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Niche Diplomacy as a Soft Power Strategy for Small States

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Abstract

Small states particularly those in the Global South, have often been relegated to being objects of international relations rather than actors. When discussed by most scholars, much focus is put on their ability to cooperate with big powers or form coalitions in order to achieve their goals. Only a few scholars discuss the ability of small states to independently hold power in international relations. Amongst those who do, only a small number go further than affirming that small states can exist independently in a world dominated by large power states. They often fall short in theorizing ways for small states to acquire and keep this independent power. By focusing on Fiji and its implementation of niche diplomacy, this thesis will argue that small states are not only capable of being independent actors of world politics, but that they can become leaders in a domain of international politics. Although niche diplomacy is a type of diplomacy often associated with middle powers who have the capacity of becoming big powers, this article will argue that it is in fact a strategy that can assist states who have the potential and capacity but not necessarily the window of opportunity needed to establish themselves as international powers.

Keywords: Alternative, Small states, Niche diplomacy, Strategy, Independent power

Introduction

In 1963, John F. Kennedy remarked that “the most enduring literature of the world came from little nations. The heroic deeds that thrill humanity through generations were the deeds of little nations fighting for their freedom (Annan in the United Nations, 1998)”. This remark was utilized by Secretary General of the United Nations (UN), Kofi Annan, and used to illustrate the importance of small nations, as a way to emphasize the role of small states in the international society. Listing a few examples of states such as Denmark, Fiji, and Nepal, he highlighted the contributions of small countries to the international peace and security mission of the UN. However, his speech remained focused on economic and military contributions such as UN regular budget and UN peacekeeping missions respectively. Nonetheless, Kofi Annan’s speech proved that some key actors in International Organizations believe in the activeness of small states and see them as equal actors that can contribute to world politics. It is thus possible to argue that small states are not powerless in international relations.

Different from Kofi Annan (1998) who applauded the efforts made by small states, Kenneth Waltz is known to have once affirmed that “Denmark does not matter” and thus effectively he underlined the marginal position that small states are demoted to occupying in international relations (Bilgin 2008, 10). This contrast in positions clarifies the awkward position small states are thrust into in world politics. Just as there are some important actors of world politics lauding small states for their actions, still there are those that believe small states are objects and not actors of international relations (Long 2017, 186).

Before proceeding any further, the term ‘small state’ needs to be explained given its importance for this thesis. However, there is no clear definition of what a small state is in International Relations (IR) as the definition provided depends on the scholar read. Moreover, there are some scholars who believe that size is a social construction (Maas 2009, Browning 2006, Panke and Gurok 2018) and whose point clearly highlights the difficulty of finding a common definition in IR. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this thesis, Long’s (2017) and Browning’s (2006) argument that power/capability and influence in world politics have long been attributed to the possession of material resources and size will be used in order to provide an idea of what the term ‘small

states' refers to. Long (2017, 188) says that the very definition of a 'small state' depends on "the amount of resources that [it] possesses". If a great power is defined as possessing huge resources in terms of military, economy, population, GDP, and many more, then a small power is defined by its lack of the same resources. Small states will therefore be defined based on their geographical size, military and economic resources, population, GDP, and international presence.

However, it seems to be a general consensus that participation in world politics depends on one's possessions and ability to control power in international politics. Long (2017, 185) identified the conventional assumption in IR that small states, although not completely powerless, are still helpless when faced with a great power. This position is shared with many other scholars who defended the idea that small states do have agency and are not totally powerless even when opposed by great powers (Björkdahl 2007, Kassimeris 2009, Browning 2006, Lakatos 2017). Literature on small states remains centred around two points: on one hand the argument that small states can only exist in the international scene through their alliance with large powers or by forming stronger coalitions (Deitelhoff and Wellbott 2012; Panke and Gurol 2018), and on the other hand, the difficulty of being a small state in a world ruled by great powers (Kassimeris 2009, Browning 2006, Lakatos 2017, Pariona, 2018). Of course, there are authors such as Gashi (2016), Graham (2017), Browning (2006) and others that advocate for the strength of small states by trying to go beyond their limitations.

Browning (2006) argued that literature in IR is very limited where it concerns small states and this argument is corroborated by Long (2017) who argues that it has become common sense to believe that small states are only able to survive due to the protective norms, regulations and institutions created by large powers. Long's statement allows one to understand the possible challenges faced when a scholar tries to argue in favour of an independent small state, especially those non-Western small states.

A few authors such as Deitelhoff and Wellbot (2012); Browning (2006); Gashi (2016); Graham (2017); Kassimeris (2009); and Long (2017), theorized the way in which small states strive to be heard in world politics. They argued against size being an obstacle to participation in international politics however they also remained focused on how size forces small states to opt for certain options in order to be active actors of international relations. A few authors explored various

venues of participation which they seemed to believe was best for small states such as coalition-building (Deitelhoff and Wellbot 2012); Panke & Gurol 2018) or being part of an international institution (Gashi 2016; Björkdahl 2013). Despite refuting the argument that small states are objects of international relations, their literature is very limited in its focus. This thesis understands their positions as reinforcing the weakness of small states by maintaining that small states are only powerful if they band together or if they rely on external power. Therefore, this thesis will also provide an insight into the alternative literature on small states which affirms that small states can be independent powers with coalition building.

This thesis will prove that small states and in particular non-Western ones can, through other means, be powerful in their own ways that does not necessarily need to be through the hard power means accentuated by traditional IR theories. Thus, this thesis aims to identify ways in which they can hold independent power in international relations. However, little has been done to theorize ways in which solitary small states are able to stand and act as independent actors in a world dominated by larger powers. Only a few authors touch upon the subject of niche diplomacy as a possible source of independent power for small states (Lakatos 2017; Rickli 2014; Betzold 2010; Wolf et al. 2016). It also has to be acknowledged that most scholars focus on the West when theorizing small states and often neglect the Rest. Hence the aim of this thesis will be to fill in this gap which has been identified in the literature by closely examining a non-Western small state such as Fiji.

The Republic of Fiji usually shortened to Fiji is made up of 332 islands with 110 being inhabited (CIA,n.d). It is located in the Pacific and is endowed with a natural landscape that makes it a very attractive tourist destination with sandy white beaches, tropical climate, a rich and diverse ecosystem and beautiful coral reefs (Tourism Fiji, n.d). This ‘home to happiness’ as it is described on the Fijian official tourist website is victim to natural disasters such as cyclones on a frequent basis (CIA, n.d). In 2016 for example, Fiji was hit by cyclone Winston which left in its wake a devastating impact on the lives of the islands’ inhabitants. Climate change in Fiji is not a nightmare but a reality with citizens suffering directly from the consequences of extreme weather conditions, rising sea-levels, and forced migration to higher grounds due to global warming. Thus, naturally climate change is of utmost importance to Fiji and its actions emphasize this through its activeness and willingness to take part in international actions against climate change. Despite the smallness

of Fiji, it has acquired an international presence that cannot be ignored especially in talks concerning climate change (Corbett, Yi-Chong & Weller 2018, 103). This presence can be seen in its position as president of the 23rd annual Conference of the Parties to the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, as well as its position as the first country to ratify the Paris Climate Agreement with a unanimous parliament. The choice of Fiji as a case study helps this thesis to remove the focus of mainstream IR from Western states in order to spark interest in the Rest. There is a need for more focus on non-Western states in mainstream IR and this is another area this thesis hopes the analysis of Fiji will contribute to. Due to the evidence provided by Fiji in the international system, this thesis argues that small states, given the right resources and strategy, do not need to form coalitions in order to have their voices heard in the international arena. Niche diplomacy, as a key feature, will also need to be defined in order to provide a definite idea of what it entails for this thesis.

Arguably the term niche diplomacy was either coined by Andrew Cooper in 1995 (Smith 1999) or by Gareth Evans, Australian foreign minister (Henrikson 2005, 67). Nonetheless, the term is used to conceptualize when a country focuses its attention on a specific area of foreign policy in an attempt to generate important yields in that domain (Smith 1999, Henrikson 2005). In other words, niche diplomacy can be seen as a strategy of foreign policy that aims at making a country an important actor in a specific field. This accounts for the fact that small countries and middle powers with limited hard power capacity to participate in world politics can, by developing a particular area in which they can be the equivalent of a great power, become important actors of world politics.

In order to verify or falsify the above statement, this thesis will be centred on this key research question: *What are the ways through which small states can establish themselves as non-neglectable voices in the international system?* However, in order to approach an answer to this question, it will be broken down into a series of sub questions such as the following: Firstly, it is important to understand *What are the motivations that lay beneath a country's decision to cultivate an alternative to hard power?* Furthermore, *how can small states instrumentalize niche diplomacy as a soft power strategy to establish a standing in world politics?*

Secondly, this thesis asks the questions: *To what extent can niche diplomacy be a viable approach for small states or in other words what are the factors that can allow a small state to utilize this strategy? How advantageous is niche diplomacy for small states in the long term?*

However, before tackling these questions, this thesis provides a literature review section which surveys the existing literature on small states in IR. This section is provided in an attempt to highlight the existing positions of IR scholars regarding small states and will argue that while some positions correspond to reality, there is evidence of an alternative power source for small states. Following this, will be a section detailing the chosen method used as well as the framework employed in the first section of the analysis. The analysis will be divided into two sections in order to tackle the four sub questions. The first section of the analysis will attempt, by analysing Fiji as a case study, to respond to the first two sub questions. By using Bjordkdahl's framework, it will attempt to understand the motivations and decisions of small states to turn to niche diplomacy as a strategy in world politics. It will also focus on how small states can instrumentalize their activeness in their areas of specialization and the consequences of such actions in international politics and relations between states.

The second section of the analysis will focus on the possibility that this strategy might have a shortcoming as it might not be suitable for all states. This section will focus on shedding light on the conditions that make niche diplomacy a possible strategy for a small state. Finally, in this section, this thesis will concentrate on understanding the limitations of specializing in one area of international relations.

Literature Review

This section does not claim to reunify all available literature, instead it aims to bring together a fraction of existing literature that will help orient this thesis towards its end goal of proving that small states can act as independent actors through alternative strategies such as niche diplomacy.

In order to achieve the goal of this thesis, it is important to reiterate Browning's (2006) argument that literature in IR is limited, especially concerning ways in which small states can gain independent voices in international politics. Despite the fact that there are authors who believe that

size is not necessarily what matters in world politics (Panke and Gurol 2018, Browning 2006, Gashi 2016, Graham 2017) and also those authors who propose ways for states to be independent actors of international relations (Rickli 2014, Browning 2006, Björkdahl 2013, Deitelhoff and Wellbott 2012), it remains a fact that little has been done to theorize ways in which solitary small powers are actually able to act in a system ruled by great powers. This is the gap that has been identified and in which this thesis hopes to contribute.

Furthermore, except for a few authors who included small non-Western states in their literature (Rickli 2014; Rana 2006; Long 2017; Graham 2017; Veenendaal and Corbett 2015), most of the authors (Panke and Gurol 2018; Björkdahl 2007; Lieberfeld 1995) illustrated the ability a small state has through the examples of Western states. Although useful for this thesis, it can only be used as an opening into a broader project. This thesis aims to break away from focusing on Western states and to develop a more inclusive project that can be used to prove that all small states, no matter their geographic positions, can stand as independent entities without the need for a coalition or an international institution.

Conventional Literature on small states

Gashi (2016, 147) and Graham (2017, 133) recognize that the world has always been a place where the powerful flourish, sometimes at the expense of small and medium states who are often subjected to military or economic manipulation by great powers. However, they both maintain the argument that although size matters, it is not and should not be seen as the only determining factor of a state's power. This is an important point that this thesis will seek to prove through its choice of a case study. Their focus on non-Western countries also makes them a very interesting source of information regarding small states. This is also a divide between IR scholars as will be explained later in this section. Using the examples of Switzerland, Singapore, Israel and Costa Rica, Gashi (2016) provided proof that small states that have survived and flourished as independent sovereign powers in history could also be found in the Rest. It is thus an important point that allows this thesis to affirm that non-Western small states can be independent actors in world politics. Similarly, Graham (2017, 134) uses the example of Switzerland, Singapore and Mauritius to defend her idea that small states are 'able to use their smallness to their advantage' to support the idea that small states can hold power in.

One of the ways literature on small states in IR suggests that these actors can possess the power to act is through coalition building. Deitelhoff and Wellbott (2012) and Panke & Gurol (2018) identified coalitions and prioritization as two strategies that small states can make use of in international politics. This places them in the same category of scholars as Gashi (2016), and Browning (2006) who suggested that coalition building is the most rational choice for small states to take part in world politics as it is less uncertain and also facilitates negotiation in international politics. They recognised that it is almost compulsory for small states to be in groups as often times singular small states are not seen as having enough strength to be considered when scholars research the process of negotiations and as a result often determine major powers as key players of negotiations (Deitelhoff and Wellbot 2012, 347; Browning 2006; Gashi 2016 and Graham 2017). Despite recognising the shortcomings of forming a coalition, which ranges from the difficulty of maintaining a coalition as numbers grow to the coalition not preventing its members from having private dealings (Deitelhoff and Wellbot 2012, 349), they seem to believe it is more likely small states will form coalitions rather than develop niche diplomacy which is the second strategy identified by Deitelhoff and Wellbot (2012, 345). Gashi (2016, 148) supports this argument by stating that the new world order has left little alternative to small and medium states apart from becoming part of a European-Atlantic cooperation to secure their safety.

Despite differing from rational choice theorists who see effectiveness of coalitions in numbers, and also admitting that coalitions can have varying levels of success especially when compared to coalition between major powers, Deitelhoff and Wellbott (2012, 346) remain authors who believe that coalition building remains an effective strategy for small states. They argue that it is legitimacy and moral leadership that determine the success of a coalition. Similarly, Panke and Gurol (2018), while defending the idea that smallness does not dictate if a state can set the agenda in international politics, also remain focused on the activeness of small states through participation in international institutions which they see as a '**window of opportunity**' for small states to 'amplify' their voice. This argument, however true and effective as it may be, is not the position this thesis wishes to adopt. Nonetheless, it is helpful in understanding how small states are understood to only have voices in international relations through coalitions or international institutions, even in the eyes of authors that believe they are not powerless due to their sizes. This thesis argues that such key notions would be more efficient in developing independent voices of small states if they were implemented with niche diplomacy instead of coalitions. Developing the voice of a small state

through coalitions can only be called borrowing and, if and when the coalition falls apart, the small state will eventually lose that voice that they have obtained.

Limitations of Conventional literature on small states

Despite Deitelhoff and Wellbot 2012; Browning 2006; Gashi 2016 and Graham 2017's argument that small states have a role to play in world politics, they remain a part of those scholars who focus on small states and their participation in the international scene through coalition building or material resources despite acknowledging that often, small states do not have the military or economic capacity to actively become singular non negligible actors of international relations (Gashi 2016, 149).

Although they breach the silence in the literature about small states and how they can act independently in international relations, there remains a gap in theorizing ways small states can achieve this. Gashi (2016) in particular fails to explore other possibilities of power that contribute to the independence of the small states he used as examples. He achieves his goal of affirming that these states are not powerless, however, his article does nothing to explain or theorize how they gained their power. This is a limitation of his paper and also a point that allows this thesis to identify the possible literature gap which exists in IR. The other authors (Deitelhoff and Wellbot 2012; Browning 2006) proceed in theorizing various ways through which small states participate in world politics but fall short on theorizing ways through which they can be independent actors instead of a group of small states coming together to survive. It is this point that limits the information that can be used by this thesis as it endeavours to explore ways for small states to be singular, strong actors of the international scene.

This shortcoming is one which Graham's (2017) does not possess as, although she recognizes that small states are often neglected and seen as having two options in international politics, she chooses to focus on their individual ways of showing strength. In this sense, she differs from Gashi (2016) as she goes a little further into theorizing how small states have been able to act as independent actors in international relations without necessarily resorting to coalition building. The two options she identified as mainstream options for small states are: either, they act in the way Deitelhoff and Wellbott (2012) and Gashi (2016) argue by '[ganging] up', by forming coalitions or, by '[opting]-out' of international politics (2017, 133).

Her proposition is that we see small states as “‘emergency’ agenda-setters, in terms of calls for climate change, as resilient, innovative actors as global leaders ‘at the forefront of positive change’ in the world and ‘as architects of a culture of cooperation’ (Graham 2017, 134).” This allows her to make a break from Gashi (2016) whose position she was extremely similar to in the start. Nonetheless, she remains focused on the smallness of states and how they struggle to gain a foothold in the international society thus falling short of completely arguing and proposing ways for small states to discard their smallness in the international system.

A possible explanation for such shortcomings could be Browning’s (2006, 669) argument that literature in IR is often limited when it comes to small states precisely because it focuses on size which often is associated with a state’s ‘capability and influence’. He argues against the (neo)realists that have a materialistic way of measuring a state’s power. In his words, (neo)realists often measure states ‘in terms of numbers of guns, planes, soldiers or size of GDP’ (2006, 670). Browning’s work endeavours to bring about a change in how small states are perceived in international relations and this is the area which is most attractive to this thesis. By highlighting how different theorists from realists and more discursive theorists think about small states, Browning helps to underline the different biases that exist concerning small states (2006, 670-4). The position most useful for this thesis is his argument that “smallness need not necessarily imply weakness (Browning 2006, 681). Without aiming for a utopia, it seems more interesting to look into ways a small state can stand on its own instead of focusing solely on its shortcomings. By focusing on shortcomings of small states, it is possible to forget the aim that authors started with, which is proving that being small in size does not and should not dictate what action one can take in international relations. It is a trap that Gashi (2016), and Graham (2017) both fall into.

Alternative Literature on Small States

Another break in the literature which is important to highlight is through Björkdahl (2013) and Rickli (2014). They both are very fascinating authors in the way they differ from other IR scholars. They both chose not to focus on the limitations of small states nor on coalition building and institutional power and instead they developed different strategies for gaining power in international relations. Björkdahl (2013) chooses to challenge the common assumption in IR that major powers have the ability to ‘do as they will’ whereas small states because of their limitations

can only 'do as they must' (322). She also argues against the assumption proposed by Deitelhoff and Wellbot (2012), Browning (2006), and Gashi (2016) that coalition building is the best choice for small states. Björkdahl (2013) attempts to debunk this by focusing on norm entrepreneurship as a diplomatic strategy used by small states to gain a foothold in world politics. According to her, by controlling what the international community sees as wrong or the 'right thing to do', small states can exert normative power which she argues is important in the transformation of the 'international normative architecture' (2013, 322). Using Sweden, she illustrates how, despite the bias against small states in IR, having power over norms can help a small state to reside in a position of power comparable to a military power (2013, 323). Björkdahl's use of norm entrepreneurship will aid this thesis in showing how a country can occupy a moral high ground and derive power from it simply by specialising in a specific area which fits in with one of the two strategies talked about by Deitelhoff and Wellbott (2012) in their work *Beyond Soft balancing: Small States and Coalition-building in the ICC and Climate negotiations*. However, they chose to focus on coalition building thus ignoring how niche diplomacy could very well be a more independent alternative for small states. It is in this aspect that this thesis disagrees with the approach taken by Deitelhoff and Wellbott.

Similarly, by choosing to focus on developing clean energy as a niche strategy for small states in the Gulf, Rickli (2014) most closely achieves the goal of this thesis which is to understand how soft power through niche diplomacy can be generalised to all small states, thereby granting them a way to stand against major power in world politics. Rickli (2014, 268) understands that small states in IR are seen as entities not capable of offensive strategies as they do not have the power to influence the international community while also guaranteeing their own security. His area of focus are the Gulf and energy. Combining both, he aims to develop a strategy that can be beneficial to small states in the Gulf in order to help them gain footing both domestically and internationally (Rickli 2014, 265). He sees niche strategies as a way out of the security dilemma that small states often face. Instead of channelling all one's resources to fuel their bargaining power, he argues that by specialising in one issue area and increasing one's expertise, small states will then be able to frame and influence topics as they will have the power to define 'terms of negotiation' in the areas that they specialise in. It is the way in which Rickli (2014) develops his argument that will benefit this paper as it will also focus on ways in which small states can utilize niche strategy in a way

that lets them focus on something else other than the never-ending race of catching up to a major power in the economic and military race.

Power

After going through a small fraction of the authors who have written and published on small states in IR, Long (2017) is a very noteworthy author that has earned a mention in this thesis. He is striking in that even before refuting any argument or stating his position, he acknowledges that there is a conventional knowledge in IR about small states which is that they are only able to survive and protect their territories because of the norms, institutions, rules and regulations put in place by the world's strong powers (Long 2017, 185). A very interesting fact is that it shows the bias against small states that has become common knowledge in IR and how this limits the possibility of theorizing the independent activeness of small states. Long duly notes that literature on small states either focus on their limitations or they try to focus on their independence, their power. It is the latter set of authors that interests this thesis as they have set the foundation needed to achieve the goal of this thesis which is to prove that small states can be independent actors of international relations through niche diplomacy.

Long (2017) points out how power cannot be separated from the notion of independent action which this thesis agrees with. It would be ill-advised to neglect Lukes' three faces of power especially when theorizing and analysing ways in which actors of the international society gain an independent foothold and a voice that cannot be easily ignored.

Lukes' (2005) approach to power, albeit developed more than a decade ago, remains important across various disciplines and has helped to structure our understanding of different ways in which power can manifest itself. Building on previous definitions of power by Dahl (1961), Bachrach and Baratz (1962), Lukes' definition of power is that of the third dimension of power.

Dahl (1961) defined it as something visible that could easily be measured. For him, power was the ability to make decisions. Bachrach and Baratz (1962), following this, argued that we should see power as not only the ability to make decisions but also to set the agenda of what is to be discussed. Hence, power is not only something that is visible but also invisible. Power dictates what happens behind the scene (Robinson 2006, 2).

Lukes' definition of power focuses more on the invisible aspect. Lukes goes further than the invisible hand that sets the agenda. He argues that power also exists when party b has been convinced that a decision they made, comes from them without being aware of party a who is pulling the strings behind them. In other words, Lukes' definition is power as the ability to manipulate, distort someone's perception and shape their preferences (Robinson 2006, 2).

Long (2017, 187) points out the nature of power has changed and thus the international society now has a new understanding of what power is, which is different from the realist definition. Although still relevant, power has morphed to include ways that small states make use of it. It needs to be acknowledged that small states often lack the material resources that make up a realist definition of power, however as Long (2017) and Björkdahl (2007) point out, power can also take the form of norms, agendas, interests, interdependence and institutions. Thus, there are alternatives for small states to explore. Long argues that, according to the realist definition of power, that the weaker a state is the more it has to develop these alternative sources of power. This position is one that this thesis will adopt throughout. Power is power no matter the form it takes as proven by Lukes (2005) and his theory on the three faces of power. This thesis will thus focus on theorizing the type of power small states can wield and which allows them to stand equally with world powers. It will also be focusing particularly on non-Western small states in its attempt to theorize ways for small states to possess independent power in world politics. Therefore, Bilgin's (2008) argument on how literature in IR has relegated non-Western states and small states to subpar actors will be extremely useful in proving why there is a need for a non-Western focus in this thesis.

If it is not Western, then it is not worth inquiring about. This is the general assumption Bilgin (2008), Aydinli and Biltekin (2017), Brown (2006), Acharya and Buzan (2017) try to debunk and it is this point that this thesis hopes to falsify at the end. Bilgin (2008) writes about non-Western scholars and their place in IR. He supports the argument that most non-Western states are often ignored by mainstream IR as places where knowledge can be found and also in their capacity to be relevant actors in the international system. He argues that what non-Western scholars have to say about world politics is worth inquiring into thus providing one point of argument for this thesis which is that although "attempting to think past 'Western IR' is a challenge (Bilgin 2008, 19)", one cannot believe it is a challenge that cannot be won. Attempting to break away and fully theorize alternative ways for small states to flourish in international relations is a challenge that one needs

to face. Scholars are quick to admit that the current literature is limited in its understanding of the world and that there is a need to broaden the literature on non-Western states. However, they also fall short in theorizing these alternative ways that exist for small states and thus limit their contributions to simply being about the limitations or the struggles of small states (Long 2017). Hence the reason why this thesis has the goal of going further and providing a foundation on which small states can build their independent activeness through niche diplomacy.

Methodology

In order to achieve the goal of proving how niche diplomacy can be an alternative to hard power in international relations, this thesis has chosen to analyse one case study which is Fiji. Due to limitations in words, time and capacity, the focus will be on one case study in hope of delivering a more in-depth analysis and contribution.

As mentioned in the introduction, Fiji is a state known for its beautiful and relaxing beaches, coral reefs and natural landscapes. However, this natural tropical paradise is threatened by the increase of natural disasters which are a result of global warming. Fiji was chosen as a case study not only because of its relevance to the present-day international society, but also because despite its smallness, it has succeeded in gaining a foothold of power that needs to be accounted for.

Previously, a definition of small states was provided based on geographical size, military and economic resources, population, GDP and international presence. According to this definition, the choice of Fiji is also justified as it is a state that falls within the aforementioned criteria: Its GDP per capita places it at 140th in the world, it has a national population of 926,276 as of July 2018, placing it at 161st in the world and its military spending in 2018 amounted to 0.92% of GDP placing it at 125th in the world (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018). Another reason that justifies the choice of Fiji as a case study for this thesis is that it is recognized as one of the success stories of small state niche diplomacy (UN News, 2019). This recognition makes it a solid case study on which this thesis can rely to argue its point that small states can and do possess the capacity for independent power in world politics.

Theoretical Framework

This thesis explores norm entrepreneurship as a form of niche diplomacy for small states. It utilizes Björkdahl's (2007, 2013) framework on norm entrepreneurship which she applied to explain how Sweden became a power in conflict resolution. This framework consists of four major steps which she argued were taken by Sweden and resulted in Sweden's international power in the domain of conflict prevention. In her work *Swedish Norm Entrepreneurship in the UN* (2007), she explains how the country instrumentalized normative power in its foreign policy strategy to establish itself as a norm entrepreneur in the domain of conflict resolution in the post-war era. The country thus gained international recognition due to its ability to shape the 'right thing to do' (Björkdahl 2007, 548). Her findings allowed her to affirm that this strategy can be an alternative to hard power especially for countries that do not meet the requirements to be hard powers through military and economic sectors. However, by possessing "'moral authority' over an issue 'a strong international reputation, credibility and an ability to persuade others' (Björkdahl 2007, 549)", small states can develop just as Sweden did.

Her framework is thus relevant to this thesis as it provides a theoretical skeleton that can be used to a certain extent to explain the strategy employed by Fiji in order to become a niche power of climate change. Björkdahl (2013) identified four steps in establishing control through norm entrepreneurship in world politics. In the way the framework was applied to Sweden, this thesis will also apply it to Fiji in an attempt to evaluate and understand the strategies it used to establish itself as an authority in climate issues. While she applied it to a sector relevant in the post war era, this thesis will be applying the main steps of this structure to Fiji's climate change activeness. This theoretical framework will be used to evaluate Fiji's moral authority, its ability to persuade and also to what extent the country was able to gain a strong international reputation. These elements were crucial in the establishment of Sweden as a norm entrepreneur of conflict prevention and will thus need to be present in the case of Fiji if this thesis is to prove that Fiji developed according to Björkdahl's theory. Thus, the following steps need to be fulfilled:

First, a purposeful norm entrepreneur commits itself to a norm that agrees with values, beliefs, identities, and practices of the norm entrepreneur. The norm is then framed to make it morally appealing, familiar, and 'good', in order for it to resonate with a global audience. [...] Second, the norm entrepreneur strives to find an organisational home for the emerging norm in order for

it to become self-sustaining and institutionalized into the organisational structure of the organisation. [...] Third, the norm entrepreneur then uses norm advocacy, which combines agenda-shaping, norm-negotiation, and coalition-building, to persuade other states to embrace the norm. [...] The final step in the norm entrepreneurial activities is to support the process of institutionalization. This process is characterised by how a norm becomes mainstreamed into an organisation's discourse, procedures, and structures.” (Björkdahl 2013, 325)

Data and Research Method

To reinforce Björkdahl's (2013) framework, this thesis has chosen discourse analysis as a method of analysis. This method emulates the approach to discourse as explained by a group of scholars such as Lynn Doty (1993), Mikael Madsen (2016) and Didier Bigo (1995), who belong to the group of critical constructivism theorists who argued that words were given power by the actions they described as well as by the person saying them. They argued that words need to be critically taken apart in order to understand the reality they create. This thesis utilizes this form of discourse analysis as illustrated by Lynn Doty, particularly in her work *Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of U.S Counterinsurgency in the Philippines* (1993). In this, she takes apart the words used to describe the actions of the USA in Philippines and explains how these words helped the country in gaining a positive image internationally. This thesis will also be looking at written texts as Lynn Doty (1993) and her group of critical constructivism theorists argue in favour of. This form of discourse analysis will be used mainly to analyse written texts which include speeches, headlines from international and Fijian news outlets, as well as other forms of important statements that can highlight the narrative built around Fiji and its work on climate change. By doing this, one can dig into the message presented in order to utilize the data appropriately. It is also crucial as words employed help to highlight the imagery the country leaders as well other international actors have of Fiji in regard to its strategy. It also helps to underline the motivations of government officials and what they hope to achieve through their development of niche diplomacy.

In order to understand the international leadership role of Fiji, foreign policy statements as well as statements of Fijian officials found on the official website of the COP23 will be used. This platform is significant being the 23rd annual Conference of the Parties to the 1992 United Nations

Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP23, 2017). Fiji is the first Small Island Developing State (SIDS) to chair this platform which shows its international importance on the issue of climate change. Therefore, Fijian Prime minister Frank Bainimarama's speeches on various national and international platforms will be used as data for this thesis in order to highlight Fijian leadership in climate change. This thesis has elected to focus on a period from 2016 to 2019 during which Fiji suffered at the hands of cyclone Winston (2016), signed the Paris climate agreement (2016), became president of the COP23 (2017) and much more. This choice of data will provide an insight into the country's stance in world politics. As this set of data is provided and justified by the government, it can thus provide a reflection of what goals the country leaders wish to achieve by adopting such a strategy. This data was chosen with a clear understanding that it will contain bias, therefore, in order to reduce its impact, official press releases, reports and speeches of the UN officials will be collected and analysed. The process of extracting information from multiple sources in an effort to highlight differences and glean valuable information from them is called triangulation and it is this method which will be used in order to reduce bias and increase the validity of the conclusion reached.

Through the bias of a single case study and keeping in mind the social context in which these discourses were pronounced or produced, an analysis of the structure of words and sentences will be carried out in dialogue with relating our findings to themes of leadership and power as well as any other patterns that can aid in responding to the research question. Furthermore, in order to provide a deeper analysis of the data, qualitative analysis will be used with the aim of uncovering what is being implied in the texts and equally to explain the usefulness of niche diplomacy for Fiji. This method was chosen as it requires the interpreter's knowledge of the social context that the texts being analysed were produced. Taking into account Fiji's geographic position and also its experience with natural disasters (The Natural Disaster Management Office, n.d) this method seemed most appropriate for analysis. Exploring foreign policy statements with this method will equally assist in discovering the factors that played key roles in establishing Fiji as a niche diplomacy success.

Case Study: Fiji

Deitelhoff & Wellbot (2012) and Panke & Gurol (2018) identified coalitions and prioritization as two strategies that small states can make use of in international politics. Despite their arguments that coalition building is one of the most effective strategies for small states in world politics, this thesis through the medium of Fiji as a case study will endeavour to argue differently. This section will introduce Fiji in the dimensions relevant to this thesis. It will try to shed light on the various motivations and strategies that have made Fiji a successful niche diplomacy case in world politics. That is not to say that this section will be devoted to highlighting only the positive. It will also through analysis of the chosen data, shed light on various limitations that Fiji encounters as a player in world politics.

Prioritization, or niche diplomacy as it will be referred to in this thesis, is one source of power for small states which has not been explored a lot as the focus remains on coalitions and borrowing power from international institutions (Deitelhoff & Wellbot 2012; Panke & Gurol 2018; Gashi 2016; Betzold 2010; Corneloup and Mol 2013). Therefore, there is a need to theorize the motivations behind the decision of adopting niche diplomacy as a soft power strategy as well as the instruments that led to the success of Fiji in the domain.

Step One: Constructing a Norm Pertaining to Climate Change

Framing the norm for a global audience

Fiji is composed of multiple islands which are subjected to ‘potentially catastrophic’ natural climate events and each of these have potential to majorly impact the economy and infrastructure of the country (PCCP, n.d). In 2016, the islands of Fiji were hit by Cyclone Winston which was described as ‘one of the strongest storms ever recorded’ (NOAA Climate.gov, 2016). The impact of this cyclone was felt both by the people and the country’s economy as it left 44 dead and wiped out one third of the national economic production (BBC, 2018). In 2018, another cyclone hit the islands of Fiji, wreaking havoc similar to the devastation left behind by Cyclone Winston in 2016.

In light of the growing frequency of natural disasters, the Fijian prime minister, in his speech in response to Cyclone Josie in 2018, framed an external danger through the use of the word ‘threat’ in association to ‘severe’, ‘more frequent’, and ‘extreme’ to corroborate Fiji’s stance on natural disasters as a national security issue (Climate Action, 2018). Evidence of this can be found in Fijian documents such as *Roadmap For Democracy and Sustainable Socio-Economic Development 2010-2014* (Ministry of National Planning, 2009) which serves as a national framework for Fijian national policies. The importance of natural disasters as a national issue can also be seen in the launch of the Disaster Risk Reduction Policy by Fijian prime minister Bainimarama in 2019 (fiji.gov.fj). The association of such words together emphasize the degree of importance accorded to the word ‘threat’ and thus increases the impact it will have on those who receive the message. Fiji has always been subjected to natural events such as cyclones, flooding, etc (PCCP, n.d), however, the increase in severity, in addition to the damages left behind, as well as the terms used to address the situation, seemed to contribute to the decision to explore an alternative solution to secure Fiji’s existence. Bainimarama (2018) described this as a ‘fight for survival’ for the country however, this ‘fight for survival’ would lead Fiji to becoming a leading power in the domain of climate change.

Fiji had always accorded importance to climate change and had included strategies to reduce its effects in its national policy (PCCP, n.d). However, despite the importance of combating climate change in Fiji, this alone could not have guaranteed its ascension to occupying an important leadership role during discussion on climate change in the international arena. There had to have been other factors that played a role in transforming Fiji and thrusting it to a position of such importance concerning climate issues. When analysing the various official statements and international news outlets, what quickly became evident was that this state, in spite of its smallness which many in international relations are quick to use against it, was determined to be heard as well as to bring about a change in the way the world viewed its issues.

Fiji’s leading move as the first to ratify the Paris Climate Agreement in 2016 with a unanimous parliament as well as the headline of the article published by the Fijian Government media centre, “*FIJI RATIFIES PARIS CLIMATE AGREEMENT AND CALLS ON THE WORLD TO FOLLOW ITS LEAD* (Fijian Government, 2016)” displayed Fiji’s commitment and determination to become

a leading power in the sector of climate change. The headline both figuratively and literally, displays the aspiration of the Island to become a leader and its actions are to support this ambition.

Oftentimes small states do not lack power, nor do they lack the willingness to commit and lead. What they lack is the opportunity to display that power and become leaders in their own right (Kassimeris 2009, 85). Becoming an authority in climate issues can thus be attributed to taking advantage of an opportunity that presented itself. When the cyclones hit and left destruction in their wake, Fiji, as one of the countries that contributes the least to climate change but suffers the brunt of it, could occupy a moral high ground and push its voice to a stage where it could no longer be ignored (Betzold 2010, 136; Corneloup and Mol 2013, 293). It reacted by redefining its ‘fight for survival’ as a situation that the world should be involved in. This illustrates the point made by Björkdahl (2013, 324) that small states can reconstruct their national identity in a way that they portray themselves as agents of the ‘common good of the international community’. Furthermore, not only were they able to frame the issue in a way that affects the world, they also built a discourse around morality (Tahani, 2019) which allows it to act as an ‘agent of normative change’ (Björkdahl 2013, 324):

“Unless the world acts decisively to begin addressing the greatest challenge of our age, then the Pacific, as we know it, is doomed,” – Frank Bainimarama, COP23 President and Fijian Prime Minister (COP23, 2017)

When Bainimarama pronounces the statement above, he does so to appeal to the international community and to explain that not only are Fiji’s surroundings changing, but these surroundings are also part of our world. If actions are not taken, then the world as it is known today will suffer the consequences. This way of framing the issue transforms a danger to Fiji into a danger to the world. His stance corroborated that of Timoci Naulusala, a 12 year old Fijian climate ambassador who gave a speech on how “the threat from climate change is real, urgent and growing overnight”(COP23, 2017) in order to urge the international community to acknowledge his reality as their reality and to come together in action against climate change. His identity as a person personally affected by the disaster gave the speech a moral authority that helped appeal to the international community.

While the Prime Minister's speech emphasized existential dangers faced by those residing in the Pacific, thus generalising the problem from a Fijian threat to a threat to the entire world, moral authority was further gained by the presence of a young child who effectively reminds the international society of the humane side of the problem. By doing so, not only does this play on the responsibility of the international community, it also ensures that anyone whose actions are not in line with finding solutions and acting to stop climate change would be criticized by the entire community. Proof of the position Fiji has come to occupy in the international system was given when UN Secretary-General Antonio Gueterres described Fiji as 'natural global leaders on climate and environment' and justified this description by explaining how Fijians have 'strong traditions' and sense of 'social responsibility' and how other countries should emulate Fiji in their actions to combat climate change (United Nations, 2019).

In sum, Fiji's geographical position, the destruction of Fijian livelihood due to an increase in severity and frequency of natural disasters which it faces, as well as its willingness to spearhead changes in the international community are important traits which allowed Fiji to have a voice on the subject of climate change in the sense that no one can deny Fiji's suffering and thus its right to participate in discussions. However, it is the way in which Fijian Prime Minister Bainimarama instrumentalized the effects of climate change on the Fijian population, the domestic importance of climate strategies as well as the attractiveness of the idea of combating climate change which contributes to the chances of this idea being accepted by many internationally. It is also what aided in establishing Fiji as a norm entrepreneur in world politics (Björkdahl 2013, 325, 327). This analysis highlights the motivations and interests that boosted Fiji into a position of leadership through its strategy of norm creation.

Step Two: COP23 and the UN as Arenas for Norm Entrepreneurship

Small states need the assistance of 'international organisations' like the European Union (EU) or the UN and 'multilateral settings' in order to participate in world politics as singular subjects of international relations. They need to utilize such organisations as platforms in order for their ideas

to be heard and given importance (Gashi 2016, 151; Björkdahl 2013, 328). While this thesis agrees with this statement, it does not agree that the ideas that small states have are only made relevant by international institutions. Therefore, this section will argue that international institutions can be used to amplify the voices of small states without necessarily appropriating their ideas. Instead, they can be used to gather support for their ideas and to stabilize their independent voices (Gashi 2016, 152).

Organisational home for the emerging norm

The UN, for example, is an excellent platform for norm promoting as it is a world forum that strives to achieve world peace and security. Its goals, especially the recent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) create a perfect normative environment for the norm promoted by Fiji. On this international platform, Fiji itself acts as a voice for issues such as climate change, sustainable development, and other issues that are on the agenda in the UN (Fiji and the United Nations, n.d).

Not only does the UN act as an amplifier for Fijian leadership concerning norm entrepreneurship in climate issues, Fiji's good relations with other members of the international organisation also factors into the reasons why Fiji is able to gather the support of others in order to further the promotion of its cause (Fiji and the United Nations, n.d).

Another platform that serves to affirm and amplify Fiji's role as a norm entrepreneur in international relations is the AOSIS (Alliance of Small Island States). This organisation is composed of 44 small island/coastal developing states. Since its creation in 1990, its role has always been to amplify the voice of vulnerable Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the international system (Ourbak and Alexandre 2017). It also acts as a bridge between small states and other international organizations such as the EU or bodies of the UN specialized in development such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (AOSIS, n.d).

Both organisations provide a relevant arena where Fiji can find and mobilize the necessary support needed to defend its interest in fighting climate change. Thus, it could be argued that their choice of both arenas as the stage for promoting and institutionalizing climate issues and solutions as well

as their activeness and interests in both institutions is because both these institutions have a normative field with which Fijian's goal resonates (Björkdahl 2013, 328).

Step Three: Tools of persuasion

This section will mostly be interested in ways which Fiji participated in highlighting and emphasizing the need for appropriate actions against climate change. Björkdahl's (2013) framework for norm entrepreneurship described this process as one during which the state will endeavour to 'push for a particular definition or a certain idea' (Björkdahl 2013, 328). Therefore, this section will focus on ways through which Fiji influenced actions against climate change in international relations.

Agenda Shaping

Fijian foreign policy has always been in line with their position on climate change. This position is understandable considering the country's geographical situation and the effects climate change has had on its population. Climate change has thus been an issue that the Fijian government considers extremely important as it has devastating effects on their citizens and the country's infrastructure (PICCAP and Fiji Country Team, 2005). Fijian Prime Minister Bainimarama, as previously mentioned, described the fight for a change as a fight for survival in Fiji as well as the world. The aim of turning the issue into a global issue was to bring about a change spearheaded by Fiji. However, being a small state, its issues were bound to remain invisible if it could not find the right arena to publicize and render visible to the entire world (Lakatos 2017).

Being president of the COP23 provided Fiji with the necessary visibility it needed to act as a leader for climate issues (Corbett et al. 2018, 103). It allowed Fiji to demonstrate how its willingness to play a key role in the issue should be the focus of the international actors instead of its smallness which is not a disadvantage and could even be an advantage as it makes it more morally inclined to want to bring about change. Its willingness to work with other states in what many describe as a coalition but is more of an organisation (AOSIS) also aids Fiji in the spread of the importance of climate issues. As Fiji is not the only state affected by climate change, the need for something to

be done creates a normative field with which many resonate and thus can be in support of (Björkdahl 2007, 538).

The simple action of being the first to sign and ratify the Paris Agreement in 2016 already gave it a certain clout which Fiji instrumentalized and emphasized in a way that the international scene was forced to acknowledge its willingness to spearhead the climate project (Bainimarama 2016; Cuff, 2016; Fijian Government 2016). Fiji's willingness to act as a leader was also recognized by UN Secretary-General Antonio Gueterres when he commended the country for being the 'first to undertake the SDG self-assessment' (United Nations, 2019). The word first is used to describe Fiji in many circumstances (Paris Agreement, ratification of climate agreements, actions to fulfil goals listed in said agreement, to self-evaluate) thus it comes as no surprise that Fiji has transformed this area where they get positive responses into a strategic area to gain weight in world politics. It was able to use its normative power which is present in its foreign policy actions to build a foundation for norm entrepreneurship and thus set the base for its leadership in world politics (Björkdahl 2007, 540).

The Fijian government also acted to keep climate change on the agenda. One key strategy was the proposition of the Climate Change Law with the aim to implement its international commitments at a national level thus setting an example to follow for other state parties to climate agreements at international level (Sloan and Manley, 2019). It also took the initiative to submit a 'long term climate action plan' (referencing the Paris Agreement which it was the first to sign) to the secretariat of the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) (UN Climate Change News, 2019). This action cannot be taken lightly. Fiji being the first to ratify a treaty could have been forgotten in time if it did not follow up on its agreement by proposing a plan in direct relation to the agreement it ratified in 2016. Through its actions, Fiji is proving that it is ready and eager to act and lead the world in climate related issues. In addition to this, its presidency of the COP23 which acts as the primary platform for deliberations regarding solutions to climate issues allows it to occupy a seat of importance on the issue (Corbett et al. 2018, 103). This seat gives Fiji the necessary arena for it to voice its grievances as well as its call for more action through pragmatic leadership. Having this voice makes Fiji a non-negligible part of international discussions in the same way that it made Sweden an important member to discussion regarding conflict prevention in the EU and in the world.

This analysis highlights the importance of a normative foundation, an appropriate setting as well as the instrumentalization of a good strategy to promote a country's position as a leader in a specific domain. By concentrating their efforts on promoting their interests in climate on different platforms and through consistent actions, Fiji was able to destroy the bias around its smallness and prove that it can also be as active as large countries in other ways that do not necessarily call for the use of hard power resources.

Coalition Building

Coalition building is a very common strategy advocated by many scholars who believe in its effectiveness particularly in the ways it helps small states to have weight in world politics (Deitelhoff and Wellbott 2012; Browning 2006; Gashi 2016). Deitelhoff and Wellbott (2012, 348) especially argue that coalition building is the most rational choice for small states to take part in world politics as it is less uncertain and also facilitates negotiation in international politics compared to the uncertainty of niche diplomacy. This section will argue that niche diplomacy can utilize coalition building as a strategy to further the goal of a state's leadership in an area. Consequently, coalition building, and group diplomacy will be used intermittently in this section of the thesis.

One of the platforms previously mentioned which is utilized by Fiji to gain support for its nascent norm is the AOSIS. This platform regroups small island states in the Pacific Ocean, the Caribbean and the African, Indian and South China Seas (AIS) as its members. These small states have their geographical positions and their natural surroundings in common (surrounded by seas, their smallness and their need to have a voice in international relations). They are equally vulnerable to environmental changes and have the need to act in order for the geo-political situation to also reflect their needs and interests (AOSIS, n.d). These countries can thus be described as like-minded and the formation of this organisation is crucial in that its members such as Fiji will gain access to support which will have a great impact in the success of norm entrepreneurial activities such as proposition of agreements, discussions, etc in other international organisations such as the UN (Björkdahl 2013, 330).

The AOSIS is an important means of group diplomacy for Fiji as proven by its ability to convince the international system to allow the office for the Commission for Sustainable Development to

be located in New York and not in Geneva (Waqainabete 2012, 21). Through this association of states, small island states are able to gain recognition and leverage in international politics (Corbett et al. 2018, 104). Fiji's position as one of the AOSIS members provides it with abundant resources in terms of networking and alliances that can aid in the achievement of its goal.

The AOSIS is actively partnering with the UN bodies to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and well as with the European Commission in an attempt to bolster the ability of its member states and to effectively influence negotiations in different arenas in the world (AOSIS, n.d; United Nations, n.d). Their presence in the EU allows allocation of help, funding, etc, and strategic inclusion in discussions to resolve the effects of climate change in small island states to remain on the agenda whenever climate change is mentioned in the European community (Council of the European Union, 2012; European Parliament 1999).

These arenas recognize the vulnerability and the relevance of small states regarding climate issues and in addition to their weighted presence through their cooperation in the AOSIS, they remain participants to any such action that has the aim to reduce the effects of climate change in the world. The participation of the AOSIS in different arenas allows small states like Fiji to keep control over issues in which their interests lay. Despite not acting on its own but as part of a group, this analysis sought to show that group diplomacy can also be a strategy that allows a country to have a voice in a different region or institution of world politics. As a group, it is less likely that its interests will be pushed aside in favour of a more recent topic. It achieves protection as well as it continues to strengthen its position on the subject (Gashi 2016, 152).

Step Four: Institutionalization

Supporting institutionalization is the final step of becoming a norm entrepreneur according to Björkdahl's (2013, 2017) framework. Through this step, the norm entrepreneur will see the norm it has advocated for gain power from the political support it receives. This process will see a paradigm shift occur as the norm will no longer be seen solely as a topic put on the international agenda by the norm entrepreneur but as a theme ingrained within the framework of an international organisation. The norm will thus gain power through the political support it will receive from members of the organisation (Björkdahl 2013, 331).

SIDCs have always been in support of combating climate change as can be seen through their actions and debates on the issue (Corneloup and Mol 2013, 285- 286; Ashe et al. 1999, 211). The AOSIS members paved the way for the institutionalization of climate change as a global norm through their activeness even before the UNFCCC was created in 1992 (Ourbak and Magnan 2017, 2201). During the negotiations of the UNFCCC, these small Island states, through their experience and expertise on the issue of climate change, were able to set up a framework that would shape future actions and agreements in the domain of climate issues after that moment (Ourbak and Magnan 2017, 2202). Their international actions were also supported by their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) in which emission reduction targets, timeframes for the achievement of low-emissions targets etc were included (FCCC/CP/2015/7). These national contributions became the ‘foundation of the new climate regime’ (Ourbak and Magnan 2017, 2202).

As one of the AOSIS and as well as an individual international actor, Fiji’s efforts in support the institutionalization of climate change as well as to obtain more international support for the cause cannot be ignored. Although the UNFCCC has existed since 1992, Fiji’s continuous advocacy for climate issues internationally brought with it a perspective of small island states directly affected by a problem that they contribute the least to (Ourbak and Magnan 2017, 2202; UNFCCC, 2015). Fiji’s international continuous support for the institutionalization of climate change can also be seen in the speech given by Prime minister Bainimarama of Fiji in September 2015. With the Paris climate change conference on the horizon, he addressed the members of the UN on the issue of climate change. On this issue, he stated that “[t]he time for excuses is over.” thus urging the international community to commit to standing with Fiji on the issue of climate change (UN News, 2015). When information about this speech was published by the UN News, the title read as follows: “*‘The time for excuses is over,’ small island leaders tell UN, urging global action on climate change*” (UN News, 2015).

Not only does it highlight the statement that the Fijian prime minister used to call on the international community’s ability to act, the word ‘leader’ as well as its position in the title could also be seen as an implicit acquiescence to Fiji’s role as an authority in the discussion on climate change. Fiji’s efforts to establish climate change as an institutional norm came to fruition not only

with the signature of the Paris Climate Agreement (2015), but also with the presence of climate change as one of the 17 sustainable development goals to be achieved by 2030 (un.org, n.d).

Fiji's support of the norm did not end with this achievement, instead it continued to urge for action in order to prevent the issue from becoming a paper tiger. This support is felt in the *UNFCCC's Report of the Conference of the Parties on its twenty-third session, held in Bonn from 6 to 18 November 2017* (FCCC/CP/2017/11/Add.1) which affirmed Fiji's determination in making sure that the programme under the Paris Agreement is completed. This includes the goal of reducing the global temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius (a goal put forward by the AOSIS during its negotiations in the UNFCCC in the early 1990s (Ourbak and Magnan 2017, 2203) as well as strengthening the actions of states against climate change. Fiji's support for the institutionalization of climate issues did not end with the UNFCCC framework (1992), the signature of the Paris Agreement (2015) or the various international meetings which it chaired (COP23 etc). In 2019, it submitted a long-term climate change plan to the UN secretariat as further proof of its efforts and willingness (UN Climate Change News, 2019). Although this action is in accordance with the Paris Agreement which was signed in 2015, Fiji's leadership role can still be seen in the fact that by the end of 2019, 17 countries have submitted their long-term plans but only Fiji and the Marshall Islands have submitted long-term plans with the goal of achieving zero carbon emissions by 2050 (Ross and Ge, 2019).

Bjorkdahl's framework shows that to a certain extent, Fiji's leadership role in niche diplomacy was established by its activeness as a norm entrepreneur. Therefore, we could assume that becoming a norm entrepreneur is a successful strategy for small states searching to establish themselves as international powers through soft power strategies. However, the question remains *who can practice niche diplomacy through norm entrepreneurship?*

Niche Diplomacy: A strategy for all?

As demonstrated in the previous section, small states such as Fiji can utilize niche diplomacy in order to become international powers and to refute the image of small states not being powerful enough to be actors and not subjects of international relations. However, a question remains: if niche diplomacy is such a successful strategy for small states, why is it then that we do not see

more small states utilizing this strategy? This part of the thesis will rely on the limitations identified by Smith (1999) in her work *Caution Warranted: Niche Diplomacy Assessed* to provide an answer to this question.

According to Smith (1999, 54), niche diplomacy is only possible because the “complex international agenda demands that we practice [it].” This suggests that niche diplomacy being an alternative to hard power strategies is only possible because the international system allows it. She further supports this argument by stating “niches are [...] identified within issues given priority (ibid, 55)”. Her point here is that not only is the soft power strategy possible because of the implicit acquiescence of the international system but it is further facilitated as the international agenda gives countries various areas in which they can choose to specialize in. This assumes that Fiji was only able to become an international power through niche diplomacy in climate issues because its area of specialization resonated with an existing issue which was already on the international agenda. With such an assumption, niche diplomacy can only be possible if the international society has placed the area of specialization on the agenda. This argument not only limits the areas to which niche diplomacy can be applied, but also limits those who are able to employ the strategy. Smith’s position limits the application of niche diplomacy to those whose possible areas of specialization resonate with an existing issue on the international agenda.

Another factor that needs to be taken into account here is that niche diplomacy must be in the country's interest (Smith 1999, 62) in order for the country to see the advantage of such a strategy. This factors into another reason which restricts utilization of the strategy. If countries can only specialize in areas that resonate with the international agenda, and this area must also be in their national interests, then we have identified two necessary variables needed for a country to contemplate the possibility of niche diplomacy as a national strategy.

Fiji’s choice and ability to specialize in climate issues was corroborated by the fact that it is frequently a victim to natural disasters that have become worse due to global warming (Bainimarama, 2018). Fiji’s interests and national security became an area in which it advocated internationally and finally succeeded in becoming an international power in. This success was also due in part to its participation in the AOSIS’s negotiations leading to the UNFCCC’s framework on climate change (Ourbak and Magnan 2017, 2203). Its choice and activeness also allowed it to

close the 'commitment-credibility gap' thus enabling it to become a leading role in international climate issues (Smith 1999, 59). While these factors allowed Fiji to successfully utilize niche diplomacy as a strategy to become an international leader in climate issues, this same commitment to the cause limits Fiji's role internationally restricting it to being a voice only on climate issues and not in other domains. The choice of utilizing niche diplomacy as a strategy must also be weighed against this reality. By choosing to specialize actively in a specific domain in order to become international leaders through that area, one is also consciously choosing to renounce other domains that could potentially be sources of international power.

Smith (1999, 62) asks a very interesting question which is "what happens if a niche no longer provides the maximum impact?" How does a state remain relevant as an international power if its domain of specialization loses international relevance? This allows us to question how advantageous adopting niche diplomacy is for small states in the long term. According to Bjorkdahl (2013)'s framework implies that the country needs to put in a lot of effort into gaining international recognition in the chosen domain. This effort cannot stop at simply achieving international recognition. Instead it has to be continuously maintained in order for the country to remain relevant to the international society (Ross and Ge, 2019).

Despite becoming a leader in climate issues, Fiji continues to actively participate in the combat against global warming (Ross and Ge, 2019) thus ensuring that its credibility is not questioned. Fiji does not content itself with what it has achieved but strives to continue achieving new goals. Thus, it effectively strays away from a trap which Gilley (2016) identified as an issue middle powers who engage in niche diplomacy often face. Gilley (2016, 655) talks about delusions of grandeur and how middle powers often "ignore the global altogether and simply live in the region where one is already a great power." This suggests that there is a possibility that once a country has achieved international recognition in a specific domain, they might become complacent. Although Gilley applied this statement to middle powers, it is an argument that can be applied to small powers who strive to gain international recognition through various strategies. Thus, if the goal of specialization was to become powerful enough to be recognized as an international actor and not an object, one must guard against becoming satisfied with what has been achieved and like Fiji, must remain relevant through actions. This could be disadvantageous if the country lacks the financial resources and support to continue specializing in its chosen domain. Therefore, the

country must have the ability to persuade the international society to support it (Bjorkdahl 2013, 549) and also the area of specialization must remain relevant to the international society (Smith 1999, 62).

Conclusion

By applying Bjorkdahl's (2013) framework on norm entrepreneurship to Fiji as a case study, this thesis sought to highlight a strategy that can be employed by small non-Western states in order to become independent powers through niche diplomacy. It was argued that through a soft power strategy such as niche diplomacy as an alternative to developing economic and military strategies, small states can establish themselves as non-negligible participants of world politics. This thesis chose to focus on a non-Western small state such as Fiji in an attempt to decentre mainstream IR whose focus seems to mostly be on the West. It sought to show that non-Western states and in particular those that are seen as powerless because of their size are able to develop a strong international presence without the use of military or economic means. The example of Fiji shows that there is a different path that small states can embark upon and which will assist them in becoming actors of the international arena in their own right.

Fiji utilized its identity as a victim of climate change to take control over the field and to become a voice that must be listened to in the domain of climate issues. Fiji's focus was not on becoming an international power through the development of hard power resources. Instead, it instrumentalized an issue of national interest that resonated internationally and gained its role as a leader of climate actions. By establishing itself as a norm entrepreneur for climate actions, Fiji was able to effectively prove that niche diplomacy can be an alternative for small states who do not possess the capacity to become international powers through their hard power resources. Thus, aiding this thesis in demonstrating an alternative source of power for small states in international relations.

Nonetheless, niche diplomacy, as attractive as it may seem, needs to be put in perspective and understood as applicable only if one is able to reunite the necessary variables to make it a success. This is not to say that niche diplomacy is not for every country, however countries that choose to employ such a strategy need to understand what factors could hinder their successful application

of it. Fiji's success in climate issues stems from various elements: its natural geographic position, the moral authority gained from being a victim of global warming, its willingness to lead and participate in various actions against climate change, etc. Niche diplomacy seems thus a logical choice for Fiji and as proven in this thesis, is an appropriate strategy that allowed Fiji to become an international leader on climate issues. Despite the success story Fiji turned out to be, it does not take away from the fact that there are limitations to this strategy that need to be taken into account. These limitations can also be disadvantageous to the country in the long term as it limits them to their chosen area of prioritization and does not allow them to gain the same international power in another domain. This is the choice imposed upon states by niche diplomacy (Smith 1999, 67).

One interesting point made by Smith (1999, 62) but which was not discussed in this thesis is the question of how do we determine when a country is practicing niche diplomacy if it is never stated explicitly? While the question is interesting and should be explored, it does not fit in with the ambition of this thesis due to its scope. Thus, it could be an area of further research to find a way to provide an evaluative framework which could then be used to pinpoint the moment a country's foreign policy statements become proof of its engagement in niche diplomacy. Despite this limitation, this thesis reaffirms that niche diplomacy as a soft power strategy is an alternative that small states need to explore instead of engaging in hard power strategies where they have been set up to lose from the very beginning.

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