International Influence of Pacific Civil Society: Channels and Barriers
Summary of 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
The institutions governing the international arena were created by and for Western powers, privileging their ideas, experiences, and interests. Despite many Pacific nations gaining independence and/or forming regional organisations to be heard internationally, there is still inequity in terms of access to, and influence in, the international arena. This is observed in international climate policy which is largely guided by powerful interest groups and Western nations despite significant impacts and political agitation in Oceania.

This piece explores why this is the case through assessing the channels and barriers Pacific civil society faces to interacting in the international arena. Ultimately it is argued 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
The conceptual framework of this piece is based on Anderson's (2006) *Imagined Communities*, Epeli Hau'ofa's (1994) *Our Sea of Islands*, and Grey Fry's (2019) *Framing the Islands*. It holds that Pacific Island States as known today were constructed and imposed, often violently despite pre-existing societal structures. This piece, therefore, inclusively encompasses different epistemologies and ontologies through a focus on Pacific civil society and avoids problematisation of Oceania.

Methods
A literature review was conducted to explore Pacific colonial experiences, constitutional status', and channels and barriers to international interaction. A survey was sent to Pacific chapters of Transparency International in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Fiji and Vanuatu. Due to limited time and resources, there were few responses with one written response from Joseph Veramu of Transparency Fiji and one interview with Ruth Liloqula, Executive Officer of transparency Solomon Islands.

Background
Colonisation built the foundations of the current international system. Before this many people and societies existed with various processes of social order, interaction, and interdependence. Local contexts and experiences were unique, but broadly, colonial borders were drawn and enforced, and western style state government was imposed. In the 1960's, the UN General Assembly officially denounced colonialism, declaring the right of all people to self-determination in the UN Declaration on Decolonisation. Notably, colonisers decided which nations had rights for decolonisation under this agreement.

Following this, some Pacific Nations gained independence and seats at the UN. Others maintained free association agreements with the US or NZ, while a few remained non-

self-governing territories. Independence generally entailed one opportunity to change constitutional status to something largely dependent on what colonial rulers determined to be politically and organisationally adequate. In many cases contemporary aid relationships now serve to ensure policies and actions by Pacific states continue to align with interests of these more powerful nations. Civil society has existed throughout this political and constitutional change and consists of social movements and organisations contesting national, regional, and global issues. We now assess the channels and barriers in Oceania to civil society gaining international influence.

Channels to International Interaction

United Nations
The UN General Assembly provides a formal channel of influence to all member states. Not all Pacific Nations, however, are member states, and among those who are, many experience coercion through financial reliance on and political dominance of other nations. In terms of the inclusion of more diverse voices and a wider array of needs and interests, Article 71 of the UN Charter provides accredited NGOs a formal consultative arrangement with the Economic and Social Council.

Regional, Sub-Regional and Issue Groups
After Pacific nations began gaining independence, they boycotted the NZ and Australian dominated South Pacific Commission (today the Pacific Community) to obtain equal representation and influence. Around this time, Pacific Islands Forum was also founded. Here the membership of Australia and NZ has been controversial. It brings finance, but also minimises issues of independence, decolonisation, and climate change mitigation, and prioritises economic integration. The Pacific Small Islands Developing States group and Pacific Islands Development Forum both exclude NZ and Australia and have become more prominent vehicles for decolonisation issues.

Sub-regional organisations also exist alongside numerous issue specific groups. It has been argued that the sheer number of different groups is counter-productive, disaggregating efforts. Thus, that negotiations should be confined to all-encompassing forums such as those provided by the UN. However, there are significant barriers to inclusion at UN forums, thus exclusion of whole sets of ideas, experiences and interests would occur if all negotiations were confined to this arena. This multitude of existing groups can, therefore, be seen as a valuable and resilient manifestation of diversity.

States
As many international institutions are intergovernmental, we must assess the channel between civil society and the state. For this channel to function, states must have open and accountable regimes. Restrictions to dissent and media as seen in Samoa and Fiji, effectively block this channel. If CSO are able to access states, and hold them accountable, international power structures must then allow said state to have influence. As these conditions rarely arise, civil society often turns to self-made, or endogenous channels.

Endogenous Channels
In some cases, civil society groups utilise the size, influence, and resource base of larger international NGOs. Unfortunately, these groups are often in direct competition with each other for funding and resources. Increasing internet accessibility, thus global connectivity

has, however, laid the foundation for groups to influence global norms and foster international awareness through social media advocacy. Local projects and initiatives also serve as their own channel of influence through generating knowledge and ideas which grow and create results which influence global politics and decision making.

Barriers to International Interaction

Power
Power as hard, institutional rules, exclusion, and control underlays many of the barriers uncovered throughout this piece. The most obvious is Pacific nations which lack UN membership, thus are excluded from the world's most influential international institution. For NGOs, while many engage with the UN, accreditation processes necessarily exclude groups with alternative structures and without spare time, finance, personnel, and/or resources. Institutions also gain legitimacy through publicly engaging with civil society, while defining rules of engagement which don't necessarily allow meaningful influence. Outside formal UN engagement, much of civil society is excluded from intergovernmental institutions. Groups lacking access to national governments due to corruption/repressive regimes are, thus, at a further disadvantage. These groups also face additional barriers to endogenous channels through restricted financial opportunities, civic space, and media.

Disenfranchisement
Disenfranchisement describes soft power and the effects of conceptualisations of Oceania. This creates barriers even when groups are legally and institutionally entitled to an equal say. We see this within the UN as coercion, soft power, and financial/political dependence often restrict the positions Pacific member states can feasibly take up. Many barriers for civil society surround lack of time, money, resources, and capacity. The conceptual framework utilised here highlights that lack of capacity is often a consequence of perceptions. Perceptions that Pacific civil society lacks capacity means *'more capable'* outside groups make decisions and fill high level project roles, occupying space and reducing opportunities available. Perceived incapability also means international actors fail to include Pacific civil society representatives in meaningful ways. Thus, belittlement, and underestimation of Pacific civil society feed exclusionary processes which underlay many barriers to Pacific civil society having equitable access to international arenas.

Conclusion
Using the conceptual framework outlined, it becomes apparent that much international negotiating and decision making is on the terms of powerful, often European states. The state-centric nature of many international institutions often means that civil society is excluded or limited by rules of engagement. All too often, powerful groups predetermine which forums, institutions, nations, and ideas are valid, thus who is present and has influence at agenda setting, negotiating and decision-making tables. Perceptions are, therefore, paramount in determining outcomes. Over time in media, politics, and academia, Oceania has been perceived as a *'failing'* or *'weak'* political region. These views perpetuate belittlement and neo-colonial relationships of dependency and disempowerment which inhibit Pacific civil society from gaining equitable access to international space.

Note: This is a summary. Acknowledgements, citations, full reference list and appendices available in full text.