

Global Governance 10 (2004), 419–436

Modes of Regional Governance in Africa: Neoliberalism, Sovereignty Boosting, and Shadow Networks



Fredrik Söderbaum

The profound implications of globalization, regionalization, and the restructuring of the nation-state have made it necessary to transcend the conventional obsession with national government and recognize the emergence of new and revised authority and governance structures, both “above” and “below” the level of national government. The political and institutional landscape is in transformation. In response, I suggest in this article that there is a need to think in terms of more complex, multilevel modes of governance, in which the state is reorganized and assumes different functions and where nonstate actors also contribute.

The study transcends the limitations in the debate on governance by (1) bringing in the regional dimension in contrast to the current emphasis on either “global governance” or “good governance” at the national level; and (2) considering informal and private aspects of governance as opposed to the excessive focus on formal and public modes of governance. The purpose of this article is therefore to identify and critically assess three particular modes of regional governance in current Africa with regard to how they are related and by whom, for whom, and for what purpose they are erected.

Critical international political economy (IPE) provides a useful analytical perspective for this endeavor, because it transcends state-centric ontology and rationalist epistemology and is concerned with structural and social change; historical power structures, emphasizing contradictions in them; and change and transformation expressed in normative terms.¹ That is, the critical perspective seeks to unmask the injustices and power relations built into the prevailing order and thereby to contribute to the emancipation of the excluded. It does so by avoiding state-centrism and instead problematizing the “state-society complex.” The critical perspective does not take states as givens, but neither does it wish them

away, which is important in accounting for the changing governance structures in today's global political economy.

The article is structured as follows. In the next section, the phenomenon of "governance" is nuanced and problematized. The elaboration draws attention to the possibility of a variety of modes of governance at various levels and indicates that an important task is to critically assess the power structures, the underlying interests of the dominant actors, and the beneficiaries of these governance mechanisms. Thereafter, in the main section of the article, three particular modes of regional governance in Africa are identified and analyzed: neoliberal regional governance, sovereignty-boosting governance, and regional shadow governance. The analysis explains the origins, the main actors, and the purposes of these three varieties of regional governance. The conclusion draws the threads together and also considers the relationships among the three forms of governance as well as their long-term viability.

Nuancing Governance

James Rosenau provides a useful starting point for conceptualizing and nuancing governance by referring to "spheres of authority at all levels of human activity that amount to systems of rule in which goals are pursued through the exercise of control."² This overall definition implies that there are many varieties of governance that may exist at different levels. Much of the conventional discussion on governance is heavily focused on either global governance or on the idea that the governance challenge is a question of national governance (that is, "good governance" as pushed by the international financial institutions [IFIs] and the donor community in particular). Both these discourses are important and challenging. However, with regard to the first discourse, it is misleading to assume that global governance and multilateral institutions explain the complexities and the realities of what happens on the ground in Africa. The second discourse is state centric and overly concerned with national government.³ By contrast, I argue in this article that the regional dimension is crucial if we are to better understand the phenomenon of governance in contemporary Africa.

Just like states, regions are social constructions and may involve a large number of countries in macroregions or a more limited number grouped in subregions or smaller cross-border microregions. At the same time, the socially constructed nature of regions implies that they are politically contested. There are almost always a multitude of ideas,

regionalization strategies, and modes of regional governance within a particular region that merge, mingle, and clash. Because regions are political and social projects, devised by human (state and nonstate) actors in order to protect or transform existing structures, they may, just like other social projects, fail. Regions can be disrupted from within and from without by the same forces that build them up. In contrast to mainstream thinking in the field, whereby regions are taken as givens or defined in advance of research, the research focus in this article is placed on how social, economic, and political actors perceive, interpret, and carry out regional governance.

As indicated above, various levels of governance are often closely intertwined. This study shows that authority travels to other levels, up or down in the system, and often into more informal and disguised forms. Global, regional, national, and subnational processes are closely intertwined, which results in the need for multilevel analysis. Furthermore, since actors are fully capable of simultaneously pursuing several governance strategies, various modes of governance are not necessarily mutually exclusive but can overlap and even shape each other.

The definition of governance given above also implies that the concept needs to be broadened beyond the common emphasis on formal-public governance. The strong emphasis on formal and public dimensions of governance in much of the literature has prevented a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Although Anthony Payne's study is arguably one of the best available on the topic of regional governance, concern is with formal and public aspects.⁴ Payne concentrates on three particular modes of regional governance in the "Core," which he labels "multilevel governance in the EU," "hubs and spoke governance in North America," and "pre-governance in Asia-Pacific." The limitation of Payne's perspective is revealed primarily in his claim that there is simply *pre-governance* in the Asia Pacific. This contrasts with several observations in the field that authority structures in the Asia Pacific serve the interests of dominant actors and state-business coalitions, and that these actors are organized into informal networks of power, that is, particular informal modes of regional governance, serving private as well as public interests.⁵ This crucial distinction is equally relevant in the case of regional governance in Africa. In fact, to understand the emerging and prevailing modes of governance and whose interests and purposes they serve, it should be recognized that they are more than simply formal-public systems of rule and authority structures for goal achievement.

Conceptually it is useful to distinguish between public and private as well as between formal and informal aspects of governance:

- *Public governance* serves an identifiable population across a range of issues of general concern.
- *Private governance* is generated by and for a specific group of actors, and is concerned with a restricted range of self-interested issues.
- *Formal governance* is backed by legal treaties or constitutions.
- *Informal governance* is based upon mutual understandings and accommodations, tacit agreements, etc.⁶

Building on the preceding definition, *regional governance* can be defined as spheres of authority at the regional level of human activity, that amount to systems of rule—formal or informal, public or private—in which goals are pursued through the exercise of control.⁷

Although the governance concept needs to be nuanced, it is still relevant to discuss what governance is and what it is not. Governance must not be confused with government (although it encompasses the latter). Governance is more than government, but it is less than sociopolitical and economic-political processes as such. In other words, to be able to speak of governance and “systems of rule,” there must be a certain degree of control and continuity. There must also be a minimum degree of formality and public interest for governance to be sustainable and legitimate. The dividing line is not crystal clear, and in this article I reveal that there are many examples whereby a small elite manages to establish a fluid and rather informal system of rule that mainly serves their own private interests rather than those of the broader public. Thus, regional governance may be both shortsighted and have weak legitimacy. But weak and malign governments can be very persistent, as can weak and malign modes of governance. The concept of governance must thus be freed from wishful thinking: governance is constructed by certain actors for certain purposes.

Regional Governance in Africa: By Whom, for Whom, and for What Purpose?

Governance in Africa is more pluralistic and more complex than commonly believed. The weakening of the state does not necessarily imply an equivalent weakening of governance, which may be stronger at other levels than the national, involve new actors, and be both informal and private. This study deals with a limited albeit important set of modes of regional governance in contemporary Africa, here labeled neoliberal regional governance, sovereignty-boosting governance, and regional shadow

governance. Of course, there are other varieties of regional governance, and the cases are selected to draw attention to the complex relationship between public-private and formal-informal dimensions. The majority of the empirical illustrations are taken from southern Africa, but other regions of Africa are also considered. By abstracting from various concrete cases, it is possible to identify more general modes of governance, which in many cases overlap. Although the modes of regional governance emerge within a particular African context, it is important to point out that similar structures can be discerned in other parts of the world.

Neoliberal Regional Governance

The great majority of present-day regionalist schemes in Africa are founded on the notion that the regional economic integration project should be market driven and outward looking and should remove obstacles to the free movement of goods, services, capital, and investment within the regions as well as to the rest of the world. The overall intention is to ensure a closer integration into the world economy. The main justification of this strategy is that it contributes more to the process of (global) liberalization than it detracts from the process. According to this line of thinking, which is often labeled “open regionalism” or “adjustment-adapted market integration,”⁸ there is no contradiction in the great number of coexisting regional trading and economic integration schemes in Africa, because they are all perceived to contribute to the same goal of liberalization, reduced protectionism, and downsizing of the role of the state in the economy. In southern and eastern Africa, there are many coexisting regional interstate frameworks, such as the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Cross-Border Initiative/Regional Integration Facilitation Forum (CBI/RIFF), and the Indian Ocean Rim Trade Bloc (IORTB). A similar pattern exists in most other macroregions in Africa. Although each regional project can be seen as a mode of governance in its own right, it is striking how the various projects conform to the same overall neoliberal belief system and broader system of rule.

The external and global dimension is crucial. The international financial institutions and U.S. and European donor agencies strongly promote, enforce, and support neoliberal regional governance. However, although the African regional organizations and African states often claim to be supportive of neoliberal regional governance, there is also resistance. In this sense, it is sometimes more of a model than the actual mode of regional governance on the African continent.

Hand in hand with neoliberal governance at the macroregional level is a simultaneous and perhaps even stronger logic at play on the micro-regional level. Again, southern Africa is a good illustration. The southern African region is reconfigured by the implementation of a number of spatial development initiatives (SDIs).⁹ These are targeted, short-term interventions whose main purpose is to accelerate private investment in order to unlock economic potential, to enhance regional economic integration, and to become integrated into the global economy. It is an outspoken neoliberal market paradigm that rules investment decisions. One of the main architects stated, "In order to be selected for inclusion in the SDI process, a project must offer a commercially viable return on investment, i.e., it must be a bankable project—a project which a commercial financial institution would be willing to back."¹⁰ The SDIs are governance mechanisms designed to quickly change legislation, change the role of the public/state, broaden the ownership base of the economy, and enhance market "competition." As such they are designed to be part of a broader pattern of neoliberal regional governance in southern Africa.

Considering the size of the SDI projects, they are weakly institutionalized. They are intended to be informal and nonbureaucratic to allow for flexibility and adjustability to private and contextual demands. This mode of regional governance represents a radical shift from older formal and ambitious public modes of governance in favor of a notion that conforms with neoliberal globalization, whereby too much government is considered a systemic fault. According to the official view, only a small number of formal organizations and institutions are needed, because these are seen as rent-seeking and bureaucratic anyway. The result is a narrow and exclusivist governance mechanism, geared only or primarily toward enhancing privatization and private investment projects and public-private partnerships (PPPs). This implies a loss of public participation and democratic control in the decisionmaking and implementation process. Again, informality serves the interests of the powerful and wealthy, especially a small ruling political elite and transnational capitalist interests.¹¹

Through the two-track model of open regionalism and SDIs, an informal but nevertheless strong coalition of economic and political elite interests, led by South African actors and President Thabo Mbeki's private business partners, creates and sustains neoliberal regional governance in southern Africa, which also draws in (outward-oriented) economic and political elites in neighboring countries. As indicated above, to a significant extent this mode of governance is also actively promoted from the outside through external actors, such as the IFIs and the European and U.S. donor community.

According to neoliberal regional governance, good governance is thus defined as “less government” and “getting the prices right,” rather than providing public goods and intervening in the economy and ensuring poverty reduction.¹² It indicates the commodification of basic material needs and everyday life, which only results in a retreat of the conventional welfare and development ambitions of the state. Poverty reduction is reduced to economic growth, and development projects must be bankable and profitable. The public is needed mainly to ensure an enabling environment for the private. In other words, the public has been subsumed under the private. It is a systemic fault in this type of governance to accommodate the interests of the poor, the disadvantaged, and the unemployed who lack the means to participate, much less compete on a global market.¹³

In accepting this ideology, the government/state becomes the disciplining representative of global economic forces—a “transmission belt for transnational capital” in Coxian terminology—rather than the protector against these forces, which is the classical task of mercantilist nation building and public governance.¹⁴ Although all strategies are surrounded by a rhetoric of people-centered development, the role of public institutions has been reduced to implement trade and investment liberalization or boost new bankable and commercially viable investment projects, often of gigantic proportions—for example, Saldanha Steel, the Mozal aluminum smelter, and the Maputo Iron and Steel project. Even public roads are becoming commercialized, as shown by the N4 toll road between Johannesburg and Maputo. In this process, the main function of the state has been reduced to a gigantic investment promotion agency.

Sovereignty-boosting Governance

It is a widespread belief in the research field that regional integration requires a ceding of state sovereignty and national decisionmaking authority to supranational institutions.¹⁵ Although this dichotomy between sovereignty and functioning regional integration is first and foremost a remnant from neofunctional theory, it continues to plague the debate. The notion that sovereignty constitutes an obstacle is to misunderstand ways through which state actors and political leaders are able to use regionalism and regional governance to bolster their regimes and governments. This may or may not promote the interests of the citizenry and the broader public.

According to intergovernmentalist and neorealist logic, such state-steered regional governance can possibly be portrayed as a means to

promote the national interest. However, there are at least two main reasons why conventional state-centric and intergovernmental analysis is not enough, or is even misleading. First, because of their inherent “weakness,” most of the postcolonial states in Africa tend to be obsessed with absolute sovereignty and the formal status of their governments rather than with the promotion of national or public interest in a more comprehensive sense. Second, in many cases the so-called state is much less than what it pretends to be: The type of regional governance designed to boost the government is exclusivist and centralized, “reflecting the perceptions of government leaders, small groups of civil servants and perhaps also key bilateral and multilateral donors.”¹⁶ In fact, under certain conditions, the state is not much more than a (neopatrimonial) interest group, and in the worst instances it has degenerated into a postmodern mafia syndicate (consider for instance, Liberia under Charles Taylor or Zimbabwe under Robert Mugabe).

To understand how certain governments use regional governance to boost the official status and sovereignty of their governments, one has to consider the nature of statehood in Africa. It is widely agreed that the states in Africa are weak. However, these states enjoy international recognition even though they often lack substantial and credible statehood by the criteria of international law. The result is that in their international relations weak states tend to place heavy emphasis on formal and absolute sovereignty—that is, the maintenance of existing borders and the principle of nonintervention in domestic affairs—because it enhances the power of the governing political elite and its ability to stay in power.¹⁷ In fact, the institution of formal sovereignty is the justification for their continuation and survival as states. The principle of formal sovereignty has clearly been successful in Africa. Although many African states are extremely weak, the state system and the old colonial boundaries have, with a few exceptions, remained intact. The result is a somewhat paradoxical situation with weak states that have rather strong or at least stable regimes.¹⁸

The argument raised here is that there are many instances whereby political leaders and regimes are using regional governance to promote rather than to reduce absolute state sovereignty and its legitimacy. In many places around Africa, ruling political leaders engage in a rather intense diplomatic game, whereby they praise regionalism and sign documents, such as free trade agreements and water protocols. Once again southern Africa is a good example. Ever since the foundation of SADC, an increasing number of members and sectors have been added. In this way, SADC’s political leaders have been able to create an image that the organization is constantly developing. This has enabled them to be

perceived as promoters of the goals and values of regionalism, which in turn has enabled them to raise the profile and status of their (often) authoritarian governments. The problem is that this has not been to serve public interest but rather to raise the formal status of their crumbling governments. To implement policies is not the first priority. Instead, SADC decisionmaking is, as David Simon points out, highly formalized, and to some extent even ritualized.¹⁹ This social practice is then repeated and institutionalized at a large number of ministerial and summit meetings, which in reality involves no real debate and no wider consultation within (or among) member states. Many other regional organizations in Africa function in a similar fashion. For the political leaders, it is a matter of constructing an image of state building and of promoting important values.

Formal participation in SADC is another way whereby the states seek to confirm, fix and secure the appearance and power of "sovereignty." Rather like the boundaries and colour schemes of political maps, participation in fora such as SADC is a way in which the state is actively represented as a real, solid, omnipresent authority. In doing so, the fact that it is a contested, socially constructed (not simply natural) object is obscured, and states would have us take them for granted as the natural objects of governance and politics.²⁰

From the point of view of governments and political leaders, this type of regional diplomacy is often successful. The problem is that many postcolonial states in Africa are to an overwhelming extent ruled by personal leaders, who are often portrayed as embodying the idea of the state. The personal rulers often use the coercive instruments of the state to monopolize power and to further their own interests, including to deny or restrict the political rights and opportunities of opposing groups.²¹

This logic can be detected in many fields. Security is one of them. An important part of the explanation for the regional interventions carried out under the banner of regional organizations, such as SADC and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), can be seen as a relatively informal governance and a collective intervention mechanism, whereby ruling governments pool sovereignty and power in order to strengthen their own and their neighbors' weak governments and regimes against domestic opposition and national disintegration. This mode of regional governance is created by political leaders, securocrats, and national armed forces (sometimes with the assistance of mercenaries and external powers, including the UN). The regional interventions are carried out to increase state stability, strengthen sovereignty, and maintain

the existing order so as not to disrupt existing or future economic relationships in the region and with the outside world. Because there are no or very few preventive conflict management strategies, military force is seen as the conventional solution. Military interventions can be characterized as quick-fix fire brigade operations, often conducted on an arbitrary basis in which personal relationships and the mood and strength of political leaders determine the outcome.²² To the extent civil and nonstate forces (including opposition parties) have the capacity to mobilize themselves, they are primarily seen as threats to political stability and the ruling regime. Whether this type of regional governance also promotes broader public interests, such as democratization and human security, remains an open question. Its viability, strength, legitimacy, and desirability rest with how the ruling regime is interpreted. Some regimes have undoubtedly egalitarian motives for sovereignty boosting, while others do not.

Regional Shadow Governance

It is widely recognized that there are many vibrant and dynamic processes of de facto and informal market activities all over the African continent. Although these may sometimes be understood as survival strategies created by the poor, the excluded, and other nonstate actors, it is important to recognize that many researchers draw attention to the fact that state/regime actors are deeply entrenched in informal market activities with the purpose of promoting patronage networks and (hidden) private self-interests. For instance, it is widely agreed that the parallel economy in the former Zaire, which exceeded the official economy in size, expanded as a consequence of the systematic corruption, the theft of state revenues, and the personal rule of President Mobutu Sese Seko.²³ William Reno referred to Sierra Leone as a "shadow state"—a state where the formal facade of political power based on informal markets shelters corrupt politicians.²⁴

It is often shown that these types of activities extend beyond the borders of the shadow state as such. Stephen Ellis and Janet MacGaffey elucidate the crucial relationship between politics and economics and between the domestic and the international level:

International trade in Africa, and inter-continental trade particularly, occupies a crucial strategic position chiefly because of the scarcity of foreign exchange which is necessary to import manufactured goods and which can play a vital role in the construction of a political power-base. Government ministers and officials regulate access to hard currency either by their control of the state, or by going into business themselves or through nominees including members of their own family, or indirectly, by forming alliances with traders. The interplay of the

resulting trade and clientist networks is an ingredient in most successful political careers in Africa.²⁵

Although the international dimension is mentioned in the literature, the regional dimension seldom receives enough attention. The argument raised here is that we can increase our understanding of what is going on by analyzing shadow networks as a particular mode of regional governance—that is, as a particular but malign system of rule for goal achievement.

The viability of informal shadow activities depends on states' lack of transparency, declining financial capacities, and territorial control. The success of these shadow activities also depends on the exploitation and preservation of boundary disparities. For instance, James Sidaway and Richard Gibb refer to the extremely drawn out process of renegotiating the SACU agreement in the postapartheid era by quoting a representative of the South African negotiation team, who states that dominant rentier-elite factions in the BLSN countries (Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, and Namibia) "are dragging their feet because the old formula is advantageous to them."²⁶ Consequently, the argument is that certain state elites and rentier classes actively seek to preserve existing boundary disparities and therefore also seek the continued failure of regional organizations and policy frameworks in order to further their own private interests. Sometimes the strategy is less subtle. Ian Taylor and Paul Williams observed that "a number of state elites in the Great Lakes and southern African regimes have ceased to use the mantle of sovereignty to promote the collective good. Instead, they have used it to help bolster their own patronage networks and weaken those of potential challengers."²⁷ This mode of regional shadow governance grows from below, and it is designed for personal accumulation and not for the regulation of regional interaction or for the encouragement of formal-public modes of regional governance.

It should be recognized that these activities and networks are inherently inequitable and extremely uneven. Power and resources accumulate at the top, benefitting the rich and powerful and those with jobs, including the urban and rural producers. Small-scale cross-border traders have a disadvantage, because the economies of scale are "only for those who can pay the necessary bribes."²⁸ The only popular dimension of these networks can be found in their capacity to adjust to market demands and in the ruthless exploitation of populations that are confronted with diminishing alternatives to satisfy their needs.²⁹

The attempts to restrict these activities have been counterproductive. In the new (neoliberal and post-Cold War) context where the state

apparatus itself offers fewer opportunities for private accumulation and where formal barriers between countries have been reduced, shadow states have gone regional. In the process of going regional, they have expanded to more criminal activities, such as new trades in illicit drugs (including heroin, mandrax, and cocaine), arms, light weapons, and other merchandise of war. In fact, these networks can even be actively involved in the creation and promotion of war, conflict, and destruction, as seen for instance in Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Zimbabwe.³⁰

Without disregarding other complex reasons for the conflicts in the Great Lakes region of Africa during the past decade, there are a range of questionable reasons for the military interventions in these conflicts. The ad hoc and informal nature of the SADC organ is sometimes seen as a failure of organized security cooperation. However, there is evidence that this informality has enabled particular leaders to use the (quasi)legitimacy of the SADC organ to assist fellow political leaders to boost sovereignty (discussed previously) and/or to bolster their own personal economic interests by way of shadow networks. The latter is a more destructive and rent-seeking form of regional governance compared to the former. As eloquently pointed out by Taylor and Williams,

Far from being a humanitarian and developmental disaster which sabotages the nascent [African] Renaissance, for well-placed elites and businessmen the wars in the Great Lakes region . . . offer potentially substantial resources for those able to exploit them. This explains much of the foreign interventions in the DRC: it is not only about preserving national security and defeating enemies, it is also about securing access to resource-rich areas and establishing privatised accumulation networks that can emerge and prosper under conditions of war and anarchy. In this sense, war assumes the characteristics of a business venture, the beneficiaries of which are unlikely to abandon the venture easily.³¹

Through regional shadow governance, state and nonstate actors come together in diffuse and volatile networks in order to profit from violence and from underground economies. It is a devilishly well calculated terror war and obviously has little to contribute to human development and security, or for that matter the broader national interest. A fairly limited number of regional players tend to be involved. A recent UN report on illegal activities in the DRC highlights the connections among Zimbabwean, Namibian, Angolan, and Congolese politicians and military figures who have links to international business through trade in diamonds, gold, copper, and cobalt.³² Sandra MacLean states that the report reads like “a ‘Who’s Who’ list of prominent political and military figures in

the governments of the region.”³³ For instance, anyone following the Zimbabweans in the DRC conflict is probably familiar with names such as Billy Rautenbach, John Bredenkamp, and Lieutenant General Vitalis Zvinavashe, as well as company names such as Gecamines, (DRC-based) Comiex, Sengamines, Oryx, Osleg (controlled by the Zimbabwean Defence Force), Cosleg, and Ridgepoint Overseas Development. MacLean points out that both Rautenbach and Bredenkamp have had long-standing and close connections with government officials in current as well as previous, even oppositional, regimes. Other well-known figures in this dirty business—which MacLean refers to as “networks of plunder”—include Zimbabwe’s former justice minister and permanent secretary of the ministry of defence, the general manager of the Zimbabwe Minerals Development Corporation, the acting general manager of the Minerals Marketing Corporation of Zimbabwe, and the commander of the Zimbabwean Defence Force.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been to enrich the study of governance in Africa by (1) going beyond the current emphasis on global governance or national-level governance and drawing attention to the important role the regional dimension plays in the larger picture; and (2) bringing to the fore that governance is also informal and private.

Critical international political economy was used as the analytical point of departure because it is helpful in exposing the underlying power and authority structures, with the goal of emancipating the excluded from injustices and inequalities built into the prevailing order. In other words, IPE is designed to critically address the key questions raised in this article, such as by whom, for whom, and for what purpose authority structures are erected and maintained.

Three particular modes of regional governance are highlighted: neoliberal regional governance; sovereignty-boosting governance; and regional shadow governance. The first is perhaps the dominating mode of regional governance in contemporary Africa. It emerges in many corners of Africa and in different guises. It appears in multiple forms, under continental African frameworks, such as the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), various macro- and subregional economic integration schemes, and cross-border microregional initiatives such as the development corridors and SDIs in southern Africa. Neoliberal regional governance is created by coalitions and networks of governments, big business, IFIs, and donors, albeit with national governments formally

determining policies. Moreover, although neoliberal regional governance is built on a certain degree of formality, its overarching strategy and direction are broader and more important than intergovernmental regional organizations, such as SADC, CBI, and COMESA. Neoliberal regional governance seeks to promote the public interest, so the official discourse goes. However, the fundamental problem is that the public is subsumed under the private. Neoliberal regional governance reinforces a process of neoliberal globalization, which lacks ethical content and contains a drastically reduced role for public interests, since this governance depends on global market demands and on access to international capital and does not focus on poverty reduction and public goods. In its detrimental form, neoliberal regional governance implies a diffuse and turbulent system of competing and changing authority structures, with the consequence of exclusion as well as a drastically reduced role for the state/government as we know it. Nevertheless, under the right conditions, this mode of regional governance has the potential to be transformed into more inclusive, democratic, and just governance structures, primarily through the mobilization of local business and the involvement of civil society.

The second mode of regional governance I highlight in this article is designed to boost sovereignty and national government. It represents a system of rule with the regime largely in control, assuming the privilege of intervention by reference to a value system focused on political order, state stability, and national sovereignty. It is created and promoted by those actors pushing such an agenda—mainly political leaders, governments, and securocrats. It is based on a certain degree of formality in order to obtain legitimacy, or to make informal competitors (including rebels and quite often political opposition) illegitimate. Sometimes it emerges as a direct result of neoliberal regional governance, since the latter may actually undermine both national sovereignty and a functioning government. The desirability of sovereignty-boosting regional governance depends to a large extent on the interpretation of whether the involved regime/government is considered to be ruling for or against the people and the public interest (that is what sovereignty is used for). For instance, when questionable political figures such as Robert Mugabe or Charles Taylor are in control, there are good reasons to be sceptical, because they may at the same time be actively involved in the third type of regional governance—regional shadow governance.

In this article I suggest that sometimes the shadow state has gone regional, which is partly a consequence of neoliberalism and the fact that there is not much left of state resources to plunder. In regional

shadow governance, a small number of regime actors use the formal state apparatus as a facade and join forces with a limited number of informal or criminal private actors, private security companies, and/or military leaders to bolster their own private interests. This mode of regional governance occurs in many parts of Africa, first and foremost where the shadow state exists. One of the most tragic examples is the regional intervention by ECOMOG, the cease-fire Monitoring Observer Group of ECOWAS in West Africa. Although often referred to as a success story in the literature, it is clear that ECOMOG became part of the political economy of violence that kept the conflicts going in the West African war zone. Important sections of the ECOMOG troops actively took part in the crimes committed against civilians and became heavily involved in warlord politics and plunder. The questionable role of the ECOMOG force is perhaps best illustrated by how it came to be known in Liberia as “Every Commodity and Movable Object Gone.” A similar type of logic prevails in the wars in the Great Lakes region.

One general argument I make in this article is that there is a pluralism of modes of regional governance in Africa. I have identified and assessed three particular modes. Sometimes they are distinct and not closely related and at other times only one or two prevail within a given region. Yet at certain times, the three different modes of regional governance overlap and stand in a rather complex (and sometimes dialectic) relationship with one another. As a result, they may persist in spite of their sometimes detrimental effects.

Neoliberal regional governance is perhaps the dominating mode of regional governance. It prevails, at least as a discourse, in most regions of Africa. The fact that the regional dimensions are an integral part and fit the broader neoliberal strategy is what makes it rather pervasive. Sometimes it constitutes more of a model (promoted from the outside) than actual regional governance in Africa. Sovereignty-boosting regional governance may occur for many different reasons. As indicated previously, during the last decade it has often emerged in response to the challenge posed by neoliberalism and globalization to the sovereignty and legitimacy of the state/regime. Hence, sovereignty-boosting regional governance may emerge as a strategy to rescue what neoliberalism challenges. Regional shadow governance may also be related to the two other forms of governance and may be explained as a consequence of neoliberalism and structural adjustments, which have left few state assets to plunder. As a result, certain corrupt regime actors (and certain businessmen) go regional. And since they need the state and formal regionalism as a facade to continue with their rent seeking and

plunder, they also need to pursue sovereignty-boosting regional governance as a shelter.

Taken together, this picture of partly overlapping and often informal and private modes of governance is what makes Africa an intriguing and heterogeneous continent—one that is more complex than the picture presented by the dominating approaches in the research field. Since the cases of this study are taken from the current empirical scene in Africa, it is possible that this scene may look very different tomorrow. On the other hand, according to the more pessimistic view, it looks as if these modes of governance, perhaps in combination, give a good clue to the current political and economic system in Africa and perhaps also to what its future will be. Finally, I should emphasize that there is no reason to assume that these three modes of regional governance are restricted to Africa. 🌐

Notes

Fredrik Söderbaum is associate professor in the Department of Peace and Development Research (Padrigu) at Göteborg University and associate research fellow at the United Nations University/Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU/CRIS), Bruges, Belgium. He is widely published on the topic of regionalism. Recent coedited books are *Regionalization in a Globalizing World* (2001), *The New Regionalism in Africa* (2003), *Theories of New Regionalism* (2003), *Regionalism and Uneven Development in Southern Africa: The Case of the Maputo Development Corridor* (2003), and *The Political Economy of Regionalism: The Case of Southern Africa* (forthcoming). The financial support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) is gratefully acknowledged. The constructive comments by Morten Bøås, Björn Hettne, Patrik Stålgren, Ian Taylor, and three anonymous reviewers are greatly appreciated.

1. Cf. Robert Cox, *Approaches to World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Björn Hettne, ed., *International Political Economy: Understanding Global Disorder* (London: Zed Books, 1995); Craig N. Murphy and Roger Tooze, eds., *The New International Political Economy* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1991); and Anthony Payne, "The New Political Economy of Area Studies," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 27, no. 2 (1998): 253–273.

2. James Rosenau, *Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontier: Exploring Governance in a Turbulent World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 145.

3. For instance, the regional dimension is not even mentioned in an otherwise sensitive volume, Goran Hyden, Bamidele Olowu, and Hastings W. O. Okoth-Ogendo, eds., *African Perspectives on Governance* (Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2000).

4. Anthony Payne, "Globalisation and Modes of Regionalist Governance," in Jon Pierre, ed., *Debating Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 201–218.

5. Peter Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Norman D. Palmer, *The New Regionalism in Asia and the Pacific* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1991).

6. Barry Jones, "Governance and the Challenges of Changing Political Space," (mimeograph, University of Reading, 1998), p. 2.

7. Rosenau, *Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontier*, p. 145.

8. Cross-Border Initiative, *Volume 2: Country Papers and Progress Reports for the Initiative to Facilitate Cross-Border Trade, Investment and Payments in Eastern and Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean* (Harare: CBI, 1995); World Bank, *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1989); Jens Haarløv, *Regional Cooperation and Integration Within Industry and Trade in Southern Africa* (Aldershot, England: Avebury, 1997).

9. See "Spatial Development Initiative (SDI) in Southern Africa," available online at www.africansdi.com; and Fredrik Söderbaum and Ian Taylor, eds., *Regionalism and Uneven Development in Southern Africa: The Case of the Maputo Development Corridor* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2003).

10. Paul Jourdan, "Spatial Development Initiatives (SDIs)—the Official View," *Development Southern Africa* 15, no. 5 (summer 1998): 20.

11. Söderbaum and Taylor, *Regionalism and Uneven Development in Southern Africa*.

12. Carol B. Thompson, "Regional Challenges to Globalisation: Perspectives from Southern Africa," *New Political Economy* 5, no. 1 (2000): 41–58.

13. James H. Mittelman, *The Globalization Syndrome: Transformation and Resistance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Michael Niemann, *A Spatial Approach to Regionalisms in the Global Economy* (Basingstoke, England: Macmillan, 2000).

14. See Robert Cox, "Global Perestroika," in Robert Cox, ed., *Approaches to World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Fredrik Söderbaum and Ian Taylor, "Transmission Belt for Transnational Capital or Facilitator for Development: Problematising the Role of the State in the Maputo Development Corridor," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 39, no. 4 (2001): 675–695.

15. Ernst B. Haas, *Beyond the Nation-State* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964); Heribert Dieter, Guy Lamb, and Henning Melber, "Prospects for Regional Cooperation in Southern Africa," in *Regionalism and Regional Integration in Africa: A Debate of Current Aspects and Issues*, Discussion Paper No. 11 (Uppsala: Nordic African Institute, 2001), p. 63.

16. David Simon, "Regional Development–Environment Discourses, Policies and Practices in Post-Apartheid Southern Africa," in Andrew Grant and Fredrik Söderbaum, eds., *The New Regionalism in Africa* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2003), p. 71.

17. Christopher Clapham, *Africa and the International System: The Politics of State Survival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

18. Morten Bøås and Karin Dokken, *Internasjonal Politikk og Utenrikspolitikk i Afrika sør for Sahara* (International politics and foreign policy in Africa south of the Sahara) (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2002), p. 138.

19. Simon, "Regional Development–Environment Discourses," p. 71.

20. James Sidaway and Richard Gibb, "SADC, COMESA, SACU: Contradictory Formats for Regional Integration in Southern Africa," in David Simon,

ed., *Reconfiguring the Region: South Africa in Southern Africa* (London: James Currey, 1998), p. 179.

21. Clapham, *Africa and the International System*.

22. Fredrik Söderbaum, "Whose Security? Comparing Security Regionalism in West and Southern Africa," in James J. Hentz and Morten Bøås, eds., *New and Critical Security and Regionalism* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2003), p. 180.

23. William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

24. William Reno, *Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

25. Stephen Ellis and Janet MacGaffey, "Research on Sub-Sahara's Unrecorded International Trade: Some Methodological and Conceptual Problems," *African Studies Review* 39, no. 2 (1996): 31.

26. Sidaway and Gibb, "SADC, COMESA, SACU," p. 178.

27. Ian Taylor and Paul Williams, "South African Foreign Policy and the Great Lakes Crisis: African Renaissance Meets *Vagabonde Politique*," *African Affairs* 100 (2001): 281.

28. Daniel Bach, "Regionalism Versus Regional Integration: The Emergence of a New Paradigm in Africa," in Jean Grugel and Wil Hout, eds., *Regionalism Across the North-South Divide: State Strategies and Globalization* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 162.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

30. Sandra MacLean, "Mugabe at War: The Political Economy of Conflict in Zimbabwe," *Third World Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (2002): 513–528.

31. Taylor and Williams, "South African Foreign Policy and the Great Lakes Crisis," p. 273.

32. United Nations Security Council, *Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, UN Doc. S/2001/357 (12 April 2001).

33. MacLean, "Mugabe at War," p. 523.