

Region building debates in a global context

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A starting point of this introductory chapter is that region-building debates necessarily take place within a global context and are informed by wider patterns and trends so it is important to examine this wider context and how it develops over time. At the same time region building is also intimately connected with the specifics of a particular region, hence a parallel study of regional particularities and variants is also needed.

Nowhere is this more apparent than the case of the African continent, as different chapters in this volume show. However, if we also consider the parallel cases of Western Europe, Asia or Latin America since the Second World War, we cannot understand region building without juxtaposing the global and the local. All these regions developed alongside and in response to major changes in the international system: the Cold War and its ending or the processes of decolonisation and globalisation. Yet each region also developed in a unique way, responding to local circumstances informed by geography and history. In this respect any informed International Relations study of region building also demands a good area studies perspective – something that is often lacking in attempts to construct a general theory of regionalism.

General Features and Theories of Region Building

Some definitions

While this chapter focuses primarily on region-building as a policy linked to formal organizations comprised of states, it is also important to note that the activities clustered under the term of region-building occupy a wide spectrum of activity from integration and cooperation within regional institutions to more informal or ad hoc processes and practices. Regional integration is at one end of the spectrum denoting a process where previously disparate units become united implying the surrender of state authority to some supranational body. Region-building, like the associated term regionalism, is a looser term which is understood here as the promotion of regionally-based policies and practices. It could be as much about fostering shared ideas, a dialogue or regional awareness as it is about building formal institutions. Regionalisation is another widely used term, which needs to be distinguished from regionalism and region-building because it can refer to spontaneous or undirected regional activity. Regionalisation, the *process* may drive and flow from regionalism, the *policy*, but it is not a conscious project.¹

The formal informal divide

Within regionalism and region building processes there are sharp divides over levels of legalization and institutionalization. As regards this formal-informal divide, some

states evidently prefer the greater flexibility and opt out that informal arrangements allow, and this is reflected in looser institutional arrangements.² The Central American peace process was initiated in the 1980s informal Contadora grouping rather than the more formal setting of the Organization of America States. At the United Nations level the preference for informality is evident in the Security Council's frequent use of ad hoc coalitions or groups of friends as a means of conflict mediation.³ Others like the tie-in of formality, where it offers harder contractual obligations or guarantees. And here the hard-soft law analogy regarding state preferences is helpful in showing under which conditions states might prefer 'hard' over 'soft' regionalism.⁴ Contrast the development of the European Union (EU), a highly legalized institution, with that of the Conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe or Asia Pacific Economic Conference, both of which commenced as a conference rather than a formal organization. So did the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) of 1980, which aimed to finally dismantle apartheid South Africa in the early 1990s and only became a community in 1992 with the formation of the South African Development Community (SADC). The Association of South East Asian Nations' (ASEAN) early activities were largely informal, based around the principles of dialogue and consensus building, reflecting the limits of cooperation in a conflict-prone region.⁵ It did not formally adopt a Charter – an important constitutional development - until 2008.⁶ Though this chapter focuses principally on region building as a policy linked to formal organizations, it recognizes the important roles that informal processes can play in the start up and evolution of cooperation.

Geography and territory

Apart from definitional questions discussed above, there are also various types and size of region that can be built depending on the designs and intentions of the builders. Efforts at region building usually conform to a combination of geographical, political or cultural logics, though not in equal measure and scholars disagree on the hierarchy of factors that drive regionalism.⁷ The League of Arab States (LAS) is an example of an organization applying linguistic-cultural rather than purely geographical conditionality for inclusion: only the 22 Arab-speaking states are eligible, so Israel Iran and Turkey are excluded (Turkey has recently been granted observer status⁸). The Islamic Cooperation Organization (ICO) is another example where religious identity, rather than geography defines membership. History and politics explain the start up and consolidation of an organization like the Commonwealth, though for some the idea of the Commonwealth as a regional organization is stretching the definition too far, because from a simple geographical perspective Commonwealth countries are widely dispersed across five major regions.

From a geographical and territorial perspective international (as opposed to sub-national) region building also occupies a wide spectrum. It includes large, continental-scale projects, covering contiguous territorial areas, or smaller regional units, sometimes called sub-regions, with the latter denoting fewer member states and occupying a smaller territorial space. The names of such organizations usually indicate their size and reach: the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Southern African Development Community (SADC) or the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR) all occupy sub-regions within their wider respective regions: the

Middle East, Africa and Latin America. It should be noted that size, in itself, is not necessarily a facilitator of region building, often the reverse. The potential collective weight of a larger number of states is balanced by their diversity and the difficulty of reaching common agreement.⁹ Indeed, large-scale region building is notoriously hard to achieve beyond advancing dialogue and confidence building measures. In this respect it experiences similar obstacles to universal organizations like the United Nations while lacking the equivalent authority and legitimacy.¹⁰ Smaller, more compact institutions with one or more powerful players, despite their more limited resources, may be more effective in taking the lead in and promoting region building. The start up of the European Community as well as the activities of the GCC, ECOWAS or MERCOSUR all depended on strong regional players. In Africa, a recent innovation to maximize efficiency is the aspiration to bring regional organizations under a single umbrella in the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) initiative.¹¹ The wider ASEAN network is another example with the ASEAN Regional Forum and ASEAN plus Three constituting the ASEAN 'family' of institutions.¹²

Functions and purposes

Fourth, region building serves different functions and purposes. Some regions are constructed for the purposes of fulfilling specific function whether security, development or economic. Many early organizations followed the EU lead in proposing to create free trade areas and common markets.¹³ Some organizations today remain principally focused on economic integration like APEC or NAFTA. Some are self-consciously security oriented like the long-established North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or the more recently established Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which has prioritized cooperation against terrorist threats. Others are multi-purpose, as was the case with a number of the early continental or 'pan' associations like the Organization of American States (OAS), Organization of African Unity (OAU), or the LAS. An interesting feature of region building is how the emphasis and functions can shift depending on changing external and internal factors. Some organizations that started life promising economic integration have moved towards promoting security tasks: the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is one such case. Others have experienced sustained institutional deepening and accordingly expanded their repertoires to take on both economic and security roles – the EU is the most obvious example, but there are others like MERCOSUR.

Drivers

Finally, and reflecting its global and local origins, regional building is a process that can be driven both externally and internally, though the two are often found in combination. First, it can be driven by other international organizations: the United Nations (UN) in particular but other multilateral institutions like the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade or World Trade Organization may act as engines of regional cooperation. The role of the United Nations as a facilitator of regional security cooperation will be considered later in the chapter. The European Union has also become an important facilitator of global regionalism, both by providing a model and by promoting inter-regional cooperation, for example in the Joint Africa-EU Strategy; or in attempting to create a greater Mediterranean region to incorporate

Middle Eastern states.¹⁴ Second, regionalism may be driven by powerful external states. The United States and Great Britain and France were interested in and supportive of the construction of the European Community, the LAS and African institutions respectively as vehicles for enhancing their regional and global position. The US supported the creation of ASEAN as a stabilizing force in Cold War Asia. Since the end of the Cold War the US as well as Russia inside and outside the former Soviet space, have been active in promoting region building, particularly in conflict areas where they wish to sustain their involvement.

Just as important, of course, are the internal drivers of regionalism. First, region building reflects the specific concerns of states - domestic elites and interest groups – whether security, economic and political.¹⁵ Second, one or more core regional states – hegemons – may be particularly important in driving and sustaining regional organization.¹⁶ Individuals may play important roles in promoting region-building ideas and policies as the chapter by Adebajo shows in writing of regional entrepreneurs in Africa, Europe and Latin America.

At a macro level, regional blocs of states have been influenced by wider trends, particularly among developing countries, who have viewed region building as a defence against the pretensions of global powers, or as a way of harnessing their collective strength and identity in pursuit of common regional goals like economic development or security. Such efforts were evident in UN forums like the G-77 with its demands for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) in the 1970s; the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which had its origins in the 1950s. There is a synergy between such developing country or ‘southern’ coalitions and region-building, illustrated, for example in the work of the Dependency School which highlighted the unequal relationship between the advanced industrialised and less developed countries. Though this school originated largely in Latin America it influenced economic policy throughout the developing world. Current forums, like the G-20, also reflect similar intentions to realign the international economic and political system, challenging the persistence of Western predominance.

These combinations of external and internal drivers may change over time: external factors may become more or less important – at times of international crisis for example. It is widely recognized that crises provide critical turning points in stories of region building.¹⁷ In this respect, theories of historical institutionalism, which track institutional pathways and processes of change, are helpful in identifying such junctures in regionalism.¹⁸ Where regions suffer from chronic internal conflicts and instability and are of particular interest to external actors (like the Middle East) there may be repeated, externally-driven efforts to region build. Or region building may become a more internally-driven process, as the case of Africa since the Cold War where outside powers sought disengagement; or in Asia or Latin America where the effects of global financial crisis sparked a desire for greater regional autonomy.¹⁹ All the above factors need consideration in thinking of region-building and in locating the African, or any other region, within the wider global experience.

The remainder of this chapter builds on these preliminary observations and considers comparatively different attempts at region building by looking first at some global push factors over time and then considering how these have played out in different regions. The concern throughout is both to historicize region building and to explore

the multiple connections between global and regional processes, but with an emphasis on the region itself, and regional particularity as a locus of explaining different outcomes. We cannot explain the early successes of European integration, or its relatively slow development in Asia or the Middle East without reference to such particularities: Western Europe found itself in a unique situation after the Second World War making regionalism both desirable and possible; conflict and contestation about regional order in Asia and the Middle East made progress harder to achieve. From this observation it is evident that any single explanation or understanding of region building should be rejected. If, for example, we use a simple integration measure: whether the customs union or free trade area; or security community measure, we will likely be disappointed. There is rarely linear or continuous progression towards a collective goal: both the 'successful' European and Latin American cases show this clearly. Some organizations have shifted the emphasis of their activity from economics to security to respond to more immediately pressing security demands. This does not mean that regional integration is necessarily transient or elusive, rather that its progress is punctuated and uneven and defies simple attempts at measurement. For these reasons, regionalism cannot be reduced to neat theoretical formulas such as inter-governmentalism, functionalism or constructivism.²⁰ Elements of all three play into different region building efforts at different times but none provide sufficient explanations. Current evaluations of regionalism that adopt such singular perspectives lead to a partial understanding and do not capture its breadth or its historical trajectory. Indeed recent analyses of regionalism, particularly of non-European regions, argue for the possibilities of alternative perspectives and for cross-fertilization between regions.²¹

If we detach ourselves from any single perspective, consider regionalism on a wide spectrum and over the long run, we find a steady growth in the numbers and the activities of regional organizations. Formal integration as described above – the uniting of formally disparate parts to create a new sovereign body – has not been achieved in most cases, but some progress towards greater integration has. The growth of regionalism in numerical terms is demonstrable and measured in databases like those of the United Nations University Centre for Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS) or the World Trade Organization (WTO).²² Though growth is not synonymous with success according to any fixed criteria, the existence and persistence of regional organizations – the product of region building – cannot be ignored. Regionalism has become a well-established fact of International Relations making it hard to imagine a world without it. As such it is an integral part of the contemporary multilateral architecture. This emphasis could shift. Regionalism has gone through a number of phases, often referred to as waves, where its importance, like its content, has waxed and waned. Recent research in the economic arena suggests that regional trading blocs may diminish in importance giving rise to mega-blocs without regional relevance (see Ravenhill chapter). There have been previous shifts in the relationship between regionalism and multilateral processes. Both Europe and Latin America have been referred to as sites of regional disintegration following financial crisis (in the Eurozone) and political change, with the latter in particular displaying multiple and often competing types of organization (for example bandwagoning with or balancing against the United States) of which the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) or Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) are two examples.²³ However, it is important to keep a wide perspective on the region-building debate: even if regionalism is faltering in some areas, or giving

way to alternative cross-regional, transnational, or sub-national forces, there are other sectors, like security for example, where region building remains highly relevant.

The Global Context

In advancing two parallel and interlocking stories of region building the following discussion focuses principally on the security side of regionalism, balancing the emphasis of other chapters, while recognizing the interdependence of security and economic domains. Indeed as the notion of what constitutes security has continuously expanded to include economic development and human security as defined in various UN documents,²⁴ it is increasingly hard to separate these spheres.²⁵

History

Processes of international region building have a long history, which predate any formal recognition of regional agencies by international organizations like the League of Nations and the United Nations. Powerful states and empires have long sought to build and develop regions as an extension or demonstration of their power or as a means of balancing the power of others. These were not experiments in integration as such: region building was often done in a coercive and expansionist fashion. In this sense imperial powers like the Cold War superpowers were forceful region builders. However, contemporary regional organization as recognized in international law is understood as non-coercive, consensual and conformist with UN principles. Regional organizations have not always operated fully within the constraints of the UN Charter: NATO's interventions in the former Yugoslavia, or the ECOWAS intervention in Liberia, are two examples. Yet they feel obliged to justify their actions in Charter terms. It is not only strong states that seek to advance their power and influence in this way: weaker states in the international system have found in regionalism an effective way of augmenting their own capabilities, or to balance an opposing power – as in the case of the GCC (against Iran) or SADC (against South Africa). Early region building in independent South America responded to the desire of the new Spanish American states to strengthen their position in the prevailing global order, balancing first against European power and later the United States.²⁶ Regionalism was seen as a stepping-stone to greater global influence and acceptance as well as promoting regional identity and self-sufficiency. This process has been reflected elsewhere. Newly created Arab states after the break up of the Ottoman Empire, albeit not fully independent, also saw region building, informed by pan-Arab sentiment as a way of contesting the colonial settlement – an effort that continued beyond formal independence and shown in the actions of Egypt's President Nasser. Pan-Africanists had similar aspirations.²⁷ Most contemporary regionalisms combine a mixture of competition and complementarity in relationship to the prevailing global order.

Though the wider historical context is important and illuminating, the foundational assumption for those who study regional integration is that regionalism is principally a product of the post Second World War (WW2) era where region building can be more clearly distinguished from other forms of universal or multilateral organization and was accorded a formal status in international law. The global context of regionalism after WW2 was one in which the prevailing international system encouraged the development of regional groups under certain conditions and afforded

them legal status. This is clearly laid out in the UN Charter, mostly in Chapter VIII, (the League of Nations Covenant contained just one reference to 'regional understandings.') Article 53, for example, states that 'the Security Council shall, where appropriate, utilize such regional arrangements or agencies for enforcement action under its authority.' The internal structure of the UN itself is regionally organized, as reflected in its voting procedures and the regional economic commissions; the Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) for example.

Though this opportunity to collaborate with the UN structure existed, there was little evidence outside Western Europe of sustained region building in the early years of the Cold War. Indeed the success of the European Community, though itself a regional organization must be included in regionalism's global context, since the EC model informed region-building worldwide. Why did regionalism not take off elsewhere? First, the conditions in many newly independent states, considering the newness of their institutions, relative inexperience of their leaders and underdeveloped state of their economies, were simply not conducive to regional integration. Second, the actions of the superpowers, while actively promoting some forms of regionalism, like NATO, the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) or the Warsaw Pact, placed restraints on regional autonomy, while often not recognizing the constraints of the UN Charter. Even the European Community, the early flagship of regionalism was partly shaped by the global system, and dependent on US security guarantees. Third, there was some hostility towards regionalism among international liberals who feared that its separatist and partial quality might threaten the aspirations of a global peace. Memories of the region-building experiences of the Nazis in Europe and Japan in Asia were still fresh.

Against this rather negative picture may be set an alternative interpretation of region building in the Cold War era. While scarcely able to pursue deep integration in security and economic affairs - the record of early attempts at economic integration was particularly poor - regionalism offered some obvious advantages to newly independent countries. Given their relative weakness and desire for autonomy, they found in regionalism a useful defence against external domination and a means of finding collective voice. In this task, they were assisted by the UN environment, with its language of equality and self-determination, but also the wider climate of ideas provided by the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and episodes like the OAPEC-inspired oil price hikes of the early 1970s which helped to inspire the G-77. The fact that states were not otherwise particularly successful in coordinating responses to security or developmental challenges in the short term does not detract from the claim that there was an important global and ideological context to region-building provided by the Cold War, albeit one generating considerable variety across regions. Rather than regarding the Cold War as a desert for region building, or classing early regional organizations as failures, it is more useful to see it as providing an arena for their selective development and as a foundation for later region building.

The later Cold War period validates the above claim since it opened up further spaces for regionalism to develop in response to new global circumstances and opportunities. This was an era of sub-regionalism with the emergence first of ASEAN (1967), then ECOWAS, (1975) SADC (1980), the GCC, (1981) and SAARC (1985), to name just a few examples. All these institutions fulfilled new security and developmental roles in a changing international environment. The development of the Conference of

Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) also anticipated new levels of pan-European cooperation beyond the Cold War. The value of such experiences became more apparent after the Cold War ended when the increased capability and autonomy of weaker states meant that they were better placed to region build on their own terms.

Contemporary perspectives

While the end of the Cold War is rightly viewed as providing a critical juncture in stimulating 'new' regionalisms, this pre-history of region building is also important in that many existing organizations were able to build upon existing structures, upgrade their activities and spawn new institutions. There are numerous examples whether from Latin America (MERCOSUR), the Asia-Pacific (APEC) or Central Asia (Central Asian Cooperation Organization). As before the wider global context was critical, with the UN documents, like Boutros Ghali's 'Agenda for Peace' laying out an agenda for to improve upon but also expand the existing remit of regional organizations.²⁸ Indeed as the United Nations Security Council was overburdened with new security demands, the 'logic of Chapter VIII' was brought sharply into focus.²⁹ Boutros-Ghali and his successor Kofi Annan also set a precedent in convening regular meetings with heads of regional organization further emphasizing their importance and showing how a determined Secretary General could make a difference to the region-building process. Under Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon the emphasis shifted to promoting partnerships with the African continent reflecting the continuing gravity of the regional security situation.³⁰

Though the tension and competition that had characterized relations between the UN and regional bodies was not entirely removed, the post-Cold War environment, in the words of one scholar, helped to 'set regions free' enabling them to pursue own goals.³¹ In some regions, like Africa and South America, superpower overlay was less oppressive than previously, encouraging regional autonomy; in others like the Middle East, the new Chinese or the former Soviet space it remained significant. But overall, the UN and post-Cold War environment of economic and political liberalization together provided greater incentives for regional empowerment and action. Regionalism also provided a site to challenge US unipolarity and fill global governance gaps in security and development provision. This was reflected in the new arenas of regional activity in the security and economic domains, with latter borrowing from the European experience once again. In the former, peace operations can be seen as a major new departure with African institutions in particular making a contribution to an expanded array of peace keeping and related activities. This growth in regional peace operations is recorded annually by the Centre on International Cooperation. In 2012-2013 around half of a total of 130 missions involved regional organizations.³² Regional organizations around the world have also responded to the threats to international security posed by terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The Shanghai Cooperation Organization has established a Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure based in Tashkent, while the Pelindaba Treaty establishing a nuclear weapons-free zone among African states, came into effect in 2009.

This picture of regional empowerment, whether in the security or economic sphere, may be countered in the light of contemporary evidence which reveals both diversity

of practice and significant shortfalls in the progress of economic integration and security cooperation around the world: consider the persistent levels of insecurity in parts of Africa or the Middle East. New experiments in economic integration, inspired by Europe's post-Maastricht Treaty agenda have yielded patchy results, as the still disappointing regional trade patterns in Africa, Latin America and parts of Asia reveal. Despite some encouraging signs from the Middle East in respect of support for multilateral action in Libya for example, there has been little evidence of any major upgrading of regional security organizations. The early failure of Arab and African organizations to agree on a common response to the Arab uprisings is noteworthy.

Despite the opportunities for regional organizations to operate more effectively within the UN framework, there remain significant limits to region building, with lack of capacity, overlapping mandates, and sometimes-contradictory incentives provided by both internal and external actors. Regionalism has not provided a particularly effective mechanism for strengthening state capacity, or for contesting external influence. Core states like the US, Russia or China are able to set and constrain security agendas showing how the concept of great power overlay remains salient.

In some ways both the picture of regionalism's failure (outside Europe) in the Cold War context and its relative success after are over-simplifications. The Cold War provided a base for regionalism on the one hand, and the post-Cold War era, did not offer a simple springboard for regions to assume more important roles. The definition of regional activity under the heading of new regionalism has ballooned to include new issue areas and actors making it harder to identify and evaluate. The limits on region-building in the current global context remain apparent as evident in the case of the Middle East where fragmentation rather than integration has been the norm. ASEAN's success story is contested by some, while Africa's attempts at institutional borrowing and the creation of an integrated architecture are patchy and incomplete, with competing transnational networks cutting across and arguably diminishing the capacity of formal state based organizations.³³ A similar alphabet soup of crisscrossing regionalisms is also a constraint on further integration in South America.³⁴

This global context of region building viewed historically is crucial to understanding its trajectory, revealing the constraints and opportunities it has encountered. No less important is the local context, as discussed below.

Regional Experience

Surveying the diverse landscape of regionalism today it is evident that whatever the global context, regional outcomes do not map onto prescribed patterns, but invariably reflect the agency of local actors and circumstances. The conditions that facilitated region building in Europe cannot be replicated. ASEAN is sometimes dubbed as one of the most effective organizations, but Asian institutions may borrow and adapt, but will never mirror those of Europe. Similarly, Latin American countries have consistently exhibited different forms of regionalism in response to first European then US hegemony, placing a high premium on sovereignty and non-interference. In the Arab case region-building was overlain by ideas of community and solidarity in response to the divisions brought about by colonial rule. The same was true of Africa,

though today the transnational features of regionalism and proliferation of cross-border flows suggest how the profile of region building is constantly changing (see Bach in this volume).

First and second wave regionalisms

Let us briefly some explore regional differences across space and time. In first wave regionalisms divergence was the result of state type, colonial or superpower overlay, the nature of the regional economy and the extent of regional rivalries. In regions with well-established external trade patterns and weak infrastructure (as in parts of Africa), the incentives to regional integration were few. Similarly, where regional rivalries, or superpower overlay persisted (as in Asia) the prospects of building security cooperation were slight. However, US-driven efforts to create NATO-type security structures in the Middle East and South East Asia (CENTO and SEATO) were divisive and unpopular and ultimately failed. Later Cold War regionalisms, while reflective of changing international conditions, were also place and function specific: the creation of the GCC to counter the threat of Islamic Revolution in Iran; SADC to balance apartheid South Africa; the ICO to give expression to the voice of Islamic countries. While certain common features and language were present, the conditions that gave rise to these institutions were unique to these regions, revealing the importance of the 'history of place' in different region building stories.³⁵

Second wave regionalisms showed similar diversity, despite the common themes provided by the end of the Cold War. Some regions, Latin America and Africa, embraced new models of integration; others, like the Middle East, lagged behind. The regeneration and diversification of Europe was important and continued to provide a model and inspiration to others. Indeed one feature of 'new' regionalism was the adoption of EU-style institutions, evident in Africa's remodeled institutions like the Court of Justice,³⁶ but also Latin America – in MERCOSUR for example. Security regionalisms took on new forms incorporating principles like Responsibility to Protect (R2P); the remodeled African Union is an example of an organization that embraced R2P before the UN itself.³⁷ But the take up by regional organizations of new security challenges has varied widely. Multiple peace operations have been conducted in Europe and Africa, a much more limited number in East Asia and South America, but virtually none in the Middle East. The latter, in contrast to other regions, also lacks any unified anti-terrorist or nuclear non-proliferation regime.

New regionalism

New regionalism, despite its promise of offering a fresh agenda for region building in a transformed global era was neither a coherent nor a distinctive project. Some of the 'new' actors and practices identified did not constitute sustained evidence of region building, rather looser processes of regionalization which operated at different levels creating contradictory trends. Despite the claims of scholars to have advanced theories of regionalism that move beyond state-centric formulations,³⁸ the practical reality is that it is still the state that remains the main gatekeeper of region building and it against state-centred projects that regionalism is mostly judged. This point is placed squarely in perspective by considering the region-building activities of new or

rising powers, like China, Russia or Brazil, for whom the authority of the state remains at the centre of any such project. Indeed strong states or hegemons continue to be critical elements in any story of region building. What is interesting about contemporary regionalisms is that as new strong states, or rising powers are emerging, the panorama of regionalism has changed to reflect this. Region-building is not, as once predicted, about the decline of the nation state,³⁹ nor can it any longer be seen as a largely Western project.

One aspect of region building that captures its diversity is the vexed question of regional identity. Most regions, even loosely connected communities, share some common identity and purpose that distinguishes them from others. As a starting point one could point to the notion of Europe as a 'normative power' of a common 'Arab dialogue' or of an 'Asian Way' of regionalism.⁴⁰ The much-repeated 'African solutions to African problems' slogan captures parts of the Africanist agenda and its links the heirs of Nkrumah. The manner in which regions are constructed and how regional actors respond to the challenges of region building depends on a variety of conditions: existing institutional frameworks, leaders and crises as well as the external domain described above; but ideas about regionalism: its scale, its ambitions and its language also have a local character. This was evident the era of so-called pan-regionalism, but it is also true of smaller groups, which seek to nurture particular values or styles of cooperation.

In this way understanding region-building needs to incorporate not only global trends and measures, but a variety of local factors including hard-to-define identity constructions which help to make sense of regions and their relationships with the wider world.

Conclusion: global imperatives, regional outcomes

Region building is neither natural nor inevitable. The above discussion shows there is no linear progress or automatic relationship between regionalism and multilateralism. Regionalism has waxed and waned according to local and global conditions. Yet, despite the contrary pressures of globalization, it has become an inescapable feature of International Relations and is likely to remain so.

One only needs to consider events of the past few years: whether in the Eurozone, the Arab uprisings, events in Mali or the Ebola crisis to see how regional actors are often placed in the front line of problem solving, regardless of whether or not the United Nations and other multilateral institutions become involved. Yet while the broad parameters of regionalism are often set by global trends, the local picture remains extraordinarily varied, depending on the features of any given region with regime type, resources and external links all critical variables.

If we return to the starting point of the post-war world, it is apparent that outside Europe at least, the local context of early regionalisms, given their lack of resources and the global environment was often unfavourable both to economic regionalism, or security regionalism. This is hardly surprising; states and regions were in the processes of (re)construction after decolonization. If we consider Africa for example, or the Middle East or South Asia, there were evidently few prospects for short-term

economic integration or security cooperation, given levels of underdevelopment and regional divides. Indeed, in retrospect, it seems extraordinary that the European integration yardstick could be applied to measuring non-European efforts at economic integration. The same could be said for security regionalism and early ideas of building security communities.⁴¹ Both were highly Western-centred concepts developed around a particular notion of integration and community among like-minded states. They also rested on a particular notion of the state – a strong and prosperous liberal one: the kind of state most likely to engage in and benefit from regional organization. Weak states often suffer from legitimacy deficits and from a chronic lack of resources, meaning the appropriate conditions do not exist. Regionalism can help weak states grow stronger and more legitimate and hegemons and new rising powers can act as region builders, but these processes take time. Hence it is only in the late-post Cold War period that we have seen region-building beginning to take off outside the European core, with regions becoming more assertive and capable – even possible sites of reconstruction of global order.

Global conditions provide critical opportunities and constraints to region building. Overload on global institutions can be empowering for regions allowing them to close global governance gaps; conversely efficient global institutions may offer disincentives to regionalism. After World War II and again after the ending of the Cold War there were attempts to strengthen the multilateral system through universal rather than regional institutions. Other modalities may emerge to surpass regionalism and a number of chapters in this volume express skepticism of its long term viability and potential, but here the African case may be atypical in terms of the high levels of contestation regarding the appropriateness of any regional level of analysis. However, as this chapter has argued, a long view of regionalism in the local and global context has been one of opportunity and enablement; institutions have demonstrated the ability to adapt and survive even to shift functions to address new conditions and demands. Another conclusion is that there is also some inertia or path dependence in terms of dominant patterns of regional and global governance; current patterns are likely to prevail.⁴² Finally, the local context of region building, while critically informed by global conditions, has its own logics and dynamics. Regions and regional actors are constantly making and remaking choices about whether, when and how far to respond to global and local challenges.

In International Relations the dominance of rational-realist scholarship has been unable to account for the resilience of regionalism and the stickiness of regional institutions and norms. Regions are not transient creations: incidental and time limited repositories of power and resources. Such scholars fail to account for regionalism's survival, durability amid multiple challenges, and its receptiveness to local ideas. They also fail to account for the scope and variety of sub- and transnational forces that impact on regionalism: in arenas of trade, environment and human rights for example. While the focus of this introductory chapter has been on more formal institutions and processes, it is important to recognize the world of regionalism outside formal structures like the UN, AU or EU. Indeed region-building while most evident at the state level, is the result of multiple and repeated iterations between states, domestic, international and civil society actors.

Notes

- ¹ See further Louise Fawcett 'Regionalism from a Theoretical Perspective' in Mary Farrell et al (eds.), *Global Politics of Regionalism*, (London: Pluto press, 2005), pp. 23-25.
- ² Barbara Koremenos, Charles Lipson and Duncan Snidal, 'The Rational Design of International Institutions', *International Organization* 55/4 (2001), pp. 761-799.
- ³ Jochen Prantl, 'Informal Groups of States and the UN Security Council', *International Organization* 59/3 (2005)
- ⁴ Kenneth Abbott and Duncan Snidal 'Hard and Soft Law in International Governance', *International Organization*. (2000) pp. 421-22.
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