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## **Chopping the world into bits: object-relations theory and the good governance norm**

### **Abstract**

This article explores the way in which idealized norms are promoted by international organizations (IOs) to establish a sense of self-certainty. I argue that this is necessary because it masks an anxiety about the coherence and wholeness of such organizations. Using psychoanalytic object-relations theory, I explore the ways in which one norm – that of good governance – splits the world up into good and bad objects. In doing this, it enables the subject (the World Bank and other donors) to transcend the discomfort of ambiguity by creating a sense of clarity about the way the world is populated by unambiguously good and bad objects. Such a process can be thought of as one in which uncertainty about the self is avoided through simplified and morally certain depictions of the other. ‘Ideal norms’ enable IOs to pursue their work with moral vigour and certainty, and to represent a collective good object. Object-relations theory as a way to understand norms highlights first, their significance as idealizations for individuals; second, their clumsiness in defining and categorizing the world’s objects; and third, the challenges they pose to the flexibility and maturity of IOs.

## **Chopping the world into bits: Africa, the World Bank and the good governance norm**

This article explores norms as idealizations, in an attempt to grasp their significance as projects for international organizations (IOs). We can think about norms as ‘standards of proper behaviour’ (Katzenstein, 1996: 5). In this sense they are somehow natural, things to be taken for granted, noticed only really when they are absent. We can also think about norms as ‘understandings about what is good and appropriate’ (Finnemore, 1996: 2). In this sense, norms embody a stronger sense of virtue and an ability to enable progress or improvement. Norms become ideal when they are able to conflate what is good with what is appropriate, standard or proper. It is when the good becomes ‘natural’ that a norm appears immanent and non-contestable, and so acquires an idealized form.<sup>1</sup> Along with the other articles in this special issue, I will attempt to challenge some of the complacency surrounding the apparent naturalness and universality of norms employed in international relations.

I explore the ‘naturalness’ of idealized norms, think about how their incontestability is achieved, and why this matters to those who subscribe to them. Using psychoanalytic object-relations theory, I will argue that idealized norms work by breaking the world up, splitting complex political wholes into bits that are idealized as wholly ‘good’ and wholly ‘bad’. I will examine why such processes occur, and the implications of such processes for the identity of norm-promoting organizations, their objects, the focus of socialization, and for the relationship between the two.

To make my argument, I will concentrate on one norm, that of ‘good governance’, an approach to development adopted from the 1990s by the World

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<sup>1</sup> Accounts of this include Epstein’s work on anti-whaling norms in which she describes how a norm changes from a political project into a taken for granted ‘truth’ (Epstein, 2008); and Klotz’s depiction of the anti-racist norm, employed in the battle to end Apartheid in South Africa, as embodiment of absolute ‘good’ versus absolute ‘bad’ (Klotz, 1995: 14).

Bank, and now established as the dominant development blueprint among western donors. In the last 20 years the Bank has developed good governance as a technocratic guide to governing (World Bank 1994; 1997; 2002; 2008). It rests on the assumption that poverty arises from inadequate governance structures and mechanisms, and that these can be corrected by the implementation of market-based economic and political reforms which should be taught to poor countries. Good governance is a very successful and widely accepted norm (Abrahamsen, 2004), and also one that in its apparent incontestability, or 'naturalness', has achieved an idealized status. The agenda is based on the idea that governance reforms are 'natural because they are the product of an economic rationality inherent in all persons' (Williams, 1999: 79), and has become 'the pursuit of a very detailed programme of transformation targeted at government, institutions, and the habits, attitudes, and mores of persons' (Ibid, 98). I will concentrate on the way in which good governance is framed and used in the context of African countries many of which, as some of the most substantial recipients of development aid and policy, have been subjected to it for the best part of two decades.

The very clear way in which the Bank approaches the good governance programme in Africa, in particular its understanding of the good and bad objects it encounters in its activities, lend themselves particularly well to an object-relations analysis. The theory was framed by psychoanalyst Melanie Klein who used it to explain the way in which individuals construct themselves in relation to the world. It is rooted in mechanisms of what Kleinian psychoanalysts call 'projective identification', in which an individual both 'gets rid of whatever is a painful or bad experience by trying to project it outside into the object, thereby increasing the badness of the object', and similarly, projects 'parts of the self felt as good and constructive... into a good object, making it more ideal' (Segal, 2006: 95). Projective identification happens in an attempt to avoid the 'psychic discomfort' that would be caused by a recognition of internal ambivalence, and it involves a splitting apart of whole, complex objects and the creation of idealized

good and bad objects as a way to reaffirm moral certainty.<sup>2</sup> I use Klein's theory to shed light on the complex forms of splitting at work in the good governance project; and then in the universalized norms that represent a need to overcome (or to cover up) disturbing ambivalence.

This theme of ambivalence is one that has been tackled within postcolonial IR theory particularly directly by Homi Bhabha. In his essay 'Sly Civility', for example, he explores the confusion of Victorian liberalism in relation to empire, arguing that the inconsistency between the values of individual freedom as the basis for progress and advocacy of colonial despotism (found explicitly in the work on J. S. Mill) reflects a troubled ambivalence at the heart of the colonial project. Colonial discourse attempts to express distance from the terror of ambiguity by positing 'strategic splitting of the colonial discourse'. Differences are subsumed in a simplified mapping of the world of the colonized. 'It is this image of India as a primordial fixity – as narcissistic inverted other – that satisfies the self-fulfilling prophecy of Western progress and stills, for a while, the supplementary signifier of colonial discourse' (Bhabha, 1994: 139).

Following in this vein, my argument also delves into the way poorer parts of the world are mapped out in simplified, idealized ways. In the World Bank discourse on Africa, for example, splitting takes place on several different planes. We can see splits created between the self and other in the way Bhabha suggests, but also between different African subjects; alongside malignant African actors are also idealized 'good' actors, the 'innately capitalist' individuals that make up civil society, or the 'progressive drivers of change' that struggle against the apparent backwardness and inertia in African political systems. The degree to which this

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<sup>2</sup> The psychoanalytic term 'object' is a useful one for IR. It can be used to mean 'other', in the sense that other is demarcated as separate, different, outside; but it also carries an understanding of the 'other' as connected to the self, in that it is defined as a way to establish the self. Object-relations theory deals with internal and external objects which together constitute the self. It describes a process whereby all objects, although mutually constitutive, can be imagined as completely separate. This resonates with constructivist debates around the constitution of 'things' (Jackson, 2004) and 'individuals' (Emirbayer, 1997) as embedded within relationships.

mapping enables the World Bank to overcome internal ambivalence is explored at the end of the article.

Three themes run through the paper. First, why might projective identification take place; second, how do projection and idealization create objects in international politics; and third, how do such processes impact on the IOs that promote 'ideal norms'. The first explores the ways in which the emotional wellbeing and identity of those who shape and promote particular norms, as well as all those who unthinkingly subscribe to them, are at stake in the processes of norm creation and diffusion. Blaney and Inayatullah refer to the 'ethical heroism of norms constructivism' (Blaney and Inayatullah, 2012), arguing that constructivists continually emphasize the diffusion of good or improving norms, and ignore bad or degenerate norms. This process they call 'projected deflection', an attempt to distance oneself from the bad by displacing it onto another, who becomes the object of one's rescue or reform through socialization. The Kleinian perspective enables us to explore these ideas of deflection and displacement. More, it shows the ways in which displacement, projection and idealization are not just a way to make one feel better, or present a cleaner self-image, but represent far deeper, and probably unavoidable, processes of ego-formation.

The second opens up to question the way in which those (more powerful) parts of the world that shape and promote norms define the (less powerful) rest. Object-relations theory explores this dismissal of the complexities of objects by describing how norms can split the world into part-objects, made to fit categories that relate to the preoccupations and identities of norms-shapers. How safe, therefore, are the definitions and delineations established by norms, particularly from the perspective of those targeted by them? As an example of this, Epstein suggests that for the socializee, socialization is characterized by loss rather than the neutral change that is often assumed in the literature. She points out that values and meanings attached to 'undesirable' practices can only be relinquished with pain, and that the 'political costs incurred in processes of identity change' are continually underestimated (Epstein, 2012). This is a reminder of the ways intrusive and controlling definitions of 'them' in relation to

'us' saturate the language of norms and socialization, and continually overlook and seek to overturn political and social relationships and meanings that don't conform to the dominant normative agenda.

Finally, the third theme explores the ways in which IOs that work with ideal norms are constrained in the ways they can 'see' and engage with the world. Object-relations theory suggests that an inability to grasp objects as whole and complex is related to an inability to grasp the self as whole and integrated. I will suggest that an analogy can be drawn with IOs that cannot 'see' the world in its complexity because they are predicated on an idealized self-image. The inability to let go of this idealized self-image then prevents more mature engagement with the world, inhibiting the purported ambitions of the organization.

The article proceeds as follows. First, I outline Klein's theory. Next I discuss the good governance agenda, describing its basic assumptions and exploring these in the light of object-relations theory. In particular, I look at the way the good governance discourse establishes good and bad objects. Finally, in the conclusion I suggest that the World Bank, by using the norm of good governance in this way, is able to embody certainty about the world, and to avoid the anxieties connected with complexity. This has profound implications for the scope and capacity of the Bank, whose function and identity has been infused with its promotion of such a norm, and for the bits of the world that are chopped and ordered by it in the process.

### **Klein's world of objects**

One of Klein's key contributions to psychoanalysis was object-relations theory, the idea that individual subjectivity develops through relations between internal and external objects. Internal objects, defined by John Bowlby, are 'internal working models'. 'Each individual builds working models of the world and of himself in it, with the aid of which he perceives events, forecasts the future, and constructs his plans' (Bowlby, 1973: 203). External objects are the things the

individual encounters in the world. Internal and external objects are constantly compared and altered in relation to each other through the individual's experience and engagement in the world: Klein's understanding of object relations is not simply about a series of adjustments between inner and outer worlds, but about the way in which each creates the other. Because of this, the self and the other are mutually constitutive, and relationships themselves are foundational of individual identity.

Klein argued that the process of constructing internal and external objects begins with the separation of aggression and love, and is then realized through their projection onto external objects. Thus she discusses processes of splitting and projecting internal fears, fantasies and emotions onto external objects which are encountered and reintrojected to form and reform internal objects. The processes begin with the new-born infant. At first, the infant cannot distinguish between itself and the outside world. It experiences inside and outside together, in bits, as wholly idealized good or aggressive part-objects. These engender either extreme feelings of love and security, or of hatred and destructiveness. The distinction between 'inside' and 'outside' remains unclear: it is as if the external objects are under the control of the baby, but also part of it. The baby experiences, attempts to control and feels overwhelmed by good and bad objects all at once.

The tendency for the self (or ego) to split itself and its objects 'occurs in part because the ego largely lacks cohesion at birth, and in part because it constitutes a defence against the primordial anxiety, and is therefore a means of preserving the ego' (Klein, 1997a: 191). Projection allows a sense of distancing. 'The fear of the destructive impulse seems to attach itself at once to an object – or rather it is experienced as the fear of an uncontrollable overpowering object' (Klein, 1997b: 4). Destructive fantasies stemming from the innate death instinct are projected onto external objects which are then experienced as powerful and frightening. In this way, aggression is expelled and then re-encountered, coming now from external objects. At the same time, emotions of love and good, which arise from the life instinct, are projected onto external objects which are then encountered

as loving. Klein argues that in this state which she calls 'paranoid-schizoid', splitting and projecting good and bad onto principally the mother leads the infant to experience 'two' mothers, one wholly good and one wholly bad, in a way that appears manageable (Klein, 1998a: 290-1).

Only towards the middle of the first year of life does the infant begin to put disaggregated objects together, to comprehend the ambiguity of whole objects, internal and external. The mother, for example, is gradually realized not to be two mothers but one that is both loved and hated. With the realization of the ambiguity of objects, the child reaches a crucial stage in emotional development, which Klein called the 'depressive position', in which destructive fantasies in relation to vital good objects are acknowledged. Kristeva describes the depressive position as an acceptance of 'psychic discomfort'. 'Anxiety has not disappeared, as it is always present with Klein, but it chooses another domain: rather than splitting or fragmenting and rather than destroying and tearing into pieces, anxiety is tolerated as a source of pain relating to the Other and a source of guilt about having taken pleasure in hurting him' (Kristeva, 2001: 89).

If the depressive position is acknowledged, the child can develop richer and more complex object relations, in which whole internal objects are reinforced by an engagement with the world. The acceptance of guilt, leading to a piecing together, repair and introjection of ambiguous objects enables the child to develop more balanced, integrated relationships with the outside world, and an ongoing acceptance of 'psychic discomfort'. Mature relationships in which the other is allowed to be complex and ambiguous thus enable and are enabled by an acceptance of the wholeness but also complexity of the self.

For Klein, this is not a 'stage' to be resolved once and for all, but a series of processes that can repeat throughout life.<sup>3</sup> She traces the ways in which older children and adults continue to split apart internal objects and project them onto

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<sup>3</sup> Klein uses 'positions' rather than Freudian 'stages' to emphasize that these phenomena are not to be resolved as, for example, Freudian phases. Klein's term refers to particular configurations of object relations, anxieties and defences which persist throughout life. (Segal, 1997: ix).



external objects as a way of protecting internal objects against their own feelings of aggression and destructiveness. 'Bad' objects can be hated more safely from a distance; 'good' objects can be idealized more plausibly. Thus the world can sometimes appear to be populated by an assortment of good people and noble causes, alongside aggressive and hateful figures. Klein argues that such mechanisms are employed in order to keep intimate objects – those that are most closely bound up with the internal objects that constitute the self – safe from destructive feelings. 'This division between love and hate towards people not too close to oneself also serves the purpose of keeping loved people more secure, both actually and in one's mind. They are not only remote from one physically and thus inaccessible, but the division between the loving and hating attitude fosters the feeling that one can keep love unspoilt' (Ibid).

Anxiety caused by aggression and envy continue to exist to a greater or lesser extent throughout life and Klein thought that everyone on occasion resorts to defensive mechanisms where guilt is denied and envy projected through 'projective identification'. Segal describes this as a process in which the individual 'gets rid of whatever is a painful or bad experience by trying to project it outside into the object, thereby increasing the badness of the object. And similarly, parts of the self felt as good and constructive may be projected into a good object, making it more ideal *but stripping the ego of its potential*' (Segal, 2006: 95 – *my emphasis*). The ego's potential lies, for Klein, in its acknowledgement of anxiety or psychic discomfort. In extreme cases, when anxiety is overwhelming, individuals can resort to a paranoid-schizoid position in which splitting and projecting ideal (good and bad) objects become the only way they can deal with themselves in the world.

A defining characteristic of idealized objects is their symbolic role. Making symbols is an essential part of discovering and understanding the world. It necessarily involves some splitting and shaping of external objects to make them fit and reinforce preconceived ideas (or internal objects). An acceptance of anxiety and uncertainty allows us to approach this task with flexibility, to recognize when external objects do not 'fit', and to constantly reassess and

recreate symbols. Problems arise when anxiety is overwhelming and symbolization becomes fixed or rigid. 'A part of the ego becomes identified with the object and, as a consequence, the symbol is equated with the thing symbolized. The symbol does not *represent* the object, but is treated as though it *was* the object' (Segal, 19917: 43 – *my emphasis*). As Alford suggests, such rigid symbolism means that, 'we fail to learn all we could about the world because we force it into a framework determined by our phantasies and needs, giving the world less of an opportunity to modify these phantasies' (Alford, 1989: 149).

Applying the object-relations lens to norms produces two observations. First, norms as an expression of an ideal represent a form of rigid symbolism – a posited universalism enables engagements with external objects in a literal relation to internal objects by subjecting them to an already perfect internal structure. Thus norms seem to order and rationalize the world, making it appear more predictable, manageable and less frightening. Through rigid symbolization, the other becomes an expression of the idealized self. Second, the power of norms, which are social creations, is magnified because they are joint enterprises that collect individuals together in a common cause. This reinforces the sense of the universal: the organization can be an expression of the individual writ-large, a super, more powerful individual. In identifying with such an organization, the individual is affirmed in its sense of itself in the world, and of the wider certainty of its objects. The role of IOs in pulling together an ideal sense of the individual writ-large, of projecting onto the world clear-cut and certain categories, provides psychological underpinning to individuals that belong to or identify with it.<sup>4</sup>

Relating this to the identity and wellbeing of individuals, the construction of norms' objects and the constraints on organizations that promote them – it could be argued that defensive splitting and projecting of very idealized good and bad

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<sup>4</sup> Some psychoanalysts have attempted to extrapolate individual ego-formation onto groups – mirroring similar attempts in IR (Wendt, 2004). Bion's work, for example, suggests that the unconscious dynamics in groups can lead to forms of group idealization or denial in ways similar to those developed by individuals (1974). Others have explored these ideas in discussions of politics and war (Gallagher, 2011; Segal, 1997).

onto external objects produces two effects. First, it limits the subject's potential for engaging with the complexities and ambiguities of the world, and therefore of realizing more complex internal objects. This has profound implications for the IO that serves up certainty in this way. Such a simplified, rigid division of the world into idealized objects suggests an investment in an idealized image for such an organization, and an inability for it to recognize its own ambiguous wholeness. Second, it forces external objects into rigid categories that are over-determined by the subject's internal objects. Such misrepresentations work to reinforce the power disparities found in relationships between large powerful IOs and the countries they work with. In the next section I will consider these effects through an exploration of the World Bank's good governance programme in sub-Saharan Africa.

### **Good governance: chopping Africa into bits**

Good governance is an agenda of best political practice designed to promote economic development. The World Bank employs this norm in its work with developing countries, using it to define what has gone wrong with the role and work of the state, and to devise ways to make it work better. The concept was first developed in the Bank's 1989 report, *Sub-Saharan Africa: from crisis to sustainable growth*, as a response to the continent's particularly poor development record throughout the 1980s (Maldonado, 2010: 4). Governance was presented as a major shift in the Bank's approach to development, one that replaced its previous structural adjustment paradigm rooted in a more simplistic idea that states are bad and should be cut back, to one which argued that states are vital for development, that some states are good and others are bad, and that it is possible to turn bad states into good states.

In this section I do three things. First, drawing on its own policy literature and that of supporting organizations, I describe the World Bank's understanding of good governance. Second, I discuss some of the critical literature on good governance that highlights the ways in which the Bank simplifies the political

context within which it works. And third, I bring object-relations theory into the discussion to explore the ways in which such simplifications are predicated on three discursive and ideational splits which create separate and idealized good and bad objects.

Governance has become the lever by which the World Bank identifies development failure and prescribes remedies for it. 'The clamor for greater government effectiveness has reached crisis proportions in many developing countries where the state has failed to deliver even such fundamental public goods as property rights, roads, and basic health and education' (World Bank, 1997: 21). States with low capacity need to get the 'fundamentals' right, 'without which sustainable, shared, poverty-reducing development is impossible' (Ibid: 23). The fundamentals include: 'establishing a foundation of law, maintaining a non-distortionary policy environment, including macroeconomic stability, investing in basic social services and infrastructure, protecting the vulnerable and protecting the environment' (Ibid). The key priorities of public policy reform that dominate the good governance agenda are 'reducing corruption, strengthening civil society, and reducing poverty' (World Bank, 2001).

Good governance has been a successful norm in terms of its uptake by a wide range of donors, including western states, multilateral donors and international non-governmental organisations (Abrahamsen, 2000: 48). Unlike the Bank's previous structural adjustment policies, which remained contested, good governance has succeeded in normative terms by becoming the unquestioned prescription to promote development in poor countries. Such a shared agenda necessarily expresses a sense of a universal good, and the good governance approach does this by presenting the business of governance as a neutral, essentially technical exercise involving a set of institutions and practices that can be applied anywhere in the world. 'A crucial part of the justification of the Bank's activities is that economic relations are natural, hence aiding their development is not imposing its own conception of the good but rather assisting in what is a natural course of development' (Williams, 1999: 81).

Together, donors attempt to transfuse these principles into outlier states, bringing them into the international fold through socialization. For example, Britain's Department for International Development (DfID), an enthusiastic promoter of the good governance agenda, argues that good governance policies are designed to bring about 'capable' and 'accountable' governance, and that 'this is largely contingent on getting the right kind of politics' (DfID, 2009: 5). And, as US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton argued on a visit to Nigeria that: 'the most immediate source of the disconnect between Nigeria's wealth and its poverty is a failure of governance at the local, state, and federal level... Without good governance, no amount of oil or no amount of aid, no amount of effort can guarantee Nigeria's success. But with good governance, nothing can stop Nigeria' (Clinton, 2009). Africa, as one of the most substantial targets of development funding and policy, has been subjected to good governance reforms for the best part of two decades because, from the perspective of donors, 'institutions in Africa have not yet progressed sufficiently to make a significant contribution to development... [they] are not yet strong enough to permit countries to continue pursuing appropriate policies' (Nsouli, 2001).

The longevity and vigour of the good governance programme in Africa has spawned an extensive critical literature that explores the effects of transplanting a supposedly universal norm onto African contexts (Williams and Young, 1994; Williams, 1999; Weiss, 2000; Abrahamsen, 2000; Kelsall, 2002; Mkandawire, 2002; Harrison, 2005, for example). In particular, this literature deals with the ways in which the World Bank and other donors have tended to simplify, ignore or overlook the political complexities of African polities. Kelsall discusses how reforms, which appear to 'take place in an air-conditioned, administrative bubble, isolated from the political atmosphere', potentially disrupt deeply entrenched interests and political relationships (2002: 605). In African political communities and wider societies, Harrison argues, 'individuals are not isolated and utilitarian, but members of ethnically-defined networks of power and mutual support' (2005: 253) and as such are characterized by a "rhizomatic" form of power that pervades society' (Ibid: 252). The simplifications of the good governance analysis and prescription come nowhere close to getting to grips

with these complexities. Instead, it has been suggested that they better represent preoccupations of the donors, and in particular donors' desire to formulate a 'liberal universalism'; a 'liberal project' which seeks to remake Africa and Africans on supposedly neutral liberal lines (Williams and Young, 1994; Williams, 1999).

Digging beneath the political analyses of good governance, in a way that seeks to complement rather than replace them, I now turn to the ways in which the good governance agenda can be understood within the context of object relations. I argue that good governance produces discursive and ideational splits in three distinct planes: between the donor and the recipient; between the recipient state and society; and between individual actors within the recipient state. In all cases, splitting results in the creation of apparently wholly good and wholly bad objects.

First, the good governance norm reifies a split between a principal, the donor 'who wants "good policies"' and the agents, the recipient regimes which are 'deemed to be self-serving and corrupt' (Mkandawire, 2002: 15). This perception was the basis of a regime of conditionalities whereby recipient regimes were expected to shift economic and political policy in order to secure continuing aid (Ibid). Mkandawire argues that in a whole range of donor approaches to Africa's governance problems, this differentiation between donor and recipient is constantly reinforced: 'In the culturalist view, African states... were depicted as hopelessly and incurably steeped in Africa's debilitating culture... From an economics points of view, African institutions were infested with those who had captured state policies to serve their narrow interests [while] a more technocratic view questioned the analytic capacity and the bureaucratic acumen of the African state' (Ibid). Whether it was Africa's 'debilitating culture', its self-interested elites or the weak analytic capacity of its bureaucrats, African countries as the objects of development reform are decayed, corrupt and incapable.

In such rigid symbolic thinking African states and political actors become straightforwardly bad, fitted into a category that reinforces the subject's contrasting goodness. In a speech he made in Nigeria on good governance and the ways in which the World Bank was supporting transformation in Africa, then president Paul Wolfowitz related a discussion he had had with his daughter about how often ordinary Africans greeted him in public places.

My daughter said, well gee, Dad, I don't think that there are more than 20 people in the United States who would recognize you as the president of the World Bank. And she said, it must be because the World Bank is so important for Africa. And I said, yeah, I think you're right. And I remember feeling a little surge of pride that we do great things for the people of Africa. (Wolfowitz, 2006)

Although most World Bank officials would adopt a less overtly self-congratulatory tone, Wolfowitz's story distills an impression of 'good works' that oozes out of the organization. All of this conveys the sense of a very clean cut between donor and recipient, overlooking a long, and often fraught, history of relationships between African and western actors.

Second, the good governance agenda creates a split between 'good' society and individuals, and 'bad' government. This is rooted in 'an artificial dichotomy ... between "state" and "market"' (Weiss, 2000: 803) where the market encompasses civil society, NGOs, and forms of public participation that can hold the state in check. Civil society is the primary focus, its organizations characterized by World Bank officials as 'institutions that exert pressure and control as "watchdogs" on state institutions in the area of governance and development' (Matovu, 2002). In this depiction, civil society carries all the virtues – 'participation, transparency, accountability, equity, effectiveness and efficiency, strategic vision, and good management' (Ibid) – while government carries all the vices – 'corruption, lack of transparency and accountability, poorly designed decentralization, inadequate service delivery, and social exclusion' (Parker, 2001). On one side, 'the poor, needy, and powerless'; on the other, 'the

rich, replete and dominant' (Ibid). Once again, this approach denies the complexity outlined, for example, in Bayart's discussion of Africa's 'rhizome states' whose roots reach down into society (2009).

As Abrahamsen points out, this discourse 'constructs a binary opposition between an alien state intervention, which is associated with past development failures, and an "indigenous capitalism", which represents the basis for future development successes' (2000: 50). She argues that the World Bank, having flattened and idealized the 'innate' capitalist instincts of ordinary Africans, constructs 'an essential unity of purpose ... between the development apparatus and the "ordinary people", in that they all oppose the state and seek to reduce it' (Ibid: 52). Civil society's virtuous actors – who are represented as 'undifferentiated and harmonious' with 'no classes, no races, no genders, [or] ethnic groups of oppressors' (Ibid: 56) – confront the inertia, corruption and vested interests of government. 'Citizens demand quality services, while city managers lack the resources and morale to perform' (Matovu, 2000). All the energy, initiative, and qualities of good governance are on the side of civil society, while government is, at best, tired and cash-strapped, and at worst 'using communities to achieve selfish political and economic gains' (Ibid).

Third, the good governance agenda splits up actors within states, identifying and supporting 'champions' or 'change teams' (Harrison, 2005: 247) in their purported struggle with 'predatory local elites' (Mkandawire, 2002: 18). DfID has been particularly attached to this approach which has been called 'Drivers for Change' (DfID, 2004) and is now known as 'Political Economy Analysis' (DfID, 2009). The approach aims to 'get beneath the formal structures to reveal the underlying interests, incentives and institutions that enable or frustrate change' (Ibid: 1) and increasingly 'is being used to identify opportunities for leveraging policy change and supporting reform' (Ibid: 5-6). It builds on a World Bank analysis that suggests that donors must get past the evidence of failure, to explore 'the associated institutional set-up and governance arrangements' and beneath these, the sources of inertia (Fritz, Kaiser and Levy, 2009). Political reform can be 'driven' by a handful of enlightened individuals often educated in



the west who, with donor support, can combat inertia and bad governance and realize substantial policy-reform (Harris, 2013). DfID, in advocating this approach, encourages its officials to 'drill down' to the 'drivers which constrain or support progressive change' (DfID, 2009: 13).

This approach fits into broader Bank analyses which advocate simplified state structures, in which political and complex bureaucratic mechanisms are cut up into discrete units. Within state institutions, incentives are used to get individuals to do the right thing; and between state and society, transparency and freedom of information enables citizens to check and monitor individual representatives and officials. A further favourite theme is that of decentralization, explored in a 2002 Development Report: 'Building Institutions for Markets' that argued that decentralized institutions could 'limit the state's capacity for arbitrary action' (World Bank, 2002: 2). In this document, the theme of corruption 'a tax which distorts the choice between activities and lowers the returns to public and private investments' (Ibid: 9) is addressed. We are told that complex regulation and closed trade, alongside centralized government, weak electoral frameworks and a lack of information all feed corruption. Here is the strong sense that complexity, ambiguity, and the sense of opacity together erode governance. The World Bank instead advocates a pared down, simplified and unambiguous state structure.

Such simplifications and flattenings make the programme of development appear more straightforward, but they cannot in fact make it more achievable. Harris, for example, notes that in the case of Sierra Leone which has had intense involvement from DfID, there is little evidence that individual drivers for change working in government ministries are doing much more than exhausting themselves (Harris, 2013). A more open and flexible attempt to see what African societies are like would reveal a more complex picture in which state-society relations are thickly interwoven (Mbembe, 2001; Chabal and Daloz, 1999). And yet the Bank and other donors persist in their characterizations of individual Africans as virtuous entrepreneurs or victims who are 'just like us' (Gallagher, 2011).

The Bank's approach does particular violence to relationships which are constantly deconstructed and simplified. Historical, social and political complexity appear to lend too much muddiness to the straightforward way it wants to see the world; and so, the Bank chops the world up into bits through the norm of good governance. I have argued that this is possible because the norm is constructed as ideal, so disallowing room for uncertainty and ambiguity. The way in which this norm is viewed as both good and self-evident or 'natural' allows only one way to structure the world. This is an example of rigid symbolism, one in which the Bank creates stark and idealized objects that reflect a sense of the Bank itself and its relationships as ideal.

## **Conclusion**

What does all this splitting achieve? A running theme in World Bank discussions of governance is the problem of fragmented donor interventions (World Bank, 2008: 14). It recognizes that when donors contribute large amounts of aid in uncoordinated ways, this can create more messiness and retard development. The Bank argues for country-ownership (an abiding theme of all donors in recent years) but, alongside it, a single global agenda. There is a sense that aid recipients are many and diverse, but the 'international community' should be integrated, somehow able to gather global challenges together.

I have argued that the norm of good governance can be viewed, not as a smooth diffusion of ideas and practices, but as a project of splitting the world up into good and bad bits that reify and repair a sense of the good self. First, it brings like-minded western donors together around an apparently incontrovertible principle and good project. Good governance's technocratic qualities represent a transcendence of messy politics and the pursuit of a disinterested ambition to 'repair' broken states and economies. Together these characteristics create the sense of an 'ideal' international community. But second, this ideal community is built on the back of a split up world, one that is split, first, between donors and

recipients; and one that, second, splits recipient governments and societies into good, or 'progressive' actors, and bad or 'corrupt' actors, and denies local political or social meaning.

Norms, I suggest, can perform a particular and important function as idealizations: they enable subjects to construct the idea of a more certain, morally clear-cut world *out there* in a way that avoids *internal* discomfort. What is the cost of this, the practical implications? I suggest they are two-fold. First, in terms of the subject, as Segal suggests, projective identification, can 'strip the ego of its potential' (Segal, 2006: 95). In this case, we can wonder about the effects of idealization on the IOs that have been set up to explore the world and find solutions to its problems. Such a rigid engagement compels them to inflexibility and immaturity; such avoidance of 'psychic discomfort' dooms them to continually misunderstand and misrepresent the world. Second, African 'objects', both 'good' and 'bad' – are clearly compromised by a relationship that currently rests on purposes that serve wholly different needs and interests than their own.

The challenge then would be to explore ways in which IOs might be brought to accept internal ambiguity, a more messy and compromised history and relationship with external objects, and ultimately, a more integrated and uncomfortable role. Such a project would be of importance to both the organizations themselves, and to their objects – in this case of good governance, African countries, states and populations. However, object relations applied here suggests that the social construction of the norm of good governance acts as a defensive mechanism against internal ambivalence. The Bank's actors and spokespeople, in breaking up and defining African countries in the ways described, are engaged in processes of projective identification that enable them to view themselves, their organization, its project, and the wider 'international community', in idealized ways. This is an idea of the World Bank, or the donor community, or the international community, as a good object, and it has buy-in from far beyond its employees.

What is being defended against? Bhabha's answer relates to the inherent ambivalence at the heart of liberalism itself – liberalism, he argues, presents an idealized representation of a universal pure project, to paper over the internal confusion and a hidden terror of the colonial project. In this particular case, we might point to the ambiguities and problems at the heart of the World Bank project itself, particularly to policy failures like its structural adjustment programmes. The ideal of the Bank as an apolitical, benign actor pursuing a rational, incontestable normative project suffered a severe shock in the now widely recognized failure of the programmes. But perhaps more fundamental is the idea of the subject as inherently troubled by ambiguity, something that is writ-large in groups and organizations that carry and multiply anxieties. Collectively, Western subjects have tried to overcome this by searching for a universalizing project, an idealized form of government over an idealized population. This final point underlines a gloomy prognosis. Bhabha argues that there is no 'passage from trauma to transcendence... [because] both colonizer and colonized are in a process of misrecognition where each point of identification is always partial and double repetition of the otherness of the self – democrat and despot, individual and servant, native and child' (1994: 138-9). There is scant possibility that the World Bank can 'grow up' or begin to recognize its ambivalence: there is simply too much at stake.

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