

# 8

## Regional self-determination<sup>1</sup>

While regional self-determination had been recognised as a key legitimating principle for regional governance in the postcolonial era—by the regional ‘society of states’, regional civil society groups and most of the international actors—it also became a focus of significant political contestation during the 1970s and 1980s. This chapter focuses on the region as a site of political contest over self-determination in relation to three issue areas of regional politics: environmental protection, anticolonialism and political agency within regional decision-making.

### Environmental protection

One of the key expressions of the commitment of Pacific states and NGOs to regional self-determination in the 1970s and 1980s was in relation to the issue of environmental protection. The environmental issues that captured the imagination of the Pacific leaders were those to do with the activities of large powers, wherever they took place in the region, rather than those associated with their own national development. State leaders and civil society groups focused on three specific environmental protection issues

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1 Parts of this chapter incorporates material from Greg Fry, ‘International Co-operation in the South Pacific: From regional integration to collective diplomacy’, in W. Andrew Axline, *The Political Economy of Regional Cooperation* (London: Pinter, 1994), pp. 136–77.

in the first two decades of the postcolonial period: French nuclear testing, Japan's proposal to dump radioactive wastes in the Marianas Trench and the US proposal to incinerate chemical weapons on Johnston Atoll.

It was in their attempts to influence these activities and proposals that the island states came closest to having a joint foreign policy and closest to the positions of the regional civil society groups. Significantly, these states and civil society groups invested a great deal of diplomatic resources in challenging the most powerful global states on these issues, and they did so in relation to geographical locations within the Pacific that they would not have visited. These sites of nuclear testing, dumping and incineration were isolated locations on the edge of the region—well to the north in the Marianas Trench and on Johnston Atoll, and well to the east in the Tuamotu Archipelago. These regional campaigns illustrated a doggedness, passion and unity not found in relation to other issues, and they were conducted in relation to an imagined region rather than a known space or national interest. They also referred to spaces that were legally outside the jurisdiction of Pacific island states and under the legal jurisdiction of powerful states. They therefore illustrate most effectively the commitment to *regional* self-determination as a fundamental principle of regional governance.

The collective opposition of Pacific island leaders to French nuclear testing in the Tuamotu Archipelago in French Polynesia predated the establishment of the SPF. As we have seen, the inability to raise such concerns during the late 1960s under the 'no politics' constitution of the SPC had in fact strongly influenced the decision to create the SPF.<sup>2</sup> It was therefore not surprising that the communiqué issued after the first SPF in 1971 included an appeal to the French Government to make the current test series its last. The SPF continued to issue this appeal at each of its meetings until 1975. Australia and New Zealand, under Labor/Labour governments from 1972 to 1975, joined the island states in stronger protests outside the formal SPF context. In 1973, the New Zealand Government sent the warship HMNZS *Otago* into the French Government-declared 'danger zone' around Moruroa Atoll; Australian and New Zealand unions established a boycott against French goods and services; the Fiji Trades Union Congress placed a boycott on French-owned UTA Airlines; and Australia, New Zealand and Fiji took France

2 Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, 'Statement to the Thirty-First South Pacific Conference', Nuku'alofa, Tonga, 18 October 1991, p. 1.

to the International Court of Justice. In 1975, partly in response to these actions, France ceased atmospheric testing and moved the program underground at Moruroa Atoll.

In a move aimed at putting further international pressure on the French Government, but also with broader antinuclear objectives in mind, the 1975 SPF meeting 'commended' a New Zealand Government idea of establishing a nuclear-free zone in the South Pacific and agreed that UN backing should be sought for this. Later in the year, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Fiji cosponsored a resolution at the UN General Assembly proposing the establishment of such a zone. Although the resolution was passed, the SPF took the initiative no further because of the influence of the more conservative opinions of the new governments in Canberra and Wellington from early 1976.<sup>3</sup>

The anti-nuclear-testing regional campaign gained new energy when Labor/Labour governments returned to power in Canberra, in 1983, and in Wellington, in 1984. The Australian foreign minister's anger at continued French testing was a major stimulus to his government's decision to launch a proposal for a nuclear-free zone in the South Pacific at the Canberra SPF summit in 1983.<sup>4</sup> The zone came into being in 1985 but left the French program unaffected. The French Government did, however, become concerned about the level of regional opposition to its nuclear presence in French Polynesia, particularly following the outrage expressed by South Pacific states at the bombing by French agents of the Greenpeace protest ship *Rainbow Warrior* in Auckland Harbour in July 1985. French president François Mitterrand consequently instituted an active lobbying program to attempt to influence islander opinion.<sup>5</sup> Although the French campaign had some success in parts of Polynesia, the SPF remained firm in its opposition throughout the 1980s. When president Mitterrand suspended the program in 1992, however, he was responding more to political developments within France and Eastern Europe than to protests in the South Pacific region.

3 See Greg Fry, 'Australia, New Zealand and Arms Control in the Pacific Region', in Desmond Ball, ed., *The ANZAC Connection*, Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1985, pp. 91–118, at pp. 101–3.

4 P. Beard, 'Paris Snub Prompts Hayden to Seek Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone', *The Australian*, 13 May 1983: 4; 'French Nuclear Test at Mururoa Atoll', *Australian Foreign Affairs Record*, May 1983: 186–7, at p. 187.

5 Stephen Henningham, *France and the South Pacific: A Contemporary History*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992, pp. 299–316.

The Japanese Government's proposal to dump cement-solidified drums of low-level radioactive waste in the high seas north-east of the Ogasawara Islands in the early 1980s aroused as much emotion as the nuclear testing issue.<sup>6</sup> It was also an issue that united all dependent territory administrations and all independent countries, as well as regional civil society organisations such as the Nuclear-Free and Independent Pacific movement and the Pacific Conference of Churches. As with the testing issue, the Australian and New Zealand governments were very supportive of Pacific island concerns, while the United Kingdom, France and the United States—as fellow dumping nations—lined up with Japan. An experimental dumping program was to begin in 1981 but was delayed because of regional opposition. In an effort to placate islander leaders, the Japanese Government sent several missions through the region in the early 1980s.<sup>7</sup> These were not successful in changing the united position of Pacific states and societies. Rather, they simply served to galvanise the opposition of South Pacific states to the proposal.

The campaign against dumping radioactive waste was conducted on several fronts. Kiribati and Nauru represented the region's interests at the London Dumping Convention meetings. In 1983, they put forward a proposal for a global ban on the dumping of low-level radioactive waste. Although the proposal was defeated, it led to a compromise motion, which was passed, calling for a moratorium on dumping until the Nauru/Kiribati proposal could be assessed. The island states also worked to establish a regional antidumping regime.<sup>8</sup> A prohibition on dumping was incorporated in two regional legal regimes: the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty and the Convention for the Protection of the Natural Resources and Environment of the South Pacific Region (1986). Although the dumping proposed by Japan fell outside the legal jurisdiction of these regimes, these provisions were seen to be pointing at Japan. In early 1985, on the eve of an official visit to Fiji, the Japanese prime minister, Yasuhiro Nakasone, announced his intention to shelve the dumping proposal in deference to islander sensitivities on this matter.<sup>9</sup>

6 The Japanese Government's intentions are set out in detail in Nuclear Safety Bureau, *Low-Level Radioactive Wastes: Dumping at the Pacific*, Tokyo: Science and Technology Agency, Government of Japan, 1980.

7 Ogashiwa, *Microstates and Nuclear Issues*, pp. 18–19.

8 Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat [hereinafter PIFS], *Leaders' Communiqués: Twelfth Pacific Islands Forum, Port Vila, Vanuatu, 10–11 August 1981, Thirteenth Pacific Islands Forum, Rotorua, New Zealand, 9–10 August 1982 and Sixteenth Pacific Islands Forum, Rarotonga, Cook Islands, 5–6 August 1985* (Suva: PIFS).

9 Bronwen Jones, 'Japan Seeks Understanding on N-Waste Dumping Plans', *The Canberra Times*, 12 January 1985: 1.

This degree of cohesiveness among South Pacific countries was aroused again at Port Vila, Vanuatu, in 1990 in relation to a proposal by the US Government to use Johnston Atoll as a site for the incineration of chemical weapons. Island leaders were angered by the lack of consultation and very concerned about the possible environmental effects of the proposed program. The ‘consultation’ mission toured the island states only after their concerns were publicised and when a point of no return had been reached regarding the destruction of chemical weapons already en route from Germany. This islander opposition needs also to be seen against a long history of Pacific islanders being deceived by the United States, the United Kingdom and France about the long-term effects of their nuclear testing programs since 1945 at Bikini, Enewetak, Johnston Atoll, Christmas Island, Moruroa and Fangataufa.

In this case, the South Pacific position was not supported by Australia. At the 1990 SPF meeting in Port Vila, where this issue dominated the agenda, Australia attempted to garner support for the incineration facility on the grounds that it was an important contribution to global disarmament and that it was safe. The island states regarded the Australian efforts, and particularly the way in which prime minister Bob Hawke sought to have his minority view dominate, as unacceptable behaviour.<sup>10</sup>

The island states’ strong opposition to the US proposal, voiced by all island leaders at the Port Vila forum, and subsequently by the Secretary-General of the SPF Secretariat—who reportedly accused the United States of treating the Pacific people as ‘breadfruits and coconuts’ rather than human beings—caught Washington’s attention.<sup>11</sup> In October of the same year, president George H.W. Bush invited the leaders of all Pacific island states to a summit in Honolulu. While the meeting covered several aspects of the United States’ relationship with the island states, the incineration issue was of the most immediate concern to the island leaders. The US president ‘assured’ the Pacific leaders:

[W]e plan to dispose of only the chemical munitions from the Pacific theater currently stored at Johnston Atoll, any obsolete materials found in the Pacific Islands, and those relatively small

10 Mary-Louise O’Callaghan, ‘“Two-Faced”: Forum Attacks Hawke’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 August 1990: 3; and Karen Magnall, ‘A Tale of Two Hotels’, *Pacific Islands Monthly*, September 1990: 10–14.

11 Geoff Spencer, ‘Forum to Protest Over US Chemical Weapons Plan’, *The Age*, [Melbourne], 8 September 1990: 9.

quantities shipped from Germany ... once the destruction is completed, we have no plans to use Johnston Atoll for any other chemical munitions purpose or as a hazardous waste disposal site.<sup>12</sup>

This was a significant concession to the strong Pacific island opposition. The United States would have preferred to have kept its options open, knowing that there would be more weapons to destroy as part of new disarmament agreements and that there would be considerable opposition to the use of mainland US sites.

## Anticolonialism

A second key expression of the commitment to regional self-determination as the defining principle of regional governance in this period was the diplomatic energy Pacific leaders injected into opposing continuing colonialism in the Pacific, particularly in the French Pacific. As seen by Pacific leaders and civil society groups, legitimate regional governance should respect the right of self-determination for Pacific peoples wherever they were in the region. Like the regional diplomacy on the environmental question, the sustained regional actions on anticolonialism did not relate to the promotion or defence of the national interest of the Pacific states involved. They were motivated by a commitment to *regional* self-determination.

Support for decolonisation did not appear on the regional agenda in the early 1970s because decolonisation was proceeding relatively smoothly. Far from there being obstructions in the granting of self-determination, there was, if anything, a desire on the part of Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom to move to a faster timetable towards independence than desired by significant sections of the island societies they were administering. The exception was the French–British colony of the New Hebrides, where the independence aspirations of the Vanua`aku Party came up against obstruction by the French half of the joint administration. But even here events moved quickly. The forerunner of the Vanua`aku Party was established in 1975; by 1980, Vanuatu (as the New Hebrides was now known) had gained full independence.

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12 George H.W. Bush, 'Remarks at the Conclusion of the Pacific Island Nations–United States Summit in Honolulu, Hawaii', 27 October 1990.

When the independence issue did begin to feature on the regional agenda, it did so in a selective way. The focus was on support for self-determination efforts in the French territories and, more particularly, in New Caledonia. This partly reflected the fact that, unlike French Polynesia or the American territories such as Guam, American Samoa or Palau, the majority of indigenous people in New Caledonia desired full independence; that, unlike Tokelau, Wallis and Futuna Islands and Pitcairn Islands, New Caledonia was a significant size and was significantly resourced; and that, unlike West Papua and Hawai`i, New Caledonia was not regarded as an integral part of a large country (Indonesia and the United States, respectively). Furthermore, New Caledonia's indigenous people were Melanesian. It was therefore understandable that neighbouring independence-minded Melanesian states, and especially Vanuatu, which had just been through its own independence struggle, would champion its independence.

The collective Pacific diplomatic campaign to oust France from its colonies began in 1978 when the four South Pacific members of the United Nations—Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Fiji and Western Samoa—made a joint attack on continuing colonialism in the region during the thirty-third session of the UN General Assembly.<sup>13</sup> Vaovasamanaia Filipo, Western Samoa's finance minister, was reported as having

voiced his country's 'deep concern' that some Pacific countries which want to gain independence have yet to do so. In some cases their wish and their right to aspire to independence have not even been acknowledged by the colonial powers concerned. We would wish to see an end to this situation as soon as possible.<sup>14</sup>

Immediately after the 1978 Nouméa South Pacific Conference, Papua New Guinea initiated a political campaign to pressure France into giving independence to its Pacific territories. Papua New Guinea's foreign minister, Ebia Olewale, raised the issue at the July 1979 SPF meeting and was supported by the other independent Pacific states. Australia and New Zealand insisted, however, that the call for the decolonisation of the Pacific territories appear in a watered-down form in the final

13 'Pacific Nations Speak Out with One Voice', *Pacific Islands Monthly*, February 1979: 9–10.

14 *ibid.*, p. 9.

communiqué.<sup>15</sup> Olewale continued his campaign in press interviews and at an independence day rally in Tahiti while attending the October 1979 South Pacific Conference in Papeete. He called for decolonisation of the French territories and attacked Australia and New Zealand for not supporting the issue.<sup>16</sup> Even Father Gerard Leymang, the francophone chief minister representing the New Hebrides at the 1979 South Pacific Conference, was supportive of Olewale's sentiments and was openly critical of French attitudes in the Pacific.

At the 1979 SPF meeting, Pacific leaders made the following recommendation:

Noting the desire of Pacific Island peoples, including those in French Territories, to determine their own future, the Forum reaffirmed its belief in the principle of self-determination and independence applying to all Pacific Island peoples in accordance with their freely expressed wishes. Accordingly, the Forum called on the metropolitan powers concerned to work with the peoples of their Pacific Territories to this end.<sup>17</sup>

In the following year, in his first speech to the UN General Assembly, Vanuatu's prime minister, Father Walter Lini, stated:

Our difficult colonial past has also prompted in our national experience many concerns, and, with all humility, there may be occasions where a mutual benefit may be derived if those concerns are voiced here. It is the fact that some of our concerns are regional, based on support for what we in Vanuatu regard as a natural expectation held by those Pacific peoples still subject to colonial rule. Their right to be granted a free and unfettered political determination is a principle we shall not abdicate. We shall not forget that this principle is supported by this Assembly on every available opportunity, just as we shall advocate and strive with equal conviction to ensure that our Pacific Ocean be free from nuclear contamination through the practice of the dumping of nuclear waste or the testing of nuclear devices.<sup>18</sup>

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15 PIFS, *Press Communiqué: Tenth South Pacific Forum, Honiara, Solomon Islands, 9–10 July 1979*, Suva: PIFS.

16 Author's observations at the nineteenth South Pacific Conference, Papeete, French Polynesia, October 1979.

17 SPF Secretariat, *Leaders' Communiqué: Tenth South Pacific Forum*.

18 Walter Hadye Lini, 'Vanuatu Enters the United Nations', in William L. Coop, ed., *Pacific People Sing Out Strong*, New York: Friendship Press, 1982, p. 52.

The New Caledonia question became a major item on the SPF agenda for the next decade. There was general sympathy among forum members for supporting political change, with nearly all members supporting full independence as the ultimate goal. The annual discussions centred on the form that support should take and how hard and fast the issue should be pushed. In the period 1980–86, there was a fundamental division on this question. On the one side, the Melanesian states fully supported the position of the Kanak independence movement, the Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste (FLNKS: Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front). They proposed that FLNKS be given observer status at the SPF and that the forum support the reinscription of New Caledonia on the UN decolonisation committee's list of non-self-governing territories. On the other side were the Australian and New Zealand governments, Fiji and the Polynesian states, who opposed the reinscription strategy on the grounds that it would be counterproductive and that France should be given more time to demonstrate that it was instituting the political change it had promised. They went as far as agreeing to discussions with the French Government and the setting up of a fact-finding mission; however, they did not wish to embarrass the French Government in wider international forums.<sup>19</sup>

The politics changed dramatically following a change of government in Paris in 1986. The determination of Jacques Chirac's centre-right coalition government to reverse the socialists' political reform process in New Caledonia ended this division among the Pacific states. The SPF island states united behind the Melanesian 'reinscription' strategy. At the 1986 SPF meeting, the leaders decided to pursue this strategy vigorously, and in this they were even supported by Australia and New Zealand. On Vanuatu's request, the Non-Aligned Movement (of which it was a member) subsequently agreed to support the reinscription issue at the United Nations, and in December of the same year, the General Assembly passed the SPF states' reinscription resolution by 89 votes to 24.<sup>20</sup>

The turning point in France's New Caledonia policy in 1988, was not, however, provoked by the SPF's efforts to increase international pressure on France but rather by the departure of the Chirac Government and the appointment of Michel Rocard. This once again caused a more progressive

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19 Stephen Bates, *The South Pacific Island Countries and France: A Study in Inter-State Relations*, Canberra: Department of International Relations, The Australian National University, 1990, Ch. 5.

20 *ibid.*, pp. 86–8.

approach to New Caledonia. In August 1988, the French Government and the FLNKS leadership signed the Matignon Accords, which promised assistance with economic development and political change leading to a referendum on political status in 1998. With the FLNKS willing to give the accords a chance, the SPF took the issue off its agenda until 1990 when, on the request of the FLNKS and the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), it reactivated its interest in overseeing progress made on decolonisation under the Matignon Accords.

## Regional decision-making

A third important expression of the commitment to regional self-determination was evident in the various positions taken on the question of political agency in regional decision-making. The postcolonial states built their regional efforts on the regional self-determination principle they had earlier established in their bid to take over the regional organisations. They accepted the regional boundaries of the SPC as the extent of their commitment to regional self-determination but, consistent with this principle, they acknowledged as having a right to speak or decide on regional politics only those Pacific peoples who had gained independence or associated statehood. This interpretation of regional self-determination, which privileged a particular view of who should have a right to political agency in regional governance, was built implicitly on the idea that states are the appropriate bearers of rights and duties in international relations—a fundamental proposition in the ‘society of states’ conception explained in Chapter 7.

The regional self-determination principle—a foundation principle of the SPF—therefore involved a commitment to political agency in the regional structures being in the hands of Pacific states, and not metropolitan states or former colonial powers. Consistent with this principle, Australia and New Zealand were invited into the SPF on terms set by the Pacific island states; and other non-regional metropolitan powers were excluded.

This view of political agency in regional decision-making became a source of tension both within the ‘society of states’ and between the ‘society of states’ and civil society organisations, metropolitan countries and territorial administrations. Territorial governments of the dependent territories of France and the United States demanded equal rights to participate in regional decision-making even though they did not have,

nor did they necessarily intend to achieve, full political sovereignty. France and the United States, which wished to retain their influence on regional governance, supported their territories in this struggle, as did some states within the SPF. Civil society groups asserted a right to a political voice in relation to the same set of issues confronting the Pacific governments meeting in the SPF. They asserted a right to participate in the debate over how postcolonial Pacific societies should engage with powerful global structures around issues of development, security and sovereignty.

The tensions over admission criteria in relation to SPF membership first arose when, in 1972, a newly self-governing PNG administration was denied membership. Some observers believed Fiji was behind this decision and surmised that it was trying to block a potential rival for leadership in South Pacific affairs. During a seminar in the same year, Reuben Taureka, Papua New Guinea's Minister for Health, commented:

We were refused admission by Fiji and its small neighbours to the South Pacific Commission. We have been excluded from the South Pacific Forum. Fiji is afraid for us to enter the South Pacific Forum because she thinks we may dominate her.<sup>21</sup>

Ratu Mara worked extremely hard to overcome these concerns. He visited Papua New Guinea in 1974 to hold talks with Somare, the new chief minister. Having assured his host that Fiji's objection to Papua New Guinea's membership was solely to do with the fact that it was not yet fully independent, he moved to scotch the idea that there was not room for both Papua New Guinea and Fiji in leading roles in regionalism. Papua New Guinea accepted this position and joined the SPF on gaining full independence in 1975.

The issue of the admission criteria arose again in 1978, this time as a conflict within the SPF membership. The occasion was the ninth SPF meeting, held at Niue in September 1978. A Polynesian group, led by Western Samoa's Tupuola Efi, proposed that American Samoa, a dependent territory, be admitted to SPF membership. This proposal was strongly opposed by the Papua New Guinea/Fiji bloc, which, it appears, saw it as threatening indigenous control of the SPF. American Samoa,

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21 Commentary following U. Sundhaussen, 'Discussion Topic: That PNG Should Try to Play a Significant Role in Both the South-East Asian and South-West Pacific Regions', in James Griffin, ed., *A Foreign Policy for an Independent Papua New Guinea*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1974, pp. 107–17, at p. 110.

as a dependent territory, could not make its own final decisions; it would have to consult Washington. For Papua New Guinea and Fiji, this went against the founding principle of the SPF. They argued that if island countries wanted to enjoy full political agency within the forum, they should first work for independence from their administering power.<sup>22</sup>

The principle of regional self-determination also created a tension between the Pacific states and metropolitan countries when it came to the participation of metropolitan countries in regional decision-making. It also created a division between SPF states over how far to press on this principle. In the postcolonial context of the 1970s, it arose first in relation to a Samoan proposal backed by the Pacific states to admit the United States to the proposed FFA. A Fiji/Papua New Guinea-led Melanesian group objected to US membership partly because the United States did not recognise coastal state sovereignty over migratory species, which was the main resource such an agency would control. Fiji's position was made clear in the month following the 1978 SPF meeting when, in an address to the UN General Assembly, its ambassador, Berenado Vunibobo, stated:

We have now reached a situation where the formation of such an agency is threatened ... The main reason for this sorry state of affairs has been due to the wishes of a dominant power foreign to the region, to join the Agency on its own terms. We view this ... as yet another attempt to dominate our region and to dictate to us the terms and conditions in which we should run our affairs.<sup>23</sup>

They particularly objected to the idea that a distant water fishing nation should be a member of an agency controlling the activities of such nations on behalf of the Pacific states. In what turned out to be a victory for the Melanesian bloc in relation to the control of this richest shared resource, the SPF decided to proceed with the establishment of an agency restricted in the first instance to SPF member countries and leaving the question of metropolitan country membership open to further discussion. By the end of the SPF meeting, it was clear that the participants were very aware of the new west/east, Melanesian/Polynesian split that had occurred around the issue of regional self-determination. As a result of these tensions,

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22 The SPF proceedings were closed to the public; however, journalists covering the Niue forum reported the rift. See, for example, Bruce Jones, 'US Tuna Fishing a Divisive Issue for Forum Members', *The Canberra Times*, 11 October 1978; and 'Islanders Wary of US Bait', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 October 1978.

23 As reported in "'New Colonialism" Over Fishing: Fiji Accuses the US', *The Canberra Times*, 11 October 1978.

the Melanesian states threatened to set up their own fisheries agency and Tom Davis, the Cook Islands premier, was talking of the need for a Polynesian alliance.<sup>24</sup>

The rift between these two groups carried over into the SPC meeting in Nouméa in the following month. Here it was clear that Papua New Guinea and Fiji were determined to weaken the SPC, which they viewed as being tainted with undue metropolitan influence. At the same time, it was evident that they wanted to strengthen the SPF as the regional organisation of choice. The PNG delegate, Father John Momis, used jurisdiction over the proposed South Pacific regional environment program as a test case. His success in having the conference agree to this becoming a joint SPF–SPC venture was regarded as an SPF incursion into traditional SPC territory.<sup>25</sup> Papua New Guinea and Fiji also froze their contributions to the SPC for the next three years. The campaign to strengthen the SPF continued in the 1980s with a proposal to establish a single regional organisation. Dependent territorial administrations, and France and the United States, saw this move as threatening the continuation of the SPC and their political agency within regional politics. They were afraid that any move to a single regional organisation would accord them second-class citizenship. They therefore stymied any such move. By the end of the 1980s, the compromise outcome was the establishment of the South Pacific Organisations Coordinating Committee, to increase cooperation among regional agencies, but stopping short of a single regional organisation.

In the 1970s, civil society groups did not see political agency within the official regional organisations as an issue. State and civil society positions were generally in agreement on a ‘Pacific way’ ideology that asserted anticolonial and antinuclear positions, and which asserted the right of Pacific peoples to control developments in their region. Moreover, many prominent civil society actors in the 1970s became political leaders by the end of the decade. In such a context, it was hard to draw a firm line between the state and civil society. This accord between civil society and

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24 Based on discussions with journalists and delegates attending the eighteenth South Pacific Conference, Nouméa, October 1978, and who had attended the SPF meeting earlier in the month.

25 Based on author’s observations at the eighteenth South Pacific Conference, Nouméa, October 1978.

official regionalism was also aided by the progressive policies of the Labor/Labour governments in power between 1972 and 1975 in Australia and New Zealand.

In the 1980s, this civil society perception of official regionalism changed. Alarmed by the more hegemonic positions of Australia and New Zealand after 1976, but particularly in the second Cold War context from 1984, and concerned that some Pacific governments, and particularly Fiji and the Polynesian states, had compromised their position on regional self-determination, civil society groups started to critique the 'Pacific way' as an ideology masking state power, and particularly chiefly power. State representatives meeting regionally were now seen as denying political agency to the 'Pacific people'. This was nowhere clearer than in the development of the People's Charter by the Nuclear-Free and Independent Pacific movement.<sup>26</sup>

By 1980, Pacific women were also demanding political agency within what they saw as a men's club involved in regional decision-making in the SPC and the SPF. At the 1980 South Pacific Conference in Port Moresby, PNG women protested on the other side of a glass wall at the conference venue, with placards asking in effect: 'Where are the women in regional decision-making?'<sup>27</sup> As a result, the SPC instituted a triennial women's conference and established a women's bureau within the secretariat in Nouméa.<sup>28</sup> Other civil society groups did not seek at this stage to become part of the official regional processes of the main institutions, preferring to remain as social movements outside the formal state-centric arenas.

## Self-determination and legitimate regional governance

Whether concerned with practical issues and outcomes, and whether promoted by states or civil society organisations, regional governance in the first two decades of the postcolonial era gained its legitimacy from the shared principle of regional self-determination. The question 'what kind of societies do we want for ourselves', which was the focus of the

26 *The Peoples' Charter for a Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific*, 1983, available from: [www.apc.org.nz/pma/pacchar.htm](http://www.apc.org.nz/pma/pacchar.htm).

27 Author's observations at the twentieth South Pacific Conference, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, 1980.

28 George, 'Pacific Women Building Peace', p. 41.

second Nuclear-Free Pacific Conference in Pohnpei in October 1978, was one that was also being asked by the leaders of the new Pacific states.<sup>29</sup> For both states and civil society groups, the 'ourselves' not only included the citizens of independent states; it also included 'Pacific peoples' in the dependent territories of France and the United States. For some key regional civil society groups, 'Pacific peoples' extended further to include West Papua and the indigenous people of New Zealand, Australia and Hawai'i.

For both Pacific states and civil society groups, this commitment to regional self-determination motivated active and heartfelt political campaigns opposing nuclear testing and proposals to dump radioactive waste and incinerate chemical weapons in the Pacific, as well as opposing continuing colonialism. The strength of this commitment, and the diplomatic resources and time engaged in these campaigns, demonstrated the central importance of regional self-determination as a legitimating principle. This was not explained by national interest or development needs but was rather about promotion of a shared principle. It was focused on territories that were not part of the legal jurisdiction of the SPF members and usually on areas that most would not have had an opportunity to visit. There were, as we have seen, divisions within the society of states and within the Nuclear-Free and Independent Pacific movement over how hard to press, and in relation to which territories, on the question of anticolonialism. But this did not get in the way of united support for decolonisation where the indigenous people desired it.

There were serious divisions within the Pacific society of states, and between the society of states and civil society groups, over the interpretation of political agency in regional decision-making. As we have seen, the experience of the 1960s, with Pacific leaders pitted against colonial powers on this question, had led to a particular interpretation of how this principle should be expressed in postcolonial regional organisations. For Fiji and other founding members of the regional society of states, this meant that only independent states should be involved in regional decision-making, with the proviso that observer status could be arranged for those approaching independence. They invited Australia and New Zealand to participate in the SPF but only on terms of sovereign equality set by the founding members. They did not want a return to the SPC

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29 Alexander, *Putting the Earth First*, p. 145.

experience of the 1950s and 1960s, when outsiders dominated regional decision-making (or when territorial administrations acted as proxies for those interests). This created tensions with those in the dependent territories of Guam, American Samoa and French Polynesia in particular who wanted to go no further than having 'autonomy' within a continuing colonial context, but who at the same time wanted to participate fully in regional deliberations and be regarded as sovereign entities for this purpose. As we have seen, tensions over political agency within the regional organisations also extended to the contest between supporters of the SPC, on one hand, and supporters of a single regional organisation, centred on the SPF, on the other. The 'society of states' interpretation of who should have political agency to promote regional self-determination was also challenged by civil society groups, particularly women's groups and the nuclear-free Pacific movement.

Contending interpretations of the regional self-determination principle also became a source of tension *within* the regional 'society of states'. By the beginning of the 1980s, it became clear that an emerging Melanesian identity within regional politics was rallying around a commitment to press harder than their Polynesian and Micronesian neighbours on the regional self-determination principle when confronting colonialism, nuclear issues, fisheries exploitation or diplomatic dominance by former colonial powers within the regional organisations.

Australia and New Zealand supported the position of the Pacific island states on the various regional self-determination issues examined in this chapter. They were strong supporters of the establishment and development of the Pacific-controlled SPF. They joined Pacific island states in opposition to nuclear testing and nuclear dumping proposals. They were also very active participants in the regional move to assist in the decolonisation of Vanuatu and New Caledonia. However, along with the Pacific states, they did not go as far as endorsing civil society demands for decolonisation of the American territories. In these areas at least, then, Australia and New Zealand did not challenge the political agency of Pacific states. As we shall see in Chapter 9, the story in relation to the question of regional security was very different in the period from the mid 1970s until the end of the Cold War. Here, Australia, and to a lesser extent New Zealand, attempted to create a two-tiered hierarchical regional governance structure that fundamentally challenged the legitimating principle of regional self-determination and attempted to deny political agency to Pacific island states.

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