Negotiating Sisterhood in the Pacific Region: Feminist Alliances across Diversity

By

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Sometimes life gets in the way
We've got to keep on breathing
Look how far we've come
Look what we've made

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ABSTRACT

In recent years spaces for feminist civil society have been shrinking at the global level. Yet the efforts to have feminist civil society voices heard continue at both national and regional levels. This thesis explores how feminist civil society actors in the Pacific are responding to backlash and shrinking space. In particular, it focuses on the activities these actors undertake to build and strengthen regional alliances and identifies the conditions under which these alliances can help form a collective vision – a vision which is shared across the region, yet at the same time recognises the diversity within the region.

Empirically, the thesis draws on semi-structured interviews with feminist civil society actors and key representatives of regional institutions, as well as document analysis of gender statements from various organisations and institutions in the Pacific region. In order to develop a better understanding of feminist civil society activities and their impact in the region, the thesis focuses on two recent initiatives in the Pacific: the Pacific Feminist Forum and the We Rise Coalition. Both initiatives have a particular focus on the regional level, and they both seek to consolidate and amplify the feminist voices in the region for the purposes of building feminist alliances.

A close analysis of these two initiatives offers crucial insights into the processes, prospects and challenges of building regional alliances. More specifically, this analysis shows that Pacific women build alliances and enact solidarity ('sisterhood') in the region by emphasising the negotiated, strategic and intersectional aspects of these practices. The negotiated nature of the Pacific feminist identity is illustrated in the ways Pacific women combine unity with diversity and build inclusive regional feminist alliances with significant impact at both regional and global levels. It is also manifested in the way feminist civil society actors enact solidarity which is plural, strategic and fluid, and which emphasises the constant negotiation process involved in building feminist alliances and making them work. The thesis reveals that sisterhood or solidarity is not a given. It needs to be actively created and re-created by the actors on the ground. Drawing on these insights, the thesis also shows that an alternative way of understanding and enacting regionalism is both possible and desirable in the Pacific. The thesis shifts the attention from formal institutions to civil society initiatives and identifies the conditions under which such initiatives can have an impact at both regional and global levels.

While the thesis primarily focuses on feminist organisations, it also offers important insights for other organisations and networks which seek to form collective action at the regional level. As well as its conceptual contribution on feminist alliance building, the thesis provides practical recommendations for civil society actors who are confronted with the challenge of building regional feminist alliances without eradicating differences.

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ABBREVIATIONS

APWLD	Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
COP	Conference of the Parties
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DIVA	Diverse Voices for Action
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
EU	European Union
IWDA	International Women's Development Agency
FWRM	Fiji Women's Rights Movement
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
PACCOM	Pacific CSO Organising Mechanism
PICS	Pacific Islands Countries
PIFS	Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
PIDF	Pacific Islands Development Forum
PIDSOGIESC+	Pacific Islanders of Diverse Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Sex Characteristics
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PPA	Pacific Platform for Action
PLGED	Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration
PWSPD	Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development
PFF	Pacific Feminist Forum
RPPA	Revised Pacific Platform for Action
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals

SPC	Secretariat of the Pacific Community
SOGI	Sexual orientation and gender identity
UN	United Nations
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
USP	University of the South Pacific
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
WAVE	Women's Action for Voice and Empowerment
WRC	Women's Rights Caucus
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

PREFACE

This thesis has been a navigation of my activist interests in an academic context. I have been an active advocate for feminism and gender equality for over 30 years, and participated locally in Australia, regionally in Asia and the Pacific, and globally at the United Nations in the women's movement. This participation drew my attention to the importance of a community of women supporting one another and speaking out.

My Pacific interest was cemented when I lived and worked in Kiribati in the Central Pacific in 2006–2007. On my return to Australia, I was appointed as a Pacific Adviser for the Australian Attorney-General, which involved multiple trips to Kiribati, Tuvalu, Nauru, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji and Papua New Guinea. Currently, I work in the area of international development, with a particular focus on civil society strengthening. I have served as Convenor and Chair of the Pacific Committee for the YWCA Australia, as a facilitator, mentor and resource for the Mobilising Young Women for Change in Asia and Pacific Workshop, as a reviewer of the Rise Up Program for Pacific Women Leaders and as a member of the Pacific subgroup at an International Women's Summit. I have made parliamentary submissions on the human rights of Pacific women and girls and participated in the Pacific Women Lead program redesign consultations. I am currently a mentor in the Pacific Wayfinders program and have mentored two Pacific women as part of the Australia Awards' Women's Leadership Initiative. These experiences have expanded both my experiences of working with the Pacific Islands and my exposure to Pacific women's concerns.

Having been a lawyer for 25 years I thought I was leaving the law behind as I pursued academic study in gender. However, academic Davina Cooper made me realise in conversation that, despite my best efforts to get away from it, my research is not 'not law'. I can see now that my research falls equally into the areas of politics, international relations, law and human rights, women's rights, global social movements and feminist theory. It contributes to the ways in which gender equality and women's rights collective action are framed and contested in various international and regional formal and informal policy sites.

As I contribute further to the conversations about Pacific feminism, diverse alliance building, and impact and amplification, I have been invited to write both scholarly and more generalist pieces for a broader audience to the conversation. This motivation and invitation to shine a light

on the innovative work being done by Pacific feminists to build alliances across diversity has resulted in a number of blogs, working papers, conference papers, journal articles and book chapters during my PhD project.

There are, of course, aspects of education, profession, activists' commitments and identity that affect researchers' ability to do the kind of research they seek to do (referred to as positionality). I am an Australian feminist doing regional-level research in the Pacific in international affairs and politics. I take an interdisciplinary perspective born of my studies and work in the fields of law, international development, governance, gender and activism. In the research for this thesis, my Pacific experience helped me to build trust with my interviewees and gave me insight as to questions to ask, or an understanding of what might have been going on behind the scenes. It also gave me contacts to approach.

My motivations are reflected in the words of renowned Pacific academic Teresia Teaiwa (Teaiwa and Slatter 2013) who noted: 'Most Pacific feminist scholars would identify [with the idea that] my motivation centres on problems in the world I want to change – not on a field of academia I want to change'. I was also inspired during this research by the words of Yvonne Underhill-Sem, who wrote:

> *Not giving up is another radical practice of the active scholarly citizen. This requires intellectual agility, to be able to connect debates across disciplines…It also requires encouraging those with non-traditional intellectual trajectories that it is possible for academic work to be radical practice….Radical practice in the academy has a place in the wider struggle for social justice, equality…but it requires getting into the academy, creating new spaces and not giving up (Underhill-Sem 2017:336).*

In adding 'academic' to my activist hat rack, I have been deliberately transparent, navigating between being an insider and outsider, sometimes participant, sometimes researcher, sometimes activist. My scholarly position often reflects my activist interests and I have worked hard to find alternative positions, limitations and challenges and not be one-eyed. Yet we remain part of our communities:

> *As activists and researchers, we are part of the communities we are studying and aware of the situated knowledge we produce, which is rooted in conversations and shared*

> *experiences with other activists. We are aware of the political importance of these phenomena (Lucas Platero and Ortega-Arjonilla 2016:47).*

It is being part of a community of women that has given me such joy. My hope is that others find their own community, and that their voices are heard.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION:

GLOBAL PROBLEMS, REGIONAL SOLUTIONS?

> *During [global] negotiations it is hard to get that Pacific voice. But now, what has happened is that the Pacific countries start coming and supporting each other…. So, it is getting there, we are trying to move [forward]. It is a process; and of course, not an easy one (Pacific feminist activist, Suva, Fiji, 2016).*

In 2015, I had the privilege of travelling to New York to participate in the United Nations (UN) Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) as an Australian civil society delegate. It was the year of the Beijing 20+ Review, a chance for all delegates to come together and assess progress on gender equality 20 years on from the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on gender equality in 1995. The Beijing Platform for Action set the 12 critical areas of concern for gender equality, including women in power and decision-making, violence against women, women and the economy, the girl child, and the human rights of women. Each year at the CSW countries report on their progress in these critical areas. There were thousands of civil society delegates who had flown many miles at great expense to New York to share ideas, keep the countries accountable, and contribute to the development of a Political Declaration, which was intended to provide a basis for the accelerated implementation of the commitments made in Beijing 20 years before (UN Women 2020). There was excitement, a sense of occasion, with civil society actors looking forward to shaping the declaration, guiding its language through lobbying government delegations, and marking this important occasion. However, civil society delegates found themselves being effectively excluded from working on this declaration. Promises regarding the important role of civil society, with a statement by the UN welcoming their contribution and 'promoting a safe and enabling environment for civil society' (UN 2015a) proved, in practice, to be mere lip service. Instead, the Political Declaration for CSW was

passed as item one on day one, without any deliberation where civil society voices could be articulated and heard. I was one of the numerous civil society delegates who protested being silenced at the CSW in this way. We stood on the steps of the UN building in New York with our hands over our mouths, which were clamped shut, and carried handmade signs with the slogan: 'Feminists are here, and we want to be heard'.

The backlash against feminist civil society

The sentiment of exclusion I experienced in 2015 as a civil society delegate was also shared among other delegates who were hoping to represent civil society voices in the CSW (DAWN 2015, Shameen 2015, Zarro 2015). More importantly, what we observed and experienced in New York has proved to be only one instance of a broader phenomenon of shrinking spaces for civil society at the global level. While civil society organisations continue to be considered as an integral part of CSW negotiations in most UN documents, bringing on-the-ground experiences to the dialogue, and are characterised as a vital resource for advancing gender equality (UN 2020a), the reality seems to be different. Especially in recent years, a significant backlash from conservative and religious groups regarding the inclusion of civil society actors in decision-making and policy development at the global level has been observed (Atria 2019).

Emerging research shows that feminist civil society is increasingly under threat, with feminism facing backlash, and spaces for progressive civil society advocacy diminishing and closing (Bhagwan-Rolls 2017d, Bhagwan-Rolls 2017b, Hossain et al 2018, Listo 2019). Threats to feminist civil society come from a variety of political forces and actors (Gutierrez Rodriguez et al 2018, Kantola and Verloo 2018, Paternotte and Kuhar 2018, Verloo and Paternotte 2018). Worldwide, feminist civil society is under threat partly due to larger political threats against progressive politics, social justice or equality (Köttig et al 2017, UN 2020b). At the UN General Assembly in 2020, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women remarked:

> *there is a mounting opposition to and backsliding of women's rights everywhere, including an upsurge in retrogressive movements and a backlash against feminism, gender equality and women's empowerment…an increasing trend of denying and challenging international standards concerning women's human rights and gender-based violence. All of the above continue to pose significant challenges to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (UN 2020c:43).*

The rise of an extremist right, for example, has worked to undermine the ideal of political equality in contemporary societies. This is evident in the rise of conservative voices antithetical to feminist concerns demonstrated, for example, in a backlash against sexual and reproductive health and rights, diverse sexual and gender expression and women's bodily autonomy. Anne Marie Goetz (2015) has observed an increasingly coordinated misogynist backlash, where the rights of women and LGBTI individuals are subordinated to the project of preserving family. She described attacks on gender equality at CSW. Similarly, Jenny Birchall (2020:2) has reported on women's rights advocates in international fora fighting against regression of rights of women and girls due to 'illiberal and conservative agendas of some particularly influential countries'. Donatella della Porta has argued that the rise of neoliberalism shifts the focus of attention from collectives to individuals and from civil society to private corporations (della Porta 2013).

Rather than seeking collaboration with civil society actors, states and political actors seem to be concentrating and consolidating their own power, sometimes in collaboration with powerful business actors, taking up spaces for non-state actors (see, for example, Hossain et al 2018, Kaltner 2018). I witnessed this in 2015 at CSW with the announcement of a UN Women partnership with Uber, which was both controversial (as women's labour rights were not being protected) and short-lived (Neate 2015). Barriers to the participation of diverse feminist civil society actors and the tabling of their issues for discussion are not only witnessed in the context of the meetings of the CSW (Sugars 2017). Similar exclusions of feminist non-government organisations (NGOs), women and gender diverse people have also occasioned protests at the UN Conference of the Parties focused on climate change negotiations (Harvey 2019). This has been flagged by various scholars, including Nicole George (2013), who wrote about the constricting feminist political space in Fiji where she compared the radical, holistic feminist agendas of the YWCA of the 1970s with the barriers faced by later organisations like the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM). She attributes this to both a shift in neoliberal political agendas and a series of coups that Fiji suffered.

Organising as a regional blocs for impact

In addition to feminist civil society being silenced, what is noteworthy in the context of CSW is the influence of regional blocs of countries, including the Russian Bloc and the Eastern

European Bloc, on the wording of the CSW Outcome Statement (Jolly 2018). If acting as a region serves as a precondition for having an influence at the global level, it could be questioned whether the Pacific has an effective regional bloc. Writing about CSW, Jihii Jolly (2018:2) reports that the lack of an outcome document in earlier CSWs was 'partly due to the lack of feminist organising around the negotiations'. Similarly, Anne Marie Goetz articulated the way forward, noting that 'feminist movements in emerging economies now have a crucial role to play in demonstrating that feminism is not limited to the West and in influencing their national foreign policy establishments to defend women's rights in multilateral agreements' (Goetz 2015:1). As spaces for progressive voice shrink, feminist civil society gets fewer opportunities to speak. Thus, more organisations need to come together to find a common platform from which to advocate, in order to maximise the opportunities that exist.

Looking for a regional solution

I came away from the 2015 CSW wanting to understand what regional blocs existed for Pacific feminist civil society that could amplify Pacific activists' own voices and exert greater impact, as well as how these alliances included diverse women. Disheartened that the global level might not be the forum for progressive change on gender, might efforts be better focused at a regional level, and could headway be made? I sought to test this thinking, and to explore whether recent innovations in the Pacific by feminist civil society are a way around aspects that limit or hinder the participation of feminist civil society in decision-making processes.

The exclusion of feminist civil society from key decision-making sites raises many important questions about representation, democracy and accountability. Feminist civil society organisations play critical roles in forming what Nancy Fraser calls 'subaltern counter publics', in which marginalised groups meet, talk, find a voice and share tactics of engagement (Fraser 1992:23). Similarly, Jennifer Dodge characterises civil society as the 'frontiers of disagreement' and emphasises the centrality of civil society actors in contesting and shaping the official conversations (Dodge 2015:249). Civil society is key for formulating, representing and amplifying the concerns of the marginalised and disempowered publics, and for holding formal institutions to account (Cornwall and Goetz 2005, Weldon 2011, Brett 2017).

Specifically, the thesis seeks to respond to the following research questions:

(i) *What are the prospects and challenges of building regional feminist alliances in the Pacific region?*

(ii) *How do the Pacific feminist civil society actors navigate the challenge of building a unified regional voice that is attuned to the differences across the region and its peoples?*

(iii) *What impact, if any, do the Pacific feminist alliances have regionally and globally?*

The aim of this introductory chapter is to contextualise these research questions. The chapter is structured in four sections. In the first section, I present my rationale for focusing on the regional level. This is followed by the second section, where I offer a brief introduction to the literature on civil society and a Pacific-specific feminist civil society. This will be further developed in a subsequent chapter. In the third section, I present the central argument and the key insights of the thesis. Finally, in the fourth section, I outline the structure of this thesis and provide a brief overview of each chapter.

1.1. The Regional Level

While civil society spaces might be shrinking at the global level, efforts to make feminist civil society voices heard continue at both national and regional levels. The threat to feminist advocacy and women's human rights at the global level flags an urgent need to identify what other pathways are available, and how feminists make use of these pathways in their efforts to respond to the threats they experience at the global level (Verloo and Paternotte 2018). This thesis explores these questions by focusing on one particular region: the Pacific region. It investigates the ways feminist civil society actors in the Pacific region respond to the shrinking opportunities for inclusion at the global level, and the type of alliances they build to consolidate and amplify their voice in the region.

The geographical scope of this research is the Oceania countries of the Pacific (IUCN 2020). Described as a Sea of Islands (Hau'Ofa 2016), I focus on the collective actions of the independent Pacific Island Countries being the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu (DFAT 2012). I focus specifically on the Pacific region because I live in the region

(Australia), I have lived and worked in the Pacific Islands, and my work and writing is focused on Pacific women's experiences and activism regionally and globally.

The map of the Pacific Island Countries provided in Figure 1 below also shows the division into subregions of Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia which are used by the United Nations. However, these subregion boundaries have been criticised as colonial impositions (Trask 1990); that is, introduced from the outside to control the region. Margaret Jolly and colleagues (2009) have noted the contestation of these subregional divisions and attempts at European hierarchies, which positions the regions against one another. Yet they also note the deployment of Pacific actors and groups, such as through the Melanesian Way (Dobrin 2020) and the Melanesian Spearhead Group (Lawson 2016b), and in the 2021 Pacific Islands Forum leadership vote and split (ABC News 2021, SMH 2021). In this thesis I look for the creation of a Pacific-wide collective voice. Rather than focusing on the feminist activities in individual Pacific Island states or on those in a subregion, the thesis pays particular attention to regional civil society initiatives and how civil society actors work cooperatively across the region. The individual islands, such as Fiji, are only emphasised to the extent that they are relevant to the regional activities. Much of the regional activity in this geographical area is centred around Fiji as a regional transport hub and the site of Pacific regional institutions (George 2013). The 'metropolitan' states of Australia and New Zealand play a role as donors and supporters but their inclusion in the 'Pacific' is a subject of longstanding contestation, with criticisms that Australia and New Zealand are not 'Pacific Islanders' reported in the press (AAP 2010, Lyons 2019).

Most Pacific countries seen on the map below (Figure 1) are signatories to global conventions on improving gender equality. Most Pacific countries are also committed to the Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality and the recommendations of the Triennial Conference of Pacific Women. In addition, the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (2012) commits Pacific Island Forum countries[1] to advancing gender equality in various significant areas, including gender-responsive programs and policies, decision-making, economic empowerment, violence against women (VAW), and health and education. These recent commitments by Pacific leaders show a firm regional commitment to gender equality.

[1] The Pacific Island Forum countries are Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, PNG, Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. Source: Pacific Islands Forum website. www.forumsec.org

However, it is difficult to implement change. Part of the challenge is related to the misconceptions of 'gender equality', as Yvonne Underhill-Sem has noted, and 'the disconnect between global approaches to women's rights and equality and policy implementation in local contexts' (Underhill-Sem 2016:2). Regional bottom-up activities (that is, informal actions rather than formal institutional actions) in these areas and mobilisation of grassroots groups and civil society activists can potentially help address these challenges.

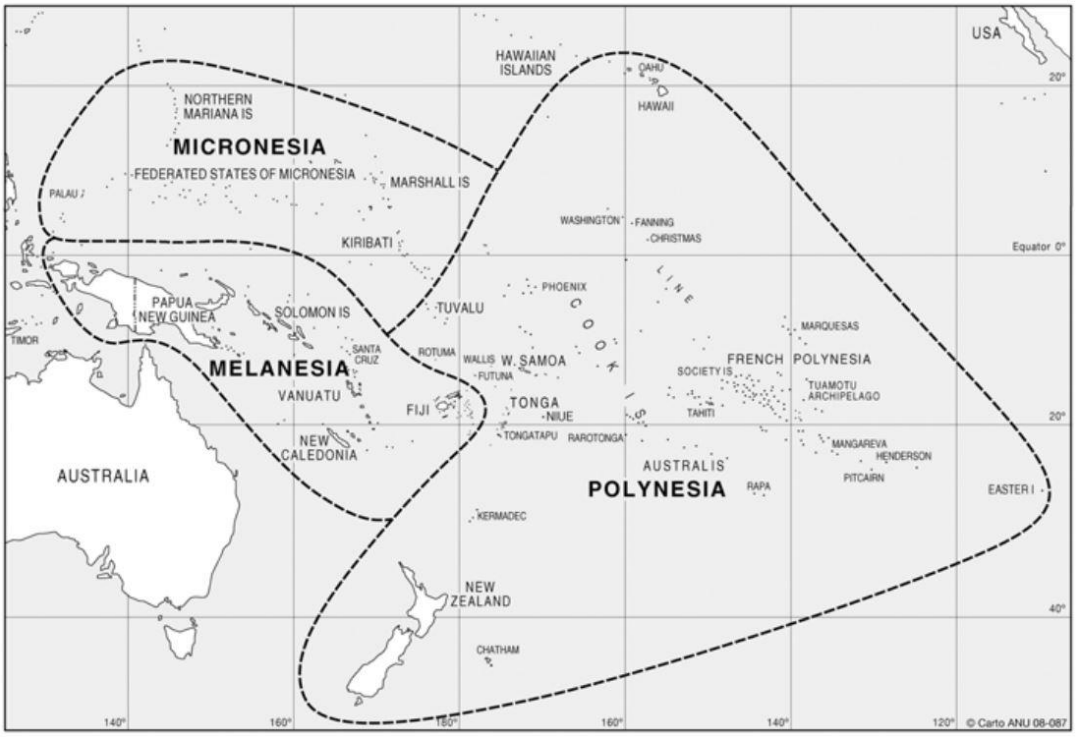

Figure 1: Pacific Region Map. Jolly, M. et al 2009:38.

There are several important reasons for both academics and activists to explore the regional actors and spaces of feminist civil society. The first key reason for focusing on feminist activities and practices at the regional level is that it offers an intermediate level beyond the nation state to amplify voices and enhance the influence of similarly situated actors through greater numbers and greater reach. There is evidence of the intrinsic benefits of focusing feminist attention at the regional level in other regions, such as the achievements of the African Feminist Forum, the European Feminist Forum and the Latin American Feminist Forum. Writing about the African Feminist Forum, Jessica Horn (2008), for example, outlined the role of feminist organising at the regional level in consolidating and spreading feminism in Africa

(see also Imam 2009). Similarly, in the case of Latin America, region-wide feminist meetings are reported to have helped forge a self-consciously regional political identity, affirming a feminism distinct from the North American or European variants. As Sonia Alvarez (2000) observed, here the region-wide networks created effective bonds of solidarity and platforms for discussion on various common, strategic issues across the region. Similar efforts have also been manifest in the Pacific region, but they have gained a new momentum as part of the Framework for Pacific Regionalism (PIFS 2014). This renewed regional focus (detailed in chapter 3) is key for the development of a Pacific-wide feminist civil society, given that, until recently, much of the gender-related Pacific research focused on single states only: for example, the Solomon Islands (Pollard 2014, Soaki 2017), Vanuatu (Donald et al 2002, Jolly 2012, Walsh 2016) and Samoa (Tcherkézoff 2014).

The second important reason for focusing on a regional level concerns the way collective decisions are made at the global level. When CSW meets annually to discuss progress and pitfalls in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, each member of the UN (a 'Member State') sets out its progress against agreed gender equality goals. UN Member States do this mainly in their respective regions. At CSW, UN Member States are grouped by regional blocs and caucus in regional blocs to achieve impact at meetings/negotiations.[2] The regional blocs dominating the CSW in 2015 when I attended, for example, had come to the meeting prepared with a unified statement and position; they were able to exert power and influence over the review process, which was structured to allow a regional bloc to represent a common position (UN Women 2015). At the same time, these dominant blocs were dismissing calls for the inclusion of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities in statements (Kara 2015). Katie Laatikainen (2017, 2020) describes this practice of forming regional groups at the United Nations as being 'pervasive'. When it comes to the Pacific region, as the quotation that opens this chapter suggests, having a strong regional voice can help not only to empower individual actors but also to enhance the prospects of having an influence in global meetings where bloc positioning is prominent (Macaj 2012; see also Dee 2020).

[2] Caucusing in regional blocs is aimed at achieving impact at meetings and in negotiations. For example, regional groups include the Arab Group, Mountains Group (Australia, NZ, Canada, Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Switzerland), Eastern European Group, Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC), Asia-Pacific Group, African Group and Western European and Others Group (WEOG). Only the superpowers of the USA, China and Russia act in their national capacity.

I explore these questions through a close analysis of the recent developments in the Pacific region and against the backdrop of the renewed Framework for Pacific Regionalism which was introduced in 2014. Regionalism can be defined as a sense of boundedness beyond national borders (Tomaney 2016). It usually refers to a shared geography, but also goes beyond it and takes a political meaning as well. This is particularly the case in the Pacific region, where regionalism takes the Pacific Ocean as its unifying factor, and refers to the shared development aspirations of many countries (PIFS 2020). It refers to a region which is collectively under increasing strain and whose communities are experiencing compounding vulnerabilities, such as climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and disaster recovery from events such as tropical cyclones (Farrell et al 2020, Steenbergen et al 2020).

The renewed focus on the Pacific Island Countries (PICS) acting regionally (rather than individually) as part of the regional framework also has important implications for the development of feminist alliances in the region. In fact, one important purpose of the Framework for Pacific Regionalism is that it promises to enable the inclusion of diverse civil society actors in the shaping of decisions that affect the Pacific region (PIFS 2014). This thesis assesses the capacity of the Framework for Pacific Regionalism to deliver on this promise, and offers an in-depth analysis of the recent feminist civil society regional initiatives against the backdrop of this framework. In doing so, the thesis seeks to counteract the problematic perception of Pacific Island Countries as 'aid clients' with limited capacity or agency, as Jenny Hayward-Jones (2019) observes; it highlights instead the agency and intentional efforts of these actors in shaping the feminist politics in the region, and identifies the key learnings they offer on bottom-up organising and feminist alliance building.

1.2. Feminist Civil Society in the Pacific Region

In this thesis, I focus on the formation of a specifically feminist civil society in the Pacific region. A Pacific feminist 'civil society' can be conceived of as multiple organisations committed to highly diverse causes and interests, with ties developed through involvement in gender equality advocacy and protest events over the years. Understanding how feminist civil society actors from different Pacific Island Countries come together and develop a shared agenda is an important yet under-explored area of research. Existing research on gender and the Pacific Islands tends to focus on women's participation in formal political sites, such as the

parliaments (Corbett and Liki 2015, Spark and Corbett 2016, Baker 2019, Baker and Palmieri 2020), thus paying limited attention to women's participation in civil society and alliance-building activities in the region.

I use the term 'feminism' in this thesis to characterise ideas, actors and practices 'having a general objective directed at changing society' (Walby 2011:6) in support of gender equality and women's rights. When I refer to feminism it is important to note that there is no one understanding of feminism 'out there'. Rather Pacific feminisms (plural) have been homegrown and shaped by culture, location, indigeneity, ethnic mix, colonisation and decolonisation. It is important for Pacific civil society itself to define the specificities of Pacific feminist identities, solutions and spaces. As noted by a member of the We Rise Coalition, one of the key organisations I studied in the context of this thesis, 'feminism is about respecting diverse women's experiences, identities, knowledges and strengths and striving to empower all women to realise their full rights' (IWDA 2021a).

The term civil society is used in multiple ways in the literature. Briony Jones and Dit Djane (2017), for example, use this term to refer to a community of citizens linked by collective activity. Civil society, according to David Yencken (2013), is a myriad of community organisations that aim to promote the public good and belong to a civil society sector separate from the government and business sectors. Other scholars have defined civil society as a public sphere in which issues are discussed and those interests are pressed, or the arena within which social forces and class groups in society gain organisational form (Gill 2017).

To be clear, civil society is not a unified entity (Jones and Djané 2017); it is heterogenous. It is this aspect of civil society that sometimes becomes an obstacle to civil society mobilisation, as it can include potentially contradictory agendas, with the actors involved spending more time debating their differences than working towards a common agenda (Grugel 2004).

Recognition of civil society as actors with a voice necessitates shifting the focus from formal to informal spaces and actors, including civil society organisations, to achieve change in the Pacific. Several scholars, such as Nicole George (2011), Anne Dickson-Waiko (2015) and Alice Pollard (2003), have argued that informal networks of women organising in the Pacific (around peace building or through church-based mobilisations) show alternative pathways for building collaboration in the region. Lorraine Sexton (1986) has written about women as political actors

in local NGOs and in local, national and regional formations of women's church groups. The centrality of religion to culture in the Pacific extends to women's movements, and it has been recognised that this is sometimes reflected in a Pacific-specific feminism (ACFID 2020). Dickson-Waiko (2003) described Christian women's groups as the missing rib of politics. This underscores the importance of donors that engage in gender equality efforts in the Pacific understanding Pacific culture and how best to support and sustain leadership and growth against a backdrop of cultural deference to hierarchy, family and relationships (ACFID 2020), as well as faith influences.

It has been recognised that women's rights organisations in some Pacific countries exist outside the formal civil society organisation (or CSO) sector and yet are very influential allies on women's rights issues, providing a powerful voice to government on the issues for which they choose to advocate (ACFID 2020). This highlights the need for broad definitions and lenses. Nicole Haley and Kerry Zubrinich (2016) do this: in their consideration of women's leadership and political participation, these concepts are broadly defined, with civic engagement a key part of women's political participation. Research from beyond the Pacific has relevantly emphasised the horizontal and collective organisational structures of women's groups in enabling a distinctive style of political engagement (Goetz 1997, Alvarez 1999, 2000). Women's groups in civil society provide Pacific women with important opportunities to lobby governments regarding issues that affect them (McLeod 2005, Smith 2020). As Tait Brimacombe (2017:142) argued:

> *Civil society organisations and coalitions in the Pacific have given women an opportunity to 'challenge the status quo' in quieter and subtler ways, acting as a vehicle for the pursuit of social and political change and a platform from which to lobby for legislative and policy change.*

It has also been suggested that as 'less male dominated' realms, the civil society organisations in the Pacific seem to have also offered an important opportunity for Pacific women to build capacity and gain prominence as leaders (McLeod 2015:4), and to put forward otherwise marginalised voices (Dickson-Waiko 2003).

The thesis builds on these crucial insights about the significance and the transformative power of civil society organisations in the Pacific region, and investigates the alliances such

organisations build to amplify their voices, and to make the most of opportunities to counteract the shrinking spaces of civil society at the regional and global levels and advance gender equality in the region.

1.3 Argument and Contribution of the Thesis

To investigate how Pacific feminist civil society actors respond to limited opportunities to be heard and to have a better understanding of the kinds of regional alliances they build to amplify voices and maximise resources, I collected and analysed data from several sources. First, I conducted semi-structured interviews with feminist civil society actors and the key representatives of regional institutions. In addition, I undertook a document analysis of gender statements of regional organisations and institutions in the Pacific. I also interviewed gender advisers from two regional institutions – the Pacific Islands Forum and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community – to understand how Pacific feminist civil society organisations position themselves in relation to each other and in relation to regional formal actors to advance gender equality in the Pacific. As Yvonne Underhill-Sem rightly noted, it is important to 'unpack how feminist activists can build non-colonising feminist solidarities across borders' and enable meaningful collective action (Underhill-Sem 2012:1099).

In order to shed further light on the type of collectives Pacific feminists build, I pay particular attention to two recent civil society initiatives in the region: the Pacific Feminist Forum and the We Rise Coalition. Both initiatives seek to provide spaces to hear new voices and amplify them at the regional level; the former provides a structured forum and the latter provides coordination. So far, these initiatives have received limited scholarly attention from academics working in the Pacific region.

The key argument of the thesis is that, in getting space to be heard and impact regional institutions, policy and thinking on gender equality, it is important for diverse Pacific feminist civil society organisations to join forces across difference and find a way to advocate with a collective voice without erasing difference. This is achieved by a what I am calling a *negotiated sisterhood*, which is a strategic coming together. My use of the term 'sisterhood' aligns with the explanation by Maria Lugones and Pat Alake Rosezelle (1995) that sisterhood is a metaphor used by feminists as a model of relationships that women need to foster, and concerning relations among women not just as biological sisters. I use it to denote a sense of solidarity or

support but with an understanding that women do not just join together qua women, and are not a homogenous block.

The thesis shows how sisterhood is negotiated in the Pacific region through a close examination of two case studies: the Pacific Feminist Forum (chapter 5) and the We Rise Coalition (chapter 6). Central to the argument of the thesis is the meaning, form and impact of this negotiated sisterhood in the Pacific. Based on a close analysis of these two initiatives, I argue that 'sisterhood' (solidarity among women) in the Pacific region has three key characteristics: it is *negotiated, strategic* and *intersectional*.

The *negotiated* nature of the Pacific feminist identity is illustrated in the ways Pacific women negotiate to combine unity with diversity and build inclusive regional feminist alliances with (significant) impact at both regional and global levels. It is also manifested in the way feminist civil society actors enact solidarity, which emphasises the constant negotiation process involved in building feminist alliances and making them work. In other words, the thesis reveals that sisterhood or solidarity is not a given. It needs to be actively created and re-created by the actors on the ground. I use the term solidarity in this thesis following Mohanty (2003), who rightly argues that solidarity does not require complete identification.

The *strategic* nature of the Pacific feminist identity is seen in the deliberate act of diverse actors choosing to come together. In search of greater impact, Pacific feminists are pursuing a deliberate strategy of generating a wider network of actors, and giving space for information sharing and for strengthening Pacific feminists' engagement.

Finally, the *intersectional* nature of Pacific feminism is seen in a commitment to making space for marginalised groups to be heard and join together. Intersectional activism addresses more than one structure of oppression or form of discrimination. Intersectionality is used as an organising principle for diverse actors, without insistence on homogeneity for alliances to be sustained. It is used to mean a recognition of the different parts of identity that come together to generate one's lived experience (Crenshaw 1989). This necessitates an understanding that one's identity as a woman is shaped further by one's age, sexuality, race, disability or other relevant markers of one's identity.

In addition to unpacking the key characteristics of Pacific feminism, the thesis also shows that an alternative way of understanding and enacting regionalism is both possible and desirable in

the Pacific. It shifts the attention from formal institutions to civil society initiatives and identifies the conditions under which such initiatives can have an impact at both regional and global levels.

While the thesis primarily focuses on feminist organisations, it also offers important insights for other organisations and networks which seek to take collective action at the regional level. As well as its conceptual contribution to feminist alliance building, the thesis provides practical recommendations for civil society actors who are confronted with the challenge of building regional feminist alliances without eradicating differences. A focus on many diversities coming together to form a common vision enables us to think about practical solutions. The thesis shows that there need not be complete consensus, but that common platforms which reflect a larger number of struggles are an impactful way forward for feminist activism. The case studies in this thesis display the melding of goals of Pacific Islanders of Diverse Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Sex Characteristics (PIDSOGIESC+) or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) movements and women's movements, and so are very inclusive in contrast to some of the examples of trans-exclusionary Western feminisms (Hines 2019). Terminology of sexual and gender minorities differs throughout the world (Bett et al 2020). At the UN level, the term sexual orientation and gender identity is used, referred to as SOGI. Pacific activists have developed their own terminology to describe their movements, including Leiti, Fa'afafine, Fakaleiti and Mahu. Instead of using the LGBTQ label, some Pacific activists are referring to the rights of Pacific Islanders of Diverse Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Sex Characteristics (PIDSOGIESC+) to recognise the range of cultures and communities within the region, including many traditional third gender communities and those who may not identify as LGBT. In this thesis those interviewed used the term 'LGBT', and so I have reported the terms as used by the Pacific women interviewed.

1.4 Thesis Outline

This thesis is composed of three main parts. Part 1 (chapters 2 and 3) serves a context-setting role, covering literature on alliance building in civil society and the background to Pacific regionalism. Part 2 (chapters 4, 5 and 6) covers the empirical work in detail, discusses methods used and features case studies of the Pacific Feminist Forum and the We Rise Coalition. Part 3

(chapters 7, 8 and 9) takes a balcony view and considers what we can learn from the research, its insights for alliance building and its impact.

In this introduction to the thesis, I have described the broader context and the problem of shrinking civil society spaces, presented my rationale for focusing on the regional level and outlined the central research questions.

In chapter 2 I give a brief overview of the existing literature on intersectionality and alliance building, feminist civil society and Pacific-specific feminism.

In chapter 3 I set out the key actors and sites in the Pacific region, describe the renewal and re-emergence of the regionalism agenda in the Pacific. I examine how this re-emergence is affecting regional decision-making spaces in terms of furthering efforts on gender equality strategies that can be leveraged in the face of the shrinking spaces at a global level. This background is important for understanding the landscape and the key developments in the region in recent years.

Chapter 4 introduces the two cases the thesis focuses on (the Inaugural Pacific Feminist Forum and the We Rise Coalition), the reasons for choosing these, and the methods used to collect data. In this chapter, I also reflect on the challenges I faced as a feminist researcher undertaking feminist inquiry, and how I sought to address these challenges.

Chapter 5 focuses on the first case study – the Inaugural Pacific Feminist Forum (PFF). It analyses the interviews conducted with the PFF organisers and participants about the role of the PFF in building regional feminist alliances and identifies insights gained from this analysis. I also consider the publicly announced outcome of the PFF, the Charter of Feminist Principles for Pacific Feminists, and discuss the meaning of this document for the development of feminist civil society in the region. I consider the PFF as a project identity and outline the lessons learnt from the PFF as a collective space advancing Pacific feminism.

Chapter 6 details the second case study – the We Rise Coalition. I look at the organisational structure of the We Rise Coalition and its alliance-building activities. In this context, I focus particularly on the specific activities the We Rise Coalition has undertaken to build and sustain a Pacific feminist movement in the region, from a project to a longer lasting mobilisation. Finally, I reflect on the broader lessons this case provides about the requirements for alliance

formation, and its contribution to alliance-building studies for social movements using the tool of intersectional recognition to address diverse struggles and constituencies. This is of significance as it addresses the question of whether, and how, it is possible to respect difference but still find a common purpose.

Chapter 7 offers key insights based on a synthesis of my case studies in response to the question of how Pacific feminist civil society can create effective alliances across diversity to amplify calls for gender equality. Taken together, the two case studies make a contribution to the literature by showing the importance of forming feminist collectives that are strategic, intersectional and transparent, and based on trust and reflexivity. These insights reveal how to build strong, cohesive movements without erasing the individual actors' differences. The case studies also demonstrate how to make space for diverse alliances to form.

The aim of chapter 8 is to counter any potential observations as to the 'so what?' question regarding the practical impact of these small alliances. Contrary to how impact is understood in the existing literature, I argue that while policy change is usually characterised as an important manifestation of impact it is possible to broaden the notion of impact to go beyond policy change alone. I focus on three categories of impact – procedural, substantive and structural – to unpack both the regional and global impact of the Pacific feminist alliances. Despite being small, these initiatives are important sites of feminist innovation in alliance building, and have considerable impact. To dismiss initiatives as small scale is to overlook the impact feminist civil society is demonstrating.

Chapter 9 sums up the research. It consolidates the insights of the thesis under the broader concept of 'negotiated sisterhood' and explains how this is enacted in the Pacific. This concept not only captures the dynamic and diverse nature of feminism and feminist activities in the region, but also helps to identify some practical recommendations for regional civil society organisations moving forward. I discuss the contribution of the thesis to the literature and to an understanding of the role of *regional* feminist civil society in collectively creating spaces to be heard, and I make suggestions for potential areas of further study.

PART ONE:

SETTING THE SCENE

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW:

GENDER, FEMINISM AND ALLIANCE BUILDING IN THE PACIFIC REGION

> *Organising to recognise difference also creates the possibility of forging alliances on specific issues (Weldon 2011:127).*

In order to develop a better understanding of how Pacific feminists come together and act collectively, I reviewed a range of literature, including work focused on gender and feminism in the Pacific, as well as the theory and practice of alliance building in the context of social movements and organisational studies. My aim with this review was to establish connections to the existing literature and develop a basis upon which I could generate new knowledge about feminist civil society in the Pacific region.

This chapter presents the literature reviewed for this thesis in two sections. In the first section, I provide a brief overview of the existing body of work on gender and feminism in the Pacific region. Much research to date has focused on the participation and representation of women in the formal political arenas. However, there is growing recognition of the importance of informal spaces and forms of informal political participation in the Pacific region. In this context, the formal spheres refer to spaces of action such as parliaments, and the informal sphere relates to spaces that are sites of action beyond parliaments and governments, such as civil society protests and activities. The thesis seeks to build on the insights offered by those scholars who have focused their attention on the prospects of building collective action and inclusive alliances in the region. In the first section, I also focus on the body of literature that articulates the need for a 'Pacific feminism', one which takes into account Pacific needs and concerns. After reviewing the gender and feminism research in the Pacific, in the second section of this chapter I focus on the theoretical approaches to alliance building and outline the relevance of these approaches for studying feminist civil society in the Pacific.

2.1 Gender and Feminism in the Pacific

The state of gender research in the Pacific

Recent years have seen a growth in gender-related research globally. Some of the renewed interest has resulted from the inclusion of a standalone goal on gender equality (Goal 5) as one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations in 2015. This goal is to 'achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'. The official acknowledgement represented by this goal brought renewed scholarly attention to gender-related issues in the Pacific region. Challenges faced by Pacific women include the issue of intimate partner violence against women and girls, and access to quality education, clean water and sanitation (UNESCAP 2019:27). These challenges have given rise to concerns that the goals set by the UN will not be met in the Pacific region, and to a call for progress towards the goal to be accelerated. In this context, scholars have also emphasised the cultural barriers hindering progress towards gender equality in the region. Examples include the male-dominant practices of decision-making, with cultural codes reinforcing that a man's place is in the public sphere, and a woman's is in the household, continuing to persist in many Pacific countries (Brouwer et al 1998, Jolly 2015). In addition, men continue to hold the majority of formal leadership roles at village, community and national levels, and women have been consistently represented as mothers, wives, daughters and sisters, as members of families rather than as citizens with the same rights as male citizens (Underhill-Sem et al 2016, Howard 2019). As Vanessa Griffen (2006) argued, the rules and morals imposed by colonialism and Christianity continue to regulate men's and women's behaviour and reinforce distinct gender relations as part of the cultural and social life in the Pacific.

Pacific feminist activism has had to navigate a complex terrain and multiple political upheavals. Using the example of the constricting feminist political space in Fiji, Nicole George noted that 'advocacy grew out of critical and concrete evaluations of Pacific women's lives and how they were being shaped by economic and political forces emanating from outside the region' (George 2012:63). These include forces such as multiple military coups. She further noted the 'interplaying local and global contingencies that shaped women activists' views of the prevailing political climate and their subsequent negotiation of organisational collectivity, progressive ideas and transnationalism' (George 2012:63). Aletta Biersack et al (2016) spelled

out how human rights discourse has been contested and blocked in the Pacific, with cultural differences cited as blockages to the transfer of human rights across borders. Gender equality activists in the Pacific have been energised by the human rights discourse of tools such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which can assist in a common call for legislative action in the struggle against gender violence and promote the inclusion of women's rights in the human rights discourse. However, implementation of CEDAW across the region is uneven.

My research is focused on the civil society actors shaping regional alliances. Much of the early attention on women's rights in the Pacific was driven by civil society actors. A report written on Pacific feminism in 1987 set out the visions and ideas of 26 women from 11 Pacific Island countries who shared their respective knowledge, values and beliefs, and practices as women in their local communities (Griffen 1987). The report outlined a vision of a feminist perspective that would be meaningful and relevant to women's lives in the Pacific and contribute to their activities and work. It considered a range of aspects, including education, family, politics, environment and religion. This report was influential in setting a common agenda around the issues of gender equality in the Pacific. It has been used by other civil society actors as a 'framework defined and owned by Pacific women and provided an initial guideline for interrogating and voicing women's concerns about living conditions and the status of women in the Pacific' (Yabaki 2006:56).

While the 1987 report acknowledged the central role of civil society for establishing a feminist vision in the region, most of the efforts remained focused on advancing the status of women in formal spaces. As Sohela Nazneen and Maheen Sultan (2017) noted, much of the scholarship has focused on the inclusion of women in policy circles and state machinery. In this context, the representation of women in parliament received particular attention (see, for example, Baker et al 2013, Zetlin and Palmieri 2014, Baker 2014, 2015a; 2015b, 2017, 2018; 2019). Kerryn Baker (2019), for example, studied women's underrepresentation in politics in the Pacific Islands and found that only one in twenty Pacific parliamentarians were female, compared to one in five globally. She examined quotas, a common method of increasing women's representation, and looked at four countries where parliamentary gender quota measures have been introduced: Samoa, Papua New Guinea, Bougainville and the French Pacific Territories. This research revealed that while some places' attempts at quota introduction have faced

resistance in the Pacific as being against culture or norms, other Pacific advocates came up with arguments in support of such measures.

An insightful scoping study on gender research in the Pacific between 1994 and 2014 (Underhill-Sem 2016) provides a useful review about the body of research that exists and its variety. The study covers areas of research such as education, health, climate change and environment, economic empowerment, gender mainstreaming, leadership and decision-making, violence against women and human rights. The study authors expressed a desire to build research capacity in the Pacific, as well as to strengthen gender-responsive policy development. The study also sought to identify gaps in research. The authors identified the importance of research being relevant to the intended audience and that it needs to be communicated repeatedly and exposed to feedback from Pacific-based stakeholders. They especially note that this can be difficult when much of this research suffers from a lack of accessibility or public availability. Subsequently, the Tok Save Gender and the Pacific research portal, launched in 2021 (Tok Save 2021), aims to aid accessibility. This thesis will also be submitted to that portal.

Writing about the state of gender and gender relations in the Pacific, scholars have focused on particular issues facing Pacific women, such as on violence against women (Fisher 2014, Pollard 2014, Bull et al 2017), women's human rights (Griffen 2006c, Jolly 2012) and the family (Jolly and Macintyre 1989, Jolly and Ram 2001, George 2010). Another focus is the role of tradition in silencing women (Jolly and Thomas 1992) and maintaining traditional gender norms around men, and elder men in particular, as the only decision makers. Research has also provided insights into gender-differentiated impacts of structural adjustment and development in the Pacific (Rapaport 1999), rural women's development and empowerment in Fiji and the Pacific Islands (Yabaki 2006), 'Pacifika' (that is, of the Pacific Islands) identities (Wilson 2013) and the empowerment of young Pacific Island women (Greene 2015).

Despite this broad coverage, there are still significant gaps in the academic literature. This is partly due to the geographically wide and heterogenous nature of the region. Underhill (2016) reveals that much of the gender equality literature in the Pacific context focuses on single states only, such as the Solomon Islands (Pollard 2014, Soaki 2017), Vanuatu (Donald et al 2002, Jolly 2012, Walsh 2016) and Samoa (Tcherkézoff 2014). My research focuses on understanding the regional level activities in the Pacific by addressing questions such as how the various

national and subregional women's organisations can work together and reconcile differences, and it seeks to highlight how commonality can be found across differences in order to speak with *one* amplified Pacific voice (see Lawson 2016, 2017 on the subregional grouping of Melanesia, for example; this dominance of a subregional affiliation in the Melanesian context was also flagged in Interview #20, 2016).

Some scholars have emphasised the need for safe spaces where Pacific women can come together in collective action. For example, following the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) Forum in 2005 (which saw the participation of women from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu), Vanessa Griffen (2006) drew attention to the importance of regional forums for creating spaces where Pacific women become visible and where they can debate the issues surrounding the women's movements in the region. These spaces, Griffen (2006c:108) argued, can give Pacific women's rights activists 'a sense of the struggles and commitment to intersection of all human rights'. She argued that these spaces are crucial for making progress and achieving change on issues related to gender and sexuality (Griffen 2006c:110). She pointed out the examples of Pacific NGOs, which were formed after the United Nations 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing, and which have contributed to monitoring the progress of women's rights in critical areas (Griffen 2000). Yet, so far, not enough attention has been paid to such regional spaces and activities.

Another related gap in the literature relates to the study of informal networks and women organising in the region. Not enough research attention has been paid to how women establish and maintain informal networks and what role these networks play in the Pacific. This is a significant omission because they are mobilising with an intention to include diversity and to have an impact in multiple modes regionally and globally. I aim to address this by analysing two recent grassroots developments in the region, and by studying how a reinvigorated feminist civil society can drive change across the Pacific region. In so doing, I seek to build on the work of scholars such as Nicole George (2004, Fiji), Alice Pollard (2003, Solomon Islands) and Anne Dickson-Waiko (2015, Papua New Guinea), who examined the activist and advocacy work of civil society in women's organisations in various Pacific countries, and explore how these organisations can build space for the development of a collective voice in the region.

The need for Pacific feminism(s)

When studying feminist civil society in the Pacific, one recurring question relates to the notion of feminism, and how it is understood in the region. As mentioned previously, the rich and varied nature of feminist scholarly literature means that it is no longer possible to discuss feminism as if it constituted a single, cohesive theoretical framework. In this section, I revisit these discussions and reflect on their relevance for the Pacific region.

One of the significant and persistent tensions in the literature has been the extensive focus on women in the developed, Western democracies (to the exclusion of others). Feminist theorists have criticised many aspects of mainstream feminism. Their main critique has centred around the assertion that mainstream feminism captures the experience of white, cisgendered, heterosexual and middle-class women only. For example, Daniels (2015) argued that the trouble with mainstream feminism is its failure to acknowledge racist, sexist behaviour happening even within the feminist movement itself.

In addition, foreign donors focused on women's empowerment have tended to impose their own gender norms in the region and have failed to acknowledge the context-specific factors shaping the experience of Pacific women, as Jack Corbett and Asenati Liki (2015) argued. They suggest that 'employing the concept intersectionality allows…a more nuanced reading of the impact of gender' (Corbett and Liki 2015:320). That is, a context-specific understanding of feminism requires paying attention to intersectionality, and what it means in the context of the Pacific region. Intersectionality is the acknowledgment of the interacting, simultaneous effects of multiple axes of oppression. Gender, race, class, sexuality, age, ethnicity and ability, for example, cannot be understood in isolation from one another. The term 'intersectionality' was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 as she drew to attention to feminist and anti-racist campaigns that left women of colour invisible. Crenshaw argued that when feminist theory and politics that claim to reflect women's experiences and women's aspirations do not include or speak to black women, they cannot make claims about what 'women are' or what 'women need'. She noted this exclusion is reinforced when white women speak for and as women, leaving feminism's potential to broaden and deepen analysis by addressing non-privileged women unrealised (Crenshaw 1989:154).

The issue Crenshaw identified was that 'feminist efforts to politicise experiences of women and antiracist efforts to politicise people of colour have frequently proceeded as if the issues and experiences they detail occur on mutually exclusive terrains...they readily intersect in lives of real people but seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices' (Crenshaw 1991:1242). The problem with this is that when expounded as an 'either/or proposition they relegate the identity of women of colour to a location that resists telling', not 'represented in discourses of either feminism or antiracism. Because intersectional identity as both women and of colour within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other women of colour are marginalised within both' (Crenshaw 1991:1244).

Crenshaw also pointed out that conflicts developed over differing definitions of feminism stemming from a failure to 'recognise the different circumstances under which feminist consciousness develops and manifests itself within minority communities' (Crenshaw 1991:1265). This resulted in women of colour leaving coalitions to return to community-based organisations, preferring to struggle over women's issues within their community rather than struggle over race and class issues with middle-class women. These established leaders in their own communities are familiar with gender dynamics in their communities and better qualified to handle outreach than those with more conventional feminist credentials. The problem Crenshaw gave a name to was not that women who dominate anti-violence movements are different from women of colour but that they frequently have the power, whether through material or rhetorical resources, to determine whether the intersectional differences of women of colour will be incorporated at all (Crenshaw 1989).

These insights have important implications for Pacific feminism. Most importantly, a focus on intersectionality underscores the need for Pacific-specific feminist approaches and ensures that feminism remains relevant for the specific concerns facing Pacific women, rather than imposed from elsewhere. This ongoing debate was well captured in Vanessa Griffen's 1987 Pacific Women's Workshop Report (referred to above). The workshop included facilitated sessions on developing a feminist perspective, and the report summarised the debate as follows:

> *A Pacific feminism would be defined by Pacific women and cover issues that were relevant to them, such as cultural imperialism for example. Pacific women needed to develop a feminist ideology to analyse the wider issues of women's struggles, which were important to them as women and as Pacific people – for example, all forms of*

> *dominance, social inequalities, and the role and influence of institutions such as the church. It would allow Pacific women to question in a different way issues such as colonialism and imperialism. Having a feminist perspective would influence the questions Pacific women asked about institutions and enable women to challenge conditions and cultural practices that contribute to their oppression (Griffen 1987:21).*

In order to have traction, a Pacific-defined feminism needs to be context specific. Existing research reveals that many problems Pacific women face, such as the institutional and cultural barriers to their leadership, are context or country or subregion specific (Griffen 1987). Understanding these norms and cultural codes is crucial for creating a Pacific-specific feminism. Griffen's report (1987) further highlighted the importance of adopting a Pacific-specific feminism, which it defined as 'a perspective that women in the Pacific could live and work with' and which is a perspective that conveys what feminism means to Pacific women (Griffen 1987:8). The participants who participated in the 1987 Pacific Women's Workshop noted that working out their own ideas of a Pacific feminism had benefits, including producing 'a greater sharing, a greater sisterhood' (Griffen 1987:21).

It is important that the stories of Pacific women and girls are told, and this drove my commitment to public writing and engagement during my research, through blogs, panels, papers, children's books, videos and speeches. Storytelling is part of this amplification, and is a Pacific cultural practice. Margaret Jolly (2005) looked at feminisms and considered the different views of what aspects of feminism might be indigenous and what aspects might be foreign in the Pacific, as expressed by Pacific women in their writing. Similarly, Tui Nicola Clery and Robin Metcalfe (2018) wrote about the importance of claiming space for Pacific women and girls' stories of feminist activism. They noted these voices are too often excluded. They argued that stories can encourage a sense of collective belonging. They acknowledged Pacific women's complex and intersecting identities, and that multiple oppressions overlap and interconnect, and the importance of alternative stories of practice and the inclusion of diverse voices (Clery and Metcalfe 2018).

Equally important in this context is to recognise that Pacific feminisms are plural. The Post Development Dictionary for example, which is described as transformative alternatives to the currently dominant processes of globalised development, lists Pacific feminisms in the plural (Kothari 2018, Underhill-Sem 2019). Yet, recognising the uniqueness of Pacific feminisms

should not mean their separation or isolation from the broader, global context. Rather, the local and global are interwoven in Pacific women's rights activities as women's rights advances and setbacks globally affect women in the Pacific. Pacific women at regional and global forums speak from a place of a Pacific-specific feminism, generated from within by grassroots Pacific feminists, based in cultural contexts. This was also asserted by Sarah Smith and Falyn Katzman (2020) in their work on grassroots women in Chuuk, one of the Federated States of Micronesia, who demonstrated that community narratives of gender can transform from within using their own ideas about gender equality. Smith and Katzman's findings demonstrated how grassroots NGOs foster collective power and action to effect change, and how these actions are grounded in their own Pacific cultural and social context. Anne Dickson-Waiko (2003), for example, wrote of the important nexus between Pacific grassroots female activism and the church in empowering female citizens against a backdrop of the state's neglect of women's interests. This history of church women's mobilisation forms a rich part of the emergence of a Pacific-specific feminism, where faith and feminism mingle. Tracey Banivanua-Mar (2016) also highlighted the importance of networks of solidarity in the Pacific decolonisation story (that is, the independence movement for the Pacific). She argued that these indigenous networks transcended colonial and national borders with localised traditions of protest and dialogue connected to what was taking place globally during decolonisation and beyond, and that they continued in the post-colonial era.

Pacific feminists have a strong commitment to reflecting the diversity of Pacific women's experiences. Pacific feminist scholar Yvonne Underhill-Sem (2012:1098) has made clear the difficulties of 'isolating one's gender from the myriad of other self-identified attributes which then somehow require linking up with others who have negotiated through a similar constellation of identities'. Raising the question of how feminist scholar activists can be part of the process of building non-colonising feminist solidarity across borders, she identified that vision is created by collectivities, and that a commitment to vision consolidates the collective action. Quoting Pacific scholar Claire Slatter, she argued that vision is what provides a reference point for a network of actors and keeps them committed to their goals. Crucial is a reconsideration of how collectivities are formed (Underhill-Sem 2012).

Prominent Pacific feminist leader and PFF organiser Noelene Nabulivou argued that meaningful change by coalitions of feminists requires bold and progressive strategies and a transparent concern for human rights, gender equality and social justice (Nabulivou 2015). She

also commented on the importance of creative approaches to explore commonalities and to work collectively across diversity:

> *there is a need to explore the commonalities and the convergences…as well as honouring women's diversity. Rather than emphasising simplistic, polarising differences, we can consciously resist dichotomies, and gain a better understanding of our experiences as women across cultures, gender roles, poverty and life within a patriarchal society (Clery and Nabulivou 2011:178).*

These insights foreground the importance of developing an understanding of a Pacific-specific feminism which recognises the intersections, and denotes an authentic and inclusive collective identity that reflects the struggles and concerns. This thesis seeks to build on these insights in its efforts to unpack and deepen an understanding of Pacific feminism.

2.2 Building Feminist Alliances across Difference: Challenges and Strategies

Apart from the literature on gender and feminism in the Pacific, the growing literature on feminist alliance building offers crucial insights for the research undertaken in this thesis. In recent years, studies on feminism have shown a renewed interest in the theory and practice of alliance building. Scholars have noted alliance building as key for developing solidarity (Bhimji 2020), yet it is difficult to realise across difference (Lober 2019). There are many reasons for this. Sara Motta and her colleagues (2011), for example, suggested that the rise of neoliberalism is one key reason for attacks on feminist aspirations and women's movement building. They argued that a serious reconsideration of the political strategies used for feminist movement building is needed in these times (Motta et al 2011). They observed that women's groups and feminists are creative, and are forging new forms of feminist organising. Feminist activists can recognise multiplicity and a praxis that is simultaneously localised and transnationalised, and develop a feminism that speaks to their own needs and desires, and a recognition that other feminists can have the same rights and freedom. Motta and colleagues argued that it is only when we 'make visible tensions among feminists that we can collectively think through the possibilities and parameters of our alliances' (Motta et al 2011:7). Marco Teixeira and Renata Motta also found that the particular context that defines the needs of women was important for building effective feminist alliances They argued that processes of building solidarities that are

key to coalition formation are best understood when taking into account context and the building of coalitional identity (Teixeira and Motta 2020).

Given the racial, ethnic or class-based differences within the feminist movement itself, as noted above, many scholars have turned to the concept of 'intersectionality' to understand what it can offer to help build effective alliances across difference. In the discussion that follows, I focus on the literature emphasising intersectionality as a strategy for alliance building.

Intersectionality as a strategy of alliance building

One important strategy for feminism to acknowledge differences and to build alliances across difference is to put emphasis on intersectionality. Existing literature on intersectional alliance building has examined communication strategies, spaces of meeting, and enabling conditions for women to meet and build feminist collectives. When intersectionality is used as a social movement strategy it helps to identify and confront different forms of interlocking oppression. In their study of Asian immigrant women advocates, for example, Chun and colleagues (2013) suggested that intersectionality as a strategy helps activists change multiple states of subordinated voicelessness and devaluation into an empowered sense of self-representation and self-activity.

How to bring these multiple states into solidarity is the key to building feminist alliances. We cannot assume women will agree with each other just because they are women. Iris Marion Young (1994) wrote about women as a collective but noted the discussion among feminists about the difficulties and dangers of talking about women as a single group. Young acknowledged that 'knowing the right labels to call ourselves and others does not imply the existence of any checklist of attributes that all those with the same label have in common' (Young 1994:715). Young's interventions encouraged feminists to unpack what sort of social group 'women' constitute, and what feminist solidarity entails in the face of intra-group differences. To be clear, Young did not view these differences as obstacles to the formation of feminist collective identity. Rather, similar to the suggestion in this chapter's opening quote from Laurel Weldon (2011), she emphasised the need for recognising intra-group differences in order to build effective feminist alliances working on specific issues. Dara Strolovitch (2008) crucially argued that coalitions, by their very nature and purpose, would seem to be perfectly suited to engage in advocacy on behalf of intersectionally disadvantaged groups.

Similarly, Serene Khader (2018:36) noted that Western feminists must take care as to what they take to constitute a 'universal ideal of gender justice'. She argued that if Western feminists are going to help in the fight for the elimination of global and transnational gender oppression, we need to develop an understanding of 'non-ideal universalism'(Khader 2018:36). For Khader, the key to achieving a truly transnational feminism is to give women in the Global South more voice in global decision-making structures.

As a social movement and alliance-building strategy, intersectionality is used to foster inclusion and representation of minority groups. Marie Laperrière and Eleonore Lépinard (2016) argued that social movement scholars would benefit from paying attention to intersectionality and how it is practised. A focus on intersectionality sheds light, they argued, on tensions inherent in processes by which organisations construct collective identity, formulate political demands, manage internal conflicts and build alliances.

Of particular relevance to alliance building between diverse groups, intersectionality has most recently been framed as attention to the spaces in between and the space between the 'between-ness', not space that separates but space that relates and holds separate entities together (Muliaumaseali'i 2020). The case studies introduced in this thesis are examples of efforts to not erase difference but to hold a space for differences to coexist (the 'between-ness' referred to above). Context is all important, and will direct the use of intersectionality as either a theory, framework or approach (Simic 2018). Maria Lugones (2008) stated the focus on the intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality can be found at both the level of everyday living and at the level of theorising. She argued that not blinding differences through categorical separation aids understanding and makes visible the barriers in people's 'struggles towards liberation' (Lugones 2008:1). Similarly, Lila Singh-Peterson et al (2019) argued that drawing on intersectionality provides a necessary context for the design and implementation of development projects and helps situate gender equality into a broader framing of social equality. Other scholars, such as Camille Nakhid (2015), have found that intersectionality as a theoretical concept has been used to describe the ways in which oppressive institutions (racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia, classism and others) are interconnected, or in her words 'interlocked', and cannot be examined separately from one another. To enable diverse people to come together collectively without losing their individual differences requires an intersectional approach.

Even though recognising or addressing intersectionality has become part of the daily practices of many activists and movements, and it is 30 years since Crenshaw coined the term, scholars have argued that the study of intersectionality has still not been mainstreamed in social movement scholarship (Laperrière and Lépinard 2016) or political science (Hancock 2007). Others have argued that intersectionality still remains on the margins, with most high-profile feminist groups and actions having failed to take intersectionality seriously, with little interest being shown amongst some social scientists (Ishkanian and Peña Saavedra 2019). Nira Yuval-Davis (2006) argued still more work needs to be done for methodological approaches towards capturing intersectionality, and that this requires wider dialogue and articulation of problems by both feminist scholars and global feminist networks. Scholars have started to reflect that there has been very little effort to reflect upon precisely how intersectionality has moved across time, disciplines, issues and geographic and national boundaries. For example, Carbado et al (2013) claimed a failure to attend to the intersectionality movement has limited the ability to see the theory in places in which it is already doing work and to imagine other places to which the theory might be taken. To address the remaining gaps and silences, scholars are calling for more attention to the experience of women in the Global South (Tormos 2017).

Scholars have argued that paying attention to practices of intersectionality can contribute to alliance building in particular and social movement scholarship in general in many important ways. For example, scholars who have analysed ways in which intersectionality has been adopted as a social movement strategy have shed light on the difficulty involved in forging coalitions between different groups of women and agreeing on a common political agenda (Laperrière and Lépinard 2016). Some scholars have suggested intersectionality has relevance as a project for social transformation (Doetsch-Kidder 2012, Grzanka 2014, Collins and Bilge 2016). Intersectional activism addresses more than one structure of oppression or form of discrimination. Intersectional activists are often marginalised in social movement histories because they do not work in an organisation that focuses solely on women's issues, gay and lesbian issues or race issues. As people whose experiences and thinking transcends categories they have the capacity to bridge movements and highlight connections among different people and groups. Fernando Tormos (2017) rightly pointed out that a discussion of intersectionality has important implications for projects to build inclusive movements for social justice. He contrasted social movement scholars who emphasise the importance of shared identities for movements (Taylor et al 1992) with intersectional scholarship that problematises these same

identities. Tormos makes clear that intersectionality problematises existing accounts of how social movement identities emerge and how they strengthen collective action (Tormos 2017). The next section explores how feminist, anti-racist and other movements build solidarity without erasing the voices and perspectives intersectional research uncovers.

Managing disagreements in feminist alliances: Dialogue across difference

What does it take to conduct dialogue across difference and manage disagreements? Janet Conway (2012) saw dialogue across difference and alliance building as requiring more than a one-off dialogue or project/event. Alliance and coalition building suggest something sustained that lasts beyond an event but signifies a desire to continue to act together. Dialogue could be a mere meeting without concrete action to follow. Conway saw both a standalone forum (which is also my case study 1 in chapter 5) and alliance and coalition building (which is my case study 2 in chapter 6) as being underpinned by discourses of intersectionality. There is much literature about the importance of intersectionality, but not about how this is used in practice. Conway argued that theories and practices of solidarity are being remade currently, leading to transformations for feminism and social movements. She found that intra-movement dialogues and long-term alliance building makes such movements become more porous to the concerns of others with whom they wish to cultivate affinity. She pointed to a shift currently underway from intra-movement solidarities among diverse feminist and/or women's movements to inter-movement solidarities with non-feminist groups. This can range from recognition of others struggles to endorsements, from one-off collaborations or occasional dialogue to jointly crafted campaigns, and from coalition-based mobilisation to long-term, multi-issue alliances (Conway 2012).

Scholars have noted that, in the process of alliance building, tensions can surface amongst groups that have different cultures, practices and goals, making the formation of a collective difficult. For example, Van Dyke and McCammon (2010) noted that when coalition work is problematic, the emergence, sustaining and success of movements can be stalled. Conway focused on contemporary practices of inter-movement solidarity by feminists and the theories of solidarity and coalition building across difference among women (Conway 2012). Conway considered that inter-movement dialogues are critical in fostering understanding across difference, and that practices of solidarity across issues proceed in a way set by their feminist

organisers, notably through analytical discourses of intersectionality. This contributes, she argued, to promoting exchange among diverse people and struggles.

Alliances and coalitions unable to resolve positional tensions, conflicts of interest and perspective both within and across movement groups can 'erode membership, break down collective incentives and commitments and undermine social movement efficacy' (Beamish and Luebbers 2009:647). Thomas Beamish and Amy Luebbers (2009) argued that collaborative efforts within movements are well documented, with groups that have relatively aligned causes and goals engaging in joint action and planning, but that less attention has been paid to cross-movement coalitions. They defined cross-movement groups as protest groups with different causes but shared goals seeking to engage in joint planning and action. They saw this neglect as surprising, as cross-movement coalitions pose special problems for collaboration when groups must reconcile distinctive, but sometimes competing, remedies for social problems they jointly seek to stem. There is potential for intergroup conflict because issues are taken for granted within movements and must be defended and explained in cross-movement contexts. There is capacity for alliances to persist and continue to be viable vehicles for social change. Collective bridging processes take shape through an ongoing set of social interactions that lessen the potential for intergroup conflict over time. Cause affirmation, strategic deployment, exclusion and co-development of cross-movement commitments are key (Beamish and Luebbers 2009).

Activists develop 'tolerant identities', framing differences as an enriching characteristic of the movement deriving from long-lasting experiences of common mobilisation (della Porta 2005:178). A challenge for social movements, found Donatella della Porta (2005), is sustaining this apparently weak form of commitment over the long term.

Critics argue that movement-building tactics prevent compromise and emphasise differences over commonalities, thus fragmenting into separate identities. However, my research focuses on feminist alliances that speak for the excluded. Weldon (2011) noted that formal institutions tend to disempower and exclude these groups. She argued that states should provide opportunity for active participation in policymaking processes. Her focus was on the need to know more about the composition of the system of women's organisations and how effective these organisations are at attracting public attention to policy issues of importance for women. She acknowledged disadvantaged people are left out of the organisations aimed at broader groups:

'women, people of colour and the poor' (Weldon 2011:127). Her study suggested that not only the most vulnerable segments of society but also social movements in general benefit from organisational mechanisms that recognise the marginalisation of specific groups:

> *The collective identities created by social movements are contingent identities forged for political purposes, rather than primordial or essential ones (Weldon 2011:111).*

Efforts to gloss over deeply divisive conflicts by emphasising similarities can make matters worse and weaken social movements, and 'cooperation in the form of coalitions can occur even in the context of disagreements about ideology or a lack of shared identity', found Weldon (2011:112). Movements can be strengthened through the organisation of marginalised communities whose 'perspectives might otherwise be overlooked or silenced and whose participation broadens their constituencies' (Weldon 2011:127). When organising strategies recognise social divisions, social movements are strengthened. This may be because such organisation increases feelings of affiliation with the movement, revitalises social movement organisations and prevents movements coming undone over internal divisions.

Forming a collective identity

This thesis also relates to the ongoing question of the challenges of forming a collective identity. Theorists have tried to capture how groups form identities and how these form from interactions. Charles Tilly (2017) has, for example, shown how personal interactions compound into identities, create and transform social boundaries and accumulate into durable social ties. He also shows how individual and group dispositions result from interpersonal transactions. To get anywhere at all, he claimed, we will have to hew out rough models of interaction among groups, and of a single group's collective action.

Similar to the notion that intersectionality is interesting for what it 'does', Alberto Melucci (1996:46) argued that collective identity should not be understood 'as a thing to be studied'. Instead he saw it as a tool for understanding processes that produce a set of constructed, negotiated and shared definitions regarding the fields of opportunities and constraints offered to collective action. Melucci (1996) asserted that concepts cannot be separated from production of meaning in collective action. He suggested moving the focus from the actors themselves to the process by which actors become a collective. In that vein, this research builds on the

literature of the process of constructing actions and the field of opportunities and constraints. Collective identity is an interactive and shared definition. He suggested that elements are constructed and negotiated through a current process of activation of the relations that bind actors together.

In my research I thought about labelling and creation of a collective identity. This statement of Sarah Maddison writing on the Australian context resonated with what I was seeing in a Pacific context:

> *In the process of constructing a collective identity challenging groups adopt labels for themselves such as feminist, draw lines between insiders and outsiders and develop interpretive frameworks, a political consciousness though which members understand the world. Of course, collective identities exist only as far as real people agree upon, argue over and internalise; group definitions have no life of their own, and they are constantly changing rather than static (Maddison 2004:234).*

Existing literature shows that the making of a collective identity as a process refers to a network of active relationships between actors who interact, communicate, influence each other, negotiate and make decisions (Melucci 1996). This interaction could be face to face or virtual, as the emerging research focusing on Pacific women's engagement in the online spaces shows (Brimacombe 2017, Brimacombe et al 2018).

Dufour et al (2010) argued that a regional level of activism is prominent in numerous case studies featuring transnational organisations and networks – for instance, in Africa, Latin America, Europe, North America and Asia. Ciccia et al (2021) wrote on feminist alliances and practices of intersectional solidarity giving examples from Europe, Asia, North and Latin America. However, in both I note the absence of a Pacific mention. Dufour et al wrote of constructions of shared agendas at conferences for the world's women, bringing together voices of diversely located women whose voices neither speak in unison nor have equal weight in the crafting of a common agenda (Dufour et al 2010). These authors noted that tensions have arisen along the North/South hemispheric divide, and issues of major importance to women in the Global South have been slow to find their place in common political platforms due to Northern reticence. This reinforces the importance of the generation of a Pacific-specific feminism and alliances.

A practical side of a commitment to intersectionality is that feminist alliances rapidly change with the appearance of new groups. Christina Schwabenland and Lange (2016) pointed out that an evolution of feminist claims and ways of expressing them is due, in part, to closer connections between feminist movements and movements defending sexual diversity, alongside the growing importance accorded to gender issues. This work usefully highlighted a tactical repertoire to understand how activists aspire to effect remedies for inequality. It makes clear that a tactical repertoire is the various actions and interactions, gathered into performances, that an activist group may use to express its claims; the importance of ideology and symbolism in feminist movements' selection of tactics; and the 'impact on tactical repertoires generated by prior participation of activists in other movements' (Schwabenland and Lange 2016:114).

White, middle-class Western feminism of the type criticised above has not always been open to other movements. Transgender women, in particular, are a group that have been subject to fierce and extended scrutiny. This scrutiny includes a feminist literature that exposes an 'often antagonistic relationship between feminism and transgender women' (Connell 2012:857). Raewyn Connell's scholarship outlined feminist encounters with transgender women and the idea of gender change. It identified the assumptions within this debate and the impact of transgender ideas; overall, it argued for a stronger input from feminist social science. The literature on these debates around feminism and the inclusion of transwomen is centred in Western Europe and the United States. Connell argued that writers on gender issues have often 'appropriated [transgender women's] experiences with an appalling lack of care and respect' (Connell 2012:857) and asserted that 'at first the women's liberation movement paid no attention to transgender women though some were in its ranks' (Connell 2012:860). Despite facing claims that transgender women were 'male invaders of feminist spaces', she also acknowledged that feminist support for transgender women at the level of practice and personal relationships never entirely disappeared. The idea of merging the activities between these two groups to found collective action has, however, seemed impossible, as Connell noted that 'for two decades an exclusionist stance dominated the relation between transgender women and movement feminism' (Connell 2012:860). She argued that turning the research focus onto transgender women provides key evidence about how gender categories are sustained in everyday practices of speech, styles of interaction and divisions of labour.

Generating this collective action relies on recognition of intersectional linkages for identity formation and alliance building. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1990) suggested, in fact, that we should reconceptualise identity groups as coalitions, or at least as potential coalitions waiting to be formed and that recognition of the intersectionality of feminist struggles is essential . Similarly, Anna Carastathis (2013) argued that conceptualising identities as in fact coalitions; as complex, internally heterogeneous unities constituted by their internal differences and dissonances and by internal as well as external relations of power. Chun et al (2013) saw that a group does not embrace intersectionality simply because its members have been wounded by racism, sexism, imperialism, class exploitation and language discrimination, but because each realm of these experiences has helped the organisation to see how power works and how new identities are needed to convey its intersectional reach and scope.

On the other hand, scholars have found that some movements inherently based on single identity groups have not been able to create a political culture and practice for this paradigm shift (Gandhi and Shah 2006). This is in keeping with existing findings in the literature that note that not all coalitions are intended to be fully integrated, but can allow for strategic separation. Such a view also promotes framing of shared claims and goals (Pullum 2017). Similarly, Weldon has made clear that the idea that groups share a perspective does not suggest unanimous agreement nor does it suggest the shared agenda 'exhausts the issues important to the members' of the group (Weldon 2011:15). Yet other scholars have argued that the identification of stable core beliefs are the drivers of coalition building and coordination (Sotirov and Winkel 2016). Chapter 5 will detail how a strategic coming together has been described in the literature as a 'project identity' (Castells 1997, Bang 2009, Hietajarvi and Aaltonen 2018) and will investigate how this might resonate with the empirical studies chosen for this research.

Coalitions as a form of political behaviour can be categorised as social movement organisations, and 'efforts to understand coalitions empirically are increasing' (Mizrahi and Rosenthal 2001:64). Terry Mizrahi and Beth Rosenthal (2001) noted the most common reason for coalition formation was that members shared common interests and hoped to affect a larger agenda, and that coalitions formed commonly in reaction to a crisis or to a threat. They further identified that a broad understanding of what it means for a coalition to achieve success includes achieving goals, 'gaining recognition from a target', gaining community support, 'gaining new consciousness of issues', creating lasting networks, attaining longevity or acquiring new skills

(Mizrahi and Rosenthal, 2001:68). They quote a participant from their empirical studies, who stated that 'you don't have to last forever, there is so much tension in the beginning you think you aren't going to make it' (Mizrahi and Rosenthal 2001:69). In addition, Metodi Sotirov and Georg Winkel (2016) argued that empirical findings pose questions about identification of advocacy coalitions, explanations for shifting coalitions and the role of coalitions in policy change. They found that for strategic alliances between different advocacy coalitions were enabled through specific 'shared or complementary core beliefs' (2016:125). Their theory gave me a conceptual lens through which to understand my case studies of coalitions joining forces in strategic alliance.

Importantly, the joining of forces into collective action is having a great impact. Examples of this impact have been outlined by scholars who have noted the growing recognition of the 'importance and usefulness of coalitions in improving community conditions' (Mizrahi and Rosenthal 2001:63) and the importance of recognising the power of association and collective action for women in pursuing transformative changes (Kabeer 2012). Chapter 8 will investigate the areas of this impact. In particular, it will suggest a broader construction of what we mean by impact, to underpin an argument that limiting impact to policy impact alone is a very high bar to set for grassroots civil society, and that other forms of impact should be recognised. I examined numerous scholarly works focused on impact to underpin my findings about where impact was occurring, but found that Herbert Kitschelt's (1986) work on political opportunity structures and political protest gave me a way to structure the breadth of areas of impact I was observing. I therefore applied Kitschelt's three-way framing to the examples of Pacific feminist collective action in chapter 8.

2.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I sought to review the literature in the areas that the thesis focuses on. This included a brief review of the existing body of work on gender and feminism in the Pacific region, and a review of the literature on feminist alliance building. Scholars have noted the dearth of empirical studies in coalition and alliance building in spite of the importance of these processes to social movements (Van Dyke and McCammon 2010). My research aims to fill this gap, as it shines a light on an understudied corner of the world, recentering a region erroneously considered 'out of the way' (Underhill-Sem 2020:315) – the Pacific region.

To sum up, the literature review suggests the following insights. Understanding Pacific-specific forms of feminism is important. Focusing on informal activities is important. Focusing on how feminists manage disagreements and establish alliances across difference is important. These insights shape the way I approach the empirical study presented in the thesis.

CHAPTER 3

BACKGROUND TO PACIFIC REGIONALISM

> *The Blue Pacific represents our recognition that as a region, we are large, connected and strategically important. It speaks to our collective potential and our shared stewardship of the Pacific Ocean (Dame Meg Taylor, then Secretary General, Pacific Islands Forum, Griffith Lecture, 11 November 2019).*

In recent years there has been an increased focus on Pacific regionalism, emphasising the values of cooperation, coordination, collaboration and harmonisation as well as economic and legal integration in the region. As articulated in the 2014 Pacific Islands Forum, Pacific regionalism is 'the expression of a common sense of identity and purpose'. It is about 'overcoming common constraints, and enhancing sustainable and inclusive development within Pacific countries and territories and for the Pacific region as a whole (PIFS 2014). In this context, regionalism, or acting 'regionally', usually means not just in the Pacific Islands context but in general acting together, and combining and maximising resources for a bigger impact. A 'region' is being defined here as a group of countries with a more or less explicitly shared political project (Hettne 1999).

In this chapter, I unpack this renewed focus on regionalism and consider its implications for feminist civil society in the Pacific region. What defines the Pacific as a region? Oceania is immense. Frequently, the Pacific area is described as a group of islands, but this is inadequate in a region with great geographical and demographical diversity (Boxall 2006). To counter this, the area is increasingly being framed as the 'Blue Pacific', so as to represent a 'large, interconnected and strategically important' region, or as an Ocean continent. The 'Blue Pacific' term was used by the Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum, Dame Meg Taylor, in the 2019 Griffith Lecture (Taylor 2019), as reflected in the opening quote to this chapter.

This chapter sets out the key actors and sites that adopt a regional Pacific approach. It describes the renewal and re-emergence of the regionalism agenda in the Pacific and how this affects

regional decision-making spaces especially in terms of furthering efforts on gender equality strategies that can be leveraged in the face of the shrinking spaces at a global level.

The chapter is structured in five sections. In what follows, I will capture both historical and recent developments in the Pacific in this type of regional cooperation. I describe the moves to a regional framework as becoming increasingly inclusive, as put forward in key documents, and set out the breadth of key actors and sites. I discuss how the Framework for Pacific Regionalism (PIFS 2014) reflects Pacific relevance and the barriers of the Framework for Pacific Regionalism for regional civil society.

This chapter shows that there is an important gap in the regionalism focus in the Pacific, with an intense concentration on formal regional spaces, actors and institutions. Attention must be paid to harnessing both state *and* non-state capacity, making the most of what is available. The 2017 State of the Pacific Regionalism Report (2017:13) identified that 'regionalism will need to be resolute in making the most of what it has in order to drive the development outcomes it seeks'. In this context, it is important to go beyond a sole focus on the Pacific regional formal institutional angle, and focus on the informal institutional Pacific regional actors and activities pushing for greater diversity and inclusion of diverse voices. Here, inclusion can be understood as the ability to incorporate and adapt to specific circumstances of members of disempowered groups, for example, women, socially excluded representatives of some ethnic groups or people with non-binary gender (Wojciechowska 2018).

3.1 Regionalism: An Historical Overview

Regionalism is a contested term. It can be understood and defined from different viewpoints – structures, actors, institutions, interdependence and outcomes (PIFS 2017). In the context of the Pacific region it is commonly framed with a particular focus on trade and security in the region (State of the Pacific 2018). As a policy framework, regionalism gained particular prominence in the Pacific at the time of independence (1960s to 1990s). Since then, plans to organise regional activities in the Pacific have been reviewed, revised and redrafted multiple times (Dornan and Newton Cain 2014). Most recently, the Pacific Islands Forum has used a regionalism framework as its key document for regional relationships and activities (PIFS 2014).

Regionalism can be understood in a pluralistic way to mean different things. While, as noted above in the Pacific context, much regionalism discussion is confined to trade and security (Graham 2008), reviews of its functioning are slowly taking steps away from a purely trade focus. As an organising mechanism, it shows greater scope for broader collective regional action to share capacities, resources and support. Revi (2020), for example, argued that regionalism is an appropriate strategy for development in a post-pandemic world (referring to the COVID19 pandemic), as the new regionalism looks beyond trade to cooperation. Of direct relevance to my argument, Revi noted the importance of opening the regionalism discourse to a broad set of actors, including NGOs and social movements. My case studies are examples of this social movement regionalism approach through bottom-up actors and activities helping to advance women's rights in the Pacific region.

In this thesis, I am particularly interested in the questions of whether and how the regionalism agenda in the Pacific helps create spaces and potential for regional alliances to amplify the Pacific's voice for change. This requires an understanding of how Pacific regional politics and decision-making spaces are organised and what arenas constitute the potential 'spaces for change' (Gaventa 2006) that would make gender equality change advocacy possible. Several scholars have noted that there has been a paradigm shift in political engagement of Pacific Island states with regional and world politics. As Greg Fry and Sandra Tarte (2016:3) put it, the paradigm shift has mainly been about the ideas of 'how Pacific diplomacy should be organised and on what principles it should operate'. As a result of this shift there has been a noticeable increase in calls for a heightened Pacific voice in global affairs and a new commitment to establishing Pacific Island control. Scholars are calling for new ways of connecting at both regional and global levels (Fry and Tarte 2016). This is an important development, as George (2012) has noted that the abilities of 'gender activists' to be heard regionally and internationally were hampered by institutional disregard for the Pacific Island region' (2012:76).

Sandra Tarte similarly acknowledged that this paradigm shift has included the call for a genuine Pacific voice to be heard in global forums (Tarte 2017). She perceived that this shift has resulted in challenges to stereotypes and assumptions about Pacific Islands diplomacy. New ways of thinking about Pacific regionalism open up discussions about choices. More importantly, this new thinking encourages Pacific-led discussions about regionalism, whereby the issues and solutions in the Pacific are given a strong emphasis. While scholars like Tarte (2017) view these developments as part of an empowering transformation agenda in the Pacific, they suggest

keeping a close eye on how this transformation has played out so far, and how it could evolve in future.

So, just like Tarte, this chapter helps us to understand where the recent momentum around regionalism might lead in the Pacific, especially with respect to the opportunism for building or strengthening a collective voice for the feminist civil society in the region. Before considering the implications of the 2014 Framework for Pacific Regionalism (PIFS 2014) for feminist civil society, I will first provide a brief overview of the key aspects of this framework. This overview will provide a better sense of the institutional context within which Pacific feminists and women's rights organisations operate, and which actors and institutions they need to influence to achieve change towards gender equality.

Four phases of regionalism in the Pacific

The history of regionalism in the Pacific can be categorised into four phases of different activity or organisation. Traditionally, a focus on Pacific regional institutions has been in the mode of top-down formal institutions (phases 1–3). As civil society has organised itself regionally it has become evident that another mode is at play in the region – the bottom-up, grassroots regional identity of civil society networks acting at a regional level (phase 4). Table 1 below provides an overview of the key milestones involved in each phase.

Phases	**Year**	**Key milestones**	**Formal spaces (with regional focus)**	**Informal/civil society spaces & milestones (with regional focus)**
Phase 1	1971		Pacific Islands Forum (PIFS) established	
	1982			Pacific Women's Bureau established
	1988		Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) established	
	1992	Honiara Declaration		Regional Meeting of the Pacific Women's Network – Violence Against Women

	2000	Biketawa Declaration		Pacific Women's Bureau renamed as Pacific Women's Resource Bureau
Phase 2	2002	Nasonini Declaration		Pacific Disability Forum established
	2004	Auckland Declaration		
	2005	Pacific Plan Kalibobo Roadmap on the Pacific Plan		
	2010	Natadola communique		
Phase 3	2012	Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (Pacific Women) starts a10-year AU$320 m program	Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED) (PIFS)	
	2013	Review of Pacific Plan (set foundation and commitment to implement the Framework for Pacific Regionalism)	Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF) established	UNEP Asia Pacific Civil Society Regional Consultation Meeting Pacific Feminist Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Statement
	2014	Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) pathway		
	2014	The introduction of the Framework for Pacific Regionalism (PIFS)		Regional Civil Society Meeting 'Impacts of Climate Change and Disasters on Human Mobility in the Pacific: Challenges and Opportunities'
Phase 4	2015	Hiri Declaration	PIDF first meeting	
	2016	Pohnpei Ocean Statement	Pacific Step Up launched at Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting	Inaugural Pacific Feminist Forum Charter of Feminist Principles for Pacific

				Feminists negotiated and launched
	2017	State of Pacific Regionalism Status Report (PIFS)	PIFS and European Union (EU) sign gender inequality financing agreement 2017	First civil society seat at Triennial table
	2018	Boe Declaration		
	2019	Kainaki II Declaration for Urgent Climate Change Action Now		2nd Pacific Feminist Forum held, Suva, Fiji Pacific Feminist Charter Action Plan produced
	2020			We Rise Coalition adds new members to ensure broader Pacific regional representation

Table 1: Key Milestones of Pacific Regionalism, 1971–2020

Phase 1. 1970–2002: Burgeoning regional identity in the Pacific

In what follows I outline this first phase, which can be defined as a burgeoning regional identity as independence was achieved. The urge to a regional identity reformation occurred immediately at the time of decolonisation in the 1970s (Tarte 2014). As some scholars have rightly argued, the current focus on regionalism and the Pacific taking hold of the agenda has indeed been seen before. As Fry and Tarte put it:

> *Indeed, in many ways, the current activity is reminiscent of that time – in its assertive attitude, the emphasis on Pacific Island control of the diplomatic agenda, the creation of new institutions, its appeal to regional identity, and its concern with negotiating global agendas that are impacting Pacific societies (Fry and Tarte 2016:3).*

Phase 1 was a time of key institutional establishment. The Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) (operating as the South Pacific Community since 1947) was renamed in 1997 as the Pacific Community. According to its website, the SPC mission focuses on technical support and aims to 'work for the well-being of Pacific people through the effective and innovative application of science and knowledge, guided by a deep understanding of Pacific Island

contexts and cultures' (SPC 2020a). In 1983 all 22 Pacific Island member countries and territories were recognised as full voting and contributing members of the SPC (SPC 2020a).

During this first phase, the Pacific saw the establishment of another major regional state-led institution, the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). PIF was established in 1971 after the decolonisation of the Pacific Islands, and it includes Australia and New Zealand. Regionalism has been an important framework for PIF to capture and develop a sense of regional priorities. Scholars have rightly identified that regional cooperation began among the colonial powers immediately after World War II, when the region was almost wholly made up of dependent territories. It increased in the 1960s and 1970s as those territories gained their independence and formed new organisations among themselves as sovereign states (Bryant-Tokalau 2017).

The Pacific Women's Bureau was established in 1981 to provide a clearinghouse, technical and advisory services and organise skills development programs to maintain gender concerns not national development planning processes of Pacific countries and territories. It also served as an information network among Pacific women and developed national and regional programs to address concerns as identified by Pacific women. (UIA 2006).

In 1988 the Pacific Islands Forum leaders established an overarching committee for regional organisations in the Pacific: the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) (Bryant-Tokalau 2017). It works collectively to build a stronger region for Pacific people by coordinating policy advice and providing technical expertise, assistance and resources to support Pacific countries (Taylor 2018a).

Towards the end of this phase, a number of declarations about strengthening regionalism in the South Pacific in terms of security cooperation were published (Richter 2004). For example, the Honiara Declaration (1992) established law enforcement cooperation; the Biketawa Declaration (2000) established the states in the region going to the aid of others; the 2002 Nasonini Declaration on Regional Security identified a need for sustained regional action to respond to the security environment, particularly in light of the terrorist events of 11 September 2001 in the USA; and the 2004 Auckland Declaration recognised the need for greater regional cooperation and integration because of the fast-changing security environment.

Phase 2. 2000–2011: Civil society scarce access to decision makers and regional institutions

The early focus of this phase was very much on state-led regional cooperation, with civil society poorly resourced and with little access to decision makers or dialogue with formal regional institutions. In the early years of the Pacific Islands Forum, no mechanism for a regular dialogue between regional institutions and regional civil society existed (Interview #17, 2016). Even when dialogue was first introduced, the state leaders did not participate and very few turned up to arranged opportunities (Interview #17, 2016).

An early model for Pacific regionalism was the 2005 Pacific Plan for Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Integration, which had as its mission regional peace, harmony and prosperity (PIFS 2005). It acknowledged the benefits regional cooperation would have as a tool at the global level:

> *The collective position of Pacific Islands Forum members in the international arena is a significant tool in garnering support for Pacific Island Countries individually and as a group and is recognised and valued by other United Nation members (PIFS 2005).*

This collective position was supported particularly by the Kalibobo Roadmap, which was developed by the Pacific Leaders for the purposes of giving practical effect to the leaders' vision to implement the Pacific Plan to strengthen and deepen regional cooperation and integration. The Kalibobo Roadmap highlights the key priorities and practical steps required for the implementation of the Pacific Plan (XinHua 2005). The actual implementation of this plan faced significant resistance among some Pacific Islanders. As the Pacific Plan was imposed by Australia and New Zealand, there was some pushback that it ought to be a Pacific document for and by Pacific people. Commentary on the Pacific Media Centre noted that:

> *What evolved was a classic bureaucratic response to what was perceived as an imposed, alien and unnecessary process. Australian and New Zealand officials basically took the regional aid programs that they were already implementing and renamed them the Pacific Plan. There was also little or no support from islands as it soon became evident that the Plan was merely window dressing, a renaming of whatever Australia and New Zealand bureaucrats were, in any case, planning to do (Grynberg 2013:1).*

Scholars have argued that for regionalism to be effective, cultural identity of Pacific peoples' needs to be at its heart, and must be central to any plan designed to further this region:

> *Pacific Island Countries have traditionally sought to make cultural identity the foundation of regionalism and that it is in their best interest to continue to build on this approach if regionalism is to have any meaning for the peoples of the Pacific Islands and if it is to become an effective tool for the betterment of governance and development in the Pacific (Huffer 2006:44).*

This concern with reflecting Pacific culture was also raised in interviews with civil society actors (Interview #20, 2016), where interviewees noted that communities need to be given a direct voice in regional institutions. This view is also reflected in the literature:

> *Pacific cultural values such as solidarity and reciprocity and respect for kinship networks need to become the guiding principles of Pacific regionalism; communities need to be given a direct voice in regional institutions, and human mobility among island states needs to be encouraged not only for economic reasons but as part of a project to enhance a sense of regional identity (Huffer 2006:50).*

The Pacific Plan Review in 2013 also flagged concerns that 'citizens' voices about the kind of Pacific that is emerging' were not being heard in the absence of coherent, effective regional governance (Morauta 2013:17). This concern with the lack of any mechanisms enabling the direct voice of a range of people has been raised multiple times by feminist civil society actors who are active in the region (Interview #20, 2016 and #38, 2017). This comprehensive review of the Pacific Plan undertaken by Rt. Hon. Sir Mekere Morauta, former PNG Prime Minister, acknowledged the diversity and complexity of the region and described it as being without a sufficiently clear governance architecture, leaving it connected but fragmented, faced with vulnerabilities and uncertainties (Morauta 2013). The developments in the following years attempted to lessen this fragmentation and enhance this connection.

Phase 3. 2012–2014: A broader sense of regionalism comes into frame in formal documents

Phase 3 can be described as a period where a broader sense of regionalism comes into the frame in formal documents. As an example, from 2012 there was a perceived increase in regionalism language and framing, with a formal acknowledgement that the Pacific would benefit from

acting more regionally, with new actors, such as the Pacific Islands Development Forum, and a renewed regional agenda. The Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED) of 2012 (PIFS 2012) and the Framework for Pacific Regionalism 2014 (PIFS 2014) reinvigorated regionalism as the dominant organising force. In 2013, in the Pacific Plan Review Report to Pacific Leaders (Morauta 2013), Papua New Guinea's former Prime Minister Sir Mekere Morauta called for change to a more robust Pacific politics and a bigger, better and deeper process of regionalism (Dobell 2014).

The Sustainable Development Goals also accelerated the sense of regionalism of small island states and the importance of civil society working as part of broad alliances. In 2014, the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Accelerated Modalities of Action ('SAMOA') pathway was created, representing the agreed outcomes of the 3rd International Conference for Small Island Developing States. It articulated the sustainable development pathways and aspirations for SIDS over the next 10 years. Crucially, it acknowledged that development of Small Island Developing States could be achieved only with a broad alliance of people, governments, civil society and the private sector all working together (UN 2014).

To bring a greater gender focus for the region, the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED) emerged from the Pacific Leaders Forum in 2012. At the time of its introduction, it was noted that only modest achievements had been made on gender equality progress despite the rhetoric (Mackesy-Buckley 2012). The PLGED is actually a commitment to a number of existing agreements, yet with a renewed focus. It recommits leaders to implement the gender equality actions of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Revised Pacific Platform for Action on Advancement of Women and Gender Equality (2005–2015) and the Pacific Plan. It also gave renewed focus and attention to the 42nd Pacific Island Forum commitment to increase the representation of women in legislatures and decision-making and the 40th Pacific Island Forum commitment to eradicate sexual and gender-based violence (PIFS 2012).

In this phase, one particularly important initiative of PIF was to introduce the Framework for Pacific Regionalism in 2014, following a refresh and review after the end of the Pacific Plan (PIFS 2005). The Framework identifies the issues needing focus as: shared sovereignty, pooled resources, delegation of decision-making, shared responsibility, leveraged voice, influence and competitiveness, and overcoming geographical and demographic disadvantage (PIFS 2014).

The Framework focuses on strengthening cooperation and integration between the states and territories of the Pacific region. It articulates the vision, values and objectives of an enhanced Pacific regionalism and sets out a process for identifying and prioritising high-level regional public policy. These were then assessed by the Specialist Sub-Committee on Regionalism. Five initiatives were then put on the Leaders Meeting Agenda in 2015, to contribute to regional integration and cooperation:

> *Initiatives may touch on regional delivery of services, regional infrastructure, political dialogue and processes, international diplomacy, regional policy and regulatory reforms, new norms and standards for the Pacific, region-wide services and infrastructure, and many other things (PIFS 2015b).*

The Framework process involves seeking submissions for initiatives from individuals, government, the private sector, civil society organisations and regional organisations. This widening of the pool from 2014 of who can have input is a potential opportunity to influence decisions about the agenda and priorities for the Pacific region (PIFS). The Framework mentions gender equality in its values, and its values also mention diversity, inclusivity and equity and equality for all people:

> *We embrace good governance, full observance of democratic values, the rule of law, defence and promotion of human rights, gender equality and commitment to just societies. We support full inclusivity, equity and* ***equality for all people*** *of the Pacific [my emphasis] (PIFS 2014).*

Phase 4. 2015–2020: Developing an exclusively Pacific identity

A significant departure in the fourth phase was the establishment of the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF), as it leaves out Australia and New Zealand. It was established after the departure/expulsion from PIFS of Fiji following its coups. The starting point for talking about the PIDF was the move towards a 'Pacific-specific' regionalism (noting the suggestion that Australia should be excluded from the Pacific Islands Forum) (*The Australian* 2015). One of the key documents that created the PIDF was the Suva Declaration on Climate Change (PIDF 2015b). There was a disagreement between Australia and New Zealand on their climate change policies (Herr 2016), and PIDF expressed the view that having PIFS with Australia and New Zealand as members was hampering the ability of Pacific Island States to defend their own

interests. Similarly, the Kainaki II Declaration of 2019 for Urgent Climate Change Action Now called for solidarity and alignment of action for common concerns.

This political solidarity via a unified call on climate change was made in the context of a divergence from Australia's approach that the institution of the PIDF also reflected:

> *For too long we have accepted down as normal; we have accepted small as normal; we have accepted prescriptions of our development partners as normal – that we must do what we are told to do, not what we want to do. I came to this meeting in the hope that the PIDF will make up for that deficiency in our development; where solutions to our development problems can be reached quickly without multitudes of expensive consultants (Tarte 2017:135).*

This challenging of the way things are framed was also raised in my interview responses (Interview #20, 2016; #23, 2016). The PIDF does not define 'region' but does list members as limited to Pacific Islands (PIDF 2020). The strategic plan of the PIDF signals a regional approach through its description of its program as 'one Pacifika' (PIDF 2020). The stated aim in the strategic plan includes genuine partnerships, and it lists full and active participants from government, institutions, civil society and the private sector, and includes supporting national, regional and international commitments. The PIDF Charter (PIDF 2015a) states an intention to serve as a regional counterpart for (Global) South/South groupings to ensure policy coherence.

The PIDF Charter states an aim to be inclusive:

> *Committed to ensuring that no one should be left behind in securing the benefits of development that is inclusive of people with disabilities, gender, ethnicity and the aged (PIDF 2015a:1).*

This demonstrates that inclusion and engagement are viewed by the PIDF as necessary for policy success at the regional level. The major push for regional inclusivity comes from civil society, so next we shift our focus to bottom-up regionalism: activities coming from the grassroots organisations and activists themselves. Scholars have acknowledged that the approach of the PIDF to include civil society is forcing the hand of the other regional institutions:

> *The unique membership and structure of the PIDF (which provides a space for nongovernment organizations and the private sector) means that it can push the boundaries of established thinking and policy. This is having some impact on the Pacific Islands Forum process – evident in the reaching out to civil society and others (Tarte 2017:135).*

In response, the Pacific Islands Forum now states that it is committed to making the process one that is 'open, inclusive' through the Framework for Pacific Regionalism (Taylor 2015:45). This increased regionalism focus is timely and necessary, as stated by the then Secretary General of the PIFS[3], Dame Meg Taylor:

> *If we are to ever realise the full potential of Pacific regionalism, then now is the time… Realising the potential of Pacific regionalism in today's context will require a range of focused political conversations in order to establish the foundations for the future of our region. … To date, our collective Pacific voice has remained largely absent from global debates … We need to ask ourselves how we do, as a region, position ourselves in this new global context? (Taylor 2018b).*

The moves to forge a Pacific standalone approach with an independent Pacific identity is a departure from the model of the existing institutions:

> *The newly emerging wave of regionalism maintains a people-centred lens and Pacific control of a regional agenda, it fosters wider political engagement, and manoeuvres creatively through and around structures with the common goal of improving the lives of our Pacific people. Of particular importance, the Framework places strong emphasis on the fact that achieving impact requires us to work together, not just as states, but in ways that include all actors in the region (USP 2017).*

This Pacific control of the agenda was evident in the Natadola Communique issued in 2010. It established the tone and focus for what would become the PIDF. This emphasised the need for new modes of regionalism (Fry and Tarte 2016). Similarly, the Hiri Declaration 2015 was described as 'Strengthening Connections to Enhance Pacific Regionalism'. To do this, it acknowledged the traditional and cultural trading and barter networks that brought the 'People

[3] The PIFS leadership changed hands in mid 2021.

of the Pacific' together and, in view of the common challenges faced by the region, set out to take effective and meaningful actions to implement people-to-people, institutional and physical connectivity. It dealt explicitly with the challenge of climate change. So, too, the Blue Pacific notions embrace owes much to the revisions of the region as a large ocean continent or 'sea of islands' (Hau'Ofa 2008); a posturing entangled with wanting a louder say in relation to climate change (Fry and Tarte 2015). This framing also seeks to end the foreign construct of the subregional divide that was introduced by external colonial forces (Jolly 2007).

Building on this theme of bringing people together, the last phase stepped up the desire for formal and informal institutions to work together regionally. Further revisions to the Framework in 2017 sought to acknowledge the multitude of regionalism players. This fourth phase has also coincided with the case studies covered in chapters 5 and 6; that is, bottom-up, grassroots, collective Pacific-specific identity-building activities of civil society networks acting at a regional level (developing, for example, the Pacific Feminist Charter Action Plan referred to in Table 1). Epeli Hau'Ofa (1994) noted that academics and consultants tended to overlook or misinterpret grassroots activities in the Pacific. He further argued that Pacific peoples can reorganise regionally to strengthen their collective capacity to deal with modern issues and be custodians of the sea together for a stronger Oceania (Hau'Ofa 2008). Bottom-up regionalism highlights for Pacific leaders and institutions that actions are excluding or leaving behind some segments despite a promised push for solidarity. Bottom-up movements are working regionally, reacting to assumptions that state leaders and institutions have the 'exclusive right to speak for the region':

> *NGOs and social movements in the region have not only exerted pressure on independent Pacific Island governments to support their various struggles in defence of Pacific interests, they have also often challenged governments and political elites arrogating to themselves the exclusive right to speak for the region (Slatter and Underhill-Sem 2009:1).*

The next section considers promises that have been made about making the regionalism agenda inclusive.

3.2 Towards a More Inclusive Regionalism?

Documents that reflect the latest developments in Pacific regionalism seek to include the words inclusive and 'inclusion'. They are attempting to include new voices. But how inclusive are they in reality? The empirical insights of this research suggest that the promised inclusion still excludes groups such as gender diverse and transgender people. A major question for inclusion and engagement is how to engage diverse women in policy formation and decision-making. What inclusion promises are made by the regionalism agenda? The Framework for Pacific Regionalism is designed to be multi-faceted, with all facets interrelated, but to what extent do all moving parts actually interrelate?

After all the reviews of regionalism in the Pacific, the formal institutions are being called upon to ensure genuine inclusion:

> *Pacific Regionalism has to be inclusive so that there is access to the breadth of experience and insight that exists in our people. It has to be inclusive to make sure that it impacts on those in our communities who are most in need. It has to be inclusive because only by looking at the whole picture can we identify where we might make the most profound impact (USP 2017).*

Pacific academics Claire Slatter and Yvonne Underhill-Sem have identified that regionalism is about more than the creation of regional capacity:

> *One of its hallmarks has been its effectiveness in politically organising Pacific Island states to collectively resist powerful outside interests that pose threats to Pacific Island interests (Slatter and Underhill-Sem 2009:1).*

This highlights the Pacific-specific nature of regionalism efforts and is reflected in modern day narratives about the Blue Pacific and the Ocean Continent (Lesa 2017). These present the Pacific region as an important player in global affairs and as a regional, organised bloc with a clear view of Pacific Islands' interests vis-a-vis the rest of the world.

Expanding the focus beyond narrow formal institutions, in 2017 the State of Pacific Regionalism Report (the Status Report) by PIFS recognised there are many regionalisms (PIFS 2017). This Status Report recognised a common ocean identity, and also recognised the desire of non-state actors to participate and that non-traditional partners were starting to play a role in

the region (PIFS 2017). Furthermore, the Status Report noted the existing inequalities in the Pacific region, including some of the highest rates of violence against women and the lowest rates of political participation by women globally (Palmieri and Zetlin 2020).

The Status Report mentioned 'rising inequality', and the Secretary General of PIFS, Dame Meg Taylor, wrote that this report can act as a conversation starter about new strategies employed to build a stronger and increasingly responsive region (PIFS 2017). The purpose of this Framework, as articulated, was to provide a mechanism by which issues can be raised and prioritised for regional attention in the Pacific. The Pacific Islands Forum had heralded the Framework as an 'emerging opportunity to improve intergovernmental coordination and cooperation' (PIFS 2014). Therefore there needs to be space to hear all affected voices and generate new ideas from many corners. Opening opportunities for regular scheduled civil society dialogue with regional institutions and with each other has the potential for other forms of cooperation and coordination (Interview #17, 2016). However, one interviewee admitted that not many leaders attended the scheduled civil society dialogue but that this was improving (Interview #17, 2016).

In 2016, a trend assessment report was designed by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat to motivate action and accountability by reviewing commitments made and assessing areas of strength and weaknesses in implementation, in the context of the PLGED (PIFS 2016a). The assessment found that progress towards gender equality in the Pacific region remained 'slow and inconsistent', with challenges about negative attitudes towards women and girls persisting (PIFS 2016a:7).

In 2017, the SPC Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Human Rights (PPA) was revised again through a series of consultations, including with the participants at the Pacific Feminist Forum in 2016, at which I was a participant/observer (participant observation, Suva, Fiji, November 2016). This recent PPA covers the period 2018–2030 and focuses on transforming harmful social norms and exclusionary practices (SPC 2017b). The PPA mentions 'supporting the participation of women *of all diversities* [my emphasis] in decision-making positions' (SPC 2017b). A part of my research was to engage in a participant observation in consultations with Pacific feminist civil society on this latest platform revision (participant observation, Suva, Fiji, November 2016). The latest revision synthesises all the existing frameworks, as it takes into account the PLGED and Agenda 2030/Sustainable Development

Goals (SDGs), the Framework for Pacific Regionalism and CEDAW. It states that its objective is to accelerate implementation of gender commitments at all levels to achieve gender equality and the promotion and protection of human rights of all women and girls in all their diversity:

> *Parameters must be guided by the regionalism Framework with countries front and centre and development partners providing support. All civil society organisations, Pacific Island Country governments, and development partners are encouraged to use PPA (SPC 2017a).*

Importantly, the PPA aligns with international and regional commitments on gender equality made by Pacific Island Countries, especially in PLGED. The timing of its revision meant it had the benefit of being able to reference those other documents to generate a more comprehensive approach. The latest PPA was endorsed by the Pacific Ministers for Women on 5 October 2017 and saw agreement to 'strengthen consultative mechanisms with civil society groups, including women's advocacy groups, on key budget and policy issues of national and sub-national government' (SPC website). However, it just mentions 'women', flatly, without any mention of the diversity of women or the intersecting inequalities faced.

3.3 The Need to Recognise the Breadth of Regionalism Actors

There is opportunity in a regionalism approach for a broader recognition of regionalism actors; that is, both formal and informal spaces of regional cooperation. A widening range of regionally-focused operating NGOs operate in this space, with Bryant-Tokalau (2017) remarking on a growth in their size and in number, with over 1,000 NGOs estimated to be present in the region.

A regionalism focus needs not to be limited to states only; it should also investigate this increasing number of non-state actors working cooperatively to maximise outcomes. Regional leaders and scholars alike have recognised that smaller Pacific states needed to share resources to overcome the constraints imposed by their small size and lack of capacity (Fry 2005). Various scholars have shown that it is possible to expand the definition of politics in ways that encompasses the informal spheres of civil society and interpersonal relations (Goodin 1996, Curtin 2019).

It is important to broaden the scope of regionalism research by going beyond formal actors, and acknowledging the informal, bottom-up forms and practices of regionalism. In other words, the rise of informal regionalism needs to be acknowledged by the formal regionalism literature. As Slatter and Underhill-Sem rightly put it:

> *Nor has regionalism been the exclusive preserve of governments or states. Regional solidarity among peoples' movements has as long a history in the Pacific as intergovernmental regionalism. This solidarity has included movements for political independence or sovereignty, together with workers' and women's rights movements, environmental movements, and mobilization by Pacific churches, trade unions, and NGOs in support of peoples' struggles for freedom and justice (Slatter and Underhill-Sem 2009:1).*

The promise is that all actors, not just states, are beginning to be recognised as stakeholders in the emerging approach to Pacific regionalism. The idea behind a revisit of the architecture of regionalism to include other players beyond the state is that this may permit new and emerging possibilities:

> *In recent years the Pacific region has experienced new interest from a range of new governments, donors, civil society and philanthropists leading to claims to revisit the architecture of regionalism and the realisation that there are many regionalisms rather than a single site of regionalism e.g. the Pacific Islands Forum (PIFS 2017:2).*

The 2017 Status Report acknowledged that the region faces both external and internal forces that are influencing it (PIFS 2017). In order to address these issues, governance actors in the region must continually reflect how regional players can effectively continue working together (PIFS 2017). This opens the door for a conversation of civil society inclusion and making space for a greater diversity of voices. This sense of working together was reinforced by then Secretary General of PIFS, Dame Meg Taylor, in a radio broadcast, as she spoke about the Pacific knowledge that more can be achieved together than alone and that major global concerns facing the region, such as climate change, bring an increased focus on acting collectively:

> *The challenge for us is how we are going respond to this [growing global interest in the Pacific] and how do we work as a united front, and I think that's what the Pacific Islands Forum is about (Taylor 2018c).*

Scholars have also backed the importance of a regional approach over a one-on-one approach for getting results. Catherine Graue noted that 'regionalism is more important now than it's ever been because one-on-one, we're not going to be able to manage a lot of these' (Graue 2018). Similarly, Yvonne Underhill-Sem noted that Pacific feminist recognition of the importance of working regionally 'challenged the vestiges of colonialism', such as nuclear testing and the dearth of women's voices in national parliaments (Underhill-Sem 2019:264).

In this thesis I am particularly interested in looking at organised feminist alliances advocating to be included in both the agenda and interactions between the formal and informal spaces of regional activity. As Claire Slatter described it:

> *In sum, Pacific regionalism has reflected political solidarity both among Pacific Islands states, and among peoples of the Pacific organised in social movements and has often seen a convergence in their respective agendas, especially in matters involving external political interests detrimental to Pacific Island ones (Slatter 2015:195).*

Recognising the need to broaden the breadth of regionalism actors, the Framework promises to open up the space for a broader range of actors including civil society actors. It emphasises the need for a stronger public participation and the centrality of bottom-up advocacy. Evidence for this is found, for example, in a PIFS public statement explaining how the Framework opens up the process for submitting ideas for collective action to a broad audience, via public calls for submission:

> *In response to a public call for ideas and proposals for action at the regional level through the Framework for Pacific Regionalism, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat received a total of 68 submissions. Proposals have been received from civil society organisations, intergovernmental bodies, regional agencies, academic institutions, Member Governments, individuals, private sector organisations, technical agencies, and media organisations (PIFS 2015a).*

The governance leaders are now, on paper at least, recognising that the process is strengthened by bringing in a broader selection of actors, including those from civil society:

> *To really make good on the inclusivity principles that the Forum exists by, we want to democratise I guess the policy process at the regional level. So we want to engage*

> *individuals in seeking their ideas and their concerns and try to filter that into the broader policy process and raise awareness of regional policy processes, the work of the Forum. Our government officials know these issues extremely well but in order to make the regional agenda relevant, we need to bring in broader community into the process (Dateline Pacific 2018).*

The PIFS Secretary General described the 2017 Status Report as mapping steps along the way towards inclusion. My research focus is on how that agenda and the Pacific feminist civil society agenda interact, to see whether and to what extent steps are comprehensive and 'working together', not acting in opposite directions or leaving anyone behind (as the SDGs exhort):

> *The Framework for Pacific Regionalism envisages a region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion and prosperity so that all Pacific people can lead free, healthy, and productive lives. Working together I am confident this can be realised (PIFS 2017: 1).*

As civil society has organised itself regionally, it has acted at a regional level as advisors and influencers in order to broaden out the scope for regional input from a civil society perspective.

Civil society has opportunities to influence regional institutions with formally established dialogues with the Pacific Islands Forum (PIFS) and the Pacific Community (SPC) as well as the newer Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF). More recently, spaces have opened for the beginnings of influence in regional decision-making via the Triennial meetings, the Framework for Pacific Regionalism process calling for submissions, and the introduction of regularly scheduled and better attended regional dialogues with civil society by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

3.4 Enhancing the Pacific Voice Through Regionalism

To enhance a Pacific voice Pacific regional and subregional oversight is seen as most appropriate rather than externally imposed:

> *regional initiatives and challenges that require oversight of Pacific leaders and are most appropriately dealt with at the regional or subregional levels (SPC/CRGA 45 Paper 15:3).*

The establishment of the PIDF shows a concrete move towards institutional design to reflect Pacific-specific thinking. Some of this comes from the divergence in interests between the Pacific Islands and Australia, for example on climate change policy:

> *The region is at a crossroads and needed to embrace regionalism even more. Pacific leaders declared their commitment to progressing beyond regional cooperation to regional integration in areas where there are clear and equitable benefits to be gained (SPC/CRGA 45 paper 15:3).*

Recent regionalism scholarship has noted the move towards a less Eurocentric approach to regionalism; that is, it is showing an increased focus on post-colonial, non-Western sites and experiences (Buranelli and Tskhay 2019). To understand regionalism from a Pacific civil society perspective, I conducted interviews with Pacific activists acting regionally. These interviews revealed that international NGOs needed to translate their issues into Pacific issues, and highlighted the need for a Pacific voice and regional view:

> *Because when we come as a Pacific region, we need to be a Pacific voice. And although we have, the international NGOs have their issues, that's not the only issue. We need to come together, and we have to look into what does it mean for the region (Interview #17, 2016).*

This mirrors the views of the PIFS on regionalism. Working towards a collective voice, using the Framework to focus conversations and ensuring a regional position and action are all essential, as then Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum, Dame Meg Taylor (2018b), states:

> *Let me reiterate the importance of the Framework for Pacific Regionalism which enables focused political conversations and settlements on key strategic priorities that will drive the Leaders' vision…ensuring we have a strong and collective voice, a regional position and action, on issues vital to our development as a region and as the Blue Pacific continent.*

These are the very same values and concerns that underpin the gender inequality advocacy efforts of civil society in the Pacific. Of course, there is no one way of Pacific thinking, and finding a regional consensus can be a challenge. For example, in answer to the question 'do you think that there can be one Pacific voice?' one interviewee replied:

> *It's really difficult to achieve that. In the forum statements, we tried very hard, to have a clear Pacific voice on issues. There seems to be a consensus around climate change issues, humanitarian issues, and disaster, violence against women. Only the issue of sexual reproductive health rights, we've had difficulty. Largely on the issue of sexuality (Interview #17, 2016).*

A common voice requires careful negotiation, coordination and participation in direction setting:

> *During negotiations it's hard to get that Pacific voice. But now, what has happened is that the countries start coming and supporting each other. Last CSW we tried to get a Pacific voice in negotiations to Papua New Guinea. To coordinate the meetings, to say, 'okay, this is our position'. And they invited all the forum countries to come in to participate and some clear direction (Interview #17, 2016).*

This reflection of a Pacific voice is reflected in the Pohnpei statement of 2016, where Pacific Leaders take the stance: 'as guardians of the largest portion of the Pacific ocean our leadership matters' (PIFS 2016b).

Regionalism can be used as a tool for multiple voices to work together and scale up their relevance. For example, Rebecca Gruby and Lisa Campbell, writing on the concept of a scaling up of Pacific regionalism at the 2010 Conference of the Parties (COP), noted that regionalism has characterised the Pacific response to global initiatives (UNFCCC 2010). They observed Pacific Islands governments working together to pursue collective goals. These authors noted the call for a new sense of the region that is of their own creation and anchored in the common heritage of the ocean. Similarly to what I have observed in Pacific feminisms, they witnessed the Pacific region being 'enacted'. Dubbed 'one Pacific voice' in order to amplify voices, and in order to be rescaled from national to regional, a connected, expansive and engaged Pacific region was brought into public existence. They described this as a 'collective diplomacy'

demonstrating depending on one another, and shared messaging (Gruby and Campbell 2013:2052).

Although Gruby and Campbell's case study was the 2010 COP, their categorisation of the Pacific region as a tool of a political scaling project, whereby Pacific Islands' smallness and isolation is rescaled into being referred to as a 'Pacific region', is also reflected in my case studies. Both their case study and mine used acting 'regionally' as a solution for countering perceptions of the Pacific that focus only on its 'smallness' (Gruby and Campbell 2013:2060).

3.5 Limitations of the Regionalism Framework for Civil Society

The Framework is intended to be agile and respond to the shape-shifting landscape quickly. However, there are some limitations. The first brake on regionalism in the Pacific has been the constant reviews that have taken place. As critics have rightfully reminded us, the purpose of regionalism cannot be conducting reviews*:*

> *In the last 10 years, there have been myriad reviews of regional organisations and plans/processes. These include the 2013 Independent Review of the Pacific Plan for Regional Integration and Cooperation (the Pacific Plan); the 2012 reviews of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat; the 2007 Regional Integration Framework (RIF) review, which led to the merger of a number of major regional agencies; and the 2005 review of the regional architecture commissioned by Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS). Surely this is overkill? The purpose of regionalism cannot primarily be to review regionalism (Dornan and Newton Cain 2014:1).*

Second, despite gender equality being a standalone goal for improvement in the SDGs (UN 2015b), and the subject of a declaration from all Pacific leaders, the Framework for Pacific Regionalism does not mention gender equality. Alma Espino and Yvonne Underhill-Sem emphasised the need to improve knowledge about the gender dimension of regionalism processes. They noted a marked gender imbalance in processes in the Pacific, with women's diverse economic activities overlooked (Espino and Underhill-Sem 2012). Sometimes this absence of gender by name is excused by regional institutions as reflecting intentional mainstreaming (Interview #16, 2016), but then the risk is that it is forgotten or does not cut

through. Any criticism of a lack of transmission or inability to influence policymakers is not through a lack of pushing by civil society, but rather requires unpacking of the unseen, but existing, structural barriers to any intervention making headway. Alma Espino and Yvonne Underhill-Sem (2012) noted the need for a more gender-aware regionalism discussion. The Boe Declaration emerging from the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting in 2018 (DFAT 2018) does not mention gender inequality at all. It does mention an *expanded concept of security* inclusive of human security and humanitarian assistance, prioritising environmental security and regional cooperation in building resilience to disasters and climate change, including through regional cooperation and support. This might be able to be strategically leveraged to include women's security. It also recognises:

> *the need to strengthen regional security cooperation and collective action through the assertion of Our Will and the voices of Our Pacific Peoples (DFAT 2018).*

The Boe Declaration stresses climate change as the greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and well-being of the peoples of the Pacific. It uses the notion of the Blue Pacific and talks of collective security interests to sustain Pacific peoples and resources.

Third, despite review after review, the new Framework model shows little responsiveness to civil society demands for new actors and inclusion. A risk of aiming for a common position that all can agree on is the watering down of statements to achieve a regional Pacific voice, and that what gets left behind is the diversity of experiences reflected and rights protected:

> *They all agreed on it because Cook Islands tabled it and Cook Islands is a very good, very progressive country. And there wasn't any disagreement. But even if you look at the reference on sexual reproductive health, it says, 'sexual reproductive health services'. It doesn't even mention rights. So, I think when the declaration was drafted, it would have been drafted in a manner that it would be accepted by the countries without any disagreement (Interview #17, 2016).*

PIFS stresses that the Framework for Pacific Regionalism is meant to open pathways for other actors to make proposals. Other pathways in which to speak out are emerging as the landscape is changing, with new donors coming with resources and opening the space for non-state actor engagement. For example, PIFS, through the EU-funded Strengthening Non-State Actors Engagement in Regional Policy Development and Implementation Programme, hosted a

Regional Civil Society Organisation Forum in Suva, Fiji, in August 2017. However, interviewees expressed concern that non-state actors often include the private sector and, if there are limited spaces, it is the private sector actors dominating and taking the spaces of civil society (Interviews #23, 2016 and #13, 2016). Activists interviewed said that claims that such meetings are open to non-state actors must be tempered with a more detailed look as to whether those spaces available are mainly being taken by corporates (Interview #13, 2016).

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided a background to the historical rise of a regionalism agenda in the Pacific, describing the key actors, the key regional institutions, and whether they make space for dialogue with civil society. I investigated what the formal institutional version of regionalism suggests are the key spaces and issues for regional decision-making. On the one hand, the PIFS is beginning to recognise the multiplicity of regional frameworks, approaches and platforms for action. The PIFS Secretary General acknowledged that submissions reflect the way Pacific people are thinking about issues that exist at the regional level and what needs to be done (USP 2017).

It is also beginning to be acknowledged, in a departure from the traditional model, that there are 'many regionalisms':

> *others argue for a more flexible approach to regionalism based on network diplomacy and the need to embrace the fact that there is no longer one site for determining regionalism but rather now there are many regionalisms (PIFS 2014).*

Yet, on the other hand, empirical evidence continues to reveal the gulf between understandings of what is required to meet the inclusion promises made in formal policy documents (Interview #33, 2017). Civil society activists work to shine a light on the gaps in the formal approaches and emphasise the need for an official Framework for Pacific Regionalism to be more inclusive of actors and issues that are central to the region.

Pacific Leaders have recognised the need for a new inclusive and game-changing approach to Pacific regionalism:

> *At the heart of this new approach is an emphasis on inclusive and robust policy development and implementation, as well as recognition of the political dimension for ensuring development outcomes for the Pacific. It has to be inclusive to make sure that it impacts on those in our communities who are most in need. It has to be inclusive because only by looking at the whole picture can we identify where we might make the most profound impact (USP 2017).*

The next step in this investigation is to look at the extent to which gender action maps onto the rise of the regionalism agenda in the Pacific more broadly and what role feminist civil society actors play in planning, coordinating and executing gender action in the region. There is a long history of regional solidarity among peoples' movements, including movements for independence, workers and trade unions, women's rights movements, environment movements and Pacific churches (Slatter and Underhill-Sem 2009, Mar 2016). However, progress towards gender equality still remains slow and inconsistent, and gender equality is not referred to in the Boe Declaration (2018). Violence against women and issues of sexual and reproductive health rights remain difficult.

The next chapters will engage precisely with how Pacific feminist civil society interacts with regionalism among people, not just among states, to tackle these issues. This is done through a close analysis of the two recent civil society initiatives in the region.

PART TWO:

THE CASE STUDIES

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY:

A FEMINIST INTERPRETIVE INQUIRY

> *The women's movement needed knowledge that was for women. Women had long been the object of others' knowledge projects (Harding 2004:29).*

This chapter outlines the methods deployed in the thesis for investigating how civil society actors in the Pacific build feminist regional alliances, and what they do to ensure that these alliances are inclusive of diverse identities and voices across the Pacific. The research is informed by feminist interpretive inquiry, and the main method of investigation is case analysis. To offer an in-depth understanding of how civil society actors operate on the ground, and what meaning they attach to their regional activities, the empirical analysis presented in this thesis focuses on two recent examples of feminist alliance building in the Pacific: the Inaugural Pacific Feminist Forum (PFF), which took place in 2016 in Fiji, and the We Rise Coalition of four feminist organisations, formed in 2016 with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding for the purposes of coordinating collective action at the regional level.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section outlines the inquiry, explaining its distinguishing characteristics and relevance for the empirical research undertaken in this project. The second section covers my methods of inquiry and I introduce the two cases the thesis focuses on, outline the reasons for choosing them and the methods used to collect data. Finally, the third section presents the challenges I faced as a feminist researcher undertaking feminist inquiry, and how I sought to address these challenges.

4.1 Undertaking a Feminist Interpretive Inquiry

The qualitative research undertaken for this thesis is situated within the broader tradition of feminist interpretive inquiry. What makes research interpretive is the intention 'to understand

how people see and produce the world by exploring how meaning, beliefs and traditions inform their actions and practices' (Corbett 2013:493, see also Bevir 2015). Interpretive researchers seek to understand the lived experiences of the actors from the perspective of the actors themselves. In order to hear the voices of the Pacific feminists themselves, I sought to include their direct quotes as much as possible. This was to ensure their participation in the 'knowledge production', and included me asking interviewees what questions they thought I ought to be asking and if there was anything I did not ask that I should have. This is an important step in being conscious of what Yvonne Underhill-Sem calls, 'decentering the coloniality of knowledge production in the Pacific' (Underhill-Sem 2020:317).

What makes research feminist 'lies in the particular set of theoretical perspectives and research questions that places women's issues, concerns, and lived experiences at the centre of research inquiry' (Given 2008, Hesse-Biber 2008). This requires more than developing an understanding of the world that takes women into account. In a feminist research project, the ideas and principles of feminism underpin the entire research process, from constructing the research question to producing data and explicating findings (Ackerly and True 2010). Feminist research places women's lived experiences at the centre of knowledge building (as noted in the opening quote to this chapter) and works to initiate social change in women's lives (Gunew 1991, Jansen and Rae Davis 1998). As a method of inquiry, feminist research involves paying particular attention to the gender and power differentials, to the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, and to relationships; it includes a commitment to self-reflection, as well as a consistent attention to how research impacts and is impacted by social and political contexts.

I was guided by *Doing Feminist Research in Political and Social Science* by Brooke Ackerly and Jacqui True (2020) in looking at feminist ethics, such as attentiveness to relationships. A participatory approach to research, and negotiating consent, means being alert to any perceived power imbalances and representation considerations. I was very careful, for instance, when selected by the PFF organisers to be interviewed by FemLink Pacific about my impressions of the PFF, I sat alongside two Pacific women participants and ensured they did most of the talking, and had space to answer the questions first; my role was to support them, as they were

nervous about being interviewed, to highlight their leadership and to support the case for young women's leadership now and not just as leaders of the future.[4]

A key aspect of interpretive feminist inquiry I adopted in this thesis concerns the reflexivity of the researcher (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012) and the relationship between researchers and researched. This involves 'giving consideration to the ways in which our beliefs, interests and experiences might have impacted on the research' (King and Horrocks 2010:128). I conducted the research presented in this thesis as a researcher who has experiences as a feminist activist involved in the women's movement for over 30 years. This experience helped me to understand the ideas and actions of those I observed and interviewed in the context of this thesis. My connection to the women's movement has enabled me to identify the issues facing the women's movement and also shaped the overall aspirations of this project. My commitment to social change, for example, meant that I wanted to build knowledge that can be used to advance feminist practice. This type of knowledge building is widely acknowledged in feminist research and in women's studies in general (Gunew 1991). While I identify as feminist, I recognise the diversity of feminisms and my empirical insights seek to capture this diversity as well.

With respect to the relationship between researcher and researched, I consciously made efforts to render visible what Naples calls the 'workings of power within the research process' (Naples 2003); for example, I noted my age in relation to the young participants, and in the Young Women's Focus Group I convened, I drew participants' attention to my familiarity with the organisation for which we all volunteered, in order to build trust. I also reflected on the benefit of having English as a first language in a forum where for many it was their first time addressing a crowd in English, and so gave encouragement and ample time to compose and communicate ideas and thoughts. I also regularly sent blogs and updates on conferences, reporting on the research progress to the feminist actors involved in my research to keep them up to date with progress, to overcome any fear that I had come in and then would just disappear.

Aware of the contestations and accusations levelled at the feminist movement's quest for global sisterhood which has been challenged as 'refusing to see its positionality' (see, for example, Morris and Bunjun 2007, Bunjun 2010), I was very careful in acknowledging my own positionality. I kept journal notes during my fieldwork to capture my reflections and discussions

[4] Pacific Feminist Forum: Talking with Yvonne, Naomi and Jane – YouTube. Interview from November 2016, in Suva, Fiji, accessed 29/4/21.

with trusted Pacific women. I asked my interviewees about their understanding of the term 'sisterhood' and took care in emphasising the meaning they attach to this term, not to 'whitewash' their perceptions (Andersen 2003, Roth 2004, Pizzingrilli 2017).

I was guided by the university ethics requirements[5], the values of Pacific research methodology and the cultural practice of *talanoa*, explained as encompassing 'behaviours/manners such as openness, patience, tolerance, flexibility, silence, humility, generosity, gifting, reciprocity, humour, empowerment, listening, sharing, forgiveness and subjectivity' (Stewart-Withers et al 2017:59). I heeded calls for evidence-based research 'undertaken by researchers who contribute to Pacific knowledge in an ethical, respectful and empowering way' (Underhill-Sem et al 2016: 6). In my efforts to be 'ethical, respectful and empowering' I have been sharing my research findings with the key stakeholders through emails, social media, blogs and conference papers, and by inviting stakeholders to a paid-for zoom conference where Pacific feminist research, including my own, were being presented. My consent form also captured interest from participants in receiving an update on the research findings once completed, which reflects my commitment to not being extractive but rather to provide something in return for participation that may be beneficial.

Scholars such as Terence Wesley-Smith have encouraged Pacific Studies scholars doing research in or of the Pacific to guide appropriate forms of knowledge production about Oceania (Wesley-Smith 2016:154). I am following his model of Pacific studies by emphasising 'reflexivity, indigenous epistemologies and interdisciplinarity' (Wesley-Smith 2016:154). He pointed to scholarship that see the fundamental research question as being how can we understand the region in a way that will make people better off (Wesley-Smith 2016:159).

Wesley-Smith stressed that an interdisciplinary approach is better equipped to understand urgent regional problems (Wesley-Smith 2016:154). It allows space and emphasis on traditional ways of being and knowing in the face of massive forces for change. He stressed the importance

[5] The empirical research undertaken as part of this project received ethics approval from the University of Canberra (approval 16-145 granted 30 June 2016). It complied with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and the University of Canberra Human Research Ethics Manual. I also checked the Pacific Research Guidelines and Protocols (produced by Massey University) for any Pacific-specific considerations.

of generating a literature that reflects on practice as well as theoretical and philosophical assumptions.

Wesley-Smith criticised research where Pacific people cannot see themselves, or in which they see themselves distorted and misrepresented. What is important is the creation of meaningful spaces that 'acknowledge and viscerally engage indigenous time, space and place' (Wesley-Smith 2016:158). To avoid this criticism, I made space for the interviewees to suggest what I should be asking and to talk about topics I had not raised. I also ensured that I sent them the research summaries in the form of blogs and conference papers to provide an opportunity to correct any misrepresentation or distortion. I was very focused on reflexivity, and ensured I spent time engaging in cultural activities such as dance, kava and eating together as well as in discussion, to acknowledge time, space and place. I had an awareness of what Wesley-Smith says is required to do Pacific studies: a heightened awareness of issues of positionality, research ethics and the politics of knowledge.

He advocates for a social science firmly grounded in an indigenous experience and ways of knowing (Wesley-Smith 2016:159), and argued that an interdisciplinary approach should be an essential part of reformed Pacific studies. This acknowledges bodies of knowledge rooted in indigenous histories and cultures on which scholarship can be based is a worthy, even essential, 'long-term aspiration for Pacific studies' (Wesley-Smith 2016:160). Critically, I was focused on learning from the Pacific feminists; to 'learn from, not just about' them (Wesley-Smith 2016:160).

In terms of the case study in chapter 5, the PFF's very design reflected what Wesley-Smith saw as a reclaiming of Pacific peoples' 'own representation, and approach; that reclamation through creativity and imagination that have always been part of the …epistemology of Pacific peoples' (Wesley-Smith 2016:163). This is reflected in my observations in chapter 5.

Interdisciplinarity in Pacific studies is a tool for opening up new approaches to the issues of concern to peoples of the Pacific, Wesley-Smith notes (2016:163). This all underpins my commitment to an interdisciplinary approach to Pacific studies, demonstrated by a commitment to reflexivity and to hearing the voices and perspectives of Pacific feminist civil society. I have paid attention to the creative endeavours, the Pacific knowledges and storytelling and the ways

of letting relationships unfold through spending time together in place and in solidarity in order to learn and build understanding:

> *Navigate choppy waters between rationales, disciplines, knowledges, identities, lands people, and cultures. Despite all its instability and uncertainty Pacific studies has become a vital academic space to encourage deep learning, promote creativity and understanding, generate counter-hegemonic discourse and nurture personal growth* (Wesley-Smith 2016:164).

I took the approach of allyship, listening to and engaging with both the Pacific feminists and the transgender women activists, sharing their stories and innovations with a broader audience, not to 'stand in' for them but rather to use spaces to have their voices heard in all their diversity. Allyship is described as 'articulating support for marginalised groups (Sumerau et al 2021). Sumerau et al (2021) wrote about the specifics of where allies come from and how they fit as part of the construction of what it means to be an ally to marginalised groups. Their research revealed that a connection to a person in the marginalised group is a way in and a chance to offer support for the marginalised group experiencing isolating spaces and situations. Radke et al (2020) suggested that motivations to improve the status of a disadvantaged group can be legitimate. Kluttz et al (2020) saw social movements as a site for collective learning against a backdrop of power, historical difference and divergent interests which complicate allyship and solidarity. They considered allyship as a learning process for decolonising solidarity in the context of white scholar and activist, non-indigenous settler-colonial solidarity with indigenous actors (Kluttz 2020).

These tensions are also evident in my position of seeking to amplify the Pacific activities from the sensitive position of being an Australian researching Pacific women. I work in the Australian aid space, with a focus on development and on the empowerment of women to lead in the Pacific. Australia, situated in the Pacific, is a large donor for Pacific women's empowerment, with AU$320 million over 10 years committed for Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development, and AU$170 million over five years committed for Pacific Women Lead (announced by Senator Marise Payne at the 2021 Triennial (Payne 2021)). I am from the largest island in the Pacific; Australia is a Pacific Islands Forum member, and a signatory country to the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration. I have been undertaking this research at a time when the Australian aid and foreign policy approach is for a 'Pacific Step-Up', and yet

Australia is frequently criticised as not being sufficiently 'in the family' (Lowy 2021, Conroy 2021).

I also sought guidance and answers from other Australian scholars who have researched the Pacific feminist movement. Nicole George, for example, proved illuminating when she explained her own research methodology in conducting research about Pacific feminists, including the YWCA of Fiji, which provided my own Young Women's Focus Group members. She outlined the importance of having worked in country in building relationships and in observing day-to-day operations (George 2013). I similarly felt my time living and working in Pacific countries was invaluable in building relationships, developing understandings, and grasping cultural nuance. She also noted that, at times, her outsider status afforded her the role of a confidante, amidst the very small women's movement, in which everyone knew each other. She felt people shared information or critiques with her that they did not share with others. I certainly felt this situation arise in my own research. My own research learning process involved how to do the work reflexively, ethically, and respectfully, and I presented my reflections on doing this research 'right' at the International Feminist Journal of Politics Conference in Delhi in 2017. I projected this learning into my development practice in my paid work.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty asked whether feminism can be transplanted and used as a fertile ground for struggle (Mohanty 1988, Mohanty 2003). The crux of my research is not to transplant but to support what has grown organically and within context. In what follows, I present the particular methods of inquiry I used to enable feminist knowledge development on the prospects and challenges of building feminist alliances in the Pacific region.

4.2 Methods of Inquiry

To investigate how Pacific feminists respond to the shrinking spaces at the global level, and what they do to build and strengthen regional alliances in the Pacific, I focused on two case studies, exemplifying recent attempts at alliance building in the Pacific region: the Pacific Feminist Forum and the We Rise Coalition (We Rise). For each case, I conducted interviews with the relevant actors, undertook participatory observation of their activities, and conducted an analysis of the documents they produced. I provide a detailed explanation of these methods below.

Case studies

A case study is a research method that enables the researcher to examine a particular case in an up-close, in-depth manner (Simons 2009). A case is usually used as a particular instance of something larger than the case itself. In the context of this thesis, for example, I use two case studies that are both examples of feminist alliance building to be able to better understand the phenomenon of alliance building itself.

I will firstly discuss my choice of the PFF as a case study. This case study was selected for two main reasons. Firstly, it is a relatively new (understudied) regional initiative, which uses the design of a forum to strengthen the feminist networks and alliances in the Pacific. Secondly, it offers an example of attempts to negotiate a shared vision on gender equality progress when there are substantial diversities across participating countries.

The second case study, We Rise, offers another recent initiative of alliance building in the Pacific. It was selected to complement the insights gained from the PFF and, more specifically, to examine what goes on beyond the structured forums, and how cross-movement alliances are being forged and sustained in the Pacific at a more macro level. The We Rise Coalition brings together four feminist organisations, which are active at the regional and global level: Diverse Voices in Action for Equality, FemLink Pacific, Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) and the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA). By focusing on this regional initiative, we can gain a better understanding of the inner workings of alliance formation, the tensions, the structures put in place and the ways of dealing with differences at a macro level. We Rise was being shaped as my research was undertaken, and thus this study represents a contemporaneous exploration of alliance building across difference in action.

The case studies are presented in detail, including working methods, objectives, agenda setting and membership, in chapters 5 and 6. A synthesis of the insights stemming from a collective review of the chapters and what the findings can tell us about Pacific feminists building alliances across diversity is then presented in chapter 7.

Semi-structured Interviews

I conducted 'epistemic interviewing' (Curato 2013), which is about learning as you do and recognising interviewing as knowledge-producing. Between 2016 and 2019, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the following three cohorts:

(i) **Government stakeholders** with relevant knowledge and responsibility in gender equality and international engagement in the Pacific (five interviews). This included the senior gender equality officials from the leading regional institutions in the Pacific: the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC). The interviews focused on the historical and present-day relations between feminist civil society and these institutions, knowledge of regional alliances, and thoughts about regional institutional action on gender equality and the spaces for capturing the views of civil society.

(ii) **Conveners and facilitators of regional forums**: This group involved those who play a leading role in organising and facilitating regional forums, workshops and alliances that bring women with diverse background together (11 interviews). These interviews focused on the roles regional organisations can play in amplifying voices and the spaces for civil society voices to influence these regional organisations. This includes targeted interviews with people primarily involved with We Rise, asking questions specifically on We Rise in order to understand the coalition, how it bridged differences, how it was organised and the processes it followed, and what it did to sustain an alliance that brought out multiple voices. I wanted to understand what impact a coalition across diversity would have and how this might build on the other case study of holding space for a forum. Some of these interviews were formal, scheduled, recorded interviews, with written consent to interview (Appendix 3) filed, and resulting in a typed transcript. Others were short conversations in the margins of other meetings, with oral consent to interview, and notes from these conversations scribbled as soon as the meeting concluded. I coded the interviews manually by identifying themes, to find any groupings of similar comments or beliefs.

(iii) **Members and participants of regional feminist organisations and workshops:** During my fieldwork in Fiji in 2016, I interviewed 18 women who participated in the PFF. These women came from Pacific Island countries including Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Kiribati, PNG and Bougainville. I interviewed six additional Pacific feminist activists (not present at the PFF) who are engaged in feminist mobilisation in the region. These interviews were complemented by five additional interviews with Australian activists who have close working relationships with Pacific women in the context of both global and regional forums.

After starting with NVivo as a coding tool, I chose to analyse the interviews manually. This helped me become very familiar with the content and themes, and with the voices of the women. I also used tables and matrices for organising and categorising interviews and themes.

The interviews are identified in the thesis by numbers rather than interviewee names (see Appendix 1). This reflects the commitment to participants in my Explanatory Statement (Appendix 2) and Consent Form (Appendix 3) that they could remain anonymous.[6] In these consent forms I made clear that the interviewees would remain anonymous. In this, I used a common approach in international development research – the Do No Harm approach, for the safety of the respondents and because women's human rights defenders are under threat. This is especially important because of the small size of the Pacific women's movement, which means that respondents could be easily identified.

Overall, the interviews were used to gain an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of the actors involved in regional feminist civil society activities, and not for making generalisations on the broader population. More specifically, the purpose of the interviews was to understand what meaning the actors involved in the Pacific feminist society activities attach to their activities. So my analysis aimed to undertake what is categorised in methodological discussions as a 'double hermeneutic'. As Vivien Lowndes (2017) puts it, the purpose of a double

[6] My interviews were structured as followed: I provided a written explanatory statement to my interviewees (see Appendix 2) in advance and sought completion of a consent form (see Appendix 3). I would introduce myself and introduce the purpose and nature of the research. I gave assurances that respondents would remain anonymous and that there were no right or wrong answers. I explained that the respondent was free to interrupt, ask for clarification, or end the interview at any time. I also asked permission to tape the interview as an aide-mémoire and not for broadcast. The interviews were conducted in compliance with the ethics application, approved by University of Canberra's Human Research Ethics Committee on 30 June 2016 (application reference 16-145).

hermeneutic is to establish two levels of understanding. This helps us to understand that the world is interpreted by the actor (first level) and their interpretation is interpreted by the observer (second level). I then try to reflect on my own interpretation of the interpretation made by the actors about their behaviour.

Critically, a young Pacific activist's comment led me to reconsider my approach to interviews, to definitions and even to the topic under study itself. The respondent (Interview #23, 2016) said I most likely started from identifying a 'gap' to study, whereas Pacific feminists, she argued, don't see a 'gap', but a strong movement already. There remains, however, a gap in the literature on regionalism and civil society diverse alliance-building initiatives, which has not focused on this region (Parry et al 2019).

My interviews sought to draw out the activists' own words and experiences. The face-to-face discussions were preferred as I could see interviewees' body language and facial expressions. I kept telephone or Skype interviews to a bare minimum. This importance of face-to-face interactions was also reflected upon by Nicole George (2012), with a focus on activists' own understandings in order to understand how Pacific activists navigate these issues and relationships. In particular, there was great value in interviewing the activists while in the Pacific, in the margins of the PFF in Fiji, as the event unfolded. This onsite interaction afforded much learning in the context of events unfolding and how the PFF was being perceived and received. This 'situated knowledge' and situated women's organising opened more sensitive opportunities for hearing activists' own perceptions (George 2012:7).

In addition to interviews, I held a focus group with five young Fijian women at the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) of Fiji, a local grassroots women's organisation linked with a global movement of women. These women were aged in their twenties. The purpose of the focus group was to test concepts and language choice with young women around feminism, sisterhood and gender equality, and explore the issues they faced.

Document analysis

In addition to semi-structured interviews, the focus group and participatory observation, the empirical research undertaken in this thesis also draws on document analysis. Using multiple

and varied data sources gives a 'confluence of evidence that breeds credibility' (Bowen 2009). The document analysis focused on 10 key documents produced between 2016 and 2019.[7]

For the in-depth analysis of the two case studies, I analysed the following documents:

(i) 2016. We Rise Coalition *Theory of Change* (We Rise Coalition 2016)
(ii) 2016: Memorandum of Understanding (We Rise Coalition 2016)
(iii) 2016: Charter of Feminist Principles for Pacific Feminists (Appendix 4)
(iv) 2016: Pacific Feminist Forum Schedule (Appendix 5)
(v) 2017: The Monitoring, Learning and Evaluation Framework (We Rise Coalition 2017)
(vi) 2017: 13th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women and 6th Meeting of Ministers for Women Recommendations and Outcome Statement
(vii) 2017: Pacific Platform for Action (PPA) for Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights 2018–2030
(viii) 2019: Recommendations and Management Response (DFAT 2019)
(ix) 2019: We Rise Milestone Presentation (the We Rise Herstory 8 March 2019)
(x) 2019: 2nd Pacific Feminist Forum Opening Address by the Fiji Minister for Women (Vuniwaqa 2019).

I also reviewed the relevant reports on women in the Pacific from different policy actors (government and civil society organisations in Australia and the region). Examples include the Mid-Term Evaluation of the Strengthening Feminist Coalitions and Partnerships for Gender Equality report and the Pacific Women Annual Progress Reports.

The documents I draw on speak to the aims of We Rise and the PFF, or to the regional Pacific feminist movement they aim to influence and the context or environment they work in as they each seek to maintain their own sustainability. I searched these documents for common themes, mentions of women 'in all their diversity', promises for civil society inclusion and dialogue,

[7] I requested some documents from the We Rise Coalition directly, such as the 2016 We Rise Coalition MOU document and the coalition's only official submission to CSW in 2017. Beyond these two documents, there is not much publicly available documentation on the We Rise Coalition. Documents such as a Head Agreement, Cooperation Agreement, funding orders, partnership agreements, internal reports, journal reports and minutes of meetings were not accessible as they are restricted to the We Rise Coalition partners only.

mentions of LGBTIQ and mentions of feminism. I counted the mentions of women and gender and I looked for mentions of the mechanics of forming alliances and coalitions across diversity.

Additionally, my research included monitoring the social media (Twitter and Facebook) statements of all four We Rise partners in relation to their coalition involvement from late 2016 to 2020, to have a sense of what they were talking about in relation to We Rise activities, formation and achievements. I did this by following the posts, being alerted to new posts, and screenshotting and saving relevant posts. I also followed the social media statements of the PFF from 2016 to 2020 in relation to the promotion of the events, the PFF's impact and the spread of the Charter of Feminist Principles for Pacific Feminists (the Pacific Feminist Charter) as well as calls for participation by PFF participants in regional and global forums.

Participatory observation

Participatory observation is watching an event or a group of people as a means of learning, or where the researcher takes part in activities and interacts. The benefit of this approach is that it puts the researcher 'where the action is' and enables the researcher to collect data from that participation and observation (Musante and DeWalt 2010:1). My participation has enabled me to better understand what I am observing. Indeed, scholars have claimed that in experiencing mobilisations researchers have better understood what social movements are and can help to 'close the gap between theory and practice' (Balsiger and Lambelet, 2014:1). They see that participant observation when combined with reflexivity can produce strong data.

I conducted participant observation of five key events in the context of this research:

(i) the Inaugural Pacific Feminist Forum in Suva, Fiji (November 2016)
(ii) a workshop with young women of the Fiji YWCA about young women's leadership (five participants), run the by World YWCA in Suva, Fiji (November 2016)
(iii) a workshop with We Rise Coalition partners about building Pacific feminist-led research capacity (45 participants), run by the We Rise Coalition in Suva, Fiji (November 2016)
(iv) office visits to two We Rise Coalition partners – FWRM and IWDA– in Suva, Fiji (November 2016) and in Melbourne, Australia (March 2017) respectively

(v) a dinner for We Rise Coalition partner organisation FWRM's 30th anniversary in Suva, Fiji (November 2016). This dinner was attended by the participants of the Pacific Feminist Forum and the We Rise Coalition, where the Director of the FWRM spoke about the We Rise Coalition and its history.

The purpose of these participatory observations was to observe the group dynamics of women involved in regional activities (for a similar approach, see Polletta 2002). I used participatory observation to supplement the insights I gained from the interviews I conducted with various actors in the region. I saw the innovation and openness to a movement-building process as praxis and outcome in itself in the cases I observed, and was keen to amplify these stories to a wider gender, politics, development and social movement audience. As Teresia Teaiwa noted, 'many times I am surrounded by academics who believe the Pacific offers them little more than some colour and entertainment, and that all they need to know to truly be in the world is in Europe/Africa/Latin America/Asia/Anglo-Austronesia (white Australia and New Zealand) – that is, not in the island Pacific' (Teaiwa 2006:72). In contrast, I saw the innovation in feminist movement building in the Pacific and wanted to share it with a wide audience. My argument in my research, as well as my experience from my paid work in development and aid in the Pacific, is that capacity building is not all North to South; the academy needs to hear the stories from the Pacific and development practitioners need to recognise the agency and capacity that already exist in the region. They need to do justice to this and acknowledge Pacific women's leadership in gender equality advocacy and the empowerment of women.

4.3 Methodological Challenges and Limitations

In this section I outline methodological challenges faced and acknowledge limitations. I acknowledge that I am an activist and feminist who wanted the project to succeed. Any perception of bias was mitigated, however, by 'triangulating' interview data with documents and observations. My methodology was inductive and interpretive. The purpose of the interviews, focus group and participatory observation was not to provide generalisable information but to offer a plausible interpretation. I checked these interpretations by regularly sending my blogs and videoed conference presentations to my interviewees, using social media and email, as the research progressed. I explained during the consent process that the research would take many years to be finalised so this was a way of keeping in touch during the process.

This approach was important to me to counter assertions of being 'extractive' without keeping up relationships. In particular Haus of Khameleon, active at the PFF, and FWRM, a PFF organising partner and We Rise Coalition member were helpful in circulating material I produced. I also used social media to share updates and aspects of the research, and received encouragement from relevant organisations along the way.

A limitation was being a 'fly in fly out' researcher. Despite having spent 12 months full time and two years part time in the Pacific, during the research my trips were limited to short visits. This of course impacts on relationships of trust, although there was recognition that many people who were involved in the study knew me already, or else I had built a relationship of trust with them over a short time due to living and eating together at the PFF. Personal relationships and trust are an important part of conducting research in the Pacific, and it is important, as noted above, that researchers do not merely extract information without giving something back of use to problem solving in the Pacific (Vaioleti 2016). Yvonne Underhill-Sem (2020:318) noted the central importance of relationships in knowledge production in the Pacific; she explained that 'invoking prior relationships can lead to other knowledges being produced that both result from the prior relationship and grow the relationship.' She further noted that this can come from other activities on the sidelines of research trips and she cited a burial relocation example (2020:319); in my case, knowledge production also happened from both older relationships built over 10 years and newer ones built through participation in kava circles, dancing and eating together.

I am an outsider who could be cast as an 'insider/outsider', due to my time spent living and working in the Pacific, but a little bit of knowledge makes me more aware of the pitfalls an outsider can encounter. The role of the researcher is to stand back and see in a new way things perhaps previously overlooked; this is why I chose this topic, consciously working reflexively at every step. I was very nervous in the lead-up to the PFF as to whether I would be excluded (due to being Australian). This hesitation included concerns as to whether an indication of my 'insider/outsider' status would be cultural appropriation. As an example, I had brought a tibuta (a traditional top from Kiribati which was a gift to me during my residence there) but was not sure whether I should wear it or not (not wanting to be accused of appropriating a culture). One respondent from PNG, when I shared my nerves, called me an 'islander', explaining she has seen me dance, seen me eat – 'different to other Australians who use a knife and fork to cut up their food and do not move or sit stiffly when music is on! (Interview #20, 2016).'

I was also conscious of the strong influence of cultural and religious beliefs in many of the Pacific activists I was interviewing, contrasted with my own secular position. With colonisation came Christianity, and to this day it influences discussions on abortion, homosexuality and other feminist topics. This influence could be seen in the debates on the Pacific Feminist Charter at the PFF and on the prayers that started sessions I observed during fieldwork. Selina Tusitala Marsh suggested part of the resistance to feminism in the Pacific has been that it is perceived as a threat to traditional views; that is, a threat to women's traditional seat of power – the family (Marsh 1998). I was only able to ask about these sensitive topics due to the trust I had developed with the participants of the various forums.

Doing feminism research 'right' means that I needed to constantly examine my own unspoken assumptions about feminism, such as being older and enquiring about what young women want; not assuming we shared understandings but seeking to have concepts explained and defined by respondents. My view of feminism and my positionality still coloured my questions and my focus; I am not necessarily objective, no matter how hard I try. I acknowledge the limitation of my Young Women's Focus Group, as all its members were from within one global women's organisation, one with which I had had several decades of involvement and which is not reflective of a wider group of Pacific women. Also, despite being selected as part of the same selection process as all other participants at the PFF I was noticeably apart. I acknowledge the risk that my questions about how to best support the Pacific-*led* development of gender equality in the Pacific might have received the answers the respondents thought I wanted to hear rather than a true reflection of their beliefs, and that face saving might have hindered a true discussion about capacity and gaps. I listened with great care to Pacific feminists speak of the approaches to decolonisation of research at the Decolonisation Conference run by the Australian Association of Pacific Studies, and read about non-colonising feminist solidarities in the Global South (Mohanty 2003, McLaren 2017). I also read about the ethics of white Australians researching indigenous peoples to ensure I was alert to issues such as power imbalances and differences in resources, and how these could impact interviewees' experiences of the research process (Moreton-Robinson 2000, Land 2015).

I also had to appreciate the commercial-in-confidence nature of some material which was not available for me to review. We Rise was generous with the documents it could provide when I visited one of its headquarters, but explained that some material was commercial-in-confidence

and could not be made public, and so not given to me. To build up the body of material, I relied on public documents to round out the documents We Rise had given me.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented the key principles of the interpretive feminist inquiry undertaken in this research and outlined the research methods used. It covered the case study approaches used for the research, and the justifications for these, and set out the challenges or limitations of the research. An important task of my research journey has been to assess the extent to which there is a way of conducting feminist research 'right'. I reflected on this question in a paper given at the International Feminist Journal of Politics Conference in New Delhi in 2017. I have established in this chapter that checking on language choice and testing assumptions is key. I have suggested that building trust and relationship building is important when you are an outsider and helps you become an insider/outsider. The next chapters delve into my case studies.

CHAPTER 5

BUILDING FEMINIST ALLIANCES THROUGH REGIONAL FORUMS: THE PACIFIC FEMINIST FORUM

> *A space to learn from each other, to share the challenges and hurt, to reflect, recuperate, strengthen existing relationships, forge new relationships, and join forces in all our diversities to weave something new and transformative (Michelle Reddy, Pacific Feminist Forum Program 2016).*

As outlined earlier in the introduction to the thesis and more broadly, this thesis explores the possibility of building regional alliances in the Pacific. In recent years, feminist activists have been facing significant backlash, and spaces for social movement mobilisation are shrinking (Bonisteel and Green, 2005, della Porta 2013). Several scholars have rightly argued that this is especially evident for developing countries (Wood 2016), which includes the Pacific Small Island States. This has repercussions for civil society sustainability (della Porta 2013, Pratt 2016). Without meaningful channels for political participation in national politics, and shrinking spaces at the global level, social movement actors globally are being excluded, pushed to the margins and searching for alternative institutions (della Porta 2013).

In this context, Pacific feminists are increasingly interacting with regional peers and looking for ways to build and strengthen regional alliances. Especially in recent years, there have been various initiatives in the Pacific region to build and strengthen regional alliances among civil society actors. This chapter focuses on one such initiative, the Inaugural Pacific Feminist Forum (PFF), and explores the role of this forum in generating a regional voice for Pacific feminists. The PFF took place in November 2016 in Suva, Fiji, and brought together over 100 women from 13 different countries in the Pacific region. This chapter outlines how this forum was designed, how participants perceived it and what it achieved.

Empirically, as flagged in the methods chapter, this chapter draws on interviews with participants and organisers of the PFF, a focus group with five young Fijian women, interviews

with regional institutions and regional donors, my participatory observations during the PFF in Suva, Fiji, in 2016, and a close analysis of the documents produced before and during the PPF, such as the Program (Appendix 5) and the Charter of Feminist Principles for Pacific Feminists (Appendix 4).

In my analysis of the PFF, I focus particularly on the capacity of a regional forum to include and accommodate diverse feminist voices across the region and on the prospects of developing 'a shared vision' on gender-related issues. These gender-related issues include advancing gender equality to ground action in all areas, including ending violence against women; lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer (LBTQ) rights; leadership and participation in decision-making; and equal opportunities.

The analysis carried out in this chapter suggests that the PFF offered a crucial space for Pacific women to take a more coordinated and structured approach to their collective action at the regional level. A distinguishing feature of this collective action or collective thinking was that, rather than requiring participants to come together under a 'shared identity', it enabled their temporal collaboration under 'shared interests' without having to let go of other facets of their advocacy. More specifically, the PFF led to an understanding of Pacific feminism as a 'project identity', under which women with diverse understandings of feminism came together and sought to craft a regional voice for advocacy without having to reconcile their differences or disagreements. The chapter shows how this happened in the context of PFF and discusses the meaning of 'project identity' for establishing and sustaining regional alliances.

The interest in the potential for collective action at the regional level is also set in the context of the renewed focus on regionalism in the Pacific (as detailed in chapter 3). The Framework for Pacific Regionalism (PIFS 2014) made it clear that:

> *regionalism is not just about geography and economics; it is also about the governance of a region that is, collectively, under increasing strain, and whose societies are experiencing new vulnerabilities (PIFS 2017).*

As various scholars (Taylor 2015, Slatter 2015, Bryar and Naupa 2017) have noted in recent years, there has been a move to a rethink on Pacific regionalism. This makes the questions this chapter explores topical and timely. The renewed focus on regionalism was explored in more

detail in the chapter 3 but it also forms part of the context of formal and informal regional coordination against which the PFF took place.

The chapter is structured in four sections. In the first section after this introduction, I offer a brief description of the PFF and provide an explanation of why and how it was created, who was invited to take part in it and what topics and issues were covered in the agenda of the PFF. I also present the design features of the PFF, paying particular attention to the strategies of broadening the participation in PFF discussions. In the second section, I offer an analysis of the interviews conducted with the PFF organisers and participants about the role of the PFF in building regional feminist alliances and suggest five insights. In this section, I also consider the publicly announced outcome of the PFF, which is the Pacific Charter of Feminist Principles for Pacific Feminists (the Pacific Feminist Charter), and discuss the meaning of this document for the development of feminist civil society in the region. In the third section, I consider the PFF as a project identity. Finally, in the fourth section, I look at how the charter has been used beyond the PFF.

5.1 The Pacific Feminist Forum: Objectives and Key Design Features

The Inaugural Pacific Feminist Forum was held at the University of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji in November 2016 over three days. It brought together feminists, activists and women human rights defenders from around the Pacific to strategise, build networks and negotiate a charter of feminist principles from which a coordinated platform of advocacy could arise. This descriptive section covers the organisers, participants, objectives, program and key design features of the PFF. It also flags challenges faced.

The Organisers of the PFF

The PFF was organised by a diverse range of women's organisations who stated their common aspiration was convening a forum for celebrating Pacific feminism and strengthening the regional networks for a stronger voice on gender-related issues (Pacific Feminist Forum Program 2016). This was underpinned by the idea of 'transformative feminist change' facilitated by diverse women's organisations, with a forum established to identify common issues of concern and a collective way forward in addressing those issues (Pacific Feminist

Forum Program 2016). The transformative expectation associated with the PFF was that it sought to offer a space for participants, composed of feminists, women human rights defenders and advocates, to regroup, learn, share challenges and forge new relationships among activists and strengthen existing ones. They hoped that joining forces across all diversities, including age, sexuality and geography, could create new and transformative alliances as flagged in the opening quote to this chapter by Michelle Reddy.

The organisers of the PFF reflected organisational and personal diversity. The steering committee was made up of the organisations shown in Table 2.

	Organisation	**Description**
i.	Haus of Khameleon	A youth-led trans group
ii.	Fiji Women's Rights Movement	A feminist human rights organisation that links local concerns to global debates
iii.	Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality	A feminist lesbian, bisexual, transgender collective, working on issues of human rights and social justice
iv.	Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance	A network of regional, international and locally based organisations working with and for young women leaders across the Pacific region
v.	Bold Alliance	Business management, specialising in operational, administrative, marketing and communications

Table 2: Steering Committee, Pacific Feminist Forum, Suva, Fiji, 2016

Beyond the organisers' steering committee, other partners included the University of the South Pacific, We Rise Coalition, IWDA, FemLink, Westpac, Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development, Australian High Commission, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. These partners were a mix of private sector, academic institutions, government and civil society organisations, either Australian based or Asia-Pacific or Pacific Islands based and/or focused. The only government officials present at the first PFF were Australian, from the High Commission, which reflects the comments made in interviews that Australian government officials bypass the state to support Pacific women's organisations directly (Interview #33, 2017). By the second PFF, held in 2019, this had changed, with the event opened by the Fijian Minister for Women (Vuniwaqa 2019).

The organising committee needed to make value choices about whom to involve and what to do, and the process as to who to invite was lengthy. The existence of a pre-existing dynamic relationship between the steering committee, through their work locally, regionally and globally, allowed the event to come together and their networks reach as many potential participants as possible.

The Participants of the PFF

Although the Pacific Islands region might look like a homogenous entity from outside, there are significant differences among these countries, each reflecting different cultures and histories, and different stories of marginalisation. More specifically, the PFF brought together participants from 13 countries – Fiji, New Caledonia, Marshall Islands, Samoa, PNG, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Bougainville, Vanuatu, Kiribati, New Zealand and Australia.

Attendance at the PFF was mediated through a selection process. Applications were due three months before the PFF date and required a written proposal as well as references. The call for applications was advertised on the social media sites of the organising partners and by word of mouth. Letters of endorsement were required to make a case for participating in the PFF. Figure 2 shows the PFF participants in Suva, Fiji.

Figure 2: PFF Participants, Suva, Fiji, November 2016, Source: Facebook update of PFF (last accessed on 10 May 2018)

Key Objectives of the PFF

The purpose of the PFF, as stated in the Program, was to 'share stories, map journeys and build the feminist movement in the Pacific (Pacific Feminist Forum Program 2016). It was initiated and managed by a diverse steering committee and described in the Program as a 'civil society space of collaboration', focusing on 'respect', 'diversity', 'intersectionality' and 'intergenerational leadership and activism' (Pacific Feminist Forum Program, 2016). The PFF had two main features: an emphasis on Pacific feminism and a focus on network building. Overall, the PFF aimed to convene a diverse and influential network of Pacific feminists, reflect on key issues paramount to gender equality and women's rights, and collaborate to enable a new wave of feminism to flourish.

Emphasis on Pacific feminism

The title of 'Pacific Feminist' was given to the forum. This may have been copying other feminist forums in other regions similarly styled, including the previously held European Feminist Forum (EU Feminist Forum, 2020) and, as Yvonne Underhill-Sem (2019) has suggested, the African Feminist Forum (African Feminist Forum 2020). However, it was also a political act as feminism is a contested term in the Pacific, sometimes labelled a Western term or a hangover from colonisation (Marsh 1998).

The experience of the PFF as a site of intense sharing binds the community of participants, as we were there together, working, living, eating and sleeping for the period and cut off from our other lives. There was a sense of 'ours', not individuals. This was part of the design too – the keynote speaker spoke of the collective history or 'herstory' rather than her own accomplishments, and all sessions were panels, illustrating the power of the collective rather than shining a light on individuals (Pacific Feminist Forum 2016b).

In line with the focus on Pacific-specific feminism, the facilitators explained that this meant they were transparent in their learnings in order to help others, as they themselves were learning lessons from 'building the road as we walk it' (Pacific Feminist Forum 2016b). They opened the circle to all and sought to ensure a diversity of voices was heard: young, old, all abilities and different sexualities. They were open to sharing pitfalls, failures and lessons learnt, and to answering questions.

The language of the PFF sessions and the charter makes it clear that there are specific Pacific feminisms to suit Pacific issues, problems and culture. A session on feminist and civil society-led research on day 2 at the PFF noted the importance of feminists and civil society learning to generate their own research, and this was suggested as a way forward to escape the colonising of Western-funded projects. My empirical work has led me to agree with scholars such as Saparinah Sadli and Marilyn Porter that each group of feminists has the responsibility to create its own feminisms 'appropriate to its own needs' (Sadli and Porter 1999). There are many feminisms, each with their own validity. A third gender exists in some but not all Pacific cultures (Barrett 2019) but they are both integrated and marginalised (Farran 2010). The PFF included both Haus of Khameleon, which is a youth and transgender feminist-led feminist movement, and DIVA, which is a lesbian and trans support organisation. All brought their own agenda but could work across difference with other women's organisations to map new journeys and new paths for an inclusive feminism for the Pacific. They worked side by side with more traditional women's organisations. Part of this push for new paths included moving to a whole-of-Pacific diverse intersectional involvement.

Focus on network building in the region

An important objective of the PFF was to enable the formation of regional networks (Pacific Feminist Forum 2016b). The PFF aimed to build and strengthen the regional network as the first specifically 'Pacific', specifically 'feminist' forum, bringing Pacific women together, and noted that the efforts of women in the Pacific on gender equality had been present in the region (but not styled as 'feminist') (Griffen 1976). The forum acknowledged this as it placed a thematic emphasis on past struggles and achievements of Pacific women and paused to acknowledge women's human rights defenders.

The dialogue was styled as a sharing of perspectives rather than a debate. By using different perspectives, keeping an open mind and giving enough time, shared understandings developed, and the networks of individuals and organisations grew. Scholars have pointed out the importance of this in creating connections with one another and fostering future cooperation (Walsh 2007). Katherine Walsh (2007:46), for example, argued that dialogue can be effective to confront conflict and forge connections. She asserted that dialogue can allow participants to achieve a balance between unity and diversity. Given time, it forges connections and

understandings, active listening and empathy. This can foster future cooperation or establish common ground.

An inclusive program

The PFF lasted for three days and covered a range of specific issues women face in national and regional spaces, such as where to find funding, coalition building in the Pacific, legal gender recognition, realities of organising and building movements in the Pacific, and strategies of navigating diversity (see Appendix 5). Of particular interest to the research undertaken for this thesis was a session on Pacific feminist civil society-led research (on day 3) and the session focusing on the realities of organising and building women's movements in the Pacific region (Pacific Feminist Forum 2016b). In these sessions, the organisers encouraged participants to tell their own stories through research projects and take control of what is researched about the Pacific. The main reason for this was to increase the number of authentic stories and diverse experiences about the Pacific, as they felt that these stories were not being told. They were transparent about the need for this, and about their own efforts to skill themselves up to do this.

The common identity of coming from the Pacific was strongly signalled at the outset of the forum and highlighted a common background from which to launch discussions. For example, the opening included the giving of a gift from the Kanak participants, as well as garlanding, which is a sign of respect and is a traditional welcome, to the most important participants. Contrasted with this tradition at the opening was an opening dance from a modern Pacific dance company which may have been a way to foreground that times and customs change and to be open to moving with the times and coming up with new interpretations of culture.

Thematic organisation was exhibited in the panel design and parallel sessions, with grouped themes each day. As shown in Table 3, on day 1 the overall theme was 'where have we been, where are we going', day 2 was designed for 'provoking and proposing', and day 3 was designed for 'building strong Pacific feminist movements'.

Day	**Thematic focus**	**Themes for parallel sessions**
Day 1	Pacific Feminism: Where have we been, where are we going?	Coming Home: A Pacific Welcoming for Pacific Feminists. Setting the Scene (of the PFF) Pacific Feminist Voices from Near and Far

		Pacific Women 'Talanoa' – What is "Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development?" We Rise: Bold ideas, alliances and collective action in coalition building Charting a Feminist Way Forward Celebrating Young Feminists
Day 2	Women Human Rights Defenders Day – Provoking and proposing	Celebrating Women Human Rights Defenders Day with a Feminist Knowledge Building Circle Legal Gender Recognition: Making the Links: Trans Feminist Reflections for the Pacific Pacific Feminist Civil Society Led Research – Lessons Learnt from Building the Road as we walk it Feminist Learning Circle and Listening
Day 3	Building strong Pacific feminist movements	Realities of Organising as Feminists in Rural and Remote Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Building a Feminist Movement Through Communications: Navigating Diversity Storytelling Deliberation Over the Pacific Feminist Charter Launch of the 2016 Pacific Feminist Charter The Pacific Feminist Charter – (time to be accepted and endorsed)

Table 3: Pacific Feminist Forum Program and Parallel Sessions, University of the South Pacific, Suva Fiji, 2016

The sessions were described in the program schedule (See Appendix 5) as designed to enable knowledge sharing and to enhance the skill set of participants in advocacy and research. The organisers also sought to create an empowering environment for participants, where knowledge

on both feminist advocacy and alliance building was produced and built upon (Pacific Feminist Forum 2016b).

Key design features of the PFF

A close analysis of the PFF shows that there are various important design features of this forum which are worth emphasising in the context of this chapter.

The PFF offered a space for creative expression

The PFF offered a space for creative expression and displayed innovative design broader than the typical panel or plenary. For example, along with panels, roundtables and keynote speeches, the PFF participants employed pluralistic ways of expression, such as through posters, dance, chants and art – elsewhere styled as 'artivism' (Msimanga and Nijenhuis 2017). The PFF used music, spoken word poetry, drag performance, lip-synching, readings, open microphone, guitars, drums, protest songs, and call and response. This ensured a much wider opportunity for all voices to be heard, rather than reliance on the usual presentation styles. Pacific scholars Tui Nicola Clery and Noelene Nabulivou (2011) have written of the importance of safe creative spaces in hearing diverse perspectives and imagining possibilities:

> *In coming together to share stories, women make linkages interpersonally, conceptually and practically. A collective consciousness begins to develop and grow. The use of theatre and storytelling is a conscious choice. The form and process is integral to the outcomes for communities and allows the entire creative process to be powerfully portrayed and shared…in this safe drama space we can play with ideas and possibilities, question norms, situations and conflicts and imagine new possibilities* (2011:167).

The PFF used many different and creative forms of participation to flesh out diverse perspectives. In a World Café style workshop (Carson 2011), discussion points and questions were assigned to each table. Facilitators encouraged participants to answer the questions, then choose another table. Participants moved between tables to discuss various topics. By moving several times, participants had multiple opportunities to have a say on a variety of topics and meet other participants and hear more stories. This also provided an opportunity for the greatest

number of people talking about the greatest number of topics, as it happened simultaneously and in parallel, and voice was not limited to the chosen panel presenters.

Another facilitated session was youth-led by very young girls – some as young as 12 and 13. They ran theatre-style workshops where identified issues were discussed then acted out like a 'play'. This permitted many voices and various performative expressions beyond verbal expression to be included in the sessions. Theatrical skits were then used as conversation prompts and for team building among participants.

Another workshop lined the walls with decade timelines of key feminist moments, generated by participants who added their own key moments. This sharing tool enabled the breadth of lived experience to be illustrated and informed discussion and understanding on diverse lived experiences (participant observation, PFF Day 2, 29 November 2016).

The organisers acknowledged the power of creative outlets. For example, the 'tok story' open mic night was described as follows: 'Music and the arts have a reach and a pull that can reach many. In the Pacific this is inbuilt into the oral culture of storytelling and knowledge sharing' (Pacific Feminist Forum 2016b). The open mic was a space for non-plenary style presentations. For example, a young woman presented slam poetry in which the anger at not being permitted by society to be in control of her own body, own freedom, own sexuality and own identity was very raw, and the audience reacted and got on board with her passion. Transgender women also used this space for performance and political commentary about identity, freedoms and being true to one's self.

The PFF drew on culturally relevant participatory practices

The design of the PFF was strategic in addressing upfront the hardships or barriers in one of the first sessions, using a traditional Pacific woven mat made out of pandanus leaf to enable diverse actors to outline their intersectional struggles. The women sat in a circle on a woven mat on the floor at the front of the room. They were observed by the other participants and the session was amplified by a microphone so all in the room could hear the discussion. It was introduced as a feminist practice as there was no head of the circle. The rules were thus: In the first round the women were invited to speak their 'truth'. This was in acknowledgement that they may well change their mind later but that this was what they believed now. The second round was to reflect on or expand or extend the analysis of something they had heard said in the first round.

After that there was an opportunity for questions and comments from the wider participatory body who had listened.

The PFF created a crucial space for storytelling and listening

This structure meant that each participant had the opportunity to be heard but also had to actively listen to each other, knowing that in the second round they had to pick up on something that someone else had said. One of the other participants later commented to me that they should have brought the mat out from the outset as, she said, that is the way that decisions are reached in the Pacific (Interview #20, 2016). It offers an example of both an innovative practice worth further investigation, and a tradition tied up with culture and with Pacific ways of talk.

There was also a storytelling angle to the circle. For example, rather than just stating that access to comprehensive sex education is a need for the Pacific youth, one person in the circle talked of her experience as a teen mum and the reaction she got from her family and her community (participant observation, PFF Day 1, Suva, Fiji, November 2016).

The circle participants were chosen to ensure a full range of voices was teased out: there was a young woman, an older woman, a lesbian woman, a disabled woman and a woman from an elite background who spoke of her privilege and now her activism. One of the stand-out moments of this feminist knowledge circle was when the conservative traditional woman from the longstanding indigenous women's group Soqosoqo Vakamarama I Taukei (SSVM), invited one of the transgender women from the transgender equality advocacy organisation, Haus of Khameleon, to come to her next meeting where she said she would welcome her. This was later reflected on by another participant as one of the moments from the PFF she would remember as long as she lived (participant observation, PFF Day 1, Suva, Fiji, November 2016). It was very powerful and, even taking away the potential performative element, was the type of gesture that bringing together women in solidarity is designed to achieve.

The mat was a significant part of the design of the PFF as a breakaway from a more staid conference style. Recognition of its significance in Pacific culture (Young-Leslie 2007) was part of the background of the use of the pandanus mat as detailed earlier in this chapter. A participant noted it is *'how most of the forums are held in the region'* and, *'We sit on mats and we discuss our issues'* (Interview #16, 2016).

The mat is recognisable as a place for discussion and deliberation. This setting perhaps made possible the invitation extended as flagged above, as it is a place that has always generated discussion and ways forward over difficult issues and is a place that represents the respectful coming together in the spirit of finding solutions.

The mat practice over the three days served as a background to understanding but was also political, as in some Pacific Island countries it is the older men who serve as decision makers (SPC 2020), so to see feminists claiming the space as decision makers around the mat would also set the tone against cultural practice (Bhagwan-Rolls 2018).

The conversations taking place on the pandanus mat offered a practical illustration of the power of circle deliberation, which has been described in scholarship from other sites (Lee 2014). As Lee argued (2014:81), circles are 'symbolically used to take turns sharing, to get away from positional power or authority', and circle sharing visibly establishes equality. She envisaged the power of the whole demonstrated through the circle. The feminist knowledge circle dialogue offered a platform for inclusion and was not for one party to impose ideas on the other – it was just to see ideas afresh – and was as much about revealing difference as striving for a kind of unity (Walsh 2007). All participants in the circle were chosen to flag different angles and different starting points.

This symbolic power was demonstrated in using the mat circle in the service of a feminist-run forum (a room of equals without the enforcement of hierarchy), and the organisers strove to adopt a practice with limited resort to intervention by a chair into discussions. This practice was the aim from the outset but was reinforced within the practice as it went on and others took it up. For example, the session on Pacific feminist civil society-led research was described on the program as a feminist learning circle and listening room, and was not just limited to talk as a means of interacting with one another, but also to the practice of listening. Nor did this circle focus just on successes; it also drew on the mistakes and challenges as part of the learning journey and was openly labelled as such in the program.

Open sharing was part of the practice to lead to movement building, as it enabled young feminists to tackle troubling issues and yet be sustained through energising, uplifting interactions. The PFF aimed to transcend identified barriers so as to be truly inclusive of women who were young, older, disabled, or of diverse sexual orientation through their participation in

hands on decision-making. The organisers described a 'booming voice' of Pacific women collectively speaking for themselves and their countrywomen (Pacific Feminist Forum 2016b).

Limitations of the PFF

Having said that, the PFF was not without its challenges or criticisms. There were also concerns and limitations, as articulated by the participants. A necessary step for sustaining alliances is reflecting wider Pacific whole-of-region identity. A review of the participants list in the program confirms that there were not numerous representatives beyond Fiji, and often the same people were repeatedly on panels, with speakers largely drawn from the organising committee:

> *Since yesterday till today, I haven't seen a good representation of speakers from the region on the opening of the panels in the morning. It's sad. Even right now the sessions that we are having, it's more Fiji-based organisations that are speaking. I, for one, I don't know how and why it's called a forum for the Pacific because it seems more that we are talking about the agendas of Fiji (Interview #20, 2016).*

One interviewee would have liked to have seen more Pacific ways of discussing and deliberating from the outset, rather than the one mat example:

> *Should use mat more, it is our way, it [is] how we make decisions in the Pacific (Interview #20, 2016).*

She expressed concern that there was not full participation from PNG. She commented that many of the speakers were Suva based and did not have a grassroots connection but operated from 'up on high':

> *The dancing at the opening ceremony was not Pacific – it was contemporary. PNG is more grassroots based – here is more up high. Speakers at the PFF are all Suva based. No connection. Speakers are using technical terms. Not full participation from PNG for that reason. Gifts not accepted in the Pacific way (Interview #20, 2016).*

However, she was hopeful that things might improve in future.

One participant raised concerns about not doing Pacific culture right which she put down to the forum being led by Indo-Fijians not indigenous Fijians. She expressed concern that the Indo-

Fijians did not accept a gift from indigenous Kanaks properly. She felt that the indigenous Fijians deliberately held a kava bowl evening in response, to show traditional culture. The closing did end with a traditional Fijian farewell despite foreigners not being properly acknowledged onto land at the outset.

> *The way the gift was received was not Fiji-like. The opening ceremony was done very ... it's not the Pacific way. When we're putting names like Pacific to the forum. When we're using Pacific, Pacific comes with some of the traditions around the region. The opening of the ceremony itself wasn't done the Pacific way. There wasn't a kava done. The dancing was not Fijian. It's a contemporary performance. That person who did the performance of going up the red ribbon is not very islander of us because when you have a keynote speaker sitting at the bottom or a chief sitting at the bottom, you don't go above the head. You are supposed to ask permission before you go up (Interview #20, 2016).*

Instead of being Pacific feminist, as styled, several respondents perceived the PFF as just 'Fiji-plus':

> *Very Fiji-centric, not enough representation from other states, same people (Interview #28, 2017).*

The decision to host in Fiji was possibly due to it being a central transport hub in the Pacific with many flights in and out. Further, the women's movement is strong in Fiji as a result of the constitutional crisis that occurred there and women mobilising as a result. Fiji women have the benefit of being able to do collective work beyond their usual groups as a result of their proximity. This is evident from Facebook posts of regular meetings and also can be seen in the example of the We Rise Coalition, which is newly active, with three-quarters of the coalition being co-located in Fiji. This coalition will be discussed in detail in the next chapter as an example of building strategic alliances across diversity.

Another respondent said:

> *The whole thing yesterday with the opening wasn't very much Pacific-like. That was one thing that I noticed in terms of our traditions here in the region. A thing that's called*

> *Pacific Feminist Forum, if we're talking about these things, we should also show the way of appreciating our diversity in the region and our traditions (Interview #20, 2016).*

Respondents would like to see the PFF broadened out in future:

> *The things that I think would be more ... You know, that could be improved in the future, were to actually make it fully Pacific, not Pacific led by Fiji. That means really investing and making sure there's money for participation, from much more broadly across the Pacific (Interview #28, 2017).*

Some of the participants said the agenda was being pushed too fast for them to be able to take it to their national legislatures. For example, Kiribati and Vanuatu were struggling with the inclusion of LBT and abortion in the charter; as participants explained, faith and religious views form the basis for objections to these activities and hamper dialogue about changing them. As one interviewee explained:

> *It would have been more strategic to have a make your own national charter from pre-set pieces rather than a one size fits all (Interview #34, 2017).*

Another interviewee, after being followed up after the PFF, reported:

> *We are working on a lot of the agenda outlined on the charter and proud to say that the government is doing great in terms of gender inclusion in climate change, education, disability except for the LGBT which is still a battle (correspondence post-PFF with Interviewee # 24, 2016).*

As these interviews reveal, even with a very specific focus on capturing the diversity of the Pacific in its participants, panellists and speakers, some participants still criticised the PFF as not being undertaken in a diverse, truly Pacific-wide way and hoped for future expansion.

Another challenge in sustaining alliances was communication barriers between participants and organisers:

> *One of the gaps leading to our disconnection is that because we did not hear further. I guess our correspondence was only coming from Fiji, this makes it difficult to keep everyone in correspondence (Interview #24, 2016).*

However, resources (both people and money) were stretched, with more forums following soon after, such as the Pacific Civil Society Organising Mechanism Dialogue which was then followed a month later by CSW, all of which involved the same set of actors/representatives from the Pacific. This underscores the importance of growing the numbers and capacity of more Pacific activists in order to make the actions sustainable.

Another participant indicated that her major problems, and ones she felt everyone was struggling with, were a lack of political participation, a lack of overseas mission participation, and a lack of funding support to local women's groups (Interview #36, 2017).

Another challenge was how to make a mechanism cut through. Although the notion of project identity, introduced later in this chapter, offers a useful motivation for the participants to relate to and identify with the regional feminist project, a loose collection of people not following the path set via the Pacific Feminist Charter may fail to achieve better outcomes for gender equality, as was intended. Concrete actions were needed to implement the charter and reporting back mechanisms needed to be set up. There was talk at the conclusion of the PFF of it being annual but to date it has been repeated once, three years later, in 2019. At this 2nd PFF, a Pacific Feminist Charter Action Plan was drawn up, described as 'setting a collective pathway to build solidarity, strengthen resistance and join feminist struggles' (Pacific Feminist Forum 2019). In terms of the creation of a cohort or network, participants have kept in touch via online platforms and several have met up at other meetings, such as the Triennial (Interview #41, 2018).

The Pacific Platform for Action was not used by very many and the Triennial Outcome Statements were used by even fewer.[8] French territories explained that they do not use the Pacific Leaders' Declaration (PLGED) as it is from the Pacific Islands Forum to which they did not belong (until recently) and documents drawn up by the French do not reflect their Pacific lived experience. Perhaps this lack of take up is because these documents were imposed rather than consulted on. Will this make the charter something they use more, as it was deliberated from within and they had the opportunity to have it reflect their suggestions and voices? As one of the key PFF organisers explained, it will aid stronger and more intersectional Pacific representation at global fora:

[8] PPA Review 2017 Report (2017:8). CEDAW, the Beijing Platform and the Pacific Leaders Declaration on Gender Equality were cited as more useful.

> *We are already working nationally and regionally in Pacific Small Island States and from a preparatory meeting in Suva last October, for stronger and intersectional Pacific small island direct and indirect representation into CSW62 (Pacific feminist, 14 February 2018, email correspondence).*

Women participating in the Triennial meeting of Pacific Leaders in 2017 reported that the charter wording was able to be used as a template for recommendations for wording choices in the statement to be given to the Pacific Island Leaders for incorporation and guidance. This was reported as especially useful due to the very short time the Pacific feminists had to craft their recommendations, having come together immediately prior to the Triennial (Interview #38, 2017).

5.2 Building and Strengthening Regional Alliances through PFF: Participants' Views and Experiences

What did participants think about their involvement in the PFF and about the capacity of such regional forums in building alliances across difference, and effecting change at the regional level? In this section, I respond to these questions by drawing on over 30 interviews I conducted with the participants and the organisers of the PFF. As outlined in chapter 4 (methodology chapter), the interviews were semi-structured and aimed to elucidate a diversity of views. The interviews focused on who interviewees worked with, the challenges encountered and their activities in relation to gender equality in the Pacific. As the PFF was very busy, interviews with people based in the Pacific were held in the margins, but several interviews were conducted soon after the event, with people who were based in Canberra and Melbourne.

A close analysis of interviews revealed five key insights about the role of the PFF in building and strengthening feminist alliances in the region.

Insight 1: PFF offered a safe space for Pacific women to meet and to advance a shared agenda across the region

A key function of the PFF for most participants was the opportunity it offered to meet other Pacific feminists and form networks and alliances. The participants emphasised particularly the role of diverse alliances of Pacific women in creating a safe space for dialogue and a Pacific

Feminist Charter. The PFF was facilitating space for change and action, where participants could express their agenda, then unmet at a national or regional level. This role is important, especially in contexts where participants lacked the support and resources at a national level to have their voices heard. Reflecting this, one participant from Fiji noted that women who felt unable to get traction from their national governments could use the benefit of regional level dialogue to find partners, raise concerns and have regional institutions place pressure on their governments to implement change:

> *We were reacting to a closed space. We felt restricted, we felt unsafe, but we also felt the need to talk and discuss. It is not like we weren't having those discussions, but we wanted to have it in other spaces too (Interview #23, 2016).*

Several other participants shared a similar view. They thought that rather than waiting for spaces to open up to be heard, for instance by government actors at the national level, civil society actors should create their own spaces. This was important at the individual level as well, as one participant put it:

> *[creating a space like PFF] gives me feeling that I actually have something to give. When I hear other young women also giving their stories of what they're doing, and then you hear a story of a young woman, and she's like 'I need help', and you go 'I think I know how to help her' (Interview #11, 2016).*

In this context, participants particularly emphasised the value of empowering each other and building new relationships, as well as strengthening the existing ones. This suggests that coming together to share stories is an important part of building connections, as such an experience gives a sense of helping one another rather than working in isolation. Forging relationships and networks this way was perceived as valuable:

> *I learned of the different issues and solutions my sisters from around the world are practising. Most importantly building partnerships and friendships is something I would dearly treasure (Interview #40, 2018).*

The PFF gave Pacific women a space to be heard and to support one another. It served as an intergenerational space, meaning a space for participants of all ages, , to share ideas and speak freely. Some respondents reflected on this, noting that they were accustomed to only having the

elders speak and for young women to find it hard to be heard (for example, Interview #11, 2016). The opening plenary session emphasised that participants, as Pacific feminists, all commonly faced the challenge of transforming the power structures, including those within feminist organisations and movements, as well as 'economic, social, cultural and political structures' (UN 1995). Having experienced exclusion and silencing at a local, global and regional level, the participants reacted positively to the opening of such a space for Pacific feminists to raise their voices. One participant said:

> *This space is an important space. It's bringing women from across the region. At least they can raise their voice at this forum (Interview #20, 2016).*

Another participant commented on it as an opportunity to come together:

> *I think it's an amazing opportunity, and I commend Fiji Women's Rights Movement to having created this platform for not all but some women's organisations within the region to come together (Interview #15, 2016).*

The benefit of sharing stories was highlighted:

> *Here to share experiences, stories, women with disability, women's journey, experience and learn and form coalitions, to influence ideas, projects and programs, meet, see what works, learn what has been successful (Interview #18, 2016).*

The respondents in my interviews also revealed the importance of the trust and safety of spaces created. The PFF was set up as a safe space. A safe space is a place where anyone can relax and be able to fully express themselves, without fear of being made to feel uncomfortable, unwelcome or unsafe due to sex, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, cultural background, religious affiliation, age or physical or mental ability. The Safe Space Network has described i a place where the rules guard each person's self-respect and dignity and strongly encourage everyone to respect others (Network 2017). This means, in the context of the PFF, that participants were free to express themselves and share their stories and their truths without fear of repercussions or judgment. This was done by having a participant application process in advance which could have weeded out threatening groups, and having some sessions closed to the public and the media. Sessions open to the public were clearly labelled as such and lanyards were to be worn at all times so that participants could identify

people. The residence where participants stayed was women only. Transgender women were free to speak about their lives, struggles and activism. Daily sessions had a maximum number of participants, so that groups remained small and multiple voices could be heard. . As participants, we were required to submit our names to the organisers' table each morning for the sessions we wanted to attend.

The PFF came at a time when diverse sexuality is a contested topic and so there was the ability to close these sessions to the public to enable people to talk freely and safely and not necessarily be 'outed' if they did not choose to be. For example, in some Pacific countries LBT identity is still seen as a form of deviance. Part of the creation of a safe space is how respectfully disagreements are handled. I was particularly focused, in this context, on how the PFF dealt with diversity within the Pacific feminist movement and included topics and speakers reflecting diver sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI). The organisers asked participants to open their minds and hearts to new ideas, new ways of interaction and expression, including in relation to SOGI diversity, and new concepts and different ways of seeing the world (Pacific Feminist Forum 2016b).

Insight 2: Acknowledging differences was important for building a shared vision

The PFF was focused on generating a shared vision for Pacific feminists. However, finding a shared vision was not equally easy across all topics. In this context, several participants spoke of the cultural barriers to young women participating in decision-making and leadership. One young interviewed participant expressed frustration at older women (not just men) not making space at the table for young women (Interview #11, 2016). The PFF sought to address this issue by encouraging young women to take leadership roles within the PFF. Girls as young as 12 were leading the sessions on identity, issues experienced, barriers faced and moments when one recognised one's own leadership. Reflecting on the importance of providing space for younger women, one interviewee who was present at the PFF but interviewed after the event, noted:

> *I thought the engagement of young women in particular, including quite young women, you know those 12- and 13-year-olds, was just fantastic. Just fantastic, and really modelled engagement of a younger generation in an important forum, and in important roles in ways where they genuinely led the agenda, and got a lot of positive reinforcement, but that they did superbly at it (Interview # 28, 2017).*

Besides encouraging the participation of young women and girls, there were intentional efforts to include transgender women, disabled women, remote and urban, older, more experienced actors and those new to the movement. It was suggested in an interview that the diversity of feminist organisations in Fiji could have been behind the leading push by Fiji to embrace diversity in the women's movement and to open doors for inclusion and recognition of the heterogeneity of 'Pacific women' (Interview #38, 2017). This was backed up by another participant, who was present at the PFF but interviewed after the event, who noted:

> *[PFF] has been really led by FWRM, and then individuals within FWRM, and the genuine inclusion of DIVA and Haus of Khameleon as allies, and DIVA as part of the coalition. You know where you have the individuals with good personal power and gravitas and contribute their outreach activities, it's really ingrained in them to seek ... diverse inclusion, and they get ... if there's any slippage they get reminded by their members, who are part of that. I think that's just really a credit to the thinking and approach, and connections of different individuals that have had an institutional impact, that have sort of changed the organisation (Interview #28, 2017).*

Some feminists at the PFF were active in organisations and were already participating in institutional forums, such as the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) which, as noted earlier, is a key global space for monitoring progress on women worldwide:

> *Pacific feminists are always present at global spaces lobbying for issues important to us, but there has never been a space in our own region to engage and strengthen solidarity (Reddy 2016).*

Other participants were individual grassroots women with limited regional and global outreach. Feminist organising of these individuals and organisations at the PFF was aimed at making strategies, and gaining new allies and effective networks for a sustainable movement.

The conversations and discussions during the PFF also brought significant disagreements to the fore. Despite the willingness of participants to build a cohesive regional movement, there were disagreements on a variety of contentious issues, largely emanating from faith concerns. While some topics were easier to get general agreement on, such as the framing of 'women's rights as human rights' and the need to protect women's human rights defenders (participant observation, PFF Day 1, opening session, Suva, Fiji, November 2016), there were significant

disagreements on others. The more contested topics, judging by the comments expressed at the PFF (participant observation of charter negotiation, PFF Day 3, Suva, Fiji, November 2016), were decriminalisation of abortion and rights related to sexual orientation and gender identity, such as whether advocacy for legal recognition of the third gender ought to be the *main* focus of the charter or one *amongst* several focuses. These disagreements, based on my observation of the reasons given by participants, stemmed from these issues not having been encountered before, from possible cultural or legislative resistance at home, or from religious concerns (participant observation, PFF Day 3, Suva, Fiji, November 2016). Group discussions focused on concerns about how faith and feminism can sit together given the context of religious teachings against abortion. Some women initially said that they could not support the inclusion of the decriminalisation of abortion in the draft charter .

Similar concerns, based on faith or concerns about the ability to get the changes through the parliament once home, were raised when it came to support for sexual orientation and gender diversity in the charter. Reflecting this, one interviewee noted the difficulty of pressing these issues with her national legislature. She expressed concerns over supporting the charter sections or sections that referred to lesbians and sexual and gender diversity She felt that if she took that version of the charter back home nobody would support it because of its call for the decriminalisation of homosexuality (Interview #34, 2017). The issue of sexual orientation and gender identity was respectfully discussed at the PFF, and various views noted. Drafting changes were made to accommodate concerns in order to reach a shared vision that could be owned by the group. The negotiation of the charter was an opening to hear and discuss objections to each claim.

Cultural norms in the Pacific and homophobia and stigma have been flagged as underpinning this resistance. As Tara Chetty and Rachel Faleatua (2015) noted:

> *persons whose sexual orientation or gender identity does not conform to majority norms are nonetheless often stigmatised, discriminated against, and subjected to bullying and in many cases horrendous sexual abuse, including by close family members. Protection of the rights and freedoms, and recognition and respect for the sexual rights of sexual minorities is way overdue in our region, where in most countries same-sex relationships are criminalised and homophobic hate crimes occur (Chetty and Faleatua 2015:26).*

Participants also flagged the same difficulties in pursuing the decriminalisation of abortion in their home countries, which was another charter provision (Interview #34, 2017). The longest group deliberation during the PFF was regarding abortion decriminalisation. Abortion has been a controversial issue in the Pacific (Graue 2014), with some countries imposing criminal sanctions (Chetty and Faleatua 2015, Latu 2017, White et al 2017). In response to some participants raising women's safety concerns as one basis for not wanting to include provisions on abortion, Other participants were able to explain that not decriminalising abortion would mean women were less safe, as they seek unsafe procedures (see, for example, Council 2020).

Another participant explained that decriminalisation would make it more likely that women would seek professional help and thus be safer. A nun attending the PFF told stories of women in her care who had an abortion, which led to the women and their husbands being jailed. She asked: 'Who would look after the children?' (participant observation, PFF Day 3, Suva, Fiji, November 2016). An interviewee recalled this discussion:

> *because what became apparent in that discussion is that very many of those who spoke against the inclusion of that clause in the document, were not speaking against the decriminalisation of abortion, they were speaking against abortion. Sister got that it was about the decriminalisation, not about anything else (Interview #28, 2017).*

This indication from the this nun that she had no objection to the decriminalisation of abortion addressed the hesitation among some participants and allowed the provision to be included in the charter with no further debate or changes. Yvonne Underhill-Sem (2019:264) also noted the importance of the 'women of faith' supporting the calls for decriminalisation of both homoexuality and abortion. There is a religious culture in the Pacific that the largely secular Australian women present left Pacific women present to speak to. As one participant (from an Australian organisation in the We Rise Coalition) stated:

> *All I did was say to her, 'Well Sister, you have to say that out loud. You can't just say it to us'. So ... she sort of demurred a bit, but I just asked the person with the microphone to come over and gave it to her, and then she made her intervention, which was just ... so timely, you know, and beautiful. It was more to say, 'Say what you're saying to the broader group, you can make a contribution'. Once I knew that she wasn't going to go the other way (Interview #28, 2017).*

This was an important moment for Australian women (such as this observer interviewed) to not participate in the discussion so it generated by and owned by Pacific women.

In relation to the deliberations on decriminalisation of lesbian, bisexual and transgendered women and advocacy for the legal recognition of the third gender, the draft wording changed from seeking legal recognition of the third gender as the main focus to just one of the focuses of advocacy, which appeased concerns in the room. This demonstrates how the PFF took a strategic path to a shared vision.

The PFF provided a constructive space for the participants to talk about their disagreements, and to look for pragmatic, practical solutions that they could all agree on and live with. The other points proposed for the charter were uncontroversial, with only some minor tinkering with words. There was applause and hand shaking at the conclusion of the charter discussion and its endorsement. Music and protest and action songs, as shown in Figure 3, rounded off the day and closed the forum.

Figure 3: Celebrating the endorsement of the Charter with song and dance
Source: Fiji Women's Rights Movement

Insight 3: Building effective alliances required recognising the minorities within the group and countering their marginalisation

In social movements there is a need to value difference without imposing exclusion (Young 2002). Yet even movements bringing marginalised groups together can still have minorities within the larger group, with 'in-groups' or 'out-groups', and care must be taken to leave no one behind. Scholars have identified that in- groups and out-groups exist in social movements, leading to differences in the extent to which members see themselves as being part of the group (Tyler and Smith 1995). At the PFF, out-groups and in-groups could be perceived at the start of the forum. By this I mean that the in-group members were the organising committee who knew everyone present, including from their own global work. The out-groups appeared, from my observation, to be made up of first-time attendees at a feminist civil society space, those who did not say much, those who were not on any panels and those who did not ask any questions or make comments. Staff from one of the leading organisers, Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality Fiji, formed a definite in-group. As discussed in the literature review chapter, not all women have the same concerns and so do not necessarily have a collective identity, or a shared basis or agenda for action. Thus, to support an intersectional approach, out groups and marginalised women were a visible part of the design and discussions at the PFF. The very visibility of diverse woman at the PFF led to opening up new discussions on diversity:

> *There's issues of diversity that are being discussed more and more and being made more visible (Interview #18, 2016).*

Based on my interviews, some interesting potential intra-group power relations might have arisen between transgender women vs cis women, young women vs old women, religious women vs secular women, women from Fiji vs other Pacific women, Indo-Fijian vs iTaukei (indigenous) Fijian women, and Pacific women vs Australian women. Despite this potential, due to the time women spend residing and sharing together, and the forum design, there was evidence of a coming together over the days of the forum. Differences were put aside for the purposes of strategically agreeing to a focused way forward through the Charter, in a common project identity of 'Pacific feminist'. Indeed, scholars on identity and diversity, such as Colgan and Ledwith (2000), argue that identity is developed and sustained through group support and solidarity, and that self-perception as an activist feeds further activity. My interviews and

observations confirmed that group identification grew when a person recognised she had ideas, feelings, interests and characteristics in common with others in the group and could see the potential for collective action:

> *Sisterhood existing already. Melanesian ones, stronger than others. I am Melanesian and I have a strong link – not sure if the others are connecting the same. Fiji, Solomon Islands and PNG do come together. There is no forum specifically for Melanesian women. They do connect and participate at meetings in the Pacific. Melanesians relate as pidgin makes communication easier if they don't understand English. This creates an alliance (Interview #19, 2016).*

To limit the risk of seeing only differences and to highlight what diverse women had in common, so as to forge links, transgender women were included from the outset of the PFF. This created new personal links, given that some participants indicated they had not had much interaction with transgender women previously. The transgender women took a performative role at the PFF, leading song and performance, often in drag. This highlighted the visibility of the transgender women's activities at the forum. As part of my observation, this appeared to be a deliberate strategy as part of the programming. The inclusion of trans rights and sexual orientation rights has been contentious at a global level, so I wanted to understand if the willingness to include LBT rights was greater at the regional level. To understand this further, I examined the literature on the use of creativity to turn a negative into a positive. Colgan and Ledwith (2000) indicated that social creativity attempts to develop strategies whereby a social identity seen as negative is seen more positively. At the PFF, the organising committee prepared several performances in drag for two occasions – opening night and closing night. The performances were entertaining and passionate, but also spoke to issues of inclusion, rejection and non-binary representations of gender; many of the participants might have never previously seen a drag performance. The repeat of several of the songs on the closing gave them the status of an unofficial anthem, and a Tongan trans activist took on leadership status as a result of her performances. This challenged any sense of an out-group and transformed relationships by cementing the transgender women very clearly into the centre of the feminist project; for some participants, this was new. As one interviewee explained:

> *Coming back from the Pacific Feminist Forum, I guess that's the first feminism forum that I attended, and I guess that [was] also the first body that looks into feminism and*

> *also women's human rights and other human rights like ... I can't remember the name. Fe-men. Yeah. Lesbians and ... [trans]. This, I guess the PFF is the first forum that discussed this (Interview #34, 2017).*

Another participant said:

> *I don't feel uncomfortable in the space of, what do you call it, transgender, or the lesbians, or the gays. I don't feel uncomfortable in their space. I have a lot of respect for them (Interview #15, 2016).*

This latter participant came from an older generation, and had a particular religious and cultural perspective, and yet she respected the inclusion of transgender women and, indeed, as this quote reflects, saw the PFF as their 'space'.

While the involvement of lesbian and transgender women was new to some, for other people it was the basis of advocacy over a lifetime. By spending time with one another, sharing hurts as well as hopes, relationships were built person to person; this may have overcome some of the religious concerns held by some communities and led to the acceptance of the trans participants (Interviews #15, 2016 and #34, 2017). A close look at the politics of the inclusion of transgender women reveals the creation of a changed perception of these participants, by other women, as insiders rather than outsiders, through deliberate participation alongside each other:

> *I think you saw that sort of changed, just at PFF, with you know, different individuals getting up and saying, 'I've never considered the issues for trans, or gender-diverse people'. You know, like our Solomons partners talked about that to me, and also with a sort of commitment saying that they will go and seek to find groups within Solomons. A bit harder for PNG, but I think it always changes around personal engagement and relationships, and then ... sort of trust, and confidence, and awareness of issues. If you have that and if you share principles and values, then you can sort of see that alignment (Interview #28, 2017).*

This inclusion was enhanced by establishing categories of belonging as Pacific *feminist*, rather than using terms such as woman and women's movement (to avoid being binary or trans-exclusionary). Scholars have identified it is through a relationship that a semblance of unity is established (Hetherington 1998). This may explain why the central position of trans inclusion

in the PFF project supported the successful incorporation of multiple agendas into the Charter. This positioning was in contrast to the global feminist project (Scott-Dixon 2006, Browne 2009) where transgender and non-binary women have often been pushed to the margins, or their rights ignored altogether(Rothschild 2004 and 2005, Interview #20, 2016 and #38, 2017).

The various impacts of the PFF were raised in interviews, including information transmission and its importance for building a shared identification for a 'strategic sisterhood':

> *We need spaces where we can sit together and discuss and get to learn about each other and know this is how we develop those partnerships (Interview #16, 2016).*

and collective yet diverse identity formation:

> *developing partnerships, intersectional identification, open up binaries (Interview #18, 2016).*

Pacific spaces for feminism are diverse spaces for action, sharing experience to influence ideas, projects and programs. When I asked a young participant if she, as a transgender woman, felt included in the feminist movement, she responded:

> *Being part of the women's movement as an activist, I have come to learn a lot about the different capacities that I need to embody in different spaces. It has been a struggle doing that, but I try to embrace and celebrate it (Interview #18, 2016).*

This concept of embodying 'different capacities' in 'different spaces' highlights how alliances can be a strategic decision for the 'project', rather than a natural 'fit' mandating consensus on all areas. This is reflected throughout the PFF and the strategic decisions forming part of the Charter negotiations.

These interviews revealed that diversifying feminism in the Pacific context means inclusion of lesbian and transgender women, reconciling faith and feminism, and speaking up for youth voices to be heard even when culture dictates otherwise. Activists can create new spaces hospitable to views that have been suppressed by the state. Regional spaces are robust arenas for dialogue to diversify feminism. The PFF has the potential to increase the numbers of people who will advocate for gender equality, sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) rights, and trans inclusion.

In one session, Pacific feminists came together to talk about the uncomfortable and silent issues faced by activists across the Pacific. Diverse women from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands and Solomon Islands sat on the pandanus woven mat to discuss feminism in the Pacific. Participants named some of the issues around exclusion and marginalisation:

> *Feminism is a power, but when you are excluded, you are prevented from exercising self-determination. (Adi Finau Tabaukacoro, the General Secretary for the Soqosoqo Vakamarama in Fiji, participant observation, 28 November 2016).*
>
> *When we are marching, the scary part is as an LBT [person] how everyone looks at us…I've experienced that every time [I march in public]. (Kini Tinai from the Patriots Community and Sports Club and mobiliser for Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality Fiji).*
>
> *I continuously thank the trans and women's movement to give space to talk about our issues. It's about accepting our diversity. It's not wrong being different – it makes us human (Amasai – House of Khameleon, Fiji).*
>
> *It's hard to speak out because [coming] from a small community you have to watch what you say…People have this perception that you are promoting sexual activity when you talk about sexual and reproductive human rights. Confrontation with family members [has meant that I] have to step back and think about why I am doing this (Yoshiko Yamaguchi-Capelle of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, represents the Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance on the advisory board of Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development).*

These quotes together suggest that diverse women – trans, lesbian and young – felt the PFF provided a space for them to raise their issues, counter their marginalisation and feel comfortable to form new alliances in this space, in contrast to their local level where they faced exclusion, fear or isolation. It is important to Pacific feminism that this new space has been created, as existing spaces are not as diverse as this one, national governments are not making progress on SOGI rights language at CSW (ISHR 2016), the rates of women's political participation in Small Island Developing States are very low (IPU 2017) and some states have not signed the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

The concept of collective identity has been used extensively by social movements scholars to explain how social movements generate a sustained commitment and cohesion between actors over time (Flesher Fominaya 2010). In the case of PFF, a collective identity was formed mainly through the process of deliberation – giving agency to a diversity of voices who have a stake in the outcome but who are sometimes marginalised in the essentialised presentation of a single set of 'women's interests' (as flagged in the literature review in chapter 2).

This offers insights to expand thinking about how collective identities may be effective, even when they are time limited and ad hoc, and how they can come together when strategic purposes require this, without erasing individual differences. Solidarity can be negotiated between very different groups in order to grow numbers and amplify calls for change, such as progressing gender equality.

Insight 4: Visual artefacts helped the formation of collective identity across difference

To promote the acceptance of the collective framing of the group as Pacific feminists, the organisers of the PFF performed two visual actions: presented t-shirts and negotiated and launched a Charter.

T-shirts

The organisers gave t-shirts with 'Pacific Feminist' emblazoned on them to every participant. This had the effect of quickly creating a sense of a group as a whole identity, as well as showing the diversity of that identity through the diversity of the wearers. Through the wearing of the Pacific Feminist t-shirts at the PFF, the wearers identified themselves as 'Pacific feminists'. When participants were asked what was meant by this term, comments ranged from their self-identification with feminism, to reflections on this being, for them, a new title, of uncertain meaning and new to the Pacific. This use of the term 'Pacific feminist' was seen by some interviewees as a new way of thinking about themselves and their activities. Its use on t-shirts and other promotional material prompted their acceptance of the term as reflective of their identity and activities. and also provoked discussion about it as a potential common identity. The t-shirt images have also appeared subsequently at other forums and in social media, worn by those who were not present; thus they have been exchanged, with new actors then taking on and reinforcing the collective feminist 'identity'.

The participants I interviewed from various Pacific Islands were active and engaged; they want to learn more about feminism and to speak up about women's rights. For example, in reaction to participants at the PFF embracing the label 'Pacific feminist', one participant commented on the changes this heralded. She spoke of a time after the forum where she felt able to identify herself as a feminist, and to speak up, whereas previously she had felt that this would have been received with shock and a sense that she was going too far:

> *I can wear my Pacific feminist t-shirt in [my island] – these forums find ways to speak up whereas before it was 'whoa' [author note: expressing a surprised or shocked reaction from others seeing her t-shirt] (Interview #19, 2016).*

This suggests the benefits for confidence that come from attending a regional forum, as women feel that a network supports them and gives them a voice. This was flagged in the opening quote to this chapter, as well as in interviews (Interview #20 and #19, 2016). The t-shirt is also a powerful way of making a claim of identifying as a feminist, as a part of the wider group of Pacific feminists, without relying on voice alone but also on the power of image and collective attire for identity negotiation. This is a crucial point, which is also emphasised in the literature on appearance management in identity (see, for example, Freitas et al 1997). Having an enduring item also permits future building of project identity and symbolic continuity after the forum, with the t-shirt continuing to be worn. Figure 4 shows the t-shirt issued at the PFF, worn to generate a 'project identity' of 'Pacific feminist'. This type of identity may have helped participants put concerns for immediate and prudent action above worries over reaching agreement (Bang 2009).

Figure 4: Pacific Feminist Forum T-shirts
Source: C. Fruean Facebook (last accessed 12 November 2020)

Charter of Feminist Principles for Pacific Feminists

Secondly, crucial to developing a Pacific feminist identity was negotiating what principles that meant committing to. As previously noted, a Charter of Feminist Principles for Pacific Feminists (Pacific Feminist Charter 2016) was negotiated as a formal outcome of the PFF, grounding participants' advocacy as Pacific feminists. What can we learn from the charter as an illustration of the practical creation of a platform for a shared vision, stemming from the participation of a diversity of actors at a regional structured forum?

The Pacific Feminist Charter creation process brought differences under the spotlight. The PFF concluded with the signing of the charter, which was designed to act, for Pacific feminists, as a platform of action for change. Despite their differences in experience, age, sexuality, ability, location and nation, participants were able to focus on their strategic interests together to bridge their differences. Feminist activist reaction to the process and conclusion of the charter included the importance of including diverse voices and the charter's benefit in providing a way forward for young feminists (participant observation, PFF Day 3, closing, Suva, Fiji, November 2016). Activists from around the Pacific had input into the charter, including those representing the

Fiji Women's Rights Movement, Haus of Khameleon, Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality and the Pacific Young Women Leadership Alliance.

The intention of this moment of coming together with a shared vision was described by the organisers as communicating the way Pacific feminists were reshaping and redefining freedom and solidarity in a manner that was inclusive yet also acknowledged and respected diversities (participant observation, PFF Day 3, closing, Suva, Fiji, November 2016). The organisers saw the charter as being able to chart a course for a new future:

> *We can weave together feminism, faith and culture like a beautiful pandanus mat (Alisi Rabukawaqa, Fiji).*

In building the Pacific Feminist Charter, actors resisted the imposition of Western feminism and allowed for many different feminisms (plural). Underhill-Sem (2020:319) considered the charter demonstrated the 'boldness' of Pacific feminists in calling out injustices based on race, class and sexual orientation. She described it as signalling an 'ambition for transformative change' to uphold the rights of women and girls and gender non-conforming people (2019:264). I saw that the design and practice of the PFF gave space for feminisms, although I noted that some cultural and religious reservations, as previously mentioned, would continue to need working through by some participants.

The adoption of a Pacific Feminist Charter was the subject of deliberations and negotiations (as shown in Figure 5) before finding a common platform for a way forward for feminists in the Pacific. A draft prepared by the steering committee was circulated on day 1. Participants were invited to submit drafting suggestions and additions in a box at the front of the session room. This meant the opportunity to provide input was inclusive and could be anonymous if wished.

The language of the charter itself recognises Pacific feminists are diverse; these differences needed to be reflected in the common platform. It speaks of:

> *a recognition that our strength lies in our diversity, we respect our differences, our journeys as Pacific feminists are diverse, solidarity based on mutual respect and open discussion of differences (Pacific Feminist Charter, 2016).*

It aims to:

> *have spaces of power shared across diversities [and] escalate and support innovative feminist social organising efforts by all Pacific women (Pacific Feminist Charter 2016).*

Figure 5: Pacific Feminist Charter deliberation
Source: Facebook update of PFF (last accessed on 3 May 2018)

The Pacific Feminist Charter's recognition of the diversities of the Pacific regional feminists is in keeping with the literature, which insists that 'the dynamics of regional politics in Oceania cannot be reduced to a simple unified position' (Lawson 2017). Overall, I observed tolerance and a willingness to cover a breadth of lived experience of Pacific women and transgender women, giving a broader representation. I observed that the charter negotiations were conducted with a willingness to create bonds across difference. For example, following concerns being raised about the meaning of 'decriminalisation', the charter was drafted to include explanatory notes, an addition that some of the more concerned participants found helpful:

> *Yeah, it's really good that they consider all the comments and also it will help us to explain it to the Ministry of Women and other women who are interested in the move to see that it doesn't mean that, when the charter talks about abortion, it talks straight*

away about getting rid of children. It's something else. It's really good (Interview #34, 2017).

The Pacific Feminist Charter tied women's activism in the Pacific to spirituality, with overt recognition of connections of water and land and flowing mana. The charter launch was a visual celebration, described in the program as a 'feminist moment with feminist finery', with drums, chanting, song and dance (Appendix 5).

One interview commented on the differences between this forum and others she had witnessed:

There's a big difference between the two forums because with the Triennial, it's a ministerial forum, where it's a high-level meeting, where the Women's Ministers, Women's Ministry's ministers and also other women's missionaries, NGOs, they also participating in that forum. It's a high-level meeting, but the [PFF], it's only comprised of feminists around the Pacific Islands. I don't see any high-level people or officials in that meeting last month when I attended (Interview #31, 2017).

This highlights again the importance of using the charter language as a basis for Triennial recommendations, through which the platform could then be transmitted to political leaders. As the Triennial is run by the SPC, the presence at the PFF of the SPC Gender Advisor may have contributed to this influence.

In terms of specific kinds of learning and support which would be lost if the PFF did not exist, respondents suggested movement building, sustainability, self-care support and solidarity, and being exposed to diversity:

It was a good personal experience for those who participated, in terms of networking, reinforcement of ideologies and thinking, some opening up to new areas of thinking. Making that sort of need for reinforcement to be in a group, to share some of the personal challenges (Interview #28, 2017).

Digital spaces are serving as a useful follow-up for information sharing but face-to-face forums such as the PFF are important, as physical meetings build relationship and trust initially. An absence of further face-to-face forums in the future may diminish the impacts that the movement is having; there are some very active Pacific women, but they need to ensure that younger Pacific women are both active now and also that their capacity to sustain the action

into the future is strengthened. A small group of women cannot cover all the forums worldwide that need the input of Pacific feminist civil society. This work is often tiring, emotional and dangerous. This sentiment was reflected in the opening of the PFF, with a recognition that it was being held on Human Rights Defenders Day and remembering people who had lost their lives (Pacific Feminist Forum 2016b). The Pacific Feminist Forum that has now been created is part of the sustainability story – as its own entity, with its own agency. It is able to act and influence as an informal institution which can influence change, albeit slowly. As one respondent commented after she had presented the charter on her return to the government department with responsibility for gender and also to the country's Council for Women:

> *They will work on some of the stuff that is applicable (personal correspondence with respondent #24 2017).*

The interview comments presented above are relevant to the next chapter in terms of identifying how to ensure a multiplicity of voices is included in the context of burgeoning Pacific feminist alliances amongst civil society actors.

Insight 5: Alliance building does not require everyone to identify as a feminist

A close analysis of the interviews suggests there are multiple local paths in the way feminism is understood and enacted. Two critical points unveiled in my empirical fieldwork were: (1) Pacific activists for gender equality might not call themselves feminists; and (2) advocacy on women's rights, human rights and gender equality was found to be happening regardless of what it is named. In addition, Pacific feminists, even when calling themselves 'feminists', are not suggesting they import 'a Western-style feminism' (that is, one that is not sufficiently intersectional, without attention to race, colonial or other cultural contexts and focused on individual empowerment rather than collective agency) (Amos and Parmar 1984, Dosekun 2015, Zimmerman 2015). Instead, they are creating their own identity of 'Pacific feminist'. This was borne out in interviews where I asked, 'Are you a feminist?' and, 'What does it mean?'. Several did not engage with that word but still described themselves as working for women's empowerment or gender equality:

> *To say that it's a Western imposition, you don't have to accept that that's the case because each of the countries we're working in has a strong women's movement and*

> *we're supporting those women to make the claims against their government (Interview #33, 2017).*

As part of my interviews I was careful not to assume we had a common understanding of words. I was alert that, being in my mid-forties, I am now an older feminist and could not assume one feminism was the same as another. In response to the question, 'Are you a feminist?', the Young Women's Focus Group did not embrace this term readily. The focus group participants believed that grassroots people do not understand the term feminism (Focus Group, Suva, Fiji, 2016). They explained they were not feminist but believed in gender equality:

> *We are Christian women and embrace our role as women of God, we submit to our husband. We are not radical feminists, but we do advocate for gender equality (Focus Group, Suva, Fiji, 2016).*

The young women believed they shared the same issues. For example, they noted issues such as '*marriage', 'culture', 'pressure to be married by 25 or missing out', being 'looked down upon', 'patriarchy', 'not heard because young and opinion not valid because not much experience'* and repeatedly being told that their '*place is in the kitchen*' (Focus Group, Suva, Fiji, 2016). The transgender women at the PFF also expressed frustration at being told their place was in the kitchen, providing evidence of an attempt to forge empathic links with the other participants and reveal shared burdens (participant observation, PFF Day 1, opening session, 'barriers and hurdles' discussion, Suva, Fiji, November 2016). This reflects a finding by Tom Tyler and Heather Smith that once people feel deprivations as part of a 'group' and thus interpret their experiences in group terms they are more likely to engage in collective action (Tyler and Smith 1995:53).

The focus group discussions revealed that not everyone in the group of young women used the term feminism to describe their efforts, and to some participants it was a new term. As a focus of their collective gender equality activity they are pushing for what might be conceived of as 'feminist' issues even when they do not name these as such – for example, seeking more leadership roles. They also discussed intergenerational issues, acknowledging that this can be a problem because of customs around elder respect, and older women not making space for younger women to lead. This revealed that even when they did not find that the label 'feminist' resonated, their efforts still had much in common with others at the PFF. In fact, one focus

group member attended the closing event of the PFF, sitting with me, and I later saw a photograph of her wearing the 'Pacific Feminist' t-shirt, suggesting she might have started to recognise the alignment in views and/or have begun to strategically adopt a common identity.

The PFF was described in the program as having been designed as a prompt 'to find a new lens', and participants were encouraged to come open to new ideas (Pacific Feminist Forum 2016b). A young woman from a low-lying atoll at the frontline of climate change said:

> *Feminist is still a word that is still evolving with our changing lifestyles and perceptions of society. Being vulnerable to climate change changes, me as a feminist to see the world from a difference lens (Pre-forum statement. Source; PFF Facebook, accessed 3 May 2018).*

A young woman, who was a carer for her mother with a disability, said:

> *Feminism is a new idea to me; I don't know as much as should like to. Me attending this forum is a milestone to learn and perhaps have a change of perspective (Interview #21, 2016).*

This young woman was open to being exposed to feminist concepts and showed a willingness to change her perspective. This is a key feature of deliberative engagement, which the charter process could be perceived as representing.

Focusing next on the plausibility of a shared feminist vision, and uniting across differences, I asked young women in the focus group what 'sisterhood' meant, to test this language and its meaning. They replied that:

> *Sisterhood means being able to come to safe spaces and discuss issues affecting us and to be comfortable with that group. We can share secrets and have bonding in that space with the group. Accept whatever background, religious or life or disability and be able to share problems and help how we can – we can give positive ideas to help (Focus Group, Suva, Fiji, November 2016).*

The young Fijian women in the focus group wanted to start some gender equality programming for other young women in Suva (Focus Group, Suva, 2016). They believed young women had shared issues, and the topics that affect them can be shared. However, they cautioned that:

A common vision within the Pacific is possible but there are different cultures, need to scope before [we] can say there is one Pacific program (Focus Group, Suva, Fiji, 2016).

Collectively, PFF participants demonstrated a belief that the PFF was worthy of their time and expertise and would ground future action. By setting aside time and space to come together we can see temporal convergence and emergence – giving space to build relationships and increase understanding face to face.

The different ways feminism is understood and enacted in the Pacific reflects a combination of living with culture and the lived realities that calls for gender equality merge with faith, culture, tradition, social norms and resistance to colonisers' frameworks. Ferree has acknowledged that much feminist organising worldwide is today hidden in plain sight (Ferree 2013). Transnational organisations focusing on feminist issues tend not to use the word 'feminist'; they frame their concerns as women's rights, gender policy or social justice. This is key to remember also in the context of the Pacific.

The same is true for 'feminist civil society' in the Pacific context: it might not always be captured in the title, the website or the stated mission of an organisation. Some scholars have made similar observations in relation to young women not using the label 'feminist 'to describe their activities, even though these activities were also used by feminists to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. Scholarship focused on women in the United Kingdom and Germany, for instance, has found instances where feminism was considered anachronistic and irrelevant to the present, or was fiercely repudiated (Scharff 2009). However, whilst my research aligned with some extent with Christina Scharff's, who found most of her research participants in England and Germany would not call themselves feminist, in contrast the women I interviewed did not reject the term outright, but were prepared to learn more and explore it further (Focus Group, Suva, Fiji, 2016). Scharff's subjects preferred to act independently and autonomously, were unwilling to identify as feminists, would 'recoil in horror' (2009:14) or were 'hostile' (2009:15). Scharff's research (2009) found young women considered feminism exclusionary, perceiving feminists as white, middle class, middle aged and able bodied. This contrasts sharply with the inherently diverse nature of Pacific feminists, and the images from the PFF, shown in this chapter, of participants all wearing the 'Pacific Feminist' label on their t-shirts.

5.3 The Emergence of Pacific Feminism as a Project Identity

In this section, I consider the type of collective identity formation the PFF enabled, drawing on the key insights presented above about how participants perceived and experienced the PFF. In this context, one particularly useful approach is offered by the concept of 'project identity', which is an identity built around a common project for pragmatic reasons (Castells 1997).

The concept of project identity has been used mainly in the literature on strategic alliances, political participation, and organisational studies to explain how individuals with diverse interests and identities can come together, build a sense of joint belonging and a culture of cooperation. The central idea is that individuals or groups can get together around shared interests and goals, and continue to emphasise the values and practices that are central to their individual identity (Hietajärvi and Aaltonen 2018).

Focusing on the relevance of project identity for alternative forms of political participation, Henrik Bang (2009) argued that project identity offers a meaningful way of coming together for those who participate in politics to solve issues that confront them in their everyday lives. The participation of individuals or groups operating on the basis of a project identity (as opposed to, for example, an identity based on an ideological affiliation) is underpinned by their desire to develop capacities to address the common issues they face. The key lessons here relate to mobilising and empowering people to make a difference in, and through, immediate and concrete political action. In practice, Bang found identity is very much a project, the realisation of which depends crucially on the transformative capacity of oneself and others. Bang (2009:130) gave the example of protesters, whose project identity is usually 'not prompted by some general norms or reasons', but 'constructed in and through their concrete experiences with how to make a difference'. Bang (2009) also saw the development of identification-based trust as extremely challenging – when actors are new to working together and wish to move beyond conflicting agendas – but nevertheless an important part of a project identity.

The concept of project identity is also useful for making sense of the collective identity formation in the context of the PFF. This forum offered a platform for the participants to come together for a fixed period of time and work towards a common agenda, but then being able to return to their individual organisational identity. This kind of 'loose' alliance building enabled multiple organisations to participate as part of the PFF.

The experience of the PFF shows that it is important for feminist civil society organisations and actors to think about the ways of combining individual identity with some sort of collective identity. This is important as only those individuals who have some sort of identification with the group are likely to be involved in *collective* action on its behalf (Colgan and Ledwith 2000). Individuals with no or weak group identity are more likely to engage in *individual* action only. Project identity offers a promising way of combining individual identity/action with collective identity/action.

We see this happening in the context of the PFF. Rather than yielding a uniform and enduring collective identity, the PFF enabled the emergence of a more temporal (that is, limited for the time it serves a purpose) 'project identity'. Articulating a joint vision for a collaborative project identity requires understanding the mechanisms and activities that develop and maintain a such an identity in project alliances. The concept is useful for examining the development of shared interests and goals, with values central to the self-image of Pacific feminism.

In the PFF, Pacific women formed a strategic 'project identity' to be able to move forward together. Even though the term 'feminist' is used in the title of the PFF, some participants suggested that the term 'feminism' was not a familiar term or one they readily identified with, nor was it a term that would be understood by grassroots women (Focus Group, Suva, Fiji, 2016 and Interview #21, 2016).

> *Feminism is a new term in [interviewee's country], and it's really, really a concept that people think it's undermining men's role, men's rights in our traditional culture, so when you tell people that you are feminist, you are on fire. They will see you as a tomboy. They will see you as a divorced person or a single person. They will see you as a deviant person because you are not complying with the expected norms, women's norms, within our traditional culture (Interview #34, 2017).*

At the PFF, diverse Pacific women *chose* to come together under the umbrella 'Pacific feminist' for the success of the 'project', even though my interviews suggested that the term 'feminism' was a new to many Pacific women. The boundaries of this new identity were constructed by deliberations for a Pacific Feminist Charter setting out what it means to identify as a Pacific feminist.

5.4 Impact of the PFF

One of the purposes of this thesis is to explore whether and to what extent the regional civil society actors in the Pacific can respond to the problem of shrinking spaces at the global level. This requires a consideration of how the PFF links to the formal mechanisms and spaces of decision-making.

As noted previously, the Charter of Feminist Principles for Pacific Feminists (the Pacific Feminist Charter), which was developed in the course of the PFF, plays an important role in this context. The charter was presented by the PFFs charter working group members at many other forums taking place in the region. In 2017, it was included within participant briefs for the first Pacific CSO Organising Mechanism (PACCOM). PFF working group members FWRM and DIVA were also part of the initial PACCOM working group and were involved in the drafting of the PACCOM outcome document, ensuring PFF principles were reflected in the outcome document. At the 61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW61), the charter was integrated into the We Rise communications plan for CSW as part of the publications and briefs that were presented to women, community, funders and development partners. Furthermore, the PFF was also mentioned during a South Feminist Knowledge and Sharing side session, which took place at CSW61. The DIVA LBT National Convention distributed 100 copies of the charter to participants of the convention. At the 2017 WAVE Partner Workshop in Yangon, Myanmar, PFF participants presented on the We Rise Coalition and were able to present the Pacific Feminist Charter to participants at the workshop. Similarly, at the Fiji Young Women's Forum Gender Budgeting Workshop in 2017, the charter was included within the workshop brief for 26 young women from diverse backgrounds across Fiji. Later, it was presented at the High-Level Political Forum 2017 in New York by a panellist during the review of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) to 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'. Additionally, 10 copies of the charter were distributed to the Haus of Khameleon and Pacific Young Women's Alliance Yoshika Yamaguchi in the Marshall Islands, helping to represent and amplify the collective voice developed at the PFF. The charter was included at the Marshall Island's Women's Conference in 2017 and the Triennial Meeting of Pacific Women in 2017 in Fiji (FWRM correspondence to researcher, 7 August 2017). To extend the impact of the charter, in 2019 a Pacific Feminist Charter Action Plan was produced (Pacific Feminist Forum 2019).

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I focused on the role and meaning of the PFF both for those who participated in the forum, and for development of feminist civil society with a regional focus. An in-depth exploration of the PFF has shown how a structured forum can act as a mobilising structure, supporting existing action and prompting ideas and coalitions for further action. The chapter also highlighted the importance of establishing a project identity through symbolic and communicative interactions. The concept of project identity is also consistent with the idea of 'strategic sisterhood'; that is, solidarity crafted for the purpose of amplifying voices and numbers for great effect. The development of such project identity is crucial for building alliances across difference towards a shared agenda and vision for the region. But sustaining these alliances is a different story: it requires more bottom-up initiatives at different national levels and resources for creating (safe) spaces like PFF to keep the conversation going. It also requires acknowledgement of intra-cultural differences and intra-group power relations among the groups discussed above; pushing the boundaries of inclusion; and keeping the momentum going in both face-to-face and online settings.

In line with the idea of project identity, the PFF experience shows that different levels of acceptance of the term 'feminism' did not hinder the participation of actors at the structured forum nor the development and ultimate acceptance of a charter labelled as feminist as the basis for future individual and collective action. This is evidence of the ability to form strategic alliances across difference without getting bogged down by labelling. For some in the group, feminism was at the heart of their identity and participation, while for others in the same group, it was something they were still learning about.

While the thesis focuses mainly on how the creation of regional spaces such as the PFF can help respond to the problem of shrinking civil society at the global level, it is also important to recognise the role these spaces play in response to the various problems at the regional level. The lack of action by governments and regional institutions to respond to calls to decriminalise issues in the Pacific such as homosexuality[9] and abortion could be a motivating force behind the establishment of new alliances and informal networks. These alliances play a significant

[9] For example, in the Pacific region seven countries still criminalise homosexuality (Gerber 2020): Cook Islands, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Tuvalu. Homosexuality was only decriminalised in Nauru in 2016.

role in confronting a variety of the issues Pacific women face. For example, in most Pacific Islands transgender women still face discrimination and are excluded from power structures, but at the PFF they assumed leadership and reclaimed space. This could be continued by women, including transgender women, supporting one another across national boundaries through building stronger networks following coming together at regional forums. The inaugural Pacific Feminist Forum marked an important milestone in this process and offered what was described in the PFF Program in 2016 as a ‘rejuvenation and a challenge to do things differently’ (Pacific Feminist Forum 2016b).

CHAPTER 6

BUILDING FEMINIST ALLIANCES BEYOND REGIONAL FORUMS: THE WE RISE COALITION

No permanent enemies, no permanent allies, only permanent interests (We Rise Coalition member email signature, where these words were attributed to Saul Alinksy).

This chapter builds on the insights gained in chapter 5 and explores the prospects of building effective feminist alliances in the Pacific Region through an in-depth exploration of a recent coalition-building initiative, the We Rise Coalition (We Rise hereafter). We Rise is an example of organised feminist activism and leadership in the Pacific. It is one of the key actors in the region, advocating for gender justice for Pacific women in all their diversities. In this chapter, through an analysis of publicly available documents, participant observation and interviews conducted with the key members of this organisation, I investigate the organisational structure of We Rise: how it defines its 'shared vision' for Pacific feminism; its members' perceptions of the coalition; and the activities it undertakes to foster and sustain diverse feminist alliances in the Pacific region. My focus is particularly on the second phase of We Rise (2016–2019), as at this time the movement expanded from two to four differently focused organisations, thus bringing diversity to the fore.

We Rise plays three roles or functions in moving Pacific feminism from an isolated or one-off project to a position where it is able to contribute to a sustained feminist movement. These are: (1) communicative – it facilitates a regional dialogue between individuals and organisations with different constituencies across the region; (2) knowledge-building – it builds capacity of Pacific feminists to conduct their own research, movement building and advocacy; and (3) organisational – it coordinates the generation of a regional feminist voice. The three functions are grounded in the principles of intersectionality and intersectional recognition of diverse Pacific women's struggles, which increases reach. This is also evident in the Memorandum of Understanding that underpins the We Rise agreement, which highlights a strong commitment

to diversity and acknowledges various forms of oppression: 'We stand in political opposition to sexist, racist, heterosexist, ableist and classist oppression' (We Rise Coalition 2016).

This case study offers insights into the prospects for, and challenges of, sustaining feminist alliances through generating solidarity across different spheres of advocacy and diverse groups in the Pacific region. It also provides empirical insights to inform the practice of coalition building.

The chapter comprises five main sections. The first section provides a brief overview of We Rise and describes its activities and goals. In the second section I look at the organisational structure and interactions of We Rise. In the third section I consider how the functions of We Rise reflect its commitment to intersectional coalition building. In the fourth section I focus on the specific activities We Rise undertakes to build and sustain a Pacific feminist movement in the region, from a project to something longer lasting. Finally, I reflect on the broader lessons from this case about the requirements for coalition formation and the contribution my analysis makes to coalition studies on social movements using the tool of intersectional recognition to address diverse struggles and constituencies.

6.1 We Rise Coalition: A Background

In recent years, a range of diverse women's organisations have come together in the Pacific with the aim of achieving a coordinated voice on gender equality. One outcome of this was the We Rise Coalition. Originally, We Rise was developed as a two-organisation partnership in 2012 between the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) and the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM). From 2016 to 2019 it was led by four feminist organisations:

i. Diverse Voices in Action (DIVA) for Equality is a lesbian, bisexual and transgender women's (LBT) collective, based in Fiji

ii. FemLink Pacific, which is a women's community media organisation with a focus on women, peace and security, based in Fiji but with a regional focus

iii. Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM), which is a women's rights organisation, based in Fiji

iv. International Women's Development Agency (IWDA), which is a women's rights organisation working with partners in Asia and the Pacific, based in Melbourne, Australia.

These four partners serving different constituencies use a commitment to intersectionality to connect their struggles and to create a strong partnership (Interview #44, 2018). As the MOU states:

> *Sustainable change can only be achieved by mobilising the collective power of women to lead and act towards a shared vision. Building movements of women, with a strong consciousness of the roots of inequality, social and gender power structures, are needed to achieve a wider, deeper and more sustainable transformation (We Rise Coalition 2016).*

This ability to grow numbers, forge new coalitions and alliances and bring people together to find a common voice has been aided by financial and in-kind resourcing, a renewed attention on Pacific gender equality due to the targets set by the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (PIFS 2012), and funding to meet these promises by donor partners. We Rise was successful in accessing two tranches of funding from the Australian Government in 2012 and 2014. We Rise in its latest form (known as We Rise 2, the focus of my research) is a $4.8 million, 3.5-year project (November 2015 – August 2019) funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). Table 4 outlines the two phases of We Rise and the key milestones of each phase since its establishment in 2012.

Coalitions are beneficial to sustaining action on gender equality in the Pacific as they provide an agile model to use in a rapidly changing environment and for negotiating sisterhood across diversity. Against a backdrop of slow progress to gender equality and resistance to diverse sexual orientation or gender identities in the region, We Rise came together for strategic purposes to increase Pacific women's voice and impact. It was, in part, also enabled by the increasing focus on regionalism and the availability of donor funding for supporting Pacific women. Coalition building across diverse groups is fraught with challenges. Difficulties expressed by We Rise partners included the need for IWDA to 'walk the fine line' and balance both the broker/contract manager and partner (Interview #28, 2017). Budget issues can also lead to difficult conversations. As an example, the 2019 evaluation noted that from 2016-2019

We Rise received only 50% of its anticipated budget due to uncertainties in government, but nonetheless completed its planned work without funding (Winterford and Laqeretabua 2019). This demonstrates the persistence but also the autonomy of We Rise.

Phase	Year	Milestone
Phase 1	2012	**Establishment phase**. Two organisations, FWRM and IWDA, receive AUD $2.2 million from DFAT for the period July 2012 – July 2015.
	2013	The first iteration of We Rise, with two partners (known as We Rise phase 1).
	2014	We Rise receives AUD $4.8 million given by DFAT supported by Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Program over four years (until 2019).
Phase 2	2015	We Rise 2 holds opening meeting and MoU drafting begins.
	2016	**Expansion and outreach phase**. We Rise 2 MOU signed – change from a two-partner consortium to a four-partner coalition. We Rise holds Workshop at Pacific Feminist Forum, Suva, Fiji.
	2017	We Rise participates in 13th Triennial of Pacific Women. We Rise participates at 6th Meeting of the Pacific Ministers for Women. We Rise runs safe hub and pre-meeting caucus at Triennial and CSW. We Rise makes statement to CSW in New York, March 2017.
	2018	We Rise participates at Annual Budgeting and Planning Workshop. We Rise participates at CSW 2018.
	2019	We Rise evaluation report and DFAT management response flags We Rise 3. We Rise participates in 2nd Pacific Feminist Forum, Suva, Fiji. Phase 2 concludes (July 2019). We Rise becomes a three-organisation partnership with the departure of DIVA for Equality.

Table 4: Evolution of the We Rise Coalition, 2012–2019

The central focus of the phase 2 We Rise Coalition was to advance women's rights in the Pacific and the vision expressed as 'a Pacific where there is gender justice, ecological sustainability, peace, freedom, equality and human rights for all' (We Rise Coalition 2016). The values underpinning We Rise are listed as 'the personal is the political, equality, transparency, accountability, solidarity, reciprocity, human rights, peace and security, bodily integrity and freedom and do no harm' (We Rise Coalition 2016). To achieve this focus and vision, the members combined diverse organisations and made space for both individual as well as

common goals. The next section covers this, focusing first on organisational interaction and second on the functions of We Rise.

6.2 Organisational Structure of the We Rise Coalition

In the discussion that follows, I explain the organisational structure of We Rise. I first focus on the bringing together of individual organisations striving for an inclusive common goal. I sought to investigate how We Rise harnesses key organisational principles and governance structures to shape the relationship between members. Second, I focus on the differences and how to bridge them to find a common voice without clouding the various perspectives.

Emphasis on individual organisations with a common goal

The four entities forming We Rise retain their individual identities even as they work towards a common goal of strengthening feminist partnerships for gender equality in the Pacific. This means separate agendas and goals are not cast aside through entering into a coalition. Rather, We Rise works hard to successfully integrate the individual and collective goals as part of its embrace of diversity. Scholars have identified that feminist organisations grapple with the challenges of difference in innovative ways; for example, by reference to the varying positionalities of individuals assembled (Cole and Atuk 2019). We Rise does this through its commitment to inclusive practice, with diversity intentionally highlighted collectively as well as individually. The review of the annual reports of the individual partners demonstrates their fluid mobility between their own entity and the We Rise identity. For example, We Rise does not produce a separate public annual report. Instead, We Rise is described in individual partners' annual reports as one aspect of their work, and thus partners maintain the ability to move in and out of that arrangement when necessary for strategic purposes, while maintaining their individual (personal) shapes. This is illustrative of a recognition of Pacific feminisms, rather than a singular Pacific feminism. For example, We Rise prioritises the inclusion of rural women, who find city advocacy for gender equality does not always correspond to their own concerns (Sanga 2020).

In another example, the discussion about the We Rise Coalition in the IWDA 2016 Annual Report described the breadth of its reach and activities:

> *In 2015, four strong, dynamic, women's rights organisations came together with a bold agenda for change. Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM), FemLink Pacific, Diverse Voices and Action for Equality and International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) are combining efforts to amplify their reach and impact in women's lives. The program is part of the Pacific Women program, funded by Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Coalition is engaging in local, regional and global advocacy concerning women's human rights; strengthening and building mechanisms for civil society and social movement activists to advocate for women's human rights; and creating spaces for women to exercise leadership in decision-making through building networks with diverse women (IWDA 2016a).*

This quote paints a picture of We Rise amplifying reach and impact and building networks of diverse women to strengthen and build a movement to advocate for women's rights.

We Rise organises its collaborative work practices by holding regular face-to-face partnership meetings, enabling partners to work together in the development of We Rise proposals, budgets and reports. During phase 2 these meetings were held six-monthly as a way to check in on each partner, what each was feeling and thinking and how this affected the way that partners worked together and separately (Interview #44, 2018). The We Rise partners usually kept outcome journals to identify changes in behaviour, actions and reactions, and relationships against outcome areas. They analysed these journals annually for internal evaluation purposes, in order to build their capacity from lessons learnt.

To strengthen the balance between individual goals and collectively agreed common goals, We Rise 2 set up a formal, recorded organisational structure. The formalisation of We Rise took place with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 2016, in Fiji (see Figure 6). According to the MOU, the individual organisations are not subsumed by the We Rise objectives; it sets out the shared objectives as well as noting the individual objectives of the four member organisations. This is in keeping with findings in the existing literature that note not all coalitions are intended to be fully integrated but can allow for strategic separation. Scholars such as Pullum (2017), for example, argue that coalitions may be 'intentionally limited' (coming together and breaking away as demonstrated by We Rise in its third phase) to enhance their effectiveness to respond to opportunities or threats. After all, as this chapter's opening quote suggests, they need not be permanent allies. This acceptance of being temporary

can have benefits: it may be less costly and it also promotes a 'broad' framing of shared claims and goals without having to be permanent or needing to rely on pre-existing networks (Pullum 2017). This has been the case with We Rise, especially with respect to being able to take a strategic approach to finding and framing goals in common without having to be identical, whilst being able to retain goals for themselves that are beyond the We Rise remit. This also allows for strategic separation (when necessary). This is evidenced, in the We Rise context, by one partner (DIVA for Equality) deciding not continuing into phase 3, while the other members were still able to proceed.

Figure 6: Signing of We Rise 2 MOU 2016 by Four partners
Source: Development Policy Centre, Australian National University.

The MOU lists as the coalition's shared initiatives as the following:

- *To exchange and enhance Pacific feminist perspectives.*
- *To influence donors and development partners through modelling an innovative partnership and Coalition approach.*
- *To support the renewal of our own organisations and feminist movements through empowering new generations of actors and leaders, and creating respectful spaces and roles for beginners, the experienced and the wise.*

- *To be a reflexive learning partnership that values multiple sources and ways of creating knowledge.*
- *To commit to protect an open, safe environment that values diversity and difference. (We Rise Coalition 2016b:6).*

The MOU sets out an understanding of the We Rise identity as affirming difference even as the partners come together as a unified group. This will be achieved by working together in allyship to support each other's actions even in the event of disagreement:

> *We also recognise that we may need to come together in situations where there will be ideological disagreement and work to change that interaction so that communication occurs. This means when we come together, rather than pretend union, we would acknowledge that we are divided and must develop strategies to overcome fears, prejudices, resentments and competitiveness (We Rise Coalition 2016b).*

In general, allyship refers to taking on the struggle as your own, standing up and transferring the benefits of your privilege to those who lack it (Kendall 1998). This is based on the understanding that the 'sum is more than its parts', recognising that successes are part of the whole, and supporting and standing by one another in advocacy (We Rise Coalition 2016b). The MOU allows for flexibility, as it sets parameters without being too restrictive and allows for seizing of new opportunities.

Developing a shared vision across difference

The intersectional commitment of We Rise in its organisational interactions makes space for differences. Boundary-crossing conversations are central to capacity building and to strengthening the relationships needed to nurture social movement intersectionality (Findlay 2017). Against a backdrop of resistance to diverse sexual orientation or gender identities, We Rise enables dialogue across difference to generate a coordinated, diverse voice uniting feminist advocacy and sexual orientation advocacy in the region.

Scholars of coalitions have identified key challenges for coalition building across difference. One challenge that We Rise addressed very effectively through its arrangements for equal power sharing and regular dialogue was the need to build alliances across differences without imposing homogeneity. This contrasts with the views of scholars who have insisted that

homogeneity is key for establishing strategic alliances. Based on analysis of small firms learning though alliances, Subramanian et al, for example, suggested that the homogeneity of a group and its knowledge base can mitigate costs (Subramanian et al 2018:166). In contrast, We Rise uses an intersectional approach to coalition building, involving recognition that similar situations can impact individuals differently. For example, a working-class woman in a same-sex relationship in Fiji may experience systemic oppression in a completely different manner from a middle-class woman in a heterosexual relationship. It is also possible to use intersectionality as an organising principle for organisations with diverse actors without insistence on homogeneity for the alliance to be sustained.

6.3 Commitment to Intersectionality in Practice

Intersectionality is often talked about; however, beyond the level of theory, and in part due to the inherent complexity of the topic, there are few roadmaps for applying the concept in practice. For this reason, I investigated how We Rise uses intersectionality as an organising principle. A close analysis of the interviews and documents suggests that We Rise has three crucial and strategic functions, that are underpinned by intersectionality and which are particularly important for alliance building across difference in the Pacific:

(i) Self-led capacity building in the region: this refers to Pacific feminists building their own knowledge and skills, moving away from reliance on external advisors. It includes learning exchanges and lesson sharing. It is particularly crucial for going beyond an understanding of regional feminism as a one-off 'project'.

(ii) Coordinating a regional feminist voice: this refers to supporting one another's calls for action, using media in a coordinated and strategic manner, and making space for the Pacific voices to be heard. This is particularly important in contexts where resources are limited, so that they can be maximised by collective efforts.

(iii) Facilitating a regional dialogue across difference: this means providing space for support and amplification of diverse women's voices and recognition of, and engagement with, intersectionality.

The next sections will address each of these in turn.

Self-led capacity building in the region

Developing the coalition partners' capacity to lead is one of the key focus areas of We Rise but the form it takes offers some crucial insights into the longevity of the coalition's impact in the region. The United Nations Development Program defines capacity as 'the ability of individuals, institutions, and societies to perform functions, solve problems, and set and achieve objectives in a sustainable manner' (UNDP 2010). According to scholars, capacity building ought to be about enabling those out on the margins to represent and defend their interests more effectively, not only within their own immediate contexts but also globally (Cornwall and Eade 2010). In contrast, self-led capacity building differs from the broad conceptualisation in that it recognises the agency of the actors themselves. That is the basis of the We Rise Coalition's agenda. It rejects the common assumption in the development context that all capacity building comes from external NGOs; this ensures that the coalition's own priorities are addressed over those of the NGOs and helps it represent women in all their diversities more effectively both regionally and globally.

In November 2016 I attended a We Rise workshop as part of the PFF in Suva, Fiji, which allowed me to observe the agenda in practice. The purpose of the workshop was for We Rise to teach Pacific feminists to build their capacity. As a practical example, the workshop aimed to equip the participants to conduct their own research, in order to underpin evidence-based influence and advocacy. The formation of the Pacific Feminist Charter (detailed in chapter 5) has been another means of increasing the capacity of Pacific feminists to advocate on positions and quickly form a collective regional feminist voice, as it provides a pre-agreed platform of action. It has also helped Pacific feminists speak for themselves in a strong regional voice at regional and global fora, rather than being represented through international NGOs and donors.

We Rise plays a crucial role in capacity building in Pacific regional civil society. One partner explained this role as central to being able to 'develop, demonstrate and strengthen feminist coalitions and partnerships in order to grow and uphold inclusive governance, equality, diversity, justice and women's human rights' (FemLink Facebook, 24 July 2019). The capacities that We Rise seeks to build include intellectual, organisational, social, political, technical or financial – and most likely a shifting combination of all of these. As Cornwall and Eade (2010) have noted, the ability to articulate and mobilise around specific interests or

demands is intimately linked to the development of a civil society in which divergent interests can be represented.

In the case of We Rise, capacity is built mainly though learning and sharing activities, such as building confidence to speak out, to advocate, to conduct one's own research and to capture lessons to share with others. At the workshop in Suva, We Rise leaders stated they were deliberately undertaking this task themselves rather than relying on foreign-led capacity building (Interview #44, 2018). This was a message I observed frequently during my attendance (participant observation, We Rise Workshop, Suva, Fiji, November 2016). This revealed a real sense of standing strong, and confidently conducting their own training by and for Pacific women. Being able to present their own perspectives rather than having them mediated or analysed through an external lens was an important aim stated at the workshop (participant observation, We Rise Workshop, Suva, Fiji, November 2016).

Furthermore, network knowledge accumulation builds the capacity of coalitions. We Rises' efforts to continuously improve includes the holding of annual reviews (referred to in Interview #42, 2018), annual strategy planning, implementation of communication strategies, and an organisational assessment and evaluation (We Rise Coalition 2016). The We Rise Theory of Change document also reveals financial monitoring, training workshops (also referred to in Interview #44, 2018) and two-way learning exchanges of lessons learnt (also referred to in Interview #44, 2018), program coordination committee meetings, and the conduct of mid-term and end of term evaluations, which capture lessons and build capacity. An important aspect of capacity building has been to acknowledge and build on the traditional places for knowledge sharing, such as *talanoas*. A talanoa is a Fijian word meaning a process of inclusive participatory and transparent knowledge sharing and dialogue to assist in making decisions. Its purpose is to share stories, build empathy and make collective decisions for the collective good. It aims to foster inclusiveness (UNFCCC 2018). We Rise held a talanoa on the first day of the Pacific Feminist Forum, called the Pacific Women Talanoa (Pacific Women 2016) and again at the Triennial Meeting of Pacific Women in 2017 in Fiji.

Similarly, exchange visits between We Rise members permits capacity building through skill sharing, including budgeting, reporting and advocacy (Interview #42, 2017 and #44, 2018). According to We Rise members I interviewed, the key to sustaining the building of We Rise has been the dual focus on both the whole organisation and the individual organisational

strengths of the partners (Interview #44, 2018). Interviewees viewed the capacity building as 'a learning exchange, whereby each member contributes skills to the other' (Interview #44, 2018). We Rise enables this exchange by investing in organisational strengthening as well as providing meeting spaces for members to learn from each other.

We Rise also uses aid resources to enhance the capacity of local change agents to make the choices they deem appropriate. Donors funding of progressive social change is not new and is not confined to the Pacific. Scholars have noted, for example, that NGOs are increasingly dependent on government funding. Increasingly, Global South donors have begun to channel resources through national NGOs which had few other means of survival (Pearce 2010); this can present issues if the funding is attached to the goals of the funding body rather than those of the local actor. Pearce (2010) acknowledged that in some instances NGOs are indeed working to the agenda of external donors but, importantly, she countered this with her findings that many are longstanding organisations with strong roots in community and grassroots organising. She argued that much depends on the theory and practice of social change to underpin the resource transfer and the robustness of efforts within organisations to resist or modify bureaucratic imperatives (Pearce 2010). Examples of We Rise resisting bureaucratic imperatives are the self-care emphasis of their actions, including taking self-care leave days every month, and taking into account the material needs of feminist activists and being sensitive to care economy concerns and structural concerns.

These activities are having an impact. The capacity-building activities and the leadership of We Rise are strengthening Pacific feminism. We Rise members have acknowledged that feminism in the Pacific has grown stronger (Forum 2016) and interviews (Interview #28, 2017). Further, the Fijian Minister for Women, the Hon Mereseini Vuniwaqa, also noted this at the 2nd Pacific Feminist Forum (Ragaruma 2019):

> *Feminism within the Pacific has grown from strength to strength, with various feminist organisations, networks, activists and groups accumulating a wealth of experience and knowledge to advance gender equality and women's rights across the region (opening address 2nd PFF, 20 May 2019).*

To date, many calls for change have been ignored in the region, a problem We Rise is working to address. Local strategies for dealing with not being heard or backlash against calls for action

include improving the capacity of grassroots communities and activists to negotiate power and privilege, and strengthening intersectionality through feminist skill-sharing workshops, with women of all diversities empowered and confident to voice their views with stakeholders. Work has also led to an increased knowledge of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), coordination of women of diversities, stronger engagement of women of all diversities with government, and women from rural areas being mobilised to influence submissions (Winterford and Laqeretabua 2019).

To show how to navigate intersectional approaches to coalition building, and maximise capacity of others, We Rise makes transparent its inner workings of negotiating power. This helps others learn about coalition formation, which can in turn grow the strength of the feminist movement in the Pacific. The mid-term evaluation of We Rise, commented on gender activists having a strengthened capacity in research, which can then be used for greater influence (Winterford and Laqeretabua 2019). This increases the potential for insights to be spread further for others to follow.

Coordinating a regional feminist voice

The second key function of We Rise, as communicated by interview participants, is coordinating a regional voice for Pacific feminists. This involves coming up with a way for women in all their diversities to feel included in the regional feminist discourse. For example, the We Rise evaluation report quoted a 2017 Triennial Meeting of Pacific Women delegate as follows:

> *We want to follow this coalition processes. We want to bring together sister organisations. We want to form a coalition, for solidarity, a stronger voice, an amplified voice to our politicians. We want to come together as sisters. It was wonderful to see them coming up as one voice (Winterford and Laqeretabua 2019).*

Some advocates interviewed made it very clear that they do not speak for the Pacific as a whole (Interview #27, 2017). This highlights the importance of We Rise coordinating a regional feminist voice of its own. This is evidenced in several key documents I analysed:

> *We Rise is instrumental in bringing the voice of Pacific women direct to a range of high-level policy engagements, knowledge and skill-building workshops and public advocacy (IWDA 2017).*

Similarly another We Rise partner highlighted 'the work of the We Rise Coalition and our partners towards mobilising and amplifying Pacific women's voices' (FWRM 2018b).

This development of a coordinated voice is part of the movement-building process as it grows in organised numbers (participant observation, We Rise Workshop, Suva, Fiji, November 2016). It involves training, confidence building, caucusing and talanoa hubs, and explaining regional and global processes to newcomers. Interviewees suggested that this coordination is an important part of We Rise's work as the coalition grows a network, forms partnerships, opens up spaces (Interview #18, 2016) and conducts outreach activities (Interviews #42 and #44, 2018).

The importance of Pacific feminists' collaboration and outreach activities to build and present a collective position was also highlighted by the Fijian Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation in her opening speech at the 2nd Pacific Feminist Forum in 2019 in Suva:

> *It is important that Pacific feminists have continuous engagement within a collective space to collectively map points of commonality on identity issues and present a strong collective Pacific feminist position within the regional and global level dialogues and decision-making forums. It facilitate opportunities for collaboration (Vuniwaqa 2019).*

The We Rise Coalition seeks to counter challenges of distance and scarce resources and establish solidarity by connecting and coordinating different actors across the region. This is particularly important for alliance building, as resources are limited and may be maximised by collective efforts. For example, again in her official welcome address to the 2nd Pacific Feminist Forum, the Hon Mereseini Vuniwaqa commented on this leadership and connecting function of We Rise:

> *This exciting second regional meeting of Pacific feminists is being connected by a regional working group, with additional leadership by partners of the We Rise Coalition (Vuniwaqa 2019).*

Coordinating and connecting the advocacy claims of many small groups through a common vision enables the calls to be amplified, making them more effective than single, isolated requests from smaller groups. In this vein, the We Rise partners recognise that speaking and acting together can reach a bigger audience:

> *We get tired and need mutual support. Then we can share the joys and work through the more difficult aspects. We hold intense conversations. [Together] we can reach more people (Michelle Reddy, based on notes from participant observation, We Rise workshop, PFF, Suva, Fiji, November 2016).*

To do this, We Rise brings together the sexual orientation/gender identity movement and the feminist movement, combining them into a coalition to amplify their voices and pool their resources. We Rise describes this joining up aspect of their work as joining strengths, resources and networks, with a reach to national, regional and global levels:

> *The We Rise Coalition cooperates in joint actions; we join our strengths, resources and networks together towards a common vision set out in a Memorandum of Understanding. This includes building a movement to demand that women are able to realise their full human rights, equality and justice, and creating a political force for change that cannot be ignored by families, communities, governments, or society at large. We Rise partners are based in Fiji and Australia (FWRM 2018c).*

The important element of this quote is the joining of networks working towards a common vision. There are different individual agendas, yet they have been able to come together, calling for common action as well as maintaining their calls for separate actions. A look at the creation of Pacific regional level spaces for solidarity networks by feminist civil society confirmed that networks are critically important for reinforcing relationships:

> *A lot of the regional meetings, workshops here and there, cementing networks, especially for the Pacific. The other Pacific Islanders that were there, we've never met but we know mutual friends and reinforcing that relationship between mutual people that we've met, or we've heard of. Where did you hear about that Pacific person? They are like, oh yeah. Then we can reinforce that and there is a confidence in my research of Pacific feminism because of this network that is who you know, don't know, your friends, never-ending friendships and family (Interview #23, 2016).*

A key challenge noted in terms of coordination of a regional voice was the ability to agree to a Charter as the platform for action, as outlined in the previous chapter on the Pacific Feminist Forum. We Rise builds on the charter and gives visibility to marginalised, stigmatised and socially excluded women, including women with disabilities, widows, rural women, young women, and lesbian and transgender women (IWDA 2016b). The members share a belief that multiple voices on a common agenda of change are not as easily suppressed as individual voices might be (We Rise Coalition 2016). The impacts of Pacific feminist activists at the 2017 Triennial Meeting of Pacific Women and at CSWs further detailed in chapter 8 demonstrate the ways We Rise activities amplify these voices to the local, national (Fiji), regional (the Pacific) and global levels (FWRM 2018c).

Facilitating a regional dialogue across difference

Finally, the third key function of We Rise that is crucial for alliance building across differences is facilitating a dialogue across difference. This means making space for discussions around different positions, taking time to flesh out differences, and listening to alternative points of view and acknowledging other identities. The interviews I conducted with various We Rise members suggested that the semi-annual retreats held by We Rise members provide a dedicated place for dialogue and the opportunity to unpack position differences and power imbalances or potential imbalances, and to lay bare different opinions between individuals and organisations that might be behind positions or stances (Interviews #31 and #28, 2017). For example:

> *That's a sort of nuancing that's important, and that makes some of the power discussions (Interview #31 2017).*

Pacific women benefited from dialogue and exposure, as was evident, for example, from their responses to the word 'feminism'. As noted in the previous chapter, while some of the interviewees noted that the word was not one they would refer to (Interview #21, 2016) for others it was part of their everyday discourse (Interview #28, 2017). The majority noted that they were keen to attend the We Rise workshop so that they could listen and learn about new ideas. There was a recognition that the starting place of these discussions varied greatly, depending on their individual positionalities:

> *Feminist thinking and feminist approaches really are just not, you know just not [used throughout Pacific]. The starting place is so different in those discussions. Others are very aligned to the women's movement, and to feminist thinking, and practice. It's just interesting to see the sort of similar but different parts, and what it might lead to [in the region] (Interview #28, 2017).*

Scholars of coalitions have stressed that, in successful coalitions, managing differences in values and interests is critical. Coalitions with spaces available to reframe gender issues and engage in open and honest conversations about differences can facilitate engagement with invisible power and promote shared or negotiated leadership (Fletcher et al 2016). This reflects the desirability of creating and using this dialogue space as part of strengthening feminist movement building in the Pacific.

Regional dialogue across difference needs a space for the support and amplification of diverse women's voices, and space to 'hear the other'. The Fijian Minister for Women, in her opening statement at the 2nd Pacific Feminist Forum, acknowledged the role of We Rise in providing this space. The key to sustaining coalitions across diversity is the recognition of intersectionality; and the Minister defined this as accepting that struggles are interconnected and solidarity across differences is reachable when we listen to one another:

> *I encourage each one of you to stay strong in sisterhood and stay united in comradery because the battle you are fighting is extremely important, but it is also a difficult one. To me, feminist solidarity starts with the decision to hear the other. It is a decision to listen to the experience of the other. It entails accepting that our struggles are interconnected. We stand together with each other. We sit in circles and share. We see one another, we hold hands. We move beyond recognition of problems to working together, to have the common efforts to build that common ground we hope to see. Let's continue in our pledge and strive to boost the power of feminist solidarity and social change* (Vuniwaqa 2019).

Interviewees also identified the central role of dialogue in exploring and creating relationships in the Pacific. They acknowledged the role of We Rise in opening up spaces to explore new partnerships (Interview #18, 2016). Yet, at the same time, they acknowledged that these

dialogues are not always easy. Understanding another's perspective and what people are trying to achieve takes trust and effort:

> *There's a lot of effort, has gone into that [trust]. I have worked on very complex partnerships, and what is similar is the time that is needed to build relationships, build trust, and actually make sure that ... and understand. the perspectives and what people are trying to achieve (Interview #28, 2017).*

We Rise opens new spaces for diverse civil society actors to think more reflexively about how they work together. As We Rise member Noelene Nabulivou, from Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality, said

> *When you bring people to go into that kind of thinking, about the level of change we need to bring real justice to ourselves and the world, you forget a lot of the silly, ego-filled angst and you are focused on the higher order thinking and feeling – what does that mean for the future of our feminist movement to be together in this Forum? (UN Women 2019).*

In particular, We Rise partners demonstrate practical ways to achieve a strong, intersectional Pacific feminism. Noelene Nabulivou further expressed her focus on the lessons that can be taken and shared with others:

> *How are we going to do it and practically what would that look like to produce a movement-focused Pacific Feminist Forum? Who has the skills and experience to do this piece? Why did this not work, when we tried so hard? From all of our evaluations that we have seen come through, our intersectional and interlinkage frames of south feminism, really has helped us to keep the Pacific Feminist movement focused, growing, and strong (UN Women 2019).*

As well as creating a space to build new partnerships, an important function of the dialogues organised by We Rise is to ensure that power sharing is maintained, and the visibility of marginalised women increased. With regard to power sharing, the sole Australian partner in We Rise was especially conscious of constantly evaluating its own positionality as a larger organisation with more resources, so as not to overpower the smaller actors (Interview #28, 2017). This need to continually negotiate power differences, develop a shared vision and forge

a collective identity as a coalition was emphasised by several We Rise members. Interviews revealed that this takes time, but is necessary in order to show that We Rise is more than several organisations working on a program together (Interview #44, 2018). Through its transparency and trust, We Rise has been able to reveal these tensions to other alliance-building actors and the processes it uses to resolve them, ensuring creativity still occurs. This is part of its value to others and part of its core aspiration – to grow and strengthen Pacific feminist movements.

In addition, when dialogue takes place between We Rise partners there is a particular emphasis on giving visibility to the voices and experiences of marginalised women. According to another partner of We Rise, IWDA:

> *The We Rise Coalition partners offer a unique range of skills and regional networks, while representing a breadth and depth of constituencies (IWDA 2020).*

This suggests that the inclusion of the 'breadth' of constituencies is a key part of the We Rise design. This was supported by another We Rise partner:

> *We Rise grows a diverse movement with the fact that all partners now have an inherent way of working which means that all our activities need to have diverse representation, not just LGBTIQ but also rural and urban representation, intergenerational representation etc. So this role is not just DIVA's but also for FemLink and FWRM – we do this for all our activities. It is deliberate and mindful (Email correspondence, We Rise partner, 2019).*

We Rise demonstrates how this 'deliberate and mindful' dialogue across difference is key to the ability to build a shared vision to sustain and realise the goals of an amplified, diverse feminist voice regionally. We Rise acts to increase the visibility and input of those who have no power and no voice and to grow the capacity of the marginalised to promote social change (participant observation, November, We Rise Workshop, Suva, Fiji, 2016). The diversity of the We Rise partners is illustrative of the strategic dimension of this work to generate more action on gender equality advocacy. They consciously create spaces for airing disagreements and find ways forward to work together on agreed advocacy platforms despite some partners coming from a more radical position. A focus of one partner on the inclusion of sexual and gender minorities (DIVA for Equality) has been taken up by all We Rise partners and the Pacific Feminist Forum (PFF) in their advocacy. We Rise work in partnership with other feminist

individuals and organisations, mobilising different publics depending on the issue. By working strategically, they find sites of collective struggle with what may initially appear to be an unlikely partner, in order to make the best use of opportunities. This has resulted in transgender women building alliances with the mainstream feminist movement in the Pacific to achieve strength in numbers and solidarity.

Intersectionality underpins all three functions of We Rise. For example, interviews highlighted the importance of the inclusion of diverse women and non-binary acceptance (Interview #18, 2016). The idea is that, when time and space is given for dialogue to flesh out differences, this allows for a greater understanding of where people are starting from and highlights nuances behind positions taken. We Rise makes space to hear differences as it collaborates with diverse women, including those varying in age, sexual orientation, gender identity and location, all under the identity of 'Pacific feminist'.

6.4 Pacific Feminism: From a 'Project' to a Sustained 'Movement'?

In the previous chapter, I have shown that the adoption of a project identity was observable at the Pacific Feminist Forum (PFF). Together, the three functions of We Rise outlined above show how the We Rise Coalition is taking active steps to help move Pacific feminism from the PFF 'project' or funded We Rise Coalition 'project' to participation in a wider feminist movement. Taking steps towards regional mobilisation in order to engage in a bigger movement involves stepping beyond ad hoc projects to something more sustained. A review of social movement literature provides guidance as to what conditions are required for a group to become a movement. These steps in mobilising towards larger social movements have been described as requiring: (1) mobilisation of networks, evidenced in We Rise as the intersectional honing of common interests; and (2) mobilisation of potential, evidenced in We Rise through resourcing and capacity building (Klandermans and Oegema 1987).

In the following discussion I focus on each of these steps in turn, as observed in the context of the We Rise Coalition.

Mobilisation of networks in Pacific civil society

We Rise has played an essential role in developing, demonstrating and strengthening the networks of Pacific feminist civil society towards being able to participate in a regional and global movement of women's human rights defenders (We Rise Coalition 2016). Two aspects of this effort are important: dialogue across difference with an intersectional recognition and constructing an intersectional collective identity for the network.

The empirical work presented in this chapter found that the dialogue across difference was essential for a mobilisation of networks. Diverse Pacific women advocates and activists have been sharing and learning from each other, growing the network links through recognising the intersectionality of their struggles and using 'intersectionality as strength' as a mobilisation tool. This is in keeping with Crenshaw's findings that policy silences and challenges are experienced by marginalised groups, particularly among those whose marginalisation is shaped by interacting forms of disadvantage (Crenshaw 1989). These findings are also in line with Hankivsky who noted social movements and scholarship recognise previously ignored subject positions and identities. An intersectional lens can generate practical strategies for confronting and transforming interlocking power inequities (Hankivsky 2014).

Recognition of intersectionality in the dialogue, activities and organisation of We Rise has been particularly crucial for mobilising networks. Much has been written about intersectionality as a social movement strategy. As discussed in the literature review chapter, intersectionality is the acknowledgment of the interacting, simultaneous effects of multiple axes of oppression. My thesis focuses on the practical implications of forming intersectional alliances for the Pacific feminist movement. Gender, race, class, sexuality, age, ethnicity and ability cannot be understood in isolation from one another. Hills Collins provided a definition of intersectionality when she stated that:

> *these constructs signal an intersecting constellation of power relationships that produce unequal material realities and distinctive social experiences for individuals and groups positioned within them (Collins et al 2013).*

Intersectionality as a strategy for social movements gives such movements the ability to confront diffuse and differential forms of interlocking oppression. The literature review noted that social movements may deploy intersectionality to help activists organise. Through a sense

of self-representation and self-activity the We Rise Coalition has purposefully used intersectionality commitments to help it to mobilise, connect, coordinate and organise.

We Rise has constructed an intersectional collective identity through dialogue with a broad network across issues and geographical boundaries. Scholars have started to acknowledge that there has been very little effort to reflect on precisely how intersectionality has moved across time, disciplines, issues, and geographic and national boundaries. For example, some argue that a failure to attend to the intersectionality movement has limited our ability to see the theory in places in which it is already doing work or to imagine other places to which the theory might be taken (Carbado et al 2013). Attention is also being given to how this might be done in practice, and We Rise's particular focus on practice and on sharing lessons makes this a useful case study. For example, it can help answer questions scholars have raised as to whether 'a diverse crowd of individuals whose interests focus on distinct issues related to racial identity, class, gender, and sexuality [can] mobilise around a shared issue? If so, how does this process work in practice?' (Fisher et al 2017:1).

This case study reveals that this recognition of intersectionality is a key part of the movement-building function that is crucial for alliance building in the region. We Rise partner IWDA explains intersectionality and its importance to IWDA's own work, noting that life experiences are based on how multiple identities intermingle (IWDA 2018). IWDA goes on to explain that compounding forms of discrimination are experienced by the women the We Rise partners work with:

> *DIVA for Equality have seen that LGBT women in Fiji found it more difficult to access disaster relief in the wake of Cyclone Winston. IWDA contributed to research that shows that women with disabilities are more likely to face violence from immediate family members, and more likely to experience controlling behaviour from partners (IWDA 2018).*

According to IWDA, acknowledging how different forms of discrimination intersect with and amplify gender-based discrimination is critical to ensuring all women reap the benefits of women's rights (IWDA 2018). We Rise uses a commitment to and recognition of the intersectionality of Pacific women's struggles, as noted in the Pacific Feminist Charter, to bring together a diverse coalition:

> *As feminists in the Pacific we recognise multiple intersecting forms of patriarchy, long standing and unequal gendered power relations and emerging processes of oppression (Pacific Feminist Charter 2016).*

Connecting intersectional identities has helped to generate solidarity for each other's advocacy platforms. One leading We Rise partner described strengthening a movement to UN Women it thus:

> *What intersectional identities allow me to do, is to look at things in a different way from your view of our rights, and we can find commonalities, and where differences occur, it can help to deepen and nuance our shared work, not harm it. Once we unpack and express our issues, sometimes quite fiercely, work can continue better, and together (UN Women 2019).*

Still on this theme of working better together, We Rise partner Tara Chetty from FWRM argued that working through coalitions and alliances for change will contribute to more sustained and substantial outcomes (Chetty 2017). A We Rise partner confirmed that phase 3 of the We Rise Coalition, which has now commenced, will be focused on the idea of a 'movement' (Interview #44, 2018). The resources provided by DFAT for We Rise 2 were targeted towards the strengthening of feminist coalitions and partnerships for gender equality (DFAT 2019). Being more focused on contributing to a movement as a whole rather than focusing on specific individuals will also sustain the entire network mobilised (beyond individuals) into the future:

> *It's been three years now and we realise that with the transitioning out of the Coalition of individual personalities – taking steps to be more sustainable for organisations – being less dependent on people (Interview #44, 2018).*

This interviewee stressed that this change was evidence of We Rise's flexibility and its ability to change with the needs of individual partners (Interview #44, 2018). It was acknowledged in an interview with a We Rise partner that this is an ongoing process:

> *Bringing feminists and women's organisations together takes a lot of work. To be ready to meet at one room at one time, it is an ongoing journey, legacy of [the] women's movement. It is necessary to make sure women are at front and centre and keep organising through a coalition. This opens the space further having four organisations*

as leaders. When they work together, they share opinions and resources and strengthen feminist practice and find their opportunities (Interview #28, 2017).

Mobilising networks via strengthening coalitions and capacity building enables diverse Pacific women advocates and activists to move towards strong participation in a wider social movement in the face of a threat to feminist activism. We Rise creates visibility for diverse women advocates, allowing them to have fun together, to reduce siloing and to show the interlinkages of women's human rights issues.

Mobilising the potential of feminist alliances

As noted above, the second important component of sustaining a movement is its mobilising potential. In the case of We Rise we can observe this, in particular, in two different ways: first, by the coalition's strengthening of linkages between diverse groups; and second, by a consideration of what makes a safe space, which enables We Rise's activities to flourish.

Strengthening linkages of national feminist movement building with regional and international agendas supported by the We Rise Coalition is a key part of mobilising potential. We Rise also strengthens movement building within the contexts of local Pacific Island Countries and plays an important role in building a Pacific movement for ending inequality and promoting women's empowerment. Activities to maximise the coalition's potential have included mentoring and support of other Pacific coalitions, formal training activities in feminist practice, and advocacy and policy engagement with stakeholders. Continuing to build a strong connection between We Rise and the broader Pacific feminist movement will be important. This willrequire consideration of interlinkages between We Rise and the broader feminist movement and a strategy for sustaining activism as part of a bigger movement, with feminist solidarity firmly embedded. Despite the different areas of work of feminist actors and organisations there is a sense of feminist solidarity for common visions, such as accountability, equality and, diversity as principles, and deliberate intersectionality to capture these different group is included in all We Rise activities.

Secondly, safe spaces are required to fulfil We Rise's potential. We Rise creates safe and confidential spaces for diverse voices and experiences. In turn, this will increase the trust between the members, and thus aid collaboration within the women's movement with an end

goal of demonstrating influence through language in national, regional and global policy and in grassroots campaigns. Examples of these spaces include a self-care corner in the We Rise tent (known as the 'Hub' at the 2017 Triennial), which allowed for collaboration around the inclusion of recommendations in the final text of the agreed Triennial Outcome Statement, with strategising between institutional and social movement feminists. This was also done at the global level at several CSWs, where We Rise maintained engagement and collaboration with the broader women's movement through the Women's Caucus (Winterford and Laqeretabua, 2019). In successful coalitions, managing differences in values and interests is critical. Fletcher et al (2016) assert that coalitions with space to reframe gender issues and engage in open and honest conversations about differences help facilitate engagement with invisible power and promote shared or negotiated leadership. This underscores the importance of safe dialogue spaces as part of strengthening feminist movement building in the Pacific, with time for:

> *considering [the] strategic purpose of an activity and investing time in unpacking goals. Did our team understand the movement building? There is a need for deliberate discussion to ensure cohesion (We Rise Coalition partner 2018).*

The We Rise movement-building approach to Pacific feminism is significant, as feminism is under threat globally (Verloo and Paternotte 2018) and women's human rights in the Pacific and globally are under threat. Therefore, there is a great need for women's human rights defenders and activists to build solidarity, strengthen resistance and lead the revolution against all forms of discrimination and injustice that hinder progress towards gender equality (Pasifika Rising 2019). The We Rise Coalition case study investigates a response to threats experienced to the feminist project and an attempt to strengthen the numbers and diversity of Pacific women involved in an effort to have greater impact. This was acknowledged by We Rise at its workshop in Suva (participant observation, We Rise Workshop, Suva, Fiji, November 2016).

Practical examples of how the We Rise potential can be further mobilised are provided in the We Rise mid-term evaluation; these include influencing the practice of each member, negotiating power and relationships, influencing the programming practice of each member (for example, in areas such as finance) and a strengthened Pacific appreciation of the diversity in feminism (Winterford and Laqeretabua 2019). To achieve this in the next phase, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) review of We Rise recommended that We Rise Coalition phase 3 strengthen strategic coalition work at regional and global levels through

sustained and coordinated action (DFAT 2019). The third phase was also to include integration of relevant monitoring and evaluation approaches to measure progress, and ongoing appropriate resourcing (DFAT 2019) which will further maximise its potential. Equally important are communications to more Pacific women's human rights organisations about the achievements of the We Rise Coalition and lessons learned about coalition practices (DFAT 2019). Interviews with one of the members of a We Rise partner organisation revealed that changes were coming in phase 3 of We Rise, with the departure of one foundation partner to pursue other goals, and its replacement by other organisations (Interview #44, 2018).

Phase 3 of We Rise commenced after this case study was completed. The Coalition continued to grow in strength and numbers, with the bringing together of seven diverse regional organisations from 2020. New members included organisations from across the Pacific, such as Sista (using art to empower girls), Talitha Project, and Voices for Change (a women's human rights organisation in PNG). At the announcement of these new We Rise partners (We Rise 2021), new partners expressed their hope at being part of the Coalition through a press release from which the following quotes are drawn. Lilly Be'Soer for example, the director of Voices for Change, commented:

> *It's a total game changer when women come together and we are ready. Ready to talk to each other openly and honestly, ready to celebrate each other's diversity, ready to hold each other accountable and ready to create a new world that is inclusive for all.*

This highlights the voice of Pacific women in wanting to talk openly, and being ready to do so in an inclusive way. Similarly Talitha Project members saw the coalition as a diverse, powerful tool to assist feminist organisations. They gave examples of building partnerships with the members in the coalition to learn from and grow with, to learn about how each organisation has worked towards gender equality and ending violence against women. They highlighted the power of coming together:

> *I believe we don't have to reinvent the wheel but partner and share power.*

Sista uses art and media to empower women and girls. Executive Director Yasmine Bjornum commented on inclusion: *We all have something to bring to the table.*

FWRM Executive Director Nalini Singh said when commenting on the importance of collective voice:

> *Pacific women's representation and voice has always been key to our work and it's been incredible to see the We Rise Coalition grow to seven diverse NGOs from across the region. We are honoured to be part of such a ground-breaking collective, where we are bringing together our strengths and resources and building a collective voice.*

FemLink Executive Director Susan Grey commented on the importance of solidarity and women's voice and leadership, linking this to COVID recovery:

> *2020 has been such a challenging year for Pacific feminists and as we commence 2021 we look forward with lots of hope, persistence, and determination that with our solidarity through an expanded collective of seven diverse regional organisations, we will ensure women's voice and leadership in the response to and recovery from COVID.*

These We Rise members quoted above all reflected on the power of women's collective voice and solidarity, and the importance of forming alliances across diversity to increase power and impact. The impact of this next stage of an expanded We Rise Coalition is continuing to grow, as evidenced by the virtual meetings I attended at the 2021 Pacific Women's Triennial side events hosted by We Rise, and saw the confidence, power and clarity in calls for action of diverse groups united under the banner of the We Rise Coalition. This expanded coalition will be an area of future research and evaluation, perhaps by me or by another scholar.

6.5 Practical Lessons on Alliance Building

What does this case study offer as lessons and implications for diverse alliance-building scholarship? Two areas where existing knowledge could grow through this case study are intersectional alliance building and negotiating solidarity.

Intersectional alliance building brings to light the linkages between diverse groups

My contribution in this area is to provide additional empirical examples of the practice of intersectional feminist alliance building in the Pacific. Sustained and enduring actions of

alliances across diversity requires interactions to continue to promote learning, sharing and advocacy. A We Rise partner commented in an interview:

> *Given that the four organisations are so different in nature, the way the programs are organised contributes to the larger outcomes. The partners of the We Rise Coalition are connected to many in the Pacific feminist movements and the model allows for interactions to promote learning, sharing and advocacy. The Pacific Feminist Forum is one such space where this has happened through We Rise and there [have] been other regional and international opportunities in which We Rise has galvanised the feminist movement, such as the 13th Triennial [and] CSW (Interview #44, 2018).*

This empirical study into intersectionality as a mobilisation tool reveals the foundation of this ability to move individuals and diverse organisations towards movement building. This involves generating a sustained body of actors, with a defined platform for action, and a clear way of working together. I found that the We Rise members consider this a key part to building their diversity and their collective feminist practice in the region (Interview #31, 2017). The We Rise Coalition is quite new, and so has not been studied before; existing literature also acknowledges that intersectionality as a mobilisation tool has been understudied. This is particularly important in the Pacific. This knowledge on intersectionality as a tool in mobilisation for movement building is important to my research question, as it enabled a move beyond a focus on 'projects' and was more in line with a 'movement building approach' (Interview #44, 2018). Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls of FemLink, a We Rise partner, acknowledged that a coalition was more than just a project activity (Chetty 2017). We Rise was described as a 'movement building' force during the workshop in Suva in 2016 (participant observation, We Rise Workshop, Suva, Fiji, November 2016). This necessitates having a sense of which direction to pull in, and uniting many different individuals and organisations, all with different agendas, can be risky and difficult. In order to achieve this, the We Rise members spend resources to support the ongoing capacity of the alliance to survive, and to ensure it continues to be a viable vehicle for social change (Interview #44, 2018). For example, as a We Rise partner has noted, there is also a diversity of the resources the partner groups bring to We Rise:

> *We need to acknowledge that each partner brings different forms of resources to the Coalition – need to name them, claim them and use them! (IWDA 2016b).*

Pacific women advocates and activists have created spaces in which to build skills and confidence to advocate for transformative change to achieve gender equality. This staged process and development reflects a progression from a project to a movement, achieved by supporting and strengthening others to mobilise and collectively engage.

The We Rise case study shows how the activities helped partners learn and reflect, where interventions were made to ease tensions, or prevent or deal with conflicts and heal from them. Those interviewed from We Rise talked about their internally focused power-sharing activities. Scholars have argued that that purpose of intersectional activism is not just a concern with external impact, but that sisterhood has to be about how we interact with each other and the way we care about each other. Armine Ishkanian and Anita Pena Saavedra's (2019) study of the intersectional feminist anti-austerity group 'Sisters Uncut' focused on the generation of a toolkit to create spaces to address harmful acts and explore harmful behaviour. This was described by the authors as a messy, uncomfortable and complicated process but essential in preserving group cohesion.

It is true that uncomfortable communications can cause rifts between groups. Yet interviewees noted the We Rise Coalition's willingness to facilitate uncomfortable conversations (Interview #44, 2018 and #28, 2017). Interviews with We Rise partners (for example, Interview #44, 2018), as well as the literature (Ishkanian and Pena Saavedra 2019:997) suggest that an investigation of how to build towards a diverse alliance must understand what group members do internally to acknowledge and address inequalities, not just how they focus their 'outward facing actions'. This is especially evident in the comments of the Australian partner in We Rise (IWDA), an organisation that is aware of its own privilege. The adoption of intersectionality, as part of a collective identity and a culture, requires the use of tools to turn it into practice; these tools include conscious and constant effort and self-reflection.

The ability to mobilise networks and mobilise potential requires resources such as people, skills and money. The We Rise Coalition, funded as it is by Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) demonstrates ways that civil society can engage with the state whilst retaining its own identity and ability to criticise government policy. This so-called 'dual strategy' concept of social movements (Suh 2011) may be helpful for Pacific feminist alliances more broadly in terms of the adoption of a simultaneous strategy of engagement and maintenance of their own identity. This dual strategy is evidenced in We Rise taking the

political opportunity granted through the DFAT funding from Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program, while also channelling the Pacific Step Up development funding into women's empowerment and gender equality (DFAT 2016). Yet, at the same time, We Rise maintains its arms-length status as it continues to conduct activism and voice opposition about independence in West Papua and climate change, both areas where the Pacific stance is at odds with Australia's policies (Radio New Zealand 2019).

This case study is helpful for discussing both a particular project that provides interesting empirical insights into the strengths of grassroots Pacific feminist organisations, and the potential for them to work together successfully to form a movement, and a particular project that has actually served as the catalyst for, or the opening stages of, a strengthened Pacific feminist movement that is now underway. We Rise partners revealed innovation in the model they used. As one interviewee argued: '*For us it has allowed space for ideation and innovation'* (Interview #44, 2018). Ideation refers here to new ideas and innovation is a reference to new ways of doing. These insights further support my argument that We Rise is helping shift Pacific feminism from a project to a strengthened participation in a regional movement. Recognition of the innovation that exists in the Pacific is overdue, as the common model is that the Global North builds the capacity of the Global South. In fact, rather than a skills gap approach, Pacific feminists see the strength of their efforts. For example, one interviewee noted the issue of outsiders seeing only gaps, whereas she saw Pacific feminism as an already effective movement:

> *Coming from a global perspective of feminists, if you look to the region as a gap, so you have a privileged view of how to see the effectiveness of Pacific feminists while some might have the perception that it is quite an effective movement (Interview #23, 2016).*

The We Rise case study emphasises the importance of identifying intersections and interlinkages in order to break down the siloes of women's movements in the Pacific. UN Women noted on the siloes that exist and the need for interlinkage:

> *A lot of our women's movements are very siloed, … the women in climate work on climate, a lot of women in EVAW [ending violence against women] work primarily on EVAW and the women in economic development, a very small group, work on economic development. So, we have spent a lot of time doing the conceptual work around South*

> *feminists organising on interlinkage, not intersectionality, but interlinkage (UN Women 2019).*

Understanding these 'interlinkages' among the goals and targets can help identify potential synergies and trade-offs (IGES 2019). In the context of the Pacific, this term refers to:

> *the joining or connecting of two or more things together. These may include linkages between sexual and reproductive health and rights, political economies of globalisation and sustainability (UN Women 2019).*

Negotiated solidarity allows diverse groups to move forward without requiring them to give up their individual identities

We Rise is an example of an approach which I call a 'negotiated solidarity'. Some scholars have explained solidarity as being a result of shared identities (for example, Taylor and Whittier 1992). They argue that solidarity emerges where social movement participants share identities. This approach has been criticised for treating groups and their members' identities as homogeneous, and not recognising that people identify in relation to multiple intersections of gender, class, race, sexuality, region, and nationality (Butler 1990; Epstein and Straub 1995; Rupp and Taylor 1999; Weldon 2006a). Tormos (2017) suggested that the notion of shared identities as a basis of solidarity tends to privilege the voice and preferences of dominant groups within movements. Failing to account for social group differences, he argued, has been detrimental to the sustainability and success of social movements that attempt to mobilise across group differences. Other scholars have suggested that identities are constructed through the process of mobilisation (Collins and Bilge 2016). Others point to the presence of shared interests (Keck and Sikkink 1998, Anner 2011). Studies on solidarity in women's, queer, global justice and labour movements identify an approach to solidarity that is more congruent with an intersectional social movement organising approach (Ewig and Ferree 2013). There are challenges that group differences present to efforts to build solidarity in women's movements and feminist movements. The women in the Pacific have explored how intersectionality can become a divider rather than a unifying celebration of diversity, including a We Rise partner who pointed out that nuance needs to be part of discussions when younger women call out the women who had been in the movement a long time:

> *…age is also interacting with ethnicity, class, heteronormativity, privilege and colour issues all the time. Inequality issues can arise from these differences – an activist's age or time in the women's groups and movement (UN Women 2019).*

This demonstrates the range of intersectional inequality issues that need to be highlighted:

> *The reality is that all the things that makes movements beautiful is also the stuff that potentially oppresses if under-acknowledged and under-analysed inside and between organisations (UN Women 2019).*

This highlights the importance of intersectional acknowledgement and analysis to find commonalities in order to create a solidarity across diversity and see what still needs attention in diverse feminist movement work:

> *So once you change this from an intergenerational to an intersectional model, then it allows you to better work on the inequalities and movement fissures, and find commonalities rather than just shallow, single-dimension differences (UN Women 2019).*

Scholars focusing on 'international solidarity' have argued that bonds of solidarity emerge as a rational expression of shared interests (Waterman 2001, Wilde 2007). Mobilisation, through modalities of coordinated social movement agency, cut across social group differences and mobilise groups from disparate material backgrounds. Tormos (2017) argued the environmental, LGBTQ and human rights movements provide examples of movements that have sustained mobilisation while building solidarity across multiple social group interests and identities.

Key to the ability of the We Rise Coalition to build and sustain a movement in the Pacific of feminist women is its continued commitment to negotiating intersectional solidarity through dialogue and organising:

> *The reason why we use more grassroots and localisation language now, is because we wanted to put increased public attention to things that are difficult for Fiji and Pacific people to talk about – which is, we really do have differences between urban and rural and we really do have differences between heterosexual women and LBT women and gender non-conforming people, and women with disabilities (UN Women 2019).*

This can be of benefit to others who wish to follow a similar path, and may provide some practical ways to be inclusive, including using grassroots language. Acknowledging the importance of negotiating solidarity can also push feminists to consider class, privilege and other barriers to achieving solidarity and engaging a wide membership:

> *But people in general, even human rights and feminist activists, do not necessarily look at these as issues of class and inequality, non-inclusion, stigma and violation of human rights. Many still do not like to do this analysis, to change their work in the ways this lens demands, so to bring this front-and-centre as an issue of class and privilege in our country, in our region, has really helped us to move stronger local feminist work forward, and push each other as feminists (UN Women 2019).*

All of these activities are demonstrated by the We Rise Coalition, and they lay the foundation to strategically take Pacific feminism from a project to a stronger position. Through such activities, We Rise can participate in a wider movement through a negotiated solidarity and a recognition of intersectional synergies.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the role We Rise plays in building diverse feminist alliances in the Pacific. I investigated the processes, goals and structure of We Rise and what it does to grow its capacity and numbers to play a strong role in the feminist movement in the Pacific. Research has begun to explore intersectionality as a mobilisation tool for social movements (Fisher et al 2017). Using this literature as a springboard, I focused on the understudied Pacific region to expand the empirical base of this area of inquiry and examine what lessons can be learnt for feminist alliance building. I concluded that insistence on intersectional recognition and inclusion has been a key mobilisation tool for Pacific feminisms. Importantly, the We Rise Coalition was able to build feminist alliances *because* of its focus on intersectionality, which is manifested in its organisational interaction and in its core functions. The We Rise Coalition openly demonstrates thinking and acting intersectionally and bringing disparate groups together. This is of significance as it addresses the question of whether and how it is possible to respect difference but find a common purpose.

We Rise is an example of a 'strategic' alliance, in that the partners mindfully put aside differences to focus on the parts they have in common. They deliberately join forces to maximise their shared resources and reach. They also uncover the usually hidden processes on how to reconcile individual goals with joint goals and how to share power. The coalition's partnership agreement makes explicit how partners are aiming to further both their individual and joint goals. However, they openly acknowledge that this is difficult. We Rise is an example of a situation where some of the common challenges involved in building alliances have been overcome. The downsides or challenges in relation to working in alliances, using examples from We Rise, include: taking time and effort away from 'core work'; difficulty in obtaining funding and staff to do the networking activities required of an alliance (such as attending We Rise meetings, contributing to We Rise reports); and dilution of an individual organisation's 'brand' .with all the focus on the We Rise brand, not their own. Part of the reason these challenges have been met, I argue, is that the organisations have chosen an approach that purposefully prioritises intersectionality. Voices usually marginalised have found a safe partnership that is willing to take on their issues and amplify them collectively, working through intersectional challenges by using dialogue, checking in, and deliberately finding a way forward rather than insisting on consensus or nothing.

Carefully designing a new strategic (that is, deliberate), mindful alliance can build a diverse but collective identity that sits alongside an existing alternative identity. We Rise commits to ways of collective action that respect rather than erase differences. Most importantly We Rise is very transparent in identifying activities that aid alliance building across diversity. This transparency helps other actors in forming alliances where multiple voices mean amplification. We Rise uses multiple voices to increase the amplification and impact of its advocacy on progress towards Pacific gender equality. The next chapter will tease out the underpinning principles that can influence other future coalition- and alliance-building practice and scholarship.

The We Rise Coalition puts its diversity at the forefront of its collective actions and alliance building. To fully understand mobilisation and success we need an understanding of the factors facilitating organisational coalitions. The case study in this chapter, demonstrating the emergence of regional activities and collective action in the Pacific, is further building on the work done by the PFF described in the first case study. The intersectional alliance building of both these cases expands the membership of groups seeking to sustain feminist civil society in the Pacific and builds the capacity of others to create further alliances founded in the negotiated

sisterhood that is Pacific feminisms. The case studies – the Pacific Feminist Forum and We Rise Coalition – together add to our understanding of the potential for strong collective response by a regional bloc of Pacific feminist civil society actors in the face of the threats and backlash (outlined in chapter 1). The next chapter will consider the synergies the case studies illustrate.

PART THREE:

KEY INSIGHTS AND CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER 7

BUILDING FEMINIST ALLIANCES IN THE PACIFIC:

WHAT WORKS?

> *There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives. Audre Lorde (Address, 'Learning from the 60s', Harvard University, 1982).*

In the previous two chapters I focused on two recent examples of building alliances across diversity to amplify and multiply voices for gender equality advocacy. In this final part of the thesis, starting with this chapter, I will review and reflect on the combined insights and impacts these examples offer in response to the following research questions as outlined in the introduction to the thesis:

1. *What are the prospects and challenges of building regional feminist alliances in the Pacific region?*
2. *How do the Pacific feminist civil society actors navigate the challenge of building a unified regional voice that is attuned to the differences across the region and its peoples?*
3. *What impact, if any, do the Pacific feminist alliances have regionally and globally?*

In responding to these questions, in this chapter I revisit the commonalities of the two civil society initiatives and identify the key insights they offer for future feminist action in the Pacific region.

The chapter is structured in two sections. The first section synthesises the insights the two case studies suggest with respect to the practices and processes of feminist alliance building in the region. This discussion shows that, taken together, the two case studies demonstrate the importance of forming feminist alliances that are strategic, intersectional, transparent and based on the principles of trust and reflexivity. The case studies also demonstrate how aligned purposes (with no insistence on a singular purpose) make space for diverse alliances to form.

This is in contrast to views that alliances form by joining 'like with like'. In the second section, I outline how the insights gained from a synthesis of the two case studies add to existing approaches to alliance building, and flag the practical benefits of these insights to civil society actors in areas of the Pacific and beyond.

7.1 Key Insights on Feminist Alliance Building in the Pacific

In this section I outline the combined insights from an analysis of the Pacific Feminist Forum (PFF), and the We Rise Coalition (We Rise), two recent initiatives with a regional and feminist focus in the Pacific. Some of the literature on feminist alliance building detailed in chapter 2 covered the importance of trust among coalition partners and intersectional recognition. However, most of this literature focused on the Global North (as outlined earlier). This thesis furthers this body of work by focusing on feminist civil society alliance building in the Pacific (Global South). Reflecting on the vastly dispersed, under-resourced, diverse and heterogenous Pacific region, it provides pragmatic steps for replicating this in different contexts.

What are the synergies between the two cases and what can we learn from them about diverse alliance building? To start with, the PFF and We Rise, while separate entities, interact to mutual benefit. Each initiative amplifies the other as part of a pattern of building diverse alliances focused on gender equality advocacy. For example, We Rise uses the Pacific Feminist Charter, an outcome of the PFF, to push forward its own advocacy work and highlight interlinkages with others as it strengthens diverse networks of Pacific feminists in the region. DIVA for Equality and the Fiji Women's Rights Movement were in both the We Rise Coalition and the organising committee for the PFF. We Rise took the charter from the PFF into the 2017 13th Triennial Meeting of Pacific Women, the 6th Meeting of Pacific Women's Ministers and meetings of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), using agreed language to ground recommendations for outcome statements' language. Building on this foundation moves Pacific feminist civil society forward from a single-issue project to coordinated involvement in a broader movement.

Both initiatives were developed in the same socio-political context and faced similar kinds of challenges, such as slow progress on gender equality in the Pacific and resistance to gender diversity acceptance and inclusion. Yet, despite these challenges, as the previous two chapters

demonstrate, both PFF and We Rise succeeded in creating a shared vision across diverse groups, as articulated by the research participants in their individual interviews.

The first case showed how the PFF acted as a mobilising structure. Through a participatory forum, it supported existing action and prompted ideas and coalitions for further action. It showed the potential of dialogue across difference to connect, particularly through the emergence of Pacific feminism as a 'project identity'. The second case, the We Rise Coalition, presents an example of alliance building in a regional civil society. The case showed active steps the We Rise Coalition has taken (and is continuing to take) to help move Pacific feminism beyond a 'project' to a sustained movement and program for action within the wider women's rights movement globally.

Taking steps towards regional mobilisation in order to engage in a bigger movement involves stepping beyond one-off or ad hoc projects to something more coordinated and impactful. This argument builds on Nicole George's work on bottom-up regionalism in the Pacific (George 2011), by giving feminist-led examples of regional networks which, as George identified, were forged by Pacific Islanders at the community level. She gave examples of faith networks, 'participation in regional religious congresses' and regional education 'mobilised around specific causes' (George 2011:37). Indeed the participants in the Young Women's Focus Group in my study were all members of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), an organisation that moves freely between the council of churches and faith-based networks and the women's movement, due to its practical support for women, such as childcare for working parents and shelters for women escaping violence. George (2011) remarked that Pacific regionalism analysis is commonly focused on the institutional realm. She saw the importance of a focus on the less well understood political context of more informal modes of Pacific Islands regional integration. She used Pacific women's regional peacebuilding collective responses as an example of this. My case studies in the 'bottom-up' community realm of women's collective responses to gender equality build on George's call for a focus on these informal activities and on Pacific 'bottom-up regional engagement' (George 2011:38).

Considered together, an in-depth analysis of the two case studies in the previous chapters suggests four main factors as crucial to building feminist alliances across difference: (1) paying attention to the process of alliance building itself enables true inclusion; (2) trust is a central element for building feminist alliances across difference; (3) a dynamic understanding of

solidarities creates space for building alliances across diversity; and (4) 'aligned principles' rather than identical goals are key for feminist alliance building across diversity.

In the discussion below, I detail each of these insights and note how they may be of interest and benefit to other potential alliances and to coalition scholars in the Pacific region and beyond. In particular, this discussion's practical treatment of the difficulties and possibilities of forming alliances across diversity in a transparent manner is designed for others who might learn from and adopt the approaches used in the case studies in order to further promote diverse mobilisation and alliance building.

Insight 1: Paying attention to the process of alliance building itself is key for genuine inclusion

A close analysis of both initiatives reveals that the *process* of alliance building is just as important as the outcomes for building inclusive and sustainable feminist movements. Both the We Rise Coalition and the PFF pay particular attention to the process of alliance building and of space creation. In both cases, we see a strong commitment to two principles that shape the process in important ways: transparency and reflexivity. These two principles are expressed by the PFF and We Rise as part of their commitment to a feminist way of working, with no hierarchy, and acting instead as a collective and with an approach of 'power through' (Galiè and Farnworth 2019) rather than 'power over' (Berger 2005). That is, this way of working recognises the relational notion of power and that the empowerment of individuals is constituted through the empowerment of others. This collective approach to empowerment, in contrast to the common individualistic notion, fits the Pacific concepts of community. The Pacific feminist organisations involved in these cases used the idea of 'power through' as a means of building a sense of their own agency. They rejected 'power over' by constantly checking in to eliminate hierarchies in their relations with one another, so as to stay true to a feminist ideal of equality.

In both cases, transparency about the process of bringing diverse women together took the form of being open about the difficulties of brokering alliances. This included processes through which to negotiate disagreements. This was done, for example, by creating spaces for dialogue hospitable to honest conversations about power sharing, aiming to address any tensions and reflecting on what was working and what was not in the context of being able to act collectively. The way the Pacific Feminist Charter was developed as part of the PFF is a case in point here.

It showed that balancing individual and collective goals in the context of forming a functioning coalition and an agreed charter could be achieved through dialogue that allowed various viewpoints to be heard. The emphasis on transparency in the case of Pacific feminism speaks to similar developments in the field of social movements more broadly, and alliance building in particular. Scholars have argued that not having to hold back from the difficult conversations is important in order to maintain a 'consensus movement' (Diani and Bison 2004, Taylor 1989) or to maintain consensus as a key organisational value (della Porta 2009). An emphasis on transparency was also identified by Jack Corbett (2015:66), who noted that the small scale of Pacific Island nations makes the 'expectation of transparency easier to meet due to the existing interpersonal connections' in both the private and the public sphere.

One key process displayed by the case studies was what the actors called 'checking in' on how they were building a coalition. This refers to moments of reflexivity with a view to constantly improving the process of alliance building and problem solving. As I discovered during my data collection (PFF workshops and plenary, Suva, Fiji, 2016, Young Women's Focus Group, Suva, Fiji, 2016, and individual interviews #44, 2018, #33 2017), both case studies amply demonstrated this process through 'checking in' on power dynamics, as well as being reflexive (that is, looking at their own actions) in building capacity or negotiating a charter. In chapter 5 I discussed the case of the PFF and its careful stepping through of the charter drafting and negotiations. In chapter 6, I drew attention to the We Rise Coalition's use of scheduled meetings to discuss power. These examples demonstrate the rigour required to keep alliances on track and to guard against any tensions or actions which may impact their sustained longevity. We Rise, in the way it resolved tensions about power and was open about its processes, gives insight into the power differentials that might have arisen, or were expected to have arisen, in building diverse coalitions, and the importance of being upfront about these, and open to challenging discussions. For example, the We Rise partners were prepared to have uncomfortable conversations and, through these, identified conflict about the approach to budget negotiations, which then led to a new process for the We Rise budget (interview #44, Melbourne, 2018).

Insight 2: Trust is a central requirement for building feminist alliances across difference

The strategies and processes that Pacific feminist alliances across diversity have used can provide useful practical insights for others. A practice of relationship and trust building, as

noted in the previous chapters, develops between diverse actors by acknowledging their diversity and engaging in dialogue to understand one another and to resolve any tensions openly. The steps to build and sustain trust demonstrated by the initiatives I focus on included space for open dialogue, being transparent, and building a community that addresses their intersectional struggles.

Trust amongst members helps to sustain alliances by grounding expectations of behaviour, and provides a feeling of certainty and belief in the integrity of the other to match their actions to their promises and, rather than acting through self-interest, always acting to serve the interest of the whole alliance. These benefits of trust could be observed in the We Rise Coalition. Trust can be fostered through both the time spent together and through dialogue, generating understanding and experiences. These processes for overcoming tensions, openly revealed by both regional alliance-building initiatives, offer significant learning opportunities for other movements in terms of understanding differences and forging and maintaining trust between unlikely 'bedfellows' or allies.

Having said that, establishing trust amongst strangers presents obvious challenges, and it is important to note that many members of We Rise and participants at the PFF had pre-existing relationships, which helped them to establish connections quickly. As discussed in an earlier chapter, this helped in the early phase of building an alliance in terms of being able to start a dialogue to see what opportunities existed in terms of overlapping goals for solidarity and collective action.

Personal relationships, kinship and collectivity are all important in the Pacific (Corbett 2015, Henderson 2016). As Corbett (2015:7) noted, 'the importance of family and kin' produces close links. As such, building trust is primary for taking action collectively in the Pacific. It is a key part of relational development in Pacific feminism, and great care was observed in both fieldwork settings to establish a safe space where people could discuss sensitive topics openly.

The creation and maintenance of trust is an ongoing task. There are at least three types of trust that seem to be particularly important to Pacific feminist civil society: interpersonal trust, trust in regional institutions, and trust in the fact that nations will act regionally, and not nationally, when regional alliances are being forged.

My two case studies confirmed that trust is crucial to establishing an effective and enduring intersectional alliance. Furthermore, this requires ongoing work as it takes effort, time and understanding to build interpersonal trust. This reflects the discussions in the literature review which noted the essential role of trust in intersectional civil society coalition building and sustainability (Roberts and Jesudason 2013, Adam 2017a, Price et al 2017). In this context, Dorothy Roberts and Sujatha Jesudason's (2013) work deserves particular attention. They argued that intersectionality need not just focus on differences but can be the very foundation of solidarity. They contended that, 'contrary to criticism for being divisive, attention to intersecting identities has the potential to create solidarity and cohesion' (2013:313). Similarly, the cases in this thesis highlight the practical steps by which intersectional networks and coalitions can develop this solidarity, which brings them together while still recognising their differences. Time to understand the different perspectives is needed to build trust, and the face-to-face time provided by the PFF helped to facilitate these exchanges. Shared goals rather than shared identities are important, as is knowing that bringing together these similar but different parts will be allowed develop and flourish. This reinforces the importance of going beyond an insistence on an identical identity, but rather emphasising 'similar but different', leading to the idea of solidarities in the plural.

The tension between Pacific feminist activists and regional institutions demonstrates how a lack of trust can affect the prospect of alliance building. In particular, the regional institutions' commitment to fighting for a diversity of rights was questioned after trans rights were consistently excluded from the 2017 Triennial Meeting of Pacific Women and Pacific Ministers for Women Outcome Statement. To build trust with regional institutions, the gradual inclusion of a seat at the decision-making table for civil society organisations, which is a very recent development, needs to result in a take-up of these organisations' recommendations. Failure to reflect their hard work may risk a perception that their inclusion is window dressing. In other words, people are being asked to sit in the meeting but are not actually being called on to speak. As Castells (2015) has suggested, without trust movement building can instead look like individuals jostling for power .

Interviews revealed that some actors from outside Fiji feared that Fiji was dominating or would dominate the PFF (Interview #38, 2017). Some participants expressed fears that they did not trust Fiji to act collectively and regionally as they believed it might focus only on its own needs. Others however, in contrast, expressed high levels of trust and support among a Pacific

sisterhood (Interview #20, 2016, Focus Group, Suva, Fiji, November, 2016).[10] As such, much work was required to create the PFF; this remains an ongoing process in order to maintain productive relationships between diverse actors and organisations from across the Pacific to make the forum regionally representative. Addressing power dynamics within alliances is crucial, especially in ensuring more equality and equity with alliance partners. This was also pertinent in the We Rise Coalition, where one partner is from a larger country, Australia, with more resources. One interviewee (Interview #28, 2017) noted this was something they continually checked in about and reflexively focused on. Keeping track of power dynamics in the PFF was helped by involving people from different countries on the organising committee to encourage balance and ensure various countries were heard and represented. We Rise puts much effort into maintaining its equal power sharing notion of collectivity. Pacific women's scholar Nicole George argued (2013:22) that this equal power sharing, which she terms 'horizontal collectivity', is an important feature of research into women's organising. Building on this, the initiatives analysed in this thesis suggest that much energy is spent on balancing input at both an individual and country level to maintain trust that no one actor will dominate.

Insight 3: A dynamic understanding of solidarity is key for building alliances across diversity

The Pacific feminist initiatives demonstrated an example of building solidarity as an evolving, non-rigid and dynamic practice. This dynamic understanding of solidarity is important if both individual and collective activities are to be maintained. This practice was underpinned by intersectionality and an attention to not erasing difference. Instead, both case studies reflected a strategic – that is, deliberate and considered – coming together to act. This 'strategic' element of sisterhood was a deliberate choice for building solidarity (with sisterhood being identified in interviews and the focus group as an idea that held meaning for participants). A decision to come together was made in recognition that the 'sum is greater than the whole'; participants felt that the strength of numbers would amplify their advocacy for gender equality including

[10] An alternative approach to understanding the current Fiji-centred nature of the Pacific partners, rather than seeing it as a limitation to be fixed, might also be explained by the importance of access to the location of the formal institutions engaged with gender. The Pacific Islands Forum and Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) are headquartered in Fiji, so it is a central regional hub with sufficient transport connections and hotels for conferences. Fiji's central location and basis for regional institutions is also flagged in George (2013).

amplifying marginalised voices. In this section I will unpack the dynamic nature of a Pacific feminist solidarity across diversity.

There was a strong focus in both case studies on solidarity among Pacific women and standing up for diverse Pacific women's rights. Multiple pathways were taken to this solidarity. First, as one active member of both We Rise and the PFF, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement, noted, the ability to caucus and mobilise quickly was important. This was demonstrated by the use of the agreed Pacific Feminist Charter as the basis for Triennial recommendations when We Rise and PFF members attending the Triennial were faced with a short time frame to make coordinated recommendations for inclusion in the Triennial Outcome Statement (Interviews #38, 2017 and #41, 2018). The ability to move rapidly beyond mere reaction and generate a shared gender analysis of the revised draft helped these groups respond knowledgeably and quickly to the government draft. On this example of solidarity one leading participant of the PFF commented on social media:

> *It's being in spaces like this where solidarity is meaningful and to see people who have the same passion to keep pushing the boundaries.*

Second, solidarity in the case studies was evident in the sense of people standing by one another despite personal differences, and aims and/or methods sometimes varied in order to address a bigger purpose or achieve an end goal. Solidarity came from a sense of being in action collectively, supporting what can be a tiring activity, and from a recognition of both the joys and the difficult aspects of movement building. To sum up, my interviews and participant observation of the creation of Pacific regional level spaces for solidarity and the building of alliances and networks by feminist civil society confirmed that relationships are important (Interviews #18, #34, #19, #25, #23, #28, #44 and Focus Group, Suva, Fiji, 2016).

Third, supportive coalitions are important for achieving solidarity around gender quality and, in the face of backlash and shrinking spaces, women's civil society needs to be supported in its organising. The cases revealed the use of alliances at a regional level to make appeals for transformation in relation to gender inequalities. For example, a member of the We Rise Coalition has publicly stated that 'without bringing women together, building communications strategies and resources, Pacific women are not going to get traction on gender equality' (Bhagwan-Rolls 2014).

Fourth, solidarity was further enhanced by the relationships of care and attention to emotions the partners had built over time by participating in regional and global events, working together and separately to amplify their calls for change. For example, the PFF and We Rise put the importance of care at the forefront of their work, recognising openly that this work is tiring and exhausting. This care for one another, and recognition of the emotional aspects of the work, has built the PFF network and the We Rise Coalition and gives an identity of caring to the kinship notion of 'Pacific feminists'. Scholars have identified that 'care' is central to belonging to a collective. For example, Nira Yuval-Davis (2011) argued the politics of belonging are concerned with the boundaries of the political community of belonging, the boundaries which, sometimes physically, but always symbolically, separate the world population into 'us' and 'them' (Yuval-Davis 201:3). Thus, of significance here is that the use of the 'We' in We Rise and the idea of 'Pacific feminists', prominent on t-shirts and posters, denote an identity of belonging and of the 'we' involved in the process. That is, this 'we' is created as a strategic solidarity of coming together across diversity to form a diverse alliance in order to build, sustain and amplify a Pacific regional feminist 'bloc' with a coordinated voice and platform of action.

Finally, the fifth aspect of solidarity identified through the case studies was the notion of supporting one another and self. The We Rise Coalition and PFF were transparent in their acknowledgement and management of emotions and in their commitment to self-care and mutual support as an aspect of solidarity (We Rise Coalition 2016). They defined this as being able to do the work they love while still feeling fulfilled and happy in every part of life, including feeling safe, recognised, respected and valued. This provides empirical evidence for the claims in literature that social movements transform and manage the feelings of their members (Flam and King 2007). We Rise and the PFF both foregrounded emotions and the importance of care – rather than suppressing tensions and managing differences – in a transparent acknowledgement of what needs to occur to sustain alliances across difference. This focus on emotions and care reflects the difficult context they were operating in and was revealed in the interview data (Interview #23, 2016). The two case studies are examples of people coming together and working together in a way that takes into account regional specifics and differences, the need to recharge, and the need for reflection and care in order to sustain difficult work.

However, it should be acknowledged that this solidarity need not be overly rigid. Shifting now from a focus on solidarity in movement studies to a recognition that new social movements are

flexible my case studies are exhibiting what scholars have reframed as ‘fluidarity’ (playing on the word fluid rather than solid) (McDonald 2002). My analysis of We Rise supports a view that this solidarity can be flexible, dynamic and ‘fluid’ while still being able to lend that support to group members. This suggests that modes of fluidity and their acceptance can actually build solidarity. Examples of this include reforming and regrouping from time to time, for a period of time or for a specific purpose. Neither permanence nor full-time activity is a requirement for an alliance to hold a space and support others.

To reflect this on/off activity I observed in both the We Rise and PFF examples, the metaphor of the yellow Post-it note is useful; that is, it sticks very well where you need it to stick. But then once you decide to move it to serve another purpose it can be moved easily and can still retain its stickiness in another space. The beauty of the product is that it is moveable as needs require – and serviceable in each place. There is no suggestion that this is a flaw; rather, this is its asset.

As an example, the PFF came together in 2016 and then again in 2019. Neither the We Rise Coalition nor the PFF have standalone permanent headquarters, and this is not the sole focus of either actor’s efforts. Both were formed for a strategic purpose and each entity adopted what was called in a previous chapter a ‘project identity’, coming together when required. For example, actors regroup at the times of the CSW and Triennial. This temporary, dynamic nature of the PFF and We Rise, with members coming together occasionally, is the best use of limited resources rather than a weakness. My empirical findings reflect the scholarly literature that found this dynamism in movement coalitions often formed in response to periods of especially strong opportunities or threats (Pullum 2017). Of particular resonance to my fieldwork observations are the observations in Amanda Pullum’s work that in times of threat those coalitions are built upon networks created during previous periods of greater opportunity. For example, when facing threats activists tends to focus on coalition work to advance their goals and form new alliances. In response to threats that affect multiple groups, activists may form broad cross-movement alliances and focus on long-term partnerships (Pullum 2017). This could be used to explain how the PFF and We Rise were formed in the context of feminists being faced with the threat of backlash, as noted in earlier chapters, They both emerged at a time when feminist civil society activists were merely ‘holding the line’ (Lawson 2013) instead of making progress, and diverse sexualities were not being included in statements and platforms for change

(as outlined in Part 1 of this thesis, 'Setting the scene'). Thus the case studies may provide an example of a solidarity being employed for strength in times of threat.

A dynamic understanding of solidarity has been noted as a particular feature of Pacific solidarity. Dr Colin Tukuitonga, Director General of the Pacific Community, candidly noted when commenting on Pacific regionalism in a 2019 speech that 'Pacific solidarity is fluid, like a lot of things in the Pacific' (Tukuitonga 2019). I see that We Rise's creation of fluidarity rather than solidarity as not deficient or 'less than'; rather, it is a strength that enables partners to come together when it is beneficial and then continue to work on their own actions, knowing they will be able to regroup when required. To visualise what I observed in Pacific alliances of women I considered the properties of an emulsion. An emulsion is a mixture that results when one liquid is added to another and is mixed with it but does not dissolve into it. This is a suitable metaphor, as the individual partners in We Rise, for example, did not dissolve but continued to work and act as their own entity; however, in each of their own Annual Reports they referenced the We Rise Coalition.

Insight 4: 'Aligned principles' rather than identical goals are key for feminist alliance building

Both case studies revealed that alliances that are specifically Pacific, specifically feminist and specifically engaged with and strengthened by diversity are founding a Pacific women's voice on gender equality at regional and international forums. These new initiatives are allowing for the learning of new ideas, such as trans inclusion in the women's movement, inclusion of young women and inclusion of intersectionality. That is, alliances are occurring across ethnic lines, and indigenous, lesbian, trans, young and older women, and women living with disabilities, are all united by an ocean. The goals expressed are not identical, but are aligned; they can therefore complement one another or sit together. For example, I found that Pacific women are not being restricted to formal engagement in institutions regionally but can – and do – form their own spaces, such as those illustrated in the case studies. A bringing together of the sexual diversity (LGBT) movement and the women's movement was important because it has been acknowledged that solidarity from other movements is necessary to support Pacific LGBT action:

> *[The] Pacific LGBT movement is uneven; there is an urgent need for more work across the region, and increased solidarity from other social movements (Pacific Women 2017).*

I observed that genuine inclusion across diversity was championed by We Rise and the PFF. This was evident at the PFF through inclusionary agenda setting. Pacific feminist civil society activists involved in the PFF and We Rise successfully brought the parts of the movement together through their constant checking on making space for diverse inclusion. More experienced women's organisations played a connecting role and offered their knowledge to the less experienced organisations. For example, exposure to the diversity of Pacific feminism (several respondents indicated that trans inclusion was new for them) showed how to sensitively make space for inclusion of women of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity.

The public and transparent acknowledgement that there is no one experience or unified existence of being a Pacific woman is crucial for diversity inclusion. As one interviewee suggested, embracing diversity in the Pacific women's movement opened doors for inclusion and recognition of the heterogeneity of 'Pacific women' (Interview #38, 2017). This is supported by the literature; for example, Yabaki (2006) noted that 'with Fiji's ethnic, racial and cultural diversity, women have different experiences and different needs and there is no single standard upon which women's issues can be assessed'. Against a backdrop of various global and regional commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment, the aim of the research was to inform debates on whether Pacific women have made real progress.

The aligned principles rather than identical goals are also evident in the ways in which the women's movement and the sexual and gender diversity movement in the Pacific are coming together, influencing one another and forming a larger whole through both the PFF and the We Rise Coalition. Through its transparency and trust, We Rise has been able to reveal tensions and how it resolved these, and the processes used to achieve such resolution. There is a particular identification in both case studies of the centrality of giving visibility to marginalised women, such as women with disabilities, widows, rural women, young women and women of lesbian and transgender orientation. This was achieved by raising these women's concerns in suggestions for outcome statements and charters for change, and by ensuring these women hold speaking roles and organising roles and have opportunities to tell their stories in their own words. This is an example to others and part of the We Rise Coalition's raison d'être – to grow

and strengthen a *diverse* Pacific feminist movement. Indeed, as this chapter's opening quote by Audre Lorde (1982) suggests, 'there is no such thing as a single-issue struggle as we do not live single issue lives'. The Pacific feminist movement's identity can be fluid according to what suits, what resources are available and the immediate priority. Scholars see identity as a field of tensions, where actors confront dilemmas and where the processes of social creativity may occur (McDonald 2002).

In conclusion, the functions of We Rise were underpinned and strengthened by a set of principles. It is these interlinking principles that connect the collective under the identity 'Pacific feminist', for alliance forming across diversity. This identification of the alignment or interlinkage of principles, despite members coming from different places, was the lens that helped diverse alliance formation to progress gender equality and amplify marginalised voices in the two case studies. As Yuval-Davis (2011:13) argued, shared principles can 'encompass intersectional individual and collective differential positionings'. Both cases showed this happening, as PFF and We Rise were fluid enough to move between combined goals and individual and separate activities.

7.2 Contribution of the Thesis to Existing Literature

In the first section of this chapter, I took a step back from the individual case studies and outlined their common key insights regarding the prospects and practice of feminist alliance building in the Pacific. In this section, I consider the key areas of scholarship that the empirical findings of this thesis contribute to.

The first area of scholarship to which the thesis makes a contribution is social movements. Existing literature on social movements discusses the promotion of causes for activists in terms of principles and beliefs, which might not be readily apparent to potential supporters, and are therefore in need of amplification. For example, Snow et al's (1986) research in the context of resource mobilisation and movement participation found that it is the linking of goals and activities that encourages participation. While focused on religious movements, peace movements and neighbourhood movements, his analysis of alignment in bringing groups together resonates with my own research on how diverse women can come together and build alliances. Both the PFF and the Pacific Feminist Charter were trans-inclusive, and this was new for many attendees. However, by the end of the forum, the transgender women were performing

anthemic numbers in celebration at the closing dinner, encouraged by everyone, and rights to sexual orientation and gender identity were central to the agreed charter (participant observation, PFF, closing dinner, Suva, Fiji, November 2016). This is in stark contrast to the failure of the agreed conclusions from the CSW year after year to include SOGI language and rights. The significance of the activities of the PFF organisers and We Rise members in forging diverse alliances and bringing together the cross-movement goals on SOGI rights and feminist advocacy is similar to claims Snow et al made (1986:472); that is, that movement leaders frequently elaborate goals and activities so as to 'encompass auxiliary interests not obviously associated with the movement in the hopes of enlarging its base'.

Snow et al (1986) dealt with an 'adherent base' (that is, those who support a particular set of ideas); however, this contrasts with two aspects of my own findings. The first is the truly intersectional approach to Pacific feminism that the We Rise and PFF organisers took. They brought diverse advocacy organisations together in a strategic manner by conflating the goals and shining a spotlight on the interlinkages in order to grow numbers and grow strength. They also amplified voices when faced with backlash and shrinking space for progressive feminist voices, as had been seen in the backsliding from the Beijing Platform for Action, and the invisibility of SOGI rights in outcome documents, despite advocacy.

This intersectional empirical example is thus my contribution to this social movement strategy that Snow et al (1986) identify, whereby participation in movement activity is frequently 'contingent on amplification or transformation of beliefs' (Snow et al. 1986:470). Snow and colleagues argued that 'beliefs about the efficacy of collective action are subject to efforts to mobilise them' and identified a barrier to this as the frequent confusion among social movement actors as to what was going on and why (Snow et al 1986:471). In contrast, my empirical findings reveal first the efforts We Rise and the PFF made to ensure transparency of process, in order to bring everyone along. This was crucial, as scholars have identified that frame alignment is a 'necessary precondition for generating movement participation' (Snow et al 1986:467). The banner 'Pacific feminist', and the time and dialogue to unpack what this meant as part of the forum and associated charter negotiations, gave the conditions for mobilisation. Under this banner, actors could understand the alignment of their own agendas and flag and resolve any concerns about what this signifier stood for (participant observation, PFF, Suva, Fiji, November 2016).

In addition, the thesis offers potential benefits to alliance formation literature. My empirical work is relevant to scholarship on alliance formation and how the formation of collective ideas takes place. The actors participating in the PFF, for example, did not resist altering a particular set of ideas; rather, the dialogue, relationship building and trust building and the time spent building the case for solidarity saw views changing, or participants at least becoming open to other points of view; this could be observed, for example, in the charter (Pacific Feminist Forum Charter 2016) negotiations detailed in chapter 5. The participants did not know the contents of the charter at the outset, as it was drafted collectively, yet after capacity-building workshops, relationship-building time spent together, and honest and open dialogue unpacking principles and interlinkages, actors agreed to identify under the Pacific feminist banner, and the final charter included SOGI rights, trans inclusion and decriminalisation of abortion. This shows the possibilities of negotiating a platform across difference, which is of benefit to scholarship on social movements and alliance formation.

More specifically, the cases investigated in this thesis show that actors do not have to arrive with beliefs fully formed, but can go through a process of belief formation of deep core beliefs. The empirical findings revealed how dialogue, transparency, care and solidarity can make beliefs more complementary, aligned and framed in such a way that diverse Pacific women could strategically join in coalitions and alliances. These insights further correlate to the scholarship identifying that actors do not need to agree on 'an entire set of principles and beliefs in order to build strategic cross-cultural alliances' and work together on particular policy issues (Sotirov and Winkel 2016:131). The empirical findings captured in earlier chapters align with the theory that contends that actors will seek strategic cooperation with others in the belief that strategic alliances are instrumental to strengthening one's own advantages (Sotirov and Winkel 2016:131). Strategic alliance building goes hand in hand with issue reframing strategies, and disruptive events are 'windows of opportunity' for policy reform (Sotirov and Winkel 2016: 131). In my case studies, these windows were the three-yearly Triennial, and the CSW, and issues relevant to these, such as decriminalisation of abortion, decriminalisation of homosexuality and unpacking feminisms, were able to be reframed during dialogue at the PFF. As the PFF and We Rise included transgender issues squarely in their feminist advocacy platform, this brought people to see the links between diverse groups and their agendas and interests, and to forge alliances across diversity to progress change.

There is potential interest for civil society scholars in my findings that Pacific feminists have a determined commitment to intersectional spaces to tackle marginalisation. The case studies, taken together, are of relevance to scholars of civil society, as they reveal the importance of building spaces for diverse Pacific feminists to come together. The principles and functional aims the PFF and We Rise had in common were to amplify voices, to create common platforms and to bring women together to tackle marginalisation. However, the two case studies also revealed different approaches, different tactics and different resources. In a time of shrinking spaces both feminism and feminist research can benefit from the case studies thinking 'from below' and the practical steps through which they seek to remedy the exclusion of women and marginalised social groups. Rather than neglecting conflicts, power relations and multiple differences and inequalities among women, as well as between women and marginalised groups, these coalitions and forums are tackling these issues head-on in a very transparent manner, negotiating sisterhood. Pacific feminists do form alliances across diversity. Their alliances are intersectional and strategic, in that they have chosen to work together to grow numbers and amplify their voices in response to global backlash and limited resources. They act regionally in the context of an increase of a regionalism focus in the Pacific – no longer focused on 'small island' states but speaking up about a 'large ocean continent' – to push back against sidelining.

These case studies offer novel insights and original empirical data from the Pacific region. Other scholars, activists and policymakers wanting to build and sustain intersectional alliances beyond the Pacific can learn from the practical processes and transparency revealed in the case studies. In terms of intersectionality, this research shows a practical, determined and consistent commitment to intersectional practice in growing networks and mobilising diverse forces for change. Pacific feminism is built on intersectional identities and solidarities. The case studies offer real-life examples of communities learning together, expanding engagement, making new networks and drafting new conversations. A community-wide negotiated platform for action via the Pacific Feminist Charter was used for action and change by the PFF and the We Rise Coalition, and to lay the foundations for future engagements. The facilitators of PFF sessions were transparent in where the gaps lay and where further capacity building and learning was required, and then shared this knowledge with the wider group. For example, one session at the PFF run by the We Rise partners was focused on feminist and civil society led research; in this session, leaders acknowledged that they had identified a gap in being able to conduct their own

research, and had learnt new skills to make progress in this area. Taking control of their own research also allowed voices not currently given space, in an understudied region, to now be heard.

7.3 Conclusion

The combined findings of the two case studies – one focusing on the prospects of reaching agreement on a common platform for action across diversity in and through a structured forum, the other looking at how diverse feminist groups can form a workable coalition to coordinate regional action –reveal important insights about the prospects and challenges of building feminist alliances in the Pacific region. Transparency, solidarity, the importance of relationships of care, and the belief that it is possible to unite strategically in sisterhood without losing diversity (that is, maintaining fluidarity as a modern form of solidarity) through embracing intersectionality are all principles evident in the case studies.

In both cases we see how actors and organisations use intersectionality as a principle to highlight and establish new interlinkages between diverse groups and to build relationships of trust and solidarity. This involved finding the parts where synergies lie and making space for diverse alliances to form and flourish. Furthermore, building effective feminist alliances also requires a dynamic understanding of solidarity. The case studies revealed solidarity being practised in a strategic manner in order to sustain these cross-movement alliances: that is, a negotiated sisterhood and non-rigid notions of enacting solidarity. At times, the two case studies showed different instances of this practice, with only slightly nuanced shifts. For example, the PFF demonstrated an approach designed for a face-to-face encounter, such as building trust through time spent together; We Rise, on the other hand, had this trust structurally embedded through a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which sets out the ways individual and collective goals would both be met.

Also key in this context is that neither set of alliances shied away from tackling difficult conversations. Participants in the alliances acknowledged openly that it was important to work through discomfort, as this can lead to a frank discussion on ways forward. This openness, in turn, built greater trust. The PFF had these discussions face to face, whereas in the We Rise Coalition the willingness to have difficult conversations was embedded into the structural processes in the MOU. The PFF worked towards the creation of a collective project identity –

`Pacific feminist'. This was achieved through coming together under that banner, unpacking what that looked like and using this branding on t-shirts. The forum's use of call and response also highlighted variety within collective identity (chanting 'Tell me what a feminist looks like. THIS is what a feminist looks like' signifying that there is no one way to present as a feminist when the diversity of the room responding was assessed). The We Rise Coalition has its collective identity of 'We' formally united by its MOU.

What these cases have in common is a clear demonstration of the capacity of Pacific feminists to identify, develop and implement Pacific-appropriate strategies that can actually influence change in the contemporary state of gender inequalities in the region, and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Pacific regionalism. Such an understanding goes beyond the formal institutional approach, to recognise the bottom-up communities of action contributing to the regionalism approach in the Pacific. A key reason for focusing on feminist activities at the regional level is to define regional specificities in terms of feminist identities, feminist solutions and feminist spaces.

Activists, donors and scholars working on diverse alliance building can benefit from taking note of the innovation occurring in Pacific feminism, especially its ability to take advantage of opportunities that are opening for civil society dialogue and through a strong interest in regionalism. Ways forward such as those in the case studies profiled help ensure a greater proliferation of strategies for feminist mobilisations to stay effective and to begin to have impact (as discussed further in the next chapter).

I acknowledge that with only two case studies, the emerging connections I have made between the cases themselves, and between the empirical findings and the literature, are interesting but not yet generalisable. However, it seems there is a thread; synergies and linkages are evident between what existing theory suggests makes for workable coalitions and alliances across diversity, and what has propelled the diverse Pacific women's alliances to mobilise and start to have impact. The two empirical cases also extend existing knowledge further, due to the very purposeful inclusion of women of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities and the focus on an understudied region of the world which has so much to offer in terms of feminist identity formation across diversity. This, of course, could be tested with more case studies in the future. This attempt to synthesise the findings offered by the two case studies captured the similar, but not identical, mapping of the foundations between the groups that enabled

intersectional linkages, which in turn forged collective identities across diversity in my two case studies. This chapter notes there are similarities between the case studies and what they revealed about the underpinnings of successful diverse alliance building.

Future research will uncover more examples that confirm or refute these insights and synergies. For example, other Pacific feminist coalitions are emerging, including the Shifting the Power Coalition (ActionAid 2020). I flag it here as a possible focus for further investigating Pacific feminist coalition formation, this time from the perspective of a gender and humanitarian, emergency responder group. Feminist civil society acting with greater cooperation and collaboration is resulting in diverse inclusion of multiple voices of Pacific women. The next chapter turns to the impact of feminist movements and other initiatives of marginalised groups organising to contest gender inequality. These coalitions and forums, viewed together, can be seen as forming a broader movement across difference within their own organisations and networks, but also as reaching out across movements to build numbers, amplify diverse voices and create more transformative change.

CHAPTER 8

THE IMPACT OF FEMINIST ALLIANCES IN THE PACIFIC REGION AND BEYOND

> *Being able to rise up and speak up increased my self-confidence and courage to engage with dialogue with people from across the world and intergenerational leadership (Interview #40, young Pacific woman, Samoa, 2018).*

In the previous three chapters, I explored how feminist civil society actors come together and build alliances across difference, and what they do to amplify their voice regionally and globally. The two particular recent feminist initiatives I focused on – the Pacific Feminist Forum (PFF) and the We Rise Coalition (We Rise) – revealed the processes and drivers behind the formation of feminist alliances and the challenges these initiatives faced. In this chapter, I focus on the impact of these initiatives. Are these two initiatives demonstrating impact regionally and globally? And if so, in what ways, where and how?

In order to respond to these questions, I focus particularly on the period from 2015 to 2020. I start at 2015 as this year marked key developments: it was the year when the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) Beijing +20 Review took place in New York, when the Political Declaration was passed by member states without civil society participation or debate. This was also the year that marked the launch of the first Progress Report of the Pacific Women program (Pacific Women 2015). And finally, 2015 was the first full year of the Framework for Pacific Regionalism. As I end my research in 2020, the year of the Beijing +25 Review, the CSW was postponed due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Once again, civil society voices were excluded as parallel sessions were cancelled and the Political Declaration was once again passed in a forum, which was reduced to one day, without debate (Alver 2020). The alternative Feminist Declaration, drafted by feminist civil society uniting in coalition across the world through the Women's Rights Caucus in protest, was circulated to amplify feminists' disquiet (McEvoy and Patel 2020).

Continued marginalisation of feminist civil society actors has led scholars to allege that 'small-scale changes with policies or projects are futile in the absence of more fundamental institutional change' (Goetz 1997:248). My aim in this chapter is to illustrate the difference that these small instances of alliances can make.

The chapter is structured in two main sections. In the first section, I consider the way impact is understood in the existing literature, and problematise the policy-focused understanding of impact. I argue in the second section that while policy change is an important manifestation of impact, it is also possible to broaden impact to go beyond policy change. I then describe the framework I used to assess the impact of regional feminist alliances in the Pacific, drawing on the work of Herbert Kitschelt (1986). This framework emphasises three categories of impact: procedural, substantive and structural. I use these categories to explore both the regional and global impact of the Pacific feminist alliances. I conclude that, despite being small, these initiatives are important sites of feminist innovation on alliance building with considerable impact, when a broad view is taken of where impact is occurring.

8.1 Definition of Impact

Impact has been an important but contested term in social movements literature. In what follows I will provide a short overview of the literature on impact, including identifying literature that has focused on impact as a result of social movement mobilisation. Scholars approach the question of impact and how to assess it differently. This ranges from a focus on policy impact to a pathway that seeks to broaden out the concept and the way it is measured.

Scholars with a direct focus on Pacific civil society, such as Nicole George (2010), have defined impact in terms of successful resistance to women's cultural and political status. George emphasised the ways Pacific women situate themselves in relation to international feminisms. In her study on how feminism and maternity are articulated in the Pacific, and the challenges to women's role and place in society, one aspect of impact is successfully setting up a Pacific-specific feminism; that is, a context-relevant feminism. Similarly, writing about regionalism and Pacific Island political solidarity, Claire Slatter and Yvonne Underhill-Sem (2009:195) suggested that regional solidarity of social movements in the region have 'exerted pressure on independent Pacific Island governments to support their various struggles in defence of Pacific interests'. These scholars also noted impact in terms of the effectiveness of organising Pacific

Island States to collectively resist powerful outside interests that pose threats to Pacific Island interests. Abby McLeod (2015:16) further noted that in the Pacific, where formal institutions are weak and the state has limited legitimacy, civil society organisations provide women with 'real opportunities to influence the delivery of services and advocate for government attention to issues of concern to them'.

In social movements studies beyond the Pacific, scholars have been searching for a variety of ways to grapple with the understanding of impact. This has ranged from a focus on responsiveness through to political opportunities, policy, and structural or cultural impact. For example, Nancy Naples (2002) argued that impact occurs when social movements move beyond narrow solidarities and particular affinities. When assessing where impact was possible, Laurel Weldon (2011) saw social movements as the best possible avenue for women to make policy change. She argued this is due to these movements directly addressing the 'structural nature of political marginalisation' (Weldon 2011:28). Notwithstanding this, Kristen Hopewell (2015) looked at persistent barriers to civil society impact. She argued that civil society actors seeking to impact decision-making within a global governance institution are forced to negotiate and respond to the opportunities and constraints that arise from the configuration of the field in which that institution is embedded. This includes its power relations, institutional dynamics, dominant ideology and modes of operating. She noted that for advocacy organisations, access to policymakers and the potential to influence global governance are tied to their ability to marshal the types of capital, or power resources, valued in these fields. This creates considerable pressure on global civil society to adapt (Hopewell 2015). Similarly, Sonia Alvarez argued Latin American feminist NGOs played a critical role in advocating feminism by advancing a progressive policy agenda while simultaneously articulating vital linkages among larger women's movement and civil society constituencies. However, the paper also noted developments potentially undermining NGOs' ability to promote feminist-inspired policies and social change (Alvarez 1999).

Scholars have also grappled with getting a full picture of the system they are trying to influence in order to find where they may have impact. For example, Paul Schumaker (1975) defined social movement outcomes in terms of the responsiveness of the political system, and distinguished five criteria of responsiveness: access, agenda, policy, output and impact responsiveness. Kitschelt (1986) described the importance of opportunities to articulate new demands finding their way into processes of firming policy compromises and consensus. He

emphasised the importance of openness, and the need for procedures to 'aggregate demands and build effective policy coalitions' (Kitschelt 1986:63). Related to this sense of grasping opportunities as they open, it has been argued that protest can produce political changes (or impact) in three ways: by altering the power relations between challengers and authorities; by forcing policy change; and by 'provoking broader and usually more durable systemic changes', both on the structural and cultural levels (Giugni et al 1993:13).

This insight highlights the importance of capturing the diverse aspects of impact, a process which is far from straightforward. One of the key challenges here has been identified as the difficulty of empirically studying the consequences of social movements. In their study of how social movements matter, Giugni and colleagues (1999) looked at success, failure meanings, disruption, causality and the direction of change; they particularly focused on the US civil rights movement's March on Washington. Part of the difficulty they pointed out is actually working out what the notion of success means when it comes to collective action. They noted scholars have mostly been interested in relating observed changes to movement demands. Succeeding or failing to achieve stated goals is certainly a legitimate way to approach the subject, but has the problem that success is often not assessed in a single manner by everyone.

Movement participants and external observers may have different perceptions of the success of a given action. Moreover, the same action may be perceived as successful by some participants but judged as a failure by others. This reveals that measurement of impact is contested. Giugni et al (1999), for example, pointed out the difficulty of empirically studying certain types of effects of social movements, which has led scholars to focus on policy outcomes as the clearest manifestation of impact. They noted that policy changes are easier to measure than changes in social and cultural arenas. Therefore, much research has focused on the policy impact of movements by relating their action to changes in legislation or to some other indicator of policy change (Giugni et al 1999).

I sought to look beyond policy impact and identify what other impacts, more broadly, of Pacific feminist civil society can be seen. This will be discussed in the next section.

8.2 Beyond Policy Impact

Going beyond understanding impact as limited to achieving policy change captures more of the impact of feminist civil society mobilisation in areas beyond policy alone: it captures structural and procedural impacts. In this vein, I sought to identify a framework through which to structure my findings. Critically, premised on the broader notions of impact, I set out to extend the commonly used conceptualisations of the sites where impact occurs and focus particularly on ways of understanding social movement impacts beyond policy change in the area they contest.

Scholars have critiqued a sole focus on political effects, arguing that they do not capture the whole picture of the consequences of social movements. For movements to be successful, it is not enough to produce policy change. The extent to which movement mobilisation brings about collective benefits is crucial (Amenta and Young 1999). These benefits might include international pressure on the national level government. National governments must report their gender equality progress and progress on promises made in agreed conclusions at CSW every year; civil society attends CSW in parallel sessions to influence the governments and hold them to account. This type of impact was described by Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink (1999) in their seminal work on transnational advocacy networks as a form of 'boomerang', in that the force of the impact comes back with benefits. Keck and Sikkink argued that diverse groups communicate, share information and services, circulate personnel, exchange funds and work together to influence policy.

Broadening the understanding of impact beyond an immediate policy change, Keck and Sikkink (1999) saw that networks could also influence issue creation and agenda setting, states' discursive positions, and changes to institutional procedures. They described non-state actors' significant roles on the global stage of politics, transforming and challenging conceptions of national sovereignty through networked relationships. These networks vary with time, context, and issue, but include those relevant actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services. Keck and Sikkink (1999) argued that the fundamental goal of such networks is to create a boomerang pattern. For example, if, for whatever reason, individuals (or organisations) in a country are unable to effectively persuade that state's government to initiate change, they may nonetheless be able to activate a transnational network focused on the issue. This network can, in turn, influence other states and international organisations and these other actors can

then exert pressure on the original state at the global level. Smith et al (2020) similarly cast the impact of feminist activist networks in terms of exerting pressure to promote social change, including by 'constructing and spreading norms and standards of gender equality' (Smith et al 2020:1).

In the case of Pacific feminism, we see this happening at the international level, where governments report on their progress against global commitments (such as at CSW on the Beijing Platform for Action), and civil society caucuses with like-minded groups to build a collective pressure and then hold the leaders accountable for their statements once home. This goes beyond policy alone but can include having a process through which their own issues are represented.

In their study of coalition dynamics, operations and outcomes, Mizrahi and Rosenthal (2001) noted that the leaders they interviewed defined success in multiple ways. Beyond a narrow focus on the consequences of collective action's political aspects, some scholars have also recognised the social and cultural dimensions of such action (Giugni 1998, della Porta and Diani 2020). For instance, 'collective efforts for social change occur in the realms of culture, identity, and everyday life as well as in direct engagement with the state' (Taylor and Whittier 1995: 166).

In this context, one particularly useful broader understanding of impact is suggested by Herbert Kitschelt. In his work he stressed three spheres of impact – procedural, substantial and structural– when writing about the impacts of social movements (Kitschelt 1986). His comparative work across countries on mobilisation impact, albeit in relation to nuclear protests and not focused on the Pacific, provides a promising framework. Here I am using his framework as a way of structuring the impact of Pacific feminist alliances at regional and global levels.

Kitschelt's (1986) approach is beneficial to developing our understanding of the breadth of areas of impact of feminist civil society due to his drawing important distinctions between the gains of movements in the various impact modes. Many other studies have drawn on Kitschelt's notion of impact to analyse the success or failure of social movements or mobilisation across diverse settings (see, for example, Bernstein 1997, Giugni 1998, Polletta and Jasper 2001, della Porta and Diani 2020).

In specific terms, Kitschelt (1986:67) defined the three modes of impact as follows:

(i) Procedural impacts open new channels of participation to actors and involve their recognition as legitimate representatives of demands.
(ii) Substantive impacts are changes of policy in response to protest.
(iii) Structural impacts indicate a transformation of the political opportunity structures themselves as a consequence of social movement activity.

Kitschelt's (1986) categorisations of impact helped me to make sense to the impact of the civil society actors in the Pacific region. More importantly, he argued that we should not expect policy impacts to be attributable to the scale and intensity of protest but to vary. He found that high mobilisation does not necessarily lead to profound impacts, while lower mobilisation can have a disproportionate impact (Kitschelt 1986) These are useful categories to consider the impact of civil society initiatives with a regional focus: they invite us to take a broader view of the multiple sites of impact, which capture both large and small impacts as worthy. In other words, we have much to gain from a broader perspective that focuses on the processes through which outcomes are produced. I also reviewed more recent considerations of impact, such as Weldon's (2011) *When Protest Makes Policy*, but wanted to explore the ways of understanding impact beyond policy and therefore drew on the structural, procedural and substantive ordering suggested by Kitschelt. Using this framework as a lens, and building upon it, in the next section I show how the impact of the two feminist civil society initiatives I studied goes beyond policy impact and falls into multiple other areas. I identify supporting evidence of impact in Pacific feminist civil society alliance initiatives for each of the three impact modes described above.

Procedural impact

The first type of impact is procedural. Procedural impact comes from having set up a system or framework through which to draw together diverse voices. One significant example of this happening in the Pacific was at the 2017 Triennial Meeting of Pacific Women and Women's Ministers. At the regional level, for example, having a procedure for collaboration via the Women's Caucus Hub at the 2017 Triennial allowed for the rapid inclusion of recommendations in the final text of agreed outcomes, and the submission of language to better protect diverse women's human rights (Interviews #38, 2017 and #41, 2018).

The Pacific Feminist Hub at the 13th Triennial Conference on Pacific Women allowed for Regional CSO delegates to meet, network, strategise and plan. The hub created a space for media, talanoa (that is, a Pacific space for inclusive, participatory and transparent dialogue), self-care and 'artivism'. The hub also created space for young women and newcomers to learn the procedures. For example, mobilising young women was a critical element:

> *Mobilising a cohesive movement of young Pacific women advocating for their rights the We Rise Coalition continued to be a critical element in FWRM's movement building effort, with partners DIVA for Equality Fiji, FemLink Pacific and IWDA. A key achievement under this pillar was FWRM's work through the We Rise Coalition to mobilise and support Pacific women's human rights defenders to attend the 13th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women and 6th Meeting of Pacific Ministers for Women (FWRM 2018a).*

In order to make the most of attending the Triennial, and to be a cohesive movement, coordination was required. To this end, a daily morning caucus was held for strategising on the day ahead and clarifying decisions. The hub worked because of the display of each organisation's strength and also because young women, transgender women and first-time attendees felt safe in the space. This hub created space to discuss issues like transgender inclusion in the feminist movement, which has been an explicit focus of Pacific feminist action recently. An interview with a participant revealed the positive benefits of the We Rise pre-Triennial training, and its potential impact on regional and global meetings. In particular they felt they benefitted from the orientation for civil society organisations (CSOs) attending the Triennial and a session on how to prepare for presenting a Pacific regional common voice at global meetings. Already having the Pacific Feminist Charter agreed and adopted meant that a settled voice could be amplified using the procedure of the Triennial setting (Interview #38, 2017). This maximised the impact of the presence of Pacific feminist alliances, which were strengthened in the context of a new Pacific regionalism focus whose processes now made way for civil society inclusion and dialogue.

Procedural impact was also visible at the global level at a UN meeting. Procedural impact was demonstrated by having procedures in place for influencing government stakeholders at CSW. Agreed language from the 2017 Triennial was successfully included in Pacific states' input to global forums, together with greater engagement with Pacific duty bearers (i.e., those

making the decisions) attending the UN CSW meeting as to how they could provide input, enabling greater coordination and ability to influence CSW outcomes (Winterford and Laqeretabua 2019). These procedures included a series of statements from the actors involved in the feminist alliance built in the Pacific. The following table (Table 5) illustrates statements made by We Rise members at CSW in 2017, and their focus.

Who	**Content and speaker**
We Rise Partner Statement (Fiji, 2017)	Noelene Nabulivou of DIVA for Equality, and DAWN Associate, statement at the 61st Commission on the Status of Women 2017.
We Rise Coalition: Pacific Women Rise In Solidarity For Annual UN Meeting On Gender Equality (Bhagwan-Rolls 2017c)	'Keeping the Beijing Platform for Action alive for women in the Pacific region and ensuring accountability to women's human rights is the mission of the group of four diverse and dynamic feminist organisations working together at the We Rise Coalition 2017'.
We Rise Coalition: Pacific feminists call for a removal of the economic barriers to women's leadership (Bhagwan-Rolls 2017a)	'It is vital that the 61st session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW61) addresses the intersections of women's productive and reproductive labour, their paid work and their unpaid work so that women can equally participate in the formal leadership spaces'.
We Rise Coalition: Pacific feminists negotiating in shrinking spaces (Noelene Nabulivou, the Political Adviser of DIVA for Equality at CSW61, reported in Bhagwan-Rolls 2017b)	'Pacific feminists and women-led groups are pressing for a CSW61 Agreed Outcome document that shows Governments showing courage to change the inequalities within and between states, examining and addressing sustainable consumption and production patterns, and envisioning a changing world of work for women that is not toward concentration of wealth and corporate power that prevents governments from investing in public services and social protection necessary for women's economic rights, but rather toward a just and equitable future for all, including women and girls'.

We Rise Coalition (2017): Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls, of FemLink, We Rise Coalition partner on R2P; 61st session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW61) New York, 2017.	'Finally, from my own Pacific Island region, I amplify the call of feminist sisters in particular the We Rise Coalition that progressing the gender equality and women's human rights agenda requires building and sustaining women's collective power through movements because it has been and will continue to be women's movements that turn individual efforts into a political force for change that cannot be ignored'.

Table 5: Commission on the Status of Women Statements, 2017

The specific interventions and contributions outlined in Table 5 are significant because this is not only evidence of a determined procedure to get We Rise demands out widely, to make a statement at the CSW, and to use the procedures of that forum to have impact. It also includes a commitment to transparency and communicating to all of Pacific feminist civil society beyond those groups and individuals in attendance.

Substantive impact

The second type of impact is substantive impact, which refers to demonstrated impact such as language/text adoption or amendment. First, at the regional level a clear manifestation of substantial impact is when Pacific feminist language suggestions and recommendations are taken up in formal institutional settings. As an example, the Triennial meeting of Pacific Women and Pacific Women's Ministers' 2017 Outcome Statement directly reflected the recommendations of the Pacific feminists. These were taken from the Pacific Feminist Charter (Pacific Feminist Forum Charter 2016). The conference made mention of the important role of civil society organisations (CSOs):

> *The Conference acknowledged the valuable role of CSOs, in particular women's human rights organisations, in promoting gender equality, human rights including sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and women's leadership, and supporting measures to eliminate gender-based violence and all forms of discrimination against women and girls of all diversities (SPC 2017c).*

Substantive impact comes through the changes being adopted. The substantive policy impact was reported as follows:

> *This proved to be highly effective as 14 proposed changes being adopted in the final outcomes document during the negotiations. Overall, FWRM's involved in the 13th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women and 6th Meeting of Pacific Ministers for Women contributed significantly in both broadening its policy reform mandate as well as intergenerational leadership and movement building at a regional level (SPC 2017c).*

This demonstrates that substantive impact can be through both policy impact and movement building. The preparation had been done in advance by We Rise to connect to partners' pre-existing networks and alliances and use the Pacific Feminist Charter they had adopted by consensus at the Pacific Feminist Forum in 2016. This facilitated a quick agreement to recommendations, using the Charter as a basis, and thus being granted a seat at the decision-making table at the 2017 Triennial (Interviews #38, 2017 and #41, 2018). Substantive impact has been demonstrated through influencing the text of outcomes documents and the take-up of written proposals:

> *FWRM as part of the We Rise Coalition in collaboration with Pacific CSO representatives was successful in influencing PSIDS [Pacific Small Island Developing States] duty bearers to include feminist gender sensitive measures within the outcomes document. Out of the negotiations with the CSO representatives the We Rise CSO caucus formulated a written text proposal. To strengthen the proposed text changes, a strong rationale with strong supporting evidences was added for every proposed change in order to effectively address why the proposed changes in text were important (FWRM 2018a).*

This demonstrates the impact We Rise had on influencing the agenda, as language on the inclusion of sexual diversity as part of the diversity of women was discussed. This led to wording on lesbian rights as women's rights 'being included in the outcome statement for the first time'; this was a result of Pacific feminist lobbying and preparation by the We Rise Coalition (Interviews # 38, 2017 and #41, 2018). However, those present noted they were unsuccessful in the inclusion of transgender people, as these arguments were 'blocked by opposition from Nauru' (Interviews #38, 2017 and #41, 2018).

Second, a global illustration of substantive impact is the engagement of the We Rise Coalition with global formal institutions and the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which

provides an example of sustained efforts. This discussion covers CSW interventions from 2017 to 2019 by the We Rise Coalition and its partner organisations. The combined actions of women mobilising through We Rise and speaking with a coordinated regional voice based on the Pacific Feminist Charter has exerted pressure and resulted in opportunities to have diverse civil society voices heard. Feminist insistence at the CSW has delivered new international standards, according to Outright International's Executive Director, Jessica Stern. She claimed that 'CSWs outcome shows that when feminist movements, both within the institutions and outside, come together to hold governments accountable, progress is unstoppable' and gave the example of the impact of civil society from Asia and the Pacific on Agreed Conclusions on diverse genders (Outright International 2020).

The We Rise and PFF organisers saw participation in global forums and events as having substantive impact in the form of bringing together activists, women's human rights defenders, academics, lawyers and global allies (Interview #44, 2018). This helped grow numbers and voices for a greater impact, with more supporters lobbying for changes in line with the charter. It also strengthened the lobbying push in light of opposition at home, described by a Pacific scholar of sexual minorities in Fiji as 'constraining the political spaces available to local activists, oppressing their claims and state recognition of their rights' (George 2008:164). They hope to leverage these opportunities to take action at home through keeping countries accountable to their international promises. As one We Rise partner, Nailini Singh from FWRM, suggested, making statements at CSW kept governments in the Pacific accountable:

> *We want to hold our governments accountable to the highest standards in terms of promoting women's rights so that the local lived realities of women are put at centre stage in front of our decision makers to ensure…there is no roll back (Loop 2017).*

Such increasing visibility and these types of joining together strategies are required, rather than an ad hoc, business as usual approach in order to achieve change by coalitions. It is important to acknowledge that impact can be incremental and can be found beyond immediate policy impact.

The global influence of the Pacific feminists uses the following model: when they cannot make headway at a national level, they attend the CSW and make statements and interact with other member states in order to influence the outcome statement. This places pressure on their own

countries, as the countries must report annually at the UN about their gender equality progress against the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action arising from the 1995 UN Fourth Conference on Women (UN Women). Youth feminist activist, Gloria Konare, from Solomon Islands, has argued that greater coordination and speaking with one voice at global fora has 'change[d] ways of organising, and paved the way to a feminist future' (APWLD 2019:1). Nalini Singh, from FWRM, has claimed that these significant achievements would not have been 'possible without an organised feminist, women's movement' (APWLD 2019:1).

Reflecting this, the We Rise member from FemLink Pacific, Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls, in an official submission to CSW in 2017, used the following language:

> *I amplify the call of feminist sisters in particular the We Rise Coalition that progressing the gender equality and women's human rights agenda requires building and sustaining women's collective power through movements because it has been and will continue to be women's movements that turn individual efforts into a political force for change that cannot be ignored (Bhagwan-Rolls 2017a).*

The participation of the Pacific women at global forums such as CSW has been reported as enabling Pacific women to be heard, noting they are traditionally underrepresented at forums such as CSW. At CSW61 in 2017, for example:

> *Being part of a global forum mobilised women to participate and be heard, which was especially important for women from the Pacific, a region which is often underrepresented in global forums like CSW. Alongside her sisters from women's organisations across Asia Pacific, Dr. Alice Pollard explained the challenges women face in attaining leadership. The sixty-first session on the Commission on the Status of Women saw the We Rise Coalition amplifying women's voices from across Asia and the Pacific. Two feminist skill-building camps brought together feminist activists from across Fiji to create strategies to ensure the well-being and self-care for activists (IWDA 2017).*

The We Rise Coalition partner FWRM participated in the 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62), represented by the Executive Director, Nalini Singh, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 12 to 23 March 2018:

> *FWRM made some notable contributions and achievements including contributing for the first time to a We Rise Coalition and Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era joint statement at the CSW62 to highlight Pacific issues on gender equality and women's human rights, with a particular focus aligned to the priority theme of rural women. This strengthened partnerships within the We Rise Coalition and various national, regional and international CSOs and networking with government representatives (FWRM 2018a).*

We Rise supported the participation of five Pacific rural women at CSW62. This promoted Pacific women's representation, noting that they are still largely underrepresented in these forums. Support from We Rise also increased young women's confidence to speak up and participate in dialogue, as reflected in this chapter's opening quote. Working via We Rise supported women to identify entry points and potential opportunities to influence other national, regional or international spaces (FWRM 2018a).

Further, at CSW in 2019 We Rise led a side event where it explained the impact of amplification:

> *Pacific feminists are collaborating to identify the specific needs of diverse Pacific women as carers, workers and citizens; and to amplify women-led strategies for ensuring the rights and protection of Pacific women and girls in all their diversities (We Rise Coalition 2019).*

Pacific feminist civil society actors from the PFF and the We Rise Coalition are sharing their lessons with other small island states globally, including, for example, the Caribbean (UN Women 2019). They are sharing lessons on advocating for climate justice at global forums (FWRM 2018a, Women's Funding Network 2019), mobilising on the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, and Sustainable Development Goals, as part of the Asia Pacific Caucus marking Beijing +25 (Rolls 2019).

Structural impact

Finally, the third type of impact is structural impact. It refers to influencing who has access, who is part of the arrangement. This is seen mainly through getting a seat at the decision-making

table when previously there had been no space or through overcoming other structural barriers. The active presence and coordination of Pacific feminists resulted in a major breakthrough for civil society organisations (CSOs) at the Triennial meeting in 2017. The structure of the delegation was amended when Vanuatu approved two representatives of civil society to sit at the negotiating table with country heads of delegation (Kumar Lami 2017). The FWRM Annual Report indicated the importance of this collaborative space for holding informal meetings and dialogues that helped to strengthen relationships amongst the CSOs and women's human rights groups from the Pacific region (FWRM 2018a). The report also noted the regional impact the We Rise Coalition was having in formal spaces. This was a development from years of lobbying by Pacific feminists to have greater impact on regional dialogue. Until this change, Pacific-invited spaces for diverse feminist civil society were very limited, and interviews confirmed that, until recently, there were few signs of any real governmental interest in encouraging input from CSOs (Interview #17, 2016). Nevertheless, Pacific women have been able to use groups formed outside official structures, as the case studies reveal, to similarly enter and influence formal spaces (Interviews #23, 2016 and #33, 2017).

After many years of lobbying for increased dialogue with civil society, a second key structural impact at the regional level has been the Framework for Pacific Regionalism (PIFS 2014). The framework has opened opportunities in the structural sense for regular, scheduled civil society dialogue with regional institutions, such as the Pacific Islands Forum, and among individual organisations, including the potential for other forms of cooperation and coordination. Coalition building across actors is expected to become a key feature of Pacific regionalism (Bryar and Naupa 2017). There is a renewed emphasis for collective regional action to share capacities, resources and support. Feminist civil society is mobilising to ensure that, against a backdrop of the Framework for Pacific Regionalism (PIFS 2014), there is political opportunity for diverse civil society working together in coalition at a regional level to bring Pacific feminist voices to the decision-making table.

There is evidence of structural impact at the global level too. To maximise its activities in building intersectional solidarity and a coordinated voice, Pacific feminist civil society pushed for a structural change to better use any emerging spaces globally to insert a Pacific feminist perspective. Advocacy to disaggregate Pacific from Asia Pacific as a regional grouping at the UN has resulted in the announcement of the Pacific Small Island Developing States Organising Partner (OP) being added to the Women's Major Group (WMG) (UN 2020d).

> *We are so pleased that WMG OPs listened to concerns and answered strong calls for specific Pacific small island representation in this important organising platform at the UN – above and beyond usual Asia and Pacific or other groupings (Nabulivou 2017).*

The WMG is a grouping of organisations working to promote human rights-based sustainable development with a focus on women's human rights, the empowerment of women and gender equality. Pacific small island feminist and women-led civil society groups have had their own organising partner in the WMG on Sustainable Development from 2017. Pacific feminist and women-led civil society groups lobbied for this change in order to highlight, promote and strengthen distinctive voices, advocacy positions and strategies of Pacific small island civil society activists and constituencies. Partners in We Rise used their collective power to send a message about issues of women's human rights specific to the Pacific at CSW, with one partner saying:

> *From a Pacific feminist point of view, it's also really important that we be there and loud and present. Too often the United Nations never takes proper account of the issues that are specific to the Pacific (Prasad 2017).*

The structural change represented by having a standalone Pacific voice means there is a channel through which to make Pacific-specific inputs. The PFF and the We Rise Coalition's wider Pacific regional-level grouping now feeds into this Pacific-specific grouping. The Pacific Small Island States group had a distinctive identity when in contact with member states in the region at the 2019 CSW:

> *We Rise Coalition (3 feminist groups in Fiji and 1 in Australia – DIVA for Equality, FWRM, FemLink Pacific and IWDA) are feminist groups actively working together toward CSW63. We are working on preps for CSW63 better than previous years, learning as we go, and we will update as able. Some particular difficulties coming this year for us, but also more momentum/contact between Member states in the region, and the small group of PSIDS national and regional CSOs and NGOs regularly working into CSW processes (Report on preparation for CSW, email correspondence, 2019).*

The impacts of more effective contact and preparation were noted as significant and tangible, as shown in Table 6.

Modes of impact	Regional level	Global level
Procedural impact This refers to having set up a system or framework by which to draw together diverse voices or having procedures in place for influencing government stakeholders as well as knowing how to best use the formalities of the forum	Examples include the ability to have recommendations prepared for the procedures of the Triennial submission process and being able to act quickly	Examples include using the procedures of the UN to make a statement from the floor at CSW statement coordination
Substantive impact This refers to specific changes (e.g., to wording adoption)	Examples include having the recommendations from the Charter included in the Triennial Outcome Statement; 14 recommendations for language adopted in 2017	Examples include CSW outcome statement influence working though the Women's Major Group
Structural impact This refers to changing structures or barriers	Examples include civil society being officially granted a seat at the Triennial table in 2017	Examples include having a Pacific standalone Group rather than being subsumed in Asia Pacific, where Asia dominates and the needs are different

Table 6: Overview: Impact of Pacific Feminist Alliances at Regional and Global Levels

The impacts summarised in Table 6 stem from Pacific feminist groups' capacity to work together more and interact with member states with a clear identity.

8.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I considered the impact of Pacific feminist alliances at both regional and global levels. I sought to see how the findings from the diverse alliance initiatives outlined in the chapters on the Pacific Feminist Forum and the We Rise Coalition addressed my third research question: '*What impact, if any, do the Pacific feminist alliances have regionally and globally?'* As noted previously, the impetus for this question came from witnessing the lack of this kind of impact at the global level in CSW. Inspired by this participant observation of shrinking spaces for feminist civil society, which has also been noted by others (FIDH 2020, ICAN 2018,

Council of Europe 2018), I explored whether and how a progressive feminist Pacific regional bloc was demonstrating impact at regional and global levels.

Policy impact – that is, changing the policy of governments – is demonstrated by the case studies, with successful advocacy by Pacific feminists for the inclusion of recognition of lesbian and bisexual rights in outcome statements in the 2017 Triennial. However, in analysing my selected case studies I looked for evidence of impact beyond this narrow understanding of policy-related impact, which is too narrow to be the only litmus test of civil society impact, given the fewer resources available to CSOs. While other types of CSO impact can be on a small scale, they can still legitimate. Procedural, substantive and structural inroads into gaining greater access to formal political decision-making are also important. If we understand impact beyond policy alone there are other areas of impact that can be observed, and in this chapter I identified evidence of these impacts through the activities of feminist civil society actors and organisations. A breadth of impact emerged, beyond the policy impact that is the sole focus of much of the literature. It is important in the context of Pacific feminist civil society alliances to look beyond the policy impact to include the multiplicity of impacts of Pacific feminists. Coordinated activity has resulted in a ready network to speak up when opportunities arise and ensure impact continues to be seen at regional and global levels.

The examples presented in this chapter give weight to the findings that Pacific feminist alliances are impactful, creative agents that innovate spaces, build capacity and claim a seat at the decision-making table. Mobilisation may not only result in impact through strengthening of internal solidarity and identities, and through shifting attitudes; my research found that it can also have an impact through the recognition of a Pacific-specific regional progressive voice at a regional and global level, an organised, coordinated, representative and strong voice to participate in gender advocacy. Impact in relation to feminist civil society alliances must be considered in all its breadth and go beyond policy impact. To dismiss initiatives as small scale is to overlook the impact feminist civil society is demonstrating.

> *Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has (Margaret Mead, quoted in Barry 2008:25).*

Collective action across diversity is leading to impact regionally and globally. This serves as a confirmation, in answer to my original research question, that the formation and strengthening

of diverse Pacific regional feminist civil society blocs amplify a Pacific feminist progressive voice regionally and globally. The case study initiatives and their impacts also serve as potential models for others wanting their advocacy to have impact.

CHAPTER 9

NEGOTIATED SISTERHOOD IN THE PACIFIC:

CONCLUSIONS, PROSPECTS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

> *We have a story to tell from the Pacific about how we can do better so that not just the loudest voices are heard but that we have a shared voice that equally reflects everyone (Setareki Maeanawsai, CEO Pacific Disability Forum, speech at Raising Pacific Voices – Reinforcing Pacific Civil Society Information Session, Fiji, 2017).*

In this thesis I explored the practice and process of feminist alliance building in the Pacific region. Furthermore, I sought to understand whether and to what extent such alliances help to amplify Pacific feminist voices and enable a greater impact at the global level, especially in the context of shrinking civil society spaces. To do so, I reviewed the literature on gender, feminism and alliance building in the Pacific (chapter 2), investigated the way regionalism and regional action are understood in the Pacific (chapter 3), and undertook an in-depth study of the most recent initiatives aimed at forming regional alliances and feminist collective action in the Pacific (chapters 5 and 6).

This analysis reveals that the creation of new regional spaces and alliances are crucial for achieving change at both regional and global levels. They offer not only unique opportunities for the Pacific civil society actors to come together and to develop a shared regional agenda but also serve as important mechanisms through which progressive regional voice can be amplified and transmitted to the global level (chapter 8). Feminist alliances enable Pacific civil society organisations and actors to position themselves regionally both in relation to each other and in relation to formal institutions. They take crucial steps to advance gender equality in the Pacific and to raise awareness and take action to address various pressing issues, such as violence against women, recognition of sexual and gender minorities, and gendered aspects of climate justice.

There are many important insights we can draw from a close study of these regional activities and feminist initiatives in the Pacific. These insights also speak to a growing research agenda in the fields of political science and international relations in recent years on regionalism in the Pacific (see, for example, Tarte 2014, Bryar and Naupa 2017, Lawson 2016). As Matthew Dornan, a senior economist at the World Bank noted, Pacific Island Countries are currently 'in the global spotlight like never before' due to the 'global discussions around climate change' (Dornan 2018:390). The Australian Government's policy of a 'Pacific Step-Up' (DFAT 2020) is also increasing the debate about relations with traditional allies like Australia and New Zealand. In this thesis, I focused particularly on regional dynamics as they related to feminism and gender in the Pacific. I investigated both the opportunities and constraints for Pacific feminist actors and organisations to form effective and inclusive alliances. I investigated their capacity to capture and include otherwise marginalised voices in the formation of a shared voice and agenda in the region.

In this concluding chapter, I will consolidate various insights the thesis offers under the broader concept of 'negotiated sisterhood', and explain how it is enacted in the Pacific. This concept helps me not only to capture the dynamic and diverse nature of the feminism and feminist activities in the region but also to identify some practical recommendations for regional civil society organisations moving forward.

The chapter comprises four sections. First, I present the concept of negotiated sisterhood in the Pacific. In the second section, I outline the contribution of the thesis to the literature, especially in the areas of regionalism studies, gender and politics, and intersectional alliance building. The third section offers practical recommendations arising from the study for both civil society and regional institutions. In the fourth section, I acknowledge the limitations of the study whilst offering some suggestions for future research directions.

9.1 Negotiated Sisterhood in the Pacific

An in-depth analysis of the case studies I focused on in this thesis, the Pacific Feminist Forum (PFF) and the We Rise Coalition (We Rise), shows different instances of alliance building in the Pacific. One central theme that runs across both cases, however, concerns the negotiated nature of alliance building and feminist sisterhood. Building on the insights these two cases offer, I define 'negotiated sisterhood' as a form of solidarity that requires the feminist civil

society actors to create safe spaces for dialogue and discussion across difference, which then leads to trust building and transparent learnings amongst participating actors.

The thesis shows that sisterhood, or solidarity, is not a given. It needs to be actively created and re-created by the actors on the ground. This process is not as seamless as it sounds, as Pacific feminists are not a homogenous group but comprise diverse identities with diverse agendas.

The way actors negotiate solidarity to establish and build alliances at a regional level provides lessons for the strengthening of movements and supports the need for additional inclusive spaces. Overall, this analysis shows that negotiation of an intersectional solidarity is both possible and desirable among diverse women. However, the thesis also shows that it is not easy to navigate across difference and to form a coalition across dispersed, diverse places in a political context that is resistant to gender equality and openly discriminates against diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. Building effective alliances in this context requires rigorous internal processes of checking in on how power is operating (as detailed in chapter 6) and how collective identities can be made more inclusive. In the case of We Rise and the PFF, this was done through careful planning and communication. The cases show that solidarity is not a given, but it can be established and sustained through intentional planning and communication.

The case studies also show how civil society actors navigate the diversity within the region, and how they take a strategic approach to sisterhood. They manage to put aside differences and focus on aspects that can be advocated for, bridge different perspectives through dialogue, and work to amplify the voices of marginalised groups (as reflected in the opening quote to this chapter).

Rather than repeating material already covered in detail in the case study chapters, in the following discussion I highlight three key identifiable characteristics of negotiated sisterhood as it happens in the Pacific region: (i) negotiated sisterhood relies on an intersectional solidarity, (ii) it requires a strategic agreement among diverse organisations choosing to collaborate that might not otherwise work together, and (iii) it draws on the idea of project identity. I will explain each of these characteristics briefly before I move on to reflect on the contribution of the thesis to the literature.

Negotiated sisterhood relies on intersectional solidarity

The first key characteristic of negotiated sisterhood is that it relies on intersectional solidarity. This involves moving away from siloed approaches to more intersectional feminisms:

> *The culture of silos we're existing in – geographical, organisational and based on one issue, whether that's gender, sexual identity or race, cannot continue if we are to end violence against women and girls (Wali 2018).*

By coming together the actors are very transparent in their actions and processes; they develop trust and work across the siloes referred to in the quote above through negotiation.

Throughout the thesis I recognised that neither Pacific countries nor women are a homogenous group, and so deliberately framed the actors being analysed as broader than 'women' and instead used 'Pacific feminists' as the identifier for intersectional solidarity. This enables us to have a broad enough lens to see how progress and action is possible across difference in a strategic alliance of these actors in a more intersectional way than reliance on the term 'women's movement' alone might do. As Nicole George noted, civil society is more complex than literature usually acknowledges (George 2004). She has asserted that the way individual organisations negotiate political culture simultaneously throws opportunities and constraints in their path (George 2010, George 2011, George 2014). Echoing previous work by Nicole George (2004) and Felogene Amumo and Ruby Johnson (2017), my research found how Pacific feminist civil society's negotiation of their intersecting identities marks their organising in solidarity. This was similarly noted in Amumo and Johnson (2017), who focused on young women from Latin America, the US, South Africa and Poland, and found they were 'not a homogenous group. They are young women, trans youth and girls from across the world who are experiencing oppression and rights violations first-hand. They have distinct politics and their intersecting identities shape their organising' (Anumo and Johnson 2017:1).

Actors interviewed for both case studies have disagreements and diverse priorities, but they stand a better chance of sustaining their collective activity when they rely on an intersectional notion of solidarity. The initiatives highlighted are very transparent in how they approach a 'negotiated sisterhood' to capture this intersectional solidarity. This transparency can assist others similarly seeking to deliberately form an alliance around joint problems and make progress towards gender equality without insisting on a consensus, or letting differences be a

barrier to progress. They reveal novel ways of tackling alliance building across difference, with solidarity emerging for Pacific civil society actors. This can influence donors and formal institutions, and allow the creation of negotiated spaces and the fostering of feminist ideas, as well as facilitating the combining of resources. This negotiation is ongoing, dynamic and pays attention to the process of establishing and negotiating alliances to ensure good outcomes and impact.

Negotiated sisterhood requires a strategic agreement across actors

The second important aspect of negotiated sisterhood as it is enacted in the Pacific is that it requires a strategic agreement across actors. There is a growing recognition of the importance of forging strategic links. This thesis revealed that sisterhood can be a deliberate act, requiring diverse actors to come together for achieving greater impact.

Pursuing a deliberate strategy of generating a wider network of actors, and giving space for information sharing, supports Pacific feminists' engagement at the local, national and global levels. This is particularly true for those women who lack the opportunities to engage at a national level. After attending the PFF, an interviewee commented that she used her participation to grow alliances and networks of other progressive feminists from the Pacific region. She felt that it prepared them to engage, within a context of national and global failures to be heard (Interview #19, 2016). This strategy of deliberately adopting a negotiated sisterhood helps Pacific feminists to speak with a regional voice at international fora, such as the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, on topics that have otherwise been excluded. They are joining resources, opportunities and networks for greater impact. More broadly, the emphasis on the notion of 'negotiated sisterhood' reinforces the recognition that there is not one single international sisterhood. In fact, sisterhood can take multiple different forms depending on the negotiable collaborations between feminists, their locally specific conditions and lived experiences (Ong 1996).

The research undertaken in this thesis contributes to the notion of sisterhood in three particular ways. First, it adds empirical insights from the Pacific region to the literature on a contextually specific feminist sisterhood, which has been emphasised before by other scholars (see, for example, Ong 1996, Predelli et al 2012). Second, it joins previous examples of a strategic sisterhood and efforts for joint mobilisation occurring even in cases when minority and majority

women's movements have emerged along separate paths and are rooted in different countries (Predelli et al 2012). Third, the strategic dimension of sisterhood revealed in this thesis adds to our understanding of identity construction without erasing differences. The thesis offers empirical insights relevant to the literature on forming sisterhood in the face of difference (see, for example, Layzer 2000, who focused on sisterhood of Latina women, and Tuuri 2018, who focused on sisterhood in the context of the black freedom struggle). The two cases investigated in this thesis illustrate that strategically negotiated sisterhood for Pacific feminists is about putting their differences aside, pushing collective agenda items forward and being strategic about this, rather than trying to achieve a thick consensus around issues and action points.

Negotiated sisterhood draws on the idea of project identity

Finally, the thesis shows important parallels between negotiated sisterhood and the idea of project identity. We have seen that a regional organising of the various entities through the PFF has served, for many actors involved in this forum, as a unifying driver for the adoption of a 'project' identity of 'Pacific feminist'. The project of the Inaugural Pacific Feminist Forum detailed in chapter 5 brought diverse women together under the banner of 'Pacific feminist'. This was despite many participants acknowledging they were still exploring what 'feminist' meant to them. The PFF provided an opportunity to learn and explore what Pacific feminisms looked like and what a Pacific-specific feminist was. This contrasts with some social movements literature that emphasises that leaders can create a social movement *only* when they tap into and expand deeply rooted feelings of solidarity and identity (see, for example, Tarrow 2011:11 on this point). My analysis suggests that a collective identity totally in unison is not a required precursor to a social movement, but rather a movement or project identity can form from a decision to come together strategically to find where diverse women can work together – in the interests of taking up space, generating volume for voices, combating the shrinking of spaces and making the most of resources.

In summary, the thesis shows that it is possible to form effective regional feminist alliances provided that there are spaces where women across the region can meet and develop a shared strategy of action. These spaces serve as important mechanisms through which a progressive regional voice is organised and amplified. They enable Pacific feminist civil society organisations to position themselves regionally, both in relation to each other and in relation to

regional formal institutions (such as PIFS and SPC), and to promote gender equality in the Pacific and beyond.

9.2 Contribution of the Thesis to the Literature

This thesis drew on insights from various areas, including regionalism studies, and literature on social movements, feminism, and intersectional alliance building. In this section, I will summarise the key contributions of the thesis to these areas.

First, this thesis makes a contribution to regionalism studies by emphasising the centrality of informal regional activities. A recent special issue of the journal *Asia and the Pacific Policy Studies* promised to cover issues of greatest concern to the Pacific region. It was envisaged that possible topics might include: the blue-green economy, service delivery, regionalism, trade and labour markets. Yet, despite stating its aim was to explore the significant changes sweeping the Pacific Islands region this century (Dornan 2018), it made no mention of gender. Part of my research agenda is to turn the spotlight on the Pacific region and the innovations and stories of concerted action to end gender inequality. So far, these stories have mostly gone untold, but this thesis is a part of shifting the tide. As flagged in chapter 3, regional feminist civil society is organised to influence regionalism debates; it moves towards inclusion and seeks promises from Pacific Island States for progress on gender equality.

Second, my research reveals the power of civil society actors in the Pacific. This speaks directly to the purpose of feminist approaches rectifying the biases of mainstream political science research (Lowndes et al 2017, Jolly 2020). The insights offered in this thesis add to the existing notions of power by further highlighting structured inequalities and examples of 'power through' and 'power with'. The recent initiatives highlighted in this research, the We Rise Coalition and the PFF, are not just a reaction to power; there is power in their existence. This includes the power of inventing their own space to resist the silencing impact of shrinking spaces, as well as the power which is represented by the visibility of trans activists as part of the Pacific feminist campaign. Both cases show the power of civil society actors in building capacity in the region and in establishing stronger alliances. The cases are examples of bottom-up Pacific feminist collective action, revealing the identification by Pacific individuals and organisations of common areas of interest on which to act to progress gender equality in the region.

In addition to the research findings, the thesis also seeks to offer practical suggestions for enacting change towards gender equality. Through this applied focus, I seek to join scholars bringing feminist methodology to research methods in political science.

Third, through the use of case studies the thesis makes an important contribution to the scholarly discussion of intersectional alliance building (detailed in chapter 2). By looking at the *process* of intersectional alliance building across diversity in two real-world case studies I have suggested that innovative practice is required to address the deficit in civil society spaces and open up new spaces. The inclusion of new voices can help establish and enhance a shared vision to more effectively achieve change.

To summarise the key message of this section, my findings speak to feminist literature debates, and the transformations in global feminist debate, by showing ways forward in feminist and intersectional inclusion that are, for example, inclusive of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. My argument is that Pacific feminist agitation is timely; new reframings of Pacific regionalism are a departure from what has happened to date in the region, as we see the emergence of a new type of regional intersectional voice in the Pacific, especially on gender related issues. I focus on Pacific-generated strategies that can tackle the contemporary state of gender inequalities in the region, and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Pacific regionalism. The practical examples of negotiating diverse alliances from a Pacific perspective both illustrate aspects of existing literature in theory as well as moving forward its praxis. My research findings also contribute to global feminism, as too often the focus of research is only on North America and Europe, or if covering the Global South then limited often to Latin America. This focus helps to make sure Pacific initiatives are acknowledged and become part of the body of knowledge in relevant fields.

9.3 Practical Recommendations

As well as making a contribution to the relevant literature, the thesis also offers important practical recommendations for enabling effective regional action going forward. The following three recommendations are directed at Pacific civil society, to civil society elsewhere and to regional institutions in the Pacific.

Recommendation 1: Acting regionally can help improve the impact of civil society

The thesis shows that shifting the focus to the regional level as a strategy to counteract the situation of shrinking civil society spaces has proved to be an effective strategy. One particular example of this, as I observed during my participant observation (PFF, Suva, Fiji, November 2016), was the carefully planned for inclusion of LGBTQ people, people with disabilities, feminists, and indigenous, ethnically diverse, urban, rural, young, older and non-feminist women in order to give a voice to marginalised women. A strategic sisterhood between these diverse groups was negotiated in order to capture the individual and collective goals of Pacific feminists. The PFF was a place for learning on issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as the different experiences of women from urban and rural areas. For example, one participant was reported as saying:

> *It [homosexuality] is not easily accepted in remote areas of [where I come from]– some accept it and some don't. But it was good for us to learn more and see how the community does networking – with others and between themselves as a feminist movement (Pacific Women 2016).*

Another said the PFF and the space given to hear from diverse women broadened her knowledge and understanding on the diversity of the women's movement in the Pacific, adding that

> *it was an opportunity for people like me and my organisation to look into what are some possibilities to engage with other women's groups in the future (Pacific Women 2016).*

Similarly, other civil society organisations can also form diverse alliances by going beyond attempts at a simple aggregation of interests, by holding a process of dialogue with the intention of all voices contributing to the ultimate outcome, and with space to hear different positions. It is recommended that facilitators should aim to interfere as little as possible with this dialogue and let it flow, thus bringing out diverse women's voices and ensuring that all have a chance to speak.

Recommendation 2: Intersectionality can be adopted as an organisational principle

The thesis suggests it is important for regional activities to take an intersectional approach to be effective. In this context, external civil society organisations (CSOs) engaging with Pacific CSOs need to understand the tactics and drivers of regional approaches and the intention around inclusion. Also, regional workshops organised by diverse feminist civil society actors are enabling women to negotiate regional approaches and share ideas. Similarly, sharing lessons transparently and building capacity can aid the growth of a larger supportive cohort to amplify voices at the regional and global level. This research demonstrates that women who feel unable to get traction from their national governments can use the benefit of regional-level dialogue to find partners, raise concerns and have regional institutions place pressure on their governments to implement change. The lessons from the study of We Rise and PFF around organising and connecting women are focused on learning and participating together and creating spaces to play an active part in a coordinated movement of Pacific feminists. Pacific feminist CSOs demonstrate the value of regional and global coalitions and cooperation. This can be followed by others beyond the Pacific wanting to form alliances across diversity. Non-Pacific CSOs can not only emulate this, but also, where resources permit, should support Pacific civil society to do so. The lessons for building solidarity apply regionally as well as nationally, so investment in supporting diversity and holding space is still required.

This coordination is an ongoing effort to ensure that all feel included and heard (as this chapter's opening quote insists upon) and that the space reflects all participants and makes room for difference. This making room for difference also includes the possibility and fluidity for a group to move on to do something else, having built the capacity of others to continue mobilising. Further, the research demonstrates the creation of a common vision or platform for action for diverse feminists which, although already achieved in some regions, can be used as a template in regions where this has not yet been done.

Recommendation 3: Regional institutions must hear civil society voices

Finally, there are recommendations arising from the research relevant to regional institutions in the Pacific and how to include civil society in the regionalism framework. Despite the fanfare of civil society inclusion in the Framework for Pacific Regionalism, this analysis has shown that this, at times, appears to merely result in lip-service inclusion of Pacific civil society's

gender and diversity focus. Gender-specific regional activities exist at a time when regional Pacific identity is dominating – speaking collectively, claiming a larger geographical space (Gruby and Campbell 2013) rather than the 'small island states', with an emphasis on the 'Blue Pacific' and the 'Ocean Continent'. The continual involvement of informal actors and activities in the gender equality civil society space pushing governments to make the regionalism agenda an *inclusive* agenda is important.

Regional alliances being formed are a timely mechanism for civil society to engage collectively with the region on gender issues. In the context of a new Pacific regionalism focus, which is promising greater cooperation and collaboration, regional institutions must embed steps to keep spaces open for civil society organisations to remain at the table.

We can understand regionalism from different viewpoints – structures, actors, institutions, interdependence and outcomes (PIFS 2017). Regionalism ought to be understood in a pluralistic way to mean different things and to step away from a purely trade focus. As a framework, it shows scope for collective regional action to share capacities and resources and support for all actors. As chapter 3 showed, this new regionalism is a political opportunity for civil society working together in coalition and alliance at a regional level to bring the 'Pacific' feminist voices to the table. The importance of this is that Pacific feminists are acting at a regional level, beyond the state level, which brings greater numbers and greater reach. For impact to be achieved, it is essential to extend beyond state level, as women's legislative representation in the Pacific is low. This is further compounded at the global level; as Veenendaal and Corbett noted, 'small states have tiny populations and do tend to be ignored' (2015:527). Joining forces in a regional manner rather than at an individual state level is one way to mitigate this, aiming to make a small voice a bigger voice.

Pacific feminist alliances are finding strategic ways to overcome institutional barriers to participation. Regional institutions can assist by removing these barriers. For example, at the Triennial meeting of Women Ministers in Fiji in 2017, for the first time Pacific feminists were invited to take a seat at the decision-making table and advocate for their recommendations (Pacific Feminist Forum Charter 2016). Pacific feminists are using the lessons learnt through these experiences to advocate for entry to more dialogues. As civil society bring different insights and lessons, regional institutions can benefit (Interview #44, 2018).

Giving resources and time to hear the voices of the full diversity of Pacific feminist civil society will help organise and amplify organisations' and individuals' engagement. Spaces will be created to be heard directly; not spoken about by regional organisations but rather being able to tell their own stories. The lesson for regional institutions is to drop the 'us and them' stance, and see that sufficient formal space is provided by regional organisations, so that feminist CSOs can be a key part of meeting the gender equality goals. An intentional supporting of feminist alliance building can accelerate progress on gender equality. In terms of engagement with other states or regional institutions, Pacific feminists are now engaging in multiple ways. However, the work is not over. The interaction and formation of strategic Pacific feminist alliances aims at the self-creation of spaces where such spaces did not previously exist in order to enhance the prospects of moving forward on gender equality. However, the mere increase in feminist alliances and regional gender declarations is not a sign the work is finished. Members of regional alliances have found some room being made at formal decision-making tables, but the agendas of states and civil society are in some respects still far apart. Transgender rights, for example, are central to Pacific feminist alliance agendas but are not translating to regional institutional agendas (Interviews #38, 2017 and #41, 2018). Further civil society voices must be heard in the breadth of areas dealt with by Pacific regional institutions, not marginalised in areas beyond gender equality debates.

To summarise this section, the practical reality is that a non-intersectional approach to what is Pacific and what is Pacific regionalism does not meet the rhetorical promises of ensuring all walk together and no one is left behind. The regionalism agenda is accountable to all Pacific peoples in all their diversities. To be truly inclusive, future formal frameworks must consider how inclusive they are of all regional actors, and understand which impacted voices are not being heard. A sharper focus is required from regional institutions to ensure that the development of future Pacific regional roadmaps includes meaningful participation from civil society, and to achieve SOGI inclusion in the Pacific by 2030. The best pathway to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and delivering on gender equality is through broad-based and inclusive regional fora and discussions that provide space for inclusive civil society – and space for civil society to be inclusive. Only then will there be a full leveraging of the 'leave no one behind principle' from the SGDs, to end marginalisation by adequately addressing human rights of the full diversity of women in Pacific regional programs and initiatives.

9.4 Future Research Directions

Three areas for future research can be identified: gender and climate justice as a mobiliser for Pacific feminist civil society alliances; online spaces to sustain the negotiated sisterhood; and Australia's role in supporting and partnering with regional Pacific feminist civil society.

First, the emergence of a negotiated, coordinated and diverse Pacific feminist civil society has been made more urgent by the climate emergency faced in the Pacific (McLeod et al 2019, Luetz and Nunn 2020, UNEP 2020). One We Rise leading partner noted that the climate change crisis has forced women's organisations in the Pacific to recognise their areas of common interest, and to push past siloed approaches to redefine and reclaim solidarity. McLeod et al (2018), for example, focused on the need to increase support for local women's groups. They argued, in the context of climate change policies, that if women's participation is missing there is a missed opportunity to support vulnerable communities and reinforce the vulnerability of marginalised groups. Generating and affirming Pacific feminist knowledge sharing and strategy has brought strength and political will that can be used in critical areas. There are interesting case studies in this space that could be explored to extend and test my findings.

Second, ideas for future research directions include a consideration of how to sustain spaces for Pacific feminist civil society and through online communication (Brimacombe 2017, Brimacombe et al 2018). Interviews flagged that online technology has benefited the maintenance of alliances across distance; although this was beyond the scope of my research project it is an important direction for the next steps in my research. Alison Crossley, for example, argued that online feminism provides an accessible and egalitarian space for feminist community building and organising (Crossley 2017). Danielle Cave (2012) found that Pacific Islanders are using digital tools to communicate and form online networks and coordinate activities. She found a digital generation of activists, thinkers, informers and influencers. This has given a greater opportunity to Pacific Islanders to harness, influence and promote political and social change (Cave 2012:17). Facebook can be, and is, used to organise and advertise feminist events, communicate and educate. It may be seen as an important resource for development of a feminist self-identity, and feminist blogs can allow participants to initiate dialogues about feminism online and offline. Pacific feminists have effectively used zoom and other similar technology to maintain activism between face-to-face events and to participate in global events such as Generation Equality in Mexico and Paris in 2021, bridging distance and

time zones. Online space can continue the connection to feminist communities, as is evidenced by the reaching out via Facebook by Pacific women, making supportive comments and sharing wins and challenges:

> *We've been able to create that space online for political discussion for feminist, women's discussions online, which has been really good in terms of counteracting Fiji's media restrictions or the intimidation of the media and so forth (Interview #23, 2016).*

In this way, virtual or online settings can be a way of opening spaces where other spaces are closing. Some have even argued that online spaces draw in marginalised voices more effectively (Gastil and Richards 2016). Amy Haddad (2020) recognised the potential benefits of online meetings (which have significantly increased during COVID-19) for civil society, such as lowering the costs and logistical barriers of attending overseas meetings:

> *Normalising virtual engagement means states can create and share informal spaces to boost non-state participation and lift the bar on diversity but requires new ways of sharing information with civil society and navigating the digital divide (Haddad 2020).*

She identified that a post-pandemic world will hold potential for new collaborative practices. This 'post-Covid-19 new normal' will be an interesting site of future research, to see if such benefits are achieved in reality and do address shrinking spaces. Certainly, these online connections have been a way of maintaining a collective identity between the Pacific Feminist Forums of 2016 and 2019, for example. They have also maintained my relationship to the field, as a researcher, after my departure and I have been able to continue amplifying the stories from my fieldwork and to the present.

Third, as an Australian-based researcher I am interested in the role of Australia in capacity building and supporting (without dominating), learning from, and partnering with, feminist civil society in the Pacific region. I am interested in seeing how Australia (both government and civil society) engages with Pacific feminist alliances in the region, and whether regional actors see a role for Australia in listening to and amplifying their advocacy for gender equality. Former Principal Gender Equality Specialist at DFAT, Amy Haddad, suggested a role for Australia in sustaining virtual working methods to increase participation, such as 'considering expanded delegations to virtual meetings to support gender balance and representation' and 'deepen[ing] partnerships with women's rights organisations in our region' (Haddad 2020). The role of the

larger states in learning from and supporting civil society in the region is an area I propose to cover in future research, specifically Australia and its renewed focus with the Pacific 'Step-Up' (DFAT 2020, Newton Cain 2018). Most importantly I am keen to explore how this work might be done by civil society and policymakers in true collaboration, in allyship. As Jolly (2016: 344) suggested such efforts could involve 'linking scholarly analyses with practical political action, joining with local agents and allies in transnational coalitions to offer support and culturally sensitive advice rather than assuming an imperial maternalism'. A big part of this is recognition of how much Australia can learn not just what it can impart.

Of course, in terms of limitations of the research, further future research can cover more cases and more locations. I have not set out to cover all spaces emerging in the Pacific. My objective has been to investigate the building of Pacific feminist alliances for gender equality. My approach was limited in that I studied a face-to-face forum and a formalised coalition specifically, and drew conclusions from these illustrations. In this thesis I have drawn generalisations from two main case studies. Examinations of other sorts of cases might yield confirming or diverging results. Further research might consider how to better include more of the French territories (to date, only New Caledonia is included in my research as it participated in the PFF), or more of the US Compact of Free Association States (Palau, Federated States of Micronesia), with only the Republic of the Marshall Islands participating in the PFF. Future research may also consider comparing and contrasting these findings with other regions of the world to tease out to what extent they are generalisable.

9.5 Conclusion

This thesis showed how Pacific feminists share initiatives, reconcile differences in goals, resolve tensions, have open processes, work across difference and sustain actions which have resulted in Pacific feminist civil society being able to build a space for influencing other regional decision makers. In doing so, they have also been responding to the perceived problem of a global backlash against women's rights, a failure to progress the Beijing Platform for Action (UN 1995) and shrinking civil society spaces for feminist civil society in global decision-making at the United Nations. This thesis contributes to a better understanding of the role of *regional* feminist civil society in collectively creating spaces to be heard. It provides ways forward to foster diversity in Pacific feminist alliances made up of individual entities

negotiating common goals, which serves both Pacific feminism and feminist activism in general.

Research by social scientists must have a clear and direct benefit to the people being studied. In other words, the research should not just be for the benefit of the social scientists. In terms of what the benefit can be to the feminist civil society activists who took part in this study, I hope to contribute to promoting their work to a wider audience, to build greater understanding and potential emulation of their initiatives. I hope there is also potential benefit to Pacific feminist civil society in having pulled together the threads and themes emerging from the analysis to reflect on feminist CSOs' activities to date and in the future. There is also potential benefit to feminist civil society in other parts of the world from having highlighted some alternative solutions and ways forward. The thesis can potentially also add to knowledge in both a scholarly and practical sense, alerting civil society more widely to the efforts being made in the Pacific and the impact being achieved. The thesis may have benefits of linking the academic literature to the practical activities of Pacific feminist civil society, thus helping to identify current bodies of knowledge that this activity speaks to and might influence. Several Pacific feminists I interviewed for this thesis noted their wish to be researchers and knowledge makers. The research presented in this thesis hopes to amplify their voices and contribute to the process of feminist knowledge production. Amplifying this work of Pacific feminist civil society might help it reach a broader audience of activists, donors and funds who could resource the efforts, and encourage other researchers to further shine a light on the Pacific. Lastly, the persistence of Pacific feminist civil society activism can be tiring work and I hope that the research dissemination can reassure activists that they are heard and seen.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES (ANONYMISED)

Number	Year	Anonymised identity
1.	2016	Young woman at regional forum
2.	2016	Young Pacific woman
3.	2016	Young Pacific woman
4.	2016	Young Pacific woman
5.	2016	Young woman at regional forum
6.	2016	Young woman at regional forum
7.	2016	Young woman at regional forum
8.	2016	Young woman at regional forum
9.	2016	Young woman at regional forum
10.	2016	Young woman at regional forum
11.	2016	Young Pacific woman
12.	2016	Pacific woman at regional forum
13.	2016	Asia Pacific regional CSO
14.	2016	Young woman at regional forum
15.	2016	Pacific woman at regional forum
16.	2016	Pacific regional institution gender adviser
17.	2016	Pacific regional institution gender adviser
18.	2016	Young Pacific woman at regional forum
19.	2016	Young Pacific woman at regional forum
20.	2016	Young Pacific woman
21.	2016	Young Pacific woman at regional forum
22.	2016	Pacific woman at regional forum
23.	2016	Young Pacific woman at regional forum
24.	2016	Pacific woman at regional forum
25.	2016	Pacific woman at regional forum
26.	2017	Australian gender activist involved in Pacific
27.	2017	Australian gender activist involved in Pacific
28.	2017	We Rise Coalition member
29.	2017	Australian gender activist involved in Pacific
30.	2017	Australian gender activist involved in Pacific

31.	2017	We Rise Coalition member
32.	2017	Australian gender activist involved in Pacific
33.	2017	DFAT government gender adviser
34.	2017	Pacific woman at regional forum
35.	2017	Australian gender activist involved in Pacific
36.	2017	Pacific woman at regional forum
37.	2017	We Rise Coalition member
38.	2017	Australian gender activist involved in Pacific
39.	2017	Australian parliamentarian involved in Pacific
40.	2018	Young Pacific woman
41.	2018	Young Pacific woman
42.	2018	Australian gender activist involved in Pacific
43.	2018	Diplomat – Pacific posting
44.	2018	We Rise Coalition member
45.	2018	Australian gender activist involved in Pacific
46.	2016	Pacific young woman at Focus Group
47.	2016	Pacific young woman at Focus Group
48.	2016	Pacific young woman at Focus Group
49.	2016	Pacific young woman at Focus Group
50.	2016	Pacific young woman at Focus Group

APPENDIX 2: EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT; Project: Feminist civil society – Alliances in the Pacific

Dear Colleague:

I invite you to take part in this research project by either agreeing to be interviewed by me. Please read this Explanatory Statement in full before deciding whether or not to participate. If you would like further information, please contact me via the email listed below.

This invitation is extended to you because of your work as an advocate around issues of building strong, stable and rights'-based communities. We want to know about your views on efforts to build regional feminist civil society across the Pacific

This is an independent research project that forms part of my PhD research. The goal of the project is to understand alliances of feminist civil society in the Pacific.

We will ask you questions about: your work in building strong regional feminist communities; your view on the unique issues that impact women's capacities to generate a shared vision; and what alliances of feminist civil society can contribute to progress gender equality for the Pacific.

Confidentiality and Consent: If you agree to be interviewed, your comments will remain anonymous. The interview will be digitally recorded and will only be accessed by the academic researcher. No third party will have access to these recordings. Participation is voluntary. You have the right to terminate the interview at any stage.

Storage of Data: Electronic data will be stored on the University of Canberra computer of the researcher and individual responses will be destroyed once the data has been collated and analysed.

Complaints: Should you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Ethics Committee of the University of Canberra at HumanEthicsCommittee@canberra.edu.au

Thank you,

Jane Alver

Chief investigator/ PhD Student

Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Government
Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis, University of Canberra
Jane.alver@canberra.edu.au

APPENDIX 3: CONSENT FORM

Consent Form – Interview or Focus Group

Project Title: Regional Sisterhood? Exploring the spaces of talk and action towards gender equality in the Pacific region

I have read and understood the information about the research, and I agree to participate in this project. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my participation in the research. All questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

Please indicate whether you agree to participate in each of the following parts of the research (please indicate which parts you agree to by putting a cross in the relevant box):

☐ Participate in an interview and/or focus group with the researcher.

☐ I agree to audio record the interview.

Name……

Signature……

Date ……

☐ I am interested in participating in further phases of the research and would like the researcher to contact me using the following contact details:

Name……

Address……

Email address ……

Skype address ……

A summary of the research report can be forwarded to you when complete. If you would like to receive a copy of the report, please include your mailing (or email) address below:

Name……

Address……

Email address ……

APPENDIX 4: CHARTER OF FEMINIST PRINCIPLES FOR PACIFIC FEMINISTS

Charter of Feminist Principles for Pacific Feminists

The inaugural Pacific Feminist Forum took place from the 28th – 30th of November 2016 at the University of the South Pacific in Suva, Fiji. The forum brought together over 100 feminists from the Pacific region. In a collective space we acknowledged those who came before us, recognised our diversities, identified our challenges, celebrated our achievements, rearticulated a shared vision, shared strategies, built new and strengthened old alliances, and further defined our shared politics.

Our diversities include; women, girls, lesbians, bisexual, trans diverse people, gender non-conforming identities, ethnically diverse women and girls, women of indigenous minorities, women with disabilities, sex workers, women living with HIV and aids, women living in rural and remote areas, young women, older women, heterosexual women, women in sports, women in non-traditional roles, women in creative industries and women in the informal sector and others. [1]

A key outcome of the forum was the creation of the Charter of Pacific Feminist Principles. Participants at the forum endorsed the Charter and recommended further endorsement by those who were not able to be at the forum. It sets out the collective principles that are key to our work as Pacific Feminists. The Charter is a living document and is intended to guide our analysis and practice.

Defining Ourselves as Feminists

We are Feminists from Oceania. We have common bonds of *wansolwara* (ocean), vanua (land) and *tua'a* (ancestors). We recognise that our strength lies in our diversity. We respect our differences. We work towards transformative change by upholding the rights of women, girls, and non-gender conforming people. We want the best full lives for ourselves and our Pacific communities. Our work and love is focussed on the lives of the women and the people on our many islands and atolls, and the whole planet.

[1] From here on when we mention 'women and girls' we refer to specific identities and needs of lesbians, bisexual, trans people, intersex people, fa'afafine, leiti, and other non-heteronormative Pacific identities, women with physical disabilities, women with psychosocial disabilities, sex workers, living with HIV aids, women living in rural and remote places, young women, the girl child, older women, heterosexual women, women in sports and creative industries.

As feminists in the Pacific we recognise multiple intersecting forms of patriarchy, long standing and unequal gendered power relations and emerging processes of oppression. Our journeys as Pacific feminists to address these are varied and diverse. We recognise the specific challenge of geographical location in the richness of the vast Pacific Ocean. We also acknowledge our geopolitical histories and their contemporary manifestations as part of the global economic south. We are in solidarity with south communities in the global north, such as indigenous, ethnic minority, Pacific diaspora and climate frontline communities. The diversities of our cultures, experiences, and the multiple social, political, economic and ecological challenges we face as climate frontline states are our realities.

The pandanus mats of our current struggles reveals our history of: gendered cultural and social hierarchies; criminalisation of LGBTQI; gender based violence; sex work and human trafficking; poor education systems; underfunded health systems; lack of attention to mental health, including societal stigma; internally displaced persons; rise in fundamentalist religious groups; ethno-nationalism; colonisation including the world's last remaining colonies and territories; forced foreign and domestic military occupation; the erosion of democratic spaces; unfair trade; aid; hyper-development and no development; enforced labour regimes; extractive industries; environmental and nuclear disasters, closure of the commons, ecological damage; climate change, refugee and enforced migration and more.

We affirm that our Pacific feminist and women's activism is vibrant and always growing, and draws on its rich lineage and herstories. We acknowledge that there is still a long way to go and this Charter guides our future work.

Our Principles as Feminists

Wherever we are working, as individuals, in our homes, workplaces, in governments and intergovernmental institutions, regional development institutions, as funders, civil society organisations and social movements, we commit and believe in the following feminist principles:

- Women's human rights are, indivisible, inalienable and universal
- All Pacific women and girls have the right to live free of patriarchal oppression, discrimination and multiple, intersecting forms of sexual and gender based violence and discrimination
- Feminist solidarity should be based on mutual respect, honesty and open discussion of differences;
- Universal, comprehensive, integrated and quality health and education systems, including Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), and comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is supported
- Safe systems of care, wellbeing and support should be available for all women and girls

- Issues of freedom of choice and autonomy regarding sexual orientation, gender identity, expression and sexual characteristics (SOGIESC), affirm the inextricable links between bodily integrity and autonomy, SRHR and social justice, as central to our advocacy
- Ensuring the inclusion and explicit needs of women and girl's with disabilities
- Women and girl's knowledge, skills and lived realities are acknowledged and affirmed
- Inclusive multiculturalism where the knowledge, skills and lived realities of Indigenous Pacific peoples, as well as of all ethnic minority groups, including descendants of indentured and settler communities, in all their diversity, are acknowledged and affirmed
- We commit to non-violence, human security and peacebuilding
- We will strengthen alliances that assist feminist social movements to dismantle patriarchy, colonisation, neo-liberal development and militarisation
- We acknowledge men and boys as participants and allies in our work

Our Principles as a Collective

Whenever we organise collectively as Pacific feminists, we commit to the following:

- The leadership of women's organisations and networks in our region should be led and managed by Pacific women from small island states
- Recognising the leadership of women of all ages, including older women, young women and girls, and women of all intersectional identities
- Spaces of power sharing are created across our diversities, in socio-economic and other class and privilege systems, generations, ethnicities, spiritual beliefs and other intersectionalities
- We recognise our privilege or lack of it, including education, cultural and traditional status, ethnicity, race, urban status, language, sexuality and others
- Transparency, accountability, and financial responsibility are practiced in our collectives, partnerships, coalitions, networks, organisations and institutions
- Feminist ethics is practiced everyday
- All women and girls, including those in rural, remote and urban communities must have access to information and communication platforms, including feminist, appropriate and accessible media and Information and Communications Technologies (ICT)
- Social and economic justice, including sustainable livelihoods, universal social protection and fair and decent work are realised
- We will collectively escalate our work to address the climate and ecological crisis of our times, and protect our commons and our planet

- We commit to decriminalization of LGBTQI people of all countries in the Pacific region, and advancing legal rights of all LGBTQI people, with focus on third gender legal recognition
- We commit to decriminalization[2] of sex work in all countries of the Pacific
- We commit to decriminalization[3] of abortion in all countries of the Pacific
- We commit to protecting women human rights defenders including trans human rights defenders
- We commit to escalate and support innovative feminist social organising efforts by all Pacific women, inclusive of marginalised rural, remote and urban communities

The Pacific Feminist Charter is endorsed by participants of the Inaugural Pacific Feminist Forum.

[2] The call for decriminalization of sex work is based on evidence that criminalization makes sex workers less safe, by preventing them from securing police protection and by providing impunity to abusers. Decriminalization does *not* mean the removal of laws that criminalize exploitation, human trafficking or violence against sex workers. These laws remain. It *does* mean the removal of laws and policies criminalizing or penalizing sex work.

[3] Decriminalising abortion means the removal of laws and policies that criminalise women who have an abortion, or those who assist women who have an abortion. Laws that put women in jail for having an abortion are unjust, separate women from their families and lead to unsafe abortions that endanger women's lives.

APPENDIX 5: PACIFIC FEMINIST FORUM PROGRAM SCHEDULE 2016

PACIFIC FEMINIST FORUM 2016
Mapping journeys, Building movements

PROGRAM

Monday 28th – Wednesday 30th November
AusAid Lecture Theatres
University of the South Pacific, Laucala Campus, Suva, Fiji

Note: All Sessions are exclusive to registered Forum participants only and Session facilitators, unless indicated 'open to the public'

DAY 1 Monday 28th	**'Pacific Feminism: Where we have been, Where we are going'**	**VENUE**
8:00am - 9:00am	**REGISTRATION** at the PFF Secretariat & Volunteer Space Coordinated by – PFF Communications Team & FemLINK Pacific	Building 1 – AusAid Performance Theatre
9:00am - 11:00am	**OFFICIAL START OF PROGRAM – Open to the public** • 9.00am - All guests to be seated • 9.10am - *Coming Home:* A Pacific Welcoming for Pacific Feminists. Setting the Scene, opening address & introduction of Key Note Speaker & introduction of the Oceania Dance (ODT) Theatre for opening ceremony • 9.20am - Performance ODT & garlanding Chief Guest • 9.30am - Key Note Address by Dr. Claire Slatter • 9.45am - Pacific Feminist Voices from Near and Far: video messages from across the region [and world] for participants of the PFF • 10.00 – 11.00am **SESSION 1** Opening Plenary ***Speakers:*** Dr Claire Slatter (SGDIA, USP, DAWN), Michelle Reddy (FWRM), Kathryn Relang (WUTMI), Akansha Kant (GIRLS), Joleen Mataele (Tonga Leitis Association) Moderator: Tara Chetty (Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development)	Building 1 – AusAid Lecture Theatre 1
11:00am - 11:30am	**MORNING TEA**	Building 1 – AusAid Lecture Theatre 1
11.30am – 1.00pm	**SESSION 2 - Breakout sessions.** Session 2 A - 45pax (maximum) *'Feminism, Climate Change & the Pacific'* - Facilitated by UN Women Session 2 B - 45pax (maximum) *GIRLS MATTER!* - Facilitated by FWRM Girls Programme	Building 2 Journeys Room Multimedia Room
1.00pm – 2.30pm	**LUNCH BREAK** Lunch Panel Donor Space: *Feminist resource & funding - 'Making money count for Feminist organizing in the Pacific'* - Facilitated by the PFF Working Group.	Building 2 Multimedia Room

2.00pm – 3.30pm	**SESSION 3 - Systems Change** Session 3 A (35pax) *Pacific Women 'Talanoa' - What is "Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development?"* - Facilitated by Pacific Women Session 3 B (35pax) *We Rise: Bold ideas, alliances and collective action in Coalition building* - Facilitated by International Women's Development Agency (on behalf of the We Rise Coalition) Session 3 C (35pax) *'3 things I wish I had known about feminist leadership'* - Facilitated by Raijeli Nicole, OXFAM Pacific	Building 2 Multimedia Room Journeys Room Movements Room
3.30pm – 4.00pm	**AFTERNOON BREAK**	Building 2 Break Area
4.00pm - 5.00pm	**SESSION 4** Reflections - *Charting a Feminist Way Forward* Open mic, spoken word, reflections, introductions, music, poem, initiating discussions for Charting a Feminist Way Forward - Facilitated by Haus of Khameleon (HoK)	Building 1 – AusAid Lecture Theatre
5.00pm	**END OF PROGRAM**	
5.15pm – 8.15pm	**Evening Side Event – Open to the public** *Celebrating Young Feminists – Tok Story* Open to the public & PFF Participants. - Facilitated by the Emerging Leaders Forum Alumni	Building 1 – AusAid Performance Theatre
DAY 2 Tuesday 29th	**Women Human Rights Defenders Day (WHRD): 'Provoking and proposing'**	
9:00am - 11:00am	**SESSION 5 – Open to the public** Plenary – Celebrating World Human Right's Defenders Day with a Feminist Knowledge Building Circle *'On WHRD Day, what are issues that are scary and necessary to move in the Pacific, and why?'* ***Speakers:*** Tamara Kruzang Mandengat (ACT Now, PNG), Adi Finau Tabakaucoro (Soqosoqo Vakamarama, SVM), Savina Nongebatu (People With Disabilities on Solomon Islands), Mamta Chand (FWRM), Yoshiko Yamaguchi-Capelle (Pacific Young Women's Leadership Alliance, PYWLA), Alisi Rabukawaqa (Urban Youth Network), Maryann Lockington (Fiji Young Women's Forum), Kiny Tinai (Patriots Community & Sports Club), Amacy Antonio (Haus of Khameleon) Moderator: Noelene Nabulivou (Political Adviser, DIVA for Equality/DAWN Associate)	Building 1 – AusAid Lecture Theatre
11:00am - 11:30am	**MORNING TEA**	Building 1 – AusAid Lecture Theatre
11.30am – 1.00pm	**SESSION 6** Session 6 A (35pax) *Legal Gender Recognition: Making the Links: TransFeminist Reflections for the Pacific* - Facilitated by Haus of Khameleon (Hok)	Building 2 Multimedia Room

	Session 6 B (35pax) *'Pacific Feminist Civil Society Led Research – Lessons Learnt from Building the Road as we walk it'* – Feminist Learning Circle and Listening Room - Facilitated by DIVA for Equality Session 6 C (35pax) *'The role of communications, activism and women's rights in the Pacific'* - Facilitated by International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) and Developmental Leadership Program	Journeys Room Movements Room
1.00pm – 2.00pm	**LUNCH BREAK**	Building 2 Break Area
2:00pm - 3:30pm	**SESSION 7** Session 7 A (45pax) Intergenerational and Intersectional Feminism: A 'world cafe'-style session. A plenary that will involve an interactive discussion amongst feminists of all ages and diversities. *The Journey with Young Feminists* - Facilitated by Fiji Young Women's Forum, FRIDA and the Emerging Leaders Forum Alumni: Young Feminist Caucus Session 7 B (45pax) *Women and Constitution Building in the Pacific* - Facilitated by Constitution Transformation Network	Building 2 AusAid Performance Theatre AusAid Lecture Theatre 2
3:30pm - 4:00pm	**AFTERNOON BREAK**	AusAid Performance Theatre
4.00pm – 5.30pm	**SESSION 8** Session 8 A (35pax) *Women and Girls Access to Education* - Facilitated by Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition Session 8 B (35pax) *Beyond Pads and Buckets - Gender in Humanitarian Action* - Facilitated by UN Women Session 8 C (35pax) *Trade Agreements Undermining Women's Rights & Exacerbating Climate Change* - Facilitated by Asia Pacific Women Law & Development (APWLD)	Building 2 Journeys Room Multimedia Room Movements Room
5.30pm	**END OF PROGRAM**	
DAY 3 Wednesday 30th	**'Building Strong Pacific Feminist Movements'**	
9:00am - 10.30am	**SESSION 9** Session 9 A (45 pax) *Realities of Organising as Feminists in Rural and remote Pacific SIDS* - Facilitated by DIVA Session 9 B (45pax) *Building a feminist movement through communications: A regional exchange* - Facilitated by International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) and Developmental Leadership Program	Building 2 Movements Room Multimedia Room

10:30am - 11.00am	**MORNING TEA BREAK**	Building 2 Break Area
11.00am - 12.30pm	**SESSION 10** Session 10 A (45pax) *Consultation on the draft of the new Pacific Platform for Action* - Facilitated by Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) Session 10 B (45pax) *Navigating Diversity: The Fiji Women's Forum experiences - Storytelling* - Facilitated by Fiji Women's Forum	Multimedia Room Movements Room
12.30pm - 1.00pm	**LUNCH BREAK**	AusAid Performance Theatre
1.00pm - 3.30pm	**SESSION 11 - Change at Work** Pacific women walk the talk. Deliberations over the Pacific Feminist Charter - Facilitated by the PFF Consultant Writer	Building 1 – AusAid Lecture Theatre 2
3.30pm – 4.15pm	**AFTERNOON TEA BREAK**	AusAid Performance Theatre
4.15pm – 5.00pm	**Open to the public** **SESSION 12 - *Launch of the 2016 Pacific Feminist Charter*** Feminist Moment: Fun & Creative space, free flow of mana, chanting, lalis (Fijian drums), ukuleles, feminist finery, song and dance. *The Pacific Feminist Charter is accepted and endorsed.* - Facilitated by the PFF Working Group	Building 1 – AusAid Lecture Theatre
5.00pm	**END OF PROGRAM**	
5.00pm - 5.30pm	**MEDIA EVENT** and Twitter rally - Facilitated by FemLINK Pacific and PFF Communications Team	AusAid Performance Theatre