

Remarks on the Occasion of the Launch of the Book

THE NEW PACIFIC DIPLOMACY

edited by Greg Fry and Sandra Tarte

ANU Press, 2015

ANU, Canberra, 21st September 2016

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(The views expressed herein are those of the author's only and do not represent views or policies of the Government of Papua New Guinea)

As is the practice in our Pacific Islands, we commence our gatherings with a prayer. I wish to say a prayer that used to do the rounds in the region when I was the Director of Pacific Islands Development Program at East West Centre for five years from 1986 to 1990. It goes something like this, "O Lord God, help me craft my words today, for tomorrow I may be forced to eat them. Amen."

Acknowledge diplomatic colleagues and other dignitaries.

Can I first of all thank Professor Greg Fry for the kind invitation he extended to me to launch this book, *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, an important contribution to our discourse on the architecture of our Pacific Region and our diplomatic endeavours. I also wish to acknowledge and thank the writers for their contributions in the book, most as papers initially presented at the Workshop on The New Pacific Diplomacy at the University of South Pacific in December 2014. I also acknowledge the inspiration from the students at USP's School of International Diplomacy to put the thoughts presented at the Workshop into this book. To the editors, Greg Fry and Sandra Tarte, and those who worked behind the scenes to bring this book to reality, I also extend my gratitude. Last but not the least, to ANU Press and Stuart Firth's chairmanship of the Pacific Editorial Board, and indeed to ANU, the premier Australian institution in its various incarnations and reincarnations historically, for continuing to support our Pacific Islands people in our research and intellectual endeavours.

To comment comprehensively on each of the 21 chapters and do justice to the range of views expressed in the book would be impossible due to time constraints. So to honour this special occasion of the launch of the book, I will keep my remarks brief.

My remarks will focus on what I consider to be several key streams of arguments and assertions that are offered to support the view that the new Pacific Diplomacy represents a “fundamental transformation in diplomatic ideas, institutions and practices” and this transformation has been initiated and driven by Fiji since 2009, when it was ostracised from Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) as a result of the coup.

English not being my first language, I made an effort to seek the meaning of this word “NEW” by Google (yes, even though I come from a Pacific Island country that carries ‘new’ in its name). It is an adjective and first it means “produced, introduced, or discovered recently or now for the first time and not existing before”; and second, “already existing but seen, or experienced or acquired recently or now for the first time”; and thirdly, “of dissimilar origin and usually of superior quality” with the example of a new car as compared to a second hand car.

In essence, there are four benchmarks proffered by some of the writers to support the New Pacific Diplomacy assertion:

1. The inception of Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF) by Fiji focussing on supporting Small Island Developing States (SIDS).
2. The argument to exclude Australia and New Zealand from PIF as a condition for Fiji’s return to PIF . As such, some see it as Pacific Island states under the leadership of Fiji asserting their sovereignty and independence from Australia and New Zealand and their dominance of the PIF agenda for the region, mainly because of their overbearing persistence on a neoclassical economic approach for regional integration closely modelled on the European Union. Moreover, Fiji made a very strong case for the exclusion of Australia and New Zealand because their policy on climate change is antithetical to the interests and dire needs of Pacific Islands states suffering from regular ravages of natural disasters and rising sea levels.
3. Fiji’s alternative regional initiative for PIDF to be inclusive of NGOs and private sector has attracted much support.
4. Lastly, Fiji’s very activist diplomatic efforts in regional and international organizations since 2009 must therefore justify this recognition and acknowledgement that Fiji has led the region in advancing the New Pacific Diplomacy and therefore restructured the Pacific regional architecture.

I wish to refer to the various related meanings of “NEW” courtesy of Google and match the four benchmarks of “newness” to see if we now have a New Pacific Regional Diplomacy; and secondly, delve deeper into assertions of Fiji’s leadership in basically initiating and owning, on the one hand, and by what I call “osmosis”, on the other hand, this NEW Pacific Diplomacy. In doing so I have canvassed views of some of the former PNG diplomats in the UN to see if Fiji’s new activist diplomacy has been solely responsible for PISDS emergence as a key player in some of the major Small Islands States conferences at the UN level; former staff of some of our regional and subregional organisations; and some current serving diplomats to test the voracity of Fiji’s diplomatic dominance. I also make reference to my own observations based on my conversations with my diplomatic colleagues in Canberra concurrently accredited to Papua New Guinea and Pacific Islands and our regional organisations.

I also refer to the branch of economics called welfare economics, a somewhat unfortunate coincidence in our case in the Pacific Islands, and the practice of project analysis, which sees a project in phases and poses the question, at what stage does a phase become a project in itself. In other words, the phase integral to the project initially has outgrown the phase and justifies being evaluated as a new and separate project.

Let’s look at the formation of PIDF. I think it does meet in a nebulous way the first two benchmarks of newness but as to whether the third, that of “dissimilar origin and usually of superior quality”, with the example of a new car as compared to second hand car, remains to be test-driven so to speak. I say nebulous first for PIDF, or other advocates, to lay claim to the first two criteria of newness because how it began was the pretext of “engaging the Pacific”—a pretext for Fiji to remain engaged in the region during its days when it was relinquished of its membership in PIF. PIDF then morphed with the PSIDS and Dialogue Partners, China, Russia, etc., other than Australia and New Zealand.

In turn, when we view the process of evolving Pacific Islands regional architecture from the lens of project evaluation, I say the PIDF and its close advocacy of the PSIDS remains a phase, rather than a fully matured project, and does not justify the criteria of “new” when we see it in terms of a “new car verses the second hand car” and benefits it may bring to the region

qualitatively in terms of international exposure and the associated gravitas, and indeed quantitatively in terms of “kilometres per litre of fuel,” so to speak.

Indeed when I cast my net as wide as I can to see if I can catch words in the book that I can cook and eat and digest and feel contented, I find my net full of smatterings of shells and seaweed and past edibles, and only some edibles that nebulously resemble “new” in terms of substantial or a big catch of Newness.

Let us briefly look at the issue of inclusiveness of NGOs and Civil Society in general, including the private sector. The Eminent Persons Group, reviewing the PIF (Morauta Review Team) did recommend this for PIF to take on board and PIF is currently doing so. I have been and continue to be a strong advocate of NGOs. I have met quite a few of them seeking support for their work and I assist them to advocate for funding and access to PNG and Australian governments. So what I say now does not detract from the efforts and recognition of the good work they do nationally, regionally, and internationally on our behalf.

The question of inclusiveness among governments in our region and among our leaders, nationally and regionally, becomes vexing as to which of the NGOs have legitimacy to be representing us in local, national, regional, and international arenas.

Of course, I hear a resounding and deafening chorus of “the more the merrier”. At times when governments from whose coffers much of the funding for the work of the NGOs is sourced, and in turn the funding of our regional agencies as well, it becomes an issue when we look at selecting which one of our regional and national NGOs can represent us, and of course globally resourced NGOs will go ahead and represent us anyway whether they consult with us or not (Human Rights Watch, etc). Of course, the broad criteria of relevancy in issues of advocacy such as climate change, fisheries conservation and management hold significant sway in this issue of legitimacy for us.

On the other hand, there are calls among our national governments that NGOs and development partners are operating in parallel rather than in concert with development efforts of our national governments, particularly when it comes to allocation of limited resources and capacity constraints in most if not all our economies. That applies the same for competing calls on resources for our regional organisations and NGO inclusion.

You may notice I make regular reference to four levels of inclusion of NGOs and their advocacy work, those at local, national, regional and international levels. When we talk of NGOs, Pacific Islands States and members of our regional organisations cannot be selective in terms of inclusiveness of NGOs in regional and global advocacy, but exclude them on political grounds locally and nationally, is a point worth noting.

I think where much of the acceptance and legitimacy of NGOs, and indeed the private sector, in our development lies with project implementation and their effective delivery of services locally, nationally and regionally. Here, national governments and regional organisations may find legitimacy of NGOs and private sector partnerships more palatable. As for inclusiveness in equal representation and membership on the regional policy-making table, and indeed nationally, as noted in one of the chapters in the book (Penjueli)—that remains to be seen. The issue of democratic process of representative government and governance come to the fore.

On diplomacy by osmosis, I call on the views of Transform Aqo rau, the PNA CEO. I am grateful for Transform Aqorau's very detailed technical and professional exposition of the intricacies and workings of our PNA, but his call for Pacific to move away from the "past, the consensus decision-making" inherent in our cultures, which have stood us in good stead at our regional level decision-making, needs to be carefully managed. Further, I think Aqorau was referring to the reorganisation of our fisheries resource management agencies, particularly realigning the tuna revenues according to the species and volume of tuna fished in specified subregions in our region and how to make such a re-arrangement function effectively when we negotiate with Pacific Rim countries to fish in our waters. I stand corrected but Aqorau may be referring to Niue's claims on the PNA Group's entitlements. Had this issue been couched in the ambit of the decision-making processes of PIF and even within Forum Fisheries Agency, the consensus process may have left the PNA Group less than happy. But to relate Aqorau's call to do away with consensus decision-making to Fiji's activist style of diplomacy is what I will refer to as regional Diplomacy by Osmosis. There are many other examples of these claims and assertions in the book which I will put in the canoe of Diplomacy by Osmosis.

I want to make a few observations of the thoughts of our three leaders included in the book. First, His Excellency, Hon Anote Tong, President of

Kiribati, and his call for a “new paradigm” in our diplomacy. Second, His Excellency, Hon Henry Puna, Prime Minister of Cook Islands, and his call for us to think “Outside the Rocks” by re-imagining the Pacific. And third, His Excellency, Hon Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare, speaking on the occasion of 25th anniversary of MSG in Noumea, and his call for the Sub Regional Organisation to continue efforts for self-resourcing to avoid outside influences, and for larger Pacific Island economies such as PNG, to carry a larger share of assisting our smaller Pacific economies.

President Tong’s call for a new paradigm in Pacific Diplomacy implicitly calls for greater focus and advocacy on climate change and to some extent on management and realising greater returns on our fisheries resources in our regional cooperation and regional organisations. Climate change as the key issue uniting Pacific Islands, and the reason put forward to exclude Australia and New Zealand from PIF and hence, by implication, to support Fiji’s new Pacific Diplomacy, can be seen as justifying the newness of the Pacific Diplomacy, and is reflective and expressive of Pacific sovereignty and independence at the regional level. I beg to differ. Climate change as an issue in the region is advocated by all Pacific Island countries. It is a unifying force in our collective effort, and not meant to be reapportioned to a country leading the advocacy on our behalf. New issues arise and are dealt with collectively amongst us, some taking longer than others, but they are a continuing part of the regional process in our diplomacy, rather than a divisive cause celebre for exclusion. Where we differ in policy approaches we negotiate and not exclude.

As to the call by Cook Islands Prime Minister, to think outside the Rocks, and his eloquent recount of long sea voyages of our ancestors to find new rocks in our region, I say yes, we must keep these voyages alive and continuing, but to go outside of our islands region we can only come to Big Rocks that are US, Australia, New Zealand, and others. New Zealand and Australia, the two Big Rocks some of us want to exclude in our search for independence, are the two who have generously afforded to take in many of our Pacific Islanders, and who have generously stood by us in our development efforts bilaterally and regionally in good times and bad. The issue of Pacific Islands diaspora in Australia, New Zealand, and USA is not insignificant. Figures from IFC a few years ago indicate that flows of remittances globally surpass flows of official development assistance and private investment capital from developed to developing countries, and for some of our small island states flows of remittances constitute a major source of income.

Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare, with his counterparts of yesteryears, Sir Ratu Kamisese Mara, Hamer DeRobert, and others, nurtured our countries to independence. His thoughts reflect the continuing and consistent—what some might call “old passé consensus”—diplomacy, that is PNG’s continuing diplomacy, working cooperatively and collectively and for PNG as the bigger of the economies to help our smaller Pacific Island countries. As for his call to resource our regional and subregional organisations ourselves, it is not a call supporting Fiji’s call to expel Australia and New Zealand, but is assumed in that vein by some in the book, again *Diplomacy by Osmosis*.

Grand Chief Somare’s thoughts lead me to conclude by itemising PNG’s efforts in Pacific national, regional and international diplomacy. Notice I do not invoke the spectre of “New.” For Fiji and China diplomatic relations, yes it is wonderful to expand this relation on the bilateral level. Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare himself was the first Pacific Islands leader to make an official visit to China in October 1976, shortly after the death of Chairman Mao, and formal bilateral relations were established soon thereafter. On Fiji’s “Look North” foreign policy as enunciated by Foreign Minister, Kubuobola—the then Prime Minister of PNG, Pius Wingti, preceded him in early 1990s with PNG’s “Look North” foreign policy. It was PNG government’s initiative under Pius Wingti to convince Melanesian Group of countries to form a sub-Regional Grouping in 1986 -87. Fiji was not a founding member. PNG was responsible at UN for restoration of New Caledonia to the UN list of non-governing Territories. PNG’s then Permanent Representative to UN, Ambassador Donigi was in fact President of International Seabed Authority in 2001, having previously served as President of the Meeting of States to UNCLOS in 2000 and Chairman of UN Special Committee on Decolonization in 1999-2000. PNG is member of APEC and observer on ASEAN.

At the MSG level, from a former staff source (Ms Barbara Age), Fiji’s agenda was more focussed on international policing and peacekeeping and seeking support at the UN level by other MSG members for Fiji’s role in peace keeping. At the time of Fiji’s chairmanship, which claims Fiji diplomacy, as the Driver in Trade and Investment Agenda—again, *Diplomacy by Osmosis*. Trade and investment was already a MSG agenda long before Fiji assumed the chairmanship. On investment and finance in MSG and Pacific Island States, PNG’s Credit Corporation, Bank South Pacific and the Constantinou Family Hotel Investments, are some examples of PNG’s efforts at regional finance and investments. The Solomon crisis and Fiji coup did not deter PNG in restoring

investor confidence in both countries. New Activist Diplomacy? No, definitely not. PNG has not and will never claim such. We are just being a good Pacific Islands citizen.

In the book there is no mention of PNG's role in ensuring Fiji remained connected to issues related to EU and Pacific, particularly on setting up of Pacific ACP Secretariat. In the standoff between Australia and New Zealand, on the one hand, and Fiji on the other, and its exclusion during the coup, PNG's position remained the "open door policy for Fiji" and all during this period PNG was the source of guidance for Australia and New Zealand on Fiji issues. I know because I was present in some of the bilateral leaders' meetings between successive Australian Prime Ministers and PNG's Prime Ministers and successive PNG Foreign Ministers and Australian Foreign Ministers. PNG's position under PM O'Neil remains that if Fiji has differences with Australia and New Zealand, it should deal with them bilaterally rather than seeking to exclude them from PIF.

In defining and charting the "new", what is undoubtedly clear is that *The New Pacific Diplomacy* as a new publication offers words crafted as food for thought, or as we say in PNG, *kaikai bilong tingting*. It is an important contribution to the ongoing dialogue on the architecture of Pacific regionalism and Pacific diplomacy.

I now have pleasure in Launching the "NEW PACIFIC DIPLOMACY".

Thanks you

