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Chapter 2

The seductiveness of good governance¹

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Conventional discussions of development tend to ignore the power of discourse and its role in the construction and maintenance of Western hegemony in the Third World. This chapter shows how development discourse has constructed the Third World as underdeveloped and thereby normalized and legitimized the right of the North to intervene in, control and develop the South. The focus is on the good governance agenda itself. The good governance discourse is merely the latest version of the 'dream of development', entitling the North to develop and democratize the South in its image. In this way, the chapter shows both how the international is always present in domestic politics and how many international interventions are sanctioned by development discourse's representation of the Third World. Development discourse thus emerges as crucial to an understanding of development in Africa.

Based on key World Bank documents, this chapter provides a theoretical and textual analysis of the good governance discourse and aims to expose its inconsistencies, evasions and silences. It argues that the discourse narrates governance in a manner that serves to blur the distinction between democratization and the retreat of the state from the social and economic field, and thereby constructs a new legitimacy for economic liberalism in the form of structural adjustment programmes. This relegitimation is achieved by invoking images of an 'alien' interventionist state versus an 'indigenous' African capitalism, and through reliance on a liberal conceptualization of power, state and civil society. The key effect of the good governance discourse has been the construction of structural adjustment, and the institutions and countries that promote it, as a force for democracy: the liberators of civil society from an oppressive state. A closer analysis of the agenda's claim to 'empower ordinary people', however, reveals that the discourse deprives

this term of its radical political connotations and instead gives it a highly instrumental meaning. Empowerment in the good governance parlance merely signals that people should 'pull their weight' and make development projects more cost-efficient; again, the near fusion of democracy and economic liberalism in the good governance discourse becomes apparent. The chapter also challenges the good governance discourse's claim to cultural sensitivity and argues instead that it is not significantly different from the modernization theories of the past in that it embodies an image of the good society that is largely constructed from Western values and experiences.

The strength of development discourse, Gilbert Rist has written, comes from its power to seduce; 'to charm, to please, to fascinate, to set dreaming, but also to abuse, to turn away from the truth, to deceive' (Rist 1997: 1). The promise to eradicate poverty is so seductive that although the history of development is littered with failures, the *belief* in development survives. Past failures merely give rise to new theories, each claiming to have discovered the real solutions to the problems of development. The good governance agenda is simply the latest in a long series of such theories.

This chapter is not concerned with the implementation of the hotchpotch of policy recommendations contained within the good governance agenda, nor does it seek to rectify or to arrive at the 'correct' theory of development. Instead, the focus is on the discourse itself, the way in which it narrates development as an absence of good governance. It seeks to expose, not only the discourse's conceptualization of democracy but also what the discourse silences and evades, the ways in which its seductive power is used to deceive. This, in turn, should enable us to show what effects these ideas about development have on larger social processes, what interventions and practices they legitimize, and also what actions and policies they delegitimize and exclude.

Almost any analysis of this nature runs the risk of representing discourse as monolithic, unchanging and unchallenged, of constructing consensus where diversity, discord and flexibility exist. While there are dissenting voices within development and no complete uniformity and agreement can be said to exist between various donor countries and aid organizations, it is nevertheless the case that development discourse today is more homogeneous than perhaps ever before. The so-called 'Washington Consensus' (Williamson 1993) is still accepted by the majority of multilateral and bilateral donors, and there is general agreement on the desirability of both economic liberalism and liberal democracy. Disagreement is confined to the more minor issues and details of what importance to assign to

the various aspects of 'good governance' and 'development', while the overarching tenets remain unchallenged. On this very basic level, then, it is legitimate to speak of the existence of a development discourse that donors and creditors in the North all subscribe to and advocate as the model to be followed by the South.

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* (1992a), still represent the most rigorous and assertive official pronouncement of current development thinking, the *locus classicus* of the governance literature.² Accordingly, my analysis of the governance discourse centres on these two 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's Experience* (1994). By and large, bilateral donors have fallen to 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 rejection 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' (World Bank 1989: 83, 3). Following independence, 'Africa's governments were grafted onto traditional societies and were often alien to the indigenous cultures' (World Bank 1989: 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' (Landell-Mills 1992: 545, 543). With hindsight, then, Africa's 'economic, political and social disaster' can be blamed on 'a fundamental flaw in the prevailing development paradigm' (Landell-Mills 1992: 543).

The lesson has now been learned, 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 '[m]odern societies meant "progress"' (World Bank 1989: 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 recognizes, in the words of the World Bank, that 'far from impeding development, many indigenous African values and institutions can support it' (World Bank 1989: 60). Good governance does not therefore advocate a 'dash for modernization', 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 be effective only if it is 'rooted firmly in the societies concerned', and World Bank programmes must therefore 'reflect national characteristics and be consistent with a country's cultural values' (World Bank 1992a: 12; 1989: 193).

On the face of it, these suggestions are very seductive and 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 recent debates.

The World Bank's discourse, however, performs two important functions within the governance discourse. First, it serves to dissociate 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 not only serves to construct an image of the modern Weberian state as alien to Africa but also delegitimizes state-led development.³ The state is constructed as a Western invention, a result of foreign ideologies and misguided development theory, imposed from above to modernize 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, however, 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 '[e]ntrepreneurship 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' (World Bank 1989: 136). We are further asked to recall that Great Zimbabwe mining activities were linked to Arab trading and export centres on the south-eastern coast, where a liberalized system of exchange operated and where mutual tolerance prevailed. In contemporary Africa, by contrast, state-led development has stifled private sector activities. In their misguided 'dash for modernization', governments 'greatly underestimated the depth and potential of African entrepreneurship' (World Bank 1989: 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' (World Bank 1989: 136–7). 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' (World Bank 1989: 59, 38).

Not only has African capitalism triumphed against the odds, but it has done so in a manner 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' (World Bank 1989: 140). Traders and artisans carry out their activities 'according to long established customs and rules administered through grassroots institutions' (World Bank 1989: 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 (World Bank 1989: 140–1). There is no mention of moneylenders charging exorbitant interest rates. Instead, informal sector capitalism is given a caring and compassionate face, less concerned with profit because of its reliance on 'personal relationships' (World Bank 1989: 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 destatization is presented as synonymous with democratization. This conflation of destatization with democratization 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 destatization and democratization has its roots in the perception of democracy and economic liberalism as the two sides of the same coin. Contemporary development thinking perceives of democratization and economic liberalization as interrelated and mutually reinforcing processes, an argument that can be synthesized as follows: economic liberalization is expected to decentralize 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, however, are seen to safeguard property rights, which in turn create the security and incentives necessary for economic growth. A positive synergy is thus perceived to exist between economic liberalization 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' (World Bank 1989: 60, 192). This view has been repeated by numerous other development organizations and bilateral donors.

Former British 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' (Hurd 1990: 4–5). The same view also informed the later Labour government's foreign policy, with former Foreign Secretary Robin Cook stating that 'the past two decades have repeatedly demonstrated that political freedom and economic development are mutually reinforcing' (Cook 1998).

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 and Serageldin 1991: 307). Because democracy and economic liberalism are conceptually linked in the one concept of 'governance', the possibility of conceiving of potential contradictions between the two is virtually impossible within 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 lead to good governance only 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 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.

Instead, the good governance agenda claims to speak on behalf of the 'ordinary people' of Africa, and states 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 intimately bound up with economic liberalism.

LIBERATING CIVIL SOCIETY

In the good governance discourse, civil society emerges as the key link between economic liberalization and democratization; 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 organizations, 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' (World Bank 1989: 61), and intermediary organizations 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' (World Bank 1989: 61). Intermediate organizations 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 and 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 suggested by structural adjustment programmes. This is expected to decentralize decision-making away from the state and open up new spaces for grass-roots organizations and private initiatives. In this context, attention is drawn to the flourishing of informal, voluntary organizations such as credit unions, farming associations, women's groups and professional associations on the continent over the past decade (World Bank 1989: 61; 1992a: 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, 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 (1992: 563), the 'proliferation of associations at all levels' supports the trend towards 'more participatory politics, greater public accountability, and hence basic democracy'.⁴

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 conceptualization 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.⁵ 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 grass-roots organizations. It is only in the 1994 report *Governance: The World Bank's 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 development, 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 outside the state. This is also the World Bank's usage and, in effect, the references to institutions and intermediate and grass-roots organizations 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 conceptualization 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.⁶ 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 organizations 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 in 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 organizations 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 many developing countries, 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 black or parallel market has 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 democratization in any constructive and significant way as it does not necessarily imply any political alignment or relation to political parties or activities.⁷ 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 democratization, 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 mobilizing 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 many developing countries, and such conflicts are sufficient reminders of the potential dangers in culturally heterogeneous societies. And while the vacuum created by the retreating state may well allow voluntary organizations to mobilize for democracy, it also raises the spectre of intensified particularism and fragmentation.⁸

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 democratization 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 legitimized 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 democratization. Structural adjustment curtails state activity and is associated with the growth of voluntary groups and organizations, and hence, adjustment becomes a democratic enterprise for the liberation of civil society.

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH COST RECOVERY

What, then, remains of the good governance discourse's claim to empower 'ordinary people', one may legitimately ask. The governance discourse has the effect of valorizing everything outside the institutions of the state and bestowing democratic legitimacy on all organizations 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 '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

developing countries 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. Organizations are abstracted from the socio-economic structures in which they are embedded, and become instead part of the South'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 organized 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 cooperative 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 to build 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 romanticized conceptualization 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 marketplace becomes a realm of freedom and liberty. Such a conceptualization of civil society cannot take account of the possibility that economic liberalization may reinforce existing socio-economic inequalities, as it does not recognize the organizational 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 recognized that state action at times may be necessary or desirable to overcome or reduce inequalities in civil society.⁹ 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, and yet again, we see how democratization becomes almost synonymous with destatization.

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 (World Bank 1989: 54). The seductive power of development is clearly demonstrated in the intention 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 and a more just distribution of income, and thus put into question the whole gamut of existing socio-economic arrangements.¹⁰ Needless to say, this is not the 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' (World Bank 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' (World Bank 1989: 6–7, 86). Water supply and sanitation are other services for which 'much of the cost could be recovered through user charges' (World Bank 1989: 7). The World Bank maintains that '[w]hatever 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' (World Bank 1989: 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 '[c]ommunal culture, the participation of women in the economy, respect for nature ... can be used in constructive ways' (World Bank 1989: 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' (World Bank 1989: 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' (World Bank 1989: 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' (World Bank 1989: 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 fewer state services, especially to the poor, and as a result of the economic crisis in the past 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 by putting 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 people. 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 (1992: 567) to describe local, voluntary self-help groups as 'cost-sharing moves'. 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 liberalize the economy, efforts that can be tapped into and used to reduce the cost of public provisions. Community involvement and empowerment are intended to function within the framework of economic liberalism 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 democratization.¹¹

GOOD GOVERNANCE AS MODERNIZATION THEORY

The good governance discourse presents its intention to build on local grass-roots organizations as evidence of the cultural sensitivity of the new development paradigm. As we have seen, a sharp contrast is drawn between

the 'modernization' 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 and Serageldin 1991: 311). Unlike the misconceived policies of yesteryear, then, governance takes account of cultural differences and recognizes that African values and institutions can support development and be used in constructive ways (World Bank 1989: 60; 1992a: 8). The emphasis is on the need for 'home-grown solutions' (Landell-Mills and 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 is actually a peculiar brand of 'pick and mix' cultural relativism, which recognizes 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"' (World Bank 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 (1992: 545), 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 modernization and development, *rejecting those that are not* and, where necessary and appropriate, borrowing wittingly from foreign models, western or eastern' (italics added).¹² 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 compatibility with modernization.

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 well 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.¹³ Another custom that must give way to good governance is communal land ownership and land use rights, as the World Bank claims that agricultural modernization makes land titling necessary (World Bank 1989: 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 and 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 'modernization' 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 the 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 organizations. 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 and Young 1994). Accordingly, the World Bank (1989: 59) can perceive of a 'common desire of individual Africans to be independent economic operators', and its development mission thus appears as the liberation of the liberal subject from the oppressive structures of the state.¹⁴

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' (Landell-Mills 1992: 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 democratization.

In the conventional manner of modernization theory, the good governance discourse can 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 bourgeoisie to perform the same function. This view also holds strong support among contemporary liberal academics, and Diamond (1988a, 1988b), in particular, has been an eager proponent of the bourgeoisie as the agent of democracy. 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-productive, and even parasitic' (Diamond 1988a). 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' (Diamond 1988a: 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 democratizers 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.¹⁵ The bourgeoisie in parts of nineteenth- and twentieth-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 or historically linked. Instead, democracy has, as Therborn argues, always and everywhere been established in struggles against the bourgeoisie and can be seen as 'grafted' onto liberal capitalism (Macpherson 1977; Therborn 1983: 271). In the same way as the European bourgeoisie resisted democratization, 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 or can be the agent of liberal capitalism but 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 that is equally problematic, namely that economic liberalization will lead to 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 Jean-François Bayart's (1993: 218–27) image of 'the rhizome state', which is linked to society through a multiplicity of horizontal networks. While the World Bank and many liberal writers (like the prolific Larry Diamond) lament the near fusion of state elites and economic elites, they exaggerate the fragility of this relationship, expecting it to disintegrate once liberalization 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 liberalization 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 privatized resources and income-earning opportunities; concerns by donors, including the World Bank, about the politicization of economic reforms lend further support to such arguments (see, for example, *Africa Confidential*, 39 (13), 1998).¹⁶ 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 jeopardize the stability of the political and bureaucratic support that provided profit and protection. They were particularly opposed to any crackdown on corruption, as this would target precisely the 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, represented by the Zambia Confederation of Chambers of Commerce and Industries, argued against the government's economic liberalization programme. In the Confederation's argument that the programme 'kills domestic industries' (*Zambia Daily Mail*, 24 May 1993), an implicit preference for state protectionism and old-fashioned 'crony capitalism' can be detected.

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 possible by denying power and interests in civil society, so that all individuals and groups are perceived as equal and as sharing the same goals and motivations. Not only is this rather naive, but it also relies on a particular interpretation of the emergence of democracy in the West. In this respect, contemporary development discourse is not significantly different from the modernization theory it so eagerly disclaims. Like modernization theory, it theorizes about development on the basis of the historical experience of the West, and despite its claim to be 'culturally sensitive', it embodies a vision of the good society 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 two sides of the same coin. The discourse then proposes to reconstruct or develop societies according to these values, to recreate the South in its own image.

CONCLUSION

The power of development to 'seduce' (Rist 1997) is clearly evident in the good governance discourse. Its language and imagery are forceful and emotive, and its claims to 'empower', 'democratize', '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 liberalization. Governance is conceptually linked to economic liberalization, and civil society is regarded as emerging from the liberalization 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 only entails a commitment to build on traditions compatible with capitalism and modern state structures.

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

Three decades on, the good governance agenda has been largely unsuccessful in promoting stable multiparty democracies. This, however, does not mean that the good governance discourse as such has been a failure. Success or failure should be judged by what development as a practice actually does, rather than by its stated aims and objectives. Seen from this perspective, the governance discourse has been eminently successful. The good governance discourse reproduces the hierarchies and unequal relationships that have characterized development ever since its inception, and seen as part of the exercise of power in global politics, it has helped legitimate the North's continued power and hegemony in the South. By constructing African countries as undemocratic and lacking in good governance, it reconfirms the right of the North to intervene, set conditions and define the policy choices of the South. In this way, the good governance discourse is an intrinsic part of the governance of the South

by the North and one of the ways in which contemporary international structures and relations of power are maintained and reproduced. By constructing democracy as relevant only within countries, the governance discourse shields international organizations and relations from democratic scrutiny and serves to bestow legitimacy on a world order that is essentially undemocratic.

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