

# The World Bank's Good Governance Agenda

## Narratives of Democracy and Power

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Development and its success or failure is conventionally judged with reference to its own stated aims and objectives; whether poverty has been reduced, the production of a particular crop increased, corruption curtailed, and so on. On the basis of such evaluations, development theory and policy is revised and, in turn, a 'new and better' strategy for tackling underdevelopment is launched. Taking its inspiration from Michel Foucault (1991), this analysis of the World Bank's good governance agenda takes a different approach. It is not concerned with devising a more 'correct' development theory, or with arguing against the promotion of democracy and good governance on the African continent. Instead the analysis seeks to draw attention to a different way of understanding development as a practice and the interests that are served by these practices. Accordingly, the focus of this chapter is not on what development *is* or *ought* to be, but on the larger social and political implications of particular ideas and representations about development.

The chapter argues that development is an intrinsic part of the technologies of power employed in international politics, and that the way in which it constructs democracy is central to the maintenance of contemporary international relations and structures of power. The chapter provides a close textual analysis of the so-called good governance agenda, and the way in which it narrates development as an absence of democracy and good governance. It seeks to expose not only the discourse's conceptualisation of democracy, but also what the discourse silences and evades, the ways in which its construction of development serves to facilitate specific policies and results. This in turn enables a brief discussion of the effects of these ideas of development on larger social processes, what interventions and practices they legitimise, and also what actions and policies they delegitimise and exclude.<sup>1</sup>

## Alien state intervention, indigenous democratic capitalism

The concept of good governance was first introduced to development discourse by the World Bank's 1989 report *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth*. This document was a major statement of the institution's intellectual leadership of the donor community (Gibbon 1993), and ever since the Bank has taken the lead in the articulation and ideological refinement of the new development doctrine. The 1989 report, together with the Bank's study *Governance and Development* (1992) represent the most rigorous and assertive official pronouncement of current development thinking about good governance, the *locus classicus* of the governance literature.<sup>2</sup> Although aspects of development discourse have changed since the publication of these documents, most notably with a stronger emphasis on

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter draws on the arguments developed in my book *Disciplining Democracy. Development Discourse and Good Governance in Africa*, especially Chapter 3.

<sup>2</sup> Both these documents represent major research efforts by the World Bank. *Governance and Development* (1992) is the product of 22 members of staff, while the 1989 long-term perspective study was partly a response to critiques of structural adjustment programmes and numerous scholars outside the Bank were consulted, including Goran Hyden, Claude Ake, Janet MacGaffey and Paul Harrison.

'partnerships', 'ownership' and poverty reduction, these texts still stand as the main pronouncements on the relationship between development and democracy. Furthermore, structural adjustment still continues on the African continent into the new 'post-conditionality' era (Harrison 2001), albeit under new names such as the IMF's Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF). Economic liberalisation is presented as now compatible with poverty reduction and democracy, and the central tenets of market friendly policies as set out in the good governance agenda appear more or less intact.

Accordingly, my analysis of the governance discourse centres on these two key World Bank documents, but also draws on articles published by two senior members of the World Bank staff and the more summary Bank report entitled *Governance. The World Bank Experience* (1994b). By and large, bilateral donors have fallen into line with the views expressed in these documents, and although contemporary development discourse cannot be seen as monolithic and unchanging there is nevertheless broad agreement on the fundamental elements of good governance as constructed by the World Bank.

The World Bank's construction of good governance starts from a refutation of the development models of the past. The 'postindependence development efforts failed', we are told, 'because the strategy was misconceived' (World Bank 1989:3). According to the Bank, there is now 'a growing consensus' that these strategies 'pinned too much hope on rapid state-led industrialization' and mistakenly encouraged African governments to make 'a dash for "modernization", copying, but not adapting, Western models' (ibid: 83,3). Following independence, 'Africa's governments were grafted onto traditional societies and were often alien to the indigenous cultures' (ibid: 38). The Bank's senior policy advisor makes the same point, asserting that 'state institutions based on Weberian bureaucratic principles... were not compatible with the beliefs and practices of African society' (Landell-Mills 1992: 543). The post-colonial state was, in short, 'the perfect example of an alien system imposed from the top' and, because the underlying cultural premises of Western state institutions were foreign to the continent, these institutions 'started to crumble the moment the colonial administrators left' (ibid: 545,

543). With hindsight then, Africa's 'economic, political and social disaster' can be blamed on 'a fundamental flaw in the prevailing development paradigm (ibid: 543).

The lesson has now been learnt, however, and development theory has been amended accordingly. While previous state-led development efforts failed because they 'did not build on the strengths of traditional societies', the good governance agenda claims to be different (World Bank 1989: 60). Past development strategies made a rigid distinction between the modern and the traditional, discarded the traditional and made it abundantly clear that 'Modern societies meant "progress"' (ibid: 60). The good governance agenda claims to have a greater degree of cultural awareness and appropriateness, as there are 'close links between governance, cultural relevance and the components of civil society' (Landell-Mills 1992: 567). The new development paradigm recognises, in the words of the World Bank, that 'far from impeding development, many indigenous African values and institutions can support it' (1989: 60). Good governance does not therefore advocate a 'dash for modernisation' but understands instead the need to 'progressively remodel its institutions to be more in tune with the traditions, beliefs, and structures of its component societies' (Landell-Mills 1992: 545). Accordingly 'each country has to devise institutions which are consonant with its social values' (World Bank 1989: 60). Change cannot be imposed from the outside by development agencies, but will only be effective if it is 'firmly rooted in the societies concerned' and World Bank programmes must therefore 'reflect national characteristics and be consistent with a country's cultural values' (World Bank 1992b: 12; 1989: 193).

On the face of it, these suggestions are not only seductive, but also almost commonsensical. The expressed desire to build on a society's own values, rather than imported ones, would today be endorsed by both the political left and right. The recognition of the 'alien' nature of the modern state and its lack of roots in indigenous society also reflects current debates among Africanists. The World Bank's order of discourse, however, performs two important functions within the governance discourse. First, it serves to disassociate the

good governance agenda and its proponents from the development failures of the past. Previous development strategies may have been misconceived, but these mistakes have now been rectified as donors have discovered the 'real' solution to Africa's problems. In this way, the development apparatus and the World Bank in particular remain untainted by previous mistakes and retain the moral right to continue the development effort. Second, the representation serves to construct an image of not only the modern Weberian state as alien to Africa, but state-led development is also delegitimised.<sup>3</sup> The state is constructed as a Western invention, a result of foreign ideologies and misguided development theory, imposed from above to modernise indigenous societies. Because the state is a foreign imposition, everything the state does is tainted and state intervention, whether the provision of welfare or the ownership of enterprises, is bound to fail as it is out of tune with local values and customs. In this representation the prevailing developmental or interventionist state becomes the enemy of the people, the reason for Africa's underdevelopment and misery. The good governance agenda, on the other hand, emerges as the liberator that will allow not only for development, but also for the release of society's true, indigenous values. At this point the good governance discourse takes a rather astonishing twist. While the state and *state-capitalism* are regarded as imported artefacts, *capitalism* is represented as an integral part of Africa's indigenous culture perfectly attuned to local, traditional values.

The governance discourse portrays African societies as bursting with suppressed capitalist energy and entrepreneurial spirit. Under the headline *Africa's market tradition* the World Bank reminds us that 'Entrepreneurship has a long history in Sub-Saharan Africa. In parts of the continent long-distance trade on caravan routes dates back to the 11th century' (1989: 136). We are further asked to recall that in Great Zimbabwe mining activities were linked to Arab trading and export centres on the southeastern coast, where a liberalised system of exchange operated and where mutual tolerance prevailed (ibid). In contemporary Africa, by contrast, state-led development has stifled

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<sup>3</sup> A similar point is made by Beckman (1992).

private sector activities. In their misguided 'dash for modernisation', governments 'greatly underestimated the depth and potential of African entrepreneurship' (ibid: 136). Massive resources were directed to public enterprises, and these policies 'have driven entrepreneurs into the informal sector' and 'crowded local firms out of access to markets and financial resources' (ibid: 136-137). But 'despite considerable hostility from central government, local entrepreneurs have shown remarkable vitality', and the Bank argues that in sharp contrast to the failure of public enterprises 'almost everywhere the informal sector has been a thriving success' (ibid: 59, 38).

Not only has African capitalism triumphed against the odds, it has done so in a manner which is consistent with Africa's indigenous culture. According to the World Bank, enterprises in 'the informal sector are organized around, and supported by, local values and traditions' (ibid: 140). Traders and artisans carry out their activities 'according to long-established customs and rules administered through grassroots institutions' (ibid: 136). Thus, the good governance discourse speaks of financing in the informal sector in terms of savings clubs, rotating funds and other informal arrangements where 'interpersonal loyalties' are more important than formal guarantees and profit (ibid: 140-1). There is no mentioning of moneylenders charging exuberant rents. Instead, informal sector capitalism is given a caring and compassionate face, less concerned with profit because of its reliance on 'personal relationships' (ibid: 140).

In this way the good governance discourse constructs a binary opposition between alien state intervention, which is associated with past development failures, and indigenous capitalism, which represents the basis for future development successes. While there is no denying the dismal performance of the African state, a clear consequence of this binary opposition is that it bestows legitimacy on the contraction of the state and its services in accordance with structural adjustment programmes. Because the state is an alien oppressor, the curtailment of state activities becomes a people-friendly, democratic venture, almost to the extent that state contraction or destatisation is presented as synonymous with democratisation. This conflation of

destatisation with democratisation is an essential characteristic of the good governance discourse, and as we shall see it reverberates in various guises throughout the entire discourse.

The conflation of destatisation and democratisation has its roots in the perception of democracy and economic liberalism as the two sides of the same coin. Contemporary development thinking perceives of democratisation and economic liberalisation as interrelated and mutually reinforcing processes, an argument that can be synthesised as follows: Economic liberalisation is expected to decentralise decision-making away from the state and multiply the centres of power. This in turn is assumed to lead to the development of a civil society capable of limiting the power of the state and providing the basis for liberal democratic politics. Democratic rights, on the other hand, are seen to safeguard property rights; this in turn creates the security and incentives necessary for economic growth. A positive synergy is thus perceived to exist between economic liberalisation and democracy, and the World Bank accordingly argues that 'political legitimacy' is a 'precondition for sustainable development' and growth and that economic reform will be 'wasted if the political context is not favourable' (1989: 60, 192). This view has been repeated by numerous other development organisations and bilateral donors. Britain's former Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, for example, maintained that 'good government goes hand in hand with successful economic development. In the short term an authoritarian or corrupt government may achieve some economic progress. In the longer term, however, such governments prove inefficient, and are unable to deliver social goods as effectively as governments which are accountable' (1990: 4-5). The same view also informs the present Labour government's foreign policy, with Foreign Secretary Robin Cook (1998) stating that 'the past two decades have repeatedly demonstrated that political freedom and economic development are mutually reinforcing'.

In the good governance discourse, democracy emerges as the necessary political framework for successful economic development, and within the discourse democracy and economic liberalism are conceptually linked: bad

governance equals state intervention, good governance equals democracy and economic liberalism. Or in the words of two senior World Bank officials, governance means competent and accountable government 'dedicated to liberal economic policies' (Landell-Mills & Serageldin 1992: 307). Because democracy and economic liberalism are notionally linked in the concept of 'governance', the possibility of conceiving of potential contradictions between the two is virtually impossible within in the parameters of the discourse. To be in favour of democracy is simultaneously to be in favour of free market economics and structural adjustment. The fact that the two may at times conflict, so that for instance economic inequalities generated by capitalist competition may undermine political equality and the functioning of democracy, is rendered inconceivable by the fusion of the concepts. It also follows from the above definition of governance that democracy will only lead to good governance if the electorate chooses governments that adhere to a free market ideology. This is of course an inherently undemocratic stipulation, in that it attempts to restrict the scope of political choice. It entails, in short, an *a priori* determination of a country's economic model and a relegation of constituents' preferences to second order importance. The possibility that large sections of the electorate in poor countries may favour economic and political solutions that conflict with the good governance agenda's vision is passed over in silence by the discourse.<sup>4</sup>

Instead, the good governance agenda claims to speak on behalf of the 'ordinary people' of Africa, and claims that its primary aim is to 'empower' them and enable them to resist the alien and oppressive state (World Bank 1989:54). In this way an essential unity of purpose is constructed between the development apparatus and the 'ordinary people', in that they all oppose the state and seek to reduce it. The good governance agenda's strategy for supporting the people against the state is to strengthen civil society, a strategy that is also intimately bound up with economic liberalism.

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<sup>4</sup> I explore this possibility in some detail in *Disciplining Democracy*.



## Liberating Civil Society

In the good governance discourse, civil society emerges as the key link between economic liberalisation and democratisation; it is both the locus of economic growth and vitality and the seedbed of democracy. The weakness of civil society on the African continent is blamed on the statism of past development strategies. The dominance of the state is seen to have prevented the growth of autonomous organisations, which in turn enabled state officials in many countries to serve 'their own interests without fear of being called to account' (World Bank 1989: 60). Civil society is regarded as a 'countervailing power' to the state, a way of curbing authoritarian practices and corruption, hence the concern for strengthening or nurturing civil society. The World Bank states that good governance 'requires a systematic effort to build a pluralistic institutional structure' (ibid: 61), and intermediary organisations are seen to have an especially important role to play. They 'can create links both upward and downward in society and voice local concerns more effectively than grassroots institutions. In doing this, they can bring a broader spectrum of ideas and values to bear on policy making' (ibid). Intermediate organisations are also expected to exert pressure on public officials for better performance and greater accountability. In short, it is believed that by 'deliberately supporting the development of plural institutional structures, external agencies can help create an environment that will tend to constrain the abuse of political power' (Landell-Mills & Serageldin 1991: 313).

According to the good governance discourse, the best way to strengthen civil society is to reduce the role of the state and expand the scope of market forces as prescribed by structural adjustment programmes. This is expected to decentralise decision-making away from the state and open up new spaces for grassroots organisations and private initiatives. In this context, attention is drawn to the flourishing of informal, voluntary organisations such as credit unions, farming associations, women's groups, and professional associations on the continent over the past decade (World Bank 1989: 61; 1992: 25; Landell-Mills 1992). The growth of such voluntary associations is in large

part a reflection of the state's curtailment of services in accordance with structural adjustment programmes. As the African state has become unable or unwilling to deliver basic services and infrastructure to its citizens, more and more people have come to rely on private initiatives, frequently centred around traditional or ethnic associations, but also involving new, voluntary self-help groups. The vacuum left by the retreating state has thus been filled by private initiatives, and given the good governance discourse's representation of the state as an alien oppressor this development is regarded as enhancing the prospects of democracy. In the words of Landell-Mills, the 'proliferation of associations at all levels' supports the trend toward 'more participatory politics, greater public accountability, and hence basic democracy' (ibid: 563).<sup>5</sup>

While the mushrooming of associational life on the continent in recent years is indisputable, the good governance discourse's representation of this development as inherently democratic is far from unproblematic. This representation is intimately bound up with the conceptualisation of civil society within the governance discourse. A notoriously vague and ambiguous concept, civil society is at no point defined in the World Bank discourse.<sup>6</sup> In fact, the two main documents under consideration do not use the concept at all, but refer instead to institutional pluralism as well as intermediate and grassroots organisations. It is only in the 1994 report *Governance. The World Bank Experience* that the concept emerges, but here its meaning is taken as too obvious and familiar to require any definition or further discussion. This treatment of civil society as an unproblematic concept has become commonplace in much contemporary literature on Africa, where civil society is used as an all-encompassing term referring to a wide range of voluntary cultural, economic, social and political associations, institutions and relations

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<sup>5</sup> This view of associational life as more or less automatically supporting democratisation also finds widespread support in academic writing; see for example Bratton (1989); Chazan (1982; 1988a&b; 1993); and Diamond (1988a&b).

<sup>6</sup> Useful explorations of the concept of civil society can be found in Cohen & Arato (1992); Calhoun (1993); Keane (1988); Taylor (1990); Walzer (1991), and in relation to sub-Saharan Africa, Bayart (1986); Comaroff & Comaroff (1999); Harberson, Rothchild, & Chazan (1994); and White (1994 & 1995).

outside the state. This is also the World Bank's usage, and in effect the references to institutions and intermediate and grassroots organisations in the two main documents are simultaneously the Bank's definition of civil society. In the governance discourse then, civil society equals associational life.

The agenda's conceptualisation of civil society proceeds from a particular conception of state and society, where the state is associated with power and civil society belongs to the realm of freedom and liberty.<sup>7</sup> In this interpretation, power and exploitation become the exclusive property of the state and the public/formal sector, and any reduction of the state and its economic and social services can accordingly be represented as an expansion of democracy and freedom. Such a narrow sovereign conception of power gives rise to the rather romantic representation of civil society as implicitly democratic, and the mere existence of organisations outside the state is assumed to be sufficient to limit the power of the state and enforce a transition to democracy. This representation is reductionist to the extreme. The emergence of various voluntary groups and associations cannot automatically be expected to constitute the basis of an active, well-informed, articulate civil society, nor can it be taken for granted that political activities with a strategic dimension will be generated by societal organisations and movements. Many associations in civil society do not involve any self-conscious political intention or action, and do not seek to limit the reach of the state or influence its policies. Other groups, in turn, may espouse authoritarian ideologies and pursue undemocratic strategies and goals. Civil society cannot therefore be seen as either inherently democratic or undemocratic, rather its character may vary across time and space.

Such observations are of particular relevance in the African setting, where the blossoming of informal associations is largely a result of the inability of the state to deliver basic services. People have withdrawn from an increasingly oppressive and exploitative state, and turned instead to community networks for their social welfare. In the same way, the informal or parallel market has

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<sup>7</sup> A similar observation is made by Bangura & Gibbon (1992).

provided an effective way of avoiding high taxes and the artificially low prices paid for farm products by state marketing boards. Such exit or coping strategies may well have weakened the state, but the ability to avoid the state should not be conflated with an ability to support democratisation in any constructive and significant way, as it does not necessarily imply any political alignment or relation to political parties or activities.<sup>8</sup> Instead, these strategies generally signal a deep distrust of the state and a perception of its institutions as irrelevant to everyday life and struggles. If anything, such attitudes may have negative implications for democratisation, which requires the associations of civil society to engage with state institutions in order to achieve their aims and improve their conditions of existence.

The heterogeneous and segmented nature of civil society also cautions against definitions that treat it as inherently democratic. Civil society in Africa (as elsewhere) embodies a diverse set of traditional, ethnic, professional, class, local, regional and national interests. While heterogeneity does not in itself prevent voluntary associations from mobilising for democracy, it increases the likelihood that some may become agents of ethnic or parochial interests, especially where state boundaries are still in dispute and nation building an incomplete process. This is arguably the case in most African countries, and the atrocities of the Liberian civil war in the post-Doe era, the brutality of Somalia's warlords, and the killing fields of Rwanda are sufficient reminders of the potential dangers contained within heterogeneous societies. And while the vacuum created by the retreating state may well allow voluntary organisations to mobilise for democracy, it also raises the spectre of intensified particularism and fragmentation.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, one view holds that

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<sup>8</sup> Ekeh argues that civil society in Africa is highly apolitical and is 'largely indifferent to the affairs of the civil public realm over which the state presides' (1992:197). While this may be a rather heavy-handed generalisation, it nevertheless serves as a useful corrective to the uncritical interpretation of civil society as an automatic check on the powers of the state.

<sup>9</sup> The ambiguity of civil society's relationship to democratisation has for example been noted by Davis (1995) in a case study of the popular organisation Mboscuda among the Mbororo in Northwest Cameroon. Davis is doubtful whether the organisation will become an effective participant in a national democratic movement, or whether it will instead develop into a vehicle for ethnic chauvinism.

'Africa seems too condemned to harsh nation-building as to rule out many hopes for civil society' (Hall 1995: 25).

While such interpretations may be too pessimistic, it seems equally clear that the good governance discourse's representation of civil society as inherently democratic is too romantic and optimistic. The mere existence (or absence) of civil society, important as it is, is not sufficient to explain the success or failure of democracy. Civil society and its relationship to democratisation cannot be understood in abstract terms, but requires instead a specific analysis of the various groups and interests involved in these struggles. The point here, however, is not merely to note that the highly differentiated nature of African societies, both in terms of ethnicity and wealth, must be taken into account when considering the democratic potential contained in the emergence of their civil societies. Rather the important question relates to the effects of an order of discourse that ignores such cautionary observations about the heterogeneous and potentially undemocratic qualities of civil society. What actions and practices are legitimised by this discourse, and what types of power does it underwrite? The short answer is that the good governance discourse serves to construct economic liberalism as a force for democracy. The equation is simple: coercive power is perceived to reside exclusively in the state and public institutions, and any reduction in the size or reach of the state is therefore regarded as conducive to democratisation. Structural adjustment curtails state activity and is associated with the growth of voluntary groups and organisations, and hence adjustment becomes a democratic enterprise for the liberation of civil society.

## Empowerment through cost recovery

One may then legitimately ask, what remains of the good governance discourse's claim to empower the 'ordinary people' of Africa? The governance discourse has the effect of valorising everything outside the institutions of the state and bestowing democratic legitimacy on all organisations and practices in civil society. Civil society emerges as undifferentiated and harmonious, and there are no classes, no races, no

genders, ethnic groups or oppressors in the civil society of the good governance discourse. Instead the various groups and associations of civil society are implicitly expected to further the cause of 'the people', that is to serve the interests of all groups equally and democratically, and we are repeatedly reminded of Africa's 'rich traditions of community and group welfare' and the 'widespread practice of sharing among people' (World Bank 1989:60, 168).

Reality, unfortunately, is somewhat different. Structures of power and hierarchies of wealth and influence permeate all civil societies, and African societies are no exception. The governance discourse, however, builds on an essentially ahistorical notion of civil society, where tradition is regarded as part of human nature, unchanging and set apart from power and authority. Organisations are abstracted from the socio-economic structures in which they are embedded, and become instead part of Africa's eternal tradition of sharing. Not only does this representation render inequalities of power between individuals, classes and groups invisible, but it also conceals the possibility that various traditional associations and practices may be hierarchically organised and form part of structures that privilege certain individuals and groups and enable them to serve their own particularistic economic and political ends. Accordingly, Landell-Mills discusses the *Harambee* movement in rural Kenya only in terms of co-operative effort and mutual benefit for all, neglecting alternative views that the self-help activities of the movement rely heavily on women's labour, and that 'some communities, some groups and some national elites benefit far more than others' (Thomas 1988: 23).

The good governance discourse not only obscures such relations of power and domination, but its declared intention of building on traditional, indigenous structures in the effort to improve governance implies a continuation of the forms of oppression entailed within primordial relationships. This position is of course not compatible with the new development paradigm's democratic message, but it is nevertheless the inescapable corollary of its rather romanticised conceptualisation of tradition and civil society.

The conception of power that underpins the good governance discourse also has the effect of obscuring the coercive and oppressive relationships associated with capitalism. By locating power exclusively in the state, the market place becomes a realm of freedom and liberty. Such a conceptualisation of civil society cannot take account of the possibility that economic liberalisation may reinforce existing socio-economic inequalities, as it does not recognise the organisational and institutional structure of power in social relations in the first place. Similarly, there is no room for a critique of the threat that capitalist market forces may pose to systems of social solidarity and justice, and thus to some structures of civil society itself, nor is it recognised that state action at times may be necessary or desirable to overcome or reduce inequalities in civil society.<sup>10</sup> Instead the confinement of power to the state and the portrayal of the market as a place of liberty reinforce the image of structural adjustment as conducive to the expansion of democracy; yet again we see how democratisation becomes almost synonymous with destatisation.

The governance agenda's overall aim to 'release the energies of ordinary people' and to 'empower ordinary people to take charge of their own lives, to make communities more responsible for their development, and to make governments listen to their people' is also intrinsically bound up with economic liberalism (1989: 54). The seductive power of development is clearly demonstrated in the will to empower; it draws on emotive and forceful imagery and appeals to notions of rights and justice. If taken literally this call for empowerment has far-reaching political consequences, in that it implies a challenge to local as well as national power structures. If people were enabled to hold those in power more accountable, they might demand more services, a more just distribution of income, and thus put into question the whole gamut of existing socio-economic arrangements.<sup>11</sup> Needless to say, this is not the

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<sup>10</sup> Whitehead (1993) has convincingly argued that the maintenance of social communal values to curb unbridled individualism was a major concern of the early theorists of civil society, like Ferguson, Hume and Smith. Such concerns seem all too easily forgotten in contemporary debates that associate democracy with capitalism and state minimalism.

<sup>11</sup> A similar point is made by Beckman (1992).

intention of the development apparatus, and when analysed within the overall context of the economic policies of the good governance agenda empowerment takes on quite a different meaning.

One of the central tropes of the good governance discourse is *cost recovery*, which the World Bank introduces as one of a few 'watchwords for the future' (1989: 7). The Bank advocates the introduction of user charges for secondary (possibly also primary) education and primary health care, whereas full cost recovery is recommended for 'nonbasic services such as university education and nonessential health services' (1989: 6-7, 86). Water supply and sanitation are other services for which 'much of the cost could be recovered through user charges' (ibid: 7). The World Bank maintains that 'Whatever the merits of free social services, the reality in Africa is that it means inadequate provision or no provision at all to many people and particularly to the poorest and most vulnerable' (ibid: 86). It is in this context that the emphasis on empowerment, as well as the need to build on 'indigenous African values and institutions', emerges. The World Bank suggests that 'Communal culture, the participation of women in the economy, respect for nature... can be used in constructive ways' (ibid: 60). By placing the management of basic social services in local hands two purposes can be achieved; programmes become more responsive to users, who then in turn 'become more willing to contribute to their cost' (ibid: 7). There is, according to the World Bank, little or no resistance to user charges in Africa and 'even very poor people willingly pay for health care if they demonstrably get value for their money' (ibid: 6). All in all, cost sharing is a means of 'empowering the beneficiaries to demand improved services and of fostering a sense of individual and community responsibility for their delivery' (ibid: 86).

It is this form of consumer sovereignty that the World Bank tries to dress up as empowerment and, by implication, as democracy. The incorporation of words like 'empowerment', 'self-help' and 'participation' into the Bank's otherwise monetarist vocabulary serves primarily to justify the curtailment of state responsibility. Adjustment programmes necessarily mean less state services, especially to the poor, and as a result of the economic crisis in the last decade



the burden of caring for the sick, feeding the poor and so on has been increasingly transferred from paid state officials to unpaid local labour (mostly women). There is absolutely nothing democratic or empowering about this. By contrast, local people and women in particular, are expected to make up for the shortfall in public services, to be able to put in more working hours to compensate for the withdrawal of state provisions. While this may register in national budgets and World Bank statistics as cost saving and a sign of increased efficiency, it entails increased burdens for many local peoples. Terms like 'empowerment' and 'community responsibility', however, serve to give this development an aura of democratic freedom. Within the good governance discourse, then, empowerment is deprived of its radical, political implications, and becomes instead a highly instrumental term; the objective is to 'capitalize on the energies and resources of the local people' who should pull their weight and thereby make development projects more cost-efficient (World Bank 1989: 58). Only in this context does it make sense for Landell-Mills to describe local, voluntary self-help groups as 'cost-sharing moves' (1992: 567). Local initiatives are expected to fill the gaps left by the retreating state, to provide social services like health care, water and sanitation. Self-help, participation and empowerment become an intrinsic part of the effort to liberalise the economy, efforts that can be tapped into and used to reduce the cost of public provisions. Community involvement and empowerment is intended to function within the framework of economic liberalism, not to challenge existing power structures or question adjustment programmes through 'excess' demands. This kind of participation and empowerment has nothing to do with democracy, but again we see how the good governance discourse blurs the distinction between the retreat of the state and democratisation.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The good governance discourse's appeal to grassroots and self-help organisations is perhaps analogous to the neo-conservative call for a return to family values, tradition and religion in the West as part of the attempt to revive self-restraint and unburden the state.

## Good governance as modernisation theory

The good governance discourse represents its intention of building on local grassroots organisations as evidence of the cultural sensitivity of the new development paradigm. As we have seen, a sharp contrast is drawn between the 'modernisation' strategies of the past, which imposed alien systems on traditional societies, and the new strategy, which builds on the indigenous and listens to 'the people'. Grave concern is also expressed about the risk of 'ethnocentric and cultural bias', and it is acknowledged that development institutions must be 'very cautious in proposing specific solutions or advocating particular arrangements' and that 'there should be no question of imposing a particular democratic system on any country' (Landell-Mills & Serageldin 1991: 311). Unlike the misconceived policies of yesteryear, governance takes account of cultural differences and recognises that African values and institutions can support development and be used in constructive ways (World Bank 1992: 8; 1989: 60). The emphasis is on the need for 'home-grown solutions' (Landell-Mills & Serageldin 1991: 311) and it is argued that each country 'has to devise institutions that are consonant with its social values' (World Bank 1989: 60).

On closer inspection, however, this appears a peculiar brand of 'pick and mix' cultural relativism, which recognises that indigenous African traditions are not uniformly favourable to democracy and economic liberalism. In *Governance and Development*, the World Bank points out that the spread of political legal systems modelled on Western traditions may lead to the existence of two sets of norms and institutions; 'Western notions of the rule of law, private property rights, and contracts' may be superimposed on 'ideas such as "consensus", "communal property", and "reciprocity"' (1992b: 8). The question of whether these 'different ways of anchoring social rights and obligations... hamper the functioning of modern economic institutions' is raised, only to be left unanswered in the document. Landell-Mills, however, is more outspoken on these issues. He asserts that the 'challenge is to build on the elements [of African tradition] that are compatible with modernisation and development, rejecting those that are not and, where necessary and appropriate, borrowing

wittingly from foreign models, western or eastern' (ibid: 545, italics added).<sup>13</sup> The turn of phrase is important; the good governance agenda may advocate institutions that are consonant with indigenous social values, but then proceeds to narrow those values down to imply compatibility with modernisation.

One aspect of African tradition that must be discarded is the strong family and ethnic ties which 'have no place in central government agencies, where staff must be selected on merit and where public and private monies must not be confused' (World Bank 1989: 60). In the context of seeking to establish honest, efficient and accountable administration, such statements make eminent sense, but they simultaneously reveal a deeper contradiction within the good governance discourse. On the one hand, the World Bank praises Africa's strong family and communal ties in relation to issues of empowerment and cost recovery, while on the other, it attacks these aspects of African culture and practices as detrimental to good governance. It seems that the World Bank wants to make use of communal bonds when they can serve to reduce the cost of basic state services, and abandon them as archaic and hostile to the project of development in other contexts. Rather than cultural sensitivity, such statements signal not only a degree of instrumentalism, but also a simplistic understanding of cultural practices and traditions as existing independently of social structures and as something that can simply be abandoned at will. While the persistence of patrimonial practices in Africa may be an affront to good governance, one should not disregard the fact that these practices have particular historical and cultural roots and that they may also serve particular political purposes. Abandoning patrimonial practices may accordingly prove far from easy, and may also have wide-ranging consequences for the construction of viable political authority and structures of governance.<sup>14</sup> Another custom that must give way to good governance is

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<sup>13</sup> This brief reference to Eastern models appears to be nothing more than a token gesture, as the experience of Japan and the East Asian Tigers is conspicuously absent from discussions of good governance. This is the argument of Moore's (1993) article 'Declining to Learn from the East?', which maintains that if Eastern development models had been considered good governance would have appeared very different and accorded a much greater role to selective state intervention.

<sup>14</sup> In relation to the decline of patrimonial politics and the maintenance of political authority and social order, see for example Reno's book on the emergence of warlord politics (1998).

communal land ownership and land use rights since, according to the World Bank, agricultural modernisation makes land titling necessary (ibid: 104). This issue is presented as entirely 'technical' in nature, and there is no discussion of the political and cultural significance of communal land ownership and networks of patronage. Thus, the fact that land titling would most likely exclude some people from access to land, make the survival of others highly precarious, while enriching a few is passed over in silence.

The good governance discourse asserts that it seeks to create 'a modern sector that *supports* the traditional sector, rather than one that aims to *replace* it' (World Bank 1989: 60, italics in original). It is nevertheless difficult to see how the governance paradigm is qualitatively different from the 'modernisation' strategies of the past. 'Development' within the good governance discourse is still perceived to imply 'a profound change in social culture' and a 'long-term process of changing mentalities' (Landell-Mills 1992: 564, 565). As we have seen, good governance is conceptually linked to economic liberalism and the effort to strengthen civil society concentrates primarily on nurturing the bourgeoisie and creating an enabling environment for business. Apart from token references to the 'empowerment of ordinary people', which ultimately boils down to an issue of cost recovery, the civil society of the good governance discourse consists primarily of modern, professional and contractual organisations. The discourse embodies a liberal conception of civil society as the equivalent of market, or bourgeois society. This is not only a conception that elevates the right to private property over all other rights, but it also draws on notions of the universal liberal subject and the philosophy of possessive individualism (see Williams & Young 1994). Accordingly, the World Bank can perceive of a 'common desire of individual Africans to be independent economic operators' (1989: 59), and its development mission thus appears as the liberation of the liberal subject from the oppressive structures of the state.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note here how culture can be used to defend almost any argument. For a long time, many leaders promoting the idea of an African Socialism rooted their ideas in precisely the opposite interpretation of African culture. The late President Julius Nyerere, for example, argued that 'whenever we try to help Africans become capitalist shopkeepers, capitalist farmers, industrialists, etc., we find that most of them fail because they cannot adopt the capitalist practices

In order to assist Africans in their struggle to become 'independent economic operators', the good governance discourse pays particular attention to strengthening the business community. A free economy is perceived as absolutely vital to civil society, and the focus is on creating an 'enabling environment' that can 'release private energies and encourage initiatives at every level' (World Bank 1989: 59). 'Private enterprises' are regarded as 'a crucial component of civil society, acting effectively as its life support' (Landell-Mills 1992: 563). Accordingly, 'measures taken to favour private-sector activities, including the widespread attempts to privatise state enterprises, serve to reinforce civil society' (ibid: 564). The good governance agenda here employs arguments that are commonplace in many liberal accounts of the rise of democracy in the West, where the bourgeoisie is regarded as the engine not only of economic growth, but also of democratisation.

In the conventional manner of modernisation theory, the good governance discourse can here be seen to draw on the historical experience of the West in its construction of 'development'. As Barrington Moore's famous dictum 'No bourgeois, no democracy' indicates, the emergence of civil society in the West is closely bound up with the pioneering role of this class in demanding and maintaining a sphere free from state intervention (Moore 1991: 418). The good governance discourse now expects the African bourgeoisie to perform the same function. This view also holds strong support among contemporary liberal academics, and Diamond in particular has been an eager proponent of the bourgeoisie as the agent of democracy (1988a & b). Diamond argues that the intimate link between political power and dominant class formation in Africa has stunted the growth of an autonomous, indigenous bourgeoisie, and that this has 'meant the absence of that class that pressed for the expansion of democratic rights and limitation of state power during the early development of democracy in the industrialized West' (Diamond 1988a: 22). In Africa, the 'bourgeoisie that has developed ... has been bureaucratic or political, non-

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which are essential to commercial success...Capitalism demands certain attributes among its practitioners which the majority of our people have never been forced to acquire' (1968:18).

productive, and even parasitic' (ibid). He thus argues that the increasing movement away from statist economic policies and structures represents the 'most significant boosts to the democratic prospects in Africa' (ibid: 27), as it is expected to loosen the connection between state power and class formation.

It cannot, however, be categorically stated that the bourgeoisie in European history was always in opposition to the state, nor can the African bourgeoisie be trusted to act as the democratisers of their societies. In European history this class has frequently formed vertical links and alliances with the state, especially when it feared challenges from below.<sup>16</sup> The bourgeoisie in parts of 19th and 20th century Europe sought to overthrow political absolutism in order to safeguard the sphere of liberty and private property, but it did not seek to inaugurate the rule of the majority. In other words, the bourgeoisie had liberal goals associated with economic freedom, but not political democratic objectives. The bourgeoisie and democracy cannot therefore be regarded as logically, nor historically linked. Instead democracy has, as Therborn argues, always and everywhere been established in struggle against the bourgeoisie and can be seen as 'grafted' onto liberal capitalism (Therborn 1983: 271. Macpherson 1977). In the same way as the European bourgeoisie resisted democratisation, the emerging business classes in Africa may have much to fear from democracy and universal suffrage. To identify this class as an agent of democracy in the manner of the good governance discourse is therefore highly contentious. It is one thing to assume that the bourgeoisie is/can be the agent of liberal capitalism, quite another to expect it automatically to promote democracy. The support of this class for democracy and majority rights cannot be taken for granted, but requires instead concrete empirical investigation.

The good governance discourse also contains another, related assumption which is equally problematic, namely that economic liberalisation will lead to

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<sup>16</sup> Marx argued that the French bourgeoisie in the mid-19th century sacrificed the autonomy of civil society to protect their interests from the masses. The 'French bourgeoisie', he wrote, 'was compelled by its class position to annihilate... the vital conditions of all parliamentary power and to render irresistible... the executive power hostile to it' (Marx 1963:63).

the development of an *autonomous* bourgeoisie (democratic or otherwise). This expectation entails a view of civil society as separate from the state, but no such clear demarcation line can be drawn between the two. Instead the boundaries of state and society constantly overlap and intersect in complex ways, and this is especially the case in African countries. This feature of state-society relations is effectively captured in Bayart's image of 'the rhizome state', which is linked to society through a multiplicity of horizontal networks (1993: 218-227). While the World Bank and many liberal writers (like the prolific Larry Diamond) lament the near fusion of state elites and economic elites, they appear to exaggerate the fragility of this relationship, expecting it to disintegrate once liberalisation begins. However, clientelistic relations between the state and the various groups engaged in production and accumulation have evolved over time and may not be easily superseded by an ideal-type bourgeoisie capable of acting independently of the state.

First, groups closely associated with the state are most likely to benefit from liberalisation measures, and clientelistic relationships may be continued and reinforced rather than severed by adjustment programmes. Government officials may use their positions of authority to gain a disproportionate share of privatised resources and income earning opportunities, and recent concerns by donors, including the World Bank, about the politicisation of economic reforms lend further support to such arguments.<sup>17</sup> Second, sections of the bourgeoisie may actively seek the continued protection of the state. The reaction of the Chinese business class during the pro-democracy protests in 1989 may serve as an illustration here. The nascent Chinese entrepreneurial class did not come out in favour of reform, as they were anxious not to jeopardise the stability of the bureaucratic support that provided profit and protection. They were particularly opposed to any crackdown on corruption, as this would target precisely the kind of personal ties with state officials that business depended on. And, as many firms were run by relatives of high-ranking government officials, the students' call for an end to nepotism fell on deaf ears (Wank 1995). Similarly, the Zambian business community,

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<sup>17</sup> See e.g. Gibbon (1992), Galli (1990), Hibou (1999), Tangri & Mwenda (2001) and Zack-Williams (1990).

represented by the Zambia Confederation of Chambers of Commerce and Industries argued against the government's economic liberalisation programme. An implicit preference for state protectionism and old-fashioned 'crony capitalism' can be detected in the Confederation's argument that the programme 'kills domestic industries' (Zambia Daily Mail 1993).

In the good governance discourse, however, the bourgeoisie by virtue of its place within civil society is inherently and automatically democratic. It is also assumed to be willing to defend the rights of the 'ordinary people' against the alien and oppressive state. Such a representation is only rendered possible by the extraction of power and interests from civil society, so that all individuals and groups are perceived as equal and as sharing the same goals and motivations. Not only is this a rather naïve representation, but it can also be seen to rely on a particular liberal interpretation of the emergence of democracy on the West. In this respect, contemporary development discourse is not significantly different from the modernisation theory it so eagerly disclaims. Like modernisation theory, it theorises about African development on the basis of the historical experience of the West, and despite its claim of being 'culturally sensitive' it embodies a vision of the good society that is largely constructed from Western values. Prime among these are democracy and economic liberalism, which according to the good governance agenda are historically linked and constitute the two sides of the same coin. The discourse then proposes to reconstruct or develop African societies according to these values, to re-create Africa in its own image.

## Good governance and technologies of power

The power of development to 'seduce' (Rist 1997) is clearly evident in the good governance discourse. Its language and imagery is forceful and emotive, and its claims to 'empower' and 'democratise', to 'release energies' and 'liberate civil society' are the stuff that dreams are made of. Analysis of the good governance agenda, however, seems to go around in circles, always leading back to one factor: economic liberalisation. Governance is conceptually linked to economic liberalisation, and civil society is regarded as



emerging from the liberalisation of the economy and reduction of the state. 'Empowerment of the people' is reduced to cost sharing, and becomes a tool in the hands of liberal economists. The bourgeoisie is regarded as both the source of economic growth and democracy, and cultural sensitivity entails only a commitment to build on the traditions that are compatible with capitalism and modern state structures.

Despite the discourse's effort to distance itself from past development failures and its endless repetition of the specificity of Africa, its respect for indigenous traditions and cultures, its recommendations amount to little more than a new gloss on age-old prescriptions. The main effect of the discourse is to construct economic liberalism as a force for democracy, and although the discourse does not go all the way to reducing democracy to economic liberalism it is clear that 'good governance' is impossible without liberal economic policies. In this way the discourse legitimises continued structural adjustment, and gives it a more democratic face, while simultaneously delegitimising more interventionist and socialist strategies, which by implication become examples of 'poor governance'.

One of the political consequences of constructing democracy and good governance in this way has been the emergence of unstable, exclusionary democracies on the African continent.<sup>18</sup> Many of Africa's new democracies have been plagued by instability and unrest, and their democratic institutions and procedures have proved highly fragile. This instability and fragility is difficult to divorce from development discourse's insistence on simultaneous economic and political liberalisation. The pursuit of simultaneous economic and political liberalisation has presented many elected governments with complex and intractable dilemmas, where economic and political logic often appeared contradictory and conflicting. On the one hand was the demand for further economic adjustment, on the other the expectation that social improvements will follow in the wake of democracy. Many newly elected

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<sup>18</sup> I have developed this argument in greater detail in *Disciplining Democracy*, especially chapters 5-6.

governments thus had two irreconcilable constituencies; external donors and creditors, and their poor domestic majorities. While governments were crucially dependent on both, for their financial survival and re-election respectively, they could not satisfy the two at the same time. External sponsors demanded continued economic liberalisation, which was sure to create domestic dissatisfaction and unpopularity at the polls. Responding to popular demands for social improvements, on the other hand, was likely to result in loss of vital financial assistance. In several countries, like for example Zambia and Côte d'Ivoire, the first casualty of this dilemma was democracy itself, as elected leaders reverted to the tried and tested methods of the authoritarian past in order to contain civil disorder and silence critics. In this sense, the very heart of contemporary development discourse can be seen as internally contradictory, as its proposed economic forms continually threaten to undermine and erode the prescribed political reforms.

Another political consequence of the good governance agenda's construction of democracy is to help maintain prevailing international relations and structures of power. Despite all its claims to be different, to have learnt from the 'mistakes of the past', the good governance agenda repeats and reproduces a number of key aspects of the narrative of development. For example, the hierarchies so central to development- first world/third world, developed/underdeveloped, rich/poor- are reproduced, only this time the categories are slightly different. Constructing African countries as undemocratic and lacking in good governance reconfirms the continual right of the democratic countries of the North to intervene and set conditions for development aid to Africa. The countries of the North are treated as implicitly democratic, serving as models to be emulated by the South, and shielded from the democratic scrutiny that African countries are subjected to. More importantly, the good governance agenda constructs democracy as relevant only *within* countries, and not within international institutions and relations. Domestic politics must be democratised, but international relations are left untouched and protected from the reach of the governance discourse. In this way contemporary development discourse can be said to be part of the global governance of the African continent, one of the ways in which present

international structures and relations of power are maintained and reproduced. Accordingly, one of the main effects of the good governance agenda, despite all its proclamations in favour of democracy, is to help reproduce and maintain a world order that is essentially undemocratic.

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