Globalization and regionalization in Africa: reactions to attempts at neo-liberal regionalism*

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ABSTRACT
The ideology of neo-liberalism is currently dominant at the elite level. This has profound implications for how development is viewed as best pursued. Currently, a process of regionalization projects, at both the macro- and micro-level, are reconfiguring parts of Africa as the continent’s elites seek to promote economic integration as a means of latching onto what is perceived as the globalization juggernaut. However, such processes, and the case of the Maputo Development Corridor (MDC) is provided as a case study, cannot simply be defined as top-down projects to reconfigure spatial areas along neo-liberal lines: globalization and regionalization stimulates reactions involving the re-organization and re-territorialization of spaces in order to meet the challenges posed. Though existing regionalist projects, such as the MDC, reflect the impulses of a neo-liberal world, space for contesting alternatives exists and is nascent, with counter-reactions being continually generated, with diverse forms of regional connectivities being constructed. Analyses of the new regionalisms must be cognisant of such pregnancy within such ongoing processes.

KEYWORDS
Regionalization; Africa; Mozambique; South Africa; globalization; development.

At the turn of the new millennium, the world continues to be configured and reconfigured by heterogeneous processes that constantly enervate the globe and its peoples. Captured in the catchall term ‘globalization’, such processes have compressed time and space, resulting in a global political economy that is in increasingly integrated and in a state of perpetual flux. There has been an increased transnationalization of production and
In its present mythic and ideological representations, the \textit{globalisation} concept serves to reify a global economic system dominated by large institutional investors and transnational firms which control the bulk of the world’s productive assets and are the principal influences in world trade and financial markets. 

\textit{(Gill, 1995: 405)}

In this context, how the developing world ‘fits’ with globalization, and how or in what way the non-core can benefit from globalization is an intense area of debate. Thus far, it has been regional elites, with their own particular understanding of what globalization is, that have largely set the agenda in response to perceived pressures. In Africa, the debate has been advanced by specific African leaders who have sought to craft a relationship with the North and promote a developmental agenda which is based largely along neo-liberal lines. The leaders of Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa have been at the forefront of this and their agenda was crystallized in Abuja, Nigeria on 23 October, 2001, when the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) was launched (NEPAD, 2001).

The message communicated by the NEPAD fits within the orthodox neo-liberal discourse and avoids blaming particular policies or global trade structures on Africa’s marginalization but rather, if pushed, simply passes off the blame on ‘globalization’. But even here, the document sees globalization as providing glowing opportunities, with a statement arguing that:

The world has entered a new millennium in the midst of an economic revolution. This revolution could provide the context and means for Africa’s rejuvenation. While globalisation has increased the cost of Africa’s ability to compete, we hold that the advantages of an effectively managed integration present the best prospects for future economic prosperity and poverty reduction.

\textit{(Ibid., p. 8)}

The NEPAD itself fits snugly with the policy aims of South African president Thabo Mbeki’s touted ‘African Renaissance’, which has underpinned post-apartheid South Africa’s foreign policy, particularly since Mandela stepped down (Taylor and Williams, 2001). Yet this Renaissance and the posture towards ‘globalization’ has been criticized as being under undue influence from the dominant neo-liberal orthodoxy (Taylor and Vale, 2000). As one critical commentary put it:

The African Renaissance suggests a continental effort led by South Africa to advance the familiar ‘end-of-history’ thesis … South
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Africa’s African Renaissance (this choice of words is important) is anchored in a chain of economies which, with time, might become the African equivalent of the Asian Tigers . . . In this rendition, the African Renaissance posits Africa as an expanding and prosperous market alongside Asia, Europe and North America in which South African capital is destined to play a special role through the development of trade, strategic partnerships and the like. In exchange for acting as the agent of globalisation, the continent will offer South Africa a preferential option on its traditionally promised largesse of oil, minerals and mining.

(Vale and Maseko, 1998: 279)

The implications of such a stance for southern Africa, particularly in the light of a concretised NEPAD which has been critiqued as being largely of South African origin, is profound (Keet, 2002). Indeed, the policy options currently being pursued, as crystallized in the NEPAD, seeks to press for increased access to the global market. Far from critically engaging with globalization or even remotely interrogating it, the African elites promoting the NEPAD are actually pushing for greater integration into the global capitalist order, but on re-negotiated terms that favour externally oriented Southern elites. The actual neo-liberal underpinnings of the global market are presumed to be sacrosanct. As Trevor Manuel, South Africa’s finance minister asserted, ‘there is a new resilience and a new will to succeed in the African continent. We in South Africa have called it a renaissance, a new vision of political and economic renewal. It takes the global competitive marketplace as point of departure’ (Manuel, 1998).

This position, an essential acceptance of the basic tenets of the ongoing world order, reflects the actuality that most elites from Africa are, in the main, just as interested in maintaining the global system as their colleagues in the North. Reflecting on the monumental sea change of the 1980s regarding macro-economic common sense, one account has correctly remarked that,

Third World elites were not the passive victims of the US liquidation of the development project. At least some fractions of such elites [i.e. the externally oriented] were among the strongest supporters of the new Washington Consensus through which the liquidation was accomplished. To the extent that this has been the case, Third World elites have been among the social forces that have promoted the liberalisation of trade and capital movements.

(Silver and Arrighi, 2000: 66–67)

Actually defending globalization and the advancement of specific externally oriented interests and values, while ameliorating excessively negative aspects of this project, is the new message emanating from Africa
Certainly, one analysis, talking specifically of South African involvement in this project, asserted that ‘for President Thabo Mbeki, the Renaissance means, essentially, the promotion of Western political and economic values’ (Business Day (Johannesburg) 23 March 2000). This is somewhat problematic, as ‘there is [a] quite obvious tension between on the one hand supporting global free trade, and on the other committing oneself to changing the rules of the system to ensure greater equity’ (Thompson and Leysens, 1996: 8).

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The common sense approach to globalization is reflected in the way in which regionalization is assumed to be of major importance. The NEPAD document asserts that:

Most African countries are small, both in terms of population and per capita incomes. As a consequence of limited markets, they do not offer attractive returns to potential investors, while progress in diversifying production and exports is retarded . . . These economic conditions point to the need for African countries to pool their resources and enhance regional development and economic integration.

(NEPAD, 2001: 17)

Yet the form of regionalization being currently promoted in southern Africa is premised on an unquestioning belief that integration of their territories into the global economy is absolutely crucial and inevitable. The structural limitations of this are never probed as, it is apparent, ‘there is no alternative’. Thabo Mbeki summed up this attitude when he proclaimed that ‘the process of globalisation is an objective outcome of the development of the productive forces that create wealth, including their continuous improvement and expansion’ [emphasis added], (Mbeki, 2000) whilst Nigeria’s Obasanjo stated that ‘we must get used to the idea that globalization is a fact of life. It’s a reality of the new age (quoted in Middle East Times (Cairo) 23 July, 1999). However, as Cerny remarks, ‘globalisation is driven not primarily by some inexorable economic process, but rather by politics: by ideology, by the actions, interactions and decisions of state actors, their private-sector interlocutors and wider publics’ (Cerny, 1999: 159).

Regarding such perceptions, the functions of the national scale both as a discrete unit of socio-economic relations and as an organizational interface mediating between sub- and supra-national scales, has been eroded in the eyes of the national units’ own elites. The desire among regional elites to locate a regional connectivity and regional identity appears of
profound significance in citing tactical responses to globalization. But, regionalization should not be seen as a counter-reaction in the direction of regional autarkies. Instead, it delineates a consolidation of politico-economic spaces contesting with one another within the capitalist global economy. It is clear that there are no ‘natural’ regions, and that regions have to be constructed. That existing regionalist projects reflect the impulses of a neo-liberal world order is of a consequence of the environment within which regional elites find themselves and perceive themselves to be in. Although the proponents of the transnational ideology of globalization seek to cast the world as having to adjust to a totalizing tendency from which no one can escape, globalization is obviously asymmetrical and variegated and its impact upon different spatial entities varies. As such it takes advantage of, indeed exacerbates differences as much as, if not more than, it produces a uniform new world. In doing so, counter-reactions to, and space opened up by, such contradictions are generated. Analyses of new regionalisms must be cognisant of such pregnancy within ongoing processes. Certainly, the new regionalism(s) are connected to processes associated both with globalization and with the specific historical experiences of a particular space. At the same time, the globalization discourse pushes for a reconfiguration along the lines of its own ideal type of socio-economic governance. Local and global processes are interlinked, ‘since any particular process of regionalization in any part of the world has systemic repercussions on other regions, thus shaping the way in which the new world order is being organised’ (Hettne, 1996).

According to one account:

‘regionalism’ refers to the general phenomenon as well as the ideology of regionalism, that is, the urge for a regionalist order, either in a particular geographical area or as a type of world order. There may thus be many regionalisms. The broad New Regionalism approach (Gamble and Payne, 1996; Hettne and Söderbaum, 1998; Grugel and Hout, 1999; Hettne, Inotai and Sunkel, 1999; Schulz et al., 2001) seeks to understand why and how pluralistic and multidimensional regionalization processes enfold. The New Regionalism literature essentially locates the new wave of regionalization processes within the ongoing transformation of the global political economy. In contrast to older regionalization projects, which were often imposed from outside either directly or indirectly, in correspondence with the Cold War milieu, the new forms of regionalisms are more often emerging from within the regions themselves and are extroverted rather than introverted.

(Schulz et al., 2001: 4)

At the same time, such processes ‘cannot be understood merely from the point of view of the single region in question, but only in a global
perspective. In this regard there has been a globalization of regional integration theory and praxis' (ibid.). Clearly, the importance that the NEPAD document assigns to African regional initiatives, placed within the context of globalization, fits with this prognosis.

Why the New Regionalism approach is ‘new’ is important. Broadly speaking, the old studies of regionalism were more or less concerned with the particular objectives and make-up of regional projects, and frequently concentrated on the means by which trade arrangements and security concords operated. The new regionalism, which the New Regionalism approach seeks to comprehend, on the other hand, is a more comprehensive, multifaceted and multidimensional process. These processes imply a qualitative change of a region from comparative heterogeneity to expanded homogeneity. This takes place across a number of dimensions, most notable of which are culture, economic policies and indeed, political management. Confluence that brings these dimensions together may, it is possible, be ‘natural’ but more often than not are politically directed and involve a combination of bottom-up and top-down processes (Hettne and Söderbaum, 1998). In addition, the New Regionalism approach, ‘unlike the ‘old’ regional studies also incorporates all three major types of actors in its purview, not just states but also companies and communities’ (Shaw, 2000: 401).

Accepting that the hegemony of neo-liberalism underpins the logic of formal contemporary regionalization processes, it is important to set out the various levels of regional configurations that seek to mark out a world order based on regional projects. Breslin and Hook assert that there are essentially three levels, interacting with and reacting to other elements of the international political economy (see Breslin and Hook (eds), forthcoming). These are namely, macro-regions, sub-regions and micro-regions. Macro-regions co-ordinate transnational capital flows within a particular geographical area and assist the globalization process of constructing a global economy. Neo-liberal macro-regions involves a monumental expansion in the proportions of a regional market, while at the same time diminishing the authority of political units i.e. state administrations and intensifying existing power relations between contending class forces and/or state elites within that region. Examples of such macro-regions are the European Union (EU), North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA). The Southern African Development Community (SADC) is based – albeit ambitiously at this stage – on such premises, although the diminishment of political authority, to be replaced by a regional administration à la the EU, is nowhere near as advanced (and is, perhaps, unlikely to ever be). Because of their scale, macro-regions are most likely to generate the greatest tensions and contradictions, and are least susceptible to the construction of any coherent form of regionness. This concept is closely related to regionalization and
is a social construction: there are different shades of ‘regionness’. These may be as a geographic and ecological region; as a social system; as a planned functional organization to promote co-operation; or as a historic formation with a discrete identity. The concept of ‘regionness’ should be seen as a sort of qualitative measurement of the cohesiveness and distinctiveness of what stage the regionalization process is in. In short, the degree to which a particular region in various respects makes up a coherent entity. In this sense, regionness can both increase (towards greater regional cohesiveness and identity) or decrease. ‘Regionness thus implies that a region can be a region “more or less”’ (Hettne and Söderbaum, 2000: 461).

Below macro-regions are sub-regional processes. These processes are frequently constructed upon past historical and economic legacies, or are generated by the demonstration effects of already existing economic processes (or neo-liberal ‘success stories’). Sub-regionalisms may or may not include processes within a single nation-state. They in general refer to initiatives that integrate a number of states (and the concomitant activities at the sub-state level) than the higher level macro-processes. They may or may not be formally state-led. One example of a sub-regionalist process is the southern China economic community of Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, southern Guangdong and Fujian. Finally, micro-regionalism refers to sub-national levels of regional integration. Geographic proximity is influential indeed an essential determinant. Because of this geographical proximity, the weight of historical experience impinges on the micro, even more than on other levels of regional processes. Furthermore, the construction of regionness is potentially smoother. At the same time, historical antagonisms may act against regionness – such processes are contingent on each particular historical experience. In addition, micro-regionalism is perhaps the form of regionalism that is most beholden to ‘real’ processes on the ground and which is least affected by the role of state actors. In this sense, micro-regions are most obviously constructed from the bottom-up, with top-down activities often merely granting state legitimacy (or being lagging pushes for ownership) over processes that have long-existed and that are least obligated to what administrations may or may not pursue. How this relates to the wider global movement where state elites promote regional projects as a means to embed neo-liberal strategies of accumulation is of profound interest in understanding the wider reconfiguration of the globe. Identifying the interface between elite-derived agendas and popular reactions to such is important as by doing so, the imminent possibilities of transformative counter-movements may be more readily identified. With this in mind, the paper now turns to one such ongoing micro-region: the Maputo Development Corridor.
In the context of southern Africa, a number of micro-regions have been/are being constructed. The developmental philosophy behind these projects are largely captured within a neo-liberal framework, particularly those projects known as Spatial Development Initiatives (SDIs). The Maputo Development Corridor (MDC) running from Witbank in Mpumalanga (eastern South Africa), through Nelspruit, to Maputo, capital of Mozambique is an example of such a SDI. These SDIs are high-profile attempts by the South African private sector, with the active support of the state, to ‘unlock inherent economic potential in specific spatial locations in southern Africa’ (‘Spatial Development Initiatives in Southern Africa’, www.sdi.org.za). Almost entirely driven by private capital (though in partnership with national and provincial administrations), these SDIs are currently reconfiguring whole areas of South Africa and neighbouring states, constructing effective micro-regions of economic activity.

Though part of a wider macro-regionalism/regionalization, SDIs are attempting to reconstitute the region along lines favoured by private enterprise, particularly externally oriented fractions of capital with an eye to the global market. South African financial interests are firmly driving this process (see Simon (ed.), 1998). This attempt to (re)construct a micro-region is explicitly connected to perceptions held at the elite level that in an era marked by globalization, regionalization is a crucial means by which states may come together and tap into this process in order to maximize their pulling power vis-à-vis international capital. As Swaziland’s economic planning minister, Themba Masuku, remarked on the MDC, ‘there is no question the trade corridor must succeed. The world is globalising rapidly and regional co-operation is vital if [we] are to cope with increasing competition for trade and investment in the fast-improving world’ (Sunday Independent (Johannesburg), 6 November, 1996). The micro-regions currently being constructed then cannot be separated from the wider national and global context within which their promoters find themselves, nor from the perceptions that there is a ‘fast-improving world’ out there that African state elites but need to tie themselves to.

Launched in 1995, the SDI project(s) purport to be short-term and targeted attempts to stimulate ‘growth’ by creating globally competitive spatial entities via new investment, infrastructural development and job creation. To date there exist 11 SDIs in South Africa: the MDC; the Lubombo SDI (to include Mozambique and Swaziland); the Coast to Coast SDI (Namibia, Botswana, and Mozambique); the Platinum SDI (Botswana); the Phalaborwa SDI; the West Coast Investment Initiative; and the Gauteng SDI. In addition, a number of SDIs have been identified/
put forward within the broader southern African region: Walvis Bay DC (Namibia); Malange DC (Angola); Lobito DC (Angola and the DRC); Namibe DC (Angola and Namibia), Okavango-Upper Zambezi SDI (Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe) Tazara DC (Zambia and Tanzania); Nacala DC (Mozambique and Malawi); Beira DC (Mozambique and Zimbabwe); and the Mozambique-Zambezi River SDI.

Such has the imagination of regional elites been captured by the SDI concept that a whole host of possible projects have been put forward. But, how realistic are such SDIs? It is outside the remit of this article to discuss such issues, suffice to say that the viability of many of these SDIs would provide the critical researcher with rich pickings for material.

Returning to South Africa, the South African government sees as its primary task the need to work with private capital in partnership in order to facilitate such SDIs. 'The principal mechanism underpinning the SDI programme is private sector investment which will be “crowded in” through a number of public sector interventions' (Lewis and Bloch, 1998: 730). This approach to development and the importance attached to the private sector, is very much in line with the neo-liberal Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policies adopted by the African National Congress, in 1996 (see Williams and Taylor, 2000; Taylor, 2001). This shift in macro-economic thinking has had profound implications for developmental thinking within government circles. In essence, ‘growth’ has been privileged over development, with poverty upliftment largely pinned on familiar neo-liberal ‘trickle-down’ prescriptions (Bond, 2000). The SDIs have been sold as ‘the practical implementation of the government’s economic strategy as set out in its Growth, Employment and Redistribution policy’ ('Spatial Development Initiatives in Southern Africa', www.sdi.org.za). Indeed, ‘with the structural death of the RDP and the persistent poverty in South Africa, SDIs are regarded as the government’s “last card” in attempting the reconstruction of South Africa. SDIs are spokes of the government’s fledgling Growth, Employment and Redistribution strategy, which is touted as the panacea to the country’s developmental crisis’ (Moloi, 1998: 16).

Any reconfiguration of the region – or the construction of micro-regions – along the lines promoted by the SDI programmes then is a developmental agenda founded on neo-liberalism. It is this actuality that at once enjoys the enthusiastic support of capital on the one hand, while posing severe problems for any truly empowering project on the other. Certainly, a regional project predicated upon neo-liberalism is ‘silent about deep structural inequalities, especially the qualitative aspects of underdevelopment lodged in the blockage of highly inequalitarian social systems’ (Mittelman, 2000: 126). This article aims to critically interrogate the MDC and how it is affecting/reifying existing power relations on the ground. The MDC is seen as an interesting case study as it constitutes new and
potentially enormously influential frameworks for governance, which have serious implications for formal interstate relations, particularly in a continent that has traditionally jealously guarded (at least the appearance) of state sovereignty at all costs. In order to do this however, the historical origins of the micro-region and the developmental vision it is based on need to be understood.

THE HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF THE MDC

The MDC was launched in May 1996 at an official ceremony in Maputo attended by the presidents of Mozambique and South Africa. The process began in August 1995, when the ministers of transport of Mozambique and South Africa met to set in motion a plan to establish a developmental axis between the port of Maputo and the industrial centre of South Africa (Gauteng). However, this process was very much an attempt to reconstruct a cross-border relationship and micro-region that had effectively existed since at least the industrialization of the area around present-day Johannesburg since the late 1800s (Taylor, 1999).

The historical legacy of colonial intrusion into the spaces now known as ‘Mozambique’ and ‘South Africa’ is of profound importance, critically informing the setting and features of the dilemmas facing the micro-region in contemporary times (Swatuk and Vale, 1999). This constructed historical space demonstrated all the idiosyncrasies of a dominant and subordinate relationship, with White African capital exploiting Black labour. Mozambique became a regional conduit and effective labour reserve for the minerals-based industries in South Africa, fastening southern Mozambique and the Johannesburg environs together, and firmly establishing the migratory labour system that formed/forms the basis of the historical space around which the MDC has been formulated.

A transport corridor linking Johannesburg and its environs to the Indian Ocean – and the world – via the sea port developed and became a major feature of southern Africa’s regional dynamics. Being the shortest link to an export harbour for South Africa’s industrial heartland, this corridor rapidly became a major intersection for southern Africa’s linkages with the world economy. Hundreds of thousands of Mozambicans travelled to work as migrant labourers in the minerals industries along the Witwatersrand, as well as others finding work as agricultural contract workers. Between 1908 and 1975 the annual flow of legally recruited labourers from Mozambique fluctuated between 74,000 and 118,000 (Mamdani, 1996: 153).

Such arrangements were dislocated when in the mid-1970s the progressive Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (Frelimo) assumed power in Maputo after Portuguese rule collapsed following a coup in the metropole. A period of mutual hostility ensued, with the apartheid regime actively
undermining Frelimo’s efforts to construct a socialist developmentalist state (Minter, 1994). Space precludes a history of the Mozambican revolution and its demise (see Saul, 1994; 1997; Vines, 1994), suffice to say that a combination of factors induced Frelimo to finally sup with the devils of Pretoria, as witnessed by the Nkomati Accord, and the bandit movement Renamo. Concomitant with this process was a gradual shedding of Frelimo’s socialist pretensions. The current movement to draw closer integration between Maputo and eastern South Africa can be said to reflect processes that have been developing ever since Frelimo began casting off its socialist clothes and engaging in dialogue with the then minority-ruled regime in Pretoria. That much of this serves to reinforce the consolidation of a micro-region that has long been in existence, even during the height of provocations from South Africa, implies that the practical concept of a cross-border economic and social sphere between Mozambique’s southern and South Africa’s eastern territories is a reality that is simply being institutionalised (and, importantly, directed) by the newly constituted MDC.

This has been facilitated by a seeming policy ‘fit’ between Mbeki’s GEAR project and Mozambique president Joaquin Chissano’s neo-liberal conversion. The Mozambican state has been (at times reluctantly) pursuing a neo-liberal project since it implemented its Economic Recovery Programme in 1987, largely at the behest of disciplinary agents such as the World Bank, the IMF and other donors, who supply some 60 percent of Mozambique’s income. This has been spurred on by the paucity of alternative visions among Frelimo vis-à-vis recovery strategies: the Mozambican elite believes that there is simply ‘no alternative’ to neo-liberalism, a view heartily endorsed by the South African state elites, capital and the international financial institutions (IFIs), upon whom Maputo is so dependent (interview with Iraê Baptista Lundin, Centro de Estudos Estratégicos e Internacionais, Instituto Superior de Relações Internacionais, Maputo, 9 April, 2000).

Maputo’s approach is very much in line with the norms demanded by international capital and appealing to the need to positively engage in the globalization process. This effectively signals the tailing off, if not the closure, of Frelimo’s progressive project embarked upon from the mid-1970s onwards: Frelimo’s ‘historic retreat to capitalism’, which has aimed to ‘stop the haemorrhage that was the war [with Renamo], creates a climate of peace [and] promotes economic development again’ (Marcelino dos Santos, member of Frelimo’s Central Committee, quoted in Mozambique-file, June 1999, no. 275: 21). Not that this has brought much rewards for the average Mozambican: after twelve years of economic reforms 70 percent of the population live in absolute poverty (South African Press Agency (Maputo), 25 February, 1999). How such actualities compromise the prospects for a genuine sense of regionness and sense of coherence along the MDC is a key question.
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The prospectus for the MDC includes admirable developmental commitments and environmental awareness which suggest a basis for a popular form of regionness. For instance, the MDC’s ‘Strategic Context’ and ‘Vision’ states that:

the re-establishment of the [Witbank-Maputo] axis will significantly enhance the underlying conditions for development along its entire length . . . The development corridor will also present opportunities to address the important (corridor and wider regional area) issues of sustainability (natural resource use, refined industrial processes etc.), poverty and access to basic needs and social services.

(‘Key Goals and Strategic Objectives for the Maputo Development Corridor’, <www.dbsa.org/Corridors/maputo/sectionc.htm>)

Indeed, the World Bank’s deputy chief resident in South Africa asserted that ‘the Corridor must be seen as a means to an end, and that end is poverty alleviation’ (Cape Times (Cape Town) 11 August, 1997).

However, such developmental impulses are profoundly compromised by the neo-liberal underpinnings of the SDI concept and the concomitant ingredients within neo-liberalism itself which can but serve to undermine any coherent sense of regionness among the affected peoples along the Gauteng-Maputo axis. This of course is not to say there will not be ‘winners’ from the (re)construction of the micro-region. But, any popular sense of regionness is bound to be compromised by the explicitly neo-liberal thrust of both the South African and Mozambican state’s economic policies and the accompanying playing out of such tendencies within the MDC SDI. Unpacking the implications of this is obviously important.

According to Hettne, a spatial area demonstrates a conspicuous level of regionness if it contains ‘a higher degree of economic interdependence, communication, cultural homogeneity, coherence, [and] capacity to act’ (Hettne, 1993: 211–32). In his five levels of regionness, Hettne also argues that regionness is demonstrated if it acts with a distinct identity and its actors possesses capability, legitimacy and formal structures of decision-making. Hettne goes on to say that,

Crucial areas for regional intervention are conflict resolution (between and within former ‘states’) and welfare (in terms of social security and regional balance). The ultimate outcome of this could be a ‘region-state’, which in terms of scope can be compared to the classical empires, but in terms of political order constitutes a voluntary evolution of a group of formerly sovereign national, political units into a supranational security community.

(Hettne in Hettne et al. (eds) 1999: 11)
Certainly, along the MDC there is a high degree of social and economic interconnectedness, be it formal/informal, legal/illega. Formally, South African-Mozambican trade is relatively substantial and growing: in 1998 South Africa imported 218 million Rands worth of goods, while exporting 2640 million Rands worth (Bertelsmann-Scott, 1999: 443–44). Such a massive trade imbalance reflects the overall imbalance between the South African economies and those of the region, and has been a constant source of grievance by other states in the region. Such figures, as elsewhere in Africa, only tell one part of the story however (MacGaffey, 1991; Bayart et al., 1999). As Swatuk and Vale remark, ‘the fiction of the Westphalian state system in southern Africa contrasts with the lived reality on the ground: goods, people, resources, animals, and so forth continue to ignore these borders and to get along in spite of them’ (Swatuk and Vale, 1999: 366).

Illegal activities are equally as important when discussing the processes at work along the MDC. For instance, Mozambique’s historical experience of armed conflict continues to play itself out in a host of negative ways which whilst drawing together criminal elements along the Gauteng-Maputo nexus, weakens a sense of regionness – although a cross-border criminal fraternity may indeed construct their own forms of ‘regionness’. So far however, there has been a stimulation of xenophobia and hostility to foreigners. Estimates of weapons imported into Mozambique during the civil war range from 500,000 to 6 million. During the United Nations peacekeeping operation of 1993–95, about 190,000 weapons were collected. However, most were not destroyed and through various corrupt practices were soon back out in the public domain, either circulating within Mozambique or being sold and illegally smuggled into neighbouring states, the main destination being South Africa. In four recovery operations performed jointly by South African and Mozambican authorities in recent years, a total of 11,891 firearms were seized and destroyed. These have included over 100 pistols, 6,000 anti-personnel mines, and hundreds of the ubiquitous AK-47. Also captured were over 3 million rounds of ammunition (Business Day (Johannesburg), 18 January, 2000).

Such a profusion of illegal weaponry flows back and forth along the micro-region, much of it for hire at hourly rates. This criminality surely erodes any coherent notion of a security community, at least at the ground level and, lofty rhetoric aside, there has been a lack of success in stopping such illegal activity within the micro-region. In fact, recently it was announced that there exist 144 organized criminal syndicates specializing in offences ranging from cash heists to stock theft operating in Mpumalanga. These syndicates also act as conduits for drug smugglers along the Gauteng-Maputo nexus, using their organizations for drug and weapon smuggling, counterfeiting money, cross-border vehicle smuggling and (increasingly) subverting government through corruption (Business Day (Johannesburg), 28 March, 2000). Though it is not covered in any MDC
prospectus, the 'real' micro-region is made up of a host of hubs and spokes of illicit activities, a large degree of which are historically long standing. Indeed, given the apartheid regime’s covert support of anti-government bandits during the destabilization campaign against Frelimo, the 'returning home' in the hands of criminals of much of the weaponry provided by Pretoria to Renamo is grimly ironic.

In addition to such life-threatening activities within the micro-region, the flow of migrants, both legal and illegal, is also of profound importance and again serves in many ways to undermine a sense of regionness. Tolerated in the past as a source of cheap labour for businesses owned by Whites, the continuation of immigration flows from Mozambique into South Africa has stimulated an increasingly hostile atmosphere against Mozambicans, particularly within the informal settlements ringing Gauteng. This hostility has been fuelled by organized labour which fears that such immigrants will undermine wage levels for working South Africans and put pressure on already existing scarce resources. All 'refugees' from Mozambique are now classed by Pretoria as illegal immigrants and South Africa enforces a policy of forced repatriation, expelling Mozambicans at a rate of 3,000 people per week (Solomon, 1994: 67). In a period of only two months in 1994, South Africa deported over 50,000 illegal emigrants from Mozambique (Sunday Independent (Johannesburg), 26 December, 1994). Yet, despite such measures and the elaborate fencing at the South African-Mozambican borders, the flow of impoverished migrants continues to stream across and through the micro-region.

The causes of this are profound poverty within Mozambique, a situation created by years of destabilization by Pretoria during the apartheid years, the misguided attempt by Frelimo to rush through socialist economic reforms with a less than satisfactory support structure to see these through and, and this is crucial, the implementation of neo-liberal reforms which have thrown thousands of Mozambicans out of work (Abrahamsson and Nilsson, 1995; Hanlon, 1991, 1996). This last point is of particular interest when discussing the micro-region of today: how can a sense of regionness be constructed within Mozambique when it is predicated upon policies that further impoverish the masses while an ostentatious class of 'entrepreneurs' (both local and South African) appear to be the only winners? Evidence of the direction processes have led thus far is provided by the United Nations Development Programme's 1998 'National Human Development Report on Mozambique', which posed a number of questions about Maputo's neo-liberal elevation of growth as the main developmental goal:

What is growing and for whom? The growth of absolute poverty for the great majority, or the growth of ostentatious incomes for a small
Indeed, the winners of the ongoing processes within the micro-region appear to be restricted to a small fraction of the population.

But, outside the parameters of the official are the informal trading networks that have been established along the MDC to take advantage of the increase in the flow of traffic through the micro-region. This goes to the heart of issues surrounding gender equity and accessibility to any developmental spin-offs that may accrue from the MDC. Perhaps the most contentious issue in this regard is the privatization of formerly publicly accessible transport routes. This has already provoked tensions between local communities and the investors involved in the project. Initially, women informal traders were chased off the N4 for trying to sell fruit to travellers (something they have done for decades). With the increase in traffic flows along this route, the impoverished women felt that they had a right to try and make a living this way. However, the local council felt that this activity was dangerous to road users and so a hard-standing area with a slip-off road was planned. Local women interviewed felt that this would deprive them of potential customers and complained about the sanitation conditions they work in (interview with informal traders outside Nelspruit, 3 April, 2000).

However, it seems apparent that local ANC politicians have been involved in a degree of populist grandstanding which has exacerbated resentment *vis-à-vis* the whole MDC project. In conversation with the women traders they claimed that they had been promised free housing and other facilities by local politicians: everyone else spoken to vehemently denied this. It was also reported by one (reliable) source that local ANC politicians had – quite illegally – addressed meetings to announce that the government would make sure that local users did not have to pay the toll fees. What seems to be occurring on the ground is that local ANC officials are projecting a populist agenda in an attempt to deflect pressure against the logical implications of their own party’s pursuance of a neo-liberal programme. Such a scenario has profound implications for popular support for the construction of the micro-region. This is exacerbated by the poor consultative processes with local communities over issues affecting their daily livelihoods. Though there are exceptions, dialogue over many issues seems minimal and only really is enacted when affected
local inhabitants complain, leading to what we can see in emerging regionalisms in southern Africa as the SDI’s ‘democratic deficit’.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

What all the above suggests is that the regionalism of the MDC is not only driven by state elites, who have their own agenda, but by communities and peoples who utilize the micro-region for a heterogeneous set of reasons and motives. These two sets of processes – the top-down and the bottom-up – frequently clash and are in confrontation at a multiple and quite complex set of levels. Such processes and outcomes of regionalization, in all their multiple activities and levels characterize the micro-region (and not vice versa). Having said that, the broader macro-economic vision upon which the MDC is constructed is vitally important. The neo-liberal forces behind the formal micro-region’s inception can only push for further privatization and the rolling back of state involvement, casting everything within a profit-seeking framework which allows very little space for social and ecological implications. In the context of an impoverished part of the world, the privatization of everyday life is clearly doubtful.

Such a foundation for constructing the micro-region undermines the whole notion of a popular regionness which, it is obvious, is vital for any long-standing and sustainable project to survive. Hence there is a profound contradiction within the MDC, which goes to the heart of regionalisms across the continent and are mirrored elsewhere. This contradiction is essentially this: as various parts of Africa become more integrated into the global economy based on a dominant conception of what globalization is (or should be), a concomitant process of marginalization (and at times criminalization) occurs that undermines the whole notion of regionness and the successful building of community. This argument needs reinforcing: the hegemony of a transnational globalism as a comprehensive concept of control (or, in regulationist parlance, mode of social regulation) is tendentious and inherently crisis-prone and, in the long-term, unsustainable. Lipietz neatly summarizes why this is so. First, neo-liberal globalism is analogous with social polarization and breakdown. Second, it progressively alienates labour from the production process and collapses the social framework within which gains could be socially shared, thereby increasing marginalisation. Third, it stimulates business cycle swings and creates a climate whereby the threat of crashing is omnipresent. Finally, the deregulation of global commerce leads, not to structural adjustment on the part of economies, but rather worsens structural imbalances and forces deflation as state elites engage in race to the bottom competitive strategies (Lipietz, 1992).

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Paradoxically, such tendencies might generate a new sense of community among affected social formations, but one built from the bottom-up and which is based upon an alternative vision of regionness that reacts against the insatiable logic of the ‘free market’. Indeed, such marginalizing tendencies may well encourage the growth of informal politics alongside the informal economy and the (re)building of local and regional civil society (Shaw, 1994). This development is nascent at present but, if there is one thing that is clear, it is that regionalism is not simply ‘economic’, it is also profoundly political and ideological. Hence any resistance struggle(s) and forces against the marginalization of a regionalism built upon a transnationalized ideology of globalism must be conscious and organized: ‘the essential task is that of systematically and patiently ensuring that this [progressive] force is formed, developed, and rendered ever more homogenous, compact, and self-aware’ (Gramsci, 1971: 185).

This process will be contingent on the historical experience of the particular micro-regions in question and will be based on the imminent possibilities that present themselves between the past and the present – the terrain of the conjunctural. This will be dependent upon the various and diverse configurations and social formations within each micro-region and will hinge on civil society within such entities. Such counter-responses to marginalization at a micro level will need to be based upon an alliance which are cross-border, micro regional and ultimately, global. Analyses of such potentiality must first analyse the strength of this ideological globalism and then construct strategies for its transformation (see Morales-Gómez, 1999). The key is in identifying and building upon the imminent possibilities presented by civil society as potential agents of transformation.

As globalization more and more generates regional responses, the possibilities that counter-reactions at the regional level (be it micro-, sub-, or even macro-) can be constructed as building blocks for a more compassionate world order need to be considered. Talking of the task before critical intellectuals, Robinson asserts that ‘critical globalization studies should set as their objective elucidating the structural and historical context of the crisis of civilisation we face, as well as the real inner workings and the contradictions of the emerging global social order’ (Robinson, 1999: 67). Here, the insight from Gramsci that civil society is not simply an aggregate of non-state actors but it is also the site of conflicting ideas in which ‘the intersubjective meanings upon people’s sense of “reality” are based’ is needed (Cox, 1999: 10). Instead of focusing on a unifying conception of society and transformation, we must look for a workable sense of cohesion to emerge out of the seemingly irreconcilable modes of resistance from below’ (Cheru, 2000: 353). From this comes a recognition that within this site, constructed ‘realities’ regarding the
region and its regionness can become contested and, indeed, transformed, based on shared notions of community and solidarity:

In short, the ways in which the market, the state, and civil society interact and react to the challenges of globalisation are crucial in constituting sub-regional outcomes. Under very different conditions, there will be different configurations. But in all instances, sub-regionalism is a historically contingent phenomenon at the crossroads of globalisation and the need to cope, in one manner or another, with this mega-process. Although there are a variety of ways to accommodate globalisation, sometimes resistance is either the preferred choice or the only option.

(Mittelman, 2000: 160–61)

Whether this strategy will mark out the future of the micro-region will be dependent on the ongoing processes and counter-processes that are currently energizing the Maputo Corridor. These processes will be contested across the extended state (in Gramsci’s words, civil society plus political society) and are likely to occur both within the formal, when the state engages with social formations, and the ‘real’, where the counter-hegemonic terrain of struggle for a more people-centred regionness is likely to be sited. The SDIs of southern Africa are but one site of struggle against a totalizing globalism that threatens the life chances of millions. Their trajectories remain open and contested. Progressive regionness may yet prosper, despite the current negative environment within which such projects must struggle.

NOTE

* The fieldwork conducted in Mozambique and South Africa for this study was supported by the Development Policy Research Unit, University of Cape Town.

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