GLOBALIZATION PROCESSES
IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

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The Pacific Ocean extends over almost a third of the surface of the earth. With a
distance of 14,800 km from the Bering Strait in the north to Antarctica in the south and
over 19,000 km at its widest point from Singapore to Panama, and with an average depth of
4,000ms, (the deepest point reaching almost 11,000ms in the Marianas trench), the ocean
is one of awesome dimensions. The whole land area of the five continents would easily fit
into the Pacific Ocean. Stanley (1993:16) refers to a theory that the moon was flung from
the Pacific at an early stage of the earth’s history. This vast sea is the setting for the Pacific
Islands that are the focus of this book.

A majority of scholars in the different academic disciplines, such as biological
anthropology, archaeology and the paleoenvironmental sciences, propose that the colonization
of the Pacific Islands began 35,000 ago (Golson 2000: 53), long before any record was
made. This colonization began in the southwest of the Pacific Ocean at a time when New
Guinea and Australia were not separated by sea, and continued over thousands of years in a
never ending migration gradually eastwards. The last stages of colonization took place in
the Marquesas Islands, Hawaii, Easter Island and New Zealand not too long ago, between
800 and 300 AD (Campbell 1989:33, Fischer 2002:xvi).

The Pacific Islands comprise an estimated 30,000 islands — most of which are either
not shown or appear as tiny dots on standard world maps. The huge area between Hawaii
and New Zealand is commonly omitted from these maps, which probably helps to account
for the fact that most people outside the region have never heard of such independent island
nation states such as Fiji, Samoa, Kiribati, Tuvalu or Vanuatu.

THE SUB–regions: MELANESIA, POLYNESIA
AND MICRONESIA

What kind of people settled in the Pacific Islands? Most scholars today agree that all
people in the world, popularly called ‘modern human beings’, are descendants of ‘homo
sapiens sapiens’, a species that originated from Africa and from which the whole world has
been populated since 100,000–50,000 years ago (Fischer 2002:3). In an attempt to describe
the obvious physiological, cultural, and linguistic differences, the classification of the people
of the Pacific Islands began with French explorer Dumont d’Urville, who introduced the
term ‘Melanesia’ (from the Greek word melas for black) and ‘Micronesia’ (from Greek mikros
for small), while the original, all embracing term ‘Polynesia’ (from Greek poly for many) and
nessos for islands), was coined by French historian and cartographer de Brosses (Fischer
2002: xvi). Within this classification system the Melanesians to the west are less dispersed
than the rest of the Pacific Islanders and occupy a string of islands stretching from New
Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu to New Caledonia. In Melanesia we also find most of the Pacific Islands’ significant land masses. North of the equator lie tiny islands and atolls, sometimes not bigger than a football field, and a few high islands (e.g. Pohnpei), which are home for Micronesians on islands today known as Belau, the Mariana Islands, Guam, the Federated States of Micronesia (Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei and Kosrae), the Marshall Islands, Nauru and Kiribati. The eastern part of the ‘liquid continent’, as some writers call the Pacific Islands, is inhabited by Polynesians who live in the territories of Tonga, Samoa, American Samoa, French Polynesia, Tokelau, Tuvalu, Niue, the Cook Islands, Hawaii and New Zealand. The Fiji Islands, situated more or less in the centre of the Pacific Islands, lie at the crossroads of Melanesia and Polynesia, with the eastern part strongly influenced by Tonga (Ernst 2002:194).

The Pacific Islands were in many aspects ‘last’: the last area on the planet to be colonized by humans, the last to be ‘discovered’ by Europeans, the last to be colonized and decolonized — with decolonization not completed even today (Stanley 1993:29).

Before contact with Europeans, Pacific Islanders did not write. Their pre—history is thus a mixture of legends, myth, and tribal traditions that were orally transferred from generation to generation, which is “the antithesis of the modern West’s linear cause-and-effect historiography” (Fischer 2002:23). A partial reconstruction of the region’s past has been taking place, with the help of modern academic disciplines and techniques (archaeology, historical linguistics, DNA analysis, computer navigation, etc.).

Social, Cultural and Ethnic Diversity

Characteristic of Melanesia is its huge social, cultural and ethnic diversity, so that generalizations are problematic: “not one is valid for the entire region” (Fischer 2002:24). In sharp contrast to Micronesians and Polynesians, Melanesians did not travel large distances over water. Also quite contrary to the rest of the Pacific Islanders, Melanesians’ behaviour towards strangers was traditionally hostile and aggressive, which led to the development of thousands of communities with diverse cultures and languages in Melanesia. On the other hand, Polynesians, and to a lesser extent Micronesians, have been described by European explorers as generally hospitable and friendly to guests and strangers alike.

The islands and atolls of Micronesia can be described as belonging to the most difficult places for settlement on the planet. Besides the extreme isolation, the generally poor soils restrict planting and makes any cultivation difficult. In addition, there are recurrent droughts and cyclones. More recently the biggest threat for future living on the low lying islands and atolls is the rise of the sea level as a result of global warming. While scientists have begun to pay more attention to Micronesia in recent years, for example, identifying Southeast Asian influences and language similarities between eastern Melanesians and central—eastern Micronesians, most of the early history of Micronesians is still not known and needs to be discovered.

In contrast to the cultural and linguistic diversities of Melanesia, and to a lesser extent Micronesia, a remarkable ethnic, cultural, and linguistic homogeneity is characteristic for Polynesia. The sociopolitical organization in Melanesian societies was much more informal than in the highly stratified societies of Polynesia. With regard to different types of leadership, the following characteristics have had impact on present times. In Melanesia men competed with each other through various kinds of resource distribution and ceremonial exchange to
achieve social prestige and political influence. The term 'Big-Man' was adopted by anthropologists from different versions of Tok-Pisin (Pidgin English) to classify this form of leadership in the usually small-scale communities of Melanesia. ‘Big Men’ usually possess outstanding skills as orators and charisma but becoming a Big Man was based on individual skills and achievements and the ‘title’ was not automatically transferred to offspring. Being a Big Man was and still is a personal, individual life achievement. In recent years growing attention in research has been paid to the observation “that egalitarian ideologies widely professed in Melanesia may in fact hide serious social inadequacies, especially between male and female” (Douglas 2000: 273).

In Polynesia particularly, and to a lesser degree Micronesia, elaborated hierarchical, patrilineal or matrilineal aristocracies developed. Today traditional forms of leadership in all Pacific Islands appear to be in a process of erosion and distortion. Often dismantled of their traditional meanings and values such as certain responsibilities towards the community, more and more traditional chiefs appear greedy and individualistic, using their responsibilities towards communities in their rhetoric but without any practical backing. Before and after independence in many Pacific Island nations chiefs were given semi-official government functions at village, island or provincial level, but instead of working towards the common good of all members of the communities, party politics, hunger for power, accumulation of wealth, rivalry and individualism are becoming more and more characteristic of contemporary chiefs, as will be shown in some of the following country case studies.

There is an old story of a chief who, upon receiving a bright red coat, promptly cut it up into several pieces which he distributed to his underling chiefs. It is unlikely that such a thing would happen today! Chiefs everywhere sense that their traditional power base is fading. Many are scrambling in rather unseemly fashion to build for themselves a new power base safely within the cash economy. All too many are parlaying their traditional authority into cash benefits for themselves (Hezel 1992:16).

**Traditional Religions**

In the *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* inculturation is defined as “the insertion of new values into one’s heritage and world view” (Waliggo 1991: 506). In that sense the introduction of Christianity to the Pacific Islands was a very powerful insertion with lasting consequences as the first missionaries took local cultures and their embedded values to build what was to become one of the great success stories of Christian mission work, with over 95 per cent of the Pacific Island populations today professing allegiance to one or other of a growing number of Christian denominations. The way Methodists in Samoa express and live their faith in worship, rituals, buildings, organizational structure, spirituality, and ethical and moral viewpoint differs substantially from that of their counterparts in Fiji or the Solomon Islands, and certainly of those in the United Kingdom where Methodism began. The same can be said for Catholic, Anglican, Reformed, Lutheran or any other denomination.

In the historic mainline churches of the Pacific Islands the presence of a certain degree of syncretism in all Christian denominations is undeniable. For many years the term syncretism had a negative connotation in almost all Christian denominations because of a
certain line of thinking in mission theology. Kraemer, for example, defined syncretism as an “illegitimate mingling of different religious elements” and stated that “every religion is seen as a living, indivisible unity and no part of it — a dogma, a rite, a myth, an institution [can] be separated from the faith—apprehension as a whole” (Kraemer 1947: 203/135). However, history has taught us that belief systems, worldviews, and dogmas are not written in stone and are subject to different interpretations and change over time. Pannenberg, for example, represents the view of most churches related to the World Council of Churches, which sees syncretism as an inevitably positive or at least neutral process:

Christianity ... affords the greatest example of syncretic assimilative power. This religion not only linked itself to Greek philosophy but also inherited the entire religious tradition of the Mediterranean world — a process whose details have still not been sufficiently clarified, but which was probably decisive for the persuasive power of Christianity in the ancient world (1971:87).

In this sense Christianity has also linked itself to Pacific Islands mythology and the world of spirits as it inherited the entire religious tradition of the region. To understand the way Christianity has been shaped and formed in the Pacific Islands over the past 200 years to its present form, it might be useful to take a brief look at pre-Christian belief systems and religion in the different parts of the Pacific Islands.

**Melanesia**

Like many other primeval religions in the world Melanesian religion was basically life oriented and socially pragmatic as there was no worship but only rituals to ward off harm and to attain success. There were a great number of predominantly malicious spirits to be feared and appeased, and there were attempts to manipulate the spirits through different forms of magic and sorcery (Dürkheim 1968: 387–89). The Melanesian belief system was also expressed in unique art forms in the decoration of cult houses, elaborate body paintings and ornamentation, colourful hair adornments and costumes, and the carvings of ritual canoes or the famously sculptured colourful wooden masks in certain parts of Papua New Guinea.

**Micronesia**

In Micronesia magic and sorcery was not practised but Micronesians knew a range of ghosts and spirits, very similar to Western Polynesia, of which some were deified ancestors that could be called upon for specific activities and missions. Compared to Melanesians, Micronesians' expression of religion in the arts was less sophisticated and more down to earth, which simply reflects the meagre and limited resources of their world of small islands and atolls. For example, necklaces, bracelets, and belts were made of shells, flowers, coconut leaves, shark’s teeth and other consumables (Fischer 2002: 71).

**Polynesia**

In pre-Christian Polynesia the function of religion was similar to that in Europe before the Reformation as it was used to legitimize and promote the ruling class. Polynesian deities to some extent resembled ancient Greek gods, who sometimes turned up to mingle with mortals, but, unlike the Greek gods, they were deified ancestors who were not out of touch but present in perceptible lineages to the living. The oldest and probably best known of these deified ancestors is the greatly respected Tagaloa, Tangaroa, Kanaloa or Ta’aroa, as he
is named and known by all Polynesians in the different islands. The pre-Christian religions in the Pacific Islands certainly did not pay much attention to ideals such as righteousness, morality or goodness, but tried to achieve success, strength and influence through religious practice and activities. In that sense and in sharp contrast to the Christian belief system, the deified ancestors were not so much ideals “but tools to be used to benefit oneself and one’s descent group, and to guard from storm, drought and attack” (Fischer 2002: 72). The way in which religion offered a scheme for protection, power and wealth for those who sacrificed to the ‘gods’ has inevitably been demonstrated in some of the features of contemporary ‘Gospel of Prosperity’ preaching. More important is the observation that “ancient Polynesian ‘religion’ was thus the same as society itself, as nothing separated the two realms: ‘religion’ was merely the supernatural extension of the descent group’s lineage” (Fischer 2002: 72). The current debates on religion and state relationships in some Pacific Islands are possibly rooted in that close link.

Cannibalism and Paradise

The reports of cannibalism practised by Melanesians and Polynesians were received in ‘civilized’ Europe with mixed feelings of disgust, fascination and fear, especially the details reported by crew members of the first exploring ships that some Melanesians perceived the white skinned strangers with their removable skins (shoes and clothes) as evil spirits. From Polynesia some of the early travellers reported that sometimes islanders would kneel beside newcomers squeezing and pinching their legs in order to assess how tasty and substantial the white men’s flesh would be. It was believed that by eating parts of the body of an enemy spiritual power (mana) would be passed on to the consumer. The ultimate revenge was to eat the body of someone who was greatly hated. The image of the ‘noble savage’ created by Rousseau and other 18th century rationalists at the time of the great explorers, with their vision of a perfect state where people live in harmony with nature, disregarded other Pacific Islands realities — frequent warfare, cannibalism, polygamy, widow—strangling, inequalities, constant fear of enemies, and natural disasters. The false image of Pacific Islanders has somehow been perpetuated in the way the region is promoted by the tourism industry today, with images of happy, easygoing, hospitable and friendly people living in a sort of paradise, with clear waters, blue skies, and endless white beaches. Without a doubt all of this can still be found, but the reality today also includes increasingly widespread poverty, poor working conditions, a sometimes quite hostile environment, and all kinds of pollution of the land, sea and air — quite different from the intact and unspoiled nature of only 200 years ago (Stanley 1993: 31).

HISTORICAL ROOTS OF GLOBALIZATION IN THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

The first Europeans to arrive in the Pacific Ocean were of Spanish and Portuguese origin. While the Spaniards were mainly interested in gold and silver, new territories and colonies, the Portuguese were trying to find passages from Europe to the Moluccas. It was Vasco Nunez de Balboa from Spain who first crossed the Isthmus of Panama in 1513 to enter the vast Pacific Ocean. He was followed by Fernao de Magalhaes (Ferdinand Magellan) who entered the Pacific Ocean from around the cape of South America and sailed northwest,
calling in at Guam two months later on his way to the Philippines (Stanley 1993: 32–32).

Later, systematic exploration was carried out by representatives of other great seafarer nations of that time, such as France, the Netherlands, Great Britain, and later the USA and Germany. Exploration originally took place in the context of the search for a southern continent — ‘terra australis incognita’ — that was believed to balance the continents of the north. Dutch explorers Schouten and Le Maire were the first to see the Tongan archipelago in 1616, and another Dutch navigator, Jacob Roggeveen, was the first European to visit Samoa in 1721–22 (Ernst 1996: 307). Many of the pioneer explorers left behind a lasting legacy in the naming of islands such as Bougainville after the French explorer who landed there in 1768, and the Shortland Islands northwest of Guadalcanal in Solomon Islands after a British captain. Wallis is named after British captain Samuel Wallis who was the first to ‘discover’ Tahiti in 1767. The Marshall Islands and Gilbert Islands were named after British captains John Marshall and Thomas Gilbert. Last but not least, the Cook Islands were named after the most famous British captain, James Cook, the multitalented master navigator, mathematician, astronomer and practical physician, who made three voyages to the region until he met his destiny at Kealakekua Bay on Hawaii, where he was killed on 16 February 1779 (Salmond 2004: 413–14).

These early contacts with the wider world had immense negative consequences. European diseases such as measles, influenza, tuberculosis, dysentery, smallpox, typhoid and whooping cough ravaged the islanders, and alcohol, new weapons and sexually transmitted diseases like syphilis contributed to the devastation. Before official colonization began in the mid 19th century (only the Mariana Islands were colonized earlier by Spain, 1565–1898), many of the islands had been for more than a century in regular contact with European sailors, whalers, and missionaries. Trade was established by Europeans looking for sandalwood, sea cucumber, and copra in exchange for iron tools, guns, clothes, tobacco and alcohol (Lockwood 2004: 11).

The Arrival of Christianity

Accompanying or even preceding western imperialism and economic exploitation, planned and organized mission work advanced rapidly, starting with the arrival of the first missionaries of the London Missionary Society (LMS) at Matavai Bay in today’s Mahina district on Tahiti, on 5 March 1879 (EEPF 1997:11). Much earlier attempts by Spanish Catholics are disregarded here as they had no lasting impact except in the Mariana Islands.

From Tahiti the LMS went on to other places and established other congregationally organized churches, which today are predominant in the Cook Islands, Samoa, American Samoa, Niue and Tuvalu. Over the following 100 years missions by Methodists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Catholics followed, marked by competition for winning souls and influence, similar to the rivalry amongst the governments of the missionaries’ homelands as they competed for economic, strategic and political advantage and the expansion of their territories. The first Methodist missionaries to the region arrived in 1822 in Tonga where Methodism took strong roots and soon spread to Fiji and Samoa, from where later missionaries went out to other parts of the Pacific (Latekefu 1996: 17–40). French Reformed missionaries took over the missions begun in French Polynesia and New Caledonia by the LMS. In Vanuatu the Presbyterians were the first to establish an ongoing mission, beginning in 1848. The (Anglican) Melanesian Mission concentrated on northern Vanuatu and the
Solomon Islands. In Micronesia the first mission work started with the Boston–based American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), a congregationalist body that planted churches in the Marshall Islands, northern Kiribati, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Chuuk. Papua New Guinea is the only Pacific Island nation in which the Lutheran Church has taken strong root, with mission work beginning with German Lutherans from Neuendettelsau in Bavaria in 1886. Catholic mission attempts were carried out by a variety of missionary orders across the whole region but usually after Protestants had successfully converted large parts of the local populations. With the exception of New Caledonia, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea and Wallis and Futuna, where the Catholic Church today is the largest denominational body, the Catholic Church usually takes second place to the respective Protestant mainline churches.

This first huge wave of mission work that saw the conversion of the majority of the island populations within a span of not much more than 50 years was followed by a second wave of mission from 1844 to 1930; this saw the arrival of newer religious bodies such as the Seventh–day Adventist Church, the Latter–day Saints, the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Assemblies of God, all of them originating from the USA. With the exception of the Latter–day Saints, which had a small impact on some of the Polynesian islands (Tahiti, Samoa and Tonga), the others did not record much growth until the end of World War II.

Other world religions arrived mainly in the form of Indian Hindu and Muslim contract labourers to work in British sugar plantations in Fiji, where these religions today claim a substantial percentage of the population. In other islands the influence of Muslims, Hindus or Buddhists is rather small and does not go beyond the minority migrant populations. One exception is to be seen in the Baha’i Faith, an offspring of Shiite Islam that had some impact across the region after World War II (see Thornley, Gunson, Fortune, in Lal and Fortune 2000: 175–187).

**Colonization**

Three basic objectives for colonial rule in the Pacific Islands can be differentiated:

i) expanding economically with the exploitation of resources, the creation of new markets and the maximizing of profit;

ii) extending and establishing the military and strategic power of the colonizing states by gaining influence over a substantial part of the earth’s surface;

iii) and to a lesser extent, modernizing, educating and converting the indigenous populations “in the image of the west” (Hempenstall 2000: 229).

During the colonial era some of the larger islands, namely New Caledonia, New Zealand and Hawaii became white settler colonies where the indigenous populations gradually became marginalized minorities. In New Caledonia resistance was the strongest as the indigenous Kanaks were moved from their fertile lands into the mountains or into reservations as French settlers established their farms and started mining and exploiting the rich nickel deposits (Lockwood 2004: 11). Other French colonies were established in Tahiti and the surrounding islands (which today form French Polynesia) and Wallis and Futuna. Great Britain colonized Fiji, the Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau, the Gilbert and Ellice Islands (today Kiribati and Tuvalu), the southern Solomon Islands and the southeastern part of New Guinea. The United States acquired the previously independent Kingdom of Hawaii, and after defeating Spain in 1898, took possession of Guam and the eastern islands of Samoa.
Germany's colonial rule in Western Samoa, Nauru, the Marshall Islands, Pohnpei and parts of New Guinea was cut short with the loss of all her colonies worldwide as a consequence of WWI, which Germany lost in 1918.

**The Impact of World War II**

Like all wars, the 'Great Pacific War'— as that part of WWII that was fought in Southeast Asia and the Pacific Ocean is sometimes called — did not just happen but had its roots in a power struggle for domination in the region. The occupation of French Indochina (Vietnam today) by Japanese troops in 1941 took place after Japan had signed the axis pact with Germany and Italy on 27 September 1940. The USA responded with an embargo on iron and oil from the Dutch East Indies and left Japan with a choice between retreat, strangulation or war (Stanley 1993: 35). The attack on Pearl Harbour, a lagoon on the island of Oahu, Hawaii, and a US Pacific fleet and Air Force base, on 7 December 1941 was synchronized with the occupation of Thailand and Guam by Japanese troops on the other side of the dateline on the same day. As in many other wars in human history, innocent people were drawn into a war they did not cause and did not call for. Being occupied by one or another nation from both sides of the fighting factions from one day to another, the Pacific Islands were at war. In the early stage of the Pacific War Japan advanced fast, with the occupation of Malaya, the Philippines, Borneo, Java, Sumatra, Bali, Timor, Hong Kong, Burma, the Gilbert Islands (Kiribati), and Nauru. Papua New Guinea was invaded at different points from where Japanese troops moved to the Solomon Islands. The result was that Japan, by mid 1942, dominated over 450 million people and threatened to expand further to the rest of the Pacific Islands in the south and east as well as to Australia and New Zealand. Further advances were stopped by the US–led combined forces of the war allies in fierce battles at Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, which became the turning point of the war. The battles in the Solomon Islands, Papua and New Guinea are widely regarded as among the cruellest and fiercest episodes in the history of warfare. After the despicable and unnecessary detonation of atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 August 1945, Japan finally surrendered unconditionally on 2 September 1945 on the battleship *Missouri* in Tokyo Harbour (Fischer 2002:205).

**Post War Developments — of Winners and Losers**

The southwestern and southern region of the Pacific Ocean this book is dealing with experienced the war in many different ways. While some areas in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands experienced massive invasion and counter-invasion, including heavy bombardment and fighting at sea, on land and in the air, some tribes in the Highlands of PNG did not even know at all that there was a war raging on their island. While most of Melanesia and Micronesia suffered, for Polynesia the war brought a period of wealth and excitement, with unparalleled economic growth and a sense of new opportunities and liberation. The amount of supplies that entered the Pacific Islands to keep the war machinery alive was enormous and unprecedented in the region. In Papua and New Guinea alone almost 1 million American soldiers, 300,000 Japanese soldiers and a smaller number of New Zealanders, Australians and Pacific Islanders were involved in the fighting and needed supplies. Of lasting consequence was the massive programme for constructing and
maintaining strategic supply bases and infrastructure, with roads, airfields, and buildings for the provision of all the services that were needed to bring in huge amounts of cargo and move back and forth great numbers of soldiers with with all their accommodation, food, and recreation needs. Airports built in Nadi (Fiji), on Guadalcanal (Solomon Islands), and in Samoa, Vanuatu, Tahiti, and so on prepared the way for the development of the post-war tourism industry on a much larger scale than had been known pre-war. The complementary improvement of roads, construction of hotels, establishing of bars, restaurants and warehouses, and extension of trans-shipment ports formed the basis for an economic boom in the following years.

**Employment Opportunities**

All of this required a massive recruitment of local labour. In New Caledonia, for example, the US military employed 1,500 Kanaks, 5 per cent of the indigenous population. In Vanuatu 1,500 men were recruited on the islands of Espiritu Santo and Efate. In the Solomon Islands 3,200 men worked on Guadalcanal and in PNG close to 40,000 people were recruited at the peak time in 1944. Similarly, thousands of people who were previously involved in subsistence farming or plantation work found new forms of employment in Fiji, the Samoas, Tonga, Wallis and Futuna, and Tahiti. Furthermore, substantial numbers of young men were recruited by the combatant nations on both sides as soldiers, scouts and labourers. According to White, 3,500 men in Papua New Guinea were recruited by the allies. Polynesian villagers were eager to be sent to Europe to fight for the liberation of France, and about 2,000 indigenous Fijians joined the British Army, led and inspired by Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna — a paramount chief — who was driven by a wider vision as he believed that “Fijians will never be recognized unless our blood is shed first” (White 2000b: 243–48).

A total of 10 per cent of the indigenous population of Fiji enlisted for war service as labourers and combatants and showed full support for their colonial masters. The response from the Indo-Fijian community, however, was quite different as only one member joined the army and Indian labourers staged a strike that caused deep-seated resentment amongst the British and indigenous Fijians. Indian merchants made big profits in the blossoming war economy and were seen to take advantage of the situation by trying to buy or lease land that was left vacant.

On the other side the Japanese recruited workers and, to a lesser extent, soldiers in Micronesia, Papua and New Guinea. In the case of Papua and New Guinea recruiters sometimes built on old tribal rivalries, with occasional tragic consequences as locals caught by the other side were mercilessly hanged, shot or beheaded as traitors (Nelson 2000: 249–50).

**Cargo Cults**

Cargo cults may be considered simply as basically Melanesian religious movements characterized by an indigenous adaptation of Christian millenarian elements. They promise salvation through the return of ancestors who are believed to bring ‘Western’ goods (cargo) in large quantities to their descendants. In a wider sense political-religious movements that combine elements of protest and expectation are sometimes included in the discourse on cargo cults (Hempenstall and Rutherford 1984).

The phenomenon of cargo cults, however, is not restricted to Melanesia and not to the
war and post-war period only as there have been similar, though temporary, movements in the other regions. In this context White (2000a 253–56) mentions such examples as the ‘Mamaia’ movement in Tahiti (1828–33), the ‘Sioviili of Eva’ in Samoa (1830–65) and the ‘John Frum’ movement on Tanna, Vanuatu (see case study on Vanuatu in Part II). Some of the new cults with little or no expectation of cargo metamorphosed into indigenous independent churches, similar to the African phenomenon of the new independent churches that emerged after World War II in the process of decolonization. They were founded by charismatic local prophets who had dreams and visions such as Silas Eto, also known as ‘Holy Mama’, the founder of the Christian Fellowship Church in New Georgia, Solomon Islands (see case study on the Solomon Islands in Part II).

Individual Liberation

Most authors acknowledge the significance of contacts between locals and especially American soldiers, as large numbers of Pacific Islanders came into contact with a complex new world of consumer goods, material wealth, and modern technology, as well as with new ideas of self-determination and equality (Douglas 1989: 395; Krossigk, Rath and Leidhold 1988: 9). This ‘revolutionary potential’ is illustrated by Laracy’s account of the Solomon Islanders’ war experience:

As well as obtaining material rewards, the men who worked with the Americans gained unprecedented opportunities for fraternizing with Europeans. During church services they saw, for the first time, large numbers of Europeans worshipping the God talked of by the missionaries. They also saw negro troops wearing good clothes and drinking alcohol, things that in the pre-war Solomons had been the prerequisite of the Whites. They learned that the Americans were not only fighting a global war to obtain freedom for subject people but that they once had to fight to obtain their own freedom from English rule (1983:16).

Decolonization

Decolonization in the Pacific Islands came comparatively late and is still not completed, as a number of island nations are still kept in a neo-colonial dependent status, most obviously French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and Wallis and Futuna. In a wider sense the island nations of Guam, the Northern Mariana, American Samoa and the Marshall Islands fall into this category. After the end of WWI some ex-German territories were administered by New Zealand (Samoa) and Australia (PNG and Nauru). Japan took control of Micronesia until it was defeated in World War II by the allies led by the United States of America, and, consequently, the United States assumed control over Micronesia and governed it as a United Nations Trust Territory. Western Samoa was the first Pacific Islands nation to gain independence, in 1962, followed by Nauru (1968), Fiji (1970), PNG and Solomon Islands (1978), Kiribati and Tuvalu (1979), and Vanuatu (1980).

The greatest and most obvious abuse of colonial power without consideration for indigenous populations is manifested in the nuclear tests that were carried out by the USA in the Marshall Islands, Great Britain in the Christmas Islands, and France in French Polynesia, as well as in the USA’s use of Johnston Atoll in the mid-Pacific as a dumping ground for the highly toxic chemicals remaining after the partial destruction of chemical weapons. In Kwajelein Atoll in the Marshall Islands missiles are tested over large areas of the Pacific Ocean by the USA.