FOREWORD

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In 2007, I entered a lecture hall at the University of Pretoria to attend my introductory module on International Relations (IR). I expected the usual lecture on concepts and theories. Instead, the lecturer stood in front of hundreds of students, each with a different social, economic and cultural background, not fifteen years after the end of apartheid and walked us through one of the most essential driving forces in international relations: perspective. That lecturer was the late Professor Maxi Schoeman. She taught us not only to understand the perspective of others but also to interrogate our own. Perspective influences the interpretations, narratives, decisions, imaginaries and realities of international relations. It explains why the threat of climate change can seem existential to one and peripheral to another; why perceived success in making and building peace can also be read as a failure; and why, faced with the same crisis, two states will embark on different, and sometimes opposing, solutions. It also explains how shifting our level of analysis from the global to the regional generates new interpretations of international dynamics and ideas free of the burdens of Western-centrism disguised as universality. The regional reveals the constructed imaginaries that shape perception, behaviour and power. To push this even further, what does shifting our perspective of the region from the territorial to the oceanic reveal?

Following that first encounter, I came to know Prof. Schoeman as a supervisor, boss and colleague, and if I were to identify one unifying thread in her research and daily work, it would be her understanding of and respect for perspective. In these books, and in her foundation of the Ocean Regions Programme, she continues this tradition with her co-editors Prof. Licínia Simão and Dr Daniela Bianka Marggraff. The Ocean Regions Programme was created to convene, compare and collate differing perspectives on Oceanic IR. It became an incubator of ideas designed to shed the seablind label attached to both academic and policy spaces. In doing this, it centred ideas from a diversity of traditions, professions, disciplines and locations. It produced an epistemic community of scholars and

practitioners whose contributions interrogate the meaning of the ocean, its intersection with international relations and its commentary on power. The result is a work, codified in this edited volume, that ultimately questions how the ocean is understood and encountered when viewed from different perspectives.

Why oceans? The ocean has been the site of and borne witness to many a watershed moment in international relations. From the facilitation of early contact, exchange and discovery across the Indian Ocean and the Pacific, to the medium of conquest, colonisation and slavery, the ocean carries the memory of humanity's triumphs and greatest atrocities. We now know that whales felt and still carry with them the stress of the cataclysm that was World War II.[1] What will the ocean remember 80 years from now? As we enter the latter half of the United Nations Decade of the Ocean, the ocean sits at the heart of many regional and global crises. The Strait of Hormuz, previously considered only of importance by experts of the Middle East and those passing through its narrow waters, has entered global consciousness. Repeated supply chain disruptions caused by accidental obstructions in canals to geopolitical turmoil slow global and local economies. And most concerning, the Blue Machine[2] that cleans our air, calibrates our seasons and sustains our ecosystems is collapsing[3].

These challenges cannot be understood through our traditional lens of regions bound by continental and territorial boundaries. By shifting the understanding of region to the oceanic, the editors and contributors of this book shift our perspective of global trends and power dynamics. They prioritise the African perspective by focusing not only on Africa's oceans, but also on Africa's intersection with the world's one ocean. Part One starts with an exploration of the concept of ocean regions. Here, the contributors reinterrogate established concepts and issues in international relations, including regions, international law and governance, from an oceanic perspective. Part Two directs our attention to Africa's role in governing oceans, resulting in a robust mapping and analysis of African agency through both traditional and non-traditional forms of power. In a discipline that has marginalised both oceanic and African perspectives, the contributions of this project serve to recalibrate our point of view.

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1 Measurements of historical cortisol levels reveal a stress response among whales during the years of WWII (Pavid, K. 2018. Whale earwax reveals just how much human activity can stress out marine mammals. *Natural History Museum*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/news/2018/november/whale-earwax-reveals-just-how-much-human-activity-can-stress-out.html. (Accessed 19 May 2026).

2 In her book, Helen Czerski uses the metaphor of a blue machine to illustrate the role the ocean plays in the way our planet functions (Czerski, H. 2023. *The Blue Machine: How the Ocean Shapes Our World*. Great Britain: Penguin Random House UK).

3 As an illustrative example, recent models suggest the Atlantic current system is likely to approach collapse at the end of this century (Carrington, D. 2026. Critical Atlantic current significantly more likely to collapse than thought. *The Guardian*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2026/apr/15/critical-atlantic-current-significantly-more-likely-to-collapse-than-thought. (Accessed 19 May 2026.)

As we move into an uncertain geopolitical future, this recalibration is needed not only to understand emerging issues but also to identify opportunities. Prof. Maxi Schoeman had an eye for the future and potential in things. The Ocean Regions Programme, the networks it built and the emerging scholars it fostered, both epitomised in the editors and authors of this work, serve as a final reminder of this. The Ocean Regions Programme seeks to take her work forward by capitalising on the networks and oceanic consciousness that have been fostered among scholars and practitioners since its inception. Having confronted seablindness by centring the ocean, it now moves towards investigating, understanding and responding to the region's maritime challenges. It does so from an interdisciplinary posture, having discovered this imperative during the annual colloquia held at UP. Furthermore, it looks towards the future of oceans, employing future thinking to bridge the divide between policy and community, in a new endeavour—Ocean Futures—which rests within the Human Futures project of the Emerging Scholars Initiative (ESI) in the Faculty of Humanities at UP. The Ocean Regions Programme and its associated projects have been entrusted to emerging scholars mentored and trained by Prof. Maxi Schoeman.

May this work carry Prof Schoeman's legacy forward, and may she rest in peace.