

# 7

## The postcolonial regional polity

Regional governance took a dramatic turn in the early 1970s. The contest over regional self-determination continued but it took place in a very different context, that of a *postcolonial* regional polity. Although the independence of Fiji and Tonga in 1970 brought the number of new Pacific island states to only five, there was already a shared sense among the Pacific leaders that a new political era had begun for the region as a whole. The independent Pacific countries committed themselves to the newly established SPF as a diplomatic focal point for promoting the practical purposes of postcolonial national development and negotiating global relationships, as well as promoting regional self-determination beyond their own territorial borders.

From 1971, the new leaders began meeting in the annual summit of the SPF, together with Australia and New Zealand, and by 1972, they had set up the economic research arm, the SPEC, which soon became the *de facto* secretariat of the SPF. They assumed, correctly, that it was only a matter of time before they were joined in their regional association by the other dependent territories that fell under the jurisdiction of the SPC. This was encouraged by the certainty that, with a change of government in Canberra, Papua New Guinea would move to independence by 1975, and by Britain's indication that it would soon be leaving its remaining colonies, Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Tuvalu. By the end of the decade, there were 11 independent Pacific countries and they were to be joined by three more in the 1980s.

The sense that this was the beginning of a ‘new South Pacific’<sup>1</sup> was also encouraged by the impact of the new regional university established in Suva in 1968. The University of the South Pacific (USP) generated a regional awareness among its students and in parts of the broader community. The sense of a new postcolonial age was further fostered by the emergence of a number of important regional civil society organisations and institutions around churches, women’s groups and antinuclear and anticolonial movements. They expressed a shared commitment to regional self-determination and a desire to participate actively in influencing the ideas that underpinned the practices of regional governance.

The emergence of new sovereign states with independent foreign policies and a commitment to joint diplomacy attracted the interest of larger powers that had not previously been active in the area in the colonial era. It also demanded a recalibration of involvement from the former and continuing colonial powers. From 1976, Australia, New Zealand and the United States began to see the region through Cold War lenses. They regarded it as essential that regional governance in the security realm accord with Western interests. They promoted the idea of ‘regional security’ for the first time in the South Pacific context and linked this to national development and regionalism. France also had to adjust its approach to the region as its nuclear testing at Moruroa and Fangataufa atolls—and its failure to decolonise its Pacific territories—became a key target of the new Pacific collective diplomacy through the SPF. The rapid political change in the South Pacific, together with the prospect of a new law of the sea regime from the mid 1970s, also spurred strong interest and involvement from China, Taiwan, Japan and the European Economic Community (EEC).

The postcolonial regional polity that developed from the early 1970s can be usefully seen as comprising three major groups of actors. At the centre of this new regional polity was what we might term a developing regional ‘society of states’ with shared purposes around practical concerns of nation-building and negotiating global engagement, together with shared values, particularly around the principles of regional self-determination, sovereign equality and Christianity within a broader ‘Pacific way’ ideology.<sup>2</sup> A second group, comprising new NGOs with aspirations to

---

1 R.G. Crocombe, *The New South Pacific*, Wellington: Reed Education, 1973.

2 Following Mohammed Ayoob’s adaptation of Hedley Bull’s international society concept. See Ayoob, ‘From Regional System to Regional Society’.

counter deleterious global influences on Pacific societies, constituted an embryonic regional civil society. They were also vitally concerned with regional self-determination. The third group comprised international actors—states and international agencies—seeking to influence the way in which regional security and regional development would be defined in the postcolonial Pacific.

Underpinning some significant aspects of this international influence was the policy-related knowledge created by academics and international agencies around the notion of ‘smallness’ as a special category in international relations and development, requiring regionalism as a key policy solution. From 1976, a Cold War security framework in which the economic realm was in service of security objectives joined this global framing of the Pacific island region in economic terms.

## Changing global context

The context in which regional governance developed in the 1970s and 1980s was influenced very significantly by the decolonisation policies of the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia. The changed attitudes underpinning these policies made the ‘new South Pacific’ possible. In nearly all cases, the pace of decolonisation was faster than that desired by the people of the territory concerned. In only three cases—Nauru, Western Samoa and Vanuatu—was there a concerted demand for independence. For Britain, the pressure to move Fiji to independence by 1970, despite the reluctance of the Fijian population (concerned about Indian dominance in a new state), was driven by its general policy determination to withdraw from all its colonies that were big enough to stand on their own feet. It was only with a changing international attitude to the possibility of decolonising very small territories that Britain then moved in the 1970s to decolonise Gilbert and Ellice Islands into two states, Tuvalu and Kiribati, and Solomon Islands and Vanuatu (which it ruled, with France, as a condominium). The new Australian Labor Government promoted the decolonisation of Papua New Guinea at a similar pace between 1972 and 1975, and New Zealand moved Niue to associated statehood in 1974. Tonga was a special case. As a British protectorate, it chose to reenter ‘the comity of nations’ in 1970.<sup>3</sup>

---

3 Campbell, *Worlds Apart*, Ch. 17; Howe et al., *Tides of History*, Part 2.

The decolonisation of the British, Australian and New Zealand territories, leaving only the American and French Pacific territories as colonial dependencies, impacted significantly on the nature of the postcolonial regional governance that emerged in the 1970s. It was Suva-centred and English-speaking. Its participating states were members of the Commonwealth. They adopted variations of the Westminster model (except Kiribati) and six of them recognised the Queen of England as head of state.

While the international influences on the emergence of the new regionalism were thus profound, the resulting indigenous regional developments in turn invited new international interest and involvement. The emergence of a significant number of independent Pacific states scattered over a large area of ocean inevitably stimulated interest from outside powers with no former colonial links to the area. New overtures—first evident in the mid 1970s—came mainly from the Soviet Union, China and Japan, and were expressed in the establishment of diplomatic ties, trade links, visits and offers of economic assistance. The Soviet Union and Japan appeared to be motivated primarily by the desire to facilitate the operation of their large fishing fleets in the area. This has to be considered in the context of the move by the newly independent Pacific states to declare 200-mile economic zones under the new Law of the Sea promulgated in 1976. Under such arrangements, most of the independent island states, being archipelagic countries, have sovereignty over a very large area of ocean—so large, in fact, that, taken collectively, they claim control of most of the South Pacific Ocean. The declaration of these zones, the political change within these states and the increasing attractiveness of the South Pacific as a fishing ground compelled distant water fishing nations (DWFNs), such as Japan and the Soviet Union, to develop closer relations with the new island states.

The Soviet Union was particularly concerned to establish a base for its fishing fleet in the region, and in this regard approached Tonga in 1976 with an offer of aid to assist with airport extensions in exchange for port facilities.<sup>4</sup> In the same year, the Soviet Union established diplomatic links with Fiji and Western Samoa. Japan became involved in joint fishing

---

4 Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, 'The South Pacific', Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence Inquiry into the Need for an Increased Australian Commitment to the South Pacific', Canberra: AGPS, March 1977, p. 21. For a Soviet perspective, see Alexander Malyashkin (a journalist of the Novosti Press Agency), 'USSR, the Pacific', *Pacific Islands Monthly*, January 1978: 15–16.

ventures with some Pacific states and gave assistance to their fishing industries through the provision of ships and training.<sup>5</sup> The factors underlying Chinese involvement in Oceania from the mid 1970s are less clear, although the decision to establish diplomatic missions in Fiji and Western Samoa in 1976—the same year as the Soviet initiatives—lends support to the view that China was motivated primarily by the desire to compete ideologically with the Soviet Union. This is also indicated by the public warnings that the Chinese Government made concerning Russian activities in the area.<sup>6</sup> There was also the equally compelling motive of countering Taiwan's growing influence in the region. Three of the Pacific island states—Nauru, Tonga and Tuvalu—recognised Taiwan in the 1970s and Taiwanese trawlers were already active in South Pacific waters.

The metropolitan powers with established or former colonial interests in the area had to readjust their relations with this 'new' Pacific. For all except the United Kingdom (which retained only a token interest after withdrawing from its last major Pacific colony in 1980), strategic interest heightened as the region became more involved in Cold War competition. For the United States and France, their continued involvement in the region was more direct as they had no intention of withdrawing from their Pacific territories. The wide, isolated expanse of French Polynesia provided an ideal setting for nuclear testing at Fangataufa and Moruroa atolls after France was excluded from its Algerian testing site in 1962.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the Rothschild mining operation in New Caledonia was at this time the world's second largest producer of nickel. For the Americans, the strategically placed Micronesian territories and Guam continued to provide sites for key military, nuclear and communications bases that were seen as crucial for prosecution of the Cold War.

Although they had withdrawn from their own colonies, Australia and New Zealand increased their involvement in the region dramatically as a response to the new, more fluid situation in the decolonised context of the mid 1970s. They were particularly motivated by the Soviet offers of aid to some Pacific countries in 1976. They returned to the longstanding Australasian assertion of a natural right to lead this region. Australia, in

---

5 Japan's economic involvement at this time is explored in a series of articles: 'Japan: Her Role in the South Seas', *Pacific Islands Monthly*, June 1976: 33–47, and 'Japan and the Pacific', *Pacific Islands Monthly*, September 1978: 37–68. See also Yoshio Okawara, 'Japan's Plea: Give Us Access to Your Waters', *Pacific Islands Monthly*, April 1978: 10–11.

6 'Russian Threat in Pacific Claimed', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 March 1977.

7 Denoon et al., *The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders*, Ch. 10.

particular, saw the Pacific island area as constituting a regional strategic entity with itself as the manager on behalf of the West. There were ongoing attempts by Australia, New Zealand and the United States—as an explicit Australia New Zealand United States (ANZUS) Treaty strategy—to keep the newly independent states under Western influence in the Cold War struggle and to see regional governance as central to this enterprise. These developments are explored in detail in Chapter 9.

In the 1980s, the political stakes became much higher, at least as seen from the position of the metropolitan countries. Regional politics began to attract, for the first time since World War II, the serious attention of the world's largest powers.<sup>8</sup> They began to view the outcomes of SPF deliberations as having significant implications for their grand strategies—France on nuclear testing and its continuing colonial presence in the region, the United States on security issues and Law of the Sea questions and Japan on nuclear waste dumping and driftnet fishing. For such international players, the SPF came to be seen increasingly as the political site where the governing norms and principles of a regional order, as a prevailing pattern of state practice, were being determined. It became the focus of efforts to influence the content to be given to such concepts as regional security and regional development. In 1989, Canada, France, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States accepted an invitation to participate in a regular post-SPF dialogue. China and Taiwan jealously eyed the one position at the table available to China, seeing it as an important symbol of regional acceptance. In the event, a formula was found where both could be involved in dialogue with SPF members. International agencies also played a much greater role in the regional polity in the 1980s. The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the UNDP and the UN Environment Programme all became major influences on regional politics, as we will see in Chapters 10 and 11. Cold War thinking, decolonisation and self-determination ideas, and developmental ideas around the special needs of the small state, provided the large global policy frameworks influencing international involvement in the Pacific in these opening decades of the postcolonial era. Each emphasised regional governance as the focus of their Pacific strategy.

---

8 Fry, 'Regionalism and International Politics of the South Pacific'.

## The development of a regional ‘society of states’

Against this global backdrop, the leaders of the independent Pacific countries developed what I referred to, in Chapter 2, as a regional ‘society of states’. Beginning in 1971, with seven members, it grew to 13 member states by 1980 and to 16 by the mid 1980s. Although there were other important participants in the contest over regional governance, their joint efforts to set up and develop regional organisations and to promote joint diplomacy were the ‘main game’ of regional politics. I argue that the Pacific regional system that developed in the 1970s and 1980s meets the criteria put forward by Hedley Bull (and adapted to the regional level by Mohammed Ayoob) for the existence of a society of states. Furthermore, I argue that this demonstrates the political significance of this form of regional governance without a high degree of regional integration. These criteria include common interests and practical association, institutional expressions and common values.

### Common interests and practical association

The five Pacific island countries which, along with Australia and New Zealand, constituted the membership of the SPF at the time of its first meeting in 1971, were all committed to regional cooperation as a principal, if not *the* principal, avenue for their postcolonial diplomacy. The leaders of these states had worked closely together in establishing indigenous-controlled forms of regional governance in the 1960s. In the post-independence context of the 1970s, and with a new regional forum in existence, this commitment to regional affairs took a more practical turn. Tonga, Samoa and Nauru decided not to join the United Nations and other international agencies but to instead focus their limited diplomatic resources on participation in regional forums. The Cook Islands, as an associated state (with New Zealand), had even more limited diplomatic possibilities. Under the terms of its association status, it could not become a member of the United Nations. Membership of regional organisations was by necessity the only avenue available; it was also one that granted Cook Islands a limited international legal personality. In the regional context, Cook Islands (and later, Niue and the Micronesian associated states) was recognised as equal to the fully independent countries.

Fiji's case was very different. It had the resources to look further afield and participate in international organisations. Fiji joined the United Nations but emphasised that it saw its role as a representative of the Pacific island region. In 1970, in his first statement to the UN General Assembly after Fiji's entry to that organisation, prime minister Ratu Mara, in speaking of the need for a 'Pacific voice' in the General Assembly, said:

[A]s far as we are authorised by our friends and neighbours, and we do not arrogate to ourselves any role of leadership, we would hope to act as representative and interpreter of that voice.<sup>9</sup>

The Fijian Government claimed that it regarded involvement in world forums as of secondary importance to participation in regional affairs. In his address to the twenty-sixth session of the UN General Assembly in 1971, Fiji's permanent representative S.K. Sikivou said:

[As] important as our membership of some of these [international] organisations may be, our sense of geographical identity has us [sic] to place greater emphasis on the development of our relations with our immediate island neighbours.<sup>10</sup>

In a similar vein, in his report to parliament on the first three years of foreign affairs as an independent Fiji, prime minister Ratu Mara made it clear that

in its foreign policy, Government has accorded the highest priority to the development of the closest possible relationships with its South Pacific neighbours and to the extension of practical co-operation to all matters of common interest.<sup>11</sup>

Beyond their general ambition of creating a form of regional governance in which they could speak about any matter of concern to them, the Pacific leaders clearly had two specific interests in promoting cooperation through the SPF. One was to jointly approach the economic development of their newly independent states; the other was to maximise the diplomatic influence of their small countries on political issues such

9 Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, 'Statement to the Twenty-Fifth Regular Session of the UN General Assembly: 1970', in Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, *Report on Foreign Affairs for the Period 10th October 1970 – 31st December 1973*, Parliamentary Paper No. 19, Suva: Parliament of Fiji, 1974, Appendix iii(a), p. 22.

10 S.K. Sikivou, 'Statement to the Twenty-Sixth Session of the UN General Assembly: 1971', in Mara, *Report on Foreign Affairs for the Period 10th October 1970–31st December 1973*, Appendix 3, p. 26.

11 Mara, 'Statement to the Twenty-Fifth Regular Session', p. 1.

as nuclear testing. It was less clear what notions were held about the form cooperation should take and how far state sovereignty should be subsumed in supranationalist arrangements. Would a customs union, free-trade area or other form of economic community be attempted? Would political union be held out as an ultimate objective, as in the African and European cases?

The Wellington SPF meeting went some way in clarifying these questions. There was no talk of moving towards political unification in the longer term. Collective diplomacy, however, was clearly considered a useful strategy. As part of their first communiqué, the leaders issued an urgent appeal to France to make the current nuclear test series at Moruroa Atoll its last—something they had long wished to do in the SPC, where such a political move was banned. Further, the leaders indicated that they were open to exploring various forms of regional economic integration, including economic union, a regional bulk-purchasing scheme, joint tourism promotion, a regional disaster fund and a regional shipping line.<sup>12</sup>

The SPF gradually expanded its membership as other island states became eligible through the second and third waves of decolonisation in the 1970s and 1980s. By 1980, the founding members had been joined by Niue, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Kiribati and Vanuatu; and by the end of the 1980s, with the addition of the Federated States of Micronesia and Marshall Islands from the north Pacific, there were 13 island members (Palau was still to join in the 1990s). As well as introducing additional Polynesian countries (Niue and Tuvalu), the decolonisation of the 1970s and 1980s also introduced Melanesian participants (Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) from the Western Pacific and three more Micronesian countries (Kiribati, Federated States of Micronesia and Marshall Islands) to join Nauru. Although some of these new states were geographically and historically removed from the old Commonwealth club of the central Pacific, their commitment to regionalism was as strong as that of the founding member states. Papua New Guinea, for example, which had other interests to pursue in South-East Asia and could afford other diplomatic channels, opted to make participation in South Pacific cooperation a priority concern. In his 1974 report on foreign affairs to the Papua New Guinea House of Assembly, the Minister for Defence, Foreign Affairs and Trade, Albert Maori Kiki, said:

---

12 SPF Secretariat, *Final Communiqué: South Pacific Forum, Wellington, 5–7 August 1971*, Suva: SPF Secretariat, 1971.

[W]e feel ... that Papua New Guinea's interests are best served in international affairs by being clearly a member of the community of the South Pacific Island Nations loyal to this community's causes and common initiatives.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the differences in the size and structure of their economies, the island state members all emphasised the importance of shared economic and developmental needs as a primary motivation for working together in these areas. At their regional gatherings in the 1970s, the leaders of the new Pacific states often drew attention to their similar situations with regard to economic development. For example, Tamarii Pierre, a Cook Islands delegate to the fourteenth South Pacific Conference in 1974, said:

As stated by other speakers before me, whether it be in economic, political, social or educational fields, our developmental problems and aspirations are identical to many, if not all of the islands states within the Pacific.<sup>14</sup>

At the same meeting, Iulai Toma from Western Samoa commented that 'the problems of Western Samoa are very, very similar to those faced by all of us here'.<sup>15</sup> Even Papua New Guinea—a country with a markedly different economic structure and potential to its Pacific neighbours—recognised a shared situation. The new prime minister of Papua New Guinea, Michael Somare, when speaking of his country's relations with the South Pacific, said: '[W]e share the same development problems and aspirations for the future.'<sup>16</sup> For Western Samoa's prime minister, Tupuola Efi, speaking in 1978, the 'attractions for regional action are inviting if not irresistible' given the fact 'the human, natural and economic resources are just not present to enable many small island states to go it alone'.<sup>17</sup>

13 Albert Maori Kiki, *Papua New Guinea: An Assessment Report on Foreign Policy by the Minister for Defence, Foreign Relations, and Trade to the House of Assembly, 6 December 1974* [Reprinted as 'Papua New Guinea: An Assessment Report on Foreign Policy', *Australian Foreign Affairs Record*, June 1975: 320–5].

14 Tamarii Pierre, *Address on Special Needs and Problems*, Fourteenth South Pacific Conference Working Papers, Rarotonga: SPC Secretariat, 27 September 1974.

15 Iulai Toma, *Address on Special Needs and Problems*, Fourteenth South Pacific Conference Working Papers, Rarotonga: SPC Secretariat, 27 September 1974.

16 PNG National Broadcasting Commission [hereinafter NBC], 'Papua New Guinea and the Pacific', *Politics in Paradise Radio Series*, Port Moresby: NBC, February 1975, p. 3.

17 Tupuola Efi, 'Statement at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Regional Meeting in Sydney, 14 February 1978', Press release, 16 February 1978, Sydney, p. 2.

The Pacific states' practical commitment to regionalism as a preferred way of approaching their developmental needs should also be seen in the context of the international environment in which the Pacific countries sought development assistance. That environment was one in which donor countries and international agencies regarded a regional approach to the development of the Pacific countries as desirable. In such circumstances, it was in the interests of the Pacific leaders to emphasise their commitment to regional approaches to attract financial support that would otherwise be lost to the region.

### Institutional expressions

The focal point of this regional commitment by Pacific leaders was the SPF, later renamed the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) to reflect the fact that its membership included the island countries of the North Pacific. The SPC—in which these states could now operate as full members alongside France, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand—continued to operate alongside the SPF network. In addition, a number of other intergovernmental agencies were created: the Honiara-based South Pacific Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) in 1979, the Honolulu-based Pacific Islands Development Program in 1980, the Suva-based South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission in 1984, the Apia-based South Pacific Regional Environment Program in 1990 and, in 1988, a coordinating body, the South Pacific Organisations Coordinating Committee, which sought to rationalise the activities of all these institutions. Most of the Pacific island countries were also members of the governing boards of other significant regional institutions and corporations including the USP, Air Pacific and the Pacific Forum Line. The forum network of institutions nevertheless became the main focus for the 'society of states'. It was through this network that the principal integrative schemes were attempted, joint political stances were worked out and a number of regional legal regimes were negotiated on arms control, environmental protection, resource management and international trade. With its entry qualifications of full political sovereignty and regional residence, the SPF was the only regional organisation representing the collective opinion of the independent states of the region.

In 1972, the SPF established the SPEC as its research arm.<sup>18</sup> Australia and New Zealand each contributed one-third of the budget, with the remainder contributed jointly by the island country members. As a subject became of interest to the SPF and required further investigation, it was referred to the SPEC. In its first years of operation, the SPEC's most important tasks were coordinating the negotiation of the terms of association of Western Samoa, Fiji and Tonga with the EEC, promoting regional trade and examining the feasibility of a regional shipping line. It subsequently began to oversee research and programs concerned with such matters as telecommunications and fisheries development.<sup>19</sup>

The region therefore had two organisational networks—one centred on the SPC and the other on the SPF. As will have become evident, there are important distinctions to be made between them. The SPC covered a wider region through its inclusion of dependent territories; it also had greater metropolitan involvement through the participation of France, the United States and the United Kingdom, in addition to Australia and New Zealand. The SPF, on the other hand, restricted its membership to the independent Pacific countries, plus Australia and New Zealand. Another important distinction was that the SPC retained its 'no politics' rule, whereas any subject could be raised in the SPF. Thus, it was only in the SPF that joint positions could be adopted regarding important political issues affecting the region, such as decolonisation and nuclear testing, and that joint approaches could be made to countries and organisations outside the region.

By the end of the 1980s, there were more than 300 full-time staff in the principal regional organisations. The commitment of bureaucratic resources required of each island state was also substantial. Key officials in economic and foreign policy areas were spending a great deal of time on regional governance—in meetings for the FFA, the Pacific Islands Development Program, the Secretariat of the South Pacific Regional

18 *Agreement Establishing the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Cooperation*, Suva, 1973.

19 Author's interviews with SPEC staff, Suva, October–November 1975; South Pacific Bureau for Economic Co-operation [hereinafter SPEC], *Director's Annual Report 1973/74*, (74)17, Suva: SPEC, 1974; SPEC, *Director's Annual Report 1974/75*, Suva: SPEC, 1975; SPEC, *Director's Annual Report 1975/76*, Suva: SPEC, 1976; SPEC, *Director's Annual Report 1976/77*, (77)18, Suva: SPEC, 1977; SPEC, *Director's Annual Report 1977/78*, (78)17, Suva: SPEC, 1978; SPEC, *Director's Annual Report, 1979/80*, (80)8, Suva: SPEC, 1980.

Environment Program, the USP, the Pacific Forum Line, the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission, the Regional Security Committee, the Regional Trade Committee and the Committee on Small Island States.

The growing complexity and significance of regional governance, by the late 1980s, was also reflected in the establishment of an array of regional legal regimes, including the South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone Treaty (Rarotonga, 1985), the Convention for the Protection of the Natural Resources and Environment of the South Pacific Region (Nouméa, 1986) and the Convention for the Prohibition of Fishing with Long Driftnets in the South Pacific (Wellington, 1989).

Political differences were moderated by a shared experience of British political and social institutions—whether under Australian, New Zealand or British colonial rule—to the point where the SPF in its first decade was dubbed the ‘Commonwealth club’. There were no participants from the French or American Pacific at this stage because of the lack of decolonisation by those powers. These new states also embraced similar developmental models despite some rhetorical differences. And there was none of the border or irredentist disputes common to new states in Africa and Asia. The early participants were therefore able to conduct their negotiations without the complications of serious conflict between countries in the region or spillover tensions from internal instability, at least until the Fiji coup of 1987 and the outbreak of the Bougainville war of 1989.

The diplomatic rituals of the SPF and of the SPC (and South Pacific Conference) in the 1970s supported the principle of respect for the equality of national sovereignties in participation in regional meetings. Much of the ritual was about establishing equality of countries as diverse in size and power as Australia and Niue. This meant that challenges or perceived challenges to this principle by attempts to establish hierarchy as had existed in the old colonial structures were resisted. Fiji’s attempt, as seen by some other Pacific states, to put itself at the centre of regionalism was one such provocation; the other was Australia and New Zealand attempting, from 1976, to create a two-tier hierarchical society of states around regional security, with different rights and responsibilities for the leadership tier. We return to each of these tensions in later chapters.

## Regional self-determination and regional identity

This commitment to regionalism on the part of all island states was based not only on shared practical purposes of small new countries entering development, nation-building and global relationships. There were also shared values and, in at least certain political contexts, a regional identity. This places the Pacific closer to Ayoob's concept of a regional *community* of states. This may seem counterintuitive in a region that is so culturally and linguistically diverse, with an overlay of different colonial cultural influences. The shared values arose out of the context of colonialism and decolonisation and the shared commitment to regional self-determination. In the postcolonial era of the 1970s and 1980s, Pacific leaders saw legitimate regional governance as resting on the principle of regional self-determination. There was a strong commitment to the idea that regional decision-making should be in the hands of Pacific islanders and that the right of self-determination should extend to all 'Pacific peoples'. They opposed colonialism and wished to control the 'neocolonial' economic engagements, and to reclaim Pacific values and practices.

In the 1970s, in particular, this was captured in the promotion of the phrase the 'Pacific way', which came to encompass a set of ideas about Pacific regional identity based on shared notions of regional self-determination. Ratu Mara was the first to use the phrase, at the UN General Assembly in 1970, and he was also the main person to give content to the ideology associated with it.<sup>20</sup> It gained widespread currency among Pacific leaders in the 1970s. The ideology embraced several key propositions: that regional decision-making structures should be controlled by Pacific states representing Pacific peoples and societies; that remaining colonial intrusion in the region should be opposed; that neocolonial exploitation should be controlled; that Pacific cultural values should be asserted or at least defended in the face of Western cultural values; and that a Pacific cultural affinity had always existed and had been 'interrupted by colonial expansion and rivalry'. In his message to the SPC on its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1972, Ratu Mara asserted:

[T]he Commission also formed a focus to bring together again what might be called 'long-lost brothers' and to remind us of ancient historical links which had become weakened by incursions in to the region.<sup>21</sup>

20 Crocombe, *The Pacific Way*.

21 Mara, 'Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Messages', p. 15.

In the following year, Fiji's representative to the United Nations, S.K. Sikivou, reiterated the theme, saying the growth of a Pacific consciousness 'is not so much a birth as a rebirth or rediscovery of old links and ties temporarily broken by the division of the area into metropolitan spheres of influence'.<sup>22</sup>

Initially, the 'Pacific way' ideology was associated with the small group of leaders who had worked together in the 1960s and early 1970s in pressing for self-determination in regional governance structures. Although it had grown out of the experience of a Fiji-led group of central Pacific territories, which could largely be categorised as Polynesian, Mara was speaking on behalf of all Pacific societies when he promoted the concept. The leaders of new members of the SPF readily adopted the sentiments of the 'Pacific way' concept. Papua New Guinea's endorsement, given its position on the western periphery of the region and as the leading Melanesian state, was particularly telling. At the completion of Ratu Mara's visit to Papua New Guinea in May 1974, Somare and Mara issued a joint communiqué, which among other things, said:

[B]oth leaders are aware of the destructive effects on traditions, customs and culture caused by rapid economic exploration [sic] of the Pacific peoples' human and natural resources. The leaders saw the solution as one of complete control over one's human and natural resources.<sup>23</sup>

Somare took up this theme in his own right. He asserted that 'the Pacific will be exposed to outside influence. The Forum and its Bureau of Economic Co-operation hold the hopes of the Pacific people to control these influences'.<sup>24</sup> In 1976, at Papua New Guinea's independence celebrations, Somare again voiced this concern. He claimed:

Unless the countries now set out to foster a Pacific consciousness, one of the consequences would be the intrusion of other countries who would be prepared to get what they could from the Pacific, but without having the interests of the Pacific at heart.<sup>25</sup>

22 Sikivou, 'Statement to the Twenty-Eighth Regular Session', p. 32.

23 Mara and Somare, 'Joint Communiqué', p. 2.

24 Michael Somare, 'The Emerging Role of Papua New Guinea in World Affairs', Twenty-Fifth Milne Lecture, Melbourne, 14 June 1974, p. 13.

25 "'Let's get together' says Somare", *Pacific Islands Monthly*, November 1976: 25.

Alongside this ‘Pacific way’ theme of asserting Pacific control on behalf of Pacific peoples against global economic and political forces seeking to exploit the region, Somare also embraced the theme of cultural brotherhood and ancient links interrupted by colonial partition of the Pacific. Speaking just before independence in 1975, he said:

Our principal contacts with the outside world have always been with our brothers in the South Pacific region. Culturally, Papua New Guinea and the other South Pacific islands have always been linked ... Our basis for building this relationship will be our similar background historically, and our similarities in culture and custom.<sup>26</sup>

Significantly, all leaders of the independent Pacific states openly endorsed a notion of the Pacific region that equated not just to the territory of SPF member states. Rather, the leaders recognised that the territories of the SPF island states formed only part of the region of their imagination. The region they acknowledged was actually the SPC area, with its much wider boundaries. They agreed to make SPF membership open to any Pacific island country in the broader region once it had ‘attained nationhood’. In the meantime, they arrogated to themselves the right to speak on behalf of these colonised territories.

This was particularly evident in relation to the two great causes of joint diplomacy of the Pacific states in the 1970s and 1980s examined in Chapter 8: environmental protection (nuclear testing, dumping of radioactive waste and incineration of chemical weapons) and anticolonialism. Although the proposed site for the dumping of Japanese nuclear waste was technically outside even the broader SPC region (in the Marianas Trench), it was still seen as part of the region for the purposes of this regional campaign. Thus, the Pacific states imagined a region that was beyond their legal jurisdiction. They put a very significant diplomatic effort into pursuing objectives that could not be explained by traditional *realpolitik* or national interest promotion, but rather had everything to do with shared values around *regional* self-determination.

The ‘Pacific way’ ideology also included notions about the diplomatic culture that should prevail in regional decision-making. These can be distilled to three maxims: decisions should be arrived at through ‘consensus’ rather than voting, the process should be conducted among those heads

---

26 Michael Somare, interviewed in NBC, ‘Papua New Guinea and the Pacific’.

of government who can make decisions for their countries and they should be conducted in an ambience of informality and with a minimum of background bureaucracy and organisation. Significantly, the SPF's establishment was not formalised by international agreement.

The shared values of regional self-determination associated with the experience of colonisation and decolonisation were interwoven with shared Christian values. Although there were large Hindu and Muslim communities in Fiji, all Pacific countries identified as Christian countries. An indigenised Christianity had permeated all traditional societies of the region to the point where Christianity was regarded as part of indigenous culture. While the contest between Christian sects had often been hard-fought and even violent, particularly between Catholicism and Protestantism, Christianity nevertheless provided an important basis for shared values that marked off the Pacific from East Asia.

The perception on the part of the leaders of the postcolonial Pacific states that they shared practical interests and common values was sufficient to invigorate a very active diplomatic effort to establish, develop and support an increasingly complex set of regional institutions, procedural norms and regional law. The acknowledgement that this constituted a regional society of states with real political significance that went well beyond the sum of its parts was demonstrated by the efforts of others to become members of the society and by the recognition accorded to it by the world's largest powers, which, by the end of the 1980s, were queuing up to engage with the regional agenda pursued through the SPF, as well as seeking to influence individual forum members on regional policy.

## The emergence of regional civil society

The regional self-determination principle was also at the centre of the attitudes and activities of the various groups and movements that made up what we might term 'regional civil society'. Emerging in the mid 1970s alongside the new regional society of states, they became active participants in regional debates over security, development and anticolonialism. These included the Protestant and Catholic churches, women's groups, anticolonial and antinuclear groups, writers and scholars. Although excluded from formal decision-making within the main interstate regional organisations, they nevertheless became important players in the postcolonial regional polity. They directly influenced the deliberations of

these state-based organisations on key regional issues. Just as importantly, they influenced regional governance through their assertion of alternative conceptions of what the regional community should stand for as a set of ideas, who should belong to it and who should have the right to speak. They also influenced the way key ideas about Pacific security and Pacific development should be conceptualised. It was also the case that many of the key regional civil society thinkers of the early 1970s became key players in state-level politics by the end of the decade, including in a prime ministerial role, and thus had a more direct influence on policy.

In each of these new movements, an emergent regional identity was tied to the idea of regional self-determination. Implicit in their concerns for the self-determination of all 'Pacific peoples' was a notion of regional community that was deeper than that embraced in the regional 'society of states'. This accorded with important aspects of an 'imagined community' in the Andersonian sense because it involved deep commitments to peoples and places that individual members had not met or seen.<sup>27</sup> The commitment was to a regional sovereignty rather than state sovereignty per se. The use of such terms as 'Pacific peoples' and 'we Pacific islanders' reflected the new solidarist positions in this concept of regionalism. It also tended to invoke a slightly broader region geographically and politically than that of the society of states, to include indigenous Pacific peoples in New Zealand, Hawai'i and West Papua. The concerns of regional civil society groups nevertheless overlapped with the commitments and underlying principles of state-led regionalism, and in some cases, there was no distinction between state leaders' and civil society's positions on these issues, particularly in the 1970s.

The first most important institutional development providing a base for the emergence of regional civil society was the creation of the regional university with its main campus in Suva. The idea of setting up a university to serve the needs of the English-speaking countries of the South Pacific had its origins in the recommendations of the Higher Education Mission to the South Pacific appointed in 1965 by the British and New Zealand governments.<sup>28</sup> Although the USP was officially established in 1967 under a Fiji Government Ordinance while Fiji was still a British colony,

---

27 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

28 Colin M. Aikman, 'Establishment: 1968-74', in Ron Crocombe and Malama Meleisea, eds, *Pacific Universities: Achievements, Problems, Prospects*, Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1988, pp. 35-52.

it was formally inaugurated under royal charter after Fiji's independence in 1970 to recognise the USP's regional, and Commonwealth, character. Under the royal charter, the Governing Council of the USP comprised representatives of 11 Pacific states and territories. As decolonisation proceeded, the Governing Council came to mirror the SPF in its island country membership, except for Papua New Guinea. From the start, this was seen as a regional enterprise. The university's students were drawn from all 11 countries, and they were catered for at the Laucala Bay campus in Suva, as well as at a growing number of USP centres in the member countries, serviced, from the mid 1970s, by a sophisticated distance learning capacity through the Pan Pacific Education and Communication Experiments by Satellite.<sup>29</sup> Its regional nature was emphasised symbolically by the appointment of the King of Tonga as the first chancellor, and of Fiame Mata'afa Faumuina Mulinu'u II, the prime minister of Western Samoa, as pro-chancellor. In 1973, Nauruan president DeRoburt followed the King as chancellor.

The USP's second vice-chancellor, James Maraj, came to the position in 1975 with a very clear regionalist vision:

The University has a right and duty to cause regionalism to be seen as a way of life and for these islands—an inescapable way—for those who seek a dignified existence as a people.<sup>30</sup>

He proposed that in planning for the future, the university should emphasise the projection of its regional nature and the 'promotion of a distinctive Pacific flavour'.<sup>31</sup> This emphasis was reflected in such developments as the instituting of Pacific Week, the organising of regional conferences, the provision of extension services throughout the region, the establishment of more university centres in member countries, the creation of the Institute of Pacific Studies with an active publishing program by indigenous scholars, the foundation of USP-based Pacific journals and the teaching of compulsory undergraduate courses on Pacific studies.<sup>32</sup>

29 See Pan Pacific Education and Communication Experiments by Satellite, *Peacesat Project: Early Experience—The Design and Early Years of the First Educational Communication Satellite Experiment*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, October 1975.

30 James A. Maraj, 'Statement to the University of the South Pacific', Suva, 23 September 1975, p. 3.

31 *ibid.*, p. 7.

32 Author's interview with Dr James Maraj, Suva, 28 November 1975; also see Frank Brosnahan, 'Outreach: 1975–83', in Crocombe and Meleisea, *Pacific Universities*, pp. 55–6.

While the USP is to be seen, therefore, as part of the emerging regional society of states and as an expression of the commitment of its member states to regional cooperation, it was also a very important stimulus to the establishment of regional civil society. From the early 1970s, the USP became the key site for the coming together of intellectuals from all of the English-speaking Pacific, outside Papua New Guinea.<sup>33</sup> In a time of rapid political change in the early to mid 1970s, it was natural that students and staff at the regional university would be vitally involved in intellectual and social movements concerned with countering exploitation of Pacific societies, the questioning of imposed knowledge systems and concepts and the assertion and reclaiming of Pacific ideas about education, development and social organisation. At this time, the 'Pacific way' ideology was one that also appealed to intellectuals working within the USP, in regional civil society groups and even to creative writers. For Epeli Hau'ofa—later a critic of some aspects of the 'Pacific way' ideology—it held substantial attractions at this time:

When I first came [to the USP] in 1975 the campus was abuzz with creativity and wide-ranging discussions generated by the emergence of the Pacific Way. Whatever one may say about it the Pacific Way was a large and an encompassing idea that became the ideology of its time, perfectly suited to the immediate postcolonial euphoria and expectations of the 1970s.<sup>34</sup>

The Pacific Way conference organised under the auspices of the newly formed South Pacific Social Sciences Association at the USP in 1973, bringing together intellectuals from across the region, was a major expression of this new commitment. The conference brought together leading intellectuals from the church, journalism, academe, the civil service and NGOs from across the Pacific. Illustrating the blurring between civil society and the state that is a feature of Pacific regionalism, six of the participants were later to become prime minister or president of their country, and two were later to become secretaries-general of the SPC. In his summing up, Ron Crocombe asserted that the conference 'did identify considerable areas of consensus among leading Pacific thinkers

---

33 Aikman, 'Establishment'.

34 Epeli Hau'ofa, 'A Beginning', in Eric Waddell, Vijay Naidu, and Epeli Hau'ofa, eds, *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands*, Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1993, pp. 126–39, at p. 126.

and a widespread desire to evolve a “Pacific Way”.<sup>35</sup> In sentiments similar to those held by leaders of the independent states at this time, one of the organisers, Sione Tupouniua, a USP academic, concluded the conference with this observation:

Pacific Islanders are searching for a new way of life in which we fully accept the responsibility for creating the social, political, economic and cultural institutions to suit our own particular needs. Such responsibility involves the acceptance of ourselves for what we are, and not imitating others, whether colonial rulers or neo-colonial masters.<sup>36</sup>

A second major development in the institutionalisation of regional civil society was the establishment of the Pacific Conference of Churches in 1961, and its important offshoot, the Suva-based Pacific Theological College, in 1965. The Catholic Church created a parallel regional forum, the Episcopal Conference of the Pacific, in 1968, and a regional training college, the Suva-based Pacific Regional Seminary, in 1972.<sup>37</sup> Although an important part of the development of regional civil society, the Catholic Church-created institutions did not have the same political involvement in the key regional political issues of the day—nuclear issues, decolonisation and development. The Pacific Conference of Churches came to matter more in the context of influencing regional politics.

The Pacific Conference of Churches had its origins in a regional conference of Pacific Protestant churches held at Malua, Samoa, in 1961. Although organised by the London Missionary Society, it was a response to a need for regional organisation identified over the previous decade by island ministers—notably, Sione Havea of Tonga and Setareki Tuilovoni of Fiji.<sup>38</sup> The conference recommended the establishment of a regional interchurch organisation and the establishment of regional theological training. The Pacific Theological College was a direct result of this recommendation.

---

35 Ron Crocombe, ‘Seeking a Pacific Way’, in Sione Tupouniua, Ron Crocombe, and Claire Slatter, eds, *The Pacific Way: Social Issues in National Development*, Suva: South Pacific Social Sciences Association, 1975, pp. 1–6, at p. 6.

36 Sione Tupouniua, ‘Political Independence: An Opportunity to Create’, in Tupouniua et al., *The Pacific Way*, pp. 239–47, at p. 239.

37 Pacific Regional Seminary, *Pacific Regional Seminary 2002 Handbook*, Suva: Pacific Regional Seminary, 2002; and John Foliaki, ‘Pacific Regional Seminary’, in Emiliania Afeaki, Ron Crocombe, and John McClaren, eds, *Religious Cooperation in the Pacific Islands*, Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1983, pp. 84–8.

38 Lorini Tevi, ‘The Pacific Conference of Churches’, in Afeaki et al., *Religious Cooperation in the Pacific Islands*, pp. 148–56.

It went on to become another major influence on regional consciousness through the training of young ministers from the Anglican, Methodist, Congregational, Lutheran, Presbyterian and Reformed Evangelical churches, from across the region.<sup>39</sup> The other outcome of the Malua conference was the formation of the Pacific Conference of Churches. It held its first assembly in Lifou, New Caledonia, in 1966 and its second in Davuilevu in Fiji in 1971. It established a number of key regional offshoots: a regional publishing arm, Lotu Pasifika, in Suva, and the Pacific Churches Research Centre, in Port Vila, ‘to encourage Pacific people to study our own religion, history, culture and social organisation’.<sup>40</sup>

The Pacific Conference of Churches saw its remit as going well beyond the indigenisation and regionalisation of the Christian churches within a spirit of ecumenicalism. It also engaged in a publishing and diplomatic campaign in relation to key regional political issues: development, decolonisation and nuclear questions. It campaigned for integrated human development against other top-down economic planning models. It pressed for the decolonisation of remaining Pacific dependencies, particularly where the local society had made it clear they desired independence. It was also a very active champion of a nuclear-free Pacific—seen most prominently in its support for the establishment of the Nuclear-Free Pacific Conference and subsequent social movement, its declarations against the nuclear activities of France, the United States and Japan, and its influential publication *A Call to a New Exodus: An Anti-Nuclear Primer for Pacific People*.<sup>41</sup> The Pacific Conference of Churches’ position on nuclear issues was unequivocal:

As Christian people committed to stewardship, justice and peace-making, we oppose and condemn the use of the Pacific for the testing, storage, and transportation of nuclear weapons and weapons delivery systems; the disposal of radioactive wastes; and the passage of nuclear-powered submarines and ships.<sup>42</sup>

---

39 Stone ‘A. Havea and Bruce J. Deverell, ‘The Pacific Theological College’, in Afeaki et al., *Religious Cooperation in the Pacific Islands*, pp. 75–83.

40 *ibid.*, p. 150.

41 Suliana Siwatibau and B. David Williams, *A Call to a New Exodus: An Anti-Nuclear Primer for Pacific People*, Suva: Lotu Pasifika, 1982. Also see the Pacific Conference of Churches Secretariat, ‘The Pacific as an Arena of Increasing Competition, Conflict, and Struggle’, in William Coop, comp. and ed., *Pacific People Sing Out Strong*, New York: Friendship Press, 1982, pp. 12–16.

42 As cited in Siwatibau and Williams, *A Call to a New Exodus*, inside cover.

A third major institutional development creating the basis for the emergence of regional civil society began with the Nuclear-Free Pacific Conference, held in April 1975 in Suva. The conference was sponsored most prominently by Fijian-based ATOM (Against Testing on Moruroa), in conjunction with the Christian student movements in Australia, New Zealand and Fiji, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament New Zealand, the Campaign against Foreign Military Activities in New Zealand and the Congress for International Cooperation and Disarmament of Australia. Vijay Naidu, a conference participant and later academic commentator, argues that, from 1970 to 1976, ATOM ‘provided the vanguard of the protests against nuclear activities’. He points out that ATOM was

formed by concerned individuals from the Pacific Theological College (PTC), the University of the South Pacific (USP), the Student Christian Movement (SCM), and the YWCA [Young Women’s Christian Association], and was, from its inception, backed by the Fiji Council of Churches (and later the Pacific Council of Churches) and the University of the South Pacific Students Association (USPASA).<sup>43</sup>

The conference brought together the representatives of 86 organisations from 22 Pacific countries. Naidu contends that during the conference a large number of participants shifted their thinking about nuclear involvement in the Pacific, from seeing this as an environmental issue to seeing it as one that was first and foremost a political issue linked to colonialism and racism. This was reflected in the ‘Fiji Declaration’ that summed up the conclusions of the conference:

The Conference agreed that racism, colonialism and imperialism lie at the core of the issue of the activities of the nuclear powers in the Pacific. The Pacific peoples and their environment continue to be exploited because Pacific islanders are considered insignificant in numbers and inferior as peoples, the delegates stated.<sup>44</sup>

The conference set up the Suva-based Continuation Committee to draft a Pacific nuclear-free zone treaty and to organise the bringing together of the regionwide movement in its next conference, at which the issue would be further advanced. Reflecting the position of the

---

43 Vijay Naidu, ‘The Fiji Anti-Nuclear Movement: Problems and Prospects’, in Ranginui Walker and William Sutherland, eds, *The Pacific: Peace, Security and the Nuclear Issue*, Tokyo: United Nations University and Zed Books, 1988, pp. 185–95, at p. 185.

44 ‘Fiji Declaration’, cited in *ibid.*, p. 188.

majority of the conference participants in seeing the nuclear issue as primarily one of imperialism and colonialism, some ATOM members of this persuasion established, in 1976, the Suva-based Pacific Peoples' Action Front, which began to produce a newsletter, *Povai*, supporting independence and autonomist movements throughout the region. There was a close correspondence between the membership of the Continuation Committee, which was drafting the treaty, and the Pacific Peoples' Action Front.

The continuing division between those who saw the issue primarily as an antinuclear issue and those who saw it as an independence issue was reflected in the organisation of the second Nuclear-Free Pacific Conference, in Ponape (Pohnpei), in the Federated States of Micronesia, in 1978. The organisers—the Pacific Peoples' Action Front and the Pacific Conference of Churches—set up two conference streams: an antinuclear stream and an 'independence' stream. The organisers intended, however, that both streams would ultimately be grappling with the question: 'What kind of societies do we want for ourselves?'<sup>45</sup> The deliberations of both streams were concerned with developing strategies for influencing national and regional policy. At the 1980 Nuclear-Free Pacific Conference, the two streams were brought back together—in recognition that all participants were accepting that, in the Pacific context, the issue of nuclear involvement was entwined with the independence issue, and therefore gaining any traction on the nuclear issue would require prior action on decolonisation. In the words of the conference report, 'self-determination for Pacific peoples was the key to creating a demilitarized and nuclear-free Pacific'.<sup>46</sup> The 1980 conference also produced the People's Charter for a Nuclear-Free Pacific and established the Pacific Concerns Resources Center in Honolulu. From the time of the 1983 conference, the movement became known as the Nuclear-Free and Independent Pacific movement.

The last major piece in the jigsaw of the emerging regional civil society of the 1970s was the development of women's organising at the regional level. Although there had been earlier ad hoc connections between Pacific women, the Pacific Women's Conference, held in Suva in October 1975, was a key point of departure. Like the Nuclear-Free Pacific Conference, it drew its participants from a broader region including indigenous

45 Ronni Alexander, *Putting the Earth First: Alternatives to Nuclear Security in Pacific Island States*, Honolulu: Matsunaga Institute for Peace, University of Hawai'i, 1994, p. 144.

46 As cited in *ibid.*, p. 151.

participants from Hawai`i, New Zealand and Australia. While the conference resolutions included issues that focused on women's roles, they also notably expressed concerns about broader issues of regional self-determination. The conference called on the independent Pacific governments to 'support territories under colonialism wanting to achieve self-government status, namely the independence movements of New Caledonia, New Hebrides, Micronesia and the autonomist parties of French Polynesia'.<sup>47</sup> It also resolved

that the Conference support a denuclearised Pacific and in particular the proposals of the People's Treaty for a Nuclear Free Pacific formulated by the Conference for a Nuclear Free Pacific, April 1–6, 1975.<sup>48</sup>

The Pacific Women's Association, which was established as a result of the 1975 conference, set up a regional resource centre at the YWCA in Suva. Although the association did not have strong support among women's national organisations at the end of the 1970s, women's organising at the regional level strengthened in the 1980s. With changing support from international agencies, women and development became a prominent topic of regional governance and women began to have more political agency within regional organisations.

Despite their Fiji-centrism, these emerging regional civil society organisations were genuinely regional in membership, leadership, staffing and geographical interests. Importantly, they included other countries' nationals in the key positions in Suva. They were also genuinely concerned with regional issues and their identity included all those islanders within the SPC region and beyond—for example, in New Zealand, Hawai`i and West Papua. Over the next several decades, they engaged with all of the key areas of regional debate: development, security, ecology, globalisation, decolonisation and nuclear issues.

---

47 'Resolutions of the Pacific Women's Conference, Oct. 27 – Nov. 2, 1975', in Vanessa Griffen, ed., *Women Speak Out! A Report on the Pacific Women's Conference*, Suva: Pacific Women's Conference, 2005, p. 140, Resolution 6.

48 *ibid.*, p. 140, Resolution 5.

## Conclusion

This chapter has provided a broad description of the nature of regional governance that emerged and developed during the first two decades of the post-independence era. It made the argument that the emergent regional system could be seen as a regional ‘society of states’ and that this implies considerably more political significance for Pacific regional governance than is often acknowledged. I also outlined the broader emergence and development of a regional civil society. The commitment to regional community evidenced by this development could even support the view that the Pacific regional political community system is more solidarist, and therefore more politically significant, than the ‘society of states’ descriptor implies.

In Chapters 8, 9 and 10, we examine three important political contests that took place within this regional polity in the first two decades of the postcolonial era. The first concerns regional self-determination—a normative frame promoted by Pacific island leaders and regional civil society. The second is regional security—a contest prompted by the efforts of Western powers to impose a Cold War frame on the region. The third concerns what form development should take in the postcolonial societies of the Pacific—a contest stimulated by the power of global discourses on development to frame Pacific ‘development’. As we shall see, the outcomes in the substantive contests over development and security explored in Chapters 9 and 10 are directly related to the contest over the questions of self-determination, political agency and identity explored in Chapter 8.

This text is taken from *Framing the Islands: Power and Diplomatic Agency in Pacific Regionalism*, by Greg Fry, published 2019 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.