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Introduction: Framing Oceania

This book tells the story of power and diplomatic agency in Pacific regionalism against the backdrop of a changing global order and a changing political situation within Pacific societies and states. Its purpose is to explore the political significance of this region-building activity for Pacific societies and its political meaning within a broader global politics. It examines the power of the regional site of politics and diplomacy vis-a-vis that of the postcolonial state, on the one hand, and that of the global order, on the other. It asks whether this region-building activity has mattered, why it has mattered and for whom? It also engages with a wider debate concerning the power and authority of regionalism and regional governance in global politics.

The political puzzle

Since its origins in late-eighteenth-century European thought, the idea of placing a regional frame around the Pacific islands and seeing this bounded entity in the context of a wider global system has never been just an exercise in geographical mapping. This imagining of the Pacific—sometimes termed Oceania, the South Seas, the south-west Pacific or the South Pacific—has always been a political exercise. Contending regional projects and visions of the colonial and postcolonial eras—whether promoted by larger powers, administrators, church people, island governments, international agencies, sovereignty movements,

non-governmental organisations (NGOs), politicians, artists or social scientists—have been part of a political struggle concerning how ‘Pacific islanders’, scattered in hundreds of societies over an area of ocean larger than Africa, should live their lives.

As a result of this intensive region-making activity, the region now appears to be an entrenched objective reality. It is a name in a school textbook, a category in the social sciences, a department in the foreign ministries of larger states and an assumed category in global management by international agencies, the United Nations and international NGOs. The idea also has solid expression in the bricks and mortar of a vast array of regional organisations such as the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, the University of the South Pacific and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme. It is reflected in the efforts of hundreds of regional public servants, and it is codified in countless regional treaties.

The political meaning of this region-building activity for postcolonial Pacific societies is nevertheless puzzling. It is clearly much more than a set of formal organisations for interstate cooperation. It goes beyond a set of international agreements and conventions on everything from security, conflict resolution and fishing to shipping, trade, nuclear issues and the environment. The Pacific is invoked sometimes as a regional cultural identity; sometimes as a political community with its own values, norms and practices; sometimes as a collective diplomatic agent; and sometimes as a site of political struggle. Situated between the global arena and local states and societies, it also appears as a mediator of global processes—sometimes as an agent for outside forces and sometimes as a ‘shield’ for local practices.

Despite the extensive region-building activity in the Pacific during and since the colonial period, there has been a tendency on the part of practitioners and scholars to undervalue its significance. The story of the politics of region-building has been overshadowed by the story of state-building. This is not surprising. In a postcolonial context, the state is where sovereignty sits. It is the site of formal government, lawmaking, taxation and policing. Accordingly, indigenous leaders and international agencies have focused their efforts on the stability and development of states. For the international community and for scholars, state failure—or potential

failure—is seen as a key problem. This further encourages state-building as the primary focus of efforts to influence how Pacific islanders should live in modern political communities.

By contrast, the regional political community in the Pacific context appears to be of less political significance. Region-building efforts have not sought to seriously dilute state sovereignty within a new integrated regional entity. The region is not a new ‘state-in-the-making’ with state-like attributes. Unlike the state, the region has no executive power, and there is no ethical obligation on the part of a ‘citizen’ to the regional political community. The Pacific region therefore does not appear on the scholarly radar as a powerful political entity or political community, at least in comparison with the emergent Pacific island states.

Ironically, the dismissal of the political significance of Pacific regional politics is most evident in the positions of those scholars and practitioners most concerned with establishing effective Pacific regional governance in the future as a means of dealing with the perceived failure or limitations of the postcolonial state. Seen from this viewpoint, the regional level has the potential to moderate the excesses of national governance through establishing obligations to regional norms about good governance and economic management. It is also seen as having the potential to assist in resolving conflict, to increase the economic viability of the smaller states through the pooling of limited resources and to provide a *cordon sanitaire* against global terrorism. While the position of these commentators endorses the *potential* significance of regional governance, it implicitly dismisses the significance of the region-building of the past century.¹

Against these positions, this book tells the story of region-building in the Pacific as a politically significant exercise inextricably intertwined with state-building. To do so, it introduces a novel conceptualisation of the power associated with region-building and regional governance. The novelty of the approach adopted here has its main roots in the postcolonial writings of Edward Said and Eveli Hau`ofa, and in particular

1 Satish Chand, ed., *Pacific Islands Regional Integration and Governance*, Canberra: ANU E Press and Asia Pacific Press, 2005; Dave Peebles, *Pacific Regional Order*, Canberra: ANU E Press and Asia Pacific Press, 2005; Kennedy Graham, ed., *Models of Regional Governance for the Pacific: Sovereignty and the Future Architecture of Regionalism*, Christchurch, NZ: Canterbury University Press, 2008; and the various proposals surrounding the emergence of the ‘Pacific Plan’ under the auspices of the Pacific Islands Forum in 2003–04, as surveyed in G.E. Fry, ‘Whose Oceania? Contending Visions of Community in Pacific Region-Building’, in Michael Powles, ed., *Pacific Futures*, Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2006, pp. 204–15.

their emphasis on the power of normative regional framing in influencing how policy is determined towards the people within that regional frame.² But I depart from Said's assumption of the West as an undifferentiated whole framing a powerless Orient. Instead, I posit the regional framing as a contested space in which various local and global framings of the Pacific compete for influence on how Pacific islanders should live their lives. This approach is developed and explained in Chapter 2.

In relation to the question of which interests prevail in these normative contests, I develop a line of argument that rejects the usual assumptions concerning who has power in regionalism. This includes those theories that emphasise 'the hegemon', the largest state in the regional community, the broader 'West' or 'globalisation' as being the main shaper of the direction of region-building. I also argue against those who emphasise states as the only influential actors in region-building projects. Drawing on positions within debates in Pacific history and anthropology about Western/islander power relations in the nineteenth century, I argue for a much more contingent answer to the question 'who is the region-building enterprise for' than that implied in conventional approaches—and one that assigns a good deal more political agency to local states and societies. I develop this approach in Chapter 2.

The region in world politics

This study seeks to engage with a broader debate about the changing political character of regionalism in world politics. Although not all those involved in this debate would go as far as endorsing W.W. Rostow's claim, made at the beginning of the 1990s, that a 'coming age of regionalism' is *the* metaphor for our times, there is increasing support for the idea that regions have come to matter in world politics in a way that they did not before.³ From the mid 1990s, academics, policymakers and commentators began to speak not only of a 'new regionalism', to capture a new institutional and policy emphasis on regionalism, but also of a new

2 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1979; Epeli Hau'ofa, *We Are the Ocean: Selected Works*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008.

3 W.W. Rostow, 'The Coming Age of Regionalism: A "Metaphor" for our Time?', *Encounter*, 74(5), 1990: 3–7.

status for regions within the world order.⁴ Peter Katzenstein offered the image of ‘a world of regions’ to capture what he saw as the move towards a new ‘political arena’ for world politics;⁵ and prominent security theorists suggested that global security must now be seen largely as the sum of its regional parts rather than as a product of a global logic.⁶ Economists also talked of a new significance for regionalism: Jagdish Bhagwati asserted the emergence of a ‘second regionalism’ and Wilfred Ethier of a ‘new regionalism’.⁷ For other scholars, the regional political community offered a possible new site of promotion of world-order values of democracy and human rights, and a possible site of resistance to globalisation.⁸

While the scholars of ‘new regionalism’ recognise that there is a 50-year history of regional schemes and doctrines of various kinds, they see these previous efforts as ineffective, as having been idealistic non-starters or as derivative of hegemonic power, and therefore not powerful in their own right. This, they imply, is the first time that developments in regionalism are occurring in a form that really matters in world politics. They also come together in seeing this new regionalism as occurring as a response

4 See, for example, Norman D. Palmer, *The New Regionalism in Asia and the Pacific*, Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1991, particularly Ch. 1; Louise Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell, eds, *Regionalism in World Politics: Regional Organization and International Order*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995; Björn Hettne and Andrés Inotai, *The New Regionalism: Implications for Global Development and International Security*, Helsinki: United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research, 1994; Andrew Gamble and Anthony Payne, eds, *Regionalism and World Order*, Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1996; David A. Lake and Patrick M. Morgan, eds, *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997; Jean Grugel and Wil Hout, eds, *Regionalism Across the North–South Divide: State Strategies and Globalization*, Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 1999; Peter Robson, ‘The New Regionalism and the Developing Countries’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 31(3), 1993: 329–48.

5 Peter J. Katzenstein, in Atul Kohli, Peter Evans, Peter J. Katzenstein, Adam Przeworski, Susanne Hoebler Rudolph, James C. Scott, and Theda Skocpol, ‘The Role of Theory in Comparative Politics: A Symposium’, *World Politics*, 48(1), 1995: 14–15.

6 Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations*, Brighton, UK: Wheatsheaf, 1983; Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post–Cold War Era*, 2nd edn, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991; Muthiah Alagappa, ‘Regionalism and Conflict Management: A Framework for Analysis’, *Review of International Studies*, 21(4), 1995: 359–87; Mohammed Ayoob, ‘From Regional System to Regional Society: Exploring Key Variables in the Construction of Regional Order’, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 53(3), 1999: 247–60.

7 Jagdish Bhagwati, ‘Regionalism and Multilateralism: An Overview’, in Jaime de Melo and Arvind Panagariya, eds, *New Dimensions in Regional Integration*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 22–51; Wilfred J. Ethier, ‘The New Regionalism’, *Economic Journal*, 108(449), 1998: 1149–61.

8 Richard Falk, ‘Regionalism and World Order after the Cold War’, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 49(1), 1995: 1–15.

to a new era of post–Cold War globalisation of markets and associated neoliberal economic ideas, to a new US-led global security order and to unprecedented global governance through the United Nations.

For these scholars, the key question around the power of regionalism concerns how to characterise the politics of the relationship between regions and the global order or globalisation, on the one hand, and—at least for some—the relationship with the state and society, on the other. This is a very different question about the power associated with regionalism to that posed by an earlier generation of regionalism scholars who focused on the regional integration process itself and who asked whether the regional organisation was moving towards the goal set by the integration model underpinning European regionalism. For the scholars of ‘new regionalism’, the answers regarding the political significance of new developments in regionalism are varied. For some, this constitutes a transformation—a shift in the site of political agency, community and identity away from the state. For others, the region is not displacing the state; it is merely adding another layer of politics—a move that has prompted the image of a ‘new medievalism’.⁹

The Pacific may seem to be an odd vantage point from which to reflect on this broader debate about the changing power of regions within world politics. Although encompassing an enormous area of ocean, this is, after all, a region of small island societies, its states marginal to global politics in geographical, economic and cultural terms, and its population relatively small. The argument of this study proceeds, however, on the assumption that the Pacific experience nevertheless has something of real interest to contribute to an exploration of the power of regions and their political role between local societies and global processes, precisely because of this marginality. In fact, it could be argued that just as the claims of empires are often best tested in their remotest outpost, so a peripheral region offers a unique vantage point from which to explore global relevance.

The Pacific also offers an interesting counter to Europe, the region that so often drives general understandings of the political meaning of region. As a postcolonial, non-Western region, the Pacific offers a series of insights derived from being at the receiving end of imperialism. For example, there are issues to do with the transfer of the regional idea from colonial powers

9 Andrew Gamble and Anthony Payne, ‘Conclusion: The New Regionalism’, in Andrew Gamble and Anthony Payne, eds, *Regionalism and World Order*, Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1996, pp. 247–64.

to the new elites, and in the postcolonial period there are issues to do with the struggle over Western ideas and practices that accompany economic assistance, UN interventions or World Bank conditions, or the clash with cultural processes, landownership and customary practices. In this context, Europe is an important source of global processes and influential ideas, whereas the Pacific has typically been subject to them.

The Pacific experience further challenges the impression often given in the academic literature that it is only recently that regionalism has become important in global politics. The reality is that the region has provided a locus of power since the colonial period, and even before. The story does not therefore begin in the late 1980s, when the so-called new regionalism emerged. The idea of region—in the sense of a category, affinity or identity larger than the nation, tribe or state, with a geographical, although often shifting, basis—was a major part of global politics throughout the postcolonial period in particular. Whether as part of Cold War security management, developmental theory and practice, Third World anticolonialism, collective self-reliance strategies or as an expression of cultural identity, region-building was advanced by powerful states, local elites, social movements, anticolonial forces, environmentalists, human rights activists, strategists and global institutional managers.

The Pacific region-building story, then, suggests some interesting questions for understanding the political meaning of ‘region’ more generally, but particularly in postcolonial areas. The centrality of colonialism, postcolonialism and the Cold War in defining and remaking ‘region’ in all non-European regions is an important common feature. The region has provided an important site for the contests over the norms and practices of postcolonial societies in relation to security, development, ecology, cultural identity and sovereignty. The Pacific provides a good example of this, but similar stories could be told for South-East Asia, parts of Africa, the Caribbean and Eastern Europe.

The region in Pacific studies

This region-building story is not one that has been told in the general histories of the Pacific island region.¹⁰ These general Pacific histories are interpretations of what happened inside, or across, an assumed geographical category called the Pacific, the Pacific island region or the South Pacific. This study, on the other hand, provides a political history of ‘the idea of the Pacific’ itself. It is concerned with the political significance of the contest over what this idea should stand for and its expression in forms of regional governing ideas and social institutions that impact on local societies. Even in *The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders*, in which Donald Denoon and his co-authors recognise the constructed nature of the subcategories of the Pacific island region—Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia—and of the boundaries of states, this reflection is not applied to the regional category itself except in a brief section on Pacific regional identity.¹¹

This study nevertheless engages with the central question animating these general Pacific histories: how to characterise the relationship between ‘the West’ (‘Europeans’ or ‘the global system’) and Pacific island societies since the late-eighteenth century. What agency should be assigned to Pacific peoples in this engagement? Whereas these general works bring together narratives of local engagements to build up a larger picture of regionwide experiences, this study is concerned with the regional site of engagement per se—in knowledge systems, diplomacy and institutions. As indicated above, in examining this regional site of politics, I draw on, and adapt, the approaches developed within the historiographical debate underlying Pacific history (together with key interventions from Pacific anthropology) concerning local engagements between Pacific societies and the European world in the precolonial and colonial periods.

10 Deryck Scarr, *The History of the Pacific Islands: Kingdoms of the Reefs*, Melbourne: Macmillan, 1990; Donald Denoon, Malama Meleisea, Stewart Firth, Jocelyn Linnekin, and Karen Nero, *The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997; Ian C. Campbell, *Worlds Apart: A History of the Pacific Islands*, Christchurch, NZ: Canterbury University Press, 2003; Kerry R. Howe, Robert C. Kiste, and Brij V. Lal, eds, *Tides of History: The Pacific Islands in the Twentieth Century*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1994.

11 Denoon et al., *The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders*.

As will become evident in Chapter 3, where I explore the South Seas in the imperial imagination, the insights of three historians, in particular, provide an important conceptual entry point for this study. Oskar Spate's magisterial study *The Pacific Since Magellan* is built around the idea of the Pacific as a European construction.¹² Where Spate's approach becomes crucial for this study is his consideration of the importance of the various European ideas about Pacific islanders and Pacific island societies in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. This focus on the European constructions of what Pacific island societies and Pacific islanders were, and could be, and seeing these as a function of particular points in debates about European society, is the beginning of the story I tell here. Art historian Bernard Smith had already made a similar argument in *European Vision and the South Pacific 1768–1850*,¹³ and Kerry Howe later developed the theme in *Nature, Culture, and History*.¹⁴

While these writers' insights are invaluable as an intellectual opening, it is important to note how this study develops these ideas in relation to the politics of regionalism. Where the main concern of these authors is to provide an understanding of shifting European ideas and how these construct competing notions of Pacific 'reality', I am concerned with the political significance of these imaginings and representations in relation to colonial and postcolonial authority over how Pacific societies should be organised. Furthermore, I am concerned not with how the Pacific shapes key ideas in European theory about how European society should be organised, but with how these changing and contesting European representations have impacted on Pacific societies. Whereas these authors are focused on the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this study focuses mainly on the colonial and postcolonial periods of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Furthermore, by dint of the period with which they are concerned, they are focused only on *European* representations of the Pacific, whereas this study is also interested in indigenous representations of the region.

12 O.H.K. Spate, *The Pacific Since Magellan. Volume 1: The Spanish Lake*, Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1979.

13 Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific 1768–1850: A Study in the History of Art and Ideas*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960.

14 Kerry R. Howe, *Nature, Culture, and History: The 'Knowing' of Oceania*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000.

Although they asked different questions from this study, the various accounts of regional institution-building in the Pacific each inform part of the story told here. Again, it is curious that this does not form part of the general histories of the Pacific. Richard Herr's chapter, 'Regionalism and Nationalism', in Howe et al.'s *Tides of History* is an important exception.¹⁵ Ron Crocombe's influential early examination of regional identity and Uentabo Neemia's critique of the costs and benefits of regional cooperation until 1980 provide key dimensions of the regionalism question.¹⁶ Other scholars, such as Sandra Tarte, Yoko Ogashiwa and Jeremy Carew-Reid, have provided important sectoral studies of regional cooperation in fisheries management, nuclear issues and environmental issues, respectively.¹⁷ There have also been very useful recollections from key players in regional organisations: W.D. Forsyth and T.R. Smith, former secretaries-general of the South Pacific Commission (SPC), focused on the operations of the commission between the 1940s and the 1960s, and Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara's *The Pacific Way* provides invaluable reflections on his time as a leading participant in the decolonisation of regionalism.¹⁸

Hau'ofa's influential essay 'Our Sea of Islands'¹⁹ is the Pacific work that is closest to the concerns of this study, and which has been a major influence on the conceptual approach adopted here. Hau'ofa draws our attention to the power associated with unquestioned characterisations of the postcolonial Pacific—and of the typical island society and economy—prevalent in the social sciences. He sees this knowledge reflecting the

15 Richard A. Herr, 'Regionalism and Nationalism' (in Kerry R. Howe, Robert C. Kiste, and Brij V. Lal, eds, *Tides of History: The Pacific Islands in the Twentieth Century*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1994, pp. 283–99); this is a persuasive examination of institutional developments until the late 1980s. His unpublished PhD is the definitive work on the political history of the South Pacific Commission from 1947 to 1974. See R.A. Herr, 'Regionalism in the South Seas: The Impact of the South Pacific Commission 1947–1974', PhD dissertation, Duke University, Durham, NC, 1976.

16 Ron Crocombe, *The Pacific Way: An Emerging Identity*, Suva: Lotu Pasifika Productions, 1976; Uentabo Fakaofa Neemia, *Cooperation and Conflict: Costs, Benefits, and National Interests in Pacific Regional Cooperation*, Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1986.

17 See Sandra Tarte, 'Negotiating a Tuna Management Regime for the Western and Central Pacific: The MHLIC Process 1994–1999', *Journal of Pacific History*, 34(3), 1999: 273–80; Yoko S. Ogashiwa, *Microstates and Nuclear Issues: Regional Cooperation in the Pacific*, Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1991; Jeremy Carew-Reid, *Environment, Aid and Regionalism in the South Pacific*, Pacific Research Monograph No. 22, Canberra: National Centre for Development Studies, The Australian National University, 1989.

18 W.D. Forsyth, 'South Pacific: Regional Organisation', *New Guinea and Australia, the Pacific and South-East Asia*, 6(3), 1971: 6–23; T. R. Smith, *South Pacific Commission: An Analysis after Twenty-Five Years*, Wellington: Price Milburn for the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, 1972; Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, *The Pacific Way: A Memoir*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997, Ch. 18.

19 Epli Hau'ofa, 'Our Sea of Islands', in Eric Waddell, Vijay Naidu, and Epli Hau'ofa, eds, *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands*, Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1993.

dominant mindsets outside the Pacific and not depicting the reality of the experience of ordinary Pacific islanders. Furthermore, he sees these authoritative depictions as consistently belittling and continuing a practice prevalent in the colonial period. In a position reminiscent of Said, he also sees these depictions as powerful. Taught through authoritative institutions, Pacific islanders take these on as self-images. Hau`ofa is speaking here, he says, as a teacher at the regional university where he had taught these ‘small is powerless’ depictions for many years. They are, he argues, as disempowering as when men were called ‘boys’ in colonial Melanesia. This study expands on these insights in examining policy-related knowledge contests about how the Pacific island region should be depicted over time.

Hau`ofa’s work features in this study not only because of his influential ideas concerning the power of these regional characterisations within knowledge systems and the sources of this power in the authority of knowledge; his ideas are also *part* of the political contest over legitimate political community conducted at the regional level on which this study is focused. Hau`ofa is joined by many other indigenous Pacific scholars who have been engaged in the debate about the decolonisation of Pacific knowledge and who, in so doing, have become part of the political contest over region-building examined in the following chapters.²⁰ Other scholars become relevant to the study when they enter a debate about how the idealised ‘Pacific island society’ should be organised. Ideas about how Pacific islanders—thought of collectively—should live have been prominent and powerful throughout the period covered here. Anthropological studies were important in the promotion of native welfare in the Pacific in the 1940s; Pacific geographers were important to the idea of the Pacific island economy, strategic studies analysts to the construction of a Pacific strategic entity and economists to the construction of a neoliberal economic order in the 1990s and 2000s. All of these influences will be considered in the chapters that follow.

20 See, for example, Subramani, ‘The Oceanic Imaginary’, *The Contemporary Pacific*, 13(1), 2001: 149–62; Konai Helu Thaman, ‘Decolonizing Pacific Studies: Indigenous Perspectives, Knowledge, and Wisdom in Higher Education’, *The Contemporary Pacific*, 15(1), 2003: 1–17; Vilsoni Hereniko, ‘Indigenous Knowledge and Academic Imperialism’, in Robert Borofsky, ed., *Remembrance of Pacific Pasts: An Invitation to Remake History*, Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2000, pp. 78–91.

Which regional boundaries?

Before we enter a version of the Pacific region-building narrative that emphasises the above commitments, assumptions and questions, we should note the extent to which the boundaries of the framed region, and the name given to it, have been in continual contest. These boundaries have varied according to time, issues and perspectives on a particular issue. They are indicative of political aspirations and political outcomes. Even the regional institutional arrangements have not succeeded in establishing a fixed idea of regional boundaries.

What we can say, however, is that at the core of the idea of the Pacific are the thousands of islands scattered across the central and southern Pacific Ocean, including to the north of the equator. They stretch from the Micronesian islands just south of Japan and east of the Philippines, south to Papua New Guinea, and south-east along the Melanesian chain to New Caledonia, and then east across the Polynesian Pacific to Tahiti. These societies are organised into nine independent states (Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu); five associated states (Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Niue, Palau and Marshall Islands); and eight dependent territories—of France (New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna, and French Polynesia), the United Kingdom (Pitcairn Islands), New Zealand (Tokelau) and the United States (American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands). It also includes, importantly, the sea around them—extending out to 200 nautical miles for some purposes. This area—which is recognised as constituting the boundaries of the oldest regional organisation, the SPC (renamed the Pacific Community at its fiftieth anniversary conference in October 1997)—covers more than 30 million square kilometres (not including Australia and New Zealand).

In terms of politically weighty decision-making, such as treaty-making and collective diplomacy, the membership is a little smaller because, until 2016, only independent states were recognised in the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). But, even here, the regional boundaries seen as relevant for political action include the dependent territories, as, for example, when the organisation takes a collective position on decolonisation in New Caledonia or nuclear issues in French Polynesia. For some purposes—and particularly for sovereignty movements and regional NGOs, such as the Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organisations and

the Nuclear-Free and Independent Pacific movement—the cultural and political identities of the Pacific stretch to an extended outer boundary incorporating Hawai‘i in the north, New Zealand in the south, Easter Island (a territory of Chile) to the east and West Papua, a province of Indonesia, in the west. Although they are members of the Pacific Community and the PIF, Australia and New Zealand do not always put themselves within the regional boundaries. This in/out behaviour is an important variation in what is seen as constituting ‘the region’. Australia, for example, sees itself as part of the South-East Asian and Indian Ocean regions as well as the Pacific. But, despite its significant region-making initiatives in the other two areas, it is the Pacific where it has seen itself as having a leadership and management role.

As we have already noted, the region has also attracted different names—South Pacific, Pacific islands, Pacific, Oceania, South Seas, south-west Pacific—at different times or on different issues, or even by different actors in relation to the same issue. To add to the confusion, some of the names used to refer to this island area have also been used at times to refer to a broader region, which encompasses the Pacific Rim. In this study, there is no attempt made to standardise the naming, but rather, this contest becomes part of the political story. Names can signal ownership, belonging and political purpose. Thus, for example, the move from the use of Pacific or the Southern Ocean or the South Sea (singular) to the South Seas in the nineteenth century depicted a new consciousness of the island region against the broader Pacific Rim. The tension over naming resurfaced in the 1980s when Pacific island countries north of the equator demanded that the regional nomenclature reflect their inclusion. This was generally resolved through the shift from South Pacific to the more general ‘Pacific islands’, as in the change to Pacific Islands Forum, or ‘Pacific’, as in the change to Pacific Community. Similarly, naming became part of regional debates about what regional governance should stand for in the 1990s when ‘Oceania’ began to reemerge as a way of denoting a different position from official regionalism, which employed ‘Pacific island region’.

Where to begin?

As in the case of ‘the idea of Europe’, the chosen starting point for considering ‘the idea of the Pacific’ has implications for the authority of particular positions in current debates about who belongs to the region,

who should speak on its behalf and what the ideas should stand for. The answer to the question of ‘where to begin’ is also highly dependent on how we conceptualise the authority of regional governance and how we think about the politics of region-building. For those who see regional governance as having significance only when there is the level of integration and the kind of coercion that are present in the European model of regionalism, the story has not yet begun. This, for example, has been the position of the economists and policymakers around the Australian Government’s influential attempts to create ‘pooled regional governance’ in the Pacific since 2003. On the other hand, for those seeing political significance as lying mainly in formal institutional development, the story typically began in 1944–47 with the formation of the SPC, but with acknowledgement of forerunners in colonial institutions such as the Central Medical School and the Western Pacific High Commission.

For some prominent Pacific islanders involved in this debate, the political legitimacy of the regional idea hinges particularly on who is promoting it and on the degree to which there is indigenous control or participation in these regional visions. Even within this position, however, there is wide variation on the suggested starting point for telling the region-building story. Macu Salato, Fijian secretary-general of the SPC from 1975 to 1979, claimed that South Pacific regionalism had its ‘first appearance in the world ... at the Sixth South Pacific Conference’ in 1965 of the SPC²¹—a reference to the ‘Lae Rebellion’ (the conference was held in Lae, Papua New Guinea) in which Pacific island leaders first challenged the right of colonial powers to direct the regional organisation without indigenous participation. Rather than seeing the ‘rebellion’ as the next stage in an already long history of regional thinking, it was important for Dr Salato that earlier regional thinking, in which Pacific islanders had no voice, be delegitimated.²²

Working from the same principle, Ratu Mara, then prime minister of Fiji, and the leading figure in the indigenous regional movement of the 1970s, asserted a more distant origin for the idea of the Pacific. He argued that contemporary indigenous regional identity had its roots not in the rebellion associated with decolonisation in the 1960s or the coming together of Pacific island representatives in the South Pacific

21 E. Macu Salato, ‘South Pacific Regionalism: “Unity in Diversity”’, *South Pacific Bulletin*, 26(Fourth Quarter), 1976: 30–5, at p. 35.

22 *ibid.*, p. 31.

Conference from 1950, but in ancient connections among Pacific island peoples. He further asserted that indigenous regional connections were interrupted by colonialism (rather than being a product of colonialism).²³ Hau'ofa developed this position in the 1990s as part of his advocacy of a new kind of regional thinking during his tenure as director of the Oceanic Centre for Arts and Culture at the University of the South Pacific (USP). He argued that, for thousands of years, there had been a network of connections across the Pacific, which was interrupted by colonialism. For Hau'ofa, the 'new Oceania' needed to draw on these unifying links of the past—the epic ocean voyages, the exchange relationships and the unifying Pacific Ocean that made Oceania a connected 'sea of islands' rather than remote 'islands in the sea'.²⁴

In this study, I have chosen to begin the region-building story with the emergence of European imaginings of the Pacific around the time of the voyages of James Cook and Louis Antoine de Bougainville in the late eighteenth century. This choice follows from the conceptualisation of region-building and regional governance that I outlined earlier. I asserted that the idea of a Pacific island region emerged as a result of European imperialistic processes and that Pacific islanders later embraced the idea as a vehicle for negotiating these global ideas and processes. This is so whether 'region' is employed as a category, an identity, a community, as a shield against global forces or as an agent of them. Following this conceptual approach, the Pacific as a region of a larger global system is, at first, a construct of the European imagination and of European power. In the felicitous phrase of Spate, speaking of a broader geopolitical notion of the Pacific (and not of the peoples and societies within it, which are the subject of this study), it is to be seen as a 'European artefact'.²⁵ The story

23 Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, 'Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Messages: South Pacific Commission', *South Pacific Bulletin*, 21(Second Quarter), 1972: 15–19, at p. 15; S.K. Sikivou, 'Statement to the Twenty-Eighth Regular Session of the UN General Assembly: 1973', in Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, *Report on Foreign Affairs for the Period 10th October 1970 – 31st December 1973*, Parliamentary Paper No. 19, Suva: Parliament of Fiji, 1974, Appendix 111(d), p. 32; Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, 'Regional Co-operation in the South Pacific', Address at the University of Papua New Guinea, Port Moresby, 27 May 1974, pp. 1–2; Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara and Michael Somare, 'Joint Communiqué', Port Moresby, 27 May 1974; South Pacific Forum Secretariat, 'Summary Record and Final Press Communiqué', in *Leaders' Communiqué: Fifth South Pacific Forum, Rarotonga, Cook Islands, 20–22 March 1974*, Suva: South Pacific Forum Secretariat, 1974, p. 10.

24 Epli Hau'ofa, 'Our Sea of Islands', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 6(1), 1994: 148–61.

25 O.H.K. Spate, 'The Pacific as an Artefact', in Niel Gunson, ed., *The Changing Pacific: Essays in Honour of H. E. Maude*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1978, pp. 32–45.

therefore begins when global actors start to place a conceptual frame around the Pacific islands and want to influence how people within that frame should live.

This approach may appear to deny a previous long and rich history of Pacific island societies, and therefore to reinforce the tendency to see Pacific history as only beginning with European imperialism.²⁶ This study should not be interpreted as a denial of the idea of precolonial connectedness and affinity between various Pacific island societies as put forward by Ratu Mara and Hau'ofa. In the approach I adopt here, I fully acknowledge the importance of the long history of interisland voyaging, of the existence of kingdoms (such as the Manono-based Kanokupolu kingdom), 'empires' (such as the Yap empire) and tributary systems (such as in Ponape and the Caroline Islands) all spread over large areas of the Pacific Ocean. I also acknowledge the extensive trading and exchange networks (such as the *kula* trading ring around the eastern end of New Guinea) and the longstanding intermarriage among the royal families of Fiji, Tonga and Samoa.²⁷ In terms of the concerns of this study, this history of island connectedness becomes germane to the story when postcolonial indigenous actors draw on this rich history to engage in contemporary debates about how Pacific islanders should engage in regional politics within a global context. But these ancient connections, while sometimes conducted over vast areas of ocean, were not 'framing Oceania' in a global context; Oceania was their vast known world.

There is an important exception: the Hawaiian kingdom's nineteenth-century vision of a Polynesian confederation, encompassing Fiji, Tahiti, Samoa and Tonga.²⁸ This was a political project to create a Hawaiian-led Oceanic entity that could both defend the kingdoms of Polynesia from

26 Epeli Hau'ofa, 'Epilogue: Pasts to Remember', in Robert Borofsky, ed., *Remembrance of Pacific Pasts: An Invitation to Remake History*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000, pp. 453–71.

27 See, for example, Paul D'Arcy, *The People of the Sea: Environment, Identity, and History in Oceania*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006, Chs 1, 5; Niel Gunson, 'Early Society and Authority Systems', in Brij V. Lal and Kate Fortune, eds, *The Pacific Islands: An Encyclopedia*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000, pp. 132–9; Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, London: George Routledge & Sons, 1922; Patrick Kirch, *On the Road of the Winds: An Archaeological History of the Pacific Islands before European Contact*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000, pp. 191–3.

28 The case for seeing Hawai'i's Polynesian confederation diplomacy project as the first assertion of an indigenous attempt to build a regional Oceanic identity in relation to an impinging world system is persuasively made by Lorenz Gonschor, *A Power in the World: The Hawaiian Kingdom in Oceania*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019. He provides a comprehensive and definitive examination of the Hawaiian diplomatic project over several decades.

imperial control and be recognised as a ‘power in the world’, much like the Hawaiian kingdom had already achieved for itself. The vision was strongly supported by Kings Kamehameha III and IV, but was largely devised by Charles St Julian, their *haole* (white) adviser. The vision was promoted actively as a diplomatic project from the 1880s. Under King Kalākaua, extensive relations were pursued with the Polynesian kingdoms: King Pomare V of Tahiti, King George Tupou I of Tonga and Malietoa Laupepa of Samoa. The project was, however, severely constrained by the growing impact of imperial powers on the sovereignty of these kingdoms. Ultimately, it was the Missionary Party’s ‘Bayonet Coup’ of 1887, followed by the American invasion and occupation of Hawai‘i, which abruptly stopped any further development of the idea of a Polynesian confederation. The confederation nevertheless has its historical significance in being the first indigenous project to create an Oceanic regional grouping to control the pressures of an impinging global system. It also has contemporary importance as a source of inspiration for attempts to forge subregional links among Polynesian leaders in the Polynesian Leaders’ Group.²⁹

Structure of the book

Before entering the story of Pacific region-building, Chapter 2 first explains why conventional conceptual approaches to regionalism make it difficult to see the political significance of the long history of Pacific regionalism. It then develops an alternative approach, focused on the power of normative framing, which, it is argued, provides a more useful way of examining the political meaning of the region-building experience in the Pacific. This chapter also explains the conceptual approach employed to examine the authority of Pacific regional governance and posits a novel approach to the question of whom the regionalism project serves at different points in its history.

Chapter 3 focuses on the emergence of the idea of the Pacific in the European imagination and its gradual incorporation into colonial and other European practices of the imperial era. The chapter examines the application of powerful European normative frames associated with the imperial era—such as trusteeship, native welfare and self-determination—

29 See, for example, Tupuola Terry Tavita, ‘Samoa PM Talks about the Polynesian Leaders Group’, *Savali*, 28 November 2011, available from: www.pireport.org/articles/2011/12/01/samoa-pm-talks-about-polynesian-leaders-group.

through the content given to an idealised ‘Pacific islander’, such as a ‘dying race’, inferior and civilisable, and to the policies these characterisations informed. It argues that the idea of the Pacific region was one that arose in relation to contending global discourses promoted by the imperial powers and other European agents, such as missionaries—some concerned with welfare, others with self-determination and others with the maintenance of colonial control. These normative contests were contests among Europeans and were mainly about the agency—or potential agency—of Pacific islanders. Ultimately, they had a significant influence on Pacific island societies given the relationship to colonial policies.

These same contests over the appropriate political agency of Pacific islanders can be clearly seen in the formal colonial region-building examined in Chapter 4. The chapter examines the establishment of the main regional organisation, the SPC, and the tensions it set up between the colonial powers and the emergent indigenous elite experiencing decolonisation in their own territories. These tensions would not finally be resolved in favour of indigenous agency until the late 1970s. The chapter emphasises the impact of World War II as a major influence on the ideas and interests that coalesced to promote the modern idea of the Pacific island region and its regional governance.

In contrast to the ambitious sweep of Chapters 3 and 4, which range over the long period from the late eighteenth century to the end of the Pacific War in the early 1940s, Chapter 5 focuses on one event that took place over four days in November 1950 at the assembly hall of the Nasinu Teachers’ College in Suva. This was the first regional meeting of Pacific islander representatives drawn from 20 territories across the broad region from West Papua in the west to Tahiti in the east. The South Pacific Conference was widely represented in the colonial press and policy papers as an ‘experiment’ in creating a regional identity among Pacific island leaders. The idea of creating a sense of affinity among these diverse peoples was seen as working ‘against the odds’, but in the end was proclaimed a success. It was also an experiment in whether Pacific islanders could be seen as ready to begin the process of political development and to participate in the decisions affecting Pacific communities. In the view of these observers, the values of the idealised Pacific community were assumed to be those associated with the modernisation trajectory. It is also here that we first hear the voices of Pacific islanders in the region-building story. Polynesian chiefly leaders and Melanesian ‘high achievers’ saw the experiment as novel and embraced the idea of a regional identity.

Chapter 6 is concerned with the impact of the political change associated with decolonisation in the 1960s and 1970s on the development of regional identity among the emergent political elites in the so-called New South Pacific. It first examines the regional norms concerning decolonisation and legitimate statehood; moves to an exploration of the link between ideas of national self-determination and regional identity; and then examines the institutional expression of a commitment to self-determination in the efforts to take control of the colonial regional structures and to create new organisations, particularly the South Pacific Forum (SPF). It ends with an examination of the ‘Pacific way’ ideology, developed at this time, and asks what it said about region-level community, identity and agency.

Chapter 7 explores various dimensions of the new postcolonial regional polity of the 1970s—its founding ideas and normative framework, and its participants and organisational expressions. We first explore the emergent regional ‘society of states’ and its founding principles and procedural norms. We then examine the influence of global norms on the rituals of this emergent diplomatic culture. I argue that a broader regional polity—a regional political community—emerged at this time, which included regional and international NGOs, international agencies and academics, as well as state leaders and officials. I further argue that the tensions around agency arose not only between independent countries and the leaders of dependent territories and between small states and Fiji, but also between Australia and New Zealand and the island countries. The regional discourse of Pacific and international NGOs raised alternative versions of the boundaries of Pacific identity to those that were accepted by the ‘society of states’ and offered another view on how societies should be organised and developed.

In Chapter 8, I examine the development of regional governance over the first two decades of the postcolonial era, set against the backdrop of a changing global order dominated by the Cold War. Here the focus is on the region as a site of politics over self-determination and in relation to three key aspects of regional governance: environmental protection, anticolonialism and political agency within regional decision-making.

Chapter 9 deals with how the region mediated the impact of the changing global strategic order in the 1970s and 1980s. In the postcolonial period, the Cold War was the dominant global strategic order within which island societies had to work. It was a major part of the region-building story because of the efforts of Western powers to encourage an idea of ‘regional

security' as a way of countering possible Soviet influence in the island region from the mid 1970s. From that time, various interests promoted distinct meanings of 'regional security', each with very significant implications for Pacific societies. The nuclear issue was central to this debate. It was the global issue of highest concern for all parties and the ultimate case of a contest over Pacific community, identity and agency. The chapter considers the quite different conceptualisations of the United States, Australia, New Zealand, the island states and antinuclear groups, and again includes the central role of social science (security studies) in defining a regional strategic entity, giving content to the idea of regional security and creating a security personality for the typical island state.

Chapter 10 is concerned with the efforts of Pacific islanders to collectively influence their relationship with the global economic order and promote development, and the efforts of outside economic partners and UN agencies to influence regional development norms and practices through a regional approach. The chapter also considers the regionally organised critique of these ideas. I characterise the period as a shift from the regional integration ideas of the 1970s to the collective diplomacy ideas of the 1980s. Again, the social sciences are seen as part of this story, and particularly in the set of assumptions created about 'Pacific economic man', the Pacific entrepreneur, the 'smallness' assumption and in relation to modernisation and integration theory. This chapter is particularly concerned with the power of ideas transmitted at the regional level to establish norms about the concept of development and appropriate development policies.

Chapter 11 deals with the post-Cold War period from the 1990s into the twenty-first century, focusing on the dominant global pressure on the Pacific community: the attempt to impose a regional economic order based on neoliberal principles and a related discourse of 'good governance'. It focuses on attempts by donor countries, particularly Australia, to introduce institutions of regional governance in finance, investment and trade and instil regional norms of accountability and transparency. As part of this, it examines the ideas of development studies and their influence on policy, and the response of the Pacific leaders and NGOs. It includes the debate over the regional free-trade area, which has continued as a key issue in the second decade of the twenty-first century.

Chapter 12 explores the attempt by Australia and New Zealand in the post-Cold War era to reconceptualise the regional security 'problem' in the Pacific, and to rethink the regional approaches to its solution. Australia and New Zealand now saw threats as emanating not from foreign

powers, but rather from transnational forces interacting with the internal fragility and vulnerability of Pacific island states. Spurred initially in the early 1990s by global developments in transnational crime, then from 2000 by political crises in some Pacific island states, and then from 2001 by the global war on terror, Australia and New Zealand proposed ever deepening levels of regional integration to activate regional intervention both preemptively and at times of crisis. An attempt by Australia and New Zealand in 2018 to promote a geopolitical conceptualisation of Pacific regional security aimed at countering a perceived threat from China came up against a very different policy framing promoted by the Pacific island leaders—that of broader human security and climate change. This chapter examines this contest over the reframing of regional security and assesses its influence on regional security governance.

Chapter 13 examines a third key contest over region-building in the contemporary period: the emergence of a ‘new’ Pacific diplomacy and its challenge to the existing diplomatic culture, especially the question of who should control the regional institutions and the regional agenda. Primarily a contest over political agency, this brings the regional story back to the issues of the immediate post-independence period when Pacific island leaders asserted a Pacific right to regional self-determination. This chapter examines the implications of this contest for the framing of the regional architecture and for key areas of regional concern, particularly climate policy.

The concluding chapter returns to the question of the political meaning of Pacific regionalism as viewed through the unpacking of two key puzzles: first, what is the political significance of Pacific regionalism? And second, whom has this region-building project served? Who has power? In relation to the first puzzle, it makes an argument for viewing political significance not through the lens of the European model with its emphasis on integration and coercion, but rather through its political roles: as a regional arena for negotiating globalisation, as a source of regional governance through agreed norms, as a regional political community and as a diplomatic bloc. On the second puzzle, it considers conventional explanations of who has power in Pacific regionalism, focused on hegemonic states, globalisation and Pacific island states, before making an argument for a more complex amalgam of these explanations. It argues that how these complex power relations are resolved within Pacific regionalism at any given time is highly contingent. It suggests what the key contingent factors are based on this long history of Pacific regionalism.

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