night, the Tavararo Memorial is dedicated to the Faʻaʻā residents who died in 1844 defending their land and independence against French soldiers and was built in 1985 following the mayor's will. The ceremony I was attending was designed to commemorate the Polynesian loss of sovereignty and consisted of a march with chants to the monument and then a series of speeches or ʻōrero to commemorate the death of the Māʻohi independence and at the same time emphasize Polynesian cultural identity, heritage, and new political imagination over the territory's future. The discontent with the French government was expressed through the use of Māʻohi rhetoric (in its etymological sense, as the art of the speech) and the presentation of woven and flower offerings to a symbolic tomb, meant to mourn the sovereign kingdom of Tahiti before it was colonized. Sovereignty was a recurrent noun that night, marking the beginning of my fieldwork in Tahiti and my first encounter with local interlocutors and activists. I believe it is important to mention this episode because sovereignty is not only a classical political concept defined by scholars; on the opposite, it exceeds the boundaries of academia and is place-based and empirically defined. For my

[46] « Vous savez ce que c'est le droit de souveraineté? [Silence among the crowd] Monsieur Macron a le droit de souveraineté sur moi et mes enfants. Le droit de souveraineté c'est le droit de vie et de mort [...] La France... Macron a le droit de venir chercher vos jeunes là, pour les envoyer au Mali faire la guerre. [...] Notre droit de souveraineté est un droit sacré. Il n'est pas à vendre ». Oscar Temaru, June 29th 2021, public discourse in Faʻaʻā attended by the author.

Polynesian friends and acquaintances, sovereignty means what could be done or not, which possibilities are available and for whom, and at what price and conditions.

How are sovereignty practices to develop in such a context? Rather than taking for granted the political ties that link modern-day French Polynesia to its metropole, and instead of analyzing such a relationship as a post-modernist 'different appetite for sovereignty' (Hepburn, Baldacchino 2012), or 'late' form of sovereignty (MacAmlaigh 2013), I argue it is necessary to unsettle the very concept of sovereignty (Bonilla 2017), showing that the inherent flaw is not in overseas territories' political status within a bigger political entity, nor in the structure that defines them. The problem that I aim to bring into question lies in the insidious and long-lasting coloniality inscribed in such governing mechanisms resulting in embodied practices of non-sovereignty, the emergence of political subjectivities in a non-sovereign condition, and limited future aspirations.

Fig. 1.1
Oscar Temaru, mayor of Faʻaʻā and President of the independentist party Tāvini Huiraʻatira, in front of the Tavararo Memorial, founded in 1985.
Faʻaʻā, June 29, 2021. © Claudia Ledderucci

CHAPTER 2
Linking Military Presence to Sovereignty Claims
A Genealogical Approach

Observing the continuous negotiations that occurred between the French government and the Polynesian government, Chapter 2 unravels how and why, over many years, the military presence, as well as the non-sovereign condition of Polynesian women and men, has changed in response to a wider context entailing French history, international fluctuations, and geopolitical strategies. Assuming that today's Franco-Polynesian relations reflect a contemporary colonial configuration, and shifting away from the dual analysis that identifies historical conjunctures as continuities or discontinuities, this chapter seeks to illustrate the recurrence of certain power structures which result in what anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler defined as « colonial histories of the present » (Stoler 2016:7). Historicizing the shifting relationship between the military presence and sovereignty vindications, this chapter seeks to assess the role that military presence had in the instantiation of sovereignty claims, intended here not as a way out of the colonial situation but rather as a reorganization of the asymmetry of power between the French and Polynesian entities. To what extent is military presence hindering or contributing to the emancipation of this overseas territory? Sovereignty claims are to be intended as shifting over time and they differ from sovereign practices (described in Chapter 1) precisely because they represent demands entailing consequent negotiations, while everyday sovereign practices are all those ways of living and behaving comprised in the interstitial space between the Polynesian autonomy statute and French national politics. In such a context, and differing from other militarized islands' contexts, contemporary military presence per se doesn't trigger directly any particular sovereign vindication in French Polynesia. What has been contested over the years is yet military action and its consequences, mostly those linked to the nuclear testing program, that were in turn at the core of many vindications and protests. Similarly, as shown through the Covid-19 pandemic example, the virus has been creatively used as an analogy to nuclear testing and as a metaphor for the negative outcomes of the French presence. Other than being used as an analogy and/or metaphor, this positioning towards the French-military presence could be used as an archetype for local political struggles giving rise to political imaginaries and imaginations, and real-life actions. By assuming that what has been historically contested is not the military presence per se but its actions and their outcomes, I aim to sketch the contours of a particular way of advancing political struggles 'by proxy'. The army is seldom contested, yet its proxies (nuclear testing, a worldwide pandemic) are at the core of political struggles and give rise to sovereignty claims. The army is then reconfigured in different facets comprising its presence, its actors and actions, as well as these actions' consequences and the symbols such presence represents. How are these many military facets linked to sovereignty claims? How is the Polynesian political field structured and influenced by the disconnection of military presence and military action? Can this action be considered a 'proxy' in pushing forward sovereignty claims?

Retracing some important historical periods as well as ethnographical snapshots, this chapter aims to trace a genealogy of sovereignty claims in French Polynesia, starting from the local resistance to the Protectorate imposed on the Pomare kingdom in 1842 and until today, taking into consideration that such claims changed over time as well as their proponents. In which terms and by whom is sovereignty claimed? And what does it imply with regard to the military question? As for the disconnection of military presence and military action, resulting in the exclusive contestation of the latter, I believe it is possible to observe such a pattern in other forms of contestation.

I propose to divide sovereignty claims following the different phases of the local political history and considering the wider contexts on which such vindications were built. The relationship with France and the consequent vindications were configured over time around demands for more equality and liberties, as explained in paragraphs 'First encounter and Christianization' and 'The first sovereign claim was a French one'; more autonomy in the aftermath of WWII, as explained in the paragraph 'Vanishing hope for decolonization in the aftermath of WWII'; more competencies and decisional powers during the Flosse era, as explained in the paragraph 'Bribed sovereignty and toxic promises'; finally as independence, as explained in the paragraph 'From pro-autonomy to pro-independence claims and back'.

First Encounters and Christianization

For the sake of clarity, I follow Bruno Saura's (2015, 2015a) repartition of what are broadly defined colonial times into three distinct and sometimes contemporary processes that took place in what is today known as French Polynesia: the first process entails the encounter of Polynesian people with a different Other, usually the first European explorers (1767-1797); a second process comprising the arrival of Christian missionaries (1797-1840); a third process entailing the French political colonization of the Pomare Kingdom and the Marquesas Islands. While military presence can be traced back to the third process, i.e. the political colonization of Tahiti, I think it's useful to recall some key historical periods and conjunctures.

Although Tahiti was first encountered by Samuel Wallis in 1767, opening the era of European encounters, numerous other navigators were crossing the Pacific Ocean since the 16th century without forcibly establishing contacts with native populations[47]. Soon after Wallis' voyage, other explorers docked on the Tahitian shore: Louis Antoine de Bougainville in 1768[48] and James Cook in 1769, and again in 1773-74 and 1777. Each of them engaged in relations with local personalities, without necessarily establishing lasting alliances. Among these relations, was the friendly and continuous relationship between James Cook and Pomare I, which influenced further relations

[47] Among them the Spanish Magellan and after him, Alvaro Mendaña and Pedro Fernandez de Quirós, navigated around the Tuamotu archipelago respectively in 1521, 1595, and 1606. Between the second half of the 17th century and the first half of the 18th century, many other English and Dutch navigators were crossing the Pacific Ocean. For more references, see Saura 2015.

[48] Bougainville's voyage, narrated in its journal, has marked Western imaginaries and myths on the South Seas and particularly on Tahiti. For more details see Tcherkézoff 2009.

between English businessmen and the Pomare family[49]. Yet, the presence of foreign figures and businessmen didn't alter Polynesian societies that were instead curious and available to exchange products with these interlocutors. Complex commercial and political relations between local inhabitants and European navigators established alliances and strategic choices were made on both sides (Saura 2015; Baré 1989, 2002; Newbury 1980; Thomas 2010). Although the foreign presence was still a virtual one it could still be considered an informal colonization, influencing and modifying native social and cultural systems (Saura 2015a; Gleizal 2009): English businessmen were interested in the islands for their ports and the possibility they represented in trans-Pacific commerce, while at the same time, Tahitians were also profiting from the exchanges. Such diplomatic relations with English and then French representatives were the result of the high dynamism that characterized the political and economic life of the Pomare Kingdom and the other archipelagos that today form French Polynesia. Nevertheless, the end of the 18th century was marked not only by these encounters but also and at the same time by the rise of Pomare's influence on the local chiefs and the Tahitian political system[50]. As French anthropologist Bruno Saura demonstrated in *Histoire et mémoire des temps coloniaux en Polynésie française* (2015), these two concomitant episodes are more coincidences than the effect of the European encounter: a centralization of Pomare's power was already taking place through the dense and astutely weaving of alliances through marriages and adoptions. Contacts with the newcomers are therefore not to be considered the cause of such a rise to power.

While the 30 years separating the first encounter with the European navigators and the arrival of the London Missionary Society (1767-1797) didn't experience radical changes, the situation started to mutate in the early 19th century as the majority of Polynesians converted to Christianity and Pomare II's influence consolidated. It was only with the arrival of the London Missionary Society in 1797, that Polynesian society and its habits started to be profoundly altered: ancient rites, dances, and temples (the *marae*) were forbidden by the fathers and Polynesians became fervent Christians[51]. The arrival of protestant missionaries marked a turning point in Polynesian history, establishing a continuous and voluntary cultural bond, whose importance was recognized years later as at the time of its arrival the missionaries' ship was only one amongst many that were docked in Tahiti (Saura 2015; Baré 2002). A real turning point after the arrival of the London Missionary Society was nevertheless the promulgation of the Code Pomare in 1819, a corpus of laws emanated by Pomare II after having won the battle of Fē'ī Pī in 1815, opposing newly converted Polynesians to those that refused to accept the new religion. The two major consequences of this event–the result of a compromise between ancient Polynesian values (taking into consideration the aristocratic origin of

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[49] In 1767, Wallis came in contact with the Teva family (considered one of the sacred families from Raiatea). Yet, this friendly encounter did not prevent Wallis from firing the Tahitian shore when local inhabitants threatened to attack the vessel, greedy to trade coveted goods. Before departing, Wallis would declare the takeover of the island in the name of King George III of England, yet this episode did not initiate the political colonization of the island. It was nevertheless through these symbolic gestures that European nations will later start the scramble for the Pacific (Saura 2015).

[50] Traditionally, Polynesian chiefs never ruled over entire islands; instead, the power of a local chief was only exercised on a small portion of land (*chefferie*) and its inhabitants. Tahiti, always deemed inferior to Raiatea because of the supposed lack of sacredness that was instead the latter's prerogative, acquired its influence only after being conquered by the sacred chiefs originally from Raiatea. The Pomare family had its own area of influence in Arue (Saura 2015).

[51] Toriki Gleizal, Mā'ohi historian, argues that protestant missions indirectly participated in the colonization of Polynesians' minds and souls, eventually preparing the ground for the French colonization that followed (Gleizal 2009, see also Saura 2015). Following his analysis, protestant missions could then be considered pre-colonial baseworlds.

the Polynesian political system, and the warriors' values embedded in it), and puritan and democratic values instilled by the newcomers–were the centralization of Pomare's power (who decided to diminish other chief's status) and the massive Christianization of the population. When the French Navy sailed the Polynesian waters more than 20 years after the Fē'ī Pī battle, this was the context they encountered.

The First Sovereign Claim was a French one

At the time, towards the end of the 1830s, the French Navy's only mandate in the Pacific Ocean was to watch over French Catholic missionaries and businessmen in Oceania. To this end, Abel Dupetit-Thouars, commander of the French Navy ship navigating around the Pacific Ocean, was in charge of a surveillance and reconnaissance mission over the region in 1836. Soon after, with the pretext of rescuing two Catholic missionaries, the commander set foot on Tahiti. It is in this conjuncture that the previous exploratory voyage concluded by Dupetit-Thouars became the base for a new expansion in the region: in 1838 he was in charge of settling in a Catholic mission in the Marquesas Islands. Such a virtual presence, ensured by these French floating baseworlds, was aimed at countering the English presence in the region. After its first appearance, locally designated as a « *grand malheur* » (Baré 1989:66), France had apparently come to stay. It soon realized there were interests in the region, mainly to pursue its politics of *points d'appui,* commercial ports and strategic outposts, to expand French commercial interests, and to contrast the English influence. In 1838, before any official declaration of possession over these islands, Dupetit-Thouars convinced Queen Pomare IV to sign a friendly treaty ensuring privileges to French citizens and missionaries dwelling in her reign (Saura 2015), while at the same time naming Jacques-Antoine Moerenhout, eminent French businessman in the Pacific region, as the French consul in Tahiti. It was only after 1840 when Britain decided to annex New Zealand crushing French expectation to implant new *points d'appui* over there, that France felt the need to symbolically challenge its rival. Newly appointed Rear-Admiral, Dupetit-Thouars was instructed to occupy the Marquesas Islands in 1841 and those islands were annexed to the French monarchy the following year, in May 1842 (Meltz 2022, 2011; Al Wardi 1998; Saura 2015).

Having settled his garrisons in the now annexed Marquesas Islands in May 1842, Rear Admiral Dupetit-Thouars arrived in Tahiti at the end of August of the same year (Saura 2015; Newbury 1980). Given the intimate relations that Queen Pomare IV weaved over time with English missionaries, the local population was familiar with the British presence and willing to continue such an alliance. Therefore, the arrival of Dupetit-Thouars was perceived as an intrusion, especially because, as stated by Renaud Meltz (2022), newly arrived soldiers and governmental agents, the main actors of French acculturation, were against local traditions and cultures, as well as against Christian religion. Profiting from Queen Pomare IV's and her counselor's absence, the French Admiral discussed with a minority of local chiefs who soon after decided to present a formal request asking for French protection, not without financial benefits of different kinds (see Baré 1989). Local chiefs often used such alliances with France to contrast Queen Pomare's power and gain more influence in such a tug-of-war. This goodwill treaty was forwarded to Queen Pomare IV, protestant and pro-Britain, who was forced to sign the document under threat of immediate annexation. The

treaty established a protectorate over Tahiti and the rest of Queen Pomare IV's kingdom[52], conceding French citizens a privileged status and allowing Catholic missionaries to profess their will with the same liberties as the protestant ones (Newbury 1980). The Queen was confident that Britain would intervene to respond to her formal request of annexation to counter the French presence, which was resisted by the majority of the local population and their chiefs (Baré 1989). The symbolism of such an initiative on the part of Dupetit-Thouars is evident if we consider that it was made without any backup from his government, in a context in which commercial interests in the region were not key drivers for France, as it was true in different parts of the French empire; and that moreover, no population pressure was prompting France to look for a new settler colony to establish in the Pacific, especially because the country was already engaged elsewhere, for instance in Algeria (Le Meur, Mawyer 2022; Fisher 2013; Mohamed-Gaillard 2010).

This first, pre-colonial and maritime military presence was ensured by the French Navy and its vessels, which I defined as floating baseworlds. French gunships aimed at safeguarding national interests in the region ceased to be a virtual influence and became the symbol of a violent occupancy soon after the declaration of the Protectorate. Floating baseworlds would soon be supported by colonial baseworlds deemed to defend the French hegemony over these newly acquired islands. In this historical period then, it is not wrong to say that sovereignty claims backed by military presence, served to plead the French colonial cause.

Arriving at the end of 1843, newly appointed Governor Armand Bruat had full power to administer this new, if not ratified Protectorate. Bruat governed with the help and support of the native chiefs who filed the treaty in the first place, while Queen Pomare decided to find refuge inside the British consulate. To secure the island of Tahiti, Bruat ordered the construction of a fort in the southern peninsula, the Fort de Taravao, as well as the reinforcement of both the islet Motu Uta and the waterfront in Fare Ute, as well as the construction of military barracks in St. Amélie, in Papeete, starting a militarization process whose marks are still visible today[53]. Once Queen Pomare IV realized that notwithstanding the Treaty, the French were not just protecting her reign but hindering her government, she decided to disavow the Protectorate signed a year before. The arrest of her counselor, English missionary Pritchard, and the declaration of a state of emergency led to the precipitation of local events: armed opposition to the French presence started soon after and Tahitians resisted what was conceived as an intrusive foreign and military occupation, fighting the French to preserve Tahitian sovereignty. Queen Pomare IV exiled herself to the Leeward Islands and the riots in Tahiti were violently repressed by the French governor Bruat with the help of local inhabitants who deserted the Tahitian side. In 1845, once the Protectorate was officially ratified by the French monarchy, many local chiefs and « everyone they [the French] thought of importance » was offered offices and therefore a monetary payoff (Baré 1989:85). At the beginning of 1847, lacking a British intervention that eventually never came, Queen Pomare signed a formal submission to the French rule while retaining restricted responsibilities over internal affairs and gaining herself a regular salary provided by the French government.

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[52] Queen Pomare IV inherited her predecessors' kingdom composed of Tahiti, Mo'orea, Tubuai and Raivavae in the Austral Islands, and the Western Tuamotu archipelago.

[53] Today, the same building that hosted military barracks until the 1960s, hosts the Presidency of the overseas territory.

Queen Pomare IV's death, in 1877, prompted the local French government implanted in Tahiti to modify the Protectorate statute, soon after declaring the annexation of what was known at the time as the *Établissements Français de l'Océanie* (EFO). On June 29, 1880, King Pomare V, Queen Pomare's successor, was induced to sign a new treaty[54]. The twenty or so years that elapsed between the protectorate (1842, ratified in 1845) and the formal political colonization of 1880 were strategically used by the French colonial government to prevent any other foreign intrusion in Tahiti, Mo'orea, and the Leeward Islands. These were not under French rule yet, but they soon would be. In fact, their importance, as well as Tahiti's strategic position halfway between Europe and Australia, especially in the aftermath of the Panama Canal feasibility, invigorated French colonial impetus in the Pacific (Meltz 2013). Such intrusive presence was yet perceived by the local population as a conjuncture of powerlessness (*conjuncture d'impuissance* as defined by Baré 1989:66), a period in which Polynesian people were deprived of their land, culture, and social meaning by persistent invaders.

Vanishing Hope for Decolonization in the Aftermath of WWII

Seeing the history of Franco-Polynesian contacts as a cyclical process of engagement, disengagement, and re-engagement, as Le Meur and Mawyer have suggested (2022), or as conjunctures (Baré 1989; Sahlins 1985), allows the reader to analyze local history from a different point of view and to better place it within a wider context entailing French history as well as international conjunctures. After the violent annexation of 1880, the *Établissements Français de l'Océanie* experienced a relatively calm period in the few decades that separated the annexation from WWI and experienced a first French disengagement, resulting in more liberties, in the aftermath of WWII. At this time in history, military presence is dormant and sovereignty claims are not expressed against the French presence. Indeed, many Polynesians had recently returned after having voluntarily joined the French army and fought in Europe and Northern Africa during WWII, renovating a link of alliance (Shigetomi 2017).

With the promulgation of the new Constitution of the Fourth Republic in 1945, French citizenship was granted to all inhabitants of the EFO and the colonies' statute mutated into that of overseas territories. These were allowed for the first time to democratically elect a representative assembly and also gained representation in the national government bodies: the *Établissements Français de l'Océanie* would be represented by one deputy in the national assembly and one senator in the Senate. The local government would be managed by a French-appointed governor, nevertheless, it is within this new political and administrative configuration that the first local political claims would be expressed. Sovereignty claims in this historical period would organize around the quest for more equality and against colonial injustices. The first political movement, the Democratic Rally for the Tahitian Peoples (*Rassemblement Democratique des Populations Tahitiennes* or RDPT) was founded in Tahiti in 1947, becoming a political party in 1949, and started to gain consensus among the working and rural class people. Its leader, Pouvanaa a Oopa, was elected deputy in the French Assembly in 1949 and would continually advocate for a more equal relationship between France and its overseas territory as well as for the accession of Polynesian people to functionary jobs, a claim locally referred

[54] Such a treaty granted French citizenship to all the inhabitants of the Pomare kingdom, while the rest of the Polynesian population acquired the status of French subject (Clinchamps 2010).

to as *océanisation des cadres*. Thanks to the increasing support he and his cause received, Pouvanaa would continue winning local elections with a large majority during the 1950s.

Similar situations and claims, for instance, the request for more liberties and the denunciation of the restricted powers of local government bodies, were being experienced in other overseas territories. Consequently, towards the end of the same decade, the national government decided the promulgation of the so-called *loi Defferre*, a framework law granting ample liberties to French overseas territories. The *loi Defferre* was initially promulgated in 1956 and designed for the African colonies after the breakout of the Algerian riot of 1954. It was then applied to overseas territories in the Pacific and was effective in the EFO in 1957. The law allowed the establishment of locally elected government bodies with a certain degree of autonomy from the French government: in the EFO, the representative assembly implemented in 1945 was given the power to elect a government council made up of a maximum of eight elected members. Such a body was presided by a French-appointed governor and an elected vice-president and local competencies were delegated to elected members acting as ministry (Gonschor 2013). In 1957, as soon as the new law was implemented in the EFO, Pouvanaa a Oopa was elected as vice-president of the new government council.

This is the wider Polynesian context in which Charles De Gaulle, Prime Minister from June 1, 1958 until January 8, 1959, would be elected President on December 1958 and therefore resigned from his position as Prime Minister. After a long political instability during the Fourth Republic, and the Algerian military coup of May 1958 that destabilized the national politics even more, a new period of national stronghold would start, lasting during the presidencies of De Gaulle and Pompidou, until 1974 (Casteigts 2011). A referendum was put in place to vote for the new national constitution of the Fifth Republic and for colonies to decide their relationship with the metropole, paving the way to a decade of decolonization.

Given the difficulties the nascent local political class was facing in the EFO, among which various impediments to campaign for the NO vote, that Pouvanaa a Oopa was promoting to gain autonomy, the majority of the population voted to renovate the EFO's link with metropolitan France, adopting the official name of French Polynesia[55]. Soon after the referendum and following some violent confrontations between Pouvanaa's supporters and pro-France sustainers, the local government council granted by the *loi Defferre* was suspended and Pouvanaa was arrested and charged with having organized revolts in Papeete in the aftermath of the referendum. He was then condemned to spend eight years in prison and fifteen years in exile outside the Polynesian territory (Saura 2012). Moreover, the representative assembly was asked to decide whether French Polynesia wanted to maintain the status quo (i.e., overseas territory); whether they wanted to reinforce the tie with the Republic, becoming an overseas department; or whether they wanted to join the *Union Française*, a sort of transitional Commonwealth that would eventually lead to independence. The representative assembly voted to become an overseas territory and soon after decided to dissolve the government council, a decision ratified by successive decrees officially abolishing the government council and its powers and competencies. Therefore, as explained by political scientist Lorenz Gonschor, it is not the 1958 referendum and its results that automatically abolished the liberties

[55] What is interesting to note here is that after 1946 the French political vocabulary changed in order to accommodate the requests of its overseas dependencies. The 1958 referendum, that for many African colonies sanctioned the access to independence, marked a terminological shift to formally exit 'colonialism'. Old colonies became French overseas departments or territories while the political relations linking the metropole with its satellites were not 'colonial' anymore but based on a mutual 'association' or partnership.

acquired through the *loi Defferre,* but a decision of the local assembly (Gonschor 2013). This new configuration symbolized a strong re-engagement (Le Meur, Mawyer 2022) or re-colonization (Gonschor 2013) of French Polynesia, as the new statute of the overseas territory included a Governor appointed by the President of the Republic with broad powers, while as we have seen the local government body was stripped of its powers. Further protests or demands for revisions of the statute were denied and moreover, the RDPT (from which such requests were coming) was dissolved and banned in 1963, with the excuse of being a threat to France's integrity.

Bribed Sovereignty and Toxic Promises

It is in this configuration of events that military presence, acting as a means and symbol for French colonial politics in French Polynesia, and sovereignty claims started to intersect: the stronghold was maintained in the Pacific and especially in French Polynesia at the end of the 1950s and during the 1960s after the independence of French Indochina in 1954 and Algeria in 1963. Such an anachronistic decision, while the majority of other overseas territories and colonies were gaining independence, was supposedly justified, as hypothesized by French historian Jean-Marc Regnault (2003), by the need for a testing ground for French nuclear bombs, much wanted by De Gaulle's government, and needed to demonstrate its ongoing international power and influence over competing nations in the aftermath of WWII. It is during this period that military presence became conspicuous and started to take its contemporary shape. Yet, at the end of the 1950s, the French nuclear testing program in the Pacific was still in its embryonic stage, as French Polynesia was lacking the basic infrastructures needed to develop such an industry. While the infrastructures were being built in Tahiti, for instance, the airport in Faʻaʻā at the end of the 1950s, France was temporarily testing its nuclear weapons in the Algerian desert, notwithstanding the ongoing revolt and the threat of independence[56]. According to French historian Jean-Marc Regnault (2003), France was well aware of the possibility of losing its North African colony and therefore its testing ground. This is why the French army was already conducting reconnaissance missions in the Pacific Ocean in order to identify a new ground zero. It is therefore very likely that the French government already had identified a new testing ground before the first bomb exploded in the Sahara in 1960 so that France could have a new laboratory ready to be used, in counter-trend with regard to other nations (Regnault 2003)[57]. In fact, as soon as 1958, just as France was getting ready to start its nuclear testing in the desert, the United States and the Soviet Union, which had already been testing their

[56] The Algerian revolution erupted in 1954 and ended in 1962 with the signing of the Evian Agreement. Algeria became an independent state the following year, in 1963. France retained permission to conduct nuclear testing in the Algerian desert until 1966.

[57] The recent storm raging the French academic debate over the genealogy of the nuclear adventure in the Pacific is worth recalling to give an account of the different 'hypotheses' and approaches to the issue. The recently published book 'Des bombes en Polynésie', edited by historians Renaud Meltz and Alexis Vrignon (2023) advanced the hypothesis that nuclear testing became a reality for French Polynesia only in 1962, unsettling in this way the earlier hypothesis proposed in 2003 by historian Jean-Marc Regnault. According to the latter, the decision to build the airport in Faʻaʻā was already part of the nuclearization plan for French Polynesia. The main implication for both hypotheses lies in the temporal lapse between the secret decision made at the governmental level and the announcement made to the Polynesian population, and consequently in the gravity of the government misconduct. S. Tcherkézoff, personal communication, June 10th, 2023.

own devices for years, proceeded to sign a treaty suspending atmospheric nuclear testing[58]. The Algerian desert provided France with underground tunnels to test its nuclear bombs in a less visible, and therefore supposedly less dangerous way if international opinion would pressure the French government. The first French nuclear bomb exploded at Reggane in the Sahara Desert in 1960, during the Algerian War. The first four tests took place one after another between 1960 and 1961, even though the neighboring African countries were protesting against the explosions, demanding the atmospheric tests be stopped. Thirteen bombs were then detonated in underground tunnels between November 7, 1961, and February 16, 1966 (Fraise 2023).

The atolls of Moruroa and Fangataufa, in the Tuamotu archipelago, were legally acquired by the French government in 1964 with the deadly purpose of becoming the new testing grounds, even though the army was already building the necessary facilities in 1963[59]. As there was awareness on the part of the French government that the announcement of a new nuclear testing campaign in the Pacific would create fear and resentment among the local populations, eventually leading to the exacerbation of autonomist movements, the French government put in place a media campaign to dissuade any dissent. The importance of the infrastructural development brought by the nuclear program, as well as the creation of new jobs and related economic prosperity were strongly highlighted and the military presence, through the massive arrival of French soldiers, became the symbol of this new economic welfare and increase in local commerce created by the *Centre d'Éxperimentation du Pacifique* (CEP) induced activities.

The nuclear industry, presented by French President De Gaulle as a gift to the Polynesian people, revealed itself to be a poisoned legacy that encroached into a complex ambivalence: the modern development of Tahiti was completely financed by the nuclear testing program which created a sudden wealth for many Polynesian families employed by the CEP or its contractors while engendering a hard-to-fight dependency. According to the analysis presented by Stewart Firth and Karin von Strokirch (1997), such dependency and reliance on French money contributed to the absence of a strong pro-independence movement, and the growth of patronage practices among the local political class, while the military presence was never really considered a problem per se.

Polynesian Political Parties and their Anti-Nuclear Quest for Autonomy

Polynesian political leaders have had fluctuating attitudes toward the nuclear program: initially, all local political parties protested against the installation of the CEP, deemed to be a serious threat to public health, the environment, and society. Yet, enticed by the generous French funding and especially once the testing went underground in the 1970s, parties closer to De Gaulle's politics, such

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[58] The United States tested nuclear weapons in the Marshall Islands from 1946 to 1958. After a short halt, they further tested weapons at Johnston Atoll and Christmas Island in 1962. The United Kingdom also tested nuclear weapons in the Pacific, particularly in the Australian desert between 1952 and 1957, and until 1963 (Firth 1987; Maclellan 2017). At the same time, the Soviet Union was testing its nuclear weapons in the Kazakh steppe from 1949 to 1989 (Stawkowski 2016).

[59] The Standing Committee of the Territorial Assembly decided to cede the two atolls to the French state free of charge so that it could carry out its nuclear activities there. The resolution also specified that if activities ceased, the two atolls would be returned to the Territory of French Polynesia without compensation (Journal Officiel de la Polynésie Française, 1964). This has not yet happened.

as Tahoeraa Huira'atira and Te Tiarama, aligned themselves with the republican rhetoric of infrastructural development for the benefit of the territory (Von Strokirch 1991).

Anti-nuclear campaigns and early opposition to the nuclear testing came from those parties advocating for a wider autonomy for the territory, including John Teariki's Here Ai'a, a party founded in 1965 and which collected the legacy left by Pouvanaa a Oopa and his party, the RDPT. Here Ai'a denounced the dangerous nature of the tests and advocated for at-risk populations on islands considered to be too close to ground zero. Another anti-nuclear party was founded by Francis Sanford in 1965, the E'a Api. Schoolteacher, then civil servant in the Tuamotu-Gambier archipelago during the 1940s, Sanford was a supporter of the Free France committee during WWII. During the same period, he was also the territory's delegate in charge of negotiating with the U.S. troops stationed in Bora-Bora. After serving in the governor's office from 1959 to 1964, Sanford was elected mayor of Fa'a'ā in 1965, then deputy at the national assembly in 1967. Initially opposed to John Teariki's autonomist movement, Sanford soon became an advocate for autonomy and the leader of the movement (Regnault 2004).

Both the Here A'ia and the E'a Api called for a referendum to assess the popular will regarding the nuclear campaign but without any concrete results. Indeed, throughout the whole period of the nuclear tests, the French government claimed that the explosions were safe and did not affect either the environment or the health of the Polynesian people[60]. In 1968, Pouvanaa a Oopa was graced by French President De Gaulle and was able to return to French Polynesia, where he continued to advocate to halt the nuclear testing. At the time, the anti-nuclear campaign was gaining consensus and in 1971 Pouvanaa was elected Senator in the French Senate, where he represented the Polynesian territory. The following year he was elected as President of the local Assembly. Notwithstanding this early anti-nuclear engagement, the presence of the nuclear industry and therefore of the army meant no further liberties for the local government during the 1960s and until the end of the 1970s. On the contrary, in 1971 and 1972, a new jurisdiction was put in place and Polynesian districts were replaced by town councils directly linked to the President of the Republic, as in the French metropolitan system, hindering in this way the already restricted power of local institutions. Once again, it was not the military presence per se that was hindering local autonomy or the equal treatment of overseas French citizens, but the goal the army was defending and pursuing at the time, i.e. the nuclear testing program.

In part due to the circulation of reports concerning the radiological consequences coming from the Marshall Islands and the continuing international anti-nuclear campaigns, especially in New Zealand and South America, anti-nuclear protests reached a peak in the 1970s (Firth, Von Strokirch 1997). Due to intense international pressure and local protests, newly elected French President Giscard d'Estaing decided to end atmospheric testing and switch to underground testing in 1974, not before conducting a final atmospheric testing campaign that same year. Relying on unpredictable data such as wind direction, Operation Centaure resulted in the contamination, kept hidden for years, of the entire population of Tahiti. In fact, the detonation did not reach the height hoped for and predicted by preliminary calculations, and the toxic cloud was therefore pushed in unexpected directions by winds blowing at different speeds and directions (Philippe, Statius 2021).

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[60] Not only this assertion was false and contradicted by a recently published study (Philippe, Statius 2021), among many, but the French government still refuses to apologize for the disruption caused by the 193 bombs detonated in French Polynesia.

The following year and fulfilling a general politics of State withdrawal from what was considered nations' duties, President Giscard d'Estaing began negotiations for a new autonomy statute covering the Polynesian territory. The negotiations lasted two years and were marked by tense moments, including a ten-month occupation of the assembly hall by pro-autonomy activists, in 1976. Since pro-autonomy claims were strongly tied to anti-nuclear vindications, only a narrow autonomy statute was conceded to French Polynesia in 1977 and after many negotiations. The new statute, locally called *autonomie de gestion*, granted a territorial government council (similar to the one granted in 1957 with the *loi Defferre*) led by an elected vice-president (the president being a French-appointed functionary). The Governor was substituted by a high commissioner, the official head of the overseas territory, and the territorial government became then responsible for all competencies not explicitly attributed to the French government.

Protesting against the Bomb

Peaceful protests were continually organized since the 1970s, a period in which hunger strikes and marches along Tahiti's main road were organized by some of the most influential Polynesian cultural and political figures, among them Rai Chaze and Unutea Hirschon. During our conversations, both of them recalled the many events and protests they contributed to organizing against the atomic bomb and French politics in the Pacific[61].

Rai Chaze is a Māʻohi writer, among the founders of Littéramāʻohi, a literary review whose goal is to connect and let know the variety of Māʻohi literary production. She is also a long-time pro-independence supporter and was an anti-nuclear militant in the 70s, a decade that she would observe from the other side of the Pacific Rim, having moved to California for ten years. In our conversations, it became clear that, as for many Māʻohi families, her's too was deeply influenced by the toxic French presence. The disease spread tentacularly in her family and spared her because she wasn't living in French Polynesia during that decade: her grandmother suffered from breast cancer; her mother died because of thyroid cancer; her sister would develop breast cancer in 2010 and will die of the same disease five years after, in 2015, only six months after her beloved husband perished because of four different types of cancer. He was one of the many workers who served the nuclear industry even before it was implanted in French Polynesia, in the Algerian desert. She would tell me that « all my books are acts of resistance », adding that her generation's task is to pass the knowledge to younger generations, so as not to forget the territory's local history (see Maurer 2018 for an insight of Rai's works). When she was a child she witnessed De Gaulle's visit in 1956, which many would later come to interpret as revealing given the installation of the CEP a few years later in 1963 (Regnault 1997)[62]. Indeed, wearing red clothes, she was one of the three children (the others in white and blue outfits) who gifted the reproduction of a local canoe to the president. As she recalled, everyone from the neighborhood was there, in Pirae, to testify about this important event. Everyone

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[61] Rai Chaze was interviewed on September 27 and October 14, 2021; Unutea Hirschon was interviewed on September 29 and October 5, 2021 at her home in Puna'auia.

[62] As highlighted by S. Tcherkézoff (personal communication, June 10th, 2023), while De Gaulle's speech in 1956 alluded to the beginning of the nuclear era stressing the strategic importance of French Polynesia, it has yet to be proven that he was referring to an early will of implementing a nuclear testing center in French Polynesia. It seems more likely that he was referring to the 'isolation' of the Polynesian islands as a strategic asset to serve France as an atomic shelter.

except her grandmother, one of the very few Tahitian women who ever participated in the French resistance during WWII. Rai described to me a very different Tahiti from the one I came to encounter in 2021-2022.

Changes came in waves, as she recalled, starting from the 60s and the implant of the CEP: offices were opened in Papeete and the surrounding small towns, such as Pirae and Arue, cars started to be common features in Polynesian lifestyle, and abundance was palpable in every sector. At the same time, she recalled an exodus of Pau'motu, people from the Tuamotu Islands, moving to Tahiti hoping to get a salaried job. While living in the Fautaua Valley with her grandparents, she witnessed the arrival of distant relatives from the Tuamotu asking for hospitality. They never moved back to their native islands, as she bitterly recalled, participating in Tahiti's massive urbanization and overpopulation that lasts to these days. Rai's generation was gathering around Henri Hiro, a Polynesian intellectual and one of the most influential cultural figures in contemporary French Polynesia, to protest against the French nuclear testing program in Moruroa and Fangataufa.

The problem of such actions lay in the visibility they were lacking, as explained to me by Unutea Hirschon, a prominent anti-nuclear activist taking part in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Movement. She is also a pro-independence politician and cultural promoter, elected at the Territorial Assembly from 2001 to 2013. At the time, local newspapers had little freedom of expression being mostly pro-French, and the only means of communication available to the activists at the time was Radio Te Reo o Tefana, the openly independentist radio channel that still broadcasts (only in reo Tahiti) today[63]. In the 70s, protesters' primary goal was to first and foremost reach the local population, which was very often unaware of what was going on, partly because so many families had been bribed to participate in the nuclear industry. As Rai Chaze recalled, such peaceful protests were not explicitly pro-independence, and that was mostly why they gained the support of international environmental organizations such as Greenpeace.

From Pro-Autonomy to Pro-Independence Claims and back

The autonomy statute acquired in 1977 and the halt to atmospheric tests in favor of the underground ones resulted in a slowdown in anti-nuclear protests, which quickly lost international media interest for a while. Yet, many pro-independence local parties were founded towards the end of the same decade to express dissatisfaction with the restricted autonomy conceded to the territory. Among them, Charlie Ching's Te Ta'ata Tahiti Tiama, Jacques Drollet's Ia Mana Te Nunaa, and Oscar Temaru's Mouvement de Liberation de la Polynésie (MLP) (Regnault 2004; Von Strokirch 1991). All of them advocated for independence although with a different emphasis: other than to halt nuclear testing, they also wanted to defend local culture and demand ancestral land back. Te Ta'ata Tahiti Tiama was the most extremist of the three and was determined to acquire unconditional independence through armed struggle; Ia Mana Te Nunaa and the MLP were

[63] Radio Tefana has recently been at the center of the stage as Oscar Temaru, mayor of Fa'a'ā and pro-independence leader, has been accused of using public funds to finance the radio station, promoting in this way pro-independence propaganda. The accusations have been defined by the radio station's lawyer, Stanley Cross, as a « political assassination [...] in the name of State policy [raison d'État] [...] to hinder our country, Mā'ohi Nui, from getting full sovereignty ». (TNTV 2023). All defendants were acquitted on May 24th, 2023.

instead democratic and peaceful groups, concerned about the economic effects and social repercussions brought by the CEP, as well as on the environmental impact and health of Polynesian workers and inhabitants (Von Strokirch 1991).

On the Polynesian political stage, until the end of the 1970s local political movements were demarcated by their advocacy for autonomy, and therefore more governmental liberties, or their loyalty to the French Republic. Even though it is hard to define autonomy and independence, as both of them are relational concepts and often have fuzzy borders at least in French Polynesia, between the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, the local political agenda started to polarize around pro-autonomy and pro-independence requests (see Regnault 2004). A fluctuation in national politics influencing the links between the local government and the national one was in act in the 1980s, during which period a disengagement of France was observable: President Mitterrand–who ruled from 1981 to 1995–was an advocate of a more decentralized model for the Republic and this meant the transfer of numerous competencies and decisional powers to territorial entities, resulting in more negotiations for French Polynesia's autonomy were possible. This shift in national politics was also coincidental with the first efforts leading to an increase in European integrity, meaning that national decisional power was being transferred not only to territorial collectivities within the French Republic but also to supranational entities. In 1982, the decentralizing reform had a paradoxical backlash in French Polynesia. In fact, all Polynesian districts became municipalities (*communes*), i.e. republican entities answering to state authority (the High Commissioner in French Polynesia) and not to the local government, hindering in this way autonomist ambitions.

With the political ascendency of Gaston Flosse, vice-president of the local government council from 1982 to 1984, the situation changed. Loyal to the Republic and in favor of ever-increasing favors and wealth coming from the French government and nuclear testing program, Flosse started to promote local autonomy in partnership with France and became the leader of the autonomist party Tahoeraa Huira'atira[64], representing an illustrative example of those negotiating skills already mentioned in Chapter 1. After negotiating the territory's position and privileges regarding the metropole for a long time, Flosse was able to obtain a formal autonomy statute for French Polynesia in 1984, once the nuclear testing program, which he energetically supported, was deeply established on the territory and liberties acquired through the autonomy statute could not threaten the nuclear program in any way. The autonomy statute, locally referred to as « internal autonomy », included extended competencies for the territory, and the recognition of local Indigenous political and cultural identity through the use of a flag, national anthem, and other symbols. The local assembly was led by an elected politician holding the very symbolic title of « president » and became officially separated by the French State, which in turn was represented by a High Commissioner (Mrgudovic 2012; Gonschor 2013).

In the same period, the independentist movement MLP was officially reorganized as a political party and was renamed Tavini Huira'atira in 1982. The party started to gain momentum after its leader Oscar Temaru was elected as mayor of Fa'a'ā in 1983 and would harshly oppose the corrupted and

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64 Tahoeraa Huira'atira was founded in 1977 by Gaston Flosse after many experiments in the pro-Gaullist field. Gaston Flosse became leader of the autonomist party in 1980 and then president of the local government from 1984 until 1987, then again from 1991 until 2004. After the Constitutional reform of 2004, he was elected President of the Territorial Assembly until 2005, for a short period in 2008, and in 2013-2014 before being banned from public office in 2014 (Regnault 2020).

autocratic system put in place by Gaston Flosse, negotiating ever-expanding liberties and hindering in this way the capacity of the local government and population to develop a self-sustained way of life (Al Wardi 2008). Considering the nuclear testing program as the continuation of the French colonization of the territory, the pro-independence Tavini Huira'atira believed the development of a Māʻohi nation was to be built through ecological values, the return to the Polynesian ancestral culture in harmony with nature, and the stewardship of nature's bounty (Regnault 2004).

Explicit political support against the French nuclear testing would come from the FLNKS, the Kanak pro-independence party, as well as from all those countries participating at the South Pacific Forum that in 1985 signed the Rarotonga Treaty, banning all nuclear weapons from the region. The emergent Polynesian intellectual class was demanding a halt to nuclear testing to prevent the environment so important for Polynesian cosmology and culture. During those years, Polynesian vindications resolved around what has later been called *renouveau culturel*, a cultural renaissance to valorize the Polynesian language and culture, leaving aside the importance of the environmental issue and most importantly political independence from France, defined by Unutea Hirschon as « non [pas] comme rupture mais comme continuation de la relation française », i.e. not an anti-French rupture but rather as freedom of association with other partners than France. Politicians and sympathizers siding with the pro-independence party, Tavini Huira'atira, contributed in a certain way to develop a new sense of belonging, focusing on the importance of a Māʻohi identity, tradition, people, and nation. Yet, after the initial vindications of the 1970s and 1980s, strongly advocating for immediate independence, in the mid-1990s Tavini would nuance its assertions, paradoxically resembling autonomist vindications.

Similar claims for the recognition of native cultures and traditions were in fact strongly asserted by Gaston Flosse himself, who contributed, through continuous negotiations, to the establishment of cultural symbols sanctioned by the autonomy statute accorded progressively since 1984. The search for an official acknowledgment of Māʻohi culture and traditions, some aspects of which were long discredited before the 1980s (see also Saura 2009), often overshadowed political vindications, such as those concerning ancestral land and the land tenure system. Flosse would continue to negotiate further autonomy statutes in 1996 and 2004 (with further amendments in 2007 and 2011). The acquisition of these statutes meant a formal disengagement of the Republic, through the numerous competencies given to the local government, but also showed the negotiating skills developed by Polynesian politicians, defined by many scholars as a new form of sovereign relationship (Mrgudovic 2012; Favole 2021). If these liberties are in no way considered a form of internal sovereignty by the indivisible and unitary French State, the same cannot be said on the Polynesian side. The ample concessions made to the local government from 1984 on are in fact symbols of a certain emancipation in the eyes of local politicians.

The peak of such nominal disengagement, or in other words the shifting presence of the French Republic and evolving relations with the Polynesian government can be observed between the mid-1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, motivated by a convergence of different situations.

Sudden Eruptions and the Struggle for Sovereignty

> We couldn't sleep, the gas impeded us to sleep [...] we were obliged to go up the hill [...] it is called *Cité de l'Air*. We had to go up there to avoid smelling the gas [...] soldiers had dropped their tear gas bombs everywhere in the neighborhood and in our yard [...] we lived next to the airport, right in front of it, so... yes, we heard everything, we smelled the gas, the explosions and everything [...] from our house we could see the CRS [...] I could see the population going against the CRS and it was pretty impressive [...] then, at night, I know that the airport was set on fire [...] it was shocking to see the airport on fire, like that. That period for me was really shocking... the noise, the explosions [...] we couldn't go back to school [...] when you're seven you tell yourself something really bad is going on[65].

Keali was seven years old on September 6, 1995, and little aware of what was happening around her. She only knew it was something serious, as she told me recalling the events of that Wednesday. It was indeed a significant episode, immortalized by well-detailed and widespread media coverage, showing the world what was happening in Tahiti.

A few months earlier, in May 1995, and ending a three-year moratorium on nuclear testing decided by former French president François Mitterrand in 1992, the newly elected president Jacques Chirac announced his will to resume the nuclear testing program before the end of the year. The first detonation was blasted, unannounced, on September 5, 1995. On September 6, it all began with an act of insubordination pursued by some women who decided to sit down on the tarmac, at Fa'a'ā international airport[66]. They aimed to prevent the departure of a flight bound for Paris, or more specifically to hamper a special passenger to leave the island: rumors vociferated that Gaston Flosse, president of the local government and long-time supporter of French nuclear testing, was headed to metropolitan France, right when the local situation was threatening of degenerating given the resumption of nuclear testing. Rushing in support of the peaceful sit-in protest organized by the courageous women, some members of the local union, A Tia I Mua, rushed to the airport. The uprising which suddenly took place right after was spontaneous, not planned ahead, and yet its seed had been planted years earlier and remained dormant until that year. That Wednesday, violence escalated because of the perceived threat felt by protesters: soldiers belonging to the *Compagnie Républicaine de Sécurité* (CRS), i.e. the French police riot corps which Keali would later see fighting against the population, were advancing on the tarmac to clear the runway using tear gas. The thirty or so women seated on the airstrips stubbornly refused to move and indeed, as in a catch-all game, moved to the other side of the runway to not be caught. The airport was under renovation at the time and provided countless improvised weapons, such as stones and rubble, which were used by the

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[65] « On dormait plus, le gaz nous empêchait de dormir [...] on a été obligés de remonter un peu plus haut sur la colline [...] ça s'appelle la Cité de l'Air. On a dû monter jusque la haut pour éviter de trop sentir le gaz [...] les soldats avaient lancé leurs bombes lacrymogènes un peu partout dans les alentours et dans notre jardin [...] on se situait à coté de l'aéroport, juste en face, donc... oui, on entendait tout, on sentait le gaz, les explosions et tout. [...] De chez nous on pouvait voir la troupe de CRS [...] je pouvais voir la population contre les CRS et c'était assez impressionnant, quand même [...] après, dans la soirée, je sais que l'aéroport a prit feu [...] c'était impressionnant de voir l'aéroport prendre feu, comme ça. Cette époque pour moi était vraiment impressionnante... les bruits, les explosions [...] on pouvait plus retourner à l'école... [...] à 7 ans on se dit il y a quelque chose de grave, quand même, qui se passe ». Keali was interviewed online on August 22, 2021, during a territorial lockdown in Tahiti.

[66] When not specifically referenced, this account is a reconstruction based on conversations I had with Unutea Hirschon on September 29, 2021, and October 5, 2021 at her home in Punaauia.

population that gradually flocked to the site from nearby neighborhoods. The situation escalated quickly: after the first person threw a stone against the glass of the airport's main structure, the others followed soon after. Tahitians were demonstrating their intolerance regarding nuclear testing and the French disregard towards them.

The violent images of an angry Tahiti went around the world thanks to the international press that flocked to the island to testify about the resumption of the tests (Kahn 2011; von Strokirch 1997). The pro-French press at the time claimed that the protesters had turned the city into a real hell, scaring honeymooners away, while forgetting that actual hell was being reproduced over and over by the national government in Moruroa and Fangataufa.

Local uprisings in Tahiti seem to follow a fluctuating trajectory, the result of a history of sudden and emergent eruptions rather than linear events (Stoler 2016; Brown W. 2001), exacerbated by the corrupted system put in place by long-time President Gaston Flosse and the resumption of nuclear tests[67]. In fact, while nuclear tests first started in 1966, a riot of comparable magnitude did not take place until 1995, by which time the tests were drawing to a close. That same year, after the presidential announcement, many anti-nuclear demonstrations were organized and a *village de la paix* (peace village) was set up in Tarahoi, in front of the local assembly headquarters. On June 29 (a very symbolic day, as was explained in Chapter 1) 15.000 to 20.000 people were deemed to flock to the streets to demand a referendum on nuclear testing. A blockade was set up to block access to the main road which lasted until July 2, another symbolic day marking the 29th anniversary of the first detonation in Moruroa, finally leading to the September riots (Kahn 2000). As will be broadly discussed in the next chapter, in February 1996 French President Jacques Chirac decided to end nuclear testing in the Pacific, therefore marking the formal and partial disengagement of the French army from the territory. Once the nuclear testings were over, military facilities in the Tuamotu and Gambier Islands were set to be dismantled. The restitution of many military land and infrastructures, as well as the disengagement of the army, represented a major economic crisis, the Polynesian economy being strongly influenced by the nuclear industry and the military presence.

Constitutional Reconfiguration and local Desires for Change

At the turn of the century, and achieving the decentralization momentum that started years earlier within the French Republic, a constitutional reform was studied and then promulgated in 2003. This reform comprised the modification of Article 74 of the French Constitution, ruling over the status of overseas dependencies, and paving the way for the new autonomy statute adopted in French Polynesia the year after. The latter accorded ample powers to the Territorial Assembly of French Polynesia, which was finally allowed to rule over the majority of the political and economic life of the territory–except for some *compétences régaliennes*[68]–through the promulgation of *Lois du Pays* (local laws). The same statute stated that French Polynesia was considered a *Pays d'outremer*, and not a territory anymore and that the president of the local government had the title of President of the *Pays*/country, playing on the ambiguity of this term (Mrgudovic 2012; Gonschor 2013). The organic

[67] Previous riots took place in Papeete in October 1987. While striking dockers and French riot police were confronting in Motu Uta, downtown Papeete was damaged by protesters (Von Strokirch 1991).

[68] Royal competencies concern justice, defense, law and order, and international relations.

law of 2004[69] granting the new autonomy statute to French Polynesia also modified the electoral system, triggering a perpetual political instability that became the norm in the territorial political life (Clinchamps 2010; Al Wardi 2009). Designed to maintain the pro-independence party underrepresented, the new electoral system for which Gaston Flosse strongly lobbied at the French Senate, was based on a single round of proportional voting, with a bonus of one-third of the seats allocated to the winning list. Soon after, the new law unpredictably and involuntarily backfired Flosse and led Oscar Temaru to the presidency in May 2004 (Mrgudovic 2012; Regnault 2004).

This period, locally referred to as *taui* (lit. change), meant a turning point in the local political life, bringing the pro-independence cause to the front of sovereign vindications. Yet, Temaru, governing with the majority of a large coalition, wisely decided to momentarily put aside the independentist vindication, to better focus on social injustices and on how to change the system put in place by his predecessor. The election of pro-independence leader Temaru resonated in mainland France as the new local government wasn't aligned with Chirac's presidency. Moreover, the French government was strongly supporting Gaston Flosse and forcefully influenced local politics, contributing to the overthrow of the Temaru government. After only four months of office, one of the coalition deputies decided to impeach Temaru who suddenly lost the already precarious majority opening an era of lasting political instability (Al Wardi 2009). Such interventions in local politics are quite recurrent, as demonstrated by more contemporary events (see also Mrgudovic 2012; Gonschor 2013). Notwithstanding the turning point represented by the 2004 elections, the particular way of 'making' politics in French Polynesia didn't substantially change and it still seems to be dependent on socially accepted clientelism and the high mobility of its politicians, what political scientist Sémir Al Wardi has defined 'political nomadism' (Al Wardi 2008, 2009). For instance, after Gaston Tong Sang was elected president of French Polynesia at the end of 2006, Gaston Flosse and Oscar Temaru secretly met to discuss a possible alliance between them (Al Wardi 2009). When Tong Sang was impeached and Temaru re-elected in 2007, French overseas Minister intervened to render no-confidence motions harder to push forward. Moreover, the electoral system was further reformed in 2011, assigning a third of the assembly seats as a bonus to the party that comes out first in the elections.

Notwithstanding the ample powers conceded to the local assembly/government, among which the competence to rule over education, the health system, and land and sea management, the Polynesian economy is still highly dependent on French investments and funds, especially in the aftermath of the nuclear testing program and the dependency that followed (Regnault 2010). Through an ethnographical example, the next paragraph will demonstrate how the contemporary political situation can be read in the light of colonial power relations that still define political facts in modern-day Tahiti.

Granting and resigning Sovereign Competencies during the Covid-19 Pandemic

The functioning of political and administrative relations and responsibilities was on the daily agenda during the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic that hit French Polynesia at the end of

[69] Loi organique n° 2004-192 du 27 février 2004, « portant statut d'autonomie de la Polynésie française », *JORF*, 2 mars 2004, p. 4183. See also Clinchamps 2010.

August 2021[70]. During such a period, coinciding with the first months of my fieldwork, the Polynesian government was measured to an unprecedented health crisis. The competence to rule over health issues was acquired under the 2004 autonomy statute and further implemented with the financial support of the central government under the 2016-2025 Strategic Health Plan (Gouvernement de la Polynésie française 2016). In August 2021, the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres stated the responsibilities of the administering powers towards their dependencies, prompting them to provide the distribution of vaccines to overseas territories. Following soon after, the Polynesian Ministry of Health and the pro-autonomist government led by Édouard Fritch decided to ask for help and closely collaborated with the French government on the pandemic management, temporarily abdicating its competence over health issues.

At the time, the debate was turning around the jurisdiction over population control, one of those competencies retained by the French government that in some ways can, and indeed did, hinder local laws and dispositions over public health and security. For instance, I traveled to Tahiti for the first time on June 9, 2021, on which day the border restrictions imposed by the French government were being lifted, with the approval of the local government, worried about the tourism industry and the negative impact the pandemic and the closure of the borders had on it. It is worth noting that the local government had assumed different positions concerning the closure of the borders: if at first, during the first wave of infections in March 2020, the restricted international connections meant no major contagions in French Polynesia, resulting in a low death rate; the opening of the borders, advocated for by the local government to improve the tourism industry amid a global crisis, resulted in the fast spread of the virus causing a deadly second wave that brought to the collapse of the local health system and the intervention of the central government. Doctors and nurses were sent to reinforce and relieve the local medical personnel, and eventually, the French government voted a discussed law to impose vaccination on the entirety of the French population.

Having recently arrived in Tahiti, I found it interesting to analyze the social and political situation unfolding around the Covid-19 pandemic in a historically scarred landscape. In fact, other than just bringing a continuous influx of money and commodities to Tahiti, the nuclear era left behind a material and metaphorical radioactive wake that can still be found today. In this context, the military presence on the territory is once again partially linked to such a discourse, and only when acting as a proxy for the French government. Thirty years of nuclear testing meant the premature death of many Polynesians, due to radiation exposure and consequent cancer; but it also meant State lies that still today have a hard time disappearing and resulted in a deep distrust regarding French institutions. Suffice it to say that, during his last presidential visit, in July 2021, President Emmanuel Macron refused to officially apologize for the many inconveniences that the nuclear testing program brought to Polynesian families and lives. This stodgy past is hard to forget, even more so during the Covid-19 pandemic. Following French anthropologist Didier Fassin (2007), I believe that history is inscribed in bodies and sits in places. Holding together this *longue durée* helps us understand what is happening today, as well as people's reactions and positions facing the new pandemic threat, while at the same time positioning such elements in a broader context. The Covid-19 pandemic and the wide vaccination campaign that followed are good examples to understand how Franco-Polynesian relationships work and how the local population in French

[70] At the peak of the crisis, in August 2021, there were more than 1000 new cases/24h, on a population of 279 550 inhabitants (ISPF 2021).

Polynesia makes sense of the contemporary situation on the premise of colonial power relations, using contemporary episodes as proxies to protest the territory's underlying political situation.
In July 2021, I was attending a local march organized every year to commemorate the first detonation in Moruroa, on July 2, 1966. During the march, organized jointly by the pro-independence party Tavini Huira'atira, the *Église Protestante Māòhi* (EPM), and the associations Moruroa e Tatou and 193[71], I was given a flyer that at first struck me (Fig. 2.1). Directly linking nuclear testing and the contemporary Covid-19 pandemic, the flyer states: « If even the first vaccines contain toxic products, do you think that a brand new vaccine, anti-Covid-19, will be *clean*, as the bomb should have been *clean*? »[72]. Such flyer, distributed by the *Collectif des Femmes de Polynésie* and written both in French and reo Tahiti, further interrogates the reader on the efficacy of the new Covid-19 vaccines and their origins, prying on the *clean bomb* rhetoric used at the time of the testing by the French government to minimize the effects and consequences of the atomic bomb. The direct link made between the bomb and Covid-19 passes through politics. Paraphrasing the above-mentioned questions, one could read: « if the French government lied to us for 30 years, telling us that the nuclear bomb was necessary and indeed harmless, revealing itself as deadly for people and the environment, how are we supposed to trust that same institution that today is telling us that the vaccine is necessary and harmless, if not lifesaving? ».

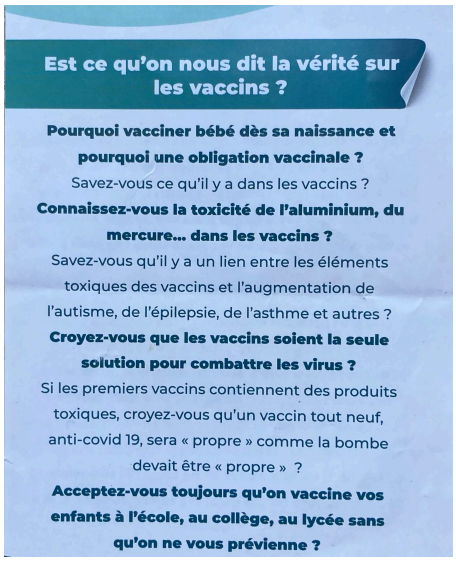

Fig. 2.1
Flyer given to me during the march on July 2, 2021[73].
© Claudia Ledderucci

If even the first vaccines contain toxic products, do you think that a brand new vaccine, anti-Covid-19, will be 'clean', as the bomb should have been 'clean'? »

[71] Moruroa e Tatou, which means Moruroa and Us, is an association linked to the Māòhi Protestant Church and gathers ex-workers in the nuclear industry. The Association 193 aims at helping the nuclear victims to file documents to get compensation from the French government.

[72] « Si les premiers vaccins contiennent des produits toxiques, croyez-vous qu'un vaccin tout neuf, anti-covid-19, sera *propre* comme la bombe devait être *propre* ? ».

[73] « Do they really tell us the truth about the vaccines? Why vaccinate your baby since their birthday and why a mandatory vaccine? Do you know what's in the vaccines? Do you know about the toxicity of aluminum, mercury... in the vaccines? Do you know that there's a link between the vaccines' toxic elements and the augmentation of autism, epilepsy, asthma, and others? Do you think that vaccines are the only solution to fight the virus? *If even the first vaccines contain toxic products, do you think that a brand new vaccine, anti-Covid-19, will be 'clean', as the bomb should have been 'clean'?* Do you still accept that your children are vaccinated in school, middle school, and high school without preventing you? »

What might have initially seemed a fanatically religious leaflet or an anti-vax manifesto, started to gain meaning if read in the light of the recent colonial history of the territory. The flyer I just mentioned came with an additional pseudo-religious pamphlet that, referring to the Book of Apocalypse, contextualized the current situation (Fig. 2.2): « Apocalypse 13:17-18 already prevented us that a time will come when 'nobody could buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name, which is 666' »[74]. The biblical quote refers to the mandatory use of facial masks as Satan's mark, stating that « already without a mask you can't buy »[75] and are therefore excluded from social life. Adding to this biblical interpretation, the flyer continues in a science-fiction vein. The first paragraph of the pamphlet states: « Yes, the mRNA vaccine is not a vaccine but a genetic manipulation. [...] They want to transform you into a GMO human or a trans-human through the implant of microchips activated later by the 5G! »[76].

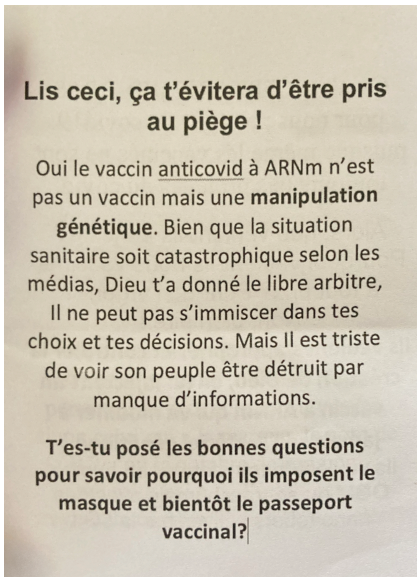

Fig. 2.2
Pamphlet given to me during the march on July 2, 2021[77].
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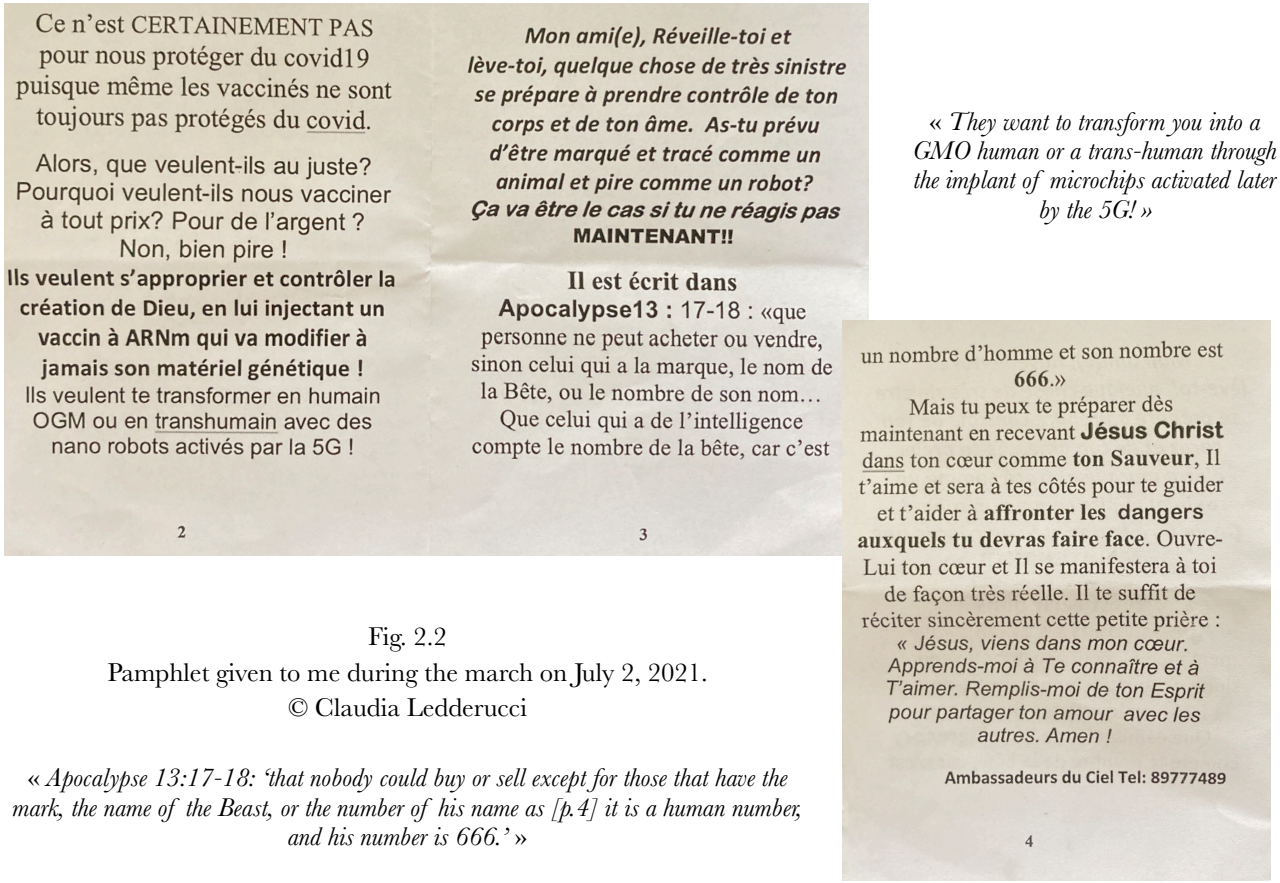
« *Yes, the mRNA anti-Covid vaccine is not a real vaccine but a genetic manipulation.* »

[74] « Apocalypse 13:17-18 nous a déjà prévenus que le temps arrivera où 'personne ne pourra acheter ou vendre, sinon celui qui a la marque, le nom de la Bête, ou le nombre de son nom et son nombre est 666' ».

[75] « Déjà sans masque tu ne peux pas acheter ».

[76] « Oui, le vaccin à ARN messager n'est pas un vaccin mais une manipulation génétique. [...] Ils veulent te transformer en humain OGM ou en transhumain avec des nano puces activées plus tard par la 5G! ».

[77] « Read this, you'll avoid to being caught in the trap! *Yes, the mRNA anti-Covid vaccine is not a real vaccine but a genetic manipulation*. Even if according to the media the health situation is catastrophic, God gave you free will, He cannot interfere with your choices and decisions. But He is sad to see his people being destroyed by a lack of information. Did you ask yourself good questions to understand why they impose us to wear a mask [and will impose] soon a vaccine passport? [p.2] It is CERTAINLY NOT to protect us from covid19 because even vaccinated people are not protected against covid. So what do they really want? Why do they wanna vaccinate us at all costs? For money? No, even worst! They want to claim ownership and control God's creation, injecting in them the mRNA vaccine that will modify their genetic material forever! *They want to transform you into a GMO human or a trans-human through the implant of microchips activated later by the 5G!* [p.3] My friend, awake and get up, something very sinister is getting ready to take control of your body and soul. Did you foresee being marked and traced as an animal, or worst as a robot? It's gonna be the case if you don't react NOW!! It is written in *Apocalypse 13:17-18: 'that nobody could buy or sell except for those that have the mark, the name of the Beast, or the number of his name as [p.4] it is a human number, and his number is 666.'* But you can get ready now receiving Jesus Christ in your heart as your Savior, He loves you and will be next to you to guide and help you overcome the dangers you will have to face. Open your heart to Him and He will appear to you in a very real way. You only have to sincerely recite this little prayer: Jesus, come to my heart. Teach me how to know You and love You. Fill me with your Spirit so I can share your love with others. Amen! »



« *They want to transform you into a GMO human or a trans-human through the implant of microchips activated later by the 5G!* »

Fig. 2.2
Pamphlet given to me during the march on July 2, 2021.
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« *Apocalypse 13:17-18: 'that nobody could buy or sell except for those that have the mark, the name of the Beast, or the number of his name as [p.4] it is a human number, and his number is 666.'* »

Even if not directly linked to nuclear history, such fears are, at least for the pamphlet's authors, well-founded and inscribed in a larger context of distrust regarding science as a discipline and the State. A clarification is perhaps in order: as everywhere else, skeptic and no-vax groups are very heterogeneous. I have encountered QAnon followers not believing in the Covid-19 pandemic because supposedly orchestrated by the Evil[78]; independent and self-taught (as they refer to themselves) religious extremists and millenarianists; hard-core no-vax, skeptical of science and especially distrustful of the speed with which the vaccine was developed; others, perhaps even vaccinated, who simply oppose mandatory vaccination or the green pass mechanism that precludes certain activities for anyone who refuses to be vaccinated[79]. Since my research does not focus on these groups, I have decided to only dwell on a few episodic examples linked to the pandemic, that if not carefully analyzed from this historical perspective, risk being unnoticed or worst, labeled as too radical or nonsensical. In the rest of the paragraph, I aim to make sense of three episodes: the presidential visit of Emmanuel Macron, the marriage of the country's vice-president, Tearii Alpha, and the affair of a local doctor who became a no-vax symbol.

[78] QAnon is an internet-based conspiracy movement started in 2017 whose members believe that the world is run by what they call the « deep state », an establishment composed of Satanic sex-trafficking pedophiles. In 2020, the QAnon movement has grown very powerful as a major genre of Trump's support and during the Covid-19 pandemic, its members played a central role in disseminating false information about the disease and subsequent vaccination campaigns (Morelock, Ziotti Narita 2022).

[79] The proposition of law regarding the obligation of vaccination for many workers had to be voted on October 23rd, 2021 but it was postponed to December 23rd and eventually never came into effect.

Emmanuel Macron's controversial Presidential Visit

French President Emmanuel Macron arrived in Tahiti on July 25, 2021. The first cases of the Delta variant were already confirmed in French Polynesia but the healthcare situation was under control and there were no excessive restrictions, at least not linked to the pandemic. Restrictions were ordered, on the other side, towards pro-independence and anti-nuclear demonstrators who were planning peaceful sit-ins at the airport and the hospital (the first stop of the presidential visit) to manifest their dissent concerning the president and his politics. For instance, the round table organized at the beginning of the same month to discuss how to better manage the consequences of the 193 nuclear bombs detonated in French Polynesia, was boycotted by Tavini Huira'atira in agreement with other associations (Temaru 2021).

Blaming the Covid-19 threat, the High Commissioner published a release stating: « the protests announced by the organization TAVINI HUIRAATIRA NO TE AO MAOHI - FLP [...] are forbidden »[80]. It was also specified that the presidential visit was subject to strict protocol to prevent the spreading of the epidemic. That day, writing in my notebook, I noted:

> Today, July 25, 2021, French president Emmanuel Macron arrived in Tahiti. Surely, he was expected by everyone, in different ways. The various associations, among them 193 as well as the pro-independence party, Tavini, organized a rich sit-in program during the presidential visit [...] today from 3 pm to 6 pm [at the airport]; [...] from 4 pm to 6 pm in Pirae, at the Taaone hospital parking lot (first stop of the visit). However, yesterday night the High Commission published a release hindering every kind of demonstration, canceling the authorizations that were already given for the sit-ins. For security reasons, as can be read. And to prevent the spreading of Covid-19, especially since the Delta variant landed in Tahiti. That's ironic. For security reasons. Every offender will be fined.

Indeed, on July 25, 2021, I joined the activists in front of the airport. To astutely avoid the restrictions, the gathering was taking place in a private property on the mountainside of the main street, overlooking the airport and the parking lot where the sit-in was deemed to initially take place. At first, the atmosphere was relaxed, the presidential plane haven't landed yet. All the participants were given a small sign to wear featuring a statute of liberty adorned with two words: liberty and sovereignty (Fig. 2.3). As time passed, activists were getting busy by unfolding banners on the side of the street and I decided to join those who were slowly gathering outside of the private property, aligning on the street to greet the presidential motorcade. The banners and flags were clearly visible, reporting many slogans: « Maʻohi People Freedom », « Maʻohi Lives Matter », « colonization is a crime against humanity »[81], and « the nuclear doesn't forget us » (Fig. 2.4, 2.5, 2.6)[82]. A few people

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[80] « Les manifestations déclarées par le collectif TAVINI HUIRAATIRA NO TE AO MAOHI - FLP [...] sont interdites » (Haut-Commissariat 2021). It is worth noting that in this press release the Tavini Huira'atira is indicated as a union or organization, and not as a political party.

[81] « La colonisation est un crime contre l'humanité ». This quote is stingingly used by pro-independence activists referring to a 2017 statement by Emmanuel Macron, at the time candidate for the French presidential elections, in which he admitted that the colonial enterprise in Algeria was a crime against humanity. Pro-independence activists argue that the same situation is affecting their lives, highlighting at the same time Macron's disavowal of the colonial situation in contemporary French Polynesia.

[82] « Le nucléaire ne nous oublie pas », alluding to the fact that the nuclear issue is easily bypassed and its victims forgotten, while radioactive consequences are still very present in their bodies.

were following the official Facebook direct broadcasted by the local tv channel to know when the presidential plane would land and consequently coordinate their actions. They wanted to be seen by the president and the presidential motorcade and to this end, they started to flock on the street, closely monitored by the numerous policemen hastened for the occasion. More and more policemen and riot corps arrived with the order of clearing the side road where we were peacefully standing (Fig. 2.7). After a few confrontations, the protesters were forced to stand way back from their initial position but they were nevertheless able to boo the motorcade and express their dissatisfaction. « Pourri! [...] Macron rentre chez toi! [...] Assassin, corrompu! ».

Fig. 2.3
Sign portraying the American Statue of Liberty reading 'liberty and sovereignty',
Fa'a'ā, July 25, 2021. © Claudia Ledderucci

Fig. 2.4
Banner reading « colonization is a crime against humanity ».
Protesters were quoting French president Macron, who affirmed in 2017 that French presence in Algeria was a crime.
Faʻaʻā, July 25, 2021. © Claudia Ledderucci

Fig. 2.5, 2.6 (next page)
To the left: banner portraying the crucifixion of a Polynesian-like Jesus. On the cross stands the French flag with the French Republic initials.

Next page: banners reading (from the left) 'Māʻohi people freedom', 'nuclear doesn't forget us', a quote attributed to French far-right politician, Marine Le Pen, 'France to French people' to which protesters have added 'Polynesian to Polynesians'

Faʻaʻā, July 25, 2021. © Claudia Ledderucci

Fig. 2.7 (below)
French gendarmes in a security cordon to prevent people from getting too close to the main street, Fa'a'ā, July 25, 2021. © Claudia Ledderucci

While the debut of the presidential visit remarked on the critical issues related to the virus and sought to reiterate the importance of the precautions taken to ensure that all meetings were conducted safely, the rest of the stay did not exactly shine in terms of compliance. Large presidential motorcade, social events, and mingling with the crowd marked its path. In Mo'orea, the president picked up children in the crowd, kissing them in goodwill, perhaps forgetting for a moment the global Covid-19 pandemic (Fig 2.8, 2.9).

Fig. 2.8
President Macron
mingling
with the crowd in
Mo'orea,
July 27, 2021.
© ABACAPRESS

Fig. 2.9
President Macron
blessing a baby in Mo'orea,
July 27, 2021
Screenshot from Polynésie la 1ère
live streaming[83]

[83] Available at https://www.facebook.com/polynesiela1ere/videos/542880000197556/ (1:37:57).

What is worth noting, besides the presidential visit, are the events that unfolded in the aftermath of the visit and that were noticed by many in Tahiti. Covid-19 second wave hit French Polynesia right after the president left the island, at the beginning of August. Social restrictions were bland at the beginning and governmental responses were slow in coping with the virus: gatherings were prohibited on August 5, then a first lockdown was enforced on Sundays on August 11. On August 17 the lockdown was enlarged to the whole weekend, from Friday night to Monday morning. Finally, a territorial lockdown was decided on August 20 with immediate effect on Tahiti until further notice. Infections rates skyrocketed to 1000 per day resulting in a collapse of the healthcare system. Many started then to blame the presidential visit, highlighting its usefulness and the risks associated with an already precarious situation. At the same time, others were asking the local institutions to close the borders, which remained open to welcome tourists on vacation.

What are such events telling us about the territorial history of French Polynesia? After reading that pamphlet at the demonstration on July 2, Macron's visit reminded me of an earlier presidential stopover. Charles de Gaulle visited French Polynesia on two occasions: the first time in 1956, before having been elected Prime Minister and then President, and before the official inauguration of the CEP. The second visit, as President, took place in 1966 and was organized to greet the Polynesian people and witness the nuclear venture in Moruroa. Both De Gaulle and Macron are deemed to have left behind a trail of death and lies but for different reasons. De Gaulle is accused and deemed accountable by anti-nuclear activists for the many deaths attributable to the nuclear testings, while Macron and his visit are deemed to have caused the spread of the virus. Once again, the link between the bomb and the virus is explicit, but the role of the army remains out of focus. Furthermore, it's worth noting that the first Covid-19 cases were brought to Tahiti in 2020 from metropolitan France: it seems that a group of gendarmes, unknowingly positive for Covid-19, infected other people during an overcrowded work dinner (in a period in which gatherings were supposed to be forbidden). This episode, and in general the management of the whole situation by the French government and the Polynesian one, considered by many as bribed by the French State, brought one of my interlocutors to state: « this is a French virus! Covid-19 is not a Polynesian problem. French people brought it here! ». The ingenuity of this sentence, especially considering the mortality rate of French Polynesia at the time, gains all its historical and political weight if analyzed from a *longue durée* perspective.

The Wedding of Contention

> Teva I Uta, Tahiti. Tearii Alpha's wedding still makes the argument. People attending the wedding ceremony, among them president Fritch, are supposed to not have respected sanitary restrictions put in place by the local government to contrast the Covid-19 pandemic.

On August 11, 2021, I was reporting such facts in my notebook, referring to Tearii Alpha's wedding on August 5. If the first example allowed us to sketch Franco-Polynesian relations, the second one projects us into local politics. Tearii Alpha, mayor of Teva I Uta and Polynesian vice-president, got married in grand style on August 5, the same day during which the first sanitary restrictions were announced. The ceremony, supposed to initially be a humble one with only a few guests, revealed to be a big party with hundreds of people invited, among them the local political elite. Precautions

taken at the organizational stage (no more than six guests per table, table service to avoid people's movement) proved ineffective or disregarded. Videos circulated the same day showing President Fritch playing the guitar, accompanied by the mayor of Papeete singing at the microphone, in a singing performance that was certainly not appreciated by voters (Fig. 2.10).

While French and local authorities imposed increasingly heavy restrictions and demanded huge sacrifices from the population (in economic but also social terms), those same elites could afford, unlike others, private parties and concerts without compliance with anti-Covid restrictions. On another note, I wrote: « people are rightly asking why this wedding was allowed while all other events were canceled. Fritch's resignation has also been called for, but he hasn't even thought about it ». Indeed, the president is increasingly unpopular and perceived as untrustworthy, false, and even manipulated by the French government. At the same time, as mentioned above, the borders have remained open since, according to the authorities, the problem is not so much the tourists coming to Polynesia, but Polynesians who stubbornly refuse to be vaccinated.

Fig. 2.10
President Edouard Fritch
playing the guitar during
Tearii Alpha's wedding reception,
Tahiti, August 5, 2021.
Screenshot from Tahiti Infos live streaming

On August 16, while quarantining after having got the infection myself, I wrote:

> [...] I was thinking about the sudden increase in Covid-19 cases experienced by both French Polynesia and Hawai'i. The first thing that comes to my mind is that both of these archipelagoes are in reality playgrounds for their metropoles, France and the U.S. In the common imagination, who doesn't dream about visiting Hawai'i, specifically Honolulu, and even more Tahiti? The quintessential paradise on earth. Yet, the media tell us that this surge is not so much due to a continuous flow of tourists and people who for various reasons visit these islands, this category is presented as *responsible* and vaccinated. [...] The problem is not represented by vaccinated tourists, but more so by the local inhabitants that, far from being responsible, but rather represented as too

> attached to traditions and religious denominations, sharply refuse to get the vaccine, claiming that Covid-19 is not a Polynesian disease [stating]: « our bodies know exactly how to heal, without any vaccine or exogenous substance; the fear proposed to us by the media should be ignored as our spirit and body will create the solution ». [...] In Polynesia, opening the borders and welcoming tourists had been clamored for by hotel and restaurant managers. It is also true that the local population resents the French: it is said that Covid-19 was first brought to French Polynesia last year by French policemen and this current surge coincides, coincidentally, with Macron's presidential visit.

What can these episodes tell us about the relationship between the French Republic and French Polynesia? What can they tell us about local politics and French interference in it? The next example helps us to better frame the problems brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic and vaccine, and how are they locally perceived, in the light of the colonial and political history of the territory.

No-Vax or Anti-French?

Opened on August 26, 2021, to cope with the limited number of hospital beds, the Manu Iti Center in Paea has been at the center of many controversies since its opening. Manu Iti was initially designed to be a cultural center and to host different events, but during the peak of the Covid-19 crisis in August 2021 it temporarily became an in-patient center able to host many people affected by the virus with minor symptoms that could not quarantine otherwise and could not be admitted in the hospital in Pirae due to the limited number of beds. As Tony Geros, mayor of Paea and Tavini's vice-president, declared on many occasions to the local tv and newspaper, many families live in critical situations and crowded spaces and are therefore not able to provide for the isolation needed during the course of the disease and to limit the spread of it. Manu Iti was reorganized to help local inhabitants and to offer them an alternative in a critical situation. And yet, suddenly such a remarkable initiative was in the eye of the media storm, and within a few days, everyone was talking about the Manu Iti case.

The reason is to be found in the treatments administered to the patients by a retired French doctor who was dedicating his time and knowledge to the cause, pro-bono and on a volunteering base, in agreement with Mayor Tony Geros. Doctor Jean-Paul Théron is among the few doctors in French Polynesia who decided to cure Covid-19 following a particular non-orthodox protocol, perfected by another French physician, Doctor Raoult. This protocol suggests the prescription of alternative medicines to cure the disease, such as ivermectin (a horse parasitic), aloe vera, and noni, a local fruit used in traditional medicine (ra'au Tahiti). The protocol, as well as the medicines, were not recognized as valid by the main doctors and medical association of French Polynesia, but they were at the same time very popular in the anti-vax movement. Within this context, an initial asymmetry became clear to the curious observer: on the one hand, stands the French (Western) medicine/ medical system, with saturated hospitals, vaccination campaigns, and calls for responsibility; on the other hand, stands a local alternative that, not wanting to replace but alleviate the hospital system, started to receive patients that were then treated with un-orthodox medicines.

Observing and reading these episodes from a political point of view, as a continuous tug of war in the light of a particular historical and colonial context, allows the researcher to make sense of minor details that would otherwise go unnoticed. Exacerbating the situation were allegations of euthanasia against the hospital coming from a few families whose familiars were admitted at the Manu Iti

center; as well as a firm condemnation of such accuses coming from the medical association and the High Commissioner, both reiterating the free and equal access to care guaranteed by the French Constitution and the illegality of euthanasia. In the meantime, two people died while hospitalized at Manu Iti and the media storm hit the cultural center in Paea. Doctor Théron was accused of practicing bad medicine and within a few days, he was theatrically arrested by the local police while he was visiting a patient at Manu Iti. Yet, notwithstanding the few complaints received by the local police station, the cause of the arrest was not the medicine he was practicing at Manu Iti. Instead, what caused the detention was his bad behavior against the policemen called to investigate him and his case in the previous days. The modality of the arrest itself, with policemen grabbing the doctor while he was visiting a patient, soon drew a crowd of supporters at the Manu Iti center, protesting against the arrest and enumerating the many qualities of *notre taote* (lit. our doctor). The crowd immediately took sides defending Dr. Théron at all costs, while reporting the State interference in this local quarrel. Unlike other doctors, their *taote* is not only capable of curing bodily diseases but especially of listening to his patients and healing ancient colonial wounds. The crowd was so loud because it was not only a different kind of medicine that was being investigated but a whole different way of performing the doctor-patient relationship.

Power forces were crumbling and stratifying at the same time outside the Manu Iti center: bypassing the violent police action that brought to the arrest of Dr. Théron, discharging the policemen of any responsibilities, the crowd was highlighting a different kind of prevarication. Their rage was more addressed to the one who ordered Dr. Théron's arrest: President Fritch. At the heart of the protest was then the system as a whole, and the institution embodied by an irresponsible president who was portrayed as partying amid the Covid-19 pandemic, while Dr. Théron was instead pictured as saving lives and going against the system. Even though Dr. Théron was charged with personal assault and not illegal medical treatment, his supporters felt intimately violated in their inability to choose their treatments and therefore continued to say, write and post online, that the doctor was arrested because of the treatments he used. Arrested under what are defined by many as suspicious and violent circumstances, Dr. Théron has become a symbol for a consistent part of the population that not only does not identify with Western medicine but at the same time claims freedom of choice.

What these three examples make clear is that what is at stake is not only the Covid-19 pandemic. The episodes illustrated above are yet another battlefield in a figurative/rhetorical war that has been going on for years between the local/Māʻohi mindset and the French one. Rejecting Western medicine and practicing alternative therapies started to gain a deeper meaning: fighting a system recognized as exogenous, and even more so culpable (« covid is a French problem », as local interlocutors would tell me) and liberticide, as perceived by the many anti-vax demonstrators. It is not by chance that the majority of Dr. Théron supporters are native Polynesian, pro-independence activists who in extreme cases blink an eye to populism and pseudo-science in reaction to and rejection of the French colonial system (see Bonilla 2015 for the use of historical episodes to vindicate contemporary political claims).

A few days after Dr. Théron's arrest, the Māòhi Protestant Church (EPM) finally took sides about the health crisis linked to the Covid-19 pandemic, and a law proposal suggesting the mandatory vaccination for workers in many sectors. While not condemning the vaccine per se, the Protestant Church sided with the demonstrators, reiterating the freedom of choice and the importance of

traditional medicine (ra'au Tahiti) and knowledge. This same knowledge is yet often instrumentalized by the many radical groups who defined themselves as anti-vax (as the one described at the beginning of this paragraph). Such a complex situation exacerbated the long-lasting incomprehension between those who practice and believe in alternative medicine while recognizing the importance of the conventional medical system; and those who portray such radicals as ignorant and naive. I argue that the vaccine refusal as well as the importance accorded to the traditional medicines, are yet another form of dissent with regards to the colonial system on the one side, and evidence of the local government's weakness, accused by many of being at the service of the French one, on the other. What the protesters were asking was after all the acknowledgment of their diversities, alternatives, and the possibility to choose yet another way, in their own terms, being coherent with their background, and their cosmologies and ways of understanding the world. This is very different from the many anti-vax protests organized in Tahiti and conspiracy theories that not by coincidence come from the outside and thanks to some similarities with certain local discourses found a fertile ground to develop and expand.

Such a context revealed to be hard to understand for many French journalists and media, which kept homogenizing the different currents and positions, portraying Mā'ohi people as skeptical, backward, and against Western medicine. These two thought systems are radically different from each other and cannot communicate on such premises. In fact, on September 22, 2021, during a press conference organized by the association Moruroa e Tatou the president of the *Église Protestante Māòhi*, François Pihaatae, detected what he called *political suffering* that lie outside the general economic and pandemic crisis. He stated: « Māòhi people belong to God, not to the French State. It seems to me that Māòhi people are not governed but rather dragged. Dr. Théron is the symbol of our people[84] ». Emphasizing the sense of belonging towards God instead of the French State, the EPM was declaring very clearly its disavowal of French policies applying to the Polynesian territory, remarking at the same time that *governance*, i.e. the ability to govern, requires three main prerequisites: consultation, participation, and negotiation, that are absent in French Polynesia, as the exercise of power often follows a top-down pattern.

These very contemporary examples (see also Mulot 2021 on Guadeloupe) remind us that it is extremely important to look at a deeper history, made of prevarications and dispossession, that goes back to the political colonization of French Polynesia entailing land grabbing, the nuclear testing program and the following cultural and spiritual renaissance, expressed through the negotiations of ever-expanding political competences, to understand the present.

Ultimately, it should be reminded that French Polynesia is not only traditional with regards to folklore and cultural spectacles and dances to greet and welcome guests of honor visiting what they imagine as a paradise. French Polynesia and Mā'ohi people are traditional, especially in facing and overcoming challenging crises, as the Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated. Tahitian people won't get their vaccines even if they would have become mandatory, and not because they don't understand the risks brought about by the virus: the more the vaccines will be forced on them, the more they will be reluctant to get the shot. To refuse the vaccine is in some way refusing the French presence and its imposition while reinstating a local way of navigating the problems of the now.

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[84] « Le peuple Māòhi appartient à Dieu, pas à l'État français. J'ai l'impression que ce peuple n'est pas gouverné, il est trainé. Le docteur Théron est le symbole de nos peuple ». François Pihaatae, press conference organized by Moruroa e Tatou, attended by the author on September 22, 2021.

Triangular Negotiations: France, Māʻohi Nui, and the United Nations

As recalled above, during Emmanuel Macron's July 2021 presidential visit, Tāvini Huiraʻatira activists organized many sit-ins to greet the President. On July 25, the day of the president's arrival, a protest was organized in front of the airport and notwithstanding the last-minute restrictions ruled by the High Commissioner to impede such a gathering. During the sit-in, pro-independence activists unveiled a Polynesian Statue of Liberty in front of the airport. The statue was adorned with a blue and white robe and the Tavini's flag waving over her shoulder (Fig. 2.11). Prior to this occasion, Tehau, one of my local interlocutors and translator in many events organized by the pro-independence party, during which the use of reo Tahiti is the norm, told me that blue and white are the colors of the independentist party as well as of the Virgin Mother, representing the dual-relationship between the party and the Catholic church. The statue also has a double meaning, symbolically representing Māʻohi's quest for freedom from the colonial yoke while reiterating the local relationship with the United Nations General Assembly in New York, strengthened by the yearly participation of a Māʻohi delegation to the UN Special Political and Decolonization Committee (or Fourth Committee). The importance of the party's link to the UN is demonstrated throughout each Tavini Huiraʻatira gathering, including the June 29 protest sketched in Chapter 1, in which the UN flag was draped over the lectern (Fig. 1.1). This is particularly true because since 2013 and after years of lobbying and struggles, Oscar Temaru and the government he was leading from 2011 to 2013 were able to ensure that French Polynesia was re-inscribed in the UN list of overseas territories to decolonize, formally recognizing the colonial French presence on the territory[85]. On May 17, 2013, Resolution 67/265 on the self-determination of French Polynesia was adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly. With this resolution, the General Assembly « affirms the inalienable right of the people of French Polynesia to self-determination and independence»[86] (see also Gonschor 2013).

In early October 2022, the cold weather hitting Long Island, NY, caught me off guard, being accustomed to the mild fall weather in my hometown of Rome, Italy. I was spending some time with my partner's family and profiting from the calm marine landscape to start writing my thesis. By a happy coincidence that I naively didn't take into account, I realized that very special visitors were about to set foot in the United States, only a few weeks after my arrival. On October 2, 2022, Moetai Brotherson, Polynesian deputy to the French National Assembly, landed in New York. In the following days, many other Māʻohi delegates were scheduled to arrive as well, many of whom I had met in Tahiti in the previous year. After having contacted Moetai Brotherson and Teva Géros, social media manager of Tavini Huiraʻatira, on the morning of October 4 I decided to travel to the city to join the Māʻohi delegation. It was a cold and rainy day, and by the time I arrived in Manhattan, I was completely soaked. Everyone gathered at the hotel, where the delegates waiting for the afternoon session were rehearsing their speeches. I recognized familiar faces, among them: former French Senator Richard Tuheiava; Deputies Steve Chailloux and Tematai Le Gayic; vice-president of Tavini Huiraʻatira and mayor of Paea, Tony Géros; president of the same party and mayor of

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[85] French Polynesia was initially inscribed in the list in 1946 but was suddenly removed the following year, for no clear reasons (Gonschor 2013).

[86] The document is available at: https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N12/494/50/PDF/N1249450.pdf.

Fa‘a‘ā, Oscar Temaru, accompanied by his daughter; and President of the Māòhi Protestant Church (*Église Protestante Māòhi* or EPM), François Pihaatae. The atmosphere was relaxed and those that were not rehearsing were happily chatting. After the delegates left the hotel lobby to go to the UN Headquarters, Teva and I settled down on a sofa and patiently waited until the Fourth Committee Session was broadcast online.

Such a circumstance made me think about the previous October 2021, during which period I was carrying out fieldwork research in Tahiti. At the end of the month, I was invited to a Tavini Huira’atira meeting, organized by the Papeete’s branch of the party to discuss the results of the recent trip that some delegates accomplished in the previous weeks[87]. The meeting took place at the local constituency, referred to as *la permanence*, in an old building in downtown Papeete. Of the seventeen or so participants, I was the only non-Mā‘ohi one, and all the conversations, with few exceptions, were carried out in reo Tahiti. Chantal Minarii Galenon, councilwoman for the Papeete municipality, recently came back from New York, where she advocated for Mā‘ohi Nui’s sovereignty during the Fourth Committee hearings, the same I was witnessing in New York a year after. One of the main goals of her experience report, which she kindly decided to recount in French for me to understand, was to inform party members of the difficulties and intricacies that are often masked behind the official formality of such events and easily reificated by party members, as by my interlocutor Tehau. Listening to the excitement Tehau expressed in many conversations we had about petitioning at the UN Fourth Committee, I had the impression that for him going to the UN was the natural course of the events. Tehau’s old-fashioned, independentist ideal–immediate and unconditional independence–was not gauged on the continuous and hectic work, made of details and minutiae, needed to achieve such an international negotiating position[88]. As Chantal highlighted, several behind-the-scenes meetings, discussions, negotiations, and lobbying are necessary year-long to eventually fly to New York. As she made clear, « at the UN, it is a continuous lobbying work »[89], supported by a permanent delegate representing the Polynesian case at the UN headquarters. In addition to the legal knowledge that such a task requires, and the political opportunity represented by this yearly meeting, Chantal shed light on yet another hidden aspect of petitioning at the UN, linked to a particular know-how that the delegates are required. In fact, as trivial as it sounds, traveling to the United States means not only a geographical displacement but a cultural one. Going to a big metropolis such as New York City, during a global pandemic, and not being able to speak any English is a challenge that not everyone can overcome, as Chantal clearly and honestly admitted.

What became clear to me that night, and was confirmed in New York a year later, is that there is a huge gap between at least three different levels in which political discourses and rhetorics are continuously articulated and in which politics is crafted. On one side, French politics pursued a stubborn absence policy within the Fourth Committee, refusing to participate in any negotiations

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[87] This paragraph is mostly based on the recent experience I had in New York City in October 2022, as well as on fieldwork notes written during the October 27th, 2021, branch meeting in Papeete and the ceremony organized by the pro-independence party in May 2022.

[88] In Tehau’s ideological view, the role of Polynesian deputies within the national assembly is not that of representing the Polynesian people and the territory’s instances to the national stage but more that of petitioning for Mā‘ohi Nui independence at the United Nations!

[89] « À l’ONU c’est un grand travail de lobbying ».

regarding French Polynesia's self-determination; on another side, the international stage sanctioned by the UN Fourth Committee; finally, a local level composed of everyday politics carried out by Māʻohi women and men precisely through those branch meetings that I participated in. This was made clear by another member participating at the meeting I attended in October 2021, who stated: « Our fight is here! »[90]. Being involved in politics, for him, means overcoming local political battles and everyday dysfunctions rather than advocating at the French National Assembly or the UN Fourth Committee: « Il faut que les decisions nous reviennent! ».

This brings me back to yet another snapshot from my fieldwork. It was May 17, 2022, and I was invited by Tehau to attend the *fête de la reinscription* (festival for the re-inscription) which took place at Outuaraea public park in Faʻaʻā, to celebrate the 9th anniversary of the re-inscription of French Polynesia in the UN list of non-self-governing territories. The program included rich interventions from activists and official delegates, as well as live music and traditional dances. A small stage was set at the extremities of the park, bordering the international airport, and seats were placed right in front of it, overlooking the airport land strip and the lagoon behind it. The festival started with a symbolic flag-raising ceremony, during which Tavini Huiraʼatira hierarchies and delegates were testifying about the rise of the white and blue Tavini flag, while rhythmic music was being played on the toʼere, the traditional drums, and ukuleles (Fig. 2.12). The many speeches that animated the evening program, among which were Steve Chailloux's, Tematai Le Gayic's, and Richard Tuheiava's, were regularly interrupted by the deafening rumbling of planes landing on the airstrip next to the park. Given the restricted flight schedule, mostly because some Pacific destinations such as Australia and New Zealand were still closed to international traveling due to Covid-19 restrictions, I wondered what that air traffic was about. Soon after I noted that the planes that were landing and taking off were military jets and not commercial flights. Shockingly, I counted five of them and many more would come during the evening. I wondered where they were going.

During the previous week, from May 8 to May 18, the Society Islands had indeed hosted an international military exercise, presented as « one of the most important events concerning inter-army relations in the Pacific region » and deemed to develop meaningful synergies between the armed forces involved (Polynésie la 1ère 2022; Haut-Commissariat 2022). Operation Marara engaged more than a thousand soldiers coming from different Pacific and Pacific-rim countries, whose goal was to simulate rescue operations in a post-cyclone scenario. As in a real live game, Bora-Bora, Huahine, Raiatea, and Tahaa were renamed Greenland and were used as the landscape of various aerial and maritime simulations. As I was wondering if Operation Marara had anything to do with the continuous landing and take-off of those military jets that were interrupting the ceremony in Faʻaʻā, Tehau came to me, a concerned expression veiling his face. « Tu vois?! C'est fait exprès, hein! », he told me, referring to the military jets. What at first sounded as an absurdity to me, that military jets were doing rounds just to disturb the pro-independence gathering, was indeed conjectured by other persons attending the festival, testifying of the continuous symbolic role played by the army in a non-sovereign territory.

[90] « Notre combat est ici! »

Fig. 2.11
Unveiling of the 'Polynesian' Statue of Liberty,
Fa'a'ā, July 25, 2021. © Claudia Ledderucci

Fig. 2.12
Tavini Huira'atira's pro-independence flag raising during the commemoration for the re-inscription of French Polynesia within the UN list of dependencies to be decolonized.
Fa'a'ā, May 17, 2022. © Claudia Ledderucci

Conclusions

There was no way for me to assess why those planes were gliding over our heads that night but their symbolic presence did not pass unnoticed among the crowd and represents the contemporary relations occurring between France and French Polynesia/Mā'ohi Nui. As I have argued in this Chapter, military presence and military actions are often disconnected in French Polynesia, and not directly linked to the non-sovereign condition of the territory. Yet, the local political field has been (and still is) influenced by such a presence and the actions fulfilled by the French army have been used as 'proxies' to put forward sovereign claims. Similarly, the Covid-19 pandemic was used as a proxy to protest an underlying situation of discomfort that many struggle to even recognize, testifying the inherent coloniality that shapes everyday life in a non-sovereign territory.

The role of the army is in fact ambivalent and seldom contested, its presence not really at the core of pro-independence vindications, if not episodically during the nuclear testing program. Suffice it to say that every year hundreds of young Polynesians decide to join the armed forces and leave for metropolitan France in the hope of finding better living conditions. This intimate link is yet another symptom of the ongoing coloniality that shapes Franco-Polynesian relations and is configured as a subcutaneous form of violence. Such a link between the army and Polynesian youth will be widely analyzed throughout Part III of this thesis, but before turning to such an issue, Chapter 3 and 4 will focus on the importance of the territorial dimension of the militarization process and illustrate an example of how the military presence is not contested and its structures not at the center of local vindications.

PART II

Militarization as a Territorial Process: On Baseworlds and Infrastructures

CHAPTER 3

Baseworlds: Past and Present

Retracing the Contemporary Military Presence in French Polynesia

When I first arrived in Tahiti to study the restitution of military land and the transition of such places into parks or commercial hubs in the aftermath of French nuclear testing, the idea I had of such structures was that of well-protected and unassailable fortresses.

In the Merriam-Webster dictionary[91], a *base* is a « permanent military installation; the place from which a military force draws supplies; a place where military operations begin ». Bases are delimitated by well-designed borders and often patrolled. Their entry is strictly monitored to allow personnel and the activities that take place inside the fence concealed from the public. Moreover, depending on their functions, military facilities can be located on national territories, in allied or subjugated nations, or on overseas territories, as the ones at the core of this Chapter. As for their goal, military bases were first designed as defensive outposts to secure national or regional defense and sovereignty, even though their functions and geographical expansion changed over time. Geographer Sasha Davis proposes to think of contemporary bases as « sites from which force can be projected and [...] that ensure the functioning of critical economic and logistical processes » (2015:6), highlighting the importance of interpenetration and power and economic networks at the base of contemporary geopolitics.

Most importantly, bases sit in places. The peculiar history of the army in French Polynesia is tightly woven into local histories, contributing to telling the story of contemporary French Polynesia and the French presence on these islands. Looking at military facilities from an anthropological perspective, bases are more than mere places from which to draw supplies. According to Cynthia Enloe, they are « artificial societies created out of unequal relations between men and women of different races and classes » (1990:2). Embracing such a perspective enables the reader/researcher to see that what may be considered natural, inevitable or given, such as the military presence in our daily life, are the product of ideological stances or of the societal structuring that follows cultural patterns. The army is then not only a national institution assumed to protect the nation during war times and to ensure the sovereignty of our States in normal times. It could be observed and analyzed as a cultural institution, informed by cultural habits and preferences. Moreover, the army is built on patriarchal and ethnic divisions of labor and hierarchies (Enloe 1990), as well as on paradoxes that are at the same time structuring contradictions at the base of the military-industrial 'colonial' complex (see Hirshberg 2022 on this concept). This kind of industry works at its best only if some of its most debated aspects are hidden, while others are valorized (Belkin 2016). It is precisely because of this paradox that Enloe warns us that « except when the bases raise questions about international strategic doctrine or blatant infringements of national sovereignty, they seem to fade into the backdrop of ordinary life » (Enloe 1990:66). Their naturalization became evident when driving along the northern coast of Tahiti: one has to know the exact position of the bases to recognize them as they perfectly fit the urban landscape and mostly go undetected.

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[91] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/base

Chapter 3 aims at investigating the historical conjunctures that led to the militarization process started in the 1960s in French Polynesia, specifically concerning a spatial analysis of French military bases and structures. In what follows, I propose to analyze the military presence on these Polynesian islands following three main trajectories: temporal articulations, spatial articulations, and shifting army functions. By retracing the contemporary military presence and analyzing its past and present spatial dimension, as well as the roles covered by the army, we can also reconstruct a genealogy of space and power in French Polynesia. In fact, despite transitioning from being a French protectorate in 1842 to a colony in 1880 and then to an Overseas Territory following the Second World War, status changes in French Polynesia nominally gave Mā'ohi people more rights while continuing the asymmetry of power between the French Republic and these Polynesian islands.
To better frame the spatial disposition that will be analyzed in the next Chapter, Chapter 3 maps the contemporary military presence and briefly summarizes the establishment of military bases and the history of militarization and its impact on French Polynesia.

Contemporary Military Presence in French Polynesia

Defense being one of the royal prerogatives still held by France, the overseas collectivity of French Polynesia does not have the mandate to rule over the security and military strategy of the territory and therefore does not have its own army. The French armed forces have today two main missions in French Polynesia: the defense of the territory is delegated to the army stationed on Tahiti (RIMaP-P) while a different branch of it is responsible for an educational military program, called *Régiment du Service Militaire Adapté* (or RSMA), which has facilities scattered on all four administrative prefectures (Society Islands, Marquesas, Tuamotu-Gambier and Austral Islands). As can be read on the official website of the Ministry of Defense (Ministère des Armées 2023), the main military mission in French Polynesia is to protect the territory and its national borders and to facilitate regional cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region. In fact, according to president Macron's speech last July 2021, French Polynesia is today at the core of the Indo-Pacific strategy carried out by the national government (Macron 2021). According to the same Ministry, « the presence of the French army strengthens historical and strategical links [with the territory] and creates a strong sense of military fraternity » contributing to three of the main functions of the army, i.e. protection, prevention and knowledge/anticipation (Ministère des Armées n.d., n.d.a., n.d.b.). Military presence is therefore a familiar one among these islands, and for historical causes as well.
The principal military facilities in French Polynesia are today stationed in Tahiti. The only active military base of the territory, or *base de défense*[92], is implanted in Arue, a small town on the northern coast of Tahiti. It comprises the *Caserne Lieutenant-Colonel Broche*, where the military activities take place on an everyday base, and the *Régiment d'infanterie marine du Pacifique-Polynésie* (or RIMaP-P), as well as numerous offices (Fig. 3.1, 3.2). The armed forces stationed in Arue, composed of about 1200 men and women (Ministère des Armées 2023), are part of the regular French army (*Armée de Terre*) and come more specifically from the *Troupes de Marine* corps, the ancient colonial troops of the

[92] Following the 2008 armed forces reform, *base de défense* is the new classification for active military bases. In French Polynesia, the reform had its first consequences only in 2012 when, following the restitution of military land to local towns, the military base in Arue was reorganized and renamed *base de défense*.

French army. More generally, the *Troupes de Marine* operate overseas: « leur vocation c'est d'aller prendre les postes outre-mer », as explained to me by one of them, and their main function is to maintain national sovereignty on overseas territories. They are therefore called *forces de souveraineté*.

Fig. 3.1, 3.2
To the left: Arue's Base de Défense, entrance of the restricted military area. Arue, December 7, 2021.
Below: main facility's entrance. Arue, May 20, 2022. © Claudia Ledderucci

Armed forces in French Polynesia follow the orders of the Rear Admiral (or *Contre-Amiral*) commanding both the Commandment Section (*Commandement Supérieur*) and Army General Staff (*État Major*), implanted at the *Caserne Broche*. The Rear Admiral is in charge of the French Polynesian maritime zone as well as of the entire Pacific maritime region, except for the Western Pacific region, under the aegis of the French armed forces stationed in New Caledonia; the Rear Admiral also supervises, as Commander, what remains of the *Centre d'Experimentation du Pacifique* (or CEP), the ancient nuclear testing center (Haut-Commissariat, n.d.). Given the restricted extension of the Polynesian territory and therefore of the soldiers stationed in it, the Army General Staff is a mixed one, administering the Navy and Air Force as well, stationed respectively at the naval base Fare Ute in Papeete, and the *Groupement Aéronautique Militaire* (GAM) next to the local international airport in Faʻaʻā. The Rear Admiral rules over all the components of the armed forces in French Polynesia, as well as on the RSMA, the educational military program tailor-made to help socially and professionally struggling young Indigenous people.

Other than the already mentioned military facilities in Arue, Papeete, and Faʻaʻā, military structures are also present in Pirae and Mahina. Pirae hosts the *Cercle Mixte Interarmée de Tahiti* (or CMIT), the facility I would visit many times with my interlocutor Florence (Fig. 3.3). Locally known as Club Dec, the CMIT is an exclusive but decadent club on the coast offering multiple services to soldiers and their families, such as a boutique, a café, amusement activities, a hotel for soldiers and family members visiting from outer islands or traveling to Tahiti during their tour of duties, and finally some barracks for bachelor soldiers.

Fig. 3.3
Cercle Mixte Interarmées de Tahiti.
Pirae, July 21, 2021. © Claudia Ledderucci

Mahina hosts two military facilities, one on the coast and one uphill. The one on the coast lies down next to a parcel that has been returned to the town hall. As the responsible functionary in charge of the new commercial project to be developed in the ex-military site in Mahina explained to me during our visits to the site, the military radars hosted next door are considered « les oreilles de la France », whose importance is today central given the strategic and geopolitical challenges France is facing in the Pacific region (Fig. 3.4). As for the military site uphill, it is mostly overgrown by the tropical vegetation and its scope remains unclear. Very likely, and given the inaccessibility of the facility, the site hosts satellites and technologies but not military personnel.

Fig. 3.4
Mahina's ex-military site seen from the inside.
To the right side stands the active military facility,
to the left is the vaccination hub set up during the Covid-19 emergency.
September 3, 2021. © Claudia Ledderucci

On the southern peninsula, locally called *presqu'île*, the presence of the army is very different from the one I was used to witnessing on the northern coast, made of military infrastructures on the side of the road and a quite intense traffic of white official cars driving in and out the ever-open gates in Arue. While living in Afaahiti, in Tairapu-est, I came to notice military trucks and jeeps driving on the deserted main road that connects the northern coast to the southern peninsula. Riding my scooter in the other direction, I always wondered about the nature of such a presence. Where could they possibly go? Only then I realized that the firing range and training facility are hosted in Faaone, while the weapons deposit is located in Papeari, respectively on the South-East and South-West coast of the isthmus dividing Tahiti Nui from Tahiti Iti (the peninsula). The trucks I would meet a couple of times on the road, as well as the soldiers met at the local *boulangerie* (in all likelihood

military instructors judging by their shirts reading 'instructor AITO') were probably on their way to the training facility in Faaone. Soon after, my speculations would be confirmed by a Facebook post shared by the official page of the RIMaP-P documenting a recent military training in a 'tropical environment' in which the local regiment took part[93].

The peninsula hosts yet another military facility, the now crumbling *Fort de Taravao*, built in 1843 on the isthmus connecting the northern and southern parts of Tahiti to counter the Tahitian rebellion following the 1842 annexation. The Fort was an active military base until 2011, i.e. until the reform that deeply modified the material presence of the army in many French towns (Fig. 3.5, 3.6).

Fig. 3.5, 3.6
Respectively the old Fort and
the old regiment's unofficial coats of arms.
Soldiers stationed in Taravao were locally called
« les sauvages » (the savages).
Taiarapu-Est, September 27, 2021. © Claudia Ledderucci

[93] Available at https://www.facebook.com/RIMaPPolynesie/posts/pfbid0228DE8E6SSrtGVAeeZ3Nkma1sbRYw8YJJD3cHzxyssKkW9XznFDazRZASw2M2QjqDl

To these structures, many more could be added: the army owns so many properties on the island that one of my interlocutors described it as the biggest estate agency in French Polynesia (Fig. 3.7). Military residences are scattered all over the urbanized northern coast of Tahiti and often pass unnoticed. The majority of them are near military facilities, such as the Residence Bopp-Dupont in Faʻaʻā, the Residence Mahina in Mahina, or the Residence Jay in Arue. Other structures are rented to civilian enterprises, as is the case at the *Centre de détente* Moana in Arue, a military restaurant; or to other entities, like the RSMA facilities rented to the Ministry of the Overseas, or the *Gendarmerie* stations rented to the Ministry of the Interior.

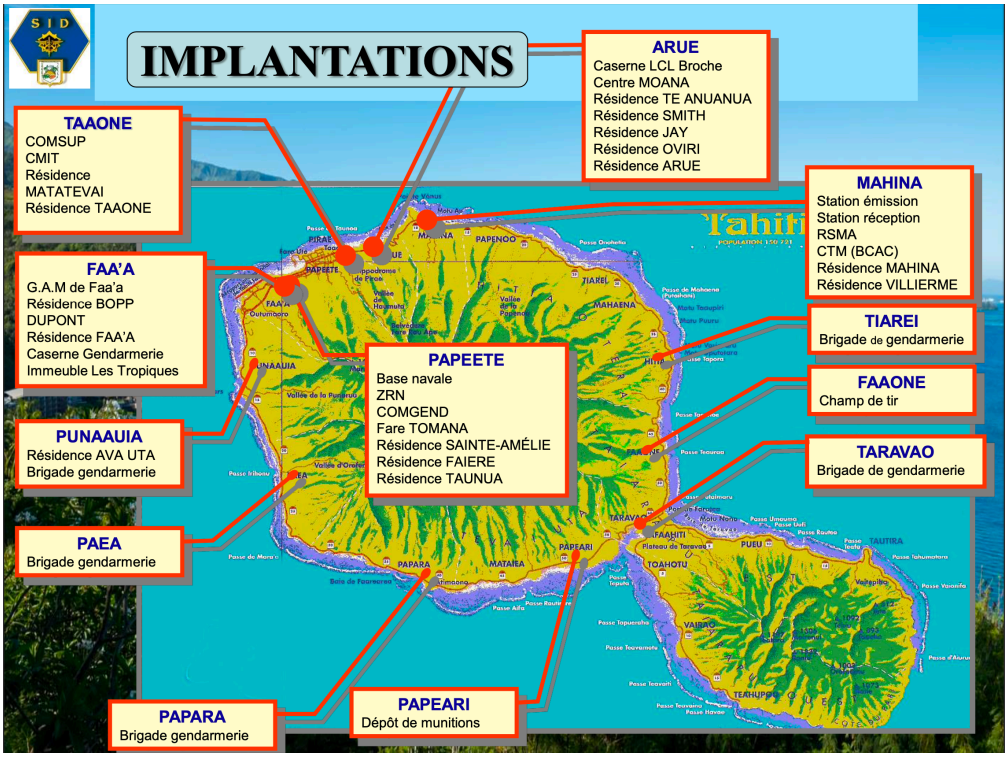

Fig. 3.7
Military infrastructures in Tahiti
© Service des Infrastructures de la Défense, 2019

The *Centre de détente* Moana, which I visited many times as a client, is a particularly interesting example of the sometimes twisted entanglements between the army and the civilian world: the restaurant hosted in this military site is in reality a private-run business and all the workers and manager are civilian. Yet, access is restricted to military personnel and the infrastructure is based on military land. The restaurant manager is a retired soldier who, after having served the Rear Admiral as personal chef, decided to stay in Tahiti to start a new career in the civilian world.

Walking around Pirae and Arue, one can see barbed wire and fences all along the military perimeter and signs informing people that the area is restricted to military personnel. Yet, what is striking is the easy accessibility to other sections of the bases: the gates are open, no armed soldiers are defending the entrance and indeed, there is a surprisingly active recruitment section in Arue open to the public. In addition to the lax security, there appear to be few soldiers in uniform inside the base and surprisingly a lot of civilian Polynesians doing maintenance work inside the fences. Moreover, the

open spaces are well maintained and can be viewed from the outside, with coconut palms, mango and papaya trees, and wild chickens singing in the fields. This is not the usual background for a military setting and yet it is the norm since, as Enloe remarked, « most bases have managed to slip into the daily lives of the nearby community. A military base, even one controlled by soldiers of another country, can become politically invisible if its ways of doing business and seeing the world insinuate themselves into a community's schools, consumer tastes, housing patterns, children's games, adults' friendships, jobs and gossip » (1990: 66-67).

Such a scenario would change a few months later my first 'phenomenological walks' as I was admitted into the military base in Arue for the first time. The reason for my visit was a preliminary meeting with some key figures of the RSMA: I was invited by the RSMA-Pf second-in-chief to discuss my research plan and to get to know different figures working within the regiment, such as the military psychologist, the social worker and the teacher, as well as a very active and engaged trainer, or *chef de filière*[94]. As I was escorted by B., the psychologist, from the entrance of the base to the RSMA facilities, at the very end of the base's perimeter, I was able to observe bits and pieces of military everyday life, realizing that what from the outside looked like a sleepy environment was instead full of life. It was lunchtime and I had the impression that soldiers were everywhere: the canteen was overflowed with people, more soldiers were rallied on the side of the street and as soon as we approached them they began to march and chant. We had to stop to let them pass. B. greeted them and every other person we crossed with a hand wave, the military salute. As B. explained to me, the young soldiers marching and chanting in front of us are the volunteers enrolled in the RSMA program.

Fig. 3.8
Visitors' badge I was given
upon visiting the base de défense in Arue.
December 8, 2021. © Claudia Ledderucci

A few weeks later, I would go back to the military base to interview Noa, the *chef de filière* met during the initial meeting, and a few other soldiers working within the RSMA facility. Since the occasion was less official, I was required to leave my ID card at the entrance, and in exchange, I would be given a daily pass, allowing me to go inside the fences (Fig. 3.8). I would never be left alone, there would always be someone escorting me in and out, so I couldn't wander around. Nevertheless, a detail intrigued me: every street and every corner of the base's urban landscape is meant to

[94] *Chef de filières* are teachers and responsible of a professional teaching branch in the RSMA. Their roles will be broadly discussed in Chapter 6.

celebrate a battle or a victory, resulting in a militarized toponymy. Such a celebratory toponymy, enumerating an *avenue du Battalion du Pacifique,* a stadium named after the *tamari'i volontaires*[95] as well as an *avenue El Alamein*, is not prerogative of the military base: on the opposite, it is well detectable on the streets of the capital city, Papeete, counting an *avenue du General De Gaulle,* a *rue Dupetit-Thouars*, and an *avenue du Commandant Destremau.* The difference between the two kinds of toponymy lays nevertheless in their visibility: *avenue du Battalion du Pacifique* refers directly to the young Polynesians who joined the French army during WWII, while *rue Dupetit-Thouars* does not have the same visibility, even if it recalls straightforwardly the French annexation of Tahiti[96].

This patriotic celebration of war victories and military-colonial figures is yet paired with a cognitive erasure of their significance. The disguisement of any military presence, although not complete, represents both a physical and symbolic reconfiguration of the relationship between France and French Polynesia. Starting from the end of the 90s, i.e. at the end of the nuclear testing program, military presence started to fade away and became part of the everyday life of the administration routine: soldiers are state functionaries in all respects and their presence is part of the wider colonial context that still shapes modern-day French Polynesia. Soldiers, together with teachers, doctors, and nurses contribute to reiterating the quotidian colonial system sustained by the French government. As will be illustrated in the next paragraph, such a situation differs from the one observable in the past, when French soldiers massively came to Tahiti during the 1960s to participate in the nuclear testing project.

Besides the material presence exercised on Tahiti, French sovereignty is reiterated on outer islands through the exercise of the so-called *Taamuraa* missions, whose main goal is to secure French presence/sovereignty on 'isolated' communities, while at the same time strengthening friendly and enduring relationships with local populations. According to the official website of the Ministry of Defense, the complementary goal of such missions is to map islands, communities, and local infrastructures to better manage rescue and relief missions during cyclones or other emergencies (Ministère des Armées n.d.b.). Beyond sovereignty defense, the RIMaP-P carries out other functions such as the general support of the overseas territory, providing for instance a fish/ocean police to fight against smugglers; or the radiological, biological, and geo-mechanical surveillance and follow-up of ancient nuclear testing sites that are still strictly forbidden to the public.

Military presence in a fragmented territory with a particular islandian morphology and geographical expansion such as the Polynesian one requires a wide dislocation provided not only by continuous military missions and training in the outer islands but also a familiar presence provided by soldiers and their families stationed in Hiva Oa, Tubuai and Hao, serving in the RSMA facilities. The above-mentioned program is in fact stationed in virtually every archipelago (Marquesas, Austral, Tuamotu and Society Islands) and is today a familiar presence in French Polynesia: every year about 850 young Indigenous people decide to join the program to obtain working and driving

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[95] *Tamari'i* (kids in Tahitian) *volontaires* refers to all those men that decided to voluntarily join the army and fight for the French nation during WWII. A deeper analysis will be presented in Chapter 5.

[96] After WWII and the homecoming of Polynesian soldiers, the local toponymy drastically changed to honor these brave volunteers, as the main narrative represents them. The military barracks hosted in avenue Bruat (renamed avenue Pouvanaa a Oopa) were baptized after Félix Broche, Commander of the Bataillon du Pacifique who died in combat. Still today, even after the 1960s displacement of the military barracks in Arue, the main military facility is named after Commandant Broche (see Saura 2015).

licenses and permits[97]. The RSMA represents today a nonmilitary function of the army and its history and functions will be widely explained in Part III.

The French Grandeur *in the Eastern Pacific Ocean*

Even though French President Emmanuel Macron recently described French Polynesia as the core of the French Indo-Pacific military strategy, today what 1960s military structures remain are faded versions of what they used to be in the past. Before tracing a social history of the interlacing militarization and nuclearization processes in French Polynesia, it is necessary to reconstruct a bigger picture that goes far beyond this contradictory and multifaceted period and back to World War II and its aftermath.

Militarization, which has been previously defined as a multi-scalar and pervasive process that acts on the administrative, territorial, and intersubjective spheres, and more broadly the defense functions carried by the army are core mechanisms used to allow political entities to maintain their power and status quo, i.e. to exert their sovereignty. As we have seen in Chapter 2, Franco-Polynesian first encounters, followed by the declaration of the protectorate and the political colonization, were militarized acts backed up by the French Navy. The lack of a clear imperial policy for the colonization of the Pacific Ocean didn't prevent French explorers and Navy commanders to establish contacts and stipulate economic agreements with local inhabitants on land they deemed strategic, setting the base for a chain of military and colonial outposts configured as baseworlds.

In this sense, I argue that even the first gunships approaching Tahitian shores during early European explorations were floating baseworlds projecting colonial power and desires on still unknown islands. These pre-colonial baseworlds were later strengthened by the building of *point d'appui*, outposts of a not-yet-institutionalized colonial power that the French government had largely used on the African coasts and in the Caribbeans to provide for commercial support in a 'familiar' administrative environment (Plouviez 2014). It is on these premises that Rear Admiral Dupetit-Thouars, supported by the head of the French government Guizot, theorist of the strategy of *points d'appui*, decided to back up French catholic missionaries to penetrate the Polynesian islands starting in the 1840s.

Colonial baseworlds were later built during the annexation and formal colonization of the Polynesian territory (1880) in the form of military forts to both protect the French population and attack native inhabitants, e.g. the Fort de Taravao on the isthmus connecting the southern peninsula to the northern island. French outposts were yet not the only ones present on the islands: Mā'ohi people also had their own baseworlds from which to resist and counterattack the French offensive, not to mention those used for internal conflicts well before the French threatened to annex the islands. One of these outposts is still visible in the Fautaua valley: the *Fort de la Fachoda*, built during the Franco-Tahitian war to resist the French invaders. After the formal colonization of French Polynesia (1880), other outposts were developed in the form of police stations and Governor's offices and houses, and an entire urban sector of Papeete, the neighborhood of St. Amélie, became known as the military quarter where the army was initially stationed.

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[97] As of August 2022, French Polynesia counted a population of 278 786 (ISPF 2022).

The war initially arrived in the Pacific islands as a reverberation of distant events: from the beginning of the conflict and until 1941, i.e. until the entry of the United States and Japan into war, battles were fought elsewhere, and news reaching Oceania were distant reflections of far away conflicts. Notwithstanding the estrangement of the situation, in 1940 Polynesian inhabitants decided to side with the Free France Committee, showing loyalty to General De Gaulle exiled in London, and after such proclamation, many young Polynesian men voluntarily joined the Pacific Battalion to support France's war. The following year, with the Japanese bombing of Pu'uloa (Pearl Harbor), Hawai'i, the war came to disrupt islandian lives.

Although French territories in the Pacific were never the scene of armed battles, unlike Micronesian islands, French Polynesia as well as New Caledonia were extremely important from a strategic point of view and served as Allied baseworlds from 1942 to 1946 to assure connections between the United Kingdom and the United States. War-time militarization entailed infrastructural development so far unknown in most of the islands: Bora-Bora, in the Society Islands, was equipped with a naval refueling station, an electrical plant, roads and docks, the airstrip/airport and the first drinkable water system to provide for the well-being of the U.S. troops and the efficient functioning of the base (Saura 2015; Shigetomi 2022)[98]. Before the arrival of the U.S. army, the island counted 1200 inhabitants; during the war, Bora-Bora hosted at least 3500 soldiers. Such massive cultural influence affected every aspect of daily life, spanning from an economic to a cultural and aesthetic point of view, contributing to the upheavals of local geographies and cultural imaginaries: numerous jobs were newly created and many locals were forced to reinvent themselves and began working in the supply industry, bringing an unexpected wealth for local populations. Yet, American soldiers were warmly accepted and not perceived as invaders; on the opposite, they were able to bring a kind of prosperity that France was never able to provide for local inhabitants (Firth 1997). If the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki conventionally marks the end of the war, in the Pacific this event symbolizes the opening of a new period: the nuclear era.

In the aftermath of WWII, multiple conjunctures led General De Gaulle to make compromising decisions to maintain France's international hegemony. The loss of Indochina (1954) and the Suez Crisis (1956) exposed the weaknesses of the fading French empire; meanwhile, the U.S. and UK started testing in the Pacific to improve their nuclear weapons, respectively in the Marshall Islands from 1946 to 1958, and in Australia from 1952 to 1963. Nuclear deterrence and the Cold War opposing the United States and the Soviet Union in a never-ending scientific and technological challenge prompted De Gaulle to reinstate France's influence and strength by developing its own nuclear arsenal. As early as 1945 the CEA (*Centre pour l'Energie Atomique*), a public research institute particularly focused on nuclear energy, was created to support such a venture. Many sites were taken into consideration, both in metropolitan France and in its overseas territories. In 1957, General Ailleret, Commander of the Special Weapons Section, filed a report to be submitted to a special committee (the *Comité des Applications Militaires de l'Energie Atomique*), indicating two possible sites to be used for the first nuclear experiments among the many who were reviewed: the Algerian Sahara and the Tuamotu archipelago in French Polynesia. Polynesian islands were at first discarded because of their remoteness and lack of any modern infrastructures to reach them. France needed a ready-

[98] New Caledonia, the other French overseas territory in the Pacific Ocean, was as well used by allied troops to contrast the Japanese presence and to refuel the U.S. Navy.

made solution to start testing as soon as possible. While the Algerian Sahara would be used as a testing ground from 1960, a few weeks after General Ailleret presented his report in 1957, a decision was taken to build an airport on the island of Tahiti (Regnault 2003). If the large economic and technical investment seemed at first to be aimed at developing tourism in French Polynesia, De Gaulle's re-election in 1958 contributed to the speeding up of the decision-making process regarding the advancement of the nuclear testing program, deemed to be the key for advancing the new national defense policy. Such a decision engendered many consequences and changes in the social, cultural, economic and geographical landscape of French Polynesia, reshaping the urban architecture of Tahiti's northern coast while attributing new meanings to old infrastructures and historic military sites of the 19th century.

The sudden military infrastructural development decided for French Polynesia contributed to the upheaval of the economic and cultural life of local Indigenous communities, a process that in part started a few years before with the implantation of the allied troops in Bora-Bora. The 1960s represented a turning point in French Polynesia: the ample rights guaranteed by the *loi Defferre*[99] were abolished after French Polynesia voted through a constitutional referendum to become a French overseas territory in 1958, resulting in a strong re-engagement of the French Republic[100]. Big investments and infrastructural development were keywords in the French agenda and brought so-called modernity to Tahiti and some outer islands, such as Hao in the Tuamotu archipelago[101]. This was not without future strings attached: on January 3rd, 1963 President De Gaulle officially unveiled his will to build a center for nuclear testing in the Tuamotu archipelago, announcing that Moruroa and Fangataufa will be used as testing grounds. The re-engagement of the colonial regime was at its height and manifested itself mostly in the form of French soldiers and military infrastructures that were at the core of the French nuclear strategy.

The process of militarization started with the construction of the international airport in Faʻaʻā, the construction of which had a huge impact on the local land- and seascape. In fact, it was necessary to build an embankment in the lagoon and the airstrip was built on an islet in front of the coast, which was then linked to the land by a man-made land bridge. Officially inaugurated in 1961, it expanded Tahiti's connections to the outside world and made possible the arrival of people–both soldiers and tourists–and different kinds of machinery. After the inauguration of the airport, the Ministry for the Overseas remarked on the necessity of rendering France and its influence more present in the Polynesian territory, and even the teaching of the French language increased during the same period, while the use of Polynesian languages was highly discouraged. Meanwhile,

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[99] The *loi Defferre*, promulgated in 1956, was initially designed for French African colonies, following the Algerian insurrection of 1954. It was later applied to Pacific territories and came into effect in French Polynesia in 1957. It allowed the establishment of local government bodies elected by universal suffrage and with a degree of executive autonomy from the French central government (see Gonschor 2013).

[100] In 1958, French citizens overseas were asked to express their preferences for belonging to the French Republic. The options proposed were to become an independent country, to remain in the orbit of the republic by joining the *Union Française*, or choose whether to strengthen its ties with France by becoming an overseas department or territory. The Polynesian majority voted to become a territory, losing some of the freedoms that were granted by the *loi Defferre* (Gonschor 2013).

[101] As noted earlier (see Chapter 2), a first wave of modernity came to Tahiti even before the Protectorate was declared, and as demonstrated by Baré (1989) local chiefs and influential figures were offered a 'salary' engendering influences of Tahitians' political choices and behaviors. The massive modernization of the 1960s exacerbated such mechanisms and contributed to the upheavals of the local economy and consumerist practices.

Papeete's port was enlarged to accommodate larger shipments of supplies for military construction projects and infrastructural development. Shortly after, land was purchased to host new military facilities following geographical and urban planning which saw military bases concentrated in Arue and Pirae, respectively hosting the *Caserne Broche* which was moved there from its previous implantation in St. Amélie, and the Commandment of the *Centre d'Experimentation du Pacifique* (CEP); while Mahina was hosting the headquarters and technological equipment of the *Commissariat à l'Energie Atomique* (CEA). Moreover, after having served as a prison and then a hospital during WWII, the *Fort de Taravao* in the southern peninsula of Tahiti was re-converted into a military base in 1962 and started to host troops in the following years, assuring the security of the island from its southern region. This massive military installation, necessary for the establishment of the rear base in Tahiti, and the coming of many French salaried workers also meant the need for the development of a leisure industry: soldiers working in the outer islands were given permissions very often and were sent to Tahiti to relax and enjoy the money they were working hard to gain. Punaauia, which still today hosts the majority of the French metropolitan population settled in Tahiti, became known for its R&R bases (Rest and Recreation), such as the Ia Ora Na Villa, a private hotel enterprise that was rented by the French Government to host French Army officials. Others were hosted in Arue, not far from the *Centre de Détente* Moana. As a few interlocutors of mine would recall, the *Centre de détente* Moana, the only R&R base that survived the aftermath of the nuclear epic, was at the time only one among the many leisure facilities implanted on Tahiti, and it was reserved for privates. To this properly military R&R bases, during what has been called the *belle époque*, many cinemas and night clubs were developing around Papeete and Tahiti's northern coast to host military and civilian clients. For instance, the Lafayette opened in 1960 in Arue[102], while the Tahiti Village opened the following year in Punaauia.

The nuclear testing program was nevertheless far wider and expanded the French military presence on virtually every island. The construction of nuclear facilities engendered new kinds of atomic baseworlds, such as weather stations and peripheral stations in outer islands to monitor the fallout of nuclear bombs. All these facilities were crucial to the nuclear industry but most importantly to the French government, in order to guarantee control of outer islands and their populations in a time in which communication and mobility were still restricted. Police stations and *gendarmerie* were deployed in all Polynesian islands to maintain social order while reiterating French hegemony over the local economy and commodities that are necessary to sustain French functionaries and French-accustomed local desires. The French army gained access to Indigenous lands through leasing directly from private land owners, as is the case in Hao, or through land purchase, as in Tahiti. For instance, Moruroa and Fangataufa, in the Tuamotu archipelago located south of Tahiti, were considered forward zones, or ground zero. These islands were uninhabited when they were *graciously* given to the French government for nuclear purposes, but this does not mean they were empty[103].

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[102] A couple of my oldest interlocutors recalled their nightclubs 'tours', explaining that once the regular *dancing*, such as the Quinn, closed at midnight, they would go to other nightclubs, such as the Lafayette, which stayed open until dawn. See also Tahiti Heritage n.d. (a), (b), (c).

[103] The two atolls would be officially acquired by the French government in 1964 after a restricted commission of the territorial assembly of French Polynesia voted for their *gracious* cession to the State. *Graciously* is the term used in the law itself, meaning the two atolls were donated from the Territorial Assembly to the French government for defense purposes. (Assemblée Territoriale de la Polynésie française. *Délibération n° 64-27 AT du 6 février 1964 portant cession gracieuse, par le territoire, des atolls de Moruroa et Fangataufa (Tuamotu) à l'État français*).

They had a symbolic role in Māʻohi life as fishing grounds and places for foraging. Notwithstanding their importance, hundreds of coconut trees were taken down to build the military base and numerous *blockhaus*, concrete structures deemed capable of withstanding explosions and used for scientific measurements.

The atoll of Hao, in the Tuamotu archipelago, was used as an advanced base to sustain the troops stationed in Moruroa. An airport and wharf were built in 1964 as well as different laboratories, offices, and housing for the upcoming military and civilian CEP personnel[104]. Mangareva, in the Gambier Islands, was deemed strategic as well and hosted a weather station, a fallout shelter for local inhabitants and a military base built on Totegeige, comprising a land strip for military planes and a dock, mostly to protect the testing grounds from any intrusion coming from the east. Other weather stations were built as soon as 1964 on Tureia, the closest inhabited island to Moruroa, as well as on Tematangi, Reao, and Pukarua. In Tureia, as well as in Hao, the army concluded rental or land use agreements directly with the local population, bypassing the authority of the local assembly. Given its vicinity to Moruroa, Tureia was considered a real laboratory by the scientists working for the CEP who lived there until 1986 to observe the consequences of nuclear testing at such a close distance, contributing to the economic and cultural upheaval of the local population. Two shelters were built to protect local inhabitants from radioactive fallout even though when the bombs were deemed too dangerous, the local population was temporarily evacuated to Tahiti.

A military weather station was implanted in Tematangi, not far from Tureia, in 1966, together with a peripheral base equipped with tarmac and dock, as well as barracks, a canteen and sports facilities for the leisure of soldiers stationed there, hindering at the same time local activities. Tematangi, occasionally inhabited before 1960, was in fact mainly used for harvesting coconuts used to produce copra, considered fundamental for the local economy and strongly encouraged by the catholic mission stationed in Tureia, which owned the island. Further fallout shelters were built in 1967 on Reao and Pukarua, even though Reao hosted a blow-up shelter since 1966. The local population was lured into it by the presence of a movie theater inside of its walls. These infrastructural works were done in part by French soldiers and in part by the local population, although their working status varied enormously.

The construction of the military infrastructure involved measures such as clearing coconut fields, as was seen in Hao, and dredging stretches of the lagoon to build the airport in Faʻaʻā, drastically changing the socio-environmental landscape of the islands. These alterations were accompanied by restricted access to the new military properties; Māʻohi were now prohibited from utilizing their customary fishing and farming lands on land deemed strategic by the Republic. Moreover, the influx of money brought by the nuclear testing program had significant social and cultural effects and prompted changes in the locals' appetites, aspirations, and desires. Indigenous landowners began selling their properties for small fortunes, while the middle class, due to an influx in jobs from nuclear testing, began building family houses using concrete and Western techniques. In turn, this brought thousands of people to migrate to Tahiti from the outer islands, starting a depopulation process that is still ongoing today. While the first colonization of French Polynesia was almost

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[104] In 1962, Hao counted 194 local inhabitants. With the arrival of the CEP in 1964, 2500 people will be stationed on the island. Tureia counted between 50 and 80 inhabitants before the '60s and the arrival of the army (Mémorial des Essais Nucléaires Français, n.d. (a), (b)). For a thorough reconstruction of the military-nuclear build-up and the consequences on French Polynesia, see the Report of the Commission d'enquête sur les conséquences des essais nucléaires (CESCEN 2006).

considered a privileged alliance by some local politicians, the infrastructural development and the building up of the nuclear industry led to a social and economic disruption full of consequences, while providing the French government with a capillary network of military bases. The creation of a job market and the massive salary-zation of Polynesian workers, as well as the commercialization of French commodities now available for salaried local workers, entailed profound economic and cultural upheavals. The money earned through these new-generation jobs was then used to satisfy new desires and appetites, instilled by the newly come French lifestyle, representing a subtle colonization of Polynesian minds and bodies.

Progressively, starting in 1986, personnel employed at military facilities or their contractors was reduced, and a moratorium was imposed by French President Mitterrand in 1992. While at first the nuclear testing program had represented a steady increase in jobs and economic prosperity, two decades after the Polynesian economy mainly relied on massive loans and funding from the French government and the local tourist industry. The dismantlement of the CEP and the halt of nuclear testing was clamored for by environmental movements and independence parties, but at the same time opposed by the local government and its leader, Gaston Flosse, who claimed the end of the testing program would represent a huge economic loss for French Polynesia and the insecurity of receiving French funding on a regular basis. Yet, the moratorium signed by Mitterrand in 1992 was interrupted by newly elected President Jacques Chirac, who advocated ending the series of tests that had been halted early in 1992. The French government therefore decided to proceed with the detonation of the last eight nuclear devices in 1995, so as to end the military campaign in the spring of 1996 and then pledged to sign the Comprehensive Nuclear Expression Ban Treaty in October of that year.

The announcement of the resumption of nuclear testing met with fierce popular opposition, especially as the international spotlight was on French Polynesia for another major event: the gathering of traditional canoes (va'a) in Taputapuatea, considered a sacred place for all Polynesian peoples in the Pacific[105]. Anti-nuclear demonstrations erupted in September 1995 and undermined the idyllic image of Tahiti and French Polynesia in the eyes of the international public (see also Chapter 2). Locally, however, they helped gain support for Oscar Temaru's independence party, the Tavini Huiraatira[106]. In the aftermath of the first explosion, on September 6th, 1995, pro-independence militants and young Polynesians put Papeete to the sword, raiding Fa'a'ā International Airport, a symbolic place of tourist arrival and quintessential connection to the world. The following year President Chirac decided to end nuclear testing in the Pacific and disband DIRCEN (*Direction des Centres d'Experimentation Nucléaire*), founded in 1964 to manage the operational tasks required by the nuclear program. Some of the military bases were progressively shut down as nuclear testing came to an end in the 1990s, for instance, the infrastructures in Hao shut down in July 2000, while other bases are still being restructured and dismantled, with restitution processes continuing to this day. These processes are consequential and top-down: after the end of the nuclear era, the French army was reduced in numbers, and the remaining soldiers were reassigned among the Polynesian islands and moved primarily to Tahiti. Many existing military sites were dismantled

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[105] *Marae* are sacred temples and/or meeting grounds. Raiatea hosts the sacred Marae of Taputapuatea, also known as Hawaiki, the mythical island from which traditional canoes set sail to explore the wide Pacific Ocean. Eventually, these explorers set foot in Hawai'i and New Zealand (Aria 2007).

[106] While the party won its first elections in 2004, it started to gain consensus at least from 1996 (Aria 2007).

and the military infrastructures emptied and some of the military-occupied lands were given back to the respective local municipalities.

Conclusions

While initially the implantation of military-nuclear facilities posed a major problem for economic, environmental, cultural, and health reasons, and was criticized by many parties, the closure of the nuclear testing program and consequent shutting down of many of its facilities triggered yet another huge crisis as the military and nuclear economy were disengaging. These fears were somehow put to rest and Polynesian politicians were reassured: France pledged to implement a ten-year Progress Pact to compensate the Polynesian government with the same amount of money it received during the testing period. The economic dependency of French Polynesia is another result of French assimilationist policies specifically implemented during the testing period. The speed and intensity of social and cultural changes and the imposition of new French models and ways of doing went hand in hand with the installation of the CEP, the structural development that was put into practice to sustain it and the massive economic subsidies paid during those years. Nuclear testing profoundly contributed to the asymmetry of power between France and French Polynesia and helped maintain a strong tie between the two entities, resulting in a quasi-sovereign condition.

Militarized spaces, defense facilities, and fence lines were literally crafted over already signified and lived places that were yet to be modified following the presidential *souci d'hégémonie*, as the nuclear testing enterprise was defined by pro-independence leader Oscar Temaru. The mobility engendered by the creation of such facilities exacerbated long-lasting economic and cultural mutations in host communities, highlighting the multiple dimensions of the defense phenomenon (see Lutz 2001). From a macro point of view, defense entails the maintaining of national sovereignty over a determined territory (with regards to internal and external menaces) in the guise of geopolitical vindication; on a micro level, though, the phenomenon of defense is daily crafted by women and men operating in the many and different baseworlds. As will be widely discussed in the following Chapter, it seems that the material presence of military infrastructures and historical sites of defense is paired with a paradoxical cognitive absence. In French Polynesia, it is as if material traces of the particular colonial history of the territory are voluntarily demolished, or erased instead of patrimonialized (e.g. as in New Caledonia regarding the historical sites of penal colonies or *bagnes*). The relation with local history is then politically configured as if to only highlight the cultural histories and traditions of Māʻohi people, in the effort of folklorizing all which is possible and erasing the rest of it.

CHAPTER 4
Living Ruinations
Genealogy of Space and Power in a Non-Sovereign Territory

As seen in previous chapters, sovereignty claims mostly revolved around freedom, autonomy, independence, and decisional competencies that eventually resulted in a large autonomy statute allowing the Polynesian government to rule over many aspects of everyday life. Military presence per se was uncontested, not at the core of debates and controversies and was involved in the local political scene only indirectly and episodically, as the means through which the nuclear testing program was carried out. As my interlocutor Tehau exemplified, the military jets flying over our heads during the re-inscription ceremony in May 2022 (see Chapter 2) were symbols of power imbalances and political interference brought about by the atomic testing and acted by the French army.

The crumbling infrastructures bordering the main road in Tahiti, many of which have recently been given back to local municipalities, are yet another kind of military traces. Not only was the military presence not part of popular interest and vindications, but paradoxically the retrocession of military land and infrastructures in the aftermath of the nuclear testing program, at the core of this chapter, was a top-down decision expressing the French sovereign power exercised over the Polynesian territory. As argued in Chapter 2, military presence and the restitution of military land are once again considered as proxies, collateral outcomes of political decisions made elsewhere and for specific reasons. Considering the changing global political equilibrium in the post-Cold War era and the end of the nuclear testing program, the French government voted to reform the army and consequently reduce its presence by restituting land deemed too expensive and useless given the time being. The army was not being forced out, as recently happened in Okinawa, Japan; nor was it contested, as in Guam (Tanji 2006; Ginoza 2012; Aguon 2022) as I first thought. On the contrary, in Tahiti, people seemed to pay little attention to the process and even though the restitution of military land was coeval to the obtention of the latest autonomy statute, it wasn't part of the negotiations.

This Chapter looks at the political lives of these military imperial debris, observing both the material presence and decay of military infrastructures and local memories and hopes linked to such a presence. Military land, officially given back to town councils throughout the past decade, represents a heavy heritage for both local towns and the French government. The deconstruction of French military sites in Tahiti, their material erasure, and the subsequent yet unachieved transformation of these ruined landscapes, although not complete, represent both a physical and symbolic reconfiguration of the relationship between France and French Polynesia. Moreover, while presented as the result of a politics of togetherness advertised by the French government, the cession of military facilities is contributing to the well-orchestrated French will to erase the military/nuclear history of the territory, while at the same time, presidential discourses and decisions concerning the army in French Polynesia testify the French will to re-engage in the Pacific given the contemporary historical conjunctures. In this sense, my research field has been as much a geographical place–

Tahiti and French Polynesia more broadly–as a cognitive space, « a metaphor for the production of anthropological knowledge » (Pavanello 2010:94). Embracing such an approach has allowed me to consider fieldwork as a constructive and shared experience in which both the researcher and their interlocutors–communities, social actors, ways of thinking, land and seascapes–co-construct knowledge. Such an approach has been particularly relevant because part of the phenomenon that I aimed to observe, militarization, goes unnoticed. In this Chapter, I show how notwithstanding « the camouflage of normalcy » (Enloe 1990:66) that many military bases have draped themselves with, « rumors of a base closing can send shivers of economic alarm through a civilian community that has come to depend on base jobs and soldiers' spending » (ibid.)

Many times I have driven at the borders of these military facilities, be they restituted or not, up and downhill in Mahina, overlooking the bay in Taiarapu-Est, bordering the main road in Fa'a'ā or Pirae, and I always wondered what their symbolic role was. During these rides, it occurred to my mind that, as a young student spending a semester abroad in New Caledonia, I had visited similar haunted places many times. The university campus in Nouville, a few kilometers outside the main town of Nouméa, still encloses an old military base used by allied troops during WWII. I explored those old and crumbling infrastructures with friends but more often alone, to relax and focus. I visited blocked tunnels, what remains of toilets and canteens, and took imaginary baths in old bathtubs sitting out of place and overgrown. I climbed unstable watchtowers overlooking the lagoon and only there, up in the air and watching the infinity of the ocean, I found peace. But it never occurred to me that those infrastructures as well as the places hosting them had a history and a symbolic meaning. I would recall these memories while riding my second-hand scooter around the crumbling Fort in Taravao, once hosting the 'savages', as the troops stationed there were called. Why are these places left to rot, with no official importance, while bearing colonial wounds that are very much still open to these days? Revolving around the less spectacular forms in which colonialism leaves its traces, throughout Chapter 4, I investigate the making and unmaking of military geographies, arguing that not only the making but also the unmaking of these places changes physical spaces and their social meanings. I consider such infrastructures as persistent byproducts of an ongoing process of ruination (Stoler 2016) and bearers of enduring memories of what the land and infrastructures built on it represent. With a focus on land and land management, I aim to demonstrate how military orders create their own geographies exerting webs of moral control over the physical and social landscape, and how military activities intersect and shape wider geographies (Woodward 2004).

Crafting Space-Places and Imaginaries

Place is a contested concept and indeed a subjective and relational one. Differing from the geographical space usually intended as a mere location, place is invested with emotional attachment and could be conceived as a way of understanding and experiencing the world, of making it meaningful in a context of power (Cresswell 2004). For Yi-Fu Tuan, humanistic geographer that contributed to the understanding of a sense of place, place is crafted as we get to know a portion of space and endow it with value (Tuan 1975). Moreover, as noted by anthropologist Setha Low, « humans and nonhumans create space through their bodies and the mobility of those bodies,

giving meaning, form and, ultimately, patterning of everyday movements and trajectories that result in place and landscape » (Low 2017:8). One of the many ways of attributing meaning to a space is through naming, which could also be considered a political strategy (Woodward 2004). Early European explorations, which set the stage for a planetary scale expansion sanctioned by Cook's circumnavigation of the seas (DeLoughrey 2014) were all about naming newly discovered places in order to claim their belonging and better domesticate them. This was true in the Pacific Ocean as well as elsewhere, where places of empire were being crafted, not considering and sometimes blatantly ignoring and erasing the previous, ancestral sense of places. Such processes of exploring, mapping, converting, and administering unknown locations such as remote islands and boundless continents, were yet implicated in a wider imperial politics of place which was strongly contributing to the idealization of the colonial endeavor (Cresswell 2004). Pacific islands, and Tahiti more specifically, came to be at the center of such an idealization and myths, especially after the publication of Bougainville's report of its voyage to the South Seas (Tcherkézoff 2009; Jolly, Tcherkézoff, Tyron 2009). Pacific islands started to be conceptualized by Europeans in many different ways, and Pacific islanders accordingly: Tahiti was for a long time seen (and to some extent it still is) as a peaceful and lustful garden of Eden, where young women were apparently willing to undertake sexual liaisons with sailors and newcomers, laying the ground for the idealization of Polynesian Islanders as happy and uninhibited people, consequently infantilized into subordination (Connell 2003; Tcherkézoff 2009; Deckard 2010). The 'noble savage' imaginary staging in the idyllic eroticized and feminized Pacific islands was yet to change as soon as the beginning of the 19th century when the first Christian missionaries were sent to the South Seas to redeem sinful and violent islanders. Such social construction hovering over Pacific islands favored in some way the crafting of a specific imaginative place that became a world-known symbol in the following years, thanks to European artists and writers, such as Paul Gauguin and Robert Louis Stevenson, that escaped the modern-day European *malheur* finding a lost paradise in the South Seas (Alexeyeff, McDonnell 2018). Tahiti never really lost its allure and in the aftermath of WWII, the tourism industry was propelled by the opening of the international airport in Fa'a'ā and the expansion of modern infrastructures, allowing many European and American travelers to come witnessing the myth of the South Seas. In those same years, Marlon Brando was in Tahiti to shoot the Hollywood movie 'Mutineers of the Bounty', reinforcing once again the idyllic paradise that was continually being projected on the islands. As was true for the influence Gauguin and Stevenson, among many, have had in the past, popular culture and the newly developed cinema industry contributed to reiterating the Polynesian myth, as the coming of Marlon Brando to Tahiti has demonstrated (Kahn 2011) and to further catalyze the tourism industry that in a hedonistic fashion replicated the colonial endeavor made of conquest, commodification, and exploitation of native people and their geographical space (Alexeyeff, McDonnell 2018; Trask 1993; Teaiwa 1994, 1999; Desmond 1999; Kahn 2011).

At a considerable spatial distance from the administrative metropoles, the various activities developed on Pacific islands in the wake of colonial endeavors were mostly invested in trading and commercial activities and also served strategic and ideological purposes, as the many commercial outposts and military *points d'appui* built by Euro-American nations testify to today. Geographical isolation, be it perceived or real, eventually became an advantage and was largely exploited by colonial powers to build penal colonies, utopian communities, and modern detention centers, as well

as testing sites and military outposts[107] (Connell 2003). Indeed, there is a strong and complementary link between the two processes of colonization and militarization/basification. As geographer Sasha Davis observed (2015) some places were colonized because deemed strategic by colonial powers, while at the same time, military bases and training centers are built in non-sovereign territories and islands precisely because they lack political and administrative control over their land. The fuzziness that hovers over such places, which I defined as baseworlds, and their spatial and discursive marginality is not a mere coincidence, on the contrary, such excision is the result of a well-researched discursive erasure of islands and islanders' lives.

As said at the beginning of this paragraph, place is the result of an attachment to a specific portion of space, yet military geography is founded on different premises. Military-informed geographies are about the control of space and the consequent creation of the necessary preconditions for military activities that in turn are capable of shaping wider economic, social, environmental, and cultural geographies, producing their own ordering of space. Military activities are therefore able to create new spaces, places, environments, and landscapes that are informed by a distinct moral order. It is in this framework that the baseworlds I described in the previous chapter were crafted and thrive. Military geography is inherently political because it implies the imposition and negotiation of control over not only space and places but also their inhabitants, exerting control in invisible and imperceptible ways (Woodward 2004; Hirshberg 2022). The implantation of the atomic testing center in French Polynesia was inscribed in this mindset, in the sense that not only it meant control over Polynesian space, places, and people, but interestingly it was deemed to maintain French military power in the Cold War context. One of the preconditions of creating a new military space was the rhetorical erasure of native inhabitants and their culture and history, in order to present islands as « tabulae rasae, potential labs for any conceivable human project » as Godfrey Baldacchino (2006) stated.

The use of islands as living laboratories was not new in the 1960s and followed an older colonial pattern used all over the globe to test social, botanical, and industrial experiments that were indeed crucial to advance modern science (DeLoughrey 2012; see also Grove 1995; Baldacchino 2006; Davis 2015). Islands as a metaphor for laboratories also implied the idea that islands were an enclosed system, bounded by the ocean and isolated from the rest of the world and therefore safe for experiments, bypassing native cultures and the well-known navigational skills of the islanders, as well as those same technologies that rendered islands available to modern scientists (Hau'ofa 1993). At the same time, this rhetorical mechanism contributed to the reification of isolated islands, sublimated as terrestrial gardens of Eden and tropical playgrounds, consequently making it possible to commodify them as products. The trope of an islandian paradise was instrumental in hiding from Western audiences the nuclear testing program that was being implemented in those same years. In other words, the objectification of islands resulted in the erasure, as already said, of both native cultures (that have been commodified) and of nuclear testing. This very particular relationship between the development of a tourism industry and of a military one, defined as militourism by Teresia Teaiwa (1999), contributed to the rhetorical removal of the nuclear-colonial complex

[107] See Maxwell-Stewart (2010) on the penal settlement built by the British empire in Australia; Merle (2020), Merle, Coquet (2019) on the history of the French colonial penal settlement in New Caledonia; Neilson (2019) for a comparative perspective on the Australian and New Caledonian cases; Firth 2016 on the modern-day detention center in Nauru.

(Hirshberg 2022) from the paradisiacal imaginary closely associated with French Polynesia (Teaiwa 1999, 1994; Enloe 1990). As Kalissa Alexeyeff and Siobhan McDonnell have argued, « from early European exploration, to colonial invasion and settlement, to the continuing economic and leisure imperialism of former colonies through global capital and tourism, paradise discourse has been repeatedly deployed to mask capitalist modes of wealth extraction, exploitation of human and environmental resources, and capital accumulation » (Alexeyeff, McDonnell 2018:274). I argue that this is indeed the cultural mindset and imaginative geography (Davis 2015) that led Euro-American powers to maintain their grip over Pacific islands, yet acquired in many different ways and historical periods. This imaginative geography contributed to the creation of a French place myth (Davis 2015) that crafted French Polynesia as a strategic and geopolitical stage, a baseworld, where its army could play out its military muscles.

Nuclear Infrastructures

The imaginative geography that brought the French army to test its nuclear weapons on Polynesian island-laboratories left many traces. Military bases and, more broadly, the militarization process are a particular material heritage left by nuclear testing and its related infrastructural development of the 1960s. Yet, if many aspects of the nuclear testing program were hard to see or understand, it is precisely because they were rendered imperceptible and incomprehensible by a mechanism that Michelle Murphy defined as a domain of imperceptibility (Murphy 2006), fueled by « regimes of secrecy, misinformation, and bureaucratic boringness designed to deflect attention » from the matter (Hurley 2020:6). Similarly, colonial histories « can be made unavailable, unusable, safely removed from the domain of current conceivable human relations, with their moorings cut from specific persons, time and place » (Stoler 2016:122). Such elements are therefore not forgotten but voluntarily hidden and displaced following a logic that Stoler defined as colonial aphasia, implying both the unavailability of a given history or knowledge and the disassociation from the process that rendered them absent (Stoler 2016).

Nuclear infrastructures, intended here as the material facilities that allowed the expansion of the nuclear industry but also the cognitive mechanism and rhetorical discourses that sanctioned such an enterprise, produced gradated levels of harm depending on their geographical position and discursive importance (Hurley 2020). The spatial dislocation of these nuclear infrastructures has been strongly structured by power imbalances and « the politically potent denial of coevalness » (Hurley 2020:22; see also Fabian 1983) of subjugated subjects, that deemed Polynesians and Polynesian islands as disposable. To refer to such a phenomenon, which is yet not unique to the Polynesian context, Sasha Davis (2015) talked about a 'double erasure' of both the local social life present at the time of the military takeover and the history of the military presence. Applying this reasoning to the Polynesian context, this means that not only Moruroa and Fangataufa were harmed because they were designated as ground zero, but also that the military infrastructures and land that were recently given back to local town councils in Tahiti bear such harm because their very construction meant the disruption of whole economic, cultural and social systems.

Building on the brilliant analysis Jessica Hurley did of the term 'hot spots', in turn borrowed from geographer Shiloh Krupar, I use such a concept to identify « areas where something remains

unassimilated and nagging; [hot spots] are reminders of the 'stickiness' of radiation » (Hurley 2020, p.16). Hot spots, therefore, referred to specific locations and subject positions that are historically and structurally positioned to receive the most damage from the nuclear industry, places where radioactive particles collect over time because of environmental, social, and political factors that shaped their very nature (Hurley 2020). I argue that hot spots are not only material places where fallout accumulate but also metaphorical and cognitive places. These cognitive hot spots are closely linked to social and collective memory of the nuclear testing era, i.e. the cognitive place where metaphorical toxicities have accumulated, and that activists and nuclear victims in French Polynesia are strenuously trying to defend.

The life cycle of most of the nuclear infrastructures in French Polynesia experienced an abrupt end at the turn of the 1990s, with the conclusion of the nuclear testing, as seen in the previous Chapter. The evolution of socioeconomic and international conjunctures that led to the opening and closing of the nuclear testing program was widely reflected in the geographical space in Tahiti. Changes and adjustments were necessary to facilitate the transition from a nuclearized to a normalized economy and to convert nuclear infrastructures into normalized and de-militarized equivalents, i.e. to reconcile the needs of the Ministry of Defense with those of local communities experiencing in their daily lives the consequences of such reorganization. Territories once occupied by the French army for military and nuclear purposes are now experiencing renewed attention and a process of restitution. While wide portions of ex-military land have legally been returned to town councils, the actual restitution process has left the terrain visibly untouched, still bearing its original military fencing and imperceptible toxicity, with little to no public access, lacking the environmental rehabilitation and landscape redevelopment required prior to any economic reconversion and reintegration into the urban architectural and social network (Deshaies 2006).

In the remainder of this Chapter, I aim to describe how military activities intersect and shape wider geographies and explore the historical and colonial heritage that such military infrastructures leave behind. What kind of political, administrative, and memorial processes are engendered by the end of military structures' life cycle?

Land Tenure System

Euro-American place myths, and before them the missionaries' imaginative geography, were not grafted on *tabulae rasae*. In pre-colonial Polynesia ancestral land was so important and at the center of Polynesian societies that in Tahiti land purchase was prohibited as soon as 1838 (figuring in the Code Pomare), and mixed marriages banned, fearing land grabbing on the part of the newly arrived foreigners, missionaries, and businessmen. The concept of land as a symbol of unity among an enlarged family or social group, which dramatically differed from the European one, was yet superseded with the arrival of the first missionaries, who contributed to the alteration of the customary notion of what was sacred. Following an individualistic approach, relationship to the land became a purely economic and/or legal matter, and land itself started to be commodified (Sage 1996). As we have seen in the previous chapter, the Protectorate and subsequent annexation of French Polynesia meant the disruption of cultural, economic, and societal systems. Such a disruption didn't spare the ancestral land tenure system which would finally be altered with the

implementation of the new laws. Soon after the Protectorate was declared on Tahiti and the rest of the Pomare kingdom, a new law was passed instating the principle of freedom of transaction, dropping the ban on land sales, and establishing individual ownership over the familial one (Sage 1996). Some difficulties in implementing the French law were yet encountered, specifically due to the political fragmentation of the territory. The implementation was nevertheless successful as the demand for new land from French settlers became pressing.

Following the doctrine of eminent domain, the entirety of ancestral land in the newly French colony was acquired by the French administration and would be gradually re-assigned following a popular voluntary vindication system only in 1887. This system was based on what were locally called *tomite* (from the English committee) consisting of individual declaration of ownership and their subsequent registration in the district land registry. Such declarations of ownership had to be made in front of the district council providing the person's registered name, the name and location of the parcel, and the adjoining parcels. If no objections were made in the following three months, the title of ownership became official. If there were objections, the district council had the right to judge the matter, analyzing the familial genealogies of the petitioners to establish the ownership. Starting in 1887, the French Civil Code would apply to Tahiti and the Pomare Kingdom ruling over land tenure management, while the rest of contemporary French Polynesia would implement the Civil Code in 1945, after the bestowment of the French citizenship to the entirety of the Polynesian islands. The 1887 decree emphasized the preeminence of French law in its Polynesian settlement, replacing chiefs' authority over the land with the eminent domain mechanism, while at the same time transforming individuals' right of possession and/or use in ownership (Bambridge, Neuffer 2002). At the same time, all land that remained unclaimed for more than a year would become property of the State or the district. This uneven adjustment of the ancestral land tenure system over the French Civil Code lacked the nuances that ancestrally linked individuals and familial groups to the land, and its consequences are still visible today in the many disputes dividing families. What is more important, a continuous process of land commodification was put in place, alienating ancestral land to rich landowners that were willing to acquire land. Such a mechanism will allow the French government, through private companies, to acquire strategic land in the 1960s in order to expand its military facilities and support the nuclear testing program. Land tenure system is all the more actual in French Polynesia where a plurality of juridical systems is today in play and land vindications are on numerous families' daily agenda.

Woven Histories

> Before Attorney Andrée Dubouch, notary in Papeete (Tahiti Island), undersigned; appeared: 1°/Mr. Max Bopp du Pont, owner, and Mrs. Edith Tetarii Tiare Vivish, unemployed, his wife whom he assists and authorizes, living together in Piafau, district of Faaa. Born, namely: Mr. Bopp du Pont, in Bordeaux (Gironde), on February 24, 1890, Mrs. Bopp du Pont in Mataiea on January 6, 1892. Married both in first marriage, under the regime of the legal community of goods, in the absence of a marriage contract prior to their union celebrated at the Town Hall of Papeete, on March 12, 1911. 2°/Mr. Maxime Francis Edwin Bopp du Pont, owner, living in Mahina, widower of Mrs. Heimata Pihatarioe, born in Papeete on July 7, 1912. 3°/ And Mr. Llorca (François) clerk of notary, living in Papeete, acting in the name and as agent of: a) Mrs. Bopp du Pont (Olga Tiare Rolande Thérèse

> Edith) born in Papeete on November 23, 1913, wife of Mr. Brush (Georges), born in Morris (Illinois) on January 17, 1912, with whom she resides in Honolulu [...] b) And Mrs. Bopp du Pont (Edith Martha Mildred Mareva Apoeura), without profession, residing at 393 Laguna Beach (California), divorced wife of Mr. Wiser (Paul Fairchild) born in Papeete on August 8, 1915. [...] The parties appearing [...] have hereby sold, jointly and in solidarity with Mrs. Olga and Mrs. Mildred Bopp du Pont, under all the usual guarantees of fact and law most extensive in such matters, to: "La Société Centrale pour l'Equipement du Territoire-Cooperation" [...] The following property: [...] A group of land located in the district of Faaa (Tahiti Island) [...] consisting of parcels A, B, C, D, E, F of lot No. Two and of parcel A of lot No. One of the "Pohatuhurihuti, Tetapare, Tetaporo" land estate.[108]

Land is traditionally inalienable in French Polynesia, its name sacred (or tapu). Entire genealogies can be retraced through land names given the visceral attachment Māʻohi people nourish with their land (fenua). The representation of the land was in fact inseparable from the societal organization and stratification in pre-colonial Polynesia[109] (Bambridge 2009). And yet, on December 16th, 1963, Pohatuhurihuti, Tetapare, and Tetaporo are sold to the French Central Society for the Equipment and Cooperation, one of the many proxies used by the French army to mediate with private citizens and more generally with the public sphere. The French Central Society for the Equipment will in turn sell those lands to the French army the following year.

Jacqui Bopp-Dupont, whom I met for the first time on October 10th, 2021, is one of the descendants of the family which sold Pohatuhurihuti, Tetapare, and Tetaporo back in 1963. Sitting on the front porch of his house in Moʻorea, overlooking the lagoon, Jacqui would recall past events and intercontinental movements, flattening years and years of familial history on a few generations. Notwithstanding the fuzziness of his memories, which he would honestly admit, he told me that his ancestors were of Prussian origin, as the name Bopp would suggest; as well as French, hence the second family name du Pont. He further explained familial bonds, recounting that his great-grandparents emigrated from France to the United States, where they settled for some time before moving to French Polynesia. The family moved to Tahiti when Jacqui's grandfather, Max, was 9 years old. In 1911, Max would marry a Polynesian woman, Tetarii Vivish, whose family was

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[108] Par devant Maitre Andrée Dubouch, notaire à Papeete (Ile Tahiti), soussigné ; ont comparu : 1°/Monsieur Max Bopp du Pont, propriétaire, et Madame Edith Tetarii Tiare Vivish, sans profession, son épouse qu'il assiste et autorise, demeurant ensemble à Piafau, district de Faaa. Nés, savoir : Monsieur Bopp du Pont, à Bordeaux (Gironde), le vingt quatre février mil huit cent quatre vingt dix, Madame Bopp du Pont à Mataiea le six janvier mil huit cent quatre vingt douze. Mariés tous deux en premières noces, sous le régime de la communauté légale de biens, à défaut de contrat de mariage préalable à leur union célébrée à la Mairie de Papeete, le douze mars mil neuf cent onze. 2°/Monsieur Maxime Francis Edwin Bopp du Pont, propriétaire, demeurant à Mahina, veuf en uniques noces de Madame Heimata Pihatarioe, né à Papeete le sept juillet mil neuf cent douze. 3°/ Et Monsieur Llorca (François) clerc de notaire, demeurant à Papeete, agissant au nom et en qualité de mandataire de : a) Madame Bopp du Pont (Olga Tiare Rolande Thérèse Edith) née à Papeete le vingt trois novembre mil neuf cent treize, épouse de Monsieur Brush (Georges), né à Morris (Illinois), le dix sept janvier mil neuf cent douze, avec lequel elle demeure à Honolulu, 950 Kealaolu, avenue Honolulu, district de Kahala (Iles Hawaï) ; [...] b) Et Madame Bopp du Pont (Edith Martha Mildred Mareva Apoeura), sans profession, demeurant à 393 Laguna Beach (Californie) épouse divorcée de Monsieur Wiser (Paul Fairchild) née à Papeete le huit août mil neuf cent quinze. [...] Lesquels comparants [...] ont par ces présentes, vendu, en s'obligeant conjointement et solidairement avec Mesdames Olga et Mildred Bopp du Pont, à toutes les garanties ordinaires de fait et de droit les plus étendues en pareille matière, A : La "La Société Centrale pour l'Equipement du Territoire-Cooperation" [...] L'immeuble dont la désignation suit : [...] Un ensemble de terre sis au district de Faaa (Ile Tahiti), d'un seul tenant, [...] constitué par les parcelles A, B, C, D, E, F du lot N° Deux et de la parcelle A du lot N° Un du partage des terres "Pohatuhurihuti, Tetapare, Tetaporo".

[109] Ownership was proved by providing an accurate and systematic reciting of the genealogy that established the link between the individual/family and the ancestor who founded the marae (Sage 1996).

originally from Rurutu, in the Austral Islands. They had three children: Maxime, Olga, and Mildred. For reasons that are not entirely clear, the family moved back to the U.S. in 1922 and would return to Tahiti only in the aftermath of WWII, in 1947. In Tahiti, they inherited Pohatuhurihuti, Tetapare, and Tetaporo from Max's parents. Jacqui couldn't remember how or why his grandparents got the land and hypothesized it was because of Tetarii's royal descent. Yet, in the documents I found at the *Directions des Affaires Foncières* (or DAF), the local land register, it seems that such land was inherited from the paternal side of the family, i.e. the Bopp-Dupont. Jacqui's great-grandmother, Thérese Cazalbou, married to Léon Bopp-Dupont, inherited the land from Ariinoore Moetia Salmon. Reading the documents, it is not clear what was the kinship between the two women, nor Jacqui mentioned it during our conversations.

Jacqui grew up in Faʻaʻā together with his numerous siblings and enlarged family, on this familial land extending all along the coastline, from the airport (which was inaugurated in 1961) and to a small bay on the western point of Faʻaʻā, where today stands the Intercontinental Hotel. When I asked him why they decided to sell the land, he responded they were forced to do it because the French government needed land adjacent to the newly built airport in order to expand the infrastructure. For this reason, a huge part of the lagoon was embanked, to gain more land out of the ocean, erasing part of the lagoon that made Jacqui's childhood landscape. As it would be evident from talking to Jacqui, such architectural and visual disruption meant the mutation of affective landscapes. After selling the land, the family would move to Papeete, where they owned other parcels. Jacqui would ironically work at the airport facility as a mechanic for a long time and remembered the radioactive military planes that would fly back and forth from Moruroa to be cleaned up at the airport.

Today, walking around Faʻaʻā, and more specifically in Piafau, where the Bopp-Dupont's still have some smaller parcels, the toponymy clearly reflects the territorial and genealogical relations that bond this family to their fenua[110], even though Jacqui would bitterly describe the whole area as a « deposit », given the recent industrialization of the neighborhood. Interestingly, what brought me to the Bopp-Dupont's was precisely one of these toponymical remains. The Residence Bopp-Dupont, sitting on the side of the old main road right before the roundabout in Heiri, is not very visible from the street, yet I would pass it many times driving back and forth along what is now called Avenue Nelson Mandela that links Papeete to Punaauia, through Faʻaʻā. Stuck in the traffic jam, I would observe the fence, barbed wire, and restricted area signs that surround the Residence's entrance, today almost completely covered by vegetation. The unassuming name of the Residence, still bearing the name of the family who sold the land, and the fact that it blends in with the surrounding area, seemed to mask its real function: the structure is a military barrack hosting a few families and a parcel of it was officially ceded to the municipality in 2018 (Haut Commissariat 2018a), that eventually acquired it only a year later.

This retrocession was inscribed in a bigger administrative and legislative frame originating in a particular moment of French national politics coinciding with the Sarkozy presidency and the subsequent international financial crisis of 2008, that in French Polynesia followed another key moment: the closure of the nuclear testing program in 1996 and the consequential dismantlement of many military facilities at the beginning of the 2000s. The decision of reorganizing the army,

[110] There are aroa Bopp-Dupont and servitude Bopp-Dupont, not to mention the military residence Bopp-Dupont and the bus stop standing right outside of it.

with the consequent retrocession of military facilities that such a decision engendered, could be traced back to two key publications: the General Review of Public Policies of 2007, and the White Paper concerning Defense and National Security of 2008.

The military geography crafted at the beginning of the 1960s was quickly changing at the turn of the new century following shifting strategical needs, and its crumbling infrastructures became ruined sites about to be restituted to local municipalities after a top-down decisional process. Notwithstanding their declared uselessness, the restitution of military sites didn't translate into a new paradigm in governing French Polynesia or in effective changes for the everyday lives of people living in their vicinities. On the contrary, France is still the sovereign nation watching over French Polynesia, and the dismantlement of the majority of military infrastructures didn't resolve in a political disengagement in the territory. The political lives of these military facilities were unfolding as a pervasive and enduring influence even after their formal dismantlement. Debris of a fading yet hard-to-die colonial mindset, these military facilities symbolize the lasting presence of an anachronistic modality of governing through physical outposts. These outposts were being restituted but the nature of their presence remained intact. The recursiveness of such colonial histories can be located in the long and unwieldy administrative process hindering local municipalities from developing their projects, not to mention the toxicity of military pollution and the costly clean-up that the municipalities are required to pay prior to building any new construction.

I argue that the military restitution affair is yet another way of observing not only the shifting military presence but its intersection with local sovereignty claims. As shown in Chapter 2, the presence of the French army in French Polynesia is never contested and yet its actions were used as proxies during the nuclear era. Through demanding more autonomy or wider competencies, sovereignty is never directly engaged–pro-independence quests are often mocked as naive and irresponsible ideas–but often the underlying request.

The Legal and Administrative Frame of the Restitution Process

The General Review of Public Policies (*Révision Générale des Politiques Publiques* or RGPP) was aimed at managing public expenditures and reorganizing the administrative personnel in a particular historical context. Nicolas Sarkozy was elected President a year earlier and the promises of his electoral campaign, especially those regarding a financial review, were decided during the first years of the 2000s: the reform's main goal was to limit public expenditures. The General Review of Public Policies was launched in the summer of 2007 and the Ministries were invited to implement cost reductions and to redefine their roles and strategies with regard to public policies. A financial law was implemented in 2008, well before the outbreak of the global financial crisis, deciding a halt to increases in public spending for the entire presidential term until 2012 and the cut of 22 800 jobs (Bezes, Le Lidec 2015).

These massive cuts to public institutions and their expenditures, comprising the Ministry of Defense and therefore the army, were echoed by the White Paper's conclusions, which identified the rise of new needs for national defense, in the aftermath of the Cold War, and the necessary shift in national defense strategies entailing the structural reorganization of the army to better meet new securitarian needs (n.d. 2008). These reforms resulted in the centralization of the French army and its territorial

rationalization, met by the implementation of three different axes of action: the clustering of administrative personnel into one central management hub; the grouping of military bases and facilities into bigger hubs, called *Bases de Défense*, and effective since 2011; and the simplification of purchasing and selling acts for military structures and land, to give away those deemed useless (Gaymard 2014).

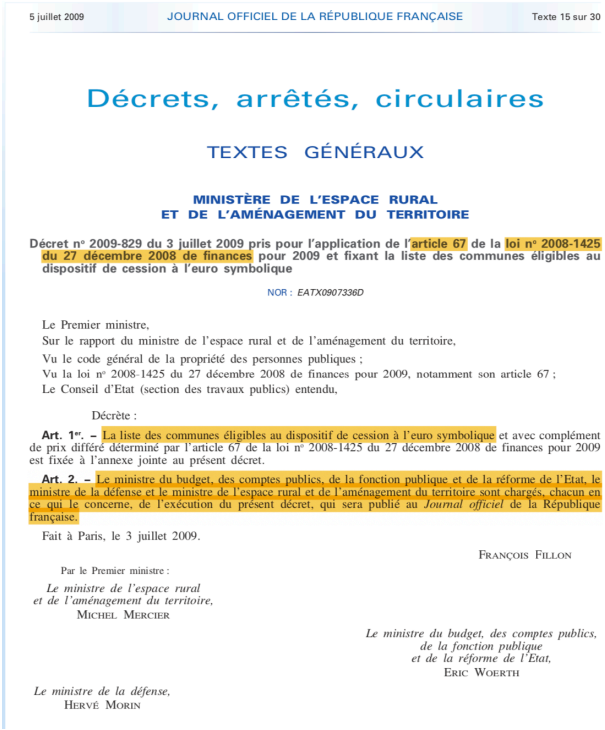
Following the publication of these two documents, the Ministry of Defense announced the closure of several military sites to address redundancy, resulting in reduced troops and the following reassignment of the remaining forces. The 2008 military reform and consequent reorganization sanctioned by the *loi de Programmation Militaire* for the years 2009-2014 were a huge one, concerning 20 regiments, 11 air bases, 1 naval base, and the cut of 54 000 jobs (Calzada et al. 2018), menacing to trigger an economic crisis in many parts of metropolitan and overseas France, engendering direct and indirect consequences for the territories concerned.

In French Polynesia, the reorganization of the army sanctioned by the 2008 budgetary law followed an already massive military disengagement in the aftermath of the nuclear testing program, resulting in a massive downsizing of the armed forces and consequently the dismantlement of numerous military facilities, especially in Tahiti.

To overcome the threat of a generalized economic collapse, the national government decided to enact different financing and compensation devices/compensatory mechanisms, that were sanctioned by the July 25, 2008, Prime Minister regulation. Among such devices, is the *Contrat de Rédynamisation des Sites de la Défense* or CRSD, a 3-year contract stipulated between the French government, the Ministry of Defense, and the town councils concerned with the restitution of military land and facilities. Such a mechanism was designed to bolster the territorial collectivities touched by the dismantlement of the army, through the promotion of places' attractiveness, the economic revitalization of the territory and regeneration of the social fabric, the consequent creation of new jobs, and eventually the expansion of an urbanized center to obviate the economic crisis first engendered by the disengagement of the army. Binding the nature of redevelopment projects of such areas, supposed to invigorate the local economy, the CRSD allowed the retrocession of designated military facilities at the symbolic prize of €1 (Gaymard 2014).

The legal and administrative frames designed through the CRSD were applicable in French Polynesia, as stated by a first national decree published in 2009 in application of the budgetary law and implemented by another decree published in 2015, both listing the town councils concerned in the retrocession of land and military infrastructures (Fig. 4.1, 4.2, see also JORF 2009, 2015). Among the many town councils affected by such retrocessions, only Arue, Pirae, and Mahina were comprised in the first contract (CRSD) stipulated in 2011; while the municipalities of Fa'a'ā, Papeete and Taiarapu Est were concerned by a second CRSD published in 2016 (Tahiti Infos 2015; Fig. 4.3). Yet, differently from what happened in metropolitan France, in French Polynesia the ex-military land was not legally given back to the town councils until 2017, i.e. almost 10 years after the announcement of the restitution (see also Appendix I). Such a delay was the paradoxical consequence of the special legislation sanctioned by Article 74 of the French Constitution, according to which French laws do not apply automatically to French Polynesia unless specified in the law itself. Moreover, the land was being given back directly to the municipalities which were unable to benefit from the transfer as the jurisdiction over economic and developmental planning is a territorial competency assigned to the Polynesian Assembly (Statut d'Autonomie 2004, see also

Tahiti Infos 2015). This gap in collaboration meant that the towns could not benefit from the restituted land because they did not have the ability to receive and manage the space. In other words, the ample sovereignty and administrative autonomy acquired by the Territory after long negotiations with the metropole was, at least in this case, an obstacle and the cause of the impasse.



5 juillet 2009 JOURNAL OFFICIEL DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE Texte 15 sur 30

Décrets, arrêtés, circulaires

TEXTES GÉNÉRAUX

MINISTÈRE DE L'ESPACE RURAL ET DE L'AMÉNAGEMENT DU TERRITOIRE

Décret n° 2009-829 du 3 juillet 2009 pris pour l'application de l'article 67 de la loi n° 2008-1425 du 27 décembre 2008 de finances pour 2009 et fixant la liste des communes éligibles au dispositif de cession à l'euro symbolique

NOR : *EATX0907336D*

Le Premier ministre,
Sur le rapport du ministre de l'espace rural et de l'aménagement du territoire,
Vu le code général de la propriété des personnes publiques ;
Vu la loi n° 2008-1425 du 27 décembre 2008 de finances pour 2009, notamment son article 67 ;
Le Conseil d'Etat (section des travaux publics) entendu,

Décrète :

Art. 1er. – La liste des communes éligibles au dispositif de cession à l'euro symbolique et avec complément de prix différé déterminé par l'article 67 de la loi n° 2008-1425 du 27 décembre 2008 de finances pour 2009 est fixée à l'annexe jointe au présent décret.

Art. 2. – Le ministre du budget, des comptes publics, de la fonction publique et de la réforme de l'Etat, le ministre de la défense et le ministre de l'espace rural et de l'aménagement du territoire sont chargés, chacun en ce qui le concerne, de l'exécution du présent décret, qui sera publié au *Journal officiel* de la République française.

Fait à Paris, le 3 juillet 2009.

FRANÇOIS FILLON

Par le Premier ministre :

Le ministre de l'espace rural et de l'aménagement du territoire,
MICHEL MERCIER

Le ministre du budget, des comptes publics, de la fonction publique et de la réforme de l'Etat,
ERIC WOERTH

Le ministre de la défense,
HERVÉ MORIN

98 7 12	Arue (Tahiti)
98 7 15	Faaa (Tahiti)
98 7 20	Hao (îles Tuamotu-Gambier)
98 7 25	Mahina (Tahiti)
98 7 31	Nuku-Hiva (îles Marquises)
98 7 35	Papeete (Tahiti)
98 7 36	Pirae (Tahiti)
98 7 38	Punaauia (Tahiti)
98 7 47	Taiarapu-Est (Tahiti)
98 7 52	Teva I Uta (Tahiti)
98 7 55	Tureia (îles Tuamotu-Gambier)

Fig. 4.1, 4.2
Excerpts of the 2009 and 2015 decrees, sanctioning the restitution of military land.

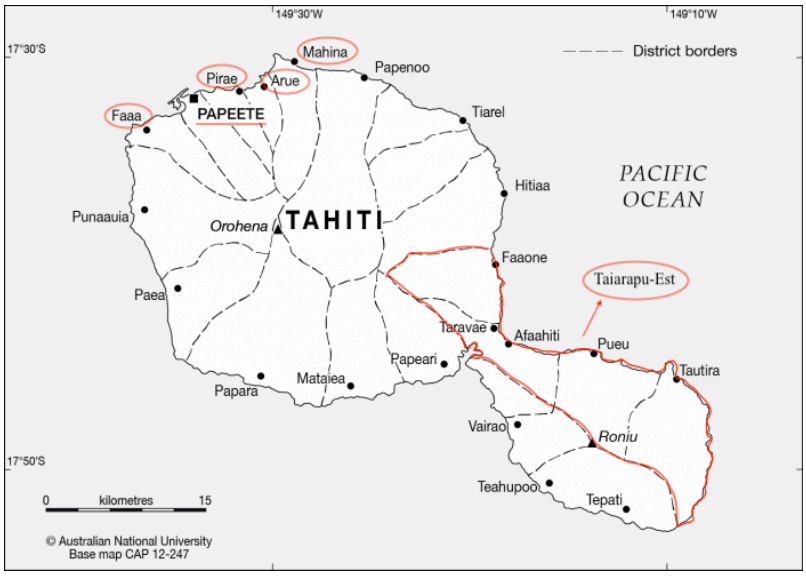


Fig. 4.3
Map of Tahiti (© ANU), highlighted in red are the municipalities concerned by the restitution of military land

The administrative procedure to render a military infrastructure available for sale was very long and needed the participation of multiple actors. The restitution of military land and infrastructures is operated by the Ministry of Defense in collaboration with two other administrative bodies: the *Diréction de la Mémoire, du Patrimoine et des Archives* (DMPA), responsible for the real estate policy, and the *Service d'Infrastructures de la Défense* (SID), responsible for the reconversion of military facilities. The administrative procedure is long but it is worth recalling it, as the particularity of the Polynesian restitution process resides in the fact that it was managed differently.

Given the inalienability of public structures, among which figure the Ministry of Defense's facilities, the preliminary operation to any restitution is therefore to transform such structures into alienable assets and this is done through their commodification into private assets owned by the State. Such operation occurs by means of two administrative acts operated by the state-owned France Domaine[111]: the *désaffectation* (alienation) by which the asset is declared useless for public purposes, and the *déclassement* (decommission) by which the asset officially becomes private propriety. Once the designated military facilities are declared private property of the State, it is the Commander's duty to contact France Domaine to notify the usefulness of the military facility in question. Consequently, another body called *Mission pour la Réalisation des Actifs Immobilier* (MRAI)[112] working in collaboration with the Ministry of Defense, proceeds to notify the Prefect (or High Commissioner in French Polynesia and other overseas collectivities), and they start a reconversion study and financial assessments with the support of a special committee (*comité de pilotage*) with technical and legal expertise (Gaymard 2014). Once completed, these studies are sent to France Domaine to be assessed, and soon after the MRAI proceeds to oversee the negotiations.

Tahitian Municipalities confronted with a benevolent *Restitution*

On December 3, 2021, a press release published by Tavini Huira'atira and signed by its president Oscar Temaru (2021a) denounced the « invisible hand of the State which, through the delegation Reko Tika, continues to destroy Polynesians' mental universe by erasing the traces, proofs and vestiges constituting the history of the nuclear colonization [perpetrated by] the army and money »[113]. A few months earlier, in July 2021 and following a presidential will, a round table was organized in Paris to discuss how to better manage the consequences of thirty years of nuclear testing in French Polynesia. A Polynesian delegation, named Reko Tika–meaning the right word–was invited to discuss at the table with French institutions responsible for the post-nuclear follow-up, yet activists from different associations as well as pro-independence leaders and politicians decided to boycott such a meeting, denouncing the lack of any trust towards the French State (Temaru 2021). The December 2021 press release targeted the same delegation which was defined by Oscar

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111 France Domaine was founded in 2007 specifically to deal with military restitutions. The institution is linked to the Ministry of Finance and is the only one owning French national real estate.

112 Created in 1987 and attached to the DMPA, the MRAI is responsible for the juridical and technical competencies needed to engender the restitution process as well as for the negotiations.

113 « Le Tavini dénonce la main invisible de l'Etat qui, au travers de Reko Tika, continue de détruire l'univers mental des polynésiens en effaçant les traces, les preuves et les vestiges constituant l'histoire d'une colonisation nucléaire par l'armée et l'argent » (Temaru 2021a).

Temaru as « the way through which the French State and its local collaborators [those same Polynesian politicians and functionaries that participated in the round table] were destroying the last vestiges of the history of the nuclear colonization » (2021a) and alluded to the French will to demolish an ex-nuclear shelter in Tureia. During those days, Reko Tika was accompanying French functionaries from the *délégation de la commission d'information auprès des anciens sites d'expérimentations nucléaires du Pacifique* visiting the most well known sites of the French nuclear myth, Hao, Moruroa and Tureia, to establish the safety of the remaining military infrastructures and facilities and to meet local populations. The nuclear shelter in Tureia, which the French government wanted to demolish and rebuild in a sort of tsunami prevention politics, became for a few days the symbol of a particular nuclear history that cannot be forgotten, a material and cognitive hot spot of nuclear memory where radioactive fallout and metaphorical toxicities have accumulated over time. And yet, the military and nuclear infrastructures in Tahiti, in the process of being given back to local municipalities, were left aside following a discursive erasure mechanism that in turn translated into an imaginative geography that confined such facilities to cognitive marginality. The discontinuous transmission of colonial and nuclear memory is voluntarily occluded by the colonial history of the now, presenting itself through a benevolent politics of togetherness advertised by the French government through the restitution of these ruined landscapes and infrastructures. In this sense, it is not wrong to argue that such blasted histories are voluntarily made unavailable, displaced and removed from the public discourse and political negotiations.

When in Tahiti, I was able to visit some of the ex-military facilities, especially those ceded to the municipalities of Arue, Pirae and Mahina. I also interviewed mayors and functionaries in charge of the restitution and management projects in the same municipalities as well as in Fa'a'ā. Walking around the restituted sites in Arue and Mahina, accompanied by the respective managers, I had the impression that the disassociation in place between the history of those places and their restitution was re-articulating itself over another set of processes entailing the economic projects and development desires that were being projected over such places. While nuclear infrastructures in Moruroa and Fangataufa, ground zero of the French nuclear testing program, were dismantled in the aftermath of the nuclear testing, military infrastructures in Tahiti didn't follow the same procedure because, I argue, they represent different symbols of the French military presence in French Polynesia whose occluded history is as well the product of an ongoing process of ruination. Their traces still haunt the urban space in Tahiti and represent, differently from Moruroa and Fangataufa, non-places of the nuclear history of the territory. This is, I argue, the consequence of a persistent and ongoing process of what Ann Laura Stoler (2016) defined 'ruination', the product of a lasting imperial presence that allocates imperial debris differentially and this is also why their patrimonialization and development process remains unachieved.

The challenge I experienced during my fieldwork of explaining my interest in the restitution process, as well as my interlocutors' disbelief in such a curiosity were, I argue, the result of a top-down process aiming at economically revitalizing places that were restricted to public access for decades and consequently bear no interest in the local population. Therefore the management of such projects fell entirely on fluctuating political figures, depending on ballots results, and town hall functionaries. The absence of local inhabitants and their requests is yet another effect of the normalization and consequent discursive erasure that rendered the military presence unnoticed over the years. At issue here is not only the discursive marginality and lack of interest in the political lives

of military facilities and infrastructures but most importantly the disassociation of such a process from a more generalized French presence and military pervasiveness over Polynesian minds, bodies, and affective landscapes. In the remainder of this Chapter, I will present a few cases concerning the Tahitian municipalities confronted with this benevolent cession of land/infrastructures while dealing with the cognitive aphasia and discursive erasure of such processes.

Arue[114]

The case of Arue is particularly interesting not only because it was the first Tahitian municipality to be concerned by the restitution of military land but also because of the alternation of two diverging municipal councils during the implementation of the reconversion project. Each with their diametrically diverse approaches, they made explicit different modes of doing politics: the first one following French modalities and ideals of development and economic dynamism; the second pushing forward traditionally-informed ways of promoting the economy through the revitalization of Polynesian culture and traditions.

The parcel that has been given back to the municipality in the wake of the 2008 budgetary law–for a total of three hectares–was part of the Arue military base and more specifically situated in the Caserne Broche. If the political decision in application of the budgetary law was clear, many were yet the obstacles that the municipality had to overcome over the years. As early as the second half of 2008, worried about the possible downsizing of the army, the municipal council decided to conduct a socio-economic impact study to assess the consequences of a possible military dismantlement and in December of the same year the parcel to be ceded was identified. Anticipating the official decree that would list the facilities and land eligible for restitution (to be published on July 3, 2009, see JORF 2009), in February 2009 the municipality of Arue published a call for projects to be developed in the ex-military area. Notwithstanding the involvement of the municipality, the official announcement of the parcel restitution was made only months after, in August 2010 (Ville de Arue n.d.). The draft for the cession contract was drawn up in December of the same year but no official plan adopted yet. Meanwhile, in January 2011, as seen in Chapter 3, the armed forces stationed in French Polynesia were reorganized within the Caserne Broche, officially labeled as *base de défense*. The following month, the municipality began works on building a civilian access road to the parcel to be returned, and an urban management and regulation project was submitted for the same area (Ville de Arue n.d.).

The 3-year contract regarding the cession and conversion of military facilities (CRSD, see above) was finally drafted in July 2011 but for reasons that were not immediately clear, it remained wedged within the French administration until December 2014 and couldn't be signed by any parts involved (Tahiti Infos 2015). Faced with such an impasse, the municipalities involved in this first round of retrocession (Arue, Pirae, and Mahina) lobbied the French Ministry of Overseas and the Ministry of Finance to understand the nature of the problem. While there was no explicit resistance on the part of both Ministries for the contract to be signed, it remained unclear why the document was still pending the Ministry of Finance's approval. Determined to close the transaction before the imminent contract deadline in 2014, the mayors of Arue, Pirae, and Mahina lobbied Polynesian

[114] Unless specifically referenced, this account is a reconstruction based on conversations I had with Philip Schyle, ex-mayor of Arue who followed the restitution process until 2020, on September 21, 2021; and with C. L., president of the semi-public corporation in charge of the management of the restituted site, on September 27, 2021.

senators and deputies in the national assembly and senate to submit a written request to the French government, while at the same time confronting the Ministry of Finance for further explanations (Ville de Arue, n.d.).

Fig. 4.4.
Restitution plan posted by
the local municipality in ʻĀrue,
June 15, 2021. © Claudia Ledderucci

As recalled by the ex-mayor of Arue, Philip Schyle, the CRSD constrained the local municipalities and/or regions concerned by the restitution of military facilities to a specific economic development to achieve on such land, with the goal of making the local economy more dynamic and attractive to compensate the lost linked to the shrinking of the military presence. Such a project was financed by the three entities that were supposed to sign the CRSD, i.e. the French State, the Pays, and the local municipalities concerned. Yet, according to the Autonomy Statute implemented in 2004, the competence for economic development belongs to the territorial government and not to local municipalities, which on their part respond to the national jurisdiction. As Schyle remarked, « [we were confronted to] the following difficulty: how to implement the CRSD in Polynesia, encouraging the municipalities to develop economic projects to compensate for losses and lacking revenues if these municipalities are not allowed to engage in economic development?[115] ». Moreover, a document drafted by the French Ministry of Finance assessed the insufficiency of municipal economic resources to invest in such development projects, with the result of hindering even more local possibilities to acquire military land.

Two options were at first envisioned to surmount the impasse, with no success: either the organic law defining the autonomy statute of French Polynesia had to be modified; either land had to be

[115] « La difficulté était la suivante: comment mettre en application le CRSD en Polynésie, en incitant les communes à faire des projets économique pour compenser les pertes, le manque à gagner, si les communes n'ont pas le droit de faire du développement économique? »

ceded to the territorial government in agreement with municipal councils. Yet, not only the territorial government was not mentioned in the CRSD (hindering the legal possibility of such an option) but the organic law ruling over the Polynesian statute was a hard one to modify. Other solutions were further proposed, among which: the creation of a joint group uniting the entities involved, i.e. the French state, the Polynesian Territory, and the affected municipalities (but this option was rejected by the municipal council, see Tahiti Infos 2015); or the temporary cession of the economic competency to the municipalities allowing them to receive and manage the ex-military land. Such a decision was eventually sanctioned by a territorial law voted in early 2016 (Tahiti Infos 2016a, 2016c). Once the law was adopted, Schyle was keen to point out that all this questioning was not meant to contradict the French government or its decisions, rather it was a desire to enforce the law and to understand its flaws: in fact, out of twenty-five restitution projects listed under the CRSD, twenty-two had already been approved (including in the other French overseas dependencies), except for the three Polynesian cases (Ville de Arue, n.d.; Tahiti Infos 2016a).

Meanwhile, in August 2015, the municipalities of Fa'a'ā, Papeete and Taiarapu-Est were involved in a new national decree concerning the restitution of further military facilities (JORF 2015). It was only in February 2016, after years of legal discrepancies and strenuous lobbying, that the CRSD regarding the six Tahitian municipalities was signed (APF 2016). Yet, the restitution saga was far from being achieved and by the end of 2016 the municipal councils were still waiting for an official ratification of said contract sanctioning the cession of the land (Polynésie la Première 2019). As explained by ex-mayor Schyle, besides the challenges posed by the administrative process, many were the obstacles to overcome. Among them, the armed forces' reluctance to cede land, and therefore further delays in clearing up the parcel; and the amount of the costly clean-up required prior to any new construction[116]. Notwithstanding these concerns, in January 2017 two official decrees were published in the *Journal Officiel de la République Française* in ratification for the CRSD: the municipalities concerned were Arue and Taiarapu-Est (Tahiti Infos 2017a, 2017b). In May of the same year, the notarial acts were finally signed and Arue became the first town to officially acquire the ex-military land (Tahiti Infos 2017b). The three hectares within the Caserne Broche, rendered available by the army in 2018, are today managed by a semi-public company (*Société à Économie Mixte*, or SEM) run by the municipal council and created at the advice of Schyle in 2019. At the time, the now ex-mayor had very clear ideas concerning the economic project to develop in the area:

> From the start, [...] my goal was to develop, on these three hectares, an economic project. To invite enterprises on this land and create some activity, an activity that has to be... that is innovative, able to bring some added value instead of remaining in the domain of the classic economic activity. [...] To attract companies come to settle on this land... but orienting their projects towards innovation. [...] I was thinking about everything that has to do with new energies or technology. My preference was leaning on technology. [...] To encourage companies to settle on military land we created, and this was our will since the beginning, we created a corporation. A mixed-economy corporation, a SEM [...] to manage our three hectares. Our idea in creating this corporation: first, to valorize [...] the

[116] Asbestos, lead, and hydrocarbon pollution were found in the majority of the ex-military land ceded to Tahitian municipalities. The first version of the CRSD, published in 2008/2009, stated that clean-up costs had to be taken in charge by the national government; while in the second version (signed in 2016) it is written that clean-up costs are to be covered by the beneficiaries of the restitution, i.e. the local municipalities.

> land, to manage it, build on it, and coordinate the constructions. It was the corporation's goal to search for investors.[117]

While this development project perfectly met the goals of the CRSD, i.e. to economically revitalize an ex-military area supplying to the downsizing of the army, it's hard not to see in it a faded reflection of the « invisible hand of the State » mentioned by Fa'a'ā mayor Temaru (2021a) in « erasing the traces, proofs and vestiges constituting the history of the nuclear colonization » (ibid.).
The project came to a halt in 2020, when municipal elections overthrew Philip Schyle and brought his opponent, Teura Iriti, to the mayor's office. Since the parcel of land had been given back in 2018, little had changed and the restituted parcel is still under renovation, following a strict protocol for the clean-up and dismantlement of toxic structures that began in 2019 (Tahiti Infos 2019a). Sagest Arue, the semi-public corporation created in 2019, is still administering the existent structures that, waiting to be demolished, are notwithstanding rented to private companies to generate an income supposed to finance future projects once the infrastructures will be demolished (see also Tahiti Infos 2019a).
Teura Iriti, together with a couple of municipal councilors involved in the process of managing and reorganizing the ex-military sites, among whom stood Jacky Briant, local politician and exponent of the local Green Party, received me at the town hall in October 2021. While the new project shares similar goals with the previous one, e.g. the creation of a *centre ville* (city center) inscribed in a wider re-qualification of the town which comprises not only the ex-military parcel but also another communal site situated in front of the *base de défense*, today hosting a small marina and a public stadium (Fig. 4.5), I argue that their positioning towards the realization of the outcomes is yet different[118]. In contrast with the former development project approved by their predecessors, the new municipal council is not interested in big economic projects, as Briant explained: « We don't want big companies but really, enterprises on a human scale! These big operations that make us dream but that are unrealizable are over![119] ». In an effort to incentivize the economy of the town, the new project aims at valorizing local culture and languages through the management of the coast/shoreline supposed to invigorate the transmission of local ancestral knowledge linked to the marine landscape. As highlighted by the mayor herself, « Modernity doesn't have to surpass and then erase [traditions][120] ».

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[117] « Dès le départ, [...] mon objectif était de créer, sur ces 3 hectares, un projet économique. Faire venir des entreprises sur ces terrains et créer de l'activité, mais de l'activité qui soit un petit peu... qui soit innovante, qui apporte de la valeur ajoutée plutôt que de rester dans l'activité économique classique. [...] Inciter les entreprises venir s'installer sur ces terrains... mais orienter les projets vers l'innovation [...] j'ai pensé à tout ce qui est énergie nouvelle ou numérique. Ma préférence allait plutôt vers le numérique. [...] Pour encourager les entreprises à venir sur les terrains militaires nous avons créé, et c'était une volonté dès le départ, nous avons créé une société. Une société à économie mixte, une SEM [...] pour gérer ces 3 hectares. L'idée qu'il y avait en créant cette SEM: premièrement de mettre en valeur [...] ce terrain, donc faire l'aménagement, construire, gérer les constructions. A charge pour la SEM d'aller chercher des financements pour financer les projets ».

[118] Yet to be approved by the new council at the moment of the interview, on October 6th, 2021.

[119] « On souhaite pas des grandes entreprises, mais vraiment des entreprise à la hauteur humaine, hein! C'est fini ces opérations là où on fait rêver et en réalité on y arrive pas ».

[120] « Il faut pas que la modernité surpasse et puis efface [la tradition] ».

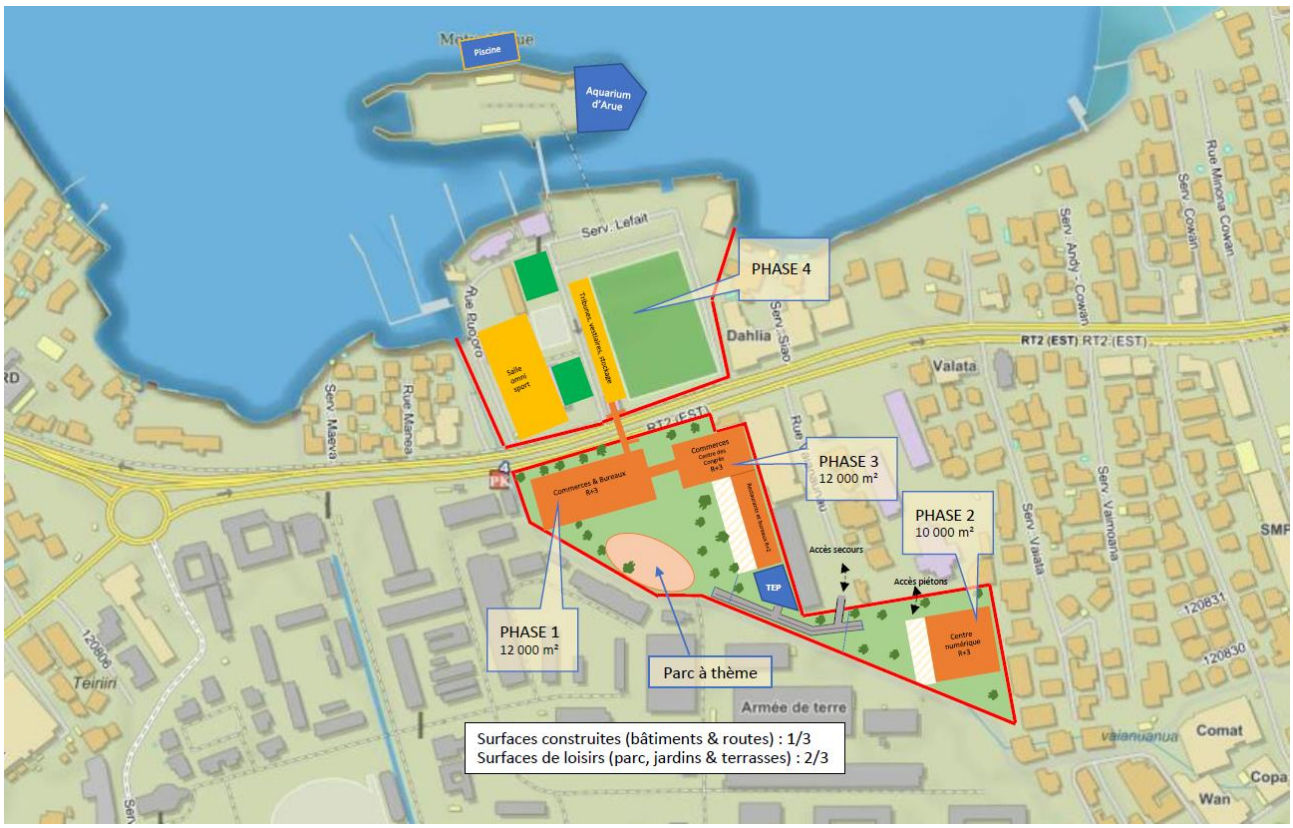

Fig. 4.5
Map showing both parcels: the ex-military site (phase 1, 2, and 3)
and the communal site (phase 4).
Photo courtesy of Sagest Arue

Moreover, Briant noted how

> Economy has been reduced to the ideal of growth [...] but today people realize that this ideal of economic growth for B serie's countries has ended. It's over, it has ended. [...] If we don't integrate [...] local know-how [...] intergenerational transmission [...] it's not only the school's task to answer these problems. Traditional activities are creators of employment[121].

Local knowledge transmission and cultural values are key to guiding new generations toward a thriving future:

> We are really attached to the management of both mountain and seaside [...] with particular attention to the cultural dimension, as we believe it is one of the responses, not the only one but one

[121] « L'économie a été réduite à une notion qui est la croissance [...] on se rend compte que aujourd'hui cette notion de croissance de pays B de développement économique est arrivé au but. C'est fini, c'est terminé. [...] Si on intègre pas [...] les savoirs-faire traditionnels [...] la transmission intergénérationnelle [...] il y a pas que l'école qui va répondre à ces problématiques là. [...] Les activités culturelles sont créatrices d'emploi ».

> of the answers to the crisis today experienced by our youth, identifying in TikTok, or in McDonald's...[122]

Despite these diverging ideals, the ex-military site is still managed by Sagest Arue's director, appointed by Schyle in 2019. According to him, the new municipal project doesn't help the development of the town: « Small local businesses [...] get together areas for the population [...] we don't share the same worldview[123] ».

As shown so far, not only do these two development projects differ but what is more, they are informed by diverging notions of development itself. For the new municipal council, development doesn't mean exclusively economic development because local economy can be fostered following a more traditional pattern. As Briant explained, economic development « is a tool, not the goal. It has to be at the service of our projects[124] ». Moreover, dissenting from the main French popular discourse according to which French Polynesia is highly subsidized by the French government, he observed that it is more correct to talk about a circular economy, especially in the aftermath of the nuclear testing era.

> There is a different attitude of the state today that continues to make us drool over the financial transfer they pay to Polynesia, to show their generosity, the almost crazy love the French state feels for Polynesia. [...] Imports today, our imports in the trade balance [...] 42-43 billion CFP, come from French imports. Out of the 200 billion CFP transferred [...] to Polynesia through subsidies, aid, salaries, etc. So there are already 42 billion CFP that return to France because we directly import from France. Then you have all the soldiers, teachers which... upon moving here they try to find the cheapest rent, they buy second-hand cars [...] to disburse as little as possible. Money return in this way... Then there is an entire part that we don't know well: everything that is linked to insurance companies. All of our insurances are French. How much do they cost? So in reality the totality of what we indirectly send back in our daily life... sometimes the state should moderate its words and say "actually we regain part of that money". We have the impression that [...] "out of love we give 200 billion CFP every year with no gains back"... they should not exaggerate, huh! [...] And with the CRSD it's the same![125]

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[122] « On est très attachés à l'aménagement coté montagne et coté mer [...] mais avec une dimension culturelle fort historique, parce que pour nous c'est une des réponses, c'est pas la seule, mais c'est une des réponses à la crise, aujourd'hui, que connait nos jeunes qui se reconnaissent dans TikTok, qui se reconnaissent dans McDo's... »

[123] « Petit commerce local [...] point de réunion pour la population [...] on est pas dans le meme monde ».

[124] « C'est un outil, c'est pas une finalité. Il doit être à la disposition de nos projets ».

[125] « Il y a une autre attitude de l'état aujourd'hui qui continue à nous faire baver sur le transfer financier qui ils ont par rapport à la Polynésie, pour montrer la générosité, presque l'amour fou que l'état français aurait par la Polynésie. [...] Les importations aujourd'hui, nos importations dans la balance commerciale [...] 42-43 milliards de francs cfp ce sont des importations qui viennent de France. Sur les 200 milliards qui sont transférés [...] à la Polynésie avec les subventions, les aides, les salaires etc. Donc il y a déjà 42 milliards qui retournent en France parce que nous importons directement en France. Ensuite vous avez tous les militaires, tous les profs de secondaires, de tertiaires qui... lorsque ils viennent ici ils essayent de louer le moins cher, ils achètent une voiture d'occasion [...] pour dépenser le moins possible. Donc l'argent retourne... Ensuite il y a toute la partie qu'on ne connaît pas bien: c'est toute la partie qui est liée aux assurances. Toutes nos assurances sont des assurances françaises. Combien ça représente? Donc enfaite le total de ce que nous renvoyons indirectement par la vie de tous les jours... de temps en temps l'état devrait un peu modéré ses paroles et dire "effectivement nous récupérons une partie de notre argent". On a l'impression que [...] "par amour on leur en file les 200 milliards tous les ans et qu'en contrepartie je ne récupère pas"... il faut quand meme pas exagéré, hein! [...] Et le CRSD c'est pareil! »

At the same time, Jacky Briant is well aware of the geo-strategic position occupied by France and exploited by the French government. According to him, this modern geopolitical interest is linked to the decades-long nuclear testing that have crafted Polynesian economic dependency that still bonds these islands to the French metropole.
Even though it remains uncertain whether this project will be officially ratified, the example illustrated so far provides an insight into the negotiations going on at the political level, while the local populations seemed to be taken out of such a decisional process.

Mahina[126]

Built in the 1960s to host the technical infrastructures of the CEA (*Centre pour l'Énergie Atomique*) during the years of the nuclear testing program, the military facility in Mahina later became the headquarters of the RSMA once the atomic tests ended at the end of the 1990s. Today, part of that land ceded to the local municipality in 2019 (Tahiti Infos 2019b, 2019d), is deemed to become the economic artery of the town[127].
When I first visited the ex-military site in Mahina, two main characteristics caught my attention: while from the outside the site still bears its original signs and fences, it nevertheless hosts multiple municipal activities such as the temporary anti-Covid vaccination hub, the local police station, and firefighters that were displaced from their respective stations by a landslide hindering the safety of the infrastructures (Fig. 4.6). This was because, as it was explained to me by the chief of technical services of the municipality, there are no other public infrastructures to host neither of these services. The second characteristic was given by the fact that such a restituted land borders with an active (yet dormant) military facility on one side, and with a military residence on the other. Such a military facility hosts radars that, as defined by my interlocutor, are « France's ears[128] » and are supposed to intercept Chinese communication in an area deemed of strategic importance.
As seen through the example of Arue, the historical heritage of these infrastructures is not taken into consideration given the precariousness of the buildings and their pollution. The working plan for the restituted land includes the clean-up and demolition of old and polluted buildings to be replaced by new hangars and structures. The municipal plan includes the re-qualification of the site and an economic development strategy including the lease of hangars in the back part of the parcel, while a commercial zone is to be developed next to the main road to create commercial dynamism (Fig. 4.7). The clean-up and decontamination of the site started in between my second and third visits, i.e. between October 2021 and January 2022, and was supposed to end by the end of 2022 (Fig. 4.8). Throughout the same year, the municipality aimed at approving the development plan while the leases of the first hangars were envisioned for 2023. The open-to-the-public area should be open in 2024.

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[126] Unless specifically referenced, this account is a reconstruction based on conversations I had with the chief of technical service, on September 3, 2021; October 8, 2021; January 26, 2022.

[127] While the land was supposed to be ceded in 2017, the official contract was signed only a year later after the publication of a national decree (Decret 2018-327 du 2 mai 2018) sanctioning the uselessness of the said parcel.

[128] « Les oreilles de la France ».

Fig. 4.6
Mahina ex-military site's entrance. The banner reads 'vaccination hub'. Mahina, October 8, 2021. © Claudia Ledderucci

Fig. 4.7
Mahina project plan for the ex-military site.
Courtesy of the Municipality of Mahina

Fig. 4.8
Asbestos cleanup in Mahina.
January 26, 2022. © Claudia Ledderucci

Pirae[129]

Prior to 1965, Pirae was comprised in the district of Pare Nui, together with Arue (whose ancient name was Pare), and Mahina. The municipality of Pirae, together with the one of Fa'a'ā, was founded in 1965 following a national administrative reform and former chief of district, Gaston Flosse, became the new mayor. At that time, the army was already present in that area having acquired land in Ta'aone from a démi family, the Hirschon's, a few years earlier (see Chapter 2). Unutea's father, an American businessman, bought that land upon arrival in Tahiti years ago, and Unutea herself grew up there until the age of 9, after which time she was sent to school in Switzerland, France and the U.S. and would come back to Tahiti during summer vacation. After her father passed away, in 1954, her mother remarried to a French businessman who soon after decided to sell part of the land in Pirae to the French army.

I visited the ex-military site in November 2021, accompanied by the chief of technical services. In Pirae, the cleanup works have not started yet. The more I visited ex-military sites, the more I realized the extent of their irrelevance to the local population: the restitution process passes unobserved to the big majority, and yet the revitalizing project approved by the municipality aimed at building a city center to foster a sense of community.

Driving west of Papeete, the ex-military terrain is located on the ocean side of the main road (*coté mer*) and before the CMIT (see Chapter 1). To enter the property it is necessary to pass through another military facility (which is unattended and with no gate) hosting the *Légion Étrangère*, the French Foreign Legion, as the signs on the fences let me guess. On the right side of the road stands

[129] Unless specifically referenced, this account is a reconstruction based on the interview I had with the chief of technical service on November 9, 2021.

the massive building that was given back to the municipality, overgrown by vegetation and closed to the public. Instead of going inside the main building, we continued driving along the side road, until we arrived at a big and deserted parking lot, bordering the shore. The army social services are located right there, next to a kindergarten. On the left side of the parking lot stands a municipal sports facility, separated from the parking lot by a small canal. Standing on the beach, and overlooking the bay, it is possible to see the CMIT, situated not far from where I was standing.

Fa‘a‘ā

If the ex-military facilities in Arue, Mahina and Pirae border with active military infrastructures, the land given back to the town of Fa‘a‘ā is completely enclosed within a military residence, the Residence Bopp-Dupont that was recalled above (Fig. 4.9). Notwithstanding the juridical act signed in August 2018 by a representative of France Domaine and the mayor of Fa‘a‘ā, Oscar Temaru, formalizing the cession of a parcel of the Residence Bopp-Dupont, the restituted parcel is enclosed within the surrounding military property, with no public entrance. Municipal functionaries and technicians still need (in 2021) written permission from the military to enter the residence and access the returned land and this was also the reason why it was impossible for me to visit the site. Moreover, and as true for the majority of the ex-military land, the space was not cleaned up and depolluted before being returned, therefore, the town is supposed to pay for the cost of clean-up. As of now, the town hall of Fa‘a‘ā is ready to begin an aquaponic greenhouse project, but they are waiting to come to an agreement with the army to obtain entry permission. The responsible person for the process told me that the municipality does not want to spend public money to invest in a project that might not be beneficial for the community. Besides these problems, themselves the product of a never-ending tug of war over sovereignty and autonomy between the Polynesian government and the French state, I argue that the project itself bears the potential for new forms of re-appropriation and new practices of local sovereignty (Fig. 4.10). In fact, after an earlier proposal to build a community market was discarded, a new project was approved to build an aquaponic greenhouse whose main goal is to achieve food sovereignty and improve the local diet, in compliance with the pro-independence politics that has been carried on in the municipality for over 30 years. Yet, as of now, the project has been on hold for the last few years lacking a public entrance to the site.

Following the continuous requests coming from the municipalities and their mayors to allocate more funds for the clean-up costs (Tahiti Infos 2018a, 2019a), during his visit to French Polynesia in July 2021, French President Macron announced that the French government will pay for the clean-up costs, giving new hope to the mayors and communities (Macron 2021). If the recent announcements made by the President during his visit were welcomed by many, the town halls functionaries responsible for the management of the restituted sites are still very cautious with regard to the coverage of clean-up costs. In fact, for the town halls, the management of these sites weighs too much on their finance and this is also why the envisaged projects to re-develop the urban areas are taking a long time.

Fig. 4.9
Entrance to the Résidence Bopp-Dupont. Fa'a'ā, August 8, 2021.
© Claudia Ledderucci

Fig. 4.10
'Border' sign indicating you are entering the municipality of Fa'a'ā.
December 11, 2021.
© Claudia Ledderucci

Conclusions

The administrative impasse described above is a clear example of how the legislative specialty enjoyed by French Polynesia can represent, in extreme cases, an obstacle to the territorial autonomy it is supposed to guarantee. Far from representing a sovereign attempt on the part of local municipalities, the restitution of military land was centrally decided in France and its consequences were imposed on Polynesian municipal councils, enacted with administrative powers by the decentralizing politics implemented throughout the 1980s. Moreover, this top-down decision can also be understood as a politics of togetherness advertised by the French government given the relaxation of international geopolitics. Not only does such a decision look anachronistic today, as the Pacific Ocean continues to be configured as an 'oceanic security state' (Naputi, Frain 2023) but it also contributes to the symbolic and material erasure of the socio-collective memory and heritage about the nuclear history of French Polynesia and Mā'ohi people.

While I don't mean to belittle the economic projects approved by local municipal councils in Arue, Mahina, or elsewhere, it is curious to note how there are still no memorialized sites to commemorate the nuclear history that has so deeply influenced the territory's past and present[130]. Any process of patrimonialization seems to be hindered by the imminent demolition of military infrastructures that symbolically represents the *de facto* erasure of those places, their meanings, and eventually the territorial memory encapsulated in the facilities' crumbling walls and roofs. The stark rejection of the demolition of the nuclear shelter in Tureia, supported by Oscar Temaru (2021a), expressed a firm refusal to forget. In other words, the erasure of military and nuclear infrastructures would sanction the end of a story that cannot be forgotten and which is inscribed in people's bodies, embodied in their daily lives and those of the generations to come.

As I argue throughout my work, French Polynesia is configured as a baseworld not only because it is a militarily occupied overseas territory but also because French sovereignty is exerted through cultural and economic influences, often subtle and invisible but a feature of the domination nonetheless. While such influences are exercised on local communities, French presence and its regime of truth are normalized through the excision of local histories, sovereignties, future aspirations and Indigenous knowledge. As explored in this Chapter, the physical landscape is one of many ways of exerting such an influence. Rachel Woodward (2004) listed three more sources from which military control emanates: the control of information; the relationship between the state and its citizens; and a securitarian rhetoric. Since military bases are « emblematic of domination, power and control » (Woodward 2004:152), the moral order they created as well as their impact on the physical landscape, local economy, and culture, endures in intangible and less immediate ways well after they've closed. As the next Chapters will point out, this material and cognitive erasure is paired with the normalization of the French military presence in modern-day French Polynesia. The structural violence (Farmer 1996) exercised over these islands is represented by, among many, the ongoing militarization process taking place in French Polynesia, as elsewhere, embodied by Mā'ohi people in their daily living spaces and in the ways they assert renewed claims to their lands and culture. Such a situation has shaped–and continues to shape–the natural and social environment of

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[130] Indeed, a museum, Pu Mahara or the *Centre de Mémoire des Essais Nucléaires en Polynésie français*e, is being developed. The project was officially approved in 2019, its main goal being that of becoming a pedagogical tool for local communities. Moreover, a monument was built and inaugurated on July 2, 2006, on the 40th anniversary of the first nuclear bomb detonated in Moruroa on July 2, 1966 (Fig. 4.11).

local inhabitants while simultaneously translating into the emergence of new cultural practices and forms of expression.

This complex intersection between the presence of a supposedly benevolent metropole and the toxic consequences left by its atomic testing is embodied by the army and the ambivalences that accompany its localized (and seldom contested) presence, as well as the many opportunities for Polynesian youth offered by the armed forces (see Chapters 5, 6, and 7). Such a multilayered landscape ties together local histories and struggles with global practices of geopolitics. As sketched at the beginning of this work, the Pacific region is today considered a transnational space of strategic importance for the international economic system as well as for the high strategic value it holds for several Western nations. The interpenetration of economic and power networks and the relations entertained with sovereign and non-sovereign territories make contemporary geopolitics in need of baseworlds implanted on interspersed Pacific Islands.

After a relatively short period of political relaxation, the contemporary process of militarization in Oceania has seen an exponential increase in the first decade of 2000, during the U.S. presidency of Barack Obama. In order to counter the 'Chinese threat', the presidential strategy included the shift of American military capacity towards the Asian continent, consequently increasing military hegemony over the Pacific Ocean, and in Guam more specifically (Camacho, Ueunten 2010). In counter-trend, France was at the same time dismantling its nuclear facilities (see Chapter 3), while implementing a new form of soft power through the militarization of specific civilian tasks (e.g. education). The expansion of the *Régiment du Service Militaire Adapté*, an educational military program tailor-made for the struggling young Indigenous population of French overseas dependencies, will be widely discussed in Part III.

Fig. 4.11
Lieu de mémoire des essais nucléaires.
Papeete, June 20, 2021.
© Claudia Ledderucci

PART III

Militarization as Interpersonal Process: On Militarized Intimacies

CHAPTER 5
Learning with the French Army

Each year, eight hundred or so young Polynesian women and men coming from the many near and far islands of French Polynesia approach the Defense Base in Arue, Tahiti, to sign their volunteering contracts at the *Service Militaire Adapté*'s recruitment office. They are ready to start their new, yet temporary, lives as volunteers in the *Régiment du Service Militaire Adapté* (RSMA[131]), an educational military program active in all French overseas dependencies whose explicit goal is to help socially and professionally struggling young Indigenous people aged 18 to 25 years old (Ministère de l'Intérieur et des Outre-Mer 2021). Virtually present in each archipelago of French Polynesia[132], the SMA's First Unit, or *Compagnie de Formation Professionnelle* (CFP), was built in 1989 in Hiva Oa, Marquesas Islands. The Second Unit was opened in Hao in 1993, where it operated until 2010. The following year the Company was transferred to Mahina (Tahiti), where it merged with the other branch present on the island since 1995. During the same year, the program changed its status and the Companies were officially grouped in the *Groupement du SMA*[133]. A Third Unit opened in Tubuai, Austral Islands, in 1996. In 2007, the administrative Unit (*Compagnie de Commandement, Formation Professionnelle et Logistique*) opened in Mahina. In 2013, the *Groupement* officially became a Regiment and adopted the name still in use today: *Régiment du Service Militaire Adapté - Polynésie française* (RSMA-Pf). Following the reform of the French army and the reorganization of the military forces in French Polynesia that occurred in 2008 (see Chapter 4 for a detailed analysis), the Commandment Unit (or *État Major*) of the Regiment and the Unit active in Mahina were moved to the Defense base in Arue. Today, the Defense base hosts the Second Teaching Unit and the *Compagnie de Commandement, Formation Professionnelle et Logistique*, where the Recruitment section is located (RSMA-Pf 2021; see Fig. 5.1).

During the final discourse concluding Macron's presidential visit to French Polynesia in July 2021, the French president promised a renovated commitment to Polynesia and its inhabitants: among the many promises, he announced his will to create a new branch of the *Régiment du Service Militaire Adapté* in Hao, Tuamotu archipelago, strengthening colonial ties and deterring at the same time the arrival of potential unwelcome partners, as the Chinese fishing industry presented elsewhere (see Chapter 1; Kayser 2023). The Fourth Teaching Unit in Hao became effective in the summer of 2022 and is today welcoming volunteers from the Tuamotu archipelago and other islands of the territory.

The first time I saw the young RSMA volunteers I was on the ferry that links Tahiti to Mo'orea. It was a Wednesday morning and I was going to Mo'orea for the first time to meet Tahitian anthropologist Tamatoa Bambridge. As I was standing on the ferry deck, I observed a large group

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[131] Throughout the text I use the acronyms RSMA to refer to a specific regiment; SMA to refer more generally to the program; and RSMA-Pf to refer specifically to the program delivered by the regiment in French Polynesia.

[132] The only exception being the Gambier Islands, which from an administrative point of view are attached to the Tuamotu archipelago.

[133] Within the French army, a *groupement* is composed of several units or companies.

of young Polynesian women and men approaching. They were accompanied by a couple of older metropolitan-looking men, with the only exception being one older Tahitian man. Even though none of them were wearing uniforms, the older men had military backpacks on their shoulders and I hypothesized they were part of the *Service Militaire Adapté* program. Yet, I had no certainty and was too shy to approach them and spark a conversation. When we arrived in Mo'orea, they got on a private bus and I lost sight of them, wondering what they could possibly be doing off-duty on the island. That afternoon, after a long and fruitful day spent at CRIOBE[134] with Tamatoa and his colleagues, I was ready to board the ferry back to Tahiti. What a pleasant surprise to find the same group from that morning again on the deck! Too curious not to observe them, I decided to stand next to them on the deck for the entirety of the trip. There was loud music coming from their boomboxes and coolers full of beers around them. They were visibly drunk, except maybe the older men, supposedly their supervisors. There was a continuous coming and going and some of them waved at me while passing. The girls were trying to dance but they could barely stand up because of the alcohol and the rough waters. Some of them gathered next to one of the metropolitan men, seated on the deck. They sat next to him and started crying and screaming. The group was so loud that a couple of times the security guard came to the deck and told them they could not drink or dance. I hypothesized they went on a day trip together to encourage group cohesion, or that maybe they were finishing the program and went to Mo'orea in the guise of a farewell party. Maybe the girls were crying because the metropolitan soldier was about to leave to go back to France. Or maybe they had a fight during the day and were trying to resolve the issue? There is no way to know, but what is worth noticing is that the group all together appeared more like a summer camp than a military service. Interestingly, this is the idea that many of the volunteers themselves have on their participation in the program: « you *have* to do it! », as one of the ex-volunteers told me while I was carrying out fieldwork in Tubuai, months after this first encounter.

Chapter 5 aims at exploring such uncanny similarities through a genealogical reconstruction of the program's history while investigating the inner logic that led to the transformation of core military and defense functions into civic and socio-cultural ones. Today, there is nothing explicitly linked to the defense functions of the army about the SMA, except the uniforms worn by the volunteers and the lax military discipline inculcated in them. What the program offers are opportunities and possibilities that should otherwise be available in civilian life, and yet they are not. By providing such a life-changing opportunity, as it is advertised, the SMA is able to penetrate young Indigenous people's lives and instill in them values and ideas that in many cases are foreign to them and, most importantly, are military-driven and military-informed. As a result, for the majority of the volunteers and the local population, at least in French Polynesia, the line between this voluntary military/educational service and the regular army is very much blurred, and volunteers' and soldiers' roles are considered interchangeable on many occasions[135]. Moreover, there is a particular pride in wearing military fatigues that permeates such an educational experience and which is fueled

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[134] *Centre de Recherches Insulaires et Observatoire de l'Environnement*. CRIOBE is a Research Support Unit affiliated to the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* (EPHE), University of Perpignan Via Domitia (UPVD), and the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS).

[135] Such a link has been recently explored by Sierra-Paycha, Mora, Lelièvre (2023) by a demographic point of view. More generally, the SMA has been little studied by social scientists, see for instance Mary 2016; Milia-Marie-Luce 2019; Mora 2022; Salomon 2020.

by a historical fascination and adventurous allure that wraps over the army in French Polynesia, as will be explained in this Chapter.

Through an empirical reconstruction of the context in which the SMA was crafted and evolved within the French overseas departments and territories, I aim to show how military functions as they were described in Chapter 3, i.e. all those functions pertaining to the defense and the maintaining of the national and territorial sovereignty, not only were transformed but also extended in their goals and finalities. In this sense, Chapter 5 engages with the expanding social functions carried out by the army, which entail moral and redemptive functions in terms of cohesion of the social entity, as well as economic tasks in terms of inclusion of marginal categories. To this regard, particular attention will be given to the role of the educational system in French Polynesia, whose jurisdiction was acquired and then withdrawn by the local government, in a continuous negotiation over sovereign competencies (for a more detailed analysis see Chapter 2). For instance, the SMA was coincidentally implemented in 1989, i.e. only a few years after the enlargement of the autonomy status was conceded in 1984, granting the educational competency to the local government. The acquirement of rights and governmental competencies awarded with the autonomy statute appears to be counterweighted, on an individual level, by the implanting of this voluntary military service presented as a new governmental tool tailor-made to help struggling Indigenous youth.

Fig. 5.1
RSMA-Pf map. The new facility in Hao doesn't figure on the map.
Source: https://www.rsma.pf/le-regiment/implantation.html

The above-mentioned mutations and extensions of military functions contributed to the blurring of social and political roles and the emergence of new configurations entailing the shift of sovereign tasks from a national entity to a territorial one, and back. To this regard, I intend sovereignty and the consequential administrative negotiations and fluctuating political agreements as the result of a subcutaneous tension inscribed in the non-sovereign Polynesian context itself. These tidal waves of re-colonization remark the non-sovereign nature of the territorial autonomy of French Polynesia and stress the nature of sovereignty as the result of a contested political condition expressed as a continuous struggle.

On Military Myths and Symbolism

Wandering in downtown Papeete, more specifically in what is today known as the neighborhood of St. Amélie, it is possible to walk down *rue du Bataillon du Pacifique*, bordered by a historical-artistic installation, featuring paintings of some among the many Polynesian soldiers who participated in WWI and WWII (Fig. 5.2, 5.3, 5.4). Funded by the local government to celebrate the centenary of the WWI armistice on 11 November 2018, the installation was meant to honor all those Polynesian soldiers that participated in the two world wars. Continuing the virtual walking tour in St. Amélie, *rue du Bataillon du Pacifique* leads the wanderer to a small roundabout: on the right side of it stands the *Présidence de la Polynésie française*, whose building was in the past the only military barracks of colonial times, hosting the *Compagnie autonome d'Infanterie coloniale* stationed in Tahiti (Fig. 5.5). On the left side of the roundabout and facing the High-Commission building on the other side of *avenue Pouvanaa a Oopa*, in the guise of a particular colonial tribute, stands a singular monument, in front of which every military commemoration takes place (Fig. 5.6).

Fig. 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4 (following page)
Artistic installation on *rue du Bataillon du Pacifique*, Papeete.
October 29, 2021. © Claudia Ledderucci

Fig. 5.5
The Presidency's colonial architecture
Courtesy of Moetai Brotherson, President of French Polynesia

Fig. 5.6
War Memorial, Papeete, October 29, 2021.
© Claudia Ledderucci

The war memorial (or *monument aux morts*), intended here as a militarized site of memory (Tengan 2008), celebrates all Polynesian soldiers who voluntarily joined the French army during WWI, WWII, the Korean and Indochina War as well as other campaigns in Madagascar and North Africa, and consequently died fighting for France. In the aftermath of WWII, their role achieved a very prestigious position in the Polynesian imaginary, so important that today they are heroized and cheered in all speeches by every French politician visiting Tahiti. It is precisely in front of this monument that each year, on 14 July, a military parade takes place to reinstate French sovereignty and the relationship between the French Republic and the Polynesian territory, as was sketched in the Introduction. This special union was highlighted by French President Emmanuel Macron during his visit on July 2021. During his speech, he stated:

> [...] There is a unique, intimate, sensitive pact between the Republic and French Polynesia. This pact is the fruit of our history [...] of a unique history, France in the heart of the Pacific. And this unique history is the intersection of a profound culture, an identity, a civilization, and of the fact that here, a people with its culture, a first nation has revealed itself and that the Republic has come. [...] You are at the same time deeply Polynesian and deeply patriotic, deeply Polynesian and deeply Republican. [...] This intimate, sensitive pact was forged by a commitment [...] to the Republic: "Polynesia never turned away, never". [...] I do not forget 1914. The commitment of Polynesians, as everywhere in France, who went to the metropole and shed their blood in the trenches of Aisne, Champagne, Oise, for some of them on the Eastern front, while Papeete was undergoing bombing from the beginning of the war. [...] I don't forget those bereaved families whose children went to defend their freedom and their country more than a century ago, far from their own shores, in trenches, under skies they had never seen before. I don't forget the *Battailon du Pacifique*'s involvement. [...] Leaving more than 80 years ago from Papeete, the *Battailon du Pacifique* was to write its name in style in the epic of the Free French Forces. You have chosen, so many families here. The side of freedom and courage. You have chosen as a matter of evidence to rally to Free France [...] All the companions who left, some of whom died and others who returned. This is a Polynesian pride. It is a French pride. Thank you. You

> recalled how much this place was marked by this Battalion. Today, it is garrisoned here among you. [...] In recalling this glorious past, this more recent past, I do not forget all our OPEX soldiers and their families. [...] I am unfortunately with them because every year there are Polynesian families at the ceremony we hold at the *Hôtel de Brienne* when we celebrate our wounded or our dead. I always have the same emotion and pride because these families never complain. [...] Polynesian mothers and fathers always thank me because they are proud of their son's commitment. [...] I know what French Polynesia, every year, gives to our armed forces more than five hundred recruits. [...] Thank you. So yes, this commitment to the heart, to France. [...] I am proud of this patriotism, of this Polynesian commitment to the service of freedom and France, I am proud of the Polynesian culture at the heart of France, deeply proud. [...] I am proud of these seafaring and warlike people[136].

The presidential speech focused on two different episodes of Polynesian engagement in the French army: a historical one referring to the voluntary engagement of young Indigenous men during WWI and WWII; and a contemporary one referring to the hundreds of youngsters that each year leave their *fenua* to start a new promising life in France, serving in the French armed forces.

It is worth recalling the particular historical circumstances that brought Polynesian men to join the French army during both World Wars, as it is precisely on these myths that the *Régiment du Service Militaire Adapté de Polynésie française* (RSMA-Pf) and the armed forces today base their allure in French Polynesia. In fact, if the role of the army and its soldiers is presented as such a myth to Polynesian people, and if belonging to the French Republic and the army is so glorified, it is clear that the social meaning of and local imaginaries over the army in this far-away (from a French-centric point of view) overseas territory is highly remarkable instead of stigmatized[137].

The history of the *Troupes de Marine*, the French colonial troops, goes back to 1671 when the French Navy established a military corps, yet separated from the French army, to keep the Caribbean

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[136] « [...] Il y a un pacte unique, intime, sensible, entre la République et la Polynésie française. Ce pacte, il est le fruit de notre histoire [...] d'une histoire unique, la France au cœur du Pacifique. Et cette histoire unique, elle est le croisement d'une culture profonde, d'une identité, d'une civilisation, du fait qu'ici, un peuple avec sa culture, un peuple premier s'est déployé et que la République est venue. [...] Vous êtes en même temps profondément polynésiens et profondément patriotes, profondément polynésiens et profondément Républicains. [...] Ce pacte intime, sensible, il a été forgé par un engagement [...] à la République : « La Polynésie n'a jamais manqué, jamais ». [...] je n'oublie pas 1914. L'engagement des Polynésiens, comme partout en France, qui alors ont gagné la métropole et ont versé leur sang dans les tranchées de l'Aisne, de la Champagne, de l'Oise, pour certains sur le front d'Orient, alors même que Papeete subissait les bombardements dès le début de la guerre. [...] Je n'oublie rien de ces familles endeuillées dont les enfants sont allés défendre la liberté et la patrie il y a plus d'un siècle, très loin de leurs propres rivages, dans des tranchées, sous des ciels qu'ils n'avaient jamais vus avant. Je n'oublie rien de l'engagement du bataillon du Pacifique. [...] Partis il y a plus de 80 ans de Papeete, le bataillon du Pacifique allait inscrire avec panache son nom dans l'épopée des Forces françaises libres. Vous avez choisi tant de familles ici. Le camp de la liberté et du courage. Vous avez choisi comme une évidence le ralliement à la France libre [...] Tous les compagnons qui sont partis, dont certains sont morts et d'autres sont revenus. C'est une fierté polynésienne. C'est une fierté française. Merci. Vous avez rappelé combien ce lieu était marqué par ce bataillon. Il est aujourd'hui en garnison ici parmi vous. [...] Je n'oublie pas, en convoquant ce passé glorieux, ce passé plus récent, tous nos combattants en OPEX et leurs familles. [...] Je suis malheureusement avec elles parce qu'il y a chaque année des familles polynésiennes à la cérémonie que nous faisons à l'hôtel de Brienne quand il faut célébrer ou nos blessés, ou nos défunts. J'ai toujours la même émotion et la même fierté parce que ces familles ne se plaignent jamais. [...] Les mères et les pères polynésiens me disent à chaque fois merci parce qu'ils sont fiers de l'engagement de leur fils. [...] Je sais ce que la Polynésie française, chaque année, donne à nos forces armées plus de 500 engagés. [...] Merci à vous. Alors oui, cet engagement au cœur, à la France. [...] J'en suis fier et qu'en étant fier de ce patriotisme, de cet engagement polynésien au service de la liberté et de la France, je suis fier de la culture polynésienne au cœur de la France, profondément fier. [...] Je suis fier de ce peuple marin et guerrier ».

[137] For instance, see the example of *'Aito - Guerriers du Pacifique*, an internet-based project aiming at advertising pan-Pacific and Polynesian soldiers' lives and their military missions. Further info available at: https://aitoguerrierdupacifique.com/

colonies under French aegis[138]. A specific military career in the colonial troops consequently became a viable solution for metropolitan soldiers whose double role of citizens/colonizers made them subjected to manual labor to develop the colonies, while at the same time being in charge of the security and protection of those same territories. Responding to financial and health issues, in 1765 a military colonial corps was created to host Indigenous soldiers and soldiers of Indigenous descent, granting them almost the same rights as metropolitan soldiers and citizens (Lesueur 2009; Antier 2008). Such a decision could nevertheless be considered a political move, as « there is no colonization without a more or less active participation of a more or less important part of the colonized to their own oppression system[139] » (Garan, Klein 2022). This participation precisely meant the achievement of privileges and opportunities for them. Moreover, the continuous presence of Indigenous soldiers within the military ranks meant a specific cultural transfer between the colonial and colonized societies and, to a certain extent, it meant the exercise of personal agency on the part of Indigenous soldiers, who saw in the military career a means to acquire rights and possibilities that were otherwise precluded to them (Antier 2008; Tengan 2008; Morone 2022).

This aspect wasn't a peculiarity of the French colonial army and can indeed be found in other military corps entailing the presence of Indigenous subjects/citizens (see Ware 2012 on the example of the British army welcoming Commonwealth citizens until 2012; Morone 2022 on the Italian colonial army in Libya). The sometimes voluntary participation of Indigenous soldiers in the two World Wars could be explained by the sense of loyalty in arms, friendship and pragmatism weaved over time and felt by Indigenous subjects towards the metropole (for a comprehensive survey on the participation of the French colonial troops to WWI and WWII see Deroo, Champeaux 2013).

In the *Établissements Français de l'Océanie* (EFO), there was no Indigenous colonial army as was the case in the African colonies, and only a small contingent of the French army was stationed in Tahiti. At the outbreak of WWI, in the late summer of 1914, the EFO were a faraway colony not directly touched by the conflict. Yet, in September 1914, Papeete was bombed by a German ship navigating in the Pacific region and this episode contributed to mark such a particular time in history. A thousand men, volunteers and conscripts, left Tahiti in 1914-15 and 1916 but it would be misleading to attribute such a zeal to national patriotism, as the EFO were violently annexed only a few years earlier. Moreover, as noted by Bruno Saura (2012), not everyone in the EFO was subjected to mandatory conscription: all French metropolitan citizens, even those serving in the faraway colonies, were called to arms in 1914-1915; while local inhabitants of Tahiti, Mo'orea, Tubuai, Raivavae, Rapa and the Tuamotu Islands (i.e. the ancient Pomare kingdom) having acquired the French citizenship after the annexation, were called to join the French army the following year (Saura 2015). And yet, Polynesian men from the rest of the EFO (i.e. from the Leeward Islands, Rimatara, Rurutu, the Gambiers, and Marquesas Islands), whose status was of French subjects and therefore not subjected to mandatory conscription, decided to voluntarily join the French army and not for national patriotism, considering the fresh memory of the violent annexation of almost twenty years earlier. Among them, Pouvanaa a Oopa, is considered the father of modern Polynesian politics and pro-autonomy leader (see Chapter 3). Saura (2012) hypothesized that Polynesians who voluntarily

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[138] At the end of the 18th century, the jurisdiction over the colonial troops passed from the Navy to the Army (see Lesueur 2009).

[139] « Il n'y a pas de colonisation sans une participation plus ou moins active d'une part plus ou moins importante des colonisés à leur propre système d'oppression ».

joined the army did so for a sense of honor, especially after the bombardment of Papeete, and to feed their taste for adventures. It is out of solidarity that Polynesian men decided to voluntarily join the French army, and it is precisely upon this *glorious* historical conjuncture that more Polynesians would decide to join the French army twenty years later, to fight in the Second World War (Saura 2015).

At the outbreak of WWII, in 1939, there were five thousand reservists stationed in Tahiti, but none was called to arms as, once again, the war was a faraway event. Out of five thousand, only two hundred soldiers were effectively incorporated in the *Compagnie autonome d'Infanterie coloniale*, stationed in Papeete and commanded by Félix Broche. After the armistice was signed between France and Germany in 1940, Charles de Gaulle exiled himself in London and called on the French empire to rally the newly created committee of *France Libre* (Free France). In the EFO, the political scene was divided: on the one side, stood French functionaries, the majority of whom rallied with the Republic of Vichy, the German-occupied part of France after the armistice; on the other side, stood different figures, such as self-proclaimed communists, free-masons, French and *démi* businessmen (for which the armistice meant a commercial block, the Pacific being patrolled by allied forces), protestants dignitaries and some local functionaries, among whom stood Pouvanaa a Oopa, pro-autonomist leader as we have seen in Chapter 2, and WWI veteran who voluntarily joined the French army in 1916[140] (Saura 2015). Interestingly, the local population didn't take sides at first and was probably assessing the gravity of the situation. After Vichy laws were promulgated by the French governor on August 21, 1940, a Free France Committee was created in the EFO and led by Émile de Curton, a French military doctor stationed in Papeete. Since the French governor played an ambiguous role, not siding with Vichy nor the Free France Committee, this last one's activists organized a popular referendum to decide where to stand. The September referendum saw a striking majority voting to rally the Free France Committee, following De Gaulle's call to arms via radio in the previous weeks, and Commander Broche, leading the *Compagnie autonome d'Infanterie coloniale*, was in charge of rallying men to make up a new battalion and leave for the front. In 1941, the *Bataillon du Pacifique* left Tahiti counting three hundred Polynesian men, and more volunteers to be recruited in New Caledonia and the New Hebrides (Regnault 2006; see also Deroo, Champeaux 2013). The *Bataillon du Pacifique* fought in North Africa, Italy and France (Regnault, Kurtovitch 2002; Benhalima 2020), and when the volunteers came back to the EFO in 1946, they were acclaimed and commemorations followed right after (Saura 2015). Once more, what pushed Polynesians to voluntarily join the army (as there was no conscription for them) was not only national patriotism, even though those who served during WWI stood as good examples and influenced those who would leave to fight in the conflict. As remarked by French historian Jean-Marc Regnault (2006, see also Regnault, Kurtovitch 2002), many joined the French army to side with Great Britain, the old ally, more than with de Gaulle. Moreover, there were also local reasons at the origin of such an enlistment. Among them stood economic reasons: many businessmen feared their businesses to fail because of an allied (Australia,

[140] Pouvana'a had a complicated relationship with the metropole, exemplifying the multilayered nature of Franco-Polynesian political bonds. He was born in 1895, only seven years after France had taken over his island home of Huahine. Nonetheless, he decided to risk his life for what he thought was a just cause, i.e. fighting for France and its English ally. At the outbreak of WWII, Pouvana'a rallied to the cause of Free France, but his subsequent protests to the local administration over war profiteering and the unequal distribution of foodstuffs and other scarce goods to the Tahitians resulted in his exile to Huahine. Later, in 1958, he emerged as a leading politician fighting for Tahitian rights, for which reason he was framed and convicted of attempted arson and exiled in France (Saura 2012).

New Zealand, and the UK) commercial block over the Pacific region. Therefore, siding with the Free France committee meant commercial benefits and avoiding bankruptcy. The protestant church also played a key role in inviting its believers to side with de Gaulle and the Free France Committee (Regnault 2006).

The military myth at the core of this Chapter and which I argue stands at the base of a modern-day high rate of military enlistment was crafted exactly in that historical conjuncture after WWII. Such glorious and mythic rhetoric hovering over the armed forces was shaped by those same leaders that would later fight for equality, more autonomy, and eventually independence (Saura 2015)[141]. Armistice Day, 8 May 1945, is warmly commemorated every year in modern-day French Polynesia. Both WWI and WWII contributed a great deal in shaping contemporary belongings and representing performances of citizenship. Whether they were French metropolitans, Tahitians holding citizenship or Polynesian subjects from the outer islands, soldiers who participated in both World Wars, the Indochina War, and to some extent to the Algerian War, the army shaped individual and political subjectivities, offering native subjects/citizens economic opportunities as well as social mobility that would have been precluded otherwise. Moreover, in the EFO, unlike elsewhere within the French empire, there was no colonial army in its proper sense and no colonial trauma directly linked to the army, as we have seen that even during the nuclear testing program the army was used as a proxy (see Chapter 3). French soldiers massively arrived in Tahiti during the 1960s, and with them came modern infrastructures and money. Soldiers were thus seen by the local population as symbols of modernity and most importantly social prestige and economic welfare. On the other side, French soldiers stationed in Tahiti were attracted by the Garden of Eden image linked to Polynesian islands. For instance, during long conversations I had with one of the metropolitan soldiers at the RSMA facility in Tubuai, he repeatedly told me that French people want to come to Polynesia to escape modernity and technology while Polynesians want to go to France for exactly the opposite reason. He couldn't understand why. I argue that these reasons are very much clear, especially if we make the right connections. These two imaginaries and the myths they both carry, feed the colonial system still in place in French Polynesia, exporting Indigenous soldiers and importing metropolitan functionaries.

Many times I wondered to what extent this monumentalization and heroization of Polynesian soldiers, or *tamari'i volontaires*, is at the core of contemporary discourses revolving around the French army and the supposedly predisposition of Polynesian people to join such an institution. As repeated to me by many different interlocutors, and as reflected in Macron's speech as well, Polynesians are considered (and to some extent consider themselves) warriors[142]. This is true especially for young men, as one female interlocutor would explain to me: « they are not done to go to school or for education, more generally. They need to be rigidly framed because they like rules. [...] Polynesians

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[141] Yet, ex-soldiers who were promised jobs and financial support were rapidly forgotten. The functionary positions promised to them would be taken over by metropolitan functionaries coming from France at great expenses and the situation was so tense that in 1947 a group of local inhabitants, led by Pouvanaa a Oopa, occupied a ship freshly arrived to deliver French functionaries to their new posts (Saura 2012).

[142] In the Tahitian language (or *reo tahiti*), warrior can be translated with two words: *toa* and *'aito*. Although the two words are synonyms, *toa* is an archaic Polynesian term, widely spread across the Polynesian territory, meaning fighter, warrior, hero. *'Aito* is a more recent and specifically Tahitian form for this term. According to the interpretation of a friend, a Tahitian language teacher, Tiaremaòhi Tairua, *toa* has a protective connotation: the coral barrier is *toa* because it protects from the swell. On the other hand, *'aito* has a different connotation: strong, stable, like ironwood, the Polynesian pine. See also the online dictionary of the Tahitian Academy: http://www.farevanaa.pf/dictionnaire.php

are warriors[143] ». This warrior-like tradition is then supposed to be at the core of their education and it is what brings them to join the army or its local program (RSMA) as soon as they turn eighteen years old[144]. As we will see in the rest of the Chapter, it is precisely on such ethnocultural attributes that new social and moral categories will be shaped, giving way to the racialization of political subjectivities (see Tengan 2008; Dvorak 2008 on martialized masculinities in Oceania). Moreover, the RSMA provides young people with professional diplomas that can be employed in the everyday search for a job, while the general diploma obtained after high school is seen as useless to start a professional life, as another one of my interlocutors told me.

This kind of profiling targeting Polynesian youth is the result of a linguistic as well as cognitive shift that occurred in the past, coincidentally with the acquirement of political rights and the opening of French Polynesia to modern job market mechanisms and capitalist functioning. What in the past was considered as an ethnic heritage/survival to overcome through the advancement brought by the colonizers, is today resignified by the same national system and presented as a social stigma to be eradicated through these regimenting devices such as the SMA. This is also the case because, as noted by native Hawai'ian scholar Ty Tengan, « militarism has become so deeply embedded [into Pacific islanders' lives and nation-making] it cannot be seen as completely "Other" and instead must be accounted for in the ways that contemporary Oceanic people construct themselves and nations and modern objects » (Tengan 2008:29).

Given these premises, what kind of political subjectivities does the army craft? And to what extent can these subjectivities be considered sovereign since they bloom in a colonized context? What does it mean to be a soldier for young Polynesians? And how important are life aspirations they try to reach through a military career? Would Polynesians join the army at the same rate if such a heroic myth would not be reinstated constantly? Before answering these questions, it's worth recalling the historical conjunctures that brought to the creation of the SMA. Even if the goals of these two institutions (the SMA and the regular army) are different, as was constantly repeated to me by French metropolitan soldiers, I argue they share the same nature as national institutions, and that moreover, the RSMA thrives in French Polynesia exactly because it is constantly fed by the heroic myths presented above, as well as on the supposedly positive role played by the army in its overseas dependencies.

Colonial Reanimations through the Militarization of Civilian Tasks

According to the Ministry of the Overseas (Ministère des Outre-mer 2021), ruling over the educational-military device in agreement with the Ministry of Defense since 1968, the *Service Militaire Adapté* is a military device aimed at socially and professionally integrating Indigenous youth that struggles at finding a job in the restricted overseas job markets. Today, almost everyone in French Polynesia knows the program and nods at its mention, as it is presented as a second-chance

[143] Unutea Hirschon, personal communication, 29 September 2021.

[144] The RSMA was defined by the same interlocutor as « la meilleure chose arrivée en Polynésie [car il] aide les jeunes ».

school working as a redemption mechanism[145]. Not only the supposed warrior-like culture makes Polynesian young men the perfect candidates, as recalled in the previous paragraph, but also the fine-grained network crafted by the local institution itself contributes to rendering the SMA very much appreciated by young people, their families as well as by local politicians of every side, many of whom are convinced that the SMA is the only means able to help the struggling Indigenous youth of the *fenua*. In other words, the SMA is pragmatically perceived as the best way to overcome the precarious living situations that many young people have to deal with in their everyday life. The explicit local politics willing to target local unemployment through a strong partnership with the army, not only gives rise to ambiguous triangulations but goes hand in hand with the lasting influence exercised by the army, as recalled above. Such triangulations entail the shifting roles of the army (from core military and defense functions to civic and socio-cultural ones) and the expansion of its tasks. I argue that the manifold institutions supposedly in charge of the deliverance of such opportunities (schools, employment centers, church, etc.) struggle at achieving the great success covered by the army and its local program, not only because of a financial/budgetary issue (meaning that the army has bigger funds than the rest of the social institutions) but also and significantly because of the adventurous allure and social role covered by soldiers and the army more generally. This shift in functions is not a recent one, even if nowadays we are witnessing a new revival. Indeed, the army, and colonial troops particularly, have always thrived at the intersection of defense and civic functions.

Building on the fundamental study conducted by French historian Sylvain Mary (2016), I argue that the origin of the SMA is an example of how a colonial past can be reanimated and still influence practices, discourses, and representations of local actors today. Looking closely at the origin of the SMA, we learn that such a device was created at the beginning of the 1960s to massively incorporate French colonial citizens, especially after the riots that were shaking the French Antilles in 1959. A Caribbean detour is necessary to better understand the role of such a device in the wider French colonial context. As we have seen in Chapter 3, inhabitants of the French colonies officially became citizens in 1946, consequently acquiring the same rights and duties as French metropolitan citizens. Yet, the most visible and symbolic of these duties, i.e. the mandatory military service, did not apply to the Caribbean colonies, newly become departments, of Martinique, Guadalupe, and Guyana because of logistical and economic impediments. Instead, young men from the French Antilles were given paid holidays and were not subjected to military service (Mary 2016).

Introduced in mainland France in 1905, the modern military service was a means for French citizens to perform their belonging to the motherland, but it was also a symbol of equality among citizens (Gresle 2003): everyone was called to service... except French citizens from the Caribbeans. The departmentalization didn't bring the expected outcomes nor did it better the social conditions of local inhabitants who were claiming the same rights and duties as French metropolitan citizens. Such political requests, which eventually led to the 1959 riots in Martinique, appeared as threatening to the metropolitan government. Out of fear that those riots would degenerate into a civil war as happened in Algeria in those same years, the newly appointed Commander of the

[145] An interesting parallel could be drawn between this redemptive function of the army and similar outcomes delivered by the church, an institution that quintessentially carries on redemptive roles. The army is more efficient in delivering social redemption as it tightly weaves social and neoliberal-informed categories together with the hard work supposed to redeem the laziness of native populations (see Tengan 2008; McClintock 1995; Teaiwa 2001). In this way, not only native soldiers are not presented as lazy, indeed they embody positive qualities such as braveness and steadiness.

Régiment Mixte des Antilles-Guyane, the army corps stationed in the region, General Némo, was entrusted by Prime Minister Michel Debré to design a new program tailor-made for the Caribbean departments aimed at substituting the mandatory conscription. The new program was designed with the precise goal of pacificating, domesticating, and politically assimilating a riotous fringe of the local population (Mary 2016) but was instead advertised as the fulfillment of popular requests over equality of rights and national duties. This colonial military service had two main functions: as any military service, considered to be a pillar of modern nation-states, it was central in incorporating and acculturating citizens to the nation; while at the same time responding to local politicians' requests for more equality and social justice.

The accent on the military aspect of such a device was central, as General Némo was also one of the main theorists of the counterinsurgency theory, which he refined on the field during the Indochina War. In that particular context, he was persuaded that the French army wasn't prepared enough, especially because French soldiers ignored the social structure and functioning of those they were fighting. His tactic, defined as *guerre dans la foule*, was supposed to provide a grounded knowledge of the social context into which soldiers were supposed to integrate. Closely observing the local population and its socio-cultural structures, in Némo's view, was fundamental to understanding the weaving of local alliances and the dynamic nature of these positions subjected to rapid changes during a guerrilla war (Villatoux 2004; Tisseron 2009). Developing a colonial military device aimed at incorporating Indigenous young men into the French army could be considered, to a certain extent, the fulfillment of Némo's idea of grounded knowledge of the local populations[146]. Not only the newly recruited young men served as virtual counterweights to their local and riotous compatriots, but they were indeed the entry point the French army needed to better learn and understand the social and political pattern of its Indigenous enemies/citizens[147].

The original plan was also designed to alleviate the demographic pressure that was threatening Guadalupe and Martinique's social stability and development and was deemed to be the cause of social riots: while a part of the newly recruited military contingent was supposed to operate in the French Antilles, another part of it was deemed to be sent to mainland France. The Guadalupean and Martiniquan contingent was also susceptible to being sent to French Guyana, as the South American department was considered under-populated and therefore under-developed (Mary 2016; Milia 1997). The mandatory military recruitment was conceived to function as a demographic re-equilibration of the Indigenous Caribbean population to better define French sovereignty in that part of the world. A real social engineering plan, Némo's project contemplated a selective migration towards French Guyana, where the newly arrived soldiers-citizens were supposed to literally build infrastructures and found small communities to advance French sovereignty in the South American

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146 This configuration of events gives space to analyze and realize how the State, usually intended as a totalizing institution, is in reality made up of social actors, such as General Némo. In fact, if the politics informing the implementation of the SMA device were colonial ones, they were as well the result of personal views spurred by personal experiences, such as Némo's personal experience in the Indochina war.

147 The logic of colonial reanimations could be applied to military strategy as well. The military budget's cut operated at the turning of the 21st century in the aftermath of the Cold War and nuclear dissuasion was the result of a changing military strategy supposedly more focused on prevention than on attack. The slimming down of the military apparatus has been at the core of a new military strategy aiming at developing what has been defined as « guerre aux sein des populations » (Tisseron 2009). Yet, as we have seen, this is not a new strategy at all, as it was at the center of Némo's strategic will in developing the SMA in the French overseas dependencies. Such colonial regurgitations are positioned at the core of imperial formations' thriving strategies and are perfect examples of how colonial histories are recursive ones.

continent (Mary 2016). Such a device would have been capable of transforming simple workers into colonizers and landowners, veiling the military colonization of Guyana that was instead presented as a civilizational effort[148]. These grandiose projects and plans were indeed the product of imperial anxiety and fears, which prompted the French government to finance such enterprises that were presented as gold opportunities offered by a benevolent nation. Yet, local hostility to this kind of forced migration and the lack of political will to persevere in such an enterprise marked the end of this imperial dream of glory (Mary 2016).

The Army's « Social Mission »

Starting in 1962, the military program became effective in Martinique, Guadalupe, and French Guyana and these three French departments became real social laboratories through which France was implementing its territorial cohesion, exerting its sovereignty, and testing out its social-military device. Fulfilling what has been defined as the army's social mission (Coudray 2019), the same institution was simultaneously assuming new roles, for instance expanding its educational functions, and representing the militarization of civic, moral, and socio-economic tasks, as argued in this Chapter. Throughout the years, and especially after the suspension of mandatory military service in 1997, such militarizing tendencies coupled with the expansion of market-oriented civic-educational offers aimed at regimenting and disciplining marginal categories of citizens. Building on the work of political scientists J. Soss, R. Fording, and S. Schram (2011), I argue that similar patterns of neoliberal paternalism[149] in the management of poor and marginalized categories can be observed in the enlargement of the roles and functions carried out by the army in French overseas dependencies. For instance, the enlargement of the non-military functions of the army (mostly through the RSMA) coincided, in French Polynesia, with the enlargement of administrative and political competencies accorded to the territorial government as if the new liberties acquired needed to be counterweighted to a nationally-driven device setting its particular standards and definitions over the social categories it was supposed to administer.

Notwithstanding the very diverse contexts in which General Némo implemented the SMA (the 1960s) and the contemporary one described by Soss et al. (2011), I believe there are striking similarities between the enlargement of civic functions carried out by the army and the rise of neoliberal paternalist policies. Differing from earlier neoliberal *laissez-faire* tendencies, which have

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[148] The attractiveness of the migratory plan towards Guyana was indeed fueled by a well-known myth that contributed to the sublimation of such a place. As observed by Sylvain Mary, Guyana was imagined as « a blank page, the place of all utopias » (2016:102). Such familiar place-myths, recalled in Chapter 4, were as well used to describe French Polynesia, imagined as a terrestrial paradise or Garden of Eden. Such discourses were fundamental to sublimate the adventurous myth of conquest at the core of colonial endeavors (see also Redfield 2000; DeLoughrey 2012). The military enterprise carried out by the SMA played a central role in sublimating the immensity of the French colonies, while at the same time promoting their development and technological advancement.

[149] The authors described neoliberalism as « an intellectual and political movement that emerged in the late twentieth century to advance a radical market-centered agenda in global and domestic relations. Like all forms of liberalism, it prized the "possessive individual" and privileges the freedoms associated with private property, market relations, and trade across nations. [...] Neoliberalism is an effort to extend the reach of market logic, applying it as an organizing principle for all social and political relations. [...] It is an effort to mobilize the state on behalf of the market and reconfigure the state as a quasi-market operation » (2011:20), while paternalism is defined as « an authority relationship based on unequal status and power » (2011:24).

entailed the implementation of structural reforms and modernization mechanisms operated by new institutional actors such as the IMF or the WTO and the dismantlement of the welfare state, the contemporary neoliberal paternalist configuration « [...] is not about weakening the state; it is about strengthening [it] as a disciplinary authority » (Soss et al. 2011:42). Moreover, « neoliberals [...] have embraced its [the state's] authority while working to redirect and transform it. In many respects, the neoliberal state is marked by *more* ambitious economic involvements and by *expansions* of social programs that target the poor. Neoliberal reforms have strengthened the state's capacities to serve markets, restructured its operations around market principles, and extended its reach through collaborations with civil society organizations » (ibid. 2011:6, original emphasis). It is not surprising then that issues such as the social one, which I define as the revolutionary and riotous potential inscribed in marginal fringes of the population, but also as a particular configuration that contributes to the definition of social categories and their framing, started to be molded by market-oriented actors and consequently driven by their policies.

In French Polynesia, the situation is particularly interesting as there are very few external actors, be they multinationals, supranational organizations or NGOs, as this role is mostly played by the French metropolitan government. The territory has in fact always relied on a hard-to-fight economic dependency bolstered in the 1960s with the implantation of the nuclear testing program, hindering in this way the local capacities to develop a flourishing economy based on the territorial specificities and resources, other than tourism. As a result of this, as we have seen with the example of the Covid-19 pandemic (see Chapter 2), the local government can resign and indeed did resign its competencies when the governance appears too challenging or the economic problems are insurmountable. The metropolitan government consequently and paternalistically steps in to regulate the matter, allocating more funding or proposing new options[150]. This mechanism works as well in the implementation of national devices, such as the SMA, proposed unilaterally as a golden standard in solving social and economic problems. The main outcome is that local devices exercising civic, educational, socio-cultural, and economic functions don't receive popular support or alternatively don't work as well as their national counterparts, precisely because the national corresponding devices and institutions are better placed and have more funding to pursue their goals[151]. Therefore, the local educational system as well as the professionalizing and employment mechanisms (such as the *Centre de Formation Professionnelle des Adultes* or CFPA, the local vocational training center) are not as popular as the SMA, capable of gathering these functions all at once. This means that, notwithstanding the ample liberties conceded to the territorial government in the 1980s, the national government is deeply and perversely insinuating into the intimate lives of its populations, convincing them they need the devices supposedly created to help them while implementing social cohesion and the smooth functioning of the colonial system. In reality, such strategical planning aims more at making sure to have a disciplined population and secured island bases in the Pacific Ocean to maintain a strategic place in the contemporary geopolitical chessboard.

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[150] As seen through the example of the electoral system reform (see Chapter 2), the French government can indeed intervene at any moment in the local political life of French Polynesia, and not just when the local government asks for guidance.

[151] Not to mention the allure and fascination that hover over the army, as discussed at the beginning of the Chapter.

The army thrives in such a situation as it is presented as a fix-it-all device, able to overcome the critical situation that local devices couldn't adjust with their modest budgets. Far from looking after national security and the maintenance of national sovereignty, the role carried out by the army is not a defense function, in this case; it is its reverse. The army's functions are declined over contextual necessities. This thought process could explain why the SMA was implemented overseas, where French sovereignty had to be reinstated constantly but not through the use of strength. As observed by Soss et al., « [...] the political importance of paternalism lies precisely in its capacity to make coercive force less necessary for the maintenance of unequal power relations » (2011:24). General Némo was in fact convinced that the most efficient way of maintaining a colony within the French orbit of interest was to befriend its inhabitants (Villatoux 2003; Tisseron 2009).

The *Troupes de Marine* and the SMA have always carried out a civic and educational role, assuming redemptive and moral functions aimed at helping Indigenous citizens in need of regimentation and discipline. This has also meant that the army took over a precise economic and moral function to rebrand and empower its soldiers-citizens: it is only through enlistment in the French army that Indigenous citizens can demonstrate they are deserving of the citizenship conceded to them and ready to be integrated into the national body. Moreover, it is only through enlistment that marginal fringes of the society, pertinently regimented, can acquire soft skills leading them to a certain economic stability otherwise inaccessible in the empire's peripheries. The economic as well as the social function of the army contribute to the social mobility and inclusion of soldiers-citizens and to a general social cohesion that provides for the maintenance of social peace much wanted by the national state. This is why national devices such as the SMA could be considered as pacification mechanisms comprised in a wider social disorders' prevention policy.

Since the date of its creation in 1961, General Némo highlighted the non-military qualities of its noble program, on which flag « we will never write down the names of military victories, but there are other victories: those we win against misery and underdevelopment[152] » (in Mary 2016:103), while at the same time putting forward Némo's anti-guerilla strategy and the defensive role of the military device: « the SMA must be the starting point of this long and patient operation of national defense [...] whose goal is to keep the French departments of the American continent within the national heritage[153] » (ibid.).

Placing the SMA in a broader conflictual colonial context, where some fringes of the local population were requesting independence from France, it is arguable that the new program indirectly represented a non-armed fighting cohort. The fact that General Némo was also appointed as the new Commander of the French army corps stationed in the Antilles-Guyana played as a guarantee that any insurrectional group would be defeated, in part through the symbolic example of the good Indigenous young men that were participating in the SMA military service. Through this new program, the non-military face of French colonial action overseas, the army was not only reinstating French sovereignty in the Antilles and Guyana but also fulfilling its social mission (Trucy 2008; Coudray 2019).

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[152] « On n'inscrira jamais de noms de victoires militaires mais il est d'autres victoires : celles que l'on gagne contre la misère et le sous-développement ».

[153] « Le SMA doit être le point de départ de cette longue et patiente opération de défense nationale [...] dont le but est de garder les départements français d'Amérique dans le patrimoine national ».

The *Troupes de Marine*, or colonial troops, from which the new military program took its soldiers, always had a particular role in the history of the French armed forces: not only were they created to conquer and defend French colonies, but they were also used to export a certain way of behavior and know-how to domesticate Indigenous people through acculturation[154] (Lesueur 2009). This way of administering colonies was so common within French entities that a recent document, an information report redacted for the French Senate by Senator François Trucy, stated that « the project that General Némo set up in the Antilles and French Guyana in 1961 was only an adaptation of what had been done elsewhere in other times and which had been perpetuated in variable forms[155] » (Trucy 2008:15). Quoting the preface of the 1926 handbook for colonial troops, officializing « the development mission that soldiers carry out outside of the metropolitan borders[156] » the same document stated that « "outside of France, a soldier wouldn't be complete if he were to be satisfied to only be a soldier!"[157] » (ibid.). The social problems that the army and its new device were called to solve « remained the same as in the past: to help people pulling through, both economically and socially[158] » (ibid.).

Through the integration of the local social and economic fabric, the SMA was supposed to prevent any riots and local protests in the French Antilles while at the same time gaining the trust of the Indigenous population through such a benevolent concession by the metropolitan government, as the program was advertised[159] (Mary 2016). The program's ambition was to socially elevate the participants, fueling in them a sense of citizenship, modest behavior, and goodwill through the improvement of their living conditions. Consequently, this was deemed to bring to a relaxation of social tensions and to reduce any possibility of riots while at the same time exalting the good qualities of manual labor that the newly recruited Indigenous soldiers were supposed to carry on. Interestingly, this was not a peculiarity of the SMA program, even if the novelty of such a device was very well advertised by its creators, and continues to be until today. For instance, Charles de Gaulle, then President of the French Republic, noted a similarity between the SMA and the *Chantiers de la Jeunesse*, a mandatory civil and educational service active from 1940 to 1944 in Vichy France,

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154 This particular aspect would emerge throughout the interviews I conducted with French metropolitan soldiers in Tahiti and Tubuai. See next Chapter.

155 « Le projet que le général Némo met en place aux Antilles et en Guyane en 1961 n'est donc finalement qu'une adaptation de ce qui se faisait ailleurs en d'autres temps et qui s'était perpétué sous des formes variables ».

156 « La mission de développement que remplit le militaire hors de nos frontières métropolitaines ».

157 « "Hors de France, un militaire ne serait pas complet s'il se contentait de n'être que soldat!" ». The same report mentions the actions of Colonel Monteil, Colonel Ferrandi, and Maréchal Gallieni, military officers and colonial explorers who stressed the importance of the non-military aspect of their missions in Africa and more generally overseas, once again considered as laboratories for new enforcement practices (Trucy 2008).

158 « Restait le même que par le passé: aider les populations à s'en sortir, autant économiquement que socialement ».

159 Within the SMA ranks, as it will be explained in the next Chapter, this kind of trust is achieved through the minimization of differences in ranks and origins among soldiers, which nevertheless doesn't alter the difference in the military hierarchy. Similar situations were observed by Ware 2012 and Morone 2022, regarding the enlistment of native people into national armies.

after the mandatory military service was temporarily suspended with the declaration of the armistice in June 1940 (Mary 2016; Pécout 2008, 2009)[160].

Yet, as modern imperial formations produce recurrent patterns of governmentality, the genealogy of such a device goes back to even earlier than WWII. The resemblance between my first encounter with the SMA volunteers' on the ferry deck recalled above and summer camps is not casual, nor is it the homonymy between summer colonies and political colonies (be they penal colonies, settlement colonies, island bases, etc.). Anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler retraced the genealogy of agricultural colonies for delinquent youth established in France in the 1840s and 1850s and proposed to think of them within a broader context of imperial governance entailing a wide array of different devices, such as penal colonies, detention centers, and island military bases (Stoler 2016, especially chapter 3; see also Foucault 1977 quoted in Stoler). Agricultural labor was intended to rescue recalcitrant youth from their precarious living conditions, as attachment to the land and manual labor would elevate their spirit while at the same time providing economic, political, and moral solutions to social problems such as urban pauperism, the threat of revolutionary potential coming from the urbanizing poor, as well as potential crimes committed by abandoned children. At the same time, these devices allowed to make productive those categories that otherwise represented a threat to society and a social burden, transforming recalcitrant individuals into loyal settlers and citizens with limited aspirations (Stoler 2016, see also Pécout 2008, 2009 on the *Chantiers de la Jeunesse*).

It is precisely upon this ambivalence and fuzziness of roles and positioning, in which Indigenous people are absorbed by the colonial system by being a part of the mechanism while retaining their Indigenous identities, that sovereign yet colonized subjectivities are molded (see also Tengan 2008). And this is precisely the lever that the army still uses today in order to find new volunteers each year, promising them learning and working opportunities, while simultaneously making French citizens with limited aspirations out of them.

Since 1962, young Indigenous men from Guadalupe, Martinique, and French Guyana took on a new identity while participating in this military program, wearing a military uniform and abiding by a particular motto: « la réussite par l'effort et le travail » (success through effort and hard work), instilling in them the idea that only through their hard work can they acquire rights and better their social position, that is nonetheless structurally limited. Such a moralizing principle was empowered even more by contemporary neoliberal and paternalist ideals which transferred social problems from the public sphere to an individualized and intimate level, eventually resulting in the culpability of personal attitudes and the criminalization of marginalized categories of people.

Under the aegis of the Ministry of the Overseas, in which bureau's the Commandment General of the SMA is stationed in Paris, the program is today delivered in virtually all French overseas dependencies: after the first units were implanted in the Caribbean, the rest of them followed soon after in La Réunion (1965), New Caledonia (1986), Mayotte (1988) and French Polynesia (1989). Moreover, a metropolitan unit was built in Périgueux, near Paris, in 1995 serving as a teaching center for soldiers and military personnel about to leave for their overseas tours of duty.

After a first and violent encounter in what became French colonies (see Saura 2015; Bayart, Bertrand 2006), the army was central in normalizing French presence overseas and the SMA

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[160] Once again, an interesting parallel could be drawn between this national institution and the religious associative world, for instance, the boy scouts, conveying ambivalent messages over character and identity development, as well as paramilitary and religious ideas and rules (on boy scouts and the American youth see Mechling 2001).

program was so popular that it was made a permanent device after its first twenty years of trial, and spread throughout French overseas departments and territories. Working as a redemption mechanism for urbanized Indigenous poor, this new military device became part of a particular colonial governance that translated into a sort of risk management politics[161] operated by the French government overseas, to stem social riots and possible threats. National devices such as the SMA stand at the intersection of a pacification industry, entailing inclusion/exclusion mechanisms based on moral values as well as enclosure and enforcement strategies (Stoler 2016).

The Fragmented Educational System of French Polynesia

In modern-day nation-states, the educational system and schools more generally are another means through which the government delivers a specific pedagogy to educate and craft responsible and loyal citizens[162]. As we have seen in Chapter 2, the *loi Deferre* (active in French Polynesia since 1957) gave wide autonomy to overseas territories, among which stood the competency over education. Paradoxically though, the granting of educational competencies to the local government had opposite outcomes in French Polynesia, as the local government had a restricted budget and couldn't administer the educational system properly, eventually deciding to resign its competency (Maurice, Salaün 2020). This inevitably had political repercussions on the administration of the territory, as during the same period there was a sudden stronghold over local management aimed at contrasting autonomist ambitions. As noted by anthropologists Edenz Maurice and Marie Salaün (2020), the school played a fundamental role in retaining overseas citizens through the standardization and the enlargement to virtually every one of primary education, as well as the use of the French language as the universalist teaching language in its overseas dependencies[163].

Education was one of those competencies that were conceded to the local government of French Polynesia with the promulgation of the autonomy statute of 1984[164]. Notwithstanding this local competency accorded to the territorial government, 91% of the budget was financed, in 2015, by the national government, while the territorial government provides for local infrastructures (Salaün, LePlain 2018; Malogne 2001). This also implies that the majority of high school teachers, and part

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[161] Here I referred to a concept explained by anthropologist Rebecca Bryant during the panel « Uncanny Colonial Reanimations: Ethnographies of post-colonial population control and resilient alternatives » at the EASA 2022 Conference in July 2022, at Queen's University Belfast.

[162] See Tengan 2008 on Kamehameha School in Honolulu, Hawai'i; Goodyear-Kā'opua 2005 on community and nation building through the school system in modern-day Hawai'i; and Aguon 2008 for an overview of the entanglements between the educational system and the enlistment in the U.S. Army in Micronesia.

[163] The use of Tahitian and other native languages was forbidden in public schools since the annexation in 1880 and until the 1980s, when the *loi Deixonne* ruling over the use of regional languages and promulgated in 1951 in metropolitan France was finally applied to French Polynesia in 1981 (Peltzer 2009). Such restrictive linguistic policies aimed at facilitating the assimilation of native Polynesians by the use of the French language. Tahitian was nonetheless dominant within religious institutions and indeed taught in religious (protestant) schools. Counterintuitively, kids in native language speakers' families were encouraged to speak French by their parents, as it was seen as a means through which to better their social position (Lavondès 1972).

[164] As stated in the law defining the local and national competencies conceded with the 1984 autonomy statute (*loi n° 84-820 du 6 Septembre 1984 portant statut du territoire de la Polynésie française*), the national government retains its competency over post-secondary and higher education, as well as over the definition of national programs and exams (Art.3, clause 16).

of middle school teachers are provided by the national Ministry of Education and sent to French Polynesia with short-term contracts and lacking knowledge of the contexts they are about to enter. Moreover, the educational system in place in French Polynesia is molded on the metropolitan one, which focuses on nominally teaching each one in the name of the universalist ideal of the French Republic, without paying attention to local specificities and needs. The only exceptions are represented by Tahitian and Pacific cultures' classes that became mandatory in primary school in 1982 with the implementation of the *loi Deixonne*, and the adjustment of the history and geography programs to better reflect the Pacific context at all school levels. The risk of such a system is that local particularities and differences are not taken into consideration with the attention they supposedly need. This universalist model, exercised in French overseas dependencies, is the result of a wider colonial system which, on the premise of teaching its population, ends up delivering two different outcomes: on the one side, it regiments its Indigenous citizens limiting their future aspirations, while on the other side, it teaches its elites how to better govern (Maurice, Salaün 2020). This was even more explicit in the past when, until the beginning of the 1960s, there were no high schools in French Polynesia and only rich (*démi*) families could send their children abroad to continue their studies. It was only with the arrival *en masse* of the army and its functionaries to develop French nuclear weapons that the necessity of educating their teenage children prompted the national government to open the first high school in Papeete (Le Plain 2018).

The geographic particularities of French Polynesia continue until today to complicate the deliverance of national education. French Polynesia is composed of one hundred eighteen islands and atolls, spread over an area of four million km^2, i.e. roughly the size of continental Europe. Of these one hundred eighteen islands, only seventy two are inhabited. On these seventy two inhabited islands, schools are spread unevenly. While elementary schools are located in the majority of the islands, middle schools and high schools are not that extended. Middle schools are present in each archipelago, at least on the most populated islands, while high schools are only located on Tahiti, Mo'orea, and Raiatea, in the Society Islands (see Fig. 5.7). This means that young students coming from the other four archipelagoes composing French Polynesia have to move away from their islands, i.e. their social, familiar and environmental contexts of belonging, at a very young age and with important consequences on their quality of life. Such premature mobility influences students' attitudes and the quality of their learning experiences: school is not seen as an exciting opportunity but more as an obligation whose goal is not fully understood by students, and whose teaching programs don't reflect their contexts of belonging. Such visions over the school system and more generally about students' experiences are indirectly visions about one's own future. Far from being hindered by revivalist-like ideas over the understanding of time and Polynesian traditional temporal concepts, future aspirations are indeed baffled by the differential education offered to Polynesian youth.

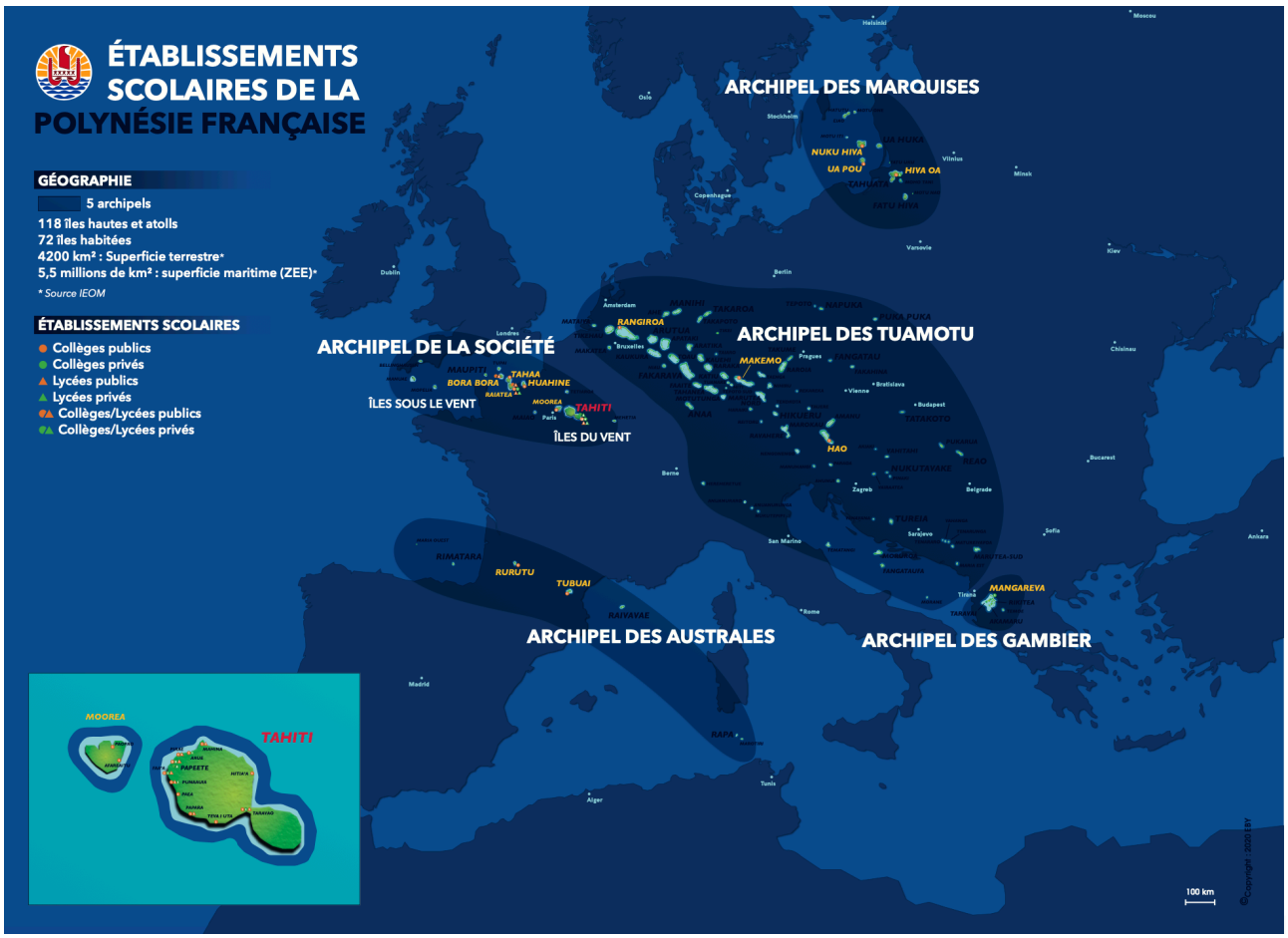

Fig. 5.7
Educational infrastructures in French Polynesia.
Courtesy of the Ministry of Education Chief of Staff, T. Delmas

Traveling students are hosted in board schools or by their extended families, and can travel back to their islands of origin only during long holidays, such as Christmas and summer vacations. While the totality of the mobility costs is taken into charge by the local government, youth coming from the outer islands are yet disadvantaged as it takes a long time and a great deal of patience to travel back to their homes, especially when air travels are not available, as in the case of Rapa in the Austral Islands. Moreover, the mobility that originated through the educational system is a long-lasting one, as many students remain in Tahiti in quest of a job, the majority of the working opportunities being offered there anyway. Such a structurally lacking system fails both of its goals, i.e. to educate French (yet Indigenous) citizens in the name of the republican universalist ideal, and to provide outer islands with educated and well-prepared workers to alleviate demographic pressure on Tahiti, resulting in what Hugo Bréant (2022) defined as, referring to higher education, *segregative democratization* of education.

This structurally deficient system reflects all the weight of the differential education it delivers on the economic situations of local families: while the majority of Indigenous Polynesian families have low-income jobs and work in unskilled positions, precisely because they prematurely dropped the educational system, *démi* and French metropolitan households have higher incomes and work in skilled positions having higher education (Le Plain 2018; Salaün, Le Plain 2018). Consequently, rates of illiteracy and school abandonment are incredibly high among the Indigenous youth, the

same group targeted by the *Service Militaire Adapté*[165]. According to Tahitian scholar Flora Devatine, such passive resistance on the part of Tahitian scholars could be traced back to an underlying refusal of French assimilation (Devatine 1979). Reflected in this situation is the hypocrisy on which imperial formations thrive, because those who were until recently considered natives to be educated, fulfilling the colonial *mission civilisatrice*, have now become the poor to be trained and regimented in the workforce. The racial/ethnic question thus became a moral question. Such a configuration was masterfully explained by native writer Chantal Spitz, who wrote in her best-seller book, Island of Shattered Dreams:

> School, a tremendous instrument of colonization and deculturation, produces a majority of under-educated women and men, incapable of adapting to modern life, future under-trained workers who can be underpaid. To avoid the awakening of the educators' consciences, the metropole, in charge of their management, has set up a foolproof system. Teachers are paid twice as much as their colleagues in metropolitan France and don't have to pay income taxes. This is hypocritically called « a local specificity ». It worked out and they quickly became blind, deaf, and mute. The importance of school failure is the direct result of a system established by the colonizer and perpetuated by the new elite, colonizer of its own people. The invaluable resource represented by the intelligence of individuals is voluntarily unexploited. No serious training policy is envisaged, and the mass of Māʻohi remains undervalued[166] (1991:181).

Retracing the administrative history of the territory, the first Unit of the SMA was implanted in Hiva Oa, in the Marquesas Islands, in 1989, coincidentally only a few years after the enlargement of the autonomy status was granted in 1984[167]. The first Unit was followed soon after by other Units in the rest of the archipelagoes[168]. While none of the soldiers I asked could respond to my question, why the SMA was implanted in French Polynesia at the end of the '80s?, it is clear that the acquirement of rights and governmental competencies awarded with the autonomy statute of 1984,

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[165] According to Al Wardi (2018), school dropout is higher among disadvantaged families and households, with the result that only 16,5% of each age group graduates from high school. Moreover, 40% of each age group holds no diplomas and 40% of Polynesian youth is defined as illiterate (against 9,6% in metropolitan France).

[166] « L'école, redoutable instrument de colonisation et de déculturation, fabrique une majorité des femmes et hommes sous-éduqués, incapables de s'adapter à la vie moderne, futurs travailleurs sous-formés que l'on pourra sous-payer. Pour éviter le réveil des consciences des éducateurs, la mère patrie qui a en charge leur traitement a mis en place un système imparable. Ils ont un salaire deux fois plus élevé de leurs collègues de métropole et ne paient pas d'impôts sur le revenu. C'est ce qu'on appelle hypocritement « la spécificité locale ». Cela marche et ils deviennent vite aveugles, sourds et muets. L'importance de l'échec scolaire est le résultat direct d'un système établi par le colonisateur et perpétué par la nouvelle élite, nouveau colonisateur de son propre peuple. L'inestimable ressource que représente l'intelligence des individus est habilement inexploitée. Aucune politique sérieuse de de formation n'est envisagée, et la masse des *Māʻohi* reste sous-valorisée. Car en fait, la liberté ne naît-elle pas de la liberté des choix engendrée par une éducation et une formation intellectuelle et morale réussies? »

[167] When I asked the Captain of the Tubuai Unit if he knew why the SMA arrived in French Polynesia in 1989 he responded with a shrug: they realized it was working very well in the rest of the French overseas dependencies, so why not exporting it to French Polynesia as well? As for the site of the Unit, Hiva Oa, he hadn't a precise explanation, therefore he called his colleague in the Marquesas to ask. According to the Captain of the first RSMA-Pf Unit, the mayor of Hiva Oa was enthusiastic about the project from the very beginning, while other mayors were not so happy about it. Conversation with Captain K., March 9, 2022, Tubuai.

[168] The second unit was implanted in Hao, Tuamotu archipelago, in 1993. This unit was closed in 2010 and reopened in the summer of 2022; another unit opened in 1995 in Tahiti; the third unit was implanted in Tubuai, Austral Islands, in 1997. Before the mandatory military service was abolished, Polynesian youth was subjected to service in Tahiti and only the most rewarded were sent to France to complete the military service.

among which stands the educational one, appears to be counterweighted, on an individual level, by the implanting of this military service presented as a new governmental tool tailor-made to help struggling Indigenous youth.

When I interviewed the local Ministry of Education[169], the unconsciousness or maybe the resignation of the local strategy planning struck me. I asked why the local government couldn't provide at least a high school in each archipelago, as to promote regional and short-range mobility while at the same time disgorging the demographic pressure on Tahiti (Merceron, Morschel 2013; Merceron 2005). The Ministry's answer was a simple one, yet reflected a static political will: there isn't enough funding to allocate to such projects, nor enough students to fill such schools, implying the waste of money that such an idea would represent. I then noticed that the SMA is indeed present in each archipelago and wonder how was that possible. Why a fundamental and mandatory right cannot be fulfilled by lack of budget, while a volunteer-based program delivered by the army is indeed capable of offering what the educational system fails to do? Counterintuitively, the Ministry highlighted the importance of the SMA in filling the gaps left by the educational system, and society more generally, for instance by fighting against early school dropout and illiteracy. And yet, the link that connects the local Department of Education and the military program in a smooth *continuum* is an enduring one and was reinstated in 2021 by the signing of a tripartite agreement, the sixth since 2006, between the High-Commissioner of French Polynesia, the Commander-General of the RSMA-Pf and the President of the local government (Présidence de la PF 2021).

The spatialization of the social issue and the profiling of Polynesian youth (« they're not done to go to school ») contribute to the framing of the topic, particularly concerning youth, as a moral and cultural one: Polynesians don't go to school not because the educational system is an impossible mission, but because they're not good at studying! For instance, the same situation concerns employment centers that not only are spatialized in the urban center of Tahiti but are also considered inefficient in delivering targeted responses because of a lack of budget. Such a discourse contributes to the crafting of the dependency rhetoric according to which French Polynesia without French subsidies and investments will be easy prey for the greedy Chinese neighbor, discrediting in this way any pro-independence politics. While two educational devices targeting premature school dropouts were implemented in French Polynesia since the 1980s[170], both of them are today mostly inefficient as the imaginaries and rhetoric hovering over them present them as second rank opportunities (Malogne 2001; Le Plain 2018). On the opposite, while the SMA has exactly the same goals, it is presented as a success instead of a failure, and that is why it is so well-acclaimed locally.

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169 The interview took place in the Minister's office, in Papeete, on 13 October 2021.

170 The adaptation of the educational system to local needs resulted in the creation of the *Centre d'Education aux Technologies Adaptée au Développement* (CETAD) and *Centre de Jeunes Adolescents* (CJA). These two devices were designed to help struggling youth and to accompany them in reaching the age for mandatory education, which was raised from 14 to 16 years old in the same period. The CETAD, geographically placed in some middle school buildings, aimed at educating multifunctional and versatile manual workers to be employed in their islands of origin once the program was over, at the same time rendering more flexible and efficient the peripheral educational system. Before the educational reform of 2016, 12-year-old students could join the CETAD after having attended only one year of middle school, and with the deliverance of a diploma that wasn't recognized by the national educational system nor the local enterprises supposedly interested in hiring the students. The 2016 reform aimed at filling this gap, by providing the deliverance of a recognized diploma, hosting 14-year-old students, and substituting in this way high school education. CJA hosts students aged 12 to 17 years old and their goal is to professionally educate young students in precarious conditions (Le Plain 2018).

Part of the bewilderment of my fieldwork research, as will be widely explained in Chapter 7, stands exactly at this intersection. Whether this is clear or not for the Ministry of Education or the SMA Commander, their roles are conjunctural and stand at the core of imperial formations' policies, as they were explained so far. What drives them is not an explicit will to regiment and domesticate Indigenous people in order to better govern them, yet what their strategies deliver it's precisely the pacification of an Indigenous and possibly riotous population. These different roles are founded on differential kinds of citizenship that will be widely explored in Chapter 6.

Défense Deuxième Chance and the JROTC: Disciplining Struggling and Indigenous Youth

As we have seen, the SMA is not a new device as it is rooted in the pacification of Caribbean departments, nor is it the only one aiming at regimenting while supposedly helping struggling youth. The allegedly good outcomes of this overseas device were (and still are) closely monitored in metropolitan France and multiple apparatuses were put in place in the metropole with similar goals. I refer to such programs as disguising devices, as they act as educational, professional, civic, and economic tools that nevertheless are carriers of core military values–incessantly denied in favor of these new civic functions taken over by the army–and neoliberal moralizing values which depict poverty and other social issues as the result of personal inaptness and/or laziness. It is only by following the politics specifically crafted to overcome such inconveniences, and with a good deal of dedication, that even those more marginalized can succeed. Such a pedagogy, as explained by one of my military interlocutors, differs from the one offered by the educational system as the army doesn't force anyone to participate in their programs: it is indeed the possibilities offered that attract young social actors to benefit from it.

The SMA served as an exemplar precedent as, since 2005, a similar device was implemented in metropolitan France to integrate struggling youth dwelling in French urban suburbs[171]. Called *Défense Deuxième Chance* and offered by the EPIDE (*Établissement Pour l'Insertion Dans l'Emploi*[172]), this device is a public institution in charge of helping unemployed struggling youth in metropolitan France. From an administrative/legal point of view, the volunteers participating at the EPIDE are not subjected to military status but are instead covered by a specific contract called *Contrat de Volontariat pour l'Insertion* that allows them to receive professional teaching within the institution (Leroy 2017). The teaching offered by the EPIDE is inspired by military methods and indeed the personnel working in these centers is essentially composed of retired soldiers and veterans. To promote social cohesion and community life, the volunteers are accommodated in boarding schools, and throughout the week they are taught different courses and trades to « remove the peripheral barriers to employment » (Leroy 2017:181). As in the SMA, whose activities will be widely explained in Chapter 7, teaching is centered around three core values, which are civic and behavioral education, educational upgrading to fight illiteracy, and professional teaching aiming at the employability of

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[171] Since 2015, another military device is active in metropolitan France, the *Service Militaire Volontaire* (or SMV). As with the SMA, its goal is to help struggling youth through military training, the obtention of the driving license and diverse training to bolster youth's professional competitiveness and financial autonomy (Anne, L'Horty 2022).

[172] Former *Établissement Public d'Insertion de la Défense* (Leroy 2017).

the candidates (Geng 2009). The SMA and the EPIDE both work not only as second-chance schools but also as employment centers, favoring social cohesion and economic entrepreneurship in the young volunteers through vocational teaching. In fact, labor is seen in modern-day and neoliberal-informed societies as the privileged modality through which to implement the inclusion of marginal fringes of the community, as the struggling youth in this case. As observed by Italian political scientist Irene Bono (2014), in such cases the State doesn't directly intervene in assisting the poor, nor in creating new job opportunities; instead, it extensively promotes disciplining policies geared towards defining the right conduct to be taken to succeed in this new configuration, instilled through the teaching offers. Whether these policies target young people seeking inclusion or poor people eager to improve their living conditions or both, the invitation is to take an active part in their own social advancement, participating in defining their success or failure, both defined by national politics. One of the outcomes of neoliberal paternalist policies is precisely the moralization and individualization of wider social problems, that are attributed to individuals' lack. Those who decide not to take part in this new reconfiguration of socio-cultural and moral categories by joining these programs risk being condemned to social indifference and political stigma as if to say that their exclusion is somewhat their fault (Bono 2014). Such educational, professionalizing, and moralizing devices are not exclusive to the French context but they operate in other overseas and their metropoles: I'm referring here to the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (or JROTC) program, active in the continental United States, as well as in its Pacific island dependencies[173]. The JROTC is a class taught in American high schools by retired military officers which operates as a club or extra-curricular activity. According to Lutz and Bartlett (1995:3), « [it] teaches a military curriculum, and puts students in uniform. [...] It promotes authoritarian values instead of democratic ones; [...] it uses rote learning methods and drill in lieu of critical thinking and problem-solving skills ». Moreover, the program is advertised to overcome socially caused schools' problems, such as « changing economy, urban de-industrialization, growing poverty, and racial discrimination », i.e. those issues that the RSMA in French Polynesia as well as in other French overseas dependencies seeks to control through its programs.

These three devices (the SMA, the EPIDE, and JROTC) target a particular category of persons (youth) that has been incessantly defined as marginalized, struggling, in need of help, living in peripheral territories, in need of financial aid to implement social welfare policies (overseas dependencies, metropolitan suburbs, rural regions of the U.S.). It is not by chance that the majority of these soon-to-be-regimented people are natives, poor, and black (mostly in the U.S. case). In fact, not only ethnocultural classifications and discrimination, a survival of colonial heritage, became a new moral cleavage on which to classify people on a moral basis; moreover, these categories of people, as is the case with the JROTC in the U.S., live in such territories because the urbanization and ghettoization of poor and black or Hispanic people was part of a wider policy aiming at separating them from the middle-class white American families. Once again, we see how the racialization of social problems has become a moral issue to resolve through social redemption in the modern neoliberal world. What these devices aim to do is to forge not only responsible and loyal citizens, from a political as well as economic point of view, but moreover a working class with limited aspirations, able to fill in the gaps left by globalized job markets in which native people are

[173] See Tengan 2008:32 on the origin of the JROTC program in Hawai'i.

caught in overseas dependencies and peripheries. In the end, what these devices offer is not only working skills and new competencies, as the majority of the trade offered by the SMA center on already acquired (traditional) knowledge, but a particular conduct, way of behaving, and the acknowledgment and recognition of precisely these rebranded skills[174].

Conclusions

Defined alternatively as a second-chance school or a missing link between the educational system and the professional world (Helfter 2014), the RSMA is considered a targeted answer to youth exclusion, unemployment, de-socialization, and illiteracy in the French overseas (Ministère des Outremer 2021). Yet, the SMA was originally crafted following Martinique's riots in 1959 to massively incorporate and pacificate the rioting Caribbean populations who were manifesting their dissent with regards to different treatment facing the law and menacing to organize itself in a pro-independence movement as was happening in Algeria, which then gained independence in 1963 (Mary 2016). If the military presence in French Polynesia seemed to fade away at the beginning of the new century, due to internal and administrative reforms and historical conjunctures (see Chapter 4), the renewed attention paid to the SMA program demonstrates that through this military device, the army is indeed very present and accomplishing its « social and cultural mission ». The militarization of civilian tasks, such as youth education and socially-driven projects and programs, has not only been normalized but moreover goes hand in hand with neoliberal and paternalist social, political and economic tendencies which aim at regimenting marginalized social categories in the name of a pacified community ideal. As discussed in this Chapter, the French state is not delegating its sovereign functions to external entities but penetrating even more deeply into the exercise of its national authority over an autonomous overseas territory. In French Polynesia, this is particularly true because whereas the territorial administration/politics encounters some obstacles, be they financial or managerial, there is a tendency to delegate governance competencies to the French national government in a never-ending effort in negotiating sovereign competencies as if to state that 'self-advancement' can only be achieved by 'self-negation' (see the critical analysis of such concepts in Bonilla 2015). Notwithstanding the two very different historical moments in which the SMA was created (1962) and the contemporary neoliberal paternalist turn emerged (the 1990s), it seems that the military program can't resist but be informed by paternalist recommendations and market fluctuations, well adjusting to contemporary policy tendencies.

As explained throughout the Chapter, the recursive configuration which incessantly re-organizes French devices and interests overseas, while at the same time modeling itself over local contexts, goes hand in hand with the cyclical process of re-colonization of French Polynesia that was explained in Chapter 2 and that will be empirically illustrated throughout Chapter 7. The high rate of participation in the SMA could be used as a detector for the precarious situations that affect the Polynesian youth and the skyrocketing racialized unemployment they have to face. In other words, the SMA represents an entry point to investigate the intimate link between these changing defense/

[174] For instance, in French Polynesia, this is particularly visible regarding two particular trainings offered by the SMA: lagoon navigation skills and agriculture. Many people, especially those coming from rural environments and outer islands, are very familiar with (traditional and non-traditional) knowledge concerning navigation and agriculture. Yet, they still join the RSMA program in order to have their knowledge officially recognized and usable in the job market.

military functions and practiced sovereignties and political imaginations unfurling within the military institution's womb. As has been argued at the beginning of this work, militarization is an interpersonal, as well as administrative, and territorial process, whose sociocultural role has been played out, among others, by the implementation of the SMA program throughout the years. Far from embracing the halt to national independencies after the 1980s as a 'different appetite for sovereignty' (Baldacchino, Hepburn 2012), I argue that the lack of more sustained sovereign/ independent movements in non-self-governing islands and territories is the result of an underlying absence: that of an essential « conceptual language with which to describe plausible (or even utopian) alternatives to the modernist projects of decolonization and national sovereignty » (Bonilla 2015:xiv). Conceptualizing sovereignty as a 'grey spot' or an interstitial space in which residual and fragmented sovereignty could be requested, expressed, and appropriated by social actors within a broader 'national' reality (see Favole 2021), fails at recognizing the non-sovereign politics at the base of such situations. Moreover, it struggles at engaging with the contested contexts from which sovereignty as a practice emerges as the result of perpetual tension.

As argued in the next Chapter, the SMA program and its facilities, inherently modern baseworlds, are acted and considered by the volunteers as a possibility to perform a right to citizenship, often impeded in everyday life by structural circumstances (Tengan 2008). The SMA and the multiple relationships that are weaved through the mobility it creates and the various situations spurred by the adventurous environment are as well intersubjective as they are political and it is precisely through them that the ethnographer could retrace the many triangulations between the army as an institution, the soldiers who work in it, the young Indigenous volunteers, their formal citizenship and the role played by the overseas territory and its thickly weaved network of compromises and negotiations with other institutions.

CHAPTER 6
Inculturating Bodies and Minds:
Understanding the *Service Militaire Adapté* from the Inside Out

« Le Polynésien peux devenir président! » exclaimed Noa to the amazed-looking class seating in front of him. He continued by praising the SMA, saying that through the program they–the young and disoriented newly enrolled soldiers attending the class–could become, one day, successful men like him. The SMA is in fact well renowned to offer a second chance to struggling youth and to boost everyone's capacity through the teaching of specific professionalizing skills implemented during the years and pampered by the always increasing funds allocated to the program. Engaging with a 'grassroots politics' perspective, in Chapter 6, I explore citizenship as an everyday experience or, as French anthropologist Catherine Neveu defined it, ordinary citizenship practices (2015). Citizenship has been defined by Neveu and Carrel as « a social and political construct, an ever-changing work, a bundle of processes subjected to changes in their own becoming[175] » (2014:6). Unsettling the classic definition of citizenship as a political status, such an approach reconsiders the very notions of politics and political subjects, arguing that every social action is indeed political precisely because politics is to be considered as « always emergent and often insurgent » (Clarke et al. 2014:59; see also Carrel, Neveu 2014). As for the concept of sovereignty recalled in the previous Chapter, citizenship is a processual and relational concept in that it is « a defective, rectifiable, improvable institution [...] [it] is rather a practice and a process than a stable form. It is always 'in the making' » (Balibar, 2001: 211; see also Neveu 2015). Far from considering ordinary citizens as depoliticized and therefore non-political subjects placed outside of the political realms because not formally engaged in any political organization or movements, such an approach asserts that politics itself is not a well-defined category of politically delineated actions and claims. Consequently, ordinary citizens are political subjects in all respects and indeed carry (implicitly or explicitly) political vindications in their everyday lives, requesting rights (or more rights) through their quotidian actions, such as enrollment in the army, as shown in Chapter 5. Such citizenship practices differ from classical concepts of citizenship (i.e. a political status) and are made of everyday acts not necessarily pertaining to what is classically considered as political[176].

Such a perspective is particularly stimulating to approach the contents of Chapter 6. Continuing the discourse started in Chapter 5 and revolving on the shifting functions of the army and the enlargement of its moralizing and racialized functions, Chapter 6 goes on to investigate in what ways are the young volunteers profiled following neoliberal paternalist and market-oriented categories and mechanisms, as well as the reasoning behind the choice and enlisting process of Polynesian volunteers, delineating an essential power relation among the figures working inside the regiment and its units. Moreover, Chapter 6 analyzes the military program rebranding effort in

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[175] « Un construit social et politique, une fabrique en constante évolution, un ensemble de processus pouvant varier dans les formes de son effectuation ».

[176] Classically, citizenship refers to a status (that of citizen) deriving from a relationship between a political subject and the state. This relationship is enshrined in rights and duties on both sides and is articulated on membership in a political community, which very often takes the form of a nation. Similarly, citizenship is used to distinguish 'us' from 'them' and/or to highlight social inequalities based on the privileges conceded by citizenship (Clarke et al. 2014).

offering knowledge that most often volunteers already have, but nonetheless fail at being recognized as valuable. These rebranded masteries, supposedly acquired by the volunteers during the training, are precisely what the French-oriented local job market needs. Bearing in mind the definition of ordinary citizenship recalled above, the enrollment of young Polynesian people in the SMA (and broadly in the regular army) could be considered as claims to greater rights ascribed to them on the basis of their citizenship status, but which they are nevertheless unable to exercise otherwise given the particular political position of the Polynesian territory within the French Republic. Thinking citizenship as this was proposed by Neveu (2015), Carrel, Neveu (2014) and Clarke et al. (2014) allows us to individuate the flaws of 'classical citizenship': if Polynesians and French metropolitans are due the same rights and privileges because of their identical citizenship status, in reality such status-related privileges do not convert into rights (or more rights) for all, leaving Polynesians with fewer tools than their metropolitan compatriots. I argue that youth participation in military programs could be considered an ordinary citizenship practice in that it allows social actors to position themselves in a political field and claim rights, while at the same time conveying a form of belonging that is always performative and expressed through participation in specific activities. On the other side and in an interesting mirror game, we could consider French metropolitan soldiers' vindications of moving overseas, presented in the second part of Chapter 6, as another form of practiced citizenship. One of the goals of this work being to study the army as a cultural system, Chapter 6 also aims at describing the military life I came to observe in French Polynesia, its internal organization and functioning, and a short presentation of all the figures that work within the RSMA to assure its functioning.

Budgetary Ups and Downs throughout the Years

Being a joint military device, the history of the SMA follows the broader history of the French army and its shifting functions, that were delineated so far. Consequently, after its first years of service at the beginning of the 1960s, a key date for the institution is represented by 1996, when the newly elected president, Jacques Chirac, announced the sudden decision of abolishing mandatory military service (Boëne 2003). This decision was inscribed in a larger context entailing the end of the Cold War and the consequent relaxation of national defense strategies, as well as the need of cutting national budgets, the same that will bring Nicolas Sarkozy to reform the army and public administration a few years later (see Chapter 4). The *loi n°97-1019* of October 1997 regarding the reform of the national service, stated that « the call to military service is suspended for all French citizens born after December 3, 1978[177] » (*Livre Ier, Titre Ier, Chapitre II, Art. L. 112.2*). The same law clarified the role of the SMA at this turning point:

> French citizens may [...] serve as volunteers in the armed forces under the status of military personnel. [...] Volunteers may serve in overseas departments, territories, and territorial communities under the *Service Militaire Adapté*. Those who were born or have their usual residence in overseas

[177] « L'appel sous les drapeaux est suspendu pour tous les Français qui sont nés après le 3 décembre 1978 ».

> departments, territories, and territorial communities may request to receive professional training. They then serve as trainees of the *Service Militaire Adapté* (*Livre Ier, Titre II, Chapitre Ier, Art. L. 121-1*)[178].

Such a presidential decision revealed the differential nature of the military service, stressing racial differences instead of aiming at equalizing French citizens.

As explained in Chapter 5, the SMA substituted the military service in France's overseas departments and territories while at the same time focusing on the social role of the army, as the conscripts participated in socio-cultural projects and enterprises instead of learning war doctrines. After the 1997 reform, the targeted population changed and the SMA started to exclusively host struggling Indigenous volunteers with the precise goal of educating them (Laurey, Patient 2019). Starting in 1998, when the law abolishing the mandatory military service became effective, national service conscripts started to be replaced by Indigenous male and female volunteers aged eighteen to twenty six years old, living in precarious situations and social conditions, struggling from an educational point of view and willing to learn a trade (Trucy 2008; Laurey, Patient 2019). From 1999 to 2001 the program went through a transitional phase, during which participants in the program were conscripts as well as volunteers. Yet, as a consequence of the reform, and precisely one of the reasons why the reform was passed, participants in the program decreased, and the managerial staff and budget allocated to the program were reduced[179]. Such a tendency was inverted in 2003, during which year not only the budget allocated to the program was raised, but the recruiting goal was set to target three thousand volunteers to meet pre-reform numbers.

While the formal goal of the SMA changed, in the sense that the institution became volunteer-based, the nature of the program didn't mutate as the military service in France's overseas dependencies always had a preeminent socio-cultural role. The SMA's modern goal is to form young Indigenous volunteers into a profession, in order to render them more profitable for the local job market through a socio-economic approach designed to respond to local demands, and also through the attention to volunteers' personal needs. The program is deemed to succeed not only because of the participants' goodwill and determination but also because of the soldier's roles and their good qualities (Ministère des Outre-Mer 2013, 2021). As made it clear by the Senate report, the effective number of military cadres is gauged on the number of volunteers and it shouldn't be underestimated. As it will be explained throughout this Chapter and the next, such quotas are to be met in order to indirectly and paternalistically instill particular know-how and behaviors into the volunteers via the examples of their military superiors (Trucy 2008).

Given the good outcomes of the program, different strategic plans were implemented throughout the years to increase the number of volunteers participating in it. For instance, a strategic plan named « SMA 6000 » was put in place by the national government in 2009, its goal being to double the volunteers' number by 2016 (Laurey, Patient 2019; see also the Appendix II). Such a goal

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[178] « Les Français peuvent [...] servir avec la qualité de militaire, comme volontaires dans les armées. [...] Les volontaires peuvent servir dans les départements, territories et collectivités territoriales d'outre-mer au titre du service militaire adapté. Ceux qui sont nés ou ont leur résidence habituelle dans les départements, territories et collectivités territoriales d'outre-mer peuvent demander à recevoir une formation professionnelle. Ils servent alors en tant que stagiaires du service militaire adapté ».

[179] There were 641 staff-soldiers in 1998, compared to 499 in 2003. They were raised again later and were 1203 in 2022. Conscripts were 3030 in 1997, compared to 2065 in 2001 (Trucy 2008; Husson 2021; see also Laurey, Patient 2019).

(defined as *montée en puissance*) was implemented by the enlargement of the prerequisites required to join the program as well as by the molding of the institution on local contexts. To expand their users base, the SMA opened its doors to graduate volunteers instead of only focusing on unschooled youth; moreover, the duration of the program started to change depending on individual needs and the education chosen by the participants, spanning from six to ten months (Ministère des Outre-mer 2013). Reflecting the changing job market, the SMA was able to adapt its classes and teaching courses, offering professional classes turned towards manual jobs and the service industry[180]. Other than focusing on the training offers advertised by the SMA, military local facilities were also able to weave lasting relationships with local enterprises willing to hire ex-volunteers in their businesses. This is another reason why the integration rate of ex-volunteers is capable of reaching peaks of 73% to 77% globally, as the training offers meet the particular demand of local job markets (Laurey, Patient 2019). What is interesting to note is that in the majority of the cases, the local job market is French-influenced and the skilled and highly paid jobs are nonetheless taken by French metropolitan citizens, while the unskilled labor is performed by Indigenous workers. This situation has spurred the shift from ethnocultural to social and moral categories used to regiment people and decide who needs assistance from the State or its related institutions, such as the army.

From an infrastructural point of view, the increasing number of volunteers required the acquisition and renovation of military infrastructures to host a growing number of candidates, as well as the expansion of the training offered and an increase in military staff to meet the growing needs. Implemented from 2012 to 2017, the SMA 6000 strategy attained its goals in 2017 hosting six thousand volunteers in the totality of its facilities (Husson 2021; Laurey, Patient 2019; see also Appendix II).

The 2017 success was reinstated by another grandiose decision made in 2018 by the Ministry of the Overseas, i.e. to implement another multi-year strategy, named « Project SMA 2025[181] ». Notwithstanding this decision, a decrease in volunteers was registered during the same year for a variety of reasons, among which stands a fluctuation in local demographic tendencies in different overseas dependencies[182], and the recent Covid-19 pandemic that hindered the capacity/will of many to join the program (Husson 2021). Nonetheless, the SMA is still considered « a unique and major component of the integration system in the overseas departments and communities[183] » and also as « a key player in overseas dependencies' public health systems[184] » playing a central role, especially in particular contexts as the geographically fragmented one of French Polynesia, in serving as a public health actor (Ministère des Outre-Mer 2021), echoing once again the

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[180] Tourism is one of the trades offered in many SMA Units. I argue that this particular trade is not casual as today French overseas dependencies play a significant role in the leisure industry designed for metropolitan and more generally Western citizens (Gay 2009; Teaiwa 1999).

[181] The strategy aims at achieving four main goals: reinforcing volunteers' personal competencies; reinforcing the training's quality; including new technologies into the program to develop volunteers' digital capacities; expanding the SMA facilities' local role as reference points in order to provide young volunteers with long-lasting job positions (Laurey, Patient 2019; Husson 2021).

[182] A demographic decrease has been registered in Martinique and Guadalupe in those years. Inversely, in French Guyana and Mayotte, a demographic increase was registered which nevertheless didn't meet an increase in the number of volunteers because the infrastructures couldn't welcome more participants (Husson 2021).

[183] « Une composante unique et majeure du dispositif d'insertion dans les départements et collectivités d'outre-mer ».

[184] « Un acteur dimensionnant de la santé publique dans les territoires ».

institutionalizing role of national devices such as the mandatory military service or the agricultural colonies as recalled in Chapter 5.

To meet its ambitious goals, the SMA receives incredibly high budgets, the majority of which come from mobility funding allocated by the Ministry of the Overseas to increase and facilitate mobility towards overseas departments and territories (Laurey, Patient 2019)[185]. More financial resources are allocated by local entities, such as territorial collectivities, mostly through regional subsidies; and by the European Union which allocated up to 36% of the total budget in 2020 to the educational program (Ministère des Outre-mer 2020; see also Appendix II). Such European funds, among which stands the European Social Fund (ESF), are part of structural goals to increase European social cohesion and youth employment rate while at the same time reducing economic, social, and territorial disparities within the EU. Such funds represent one of the EU's main instruments of intervention in its Member States since the 1990s (Desprairies 2020; Lebrou, Sigalo Santos 2018). This pedantic attention to financial budgets is instilled into the volunteers as soon as they join the program, in a sort of responsibilization politics that should render them more grateful for the opportunity offered to them by the State. Many times my volunteers' interlocutors repeated to me the cost of their education, stressing the gravity of their participation in the educational program. The accent on the cost of their education is stressed by soldiers/instructors during the first weeks of the training experience, as to passively bolster volunteers' gratitude towards the French State and army. Indeed, the annual cost for each of them, €36.740 in 2017, is much higher than those allocated to other training programs, yet still inferior to unemployment indemnity rates that the government would have to pay for their welfare (Trucy 2008; Laurey, Patient 2019), and of the threat represented by a potential riotous fringe[186]. In such a context, the SMA can train and educate young Indigenous volunteers within a structured military frame centered on the acquisition of particular capacities, such as autonomy, citizen responsibility, and employability, while at the same time stemming its imperial anxieties and fears.

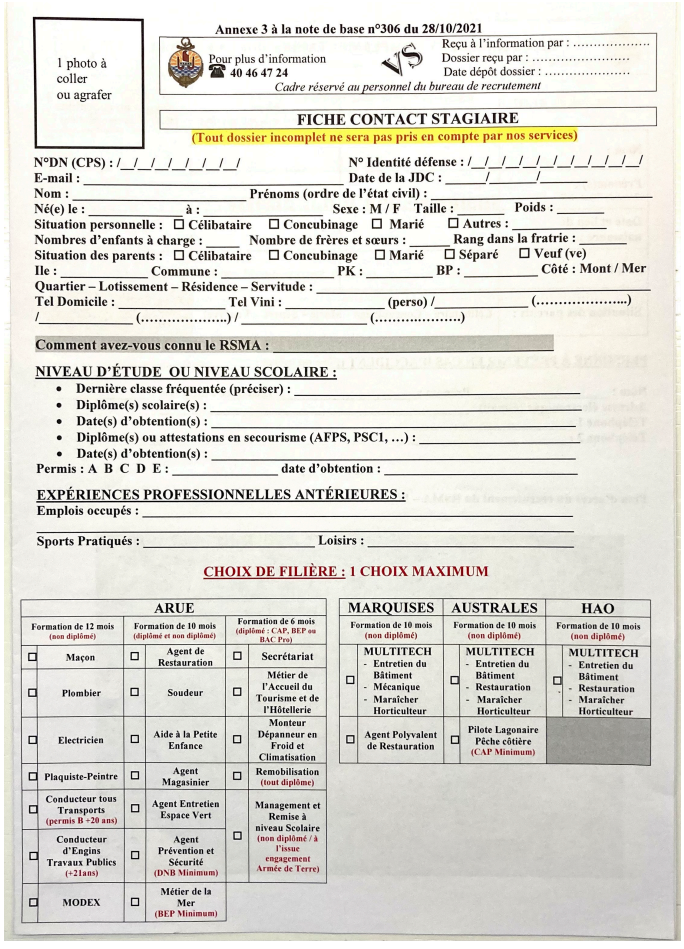
From Struggling Youth to Performing Volunteers

In French Polynesia, everyone knows the RSMA and the training it offers. Its activities are always immortalized by photos and videos posted online and shared via Facebook contributing to crafting a particularly positive image hovering over this military program. Recruitment campaigns are constantly organized not only in Tahiti and Mo'orea but also in outer islands and in accordance

[185] Program 138 - Overseas Employment, is part of the financial budget allocated to the French overseas territories. It aims to encourage the creation and safeguarding of sustainable jobs in the commercial sector and to fight against the exclusion from the labor market of those who are placed the furthest from employment through appropriate vocational training actions. In 2023, the main goals of P138 are to reinforce the competitiveness of overseas companies and to improve the professional qualifications of the active population in the French overseas territories, mainly through the SMA device and the Agency for overseas mobility, or LADOM, facilitating territorial continuity (see République Française n.d.; Laurey, Patient 2019).

[186] The same narrative would be repeated to me by the volunteers training at the RSMA-Pf facility in Tubuai, specifically by those training in the lagoon navigation program, whose teaching is supposedly more expensive than that of their colleagues.

with local municipalities and schools to try and get new recruits[187]. As explained to me by the officer in charge of the recruitment section of the RSMA-Pf during multiple interviews, French citizens (women and men) aged eighteen to twenty six years old, residents in any French overseas dependency and living in marginalized and precarious situations can submit a file to the local recruitment section[188]. The Ministry of the Overseas, ruling on the finance of this military device since 1968, decides the numbers and percentage of youth to target each year: on average, 40% of illiterates and 60% of people who didn't finish middle school (Trucy 2008; Husson 2021). To participate, candidates have to submit a form (see Fig. 6.1) stating their educational level, previous job experiences, and other personal information. On the same form, the advantages of joining the program are clearly written (see Fig. 6.2), as to remind the candidates of the advantages they will earn by joining the program. Among them: six to twelve months paid contract for graduate or undergraduate young people (their monthly salary amounted to €340,50 in 2013, see Ministère des Outre-mer 2013); housing and food, as well as healthcare, provided by the program; preparation to pass the driving license exam.



1 photo à coller ou agrafer

Annexe 3 à la note de base n°306 du 28/10/2021

Pour plus d'information ☎ 40 46 47 24

Reçu à l'information par : ……
Dossier reçu par : ……
Date dépôt dossier : ……

Cadre réservé au personnel du bureau de recrutement

FICHE CONTACT STAGIAIRE

(Tout dossier incomplet ne sera pas pris en compte par nos services)

N°DN (CPS) : /__/__/__/__/__/__/__/__/ N° Identité défense : /__/__/__/__/__/__/__/__/__/__/__/__/
E-mail : _____ Date de la JDC : _____/_____/_____
Nom : _____ Prénoms (ordre de l'état civil) : _____
Né(e) le : _____ à : _____ Sexe : M / F Taille : _____ Poids : _____
Situation personnelle : ☐ Célibataire ☐ Concubinage ☐ Marié ☐ Autres : _____
Nombres d'enfants à charge : _____ Nombre de frères et sœurs : _____ Rang dans la fratrie : _____
Situation des parents : ☐ Célibataire ☐ Concubinage ☐ Marié ☐ Séparé ☐ Veuf (ve)
Ile : _____ Commune : _____ PK : _____ BP : _____ Côté : Mont / Mer
Quartier – Lotissement – Résidence – Servitude : _____
Tel Domicile : _____ Tel Vini : _____ (perso) /_____ (……..)
/_____ (……..) / _____ (……..)

Comment avez-vous connu le RSMA : _____

NIVEAU D'ÉTUDE OU NIVEAU SCOLAIRE :

- Dernière classe fréquentée (préciser) : _____
- Diplôme(s) scolaire(s) : _____
- Date(s) d'obtention(s) : _____
- Diplôme(s) ou attestations en secourisme (AFPS, PSC1, …) : _____
- Date(s) d'obtention(s) : _____

Permis : A B C D E : _____ date d'obtention : _____

EXPÉRIENCES PROFESSIONNELLES ANTÉRIEURES :

Emplois occupés : _____

Sports Pratiqués : _____ Loisirs : _____

CHOIX DE FILIÈRE : 1 CHOIX MAXIMUM

ARUE		
Formation de 12 mois (non diplômé)	Formation de 10 mois (diplômé et non diplômé)	Formation de 6 mois (diplômé : CAP, BEP ou BAC Pro)
☐ Maçon	☐ Agent de Restauration	☐ Secrétariat
☐ Plombier	☐ Soudeur	☐ Métier de l'Accueil du Tourisme et de l'Hôtellerie
☐ Electricien	☐ Aide à la Petite Enfance	☐ Monteur Dépanneur en Froid et Climatisation
☐ Plaquiste-Peintre	☐ Agent Magasinier	☐ Remobilisation (tout diplôme)
☐ Conducteur tous Transports (permis B +20 ans)	☐ Agent Entretien Espace Vert	☐ Management et Remise à niveau Scolaire (non diplômé / à l'issue engagement Armée de Terre)
☐ Conducteur d'Engins Travaux Publics (+21ans)	☐ Agent Prévention et Sécurité (DNB Minimum)	
☐ MODEX	☐ Métier de la Mer (BEP Minimum)	

MARQUISES	AUSTRALES	HAO
Formation de 10 mois (non diplômé)	Formation de 10 mois (non diplômé)	Formation de 10 mois (non diplômé)
☐ MULTITECH - Entretien du Bâtiment - Mécanique - Maraîcher Horticulteur	☐ MULTITECH - Entretien du Bâtiment - Restauration - Maraîcher Horticulteur	☐ MULTITECH - Entretien du Bâtiment - Restauration - Maraîcher Horticulteur
☐ Agent Polyvalent de Restauration	☐ Pilote Lagonaire Pêche côtière (CAP Minimum)	

Fig.6.1, 6.2
RSMA submission form and appendix.
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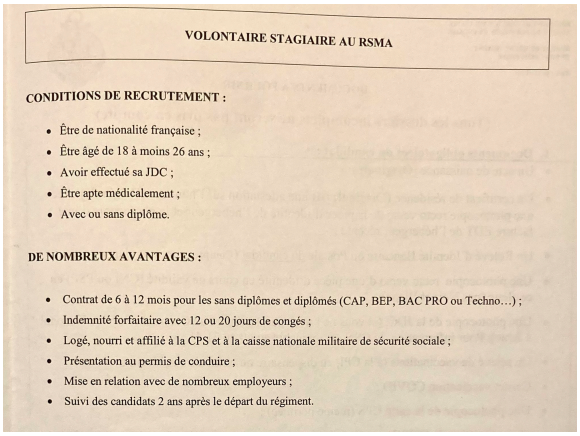

VOLONTAIRE STAGIAIRE AU RSMA

CONDITIONS DE RECRUTEMENT :

- Être de nationalité française ;
- Être âgé de 18 à moins 26 ans ;
- Avoir effectué sa JDC ;
- Être apte médicalement ;
- Avec ou sans diplôme.

DE NOMBREUX AVANTAGES :

- Contrat de 6 à 12 mois pour les sans diplômes et diplômés (CAP, BEP, BAC PRO ou Techno…) ;
- Indemnité forfaitaire avec 12 ou 20 jours de congés ;
- Logé, nourri et affilié à la CPS et à la caisse nationale militaire de sécurité sociale ;
- Présentation au permis de conduire ;
- Mise en relation avec de nombreux employeurs ;
- Suivi des candidats 2 ans après le départ du régiment.

[187] Recruitment campaigns are organized in each archipelago. As far as I know and was told, the Recruitment office in Arue, Tahiti, is responsible to organize recruitment missions in the Society Islands and the Tuamotu and Gambier Islands, while the two Units in Tubuai and Hiva Oa organize their recruitment campaigns autonomously in the respective archipelagoes (Austral and Marquesas). It is reasonable to think that with the opening of the Fourth Unit in Hao recruitment campaigns are coordinated locally in the Tuamotu Islands.

[188] Even though the program does not exclusively call on Indigenous people, in the majority of French overseas territories and departments the struggling youth targeted by the program is mostly of Indigenous descent.

The form also takes into consideration the candidates' preferred specialty, depending on the offer provided by the unit they supposedly have to integrate. This repartition is regionally biased, in the sense that the peripheral units in Hiva Oa and Tubuai usually welcome volunteers from the Marquesas and Austral Islands respectively, as well as people from the Tuamotu archipelago (even though the opening of the new unit in Hao changed this repartition). The unit in Arue serves to welcome volunteers from the Society Islands. Yet, this repartition is not always respected, as I was able to witness during my fieldwork. This is true for mostly two reasons: the first one is linked to the vocational training offered in the different units, as the majority of them are offered in Tahiti; the second one is linked to the effective numbers that each unit can host at a time. For instance, my interlocutors in Tubuai were not only from the Austral Islands or the Tuamotu archipelago: there was a least one volunteer from the Marquesas Islands and many more coming from the Society Islands. At the same time, and notwithstanding their provenance, many volunteers couldn't choose their preferred trade nor did have a choice regarding which unit to integrate into and therefore where to move and live for the next year.

Among those that were lucky enough to be trained in their preferred specialty, many already knew their craft and decided to enroll in the program in order to get official diplomas to demonstrate their expertise. This is mostly true because, in the main narrative revolving over such programs, practice-based knowledge and traditional knowledge are deemed to be unofficial and in need of a certain standardization in order to be legitimized[189]. In this way, not only young volunteers and their capacities are framed and rebranded in a particular manner but they also acquire a myriad of soft skills supposedly needed to find a place in the contemporary neoliberal job market.

Given the educational role of the program, one could think that the volunteers' educational situation should be the primary characteristic to be taken into consideration. Yet, since the program is a military one, volunteers are also chosen judging by their physical and psychological aptitudes towards the military life they're supposed to perform during the service. A great deal of importance is also given to their will to change their precarious situations, as if these depend on them and only their goodwill can redeem them.

Once the candidates are chosen, they officially become volunteers in the French army, as sanctioned by the *loi n°97-1019* of October 1997, are given a military uniform, and start their training, abiding by five 'golden rules', as they are defined by the military hierarchy in charge of the program. These five rules, attached to offices' and dorms' doors within the RSMA facilities, are: to be punctual, to act in secure circumstances, to work in a team, to wear the proper attire, and to respect superiors and colleagues (see Fig. 6.3 and 6.4). Deriving from these five rules, the SMA has three main moral missions revolving around the transmission of certain know-how: (1) to teach young people « le goût de l'effort » (a taste for hard work) as well as community life; (2) to teach them how to behave properly while (3) instilling in them the necessary self-esteem to succeed. If the volunteers' motto is « la réussite par l'effort et le travail », the soldiers/teachers' is « notre victoire: leur réussite », our victory is their success (Ministère des Outre-mer 2017).

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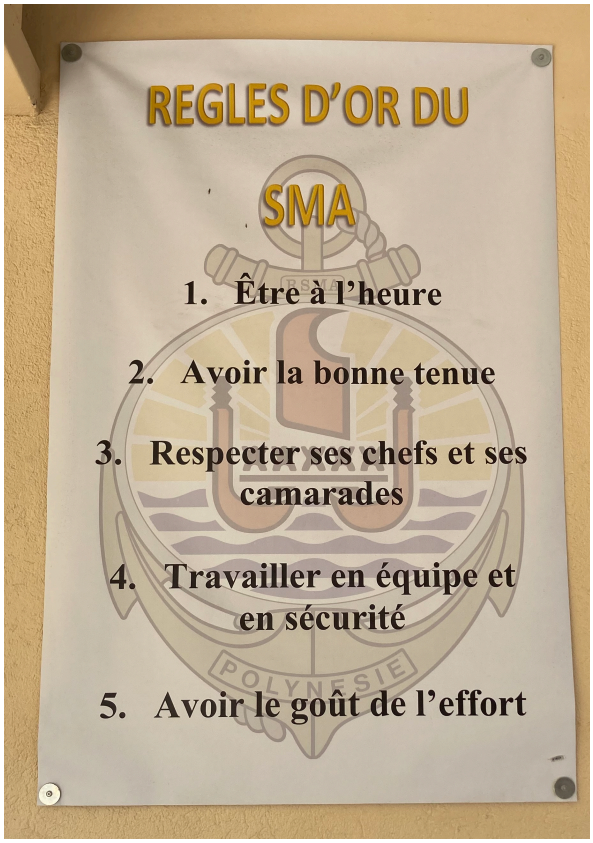
[189] Volunteers in the agricultural, hydraulic, construction, restaurant and lagoon navigation trades made explicit their will to obtain official diplomas notwithstanding their consolidated knowledge in the matter.

The taste for hard work and effort is instilled in the volunteers through sports practice (there are sports sessions each morning before the daily activities start), the value put on overcoming their limits (accomplished through the obtention of diplomas, licenses, and military rewards), and the adherence to military values and discipline. Community life and proper behavior are developed through the establishment of specific rules regarding politeness, good manners, hygiene, respect for the rules and tasks, and authority. Finally, the volunteers' self-esteem is developed within a paternalistic and benevolent frame, supposed to engender a form of belonging to a particular community (the military one, the one pertaining to French citizenship), and fed every day through daily activities such as military ceremonies and drills, group activities, wearing a uniform, chanting military chants, but also the rewards earned after having accomplished particular tasks or having obtained licenses and diplomas, as well as the construction of a life-project guided by such a strict military frame (Fig. 6.5).



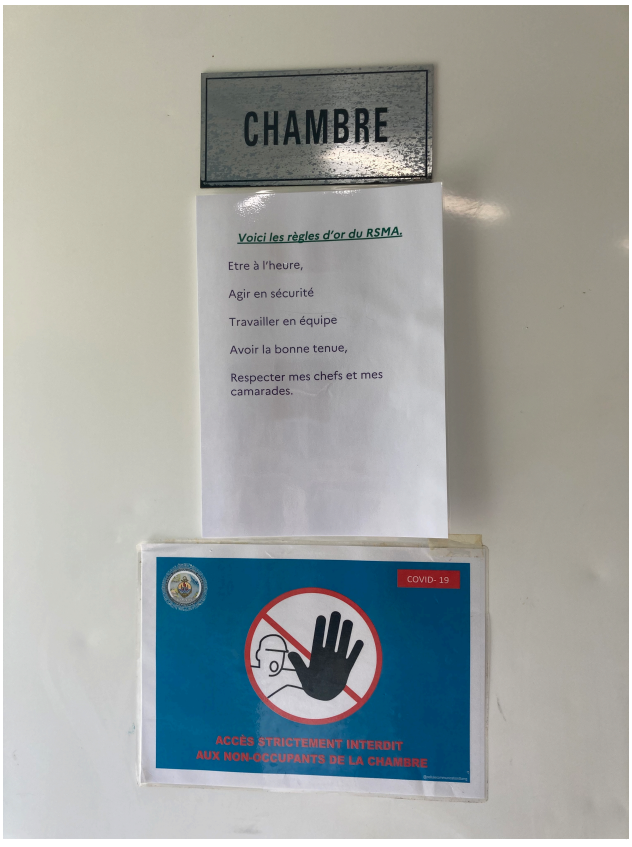


Fig. 6.3, 6.4
Banners reproducing the five golden rules of the RSMA.
Left: Defense Base in Arue, Tahiti, December 8, 2021;
Right: Tubuai military facility, April 4, 2022.
© Claudia Ledderucci

Fig. 6.5
Scheme listing the soft skills' to be acquired during the RSMA training.
© Ministère des Outre-Mer, 2020

« *Dans la peau d'un vrai militaire*[190] »: Volunteers' Impressions on the Military Training

A thicker ethnographic description of the program, based on my fieldwork experience, will be given in the next Chapter. Yet, since I wasn't there when the cohort I got to know started their training, this reconstruction is based on the volunteers' recounting of such an experience.

The program starts with a 3-month military and civic general training in Arue, Tahiti, as well as the obtention of the driving license and a safety-at-work license, after which the volunteers are sent to their respective units to start their professional experience in a particular trade of their choice[191]. Of the initial three months of training, the first one is dedicated to military training and education for indoctrination, as Aguon has defined the role of the army in public schools and discourse (2006:99). During this initial boot camp, generally referred to as FMI (*Formation Militaire Initiale*), volunteers have to learn military life routines: rules regimenting their lives at 360°, military discipline and endurance, hierarchies and the respect due to them, the functioning of the program and a specific military jargon, as well as chants reinforcing and representing their belonging to the Regiment.

Physical endurance and performance are highly valued during boot camp, a real liminal phase in which young people are not yet volunteers (*marsouins*), and therefore have to demonstrate their physical fabric as well as their emotional strength to gain their reward, i.e. the rite of passage symbolizing their belonging to the regiment, *la remise des berets*. For this purpose, they are cut off from

[190] « In a real soldier's boots », interview with H., VS in the security agent trade, Arue, December 8, 2022. This interview and the next took place in Noa's office. He was seated next to me and the VS I was interviewing, contributing to intimidate the volunteers. As soon as Noa left us for a reason or another, the VS would instantly relax their posture and use Tahitian slang in their discourses.

[191] While each candidate can choose the preferred trade and unit upon submission, the final choice is made by the administration and decided upon availabilities.

their social lives, their phone requisitioned and challenged during field trips in which they have to participate. These field trips consist in long and exhausting hikes in the forest during which the candidates have to learn first rescue maneuvers in case one of them is injured, build a camp to stay overnight and enjoy military rations to simulate real military expeditions in critical situations.

The volunteers' first reaction when asked about their boot camp experience fluctuates between awe and bewilderment. As explained by P., VS in the tourism trade at the Second Unit in Arue, Tahiti: « Military life is great, huh!, it's hard but...[192] », as if to say that this is what needs to be done to obtain the advantages offered by the military program. The reason that brought him to the RSMA is once again an economic one: « It's just to get some money[193] » to help his sick father back in Huahine, his island home. His friend A. whom I interviewed together with him, told me that her partner already did the RSMA a few years ago, and now it's her turn as if the RSMA is a job opportunity that both of them have to accept in turn, in order to have a small salary and support their baby. For poor people, that's what the RSMA is all about.

« It's hard. They put you on a diet, you're obliged to follow the instructions they give you[194] », recalled R., an ex-volunteer that I interviewed in Tubuai, together with his wife H., an ex-volunteer as well. H. joined the program when she was nineteen years old, in 2019; R. wanted to join the program too but the RSMA doesn't accept couples, and R. and H. are legally married. He joined at the end of 2019, at age twenty three, right after H. finished her training. R. explained that people usually join the RSMA for two main reasons, as noted by everyone: « For the driving license or to enlist [...] the cadres say you have to enlist because there are no jobs here. And if you don't wanna join [the army] they ask you why[195] ». This is why R. thinks the RSMA is useful only if you want to join the army: « It works only if you wanna enroll, if not, well...[196] ». Indeed, both he and his wife had thought about joining the army in the past: « Well before the RSMA, I filed my dossier to enlist[197] » but H. dissuaded him, « I encouraged him a lot [but since] he doesn't tolerate the distance as I do [...] that's why I told him not to enlist[198] ». R. then remarked that H. herself was thinking about joining the army at some point: « You wanted to join too![199] ». Immediately H. recalled: « Oh yes, I forgot! [I wanted to be] a sniper but then I go to church, they say you shall not kill. But they [the soldiers] oriented me towards other specialties[200] ». She recognized the cognitive dissonance engendered by her desire to join the army but also the precepts learned at church: « I am a

---

[192] « C'est top la vie militaire, hein!, c'est dûr mais... ».

[193] « C'est juste pour avoir un capital ».

[194] « C'est dûr. Ils te mettent au régime, t'es obligé de suivre les instructions qu'ils te donnent ».

[195] « Pour le permis ou pour s'engager [...] les cadres disent il faut s'engager parce qu'ici il n y a pas de travail. Et si tu ne veux pas [t'engager] ils te demandent pourquoi ».

[196] « Il fonctionne juste si tu veux t'engager, sinon beh... ».

[197] « Bien avant le RSMA, j'avais monté mon dossier pour m'engager ».

[198] « Je l'encourageait beaucoup [mais vu que] il ne supportait pas la distance, alors que moi j'arrivais à supporter la distance [...] c'est pour ça que je lui ai dit de ne pas s'engager ».

[199] « Tu voulais aussi t'engager! ».

[200] « Ah oui, j'ai oublié! [Je voulais être] tireur d'élite, mais après je vais dans l'église, on dit qu'il faut pas tuer. Mais ils [les militaires] m'ont orienté dans d'autres filières ».

practicing Adventist[201] », therefore she decided to « put the answer in God's hands[202] ». The military environment was yet a familiar one for her, as one of her brothers enrolled in the French army some three years ago, while a younger brother and a cousin were participating in the RSMA at the time of our interview in March 2022. Regarding religion, R. also noted that at the RSMA: « They [the soldiers] don't respect the Sabbath [...] everybody is punished [...] I'm forced to work [on Saturday] even if you're not supposed to on Sabbath![203] ». Notwithstanding their professional experience at the RSMA, none of them had a job at the time of our interview.

~

Two of my first interlocutors during my fieldwork in Tubuai, Tetuarii and Vaima, recalled their experiences at the very beginning of their military journey. « C'est dûr, hein! » said Tetuarii, stressing the accent on the adjective (dûr). Then she and Vaima would continue recalling a specific place where their instructors were used to bring them when someone had to be punished:

> Vaima: The 'Paradise' is a tarred place but...
> Tetuarii: HARD!
> V: There are rocks coming out [...] and that's where we used to do push-ups [...]
> T: Some were... injured [...]
> V: At some point, everyone would bleed on their hands [...] so if we were not listening, [the instructor] would tell us "do you wanna go to the Paradise?" [...]
> T: We don't regret it [...] Damn, but they were given a good beasting
> V: It's strict!
> T: It was reeeeaaaally strict! [...]
> V: Then, when you can't really keep up, you don't care! You will HOLD, you hold [...] You can't really stand still and do nothing.
> T: We really... we were given a good beasting during the FMI those three weeks.[204]

Chérazade, an ex-volunteer I met in Tubuai, would tell me that the physical hardships, made even more challenging for her as she was breastfeeding her newborn at the time – « I had milk leaks, my breast was hurting [...] but I had to adjust. [...] I cried a lot[205] » – are coupled with emotional

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[201] « Je suis pratiquante adventiste ».

[202] « Remettre la réponse dans les mains de Dieu ».

[203] « Ils [les militaires] ne respectent pas le Sabbath [...] c'est tout le monde qui ramasse [...] je suis obligé de travailler même si le Sabbath on ne travail pas! ».

[204] Vaima: le Paradise c'est un endroit goudronné aussi mais... Tetuarii: DUR! V: il y a du caillou qui sort [...] et du coup c'est la bas où on va pomper [...] T: il y en a qui ont... était blessés [...] V: en fait on allait tous saigner des mains [...] du coup si on écoute pas il [l'instructeur] nous dit "vous voulez aller au Paradise?!" [...] T: on ne regrette pas. [...] Putain, mais ils ont bien ramassé. V: c'est stricte! T: c'était vraaaaaaiment stricte! [...] V: après euh quand t'arrive pas vraiment à suivre, puis tu t'en fout! Tu vas TENIR, tu tiens [...] on peut pas rester sans rien faire. T: on a bien... on a BIEN ramassé en FMI ces trois semaines.

[205] « J'avais des remontées de lait, j'avais mal au sein [...] mais j'me suis adaptée. [...] J'ai beaucoup pleuré ».

difficulties: « The first weeks are hard, really hard, no phone while my only strength was to hear my daughter at least in the evening [...] but over there [there is] no room for feelings[206] ».
Vaima and Tetuarii would continue recalling their experience and the rules they had to strictly follow:

> Vaima: As soon as we arrived we are given our outfits, all of it, huh!, our uniforms, we also have to sign, then they tell us the three rules, like no paka [cannabis], no night-time noises, no relations between boys and girls and no alcohol [...]
> Tetuarii: And then, once the military training was over [laughs]
> V: Then everybody did the opposite! [laughs][...] you're given everything, the two of us were the last, huh!
> T: Tssssss[207]

They continued recalling their first experience wearing a uniform and participating in a class.

> V: They told us to change quickly, enter [the room]
> T: Eh!
> V: But they didn't explain us!
> T: But I heard mea [Tahitian for colloquial 'like'] RANGERS. We really heard Rangers!
> V: So when we changed, we put on the Rangers boots!
> T: Djooooo! Madame! Such a shame! When we went into the class, well not the class, you say classroom, when we came back, the two of us [...][she bangs her hand on the table] total shame
> V: In fact, the two of us were wearing Rangers' boots but in reality, they told us PATAUGAS, shoes for outdoor activities, because you can't really put on the rangers' boots so easily, you actually have to wait for the berets march [official ceremony sanctioning the volunteers' belonging to the regiment]
> T: It was... ye! Damn [...] and at some point, madame, we were not accustomed to the... rangers boots, huh?, [...] it was TOO heavy but in the end, as time goes by [...][208]

This detail regarding which shoes to wear is indeed important as it signifies the centrality given to such rules during the training, and the symbolical role attributed by the volunteers to such codes, symbolizing their belonging to and recognition into the Regiment's military life. The rangers' boots, as well as the blue beret given to the volunteers after the FMI, can't be worn before the official ceremony marking the integration of the candidates into the regiment. This new belonging is enshrined by other hallmarks, such as the military salute and a particular jargon, that both Vaima

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[206] « Les premières semaines sont dures, vraiment dures, pas de téléphone alors que la seule force était d'entendre ma fille au moins le soir [...] mais là-bas pas de place pour les sentiments ».

[207] Vaima: dès qu'on est arrivées on va directement percevoir nos tenues, tout hein!, nos tenues, on va aussi signer, après ils nous disent les trois règles, genre pas de paka [cannabis], pas de tapage nocturne, pas de relations entre garçons filles et pas d'alcool. [...] Tetuarii: et après quand c'était fini la FMI [rires] V: après tout le monde a fait le contraire! [laughs] [...] vous percevez tout, après c'était nous deux les dernières, eh! T: tssssss.

[208] V: on nous a dit de vite se changer, entrer T: eh! V: mais ils nous ont pas expliqué! T: mais normalement j'ai bien entendu mea RANGERS. On avait bien entendu rangers! V: du coup quand on s'est changées, on avait mis les rangers! T: djooooo! Madame! La honte! Quand on est venues en classe, en fait pas dans la classe, on dit salle, quand on es revenues nous deux [...][she bangs her hand on the table] la honte totale. V: en faite on était en rangers nous deux, mais on nous avait dit PATAUGAS, les chaussures de brousse, parce que les rangers on peut pas vite mettre, il faut carrément attendre la marche des berets. T: c'était... ye! Putain [...] et à un moment donné, madame, on s'est pas habituées sur... les rangers, eh?, [...] c'était TROP lourd mais après au fil du temps [...]

and Tetuarii illustrated to me. Tetuarii showed me how to position hands when you march and how to execute the military salute, « Like this, madame[209] ». Then they continued:

> Vaima: When we arrived at the *piaule* [bunks], they show us how to make the bed [*lit au carré*].
> Tetuarii: In fact, madame, *piaule* is the room [...] uhm... as soldiers, we say *piaule*, we're not allowed to say room
> V: Or we'll be punished
> T: You can't do it. [...] In the morning we don't say good morning, we say *mes respects* [lit. my respect]; we don't say sorry, or you'll be punished, we say *au temps pour moi* [lit. my bad][...]
> V: Instead of saying yes or ok we say *reçu* [lit. got it][...] anyway, everybody says yes now[...] it's not *reçu* anymore[210]

Months after, once in Tubuai, I noticed that such military and hierarchical jargon would be used with me as well, and in a variety of situations, in a kind of language slip. « Au temps pour moi » or « reçu » would be used by the volunteers while in conversation with me, in a sort of hierarchy outburst that has been embodied by the VS not just as a form of respect, but of a prostration almost.

While the use of weapons was recently abolished, volunteers are still required to learn drills, commands, and military chants they will perform in the guise of a cohesion mark. In French Polynesia, such chants became meta-symbols representing not only the values carried by the RSMA (and by the *Troupes de Marine* more generally, see Poussin 2014) but also the pride of belonging to such a community, and were recently transformed and commodified into a live choir performance (see Fig. 6.6).

This sense of community and belonging is expressed in Tetuarii and Vaima's words as well when they say:

> Tetuarii: Anyway, we don't regret it, we really don't.
> Vaima: Because in the end, we're gonna leave with many things. In fact, they teach us the discipline. Since with parents it doesn't work...[211]

Each of the volunteers I interviewed was well aware of these particular aspects–discipline and military framing–inculcated to them during the first weeks of the training as if to say that in the end, this is what they need to succeed and indeed, deserve in order to be better persons. In fact, the rigid temporal schedule, as well as the importance given to routines and hygiene practices, don't make skilled workers out of the young volunteers. Indeed, they craft conformed and responsible French citizens out of Indigenous volunteers. And yet, for the candidates, the RSMA is « A big gate

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[209] « Comme ça, madame! ».

[210] Vaima: quand on arrive à la piole, on nous montre comment faire le lit au carré. Tetuarii: en faite, madame, piole c'est la chambre. [...] euh... nous les militaires, on dit piole, on peut pas dire chambre. V: sinon on ramasse. T: ça se fait pas. [...] Le matin on dit pas bonjour, on dit 'mes respects'; on dit pas pardon sinon tu va ramasser, on dit 'au temps pour moi'. [...] V: au lieu de dire oui ou ok on dit 'reçu' [...] de toute façon, tout le monde dit oui maintenant [...] c'est plus reçu.

[211] Tetuarii: on ne regrette pas, quand même, vraiment pas. Vaima: parce qu'à la fin on va sortir avec beaucoup de choses. En fait, ils nous apprend la discipline, en faite. Comme avec les parents ça marche pas...

to cross[212] » (V.K., VT in the secretary trade), « A real trampoline to access the civilian life[213] » (P.T., VT in the nursery trade), because « They teach us cohesion[214] » (A.J., VS in the tourism trade).

Fig. 6.6
Banner publicizing the RSMA choir spectacle, advertised by the official Facebook page of the RSMA-Pf, April 19, 2023

The Racialized Volunteers' Profile

The already mentioned Senate Report (Trucy 2008) stated that such a military frame is fundamental to the program because it has the capacity to motivate young volunteers to behave as and

[212] « Un grand portail a franchir ».

[213] « Un veritable tremplin pour passer dans la vie civile ».

[214] « On nous apprend la cohesion ».

progressively become adults[215]. In 2008, such military training represented 30% of the program, totaling one hundred and fifty six hours of training (Trucy 2008). Even if after the abolition of mandatory military service this kind of regimented training has lost part of its importance in civic life and education, it is nevertheless considered, especially in such environments, as fundamental in re-socializing young Indigenous people precisely because it allows them to learn the fundaments of community life and good manners, as these are defined by the metropolitan military hierarchy, and allow them to position themselves in the neoliberal and market-oriented system[216].

These aspects are of course culturally defined and based on particularly strong and hard-to-fight stereotypes that in turn inform a specific profiling practice. With profiling practice, I refer to the tendency of categorizing Polynesians, and the Polynesian youth especially, following cultural stereotypes that quickly became moral categories based on their ethnic traits and traditional knowledge and culture. Such moral categories, spanning from individual qualities to culturally informed characteristics and inclinations, define what attributes are needed not only to be a good soldier but moreover a good Polynesian, and are at the base of personal representations on the part of young volunteers. For instance, not only « Polynesians are not good to go to school »–as we have seen in the previous Chapter–but they are indeed courageous and proud warriors. This masculinized imaginary is strengthened when compared to the feminine one, especially with regard to cultural practices which are counterintuitively fostered by the army itself in a sort of commodification practice of local traditional and aesthetic performances. An ethnographical snapshot will help to explain my point.

During the first week I spent inside the military facility in Tubuai, it happened more than once that every activity would be interrupted to let volunteers rehearse a particular spectacle to be played in front of the Commander General of the RSMA who would have visited the week after. The volunteers would diligently split by their gender (while the everyday training and more generally the functioning of the program don't operate such distinctions) in order to perform two different recitals: the young men would perform the *haka,* embodying the qualities of proud warriors while the young women would dance the traditional Polynesian dances (*'ori Tahiti*) highlighting their gentle and feminine features as if the military timetable only allows definite windows of time to be and feel Polynesians (as these features are defined by the metropolitan soldiers). Yet, many of my interlocutors didn't appreciate what was perceived as an imposition of uncomfortable rules in the name of cohort cohesion, community life, and performance defining what it means to be Polynesian and/or a good soldier. For instance, while I was observing the young women dancing in their military fatigues, I was approached by the Captain of the unit. Not only one of his colleagues reprehended one of the girls for dancing with a sulky expression–yelling at her « Smile while you dance![217] »–but moreover, the Captain would go on with his moralizing explanation about the importance of such culturally-informed activities:

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[215] Many pages could be dedicated to such a definition. Categories are always subjective and relational, therefore one could wonder what it means to become an adult, especially in the cultural vastness represented by the French overseas dependencies. In this context, adultness if referred to a way of behaving more than to a demographic category.

[216] For instance, French anthropologist Christine Salomon noticed that in New Caledonia even pro-independence politicians see the SMA as a necessary device to frame recalcitrant youth (Salomon 2020), and the same could in part be said concerning the Polynesian context. Moreover, as one of the teachers working for the RSMA-Pf made explicit, the program guarantees a high rate of success because it specifically offers what the local job market demands.

[217] « Souris quand tu danses! »

> You know, it's good because for example some guys have never felt like warriors in their entire life and here, finally, they can express themselves and feel like warriors for the first time in their lives. And for girls, it is the same. Some of them have danced for fifteen years, and others have danced three or four times in their lives because compelled to do it. But here, they learn how to dance and how to feel at ease within their bodies. This is some pedagogy. You know, in Polynesia there are a lot of learning centers, there is the CFPA... but they would never do this. The RSMA works because of this military environment. It is this military aspect that regiments them[218].

This specific rhetoric would be echoed by many others that I would listen to during my fieldwork. The same Captain would recall his fascination towards French Polynesia, partly one of the reasons why he accepted the job in Tubuai, and the subsequent shock felt right after having arrived on the island when he noticed that « Polynesian women are not like this » mimicking an hourglass shape « But like this » mimicking a barrel shape[219]. His vice would go even further in explaining to me that these kinds of activities, such as traditional dances, are organized for a wider goal, i.e. to preserve traditional knowledge that would otherwise be lost within a few generations without the intervention of wise soldiers like him. This strong paternalistic position gives the army, and the RSMA more specifically, a particularly attentive posture towards what is to be considered traditional and therefore to salvage, and what are instead good manners to spend in a contemporary and market-informed society. While the military culture doesn't explicitly differentiate roles and/or hierarchies based on the gender divide nor the racial cleavage, inculcating in the volunteers the idea that everyone is equal and has the same duties and rights, it seems that an exception is made with regards to Polynesian traditions that not only are commodified for the pleasure of metropolitan soldiers and citizens but moreover define what it means to be a good citizen, a good male or female Polynesian, and a good Polynesian soldier. I argue that the role taken up by the army in such situations is key in presenting the military as an attentive institution with regard to the cultural differences of its overseas dependencies, and moreover, it paternalistically aims at preserving such traditions as they are defined by a French aesthetic that in turn commodifies them.

Community life, and a specific military community life, is presented as particularly important to the success of this training as not only do volunteers live in barracks from the beginning to the end of the program, but especially because the training offers the perfect environment for mingling with professional soldiers and instructors. It is precisely through these daily interactions that a certain allure hovering over the soldiers and military life more generally is passed and thrives among the young volunteers. This was probably what was lacking and charged as the cause of the French defeat in the Indochina war according to General Némo. Indeed, it is the intimate connections that the SMA was supposed to develop to better manage French overseas departments and territories (see also Mary 2016). This is also the reason why the number of serving soldiers/instructors should

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[218] « Tu vois, c'est bien parce que par exemple il y a des gars qui ne se sont jamais sentis des guerriers dans toute leur vie et ici finalement, ils peuvent s'exprimer et se sentir des guerriers pour la première fois dans leur vie. Et pour les filles c'est pareil. Il y en a qui ont 15 ans de danse tahitienne sur leur dos, il y en a qui ont dansé 3 ou 4 fois dans leur vie parce qu'obligées. Mais ici elles apprennent à danser et à se sentir à l'aise dans leurs corps. C'est de la pédagogie, ça. Tu vois, en Polynésie c'est plein de centres des formation, t'as le CFPA... mais jamais ils feront ça. Le RSMA ça marche parce que c'est une couche militaire. Il y a ce côté militaire qui les encadre ».

[219] « Les Polynésiennes ne sont pas comme ça [...] mais comme ça ». On sexualized feminine imaginaries and 'Western masculines utopias' see Tcherkézoff 2005.

not be lowered in the name of budget cuts and improvements, as recommended by Senator Trucy in his report info (2008).

The Hierarchical Organization of the RSMA Units

After having retraced the genealogy of the program (see Chapter 5), explored its budgetary organization and funding, who can join the program, and what characteristics are required to be admitted, it is now time to survey how the professional training is organized. As I would learn after the first few weeks at the military facility in Tubuai, each of the soldiers has a specific duty and different roles and hierarchy that I had to learn in order to understand how life at the base worked. As already mentioned, soldiers serving in French overseas dependencies today carry on, together with other kinds of functionaries, a cultural and social role, more than a defensive one. It is precisely on this mobility and on the subtle influences that these functionaries exert on overseas populations that French sovereignty is daily maintained and reiterated. The goal of this paragraph is to give a hint of the functioning of the Tubuai Unit, in which I carried out fieldwork from February to May 2022.

Each RSMA Unit is hierarchically organized as in fractals and led by a Unit Commander, usually ranking as a Captain (*Capitaine*), assisted by a second-in-chief starring the same rank[220]. The *Troisième Compagnie de Formation Professionnelle* (or CFP3) in Tubuai is made up of three sections: the commandment section, the first teaching section (S1), and the second teaching section (S2). The commandment section is guided by the section chief, paired with other professional figures who guarantee the functioning of the facility such as a nurse, a mechanic, a bookkeeper, a secretary, a handyman, a restaurant manager, a quartermaster, and different assistants. Each teaching section has a chief (*chef de section*) and a vice (*adjoint*), both with administrative functions; two branch chiefs, or *chefs de filières*, responsible for the theoretical and practical classes on specific trades; and two assistants for each branch chief (*Volontaires Technicians,* VT). The professional training offered in Tubuai is organized in four different branches, three of which were recently reorganized together in a multi-purpose trade. The four branches are: lagoon navigation (PLGN) and construction work (AEB) responding to the first teaching section, and restaurant/cooking (APR) and agriculture (MHR) responding to the second teaching section.

These figures, all part of the army, hold different positions in the hierarchy and different statuses within the military system. Within the RSMA, the Section Chief is usually a First Sergeant or Master Sergeant (*Adjudant*); the vice a Sergeant or Sergeant First class (*Sergent*, *Sergent-chef*); the Branch Chiefs are Corporals or Specialists. The hierarchy of functions is reflected in the rank hierarchy: the two Captains leading the Unit are Officers (*Officier*); the Sections chiefs are non-commissioned officers (S*ous-officier*), and the Branch Chiefs are non-commissioned soldiers (*Militaires du rang*).

[220] I carried out fieldwork in a francophone environment and in a military context, where jargon is widely used. In the rest of the paragraph, I will refer to particular activities or positions as the volunteers/soldiers were calling them. Sometimes the volunteers referred to their superiors calling them by their ranks, other times by their positions.

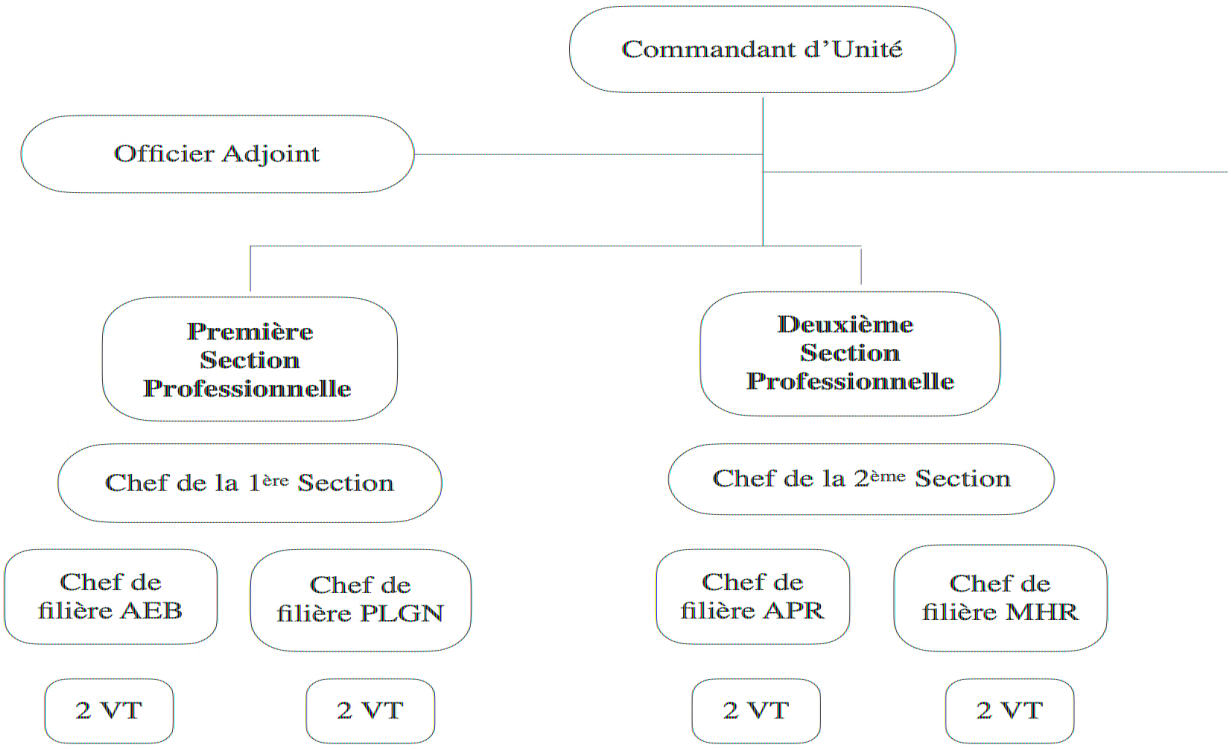

Fig. 6.7
Roles of the RSMA-Pf CFP3 branch

As I would learn while interviewing the Captain of the CFP3, the *Troupes de Marine* and more generally the *Armée de Terre* (French Army) are hierarchically composed of three different levels (excluding the General-Officers, see Fig. 6.7): at the bottom of the pyramid stand the *Militaires du rang* (non-commissioned soldiers), spanning from the rank of Private (*Soldat*) to that of Corporal (*Caporal-chef*); above the *Militaires du rang* stand the *Sous-officiers* (non-commissioned officers), ranking from Sergeant (*Sergent*) to Sergeant Major (*Major*); at the top of the pyramid stand the *Officiers* (Officers) ranking from Second Lieutenant (*Sous-Lieutenant)* to Colonel *(Colonel*).

The military life of active soldiers is organized depending on their ranks: the *Militaires du rang* usually serve within the same regiment throughout their entire career and their main duties are to participate in external operations (or OPEX) in different countries. On the contrary, the experiences of *sous-off* and *officiers* are much different and their lives greatly impacted by their mobility: the *sous-officiers* serve in a regiment for a period spanning from four to ten years, then they are moved to a different one; while the average contract for *officiers* are much shorter, spanning from two to four years. This is because they represent the executive class and have to be prepared to operate in any sort of context, as the Captain specified. Therefore, the military career of a soldier belonging to the *Troupes de Marine* is composed of three different sorts of actions, whose duration depends on the rank of the soldier: *État-Major* (general staff), *Instruction* (teaching), *Opérationnel* (military missions/OPEX). As the Captain of the Tubuai Unit would show me drawing on a blank board, these duties are

equally spread throughout the *officiers* career, while for *sous-off* the focus is more on the military missions and less on the teaching and general staff (Fig. 6.8).

Fig. 6.8
Graphics illustrating military careers breakdown for Officers (to the left)
and Non-Commissioned Officers (to the right) as these were explained to me by an officer

Given the amplitude of the French overseas, this means that the general staff and teaching duties can be fulfilled outside of the metropole, *en séjour*, in one of the many defense bases and teaching facilities spread across the French overseas departments and territories. This is also valid for the *militaires du rang*, who can be given overseas duties before returning to their regiments. In this way, *officiers* or *sous-officiers* willing to fulfill their teaching duties can do it in one of the RSMA facilities, given their educational vocation. Alternatively, they can fulfill the general staff/administrative duties in the defense bases. The following subsections will focus on each of these figures and their roles, as these were explained to me during quotidian conversations with the soldiers.

Regularly Enlisted Soldiers

The commanders, section chiefs, and the vices, as well as some of the branch chiefs and other professional figures (nurse, mechanic, etc.) working in the SMA units, are regularly enlisted soldiers, meaning that before having been moved to the RSMA facility in Tubuai they had different roles and positions in numerous regiments and units of the French army[221]. Most of them were on the field quite often and it was not surprising to hear them listing all their previous missions: the majority of them have served in Iraq, Afghanistan, Mali, Kosovo and so on. Their experiences and backgrounds are told nonchalantly to the volunteers in daily activities and regular conversations adding more fascination to military life. Their contracts in the RSMA are short-medium terms spanning from one to four years of service, after which they go back to France to join either their old unit or a different regiment.

A document sent to me by the Second-in-Chief prior to my arrival in Tubuai, a sort of guide to help new soldiers in their transition and accompany them in the discovery of the island, stated: « [...]

[221] The majority of them come from the *Troupes de Marine*, the ancient colonial troops, a unit of the French army that in the past was deployed in overseas colonies. See Chapter 5.

This phase of excitement and questioning that comes with leaving for an island on the other side of the world is not an easy thing, either emotionally or administratively[222] ».

The move was illustrated to me by the wife of one of the soldiers stationed in Tubuai, Chiquita. Originally from Wallis and Futuna, Chiquita and her husband Heifara left the Pacific Ocean years ago, when Heifara decided to join the French army and was stationed in Bretagne, in the north of France. That's where their trip to Tubuai started. They reached Paris with their three children and board a plane bound for Tahiti. When they reached French Polynesia, more than twenty hours later, it was night and they slept in Pirae, at the CMIT. By the time they were able to check-in, it was well past midnight and could only sleep a couple of hours before waking up and going back to the airport to board another plane, this one bound for Tubuai. « The RSMA is like a family[223] », Chiquita told me, explaining to me that when they finally landed, all the cadres and their families were at the tiny airport in Tubuai to welcome them, as is usual on those occasions. She told me that even if everyone was there to greet them, she was so tired that the only thing she wanted to do was to go home and have a rest.

Living in Tubuai, as recalled by another military wife, Salomé, is very hard: « It's like having a bandaid on your heart[224] », because you have to leave your friends and family back. Such hardship is rendered even more difficult by the fact that none of the military wives (with one exception during my stay) have the possibility to work given the restricted local job market, even though all of them were workers in metropolitan France. « If you don't have kids », as Salomé put it, « It's even more frustrating. At least, if you have children you can take care of them 24/7 but if you don't, you end up talking to pets or walls, like me » she said sarcastically.

Their stay in an 'isolated' unit on a Polynesian island is seen by the soldiers and their families as a well-deserved reward if not explicitly as a vacation, as more than one told me during my stay. When I asked Chiquita how does it feel to live in Tubuai, she responded that coming from Wallis and Futuna, the weather as well as the 'relaxed' islandian context, wasn't anything new for them. Indeed, the biggest change was having her husband at home all the time. Heifara was away very often when they lived in Bretagne, taking part in all sorts of missions, as he would tell me as well once we were in his office one day, gathering plastic cups to bring downstairs and toast to some events. All of a sudden, and referring to the interest I expressed earlier towards his military experience, he exclaimed: « Claudia, don't ask me your psychological questions! Psychologists are for white people, those that come from France. I am an '*enfant des îles*' [lit. child of the isles], I was like them [the volunteers] a few years ago. I teach them in my own way. I fought some wars, all the wars, even more than that one down there [he referred to the second-in-chief]. I came here to relax[225] ».

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[222] « [...] cette phase d'excitation et d'interrogation que suscite un départ sur une île à l'autre bout du monde n'est pas une chose aisée émotionnellement et administrativement ».

[223] « Le RSMA c'est comme une famille ».

[224] « T'as un pansement au coeur ».

[225] « Claudia, ne me pose pas tes questions de psy! Le psy est pour les blancs, ceux qui viennent de France. Moi, je suis un enfant de îles, moi aussi j'étais comme eux [the volunteers] ça fait quelques années. Je leur apprend à ma façon. J'ai fait des guerres, toutes les guerres, plus de celui là qui est en bas [he referred to the second-in-chief]. Je suis venu ici pour me reposer ».

Indeed, as we have seen in the previous Chapter, this *séjour* is an integral part of the military career of soldiers ranking in the *Troupes de Marine*. This organization has of course some logistical characteristics to take into consideration, especially in a context such as the Polynesian one, as explained to me by the second-in-chief of the RSMA-Pf, lieutenant-colonel C., during my first visit at the RSMA facility in Arue. According to his account, military job positions/offers in French Polynesia are strongly influenced by the demographic characteristics of the candidates: married soldiers are preferably sent to serve in 'isolated' units, such as the Tubuai one, because bachelors are supposed to be easily bored by the calm island life and the lack of amenities and leisure activities. Similarly, military families with teenage children cannot serve in remote contexts as there are no high schools in outer islands. Therefore, as I would witness myself, the military demography of Tubuai is very homogeneous, starring young couples and families with kids at a young age, while in Tahiti there is a more heterogenous military demographic presence.

The tour of duty in overseas dependencies comes with many benefits, as incessantly remarked by the soldiers themselves. Among these, not only is the salary higher for all functionaries serving overseas but it is also accorded to the cost of life, meaning that if there are variations in local products' prices, the salary will be raised accordingly. Moreover, when you are moved overseas, the army will provide for your house, which rentals equal 10% of your stipend, the rest of it being paid by the army. While in Tahiti this means that the army is « The biggest estate agency », as my interlocutor Florence told me; in Tubuai, the RSMA rents houses from private citizens, with the results that the majority of the soldiers and their families are neighbors, as it is common for local inhabitants to own some land in which multiple houses are built and rented.

The logistics of these overseas transfers were further explained to me by Aurélien, branch chief in the construction trade at the CFP3. Each soldier assigned to a job position overseas is entitled to a container to fill with personal items, and more generally with everything needed for the move and their new life. The container will be shipped before their departure and its cost completely covered by the army. Everything is carefully organized: the contract/service starts in July, and the container is usually shipped in May or June. This in turn means that a family has to pack all their belongings, from clothes to home appliances, months before their departure. The case of French Polynesia and its 'isolated' units in Tubuai and Hiva Oa is particularly interesting. In fact, not only general products and household appliances are much more expensive in French Polynesia, they are inexistent in outer islands and have to be shipped from Tahiti. Therefore, since the container is assigned to soldiers at no additional cost, they prefer to ship all they possibly need during their tour of duty. After this period, the majority of such products, especially household and technological appliances, as well as cars, are sold to incoming soldiers or local inhabitants, creating a real second-hand market economy. In April 2022, while I was at the base, I remember an Excel sheet circulating among the soldiers with a list of items Aurélien was selling prior to his departure. And until today, it is very common to read similar posts on the Tubuai island FB group, in which outgoing soldiers and teachers organize yard sales in order to get rid of items they don't need anymore but that are instead precious on the island.

The EVSMA (or *Engagés Volontaires du Service Militaire Adapté*)

Among the branch chiefs, there are also hybrid figures: they voluntarily joined the army with the specific purpose of teaching in the RSMA and serving within the same unit for their military career.

In jargon, they are called EVSMA or *Engagés Volontaires du Service Militaire Adapté*. The majority of the EVSMA are locals who joined the army to serve in the RSMA local units, but there are also metropolitan citizens who enrolled and serve in different regiments, as will be explained through the example of Noa and Clement at the end of this paragraph.

To join the army with the rank of Specialist or *caporal-chef*, they are required to have at least a high school diploma (BAC or CAP in the French system). Such a diploma would usually equal a *sous-officier* rank, yet as my interlocutor in Arue explained to me, such a hierarchy doesn't count within the RSMA ranks: the only rank achievable for the EVSMA is that of *caporal-chef*. They have to follow a general military training during which they are trained to use weapons, yet their background is completely different from their regularly enlisted colleagues, also because a lot of the EVSMA are natives. As explained in numerous SMA activities reports:

> Such a transformation occurs in six months. Before their assignment in a regiment, they come to Fréjus for eleven weeks to attend the initial military training (acquisition of the fundamentals of the military job, in their knowhow and behaviors) and the general training for those who will become trainers (learning of authority and moral training); after this, they reach Périgueux to acquire a complemental and specific training for the SMA (pedagogy, relations with enterprises and public actors, integration...) (Ministère des Outre-mer 2018)[226].

EVSMA contracts can be renewed each year for a maximum of eleven years, hindering these non-commissioned soldiers the possibility to attain the military pension attainable after a minimum of fifteen years of service[227]. Once the contract ends, or when one of the two parties decides not to renew it, the branch chief will give up their military rank and go back to civilian life.

A few of the aspects mentioned in Chapter 5, among which stand the soldiers' social mission and the supposedly ethnocultural characteristics defining the Polynesian youth, find an echo in a conversation I animated between two instructors working at the RSMA facility in Arue, Tahiti.

On December 7, 2021, I was about to cross the gate of the Defense Base for the third time, after the get-together lunch with the RSMA hierarchy and the meeting I had with one of the instructors the previous day (see Introduction and Chapter 3). When Noa, the instructor, asked me if I was interested in knowing more about the functioning of his trade and if I wanted to go back the day after, my eyes were shimmering, and of course, I couldn't say no. So there I was, standing in front of the gate, with my temporary visitor badge in hand, waiting for someone to pick me up and escort me to Noa's office (see the Introduction and Chapter 3). If during the previous day, I had the occasion to meet and exchange with young volunteers and assistants, the morning of December 7 I would have an interesting conversation with Noa, *chef de filière* in the Security Agent trade, and Clement, *chef de filière* in the Electrician trade. This double back-and-forth interview, as I was asking

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[226] « Cette transformation s'opère en six mois. Avant leur affectation dans un régiment, ils rejoignent Fréjus pendant 11 semaines afin de suivre la formation militaire initiale (acquisition des fondamentaux du métier de militaire dans le savoir-faire et le savoir-être) et la formation générale élémentaire destinée aux gradés d'encadrement (apprentissage de l'exercice de l'autorité et formation morale); à l'issue, ils rejoignent Périgueux afin d'acquérir un complément de formation spécifique au SMA (pédagogie, relations aux entreprises et aux acteurs publiques, insertion...) ».

[227] Noa, one of the branch chiefs I met in Arue, explained me that such a contract was modified multiple times in the past ten years, evolving its duration from five to eight and finally eleven years of service (renewable each two years).

questions to both of them and they were discussing among them while answering my questions, allowed me to have a glimpse of two very different military careers.

Noa defines himself as Polynesian, born and raised in Tahiti. When I asked him how and why he became a branch chief, he answered by going back in time. He started his military career as a volunteer in the RSMA-Pf. « School wasn't for me. It's not that I'm stupid but I can't stay in a classroom[228] » he added, echoing the many structural problems afflicting the school system that were raised in the previous Chapter. Many of his professors were metropolitan French and kept telling him he would end up homeless on the street, while his family considered him a black sheep as well. « It hurt me at the time but it's my strength today » he said, adding « I am proud today![229] ». The RSMA gave him emotional emancipation and economic independence, allowing him to get married and raise his daughter, while at the same time demonstrating to his family that he was capable of doing 'something good'. After having finished the training as a volunteer, he was offered a position as an assistant in the same trade, which he took for five years (the maximum length of such contracts). After that time, he decided to pursue his military career as a branch chief, but to do so he had to go back to school and obtain an official diploma before being sent to France to follow the basic military training required to become *chef de filière*. As he would explain, *chefs de filière* have to follow a particular training divided into two steps: if the candidates come from a previous military experience, i.e. they were assistants in the SMA or regular army soldiers volunteering to serve in the SMA, they only have to follow a three-month teaching training in Périgueux, France, before being sent to their regiments. If candidates come from the civilian world and never had military experience before, their training is longer and before passing the teaching training in Périgueux they have to spend three additional months in Fréjus, the headquarters of the *Troupes de Marine*, to attend a strict military training (*Formation Générale Élémentaire*), during which they learn how to become soldiers through military drill, salute, hierarchy, weapons use, etc.

This was the case for Clement, my other interlocutor that morning. *Chef de filière* in the electrician trade, Clement is a French metropolitan EVSMA (*Engagé Volontaire du Service Militaire Adapté*), i.e. the position of anyone who voluntarily decided to enlist in the army to only serve and teach within the SMA programs. The teaching experience at the RSMA-Pf was his second, after having taught the same trade at the RSMA facility at La Réunion[230]. Differing from Noa's experience, Clement defined his schooling as a normal one, at the end of which he acquired his diploma (BAC) in electrotechnics. After having worked in the civilian world for seven years, he got interested in a job offer overseas, for which he had all the qualifications needed. He didn't pay too much attention to the military institution that was offering the job, as he was more focused on the opportunity of moving overseas with his wife: « I was looking, with my wife, a job overseas [because] routine horrifies me[231] ». This is indeed a common rhetoric among French metropolitan expatriates (or *expats*, as they referred to themselves) looking for new adventures and possibilities to travel while working within the Republic. Therefore, bound to La Réunion, his role was to help young people to

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[228] « L'école n'était pas pour moi. Ce n'est pas que je suis bête, mais je ne peux pas rester dans les classes ».

[229] « Ça m'a blessé à l'époque, mais c'est ma force aujourd'hui [...] Je suis fier aujourd'hui! ».

[230] If the job contract is the same for both Noa and Clement, it is interesting to note that local EVSMA never leave their country to serve in other overseas territories, while it is precisely for this reason that metropolitan EVSMA join the army.

[231] « Je cherchais, avec mon épouse, un travail en outre-mer [car] la routine m'horrifie ».

« sortir de la merde » (lit. getting out of this shit), specifying that his first eight months of duty were very hard as he wasn't familiar with the local environment, nor with the military one. « Morally it's very hard when you're a *chef de filière* [trainer][232] » he added, referring to when he realized that the majority of young people decided to enlist in the program just to obtain their driving licenses and then quit. Discussing the military nature of the job he accepted, he was genuinely troubled and surprised as he told me that for a long period of his life, he defined himself as « anti-militaire » (lit. anti-military). And yet, « I abode to the military side even if I was anti-military[233] ». This was possible because at the SMA « [there is] a military atmosphere, but a relaxed one[234] ». Moreover, he was persuaded that it is precisely thanks to the military environment and discipline inculcated in the volunteers that the program works so well. As to justify his unexpected sympathy for the army, Clement stressed that « [the] military framing [is] important [because] the school is too permissive[235] », and he was echoed by Noa who added that not only it is precisely this « Militarism what makes the RSMA's strength[236] », but that moreover, this is the most valued characteristic that enterprises and employers look for when hiring young workforce. Sometimes it's hard, they both said, as young people struggle to find a job in their trade and for this, both of them blame the lack of discipline in civilian life, as well as the youth's lack of self-initiative. « There are no projects, no goals [...] They never have any kind of propositions, it's empty » remarked Clement, and Noa added « That's why we're there![237] ».

Noa's example is particularly poignant, as made explicit during a lecture he would give as the EVSMA President to a newly arrived class of volunteers[238]. « You don't have to forget where you come from! [...] I was at the bottom of the ladder, like you, down there, down, down, down [but] Tahitians can become president![239] », he affirmed with a steady voice. His speech would go on: « You are great people, guys! Nothing falls from the sky, there are no gifts[240] ». The good outcomes of the program are only delivered if volunteers follow some simple rules: « [stay] seated, listen, execute, succeed[241] », explained Noa as if these rules represented a step-by-step guide on how to succeed. There is no space or time to think, express yourself, differ or disagree. Once back in his office, he would add: « You can't go back down the ladder[242] », referring to his plans for the future and implying that once his military career will come to an end, he will become his own boss, a real

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[232] « Moralement c'est très difficile en tant que chef de filière ».

[233] « J'ai adhéré au coté militaire même si j'étais anti-militaire ».

[234] « [il y a] une atmosphere militaire mais cool ».

[235] « [l']encadrement militaire [est] important [car] l'école est trop laxiste ».

[236] « Militarité ce qui fait la force du RSMA ».

[237] « Il n'y a pas de projets, pas d'objectifs [...] ils n'ont jamais des propositions, c'est vide [...] c'est pour ça qu'on est là! »

[238] The EVSMA president represents his/her colleagues and is responsible for petitioning the RSMA-Pf hierarchy.

[239] « Il faut pas oublier d'où on vient! [...] Moi j'étais en bas d'échelle comme vous, en bas, en bas, en bas [mais] le Tahitien peut devenir président! ».

[240] « Vous êtes des grandes personnes, les gars! Rien ne tombe du ciel, il n'y a pas des cadeaux ».

[241] « [rester] assis, écouter, executer, réussir ».

[242] « On peut pas redescendre dans l'échelle ».

self-made man, his goal being to open his own security enterprise. Such moral rules and convictions were genuinely and naively expressed by Clement as well, as he was explaining to me the functioning of the program and the role of his mobility overseas. In a very naive way, Clement admitted that France has an interest in sending all these functionaries and soldiers overseas, precisely because they are vehicles of moral values. As a French citizen, he has and therefore is the carrier of, universalist and republican values such as punctuality, politeness, a specific deportment, hygiene, etc. And their role overseas is precisely to transmit those values to the local population. Clement's narrative echoed Cynthia Enloe's sharp analysis when she observed that « European and American [emissaries][243] taught not only letters and numbers, in their governments' colonies; they taught notions of respectability » (1990:48).

The VT (or *Volontaires Techniciens*)

The *Volontaires Techniciens* (or VT) are teaching assistants and hold yet another status: the majority of them are ex-volunteers in the program and were recruited when they were still training, even though being an ex-VS is not mandatory. Their ranks go from Private to Specialist (*première classe* to *caporal-chef*) and their contracts can be renewed each year for a maximum of five years, after which time they can decide to dismiss their military fatigues or continue their military career to become branch chiefs. In the second case, a training of three months to achieve in France, at the headquarters of the RSMA in Périgueux, is required (see paragraph above). The entirety of the assistants are locals and use these five years as an important job opportunity. In Tubuai, I became friends with one of them, Fabrice, assisting the chief of the commandment section. This position was only recently created, therefore its role is yet to be defined. Prior to this, Fabrice was a teaching assistant in the construction trade, the same training he took as a young volunteer years ago.

Fabrice and I first met at the welcome dinner organized by Jay upon my arrival. Browsing my field notes, there were details I noticed that night that started to assume meaning only after having talked to Fabrice for some time. For instance, during the welcome dinner, he was wearing a black shirt with some yellow writing to which I didn't pay attention at first. At the same time, Jay was making fun of some sort of situation, referring to Fabrice as a *légionnaire*, or referring to *la légion*[244]. It turned out that the captain's sarcasm was sparked by the black t-shirt that Fabrice was wearing, featuring writing and symbols referring to the *légion étrangère* (foreign legion). Such details are important because, as I was about to learn, Fabrice had a particular representation of himself as a young soldier and of the *légion étrangère* as well. The next Tuesday, my second day at the base, there were celebrations in honor of Fabrice's birthday, to which I was invited to stay after the daily activities. On that occasion, I had the time to get to know Fabrice more closely and the reference to the *légion étrangère* became more intelligible. His father served in that corps for nineteen years and was stationed in a base in southeast France. He retired years ago but his legacy continued until today, as Fabrice's younger brother enlisted in the *légion* and Fabrice himself was about to. Yet, one day when he was in Makemo, his birth island in the Tuamotu archipelago, he had an interesting encounter with some RSMA recruiters. He was running, as he said, and beat the soldiers who went for a run

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[243] Enloe was describing the indirect role of women leaving their countries to go teach in overseas colonies. I believe that such a role can be expanded beyond the gender divide.

[244] The reference is at the *légion étrangère*, an élite corps of the French army.

for their daily sports session. The recruiters were pleasantly surprised by Fabrice's performance and remarked that he wasn't there during the RSMA presentation the day before. That's when something clicked in his mind, as he recounted: « They made me dream. They promised me this, this, and that [...] Tomorrow I'll come to sign my file. [...] That's how I enlisted in the RSMA, they made me dream[245] ». Once his training was over, and since he was a good volunteer in the construction trade, he was offered an assistant position to fulfill in Tubuai. He accepted and subsequently moved to the island. When we met, his contract was about to end after five years of service and he had only a few months left to spend in Tubuai and within the RSMA.

Fabrice is an interesting character as he always stressed his identity and belonging to the military family and environment, even though the role he covered was a temporary one, not leading to a career in the regular army, and moreover, his duties within the RSMA were not strictly military. In a conversation we had, he explained to me that from his point of view, « Either you are a soldier, either you are not. It's like you, if you are a woman you cannot be a man[246] ». I was tempted to tell him that indeed you can have women's sexual organs (if that counts as "being a woman") and identify with men, or the opposite, or that you can be gender fluid but instead I noted what he was saying on my notebook and nodded[247]. Son of an ancient *légionnair*e, grew up with the military myth embodied by his father and practicing boxe, quintessentially a man's sport in his view, Fabrice represented himself as a soldier, no matter if he was working in the RSMA and wasn't enlisted in the regular army. He was, to his eyes, a military, an *'aito*. Many conversations we had started with « As a military, I... ». Fabrice honored his uniform and differing from other VS with whom I talked, he would never admit to having joined the RSMA for personal advantages (e.g. to get a driving license, receive professional training to be used in the future, etc.). Fabrice decided to join the RSMA accepting what he probably perceived as a personal and physical challenge, not to mention the fact that he liked the military atmosphere that makes the program so popular among young Polynesians.

A similar account was referred to me by one of Fabrice's colleagues, Rahiti, an assistant in the agricultural training. Rahiti is from Rurutu, in the Austral Islands, and was recruited by his chief, Angela, because of his knowledge. He had no previous experience in the RSMA nor familiarity with the military environment, his family being a farmer's one in Rurutu. On a Sunday afternoon, we met at the airport, I was accompanying my host Yolande to pick up some incoming guests while Rahiti was about to leave to go to Tahiti to obtain his heavy duty truck license at the defense base in Arue. Soon after, a colleague of his arrived at the airport, with his impeccable uniform on, bound for Tahiti for Rahiti's same reasons. Dean didn't come to us nor waved at us. We both noticed his uniform and Rahiti, wearing some swimming shorts and a random t-shirt, told me that Dean gave him a call the night before, asking what to wear upon departure. Rahiti told him that they wouldn't be on service: « Uhm, listen. It's Sunday, relax, we'll start tomorrow, it's ok[248] ». And yet, Dean showed up with his military fatigues, attracting admired glances from everyone present at the small

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[245] « Ils m'ont fait rêver. Ils m'ont promis ça, ça et ça. [...] Demain je viens monter mon dossier. [...] C'est comme ça que je me suis engagé au RSMA, ils m'ont fait rêver. »

[246] « Soit t'est militaire, soit t'est pas militaire. C'est comme toi: si tu es femme, tu ne peux pas être homme. »

[247] He seemed not to take into consideration *mahu* and *raerae*, identified as the third 'sex' (Tcherkézoff 2022).

[248] « Euh, écoute. C'est dimanche, relax, on commence demain, c'est bon. »

airport. « That's because he feels more official in this way », said Rahiti, indirectly implying the social role of the RSMA on which I was ruminating for weeks. Why was Rahiti fully relaxed wearing shorts and not questioning his belonging, while his colleague had to show up wearing long camouflage pants and a long-sleeved jacket in tropical weather? Maybe Dean, son of an ex-soldier, had to demonstrate (to others but primarily to himself) that he was part of the military family. Probably because, as Fabrice said, either you're a soldier, either you are not. Wearing the military fatigues could be considered as an act of ordinary citizenship, in the sense that through that performance Dean was implicitly vindicating not only his role as a soldier but moreover the privileges attached to such a status.

Notwithstanding Fabrice pride in wearing a military uniform, and more generally about the role of the French army that he sees as a protector, the more I talked to him, the more his monolithic figure started to fall apart: during a conversation, I asked him about the five golden rules of the SMA and he couldn't remember more than two of them, to which we both laugh. Secondly, he admitted: « I don't like my superiors, you know. They're no good. They punish you for nothing[249] ». And yet when I asked him what was the link between being Polynesian and being French he stared at me as if I asked something very odd. There are no links whatsoever, he said, because joining the French army (or the RSMA for that matter) doesn't mean becoming French or feeling more French. « I am Polynesian[250] ». As I would learn during my months at the RSMA facility, Fabrice explained to me that Polynesian youth doesn't join the program and/or the army to feel French, nor to show their gratitude towards the nation: « They join the army [...] because there is no job, to travel. French people come here to profit but for us, there is no job[251] ». This is coupled with the fact that having a degree is not always needed to get a job: « It's useless and expensive [...] you have to pay to get a BA, the MA... and why do you need it?[252] ».

Fabrice's contract ended in September 2022, when he moved to Tahiti. During our discussion, a few months prior to his move, he told me he wanted to join the firefighters in his island home or alternatively join the army, no matter in which corps or regiment, the first that will accept his file. And yet today he is still in Tahiti, practicing boxe and living his islandian life.

Conclusions

Voluntary enlistment in the SMA (and to some extent military enrollment in the regular army, as will be explained in the next Chapter) opens new scenarios that could be defined as 'spaces of potential' (Neveu 2015) in which social actors' positions and their social relationships are experimented and changed. It is this particular conjuncture that allows Polynesian youth, often dwelling in precarious situations, to vindicate their rights *en tant que* citizens. This is particularly true because in the contemporary social order (authoritarian, hierarchical, neoliberal, etc.) to be poor

[249] « Tu sais que je n'aime pas mes chefs. Ils sont nuls. Ils font ramasser pour rien. »

[250] « Je suis polynésien, moi. »

[251] Ils s'engagent [...] parce qu'il n'y a pas de travail, pour voyager. Les français viennent ici profiter, mais pour nous il n'y a pas de travail.

[252] Ça sert à rien et c'est cher [...] il faut payer pour la licence, le master... et à quoi ça sert?

means not only to be deprived from a material and economic point of view but more importantly to be excluded from social norms and excised from political rights, while being compelled to subdue social norms that don't take into consideration marginalized categories as political subjects and bearers of rights (Clarke et al. 2014:63). Political exclusion that comes with poverty is yet vindicated, as in this case, through voluntary and military enlistment. Citizenship, intended as an articulating political project, allows us to observe and understand « The struggle around and about citizenship [...] as *sites of politics* » (Clarke et al. 2014:58).

The SMA, conceived as a colonial means of acculturation to prevent riots and maintain French sovereignty overseas is today presented as an instrument of inclusion and perceived as a boost, fix-it-all program for the Indigenous youth. Such a discursive change is evidence of the reassembling capacity of imperial formations « To manage the resistance of those it is supposed to both police and protect » (Lutz 2006:603). Through the development of a form of soft power through the militarization of civic, educational, and socio-economic tasks, France is symbolically and materially very present in French Polynesia. Such power is not just related to French military and national strength but it is also exerted through cultural and economic influences, often subtle and invisible, exercised by the French government and its functionaries and soldiers in local communities.

CHAPTER 7

Imperial Intimacies within and beyond the Baseworld.

Echoes of Colonialism in French Polynesia

As the small plane flies over the motu off Raivavae and then begins its descent towards the island, I watch the seascape outside the window and feel excited: it is the first time that I leave Tahiti and nearby Mo'orea to travel to the outer islands. As much as I tried to travel to the Austral Islands as an informed passenger, indeed as a well-documented researcher, I couldn't help but think that I was about to finally touch with bare hands an authentic fieldwork experience on a Polynesian island. Such a particular imaginary, that I tried not to reproduce throughout my own experience and writing, is yet reiterated by teachers and soldiers and their respective families, landing in Tubuai and/or skimming the crystal clear water over Raivavae before landing on the airstrip, which is entirely built on the lagoon (see Malogne-Fer 2004). The tiny airport building in Raivavae can be glimpsed beyond the window and on the other side of the fence people are standing, watching the small plane gliding on the airstrip. Many passengers are ready to disembark, while others are on the tarmac, waiting to board and reach their next destination. The smell of the many flower necklaces in the guise of welcome or goodbye is pervasive.

The Austral Islands, or *Tuha'a pae*, located south of Tahiti, are composed of Rimatara, Rurutu, Raivavae, Rapa, and Tubuai, the administrative center of the archipelago and regional subdivision, and my destination (Fig. 7.1). The archipelago itself is more the result of a colonial policy of centralization and classification than the reflection of a real regional specificity and cultural homogeneity (Bambridge 2009). Anthropologist Victoria Lockwood observed as early as 1988 that the island of Tubuai has been for over twenty years « The target of extensive modernization programs sponsored by the Territorial/French government » adding that « These "welfare and subsidy-oriented" development programs, the outgrowth of French neocolonial interests in the region, are aimed at promoting the cultivation of European[253] cash crops and improving islanders' standard of living » (Lockwood 1988:176). The result of such policies aiming at retaining control over the island, together with the massive subsidies allocated to compensate for the nuclear testing program, are well visible until today (and were already remarked by Lockwood in 1988). If prior to such investments, the island was isolated from the administrative center in Tahiti and the majority of the islanders relied on familiar agricultural and locally fished products, starting from the 1950s and until today, many households relied on wage-jobs as the island became the administrative center of the newly created administrative subdivision[254]. As a consequence, farmers started to export the majority of their harvest to Tahiti and gained from the agricultural development programs. As I would witness myself during my stay on the island, known as the *Grenier de Tahiti*, it would be nearly impossible to find fresh local vegetables, as the majority of them are sent to Tahiti and the rest of them consumed by local producers and families.

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[253] As their demand skyrocketed due to the massive presence of French metropolitan functionaries and technicians working in the nuclear industry; as well as of tourists increasingly visiting French Polynesia (Lockwood 1988).

[254] The implantation of the RSMA on the island favored the development of wage-jobs and a certain induced economy.

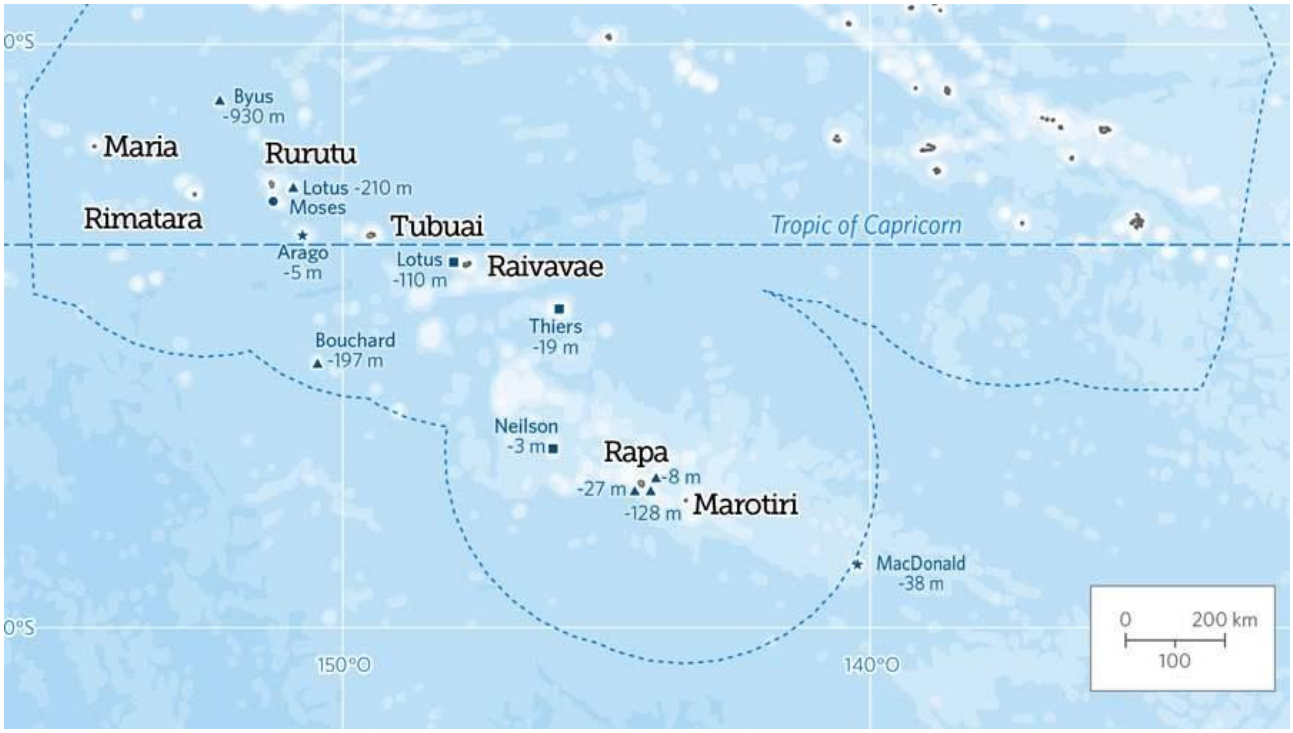

Fig. 7.1
Map of the Austral Islands. © Pew

Such a particular context is propelled by what has been defined as *macrocéphalie urbaine* (Merceron 2005), i.e. an excessive centralization of administrative services and the tertiary sector in Tahiti, partly causing the depopulation of the outer islands and the creation of internal power imbalances and dependency mechanisms, as the agricultural system in Tubuai seems to show. This imbalance is, in turn, the outcome of a permanent state of coloniality, i.e. a structure of principles and attitudes which not only shaped ways of being, behaving, thinking and desiring during colonial times but still permeates modern-day postcolonial governing practices. If the concept of colonialism is intended as temporally and geographically bounded, coloniality refers more to an ongoing condition inscribed in the governing system itself (for a discussion on the concept of coloniality see Mignolo 2007, 2007a; Quijano 2007; Maldonado-Torres 2007). Further terminological, as well as methodological clarifications are necessary. As colonialism is usually defined as a particular endeavor aimed at *discovering*[255] and then conquering new places to profit from them, what comes to our minds when thinking about a colony is a dependency of a nation-state. In this sense, a colony is always relational, as it is defined against an ideal place, the metropole, which defines imaginaries and life expectancies. Yet, in this work, I propose to think about 'colony' in a different and thicker way, building on the concept of coloniality mentioned above. Therefore, a colony is not only a geographical place, it is first and foremost a political concept. It is a way of governing and regimenting people's mobility and life possibilities, of deciding who goes where and why and who is impeded to go where and why. Anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler defined a colony as follows:

[255] I use the verb to discover instead of to encounter on purpose, to emphasize a precise colonial mindset.

> A "colony" as a common noun is a place where people are moved in and out; a place of livid, hopeful, desperate, and violent *circulation*. [...] A "colony" as a political concept is not a place but a *principle of managed mobilities*, mobilizing and immobilizing populations according to a set of changing rules and hierarchies that orders social kinds: those eligible for recruitment, for resettlement, for disposal, for aid, or for coerced labor and those who are forcibly confined. [...] A "colony" as a political concept *assesses the value of human kinds*. It organizes activities of labor and leisure and who is assigned them. It metes out punishment and defines transgressions by the goals it has set for itself. (2016:117, original emphasis).

Embracing such a theoretical standpoint, Chapter 7 illustrates an ethnographical example based on four-month fieldwork in the RSMA military facility in Tubuai. Retracing the everyday life at the base and following the future aspirations of my interlocutors, I aim to show how the non-sovereign condition experienced today by the Polynesian youth and the coloniality in which they live influence the life trajectory of young Indigenous people, often resulting in engagement in the regular army. Through the recollection of familiar and personal histories, chapter seven investigates the meaning of living in a non-sovereign condition while at the same time trying to build everyday sovereign tactics to navigate such a situation. Based on the ethnographical observation of the enlistment process, this chapter demonstrates that, far from hindering Indigenous agency, the enlistment process paradoxically results in overseas mobility and a performed act of citizenship/sovereignty: it is only by joining the army that Polynesian youth are able to weave a kind of different negotiation with the metropole and can exercise their rights to obtain privileges that otherwise can't be performed at home.

Frictions and Co-Existence in Tubuai

Tubuai airport is tiny, with no gates nor security controls. The main hall is opened on all sides and can be accessed directly from the airstrip (Fig. 7.2). Luggages would be unloaded manually and then stowed on a long counter, from which each passenger could go and take their bag. There was a festive atmosphere with newly arrived passengers running towards old friends and/or family members to be gifted flower crowns and necklaces to welcome them on the island. Upon arrival, I was a bit disoriented. I didn't know exactly what to expect but the RSMA local unit's second-in-chief, with whom I had been in touch for weeks prior to my trip, assured me he will be at the airport to welcome me, together with one of his colleagues who would be my guide for the week to come. And yet, I couldn't find anyone wearing a military outfit. Soon after, a middle-aged lady came up to me with an expression as questioning as mine. « Claudia? » I smiled and nodded at her, having no idea of who she was. Yolande, the owner of the guesthouse where I would sleep for the first few nights, offered me a flower necklace and welcomed me on the island. Surprised, I tell her that in reality I'm waiting for *les militaires* and I didn't know she would have been there as well[256]. In response, she would point me to a small group of people beyond the crowd, next to the airport food court (a small snack selling fresh soda drinks and sandwiches).

[256] Given the non-existent public transport system in Tubuai, it is common practice for guest house owners to pick their guests up at the airport and drive them to the guest house.

Fig. 7.2
Tubuai airport, February 24, 2022.
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Jay and Angela, both wearing civilian clothes, are seated at a concrete table, sipping a beer. Jay is tall and thin, with short dark hair and a pair of dark sunglasses. Angela is my size, with Polynesian traits and her dark hair pulled back into a messy bun. Two young girls are standing there with her, supposedly her daughters. When I approached them to introduce myself, they too offered me flower necklaces and welcomed me. « Bienvenue chez nous! », exclaimed Angela. We walked towards the airport's main entrance and a young Polynesian man wearing a military uniform approached us[257]. D. is in charge of driving me to Yolande's guesthouse but before leaving, Jay reminded me that night I was invited to a welcome dinner he organized with some colleagues. In the 9-seat van, two young women wearing military outfits sat in the back, not responding to my hello. As we were driving on the main street, locally called *route de ceinture*, bordering the airstrip, a quad thrown at high speed surpassed us on the right side cutting its trajectory through the near fields. D. smiled, « that's the Captain![258] » he explained, shaking his head. Shortly after, D. slightly turned right into a private court, right across the ocean. We arrived *chez Yolande* (Fig. 7.3).

At dinner, that evening, there was a friendly atmosphere. We were *chez Nani*, one of the only two restaurants on the island. Once again, as already happened at the beginning of my fieldwork in Tahiti, I would meet people, not soldiers. The world I was about to discover and aimed to understand was populated by figures whose roles I did not know but who were nevertheless

[257] Jay and Angela were not wearing the military uniform because on Friday afternoons, as well as Wednesday afternoons, activities are suspended and everyone is given free time (*quartier libre*). D. was wearing his uniform because he was working with the officer of the week (or *semaine*) and therefore didn't follow the standard timetable.

[258] « C'est le Capitaine! ».

genuinely interested in my work and available to me. I would have the same feelings a few hours later, as I met someone known through mutual acquaintances.

Fig. 7.3
Guesthouse *chez Yolande*, my home away from home, February 23, 2022.
© Claudia Ledderucci

Aurélien, a metropolitan soldier stationed in Tubuai and teaching the trade of construction, invited me to a Sunday afternoon « café » held at his house. The casual « café » would in reality be a Sunday party whose invitees were all the soldiers I didn't meet at the welcome dinner the night before[259]! There too the atmosphere was cordial and people were interested in my research on something that they consider their everyday life and job. I would meet every one of them the day after, at the military facility. In my notebook, I noted how « my difficulty in seeing 'these soldiers' as normal people was demolished between Friday evening and this [Sunday] afternoon. They're normal people, going out for dinner, organizing Sunday afternoon parties, and drinking alcohol. Like me, like everyone ».
The different figures presented in the previous Chapter (regularly enlisted soldiers, EVSMA, VT) hold different positions not only in the military hierarchy but also within the island life in Tubuai,

[259] I will keep noticing such a divisions between the two main groups within the military personnel and their families.

and more generally in the French colonial system. Given my positioning on the field, I was able to mingle with the French metropolitan soldiers, as well as with the young volunteers training in the program, and have a glimpse over both of their roles and the imaginaries hovering over them.

Life on the island is punctuated by the numerous religious affiliations and services that take place, especially during the weekends. On Tubuai, an island whose perimeter is 36 km and has a population of 2 185 inhabitants (ISPF 2022), there are six religious denominations whose sacred sites act as geographical landmarks on an unfamiliar and unknown landscape[260] (see Fig. 7.4, 7.5). The majority of the island's population is proudly Mormon: in fact, Tubuai was the first island to ever be evangelized by Mormon missionaries in a language other than English in 1844. Today, this faith is reflected in the three different chapels that line the perimeter of the island and in the presence of Mormon missionaries (mostly Americans) constantly biking around the island to teach the gospel (Garr 2008). One of the Mormon chapels is attended by my host Yolande, who invited me multiple times to go with her to the Sunday morning service or other parochial events.

Fig. 7.4
Seventh-Day Adventist Church,
route traversière, Tubuai,
March 8, 2022. © Claudia Ledderucci

[260] There are a Protestant temple; a Catholic church; a couple of reformed-Mormon chapels (*Assemblée de Dieu*); Jehovah witnesses; three Mormon chapels; and an Adventist chapel. Mormon and Adventist chapel throughout French Polynesia are constructed following the exact same architecture and aesthetic canons, resulting identical in their appearances.

Fig. 7.5
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Haramea, Tubuai, Courtesy of the Chapel

If the islandian social and community life is constructed upon religious affiliations and church events, the same cannot be said for the French metropolitan population temporarily living on the island. Consequently, there are fewer community life events where the two components of the Tubuai population can mingle. As remarked by the majority of my local interlocutors, French soldiers and their families don't really participate in the community life of the island, with the exception of specific events (mostly sports competitions), and most of the time they prefer to organize private events among them. This is mostly true because many of them are neighbors: the military geography is reflected in familial life and military families often live in a few neighborhoods in small groups of two or three households.

Other interlocutors noted that the military personnel doesn't contribute to the local economy, as they buy everything for correspondence in Tahiti and then have it delivered to the island every two weeks when the cargo ship approaches the Austral Islands (Fig. 7.6)[261]. Indeed, they contribute to the local economy in different ways. As the *Premier adjoint au maire* explained to me, the presence of soldiers and their families, as well as that of teachers and their families, is in some ways beneficial to the local administration because the bigger the municipality's population, the more substantial funding they will receive from the national government. Therefore, even if the local administration doesn't directly favor this kind of mobility, nor gain any particular or direct incentives, the military presence contributes indirectly to the financial subsidies received by the metropolitan government. On the same note, an ex-elementary school teacher with whom I discussed in Tubuai, explained to me that it is thanks to the soldiers' children that the local primary school can stay open, as without them there would be not enough kids to keep it running.

[261] It is a very common practice for inhabitants living in outer islands to order products in Tahiti to a local courier that will then ship such items to the respective islands, via cargo boats. For more info, see: https://restofworld.org/2022/online-shopping-in-the-middle-of-the-ocean/

Fig. 7.6
Tuhaa Pae IV, the cargo ship approaching Tubuai every two weeks, March 23, 2022.
© Claudia Ledderucci

Maria, a local lady that I interviewed, explained to me that « It is true, maybe they don't buy products at the local store but how can we blame them? Products here are so expensive that a lot of people order for correspondence in Tahiti, not just the soldiers! ». Her husband and herself are both employed under the table by the military personnel and their families: Maria babysits the young daughter of one of them, as there is no kindergarten in Tubuai and both the parents work (her mother being the doctor of the island); while her husband Marcel takes care of the front yards and gardens of the majority of the military households–« [il] nettoie les cours de tous les militaires »–as this kind of job mostly works through mutual acquaintances and word of mouth. She became a very intimate member of Aurélien's family, raising his child and spending much time at his house. It is precisely because of this intimacy that she is capable of seeing beyond the standard prejudice about the metropolitan soldiers, coming to French Polynesia « To line their pockets[262] ». In reality, she said, « When you get to know them, they live their life as we do[263] », i.e. they save money to repay the mortgage and to send their kids to school. Maria and her family are invited to dinners and parties organized by the soldiers (or at least those organized by Aurélien). This friendship is highly valued by Maria, who is at the same time very well aware of the pain she will feel once these soldiers will

[262] « Pour se remplir les poches ».

[263] « Quand tu les connais, ils font la même vie que nous ».

have to leave the island (i.e. a few months after our interview in February 2022). « You need to know how to cut back », she remarked, even though it will be hard « To say goodbye[264] ».

If the high mobility of this system represents an advantage for the metropolitan personnel, and the occasion of acquiring all sorts of goods at the time of their departure for local inhabitants, it is somewhat frustrating for those who stay, and not just from an emotional point of view. From a military/professional point of view, those who stay, i.e. local soldiers with longer contracts within the SMA Units (or EVSMA, as it was explained in the previous chapter), have to confront new chiefs almost every year. « You have to get used every time [...] not to new things but they're still different[265] », told me one of them. And what is more, the low-ranking local soldiers know the volunteers' situations better than their chiefs: in most cases because they often were volunteers in the past, and/or simply because they have been there for a longer time and therefore know the socio-cultural environment of the place while, most of the times, the incoming metropolitan soldiers don't have these kinds of experiences.

One of my interlocutors, Toarere, will go further in saying that both the EVSMA and VT are constant in their jobs as they have stable contracts, yet they are frustrated because their chiefs are always changing and therefore they feel they always have to keep up with the hierarchy and their changing preferences, instead of doing their job. Many satisfactory goals obtained by the locals, e.g. new infrastructural requests made or advancement in equipment, etc., are most of the time frustrated by the arrival of new metropolitan personnel and chiefs that will likely turn the tables. Put it simply, « Some of the soldiers can be frustrating. We can get scolded, we feel this military frustration [...] linked to the hierarchy[266] », explained Toarere. From his point of view, this is the weakness of the program, as they have to carry the weight of all the hard work, while the merits are taken by their superiors, coming for shorter periods and with greater benefits. He would go on by saying: « Soldiers don't respect the system [...] obsessed by their ranks, they forget the youngsters[267] ».

Such a disparity in consideration (between the French metropolitan soldiers ranking high in the army, and the Polynesian low-ranking non-commissioned soldiers) is also reflected in everyday life outside the military fence lines and in more familial contexts. Over lunch at her house, Angela was recalling to her friend Chiquita (the lady from Wallis and Futuna met in Chapter 6) a few episodes concerning the chief of the Unit, a French metropolitan soldier. « The captain really likes me[268] », she said, a bit bothered by such a statement. From her point of view, the fact that she is a good employee, is flexible to adjust to the Unit schedule and cares about her work and the people she trains, allows the Captain to count on her without even asking her if she's available or not, especially because in many occasions she wouldn't be rewarded with an overtime payment (as her male colleague). This prevarication is reflected in familial life as well, as testified by the divide separating non-commissioned soldiers and non-commissioned officials' children from the Captain's. As if the

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[264] « Il faut savoir couper aussi [...] dire au revoir ».

[265] « Il faut s'habituer chaque fois [...] pas des choses nouvelles, mais différentes ».

[266] « Certains militaires peuvent être frustrants. On se fait gronder, on sent cette frustration militaire [...] liée à la hiérarchie ».

[267] « Les cadres ne respectent pas le système [...] obnubilés par son poste, ils oublient les jeunes ».

[268] « Le Capitaine m'aime bien! ».

military hierarchy is reflected in children's friendly relations, the Captain's kids are defined as bossy and rude, and what is more, their parents don't impose any rules on them.

Fig. 7.7
Afternoon rally on the place of arms, CFP3.
Tubuai, February 9, 2022. © Claudia Ledderucci

Ethnography of a Modern Baseworld

When I first went to the *Compagnie* on that Monday morning, my 28th birthday, I had no idea about what to expect from the day or the week. The previous Friday, at dinner, Jay assured me that the officer of the week, called *la semaine* in military jargon, will pick me up at 5:40 am on Monday. That morning though, D. (the same VT who picked me up at the airport upon my arrival) was late. I had no clue where the military facility was, nor how to get there, so I waited. When he finally arrived, I got in the car, my eyes looking outside the window. We turned right on the *traversière*, the road that cuts the island in two halves, and kept going until I saw a yellow sign indicating to turn right for the RSMA facility. After a small uphill, the Unit stands on the right side of the path. As we enter the base, the volunteers are rallied on the place of arms (or *place d'armes*) and are singing the national

anthem for the raising of the flag ceremony (Fig. 7.7). While the flag is raised and lowered every day, the anthem is sung only at the beginning of each week, D. explains me.

Days at the base are carefully ritualized: depending on the daily activities, the alarm goes off at 4 am, 4:30 am, or 5 am. The volunteers have then about half an hour for bunk cleaning, the first ritual of the morning which they refer to as *lit en batterie*. Breakfast is served at 5:30 am. The first rally of the morning takes place at 6:30 am at *la place d'armes*. The sports session starts right after and goes on until 7:30 am when the volunteers dismiss the Unit's yellow sports gear and take a shower. They will then wear the military fatigues, the *treillis*, as commanded by their section chief[269]. That day was about to start for everyone. Before starting the sports session, Jay invited me to his office to better discuss the details of my stay and the goals of my research, which were already been planned over and over through emails. After the brief meeting, I followed the second-in-chief downstairs where people were gathering to start exercising. Angela, my guide, was not with us as Jay would explain because sports sessions are divided into sections: she's part of a teaching section, while Jay is part of the commandment section. Nevertheless, there are a few faces that I recognize from the welcome dinner, among them Glen (the mechanic), and a couple of VT, among them Fabrice. Jay announced to me the exercise of the day: « Un petit footing » (lit. a short run) to the town hall, i.e. the reverse of the path I had just crossed driving with David, and back! I was wearing a pair of shorts and a T-shirt and didn't really know what to expect from the session. Today, in retrospect, I'm pretty sure it was a kind of test I had to pass to demonstrate to Jay (and the rest of the crew) that I was worth the shot. I am definitely not a good runner but I am stubborn as an ox, so I ran with them for a dozen kilometers and until the very last meter, well determined to keep up the rhythm. As I would witness myself, sports sessions are centered on the myth of sportivity and performativity and are fundamental to building cohesion among the soldiers and volunteers. Unless injured, candidates cannot refuse to play or perform and bad athletes are often the protagonists of sarcastic jokes, supposedly made to spur them to do better. And yet, it is rare to witness verbal or physical confrontations, as everything is said in a playful way and the recipient of the message is supposed to play along and don't take it personally.

As remarked by one of the Polynesian branch chiefs: « On peut pas ramer » (lit. we can't row), referring to the fact that it is forbidden to use the Unit's equipment (i.e., *va'a* or kayaks) to go out to sea and train in different kinds of sports that are in turn very popular among Polynesians. The reason for this is paradoxically an excess of precautions on the part of the Unit chief: « The captain doesn't want [us to row] because we don't have a permit, even though Polynesians have always row[270] ». Everything has to be carefully organized and regulated, as in a summer camp.

Activities start at 8 am and depend on the chosen professional trade: there are theoretical teaching sessions and practical teaching sessions. Volunteers can be in the *fa'a'apu*, the garden; or in the kitchen; the construction hangar, or at the navigation skills laboratory where they practice with nautical charts and learn how to navigate. Practical training is complemented by theoretical ones, usually held with the support of a video projector and PowerPoint slides. There are also morning and afternoon school support sessions, during which volunteers can train their reading and writing skills with a professional teacher, the only civilian functionary of the whole unit.

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[269] Depending on the daily activities they can alternatively wear shorts or regular pants with the military jacket.

[270] « Le chef ne veut pas parce qu'on a pas un permis, alors que les Polynésiens rament depuis toujours ».

That day I visited the entire facility and spent most of the time with Angela and her volunteers in the teaching garden, harvesting coffee beans with volunteers and then cleaning them following the explanations given to us by Angela. That's how I met Hinano, a young volunteer from Arutua in the Tuamotu Islands. As will be widely recalled in the next paragraphs, we would become acquainted and I would interview her many times and follow her enlistment process.

The military unit is self-sufficient in every aspect: facility and garden cleanings are secured by the volunteers once the teaching lessons are done and on a rotational basis. Meals are prepared by the inexperienced hands of young volunteers who are training in the restaurant/cooking program. Lunch is served at 11:30 am, when the volunteers are gathered in a *rassemblement* and then perform military drills and chants, marching and singing on their way to the canteen. Their march is somewhat gawky, their feet scuffing the ground as if the Rangers' boots were too heavy to lift, their arms by their side not synchronized with the rhythm of their legs, as if they were involuntary mocking their superiors. Once at the canteen, the volunteers diligently line up in a queue and wait for their turn to be served the meal. Then they go sit at one of the tables, where a sort of food trading is always entertained among colleagues.

The afternoon activities start at 1 pm. During the lunch break, the volunteers can go to their bunks, *les piaules*, which are usually locked during working hours, and often have to change their uniforms depending on the activities planned for the afternoon. The dormitory is hosted in a rectangular building and bunks are gender divided: the left side of the building is the male aisle, and the right one is mixed hosting the girl's dorms at the center of the structure and the boy's at the edges. Toilets and showers are gender divided as well, and only the washing machines and the laundry wire are shared[271]. The latter goes all around the building, ornamenting the bunks entrance. Another ritual is then accomplished, which they refer to as *lit au carré*. They take the sheets carefully rolled up in the morning during the 'ceremony' of the *lit en batterie* and make the bed military-style. The officer of the week will then stop by every bunk to check all the beds are perfectly made before returning to the afternoon activities at 1 pm.

Teaching activities finish at 4 pm when both the teaching sections are rallied in the place of arms by their chiefs to sanction the end of the teaching. Each section is independent and may be rallied at different times. It is on this occasion that the section chief or his designee will make an end-of-day speech. Right before dinner (which is served at 5:30 pm), there is another unit rally (*rassemblement* or *rasso*, as it is referred to in jargon) during which orders for the night and the next day will be given. After this, volunteers are free to wear their civilian clothes and use their cell phones. Lights are out at 8 pm when all the volunteers must go to bed.

If the company is entirely self-managed from a catering and cleaning point of view, it is also self-managed from a security point of view. Security is guaranteed night and day, especially on weekends, by the officer of the week and his/her assistant (both called *la semaine*), usually a non-commissioned soldier (*militaire du rang*) assisted by a VT. It is the officer of the week who makes sure that the cleanliness of the bunks or *piaules* is sufficient and that the rules are obeyed; gives the rules of the day and the commands for the flag-lowering ceremony; keeps the log of the weekend outings (« Il faut noter tout ce qui sort et tous ce qui entre » as told me by one of them); and makes the night patrols.

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[271] Even if every space is officially gendered divided, the environment is pretty dynamic and especially during weekends toilets and washing machines become liminal spaces in which male and female volunteers secretly meet.

« A vos Ordres, mon Adjudant! »

After having spent my first day within the Second Teaching Section (S2), i.e. with Angela, the following day I asked to observe and participate in the First Teaching Section's activities. Jay agreed and so I followed Aurélien, who worked in the First Teaching Section as branch chief in the construction trade. He persuaded me to wear a military uniform pretending my full immersion wouldn't be the same without wearing the military fatigues. Adding that after all I was spending the day with the First Section and therefore had to follow their rules!

My position at the base has always been precarious as my stay was agreed upon unofficially and I have always tried to be as friendly with the soldiers as I was with the volunteers but such a balance was a hard one to keep. Therefore, on my second day of fieldwork, the uniform that I judged funny and weird during my first visits to the military facility in Tahiti, on December 2021, and that I otherwise distrust in my everyday life, would be mine for a day. For a few hours, I had to follow the military flow. In Tahiti, and even in Tubuai, I always had a certain fear or embarrassment in being seen mingling with soldiers, therefore my distrust, as I wanted to be clear for my pro-independence interlocutors that I sympathize with them. Wearing a military uniform contributed not only to making me feel kind of ashamed and embarrassed about it but also put me in a weird position with my young interlocutors, the volunteers, whom in seeing me felt immediately intimidated, exactly the opposite outcome of the one I was pursuing.

Since I didn't have my own uniform, Aurélien and I went to the nurse's office to ask if she had a spare one to lend me. Luckily enough, we were the same size, and her uniform bitterly and sarcastically fitted me perfectly. There is a particular ritual about wearing military fatigues that every volunteer has to learn upon arrival at the military facility in Arue, where they attend the general training (FMI). The uniform is composed of a khaki t-shirt to wear under the short-sleeved jacket (whose buttons are sewn following the male standard), a pair of shorts, a belt, thick socks, and a pair of black ranger boots (*rangers*)[272]. This uniform is completed by a blue beret featuring a golden anchor, the symbol of the *Troupes de Marine*, and by a number of different patches to stick on the jacket: on the right side goes the patch reading your name, on the chest the one referring to your rank, on the left shoulder go patches indicating your regiment. If wearing the t-shirt, jacket, and shorts was easy enough, I had no idea how to tie my shoes and was obliged to go back to the nurse's office to timidly ask her. After months of only wearing flip-flops in the tropical weather, my feet were hurting by only wearing those thick socks, let alone the leather boots! Lucile showed me how to tie my shoes: first of all, the socks go all the way up until your knees; then you thread the laces through the very last eyelet and stow the exceeding laces into the boots, without actually tying them. Then you fasten the buckle on the side of both boots and only after that, you can finally fold back your socks, until they're exactly on top of the buckle. When the dressing was finally done, Aurélien gave me the beret and showed me how to wear it, sloping on the left side of the head.

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[272] This particular outfit is proper for the SMA, the leather boots are not worn by other regiments anymore, as someone would explain to me while at the facility. The shorts and short-sleeves uniform are prerogative of soldiers serving in tropical territories, due to the local weather.

The fiction was yet not over: « Now that you are dressed », Aurélien told me, « You have to go to the section chief and introduce yourself ». He taught me the standard introductory sentence that the volunteers use to introduce themselves and asked me to repeat it: « Marsouin Claudia Ledderucci, Troisième Compagnie de Formation Professionnelle du Capitaine K., a vos ordres mon adjudant! » This same formula was later repeated to me infinite times to be memorized by my interlocutor and friend Tetuarii when she was called at her section chief's office. After this very embarrassing performance in front of the section chief, as if I passed a sort of goliardic test, he gave me his rank patch and told me to wear it for the day. Wearing the chief's First Sergeant patch made me different in the eyes of the volunteers and contributed to their confusion.

That morning, I was following the volunteers' training in the navigation trade. Since their lab is located next to the ocean (Fig. 7.8), the branch chief and one of the VT working with him have to drive the 9-seat vans downhill to reach the site. That day, Toarere (the branch chief) decided to stop at a snack on the way to the lab. He had ordered *nems* and coming back to the van he started to distribute them to the volunteers[273]. Once we reached the lab, the volunteers started to gather inside the class, while Toarere showed me around the site. Next to the class's building, there is a big hangar where the RSMA boat is parked, next to the *gendarmerie*'s (as they don't have another site where to store the boat). There is also another building where more equipment is stored: there are kayaks, *va'a* (traditional canoes), fishing gears, nets, and everything that is needed during the teaching sessions. On our way back to the class, Toarere asked me how I wanted to proceed and I told him that I wanted to interview the volunteers in small groups. All of a sudden and with a steady voice, he ordered the entire class to leave the room, except for three young men, the first I would interview, among them Teme. This military way of imposing an order on the volunteers had embarrassed me and destroyed in a few moments the possibility I saw of weaving intimate bonds with my soon-to-be interlocutors. The military fatigues I was wearing and especially the rank attached to my jacket, a symbol that didn't belong to me but that nevertheless the VS sacredly respected, contributed to intimidating the volunteers even more. While I was interviewing the second group of volunteers for the day, I realized the extent of my cheating by wearing that military uniform.

Tetuarii, who became my main interlocutor during my entire stay, kept referring to me as « Mon adjudant », no matter how many times I told her that I wasn't a real soldier and that the uniform wasn't mine. For her, that wasn't just possible. « Mon adjudant, je veux m'engager », she told me with a supplicating voice, and I immediately felt terrible. It was at that exact moment that I realized the gravity of the situation and of the joke I was an accomplice in playing with the metropolitan soldiers. What was considered a funny game by them, conveyed completely different images to the volunteers: the military fatigues that were almost imposed on me that morning (and just for fun!), as well as the rank that was given to me (who didn't even know its value), was instead a coveted position for the volunteers, representing one of their only chances of escaping their social instability and precariousness. I suddenly realized that I was failing them all and that moreover, I was ashamed for having betrayed their trust. By what right did I stand there clowning around, dressed up in military fatigues? Yet, once the trick was revealed, many volunteers laughed at the situation, telling me that in reality they had caught me already: they knew I wasn't a real soldier because I didn't have the right posture, I didn't know how to salute, and most importantly I was missing my name tag on! In

[273] Volunteers are not allowed to have food or drinks during the activities, and can only eat during breakfast, lunch and dinner organized in the military facility. Those spring rolls were therefore a highly valued treat for all of them.

the following days, a lot of them started to greet me with a steady voice « Respect, mon adjudant! », or to blink at me faking their position at attention as soon as they saw me coming, acting out in a new complicity game and representing the co-construction of my role and positioning on the field.

Fig. 7.8
Miti Tuhaa Pae, lagoon navigation training center, inaugurated in 2021.
Tubuai, March 18, 2022. © Claudia Ledderucci

« C'est comme ça que les Polynésiens s'amusent »

Life at the base completely transforms during the weekends when, unless punished, volunteers are given free time and can leave the facility (*quartier libre* or QL) while all activities are suspended. The weekend starts on Friday afternoon: after lunch, the VS are free to wear their civilian clothes and use their cell phones. Before leaving the facility, they have to signal their departure by signing the log of the weekend at the main building entrance, where *la semaine* is stationed (Fig. 7.9). They will have to perform the same task upon their return so that the officer of the week knows who stays and who leaves. On the benches next to the main building entrance, relatives wait for the volunteers to be picked up. It is common practice to leave the unit and go down to the village, where the only grocery shop is located, to buy toiletries, snacks, and most importantly alcohol. The volunteers leave the military facility using different means of transport: many of them have bikes and/or electric

bikes and are therefore independent (transport-wise); others decide to walk downhill or call a taxi. There are only two informal taxis on the island and no public transport. The taxi used by the volunteers is *Taxilolo*, a crasis between the word taxi and Lolo, the driver's nickname. Even though the drive is reputed to be expensive (400 CFP each way), the volunteers use the service very much, especially because Loana (or Lolo), a local woman I met at the Mormon chapel, is a silent accomplice in the volunteers' alcohol trade and stores the bottles that the volunteers cannot bring inside the base. Saturdays and Sundays are dedicated to drinking, usually without any limits for the majority of the VS, either next to the facility, where volunteers gather in the shade of a massive mango tree, or down to the beach.

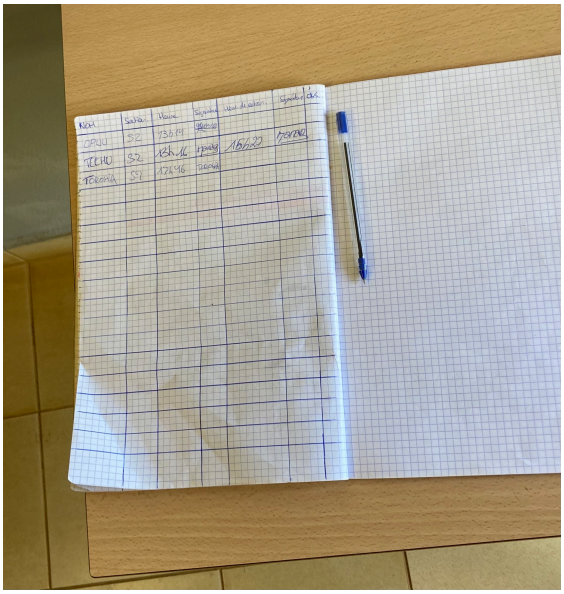

Fig. 7.9
Log of the week end.
Tubuai, March 25, 2022.
© Claudia Ledderucci

On a Sunday morning I was riding my bike back home after having hiked the *homme couché*, one of the two mountains in Tubuai. It was late morning and at the village, seated at one of the many concrete tables lining up above the beach, I saw a group of young women with familiar faces. They waved at me and I pedaled towards them. The VS were enjoying their free time, listening to loud music coming out of their boomboxes, while drinking out of a Coca-Cola bottle whose content was probably mixed with liquor. They asked me if I wanted to drink some of their soda, not mentioning that the Coke was altered with alcohol. I accepted and soon after we started playing rock paper scissors: whoever lost had to drink from the famous Coke bottle. Tetuarii was seated in front of me, a contemplative air-headed expression on her face. « I love to drink[274] », she said, adding that they had been drinking for a couple of hours since they left the Unit that morning at 9 o'clock. When I asked her about the rest of the weekend, her answer was eloquent: she stared at me and mimicked the act of drinking with her thumb down.

Everyone, volunteers, enlisted soldiers, and local inhabitants blame the island life and lack of any sort of amusement as the cause of this alcohol situation. This noisy presence is often a reason for incomprehension between the young volunteers and the local inhabitants, especially when there are arguments and fights either among the volunteers themselves or the volunteers and the local

[274] « J'aime bien boir ».

inhabitants. Indeed, many interlocutors among the locals have told me that they don't really like the RSMA precisely because the volunteers drink too much and then there are all sorts of problems following these *bagarres* (fights). Moana, one of my local interlocutors, helped me to understand how the volunteers' presence is seen on the island. If at first the distinction between the enlisted soldiers and the volunteers was clear to me (with nuances differentiating the metropolitan soldiers from the Polynesian ones), it soon became clear that, as in a game of Chinese boxes, the volunteers' were assimilated to their superiors in the eyes of my friend Moana, and possibly the local population. Young Polynesian volunteers, whom I considered peers to the local youth (for age groups, culture, similar life experiences, etc.) were indeed seen as external actors, not willing to integrate the local community life. In other words, the volunteers were « Les RSMA » likewise their superiors, « Les encadrements » as Moana was calling them. None of them was willing to integrate into the local community life and most likely ignored the locals at social events or even on the street or at the store. When the volunteers leave the military facility, i.e. during weekends, all they wanna do is « Faire bagarre » (lit. to fight) to defy others, « But we are not really interested[275] » added Moana.

Besides, the metropolitan soldiers themselves are not a good example, as pointed out to me by many interlocutors. « They don't do a good job. They think they're on vacation[276] », someone told me. Moreover, the army is seen by many, especially the most religious among my interlocutors, as a place of perdition where alcohol and cigarettes are omnipresent–« We see them drinking, we're sorry for them[277] »–and where the imbalance between the gender divide is a dangerous one for young girls who risk getting pregnant. Mila, a young and very active woman involved not only in the Mormon community life but also in the local political life of the municipality, was born in 1989 and was a young teenager during the first years of implantation of the RSMA Unit. Her family didn't want any of their kids to participate in the military program and indeed avoided any contact between the military personnel and young volunteers with their teenage daughter, as if to stress the danger of the activities taking place inside and out the military fence lines.

One Sunday morning I went to the unit to take back my bike, which I had lent to a latecomer volunteer the day before. The previous afternoon, he was late for the evening *rassemblement*, his colleagues having already left the village by taxi or by bike. I spent the afternoon with them on the beach, where we were drinking and chatting until he realized he was the only one devoid of any means of transport. « You know? [The RSMA] is like a prison, so during the week end we relax, we party[278] », told me one of them, remarking that « That's how Polynesians have fun[279] ». When I approached the unit the morning after, something was clearly wrong. Two non-commissioned soldiers were standing in front of the building's entrance, wearing civilian clothes, and soon after the Captain arrived as well. Apparently, everyone had drank too much the day before and one VS fainted and barely escaped the alcohol coma. They were all punished and when I arrived they were cleaning the main building or busy performing other tasks. When their superiors were not listening,

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[275] « Tandis que pour nous c'est pas ça ».

[276] « Ils ne font pas bien leur travail. Ils pensent d'être en vacances ».

[277] « On les voit boire, ça fait pitié ».

[278] « Tu vois? [L'RSMA] c'est comme la prison, du coup le weekend on se repose, on fait la fête ».

[279] « C'est comme ça que les polynésiens s'amusent ».

one of them said it was their turn to party–« Faire la fête »–referring to the fact that the previous days the soldiers had thrown a big party to welcome a Navy mission patrolling the Austral Islands.
If it is a common idea, especially among local inhabitants, that the volunteers are not completely to blame, as they don't have a good example coming from their superiors, this is not how the soldiers themselves see the situation. In fact, many activities, especially field trips, are organized before the weekend. On a Friday morning, returning from an early morning field trip to the Mont Taitaa, one of the section chiefs explicitly told me that the very reason for organizing such an excursion that day was precisely to tire the volunteers out and avoid in this way their crazy weekend partying. The idea guiding his thoughts was that if the volunteers were tired they would not have drank or thought about their underlying problems, as if exhaustion could delete social and familial struggles. Undereducated people are easier to govern as they don't have a lot of aspirations. What about an undereducated and exhausted one?

Building Sovereign Articulations through joining the Army

The intimacy blooming in these everyday encounters and inside the military womb is constructed through the quotidian teamwork, cohesion activities, and sport sessions in which the volunteers have to participate but also through the many rituals, ceremonies, and military narratives told and retold by the French soldiers about their missions and adventures. In this way, a kind of particular values, i.e. military and republican values, become a natural asset for young volunteers coming from rural and working-class families. Such an uncanny intimacy is complementary to the many ambiguities and fuzzy ambivalences accompanying the military presence in French Polynesia and goes together with the pragmatism guiding young Indigenous people in their working choices. It is precisely this pragmatism, as well as my interlocutors' enthusiasm, that helped me in de-centering my ethnographical gaze over the army. Instead of only seeing it as a national institution, it became clear to me that the army and its local program are at the same time a device allowing young people to express their identities and belongings. The enlistment gives them access to economic resources and commodities otherwise unavailable to them, as well as geographical and social mobility, resulting in new sovereign articulations created by young Polynesian people who are able to identify and express in such a particular and *in-between* context. In other words, cultural meanings associated with enlistment are not part of the defense functions performed by the army, as this Chapter highlights. At the same time, young Polynesians join the RSMA to better their social position and for three main reasons: attracted by the military allure of the program and to better prepare their enrollment in the regular army; to have access to economic benefits; to obtain further training, considering the RSMA as an élite school. To this regard, one of my interlocutors said: « All that people say about the RSMA [is that] it is for dumb people but I'm not dumb![280] », as if to reinstate the opportunities seized by her and her colleagues during the program.
The intimacies (as defined by Stoler 2006) blooming in the encounter between young Indigenous volunteers in the RSMA and French soldiers can be clearly seen in the enrollment process during which the participants proudly state future expectations and aspirations. Very often numerous volunteers join the RSMA because they want to try military life or want to test themselves and see if they can do it. It is common practice that some decide to enlist in the French army at the beginning,

[280] « Tout ce qu'on dise sur le RSMA [c'est que] c'est pour les bêtes, moi je ne suis pas bête! ».

the end, or during the professional training offered by the RSMA. In this sense, I argue that the army allows a sort of territorial continuity between the overseas territory and the metropole, that is not otherwise guaranteed. Given the high rate of enlistment of young people after their preliminary military experience, the RSMA represents a strong and virtual bridge to the regular army, as will be explained in the next paragraphs.

If at first, I thought such a mechanism was the result of the paternalist and controlling military device, I also started to wonder to what extent can the army be considered the « Local manifestation of a new planetary organization of culture » (Sahlins 1999:ix) and in which way are young Polynesians able to make it theirs. In fact, if overseas dependencies are ruled following « Multiplex criteria for inclusions and sliding scales of basic rights » (Stoler 2016:196), I argue that by joining the French army, Polynesian people can and indeed do acquire a different type of (more valued) citizenship allowing them to access privileges that are otherwise reserved to metropolitan inhabitants. Moreover, through this particular 'practiced citizenship' they are able to develop a specific kind of belonging.

I argue that metropolitan soldiers' position is very important in the delicate enlistment process, as they steer the volunteers towards their future and influence their choices. Before turning to the enrollment process and the test procedure, it is worth recalling the importance and social meaning attributed to the SMA itself, as explained to me by two of my interlocutors, Tetuarii and Chérazade.

Tetuarii: the RSMA as a Connection to Those Before

A Saturday afternoon I went to the Unit to interview Tetuarii, after having asked her if she wanted to share with me the reasons that pushed her to join the Regiment. On that day, I entered one of the bunks (*piaule*) for the first time. Tetuarii invited me in and showed me her room: there are four bunk beds for seven girl roommates. Each has a personal dresser to be used only for hygiene products and military uniforms, and a drawer under the bed reserved for all other civilian effects and clothing (Fig. 7.10, 7.11).

That weekend, volunteers were punished and couldn't leave the regiment. Outside the *piaule*, on the common corridor that leads to all the other rooms, and on which an endless parade of sneakers and boots is put up for air, the volunteers are immersed in daily activities of personal cleanliness: Tiare cuts Manea's hair; Ravanui does her eyebrows; Hinano asked me if I had a pair of tweezers to lend her because hers didn't work well anymore. Tetuarii is combing her hair, sprinkling it with mono'i and a hair mask. Not far from us, Herenui is languidly leaning over Vaima, sitting in a chair. Raiteva comes towards us and announces that everyone must wear sports gear for the sport session. There is a lot of commotion, no one wants to do sports on a Saturday afternoon, and everyone wonders if it is a mandatory activity or not[281]. Eventually, Tetuarii, who was the only one who changed her clothes, decided to go take a shower, whether the sports activities will start or not. When she returned, she carefully continued to comb her hair, using bobby pins to keep unruly and frizzy clumps at bay, except for the two small clumps that she carefully rolled up next to her ears. She also put on some lipstick and, I noticed, still wore the earrings I gave her, as if ready to go out for a Saturday night. With a moony expression, Tetuarii kept recalling « La belle époque », when, living in Papeete with her aunt, she was able to go out during weekends, have fun with her friends and

[281] That week, *la semaine* was taken up by two VT, contributing to the relaxed atmosphere I witnessed that weekend.

dance at the disco[282]. I had the impression that she wanted to be somewhere else and that notwithstanding the pride that persuaded her to join the RSMA, she already had enough of it and of life on Tubuai. « J'suis fiu[283] », she would repeat infinite times, not unlike her colleagues. And yet, she continued by saying that she will miss her new friends once the RSMA would be finished. When she filed her enrollment documents, she was expecting to be accepted at the Second Unit in Arue but instead, she was sent to Tubuai (see Chapter 6 for the geographical division of the volunteers).
Before joining the RSMA, Tetuarii was a chambermaid in the U.S.-owned luxury hotel Le Méridien in Bora-Bora, her island home[284]. She had a 1-year work contract that wasn't renewed because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Such a circumstance helped in stressing the country's dependence on tourism (Enloe 1990) and the densely-weaved power relations unfurling like spiderwebs between big corporations (usually from the metropole) and the native chambermaids and other unskilled figures that make sure such places are well entertained and running.
In such a conjuncture and after having lost her job, Tetuarii decided to join the RSMA. When I asked her why she decided to enter the program, she told me that it was because of the admiration she has for her father:

> Why I really did the RSMA, it's because of my dad, because... I was a fan of him because he joined the Navy. That's why I wanted to do the RSMA, and since they didn't directly accepted me in the Army, since I have a problem, I have a heart problem [...] yes, that's really why... they didn't really accepted me. That's why I really wanted to do the RSMA, that's because of my dad, I wanted to be, become like him, be a sailor but...[285]

Tetuarii is not the only one having a member of her family in the army or with a military past experience and she dreamed of pursuing a military career to identify in her father's narrations and popular imaginaries. Many volunteers are *army children*, in the sense that their parents (mostly the father) and/or their cousins or a member of the extended family has served in the French army or is in France pursuing their military careers, as the example of Fabrice recalled in the previous Chapter had made clear. Their narrations are often positive and the stories told are filled with success, encouraging even more young Polynesians to join the army. Indeed, this will be the focus of the next paragraph but before turning to the enlistment process, it is worth noticing how my position as an outsider changed drastically after that Saturday afternoon and my conversation with Tetuarii.

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[282] This episode remarked the paternal and perverse ingenuity employed by the Captain when he explained to me the role of traditional dances within the RSMA training, i.e. to help young girls to be at ease with their bodies while reiterating their folkloristic traditions (Chapter 6). For instance, when I asked Tetuarii if she used to dance before joining the RSMA, her answer was twofold: « Boff » she said, referring to traditional dances, followed right after by « Mais en boite de nuit, alors! », remarking that confidence doesn't come by performing what is considered to be familiar for other people, unless they themselves consider it to be familiar.

[283] In Tahitian, *fiu* means lazy but can also be used as a phrasal verb (*être fiu*) meaning to have had enough of something.

[284] Le Méridien was originally found by Air France, the French flag carrier, in 1972. It is now owned by Marriott International, an American multinational lodging company.

[285] Pourquoi j'ai fait vraiment le RSMA, c'est à cause de mon papa, parce que… j'étais fan de lui parce qu'il est entré dans la Marine. C'est pour ça que je voulais faire le RSMA, et comme on m'a pas directement acceptée direct dans l'armée, comme j'ai un problème, j'ai un problème de coeur […] Oui, c'est pour ça vraiment… on m'a pas vraiment acceptée. C'est pour ça vraiment je voulais faire du RSMA, c'est à cause de mon papa, je voulais être, devenir comme lui, être marine mais…

Fig. 7.10
Tetuarii's personal drawer.
Tubuai, April 4, 2022. © Claudia Ledderucci

Fig. 7.11
Tetuarii and her personal dresser.
Tubuai, April 4, 2022. © Claudia Ledderucci

The next Monday, when I went to the base to carry out fieldwork, it was as if everything had changed: I was not the *popa'a* always asking questions, I was a friend. Whenever Tetuarii saw me at the regiment or the village, she would call me loudly, as if she couldn't hold her enthusiasm any longer. After spending the morning at the theoretical session with her, both trying to learn how a combustion engine works, we had lunch together and then she invited me into her *piaule*. I followed her, delighted and curious. The almost solemn air to which everyone must submit, which consists of greetings to the hierarchy, drills, and chants sung on the way to the dining hall, naturally cracks inside the dorms. Her roommates were languidly and discomposedly lying on their beds, tired and bored after the morning activities. Others preferred to stretch out on the floor, under the fans whirring on the ceiling. Tetuarii told me she had to make the *lit au carré* before *la semaine* comes for the rounds. She unrolled the sheets she carefully folded earlier in the morning–*lit en batterie*–and began to adjust the bed (Fig. 7.12). She added that after the inspection she will change the sheets once again and make the *lit en batterie*. In fact, she explained that in this way the bed will be ready for the next morning inspection, saving her time and energy. This 'survival tactic' is used by all her roommates, who explained that they will then sleep on civilian sheets they brought from home, instead of using the military ones. Once Tetuarii's bed was done, I asked her if she could show me her uniforms (Fig. 7.13). She opened the closet and rattled off a series of names: *tenue de combat*, *gao*,

chemisette, *chemise pour le 14 juillet*, *pantalon* and *shorts* (respectively battle dress, tank top, tunic, 14 July tunic, pants, and shorts)[286]. The uniform is completed by the blue beret, the emblem of the *Troupes de Marine*, and the shoes, *rangers* and *pataugas*: the former used on virtually every occasion, the latter only used for outdoor activities, « Là où c'est sale » as Hono explained to me. In addition to these military uniforms, each candidate also receives specific gear peculiar to his or her chosen trade: those working in the kitchen have chef coats, matching with black and white checkered pants and a pair of safety shoes; candidates in the other three trades have blue uniforms (consisting of a tank top, long-sleeved shirt, and long pants) and receive gloves, soundproofing earphones, safety shoes, safety glasses, and a waterproof suit. This material, unlike military uniforms, does not have to be returned at the end of training. This entails a certain 'parsimony economy', as Tetuarii explained to me: she refused to use her new safety shoes for fear of ruining them as they will be a gift for her grandfather once she returns to Bora-Bora, her island home.

Fig. 7.12
Lit en batterie.
Tubuai, April 4, 2022.
© Claudia Ledderucci

[286] The *tenue de combat* is used for *marches commando* and other simulation activities; the *gao,* usually paired with shorts, is the outdoor uniform; the tunic, usually worn with the RSMA and *Troupes de Marine* coats of arms, is indiscriminately paired with long pants or shorts and is reserved for indoor activities. The 14 July tunic, with all the appropriate coats of arms, along with the long pants and military green belt, is worn only for the 14 July military parade.

Fig. 7.13
Tetuarii's military fatigues.
Tubuai, April 4, 2022.
© Claudia Ledderucci

Chérazade: the RSMA as a Social Lift

Chérazade, twenty one years old, is a young girl originally from Rapa, the southernmost island of the Austral archipelago and French Polynesia. She first arrived in Tubuai in 2011 to attend the local middle school because, as we have seen in Chapter 5, the educational system of the country is a fragmented one and there are no middle schools in Rapa. For instance, the only two middle schools are based in Tubuai (welcoming students from Rapa and Raivavae) and Rurutu (welcoming students from Rimatara). Once middle school was over, Chérazade left bound for Tahiti, where she started high school (precisely in Mahina). Unfortunately, she would not finish the school year: « I had some complications concerning the accommodation but also the distance ». Therefore, she decided to go back to Tubuai, where her family had moved in 2011 to support her and started working in the family food truck. In 2019, she learned about a professional training opportunity (*Certificat Polynésien d'Aptitude Professionnelle*, CPAP) available in Tubuai, and soon after she enrolled in the program to be trained in restaurant and cooking and finally get a diploma. At the end of the training, she left the school with « My diplomas and my baby in my belly[287] ». Six months after she gave birth, the decision was made: « From one day to the next I joined the RSMA in Arue, without first getting my baby used to the bottle. I left my bedroom at four in the morning with tears in my eyes but I didn't

[287] « Mes diplômes et ma petite de quelque mois déjà dans mon ventre ».

turn back. [...] My only goal at that moment was to succeed for my baby, and nobody could have stopped me. [...] I left without thinking too much[288] ».
When I asked her why she decided to join the RSMA, she answered:

> I wanted a future for my daughter. […] People said it wasn't good to stay on the street, it's not well regarded by parents, by people. So I joined the RSMA. So that people's opinions of me change. And maybe they'll stop speaking badly about me because I'm a young mother. That's why I joined, so people stop talking[289].

As already recalled in Chapter 6, her physical and emotional hardships were made even more challenging as she was breastfeeding at the time of her departure from home and didn't think through the consequences of enlisting and leaving Tubuai for the initial three months of training. Far from being an isolated case, Chérazade's life experience testifies to what Paul Farmer (1996) defined as structural violence influencing in one way or another the quotidian lives of many Polynesians. Today, Chérazade manages her own family food truck, where she works with her father. Toward the end of our conversation, she confided to me that she didn't really learn as much « Là-haut » (at the RSMA) and that she acquired most of her knowledge with her old professor while attending the CPAP. And yet, even though the military training offered didn't teach her anything that she didn't already know, the RSMA accorded her more credibility in the eyes of local people (as she joined because « People said it's no good to stay on the street »). Therefore, as explained above, the RSMA and the army more generally, are capable of providing volunteers with official diplomas and most importantly with rebranded capacities, aspirations, and behaviors.

The Enrollment Process

During my stay in Tubuai, I was able to attend the recruitment tests that took place in April 2022 and were attended by many young volunteers who were training at the military Unit. It is useful to go over some of these moments through the reading of my field notes, to make clear how enlistment in the army passes not only through personal choices but even more so through personal relationships and connections. Enlisting takes place in several stages, and in the RSMA everything is handled by the *chef de section*, one of whom would explain to me the whole process during several conversations.
Each volunteer participating in the RSMA is well aware of the possibility represented by enrollment in the army, and indeed many of them decide to join the program to better prepare for the tests. When the volunteers express their willingness to join the army, it is usually their section chief that would help them figure out their interests, assess whether they are physically and emotionally apt

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[288] « Du jour au lendemain je suis entrée au RSMA de Arue, sans avoir pris la peine d'habituer d'abord mon bébé au biberon. Je suis partie à 4 heures du matin de la chambre avec les larmes aux yeux, mais je ne me suis pas retournée [...] mon seul objectif à ce moment là était de réussir pour ma fille et ça, personne ne pourras m'en empêcher [...] donc je suis partie, j'ai foncée la tête baissée ».

[289] « Je voulais un avenir pour ma fille. […] On me disait que rester là comme les jeunes sur la route c'est pas bien, c'est mal vu par les parents, par les gens. Alors je me suis engagée au RSMA. Pour que voilà l'avis des personnes en me voyant change. Et qu'ils arrêtent de mal parler peut-être de moi, comme je suis une jeune maman. Je me suis engagée comme ça, pour que les gens arrêtent de parler aussi ».

and whether their families agree with their choice and its consequences. As a result, the section chief is a first filter allowing some volunteers to prepare their enlistment while discarding others who are not deemed suitable for the position or ready from an emotional or physical perspective. For instance, one of the soldiers in Tubuai told me that he will decide if a volunteer is 'ready' or not to join the army, even if his role as *chef de section* is not that of a recruiter. Technically he has no authority to make this decision and yet, as he told me, he acts in the best interest of *his* volunteers, counseling them on which unit to choose considering the volunteers' attitude and characteristics, and to influencing the volunteers' choices and the enrollment process, in the end exercising a decisional right that doesn't belong to him. The final decision will be made by army recruiters who come for enrollment campaigns and will decide who can join and who cannot judging by the tests' results and interviews.

As Charlie would explain, showing me some concrete examples among volunteers belonging to his section, sometimes they [section chief] prefer to reject volunteers for « Their own sake », especially when volunteers are deemed to have other and better options, or because they are considered smart enough to get a different job or continue their studies. In April 2022 he prevented two volunteers from enrolling because, as he said, one of them was still a kid and he didn't want him to even try; the other one because he had an ears problem, meaning that in all likelihood he wouldn't have been judged fit for service. Charlie continued his explanation, saying that most of the time he guides volunteers toward different specialties within the army, based on their abilities or desires. Once the section chief decides to support a volunteer in the enrollment process, he proceeds with the filling out of an official file. Each volunteer willing to enlist has one such file and section chiefs are often busy working on them. Charlie told me it is a difficult task because you have to take into consideration many aspects.

A few days before the April 2022 tests, he was filling out a document called *mode de servir*, a summary letter presenting each volunteer's personality to introduce them to the recruiter. « Basically you have to write what you think of the volunteer but without sinking them », therefore sometimes it is hard to be honest without compromising their future career, « Especially if they are not the perfect candidates ». In April 2022, nine volunteers from Charlie's section expressed their will to join the army: among them, five men and four women that I knew pretty well. A few weeks before the tests, Charlie pushed them to go online and search their preferred regiments to make a good impression on the recruiter and so he could have an idea of how to better fill the vacancies while satisfying the volunteers' requests. « If you don't have an idea you'll be recruited and sent to regiments where nobody else wants to go, such as those in northern France », he said[290]. The research is guided by two main criteria: for those who already know their preferred specialty, the regiment is chosen following the profession; the others base their choices on geographical preferences.

The search for the preferred regiment and position is followed by a more concrete preparation for both the psycho-technical and sport tests. Regarding the physical preparation, volunteers are urged to perform additional exercises on top of the daily sport activities, while the psycho-technical preparation is delegated to the teacher and performed during school hours. On that occasion, volunteers have access to computers and they can train with online tests simulations and are allowed to search regiments and complementary information about the army. This unofficial and intimate,

[290] This particular mode of interacting with volunteers is a personal choice of the section chief: Charlie was very present and supportive of volunteers, while the other section chief didn't have the same interest in the matter.

yet important, preparatory phase precedes the official tests that took place in April 2022 in Tubuai. Once the psycho-technical and sports tests have been taken, the process is still far from being finished. Only the volunteers that passed both tests can proceed to the next phase consisting in an interview during which the recruiter will assess the candidate's aptness. After this interview, the recruiter will meet with the section chief and they would discuss the situation of each volunteer based on the section chief's in-depth knowledge of the candidates.

Tests score is very important because they can determine which regiment the volunteers could join: candidates with high scores have several choices and can decide their regiments according to the required specialty. Lower-scoring candidates, on the other hand, don't have a real choice and are usually sent to low-demanded regiments (because of their geographical location) or are assigned to low-skilled trades. If volunteers pass the final interview their application is officially accepted and their files are brought to the recruiting center in Tahiti. Notwithstanding the score, it is very unlikely for the Polynesian youth to enlist in the army as non-commissioned officers or officers (at least a high school diploma is required) and the majority of them enter the army as non-commissioned soldiers, i.e. those that will most likely spend the entirety of their career performing military operations on the field. As explained to me by one of the two recruiter officials that came to Tubuai, it usually takes three to six months for a file to be taken into consideration by the recruiting center and once it is accepted, volunteers are called to go sign their contract and leave within three weeks. The recruiter added that their goal is to have such files ready once the volunteers finish the RSMA program. In fact, they fear, as Charlie told me, that volunteers could change their minds and decide to withdraw their applications.

On another occasion, the section chief would go as far as confiding to me that « The army is an enterprise. It needs to recruit people, sometimes it needs to recruit more, sometimes less » and he would explain what he means by adding that the RSMA cohort training in the first semester of the year usually has a better acceptance rate, while the one training during the second semester is more likely to fail the tests precisely because the army has quotas to be met: « At the beginning of the year you recruit more to meet the quota, so at the end of the year you recruit less because the quota has been reached ». He also specified that very likely, in his opinion, recruitment standards are higher for Polynesian candidates, precisely because the army pays for the candidates' plane tickets and they are expensive. Recruitment has then to be stricter because the army can't afford to recruit weak candidates likely to withdraw soon after. As he said, in France it is easier to enlist because the army would only pay for train tickets.

Discussing with him the high rate of young Polynesians joining the army each year, he would tell me that there are indeed few regiments in France where Polynesian soldiers are the majority, « Such as in my regiment in the Fréjus region, or in Bretagne[291] ». Trying to find a cultural reason for this high rate of enrollment, he told me that this is because « Polynesians are decided, loyal[292]» and therefore are able to pursue their military career. And, he would add, it's the only way they have to go to France, otherwise they can't afford it.

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[291] « Comme chez moi à Frejus ou en Bretagne ».

[292] « Les Polynésiens sont carrés ».

The Tests

Notwithstanding my presence at the military base was well agreed upon and controlled by the hierarchy, I was never aware in advance of the 'extra-ordinary' activities that would take place. For instance, I was made aware of the recruiting campaign thanks to some volunteers who were preparing for the tests and knew when the recruiters were coming. The various visits, called 'missions', from Tahiti are loosely organized, and do not have strict schedules since everything is evaluated by the Unit's responsible personnel and molded upon the volunteers' activities.

That Monday morning, Jay would allow me to attend the brief meeting during which the soldiers stationed in Tubuai and those responsible for the recruiting process, freshly arrived from Tahiti, would decide how to organize the different activities required for the enrollment process[293]. During the meeting, I was only able to take notes on my phone. I wrote: « Jay asks everyone how to organize the day. The lieutenants wearing their uniforms are from the RSMA professional integration office while the three still wearing civilian clothes are part of the army recruitment section: two of them are responsible for the technical and psychological tests, and the other one is responsible for sports tests[294]. They discuss and agree on the program. The sports tests would be held the next morning at 6:30. The recruiter responsible for the psycho-technical tests says the test has to be done today in the afternoon, absolutely before the sport session ». One of the two soldiers responsible for the recruiting then asked whether it was necessary for those volunteers that didn't pass the psycho-technical test to take the sport one. In the end, they decided that everyone should be able to take both tests since the validity of such tests is one year, meaning that if a candidate passes one of the two tests but not the other, he or she has one year to retake the test in which he or she failed, without losing the results of the other. This could ensure that the army has a higher yield in terms of recruitment.

In the afternoon, nineteen volunteers were attending the psycho-technical test and outside the canteen building, where the test was about to start, some of the section chiefs and branch chiefs were encouraging and supporting candidates. After they were let inside the building, each of them took a spot on the long table and sat down, waiting for more instructions. I followed the corporal in charge of the test inside the canteen, together with a couple of other soldiers. The corporal started to explain the functioning of the test, while the lieutenant/recruiter and the lieutenant from the integration section were standing on one side of the room, next to me. Each candidate was given a reusable folder with numerous questions printed in very small dimensions, as well as a different sheet where they were supposed to write their answers, each section corresponding to a column and each answer to a square. You tick the box corresponding to the answer you deem right.

Once the test started, the corporal came to the side next to me and the other soldiers and they started to talk about the tests, remarking that they are still the same that the corporal himself took when he joined the army some fifteen years ago. Unfortunately, as he remarked, not only are these tests obsolete but in the French universalist fashion, they are not adapted and/or designed for the overseas territories and departments and their populations. This of course implies that education and social and cultural contexts are the same everywhere within the French Republic and its

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[293] I was familiar with the soldiers stationed in Tubuai and their duties but I knew nothing about those who had just flown from Tahiti. A couple of them were not even wearing their uniforms.

[294] I will understand only later that the soldier responsible for the sports test works for the RSMA and was the volunteers' coach during their first month of military training.

overseas dependencies, while such a situation is of course very far from being true. The lieutenant responsible for the integration of volunteers candidly responded that this is because candidates will become soldiers working in metropolitan France, no matter their origins, so why bother modifying the tests? And yet, the situation experienced by one of my interlocutors clearly shows how biased the tests are.

Tiare didn't pass the psycho-technical test. I asked her whether she wanted to try it again in a few months when the RSMA program will be over. She responded that no, she didn't want to try again because this wasn't the first time that she failed[295]. Her explanation of why she keeps failing could be used as a response against the lieutenant's statement, that tests don't need to be 'adapted' for overseas citizens. Tiare told me that « The boxes are so tiny that you end up ticking the wrong answers![296] ». Maybe she's not familiar with written French, given the high rates of school dropping in French Polynesia; maybe she doesn't understand all the words and questions. Her explanation is exemplary of how the experience of a young Polynesian woman differs from the standard set for metropolitan French citizens. But is it really just these tests and their scores that make one a soldier? Who decides whether a candidate is fit or not and following which criteria?

At the end of the psycho-technical tests, all candidates are invited to leave the room and wait outside. The two recruiters started to correct the tests right after. I was allowed to stay inside with them and observe how the process works. The recruiting lieutenant sat behind a computer screen and was filing an Excel sheet with the candidates' information (name, surname, age, gender). On many occasions, he couldn't tell the candidates' gender and since nobody from the Unit was there, I intervened to help him. Meanwhile, the recruiting corporal was correcting the tests with the help of a transparent grid to be transposed on the candidates' tests to see if the answers were correct or not. Every once in a while, he commented on the test he was correcting: « This one is already a failure, certainly a failure »[297], referring to the candidate with the masculine and generic term « mec » (guy). More than once the tests he was correcting were not « a guy's » but instead female candidates. And even though I knew the generic term was used to not favor candidates judging by their gender or names, I couldn't help but feel discouraged. When the recruiter started to correct my friend Hinano's test, I felt some tension and became more attentive. The corporal said it was a very good test, and the candidate will get a pretty high score. Soon after, when I left the canteen to go outside and see how the candidates were doing, I couldn't help but tell Hinano that she would in very likelihood pass the test. Since I didn't wanna compromise my position or hers, I whispered what I heard and we virtually talk by only reading the other's lips movement.

Once the corrections were done, the recruiters came outside the court and told the candidates to align in front of them. They started to call out the candidates' names, first those who passed the test, consequently leaving out those that didn't pass it. Fourteen out of Nineteen succeeded in the psycho-

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[295] When I first interviewed Tiare (on February 10, 2022), she wanted to join the army to reunite with her brother, who is stationed in Auxonne, France, at the *511e Régiment du Train*. When I asked her where that was she stared at me with a puzzling expression. I therefore asked what specialty she would have chosen once in the army. Her answer gives an idea of the confusion but also of the fascination turning around the army myth that pervades the lives and dreams of young Polynesians. Tiare wanted to join the army as aux-san (i.e. *auxilière sanitaire*) but she was confusing the specialty with the geographic emplacement of the regiment. Today she's in France, where she joined her partner (Manea, whom she met at the CFP3) who joined the army.

[296] « Les cases sont si petites que tu coche pas la bonne réponse ».

[297] « Déjà lui c'est échec, certainement échec ».

technical test and were then admitted to the next step: a personality quiz. This quiz was not a real test, in the sense that there were no right or wrong answers and consequently no score assigned to it. It was more a sort of profiling survey, to assess personal inclinations and interests to better determine what position the candidates could fill. Once again, I went in with the candidates and the recruiters, to observe the course of the test. During the recruiter's explanation of the test, many questions were asked by the volunteers. For instance, the younger-looking recruiter (black and probably from Martinique or Guadalupe) told the candidates to fill the test in honesty and not to devalue themselves–« Don't underestimate yourselves![298] »–and yet one of the volunteers candidly asked back: « What does it mean?![299] ». Many more such questions would come during the development of the examination, stressing once again to what extent are these tests not adapted to such an overseas context. In my notebook I wrote some of the questions asked by the volunteers: « What does 'modest' mean?[300] » or « Claudia, what does 'philosophical discussions' mean? [...] and what about 'methodical'?[301] ».

Notwithstanding the difficulty posed by these tests, the French army is highly regarded by the Polynesian youth. Young candidates and/or volunteers keep talking about the army and the enlistment process with dreamy eyes, such as Tetuarii even though she knew she couldn't join; they imagine themselves wearing military outfits, exploring metropolitan France and the rest of the world, while at the same time providing an economic entrance for their families back home.

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The next morning I went to the Unit early in the morning, to observe the sport tests. The candidates were already gathered in the court next to the canteen, while their colleagues were on the other side of the field, ready to start their morning sport session (Fig. 7.14). Next to the unit entrance, Tetuarii nostalgically looks at her colleagues about to start the examination. With dreamy eyes, she told me once again her will to join the army and the impossibility of being admitted for medical inaptness. Interrupting her dreams, the branch chief called her and the rest of the volunteers to start running for the session.

Once they were gone, I walked across the court and positioned myself next to the section chiefs and branch chiefs that were there. The recruiter started to divide the candidates into small groups of three or four. The first test is called *Luc Leger*[302] and consists of running laps, from one end of the court to the other, synchronizing with the rhythm given by the speaker. Candidates are supposed to touch the end of the lap when the signal strikes, then start another lap and finish it by the stroke of the next beat, and so on. The difficulty consists in synchronizing with the silent rhythm, which is raised progressively. A standardized number of laps equals what is referred to as a « palier » (twenty meters). These *paliers* are in turn divided into fifteen, thirty, or forty five seconds fractions. The

[298] « Ne vous dévaloriser pas! ».

[299] « Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire?! ».

[300] « Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire modeste? ».

[301] « Claudia, qu'est-ce que ça veut dire des 'discussions philosophiques'? [...] et 'méthodique'? ».

[302] Each lap of this test is composed of twenty meters and lasts one minute. The first beats/signals that delimit each lap are designed so that the candidate runs at 8 km/h. Such a speed gradually increments by 0,5 km/h each minute.

recruiter has a grid with all the candidates' names and a column for each physical test to write down candidates' scores[303]. When the recruiter judges that a candidate is losing the rhythm, the candidate in question is eliminated and their score noted, featuring the number of the *palier* achieved, as well as the fraction of seconds he was running. Male and female standards are different: male candidates are evaluated on a base of one to nine *palier*, while female candidates are evaluated on one to five *palier*.

Fig. 7.14
Volunteers getting ready for the physical test, Tubuai, April 12, 2022. © Claudia Ledderucci

Before the first group started the test, their section chief asked the recruiter to participate and run with his volunteers, indirectly helping them to keep up the rhythm. The recruiter agreed (while the same privilege would be denied to the next groups) and the first four candidates started to run in parallels. I had the impression that they were running for never-ending laps, while the beat at the end of each lap was continually increasing in speed. While the candidates run infinite laps, their chiefs and colleagues support and cheer them with encouragement sentences, such as « Pousse, pousse! » or « Aller, va chercher! ».

The rest of the sports test is composed of a series of push-ups, abs, and squats that the volunteers have to perform. Those who passed this physical test were admitted to the interview with the lieutenant/recruiter, taking place the same afternoon. Waiting to be called in to face the recruiter, the candidates were relaxing on the lawn behind the main building. Everyone has been preparing for these exams for weeks, if not months by writing a motivation letter and choosing their preferred regiment and/or specialty. And yet, the majority of them would be disappointed by the fact that the recruiter didn't even ask them their preferences! Besides this detail, the interview went well for all of them.

[303] The rest of the physical tests are composed of push ups, abs and squats.

Performances of Citizenship and Unuttered Forms of Violence

> Hono is still running while the rest of her mates were already cut out. Her eyes are fissures, her face red for the effort. She grunts, stubbornness in her eyes. [...] Even if she is attending a test to join an army that I despise, I am proud of her, I am touched and I want to hug her[304].

That day, April 12, 2022, I was attending the enrollment tests of my young interlocutors and was well aware of my critical thinking about the army as a totalizing and controlling institution, whose aim is to assimilate young Indigenous people to make French citizens out of them. Yet, as I was observing my friend stubbornly running, her endurance beating the rest of her mates, I found myself upset by the excitement that was moving me. My inner self was praying for her to finish the test with a great score, pass the examination and decide which regiment she wanted to join. By the end of the test, which she brilliantly passed, I wanted to compliment her and tell her how proud of her I was. For a second, I forgot she was passing this test to enlist in the French army and when I realized it I felt a strange sensation, spanning from shock to disbelief. My tears were full of joy for her success, and I knew that besides my critical thinking, joining the army for her meant something different.

In this ethnographical snapshot, there is no trace of violence, and yet I knew that my emotion was coming from a specific and paradoxical brutality inscribed not just in the enrollment process but in the system altogether (Farmer 1996). This kind of violence is inscribed in the shrunk possibilities and future horizons (not) available to young Polynesian people, influencing in the end their desire to join the French army as their only 'way out'. Months after this episode, when I finally understood what had happened that day, something inside my head clicked: that was the colonial violence I was looking for inside and along the military bases' fence lines. And yet, this has nothing to do with explicit episodes of brutality: on the contrary, Hono was so happy to join the army and satisfied with her results[305].

Young Polynesians are protagonists of occluded histories and can think about their future only in terms of military engagement while navigating a paradoxical situation made of dependency and future aspirations all at once (Stoler 2016; Appadurai 2004). This is just one example of the many ambiguous twists that the contemporary colonial situation, that following Stoler (2016) I refer to as colonial *presence*, imposes on my young interlocutors. Their beliefs and life expectations are literally molded by the French colonial presence, and this is true not just because the French regime is materially present on Polynesian islands in the form of military bases and French soldiers but more so because the horizons of what is politically possible and thinkable for young Polynesian people pass through this colonial *presence*. This means that struggling youth in French Polynesia, are ideologically influenced to join the army to be able to develop their ideas and life expectations. Such a violence is unexplained and unexplainable, and its uncanny character doesn't have a social resonance today, as on one side, many Polynesians are actually proud to join the army; and on the

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[304] Field notes, 12 April 2022.

[305] In the following months, Hono decided not to join the army as not to be separated from her boyfriend who also passed the test. They were told by the recruiters that it would have been very hard to both be accepted in the same regiment. Hono decided then to let her partner enlist and follow him to France eventually. Yet, her boyfriend broke up with her upon discovering her pregnancy. She recently gave birth to her daughter in Tahiti. Violence continues to spread tentacularly and subcutaneously in her life.

other, political positions both French and local are praising the many job opportunities offered by such an institution.

In this way, I argue that the army is capable of molding particular political subjectivities that abide by their full sovereignty while normalizing everyday forms of explicit (as the one practiced by the army) and implicit (as the one inscribed in Polynesians' everyday lives) violence. Joining the army then means finally accessing privileges as well as civil rights that are otherwise inaccessible to them while living in Tahiti, Tubuai, or the Tuamotu Islands. Beyond such privileges and opportunities, this non-sovereign condition, real pathology of modern forms of citizenship[306], represents the restriction of future options for Indigenous and marginalized youth, while at the same time representing a form of uncanny everyday performance of limited sovereignty allowing young Polynesians to travel to and from the islands and metropolitan France, as well as to access multiple training, social acknowledgment and the achievement of personal hopes and dreams. In turn, such a situation is able to give an aura of emancipation and the creation of new political spaces in which to express, negotiate and contest its own positioning. These « Degrees of imperial sovereignty » (Stoler 2016:177) or multiple forms of self-determination are in other words « A principle of governance that convenes a contested political relation » resulting from a contested political sovereignty and articulating itself on a *longue durée*. Such a situation is even more unique because this individual agency is expressed and takes form in a non-sovereign context where « Gradations of rights, deferred entitlements, and incremental withholding or granting of access to political and economic resources shape the very conditions that imperial formations produce and productively sustain » (Stoler 2016 ibid.). Sovereign articulations are therefore a way of expressing one's sense of belonging while weaving relations and confronting the two main administrative institutions (the French Republic and the territorial entity of French Polynesia), as well as with the social, cultural, and familial history that link young Polynesians to their families' past and future. By adopting certain aspects of both and rejecting as many elements that do not (or no longer) represent them, Polynesian youth are able to express their own sense of belonging in an original way, and sometimes through military engagement (see Tengan 2008 for a similar analysis on the Kamehameha School as a disciplining device through which Hawaiian youth is nevertheless able to express their particular subjectivities). Anthropologist Yarimar Bonilla (2015) described Indigenous political projects crafted within and against the constraints of postcolonial sovereignty, as an effort to break free from the epistemic binds of political modernity, while still being compelled to think through its normative categories. Such attempts, which she defined as forms of non-sovereign future, well match the (non)sovereign articulations that I tried to reconstruct so far through the military enlistment of my interlocutors. The unspoken and unspeakable yet embodied violence crafted by this non-sovereign condition, and which lies in the impossibility of choosing other life aspirations, is yet and paradoxically filled with positive and pragmatic significance by most of the young people whom each year decide to take up the military profession.

The problematic colonial past of French Polynesia passes unnoticed in the enrollment process, in the name of social stability and economic security. While at first, it was difficult for me to discern and make sense of such a situation, precisely because the systemic blindness engendered by the

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306 Here I refer to a concept used by Roberto Beneduce during the round table 'Il presente reclamato. Violenze del presente in nome del passato' (Reclaimed past. Violence of the present in the name of the past), organized by the Department of Cultures, Politics and Society at the University of Turin, November 25, 2022.

colonial regime and the plasticity of Polynesians' responses to it resulted in a paradox that became the norm, I later came to understand that such ambivalences are more the result of power relationships and power imbalances than the mere results of individual life trajectories and personal decisions. Today, I argue that there is no contradiction between the condition of non-sovereignty outlined above, and the creation of new sovereign articulations through military enlistment. This impossible situation is the result of a long colonial presence that continually and violently reduces young Polynesians' horizons of possibilities, restraining what is desirable and for whom. This means that my interlocutors, young Polynesian women and men, can have a desirable future only through the French army as there are no other viable options for them. It is in this sense that the French colonial regime is actively contributing to the creation of non-sovereign future (Bonilla 2015) and political subjectivities that unwittingly abdicate any other foreseeable opportunity not linked to the military experience. This is, I argue, a form of unvoiced violence that became central in my work, even though instead of expressing its reach with the explicit force I was expecting, it hovered over my research and the interactions with my interlocutors.

And yet, the non-sovereign condition of French Polynesia and Polynesians does not prevent young people from choosing pragmatically, using concrete life strategies to obtain diplomas or a stable future provided by the French army. These expressions of personal sovereignty, which I refer to as performances of citizenship, are assertions of personal sovereignty that articulate self-determination with the pragmatism of a very limited range of choices. My interlocutors are then not victims coopted by a national controlling device, such as the army. Indeed, they are skilled social actors for whom joining the army means starting one's own life.

The army is uncannily seen as a job provider and carrier of infinite non-strictly military opportunities, and this is possible because the empire, as defined by Lutz (2006), is made up of « A complex of concrete social relationships entailing culturally constructed emotions, ambivalences and ambiguities ». During numerous interviews with volunteers at the RSMA a vast range of possibilities was presented to me: to join the army means going to France, seeing 'something different' and starting a new life, having a monthly income and accommodation provided. For a lot of them, it also means economic and social redemption. Joining the army means positioning themselves into modernity, a « Demand of the peoples for their own space within the world cultural order » (Sahlins 1999:x) and their will to restate « The structural complementarity of the Indigenous homeland and the metropolitan 'homes abroad', their inter-dependence as sources of cultural value and means of social reproduction » (Sahlins 1999:xix).

Joining the French Army from the Empire's Margins

Toarere, the navigation trade branch chief, explained to me the reasoning behind such an enlistment from his point of view. The RSMA has

> Two priorities: teaching and integrating [but] many prefer the enlistment [because it is] a long-term job. [...] When Polynesians wanna join [the army] is because there is a financial problem behind. [...] We train them so they get used to the enrollment. The RSMA is a military pre-taste, [...] a

> trampoline for those who want to join the army. [...] They [young Polynesians] see money in the French system, but they don't know the consequences, in Mali or elsewhere[307].

As will be widely explained in the Conclusions of this work, Toarere was talking from a privileged point of view that I wasn't aware of at the time, and which I learned after. In fact, his brother had joined the army after the RSMA training. Then he continued:

> They can't get all the modern things they want. They live out of copra, they fish, they don't have an acceptable minimum wage. [...] Everything starts with education. Parents don't want their children to build their own life. You have to go to school, etc. The RSMA tries to go against the parents concerning the education [...] parents educate [their children]towards modernity, the RSMA educate towards success. [...] The RSMA gives them value. You can succeed through the RSMA[308].

He remarked that « It is always because of an underlying economic problem that someone decides to enlist[309] » and that « We avoid volunteers to enlist because that is not our number one priority. We want them to go back to their islands and find a job[310] ». Analyzing such statements, it is easy to read a certain paternalism between the lines, confirmed by a rhetorical question he asked me and himself: « Do people know what they gain at the RSMA? People need to question themselves![311] ». Notwithstanding the familiar presence of the army in everyday life and the well-known myth and imaginary hovering over it that were forced on French Polynesia in the 1960s (see Chapter 5) and that today influence the choice of many, Polynesian people are supposed to be trained and then go back to their islands, instead of choosing their own future, even if this will be in the ranks of the French army. Moreover, the education inculcated in the volunteers differs from the parental one: parents educate their children towards modernity, which is in turn stigmatized by the metropolitan soldiers (as emerged more than once during my conversations with them) precisely because Polynesian people need to prevent their 'primitive' culture from disappearing, and after all they cannot reach for the stars. That is why the RSMA educates young people to succeed, whatever that means (which most of the time is synonymous with becoming part of the subaltern, undereducated, and non-skilled workforce).
And yet, young volunteers often join the army for other reasons as well, for example: « [to] see new things in the metropole, have some money. [...] The enrollment becomes an exit door. They enlist

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[307] « Deux priorités: la formation et l'insertion [mais] beaucoup préfèrent l'engagement [car c'est un] travail à long terme. [...] Les Polynésiens, quand ils veulent s'engager, est parce que derrière il y a un problème financier. [...] On les entraine pour s'habituer à l'engagement. Le RSMA est un avant-goût militaire, [...] un tremplin pour qui veut s'engager. [...] Ils [les jeunes Polynésiens] voient dans le système français l'argent, mais ils ne connaissent pas les conséquences, au Mali ou ailleurs ».

[308] « Ils n'arrivent pas à s'accaparer toutes les choses modernes qu'ils veulent. Ils vivent du coprah, de la pêche, il n'ont pas un salaire minimum acceptable. [...] Tout part de l'éducation. Les parents ne veulent pas que les enfants fassent leur vies. Il faut faire l'école etc. Le RSMA essaye de contrer les parents dans l'éducation [...] [pour] les parents [c'est] éduquer vers la modernité, [pour le] RSMA [c'est] éduquer vers la réussite. [...] Le RSMA est valorisant. On peut réussir grâce au RSMA ».

[309] « C'est toujours un facteur économique lorsque quelqu'un s'engage ».

[310] « On évite que les stagiaires s'engagent parce que ce n'est pas la priorité numéro 1. On veut que le stagiaire rentre chez lui et trouve un travail ». This is indeed the precept preached by the local government, within agreements with the RSMA.

[311] « Est-ce que les gens sont conscients de ce qu'ils gagnent au RSMA? Il faut se poser la question! ».

out of need. [...] They bring their family to the metropole[312] ». These are exactly the same reasons that would be repeated to me by the volunteers themselves, to which Toarere would add the « fatigue » of living every day on a coral atoll and seeing modernity « ailleurs » (lit. elsewhere). He would stress the fact that « Volunteers force themselves to enlist out of economic needs but they can't see themselves managing a business in two years[313] ». Toarere's stance perfectly exemplifies the coloniality mentioned at the beginning of this Chapter, and more specifically the coloniality of being, i.e. the effects of coloniality in lived experiences and not only in the mind (Maldonado-Torres 2007).

This characteristic is somewhat stereotypical and indeed pretty common among not only metropolitan soldiers but local inhabitants as well. The idea at the base of such a stereotype is that Polynesians live their lives day by day–« Au jour le jour »–and therefore are unable to project themselves and their lives and expectations in the future as if joining the army by signing a 5-year contract and moving overseas doesn't automatically contradict such a stance. Toarere specified that the main problem is not the length of the contract, and therefore of the temporal extension, but indeed the fact that Polynesians cannot see themselves in highly-valued positions: « Enlistment is easy. To create a business is a lot more difficult[314] ». « To become a businessman » with all the responsibilities and consequences that such a choice represents, frightens the majority of Polynesians and this is because there is « A lack of confidence, lack of ideas. Therefore I enlist. To buy a tractor, to ask for money from the bank, it scares Polynesians. [...] Psychologically, you have to be mature. [...] Polynesians don't wanna be responsible[315] ». Toarere's testimony witnesses the coloniality that I introduced at the beginning of this Chapter, reflected in a specific way of behaving and deciding, embodied by young Polynesians who decide not to buy a tractor or get a loan because choosing the army is easier. In Toarere's view, joining the army means having some warranties, at least from an economic point of view, and avoiding any kind of responsibilities.

« Commencer la Life »

During long conversations I had with the young volunteers enrolled in the SMA program at the CFP3 in Tubuai, it was clear that the majority of them decided to join the RSMA to get diplomas and licenses and/or to deepen their place-based knowledge in a specific trade. The main goal is to get a job after the training, and to this end, many of them decide to join the French army. In fact, it is possible to express your own will to join the army during the program in order to receive unofficial specific training to help you during the tests, as seen in the previous paragraphs. The army, the most 'democratic' job provider in French Polynesia, is seen as offering a medium-long

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[312] « [Pour] voir des nouvelles choses en métropole, avoir de l'argent. [...] L'engagement devient une porte de sortie. Ils s'engagent pour besoin. [...] Ils amènent la famille en métropole ».

[313] « Le stagiaire s'oblige à s'engager pour le motif économique, mais il ne peut pas s'imaginer 2 ans plus tard en tant que chef d'entreprise ».

[314] « L'engagement c'est la facilité. Créer une entreprise c'est beaucoup plus difficile ».

[315] « Devenir chef d'entreprise [...] une manque de confiance, manque d'idée. Alors je m'engage. Acheter un tracteur, demander de l'argent à la banque, ça fait peur aux Polynésiens. [...] Psychologiquement, il faut être mature. [...] Le Polynésien ne veut pas être responsable ».

term and stable job contract, able to provide newly enlisted soldiers with a challenging but advantageous (from an economic perspective) and adventurous (allowing geographic mobility) job opportunity. Many of my interlocutors at the CFP3 wanted to join the army « To travel [...] know something different[316] » or for personal reasons, such as « To buy presents for the family » or « Allow my old father to travel and see the world[317] »; others join the RSMA while waiting for the acceptance of their enrollment file. Joining the army from the margins is a way to advance its own position within the French Republic and have a grasp on a desirable and different lifestyle. The integration into military ranks, some of which feature a striking Polynesian majority, doesn't mean giving up its Polynesian identity, on the opposite, I argue that the enlistment and subsequent military performance represent a sovereign articulation between the expression of a local identity and a pragmatic sense of national belonging. In the rest of this paragraph, I will focus on some ethnographical snapshots based on life experiences I collected when in Tubuai, that well illustrate my point.

Teme, twenty years old, was one of the first volunteers I interviewed in Tubuai, at the navigational skills laboratory, the same day I was wearing the military fatigues (as recalled above). He explained to me to have joined the RSMA « To get his driving license, and a humble job after[318] ». Originally from Reao, in the Tuamotu archipelago, Teme wished to become a firefighter and serve his island's population. Today, he's about to become a firefighter but within the French army, and precisely in Nîmes, Occitanie, France. He left Tahiti in November 2022, his eyes full of tears: he had to say goodbye to her infant daughter and his entire family. The contract he signed will keep him in France for at least five years, and he already knew that before that time he couldn't visit his family or French Polynesia. And yet, he is proud of his choice and wouldn't go back to change his mind.

Hinano, twenty five years old and originally from Arutua, in the Tuamotu archipelago, lives today at Agen, in Nouvelle-Aquitaine, France, to attend the general military training before joining her new regiment, not far from Toulouse. In Tubuai, where we met while she was training at the CFP3, she told me that she was already sure about her choice: she wanted to join the army to work in the administration. Before her experience in Tubuai in 2022, she submitted to participate in the RSMA training for four times, without receiving any response. When she was selected to join the 2022 cohort, her hope of receiving administrative training as a secretary immediately vanished as she was sent to the CFP3 in Tubuai, to be trained in the construction trade. And yet, she wouldn't be too discouraged as she was using this military experience to better her physical performance in order to get a higher score on the enrollment tests. The higher you score at the physical performance, the better, as you can choose among multiple options and join (in many cases) the regiment of your choice. Even though Hinano would pass the tests with very good scores and held a high school diploma, she couldn't be accepted as a non-commissioned officer (*sous-off*) because of her physical performance and the recruiter suggested she join the army as a non-commissioned soldier first and then move upward in the military hierarchy in the future.

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316 « Pour voyager [...] voir autres choses ».

317 « Faire des cadeaux à la famille. [...] Pour faire voyager mon père âgé ».

318 « Pour avoir mon permis, et un petit boulot après ». After having left Tubuai, Teme and I chatted on the phone while he was in Tahiti, getting ready to leave. He left Tahiti together with Hinano, with whom I was in contact as well. I regularly talk to them to this day.

During my stay at the military unit, she constantly remarked « France pays everything. The driving license is for free, everything is for free![319] ». In March and April 2022, I followed her in her daily activities to train for the tests. She (like anyone who declared wanting to join the army) was allowed to use one of the computers located in the teaching room to look for regiments and specialties in order to get a better idea of what to choose, or to use a tests simulator; write a motivation letter and CV. She would ask me multiple times if I knew certain towns in France, without paying too much attention to the fact that I'm from Italy: in her mental geography, France and Italy were unknown in the same regard. Together with another volunteer interested in a military career, Hinano stated that she wanted to join a regiment in southern France: apparently, as her section chief told her, the weather forecast over there is very similar to the Polynesian one. For Hinano, joining the army means « Commencer la life » (to start a, indeed, the life) and building an autonomous future, even if this is far from her island home: it is precisely such a distance that allows her to feed a meaningful link between her birthplace and the adoptive one. As Clifford (2001) explained, it is essential to recognize such desirous and nostalgic paths of coming and going, these relationships weaved through and beyond geographical distance, which traverse the diasporic lives of young Polynesians.

Joining the army is in itself a life-changing choice as it means moving to metropolitan France and not being able to come back to French Polynesia for at least five years. Such a decision influences not only the candidate's life but that of their families as well, as it was made clear by one of the volunteers, Manu. He had recently lost his father and one of his brothers was about to leave for France to integrate his new regiment. These particular circumstances made him change his mind: Manu wanted to join the army as well but he preferred to wait for a couple of years to first support his mother. During my stay, he was offered a job contract as an assistant, either in Tubuai or Hao, his island home where he hoped to be hired and where he owns a house ready to be rented to the newly coming soldiers working at the RSMA facility.

Maui, twenty four years old, is another one of those I defined as *army children*. Originally from Rurutu, Maui is today an assistant in the same trade in which he was training at the time of my fieldwork, lagoon navigation. First of his class, Maui was not interested in joining the army, even though he was in the past. His life experience made him change his mind. As he recalled, a few years ago he was in France for the wedding of one of his cousins who then stayed in France and joined the army. Maui's file was ready to be dropped at the recruitment office during his metropolitan stay but at the same time, he apprehended that her girlfriend back home was pregnant. Everything changed, then, he said. He couldn't accept the possibility of dying in combat anymore, not now that he was about to have a daughter.

Conclusions

Week after week I listened to my interlocutors' answers to my questions: « Why did you decide to join the RSMA? » and « Why do you want to join the French army?[320] ». While their motivations are often the same, their personal life experiences are different and illustrate the myriad of

[319] « C'est la France qui paye. Le permis est gratuit, tout est gratuit! ».

[320] « Pourquoi tu as décidé de participer au RSMA? » and « Pourquoi tu veux t'engager? »

precarious situations that young Māʻohi have to witness in their everyday lives. The RSMA, in itself an articulated republican institution *adapted* to overseas contexts, was daily used by my young interlocutors to actively participate in the negotiation of their future resources and horizons of possibilities. These precarious situations that the RSMA tries to adjust, the device itself, the forms it takes, and the presence of the army on occupied islands are all « patterned imperial effects » (Stoler 2013:18), resulting in sequestered and unfinished histories, and in which native people are taken into a relation of dependency but at the same time aspire to the colonizer's modernity. It is important to make these connections visible, to say that the RSMA is not the fix-it-all program that the government wants to advertise and that moreover, the problems that the RSMA supposedly solves are engendered by the long-lasting French presence and the coloniality of the system that has been put in place during the years.

French Polynesia is today considered as de-colonized or as having decided a different way out of the colonial bond, this being the territorialization and expanded autonomy conceded to the territorial government. Even among French scholars and intellectuals, as noted by Natacha Gagné and Marie Salaün (2017), the colonial issue is not acknowledged: with the exception of very few scholars working on the issue, the common discourse tends to minimize or explicitly cover up the actuality of the colonial situation (Gagné, Saläun 2017:231). Moreover, Lorenz Gonschor remarked « The continuing denial of colonial history and the outright mockery of its victims by the French government [...] on the symbolic level » (2013:268).

It is true, the situation changed throughout the years and modern-day Polynesia has a number of administrative competencies, but this doesn't mean that its governing practices are not reiterating the old colonial system in one way or another. Such a tendency, which has been defined as coloniality, is not always clear and straightforward. Throughout my fieldwork, I came to know and observe veiled (because not recognized by the social actors) forms of coloniality mostly expressed through paradoxical situations. The one that I explored in Chapter 7 is the military enlistment in the French army. In order to do that, it is necessary to recognize that the enlargement and extension of the functions carried by the army (from defense functions to civic and educational ones, see Chapter 5) are a perfect example of the coloniality described above.

Coloniality reproduces itself daily, through specific patterns of governing (top-down) and behaving (bottom-up); coloniality means embodying particular (non-sovereign) subjectivities which are crafted along the lines of a far away metropole which is setting the standards, while at the same time legitimizing racial differences. In this sense, joining the army allows Polynesian social actors to not only express a particular form of sovereignty, i.e. an articulation between one's will to succeed given the limited aspirations available but also to better place themselves with regard to their compatriots (see Morone 2022). Joining the army sets the base for the creation of asymmetrical relations of power not only among French metropolitans and Polynesians but also among Polynesians that join the army and obtain privileges and those who decide not to enter the corps. Such imbalances of power, as well as the different ways to build relationships with others, or the craft of particular imaginaries over places, people and categories, are the implicit outcome of an underlying coloniality that still today informs everyday life in a post-colony.

Joining the army and the fact that Polynesian youth join at the highest rate within the French Republic, is not socially recognized as the result of a form of well-established coloniality. In a re-signification effort, Polynesians admit to joining the army because they like such a lifestyle or

because they already have friends and family in the ranks. Of course, they are well aware of the many possibilities and privileges that are linked to military careers and they join in a pragmatic way to gain access to these options, but most often the risks linked to a military career are hidden by the recruiters. In any way though the recruitment effort in French Polynesia is recognized as an ongoing effect of the underlying coloniality that permeates this French overseas territory. Such *discreet* forms of coloniality are not recognized as such because there are no moral, social, or theoretical categories to give them meaning and position them into a bigger picture (Bono 2021).

Tetuarii, Hinano, and Teme's stories tell us in part the meaning of joining the army for Polynesians (transiting through the RSMA or not), as well as that of moving to France and being taken in charge almost completely by the State. To engage in this system is to a certain extent to take advantage of it in a very pragmatic way. In this case, the army plays a double role: on the one hand, it is a colonial device whose purpose is acculturation and control of an Indigenous population in French overseas dependencies; on the other, it could be considered as the local domestication of an exogenous device, with exogenous rules and purposes. This is because the experience of the army and military life is mediated « By the habitus of an Indigenous form of life » (Sahlins 1999:xvi) which even being colonized is able to transform and deeply rewrite the hegemonic culture and the meanings of its institutions. These episodes helped me understand that the French presence and the French army are not just colonial institutions and the result of coloniality in French Polynesia. They are made of individuals and encounters, built on expectations and aspirations, they represent multiple opportunities and carry different symbols depending on who is acting in them.

This is why it is possible to witness paradoxes expressing the situation of « Being both of and against the empire » (Davis 2015:28). While on one side the French presence or Polynesian subjugation are rejected (in many conversations I was told by my interlocutors « I am not French » while wearing a French military uniform), the French army is used on the other side to socially integrate and be recognized, to succeed. The problematic colonial past of French Polynesia passes unnoticed in the enrollment process, in the name of social stability, economic security and personal satisfaction.

CONCLUSIONS
Blasted Histories and Everyday Tactics of Survival

Her name was Africa. His was France.
He colonized her, exploited her, silenced her,
and even decades after it was supposed to have ended,
still acted with a high hand in resolving her affairs.
[...]
Her name was Asia. His was Europe.
Her name was silence. His was power.
Her name was poverty. His was wealth.
Her name was Her, but what was hers?
His name was His, and he presumed everything was his,
including her, and he thought he could take her
without asking and without consequences.[321]
(Men Explain Things to Me, Rebecca Solnit)

I was reading Rebecca Solnit's 'Men Explain Things to Me' while I was carrying out fieldwork in Tubuai in March 2022 and couldn't help but see a common thread in the verses quoted in the excerpt, especially if we add Oceania to the two already mentioned colonized continents. Yet, it would be too easy to just blame history, colonialism, France, or the French colonial history in the Pacific to explain the everyday life struggles of my young interlocutors, for at least two main reasons. First of all, I consider colonialism as a phenomenon emerging in struggle (Stoler, Cooper 1997), and therefore influenced by the actions of those 'colonized'. Blaming colonialism, its ideologies, or the French presence means in some way depriving Māʻohi people of their agencies and their negotiating skills, which are, as we have seen, highly influential. Māʻohi people, as well as their *démi* counterparts, are therefore the protagonists of such histories. Secondly, as I tried to demonstrate throughout my work, these temporal creases are configured as woven histories. Their entanglement is so rooted that it is impossible to explain one without giving reasons for the other. We cannot talk about the contemporary French presence in French Polynesia without mentioning the nuclear history of the territory; we cannot talk about development without referring to the army and the sudden wave of modernity that once again was tied to the nuclear 'adventure' in the Pacific. And the fascination attributed to the army and soldiers until today was crafted around such tropes of adventure and economic wellness symbolized by French metropolitan soldiers/functionaries. Moreover, it was in the name of modernity and financial wellness that landowner families (both *démi* and Māʻohi) had sold ancestral land to the newcomers, leaving Polynesian families in precarious and marginalized living situations. Historical and geopolitical conjunctures ensured that modern-day French Polynesia is not designed for Māʻohi people, ill-positioned with regards to the neoliberal/capitalist job market mostly managed by French-influenced companies and interests. Yet, this doesn't mean they cannot put into practice their everyday tactics of survival while filling with meaning their practices.

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[321] Rebecca Solnit, *Men Explain Things to Me* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), pp. 42-43.

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Faʻaʻā is a lively and popular small town in Tahiti, hosting a majority of humble and working-class Polynesian families. It is also the bastion of the pro-independence party, Tavini Huiraʻatira, whose leader Oscar Temaru has been the mayor of the town since the 1980s. It was precisely in Faʻaʻā that I started my fieldwork in June 2021, participating in a march to commemorate the loss of sovereignty over the Pomare kingdom (see Chapter 1). At Tavararo, right in front of the commemorative monument to which we paid homage in June 2021, and that was built in 1985 to remember the dead warriors fighting the French invasion, there is a small alley (*servitude*) that slides down the main street level. Until a few years ago, the alley was home to humble Polynesian families. Today nobody lives on that road, there are no signs of those houses, and only commercial warehouses and abandoned car wrecks are in view.

It was a calm but windy Tuesday morning, that day on October 9, 2007[322]. Someone in Tavararo was grilling an ʻuru, not minding the weather and the sudden wind currents. ʻUru skin embers and brace sparks flew around in a beautiful but dangerous dance, appearing and disappearing in the air. In the blink of an eye the whirlwind embers, in their deadly dance, made their way to the shabby old house. Rapidly, the flames encircled the neighboring houses: the adjacent one, and the next one, and the next... until the Taniera's, the biggest and most beautiful house in the neighborhood. It's the beginning of the end. Everything was burning.

That day, Rirava was visiting her grandmother in Moʻorea, where every year the Taniera used to go on holiday to spend time with the family. Unaware of what was going on in Tavararo, Rirava would later learn that « Our house was on tv », as she recalled while I visited her in Mo'orea in May 2022, adding that on that Tuesday morning, a call from her mother alarmed Rirava's grandmother from turning on the tv and let Rirava know what had happened.

In Faʻaʻā, the tiny *servitude* in front of Tavararo was crumbling down. Couches, walls, memories, and hopes of a better future, everything was in flames. Rirava's mother was safe and so was one of her sons, Toarii. She knew that her daughter was away from the flames as well, in Moʻorea. But Toarere, her older son, was missing. Desperate, she went back into the inflamed house to look for him, with no luck. She feared that he could be trapped somewhere in the building, or worse that he was burned to death. For his part, Toarere was unaware of what was going on. He was fourteen at the time and having fun with his friends in Papeete. That morning, he didn't tell his mother he was going out. That night, back home, he would apologize to her, telling her how sorry he was for having scared her so much. « But it wasn't his fault », Rirava specified while recalling the episode.

When Toarere and I approached the *servitude* in Tavararo, in May 2022, we didn't even get off the scooter. It was years since Toarere had come back there and with a certain difficulty in identifying the place, he pointed me where his old house was. There was nothing to see. We left soon after.

Through the telling of this familial story, I wish to link imperial intimacies to the colonial presence and the army, seen not only as a 'dream seller' but also as a job provider. Imperial intimacies and intimate spaces are not only the private lives in the household. Everyday life in a military base, or a

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[322] This narrative is based on various conversations I had with the Taniera's (Toarere, Rirava and Toarii). Toarere was my interlocutor for a few months (from February to May) when I was on Tubuai. I met Rirava only after, and for a couple of times in Tahiti and Moʻorea, as well as Toarii, that I only met once.

hospital or prison for that matter, i.e. where every bodily need is strictly regimented and controlled, is as intimate as one's household and private life, precisely because they are crafted by the state to create links between the public sphere and the domestic scenes (Aretxaga 2003; Stoler 2010).

Toarere, whom I introduced in Chapter 6, was one of the Indigenous branch chiefs of the RSMA Unit in Tubuai, and one of my long-lasting interlocutors. I was able to retrace his story by collecting and putting together the many information gathered during our conversations. When I first asked him why he decided to work at the RSMA, he specified he had joined the army as an EVSMA to work at the RSMA-Pf as a trainer, mostly because he needed some money. And yet, his first encounter with the RSMA took place years before, when he enrolled in the training program as a young volunteer in the sailor's trade and was soon after promoted to assistant at the end of the training[323]. When he was presented with the opportunity of becoming branch chief, with all the guarantees that such a job contract represents (see Chapter 6), he accepted and was sent to France to be trained as a trainer at the RSMA headquarters in Périgueux.

As he would narrate at first elusively, then in greater detail as we got to know each other better, Toarere comes from a modest pro-independence family, today implanted in Mo'orea, to which he sends money each month. While narrating his family history, he mentioned many times that he had never met his biological father, a German traveler who docked in French Polynesia during the time of an adventure. Indeed, this absence disturbed him quite a lot, making his father's figure a daunting and very present one[324]. Toarere was 'adopted' by his mother's new partner (and father of his siblings), to whom Toarere always referred as « mon père ». Despite such a situation, he is not a fa'a'amu child, traditionally adopted following the Polynesian meaning of the word, and with different rights regarding land inheritance: his biological mother took care of him and her new partner accepted to recognize Toarere as his child.

Toarii, his brother, was born when Toarere was only one year old and the two grew up together with Rirava, respectively four and three years younger than her two brothers. This intimate and deep knowledge that the three siblings share is nevertheless not shared with the younger brother, Toareva, who was traditionally adopted (fa'a'amu) later and with whom the Taniera's children didn't grow up. Rirava, whom I visited in Mo'orea in May 2022, recalled episodes of her past in greater detail, filling in the numerous dark and uncertain spots left by her brother Toarere in his cryptic retelling of the story. After their house burnt in the 2007's fire in Fa'a'ā, the family moved to Puna'auia until 2014, when the Taniera's finally managed to move to Mo'orea, on familial land that cannot be divided and onto which they have no rights (see Chapter 4). Such land belongs to Toarere's maternal family and for reasons that were not explained to me, his uncle had privileged access to it. Despite Toarere's mother and her brother being on no good terms, the family managed to pay a sum of money for the usufruct of 'their' parcel in order to build a modest house. Yet, having no formal rights on the property, they cannot expand or modify the household further. During the same year, Toarere's father died contributing to and augmenting the precariousness in which the family is structurally forced to dwell.

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[323] He omitted until the very last moment to mention that he initially joined the SMA as a volunteer and then became an assistant, therefore having an insider's point of view with regard to each step of the program. I assumed he didn't reveal his initial position because he was ashamed or too proud to show me where he came from, given the higher rank acquired after years of serving in the RSMA-Pf, and therefore the socially-respected role he assumed over the years.

[324] He even showed me his Facebook page and profile picture, adding that he was planning on meeting him while in France for military training. Yet, in the end, they weren't able to meet.

While driving on the only road that encircles Mo'orea, Rirava and I stopped at her favorite spots, and while sipping milkshakes we discussed her past, the difficulties of finding stable employment, her will but also her inability to continue her studies in pharmacopoeia. Toarere, who had organized our meeting, was clear with his sister when he explicitly told her not to bring me home[325], and yet, she decided to invite me over: « You know what? I don't care! I wanna show you the house[326] ». Soon after, we hit the road again, driving towards Ha'apiti. The household is located on the mountainside of the main road, at the end of the *servitude*. All around the unpaved dirt path are other houses and shacks, belonging to Rirava's mother's extended family. Children and dogs walk towards us as they hear the car engine approaching the path. Teve, Rirava's girlfriend who also lives in the house, welcomes us.

Rirava and Teve have been together for six years and notwithstanding the strong tie that unites them, Rirava is well aware of the anomaly this homosexual relationship represents for her Adventist family[327]. She stressed the fact that « Frère n'est pas d'accord », referring to the fact that Toarere doesn't approve of the relationship and persuaded her to end it. Toarere is the most strictly religious of the Taniera's and the one who follows almost obsessively the church's rules. Strongly influenced by her brother, Rirava recently returned to church: « After I visited him in Tubuai in July [2021] I found God again[328] » she explained to me, adding that she knows that « What we do [Teve and I] is bad, God doesn't accept it », therefore she has to break up with her girlfriend. Having rediscovered her faith, she wants to be baptized to devote her entire life to God but to do this she has to partially deny herself. Her renewed faith has created some friction between the two of them, even though Teve can understand the situation, Rirava assured me, because she comes from an Adventist family as well. And yet, she's not ready to separate: « That's why I'm waiting. I'm waiting for her to be ready ».

Once we got off the car Rirava invited me in. The house is humble with unpaved dirt floors and raw brick walls. There are no doors, except for the one separating the bathroom from the rest of the house, and mattresses are scattered in the living room. This precarious living situation is worsened by the fact that Toarere is the only one providing for his family well being: his mother has no job at the moment, nor does his sister. Teve is working in a sushi place and probably contributes to the family income, but the responsibility that Toarere feels about his family makes him send the majority of his earnings to his sister[329]. This sense of responsibility was remarked once again by Rirava's telling of yet another episode, in which control and violence are deeply entangled.

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[325] Once again for shame or pride, depending on the point of view.

[326] « Tu sais quoi? Moi, je m'en fout! Je veux te montrer la maison! ».

[327] The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a Protestant Christian denomination distinguished by the observance of the Sabbath, considered to be the seventh day of the week in the Christian (Gregorian) calendar, as the biblical day of worship. The church credo is pretty conservative, and homosexual relationships as well as abortion are not recognized as civil rights. The Adventist message arrived in French Polynesia on December 24, 1890, from Pitcairn. Since then, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is present in all five archipelagoes (Marquesas, Tuamotu, Gambier, Austral, and Society Islands). For more info, see: https://adventiste.pf/

[328] « Depuis que je suis allée le voir [Toarere] à Tubuai en juillet [2021] j'ai retrouvé le Seigneur ».

[329] The two other siblings live outside of the island: Toarii works and lives in Tahiti with his own family, and Toareva lives in Hao, where he works as a fisherman.

She started to explain that Toarere decided to fly to Tahiti, that weekend, to resolve some family issues indirectly related to their precarious dwelling on the undivided land. While I knew that Toarere was about to land in a couple of days, I ignored the reasons that brought him home. Rirava was always making sure whether or not her brother had already told me the story that she was recounting, even though many times she would specifically choose not to respect his brother's confidentiality and confide everything to me. For unclear reasons, the week before something had happened at her house, « Teve beat my mom's brother[330] », Rirava said. Her uncle decided then to take revenge by hitting her. When Toarere got the news he didn't hesitate and booked his flight, well determined to go home and beat his uncle. « That's why he's coming, to beat him[331] », she continues, « I know my brother and I know that when he's mad he won't stop. I'm afraid that it's not gonna end up well[332] ». Such a violent image clashed with the character I met in Tubuai: Toarere as the fervent Adventist that goes to church every single Saturday wearing his best clothes and carefully respecting religious commandments; but also the attentive teacher well disposed to help his students. And yet, other episodes recalled by Rirava during that morning or told me by himself started to gain a thicker meaning: for instance, Rirava told me that when his brother was younger, he was a mean person–« Il était méchant »–and started to change and get better only after he decided to regularly go to church. In another context, while explaining one of the reasons why he dislikes the army and precisely what pushed him not to renew his contract after six years as branch chief, Toarere said it's because of the unhealthy lifestyle linked to military life as he knew it: « They [the soldiers] drink too much, they smoke too much, they tell a lot of stupidities[333] ». Then he also admitted that sometimes the volunteers behave like children, and when he was working on weekends to assure the security of the facility they would never follow the orders. « When you work weekend shifts... it's hard. I have the impression to be their father. They're children, it's hard to listen to what they say. I tell them the same things every time but they don't listen and when they come back drunk... I had beaten some of them, huh! You wouldn't tell, but I did it. It had happened[334] ».

This subcutaneous violence entangled with control and repression, and waiting for 'justified' reasons to visibly erupt (such as the volunteers' non-observance of the rules or the challenge posed by his uncle), is the result of a long-lasting colonial presence, made of the upheavals brought by the imposition of the French land tenure system, the societal changes that disrupted peer-to-peer relations and created extremely unjust situations between colonizers and colonized, extreme poverty and unemployment, the wickedness that accompany such living conditions, and a strong desire for redemption. Paradoxically, the army is the only institution capable of alleviating such circumstances by transforming social rage into acceptable, legally recognized, and normalized violence.

The intimacies crafted through and around the presence of the French army are not only individual but spread in a tentacular way and reach Toarere's island home and his family, too. All three

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[330] « Teve a tapé le frère de maman ».

[331] « C'est pour ça qu'il descends, pour le taper ».

[332] « Je connais mon frère et je sais que quand il se fâche il vas pas s'arrêter. J'ai peur qu'il va pas bien se passer ».

[333] « Ils [les cadres] boivent trop, ils fument trop, ils disent beaucoup des bêtises ».

[334] « Quand on est de semaine... c'est difficile. J'ai l'impression d'être leur papa. Ils sont des enfants, c'est difficile d'écouter ce qu'ils disent. Je leur dis toujours les mêmes choses mais ils n'écoutent pas et quand ils rentrent bourrés... J'en ai tapé de VS, hein! On ne se voit pas comme ça, mais je l'ai fait. Ça est arrivé ».

brothers (and to some extent his sister as well) are in fact familiar with the army. Both Toarere and Toarii enrolled in the RSMA in Arue. While his brother became a pawn in the RSMA-Pf chessboard, Toarii decided to enlist in the regular army, probably to live the dream of monthly income and privileges linked to the institution and his prestige. He was therefore sent to France and stationed in a regiment in the central region of the country. Both brothers were drawn to the army because of the economic stability it guarantees. To this end, even Rirava wanted to enlist until a few years ago, before Toarere prevented her from doing it. « We just wanna live Claudia, no matter the personal choice of each of us[335] » he explained. This is also why he encouraged his youngest brother to join the RSMA at the new facility in Hao, « To get at least his driving license ». The army was the only means the Taniera had to escape.

Yet, Toarii's military career didn't last long: soon after joining the army, he defected because of racism, as Toarere recounted. Toarii's skin is light brown and his Polynesian traits are marked. After the defection, in itself an extreme decision to make, he was obliged to stay in France for a while because he didn't have enough money to buy a ticket to return to Tahiti, nor did his family. If going to France is considered affordable, coming back (mostly as a deserter or a traitor) is not as easy because the army won't cover the cost. The privileges linked to the exercise of one's citizenship staged through military performance are not offered to those who cannot fulfill their citizens' duties.

The Taniera's, precariously implanted in Moʻorea, couldn't find peace: having no other options, they decided to sell their car, the only means of transport they had, to pay for Toarii's ticket and rescue him. This is maybe why, once his contract as an assistant at the RSMA came to an end, Toarere himself did everything possible to go to France and train to become a teacher in the same program, voluntarily joining the French army, that same institution defected by his brother because of the rejection of his comrades. In this way, teaching in the same program that raised him, Toarere was able to secure an income for himself and the family for a few years.

These decisions are not light-hearted and yet, Toarere told me that when you are poor you can't really afford to make decisions and have to be happy with what you have, even if your job is held by very different principles from yours and the context in which you work is not welcoming because of who you are, what you believe in, or where you come from. This is particularly true because in the neoliberal system, not seizing any little opportunity equals in some way to deserving poverty and/or the precarious situations in which you're compelled to live. And living in such conditions, in the shadow of violence, requires different strategies to survive and tactics to disguise. I am persuaded that this is the use that young Polynesians do of the RSMA and the army more generally. Only by disguising and pragmatically participating in the system you can survive, only through this mechanism you can obtain better opportunities and get where you want.

This short story, to which numerous details could be added, is exemplary of a continuous process of ruination (Stoler 2016) and structural violence (Farmer 1996), the result of poverty and precarious living conditions that are exacerbated by the intricate colonial situation that Māʻohi people still have to experience and confront in their everyday life. The difficulty of obtaining an allotted space in which to build their dwelling, the racialized unemployment and haunting poverty condition, and the impossibility of imagining an acceptable future are in some ways navigated through the use of the army and enlistment as the last resort.

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[335] « On ne souhaite que vivre Claudia au final, quel que soit le choix que chacun prend ».

And yet, the tentacular extension of social inequalities and the coloniality of living are inscribed on the Taniera's existence. After his defection, Toarii experienced unemployment but at the same time life events followed their rhythm: he married Hine and they had their first child. In May 2022, before meeting his brother over dinner, and in a sort of unwanted neoliberal regurgitation, Toarere depicted him as an irresponsible person, not taking into consideration the precariousness in which Toarii is forced to live. Reading between the lines of Toarere's recalling of the story, it seemed to me that he was almost critical towards his brother, who–despite he couldn't afford his own house and was therefore forced to live at his in-laws'–had a baby. For instance, Toarere is his brother's opposite, a real master in controlling his own physical and material urges. Yet, it must have been hard for Toarii as well, so difficult that he decided to name his son Hell as if to exorcise the difficult background from which he comes and the world in which he lives.

Not only Toarii lives with his in-laws', in front of whose house we were supposed to meet, but he cannot afford a car, the safest means of transport to move around with his family. Soon after, he came riding his old 50cc scooter, the same one that he rides with his wife and little son. Toarere judged this behavior as irresponsible and dangerous and to help his brother to come out of the situation, he was looking for a new and bigger scooter to gift him, as a car would be too expensive even for him to buy. Rirava was also critical towards his brother Toarii, especially after learning that he and his wife are expecting another baby, a further irresponsible (non)decision as they are not in a wealthy economic situation.

Once at the Chinese restaurant in Arue, to which Toarere had invited us, Toarii told me that he had recently found a stable job as cleaning manager in the new, opulent, and sparkling Hilton hotel that recently re-opened in Fa'a'ā after years of decay. No matter how stable the job is or how many skills he learned during his stay at the RSMA: he still holds a subaltern and non-skilled position, a real-life example of the neoliberal paternalist mechanisms that I have shown in Chapters 5 and 6. It is for related reasons, i.e. to break free from similar kinds of subordination, that Toarere decided not to renew his contract with the RSMA-Pf. His EVSMA career came to an end while I was finalizing my fieldwork in Tubuai.

Today, Toarere is a middle school teacher and works in a new program focusing on ocean trades offered by the local middle school in Tubuai. After finishing his contract with the RSMA and before the opening of the school (roughly from June to August 2022), Toarere was busy designing his future house project on the island. In fact, at the end of his military contract, he had to move out of his former house provided by the RSMA and was living at a friend's house to save as much money as possible, to send to his family but also to buy some land on Tubuai and build his house and a residential unit to rent to future soldiers serving at the local RSMA facility. This would assure him a good and stable amount of money at the end of each month and would enormously help him and his family back in Mo'orea. While he would very much like to go back to his island home, Mo'orea has become one of the most expensive places to live in given its vicinity to Tahiti and the increasing presence of French metropolitan citizens moving to the island. Staying in Tubuai was then a non-decision that he had to navigate and that revealed itself to be a successful strategy to position himself not only in the islandian context (given his active role in the local Adventist church) but also with regards to his family back home. This is still another example of how the military presence on the island can influence the choices and life trajectories of many, but also of how the RSMA is considered a golden ticket to get different jobs: despite he has no special training in education and

only a high school diploma, Toarere was able to obtain a teaching position at the local school precisely because of his teaching experience at the RSMA.
In 'Men Explain Things to Me', Rebecca Solnit gives yet another finale to the excerpt I quoted at the beginning of the Conclusions. Notwithstanding the historical contingencies which shaped and are still shaping the present of many among those living in the old dependencies of the French empire, Solnit didn't give up hope and wrote: « His name was privilege, but hers was possibility. His was the same old story, but hers was a new one about the possibility of changing a story that remains unfinished, that includes all of us, that matters so much, that we will watch but also make and tell in the weeks, months, years, decades to come » (Solnit 2014:42).

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This thesis had, as its main subject, the changing military and non-military functions carried on by the French army in French Polynesia, an overseas territory that by definition, and notwithstanding the ample governing competencies accorded to its local assembly, remains a non-sovereign entity. The militarization process that impacted French Polynesia starting from the 1960s, and that I investigated throughout my research, is indeed a transversal and useful theme to not only explore the concept of sovereignty–intended here as quotidian practices exercised by social actors and not as a mere political status–but also to analyze the different ways in which the changing French military presence is a privileged entry point to observe shifting sovereign practices, the instantiation of sovereign claims, and the emergence of political subjectivities in a non-sovereign condition.
Chapter by chapter, my work aimed at answering the following questions: in what ways do military presence and the long-lasting consequences of the 1960s infrastructural development reverberate on past and present non-sovereign conditions? What kind of sovereign articulations are modern-day Polynesian social actors crafting within and beyond the army? How does the army represent a form of embodied citizenship? I am especially interested in how political imaginations and future aspirations are daily created by the lived experiences and embodied political stances of my local interlocutors, and how military and non-military functions of the army vary, have varied in the past, and are linked to non-sovereign political bonds.
Given the tentacular and pervasive nature of militarization, I proceeded by collecting military traces to map such a presence and help me navigate the many paradoxes I was observing. Throughout Part I of this work, I explored militarization as an administrative process, showing how the military presence and administrative assets of French Polynesia have influenced and still influence the territory's autonomy and the many negotiations over sovereignty while remaining in the background of local vindications and protests. I view this long-lasting presence as an important factor for Polynesian's economic, cultural, and personal development: the French military presence has always shaped future possibilities for Indigenous Polynesian people who worked for the army and/or its contractors during the nuclear testing period. Part II described the territorial extent of the militarization process, showing how the spatial dimension of the phenomenon entailed the expansion and contraction of military presence and the consequent acquisition and restitution of land from the 1960s to the 1990s. Part III had as its main subject the entangled interpersonal relations crafted around the military institution and aimed to analyze the tension between the colonial nature of a volunteer-based educational device offered by the army and the opportunities

encroached in such programs for Polynesian youth. Joining the army is in fact for many a source of pride and represents one of the only possible futures for Māʻohi youth. In examining the everyday life of young Māʻohi people enrolled in this volunteering military-professional program held by the French army, I utilized life experiences and personal life trajectories, conceptualizing the enrollment process as the restriction of life possibilities, the product of colonization-militarization in a non-sovereign territory which is notwithstanding embraced by my interlocutors as a future aspiration.

While my dissertation draws on militarization processes and ongoing colonial presence in French Polynesia, as well as on sovereign and non-sovereign life experiences, I embraced the ethnographic experience as a personal journey. Understanding the military presence and the many paradoxes and uncanny situations that such a presence spurs was a difficult task. Yet throughout my fieldwork, I managed to navigate these ambivalences by de-centering my gaze and the meanings I attributed to the army as an institution as well as to its presence in a non-sovereign overseas territory. Retracing French colonial interests in French Polynesia was indeed an ambitious task especially because some of these processes are still ongoing, and that is specifically their peculiarity. By taking the colonial situation in its entirety as the context of my fieldwork, I witnessed the extent of the long-lasting coloniality informing everyday life in a non-sovereign territory, as well as the slow violence and trivial nature of the colonial history of the present (see Stoler 2016; Stoler, Cooper 1997; Farmer 2006).

One of the peculiarities of my work lies in the temporal extension of the processes I aimed to analyze in order to contribute to the ongoing discussion on colonial presents and post-colonial studies. French Polynesia is in fact a privileged place from which to observe politics in the making, as well as the crafting of political belongings and sovereign vindications, given its ongoing ties with the French metropole. Lacking a real turning point, a seizure, a before and an after sanctioning the beginning of social, political, economic, and cultural changes linked to independence and/or access to full citizenship or other forms of shifting relationships with the metropole, the example of French Polynesia exemplifies the ongoing coloniality informing its political status. More often than not, 'tradition' and 'modernity' were keywords upon which to define the extent of the modernization effort spurred by the 'post'-, while enduring problems of hierarchy and racialism became problematic legacies of past colonial times and went unexamined (Stoler, Cooper 1997:15). Moreover, postcolonial sovereignty more often than not resulted in enduring forms of non-sovereignty (Bonilla 2017). Yet, given the oddity represented by the Polynesian political situation and the ongoing French colonial presence over those islands, it is particularly challenging to define such a situation as post-colonial. While many scholars and prominent figures endorse the post-colonial situation of French Polynesia, Moreover, as shown throughout this work, the exceptional status of overseas dependencies such as French Polynesia is far from being the exception. Overseas territories are instead the result of contemporary imperial formations, political entities which produce differential degrees of sovereignty and quasi-membership with regard to their respective satellites (Stoler 2016). Therefore, the questions guiding my research were not revolving around the functioning of a new political order or its flaws, as the political entity at the center of my survey is still imbued with coloniality and its ongoing condition inscribed in the governing system itself.

Embracing such a perspective, this thesis originally contributes to another set of literature that focuses on the effervescence of non-self-governing territories and the anthropological turn to sovereignty, by filling an important gap. Rather than taking for granted the political ties that link

modern-day French Polynesia to its metropole, and instead of analyzing such a relationship as a post-modernist 'different appetite for' (Hepburn, Baldacchino 2012), or 'late' form of sovereignty (MacAmlaigh 2013), I started by unsettling the very concept of sovereignty (Bonilla 2017), showing that the inherent flaw is not in overseas territories' political status within a bigger political entity, nor in the structure that defines them. The problem that I aimed to bring into question lies in the insidious and long-lasting coloniality inscribed in such governing mechanisms resulting in embodied practices of non-sovereignty, the emergence of non-sovereign subjectivities, and limited future aspirations. The study of the military presence and militarization process has represented an innovative entry point to analyze questions such as political belongings and sovereign imagination and practices. Yet, the particular forms of non-sovereign subjectivities that I observed as they were crafting within the French army, as the ethnographic narrative of the Taniera's familial history has shown, are not specific to the Polynesian context, nor the condition of overseas territories. Similar political subjectivities bloom in the encounter between « The public institutions of the colonial state and the intimate reaches of people's lives », i.e. in contexts where « Colonial histories were bound up in each individual encounter–with the way particular groups resisted, appropriated, refashioned, or adapted the social categories of colonizers » (Stoler, Cooper 1997:viii).

As explored in Chapter 5, similar situations entailing the presence of a colonial army and the embodied performances of Indigenous military lives to access more rights and position oneself in the hierarchical social structures were observed elsewhere: new political subjectivities were crafted in similar ways in Hawai'i (Tengan 2008) and in Libya under Italian colonial rule (Morone 2022). This is especially true because as historian Frederick Cooper and anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler have demonstrated (1997), imperial projects of different metropoles, even when developing in different times, have « Influenced each other, giving rise to common colonial structures with distinct but related sequences of change » (Stoler, Cooper 1997:viii). Similarly, colonial apparatuses of economic production, population management, political and administrative government were not the product of impersonal policies but the result of shifting conceptual arrangements « That made certain kinds of action seem possible, logical, and even inevitable to state officials, entrepreneurs, missionaries, and other agents of colonization while others were excluded from the realm of possibility » (Stoler, Cooper 1997:vii).

Embracing such a positioning, this thesis actively engages with what has been defined as the 'social issue' daily experienced by the protagonists of this research. While social problems have alternately been placed at the center of policies and political debates on how to better manage living uncertainties and precariousness, the causes of social marginality are yet bypassed if not actively hidden. With a few exceptions (Bambridge, Venayre, Vucher-Visin 2010 or the Programme AUTOCHTOM[336]), studies on poverty and marginalization in French Polynesia, as well as the predominant local political discourses, seem to take for granted the factuality of such social problems, without investigating their origins and causes. For instance, Michel Tondellier and Arnaud Régnier-Loilier (2023) recently curated a special issue on the « jeunesses ultramarines » (overseas youth) remarking that « Social preoccupations concerning youth in overseas departments and regions [...] revolve around different interrelated aspects, such as education, professional

[336] Launched in 2014, the program aims at exploring colonial legacies within the French Republic, specifically focusing on the category of 'colonized natives'. For more info: https://autochtom.hypotheses.org/

integration, precariousness or migration[337] », without really engaging with any of the problems listed, nor mentioning their colonial origins. For instance, while directly linking alcohol and drug abuse to school dropout, poverty, and social exclusion, these problematics are never mobilized as expressions of shifting cultural identities but rather taken for granted and stigmatized (Beck et al. 2012). Moreover, the underlying tensions of the Polynesian context which I described above and which partly derives from contemporary political and governing structures imbued with coloniality are never engaged. On the contrary, this thesis offered to fill in such a gap, by critically taking into consideration not only the contemporary social issue but also its entangled colonial causes and how social problems such as marginality and/or poverty came to be shaped the way they are.

Last but not least, this work lays a foundation for studying militarization processes in the Pacific region, especially in non-self-governing territories, by reviewing relevant literature and creating a holistic conceptual understanding of how military presence and social experiences might inform one another in the lives of young Indigenous individuals. Critical militarization studies have informed my research since its very start and my thinking is indebted to the many scholars that have paved the way for this work (Teaiwa 1999, 2001; Enloe 1990, 2000; Lutz 2001, 2007, 2009; Shigematsu, Camacho 2010; Aguon 2006, 2008, 2022; Naputi, Frain 2023; Williams et al. 2016; Ginoza 2012; Davis 2015, 2020; Ware 2012). My thesis contributes to such a debate by showing how not only defense functions but especially non-defense functions of the army (socio-cultural, educational, moralizing roles) shape the everyday life experience of militarized communities. As I have shown throughout each chapter, military presence is able to (re)name and define social problems, places, and cultural meanings, as well as to shape future yet limited aspirations. In French Polynesia, social exclusion, poverty, and racialized unemployment are often identified as colonial fallouts/legacies, yet many fail to notice the coloniality that still informs the contemporary governing system. The ongoing ruination of Polynesian practices and imaginaries is often bypassed in a pragmatic struggle for survival, ambiguously matched by the poietic nature of militarization. In fact, the pervasive military presence is able to absorb the problems posed by the social issue by attributing new meanings to it while promoting itself as a powerful sponsor to solve social exclusions, poverty, and unemployment. While critical militarization studies have exclusively focused on American baseworlds in the Pacific Rim by surveying island bases such as Okinawa, Guam, Hawai'i, and beyond, my work is the first one engaging with militarity in a French overseas territory. Notwithstanding the language barrier hindering any comparativeness, I hope my research has shown the striking similarities and continuities informing both the American and French imperial formations.

Beyond these contributions, as many questions yet emerge from my work and lay a foundation for further research and inquiries on the subject. I have explored the odd intersections between militarization, coloniality and sovereignty. At the same time, the convergence of the enlargement of military functions not directly linked to defense–among them the educational role played by the army–and the implementation of neoliberal policies was sketched, and partly explain the modalities in which political subjectivities are daily crafted in a non-sovereign territory. Yet, a more precise analysis is needed to highlight the shift of attention from social problems–such as poverty,

[337] « Les préoccupations sociales concernant la jeunesse dans les départements et régions des Outre-mer [...] portent sur différents aspects interdépendants, tels que la scolarité et la formation, l'insertion professionnelle, la précarité, ou encore l'émigration ».

unemployment, early school dropout, criminality and drug abuse–to individualized and negatively depicted characteristics that has been typical of neoliberal governing mechanisms. First, further questions emerge about the importance given to personal will in the path to success. Do these regimenting programs, such as the RSMA, only work if their participants are strongly motivated and really want to succeed? How do these mechanisms coexist with a fading welfare state in which every citizen should, at least in theory, be entitled to certain rights, regardless of their will? To answer such questions, it is fundamental to investigate the shift from a welfare state in which social problems, such as poverty, are defined as social issues, and the emergence of a neoliberal state in which these problems are yet redefined on an individual and blaming level.

Secondly, the recruitment process, as well as enlistment strategies, which were partly engaged in my work, narrowly focused on practices based within the RSMA system. More research is indeed needed to address precise issues about recruiting strategies throughout the French overseas entities: asking questions about who is selected, by whom, and for what reasons, where does the act of enlisting lead the enlistees and what sorts of privileges and/or rights are given to them through the enlistment, is fundamental to challenge underlying assumptions about the armed forces, and to observe in which ways the militarization of everyday life gives access to different social, economic, and/or national statuses (Enloe 2015; Ware 2012). What is the role of the army in the valorization or devaluation of national, ethnic, cultural and/or class belonging?

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APPENDIX I

Chronology of the restitution process in French Polynesia

- 2008: Arue was the first town to be involved in the restitution process. The municipality decided to carry out a study on the economic and social impacts of the partial dismantlement of the military base.
- End of 2008: a delegation of metropolitan and Polynesian representatives identified land to be given back to Arue, located in the northern part of the *Caserne Broche*.
- 2009: Arue's mayor P. Schyle called for project proposals to be developed in the parcel to be restituted before the law was legally declared.
- End of 2009: the decree sanctioning the restitution of military land, including a list of military territories within the French nation to be given back to local administrations, was approved.
- End of 2010: specific contracts, called CRSD, are being drafted for each prefecture or territory.
- 2011: in application of the 2008 budgetary law, the armed forces in French Polynesia were reduced, and the remaining personnel were relocated primarily to the *base de défense* in Arue. A contract proposal was finally written concerning the restitution of ex-military land.
- 2011 to 2014: the contract regarding Polynesian municipalities eligible for restitution is wedged within the French administrative apparatus, pending approval.
- 2015: a new contract was implemented, including six Polynesian municipalities eligible for land restitution. The towns are: Fa'a'ā, Papeete, Pirae, Arue, Mahina, and Tairapu Est.
- 2016: the first CRSD was finally signed by French President Hollande and the President of French Polynesia.
- 2017: the official documents for cession were signed and Arue became the first municipality to acquire the ex-military land.
- 2018: mayors of the municipalities asked the French government for financial aid in order to finance the cleanup of the polluted sites (Tahiti Infos 2018a).
- 2019: the municipality of Taiarapu-Est officially acquired the restituted land (Tahiti Infos 2019c).
- 2020: land was officially ceded to Papeete and Pirae. A prolongation of the CRSD signed in 2016 was approved, expiring in 2022 (Haut Commissariat 2020; Présidence de la PF 2020).

Summary table of the restitution process in Tahiti

Municipality	Year	Military facilities ceded	Area	**Reconversion projects** (as presented in the first draft of the CRSD, 2015)
Arue	Décret n° 2017-3 du 3 janvier 2017	Parcel within the *Caserne Broche*	3 ha	Mixed-economy area
Fa'a'ā	Décret n° 2018-327 du 2 mai 2018	Parcel within the *Résidence Bopp Dupont*	7000 m^2	Farmers market
Mahina	Décret n° 2018-326 du 2 mai 2018	Ex-centre technique du CEA	5 ha	Mixed-economy area
Papeete	Décret n° 2020-126 du 14 février 2020	Parcel of the naval shipyard in Fare Ute	1,7 ha	Redevelopment of the urban area
Pirae	Décret n° 2020-143 du 19 février 2020	Parcel of the Taaone facility	1,45 ha	City center
Taiarapu-Est	Décret n° 2017-4 du 3 janvier 2017	Fort de Taravao	2,9 ha	Mixed-activity area
Taiarapu-Est	Décret n° 2017-5 du 3 janvier 2017	Ionospheric station	1 ha	Nautical activities area
Taiarapu-Est	Décret n° 2017-6 du 3 janvier 2017	Tautira nautical center	2150 m^2	Tourist infrastructures and accommodation facilities

APPENDIX II

Summary tables of the main features' rate for the RSMA

2000s										
Year	**1997**	**1998** (before the abolition of the mandatory military service)	**1999**	**2000**	**2001**	**2002**	**2003**	**2004**	**2008**	**2009**
Candidates	/				7800	/		9300	/	
Volunteers	/		500	1100	2065	2500 (618 of which are VT)	3000	/	3000	2975
Conscripts	3030	3000	2000	900	100	/				
Cadres (calculated on the volunteers' total number)	/	875	844	764	734	734	734	734	500	21% (799)
% women	/								20%	/
% integration	NO DATA AVAILABLE									

Tab. 1
Summary for the 2000s, when the mandatory conscriptions was still in place.
Sources: Trucy 2008

2010s	Plan SMA 6000								SMA2025	
Year	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**
Candidates	NO DATA AVAILABLE									
VS	/			4334	4514	4606	4685	4810	4766	4591
VT	/			1095	/			1200	1204	1196
Total	3029	4013	4990	**5429**	**5666**	**5764**	**5847**	**6010**	**5970**	**5787**
Cadres	21,3% (820)	% 938	% 1055	17% (1079)	% 1103	% 1105	% 1105	15,5% (1105)	15,85% (1125) 178 of which EVSMA	16,8% (1169)
% women	/			26,2%	27%	26,1%	27%	28%	30%	30%
Volunteers integration rate (%)	/	75%	/	76,3%	77,4%	76,3%	77%	77%	82%	81,2%
% military enrollment	/			2,7%	2,3%	/	6%	5%	5%	6%
Budget (no salaries counted in)	/			69,46 M€	78,7 M€	74 M€	67,3 M€	70,8 M€	76,7 M€	71,3 M€
% EU funds	/			24%	25%	22%	24%	33%	36%	36%

Tab. 2
Summary for the 2010s.
Sources: Husson 2021; Ministère des Outre-Mer 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019

2020s	SMA 2025		
Year	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**
Candidates	NO DATA AVAILABLE		
VS	2993	/	4060
VT	1199	/	1207
Total	**4192**	/	**5525**
Cadres	17% 1197 (68 of which are civilians)	1203	18% 1298 (83 of which civilians; 204 EVSMA)
% women	30%	/	30,5%
% integration	76,2%	75%	84%
% military enrollment	6%	/	6,7%
Budget (no salaries counted in)	71,5 M€	/	105 M€
% EU funds	36%	/	33%

Tab. 3
Summary for the 2020s.
Sources: Husson 2021; Ministère des Outre-Mer 2020, 2022

Summary table of the main features' rate for the RSMA-Pf

Year	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**
Candidates	NO DATA AVAILABLE									
VS	514	/								
VT	NO DATA AVAILABLE									
Total	628	629	636	640	655	661	672	/		
Cadres	NO DATA AVAILABLE									960 (Military cadres, EVSMA and civilians)
% women	29,4%	26,07%	31%	30,2%	35%	35%	38%	/		
Volunteers integration rate (%)	78%	79,3%	/	80,7%	82,4%	95,1%	96,2%	/		94%
% military enrollment	NO DATA AVAILABLE									

Tab. 4
RSMA-Pf Summary for the 2010s
Sources: Ministère des Outre-Mer 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2022