Dieter Neubert
Hans-Joachim Lauth
Christoph Mohamad-Klotzbach   *Editors*

Local Self-Governance and Varieties of Statehood

Tensions and Cooperation

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Dieter Neubert • Hans-Joachim Lauth •
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Editors

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Editors
Dieter Neubert ⓘ
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
University of Bayreuth
Bayreuth, Germany

Hans-Joachim Lauth ⓘ
Institute of Political Science and Sociology
Universität Würzburg
Würzburg, Germany

Christoph Mohamad-Klotzbach
Institute of Political Science and Sociology
Universität Würzburg
Würzburg, Germany

Contents

Editors and Contributors

About the Editors

Dieter Neubert Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Bayreuth, Bayreuth, Germany

Hans-Joachim Lauth Institute of Political Science and Sociology, University of Würzburg, Würzburg, Germany

Christoph Mohamad-Klotzbach Institute of Political Science and Sociology, University of Würzburg, Würzburg, Germany

Contributors

Dida Badi Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Bayreuth, Bayreuth, Germany

Gabriele Beckmann University of Applied Sciences for Intercultural Theology Hermannsburg, Hermannsburg, Germany

Bablu Chakma Department of Social and Cultural Sciences, University of Applied Sciences Fulda, Fulda, Germany
Institute of Development Research and Development Policy, Ruhr University Bochum, Bochum, Germany

Amy Cooter Center for Terrorism, Extremism, and Counterterrorism, Middlebury College, Monterey, CA, USA

Antje Daniel Department for Development Studies, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria

Eva Gerharz Department of Social and Cultural Sciences, University of Applied Sciences Fulda, Fulda, Germany

Thomas Hüsken Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Bayreuth, Bayreuth, Germany

Georg Klute Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Bayreuth, Bayreuth, Germany

Hans-Joachim Lauth Institute of Political Science and Sociology, University of Würzburg, Würzburg, Germany

Christoph Mohamad-Klotzbach Institute of Political Science and Sociology, University of Würzburg, Würzburg, Germany

Dieter Neubert Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Bayreuth, Bayreuth, Germany

Amal S. Obeidi Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Bayreuth, Bayreuth, Germany

Rene Pfeilschifter Institute of History, University of Würzburg, Würzburg, Germany

Anupama Roy Centre for Political Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India

Matthew Sabbi Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Bayreuth, Bayreuth, Germany

Ujjwal Kumar Singh Department of Political Science, University of Delhi, Delhi, India

Alexander Stroh Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Bayreuth, Bayreuth, Germany

Local Self-governance and Varieties of Statehood: Reflections on Tensions and Cooperation

Dieter Neubert, Hans-Joachim Lauth, and Christoph Mohamad-Klotzbach

1 Introduction

The well-established debate on governance originated in the Global North or in the OECD world (Levi-Faur, 2012). It refers to cases with a focus on cooperation between the state, other public institutions, and different private actors. It analyses "the provision of common goods, rather than (...) particular egoistic self-interests" (Thomschke & Mohamad-Klotzbach, 2021: 2). We extend this perspective with regard to different topics.

Firstly, the chapters in this volume refer, with one exception (the United States), to countries outside the OECD world. In some cases, we find strong consolidated statehood, while in others statehood is weak, or does not really exist anymore, as in Libya. *Secondly*, as shown by some of the chapters, local self-organisation and self-governance may be marked by violent conflicts that question the state or its constitution. Thus, local self-organisation has the potential to challenge the state itself. *Thirdly*, we question the assumption that governance in general, and local governance in particular, focuses mainly on common goods. Our examples show that the interests of particular groups cannot be ignored when analysing local self-governance. This includes the inside view and internal governance of local self-organisations. At least we need to recognise that different notions of the common good may clash (also) at the local level. *Fourthly*, we study governance not from the perspective of the state, but from the local level where local action and state interact. *Fifth* and finally, we challenge an implicit assumption of the governance debate.

D. Neubert (✉)
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Bayreuth, Bayreuth, Germany
e-mail: Dieter.Neubert@uni-bayreuth.de

H.-J. Lauth · C. Mohamad-Klotzbach
Institute of Political Science and Sociology, University of Würzburg, Würzburg, Germany
e-mail: hans-joachim.lauth@uni-wuerzburg.de; ch.mohamad@uni-wuerzburg.de

Despite the interest in political conflict and competition and the existing different modes of government, governance refers to a generally shared notion of order, the modern, constitutional territorial state,[1] ideally with a democratic system. When studying "local self-governance and varieties of statehood", we need to consider not only cases with different conditions of statehood, but also different types of self-governance that are not limited to this particular notion of order.

The chapters approach the question of local self-governance not only via examples from different countries, but also against the backdrop of different theoretical concepts and scholarly discussions. Knowing the focus of the governance debate on the "strong consolidated statehood" of the OECD world, this is hardly surprising. This introduction will therefore attempt to develop a comparative view, confronting the governance debate with the findings and impulses to be found in the chapters of this book. At the same time, the different concepts used in the chapters may help to widen our view of the phenomenon of local self-organisation and self-governance, and the insights gained may serve to further develop the governance debate.

The question of how local self-governance works under conditions where statehood is not strong and consolidated, and where different notions of order co-exist, is a topic outside the OECD world, and leads to the development of concepts useful for discussing phenomena similar to governance, but without any direct relation to the governance debate. The governance debate usually includes a set of "typical actors", such as the state, a more or less autonomous local administration, associations and/or NGOs, religious institutions and the economic private sector. Outside the OECD world, this spectrum is much wider. We may find neo-traditional actors who often have considerable power, international actors like foreign NGOs active in respect of development or human rights issues and accountable to their constituency in the Global North, and, in cases of conflict, local armed groups and sometimes also foreign allies who interfere directly or from the outside. We will see that these actors have different, and often contradicting, understandings of the common good. In some cases, we observe contradictory understandings of statehood and its underlying values and norms. Some local actors strive for autonomy to realise their understanding of the common good and statehood. These different understandings of the common good, and of the underlying order, shed light on the different principles of internal governance of self-organised groups, including the question of their stability, and of relations between local self-organisations and the state and between the local organisations themselves.

To link our findings with the governance debate, we will reconsider some of the most important core ideas and concepts with regard to local self-organisation and local self-governance (Sect. 2: The governance debate and varieties of statehood). Based on a short overview of the topics of the chapters, we will discuss the variety of

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[1]Mostly the term "nation state" is used. Even though the modern state often emerged as a real, or, more often, as an imagined nation state (Anderson, 2016), the existence of a nation is not a decisive criterion for a state. As Zartman (2020: 934) puts it: "A state is the authoritative political institution that is sovereign over a recognized territory and its inhabitants". In some of our cases, the notion that the people feel like a "nation" might be disputed.

local actors in our cases (Sect. 3: A variety of local actors and varieties of statehood). Our reconsideration of the governance debate beyond its common focus, against the backdrop of the chapters in this volume, is carried out in several steps. The governance debate conceptualises the setting at the local level as the specific "local institutional or political arrangement". This implies a certain stability and the existence of at least informal rules and procedures. The cases discussed here show that the implied stability, and the existence of widely accepted rules for interaction, cannot be taken for granted. We often find a local arena characterised by tensions and conflicts, with fluid, or potentially unstable, power relations, and without a commonly accepted set of formal and/or informal rules. These particular settings and variations of self-governance under different forms of statehood are the topics of debates on state and local organisations in anthropology, research on local administration, and conflict studies. This has resulted in the development of several, partly overlapping, concepts that describe the relationships between the local actors. Especially the concepts of "twilight institutions" (Lund, 2006a, 2006b) and "heterarchy" (Klute & Embaló, 2011; von Trotha, 2011) can help to capture cases where we find competing orders (Sect. 4: The local setting and the state: an approximation).

The next step provides a more detailed view of the interactions between the actors at the local level. We will see that the given canon of governance modes needs to be extended. For our analysis it is also helpful to focus on the different regulatory areas of governance claimed by the local self-organisations (Sect. 5: The modes of interaction of the local actors or modes of local governance). The various chapters show that local self-governance may follow different concepts or logics of order that constitute the foundation of their internal structures, but also a potential challenge to the state. In some cases, local concepts of order challenge the legitimacy of the state and some local self-organisations claim for themselves a state-like autonomy (notions of order). Finally, we discuss the consequences of these considerations for the governance debate, and raise the general question of how to define where the local ends and the state begins (Sect. 6: Conclusions).

The chapters of this book are based on papers read at a digital conference held in 2021 on "Local self-regulation between democracy and hierarchy. Varieties of structure and values".[2] The conference was organised in Würzburg by the DFG Research Unit 2757 "Local Self-Governance in the Context of Weak Statehood in Antiquity and the Modern Era (LoSAM)" (Lauth et al., 2019; Pfeilschifter et al., 2020),[3] in cooperation with Dieter Neubert, LoSAM Mercator Fellow. LoSAM followed a comparative approach that included present-day cases in Latin-America and Africa and historical cases in Asia (present-day Turkey, the Middle East) and North Africa. This was led by the thesis that self-governance under conditions of weak statehood—meaning that a state does exist—shows similar patterns. The analysis of these cases across different geographical regions and historical eras

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[2]For a conference report, see Hauser and Tiegna (2021).

[3]For further information on the research unit, see https://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/en/for2757/losam/

opens up new perspectives, both for the social sciences and ancient history. We will apply the successful practice of LoSAM in this book.[4] Even though we do not present ancient cases, the critical comments by Rene Pfeilschifter, a scholar of ancient history, shed new light on the material. He shows some striking parallels between the state in ancient history and the state in the Global South. This underlines that we can further develop our theories on statehood and local self-organisation by expanding our empirical base beyond the Global North.

2 The Governance Debate and Varieties of Statehood

Thoughts on governance emerged in the context of analyses of state activity. The limits of a government-focused implementation of political planning became apparent in the 1970s and 1980s (Grindle, 1980; Kaufmann et al., 1986; Mayntz, 1980; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). These studies showed that the analysis of government programmes needs to include informal rules and practices that also influence and even shape the political process. This refers to all those actors who are involved in "governing" in some form in complex societies, such as actors in civil society (groups and networks), or in the private sector (companies and associations). Political processes, including the implementation of political decisions, are a complex enterprise of steering and coordination in diverse regulatory systems, and are therefore appropriately captured by the term governance (Benz et al., 2007; Bevir, 2010; Levi-Faur, 2012).

In this view, the state loses its dominant position and becomes one actor among others, although it is often granted a certain leadership in the coordination of decision-making processes. This shift and expansion of decision-making processes has been assessed normatively in different ways. Representatives of governance research predominantly welcomed it because they associated it with an increase in the efficiency and effectiveness of state action. Critics from the field of democracy research criticised that this perspective largely ignored power and domination relations, and that non-democratically legitimised actors increasingly gain influence on central political decisions. In its sharpened conception, the approach of post-democracy can be located in this context (Crouch, 2004). Irrespective of this normative debate, the governance approach has comprehensively shaped empirical policy research, as it has made it possible to capture the real complexity of political decisions and implementation more appropriately than by focusing on government.

The governance approach proved to be very flexible here, and allowed the modelling of multi-level analyses that included the local area. It was important to include not only actors who had power to shape the agenda, but also those who had their own organisational potential. Self-organisation and the ability to self-regulate

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[4] Some first insights resulting from the LoSAM approach can be found in the volume by Krüger et al. (2022).

were understood as important characteristics of governance actors. However, it is disputed whether one should speak of a governance theory at all. Characteristic of the approach are a set of categories of analysis. However, there are no causal assumptions associated with it that would provide a proper theoretical foundation.

Even if the governance approach is associated with a withdrawal of the state, its importance is still emphasised by most researchers. This can be seen, for example, with the well-known theorem "governing/deciding in the shadow of hierarchy" (Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995), which expresses the idea that the state can intervene at any time with binding decisions. This theorem is mainly understood as a means of pressure to lead the other actors to a common solution, and not as an alternative to be preferred. Such "governing through" is far from being considered the best option.

These remarks show that the fundamental notion of the state as a normative order with a monopoly of violence is not called into question by the governance approach. Also, because of this assumption, research using governance approaches initially remained limited to the world of consolidated states. This changed in the context of development debates, which considered the concept of *good governance* to be central to development cooperation (Landman, 2003). However, this was also associated with the model of the consolidated state, which empirical developments had to follow. By contrast, the understanding of governance was empirically grounded in the concept of *bad governance*, which was intended to capture real conditions that included corruption, mismanagement, lack of rule of law, and state capture. However, such ideas were not developed further in terms of governance research, or discussed in terms of the characteristics of statehood. The good governance debate followed a simple governance model centred around the state and was not really interested in other actors that have a considerable impact on politics outside the OECD. The impact of these actors on politics has been intensively discussed by Koechlin and Förster (Koechlin, 2015; Koechlin & Förster, 2015) and by Bellagamba and Klute (2008).

This is where our reflections start in two ways. On the one hand, we will relate the governance approach to local contexts in the Global South that have not been associated with it so far. Secondly, we change the state perspective by considering not only consolidated states, but also the empirically given varieties of statehood. A consolidated state does not stand for the majority of the existing varieties of statehood, as research on fragile or weak statehood clearly shows. At the bottom end of the scale, there are states that still exist legally, but in fact no longer have any formative power. The characteristics that are understood to be distinctive of the different forms of statehood relate primarily to the enforcement of the monopoly of violence (security), but also to closely related factors, such as enforcement of the law, and the fulfilment of general state services (such as infrastructure, education, health) by an administration that is in a position to act.[5] The characteristics of these factors vary in different constellations and shape the real world of states.

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[5] A comprehensive overview of research on statehood is provided by Stawski (2022).

If we now place the different kinds of statehood in the context of governance research, the aim is not to disavow this strand of research, but to show that it can also be fruitfully used to analyse the interplay of local self-regulation and statehood, although some conceptual changes are necessary. The aim is to develop governance research in a context-sensitive way. To this end, we draw on the above-mentioned governance categories, which we expand at the same time in order to identify new contexts on this basis and to be able to systematically compare and order them.

3 A Variety of Local Actors and Varieties of Statehood

The chapters in this volume cover a wide range with regard to different varieties of statehood. Amy Cooter's chapter on militias in the USA refers to a case with strong consolidated statehood. Her focus is on the norms and values of militias that actively claim the constitutional right to carry weapons and on the relations between them and the state. Several other chapters refer to a stable, widely consolidated state with a certain strength. Antje Daniel discusses self-organisation in an occupied housing area in Cape Town, South Africa, from a social movement perspective. The question of self-governance in local self-help organisations and local notions of solidarity and grassroots democracy in lowland Bolivia is in the focus of Gabi Beckmann's chapter. Self-help organisations also play a role in the chapter by Matthew Sabbi, Alexander Stroh, and Dieter Neubert on local councillors in Ghana and their brokering position between the decentralised administration, local self-help organisations, and other development actors. In all these cases the local self-help organisations are in touch with national or foreign NGOs or other development organisations, and need to navigate between different notions of self-help.

Bablu Chakma and Eva Gerharz study the neo-traditional local organisation of an indigenous group in the rural Chittagong Hill area in Bangladesh. It provides a kind of local self-administration that practically overlaps with the decentralised state administration, which creates some tension but without open conflict. Anupama Roy and Ujjwal Kumar Singh discuss an indigenous movement[6]—the Pathalgadi movement—in India, in the state of Jharkhand and neighbouring regions. It represents the quest for autonomy of the indigenous population, or Adivasis. There is an ongoing conflict on the status of institutions of local self-governance derived from local custom, and those of the panchayat system as part of the formal administrative structure. The different notions of order have given rise to a sometimes violent conflict. Nevertheless, the demand for local autonomy is based on parts of the Indian constitution that grant special rights to indigenous communities. This is reminiscent of the US militias which also refer to the constitution. In all these cases, there is a stable constitutional state that, willingly or unwillingly, leaves room for local

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[6]Roy and Singh address indigenous movements according to the common legal Indian terminology as "tribal" movements.

self-governance outside, or on the fringe of, the formal administrative governance structures.

The chapters by Dida Badi and Georg Klute on northern Mali, and Thomas Hüsken and Amal Obeidi on Libya discuss cases in a weak state (Mali) and a nearly failed state (Libya). Both chapters describe the often violent struggle of different local actors to organise self-governance even beyond the local level. These are showcases for competing notions of order represented by different actors. In northern Mali, the struggle concerns the position of the large northern part of the country, where local actors strive for autonomy or even a separate state. The conflict in Libya is related to the reorganisation of the Libyan state as such, and the struggle for supremacy is carried on at both the local and the national level. This chapter focuses on eastern Libya, the Cyrenaica region. These cases show that there is no strict division between the local and the national, a point to be discussed later. As we can see, the chapters present selected cases from particular perspectives, and with a narrow definition of the local. For the sake of simplicity, we will use the name of the country to refer to the different cases in our discussion below. However, this does not mean that the analyses apply in each case to the country as a whole.

The first observation when comparing these empirical studies is that there are many more types of actors than are usually recognised in the governance debate.[7] In all cases the state, or state institutions, play a role. There are more or less clear references to the local administration and to local associations, NGOs, or social movements. The wider public, including intellectuals and entrepreneurs, is very important in Libya. They fight for democracy, human rights (especially women's rights), and transitional justice, but they are just one type of actor among many others. In the cases from Bolivia and Ghana, there are clear references to international development organisations, with their considerable financial resources, that intervene more or less prominently in activities and conflicts at the local level. Especially in the Bolivian case, development organisations and their notion of self-organisation play a crucial role in the self-governance of the local organisations. All these development organisations fit into the typical framework presented in the governance debate.[8]

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[7]We share this general observation with Koechlin and Förster (2015) who present different examples of the agency of non-governmental actors that may lead to new forms of governance. Bellagamba and Klute (2008) also present a variety of actors but without any direct link to the governance debate.

[8]In the cases discussed in this book, multilateral and national development organisations from the donor countries work formally with the host state but are not under strict control. The NGOs in all these countries enjoy considerable freedom. However, this is not always the case. Some countries maintain strict control over development organisations and NGOs (e.g. Vietnam, Rwanda).

"Neo-traditional authorities" are actors that are not included in the OECD-centred governance debate.[9] In the Ghana chapter they are mentioned only briefly. They do not interfere in the work of the local councillors under study, although they generally play an important role in Ghana, and are recognised by the Ghanaian constitution. In the cases of Mali, Libya, India, and Bangladesh, neo-traditional actors play a crucial role. All these cases are marked by legal pluralism, which gives the neo-traditional authorities the role of judges, at least in family affairs and other local fields. In Mali, Libya, India, and to a certain extent also in Bangladesh, the neo-traditional authorities see themselves as natural leaders and claim the right to local self-governance. This places them in a relationship of tension, or even open conflict, with the state authorities. In Mali and Libya, the position of neo-traditional leaders is also challenged by religious movements fighting for a government based on Islamic law (sharia) to replace the constitutional territorial state and also neo-traditional rule. These religious movements cannot be equated with the different religious communities in OECD countries who recognise the constitutional and territorial state, and act within its normative framework. The Islamic movements in Mali und Libya are opposed to the "Western" notion of a secular state.

Another important group of actors are local militias or vigilantes, very prominent in Libya, Mali and, to a lesser extent and less violent, in India. These armed groups use violence to back up the demands for self-governance of their groups. They challenge a crucial element of the state, the monopoly of violence. In India, Mali, and Libya, we find fighters organised by neo-traditional authorities who try to protect what they see as "their land", and who fight for neo-traditional rule. In Mali and Libya there are also Islamic militias or vigilantes fighting for their new Islamic state.[10] They represent a social movement led by the Islamic clergy. At least some of the Islamic groups have links to international partners with regard to their theology and their political agenda. The chapter on the USA also analyses local militias. These well-armed groups have regular military training and are prepared to fight. However, they are neither engaged in violent conflict nor do they claim to fight for their own state. They see themselves as protectors of the American constitution and of freedom, including the freedom to carry weapons which is guaranteed by the US constitution.

Finally, again in Mali and Libya, there are foreign armies involved in the conflict, such as soldiers from Egypt and Turkey in Libya, who act as allies of conflicting political factions fighting to be recognised as the legitimate "state". Even in the case of a ceasefire, the conflict can break out again at any time. In Mali there are

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[9] We use the term "neo-traditional authorities" because they legitimate themselves via tradition, but their role, position, and practice in the colonial period and after the independence underwent ongoing changes (on Africa, see Neubert (2019: 148–158). The chapter on Bangladesh is a good example of this change which is still ongoing.

[10] An "Islamic state" is a clerical state based on Islamic rule. This should not be equated with "ISIS", the Islamic state in Syria and Iraq, even if some of the Islamic groups sympathise with ISIS.

international stabilisation missions to fight the militias, such as the UN MINUSMA and the ECOWAS[11] military mission. Recently, there have been signs that the new military government in Mali co-operates with the "Wagner group", a mercenary troop linked with Russia.[12] Even if neither of these armies is in the focus of the Mali and Libya chapters, their presence is taken by the authors as given.

All these actors, who are usually not captured by the governance debate, indicate that outside the OECD world the local level is much more diverse than generally assumed. We observe a potential international influence by development organisations and Islamic movements. Thus, the local level is very often linked to the national level and is a potential playground for international actors. Islamic movements and neo-traditional authorities represent different notions of governance that potentially challenge not only the state's authority, but also the notion of the constitutional territorial state as such. Finally, the use of violence, ignoring the state's monopoly of violence, transcends the political actions discussed in the governance debate.

4 The Local Setting and the State: An Approximation

In analyses of the setting with different political actors, the governance debate uses the term "institutional arrangement"[13] (or sometimes also "political arrangement"). This implies a basically stable relation between the different political or institutional actors, with formal rules and established informal practices for governance and for the handling and resolution of conflicts. This usage is widely accepted, maybe simply because of clear power constellations or because of general agreement. The position of the different actors and their functions and fields of activity are referred to a common frame with a shared understanding of values, norms, and rules that describe a common understanding of order. In our cases, with their focus on local self-governance, the term is used to describe the local institutional arrangement. According to common assumptions regarding governance, the state plays a crucial role as the main ordering power, or the stability of this local institutional arrangement works in the "shadow of hierarchy". Even without direct control and interference, the rules set by the state have at least an indirect regulating function.

For some cases presented in this book, it is doubtful whether the state really has that regulating function, especially in the cases involving violent conflicts, like India, Mali, or Libya. This leads us to the question whether the local setting for self-governance can be described as a stable local institutional arrangement. In other cases, there is a stable local institutional arrangement and a widely accepted state

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[11] Economic Community Of West African States.

[12] These came after the finalisation of the Mali chapter.

[13] This is regarded as a self-explanatory term that needs no definition. We find it already in early publications, e.g. Ostrom (1990, especially chapter 6).

authority. The Ghana case focuses on local councillors who are members of the state's local political structure. We learn that a considerable part of their activities takes place outside their formal role, and that the formal procedures of local government may be side-stepped. They even gain authority beyond their formal role. However, they do not challenge the state or the formal rules of the state institutions. The Bolivian chapter describes, in all but one case, self-organised local groups that accept the state's authority but act independently from the state and its local administration. At the same time, for their internal structure and governance they use their constitutional right to adhere to local notions of order with their own values, norms, and rules. One of the Bolivian cases concerns the institution of local participation introduced by the state. Even though the local interpretations of this concept differ considerably, the ordering power of the state and its institutions are not at stake.

The self-governed occupation of a building in South Africa openly challenges applicable law. The occupation is illegal and the occupiers practise self-government inside the building. At the same time, the occupiers have negotiated a right to stay, including a certain degree of autonomy inside the building, as long as no other laws are violated. Only in extreme cases are the police called to intervene in internal affairs. The state, represented by the municipal government, is criticised with regard to its housing policy, and the law is violated by the occupation, but the state is not questioned in any fundamental way.

The local self-organisation in Bangladesh acts parallel to state institutions. Despite some tensions, the state institutions are not challenged but are penetrated by neo-traditional leaders who take formal roles in the decentralised state structure. The US militias, with their insistence on the constitutional right to carry weapons, see themselves in line with the state order. Despite the articulated distance and mistrust towards the central government, these militias are on good terms with, and sometimes even cooperate with, the local administration. In all these cases, we find local actors who do not question the state, but seek autonomy according to their own rules, or in case of the US militias, their own interpretation of rules. With this autonomy, they claim the right to exercise authority in a quasi-public setting outside the state structures. Whereas the stable local interactions, and the overall acceptance of state power, fit the notion of a local institutional arrangement, the demand for autonomy, especially in Bolivia, Bangladesh, or the USA, does not fit the notion of working in the shadow of hierarchy.

Interestingly, with regard to Africa, we find a concept close to working in the shadow of hierarchy; this is the notion of "twilight institutions" (Lund, 2006a, 2006b). This concept refers to interaction between state and local actors, but with one important difference. It was developed to describe the status of neo-traditional authorities, but actually describes a more general pattern of interdependent co-existence. The local people act according to their own notion of order, their own values, norms, and rules, which differ from the state's notion of order. Using their local power, "they are not the state but they exercise public authority" (Lund, 2006a: 673). They are "local authorities making decisions of a public nature, but in contrast to the state" (Lund, 2006b: 687). The state cannot interfere and is obliged to

cooperate, either because it lacks the power to enforce its decisions, and/or because it wishes to avoid an open-ended conflict. At the same time, acceptance of the local actors by the state underlines, or even legitimates, their local authority.

This offers a more nuanced view of the cases presented here. The relations between the different political actors are basically stable, with established practices for handling and resolving conflicts. This works despite the different notions of order and the authority exercised by the local actors. The term twilight institutions marks the difference between usual understandings of local institutional arrangements and the particular setting that integrates local self-government based on a different notion of order in a stable local institutional arrangement. The chapters on Ghana and Bolivia refer directly to the term, and the chapter on Bangladesh, with its neo-traditional institutions, is also a good example of a twilight institution. The chapters on India, Mali, Libya, Bangladesh, and, to a certain extent, also Bolivia refer to local legal institutions as an element of local self-organisation, either with reference to neo-traditional law and/or to sharia. In legal anthropology, these parallel legal institutions are addressed as legal pluralism (von Benda-Beckmann, 1994; Woodman, 1996). In political science, we speak of hybrid legal systems, or of a deficient rule of law (*Rechtsstaat*), when the respective state law still dominates the arena (Lauth, 2021: 132). Usually, customary law is used for family affairs, and sometimes also with regard to land tenure, or even criminal cases (as in the case of sharia), but it will overlap with state laws and regulations. There are other concepts that refer to a situation in which competing institutions or orders act more or less autonomously at the local level. One of these is polycephaly, in the sense of a "multiplicity of local 'power poles'" in the form of state and non-state institutions (Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan, 1997: 441). This might be applicable to the Bangladesh case, where different local administrative institutions created during its history still survive. This results in a flexible institutional arrangement in which solutions to conflicts are negotiated. The term twilight institutions goes one step further in pointing to the mutual dependency of state and local actors.

Some cases presented in this book cannot be subsumed under terms like institutional arrangements, twilight institutions, legal pluralism or polycephaly. In the Indian case, and even more in the cases of Mali and Libya, there is neither stability nor successful negotiation, nor acceptance of the state's role, but an ongoing struggle involving the use of violence. The conflict concerns not just a particular state institution, but the state's conception of order and its claim to supremacy. The local indigenous movement in India that demands local autonomy refers to a neo-traditional system of leadership, and takes this as the basis for a formal decentralised panchayat system as part of the Indian administrative structure. Whereas the panchayat is elected according to the principles of universal suffrage, the neo-traditional village committee (gram sabha) follows hierarchal principles. To adapt to the panchayat system, at least formally, universal suffrage has been implemented. The main tension arises from demands that challenge the state's supremacy. The neo-traditional leaders want autonomy in the sense of a village republic, including complete control over all land tenure and all natural resources. They justify this claim by citing the Indian constitution, which offers indigenous