

## Re-storying Moana Nui: Ocean Knowledge in Ma'ohi Nui (French Polynesia)<sup>1</sup>

### Objective:

The objective of the project is to understand the role of the Pacific ocean and its relation to local indigenous Mā'ohi<sup>2</sup> populations in Mā'ohi Nui, also known colonially as "French Polynesia." Mā'ohi Nui consists of 5 island archipelagos - the Society Islands, the Gambier Islands, the Tuamotu Islands, the Marquesas Islands and the Austral Islands located in East Polynesia in the Pacific Ocean. The local communities of these island archipelagos trace their lineage back hundreds of years, possibly thousands, to these islands and the Pacific Ocean. Each archipelago consist of at least one culture with their own language, and ways of knowing and being, but all archipelagos also have strong cultural and historical links with their neighboring archipelagos because of the history of migration and exchange between the communities for hundreds of years, giving a sense of solidarity in their historical identity with their neighbors (Kahn 2000)

The tupuna (ancestors) of these islands developed cultures and ways of living with the land and ocean that have allowed the local communities to thrive for hundreds of years in the islands up until today. Fishing and farming are viable ways of living within Ma'ohi Nui to varying degrees depending on each archipelago, and historical stories and relationships to these lifestyles have created a strong sense of identity with the local communities land and ocean environment (Bambridge 2016, 15)

Each archipelago within the region slowly became united under France through different agreements starting from the mid-1800's, starting with a "Protectorate" status, then "territory" status and today encompassing all 5 archipelagos and their surrounding ocean operating as an "overseas collectivity" of France. Today, the geopolitical area known as French Polynesia contains the largest ocean territory of the Pacific Ocean, with the political power is granted in most part to metropole France (Blue Ocean Law 2019 6). And the dominating narratives that are known about the ocean and people of Ma'ohi Nui are often saturated by outside sources, as opposed to the local people's voices (Ortega 2018, 5).

Therefore, the research prioritizes the local communities voices in telling their own stories about their own historical and present-day relationship to their lands and surrounding waters. The Ocean States Ma'ohi Nui project is then examining the historical relationship that local communities have to their islands, and also examining the changed relationship that has occurred with the introduction of France, it's government, market economy and larger sense of colonialism. Historical relationships have most notably changed with European contact and colonization and the effects of the French government partially controlling the land and sea. The effects of this control can be seen through years of French nuclear testing on Moruroa and Fangataufa atolls in the Tuamotus, commodification of the ocean and its fisheries, and most recently, the management of climate change issues locally and how it has and will affect the land and ocean (Blue Ocean Law 2019).

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<sup>1</sup>The colonial region known as "French Polynesia" will be referenced in speaking of the government and state actors of the territory, who are present on the islands. In an effort to gain solidarity of the five culturally different archipelagos which are colonized by France, local leaders have introduced the names "Mā'ohi Nui" and "Te Ao Mā'ohi." This work will refer to the solidarity of islands as "Mā'ohi Nui" when not speaking of the French government and state actors (Gonschor 2008, 1).

<sup>2</sup>The local communities of Ma'ohi Nui are the first peoples to have settled the islands in the area, and have a relationship to the land different than the dominating French culture, and therefore can be considered 'indigenous' people of the region. The terms 'indigenous,' 'local communities,' and 'local populations' will be used for the these populations and 'Mā'ohi' refers to the solidarity of identity of the different communities in Tahiti Nui. (Ra'apoto 1988, 3-7).

The project will gather first-hand experiences and stories from indigenous populations across the region on their historical and present-day relationship with the ocean. The project will focus on 4 main pillars of inquiry:

- How is this ocean embedded in the ancestral histories and knowledges of the indigenous populations in the territory?
- How is the ocean a domain for human activity and meaning?
- How do indigenous populations see ownership of the ocean, if at all, and to who? And how do they see that ownership (is it an ocean that is owned by the indigenous peoples, by France or by the European Union?)
- What are the opinions on the present-day geopolitics of the ocean? How do people see the relationship of France and outside companies trying to gain access to our ocean for mass fishing, the pearl industry, or for sea-bed mining?

### Methodologies:

The methodologies will consist of interviews with indigenous peoples across 4 archipelagos – the Society Islands, the Marquesas Islands, the Gambier Islands and the Tuamotu islands. The interviews will be video and audio recordings over 6 months from February – July 2021.

The interviewee participants will be diverse – the elders and cultural practitioners of these cultures, but also with youth. The participants will have a differing work backgrounds in relation to working with the ocean or interacting with the ocean. They could have voyaged through traditional navigation across the territory, or they could have worked on Moruroa and Fangataufa atolls during the nuclear testing period (1966-1996), or they could be those who work currently in the pearl industry, tourism industry or fishing industries in the territory.

The methodology will be a “talk story” or relaxed and informal interview-style where we can be serious to speak on serious subject matters, or we can move into spaces of joy where we can laugh together. Sharing joy and laughter are important aspects of relationship-building in Ma'ohi Nui.

The interviews will be conducted in Tahitian or in the language of the island, with an appropriate translator. In Ma'ohi Nui, when approaching elders for interviews, it is most appropriate to bring gifts (food or fruits), and to approach the elders with someone that they already know personally and speak in Tahitian or their own indigenous language, so that they will feel more comfortable. We will then usually say a prayer or thank the gods that they have brought us together for the day to share our stories.

It is also common that we will need to meet the elders one or two times before we can conduct an interview, the first meeting to introduce ourselves and to get to know each other and to ask for an interview. The second time will then be to conduct the interview.

The interviewees will answer 10 questions in relation to the questions posed in the Objective section of this report. The questions seek to understand their relationship with their land and ocean and the language they use for these areas. The questions also seek to understand the local communities thoughts on geopolitics of their ocean and any industry-related ocean activities in their archipelago.

Depending on the archipelago, we will ask relevant questions on the topic of industry-related ocean activities as it relates to their own archipelago, which include the following:

- The Marquesas: our questions for industry-related ocean activities will be on the

- topic of tuna fishing and deep-sea mining
- The Gambiers: the pearl industry and the Center of Pacific Experimentation (CEP)
  - Tuamotus: CEP , the local and large-scale fishing industry, pearl industry and tourism activity
  - Society Islands: local and large-scale fishing and tourism activity

The answers to the questions will be analyzed and organized into a comprehensive general report in English analyzing the information collected and highlighting a variety of dimensions in the Objectives. The central elements of the report will be developed further into publications such as book chapters and articles at a later date.

The report will have various potential to also print appropriate information materials in Ma'ohi Nui language(s) including a list of vocabularies, which will then be available in the archipelagos where we conducted research.

There will be online communication of project results via Ocean States and SOS, with short videos and pictures. These have the potential to then be produced into several short videos on topics related to the objectives or a short film.

### Researchers and Positionality

The research will be contracted to Sustainable Oceania Solutions (SOS), an international environmental consulting firm located in Honolulu, Hawai'i and Pape'ete, Tahiti. The research team chosen are located on Tahiti island and Mo'orea island in Ma'ohi Nui, and have genealogical ties to the islands they are located on.

The team brings skills of high-level language competencies of Tahitian language, English and French and varying life-long relationships with the ocean and land, whether it be through fishing, surfing, or sailing. One team member in particular has personal experience with traditional sea navigation on the local Polynesian voyaging canoes, Fa'afaite.

The team's personal experiences, being deeply rooted and connected to the area will add an advantage of strong cultural competency when conducting interviews with the indigenous populations of the 5 different archipelagos. The team's Ma'ohi cultural understanding prioritizes work and research to be done in respect, reciprocity and regeneration with the local communities, which align with the values of SOS as a company.

The research team's personal background combined with their professional experiences and skillskets will create work that is grounded in the area and cultural values, while creating professional work to add to the larger project of Island Lives, Ocean States.

### Covid-19 Contingency Plan

COVID-19 is a worldwide virus that has greatly affected lives and lifestyles the world over for the year of 2020 and continuing into 2021. Ma'ohi Nui has equally been affected by this virus, in a similar manner to that of other countries in that the virus has come to our territory through interaction with larger countries (most notably France, as there are many workers and tourists from this country to our territory) and the population had to stay in quarantine which prohibited most of the population from working, resulting in economic hardships, health hardships and some deaths. Our population spent 2 months in confinement during the months of March and April during 2020 to stop the spread of the virus and prevention of people getting sick. The virus was then eliminated from our territory for several months during the year of 2020, but on July 15, 2020 the local government lifted quarantine

and reopened borders to tourists, bringing back the COVID-19 virus to our territory (Coronavirus COVID-19 - Travel Information | Tahiti Tourisme).

As of January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021, we have 18, 033 cases that have accumulated since 3/13/2020 and we have 37 new cases in the last 24 hours (Facebook). As SOS is currently located in Ma'ohi Nui with the active virus, our team must adapt to this reality and change how research can be conducted, and all security measures must be taken seriously for the health of the researchers, and any interactions with research participants.

First and foremost, the research team will respect all government protocols that are in place currently, and be open to any change in protocols while doing research up until the month of July. These government protocols restrict movement at night with a current night curfew, which starts at 9pm and lasts until 5am, emphasizes wearing a mask in all public places, encourage one-meter distancing between people, restricts large gatherings or groups over 6 people, washing hands regularly, and if one feels the need to cough or has a runny nose they will use a tissue and throw the tissue away once done. The team will travel only when necessary to the libraries and archives for historical information, if things are not available online.

For research in the outer islands and travel, the team will travel to the 4 archipelagos and meet with interview participants of all ages (youth to elders). During travel (via airplane or boat), the research team will respect protocols by wearing masks, washing hands regularly and practice social distancing. When interacting with any research participants, the health of the researcher and participants are of utmost importance, and there will be adaptations respected to maintain the health of everyone involved. The interviews will take place in open-air areas, where we respect the social distancing measures.

Other than physical contact that must happen when necessary, a large portion of the research will happen with online archives when available, and writing at home so that the researchers aren't exposed to the virus.

### Research Timeline:

#### February 2021

- Prepare research questions and operations
- February 17-27, spend 10 days in the Marquesas Islands (Nuku Hiva and Fatu Hiva) for 5 – 10 interviews

#### March 2021

- Analyze data from the Marquesas Islands
- Prepare research questions and operations
- Spend two weeks in the Tuamotus Islands for 5 – 10 interviews

#### April 2021

- Analyze data from the Tuamotu Islands
- Prepare research questions and operations
- Spend two weeks in the Gambier Islands for 5 – 10 interviews

#### May 2021

- Analyze data from Mo'orea island
- Prepare research questions and operations
- Spend two weeks in Raro Maita'i islands (Taha'a, Borabora, Huahine) conducting interviews

with 5 – 10 interviewees

### June 2021

- Analyze data from the Gambier Islands
- Prepare research questions and operations
- Spend two weeks on Mo'orea island conducting interviews with 5 – 10 interviewees

### July 2021

- Analyze data in total
- Finalize report

### Ethics

SOS will conduct research in Ma'ohi Nui with respect to local customs, appropriate protocols and methodologies in each archipelago and we will respect local copyright laws in the territory. The interviewees will have consented to signing a short waiver form in French and tahitian to authorize SOS to conduct the interviews with audio or video recordings, and to allow for publication of the findings and recordings when appropriate.

### Preliminary Literature Review

#### **Climate Change in the Pacific:**

Betzold, Carola. 2015 “Adapting to Climate Change in Small Island Developing States.” *Climatic Change* 133: 481-489. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-015-1408-0>.

Campbell, J. R. 2014. Climate-Change Migration in the Pacific. *The Contemporary Pacific* 26 (1): 1-28.

#### **Climate and Environmental Law in French Polynesia:**

Avagliano, Eleonora and Jerome Petit, *Etat des Lieux sur les Enjeux du Changement Climatique en Polynesie Francaise*. Polynesie Francaise: Ministere de l'Environnement, 2009. [https://www.colibris-tahiti.org/ressources/telechargements/economie/energie-climat/2009\\_07\\_EtatDesLieuxEnjeuxChangementClimatiquePF.pdf](https://www.colibris-tahiti.org/ressources/telechargements/economie/energie-climat/2009_07_EtatDesLieuxEnjeuxChangementClimatiquePF.pdf)

Benkhelifa, Fouzi et al. 2012. *The Strategic Plan for Climate Change*. Haut-Commissaire de la Republique En Polynesie Francaise. Accessed on 2/1/2018. <http://www.polynesie-francaise.ademe.fr/sites/default/files/files/encart/plan-climat-strategique-polynesie-francaise.pdf>

Lallemont-Moe, Herve Raimana. 2015. “Introduction a l'etude du Droit de l'environnement de la Polynesie française.” *Comparative Law Journal of the Pacific*, edited by Yves-Louis Sage. Wellington: Victoria University of Wellington.

Blue Ocean Law. 2019. *Enduring Colonization: How France's Ongoing Control of French*

Polynesia resources violates the International Law of Self-Determination. Guam: Blue Ocean Law.

### **Land and Ocean Management, traditional and contemporary in French Polynesia:**

Bambridge, Tamatoa et al. 2016. The rahui: Legal pluralism in Polynesian traditional management of resources and territories, edited by Tamatoa Bambridge. Canberra: Australia National University.

Bambridge, Tamatoa. 2012. "Le Foncier Terrestre et Marin en Polynesie Francaise: L'étude de cas de Teahupoo." Land Tenure Journal, 2. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations pp. 119 - 143

Chailloux, Steve. "L'évangile de la terre polynésienne: la théologie contextuelle de Duro Raapoto en prespective (Tahiti)." Dissertation, École Pratique des Hautes Études, 2011.

Tamatoa Bambridge, Pierre-Yves Le Meur « Savoirs locaux et biodiversité aux îles Marquises. Don, pouvoir et perte », Revue d'anthropologie des connaissances 2018/1 (Vol. 12, N°1), p. 29-55. DOI 10.3917/rac.038.0029

Tetiara, Gabriel. 1987. "The Society Islands: Squeezing Out the Polynesians." In Land Tenure in the Pacific, edited by Ron Crocombe, 45-58. Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific Press.

### **Identity:**

Saura, Bruno. "L'identité Par Les Racines: Saying 'Indigenous' in Tahiti." Shima: The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures 5.2 (2011): 1-18. Print.

The Contemporary Pacific, vol. 27, Number 2, 2015 - Decolonization, Language, and Identity: The Francophone Islands of the Pacific  
<http://staging01.muse.jhu.edu/issue/32380>

Gagné, Natacha and Salaün, Marie. 2012. Les chemins de la décolonisation aujourd'hui: Perspectives du Pacifique insulaire. Critique Internationale 60(3):111-132. DOI: 10.3917/cii.060.0111

### **Language Dictionaries:**

Davies, Jon. 1851. A Tahitian and English Dictionary with Introductory Remarks on the Polynesian Language and a Short Grammar of the Tahitian Dialect with an Appendix. Tahiti, printed at the London Missionary Society's Press. Haere Pō Reprint, 1984.

Tahitian Language Dictionary

### **History of Tahiti and French Polynesia:**

Ellis, William. 1972. La Recherche de la Polynesie D'Autrefois. Paris: Publications de la Societe des Oceanistes, Number 25, Musée de l'Homme.

Gonschor, Lorenz. "Law as a Tool of Oppression and Liberation: Institutional Histories and Perspectives on Political Independence in Hawai'i, Tahiti Nui/French Polynesia and Rapa Nui." Dissertation, University Press of Hawaii, 2008.

Henry, Teuira, and J. M. Orsmond. 1928. Ancient Tahiti. Bernice P. Bishop Museum Bulletin 48. Musée de l'Homme Reprint, 2004.

Kahn, Miriam. 2000 "Tahiti Intertwined: Ancestral Land, Tourist Postcard, and Nuclear Test Site." *American Anthropologist* 102 (1): 7-26. Accessed January 24, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/>.

Mallol, Christophe Serra. 2010. Nourritures, abondance et identité: une socio-anthropologie de l'alimentation à Tahiti. Pirae: Au vent des îles

Morrison, James. 1966. Le journal de James Morrison, Second Maitre a Bord de la "Bounty". Paris: Société des Océanistes.

Newbury, Colin. 1980. Tahiti Nui: Change and Survival in French Polynesia, 1767-1945. Honolulu: University Press of Hawai'i.

Oliver, Douglas L. 1974. Ancient Tahitian Society. Honolulu: University Press of Hawai'i.

Saura, Bruno. 2005. Entre Nature et Culture: La mise en terre du placenta en Polynésie française. Tahiti: Haere Publishing House.

Dodd, Edward. The Rape of Tahiti: A Typical Nineteenth-Century Colonial Venture Wherein Several European Powers with Their Iron, Pox, Creed, Commerce, and Cannon Violate the Innocence of a Cluster of Lovely Polynesian Islands in the South Pacific Ocean. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co, 1983.

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Blue Ocean Law. 2019. Enduring Colonization: How France's Ongoing Control of French Polynesia resources violates the International Law of Self-Determination. Guam: Blue Ocean Law.

"Coronavirus COVID-19 - Travel Information." *Tahiti Tourisme*. Web Page. Date Accessed: 2021-01-29  
<https://tahititourisme.org/en-us/covid-19/>

Gonschor, Lorenz. "Law as a Tool of Oppression and Liberation: Institutional Histories and Perspectives on Political Independence in Hawai'i, Tahiti Nui/French Polynesia and Rapa Nui." Dissertation, University Press of Hawaii, 2008.

"Haut-commissariat de la République en Polynésie française." *Facebook*. Web Page. Date

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<https://www.facebook.com/hcrpf987/photos/a.484177578452215/1550046471865315/>

Kahn, Miriam. 2000 "Tahiti Intertwined: Ancestral Land, Tourist Postcard, and Nuclear Test Site." *American Anthropologist* 102 (1): 7-26. Accessed January 24, 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/>.

Ortega, Sylvie Largeaud-Ortega et al. 2018. *The Bounty from the Beach: Cross-cultural and Cross-disciplinary Essays*, edited by Sylvie Largeaud-Ortega. Australia: Australia National University.

Ra'apoto, Turo A. 1988. "Maohi: On being Tahitian" in *French Polynesia*, edited by Nancy J. Pollock and Ron Crocombe, 3-7. Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies of the University of the South Pacific.