Daniel Bach, "The lure of parochialism: Cross-border regionalism as a gateway" in Ian Taylor and Fredrik Söderbaum, eds. *Afro-regions*, Uppsala: Afrika Institute, 2008.

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The study of regionalism in Africa is deceptive for anyone intent on replicating or drawing confirmation of models of region-building drawn from the experience of the European Union (EU). Region-building and regionalisation in Africa only stand for policy-driven integration in the rare cases where hysteresis combines with hegemonic dominance.[1] The continent's Regional Economic Communities (RECs) are associated with powerful cognitive representations, but their transcription is less about sovereignty pooling than about the calls for domestic macro-economic reform and agendas. Plans towards the establishment of collective security regimes were for many years superseded by concerns at regime stability under the guise of sovereignty enhancement. Since the late 1990s, the rejuvenated mandates formally assigned to inter-governmental organisations (IGOs) in the field of regional security prioritize the restoration of peace and security sector reconstruction *within* failing states. Until such prerequisites are achieved, pledges towards the establishment common policies are bound to be structurally impaired. It is against this backstage that regionalisation processes take their cues. The stability or hardening of international boundaries, far from representing a constraint keeps offering to the populations in the borderlands opportunities for trade, migrations and financial transactions that confer a specific flavour to cross-border interactions. Trans-state regionalisation in Africa also proceeds from an exploitation of the dividends of violence within and among states. *In fine*, much of the dynamism of cross border regionalism in Africa has to do with the capacity of non-state players to avoid state territorial control or take control of state policies. This confers to cross-border interactions a low-key and parochial slant that contribute to their encapsulation as a marginal phenomenon.

The following pages argue that micro or cross-border regionalism is not to be misinterpreted as a subsidiary form of regionalisation in Africa. Indeed, micro-regionalism offers unique opportunities for the study and assessment of regionalisation and regionalisation. Its expressions have more to do with reach than with size and scale. They

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[1] Daniel Bach, *"Integration through Hysteresis: SACU in a Comparative and Contextual Perspective"*, in: Dirk Hansohm et al., eds., *Monitoring Regional Integration in Southern Africa, Yearbook volume 5 - 2005*, Windhoek: NEPRU & Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2005, pp. 137-148. (available at: http://www.nepru.org.na/index.php?id=50).

also relate to material or cognitive spaces rather than to clearly demarcated territorial span. Micro-regionalism often involves a powerful cognitive component whereby boundaries defined through geo-ethnic or religious bonds prevail over territorial lines of partition. The previous chapters confirm, each in their own way, how the study of micro-regionalism in Africa warrants a quasi-entomological slant, focused on the identification of non-state players that best reveal themselves in the borderland, where their capacity to penetrate state policies and territories is put to test. The following pages briefly explore three related components of a notion that may be best described as an entry point, a gateway into the study of African regionalism. Three issue-areas are successively addressed: the patterns of institution-building and institutionalisation; the knock-on effects of interactions between core states and their neighbourhood; lastly, the dynamics of cross-border regionalisation.

Region-building as institution-building

The distinction between regionalism as a cognitive or state-centric project, and regionalisation as a process or an outcome remains central to the review of recent attempts to rejuvenate prospects for regional integration in Africa through the enhancement of lower-scale patterns of regionalism or formalisation of *de facto* trans-boundary interactions.

The flurry of cross-border or micro-regional schemes is not really a new phenomenon. Many regional inter-governmental organisations (IGOs) owe their existence to arrangements set up during the colonial period for the purpose of inter-territorial coordination and integration, or to enhance communications and transportation with metropolitan centres.. These arrangements were underscored by the assumption that economic self sufficiency and imperial preference systems should prevail over pre-colonial trade routes and socio-historical bonds across inter-imperial boundaries. Within each imperial bloc, coordination was enforced through common tariff policies, the build up of infrastructures and the creation of common services within federal structures. Thus, in Central Africa, the dissolution of the Central African Federation (CAF) in 1964 went along with the transformation of its common services into a multiplicity of small functional IGOs designed to manage cross-border interactions on a low-key technocratic mode.[2] The

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[2] The regional organisations that were established included the Central African Power Corporation (electric power system associated with the Kariba dam), the Central African

proliferation of new groupings was often a temporary solution to the inability of member-state to share assets or adopt national policies. The survival, at least on paper, of a myriad of cross-border organisations designed to manage common natural resources or infrastructure networks and equipments has done much to impose the perception that sub-Saharan Africa combines "*the largest number of regional groupings in the world*" with the "*largest number of ineffective or dormant arrangements*".[3]

A number of cross-border projects associated with the notion of 'micro-regionalism' proceed from attempts to revitalise and institutionalise schemes that were originally associated with common services established during the colonial period. The imprint of colonialism also relates to a history of cross-border regional schemes that were motivated by geo-political considerations rather than about economics. In West Africa, the now defunct Swallow operation (*Opération hirondelle*) provides a good illustration of the idiosyncratic nature of imperial regionalist schemes. The Swallow operation was established by the French in the 1950s to export the groundnuts from Eastern and central Niger without depending on Nigerian railways and harbours. Niger's ground exports, the country's main source of revenue, were, up to 1953, been exclusively transported to the coast through Nigeria's Kano-Lagos railway. By December that year, traffic congestion on the railway forced the establishment of an alternative route, that involved transportation by lorries until Parakou, in present-day Benin, and from there by railway to Cotonou. Swallow operation, as it became known, was particularly costly since the road to Parakou was not tarred and, at Gaya-Malanville, the Niger river had to be crossed by ferry until the bridge was completed in 1958. Once in Cotonou, shipment was further delayed by the slow handling of traffic by the single wharf. During subsequent years, Swallow operation had to be heavily subsidized and only handled about one third of of Niger ground exports. At independence, the rationale for its pursuit was nonetheless seen as strategic by all parties. Benin considered the operation to be vital for the survival of its railway and the construction of a deep-water harbour in Cotonou. In Niger too, President Diori Hamani considered that the operation would contribute to curb cross-border interactions between Northern Nigeria and Niger's Hausaland. France similarly viewed the Operation as a vehicle for the preservation of tight francophone linkages. As a result, the dismantlement of the French West Africa Federation

Airways Corporation, the Agricultural Research Council of Central Africa and the Central African Airways Corporation.

[3] Augusto De la Torre & Margaret Kelly, *Regional Trade Arrangements,* Washington: IMF occasional paper no 93, 1992, p. 25.

in 1959 did not bring an end to the Swallow operation. Its continuation and expansion were instead organised through the establishment of a new IGO, the *Organisation Commune Dahomey Niger* (OCDN), entrusted with the management of the Niger-Benin transport corridor. Both countries also committed themselves to sharing equally any deficit that would arise. In effect, the priority conferred to the preservation of this francophone transport corridor had no real development impact. OCDN activities had to be heavily subsidized and failure to secure international funding for an extension of the railway were eventually compounded by political tensions. These crystallized, in late 1963, when the expulsion of Beninois civil servants working in Niger was followed by a conflict over the ownership of the tiny island of Lette, located near Gaya-Malanville, on the Niger river. OCDN traffic was then interrupted until June 1964 and this made Niger acutely aware of the dangers of striving towards increasing reliance on a "francophone" outlet.

Interactions between colonial enclaves and their neighbourhood offer insights into another type of legacy. Cross-border interactions between the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla and Morocco illustrate how 'micro-regionalism' can be encapsulated into broad inter-regional political, economic, human and financial agendas. Cross-border flows of goods and people acquire a global and exacerbated dimension as a result of the sharp disparities that crystallise along the boundary-lines. This was dramatically illustrated during October 2005, when thousands of black Africans attempted to storm the barbed wire fences surrounding the enclave of Melilla, in Northern Morocco, promoting the Spanish army to repel the assaulst while Morocco rounded up the migrants before dumping them in the desert [4].The domestic and international flows that focus on the Walvis Bay –Swakopmund area point to the ambivalent regional implications generated by the dismantlement of such boundary-lines. 'Micro-regionalism' in this area drew much of its impetus and flavour from South Africa's ownership of Walvis Bay between 1884 and 1994. After Namibia became independent from South Africa in 1980, South Africa's ongoing control of the Walvis Bay enclave transformed it into a strategic hub and a key transport corridor that could be instrumentalized at the expense of Namibia. Cross-border trade and trans-border trafficking were stimulated by the disparities associated with distinctive fiscal, trade and labour regimes operating on each side of the boundary-line. Walvis Bay's formal reintegration into Namibia in 1994 suddenly brought to an end the opportunities for interactions and transactions associated with re-export trade towards South Africa. Micro-regional expansion has since then become the object of ambitious top-down visions radiating

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[4] *Financial Times*, 1 February 2006, p. 6.

across the territory of Namibia into neighbouring states. As noted by Simons and Ekobo, the material capacity to translate these grand projects into working agendas and programmes has yet to be confirmed. Nor should the cognitive value attached to the such schemes be underestimated.

Growth corridors, development triangles and other spatial development initiatives confer a peculiar flavour to micro-regionalism and cross-border interactions in Asia. This is also associated with a history of lean institutionalisation associated with a history of militarized boundary-lines and tense inter-state relations. Conversely, in Africa, regionalism, through its ample use of summit diplomacy and international patronage, is central to the conduct of inter-state relations. This translates into a conception of region-building associated with the establishment of sophisticated institutional architectures. In this context, the EU's institutionally driven approach and its pre-eminence as an aid donor to Africa have all but reduced the historic influence of European norms, models and expertise.

The endorsement of region-building models drawn from the experience of European construction has a long history in Africa. During the past few years, the pattern has gained renewed acumen with the transformation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) into an African Union (AU). The secretariat of the AU is now known as the Commission, while the former general-secretary of the OAU has been renamed President of the AU Commission. As in Brussels, the AU has its own commissioners. The Permanent Representatives' Committee, formed by African Ambassadors is a reminder of the EU's eponym Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER). Regional disparities among AU members are to be addressed through the creation of the Community, Solidarity, Development and Compensation Fund, which draws its inspiration from the EU's allocation of structural funds.[5] Africa's sub-regional groupings similarly share a history of emulation and replication of European norms and models.

Attempts to emulate Europe's trans-frontier cooperation through a replication of the euro-regions' template in West Africa confirm that micro-regionalism is not insulated from

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[5] Daniel Bach, "The European Union's 'strategic partnership' with the African Union: Match or Misnomer?" in John Akokpari, Tim Murithi and Angela Ndinga-Muvumba (eds.), *Building An African Union for the 21st Century,* Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, forthcoming.

this trend.[6] Stated objectives focus on the formalisation of trans-frontier linkages in through the establishment of "cross-border areas" whereby informal trans-border interactions should become institutionalized. The gist of the concept, originally suggested by the Sahel and West Africa Club in 2000-2001, is to promote the joint management of "border zones" and enhance already existing patterns of integration between communities living on each side of the boundary-line.[7] This is to be achieved through the mobilization of funding towards the development and pooling of infrastructures and amenities as well as through the establishment of bilateral border management structures. The proposal entered into an operational phase in January 2005, with the formal integration of cross-border cooperation on the agenda of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). As a result of its adoption of a memorandum on the "Cross-border Concept or Local Integration" by ECOWAS Ministers of Foreign Affairs, the Cross-border Initiatives Programme (CIP) was mandated to compile, coordinate and formalise initiatives focusing on the pilot operations of Sikasso (Mali) and Ziguinchor (Sénégal).

The CIP is part of a series of civil society driven initiatives that may aptly complement the tree top and top-down slant of ECOWAS. Issues slated for enhanced interactions include shared access to hospitals and social amenities on both sides of the boundary, easing opportunities for the cultivation of unoccupied land, improved coexistence of farming and cattle-breeding as well as the more familiar issues of facilitating cross border trade and migration flows. This canvass proceeds from the assumption that that informal cross-border interactions stand to benefit from their formal incorporation into public policy and inter-state agreements. This assumption also mirrors the idea that, as was the case for EU member-states and their immediate neighbours, ECOWAS states will be prepared to delegate authority to civil society and non state players. In order to be successful, such objectives assume the implementation of a Copernician revolution in the borderland since much of the dynamism of cross-border interactions proceeds from the capacity of players who do not necessarily originate from the areas concerned, to escape and avoid state control.

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[6] Dahou, K. *Coopération Transfrontalière: vers un Dialogue euro-africain* (Paris and Dakar: Club du Sahel et de l'Afrique de l'Ouest, WABI/DT/15/04, March 2004).
[7] Aguibou S. Diarrah, "The Cross border Area" Concept in the West African sub-regional integration process: Results of the Sikasso Seminar", in John Igué and Sunhilt Schumacher, Towards a Better Regional Approach to Development in West Africa, OECD: Paris, 2003, pp. 75-91.

Narrowing the gap between informal and formal interactions so as to legitimise cross border trade and linkages postulates that trade liberalisation should be welcomed by all players. Boundary-lines are depicted as constraints that should be alleviated; in effect, they also represent, due to their porosity, a valuable source of opportunities and protection for people located at the periphery of the state. Due to the internationalisation of cross-border transit trade, the dismantlement of customs and tariff barriers need to be part of a broader policy-framework. Micro-regionalism, in this respect offers a pragmatic entry-point as well as monitoring opportunities for the assets and shortcomings of the integration programmes of sub-regional organisations.

The South Africa centred hub & spoke system:
a case of lean-institutionalisation

In Africa as in Europe, attempts to boost micro-regionalism are underscored by ambitious plans for institution-building and normative framing. Unlike in Europe, however, African policy initiatives are heavily constrained by state weakness or unwillingness to prioritize sovereignty pooling. Sovereignty or regime enhancement remain the priority. The discussion of the Zambezi valley spatial development initiative (SDI) and the Zambia-Malawi-Mozambique (ZMM) growth triangle by Slocum and Nuvunga offers an emblematic depiction of the differentiation between weak and lean institutionalisation. The ZMM growth triangle is the product of an inter-state initiative that, as the same authors emphasise, "*still remains largely an idea in the making...an evolving project...promotional in nature"*. The rhetorical and bureaucratic slant of the project is as a reminder of the all too familiar experience of weak institutional capacity and lack of internalisation associated with state-driven regionalism. In contrast with this, the contents and orientations of the Zambezi SDI are driven by South Africa's hub and spoke system of dominance and mix of private investment with public policy. Institutionalisation is lean because it proceeds from design rather than through unmatched ambitions.

The South Africa-centred hub and spoke (H&S) system involves an intricate network of bilateral agreements and initiatives underscored by public initiatives and private capital sponsorship. This contributes to a configuration where integration proceeds from the structural hegemonic domination of a core state. Lean institutions and normative frameworks

represent a voluntary substitute to weak institutions. Indeed, formal agreements, but also infrastructures and the strategies of transnational firms or diasporas provide substance to patterns regionalization' that squarely fall under the category of "micro-regionalism".

Interactions between South Africa and its neighbourhood are shaped by the combination of formal interactions associated with the establishment of SACU, in operation since 1910, with transnational undertakings that reflect the predatory dynamism of South Africa's conglomerates. In the last decades of the apartheid system, South African President P.W. Botha's "total strategy" contributed to entrench the dependency of its SADC hinterland on South African harbours and infrastructures. In addition to its hegemonic hold over SACU, South Africa maintains with four other countries (Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia) bilateral trade agreements. This legacy still exerts considerable influence over present day regionalisation processes. Indeed, these still proceed from the close interplay between policy orientations and the strategies pursued by international private investors and the South African conglomerates.

The Maputo Development Corridor (MDC) Initiative illustrates the interplay between South Africa driven multi-scalar regionalisation and lean institutionalisation. The MDC initiatives was officially launched in 1996 for the purpose of rebuilding trans-frontier interactions between southern Mozambique and eastern South Africa through the rehabilitation of infrastructures between Mpumalanga, Gauteng and Maputo.[8] The MDC's initial objectives involved the rehabilitation of road, rail and harbour infrastructures, incentives to new investment and new employment opportunities through the alleviation of material and bureaucratic impediments to cross-border interactions, the construction of mega-industrial projects and the establishment of an industrial park essentially funded by private international capital. The MDC explicitly seeks to rebuild some of the trans-frontier linkages that, until the 1970s, combined labour migrations from Mozambique with Maputo's key role as a natural outlet for Johannesburg and the province of Mpumalanga. Within a decade after it was formally launched, the MDC could claim to have instigated an impressive array of trans-frontier projects, most of them funded through private sector initiative. This involves the toll road to Mozambique, the establishment of the world's third largest

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[8] 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*, vol. 39, no. 4 (2001), pp. 675-695.

Aluminium Smelter near Maputo, the modernization of its harbour, now operated by an international consortium, the rehabilitation of the South Africa -Maputo rail link, operated by South Africa's rail utility Spoornet, the creation of an industrial park in the city, and a gas pipeline. By April 2005, further integration was expected to be stimulated by South Africa's announcement of its decision to abolish visa requirements for Mozambicans...

Cross-boundary networks and their global reach

In their respective chapters, Clapham and Grant point to the dynamism of cross-border regionalisation in conjunction with what may be described as a disjuncture between the stability of boundary-lines and the formation of regional spaces that straddle over these. Africa offers a favourable turf for the identification of situations where regionness grows independently from clearly identified regionalist strategies or aspirations. Regionalisation is then the outcome of the behaviour of geo-ethnic or religious whose activities contribute de facto to the formation of regional spaces. What is labelled as "micro-regionalism" often relates to the study of such non-state players and their manipulation of public function into private interests.

The study of cross-border interactions offers a rich field of investigations, but often proves deceptive in so far as policy-making. Depending on time, location and circumstances, regionalisation is associated with transactions that are licit or illicit, formal or informal, locally banned but internationally acceptable or conversely, locally condoned but criminalised abroad. The study of micro-strategies also offers key insight into cross-boundary networks that, far from being parochial in nature, operate in a continental and global environment. When, as most often is the case, trans-boundary interactions combine a capacity to penetrate both the institutions of the state and its territory, they reflect on the performance of trans-state networks. By contrast with cross-border or trans-boundary interactions, trans-state networks mobilise social, ethnic or religious bonds that challenge state territorial control through their ability to avoid, penetrate or permeate and take control of state institutions. Such networks thrive whenever they are embedded in neo patrimonial systems of governance, whereby institutional policies and territorial control are solftened by the privatisation of public functions. Whereas trans-frontier interactions simply involve crossing boundary-lines, trans-state interactions combine this capacity with the ability to

penetrate state institutions –controls assigned to state authorities are nullified through negotiation or avoided through complicities. Trans-state networks simultaneously challenge the institutionalisation of the state and its territorial control. They promote regionalisation through their exploitation of the opportunities offered by the (customs, fiscal, normative or monetary) disparities that materialise along boundary-lines. For this very reason trans-state networks and lobbies have no interest in the harmonisation of policies under the aegis of formal regional institutions. Trans-state regional lobbies share a strong interest in the preservation of good relations between neighbouring states, but have little to gain from the implementation of sub-regional programmes towards the liberalisation of customs and tariff barriers: these are indeed a direct challenge to the rent-seeking opportunities associated with the preservation of (fiscal or tariff) barriers and/or the establishment of (formal or informal) checkpoints.

Depending on circumstances and location, trans-state circuits are fought against or officially condoned by state-policies. Impoverished national administrations have little room for hesitation when given the opportunity to tap resources at the expense of neighbouring states. This diversion of official circuits towards trans-state networks may result in decriminalising certain sectors of trans-state activity; yet, this cannot result in their public endorsement since the profits are realised at the expense of the state(s) on the other side of the border. The strength of trans-state regionalism is intrinsically linked to the lack of transparency, the extreme versatility of the flows, as well as its autonomy vis à vis official circuits and policies. The networks' development postulates a capacity for prompt and global tuning to the interplay of changing tariff and fiscal measures, shifts in currency demand and supply, international prices on export crops or on goods treated as illegal in other areas on (or outside) the continent. The resulting effect is a nexus of constant fluctuations in the composition and direction of the trans-state flows and consequently in the articulation and impact of the networks at grass-roots level. Far from being an incentive to the disappearance of existing frontier-lines, trans-state regionalization demand their preservation if the networks' activites are to prosper. Trans-state regional networks have no interest either in regional programmes towards the dismantlement intra-zone customs and tariff barriers; nor do they seek to generate alternatives to the political fragmentation of the continent.

Cross-border interactions offer privileged insights into the dynamics of micro- or Afro-region-building. The strategies observed often cultivate reach without size, gain leverage

without sovereignty and muster space without controlling territory. In stark contrast with the reified landscape of African regionalism, the analysis of cross-border interactions also points to the need to revise a number of conventional assumptions about cross-border interactions. *De facto* regional spaces can develop independently from boundary-lines and span through bonds that proceed from cognitive interactions rather than territorial affiliation and citizenship. Regionalisation can also proceed from the exploitation of boundary disparities or distortions on a rent-seeking basis. Cross-border regionalisation also and most importantly points to states where the opportunities for survival and accumulation associated with cross-border interactions are vital for large sections of the population and sometimes the state itself.

The study of cross-border interactions refers to the exposure that borderland areas confer to local, national and global strategies. Micro-regionalism represents an entry-point for the study of broader issues and agendas. Micro-regionalism does not stand for parochialism or provincialism. The implicit hierarchy associated with the distinction between macro- and micro-regionalist schemes is devoid of much meaning from the vantage point of substance. Micro-regionalism, as the preceding chapters emphasize, is more about the crystallisation of broader issues, than about the emergence of a specific path to region building that may be instrumentalized by policy-makers. Cross-border regionalism refers to the visibility conferred to the 'glocal' nature of micro-strategies. Micro-regionalism, in this sense, contrasts with contextual and cognitive representations of cross-border interactions as a peripheral area of investigation.