International Influence of Pacific Civil Society: Channels and Barriers

Research paper for Politics State and Society in the Pacific

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Research Question:

What channels and barriers regulate Pacific civil society's access to the international arena?

Introduction

For as long as it has existed in a formalised and institutional sense, the international arena has been dominated by Western powers (Risse *et al.*, 1999; Wesley-Smith, 2007). When one group holds dominance in an institution, organisation, or arena such as this, their interests and experiences inform the outputs of said arena (Chandler, 2004; Busby, 2007; Pallas and Uhlin, 2014). Consequently, international policies and decision making have long catered to the interests of dominant Western powers and the international landscape has been shaped accordingly. As more countries have gained independence, many have formed organisations and made their voices heard internationally, however, equitable access to both participation and influence had not yet been realised (Fry, 2015b; Fry and Tarte, 2015; Goulding, 2015; Slatter, 2015; Lawson, 2017). This loses the inherent value of incorporating a broad range of experience, knowledge and understanding into decision making processes.

Consequences are apparent through the disparity created between the perceived importance of interests, experiences, and livelihoods of certain groups of people over others. This is exemplified through the international processes surrounding one of the most pertinent issues in today's global political world, climate change. Although this existentially threatens the entire global population, certain populations will and are feeling the effects sooner and more acutely. Oceania is one such example. While Pacific civil society in particular, alongside organisations, institutions and states in some cases have been agitating for decisive action on climate change, their voices continue to be drowned out (Fry, 2015b, 2015a; Goulding, 2015; Lawson, 2017). Why is this? What are the channels of access to the international arena, and what are the barriers?

This paper assesses various channels and barriers to Pacific civil societies equitable access to the international arena. Some terms employed have multiple uses or broad definitions so are now defined. Civil society is used as an umbrella term covering CSOs (Civil Society Organisations), NGOs (Non-Government Organisations) and active communities and citizens (Gerard, 2014). CSO's are defined as groups governed voluntarily by citizens pursuing shared interests without government or market control (Natil, Malila and Sai, 2020). NGOs are a subset of this. Equitable access refers to both participation and influence in the international sphere for similar effort as other nations (Fisher and Green, 2004). Finally, the international arena describes bodies, spheres, institutions, or organisations which hold negotiations, or make decisions of international scope and influence.

This essay first outlines a conceptual framework before describing research methods. It subsequently explores channels to the international arena available to PICs and Pacific civil society. This begins with global institutions such as the United Nations (UN) followed by regional and sub-regional institutions and organisations, then states and endogenous channels. Finally, it discusses barriers, analysing them in two categories: power and disenfranchisement. I argue that prominent conceptualisations of Oceania held by powerful states and institutions manifest in Pacific civil society being disenfranchised

and beholden to power. This changes opportunities available, thus material realities, creating the foundations of existing barriers to international interaction and influence.

Conceptual framework

This essay holds Epeli Hau'ofa's (1994) conceptualisation of Oceania being a sea of islands rather than the predominant view of tiny islands dispersed in a vast sea. It is conceptually grounded in the idea that Oceania has not always been composed of Pacific Island States as known today. Rather, these were constructed by certain groups with certain worldviews (Hau'ofa, 1994; Anderson, 2006). This is well outlined in Anderson's (2006) *Imagined Communities*, Epeli Hau'ofa's (1994) *Our Sea of Islands*, and Grey Fry's (2019) *Framing the Islands*. Nation states are considered western constructs, reproduced, and often imposed, throughout the world including in Oceania. States have been overlayed upon traditional Pacific ideas about society and social organisation (Anderson, 2006; Fry, 2019).

This overlaying of social structure was often forceful, imposing borders, restricting space, and frequently obliterating what came before, causing great harm to various Pacific people, groups, and structures (Hau'ofa, 1994; Wesley-Smith, 2007; Iati, 2016; Fry, 2019; Teaiwa, 2020). Even through independence, colonial nations had considerable discretion as to what systems of governance were acceptable and capable of 'handling' independence (Wesley-Smith, 2007; Iati, 2016). Understanding this constructed nature of Pacific Island States, and the considerable influence of colonial conceptualisations of appropriate societal organisation, leads to questions of how these conceptualisations affect Oceania internationally today.

While assessing states and understanding them as constructed by certain groups, the civil society focus here encompasses the people of Oceania in a way which is inclusive of various epistemologies and ontologies, thus organisational structures, ideas, and interests (Gegeo, 1998; Fisher and Green, 2004; Anderson, 2006). Currently, civil society and grassroots activities are too often belittled and overlooked for these very reasons of perceived validity, as Hau'Ofa describes so eloquently:

> *"…academic and consultancy experts tend to overlook or misinterpret grassroots activities because these do not fit in with prevailing views about the nature of society and its development"* (Hau'ofa, 1994, p. 2).

Much of academia has consequently contributed to this belittlement through numerous studies questioning what is 'wrong' with the Pacific, pathologizing being 'too small', 'too resource poor' and 'too isolated' (For examples see Hassal, 2012; Goulding, 2015). This piece instead utilises this conceptual framework to consider channels and barriers to the international arena given the constructed nature and general perceptions of Oceania today.

Methods

This mixed methods study explores issues from an on the ground perspective, with an eye to regional and global structures and frameworks to build capacity rather than problematise Oceania (Lauer, 2021). Problematisation of Pacific culture and institutions

is rife throughout the literature and not only is it inconducive to practical solutions, but it is also damaging, disempowering and colonial (Hau'ofa, 1994; Fisher and Green, 2004). A literature review was conducted to gain background on Pacific colonial experiences, constitutional arrangements, and international status. Also, to assess theories and examples of channels and barriers to international influence. A survey and an interview were also conducted to gain insight from a civil society perspective. The survey (Appendix A) contained ten questions and was circulated among Transparency International (TI) chapters throughout Oceania in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Fiji and Vanuatu.

Questions were developed in consultation with the TI New Zealand CEO and the Australian-based TI Pacific Regional Coordinator. It is important to acknowledge the way this positions Oceania's chapters in relation to New Zealand (NZ) and Australia from the outset (Fry, 2019). There were limited responses to these surveys with one written response from Joseph Veramu of Transparency Fiji and one interview with Ruth Liloqula, Executive Officer of Transparency Solomon Islands (TSI). The information gathered was used to guide literature searches and analysis, so is discussed throughout the piece.

Background

Colonisation by European powers created a long, dark, complex web in the corridors of history. It is difficult to untangle, but there were times, events, and entire societies with their own histories before this process began (Hau'ofa, 1994; Gegeo, 1998; Quanchi, 2004; Anderson, 2006; Toki, 2016; Teaiwa, 2020). In Oceania, people moved across the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean over time. These people constitute deep, rich, multifaceted societies with complex processes of social order, interaction and interdependence developed over millennia (Hau'ofa, 1994; Quanchi, 2004; Wesley- Smith, 2007; Regan, 2012; Toki, 2016).

As European nations swept through the region, Spain, Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and the Netherlands raced to divide up Pacific Islands as their property or territory (Wesley-Smith, 2007; Toki, 2016; Teaiwa, 2020). This accorded with European law and consisted of arbitrary border drawing and unilateral declarations of ownership, despite indigenous people and their social and political organisation. Later, Japan, the United States, Australia, and NZ, became a part of this tussle for 'ownership' for various strategic, political, and economic purposes (Slatter, 2015; Toki, 2016; Teaiwa, 2020). Eventually, every newly defined nation, but the Kingdom of Tonga, was under direct colonial rule through a western style state system despite many never having existed under centralised government before (Gegeo, 1998; Wesley-Smith, 2007; Teaiwa, 2020).

Although there were broad similarities of process including European transmission of devastating disease, missionisation, and imposed governance and education; varying contexts, societies and complexities led to unique local experiences of colonisation (Toki, 2016; Teaiwa, 2020; Christopher-Ikimotu, 2021). Essay upon essay could and have been written about this process, all that it entailed for each island, group and community, and the repercussions today which often appear infinite. This, however, transcends the scope of this piece.

Understanding of the historical events and processes of colonisation is, however, critical as these, at a fundamental level, shape the current world order. This essay, while beginning with the importance of this, zooms in on contemporary international profiles of Pacific Island Countries (PIC's). This underlays analysis of channels and barriers Pacific civil society faces in the international sphere today.

In the 1960's the UN General Assembly condemned colonialism and declared the right of all people to self-determination. This manifested in adoption of the UN Declaration on Decolonisation (Wesley-Smith, 2007; United Nations, 2021c). While by some this is seen as motivated by moral principles and values around self-determination, many argue it merely legitimised the international system facilitating modern, more publicly palatable, forms of oppression and exploitation (Wesley-Smith, 2007; Gerard, 2014). Throughout the following years, PIC's were among many colonially governed territories to begin official decolonisation. 'Official', here, signals that this iteration of the term decolonisation simply refers to a constitutional status change from colonial territory to independent, or self-governing state.

This, as much literature on the topic explains (Christopher, 2002; Veracini, 2007; Quanchi, 2008; Walsh and Mignolo, 2018; Teaiwa, 2020), is far from undoing the tangled web of colonial impact. It neither moves things to a pre-colonial state (near impossible and not necessarily desirable in current times) or justly redresses the wounds inflicted by colonisation (Quanchi, 2008; Toki, 2016; Walsh and Mignolo, 2018; Teaiwa, 2020). Despite such formal condemnation of colonialism and the current supposedly equal status this granted to independent PICs, we still see them being shut down internationally as they call for more decisive and robust action on climate change among other issues (Fry, 2015b, 2015a; Goulding, 2015; Lawson, 2017). Consequently, we must question what independence entailed and what structures now exist for participation and influence.

Constitutional Status of PICs

Various island nations fared differently throughout official decolonisation (Maclellan, 2015; Toki, 2016). Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu became independent and member states of the UN (United Nations, 2021b). The Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, and Palau, became member states of the UN in free association with the USA (Pacific Islands Forum, 2021). Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa remained US unincorporated territories so are not UN member states (World Atlas, 2020). The Cook Islands and Niue became independent states in free association with NZ while Tokelau remained a non-self-governing territory of NZ (Pacific Islands Forum, 2021). These three nations are not UN member states, being represented by NZ at the UN (United Nations, 2021b). French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and Wallis and Futuna remain overseas countries within the French Republic although New Caledonia is due for its third independence referendum in December 2021 (Maclellan, 2015; Prinsen, Lafoy and Migozzi, 2017; Chauchat, 2019; Dayant, 2021).

Despite being radical in declaring commitment to rapidly and unconditionally ending colonialism, the UN Declaration on Decolonisation was limited in its impacts (Wesley-Smith, 2007; Quanchi, 2008; Toki, 2016; Teaiwa, 2020). Limiting factors include that the

nations provided for under this declaration were confined to those on the UN list of non-self-governing territories (Wesley-Smith, 2007; Toki, 2016). Firstly, countries such as NZ and Australia who were already independent from the UK were never included on this list. Therefore, indigenous peoples of these places and their rights to decolonisation are not considered. Colonial powers also argued for certain territories to be exempt from the list. France argued that New Caledonia, French Polynesia and Wallis and Futuna had voted in a new constitution for the French Republic; the US that Hawaii had voted on statehood; and Indonesia that West Papua participated in a constitutional vote (Wesley-Smith, 2007). This removed all of these nations from the list thus removing their rights to decolonisation based on assertions from their colonisers that they had freely chosen the current arrangements.

Each listed country was then only entitled to one opportunity to change their constitutional status. Further, constitutional options were often dictated by the level and form of administration the colonial government deemed necessary and appropriate for independence (Wesley-Smith, 2007; Iati, 2016). This compression of space for dissent, ideas, and ways of governing created a huge barrier to true decolonisation, and left new states heavily influenced by desires of respective colonial rulers (Christopher, 2002; Wesley-Smith, 2007).

Further limitations are apparent in that many social, cultural, ethnic, and political groups were aggregated into colonially convenient administrative units during the border drawing phase of colonisation (Reilly, 2004; Nelson, 2010; Haque, 2012; Wood, 2016). This has since been a cause for conflict such as Bougainville's fight for independence from PNG (Regan, 2012; Boege, 2020). UN directed independence exacerbated this issue with entrenchment of these arbitrary borders and further aggregation of smaller administrative units into larger neighbouring units, for example Banaba being absorbed by Kiribati (Christopher, 2002; Christopher-Ikimotu, 2021).

As many continue to struggle for independence for example in New Caledonia and Bougainville, many previous colonial rulers have contemporary aid relationships with previous colonies who are now independent (Regan, 2012; Maclellan, 2015; Prinsen, Lafoy and Migozzi, 2017; Chauchat, 2019; Boege, 2020). These aid relationships publicly front as righting past wrongs to facilitate self-sufficiency (Wesley-Smith, 2007; Toki, 2016; Teaiwa, 2020). However, some argue they serve as mechanisms for undermining local systems of governance and cultural resilience whilst forcefully encouraging a shift towards market-led economies and other policies desirable to previous colonial rulers (Wesley-Smith, 2007; Moyo and Ferguson, 2010; Toki, 2016).

Aid relationships also provide leverage for coercion of PIC's in the international arena (Moyo and Ferguson, 2010; Toki, 2016; Teaiwa, 2020). One example being when most states adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) in 2007. Australia and NZ were two of only four dissenting states and, interestingly, of the 34 non-voting states, 10 were PICs who have widespread colonial experiences. Their abstinence from voting is arguably a result of the power of the colonialist position as argued by Toki:

> *"Owing to the pervasive and widespread experience of colonization throughout the Pacific, this relatively high rate of non-adoption of the UNDRIP is arguably reflective*

> *of the prevalent colonialist position. The Pacific nations continue to remain beholden to regional powers through aid and therefore continue the colonialist perspective by proxy."* (Toki, 2016, p. 190).

Finally, newly independent states entered an international system built by, and for, western powers. This system increasingly restricts possibilities for true self determination, and has aims which are not only different from, but often obstructive of, those of former colonies (Risse *et al.*, 1999; Wesley-Smith, 2007). Further, media and academia are full of rhetoric around 'failed' or 'weak' Pacific states and endless deliberation as to why states are 'failing' (Reilly, 2004; Hassal, 2012; Wood, 2016). This is damaging. Not only psychologically for the states and people in question, but also in material and political consequences via the decision-making powers of those holding conceptualisations of PICs as 'failing' (Hau'ofa, 1994; Fisher and Green, 2004).

Civil Society

With this background on the constitutional and international status of PICs, we now look to the voice of Pacific civil society. Civil society describes social and collective political agency independent of states and markets (Chandler, 2004; Botan and Taylor, 2005; Florini and Simmons, 2012; Colás, 2013; Natil, Malila and Sai, 2020). This has long consisted of social movements and civil society organisations (CSOs) contesting national, regional, and global issues. Consequently, civil society has played a crucial role in international development in environmental, human rights, conflict resolution and many other arenas (Raustiala, 1997; Kriesberg, 1998; Smith, Chatfield and Pagnucco, 1998; Warkentin and Mingst, 2000; Schmidt, 2004; Pallas and Urpelainen, 2012; Leer, 2014; Pallas and Uhlin, 2014; Aqorau, 2017).

Many describe CSO's as linking stakeholders (i.e. citizens) with international policy making, diminishing the power imbalance inherent in state and global governance systems and enacting democracy (Chandler, 2004; Busby, 2007; Pallas and Uhlin, 2014). The question here is: how does civil society reach that level of influence, what channels and barriers constitute this pathway, and how does this play out in Oceania? This piece assesses civil society's influence through international and regional institutions and states, and also through endogenous civil society channels such as networks, norm shaping, awareness raising and local influence.

Channels to International Interaction

Despite traditional governance and leadership models abounding in Oceania, the international system tends to only acknowledge certain institutional forms (Norton, 2012; Fraenkel, 2013; Wood, 2014, 2016; Toki, 2016; Aqorau, 2017). This, alongside the domination of colonial systems of government, education, and religion, has led to disempowerment and the stifling of a range of traditional and alternative institutions and governance forms. Consequently, many nations have moulded into the political image of the few dominant members of the international system to be acknowledged, thus participate (Christopher, 2002; Wesley-Smith, 2007; Toki, 2016). We will return to this point following assessment of channels available for PICs to engage meaningfully in such a system (Fisher and Green, 2004).

United Nations

The current scope and capacity of the UN is astronomical, and this scale can stifle the influence of small states and CSOs (Hau'ofa, 1994; McLay, 2011). This begs assessment of how these groups can and do interact here alongside who does hold power and influence in such an institution. All UN member states have a formal channel of interaction through the General Assembly (United Nations, 2021d), but as mentioned, not all PICs are member states. Consequently, some rely on previous colonial rulers to represent their views, for example Tokelau, The Cook Islands and Niue rely on NZ (United Nations, 2021b). Further, even when PICs are member states, their votes are often swayed by financial reliance on, and political dominance of, states such as Australia and NZ (Moyo and Ferguson, 2010; Toki, 2016; Teaiwa, 2020).

Systems of such state centricity legitimise an extremely limited array of voices. Thus, decisions are shaped to certain worldviews and interests. This excludes a whole range of lived experiences and forms of knowledge. As the UN is an institution with such wide-reaching power and influence, it is important that such wide arrays of interests and experiences are not excluded. Therefore, the inclusion of civil society is critical. When the UN charter was drafted, NGOs successfully lobbied for Article 71 to provide NGOs a consultative arrangement with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), thus a formal channel of engagement (Raustiala, 1997; Willetts, 2000). Today NGOs are engaged throughout UN assemblies and councils which goes some way towards wider inclusion. Only the 5,450 (as at September 1st 2019) NGOs accredited through this formal channel, however, are included (Willetts, 2000; Florini and Simmons, 2012; United Nations Secretary General, 2019). In addition, these NGOs only legally hold consultative roles, and progress towards meaningful engagement has been limited (Fisher and Green, 2004).

Regional Institutions

The first formal regional institution, the South Pacific Commission, was founded by Australia and NZ in 1947 (Lawson, 2017). Indigenous participation was only permitted through the separate South Pacific Conference. In the mid 1960's after the UN Declaration on Decolonisation formally delegitimised colonialism, PICs walked out due to inadequate Pacific Island control (Lawson, 2017). Subsequently, the Conference took over the Commission and exists today as the Pacific Community. This highlights that since the first PICs became independent, and began conducting their own foreign policies, there was commitment to amplifying the Pacific voice through regional organising (Fisher and Green, 2004; Bryar and Naupa, 2017).

The Pacific Community has 26 member states, 22 PICs alongside NZ, Australia, the USA, and France, all with equal votes (Pacific Community, 2021). They self-describe as a non-political organisation using science, technology, and statistics to improve development outcomes for member states (Pacific Community, 2021). Interview discussion with TSI highlighted that this regional forum has an explicit emphasis on local capacity building (Liloqula, 2021). They run workshops and financial training while giving Pacific civil society significant responsibility, allowing them to manage projects and build capacity.

> *"The model that [the Pacific Community] have is one which is really building the capacity of national NGOs"* (Liloqula, 2021).

Arguably the most prominent regional political institution is the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) (Fry and Tarte, 2015; Maclellan, 2015; Taylor, 2015; Lawson, 2017). There are 19 member states (including associate members) as status as an independent or self-governing nation is required (Lawson, 2017; Pacific Islands Forum, 2021). There are three current exceptions with New Caledonia, French Polynesia and Tokelau being non-self-governing associate members (Pacific Islands Forum, 2021). The membership of NZ and Australia brings significant finance but has oftentimes been controversial with allegations of neo-colonial attitudes and domination of the regional agenda (Fry, 2015b; Fry and Tarte, 2015; Lawson, 2017; Morgan, 2018).

The PIF was established partly to encourage cooperation regionally, but also to take a unified Pacific voice to the world (Fry, 2015a; Fry and Tarte, 2015). This resulted in a series of international treaties on resource protection, environmental issues, nuclear testing, and trade. The PIF was also active on independence issues, successfully lobbying to reinstate New Caledonia on the UN list of non-self-governing territories, granting them the right to vote on their constitutional status (Fry and Tarte, 2015; Prinsen, Lafoy and Migozzi, 2017; Chauchat, 2019; Maclellan, 2019). The PIF became less active in these areas from the mid-90s shifting their focus towards regional economic integration through leadership from NZ and Australia (Fry, 2015b; Fry and Tarte, 2015; Goulding, 2015; Slatter, 2015; Lawson, 2017).

As the PIF is an Intergovernmental Organisation (IO), their work primarily involves states. This leaves questions around the PIFs proximity to and engagement with civil society. Many critiques centre around the PIFs distance from the people of Oceania. It is described as hierarchical, technocratic, inaccessible to civil society, and representative of states, rather than citizens (Slatter, 2015). This feeds into an overarching criticism of Pacific regionalism projects claiming they are by and for the people, but really being by heads of state and for economic integration (Slatter, 2015). These criticisms will now be explored through assessing the plans and frameworks which guide the PIF's work.

In 2004, the PIF committed to the Pacific Plan. This looked to enhance regional integration through economic growth, sustainable development, good governance, and security (Firth, 2006; Lawson, 2017). The plan faced criticism from academics and civil society for paying lip service to Pacific values and culture, being a NZ initiative and a vehicle for neo-colonial imposition, and neoliberal agendas not aligned with Pacific interests (Gegeo, 1998; Slatter, 2015; Lawson, 2017). After a review in 2013 during which 37 out of 65 submissions came from CSOs, a new Framework for Pacific Regionalism was drafted, succeeding the Pacific Plan in 2014 (Slatter, 2015).

This framework emphasises civil society and is more flexible. It has a vision, a set of values and objectives, and a process for identifying policy priorities without defining them explicitly. This leaves space for civil society to participate in determining priorities (Taylor, 2015; Bryar and Naupa, 2017; Lawson, 2017). The interview conducted in this study, however, highlighted there is a lack of monitoring and accountability after adoption of such frameworks. Consequently, many are significant in development, but eventuate in limited practical applicability (Liloqula, 2021).

> *"There is no robust monitoring framework in place…to see that the countries are actually doing something about this agreement…or declaration"* (Liloqula, 2021).

Despite the long-term prominence of the PIF, recent developments have led to the rise of the Pacific Small Island Developing States group (PSIDS) at the UN (McLay, 2011; Fry and Tarte, 2015; Maclellan, 2015). PSIDS has increasingly been the vehicle for decolonisation issues, as these have gradually moved out of the PIF, potentially due to limitations imparted by Australia and NZ (McLay, 2011; Fry and Tarte, 2015). The Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF) is another group working in similar spaces which has gained prominence in recent years. This was a Fiji led initiative established after Fiji was suspended from the PIF (Firth, 2013; Lawson, 2017). This forum excludes NZ and Australia and emphasises connection between leaders and society. Consequently, it aims to bring civil society groups, the private sector, international agencies, and governments together in negotiations and discussions (Lawson, 2017).

Sub-Regional and Issue specific groups

Embedded within this framework of regional organisations exists sub-regional organisations (Fry and Tarte, 2015; Lowe Gallen, 2015; Newton Cain, 2015; Lawson, 2017). This represents Oceania's diversity and cultural demarcations have led to three main sub-regional groups divided along the Melanesia, Polynesia, Micronesia lines (Newton Cain, 2015). Many other sub-regional groups are issue specific. A prominent example is the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA). This group is primarily concerned with fisheries management and have arguably been more successful in this area than the larger Forum Fisheries Agency (Newton Cain, 2015).

The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program (SPREP) is another example. Established in 1992, SPREP is mandated to lead on environmental and resource management issues (Goulding, 2015). They coordinate the Pacific Climate Change Roundtable, disseminate funding and information, and implement climate change mitigation, waste management, pollution control, and island and ecosystem services projects (Goulding, 2015). There are a very wide range of groups coordinating similarly around different issues (Lipschutz, 1992; Reimann, 2006; Florini and Simmons, 2012; Goulding, 2015; Bryar and Naupa, 2017).

Some authors argue these numerous regional, intergovernmental, and civil society groups and networks are counter-productive, disaggregating efforts. Goulding (2015) for example argues that this stifles potential progress which could be achieved if negotiations and decision-making were confined to one all-encompassing group. For climate groups Goulding argues this would be the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It is interesting to consider, however, that barriers to inclusion at larger forums such as the UNFCCC are part of the reason this range and number of groups exists (Fogarty, 2011; Bryar and Naupa, 2017). There is then the question of who is present at and who is absent from the negotiating and decision-making table at the UNFCCC, therefore the asymmetrical exclusion that would arise from confining negotiations to this arena.

Further, forums such as the UNFCCC tend to have an institutional nature and set of values, goals and priorities which do not necessarily align with worldviews and priorities of

Pacific civil society (Barnett and Finnemore, 1999). It is, thus, interesting to question what inhibited progress Goulding (2015) is referring to alongside which all-encompassing arenas would be chosen and who would choose them. If everything was confined to UN forums for example there is a whole sector of ideas, experiences and priorities which would be excluded from less powerful states, non-member states, and civil society more broadly. Consequently, we can consider this multitude of groups as representing diversity of thought and experience, thus creating resilience, and adding value to negotiating and decision-making processes. The issue from this perspective lies with ensuring this diversity of thought and experience can equitably access and influence the international arena.

States

Many institutions discussed above, such as the PIF regionally and the UN globally, are IOs therefore are state-centric (Pallas and Uhlin, 2014). We must, then, assess channels between civil society and states, then states and international institutions to understand if and how civil society has access through this channel. CSO alliances with state actors are one way of influencing IOs. These are contingent on factors such as CSO's having state contacts, and states being accessible enough for lobbying, alliance formation, and accountability processes to be effective (Pallas and Uhlin, 2014). State regimes are key here, as restrictions on freedoms to dissent and media (as seen in Samoa and Fiji) inhibit CSO activity and CSO-State alliances (Norton, 2012; Iati, 2013; Veramu, 2021).

If civil society manages to foster alignment with state actors on issues of interest, power structures of IOs can determine influence (Pallas and Uhlin, 2014). Hard power structures in IOs are seen in voting arrangements which generally take one of three forms: 1). Weighted voting, where the power of a countries vote is based on population size, GDP, or another relevant measure 2). Majority voting where a certain majority (for example 75%) is required for a vote to pass 3). Sovereign equality voting, where every country has one equal vote and consensus is required for a vote to pass (Steinberg, 2002). Simply assessing this legal power structure is insufficient, not least because not all PICs are sovereign nations, thus, some are not entitled to a vote at the UN or other institutions at all. Additionally, because those that are member states still experience soft power, normative influence, and coercion which we will come back to in the section on barriers (Barnett and Finnemore, 1999; Busch and Reinhardt, 2000; Johnston, 2001; Steinberg, 2002; Pallas and Uhlin, 2014).

Institution type is another determinate of state influence, thus CSO-state alliance influence. More technocratic IOs such as the Pacific Community tend to be less responsive to power differentials between states, thus potentially provide more of a channel for direct CSO-state alliance influence (Pallas and Uhlin, 2014; Liloqula, 2021). In contrast, deliberative organisations such as the PIF are spaces for state discussion so power dynamics between states have greater influence (Johnston, 2001; Fry, 2015b; Fry and Tarte, 2015; Lawson, 2017; Morgan, 2018). In the PIF Australia and NZ's dominance is exemplified in climate change policy where PICs generally agitate for more combative standpoints which Australia and NZ drag back towards the status quo (Fry, 2015b, 2015a; Goulding, 2015; Lawson, 2017). Overall, conditions necessary for the state channel to be accessible and effective for CSOs include state contacts, accessibility, shared interests, open and accountable state regimes, and international power structures allowing said

state to have influence. These conditions do not arise often, leaving CSOs to forge endogenous channels in the international sphere (Gerard, 2014; Pallas and Uhlin, 2014).

Endogenous Channels

With limited time and resources, CSOs need to choose channels of international influence wisely, or forge their own (Chatfield, 1998; Pallas and Uhlin, 2014). This can involve utilising the size, influence, and resource base of larger NGOs. The literature and interview, however, say this is an uncommon, often unfruitful occurrence (Pallas and Uhlin, 2014; Liloqula, 2021). One factor here is that large and small NGOs are in direct competition for funding and resources (Liloqula, 2021). Exceptions do, however, exist. For example, the Pacific Climate Warriors forming under 350.org, utilising the resources and influence of the larger organisation to garner international support (350 Pacific, 2021). Also, chapter-based organisations such as Transparency International which often fund and support chapters in various locations (Florini and Simmons, 2012; Transparency International, 2021).

Another option for CSOs is the creation of regional and international civil society networks (Lipschutz, 1992). These can be issue specific, such as the Pacific Network on Globalisation (PANG), or, coordinating bodies such as the Pacific Island Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (PIANGO) (Florini and Simmons, 2012; Slatter, 2015). Both PANG and PIANGO played a significant role in consultations around the Pacific Plan, arguing against a continued economic focus and for a reframing with consideration of Pacific people's rights to economic self-determination (Slatter, 2015). These groups highlighted that neoliberal economic models have had negative impacts on Pacific lives and livelihoods while traditional values and ways could offer alternative models more suited to the region. Input from groups like these was instrumental in formulating the Framework for Pacific Regionalism discussed above (Slatter, 2015).

Other endogenous channels bypass the institutional realm altogether, instead fostering global awareness and norm setting (Barnett and Finnemore, 1999). This channel has proliferated through increasing internet accessibility, thus, global connectivity (Warkentin and Mingst, 2000). These interpersonal and informal channels, which include networking between groups and wider advocacy to global citizenry, promote engagement of marginalised citizens (Lipschutz, 1992; Fisher and Green, 2004; Florini and Simmons, 2012; Natil, Malila and Sai, 2020). Media, and national media regimes are crucial here. In Fiji for example, tight media controls (as mentioned in the survey response) can make this channel inaccessible (Veramu, 2021). Similarly in Samoa, where the independent media outlet (*Samoa Observer*) has faced multiple litigations from the government and on one occasion had their premises burned down (Iati, 2013).

Finally, in the interview, it was discussed that the work done locally is its own channel of influence (Liloqula, 2021). Local projects and initiatives generate knowledge and ideas which naturally grow and create results which influence global politics and decision making (Gegeo, 1998; Kriesberg, 1998). There is considerable work assessing local, community led initiatives which tends to show communities having ownership over projects is a key driver of success (McNamara *et al.*, 2020; Liloqula, 2021). Despite local focus, knowledge generation coupled with global connectivity means local projects and

initiatives can, and often do, manifest in international influence (Lipschutz, 1992; Kriesberg, 1998)

Barriers to International Interaction

Barriers have been identified throughout the literature, assessment of channels, survey, and interview. These are now categorised into two sections: power and disenfranchisement. Both have been chosen through analysis of identified barriers, and assessment of plausible underlying foundations, utilising the conceptual framework outlined at the beginning of the piece. Power here refers to hard institutional rules, exclusion, and control (Kriesberg, 1998). Disenfranchisement is soft power and the effects of various conceptualisations of Oceania as explored in Fisher and Green (2004).

Power

Regional and global institutions and states are not immune from postcolonial processes and power structures (Barnett and Finnemore, 1999; Steinberg, 2002; Chandler, 2004; Wesley-Smith, 2007; Fry, 2019). One of the most explicit and global manifestations of this is not all states being UN members or recognised in other regional or international institutions. This is particularly apparent for non-self-governing territories. Thus, countries such as Niue, Tokelau, the Cook Islands, New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands and American Samoa are excluded from much regional and international negotiating and decision making. Further, they are often forced to rely on previous colonial rulers to represent their interests internationally.

For civil society power is complex as there are various rules governing institutional participation (Fisher and Green, 2004). As seen in survey results and discussion, many institutions are intergovernmental therefore CSOs (as non-state entities) have no legal right to participate (Fisher and Green, 2004).

> *"One of the challenges of anti-corruption work is that it is mostly carried out by UN agencies like UNODC/UNPRAC and they deal with States."* (Veramu, 2021).

Civil society groups who are unable to access their national governments due to corruption or illiberal regimes which censor media and restrict freedom to dissent or lobby are, thus, at a further disadvantage. These groups lack access to the state channel which could otherwise carry their concerns to IOs. While the number of NGOs who can bypass the state channel and engage directly through consultative status at the UN has risen dramatically, there are still many without this status (Willetts, 2000; United Nations Secretary General, 2019). Although not all NGOs can be (or necessarily want to be) included in this way, we can consider requirements of consultative status to understand inclusion and exclusion. Requirements include submitting a charter or constitution, financial statements, annual reports, proof of two years activity and proof of democratic decision making, among other things (United Nations, 2021a).

One barrier here is the burdensome bureaucratic process. Accreditation procedures as described above can be onerous for groups without spare time, finance, personnel, resources, or knowledge of this institutional format. These requirements are, thus, an exercise of power as they directly exclude a vast array of groups. Additionally, in the

current world order, these criteria heavily privilege western organisational forms. (Fisher and Green, 2004). For states and institutions, a degree of power and legitimacy arises from these accreditation structures and accompanying formal engagement channels, as they publicly display consultation and engagement with civil society (Lipschutz, 1992; Pallas and Urpelainen, 2012; Gerard, 2014). Consequently, these channels created for CSO 'engagement' can become barriers through controlling who can participate and how. Not only those with limited resources, but also CSOs with more contentious agendas and grassroots organising, are excluded unless they censor certain views, criticisms and aims or alter organisational structures (Liloqula, 2021).

In defining the nature of participation permitted, institutions may allow members to vote, submit written statements, observe, speak, attend meetings, or obtain documents among other things (Fisher and Green, 2004; Gerard, 2014). Defining such rules of participation not only limits influence but can then be weaponised against CSOs to delegitimise alternative engagement attempts. Consequently, alternative engagements attempts are delegitimised for not following the rules, but participation, engagement and influence may be limited within the rules. This effectively grants NGO's, as one sector of civil society, representation without permitting contestation, thus compressing international space available for genuine engagement (Lipschutz, 1992; Pallas and Urpelainen, 2012; Gerard, 2014).

Homing in on domestic experiences and CSO-state alliances, a nations regime, political stability, and openness to dissent is significant. Repressive regimes often control CSOs through dominating financial channels and narrowing civic space (Natil, Malila and Sai, 2020). This can affect civil society's ability to organise locally, and impact delegates abilities to participate and influence international decision making (Fisher and Green, 2004). Restrictions on media are significant in this, as seen in the survey response.

> *"We extensively use social media and mainstream media to a smaller extent…Fiji is an illiberal democracy where the media is censored."* (Veramu, 2021).

One final barrier in terms of power relates to funding, a central issue raised in the interview (Fogarty, 2011; Liloqula, 2021; United Nations, 2021a). While civil society should link decisions and implementation, they are often excluded from actual decision making. Consequently, CSOs end up applying for available funding, for lack of other options, and carrying out pre-determined projects that they do not necessarily agree with in order to survive as organisations (Liloqula, 2021). This exclusion is nonsensical and detrimental to the sustainability of solutions and projects implemented (Kew and John, 2008).

> *"It is not civil society making the decisions…the solutions that we as national NGO's see would work doesn't get any funding, the solutions that international consultants come up with…get funding…when they give us funding…it is that one they are tied down to implement…just for survival national NGOs apply for it and they implement those programmes but knowing very well that it's not going to work"* (Liloqula, 2021).

Additionally, when funding is available for specified projects, it creates a competitive dynamic between CSOs. Many groups including those who haven't before worked in

particular contexts apply, explicating their expertise in the area. This prioritisation of funding often results in larger international NGOs, who are not necessarily best suited, carrying out projects and effectively pushing civil society out.

> *"When there is money there, all of a sudden UNDP is an expert on this or Oxfam is an expert…they go where the money is, and they don't involve Solomon Islanders in the discussion"* (Liloqula, 2021).

Finally, if civil society relies on large NGOs, government, or international institutions for funding, they end up tied down by funders who have rules around project implementation, and what can and cannot be said and done (Liloqula, 2021). These funding requirements can end up censoring which issues can be challenged. This as described in the interview, is the 'double-edged sword' of funding as it gives funders a degree of power and control over CSOs. This often means groups must tone down criticisms or change campaign targets to participate in this way (Gerard, 2014; Liloqula, 2021)

> *"They are…prevented from speaking…there are strings attached to that funding"* (Liloqula, 2021).

Disenfranchisement

Fisher and Green (2004) advance the idea of disenfranchisement. Their analysis first defines disenfranchisement as:

> *"Being deprived of the capability to participate and to influence agenda setting and decision-making in international regimes."* (Fisher and Green, 2004, p. 64).

This definition guides analysis here. Barriers relating to hard and institutional rules, control, and exclusion, have been discussed above enabling assessment of the disenfranchisement which exists even when PICs or CSOs are legally and institutionally entitled to an equal say. Article 18 of the UN Charter guarantees the rules of sovereign equality for all members. Thus, in the UN General Assembly, member states are entitled to an equal vote (Steinberg, 2002; Fisher and Green, 2004; United Nations, 2021d). However, we do not see equal representation, involvement in agenda setting, or influence from all UN member states.

All too often, this is a result of soft power and coercive processes. As discussed above, the international arena and the UN as a central part of this were created by and for Western powers (Risse *et al.*, 1999; Wesley-Smith, 2007). This infers superiority to these groups firstly because they made the rules, therefore they have the knowledge to operate in this forum and pursue their interests in the most effective way. Furthermore, there is the influence of aid relationships as mentioned above. These relationships can be weaponised as tools of coercion to ensure dominant nations achieve their goals despite interests of aid-dependent nations (Wesley-Smith, 2007; Moyo and Ferguson, 2010; Teaiwa, 2020; Toki, 2016)

Other widely recognised barriers to equitable access for PICs in international institutions where they have an equal vote, are limited resources, personnel, time, and financial

capacity (Fisher and Green, 2004). As impacts of these have been discussed under power, here we will dig into where this lack of capacity and resources comes from as a manifestation of disenfranchisement. The conceptual framework guiding this study suggests we assess conceptualisations and consequential treatment of Oceania, both states and civil society.

In the interview it became apparent that lack of capacity in Pacific CSOs is cyclic in nature. It is perpetuated as a manifestation of the way PICs and Pacific CSO's are conceived by dominant states and large international NGOs. The Solomon Islands here, are an interesting case study. Post ethnic tensions, international intervention through RAMSI worked at re-establishing institutions, including for civil society. Unfortunately, this resulted in large international NGOs entering to rebuild civil society capacity. The interview with TSI indicates that despite intentions to rebuild capacity, large international NGOs instead dominated space and funding previously occupied and utilised by civil society. This effectively ousted many civil society groups creating a major barrier to local and international influence (Natil, Malila and Sai, 2020; Liloqula, 2021).

> *"[International NGOs] occupied the space…of the national civil society…access the bilateral allocation for CSOs and…instead of building the capacity…established themselves in the country…drying up the funding for any of the CSOs…that were there as the strong voice for the civil society"* (Liloqula, 2021)

This process, I argue, results from conceptualisations of Pacific civil society. As discussed in the interview, large international NGOs are often tasked with managing funding and projects as civil society is believed not to have the capacity. Consequently, Pacific civil society lacks opportunities to gain capacity in these areas as large transnational NGOs consistently fill these roles (Liloqula, 2021). A well-documented phenomenon manifesting from this idea of Pacific civil society's incapability is that it incentivises organisational formalisation and professionalisation (Fisher and Green, 2004; Fogarty, 2011). Civil society faces pressure to increase perceived legitimacy and organisational form to be considered capable, thus, to be included (Fisher and Green, 2004; Fogarty, 2011). This again delegitimises alternative forms of organising, linking to questions of who has decided which organisational forms are professional, and what is perceived as legitimate.

Another manifestation of this perceived incapability is international actors not understanding, or attempting to understand, what is required for civil society representatives to participate effectively. Often, they communicate the importance of civil society groups, calling on them to participate, without recognising they are, albeit unintentionally, confining this to specific (generally Eurocentric) forums and formats. The result being, many of the most suited to participate, in terms of civil society on the ground, lack information and knowledge of these settings, whilst also lacking appropriate resources for effective participation (Fisher and Green, 2004; Schmidt, 2004).

Overall, belittlement, and underestimation of Pacific civil society feeds exclusionary processes, preventing Pacific civil society from having equitable access to international spheres. Belittling views began with initial European interactions such as missionaries denouncing Pacific people as *"savage, lascivious and barbaric"* (Hau'ofa, 1994, p. 3), and have been reinforced since through media, academia, and politics. Pacific peoples have

been relegated to colonial dominance, followed by colonially defined independence, then contemporary perception as 'failed' or 'weak' states. All of this has a lasting effect on people's views of their histories, cultures, and capabilities (Hau'ofa, 1994).

Problematisation of Pacific states, citizenry and culture is also evident in research and projects which often extract from Pacific communities without reciprocating in empowering or useful ways (Liloqula, 2021). This entrenches belittlement and disenfranchisement, disempowering Pacific civil society and reinforcing ideas of inadequacy. These considerable forces underlay many of the aforementioned barriers to Pacific civil societies equitable international engagement.

Conclusion

The conceptual framework of this piece emphasises the constructed nature of both Pacific Island nation states and international institutions. From this perspective, considerable international agenda setting, negotiating and decision making is done on the terms of European states. The international arena is, therefore, founded on the basis of colonisation, imposed governance systems, and regulated participation. This fundamentally leads to the power dynamics and disenfranchisement which exclude PICs and Pacific civil society from international spheres today.

Significant barriers arise from working within structures and frameworks created by groups with vastly different epistemologies and ontologies, thus interests. Even when participatory spaces are created by institutions, they are often limited due to protections put in place by said institutions to shape the contributions CSOs can make. This creates a cyclic barrier for CSO's in participating through legitimate channels, experiencing limitations, thus working through alternative channels, and being delegitimised for bypassing legitimate channels.

Another cyclic barrier is seen in colonially imposed borders. These confined Pacific people and compartmentalised Oceania creating perceived smallness. Academia has since problematised Pacific culture and smallness thus actualised the barriers of smallness, creating and perpetuating dependence. This all feeds into international recognition and the power at play in deciding which forums, institutions, nations, and ideas are valid, thus who is allowed at negotiating and decision-making tables. These barriers to inclusion are followed up by coercion and conceptualisations of Oceania as a failed or weak political region. At a macro level, this is all a cycle of power and disenfranchisement.

Overall, this essay has shown that views held by those in dominant positions have real consequences for self-image, behaviours, and opportunities, thus, realities for subordinated groups. For Oceania they perpetuate belittlement and neo-colonial relationships of dependency, and disempowerment which inhibit Pacific civil society from gaining equitable access to international space. These views of Oceania often differ considerably from views and realities on the ground. Therefore, there are opportunities for positivity through genuine capacity building. This, however, will take serious work and reconceptualization on the part of dominant groups. If perceptions change, legitimate capacity building in Pacific civil society becomes possible, allowing progress towards meaningful and equitable access to the international arena.

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Appendix A: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Name:
Chapter/Organisation:
Would you like your responses to be anonymous: yes/no

1. Can you provide a copy of your strategic plan or Annual Report or a document that shows your main strategic goals and activities.

2. What channels or institutions has your chapter/national contact used or worked with in the last year regionally and/or internationally?

3. How effective is the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) in achieving its aims (see below for its aims), in the context of regional and global power dynamics? If you think it could be more effective, can you explain what needs to change?

4. Are there other cross regional institutions that you think are more effective than the PIF?

5. What are the main barriers and challenges you face in your work and in being heard regionally and globally? How could these barriers/challenges be removed/overcome?

6. How do relationships with former Pacific colonial nations such as New Zealand, Australia, France, the US, the UK etc. play out in the regional/international arena? For example, do these nations generally help or hinder your country's voice, ambition and interests?

7. How responsive are PIF, and UN agencies in your country and regionally to civil society groups such as your chapter? Do you have any examples/experiences?

8. How important are regional and sub-regional initiatives such as the Teieniwa vision to the work of the chapters? In what way?

9. Does your chapter get involved with international initiatives like Sustainable Development Goals and Open Government Partnership, and instruments such as UNCAC? In what ways?

10. Any other thoughts, experiences, or comments on the effectiveness of regional and global organisations.

Aims of the Pacific Islands Forum

· The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat is an international organisation that aims to stimulate economic growth and enhance political governance and security for the region, through the provision of policy advice; and to strengthen regional cooperation and integration through coordinating, monitoring and evaluating implementation of Leaders' decisions.