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The Productive Modality of the SDGs and Overcoming Colonial Legacies in Development Cooperation? Samoa's Office of the Electoral Commissioner and the Association of World Electoral Bodies in South Korea

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This paper is based on a case study of an emerging cooperative relationship between Samoa's Office of the Electoral Commissioner and the Association of World Electoral Bodies (AWEB) based in South Korea. Drawing on a theoretical framework that borrows from Foucault's concepts of the *dispositif*, and musings on power, we present a preliminary argument that agency for developing countries can be found in certain cases of development cooperation, where the SDGs are employed as a productive discursive tool. We also infer that relationships like these can potentially construct frameworks of development assistance that help depoliticize aid, enhance effectiveness for small donors and crucially avoid reconstructing the colonial legacy of international development.

[Key Words: Samoa, Korea, Middle Power Cooperation, Dispositif, SDGs, Foucault]

Ⅰ. Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been billed as transformative, universal and representing an integrated approach to development agendas (Scott & Lucci, 2015). Boasting an impressive array of 17 comprehensive goals, broken into specific targets, measures, and frameworks (Motilal, 2015; Nilsson et al., 2013), their sheer number and wide-ranging scope have also been criticized as being too vague (Easterly, 2015; Stafford-Smith, 2014). Still, they do represent a stronger recognition that development goals are inherently cross-cutting, and that each SDG must be viewed as interdependent (Dugani, Duke & Kisson, 2016; Monaco, 2018). Furthermore, many argue that moral responsibility underpins their framing in incorporating global public goods into their orbit (Nawn, 2015; Salamat, 2016) and have been central to promoting public awareness of development issues.

While development goals have been debated, shaped, molded and remade, the power relationships underpinning the development project itself continues to be critiqued. Early criticisms that accused the project of essentializing the North/West as 'advanced'' and 'progressive,' and the South/East as 'backward', 'degenerate' and 'primitive' (see Edward Said's Orientalism, 1978), it has been argued, has evolved to expose the colonialism hidden behind its modernist assumptions (Escobar, 2011). Also, the hidden aim of exterminating Indigenous cultures and people (Norberg-Hodge, 1992). Meanwhile, Sen (1999) and others have tried to recast the development project in a liberal light, in promoting 'development as freedom'. Yet, despite all these critiques, the post-development shift has failed to find an alternative model and the development project remains marked by both continuities and discontinuities that are tied to its colonial origins (Andrews & Bawa, 2014).

Morgan Brigg (2002) applied Foucault's distinction between sovereign and biopower to the colonial and development eras. In doing so, claiming a 'Shift

away from a negative or repressive view of the operation of power through development, and from notions, often present in post-development, that a singular or intentional historical force directs power (p. 422).' Brigg argues that development is synthetically bound with biopower. Colonialism, by contrast, was imposed and enacted violently as an oppressive force, which ties to sovereign power. According to Brigg, development projects are enacted relationally, through some level of cooperation. This idea (biopower) Brigg combined with Foucault's dispositif framework or apparatus, and his concept of normalization. The argument being that power in the development community is enacted through this *dispositif*, citing the centrality of multilateral institutions as the World Bank to induce action out of actors in the development community who now operate in a single social field.

Building off this framework, this paper uses the case study of Samoa's Office of the Electoral Commissioner (SOEC) and its securing of funding for an Information Communication Technology (ICT) voting system supplied by the Association of World Electoral Bodies (AWEB). Funded by the South Korean government (herein known simply as Korea), our case study explores the productive modalities of the SDGs as a discursive tool in the development dispostif. First, we re-visit Brigg's theoretical framework, outline literature pertaining to theories relating to agency and South-South cooperation, touch briefly on Korea's position in the development community before proceeding with the case study. The case study is based on in-depth talanoa (Vaioleti, 2003) conducted as a type of semi-structured interviews with Samoan government officials and NGO workers, conducted in Apia and Seoul to build its data source. Derived arguments were constructed using an interpretivist approach woven in with data analysis in the shape of a thematic talanoa (Thomsen, 2019; 2020; Thomsen at al., 2021; forthcoming), the paper concludes with a short discussion about the implications of our case study.

Ⅱ. Morgan Brigg and Foucault - Theorizing the Development Community

Brigg's theoretical framework rests on the separation of Foucault's conception of power to mark differences and continuities between the colonial "era" and the development eras. Beginning with Foucault's (1979) classic *Discipline and Punish*, it draws on sovereign power to characterize colonialism. A well-trodden concept in social research, as its name suggest, sovereign power has its origins in the sovereign's right to take away the life of their subjects. For Brigg, it is the 'centrality of the figure of the monarch' that signals the appropriateness of this conceptualization to the operation of power through colonialism characterized by extraction.

> *"Colonies were taken in the name of the monarch and colonial rule was characterized by a sense of ownership, sovereignty or "rule over" stemming directly from conquest. Colonial rule, included forced labor, the imposition of cash crops, the extraction of taxes and profits, and a range of abuses associated with the position of power and cultural superiority European colonists felt they had (p.422)."*

Sitting in concert with, and in contrast to sovereign power is another Foucaultian theoretical and conceptual nuance: biopower (Foucault, 1980). If sovereign power is deductive in nature, biopower is productive in practice. It works by imposing on the body and mind, a force that produces behavior and co-opts people's agency. Where consent is manufactured to one's own disciplining through the process itself. One can think about biopower existing in the very action of doing and ordering, it is a power of disciplining. Brigg characterizes it as a:

> *"Multitude of procedures and mechanisms that fosters, organizes, incites*

and optimizes life; by drawing upon mutually supporting procedures of power and knowledge, it simultaneously redefines and administers life in order to manage it in a calculated way (p.422)."

This distinction is designed to distinguish the expansionist colonial era, determined and enacted by sovereign power, from the development era that Brigg claims was driven by biopower. Their thesis argues that this historical cleavage is marked by World War I, where prior to its catastrophes, sovereign power exercised in this era of colonialism underwent changes due to the shifting political climate. This forced colonial governments to retreat from more overt forms of control to that of productive forms of power modalities.

"This change meant that the option of using force or other restrictive measures to quash unrest could no longer be taken up. Instead colonial officials, along with anti-colonial nationalist leaders, began to promote the welfare and benefit of the colonies. In this period the possibility emerged for the operation of a different modality of power [...] one which relies on the mobilization of human subjects and nation-states through the notion of development (p.424)."

According to Brigg, this process would ultimately lead to the freeing of the colonies.

"As this possibility was progressively realized (as nation-states formed out of ex-colonies, joined the United Nations, prepared national development plans and so on) the relevance of oppositional formulations diminished (424)."

Although this distinction is operationally valuable in social research, the clear demarcation between eras and operation of power compartmentalizes the forces of power that underpinned colonialism, which makes this position

untenable in our view. The colonial project is on-going in many ways, and has been carefully documented as elaborately enacted not only through resource extraction, physical force and military expansion, but through the colonizing of minds (Fanon, Sartre & Farrington, 1963; Wa Thiong'o, 1994), the undermining of Indigenous knowledge (Smith, 2013). Achieved through Western-style schools (White, 1996), the imposition of monotheistic religions (Herman, 2001; Rafael, 1988), and ossification of false political as well as ethnic divisions (Hau'ofa, 1993; Padrón, 2009), Western cultural, social and economic ideologies (Banerjee & Iyer, 2005; Lewis, 1967; Pimentel, 2003) – all of which carry productive modalities of power. This clearly indicates that the forces of biopower were in operation even during the early colonial period.

Where we find the most theoretical value is in Brigg's use of Foucault's *dispositif* as both a: *'thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble of discursive and material elements – 'discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions', and so on – and the 'system of relation […] established between these elements (p. 427).'*

As a suitable frame in which to position the development project, Brigg argues the development model emerging out of Western institutions in the 1940s created

> *"Resource flows, philosophical propositions about the possibilities and desirability of social change modelled on the West, professional development practitioners, scientific efforts (the entire sub-branch of development economics), and government and non-government organizations dedicated to development (p. 427)."*

This characterization of the development community is clearly recognizable to us as an apparatus or *dispositif* and added depth when Brigg continues:

> *"Although elements do not have tight interdependent relations, and while the dispositif may generate contradictory effects, it also achieves an overall or dominant strategic function (p. 427)."*

A *dispositif* operates on a macro level, creates a single-social field that sets a norm in which all entities within that social field are measured and ranked (Foucault, 1980). Later, Brigg successfully substitutes the individual with the nation-state in the level of analysis in arguing that the *dispositif* is deployed by multilateral institutions, who set standards of normalization that nation-states strive to achieve, and in turn, order and rank nations based on this normative standard of development success.

We build on this positioning that the development community does resemble a single social field which operates much like a *dispositif*, where power in the development discourse flows through. However, we adopt the theoretical posit that within the contemporary development *dispositif* also sits the normalizing force of the SDGs, and their discursive power is deployed by actors as a standard and norm that can generate contradictory effects. We conceptualize the normalizing force in the form of the SDGs' extensive 17 goals and multitude of accompanying targets that have infiltrated discursively and symbolically nearly all forms of development communications in shaping discussions, organizations and even framing access to financial support for development projects. Within this *dispositif*, we posit that agency for developing countries can be found under special circumstances. Although a-typical, we believe this case study delivers the opportunity to complicate our understanding of development relationships beyond a dyadic binary.

Ⅲ. The Analytical Framework: Conceptualizing Agency

The agency versus structure dilemma informs many debates in the social sciences. Theorists in Sociology like Durkheim (2013) and Giddens (1979) posed that structural constraints deeply affected the choices of individuals – a well-known derivative being institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Fligstein, 1985; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Others like Beckert (1999) and Dorado (2005) would later push for individuals' agency over cultural norms and rules to take precedence.

Despite lingering vagaries over definition, this study conceptualizes agency by borrowing from two theories. Mutual structuration – an outcome is the product of both structure and deliberate action of individuals (Wendt, 1992). Combined with elements from Talcott Parson's social action theory (1965), which claims that actors are motivated to action, to find a means to attain a goal and deal with hindering conditions all the while working within a set of rules. In merging these two positions, we infer a framework of agency and structure that is encompassing but never fully accounts for the choices of an actor. So, we argue that agency can be detected when

(1) Development goals of an actor are defined by the actor themselves, and not by a more 'powerful' partner;

(2) Enacted by the initiating partner, through a means and terms that they define; and

(2) The original goal is attained despite limiting structural conditions that may include social and economic power imbalances.

We accept that this may limit the generalizability of the study, however, in analyzing unique features of a case that breaks pre-identified patterns, it opens new avenues of not only theoretical investigation, but also expands empirical points of interrogation.

Ⅳ. Case Study: Samoa

Samoa in an island nation-state that sits at the 'Heart of Polynesia' possessing a population of 200,000. In 1899, Samoa's islands were colonized by foreign powers. Germany took the western islands including Upolu and Savaii (New Zealand following the First World War) (Meleisea, 1987), which became the Independent State of Western Samoa in 1962 (Independent State of Samoa in 1997). America took control of the eastern islands, which remain an American territory to this day. Since Independence, Samoa has struggled with development issues relating to poor infrastructure, susceptibility to environmental disasters, and politically, trying to meld the two worlds of indigenous political governance with Western liberal democracy (Huffer & So'o, 2005). However, it has balanced this successfully to become a well-functioning, socially cohesive country (Chand Prasad, 2008).

While South-South cooperation has been discussed as a potential challenge to the dominance of Western donor countries and organizations (Gray & Gills, 2016; Quadir, 2013;) and hailing the dawn of a 'new era' in development aid (Melville & Owen, 2005), the rise of China has been a focal point of normative and scholarly chatter. China's rising role in the Pacific has come under increasing scrutiny as the new 'banker' in town (Hanson & Fifita, 2010) as well as within the framework of diplomatic chess with Taiwan (Atkinson, 2010; Zhang, 2007). In contrast, Korea's role in the South Pacific is nearly invisible. Scant literature focuses on Korea's role as an aid donor in the South Pacific region, with very little literature that deals with a possible relationship with Samoa (Thomsen & Jun, 2018). To the best of our knowledge, this represents the first empirical investigation of the development relationship between Samoa and Korea.

In December 2017, Samoa's Office of the Electoral Commissioner (SOEC) announced that it would be receiving an Information Communications

Technology (ICT) driven voting system from the Association of World Electoral Bodies (AWEB), funded by the Korean government. We argue that this is a unique case. Samoa has no official bilateral aid agreement with Korea, no diplomatic mission to Korea with the Korean ambassador to Samoa based in Wellington with Apia as a distant diplomatic outpost. Samoa is also not on the list of countries that Korea's official development agency targets for assistance. Although AWEB is an NGO, discussions revealed that the funding for this ICT system came from the South Korean government, thus AWEB itself in this context, worked as a proxy agency. This falls in-line with literature on Korean ODA which points to it being hotly contested by multiple actors and interests and not just distributed through its official development assistance agency: KOICA (Kim, 2016).

As Korea transitioned to OECD DAC country status in 2011, it can be assumed that this case study does not represent South-South cooperation. However, separating traditional North from South donors cannot be determined easily by as simple a criterion as OECD DAC membership, especially when the World's second largest economy, China, is not part of this framework either. Korea's role in the international community has been more commonly characterized as a 'middle power.' Korea sees itself in a bridging role, facilitator of networks between nations and actors, in pursuing an internationalist world view (Lee et al., 2015). It is an image that it has worked extensively to cultivate (Karim, 2018). Therefore, this case study adds further points of analytical complexity in exploring how development assistance may impact the positionality and power relationships at play between a developing country and that of a middle power like Korea.

V. Methodology

This study employs an abductive research approach, a method of theory construction shaped by inductive strategies. While inductive strategy emphasizes theorizing driven by data gathered, abductive reasoning focuses on data which contradicts or does not fit with existing theories. 'Surprising evidence' is derived from comparing data to existing research and theories, which becomes the starting point of theory construction (Jun and Moon, 2017; Timmermans and Tavory, 2012: 168). This methodology is deemed most appropriate as cooperation between Samoa and Korea can be characterized as 'unexpected.' Moreover, this type of qualitative approach can generate rich data that is more likely to provide insights into the theoretical points at stake in this analysis. Abductive reasoning aims to 'discover why people do what they do by uncovering the largely tactical, mutual knowledge, the symbolic meanings, intentions and rules, which provide the orientations for their actions' (Blaikie, 2007: 90).

Our analysis takes an interpretivist epistemological position which explores, describes, and analyzes the meaning of individual lived experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). Interpretivists argue that in the process of construction, social actors interpret and reinterpret their own worlds and impose their own meanings on activities. Since the process occurs before social scientists arrive, social theories which explain and anticipate the activities of social actors and their concepts and meanings should be addressed from the perspectives of the social actors (Blaikie, 2007). We deploy Pacific qualitative research methods, such as talanoa dialogue (Thomsen, 2019; Thomsen 2020), which combines talanoa – a type of open transparent dialogue that is rooted in Pacific ways of relational knowing, communication and generating knowledge – with qualitative interviews (Thomsen, 2020).

Talanoa interviews took place at the end of December 2017. We conducted in-depth interviews with Samoa's Chief Electoral Commissioner in Seoul and travelled to Apia to interview the Head of Electoral Registrations, Samoa's Assistant Chief Executive Officer (ACEO) of Ministry of Finance for Budget, Samoa's ACEO of Ministry of Finance for Development Assistance and other government officials. All talanoa lasted between 30 to 90 minutes. Data was recorded by audio means and consent was obtained prior to and after the interviews/talanoa. Implicit ongoing consent was also sought during the talanoa and participants were able to strike things off the record that they felt uncomfortable sharing. Participants were consulted again with quotations and excerpts from the paper in seeking their permission to proceed with publication. Talanoa were conducted in both English and Samoan and translated from Samoan to English by the research team. The transcriptions were then coded openly for themes, then put back together by making connections between categories, a process called 'axial coding' (Strauss, 1987). Data was then evaluated against our analytical framework. The following thematic analysis is in the shape of a thematic talanoa (Thomsen et al., 2021; forthcoming), with participant words centered in the pages whilst theory and interpretations are built around them.

1. Setting the Project Goals – Identifying the Need

At the 2021 elections, Samoans will vote using an electronic voting system for the first time. Voters will register in advance by scanning their hand and entering demographic information designated by Samoan electoral laws. On Election Day, voters will scan their palm at voting booths, the system will issue their voting paper matching their registered information. Voters will cast their vote and leave without having their ballot handled by a returning officer. All ballot box electronic counts will be automatically sent to the

electoral office at the close of polling and the individual votes manually counted. The double count provides both accuracy and protection against vote tampering.

This system materialized through a relationship between SOEC and AWEB that was established through the efforts of SOEC staff. They were entrusted with research tasks to improve shortcomings in SOEC's performance during the previous general election. Samoa's Chief Electoral Commissioner described the process as follows:

> "After the last election there were areas that we identified that we could improve on, we did the research. We found AWEB, and their mission for improving democracy through ICT and we flagged their interest."

Although the idea of an ICT voting system was a SOEC action to improve the past system, further questioning revealed the difficulties they faced in Samoa's local social and political environment. The Commissioner explained how voter turnout had been affected by an inability to take deceased people off the electoral roll. He believed that there were at least 5,000 registered who had passed away. Laws only allowed an immediate family member to remove a deceased member from the electoral roll in-person through the chief government statistician. However, as Samoans often moved abroad, the task of keeping the electoral roll up-to-date was becoming burdensome without biometric measures. When asked if the new system would improve the situation, the Head of Registrations replied:

> We'd go around to every village, we used the pulenu'u – (main village chief), they would show us the graves, but there were no immediate family members and even if we submitted the list to the statistician, sometimes they don't record it, if it hasn't been recorded by the families, they can't do anything about it. But we also had the situation where we

reported people and removed them from the roll and they turned up. Or when there's one name but two different people. So, we remove the son, but it was meant to be the father, we've had a lot of cases like that. [..] You know how it is for us Samoans and people's names[1] [···] we took the pulenu'u's word for it, but it was a mistake. With the new system, we'll be able to eliminate a lot of these problems.

These experiences motivated the department to seek out new technology that could improve the representativeness of Samoa's democracy, clearly demonstrating the active construction and definition of Samoa's own needs. Moreover, several issues were raised by independent election observers, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (2016) and the State Society and Governance in Melanesia (2017): lower voter turnout in 2016 than in 2011, voting backlogs in Apia, a shortage of ballot boxes in other areas and legislative inconsistencies (Haley et al., 2017). However, SOEC was still congratulated for holding 'highly credible elections' that reflected the will of the people.' Our talanoa revealed that SOEC was aware and self-reported the same issues in framing the pursuit of the new voting system to overcome these shortcomings. The issue of voting efficiency was seen to be dealt with directly by the new system:

"The current system now, it's so slow, if you haven't registered, the first thing you do is scan your fingerprint, it might have forgotten you have registered already, it might take 10 minutes to search, we might have 120,000 people registered, so with this system, not only will it be fast, it will be secure, and the software is up-to-date it's going to be convenient as well. It's an upgrade, it's a hundred times faster than the current

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1) It is not uncommon for Samoans to name children after their parents and grandparents without indicating a sequential marker following such as 'the second' or 'the third' which is convention in many Western countries. Thus, it is not uncommon for multiple members of a nuclear family to possess the same legal name.

system." – Electoral Commissioner

SOEC's motivation for introducing the voting system and the way the need was defined is clearly an act of agency being exercised that is embedded within Samoan experiences. SOEC wanted a new voting system to 1. Improve the efficiency of the voting system. 2. Strengthen the integrity of the results of the election. During the talanoa, the absence of an imposition from outside Samoa by AWEB or another body was noticeable. Even the report from independent observers only confirmed things SOEC already knew.

2. Enacting Agency – Funding the Project

During a talanoa with Samoa's Development Aid coordinator, we were informed that Samoa had received aid money from Korea in the past, but this can be considered rather small by industry standards.

> *"We get support from Korea it's quite limited, administered via our office/post in Wellington, the most I believe it to be for $200,000 annually and has come through more regularly lately [...] as Samoa is yet to have an official bilateral relationship with Korea."*

With this as a backdrop, we queried the Commissioner as to what strategies they employed to access the funding for the electoral system. In conversations we had had in Seoul we both knew that Samoa's government would struggle to financially back and prioritize the introduction of an advanced ICT voting system. The commissioner had said that in their initial research activities, they had seen that AWEB's mission was to help strengthen democracy and governance around the globe and decided to see if AWEB could also help them secure a line of funding.

> *"After we flagged to them to say that we were interested, and they got back to us, [⋯] they said that they'd come over and have a look at our infrastructure and see what they could design for us. After they had a look at our systems, they said, yes, we can design a system for you based on the infrastructure you already have. [...] So after they came here, we did a proposal [...] once we nailed down everything, we signed off, then we submitted it. In early November, we were notified that it went through the finance committee and that it was approved, that within AWEB's budget, 1.97 million USD, is for our project."*

SOEC not only were successful in gaining AWEB's support as a vessel for funding opportunities, AWEB also became a source of capacity building as part of the project.

> *"It (the proposal) went through the [Korean] Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [...] it's not just the system - it's both capacity building and human capability, it includes training for staff both here in Samoa and in Korea."*

Assistance was also given by AWEB in the form of technical advice on how to prepare the proposal. A large part of AWEB's funding comes directly from the Korean government and approval for their budget was contingent on it passing through Korean government bureaucracy. SOEC then used their relationship with AWEB to help access their knowledge in dealing with the Korean bureaucracy to help strengthen their proposal's case for funding.

> *Commissioner: There wasn't a strict guideline, but they helped us write it, they told us what they wanted in it; the proposal [⋯] they said: this is what should be clear and tell us what you need from AWEB.*
> *Researcher: What were some of the things you used as rationale/ justification for it?*
> *Commissioner: We really focused on those things like strengthening*

elections and democracy.

In not only revealing the strategy employed to access funding that demonstrated the use of agency in maximizing networked knowledge and expertise, the Commissioner also shed light on the discursive tools that were deployed through the language used in the funding proposal. Specific terms in the proposal read as: *'Objective: To establish an ICT based democratic electoral environment where Samoan citizens' free political participation is guaranteed and lay the foundation for sustainable, transparent and democratic electoral management system by making the voting and counting process more accurate and faster.'* This was combined with other statements in the proposal that utilized the discursive persuasion in claiming a system, like this would *'strengthen the availability and security of data'* in applying *'advanced voting and counting technologies.'* It would improve *'voter registration and identification'* in expanding *'operation capacity.'* Such language that SOEC and AWEB employed to secure support for introducing ICT to Samoa's elections intimated the clear development *dispositif* discursive strategy, whose overall focus was to strengthen governance and democracy, central to sustainable development discourses (Ziai, 2016). Later, the Commissioner and Head of Registrations would admit that all their efforts relating to accessing support for the system had been coordinated to be in-line with Samoa's National Development Strategy, which had been carefully crafted to be in-line with the SDGs.

Here we revisit our theoretical framework that reconstructed the emergence of a single social field, termed the development dispostif that normalizes and exerts power over the actions of actors in this field. We argued that this field has now come to feature the SDGs as a powerful normalizing discursive tool. In this vein, we purport that terms like 'strengthening governance' can be utilized in inducing productive forms of behavior from actors in the development community who are operating

within a normalized, single social field of production. In our example, SOEC were able to deploy this mechanism, using the SDGs' discursive power to induce a funding stream for a development project that it had defined on its own terms, subsequently exercising a form of agency consistent with the second part of our analytical framework.

3. Goal Attainment Despite Structural Limitations and Conditionality

In talanoa with officials from Samoa's Ministry of Finance, it appeared that there was a well-established norm around how development assistance was meant to be received. Samoa was well-versed already in the area, having previously received development assistance from partners that included Australia, New Zealand, the United States, the European Union, Japan and most recently, China.

> "Our job is to make sure that no sector goes untended, to ensure that all sectors of the economy has a development partner working with them and ensure effective coordination of all development assistance to avoid duplication, Samoa has a long history of working with donors over the years."

Each donor had their favored sectors and had established quite a clear set of norms around how this relationship would work. This includes a recent shift to budget support, moving away from conditionality that typical development projects have been criticized for, which was a tendency to enrich donors in working against developing countries in the past (Kemp & Kojima, 1985).

> "Water has always been the EU's sector, Australia and New Zealand have

always been more in the social sectors, you know, areas like education,
gender equality, health promotion, civil society, the Japanese are helping
to finance our new wharf, they have helped to build a lot of schools [...]
starting from about 2010, we managed to get a lot of the donors to move
toward a model of direct budgetary support, or sector budgetary support,
which has been key to helping those sectors grow and develop."

With an ICT voting system being somewhat of a novel development project, the likelihood of it falling outside the parameters of usual funding mechanisms through traditional aid partners was high. SOEC's decision to look toward AWEB for support making practical sense. However, as AWEB was viewed as a proxy and used interchangeably for 'the Koreans' by SOEC and Samoan officials, this made it a bilateral aid request in the eyes of the Samoan officials.[2]

"When we took the letter to the CEO of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to
sign, she asked me, how much are you asking them for? I said, 2 million
US, and she said to me, you're not going to get it, Korea only gives us
200,000. I said to her, can you please sign it, we've got nothing to lose."

The point of interest here is not only the striking entrepreneurship displayed to pursue the AWEB/Korea channel, but also the brashness and assertiveness in the language being employed. Clearly a sense of personal agency and enterprise is in operation. Moreover, when queried about what Samoa would have to do in return for the voting system, the Commissioner's responses demonstrated that cost-benefit analysis had been undertaken before the final decision was made. Despite not being able to recall specific

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2) See Samoa Observer article December 15, 2017, titled "South Korea to Assist Samoa's Electoral Process", Samoa's Prime Minister: "South Korea has committed $5 million WST in grant funding to improve local election processes." Crediting South Korea's government directly for the ICT system.

figures, the image that he had for the new system was being more environmentally friendly thus becoming more cost-effective. As the commissioner points out:

> *"I already foresee software license as a major cost, maintenance, I don't think it's that more expensive, we buy ballot boxes and have to print the rolls every election and that costs us half a million, we won't have to print those anymore, we'll just scan and print out the ballot form, we print so much and only about 80% of the people turn up, and about 20,000 of the papers are left."*

The benefits are enhanced when factoring in efficiency gains made on Election Day and expected improved voter turnout through more accurate registration and tracking. However, there were costs involved relating to accessing AWEB's resources. AWEB membership came with a $10,000 USD annual fee. To date SOEC had not paid it, something that the Commissioner felt pressure to remedy.

> *"The PM said to us: How can you ask the Korean's for WST $5 million and you haven't paid your membership? I said to him we'll make a cabinet submission and you guys include it in your budget next year and he shook his head at me. We flagged it with our minister and hopefully next year they'll approve it in the budget. When I went last year to Bucharest [for AWEB's annual conference], they started showing countries that had paid, in alphabetical order, they were going down the list. A, followed by B, etc, got down to S, and our name wasn't there, we all pretended to be shocked like, what? Where are we? [laughter].*

This jovial example demonstrates two important points about the types of power relationships that are on-going in the development *dispositif*. One, AWEB whose aspirations to become an IGO are also dependent on their ability

to deploy the forces of cooperation, by inducing behaviors of a productive modality. The practice of displaying the names of those who have paid is consistent with the exercising of power through an apparatus like a *dispositif*, through what Foucault (1979) would term, the power of observation. The Commissioner was affected by this experience, returning to Samoa and speaking directly to his minister in seeking the funds so SOEC could fulfill its member obligations.

However, to interpret this as a type of conditionality that chained Samoa to an oppressive global organization thus reproducing a colonial framework would be disingenuous. SOEC's desire to join AWEB was an active decision arrived at after an extensive period of self-motivated research. They sought out membership knowing full well that AWEB carried stipulated membership fees. Further, no evidence suggests AWEB had at any point attempted to influence SOEC to change any part of their country's democratic processes, legislation or structures, which would be more consistent with the logic of coercion, and by extension a loss of agency. What is apparent is that SOEC was able to overcome a pre-defined normative path for receiving development assistance by identifying new opportunities within the development field. In doing so, they were able to keep Samoa's agency intact throughout the entire process despite existing structural constraints impeding their ability to achieve the aims of their project.

VI. Concluding Comments

In our case study, SOEC accessed funding for a development project necessitated by their own needs, defined on their own terms, making use of the productive modality of SDGs discourse. In doing so, they overcame an entrenched funding structure, established a new relationship with a foreign

government through a proxy organization, achieved from the position of actor with the lower access to power and influence in the development community. This speaks to possibilities available to less-developed countries in the development *dispositif* in pursuing agency. However, this point is offered with the caveat that the development *dispositif* is still draped in a legacy of colonial structures and discourses that it continues to work through (Ziai, 2016).

The question then becomes: how do the SDGs fit as part of a single social field that standardizes and normalizes practices within it? It appears that this field has imbued the term with a type of discursive power to produce action out of its members, as such may unlock a type of productive modality that can assist less-developed countries to overcome their lack of political influence. While this type of power clearly does not enjoy hegemony, due to the ability of the *dispositif* to produce uneven effects, we argue in certain circumstances its productivity can be enhanced. One such example can be found in our case study, where a unique set of social, political and historical circumstances exist. Samoa and Korea have very little historical, cultural or political connection and their experiences of colonial subjugation are disconnected as evidenced by this paper being the first of its kind. Thus, we deduce that this allows a cooperative relationship to be constructed on a platform that is not hampered by any social, political, or racial baggage, despite the economic disparity between the two societies. Something that may not be replicated in many other locations around the world but is a line of inquiry that warrants further investigation.

Another contribution this study makes is to the discussion around funding development projects that step outside normative models and mechanisms. AWEB is acting in a different form as a proxy for the South Korean government, and the SOEC on behalf of national governments, whom usually are centered in the OECD DAC framework. Their de-centering in our case

study is important. The significance of this is that development aid in Korea can be a majorly politicized issue domestically, and is a highly contested process (Kim. 2016; Watson, 2011). The use of a proxy has not only the effect of decentering national governments, it can also have the effect of depoliticizing the issue by screening somewhat the nationalistic element. The idea of using proxies is also in-line with recent trends toward actor network theory advanced by Latour (1996) that uses the concept of nets to link actors together, decentering an actor as a primary object. It emphasizes a human in a social network, by using a net without its hierarchical structure as way to develop connectivity. This abstract concept is being reworked to advance approaches to ICT and how it can be used to de-center traditional actors in the development community, thus improving outcomes for all actors (Diaz Andrade & Uguhart, 2010; Stanforth, 2006).

For many developing countries like Samoa, the business of improving living conditions for its citizens takes priority over epistemological wars. While officials in Samoa are aware of the orientalist origins of the development project, they would all relay in some form to the research team that: 'our focus is to get better roads, better hospitals, better jobs for our people.' In all reality, the assistance provided from Korea via AWEB was small, amounting to about $5 million WST. When read in comparison to contributions from other donor countries like Australia, who have committed roughly $47 million WST in the 2017-2018 financial year (Department of Foreign Affairs, 2019), the Korean contribution appears rather miniscule. However, the apparent impact it will have in strengthening Samoa's democratic processes will be immense, which informs our paper's final inference. Development assistance does not have to arrive in massive amounts to make a significant difference to recipients. Identifying areas and projects where major impacts can be made with smaller financial investments should continue to be a guiding philosophy for countries that have a limited ODA budget like Korea.

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□□□■□□□ 국문초록

SDGs 담론을 통한 개발협력의 식민지 유산 극복: 사모아 선거관리국과 세계선거기관협의회의 협력 관계를 중심으로

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　본 연구는 사모아 선거관리국과 세계선거기관협의회(A-WEB) 간 협력 사례를 통해 중견국가 간 소규모 원조(Middle Power Cooperation)가 가지는 가치를 드러낸다. 본 연구는 미셸 푸코의 장치(dispositif)와 권력(power) 개념을 배경으로, 해석주의 관점에서 사모아 선거관리국의 주요 관계자를 심층 면접하였다. 이를 통해 사모아가 세계선거기관협의회의 원조를 활용하는 과정에서 스스로 개발수요를 파악하고, 지속가능발전목표(SDGs)라는 주류 담론을 활용하여 구조적 한계를 극복하고 있음을 확인했다. 사모아가 A-WEB의 원조 수원국임에도 행위주체성(agency)을 잃지 않았다는 점에서 국제개발협력의 과정이 식민지적 유산을 일부 재현하고 정치화되고 있다는 기존 비판에 대한 대안적 사례를 제시한다는 의미를 가진다.

[주제어: 사모아, 대한민국, 중견국가 간 협력사례, 미셸푸코, 장치,
**　　　지속가능개발목표]**