Forum: Global Governance: Decline or Maturation of an Academic Concept?

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This forum discusses contemporary scholarship on global governance in light of various problems that have commonly been associated with the global governance concept and literature. In the first contribution, Henk Overbeek maintains that global governance talk has undergone a profound transformation. While the concept initially referred to a radical restructuring of the global economic order, it is nowadays used as a reformist concept that seeks to accommodate the interests of neo-liberal globalization with relatively marginal reforms that are seen as necessary to keep the system running. Because definitions of global governance, including that of the Commission on Global Governance, tend to presuppose rather than question the existence of common interests and the willingness to cooperate at the global level, they serve to depoliticize the debate about world order. Moreover, the concept is analytically misleading given the rise of traditional forms of interstate bargaining that followed both the global financial crisis and the rise of the BRIC states.

In the second contribution, Klaus Dingwerth and Philipp Pattberg revisit the common critique that “global governance” is essentially a misnomer, as it overestimates the actual globality of existing governance schemes and as it portrays transboundary regulation as a mostly apolitical or post-political activity. Finding some truth in both claims, the authors however note that the more recent contributions to the global governance literature are very much aware of these conceptual challenges and frequently manage to address them without depriving the concept of global governance of its particular strengths. However, the authors identify a third challenge that has largely gone unnoticed thus far, namely the tendency of global governance research to almost exclusively focus on densely regulated policy areas while at the same time neglecting the more fundamental question why some issues become considered global governance issues and others not.
In the third contribution, Daniel Compagnon brings the conceptual debate down to earth. He takes issue with the common claim that global governance ignores the South. As a matter of fact, and in spite of the structural imbalances in the distribution of power and resources in the global political economy, Third World countries have not been lacking overall influence both on the international state system and on transnational politics. Rather than assuming that Third World countries are structurally excluded from global governance, the author argues for a more nuanced and fact-based assessment of global governance in the South and the inclusion of Third World countries in global governance research.

Global Governance: From Radical Transformation to Neo-Liberal Management

Henk Overbeek

Introduction

Once upon a time “global governance” held the promise of a radical transformation of world order. It was during the late 1970s, the world was just becoming aware that natural resources were finite, revolutionary regimes in the Third World were organizing solidarity in pursuit of a new international economic order, the United States were forced to withdraw from Vietnam just as the Portuguese were abandoning their latter-day colonial empire in Africa. Global governance would deliver humane and democratic institutions geared toward the management of humanity’s common affairs.

This idyllic picture is a far cry from the grim realities of neo-liberal global governance in the new Millennium. The world is increasingly governed either by informal, undemocratic, and unrepresentative gatherings of world leaders (the G7–G8) or by politicians, business leaders, journalists, and assorted other functionaries of the status quo convened in elite mountain resorts (the World Economic Forum), if not directly by the headquarters of the world’s leading transnational corporations.

This contribution traces the drift in the meaning of the concept of “global governance” from transformative rallying cry to euphemism for the global rule of capital. Section 2 addresses the normative uses of the term, from its radical roots to its co-option by reformist forces. Section 3 looks at what “global governance” in the contemporary world really stands for: the management of neo-liberal globalization. In Section 4, I address the likely evolution of really existing global governance in the early twenty-first century. Section 5 concludes the contribution.

The Radical Roots of “Global Governance” and the Turn to Reformism

The idea that our globalizing world is confronted with challenges that cannot be effectively dealt with through the channels of traditional interstate bargaining is not new. Notions of world order and global governance emerged first in the mid-1970s, more or less at the same time as “globalization” and slightly later than such concepts as “sustainable development” or “new international economic order”. During these early years, these notions were mostly of a normative/prescriptive nature, in many ways inspired by the work of the Club of Rome (Meadows et al. 1972). The work of these authors called to attention many problems of global society beyond the reach of individual states, which presumably called out for “global governance.” Quite prominent were authors such as Mendlovitz (1975) and Falk (1975). The emphasis in this early work is on identifying the shortcomings of traditional state government in confrontation with problems that transcend the reach of individual states and on the inherently undemocratic nature of whatever
international coordination of policy does occur. The solution would be a transformation in the direction of “human” and democratic governance. During these early years, global governance remained a relatively marginal concept. Its radical connotations prohibited adoption in broader circles.

This was to change in the course of the nineteen nineties. It seems a common pattern for radical projects: as long as they are perceived as a threat to the foundations of the existing order, they remain marginal, but if they address real and urgent problems that need to be dealt with (if only because public opinion begins to get restless), they are with time encapsulated by reformist forces who reformulate the demands of the radical project in terms that no longer fundamentally question the status quo but claim to reconcile the imperatives of a globalizing market economy with the requirements of sustainable development (wealth creation, poverty reduction, environmental protection, energy security, etc). The process shows parallels with what Antonio Gramsci called trasformismo, in this case referring more to the encapsulation and emaciation of radical ideas than of political actors (Gramsci 1971:58fn).

Such de-radicalizing transformation happened earlier in the case of the demand for a new international economic order—through the RIO Report (Tinbergen 1976) and Willy Brandt’s Independent Commission on International Development Issues (ICIDI 1980). Similarly, the ideas on sustainable development originally formulated by the World Commission on Environment and Development, better known as the Brundtland Commission (WCED 1987), which still had some transformative potential, were heavily influenced and watered down during the first UN Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro by transnational business interests united in the Business Council for Sustainable Development (cf. Kolk 1996).

With regard to “global governance,” several authors have suggested that the end of the Cold War was important in a similar process of making global governance a respectable concept (Hewson and Sinclair 1999; Barnett and Duval 2005:4–5; Soederberg 2006:16–7; Fuchs 2007:27–8). The defeat of the Soviet challenge to the Western (primarily United States) claim to represent the common good of all humanity fundamentally altered the terms of debate in international politics. With a global alternative system out of the way, it became possible to promote a depoliticized and watered-down version of “global governance” as the ideal consensual and non-adversarial manner to manage the world’s affairs. This development reached its apex in the report of the international Commission on Global Governance (CGG 1995). Its definition of global governance has become the most quoted standard one: The sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. It is a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and cooperative action may be taken (Commission on Global Governance (CGG) 1995:2).

This definition, and most usages of the term developed later, suffer from three weaknesses: they are apolitical in the sense of obliterating power from the equation; they are pluralist in the sense of taking the plurality of actors, interests, and partial structures as essential; and they are ahistorical in abstracting from the concrete historical conjuncture in which the concept emerged (cf. Overbeek 2004: for a more detailed elaboration, cf. Dingwerth and Pattberg in this Forum). However, we must move beyond this simple critique. For, even to the extent that power is recognized as relevant, the conceptualization of power is often limited to relational and institutional forms of power (as in realist and neo-liberal institutionalist accounts) and to discursive power (as in social constructivist accounts) (for examples, see most of the contributions to Barnett and Duval 2005). However, notions of structural power are employed only in a small

1Even a very prominent critic of contemporary global governance practices such as Joseph Stiglitz in fact does not transcend the confines of a thoroughly reformist project (cf. Stiglitz 2008).
and relatively marginal corner of the field of International Relations, that of historical materialist and critical theory approaches, inspired first of all by the work of Robert Cox.\textsuperscript{2} Without due consideration for the role of structural power in the global political economy, we cannot hope to begin to understand what “global governance” is really about.

**Really Existing Global Governance**

In the course of the 1990s, the concept of global governance gradually began to be used more frequently by social scientists commenting on the ways the globalizing world was being governed in reality. It began to stand for “what world government we actually have” (Murphy 1994:1), or—paraphrasing Rudolf Bahro’s notion of “really existing socialism” (Bahro 1977)—really existing global governance. The turning point was the year 1995, the year of the publication of *Our Global Neighbourhood* and also the year in which a new academic journal devoted exclusively to global governance (*Global Governance*) was founded (see Table 1). The use of the term increases threefold in that year and again tenfold in the subsequent 10 years, before losing some of its attraction.

What exactly is the nature of this really existing global governance? Elsewhere, I have argued that what is currently referred to as global governance is the ensemble of regulatory practices and institutions that has been developed over the past decades to manage the conditions for the global mobility and accumulation of capital. “Global governance constitutionalizes private property rights, guarantees the unhindered mobility of capital, and controls and subordinates potentially rebellious social forces and states” (Overbeek 2004:53). In other words, really existing global governance has a clear and unambiguous social purpose or class character.\textsuperscript{3}

This general social purpose of global governance comes in different guises. Initially, during the 1970s, radical Third World regimes had a big impact on the global stage, with their leading roles in the UNCTAD and other UN forums where they were able to exploit their large numbers, advocating a new international economic order which was to be realized via traditional interstate bargaining in the United Nations. However, with the advent of global neo-liberalism, personified by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, global governance has assumed a straightforward disciplinary face in most of the Third World (Gill 1995). The conditionalities of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), copied by large donors such as the European Union, the dictates of the World Trade

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**Table 1. Academic popularity of “global governance,” 1961–2010\textsuperscript{*}**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
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<tr>
<td>1961–1970</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>1971–1980</td>
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<td>1981–1990</td>
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<td>1996–2000</td>
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<td>2001–2005</td>
<td>14,900</td>
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<td>2006–2010</td>
<td>15,300</td>
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\textsuperscript{*}Number of hits in Google Scholar search, with “global governance” anywhere in the article, count conducted April, 1, 2010.

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\textsuperscript{2}Cox 1987; for a handsome anthology of his writings, see Cox and Sinclair 1996; for excellent contributions on the role of structural power in global governance, see Fuchs 2007 and Soederberg 2006.

\textsuperscript{3}On the class nature of really existing global governance, see among other van der Pijl 1998; Scherrer 2000; Callinicos 2002; Cammack 2005; Rupert 2005; and Soederberg 2006.
Organization (WTO), the extremely restrictive global migration and asylum regime: these global governance practices all serve to safeguard the sovereignty of capital while simultaneously containing and managing the social fall-out of neo-liberal economic restructuring. And where these practices do not suffice, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent transformation of the global state system have made it possible to intervene directly inside the periphery under the guise of “humanitarian intervention” to re-orient the development process toward the broader goals of extending and stabilizing global markets (Duffield 2001; Soederberg 2006). From the late 1970s to the early years of the new Millennium, the Third World has therefore mostly been the object of global governance rather than its co-author.4

Governance in the core of the contemporary global system on the other hand is increasingly informalized and networked. The multiplicity of governance sites and modes involving any combination of intergovernmental and trans-governmental regulation, “public-private” regimes, and forms of private authority and self-regulation is striking.5 The emergence of these new structures, often combining public and private forces, early on led Robert Cox to his famous phrase of a global nebuleuse (Cox and Sinclair 1996:298). Neo-liberal global governance during the late 1990s and during the early years of the new Millennium was increasingly based on self-regulation by private forces. And like the self-regulating market of the nineteenth century (cf. Polanyi 1957), the self-regulating market of the early twenty-first century was predicated on a constitutionally anchored legal basis, insulated from direct political interference. The agreements establishing the WTO, the Single European Act establishing the principles of the European Internal Market, the Statute for the European Central Bank (ECB), these are just the most consequential and well known of a whole range of arrangements making up what Stephen Gill has so aptly named the New Constitutionalism (Gill 2005; see also Scherrer 2000).6

The Future of Global Governance

Notwithstanding its successes, really existing global governance has not resulted in a stable and durable status quo. It is under constant attack, from various corners. First, there is still a strong current of critics of globalization promoting the democratization of global governance through the strengthening of global civil society (for example, Scholte 2005; but see Drainville 2004 for a sharp critique of this approach) and through the alternative of cosmopolitan democracy (Held 1995). The thrust of most of these contributions is to push the global order even further in the direction of de-statification, that is, the further reduction in the direct role of state authority in the governance of the global system (see also Rupert and Solomon 2006:75 ff). The dialectics of the process of neo-liberal globalization however point in a different direction.

The global capitalist order has entered a new phase since the turn of the Millennium. The first few years of the new century have brought a turnaround in many of the tendencies that dominated the preceding two decades. The expectation of ever further liberalization, de-statification, and de-territorialization

4Thus, I agree with Compagnon that governance in the South is part and parcel of global governance; it is however much more questionable that Third World countries can be said to have played a role (as subject rather than object) in global governance. I return to this question in the final section of this piece, where I discuss some of the most recent developments.

5For recent overviews of the role of private authority in global governance, see Cutler, Haufler, and Porter 1999; Hall and Biersteker 2002; Nölke 2004, 2006. Also see Slaughter 2004, for a distinctive network perspective on global order.

6Two recent volumes highlight the key role of transnational corporations in the governance of the global economy: May 2006a (especially Cutler 2006; Haufler 2006 and May 2006b), and Fuchs 2007.
(cf. Compagnon in this Forum) now appears increasingly untenable. On the one hand, we have witnessed the resurgence of geopolitical rivalries on a scale thought impossible just a handful of years ago; on the other hand, the global financial crisis has forced states to accept anew a leading role in the management of the economy and the accumulation of capital. Let us take a brief look at each of these new developments in turn.

First, the global crisis. In 2007, the crisis became visible as a crisis in the US housing market, where the accumulation of bad mortgage debts sparked a financial crisis that quickly spread throughout the world’s main financial markets, and was subsequently transformed into the world’s most serious recession since the 1930s. In the process, the ideology of market liberalization was dealt a massive blow, exemplified by Alan Greenspan’s admission in Congress in October 2008 that the meltdown had revealed a flaw in a lifetime of economic thinking and left him in a “state of shocked disbelief.” (Associated Press, October 23, 2008). The days of neo-liberal free marketeering are over; the role of the state in the management of the leading capitalist economies will inescapably be qualitatively different from the 1980s and 1990s, leading some to even speak of the return of state capitalism (for example, Bremmer 2008).

Second, neo-liberal globalization has produced new geo-economic and geopolitical tensions both in terms of intensified struggles over the control of the world’s major reserves of oil and gas, and equally in terms of the ongoing shift of the center of gravity of the global economy away from the Atlantic and toward the Pacific and in particular toward China. This historic shift may be interpreted in terms of a hegemonic decline of the United States (for example, Arrighi 1994, 2005a,b, 2007; also Harvey 2003, 2005). But, it may also be seen as the price of the success of the very project of neo-liberal globalization and how it has spread capitalist growth beyond the capitalist heartland. It is thus the uneven development of capitalism itself that makes for the rise of new rival centers of accumulation or what van der Pijl (2006) calls Hobbesian contender states, and for increased divisions rather than stronger unity (Schmidt et al. 2009). These rising contender states,\(^7\) signaling the passing of the unipolar moment of the post-Cold War world and the rise of a multi-polar world, can no longer be kept outside the corridors of global power. This inevitable reality is increasingly recognized within some of the key institutions providing intellectual sustenance to the status quo (for example, the IMF and the Brookings Institution). The thrust of the reform proposals coming out of these institutions is to strengthen the role of states and of intergovernmental institutions in the governance of the global system (for example, Boughton and Bradford 2007; and Bradford and Linn 2007). It may be that these new initiatives are nothing but an attempt to restore US-dominated neo-liberal orthodoxy (Cammack 2009). It may even be clear that this is explicitly intended by some (for example, CFR 2008). Nevertheless, the return to interstate bargaining as the basis for global governance is meaningful and unleashes a new and very different dialectic from the market-driven neo-liberal variety of global governance of the last quarter of the twentieth century.

Conclusion

Global governance, I argued in this contribution, is not a particularly useful concept. It is vague and imprecise, but worse, it is misleading. Unfortunately, however, “global governance” will not go away. Given its staying power, it would be better to historicize the concept, that is, to emphasize the concrete historical context in which it is used. Over the past two decades, global governance was in

\(^7\)Obviously China, but also India, Russia and Brazil, and smaller states such as Venezuela, Iran, South Africa, Malaysia.
fact neo-liberal global governance, serving the freedom of capital to accumulate around the planet.

With this historicization of the concept, we are sensitized to recognizing the inevitability of the decline of the social practices it refers to. Was it not Karl Polanyi who, more than 65 years ago, argued that unleashing capitalist markets and creating a self-regulating market civilization had its limits and internal contradictions (Polanyi 1957)? Following this logic, we know that at some point, these contradictions will build up to such an extent that capital will turn away from informal governance and turn back to old-fashioned government; from soft regulation to hard law; from laissez faire to social protection; from market-based governance to state-led government; and from liberal to authoritarian capitalism. In light of the re-emergence of geopolitical rivalries and of resource nationalism in recent years and in light of the return of the state at the managerial center of the capitalist economy, we must wonder whether the pendulum has not already begun to move in the other direction, making the discussion about “global governance” a debate among historians rather than social scientists.

How Global and Why Governance? Blind Spots and Ambivalences of the Global Governance Concept

KLAUS DINGWERTH AND PHILIPP PATTBERG

Introduction

Global governance has been defined in many and often very different ways. Yet, while many have asked “What is global governance?” few have raised the complementary question “What is not global governance?” By asking this question, we aim to critically comment on the contemporary global governance debate. More specifically, we discuss three blind spots that are closely related to the conceptual foundations of the global governance debate. The first two refer to common criticism. The global governance literature is said to assume globality where there is none, and it is criticized for portraying efforts at transboundary regulation as essentially “post-political.” Our review of more recent textbooks and course syllabi on global governance illustrates that those who refer to the global governance label in their own writing or teaching are often sensitive to these challenges. Yet there remains a third and possibly more difficult conceptual challenge, namely the tendency of the global governance literature to overestimate the amount of orderly coordination in world affairs and to neglect the more fundamental question why and how some issues have become considered as global governance while others are not.

Non-Global Governance

The term global governance has two logical alternatives, namely non-global governance and global non-governance. This section deals with the first alternative. How global is “global governance”? Or stated differently: To what extent are the phenomena that are subsumed under the concept of global governance actually “of planetary dimension,” “world-wide,” “globe-spanning” (Overbeek 2005:39)? To answer the question, we follow Robert Latham’s distinction between two different uses of the attribute “global.”

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8As for the syllabi, a google search (key words: “course,” “syllabus,” and “global governance”) led us to identify 30 course syllabi with “global governance” in the title. Out of these, 22 had sufficient information (that is, detailed reading list and class topics) to be analyzed in more detail.
In its first use, global governance refers to “governance that is global”—that is, the coordination of activities that, at least in its aspiration, spans the globe (Latham 1999:28). In this particular usage, critics have argued, the term global governance suggests a level of homogeneity that far transcends contemporary realities. Dieter’s Senghaas (2003) work on world analyses gives a good impression of the fact that the rule-based coordination of activities across borders rarely reaches a global scale. Wondering with which world(s) we are dealing in reality and hence also in our analysis of the world, Senghaas distinguishes between four “partial worlds” (‘Teilwelten der Welt’).

Beyond the OECD world, in which the dense, transboundary, and mostly symmetric integration of politics, law, economy, and civil society constitutes a “post-national multi-level system,” the New Second World of EU enlargement candidates and a few (South-) East Asian societies can also be considered as capable of actively and passively participating in transboundary governance. This is different for the Third and Fourth World. In the Third World, the centers are integrated, if only asymmetrically, in the transnational club of the First and Second World, while the periphery is structurally dependent on its own centers (and hence largely incapable of effectively participating in transboundary, let alone global, governance). Finally, in the Fourth World, societies no longer dispose of regulatory capacities because the state has either failed or been usurped by private actors (Senghaas 2003:118–133).

This analysis is a provocative challenge to well-intended notions of “one world” that are prevalent in the global governance literature. It also represents a fundamental challenge to the very idea of global governance itself (Senghaas 2003:145, our translation):

The problematique in view of implementing the concept of global governance is primarily linked to worlds III and IV. They lack, in particular the latter, elementary prerequisites for global governance regimes to be actually operative and effective at the local level (...). Since world III concerns approximately two thirds of humanity (...), and world IV about another 15 per cent of the world population, this means that approximately four fifths of humanity lack important and in some cases all prerequisites for the build-up of global governance regimes and their reliable operative translation into concrete politics (compliance). This elementary fact is often not even registered in discourses about global governance.

What is usually labeled as global governance is therefore rarely global in a literal sense. This first conception of global governance, the critics maintain, is therefore subject to the same fallacy that Senghaas (2003:119) notes for the earlier globalization discourse: The very specific experience of the OECD world is de-contextualized and “blindly generalized” in its application to the whole world (compare Daniel Compagnon’s contribution to this forum).

As Thomas Risse (2006) has recently pointed out, this generalization is problematic for at least two reasons. First, the dominant governance paradigm is based on a clear distinction between public and private, state and nonstate, and formal and informal as major analytical categories. Yet, these categories are developed on the basis of experiences of modern and developed statehood and hence imply descriptions that are characteristic for only a small part of today’s political world. Second, inherent to the governance perspective is the distinction between hierarchic and non-hierarchic modes of governance with

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9Active participation refers to the capacity to participate in setting global norms and rules. In contrast, passive participation refers to the capacity to effectively implement such norms and rules at regional, national, and local levels.
hierarchic steering closely associated with the state. This ideal-type typology
however fails to acknowledge the realities of weak or failed states, where the
state is often incapable of hierarchic steering and where, at the same time,
hierarchic steering is not necessarily limited to the state and its agencies.

Despite its global label, the global governance discourse thus seems to per-
petuate the lack of attention which mainstream analyses of international relations
pay to the world(s) beyond the OECD. The very concept of global governance
is ultimately marked by ambivalence: On the one hand, its implicit presump-
tion of largely homogeneous rule-based coordination around “global” political
problems seems astonishingly naive. On the other hand, the disparity between
the label and the phenomena the label is meant to describe induces a degree
of sensitivity for the possibilities for and obstacles to actually global governance.
For as long as we talk about “global” governance, it will be very difficult to
ignore questions about the actual globality of the phenomena we subsume
under the term.

This includes both analytical (for example, What elements of health governance are
organized on a global scale?) as well as normative questions (for example, What ele-
ments of health governance should be organized on a planetary scale?). In some sense, it
is thus not very surprising that many of the more recent writings on global govern-
ance pay explicit attention to the globality theme. They do so in two ways that
can be illustrated by reference to Jim Whitman’s two books The Limits of
Global Governance (Whitman 2005) and The Fundamentals of Global Governance
(Whitman 2009). First, authors who use the global governance label frequently
question whether and in what sense the forms of governance they describe are
or can actually be global. In The Fundamentals of Global Governance Whitman
(2009:127–8) for instance acknowledges that “however extensive the coverage,
global governance arrangements will remain aspirational to some degree.”
Second, however, writings that make use of a global governance lens tend to sen-
sitize us to the notion that some form of globality might be present in more
contemporary social relations than we may commonly assume. In his earlier
book The Limits of Global Governance, Whitman (2005:30) seems to make such an
argument when he maintains that

> the sphere of human activity and consequence is global, but comprehension,
coherence, consensus and command are sited in smaller, less comprehensive
constituencies, subject to conflicting or competing interests and practices.

In sum, the global governance debate is certainly marked by the danger to
blindly generalize or “globalize” particular experiences. At the same time, it can
also help us to discern actual globality where we may have overlooked it in previ-
ous research agendas. Daniel Compagnon’s contribution to this forum argues
very strongly that global governance is not limited to the OECD world. Whether
the way in which the use of the global governance label has developed over time
has made the corresponding research agenda more or less attentive to Seng-
haas’s worlds II, III, and IV than competing labels such as international relations,
transnational regulation, or world affairs may remain open to debate. But a short
glimpse at the more recent literature suggests that the level of self-reflection that
authors in the different conceptual camps display does not depend on the labels
they use.

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10 There are also works that do not address the globality theme; their usage of “global” may then refer to a
“plurality of actors” (Clarke and Edwards 2004:6) or to the emergence of new actors or new ways of interacting in
world affairs (Wilkinson and Hughes 2002:2).
Governance “in the global”

Some of our latter remarks already point to a second understanding of global governance, namely as “governance in the global”—in other words, as the coordination of activities at all levels of social interaction up to the global level (Latham 1999:28). On this understanding, the rule-based coordination of social activities is not global only when it does not have transboundary effects (see also Rosenau 1995). Because this is, as Latham correctly notes, a plausible assumption only for very few cases, the range of phenomena that are excluded by the concept of global governance becomes very small. Is any rule-based social interaction thus part of global governance? If we accept Rosenau’s broad definition of global governance as including ‘systems of rule at all levels of human activity—from the family to the international organization—in which the pursuit of goals through the exercise of control has transnational repercussions (Rosenau 1995:13), then this seems in fact to be the right conclusion. While we might intuitively reject such a broad understanding of global governance as analytically meaningless, Hewson and Sinclair (1999) see precisely the breadth of the concept as a central contribution of Rosenau’s work on global governance. By emphasizing the micro-foundation of world politics and analyzing the latter as a “sociology of global life,” they argue, Rosenau not only radically points to the multi-level character, but also points to the omnipresence of global governance. The term suggests, as Hewson and Sinclair (ibid.) maintain, “an existential or ontological condition of daily life in thoroughly altered circumstances,” namely in a social context in which the norms, rules, and authorities that shape our personal conduct increasingly originate from sources outside territorially bounded communities.

Yet, some might argue, such a broad concept of global governance induces a loss of analytical power because it will necessarily cover very heterogeneous phenomena. A broad understanding of global governance might thus encompass issues that are highly regulated at the global level—for instance, the use of violence in the international system—as well as issues for which explicit rules are largely absent at international and transnational levels such as animal rights, unemployment, or abortion. A perspective that builds on Rosenau’s conception would see governance in all these cases.

The global governance of abortion would for instance consist of the sum of national and subnational laws—this would be governance in Rosenau’s “state-centric world”—plus a range of more diffuse inter- and transnational norms and the activities of various actors to push for or against stricter regulations in their own as well as in other societies—this would be governance in Rosenau’s “multi-centric world.”11 Proponents of a global governance perspective could thus merely point to different forms of global governance that distinguish the governance of the use of violence in the international system from the global governance of abortion. As a result, the ordering function of the term “global governance” as such may be reduced because its outside—that which is not part of global governance—remains unclear. Yet, this is hardly a valid critique given that the concepts favored by the critics—for instance concepts such as “global politics,” “international relations,” or “transnational regulation”—face a similar problem. And in fact, the very comparison of densely and/or formally regulated areas with less densely and/or largely informally regulated areas of global governance would provide genuine insights into a number of relevant dynamics: first, the processes through which policy issues are socially constructed as falling either within or beyond the confines of “global governance” or “world affairs;” second, the interests and dynamics that lead some actors and policy fields to opt

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11 On the bifurcation of world politics into a state-centric and a multi-centric world, see Rosenau (1990).
Governance vs. Politics: Is Governance Post-Political?

Next to the “Why global?” question, the global governance discourse is frequently faced with the “Why governance?” question. The main challenges can be summarized in two simple questions: What is the analytical advantage of speaking of “governance” instead of “politics”? And what implications does this preference have?

Critics of the global governance discourse contend that the use of the governance label goes along with a new rhetoric that stresses techniques of “steering” and “management” and, by and large, conveys a depoliticized image of world politics (see for example Biermann 2007:327). At the same time, it seems clear that the social practices summarized by the concept of global governance are not in fact less political than those that fall under the heading of “international politics” (Latham 1999; Friedrichs 2005).12

The critique that global governance is portrayed as non-political or post-political is often related to the linguistic connotation of the term governance itself—for instance to metaphors that invoke steering and thus seem to pretend that central questions about political goals (that is, the “course of the ship”) or the selection of decision makers (the “captain”) frequently remain open. In this sense, the governance discourse is post-political because it neglects (or negates) what is commonly considered as the essence of politics, namely the process of deciding about collective goals and rules (Latham 1999:43).

The abstract emphasis on steering reveals a closeness of the governance perspective to technical-administrative concepts prevalent in older versions of functionalism (cf. Mitrany 1946).13 However, different from those older debates, the current usage of the term governance is said to be rather blind to the difference between the subject and the object of governance. Whereas the older theory of steering (Steuerungstheorie) never lost sight of its connection to politics (that is, the question of legitimate decisions for the public good), the emerging governance theories are criticized for their narrow focus on the effects and the effectiveness of different structures and mechanisms of governing (Mayntz 2004).

As in the previous case, alternative readings of the global governance discourse are on offer. On one reading, global governance as the sum of all rule-based coordination in the world becomes essentially synonymous with the orderly part of politics.14 In line with this interpretation, we could read Rosenau as an author who continuously reminds us that global governance is indeed omnipresent. As a result, the implications of the question “Why governance, not politics?” would again be ambivalent. On the one hand, the governance label may come with a conceptual baggage that includes technologically connotated and depoliticized ideas of societal steering; on the other hand, a global governance lens is welcomed as a tool to recognize how the “totality of human existence” (Latham 1999:27) is increasingly becoming the object of transboundary, intentional, and

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12Friedrichs (2005) for instance argues that global governance oscillates between parapolitics (the extension of politics into societal affairs) and metapolitics (the allocation of roles to the fields of politics and the economy).

13The work of Karl W. Deutsch documents that this is by no means an analytical necessity; see in particular Deutsch (1963).

14The term politics is commonly used in a broader way to include an orderly or rule-based dimension (here termed as governance) and a dimension in which political activity is not guided by rules, but remains more spontaneous.
rule-based “governance.” For adherents to the former perspective, the talk about global governance is essentially a part of a broader neo-liberal shift toward management ideas (see Henk Overbeek’s contribution to this forum). For adherents to the latter perspective, the global governance perspective offers an opportunity to redraw the map of world politics and to broaden our understanding of the discipline, including its object(s) of study and the social theories we turn to in studying those objects.

A brief look at some of the more recent writings on global governance shows that both kinds of works exist. Some authors do in fact associate the global governance label with a more managerial approach (see for instance Clarke and Edwards 2004). Yet, a host of others grapple with the “post-politics” argument and explicitly address the “governance vs. politics” theme. Jim Whitman’s books cited in the previous section, Wilkinson and Hughes’ (2002) collection on Global Governance in the 21st Century, and Lederer and Müller (2002) edited volume Criticizing Global Governance are all examples of the latter group. Thus, Whitman (2009) puts the question “Governance of, by and for whom” at the center of The Fundamentals of Global Governance; and Wilkinson and Hughes equally organize their entire volume around “the politics of global governance.” Lederer and Müller (2005:6–7) are most explicit in their acknowledgement of the intimate relation between governance—and also governance scholarship—and politics when they note that global governance itself is “a term to imagine and legitimate world order” and go on to argue that “because global governance allows us to imagine alternative world orders, the politics of global governance takes place by imagining these alternatives.” The picture is somewhat different when we look at course syllabi. Only relatively few course syllabi reviewed for this forum explicitly include the question of “governance vs. politics,” for example by asking whether global governance is a form of empire or by highlighting aspects of power in global decision making.¹⁵ The majority of course descriptions however does not explicitly engage with the question of what analysts might gain from focusing on “governance” rather than on “politics.”

In sum, the governance discourse is certainly replete with a steering vocabulary—but it is worth noting that the “politics discourse” let alone discourses around the state are hardly immune from that same vocabulary—and it is therefore important not to lose sight of the fact that both “really existing global governance” (see Overbeek in this forum) and our discourses about global governance are political in their very nature. As a result, some of us might wish to label an introductory textbook (or their undergraduate courses) Global Politics rather than Global Governance (see for example, Edkins and Zehfuss 2009). But it would be as curious to assume that the label could do the job unless it is matched by the content of the book (or course), as it is curious to suggest that the global governance literature as such lacks an interest in the politics of global governance. The fact that the critics mainly substantiate their claim, as Henk Overbeek does in his contribution to this forum, by pointing to the work of the Commission on Global Governance mainly indicates one thing—namely that a particular contribution to the global governance discourse (and possibly others that have built on this contribution) has downplayed the political nature of “really existing global governance” and the contested nature of particular visions of future global governance. But this is neither surprising nor particularly relevant. It is not surprising because the commission was itself some sort of a political body. And it is largely irrelevant because the contemporary academic discourse on global government makes only substantial references to the report of the commission.

¹⁵Literature frequently used in this context includes, among others, Hoffman and Ba 2005; Barnett and Duval 2005; and Overbeek 2005.
Global “Non-Governance”? 

The term global governance not only suggests that governance is actually global but also suggests that the globe—or a substantial part of it—is actually governed. In practice, the field of global governance is commonly divided into specific issue areas such as global economic governance, global environmental governance, or global health governance. Yet, for most of these areas, “global governance” does not go beyond the sum of the relevant steering mechanisms that exist in relation to the respective issue area in the world. Accordingly, attempts to describe a specific field of global governance commonly start by establishing an inventory of regulatory mechanisms relevant for the respective field. If inventorization is the method of choice for global governance scholars, we should however expect several blind spots: 

First, global governance research may overestimate the amount of rule-based coordination in the political world. Because its conceptual toolkit functions as a heuristic device to identify rule-based interaction rather than its absence, it may lack a certain responsiveness to the notion that “undirected human activity, abundant and largely mundane, comprises much of the substance and the burden of global order” (Whitman 2005:31). This may hold for the description of “really existing global governance” as well as for the normative prescriptions for future courses of transboundary political action (see also Wendt 2001). 

Second, global governance research thus understood is likely to have a narrow focus on those rules that can most easily be identified—in short, on written rules documented in international legal texts, in decisions of international organizations and their bureaucracies, or in codes of conduct issued by multinational corporations or transnational advocacy groups. To the extent that this is the case, global governance research would have difficulties to investigate both the deep normative structures and the more subtle workings of global (economic, health, etc.) governance. In other words, a narrowly understood governance focus is biased toward formal and highly institutionalized rules, whereas both the more fundamental “rules of the game” and the informal governance structures may frequently be overlooked. The method of “inventorization” thus runs counter to Rosenau’s fundamental promise that global governance research is interested in examining the “literally millions” of rule systems that have transboundary repercussions (Rosenau 1995:13).17 

A third pitfall is that global governance research, in its search for easily identifiable and hence explicit rules, is likely to concentrate on issue areas with dense formal rules. Scholars may therefore fail to investigate—or even identify—other areas of global governance in which governance is less institutionalized, but not necessarily less effective. Thus, we find much research on the global governance of chemicals but not on the global governance of abortion, animal rights, or unemployment, all of which are commonly seen as belonging to the realm of domestic rather than global governance. Some works, such as Roger King’s (2009) study on the global governance of universities, however illustrate that this is not a necessary development and that informal steering through “world
models,’” standards, or rankings can be a central element of empirically oriented global governance scholarship.

Finally, a fourth and related omission refers to the question why some issues come to be publicly seen or constructed as issues of global governance while others are not. The common line of reasoning here is that there are “global problems” or “global challenges” that no single state—and maybe not even the community of states alone—can solve on its own. If no “global solution” is found, we are therefore faced with a “governance gap” (Reinicke, Deng, Benner, Witte, Whitaker, and Gershman 2000). But what is a “global” policy problem? How can we recognize it? And how objective can the identification of a policy issue as a “global challenge” possibly be? Here, the observation that only some issues are constructed as global policy problems while others remain either domestic challenges or not identified as “problems” at all points to the earlier critique of global governance as a post-political discourse in which we may debate about how to best address the climate change problem, but in which we cannot deny that climate change is a priority global problem which we need to address. In response to this critique, it would be important that the global governance literature does not take the construction of issues or areas as “global governance” for granted but instead investigates how, why, and with what consequences they have come to be seen as part of global governance.

To summarize, if global governance scholarship aims for a “sociology of global life”—or more precisely, of global political life—then implicit norms, roles, habits, and routines must be as central to our investigations as explicit rules. As a result, labeling only those policy areas that are characterized by dense formal rules as governance and describing all others—including for instance the regulation of the world’s forests and their management—as “non-governance” (Dimitrov 2005) means to forfeit the innovative aspiration of Rosenau’s conception of global governance because it excludes those areas in which norms rather than rules guide the behavior of different actors from the realm of global governance. In fact, the term “non-governance” itself is misleading because it will be very difficult to even imagine a social relation that is not governed by some informal norms at all (cf. Hufty 2007). Taking the call for a “sociology of global life” seriously implies that global governance scholarship will need to take these “soft” elements of global governance as seriously as explicit rules and that it will need to extend its analysis to, first, the entire spectrum of governance broadly understood and, second, to those issues that are left out in analyses that use explicit and formal rules as its yardstick for “really existing global governance.”

Conclusions

As a particular perspective on world politics, global governance poses a considerable challenge to conventional International Relations scholarships. First, it extends the research agenda to a “multi-centric world” that complements the disciplinary focus on the “state-centric world.” While this extension is, in some sense, an old one which the transnational relations literatures of the 1970s (and also earlier periods) had already envisaged and partially realized, what remains far from clear is how the complexities of the multi-centric world and its relations with the state-centric world can best be studied (cf. Rosenau 1990).

Second, the global governance agenda also challenges us to look beyond formal rules and to investigate the “literally millions” of transboundary control mechanisms that inhabit our social worlds. In relation to these control mechanisms, the analytical breadth of the governance perspective is occasionally criticized because its outside—that which is not governance—is only vaguely defined. On the other hand, the openness of the concept can also be a virtue. It is based on the assumption that “the effectiveness of a norm is more important than its
nature” (Hufty 2007, our translation) and thereby allows us to treat informal and formal norms, standards, and rules as essentially the same where they exert comparable effects on their target actors.

Finally, the critique that “really existing global governance” is rarely global and that researchers and practitioners tend to portray global governance as a post-political activity will continue to be a part of the wider global governance discourse. As we have argued in this contribution, this is however not a major problem. The globality question, in both its analytical and its normative version, is most likely discussed more rather than less explicitly in the context of the global governance discourse than in conventional IR discourses to which it might be equally applicable. In fact, it could even be argued that the normative turn in contemporary IR (cf. Reus-Smit and Snidal 2008) is inherently linked to the emergence of a global governance discourse in which the two spheres have been united from the very start, even though not always in the most convincing manner. And the popular charge that global governance is portrayed as post-political appears valid for only a small part of the discourse. In fact, the “politics of global governance” are at the forefront of many writings that make use of a global governance lens. If we acknowledge, as many authors do, that global governance is in fact about politics, then a global governance lens again helps rather than hinders us to broaden our understanding of world politics and to challenge traditional notions of what falls in the disciplinary purview of IR. And if practicing a “sociology of global life” as envisaged by James Rosenau leads us to question our own understanding of international relations as essentially leads us to wonder why research on transnational terrorism is at the heart of our discipline while the transnational efforts (or their absence) to reduce maternal mortality are not, then this may not be a small thing.

Global Governance and the South: Blind Spot or Terra Incognita?

**Daniel Compagnon**

**Introduction**

When joining this debate, we are aware of the circular nature of de-contextualized “conceptual clarifications.” Concepts are (re)produced through social interactions and within the framework of structured arguments and counter-arguments. All major political science concepts, therefore, are hotly contested and cannot be understood in isolation of the subjective viewpoints that enrich/confuse their meaning. This is not to say of course that knowledge is beyond the reach of social sciences, rather than whatever we achieve will somehow remain contingent to a social, historical context. Therefore, reflecting on global governance should not be a gratuitous and vain search for the “right” definition; rather, it should become an exploration of the specific historical context—multidimensional globalization—in which it is nested. Therefore, we will hereafter try to connect the conceptual discussion with some empirical data drawn from our knowledge of African politics.

The main focus of this paper is a discussion of Klaus Dingwerth and Philipp Pattberg’s claim that including Southern countries in a global governance perspective is highly problematic and constitutes one of the “blind spots” in the theoretical debate they want to address. That the Third World countries are, most of the time, overlooked when theorizing on global governance is a sensible but common observation. Many would derive from this assumption that (i) Southern countries are underrepresented and non-influential in global governance mechanisms, (ii) governance in a broader sense cannot apply to countries bereft of a minimum of public order and institutionalized political
structures—the “Fourth World” in Senghaas’ typology. Yet, such statements that we undertake to challenge below are rarely substantiated with convincing empirical evidence and in-depth analysis, and they rely on a limited body of scientific literature. Pitying the South for being excluded from World’s affairs has become politically correct and does not apparently warrant the scientific scrutiny applied to other areas of international politics. We will attempt to address these two questions in a more critical way.

Are Southern Countries Disenfranchised in Global Governance?

As a matter of fact, and in spite of the structural imbalances in the distribution of power and resources in the global political economy, Third World countries have not been lacking overall influence both on the international system, understood as a system of states, and on transnational politics. This is particularly true in the area of environment and sustainable development. Most of the smaller states indeed lack resources to steer international negotiations, in particular in terms of finances and the qualified manpower required to attend an endless row of meetings; thus, they do not influence the outcome of negotiations as they would wish (Miller 1995, 1998), to the point of being disenfranchised (Fisher and Green 2004). However, there are significant differences according to the issues or problem areas involved. Third World states do influence global environmental governance for example through what Miller calls their “capacity to harm,” that is, the negative influence they may have on regime effectiveness of multilateral environmental agreements by dragging their feet in complying to international norms and regulations—whether it is a deliberate strategy or the consequence of “weak states” failing to deliver suitable national policies (Blaikie and Simo 1998; Gray Kevin 2003).

Besides, concerns of the developing countries in global environmental negotiations were articulated in the Founex Report and later included, and increasingly so, in the agendas of successive world summits since the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm 1972. With the Johannesburg WSSD in 2002, the focus was on development and poverty reduction issues, such as the Millennium Development Goals (Najam 2005). The shift from a predominantly environmentalist agenda to sustainable development in 1980s was the result of Southern countries’ active resistance to the former (Rowland 1973). Although the Northern bias in international regimes remains, it is less pronounced than thirty years ago: for example, adaptation policies in the South and emerging countries’ participation in CO2 emissions cuts after 2012 are now central issues in the climate change policy debate. UNEP was based in Nairobi in 1973 partly to take the Southern countries’ concerns into account, and it helped to do so when coaching the final negotiations of the biodiversity and climate change conventions in 1992. Similarly, the UN Commission on Sustainable Development was created in 1992 to supervise the Agenda 21 implementation largely in deference to many Southern countries’ misgivings about the undue influence of “green” NGOs on UNEP.

The G77 impersonating Third World’s economic and political interests has maintained a fairly united stance throughout the 1980s and 1990s despite the growing heterogeneity of the more than 130 states involved (Kasa, Gullberg, and Gørild 2008). Although climate change is certainly an area where there are growing conflicting interests between OPEC countries and the emerging powers on the one side, and the AOSIS and LDCs on the other (Barnett 2008), the disappointing outcome of the UNFCCC CoP 15 is also a tribute to the growing influence of emerging powers—still claiming to speak on behalf of the Third World—in world politics. If African LDCs are currently marginalized in the
CDM, some of them will bounce back as major stakeholders in the REED mechanism in the post-2012 climate regime.

In the case of the 1992 biodiversity convention also, the developing countries defeated the strictly conservationist agenda of most Northern countries and environmental NGOs (the view that natural resources in the South belonged to the “common heritage of mankind”) and imposed their approach of the sustainable use of natural resources as a means for development (McConnell 1996; McGraw 2002). In coalition with the EU, the G77 core countries succeeded to finalize a Cartagena Protocol on biosafety with far more stringent procedures than what was deemed acceptable originally by the Miami Group (largest grain producers) led by the United States (Bail, Falkner, and Marquard 2002; Pythoud and Thomas 2002).

Developing countries were also able to influence decisions within CITES—for example on the African elephant or mahogany—by building stronger coalitions and promoting a sustainable use agenda in successive Conferences of the Parties. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification adopted in 1994, after much lobbying from the G77 (Bruyninckx 2004; Najam 2004), focuses on arid and semi-arid countries’ predicament, prioritizes Africa, includes poverty eradication in its agenda, and is managed by a secretariat headed by an African expert. Southern countries thus succeeded in promoting their views on the need to correct global economic inequality, although somehow at the expenses of short-term effectiveness. Although several authors conclude that the South has exerted a modest influence on the actual contents of most environmental conventions (Miller 1995:141), their impact has been more important than commonly assumed.

This influence is not confined to environmental, “soft law” issues but also extends increasingly to trade negotiations. G20, a coalition of Third World countries, managed to block the Doha negotiation process at the Cancun WTO meeting in 2003, to pressure OECD countries to make further concessions on agricultural subsidies before liberalizing trade in new sectors (Clapp 2006). Not all rulings of the WTO dispute settlement mechanism favor Western countries. The days when the OECD countries could simply dictate their terms, on the model of the post-World War Bretton Woods agreement creating the IMF and the World Bank, are gone despite the persistent power imbalance. In this respect, creating a powerful World environmental organization (WEO) could improve the position of the Southern countries, provided there is North–South parity in decision making with a double-weighted majority system similar to the Montreal Protocol process (Biermann 2002). What is more likely though is a mere upgrading of UNEP (at best) that would not change structural imbalances—confer the failed attempts to promote a “new international economic order” through UNCTAD in the 1970s.

In this brief assessment, one needs to take into account also nonstate actors. Admittedly, international regimes and most transboundary governance networks are dominated by social actors belonging to the first world (OECD). It is even more obvious when focusing on rule making rather than mere implementation. Yet there is a growing number of NGOs in the South especially in the area of sustainable development—mostly on the implementation side though. Nevertheless, there is a growing participation of South-based social movements in the anti-globalization movement for example in the wake of decentralized World Social Forums. Southern NGOs often form partnerships with Northern development agencies; intergovernmental organizations (such as the World Bank); international NGOs; and North-based TNCs, and sometimes these initiatives have a feedback effect on their own government’s policy in a given area. Because national policies are crucial for the implementation of international environmental regimes and Third World states are usually underperforming in this respect (Hurrell 1995), a governance perspective emphasizing the role of nonstate actors is increasingly relevant.
As far as the environmental crisis is concerned, transcalar hybrid governance—that is, building coalitions between state and nonstate actors across the spatial/political scale—is likely to play a growing role: in a weak institutional context, TNCs’ codes of conducts and effective commitment to CSR may have a more immediate impact on the ground than the much wanted and still distant reform of the state in LDCs. The latter has been on Western development agencies’ agenda already for more than two decades, to no avail. The global governance concept places the emphasis on bounded sovereignty, that is, a world where governments exert control over a constantly shrinking decision-making arena, although some try from time to time to reassert control (such as China’s efforts to control the Internet). Thus, global governance points at the need to analyze the processes through which decisions are arrived at and norms and standards disseminated.

For example, there is no intergovernmental regime on forestry because a binding convention was rejected by major stakeholders; however, there is a form of tropical forests governance geared toward a more sustainable resource management—however remote such prospect remains—with mechanisms such as certification schemes (Pattberg 2005, 2006, 2007). Global governance initiatives allow various social actors to address policy issues without depending on the goodwill of political entrepreneurs having wrested control of the government. Sometimes it comes in handy for supporting civil society’s demands against despotic, corrupt rulers in the South. Thus, Third World countries do play a role in environmental governance at the global level, but more importantly governance in the South is part and parcel of global governance.

Is the Third (Fourth) World by Nature excluded from Global Governance?

Third (Fourth) World states lack the “elementary prerequisites for global governance regimes to be actually operative and effective at the local level” (Senghaas 2003: 145; quoted in Dingwerth and Pattberg this issue), so the argument goes. Third World “quasi-states” (Jackson 1990; Clapham 1996) rely on their connections to the outside for their survival and the well-being of their political elites, but most of these “weak” states (Migdal 1988) cannot perform the traditional functions of modern statehood—security and control of the territory—let alone deliver public services and suitable policies. The neo-patrimonial domination of local rulers since independence led to economic ruin and deinstitutionalization (Médard 1991). In other words, the collapsed or largely “dysfunctional states” (Lemke 2003) are seen as not taking part in global governance.

However, this view suggests a too narrow understanding of James Rosenau’s perspective of “governance without government” (Rosenau and Czempiel 1992), implicitly reducing global governance to international regimes or quasi-regimes, and the related activity of international organizations such as the UN system and conventions secretariats. Incidentally, such a minimal definition of governance would support the “nothing new under the sun” view of those who doubt the analytical usefulness of the concept of governance in IR (Smouts 1998). On the contrary, and taking into account their intergovernmental nature, these international organizations belong to global governance realm inasmuch they interact with nonstate actors or promote their specific organizational interests (Biermann and Bauer 2004). It is their “beyond the state” quality that matters then.

Following Rosenau’s approach (Rosenau 1995), global governance includes governance in social units from the smallest (including the family) to the globe as a whole as long as these units are connected to transnational trends and behaviors. Even in “collapsed” or “failed states”, looking so hopeless from a Western perspective, there are some specific forms of social-political regulation that perform functions better fulfilled elsewhere by the state. The assumption that collapsing states are likely to revert to a precolonial “traditional” social order is pure fantasy:
“the coming anarchy” (Kaplan 1994) and its dramatic, anomic violence is part of our modernity. Therefore, the paper’s suggestion of a Fourth World excluded by nature from global governance—falling off the radar screen so to say—is largely misleading.

What Westerners see as “non-governance and disorder” is just a reflection of an ethnocentric perception of governance and order and of our ignorance of grassroots realities in the South. For example, stateless and economically marginalized countries such as today’s Somalia can be connected to World’s economy, and, among others, to global security agendas—hence, the American military come back in the Horn of Africa. Thus, for fifteen years now and even during the worst episodes of fighting, Somalis have exported sheep and cattle, and all sorts of looted goods; imports for the hinterland have sneaked through Somalia’s coast where they largely evaded custom and taxes, and the most affluent of Somali traders have paraded their wealth in Dubai (Marchal 2001). Somalia has been connected to the World economy in its own weird way as much as ever before. Although many Third World states, especially in Africa, are marginalized in the world’s division of labor, global trade, and private investment flows and are underrepresented in global governance structures, they do pose a major threat in a globalized world (Risse 2005). Therefore, we need to study governance in these “areas of limited statehood” rather than exclude them.

Besides, it is precisely when there is no effective government, “where the state is often incapable of hierarchic steering” (Dingwerth and Pattberg this issue), that governance mechanisms become socially prominent, not as a preferred public management option but to fill the vacuum. In the absence of an effective state, some specific social mechanisms will supplement state bureaucracies in the provision of public goods: for example, when there was no banking system in operation in Somalia after 1991, the Somali traders re-invented methods to deal with large sums of money, currency exchange and transregional transfers, while some others put in place private electricity supply networks and small-scale telecommunication services to replace the vanished public utilities.

The extreme privatization of public functions led to bottom-up demands for peace and stability, without which recouping investments would soon be impossible. At the same time, traditional councils of elders (Guurti) were revived to deal with private disputes and peacemaking. When they failed to stop the development of criminal violence, the so-called Islamic courts replaced them. However, the absence of an internationally recognized central government skewed proper thinking on such developments. Repeated and unsuccessful attempts by external powers (Ethiopia, Kenya, the United States, and the EU) to impose on Somalis the recreation of a central government (such as the current Transitional Federal Government) through the use of money and force point at the far-reaching consequences of ignoring informal dynamics. Other examples of governance functions provided by private actors in the developing countries are the various forms of informal economy, and collective savings and financing schemes such as West African family or tribal-based “tontines,” or popular international money transfer systems outside the banking sector. A governance approach can take into account such steering processes initiated and/or controlled by social agents that are not legitimate authorities and that do not exert power in the same way holders of political office do. It fits in the larger picture of the multiplication of spheres of authority in a context of disaggregation at the global level (Rosenau 2007).

Thomas Risse’s concept is not just another addition to the long list of notions trying to capture the specificities of the state in the Third World; it is useful as it integrates both the internal weak state and the external quasi-state dimensions.
Conclusions

In sum, acknowledging that political influence in the world is unevenly divided and that the international order remains hierarchical and highly unequal is one thing. Concluding that the Third or the Fourth World are *de facto* excluded and that global governance is irrelevant as a concept is quite another. In our theorization of global governance, we should rather not replicate the past neglect for the Third World of mainstream International Relations theory (Neuman 1998; Lemke 2003; Brown 2006) and International Political Economy (Taylor 2005).

In the 1970s, dependency theory, for example (especially the world-system analysis school of thought), attempted to highlight the inequality nested in the center/periphery relations that *integrated* the periphery in the world capitalist system *instead of excluding it*. There is no reason why global governance should spontaneously assume a democratic, egalitarian character. In this respect, the participation of the Third World in private-led governance initiatives often displays new forms of inequality and subordination (Clapp 1998; Dingwerth 2008).

Global governance is a de-territorialized form of politics (Held, McGrew, David, and Perraton 1999)—rather than a depoliticized form of management—but certainly not the Kingdom of Heavens. It combines and connects informal local and transnational governance mechanisms and actors, setting collective goals as effectively sometimes as traditional forms of political authority, not as an ideal substitute to government but as a contingency plan to supplement its failures (weak states), or a spontaneous takeover by some social actors, where government does no longer (failed states) or cannot (world level) exist.

The realm of governance is thus far larger than that of government as Rose-nau pointed out long ago and is in essence multi-scalar, hence global. “How global?” then becomes a rhetorical question: the research program is not to study global governance as such but governance as a global phenomenon in its many forms. Global governance should be seen rather as a new angle to analyze social reality intersecting several scales previously fairly isolated by political analysts: the international being the preserve of IR specialists on the one hand; the national and local politics for political scientists in the other hand. Although the concept of governance does remain loosely defined and contested (Dingwerth and Pattberg 2006), it points at a series of issues that would be less intelligible and far more difficult to address with a more classical conceptual toolbox.

References


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