



# New Zealand's public diplomacy in the Pacific: a reset, or more of the same?

Simon Mark<sup>1</sup>

Revised: 9 July 2020 / Accepted: 19 November 2020 / Published online: 11 January 2021  
© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature Limited part of Springer Nature 2021

## Abstract

New Zealand's Pacific Reset, a significant shift in New Zealand's foreign policy towards the Pacific Islands region, was launched in 2018 by the government of Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern. The Pacific Reset emphasises engagement, partnerships, and collaboration, and a greater focus on soft power, public diplomacy and people-to-people measures. It has resulted in an increase in New Zealand public diplomacy in the Pacific, including a new broadcasting initiative, and enhanced domestic public diplomacy. The language and objectives of the Pacific Reset replicate key characteristics of the New Public Diplomacy, which is frequently distinguished from the 'old' on the basis of two way engagement. This article argues that whilst the Pacific Reset seeks to reflect the ethos of the New Public Diplomacy, in practice, New Zealand's Pacific public diplomacy is a mixed bag. In a contested and crowded strategic and public diplomacy environment, putting into practice a New Public Diplomacy demands a greater focus on listening.

**Keywords** Public diplomacy · New Public Diplomacy · Pacific · New Zealand diplomacy · Pacific reset

## The Pacific reset and New Public Diplomacy

This article assesses the extent to which the public diplomacy of New Zealand's foreign policy initiative, the Pacific Reset—which emphasises engagement, partnerships, and collaboration, and a greater focus on soft power, public diplomacy and people-to-people measures—reflects the engagement ethos of the New Public Diplomacy, a model frequently distinguished from the 'old' on the basis of two way engagement.

New Zealand's Pacific Reset, launched by the government of Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, has been described as “the most significant shift in policy towards the Pacific Islands region in decades.” (Powles and Powles 2018, p. 2). A Pacific Reset Cabinet paper notes that it aims to address a “dizzying array of problems” in the region and an increasingly contested strategic environment, both of which are eroding New Zealand's influence and challenging its ability to pursue its interests in the region (Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs 2018, p. 1). New Zealand's place is in the

Pacific, the Cabinet paper says. The Pacific is the region in which New Zealand matters the most, wields the most influence and has the most impact, and there is a unique and substantial overlap between New Zealand's domestic and foreign policy New Zealand's engagement in the Pacific Islands region, the Cabinet paper notes, is driven by its Pacific identity, national security and shared prosperity. New Zealand's new foreign policy approach includes building deeper, more mature political partnerships; enhancing the effectiveness of Pacific regional organisations; ensuring New Zealand government decision-making on domestic policies considers the implications for the Pacific Islands region; and applying five ‘principles of engagement’ to New Zealand agencies' activities in the Pacific, including understanding, friendship and mutual benefit (Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs 2018, p. 1). There is a specific focus on soft diplomacy, public diplomacy and people-to-people measures. This is to be expected; New Zealand sees itself as having a soft power advantage through its close family, historical, constitutional and other links. Tokelauans, Cook Islanders and Niueans have New Zealand citizenship, and each has a constitutional relationship with New Zealand. Samoa, a former New Zealand trust territory, and Tonga, have extensive family and other ties with New Zealand. The Pacific Reset is supported by an extra \$150 million of additional operational spending

✉ Simon Mark  
s.mark@massey.ac.nz

<sup>1</sup> Massey University College of Creative Arts Toi  
Rauwhāangi, P O Box 756, Wellington 6140, New Zealand



over 4 years for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) and additional funding for New Zealand's aid programme of \$714 million over a four-year budget cycle.

The reference to an increasingly contested strategic environment primarily refers to the New Zealand government's perception of a growing, and unhealthy, increase in Chinese influence in the Pacific. The Pacific Reset lists Australia, China, the United States, France, the European Union, Japan and Taiwan as those partners, along with New Zealand, with the most influence in the Pacific Islands region. It also notes, however, that New Zealand needs to influence Pacific Island countries to pursue their interests in a way that promotes New Zealand values and "mitigates the risks posed by partners with quite different value sets." (Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs 2018, p. 6). New Zealand is not the only country to have recently recalibrated its Pacific policy. In 2018, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced the Pacific Step-up. As part of the initiative, a new Office of the Pacific, headed by a former Australian High Commissioner to New Zealand with Pacific experience, has been established within Australia's foreign ministry. Indonesia announced its Pacific Elevation in 2019. The UK began its Pacific Uplift strategy in 2018, under which it opened three new High Commissions (in Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu), and India's Act East Policy seeks to expand its foreign policy focus into the region. The remit of China's Belt and Road initiative certainly extends into the region. Nine Pacific Forum member countries—Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu, the Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Niue and New Zealand—have agreed to cooperate with the Belt and Road Initiative (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2019). This plethora of Pacific foreign policy recalibrations suggests that the Pacific also likely to be an increasingly contested public diplomacy environment.

## A New Public Diplomacy

The language of the Pacific Reset replicates key terms within the concept of the New Public Diplomacy. As the concept's name implies, it represents a change in the nature of public diplomacy. D'Hooghe argues that the new concept represents a

theoretical paradigm shift... from traditional state-centered, and hierarchically organized public diplomacy to a network or 'new' public diplomacy that involves a wide variety of actors and promotes dialog [sic] and collaboration. In the traditional model, the state — often the foreign ministry — monitors the interactions between domestic and international policy environments, and public diplomacy is characterised by

top-down information flows and a focus on strategic and mass communication. (D'Hooghe 2015, p.18)<sup>1</sup>

Scholars writing about the New Public Diplomacy distinguish the new from the old in a number of ways, including two way engagement, a term which encompasses dialogue, partnerships, listening and collaboration (other characteristics include more, especially non-governmental, actors; social media and a greater connection between the domestic and the international). Two-way engagement is contrasted with one-way transmission or monologue. Pamment argues that the New Public Diplomacy represents "a break from 'broadcasting' models and takes advantage of social media to establish two-way engagement with the public" (Pamment 2013, p. 3). Melissen, whilst recognising a lack of conceptual clarity in the debate about new public diplomacy, notes however that public diplomacy today is "increasingly based on listening to 'the other', that it is about dialogue rather than monologue, and it is not just aimed at short term policy objectives but also at long term relationship building." (Melissen 2015, p. 441). Writing about the "terrain of the new public diplomacy", Cull notes the expanding number of actors, the speeding up and diffusion of communication, the connection between the domestic and the international, and collaboration (Cull 2019, p. 15). Hall, writing about India's public diplomacy, emphasises India's history of dialogue and exchange (both of which are two-way), and its new focus on new audiences, dialogue and social media (Hall 2012). In practice, as Zaharna notes, there is unlikely to be a clear delineation amongst practitioners of public diplomacy between the 'old' public diplomacy i.e. one-way transmission of messages, and the 'new' (Zaharna 2009). Cowan and Arsenaault argue that public diplomacy entails three layers: monologue, dialogue and collaboration, and each is essential "at certain times and under certain situations." (Cowan and Arsenaault 2008, p. 11). D'Hooghe's definition implies the same, a mixture of informing and engaging.

It is particularly interesting to note, when considering New Zealand's recent Pacific public diplomacy in practice, D'Hooghe's observation that a gap has emerged between the "academic and theoretical ideals of public diplomacy and public diplomacy in practice" (D'Hooghe 2015, p. 21). The idea of two way engagement is central to New Zealand's approach, and is fine in theory, especially when a new permission space provides diplomats with the authority to be less risk averse. In practice, however, a two-way engagement approach reduces diplomats' control, particularly over messaging. And if you are collaborating with partners, it is harder to insist that your viewpoint must prevail. The new

<sup>1</sup> D'Hooghe (2015) provides an excellent analytical framework of public diplomacy, and an extensive literature review.



world of public diplomacy is less predictable. Interestingly, despite an assumption that the blurring of the demarcation between the domestic and the international may take New Zealand diplomats out of their comfort zone, those New Zealand diplomats who provided their insights as part of this research seemed to enjoy this aspect of their work.

## Recent New Zealand public diplomacy in the Pacific

Aspects of New Zealand public diplomacy examined below have been selected primarily because they encompass significant new or distinguishing areas of focus for MFAT. These include values, the new Pacific broadcasting initiative, social media, and the close link between domestic and international public diplomacy. Information draws on publicly available New Zealand government papers and documents, interviews with New Zealand diplomats based in Wellington and Auckland, and with the CEO of Pacific Broadcasting. It is important to acknowledge that the paper is limited to the New Zealand perspective, particularly views of the New Zealand government (as gleaned from official, publicly-available, papers) and of New Zealand diplomats. The views about New Zealand of Pacific leaders and others is touched upon, but a thorough exploration of Pacific views on the nature and impact of New Zealand public diplomacy represents a rich vein for future research.

Public diplomacy is now regarded by New Zealand's foreign ministry as an important element of its Pacific work. It has a dedicated public diplomacy team in Wellington, a small group of which is based in the ministry's Pacific Development Group, which oversees the New Zealand aid programme and its Pacific-related foreign policy. Public diplomacy officers were appointed in four of its thirteen Pacific posts as a result of the Pacific Reset.<sup>2</sup> Those leading MFAT's Pacific public diplomacy recognise that MFAT's public diplomacy is, in some respects, "a voyage of discovery," as its work moves from a former reactive and sometimes ad hoc approach to one that is more proactive and strategic.<sup>3</sup> There is an effort underway to articulate this strategic public diplomacy; its objectives, audiences, desired outcomes, impacts, and modes of communication, and to better merge the various public diplomacy strands. The approach is more nuanced now: MFAT is looking for impact, for New Zealand and for the Pacific—in partnership. There is consensus on the changed diplomatic environment within which MFAT does its work. It is recognised that MFAT, as

with other foreign ministries, is no longer the central manager of information, policy and relationships concerning New Zealand's foreign policy.

MFAT's public diplomacy now operates within a new 'permission space.' Under the government of prime minister Jacinda Ardern and the, until recently, deputy prime minister (and foreign minister) Winston Peters, New Zealand diplomats felt encouraged to pursue public diplomacy initiatives in support of the Pacific Reset's objectives, including activities or initiatives which might previously have been seen as risky.<sup>4</sup> This is part of a wider change towards shifting New Zealand's overall aid delivery approach in the Pacific from a donor—recipient model to a mutual benefit model, which was underway before the Pacific Reset policy was applied. The MFAT update on Pacific Reset actions at the end of its first year notes that "the core message that New Zealand is a partner, and not just a donor, has resonated and enabled frank conversations about policy priorities and challenges." (New Zealand Cabinet Office 2018, p. 2). MFAT is seeking to advance New Zealand's interests *and* those of Pacific countries, and, as part of the overall tone of the Pacific Reset, is wishing to raise the profile and role of Pacific nations in collaborations when this is feasible. This change is reflected in the way in which New Zealand aid in the Pacific is branded; the intent is to emphasise that projects are 'owned' by the Pacific, with the involvement of New Zealand, one of many Pacific nations.

New Zealand's Pacific public diplomacy incorporates social media work, both from its head office and through each diplomatic post, which has its own Facebook, Instagram and Twitter feeds. Aside from press work related to the ministry's international operations i.e. recent press releases by the ministry concerning the temporary closure of some posts due to COVID-19, the ministry has a media role for the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Trade and Export Growth, and two parliamentary under-secretaries. New Zealand's public diplomacy now includes broadcasting, with the recent establishment of Pasifika TV (this element is discussed in depth below). There are regular visits by New Zealand political leaders to the Pacific, including the annual Pacific Mission headed by New Zealand's foreign minister, which meets a wide range of audiences when traveling. At diplomatic posts, a low budget but effective way of reaching audiences is through grants under the Head of Mission Fund held by each post. Each post also organises or is involved in a range of outreach activities. These include Waitangi Day

<sup>2</sup> In Apia, Samoa; Nuku'alofa, Tonga; Suva, Fiji; and Port Vila, in Vanuatu.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with New Zealand diplomat, 20 February 2020.

<sup>4</sup> At the 2020 New Zealand General Election held in October, Winston Peters lost his seat. His replacement as New Zealand's foreign minister, announced on 2 November 2020 by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, is Māori MP Nanaia Mahuta, the niece of the Māori Queen, the late Te Arikini Dame Te Atairangikaahu.



commemorations, school visits and speeches.<sup>5</sup> Some diplomats regard the work of development volunteers employed and deployed by Volunteer Service Abroad and the work of the New Zealand police, and other similar agencies, as part of New Zealand's public diplomacy.

Most diplomatic posts in the Pacific and elsewhere undertake cultural diplomacy activities and events. This activity includes sport, exchanges, workshops, conferences, performing and visual arts (including kapa haka), literature, film and food. Larger projects and initiatives are sometimes supported by other government agencies, for instance, Creative New Zealand's Pacific residencies. The Pacific Memorial at the Pukeahu National War Memorial Park in Wellington, designed by New Zealand artist Michel Tuffery, has been jointly funded and managed with New Zealand's culture ministry. A press release notes that the

Pacific Islands Memorial will represent New Zealand's enduring friendship with the Pacific Islands and the service of Pacific Islanders who fought for New Zealand in the two World Wars and later conflicts. The design depicts a bronze conch shell, a symbol deeply rooted in Pacific cultures. (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2020)

Commenting on the memorial, a senior New Zealand diplomat has noted that projects such as the memorial are two way "...as they have to be. You just cannot develop a pan-Pacific memorial without talking to all Pacific nations' diplomats."<sup>6</sup>

## Key characteristics and themes in the context of the Pacific Reset

### Objectives, and the role of interest and values

MFAT's Pacific public diplomacy is undertaken to advance New Zealand's interests, advance New Zealand's values (and what New Zealand stands for, in the words of the Pacific Reset) and raise New Zealand's profile.

It seeks to advance New Zealand's interests through influencing public diplomacy target audiences because it believes publics in the Pacific can influence domestic politics in the Pacific. The values cited by MFAT diplomats included democracy; human rights; equality and especially gender equality; governance; transparency; respect for law and the international rules-based order; fairness; the notion

of environmental guardianship (in New Zealand, this is frequently cited as a Māori concept kaitiakitanga, or guardianship). One diplomat, commenting on New Zealand values, noted that New Zealand and the world of diplomacy are being challenged globally, and that New Zealand's values are one of its soft power strengths. "New Zealand does its public diplomacy in a natural way. We are liked in the Pacific. We have a style which is respected. A kiwi way. A humility, and the Māori notion of 'standing alongside.'"<sup>7</sup> The Pacific Reset is seen as a cultural change for New Zealand, a move towards a pan-Pacific (rather than New Zealand specific) approach to issues. Public diplomacy provides an opportunity to "give Pacific people a voice", especially in climate change. One diplomat stressed the close relationship between New Zealand and Pacific nations: "the important thing for New Zealand in the Pacific is that they know us; we have been there a long time and will be in future; we have extraordinary connections (sport, churches, diaspora, study and so on). And of course cultural connections."<sup>8</sup> New Zealand may not be quite as liked, and its style as respected, as New Zealand diplomats think. Hayward-Jones for instance, writing about geo-strategic competition in the Pacific, references the comment by the Samoan Prime Minister Tuilaepa that he considered "China a better friend to Pacific countries than the United States", and that "China filled a gap that Australia and New Zealand could not by being flexible about aid delivery." (Hayward-Jones 2013, p. 7).

Public diplomacy, when used as a tool to raise New Zealand's profile, does so to raise or update countries about New Zealand; counter increased competition for attention; and increase the profile of development activities to enhance their take-up ("communicating development is good for development outcomes"<sup>9</sup>). There is also a domestic profile-raising goal. For one diplomat, the problem which New Zealand public diplomacy sought to solve was first, the issue of domestic social licence—ensuring that within New Zealand there remains political buy-in to the aid programme and foreign policy—and second, to engage with Pacific communities in New Zealand to make sure they can be involved.<sup>10</sup>

### Broadcasting

One of the most significant recent developments undertaken by MFAT has been the establishment of Pasifika Television (PTV). Set up in 2015, PTV's remit initially was to help fill a gap in content for Pacific based broadcasters. Many are hampered by limited resources and a shortage of skilled

<sup>5</sup> Waitangi Day is New Zealand's national day, commemorating the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi on 6 February 1840 in Waitangi, in the north of New Zealand.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with New Zealand diplomat, 14 February 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with New Zealand diplomat, 14 February 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with New Zealand diplomat, 14 February 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with New Zealand diplomat, 12 February 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with New Zealand diplomat, 14 February 2020.





journalists and content makers. Content on PTV is gifted to it by New Zealand broadcasters, including the state owned (but commercially run) Television New Zealand (TVNZ). A large proportion of PTV's programming comprises news and current affairs, including nightly New Zealand news, sports and factual programmes. The broadcaster has agreed not to broadcast news or other content that may be seen as potentially influencing an election outcome two weeks prior to an election in a Pacific country. PTV is based in the offices of TVNZ (but independent of it). TVNZ is contracted to manage the technical aspect of PTV's broadcasting. MFAT sees the channel as a strategic resource that can improve knowledge in the Pacific about themes of importance to New Zealand and Pacific nations. These include for instance fisheries and health. Whilst PTV's initial role as a filler of content gaps very much continues, a key focus now is on building capability in Pacific broadcasting entities, drawing on an extensive set of close relationships with Pacific broadcasters. In 2018, for instance, a programme of internships for broadcast technicians and journalists saw 16 staff from 12 Pacific broadcasters undertake two-week placements with New Zealand media operators. According to PTV's CEO, Natasha Meleisea, PTV's results measure the broadcaster's impact, using a mix of measures such as the number of hours of content shared amongst Pacific broadcasters and how much training has been provided to Pacific journalists, writers, producers etc.<sup>11</sup> The end goal is to have in place the capability within the Pacific for the Pacific to be able to produce all its own content, including pan Pacific events such as the Pacific Games, or, for instance, to produce an international feed of Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat events, independent of New Zealand or other countries.<sup>12</sup>

For Meleisea, PTV plays an important role in the Pacific for several reasons. First, it contributes to the development of a strong media in Pacific societies. In this sense PTV is a vehicle for advancing the generally agreed on New Zealand values of freedom of expression, a free press, and democracy. Second, by contributing to the work of broadcasters in Pacific countries, PTV helps preserve Pacific cultures and languages, and for Pacific countries to present to their people their own local voices. Third, the sharing of Pacific stories throughout the Pacific by Pacific broadcasters engenders and supports pan-Pacific identity and cohesion.

<sup>11</sup> Natasha Meleisea (CEO, Pasifika Television), interview with the author, 20 March 2020.

<sup>12</sup> A next stage of the evolution of PTV is for the content to be available digitally i.e. online and via streaming services. The extent of coverage of digital services in the Pacific is dependent on the connectivity of Pacific countries to the Internet via international submarine cables. The New Zealand aid budget is providing support for a cable to link to Tokelau, the Cook Islands and Niue, the so-called Realm countries of New Zealand.

The broadcast by PTV of New Zealand's daily television news programme in the Pacific has meant occasional unfavourable coverage of Pacific leaders and governments. A case in point was the coverage of the Samoa measles epidemic by New Zealand journalist Barbara Dreaver, which at times was critical of the Samoan government's handling of the crisis. It is worth noting in this context that New Zealand's television broadcasters usually have very little coverage of the Pacific on their news programmes, although this changed at the time of the Samoa epidemic. An occasional news item critical of Pacific leaders and governments seems not to concern MFAT. One senior New Zealand diplomat noted that support for a strong media in the Pacific is very much putting into practice the New Zealand values of transparency and democracy—it demonstrates New Zealand values and how New Zealand would like the world to run. PTV is more akin to a development organisation than a broadcaster. Although it has a clear public diplomacy role, presenting aspects of New Zealand foreign policy, values, society and culture to Pacific audiences, its rationale has developed into one of capability development.

## Social media

MFAT's public diplomacy has a strong emphasis on social media—Facebook, Instagram and Twitter—an emphasis which, whilst underway before the Reset, has ramped up since. Several diplomats working in this area, to underline the reach of social media in the Pacific, noted that 50% of internet traffic in the Pacific concerns Facebook. Each diplomatic post has its own Facebook page, and uses Instagram and Twitter. There is a strong recognition that the power of social media has changed: it is now seen as a powerful instrument for transmitting messages to new and hard to reach audiences. It has been highly effective for MFAT, particularly in times of crises—for instance the Samoa measles epidemic—but also to explain what New Zealand is doing on issues such as climate change. Social media is less suited for large organisations as a mode of two-way communication; it is difficult if not impossible to read and answer all feedback. This aside, social media does provide a form of engagement, and this is particularly true when one compares foreign ministries several decades ago. It does not concern MFAT that social media's capacity for two-way communication is limited. Not all the feedback received through the social media channel is of value, and it takes time to respond to it.

## The close link between domestic and international public diplomacy

There are very significant demographic ties between New Zealand and Pacific nations. Tokelauans, Niueans and Cook Islanders have New Zealand passports. By 2026 it is



projected that Pacific Peoples will comprise 10% of New Zealand's population, compared to 7.4% in 2013 (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2020). The family, cultural, language, trade, security, diplomatic and other ties between New Zealand and the Pacific are now so strong as to compel one New Zealand diplomat to describe domestic and international public diplomacy with regard to this region as 'the same thing.' This close relationship means that MFAT's public diplomacy has a strong focus on domestic audiences, particularly New Zealand's Pacific population. A new team was established in MFAT's Auckland office as a result of the Reset to expand domestic outreach to Pacific (and other) communities in New Zealand's largest city, and to do so explicitly on the basis of enhanced engagement. The team is comprised primarily with those with Pacific ancestry. Responsibilities of team members are divided up by sector (i.e. trade, culture) and region (i.e. Melanesia, a region which has traditionally been less well understood in New Zealand foreign policy circles than Polynesia). The office organises regular updates with Pacific leaders and communities on its work and on foreign policy issues. There are several objectives of connecting with these domestic audiences.

First, because of the intensity of connections between communities in New Zealand and in the Pacific (for instance the Niuean community in New Zealand is more than ten times larger than the Niuean community in Niue), MFAT sees one way to convey messages about New Zealand aid or foreign policy to those living in the Pacific, is to convey these to the New Zealand-based community, and assume that the message will travel to the islands. The measles epidemic is a case in point: it made no sense, given the level of travel between Samoa and New Zealand, to treat public diplomacy as an international practice, and leave out domestic audiences in New Zealand.

Second, there is the matter of what one New Zealand diplomat termed the policy loop: ensuring that New Zealand's foreign policy is informed by the views of Pacific communities in New Zealand, as well as Pacific nations and their communities.<sup>13</sup> Foreign policy settings need to be cognisant of the implications of policy on those affected, and New Zealand's foreign policy has an impact on New Zealand's Pacific communities, whether that be on trade, security, social policy, health, climate change and so on.

Third, the connections between domestic New Zealand audiences and audiences in the Pacific are seen as providing another method of promulgating New Zealand values: New Zealand's commitment to a free press and to democracy, for instance, are the values of New Zealand Pacific communities, and these communities can promote these values to their families and through their connections. Fourth, there is

now an emphasis in MFAT and the wider public service on diversity. Public diplomacy helps diversify MFAT's staff by connecting MFAT with New Zealand's diverse Pacific communities, and therefore with potential staff members, and by showing, as is the case with MFAT's Auckland staff, that MFAT does have within its ranks Pacific New Zealanders. Finally, public diplomacy, as noted above, helps communicate the value of aid to New Zealanders. MFAT recognises that the huge increase in aid demands greater communication about why this has been decided and how the money is to be spent.

## Discussion

The Pacific Reset has ensured resources are available for MFAT to undertake more public diplomacy in the Pacific. There are more staff working on Pacific-focused public diplomacy. The increased content and collaboration by Pasifika TV can be directly attributed to the Pacific Reset, as can the increase in domestic public diplomacy. There have been more visits to the region by New Zealand political leaders. This increased public diplomacy occurs within the context of a broad foreign policy intention to change the relationship with the Pacific to that of equal partners and to strengthen relationships with Pacific countries "in order to work collaboratively on strategic challenges and opportunities in the region" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2019, p. 27). More resources have been important, but so too has been the change in the 'permission space' within which MFAT operates, which has freed up the Ministry to be much more active, creative and energetic with its Pacific-focused public diplomacy. Any foreign ministry must work within the political system within which it is embedded, and this system naturally imposes limits. Under the government headed by John Key, which ended in 2017, the foreign minister, Murray McCully, was renowned for keeping a tight rein on MFAT's communication channels. Under the government of Jacinda Ardern, elected in 2017, the foreign minister Winston Peters was widely regarded as being very supportive of diplomats and of MFAT, and diplomats felt empowered to pursue public diplomacy initiatives, including those which might previously have been seen as risky.

The Pacific Reset's specific focus on soft diplomacy, public diplomacy and people-to-people measures, combined with the policy's emphasis on engagement, through dialogue and collaboration with a range of partners, is very much in keeping with the ethos of the New Public Diplomacy. In practice, MFAT's Pacific public diplomacy in the Pacific Reset is a work in progress, and a mixed bag. The ramped up domestic engagement, particularly in Auckland, is concerned with dialogue and relationship building. On the face of it, the New Zealand broadcasting channel might

<sup>13</sup> Interview with New Zealand diplomat, 14 February 2020.



be assumed to be the epitome of the broadcasting model (a term used to suggest one-way communication), but in practice PTV's work is as much about capability and relationship building with Pacific broadcasters as it is showing a New Zealand face in the region. The record of two-wayness is mixed in the cultural diplomacy sphere. Some of New Zealand's Pacific cultural diplomacy has been very much one-way promotion of New Zealand, such as for instance showing off to Samoa New Zealand's rugby world cup. Cultural diplomacy activity is by its very nature two-way (an audience is invariably engaged in *some* way). However, the level of engagement varies: a film screening offers very little opportunity for dialogue or collaboration, and the same might be said of non-interactive exhibitions. There is a sense however, of a move within MFAT towards more pan-Pacific cultural diplomacy events, in which New Zealand is one of many participants. Despite an assumption that social media is inherently two way, it is difficult to see this characteristic in MFAT's social media work. It uses this channel of communication to impart information rather to establish engagement and dialogue. Broadly, there was little evidence in the feedback through interviews that the social media work of MFAT at head office and at diplomatic posts is about dialogue rather than transmission.

Diplomats at MFAT head office think that its public diplomacy since the Pacific Reset has been successful at opening MFAT up to the public and connecting it to communities they had not previously reached. But the broad view is that whilst the aim is to move away from transmission, and much has been done to widen audiences and ensure connections are more strategic and effective, the ministry has "not yet quite reached the Nirvana of engagement."<sup>14</sup>

The move in MFAT's Pacific public diplomacy towards a goal of engagement reflects the changed international environment the ministry works within and the number of issues and problems that demand international collaboration. The Pacific is a perfect example of this: addressing climate change, the sustainability of fisheries, trans-national crime, health crises and so on just will not work without substantial and meaningful collaboration. However, the main impetus for a move towards engagement is a change in New Zealand's perception of its capacity to remain as relevant in the Pacific as it needs to. In a speech on the Pacific Reset, foreign minister Winston Peters specifically noted that the South Pacific has become an increasingly contested strategic space, that New Zealand's voice has been weakened during the past decade, and that if New Zealand is not there some other influence else will be (New Zealand Government 2018). References to the increasingly contested strategic space by Peters, and in the Pacific Reset policy statements,

highlight the limits of New Zealand's new foreign policy approach, and the capacity of Pacific public diplomacy to fully represent a new version of the practice. Despite all the talk of understanding, friendship, mutual benefit, soft diplomacy, public diplomacy and people-to-people measures, and New Zealand being "respectful of Pacific Island countries' clear wish to manage their own international relations" (Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs 2018, p. 6), New Zealand may need to change its fundamental mindset to the Pacific Island countries if it is to increase its influence in the Pacific. New Zealand sees the increasingly contested strategic environment as a problem for Pacific countries, because they may choose the wrong partner i.e. China, a partner which fails to share the right value set, and which Pacific countries are ill-equipped to deal with. The Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum, Dame Meg Taylor, disagrees. In a 2019 speech, Taylor notes that Forum leaders place great value on open relationships and a 'friend to all approach' and see closer relations with China as an opportunity, especially access to the huge Chinese market that this represents. She rejects the terms of the dilemma in which the Pacific is given a choice between a "China alternative" and the Pacific's traditional partners (Taylor 2019, p. 1).

In a contested and crowded strategic and public diplomacy environment, perhaps the best way to put in practice public diplomacy which adheres to the engagement ethos of the New Public Diplomacy is to listen to Pacific voices, and connect the lessons and insights of these voices, heard through engagement, to practice.

## Compliance with ethical standards

**Conflict of interest** The author states that there is no conflict of interest.

## Reference

- Cowan, G., and A. Arsenault. 2008. Public Diplomacy Moving from Monologue to Dialogue to Collaboration: The Three Layers of Public Diplomacy. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616 (1): 10–30.
- Cull, Nicholas J. 2019. *Public Diplomacy. Foundations for Global Engagement in the Digital Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- D'Hooghe, I. 2015. *China's Public Diplomacy*. Leiden: Brill Nijhoff.
- Hayward-Jones, J. 2013. Sydney: Lowy Institute. Big Enough for All of Us: Geo-strategic competition in the Pacific Islands. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/big-enough-all-us-geo-strategic-competition-pacific-islands>,
- Melissen, J. 2015. Public Diplomacy. In *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, ed. Andrew F. Cooper, et al., 436–452. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with New Zealand diplomat, 20 February 2020.



- Ministry for Culture and Heritage. 2020. *Pacific Islands Memorial*. Last revised 5 Aug 2020. <https://mch.govt.nz/pukeahu-park/pacific-islands-memorial> Ministry for Pacific Peoples
- Ministry for Pacific Peoples. 2020. Pacific People in New Zealand. Ministry for Pacific Peoples, Last revised 2020. <https://www.mpp.govt.nz/pacific-people-in-nz/>.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. 2019. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade Annual Report 2018–2019. Wellington, New Zealand. <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/assets/About-us-Corporate/MFAT-corporate-publications/MFAT-Annual-Report-2019/Annual-report-2019-Web-Edition.pdf>.
- New Zealand Government. 2018. “First Steps”. Pre-budget speech, Rt Hon Winston Peters, 8 May 2018. <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/first-steps>.
- New Zealand Cabinet Office. 2018. The Pacific Reset: The First Year. Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee, Minute of Decision, ERS-18-MIN-0028, 4 Dec 2018. <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/assets/OIA/R-R-The-Pacific-reset-The-First-Year.PDF>.
- Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. [2018]. “New Zealand in the Pacific.” Rt Hon Winston Peters, Paper to Cabinet National Security Committee, (n.d.). [https://www.mfat.govt.nz/assets/OIA/Redacted-Cabinet-Paper-for-web-publication-New-Zealand-in-the-Pacific-...\\_.pdf](https://www.mfat.govt.nz/assets/OIA/Redacted-Cabinet-Paper-for-web-publication-New-Zealand-in-the-Pacific-..._.pdf)
- Pamment, J. 2013. *New Public Diplomacy in the 21st Century: A Comparative Study of Policy and Practice*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Powles, A., and M. Powles. 2018. New Zealand’s Pacific sea change. *The Interpreter*, 7 March 2018. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/new-zealand-s-pacific-sea-change>.
- Taylor, M. 2019. A rising China and the future of the ‘Blue Pacific’. *The Interpreter*, 15 Feb 2019. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/rising-china-and-future-blue-pacific>.
- Zaharna, R.S. 2009. Mapping out a Spectrum of Public Diplomacy Initiatives. Information and Relational Communication Frameworks. In *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, ed. N. Snow and P.M. Taylor, 86–100. London: Routledge.

**Publisher’s Note** Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

