

Chapter 2

Theories of Regionalism

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Abstract

This chapter surveys theories of regionalism and proposes a research agenda to study regionalism in a more inclusive and pluralistic fashion. We argue that much of the theorizing on regionalism is either implicitly or explicitly based on the European integration experience (EU-centrism) or is deductively derived from general International Relations theories with their tendency for Western-centrism. Thus, this chapter seeks to shift scholarly attention towards other, more critical approaches that we believe hold considerable merit in the study of regionalism. After surveying mainstream theoretical approaches to the study of regionalism, we highlight critical perspectives that have already engaged with regionalism or hold much potential in doing so. Decolonial, postcolonial perspectives, and their variants present a critical historical and political lens to theorizing beyond Europe. We conclude by suggesting that regionalism's current theoretical work could benefit from a broader engagement with critical scholarship in engaging alternative knowledge, historicizing scholarship and theorizing with regions as the basis.

Keywords:

Regionalism; regional organizations; regional order; critical theory; postcolonial theory; Global IR

<a> Introduction¹

International politics has always been strongly regionalized. For much of human history, relations between polities were confined to specific geographic regions rather than global. It was only with attempts to re-order international politics on a global scale after World War One through the League of Nations and, more forcefully even, after World War Two with the creation of the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions that multilateralism started to be seen as being distinct from, and potentially existing in tension with, regionalism. This chapter surveys how scholars have sought to make sense of regionalism—the process by which political actors consciously organize the world along regional rather than global lines—since World War Two.

Even though regionalism has long and varied traditions in all major world regions, much of the theorizing on this phenomenon departed from European experiences, above all that of the European Community. It is beyond doubt that the study of European integration has produced sophisticated and ambitious theories of regionalism that have also been applied, with some success, to other parts of the world, but this is not, we argue in this contribution, where theorizing about regionalism should stop. Given regionalism's 'worldwide heritage and multiple manifestations' (Acharya, 2016, p. 109), our survey of the theoretical literature seeks to be inclusive, not only of the empirical experiences of regionalism in other parts of the world but also of theoretical arguments and approaches from those regions. As a result, our survey is not confined to mainstream European/North American theoretical perspectives in International Relations (IR) discipline but includes critical and Global South perspectives.² Our overall aim is to recover the theoretical roots of the study of regionalism in a truly global spirit.³

The study of regionalism has occupied a prominent place in IR since its inception. A theoretically ambitious research program on regional integration emerged in the 1960s under the label of neofunctionalism – two decades before research on international regimes started occupying a prominent role in the IR canon. Yet both of these debates centred strongly on or were derived from 'Western' experiences of cooperation and integration. While this bias has persisted, a curious bifurcation between the study of regionalism and the study of international institutions and organizations persists in the literature. We start this chapter by describing the intellectual history of our field of research to show how 'Western' experiences have served as the primary sites of theorizing about regionalism—yet undeservedly so—before turning to our survey of selected literature in two parts: mainstream and non-mainstream approaches, and then concluding with theory building suggestions for future research. Despite their diversity, mainstream approaches are derived from a narrow set of regionalism experiences in the global North, primarily Europe, or from mainstream IR theories that have been developed and refined primarily by scholars from the global North. Non-mainstream theories of regionalism are more diverse than mainstream theories, but they share fundamental concerns about the way in which mainstream theories are constructed. Their criticism generally goes beyond mere dissatisfaction with the explanatory power of mainstream approaches to entail more serious concerns about the production of theoretical knowledge in the field. Many non-mainstream approaches might, therefore, be labelled as critical theories. While scholars from the Global South have advanced theoretical arguments on regionalism that may be considered mainstream, the majority falls into the latter category. Although these two paradigms constantly oppose each other, this chapter concludes that the discipline of regionalism could potentially draw from the strengths of both theories to advance knowledge production in the field.

<a> A brief intellectual history of the field

All world regions have long-standing and distinctive ideas, discourses, and practices of regionalism that are tied to their respective historical experiences. In Latin America, proposals for political integration emerged during the period of independence from Portuguese and Spanish colonial rule in the early nineteenth century. As early attempts at realizing these proposals were generally short-lived, the idea of pan-Americanism eventually dominated and manifested in establishing the International Union of American Republics in 1890, which became the Organization of American States in 1948 (Mace, 1988). In Africa, the idea of pan-Africanism emerged in diaspora communities in the nineteenth century and began taking an organizational form with the first Pan-African Conference in 1900 (Adi, 2018). During the period of decolonization starting in the late 1950s, political integration quickly emerged as a powerful discourse, culminating in the creation of the Organization of African Unity in 1963 (Ramolefe and Sanders, 1972). The idea and discourse of political unity have weaker roots in Asia, yet historians and anthropologists have identified forms of precolonial interstate relations of Southeast Asian regionalism as early as the 1920s and 1930s (Acharya, 1999). In Europe, proposals for the political unification of the continent reach back to the Middle Ages. But it became more prominent only after the horrors of World War One, when a range of 'European movements' sought to turn them into actionable policy – a goal that was achieved only after World War Two with the Council of Europe in 1948 and the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951 (Lacroix and Nicolaïdis, 2010).

Despite this rich early tapestry of ideas, discourses and practices of regionalisms across the world, the European experience has widely dominated the theoretical debate. The formation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951 raised a theoretical interest in regionalism. The study of Europe's regionalism led to influential theories such as federalism, neofunctionalism, transactionalism and intergovernmentalism (Wiener and Diez, 2009). These theories shared a focus on Europe as the primary site of theory building. Regionalism theories followed Europe's regional development pattern – where wars precipitated the European Union (EU) project. Hence the main objective was to pool sovereignty in a quest for the suppression of nationalism and war while fostering economic and political integration (Kohler-Koch, 1996). Given the abundance of theories that sought to make sense of European integration, the field set out to explain the broader trend towards regionalism by drawing on these theories (cf. Pentland, 1973). It was through the analytical lens of Eurocentric theories of regionalism that other regions were studied and understood.

As these theories began to be applied beyond Europe in the 1960s, it became apparent that regionalism in the Global South followed a different path. In postcolonial regions, regionalism was driven primarily by anti-colonial movements – the need to secure autonomy, maintain sovereignty and promote sustainable economic development. Zartman (1967) argued that the basis of most regional groups in the postcolonial world was autonomy, which composed the protection and preservation of state sovereignty and the development of resilience against external interference. With the establishment of regional organizations in the postcolonial world, there was much focus on the expression of cultural identity through the Pan movements⁴ that sparked a largely descriptive literature.⁵ Nevertheless, the bulk of Eurocentric theories failed to capture the history and realities of the postcolonial world (Tieku, 2013).

The end of the Cold War hit most theorists by surprise, spurring a diversification of the theoretical landscape. New empirical developments and blatant gaps in existing IR theories inspired a new wave of theories, such as new institutionalist theories and constructivism. These were applied largely deductively to regionalism – and strived to break with the Eurocentrism of earlier theoretical efforts. Nevertheless, non-European experiences of regionalism remained theoretically marginalized. The onset of globalization shifted theorizing towards the economic dimension of regionalism and questions about the compatibility of global and regional economic integration (Bhagwati, 1993). In this vein, regionalism (including the European Union) started to be subsumed as part of the broader proliferation of preferential trade agreements (Mansfield and Milner, 1999) – a development that reinforced the field's earlier tendency towards 'universalism'. The constructivist turn, on the other hand, was accompanied by a somewhat greater sensitivity for the diversity of regionalisms, and it opened up possibilities for theorizing the specificities of non-European regions. Yet Europe (and to some extent North America) remained the primary site of theory building while postcolonial regions continued to be sites of theory testing. Where postcolonial regions consciously served as the starting point of theory development, resulting efforts struggled to become recognized within the mainstream.

New empirical developments – the war on terror, the global financial crisis, the rise of 'emerging powers', etc. – have continued to spawn new theoretical developments, and while 'regionalism is now being consolidated as a field of study' and is more consciously comparative (Söderbaum, 2016, p. 32), the field's overall nature has changed little. Scholars have argued that the analytical and explanatory tools associated with the mainstream theories of regionalism are inadequate and focus on establishing universalisms. Also, they do not get updated through innovative and new empirical phenomena outside the West, and contributions from Global South scholars are seldom recognized as legitimate ways of thinking about regionalism (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2015). This state of affairs has triggered a continuous call for a more inclusive theory building process on regionalism. Acharya (2014) describes this as Global International Relations (Global IR) and argues that the research in the field can no longer afford to ignore the voices and perspectives from the Global South. Despite its early beginnings in the 1950s, the theories of regionalism have only recently started to branch out to question mainstream and Western-centric perspectives while drawing from non-Western approaches. Certainly, theories have diversified much more today when compared to the last four decades, but we aim to show that more can be gained from theorizing based on multiple manifestations.

<a> Mainstream theories of regionalism

One of the most ambitious and successful forms of regionalism has taken place in Europe, and it is in studying the creation and evolution of the European Community/European Union (EU) that some of the most sophisticated theories of regionalism have been proposed. In particular, neo-functionalism, liberal intergovernmentalism and post-functionalism offer different explanations for why European countries have repeatedly delegated and pooled sovereignty in supranational institutions over time, and these theories aspire to generality beyond the EU.

Building on functional theories of international cooperation (Mitrany, 1966), neofunctionalism, initially developed by Ernst Haas (1958), identified several spillover mechanisms that generate the expansive logic of European integration. The core dynamic is spillover between functionally connected policy fields, triggering a self-sustaining process

towards deeper regional integration and eventual political unification. Functional spillovers, moreover, are directed and continuously nourished by supranational institutions and further reinforced by the political mobilization and organization of interest groups at the regional level (Haas 1958; Lindberg 1963). Especially in the 1960s and early 1970s, scholars sought to explain economic integration in other parts of the world based on neofunctionalist premises – a move that led to a partial reformulation of the theory. Some scholars identified a range of scope conditions that enabled, or hampered, the operation of neofunctionalism's spillover mechanisms (E. Haas and Schmitter, 1964), and sought to account for retrenching integration dynamics (Schmitter, 1970). Others integrated the role of perceptions into neofunctionalist reasoning to explain regionalism in Africa (Nye, 1970). Recent versions of neofunctionalism include the growing density of supranational rules to account for the unevenness of supranational governance across policy areas (Sandholtz and Stone Sweet, 1998).

Intergovernmental theories emphasize the importance of national governments in the process of European integration. Stanley Hoffmann (1966), an early critic of neofunctionalism, insisted on the continued role of national governments and their insistence on national sovereignty. This criticism sowed the seeds of another integration theory, liberal intergovernmentalism, developed by Andrew Moravcsik (1998). He interprets European integration as a series of intergovernmental bargains in which governments agree to delegate and pool sovereignty to enhance the credibility of their economic commitments. Building on regime theory and Robert Keohane's neoliberal institutionalism, Moravcsik posits that state preferences reflect the interests of powerful economic interest groups and substantive commitments are a function of the relative bargaining power of governments, which reflects patterns of asymmetric interdependence. However, this theory neglects the role of popular politics and social identity in the integration process.

Post-functionalism, developed by Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, emerged as a response to the lack of considerations of identity in theories of European integration. Hooghe and Marks see European integration as an attempt by governments to reap the scale benefits of cooperation, just like liberal intergovernmentalism, and add that governments are being constrained by the politicization of the integration process in the domestic political arena (Hooghe and Marks, 2009). They conceive European integration not as a process of interest group bargaining but as an issue debated in the public sphere. Expanding the theory towards a general theory of multilevel governance gives pride of place to the role of community. Where dominant notions of community transcend national borders, and more authoritative forms of regional and global governance are possible. Which notions of community become dominant is partly a question of domestic political debate (Hooghe et al., 2019). This strand of mainstream approaches has sought to build theory from the experience of European integration and have applied it to other parts of the world, including relevant modifications.

Another strand of mainstream approaches does not share these Euro-centric origins but take general social science approaches and International Relation's foundational schools as the starting point for their efforts to theorize regionalism. Realist approaches view regionalism as a response to the security dilemma that centrally depends on the balance of power, both within and beyond regions. As hegemons are expected to prefer informal relations of power to institutionalized relations, the dominance of a single state within and beyond a region is expected to inhibit regionalism. Along these lines, the 'extreme hegemony' exercised by the United States prevented strong regionalism from emerging in East Asia during the Cold War

(Crone, 1993, p. 505), and the decline of US hegemony facilitated an upsurge of regionalism in the 1990s (Mansfield, 1998). While realists are generally skeptical of the ability of states to cooperate with the help of institutions (Mearsheimer, 1994), they recognize that states may use institutions to shape the balance of power in their favor and to ease the pursuit of their geopolitical interests. Smaller states may use regionalism to balance against a hegemon, either internally or externally (Beeson, 2010; Rosato, 2011). Plutocratic arrangements, in which the dominant state effectively takes decisions, such as in the Southern African Customs Union and arrangements in the post-Soviet space, are also consistent with this realist premise (Hancock, 2009). What this perspective neglects, however, is that states may engage in regionalism for reasons other than considerations of power and security.

This is where political economy approaches come in, which highlight the welfare benefits of regionalism. Often building on neoliberal institutionalist premises (Keohane, 1984), these approaches view regionalism as the result of actors, both state and non-state, reaping the benefits of transborder economic transactions. The forms that regionalism takes, then, result from incentives for transborder economic cooperation and the political struggles over the distribution of such gains. Where economic or security interdependence is high or internationalizing coalitions are in power, regionalism is more likely to be authoritative and successful than where it is low (Mattli, 1999; Solingen, 2008). Given that economies in the Global South often depend on economies in the North for investment and industrialized products, Krapohl et al. (2017) suggest that the logic of economic integration in the North and the Global South are distinct. Rather than regulating intraregional trade, economic regionalism in the Global South seeks to enhance the collective competitiveness of its member states in global markets, and the success of this strategy depends on the existence and behavior of regional hegemons. **South-South cooperation is proliferating, and theoretical approaches are developing that examine their sources and consequences** (see chapter 19 of this volume). Arguments centering on credible commitments are compatible with this political economy approach. Both formal and informal institutions may help states to make policy choices robust to domestic pressures and time inconsistency, not least in the area of human rights (Moravcsik, 2000; Yoshimatsu, 2006; for an overview of regional human rights and democratic governance, see Pevehouse, 2016). Beyond the general insight that (domestic) political struggles between the winners and losers of regionalism shape its form and success, it is less obvious how such approaches travel to other policy fields – something that institutionalist theories are more apt at addressing.

Institutionalist theories try to explain regionalism by a focus on the role of institutions. Much of the debate about European integration has centered on the autonomy of supranational actors from member state control. Pierson (1996) argues that member state control in the European Union is attenuated by unanimity decision making, delegation to supranational actors, and sunk costs. The debate on the role of institutions has been particularly intense concerning the activist rulings of the European Court of Justice (see Burley and Mattli, 1993; Garrett, 1995). Some of these insights are unique to the European Union with its set of strong quasi-constitutional institutions. However, Karen Alter's work has established convincingly that provisions on private access to regional courts are pivotal to their ability to build up a body of regional law more broadly (Alter, 2014). Relatedly, a secretariat's autonomy is associated with more vital international economic organizations (Gray, 2018). Where supranational agents are weaker, institutionalist arguments center primarily on how domestic institutions affect

regionalism. In this vein, Malamud (2005) shows how domestic constitutional provisions favoring the executive facilitate informal presidential diplomacy in Mercosur. Relatedly, states with more domestic veto players are less likely to join deep economic integration arrangements (Mansfield and Milner, 2012). When the quality of domestic institutions are low and physical infrastructure is insufficient, regional trade agreements are less likely to be successful (Gray, 2014). Realist, political economy and institutionalist approaches provide important insights into the creation, form and success of regionalism, but they tend to neglect that structures require interpretation to generate effects.

Perceptual and interpretative elements are the focus of constructivist theories that highlight the central role of identities, ideas and norms (Wendt, 1999). When states share identities and norms, regionalism tends to be easier to construct and to operate more smoothly. Katzenstein argues that the US underpinned security organization in Europe but not in East Asia because it identified with the former but not the latter (Katzenstein, 2005). Similarly, constructivists claim that identity plays a decisive role in creating regional organizations as diverse as NATO, the Organization of African Unity, the League of Arab States, the Caribbean Community, and MERCOSUR (Barnett, 1998; Spandler, 2019; Williams, 2007). Much of this work is indebted to, or directly builds on, Karl W. Deutsch's (1957) transactionalism, which examines the role of transnational communication and interaction in the formation of supranational (security) communities – a research program that re-emerged in the 1990s (Adler and Barnett, 1998). Particular ideas of community may induce supranational forms of regionalism in one setting and prevent it in others (Barnett and Solingen, 2007; Duina, 2015; Parsons, 2003). The role of ideas and norms has played a particular role in explaining different forms of regionalism in different parts of the world, with scholars of Southeast Asian regionalism insisting most strongly on its ‘distinctiveness’ (Jetschke and Katada, 2016). In fact, in many postcolonial settings, particular understandings of national sovereignty, often closely associated with colonial histories, have induced forms of regionalism that are different from the strongly institutionalized and legalized forms of regionalism found in Europe and elsewhere. At the same time, despite its unprecedented degree of supranationalism, the European Union has shaped institutional choices in other regional organizations (Lenz, 2021). Moreover, a large literature on diffusion demonstrates that integration models diffuse across the world (see chapter 4 of this volume).

For a long time, theories of regionalism have sought to account for the emergence and evolution of individual instances of regionalism. As regionalism has proliferated, however, regional institutions and organizations have come to overlap. Scholars of African regionalism, for example, have long recognized that overlap is extensive, and the question of how to streamline the various overlapping regionalisms has been politically salient for some time (Mattheis, 2018). An incipient research agenda, therefore, attempts to map and explain overlapping regionalism. In an exploratory analysis, Panke and Stapel (2016) find that overlapping regionalism is a global phenomenon that includes all major world regions. One important driver of overlap is the strategic maneuvering of states to escape commitments, retain or strengthen national sovereignty or exercise regional hegemony (Malamud, 2019; Yeo, 2018). Beyond the emerging insight that overlapping regionalism is an intentional state strategy rather than an unintended side-effect of other processes and dynamics, the majority of studies highlights region- and even policy area-specific drivers of this phenomenon. To what extent these factors are generalizable beyond the individual cases in which they have been generated

is unclear to date. What appears to be more certain is that once overlapping regionalism exists, it generates feedback effects on its elemental institutions that, in turn, shape the creation and evolution of regionalism once again (Haftel and Hofmann, 2019).

<a> **Non-mainstream theories of regionalism**

Non-mainstream theories are as much about criticizing the deeper ontological, epistemological, and theoretical assumptions of mainstream theories as they are about constructing alternative theoretical explanations of regionalism. As Robert Cox notes, critical theory 'stands apart from the prevailing order of the world and asks how that order came to be' (Cox, 1981a, p. 129). Consequently, critical scholarship is primarily geared towards challenging the effects of power structures. This is the focus of Marxism, Neo-Gramscianism, Decolonialism and Postcolonialism, Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL), Critical Race Theory, and Feminism. In this section, we begin with some critiques of mainstream scholarship and then provide students and scholars with an overview of critical theories missing in most theories of regionalism that could serve as tools for novel theorizing in the field.

There are three significant critiques of mainstream theorizing that draws from critical scholarship. First, theorizing regionalism is engrossed in (sweeping) generalizations. The idea that reality is monotonous and ideas across regions share a common conception, making theories generalizable, is the crux of mainstream theorization. The search for universally applicable theories neglects the historical and social contexts of regions (Law, 2015; Tickner and Blaney, 2013). Blaney and Tickner (2017, p. 6) argue that 'this modern, colonial and self-sealing worlding makes it difficult for social scientists to see how different practices and worlds emerge from alternative cosmologies'. Such endeavors yield misaligned theories and understandings of regions.

Second, the thinking behind a universe with a single reality affects how regions beyond the West are studied and eventually theorized. Categorizations, concepts, and their meaning and making revolve around the focus of research agendas in the West and not necessarily questions that concern the communities within those regions. The Western-centric nature of the field has been described as racialized and colonial in the sense that meanings of concepts and their categorization are arrived at *a priori* based on Western ideas. As a result, much of the field has erased multiplicity and sustained its *status quo* understanding of regions by suppressing difference (Blaney and Tickner, 2017). Third, the very minimal engagement with history and critical scholarship on the Global South regions reflects knowledge production in the field. Mainstream theories evolve from European history, which differs from Global South experiences, thereby marginalizing alternative knowledge.

Marxism and Neo-Gramscian approaches have inspired much of the critical scholarship available today. Marxist theories in IR began as a rejection of realist and liberal views of state conflict and cooperation, which led to the rise of Neo-Marxist critics of Marxism. Neo-Marxists sought to broaden the discourse and revise Marxist thoughts to address neglected issues in initial theorizing. Thus, incorporating sociology, psychology, and feminism, Neo Marxist scholars accuse the world's capitalist system of exacerbating subordination, inequality, and dependency between the Global North and South (Gorman, 1982). Antonio Gramsci developed the concept of *cultural hegemony* through which capitalism perpetuates itself. He described cultural hegemony as a dominant ideology that reflects the beliefs and interests of hegemons

(Anderson, 2017). His thesis has inspired and propelled critical theorizing in IR, which moves beyond the *status quo* to consider other state and non-state actors in the transformational framework of the global order (Cox, 1981; Gamble and Payne, 1997; Hameiri and Jones, 2016).

What was considered "old regionalism" faded in the 1990s to make way for the "new regionalism"; triggered by global structural transformations, and globalization (Hettne and Söderbaum, 2000). A strand of literature known as the New Regionalism Approach (NRA) developed when scholars saw the need to theorize regions based on global changes. Its proponents Hettne and Söderbaum (1998, p. 10) argue that the 'theoretical approaches which start from the region must be complemented but not replaced by world approaches'. They integrate several theoretical perspectives – theory of international relations/international political economy, development theory and integration theory – to create a framework of analysis for investigating regions through a multilevel and comparative perspective. NRA was a critical response to neoliberal economism. In addition to NRA, the constructivist turn in the study of regionalism paved the way for theory-building based on Global South regions. Specifically, Acharya's work on 'localisation' was a good introduction to what it meant to theorize within regions (Acharya, 2004). However, a major critic of the constructivist turn was its lack of engagement with power – a primary focus of critical scholarship.

Postcolonial studies became popularized in the 1970s when scholars from formerly colonized states began to examine social and political power interactions that sustain neocolonialism. This intellectual movement propelled by scholars from the Middle East, and South Asia challenged the depiction of aspects of the Eastern world by the West. Said (1978) coined *Orientalism* as a Western developed approach for dealing with the Orient and controlling its representations. Spivak (1988) follows from Said's critique to study the genealogy of shifting voices of the *Subaltern*. The challenging of representations, credibility of voice, and postcolonial regions' positionality, drives critical scholarship in area studies and IR (Abrahamsen, 2000; Sabaratnam, 2011; Tickner, 2013). According to Bhabha (1994), postcolonial theory is no longer simply the projection of marginal realities or parallel interpretations, instead it seeks to interrupt and challenge Western-centric discourses.

In contrast, the decolonial literature constitutes not just the modernity/coloniality school which emerged from the works of South American scholars - Anibal Quijano (2000), María Lugones (2007), and Walter Di Mignolo (2002); but also that of African and Black scholars like Cheikh Anta Diop (1988), Kwame Nkrumah (1965), Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2012) and Samir Amin (1976). The South American scholars engaged with theories of world systems and development. A central concept within its discourse is the 'coloniality of power' conceptualized by Quijano (2000). He contends that the modernity that Europe takes to describe its being is, in fact, so deeply entwined in the structures of European colonial domination over the rest of the world that it is impossible to separate (Bhambra, 2014). It identifies elements of contemporary societies as legacies of colonialism. African and Black scholars started earlier to challenge the depiction of Western histories and knowledge of Africa. Cheik Diop (1988) challenged Eurocentric historiography while portraying Egypt as a Black civilization. Kwame Nkrumah (1965) coined the concept of *neo-colonialism* as a mechanism through which former colonial powers continue to control former colonies. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2015) introduced *colonization of the mind* to explain the internalized attitude of ethnic or cultural inferiority by people due to colonization, while Samir Amin (1990) established the concepts of the *delinking* that view underdevelopment as an effect of domination. The need to

decolonize research in the way we categorize, conceptualize and subsequently theorize beyond the West has become a primary focus for critical scholarship. Some scholars have drawn from postcolonial and decolonial perspectives to theorize regions and regionalism. For instance, Jabri (2016) analyses the concept of peacebuilding from the postcolonial society's perspective. She finds that in the relationship between 'the internationals' and 'the locals' a legacy still informs 'postcolonial subjectivity, and one that emerges, both expectedly and unexpectedly, in situated interactions' (Jabri, 2016, p. 155). In these studies, there is an emphasis on theorizing based on the histories of regions, an approach that is seldom employed in regionalism.

Other literature such as Critical Race Theory (CRT), Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAAIL), and Feminist Theory investigate how power, racialized and gendered relations are perpetuated within global structures. They move decolonial and postcolonial debates further into other contemporary societal structures. CRT emerged during the 1980s when critical race lawyers made claims about law and legal education in the US. Critical race theorists contend that structural racism and racial subordination remained endemic in American constitutional law and acts. It is grounded on the premise that racism is everywhere, and 'white' people benefit from racialized structures at the expense of people of color (Crenshaw et al., 1996; Delgado et al., 2017; Matsuda, 1993). Although this literature is heavily based on the US experience; race and colonialism as it affects the Global South are not mutually exclusive. Investigating the role of race in theorizing regions will provide a nuanced understanding of regions beyond the West and, by extension, global politics. Gabay (2018) provides this nuanced perspective in his book *Imagining Africa: Whiteness and the Western Gaze*. He argues that the changing attitude towards Africa makes Africa, in moments of Western crisis, appear as the savior of white supremacy. Bell (2013) also takes a critical look at race in international relations.

Furthermore, TWAAIL provides a clear link of the region to the international and the role of power in making sense of global governance. TWAAIL developed around 1990 following intensified debates on colonialism, race, and development studies. Focusing on legal scholarship, it deals with knowledge and actions of 'Third World' scholars, policymakers, organizations, and states. Their central purpose is to expose and eliminate norms and processes within international institutions that subordinate the 'Third World' to the West (M. W. Mutua, 2000). Like regionalism, TWAAIL engages with sovereignty and human rights concepts, self-determination, legitimacy and governance. However, TWAAIL focuses on challenging the roots of such concepts in the context of global politics. Rather than studying human rights as a universal concept, they explain how human rights came to be. An example is Mutua's (2016) analysis of the rule of law, where he argues that no African state has freed itself of the shackles of colonial rule because the concept rooted in Western practices has in most parts simply been transplanted into Africa.

From the 'Third World' to discourse on gender, ideas that reflect the diversity and concerns of women globally have been theorized by feminist scholars. It is both an intellectual and a social movement centered around women. The field rejects the traditional patriarchal order philosophy and raises issues that emphasize equal rights, justice, and fairness. The intellectual wave of feminism began in the 1980s. The field has advanced so much that there are strands of feminist literature – liberal, radical, black and social feminism (Cott, 1989; Crenshaw, 1989; Tong, 2013; Willis, 1984). These strands have researched concerns around women on race, class, sex, and religion. For instance, feminist postcolonial scholars address

concerns neglected by Western feminism by raising questions of difference around social axes of class, racism, ethnicity, sexuality, and the problem of global inequities (Brah, 2001; Mohanty, 1988; Suleri, 1992). Feminist and other critical theories focus on social and economic inequalities that promote systemic change. For example, Ribeiro Hoffmann (2019) incorporates feminist approaches into her study of Latin American regionalism. Feminism can offer regionalism critical insights into the concerns and role of women in regionalism.

Nonetheless, this does not mean that critical scholarship is without limitation. Although Acharya's (2014) critique is justified to some extent, some critical theories thrive on this presumed marginality. But decolonial and postcolonial scholarship is not merely a defense mechanism nor a reaction to colonial science. It is driven by the impetus to transform from within ideas, philosophies and practices of formerly colonized people that have been given new momentum through these intellectual movements. However, critical scholarship in conjunction with regionalism needs to do more to develop theories drawn from postcolonial regions.

<a> Theorizing Regionalism in the Twenty-first Century

Aspects of critical scholarship's approach should be incorporated to make sense of diverse regions and regionalisms. This does not mean that mainstream should be discarded – 'the strength of one is only the weakness of the other' (Cox, 1981, p. 129). However, much of the canon is Western-centric driven, neglecting many specifics of regions beyond the West. Hence, the chapter argues that regionalism can benefit from critical scholarship's concerns (as outlined in the previous section) that have been underestimated and should be embedded to advance theories in the field. There are three elements, in particular, that are essential for strengthening the field: engagement with alternative knowledge, historicizing and theorizing with regions as the basis. Although these proposals may appear obvious, state of the art has primarily overlooked them. Critical scholarship provides a foundation for inclusive theorizing that addresses both current and under-appraised concerns in regionalism.

The exclusion of alternative knowledge is a gap that has continued to be perpetuated in regionalism. A good comparison is the work of Haas (1958) on *The Uniting of Europe* and Nkrumah (1963) on *Africa Must Unite* – where the former has become a classical foundational text for research on regionalism, while the latter has been relegated to research for critical scholars and Africanists. As Hobson (2012, p. 1) argues, international theory has Western-centric elements that glorify Western civilizations and projects its knowledge as the 'ideal normative referent' – in so doing, silencing alternative knowledge. Rather than studying Western concerns of the Global South, regionalism should strive to research Global South concerns. Research questions must engage in the ideas of the region to unravel micro-practices that alter macro societal structures. For this reason, engagement with critical scholarship becomes paramount because Global South concerns, and power relations are the focus. Thus, it produces epistemological and ontological narratives that are not captured in mainstream regionalism. Current crosscutting concepts include the rule of law, sovereignty, democracy, human rights and development. However, Anghie (2007, p. 107) warns that Western-centric scholarship must 'resist the prevailing tendency to assimilate the unique history of the non-European world into the conventional model'. Critical scholarship is thickly descriptive, historical, and critical in theorizing. Therefore, an active engagement with the literature will minimize the trap of a colonial pedagogical mentality in theorizing regionalism (Acharya, 2014; Blaney and Tickner, 2017).

Questions relevant to Global South concerns have a historical depth which is often overlooked in theorizing regionalism. The Global South ought to be the starting point for theorizing postcolonial regions and not the West. However, before that, an understanding of its history is needed. Africa is a good example where some of the origins of regionalism go back to the colonial era, for instance, the South African Customs Union (SACU). Forms of regionalism and the ideas that underpin them need to be historicized. Studies that revolve around these specific historical questions still need to be addressed for theory building based on postcolonial regions. The research agenda for Global South regionalism will benefit from investigating the origins of Global South regional organizations; how they have evolved; how they have been translated into political institutions and practice at different moments in time. Unsurprisingly, the bulk of research on regionalism has a specified start date of 1945, and much work is focused only on the present. Critical scholarship considers the history, social and political power relations of actors in theorizing. Rather than theorizing from a Post-Cold War period, critical scholarship addresses a longer time frame in their analysis. In their book, Anghie et al (2003) historicize and politicize the making of international law, as well as the positionality of the Global South within the international order. Taking such an approach to studying regionalism will yield theories that eventually account for both time and space. Therefore, theorizing regionalism should be as much about studying the origins of regionalism in postcolonial regions as it is about understanding the contemporary politics. Decolonial and postcolonial studies foreground the genealogy of ideas and experiences that precipitate regionalism, and such histories should be considered when theorizing regions, institutions, and actors. This would also bring a large body of literature written by postcolonial scholars into the purview of mainstream theorizing.

Finally, critical scholarship offers regionalism a nuanced and post-Western-centric approach to understanding and theorizing Global South regions. Rather than studying Global South regions as testing sites, there should be more emphasis on theory development. A classic example is Quijano's (2000) *Coloniality of Power* which analyses the history and political relations of Latin America. While he mentions Africa in this seminal text, his analysis takes Latin American experiences as the starting point. Other scholars have employed his bottom-up approach to theorizing as well. Acharya's work focuses on theorizing local actors in Asia, while Murithi's research does the same from an African perspective (Acharya, 2004; Murithi, 2016). What sets these works apart is that concepts and categories are not set *a priori* and used to validate unproven assumptions but draws from regional history, ideas, and practices. The constructivist turn and critical approach to regionalism have catapulted knowledge production in this direction. However, there are many more gaps to be filled. In theorizing regionalism in the twenty-first century, the chapter contends that specificity in theory building should take precedence over grand theories. The current state of the art lacks specificity, especially from Global South regions. Unlike European regionalism, Global South regionalism still has untapped research avenues that could be explored for nuanced theory development in the field – scholars should strive to take advantage of these resources.

<a> Notes

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² Excellent overviews exist but they tend to focus on the mainstream. The most encompassing collection and overview is Börzel and Risse (2016).

³ In this chapter, we understand theory broadly, reaching from the critique of existing theories towards claims about causal relationships.

⁴ Pan-Americanism, Pan-Asianism, Pan-Arabism and Pan-Africanism.

⁵ In the case of Africa, several theoretical discourses on regionalism followed independence; however much of that is neglected in the canon of regionalism (Mazrui 1963; Nkrumah 1963).

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