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***The Rise of the Hybrid Domain: Collaborative Governance for Social Innovation*, by Yuko Aoyama with Balaji Parthasarathy.** Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016. Pp. 232.

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It is imperative for policymakers to strike a judicious balance between economic growth and social well-being. Simple as it may sound, it is a difficult goal to achieve. Contemporary market mechanisms have recently developed anomalies, evident at times of financial and economic crises. At the same time, social policies have not been able to ameliorate economic inequality, poverty and inadequate availability of basic services. In such circumstances, market driven solutions or social policies alone may have limited impact. But what could happen if these two approaches form linkages and collaborate? In this context, the authors of this book have proposed a novel concept of “hybrid domain”. Going beyond the distinct categorization between the state and markets, the concept of hybrid domain refers to a middle area between the two, “a newly emerging domain that overlaps public and private interests” (p. 2). The authors refer to the agents in this model as “stakeholders” rather than “shareholders” — a swelling “middle” between the public and the private domains. In doing so, they challenge the dual understanding of economic governance in terms of the state versus the market. It is argued that a unified conceptual framework rather than singular state, market or grassroots-approach will help to understand the complex interactions between the hybrid entities and generate social innovations. These social innovations often fill a certain delivery gap and may have far-reaching impact on the lives of the poor (this model is nicely captured in a figure provided on p. 5). Since India is a hotbed for such social innovations, the authors turn their gaze towards the country to test this model.

The concept of hybrid domain is corroborated through a number of case studies related to: health; agriculture; rural development; livelihoods in the informal sector; and renewable energy. One such innovation can be seen in the case of a social experiment that provides health services to remote areas through effective use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and entrenched medical networks in India. Known as the “Telemedicine Programme”, it provides for local franchisees who act as intermediaries between patients (usually in remote areas) and centrally located doctors based in urban centres. With the help of Internet-based tools, a doctor located in the central facility can carry out remote diagnosis elsewhere. Furthermore, the local franchise buys remote diagnostics kits from a non-government organization (NGO). The programme is subsidized by the state or by international donors such as the Gates Foundation. Started as a pilot in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, the programme has now expanded to other poor states, too. By 2011, it had reached 2 million patients. Another example of the hybrid domain is an enterprise that works in close collaboration with silk weavers from Kanchipuram city, which has developed a silk-based “smart” chip diagnostic tool. The enterprise is supported by the Grand Challenges Canada and several national and international firms, and has established scientific linkages with a number of universities. Similar innovations can be seen in other sectors as well. Farmers in the states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, for example, have benefited from mobile-based solutions to the information gap problem, particularly regarding prices of their inputs. Innovations have also been introduced in providing skill-based training and livelihood opportunities for the youth. These case studies demonstrate the involvement and collaboration of multiple stakeholders ranging from NGOs to multinational enterprises (MNEs), together creating an active hybrid domain.

In all these cases, collaboration between the various stakeholders played an instrumental role in driving social innovations. This blending and blurring of boundaries between the state, markets and non-profit organizations has given these hybrid domains flexibility. Authors argue that this “domain flexibility” is a long-drawn process of “merging economic and social missions” with shared values and learning from

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these hybrid collaborations, ultimately resulting in successful social innovations. A survey conducted by the authors shows that collaborations are important for learning and developing an understanding about the “contexts and needs”. It reveals that around a third of MNEs joined forces with NGOs to conduct Research and Development (R&D) activities. The authors claim that each stakeholder in the domain collaborates with its own specific characteristics and brings unique contributions through its distinct set of skills (p. 148). However, these collaborations are not without challenges. There are several hurdles, but the biggest ones are related to operations and time frame of implementation.

In this book, the authors have also tried to unravel some global–local linkages by highlighting the “scalar flexibility” of hybrid domains. This entails combining local solutions with global actions and appropriately blending territorial knowledge and resources with global technology and financing for social innovation. In the case of India, agents of the hybrid domain are primarily social entrepreneurs who have returned from overseas. Among them, two common characteristics are identified. First, they are usually professionals with a thorough understanding of the commercial and social aspects of innovations, unlike their counterparts in the development sector. Second, they share a common background of being educated at elite academic institutions in the global north. These entrepreneurs are often situated at the unique intersection of both social and economic realms bringing together the local and global aspects of implementation, technology and finance.

The authors also suggest that hybrid domains are not new. In fact, collaboration between mass media, research institutions and universities has produced positive social externalities in the past, too. However, such initiatives have attained new, expanded dimensions with the participation of varied stakeholders with diverse objectives. Hybrid domains have extended beyond nation states and attained both domain and scalar flexibility — what authors call “cross-scalar” hybridity. The hybrid domains are, therefore, still evolving and may take new forms.

While the authors have successfully conceptualized hybrid domains in current volume, the role of the state appears somewhat problematic in this model. It is not as if these social innovations have organically emerged in the absence of the state. Indeed, the state does provide both the policy as well as the political context. In light of this argument, it would be prudent to review the existing literature on: first, “embedded autonomy” of the state; and second, the state–society synergy.

There are also other questions that remain unanswered in this book. How generalizable are these cases? Do hybrid domains appear elsewhere or have they just emerged in certain pockets? Are they rooted in the social and political context of the regions where they operate? Also, how do norms travel in this domain? The authors also do not pay sufficient attention to global–local linkages. Has norm diffusion occurred from the global to the local or vice versa? Furthermore, are these innovations diffused within the state system? For instance, recently the government of the Indian state of Bihar adopted AYUSHMAN, a telemedicine programme based on public–private partnership. Was this the result of a local-level social innovation as pointed out in the case studies? An exploration of these norm linkages would have added robustness to the argument. Lastly, the book does not shed any light on whether these innovations are sustained over time or merely intervention bubbles.

These gaps notwithstanding, the authors have proffered a useful concept in this volume. Hybrid domain is yet another parsimoniously treated aspect of governance and the authors must be commended for successfully elaborating on the topic. A discussion on a subject like this is particularly useful to address some of the challenges faced by the most underdeveloped parts of the world.

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