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This perspective critically examines the global alignment of good governance as a crusader complex to ideologically universalise Western market-oriented institutions across the South. With the case of Sub-Saharan Africa, the essay interrogates the historical, sociopolitical, and economic implications of imposing one-size-fits-all governance standards without sufficient contextualisation. The political settlements approach is called to recognise diverse power structures and local realities. Scanning South Africa, Mauritius, Senegal, and Botswana, it demonstrates the necessity of tailoring governance to specific contexts with pragmatic political settlements.

1. Main

Within the realm of international development, the sermon of neoliberal ideals and standards appears transformative and disruptive to align political and economic governance in the Global South and East with the Northern and Western, such as so-called 'good governance'. Good governance and its neoliberal doctrine constitute a paradigm to institutionalise a

market-oriented policy in global transformation since the 1970s (Fourcade-Gourinchas & Babb, 2002; Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009), circumscribing the alignment with liberalisation and deregulation (Jones, 2012; Chouhy, 2019; Gerstle, 2022). However, our perspective of critical development studies argues that an essence of the good governance alignment seems, in obedience to Kempadoo (2015), a 'white chivalrous crusade' across the 'developing' East and South—in a sacrosanct moral sense of salvation—liberating the South and East from savage (pp. 14–8). The analogy may be marginally radical but impressive. Neoliberalism, to liberate each individual and society from the domineering control by 'developing' states, is carrying on political and intellectual crusades against heresy—for a Euro-Americentric free-market standardisation over the diverse contexts (Davies, 2013; Pinson & Journel, 2016; Simone, 2020). Hence, our perspective critiques the Euro-Americentric crusade of one-size-fits-all good governance under the guise of apolitical institutional adjustments indoctrinated by international development institutions (IDIs).

The perspective critiques the continuity of a 'crusader complex' with a continued crusade where the Euro-American powers, to civilise the savage 'other', impose their standardised governance without sufficiently considering the sociopolitical contexts of recipient states. Crusades were historically religious wars called and backed by Western European Christians since 1096. The wars were to liberate their Holy Land against Muslims with a belief in Islam. From military Knights Templar to non-military IDIs—the form of crusader complex, a delusion that one believes they are fighting for a sacrosanct moral, survives hitherto. During the contemporary neoliberal era, there is still a belief in a universal opinion of human society. Neoliberalism, likened to a modern crusade, proposes to free the globe from the governance heresy across South America, Southeast Asia, and Subsahara (Bullard et al., 1998; Kohl, 2002; Andrews, 2008; Gray & Khan, 2010, p. 339; Drinot, 2011; Stojanović et al., 2016; Drinot, 2011; Gerstle, 2022, p. 42). For instance, Vietnam was idealised as a battlefield for a liberal war to bestow religiously Euro-Americentric economic and sociopolitical ideals through the dollars and military intervention—ironically, with dissembled corruption and inequality (McDougall, 1997, pp. 180–95). The Asian financial crisis challenges the relevance of IDIs, as a universal neoliberal policy exacerbated market volatility and economic contraction, amplifying the devastating impact on workers, peasants,

and all vulnerable communities (Bøås, 1998; Bullard et al., 1998). Historical evidence refutes the crusader complex and calls for contextualised and resilience-oriented governance patterns (Schmidt, 2014).

Whereas it acknowledges the strengths and edges of neoliberalism, this perspective argues against the technocratic alignment of good governance over locally-embedded praxes. Without its market-oriented economic policy, neoliberalism remains a vague and vacuous analytical category (Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009; Chouhy, 2019; Bernhard et al., 2020). However, the institutionalisation of state-markets policy operates in ways that are relatively detached from economic affairs (Fourcade-Gourinchas & Babb, 2002; Acemoglu et al., 2003; Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009). On the contrary, neoliberalism exists on a sociopolitical moral to free individuals, elevating liberty as an inherent right of individuals (Gerstle, 1997; 2022, p. 7). It entrusts a mission envisions Europe and North America to head the neoliberal world, with missionary IDIs indoctrinating the 'developing' regions with the donor-dominated 'good governance' paradigm (Doornbos, 1995; Doornbos, 2001; Addink, 2019, p. 4). Over decades, IDIs have propagated the technocratic paradigm of structural adjustments in the South, which is standardised and stipulated by the North rather than South recipient states (ibid., p. 93–4, 101). In praxis, this paradigm standardisation, drifting away from contextual realities, has (re)politicised adjustments (Mkandawire, 2007). According to Polanyi (2001), the alignment of sociopolitical, intellectual, and ideological forms with a one-size-fits-all doctrine disrupts the diversity of human society profoundly; in fact, the neoliberal crusade disrupts diversity by imposing market-first institutional ideals that marginalise local culturally-embedded informal institutions. Concisely, neoliberal good governance is embedded in neoliberal capitalism, not naturally universal all over the globe (Doornbos, 2001, p. 96).

Without judicious contextualisation to sociopolitical realities—historical legacies and informal institutions—neoliberal doctrine risks being counterproductive. Therefore, our perspective advocates for a contextualised approach to governance that respects the diversity across civilisations, alternative democratic praxes, and locally-resilient patterns. Fortunately, the pragmatic framework of political settlements mediates the neoliberal good governance, dismantling its Euro-Americentrism and transforming it to be realistic in the South and East. With Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) as a case, good governance is essentially an imperative

policy toolkit rather than a doctrine. SSA states, to which other South states are akin, must consider their sociopolitical realities and tailor specific components since overall good governance is never a panacea. Accordingly, mediating neoliberal governance ought to leverage political settlements to analyse and centre on well-contextualised governance.

2. Good Governance as Neoliberal Crusade

Theoretically, the good governance agenda functions as a technocratic toolkit of procedures for SSA states and civil societies. This toolkit indicates its efficiency to enhance transparency, accountability, and responsivity within state-markets systems, of which poorly-governed SSA states are short (Mkandawire 2007; Gisselquist 2012; Sundaram & Chowdhury 2012). These procedures establish independent judiciary and unambiguous regulations to ensure fair, responsible market distribution of resources (Gray & Khan 2010; Addink 2019, pp. 5–7, 91–6). The distribution benefits from democracy and inclusivity of communities in socio-economic and political governance (ibid., pp. 96–9). Consequently, their enhancement and establishment mitigate the risks of corruption and mismanagement in SSA, with a representative democratic government for the populace (Rothstein 2011; Gisselquist 2012; Rose-Ackerman 2017). Fuelled by this representation, some SSA countries stimulated economic development; by contrast, absent accountable and responsive institutions, SSA backward economies failed in development via structural adjustments (World Bank 1994). For instance, leading IDIs, including the World Bank (2000), defined the poor governance of particular African states in the 1980s as ‘unrepresentative government’ and non-market economy (Farrington 2009, p. 249). It was true that in SSA areas, ‘poor’ unrepresentative institutions—with the missing rule of law, personalised hereditary power, and corruption (Bøås 1998; Weiss 2000)—obstructed the efficiency maximisation of state-markets systems. Therefore, by prioritising targeted procedures, SSA states could liberate themselves from poor governance institutions, and unlock their full potential for sustainable prosperity.

The SSA states equipped with good governance institutions have exemplified how less-developed economies obtain sustainable prosperity by specific priorities of procedures. The limited state capacity necessitates specific targets, whereas overall good governance

proves untransferrable. Due to inherent limitations in administrative capacity, academics decompose governance into various components to pursue targeted improvements (Farrington 2009, p. 251; Gisselquist 2012; Rotberg 2014). The Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) unfolds Africa's good governance in four components: (a) security & rule of law, (b) participation, rights & inclusion, (c) foundations for economic opportunity, and (d) human development (Mo Ibrahim Foundation 2022). This IIAG is a representative, comprehensive collection of data for governance assessment.

According to IIAG, South Africa made strides in overall governance over the past decade, ranking within the top five in both economic opportunities and civil rights indicators. The enhancement of good governance in South Africa fostered people's democratic participation in state-markets interactions and established a relatively transparent, accountable government (Fagbadebo & Ile, 2023). Naturally, targeted priorities directed South Africa to lag behind in education and social protection, compared with its success in socio-economic development. Notably, the public perceived South Africa's governance less favourably (IIAG ranking 24 out of 37). This perception prompted a phase of governance crisis (ibid., pp. 6–9). The essay does not intend to critique the imbalance in South Africa's pursuit of good governance, since imbalance is merely the flip side of targeted priorities. The pragmatic experience of South Africa holds transferability across the entire Africa in demographic and socio-economic aspects, as evidenced by Botswana, Ghana, and Namibia (Acemoglu et al. 2003; Lewin 2011; Botlhale 2017; Signé & Gurib-Fakim 2019; Nwogwugwu 2020). Our examples of context-component governance in Africa exhibit strengths and shortcomings in specific indicators. Similarly, outside of SSA, the IIAG indicates a lack of well-built inclusive societies in North Africa, notwithstanding high levels of human development and economic growth.

For the exception, Mauritius maintained the highest score in overall governance, boasting the most neoliberal institution and per-capita GDP. However, the diversified economy of Mauritius relied on tourism and financial services supported by sugar industries (Carroll & Carroll, 1999; Goldsmith, 2007). Whilst its prudent economic policy is worthy of emulation, it seems incapable of being replicated in all SSA regions and beyond. The limitation of replication stems from Mauritius being a free, beautiful island. It benefits from

historical and natural beauty, for whether attracting wealthy settlers or advancing financial and tourism sectors—the experience of such a prosperous island economy, a tax haven, might lack replicability. Additionally, the state size affects sociopolitical and economic governance. Compact states like Mauritius, Luxembourg, and Singapore exemplify the role of a compact governance pattern in economic growth and political stability, attracting investment and specialising in specific sectors. However, some others such as Tuvalu, East Timor, Djibouti, and Bhutan struggle with financial deficits and somewhat social instability, with evident constraints suggesting that small size can also be disadvantageous, especially without any resource endowment or strategic edge. Thus, the impact of size on good governance also highlights the need for a tailored approach to contextualised governance and development. Hence, for the overarching framework of good governance, the relative success of emerging African economies mostly depends on accomplishments in specific components within this framework, instead of overall success in one fell swoop.

Although good governance fosters transparency, accountability, and efficient resource management, naturally, this essay never suggests that the states analysed above with particularities are flawless in all aspects of good governance. For instance, deficiencies in human development around democratic participation (Adetula, 2011, p. 15) and insecurity from citizens' perceptions of inadequate quality of public services (Fagbadebo & Ile, 2023, pp. 7–10), persisted in South Africa. Moreover, our exemplification rejects the assertion that any African nations have absolutely structured 'good' institutions (Carroll & Carroll, 1999). Our perspective illustrates that: targeted reforms towards specific components, during given historical stages, indeed facilitated improvements in good governance over further periods. Not confined to South Africa, the achievements extended to Botswana, Ghana, and others (Lewin, 2011; Botlhale, 2017; Nwogwugwu, 2020). The institutional benefits of good governance include reduced corruption, increased investor confidence, and improved public services. Due to the benefits, certain states enhanced economic growth, social cohesion, and political stability. Such successes spotlight the centrality of specific governance components as a procedural catalyst for development in well-selected spheres, transferrable across SSA contexts.

Nevertheless, academic and policy debates increasingly consider the effects of politics

and political inferences in development praxis with more attention from donors and scholars. This essay clarifies that, strictly and scrupulously, during specific historical periods, good governance procedures catalysed prosperity. In fact, due to strong political impact coupled with socio-cultural norms and institutional legacies behind politics (Mkandawire, 2007; Gray & Khan, 2010), even a government long praised as sustainable might also confront the risks of being captured.

3. Governance Scarcely Pragmatic in Africa

Considering the components of contextualised 'good governance' is more pragmatic than paradigmatic. With available criticisms, real-world governance is intrinsically elastic, nullifying the neoliberal doctrine. Pragmatism implies that diverse states standardise divergent priorities with the elasticity of sociopolitical development (Doornbos 2001, pp. 95–7; Andrews 2008; De Herdt & Olivier de Sardan 2015). Focused on diverse SSA regions, real-world governance ought to reconcile African traditions and institutions with IDIs modern expectations (Mkandawire 2007, p. 680). However, many SSA states struggle to implement the good governance agenda, challenged by unattainable assumptions of Western-formalised standards. This struggle results fundamentally from the conceptual disparities between the socio-culturally diverging Africa and the convergent Euro-Americentrist paradigm, nuanced or significant. Due to colonial history, certain states indeed possess nuanced conditions yet conducive to replicating Western institutions, but the replication is significantly beyond the reach of others. Furthermore, Ake (1993), Wiredu (1996), and Sappleton (2021) theoretically question the transplantation of Western-democratic political institutions. In other words, development studies appreciate diverse worldviews and critically acknowledge the possibility that democracy might achieve vastly varied pathways and unorthodox results (Ake 1993, p. 244; Sappleton 2021)—otherwise, failure is highly likely. Therefore, this essay argues for an effectively SSA-localised good governance, not simply normative procedures imposed by IDIs. But in reality, while IDIs and states believe their procedures apply the term 'good governance', different standards, constructed upon sociopolitical and institutional contexts in recipient regions, trigger a discrepancy with neoliberal ideals (Coulon, 1988; Nanda, 2006;

Gray & Khan, 2010). For instance, the separation of legislative, executive, judiciary, and administrative powers differentiates the neoliberal democracy from others, whereas realistic governance ought not to dogmatise this priority. Learning the North's good patterns is to constitute locally-resilient governance components suitable to their contexts.

Without localised praxes of democracy, good governance might be unsustainable. Disclosing Senegal's presidential election as an example, African development shaped by Western IDIs might encounter dilemmas. Since gaining independence in 1960, Senegal has been a member of the most stable, peaceful, and affluent emerging African economies, yet it recently grapples with governance problems (Villalón 2004; Mo Ibrahim Foundation 2022; Carson & Sany 2024). From March 2021, Senegal witnessed widespread protest marches, not only opposing the imprisonment and trial of opposition party leader Ousmane Sonko, but also fighting for people's livelihoods affected by public health crises (PSC 2021). Initially, the protests arose from people's perception that President Macky Sall controlled the judiciary, exploiting the judicial conviction of political opponents. Such control diminished the socio-political participation of civil society, exacerbating the drawbacks of personalised authoritarianism (Mbow 2008; Dahl & Soss, 2014). Subsequent defamation-based power abuse confirmed this judgement—at the end of 2023, the authorities of Macky Sall dissolved Sonko's Pastef Party (RFI, 2023). Besides, President Sall unexpectedly postponed the election scheduled for April 2024 to December 15 (Carson & Sany, 2024). At this point, contrary to Western-democratic good governance, public institutions no longer strive to coordinate public interests but rather serve the authority. This contrariness requires SSA's good governance to sustainably localise itself beyond the Western-style political system incapable of implementation guarantee, such as the presidency in Senegal.

The realities of Senegal's governance crisis and the case studies above compel this essay to question the sustainability of the Western-style system in SSA through the separation of the presidency, judiciary, and parliament. This scrutiny of Western democracy proceeds because, despite Senegal's leadership deploying a range of undemocratic means, they fundamentally strive for the presidency—a president being one-third of Western-democratic form, but in Senegal, the elite networks wield this form to exploit people and resources (Galvan, 2001; Mbow, 2008; Kelly, 2012). Those ruling coalitions in less-developed states

are essentially clientelist factions (Gray & Khan, 2010; Gray, 2018). Allen (1995) suggests that the power (re)concentration in SSA is a response to the instability of clientelism. Clientelism features persistent in contemporary African politics, where contenders exchange favours to establish reliable patronage networks. In Senegal, in addition to material and cultural desires, citizens expect the president to acknowledge their dignity and identity (Di John, 2011; Klaus et al., 2023). Presidential contenders trade acknowledgement to exchange backing electoral support. This clientelism might derive from local worldviews and institutional legacies—due to historical conflicts among lineages and races, traditional SSA social interactions centred on free discussions until consensus (Wiredu, 1996). This consensus implies compromise and coordination between negotiating parties, but Western-democratic systems undermine this conciliatory consensus politics. In Africa, certain ethnic groups are numerically and politically marginalised, so Western-style majority-rule democracy inevitably excludes these minorities, even with Western formal safeguards in place (Wiredu, 1996). Eventually, the president's control supplanted discussing parties as the primary distributors of patronage resources (Mbow, 2008; Di John, 2011). In short, with Senegal's elections as evidence, our perspective questions the Western-standardised formal institutions, and reveals that such centrality, not belonging to Africa's pre-existing traditions, inherently suppresses localised informal democracies (Coulon, 1988; Wiredu, 1996; Sappleton, 2021). The suppression hinders further democratisation.

4. Contextualised Governance with Political Settlements

Concerning challenges of Western-standardised forms versus localisation, mediators with good governance contextualise more procedures suitable for local communities. The framework of political settlements is the sustainable, pragmatic approach to mediating Western-formalised paradigms. The operation dynamics of each institution depend on the response of organisations functioning within the institution, and the power distribution within organisations determines the response (Khan, 2010). Just as in Senegal, the presidency transplants Western-democratic standards, yet its operations are eroded, even manipulated, by power relations. Political settlements combine power distribution and institutions, wherein

informal institutions produce interests following power relations. Power distribution refers to relative control over resource allocation contested by organisations (ibid., p. 1), dependent on informal socio-economic factors (Gray & Khan, 2010; Gray, 2018, p. 61). Simultaneously, our socio-economic understanding begins with a rational reinterpretation of the transitions and transformations in different countries, rigorously combining historical, political, social, and economic knowledge of change (Khan, 2010; 2012). This reinterpretation navigates sources of interactive norms, and political settlements recognise pre-existing and constant structures since power roots outside of formal institutions (Moore, 2010; Gray 2018, p. 55). The structures of informal networks function as clientelism, and Gray (ibid., pp. 56–60) indicates clientelism as a historical phenomenon affected by material and cultural elements. To grasp the challenges in SSA, economic and political structures thereby necessitate good governance to transcend, from property rights and market failure cure, to more informal socio-cultural considerations (Gray & Khan, 2010; Khan, 2012; Cummings, 2024; Xu, 2024). Transcending the vague panacea of overall governance, political settlements elucidate specific driving forces of economic transformation (Gray & Khan, 2010; Gray 2018, pp. 75–6). This framework mediates localised development solutions by articulating governance components at which states target.

The framework of political settlements mediates an understanding of local informal power distribution. It pragmatically advances critical reflections from academia and policy praxes. As for available critiques, good governance might file an unhelpful agenda due to its vagueness in positioning ‘right’ institutions (Andrews, 2008; Stojanović et al., 2016; Grindle, 2017; Amo-Agyemang, 2024). At this juncture, political settlements rightly break free from the ‘too vague’ elasticity, dissect socio-political legacies, and localise the global development agenda to mediate pragmatic institutions and implementation strategies (Amo-Agyemang, 2024). Practically, flexible institutions underpin sustainable governance aspirations of adaptability and transferability. The flexibility could maximise indigenous cooperation, coordination, or adjustment throughout institutional arrangements rightly based on the people. Sustainable aspirations target the components of good governance following people’s priorities. In other words, this involves communities in building their perceived central tasks. For instance, if a community prioritises leadership authority, its culture entails reliable,

accountable leaders to promote governance efficiency. Therefore, IDIs should not vigorously advocate decentralisation but aim at accountability to construct reliable leadership. This envisioned scenario is clear and persuasive, although real-world situations differ but share similarities. For example, Botlhale (2017) argues for maintaining a developmental state in Botswana, even amidst gradual democratisation. Botswana's socio-economic development heavily counts on the determined developmental elite, relative autonomy, and competent bureaucracy. In essence, the developmental state is the cornerstone of Botswana's governance, shaping norms and cultures within the communities of Botswana since its independence from colonial rule in 1966—the fruits of development foster this normalised cultural identity with (in)formal power distribution of organisations. For Botswana, realistic good governance centres on transparency within its developmental state administrative systems instead of overemphasising the Western-style democracy. Besides, China grappled with corruption during its marketisation for its relatively authoritarian regime (Ang 2020). But as Rodrik (2007) elucidates, if China's governance prioritised decentralisation and anti-corruption, it would miss the exaggerated economic growth since its liberalisation in 1978, nor could it accomplish the world's greatest poverty reduction. The evidence of China and Botswana dispel concerns regarding good governance in South Africa and Senegal. This development agenda need not doggedly pursue Western-standardised 'right' institutions but pragmatically mediate global governance principles with local political settlements.

In praxis, political settlements contextualise a representative, acceptable policy toolkit to mediate a balance between socio-culturally sensitive decolonised localisation and efficient, technocratic Western standardisation (Amo-Agyemang, 2024). Remarkably, although academics and practitioners have long recognised such diverse African continent contains over fifty countries and thousands of social or ethnic groups (Coulon, 1988; Ake, 1993; Allen, 1995; Wiredu, 1996; Farrington, 2009; Gray & Khan, 2010; Nwogwugwu, 2020; Cummings, 2024; Xu, 2024), reflections should never assume it as obvious. It is indispensable to continually stress the diversity of African governance, behind which SSA development confronts numerous challenges. At this point, the pragmatic framework of political settlements refutes established Euro-Americentrist assumptions and mediates real-world governance effectiveness. This framework's pragmatism inspires progress along the pathways

of socio-cultural, historical, and institutional legacies. For instance, if one aims to surpass the institutions grappling with elite capture and perpetuated corruption over the long run, social change demands disruptive protests and revolutions, to disrupt entrenched power relations hindering good governance (Yarwood, 2016; Grindle, 2017). Conversely, if traditional norms of fairness and openness inherently mediate and govern the power in particular social worlds, good governance should not necessitate the transplantation of Western-standardised forms. At last, political settlements serve as the prism through which people comprehend recipient communities' history, mediating tailored modes of governance restructuring, radically or gradually.

In summary, the contextualised good governance reveals an evolving terminology of localisation versus neoliberal standardisation. The divergent governance components are separately central to (re)structuring the sociopolitical development in SSA, Africa, and all of the Global South. No consensus centres on the one-best-way doctrine through which states identify and achieve well-contextualised governance since African and Southern contexts are socioculturally diverse. Governance in South states must consider their historical legacies, informal institutions, and sociopolitical dynamics; our perspective argues for locally-resilient patterns and components according to their political settlements. Succinctly and ultimately, rather than sanctifying a one-size-fits-all neoliberal good governance with crusader complex, policymaking must mediate in local political settlements with vulnerable communities, civil society organisations, and informal institutions towards contextualised governance.

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