On the Genesis of the Concept of 'Governance':
A post-bureaucratic perspective

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Time (our):	*Thunder against it. Deplore the fact that there is nothing poetic about it. Call it a time of transition, of decadence.*
Legion of honour:	*Make fun of it, but covet it. When you obtain it, always say it was unsolicited.*
The aristocracy:	*Despite and envy it.*
The law:	*Nobody knows what it is.*
Hypothesis:	*Often 'dangerous', always 'daring'.*[1]

There are, perhaps, few more challenging and enduring problems within critical theorising than explaining why the common sense makes political sense. To reconstruct the genesis of the common opinion can be at once intimately recognisable and strangely perplexing, above all because what passes as the conventional wisdom does not always appear as a problem. Clichés, commonplaces, and popular vulgates often circulate smoothly and rapidly, they are what Gustave Flaubert called the 'received ideas'. In many instances, by the time the idea has reached one person, it has already been received by others, so reception never seems to be a problem. Yet what was casually accepted as being part of the *sens pratique* was always a source of great amusement and frustration for Flaubert. In his reading, these ideas were not natural or pre-ordained, but rather contained multiple meanings, associations and

[1] Gustave Flaubert, *The Dictionary of Accepted Ideas* (New York: New Directions, 1968). The book was originally published posthumously in 1913.

contradictions, often connected to political and class-specific contexts. By humouring such familiar absurdities, in his own ironic and raucous style, Flaubert not only denigrated what was deemed 'respectable' in the eyes of the French bourgeois, he also revealed clues as to how subjects were adapting to industrial capitalism.

If Flaubert was sitting in the cyber-cafes of Paris today he would certainly be able to detect some of the same banalities that he ridiculed, but he would also hear new 'fine subjects' and ideas to 'thunder against'. In a radically different institutional and political environment, he would hardly fail to notice the dominance of the vocabulary of 'globalisation'. From 'synergies', 'product placements', and 'consumer choice' to 'labour flexibilities', 'partnerships', and 'accountabilities', there are some keywords that are repeated insistently by particular speakers with little or no hesitation. For these agents, such received ideas of the twenty-first century are considered so instinctive and apparently essentially for political communication that the very possibility of constructing a language without them is almost unthinkable. How could one make sense of the world, and to others within it, without using these orthodox notions? How could one advance the interests of groups or other higher goals without speaking in the dominant vocabulary? Surely it is inevitable that political discussion gravitates around mutual starting points and fashionable topics? However imperfect, is that not the sum of the contemporary common sense?

One of the best examples of such a received idea is undoubtedly 'governance'. In less than two decades, this word has re-emerged from its previously dormant status to be re-thought and deployed across a range of domains and institutions, but often by actors who have different and contradictory ends. The term has been promoted as a central explanatory category, either descriptively or normatively, and sometimes as both at once. 'Governances' are now multiplying at a remarkable rate, and can be found in all types of institutional settings and forums, from 'school governance' and 'church governance' to 'health governance' and 'environmental governance'. In corporate missions statements and annual reports few other words appear as attractive or necessary. At the same time, permeating policy communities and academic research agendas, from Washington to Ouagadougou, are the two major derivatives: global governance and good governance. In short, governance has become a remarkably accessible and flexible word. Different actors have been able to 'empty into' the term their own meanings and visions, from business executives wanting to secure intellectual property rights to charity workers wanting respect for human rights.

This paper seeks to contribute to our understanding of why the term 'governance' has become so salient in contemporary capitalism. Such a question is, however, not straightforward to answer. Despite the apparent intuitive appeal of the term, I would argue that 'governance' contains, or even conceals, some very difficult and contentious political problems and histories. The conceptual story of 'governance' is interesting not simply on etymological grounds, but also for how uses of the word illuminate larger struggles over the relationship between language and power. Thus, this paper considers how the word could be considered a fruitful entry point or window to analyze a number of enduring political enquires. Of chief importance, this includes macro shifts in the recent evolution of capitalism, the management of social critique, and, in general, methods of legitimation deployed within power relations. The power of 'governance' as a term does not reside 'in' the word itself, taking it as a performative utterance. Rather, it is only when we assess the three-way relationship

between agents, discourses, and institutions, within particular historical contexts, that one can begin to grasp why this term has become more pervasive than others.

The paper begins by briefly problematising how the notion of 'governance' has been conventionally used with specific attention to questions of power and history. This opening will, in turn, connect with the second and third parts which re-evaluate the concept organised into two themes: (1) control and 'governance', (2) and 'post-bureaucracy' and 'governance'. The former theme addresses how 'governance' has long been associated with ideas about discipline and the process or manner of governing. This is illustrated through a focus on the origins of 'corporate governance' in the US from the 1970s. But the paper seeks to go beyond this dominant meaning to argue that the popularity of the notion also stems from how, in broad terms, it both reflects and constitutes the current cultural 'spirit of capitalism'.[2] Specifically, this refers to how the expression 'governance' became politically useful for firms in managing worker demands stemming from the wider 'crisis of governmentality'. At the same time, for similar but distinct reasons, 'governance' also became analytically useful for many researchers who sought non-hierarchical concepts in a post-Cold War, 'globalising' world, as in the appeal to 'networks' and 'partnerships'. The paper argues in conclusion that 'governance as control' and 'governance as post-bureaucracy' are essentially flipsides of the same coin, that is, symptomatic of how capitalism sought (and continues to seek) to manage the countercultural critique through adaptable terms that become attached to ideals of social 'freedom'. The paper questions the extent to which such 'freedom' is actually present in particular political relations, as well as how invoking 'governance' as a concept may obscure, rather than reveal, the complexity of modern forms of power.

I. 'Governance' and its discontents

When reflecting upon how the term 'governance' has been conceived and put to work there are two broad areas where I believe that certain problems, concerns, and tensions arise. The first centres on how the concept has always had a complex and, at times, difficult relationship with what is considered to be 'power' and the effects of 'power'. Sometimes the notion of 'governance' appears to be close to, or is even equated with 'power', that it is therefore viewed as synonymous. This meaning is often heard in popular debates in the media where govern*ment* as a recognized body of political power is, at the same time, associated with the labour of 'gover*nance*'. In other circumstances, specifically those in academic and policy domains, the meanings attached to 'governance' appear often to be at some distance – be it perceived or real – from an entity or matter of power.

One major claim that stems from this later usage of the term – be they authors in international relations (IR), development studies, institutional economics, public administration or business studies – is that we live in a world where authority does not only reside with the Leviathan but, instead, is located and diffused among a variety of actors, operating across a range of levels and spaces. For instance, Thomas Weiss, a major IR scholar, has argued that the notion of 'global governance' arose partly to account for the proliferation and increased role of non-state actors in the international

[2] Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2007).

system, such as Human Rights Watch or Greenpeace.[3] But the term 'governance' then goes beyond the recognition that there has been a proliferation of recognised agents beyond the state (as is it conventionally intellectually categorised), to stress how the said agents are engaging with each other, either directly or indirectly. Thus, it is argued and implied that a core purpose for 'governance' is in explaining sets of 'process'-like activities, conceiving of the world in a relational logic. For instance, Gerry Stoker, a political scientist who has grappled with the concept of 'governance', defines the notion as 'ultimately concerned with creating the conditions for ordered rule and collective action'.[4] The emphasis on 'governance' as a process, in turn, generates assumptions and tendencies that, in particular social environments, no single actor commands, independencies arise as a consequence, and, therefore, there is a declared *need* for cooperation and shared responsibility.

It is this idea of a *distance* – a degree of presumed autonomy from what is called 'power' – that will be revisited in this paper. One major caution that I have over the rise of the term 'governance' is how, through common applications, users are often drawing upon (through conscious or implicit means) the pre-existing legitimacy of ideas linked to community. What does this mean? In general, but particularly in the fields of IR and development studies, a dominant sense of 'governance as process' has led to the invoking of a cluster of terms that stress the goal of collective action as a descriptive or prescriptive end, such as with 'consensus', 'cooperation', 'networking', 'partnership' and so on. But what is often marginalised or, indeed, even subtly subverted in this move (and such moves may be consciously political) is the explicit notion of self-interest. Stemming from this position, I would argue that when power is not studied closely enough one may miss first, how the work of collective action is, at root, a social struggle for recognition and, second, how the actors involved may be pursuing goals that are in great conflict or, indeed, even mutual exclusivity. The concept of 'governance', therefore, often appears to have a chameleon-like quality, but such a characteristic may not necessarily be attractive if one seeks more precise, critical political analysis. 'Governance' seems to imply that an entity or process is political, but not *overtly* political; that it is paradoxically all about power and yet not about power. It is this play between 'governance' and the recognition of politics that this paper intends to further clarify and expose. Compared to common usage patterns, the paper tries to put this term in a wider political and cultural context and to analyze it in respect to a broader conception of interest.

The second set of concerns relates to how history does or does not inform why 'governance' is invoked in particular contexts and what specific meanings are given prominence. Part of the appeal of 'governance' as a concept is arguably how it is has a certain postmodern veneer, how it appears 'new' and 'fresh'. One risk involved in interpreting or, indeed, merely grasping at the word in this way (without thinking too much about it) is that particular histories are neglected. My point – to make absolutely clear – is not that all writers who have used the notion of 'governance' have been

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[3] Thomas G. Weiss, 'Governance, Good Governance and Global Governance: Conceptual and Actual Challenges', *Third World Quarterly*, 21, 5 (2000), 795-814. Also see, Thomas G. Weiss and Leon Gordenker (eds), *NGOs, the UN, and Global Governance* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1996). In terms of earlier scholarship

[4] Gerry Stoker, 'Governance as Theory: Five Propositions', *International Social Science Journal*, 50, 155 (1998), 17-28, quoted 17.

somehow ahistorical. This is certainly not the case. Authors in IR, such as James Rosenau, are correct to note how the term 'global governance' arose in the context of the end of the Cold War and the normalisation of certain neoliberal ideas linked to the efficiency of market-based mechanisms. The fall of the Berlin Wall, the rise of a so-called 'global civil society', and the trends towards private forms of authority in different areas of political life are all potential forces compelling actors to invoke the term 'governance'.[5] Nevertheless, there is a particular valuable historical context that has not always been clearly grasped and explained in these areas of literature. What is often underplayed is putting such factors into the context of broader cultural shifts in capitalism. By this I mean, to borrow from the work of Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, we need to compare the attributes of two different historical 'spirits of capitalism' – with the 1970s acting as a broad divide – in order to understand why 'governance' – with its baggage of common meanings – appears so salient, so apparently persuasive in our present cultural climate.[6] In particular, within this type of analysis, this paper pays close attention to critique – in its different forms – as a motor for change in the contemporary history of capitalist relations.

II. Control and 'governance'

Despite its postmodern appearance, 'governance' is actually a very old term which has long been associated with notions connected to discipline and the action or manner of governing. This older history of the concept, dating back to medieval and colonial usages, is not the centre of attention for this paper. But it is important to note how some authors who have struggled with the term have reached for their *OED* and drawn upon these older senses. One finds that 'governance' entered English in the fourteenth century (derived from the French *governaunce*) and was used by Chaucer in reference to both political and personal affairs.[7] The word could refer to the rule over a territory or the command of a military force, particularly in nautical contexts to define practices of steering and directing (from the Latin *guberno*). At the same time, governance also meant general administrative control, not confined therefore to states but also applied to control within the household.[8]

Some of these core meanings that were attached to the term have not been lost in its recent usage. Indeed the sense of 'governance' as being about steering and directing has been taken directly from this early usage and applied to contemporary contexts.

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[5] For instance, see James N. Rosenau 'Governance, Order, and Change in World Politics', in James N. Rosenau and Ernst-Otto Czempiel (eds) *Governance Without Government: Order and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Elsewhere, repeated scholarly and political references to the Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighbourhood: The Report of the Commission on Global Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), often act as a key signpost in debates associated with the phrase. Also see Rodney Bruce Hall and Thomas J. Biersteker (eds), *The Emergence of Private Authority in Global Governance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Patrick Bond, 'Civil Society on Global Governance: Facing Up to Divergent Analysis, Strategy, and Tactics', *Voluntas*, 17 (2006), 359-371.

[6] Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.

[7] *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, C.T. Onions (ed), (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933); and Christopher Cannon, *The Making of Chaucer's English: A Study of Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Chaucer used it fifty-nine times in his writings.

[8] *Middle English Dictionary* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), last updated December 18, 2001, http://ets.umdl.umich.edu/m/med.

However, when one advances the analytical attention to the twentieth century, where does one find the political and social seeds of its revival and re-reading? I would suggest, in the first instance, that 'governance' was retrieved not in the immediate context of the post-Cold War period but, rather, in light of the perceived crisis of governability within Western societies during the 1970s or, to locate it more specifically, the 'Anglophone heartland'.[9] According to some observers at this time, the economic and cultural changes at this time – from stagnation and oil crises to the fallout from Vietnam and Watergate – were leading to conditions of what some authors called 'political bankruptcy'.[10] Within the US in particular, there were fears by many astute defenders of the market system that social cohesion was fragmenting. A report by the Trilateral Commission in 1975 provides an illuminating (and somewhat paranoid) insight into the mind of conservative thinking at this time.[11] According to Commissioner Samuel P. Huntington and his associates, certain modes of government were giving rise 'to forces and tendencies which, if unchecked by some outside agency, will eventually lead to the undermining of democracy'. They concluded that the 'democratic surge' was to blame for generating 'a breakdown of traditional means of social control, a de-legitimation of political and other forms of authority, and an overload of demands on government, exceeding its capacity to respond'.[12] Even in that conservative Western club, the OECD in Paris, employment experts were speculating about the trajectory of social unrest. Some actually used the term 'revolution' to call what they thought was (or could be) going on outside their offices on the streets. They complained repeatedly about a 'general challenge to authority'.[13]

It is in this volatile environment, complete with a range of social and political demands, that the word 'governance' reappears. Initially, however, the first minds who began thinking about the term and elaborating upon its meaning were not government bureaucrats or popular opinion makers, but (perhaps not surprisingly given the sources of critique) those who were on the front-lines of capitalism: the corporate lawyers. The attachment of 'corporate' to 'governance' was a response to different forces and trends, but of chief significance were 'consumer-orientated politics', demands for increased shareholder power, and open business reporting.[14] The behaviour of leading managers intersected with all these concerns. It is important to recall that during this period the public image of the US corporation was greatly damaged as a result of revelations of executive misbehaviour and unruliness, investigated with particular zeal by Ralph Nader and his contemporaries.[15] Corporate abuses and consumer safety concerns at General Motors were but one prominent example. By the late-1970s, in a series of symposiums, the American Law Institute

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[9] Kees van der Pijl, 'A Lockean Europe?', *New Left Review*, 37, January-February, 2006.
[10] Richard Rose and Guy Peters, *Can Government Go Bankrupt?* (London: Macmillan, 1978).
[11] Trilateral Commision, *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission* (New York: New York University, 1975), 8.
[12] Ibid.
[13] OECD, *Les nouvelles attitudes et motivations des travailleurs*, Direction de la main-d'oeuvre et des affaires sociales (Paris: OECD, 1972). Employment experts from OECD countries were particularly concerned about the increased frequency of strikes in France, Italy, Germany, and the UK.
[14] See an early discussion in Neil H. Jacoby, *Corporate Power and Social Responsibility: A Blueprint for the Future* (New York: MacMillan, 1973).
[15] Ralph Nader, Mark Green, and Joel Seligman, *Taming the Giant Corporation* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976).

(ALI) and the American Bar Association began to react to what was being called 'the erosion doctrine'.[16] Out of these meetings came the decision of the ALI to establish an initiative which would investigate what 'corporate governance' actually meant and how it could be codified.[17] Initially viewed as controversial by some, the ALI Corporate Governance Project was born to address these challenges of legitimacy, in particular to control those insatiable managers who were straying too far from some ideal behavioural model. The word 'governance' was useful partly because it implied that greater discipline was being sought, thus appealing to deeper desires for justice and security in the capitalist order. It was recognition that the problems of firms were problems for society, particularly when delicate class relations and expectations were at stake (even if not always explicitly recognised). As the 1980s unfolded, the literature on corporate governance began to flourish. No conscientious manager or board member could claim to be disinterested in the expression. Every top firm dispatched their leading counsel to the annual meetings of the ALI in order to shape the new meanings of the term. By uttering 'governance' one could show to others (both critics and sympathisers) that one was being proactive in acknowledging the need for 'business reforms' or, just simply, 'reforms'.

One can argue, therefore, to summarise, that the genesis and rethinking of the term 'governance' lies in management theory and the experimentation by corporate lawyers. It helped to respond to a particular legitimacy deficit – specifically, how to refine methods of controlling subjects within the American corporation. It did this through mobilising actors around a master frame of reference called 'corporate governance'. Yet as soon as one begins to talk about legitimacy and methods of legitimation in power relations, one sees how the term 'governance' is trying to do more that simply discipline agents in some recognisably firm fashion. On the contrary, 'governance' is frequently invoked to declare precisely the opposite and this is where this idea of 'post-bureaucracy' enters the stage.

III. Post-bureaucracy and 'governance'

Post-bureaucracy is a concept that has been formulated principally in management studies, organisation studies, and different areas of critical sociology within the past twenty years.[18] The paradigm of the so-called post-bureaucratic organisation contains a lot of claims (for some in the literature, far too many indeed), but in essence it states that the decentralised, non-hierarchical, fluid organisation is the model now and for the future. The claims of management authors in this literature, such as Tom Peters, is that this type of organisation operates on the basis of vertical and horizontal networking, mutual collaborative adjustment, and is guided by visions and shared

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[16] Walter Werner, 'Corporation Law in Search of Its Future', *Columbia Law Review*, 81 (1981), 8, 1611- 1666, quoted at 1613.
[17] Donald E. Schwartz (ed) *Commentaries on Corporate Structure and Governance* (Philadelphia: ALI- ABI, 1979).
[18] D. Osbourne and T. Gaebler, *Re-Inventing Government* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1992); Charles Heckscher and Anne Donnellon (eds), *The Post Bureaucratic Organization: New Perspectives on Organizational Change* (London: Sage, 1994); Chris Grey and Christina Garsten, 'Trust, Control and Post-Bureaucracy', *Organization Studies*, 22 (2001), 2, 229-250; and Phil Johnson, Geoffrey Wood, Chris Brewster and Michael Brookes, 'The Rise of Post-Bureaucracy: Theorists' Fancy or Organizational Praxis?', *International Sociology*, 24 (2009), 1, 37-61.

values. The ability of the organisation to enable movement and to empower workers, to give them autonomy, to give them space for creative expression is a central objective. In turn, it is argued that the mainstreaming of such a model – through connections, communications, and ties of trust – will bring efficiency savings and greater worker satisfaction. For some writers, the post-bureaucratic organisation appears not simply as a reality, but as an inevitable consequence of modernity. Above all, in Boltanski and Chiapello's critical examination, along with the repeated emphasis on the need for workers to show a cooperative spirit, they find that the most desirable organisational form is the 'project'.[19] It is project organisation and management that will energise and mobilise people just for the period of time necessary to complete a new assignment, before granting them leave to go off, through other networks, to explore new projects.[20]

When one reads these accounts of the so-called post-bureaucratic organisation, complete with the attention to disaggregated networks, flows, empowerment, and diffuse responsibility one sees how the term 'governance' fits right-at-home with these types of ideas. Now, this is not to say, once again, that management theory did the groundwork and is the sole source of inspiration for how 'governance' was picked up by multiple users in the wider political world. The processes of dissemination and appropriation are extremely complex and resist easy summarisation. But the influential of this type of thinking and how it culturally diffuses into all sorts of fields and institutional environments, how such ideas become sedimented into the minds of people, cannot be downplayed. By way of an example, one can turn to identify (relatively) transparent sites of legitimation, in particular, prominent institutions that are tasked with organising political ideas.

The attachment of 'good' to 'governance' associated with the World Bank is clearly very important in this respect and the story of how it conceptually grappled with 'governance' is germane to my argument. One can highlight here how the use of the term can be understood through the lens of post-bureaucracy. 'Governance' came to the Bank in response to an emerging critique which had both external and internal sources. The roots of the term are found, in the first order, with the early resistance to the implementation of neoliberal policies. In this respect, we move on from the original wave which inspired the use of the term – the so-called 'crisis of governability' in the 1970s – to a second wave: the critique of the neoliberal counter-revolution. Many of these forms of opposition in the 1980s were often very timid; in some respects, almost paralysed, as the terms of the political debate changed rapidly in ways favourable to the privileged. But this did not mean that Bank apparatchiks had switched off their political radars. On the contrary, with the advance of such an ambitious orthodox agenda, they were wise to be sensitive to any form of criticism, no matter how weak or disorganised. As even a cursory glance of the results of adjustment programs across Africa and Latin America illustrated, no economic project (conceptually bracketed as 'divorced' from politics) was likely to be sustainable unless minimum conditions of state legitimacy, social order, and institutional capacity were present. The critics – found within Southern government ministries, on the streets of major cities, and a little later, the Northern academy and

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[19] Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.
[20] Also see, in particular, Damian E. Hodgson, 'Project Work: The Legacy of Bureaucratic Control in the Post-Bureaucratic Organization, *Organization*, 11 (2004), 1, 81-100.

the 'development industry' – began arguing that the state had been unnecessarily 'hollowed out', that this impeded the development process, and that such conditions were caused by Bank policy prescriptions. The economy was embedded in society, they claimed, not the other way around.[21]

It is in this context that the 1989 Bank report, *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth*, should clearly be read as an 'official' reaction to this growing legitimacy problem. For the first time in a public document, the word 'governance' was mentioned, in relation to a 'crisis' which was linked to the 'litany of Africa's development problems'.[22] Shrouded in orthodox commonplaces, it was difficult to decipher if the Bank believed that its own actions had in any way caused or perpetuated such problems.[23] But the report's authors were adamant on one matter: 'political legitimacy and consensus' were not after-thoughts in the process of sustainable development, but 'preconditions'. What was needed in the space of Sub-Saharan Africa, they argued, was 'political renewal' and the creation of a 'pluralistic institutional structure'.[24] In short, 'governance' was defined in this context as 'the exercise of political power'.[25] But how did this talk fit with the Bank's Articles of Agreement which officially forbid it from 'doing politics'? At this point, the Bank did not have any easy or predictable answers because it had yet to conceptually clarify the term in its own institutional (hydra) head. Thus, if 'governance' was to become a new received idea, the most sensitive technicians knew that it would be wise to check with the lawyers first.

It is at this point that Bank's General Counsel, Ibrahim Shihata, steps in to play a very important role in expounding and codifying what 'governance' could entail. In a long and carefully justified statement to the Executive Directors in 1991, he argued that '"governance," in the sense of good *order and discipline* in the management of a country's resources, is a relevant matter for the Bank's activities'.[26] But clarification was certainly needed, as Shihata expressed it, above all because 'perceptions, coupled at times with vague statements, within and outside the Bank, have tended to give the impression that all issues of governance in borrowing countries may have become part and parcel of the Bank's concern, if not its direct business'.[27] As a consequence,

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[21] Examples of forms of criticism that Bank officials would have recognised include: the opposition to structural adjustment policies by African states in the Abuja Declaration (1987) and the Khartoum Declaration (1988); frequent episodes of social protest and mobilisation by workers in many countries ('the IMF riots'); the prominent activism of US-based environmental groups, such as the Environmental Defense Fund (as explored by Robert Wade); and important publications, such as Giovanni Andrea Cornia, Richard Jolly, Frances Stewart (eds) *Adjustment with a Human Face*: *Volume I: Protecting the Vulnerable and Promoting Growth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[22] World Bank, *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth: A Long-Term Perspective Study* (Washington D.C.: World Bank, 1989), 60.

[23] The Bank was careful not to sell every structural adjustment program in every country as a success story. At times it noted that it may have been 'too optimistic' about the capacity of governments to implement its dictates. See World Bank, *Interim Report on Adjustment Lending* (Washington D.C., World Bank, 1988).

[24] World Bank, *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth*, quoted at 6, 61.

[25] Ibid., 60. Italics added.

[26] Ibrahim Shihata, 'Issues of "Governance" in Borrowing Members – The Extent of Their Relevance Under the Bank's Articles of Agreement', in Ibrahim Shihata, *The World Bank Legal Papers* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 2000), 247. The legal memorandum was originally submitted by Shihata to the Executive Directors on April 11, 1991. Italics added.

[27] Ibid., 254.

his initial formulation was still very tentative when compared to where the Bank would later take the term. Shihata argued that 'governance' was being studied and shaped if it involved areas such as civil service, legal and administrative 'reform', *as long as such* programs could be linked to 'economic development', the Bank's core remit. The notion was helpful at this point in terms of managing the tense (and supposedly dichotomous) relationship between what was called 'economic' affairs and what was considered the domain of 'politics'. Thus, to put it another way, one could argue that Shihata, as the Bank's 'chief consecrator', was searching for the means to build the symbolic power of 'governance' (to make it a recognisable 'universal' term), but this could only begin by drawing upon the existing legitimacy found in the Bank's older categories, classifications, and missions. Following this reshaping of what was deemed legitimate, however, other analysts had a freer hand to evaluate and re-evaluate the term.[28] Very quickly, many of these agents sensed how 'governance' could be extremely useful to a range of agendas, both 'discursively and programmatically'.[29]

By 1996, under the direction of James Wolfensohn, the term came to be associated with the rule of law, government effectiveness, and controlling corruption. By the end of the decade, another three 'dimensions' had been added under the same rubric: voice and accountability, political stability and the absence of violence, and regulatory quality.[30] In recent years, the Bank has settled on these six categories and has become keen to demonstrate that this nebulous concept – which is presently linked to the 'traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised' – can be ordered and refined.[31] Or, to put it another way, 'governance' from the Bank's position can (or should) be ambiguous, but not too ambiguous. Importantly, ideas about country 'ownership', 'autonomy' in policy formulation, and 'cooperative partnerships' have become intimately bound to this agenda called 'governance'. 'Strengthening the governance environment', in the words of Wolfensohn, means 'Enabling the country to be in the driver's seat, which requires strong partnership among government, at all levels, including representative institutions, civil society, the private sector, donors, international agencies and other development actors'.[32]

How could one critique this apparent movement towards post-bureaucratic forms of organisation under the banner of 'governance'? Three points can be noted. First, one needs to return to history again and ask where did it come from? As the name suggests, 'post-bureaucracy' is defined by what it not. That is, to draw upon Boltanski

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[28] For example, in 1991 the Bank devoted part of its Annual Development Economics Conference to the theme of 'good governance'. This was later followed by the publication of World Bank, *Governance and Development* (Washington D.C.: World Bank, 1992); as well as important interventions by Pierre Landell-Mills, Senior Policy Advisor for Africa. See Pierre Landell-Mills, 'Governance, Cultural Change, and Empowerment', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 30, 4 (1992), 543-567.

[29] Graham Harrison, *The World Bank and Africa: The Construction of Governance States* (London: Routledge, 2004), 4. Also see Rita Abrahamsen, *Disciplining Democracy: Development Discourse and Good Government in Africa* (London: Zed Books, 2000).

[30] See Daniel Kaufmann, Aart Kraay, and Massimo Mastruzzi, *Governance Matters VI: Governance Indicators for 1996-2006*, July 2007 (World Bank: Washington D.C., July 2007).

[31] World Bank, Governance and Anti-Corruption, 'What is Our Approach to Governance?', < http://web.worldbank.org>.

[32] James Wolfensohn, 'The Other Crisis', Address to the Annual Meeting of the World Bank, October 6, 1998 (Washington D.C.: World Bank).

and Chiapello again, this idea of a reaction to bureaucracy arises in response to a legitimacy crisis in the previous spirit of capitalism which stressed hierarchy, immobility, and authoritarian methods of organisation. One can only understand the saliency of 'governance' – and the meanings and values that are attached to it – through seeing how the term is informed by a negative construction. The current spirit of capitalism enters the picture during the 1980s to reject hierarchy as a form of domination and advance competition and permanent change as the presumed 'inevitable' conditions of modernity. To recall an earlier point, capitalism has accomplished this through drawing upon the pre-existing legitimacy found in ideas about community. Most importantly, it took all those demands for 'freedom' that arose during the countercultural critique – as in, claims for national independence, desires for social protest and recognition, or critiques on the behaviour of dictatorial corporate bosses – and then began a process of twisting them and, ultimately, claiming them for itself. Every reference to 'post-bureaucratic' forms of organisation in our current spirit is thus an implicit recognition of what came before: that is, the social struggle over demands for 'freedom' and 'justice' and, in turn, the incorporation of those demands into new strategies of accumulation.

Second, at the same time we have to issue a warning which only critical analysis will adequately sound: do not be distracted by this ideology. The real concern of the researcher should be in the operative ideology that is working in practice, in particular fields, in particular institutional settings. In this regard, as a substantial critical literature on the Bank and on development relations in general as tried to argue – be it from Rita Abrahamsen, Graham Harrison, or David Craig and Doug Porter – power has not dissolved in arrangements of a post-bureaucratic-inspired 'good governance'.[33] On the contrary, forms of bureaucracy – hierarchical appraisal, acquiescence to authority, strict rules, regulations, and codes – have in many cases not gone anywhere. Depending upon the empirical context, we may have something that looks or is represented as post-bureaucratic, but may in reality to be nothing of this sort or, alternatively, be something of a hybrid between bureaucracy and post-bureaucracy. The essential task for the researcher is not to be taken for a ride by such folk concepts, but use analytical concepts in part to critique those very folk concepts. Third, and related, appeals to 'governance' may in fact be encouraging or enabling more intense and sophisticated forms of control on the part of already privileged actors. In this sense – and this message needs to be told particularly to some researchers in the field of 'global governance' – power is not zero-sum. The legitimation of frameworks called 'governance' may in fact be encouraging subtle shifts in relations of political responsibility through beliefs, but not all actors may be able to challenge or acknowledge such shifts.

[33] Rita Abrahamsen, *Disciplining Democracy: Development Discourse and Good Government in Africa* (London: Zed Books, 2000); Graham Harrison, *The World Bank and Africa: The Construction of Governance States* (London: Routledge, 2004); Graham Harrison, 'The World Bank, Governance and Theories of Political Action in Africa', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 7 (2005), 240-260; and David Craig and Doug Porter, *Development Beyond Neoliberalism?: Governance, Poverty Reduction, and Political Economy* (London: Routledge, 2006).

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are three points that can be made. First, although the discussion has separated out the genesis of the term 'governance' into themes of control and post-bureaucracy, it is important to note how these meanings intertwine in social practice. The modern revival of the term begins with problems faced by American firms in the context of the broader crisis of governability. 'Corporate governance' becomes a watchword to manage the perception of unruly behaviour and, in particular, to discipline the expectations of senior managers. But the concept of 'governance' has proved remarkably adaptable as a way to enhance methods of political mobilisation in multiple contexts, across time and territories. The notion has become deeply attractive for many because it appears to tap into, on the one hand, anti-authoritarian sentiments and, on the other hand, the desire for individual autonomy and creativity in capitalist relations. For powerful agents, perhaps the 'ideal' environment involves a recognition – on the part of as many political actors as possible, both rivals and allies – that 'governance' means a *readiness to change* the institutions and practices of authority, but that this can be accomplished without substantial exercises of power, nor against the will of any actor. Such conditions are, however, rarely met, thus revealing how conflict is inherent in power relations, even if it passes as implicit. This leads, in turn, to a second concluding point: how 'governance' is often put to work to 'fix' problems of legitimacy in political relations; that is, it becomes a valuable word when original meanings of legitimacy are scrutinised and critiqued. But I have suggested that analytical problems arise when the term obfuscates and blurs the sources of power and responsibility in a given social field, leading one to speculate if alternative concepts may actually be more precise and meaningful. In particular, one needs to focus on how 'governance' may be deployed by powerful agents in their efforts to minimise or avoid accusations of 'arbitrariness' or 'bias'. Third, the paper has advanced an historicist approach for understanding the relationship between power and language. In broad terms, this exercise is aimed at unravelling the particularities contained within such apparently 'universal' terms, including the problematisation of lost histories. Inspiration for these enquiries could be found in many different locations. One may even be bold and, in confronting any notion of 'governance' that falls silent about its own tradition, adopt the Flaubertian attitude: be critical and 'thunder against it'.