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Rethinking Regionalism in the 21st Century*

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Abstract

The basic motivation for this chapter is that often regionalism is too narrowly understood and needs to be rethought. The ‘rethinking’ offered here is built on four interacting perspectives: (i) rethinking regional history; (ii) rethinking regional comparison; (iii) rethinking regional space; and (iv) rethinking regions from a global perspective. This broad-ranging approach enables new and challenging answers to emerge as to how and why regionalism evolves and consolidates, how regionalism can be compared, and the significance of regionalism for a host of issues within global politics, from security and trade to development and the environment.

Keywords: comparative regionalism, region, regional organization, global governance, Eurocentrism

Bio

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Introduction

Since the ‘return’ of regionalism in the late 1980s, there has been a global upsurge of various forms of regionalist projects. More or less every government in the world is engaged in state-led regional frameworks, but regionalist processes also involve also a rich variety of business and civil society actors, resulting in a multitude of formal as well as informal regionalization processes in most fields of contemporary politics.

The basic motivation for this chapter is that all too often, regionalism is too narrowly understood and needs to be rethought. The rethinking of regionalism offered here is built on four interacting perspectives: regionalism viewed historically, comparatively, spatially, and globally. These four interrelated ways of rethinking regionalism are rooted in reflectivist and constructivist scholarship. The argument is not that rationalist and mainstream theories are altogether wrong but rather that alternative perspectives are both possible and necessary. Subsequent sections of this chapter outline and motivate the four components of rethinking regionalism. Before this, a few core assumptions and concepts need to be elaborated.

The main concern of this chapter is with so called ‘world’ or international regions, which are viewed as territorial (in contrast with non-territorial) units or subsystems larger than the ‘state’ but smaller than the ‘global’ system. Such regions come in many varieties and may group two or more countries and sometimes even whole continents, such as Africa or Europe. These international regions should be distinguished from subnational regions that exist between the ‘local’ and the ‘national’ level, such as Flanders or Quebec. However, many subnational regions have international or transnational dimensions, which to some extent also make them relevant for the arguments developed here.

‘Regionalism’ represents the body of ideas, values and policies that are aimed at creating a region or it can mean a type of world order. Regionalism in this sense is usually associated with a regional project or regional organization. ‘Regionalization’ refers to the process of cooperation, integration and cohesion that creates a regional space (issue-specific or general). In the most basic sense, it may mean no more than a deepening or widening of activity, trade, peoples, ideas, or conflict at the regional level.¹ There is a strong tendency in

¹Fawcett, Louise: “Regionalism From a Historical Perspective” in Farrell, Mary / Hettne, Björn / van Langenhove, Luk (eds), *Global Politics of Regionalism. Theory and Practice*. Pluto Press: London 2005, p. 25.

this field of study to focus on state-led regional organizations in contrast to the processes of regionalization. This is problematic since there is a need to better understand the processes by which regions are made and unmade (i.e. regionalization and region-building).

One weakness in previous scholarship (especially that rooted in liberal thought) is that too often regions are considered desirable and ‘good’. That regionalism can solve a variety of collective action dilemmas is indisputable, but it is equally clear that it may sometimes be exploitative, reinforce asymmetric power relations or lead to a range of detrimental outcomes. Hence different theories point in different directions and from a normative point of view it should not be assumed beforehand that regionalism is either positive or negative.

Rethinking the History of Regionalism

History is the first component of rethinking regionalism. Louise Fawcett is correct in that ‘work on regionalism rarely adopts a sustained historical perspective except in an introductory and incomplete way’.² The common but misleading notion that regionalism is a phenomenon that ‘commenced’ in Europe after the First or Second World War has prevented scholars from understanding both its deep historical roots as well as its ‘global heritage’.³ The short time horizon in most scholarship has exaggerated the role of formalized regional organizations at the expense of a more diversified understanding of regionalization and region-building around the world. The fact that others early on elaborated many important ideas and theories of regionalism has been ignored for too long by too many.

The acknowledgement of ‘early regionalism’ serves to draw attention to the deep roots of and diverse trajectories of regionalism before the era of so called old regionalism (since the end of the Second World War).⁴ Early regionalism draws attention to those assorted regions which can be traced far back in history, as seen in a rich variety of geographically confined empires, alliances, trade leagues, pacts, unions, and confederations between a range of political units (not simply the European nation-state). Among other things, early regionalism underlines the interaction rather than the competition between regionalist and statist ideas,

² Fawcett, Louise: “History and Concept of Regionalism: A Call for a Post-Revisionist Synthesis”, Paper for the *International Studies Association Conference 2015*, New Orleans: ISA, p. 1.

³ Acharya, Amitav: “Comparative Regionalism: A Field Whose Time has Come?”, *The International Spectator*, (2012) 47(1): pp. 3-15.

⁴ Söderbaum, Fredrik: *Rethinking Regionalism*. Palgrave Macmillan: London 2016.

and at least in some respects this resembles more recent debates about multi-layered global governance.

Early regionalism also draws attention to the various pan-regionalist movements — such as pan-Europeanism, pan-Africanism, pan-Asianism, and pan-Arabism — that grew strong in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵ These pan-regional movements were usually motivated by a mixture of geo-political, socio-economic, cultural (sometimes even racial) and to some extent, functional beliefs and goals. They were multidimensional and reflected shared ideas and goals of political and inter-societal unity rather than intergovernmental regionalism in a more narrow sense.⁶ The pan-regionalist movements took somewhat different shapes in different regions, depending on the historical context that included the character of colonialism and external domination, but all of them ‘offer vital insights into regionalism’s trajectory past and present’.⁷ It is clear that some of these pan-regionalist ideas continue to influence contemporary regionalist projects, especially in Africa, Latin America and the Middle East, and to some extent in Asia.

The familiar distinction drawn between old and new regionalism inserted a certain historical perspective into the debate. Clearly, this distinction was relevant in the late 1980s and during the 1990s as a means of identifying regionalism past and present. One result of this distinction however, was confusion, not least since it to some extent inhibited deeper historical analysis. This confusion was reinforced further by the fact that the labels of ‘old’ and ‘new’ were sometimes misused in the criticism of others.

After several decades of ‘new regionalism’, it is fruitful to move ahead and unbundle the binary distinction between old and new regionalism. There are continuities as well as discontinuities over time, which obviates rigid temporal distinctions. Many regional projects and regional organizations were initiated in the era of old regionalism (1950s-1970s) but were then renewed or re-inaugurated during the new regionalism (1980s-1990s), often under a new name or with an expanded membership. Under such circumstances, it is difficult to separate the historical from the contemporary. This fact was strongly emphasized by one of the pioneers of the new regionalism, Björn Hettne, who argued that instead of identifying a new era or new wave of regionalism, “I find the identification of new patterns of regionalization

⁵ Fawcett, 2015, *op.cit.*, p. 1.

⁶ Acharya, Amitav: “Comparative Regionalism: A Field Whose Time has. Come?”, *The International Spectator*, (2012) 47(1), p. 5.

⁷ Fawcett, 2015, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

(co-existing with older forms) more relevant”.⁸ This important statement has rarely been acknowledged by the critics of new regionalism.

Although there are clear links between regionalisms over time, 21st century regionalism also differs from earlier phases of regionalism. For instance, in the 1980s and 1990s, both the prevalence and the relevance of regionalism could be questioned. By contrast, it is difficult to dispute that 21st century regionalism is now a structural component of today’s global politics. Some of the most influential observers even claim that today’s world order is a regional world order. Peter Katzenstein, for instance, rejects the ‘purportedly stubborn persistence of the nation-state or the inevitable march of globalization’, arguing instead that we are approaching a ‘world of regions’.⁹ Similarly, Amitav Acharya emphasizes the “emerging regional architecture of world politics”¹⁰ and the construction of ‘regional worlds’.¹¹ Barry Buzan and Ole Weaver speak about a ‘global order of strong regions’.¹² The fundamental point is not that regionalism necessarily dominates all aspects of global politics, but rather that regionalism has become a structural component of global politics, deepening and expanding into an increasing number of policy fields, beyond the conventional focus on trade and security to health, the environment, social policy and many other policy fields.

As an empirical phenomenon, regionalism has become increasingly complex, with multifold interactions between state and non-state actors, institutions and processes, which has changed the intellectual landscape of the study of it. Importantly, there is an increasing acceptance that a multitude of analytical standpoints and perspectives on regionalism are both necessary and plausible. In a theoretical and methodological sense, we have moved beyond the new regionalism into an era, which in terms of intellectual history, can be referred to as ‘comparative regionalism’.

⁸ Hettne, Björn: “Globalization and the New Regionalism: The Second Great Transformation”, in Björn Hettne, Andras Inotai and Osvaldo Sunkel (Eds), *Globalism and the New Regionalism*. Macmillan: Basingstoke 1999, p. 8.

⁹ Katzenstein, Peter J.: *A World of Regions: Asia and Europe in the American Imperium*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca, New York 2005, p. i.

¹⁰ Acharya, Amitav: “The Emerging Regional Architecture of World Politics,” *World Politics* 59, no. 4 (July 2007): pp. 629-652.

¹¹ Acharya, Amitav: *The End of American World Order*. Polity Press: Cambridge 2014.

¹² Buzan, Barry / Wæver, Ole: *Regions and Powers. The Structure of International Security*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2003, p. 20.

Rethinking Regional Comparison

Although scholars have compared regions for a long time, there is an urgent need to rethink how to compare regionalism, and why. Despite a growing number of specific comparisons of selected aspects of regionalism (especially regional institutions, regional complexes and regional orders) in selected regions (principally Europe and Asia), there exists only a weak intellectual debate about the fundamentals of comparative research in the field.¹³ There are still deep contestations of what to compare, how to compare, and even why to compare at all, which limit our understanding of regions, theoretical innovation as well as the generation of cumulative knowledge. One of the main problems lies in the unresolved tension between universalism and particularism, which too often has resulted in Eurocentrism or parochialism. The second element in rethinking regionalism is to transcend these two pitfalls in favour a more non-Eurocentric and non-ethnocentric approach to comparative regionalism.

Eurocentrism can be understood as one of the systematic weaknesses in the study of regionalism.¹⁴ This is closely related to the false belief, mentioned above, that regionalism ‘commenced’ in Europe after the Second World War and that the European integration project is the only ‘successful’ case. Indeed, anyone engaging with literature and policy on regional integration will detect that too often many other cases of regionalisms are compared — implicitly or explicitly — against a backdrop of European integration theory and practice. From such a Eurocentric perspective, European integration is usually considered as multidimensional, sophisticated and highly institutionalized—both a descriptive and prescriptive contention—whereas regionalism/regional integration elsewhere is seen only as atypical, weakly developed, weakly institutionalized and usually reduced to either an economic or security-related phenomenon (or as an instance of ‘regional cooperation’).¹⁵

Different types of Eurocentric generalizations continue to influence and shape the research field. To some extent, the widening and deepening of the European Union (EU) has led to inferior Eurocentrism in comparison to the old regionalism. For many scholars

¹³ See De Lombaerde, Philippe / Söderbaum, Fredrik / van Langenhove, Luk / Baert, Francis: “The Problem of Comparison in Comparative Regionalism”, *Review of International Studies*, (2010) 36(3): pp. 731-753; Söderbaum, Fredrik: *Rethinking Regionalism*. Palgrave Macmillan: London 2016.

¹⁴ Acharya, 2012; Söderbaum, Fredrik: ‘What’s Wrong with Regional Integration? The Problem of Eurocentrism’. *EUI Working Papers 64*, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute 2013.

¹⁵ Christiansen, Thomas: ‘European and Regional Integration’, in Baylis, John / Smith, Steve (eds), *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*. Oxford University Press: Oxford 2001.

European integration in general, and today's EU in particular, has become a marker, a model and a paradigm from which to theorize, compare and design institutions as well as policy in most other regions of the world. The Eurocentric bias lies in how underlying assumptions and understandings about the nature of European regionalism — which most often stem from a *particular* reading of European integration — condition perceptions about what regionalism in other parts of the world does and should look like. Indeed, heavy emphasis is placed on the economic and political trajectory of the EC/EU or on a particular definition of EC/EU-style 'regional integration'. Several realist or intergovernmental and liberal or institutionalist approaches subscribe to this perspective, which is often dominated by a concern to explain deviations from the 'standard' European case.

There are some legitimate reasons for why these Eurocentric notions developed in the past and for their continued salience. Nonetheless, it is a fundamental problem that such 'false' generalizations and dualistic models of comparison continue to plague both academic and policy discussions, with the result that few concepts and theories generated in the study of non-European regions have been able to influence the study and comparison of regionalism. Not only has this prevented the development of more universal conceptual and theoretical toolkits, but it also has limited our understanding of European integration itself.

If the mainstream literature on regionalism has favoured generalizations from the case of the EU, a more or less reverse tendency is apparent in the more critical scholarship on regionalism in the developing world. Many critical scholars and policy analysts have tried to reject Eurocentrism or tried to avoid it, and numerous innovative attempts to develop a regional approach specifically aimed at the developing world (or particular regions) have evolved from this work.¹⁶ On the one hand, there are good reasons for taking stock of this research on non-European regions and for being cautious regarding the mainstream domination of EU-style institutional perspectives. On the other hand, much of this scholarship and policy tends to mirror the Eurocentric view by taking the EU as an 'anti-model' and by celebrating the differences in theory and practice of regionalism in Europe and in the

¹⁶ Axline, Andrew W.: "Cross-regional comparison and the theory of regional cooperation: Lessons from Latin America, the Caribbean, South East Asia and the South Pacific., in Axline, W. Andrew (eds), *The Political Economy of Regional Cooperation. Comparative Case Studies*. Pinter Publishers: London 1994; Bach, Daniel C.: *Regionalisation in Africa. Integration & Disintegration*. Currey, James. London, 1999; Bøås, Morten / Marchand, Marianne / Shaw, Timothy M. (eds.): *The Political Economy of Regions and Regionalisms*. Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke 2005.

developing world. Too often this has resulted in ‘anti-Eurocentrism’ and in a failure to engage European integration theory and practice, while emphasizing that regionalism can be more or less tailor-made to suit specific regional realities and contexts.

Anti-Eurocentrism travels well with parochialism. At an empirical level, many scholars in the field specialize in a particular region, which quite often is viewed as ‘special’, even *sui generis*¹⁷. Too many scholars offer, almost mantra-like, that ‘my’ region is special or unique and too complex for comparison. When the uniqueness of a given region is emphasized or when other cases are considered to be too different to allow comparison, regional specialization easily becomes parochial. To be fair, some of the best studies in the field of regionalism are case studies. Certainly, detailed case studies are necessary and relevant; they identify historical and contextual specificities and allow for a detailed and intensive analysis of the dynamics and logic of regions and regional organizations (according to mono-, multi-, or interdisciplinary studies). Yet, too many case studies remain atheoretical, descriptive or, in the worst cases, even parochial, which makes them less relevant for non-specialists of a given region. Despite many good exceptions, there is a strong tendency in the field for regional specialists not to contribute to comparative and general debates. The stance adopted here is that a more advanced debate about comparative regionalism will not be reached simply by celebrating differences between European integration and regionalism in the rest of the world, or by painting all regions as unique.

Whereas the debate about new regionalism has been characterized by fragmentation and a series of paradigmatic and methodological rivalries, regionalism is now being consolidated as a field of study. Today’s discussion about regionalism is characterized by a changing intellectual landscape, with increased dialogue and at least some greater acceptance of contrasting scientific standpoints and perspectives. The recent *Oxford Handbook of Comparative Regionalism* is a powerful testimony of the consolidation of comparative regionalism.¹⁸ According to Amitav Acharya, comparative regionalism is ‘a field whose time has come’.¹⁹ The increasing cross-fertilization and interaction between students of European integration and regionalism elsewhere is particularly important, not least because this promises to lead to less Eurocentrism and anti-Eurocentrism in the field. We are witnessing

¹⁷ Söderbaum, Fredrik: “Comparative Regional Integration and Regionalism”, in: Landman T. and Robinson N. (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Comparative Politics*. London: SAGE 2009, pp. 477-496.

¹⁸ Börzel, Tanja A. / Risse, Thomas: *Oxford Handbook on Comparative Regionalism*. Oxford University Press: Oxford 2016.

¹⁹ Acharya, 2012, *op.cit.*

many new and intriguing comparisons between a range of regions and regional frameworks that were previously compared to one another.

It must also be recognized that our understanding of regions and regionalism has changed during recent decades, which is good news for those who wish to move away from narrow and conventional understandings of regions and regionalism. ‘While the contemporary interest in comparing regions and regionalisms may not be completely new, differs from older approaches. Our understanding of what makes regions has changed with social constructivist and critical theoretical approaches that have led to less behavioural and more nuanced, complex, contested and fluid understandings of regions’.²⁰

The preferred version of comparative regionalism is eclectic and inclusive. Such an eclectic perspective should enable area studies, comparative politics, and international studies to engage in a more fruitful dialogue without being trapped in either parochialism or misplaced universalism (usually Eurocentrism). It should also enable continued cross-fertilization between different regional debates and specializations (African, American, Asian, Caribbean and European forms of regionalism, and so on). Such an eclectic perspective will also enhance a dialogue about the fundamentals of comparative analysis, for example, what constitutes comparable cases, and the many different forms, methods and design of comparative analysis.²¹

The eclectic approach on offer here underlines the richness of comparison. Regions can and should be compared in time as well as within and across different spaces and forms of organization. It is thus possible to compare the comprehensive and multidimensional regions at various scales (macro, meso, micro), but also to compare more distinct types of regions and regionalism, such as trade blocs, security regions, cognitive regions, river basins, and so forth. Using the EU as an example, as an object of research the EU can be studied in different ways and its comparability depends on conceptualization and the questions asked. As in all other aspects of the social realm the EU has at the same time both specific features and general characteristics that it shares with other regions, regional political communities and regional organizations. The eclectic perspective offered here neither rejects comparisons between the EU and other federations/nation-states, nor necessarily between EU and past empires (even if that comparison may be somewhat more complicated). In other words, conceptual pluralism does not equal anarchy or efforts to create a false competition between regionalism in Europe

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 3.

²¹ De Lombaerde et al 2010; Hettne, Björn / Söderbaum, Fredrik: “Theorising the Rise of Regionness”, *New Political Economy*, (2000) Vol. 5, No. 3, pp.457–74.

and the rest of the world. The fundamental point is to be clear about the research question and case selection, while at the same maintaining conceptual clarity.²²

Rethinking Regional Space

The third component of rethinking concerns space and scale. A territorial focus on the nation-state in mainstream thinking (i.e. methodological nationalism) has resulted in many superficial representations of spatial horizons and practices. Often, and especially in political science and economics, regions have been taken as pre-given, and in a rather reductionist sense, been reduced to states-led regional organizations and policy-led frameworks. This is seen in countless studies on the EU and other statist frameworks, such as the AU, ASEAN, ECOWAS, NAFTA, SADC and Mercosur. The heavy focus on inter-state or supranational organizations is closely associated with rationalist and problem-solving research into what types of (pre-given) regions are the most functional, instrumental and efficient to ‘rule’ or ‘govern’. This perspective views regions and regional frameworks as ‘rational’ and interest-based responses to a number of ‘objective’ problems, such as security, development, trade or more generally, globalization. Integral to this reasoning is the view that regions exist ‘out there’, identifiable through objective material structures, regional organizations and regional actors.

The point is by no means that pre-given regions and issues of institutional design are irrelevant. The fundamental problem is that the orthodox, fixed assumptions about regions and the prevailing, ‘problem-solving’ and ‘rationalist’ focus on state-led and policy-driven regional organizations, crowd out alternative questions and answers as to how and why regions are formed, their inner logic and their significance for global politics. The perspective advanced here is to avoid the obsession with regional organizations by favouring a societal understanding of regional space. From such a social constructivist perspective, the purpose is to understand and explain the processes by which regions are made and unmade by a range of state and societal actors, both from within and outside the region.

Such a perspective requires the rejection of both ‘state-centrism’ and ‘methodological nationalism’. Again, the solution is not to ignore the state. Instead, attention must be drawn to the fundamental transformation that is underway in the global political and institutional landscape. There is a need to deal with more complex and multilayered governance structures

²² De Lombaerde (et al) 2010.

and spatialities, in which the nation-state is ‘unbundled,’ reorganized and assumes different functions and where non-state actors also contribute at various scales of action. Methodologically, the issue is to transcend Western conceptions of the unitary and Westphalian state and open up to a broader, social understanding of what regionalism is and regionalization in the different policy fields and parts of the world where it occurs. A focus on ‘regional space’ instead of states-led regional organizations is still rare in the study of regionalism. ‘Few are the works that seriously challenge the convenient practice of relying on spaces that are either formally predefined by regional organizations and treaties or tangible in terms of material flows.’²³ Differently expressed, the fundamental methodological problem concerns the prevalent view of regional space as just another ‘container’, with predefined views about inside/outside and how regions ‘become regions’.

Rethinking regional space implies transcending the widely shared, but simple, view of regions as ‘aggregations of states’ sharing some degree of interdependence.²⁴ It also implies rejecting the view that regions are ‘containers’ or locations for social processes, dominated by state actors. One benefit of avoiding ‘the territorial trap of the state’ is that other spaces and scales receive more recognition.²⁵ Insights from critical geography and sociology teach us that regions are not simply backdrops, containers or locations, nor are they autonomous and fixed constructs operating above actors.²⁶ Instead, regions are deeply embedded in the social dynamic of society: ‘They shape activities, ideas and decisions, which in turn shape conceptual and functional compartmentalization of space’.²⁷ From this perspective, regions are constitutive of society itself, are viewed as social constructions and are held together by historically contingent interactions, shared beliefs and identities, norms and practices.

From such a constructivist perspective, the research puzzle, is to understand and explain the process by which regions come into existence and are consolidated — so to speak, their

²³ Mattheis, Frank: *New Regionalism in the South – Mercosur and SADC in a Comparative and Interregional Perspective*. Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag 2014, p. 63.

²⁴ Nye, Joseph: *Peace in Parts: Integration and Conflict in Regional Organization*. Little, Brown and Company: Boston 1971.

²⁵ Agnew, John: “Political Power and Geographical Scale”, paper for Third Pan-European IR Conference and Joint Meeting with ISA, Vienna, Austria 16-19 September 1998, p. 2.

²⁶ Emerson, Guy: “An art of the region: Towards a politics of regionness”, *New Political Economy*, (2014) Vol 19, No 4: pp. 559-577.

²⁷ Murphy, Alexander B.: “Regions as Social Constructs: The Gap between Theory and Practice”, *Progress in Human Geography*, (1991) 15(1): 13; also see Paasi, Anssi: “Europe as a Social Process and Discourse: Considerations of Place, Boundaries and Identity”, *European Urban and Regional Studies* (2001) 8(1): pp. 7–28.

‘becoming’ — rather than describing a particular set of (problem-solving) activities and flows within a pre-given and fixed region. In other words, in the rethought perspective offered by this chapter, there are no ‘natural’ or ‘given’ regions. On the contrary, they are porous and made as well as unmade — intentionally or unintentionally, endogenously or exogenously — by collective human action and by shared beliefs and identity formation.

Viewing regions as socially constructed implies simultaneously that they are permanently disputed as well as politically contested. Moreover, because regions are political and social constructs, devised by human (state and non-state) actors in order to protect or transform existing structures, they may fail, just like other social projects. Regions can be disrupted from within and from without, often by the same forces that built them up. Such political dimensions of regionalism draw attention to agency, which is crucial for any understanding of region-formation.²⁸ Regionalism may emerge in order to achieve and protect crucial values, such as economic development, ecology and peace. Sometimes regionalism will help states to protect and achieve such values, whereas at other times the values are not ensured by the state. As a result, the nation-state will not necessarily be the main or only object of political allegiance (although sometimes it may be). Acknowledging that there are both winners and losers from regionalism and that regions can be manipulated for private gain, both by state and non-state actors is crucial. This implies that regionalism becomes a political struggle between various social forces over the definition of the region, how it should be organized politically, and of its insertion into the global order. Alternative, transformative and counter-hegemonic visions of regionalism may emerge in response, depending on the dominant form of regionalism and who sets the agenda. In turn, this implies that there are nearly always a multitude of strategies and ideas about a particular region, which mingle, merge and clash.

Rethinking Regions in Global Perspective

Since regions are not formed in a vacuum, the region in itself cannot be the only unit of theory-building. There is a need not only to escape ‘methodological nationalism’ but also to avoid being trapped in ‘methodological regionalism’. Somehow, a more ‘global’ approach to the study of regionalism needs to be built. Much effort is being made to do so, but what is

²⁸ Lorenz-Carl, Ulrike / Rempe, Martin (eds.): *Mapping Agency. Comparing Regionalisms in Africa*, Ashgate: Farnham 2013.

usually lacking from most approaches is a global perspective that also takes into account regional particularities and contexts. Acharya's effort to construct a Global IR with "Regional Worlds" as an essential ingredient is perhaps the most promising exception.

In the 1950s and 1960s, most classical regional integration theorists (especially the functionalists and neofunctionalists) concentrated mainly on the endogenous processes of region-formation and paid little attention to the external and 'global' environment. Contemporary regionalism from the mid-1980s onwards largely emerged in response to exogenous forces, not least of which was globalization. There were many studies of regionalism and globalization (between the 1990s and 2000s) and regionalism and global governance (from the 2000s) but there still remains a deficit of knowledge regarding how regions are shaped by and shape global transformation.

Since regionalism is closely linked to global transformation and world order change, it cannot be understood merely from the point of view of the region under study. Understanding the role of regions in global transformation requires integrating regional theory with a 'global' approach, which is the fourth and final component of rethinking offered in this chapter. In other words, 'comparative regionalism' is not enough to address the essential logic of how regions should be related to global transformation. Fortunately, a global approach does not prevent a particular focus on the regions or states.

As already noted above, a global approach to regions cannot be constructed on basis of methodological nationalism. Even if states remain important actors, it is quite clear that they lack the capacity to handle transnational challenges to national interests, and increasingly respond through global and regional governance beyond the nation-state. Through these processes, states intentionally or unwittingly yield sovereignty, autonomy and decision-making power to some or other degree and ultimately, may end up as semi-independent parts of larger transnational and regional political communities. In this emerging, multi-layered and 'multiplex' system of governance, actors other than the state gain strength.²⁹ This is seen in most policy fields, ranging from trade, economic development, and the environment to social policy and health. Thus, the emerging 'global theory' must rise to the challenge of accommodating the simultaneous involvement of state as well as non-state actors and global, regional, national and local level processes in the course of global transformation. Stating which level is dominant is impossible, because actors and structures intersect and their relative importance differ in time and space.

²⁹ Acharya 2014, *op.cit.*

Few observers would deny that the Westphalian nation-state approach to governance is undergoing transformation, yet the ultimate manifestation of the post-Westphalian model—fully-fledged globalization or multilateral governance—is also contested, or even premature. The basic argument is that contemporary global governance has regional governance as an essential ingredient, albeit not always the most important one.

Too many observers are locked into linear thinking whereby regional governance is considered a step (stepping stone) towards the ‘superior’ solution of fully-fledged global and multilateral governance. Such thinking has at least two major weaknesses. Firstly, it is built on an ideological and theoretical perspective that is biased in favour of multilateral governance at the expense of other notions about the regulation of international and transnational politics. Secondly, it is built around binary distinctions, which neglects the diversity of relationships that exist in today’s governance beyond the nation-state. A need to transcend binary distinctions is one of the major messages of this chapter; such distinctions are reinforced by the primacy of the UN in global security and the misleading analogy of stumbling block vs. stepping stone in the trade controversy. Instead, there is a need to acknowledge and understand the diversity of relationships that exist between global and regional governance institutions. In the field of security and trade, there are combinations of global-regional modes of governance that interact in complex and non-linear ways. From a normative standpoint, these in many respects are also the preferred solutions. The example of health is particularly instructive because it has been dominated by Westphalian modes of government. Confronted by many transnational health challenges (HIV/Aids, SARS, Ebola), there is an emergence of nested forms of governance, whereby national, regional and global modes of governance interact and shape one another. Our thinking about regionalism clearly has to give much more consideration to these and similar issues, which force us to approach regions from a global perspective.

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