**Assembling Pacific Regional Education Development Policy**

**Spratt, Rebecca**

# Assembling Pacific Regional Education Development Policy


**Submitted by:**

**Rebecca Spratt, Master of Arts**


**A thesis submitted in total fulfillment of the requirements of the**

**degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts**


Institute of Learning Sciences and Teacher Education

Faculty of Education and Arts

Australian Catholic University

February 2024

# Abstract

This thesis explores what is made possible by bringing Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory into conversation with policy mobilities and Pacific research for the study of education development policy. Empirically, the research focuses on a particular policy assemblage, referred to in the thesis as *Pacific regional education development policy* (PREDP). The research takes as an entry point the becomings of the Pacific Regional Education Framework 2018-2030 (PacREF), and explores the flows, forces and intensities that produce regional institutional and intergovernmental cooperation on education policy and service delivery across the so-called developing island nations of the Pacific Ocean. The research explores what different ways of thinking about and engaging with PREDP are possible if we ask not what PREDP *is* nor how effective is it, but instead why PREDP has become in the way that it has, how is it sustained through encounters with the potential to destabilise it, and what capacities does it make possible. The research data has been generated from conversations with 30 policy actors and the analysis of relevant policy documents. By attending to the mutual presupposition of molar and molecular tendencies generated through PREDP, and embracing the both/and thinking of Pacific research, the research demonstrates how PREDP functions to make competing desires consistent. The research argues that PREDP can be experienced as *both* regional *and* national, local *and* global, an artefact of donor imposition *and* of decolonial resistance. The research re-problematises what are arguably staid dialectics of power/resistance, global/local, dependence/independence and generality/context. It reconceptualises these in terms of becomings of responsibility, interdependence and responsiveness. In so doing, the research makes significant contributions to Comparative and

International Education and Critical Policy Studies literature, offering different ways of

thinking-doing education policy research that might open-up new lines of flight for

educational futures.

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# List of Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| ACER | Australian Council for Educational Research |
| ADB | Asian Development Bank |
| APTC | Australia Pacific Training Coalition |
| AusAID | Australian Agency for International Development |
| BwO | Body without Organs |
| CPEM | Conference of Pacific Education Ministers |
| DFAT | Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade |
| EFA | Education for All |
| EQAP | Education Quality and Assessment Program |
| FBEAP | Forum Basic Education Action Plan |
| FEdMM | Forum Education Ministers Meeting |
| FEMM | Forum Education Ministers Meeting |
| FSM | Federated States of Micronesia |
| FTI | Fast Track Initiative |
| FYR | Final Year Review |
| GPE | Global Partnership for Education |
| IA | Implementing Agencies |
| MDGs | Millennium Development Goals |
| MFAT | Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade |
| PacREF | Pacific Regional Education Framework 2018-2030 |
| PEDF | Pacific Education Development Forum |
| PFU | Pacific Facilitation Unit |
| PHES | Pacific Heads of Education Systems |
| PIF | Pacific Islands Forum |
| PIFS | Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat |
| PILNA | Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment |
| PMAT | Policy mobilities and Assemblage theory conjoined approach |
| PNG | Papua New Guinea |
| PREDP | Pacific Regional Education Development Policy |

PRIDE        Pacific Regional Initiative for the Delivery of basic Education

REPI         Rethinking Pacific Education Initiative

RMI          Republic of Marshall Islands

SDGs         Sustainable Development Goals

SPBEA        South Pacific Bureau of Educational Assessment

UN           United Nations

UNESCO       United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UNICEF       United Nations Children's Fund

USP          University of the South Pacific

# Statement of Original Authorship and Sources

This thesis contains no material that has been extracted in whole or in part from a thesis that I have submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees (where required).

Works published during the thesis are listed in the next section, with those referenced in the thesis indicated in bold type. Where the works involved collaborations with other authors I have specified my contribution (percentage wise and to what aspects e.g. conceptualisation, data analysis).

Approximately 30% of the publication *Assembling Comparison: Understanding education policy through mobilities and assemblage* ((Lewis & Spratt, 2024) book is present in this thesis. In particular, Chapter 3 of this thesis draws on content from the book that I wrote in full.

# Publications Produced During Candidature

Works cited in this thesis are indicated in bold type. My contribution to works with multiple authors is specified following each reference.

## Books and Book Chapters

**Fonua, S. M., McCormick, A., & Spratt, R.** (2022) Becoming comparative and international educationalists in Oceania. In Wiseman, A.W. (Ed)., *Annual Review of Comparative and International Education,* Emerald Publishing Ltd., 42, 71-80

Contribution: 30% to conceptualisation, data analysis and writing

**Lewis, S. & Spratt, R.** (2024). *Assembling Comparison: Understanding education policy through mobillity and desire.* Bristol University Press.

Contribution: 50% to conceptualisation and writing

## Journal Articles

Paulsen, I. & Spratt, R. (2021). Book review: Leadership, community partnerships and schools in the Pacific islands: Implications for quality education, *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, 20(1), 89-92.

Contribution: 50% to conceptualisation, data analysis and writing

**Spratt, R., & Coxon, E.** (2020). Decolonising 'context' in Comparative Education: The potential

    of Oceanian theories of relationality. *Beijing International Review of Education*, *2*(4), 519-

    536.

       Contribution: 70% to conceptualisation, data analysis and writing

Spratt, R., Anuar, A., McCormick, A. & Windle, J. (2021). Special issue: The festival of OCIES

    2020. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, 20(2), 2-4.

       Contribution: 60% to conceptualization, 50% to data analysis and writing

**Refereed Conference Presentations**

Lewis, S., & Spratt, R. (2023) *Assembling comparison: Understanding education policy through

    a conjoined policy mobilities and assemblage theory (PMAT) approach*, Australian

    Association for Research in Education Annual Conference, 26 – 30 November,

    Melbourne, Australia

McKenzie, M., & Spratt, R. (2023) *Collaborative governance and co-design: Possibilities for a

    strategic methodology of researcher engagement.* Australian Association for Research in

    Education Annual Conference, 26 – 30 November, Melbourne, Australia

Spratt, R. (2023) *Rethinking context in educational development and aid: learning from Pacific

    regionalism*, Australian Association for Research in Education Annual Conference, 26 –

    30 November, Melbourne, Australia

Spratt, R. (2023) *The truth is far from reality: desiring truth in Pacific regional education policy*, Australian Association for Research in Education Annual Conference, 26 – 30 November, Melbourne, Australia

Spratt R. & Lewis, S. (2023) *Exploring possibilities for rethinking education policy and policy research in Oceania and beyond (A Panel Discussion).* Oceania Comparative and International Education Society Annual Conference, 15-17 November, Apia, Samoa.

Spratt, R. (2021). *Problematising the reimagining of education policy research: A post-structural and Pacific perspective*, Australian Association for Research in Education Annual Conference, 28 November – 2 December, Online.

Spratt, R. (2021). *Assembling policy research in Pacific regional education development,* Australian Association for Pacific Studies Postgraduate and Early Careers Research Symposium, 8-9 April, University of Waikato, New Zealand.

# Acknowledgements

Undertaking a PhD is said to be a lonely journey, and yet it is also a journey that cannot be completed alone. There are many who have contributed to this process who I would like to acknowledge and thank here.

Firstly, to all the research participants who willingly shared their time and insights with me, and to the PacREF Steering Committee for trusting me to undertake this research, thank you. I hope I am able to reciprocate your generosity, if not through my research then in other ways.

To my supervisors, Steven Lewis and Bob Lingard, and my candidature review panel members Sam Sellar and Jess Holloway, my sincere thanks. To Steven in particular, this thesis would not have become what it has if it were not for your tireless support and willingness to go with me down the Deleuzian rabbit-hole.

To Eve, for telling me to hurry up and get a PhD and for suggesting I focus on regionalism, thank you. I am forever grateful for your mentorship and friendship.

To Seu'ula for your generosity of spirit and helping make things less 'hazy'.

To my PhD sisters, Tanjin and Sarah, this journey would have been very lonely if it were not for you both. I will always consider our friendship as one of the best outcomes of this PhD.

To all my friends who have encouraged me along the way, including the OCIES community.

To my family, Mum, Dad, Lyn, Jo, Amanda, Elijah, Zachary, and Daniel - you have all inspired me in different ways and will continue to do so.

To Brian, for everything you do and all that you are.

Thank you.

# 1   Motutapu

In languages of the southern Pacific, *motutapu* are the sacred islands that can be found in the entrances of many Pacific archipelagos and serve as 'a place of rejuvenation, a sanctuary, a place to launch new journeys' (Johansson-Fua, 2016, p. 37). Johansson-Fua (2016, p. 36) theorised *motutapu* as a space for Oceanian comparative education researchers to 'unsettle the settled' and create new forms of ethical actionable knowledge together.[1]

In this introduction Chapter, I outline the contours of this research as *motutapu*. I first discuss the aims of this research, explaining my initial motivation for undertaking the research and how my appreciation of the (assembled) desires animating this research developed through the course of the research. In Section 1.2, I outline the notional settings of myself as researcher (my positionality), the setting in which the research was undertaken (Narrm/Melbourne, Australia over February 2020 - February 2024) and the setting of the researched (regional inter-governmental education development collaboration across Pacific island countries). In Section 1.3, I state in broad terms the theoretical orientations I bring to this research, as well as the scholarly fields upon which I draw and to which I seek to

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[1] I am enormously grateful to Dr. Seu'ula Johansson-Fua for her always generous mentorship, and her willingness to allow me to draw on her theorisation of *motutapu* in this thesis. In engaging with *motutapu*, I seek to honour Dr Johansson-Fua's stated intent of offering this conceptualisation of *motutapu* to help comparative educationalists and education development practitioners chart ways of working in, with and for the Pacific that enact reciprocity, respect and relationality (Johansson-Fua, 2020).

contribute. I then present my research questions and outline the overall structure of the thesis in the final two Sections of this Chapter.

## 1.1   Research(er) aims

> Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental *encounter* (Deleuze, 2006a, p. 139; emphasis in the original).

I am starting at the end. This introduction was written at a (nominal) end of an encounter with thinking differently. As Deleuze's quote above indicates, this kind of encounter cannot (just) (re)produce recognisable answers to pre-given questions, but must rather produce new problems and new questions, which might then help us bring about different worlds.

> *Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua (*Maori *whakatauki).*[2]

But when did this encounter start, and has it been an encounter with something new, or with what I thought I already knew? When we are always already 'in the middle' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2020), and our present moment is also at once past and future, discerning starting and ending points is not so straightforward and arguably redundant. But for the sake of this story, this research began in the middle of what is now 20 years of working in education

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[2] I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on my past. Maori whakatauki or proverb from Aotearoa-New Zealand, my home place.

development[3] across several of the Pacific island countries that make up what is known as the

Pacific region (see Section 1.2 for detailed explanation of terms such as 'Pacific region', 'Pacific

island countries', and 'education development'). Therefore, when I started this research, I

already held a lot of *knowledge about* Pacific education development policy and how context

matters to its doing. But the aim of undertaking this PhD research was not to *know more*

*things* or even to *know other things*, but to learn to *think differently*. I was not fully aware of

this aim when I started the research, or perhaps more accurately, I did not fully anticipate what

such an aim would require for me to achieve. Thus, in this Section, I briefly explain how this

aim of thinking differently came about and elaborate on its implications for this thesis.

My time working in Pacific contexts and engaging with Pacific research(ers) has given

me many opportunities to encounter and experience different ways of being, knowing and

relating. These encounters enabled me to believe that certain changes in the way education

development is done in the Pacific (and elsewhere), and specifically changes in the way

context is thought about and accounted for within education interventions, might solve the

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[3] In this research, I use the term education development to refer to the international
'policyscape' of collaboration for advancing access to and quality of education (Menashy, 2019). I situate
education development as a component of global development. I draw on Horner (2020), in
conceptualising global development as the collection of relationships, processes, institutions and actors
engaged in transnational, and predominantly inter-governmental cooperation for the advancement of
human wellbeing. Historically anchored around the transfer of Official Development Assistance (ODA),
commonly referred to as aid or foreign aid, from 'developed' nations to 'developing' nations, what
previously was known as international development has morphed into global development as the
boundaries between North and South have blurred, the primacy of the nation-state has been
challenged (Horner, 2020). While conventionally associated with the economic development of nation-
states, the spaces in which development cooperation occurs and the meanings it is attributed are
increasingly diverse. This will be explored more in section 2.4.

frequently lamented problem of education development in the Pacific; namely, of not being 'Pacific enough' (see for example, Mclaughlin, 2011; Pene et al., 2002; Yates et al., 2019). My engagement with global development research and much Pacific education research affirmed this belief and offered solutions that made sense within the framing of these problems of context, local relevance and 'Pacific-ness'. However, while the importance of contextualisation was claimed as common knowledge and common sense, the point of frustration that motivated this research was that attempts to bring this solution about seemed either impossible to achieve or else failed to produce the expected change.

Thus, I began this research with the question of context front and centre: how is context constituted and mobilised in Pacific regional education development policy, and with what effects? However, I soon realised that I already had the answer to that question. I largely knew the ways in which context was recognised and made-recognisable, and that while a similar concept of context is recognised by all those involved in Pacific education development, the problem was that not all actors recognised it in the same way. I realised that the question I was not asking, and indeed, almost felt unable to ask, was why is it this way and not otherwise, and why does it seem so difficult to change what is(not) recognised? I could not even begin to ask these questions because I lacked the tools for thinking differently about why and how this situation had come to be. Why did attempts to do things differently seemed doomed to failure? Why were ways of being and doing things – policies, institutional structures, organisational behaviours – seemingly so resistant to substantive change? I realised I needed not only a new question, and a new understanding of the problem, but also new or different ways of thinking. Therefore, my aim in this research has become to learn to think

differently, and to create different questions and different problems. This is not merely to produce new answers or solutions, but also to (try) to bring about new becomings (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994).

Thus, a key focus of this thesis is to demonstrate how engaging with Deleuze and Guattari's work on assemblage theory, in conversation with Pacific research and insights from policy mobilities literature, has provided an encounter that has enabled (or forced) me to think differently about Pacific education development, and policy more broadly. It has *not* been an easy encounter. The experience of undertaking this research has often felt like being pulled out by an ocean rip and trying to swim back to steady ground.[4] In such situations, the tricky part is how to respond; do we allow ourselves to be immersed, to go with the rip, and be open to experiencing difference (do we deterritorialise?), or do we block this potential by holding fast to what we think we already know (and reterritorialise)?

In producing a thesis, we are often encouraged to present a coherent and complete work, and thus hide the wonderings, confusions, and contradictions that we have necessarily gone through to reach some point of coherence. My intent in this thesis is to present some of

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[4] I use references to immersion in the ocean throughout this thesis. I use it not as a metaphor, but because it evokes for me the experience of not only undertaking this research, but much of my experience of life. It responds to the centrality of the ocean to Pacific life and ways of being, knowing and relating (Hau'ofa, 1993). It also connects to Deleuze's discussion of swimming at sea (Deleuze, 2006a, pp. 22–23) as a way to illustrate his conceptualisation of learning and thinking. I am grateful for the work of Snir (2020), which on reading brought my attention to this example and encouraged me to delve further into Deleuze's conceptions of sense and encounter. I elaborate on my understanding of Deleuze's concepts of thinking, encounter and sense in section 1.3.1, and on Pacific oceanic philosophies in sections 1.3.2.

the ongoing struggle that being open to thinking differently with theory and data creates; or, in Deleuze's words (2006a, p. 131), the struggle of 'thinking outside' a 'dogmatic... image of thought'. I suggest such a struggle is, or at least should be, integral to research that deems itself critical. I would also emphasise that it is an ongoing struggle, and one that leads towards what very often feels like misdirections, mistakes and moments of drowning. I do not claim in this thesis to have succeeded in getting outside the image of thought. Rather, I believe I have succeeded in trying and, in doing so, have created new problems that enable me (and I hope others) to continue swimming in the ocean (Snir, 2020).

So, now as I approach the end of the research and the start of this thesis, I can state my aims, which are inevitably different from those I had when I began. This thesis aims to document a (non-linear) process of thinking differently about policy and Pacific regional education development by experimenting with Deleuze-Guattari's assemblage theory (as explained in Chapter 3), and in conversation with policy mobilities and Pacific research (explained further in Section 1.3 and Chapter 2). In this way, the problem this research aims to address is the way in which 'common sense' concepts - and in particular concepts of 'policy', 'context', 'Pacific', the global/regional/local' and 'education development' - are preventing us from *thinking*. Thus, the research seeks to recreate these as new problems that might restimulate our thinking. The thesis also aims to document the analytic relations, or *assemblage*, that I have found helpful for enabling such thinking, which I describe as a methodology of *wayfinding assemblage* (discussed in Chapter 4). This thesis does not seek to provide answers or solutions, but instead offers an encounter that makes sense, insofar as it stimulates further thinking and conversation.

## 1.2    Research(er) setting

The setting of this research(er) is an entanglement of researcher, research and researched. This Section addresses each one in turn, even though each is implicated in the other.

### Researcher setting

I was born in Aotearoa New Zealand to a family of British settler ancestry and grew up on the *rohe* (territory) of the Tāmaki Maori and the Ngāi Tara and Te Āti awa *iwi* (tribes). I currently reside on the lands of the Boonwurrung people of the Kulin nation in Narrm, Australia. This PhD research is motivated by my experiences of working in global development in the Pacific region over the last 20 years and my effort to contribute to global development, particularly in education, in an ethical manner that is affirming of people, their relationships with each other and with *fonua/whenua/vanua.*[5] I understand my positionality in this space in terms of what Johansson-Fua (2016) has described as an *Oceanic researcher*, or what Sanga (2016, p. 16) refers to as 'a new type of scrutiniser' in educational aid: those who call Oceania home, whether they are indigenous to Pacific island nations or not, and who 'are fundamentally committed to making relationships in educational aid energising and positive for all partners'. My ongoing relational accountabilities as an Oceanic researcher have influenced my research topic and design. This positionality also contributes to my desire to undertake this research in a manner that considers seriously, respects and seeks to *learn from* Pacific ways of being,

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[5] Across Pacific island countries and cultures, the concept of *fonua* (in Tongan, *vanua* in Fijian and Vanuatu, *whenua* in Māori, *fanua* in Samoan), while often translated as land, captures an ecologically connected world view encompassing ancestors, spirits, people, land, ocean, animals, the past, present and future (Tuwere, 2002).

knowing and relating, without claiming that I 'know' these and while being wary of appropriating them (Devine, 2023). In section 1.3, I further explain how I approach my engagement with Pacific Indigenous Knowledge and research.

## Research setting

Physically, the research took place predominantly in Narrm, Melbourne, with extensive use of online communication (email, Zoom) to connect with research participants in other places. The research took place during the period February 2020 - February 2024, beginning a few weeks before the first of more than 250 days of 'lock-down' in Melbourne, brought about due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While I do not explicitly discuss the impact of these space-times on the research throughout this thesis, they are inseparably intertwined with my experience and the outcomes of the research. This included the experience of being confined in one's house for days on end; of being isolated from family and friends; of having one's ability to move and travel even within one's own city so strictly prescribed; of being told it was unsafe to be with others or even share the same air; and all with no certainty for when it would end or of what would come after. It also included the experience of undertaking my first research interview on zoom while literally locked in a hotel room, in quarantine in Aotearoa-New Zealand while attempting to visit family. It included the experience of having my second and third research interviews take place while physically in Aotearoa- New Zealand, which felt at that time to be a COVID-19 free utopia. My research involved interviewing Pacific island based colleagues in varied states of lock-down or living in anticipation of COVID-19 breaching their borders, whereby the 'isolation' of islands all of a sudden became an advantage. All these experiences affected my research in a multitude of ways, even if I cannot elucidate them all here. These

experiences have given impetus to, and no doubt structured, my desires to think differently (as the world as I knew seemed to be collapsing), to problematise concepts of space, place, common sense, and questions of inter/dependence and responsibility and responsiveness. Therefore, I believe it is important to acknowledge these experiences. Even though I do not explicitly reference them through the thesis, I have remained aware of their presence and force.

## Researched setting

The nominally geographic setting for my research is the region often referred to as the Pacific, or Oceania (but also known by many other names including the *Moana* and the Blue Continent). This region is typically defined as including the 'developed'[6] countries of Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, the relatively large (in land and population terms) 'developing' country of Papua New Guinea, and 22 'small island developing' countries and territories (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020). The *Pacific region* and *Pacific island countries* are the terms most commonly used to refer to the 'developing' countries of the region, distinct from Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, and I will use these terms in this way. Where appropriate, I will also use the term Oceania to signal, after Hau'ofa (1993), a relational space of a "vibrant...

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[6] I will use the terms 'developed' and 'developing' countries when these terms have been used in the literature I am discussing and will refer to them in single quotes to indicate the contested status of these terms. Where necessary, I also use the terms Northern and Southern as heuristic devices to refer to particular loci of enunciation associated with peoples and knowledges which have acquired hegemonic positions within contemporary global institutional, economic, political and academic structures (Northern), and those which have not (Southern) (Takayama et al., 2016). After Takayama and colleagues (2016), I understand these terms as contingent, relationally defined, and legacies of the uneven coloniality of power. I therefore use these terms cautiously.

[and] much enlarged world of social networks that crisscross the ocean" (Hau'ofa, 1998, p.

392). In his seminal work *Our Sea of Islands*, Epeli Hau'ofa (1993, p. 6) put forward this notion

of Oceania in order to counter the prevailing "economistic and geographic determinist view"

of the Pacific as a region of 'small', 'poor' islands isolated in a distant sea. This dominant view

of the Pacific was argued by Hau'ofa (Hau'ofa, 1993, p. 5) to be perpetuating colonial world

views that are 'belittling' of Pacific peoples, and which assume land mass to be the defining

feature of nations and treat the ocean as empty space. Such a view ignores the long history of

interconnections, exchange and circular migration occurring amongst Oceanian peoples and

their relational ontologies in which people, nature and cosmology are connected across time-

space (Banivanua Mar, 2016). When using the terms Oceania, the Pacific region or Pacific

island countries, I am not suggesting any kind of homogeneity amongst the diverse and

dynamic peoples, cultures, languages and places of this region. Rather, my research is focused

precisely on how (and why) such a diversity can come to be known and experienced as *Pacific*,

and what does this do in relation to education development policy?

Global development and the flows of Official Development Assistance (ODA), or

foreign aid, are significant features of life in Pacific island countries. In terms of aid per capita,

the Pacific island developing countries are amongst the most aid dependent in the world

(Wood et al., 2022). Over 2008-2020, an average of US$3billion a year was spent in Official

Development Assistance (ODA) in the Pacific, of which at least 9% (US$270 million) on average

was directed towards education (Lowy Institute, 2024). ODA makes up a significant proportion

of government education expenditure in many of the Pacific Island countries, including in

education. Formal education for Pacific island countries has always been internationally

supported, with the establishment of formal education in most Pacific island countries first initiated by missionaries and then managed (in varying degrees) by colonial administrations (Hicks et al., 2021; Thomas & Postlethwaite, 1984). From the 1960s onwards, many Pacific island countries became (nominally) independent nation-states, while others took on varying degrees of self-governance within varying forms of 'special relationship' with former colonial states. Since then, the role of foreign aid and support from global development institutions for the maintenance and expansion of formal education systems has been and remains significant (Coxon & Tolley, 2005; Overton et al., 2020).

In addition to bilateral (country-to-country) collaboration in education development, regional-level cooperation in education policy and service delivery is of long-standing significance (McCormick, 2016a; Sanga, 2011). The Pacific region has a well-established institutional architecture of regionalism, dating back to the late 1960s, largely centred around the primary regional political body of the *Pacific Islands Forum* (PIF). In 2001, an inaugural meeting of the Education Ministers of PIF members was held (Coxon & Munce, 2008). A key outcome of this meeting was the endorsement of the Pacific Basic Education Action Plan, designed to support member countries to advance the goals set out in the United Nations' *Education For All* framework in a manner that was responsive to, and 'contextualised' for, Oceania (Coxon & Munce, 2008). The *Pacific Regional Framework for Education 2018-2030* (PacREF) is the current iteration of an overall framework for regional cooperation in education and serves as a convenient starting point for inquiry within this research. A key theme within the PacREF text, and associated policy discourses, is the importance of context-responsiveness for regional-level engagement in education (McCormick & Johansson-Fua, 2019; Pacific

Islands Forum & University of the South Pacific, 2018; Sanga, 2011). Over the last twenty years, regional cooperation on education policy and service delivery in the Pacific has grown in various ways, with a range of different networks, processes and events now in place, as shown in Appendix 1. As will be explained further in Chapter 4, I use the term Pacific Regional Education Development Policy (PREDP) in this research to refer to the abstract assemblage that is productive of this dynamic, multi-faceted and ever-shifting policy landscape, and much of my research is about exploring and problematising what is made to matter as regional education policy, and why (Appadurai, 1990; Ball, 1998; Buchanan, 2021).

When I started this research, the production of the PacREF was to be my focus. The PacREF has garnered attention in recent years as a turning point for Pacific regional education policy (Johansson-Fua, 2022; Thonden, 2020). It has been described as suggesting greater ownership by Pacific actors of regional policy, a move towards decolonising education development in the region, and progress to more 'effective' regionalism across all sectors in the Pacific (Johansson-Fua, 2022; Thonden, 2020). The policy actors that I spoke with for this research almost unanimously identified the PacREF as something new, different and, indeed, better than what had gone before. Therefore, when I started my research, I wanted to understand what exactly was *different* and *better* about this policy, and particularly whether the focus on contextualisation was part of this improvement. The PacREF also offered what initially appeared to be a nicely bounded phenomenon that was *small* enough to be manageable in a PhD thesis. Both the policy studies literature and my sense of needing to establish a comfortable research territory encouraged me to focus on something specific and create some boundaries around it. This provided a generative starting point for my research, a

criterion to determine which texts to read and which people to speak with, and a concrete

entry-point for conversation with my research participants.

However, as my understandings of a Deleuze-Guattarian approach and assemblage

thinking expanded, I began to think about the PacREF differently and reoriented my attention

to what the abstract working arrangements might be that are productive of particular policy-

becomings, such as the PacREF. For convenience and clarity in this thesis, I have labelled the

assemblage *Pacific Regional Education Development Policy* (PREDP), as distinct from the

varied policy texts, decisions and moments that come to be through PREDP.

## 1.3   Theoretical and academic field orientations for this research

This Section states the key theoretical sources that have oriented this research(er), including

the academic fields with which I seek to contribute and those with which I have most directly

engaged. This research draws on what I cautiously label here as *poststructuralist thought*

(specifically, the work of Gilles Deleuze with and without Félix Guattari), in conversation with

what might best be described as *Pacific research* (as discussed by Sanga, 2004; Sanga &

Reynolds, 2017). Each of these labels are best thought of in paradigmatic terms, insofar as they

can each be characterised by a set of common assumptions and principles and yet they are

still heterogenous, incorporating tensions, contentions and continual developments. There are

also points of tension *between* these paradigms; however, I argue that bringing these

orientations into conversation offers a generative framework for thinking (differently). In

drawing on these areas of scholarship, I have focused on literature related to two main

academic fields; that is, *Critical Policy Studies* (CPS), and within that specifically the work on

*policy mobilities;* and *Comparative and International Education* (CIE). As a field, CPS is focused

on critical studies *of* policy, in which policy is conceptualised not as a neutral and technical

object, but rather as a social and political phenomenon (Ozga, 2019). While CPS scholars are

diverse in theory, approach and topic of study, they arguably all broadly share an

understanding of policy as a site and process through which knowledge and power are

mobilised, and meanings and 'truths' are (re)made, normalised and contested, in ways that

have direct material effects and reflect 'underlying forms of rationality' (Ozga, 2019, p. 6).

Within the broader field of CPS, policy mobilities specifically situates movement as an inherent

ontological characteristic of policy, and therefore argues for a focus on the (im)mobility of

policy as a means to enable more 'ontologically consistent' and empirically relevant research

of policy (Lewis, 2021, p. 333).The theoretical and methodological insights of CPS and policy

mobilities will be discussed further in Chapter 2. With regard to CIE, I choose to follow Cowen

(Cowen, 2023, pp. 380–381) in understanding it as a field most concerned 'the flows of power

at the intersection of international and domestic politics as these shape the educated

identities offered in formal education systems'. In this respect, it is particularly concerned with

the transfer, translation and transformation of education and education policy across space-

times (see also Cowen, 2009, 2014).

CPS (including policy mobilities) and CIE have each been described as interdisciplinary

fields and have close relationships with critical strands of literature within the wider fields of

policy studies, geography, global development, and with cultural theory, education theory and

political theory. However, for the purposes of this research I have focused primarily on

literature situated within, or having relevance for, policy mobilities and CIE.

### 1.3.1 Poststructuralism

I consider poststructuralist scholarship as that which maintains a concern with how our

conceptualisation and experience of the world comes to be, and how these might be

otherwise (Dillet et al., 2013; Peters, 2005). Poststructuralism has been particularly interested in

the relationship between power and knowledge, as captured in Foucault's concept of

discourse (*pouvoir-savoir*): the socially-produced, historically-contingent sets of knowledge

practices that are autonomous of but inseparable from ourselves and our worlds (K. T.

Anderson & Holloway, 2020; Ball, 1993). A conceptualisation of subjectivity as constituted in

material-discursive interactions, rather than as the authors or 'users of discourse', particularly

distinguishes poststructuralism from other forms of critical theory (Bacchi, 2005, p. 200).

Both the work of Foucault and Deleuze (with and without Guattari), and other

secondary literature drawing on these sources, are the main strands of poststructuralism that

inform this research. Central to both their work, and those who follow them, is the ethos of

considering theory *as* practice; as Foucault described during a conversation with Deleuze,

'...theory does not express, translate, or serve to apply practice: *it is practice*' (Deleuze &

Foucault, 1977, p. 208; emphasis added). In contrast to some of the accusations of

theoreticism levelled against poststructuralism, this concept of theory as practice places the

emphasis on the empirical; on a pluralistic and experimental approach; and on problematising

common sense, including presumedly proven theoretical concepts. However, while focused on

the empirical, Foucault and Deleuze's work requires us to, in Buchanan's (2021, p. 131) words,

'resist the empiricist tendency to treat material as given and instead ask the more properly

transcendental-empiricist question: How and under what conditions does matter become

material?'. This implications of this will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

One of the many of Deleuze's key contributions (in conversation with Foucault, Guattari

and other past philosophers) was his concept of 'the image of thought' and his

reconceptualising of thinking, problems and of concepts themselves. As the opening quote of

this Chapter highlights, Deleuze argued that thinking is not an inevitable process common to

everyone, or one that when done correctly or deeply enough will naturally lead to knowledge,

truth, and common sense (Deleuze, 2006a; see also Snir, 2020). Rather, he argued that this way

of thinking *about thinking* works only to reinforce an 'image of thought', in which thought

remains stuck within an existing field of pre-determined concepts or objects and is thus

unable to appreciate and allow the actualisation of absolute difference (Deleuze, 2006a, p.

131). To force us out of the image of thought and into thinking, we need encounters with the

world that *make* sense, or which create new problems (Deleuze, 2006a, pp. 158–160). These

ideas will be discussed in much more detail in Chapter 3. However, here I wish to note that this

way of thinking about thinking, of the practice of theory and research as *encounters* that can

force thinking, are key orientations underpinning this research.

In drawing on poststructuralist theory, and particularly Foucault and Deleuze (and

Guattari's) work, I have been wary of the critiques launched by some scholars informed by

Southern, Indigenous, postcolonial and/or decolonial frameworks, including those working

within a Pacific research paradigm. Poststructuralist understandings of the subject, and the

role of knowledge/power in the processes of subjectification, have been embraced by some

Southern, feminist and other critical scholars to bring attention to the partiality of patriarchal

and colonial knowledge production, and to deconstruct and resist the way in which discourses

of gender, race, sexuality and coloniality shape subjectivities (Bacchi, 2005; Peters, 2005; Tikly,

2004). However, and simultaneously, such scholars have also critiqued poststructuralism on

various grounds, including that poststructuralism serves to inscribe the very form of

essentialism that it claims to reject (see, for example, Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Spivak, 2010).

These critiques argue that in positing the self as 'multiple, becoming and unfixed', and valuing

anti-essentialism and deconstruction, poststructuralism can serve to 'silence and dismiss' other

ontologies that value holism and more essentialist notions of the self (Moreton-Robinson,

2013, p. 343). Foucault and Deleuze have been specifically critiqued for their silence on

coloniality, essentialist notions of the colonial subject, and the perpetuation of colonialist

discourses (Bhaba, 1994; Hermann et al., 2014; Rumsey & Weiner, 2001).

Following other scholars (Bacchi, 2005; Bignall & Patton, 2010; Hodgson & Standish,

2009), I consider critiques to reflect, in part, an incomplete understanding of Foucault and

Deleuze's philosophical orientations. Rather than silencing 'other' ontologies or perpetuating

colonialist discourses, I find Deleuze's philosophy especially generative for bringing into being

a world and a people yet to come (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994). Here, I agree with Bignall (2008,

p. 129) who has argued that Deleuze and Foucault's work

> ... may be seen to exemplify the effort of formerly colonising peoples to
>
> rethink their historically imperial (and sometimes "facist") modes of being and
>
> of social engagement, not by appropriating concepts from other cultural
>
> traditions but by drawing from alternative concepts of sociability already
>
> embedded within the tradition of Western thought.

Thus, in taking this position, I do not seek to erase or negate the legacies of colonial, imperial, racist histories, but neither do I it seek to replace these structures of domination with a blind acceptance of others. I accept the critiques of poststructuralism are valuable for highlighting the inescapable tensions of adopting any one epistemic framework or set of concepts, as well as how thinking can be catalysed by bringing different theoretical traditions into conversation. Therefore, I have sought in this research to engage in a sceptical but curious conversation with both poststructuralist-informed discussions of coloniality, and other Southern Theory, postcolonial and decolonial theory informed work. Through this conversation, I have come to find the work of Deleuzian-informed authors such as Bignall, Patton, Colebrook and Saldanha particularly valuable, and especially their consideration of coloniality, race and connected forms of oppression and discrimination not simply as concepts to negate, overthrow or replace with an opposing decolonial or non-discriminating structure. Rather, they would offer that a more productive approach might be to deconstruct their basis in representational thought and the way in which they prevent sufficient difference. As Colebrook (2013, p. 36) argues,

> ... (t)he problem with racism is not that it discriminates, nor that it takes one natural humanity and then perverts it into separate groups. On the contrary, racism does not discriminate enough; it does not recognise that "humanity", "Caucasian" and "Asian" are insufficiently distinguished.

I will return to this discussion particularly in Chapter 7, as I consider the ways in which context and context-responsiveness is produced through Pacific regional education development policy (hereafter, *PREDP*).

For now, I wish to acknowledge that while this research has been partially informed by the 'urgent' call for decolonisation that is being made across the social sciences including in CPS and CIE, my response to this call has been mediated by the above-mentioned literature. I have also engaged with other scholars who are complicating the decolonial project, specifically in terms of the way it can be (but is not always) reliant on a form of 'culturalism' (Burnett, 2007; Ninnes & Mehta, 2004) that argues for a purity and goodness of indigeneity over all else; the turning of decoloniality into an empty metaphor (Tuck & Yang, 2012); and its tendency to view the experiences of formerly colonised peoples exclusively through an inadequate and reductionist lens of de/coloniality (Banivanua Mar, 2016; M. N. Smith & Lester, 2023).

Following Tuck and Yang (2012), I instead consider *decolonisation* as a particular set of (ongoing and unresolved) processes related to the return of sovereignty and land to those dispossessed through colonisation. Informed by Mignolo and Walsh (2018), I choose to consider *decoloniality* as distinct concept. I here draw on Pacific scholars Vaai and Nabobo-Baba (2017, p. 9) to understand decoloniality as practices of unthinking, re-thinking and doing that requires a suspension of the desire for knowingness. Decoloniality focuses on what Vaai and Nabobo-baba (ibid) describe as a process of 'seeking wisdom', whereby the 'both/and' nature of our plural worlds can be accepted. Thus, in this research, I consider a *practice of decoloniality* as involving questioning what it is that coloniality and colonisation can do in any given moment and situation (as well as related assemblages of 'Western', the 'Global North', 'whiteness'), and experimenting with how to create new and different assemblages that are

enabling of new capacities (see Chapter 3 for further explanation of how I am understanding assemblage).

In stating Foucault and Deleuze's work as key philosophical resources for thinking with theory in this research, I want to caveat this by recognising that my engagement with their work is very much 'in the middle', to adopt an often-used phrase of Deleuze and Guattari. As Buchanan (2021, p. 15) observes, there is no obvious, singular starting point to engaging with assemblage theory or Deleuze and Guattari's work in general. Reading their work, one finds themselves always already in the middle: the texts seem to sprawl, swirl, and fold back on themselves with continuous lines of connection to other concepts or variations of concepts. For me, it has again felt like attempting to swim within choppy waters. We need only step lightly into Deleuze and Guattari's texts and yet we can immediately find ourselves dragged under, trying to find a foothold in sands forever moving, or even just trying to work out which way is up. The more we try to push down, to find something stable to hold on to and to stand still, the more likely we are to be thrown around. This is not a complaint about their writing and certainly not of the clarity of their thought. Rather, it exemplifies Deleuze and Guattari's ontology of becoming and their view of philosophy as the creation of concepts, wherein concepts should not provide a singular definition but instead take us to new lines of thought. However, it makes it incredibly difficult to concisely and clearly explain their concepts, particularly in academic writing.

My initial response on reading Deleuze and Guattari's work was to immediately retreat, to return to a territory in which I felt more at home and – as other scholars have arguably done – to reformulate what I had read of assemblage within my existing frames of knowing.

However, it is precisely from this moment of discomfort that new lines of thought have opened and have again served my desire for knowingness with, simultaneously, my desire to remain open to not knowing and, as such, to learning. In this way, engaging with Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory feels generative not only for accounting for the complexity of policy but also for the complexity of researching policy. As will be discussed below, in its direct challenge to representational thought along with a theorisation of the construction of new worlds (i.e., through deterritorialisation), I believe assemblage theory offers something generative for a *constructive* decolonial practice that is relevant for my research (Bignall, 2008). However, I emphasise that I make no claims here of offering a definitive account of Deleuze and Guattari's work and concepts, but rather provide what I have learnt through my encounter with them. In this, I have found the work of few scholars particularly valuable, and rely on them throughout this research, as I have not read Deleuze and Guattari's texts exhaustively. This can perhaps be said to be a weakness, but it nonetheless speaks to where I am at in my encounter, which is only just beginning (if always in the middle).

### 1.3.2   Pacific research

Oceania deserves much more than an attempt at mundane fact; only the

imagination in free flight can hope— if not to contain her—to grasp some of

her shape, plumage, and pain (Wendt, 1976, p. 49).

For those who feel part of Pacific island societies, as in many places and for many people in the world, the relationship between academic research, daily life and Indigenous Knowledge systems can be a contentious and difficult one (G. H. Smith & Smith, 2019; Tuhiwai-Smith,

1999). As the quote from Samoan poet, writer and scholar Albert Wendt at the opening of this

Section suggests, Pacific scholars have long critiqued the way in which much academic

research reduces the life and knowledge of Pacific peoples to 'mundane fact', wherein what

counts as fact is often defined by those with little connection to Pacific life. Much academic

research more generally, and often that within the fields of critical policy studies and

comparative education, have neglected, ignored or explicitly devalued the richness of Pacific

philosophies, knowledge systems and creative arts (Aiafi, 2017; Hau'ofa, 1993; Thaman, 2003;

Vaai & Nabobo-Baba, 2017). Categorising what counts as Pacific research is of course no easy

matter, and it relates to the broader problem of interest in this thesis:  how do the criteria for

making something (whether it be research, or policy, or subjectivities) *Pacific* comes about?

In 2004, scholar and educator Kabini Sanga proposed a paradigmatic approach to

Pacific research that 'recognised the creative tension between unity and uniqueness across the

region' (Sanga & Reynolds, 2017, p. 198). Sanga (2004, p. 43) suggested a common 'set of

philosophical orientations' underpinning Pacific research, while also rejecting any notion of

Pacific thought as somehow singular or homogenous. In particular, Sanga (2004, p. 49) argues

that Pacific research be considered philosophically to prevent researchers 'from 'mud-slinging'

about whether a questionnaire or a one-on-one meeting is the more culturally appropriate

strategy'. He advocates instead for a more generative and ongoing conversation about the

diverse and ever-changing *philosophical* orientations of Pacific research, and how these can

be best enacted within research endeavours. I ascribe to Sanga's call to engage in an ongoing

conversation and have attempted to do so through reading and drawing on a range of Pacific

scholars' work in this research. Therefore, when I use *Pacific research* in this thesis, I am

referring not to a bounded and definitive discipline or type of research, but rather to work by scholars who identify as Pacific and who explicitly (although not necessarily exclusively) draw on philosophies and Indigenous Knowledge systems identified as of the Pacific in their work. As a research of settler-colonial heritage who does not have Pacific ancestry, I believe it is not my place to write about Indigenous Knowledge systems or philosophies unless doing so in collaboration with people of those communities. However, I do believe it is appropriate, and even necessary, for me to engage with and learn from the work that Pacific research scholars have shared.

Of particular importance to this research is the centrality of dialogue and *storying* to Pacific research. Dialogic and storying practices are common throughout Pacific cultures, not just as forms of collective sense-making, education and governance, but as ways of being (Fa'avae et al., 2016; Sanga, Johansson-Fua, et al., 2020; Vaioleti, 2013). I have had most experience with *tok stori* and *talanoa*. While distinct, both the practice of *tok stori* common to western Pacific societies and the practice of *talanoa* common to southern Pacific societies are ontological; they are particular ways of being in and relating with the world, as well as ways of understanding the world (Fa'avae et al., 2016; Sanga et al., 2018). Central to these dialogic practices is the art of storying; the telling of stories of the past, as well as collectively storying a sense of the present and futures yet to come (Sanga, Johansson-Fua, et al., 2020). Absurdity, comedy and trickery and forms of satire also play a key communicative role in many Pacific societies and scholars have argued this relates to ontological orientations, in which reality and illusion, non-fiction and fiction are neither opposite or mutually exclusive but instead operate interdependently in the production of the real (Hereniko, 1994; Keown, 2001; Lattas, 1989). All

of this points to the potential for considering storying as a process not only of imparting information but more a collective and creative process of thinking differently and bring about new becomings. I find synergies between these ideas and Deleuze's work that I believe can be generative when brought together into conversation, while maintaining the differences.

In bringing Pacific research into conversation with poststructuralist, postcolonial and decoloniality informed work, I am aware that Pacific research stands on its own, without need of 'justificatory reference to the West' or elsewhere (Sanga & Reynolds, 2017, p. 198). My intention is not to understand nor justify Pacific research by referencing other knowledge systems, nor to appropriate as the earlier quote from Bignall (2008) warned against. Rather, I argue that there is value in bringing pluralities of knowledge systems into encounter, and that this is precisely what is needed if we are to bring about new (or at least different) worlds. Here, I also draw on the arguments of Takayama and colleagues (2016, p. 6) for considering what they label as *Southern Theory* (a label to which Pacific research might be considered to belong); that is, 'a critical epistemic resource with which those in the North can unlearn its privilege of 'knowingness' (Hokari, 2011) or to remain epistemologically diffident'. In this way, Pacific research contributes to my thinking differently, alongside and in conversation with poststructural, postcolonial and decolonial research. Chapter 2 incorporates a consideration of some of the key Pacific research that I draw on in this thesis, while Chapter 4 addresses the methodological insights offered through Pacific research and how I have applied those in my research.

## 1.4   Research questions

My principal research question is:

What makes Pacific regional education development policy (PREDP) possible and what can PREDP do?

In answering this, I will address three associated sub-research questions:

1. Why and how has the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PaCREF) 2018-2030 come to be?

2. What is made to matter and made to be desirable (or not) in the PacREF?

3. Can assemblage theory, in conversation with policy mobilities and Pacific research, enable thinking differently about education development policy?

## 1.5   Outline of the structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured into eight Chapters, including this first introductory Chapter. Throughout the thesis, I cross-reference to Chapters and Sections where key arguments are made or concepts explained to assist the reader with navigating the document. Chapter 2 provides an overview of existing CPS, CIE and Pacific research literature and discusses how concepts of policy, context, regionalism, Pacific education development and global/regional/national scales are problematised. The Chapter concludes by putting forward a relational conceptualisation of globalisation, context and policy, as initial conceptual resources for this research. Chapter 3 then presents my understanding of Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory. The Chapter addresses the key concepts of assemblage theory and how these relate to the broader philosophy and ontology of Deleuze and Guattari. The Chapter

concludes by summarising how assemblage theory, as I understand it, adds value to the

relational conceptions outlined in Chapter 2, for the study of policy. Chapter 4 then discusses

the methodological implications of bringing assemblage theory into conversation with policy

mobilities and Pacific research, for the study of education development policy. I explain how

my methodological approach has been informed by Pacific research concepts of wayfinding

and identify four key orientations for research policy that have guided my research. I then

outline the specific data generation and analysis methods I used in the research, and the

ethical processes I followed. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 present my analysis of the data generated

from conversations with research participants and policy documents. Chapter 5 attempts to

demonstrate what kind of assemblage is necessary for producing a policy such as PacREF.

Chapter 6 focuses goes into more detail on what is made desirable through PREDP, while

Chapter 7 then addresses how context and context-responsiveness are made to matter

through PREDP. Finally, in Chapter 8, I offer an overall summary of my responses to the

research questions (as identified in Section 1.4). I identify how this research contributes to the

existing CPS and CIE literature and identify some possible areas for future research.

# 2 What is the problem of Pacific/ education/ development/ regionalism?

In this Chapter, I review how existing literature (particularly but not exclusively in the fields of policy mobilities, CIE and Pacific research) addresses four areas of questioning that underpin this research:

a) What kind of problem is *context* made to be in education development and policy?

b) What kind of problem is *Pacific education development policy* made to be?

c) What kind of problem is *policy* made to be?

d) What kind of problem is *policy movement* made to be, and how does this relate to problems of context?

I begin by looking at how context is understood as a problem and how, in turn, contextualisation is positioned as the 'obvious' solution, in both education development and in policy studies more broadly. I then provide a brief review of the existing literature on Pacific education development policy, with a particular focus on regional policy (Section 2.2). I highlight how Pacific education development, and development more broadly, is typically situated as a problem of 'context'; of small, isolated islands and cultural constraints; or, in other words, problems of globalisation, modernisation, and of local versus global power struggles. In so doing, I bring attention to and re-problematise how context is situated as a problem for global development internationally and in the Pacific region, with contextualisation offered as the solution.

In Section 2.3, I provide an overview of critical policy studies and an articulation of the distinctions between more 'conventional' policy studies research *for* policy and critical research *of* policy (see Dale, 2005; Lingard, 2013; Ozga, 2019). I then explore how critical policy studies has situated the problem of policy, with a particular focus on policy as discourse. I highlight what I believe to be some of the limitations of these responses, and gesture to the potential of assemblage theory to consider policy as a different kind of problem, which in turn can offer new analytical insights. In Section 2.4, I turn to the problems of policy movement and the phenomenon of globalisation. Drawing particularly on policy mobilities literature, I discuss the way in which scalar concepts of global/regional/national have been challenged by a more relational conceptualisation of globalisation, and what this means for analysing how and why policy moves, and what happens when it moves.

In the final Section of this Chapter (Section 2.5), I summarise some of the questions I believe have been left unasked by the current literature, including how we can think about policy, its movement, and the relational flows of globalisation in Pacific education development. I suggest that bringing this literature into conversation with assemblage theory might help us ask different questions. This leads into Chapter 3, which offers my own understanding of assemblage theory and its application to the study of policy.

## 2.1   The problem of context

The notion that 'context matters' is something of a truism in global development, and in the wider CIE and CPS literature. Countless research papers, program evaluations and stories of individuals' experiences demonstrate that deep understanding of context is critical for

development cooperation generally (Booth, 2011; Eyben, 2006; Radcliffe, 2006; Ware, 2011) and education development specifically (Cassity, 2008b; Crossley, 2019; Samoff et al., 2016; Vavrus & Bartlett, 2012), as well as CIE research (Cowen, 2006; Crossley & Watson, 2003; Lee et al., 2014). The importance of responding to context in the Pacific island countries of Oceania has been repeatedly emphasised in the education and development cooperation literature (Coxon & Munce, 2008; Crossley, 2010; Helu-Thaman, 1999; Sanga, 2005). And yet, despite years of stating that context matters, Cowen (2006, p. 567) laments, that 'we are nowhere near having sorted out, intellectually, the problem of context'.

A great deal of research on education development focuses on the question of 'effectiveness', or 'what works'. Much of the research listed above sits within this category and, as noted, consistently concludes that 'context-responsiveness' works. This perspective is reflected in the policy statements and strategies of aid donors and global development cooperation agencies; for instance, the Australian Government's strategy for aid investment in education states that 'to deliver the best possible results, Australia's aid investments will be guided by international best practice and *respond to the context* in which they are delivered' (Commonwealth of Australia & Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2015, p. 3; emphasis added). Yet, as others have shown, the way in which context is problematised, and the subsequent framing of 'in-context', 'out-of-context' and 'context-responsiveness', is tied to onto-epistemological assumptions, the deployment of which has significant consequences for the workings of education development and policy more broadly (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2019; Rappleye & Un, 2018; Sobe & Kowalczyk, 2013). It influences the 'diagnosis' of problems and

the design of interventions, the negotiation of relationships, and the assumptions made about what will work and what is valued, and by whose reckoning.

However, context is typically deployed in development cooperation, and in much CIE literature, as a largely unproblematic concept (Sobe & Kowalczyk, 2013). Typically, context is used to signify a 'local' setting, comprising *a priori* categories of political, cultural and social features, which can be identified, described and 'responded to' at the outset of a research process or intervention design (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2019; McFarlane, 2011; Sobe & Kowalczyk, 2013; Stephens, 2007). As Dilley (1999, p. 2) argues, this reflects broader trends in social science, in which 'context has been treated…as self-evident, as a given attribute in the world, something that is stable, clear and sufficient, and not requiring any qualification of its own'. There is now a growing body of work within CIE and CPS literature that challenges this way of conceptualising context, influenced through the broader turns towards relational, spatial and non-representational thinking in the social sciences. This work asserts that contexts are made through socio-material entanglements, including through the entanglement of research, researcher and researched (Gorur, 2011; McFarlane, 2011; Sobe & Kowalczyk, 2018). Thus, different conceptual resources are required for considering the problem of context, as will be discussed further in Section 2.4, and Chapter 3.

## 2.2   The problem of Pacific education development policy

In this Section, I provide a brief, if incomplete, review of research of education development policy and regional cooperation in Oceania. Despite education development being 'big business' in the region (Sanga, 2003, p. 42), critical *research of policy* is relatively limited. This

reflects both the predilection for *research for policy* (to be discussed further in Section 2.3), as well as the dominant Northern focus in education policy studies generally and the minimal literature from Oceania specifically (Crossley et al., 2015). Saetren's (2005) extensive review of public policy implementation literature found over 90% of publications focused on Europe or North America, with fewer than 3% focused on countries within the Oceania region. Aiafi (2017) reviewed literature on public policy in Pacific island countries and at a regional level, and found limited literature on the *processes* of policy, and a particular lack of research that goes beyond empirical description to provide theoretical insights. Aiafi (2017, p. 462) further demonstrated the limitations of conventional policy theories in accounting for the nature of Pacific island country and regional policy processes, particularly in their reliance on dichotomies of external/internal influence, state/market/society relations, and a neglect of how Indigenous Pacific 'deep beliefs... [and] values, customs, oral histories and languages' animate policy processes.

Despite this, there is a significant (and steadily growing) body of work that has been produced by scholars working within a Pacific research paradigm. This heterogeneous body of work includes insightful narratives of aid-supported projects and development 'partnerships', focusing on the way in which nominally colonial legacies and inequitable power relations between North and South continue to be perpetuated through education development in Oceania (see, for example, Dorovolomo et al., 2014; Sanga et al., 2005; Sanga, Maebuta, et al., 2020; Tuia, 2019). Also prominent in this literature are critical analyses of specific aid-supported policy reforms, and particularly those related to curriculum and teacher education, as well as the way in which these have neglected or devalued Pacific research, knowledge

systems, culture, and language (Helu-Thaman, 1999; see, for example, Koya, 2012; Nabobo-Baba, 2008; Puamau, 2007; Thaman, 2003). This work makes a clear case for, and has also generated valuable frameworks to support, what has been described as the decolonisation, localisation or 're-indigenisation' of Pacific island country education systems (Koya-Vaka'uta, 2017; Tuia & Iyer, 2015).

While extremely valuable, much of this work remains focused on policy content – the relevance or appropriateness of particular policy prescriptions (e.g., curriculum and pedagogical frameworks, teacher education approaches) – instead of the processes or workings of *policy* as a concept. This work provides valuable insights into how global development cooperation relationships are experienced, and rich, albeit often bleak, accounts of global development actors behaving in hegemonic ways. However, I would suggest that there is a greater focus on description rather than analysis, and a tendency to rely on factors such as power imbalance, lack of understanding, or unhelpful incentives to explain why these situations have come about, and keep recurring (Burnett, 2007). While it is undoubtedly important to demonstrate where and when this is happening, such research is limited in terms of being able to offer different ways of thinking about why such supposed power imbalances, limited understandings and incentives are sustained in the face of so much criticism and how we might bring about change.

Another body of literature provides what can be considered 'critical narratives' of historical trends in education development policy in Pacific island countries (see, for example, T. Baba, 1987; Cassity, 2008a, 2010; Coxon, 2002; Coxon & Baba, 2003; Coxon & Tolley, 2005; Fox, 2011). Key themes of these analyses include how global development policy (particularly

that of Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand) has shifted over time in response to shifts in 'global' discourses and geopolitics; the mismatch between development policy embedded in (so-called) modernist and neoliberal paradigms and the 'reality' of local contexts; and the disconnect between policy language of 'partnership' and 'ownership' and its enactment. These analyses demonstrate how the political rationalities prominent within education development shift over time, as well as how they are animated through specific policy instruments such as new forms of partnership arrangements. Most of this literature draws on critical realist frameworks, or Foucauldian-informed variants of discourse analysis, to highlight the complex interplay of discursive practices in the formation of policy. For example, McCormick (McCormick, 2014, 2016a, 2016b) draws on postcolonial theory and uses Critical Discourse Analysis to explore education policy formation in Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea. Her work demonstrates how both 'universalist' discourses of Education for All (EFA) and countering decolonial and *kastom* (traditional beliefs) discourses interplay in sometimes surprising ways. McCormick's work also highlights the multi-level nature of policy processes, the increasing diversity of types of policy actors, and the varied ways in which they participate or are enabled to participate.

The unpredictable way in which multi-scalar policy processes play out is also a feature of Tolley's (2011, 2012) insightful analysis of education sector-wide approaches (SWAPs) in Tonga and Solomon Islands. Tolley (2011) explores how the development 'discourse' of aid effectiveness and partnership was animated through the adoption of the 'new' modality of SWAPs by 'development partners' (donors and governments) in each context. Drawing on complexity theory, Tolley (2011) demonstrates the way in which heterogenous elements –

including historical, political and cultural context, actor interests, incentives, personalities, organisational structures and the interplay of global/regional/national discursive spaces – interacted in emergent ways that led to quite different trajectories for the SWAPs in each case. Similarly, Cassity's (2001) detailed historical analysis of the initial establishment and subsequent development of the University of the South Pacific (USP), and especially Australia's role as the primary funder of USP, also demonstrates how, in contrast to conventional accounts of linear policy transfer or influence from the developed centre to the developing periphery, 'spheres of influence, particularly in the South Pacific region, are always connected, contested, and infinitely more complex' (Cassity, 2001, Abstract). Finally, work such as that by Wright (2023; 2022), Tuia and Iyer (2015), and Armstrong and colleagues (2023) have explored specific instances of education policy development drawing on varied critical literatures including CPS and Pacific research. Going beyond just showing the complexity of policy processes, this work offer 'rethinkings' of education development policy encounters that seek to move beyond essentialising global-local dichotomies.

While the aforementioned critical research *of* education development policy in the Pacific offers many insights, it largely retains a commitment to a representational ontology, wherein the analysis of discourse is meant for understanding different actors' perspectives on the 'real world out there', and which as maintains a tendency to judge certain discourses better or worse than others. They also largely still accept concepts of the global and the local as needing no explanation and take us little further than concluding that education development policy in the Pacific region is complex. At the same time, a handful of other scholars have adopted more strongly poststructuralist analyses to consider questions of

subjectivity, and how categories of *Pacific* and *policy* come about in the first place. For example, Burnett's (2004) poststructuralist historiography of education policy in Kiribati picks up this theme by exploring the way in which the underlying rationalities of modernism and indigenisation interact to shape subjectivities, and thus place limits around what can be envisioned for the 'development' of Kiribati education. Burnett (2007) has explored this theme more broadly in his discussion of what he contends is a 'cultural difference' argument that underpins some of the calls for indigenisation of Pacific education systems. Burnett (2007) critiques this argument for neglecting the fluid, mobile nature of Pacific identities and relations, and for leaving silent any analysis of the 'politics of knowing' that underpin indigenous and postcolonial subjectivities themselves. Kupferman (2013) makes a similar argument in his genealogy of schooling in Micronesia, where he draws on Foucault and (to a lesser extent) Deleuze, in conjunction with postcolonial theory to question and 'disassemble' the accepted truth in Pacific education policy spaces; namely, that cultural preservation and decolonisation will occur through culturally responsive schooling.[7]

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[7] Kupferman's (2013)work is the only instance I have found of research on Pacific education development drawing on Deleuze's work, and his work is predominantly Foucauldian informed without detailed engagement with Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory per se. The only other use of Deleuze-Guattarian assemblage theory I have found in research on Pacific development and/or policy, is in the work of Walton (2020) and Walton and Dinnen (2020). The latter article argues that a concept of assemblage enables a 'reimagining' of agency in corruption reform, and of organised crime as dispersed, relational and spatially constituted. The authors (Walton & Dinnen, 2020) argue that assemblage thinking offers new insights to understanding these phenomena when contrasted with the institutionalist and hierarchical scalar accounts offered in existing literature. However, I would suggest that their use of assemblage theory does not engage deeply with Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualisation.

Finally, there is an emerging body of work that draws on new materialist and post-humanist frameworks, and engages with some Deleuzian theory to analyse Pasifika education in Aotearoa-New Zealand. This is relevant for its use of Pacific research and attempts to bring Pacific research into conversation with new materialist, post-humanist, and/or Deleuzian work. Examples of this include Matapo's (2021) rethinking of Aotearoa-New Zealand based Pasifika education research paradigms that draws on post-humanist theory and elements of Deleuze-Guattarian assemblage theory. Matapo (2021) suggests synergies between post-humanist reconceptualisations of the subject and the collective and the more-than-human sense of agency and subjectivity embedded in Pacific philosophies. She calls for a reimagining of Pasifika education research to 'move beyond conventional critical-inquiry paradigms… [and consider] new ways of thinking onto-epistemologies, including non-human worlds as co-agentic and co-existent within knowledge exchange and co-creation' (Matapo, 2021, p. 3). Devine and colleagues (2012, p. 58) have also demonstrated how Deleuze and Spinoza's philosophy might assist non-Pacific teachers to draw on 'their own philosophic and cultural heritage to think about their practice in a way more consonant with' their Pacific students' ways of knowing and being. While not yet extensive, these emerging areas of research on Pacific education policy and education development policy that draw on post-structuralist frameworks, including the work of Deleuze, indicate the potential for the different questions that can be asked through reconceptualising subjectivity, moving beyond unquestioned binaries, and brining Pacific research into conversation with post-humanist and post-structuralist thinking.

In summary, this brief review of the literature highlights relatively limited critical research of the everyday processes of policy within education development in Oceania. While there is a rich literature documenting broader shifts in donor policy and largely structuralist analyses of hegemonic power of donors and development discourses, there are limited theoretically grounded empirical explorations of *how* Pacific education development policy works (whether regional or otherwise), and why it works in this the way it does. Much of the critical literature of Pacific education policy also remains attached to an analysis of different ways of knowing or representing reality, but it still does not consider the possibility of ontological pluralisms. Furthermore, while almost all of the literature brings attention to the importance of 'context', theorising what precisely context means is rather limited. The review further highlights the potential of a poststructurally-informed analysis drawing on both insights from both policy mobilities research (to be discussed in Section 2.4) and Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory (Chapter 3) to bring fresh insights to topics of pressing public policy and academic concern. Before turning to these bodies of literature, I will first discuss how research particularly in the CPS and CIE fields have sought to conceptualise policy as a problem.

## 2.3   The problem of policy

This Section provides an overview of the literature on conventional and critical accounts of policy, and what kind of problem this literature makes policy be.

While scholarly analyses of policy have a long history, the field of policy studies only began to develop around the 1950-60s, with its roots in the political sciences (see Rizvi &

Lingard, 2010; Sabatier, 1991). Since that time, there has been a significant expansion in policy

research, reflecting the growth and evolution of policy itself, as well as how researchers have

come to conceptualise it. Shore and Wright (1997, p. 3) argue that 'the frontiers of policy are

expanding', to the extent that policy is not only ubiquitous in our daily lives, but also that the

sites, actors and mechanisms of policy have expanded. This expansion is inextricably linked to

the growth and 'shape-shifting' (Cowen, 2009, p. 315) of the organisational forms of

government and governance over the last fifty years, including into the 'global' space of

multilateralism and global governance (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). As Clarke and colleagues (2015)

succinctly state, *policy matters*. However, precisely *how* it matters and, perhaps even more

fundamentally, what policy *is* and how to study it, remain deeply contested issues (Rizvi &

Lingard, 2010).

Conventional accounts understand policy as a fixed and bounded entity or 'product'

that is made, implemented and transferred by rational policy actors seeking to achieve certain

ends (Clarke et al., 2015). Ontologically, policy is understood as 'an intrinsically technical,

rational, action-oriented instrument that decision makers use to solve problems and affect

change' (C. Shore & Wright, 1997, p. 5). As such, a large proportion of research in this vein is

concerned with delineating typologies of policy, policy actors, and policy models, all grounded

in an assumption that policy processes are ultimately knowable and predictable (Clarke et al.,

2015).

In contrast to conventional research *for* policy, critical studies *of* policy are

characterised by an understanding of policy not as a neutral and technical object, but rather as

a social and political phenomenon (Ozga, 2019). Critical theorists of policy may have varying

perspectives on concepts of power, knowledge and discourse. However, they broadly share an

understanding of policy as a site and process through which knowledge and power are

mobilised, and meanings and 'truths' are (re)made, normalised and contested, in ways that

have direct material effects and reflect 'underlying forms of rationality' (Ozga, 2019, p. 6). Thus,

critical studies of policy orient attention to the complexity and contingency of policy

processes, as well as the socio-political contexts within which policy is continually (re)made

through iterative processes (Clarke et al., 2015; Ozga, 2019). Scholars taking up the critical

study of policy, and particularly those within education, have adopted varying but closely

related perspectives of policy. These include policy as argument (Fischer & Forester, 1993); as

meaning (Yanow, 1996); as discourse (Bacchi, 2000; Ball, 1993; C. Shore & Wright, 1997); as

practice and performance (Clarke et al., 2015); and as assemblage (Savage, 2020; Thompson et

al., 2022; Youdell, 2015). These shifts in the way policy and policy processes are understood

reflect broader shifts, or 'turns', in the social sciences that are of particular relevance to this

research, including the influence of poststructuralism and Southern theory on studies of

education and development policy (Larsen & Beech, 2014; Lewis, 2020; Rizvi, 2007; Takayama

et al., 2017; Tikly, 2004).

In Ball's (1993) seminal article, '*What is policy*', and his subsequent reflection 21 years

later (Ball, 2015), he sets out a Foucauldian-informed framework for understanding policy *as*

*discourse*, or what is perhaps better described as discursive practices. In doing so, Ball (1993,

2015) distinguished between policy *as text* and policy *as discourse*: the former focuses on the

way policies are written and the processes of interpretation of those texts; while the latter

focuses on the way policies both constrain and enable what can be thought and said, including how these policy discourses construct particular subjectivities.

Ball's text/discourse distinction has been variously critiqued, including for 'not going far enough' in providing constructive critique for change (Gorur, 2011, p. 617); for establishing a dichotomy of text/discourse and agency/constraint; and for lacking a clear connection to a material social basis (Henry, 1993). An analytical approach that focuses too much on the 'unmasking' or deconstructing of policy as discourse, or on actors' interpretations of policy 'texts', may neglect the productive aspects of 'policy in practice or even policy as practice' (Clarke et al., 2015, p. 30). Similar critiques have also been launched at postcolonial and 'postdevelopment' scholars, such as Escobar (1995) and Esteva (1992). Drawing on more structuralist analyses of development discourse, they have been critiqued for being 'often worryingly silent on material conditions, particularly with regards to poverty' (Crewe & Harrison, 1998, p. 188). In portraying development discourses and global development actors as hegemonic, such analyses have been critiqued for presenting a totalising analysis that neglects the complexity and contingency of discursive practices in development, and for offering no constructive way forward (Brigg, 2002; McKinnon, 2007; Mosse, 2005).

However, as discussed previously (see Section 1.3), discourse (at least from a Foucauldian and Deleuzian-informed perspective) is never merely language and it does not exist separately from practice or the material. Rather, an understanding of policy as discourse entails, as Baaz (2005, p. 13) has stated in relation to global development, 'an acknowledgment that social practices are meaningful, that practices are constituted within different discourses, and, therefore that all social practices have a discursive aspect'. Importantly, while we may give

primary consideration to the discursive effects of policy, this does not mean that policy has no

material, or affective and spiritual, effects and dimensions (Bacchi & Bonham, 2014; Bailey,

2013). Rather, it points to the ways policy works by creating the conditions within which non-

discursive elements are considered, and how such considerations are then framed. Clarke and

colleagues (2015, p. 34; emphasis original) summarise this perspective well by suggesting we

consider policy as a 'a *genre*, as a way of imagining the world as an object of intervention; as a

way of enrolling subjects into a process of acting; and as a practice that seeks to produce

effects including the act of "taking the politics out of things"'.

In more recent years, CPS and CIE scholars have begun to explore beyond a 'policy-as-

discourse' framework, seeking theoretical, and indeed philosophical, resources better able to

account for the complex characteristics of policy in contemporary times. Specifically in

education policy research, there is an emerging concern for challenging the residual

commitments to representational and positivist thinking that continue to be present in much

CPS and CIE, as well as a continued belief in the teleology of policy (Ball, 2020; Carney &

Madsen, 2021; Cowen, 2023; Lewis & Spratt, 2024; Webb & Gulson, 2015). In addition, work in

the field of policy mobilities offers different ways of thinking about and analysing spatial and

mobility related aspects of policy, with a particular concern to challenge the methodological-

nationalisms, methodological-globalisms and state-centricisms still residual in much CPS

literature, and particularly that on education (K. N. Gulson et al., 2017; Lewis, 2017). The

concept of assemblage has become one such resource of increasing popularity for its ability to

deal with the apparent contingency, complexity, and multi-dimensional nature of policy (Baker

& McGuirk, 2017; Savage, 2020; Thompson et al., 2022; Youdell, 2015). However, as will be

discussed further in Chapter 3assemblage has been conceptualised and the extent to which its

deployment has succeeded in enabling a rethinking of policy has arguably varied.3 Before

turning to this discussion of assemblage theory and its use in policy research, the next Section

will elaborate on how policy movement and related concepts of space and scale have been

problematised in existing research.

## 2.4 The problem of policy movement and context

So far, this Chapter has highlighted the need to think differently not just about policy but also

the spaces in/through which policy moves. In the previous Section of this Chapter (Section

2.3), I outlined how policy is understood, the dominance of policy as discourse (variably

defined) in CPS and CIE literature, and the more recent shift towards more ontologically

focused conceptualisations of policy. In Sections 2.1 and 2.2 of this Chapter, I demonstrated

how academic literature and policy documents typically place PREDP 'in context' as a case of

small island, developing, postcolonial nation-states working together as a 'region' to respond

to 'global' agendas while meeting 'national' priorities. In so doing, this contextualisation

produces 'the Pacific development' as a problem of a context of limited capacity and natural

barriers, attempting to become-globalised through the assistance of development aid and so-

called policy borrowing (see, for example, Crossley et al., 2017; Dorovolomo & Lingam, 2020;

Sanga & Taufe'ulungaki, 2003). Such contextualisations tend to take as given categories of

scale (i.e., global, regional, national); leave categories of developed/developing, postcolonial,

and small unquestioned; and locate power with global and international actors. Yet, as others

have shown, such assumptions do not correspond well to the complexity of interconnections

and the relations of power within and between these spaces (Banivanua Mar, 2016; Coxon & Munce, 2008; Hau'ofa, 1993; T. K. Teaiwa, 2006).

Building on the previous two sections, I now turn to the problem of policy movement, with a particular focus on how the movement of policy is understood in relation to scalar conceptualisations of global/regional/national/local spaces. It is commonly accepted that processes of globalisation are a significant feature of most aspects of our contemporary lives, including education policy. However, there is less consensus in the academic literature as to what precisely we are referring to when we talk of globalisation, or how it relates to notions of global development, or what units of analysis (regions, countries, states/provinces …) we should focus on, or what theorisations are most useful for capturing the contingency and complexity of the contemporary phenomenon of globalisation. Globalisation is a highly contested term, and as Rizvi (2007) has argued, a hegemonic discourse of a 'global context' and the power of globalising forces is too often taken to be self-evident within explanations of changes in 'local contexts'.

In what proceeds, my aim is to first problematise the scalar and teleological approaches to thinking about space and time that have been prominent the literature on the globalisation of education policy. I will then contrast this with relational spatio-temporal approaches and explain how I will use these in my research.

### 2.4.1 Problematising globalisation

Historically, there has been a tendency in the academic literature on globalisation to conceptualise it as a singular process albeit with contingent effects, tied to territorial logics of

place and scale, and a teleological concept of change over time (Amin, 2002). In these

accounts, power is often located with the global and globalisation is situated as an all-

encompassing 'context of contexts' and, therefore, the backdrop against which changes in

'local' education policy must be understood (Verger et al., 2012). Critiques of this

conceptualisation focus on three main elements. First, this version of events silences the

historical antecedents of globalisation and development, including their roots in the

imperialist and colonial projects of Europe and the United States of America (Rizvi, 2007; Tikly,

2004). Second, it encourages a relatively myopic focus on nation-states as the singular site of

globalisation's impact, with the global construed as the intruding force in a way that overlooks

the contingency of 'local-global' interactions and the discursive construction of 'the global'

(Rizvi, 2007). Third, these discursive reconstructions of relationships between places and

peoples are underpinned by a questionable modernist discourse that maps spatial differences

(e.g., the distance of the periphery from the metropole) onto a corresponding temporal scale

of progress and development (Esteva, 1992; Massey, 1999). Underpinning these problems are

an associated commitment to a territorial and discontinuous concept of space, a linear

concept of time, and the persistence of a Northern epistemic viewpoint in theorising

globalisation (Amin, 2002; Connell, 2007; Lewis, 2023). The next sections will elaborate on

these issues before proposing an alternative conceptualisation of globalisation for use in this

research.

### 2.4.2 Problematising global-local and scalar thinking

Globalisation has often been positioned as a universalising process; either a 'triumph of world

capitalism' (Amin, 1998, p. 149) or as a new form of imperialism that can further Northern

domination over, and erasure of, 'local' places and Indigenous peoples (see, for example, Escobar, 1995; Tikly, 2004). As noted above, both the global and the local are reified in these accounts, with 'the global' being decoupled from, and even set in opposition to, 'the local'.[8] The global is also positioned as the primary agent of change and the local as the site being acted upon by 'powerful' global forces, which can only ever be understood in terms of its relationship to the global (Hall, 1991). Furthermore, such totalising discourses neglect the particularism of so-called global processes, as de Sousa Santos (2006, p. 396) argues:

> [T]here is no originally global position; what we call globalisation is always the successive globalisation of a particular localism... it would be equally correct in analytical terms if we were to define the current situation and our research topics in terms of localisation rather than globalisation.

This discourse of a global-local binary assumes a structuralist notion of power and an 'underlying assumption that separate territorial logics – one place-bound and the other at world-scale – can be readily identified and as incompatible logics of social organisation' (Amin, 1998, p. 147). As such, these accounts commit the dual error of both methodological nationalism (Beck, 2000) and methodological globalism (Clarke et al., 2015). The former refers to the assumed primacy of a territorially-bounded concept of the nation-state, while the latter 'imagines the world as a uniform and borderless space across which policies flow

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[8] Important to note here is that 'local' is as much a construction as 'global', and is used here as shorthand for referring to the various forms of local spaces such as village, town, province, nation, region etc.

uninterruptedly' (Clarke et al., 2015, p. 21), thereby denying any continued significance of place and the people therein.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the 'common sense' tendency to rely on global, regional, national, local as *a priori* and bounded categories is evident in a great deal of the policy studies literature, and particularly that which focuses on policy transfer, diffusion and borrowing (Clarke et al., 2015). Other accounts, often drawing on variants of neo-institutionalism, political economy, and network theory, have shown how the mobilisation of education policies globally occurs in varied ways through complex, dense and multi-scalar policy networks, wherein policies are 're-contextualised' or 'indigenised' into the spaces they move (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004; Verger et al., 2012). In this work, scales of global, regional, national and local are recognised as socially constructed and not clearly bounded, and greater agency is attributed to the 'local'. However, this work continues to distinguish global 'spaces' from local 'places', and at times aligning these with binaries of the 'imaginary' and 'real' (Connell, 2007; Larsen & Beech, 2014; Silova et al., 2020). This is, in part, the result of the reliance on scalar thinking, which retains a 'preconceived territorial spatiality and logic' (Lewis, 2023, p. 5). Scalar approaches conceptualise space in terms of nested layers of social organisation of global, national and local. While many scholars using scalar thinking understand such layers to be socially constructed (see, for instance, Papanastasiou, 2017; Savage et al., 2021), they are still positioned as determinant of and concomitant with identity and politics, and as such provide the most important or at very least key unit of analysis (Amin, 2002; Larsen & Beech, 2014). Such approaches limit our ability to explore forms of relationality and connection that do not correspond to scalar or territorialised boundaries, as well as

impede our ability to understand the co-constitutive and contingent nature of such constructions.

Therefore, while scalar approaches are useful, at least in part because they are so central to how policy actors think about the world, they nonetheless limit what questions we can ask and tie us to a 'lingering global-local knot' (Lewis, 2023, p. 5; Takayama, 2013), thereby maintaining a relativist ontology of space that binds us to a delimiting of 'in-here' and 'out-there' relations (Amin, 2002). As Gupta and Ferguson (1992, p. 6) have argued, the prevalent understanding of space in the social sciences is 'remarkably dependent on images of break, rupture and disjunction', so that place, culture and society are assumed as inseparably tied to discontinuous spaces. This ontology of space ties us to binaries of local and global, here and there, even when attempts are made to recognise the blurring of boundaries and multi-directional interconnections between them. Analytically, this leads to a kind of 'impasse' when researching globalisation and education policy. As Gulson and colleagues (2017, p. 228) argue, while we have an ever-expanding body of rich accounts of travelling global policies and their 'recontextualisation', these are providing minimal 'new conceptual or methodological insights'.

### 2.4.3   Spatio-temporal thinking

Considering globalisation, and the mobile dimensions of policy, in terms of relational, processual conceptualisations of space and time, may offer a way past this impasse (Amin, 2002; Carney et al., 2012; K. N. Gulson et al., 2017; Larsen & Beech, 2014; Lewis, 2023; Peck & Theodore, 2015; Seddon et al., 2018). In the academic literature, relational theorising of space has gained particular prominence within critical geography (see, for example, Harvey, 1990;

Harvey & Harvey, 2000; Massey, 1999; May & Thrift, 2003; Thrift, 1999). It is also prominent in

the theorising of globalisation, colonialisation and development by those drawing from

Southern perspectives (see, for example, Amin, 2002; Appadurai, 1996; de Sousa Santos, 2006;

Escobar, 2001; Mignolo, 2020; Quijano, 2007). Importantly, relational theorising of space and

time is central to Pacific ontologies, as documented particularly by scholars such as Mahina

(2010) and Ka'ili (2005, 2017), which in turn shapes analyses of globalisation, development and

decolonisation provided by scholars such as Hau'ofa (1993), Banivanua Mar (2016) and Teaiwa

(2020). In the area of education policy research, such spatio-temporal thinking has been taken

up in several more recent theoretical and methodological approaches, particularly the

aforementioned literature on policy mobilities and policy assemblage (K. Gulson & Symes,

2017; Larsen & Beech, 2014; Lewis, 2021; McKenzie, 2017; Savage, 2020). Broadly speaking,

relational ontologies consider space and time as emergent through relations and practice,

always becoming and therefore contingent (Amin, 2002; Mahina, 2010; Massey, 1999).

Relational or topological understandings of space are thus based on a central principle that

space is 'defined by relations between points, instead of only considering the spatial location

of points' (Lewis, 2023, p. 5).

In this way, place and 'context' are not mere passive backdrops to action; that is, there

is no space 'out there', pre-existing and simply awaiting to be inhabited, but neither is space

inherently tied to particular territorial boundaries. Rather, space is constructed through and by

interrelations between people, place and things created through practice (Massey, 1999). Thus,

relational ways of thinking place and scale reject the binary conceptualisation of these as fixed,

bounded entities discontinuous with 'other' places and scales. The *a priori* ontological

distinction between local and global necessitated by scalar approaches is thus dissolved,

allowing for thinking beyond the 'global-local knot'. In so doing, different questions can now

be asked as to the discursive practices at work in constructing particular boundaries around

spaces, and how these in turn structure and produce practices (Larsen & Beech, 2014).

Notably, such constructions are often referred to in the literature as 'imaginaries' (Jolly, 2007;

Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Taylor, 2004), whereas conceptualising them as discursive constructions

instead designates them as 'real' as anything else (Deleuze, 1992).

Thinking about space as emergent through relations and therefore as multiplicity also

has implications for thinking about time. Historically, Northern theory has tended to give

primacy to time over space, wherein time is understood as a linear trajectory and the site of

action and change, while space is simply the passive backdrop (Foucault, 1980; Larsen &

Beech, 2014; Massey, 1999). As Massey (1999, p. 7) has argued, this 'convening of space in

temporal terms is a way of conceiving difference which is typical of many of the great

modernist understandings of the world'. It is epitomised in concepts of developed/developing

nations, where spatial differences are constituted in terms of temporal sequence, where 'the

implication is that places are not genuinely different; rather they are just ahead or behind in

the same story: their 'difference' consists only in their place in the historical queue' (Massey,

1999, p. 7). An alternative understanding of space as predicated multiplicity, however, requires

us to challenge the temporal convening of space and to recognise the 'co-existence of a

multiplicity of histories' (Massey, 1999, p. 7). Importantly this rethinking of space does not

warrant a lesser focus on the dimension of time, but rather a rethinking of time *beyond* a

linear chronology to recognise the complex relationships between past, present and future

(Lingard, 2021), such as encapsulated in Harvey's (1990) space-time or May and Thrift's (2003) timespace.

My understanding of these 're-conceptions' of space and time also draws from Pacific scholarship, such as Mahina's (2010) discussion of Tongan ontology, in which space and time exist on a single plane of spatial-temporality and are mutually constitutive. Common across many Pacific cultures is a conception of the world as relationally constituted and thus peoples/places/things are constituted through spatialised relations (Anae, 2019; Hermann et al., 2014; Matapo, 2021; B. Shore, 2014; Vaai, 2019). For example, in southern Pacific contexts, social relations are constituted through the practice of *teu le vā*, which has been translated as the nurturing of the relational space between human, material, planetary and spiritual worlds (Anae, 2019). Conceptions of time within many Pacific island knowledge systems are also understood as not extending out in a linear and discontinuous trajectory; rather, pasts and futures are folded into presents, in an 'intertwining and circular arrangement' (Ka'ili, 2017, p. 36). Importantly, the flows that constitute space-time connection are not merely discursive or material, but also spiritual, cosmological and affective (Ka'ili, 2017; Mahina, 2010). It is through these spatialised connections that bodies, places and worlds take shape and are transformed. Here, there is opportunity to add to spatial-temporal theorising as currently discussed in CPS by attending to Pacific research. This will be discussed further below in Chapter 4, with regards to the methodological implications of bringing into conversation literature from across policy mobilities, Pacific research and assemblage theory.

Also important to note here is that the spatial-temporal theorising is presented in much of the academic literature as new forms of 'rethinking' space and time, typically

necessitated by and emergent from the 'new' challenges brought on by the increased complexity of our 'globalised' and technologically advanced world. I do not deny that there are 'new' features of contemporary society that are raising new and different questions. However, to suggest relational theorising as 'new' and as a form of 'rethinking' necessitated by contemporary social changes ignores the long traditions of relational thought within Indigenous Knowledges and suggests that there was a 'time before', during which non-relational theorising was sufficient. This is indicative of what Connell (2007) has argued is a continued deficit in sociology's engagement with Southern Theory, implying a continuing retention (and pre-eminence) of a Northern viewpoint. Such positioning is also evident in the consistent framing of the globalisation of policy as bringing about new challenges for what is 'normally' a nation-state prerogative, as Silova, Rappleye and Auld (2020, p. 4) argue:

> [A]lthough Western observers are apt to view global policy trends over the past several decades as novel, in fact they are only experiencing what non-Western countries have encountered since the beginning of modern education: the inevitability of thinking about education in relation to the wider global context.

This is a viewpoint baked into discourses of the Pacific. As Hau'ofa (1993, p. 6) has argued, the prevailing view of 'those who hail from continents' was to see the Pacific as made up of small, isolated, bounded island nation-states. As such, this risks overlooking both historical and contemporary processes of:

> ... world-enlargement carried out by tens of thousands of ordinary Pacific
> Islanders right across the ocean from east to west and north to south... making
> nonsense of all national and economic boundaries, borders that have been
> defined only recently, crisscrossing an ocean that had been boundless for ages
> before Captain Cook's apotheosis. (Hau'ofa, 1993, p. 6)

Thus, while recognising such thinking as perhaps 'new' for CPS, my intent in this research is to stay alert to the pluralities of knowing and being. While taking as starting points concepts embedded in Northern knowledges, my aim is to use this research as an opportunity to 'think from difference' by continually questioning such concepts in light of my (partial and always-becoming) learning from Pacific research.

### 2.4.4 Considering regionalisms

Much of this Section so far has focused on the ways in which the global, in relation to the national and/or local, has been conceptualised. However, as Hau'ofa's (1993) reflections above highlight, the significance of the regional and of relations amongst peoples pre-date the cartographic carving up of land as property that was introduced through various waves of imperial-colonial expansion. Therefore, I want to briefly discuss the literature on Pacific regionalism in this Section, as well as consider (where appropriate) relevant CPS and CIE literature on regionalisms and education policy. My focus in considering this literature is again related to the problematisation of policy and its movement across 'contexts'.

There is a large body of literature has explored the notion of the Pacific, or Oceania, as a relational space, linked to critical analysis of 'the idea of the Pacific' and the ways in which this

idea has been constructed, represented and employed at different times, by different actors, with varying effects (Bryant-Tokalau & Frazer, 2017; Fry, 2019; Fry & Tarte, 2015; Jolly, 2007; Kabutaulaka, 2021; Lawson, 2010, 2016; Pan & Clarke, 2022; T. K. Teaiwa, 2006; Waddell et al., 1993). I draw on this literature throughout this thesis to consider the broader political architecture and conceptualisations of regionalism of which Pacific education development regionalism is a part. However, I note that very little of this literature has considered education specifically.

In the CIE literature, regionalism has been recognised as of increasing significance, particularly (but not exclusively) in relation to higher education (Dale & Robertson, 2002; Lee et al., 2014; Robertson et al., 2016). Much of this work has focused on the role of regionalism in the regulation of higher education and its implications for statehood (see, for example, Robertson, 2010; Verger & Hermo, 2010). Other work has offered detailed analyses of specific cases of education regionalism such as in the Caribbean, which is of clear relevance to my research (Jules, 2008, 2014; Jules & Arnold, 2022; Louisy, 2001). Largely grounded in political economic analysis and forms of new institutionalism, this work offers useful insights into the relationships between national, regional and global governing structures as they pertain to education policy, service delivery and education markets. Overall, while this body of research on regionalism in the Pacific and education regionalism has been informative for my research, as yet I have not found any work strongly grounded in Deleuze-Guattarian assemblage theory[9]

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[9] I note that more recent work from Jule's (Jules et al., 2022; Salajan & Jules, 2021) on regionalism draws on the concept of assemblage, however I would argue that it is an example of

and exploring how we might think differently about regional education policy if we loose our attachment to fixed notions of identity and the teleology of policy.

### 2.4.5 Reframing globalisation relationally

In summary, 're-thinking' globalisation in terms of spatial-temporal theorising, and an appreciation for affective and sacred dimensions, recasts the kinds of questions we ask about policy and orients us to treat discourses of place, scale and time as 'matters of concern' and sites of productive power. Scalar analyses of processes of globalisation in relation to policy are concerned with the relationship between global, regional and national policy, the logics in operation at each scale, and would therefore ask how policy from one scale is 're-contextualised' in another. Building from Lewis' (2023) topologically informed framing of globalisation, I alternatively propose to employ in this research a concept of globalisation as primarily concerned with how people, practices, places and times are brought together in space; how discursive and non-discursive forces and flows, including affective and spiritual, are mobilised within and between these space-times; and how these movements shape the exercise of power, affective and sacred relations. Situating PREDP, and questions of context-responsiveness, within this relational, processual theorisation of globalisation arguably helps bring attention to the complexities of the multiple dimensions constituting PREDP, while also deliberately unsettling the dominant territorial, discontinuous and teleological logics of space

literature that has employed assemblage without deep engagement with the ontological implications of Deleuze and Guatari's work, as will be discussed further in section 3.3.

and time operating in discourses of globalisation and regionalism, which are themselves

frequently deployed to describe and explain PREDP.

## 2.5   Chapter summary: creating new problems

This Chapter has explored the ways in which context, Pacific education development, policy

and policy movement are problematised in existing CPS, CIE, and Pacific research literature.

Overall, I have argued that there may be value in thinking differently about these problems, in

ways that seek to question that which is taken for granted – in particular, scale, context, and

the teleology of policy. Particularly through drawing on more recent literature in policy

mobilities and Pacific research, I have demonstrated how more relational and processual

analyses open to considering not just flows of power and the politics of knowledge but also

how thinking anew the ontology of how things (including policy and space-time) come to be

might help us ask such questions. However, the extent to which the literature, particularly that

related to Pacific education development, does this is currently limited. Thus, in the next

Chapter, I explore assemblage theory and make an argument for bringing this into discussion

with policy mobilities and Pacific research, to further expand what can be asked of Pacific

regional education development policy.

# 3 Encountering assemblage theory

In this Chapter, I share my encounters with assemblage theory, and demonstrate the utility of a conjoined framework – drawing across assemblage theory, policy mobilities and Pacific research – for analysing education policy and its contexts. I begin the Chapter by briefly discussing what brought me to assemblage theory (Section 3.1). I then discuss some aspects of the genealogy of assemblage within Deleuze and Guattari's work (Section 3.2), followed by a brief discussion of the way it has been taken up within the broader CPS and CIE literature (Section 3.3). I then provide a summary of the key concepts of assemblage theory (Section 3.4). Finally, in Section 3.5, I summarise how assemblage theory can be used to think differently about policy (movement) and context(-ualisation). Following Buchanan (2021), I consider assemblage theory to offer both theory and methodology but, at the same time, question whether the two can be made distinct. As such, throughout this Chapter, as I elaborate theoretical/conceptual elements of assemblage, these should also be considered to have direct methodological implications. As such, 4I will detail more specifically in Chapter 4 the methodological implications of bringing together policy mobilities, Pacific theorising and assemblage theory in a conjoined approach.

## 3.1   Why assemblage theory?

PREDP is complex and can be experienced, analysed and theorised in many ways (see Chapter 1 for further elaboration). Attempts to analyse this complexity requires wrangling with concepts of context, policy, education, agency, change, space and time (amongst many others), each of which are conceptually and empirically *rhizomatic;* that is, they are

multiplicities in ceaseless encounter with other discourses and forms, and these are open to

continually changing through these encounters (Deleuze & Guattari, 2020, pp. 7–8). Similarly,

it is the nebulous and mercurial ways in which concepts such as *education, development,*

*globalisation, discourse* and (less so, but arguably growing) *assemblage* are often used within

the Academy that further complicates the process of inquiry.

To tackle this complexity, this Chapter sets out assemblage theory[10] as the basis for

rethinking policy and context. I openly acknowledge assemblage thinking is a way of thinking-

doing policy, which is inherently neither better nor worse than others. However, I argue

assemblage is particularly useful and relevant for my research because it is useful for unsettling

what have arguably become 'received ideas' (Flaubert, cited in Buchanan, 2021, p. 3) about

policy, context, education development and regionalism, and it is therefore a means of

enabling different questions to be asked and, in turn, answers to be found. I have determined

assemblage theory to be the basis for my inquiry through a deliberate, and often difficult,

engagement with the available scholarship on Pacific ontologies and knowledges. This has

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[10] In my discussion and use of assemblage theory, I focus exclusively on how the elements of assemblage theory operate in what Buchanan (2021, p. 28) refers to as the *techno-semiological strata*, or what could otherwise be described as the realm of human-social consciousness. Deleuze and Guattari posit the world as made up of three main groupings of strata, that of the *geological, biological* (or organic) and the *alloplastic* or techno-semiological (within which are multiple sub-strata) (Deleuze & Guattari, 2020). Buchanan (2021, p. 29) states that these strata conceptually 'problematise and map the terrain of human existence'. He helpfully summarises the relationships between strata as,

> … 'we' humans depend on the properties of the earth for our existence (geology) and 'we' depend on the properties of our bodies for what 'we' can do on the earth (biology), but 'we' constantly exceed those limits in the outpourings of our minds (Buchanan, 2021, p. 21).

In this discussion, my explanations of the components of assemblage theory relate only to how they operate within the techno-semiological strata, which is critically distinct from their operations within the geological and biological strata.

involved continually questioning the 'limits of Northern knowing' (Takayama et al., 2016, p. 6) that is dominant in academic policy sociology and related literature, as well as in my own thinking. I have tried to make this engagement explicit in what is written below and to think *from difference* as it arises through this engagement. This has been, and will continue to be, an ongoing process, insofar as my understandings are only ever partial and always becoming.

## 3.2  Situating assemblage theory

Buchanan (2021, p. 13) suggests considering *assemblage* as 'a point of departure' for addressing a central problematic for Deleuze and Guattari, of *why* things *happen* in the way that they do, and why, relatedly, do 'we' (the 'we' of human and non-human, individual and collective bodies) behave the way we do (and therefore, what conditions may generate different happenings and behaviour). Or, in Deleuze's (1995, p. 25) own words, '*the circumstances in which things happen*: in what situations, where and when does a particular thing happen, how does it happen, and so on?' (emphasis added). Assemblage theory offers a framework that encourages us to think creatively about these questions, insofar as it prevents us from answering these questions in terms of what things *are* or through recourse to 'common sense'. Instead, it requires us to think differently about the things we think we know and to make thinkable the possibility for them to be (thought) otherwise. In analysing policy, assemblage theory guides us to consider the contingent 'working arrangement' of associations between materiality (bodies, actions, objects) and expression (ideas, words), and the forces of desire that are productive of policy, but without relying on *a priori* assumptions of concepts such as intention, context or power holding absolute explanatory power. In this

way, assemblage theory asks us to think differently about difference, change (development, movement) and context, which are all central to questions of Pacific education development.

As a departure point, the concept of assemblage cannot be fully appreciated without reference to Deleuze and Guattari's broader philosophy and an understanding of multiple concepts that arguably together comprise Deleuzian- Guattarian assemblage theory (Buchanan, 2021). As noted in Section 1.3, all concepts for Deleuze and Guattari are responses to problems, and a concept can only be understood in conjunction with the problem that gave rise to it (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 16). Thus, to fully understand assemblage, we need at least some familiarity with Deleuze and Guattari's broader philosophy and what problems assemblage responds to in the context of this philosophy. This is the focus of Section 3.4.1.

Before embarking on an elaboration of assemblage theory, I believe it is useful to highlight some dimensions of what we might consider the genealogy or (perhaps more aptly) the becoming of assemblage as a concept within Deleuze and Guattari's work, including: *i)* the links between assemblage and Foucault's *dispositif*, ii) the role of assemblage as a re-conceptualising of earlier psychoanalytic theorisations of behaviour and desire; and *iii)* issues related to the translation of *agencement* (as the original French term used by Deleuze and Guattari) into English. I will then briefly review how assemblage has been taken up in secondary literature, and particularly that of policy studies.

The first point I want to make about the genealogy of assemblage is its relationship to Foucault's work, and particularly his concept of *dispositif*. As evidenced in the text *What is a dispositif?* (Deleuze, 1992) and Deleuze's book on Foucault (ibid., 1988a), Deleuze recognised

*dispositif* as a significant concept and, arguably, one requiring further elaboration. Indeed, according to Buchanan (2010, dispositif section, para. 1.), Deleuze and Guattari's 'writing suggests that they appropriated the concept [dispositif] and made it their own'.

Foucault's concepts of discourse, discursive practice and dispositif, similarly to Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory, focus on countering key elements of Enlightenment philosophical and scientific thought, including the representational logic of signifier/signified, the universalistic assumptions of the nature of being and the linear conceptions of history. Central to both *dispositif* and assemblage theory is the theorisation of how forms of content (i.e., the visible, the non-discursive) and forms of expression (i.e., the sayable, the discursive) are articulated in particular ways to produce what we recognise as social formations, including 'ourselves', through a process Deleuze and Guattari describe as 'stratification' (see Section 3.4.2 for elaboration). However, assemblage theory also extends Foucault's work, connecting the processes of stratification to a more elaborate theorisation of difference and multiplicity and the 'pre-thought' forces of desire, which arguably opens new and generative lines of inquiry into why things happen the way they do.[11] I make this point because Foucauldian

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[11] There is not space for me here to go into a detailed discussion of the limitations of dispositif and how assemblage theory builds on and extends it. However, it is important to note that my understanding of assemblage theory was greatly aided by my initial explorations into dispositif, and work I undertook for my mid-candidature review submission to consider limitations in dispositif and Foucault's broader work, particularly in terms of articulating the relationship between the discursive and non-discursive. This led me to my first in-depth reading of Deleuze's writing, specifically *What is dispositif* (Deleuze, 1992) and his book *Foucault* (Deleuze, 1988a), which was then invaluable for me in beginning to navigate assemblage theory. Hence, my concern to include at least some of this discussion here. I would also note here, that Deleuze's first published book in 1953, *Empiricism and Subjectivity: An Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature*, is useful to consider here. While I am early in my encounter

concepts of discourse have largely dominated many strands of critical policy studies to this point (Fischer et al., 2015), and readers of my work are therefore likely to be more familiar with concepts of discourse and Foucauldian theorisations of power-knowledge in relation to policy analysis. However, I would argue that Foucault's concepts have been taken up in such a way (and perhaps to such an extent) that they have taken on the properties of common sense, which has arguably, at least to my reading, and started to stifle thinking. For instance, Foucauldian concepts, and particularly discourse, have been adopted without enough attention to the ontological implications of Foucault's theorising, which has led to somewhat anaemic analysis, inconsistent analysis, or a reliance on 'discursive power' as an almost transcendent explanatory variable. This is why I have found assemblage theory so helpful, as I believe it offers a way to break out of some of these dead-ends and awaken my thinking, while still also retaining the creative power of Foucault's work.

The second point that is useful to highlight about the genealogy of assemblage theory is the extent to which it responds to and counters psychoanalytic theories, such as those of Freud and Lacan. As will be discussed further below, Deleuze and Guattari's theorisation of desire as productive, *contra* Freud and Lacan's theorisation of desire as lack, is central to assemblage theory. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari first used the term 'desiring-machine' in

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with this text and am indebted to Roffe (2016) for making it more accessible, it seems that Deleuze is exploring through Hume many of the ideas underpinning assemblage theory, with regard to considering what is prior to human nature, behaviour and subjectivity.

*Anti-Oedipus* for what they would later call 'assemblage' in *A Thousand Plateaus* (see also

Buchanan, 2021; Deleuze, 2006b, p. 277).

Importantly, Buchanan (2021, p. 20) points out that Deleuze and Guattari introduced

the term *agencement* as a 'rearrangement' of the German word *Komplex* (translated to English

as 'complex'), which was the term used in Freud's psychoanalysis. When asked to provide a

glossary definition for *agencement*, Guattari (1984, p. 288) offered 'in the schizo-analytic

theory of the unconscious, arrangement [assemblage] is conceived as replacing the Freudian

"complex"'. Deleuze and Guattari's books *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* were

oriented towards challenging the theory of behaviour put forward by psychoanalysis and the

representational, binary logic underpinning much of Enlightenment philosophy and academic

theory. It is thus important to consider assemblage within this context and especially regarding

its role in Deleuze and Guattari's broader project of *schizoanalysis*. Formulated as an

alternative to psychoanalysis, schizoanalysis attempts to provide an integrated theorisation of

individual behaviour that incorporates social and historical factors, and a theorisation of social

formations (in particular, capitalism) that incorporates libidinal and semiotic factors (Holland,

2005).

For Deleuze and Guattari, assemblage replaces the psychoanalytic perspective that

references underlying, latent psychological complexes as the drivers of behaviour (Buchanan,

2021; Guattari, 2009). As Deleuze (2006b, p. 179; emphasis added) explained in a 1980

interview, 'what we are saying is that the idea of assemblage can replace the idea of

behaviour… the problem is one of "consistency" or "coherence", and it is *prior* to the problem

of behaviour'. This statement is central to understanding the purpose of assemblage within

Deleuze and Guattari's work, and it distinguishes it from many of the secondary interpretations of assemblage (which will be discussed further below). Importantly, Deleuze and Guattari's focus was not the psychology and behaviour of individuals *per se* but, rather, the psychology and behaviour of *social forms*: the complex bodies (people, discourses, material objects …) that constitute the life of individuals, groups and societies through their continual intermingling (Deleuze & Guattari, 2020, p. 203). Assemblage was thus formulated to map the multi-dimensional processes of how libidinal forces (desire) and semiotic and material formations are made to hold together with sufficient coherence to produce the behaviour of all bodies (human, non-human, discourses, social formations, material objects).

The third point I want to note here about the genealogy of assemblage theory is that 'assemblage' - as the most common English term for *agencement* – is especially problematic. This issue of translation has also arguably contributed to a more significant issue via the problematic and/or incomplete renderings of *agencement*-as-assemblage in a considerable amount of the secondary literature (Bignall, 2007; Buchanan, 2021; Phillips, 2006). To begin with, *agencement* in French functions as both verb and noun (Bignall, 2007). This means that in the original texts, Deleuze and Guattari are at times using *agencement* as a verb and at other times as a noun, a distinction all but lost when *agencement* is translated as assemblage, which in 'plain language' English is used only as a noun to typically refer to a 'collection of things'. This distinction is quite critical for two reasons. First, as noted above, Deleuze and Guattari formulated assemblage to map the active, dynamic arrangement(s) of desire, not to merely describe a collection of things, or what Buchanan (2021, p. 18) refers to as 'bits and pieces'. Second, as Bignall (2007, p. 207) explains, it is through the interaction between an act of

*agencement* (verb) and the production of a particular (momentarily) stable *agencement* (noun) that subjectivity emerges, a point that will be discussed further below. Here, the qualifying use of 'concrete assemblage' to refer to specific arrangements or bodies (i.e., as noun) produced through the abstract assemblage (i.e., as verb) is helpful (Bignall, 2007, p. 206; Deleuze & Guattari, 2020, p. 146).

Given these issues with translation, my preference would be to use *agencement*, rather than assemblage or arrangement (which is also sometimes used). This would be consistent with my use of *dispositif* (rather than the typical English translation of apparatus) and various Pacific concepts, where I have used the original terms untranslated. As discussed in Section 1.3, doing so recognises the risks of assuming equivalences between English translations and the original idea as expressed in another language and is a small act of decolonialisation to counter the hegemonic and totalising nature of English (Thaman, 2019b). However, given 'assemblage' is so commonly used in contemporary literature and in the English translations of Deleuze and Guattari's work (upon which I rely), I will use 'assemblage' here while continually reminding the reader (and myself) that it is *not* a collection of things but is a mapping of the abstract arrangement of desire through which 'things' are made to matter. I will use assemblage theory to emphasise that assemblage cannot really be considered of as a stand-alone concept.

## 3.3   Use of assemblage thinking in policy research

The above discussion about aspects of the genealogy of assemblage provide an initial 'ground clearing' for considering assemblage theory, while also highlighting aspects that have often

been neglected in the secondary literature. Here, I will briefly discuss how assemblage has been taken up in the secondary literature and particularly in critical policy studies and policy mobilities. I will highlight some of the limitations of much of its current use and suggest the analytic potential of fuller engagements with assemblage theory for the study of policy and its movement.

As noted in Section 2.3, across a range of disciplines in the social sciences, 'assemblage thinking has exploded' (Savage, 2020, p. 319). However, while Deleuze and Guattari's work is frequently referenced as the original source, the ways assemblage thinking is formulated and applied in secondary literature are varied, at times inconsistent and imprecise, and often at odds with that of Deleuze and Guattari's original texts (Buchanan, 2021; Savage, 2020). As Marcus and Saka (2006, p. 103) argue, many scholars using assemblage have failed to take up the fuller theorisation offered by Deleuze and Guattari, and instead have engaged in 'piecemeal appropriation of certain concepts'. Others have also argued that assemblage as a concept is at risk of becoming an 'empty signifier', meaning anything and everything and thus diminishing its value for analysis (for instance, see B. Anderson & McFarlane, 2011, p. 125; Buchanan, 2021). There are at least two discernible 'variations' of assemblage theory in the secondary literature (Buchanan, 2021; Savage, 2020): *i)* Latour's (2005) *Actor-Network Theory* formulation of social assemblages, and *ii)* the *New Materialist* interpretations arising from, amongst others, DeLanda (2006) and Bennett (2010). While these each draw on Deleuze and Guattari's work, Buchanan (2021) notes they do so in ways often inconsistent with, if not outright contradictory to, the original texts, albeit without an explicit recognition or explanation of these differences.

Looking specifically at how assemblage thinking has been taken up within the policy mobilities literature, there is a tendency for it to be deployed as a kind of socio-spatial concept for describing a heterogenous collection of things that produce a coherent 'whole' through their relations, albeit with a focus on the contingent and dynamic nature of those relations (McCann & Ward, 2012a; Savage, 2020; Thompson et al., 2022). The emphasis on the socio-spatial arguably derives from the influence of critical geography on policy mobilities, wherein assemblage has become a favoured concept for attending to properties of 'emergence, multiplicity and indeterminacy' of places and spaces (B. Anderson & McFarlane, 2011, p. 124). Savage (2020) suggests the appeal of assemblage thinking is its ability to trace the relational, emergent and heterogenous elements of social formations in general, and policy specifically. Reflecting on the diverse ways in which assemblage thinking has been taken up in the literature, Savage (2020, p. 321) suggests the 'core foundations' of a policy assemblage approach include a focus on relations of exteriority, heterogeneity, emergence and flux, as well as the flows of power and agency. While these formulations of assemblage thinking have much to offer and, indeed, connect well with my argument for rethinking globalisation and the analysis of place and context in relational and spatial ways (see Section 2.4), they entirely neglect key elements of Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory. At no point in these discussions and applications of assemblage theory are key concepts such as stratification or desire mentioned, and assemblage is rendered as a largely socio-spatial concept devoid of any of the 'passional' ontology of assemblage theory (Deleuze & Guattari, 2020, p. 399).

That there are different versions of assemblage thinking is not in itself problematic, and neither is a 'creative appropriation' of Deleuze and Guattari's concepts (Buchanan, 2021, p. 5).

Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari (and Foucault, for that matter) encourage us to treat their theorisations not as definitive but as tools to support further (re)theorisation (Deleuze & Foucault, 1977; Deleuze & Guattari, 1994). However, it is arguably problematic when those claiming to deploy Deleuze and Guattari's concepts do so without first recognising (or justifying) any of the (many) re-interpretations they introduce (Buchanan, 2021). Furthermore, it is problematic that much of the secondary literature (including that of policy mobilities) has failed to engage with key aspects of Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage thinking because this means much of its analytical power is missed (Buchanan, 2021; Thompson et al., 2022), both by the authors of these works and their subsequent readership.

Arguably, in such readings of assemblage theory, scholars have tended to only engage with the parts of the concept that are readily recognisable, producing new ways of *describing* complex relations but without having to fundamentally shift away from existing *common sense*; that is, the largely 'taken for granted' concepts of structures and networks, place and space, power/knowledge relations, and a concern for the 'what' and the 'how' of social phenomena. However, as Buchanan (2021) argues, this reading not only neglects fundamental elements (which will be discussed further below) but also the very purpose for which Deleuze and Guattari formulated assemblage theory – to creatively consider the question of 'why' things happen in the way they do and the role of libidinal, spiritual and affective intensities (Buchanan, 2021). As such, much of the discussion below is written with the intent of highlighting the aspects of assemblage theory missed or misinterpreted by the secondary literature. Specifically, these include the nature of Deleuze and Guattari's 'materialism', as well as the role of desire, stratification and immanence within assemblage theory. To begin, I will

look at the broader ontology underpinned by concepts of difference, becoming and desire, within which assemblage is situated.

## 3.4 Explaining assemblage theory

This Section offers my understandings of the key dimensions of assemblage theory, with a particular focus on how they might be applied to consider education policy.

### 3.4.1 An ontology of difference, becoming and desire

In my reading of Deleuze and Guattari, they offer a conception of life as a continual flow of becoming and difference that involves an ongoing tension between forces of what might be described as organisation and dis-organisation, leading to either a re-organisation or chaos. We tend to think of the forms of life that we recognise as people, objects or institutions as *organisms*; that is, bounded wholes with a specific identity and purpose. Deleuze and Guattari challenge the presumptions of unity and singular identity that we give to entities such as 'myself', 'you', 'chair' or 'school'. Rather, they conceive of bodies (which, in their terminology, encompass any stable form of organisation, including people, ideas or material objects; these are also known as machines or assemblages) as multiplicities. As Deleuze (1983, pp. 39–40) states,

> [W] hat is a body? … What defines a body is this relation between dominant
>
> and dominated forces. … Being composed of a plurality of irreducible forces,
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> the body is a multiple phenomenon, its unity is that of a multiple
>
> phenomenon, a 'unity of domination'.

Bodies, as multiplicities, are thus a complex composition of forces held in relation to one

another, which have no prior unity, and which always retain the potential for difference (Roffe,

2010). Multiplicity does not function as an adjective, as in a 'multiplicity of ideas', but neither

does it relate to the binary of the one and the many (Deleuze & Guattari, 2020, p. 32).

Multiplicities are instead 'composed of actual and virtual elements' (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p.

148): the *virtual* refers to something perceived or sensed but not yet thought (yet still very

'real'), while the *actual* is that which 'is active in the unconscious' (Buchanan, 2021, p. 18) and

thus something our minds can comprehend.[12] It is the continual interplay of virtual and actual

within multiplicities that means they always retain their potential for difference.

This is therefore not difference as we typically think of it: as a measure of the

'sameness' of two (or more) things or 'sameness' over time and space. A conception of bodies

as multiplicities without prior unity requires a conceptualisation of difference-in-itself, or the

unique particularity of things in each moment. As multiplicities, we and the objects of our

worlds operate 'rhizomatically', ceaselessly interacting and forming connections with other

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[12] The distinction between *actual* and *virtual* is central in Deleuze and Guattari's work and, unsurprisingly, is relatively difficult to understand and explain concisely. My understanding is that for Deleuze and Guattari, both the actual and the virtual are 'real'; to actualise the virtual is not to make real that which is imaginary (Buchanan, 2021, p. 58). Rather, the virtual can be thought of as potential, as something felt or sensed but not yet thought (yet still very 'real'), or something that resides on the plane of immanence, but which has not yet been given form in our minds (Buchanan, 2021, p. 58). In contrast, the actual is that which has become active in our minds, in the sense that it is something our minds can comprehend, which is therefore also real but may be either material (a book) or non-material, such as an emotion or belief (Buchanan, 2021, p. 58). Actualisation is not a process that simply produces a resemblance or reproduction of the virtual, but rather it produces difference through an impermanent and contingent 'creative becoming' of the potential (Sellar, 2015). Importantly, the virtual is not a prior state of the actual since actualisation is not a linear relationship with a clear beginning and end. What is actual thus always retains the virtual potential for different becomings (Sellar, 2015).

bodies, and we are always vulnerable to being affected by such encounters. However, this flow

of ceaseless rhizomatic interactions is not a random whizzing around. There is an

organisational logic to it, and it is assemblage theory that names this very logic, thereby

responding to the central problem: in a world of multiplicity and difference, how, under what

conditions and, importantly, why do particular social forms and situations (what we might call

concrete assemblages) come to be (that is, are actualised) and yet others are not?

Before detailing the processes and dimensions of assemblage, I need to introduce the

concept of desire. For Deleuze and Guattari, it is desire in its assembled form that is the

productive force of our worlds. As Deleuze and Guattari (1983, p. 38) state 'the social field is

the historically determined product of desire'. This is not desire as we commonly think of it,

defined in relation to a perceived lack or need and productive only of fantasy; that is, the

imaginary obtainment of what we feel we are missing (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 25).[13]

Deleuze and Guattari specifically formulated their concept of desire against this psychoanalytic

conception of desire, whereby desire is primary: it is the productive force of life and what it

produces is actual and, in turn, causal (Buchanan, 2021, p. 56; Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 26).

To give a more specific example, Deleuze-Guattarian desire is not our longing for our child to

change from their current school to another because we perceive they are lacking access to

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[13] In this discussion, I have opted to include page references when citing Deleuze and Guattari texts, even where direct quotes are not used. This is in response to my own frustrations in trying to navigate from secondary literature back to the original texts, where a specific concept, such as the abstract machine, is simply referenced to a 500-page text such as *A Thousand Plateaus*. This makes it very difficult for a new reader to trace (and compare) the secondary authors' interpretation back to what Deleuze and Guattari actually said about a concept.

the kind of quality teaching we believe exists elsewhere. Rather, it is the almost nameless feeling of wanting the best for our child that is the productive force of desire and which could just as easily become attached to a need for the child to abandon school and devote their time to becoming a professional tennis player.

In Deleuzian- Guattarian terms, desire is a kind of affective force or intensity that is a precursor to specific emotions, thoughts or behaviours. As Buchanan (2021, p. 56) states, 'desire is primary; it is desire that selects materials and gives them the properties that they have in the assemblage'. As the basis for all behaviour, desire is therefore situated in the realm of intensities, or 'the agitations of the mind and body' (Buchanan, 2021, p. 37), which operate at the level of sensations (emotional, spiritual, libidinal) but are yet to be expressible in the form of love, hate, frustration or joy. Importantly, these intensities or flows of desire are not specific to individuals *per se,* as Buchanan (2021, p. 38) explains:

> [T]his is not the desire of individuals or even of groups of individuals. It lacks all such specificity. It is desire in general. Desire as it flows through all of us, that is simultaneously more than us, and 'us' at our constitutive core.

There is nothing in our worlds that is not the product of desire. Importantly, this suggests that the structures, ideas or relationships that we experience as oppressive are still desired by us, and, therefore, that it is the forces of desire that are productive of relations of power. This is an important distinction from much critical and Foucauldian-informed research that situates power as the primary positive force and tends to rely on relations of power as a sufficient

explanation for policy processes (Bignall, 2008).[14] What assemblage theory offers then is a means to understanding how power comes to be and comes to matter. As Deleuze (2016, p. 225) argued, 'it is not the dispositifs of power that assemble, nor would they be constitutive; it is rather the assemblages of desire that would spread throughout the formations of power... [accordingly,] power is an affection of desire', not its cause. In other words, power is a *product* of assembled desire, and one's desire is not the same as one's interests. Rather, 'interest always comes after [desire]' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 346), and to understand and to change power relations, we therefore need to start with an analysis of how desire is assembled.

Desire is only productive in its assembled state, as there is 'no desire but assembled, assembling desire' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2020, p. 399). In Deleuze and Guattari's ontology, desire in its unorganised or uninterrupted flow takes us into the realm of 'chaos', which operates 'as both the absolute foundation of all thinking (it is the beginning and end of thought) and as a kind of relative dissolution of the senses and the sensible' (Buchanan, 2021, p. 85). While we all arguably need a degree of chaos in our lives, we also need to interrupt or 'capture' such free-flowing intensities in ways that allow for the consistency and stability of thought necessary for us to function in life. As Deleuze and Guattari (1994, p. 42) state, 'the

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[14] Following Bignall (2008) and Morar and Gracieuse (2016), I would suggest that Foucault's conceptualisation of power was actually quite close to Deleuze's concept of desire, particularly in Foucault's later work. However, the way that Foucault's work has been used in much critical theory has arguably relied on Foucault's earlier work. While recognising the distinction between zero-sum conceptualisations of power, such uses of Foucault's work have failed to fully engage with the ontological difference of power as a relational force, as opposed to power as entity.

problem of philosophy is to acquire a consistency without losing the infinite into which

thought plunges'.

This relationship of stabilisation and destabilisation, structured and unstructured runs

throughout Deleuze and Guattari's work and is elaborated through a variety of concepts (as

will be discussed further in Section 3.4.5). For Deleuze and Guattari, our worlds always involve

a balancing of forces of chaos and forces of organisation. They express these as two planes; a

plane of immanence (also referred to as the *Body without Organs*) and a plane of

transcendence or organisation. It is the role of the plane of immanence to both protect us

from being overwhelmed by the perpetually present forces of chaos and to function 'like a

sieve', through which otherwise free flowing intensities, and specifically that of desire, can be

filtered and arranged in ways that enable thought to be formed (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p.

40). The task of life is, in a sense, to negotiate the middle, between this plane of immanence

filtering flows of desire and the plane of transcendence, where these flows are arranged in

particular ways to create the organised forms (strata and bodies) that constitute life as we

know it. This question of organisation, or consistency, is the focus of assemblage theory: out of

the chaos of unformed matter and intensities that underpins life, how do bodies emerge,

establish connections, and thus become consistent, meaningful and productive forms (Bignall,

2007; Buchanan, 2021)?

These elements of Deleuze and Guattari's ontology (multiplicity, difference, becoming

and desire) are the beginning of an ontology for how things come to be within a post-

structuralist paradigm. In much post-structuralist thinking, statements such as 'everything is

relational' or 'everything is discourse' are often invoked, as if these terms are adequate

explanations of ontology. I would argue that these often lack clarity for what this means in relation to the constitution of bodies, how and why subjectivities come to be, and where agency lies. The ontology offered in assemblage theory helps to address this in ways that not only provide the analytic tools to consider how things come to be, but how they can also become otherwise.

### 3.4.2 Strata and stratification

While multiplicity, difference, becoming and desire provide conceptual orientations for (re)thinking the nature of existence we need to now connect them with concepts that can explain how the apparently stable and consistent social forms and structures that populate our worlds come to be? Some of the concepts Deleuze and Guattari offered for this, are stratification, territorialisation, coding and the abstract machine. I turn to these concepts now, starting with the 'world-making' process of stratification and the formation of strata.

Stratification is pivotal to understanding assemblage theory. However, and like the role of desire, it has been largely ignored in much secondary writing (see Buchanan, 2021). As previously discussed, we are bound in life by layers of organisation that both make our life possible (and protect us from chaos) but also constrain us; they are what we cling to while also desiring escape. Deleuze and Guattari use the term *strata* to refer to the (apparently) stable forms (that is, assemblages) that serve as the 'bedrock' of our existence, or the established ways of perceiving (seeing, thinking, experiencing …) the world that we have come to accept as 'givens'.

According to Thompson and colleagues (2022), strata can be thought of as like

Foucault's episteme – as deeply embedded ways of problematising (and thus stratifying) the

world that are dominant within any particular historical period. Culture, race, nations,

education and development, amongst others, are all examples of strata. However, these are

not fixed entities but productions of ongoing processes of *stratification*. For Deleuze and

Guattari, stratification is a critical process in life. It is the process by which the chaotic

'unformed, unstable matters' that swirl across the plane of immanence (the Body Without

Organs) are given form and become the 'knowable things' that make up our world (Deleuze &

Guattari, 2020, p. 40). As Deleuze and Guattari (2020, p. 40) describe,

> … [stratification is] a very important, inevitable phenomenon that is beneficial
>
> in many respects and unfortunate in many others… [Strata] consist of giving
>
> form to matters, of imprisoning intensities or locking singularities into systems
>
> of resonance and redundancy… They operate by coding and territorialisation
>
> upon the earth.

As such, strata are also always vulnerable to the destabilising forces of chaos and desire. As

Thompson and colleagues (2022, p. 693) note, assemblage always takes place 'where

stratification is at its weakest'. For example, we can think of the assemblage of 'development

partners' as working to suture together cracks in the 'taken for granted' binaries of aid

donor/aid recipient, developed country/developing country, and to make consistent forces of

desire attached to being *both* a developing recipient of aid, *and* to being equal in authority to

those categorised as developed donors.

More specifically, stratification is the process by which materialities (forms of content) and semiotic forms (forms of expression) become, in the helpful wording of Buchanan (2017), *yoked* together. In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, the form of content relates to material, bodily, 'non-discursive multiplicities', while the form of expression relates to immaterial, non-bodily, 'discursive multiplicities' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2020, p. 67). Deleuze and Guattari also refer to these as *machinic assemblages* of bodies (forms of content) and collective assemblage of enunciation (forms of expression), which we can think of as the 'two sides' of assemblage (Buchanan, 2021). For example, consider the way in which the action of looking directly into the eyes of the person you are meeting or talking to is considered appropriate and polite in some cultures, while in others, such as many Pacific cultures, it is considered rude. The way in which eye contact (form of content) has become associated with the idea of politeness or respect (form of expression) is an act of stratification that is highly contingent, rather than relating to something essential about the identity of eye contact or the meaning of respect.

It is useful here to discuss Deleuze's (1988a, 1992) explanation of this distinction between the *articulable* and the *visible* that he offered as part of his interpretation of Foucault's *dispositif*, and which I believe to be a helpful elaboration of Deleuze's concepts that informed assemblage theory. Deleuze (1988a, p. 49) described Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* as presenting 'the generalised theory of the two elements of stratification: the articulable and the visible, the discursive formations and the non-discursive, the forms of expression and the forms of content'. Importantly, just as discursive formations (i.e., the articulable, forms of expression) are not merely words, non-discursive formations (i.e., the

visible, the forms of content) are also not merely things. As Deleuze (1988a, p. 52) elaborates,

the form of content,

> ... is no more a signified than an expression is a signifier. Nor is it a state of
>
> things, or a reference. Visibilities are not to be confused with elements that are
>
> visible or more generally perceptible, such as qualities, things, objects
>
> compounds of objects. ... We must break things open. Visibilities are not forms
>
> of objects nor even forms that would show up under light, but rather forms of
>
> luminosity which are created by the light itself and allow a thing or object to
>
> exist only as a flash, spark or shimmer.

Importantly, these two dimensions – forms of content and forms of expression – are distinct

but interconnected: 'there is never correspondence or conformity between content and

expression, only isomorphism with reciprocal presupposition' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2020, p. 44).

One does not represent or signify the other, yet they are only it is through a relation to each

other, via the assemblage, that they acquire an expressive force:

> ... [i]t is because the articulable has primacy that the visible contests it with its
>
> own form, which allows itself to be determined without being reduced. ... [T]he
>
> primacy of statements will be valuable only in this way, to the extent that it
>
> brings itself to bear on something irreducible (Deleuze, 1988a, p. 61).

While the form of content is distinct from the form of expression, the latter has (in a sense)

precedence, insofar as it is the expressive that brings about an 'incorporeal transformation' of

bodies and makes matter material, rather than matter having any agency (for want of a better

term) in itself (Deleuze & Guattari, 2020, p. 82). For example, penal law is a form of expression while the prison is a form of content, but it is the *relationship between* penal law and the prison that formed the basis of Foucault's interest, which is the determining (but not reductive) force for the nature of the prison (Deleuze, 1988a). As Deleuze (1988a, p. 47) explains,

> ... [j]ust as penal law as a form of expression defines a field of sayability (the statements of delinquency), so prison as a form of content defines a place of visibility ('panopticism', that is to say a place where at any moment one can see everything without being seen).

This relationship of autonomy but mutual presupposition - and the capacity of form of expression to bring about an incorporeal transformation in the form of content – is central to the significance of assemblages in the making of our worlds.

Here, it is important to remember that assemblage is not a thing in the world, and neither are forms of content or forms of expression; they are abstract (see Section 3.4.5 for further explanation of *abstract*), analytical relations that help us understand how the virtuality of multiplicities become actual forces of causality in our worlds, and how this actualisation can change moment to moment, even when the matter (the content) we are dealing with does not change. Consider, for instance, the statement 'the good student'. Labelling a student 'good' does nothing to change the composition of the material forms that constitute the student, nor does it represent the student. Rather, the statement brings about an incorporeal transformation that is within the realm of the expressive or enunciative, so that we now consider the student to 'be good'. As Thompson, Sellar and Buchanan (2022, p. 695) explain,

'the corporeal body is not changed, but what it can be and do is changed' (emphasis added).

This is why, in contrast to new materialists such as Bennett (2010), Buchanan (2021, p. 77)

suggests we think of Deleuze and Guattari as 'expressive materialists', not simply as

materialists. Deleuze and Guattari were not interested in material objects in and of themselves.

Rather, they were interested in the abstract patterns of relations – the arrangement of

productive desire – that bring together forms of content and forms of expression in such a

way that brings about an incorporeal transformation; in other words, that make the

arrangement 'expressive' (Buchanan, 2021).

However, as Deleuze and Guattari are fond of saying, it is also far more complicated

than this. It is also important to note here that not all collections of things can be considered

assemblages; there must be something deliberate or a unifying event that makes the

assemblage resonate. Thus, assemblage theory maps not only the process of how content and

expression are formed and brought into relation (stratification), but also how they are made to

'resonate' or cohere as a concrete assemblage (Buchanan, 2021). It is this property of

*resonance* that gives consistency and thus makes productive the arrangement of desire within

assemblage. What makes them resonate is the *abstract machine*.

### 3.4.3   The abstract machine

The abstract machine can be thought of as the 'principle of unity' (Buchanan, 2021, p. 118) of

the assemblage. As Deleuze and Guattari note (2020, p. 142),

> ... an abstract machine is neither an infrastructure that is determining in the
>
> last instance nor a transcendental Idea that is determining in the supreme

instance. Rather it plays a piloting role... [it] constructs a real that is yet to

come, a new type of reality.

The abstract machine is diagrammatic, meaning that it operates on the plane of immanence

and thus is virtual; it exists in the realm of 'pre-thought' potentiality (Deleuze & Guattari, 2020,

p. 142). The abstract machine does not exist independently of the assemblage, just as the

assemblage cannot function independently of an abstract machine (Deleuze & Guattari, 2020,

p. 100). Rather, it is the assemblage that *gives effect to* the abstract machine, or in other

words, it is the arrangement of desire through which the virtual potential of the abstract

machine becomes *actualised*, and thus produces actual behaviours, emotions, material objects

etc.

For example, a story written by a child about their weekend could be nothing more

than a series of random ink impressions on a page. However, when ink on a page (*form of

content*) connects with the strata of written language and the idea (*form of expression*) of a

story or narrative, and a principle of unity (*abstract machine*) of the need to communicate

oneself to others, these otherwise meaningless ink blots are transformed into a 'story'.

Importantly, it is not that the ink on the page signifies or represents a story, but that it is story;

it is ontologically different. This is what Deleuze and Guattari mean when they state that the

abstract machine is 'ambivalent'; that is, it is not determinative of certain effects or 'actuals'.

Rather, it is through the creation of associations that the 'work' of the abstract machine and its

effects become apparent (Buchanan, 2021, p. 46). This is why Deleuze and Guattari (2020, p.

71) state, 'the most important problem of all: given a certain machinic assemblage, what is its

relation of effectuation with the abstract machine?'. Or, in other words, 'given a specific

situation, what *kind* of assemblage would be required to produce it?' (Buchanan, 2021, p. 22),

remembering that assemblage is not a thing *per se,* but is rather a diagram of the relations of

productive flows of desire, potentiality (BwO), problematisations (strata) and forms of content

and forms of expression that are made to resonate by a principle of unity (abstract machine).

The abstract machine highlights again that Deleuze and Guattari were not interested in

material objects in and of themselves, nor discourses, but rather the relationship *between*

them and the underlying patterns of relations that bring them together. It is not the collection

of bits and bobs that is important, but more the diagram of how desire has been arranged in

such a way to make this collection performative, or 'expressive' (Buchanan, 2021).

It is useful (and no doubt overdue) to provide an example here and consider the

phenomenon of global development; a multiscalar, multidimensional yet powerfully

structuring phenomenon that has been described as being amorphous in character and

associated with highly variable effects, and yet seemingly retains some sense of a strategic

functionality (Brigg, 2001; Li, 2007b). Using an analytic of *assemblage* helps chart how the field

of global development emerged in the post-war era, with the purported function of enabling

the 'catch up' of countries labelled as 'third world' to those of the 'first world'. Thus, we might

consider that it came into being in response to historical problematisations (strata) of the

sovereign nation-state and the emerging liberalist conceptualisation of universal human rights,

in tension with deeply embedded strata of racial ordering of humanity, and of both people

and the land as resources or capital to be exploited. In this way, to sustain these deeply held

and socially structuring beliefs, the call for decolonialism and the independence of newly

created nation-states needed to be made consistent with the growing hunger of global

capitalism and its need to access resources, including labour, to fuel the growth of economies. Thus, while some would argue that contemporary global development is a continuation of colonialism (a neo-colonial or imperialist project), I would suggest instead that we think of it as the product of an assemblage of global humanity (for want of a better phrase), through which global development might be considered a reterritorialisation of colonialism. That is, we may consider it an assemblage that responds to strata of liberalism, the nation-state and economics, and which works to make consistent desires for universal human rights and never-ending economic growth.

### 3.4.4  Territorialisation and coding

However, again, it is even more complicated than this. What happens exactly when forms of content and expression are brought together; or, in other words, what does stratification involve? To explain this, there are yet more dimensions of assemblage theory to introduce: that of territory and the processes of territorialisation and coding. Indeed, as Deleuze and Guattari (2020, p. 323) observe, 'the territory is the first assemblage, the first thing to constitute an assemblage; the assemblage is fundamentally territorial'.

While I have described above the process of stratification as involving the formation of forms of content and forms of expression, these are themselves also comprising dual processes of coding/decoding and territorialisation/deterritorialisation. The relationship between coding and territorialisation is fairly difficult to unpack. A cursory description is that the act of territorialisation is the selection, from the 'milieu' of our environment, of the elements that are to be arranged through assemblage, which thus constitute the territory of

the concrete assemblage. By contrast, coding is what gives these discursive and non-discursive elements some degree of order or organisation as forms of content and forms of expression. Take, for example, the idea of a classroom. In one assemblage, this could involve desks and chairs in a constructed building, with a teacher, and the idea of quiet, obedient students listening to the teacher at the front of the class. But equally so, it could be students out in nature, exploring independently, making noise as they discover new things and so on. Each assemblage produces a sense of a learning environment, but they assemble a very different set of things and ideas of what it is to be a student, to learn etc.

Importantly, these are not temporally linear processes: coding doesn't always precede territorialisation, nor the reverse. It is useful, then, to think of these processes in terms of a matrix, with coding (i.e., forms of content, forms of expression) along the horizontal axis and territorialisation/deterritorialisation as the vertical (Thompson et al., 2022). This is shown in **Figure 1**, adapted from Thompson and colleagues (2022, p. 695).
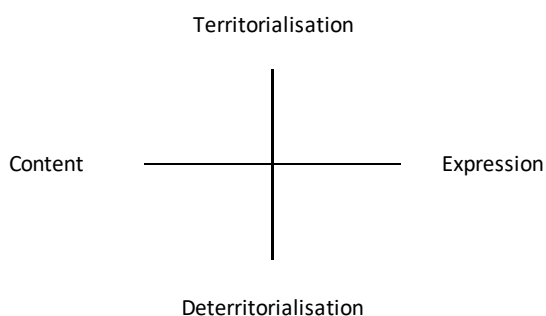


*Figure 1.* Tetravalent structure of the assemblage

The territory of an assemblage is what provides us that necessary feeling of 'home' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2020, p. 505) or our 'sense of purpose' (Buchanan, 2021, p. 96). It is not a physical space, but rather an act that is at once psychological and pragmatic: 'it is the composition of one's own world' (Buchanan, 2021, p. 98). Territory thus provides a way to theorise subjectivity in Deleuze and Guattari's work. It is the act through which we generate a sense of our subjectivity, and everything exterior to the boundary of that which is territorialised is not 'us' (Buchanan, 2021, p. 106). It attends to how our sense of self and other, as well as here and there, are produced, each of which may become associated with a specific physical/ material body or space but always in contingent and non- determinative ways.

Established strata (such as language, culture or gender) thereby act as territorialising or conservative forces, fostering the desire in us to stay within our 'comfort zone', as it were. Importantly, however, the creation of territory simultaneously provides the opportunity for further differentiation that can lead to the becoming of new strata and a new sense of subjectivity. This is because every act of territorialisation involves an associated act of *deteritorialisation*, whereby every assemblage straddles dual axes of territoriality and 'lines of deteritorialisation that cut across it and carry it away' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2020, p. 504). Deterritorialising is the act of leaving the territory at which we feel 'at home', which can either lead us to new or expanded territory or, alternatively, into the depths of chaos (Buchanan, 2021, p. 88).

In this sense, deterritorialisation is molecular; that is, it is the site of micropolitics, of change and resistance (Bignall, 2008). Territories are continually being 'worked on' by lines of deterritorisalisation, or what Deleuze and Guattari otherwise refer to as *lines of flight*, which

are themselves always multiple and involving a 'correlative reterritorialisation' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2020, p. 509). There are three forms of deterritorialisation: negative, relative and absolute (Deleuze & Guattari, 2020, p. 510). Buchanan (2021) summarises these, explaining the *negative* form leads to a reterritorialisation that takes us back to our original territory and simply maintains the status quo. The *relative* form is only partially or inconsistently successful in overcoming the push for reterritorialisation and may therefore lead to some change, but it may well just bring us back to our starting point. *Absolute* deteritorialisation, on the other hand, provides the pathway to creating new territory and is thus the opportunity for change, but it is also the most dangerous, as there is always the risk that we deterritorialise too fast, too much, and end up in chaos (Buchanan, 2021, p. 89).

As such, it is through the continual interaction of territory and deterritorialisation that our worlds are constructed and our sense of subjectivity within those worlds is generated but, at the same time, is also made open to change. It is here that the agency at the heart of assemblage theory becomes clear. Even though we are somewhat confined by the multiple, molar (macro-political) layers of stratification that construct our worlds, we always have opportunity (agency) to deterritorialise, just enough to allow the creativity that comes with opening to the flows of desire but not too much as to plunge into chaos. This provides both a framework for understanding some of the common traits that frustrate our politics: the resistance to change, the attraction to continuing a status quo that is ultimately not in our 'best interest', and why destructive practices of fascism or climate crisis denialism are able to thrive.

### 3.4.5    Elaborating the politics of assemblage

Having outlined key dimensions of assemblage theory in the sections above, I want to now

elaborate further on my understanding of how assemblage theory (in conjunction with

Deleuze's broader work) might assist in thinking differently about how change happens in

Pacific regional education development policy (PREDP) and policy in general, and why (I

believe) we need to create new problems that make sense and force thinking if we want our

worlds to become different.

As explained in Section 3.4.1, Deleuze and Guattari's ontology rests on a conception of

difference that is a direct challenge to the more conventional ways of thinking about

representation, identity, and even thinking itself. Deleuze (2006a, p. 138; emphasis original)

challenges the dominant notions of representation, in which he argues,

> *difference becomes an object of representation always in relation to a*
>
> *conceived identity, a judged analogy, an imagined opposition or a perceived*
>
> *similitude*... For this reason, the world of representation is characterised by its
>
> inability to conceive of difference in itself; and by the same token, its inability
>
> to conceive of repetition for itself, since the latter is grasped only by means of
>
> recognition, distribution, reproduction and resemblance.

This world of representation, which underpins much conventional social science, relies also on

the presupposition, or *common sense,* that,

> ... universally recognised is what is meant by thinking, being and self – in other
>
> words, not a particular this or that but the form of representation or

recognition in general. This form, nevertheless, ... [relies on] the presupposition

that there is a natural capacity for thought endowed with a talent for truth or

an affinity with the true, under the double aspect of a *good will on the part of*

*the thinker* and an *upright nature on the part of thought* (Deleuze, 2006a, p.

131; emphasis original).

It is this assertion of common sense - the belief that thought, when done properly, will lead to

truth, and that we all want truth, and have a natural capacity for thinking towards truth - that

Deleuze (2006a, p. 131) refers to as an 'image of thought... [that is] dogmatic'. He argues that

this image of thought works to limit our capacity for *thinking* to merely representation and

recognition.

In other words, our only way of thinking about something is to recognise it as a

representation of a general concept, such as recognising a particular table as representative of

the broader category of 'table', and in so doing, assuming we then *know* what that table *is*.

Within this image of thought, our forms of knowing rely entirely on comparing, judging and

perceiving things in terms of something else, and recognising it only in terms of degrees of

sameness or deviation from a broader conceptual generality. This applies whether that be a

generality of object (this table as a recognisable instance of the concept of table, or this daisy

as a recognisable instance of the generality of plant) or of subject (Joni Mitchell as a

recognisable instance of female celebrity singer, my teacher Mrs Marau as a recognisable

instance of teachers in general). Each of these are different, but only in terms of a degree of

variation from a common 'higher order' category. As such, Deleuze (2006a, p. 139; emphasis

added) argues that recognition in this form, this image of thought, works to stifle *thinking*, and indeed, 'is *incapable* of giving birth in thought to the act of thinking'.

Assemblage theory, in part, provides a diagram of how the image of thought can come to be; that is, a diagram of the multidimensional interactions that chart how the flow of life can be captured into apparently stable and recognisable forms, preventing us from perceiving, or temporarily blocking, the continual flow of difference. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (as well as in other writing), Deleuze and Guattari explicate assemblage theory as the basis of their ontology through what appear to be a series of oppositions, including arborescent/rhizomatic, molecularities/molarities, minoritarian/majoritarian, smooth/striated space, extensive-intensive, and state/war machine. There is not space here for me to explore all of these and to give due consideration to the nuances of each of these concepts, nor the particular problems to which each concept was created in a response to. I am wary of the risk of appearing to gloss over the sophistication of these concepts by reducing them to a common summary. However, for my purposes, and following Adkins (2016), I consider these concepts to all be pointing to what I believe can be considered essential in their ontology: that of ceaseless acts of capture and escape, of stabilisation and destablisation, of organisation and disorganisation, of speeds and slownesses, of fixities and flows. As Adkins (2016, p. 353) highlights, it is important to not consider these as opposite kinds of things, but rather as 'tendencies towards stasis or change' that co-exist within all things, and which reflect our tendencies towards producing transcendence out of immanence. As Deleuze (2006b, p. 388) stated in his final

essay, entitled *Immanence: A Life*, 'transcendence is always a product of immanence'.[15] This also helps with understanding Deleuze and Guattari's use of the term abstract and designation of assemblages as abstract.

Based on my reading of Buchanan's (1997) and Adkins' (2016) discussion of Deleuze and Guattari, I understand abstractions as tools for charting how things work, not what they are or what they mean, but the immanent processes through which becoming occurs. Rather than considering abstract as the opposite of concrete, it is perhaps more useful to think of it in relation to the reductionism of representation; the problem with representation is it is *not abstract enough* (Buchanan, 1997, 2021). Thus, what assemblage theory helps us do is not to merely challenge, deconstruct or replace particular representations or recognitions with others, but to get to the abstraction, to the immanence of life that is captured within representations, discern how it works, and how its potential for bringing about new becomings can be liberated. In the words of Foucault (1990, p. 155), this gets us to point where, 'as soon as one can no longer think things as one formerly thought them, transformation becomes both very urgent, very difficult and quite possible'. Thus, assemblage

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[15] Here, drawing on Roffe (2016), I think it is helpful to consider Deleuze's (1991, 28) explication of transcendence, as that which involves 'going beyond' that which is immanent to experience. For example, we have beliefs or knowledge about cause and effect (the sun caused my skin to burn), or about resemblance (that a chair is most closely associated with a bookshelf, as two items of the more general category of furniture, rather than a beer crate, as two items of the more general category of things that can be sat upon). These beliefs require us to go beyond our immediate experience of these things, and thus are transcendent. We go beyond our immediate, not-yet-described or explained sensations of burning skin in the (coincidental?) presence of the sun, or the feel and sight of wood structured into a particular shape (as chair or beer crate), and we attribute beliefs about causality or resemblance to these relations; this is transcendence.

theory enables us to diagram the processes of capture of the immanent, innumerable, unrecognisable molecularities of becoming(s) into (momentarily) stabilised molarities, majoritarian, extensive forms. The error of representational thought is to perceive the currently majoritarian forms as truth, norm or 'common sense', to which all other things must be understood only in terms of comparison, resemblance or opposition. This is not to say that representational thought is bad *per se*, but rather emphasises that we need to remain aware of the way in which it imposes a form of capture or slowing down of what is immanent in experience, and therefore how it limits the kinds of difference we can perceive. There is much more nuance here than I can give space to (or, admittedly, currently understand), but I believe this helps to further elaborate the kind of politics with which assemblage allows us to engage.

This is ultimately what I seek to do through this thesis. In discussing molar and molecular segmentarities, Deleuze and Guattari (2020, p. 213) argue that 'everything is political, but every politics is simultaneously a macropolitics and a micropolitics'. Thus, in Chapters 5 - 7, I particularly use the concepts of molecular and molar to demonstrate the way in which assemblage theory, in conversation with Pacific research, forces us to think differently (Deleuze, 2006a, p. 139) about the common sense of responsibility, in-/ter-/dependence, and context-responsiveness differently. I situate this as a form of politics, in that finding ways to 'recognise' that which is molecular or minoritarian offers a means for disrupting the dominance of molar and majoritarian forms, and thus helps to bring about new becomings. This requires us to not just know the territory we occupy, or the molar movements we follow and majoritarian languages we speak, but also to consider the forces of desire and stratification that hold us there. As Thompson and colleagues (2022, p. 696) usefully remind

us, if we are to bring about deterritorialisation, then we need to bring about change at the

level of desire and strata.

## 3.5 Summarising thinking policy with assemblage theory

In Section 3.4, I have attempted to provide a concise, yet comprehensive, explanation of

concepts that can help us think with Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory. In this Section

(3.5), I will provide a summary of my understanding of assemblage theory and how it can be

generatively brought together with the (re)conceptualisations of globalisation, space-time and

policy offered by policy mobilities literature (as discussed in Chapter 2) to study policy and its

movement.

Returning to the earlier description of Deleuze and Guattari's ontology, life is always 'in

the middle' of the continual processes of assemblage, through which otherwise free flows of

desire are (momentarily) captured and made productive. It is therefore not possible to

consider assemblage as a singular concept, for it is only when all its dimensions are brought

together that we can fully appreciate, and make creative use of, assemblage theory. In

summary, assemblage theory offers a way of mapping the processes through which the

complex social forms that constitute our worlds are produced, in and through interactions

with materialities, and the processes by which these are open to continual rearrangement.

Here, I again draw on Buchanan (2021, p. 121), who provides a concise summary of the flows,

forces and functions of assemblage theory:

Assemblage has a *material dimension* (form of content, machinic assemblage

etc.) and an e*xpressive dimension* (form of expression, collective assemblages

of enunciation etc.), a *principle of unity* (abstract machine), and it rests upon a *condition of possibility* (body without organs, plane of immanence, plane of consistency etc.) which is criss-crossed by *lines of flight* (lines of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation). (emphasis added)

In this way, assemblage serves as both theory and method (Buchanan, 2021), and as such, offers more than simply demonstrating that policies comprise complex and relationally constituted collections of material and semiotic things. Instead, assemblage theory offers a precise method for diagramming how these arrangements came to be, while attending to both the deeply embedded conservative forces of strata and the inherent openness to change (multiplicity and difference) of our worlds. It allows us to ask more precise questions, to consider what productive forces of desire and territorialising forces of strata have arranged bodies, practices, ideas and words in particular ways that themselves are productive of how we behave and relate to each other and to our worlds.

I also suggest that assemblage theory offers a generative basis for taking seriously Pacific research as valued an epistemic resource (Takayama et al., 2016). Assemblage theory and indeed Deleuze and Guattari's work more broadly, provides encouragement and a method for 'thinking outside the image of thought', that is, to think beyond what we 'know' and what is currently sayable and visible. It encourages us to not reduce what is not recognisable to something *other or lesser than* rational thought or categorise as traditional, sacred, indigenous (and thus lesser). But rather to consider that which is not (currently) recognisable, as that which 'forces us to think' (Deleuze, 2006a, p. 139). As a researcher whose heritage is embedded within Northern traditions of thought, ethics and social relations, I

believe assemblage theory also provides a generative basis for me rethink what I 'know' and

what I 'see' in my research of policy. In this way, assemblage theory enables me to not just

acknowledge the co-existence of a plurality of knowledges and cultures (as versions of the

common category of Knowledge and Being Human), but to accept the multiplicity of our

worlds, and thus our potential capacity to bring any and all worlds into being. It therefore

responds to my (assembled-)desire for (Deleuzian) thinking, both within and through my

engagement in policy research, and within Pacific regional education policy. Deleuze and

Guattari's assemblage theory also enables us to consider what is needed to bring different

worlds into becoming, as Bignall (2008, p. 127) has asked, 'if the actual present is to become

an alternative present of a particular preferred type (e.g. postcolonial) what forces of

actualisation are needed to bring it into being?'.

In summary, I propose an integrated or conjoined framework of assemblage thinking

and policy mobilities, developed in conversation with Pacific theory, and argue that this

provides a generative basis for the exploration of policy that affirms people-in-relation (with

each other, with *fonua*, with the cosmos) as the (re)creators of policy worlds. Importantly, I

argue this is not an attempt to make sense of Pacific worlds *in* Deleuze and Guattari's terms.

As Teaiwa (2006, p. 73) has argued, 'more often than not the Pacific is not brought to the table

as an equal partner in any conversation about the nature of humanity or society'. Rather, my

interest here is to give serious attention to how encounters with Pacific research and with

Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, offer the opportunity for forcing thinking. In the next

Chapter (Chapter 4), I will explore the methodological implications of this conjoined

framework. The Chapter will explore precisely what questions can be asked about policy using

assemblage theory, and how, as well as outlining in detail the particular methods used in this research. This separation of methodology from theory is done purely to manage the word length of Chapters, as the preceding discussions of relational theorising of context and globalisation (in Chapter 2) and assemblage theory should be thought of as not just tools for theorising but for practice, as Foucault stated, 'theory does not express, translate, or serve to apply practice: it is practice' (Deleuze & Foucault, 1977, p. 208).

# 4 Wayfinding policy assemblage

In Chapter 3, I explained my encounters with assemblage theory, as well as with broader concepts from Deleuze and Guattari's work, and the ways in which they have forced me to think differently about how and why our worlds are produced in the way they are. I argued that bringing assemblage theory into conversation with policy mobilities and Pacific research can provide a generative framework for exploring how to think and do Pacific education development and policy research differently.

In this Chapter, I will discuss in more detail the methodological implications of this theoretical-conceptual framework and explain the methods I undertook in my research. The Chapter begins with an explanation of my engagement with CPS literature on 'following' policy and what I found to be lacking in these approaches for researching with assemblage theory. I then explain my encounters with the concept of *wayfinding* as discussed in Pacific research and how this has informed my methodological approach. Informed by assemblage theory, policy mobilities and *wayfinding*, in Section 4.2 I identify four key orientations for thinking and doing policy assemblage research as the basis of my methodology and explain how I have applied them in undertaking this research. Finally, in Sections 4.3 - 4.5, I set out the specific methods I used in my research, including how I discerned the 'unit of analysis' of my research, the data generation and analysis methods used, and the research ethics processes followed.

## 4.1   From following policy to wayfinding assemblage

In much qualitative social science, methodology is frequently situated as a set of decisions finalised prior to one undertaking the 'actual' researching. However, my experiences would rather contest that (my) methodology was continually becoming; it was intimately intertwined with, and iteratively informed by, my engagement with theory, with others' research, and with my process of generating and analysing data. This process of thinking with theory and data led me to explore a range of different methodological resources to work out what precisely I was doing when I was researching with assemblage theory and why. This Section discusses the methodological literature and (re)-thinking that I engaged in through the process of refining my methodology.

Similar to my encounters with theory as presented in Chapters 2 and 3, my starting points for considering methodology in this research were *i)* the critical policy studies and policy mobilities literature, with a specific focus on  the methodological approaches of 'following the policy' and policy ethnography (Ball, 2016; McCann & Ward, 2012a, 2012b); and *ii*) Pacific research, with a specific focus on Pacific scholars discussion of key philosophical orientations, relational ethics and the dialogic methods of *talanoa*, or *tok stori* (Anae, 2019; Sanga et al., 2018; Vaioleti, 2013). In brief, methods of following the policy and policy ethnography argue for considering policy, and the space-times into which policy moves, as constituted through relational flows of power (see Section 2.4 for further discussion of this conceptual tenet). Methodologically, this requires extending conventional ethnographic approaches to follow the social life of policy across sites, situations and actors (McCann & Ward, 2012a; Peck & Theodore, 2010, 2012). In this way, an ethnographic approach of

'following' policy across multiple sites and situations provides a methodological response to the rethinking of context, scale, space and time as discussed in Section 2.4. It also encourages 'staying close to practice' (McCann & Ward, 2012a, p. 45), which does not always necessarily mean a physical presence in policy spaces but does, nonetheless, require careful attention to the materiality and bodily encounters of policy, as well as its discursive elements. In a different but cognate way, the paradigm of Pacific research (as discussed in Section 1.3.2), methodologically orients us towards understanding research as a relational process, and the importance of nurturing relational space (*teu le va*), and of place (Anae, 2019; Koya-Vaka'uta, 2017; Sanga, 2004; Sanga & Reynolds, 2017). Pacific research promotes using relational qualitative methods aligned with Indigenous ways of being and knowing, including oralities, story-telling and dialogic methods, such as *talanoa* and *tok stori.* These will be discussed in more detail in Section 4.3.2.

Having begun with policy mobilities and Pacific research literature, I then began to delve more into the concept of assemblage and literature on its methodological implications relevant to the study of policy. This led me to Baker & McGuirk's (2017) exposition of what they identified to be the methodological implications of 'assemblage thinking' for the research of policy. Specifically, I found their framework brought insights from policy mobilities research together with assemblage theory in a way that cohered with what I understood as key orientations of a Pacific research paradigm.

### 4.1.1 Distinguishing assemblage thinking from assemblage theory

Baker & McGuirk (2017, p. 428) identify what they perceive to be key 'epistemological commitments' associated with assemblage thinking, including considering research phenomena (such as policy) to be multiplicities in ongoing processes of (re)assembly, constructed through and held together by the agency of human and non-human actors. These commitments are then 'operationalised' in terms of a set of orienting practices, namely: *i)* adopting an ethnographic sensibility; *ii)* tracing sites and situations; and *iii)* revealing labours of assembling (Baker & McGuirk, 2017). However, it is important to note here that Baker and McGuirk (2017, p. 439) are explicit in distinguishing *assemblage thinking* from more specific versions of *assemblage theory* and describe the former as 'a diverse set of research accounts that *may or may not* engage directly with formal theories of assemblage, such as those of Deleuze and Guattari' (emphasis added). As mentioned earlier, I found such lack of engagement with Deleuze and Guattari's original texts related to assemblage theory to fall short of offering analytical value, less so for its lack of a perceived fidelity to assemblage as Deleuze and Guattari articulated it and more for the neglect of what more might come from engaging with the primary texts.

I say this not to be critical of others decisions but as a reflection on my own experience. Indeed, I was initially drawn to Baker & McGuirk's framework because it felt *accessible;* it built on the policy mobilities literature that I was already familiar with, and it cohered with what I understood to be key tenets of Pacific research. For someone new to Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory, Baker and McGuirk's framework (2017) *seemed* helpful for making explicit connections between key conceptual elements of assemblage

thinking and their methodological consequences, in ways that aligned with what I already

(thought I) understood of policy mobilities approaches. In this way, it allowed me to continue

'enjoying a ready-made thought' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 51); or, in other words, it

allowed me to integrate a particular concept of assemblage into my existing *territory* of

research methodology, but without having to change any of my underlying beliefs about the

world.

However, as I began to engage more with Deleuze and Guattari's work, I became more

aware of what Baker and McGuirk's (2017) framework made possible, as well as what it did

*not*. This enabled me to become more sensitive to their important qualification; namely, that

their framework was based on assemblage *thinking,* not specifically Deleuze and Guattari's

assemblage *theory*. In this way, their framework exemplifies the critiques I raised in Chapter 3

(Section 3.3) as to how much of the secondary literature, and particularly in policy research,

has taken up the concept of assemblage in ways that neglect key elements of Deleuze and

Guattari's arguments (see also Buchanan, 2017). [16] There is nothing inherently 'wrong' with

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[16] There is not space here to provide this critique in detail; instead, see Buchanan (2017) for a detailed analysis. In brief, a key issue is that Baker & McGuirk (2017) do not cite any original texts of Deleuze and Guattari in their framework, and some of the key secondary literature they draw on makes relatively scant use of these original texts. A good example of their reliance on secondary literature is that they adopt Li's (2007a, p. 266) definition of assemblage as a 'gathering of heterogenous elements consistently drawn together as an identifiable terrain of action and debate', and go on to explain that: '... [t]hese elements include arrangements of humans, materials, technologies, organisations, techniques, procedures, norms, and events, all of which have the capacity for agency within and beyond the assemblage. Crucially, assemblages consist of and create spatialities' (Baker & McGuirk, 2017, p. 428). As discussed in Chapter 3 (section 3.3), this understanding of assemblage neglects fundamental *ontological* commitments of Deleuze and Guattari's thinking: of assemblage as, first and foremost, a mapping of the arrangement of desire and, as such, a psycho-social concept formulated to help explain

Baker & McGuirk's (2017) framework or with their choice to use a version of assemblage

thinking that does not deeply engage with Deleuze and Guattari's theorisations. However, as I

argued in Section 3.3, what is problematic is that such a framework adds little more to existing

conceptualisations of policy as relationally constituted and 'on the move', precisely because

the framework neglects the opportunity offered by assemblage theory to think differently.

As Buchanan (2017) has pointed out, Baker and McGuirk (2017) make the (common

sense) mistake of assuming words used by Deleuze and Guattari, such as 'multiplicity', have a

unitary meaning that they already know, without having to *think differently*. As I began to

immerse myself further into Deleuze and Guattari's work (and the writing of those who have

also done so), I realised the limitations of Baker and McGuirk's (2017) framework for what I

had set out as the aims of my research: to think differently about policy; to offer an analysis

that does not seek to reduce the complexity of policy, nor accept that complexity as

symptomatic of lack of any discernible logic; and to experiment with whether Deleuze and

Guattari's assemblage theory helps me to do this.

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*behaviour*, not spatiality. Furthermore, in suggesting agency is a property of material objects within an assemblage, Baker and McGuirk diverge from Deleuze and Guattari's contention that it is the *association* of forms of expression (discourses) *with* forms of content (material objects), to be actualised by productive desire, that gives agency to material objects, rather than some mysterious force inherent in the objects themselves. Another example is Baker and McGuirk's (2017) use of the term *tracing*, which is particularly problematic from a Deleuzian perspective, given that Deleuze and Guattari (2020, pp. 5–6) explicitly associate tracing with the reductionist, binary 'tree logic' embedded in most European and Anglo-American thought traditions. They explicitly sought to counter this logic with their rhizomatic way of thinking through multiplicity and difference, and themselves use terms such as mapping or diagramming as deliberate alternatives to tracing.

That said, I have continued to find useful the notion of 'orienting practices' that Baker & McGuirk (2017) offer for extricating key methodological strategies for doing assemblage theory informed research, building off the insights provided by policy mobilities work (for example, McCann & Ward, 2012a; Peck & Theodore, 2010, 2012). I also found useful the set of six orienting questions and associated sub-questions which Thompson and colleagues (2022) suggest as a starting point for the mapping of assemblages. These questions are useful for their preciseness in relation to what to look for when researching assemblage. However, they are not directed at providing guidance for *how* to look or *how* to manage the bodily encounters of research. Therefore, I have sought to bring these methodological offerings together, along with the directions offered by Pacific research methodologies, to develop a set of *orientations for wayfinding assemblage* when doing research on policy and its mobility. These orientations for wayfinding assemblage informed the elaboration of a conjoined policy mobilities and assemblage theory (PMAT) approach in Lewis and Spratt (2024) but have also been further refined because of writing that book.

### 4.1.2   Wayfinding

Ferris-Leary (2013, p. 195) describes *wayfinding* as relating to the ancient art of ocean navigation of Pacific peoples, which involves:

> ... a process of continual mediation of *tā* and *vā* [temporality and spatiality] with natural intersectional patterns of not only place of origin and destination, but of navigational stars, sun, moon and natural patterns such as weather, winds, and those that signalled land (clouds, wave patterns, birds, etc.), as well

as the social relations and management of the resources of voyagers

themselves during the voyage… and formal 'rituals' associated with voyaging,

such as what is known in Māori as *karakia*, or in Tongan as *tapuaki*.

However, Pacific scholars argue that wayfinding practices are not simply about navigation in a geographical sense (and indeed are conceptually constrained when translated as equivalent to navigation) but are instead foundational to Pacific onto-epistemologies(see Ferris-Leary, 2013; Hau'ofa, 1993; Matapo, 2021; Matapo & Baice, 2020). Ferris-Leary (2013, p. 194), suggests that conceptualisations of wayfinding rest on a proposition of a relational world of 'intersectional patterns' in which knowing comes through the continual mediation of these intersections and the capacity to sense, respect and be guided by these patterns is integral to survival. Matapo and Baice (2020, p. 28) refer to this as a sense of 'knowing that is grounded in the belly, knowing that escapes stratified language signification'. Using wayfinding to explore Pacific tertiary student success, Matapo and Baice (2020, p. 27) describe it as 'an art that affirms and generates connection, where the collective (relational self tied to place, ancestors, people) may thrive'. This further emphasises the centrality of wayfinding to survival and well-being of the collective, in which collective refers not just to 'living humans' but place and ancestors.

Engaging with Pacific conceptualisations of wayfinding, without equating it to navigation or else treating it as a word with a meaning that can be known (and therefore dismissed) in advance, forces me to think. Ferris-Leary (2013, p. 71) discusses the concept of *laumālie*, or what might be (inadequately) translated as 'spirit' and its relation to words, as:

... a kind of "precursor of meaning" or "spirit" that, rather than having a specific

meaning from the outset, has a wider ontological and epistemological

generality, and one that only develops a more specific definition or meaning in

the context of mediation in a tangible *ta-va* [time-space] intersection.

This makes me think about the way in which concepts such as wayfinding are expressed in

language, but also how the virtual force of the concept *always* extends beyond the words

themselves. This requires me to keep questioning my own thinking; not to become-*knowing*

of wayfinding for my own purposes, but to maintain a curiosity about wayfinding as an

expression of the multiplicity of our worlds and to ensure I continue trying to think outside my

image of thought.

Importantly, engaging with wayfinding and with Pacific research more broadly, raises a

tension for me between theory informed by Deleuze-Guattarian philosophy and Pacific

research. While the former does not provide a normative framework, it does encourage the

creating of concepts, getting outside the image of thought and pluralities of knowledge. There

are both tensions and synergies between this and what I understand of the philosophical

underpinnings of Pacific research, as well as that of other Indigenous Knowledges (Hetaraka,

2020; Meyer, 2001; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). A particular point of tension are beliefs about the

source of knowledge. As Hetaraka and colleagues (2023, p. 61) explain in relation to Maori

knowledge production,

knowledge is produced externally on a spiritual plane; it is interpreted by

tohunga (person with highly specialised skill sets, chosen expert) then

critiqued, constructed, re-constructed, and internalised under tapu (sacred, set apart) on the physical plane.

Similar beliefs have been explained as foundational to other Pacific knowledge systems such as Tongan (Mahina, 2010; Thaman, 2019a), Malaitan (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001; Sanga, 2019), Hawaiian (Meyer, 2001) and Papua New Guinean (Mel, 1995) knowledges, for example. This conceptualisation of the source of knowledge, and thus the sacredness of many types of knowledge, is a point of tension with a Deleuze-Guattarian philosophy that both proposes a universal abstraction of how knowledge is produced, and a wariness towards forms of knowledge positioned as transcendent or beyond question. While my concern is not to resolve, minimise or neglect such difference, informed by my encounters with Pacific research and wayfinding, my conceptualisation of an assemblage methodology considers the opportunities for respectful conversation around these ideas, with a focus on generating concepts that are dignifying for all.

Thus, I cautiously draw on the term wayfinding to highlight the way in which my methodological approach to researching policy assemblages in the Pacific has been informed by my encounters with Pacific ways of being, knowing and relating. In so doing, I am very wary of the risks of appropriating or inadequately translating Pacific concepts, and emphasise that I am not using or adopting (what will always be a different interpretation of) Indigenous Pacific concepts of wayfinding, but rather I am informed by my encounter with these concepts, and my reading of Pacific scholars engagement with these concepts.

Engaging with wayfinding orients me towards relinquishing the teleology of both research and research phenomenon (in this case, policy), and the assumption of research phenomenon as extant outside the research process. For these reasons, I find wayfinding a more helpful alternative to the oft used terms of 'following policy' (McCann & Ward 2012b; Peck & Theodore, 2012) or 'tracing assemblages' (Baker & McGuirk, 2017). Wayfinding requires me to be alert to the multiple *dimensions* of assemblage, and to remember that while assemblage may be productive of incoherence and inconsistency and a form of absurdity or non-sense, it is always operating according to strategic logic. For me, wayfinding also evokes a sense of conversation; a conversation between materialities, spirits, cosmology and bodies in which direction and destination are not pre-determined but immanent, and where new lines of rupture or flight are able to form through conversation. Equally, my sense of wayfinding also connects with my sense of Johansson-Fua's concept of *motutapu* (as discussed in Chapter 1) and the Pacific dialogic methods of *talanoa* and *tok stori* (to be discussed in Section 4.3), wherein research (and, arguably, all aspects of life) is always an ongoing conversation, as well as an opening to new and yet different conversations. As a methodological framework for this research, *wayfinding assemblage* then directs us to four key orientations of *why*, *how*, *where and when*, and *what* for the researching of policy assemblage. I elaborate these in the next Section (4.2).

## 4.2 Orientations for wayfinding assemblage in policy research

In this Section, I propose four interconnected orientations for wayfinding assemblage in policy research, based on synthesising the methodological implications and affordances of assemblage theory, policy mobilities, and Pacific research. I explain each one in turn and

broadly explain how I have applied them to this research. In Sections 4.3 to 4.5 I then detail

the specific methods and processes I used for data generation, analysis and ensuring ethical

research.

### 4.2.1  *Why*: researching for immanent critique and relational ethics

Typically, in discussions of research methodology, the purpose of research is stated as either

producing new knowledge or evidence or else critiquing existing actions or discourses, but

often without much further interrogation as to why these are sensible purposes of research.

The question of *why research* – or perhaps more precisely, what it is that we think our research

is capable of doing? – is often not deeply interrogated but rather simply assumed in keeping

with the conditions and expectations of ones' discipline or theoretical leanings.

As discussed in Chapter 1, my primary purpose with this research and thesis is to think.

Therefore, a wayfinding assemblage methodology, first and foremost, encourages me to think.

But this is not just thinking for thinking's sake, or for the novelty of the new. I have

emphasised throughout this thesis the value of thinking differently, of being open to

difference, of seeking new lines of flight and the creation of new worlds. While I believe such

thinking is valuable in our worlds, in the context of *research* I believe an orientation towards

thinking for immanent critique and relational ethics – a *relational immanent ethics*, if you will –

is necessary. I will explain these two concepts in turn.

The notion of 'immanent critique' is discussed at length by Sellar and colleagues (2014,

p. 464) by drawing on the work of Brian Massumi. By immanent critique, Sellar and colleagues

refer to a mode of critique:

> ... predicated on asking what a thing or a situation can do, what it affords and
>
> *how one might work with these affordances*, rather than aiming to determine
>
> whether the thing or situation is good or bad or any of the myriad terms that
>
> are used to stand in for such valuation. (Sellar et al., 2014, p. 464; emphasis
>
> added)

Such immanent critique can be situated in contrast to critical research, which often relies on claims of reflexivity as being sufficient for producing ethical and valid judgements, and which still requires (and justifies) suitably reflexive researchers making such judgements with reference to a transcendent order that is *a priori* determined (Pillow, 2003; Sellar et al., 2014). For me, *wayfinding assemblage* supports a mode of immanent critique by orienting us to the question of what a policy can do (to be discussed in Chapter 5) and understanding that what a policy is capable of doing depends on the (assembled) flows of desire that animate it, as well as the problematisations to which it responds and is itself sustained. An orientation of researching for immanent critique therefore encourages me to focus on what is made possible within the situation I am researching (and am necessarily a part of), and how change might be brought about within that situation, rather than me looking elsewhere for something to blame or for a solution. As Thompson and colleagues (2022, p. 696) state, 'if we want something to change, if we want to intercede in an assemblage, we must tackle it at the level of its strata and desire'.

Immanent critique also aligns with Deleuze and Guattari's (2020, p. 4) commitment to never ask what something means but only ever how it functions (for further discussion of this, see also Buchanan, 2017, p. 467; Buchanan, 1997). This still necessitates a reflexivity about the

onto-epistemic lens being brought to the research, the desires animating my becoming-research(er), and the relationality between the researcher, research participants and the broader context, or relational space, in which this engagement occurs (Anae, 2019; Takayama et al., 2016). However, following Pillow (2003), I do not situate reflexivity itself as a solution or absolution, a methodological power to be wielded to justify certain accounts or interpretations. I see risks in relying on critical reflexivity by researchers as a kind of 'get out of jail free' card that allows us to continue our research so long as we confess our positionality and the limits to our knowingness. Rather, I attempt to engage in reflexivity while maintaining a 'suspicion of reflexivity', and a concern for 'being accountable to people's struggles for self-determination and self-determination' (Visweswaran, 1994, p. 32, cited in Pillow, 2003, p. 193). This connects with my own understanding of relational ethics and accountabilities, as part of a methodology of wayfinding assemblage, which I will now discuss.

By contrast, the *relational* aspect of a relational immanent ethics responds to my concern for working within and against the traditional 'colonising gaze' of ethnographic research undertaken by (usually) white researchers of (usually) settler colonial heritage in 'exotic' places (Hau'ofa, 1985; Hereniko, 2000; Marcus, 1998; Moore, 2003). My conceptualisation of relational immanent ethics also responds to, and is informed by, my understanding of Pacific research and broader philosophies, in which caring for the relational space that connects all beings (ourselves, others, our natural and spiritual worlds) is primary. As discussed in Section 2.4, common to many Pacific Indigenous Knowledges is a conception of time as not extending out in a linear and discontinuous trajectory; rather, pasts and futures are folded into presents, in an 'intertwining and circular arrangement' (Ka'ili, 2017, p. 36).

Importantly, the flows that constitute time-space connection are not merely discursive or material, but are spiritual, cosmological and affective. Anae (2019, p. 1) draws on the Samoan concept of *teu le va* – 'to value, nurture, and care for (*teu*) the secular/sacred and social/spiritual spaces (*va*) of all relationships…' – as a central tenet and practice for ethical research by, and with, Pacific peoples. Like the Tongan concept of *tauhi vaha'a* (Johansson-Fua, 2020), Anae (2019) describes *teu le va* as placing relationships and relationality at the centre of research, recognising the situated nature of relationalities and their centrality to Pacific ways of knowing, being and relating.

Being informed by a relational immanent ethics therefore orients me to continually consider how what I am doing as I research is contributing to *teu le va*, not just with respect of my 'research participants' but also more generally (Anae, 2019; Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2002; Koya-Vaka'uta, 2017; Sanga, 2004), and that contributes to dignifying people in their worlds (Sanga, 2016). Importantly, a concern for *teu le va* does not, in my understanding, mean abandoning the capacity to question, but rather to question in a way that opens and sustains conversation, without a prior assumption of there being *an* answer. For me, this connects with the immanent ethical concern for experimenting with ways to enhance the capacities of bodies to be affected and for affecting, that is, for becoming (Buchanan, 1997).

A relational immanent ethics requires me to be attentive to the relations of power produced within the encounters of the research(er), including those related to my subjectivity as a researcher and development professional of colonial settler heritage, as well as the complexities that may arise from having existing professional relationships with some research participants. It requires me to consider and respond to how these dynamics may impact on my

research participants engagement and data analysis, while acknowledging that I cannot fully

'know' what these impacts are, nor prevent them. It also requires me to recognise research is

not a bounded exercise and my relational accountabilities extend beyond the research

enterprise itself (Anae, 2019; Johansson-Fua, 2020; Koya-Vaka'uta, 2017). Importantly, Pacific

relational ethics requires me to consider the multiplicity of 'research participants' in my

research, not just those directly involved but also those indirectly evoked, and to recognise

that any attempt by me to 'represent' them within this thesis, or fix them as entities to be

represented, is problematic. The implications of this will be taken up further in Sections 4.2.3

and 4.2.4.

The concept of relational immanent ethics responds also to the call for researchers to

go beyond understanding difference in largely static cultural terms, and to recognise the way

in which 'common sense' representations of difference are structured by colonial, racial and

other similarly molar logics (Takayama et al., 2016; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). There is an

opportunity for research to both reveal the workings of these and to experiment with how

they can be 'proliferated in new ways [, rather than]... abolished or denied (Saldanha, 2007, p.

10). I consider this form of relational immanent ethics as a necessary component of a practice

of *decolonisation*, as I understand it (see Section 1.3). As theorised by Pacific scholars Vaai and

Nabobo-Baba (2017, p. 9), decolonisation is a practice of unthinking, re-thinking, and doing.

This requires a suspension of the desire for knowingness and instead a focus on what they

describe as a process of 'seeking wisdom', whereby the 'both/and' nature of our plural worlds

can be accepted. Thus, research informed by a wayfinding assemblage methodology is

concerned with the practice of questioning that which is made to be natural or 'common

sense' and a questioning of how our understandings of difference are reduced to that which deviates from this common sense or that which is recognised as the natural form of being. Such questioning opens opportunities for making-recognisable absolute difference. As discussed in Section 1.3, engaging with both Pacific research and Deleuze and Guattari's work in this way provides a strong foundation for me and other researchers who have inherited the benefits of colonisation, to challenge and rethink the onto-epistemic systems in which we have been embedded (Bignall, 2008).

### 4.2.2   *How*: researching with an ethnographic sensibility

The second orientation in a methodology of *wayfinding assemblages* is the deployment of an ethnographic sensibility throughout all stages of the research process, underpinned by a conceptualisation of researcher, research and researched as always 'in the middle'. Ethnographic approaches can be thought of as a family of methods that are characterised by a focus on phenomena in 'naturalistic' settings, and a concern for producing rich accounts of the 'this-ness and lived-out-ness' of social relations, practices and systems of meaning (Willis & Trondman, 2000, pp. 5–6). In this way ethnographic approaches cohere with the spirit of wayfinding, orienting research to attend first to the empirical and all dimensions of empirical experience. The last two decades have seen an increasing use of ethnographic approaches to the study of education policy (Ball, 2016; Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017) and global development policy (Gould & Marcussen, 2004; Hagberg & Widmark, 2009; Mosse & Lewis, 2005).

While historically associated with the discipline of anthropology, and with methods of participant observation through sustained immersion in the research field, ethnography has

changed significantly over the decades and is increasingly now used across a range of social

science fields. Many of these changes have been in response to the 'unbounding' of culture,

place and context, and the postcolonial and feminist challenges to representation and the

reflexivity of ethnography (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). Varied ethnographic approaches have

been widely adopted within the field of policy mobilities, as well as development practice (see,

for instance, Ball, 2016; Hagberg & Widmark, 2009; Hogan, 2016; Lewis, 2021; Mosse & Lewis,

2005; Peck & Theodore, 2012). In response to the challenges of following policy across

multiple sites, scales, times and into 'elite' spaces, critical policy study scholars have 'extended'

traditional ethnographic methods to employ a 'judicious combination of observations,

documentary analysis, and in-depth interviews as a means of probing, interrogating, and

triangulating issues' (Peck & Theodore, 2012, p. 26).

Within fields such as critical policy studies, there has also been a shift towards drawing

on ethnography less as a prescriptive approach and more as a 'sensibility' (Baker & McGuirk,

2017; Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016; C. Shore & Wright, 1997). An ethnographic sensibility means

adopting what Maxwell (2013, p. 29; cited in Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016, p. 38) describes as a

process-orientation; that is, to 'see the world in terms of people, situations, events, and the

processes that connect these...', rather than relying on *a priori* categories for understanding

the world. It involves 'rendering strange' (Baker & McGuirk, 2017, p. 435) what has been

normalised to understand how it has come to be that way. In these ways, an ethnographic

sensibility has been shown to be not only consistent with the ethos of assemblage theory, but

also enriched by Deleuze and Guattari's focus on becomings, difference and immanence

(Grinberg, 2013; Youdell, 2015). This would consider ethnography as the opportunity for

encounter, not trying to interpret bodily encounters and happenings as an instance of something else (proof of a theory, instantiation of a thought) but to rather consider what is being *made to matter* through these happenings, and what kind of happening are they; that is, in other words, what kind of assemblage must have produced them (Patton, 1997; Saldanha, 2007).

Importantly, assemblage informed ethnography encourages us to consider the always present molarities and molecularities and the re/de/territorialisations that animate any given encounter, and to consider these not as signs of inconsistency or incoherence but simply as the workings of the assemblage. It requires us to remain open to new lines of becoming and to resist closing these off by finding a tidy analysis to explain difference with recourse to transcendent causes or external factors. In adopting an ethnographic sensibility, I have heeded a warning expressed well by Jones and Jenkins (2008) regarding the risks of translating the desire for engaging with 'other' ways of knowing as the need to achieve mutual and shared understanding, thereby erasing difference in the process. I have tried to adhere to their advice to retain the tension in difference as 'a positive site of productive methodological *work*' (Jones & Jenkins, 2008, p. 475; emphasis original).

The restrictions on travel posed by the COVID-19 pandemic prevented me from meeting with my research participants in person and undertaking participant observation as I had originally planned. However, using qualitative methods like in-depth interviews and document analysis, as well as an iterative process of thinking with theory, data and secondary sources, I have attempted to engage in an ethnographic sensibility as much as possible. This has included an ongoing (online) conversations with colleagues involved in Pacific education

development to continue to force my thinking. I have also continued engaging in education

development activities (both through volunteer roles and paid casual work) while I have been

undertaking my research. I have been careful to maintain professional and ethical boundaries

between these engagements and my research. However, they have inevitably informed my

thinking, while also giving me opportunities to maintain relational accountabilities through

continuing to contribute in practically useful ways to Pacific education development. The

details of how I undertook data generation and analysis will be discussed further in Sections

4.3 and 4.4, including the management of research ethics and the minimising of the potential

for conflicts of interest.

### 4.2.3   *Where and when*: wayfinding becomings

As noted earlier, a key feature of policy-mobilities informed methodological frameworks is the

concept of following or tracing the (re)making of policy through multiple sites and situations.

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, this builds on rethinking the conventional ethnographic field

of study as a geographically and/or temporally 'bounded' culture, place, community or

occurrence and considering them as produced through relational processes, rather than

existing *a priori*. Methodologically, this demands an iterative, flexible approach to *following*

policy artefacts, actors (human and non-human), discourses and affects as they move and

move the spaces into which they move (Baker & McGuirk, 2017; Bartlett & Vavrus, 2019;

McCann & Ward, 2012b).

Distinctions of sites and situations have been drawn on by several authors as a useful

way of delimiting the physical and social spaces of policy, while also recognising these as

intimately connected (see, for example, Baker and McGuirk, 2017; McCann and Ward, 2012a).

S*ites* are the particular locales in which policy processes play out; for example, in my case,

Pacific regional agency headquarters or Pacific Ministry of Education offices; whereas

*situations* are the 'different "wheres" in and through which... policy knowledge is mobilised

and assembled... [and] where the past, present and potential future of a policy can coexist'

(McCann & Ward, 2012a, p. 47). Situations always occur within sites; for instance, a particular

meeting of the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) Steering Committee is a

situation that occurs in the site of a Nadi hotel convention centre or in an online meeting

platform like Zoom. The act of following or tracing allows the 'relevant' sites and situations to

emerge empirically, rather than assuming these can be determined *a priori*, as well as for

attention to be given to 'how practices themselves produce locations' (Leander, 2002, p. 3;

cited in Bartlett & Vavrus, 2019, p. 192).

While this language of following how policy is made and remade as it moves through

sites and situations, and how policy makes and remakes the spaces through its movement, is

useful, I suggest that an assemblage theory informed approach requires a different way of

thinking-doing policy research. Informed by Pacific research, a wayfinding assemblage

approach emphasises immanence, relational entanglements and becoming, wherein policy

and policy spaces are becomings (not spatially or temporally bounded sites or situations),

within which as a researcher I am situated 'in the middle'. My task is not to slow these flows

sufficiently to be able to describe and document the 'before and after' of policy (re)making

and movement, from a privileged viewpoint, but to get to the *abstract* assemblage that is

productive of these policy becomings. As discussed in Section 3.4.5, abstract in a Deleuzian

sense is better understood not as the opposite of concrete or real but rather as being close to virtuality (Adkins, 2016). In this way, wayfinding assemblage pushes me to stay focused on why things happen (and keep happening) in the (different) ways that they do, rather than be satisfied with tracing what happened, when and where. It emphasises the entanglement of research/er/ed and places the methodological importance on not *where/when* the lines of inclusion/exclusion are drawn around the policy phenomenon being studied, but rather *why* they are drawn where/when they are.

Therefore, in this research, I have engaged with the empirical specificity of the becoming-PacREF as means for wayfinding the abstract assemblage that (re)produces it, which I have labelled as PREDP. This responds to Buchanan's (2017, p. 465) suggestion that:

> To conceive of policy as an assemblage means seeing it purely in terms of the
>
> kinds of arrangements and orderings it makes possible and even more
>
> importantly the set of expectations it entails. To see it this way we need to
>
> separate "policy" as a conceptual entity from its myriad iterations as this or
>
> that policy... but also from all sense of outcomes and outputs.

Importantly, this is not about looking at empirical specificity to generate higher-order explanations, which reduce the empirical to an example of something transcendent. This is the generality-specificity relationship that Deleuze wrote against (2006a). Rather, it is about distinguishing the form from the content, the abstract from what we might label as the discrete entity, and the virtual from the actual. This requires staying 'in the middle', staying with the molar-molecular tensions, and engaging in an affirmative way with what assemblages

produce. Put differently, it is to understand the Pacific, the local, the small not as the negation

of or in opposition to some other referent (the west, the global, the large), but as positive

productions in their own terms. It necessitates remaining immersed in the ocean, and

engaging in practices of *wayfinding*, rather than attempting to surface to see the bigger

picture and situate oneself to some fixed externality or reference point.

However, doing this is hard.

A key challenge in using an assemblage theory informed approach is determining what

assemblage to focus on. If every assemblage is 'in the middle' and imbricated in other

assemblages, where do we begin and end? How do I disentangle the assemblages of *Pacific*

from that of *regionalism,* from that of *education*, from that of *development*, from that of

*policy*, and yet also try to make sense of them all together? In attempting to 'make sense of'

and 'write' this research, I was continually pulled by a desire for narrating a creation story, to

be able to trace back to the beginning and identify the combination of (causal) events and

influential actors that led to where (or what, or when?) we are now, and then understand this

as some microcosm of a broader situation. However, this only mired me in concerns for

drawing boundaries: where do I start, how far back do I go, how wide do I go, what do I

include and exclude?

This is, I believe, the struggle of thinking, of getting outside one's image of thought.

These questions are the strength of assemblage theory while also its challenge. Therefore, I

have no solution to this struggle but have found that continually bringing my thinking to the

task of diagramming assemblage – and of answering Thompson and colleagues' (2022)

questions – helped, even though I did not expect to find, nor achieved, answers. It was also helpful to think in terms of encounters (as discussed in Section 4.2.2) and to understand the interviews and my reading of documents etc. as encounters, rather than engagements with representations or accounts of something else. As such, in sharing my 'findings', I start with a *storying* of the 2015 Pacific Heads of Education Systems (PHES) meeting in Port Vila, Vanuatu, in an attempt to bring to life for the reader these encounters. My decision to begin with the PHES 2015 meeting is not to suggest it as *the* beginning of the PacREF but instead as one of many moments of becoming produced through the assemblage of PREDP. It was also a moment that several of my research participants expressed as a moment of disruption to 'normal' ways of working, a moment they expressed as an opening up of what we might consider to be a line of flight. As Deleuze and Guattari (2020, p. 205) remind us, 'the line of flight does not come afterward; it is there from the beginning, even if it awaits its hour and awaits for the others to explode'. Thus, I do not consider it as the beginning, but as with all things, 'in the middle', a generative moment from which different lines of PREDP might be diagrammed. This is the task of *what* to research, which is the fourth orientation for researching policy assemblage, and is what I turn to now.

### 4.2.4   *What*: diagrams of assemblage

In addition to following policy, much policy mobilities informed literature argues for a focus on 'the material and discursive labours' involved in the everyday work of (re)making and mobilising policy (Baker & McGuirk, 2017, p. 437), and 'staying close to practice', as a means for appreciating the contextual contingency of policy. While useful, as Gulson and colleagues (2017) have highlighted, this does not advance our understanding of the complexity of policy

much further than a mapping of discursive practice and their relationship with material elements. The suggestion (by Baker and McGuirk) that these are 'labours of assemblage' also invokes a humanistic notion of work as something performed deliberately for achieving pre-determined outcomes. I instead suggest that a more strongly assemblage theory informed methodology offers greater analytic specificity of the processes through which materialities and discourses come to be, which also then enables us to consider how they could be different.

Therefore, following Buchanan (2021), and Thompson and colleagues (2022), in my methodological framework I consider the diagramming of assemblage as the answer to the question of what to research. As Buchanan (2021, pp. 126–127) has argued, this requires us to,

> …[(a)] seek to determine the specific conditions under which matter becomes material (i.e., how bricks, timber and steel are determined to be the proper material for housing as opposed to mud, straw and wrecked cars or any other material deemed unsuited to house-building in Australia); [and] (b) seek to determine the specific conditions under which semiotic matter becomes expressive (i.e., how it is decided that a specific arrangement of materials is 'fitting' for a person to live in and another arrangement is not).

Thompson and colleagues' (2022, p. 691) set of questions for the 'translation of [Deleuze and Guattari's] concepts into analytical frameworks for examining policy today' are similarly valuable here for guiding me in *what to look for* when conducting research on policy when using assemblage theory. These questions provide a more detailed analytical framework for

mapping not just what a policy assemblage actualises (produces in the world), but also *why* the desire came to be assembled in this way (as opposed to other possibilities). That is, the purpose is to understand how a policy assemblage is able to produce certain kinds of actualisations, which in turn allows one to ask how they could be different.

Thompson and colleagues' (2022) questions are grounded in the abstract, virtual nature of assemblage as Deleuze and Guattari conceived it, rather than a more socio-spatial and procedural conceptualisation as offered by many policy mobilities informed approaches. For example, as Thompson and colleagues (2022, p. 693) state, 'when territory is understood primarily in spatial terms, the energetic aspect that gives the assemblage its direction or purpose (i.e., what it works *for*) is missed' (emphasis original/added?). Similarly, considering processes of assemblage in terms of material-discursive labours risks mistaking those apparent labours as the (causal) factors of interest, and therefore, when they are not visible, it arguably assumes that are not at work. In orienting us to dimensions such as the territorialisations of a policy, and the virtual-actual relation at the heart of assemblage, Thompson and colleagues' questions allow us to get to 'the desire animating policy, and not simply the spaces of production, enactment or broader impact' (Thompson et al., 2022, p. 693).

Methodologically, the questions are particularly useful to consider when undertaking data analysis, and this is how I have primarily used them in my research. Thompson and colleagues' (2022) questions, and a concern for diagramming assemblage, orients me towards *what* to look for when analysing the corpus of statements collected through document analysis and interviews, the process of which is discussed further in Section 4.4 below.

Importantly, I have heeded the warning of Thompson and colleagues (2022) to not use their

questions as a 'recipe for method', a decision made easier by these questions being not easy

to answer in straightforward ways. Rather, I have used them as prompts to force me to think

and to facilitate a continual wayfinding through my analysis process. The aim then is not

reaching answers as if they are a destination, but to generate more questions and more

thinking. As such, I have brought Thompson and colleagues' (2022) questions together with

those posed by McCann & Ward (2012a) for following mobile policy, into a conjoined analysis

framework, which I used to help guide my analysis of the data generated (see Appendix 4).

Deleuze and Guattari (2020, p. 203) describe the task of analysing assemblages and the

flows of desire as 'an affair of cartography'. We can diagram every assemblage as 'bundles of

lines, for each kind is multiple' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2020, p. 203). Some of these lines will be

more important than others and some will be more readily visible. As discussed earlier (see

Sections 3.4 and 4.2.4), the task of diagramming is not to focus on discrete components or

events to fix and understand what the assemblage *is*. The assemblage is not a thing in the

world but rather a way to diagram the relational processes that make things in our world

possible (Buchanan, 2017).

Finally, in engaging more directly with Deleuze and Guattari's formulation of

assemblage theory, I suggest that these questions offer greater potential for being able to

sense that which too often is made non-sense or not visible/sayable in research informed by

representational-based research traditions. Methodologically, there are obvious challenges in

'seeing' or sensing that which is outside our image of thought and doing so without reducing

it to some version of what we already know. As de Sousa Santos (1998, p. 131) has so

eloquently argued, '…how do we make silence speak without having it necessarily speak the hegemonic language that would have it speak?'. A focus on diagramming assemblage directs us to focus on *why* and *how* things have come to be as they are, rather than attempting to define *what* they are, which all too often involves recourse to some established 'common' sense. I believe this coheres well with Pacific concepts of *teu le va* and of *wayfinding:* the everyday practices involved in nurturing and responding to the immanent relational connections that are productive of our worlds (Anae, 2019).

## 4.3   Data generation methods

In response to the challenges of researching policy across multiple sites and situations, including into 'elite' spaces, policy sociology scholars have 'extended' traditional ethnographic methods to employ a 'judicious combination of observations, documentary analysis, and in-depth interviews as a means of probing, interrogating, and triangulating issues' (Peck & Theodore, 2012, p. 26). My research draws on this combination of data generation methods. Specifically, I undertook in-depth interviews informed by Pacific dialogic methods and document analysis. I have also incorporated what St Pierre (1997) has referred to as 'transgressive data', the kinds of data that are beyond words, and that transgress the usual 'rules' of what can be included as data. As will be discussed further in Section 4.4, this transgressive data includes my embodied knowings from my past and ongoing experiences as a 'development actor' in Pacific regional education development and my emotional and sensual responses to my research encounters (St. Pierre, 1997).

This combination of methods is appropriate for a conjoined assemblage thinking and

policy mobilities approach (informed by Pacific research), as it enables an encounter with the

complexities and apparent contingencies of policy processes, while also supporting the

diagramming of assemblage (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016; Ball, 2016; Lea, 2020; Peck & Theodore,

2012; Youdell, 2015). **Table 1** provides a summary of the methods I undertook and the

methodological considerations of each of these methods. I then explain each method in more

detail in the subsequent sections.

*Table 1* Summary of Data Generation Methods

| Method | Data search/ selection procedures | Data sources | Form of data generated |
|---|---|---|---|
| Document Analysis | Documents accessed electronically through carrying out electronic searches:<br>- on relevant organisational websites<br>- using keywords including key events and actors' names.<br>- citations from key policy documents | Organisational websites and social media feed (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube); Google searches; Organisational archives; Academic databases; Recommendations from participants and other personal networks | Political texts: relevant speeches, parliamentary debates or inquiries, and press releases |
| | | | Organisational policy and programmatic texts: policy documents, tender documents, program designs, evaluation and research reports, speeches, organisational blogs, other public communications |
| | | | Expert texts: publications, speeches, and other texts of academics, consultants and 'policy entrepreneurs' |
| In-depth Interviews | Purposive recruitment of participants, starting with those directly involved in the PacREF processes. | 30 interviews undertaken predominantly via digital platforms. See Appendix 2 for list. | Interview recordings and transcripts<br>Post-interview analytic memos |

### 4.3.1    Document analysis

Locating relevant documents is not as simple as looking for an organisation's stated policy on

context-responsiveness or regionalism, since relevant materials are likely to be embedded

within a range of policy, academic and public texts. A summary of the types of policy

documents I collected is provided in **Table 1**. I used the data management system *EverNote*,

along with a systematic electronic filing system, to enable efficient, secure organisation and

management of my data set of documents. Throughout the research period, I collected 181

documents. Even though I have not directly referenced all these documents in my analysis,

locating and reading through these helped me feel immersed in the PacREF and have

informed my thinking. Once I reached the stage of in-depth data analysis, I focused on a key

corpus of documents related most closely to the development and launching of the PacREF.

This was appropriate given that my aim was not for saturation, nor to enable a systematic

discourse analysis (as will be further discussed in Section 4.4).

### 4.3.2    In-depth interviews

Interviews are perhaps the most commonly used qualitative research method in social science

(Gubrium & Holstein, 2003). In-depth interviews, approached ethnographically, need not 'be

relegated to the status of ethnography's poor relation… [and] should be interactive, dynamic

encounters, not merely extractive, fact/opinion-gathering exercises' (Peck & Theodore, 2012,

p. 26). In-depth interviews can contribute empirical data and insights as to the bodies, actions

and passions being arranged, within what discursive conditions (collective assemblages of

enunciation) and with what effects. Ethnographically-informed in-depth interviewing also aligns with the preference within Pacific research of methods that can facilitate open dialogue (Fa'avae et al., 2016; Sanga et al., 2018; Vaioleti, 2013).

From the poststructuralist perspective employed in this research, interview transcripts are treated as texts and are scrutinised for '*precisely* what is said' and 'how it was or is possible to say those things' (Bacchi & Bonham, 2016, pp. 115–116; emphasis original). Interviews and other dialogic forms of engagement from this perspective are sites of discursive practices through which subjects are formed, and the interviewer and interviewee engage in the 'production of what can be "within the true"' (Bonham & Bacchi, 2017, p. 692). From a Pacific research perspective, Indigenous Pacific dialogic methods require the researcher being open to transformation through conversation with research participants; that is, being open to 'creating an otherward dimension of relationship through the spirit of hospitality, dialogue, sensibility, vulnerability and risk and an appreciation that one's horizon of understanding is widened and/or changed by the encounter with something/one opposite, new or unfamiliar' (Anae, 2019, p. 12). While Anae (2019) and others (see Johansson-Fua, 2016; Vaai & Nabobo-Baba, 2017) theorise this encounter in terms of a phenomenological understanding of the self, the intent can also be applied to thinking in assemblage theory terms. From this perspective, interviews are positioned as dialogic encounters that create opportunities for re/de/territorialisation, which can lead to new lines of becoming for both researcher subjectivity and data analysis (Bignall, 2008).

I have carried out in-depth interviews using semi-structured generic interview guides (see Appendix 3) that were then tailored slightly for each research participant. While the

interview guide offers a structure and set of questions, I focused on keeping the interviews as conversational as possible and remained open to allowing the conversation to head in unanticipated direction, depending on what appeared to be of most interest to the research participant. Particular attention was given to ensuring Pacific communication protocols were met, drawing on my existing experience and guidance from Pacific research methodology literature (Fa'avae et al., 2016; Johansson-Fua, 2014; Koya-Vaka'uta, 2017; Nabobo-Baba, 2005; Sanga et al., 2018; Vaioleti, 2013).

With the agreement of my participants, all interviews were recorded. Most interviews ran for 60-90 minutes in duration. During the interview, I wrote notes to capture what I experienced as key statements and noted non-verbal elements of the interview. Immediately after each interview, I added to these notes any initial reflections on the conversation using the format of analytic memos (Leavy & Saldaña, 2014). I then produced verbatim transcriptions of each interview; for about half of the interviews, I employed the services of a confidential transcription service, while for the other half I typed out the transcription myself. During the transcription process, I wrote analytic memos to encourage my own ongoing reflections on the data, as well as the interview process more generally.

I had initially intended to travel to several of these locations to engage in face-to-face conversations and undertake a form of 'participant observation' of relevant meetings. However, this was not possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic travel restrictions. As such, all but two of the interviews were conducted virtually using either the Zoom digital platform or, in one instance, by phone. Using an online platform had the advantage of maximising the number of people I could speak with by removing the time and cost restrictions of travelling.

However, the disadvantages including missing out on a lot of non-verbal communication that occurs when being physically present with someone, as well as interruptions to the flow of conversation caused by poor Internet connections. Most importantly, for those participants whom I had not met before in person and did not have an existing relationship, establishing a rapport was much more difficult to do without the opportunities afforded by the 'pre/post-interview' interactions that occur when physically meeting someone. I believe this was particularly acute when speaking with participants with whom I did not have an existing relationship, and where my positionality as a female researcher of white settler heritage based in Melbourne afforded particular power relations. My use of English was a further potential limitation in the interviews, given that English was not the first the language used in day-to-day communication for the majority of my Pacific participants and some of the international development partner representatives.

In navigating this situation, I drew on literature on the Pacific dialogic methodologies, particularly that of *talanoa* and *tok stori*, [17] which highlight the particular relational practices necessary to nurture the relational space between researcher and interview participant (Fa'avae et al., 2016; Johansson-Fua, 2014; 'Otunuku, 2011). Koya-Vaka'uta (2017) has also discussed the challenges of maintaining Pacific relationalities, captured by the concept of *va*,

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[17] *Talanoa* is the Tongan language term of a form of dialogic engagement common across Cook Islands, Fiji, Hawaii, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, Tokelau and Tuvalu involving open, unstructured discussion, which is grounded in establishing and fostering relational connection (Fa'avae et al., 2016; Vaioleti, 2013). Tok stori is a pijin term for a form of dialogic engagement grounded in collective deliberation and construction of knowledge, common across Melanesian societies of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu (Sanga et al., 2018; Sanga & Reynolds, 2021)

within digital spaces, while Fa'aea and colleagues (2021) discuss examples of how it is possible to nurture the *va* in online teaching spaces. Drawing from these resources, as well as my own previous experience in navigating such relationships, I took deliberate steps to first understand the nature of the *va* between myself and participants prior to the interview, such as finding out what I could about their heritage and life history (through colleagues and online sources) to identify potential points of connection between us, and to determine the dimensions of the power relations. In my initial email communication with participants, I ensured to introduce myself in terms of my relational connections and to demonstrate at least a small degree of cultural competency through use of greetings in the indigenous language or *lingua franca* (in the case of multi-lingual countries) of the participants' country location ('Otunuku, 2011). In undertaking the interviews, I ensured to follow any appropriate protocols for what I understood to be the socio-cultural status of the participant (Fa'avae et al., 2016). I took time, sometimes up to half an hour, at the start of the interview process to engage with the participant on a personal level in terms of talking with them about family, establishing any personal connections we had, and to ensure I recognised them foremost as people, not simply as research participants or their professional roles (Fa'avae et al., 2016; Vaioleti, 2013). I treated the interview as an 'open conversation' as much as possible (Fa'avae et al., 2016, p. 144), thereby attempting to allow the conversation to flow in directions participants appeared to be most interested in or animated about, while also trying to be respectful of participants available time to speak with me.

The generation of data necessarily occurred across multiple research space-times. Geographically, these sites ranged from Suva, Fiji (e.g., Pacific regional organisations offices);

Canberra, Australia (Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade); and Washington,

D.C., U.S. (the Global Partnership for Education headquarters), as well as the various capital

cities of the Pacific island nations participating in PREDP.

As discussed in Chapter 1 and Section 4.2.3, to manage the potentially broad scope of

my research, I have taken as a starting and anchoring point for inquiry the *Pacific Regional*

*Education Framework* 2018-2030 (PacREF) and the organisations most directly involved with

this policy. Appendix 1 presents a figure of the key actors, sites and situations related to the

PacREF. Purposeful recruitment of participants for interviews was undertaken, focusing first on

representatives of the organisations and institutional structures presented in Appendix 1 (See

Appendix 7 for example recruitment email). Through initial scoping, I also identified other

agencies that are actively engaged with the PacREF, including technical agencies, such as the

Australian Council for Education Research (ACER); as well as individual academics, consultants

and other such 'policy entrepreneurs, traveling technocrats and "thought leaders"' (Ball, 2016,

p. 14). Through initial interviews and document analysis, other actors emerged or were

opportunistically recommended to me by research participants. In taking up such

recommendations from existing participants, I have been wary of the need to maintain a

reflexive awareness of how this may direct my attention to following certain lines of the

assemblage and not others. Thus, interview participants included:

- staff of Pacific regional agencies, development partner agencies, and NGOs involved in
  regional education policy;

- individual academics and consultants engaged in Pacific regional education; and

- members of the PacREF steering committee (i.e., the heads of ministries of education in the participating Pacific Island countries in the PacREF member countries).

A list of organisations/positions of those interviewed is presented in Appendix 2. Overall, I was able to speak with a good breadth of actors engaged in/with PREDP, which provided a total of 30 interviews, conducted between 2021-2023.

## 4.4   Encountering data: analysis

The methodological framework of *wayfinding assemblage* informed the process I undertook to analyse data, in conjunction with insights from Bacchi's (2005) discussion of analysis of discourses.[18] I developed a set of questions to guide my analysis of the data, bringing together the orienting questions offered by Thompson and colleagues (2022), with insights from the 'mobile methods' discussed by McCann and Ward (2012a). This is presented in Appendix 4. The data for analysis includes the political, organisational, and expert documents and artefacts and in-depth interview transcripts – hereafter collectively referred to as 'texts'. In addition, I consider my responses to the research encounter and my embodied experiences of working in Pacific education development as data available for analysis.

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[18] Some scholars use the terminology *Foucauldian Discourse Analysis* (FDA) and have developed guidance on the 'usual' (rather than standard) steps involved (see, for instance, Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2020; Kendall & Wickham, 1999). Following Bacchi (2005), I will refer to *analysis of discourses* or else, where appropriate, *Foucauldian-informed analysis of discourse*, rather than FDA. This is to signal that Foucauldian-informed discourse analysis is not a standardised methodology, but rather requires a process of 'constantly checking' our conceptual and methodological assumptions against the empirical, and is thus guided by the Foucauldian commitment to theory *as practice* (Foucault, 1984, p. 209).

First, I carried out an iterative process of analysis involving successive rounds of reading, note-taking and producing analytic memos, guided by my analysis framework (Appendix 4). This analysis was undertaken concurrently with my data collection, as well as continued through the writing up process (Saldaña, 2014). In line with a wayfinding assemblage methodology, the initial analysis informed future data collection through, for example, identifying connections, actors and sites that I had been previously unaware of, and which are significant to follow. Analytic memos provided a space for critical reflection on the data, on my theoretical-conceptual framework, and on the analysis process and research design itself (Leavy & Saldaña, 2014). I used the analytic memos as an opportunity to also record 'transgressive' data, of my emotional and sensual responses, reflections, confusions, memories, and questions. This enabled me to acknowledge them as an inevitable data source on which my research would inevitably, even if not always explicitly, rely. The process also encouraged me to critically reflect on how my own responses may be affecting the ways in which I was considering the other sources of data, while recognising there are always limits to such critical self-reflection.

As such, I present my data and analysis in an integrated form in Chapters 5 to 7. Rather than separating findings Chapters by different sources of data, the Chapters are organised in terms of the different relational lines I followed of the assemblage and my analysis and discussion of the data are integrated throughout. My 'findings' integrate comments and insights shared by my research participants during our conversations, quotes from and reflections on policy documents, as well as interjects commentary on transgressive data of my responses to my research encounters and to the process of trying to 'make sense'. When we

write academically, we tend to hide our thinking, our decision-making processes, our moments of hesitation (Sellar, 2012), and the processes of re/de/territorialisations we inevitably endure through doing research, and I have tried to make some of these visible in my writing throughout this thesis in a variety of ways.

As will be evident, from the outset of the thesis I have written extensively about my own reflections. In the coming analysis Chapters (5, 6 and 7), I use a mix of right-aligned text (specifically in Chapter 5) to share my reflections, and footnotes (throughout Chapters 6 and 7). It took me a long time to work out where, and how, to start writing up my analysis. I felt a need to start with a story, to start with a moment of actualisation of PREDP, rather than simply use my analysis questions. I wanted to also attempt to immerse the reader somewhat in the experiences of becoming-PREDP and to evoke senses of sound, smell, sight, taste, feel, to remind the reader of the affective power of senses beyond cognition, as well as the limitations of (English) words on a page to communicate experience. My inability to travel during my research has required me to be much more reliant on textual analysis and has limited the opportunity for me to incorporate consideration of physical spaces somewhat other than through my own memories and snippets of what those I spoke with shared. Beginning the presentation of my analysis with a story of the becomings of the PacREF 2018 - 2030 is a small attempt to present these aspects in the research.

Therefore, my presentation of the analysis of data begins in Chapter 5 with a story of a particular event: the PHES 2015 meeting. As I explain further in Chapter 5, the main reason I chose this event was because several of my research participants discussed it as a significant event in the becoming of the PacREF. However, I also decided to start with this event because

it is a moment that I can not only conjure in my mind but also sense in my body. While I was not present at the meeting, I have been present in similar gatherings with some of the same people, and in similar gatherings at the same location. This is not to suggest that all such meetings are the same, or even the same-in-kind, or that my rememberings of similar (always different) moments mean I *know* it. However, it is to suggest that there is research value in having had embodied experience of the milieu that is the focus of your research, and for me to be transparent about drawing on such embodied experiences in the process of making sense.

In doing this, I also highlight methodological issues of presence raised in Section 4.2.2, in relation to adopting an ethnographic sensibility. An ethnographic approach typically requires presence in some form or another, yet there are obviously enormous challenges for researchers to be present in all the spaces they might wish to research. My experience suggests that presence-in-the-moment is not always necessary, and that deep engagement with other sources of presence (literature, research participants stories, photos, music ...) can contribute to developing an ethnographic sensibility of a research phenomenon. However, I do wish to suggest that in undertaking this kind of research, immersion in the space of Pacific education development at some point in time is necessary. As discussed in Chapter 1, I have been able to do this research *only because* I have spent time in these places, with these people, and have developed meaningful relational connections. I will reflect further on this argument and its implications for research policy in the Conclusion (Chapter 8).

Finally, it is important to note here that in presenting direct quotes from the research participants I interviewed, I identity them only in terms of a numerical code (Int. #) and, only

when particularly relevant, the type of their organisation or professional status, for example, a Development Partner staff member, or Ministry representative, or independent consultant. When I began the analysis process, I expected that it would be important to identify any quotes I used according to whether they were 'Pacific' people or not, and whether they were speaking from a 'national' perspective of a Pacific ministry of education, or an international/outsider perspective of a donor or Development Partner organisation. This expectation was based on my (common) sense of such identities being determinative of beliefs and perspectives. However, it quickly became apparent that this was not only difficult to do, but unnecessary. It was difficult because of the multiple and dynamic affiliations of my research participants, in that they often had held multiple professional positions over their careers in and beyond the region, at national, regional and international scales. It was unnecessary because there was also no clear consistency in what was said by whom, for example, by those who identified as of Pacific heritage in contrast to those who identified as non-Pacific. This coheres with an assemblage theory perspective, in which 'identity' (as was mine as researcher) is not fixed but always becoming, and thus what is said is a product of the assemblage of (generalised) desire, not individuals' identity.

## 4.5   University research ethics processes

This Section discusses the research ethics processes and consideration I undertook to align with the Australian University ethical standards and expectations. I situate this as distinct from the broader ethical orientation discussed in Section 4.2.1, which incorporates but goes beyond what I experience as narrow and purely risk-oriented procedural expectations of University ethics processes.

This research involves interactions with 'elite' policy actors engaged in Pacific regional education policy and international development cooperation. Participants were purposively recruited, based on their professional positions as policy actors in their respective national and regional contexts (See Appendix 7 for example recruitment email). Prior to making any approaches to prospective research participants for this research, I gained ethical approval, initially from Deakin University's School of Education Human Ethics Advisory Group (HEAG), which was later reconfirmed by the Australian Catholic University's Human Research Ethics Committee when I transferred universities in 2021 (See Appendix 5 and 6 for ethics approvals). The research also has endorsement from the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PacREF) Steering Committee, based on its alignment to the PacREF Research Framework (Johansson-Fua & Armstrong, 2021).

### 4.5.1   Risk and benefit

This research is considered 'low risk', as there is no foreseeable risk of harm to participants, nor to the wider communities to which the research pertains (NHMRC et al., 2018, clause 2.1.7). Areas of potential ethical concerns and the management strategies I put in place to mitigate these concerns are outlined below.

The primary ethical concerns associated with this research are three-fold. First, the Pacific regional education policy community is relatively small and 'tight-knit'. Therefore, the number of prospective research participants is limited, raising challenges for maintaining participant anonymity. All efforts have been made to ensure participant anonymity, and interview transcripts were de-identified by using numbered codes and references only to

participants organisational affiliation (e.g., Regional Agency staff member, Development Partner organisation staff member). Only de-identified data are to be used in any public presentations or publications. As part of the informed consent process, and prior to any interviews occurring, all participants were made explicitly aware of the risk they may be identifiable in the research, despite my best and genuine efforts to ensure their anonymity.

Second, this research involves countries other than Australia. As noted above, appropriate approvals have been gained from the relevant governing bodies for Pacific regional education policy and development cooperation. The research involves participants from other countries; however, apart from two interviews held in Aotearoa New Zealand, all data collection took place through virtual means while I was physically based in Australia. I have sought to undertake all interviews and interactions with research participants in a manner that respects the culture and beliefs of participants, as well as any relevant local protocols. I have committed to providing a presentation to share the results of the research with the PacREF Steering Committee, Implementing Agencies, and participating Ministries of Education, in addition to making available a written summary of key findings to them and all research participants.

Third, I have existing professional relationships with many of the research participants. I am known to several of my research participants through my previous professional roles with a donor agency, an international NGO, universities, and my ongoing role as an independent contractor in Pacific education development. Such existing relationships between researchers and participants are recognised to potentially impact the consent process and the participants' experiences, particularly where the relationship is unequal. The professional nature of my

existing relationships is not deemed to raise significant risks for participants, who in relation to

my current professional role are either professional peers or else senior to me. However, my

various positionalities create varying power dynamics and ethical dimensions that require

careful attention and management. These positionalities include, for example, as a white

researcher of settler colonial heritage linked to the 'power' of Northern universities and to my

previous roles; as a former 'insider' of donor organisations who is now an independent critical

scholar; and as a consultant hoping to not be blacklisted from future work opportunities for

being critical (Dodworth, 2017; Eyben, 2009).

These issues have been managed through a variety of safeguards, including:

transparency throughout the process, ensuring no pressure whatsoever is placed on

prospective research participants to be involved; a comprehensive consent process and

opportunities for research participants to review and 'veto' the use of their interview

transcripts; and a constant critical reflexivity as to how my relationships with research

participants (individually and collectively) may be influencing both the process and my

analysis/findings. Regular discussions with my supervisory team throughout my data collection

and analysis process have also provided an important mechanism for monitoring, identifying

and managing any ethical risks.

### 4.5.2   Consent, confidentiality and data management processes

For all interviews, participants were given a Plain Language Statement (PLS) and consent form

(See Appendix 8 and Appendix 9 respectively). Participants were given the opportunity to ask

any questions and are made explicitly aware that there is no obligation for them to participate,

and that they may withdraw their participation at any time without prejudice. Interviews were

only scheduled and undertaken *after* signed consent forms were received. All participants

were provided with copies of their interview transcripts and had the opportunity to refuse use

of all or any part of the transcripts. Interviews were carried out in confidence. As noted above,

all efforts are being made to maintain anonymity of research participants through

deidentification of all interview transcripts and observation fieldnotes. However, as recognised

above, participants were informed that anonymity cannot necessarily be guaranteed, given the

small size of the Pacific regional education policy community. All data collected through the

research – texts, interview recordings and transcripts, and field notes – are being kept securely

as per the Australian Catholic University data management policy.

## 4.6    Conclusion

In this Chapter, I have outlined a methodological framework of *wayfinding assemblage*, which

is underpinned by assemblage theory, brought into conversation with methodological insights

from policy mobilities literature and Pacific research. As argued in Chapter 3, the complexity of

policy demands a set of thinking tools that are capable of accounting for such complexity (see

also Thompson et al., 2022), and I would argue this extends to also having a set of

methodological tools that enable the researcher to encounter such complexity, and make

(Deleuzian) sense through such encounters, without reducing it to something recognisable.

My research requires a range of methodological approaches that enable me to engage

empirically with the mobility of policy; the relational constitution of space-time; the role of

policy in influencing behaviour and coordinating desire; the plurality of worlds active within

Pacific policy spaces; and my own entanglement in all of this as becoming-researcher and

becoming-Pacific development practitioner. In bringing together this methodological framework, I have sought to remain consistent with the theoretical and conceptual tools I set out in Chapters 2 and 3. As such, the bringing together of this methodological framework can itself be considered in assemblage terms and as an exercise in wayfinding, insofar as it has straddles several strata, and works to make consistent disruptive beliefs in the impossibility of research, with passions for knowing and producing research that is of use in the world.

Guided by this methodological framework, the following three Chapters present my analysis of the data and discussion of the implications of this analysis. These Chapters are structured according to the three research sub-questions introduced in Chapter 1. Thus, the first of my findings Chapters (Chapter 5) responds to research sub-question 1 and provides my analysis of the kind of assemblage necessary to produce the PacREF. In Chapter 6, I explore what is made desirable through the PacREF and in Chapter 7 I explore how context is made to matter, which both respond to research sub-question 2. Throughout these three Chapters, I highlight the ways in which assemblage theory, in conversation with Pacific research and policy mobilities, has helped me think differently about education development, thus responding to research sub-question 3.

# 5   Diagramming Pacific regional education development policy

This Chapter broadly addresses Research sub question 1: What kind of assemblage makes the Pacific Regional Education Framework 2018-2030 (PacREF) possible? The Chapter focuses on the becoming of the PacREF, as a way to introduce the dimensions of PREDP-as-assemblage. In particular, this Chapter seeks to highlight some of the strata (embedded social forms and historical problematisations) that the assemblage of PREDP straddles and how it 'yokes' (Buchanan, 2021, p. 473) together particular forms of content and expression. I will then explore these in further detail in Chapters 6 and 7. By exploring how the PacREF has come into being as an actualisation of the assemblage I have nominally labelled PREDP, the Chapter offers some sense of what kind of assemblage makes PREDP possible, and what PREDP-as-assemblage can do (remembering that assemblage is not a thing in the world but a structuring of relations that makes things possible). My intent is for the reader to have more questions in mind at the end of reading this Chapter than they had at the start, and, hopefully, some different questions from what might usually be asked of education development policy.

I begin with sharing a story of the 2015 meeting of the Pacific Heads of Education Systems (PHES) held in Port Vila, Vanuatu, as a (Deleuzian) event in the becoming of the PacREF. As noted in Section 4.2.3, my decision to begin with the PHES 2015 meeting is not to suggest it as *the* beginning but as one of many such moments of becoming. I choose this starting point because in my conversations with research participants, many identified the 2014 regional meeting of education ministers of the Pacific Island Forum member countries (FEdMM), and the subsequent meeting of their respective ministry heads (PHES) in 2015, as significant moments, both in the production of the PacREF and their continuing relationships.

It was recalled by many of my participants as a moment of disruption to 'normal' ways of working, a moment they experienced, or at least said they experienced, as a line of flight. Therefore, it offers a useful entry point to understanding the dimensions and dynamics of the assemblage of PREDP.

The first part of the Chapter is also written in a *storying* form that offers the reader a greater range of sensibility of PREDP: how it looks, smells, sounds and feels. In doing so, the story incorporates content that a *context* or *background* Chapter typically claims as its remit, consistent with my argument that such 'contextual' information cannot be treated as separate from, or prior to, the data generation and analysis processes. As discussed in Section 4.3, I also intersperse a telling of these events with reflections from transgressive data of my own memories, wonderings and confusions. In so doing, I aim to highlight how challenging it was to write this Chapter, to resist the pull to narrate an origin story and to work out what lines to include and exclude. This is in keeping with my problematisation of context and my theoretical-methodological framework, which necessitate that these details are not treated merely as background or as an objective description to 'set the scene' for my research before I move to analysis. Rather, these details are very much part of my analysis, produced through both the theoretical-methodological framework I employ and my own partialities.

By focusing on events in the becoming of the PacREF, I highlight the way in which PREDP works to produce and sustain molarities of policy as new and better than what went before; that is, as the best solution to the problems it has constructed. I will also highlight how the PacREF is simultaneously a site of molecularities, of questioning and contesting the respective ownership, responsiveness and 'Pacific-ness' of Pacific education development. As I

will argue further in Chapters 6 and 7, assemblage theory requires us to appreciate that while

'no one of these lines is transcendent, each is at work within the others' and PREDP-as-

assemblage works to hold them together in ways that maintain its territory and ward off its

limits (Deleuze & Guattari, 2020, p. 205). For example, as (assembled) desires of Pacific

ownership and Pacific forms of education development encounter bundled lines of

bureaucracy, financing structures and the multiplicity of 'Pacific' bodies, potential lines of flight

to *different* ways of doing education development often become stymied. A *wayfinding*

*assemblage* approach orients us towards these always-present molecular becomings, helps us

to understand how the assemblage stays together, and what it might take to bring about

change.[19]

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[19] It is important to note here that the aim of considering molecularities is not necessarily to make the imperceptible more perceptible, in the sense of making it recognisable. Doing so is likely to bring about a reterritorialisation, a kind of capturing of a line of flight and returning it to the territory of the assemblage. As I will argue further in Chapter 6, the risk of naming a becoming as something, as an act of decoloniality or as Pacific or as progressive, is that we stop ourselves from experiencing its capacity for difference and trap ourselves into promoting repetition of the same. However, it is not so much that we should refuse to 'recognise' particular practices as good or bad, but rather we need to be vigilant as to what we are doing when we recognise – are we reterritorialising within an existing assemblage and thus blocking the line of flight, or are we pushing the assemblage to its limit point and creating something different?

## 5.1    2015 Vanuatu: Pacific Heads of Education Systems meeting



*Figure 2.* 2015 Pacific Heads of Education Systems (PHES) meeting, Port Vila, Vanuatu. Prime Minister Sato Kilman's delegation and meeting participants led by kastom dance into the meeting venue. Sourced from www.dailypost.vu photo by Len Garae, 21 Oct 2015.

*20 October 2015.* Port Vila, on the island of Efate in the nation of Vanuatu. The chief

executives, directors and permanent secretaries of ministries of education from Pacific island

countries meet together with development partners at Warwick Le Lagon Resort and Spa for

what is counted as the 21$^{st}$ meeting of the Pacific Heads of Education Systems (PHES). PHES is

described as 'a technical forum', which comprises the 'regional heads of education systems

coming together every two years to consult through high level dialogue on policy issues

facing regional and national education systems and strategising on the most effective ways to

resolve the issues together' (UNESCO & Pacific Islands Forum, 2017, n.p.). Ostensibly, PHES

reports to the political gathering of the (then-) Forum Education Ministers Meeting (FEdMM),

now the Council of Pacific Education Ministers (or CPEM). This is the (usually) biennial meeting

of the 16 Pacific island country education ministers (plus Australia and New Zealand), which

are members of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF).[20] It is thus part of what is referred to as the

regional architecture of intergovernmental cooperation in the Pacific and is in turn

(sometimes) identified as part of the United Nations' coordinated structures for

intergovernmental cooperation on education development internationally. This dates back at

least to the 1990 *World declaration on education for all and framework for action to meet*

*basic learning needs*, which was committed to by 155 countries in Jomtien, Thailand (UNESCO,

1990).

The harmonies of the earlier welcoming ceremony still echo in the meeting room.[21] The urgent

discussions over hotel buffet breakfasts are quietened, as delegates are asked to stand close

together, to be walked into the space by *man-ples* (Bislama meaning *local*; literally translates

as 'man of place'). This is a celebration of *kastom* and an assertion of place and people-place

connection. It is also a preparing of the relational space, a way of establishing connections

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[20] The current 18 Pacific Island Forum members are: Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu (Pacific Islands Forum, 2024). Tokelau is also included in the PacREF but is only an 'associate member' of the Pacific Islands Forum due to its status as a self-governing territory of New Zealand. However, it is considered a member state of UNESCO.

[21] I was not present at this event. In writing these apparent 'reminiscences' of the event, I draw on my presence in other similar meetings in the same location, and similar encounters with the people present at the meeting. I do not wish homogenise all PHES or PREDP-related meetings as the same, or to suggest that I 'know' what happened just because I have been in similar meetings before. I deploy these imagined reminiscences purely as a rhetorical technique to offer the reader a sense of all dimensions of this event – smells, sounds, energy, temperature, sights and words.

and, at the same time, unsettling other connections. It contributes to establishing the territory for the gathering, which will affirm some bodies – will make it feel like home – while equally discomforting others. This mingling of bodies, sounds, sensations and intensities creates opportunities for rupturing the lines of connection with existing assemblages. Yet, whether this leads to the formation of different connections, new assemblages or a reterritorialisation is difficult to predict.

The 2015 PHES deliberations took place against the audible hum of the daily lives of the nearly 50,000 residents of Port Vila, who make up 16% of the national population of 300,000 (Pacific Community, 2020, p. v). Close to 50% of Vanuatu's population are under the age of 20, and just 20% percent of the adult population are in formal employment – statistics often cited to underscore the importance of discussions regarding the accessibility, relevance and quality of education (Ministry of Education and Training, 2020; Pacific Community, 2020).

> All numbers are slippery, just as all identifications by naming can be just as deceiving. Thinking with assemblage orients me to not simply critically consider these numbers, statistics, dates and labels (independent, national, colonial, vernacular) nor question what their effects are, but to question what kind of assemblage has produced them in this way. How are the associations between numbers (for example) and their significance established, and why? What desires are made consistent through such associations? How is it that an apparently low level of formal employment in a society provides a justification and a need for improved education? How is this sense produced, when it could equally be considered an argument against investing in an enterprise that is unlikely to realise

what it promises (i.e., employment)? Such numbers are meaningful only in their

comparison to those of other places. Highlighting employment statistics is

meaningful only in a world assembled so that exchanging one's labour for

monetary income is made to matter, because money is made to matter (forms of

content and forms of expression).

Along similar lines, the Vanuatu 2015 meeting is claimed as the 21st meeting of

PHES. But it is just the *fourth* meeting under the PHES name. Prior to (and possibly

still yet), this was (is?) the Pacific Directors of Education meeting organised

regularly by UNESCO since the late 1970s, which was designed primarily to discuss

and progress UNESCO's education agenda in the region (Cassity, 2001; Int. #12).[22]

In 2009, after deliberation on a review of the existing regional framework (the

*Forum Basic Education Action Plan*), the education ministers agreed to formally

change the name and strengthen the lines of accountability between PHES and the

FEdMM to strengthen Pacific ownership of these regional structures (Pacific Islands

Forum, 2009; Int. #12). This was a move claimed by some I spoke with as an

assertion of Pacific independence and decolonising (Int. #12; Int. #7; Int. #18). Yet,

UNESCO maintained the secretariat role, a role it continues to hold today

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[22] I am drawing on participant interview data, policy documents, and academic literature here, which suggests an interchangeability of data sources. Convention is to distinguish 'primary' and 'secondary' sources, as the former is seen to be more 'raw', while the latter is tainted by other scholars' interventions. Yet these conventional beliefs are the product of assemblage, which encourages us to question the logic of treating them differently. Why would we not subject our primary data to the same degree of scepticism as that of secondary?

(UNESCO & Pacific Islands Forum, 2021). Although funding for the meetings

typically comes from elsewhere, often provided by Australia and New Zealand, and

more recently the multi-lateral Global Partnership for Education (GPE) (Global

Partnership for Education, 2021). The claim to being the '21st' meeting suggests

desires for continuity, tradition, legacy, and yet changes in name and role indicate

desires to break free, begin afresh as something different. Is this the assemblage of

PREDP at work, wherein lines of flight with the potential to deterritorialise the

assemblage are blocked and lead to only a reterritorialisation and a maintenance

of stability, even though the 'bits and bobs' (names, administrative structures,

members …) that are brought together through assemblage change? Yet as every

territorialisation is accompanied by a deterritorialisation, something *always*

escapes. So, do I presume these molecular movements to be succeeding in

opening at least some space for change, giving some opportunity for disruptive

desires to destabilise the assemblage, even if just momentarily? But to what extent

does the presence of such molecularities matter, when molarities of funding flows,

agenda setting and beliefs in aid as discretionary assistance given to compensate

for what is constructed as one's own lack of capacity remain unchanged? How

does considering such questions, in terms of forces of re/de/territorialisation and

assembled-desires, open up different lines of thinking and even becoming?

The sounds of Bislama,[23] French and English – the three 'official' languages of Vanuatu – are

intermingled through the deliberations. All the while, the 100-plus distinct Indigenous

languages, developed over the 3,000 years of inhabitation of the 80-plus islands of this

archipelago, are rarely heard and some 70% of the languages are either under threat or

already extinct (Vari-Bogiri, 2008). This silence is a reverberation of colonial legacies continued

into today's education policy, and arguably a marker of how assemblages of education are

productive territories in which utterances of vernacular language are made expressive as

ignorance, rather than made to be of educational value (Early, 2015; Vandeputte-Tavo, 2013).

These colonial legacies date back to the first European 'settlers' in the late 1700s (Miles, 1998).

It was not until 1906 that Vanuatu (then the New Hebrides) was claimed as a joint French-

British condominium via an act later described as *condocolonialism*, through which ni-

Vanuatuan were deemed stateless in their own land (Miles, 1998). Despite French resistance,

France and Britain agreed to so-called granting of independence to Vanuatu in 1980 (Miles,

1998). The new Vanuatu government took on the maintenance of a dual education system of

parallel French and English schools, in which 'schools constituted the condocolonial battlefield'

(Miles, 1998, p. 45). It was not until 2012 that Vanuatu education policy officially recognised

the lingua franca of Bislama as a legitimate language of education, even though it is

recognised in the Constitution as an official language (Early, 2015). For a brief while, policy was

introduced that promoted the use of children's first languages as a platform towards learning

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[23] Bislama is a creole language of Vanuatu and is considered the 'lingua franca'. For many urban-born ni-Vanuatu, it is their first language. Bislama is primarily English based but also incorporates French (Early, 1999).

English or French; however, this is currently under threat due to perceptions that it is failing to lead to improvements in student learning (Early, personnel communication).

The hotel in which the meeting takes place is situated on the Pango peninsula, jutting into Mele Bay on one side and the lagoon known locally as 'Lagoon One' on the other. The sea is thus never far from sight and sensation. Today might be ship day, when waves of (mostly) Australian and New Zealand tourists arrive on shore, spend and then promptly leave again. The meeting is held at one of several resorts in Port Vila, which serves as both a home to tourists and a site for high-level government meetings, representing two of the primary sources of wage employment for ni-Vanuatu, alongside migrant labor (Asian Development Bank, 2023a). This is pre-COVID, of course, when cruise ships were still sites of freedom and Pacific islands sites of tropical getaways. Today, staff might be short, with the outward flow of hospitality workers, chefs and agricultural workers to Australia and New Zealand following currents of earlier generations who were coercively 'blackbirded' to Australia and Fiji to work as indentured labour for colonial flourishing (Petrou & Connell, 2023a, 2023b).

As the meeting is called to order, the crunch and thuds of construction sites reverberate off the surrounding hills as rebuilding continues after the devastation of Cyclone Pam just six months earlier, one of the most intense tropical cyclones in the South Pacific Ocean on record. These are echoes of the 'infrastructure diplomacy' of so-called great powers that compete for Vanuatu government favour (Kabutaulaka, 2021; Wilson, 2020). In moments of quiet, one might still hear the rumble of the earth, from 'the depths of brine and regions of fire deeper still' (Hau'ofa, 1993, p. 160) of Vanuatu's multiple volcanoes and fault lines, which give Vanuatu

its beauty and rich natural resources, yet also contribute to Vanuatu's vulnerability to natural

disaster and impacts of the climate crisis.

The modernisation myth of development is that the causes of under-development

lie within developing nations: their lack of capacity, poor planning, low levels of

education, and cultural impediments to entrepreneurism and so-called 'good'

governance (Carnoy & Samoff, 2014; Hau'ofa, 1993; Tikly, 2004). It is similar to the

myth of contemporary formal schooling (masquerading all too often in our

analyses as *education*) possessing an inherent goodness, in which our task as

educational researchers is simply to make it work as it *should* (Ball, 2020, 2021;

Helu, 1980). Both these myths belie the disruptive flows – the minoritarian

becomings and molecular movements – that are always escaping from

majoritarian and molar stabilisations. In diagramming PREDP-as -assemblage, it is

necessary to account for *both* molar movements governed by common sense of

what it means to be modern or to be developed (and/or, arguably, colonised), and

associated forces of capitalist and imperialist modes of being; *and* molecularities;

the almost imperceptible (or at least, beyond the threshold of perception of some)

murmurings, rustlings, and disrupting tremors of more immediate experience and

sensation, which open up lines of flight and offer potential for different ways of

thinking-doing-relating. The milieu of PREDP incorporates *both* molarities and

molecularities of what I refer to here as Pacific indigeneities; that is, the stratified

layers of Indigenous Pacific island-ness that have accreted territorialising forces, as

well as the molecular currents of becoming and 'island logics' (Heim, 2017) that

offer different becomings-Pacific and which may bring about different worlds

beyond that which makes sense as postcolonial/decolonial (Heim, 2017; K. Teaiwa,

2020; T. K. Teaiwa, 2001). As will be discussed further below, these strata of

modernity, development, human capital and Indigenous Pacific are (in part) what

PREDP-as-assemblage is responding to and working to make consistent, despite

their capacity to pull apart the assemblage. As such, they function as territorialising

and re/de/territorialising forces that both sustain and threaten the stability of

PREDP.

And yet, in attempting to 'account' for these molarities and molecularities, I am

conflicted. My interest using assemblage as theory and method is to move away

from what feel like tired and unconstructive analyses of PREDP as a matter of

North-South power imbalances and the imposition of global agendas on *pacific*

(that is, conciliatory or pacifying) Pacific nations. In suggesting coloniality or

modernity or development as some form of homogenous strata to which PREDP

responds, am I not simply perpetuating the white epistemic gaze (Bignall & Patton,

2010; Spratt & Coxon, 2020; Takayama et al., 2016) reducing those identified

(arguably through colonially created constructs) as Pacific as merely the subjects of

colonisation, and thus identifiable only in the negative as not developed, not

modern? For example, I question what I am trying to do when I draw an

association between the historic practices of blackbirding and contemporary

seasonal migrant worker programs. Is this an illustration of the way in which the

stratifying (and de-stratifying) currents of colonisation still run strong? Am I right

to think of coloniality as a strata to which PREDP responds, and if so, how do I

distinguish it from the capitalist, imperialist and liberalist ways of thinking-doing

that arguably underpinned colonisation? Which comes first, and does it matter?

How do I disentangle these and take account of these forces, while not reducing

people's experience to only the effect of coloniality or capitalism? How can I apply

an analysis drawing on assemblage theory, with policy mobilities, in ways that are

still dignifying of people-in-place (Sanga, 2016) and the relational ethics of Pacific

research? What does considering these in impersonal ways – as the generalised

flows of desire that when assembled are productive of subjects and agency – do or

make possible for relationally ethical research?

The Honourable. Prime Minister of Vanuatu at the time,[24] Meltek Sato Kilman Livtuvanu,

provided the welcoming keynote address (Pacific Islands Forum & UNESCO, 2015). In that

speech, he evoked Palau 1999, the then-annual meeting of the pre-eminent political regional

body, the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), comprising the heads of government of the (then) 14

Pacific island country members (South Pacific Forum Secretariat, 1999). Prime Minister Kilman

recalled how this meeting recognised the need for 'greater relevance in the school curriculum

… to the human resource needs of the workplace' and called for a regular meeting of Pacific

Forum Education Ministers to 'support the Forum Economic Ministers in their economic

---

[24] This was his fourth time in the role, although he retained the position for only 7 months and has never held the role for more than 2 years. In September 2023, Kilman became Prime Minister yet again, having been appointed by the Parliament after a vote of no confidence in the former elected Prime Minister. This can be considered indicative of the fluid nature of parliamentary politics in Vanuatu.

reforms' (Pacific Islands Forum & UNESCO, 2015, p. 14). This was the beginning of the Forum

Education Ministers Meeting (FEdMM), the first meeting of which was held in Auckland 2001,

and from which the body of PHES subsequently came to be. In recalling this event, the Prime

Minister reminded all those present of the continued force of the past in our present, as well

as reaffirmed the cementing of education to economic development, thereby making

education a primary instrument for the ambitions of nation-building and so-called sustainable

development.

The Prime Minister recalled also the 2014 FedMM in Rarotonga, Cook Islands, where

there was a 'call from ministers' for a new and more relevant regional education framework

(Pacific Islands Forum & UNESCO, 2015, p. 14). During this meeting, the FEdMM members

deliberated on the first evidence-based tracking report of PEDF and considered a proposal for

beginning a process to update or revise the PEDF beyond 2015 (Int. #12; Int. #14).[25] At this

2014 meeting, ministers were confronted by the 'alarming' and 'dire' situation of literacy and

numeracy in their region, made visible by the first collection of regionally-standardised

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[25] Despite many efforts, I have not been able to locate a copy of the final outcomes document and meeting report for the 2014 FEdMM meeting. Therefore, I am reliant on research participants recollections of what occurred and information contained in available meeting papers. This has been the case with quite a few of the documents related to Pacific regional meetings and other education development forum in the region. These challenges of locating documents and tracing the who-what-where of the PacREF becomings are often reduced to side-effects of the weaknesses of both Pacific and development partner bureaucracies with high turn-over in staff and inadequate investments in organisational infrastructure. It is further complicated by the protections necessary to keep documents written for public servants and political representatives for their eyes only. Based on my experience, I expect this is not a technical failure of organisations or individuals. Rather, it could be considered a strategic outcome of bureaucratic assemblages functioning productively to obfuscate, driven not by a conscious intention to mislead but more a desire to maintain a collective focus on progress and the new, in which what has gone before is made to matter not as much.

student learning assessment data, known as PILNA: the Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy

Assessment (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2014, p. 4). At this meeting, ministers

delegated the task of developing a new regional framework to PHES. In these deliberations,

FEdMM agreed to task the PHES to lead this process, with coordination support from the

Secretariat of the Pacific Islands Forum.

This takes us to the longstanding and ubiquitous debates of *education relevance;*

in Pacific island countries (as in so many places), a lack of relevance of

contemporary formal education curriculums to 'Pacific life' is repeatedly identified

as a cause of low performance and a problem to be solved by greater

contextualisation (T. L. Baba, 1999; Helu, 1980; Koya Vaka'uta, 2023; Pacific Islands

Forum & UNESCO, 2015; Thaman, 1993). These debates are well illustrated by a

research participant who worked for a Development Partner organisation. They

shared there perspective on the issue of relevance, drawing first on the story of a

Pacific educational leader who,

*… had a fundamental difference [from] the rest of everyone in Tonga. She*

*believed that education should be developed on the platform of literacy in*

*your Tongan language, yeah. Nobody else agreed with that. They all wanted*

*their children to be educated in English and sent off overseas and send*

*money home. You know? So, different drivers. And if you talk to the people*

*who actually [are] meant to benefit from this, you'll find a very different story.*

*When we were talking to people about sports in the Pacific, and we were*

*thinking of it from a health perspective, we were saying, 'Oh, if we have*

*sports, people are getting fitter and if we have heroes, they'll be promoting better health' … [Then] we talked to people, and they were saying, 'Yeah, I want my son to earn as much money as he can … '[laughs]. And then I would tell our colleagues, they were like, 'Oh no, we're not picking that … I'm sorry, this is not about making money'. Why do you think they go to school? It's because they want to know that your [their] investment is gonna lead you [them] to better opportunities. So, it's ok for you and me, you know, first world problems. But it's not ok for them [laughs]. And that's just sports, where everyone knows that the wealth that has come to Pacific people and communities has been through the lucrative contracts. And same with RSE [Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme]. RSE workers going back are building concrete houses, buying taxis, starting shops. And we think, 'Oh no, they're spending all their money. They should be…' I don't know what we think they should be doing [laughs].* (Int. #4).

How do I reconcile what seems like competing arguments here? It is judged undesirable for Pacific peoples to be interested in education primarily for its monetary returns, *and* education is equated with economic development, *and* education is to promote and sustain Indigenous Knowledges, language and culture that are not associated with any form of value in economic terms. How do we make sense of these seemingly contradictory notions of relevance, without reducing them to non-sense or merely a matter of perspectives?

Tongan educationalist and philosopher Futa Helu referred to these concerns as 'the modern educationists' doctrine of relevance' and argued it to be a concern based on a lack of appreciation for what education can do (Helu, 1980, p. 18). Helu (ibid) argued 'there seems to be a widespread unwillingness to address the question: "What is education?", and also widespread confusion between that question and the separate question of: "What can education do for us?"'. Helu went on to assert that the increasingly strong calls for bringing the teaching of Indigenous cultures into education is a confusion of the role of socialisation with the role of formal education, and a failure to consider what these different types of institutions (i.e., assemblages) can do. He questioned the fundamental assumption that education should be 'responsive to the "needs" of South Seas peoples', pointing out that needs change and that different people have different needs and therefore asking 'How logically can needs be seen as the legitimate basis of educational theory or policy? And further, which needs?' (Helu, 1980, p. 19). While written over 40 years ago, Helu's questions seem to me to remain unconsidered within PREDP, and I wonder what maintains the doctrine of relevance, as well as the focus on responsiveness to needs? Also, and equally importantly for my research, how might an approach of wayfinding assemblage, bringing assemblage thinking, policy mobilities and Pacific research into conversation, help us consider Helu's questions differently and foster new questions? Can such an approach open different lines of thinking and create different problems, capable of engendering new arrangements of desire? Or are such lines of questioning merely flights of

philosophical fancy, as critics of Helu at the time claimed? (Coxon, personal

communication).

Prime Minister Kilman directed participants to the dense nets of plans and frameworks: the

internationally agreed Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), now replaced by the

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); the regional Pacific Plan, now replaced by the

Framework for Pacific Regionalism; the Pacific regional Forum Basic Education Plan, first

replaced by the Pacific Education Development Framework and now up for revision by this

meeting (see Figure x for a visual summary of all these documents and associated forum). The

PacREF 2018 document is generally considered the *third* regional policy framework for

education developed under the auspices of FEdMM. The first was the Forum Basic Education

Action Plan (FBEAP) launched in 2001, the first act of the newly established FEdMM and a

response to calls of the Forum leaders and Forum Economic Ministers Meeting for more

urgent attention to 'the universal objective… [of] the development of human resources in

support of sustainable economic development' (South Pacific Forum Secretariat, 1999, n.p.).

The second was the Pacific Education Development Framework (PEDF), developed following a

review of FBEAP in 2009 and designed to run to the end of the MDG era in 2015. In

developing the PacREF as the successor to the PEDF, education ministers tasked their heads of

systems with accounting for the plethora of reviews of previous plans, and the new goals and

targets being set for future plans. It was also to consider the 2014 FEdMM, which expressed a

desire for post-2015 education agendas to recognise education as 'central to sustainable

development' and thus required dedicated goals, targets and policy architectures (Pacific

Islands Forum & UNESCO, 2015, p. 5).

The meeting is chaired by the Director of Education from Vanuatu as host, with an agenda

prepared by the PIF secretariat in consultation with PHES members and development partners.

There are three substantive items on the agenda: *i)* 'new directions' for the now-expired

regional education framework; *ii)* preparing the proposed theme and agenda for the next

FEdMM; and *iii)* updating regional initiatives (Pacific Islands Forum & UNESCO, 2015, p. 1). This

last agenda item involves presentations from regional agencies and other development

partners about their projects in, and beyond, the region, as indicated by the meeting minutes:

'PHES noted the progress made on PILNA, PaBER, PLSLP, QPENP, PEARL, PCEPP and REAP'

(Pacific Islands Forum & UNESCO, 2015, p. 2).

Acronyms abound in *aidland* (Mosse, 2011). They work to produce agency for

policy and bureaucratic creations, while equally obscuring and limiting the agency

of others. While I have made attempts to ease the burden on the reader by

spelling out certain acronyms, in many instances (such as the one above), knowing

the detail of the concrete assemblages that the acronyms relate is not particularly

significant. Readers do not need to be able to conjure up who or what PLSLP is or

know how PEARL is different from REAP. At one level, these are distractions – the

'bits and bobs' - whereas our focus may be more constructively directed to

considering the abstract arrangements that make a plethora of (insensible)

acronyms seem necessary and sensible. Focusing on acronyms and the projects

and organisational structures they represent necessarily leads to attributing them

some form of agency or causal power. We become focused on making

judgements, such as whether this project has transformed Pacific education, or was

that initiative particularly effective while another failed to gain traction. In doing

so, we risk missing the more abstract assemblage that is productive of such forms

and such assumed causal relations, and which can endure even when projects

begin and end or the prominence of particular organisations waxes and wanes.

An analysis informed by *wayfinding assemblage* instead directs us to different

questions: whatever happened to produce so many layers of bureaucracy and

institutional structuring? What do such layers do? Is this just policy perpetuating

itself to maintain its sense of self as the solution for all problems? Or is it also

about dispersing accountability by shifting and sharing responsibility around?

Afterall, if we are collectively and collaboratively responsible, then can anyone (or

no one?) be held accountable? The list of acronyms above highlights the

dominance of the project-model of aid and education development, intimately

linked to forms of results-based management (Eyben, 2010; Mosse, 2008). Such

'projectisation' is a particular form of governing that is not at all unique to

education development (see Lewis & Decuypere, 2023; Vanden Broeck, 2020), but

it is perhaps particular pernicious given the complexities of education

development, which is so out of step with the simplicity and reductionism that

results-based management requires. The projectisation of development, and

indeed of policy, could also be considered a form of responsiveness, a warding off

the limits of the assemblage and a response to the chaos engendered by that

which is outside our comfortable territory. To make the world manageable is to

maintain one's secure territory of policy-making control and the production of

measurable results and outcomes. It is also a means for producing responsibility

and for allocating agency to some bodies and not others. The ways in which

PREDP works to (re)produce responsibility, and how this relates to forms of

contextualisation and responsiveness, will be explored more in Chapters 6 and 7.

Of the 11 Heads of Education systems in attendance, at least four are not; that is, four

countries are represented by senior officials deputised to represent their Ministry/Department,

while a further two are in an acting capacity. While a handful of those present will be repeat

participants of previous PHES meetings, many will not be, reflecting the frequent churn of

personnel in senior management roles in at least some of the education ministries in the

region. Some would have greeted each other as friends, perhaps known to each other from

previous PHES or one of the plethora of other regional, sub-regional and intra-regional (Asia-

Pacific) meetings to which Pacific ministries of education are invited to attend. Some will be

representing departments of education that have over two hundred staff, while others can

count their staff on one hand.

While the 11 country representatives sit at the centre tables, some 26 representatives from 12

development partner organisations observe from the periphery, a ratio of 2-to-1. These

organisations and the others consistently (or not) present at PHES meetings are shown in

Appendix 1. Within this space, Australia and New Zealand occupy somewhat liminal positions,

being members of the Pacific Islands Forum with claims to being part of the 'Pacific family'

(Fry, 2019). In this space, however, they are considered *Development Partners*: the relationship

of funding trumps other lines of relationality, at least in the formalities. Their presence belies

other conspicuous absences. For instance, the French-administered 'collectivities' of New

Caledonia and French Polynesian are absent, as is France itself. While New Caledonia and

French Polynesia are PIF members, they have historically not engaged in PHES or FEdMM.

While the nation-state of France is present in the region through its claim of territory, it is

considered a mere 'dialogue partner' at PIF, alongside the United States and 19 others,

including the United Kingdom, the European Union, the People's Republic of China, India,

Japan, Cuba and Indonesia, amongst others (Pacific Islands Forum, 2024).

Presence also relates to funding, which in turn is always linked to questions of responsibility,

accountability and influence in education development. PHES is the successor of the

previously UNESCO-organised directors of education meeting. PHES was created around 2009,

with the aim of repositioning the meeting more clearly under the PIF structure and with the

secretariat of the PIF organizing the meetings (Int. #12; Int. #14). However, the break is not

absolute; UNESCO actively sought to retain its place as a co-organiser of the PHES (Int. #12).

Simultaneously, while UNESCO and UNICEF are, by definition, UN agencies, they are included

as *implementing agencies* under the PacREF and, as such, are at times referred to and treated

as *regional agenci*es.

> What matters for making this space regional? What is made to matter *as regional*?
>
> *As global*? As 'locally owned', opposed to 'globally imposed'? Especially when lines
>
> are so blurry and presences are so sporadic. Participants often commented on the
>
> importance of *who* was there – the particular individuals and their capacities for
>
> leadership. And yet others commented on the churn of both Ministry and donor
>
> personnel, and more often spoke in terms of attributing action and character to
>
> organisations and countries, rather than individuals. What are the stabilising flows

in this event, when so much is unstable? How do the personal connections of personnel contribute to the coherence of the assemblage, and to what extent are they personal? How important is being the 'representative from Niue' compared to simply being Bertha from Niue? How does this even matter? How are decisions made counted as regional mandates when the regional authority is so fluid? The presumed sense of commonality that comes from describing these systems as 'Pacific' appears to overlook the still considerable diversity contained therein.

Moreover, what am I to make of the development partner presence? A ratio of two-to-one feels about right for a regional meeting of what are described as some of the most aid-dependent nation-states in the world (Dornan & Pryke, 2017). Where government education budgets are heavily skewed towards salaries and tertiary scholarships, while aid funds much of the 'reform' or 'improvement' initiatives (Gamlen et al., 2017; Levine, 2013). What is being bought with these investments? How do we understand the relationship between materialities of money and expressions of responsibility, accountability, authority? How do these intertwine with assemblages of solidarity, charity, reparation, shared interests and national interests?

The shift in 'ownership' is notable, from times when PHES was still nominally the UNESCO Directors for Education meeting, and for which the PIF secretariat was tasked with leading the process, which inevitably meant the PIF secretariat hired a consultant, who would report direct to FEdMM, with less of a role for heads of systems. The PacREF signals a shift to the greater influence of the PHES, and what

appears to be deliberate efforts to more clearly delineate the spaces in which the

political, technocractic or funder influences can dominate. This seemed to be

viewed as a positive shift by the (predominantly) technocrats I spoke with, valued

for its potential to limit what is understood as political and funder 'interference' in

the more rational and less political work of policy-making. But what does this do

to notions of ownership and responsibility within the nature of democratic

societies of Pacific island states and the global flows of capital? Is it that these

shifts in responsibility, and the lines of flight opened up in the process, create

opportunities to consolidate territory, with education positioned as a valid

'standalone' space for policy dialogue and political action (UNESCO & Pacific

Islands Forum, 2017, p. 5)? And is regional education policy seen as a vehicle

through which education ministers can assert their statehood on regional stages,

but in a way that is potentially more comfortable due to their distance from

domestic audiences?

After asking 'observing' development partners to leave the meeting, the PHES meeting 2015

then turned to an open discussion by the country representatives (Int. #14; Int. #13), a

moment that was claimed to be the site of a becoming of the PacREF:

Honestly, the original response to PacREF, why it happened, was [the] 2015,

Vanuatu PHES meeting... I remember *we* asked for a closed section; and *we*

asked the development partners to leave... And it was... [the] Chair as

Vanuatu who said, 'What do *we* want?'. And *we* all came up with, kind of,

what was *our* thinking. So, it was around, 'Well, *we* want the next plan to be

> relevant to the *Pacific*, not something that's kind of a plan that really could
>
> have been written for anywhere and then just some Pacific words put in it'.
>
> So, just over the conversation that evolved, *we* said, 'Why don't *we* just write
>
> it ourselves? *We know what we want*'. (Int. #13; emphasis original)

This statement by a former member of PHES suggests a claiming of a territory for the PacREF, in which Pacific bodies are made capable as the source of knowing and authority, thereby warding off past policy or other policy 'imposed' from elsewhere and the incursions of development partners. However, the clarity expressed in this statement of the becoming-Pacific of the PacREF belies the more ongoing process of becoming-PacREF, in which every line of deterritorialisation is necessarily accompanied by a reterritorialisation. It is these lines, the blockages, breaks and ruptures, and the molar and molecular movements of the assemblage of PREDP that I seek to draw out through the rest of this thesis, not with the aim of resolving or solving the problems they generate, but to instead make more visible/sayable the already and ever-present opportunities for difference.

## 5.2   The becoming of the PacREF

The above depiction is itself a 'through-put' of assemblage (Thompson et al., 2022, p. 701), as all acts of writing are (Honan & Bright, 2016). It (hopefully) works to stimulate thought in the reader and (perhaps even more hopefully) provoke a questioning of existing thoughts or beliefs. As discussed at the outset of this Chapter, it is a product of a desire to communicate and expose experience to others, mediated by the constraints imposed by the materialities (*forms of content*) of the written form, word limits, the time and energy I had available to

devote to this writing, the medium of a laptop, and the *forms of expression* I am bound by: the English language, norms and expectations of academic writing, my concerns for demonstrating respect for the sovereignty of Pacific peoples to story their own lives (rather than me telling my story of 'the Pacific'), my sense of self-confidence in having something of value to communicate, and so forth. Whether it works, and precisely what work it does, will be for each reader to determine, and this is never something I can entirely control. However, I would hope that if nothing else, it has provided some sense of the milieu from which the multiplicities of bodies, passions, semiotics and discourses are selected and become assembled through PREDP to in turn produce concrete instantiations such as the PacREF.

As explained earlier, the PHES 2015 meeting and the production of the PacREF is just one moment, one event of many in the becoming of PREDP. I chose it partly for pragmatic reasons; namely, its utility to demonstrate the multiplicities within PREDP, and the extent of ethnographic detail I could collate about it in the absence of presence. I also chose it because it was a moment identified by research participants as a site of difference, of a 'new' and 'better' direction in the making and doing of Pacific regional education policy, and specifically for its degree of 'Pacific-ness' (i.e., Pacific ownership) and contextualisation or relevance. To illustrate this further, I will now provide some further detail in this Section about the becoming of the PacREF document and its associated governance, funding and implementation structures. In doing so, I will highlight that while majoritarian statements proclaim the PacREF as new and different from what went before, assemblage theory makes visible lines of continuity at the level of desire and strata and treats seriously the divergences in what is sayable and visible in relation to a concrete assemblage. Thus, I suggest that it is not

generative to consider the dominant narrative of the PacREF as new, better and more 'Pacific'

as a sign of a policy's (and policy actors') conceit or willful deceit of what the 'factual reality' is.

Rather, it may be understood as a product of the assemblage of (generalised) desire and strata

of coloniality-modernity, intersecting with (Pacific) relationality. This produces particular

embodied socio-material experiences of lines of (amongst others) responsibility, in-/ter-

/dependence, responsiveness and recognition, which will be explored further in Chapters 6

and 7.

### 5.2.1   The PacREF: A rupture of lines or dancing with words?

I mean, to me, I guess, *we're just dancing around with words* [laughs], saying

the same thing, yeah? Sometimes, we change those words that are in the front

to put them in the back. And those that are in the back, we put them in the

front … It has to be malleable or be easily massaged or bent or appropriated

for the countries to actually pick up and run with. (Int. #1; emphasis original)

The quote above, from one of the Pacific Ministry representatives involved in regional policy

making I spoke with, makes visible *both* the importance *and* the redundancy of words in

policy. The quote points to the way we switch around words just to make something *look* and

*sound* new, even when underlying meanings stay the same. *And* it points to the importance of

changing words to signify changes in meaning. *And* it points to the value of the malleability of

words, or perhaps to the gaps between words, into which actors can insert themselves. This is

another reminder of needing to be open to the world as comprising not binaries of what is

and is not, but as *both/and* (as argued by Pacific scholars Vaai & Nabobo-baba (2017) and

discussed in Section 1.3), or *and, and, and* (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 11).

However, regardless of how you as a reader decide to engage with this quote, I offer it

as an entry point for considering the majoritarian narrative of the PacREF; that is, as signifying

a substantive shift in regionalism and Pacific leadership in education development towards a

greater 'Pacific-ownership' and a more 'genuine' reflection of Pacific priorities. Many of those I

spoke with, such as the regional agency representative quoted below, were optimistic about

the potential of the PacREF, emphasising it as an improvement from what went before and a

result of learning from previous experiences:

> PacREF is *quite different*... we [PHES] discussed initially what we wanted to
>
> have or include in the plan, we contributed what our aspirations were... and
>
> there is this spirit of working together-ness, which is quite different from the
>
> last time. I think there's more input now from individual countries, that they
>
> are speaking up more and initiating something that we can start from the
>
> regional perspective. (Int. #28; emphasis added)

In these majoritarian narratives, the PacREF is positioned as different from that which went

before; specifically, the regional frameworks/plans of the Pacific Education Development

Framework 2009-2015 (PEDF) and the Forum Basic Education Action Plan 2001 (FBEAP). For

example, FBEAP was described as having 'a regional agenda but not that of the region' (Int.

#14), or in other words, an agenda that is nominally regional but not really a creation of the

Pacific island countries of the region. While research participants I spoke with readily situated

the PacREF as substantively different and the result of having learned the lessons of the past,

exactly what went before often took on a slippery quality:

> When I just started at [my organisation], PacREF was not in existence. Its
>
> predecessor – now, I have forgotten what it was called … (Int. #7)

> [I] was just reading some notes [about previous regional work] and was like,
>
> OK, I didn't realise we've done that much work. Everything's such a blur, you
>
> know? (Int. #8)

Of all the participants I have spoken with, no one has (or admits to having) a copy of the 2017

review of PEDF. Nor can anyone remember who wrote the review, let alone who wrote the

PEDF itself, or who undertook the review of the FBEAP in 2009 – beyond an unnamed 'team of

consultants' (Pacific Islands Forum, 2009). At times, PEDF is referred to as the first regional

framework (for example, Johansson-Fua, 2022), omitting FBEAP entirely.

**PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM SECRETARIAT**

PIFS(09) FEDMN.04
**FORUM EDUCATION MINISTERS' MEETING**
Nuku'alofa, Tonga
March 2009 24-26

**SESSION TWO**

**REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE FORUM BASIC EDUCATION ACTION
PLAN AND ASSOCIATED REGIONAL PROCESSES**

.This report was prepared by a team of consultants, contracted to the Forum Secretariat

*Figure 3*. FEdMM paper on review of FBEAP, by an unnamed 'team of consultants' (Pacific Islands
Forum, 2009).

In a landscape littered with reports, reviews, plans and frameworks, this 'forgetting' is perhaps not surprising. Participants largely speak in terms of what the past *was not*, in terms of failures and disappointments and 'not successes'. Most prominent was a clear sense of all that went before as not truly Pacific owned, being instead driven by 'global' or donor agendas and not Pacific-relevant, and (specifically PEDF) as an unrealistic wish list with no means of implementation. This narrative of failures is helpfully productive of the prized consumable of 'lessons learned', upon which future frameworks, such as the PacREF, are said to be built (Pacific Islands Forum & University of the South Pacific, 2018, p. 21). Yet, both FBEAP and PEDF were heralded at the time by 'Pacific voices' as being Pacific-led and owned, and therefore as relevant and responsive to Pacific needs (Coxon & Munce, 2008; Puamau, 2005; Teasdale et al., 2005). Furthermore, as will be discussed in Chapter 6, my research indicates similar (but slightly different) claims made against the PacREF as being excessively donor/development partner driven and thus inadequately led by the Pacific, even if these claims are often not yet public. This raises questions as to why do we persist with what is on some measures policy failure? Is this because policy is working for something other than that which the policymakers and the majoritarian describe? To what extent does this point to how the PREDP assemblage works to maintain its territory?

Thus, there are many divergences and inconsistencies in this narrative, and in the worlds that PREDP produces, not to mention the worlds that produced PREDP in the first place(s). Chapter 6 will provide illustrations of these divergences and further explore what appear to be inconsistencies. But for the purposes of this Chapter, it is sufficient to note that despite narratives of difference, there is much that is the same about the PacREF as previous

policies, and the same things were notably said about PEDF and FBEAP – as being different and better and 'more Pacific' – when they were first launched. The point I want to make here is that this is not a willful forgetting or misremembering, but it rather indicates, arguably, a continuity in the vision PREDP has of itself and the desires that animate it: the desires of being better than what has gone before, of having learned lessons of/from the past, and of now being an expression of Pacific priorities and being Pacific owned. Thus, the cartography of PREDP is one of becoming-Pacific and becoming-independent, and thus becoming-better, yet this simultaneously necessitates becoming-global, becoming-recognisable, and becoming-commensurate.

We are forever wanting better policy, while policy is forever about wanting better. In education development, sovereignty, independence, capability and self-sufficiency are constructed as somehow *better* than any form of dependence or need. Thus, there is a (generalised i.e., not particular to Pacific actors or non-Pacific actors) desire for PREDP to be the product of Pacific independence and capability, and this is what will make it somehow better policy than before. Yet simultaneously, desires for working together and for *inter*dependence, arguably connected to a sense of lack of (recognised) capacity within Pacific island countries, facilitate an unwillingness to surrender control completely to the 'independent Pacific'. Importantly, these desires and fears are expressed and enacted by those we might identify as Pacific and non-Pacific actors alike. There is a deep tension within Pacific development policy that is often masked by the focus on Pacific ownership versus global/foreign/colonial imposition, but perhaps it is more of a collective fear amongst

policymakers and technocrats of completely letting go: letting go of the comfortable territory of policy-as-solution (and data-as-solution, and being evidence-based, *and, and, and*).

However, a wayfinding assemblage approach also encourages us to reject the notion that an insistent belief in policy, despite knowing it does not work, *is not* an act of self-delusion, nor is it a performance, as other commentators have suggested (Hoffstaedter & Roche, 2011; Pritchett, 2014). I would suggest instead that the actors engaged in PREDP are not performing; this is no mere Potemkin's village of regional policymaking. Rather, they are engaged in the practice of making better policy, which perhaps at some level is always about faking it until you make it, and it may very well involve inconsistencies in what is said or done in different moments. I would argue that it is better understood as embodied practices of becoming-Pacific, becoming-developed, becoming-development partner, produced through the assemblage of PREDP. These arguments will be further developed through Chapters 6 and 7 but I want to first introduce them here. To support the subsequent analysis in Chapters 6 and 7, and before providing a more direct response to this Chapter's questioning of the kind of assemblage that PREDP is, I will now briefly describe the production of the PacREF, its governance and implementation structures, and the funding arrangements that are all situated as part of the becoming-different of PREDP.

### 5.2.2   Brief details on the production of the PacREF

The purpose of this Section is to provide the reader with some of the empirical detail necessary to understand the analysis that follows in Chapters 5 and 6. It is of course partial and generated through my deliberate decision-making as to what to include and exclude.

Another researcher would produce a different story, a different assemblage. As emphasised throughout this thesis, I argue that this partiality and multiplicity does not detract from the value of research – as one who is committed to a positivist conception of research may argue - but rather points to the generative power of research*ing;* the importance of considering research as an ongoing process that will always be different. Again, as discussed in Chapter 3, this requires us to assess research not from the perspective of whether it meets pre-defined criteria or solves pre-determined problems, but rather from a place of curiosity and openness to seeing and experiencing what research(ing) can do.

Following the 2015 PHES meeting in Vanuatu, the education ministry representatives agreed to establish a small-working group (SWG) to lead the process of writing the Framework, with coordination support from the PIF secretariat. The initial SWG members were the ministry CEO's from the Cook Islands, Fiji, Palau, Solomon Islands (as Vice-Chair) and Vanuatu as Chair (Pacific Islands Forum & UNESCO, 2015). Four out of the five individuals holding these positions at the time were men, and only one of these five was still working for their respective Education Ministry by 2021 when this research began. The small working group held a series of three meetings over 2016 and 2017, with a focus on identifying the thematic areas for focus in the Framework for deliberation by the PHES meeting held in October 2017 (UNESCO & Pacific Islands Forum, 2017). The work of the SWG was supported by the Social Policy Adviser of the PIF secretariat at the time. In early 2017, with the encouragement of Australia and New Zealand, the PIF secretariat sought USD $200,000

funding from the Global Partnership for Education (hereafter GPE), [26] which was used over May

2017-August 2018 to contribute to funding the small working group and PHES meetings, and

to contract a consultant to act as technical adviser to the PIF secretariat and the small working

group (Global Partnership for Education, 2020; PacREF Steering Committee & CROP, 2020).

This funding, as per GPE requirements, was administered by the Asian Development Bank as a

GPE grant agent and overseen by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

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[26] GPE can be considered a complex policy assemblage itself. While GPE was established in 2011, similar to the PacREF, it is but one in a series of instantiations of 'global' collaboration and coordination in the funding of education development. The predecessor to GPE was the Education For All Fast Track Initiative (FTI), which was established in 2002 as a 'compact' amongst partners to ensure no country would be 'thwarted' in achieving its plans for EFA by a lack of money (Cambridge Education et al., 2010). The idea was that FTI would provide a pool of funds from a range of donor countries and be able to allocate those funds to countries who were deemed to have a 'credible' education sector plan, but which faced a financing gap in implementing it. A 2010 mid-term evaluation (Cambridge Education et al., 2010) of the FTI found a range of issues, not least of which was that it was too dependent on the World Bank, too driven by donor interests and performed badly in meeting its stated purpose of leveraging more funds. The UNESCO Education for All global monitoring report (UNESCO, 2010, p. 248) went further to argue that 'implementation of FTI planning and financing processes has undermined donor coordination, raised transaction costs and weakened aid effectiveness in some countries'. The decision, however, was not to do away with it but, in a sense, to double down on the concept in a way that is argued to have increased country ownership (Menashy, 2019).

Thus, FTI was reformed (or arguably reterritorialised) as GPE in 2011 with a stronger focus on partnership, a stronger focus on 'driving impact' and monitoring for results, and a new governance structure including equal representation of developing country members and donors, as well as private sector and civil society. The language of membership is a notable feature of GPE that works to construct an 'even playing field' of members who work together in a collective interest despite vast differences. This could be understood as a deliberate attempt at deterritorialising the binary donor-recipient, developed-developing categorisation; a loosening or at least shifting of the relationship between money (form of content) and status (form of expression). However, it has arguably only been a reterritorialisation, and the reforms have done little more than to increase the complexity of GPE and the associated transaction costs, which is code word for creating more opportunities for consultants and mediating agents to manage GPE on behalf of struggling partner governments. The Secretariat is still hosted by the World Bank; it is physically co-located in the World Bank head office in Washington DC; all its CEO's have come from backgrounds in either the World Bank, USAID or the USA administration; and, according to some, it is still dominated by donor interests (Menashy, 2019). There is not scope in this thesis to go into the details of these reforms; however, they are important to be aware of when considering the encounters of GPE and PREDP.

(DFAT) as the Coordinating Agent (Asian Development Bank, 2023b; Global Partnership for

Education, 2020).



*Figure 4*. Participants of the PHES 2017 meeting, 11-17 October, at the Tanoa Hotel, Nadi, Fiji.
*(UNESCO & Pacific Islands Forum, 2017)*

At the 2017 meeting, a framework structured by themes (and not schooling sub-sectors, such

as early childhood, primary, secondary, etc.) was proposed to 'encourage seamless systems

rather than silos' (UNESCO & Pacific Islands Forum, 2017, p. 10). These themes were:

- quality and relevance;

- learning pathways;

- student outcomes and wellbeing; and

- the teaching profession.

Several key drivers for what Pacific countries wanted in a new framework were presented,

including that it would 'enable Pacific engagement with Education Agenda 2030 … support

south-south cooperation, ensure a more efficient and effective use of resources [and] support labour mobility' (UNESCO & Pacific Islands Forum, 2017, p. 10). The 2017 PHES meeting then broke into smaller group discussions to deliberate on the proposed thematic areas, with particular attention to the degree of alignment between national education plans, the draft regional framework and the SDG 4 (Education) targets. The meeting participants were asked to identify gaps in existing support and to create 'opportunities for regional approaches through both south-south collaboration and regional institutional/agency programs or modalities' to address these gaps (UNESCO & Pacific Islands Forum, 2017, p. 10). Notable from the discussions that resulted was the emphasis on regional-national alignment and complementarity, the need for more and better data, and a diagnosis that Pacific education systems are 'fragmented', which produced an emphasis on creating integrated, aligned, coordinated system-wide approaches (UNESCO & Pacific Islands Forum, 2017, p. 12). The meeting participants were also asked to consider the governance structure for the regional framework, including whether the PIF secretariat was the right 'home', taking into account the PIF-led review process underway to rationalise regional meeting structures. Participants agreed was to be a matter for decision at the next meeting of Pacific Islands Forum education ministers. In this meeting, the need to secure funding for the implementation of activities under the PacREF was raised and GPE was identified as a possible option. However, no detailed discussion on this occurred within the formal meeting.

Following the 2017 PHES meeting, the framework was further developed by the SWG with input from relevant regional agencies and development partners. What became a 20-page document was then presented to the 2018 Forum Education Ministers Meeting (FEdMM)

in Nauru in May, and 'endorsed in principle' (Pacific Islands Forum, 2018). The document states

that the PacREF is 'driven by six principles' and has four key policy areas, as shown in **Figure 5**

(Pacific Islands Forum & University of the South Pacific, 2018, p. 7). Each policy area has

specific goals and outcomes, and the PacREF is to be supported by delineated governance and

implementation structures and processes.



*Figure 5.* The PacREF principles and policy areas (Pacific Islands Forum & University of the South Pacific, 2018, p. 7)

The 2018 document assuredly introduces the PacREF and its accompanying 12-year phased

program as a body that,

> … seeks to operationalise commitments by Member States to raise the quality
>
> of education across the Pacific, to enhance learners' education outcomes, and
>
> to produce high quality graduates who are able to contribute economically
>
> and socially to their communities. It recognises the serious performance
>
> challenges that Pacific education systems face and offers an integrated set of

tools and mechanisms to help Pacific countries meet their education objectives

… Through *partnerships* and a commitment to *regionalism*, the PacREF will

deliver sustainable, affordable and high quality education goods and services

that are accessible to all Pacific countries. (Pacific Islands Forum & University of

the South Pacific, 2018, p. 6; emphasis original)

The document presented to FEdMM makes a clear distinction between the PacREF as the

policy framework and the associated *PacREF program*, described as 'the programme of

strategies and activities in each of the four policy areas' (Pacific Islands Forum & University of

the South Pacific, 2018, p. 12). The document incorporates a detailed description of how the

Framework and its associated program will be operationalised through a phased approach via

a three-year 'rolling implementation plan'. Four regional organisations are identified as the

Implementing Agencies (IA) for the PacREF. These organisations are described in the

document as comprising 'two true regional institutions… and two UN agencies that implement

regionwide education programmes'; respectively, these were the University of the South

Pacific (USP) and the Education Quality and Assessment Program (EQAP) of the Pacific

Community (regional), and UNICEF and UNESCO as the UN agencies (Pacific Islands Forum &

University of the South Pacific, 2018).[27]

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[27] A fifth organisation not named as an Implementing Agency in the original the PacREF
document (and also not a CROP HRD working group member) but incorporated during the subsequent

Phase 1 activities and targets are set out in the document and the estimated costs of

the program are discussed, noting it as 'unrealistic' to expect any financial contribution to the

program from Pacific governments nor increases in domestic education financing (Pacific

Islands Forum & University of the South Pacific, 2018, p. 19). In line with this, proposed Phase

1 activities are explained as those that build on existing activities of the Implementing

Agencies and, therefore, are those that can begin to be implemented within existing agency

budgets, thereby avoiding delays while longer-term additional funding is sought. In terms of

securing longer-term funding, the document states that,

> … the region will look to both traditional and new development partners as it
>
> seeks the necessary investments. FEdMM supports a discussion between PIFS
>
> [the PIF secretariat] and the region's development partners (including DFAT,
>
> MFAT and GPE) to confirm the steps that should be taken to prepare and
>
> submit the necessary proposals. (Pacific Islands Forum & University of the
>
> South Pacific, 2018, p. 20)

---

implementation planning process is the Australian Pacific Training Coalition (APTC). APTC began as an Australia Government-funded project in 2006 that works 'collaboratively' with partners in the region to enhance access to quality, labour market relevant technical and vocational education and training (Australia Pacific Training Coalition, 2021). I deliberately did not explore the decisions and dynamics around the involvement of APTC, nor any of the discussions related to post-secondary education in relation to the PacREF, primarily to maintain a manageable scope for this research project. Exploring these matters could easily be a PhD research project in itself, given how prominent and complicated the issues related to vocational training and labour mobility are in the region. These matters are certainly a key driver for Pacific governments in engaging in regional and Australia/New Zealand collaboration around education, and it is likely that FEdMM concerns for a stronger focus on technical and vocational education and training is what contributed to APTC's inclusion in the PacREF implementation processes, in addition to Australia's desire to make visible its investments in this area.

Ministerial discussion of the proposed the PacREF was reserved for the ministerial retreat portion of the meeting, at which it was agreed to endorse the policy in principle, contingent on some notable directives. These directives included that, going forward, Forum members French Polynesia and New Caledonia would be consulted with in the further development of the PacREF, recognising they had not previously been present within FEdMM- or PHES-related processes. A second directive of the ministers was for the University of the South Pacific (USP), as the coordinating body for the PacREF, to ensure that non-USP member countries and the national tertiary institutions of each country were included in engagement on and implementation of the PacREF (Pacific Islands Forum, 2018). These directives reflected broader and long-term patterns and concerns with regard to the engagement of French-aligned and the more USA-aligned Pacific states in Forum-led regional cooperation, as well as the growing concerns around competition between USP and the emerging national universities. While conventional analysis would situate such concerns as reflecting something like the political interests of particular actors, I would argue that considering them productions of the PREDP assemblage can be more generative in terms of enabling us to consider how such political interests come to take the form that they do. Considering policy as assemblage directs our attention to the territorialising forces of the assemblage, the work it does to include/exclude particular bodies and attribute significance to those bodies. This will also be further explored in Chapter 6.

The formation of the PacREF was also marked by an earlier decision for the coordination of the PacREF and of the FEdMM meetings to shift from the PIF secretariat to the USP. At this stage, I have not been able to ascertain when or in what forum this decision was

made. However, it was likely to have been an outcome of the broader processes of review of

the Pacific regional architecture led out of the PIF secretariat that was occurring at the time,

alongside the operationalisation of the new Framework for Pacific Regionalism and Blue

Pacific narrative endorsed by the Forum Leaders in 2017. These processes and frameworks

were all oriented to strengthening regional inter-governmental (and to an extent, non-

governmental) collaboration in the Pacific, centered around a sense of 'shared ownership of

the Pacific Ocean' (Pacific Islands Forum & University of the South Pacific, 2018, p. 1). Central

to this was a review and rationalisation of the Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific

(CROP) and associated regional meeting structures.

The CROP was established in 1988 by PIF members to support and 'improve the

coordination, cooperation and collaboration of the various intergovernmental regional

organisations to work toward the common goal of sustainable development in the Pacific'

(Pacific Islands Forum, 2024). The (currently) nine CROP agencies work through thematic

taskforces and working groups to enact the decisions and visions of Pacific Island Forum

leaders, and these groups variously comprise the relevant CROP agencies, multilateral and

bilateral development partners, and (sometimes) civil society and private sector agencies. One

of these working groups is the Human Resource Development (HRD) working group, which

focuses on HRD and education (Pacific Islands Forum, 2024). The HRD working group has

always been Chaired by USP, with the PIF secretariat as the Secretary, and its membership has

typically comprised the regional agencies and development partners that have had a

consistent lead role education in the Pacific region (specifically EQAP, UNICEF, UNESCO, MFAT,

DFAT and the PIF secretariat), with occasional additional members (e.g., Commonwealth of

Learning, ADB). As such, the HRD working group provides a mechanism for development

partner organisations (broadly speaking) to be present alongside the political and bureaucratic

bodies of FEdMM and PHES in strategic discussions of human resources development,

education and training policy and planning in the region. This structure suggests a delineation

of the political and governing functions of FEdMM, from the operationalisation functions of

the CROP agencies and development partners, with PHES sitting as a kind of go-between and

broker between each.



*Figure 6*. Launching of the PacREF 2018 document (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2018)

The final PacREF 2018-2030 document was officially launched in October 2018, in Fiji, and

some of the activities of the PacREF program were able to be implemented over 2019, as they

were within existing IA plans and budgets. However, it was to take another 18 months for the

governance and implementation structures to be finalised, known as the *Wansolwara* (Western

Pacific pijin for 'one salt water') platform for cooperation, approved by FEdMM in May 2020. It

was two and a half years before the necessary additional funding for implementation of the

PacREF program was secured from GPE (in February 2021), and not until three years later (late

2021) that funding was actually made available to Implementing Agencies via ADB as the GPE

grant agent (Asian Development Bank, 2023b). This period was marked by the COVID-19

pandemic; significant crises in the regional governance of USP, and in relation to the election

of the new Secretary General for the Pacific Islands Forum; and changing geopolitical

dynamics as China (PRC) took a more active role in the region and the politics of climate crisis

becoming more prominent, contributing to increasing attention on the region from USA and

its allies (including Australia and New Zealand), and a more assertive form of Pacific diplomacy

(Fry & Tarte, 2015; Kabutaulaka, 2021). These events have had significant impacts on the

politics of regionalism. They can be considered (Deleuzian) events through which the

assemblage of PREDP encounters other assemblages, requiring varying reterritorialisations

and, perhaps, deterritorialisations of PREDP. They brought about new configurations of bodies

and materialities, changed the proximity of certain bodies, introduced new forms of

materialities and thus, created new openings as well as blockages for flows of desire. The

specific details of these encounters and the ongoing processes of assemblage in relation to

the PacREF are beyond the scope of this Chapter. They will be discussed further in Chapters 6

and 7, in which I will demonstrate how such encounters bring about re/de/territorialisations of

PREDP and the multiplicities of regionalism and responsiveness.

In the previous two sections, I have provided a somewhat chronological narrative of

the becoming of the PacREF policy text and associated governance structures over the period

2014-2021. As stated at the beginning of this Chapter, in doing so, my intent was to introduce

all the 'bits and bobs' of the PacREF, but simultaneously make visible the flows of desire,

territorialising and deterritorialising forces that put those bits and bobs into play, which will be

explored further in Chapters 6 and 7. In this next and final section, I will now attempt to

provide a more conclusive response to the overall focus of this Chapter, which is the

diagramming of the dimensions and contours of the PREDP policy assemblage.

## 5.3   What kind of assemblage is PREDP?

This Chapter set out to address the kind of assemblage that PREDP is. The complexity of

policy, and the entanglements of policy research, means that there is not necessarily a single

answer to this question. As a way into the problem of PREDP, I began by considering what

may have happened to produce the PacREF, thereby treating the PacREF as a particular

actualisation produced through the PREDP assemblage. However, as with all instances of

policy assemblage, PREDP involves many lines of strata and segmentations of strata, all

intersecting with, pulling in and breaking apart from each other. Assemblage is the bringing

together of these strata and holding them together through the continual interaction of

transcendent and immanent movements and re/de/territorialising forces. To return to an

oceanic metaphor, there are many layers, each penetrated by varying degrees of light and

warmth, which makes some layers more visible. And yet *all* are always perceptible, necessarily

working together, and even the darkest, coldest layers generate life. As policy researchers, we

are always in the middle of these currents, and it is not an easy task to determine which ones

to follow and which to avoid, or when to dive deep and when to stay in the shallows. In what

follows I provide a necessarily partial summary of the kind of assemblage that PREDP is, but

one that is no way a (de)finite or right version or only version. It is shaped by the deliberate

attention to questions of context-responsiveness that have motivated me in this research.

In responding to the question of what kind of assemblage PREDP is, I start with

considering the territory it produces; as territory is 'the first thing to constitute an assemblage'

(Deleuze & Guattari, 2020, p. 323). I will then discuss the strata it responds to, how these strata

were formed and the forces/flows that hold them together. PREDP establishes a territory of

regional intergovernmental collaboration, within which education is the platform for

engagement but, as I will argue further below, (national) development is the more dominant

layer of stratification. This territory of regional intergovernmental collaboration is a territory of

becoming-Pacific. PREDP's work of territorialising is the (re)producing of geographic

formations (islands and land masses and the ocean that connects them), bodies and ways of

knowing, doing, and relating that are made expressive as *Pacific*. PREDDP works to ward off

the deterritorialising forces generated by the interaction with strata and other assemblages –

global development, development agencies, Pacific indigeneities, coloniality-modernity – that

are both participants of PREDP and hold potential for changing PREDP. As such, PREDP

straddles multiple strata, but particularly the problematics of sovereignty as a nation-state,

regionalism and globalisation, Pacific indigeneities, coloniality-modernity and development.

PREDP has arisen where these strata are weak and works to reconcile these, to hold them

together despite the disruptive pull of each. As such, it makes sensible the multiple

divergences that becoming-Pacific is simultaneously becoming-global; that becoming-

developing (poor or lacking capacity) is simultaneously becoming-developed (modern); that

becoming-independent is simultaneously becoming-*in*dependent, and *inter*dependent.

As a territory of regional collaboration, PREDP is also a territory of regional

knowingness (expertise) and authority, in that the expertise, decisions, actions (e.g., projects

and policy announcements) are made to be both regional and Pacific, somewhat but never

entirely, and regardless of what forms of content might be involved. Thus, as demonstrated

above, a meeting involving just some representatives of Pacific island education ministries

becomes capable of making *Pacific regional* decisions. PREDP also wards off the

deterritorialising force of sovereign nation-states and their contextual diversity, transforming

them (of course, only ever momentarily and partially) into a singular regional actor (i.e., *the*

*Pacific*). Simultaneously, PREDP bolsters the strata of the sovereign nation-state, in making it

matter as the content of PREDP, even when many of the conditions we might consider

necessary for sovereignty are not met (e.g., financial sovereignty).

In this way, the subjectifications produced through PREDP are arguably those of policy-

makers and development actors *above* educationalists. While the 'quality of education' and

'learning outcomes' are increasingly what is said and made to be seen within PREDP policy

artefacts, it is matters of institutional and financial efficiency, political feasibility and the

expansion of the system that radiate greater luminosity and carry greater gravitational pull.

The territorialising forces of (national-regional-global) development within PREDP thus work

to yoke together forms of content of schooling (classrooms, teachers, timetables, curriculum

…), and forms of expression of human resource development in the service of (predominantly

economic) development, wherein Pacific learners are incorporeally transformed into human

resources, to be developed and refined through efficient schooling systems. Education is thus

made to matter as a mechanism for advancing the capacities of individual learners to benefit

or contribute to national (and regional/global) development aspirations. This is evidenced in

the language of the policy texts, such as the 'PacREF seeks… to raise the quality of education

across the Pacific, to enhance learners' education outcomes, and to produce high quality

graduates who are able to *contribute economically* and socially to their communities' (Pacific

Islands Forum & University of the South Pacific, 2018, p. 6; emphasis added). The PacREF 2018

text is saturated with language of enabling learners acquire the knowledge skills and values to

'contribute to… nation building' (p.10); to ensure their 'employability' (p.10); and to expand

education that can 'meet the demands of the labour market and support economic

development of individuals and communities' (ibid., p. 9). Taken together, PREDP works to

make education capable of achieving these things and enables learners to 'reach their full

potential' (Pacific Islands Forum & University of the South Pacific, 2018, p. 9).

It is worth exploring in some detail some of the ways that PREDP does this. First, it

works to ward off the potentially deterritorialising forces of global capitalist markets, and

reterritorialises them so that, for example, any failure of Pacific individuals (or education

systems) to reach their full potential becomes a fault of *individual learners, contextual*

*interference*, or inadequate *policy implementation*, rather than inadequate policy solutions. By

deterritorialising forces of global capitalist markets, I am referring to assemblages of

international labour markets and the continued coloniality of development, which continue to

constrain opportunities for Pacific islands to share in the benefits that integration in global

markets bring, while arguably still suffering the harms.[28] In a similar but noticeably distinct

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[28] An example of this is the way in which wage earning opportunities in most Pacific island
countries are very limited, resulting in many young people having only the option of continuing
subsistence agriculture, which in the context of the climate crisis and increased costs of living is
increasingly inadequate. The other alternative is taking up migrant labour opportunities, which include

way, PREDP texts also make education matter for its capacity to improve 'the maintenance of

Pacific languages, values and traditions', which is listed as one of the three 'high level

achievement targets' of the PacREF 2018 document, or to be contextualised to 'reflect [and

thus protect] Pacific values, cultures, traditional knowledge and skills' (Pacific Islands Forum &

University of the South Pacific, 2018, p. 8). However, what is silenced is how this articulates

with the focus on employability and economic development in a global market where Pacific

languages and cultures are not made to matter (as opposed to international lingua franca

such as English or French).

It is hard then not to consider these juxtapositions as being somewhat absurd, and yet

policy texts such as the PacREF somehow become sense-able as sensible, comfortable zones

of confident policy ambitions, aspirations and assertions of what can be achieved. Rather than

animated by *interests in or incentives of* economic development or quality education (however

understood), an assemblage analysis considers such interests as placed by (generalised)

assembled-desire. In the case of PREDP, I suggest it is desires for the experience of being

capable of doing good, of fixing problems, and of making the world manageable, as well as

desires for *both* independence *and inter*dependence. Then, through their inter-mingling with

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seasonal work (such as fruit picking and abattoir work opportunities) controlled entirely by the market demands and political whims of Australia/New Zealand or labouring work on foreign-owned fishing trawlers under harsh and often dangerous conditions. At the extreme, it includes serving as cannon fodder for the US army - citizens of the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) had the highest per capita fatality rate in the US army during the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, as the young men were given the right to serve in the US army. This is despite, as RMI citizens serving in the US military, they had *no rights to the education, health or welfare services* of the US (For further discussion of some of these issues, see Banivanua Mar, 2016; Heim, 2017; Petrou & Connell, 2023b).

strata of development, the nation-state, the Pacific, schooling and so on, such desires are assembled and become productive of regional education policy. These desires of in-/ter-/dependence and the capacity to respond will be fleshed out more in Chapters 6 and 7.

Finally, this points us to the what we might consider the body without organs (BwO), or the plane of consistency of PREDP; that is, the dimension of the assemblage that filters otherwise free-flowing (and thus chaos-inducing) desires, allowing just particular flows of desire or belief to become assembled (see Chapter 3 for further elaboration). In every assemblage, there is a continuous interplay between the body without organs and the plane of organisation; the pull away from any form of capture and rigid organisation, and the pull towards certainty and stability. These relate also to the molar movements towards conformity with transcendent orders, and molecular movements towards immanent processes of negotiation, highlighted in previous sections (and to be discussed further in Chapter 7). For PREDP, we might consider the body without organs as the pull towards more free-flowing and immanent forms of regional collaboration and practices of *teu le va* (nurturing the space between); those almost un-nameable sensations of connection and solidarity that are continuously assembled into forms of policy organisation. In this way, the re/de/territorialising forces of PREDP effectuates an abstract machine that is perhaps best captured in the PacREF tagline of '*we are more powerful together*' - a call to collective action, collective responsibility and a sense of unity, but one that coexists, and indeed which requires the reciprocal presupposition of independence and a recognition of diversity. The potent force of the assemblage is then its capacity to continually rearrange what constitutes *together* - which

bodies, in what configurations, and behaving how? - in the face of both disruptive and conforming processes of stratifications and flows of desire.

It is within these configurations that divergences appear, and yet these are reconciled and made sensible. In this way, the PacREF can be made to matter as a Pacific-owned policy contextualised *for the Pacific, by the Pacific* (understood as not the global or the 'west'), expressive of Pacific independence, while simultaneously, it can also be a policy of becoming more globally integrated and *inter*dependent on development partners (both longstanding and emergent). As such, PREDP is both productive of and sustained by currents of togetherness and separation, independence and interdependence, control and certainty, but also freedom and flexibility, of modernisation, as well as Pacific indigeneity (that which is made to matter as not modern). The ongoing negotiation of, and subsequent processes of re/de/territorialisations generated by these molar and molecular movements, is the subject of Chapters 6 and 7.

## 5.4   Chapter summary

In summary, this Chapter has attempted to diagram or chart the currents, flows and dimensions of the policy assemblage of PREDP. It has done so by storying selected events in the becoming of a particular policy text and its associated governance and implementation structures – namely the PacREF – over the period 2015-2021. In so doing, I have sought to demonstrate the complexity of PREDP by highlighting the multiplicities of strata, disruptive and conforming flows, encounters of materialities and semiotics. Rather than attempting to simplify this complexity, I have sought to immerse the reader (and myself) in it. While it is

tempting to stay on the surface of the ocean where the water is clear, we can only experience

the intricate beauty and force of the ocean when we dive down.

I have offered a partial rendering of PREDP as an assemblage of desires for doing

good, making connections and making the complex manageable. Researchers in other

moments, including myself in a different moment, would render it otherwise. I have come to

this place, in a sense a place of *motutapu*, because it has opened up a different way of sensing

PREDP for me, one which has enabled me to engage *differently* with the lines of ownership,

independence/dependence and contextualisation that dominate education development. In

considering these as flows of responsibility, *inter*dependence, responsiveness, and recognition,

I believe it to produce a more generative analysis than conventional policy analysis, and

importantly is one that offers new lines of flight.

In Chapter 6, I will now explore these lines further, focusing on the events of the

writing and financing of the PacREF and how these have created opportunities for encounters

that are productive of different forms of responsibility and *inter*dependence. Then, in Chapter

7, I will explore in more depth the ways in which context and the act of contextualization are

made to matter through PREDP and affect the capacities of bodies to be responsive.

# 6   Making desirable: producing responsibility and in-/ter-/dependence

> The PacREF was written by members *from the Pacific Islands* ... It's almost like
>
> things were just imposed upon [them previously], whereas I think PacREF has
>
> been learning all the lessons from all those, previous programs, the PEDF... The
>
> beauty of the PacREF was that *it was the first program that we all contributed*
>
> *to, instead of getting a consultant to come and write it on our behalf*. So, the
>
> PacREF was through the lenses of all the members of FEdMM. And so, you
>
> know, *we just have to take responsibility, ownership of it*. (Int. #8; emphasis
>
> added)

Deficits in relevancy and ownership are two persistent critiques of education development

policy in the Pacific (Hicks et al., 2021; Nabobo-Baba, 2013; Overton et al., 2020; Sanga et al.,

2005). As intimated in the quote above, the cause of such deficits is often attributed to the

absence of 'adequately Pacific' bodies in the making and writing of policy. Having Pacific

policy makers and educators lead the process of making policy is argued to produce policy

that is more responsive to genuine Pacific needs and priorities, more appropriate for Pacific

contexts, and better endowed with a greater sense Pacific 'ownership'. In other words, more

Pacific involvement makes *better* (Pacific) policy. A mark of difference of the PacREF was that it

was written by members of the PHES and this is expressed in policy texts and research

participants' comments as a strength of the PacREF compared to what went before. As

indicated in the quote above, the PacREF is presented as a product *of the Pacific*: a regional

agenda independently produced and owned by Pacific education ministries and, therefore, an

agenda for which Pacific ministries are accountable and responsible. And yet, it becomes quickly apparent that this binary assertion of the PacREF as 'this but not that' (i.e., Pacific-owned and not externally imposed) is its own assemblage of truth. It is a product of cross-currents of re/de/territorialising forces working to make otherwise discordant flows of desire consistent. By orienting our thinking towards the abstract assemblage that is productive of such binaries, we resist the temptation to accept claims or discover univocal truths about what the PacREF *is*. Instead, we are reoriented to the question of how the assemblage of PREDP produces policy capable of being considered (or not) *as Pacific*.

As such, this Chapter addresses the question of what is made to matter through PREDP. I explore how policy is made to matter *as Pacific* and how bodies that are made to be Pacific are also made responsible for policy and simultaneously dependent, independent, and interdependent. As such, in addition to the consideration of what can policy do that guides this thesis overall, this Chapter also addresses the orientation for wayfinding assemblage of where (and when) policy is. Considering the where's and when's of policy necessarily requires attention to the 'who' of policy; that is, the forms of subjectivity and agency that are produced through PREDP. In the Chapter, I look at two specific dimensions of the becoming of the PacREF, namely *i)* the writing of the PacREF policy text; and *ii)* the financing of the PacREF. By following these lines, I highlight how responsibility and in-/ter-/dependence are (re)produced through the intermingling and ongoing negotiation between bodies, affects, bureaucratic and technocratic process and structures, geographic proximity, and so on. In the final sections of this Chapter, I argue that reconsidering these questions from a perspective of wayfinding assemblage offers us different, and potentially more generative, ways of thinking about

responsibility and in-/ter/-dependence (and their corollary of responsiveness) in education

development policy.

## 6.1   What is made to matter in producing the PacREF?

Most notable in conversations about the development of the PacREF was the perceived

importance that participants placed on the role of the small working group (SWG) and the

collaborative workshopping that occurred at the PHES 2017 meeting. Participants indicated

that these features made the PacREF policy-making process significantly different from

previous regional policy development. The sense that the PacREF text was written by the

Pacific education ministry representatives who sat on the SWG and was directly informed by

the discussions that the SWG had with the wider PHES membership, was expressed strongly by

those I spoke with as something that *mattered*. This is evident in the remarks below, which

come from both Pacific education ministry and development partner representatives:

> I think one of the best things that I saw about that one [the PacREF] was the
>
> involvement of the countries; because the membership of the small working
>
> group [SWG] were permanent secretaries from the countries. (Int. #7)

> So, that's why I love the approach that was taken to formulate, when I look
>
> back at the formulation of the PacREF. You know, it really looks right down to
>
> what the different countries feel should be improved and should be looked at,
>
> and it brings it out to be part of the plan. That's what makes it; that's why the

different countries are able to agree that, yes, this will be our educational

regional framework. (Int. #24)

We [PHES] discussed, initially, what we wanted to have or include in the plan.

We sort of contributed what our aspirations were then, and the plans that we

already had... Just by reading through the introduction and the key priority

areas, and the activities that have been formulated, you know exactly what you

want and how you might be able to do it. So, that's how I read the PacREF and

my appreciation of the involvement of Pacific educators to be able to identify

and plan this regional plan. (Int. #28)

But when does the writing of policy begin and end? While the SWG led the process of

determining the priority areas and framing for the PacREF policy document, it was

(predominantly) staff of the Implementing Agencies and the PacREF Facilitation Unit who led

much of the work to develop all the subsequent elements (and actual text) of the framework.

This raises the question of exactly what is being referred to in the above statements when the

PacREF is evoked. Is it the 28 pages of the PacREF text, or the various appendices and

addendums that accompany the Framework, or the governing structures and the funding

flows and the implementing agencies, and, and, and ...? Does it matter? If it does not matter to

those involved with the PacREF, then why make it matter in research? As with all policies, the

PacREF is a multiplicity that is always becoming through various events: the writing, reading

and speaking of texts; the gatherings of bodies named as 'PacREF meetings'; the allocation of

funds to the PacREF. Diving into that complexity, the waters become choppier than what the

confident claims made about the PacREF might suggest. However, my task as a researcher engaged in wayfinding assemblage is not to reveal inaccuracies or deceptions in participants' telling of a PacREF story, nor to agonise over what part of the story they are telling and what they are omitting. Rather, it is (I think) to consider what kind of assemblage must be in place for this story to be possible and what, in turn, it can do.

While there is a dominant narrative of the PacREF as a Pacific production, different bodies have been involved (or perhaps are made visible) at different moments in the making of the PacREF. This is indicated in the following remark:

> Yeah, one of the main difference[s] that we did this time, 'cos [sic] we learned from PEDF, was that we need to take the leading role, yeah? *The countries need to take the leading role in the development of the PacREF. Ahh, rather than a consultant coming across and taking a lead role in the development.* That was a major difference, a major shift. So, right from the start, the countries identified what our priorities, what our pillars, should be. And what should be the – they discussed, what should be the elements of each of the pillars of the framework. And so, when they'd set those basic parameters, *then a consultant was brought on board, and was told this is what we want, you then use your expertise to, ahhh, to put them together into a logical framework.* (Int. #12; emphasis added)

This comment suggests that while consultants were involved in the process, it was only at a point where priorities had already been set, and it is this that makes the PacREF *Pacific*.

According to other participants, however, the Pacific-ness of the PacREF was diluted in

different moments of its actualisation. As one former member of the SWG explained,

> ... [t]he actual PacREF plan, the four focus areas and what they are going to
>
> look at, was written pretty much word for word by the small working group.
>
> So, the consultants... came in when the decision was that it needed to be, that
>
> they were going to be going to GPE [for funding].
>
> *[Interviewer]: So, the real heart of it came out of the small working group?*
>
> Yes. The actual PacREF, that is a small working... well, actually – it's a PHES
>
> document. The IRP – the rolling plan – and all of that work, is solely for the GPE
>
> application. It is not for PacREF. It is a funded application. (Int. #13).

These quite emphatic statements as to the significance of the PacREF as *written by* PHES,

which is also communicated through policy texts such as media releases, either silence the

presence of 'non-PHES' bodies in the process, or else attribute different kinds of significance

to them. As noted in Chapter 5, data generated from interviews and policy text analysis

indicates a relatively intense involvement of consultants (specifically, the consultant hired by

the PIF secretariat), the regional Implementing Agencies (USP, SPC/EQAP, UNESCO, UNICEF),

and other key development partners (particularly Australia and New Zealand) in the process.

And yet, the extent to which this is acknowledged in participants' remarks is inconsistent and

often contradictory.

For example, the following remarks acknowledge the involvement of representatives of the Australian and New Zealand governments as active, and indeed, *invited*, participants in the SWG meetings, which would seem inconsistent with other claims to keeping the development partners *out of* these discussions (see below):

> In terms of being our representative from DFAT [Australian Department of
>
> Foreign Affairs and Trade], *I was part of the PacREF*. First, they had a small
>
> working group that kind of put together the policy and all that. And that's now
>
> transitioned to become the steering committee. It was the small working
>
> group, back five years ago. They invited development partners. So, *I was*
>
> *always part of that meeting*, too. (Int. #7; emphasis added)

> They're on the same table. They're also part of the discussion. They, because
>
> they are funding some of the stuff … So, both Australia and New Zealand are
>
> supportive. *They're part of the team*. (Int. #8; emphasis added)

The following narrative from the PIF secretariat consultant contracted to support the production of the PacREF is also illustrative of the fluidity concerning which bodies are made visible/sayable as present in the events through which the PacREF was produced, and the affects they were able to generate:

> [T]here was a recognition at that stage that regionalism or a regional approach
>
> could actually be meaningful, if we set about in a different way… At that stage,
>
> AusAID were intending to ramp up their investments; this is before they were

crushed and put into DFAT.[29] But they went to that meeting with the intention

of investing, over ten years, a billion Australian dollars in education. And we

were willing to shift a lot of that from bilateral to regional, *if there was a*

*regional program which was truly regional...* It took us quite a bit of time. In

fact, two years or so - right up to 2017 or so; 2018, in fact – before it really

became operationally possible to move forward with what became PacREF...

[At FEdMM 2014], the Ministers instructed the PHES members to sort out the

program, and that's what opened the door. They handed it down to the Heads

of Education Systems. They immediately formed a task group/taskforce – what

did they call it? 'PHES Small Working Group', which then I joined, although *I*

*had been engineering the thing all along*. I formally joined with - financed,

originally, by ADB and DFAT. And that's when it truly began to become

something where the PHES were laying out, 'Well, actually, *let's keep the*

*donors on the back-burner*.' And they weren't invited into the rooms. They

really were voluntarily excluded. They were happy to, I think in my mind... to

see it taking its own shape. (Int. #14; emphasis added)

What is particularly notable in this statement is the shifting between identifications of 'we' and

'they'. The participant moves between identifying as a generalised 'we' of the Pacific and an

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[29] The timelines recalled in this quote do not exactly line up with the chronology of what happened. The participant is talking about the 2014 FEdMM meeting. The announcement of AusAID being integrated into DFAT was made at the end of 2013, so the Australian representatives would have already been experiencing the resulting changes by the time of the FEdMM meeting. However, the implications of this change for funding allocations may not yet have become apparent.

AusAID/DFAT 'we'; at other times, they distinguished between DFAT and the donors as a 'they'. This is a shifting that highlights how bodies are multiplicities, capable of becoming-different across moments of encounter and through interminglings with other bodies, materialities and semiotics. If we consider actors such as Australia, New Zealand or consultants as singular and attribute to them power and interests as categorically different from, and thus against, that of Pacific island governments, then their involvement in the drafting of what is claimed to be a Pacific-owned and Pacific-led policy document becomes not only confusing but *wrong*, or else indicative of some abuse of power. Similarly, the ambiguous positioning of regional agencies – as *both* of the Pacific *and* not the Pacific – becomes difficult to reconcile when looking for single lines of causality and significance.

Such difficulties arise when we are looking for a coherent and accurate story of what *really* took place in the production of the PacREF. Such an analysis would conceive of the data presented here as indicative of different perspectives on a univocal set of occurrences, or of different actors intentionally trying to claim credit or allocate blame for some self-interested or rational reason. In this way of description of events, it becomes very tempting to treat these as confessions of hidden but ever-present power dynamics (development partners versus Pacific country 'recipients'; global experts versus locals 'lacking' expertise). Such confessions are exciting for a researcher like myself to uncover: to be able to demonstrate that things are not really as they seem and that I, as a good researcher, have found the *truth*. I have revealed the pantomime or Potemkin village at play in PREDP, i.e., the pretense of Pacific-led policy when, in practice, it is *actually* driven by development partners.

However, this assumption in and search for a unitary truth in the data, and '*this but not that*' allocations of causal power, arguably block our capacity for thinking outside the image of thought and lead only to repetition(s) of the same. That is, to consider the data as indicative of unequal power relations leads us only to diagnose a need for power to shift from those who have it to those who do not. Or else to consider the data as indicative of some actors only *pretending* to have Pacific interests at heart, which leads us only to diagnose a need to remove certain actors from policy processes and replace them with other more sincere actors who are more attuned to the Pacific. As other research participants highlighted, there is an assumption that having a Pacific person in a position or involved in a policy process will necessarily make it *more Pacific*, but such an assumption is itself fraught:

> And that is what I would like to see in my ambition, is an authentic Pacific-ism, not a rubber stamping, not a *browning*... You know, like we just don't put Pacific people on, and say *it's brown*... You know, some of us, including me, have been educated by the West. So, you know, I get a shock when I go to the community and they don't think like that [laughs]. (Int. #4; emphasis added)

It leads us only to debates about who counts as Pacific, and a need to classify actors, and make assumptions about their intentions – good or bad, genuinely for the Pacific or not – and to assume such intentions remain consistent across all situations.

The data offered here highlights the work involved in determining, at any given point in time, who and what counts as Pacific. Similarly, how the presence or absence of certain bodies in the event of writing the PacREF is made to matter. For example, is someone who is

born and raised in a Pacific island country and is working as a 'locally-engaged' staff member

of Australia DFAT or New Zealand MFAT classified as Pacific or non-Pacific when sitting in

regional forum? Identity is not a given; it is assembled. Similarly, the significance of the

presence or absence of certain bodies in a particular event can be made to matter differently.

For example, we might conclude that the presence of Australian or New Zealand

representatives in meetings about the PacREF may, in a sense, taint the Pacific-ness of what is

produced. However, participants indicated that the role of Australia and New Zealand, and to

an extent the PIF secretariat consultant, was facilitative only: that staff of *Pacific* education

ministries and *Pacific* regional organisations led the process and the decision-making on

content and language of the document. These *non-Pacific* others simply provided helpful

suggestions or assisted with the writing of the document in a form compliant with

expectations for a policy document or a (successful) development partner funding proposal.

What these ambiguities highlight is that it is not exclusively the presence or absence of

certain bodies within the writing process that matters or is made to matter. To understand

what is produced by a policy assemblage, and why, we need to consider the encounters of

bodies, materialities, semiotics, strata and desire that occur and how these are negotiated in

an event, such as the writing of the PacREF. While the following remark from a development

partner representative is long, it is useful to present it in full as it is illustrative of these

negotiations:

> I think with the PacREF, there's two parts of context. There's the how the thing
>
> is developed and owned, and then how it's implemented. And so, in terms of
>
> how it's developed, I think one of the really great things about the PacREF is

that it has been owned and developed by the countries themselves. And that was an interesting kind of path to walk as a development partner where, actually, we do have interests in this space. We do want to see things go certain ways, but we had to step back and say, 'No'. The way we're going to deliver this well is, if you own it, and it is working for your context, and we're not putting our lens on what that means...

*Interviewer: So, in terms of that process of developing the PacREF, what I heard from you is that there is a sense that it is a bit different perhaps from earlier processes, in the degree of ownership...?*

Yeah.

*Interviewer: Do you think that has changed the focus or the framing of the framework?*

Yeah, yeah, I think it has. In that, I mean, we're talking in hypotheticals and theoreticals here. But I think, [pause] *I think we probably would have got to the same objectives and the same strategies and the same outcomes if we'd brought consultants in to develop it like we had for the previous frameworks.* But I think it is the framing. It's the language that's used. There's a lot more nuance in the language than there had been in previous ones.

There were big debates about, 'Do we mean teacher professional development, or do we mean teacher professionalism? What does that mean?

What does that look like in context? Why are we framing it this way?' So, I

think there was a lot more depth.

[pause]

A lot more depth in the discussions that you wouldn't necessarily pick up if

you were just reading the documents themselves. That was a lot of debate

around some of the specific language … It was the steering committee or the

small working group at that point – they were having those debates on a fairly

regular basis to get that wording bang on. (Int. #2, emphasis added)

I have included this exchange in full for two reasons. Firstly, because I believe the

evident pauses in my research participant's remarks can be considered *moments of*

*hesitation* (Sellar, 2012), which offer opportunities to withhold judgement, to choose

to not assume we know what is happening or what something means, and thus

remain open to something different. As I will discuss further in Chapter 7, the

embodied spaces of PREDP dialogue tend to discourage such moments of hesitation

and assemble-desire in such a way as to steer policy actors towards certainty and

individual knowingness.[30] Equally, happenings such as the development of the

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[30] As discussed in Chapter 4, I attempted to encourage open conversation in my encounters
with research participants, drawing on methodologies of *tok stori* and *talanoa.* However, I
recognise that even despite these efforts, my encounters with my research participants,
especially those with whom I did not have a pre-existing relationship, were unlikely to
encourage them to embrace moments of hesitation, and this would have affected the data
generated.

*Wansolwara* platform might be considered lines of flight, which offer opportunities to disrupt these assemblages. This will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

The second reason I have included this full exchange is because it illustrates several of the ambiguities in the processes of policy, which I have alluded to throughout this section. On hearing/reading this exchange, we may wonder: is it the process of writing and the involvement of particular individuals in that process that matters, or is it the final written policy? If the final policy would have had the same words regardless of whether Pacific people were involved in writing it, then what was the importance of 'Pacific-led' negotiations to get the words 'bang on'? If policy writing is quite distinct from policy implementation, then why was there the level of concern for getting the wording right? Why do we put so much emphasis on the *words* when it is the *encounters*, and the *changes* that happen in encounters, that matter? Or is it that those made responsible for writing the policy (while 'we' as Development Partners stepped back) can then be held to account for its implementation, even when the implementation is led by others?

These questions are not to challenge or cast doubt on the sincerity of the research participant, but they do highlight the flexible interplay of content and expression, and the importance of considering what desires are being assembled and with what strategic intent (abstract machine), not just what is being made sayable and visible. At first, it seems tricky to make consistent statements that the *PacREF was written by PHES*, with those indicating both direct and 'behind the scenes' involvement of consultants and development partners in its development. A conventional policy analysis might conclude that these divergences reflect different perspectives, which are the product of the interests of each actor in claiming credit

(or not) for what was achieved (or not). However, an assemblage theory analysis orients us to

consider the strategic intent of assemblage is to persist, even as it changes. This leads us to

consider that perhaps it is not so much a desire for 'good policy' or 'Pacific owned policy' that

sustains the assemblage, but rather to consider these, in the words of Thompson and

colleagues (2022, p. 701), as the 'throughput' of the assemblage. They are what the

assemblage makes possible, but they do not reflect an intention of assemblage; they *are not*

why the assemblage has come to be. Rather, perhaps, PREDP as assemblage is responding to a

generalised desire for interdependence; the sharing of responsibility, and thus also

accountability, for education development. This requires good education development policy

to be *both* Pacific policy (Pacific-led, owned and contextualised) *and* global policy (that which

the Pacific cannot produce and which requires global policy experts), thus justifying the *status*

*quo* of intergovernmental, inter-national collaborations. The assemblage works to arrange

bodies and semiotics in such a way that supports the PacREF being experienced in this way.

For example, the presence of 'non-Pacific' bodies in the SWG is made not to matter, while

'non-Pacific' organisations – such as UNICEF and UNESCO – are incorporeally transformed to

become 'Pacific regional agencies' as part of the Implementing Agencies group.

I will elaborate further on the way in which PREDEP (re)produces interdependence in

the next Section (6.2). Prior to that, I want to explore further the ways in which words both

matter and do not matter. Policy words are nuanced and contextualised, yet they also say the

same thing(s) as a consultant could have said – at least according to my research participant's

remark above. Similarly, the consistency of bodies matters, and yet it also does not matter, as

the presence or absence of particular bodies in the writing of policy shows. How do we

reconcile the apparent importance of words, including that of words in different languages (i.e., English language and Pacific languages), with the (also apparent) redundancy of words? I believe it points to an acknowledgement of the *both/and* characteristics of assemblage and the mutual presupposition of forms of content and expression. There is a recognition within research participants' remarks of the molecular movements that take place when we negotiate bodies and materialities in the moment. Yet there is also a belief in the need, and possibility, of capturing this in words, and of somehow extending the duration and affective capacity of those encounters in the moment.

As Deleuze and Guattari (2020, p. 75) argue, language is not just information or communication, but it demands obedience. The use of words is a 'matter of acting in or upon the world: event attributions do not simply describe or report pre-existing events, they help to actualise particular events in the social field' (Patton, 1997, n.p.). This is the incorporeal transformation; the way in which the form of expression can bring about 'changes in the status of a body or change its relations to other bodies' (Patton, 1997, n.p.). But it has to work. It has to adhere to common sense, for otherwise it will be deemed non-sensical. For example, when those unfamiliar with Pacific ways of being first encounter Pacific dialogic methods such as *tok stori,* it does not make sense to recognise it as a useful form of communication for policy discussions. Such a claim can only be recognised as non-sensical; clearly a practice that appears to be pointless talking around in circles, is nothing more than a lack of having anything useful to say and is thus a mark of ignorance or an avoidance of dealing with the policy issue. However, such encounters can bring about deterritorialisations - something

always escapes - and if moments of hesitation are afforded, such claims may come to make sense, and even become common sense.

This is the functioning of assemblage; the re/territorialising of what is sensible and recognisable, in ways that are not just about words but are actualisations in the world. In this way, words do matter; new forms of description of what is happening can make possible new kinds of behaviour and becomings. However, they can only matter through a relationship with materialities, through encounters that enable difference and a different assemblage of desire. Thus, we can label education development policy as 'Pacific' (Pacific-led, Pacific-owned, contextualised, etc.) but until the underlying desires are assembled differently, we limit the extent that it can become so.

Overall, this Section has focused on the ambiguities in accounts of how the writing of the PacREF, and who was involved in that writing, matters. I have suggested that this offers insights into the ways in which responsibility and, *inter alia,* capability are produced through PREDP. Such ambiguities lead us to reconsider associated notions of in-/ter-/dependence, which are central to encounters of education development. These will be explored in the next Section.

## 6.2   Assembling in-/ter-/dependence



*Figure 7*.. *The PacREF logo and tagline, sourced from* [www.pacref.org](www.pacref.org) *1 August 2023*

> And there is *this spirit of working togetherness*; which is quite different from
>
> the last time. I think there's more input now from individual countries; that
>
> they are speaking up more and initiating something that we can start from the
>
> *regional* perspective. I suppose the slogan that has been working for us is,
>
> '*Think regionally but act locally*'. So, whatever gets done or planned at the
>
> regional level, the onus is on each country. But the message that's coming out
>
> from the regional body is that we don't want to leave our neighbours behind,
>
> in terms of planning, in terms of our aspiration of achieving goals that we all
>
> want to achieve together at some stage in our development of education. (Int.
>
> #28; emphasis added)

In the previous Section, I explored the ways in which the policy assemblage of PREDP

produces sensibilities of responsibility, with specific reference to the writing of the PacREF

policy text. I highlighted the divergences in accounts of who was involved, including the

degree of 'external' involvement, and questioned how that involvement was made to matter

(or not). I ended with tentative conclusions around how different things are made to matter at

different moments for different purposes, through different molar and molecular flows of

desires and re/de/territorialisations.

By contrast, I consider in this Section what is perhaps the corollary of sensibilities of

responsibility; that is, sensibilities of dependence, *in*dependence, *inter*dependence. As

discussed in Chapter 5, and indicated in the quote and images above, desires for *both*

independence *and* interdependence are assembled through PREDP, and these are closely

connected to the production of individual and collective senses of responsibility and

ownership. The creative force of PREDP is the way in which independence and

interdependence are both made to matter and not-matter at different moments in events of

becoming-national, becoming-Pacific regional and becoming-global. As such, PREDP makes

Pacific independence desirable, wherein the Pacific is a united region *and* a collection of

independent nation-states; and made sensible as *not*-developed and *not*-global. And yet

PREDP also makes desirable inter-dependence (and collective responsibility) at *both* Pacific

regional *and* global levels; the Pacific and the global are made inclusive of 'equal'

development partners (developing and developed nations); while the Pacific equally functions

as *both* global *and* not-global. More specifically, PREDP reinforces Pacific countries as lacking

and therefore needing external intervention, at the same time as producing them as

independent and sovereign actors capable of their own 'development'. Thus, PREDP enables

education development policy to be *both* Pacific (i.e., *not*-global) *and* global; to be *both* a

developing country initiative *and* a collaboration of (equal) development partners; and to be *both* decolonising *and* dependent on former colonial nations' (voluntary) financing and facilitating.

These are an unavoidably confusing set of statements, reflecting a confusing set of relations that the reader does not necessarily need to comprehend in detail. Rather, they illustrate the multiple layers of stratification within PREDP and reflect the ongoing negotiations, and fixities and flows, of relationalities – the conscious and sub-conscious practices of *teu le va*[31] – that occur throughout PREDP. They also reflect the *both/and* way of thinking that is central to assemblage theory and Pacific research. To further explore these relationalities of responsibility, independence and (inter)dependence, I will now follow the lines of the *financing* of the PacREF. This will make an important empirical contribution by detailing the way in which the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), as a nominally global assemblage, has entered the Pacific. However, rather than making judgements based on pre-determined assumptions of power or the significance of funding, this Section will instead consider what GPE funding of the PacREF has made possible, for whom (what is made to matter, and to whom does it matter?) and to critique it from within those terms, rather than outside them.

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[31] My understanding of the concepts of *va* and *teu le va* are discussed Section 4.2.1.

### 6.3 How was GPE funding made possible, and what does it make possible?

What triggered that off was the opportunity – well, I know what triggered that really off and turned it [PacREF] into a reality, rather than just a set of desires – was the awareness that *GPE funding was possible*; and that *we could use GPE funding regionally*, rather than in the countries which had it one by one. In those cases, the GPE commitment to those countries was very, very small. So, they [Pacific countries] had no incentive to put the effort in to raise a half a million dollars, which they could have got from another donor. But when GPE started to talk about, 'Okay, let's pull this together regionally', and we got a lot of cooperation from Washington, that's when I became more seriously involved in trying to pull this into a program. (Int. #14, emphasis added)

*[Interviewer]: So, just taking a step back, do you know where the decision came from, to go for the GPE money for PacREF? How did that even come about?*

No. That would have been before my time. Like, it may well have been a, like, it would have been much more likely to be DFAT than MFAT, because New Zealand has always been the FTI/GPE dubious (laughs)… Anyway, it would have been a combination of us, as Australia, knowing that our interests in *maintaining support to GPE rested on this working at the Pacific level*, but also people like [consultant]. Maybe even people in the World Bank at the time, if

they were still active at the time, knowing that GPE provides not only a

substantial dollar opportunity but also these benefits of *a neutral, impartial,*

*global platform* for knowledge and convening.

So, I think one of the benefits for Australia and New Zealand is that it means

that it is not just Australia and New Zealand policing how their money is

delivered in the Pacific; but it *also gives that kind of global opportunity and*

*credibility to Pacific regional processes*. (Int. #26, emphasis added)

I mean, regionally, we needed funding to make it happen. Well, no. I mean, it

depended on what you wanted the role of PacREF to be, I guess... (Int. #13)

As noted in Chapter 5 (Section 5.2.2), as part of endorsing the PacREF in 2018, the FEdMM also

agreed to look at 'traditional and new development partners' to source funds for the

implementation of the PacREF program activities, as well as the costs associated with the

proposed PacREF Facilitation Unit and related governance structures. This gave formal assent

to discussions that had already begun around the potential for accessing funding via GPE for

the PacREF. However, it took a further two years before a funding application was submitted

to, and approved by, GPE (February 2021), and a total of three years before the funding

actually became available in late 2021. As indicated in the quotes above, there are

considerable divergences in research participants' accounts as to the significance of GPE

funding, the way in which it came about and what it has produced.

The problems of financing regional collaboration in education are longstanding (Int. #7; Int. #18; Int. #23) In my conversations with research participants, and in relevant policy documentation, it was widely stated that funding had historically been inadequate for effective implementation of the former regional framework (PEDF) and the functioning of regional education governance and collaborative structures (i.e., FEdMM and PHES):[32]

> [M]y take on, during that time, the PEDF was *slow*, slow in the sense that there was not enough financial backing to assist countries to take whatever priorities they have asked for PEDF support, to come out clearly. (Int. #16)

> *What's helpful is when the region is resourced to work at a regional level*. And I think that's part of what has held back PHES and FEdMM; is that it hasn't been resourced properly to achieve what it could. So maybe that's the other way to say it. What's unhelpful is when there isn't adequate resourcing in CROP [Pacific regional] agencies or other regional mechanisms to allow them to achieve their full potential. (Int. #23; emphasis added)

---

[32] The lack of funding was also attributed to the lower priority that the PIF secretariat, as a primarily political and foreign policy organisation, placed on education. As noted in Chapter 5, the development of the PacREF was connected with restructurings of regional architecture, which date back at least to 2014 and eventually saw responsibility for education development regional collaboration shift from the PIF secretariat to USP. For Ministers, this shift and the securing of donor funding for the PacREF contributed to fulfilling what they stated as their interest for education to be given equal attention/weight as other sectors in the economic development of the region (FEdMM Outcomes document 2014). This will be discussed more in Chapter 7.

In 2014, at the time of the FEdMM meeting when the development of the PacREF was first agreed, Australia indicated a willingness to increase regional education funding *only if* there was a strong enough regionally agreed and owned platform (Int. #14). This was arguably stymied by the budget cuts and strategic refocusing of Australia's aid program that occurred from 2013/2014 onwards, which also saw the (then) Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) integrated into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). However, the explicit conjoining of an association between achieving regional consensus and gaining foreign aid funding would arguably act to exert a territorialising force, so that within the territory of PREDP, regional consensus would come to have monetary and instrumental value. As touched on in Chapter 5 (and to be discussed further below), this could be considered the assembling force of PREDP at work, wherein more free-flowing desires for regional collaboration and connection become channeled into the institutional and bureaucratic structures of development project financing.

At the same time, there were also discussions happening concerning the presence of GPE as a source of education development financing in the region. As of 2014, there were just three Pacific island countries eligible for GPE funding, and this increased to eight countries by 2018. However, aside from PNG no Pacific island country had taken up a GPE grant prior to 2018 (Int. #26). Australia had been a significant contributor to the funding of GPE from its beginnings in 2002[33]. However, by the mid 2010s, in order to continue to justify their

---

[33] Australia has been a significant contributor to GPE since becoming a member in 2008, pledging a total of USD$500million to date (Global Partnership for Education, October 2023) and

contributions, Australia needed GPE to deliver on what had increasingly become Australia's

region of priority: the (Indo-)Pacific (Interviews #10, #14, #23 and #26). As such, there was

strong advocacy from DFAT for GPE to be more active in their engagement with the region. As

one of my research participants stated, DFAT had worked at the GPE board level to 'lobby for

more money to come down to the Pacific' (Int. #23), while another explained that:

> … [DFAT] were pushing GPE globally to deliver in the Pacific and were
>
> advocating among Pacific partners to grab GPE opportunities and make the
>
> most of them in Pacific countries. (Int. #26)

> The lobbying of GPE from DFAT was considered necessary because the size of
>
> Pacific island country government budgets and schooling populations, relative
>
> to other low-income countries, meant the potential allocation from GPE was
>
> very small. This made it less attractive to both GPE and Pacific governments to
>
> jump through the hoops required for them to 'play the game', as indicated in
>
> the quote below: Initially, [it] was because the allocation was too small. Initially,
>
> it was only [USD] $0.5million for each [Pacific] country. It is too small,
>
> compared to other larger grants, just too small. Even though it is too small,
>
> they have to go through all transactions, like quality assurance 1, 2, 3, and they

serving as an active Board member throughout most of this time (the GPE Board comprises of 12 donor country representatives, 12 developing country representatives, plus representatives of multilateral and regional agencies, civil society and private sector). In addition, there has been the relational connection of former Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard having been the Chair of GPE from 2014 to 2021 (Global Partnership for Education, 2024).

have to prepare the education sector plan nationally... So, requirements are the

same as a [USD] $100million dollar grant. (Int. #9)

The administrative burden was thus deemed not worth it for GPE, which is held accountable to

its board for both the scale of 'results' it achieves (i.e., the number of children in school) and

the quantum of funding disbursed (citation). Nor, equally, was the burden worth it for Pacific

governments, many of which already struggled to manage and expend the funding they

received from existing development partners, such as Australia and New Zealand (Wood et al.,

2022).

GPE claimed to recognise and respond to the specific contexts of small island

developing states in 2014, when the GPE Board considered a proposal 'to *group countries into*

*regional grants to limit the amount of administrative costs involved* in proposal preparation

and the work of any Supervising or Managing Entity' (Global Partnership for Education, 2014,

p. 29; emphasis added). This led to the work of developing a Regional Grant instrument, which

was first taken up by four Caribbean states in 2016 (Global Partnership for Education, 2016).[34]

It was also around this time that GPE became more active in its engagement with Pacific island

countries, as reflected by GPE representatives attending the PHES meeting in Vanuatu in 2015,

and the Ministers meeting in Nauru in 2018 (Pacific Islands Forum, 2018). Several research

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[34] Four eligible Eastern Caribbean states (Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia and St. Vincent, and the Grenadines) jointly applied for an ESPIG grant to support the development of a sub-regional educator sector plan (Global Partnership for Education, 2021). This application was approved by the Board in June 2016 with the World Bank as the grant agent (ibid). Notably, the grant supported the four countries to develop a joint sector plan, in line with GPE requirements for sector plans. In the case of the Pacific island countries, they had already developed their plan and had to then retrofit it to GPE requirements.

participants present at those meetings recalled the GPE presence as somewhat of a novelty – a

*new player on the block* (Interviews #13, #18, #21, #30). As the following remarks suggest, GPE

attended these meetings to promote the GPE financing mechanism to Pacific island countries:

> *[Interviewer]: So then, how did that decision to go for GPE come about?*

> *GPE campaigned*. Really. GPE were at that meeting in Vanuatu [2015 PHES]. I
> don't really remember what they said, but they were there. And then they were
> at the FEdMM in 2018, which is when it got approved by the Ministers, the
> PacREF got approved by the Ministers; and *GPE really turned up*. They had two
> people. They had flown them in from Washington to Nauru.

> *[Interviewer]: Right, wow.*

> Yeah, exactly. So, they turned up and they campaigned to Ministers and they
> campaigned to the Small Working Group. Because they had just done this
> regional one in the Caribbean and they were trying to show that this could
> work, so they wanted to do a regional one for the Pacific. (Int. #13; emphasis
> added)

Therefore, at the point of approving the PacREF in 2018, Ministers and PHES were not only

aware of the possibility of GPE funding for the PacREF, but such an opportunity was being

actively promoted as a *preferred option:*

*[Interviewer]: Can I ask who came up with the idea of pooling the funding [in a*

*GPE regional grant] in the first place? Where did that come from?*

I think it was DFAT but quite a long time ago. So, this has been in the cards, I

think, since about 2015, whenever PacREF was first mooted. So, DFAT

obviously has a big interest in a big investment in GPE. They have been kind of

advocating for GPE to do more in the Pacific... And so, ahh, their {DFAT's]

former head of Pacific education sold this as a good way forward and so

started to promote it. (Int. #2)

As such, following FEdMM's endorsement of the PacREF in 2018, the work involved in

'operationalising' the framework and securing funding for its implementation was very much

geared towards the prospect of submitting it for GPE funding, and this was led primarily by

the agreed Implementing Agencies for the PacREF (i.e., the five selected regional agencies and

development partners). This work led up to the PHES meeting in Niue in April 2019. Here,

heads of Pacific education ministries were asked for their approval of a PacREF

*Implementation Rolling Plan* (IRP) and to agree whether to *apply collectively for a regional*

*GPE grant* to fund this plan, or else consider other funding options for the PacREF.[35]

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[35] Eight Pacific island countries were eligible for GPE funding; namely, Kiribati, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. If PHES decided not to apply for a regional GPE grant, one alternative would be that each eligible country could choose to apply for GPE funding bilaterally. If successful, they could then allocate some of this funding to contribute to the cost of regional activities agreed in the PacREF. However, this presented a potentially far more complicated and time-consuming process.

It is tempting to then judge these developments as a kind of hijacking of a Pacific

island country-owned process. Once substantive money was on the table, the regional

agencies – and those development partners *reliant on external funding* (i.e., UNICEF and

UNESCO) - scrambled to turn it into a vessel for channeling funds and achieving results for

which they could then take credit. We could thus consider this as a reterritorialisation of what

began as a line of flight towards greater Pacific island country independence into, instead,

continued forms of dependence on external funding and external agencies to manage that

funding. The process of developing the IRP seems to support this understanding. It was led by

the implementing agencies, and while there was *consultation* with the SWG and member

countries, there were indications that the SWG and member countries were not substantively

involved and had to, at times, query draft versions and reassert their priorities (Interviews #5,

#8, #13, and #15; PacREF Facilitation Unit, March 2019).

For example, countries 'requested changes to reflect country ownership and that this is

not a plan of the implementing agencies' (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2019, n.p.). When

the IRP finally went to PHES 2019 for approval, the implementing agencies had already agreed

that the plan, once approved, was then to be '*refitted* to identify the funding gap and meet

the template/requirements of GPE for funding' (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2019, n.p.).

Australia and NZ were also identified as playing a key role in keeping the process 'on track':

> [I]t was quite *huge effort* made by Australia and New Zealand. It was. These
>
> two countries have country Posts in each country. And then through these
>
> country Posts, and also Fiji, they made intervention[s] to these countries:
>
> whether or not [to apply for a GPE grant], which approach they take, and how

they prepared to utilise [a] GPE grant, how this PacREF could be organised, and

something like this. So, *these two countries made a very big, big effort.*

*Without having their efforts, I don't think this arrangement has been set.*

*[Interviewer]: Right, interesting. So, you do not think the regional arrangement*

*would have come about?*

Right, yeah. Also, ADB had quite strong determination to support this PacREF

as a grant agent. So, without having this strong determination of ADB, it's, like,

the countries chose the regional approach but if no one takes the grant agent,

it would fail. So yeah, it's quite fortunate. (Int. #9, emphasis added).

... [T]his PacREF, although it's a PacREF with country initiative, but there's [also]

a lot of recognition for working together, for collaboration between regional

institutions, IOE, USP, and international institutions, UNESCO and UNICEF, who

are major players within the region... Where[as] in the past... donors

[development partners] are looked at as providing funds, providing money.

Rather, the PacREF is actually now – *the donors are actually part of the*

*development, part of the design.* So, that's my observation of the difference.

(Int. #16, emphasis added).

Adopting assemblage thinking encourages me to resist the temptations to identify victims and

villains, or to tether agency or power too closely to identifiable 'actors' (donors, nation-states,

regional organisations ...). As noted in Chapter 5, this is also why it is not *necessarily* important for the reader of this research to keep track of all development agencies, or what all the acronyms mean, or for me to identify my research participants according to some organisational label (e.g., staff member of a development partner organisation, a regional organisation or a Pacific education ministry). Sometimes it does matter, but sometimes it does not. What matters for the research, then, is to understand when and why it matters. To do this, we need to follow lines of assembled-desires, and allow a more nuanced analysis to emerge that makes visible the ongoing interplay of territorialising and deterritorialising forces, molar and molecular movements, that reverberate through these encounters and are productive of agency.

## 6.4  The desired opportunity spaces of regionalism

In the previous Section I demonstrated the *both/and* nature of the subjectifications produced through PREDP, wherein the PacREF is made to be owned and produced by Pacific island policy actors, while simultaneously the result of development partner intervention and dependence. Rather than treating this as a contradiction, assemblage theory orients us towards considering how PREDP creates what Sanga (2011, p. 9) refers to as 'opportunity spaces' within regionalism. In my interpretation of Sanga's work, such spaces might enable encounters of *both* independence *and inter*dependence, and in ways that can reconcile tensions between these or, perhaps more precisely, make such tensions *not* matter. The following exchange with a Pacific country representative in the SWG indicates this *both/and*:

while there was a sense in which the IRP was being taken over by the Implementing Agencies,

and the requirements of GPE and ADB as the grant agent[36] made it difficult for countries to

engage, there were also perceived benefits for countries in this process:

> [T]he application took a year or so, I think, before it, finally – it was *dragging*
>
> *on* and on... It was *quite intensive* and *time consuming*... They [the IAs] had to
>
> fulfill all these wishes from GPE. It's not easy applying for funding from those
>
> organisations, you know, *very challengin*g. They need all the necessary
>
> information, data and stuff. When we finally got it through in the end, it was
>
> like, wow! [laughs]. Then they have to appoint ADB to be the agent. I'm like, oh
>
> my gosh, it's *so complicated*. It's not a walk in the park sort of thing; it's like,
>
> okay, you need someone else to handle the application... *Those are the things*
>
> *that are beyond the realm of our, you know, the countries' capacity*.

---

[36] All GPE grants must be disbursed to countries by an accepted Grant Agent. Internationally, the main GPE grant agents are ADB, UNICEF, World Bank and Save the Children, and occasionally bilateral aid donors such as Australia. As a grant agent, these organisations receive both an allocation to cover their costs in performing the role of grant agent and an 'overhead' fee, currently 1.75% of the total grant amount. Being a grant agent therefore offers not only influence and  an expansion of activity but also income. It is notable that World Bank was approved to receive a higher than usual allocation for grant management for the Caribbean regional grant, due to 'the complexity of supporting four countries in one application in addition to the travel expenses to four island states' (Global Partnership for Education, 2016, p. 5). The reputational benefits of being a GPE grant agent are also indicated by this promotional video produced by ADB and GPE about *their successes* in the Pacific: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gtlC8udlBE0. It is also notable that while the stated process is that the country receiving a GPE grant chooses their grant agent, in the case of the PacREF grant, no eligible grant agents were willing to take on the role other than ADB (Int. #9; Int. #4).

> *[Interviewer]: And is that where, do you think, having the regional agencies*
>
> *take on some of that work is helpful?*

> *Oh yeah, definitely, it's huge!* Umm, and we also have a very strong partnership
>
> with the Implementing Agencies, because we are meeting with them on the
>
> same table.... And both Australia and New Zealand are supportive. They're part
>
> of the team. And even the countries look up to them and what does New
>
> Zealand and Australia think, you know? When we were doing the GPE, the
>
> countries sort of looked at them to advise because, like, GPE was unheard of
>
> and they come with their own conditions, and, umm... So, it's like New Zealand
>
> and Australia provides that buffer, and, you know, like advice; *they know*
>
> *what's happening at that level.* (Int. #8, emphasis added)

The remarks above highlight the way in which collaboration with development partners and

Implementing Agencies is assembled as valuable, especially when in relation to encountering

other assemblages, such as GPE.

Valuing a collaborative (i.e., interdependent) process was also suggested by the Pacific

countries' decision to apply for a regional GPE grant being presented as an *achievement* of

regionalism. Following intense discussions at the Niue PHES 2019 meeting, six countries

(Kiribati, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Tuvalu) agreed to

pool their funding into a single regional grant application, while two countries (Federated

States of Micronesia and Vanuatu) decided to submit individual country applications. However,

the six countries who agreed to pool their funding were also prepared for that funding to be

shared across all the PacREF member countries, *including* Vanuatu and FSM. This was seen, at least by some participants, as a very significant commitment to and affirmation of regionalism:

> [W]hen we look at how the different GPE eligible countries, you know, the six eligible countries who were able to agree that, Okay, we will share our portion of the GPE fund to fund the program for all the Pacific. This regional heart makes it unique. You will not find it anywhere else, where you agree to share your piece of cake, to try and improve the education level, or improve the challenges that another country has. So, that's why it's unique. (Int. #24)

> But the best part about PacREF, as compared to the other regional... the PEDF was the one before this, the Pacific Education Development Framework. A good thing about the PacREF is when GPE came in and said, "We will support it; we will fund the implementation plan". And I think when that happened, say, for me, looking at it from our perspective of a development partner, this is the first time where I am seeing a regional education policy that is put together by the Pacific Islanders, it has its financial support; and... I think what the PacREF has done: it's kind of brought everything and everybody together. (Int. #7).

However, there was simultaneously a sense that the decision to apply for regional funding was chosen simply because it was *easier* for countries, or that perhaps countries did not understand there was even another option:

I think that's going to be a challenge for us in the next GPE funding round, 'cos

[sic] I think a lot of countries didn't actually know much about GPE. They

actually did not know what their allocation was. GPE hadn't *told* them what

their allocation was before that. And so, this [the regional option] was kind of

put forward as a way they could actually use that money.

*[Interviewer]: Right, so they didn't even know there was another option?*

Yup. Yeah. And there was a lot of conversation as people got up to speed. And

that was quite a complicated conversation because GPE didn't fully understand

regionalism. And so, they were saying one thing, but implementing agencies

were saying something else. Donor partners were kind of saying something

else. And so, it took quite a long time to get to a place of, here are the six

countries who are going to pool their funding. (Int. #2; emphasis added)

As the remarks above indicate, there are clear divergences in how the processes of financing

the PacREF came about, and the extent to which the involvement of different bodies in those

processes mattered, or did not.

A more conventional analysis would likely attribute this to different actors with

different interests holding different perspectives on the situation. On the one hand, there is a

sense that the PacREF moved from being an expression of PHES members' desires to connect

and learn from each other to a fundable, implementable project. This is experienced as a *loss*;

a deterritorialising of valued encounters of 'informal' collaboration; to become reterritorialised

as sites for regional agency and development partner interests. On the other hand, the

securing of GPE funding is also experienced as a *gain*, a capacitating of these Pacific desires

into something tangible, into 'regional goods' that can be made to count, as well as thickening

relations of attention and accountability between organisations and countries. This second,

more positive view is apparent in the following statements:

> I have *a good feeling about PacREF*. I think even *the implementing agencies*
>
> *are paying more attention*... I reckon even implementing partners are picking
>
> up on gaps from the feedback from all the different countries, and they are
>
> doing something about it, which is *really goo*d, because it never happened
>
> before. But *with the PacREF, the countries are getting more attention*. Even the
>
> recent FEdMM, we also discussed stuff under the PacREF. So, you know, it's
>
> good that more concerted effort is put into it. (Int. #8; emphasis added)

> In terms of getting some kind of kickstart funding, to make PacREF live, and for
>
> the kind of what they are calling 'regional goods and services'... then an
>
> injection of funding was needed. And probably *the good thing about GPE* is it
>
> has made the IA *Fono* [Implementing Agency dialogue]. So, *it has made that*
>
> *coordination*, that *collaboration* between [the Implementing Agencies], it has
>
> forced it to happen, which I think has been *a good thing*. (Int. #13; emphasis
>
> added)

Rather than understanding these experiences as indicating some actors gained while others

lost, an analysis informed by wayfinding assemblage conceptualises these as the ongoing

flows of molecular and molar movements, territorialising and deterritorialising forces,

disruptive and conformist forms of assembled-desire that operate in reciprocal presupposition

within PREDP. Put differently, wayfinding assemblage asks us not to label behavior as that of a

winner or loser, but to focus on how and why such behaviours have become possible and

what they in turn make possible. As indicated earlier, I contend that focusing too much on

determining winners and losers, or victims and villains, in a situation leads us nowhere. By

offering an analysis that not only highlights but also embraces the divergencies and

ambiguities in the quality of actors and practices (i.e., no clear binary of good and bad), a

wayfinding assemblage approach orients us to the potential for immanent difference; that is,

the potential for PREDP to become a different kind of assemblage, even without necessarily

changing the 'bits and bobs' within it. As highlighted in Chapter 5, education development

abounds with projects and plans, each with their own acronym and associated structures of

governing, and they are always accompanied by a plethora of reports. Within PREDP, these

work as molar territorialising forces that emanate from the dominant strata underlying

education development, such as coloniality-modernity. Through the assemblage, these

produce significations of bureaucracy and technocracy, and subjectifications of bureaucrats

and technocrats who are capable of making sense of the world as a series of technical

problems (including issues of politics and culture), and who are thus capable of solving those

problems through tools of planning, projects and efficient management. PREDP works to

assemble desires in ways that encourage conformity to these ways of thinking-doing. This is

likely a comforting space for policy-makers, whether they be nominally *Pacific* or *non-Pacific*.

Simultaneously, PHES's statement of 'we know what we want' (Int. #13) and assembled-desire for a more *Pacific* policy framework operate as molecular forces with potential for *de*territorialising the bureaucratic and technocratic world of education development. Through bringing these molecularities into encounter with the molar forces of education development, and specifically GPE financing, the assemblage of PREDP works to make what is otherwise out of the reach of policy-makers (the embodied knowledges and sense of connection amongst Pacific leaders that we can capture in the concept of *teu le va*), into something manageable and quantifiable. As such, a meeting of PHES is no longer simply an opportunity for *teu le va* and learning from each other, but is rather an output in a logical framework or a step within a theory of change. While on one hand, this is a blocking of a line of flight of the molecular movements of Pacific educationalists creating spaces for their own interaction and dialogue, it is also, simultaneously, serving desires for predictability, attention and results, arguably equally valued by those same Pacific policy-makers. Thus, the molar and molecular forces are not opposing or belonging to one actor or another but, rather, exist simultaneously throughout *all bodies* brought into assemblage.

Therefore, what the GPE funding (and arguably development funding more generally) does is *both* thicken these molar lines *and* expand spaces for molecular movement. It strengthens the lines of connection and integration, with which comes attention and engagement and a stronger sense of collective responsibility, as indicated in many of the remarks shared earlier. This might be experienced as being driven by development partner agendas or the imposition of global frameworks on Pacific nations. At the same time, through creating such interdependencies and producing the Pacific as a collective, it creates

opportunity spaces for minoritarian Pacific agendas, as the apparent contradiction in the

exchange below indicates:

> *PacREF, that is donor driven*, you know. It was developed with the heads of
>
> education, and they sat down and they looked at their [priorities]. But if you
>
> look at it, it is a tool for donors and people out of the context... it is very top-
>
> down, donor driven, in my view. It doesn't mean that it won't do good, you
>
> know, and it doesn't mean that there will be no winners in that. I look for those
>
> opportunities... So, I know Pacific people are really good at taking
>
> opportunities. So, what I look for are the opportunities within that, for them to
>
> make it their own...
>
> *[Interviewer}: So, at the regional level right, we talk a lot about the Pacific context...*
>
> *Doesn't exist!* I keep telling them and saying, there's no such thing! Even when
>
> we go to 'the Pacific', they might do it for convenience, but they're Tongans,
>
> they're Samoan's, they're Fijians, they're Nauruans... So, it's *a false construct to*
>
> *just enable us to deal with them as a collective*, but as an identity, it does not
>
> exist... [But} regionalism, I would defend it with *vigour* because it allows a club
>
> and a clustering that otherwise people would not get. So, Nauru would be a
>
> forgotten beast if we didn't have regionalism. You know, the big countries
>
> would survive, but in a Pacific way, it is the collective that gets the biggest
>
> bang for the most people.

> *[Interviewer]: So, in that sense, from a Pacific country perspective they might*
>
> *see regionalism as convenient for them because it gets them more leverage*
>
> *and creates more opportunities?*

> Yes, and [it] acts as a voice, a collective voice. (Int. #4; emphasis added).

So, PREDP simultaneously works to make the Pacific more manageable, *and* it creates more opportunities for individual Pacific countries to get attention, to be heard, and get what they want. Thus, coming together as a united (*interdependent*) Pacific for shared (own) goals of education development is produced as an act of independence, sovereignty, and in the 'self-interest' of countries as it offers them more opportunities. In this sense, it can also serve decolonial aims, even while it also works to reinforce the need to be part of the global system. It serves assembled-desires for *both* togetherness *and* apart-ness, and desires for homogeneity and difference. It maintains the structure of development partners who give to, and do for, developing countries, and Pacific countries who are lacking and need assistance. Yet simultaneously, it makes those Pacific countries *more powerful together*, not only by meeting a threshold of value that *makes sense* for development partner investment or political attention, but through the many ways in which such encounters of togetherness change the capacities of Pacific bodies. The assemblage works to reconcile tensions between independence and dependence, through creating forms of *inter*dependence that offer *both* spaces for together *and* apart, expanding the capacities of development partners, Pacific island countries, the Pacific region, and the global in simultaneous, albeit different ways.

Wayfinding assemblage then enables a 'recognition of and responsiveness to

*opportunity spaces*' (Sanga, 2011, p. 9; emphasis original), emphasis original) for togetherness

and apartness, directing us to an immanent analysis of any given moment and what it makes

possible and for whom, in terms of in-/ter-/dependence and responsibility. The strategic

negotiation of such immanent opportunity spaces can be considered integral to the ongoing

processes of decolonisation and the production of different forms of sovereignty in the

contemporary globalised time-space of the region, as captured so well by the late Kanak pro-

independence leader Jean-Marie Tjibaou:

> Sovereignty gives us the right and the power to negotiate interdependencies.
>
> For a small country like ours, *independence is choosing our interdependencies*
>
> *skillfully*. (Tjibaou, 2005, p. 152; emphasis added)

It is my suggestion that a wayfinding assemblage analysis assists policy researchers to be

attuned to such immanent opportunity spaces, to be nurturing of the spaces in between (*teu*

*le va*) and, in this way, to also consider them as holding potential to contribute towards

ongoing processes of decolonisation in Pacific policy spaces. This takes us towards a line of

flight for considering different forms of sovereignty and development cooperation, each of

which are contingent upon particular sensibilities of recognition and responsiveness. This will

now be the focus of Chapter 7.

## 6.5   Chapter summary

What is made to matter in the PacREF has been the focus of this Chapter, which inter alia

brings attention to the desires that are made consistent through the assemblage of PREDP.

Through the Chapter, I drew out how particular forms of content (bodies, texts) became associated with the status of *being Pacific* (form of expression), and of being simultaneously independent, dependent and interdependent. In so doing, I argued that PREDP works to (re-)territorialise responsibility, making it *desirable* to be responsible for some things but not others, and making some bodies responsible for some things and not others. Responsibility cannot be thought about without also thinking about what we are being made responsible for and to what we are responding. For instance, we can only be responsible for what is made visible and sayable, for what is made sense-able and sensible, and this is always contingent on which assemblage we find ourselves connected to within any given moment. Simultaneously, PREDP works to reterritorialise forms of in-/ter-/dependence, making it desirable for particular bodies at particular moments to become dependent, independent, or interdependent in relation to other bodies. Just as responsibility cannot be thought about without considering what we are responsible for, it also cannot be thought about without considering where that responsibility lies: is it with a collective of bodies or just one, and where are the boundaries of those bodies drawn? This in turn raises the question of what capacity bodies have to respond. This theme of *responsiveness* will be further elaborated on in Chapter 7, where I focus more on the molar and molecular production of context and contextualization and how this both expands and limits capacities for responsiveness.

# 7   Capacities for responsiveness: making context matter

In this Chapter, I experiment with Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of molarities and

molecularities within assemblage theory and consider this in relation to how assemblages'

context and contextualisation are produced through PREDP. The Chapter will explore how

particular logics of how we experience 'context' are produced through PREDP, and how these

in turn produce to what (and how) we can respond. I explore what I consider to be the

molarities of context and context-responsiveness that operate through PREDP, which (more or

less) work to constitute context as disordered, disruptive or in some way lacking, and thus

justifying the need for 'outside' intervention and expertise. I also show what I consider to be

molecularities of context; that is, the ways in which bodies are affected through intimate

encounters with/in context that open opportunities for deterritorialising. I will argue that

within and through PREDP, policies of contextualisation and context-responsiveness become

integral tools for (re)producing (transcendent) molarities of what bodies can and cannot

respond to and be affected by. However, PREDP is also simultaneously saturated with

molecular (immanent) encounters of context that make possible different ways of thinking,

doing and relating.

As discussed in Chapter 1, when I began this research, my question was focused on

how those involved in PREDP conceptualise context and context-responsiveness. It was based

on a belief (born largely from experience) that Pacific education development *was not*

sufficiently responsive to context. However, this way of problematising context presupposes its

solution; the problem of context is that we need to contextualise more. This is the teleology of

policy at work and its entrapment within a representational image of thought; that is, the

problem is that there are things in the world that we do not know (recognise) and, therefore, are not responding to sufficiently. To solve that problem, we merely need to make them knowable and determine to what class of things they belong to then know how to respond. Thinking with assemblage, and specifically in terms of the molarities and molecularities of context, has helped me get outside this image of thought and think differently about the problem of context. This Chapter attempts to show how thinking with molarities and molecularities can enable this different thinking about context, including considering context not just as a problem of knowledge (i.e., how context is conceptualised) but, rather, embodied experience (i.e., how assemblages of context affect what bodies can and cannot do). But first, before entering conversation with the data, I will elaborate more on the concepts of molar and molecular, and outline how I will engage with them in this thinking and writing.

## 7.1   Molar and molecular movements

Before considering how PREDP produces context, I wish first in this Section to provide some further explanation of how I am using the concepts of molar and molecular movements. In doing so, I draw on my reading of Deleuze and Guattari's work but have also been directly inspired by Waitt and colleagues (2021) and Merriman's (2019) use of these concepts to consider assemblages of cycling on city roads and Palestinians' capacity for movement in the Gaza Strip, respectively. Despite the focus on movement that Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of molar/molecular imply, as far as I am aware, these concepts *have not* been engaged with substantively by other policy mobilities or education policy scholars. Therefore, this Chapter is something of an experimentation in bringing these concepts to bear on matters of policy to see what they can do.

As discussed in Section 3.4.5, the concepts of molar and molecular form part of Deleuze and Guattari's array of concepts related to the ceaseless operations of stabilisation and destabilisation, of stratification and segmentation through which our worlds are (re)produced. Just as forms of content and expression operate in 'reciprocal presupposition', so too do molarities and molecularities. Every molar segmentarity or movement operates in presupposition with a molecular segementarity or movement; thus, 'every politics is simultaneously a macropolitics and a micropolitics' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2020, p. 213). However, this should not be mistaken for any kind of hierarchy of size or preference. The molar and molecular are inseparable yet also distinct; as Deleuze and Guattari (2020, p. 217) argue, 'the issue is that the molar and molecular are distinguished not by size, scale, or dimension but by the nature of the system of reference envisioned'.

By system of reference, I take this to relate to the distinction between transcendence and immanence. As Waitt and colleagues (2021) have argued in relation to traffic management and cycling, the relationship between the molecular and the molar is a matter of relative thresholds of perceptibility. Both molecular and molar movements are perceptible, and yet the principles that govern the former are immanent, while for the latter they are transcendent. Waitt and colleagues (2021, p. 5) use the example of traffic lights to illustrate this:

> The notion of the molar is associated with the presence of traffic lights: the movement of traffic is visible, but the organisational rules being followed are not. Stopping at a red light is a response to a traffic rule that sits outside a given situation in a transcendental relation. Whereas the notion of molecular is

illustrated when the red light is removed, and traffic must self-organise – so

now the arranging principle is given in the movement itself.

Extending this to other situations, we might consider the story of the PHES meeting that

began Chapter 5. In this case, once in the meeting, we can imagine how explicit rules of

meeting protocol, communicated through meeting agendas and materialities such as name

plates and country flags positioned on the inner round of tables and chairs govern where

people sit and the order in which they speak. These rules are not immediately visible and are

not 'given' in the way bodies move into the space. Rather, they 'sit outside a given situation in

a transcendental relation (Waitt et al., 2021, p. 5). In contrast, as meeting delegates gather

outside in the more open space where morning tea is served, the interactions are governed by

more immediately perceptible, affective, bodily sensations and responses. How close people

stand to one another, how loud they speak, who stands with whom, and how they organise

themselves in lining up for their cup of tea or coffee is determined more by principles

immanent to the movements and material-bodily interactions of that moment. Of course,

there is still always an intermingling of molarities and molecularities; for example,

transcendent norms that produce a tendency for older and more senior figures to take a cup

of tea first, or molecularities of bodily movements – eyebrow raises, smiles, frowns, coughs

and sighs – during the meeting contribute to organising who speaks when, as well as the

times for silence and leaving the venue.

These concepts of molecular and molar movements helps to bring attention to the

diverse experiences and conceptualisations of context that both sustain and are (re)produced

by the assemblage of PREDP. Rather than putting these diverse experiences into a binary

opposition or situating them as a divergence to be resolved, we are drawn instead to see how

molarities and molecularities operate simultaneously in relations of 'reciprocal presupposition'

(Deleuze & Guattari, 2020, p. 213). As Deleuze and Guattari (2020, p. 215) state, it can be the

case that 'the stronger the molar organisation is, the more it induces a molecularisation of its

own elements, relations and elementary apparatuses'. Considering how molarities of

contextualisation and context-responsiveness operate alongside molecularities demonstrates

how the assemblage of PREDP works to hold these together, and what this holding together

can then make possible. It can also help to challenge my tendencies as a researcher to attend

more to the molarities, and to presume that what I experience as molar is the most dominant

force within the situation. I believe that this analysis then opens new problems and new

questions. If our stated desire is to improve how context is responded to within education

development, then the problem is not how to make context better known, but rather how to

accentuate the capacity of molecularities to create escapes, and for them 'to return to the

molar organisations to reshuffle their segments' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2020, p. 217).

## 7.2   A different problem of context

Having elaborated on the concepts of molar and molecular movements in the previous

Section, I will now turn to analysis of statements from research participants and policy

documents to show how context and contextualisation are made to matter, and the molar and

molecular capacities they acquire, through PREDP. Through this Section, I 'wayfind' two lines

of the diagram of PREDP. These are not necessarily the most important or significant lines, but

they have nonetheless been the most forceful for my thinking. First, in Section 7.3, I explore

the ways in which context is made to be that which is disruptive, unruly and lacking, thereby

serving to justify 'outside' intervention in the form of development and/or superior knowledge. This generates a kind of circular, and molar, logic that sustains PREDP: because the context is unruly, it needs the ordering capacity of development, but because development works through order and planning, it cannot work in context and needs insiders to contextualise it.

Second, in Sections 7.4 and 7.5, I will show how molecular movements experienced when 'in context' are made desirable for their capacity to open different ways of thinking, but only to the extent that they do not threaten the overall survival of the PREDP assemblage . This dynamic is perhaps best captured in the following statement from a research participant:

> I mean, things change, yeah? Not so much the context, but people in the
> context change, in ideas as well as them, being moved... [W]e know very well
> the way that projects are implemented... [and] if this is to happen really
> differently and change lives, then the implementing agencies need not to
> imitate what other projects have been doing. Coming in with, you know,
> there's a pre-designed intervention and then later on, realise that this is a mis-
> fit. Because I guess, these regional agencies will be staying in the region... The
> agencies need to really touch the context... go to the context, see if the
> context is responsive, yeah? See if the context is soft enough, you know, to
> absorb or for these ideas to sink in. If the context is hard or unfriendly, then
> that's another challenge. (Int. #1)

There is nothing particularly novel in this observation. The critique of global development for being overly wedded to plans is longstanding and has brought about countless alternatives (Andrews et al., 2012; Easterly, 2002, 2006; Levine, 2013; Van der Ploeg & Long, 1994). Similarly, the capacity of intimate encounters with people and place to shift one's perspective on the world is a well-worn argument, particularly in relation to the push for education systems to develop 'global citizens' and the internationalisation of education (Doerr, 2013; Lilley et al., 2015). However, using assemblage theory and attending to the molecular/molar movements, I believe, generates different ways of problematising these concepts. The problem of development as planning and context as unpredictable presupposes the solution of abandoning pre-planned, externally-led interventions (molarities) and replacing these with more adaptive, iterative, locally-led ways of working (molecularities). An assemblage analysis does not assume that replacing one molarity with another, or with something that is molecular, is the solution. Rather, we need to consider how to continually work with the molarities and molecularities and create moments of encounter that generate space for non-dialectical, not-totalisable forms of difference.

## 7.3   Context/ualisation as dis/ordering

In wayfinding how context and acts of contextualisation are made to matter in the PacREF, I will firstly consider statements that constitute context as *both* ordering *and* disordering, and as necessary yet inadequate. The following statements from research participants in regional agencies indicate the way in which context is situated as disruptive to the plans or technical 'best practice' of the PacREF, and thus presents an obstacle that has to be accommodated or avoided:

[I]t is all about planning. Before you visit the country, make sure you have everything, that kind of quality, internal quality assurance. [It] kind of really preps you up for the trip. It is the other things, *contextual things*, that might really *derail* some of the things that you have [planned] [laughs]. (Int. #16; emphasis added)

I think most of the agencies in the region would be staffed by competent people. What they might be lacking, though, is perhaps minor cultural insight, as to just tweaking their perception on how the projects can be done in the region... So, perhaps maybe a cultural officer of some sort or cultural attaché could be assigned to all these agencies, who would then advise them.... I think it would be nice to come up with a training tool of some sort, whereby all staff [at regional agencies] *can be given that training about how cultural context can be taken into account*, as well as a tool kit which documents the *different cultural contexts*, a manual of some sort... (Int. #18; emphasis added)

But every time during [country visits], I tried to focus on the content, *something that would put the context outside, something that is common*... Because of the work, *I really have to put aside all my fears, all my worries about the context, and focus on the work*, focus on achieving what I was there to do... So, those kind of contexts [i.e., the contexts experienced as difficult] might put you in the position that might not be helpful in your work. (Int. #16; emphasis added)

It is a challenge [the contextual diversity] but... there is always commonalities

that we can see and those are where we are able bridge or design the

approach that will be able to fit nicely. (Int. #24)

Highlighted in these statements is the way in which a distinction or separation is being clearly

made between the 'work' of being a regional policy expert and the 'local context'. The pre-

travel preparations and planning of the work operate in molar ways, relying on transcendent

beliefs that if we just have the right documents, know the right pieces of information, write

down our agendas and objectives, then our movement into and movements in 'the context'

are more likely to go as we have planned, with this planning of course occurring *outside of the*

*context*. These suggest a territory produced through PREDP as that of becoming-expert, of

well-prepared plans and solutions capable of warding off and taming the wildness and

unruliness of context (see Lea, 2020).

And yet, these movements are always plied through by the unplanned, unpredictable

molecularities of context-in-the-moment. This is made quite explicit in the PacREF 2018-2030

document, which states that Pacific country members:

... have the responsibility of ensuring that both *their system's needs are*

*understood* and are being addressed through the PacREF Programme

wherever feasible and that *country-level issues that disturb the smooth*

*implementation of the PacREF Programme* are addressed promptly and

efficiently. (PIFS & USP, 2018, p.17, emphasis added)

Thus, Pacific ministries of education are made to be responsible for ensuring their needs (i.e., their contexts) are comprehensible to, and within, the regional policy, and that the(ir) country-level context does not disrupt the regional policy plans (i.e., the PacREF). Evoking a sense of movement (molarity/molecularity) here is relevant, as the outside global/regional policy knowledge is considered both fixed (in the sense of being universally true) and mobile (in the sense of being universally applicable), and thus capable of moving into local contexts. At the same time, local knowledge is deemed fixed (as in static) and immobile (as in not universal). Progressing the PacREF policy work therefore requires finding a point of commonality, a point of 'common sense' or shared understanding between the PacREF and country contexts that can allow things to move forward.

This highlights that PREDP produces a territory of a particular type of knowledge that is distinct from, and importantly *additional* or of *added value* to, local knowledge. This is demonstrated in the following interaction with a research participant (Development Partner), wherein the education development relationship is situated as combining two sets of knowledge, in which local knowledge is a necessary but not sufficient condition to achieve 'value down to kids':

> **Interviewer:** But is coming in with an idea and adapting it, is that being context-responsive, or is that just tweaking something to make it fit?

> **Development Partner:** I think there are two sides to it. I think, I think if we talk about the international development cooperation, I think it brings a lot of value. I do think it is important *to bring expertise from outside*, to share

knowledge, to try *to bridge knowledge gaps* between borders and regions,

and *I think that brings value down to kids* and young people, if we talk about

education. I truly think that. And *in doing so, you need to listen to local*

*knowledge*. So, it's not either/or. I think there is also a risk that international

development cooperation becomes a kind of client-oriented player *trying to*

*satisfy government needs without asking difficult questions*. So, I think

international development cooperation has a key role to be able to ask tough

questions... But it doesn't work if you come without *an honest, an honest wish*

*to support*. And that we come across as a friend. And we wanna work together,

*we wanna listen to your knowledge, we value your knowledge, we don't have*

*all the answers*. But we do have knowledge and tools and ability and maybe

resources to support. (Int. #20; emphasis added)

This exchange highlights the production of a territory that rests on the belief that it is possible

for two 'knowers' to share their sets of knowledge and to make them recognisable to one

another. However, this also relies on an assumption that there is *something lacking* in the

'local' knowledge, something that needs to be supplemented by what comes from elsewhere

(in this case, the territory of PREDP), and a belief that development can *only progress* through

the addition of such knowledge. However, as the next Section will show, these are not just

matters of knowledge, a politics of whose knowledge counts, or a contest of different

'worldviews'. These are matters instead of how we experience our worlds and the processes

through which we make ourselves feel 'at home' in a world of constant difference(s).

## 7.4   Becoming in context

Continuing with the theme of how context is made to matter as a source of disorder, but also

necessary for bring about order, this Section will explore the ways in which *presence* in context

is made to *both* matter *and* not matter. The following exchange with a research participant

from a Development Partner organisation indicates the way in which exposure to 'local

context' is situated as disrupting the ordered worlds of bureaucratic planning documents and

reporting requirements and is thus demanding of shifts in these molarities. And yet, it relies on

an assumption that we can know 'the context' simply by virtue of moving into a space

momentarily, which will then allow you to respond in a way that will achieve the pre-

determined objectives:

> [O]ne of the things that I always try to do... is when you're making a field visit
>
> to make sure that we got into schools. Because often the government officials
>
> or your other partners are saying, "Oh, we have too little time, we have to talk
>
> about the logframe, we have to talk about M&E [Monitoring and Evaluation],
>
> we have to talk about budgets, you know?" ... And you usually spend the first
>
> couple of days having those kind of conversations, and then often *it's sort of*
>
> *like, Day 3 is when you go to the schools, and then everyone's mind changes....*
>
> *And then you're able to get into the real conversations* around, "Okay, so what
>
> are the challenges for teachers? What's happening with the community? What
>
> are kind of barriers are the kids facing?" *And then that's the one time you can*
>
> *get people to move beyond, you know, M&E, program logic, budgets*... So, not
>
> having that [the ability to travel to Pacific countries during the COVID-19

pandemic] has been really, really hard. Because... *[p]eople aren't experiencing getting themselves out of their rarefied working spaces* and going, "Oh yeah, yeah, basically every school in the Pacific doesn't have power, doesn't have connectivity", plus all the other aspects... (Int. #10; emphasis added)

Presence *matters* because it alters the biorythymic, material and discursive associations through which bodies become entangled and incorporeally transformed (Lea, 2020). Through the encounters that happen in occupying shared space-time together, capacities of bodies are affected, and assemblages can become re/de/territorialised. As the statement above suggests, the 'rarefied' offices of regional agencies and Development Partners engenders different forms of cohabitation of bodies, affective flows and sensations than the heat, birdsong and smell of cooking fires in the verdant surrounds of a village in Makira, Solomon Islands, or the bustling, colourful sonority of downtown Suva, Fiji. *Place matters*, and perhaps *presence* in place matters even more, as the following statements indicate:

So, in many cases, I have to see, [to] actually observe the situation in schools. That is a kind of eye-opening opportunity. So, we read documents and talk, but when I see something then that can suddenly connect all information together, and, "Oh, this is the reality!" Or in many cases, this is not reality but [laughs] just first impression. (Int. #8; emphasis added)

So if PacREF can be more, have that patience to actually encourage or emphasise to the implementing agencies that we have to *touch the ground*. *We have to be there. We have to immerse, yeah*. (Int. #1; emphasis added)

So, first time last year I took the teachers out on fishing trips… I thought it's a

good idea to take them out to the sea, *so they can see the context*… They need

to see, smell, feel the environment in all its glory. That was like transformation

for the teachers! [laughs]… [*Y]ou need to taste, you need to smell. Because it*

*makes the context real, it's not just reading it on paper.* It makes the

experience real, like, "Oh wow!", you know?… And it's things like that, small

experiences like that, that our teachers have never done before, like, *go out of*

*their comfort zone*, experience it. (Int. #8; emphasis added)

So, presence in place matters. However, what *presence* entails is not always a straightforward

matter. Does a virtual presence count such as joining a meeting via an online platform such as

Zoom? Is presence in place at one time sufficient for understanding and being affected by

context at all times? Furthermore, while presence *in place* matters it is not always sufficient or

equivalent to being present in or affected by the 'context' of that place. When thinking with

assemblage theory, how place matters is determined by the pyscho-social territory in which

that place is produced, and thus geographic or physical presence in itself is not equivalent to

becoming territorialised, and nor will it necessarily bring about a deterritorialisation. The

statements above alludes to this with reference to the understanding that ones' visit to a

school produces just an 'impression', and that the intent in taking teachers out to sea is for

them to 'go out of their comfort zone'. These questions as to the quality or nature of presence

have implications for wayfinding assemblage and will be returned to in Chapter 8.

The following statement further illustrates the way in which presence in place does not

necessarily equate to presence in, or the capacity to be affected by, 'context':

> I've been really concerned, because it felt like our people at Post[37] were so
>
> caught up with the busy work of servicing [Headquarters] that [they are
>
> saying,] 'I actually don't have time to deal with my Ministry'. Which is just
>
> madness, because that is the whole point of being in country, is working to the
>
> country, not servicing [Headquarters]. (Int. #10)

Thinking with assemblage, and with molarities and molecularities, draws our attention to the

way in which immanent interactions of bodies, physical space, intensities, beliefs, words

produce what might otherwise be described as a macro and micro-politics, not because of any

'inherent' properties of these bodies but rather by the relations wrought and sustained

through assemblage. In this way, 'people at Post' are continually negotiating and having to

orient their worlds towards molarities of Headquarters' orders and directives, while

simultaneously encountering and negotiating the molecularities of *being at Post*.

What PREDP-as-assemblage does is to help smooth over, or make consistent, these

stabilising and destabilising pulls. PREDP makes the 'implementation gap' matter: the putative

distance between policy and practice, plan and reality, design and implementation, outside

solutions and inside problems. PREDP makes this gap a problem, and it also makes staying

within 'rarefied' offices and reducing 'context' to project plans and reporting templates matter

---

[37] 'Post' is a term often used within government foreign affairs/service agencies for the High Commission, Embassy or Consulate office based within another country, in contrast with the headquarter office. Within the UN, the term 'Permanent Mission' is used to stand-in for Post. Alternatively, within other multilateral or international organisations, 'Country Office' is commonly used to replace headquarters.

*as a problem*. However, in so doing, PREDP generates solutions (i.e., getting outside the office) from inside the parameters of the problem it has made to matter and, thus, these solutions remain inside a dogmatic image of thought. The solution is contextualisation, understood as making the plans 'fit' the 'real context' better; that is, to make plans and frameworks such as the PacREF more *representative* of context and capable of *capturing* 'context' more fully within these policy-text-worlds. *Capture* here is both an act of comprehension and apprehension, to understand context and hold context, and thus bring more order to it, as indicated in the following statement:

> I think that's something that we do need to get better at because, you know, if
>
> you are designing for a context and you haven't got that context right, then
>
> you haven't got your design right. (Int. #2)

Thus, the molecularities of context are not denied. They are actively engaged in, but *only* to the extent that can bring about adaptations (contextualisations) of molar ways of working; the intervention plans and processes. This is exemplified in the following exchange:

> We design a project, and these questions and these relationships and these
>
> discussions need to take place clearly in the design phase. But then I also feel
>
> that there is a risk that we can also become *too rigid* when we have designed
>
> something.... We still need to understand that *the reality is more important*
>
> *than our map*, and we need to continue to have these discussions. We need to
>
> continue to maybe adjust, adapt, do tweaks and changes, to follow the reality.
>
> Which sometimes our systems are not very good at [doing].

**Interviewer:** How does that affect the ability to be responsive to context?

Yeah, I do think that we need it because that's an instrument for our push. And

we do need the push. Otherwise, we don't, ummm, otherwise there is a risk

that we're not result oriented enough. I truly think that's a value we can bring.

But *we do need to accept the fact that that is just the map. That is not reality.*

*That is our target, that is our direction, that is our objectives. It's not reality.*

Reality comes here and that might mean that we need to question that map,

and maybe even rewrite the map, and I think we are. We should have more

attention to that. (Int. #20; emphasis added)

The molar maps of design documents and objectives prescribe ways of doing and moving and

provide the push for 'going beyond' the immanent, molecular experience of context to also

include more transcendent, molar assumptions (Roffe, 2016). These molar maps are produced

as essential yet insufficient because they are not 'reality'.

And yet, thinking with assemblage, they are nonetheless *real*; the world PREDP

produces through sustaining beliefs in the importance of policy documents and plans is real

and it brings about real, albeit incorporeal, transformations of bodies. For example, the PacREF

policy produces Pacific countries as lacking, which affects the capacities of Pacific bodies to act

in *real* ways. This is not a politics of knowledge, an epistemological issue of different

perspectives or an argument of words, but it is instead a thoroughly *ontological* matter. For

example, the molarities generated through PREDP capacitates regional experts to command

attention and for their words to be knowing, in ways that limits the capacities of 'local' bodies

to speak and question. This does not absolutely erase the molecularities of the encounter or the capacity of those bodies to question. Rather, it is a matter of which lines are dominant in the assemblage, the diagramming of which is the task of wayfinding assemblage. This is not simply to identify them or follow the dominant lines but is 'to study...the dangers of each line' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2020, p. 227) and consider what they each can do. It is tempting to consider molecularities as resistance or subversion of the molar, with the desire to supplant or become molar. However, this would be to create a false problem, as Deleuze and Guattari (2020, p. 106) argue when discussing the relationship between majoritarian and minoritarian, which can be applied also to the molar and molecular,

> [t]he problem is never to acquire the majority, even in order to install a new constant. There is not becoming-majoritarian; majority is never becoming. All becoming is minoritarian.

Considering the molarities and molecularities as in mutual presupposition, rather than in opposition or competition, helps us appreciate that any change in one will lead to a proportionate shift in the other, although something does always escape). If we want an absolute change (i.e., a deterritorialisation that bring about the limit point of the assemblage), we also need change at the level of desire and strata.

The following exchange readily illustrates these dynamics. This research participant became a staff member of a Pacific regional organisation, after having worked in and around global education development for some time:

I think I had always overestimated the sort of global push or the global

influence. And I think that's because that was the space I was in, you know;

that this international development space - you know, we always talk about it;

it is constant, you know, around donors and things.... I had overestimated the

influence of these global things... it was very much localised, like, really

localised. Even national I think is a stretch, in a lot of places; it's even more,

like, at island or village level... Like Tuvalu, you know, I think of Tuvalu as

Tuvalu. But when I spend more time in Tuvalu, it's like, "No, there's Funafati

and there's Nuie" - you know. Each island has its own identity. So it would be

like, "Where are you from?" No-one would say "Tuvalu". No-one is from

Tuvalu; that's the thing. You don't realise until you spend time in a context... I

always thought it was coming the other way down; international influences

regional influences this sort of local. And now I think I was just wrong. I think

it's very much local. Local is sort of the centre; and then people can pull in the

different things which they need. (Int. #18; emphasis added)

This example indicates the way in which the molecularities of the moment create opportunities

for encounters that can force the research participant to think, to act not as the expert but

rather as a learner and enable, in turn, the teachers to be knowers. While I am cautious about

reading too much into this research participant's statements, we might consider the possibility

that their capacity to reposition themselves and the teachers was enabled not just through

that immediate encounter, but because their subjectivity was already a product of an

assemblage in which it is possible for teachers' to know more and for documents to be wrong.

In other words, it was the stratifications and assemblage of desire that produced this situation, not simply the combination of actors, places and texts. This again underscores the methodological import of wayfinding assemblage, that is, the limitations of focusing on the combination of actors, places and texts or even discourses - the 'bits and bobs' of policy – and analytic value of focusing instead on the abstract, productive forces of assemblage.

We might also consider the ways in which PREDP sustains the distance (both physical and psycho-social) between the bureaucratic 'carpet worlds' (Lea, 2020, p. 27) of regional agencies and development partners, and the 'Pacific local contexts' outside of and inconsistent with bureaucratic order. The assemblage of PREDP situates this gap as problematic and solvable by contextualisation, including by having staff who 'know' the context. At the same time, the very architecture of regionalism functions to maintain this gap, which maintain the need for a regionalism of *inter*dependence. Thus, we arrive at a circular problem-solution logic: because Pacific island ministries lack capacity, they need regional support, but because this regional support is distant from national contexts (and struggles to get the right staff who 'know' the Pacific well enough), regional support equally needs national capacity to contextualise any such regional support. It is therefore something approaching symbiosis, an interdependence in which each is positioned as distinct from the other and yet requires the presence of the other to thrive. We can see these dynamics in the following statements:

> It doesn't make sense as a donor to support a national university in every
> country. You know, the population size doesn't - from a business sense, it is
> not effective. Similar with EQAP, there is value in supporting a *regional actor* to

do a technical role to support the region, rather than support that in each

country; there are efficiencies and effectiveness in it. (Int. #23; emphasis added)

So, it means that the countries can access this phenomenal tool [i.e., global

quality assessment tool], which is *only available at a regional level because we*

*can't do it at each country's level*. It will be impossible. So, by pooling together

the resources into the region and cooperating in that space, each country has

accessed this *global quality assessment tool*. And then each country is able to

use that for what they may (Int. #18; emphasis added)

[F]or staff that aren't from the Pacific, if they are not there, it's *really hard* to try

and explain how to do something. (Int. #13; emphasis added)

Again, these statements illustrate that context is made to matter as both problem and

solution, just as regionalism is equally also solution and problem. The molecular becomings

that context can bring about are useful insofar as they do not threaten the overall assemblage.

Similarly, the molarities of context work to justify the continuation of regionalism, but only to

the extent that some space is made for acknowledging context as molecular. This is the

buoyancy of assemblage: its ability to remain afloat not despite of, but because of, the force of

moving currents. I would again argue that this points to the need to get beyond the image of

thought – that is, to think context and regionalism *differently* – if we want a different

assemblage to come to the surface. As discussed previously, it also directs us away from a

reductionist concern for allocating responsibility with individual actors (identifying the victims

and villains, the power-ful and power-less), to instead consider what different capacities of bodies might be made possible through the assemblage.

## 7.5 Becoming in dialogue

The interplay of molarities and molecularities, and the production of seemingly circular logics, are also visible in the ways in which regional meetings are capacitated to ensure everyone has a voice, but *not too much* voice as to threaten the desires for regional consensus, achieving results or producing recognisable knowledge. Dialogue and openness is thus valued but only up to a limit and not beyond. In the following statements, research participants express recognised understandings of the type of communication appropriate for achieving consensus or for valuing Pacific 'oral cultures', and they indicate how these can work in molar ways to manage the molecularities of regional meetings. The first statement recognises the importance of oral dialogue in Pacific forms, such as *talanoa;* and yet, as shown in Chapter 6, so much of the attention on the PacREF is on what is written:

> [M]ost Pacific countries are oral cultures. They are, you know – *talanoa* is such
>
> a critical part of that and so you just lose that when it's written down. And so, I
>
> think, part of what we are learning and part of what we're trying to do better is
>
> using those Pacific methodologies and ways of working to help understand
>
> context. T*here is only so much you can get* [from the] *written down*. And the
>
> other thing, just recognising that [for] most people, English isn't their first
>
> language, and so whenever you're reading, you know, it's better than I could
>
> do in a second language but still there are limitations to that, and we don't

give them an option of writing in a different language. (Int. #2; emphasis

added)

Again, the circularity returns: to value context in development means to prioritise valuing oral

culture and the spoke, but to demonstrate global expertise in development is to prioritise

what is written, even at the expense of this being inaccessible. To be molar, or molecular: that

is the question.

Such tensions are not only limited to issues of the written and the spoken. The

following exchange suggests an equally problematic binary: that not speaking out (i.e.,

maintaining silence) is an issue of being afraid or shy, but that being asked directly to speak is

necessarily going to produce a meaningful answer. This precludes the possibility of other ways

of reaching consensus and capacitating everyone to communicate what they think:

We have to have a way to engage all of the participants. *It's not just who's

brave enough* to raise his or her hand… We did one for the Steering

Committee where we said, "Okay, we're going to do, we recommend we do

this, this and this". And then we went, "Fiji, are you in favour of that? Samoa,

are you?" So, *everybody is forced to make a comment*, which seems kinda

nasty, *but it also means that people have the opportunity to speak without

having to put their hand up or stick their neck out, if you will*. You know,

because they are being asked to speak. So, you ask me, now I am going to

speak. (Int. #17; emphasis added)

Similarly, the following statements demonstrate the advanced preparation that goes into

circumscribing what happens at meetings, to ensure dialogue occurs but only a *particular* kind

of dialogue:

> Since 2015, we have *really worked hard* to engage the CEOs of each Ministry of
>
> Education. So, we held this *extraordinary meeting* about two weeks ago, with
>
> the ministries... We spent *a lot of time preparing*... (Int. #11; emphasis added)

> We let other partners deal with sensitive issues... I might have talked to some
>
> people *ahead of the meeting* around the issues... I prefer our role to be
>
> engaging with them *ahead* on how they are gonna run it. (Int. #23)

> The regional organisations show the menu, this is menu so you can choose. So
>
> then countries choose: "Yes, we'll take that". Then, even though this [PacREF] is
>
> the countries who make regional goods, not regional organisations... But it was
>
> more like these countries *were instructed* by these regional organisations for
>
> their choices. (Int. #9)

The statements above highlight that the contextual importance of giving space for Pacific

island ministries to engage in dialogue and to identify and prioritise their own 'needs' is made

sensible in PREDP. However, there is simultaneously an explicit justification of preparation

work to ensure dialogue and priority setting is carried out in a way that maintains the integrity

of PREDP, that is, to maintain the integrity of the territory of PREDP and ward off absolute

deterritorialisation. Dialogue opens the space for lines of flight to emerge, which is recognised

as important but only as so far as these lines lead to a reterritorialisation and a survival of the

assemblage, not an absolute deterritorialisation of PREDP, which carries the risk of plunging us

into chaos. Maintaining the territory then, involves minimising the opportunity available for

'talking about nothing' (as Pacific dialogic approaches of *tok stori* or *talanoa* are often

labelled) and controlling the material-discursive interactions in ways that reduce the

opportunity for molecular movements (including those that can occur through silence). A

common territory of knowingness and assumption of values is held in place through these

material-discursive governance structures. Moreover, the capacity for gatherings of regional

actors to linger in uncertainty or be challenged on what is recognised as known is constrained

through the careful structuring of bodies within time-space. This is not just in terms of

structuring the physical space – who can speak, and when, and the timing of the agenda – but

also the enforcing of language and the communicative conventions used, in which an imposed

*lingua franca* of English denies the gathering any capacity to question what is meant, as it is

recognised that the meaning of English words are recognised by all.

My intent with sharing these exchanges is not to suggest that what is happening in

these moments are nefarious and intentional processes of manipulation of particular (less

powerful) actors by particular (more powerful) actors. Rather, the point I am trying to

emphasise is how the establishment and maintenance of consistency of the abstract

assemblage of PREDP involves the delicate balancing of molarities and molecularities;

enabling spaces for dialogue and inter-personal encounter while also circumscribing them in

such a way as to ward off absolute deterritorialisation. Much like the practice of treading

water, it requires enough movement to stay afloat but not too much as to propel oneself

elsewhere or exhaust one's energy. To remain in one's familiar and safe territory requires

constant effort.

However, at the same time, molecular movements within dialogue and relationship

structures of the PacREF are opening lines of flight to different forms of collaboration, of

responding to context, and of doing education development. One example of this that I will

explore here is the establishment of the Implementing Agency (IA) *Fono*, underpinned by the

articulation of *Wansolwara* (Solomon Islands pijin, literally translated as 'one salt water') as a

'platform of collaboration' for the governance of PacREF (Johansson-Fua, 2022). As Johansson-

Fua (2022, p. 473) has explained, *Wansolwara* 'as a metaphor, refers to oneness—one people,

one ocean, and one talk—a kind of spirit and a way of relating to a common clan'. As a

platform of collaboration for the PacREF, it is a dialogic, relational space, 'fostering a kinship

and *kainga* [te reo Maori term for village or community settlement] system of relating to one

another based on the core value of reciprocity' (Johansson-Fua, 2022, p. 477). In relation to the

regional collaboration structures in place for regional education development, Johansson-Fua

(2022, p. 475) situates *Wansolwara* as 'an act of reclaiming ownership of the structures and

processes for collaboration, whereby the act of reclaiming enables recreating newer structures

and processes for collaboration that reflect a dynamic regional identity' (Johansson-Fua, 2022,

p. 475). In other words, it is an attempt to shift the ways in which regional education

development collaboration is done, to become something more consistent with both Pacific

ways of doing and relating and the dynamic (i.e., ever-changing) and diverse nature of the

region, in which it is relationships and reciprocity that constitute a Pacific identity.

Thus, *Wansolwara* represents a shift from a concern for making what is Pacific

recognisable and accepted to a concern for finding ways of working together in the region

that serve people, as the following statements highlight:

> It reminds me, why did we fight so hard to have our way of knowing and our
>
> way of learning be accepted by others? And then *we got lost along the way by*
>
> *chasing that acceptance by those from outside*, you know? We got lost in
>
> trying to justify ourselves and our way of knowing to others. (Int. # 30;
>
> emphasis added)

> So it's a good structure. Not very formal, our discussion is not very formal, in a
>
> very informal Pacific session, Talanoa session we call it in Fiji. We bring
>
> everything to the table and we discuss it before we move… [W]e have seen the
>
> level of trust it [ the IA *Fono*] has built, and the IA's are talking more openly
>
> about issues, and then we are also able to resolve it together in the IA *Fono*.
>
> (Int. #24)

As part of the *Wansolwara* governance framework, the IA *Fono* was established as a space for

ongoing dialogue, collective problem-solving and learning of IA agencies, underpinned by

values of respect, humility and reciprocity (Johansson-Fua, 2022, p. 477). The spirit of *fono* is

that of ongoing encounter; as Johansson-Fua (2022, p. 478) explains, '[n]o one really knows or

can predetermine the outcome of a *fono*, as the outcome is determined during the *fono* by

the people present, the flow of the *Talanoa*, the negotiations, the timing of the *fono*, and the

space where the *fono* is being held'. As such, we can consider the IA *Fono* an attempt to

create a space enabling of more molecular and immanent interactions, while molarities of who

can and cannot attend (i.e., it is restricted to particular representatives of the IA *Fono*) remain

in place. It is tempting then to consider *Wansolwara* and the IA *Fono* as opposing or resistant

alternatives to the more long-established, bureaucratic and formal ways of 'doing' regional

collaboration: to consider the structures not as different, *per se*, but as variations of the same.

However, thinking with molarities and molecularities enables us to instead consider

*Wansolwara* and the IA *Fono* in their own terms, as productive, positive molecular movements

that function to create space for decisions and agreements to emerge more immanently.

Moving beyond a binary framework of opposition and focusing on what is being resisted

helps to orient us towards *wayfinding* lines of flight and becomings, towards something not

yet known.

Such becomings are evident in the following statements, which illustrate how the IA

*Fono*, and related opportunities enabled through the adoption of *Wansolwara* for the PacREF,

create space for more immanent interactions. These can, in the words of the research

participant below, produce capacities for holding bodies together and moving them forward:

> [O]ur discussion is not very formal, in a very informal Pacific session: [a]
>
> *Talanoa* session, we call it in Fiji. We bring everything to the table, and we
>
> discuss it before we move... So, it has worked, we have seen the level of trust it
>
> has built, and the IA's [Implementing Agencies] are talking more openly about
>
> issues, and then we are also able to resolve it together in the IA *Fono*... Yeah,

it's the important basis that will anchor us, rather than being moved around.

Once we hit troubled waters, that's where you fall back to, to the discussion

table... So, it holds everybody together, those are the important links that tie

everybody together. *And that is regionalism* [laughs]. (Int. #24; emphasis

added)

*Wansolwara* is therefore an attempt to create space for uncertainty and hesitation. This is

being enacted most clearly in the IA *Fono*, through which the capacities of bodies are arguably

being shifted from having to be individual holders of expertise, to being a more collective

body capable of working things out together.

I would argue that this is made possible because the strata that are being responded

to, and the desires being assembled, are different from those that have dominated PREDP. In

other words, *Wansolwara* and the *IA Fono* could be considered the throughput of a different

assemblage from PREDP, or at least they have the potential to be so. The earlier statements

from research participants indicated attempts at making existing regional meetings and

gatherings 'more Pacific' through the incorporation of Pacific language or practices, but

without also challenging assumptions about the purpose of the meetings – *fono* is *like*

*'*meeting' and talanoa is *like* 'open discussion'; while principles such as 'deliberative

democracy', 'consensus', and 'achieving technically feasible decisions on policy

implementation' are still maintained and unquestioned. In contrast, at least the genesis of the

IA *Fono* appears to have been in response to different assembled-desires: desires for working

things out together; for growing and working through long-term relationships capable of

creating new worlds, rather than transactional relationships geared towards pre-determined

instrumental outcomes. In this sense, we might consider *Wansolwara* as an attempt to push

PREDP-as-assemblage to its limits, to reorient what strata are dominant and how desire is

assembled, in order to move beyond existing molar ways of working *without* pre-determining

what might be produced in the process and in their place.

The extent to which *Wansolwara* and the IA *Fono* can achieve this deterritorialisation is

an open question. The following statements from research participants involved with the IA

*Fono* demonstrate the challenges in bringing about change but equally, in doing so,

underscore the possibility for change:

> The *Fono* was established to have those critical conversations. And that's
>
> challenging because there are officials who behave as officials and don't ask
>
> the hard questions. So, people who ask the hard questions are probably about
>
> three [laughs], who ask those questions to try to get reflection. Because we
>
> have to think deeply about what it is that we are doing, you know? We have to
>
> be able to critique our own processes and be open to learning from one
>
> another. Unfortunately, the dynamics is not quite there yet... We [are still] too
>
> fixed on "next agenda update, next agenda update", which wasn't really the
>
> reason why we created the *Fono*. (Int. #30 Regional agency)

> So, the conversations are had [in the IA *Fono*]. I think they are good
>
> conversations. *I'm not sure they are going to change the way anybody works,*
>
> because our agencies have ways of working that seem to be relatively

inflexible… I think the intent to *try* and do it is there [to work differently]. But

people just get pulled back into, you know, it's like anything. You just get

pulled back into the system. It is *really* hard… No matter who you are, there's

always another layer somewhere. (Int #13 Regional agency)

Every territorialisation is accompanied by a deterritorialisation. And a reterritorialisation. And.

And. And. It is always assemblages all the way down.

## 7.6   Chapter summary

In this Chapter, I have experimented with the concepts of molarities and molecularities to

explore how context, presence in context and acts of contextualisation are made to matter

through the assemblage of PREDP, as well as to think differently about the problem of context

in education development policy. I demonstrated what appear to be circular logics of context

as both problem and solution, as well as how PREDP functions to hold these in tension in a

way that sustains the assemblage. I considered the ways in which research participants spoke

of the experience of being 'in context' and how they negotiate this experience, negotiating

their beliefs about how to behave in, and respond to, context (molarities) with the visceral,

sensorial experience of the experience (molecularities). Rather than conceiving these as

oppositional pulls that need to be resolved, my offered wayfinding assemblage orients us

instead to appreciate the relationality and necessity of *both* molar *and* molecular. Again, the

question is not *what are* the molarities and molecularities of context, but rather: *what can they*

*do?* Furthermore, the problem of context is not how to replace the molar with the molecular,

or to make the molar more molecular. It is to remain open to where molecularities might take us, and to be alert to their capacity to 'reshuffle' our sense of what we think we know and can do.

# 8   Motutapu: the return

> In our aid giving, are we willing to be truly changed by our encounters? Or are
>
> we merely recruiting more people to our ways of seeing the world (so we can
>
> feel secure in a larger population of people like us)?... For us, *our aid and life*
>
> *need to be open to that which is outside.* Our relationships within Oceania
>
> must draw us to unfamiliar, uncomfortable places; the hinterlands and alien
>
> territories of our human existence and experiences. *Such places are the*
>
> *opportunities wherein life is lived on the threshold; life is experienced in*
>
> *tension where we are known but yet unknown.* (Sanga, 2016, p. 13; emphasis
>
> added).

I began this thesis by sharing Johansson-Fua's theorisation of *motutapu*, 'a place of

rejuvenation, a sanctuary, a place to launch new journeys' (Johansson-Fua, 2016, p. 37). I

claimed this research as *motutapu*, a place in which I sought sanctuary from the frustrations of

doing education development policy and instead went looking for rejuvenation through

finding ways to think differently. *Motutapu* has oriented me through this research, giving me a

place to hold on while I also sought to let go. A place where I felt known and in which

relational entwinements and the desire to *teu le va* (to nurture the relational space that

connects us all) kept me grounded. And yet, perhaps *because of this*, it has been a place of

safety for me to experiment with the unknown. Here, in offering some kind of conclusion to

this thesis, I return to *motutapu* and suggest that this research experience, and arguably all

experience, has become through a ceaseless repetition of *both* holding on *and* letting go, of negotiating *both* molarities *and* molecularities, of experiencing *both* territorialisations *and* deterritorialisations, *and, and, and*.

Researching, learning, becoming always involves both/and, the swelling of molecularities within molarities, and of instability within (apparent) stability. The trick is discerning the right balance to remain buoyant: afloat but not adrift and tethered but not sinking beneath the waves. To return, again, to the experience of the ocean that has run through this thesis, immersing myself in the currents of this research has sent my thoughts adrift, at the same time as they are constantly being pulling back to shore. When faced with the ceaseless return of the waves, our inclination is to try and find stability. To stay in the shallows, grip our toes into the sand, and try to stay upright. And yet, in the same moment that we begin to feel the sand being sucked out from under our feet, the next wave comes crashing in to push us backwards. Despite our best efforts, standing still and holding firm leads only to instability. Safety comes only in being flexible: to respond to the current, rather than attempting to oppose its force entirely. If there is a conclusion to be made of/from this thesis, it is that the capacity to let go enough to float, but *not too much* as to allow ourselves to be sucked into the depths beyond, that keeps us buoyant. This is the trick of wayfinding assemblage; of undertaking immanent critique while upholding relational ethics in the researching and doing of (education development) policy. In other words, it is finding the opportunities and spaces for enabling new becomings, and opening oneself up to encounters that force thought, that can expand (and not destroy) our collective capacities.

In the remainder of this final Chapter, I return to my original research questions and summarise how the thesis has responded to these questions. In doing so, I outline what I believe to be the theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions of this thesis. I then identify areas for future research that come from this thesis.

## 8.1 Returning to the research questions

[I]f you define bodies and thoughts as capacities for affecting and being

affected, many things change. (Deleuze, 1988b, p. 124)

My principal research question for this thesis is: what makes Pacific regional education development policy (PREDP) possible? To explore this question, I posed multiple sub-questions: *i)* why and how has the Pacific Regional Education Framework (PaCREF) 2018-2030 come to be? *ii)* What is made to matter and made to be desirable (or not) in the PacREF? and, *iii)* Can assemblage theory, in conversation with policy mobilities and Pacific research, enable thinking differently about education development policy? In this Section, I will summarise my responses to the principal research question and the first two sub-questions. I suggest that my responses to these questions offer both theoretical and empirical contributions to the literature. In the next Section (8.2), I then respond to the third sub-question, which captures the theoretical-methodological contribution of this research.

In asking what makes PREDP possible, my research counters more conventional policy analysis approaches that would instead (likely) ask: what *is* PREDP and what are the causal factors that brought it about? Instead, an approach of wayfinding assemblage reorients me to questions of what kind of abstract assemblage is productive of policy capable of being

experienced (or not) as *Pacific*, as *regional*, as *educational*, and as *development*. By directing

me to start with the empirical (rather than with *a priori* assumptions of what things are), my

methodology of wayfinding assemblage led me to question how diverse bodies and thoughts

are made to matter and are made expressive as Pacific, as regional, as solutions, and so on. In

assemblage terms, this is a question of what kind of virtual or abstract assemblage is

necessary to bring about actual effects, such as the PacREF. These are questions worthy of

being asked because each component of this entity – that is, Pacific, regional, education,

development and policy – are particular problematisations of the world, which have come to

be through assemblage and are also, at the same time, always becoming. As I demonstrated in

Chapter 2, in much of the conventional existing literature on education policy, Pacific

education and education development, the problematisations offered very often presuppose

their own solutions and remain within an existing image of thought; that is, they do little more

than reaffirm the world to be what we already think we know it is. As discussed in Chapter 1, I

set out in this thesis to find a way to think differently about the problems I have grappled with

through my time working in education development, with the hoping of being able to

generate different questions and different speculations on a world yet to come.

Through Chapters 5, 6 and 7, I offered my speculative responses to my principal

research question and first two sub-questions. I intentionally emphasise *speculative* and

*responses* here; I do not consider this thesis to provide definitive answer to my research

questions. Rather, the thesis is an exercise in speculating on how we might think and

experience education development policy differently, and if we do, what new questions and

new problems might be generated. In so doing, the research has helped me continue to think,

and I hope it does the same for my readers. As Williams (2013, p. 243) has argued, '[n]o answer is final. No answer is universally valid. It all depends on the relation between the situation, the events, the individuals and the effects'. As such, the responses I have offered here are very much a product of the particular situation of this research, and I offer them only with the hope that they stimulate similarly different thinking for others.

In Chapter 5, through exploring experiences of moments in the becoming of the PacREF, I considered PREDP as an assemblage that straddles problematics of nation-state sovereignty and globalisation, Pacific exceptionalism and global commonality. PREDP can be thought of as functioning to make consistent and suture together the otherwise seemingly contradictory sense that Pacific island nation-states and their people are sovereign and uniquely *Pacific* yet also, at the same time, are *global* (members of and equal to the global). Through PREDP, the seemingly divergent experience of Pacific islands as becoming global, independent and developed (capable and flourishing) are made consistent with simultaneous instantiations of Pacific islands as Pacific, as locally particular, as dependent and developing (lacking capacity and poor). PREDP establishes and maintains a territory of education development expertise and policy solutions that are made to matter as both 'Pacific' and global, each defined as not the other and as deficit because of that, yet also in need of the other. As such, PREDP enables education development policy to be *both* Pacific (i.e., *not-global*) *and* global; to be *both* a developing country initiative *and* a collaboration of (equal) development partners; and to be *both* decolonising *and* dependent on former colonial nations' (voluntary) financing and facilitating.

In doing so, PREDP-as-assemblage functions to ward off the deterritorialising forces of

sovereign nation-states and their contextual diversity, transforming them (of course, only ever

momentarily and partially) into a singular regional actor (i.e., *the Pacific*). Simultaneously,

PREDP bolsters the strata of the sovereign nation-state, in making it matter as the content of

PREDP, even when many of the criteria that may be considered necessary for nation-state

sovereignty are not met (e.g., financial and political independence). The territorialising forces

of (national-regional-global) development and independence within PREDP yoke together

forms of content of schooling (classrooms, teachers, timetables, curriculum ...) with forms of

expression of human resource development in the service of (predominantly economic)

development. As such, Pacific learners are incorporeally transformed into human resources, to

be developed and refined through efficient schooling systems, and the lack of capacity that

makes Pacific islands need education development is solved by education development.

While conventional analyses may argue that this is caused by interests in economic

development or some neoliberal or neo-colonial drive, wayfinding assemblage directs us to

instead consider more generalised desires of/for the experience of being capable, of fixing

problems, and of making the world manageable, as well as desires for *inter*dependence. Thus,

what makes PREDP possible is the assemblage of a body without organs comprising free-

flowing and immanent forms of becoming-Pacific and practices of *teu le va* (nurturing the

relational spaces that connect us and our worlds), in constant mediation with pulls towards the

organising forms of policy solutions and expertise. PREDP effectuates a unifying principle (an

abstract machine) that is perhaps best captured in the PacREF tagline of '*we are more

powerful together*': a call to collective action, collective responsibility and a collective sense of

unity, but one that coexists, and indeed which requires the reciprocal presupposition of, difference and autonomy. The potent force of the assemblage is then its capacity to continually rearrange what constitutes *togetherness* – which bodies, in what configurations, and behaving how? - in the face of both disruptive and conforming processes of stratifications and flows of desire.

In further speculating on responses to the question of what makes PREDP possible, I attended in Chapter 7 to the way in which context(ualisation) is made to matter as both problem and solution, as well as how we might think differently about context. As assemblage, PREDP functions to (re)produce context as *both* disruptive to *and* essential for education development and the 'smooth' implementation of policy, and it is through this process that it generates the rationale for continuing PREDP. I demonstrated the ways in which the experience of being 'in context' is negotiated within PREDP, and how beliefs about how to behave in, and respond to, context (molarities) are in constant mediation with immanent experiences of context (molecularities), which hold the potential to alter those molarities. I demonstrated that context is made to matter as both problem *and* solution, just as regionalism is equally also solution *and* problem. In this way, the molecular becomings that context can bring about are made valuable, insofar as they do not threaten the overall assemblage. Similarly, the molarities of context work to justify the continuation of regionalism, but only to the extent that some space is made for acknowledging context as molecular. I concluded that this is the buoyancy of assemblage: its ability to remain afloat not despite of, but because of, the force of moving currents. As such, if we desire a different assemblage to

come to the surface, we need to get beyond the image of thought – that is, to create new concepts of context and regionalism.

In summary, in considering the question of what it is that policy can do, particularly policy that is made to be Pacific, regional, education development policy, this thesis has considered how it can sustain that which is deemed unsustainable (aid dependence); how it justifies regionalism and global development as a form of independence; and how becoming-Pacific simultaneously requires forms of becoming-global. Responding to the accepted 'problems' of Pacific education development (that is, of policy not being Pacific enough, or not being sufficiently 'owned' or contextualised or evidence-based; or conversely, of being too Pacific, too owned, too contextualised, and therefore not sufficiently in line with global evidence-base or driven by educational intent), I have argued that rather than seeking solutions to these problems, we need to create new problems. Such new problems include how do we create spaces of (policy) encounter that allow thinking differently and that are oriented towards expanding capacities rather than solving problems and making our worlds manageable? I have tried to show in this thesis that the assemblage of PREDEP is perfectly arranged to produce the results that it produces. Thus, if we want different results, we need to acknowledge problematisations (strata) as alterable and engage with encounters that might at first feel uncomfortable, but which can become to feel like home (re/de/territorialisation), thereby altering that which is made desirable and believable.

This is not to say that something better will necessarily come from such encounters, but rather that without such encounters it is likely we will remain within our existing image of thought. In summary, the policy text of the PacREF, the capabilities of the bodies (policy

actors, frameworks, projects, meetings, decision-making structures …) enrolled in the PacREF,

and the ideas motivating it, are all made possible through the particular arrangements of

strata (such as sovereign nation-states, development), territories (of global yet Pacific expertise

and policy solutions), and desires (to make the world manageable, to solve that which policy

has created as problematic) that I have labelled as the assemblage of PREDP. Changing the

nature of the PacREF and the capabilities that bodies acquire occurs when the molecular

movements and disruptions of encounters (such as presence *in context)* bring about changes

at the level of strata and desire, which can in turn expand or alter the territories in which we

feel comfortable and the ways in which we are made capable to act. For these changes to

come about, we not only need encounters in which molecular movements have space to affect

our worlds, but we also need to be open to that which is outside and be prepared to think.

## 8.2   Theoretical and methodological contribution

While my principal research question for this thesis was what makes PREDP possible and what

can it do, I also embarked on this research with the question of whether assemblage theory, in

conversation with policy mobilities and Pacific research, could enable me (and others) to think

differently about education development policy. This question was itself generated by my

problematising (as articulated in Chapter 2) of existing theoretical-conceptual frameworks

common in CPS and CIE literature, and the way in which they often retain ontological

commitments to binary, teleological, scalar and representational thinking. Research from

within the policy mobilities paradigm goes some way to detach the analysis of policy from

these commitments, while insights from Pacific research can offer generative ways of thinking

about relationality and difference. However, I found I needed encounters with something

different that could offer me a fuller elaboration of how things come to be, in a world not still

tethered to univocal conceptualisations of being, knowing and relating.

I needed a way to get beyond the common-sense narrative of Pacific education

development, in which making it more Pacific, shifting power from one set of actors (or ideas

or values) to another, addressing problems of smallness and lack of capacity with scaling up

into regionalism, and solving the problem of context by contextualising are frequently the only

options on offer. In other words, I wanted to move beyond the simple formulation that

involving *more Pacific* bodies and beliefs makes a *better* (Pacific) policy. In Chapter 3, I

discussed how bringing assemblage theory into conversation with policy mobilities and Pacific

research oriented me towards not simply opposing this common sense or trying to prove it

wrong. Rather, it oriented me towards considering *why* it made sense and what might need to

change at the level of our deeply embedded problematisations of and desires in the world, in

order for a different common sense to become.

In Chapter 4, I articulated *wayfinding assemblage* as my attempt at discerning and

operationalising what a conversation between assemblage theory, policy mobilities and Pacific

research might make possible for the study of policy. I offered four orientations for wayfinding

assemblage. *First*, an orientation towards researching policy for the purposes of facilitating an

immanent critique and the upholding of relational ethics. *Second*, an orientation towards

carrying out policy research with an ethnographic sensibility, which considers research as the

opportunity for encounter, not trying to interpret bodily encounters and happenings as an

instance of something else (proof of a theory, instantiation of a thought) but to rather

consider what is being *made to matter* through these happenings. *Third*, I proposed

wayfinding assemblage involves wayfinding becomings, rather than following a policy (or

policy actors, texts, discourses) across places and times. *Fourth*, and finally, I suggested that

wayfinding assemblage is not for locating the 'bits and bobs' of policy but is instead to

diagram the abstract assemblage of desire that yokes those bits and bobs into particular

becomings. Together, when underpinned by a thorough appreciation of Deleuze-Guattarian

assemblage theory, as well as an openness to encountering (without translating into

something already known) pluralities of thought (such as Pacific research), these orientations

provide practical guidance for others interested in deploying assemblage theory to the study

of policy. Furthermore, I suggest that the orientations enable a sensitivity to the entanglement

of research, researched and researcher. This highlights a particular methodological

contribution of this research, which is asserting the necessity of presence, immersion and

relationships for the study of policy. As previously noted, this research would not have been

possible without the relationships I have and the encounters these relationships have enabled.

I appreciate that the valuing of presence and immersion as being critical to policy research

presents challenges to those desiring to study policy in places other than where they are

located (physically or relationally). I would argue that wayfinding assemblage, and any

research undertaken for the purpose of immanent critique and thinking, necessitates relational

entwinements. I acknowledge this as a contentious conclusion to make and one that could be

accused of facilitating an elitism. However, this should not be perceived as saying researchers

must physically be in/with a place/community for a particular amount of time or at a particular

time, or else belong to that place/community/time (i.e., be of a particular identity). For me,

research is an encounter that forces us to think differently and through which we can acquire

the capacity to bring about new becomings. As such, it necessitates a sense of relational

accountability and reciprocity, of what might be considered *teu le va*, or the form of mutual

presupposition of researcher, researched and research that makes research possible. This is a

sense of existing in a shared space that connects us and through which immanent

molecularities flow, and it must be nurtured to open us to that which is, as yet, outside. I

would suggest that without this sense of relational accountability and reciprocity, we are

unlikely to ever be forced to think, and as such, research will not bring about new becomings.

## 8.3   Empirical and practice contribution

My theoretical-methodological contributions are not just for the research of policy, but I

believe they also apply to do the *doing* of policy and education development. This can be

considered both an empirical and practice/policy contribution: through documenting the

dimensions of the becoming of the PacREF, I offer education development practitioners and

policy actors ways of thinking and doing education development policy differently.

Through in-depth analysis of policy documents and conversations with policy actors,

this research has been able to document a story of the becoming of the PacREF and bring

attention to the complex, yet traceable, ways in which regional education policy comes to be.

The thesis contributes detailed discussion of the roles of and relations between development

partners, regional agencies and Pacific island Ministries of Education in the making and

enacting of regional policy, including the more recent introduction of the multilaterally funded

Global Partnership for Education (GPE) into the region. The expenditure of tax-payer funds in

the official development assistance and delivery of education services, as well as the central

role accorded to education in bringing about global development and planetary survival, makes this an important matter to document. As discussed in Chapter 7, we can only become responsible for what is made visible and sayable, sense-able and sensible, and this is always contingent on which assemblage we find ourselves imbricated within in any given situation. In this way, my documentation and analysis of the empirical dimensions of PREDP has the potential to expand what is visible and sayable within the CPS and CIE literature. What precisely might come of that is not for me to predict, but it is something I will now turn to discuss in the next Section (8.4).

## 8.4   New problems and research yet to come

As *motutapu*, this research has been rejuvenating and has generated a line to new research becomings. It has produced many questions and new problems that I am excited to explore, not least of which is finding ways to share this research with those in education development policy in the Pacific region and elsewhere, and thus continue conversations to see what different thinking can and might become.

There are also opportunities for further research into how becomings such as *wansolwara* and the IA *Fono* are enabling (or not) different thinking to emerge, to explore situations where this is happening, and why and how it has come about; or in other words, what kind of assemblage was necessary. Amidst our growing climate and planetary crisis, and the direct impacts this is having on the mobility of Pacific bodies, there is much to explore as to what this means for assemblages of education. As Pacific peoples potentially relocate (to Australia, NZ, USA, or even China?), what is education then for and how might it be different?

In this, there is more to learn from Pacific theorisations, particularly those concerning eco-relationality, and how we might learn to live together (in a planetary sense) better.

On a more theoretical-methodological level, this thesis is just a starting point in exploring what the philosophy of Deleuze (and Guattari) can offer to considerations of policy, specifically but not exclusively within the field of education development. As such, I believe that continuing to expand my reading and understanding of Deleuze and Guattari's work will assist in developing generative analyses of policy. In particular, I would like to engage with Deleuze's reading of David Hume's philosophy of the mind, to explore its implications for how we might respond to questions of why we care, or do not care, about those considered 'other' or outside what we experience as our relational space (e.g. those not of the same nation-state or community, the environment, rubbish), and what kind of assemblages are necessary for producing a form of caring and attention that is people and planet dignifying (Buchanan, 2016). I also believe there are fruitful lines in bringing assemblage theory (and Deleuze's wider work) and Pacific research into conversation specifically in relation to ethics and education: what is the ethical basis that assemblage theory offers us, and what might become if we bring this into conversation with the forms of ethics discussed in Pacific research. What might this offer for how we learn to think more deeply about what compels us to behave in certain ways, and what needs to change to generate different (desires for) behaviours?

Finally, there is opportunity for further exploration of global development and official development assistance funding in education in the Pacific region. There is currently sparse CIE or CPS research that is giving critical attention to the significant flows of money, people, policy announcements, carbon emissions, and time spent in meetings in the name of

education development in the Pacific region, of which I am also a part. I would suggest there is an ongoing need for the type of 'guerilla accounting' that Lea (2020, p. 86), after Hetherington (2011), discusses to keep track of these promises and actions. However, I would not necessarily suggest that this be used to hold governments and development partners to account for their promises and actions. But rather, to use such accounting to consider what it is that this activity is doing, and to stimulate thinking about how it could be different.

## 8.5   Conclusion

This thesis aimed to document a (non-linear) process of thinking differently about policy and Pacific regional education development by experimenting with Deleuze-Guattari's assemblage theory (as explained in Chapter 3), and in conversation with policy mobilities and Pacific research (explained further in Section 1.3). In this way, the problem this research aims to address is the way in which 'common sense' concepts – and in particular, concepts of 'policy', 'context', 'Pacific', the global/regional/local' and 'education development' - are preventing us from *thinking*. Thus, the research seeks to recreate these as new problems that might restimulate our thinking. The thesis also aimed to document the analytic relations, or *assemblage*, that I have found helpful for enabling such thinking, which I describe as a methodology of *wayfinding assemblage* (as discussed in Chapter 4). This thesis does not seek to provide answers or solutions, but instead offers an encounter that makes sense, insofar as it stimulates further thinking and conversation. I of course leave it to my readers to determine how different this different thinking is; but it is only through the most tentative first steps into the waves that uncharted waters become known, or at least less unknown, or at least known differently.

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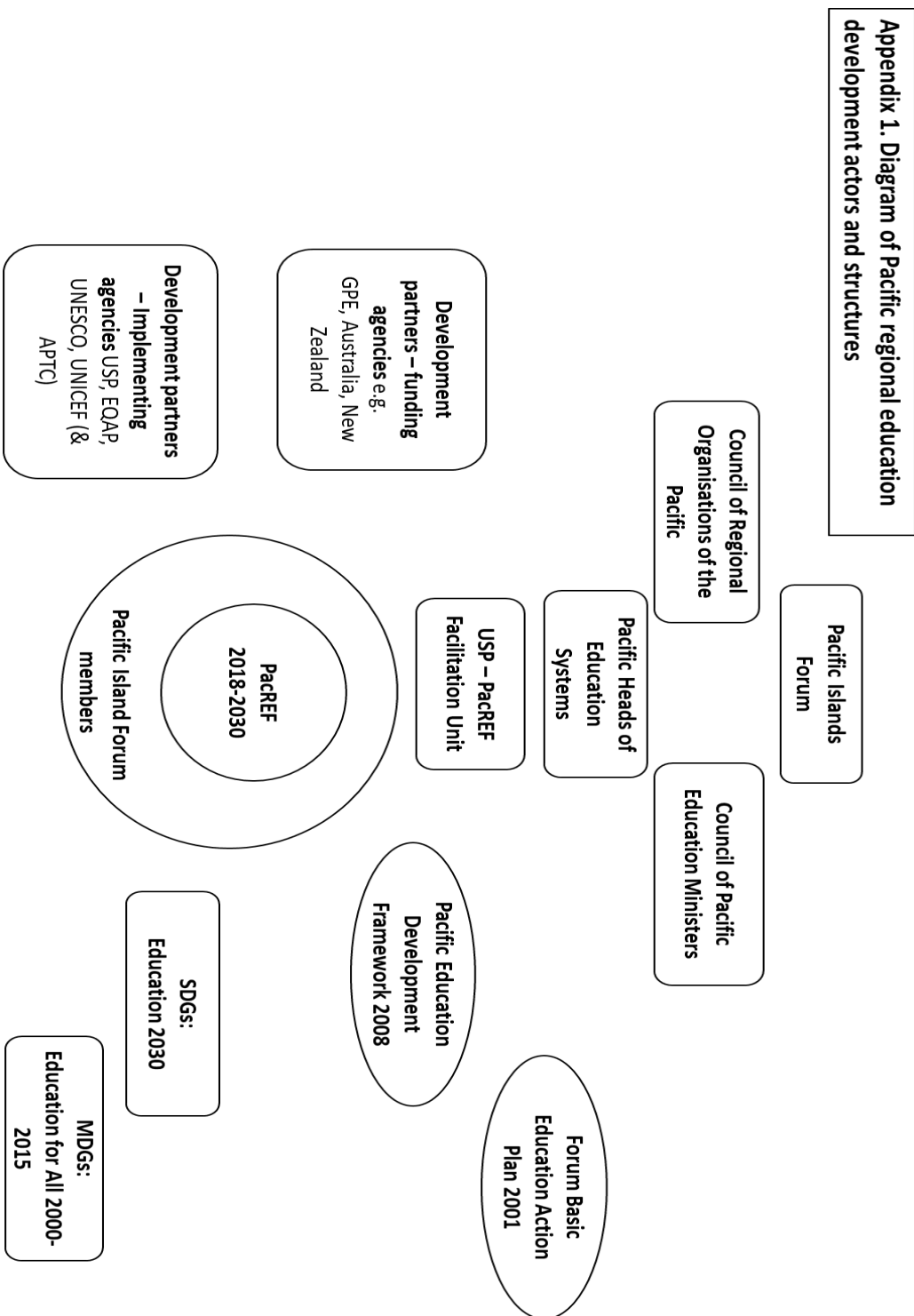
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# Appendix 1: Diagram of Pacific regional education development actors and structures

Appendix 1. Diagram of Pacific regional education development actors and structures

Development partners – funding agencies e.g. GPE, Australia, New Zealand

Development partners – Implementing agencies USP, EQAP, UNESCO, UNICEF (& APTC)

Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific

Pacific Islands Forum

USP – PacREF Facilitation Unit

Pacific Heads of Education Systems

Council of Pacific Education Ministers

Pacific Island Forum members

PacREF 2018-2030

SDGs: Education 2030

Pacific Education Development Framework 2008

MDGs: Education for All 2000-2015

Forum Basic Education Action Plan 2001

## Appendix 2: Summary of interviews undertaken

| PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATION | Number of interviews |
|---|---|
| Development Partner organisation - funding agencies | 9 |
| Development Partner organisation - regional implementing agencies | 13 |
| Pacific Ministry of Education representatives (incl. PacREF Steering Committee members) | 6 |
| Independent consultants, education development practitioners or researchers | 2 |
| TOTAL | 30 |

## Appendix 3: Interview schedule

These are indicative questions only.

Introductory questions & understanding the regional policy assemblage

- Can you tell me a little bit about your current role?

- What other agencies/actors do you interact with most in your role?

- What were you doing prior to this role? Have you worked elsewhere in the region/sector?

Experience with regional policy processes and PacREF

- What is/has been your involvement with PacREF, and/or with other Pacific regional education development processes and frameworks?

- How would you describe the purpose of regional frameworks and processes like PacREF?

- How do the regional frameworks & processes relate to national level?

- How did these regional frameworks & processes come to be – what is the history of them?

- Who is involved? Who is not involved?

- How do they operate? What are the important meetings, gatherings, processes etc?

Questions around context & context-responsiveness

- How would you describe the policy context of regional education development? For PacREF specifically?

- How and in what ways, does context matter for regional education development policy? For PacREF specifically?

- Are there aspects of context that matter more/less? For different reasons/issues?

- Are there times/issues for which context doesn't matter so much?

- Have you always thought of context in this way?

- What do you think has influenced your thinking about context?

- What is purpose of being responsive to context in regional education development policy? For PacREF specifically?

- Is it different in different spaces/moments? For different actors?

- Have you always thought of context-responsiveness in this way? If not, what has changed over time? What has influenced these changes?

- How do you think your views on context and context-responsiveness are similar or different from others in regional education development?

- What does being responsive to context look like - what does it involve (generally, and specifically for regional education development)?

- What kinds of things do you or your organisation do to be responsive to context?

- What specific approaches, processes, mechanisms etc. do you or your organisation use to enable context-responsiveness?

- Has this changed over time? If so, in what ways and how come?

- Can you tell me about your experiences in trying to make regional education policy responsive to context? And for PacREF specifically?

- What helps/hinders?

- What have you learnt through these experiences?


Anything else you'd like to share with me?

# Appendix 4: Analysis framework

The questions posed in the framework below are adapted from those offered by McCann & Ward, 2012 and Thompson et al., 2022.

| DIAGRAMMING POLICY ASSEMBLAGES | | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **The territories, strata and desires of policy assemblage** | **The becoming expressive and incorporeal transformations of policy assemblage** | **Limit points of policy assemblage** |
| What is the territory of assemblages context-responsiveness and regionalism?<br><br>• What 'problem' was /is context-responsiveness and regionalism argued to be responding to? (and what is it not positioned as relevant to?)<br><br>• How was/is context and regionalism problematised?<br><br>• How do these problems lay claim to importance? (de- and re- territorialisation?)<br><br>• What are the strategies used to get context-responsiveness and regionalism onto the policy agenda (or off it?)? | What does context-responsiveness and regionalism make possible?<br><br>How are bodies, actions and passions related to the collective assemblage of enunciation within context-responsiveness and regionalism?<br><br>• What can PREP policy makers and their organisations do in relation to context-responsiveness and regionalism? (ethology)<br>• What can the policy texts do? (pragmatics)<br>• How do the two interact?<br>• What can they not do?<br>• Why are some actors involved and not others? (what licensing, authority of actors or ideas is involved?) | What changes render the assemblages of context-responsiveness and regionalism incoherent? (lines of flight)<br><br>How do the assemblages of context-responsiveness and regionalism act to reconcile differences and produce coherence? (coding) |
| What strata does the assemblages face?<br><br>• What values underpin what context-responsiveness and regionalism aim to address? (axiomatics)<br>• How are they sustained? (stratification) | What incorporeal transformations do assemblages of context-responsiveness and regionalism produce?<br><br>• How does the act of policy-making change the meaning of bodies? (sense) | What do policy actors describe as helping/hindering them in being context-responsive or upholding regionalism? |

| How is policy mobilised? | What does policy mobilise and what changes occur as a result? | How does policy change as it moves? |
|---|---|---|
| | • How are the capacities of bodies limited or expanded? (event/intensity) | How are alliances formed and reformed around conflicting interests/ideas in the policy production process |
| How do these assemblages make consistent the multiplicities of desire that operate within the individuals, the collectives and the organisations of PREP?<br><br>• What does context-responsiveness and regionalism make desirable? (plane of consistency)<br>• How are multiple and competing desires identified, organised and reconciled? (segmentation)<br>• What are the complexities or contestations within the accounts of context-responsiveness and regionalism?<br>• How do these differ across actors/sites? | What mechanisms, instruments, processes etc. are employed for the purposes of being context-responsive and advancing regionalism?<br><br>• How do these differ across time/spaces?<br>• What/Who is not included? | How do policy actors explain apparent inconsistencies or disconnects within context-responsiveness and regionalism? |
| How have these problematisations changed over time?<br><br>How do they differ across actors/sites?<br><br>When/where are context-responsiveness and regionalism on the policy agenda, and when/where are they it not? | | |
| **How is policy mobilised?** | **What does policy mobilise and what changes occur as a result?** | **How does policy change as it moves?** |
| **MAPPING THE MOBILITIES OF POLICY** | | |

# Appendix 5: Ethics approval Deakin University

Human Ethics Advisory Group

**DEAKIN**
UNIVERSITY AUSTRALIA

Faculty of Arts and Education
Geelong Waurn Ponds Campus
Postal: Locked Bag 20000,
Geelong 3220, Victoria, Australia
Telephone: 03 5227 2226
Email: aeethics@deakin.edu.au

**Memorandum**

| | |
|---|---|
| **To:** | Dr Trace Ollis |
| | School of Education |
| | G |

**cc:** Ms Rebecca Miriam Spratt

| | |
|---|---|
| **From:** | Faculty of Arts & Education Human Ethics Advisory Group (HEAG) |
| **Date:** | 29 January, 2021 |
| **Subject:** | HAE-20-185 |
| | Assembing Context-Responsiveness in Pacific Regional Education Development Cooperation |
| | Please quote this project number in all future communications |

The application for this project has been considered by the Faculty HEAG under the terms of Deakin University's Human Research Ethics Committee (DUHREC).

Approval has been given for Ms Rebecca Miriam Spratt, under the supervision of Dr Trace Ollis, School of Education, to undertake this project from 29/01/2021 to 29/01/2025.

The approval given by the Faculty HEAG is given only for the project and for the period as stated in the approval. It is your responsibility to contact the Faculty HEAG immediately should any of the following occur:

- Serious or unexpected adverse effects on the participants
- Any proposed changes in the protocol, including extensions of time.
- Any events which might affect the continuing ethical acceptability of the project.
- The project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
- Modifications are requested by other HRECs.

In addition you will be required to report on the progress of your project at least once every year and at the conclusion of the project. Failure to report as required will result in suspension of your approval to proceed with the project.

The Faculty HEAG and/or DUHREC may need to audit this project as part of the requirements for monitoring set out in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (updated 2018).

*Jo Ryan*
HEAG Secretariat
Faculty of Arts and Education

# Appendix 6: Ethics approval Australian Catholic University

**Res Ethics**
4 June 2021 at 1:44 pm

[2021-138T] – Transfer of External Ethics Approval to ACU

To: Steven Lewis,   Rebecca Spratt,   Cc: Res Ethics

Details

Dear Applicant,

Chief Investigator: Dr Steven Lewis
Student Researcher: Rebecca Miriam Spratt
Ethics Register Number: 2021-138T
Project Title: Assembling Context-Responsiveness in Pacific Regional Education Development Cooperation
Date Approved: 04/06/2021
End Date: 28/02/2023

The Australian Catholic University Human Research Ethics Committee has considered your application for ethics transfer 2020-215T. As this application has already been ethically reviewed by the Deakin University HREC (Ethics Reference: HAE-20-185), ACU HREC accepts the approval without further conditions.

This project has now been recorded as an ACU project for which ACU is responsible. Continued approval of this research project is contingent upon the submission of an annual progress report which is due on/before each anniversary of the project approval. A final report is due upon completion of the project. A report proforma can be downloaded from the ACU Research Ethics website.

Researchers are responsible for ensuring that all conditions of approval are adhered to and that any modifications to the protocol, including changes to personnel, are approved prior to implementation. In addition, the ACU HREC must be notified of any reportable matters including, but not limited to, incidents, complaints and unexpected issues.

Researchers are also responsible for ensuring that they adhere to the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and the University's Research Code of Conduct.

Any queries relating to this application should be directed to the Ethics Secretariat (res.ethics@acu.edu.au). Please quote your ethics approval number in all communications with us.

We wish you well with your research project.

Kind regards,

Dr Leslie Silk
on behalf of ACU HREC Chair, Assoc Prof. Michael Baker

Research Ethics & Compliance Officer | Research Services | Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University
T: +61 2 9739 2646 E: res.ethics@acu.edu.au

THIS IS AN AUTOMATICALLY GENERATED RESEARCHMASTER EMAIL

# Appendix 7: Participant recruitment letter

Research Project: Assembling Context-Responsiveness in Pacific Regional Education Development Cooperation

Recruitment email

Subject: Invitation to participate in an Australian Catholic University research study

Dear _____

I am a PhD student at the Institute of Learning Sciences and Teacher Education of the Australian Catholic University and I am conducting a research project that seeks to explore how the idea of context-responsiveness is realised in Pacific regional education development cooperation.

In international development cooperation, it is commonly argued that education interventions must be responsive to the contexts in which they are implemented. The importance of being responsive to context is frequently highlighted in discussions on Pacific regional cooperation for education development. However, context-responsiveness can be realised in various ways in education development cooperation policy, which can lead to variable effects. As such, this research project seeks to explore how policy actors involved in Pacific regional education development cooperation engage with, and realise, the idea of context-responsiveness, the extent to which this has changed across time or varies across different actors, and why.

The research project involves in-depth interviews with policy actors from a range of different organisations, analysis of policy documents, and observations of relevant Pacific regional education policy forum. I have identified you as someone actively involved with Pacific regional education development who could share information about your perspectives on this topic. I am inviting you to participate in a research interview lasting approximately one (1) hour in duration, where I will ask for your perspectives on: how and in what ways context matters for Pacific regional education development cooperation; what is the purpose of being context-responsive; how and in what ways is Pacific regional education development cooperation responsive to context; and what helps or hinders this?

The interview is completely voluntary. You are free to decline any question asked or withdraw from the interview at any time, without consequence. Attached is a more detailed Participant Information Letter which describes the project in detail and how the information you share with me will be used, should you choose to participate. If you agree to take part you will be asked to sign the Consent Form accompanying the Plain Language Statement and return a

copy to me via email or post prior to the commencement of the interview. You can retain a copy of the Plain Language Statement and Consent Form for your information.

If you are interested in participating, please contact me at the email address or on the phone number provided. I will then arrange for the interview to take place at a time suitable for you and provide you the Zoom link for the interview.

Thank you for considering your involvement in this project.

Regards,

Rebecca Spratt

PhD Candidate, Australian Catholic University

Ph: +61

Email: Rebecca.spratt@myacu.edu.au

## Appendix 8: Participant information letter



# PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER

**PROJECT TITLE:** Assembling Context Responsiveness in Pacific Regional Education Development Cooperation
**ETHICS REGISTER NUMBER:** 2021-138T
**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:**  Dr. Steven Lewis
**STUDENT RESEARCHER:** Rebecca Spratt
**STUDENT'S DEGREE:** Doctorate of Philosophy (Education)

**To:**

I am inviting you to participate in a research project that seeks to explore how the idea of context-responsiveness is realised in Pacific regional education development cooperation.

You have been identified as someone actively involved with Pacific regional education development who could share information about your perspectives on this topic.

This document explains what the research project is about, the expected benefits of the project, what I am inviting you to do, and what you can expect if you choose to participate.

### *About the project*
The overarching aim of this project is to explore how the idea of context-responsiveness is realised in Pacific regional education development cooperation. In international development, it is commonly argued that education interventions must be responsive to the contexts in which they are implemented. However, context-responsiveness can be realised in various ways in education development policy, which can lead to variable effects. As such, a case can be made for examining how the idea of context-responsiveness is realised in Pacific regional education development, the extent that this has changed over time or varies amongst different actors, and why these effects and changes have occurred.

The specific objectives of the project are to explore:
1. How is context-responsiveness realised in Pacific regional education development cooperation policy
2. What conditions shape how context-responsiveness is realised in Pacific regional education development cooperation policy;
3. What mechanisms, practices, or approaches have been adopted by different actors involved in Pacific education development cooperation in order to be responsive to context; and
4. How current policy actors in Pacific education development cooperation engage with context-responsiveness in their work.

### *Benefits of the project*

This project will contribute to a greater understanding of how context-responsiveness is articulated in policy and the effects of this for Pacific regional education development. Investment in regional cooperation for education development is currently expanding in the Pacific region, at the same time as there are increased calls for more contextually-responsive approaches to education development. This project will generate opportunities for reflection within the Pacific education development community on context-responsiveness and how it is, and/or might be, realised through regional policy.

***What I am inviting you to do***

I am inviting you to participate in a research interview lasting approximately one (1) hour in duration, where I will ask for your perspectives on: how and in what ways context matters for Pacific regional education development cooperation; what is the purpose of being context-responsive; how and in what ways is Pacific regional education development cooperation responsive to context; and what helps or hinders this? The interview will be arranged at a time that is suitable for you and will be audio-recorded.

You will be free to withdraw from the interview at any time or to decline to answer any questions at your discretion. After the interview, you will be given the opportunity to review your interview transcript. If you chose to withdraw from the research process, any data generated from our interview will be destroyed at your request. This will help ensure that your participation in the research process will not adversely affect your personal or professional reputation. You will not receive any direct payment or benefit from your participation in this research.

***If you choose to participate***

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Should you choose to participate, I ask you to demonstrate your willing and informed consent by signing the attached consent form.

Interview data will be collected in identifiable form during the research interviews, during which time you will be asked to state your name, the organisation you are employed by or affiliated to professionally, and your position within that organisation. The interview will be digitally audio-recorded and then transcribed for further analysis. All data collected via the interviews will be de-identified with the use of pseudonyms or generic identifiers (e.g., 'Ministry of Education official' or 'member of a PacREF Implementing Agency') to ensure individual and organisational anonymity, and only de-identified data will be published.

All information collected will be stored on a password protected computer and destroyed after a period of five (5) years in accordance with Australian Catholic University regulations.

The research will be reported in a variety of academic and non-academic formats, including scholarly peer-reviewed journals, books and book chapters, as well as conference presentations and other public media. The research will not be discussed or presented in public media outlets until it has been reviewed and accepted by the peer-reviewed process of academic journals, or other similar scholarly outlets. As a research participant, you will be provided with the opportunity to nominate whether you would like to receive a copy of 1) your interview transcript and 2) all publications produced from the research.

This research has endorsement from the Pacific Regional Education Framework Steering Committee. This research project has ethical approval from the Australian Catholic University Human Research

Ethics Committee. The study project will be conducted under the supervision of Dr Steven Lewis and Professor Bob Lingard of the Institute of Learning Sciences & Teacher Education at the Australian Catholic University.

### *If you have any questions about the research project*
You may contact me or Dr Steven Lewis (Principal Researcher) to further discuss the project or related issues.
Ms Rebecca Spratt        Phone:  +61 450 095 800        Email:    rebecca.spratt@myacu.edu.au
Dr Steven Lewis          Phone +61 07 3861 6080          Email:    steven.lewis@acu.edu.au

### *If you have any concerns or complaints about the research project*
The study has been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (review number TBC). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may write to the Manager of the Human Research Ethics and Integrity Committee care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research).

Manager, Ethics and Integrity
c/o Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University
North Sydney Campus
PO Box 968
NORTH SYDNEY, NSW 2059
Ph.: 02 9739 2519
Fax: 02 9739 2870
Email: resethics.manager@acu.edu.au

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

I thank you for your time considering this invitation and look forward to welcoming your participation in the project.

Yours sincerely,


**Rebecca Spratt**
*PhD Candidate,*
*Institute of Learning Sciences & Teacher Education,*
*Australian Catholic University*

## Appendix 9: Participant consent form

ACU | INSTITUTE FOR LEARNING SCIENCES & TEACHER EDUCATION

**CONSENT FORM**

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** Assembling Context-Responsiveness in Pacific Regional Education
Development Cooperation

**ETHICS REGISTER NUMBER:** 2021-138T

**SUPERVISOR:** Dr Steven Lewis

**STUDENT RESEARCHER:** Rebecca Spratt

I .................................................. (the participant) have read and understood the information
provided in the Letter to Participants.

Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I freely agree to participate in this project according to the conditions in the Letter to
Participants.

I realise I can withdraw my consent at any time (without adverse consequences).

I have been given a copy of the Letter to Participants and Consent Form to keep.

The researcher has agreed not to reveal my identity and personal details, including where
information about this project is published, or presented in any public form. I also
understand that views I express will be attributed to a staff member within my organisation,
which will be named.

I understand that the interview will be digitally audio-recorded and transcribed for later
analysis.

I understand that I have the option to request a copy of my interview transcript. By ticking
this box, I request a copy of my interview transcript ☐

I understand that I can request a copy of all publications produced from this research. By
ticking this box, I request a copy of all publications produced from this research ☐

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: ...........................................................................................................

SIGNATURE: ........................................................................... DATE: ................................

SIGNATURE OF SUPERVISOR: …………………………………………………………………  DATE: ……………………………….

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: ……………………………………………………………………………………  DATE:

………………………………….

Contact details:

*Ms Rebecca Spratt*

*Institute of Learning Sciences & Teacher Education, Australian Catholic University*

*Email:*  *rebecca.spratt@myacu.edu.au*

*Phone:  +61*