

# **Governance as it is: Critiquing Normative Epistemology**

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## Introduction

- Problematic of governance in BD captured by donor discourse around ‘good governance’
- Compares practices to western derived ideal type—subtractionism
- This is not analysis but judgement
- An idealist perspective rather than realist
- Not rooted in context and deep structures
- Need to approach governance ‘as it is’ through more historical, legacy and structural lens
- In other words move beyond the limits of normative epistemology
- Universalism/relativism issue

# Navigating Ethical Dilemmas

- Paradox discourse: ‘good’ governance necessary for development, so how to explain development when governance is ‘bad’
- Fallacy: unless ‘good’ governance part of definition of development (therefore tautology), when has a society ‘developed’ with good governance as a precondition?
- Is analysis possible without judgement: can we accept ‘good enough governance’?
- Does a relativist stance imply endorsing bad practices: e.g. violence, arbitrary, absence of law, corruption?
- Is it blind on means if other ends are delivered?
- Can democracy be suspended?
- Can governance analysis avoid being teleological?
- Is governance analysis inherently evaluative?
- Can analysis of state-society problematic be value-free?
- To understand is not to endorse

# Origins of Bourgeois Liberalism and the Normative Benchmark

- Where does notion of ‘good’ come from? North Atlantic political philosophy: rights, freedoms, rule by consent, equitable treatment
- Universal propositions or western ethnocentric
- ‘Plato to NATO’: struggle to extend freedoms and rights over the arbitrary and divine state
- Linked to transition from feudal to mercantilist and market capitalism
- New forms of economic wealth from empire proliferated classes with claims
- The underpinning of western political philosophy: legitimacy of the state relies upon rule by consent and the mechanisms to create and maintain that consent.
- Elections, rights based governance, thus equity (for some) before the law—nb initially only for those having a stake (i.e. property)—hence bourgeois in evolving forms
- Doctrine of liberal-democratic pluralism (ldp)
- For many, still a myth

## Post-colonial and ‘development’ discourse

- Post-colonial vocabulary of governance via problematics such as: accountability, transparency, corruption, probity, rent-seeking, participation, developmental state, failed states, authoritarian states, democratic deficit, ‘good’ governance, rights and correlative duties, limited access states, civil society, social mobilization, social capital, moral imperatives, incentives, management and admin training for competence, dynastic politics, doorstep conditions, separation of powers for checks and balances).
- ‘Drivers for change’ masquerading as political economy—so how can negative drivers be changed for ‘good’ means.
- Strong normative discourse—de-contextualized from the real circumstances of the centre as well as the periphery, and contrasted to the real history of haphazard development-west and east, north and south.
- Is this prevailing discourse the correct lens through which to conduct analysis of what is, why and how?

## The subtraction fallacy and bourgeois illusion

- Challenge: to develop intellectual equipment to analyse **what is**, and avoid the analytic fallacy of normative subtractionism which just identifies shortfalls from **what ought to be** —an unwarranted filter/lens
- Identifying shortfalls from a de-contextualized ideal type polity is not the same as understanding that polity, which requires a process of institutional revelation, i.e. a Gramscian project
- Thus a search for a de-colonized political science
- Requires a recognition of post-colonial conditions and social inheritance/legacy without excusing authoritarian behaviour, rent-seeking and especially human rights abuses through being excessively relativist
- But significance of post-colonial legacy cannot be denied: transitioning agrarian, pastoral and extractive societies in which sub-national, primordial loyalties remain strong, reinforced by other legacies of illiteracy, poor education and strong clientelist dependencies on personalized patrons—all restricting open society cognitive horizons (and thus reducing prospect of a liberal hegemony)
- Of course nasty, venal leaders—but not the interesting question.
- Explanatory challenge to understand framework of choices faced by well-intentioned leaders seeking inclusive, equitable societies but who are induced to opt for **order** at any price over the risks of **democracy**

# The Marxian Challenge

- Challenge to the universality of the bourgeois state, i.e. the bourgeois self-delusion of legal equity
- Rather the state is the superstructural counterpart to unequal society, primarily defined in class terms (but horizontal inequalities too, prompting racist, ethnic minority and semitic othering) (materialist adaptation of Hegel, Bukharin's scientism)
- Even with bourgeois commodification of labour, slowly evolving capitalist state able to continue proletariat's exclusion, and even maintain elite interests left over from previous modes of production (e.g. landed property sources of wealth and power)
- Evidence for Marxian account of state-society remains strong as challenge to bourgeois myth of inclusive democracy—UK is a case in point, despite brief advances in ldp after each of the WWs, but think of the Tory suppression of trade unions and Tory active disorganization of the working class by Thatcher and her acolytes.
- Regulatory neglect: attack upon decent work, tolerance of delinquent banking, absence of planning constraints, blind eye to corrupt/rent-seeking supply chains
- Many other 'western'/modern examples, including v minorities: USA, Hungary, Serbia and other EU countries, and Russia, China and India, and of course Bangladesh itself (Murshid 2022)
- But!!!!

## The relative autonomy question

- Self-contradiction of the capitalist state—an institutional mirror to dominant classes, or some separation precisely to fulfil function of protecting and serving dominant class interests? (Hegelian position of state representing order over chaos)
- Without the rel aut state, dominant class its own worst enemy, failing to concede competing demands and potentially destroying its own profits, rents and privileges. ('need to concede': driver for western social policy.)
- State at one remove has freedom and legitimacy to extract concessions, while managing rules of protest and rationing access. (shades of Gramscian hegemony, subtle dialectics and interactive reciprocity between superstructure and structure)
- A position adopted by a generation of French Marxists re advanced capitalist societies-rejecting economism
- Now: post-colonial conditions? Consider Hamza Alavi (1972). Legacy of overdeveloped bureaucracy and military, competing propertied classes under transitioning mode of production requiring mediation, rapidly rising other classes and groups making claims for entry. For Alavi, rel aut was a special feature of the post-colonial state in contrast to advanced capitalist societies where the bourgeois illusion was more easily sustained in the popular imagination.
- Does this describe the core structural principle of 'governance as it is' in Bangladesh?



## The ideological instance—Gramsci and Althusser

- French Marxists modified simple economism (following Gramsci's critique, say, of Bukharin)
- Tools of coercion and violence disguised as legitimate monopoly of the state: unsustainable beyond immediate conjunctures
- Thus, crude dialectic of force/counter-force inherent contradiction for ruling elites
- Other means of control necessary through hegemonic management—hence the ideological instance
- State has to have sufficient freedom and space to represent specific interests as universal values
- Inequality has to be managed by illusion of equity in law—core principle of bourgeois pol phil and hegemony
- Maintenance of illusion incompatible with perpetual coercion and institutionalized violence
- Hence need for overarching ideological framing to bind in citizens--Gramsci's hegemony
- Ergo necessity of rel autonomy of the state in capitalist/unequal societies
- ? As societies move towards middle income and capitalism, does force have to recede in favour of ideology
- ?AL, liberation narrative, nation of small farmers—cohering function despite alternative facts re inequality

## Rationing access and inclusion—othering and labelling

- With LMIC status, more integration via rurbanisation, stronger sense of relative deprivation, more contestation
- State requirement to manage/ration access, esp to state linked rents and privileges
- Rationale for limiting access, esp under quasi zero-sum games (function of incompleting capitalism/market failures) needs to be self-evident to citizens to be effective
- Hence ideological tools of exclusionary othering, and processes of labelling to de-legitimize entitlements—such as undeserving poor—blaming the victims
- Hard to apply such labelling during rise of, and hitherto marginalized, aspirational classes
- Though continuation of othering more possible
- Such political management tools (political settlement) require relative autonomy of the state to maintain illusion of technique/science (bureaucratic rationality) as basis for rationing and determining entry/inclusion

## Understanding the ‘how’ of the state

- Role of labelling and authoritative classification (social sciences?) as part of ideological instance = management of society by means other than coercion and violence
- Awareness of this helps us understand the ‘how’ of the state not just the ‘what’ of the state—i.e. governance as it is
- The ‘what’ question is rather boring—state/dominant class nexus (though analysis of intra-elite contestation makes that more interesting)
- But if we are concerned about fairness and inclusivity, then we must pose the ‘how’ question—we must delve into the entrails of state-society. We need ‘deep reach’, esp during periods of transition when societies are caught between different and volatile sets of rules and expectations about consent
- Perhaps that volatility is encapsulated by the mix of dependent and autonomous routes to personal security for citizens
- What ‘games’ must citizens play within the institutional mix of options which combine/contrast: secrecy and transparency; arbitrariness and law; personal and impersonal; closed and open clientelism; dependency and liberty; short term gain for long term enslavement; insecurity/security of agency; pre-commodification, commodification and de-commodification?

## A four-domain institutional landscape

- Comparative welfare regimes framework for societies at different stage of state-society mix
- All people, whether citizens or not, obliged to negotiate an institutional landscape for wellbeing and security (along a dependent-autonomy scale). Need to conceptually disaggregate ‘political settlement’
- Parsimoniously that terrain comprises: state; market; community; and household. They are all problematic for different actors at different times.
- **State** can be: narrow or inclusive access, coercive and violently oppressive or rights based, upholding equity; corrupt or law abiding; personalized/impersonalised; and so on. What are the rules of engagement?
- **Market** can be segmented socially, imperfect and discriminatory, personalized thus only partially price determinant. What are the rules of engagement?
- **Community** (a deliberately wide category) combines informal localized relationships (full of hierarchy, reciprocity, alliance, conflict, belonging and marginalization, personalized networks) as well as more organized arrangements (social capital underpinning civil society). What are the rules of engagement?
- **Household** can be patriarchal/matriarchal; discriminatory of its members re age and gender.

## The permeability variable

- These 4 domains of human behaviour.
- Bourgeois pol phil largely sees these domains as separate from each other (impermeable), with discrete sets of rules, and thus able to compensate in wellbeing terms for weaknesses between them. Boundaries. State can regulate the market and households (de-familialisation as a principle of social policy). The market can offset arbitrary preferentialism of access to opportunities. Community can substitute for the state and household re allocation, access and equity. Household can be a site of moral retreat and moral proximity.
- But in most societies, this aspect of bourgeois pol phil is honoured in the breach—boundaries between these 4 domains are in varying degrees permeable
- Under strong permeability, high mutual contamination as rules are shared, prospect of compensation is lost, no countervailing forces
- To understand governance as it is, impermeability-permeability contrast within 4 domain landscape
- Are these familiar domains artificial constructs all embedded in a common set of rules connected to deep historical structures, or does story of social evolution allow for elements of disembeddedness and differentiation of rules of conduct and purpose to enable strangers to interact for their mutual benefit?

## Social dis-embeddedness and relative autonomy

- Impermeable-permeable domains: not another version of dichotomous, teleology
- ‘States representing dominant classes’ a feature of pre-modern as well as modern societies
- Indicates strong permeability and social embeddedness
- But if we accept necessity of state’s relative autonomy, then partially socially disembedded in order to serve economic power and inequality in which elites prevail, and requires impermeability to some extent
- To moderate self-destructive forces of capitalism (e.g. via anti-trust, and social policy)
- Many modern societies with ‘formal’ democratic arrangements and ‘independent’ bureaucracy in reality strongly socially embedded (circulation of elites, political class)
- And societies move at different times between degrees of permeability/impermeability—e.g. UK—less impermeable in present phase, and indeed less relatively autonomous
- Notion of steady linear progress towards ‘modern’ rule-bound impermeability, underpinned by relative autonomy cannot be relied upon

## Natural states—fragile, basic and mature

- Such reasoning sets the conditions for idea of natural states in North, Walls and Weingast *Violence and Social Orders* (2009)
- Sees state-society through core principle of access, contrasting limited and open
- Distinction between personality and social persona in the human composition of the state
- Negative permeability (dysfunctional blurring of boundaries) most strong in fragile natural states but continues in basic natural states where there is some codification away from arbitrariness
- ‘most basic natural state organisations are closely associated with the private individual identities of the elites who inhabit them. These organisations span the boundary of public and private, personal and social’ p73
- Very similar position to Gramsci, Althusser, Poulantzas and Alavi—political caste reproducing itself. Weber also.
- Sprawling political caste in Bangladesh with cross cutting ties which might offer ‘maturity’ by encouraging deals/compromises rather than violence—hence order, but not result of Hegel’s divine authority
- At same time, patronage of rulers, with personality not constrained by codification of rents and privileges
- Co-existence of forms: appearance of Weberian bureaucracy while democratic politics left trailing (Alavi)

## A complex equation

- Questionable democratic legitimacy; use of uniformed state apparatus—at a price-- to underpin relative autonomy ; state control over free speech; internalization of conflict via weakness of opposition and parachutists; deepening of rent-seeking down through society to cover parachute costs
- Economy: 70% is informal, supported by hollow lending; such uncertainty leading to capital flight and hiding of funds; impeding expansion of formal tax base while stimulating informal tax via corruption; detaches elites from returns to open economic activity and undermines accountability
- Challenge of moving from labour intensive economic model to higher levels of productivity, when rents available in present model, and any shift is labour displacing with volatile consequences
- Such contextual conditions help to explain growing inequalities despite or because of LMIC with implications for political stability
- Prospect of millenarian responses lead to suspicion of population (suppression of civil society, more reliance on intelligence gathering, manipulation of justice, and uniformed agencies)
- Shrinking of dialogic space



## Doorstep conditions

- How to move from limited to open access societies
- Shift required towards: impersonality and rule of law for elites; organisations in public and private spheres—perpetual in being independent of personalized elite control/patronage; incentive for elites to concede a controlled transition rather than lose the lot (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006); requires relative autonomy.
- How could this work in BD?
- Rise of new middle classes needs to be accommodated; threat from aspirant lower middle classes palpable; neo-Marxian window of peasant –led mobilisation via NGOs or other intermediaries now passed, contained by *mastaan* cascading new patrons with political contacts; is imminent shift from personality to social persona likely

# Conclusion

- Epistemological case for moving away from judgement to explanatory analysis to understand governance as is
- Non-economistic Marxian proposition about relative autonomy of the state is central
- Locating that proposition not just in Weberian sense of endogenous institutional reproduction of a caste (complicated by post-colonial heritage), but within habitus of power across socio-economy in which the pressures on retaining limited access have to be managed and conceded to sustain element of privilege awarded to property rather than work
- Awareness of deep structures sets parameters for how pressures are exercised on powerholders rather than surreal blandishments about civil society and accountability
- In adopting this approach, trying to avoid charge of ‘orientalism’ embodied in normative subtractionism
- Thus need to focus upon ‘how’ of the state, not just ‘what’ of the state
- Some parallels with ‘developmental state’ thinking
- And also Economist index label of ‘hybrid’– factually recognizable as headlines (de-legitimation of opposition, contamination of judiciary, encirclement of civil society, questionable neutrality of election commissions, military intrusions in government, and use of paramilitaries) but this remains judgemental rather than explanatory