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## **Conclusion: Power and diplomatic agency in Pacific regionalism**

The previous chapters have traced the politics and diplomacy of Pacific regionalism against the backdrop of changing global influences, and changing local politics, from the colonial period to recent times. In this concluding chapter, I return to the overriding question motivating this study: what is the political meaning of Pacific regionalism? To unpack this question, I propose to focus on the two key puzzles I raised at the outset.

The first puzzle is the key question of how we should understand the political significance of Pacific regionalism in a context in which the region-building project has not moved along the path of European-style regional integration. Can it, for example, still be seen as a form of political community with real and independent political significance? Seemingly without settled governance or coercive capacity, is it more than an arena for diplomatic talk? If it is, what is the nature and the source of this political significance? How should we understand the power of the regional political community in the Pacific context?

The second puzzle follows from the first: If Pacific regionalism does have political significance, whom has it served? Who has diplomatic agency in this regional enterprise? In particular, how much political agency have Pacific states and societies had in shaping the agenda, structures and policy outcomes of the Pacific political regional community? Is it, rather, the case

that, in ‘framing the islands’ in particular ways, external regional players are setting up Pacific islanders for outcomes not of their making? These thoughts arise from the reality that the pattern of power underlying and surrounding Pacific regionalism at least suggests the possibility of either an Australian and New Zealand regional hegemony or, more broadly, the dominance of globalisation over local interests. This expectation is particularly encouraged by the knowledge that this is a region comprising many of the world’s smallest states.

## Political significance

### The road not travelled

Our starting point in this inquiry was that conventional analyses of regionalism miss the significance of Pacific regionalism because they look for a high level of regional integration or evidence that the region-building effort is on a pathway to that goal. The comparative model for such a judgement is usually the European experience and the indicator of political significance is usually the degree of regional integration achieved by the regional project. Seen through such a conceptual lens, regional integration implies the development of a coercive capacity to ensure state compliance with regional regulations. From this perspective, the creation of state-like attributes at the regional level implies the derogation of national sovereignty.

While there has been constant lip-service paid to the integration goal in the pursuit of the Pacific regional project, the idea has failed to have any serious purchase on the practice of Pacific regionalism. Against those who would conclude that there is therefore little of political significance to see in the Pacific regional project, I argue that the *longue durée* of Pacific regionalism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has shown that the Pacific regional entity has had real political significance. This can be seen in the various political roles that have been performed by the regional entity: the constitution of a strategic political arena for the negotiation of globalisation, the provision of regional governance, the building of a regional political community and the operation of a regional diplomatic bloc.

## Strategic political arena

It is clear that the Pacific regional entity has acted as a key political arena for diplomatic contests over how people should live their lives and how societies should be organised in the Pacific. The regional arena has not displaced the national political arena, but it has become an important site of politics affecting all aspects of Pacific lives, including security, development, resource management, environmental protection, rights, governance, gender equality, youth and health. In particular, the strategic location of the Pacific regional arena between ‘the global’ and ‘the local’ has enabled it to become a valued site for the negotiation of global ideas and processes. As we have seen, global actors such as the international agencies and global powers see the regional arena as a strategic location for promoting their preferred policy agenda and policy knowledge across the Pacific island region. They have seen regional diplomacy as a crucial part of their effort to influence policy within individual Pacific countries. Pacific island countries, on the other hand, have regarded the regional arena as a key place to engage global forces and ideas impacting on their societies, with a view to either moderating such pressures or defending themselves against undesired influences. This has, therefore, been an important political arena for regional diplomacy; it has determined key outcomes for small states in a globalised world; it has been a place where they have negotiated globalisation.

As a result of this diplomatic activity over the past 70 years, we have seen the gradual development of a highly complex regional institutional system. As we have seen, colonial regionalism centred on the South Pacific Commission and its advisory offshoot, the South Pacific Conference. Leaders of independent Pacific island states created the South Pacific Forum in 1971, which, over subsequent decades, became the centre of an elaborate system of regional institutions focused on various aspects of regional governance: fisheries, the environment, technical cooperation and research. From 2009, another burst of institution-building occurred as an expression of what we have here described as the ‘new Pacific diplomacy’. By 2016, this new array of regional and subregional organisations was largely accepted as part of the patchwork regional governance system described in Chapter 13. These institutions now cover almost every aspect of governance, including economic development, trade promotion, resource protection, the environment, natural disasters, human rights, governance, security, conflict management, cultural heritage, sustainable

human development and decolonisation. They jointly employ more than 1,000 regional public servants to carry out their programs. By any measure apart from the European model, this is a significant regional diplomatic and governance system.

## Regional governance

For the sceptics, though, the real issue for establishing political significance is whether this regional activity leads to a form of regional governance that influences what happens within Pacific states. If it has not produced European-style integration and the derogation of state sovereignty, can the Pacific regional community be regarded as having an impact on what happens within states? I argue that the diplomatic contest within these organisations has produced significant outcomes that can be seen as a form of regional governance. However, as explained in Chapter 2, the outcome of this diplomatic activity has been a form of governance not easily recognised through the European integration lens. Its significance derives from the authority of the settled regional norms, which are the cumulative outcomes of regional diplomatic contests in a particular era. These carry authority. While they do not require formal surrendering of sovereignty or compliance, they derive their authority from the power of dominant discourses, international agreements and policy knowledge. This study has focused on how this changing regional governance has mattered, in particular, in three key areas: development, security and climate policy. In each case, we saw how the regional regime constrained or influenced state behaviour, as well as how it impacted on the policies pursued by regional institutions.

## Regional political community

Yet the political significance of Pacific regionalism goes beyond its role as an arena for and a source of governance. I argue that it also constitutes a regional political community—a term that connotes a deep level of commitment, affiliation and identity beyond the nation-state. The justification for using the term ‘political community’ to characterise the resultant political entity starts with the case I made in Chapter 7 for seeing the new regional polity of the 1970s and 1980s as a ‘regional society of states’. The shared values, institutions and ideology constituting that society of states already suggested a form of regional political community. This was not just an instrumental ad hoc association of states, but rather

one with a commitment to shared communal values. The aptness of the notion of 'political community' was further strengthened in the 1970s and 1980s by the addition of an emergent regional civil society as an active participant in the regional polity. Island state leaders and civil society representatives shared the regional identity promoted through the SPF at this time, as represented in the 'Pacific way' ideology and the concern shown for Pacific peoples outside the formal national jurisdiction of the member states.

As seen in Chapters 11–13, the 1990s and 2000s saw the advent of a more technocratic and instrumental regional political system under Australian and New Zealand hegemony. This lacked the sense of regional community among Pacific island states and regional civil society developed over the previous two decades. The perceived lack of political ownership of the regional agenda and regional organisation contributed to this lack of commitment to building a regional community. The departure of the post-independence leaders and their shared authority, commitment and values was another major causal factor. Pacific island leaders came to see Australia and New Zealand less as partners in a regional community with a shared commitment to pursuing island interests in regional self-determination. They were instead increasingly seen as the dominant members of the regional diplomatic system, pursuing their own very different interests and values. Nowhere was this more evident than in relation to climate policy.

However, in the 1990s, there did emerge two important harbingers of the need to return to a thicker idea of community in regional relations. Epeli Hau'ofa, writing in his now famous essays, 'Our Sea of Islands' (1993) and 'The Ocean in Us' (1998), made a plea for a less technocratic regionalism based on a shared Oceanic identity. In a similar spirit, at the fortieth South Pacific Conference in Canberra in 1997, Senator Berenado Vunibobo of Fiji made a plea for renaming the South Pacific Commission 'The Pacific Community' to capture the organic ties and human relations the island leaders wanted to emphasise. Vunibobo argued that the 'commission' label, which was being promoted by the Australian secretary-general, smacked of the imposed colonial regionalism of the past and certainly did not evoke sufficiently the familial ties of 'community'. The other Pacific leaders supported his call. This emerging commitment on the part of Pacific leaders to return the regional project to a broader-based regional community on behalf of Pacific peoples was evident in the Pacific Leaders' Vision of 2004, which I examined in Chapter 11. It was not, however,

until the second decade of the twenty-first century that a determination to return to this deeper kind of regional political community came fully to the fore with a display of the strong connection and shared values among Pacific leaders and the evocation of ‘one Pacific continent’ in the ‘Blue Pacific’ ideology, described in detail in Chapter 13.

## Diplomatic bloc

Perhaps the most unrecognised, significant political role for Pacific regionalism has been demonstrated when the regional community has acted as a diplomatic bloc promoting a Pacific voice in global arenas or negotiating as a group with larger powers in regional arenas. This has long been a major part of the Pacific regionalism story. I surveyed in Chapters 6–9 some of the extraordinary successes of collective diplomacy in the 1970s and 1980s against some of the world’s most powerful states. There has been an unfortunate tendency to write this significant role out of analyses of Pacific regionalism because in the 1990s and 2000s regionalism began to be defined more narrowly, even within the region itself, as regional integration. In these decades, the Forum Secretariat dropped the emphasis on the forum as a diplomatic bloc in global arenas. Collective diplomacy thus did not appear as part of the definition of regionalism in the 2005 review of regionalism or in the proposed functions of the PIF set out under the Pacific Plan.

This political role returned in the second decade of the twenty-first century as part of the movement of ideas that Sandra Tarte and I have labelled the ‘new Pacific diplomacy’.<sup>1</sup> A major part of that transformation—described in Chapter 13—was the revitalisation of Pacific regionalism as a bloc for diplomatic purposes in global arenas. The key move was the repurposing of the PSIDS at the United Nations. This organisation of Pacific island ambassadors (without Australia and New Zealand) became the globally recognised voice for Pacific diplomacy, displacing the PIF in this role. Whereas the role of diplomatic bloc in the 1970s and 1980s was expressed mainly in negotiations with one great power—for example, the United States on tuna fishing and Japan on driftnet fishing and the dumping of radioactive waste—the new Pacific diplomacy was concerned with projecting a Pacific voice in global multilateral negotiations. This required new skills and techniques, such as building coalitions, cultivating

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1 Greg Fry and Sandra Tarte, eds, *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, ANU Press, 2015.

Global South alliances, obtaining strategic leadership in UN committees and framing agendas within niche areas such as ocean management and climate change. By 2018, the Pacific leaders had reestablished the regional diplomatic bloc as a major element in the political significance of Pacific regionalism.

## Pacific regionalism and state power

As noted, efforts to build regionalism are usually seen as diluting state power and sovereignty. While this is so when and where regionalism takes the form of regional integration, it has not been the case in the forms of regional activity described here. For Pacific regionalism, I argue that regionalism and state power are mutually constitutive. Indeed, I see regional diplomatic contests as being intimately entwined with state-building. This study has shown that the regional governing ideas, and the debates about them, have been as much about how states should be run as they have been about building a regional community. We have also seen how the regional diplomatic bloc can bolster national interests in global negotiations. Finally, we saw how appeals to the authority of the regional political community were frequently used to assert or bolster claims to national sovereignty on the part of associated states, sovereignty movements and dependent territories. Ultimately, then, Pacific regionalism has provided another important layer of politics above the nation-state that has proved politically significant in each of the ways outlined above, and without requiring the surrender of national sovereignty.

## Whose Pacific regionalism?

As noted, the second puzzle about the political meaning of Pacific regionalism follows directly from the first. If Pacific regionalism matters, for whom has it mattered? Who has had the power? To what extent can it serve the interests of Pacific islanders in the face of global actors set on influencing regional diplomatic outcomes? In diplomatic contests involving such large players, the expectation would be that small states would be no more than pawns in this regional game, with larger states always dominating if they need to do so. The prospects for a regional level of politics in which Pacific agency features do not, at first glance, look likely. These are, after all, among the world's smallest countries and among the most highly dependent on economic assistance. Australia and New

Zealand have rarely been reluctant to use Pacific regionalism to promote their own interests, while there have long existed larger players who have tried to influence outcomes at particular times, including the European Union, the United States, France, Japan and China.

There are several potential answers to the puzzle of ‘whose Pacific regionalism?’. I consider here three possible candidates for apt characterisation of the dominant influence operating within and on Pacific regionalism: that it has been a vehicle for an Australian–New Zealand hegemony; that it has worked as an agent for globalisation at the expense of local interests; and that it has permitted Pacific island agency in regional and global politics. I then propose to make the case for seeing the answer to this puzzle as a fourth characterisation—namely, an entanglement of the other three ‘answers’ in a more contingent view of power in Pacific regionalism.

## Hegemonic power

Any superficial glance at the history and characteristics of Pacific regionalism might suggest that the power relations in this regional community are best described as an Australian and New Zealand hegemony. Australia and New Zealand have had a longstanding desire to manage the Pacific island region. In the late nineteenth century, Otto von Bismarck called this intention the Australasian Monroe doctrine. In 1883, concern about building capacity to flex muscle in managing security in the Pacific island region was the prime motive for organising the intercolonial convention to create the Australian nation. We noted in Chapter 4 Australia and New Zealand’s role in the 1940s in initiating the idea of Pacific regionalism and establishing and financing the colonial regional system. In Chapters 6–10, we noted that they continued to have a crucial role in the new regional system created by the Pacific island leaders in 1971. They became the only metropolitan members of the new SPF and supplied most of the financial support for the Forum’s budget. They became the main supporters of subsequent expansion of the regional architecture in such organisations as the FFA and SPREP.

From the mid 1970s, Australia and New Zealand made it clear that they saw Pacific regionalism as a key vehicle for pursuing their foreign policies in the region. As we saw in Chapter 9, this was particularly focused on regional security. They viewed the shaping of regional security as their special responsibility on behalf of the Western alliance and

particularly the United States. This was certainly how Washington also viewed the relationship: a delegated responsibility for Western leadership of the regional security order.

The influence of Australia and New Zealand was mainly exercised through agenda-setting, the staffing of regional organisations, financial control and the making of regional declarations on security. They also had an effective veto on positions pursued by the Pacific island leaders that they deemed to be hostile to their interests, such as in climate policy. The various moves made by the islands to check their dominance, such as the rise of the new Pacific diplomacy analysed in Chapter 13, also demonstrate that Pacific islanders recognised the impact of this hegemonic power on their interests.

This Australian and New Zealand intention to dominate Pacific regionalism was present throughout the history of Pacific regionalism. It was reinforced by the dependence of Pacific island countries on their bilateral economic assistance from Canberra and Wellington and, in general, the superior resources and capacity of Australia and New Zealand to set the agenda and prepare the outcomes of meetings. Australia and New Zealand were responsible for the creation of many of the new governance mechanisms within the regional architecture, such as the FFMM and the FEMM. They were responsible for nearly all the treaties and declarations, such as the Biketawa Declaration on intervention, PACER Plus on regional free trade, the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone on nuclear issues and the Aitutaki Declaration on law and order. They also attempted to impose major regional policy frames on the Pacific in relation to development and security. For example, we examined in some detail in Chapter 11 the attempt to create a regional economic order based on neoliberal ideas and policies.

However, these intentions did not always translate into clear hegemonic power. History shows instead a more complex and contingent characterisation. This is most tellingly revealed in the area of highest Australian commitment to a hegemonic system—that of defining regional security and regional security governance. As we saw in Chapter 9, Australia was ultimately unsuccessful in pursuing its preferred Cold War order. The Pacific countries rejected the policy of strategic denial and the two-tier hierarchical regional system promoted as part of the Australian system. By 1989, Australian foreign minister Gareth Evans realised that, although Australia was leading, nobody was following and, accordingly, it was time for a new partnership approach that recognised this fact.

We noted in Chapter 12 that the Australian effort to promote a new strategic denial policy against China in 2018 and a new conceptualisation of regional security was ultimately stymied by a different security narrative promoted by Pacific island states. It was this latter interpretation the PIF leaders enshrined in the Boe regional security declaration in 2018.

On balance, Australia and New Zealand have had enormous influence on Pacific regionalism—on its finances, agenda, policy directions and institutional development. This was most evident in the 1990s and 2000s, which could accurately be labelled an era of hegemonic regionalism. But, even in this post–Cold War period, when Australia and New Zealand seemingly succeeded in creating a regional economic order and a regional security order in accord with their interests, we saw, in Chapters 11 and 12, how they were constantly frustrated in areas where they thought they had agreement from the Pacific island states. With their combined economic and military power—Australia alone is the thirteenth largest economy in the world—compared with the very small economies of the island states, and their longstanding determination to shape the regional agenda and be seen as the natural leaders of the regional community, it might be expected that this would produce over time a more unqualified hegemonic regional system. This study has shown, however, that Pacific regionalism cannot be described as being ultimately determined by hegemonic power. Power as capacity has not easily translated into power as legitimate influence.

## The power of globalisation

A second possible answer to the puzzle of ‘whose Pacific regionalism?’ is to see Pacific regionalism as an agent of globalisation, broadly defined to include all processes and discourses with global reach. In the long history we have just investigated, we have repeatedly noted that large shifts in global epochs, and their defining ideas, create powerful frames that are imposed on Pacific regionalism. Indeed, we saw in Chapter 3 that the idea of the Pacific itself was a global framing of ancient island societies into a new identity and social construction as a result of European exploration, geography and imperial management. We observed that each global epoch seemed to produce a different Pacific regionalism. Global ideas and global power provided the backdrop for the political contests over regional governance, often by generating the big ideological frames within which regional politics was played out. Some of these global influences on the course of regionalism have been geopolitical—for example, colonialism

and its ending, World War II, the Cold War, the war on terror and the rise of China. In each era, we also noted powerful global discourses—such as neoliberalism, Darwinism, self-determination, gender equality and human development—which created the parameters of the regional contest of ideas about how Pacific societies should be organised. We also described and analysed the major global processes and activities in the Pacific region that prompted a response from the Pacific political community—for example, nuclear testing, driftnet fishing, the activities of DWFNs, continuing colonialism and climate change.

However, this has never been the case of a unified globalisation process using regionalism to dominate local Pacific societies. The first qualification to enter is that global framing does not represent a homogeneous globalisation process. As we saw in Chapter 3, as early as the nineteenth century, there were contending global discourses about how to characterise Pacific island societies and what policies to pursue on that basis. This extended through to the modern period, where, as we saw in Chapter 9, there was an attempt to impose three different and competing Western conceptions of a Cold War regional order on the Pacific—one supported by France, the United Kingdom and the United States, one by Australia and another by New Zealand. We also discussed, in Chapter 11, this diversity in global framing in the contest between neoliberal and human development discourses on regional development over the past two decades. Another more recent example is provided by the different global views on climate policy, with certain international agencies and parts of global civil society supporting the collective Pacific island state position and other global discourses opposing the Pacific view.

The second qualification is that there is not always one ‘local’ in this supposed global–local contestation. Some local groups have deployed particular global discourses against other local groups or states—for example, women’s groups using global feminist positions against island state positions. And, as we saw in Chapter 9 in relation to Cold War regional security, although the ‘local’ position prevailed over the most powerful Western countries, the ‘local’ was also differentiated. Regional civil society allied itself with global civil society actors and some Melanesian states in opposition to Australia, New Zealand and some Polynesian states on the question of the nuclear weapons–free zone for the South Pacific. Meanwhile, Tonga allied itself with the American/British/French position in supporting French nuclear testing in the Pacific.

The third qualification is that these imposed framings are negotiated and mediated, and thereby given Pacific characteristics, behind a seeming acquiescence in the prevailing global discourse. There is a ‘messy entanglement’ similar to that recognised by Pacific historians and anthropologists in relation to nineteenth-century engagements between colonialists and local societies. For example, behind the seeming acceptance of the neoliberal regional economic order, the Pacific island states made clear they would not accept any change to communal land tenure. This became a ‘no-go area’ for the subsequent promotion of a regional reform agenda. Overall, then, this study has shown that global ideas and processes may set the agenda and some parameters of action, but they do not necessarily control specific outcomes.

### Pacific island diplomatic agency

A third possible answer to the puzzle under discussion is to argue that Pacific islanders—state leaders and civil society representatives—have had the upper hand in the building of regional community. The case for this interpretation is built on the history of the indigenous regional movement, the shared commitment of the region’s leaders, the shared regional identity, the negotiation of a regional diplomatic culture that has sometimes enabled Pacific island control of the regional agenda, the successes achieved in promoting a Pacific voice in global and regional diplomatic arenas and the mediation of powerful hegemonic norms in relation to security, development and climate policy.

The regional diplomatic culture is an important determinant of the diplomatic outcomes of the regional political community, and therefore a key site for understanding the deep politics of the regional diplomatic system. Because it deals with the norms about who can speak, how decisions are made and what is regarded as a legitimate procedure, it determines the answers to the fundamental political questions of who controls the regional agenda and the regional diplomatic process. It therefore gets to the heart of the power politics of the regional system.

Drawing from the history of Pacific regionalism set out in the previous chapters, we can trace a long-term trajectory from a hegemonic diplomatic culture under colonialism to a diplomatic culture emphasising regional self-determination, equality and Pacific agency. This achievement was due to the joint efforts of Pacific leaders. As we saw in Chapter 6, from 1965, emerging Pacific island leaders challenged the legitimacy of the

colonial diplomatic culture based on racial hierarchy. While this political movement gradually succeeded in bringing about institutional reform that, by the end of the 1960s, allowed greater Pacific agency, the region's leaders remained frustrated that there was no movement on the key principles and practices of a colonial diplomatic culture that excluded the Pacific island peoples, except in an advisory capacity. This led to their diplomatic efforts to create a new forum for regional diplomacy with a very different diplomatic culture, the SPF. Pacific island state leaders, with Australia and New Zealand, agreed on a new set of norms governing diplomacy in the regional arena. There was a strong commitment to self-determination, non-intervention, sovereignty, equality and partnership. This regional diplomatic culture remained in place through the 1970s and 1980s.

In the 1990s and 2000s, Australia and New Zealand imposed a new hegemonic regional diplomatic culture in the PIF that was seemingly accepted by the Pacific island leaders. As we saw in Chapters 11–13, this became possible because Australia and New Zealand started to see regional governance as an extension of their foreign and domestic policies and accordingly raised the stakes by seeking to get their way more often in relation to agendas, financial control and staffing. They also misused consensus procedures, turning them into a veto power for themselves. This hierarchical diplomatic culture affected outcomes on climate policy, the war on terror and trade. The establishment of this hierarchical diplomatic culture was also a product of the loss of the strong, first-generation Pacific island leadership. Yet, behind the scenes, there was mounting evidence that Pacific leaders did not accord this diplomatic culture full legitimacy.

In Chapter 13, I showed how a 'new' Pacific diplomacy challenged and transformed this hegemonic diplomatic culture. I argued that this action in effect created a new regional diplomatic culture embracing the principles of regional self-determination and inclusiveness. It was expressed in the establishment of new institutions and the reform of existing institutions, such that the fundamental norms of how diplomatic dialogue would henceforth be conducted were transformed. The hegemonic regional diplomatic culture of the previous two decades was overthrown, but without excluding Australia and New Zealand from the Pacific regional community. This has been an important win for Pacific island agency within the Pacific regional community.

Another key site for establishing evidence of Pacific island agency within Pacific regionalism is to be found in relation to the Pacific community acting as a diplomatic bloc. Earlier in this chapter, we noted the significance of this role. But what do the diplomatic outcomes say about the success of this regional activity in promoting Pacific island interests against larger powers? This study has traced this successful collective diplomacy throughout the post-independence period since 1971. In Chapter 5, we noted the political success of the Pacific leaders acting in unison in relation to negotiations to establish a Pacific-controlled regionalism in the late 1960s. We then explored, in Chapters 7–10, their successful joint diplomacy, under Forum auspices, in relation to the Law of the Sea, within the UN General Assembly on decolonisation and on trade with the European Union in the Lomé Convention and with Australia in respect of the SPARTECA.

These highly significant outcomes against some of the most powerful states continued throughout the 1980s, with the Pacific achieving a ban on driftnet fishing by large fishing states and a ban on Japanese plans to dump radioactive waste in the Pacific. Most impressive of all was the collective action taken by the Pacific islands against the United States on their right to jurisdiction over their tuna resources. The extraordinarily successful outcome that was eventually achieved involved opposing the US position on the Law of the Sea, its domestic legislation and its powerful fishing industry. Yet the Pacific island states prevailed, and the resulting deal was enshrined in international agreement.

Following the diplomatic doldrums of the 1990s and 2000s, when the Australia/New Zealand–dominated regional diplomatic culture constrained collective diplomacy, and instead emphasised regional integration, the Pacific island states began to use joint diplomacy successfully again. As we saw in Chapter 13, there was a new era of diplomacy. This time it faced an even more difficult test. Whereas the issues of the 1970s and 1980s were usually negotiated in a context in which the Pacific collective faced only one large power, the new agenda—trade, decolonisation, climate policy, sustainable development—tended to be negotiated in large global multilateral settings. Although this created new challenges, the Pacific island states proved adept in deploying new methods to build coalitions and assert a Pacific voice at key global meetings such as Rio-Plus, the UN General Assembly and the UNFCCC. Their achievements since 2012 have included gaining recognition for PSIDS in the creation of the Asia-Pacific grouping as a regional bloc at the

UN General Assembly; the inclusion of ocean management and climate change as SDGs; the inclusion of Pacific priorities in the final outcomes of Rio+20; and the reinscription of French Polynesia on the list of dependent territories under the purview of the UN decolonisation committee. The PSIDS also coordinated a very effective Pacific campaign at the Paris UNFCCC conference, which resulted in achievement of nearly all the diplomatic objectives the Pacific leaders had set themselves in the Suva Declaration. The resultant high standing of the Pacific diplomatic bloc has also been evident in the recognition the PSIDS has been given by global actors and international agencies, particularly in the ocean management and climate change arenas.

A third site in which we can explore the degree of Pacific agency in Pacific regionalism is in relation to regional governance, the governing regional norms and the making of regional policies in areas such as security, development and climate policy. In relation to regional security, we saw in Chapter 12 the way in which Pacific leaders prevailed in the contest with Australia and New Zealand over conceptualising regional security in the Boe Declaration of 2018. The emphasis in the declaration on climate change and human security, rather than on a geopolitical conceptualisation of threat, represented a victory for Pacific island leaders. Australia and New Zealand have also sought to promote a policy of regional strategic denial against China outside the PIF. The Pacific leaders have also asserted themselves against this position, pressing their right to continue their productive relations with China while maintaining their links with Australia and New Zealand.

In relation to economic governance, we saw in Chapter 10 that, during the early decades of the SPF, the Pacific leaders were considerably influenced by a global liberal discourse emphasising economic modernisation and growth, but they qualified and moderated its impact by promoting the 'Pacific way' discourse that emphasised the preservation of Pacific cultural values and the assertion of Pacific control of the development agenda. After 1990, Australia and New Zealand promoted a neoliberal regional economic order, but as we saw in Chapter 11, this was not accepted without mediation and qualification by the Pacific leaders. Again, they promoted a cultural perspective, particularly on the question of land, and in relation to the PACER Plus agreement on regional free trade, the island states with the two biggest economies, Papua New Guinea and Fiji, refused to join. Others joined only as a way of gaining other diplomatic objectives in relation to labour access.

In relation to regional climate policy, the Pacific island leaders have demonstrated their political agency since 2015. For the previous 25 years, the regional climate policy was dominated by Australia and New Zealand. As examined in Chapter 13, the Pacific island states were always hamstrung in producing a PIF climate policy that truly represented what they desperately wanted to promote. This was because the consensus decision-making style of the PIF effectively meant that Australia and New Zealand could veto positions that they saw as working against their interests as big carbon emitters. This in turn meant the Pacific island states were constrained in working collectively through the PIF at UNFCCC meetings. This changed dramatically in 2015. As in earlier PIF meetings, the Port Moresby meeting failed to produce a strong position supporting the Pacific island states' position leading up to the Paris climate conference. This time, however, the Pacific island leaders used their recently repurposed PSIDS (without Australia and New Zealand) to organise and successfully project a Pacific voice in Paris. This gave them a strong collective voice on climate policy on the global stage for the first time.

## Contingent and entangled power

I propose therefore to argue that the best answer to the puzzle of where power lies in Pacific regionalism is to be found in a more complex amalgam of the three plausible characterisations surveyed above. In this answer, I move beyond these fixed and static views of power based on assumptions about homogeneous agents—the West, Australian and New Zealand hegemony, globalisation and Pacific islanders. I also move beyond the conventional assumption that larger powers will necessarily prevail over small island states or that powerful global discourses will naturally eclipse local cultural values and interests. What we have seen in this study is a much more complex engagement in which the Pacific island states have sometimes prevailed in shaping Pacific regionalism and at other times managed to mediate global discourses through regional action.

Furthermore, I argue that how these complex power relations are resolved within Pacific regionalism at any given time is highly contingent—that is, they are dependent on a complex set of circumstances. I am using the term 'contingent power' to refer to circumstances that, in certain combinations, can influence outcomes, and I am thus avoiding the conceptual trap of seeing power as a fixed capacity based on material factors or size. This consideration of the long history of Pacific regionalism has allowed us to

see what these contingent factors are and how they operate to influence the power politics of Pacific regionalism in different epochs. There are several, but they can easily be identified.

First, there are the changing dominant global discourses, which provide powerful mega framings of how the Pacific (and other regions of the world) should be ordered. As we have seen, it has mattered for Pacific regionalism whether the dominant global discourse is self-determination or Darwinian racial hierarchy, or whether it is neoliberalism or human development. The dominant discourse sets the framing parameters.

A second important contingent factor is changing geopolitics at the global level, which directly impacts on the power politics of regionalism. This includes, for example, the impact of World War II on the decision to establish Pacific regionalism, the Cold War and its impact on the use of the region as a 'nuclear playground' and the challenge to an indigenous regional identity based on antinuclear sentiment. It also includes such developments as the global war on terror and perceptions of China's rise, each of which changed the power relations within Pacific regionalism.

Third, we should note the importance of state sovereignty as a contingent factor. We saw how the Law of the Sea extended sovereign jurisdiction to 200 nautical miles and, collectively for Pacific states, to most of the central and southern Pacific Ocean. This collective sovereignty in turn became the basis for many powerful actions and claims by Pacific states in relation to tuna management. It also became the basis of the contemporary collective identity based on the 'one Pacific continent' narrative and the powerful rebranding of Pacific island states as large ocean states, and to recognition in global arenas of that collective identity as a diplomatic leader in ocean management. Sovereignty also gives small island states the power to say no to signing on to regional programs initiated by larger states, such as PACER Plus and the EPA with the European Union.

Fourth, there is the important element of leadership. We saw that Pacific leadership was smart, strategic, stable and confident in the 1970s and 1980s. This was a major factor affecting its success in overthrowing the colonial regional system. This continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s, when strong Pacific island leadership asserted itself within the SPF against attempts by Australia and New Zealand to assert a two-tier system during the Cold War. It was also seen in relation to Pacific collective diplomatic efforts in relation to the United States, Japan and France. Equally, we saw

the importance of the loss of strong island state leadership in the 1990s and 2000s because of political instability within many of the member states and the retirement or defeat of the independence-era leaders.

Fifth, we have seen how the prevailing regional diplomatic culture is an important contingent factor, particularly when it is expressed in the shape of the institutional architecture. We saw the importance of the establishment of the SPF in 1971 in allowing Pacific agency not permitted under the rules of the colonial organisation. We also saw, for example, how the revamping of PSIDS as a global diplomatic voice opened up the possibility of an effective Pacific diplomacy representing Pacific island interests when the PIF avenue was closed off by Australian and New Zealand influence on consensus positions.

Finally, we should note the importance of the political positions coming out of Canberra and Wellington on their relationship to Pacific regionalism. This has always depended on which parties are in government in Canberra and Wellington. For example, the Australian Coalition governments under prime ministers Abbott, Turnbull and Scott Morrison have pursued a climate policy that has been diametrically opposed to the interests of the Pacific island states. This makes it impossible for Canberra to be accepted as a legitimate leader or even a member of the regional community. On the other hand, in the 1970s and 1980s, Canberra and Wellington supported the efforts by Pacific island states to promote their interests through Pacific regionalism in global and regional arenas. This encouraged a degree of regional identity and shared communal values, which made for a very different power relationship than exists under current Australian policies. New Zealand's recent shift on climate policy under the Ardern Government has meant that New Zealand again has a chance of acceptance in the Pacific community.

## The future of Pacific regionalism

Although we can expect metropolitan powers, international agencies and economic consultants to continue to call for regional economic integration in the Pacific, past responses suggest that the Pacific island states will not seriously commit to a trajectory towards European-style integration. On the other hand, we can expect that the political roles outlined in this chapter—strategic arena, regional governance, political community and diplomatic bloc—will continue to be politically significant. As shown

in Chapter 13, Pacific regionalism is currently on a trajectory towards a deeper regional community among Pacific island peoples, and its role as a diplomatic bloc is on an upward curve of success, recognised by key players in global forums and in key ‘wins’ in multilateral negotiations. Regional governance of security, development and climate policy will also continue to grow in importance based on current trends outlined in Chapters 11–13. For the reasons developed throughout this study, Pacific regionalism will continue to be a contested political space defining regional norms about how Pacific islanders should live.

The question of the nature of the power relations within this contested regional diplomatic space and, most importantly, whose interests prevail will depend on the contingent factors outlined above. Based on current trends, there are several contingent factors pointing in the direction of deeper regional community among the Pacific island states and peoples for the foreseeable future. These also suggest a continuation of the trend of greater control of Pacific regionalism by Pacific islanders and, conversely, less control by Australia and New Zealand.

The impact of the global context is an important starting point for understanding this trend. The current and prospective impacts of climate change on the low-lying island societies of the Pacific are so profound they will continue to create a rallying cry for the Pacific island regional community and the need for a strong Pacific voice in global affairs. This will also ensure continuing resistance to any attempt by Australia, in particular, to dilute Pacific solidarity on this existential issue. And, importantly, the climate change issue ensures that Pacific solidarity includes regional civil society as well as island state leaders.

The changing geopolitical context will also continue to be an enabler of Pacific island solidarity and successful political agency. As we saw in the Cold War context, when the West sees a threat to its interests in the Pacific at a time of global rivalry, the Pacific island states have greater bargaining power. This was graphically illustrated in the case of the Pacific tuna agreement with the United States. It was also evident in Australia’s retreat from promoting a hegemonic regional security order, as examined in Chapter 9. We would therefore expect a continuation of the kind of assertion of Pacific views of security evident in the Boe Declaration of 2018, as examined in Chapter 12, and not just a ready acceptance by Pacific island states of Australia’s positions on China’s rise in the Pacific.

Another key contingent factor affecting the rise of Pacific islander agency in Pacific regionalism is the reemergence of strong Pacific island leadership. The important role of such leaders as Tuilaepa of Samoa, Bainimarama of Fiji, Sogavare of Solomon Islands, Tong of Kiribati, O'Neill of Papua New Guinea or Sopoaga of Tuvalu has played a part in a more assertive Pacific voice at the global level. But this contingent factor could change. Given the high turnover of leaders, we could see a change to less effective leaders or to ones who are less committed to regional solidarity, or less committed to a regional leadership role for their nation, in the case of Fiji and Papua New Guinea.

The emergence of strong, assertive Pacific leaders can also point in another direction. The tensions between some of these leaders have started to become evident and, although this has not yet led to less solidarity when confronting climate change or Australian hegemony on security, it may do so in the future. This is most likely in relation to Fiji's role. As we saw in the 1970s, the other island states saw Fiji as moving too far out in front as self-appointed regional spokesperson. In the same way, we are seeing a building resentment among other Pacific island states of Fiji's actions as self-appointed regional spokesperson under Bainimarama's leadership. This came to a head at the 2017 climate change talks in Bonn, where Fiji as chair had not adequately consulted other Pacific states and started to represent what were Fijian rather than Pacific positions. We can also see evidence of a souring of relations within the subregional MSG over Fiji's actions, and a cooling of support for the Fiji-created PIDF because of these tensions with Fiji. This tension is the most likely contingent factor that could derail Pacific island solidarity.

On the other hand, the Pacific leaders did not let these tensions derail their solidarity in 2018 in countering Australian efforts to have them curtail their relations with China or promote their own regional security narrative around a solid identity based on a regional 'Pacific continent' in seeking to give leadership to global ocean management. Continued solidarity and assertive agency are also supported by the enabling institutional changes the Pacific leaders achieved in the period 2012–14. These provide alternative Pacific island-controlled regional arenas and diplomatic pathways that have been recognised by global powers. The most important institution in this regard is the PSIDS. As we have seen, this has had extraordinary success in the past five years in projecting a Pacific voice in UN forums, including the UNFCCC, and in obtaining results and recognition by other states as the legitimate voice of the

region. Above all, this is an enabling mechanism for continued Pacific island agency vis-a-vis the hegemonic aspirations of Australia and New Zealand going into the future. It would not be easily overturned given its acceptance by other players in global forums and its role in taking Pacific positions into broader Global South coalitions such as the AOSIS and the G-77.

As argued in Chapter 13, the ‘new Pacific diplomacy’ transformed Pacific regionalism. We are now in a new era of Pacific regionalism, characterised by a new regional diplomatic culture, a transformed institutional architecture and the dominance of the principles of self-determination and inclusion. There is also refreshed commitment to a regional identity around a shared ocean. This new rhetoric of the ‘Blue Pacific continent’ and the collective of ‘large ocean states’ has caught the Pacific imagination as a symbol of regional identity. These are also ideas that have purchase in regional civil society.

Australia and New Zealand are not emotionally part of this regional identity, although they claim to be leaders of the regional community. They are not seen as part of this fundamental transformation, partly because of their position on climate change and partly because of their position on China and regional security. But, even more importantly, they are now being judged by the way they seek to promote their regional positions without showing respect to the majority Pacific island state position. In many ways, the Pacific island states retain a surprisingly generous stance towards Canberra and Wellington. They still describe them as ‘big brothers’ and see them as part of the Pacific ‘family’, even if they currently feel they are acting as ‘bad brothers’ and not conducting dialogue within the family in a respectful way. A major contingent factor for the future of Pacific regionalism is therefore the degree to which Australia can overcome the preconceptions that have always flowed from its tendency to see this region as its ‘own patch’.

Over the past 100 years, there has been an extraordinary effort on the part of many diverse actors to turn ‘the idea of the Pacific’ into a regional political community. Powerful global actors have sought to ‘frame’ the thousands of islands scattered across this vast ocean in at least three senses: first, in the sense of framing a picture, they have drawn geographical boundaries around them for purposes of making generalisations about Pacific island peoples and societies that fall within these boundaries; second, in the sense of framing a house, they have promoted normative

policy frames intended to shape the lives of Pacific islanders in particular ways; and finally, in the colloquial sense of 'framing', they have often sought to set up Pacific islanders for outcomes not of their making. This study has shown that Pacific islanders have a long history of successfully entering this contest of ideas in regional diplomacy with their own powerful normative framings of Oceania. We can expect this regional arena to continue to be a key political site, alongside that of the nation-state, for the negotiation of globalisation into the future. This study has shown that we should not discount the political agency of Pacific island state leaders and regional civil society in shaping this diplomatic contest. Regional self-determination will remain a key theme in this indigenous effort to build a legitimate regional political community in the Pacific in the face of global pressures.

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