PREFACE

By Licínia Simão and Daniela Bianka Marggraff

The decision to develop an academic publication dedicated to analysing Africa's role in ocean-related debates and policies emerged from work carried out at the University of Pretoria (UP) in South Africa as part of the Ocean Regions Programme (ORP) under the leadership of the late Prof. Maxi Schoeman. Building on a network of academic partnerships, initially structured around a short course on International Relations in the Indian Ocean in which the University of Pretoria is involved but also supported by Erasmus+ research and teaching mobility funds and funding from the South African National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS), the ORP reached out to policy makers and academics, particularly by hosting four colloquia on ocean regions governance between 2022 and 2025. The agenda of recognising, confronting and mitigating seablindness and increasing the visibility of ocean issues, at a time when South Africa is playing an active role in BRICS+ (having hosted the summit in 2023), and in other multilateral frameworks (including chairing the G20 in 2025), has provided opportunities to explore emerging insights and recommendations from the perspectives of academics and researchers.

The inaugural colloquium, *The Rise of Ocean Regions: Governance Challenges for the Indo-Pacific and the Atlantic*, held in 2022 in collaboration with the Atlantic Centre in Portugal and the United Nations Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies, brought together scholars from South Africa, Mozambique, France, Brazil and Portugal, amongst others, to explore the ocean region governance challenges that face the Indo-Pacific and the Atlantic oceans (ORP 2022). The following year, the programme's second colloquium, *Ocean Regions in an Era of Global Transformations*, was again held at UP, bringing together academics, researchers and practitioners from South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Mauritius, Cameroon, Rwanda, Brazil, India, Greece, Portugal, Australia and the UK to discuss approaches to—and experiences of—ocean region-making and governance with a specific focus on Africa's position, role and agency (ORP 2023).

The third colloquium, *Oceans and Ocean Regions Governance,* held in partnership with the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), expanded the

conversation to include island states, legal developments in the law of the sea, climate-induced transformations such as sea-level rise, emerging technologies for seabed exploitation and the implications of BRICS+ and the G20 (ORP 2024). It highlighted questions around territoriality, sovereignty, statehood and citizenship in the context of rapidly shifting oceanic realities. The final event held in 2025 was a conference co-hosted by the Ocean Regions Programme and the African Centre for the Study of the United States, titled *Africa, the US and the Geoeconomics of the Seas*. This conference was probably the widest in geographic scope among past iterations, including both polar regions—the Arctic and Antarctica—as well as perspectives from the US, the Indian Ocean Region, the Black Sea, the Atlantic, the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. In essence, these iterations all served the overarching purpose of being, as articulated by Yvonne Owuor at the third ORP colloquium, 'preoccupied with the place, future of the many Africas, including Oceanic Africa, in crafting a new kind of future'.

These encounters promoted valuable interactions from which a research agenda emerged that challenged dominant perspectives on the oceans and promoted a structured research agenda for African oceans. By bringing together junior and senior scholars with an interdisciplinary outlook on maritime issues, as well as decision-makers and other stakeholders, the Ocean Regions Programme provides a valuable starting point for continent-wide reflection on the value of ocean regions as a framework for addressing maritime affairs in Africa. The scope of contributions to the four colloquia over time, covering topics ranging from naval affairs and international law to the blue economy, international relations, technology and climate issues, is a testament to the significant interest generated by this topic. It also demonstrates Prof. Schoeman's ability to bring together knowledgeable individuals and generate significant interest.

Following the untimely passing away of Prof. Schoeman in September 2025, the editors of this edited volume were faced with a formidable task. Although we had worked closely with Prof. Schoeman in organising the colloquia and developing the Ocean Regions Programme, her vision for the publication was very much her own. While we had no doubt that completing the book project would be the best tribute to her stewardship over the years, we were also dealing with the sudden loss of a friend and mentor. In part, keeping the legacy of the Ocean Regions Programme alive by making it available to a wider audience through this edited volume was a way of coping with our grief. Fortunately, we were never alone in this endeavour, finding many valuable colleagues who supported our work in a multitude of ways.

We would like to begin by expressing our sincere gratitude to the NIHSS for its generous support of this project. This funding made possible not only the development of this edited volume but also the conferences and collaborative spaces that sustained it. Just as importantly, it enabled the participation and scholarly growth of several contributors. We acknowledge the Department of Political Sciences at the University of Pretoria for providing an institutional base for the Programme, as well as key staff members, Mr Roland Henwood, Dr Robin Blake and Mr Anthony Bizos, who played a large role in the formation of the Ocean Regions Programme and the establishment of networks worldwide.

Special thanks are also due to Prof. Chris Alden from LSE IDEAS, who played a valuable role throughout this process; to Prof. Valur Ingimundarson from the University of Iceland for his invaluable input, support and advice on the edited volume; and to Kostas Ifantis from the University of Panteion, all of whom became members of the Ocean Regions Programme's Advisory Board after the passing of Prof. Schoeman. Equally so, we are very much indebted to all the authors who contributed to this edited volume, as well as to those who would have liked to contribute but were unable to meet the deadlines, for sharing their immense knowledge with us. The edited volume is not only a culmination of those who contributed, but also a product of discussions over the last several years, which included valuable interactions with colleagues dear to us: Yu-Shan Wu, Jaimal Anand, Samuel Oyewole, Timothy Walker, Sanusha Naidu, Denys Reva, David Willima, Kingsley Makhubela, Ambassador Anil Sooklal (to name but a few). We would also like to thank Heather Thuynsma and her team at the Emerging Scholars Initiative (ESI) Press for their support in publishing the manuscripts during a difficult time, as well as to Sonja Theron for her foreword and her leadership in taking the project forward.

We see this edited volume, which constitutes one of the academic outputs of this work, as a tribute to all those who felt inspired by Prof. Schoeman's vision of the value of the ocean which shapes our own approach to academic cooperation and indeed life. At sea, cooperation is key for survival, and cooperation has been the most important asset on our journey to bring this work to completion. We hope you feel as inspired as we do by these reflections and that you continue to contribute to improving awareness of our shared challenge in managing the global ocean in a sustainable way for all.

REFERENCE LIST

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