

2

Rethinking the political meaning of Pacific regionalism

The premise for this study is that existing conceptual approaches to regionalism make it difficult to ‘see’ the political significance of the long history of region-building in the Pacific and the political authority of the forms of regional governance that have eventuated at various points in that history. The first section of this chapter seeks to explain why this is the case. I then consider the openings provided by some theorists who go beyond the dominant ‘new regionalism’ approaches towards developing a more useful reading of the political meaning of regionalism outside Europe. In the third section, I build on these openings to develop a conceptual approach to thinking about the politics of region-building in Oceania. The fourth section develops a new approach to understanding the political authority of regional governance in the absence of coercion. Finally, I develop a novel approach to thinking about the ultimate political question: for whom has the region-building project been intended?

The limitations of conventional approaches

Early regionalist theory, which dominated the study of regions as political entities from the 1950s until the 1970s, associated the political significance to be attached to region-building with the degree of success in moving along a continuum towards full integration. Underpinning this approach was a commitment to the desirability of achieving integration

for security and development purposes. The model was Western Europe. The European developments, which involved the prospect of the voluntary creation of a political unit larger than the nation-state, attracted the interest of political scientists. Prominent scholars such as Ernst Haas and Karl Deutsch saw this as a very significant development in international relations, which could be applied elsewhere, with benefits for the global order.¹ The approach they adopted is termed ‘analytical neofunctionalism’ because of its relationship to the neofunctionalist strategy for achieving political integration that underlay European regionalism.

The neofunctionalist strategy is a suggested means of moving from fully independent nation-states, through a stage of economic integration, and then on to full political unification. The approach adopted by Haas and other analytical neofunctionalists to the study of regionalism in Europe, and later in Africa and Latin America, reflected their concern with this strategy and with its proposed outcome—political integration or unification. They wanted to establish the structural conditions required for the neofunctionalist strategy to work.² The general theoretical question that governed their approach to the study of regionalism was: are there certain conditions under which economic integration of a group of nations automatically triggers political unity?³ For them, the political significance of regionalism started when states began to surrender sovereignty in achieving a high level of regional integration such as a customs union. Regional schemes that had not achieved this stage of integration were seen as politically insignificant.

This conceptual approach implicitly employed the analogy of the state as a basis for judgement about the political significance of the regional entity. Seen through this lens, regions begin to matter when they start to look like states—with centralised authority, policy instruments that bite, coercive sanctions if required and fixed and acknowledged boundaries

1 The pioneering works in the field were E.B. Haas, *The Uniting of Europe: Political, Social and Economic Forces, 1950–57*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958; and K.W. Deutsch, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957.

2 Robert Keohane and Joe Nye, ‘International Interdependence and Integration’, in F.I. Greenstein and N.W. Polsby, eds, *International Politics*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1975, pp. 363–414, at pp. 379–81.

3 Joseph S. Nye, ‘Patterns and Catalysts in Regional Integration’, in Joseph S. Nye, ed., *International Regionalism: Readings*, Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1968, pp. 333–49.

around given territory. With the failure of regional integration attempts outside Europe by the end of the 1970s, the political significance of this more restricted form of regionalism was generally dismissed.

To tell the Pacific story as a quest for the achievement of regional integration would require that we begin in the early 1970s with the stated goals and efforts of the postcolonial states to integrate their economies. We would focus only on regional institutions and cooperative schemes and see whether they were moving the region towards a new integrated entity. We would be particularly interested in the establishment of the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Co-operation (SPEC), the early commitment to promoting a regional free-trade area and the founding of a regional airline and a regional shipping line. With the failure of these integration attempts by the early 1980s, the story would trail off and the conclusion would be drawn that regionalism did not yet matter politically in the Pacific. In this formulation, power is associated with coercion and the focus remains firmly institutional.

The 'new regionalism' theorists who emerged during the mid 1990s were responding to what they saw as a substantial strengthening of existing regional institutions and the creation of a significant number of new regional associations among states since the mid 1980s.⁴ The so-called new regionalism is usually taken to have its roots in the *Single European Act* of 1986 and the move by the Ronald Reagan administration to negotiate 'regional' preferential trade agreements with Canada and Israel. The subsequent profound deepening and widening of European integration in the 1990s—culminating in the Maastricht Treaty, together with the creation of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1992—are cited as the most impressive institutional developments. However, more tentative developments in the economic arena in East Asia around the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation and Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and the dramatic increase in the number of new regional preferential trade agreements elsewhere in the world, were also seen as very important. The developments in Europe, Asia and North America, in particular, had by the mid 1990s suggested for many that the fundamentals of future world politics were to be found in the interaction

4 See Louise Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell, 'Introduction', in Louise Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell, eds, *Regionalism in World Politics: Regional Organization and International Order*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

of these three powerful economic blocs.⁵ Supporters of the notion of a new regionalism also point to the creation of new regional institutions and the reinvention of established ones in Latin America, the Middle East and Africa.⁶

While heralding the significance of a new wave of regionalism, these theorists at the same time implicitly denied the political significance of what went before. Despite the move away from the focus on regional integration and the shift to a central interest in the worldwide development of 'open regionalism', and its link to the globalisation of neoliberal ideas, the 'new regionalism' scholars also implicitly maintained the state analogy as their benchmark for judging political significance. The new regionalism was sparked first and foremost by new developments in European regionalism. Europe was therefore still seen implicitly as a model against which to view the global revival of regional associations. There was still a tendency to judge the power of new forms of regionalism elsewhere in terms of the degree of institutionalisation and formal organisation of governance.

Employing this lens, the Pacific would appear as part of Anthony Payne's 'pre-regionalist' governance category, which he uses to describe Asian regionalism compared with the more developed European regional governance model.⁷ The assumption here is that governance is associated with a level of political authority indicated by formal institutional development and the surrendering of sovereignty. This misses the political significance of the Pacific experience with its very different forms of regional governance. As we have seen, this is a lens shared by a number of scholars and practitioners who view regional governance as a desired good in the Pacific case rather than as having already formed an important part of the region-building story since the colonial period.

5 The developments in economic regionalism are well surveyed in Andrew Wyatt-Walter, 'Regionalism, Globalization, and World Economic Order', in Fawcett and Hurrell, *Regionalism in World Politics*.

6 These new developments in regionalism in Asia, Latin America and Africa are surveyed in Gamble and Payne, *Regionalism and World Order*; W. Andrew Axline, ed., *The Political Economy of Regional Cooperation: Comparative Case Studies*, London: Pinter Press, 1994; and Grugel and Hout, *Regionalism Across the North-South Divide*.

7 Anthony Payne, 'Globalization and Modes of Regionalist Governance', in Jon Pierre, ed., *Debating Governance: Authority, Steering, and Democracy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Openings to an alternative approach

How, then, should we think beyond the assumptions that regions must be significantly integrated and that formal regional governance is the key test of whether region-building should be seen as politically significant? How do we ‘see’ the political significance of forms of regionalism that fall below this threshold?

A first, important opening to this possibility is provided by Mohammed Ayoob’s idea of adapting Hedley Bull’s notion of ‘international society’ to regional international systems.⁸ In this view, the regional ‘society of states’ is a minimal society in which certain limited rules are acknowledged by the constituent states based on mutual interest. Implicit in this position is that regions can matter, if only minimally, even where states are not integrating into a regional whole and where state sovereignty is not surrendered to a regional authority.

Told as the development of a ‘society of states’, the region-building story in the Pacific, for example, would begin in 1971 and would explore the gradual development of the rules and norms governing the emergent society of states, such as non-intervention, equality and cooperation. While Ayoob sees many Third World regions as not yet having achieved the status of a ‘society of states’—and implicitly therefore as not having political significance—he would most likely see the Pacific as fitting his definition of such a society. This tells us some important things about the political role of regionalism in the Pacific that would be missed by those concerned only with integration or the surrendering of sovereignty entailed in free-trade areas, for example. But this is still a political significance derived from the power of the constituent states and their mutual interests. Its minimal social attributes do not really begin to get at the full political meaning of the regional site of politics in postcolonial contexts. It nevertheless provides a good starting point for thinking about this puzzle (the way in which a Pacific ‘society of states’ appears in the Pacific regional story is developed in some detail in Chapter 7).

Second, there are also important openings for an alternative understanding of the political significance of region-building in postcolonial regions among those theorists who see themselves as explicitly going beyond

8 Ayoob, ‘From Regional System to Regional Society’.

the Eurocentric assumptions of the ‘new regionalism’ theorists. Such theorists have attempted to lessen the emphasis on formal organisation and to elevate instead the political significance of social institutions and norms in regional practice. Promoted mainly by those who study Asian regionalism, this perspective has created an awareness that regions matter in different ways in different parts of the world and, in particular, that Asian regionalism is significant even while it lacks the formal institutionalisation of Europe.⁹ Fredrik Söderbaum makes a similar general point in relation to African regionalism—that the political purposes of state participants are very different from those assumed, and sometimes desired, by the ‘new regionalism’ theorists employing Europe as a model.¹⁰

Third, Peter Katzenstein’s characterisation of ‘the region’ as a political *arena* provides an important starting point for ‘seeing’ the politics of region-building in the Pacific. Rather than being caught up in seeing regionalism as static, fixed formal institutional structures, or as an integrative process, this conceptualisation creates the basis for thinking about regionalism as a site of politics.¹¹

Fourth, there are also potential theoretical openings in the efforts of some scholars to employ the analogy of ‘the nation’ to help in understanding the political meaning of ‘region’. Here the focus is on identity and region-building by states for particular political/cultural purposes, and the power of region-building is implicitly tied up with the region’s symbolic value as an ‘imagined community’. Employed most prominently by Iver Neumann in relation to Europe and Amitav Acharya in relation to South-East Asia, this approach is very useful in introducing identity into the discussion of the political significance of region-building.¹² These analysts also usefully remind us that regions are political constructions. Rather than having an objective reality, they are therefore to be seen as *for* someone and *for* some purpose. The politics of construction therefore becomes important in understanding what the region stands for, politically speaking.

9 See, in particular, Kanishka Jayasuriya, ed., *Governing the Asia Pacific: Beyond the ‘New Regionalism’*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

10 Fredrik Söderbaum, ‘Modes of Regional Governance in Africa: Neoliberalism, Sovereignty Boosting, and Shadow Networks’, *Global Governance*, 10(4), 2004: 419–36.

11 Peter J. Katzenstein, in Kohli et al., ‘The Role of Theory in Comparative Politics’.

12 Iver Neumann, *Uses of the Other: ‘The East’ in European Identity Formation*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, pp. 113–15; Amitav Acharya, *The Quest for Identity: International Relations of Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 2000.

However, Neumann's and Acharya's positions are limited by their use of the Andersonian concept of 'imagined community' to explore the analogy of the nation.¹³ Where Benedict Anderson was seeking to understand the deep cultural roots that create a 'life and death' attachment on the part of ordinary people to an imagined national community, these scholars are attempting to understand a community of states, with a much shallower level of affectation. To adapt Anderson's test for the existence of a national identity, Europeans are not about to die for the idea of Europe. This elite-driven quest for a collective regional identity of states is, of course, an important part of the story. But, while drawing attention to the importance of the contest among these elites, this perspective leaves out the normative contest among those outside the region who wish to influence the content to be given to the idea of 'Europe' or 'South-East Asia'. This state-centric approach also leaves out nonstate actors and knowledge-makers in policy circles and in international and regional agencies, academia and the media.

A fifth opening for a more useful approach is therefore provided by those who recognise this gap in the state-centric 'new regionalism' literature. Söderbaum and Timothy Shaw, for example, have called for more attention to civil society and transnational actors in the theorising of 'new regionalism'.¹⁴ In relation to the Pacific case, Nicole George has made a persuasive case for the lack of attention to more informal modes of Pacific island regional integration, which she terms 'bottom-up' regionalism. She illustrates her case by showing the importance of Pacific women's regional peacebuilding collaborations since the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁵

Sixth, Andrew Gamble and Anthony Payne introduce the 'neo-medievalist' image to describe the overlapping authorities, identities and jurisdictions involved in the relationship between the regional level and the state and global levels of governance, thereby introducing the possibility of moving the debate away from a fixation on separate authority spheres with a zero-sum power relationship between them.¹⁶ Typically, theories of regionalism previously assumed that an increase in regional integration necessarily

13 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1983.

14 Fredrik Söderbaum and Timothy M. Shaw, 'Conclusion: What Futures for New Regionalism?', in Fredrik Söderbaum and Timothy M. Shaw, eds, *Theories of New Regionalism: A Palgrave Reader*, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, pp. 211–25, at pp. 220–2.

15 Nicole George, 'Pacific Women Building Peace: A Regional Perspective', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 23(1), 2011: 37–71.

16 Gamble and Payne, 'Conclusion', p. 263.

meant a surrendering of state sovereignty. Gamble and Payne's point provides the basis for seeing a much more complex relationship between the global, regional and national levels of authority.

Taken together, all of these seemingly disparate ideas provide a foundation for developing a novel approach to the political meaning of region-building that can help us 'see' the otherwise obscured political significance of the regional level of politics in the Pacific. Of particular interest for the approach developed here are the insights that the region is a site of political contest; that the regional polity should be broadly conceived to include 'bottom-up' regionalism; that there is an intertwining of power at the national, regional and global levels; and that region-building should be seen as a political contest that matters even in the absence of formal regional governance or high levels of regional integration.

Characterising the politics of regionalism

The starting point in developing an alternative conceptual approach that is better able to capture the political significance of the Pacific case, and perhaps other cases, is the proposition that the political meaning of regionalism is best understood as a site of contest over how people in a region should live their lives in the context of an impinging, but changing global order.¹⁷ I argue that this is seen most usefully as a battle of big ideas about what constitutes a legitimate political community, whether at regional, national or substate levels. These contests can then be seen as legitimacy contests over rightful rule and, at a fundamental level, as a contest between different legitimating principles of regional governance.

These contests can usefully be broken down further, to being over three key aspects of legitimate political community: purpose, identity and agency. The contest over purpose includes such questions as how should the community be developed, secured and governed, and how should disputes be resolved? The contest over identity includes the questions not only of 'who belongs', but also of 'on what basis'. Should it be, for example, on the basis of race, appearance, residence, normative commitment or territorial attachment? This may take the form of struggles over formal membership of regional organisations, cartographic decisions about inclusion on a map or declarations about the basis of identity or implied in the use of 'us'

17 I am defining politics as 'the contest over how we live'.

and ‘them’ when referring to regional labels such as the Pacific or Oceania. The struggle over the third aspect of legitimate political community not only includes the question of who is regarded as legitimate to speak on behalf of the region; it also includes the issue of who has the right to represent the region and create knowledge about it and on what basis.

A key aspect of this normative contest over a legitimate regional political community is that it always occurs in the context of reacting or adapting to, invoking, resisting or moderating global processes and ideas. This is to argue that the ideas and processes associated with a changing global order set the *agenda* and *terms* of debate, but not the *outcome*. In the case of the Pacific, for example, it is contended that the normative contest over region-building has to be seen against a backdrop of imperialism, colonialism, decolonisation, the Cold War, the post–Cold War changes in the global economy and global governance. It is just as importantly to be seen against changing influential Western or global ideas such as imperialism, Darwinism, ‘native welfare’, self-determination, neoliberalism, biodiversity, gender equality, ‘good governance’, human rights and sustainable development.

This conceptualisation of the politics of region-building that sees it both as a site of contest over legitimate purpose, identity and political agency *and* as a mediator of global ideas and processes opens up the region-building story in several important ways. It focuses our attention on the actual political role of region-building at a particular time, rather than only those aspects of the regional experience that are seen as contributing to, or obstructing, the achievement of a supposed goal of regional integration, formal organisation or a surrendering of sovereignty. It also suggests the importance of viewing the political significance of region-building over the *longue durée* and, for colonised regions, at least back to the global order of colonialism. The attempts to influence how people live in a particular region began in the colonial period, if not before. Global influences on the framing of regions did not start with the neoliberal globalisation of the 1980s and the advent of new regionalism.

This conceptualisation also suggests a broader regional political arena. The contest over purpose, identity and agency is likely to be found as much in textbooks and international agency reports as it is in diplomatic gatherings; in battles over organisational membership as much as it is in substantive debate about development programs; and in the deployment of concepts such as ‘regional security’ as much as it is in relation to positions

taken in treaty negotiations. It follows that this conceptualisation of region-building also includes a much broader range of protagonists than is usual in studies of regionalism, in which, even among critical regionalism scholars, the analysis can be surprisingly state-centric.¹⁸ States are not the only actors in this arena. Civil society organisations, knowledge-makers, artists, scholars, sovereignty and independence movements and international agencies are also very much part of this political story.

The political authority of regional governance

While there is an ongoing normative contest in the regional arena over what the regional political community should stand for as a set of ideas, there is at any one period in this history a dominant set of norms that contributes to the shaping of how society is organised and how individuals live their lives. These dominant framing ideas and guiding principles may find expression in law and formal organisations or in less formalised norms of conduct. This conceptualisation of regional governance is broader than that commonly used in the new regionalism debate, where it is seen either as formal institutionalisation or as diffuse regional networks based on economic interdependence. The existence of significant governance of the kind I am positing here crucially depends on the authority of normative framing.

In thinking about the sources of the authority of this regional governance, my starting point is Edward Said's *Orientalism*.¹⁹ Although he focused on British, French and American representations of the Middle and Far East, Said's ideas are relevant to other contexts in which peoples are grouped together and represented by outsiders who wish at the same time to manage, control or prescribe for the peoples they are depicting. Said's central thesis is that, in the case of Europeans and Americans depicting the Orient, this has never just been a harmless imagining of far-off places: it contributed to, and became part of, the structure of power. He argues that this knowledge has an impact on the people so depicted, not just because it informs and justifies colonial and neocolonial practices by providing the lenses through which Europeans see the Orient and make policies for it, but also because it begins to be taken on as a self-image by those so depicted.

18 See, for example, Neumann, *Uses of the Other*.

19 Said, *Orientalism*.

The full authoritative significance of this regional framing in colonial and postcolonial contexts can only be understood if we are aware that the community being shaped is not only the *regional* community; the making of ‘region’ is also accompanied by the making of an idealised *local* society. Said famously drew attention to this ‘double move’—of affecting *the regional* and *the local* at the same time—as part of Orientalism. He claims that the framing of a vast region called the Orient—and the generalised depiction of an idealised regional identity—was at once to create an idealised Oriental person and an idealised local Oriental society. And because of its authority as knowledge and its attachment to the power of imperialism, this depiction was powerful.²⁰

In relation to the Pacific island region, Epeli Hau’ofa has argued that such authoritative depictions not only influence the behaviour of the powerful; they also have in the past affected the self-image of ‘subordinates’, whether images of darkness prior to Christianity being brought by the missionaries or images of inferiority captured, for example, in the term ‘boy’ to refer to an adult man. Although Hau’ofa was concerned about the influence of previous Western conceptions on the self-image of Pacific islanders, his main concern was with the representation of Pacific island states as small and powerless, as promoted by social scientists, consultants, international agencies and metropolitan governments in their framings of the region in the postcolonial period.²¹ What distressed him was the disempowering effect of this conception; its determinism, he contended, perpetuated dependency and subordination.

Although seemingly lacking the intimacy of face-to-face communities, Pacific regional governance has an intimacy in its influence that operates through this double move. In such a case the individual may know nothing about their membership of the Pacific regional community but could still be affected intimately because of the regional contest over the norms governing the idealised local Pacific society and ‘Pacific islander’ and the link between these dominant conceptions and policy, whether that policy be that of the transnational church, the colonial or postcolonial state, international agencies or aid donors.

20 *ibid.*, pp. 26–7.

21 Hau’ofa, ‘Our Sea of Islands’ (1994), p. 149.

I propose to develop the argument that the authority of regional governance in postcolonial situations in particular is derived from the strategic location of the regional site of politics in a globalising world. It sits between global management, global norms and knowledge-making, on the one hand, and local aspirations for development, security and sovereignty, on the other. The region has had a key role as a knowledge and management category and therefore as a site for the determination of authoritative conceptions of what the idealised political community is and ought to be. The region takes a special role as a knowledge and policy category in global management, and in local resistance to it. For those seeking to have global reach in influencing how society is organised, the idea of dividing the world into regions is compelling as a management strategy. It is a strategy adopted by foreign offices, the United Nations, international agencies, aid bureaus and international NGOs such as Amnesty International and Greenpeace. This tendency is not new, although it is now more widespread. It was, for example, natural for imperial powers to map and categorise far-off places and group and name them.

Another source of authority for regional governance in postcolonial contexts is its role in granting legal personality and bestowing legitimacy on would-be sovereignties, whether aspiring states or nations. It is not that we are seeing a transfer of authority and sovereignty from the state to the region, rather that each is mutually constitutive. This is to argue that the region has both strengthened the authority of other levels of governance and been strengthened by this process. This authoritative role for regional governance is seen in its control over who is accepted as a member of the regional society of states or as sharing a regional cultural identity. Regional governance can have a legitimating function for states, social movements and peoples in the granting of legal personality, the recognition of sovereignty and the conferring of legitimacy. As a political community, it can bestow regional citizenship and a right to belong and participate—a right that has been valued and, in some cases, hard-fought.

In conceptualising the sources of power for regional governance, the emphasis here is on the authority of policy-related knowledge systems situated at the strategic location of the regional site, together with the legitimating functions associated with sovereignty. This is not to deny the importance of other sources of power associated with regional governance. Collective diplomacy, for example, based on more traditional sources of power such as a pooling of bargaining power and voting power

in international forums, is a major part of the regional governance story. Nor is this an argument for the absolute authority of regional governance in Pacific life. In this regard, this study endorses Gamble and Payne's characterisation of regional governance as one of several intersecting layers of authority in world politics.²² In the Pacific case, I propose to demonstrate how the regional layer of authority interacts with nation-building, as well as with global governance, to shape how Pacific societies are organised.

Who is regional governance for?

Telling the regional politics story as a contest over the nature of legitimate political community in a context of global change reveals much about the source and nature of the authority of regional governance, and the political significance of regional diplomacy. However, it still leaves hanging the question: Who exercises this power? Who has the regional enterprise been for? In contemporary studies of regionalism, this question takes the form of asking: to what extent is regionalism or regional governance to be seen as serving global or local interests? The new regionalism literature was spurred by the advent of new forms of regional association emerging from the late 1980s in response to the regionalist policies of the United Nations and the United States and the global spread of neoliberal economic discourse. The approach of those focusing on the political significance of regions in the security realm assumed that regions were working for the purposes of global or regional hegemonic states. Seen from this realist perspective, regional organisations reflect geopolitical management of regional security. For many of those coming at the new regionalism from the angle of an international political economy or economics, new regionalism represented the dominance of global economic ideas promoted through UN institutions, the West and global economic managers.

An interesting bridging of these two spheres is contained in Katzenstein's argument that global politics needs to be seen as a 'world of regions' in an American imperium. This bridges the international political economy and security aspects of regionalism. It also links the global hegemon, the American imperium, to regional hegemons—Germany in Europe

22 Gamble and Payne, 'Conclusion'.

and Japan in Asia. This approach sees regional governance as ultimately determined by American power but with the proviso that the US Government may be constrained by the system of regions it has set up.

Katzenstein's approach provides an important entry point into the question of 'who is it for?'. This answer to the question of who exercises power in the regional arena appears at first glance to be a highly relevant approach to the Pacific case.²³ Like Germany and Japan, Australia is both a pro-American ally and a regional power in the postcolonial Pacific region, and has actively sought to give leadership to region-building. There is open talk of Australia having responsibility on behalf of the United States, or more broadly on behalf of the West, for managing this area in security and diplomatic terms. However, Australia also has its own hegemonic agenda, with its very long history, in relation to the control of the region. In the late nineteenth century, Otto von Bismarck called it the 'Australasian Monroe doctrine'.²⁴ In 1883, concern about building capacity to flex muscle in managing security in the Pacific island region was the prime motive for organising the intercolonial convention to talk about creating the Australian nation.²⁵ The Australian attempt to exert hegemonic power over regional governance in the Pacific on its own behalf therefore assumes a prime focus in this inquiry. Although the general realist argument about regional governance serving the interests of the regional hegemon, and Katzenstein's more nuanced argument about a world of regions in service of American power, opens up key areas of understanding in the Pacific case, I propose to argue that we nevertheless need to explore a more complex and contingent characterisation of who is served by regional governance.

A second entry point into the issue of 'who is it for?' is to consider Richard Falk's question: Does 'the region' act as a new defender of local interests against undesirable global processes and ideas? Or, conversely, does it act as an agent of global forces?²⁶ This focus on globalisation fits well with the characterisation of the politics of regional governance presented above, as being about a normative contest, which mediates and negotiates large

23 Peter J. Katzenstein, *A World of Regions: Asia and Europe in the American Imperium*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005.

24 Merze Tate, 'The Australasian Monroe Doctrine: Genesis of the Doctrine', *Political Science Quarterly*, 76(2), 1961: 264–84, at p. 281.

25 Alfred Deakin, *The Federal Story: The Inner History of the Federal Cause, 1880–1900*, Melbourne: Robertson & Mullins, 1944.

26 Falk, 'Regionalism and World Order after the Cold War'.

global framing ideas and interventions. Falk's general argument is that 'the region' is not acting as a shield for local societies against the onslaught of neoliberal processes and ideas, but is instead becoming an agent of this form of globalisation.

This book offers a different answer for the Pacific. While Falk's 'shield' analogy creates an opening for thinking about the power of region vis-a-vis global processes, I depart from his approach on a number of key points: first, in seeing this mediating role as crucial in understanding the power of regional governance and certainly not to be dismissed; second, in seeing this role as longstanding rather than emerging with potential in the 1990s; third, in not limiting globalisation to economic processes of neoliberalism but in broadening it to include all global processes; fourth, in rejecting the simple 'global versus local' dichotomy inherent in Falk's approach; and, finally, in seeing local agency as always present, although contingent.

Amitav Acharya provides a third entry point. He introduces the local agency of Asian elites in explaining regional organisational outcomes. He seeks to establish the power of norm-takers in the face of global norm diffusion. With his focus on the ideas that frame regional outcomes and its emphasis on the power of 'Asia's cognitive prior', Acharya opens up the possibility of local agency and a more contingent view of whose interests—global or local—particular regional outcomes might represent.²⁷ His position has the limitation, however, of seeing a homogeneous 'global' and 'local' and a preordained 'Asian cognitive prior'. I propose an approach to understanding the question 'who is regional governance for' that both expands on the contingent nature of the outcomes of this contest and problematises the categories of 'the local' and 'the global' in these power exchanges over the ideas that influence region-building and regional governance.

27 Amitav Acharya, *Whose Ideas Matter? Agency and Power in Asian Regionalism*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009.

To achieve this, I draw on the rich debate concerning the relationship between European material and normative power and indigenous island societies that has appeared in Pacific history and Pacific anthropology.²⁸ The debate has focused particularly on the impact of imperialism on Pacific island society in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The approaches that were put forward as part of that debate can be usefully adapted to the concerns of this book, especially on the question of who exercises power in the interaction of global processes and ideas and local practices in the regional arena of politics.

One position in this debate—associated particularly with early scholars of the Western influence on Pacific island societies—sees Pacific island contact with the global forces of imperialism, colonialism and capitalism as constituting a ‘fatal impact’.²⁹ European ideas and practices are seen as displacing and destroying local ways; Pacific islanders are seen only as passive recipients or victims as their societies changed inevitably towards the Western mode.

A second approach has stressed the importance of an island-centred history, island resistance to or mediation of global influences and the differences in experience of different island groups thus moving away from the dramatic regionwide generalisations associated with the ‘fatal impact’ histories.³⁰ This alternative position represents the interface as a more complex interaction, involving islander agendas and influences.

A third approach, coming from a more structuralist position, begins with a critique of the celebration of Pacific islander agency that had been prevalent in Pacific history and seeks to reinsert the island world into

28 Robert Borofsky, ed., *Remembrance of Pacific Pasts: An Invitation to Remake History*, Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2000; Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991; Nicholas Thomas, *In Oceania: Visions, Artifacts, Histories*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997; Kerry R. Howe, *Where the Waves Fall: A New South Sea Islands History from First Settlement to Colonial Rule*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1984, pp. 347–52.

29 The definitive portrait of this school of thought is provided in Kerry R. Howe, ‘The Fate of the “Savage” in Pacific Historiography’, *New Zealand Journal of History*, 11(2), 1977: 137–54. For oft-cited examples of this school, see Alan Moorehead, *The Fatal Impact: An Account of the Invasion of the South Pacific, 1767–1840*, Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1968; Douglas L. Oliver, *The Pacific Islands*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961; and J.C. Furnas, *Anatomy of Paradise: Hawaii and the Islands of the South Seas*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1950.

30 This is associated with the modern school of Pacific history under the leadership of J.W. Davidson at The Australian National University. See J.W. Davidson, ‘Problems of Pacific History’, *Journal of Pacific History*, 1(1), 1966: 5–21; Howe, *Where the Waves Fall*, pp. 347–52.

a larger global system that has often suppressed local societies.³¹ Brij Lal, for example, while being careful not to embrace the extremes of the ‘fatal impact’ position, and after recognising the vast range of experiences where islander agency was exercised, nevertheless asserts that in thinking about the impact of colonial rule we need to move the emphasis away from an unthinking celebration of Pacific islander agency (which, he argues, is in danger of becoming a new orthodoxy) in contexts where outside forces clearly have set the agenda. After all, he argues, ‘the ultimate aim’ of the colonial administrators was ‘the subversion of the indigenous cultural and moral order’.³²

This study broadly supports the characterisation of the power engagement developed by Howe and Lal—a position that recognises local agency but also acknowledges that such agency acts within a very powerful structure of the global system, whether colonial or postcolonial.³³ However, it also adapts the insights of those who write from a more postcolonial and poststructural perspective pointing out messy entanglements between the West and Pacific islanders. Nicholas Thomas’s approach, developed in his work mainly in relation to the colonial period, is of particular relevance. His characterisation of ‘colonialism’s culture’ is very useful in contemplating the very different, often conflicting, discourses that fall under the label ‘global’ in the postcolonial period.³⁴ Local agency is also differentiated. My starting point is that there are ‘complex entanglements’ between particular local agents and particular global discourses at work in the regional site of politics in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, just as in the engagements in the nineteenth-century cases that Thomas analysed.

Telling the Pacific region-building story

Reflecting the conceptual approach developed above, the following chapters are snapshots of region-building against the backdrop of a changing global order from the colonial period through to the present day. Each chapter is set in the context of a changing global structure of power—from imperial, to Cold War, to post-Cold War, to the war on

31 Howe et al., *Tides of History*.

32 Brij V. Lal, ‘The Passage Out’, in Howe et al., *Tides of History*.

33 Kerry Howe, ‘Preface’, in Howe et al., *Tides of History*; and Lal, in *ibid.*, p. 444.

34 Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism’s Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994.

terror and to the rise of Asia—and the pressures this imposes on Pacific societies, such as colonial expansion, resource exploitation, nuclear testing, war and trade and investment. This is accompanied by a change in the large global framing ideas: imperialism, Darwinism, ideas of native welfare and trusteeship, self-determination, modernisation, neoliberalism, democracy and ‘good governance’. The chapters are also set against a changing political situation within Pacific societies and states—from colonised societies to emergent new state politics associated with state-building and negotiating global relationships, to state disruption, civil conflict and coups.

The chronological snapshot approach to telling the story further reveals the changing nature of the regional polity. At the outset, the political players contesting how the idealised Pacific island society should be organised are all European—colonial administrators, missionaries, writers and social scientists. From the late colonial period, an emergent indigenous elite then introduces itself as a set of actors in this regional story—some as scholars and others as national leaders and civil society advocates. After 1970, a wider set of global actors also joins this broadening array of indigenous participants in a more complex regional polity. These include former colonial powers and new interests from China, the European Union, Indonesia, Japan, Russia, South Korea and Taiwan, and various nonstate actors—international NGOs such as Greenpeace and Amnesty International, international agencies and private sector associations.

The focus of each chapter is the political contest over legitimate regional political community in the Pacific set against the backdrop of a changing world order and its framing ideas. For example, the story begins as a contest between various global actors over the agency of Pacific peoples. This normative contest was intimately linked to the power of colonialism and imperialism and centred on a tension between the right of self-determination and the possibility of political agency for Pacific islanders. This normative contest remained centre-stage in the political contests between the 1940s and the 1970s. In subsequent periods, the self-determination debates continued but were matched by a series of regional contests over how independent Pacific states should be organised around questions of development, security, sovereignty, ecology and national governance, in the face of global pressures.

Shadowing—or often foreshadowing—policy contests over how to manage Oceanic societies has been an academic debate over the content of the idea of the Pacific. These academic representations of Oceania have

been important because they have often provided the presuppositions on which policy is built. While for some scholars, the region has provided a comparative frame, for others it has become a unitary category such as 'state' or 'society' that is portrayed as having its own economy, culture or ecosystem. The latter approach has encouraged regional generalisations and the creation of an idealised Pacific island state, society or person. These conceptualisations have often taken the form of powerful images—'the fragile region', 'the nuclear playground', 'earth's empty quarter', the Pacific 'doomsday scenario', 'the hole in the Asia-Pacific doughnut', the 'vulnerable' region, the 'nonviable' region, the 'failed' region, 'the Pacific paradox'—that have become preconceptions in policy debates.

Thus, in this story of Pacific regional governance, 'Pacific studies' is seen as an important part of the politics of region-building and of the normative contests over how people should live in postcolonial Pacific states. The role of anthropology in the 1920s and 1930s is examined in supporting ideas of native welfare and trusteeship as a regionwide policy. In the 1960s and 1970s, economists and geographers played an important role in shaping the regional narrative concerning the problem and the solution for Pacific island states. In the 1980s and beyond, strategic studies, political science, environmental studies and economics came to the fore. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Pacific academics promoted Pacific epistemology and the decolonisation of Pacific studies. Each of these interventions has influenced the regional policy debate about how Pacific societies should be organised.

As well as characterising these normative contests over regional governance and the legitimating principles at stake in these struggles, the task of each chapter is to reflect on what eventuates as a form of regional governance. What does regional governance stand for at various points and whose interests and ideas are represented? What legitimating principles does it represent? As a crucial part of tracing the nature of regional governance, the book depicts the changing nature of the governing ideas and the influence of knowledge-making on them. The story shows the strong involvement of key academic disciplines but also of the major agencies—the World Bank, AusAID, Amnesty International, Greenpeace and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)—in defining 'the Pacific problem' and proposing 'the Pacific answer'. This policy-related knowledge provides a significant basis for the authority of regional governance.

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