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Women in parliaments in the Pacific region

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The island states of the Pacific region are at the bottom of the international league table for the representation of women in parliament. Despite considerable efforts by international agencies and donor governments and by women of the region, progress on increasing representation is extraordinarily slow. Three major explanations for these low levels of representation can be identified. The most common explanation relates to cultural beliefs, while a second account locates the problem in women's socio-economic status. The third explanation argues that there are obstacles for women in the electoral and parliamentary institutions that warrant the introduction of legislated minimum representation of women. Each of these explanations contributes value to our understanding but each also has significant deficiencies, which are identified in the article.

Keywords: gender; Pacific islands; parliaments

Introduction

In August 2012, then-Prime Minister of Australia Julia Gillard launched a new initiative for women in the Pacific region, the *Pacific Women shaping Pacific Development* project. In the post-2013 national election environment, with aid priorities being re-aligned, it is timely to consider Australia's commitment to women of the Pacific region. In particular, it is important to focus on reasons for the low representation of women in parliaments in the region. The Pacific region defies international trends towards significant increases in female parliamentary representation. In an era when developing countries in Africa and Central and Latin America draw extensively on the leadership of women, it is unfortunate that the Pacific Island nations are at the bottom of the international league table for the representation of women. Excluding Australia and New Zealand and the Francophone territories, women's representation is below 5 per cent. Australian aid should assist in remedying this low representation, but it is equally important that the theories that explain low levels of female representation are robust and policies are targeted to produce significant outcomes. A first step in this direction is to evaluate existing explanations and policy derivatives.

There are numerous obstacles to understanding the position of women in the Pacific region. The diversity in the region and the complexity of 'encounters' with

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the West, and indeed with Western scholarship, requires the kind of revisioning conducted in the anthropological space by Margaret Jolly (Jolly 1992; 2007; Jolly et al. 2009). Jolly's work establishes the need to problematise both claims to Western understanding and indigenous custom in ways that require a move away from empirical claims of authenticity to a more discursive analysis. In this article, stepping outside the anthropological domain, I suggest that we need a similar project to understand better the paucity of women's representation in the region and the effectiveness of strategies deployed in order to redress it. The primary purpose, then, is to demonstrate that richer theoretical frameworks are required. More detailed empirical research is necessary to establish more robust conclusions. The method used is interpretive, giving priority to the meanings generated by both theory and policy rather than tests of validity (Yanow and Schwartz–Shea 2006). The article focuses on theoretical critique and, while recognising the historically contingent nature of this puzzle of female representation in the region, the research uses abductive processes, where 'the researcher is simultaneously puzzling over empirical materials and theoretical literature' (Schwartz–Shea and Yanow 2013). In order to achieve this iterative and recursive strategy, the article comprises a review of the literature in the field, the theoretical literature on women and representation, and empirical data and observations by observers, candidates and politicians in the region.

There are three main sets of arguments presented in the Pacific for the low representation of women, with corresponding policies to redress this inequality. Each framework has merit, but each suffers from empirical and theoretical difficulties. The most frequent explanation offered for women's low representation in the Pacific has been culture (*kastom*) that privileges men in public spaces. This argument assumes a slow process of change through education and attitudinal change. Viewed as indigenous, it can also mean that women standing for parliaments may be seen as working against their culture. In theoretical terms, this explanation tends to homogenise the concept of culture at the expense of cultural dynamism, diversity and intersection with other social actors and institutions. A second strand of the literature points to the economic disadvantage of women in the Pacific and sees the political system as a quasi-market based on supply and demand. At a policy level, this leads to positive measures encouraging women to run for office and providing training. Voter education addresses demand-side factors. This literature confuses different forms of capital and rests on false assumptions about the barriers to political participation. Policies derived from these arguments have also been slow to affect change. The third argument focuses on institutional obstacles in electoral systems that have prevented women's political participation. Remedies rely upon responsibility for equality through the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and focus on quotas for women's representation, referred to as Temporary Special Measures (TSMs). There has been considerable resistance to the introduction of quotas, although some small gains have been made. There is, however, often a poor match between assumptions in feminist institutional theory and electoral realities in the Pacific, and quotas will only increase women's representation slowly.

This article starts with a descriptive overview of the representation of women in Pacific parliaments. It then evaluates each of the explanations and identifies their associated flaws. Evaluating deficiencies in these accounts does not necessarily lead to an alternative set of answers. It may, however, assist in focusing upon questions that might enable more effective policy responses. With the exception of some discussion on the Autonomous Government of Bougainville, still formally a part of

Papua New Guinea, this study is confined to women's representation at the national level. Countries that are not fully independent are, however, included.

The Pacific in its diversity

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) publishes a league table of women's representation in national parliaments throughout the world. In terms of regional statistics, the IPU league table indicates that the Pacific region is the lowest in the world, at 12.8 per cent. IPU data include Australia and New Zealand, but not the French colonies (IPU 2013a). If Australia and New Zealand are also excluded, representation in the independent Island state slides to around 5 per cent.

There is in fact diversity in the region. The French territories have benefited from 'parity laws' and have high representation of women. Inserted in the IPU league table, French Polynesia comes in at number two and New Caledonia in seventh place. Three countries from the region are in the 'dirty dozen' at the bottom of the table, having no women in their national parliaments. Table 1 ranks the countries: countries not included in the IPU database are in italics, ranked according to where they would appear in the IPU table.

If culture was ready?

Culture in the Pacific is a complicated phenomenon, not only because of its diversity, but also because of the varying ways in which culture, or *kastom* as it is often referred to, has been modified by colonial, missionary and modernising influences. Despite this complexity, the commonest explanation for the poor representation of women in the region is to attribute this to cultural beliefs indigenous to the region.

Discussion on politics in the Pacific, particularly in the Melanesian region, tends to be dominated by the question of how leadership is framed around the masculine contest of 'big men' and chiefs (Corbett 2012: 76), in which chiefs derive power from hereditary succession, while 'big men' acquire status and power. Often the clan loyalties of traditional times are transferred into parliamentary politics, with *wantok* obligations the price of election (Rich 2008: 14). It is unsurprising then that politics is seen as men's business and a form of hyper-masculinity. For example, Huffer concludes '(c)ontemporary culture in the Pacific tends to be conservative and patriarchal' (2006: 3) and Kofe and Taomiaassert state, with respect to Tuvalu, 'culture and traditional practices were identified as the number one barrier to women's advancement' (2006: 211). The Commonwealth Observer Group that monitored the elections in 2012 in Papua New Guinea suggested:

(t)he 'big man' culture, by which certain male figures are seen as the centre of power and influence for a community or tribe, extends into national politics. As such, women are not viewed as prospective political leaders, regardless of their merit, and they are culturally dissuaded from participating in politics. (Commonwealth Observer Group 2012)

This 'cultural dissuasion' is real enough, with the portrayal of women who seek political office as unwomanly and disrespectful of their 'own' cultural norms. The tragedy of blaming culture is that it rests on flawed empirical and theoretical premises. First, it paints a homogenised view of patriarchal culture in the region.

Table 1. Rank order of female representation in Pacific region countries¹

Rank	Country	Date of most recent election	Percentage of women in lower or single house (number)
2	<i>French Polynesia (overseas collectivity of the French Republic)</i>	2013	56.1% (32)
7	<i>New Caledonia (overseas collectivity of the French Republic)</i>	2011	42.6% (23)
26	New Zealand	2011	32.2% (39)
44	Australia	2013	26% (39)
68	<i>Guam (Territory of the USA)</i>	2010	20% (3)
68 (equal)	<i>Niue (freely associated with New Zealand)</i>	2011	20% (4)
68 (equal)	<i>Wallis and Futuna (overseas collectivity of the French Republic)</i>	2012	20% (4)
89	<i>Tokelau (non-self-governing territory of New Zealand)</i>	2011	15% (3)
117	Kiribati	2011	8.7% (4)
125 (equal)	Tuvalu	2010	6.7% (1)
131	Nauru	2013	5.3% (1)
133	Samoa	2011	4.1% (2)
134	<i>Cook Islands (freely associated with New Zealand)</i>	2010	4.0% (1)
135	Tonga	2010	3.6% (1)
136 (equal)	Marshall Islands	2011	3.0% (1)
137	Papua New Guinea	2012	2.7% (3)
138	Solomon Islands	2010	2.0% (1)
141	<i>Federated States of Micronesia</i>	2013	0%
141	<i>Palau</i> ²	2012	0%
141	Vanuatu	2012	0%

Notes: The principal data source for this table was IPU (2013a), which reports data from national parliaments. Countries not included in the IPU database are entered in italics.

The Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening also publishes an Election Guide (<<http://electionguide.org/>>). Where data were not available from these sources, data were accessed from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, *Country Briefs* (<<http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/>>) or websites of the respective governments. Where possible, reports of the relevant Electoral Commissions were used. The Pacific Women in Politics website (<<http://www.pacwip.org/women-mps/national-women-mps/>>) has additional data. The French territories are sometimes differently classified. The most generic classification is used here.

¹Fiji has not been included in this study because its parliament was suspended in 2006. Prior to this suspension, the Fijian parliament had 8 women, representing 11.3% of the parliament.

²Palau has three women in its upper house.

Second, the ‘problem’ of culture is assumed to be an indigenous problem. This literature lags behind current theoretical scholarship on the interaction of culture with other sources of identity.

Indigenous patriarchal cultures exist, but not all parts of the Pacific region rest on such traditions. There has been no comprehensive comparative mapping of matriliney

in the Pacific, but we know of its prevalence across northern and western regions (Huffer 2008). Parts of Papua New Guinea, such as Bougainville, and also parts of the Solomon Islands are predominately matrilineal (Rimoldi 2011) – as is most of Micronesia, including Palau and the Marshall Islands (Huffer 2006). Matriliney does not automatically bestow political power on women, but its presence is conducive to the exercise (Lepowski 1993) and its obverse, patriliney, tends to inhibit such exercise (Young 1987).

It is not, however, clear that cultural beliefs about women's roles derive from indigenous cultures. Even in countries regarded as patriarchal, such as Vanuatu (Bowman et al., 2009: 1), the suggestion is that women had strong representation before the influence of colonisation. Regenvanu (2013), currently the Minister for Lands and Natural Resources, has observed:

Research within Vanuatu showed that, in fact, the main thing that contributed to attitudes saying women could not be represented equally with men was in fact the process of missionisation and colonisation we went through, where the patriarchy of Europe came to our lands, our islands, and said: 'women, you no longer can work with me in the garden. Now you go in the home and sew'.

This view is also expressed in relation to Bougainville. In this predominately matrilineal area, the recognition of the authority of women was expressed in the leading role women played in working for peace to end the civil war in 1992 (King 2009).

The women of Bougainville were aware of the need to be represented in the post-conflict political institutions. Ruth Saovana–Spriggs, a founder of the Bougainville Women for Peace and Freedom group, explains that women's role in the peace process was also about trying 'to reverse those trends which had marginalised their matrilineal status in traditional society while simultaneously promoting their influence on the modern sphere' (2007: 6). Eventually, they were guaranteed three seats in the Bougainville Autonomous Parliament, the first reserved seats for women in the region. However, this guarantees representation of less than 7 per cent unless they also win seats in the open electorates, a foothold denied them in the three elections since the peace agreement (Kenehata 2011).

This marginalisation of women from political power in Bougainville is attributed to the influence of colonialism. As King (2009) notes, the Bougainville Constitution Report refers to the colonial influence when identifying the changes to *kastom*, and explicitly with respect to the changes in women's roles:

It came in the form of changing roles for women, as men took more and more responsibility for economic activity, in some ways reducing the importance women had long enjoyed (especially in our matrilineal societies) as the owners of land, custodians of other forms of wealth and growers of our food. (King 2009: 170–71)

Understanding the origin of women's exclusion is important and ultimately demands the recovery of the narrative truth of both traditional cultures and the imposed cultures of missionisation and colonialism. But this should be accomplished not through an understanding of traditional and contemporary cultures as opposed and self-contained, but rather by acknowledging that cultural influences intersect with other influences in dynamic ways that can be productive or destructive of the

empowerment of women. This takes into account the literature on intersectionality (Deutsch 2007; West and Zimmerman 1987), examining the way in which gender is continually enacted through social interactions with changing normative conceptions of masculine and feminine behaviour and with regard to other influences such as race, class, sexual orientation, generational position, and, in some parts of the Pacific, clan position.

Much of the literature on the barriers to women's political participation in the Pacific falls into the trap of a reductionist view of culture. Benhabib (2002) identifies two epistemic flaws relevant to the literature on the Pacific. These are 'that cultures are clearly delineable wholes; that cultures are congruent with population groups' (2002: 4). The description of the view from 'inside' a culture seems particularly pertinent, arguing that inside a culture, participants simultaneously share and contest narrative accounts of their traditions, not seeing culture as 'whole' but as 'a horizon that recedes each time one approaches it' (2002: 5).

Moving away from 'cultural holism', we can start asking questions about narratives of women's empowerment that derive from both traditional and modern cultures and examine the interplay between understandings of gender and institutional change. Some narratives of women's traditional power derive from the history of women as chiefs or through their power to bestow chiefly authority (Huffer 2006). Some of the power of these relations seems to be weakened as the islands 'modernise', but women have also been identified as critical agents of social change in the present. In matrilineal Palau, women campaigned vigilantly to keep Palau nuclear-free (Wilson 1995). Thus, both in the past and the present, Pacific women are leaders.

Extending the horizon of culture does not mean a simple re-statement of powers that exist or might have existed, but rather finding new ways to develop culture. Jerrlyn Uduch Sengebau-Senior, one of the four Palaun senators, recently addressed a Parliamentary Leaders Forum in New Zealand on the formation of a Women Empowered Belau group. This group was formed specifically to deal with the question of political participation and is independent of the traditional organisation of women title-bearers in Palau, the *Meschil Belau*, who appoint chiefs and exercise more general leadership. It demonstrates that traditional cultural forms, even when based on matrilineal values, may not always be the most appropriate vehicle for change. Just as rejecting a holistic view of traditional and modernist cultures is critical, the formation of new forms of organisation of women might also better capture the diversity of women with claims for political participation. The senator explained:

The *Meschil Belau* group is made up of older women title bearers. We respect our elders. We do not disagree with any of them when there is a meeting. We go there, we attend, and we just say: 'Yes, yes, yes'. But in this Women Empowered Belau association that is specifically geared towards ensuring political participation of women in our Congress, the younger women – they are educated, they are family, mothers, from all walks of life – are in that group and are able to speak freely. They are able to express themselves, which I think they are limited in or prevented from doing so in this traditional women's group. (Sengebau-Senior 2013)

This cultural adaptivity can also be brought about through institutional change that may, in the first instance, be resisted on cultural grounds. The implementation of French parity laws had a dramatic impact in New Caledonia and French Polynesia,

with a lesser impact on Wallis and Futuna. In New Caledonia, women's representation rose from 17 per cent to 44.4 per cent in the first elections after the parity law in 2004 (Baker 2013). In French Polynesia, representation before the parity laws stood at 12 per cent, while under parity, it climbed to 47 per cent (Baker 2013). In both these cases, representation before parity was higher than the regional average. By contrast, in Wallis and Futuna, representation before parity was low and has increased to 20 per cent by 2012, perhaps because of the fragmented nature of political parties (Fraenkel 2006). Parity laws were opposed in the French Pacific territories by political leaders and in New Caledonia by indigenous Kanak elders. The arguments were that women were not 'ready' for parliamentary office and electing Kanak women to parliament would endanger Kanak culture (Baker 2013; Berman 2005). The reality is that the introduction of parity laws has achieved not only greater political representation of women, especially Kanak women, but has also increased services available to women through the actions of their women representatives (George 2013).

Untangling these hybrid cultural formations is important to provide a richer understanding of how cultural adaptation enables and constrains women's political participation. Rather than 'blaming' culture, particularly indigenous culture, a more productive short-term engagement with the influence of cultural beliefs might be to draw on traditional understandings of women's power alongside more contemporary beliefs around equality to advance claims for women's voices in modern parliaments that will increasingly govern the destiny of Pacific nations.

If women were ready?

The second set of arguments accounting for low levels of women's representation derive from assumptions about the socio-economic disadvantages that women face in the region. Alternately, on the supply side, it is suggested that women lack the individual capacities and will required to stand for public office. On the demand side, the argument is advanced that voters are unwilling to vote for women candidates.

The Pacific Island countries are developmentally challenged, with a number of countries (Tuvalu, Samoa, Vanuatu, Kiribati and the Solomon Islands) being categorised in the 'least developed' by the United Nations. The Pacific Island Forum tracking of progress on the Millennium Development Goals indicates only the Cook Islands and Niue are on track to achieve all the Millennium Development Goals, while Kiribati, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands appear unlikely to reach a single goal (Pacific Island Forum 2013). Compared with other parts of the world, progress in economic opportunities for women in the Pacific is slow (Economist Intelligence Unit 2012: 17). In most Pacific countries, women tend to be under-represented in the formal workforce, spend more time doing household work, are paid less than men and are occupied in subsistence agriculture. Average female labour force participation rates are significantly lower than male in Micronesia (57–71 per cent), Melanesia (53–73 per cent) and Polynesia (46–75 per cent) (AusAid 2011).

In some of the literature, the disadvantaged economic status of women is identified as an obstacle to women's political participation (Huffer 2006; True et al. 2013). It is commonly assumed women's representation will be low in countries 'where GDP per capita, life expectancy and educational standards are relatively low' (Fraenkel 2006). Usually, there is a recognition that broader economic trends do not have a direct relationship to levels of female representation (Fraenkel 2006), although True et al.

argue that the 'lack of economic resources helps explain why it is often only women from high-ranking or politically successful families that are able to achieve parliamentary success' (2013: 38).

These arguments are framed by assumptions about politics as a 'quasi-market', in which the critical factors for women are imbalances in the supply of women candidates and the electorate appetite to vote for women (Lovenduski and Norris 1993). The influence of these arguments has been extensive, with advocates for increasing women's political participation in the region. There has been a focus on training women aspirants to public office,¹ or conducting 'mock parliaments' to engage women in the ideas of running for office. On the demand side, programmes have focused on voter education, such as those conducted in Papua New Guinea in 2007 (Braun 2012) and the 'Know your woman candidate' campaign in 2012 (UN Women 2012).

These arguments may not be particularly helpful in the Pacific context. There is some evidence to support claims that there are demand-side problems in relation to both preferences for male candidates and inhibitions on women's voting freedoms. But this evidence is anecdotal and particular to some regions, whereas low levels of representation are ubiquitous, excluding the French territories. Cook Islands speaker, Niki Rattle, recently suggested 'when election time comes that means, in their minds, men are still the best people for the job' (w.comm 2013). This opinion is supported by the relatively poor showing of female candidates in recent elections. In Vanuatu, there were a record number of 10 women contesting the election, none of whom won, including the sole incumbent woman legislator. One of the failed candidates argued that it was because '(w)e didn't get support from the community, especially the women of Vanuatu' (Cooney 2012). The gender gap in voter turnout is low (Fraenkel 2006), but in some parts of the region family or clan heads determine women's voting choices. For example, in the Highlands region of Papua New Guinea, the 2012 Commonwealth Observer Group noted 'cases of male family or community members filling in the ballots of female voters' and sparse use of 'the separate male and female polling compartments' (2012: 27). In Vanuatu, there is a tendency for extended families to vote in accordance with the decision of the male head of household, despite legislation barring chiefs from determining how communities vote.

On the question of economic disadvantage as a cause on the supply side, it is important to take account of existing research. Studies based in Western countries tend to find a link between high economic status for women and high levels of representation, but this is generally related to the recruitment pool from which candidates can be drawn (Norris 1997; Paxton et al. 2007), rather than broad indicators of socio-economic development. Moreover, when the link to socio-economic disadvantage is extended to countries in Africa, parts of which have made spectacular gains in women's representation, the relationship does not hold (Krook 2010b). Scholars of candidate selection generally point to four stages of running for office: eligibility to run, aspiration to run, selection to run and success as a candidate (Lovenduski and Norris 1993; Norris 1997), noting that the pool in the final two categories realistically tends to be drawn from a limited socio-economic band. More relevant socio-

¹See the work of the Centre for Democratic Institutions at the Australian National University.

economic data might focus on the gains women in the region are making in education and professional employment.

Pacific women are making significant inroads into leadership in other sectors of their societies, particularly in the more senior positions in the public sector (Liki 2010) and professional fields, including the judiciary (Huffer 2006: 20–7). General employment data are perhaps less encouraging, although women's entrepreneurship is reflected in high participation rates in the informal business sector (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2013: 36). Parity of enrolment at secondary level has been achieved in most countries and retention rates for girls are higher than for boys (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2013: 31–2) and enrolments at the University of the South Pacific favour girls (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2013: 33). This is still a small percentage of the total number of candidates, but there has been a steady increase in the number of women candidates. The 10 women standing in Vanuatu was a record for that country, as were the 134 women candidates in Papua New Guinea. There is a need for caution in reading supply scarcity as a significant factor in women's poor representation. At the least, it is important to recognise socio-economic disadvantage for the population of women may not be the most relevant socio-economic indicator when considering the supply of women candidates.

The cohort of likely candidates drawn from the emerging professional pool of women in the Pacific gives rise to more specific questions about the economic incentives to nominate. Politics in some Pacific countries can be volatile, with high turnover rates. In the 2012 Papua New Guinea election only 40 incumbents were returned to office. Women emerging in professions may have good reasons to be cautious about taking such risks. Additionally, there is the question of whether women have more difficulty accessing campaign funds. These questions appear more relevant and timely than broader questions about socio-economic status.

This literature demonstrates that there is growing, but insufficient, evidence relating to demand factors and a more finely grained analysis of socio-economic disadvantage is needed to identify barriers to women's candidacy. At a theoretical level, there are two deficiencies in viewing politics as a quasi-market. The first is that different forms of capital are mobilised in any explanation of social change. Social capital may be far more important than economic capital, either as an inhibiting or enabling factor. Without elaborating on the term 'social capital', a working definition might be 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Lin and Erikson 2008: 4). It is important to understand *how* social capital is deployed. Second, as explained below, feminist institutionalism has demonstrated the weakness of using the metaphor of a quasi-market if it is institutional design and performance that constitute the barriers to women's political participation.

In the Pacific there is evidence that some women candidates are attuned to the way in which social capital can be used to exclude them, but can also advance their campaigns. For example, Maere Tekanene, elected in 2011 to the Kiribati parliament, has described moving her campaign from indoor halls mainly attended by men to outside informal meetings assisted by a group of young entertainers. Her campaign audiences then became about 50 per cent women (Pacific Women's Information Network 2011). In Papua New Guinea, in the limited preferential voting system, voters record votes for three of the candidates, with the elimination of the least popular candidates and distribution of their preferences. Loujaya Toni who on the seat of Lae,

held by her grandfather Bart Philemon, attributed her victory to the ways she was networked with the other candidates:

I am working with all the candidates in the Lae Open seat, I see all of them as my brothers except Bart Philemon who is my grandfather ... I'm banking on the fact that I see all candidates as brothers and Philemon as my grandfather. I'm very confident that I'm in everybody's three leaf combination. (Saiyama 2102)

She was then able to come from behind in the primary vote in order to claim the seat. In an even more spectacular victory, Julie Soso was elected regional governor for the Eastern Highlands, an area known for its 'big man' politics. In this, her fourth election campaign, she was able to use her position in preference lists to move from the fourth position in the primary vote to be the clear winner after distribution of preferences (Garamut 2012). These examples demonstrate that successful women candidates tend to be those who build strong social networks and often find innovative ways of mobilising social capital.

The other criticism of a market explanation of women's low levels of representation is that the institutions themselves are gendered, distorting any assumptions about market equilibrium (Krook 2010a). This literature informs the third set of arguments around women's representation in the Pacific.

If the institutions were ready?

Early feminist interventions in the literature on women and representation framed their analysis in terms of a 'quasi-market' (Norris 1997). Indeed, the first comparative analysis in the Pacific region used this account (Drage 1995). More recently, feminists influenced by the 'new institutional theory' (Mackay et al. 2010) have drawn attention to the way in which institutions and informal 'rules of the game' inhibit women's effective political participation and render 'quasi-market' analyses less robust. If markets do not then operate on a principle of equilibrium because institutions distort supply and demand, the explanatory power of the market metaphor is diminished. Krook proposes that we need a 'feminist institutionalism, broadly understood as "the rules of the game"' (2010a: 710) to understand the barriers to women's representation. Three levels of institutions are systemic, practical and normative (Krook 2010a).

Systemic institutions include formal arrangements of political life, notably electoral and party systems (Krook 2010a: 712). Practical institutions cover both formal requirements for candidacy such as age, educational level, citizenship status and residency requirements and informal requirements such as experience and skill and the expectations of parties and party selectors (Krook 2010a: 712). Normative institutions refer to the underlying value systems or beliefs around concepts of representation, equality and fairness (Krook 2010a: 712).

Each of these three aspects of feminist institutionalism is difficult to apply in the Pacific region without significant qualification. At the systemic institutional level, Krook's model is primarily designed to illuminate the barriers to the selection of women candidates in relatively mature democracies, where political parties are the principal filter for candidate selection. In many countries of the Pacific, political parties are either not relevant or have not evolved into the coalition models of most Western democracies. They are then less likely to act as the 'filter' for candidate

selection that occurs in Krook's model. In addition, campaigns themselves do not necessarily conform to the model of Western democratic elections, where parties aggregate interests. In the smaller Pacific Island countries, small electorates provide for a much more personal style of campaigning, while in some of the other Pacific Islands fragmented parties and shifting alliances result in a multitude of candidates. In Papua New Guinea, for example, there were 3443 candidates contesting 111 seats in the 2012 elections. Moreover, campaigns often do not focus on policies and appeals to individual voters, as familial and clan influence is more powerful.

At the level of practical institutions, the informal components Krook identifies conform, more or less, to the demand- and supply-side factors discussed above. In relation to the more formal aspect of practical institutions, it is helpful to look at impediments to women's candidacy. A small number of countries in the Pacific region still have legislative restrictions on who can stand as a candidate. In Tonga, 17 of the 28 seats are directly elected. One or two members (including the only woman to serve in the Tongan parliament) are appointed and nine members are hereditary nobles elected by their peers (IPU 2013b). In Samoa, candidacy is based on the performance of their *matai* (chiefly) duties. Women represent only 5.1 per cent of the 24,633 *matai* title-holders and in some villages rules prohibit women from being *matai* holders (Fraenkel 2006: 67–8). Age restrictions for candidacy can be as high as 30 years in the Federated States of Micronesia (IPU 2013a). Many of the Pacific Island countries require residency in the constituency for periods between two and five years. Where these provisions exist, it is clear women are discriminated against, either directly or indirectly, through restrictions on their eligibility as candidates. Residency requirements, for example, may make it difficult for women who have moved to urban centres to pursue employment or training to be a candidate for their traditional villages where they may have more effective community ties.

Finally, the normative dimension of Krook's model is designed to test for values underlying most Western-style democracies. These underlying values may differ in the diverse range of cultures present in the Pacific. There is evidence suggesting that, at least in the Melanesian region, parliaments are not really seen as being about Krook's trifecta of representation, fairness and equality. Often the perception of voters is that 'the role of their representatives is to deliver concrete benefits to their support base' (Rich 2008: 6) related to chiefly or extended family obligations. In the Solomon Islands, the modern governance institutions that have replaced traditional governance structures are seen as alienating and disempowering. Wairiu notes, '(m)ost rural communities have difficulty defining governance. For most, aspects of governance were described as service delivery and working together to meet people's daily basic needs' (2006: 409).

At a policy level, the most influential outcome of an institutionalist explanation in the Pacific region has been advocacy for the introduction of quotas,² generally referred to as TSMs, relying on the language of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. There is considerable resistance to quotas, although there are also some indications of change.

²In the discussion in this section, the French territories are not considered because they operate under the French parity system.

In Papua New Guinea, a proposal to introduce 22 reserved seats for women, guaranteeing 20 per cent representation, before the 2012 election passed the parliament but failed to secure the necessary two-thirds majority to become organic electoral law. The three women elected in 2012 were quick to publicly oppose special measures to elect women to parliament (Bani-Sam 2012). Delilah Gore, elected to the Papua New Guinea government in 2012, told a parliamentary forum in New Zealand: '(W)e believe in everybody getting into Parliament through the normal process ... Women in PNG today are holding a lot of positions despite only one woman in the previous Parliament' (Gore 2013). The recent publicity about killings of women alleged to have used sorcery has reignited a focus on the voices of women and their access to government, but the emphasis appears to be limited to the establishment of stronger legislation for women's council (PACNEWS 2013).

In Fiji, women have been active in the debate on constitutional arrangements in the lead up to elections planned for 2014, proposing 'a closed zipper' electoral list with 30 per cent women for the first two elections, moving to 50 per cent thereafter (Volatau 2013). The Constitution promulgated in September 2013 mandates an open-list proportional representation system and provides under §53(4) that a written law shall prescribe the rules for awarding seats 'that accord with an internationally accepted method for awarding seats to candidates' (Government of Fiji 2013). This leaves open a window of opportunity to continue the argument for women's representation.

In Samoa, the government in June 2013 passed a law unanimously that will guarantee women five seats from the next round of elections. If no woman is elected, five women candidates who have gained the highest number of votes will be appointed to the parliament. In this event, the parliament would be increased from 49 seats to 54 seats. If women are elected in the general round, appointments will bring the number of women up to five, with the provision not used if five or more women are elected in the general round (Mu 2013). In Vanuatu, meanwhile, following the failure of any of the 17 female candidates to achieve election in the 2012 general election, the Council of Ministers has passed legislation to have reserved seats for women at the provincial level.

Where quotas are introduced, it needs to be observed that these changes fall significantly short of the targets being set in most countries of the world that adopt quota systems. In part this is because few electoral systems in the Pacific have a system of proportional representation, the system that has been most amenable to rapidly increasing the representation of women because it limits the capacity of political parties to 'filter out' women candidates and, particularly in 'closed lists', presents voters with an already gender alternated list. Electoral systems across the Pacific vary significantly, with most Pacific Islands having a first-past-the-post voting system that elects a single member receiving the largest number of votes (Fraenkel 2006: 64). Some countries in the Pacific use alternative or preferential voting and some use block votes where more populous electorates vote in more than one candidate. Some also have systems combining majoritarian and proportional systems. The easiest reform, outside systems of proportional representation, is to add 'reserved seats' for women. It is technically possible to use reserved seats to significantly increase women's representation, but this article has demonstrated that 'reserved seat' strategies in the Pacific have so far failed to bring about such an increase.

Institutional explanations, therefore, have some merit as explanatory theories for women's low representation in the region. Their reliance on assumptions drawn from mature Western democracies limits their utility. More theoretical and empirical

work is required to understand how representation and candidate selection actually intersect with formal institutions and the rules of the game in the Pacific. The experience with quota debates so far indicates incremental, rather than transformative, change.

Conclusion

It is the contention of this article that there are serious weaknesses in the explanations developed so far to explain and remedy the low representation of women in the Pacific. Explanations attributing this to culture are too homogenising and fail to capture the dynamic interplay between traditional cultures, the influence of modernity and gender relations. In practical terms, they can lead to arguments that women pit themselves against their own culture in aspiring to parliamentary office. It is time to ask more specific questions about which cultural beliefs can be drawn on to strengthen women's leadership, rather than generalising blame to indigenous or modernising cultures. Explanations that look at economic disadvantage and view the political system as a quasi-market are not sufficiently nuanced and fail to examine the way in which social capital can be a barrier to and facilitator of women's advancement. It is time to evaluate more precisely what are the winning strategies and how different forms of capital might strengthen women's leadership, rather than generalising from socio-economic disadvantage. Institutional explanations offer some helpful remedies although, based as they are on studies of Western political institutions, they may not grasp the dynamics of recruitment of candidates and expectations of representation. In the narrower focus on quotas, the pace of change is rewarding but slow and unlikely to achieve significantly enhanced representation. There are women ready to accept the challenge of political office. The policies to assist them need to be more theoretically informed and evidence-based for substantial progress to be made.

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