



***2001***

---

**No. 01-18**

*CORRUPTION: DECONSTRUCTING THE WORLD BANK DISCOURSE*

**Tara Polzer**

**Published: December 2001**

**Development Studies Institute**

**London School of Economics and Political Science**

**Houghton Street**

**London**

**WC2A 2AE UK**

**Tel: +44 (020) 7955-7425**

**Fax: +44 (020) 7955-6844**

**Email: [d.daley@lse.ac.uk](mailto:d.daley@lse.ac.uk)**

**Web site: [www.lse.ac.uk/depts/destin](http://www.lse.ac.uk/depts/destin)**

## Outline

---

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2. Theoretical Approach</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3. The Emergence of the Discourse</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>3.1 Political, economic and ideological background</i>	7
<i>3.2 Labour pains and the birth of the corruption discourse</i>	8
<b>4. Deconstructing the Discourse</b>	<b>10</b>
<i>4.1. Crisis / Continuity</i>	13
<i>4.2 Political / Economic</i>	15
<i>4.3 Public / Private and Political / Administrative</i>	18
<i>4.4 Individual / Institutional and Moral / Rational</i>	20
<i>4.5 Policy / Implementation and Process / Outcome</i>	21
<b>5. Conclusion</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>6. Bibliography</b>	

## 1. Introduction

---

Corruption is the new star of the development scene. From being the scarcely regarded topic of specialist academic tracts it has been promoted to "the largest single inhibitor of equitable economic development," according to James Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank.<sup>1</sup> From being a subject to be avoided as "taboo,"<sup>2</sup> it is now a subject to be funded with a U.S.\$ 7.5 million budget for financial year 1999 at the World Bank Institute.<sup>3</sup>

Why did corruption suddenly enter the spotlight after 1996? Why at this particular point in time? What lies behind the terms "corruption" and "anti-corruption programmes"? And how does this new focus fit into the wider development agenda?

As a development issue, corruption has been taken up by a wide variety of organisations and actors. These include: intergovernmental organisations such as OECD and OAS; the non-governmental sector, most prominently represented by Transparency International; private companies introducing codes of conduct;<sup>4</sup> and governments around the world. Each actor has a different approach to corruption.

In this paper I will focus exclusively on the World Bank<sup>5</sup> and its attitude to corruption. The Bank serves as a significant case study because it is the pre-eminent single actor in the "development industry."<sup>6</sup> In addition to, and perhaps more importantly than, its economic leverage over poor governments, the Bank is the representative of the mainstream discourse of development, thereby strongly influencing other development actors' frames of reference.<sup>7</sup> Specifically, it has taken a leading role in promoting the anti-corruption agenda, both within its own programmes and in support of "international efforts."<sup>8</sup>

I will use predominantly African examples to illustrate the existence of alternative understandings of the state, state-society relations and corruption to those espoused by the Bank. Africa is central to the development of 'good governance' and corruption debates, because it is largely its lack of "development," as measured by orthodox indicators, which prompted the search for new explanations for bad 'development performance.'<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Washington Post, Nov. 10, 1999, p.39

<sup>2</sup> Kaufmann (1996)

<sup>3</sup> Tesh (1999:1)

<sup>4</sup> Heimann (1997:150)

<sup>5</sup> I will adopt the World Bank's practice of referring to itself simply as the "Bank." In footnotes I will use WB.

<sup>6</sup> Ferguson (1990)

<sup>7</sup> Escobar (1995), Ferguson (1990), Ranis (1997)

<sup>8</sup> WB (1997b:3) The Bank is also carrying out internal reforms to reduce corruption in Bank activities, but I will concentrate on its conception of corruption in client countries.

<sup>9</sup> Gallagher (1991:x). The Bank, of course, also addresses corruption in Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe. I believe that there are variations in how the Bank treats corruption in these regions which are not solely due to the different manifestations of the phenomena, but also reflect the different levels of influence the Bank has. A discussion of this is not possible here, but I suggest that Africa is the

The aim of this paper is to place the Bank's perspective on corruption in its specific historical and institutional context and thereby uncover the assumptions inherent in this conception. I will argue that the Bank's view is necessarily partial and biased, rather than universally applicable and neutral as commonly portrayed. Ideally, the deconstruction of the discourse itself would be accompanied by two further studies regarding the way the Bank understands corruption. These would tie the present discursive analysis into the realm of experience: first, the institutional constraints within the Bank which shape the specific rules of the discourse; and second, the effects of this particular discourse on the Bank's 'clients,' including their strategies of resistance and incorporation. The experience of real people is, in the final analysis, what gives impetus to this study of discourse. While these two approaches are far beyond the scope of this paper and therefore not developed explicitly, examples of institutional factors and implications for targeted governments are mentioned throughout the text.

## 2. Theoretical Approach

---

*"The question is" said Alice,  
"whether you can make words  
mean so many different things."*

Lewis Carol. *Alice in Wonderland*.

I am approaching corruption within the varied but well-established tradition of engaging with categories of development critically and seeing them as 'discourses' - as "systems of statements which construct an object" - rather than as unproblematic descriptions of a purported reality.<sup>10</sup> The epistemological basis of discourse analysis lies in post-structuralist thought<sup>11</sup> in which "language and discourse are not seen as a reflection of social reality, but constitutive of it."<sup>12</sup> Using this approach does not imply that bribery, extortion, embezzlement, and nepotism do not exist in reality or that they do not have real and negative effects on the lives of billions of people. Political and economic studies of corruption are crucial to furthering understanding of the phenomenon.<sup>13</sup> Here, however, my concern is with the underlying assumptions of the mainstream view of corruption which underlies many of these studies, especially those carried out by the World Bank. I am interested in the specific historical, socio-cultural and ideological contexts of this view, and the politico-economic institutional influences which help to shape which questions are asked and which answers are found to be permissible. There are several theorists who have laid the foundations for this approach, and whose insights I will use selectively.

---

target of the most extreme formulations because of the Bank's virtual monopoly over state credit on the continent.

<sup>10</sup> Parker (1992:5)

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Derrida (1978)

<sup>12</sup> Escobar (1997:51)

<sup>13</sup> See Susan Rose-Ackerman (1978) and (1999) for a political analysis and see Andvig (1991) for a survey of the economic literature.

Michel Foucault's framework of three criteria for the "individualisation" of a discourse will provide an outline for my description of the discourse of corruption. Foucault identifies rules of:

1. *formation*: ... for all its objects... concepts... and theoretical options,
2. *transformation*: the conditions which must have been effective together at a very precise moment in time for [the discourse] to be formed; ...what internal modifications it was capable of; ... from what threshold of transformation new rules have been brought into play, and
3. *correlation*: situate it among other types of discourse... and in the nondiscursive context in which it functions (institutions, social relations, economic and political conjuncture)."<sup>14</sup>

The process of *transformation* is explored in chapter 3, by discussing the political, economic and ideological changes parallel to a shift in the World Bank's discourse. Chapter 4 is concerned with disentangling a selection of rules of *formation*, expressed as fundamental dichotomies of categorisation of information, social relationships, actor motivation, and means of intervention. *Correlates* of other discourses (especially 'the state', 'bureaucracy' and the neo-liberal paradigm) and of the non-discursive context (i.e. the World Bank as an institution) will be addressed at various points in the text.

Arturo Escobar has adapted Foucault's insights to the study of the discursive aspects of "development,"<sup>15</sup> and has analysed how the "Third World" has been produced by this "development" discourse since the end of the Second World War. The emergence of the dominant modernist development paradigm engendered the professionalisation and institutionalisation of the field and "created an extremely efficient apparatus for producing knowledge about, and the exercise of power over, the Third World."<sup>16</sup> I submit that the World Bank's conception of corruption can be placed within the context, and is a continuation, of, the production and control of knowledge about desirable development outcomes.

Escobar's conception of the formation of discourses, however, is too static and unidirectional. He divides the discursive space into camps of actors (developers, those who are developed, and those who resist development) that are constructed as largely homogenous. While the themes of resistance and coexistence of different understandings are important, the variation within each 'camp' and their continual reflexive interaction should not be overlooked.

D.B. Moore, like Escobar, suggests that the World Bank is a singular "upholder of orthodoxy," which creates a hegemonic consensus by co-opting radical counter-discourses, such as sustainability and 'good governance'.<sup>17</sup> This process of incorporation is central to the analysis presented in this paper.

However, treating the Bank as a hegemonic actor does not capture many aspects of its encounter with the corruption discourse. First, as Foucault recognised, there is no opposition between lifeless discourses and all-powerful subjects who manipulate them; rather "the discursive subjects are part of the discursive field"

---

<sup>14</sup> Foucault (1978:9f)

<sup>15</sup> Escobar (1995)

<sup>16</sup> Escobar (1995:9)

<sup>17</sup> Moore (1995:16)

and so are influenced by as well as influence the discourse.<sup>18</sup> The Bank has also undergone changes because of its adoption of the anti-corruption campaign. Second, one should not underestimate the internal conflicts within the World Bank, for example between the legal department, the research department and regional offices, on whether and how to react to the problem of corruption. The assumption of hegemony, third, privileges the World Bank as a pro-active and conscious agent, thereby undertheorising its role as a *reactive* subject shaped by external pressures - such as changing donor and client priorities and public opinion. Fourth, it is crucial to recognise that discourses are never simply imposed by a dominant group on a subordinate one. The ideas within a development discourse pass from one internally heterogeneous system of knowledge to another internally heterogeneous system through the political economy of development practice and interventions. Through this social process of concept migration, ideas mutate and adapt to a particular historically and spatially located knowledge system. In our case, the World Bank's discourse(s) on corruption are not accepted wholesale by its client governments, but are selectively and strategically integrated into existing conceptions and practices of political economy.

Finally, counter to the hegemonic argument, one might even say that the World Bank is institutionally endangered by its adoption of the corruption topic. This is recognised by some actors within the Bank, especially in the legal department, who see the threat this issue poses for the Bank's credibility. It makes it very difficult to uphold the mandated distinction between the political and economic spheres and raises questions of sovereignty. Combating corruption effectively necessitates action at a level of micro-economic management at which the Bank neither has the mandate nor the professional capacities to act effectively. When the Board Paper introducing the corruption topic was being prepared, there were several sceptical voices, predicting that taking on corruption would inevitably lead the Bank to overstretch its reach and undermine its credibility among clients.<sup>19</sup> The attempt to define corruption in a limited way, and to place ultimate responsibility for its reduction with client governments (see Chapter 4) may therefore be interpreted as a *defensive* move to protect itself from added expectations and demands.

There is very little literature looking at corruption from a discursive point of view. Perhaps this is partly because of its so recent rise in mainstream development discourse, as compared to 'sustainability', 'participation', or 'aid.'<sup>20</sup> Perhaps, however, there is another factor which distinguishes 'corruption' from those other discursive 'objects' and makes its deconstruction seem politically difficult. Most concepts used in development discourse are positive: equality, helping, participation, progress, to take but a few examples from the Development Dictionary.<sup>21</sup> Corruption is a negative concept, something which one does not aim to achieve, but rather to fight. Arguing that discourses about fighting corruption are partial, biased or even self-serving runs the risk of appearing to say that corruption is not really as damaging as it is portrayed.<sup>22</sup> This is certainly not my

---

<sup>18</sup> Foucault (1978:13)

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Hansjörg Elshorst, 20.08.2000, Berlin

<sup>20</sup> For deconstructions of these concepts see, respectively, Moore (1995:4), Woost (1997) and Esteva (1992)

<sup>21</sup> Sachs (1992)

<sup>22</sup> See Annecharico and Jacobs (1996) for just such an argument.

intention; I feel, on the contrary, that it is a service to the subjects of World Bank anti-corruption programmes to identify the discourse's biases and limitations in the interest of more effectively and sustainably improving governance in their countries. In fact, the portrayal of critiques of the anti-corruption crusade as anti-development is an integral part of the discourse, and should itself be questioned.

I have based my analysis on several documents describing the World Bank approach to corruption. Helping Countries Combat Corruption (1997) first introduces the "new" topic to the Bank. It is the published version of a report by the internal task force Corruption Action Plan Working Group, set up in 1996. Further material was gathered from publications and websites of the World Bank Institute (previously Economic Development Institute (EDI)), the research and training arm of the World Bank (EDI 1998, 2000; Kaufmann 1996, 1998; Gray and Kaufmann 1998; Gray and Langseth 1998; Kaufmann, Pradhan and Ryterman 1998), other papers by World Bank staff, and relevant sections from World Development Reports. Several documents on governance issues provide further background (WB 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1995).

### 3. The Emergence of the Discourse

---

This chapter will establish the context and correlates of the emergence of the World Bank's corruption discourse.<sup>23</sup> The first section will provide an overview of changes in international political economy and attendant shifts in development theory since 1945. The second section will discuss the more immediate background of the corruption discourse, which can be found in politico-economic and ideological changes since the end of the Cold War. The rise of the 'good governance' paradigm at this time is most significant for the later ascent of the corruption issue.

Following Foucault, the aim of tracing the genealogy of a discourse is to "demonstrate its precariousness, [and] make visible, not its arbitrariness but its complex interconnection with a multiplicity of historical processes." We thereby challenge the "false self-evidence"<sup>24</sup> that the Bank's anti-corruption campaign is natural and indispensable. A genealogical approach stands in contrast to the Bank's preferred "short history,"<sup>25</sup> which lists a series of studies and reports followed by actions taken by different Bank departments; this gives the impression that change in World Bank policy is the result of a rational reaction to increasing amounts of evidence while making external socio-political changes seem irrelevant.

---

<sup>23</sup> see also Moore (1995:2)

<sup>24</sup> Foucault (1981:5)

<sup>25</sup> Tesh (1999)

### ***3.1 Political, economic and ideological background***

After the Second World War, the restructured international economy was based on Keynes' belief that state intervention could overcome market failures. This state-led paradigm of the 1950s and 1960s led to a period of exceptional world-wide economic growth and increasing expectations of the state, especially in the newly independent countries of the 'South'.

In the early 1970s, the era of state-led growth was brought to an end and replaced by a belief in the power of the market, coupled with a distrust of the state.<sup>26</sup> This neo-liberal paradigm was constructed around a model of "rent seeking", a concept which overlaps, but is not synonymous, with public sector corruption. Rent, as defined by Gallagher, is "the direct use or waste of economic resources for non-economic gains,"<sup>27</sup> and "rent seeking" theories "were employed to show that, *given any choice*, developing-country governments would only serve themselves and their (mostly urban) supporters."<sup>28</sup> Therefore, in the interests of equity, it was argued that development must be based on the market and not on the state. This conception, with minor variations, is still dominant today; it shows how deeply assumptions of the inherent corruptness of the state lie in the largely neo-liberal Bank.

In tandem with the rise of neo-liberal theory, there has been a tendency towards the depoliticisation and technicalisation of the development discourse.<sup>29</sup> This follows from the idea, prevalent in the 'West' especially since the end of the Cold War, that the main issues of political contestation have been solved - through liberal economic management and democracy - and that the only remaining task is to manage the most efficient achievement of these goals around the world.<sup>30</sup> This process of depoliticisation and technicalisation is not in itself an apolitical process, as Ferguson points out, but inherently involves inequalities of power in determining the agenda of development. The Bank's approach to "improving" state institutions in order to reduce corruption is embedded in its self-assurance in representing the vaunted consensus on development means and goals.

There were attempts to put corruption onto the international agenda prior to the 1990s. In 1975, the UN General Assembly proposed a resolution suggesting "measures against corrupt practices of transnational and other corporations." In 1979 ECOSOC suggested a "Code of Conduct" and an "International Agreement" on "Illicit Payments." These initiatives found great resistance, from both home and host countries of transnational companies; when the papers were discussed

---

<sup>26</sup> See Gilpin (1995) for a summary of changes in the international economy since 1945

<sup>27</sup> Gallagher (1991:31)

<sup>28</sup> Schmitz (1995:64), emphasis in original

<sup>29</sup> Ferguson (1990). The contemporary and opposed trend toward relativism and the rejection of grand narratives has had virtually no effect on the World Bank.

<sup>30</sup> Fukuyama's "end of history" thesis is the most (in)famous expression of this belief.



in the General Assembly in December 1980 they were rejected.<sup>31</sup> What changed in the 1990s to make the same subject acceptable?

### ***3.2 Labour pains and the birth of the corruption discourse***

The end of the Cold War and associated changes in North-South relations provided a political opportunity to rethink conceptions of “development” and evaluate achievements to date. It became clear that Africa had benefited little from 45 years of Cold-War-driven development aid, and questions were asked as to why this was the case, since it could not be explained by the orthodox economic theories of the time.<sup>32</sup>

Neo-liberal orthodoxy was further put under pressure since the Bank’s structural adjustment programmes, based on neo-liberal prescriptions, were heavily criticised by organisations such as UNICEF and UNDP. In addition to these challenges to the Bank’s theoretical underpinnings, the priorities of its members were also shifting. Donor members were adapting their aid priorities to shrinking aid budgets and domestic public opinion - there was a demand for greater accountability for development outcomes and support of corrupt dictators on strategic grounds was no longer sanctioned. Growing grass-roots democratisation movements in ‘Southern’ countries echoed this sentiment. Donors decided that aid should be limited to “worthy” governments.<sup>33</sup>

Out of these questions and pressures, the ‘good governance’ paradigm was born. We can see this as the necessary precursor of an open engagement with corruption. “‘Governance’ in developing countries (not globally or in the North)” was identified by both the World Bank and the OECD donor countries “as the primary source of the problem (explaining the lack of success of past benevolence), and as the basis for solution (justifying new conditions and limitations on this benevolence).”<sup>34</sup> Schmitz interprets the adoption of the ‘good governance’ model as a defensive strategy to forestall a perceived crisis of the neo-liberal paradigm through the co-option of a critical discourse. Rather than being a transformative and progressive move, Schmitz argues, the neo-liberal paradigm was ultimately protected by shifting attention from international systemic factors, such as “adverse conditions, unfair markets or inappropriate economic reforms,” to the local “lack of proper institutional capacity to manage the necessary processes of adjustment”.<sup>35</sup> Further, the World Bank and OECD donors agreed on the “anchoring of political conditionalities within the good-governance regime to orthodox economic conditionality and the fundamentals of

---

<sup>31</sup> Thiel (1999:295). This initiative within the UN is not alluded to once in World Bank literature on the development of the anti-corruption debate.

<sup>32</sup> Gallagher (1991:ix). See also Schmitz (1995)

<sup>33</sup> Schmitz (1995:70)

<sup>34</sup> Schmitz (1995:68)

<sup>35</sup> Schmitz (1995:67-68)

'market-friendly' development."<sup>36</sup> This linkage is expressed very clearly in some of the anti-corruption programmes of the Bank.<sup>37</sup>

It was by no means clear that an open discussion of corruption would grow out of the 'good governance' approach. There were problems of internal conceptual inconsistency and of institutional inertia. The introduction of the corruption focus into the 'good governance' debate is, on the one hand, a logical further step in the neo-liberal trend of de-politicising the state apparatus for the advancement of the market; on the other hand, corruption's 1996 debut in the Bank coincided with the 1997 World Development Report, with which it clashes conceptually. The report recognises that a "strong" state, not only a "minimal" one, is needed.<sup>38</sup> The renewed focus on "rent-seeking" and corruption, however, has given voice to the Bank's inherent mistrust of the state.<sup>39</sup> This ambivalence remains a problem and is discussed further in section 4.2.

Institutionally, there was a slow and conflictual process of negotiating a change of discourse, including both actors internal and external to the Bank. In 1991 Peter Eigen, then a high-ranking official in the Bank, formed an informal working group on corruption. This was forbidden by the legal department, as it was seen to be outside the Bank's mandate. In its first years, Transparency International, which was founded by Eigen in 1993 as an independent NGO to raise awareness of corruption issues, was refused funding by some sections of the World Bank, while it was supported by individuals in others.<sup>40</sup>

The decisive shift towards open use of the term corruption occurred only at the 1996 Annual General Meeting of the World Bank and IMF, when World Bank President James Wolfensohn made a public commitment to fighting corruption. This provided the internal impetus to develop a framework for World Bank action on corruption.<sup>41</sup> Highlights of the Bank's anti-corruption activities since then include anti-corruption training modules for client government officials,<sup>42</sup> the de facto introduction of corruption conditionality with the suspension of loans to Kenya pending anti-corruption reforms in 1997,<sup>43</sup> and the approval in 1998 of the first World Bank Anti-Corruption Action Plan for FY99.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Schmitz (1995:71)

<sup>37</sup> See Gray and Kaufmann (1998:29)

<sup>38</sup> WB (1997c)

<sup>39</sup> Ranis (1997)

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Peter Eigen, 20.07.2000, Berlin

<sup>41</sup> WB (1997b)

<sup>42</sup> EDI (1998)

<sup>43</sup> News and Notices (1999:39)

<sup>44</sup> WB (1998b). There are also various programmes to reform Bank internal procurement and project planning procedures to reduce opportunities for corruption.

#### 4. Deconstructing the Discourse

---

*Luke, you are going to find that many of the truths we cling to depend greatly on our own point of view.*

Obi-Wan Kenobi in *Return of the Jedi*

Before discussing five sets of constructed dichotomies which underpin the World Bank conception of corruption, I will look at the logic of the discourse's rules of formation. The strategies used to choose the definition of corruption, I argue, serve to sift through a "complex and sensitive"<sup>45</sup> set of relationships and experiences, in order to pick out and actively construct those aspects which do not challenge the existing self-conception of the Bank.

A central World Bank text on corruption implicitly acknowledges that a conception of corruption was chosen for its consistency with Bank categories of thought and praxis. "In considering its strategy the Bank sought a *usable* definition of corruption and *then* developed a taxonomy of the different forms corruption could take consistent with that definition." The definition of concepts according to the needs of an organisation is distressingly common in the "development industry." The danger of tautology and finding only what one hopes to find should be clear.

We can describe the process by which corruption has been incorporated into the existing Bank discourse in two ways: one, it has been made into an operational 'concept' according to certain rules, and two, it has undergone a process of 'demystification.'

Once something becomes a "concept," it is given fixed characteristics and parameters: it becomes an object of study, policy and intervention. While corruption was discussed in the academic world and at the fringes of World Bank research before 1996, it did not have the central characteristic which allowed it to be recognised as an "operational concept" by the Bank: it was too political. Only once the transition to an economic "concept" had been made (see section 4.2), could the project of defining, measuring, and finding causes and effects be commenced. Once it was thus accepted, a whole new realm of experience and information became relevant and "sayable."<sup>46</sup> As Gadbow and Richards enthuse in 1997, without recognising the obvious point that one cannot find something until one begins looking for it, "what is remarkable is how every day seems to bring to light fresh material to illustrate the pervasiveness and significance of corruption."<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> WB (1997b:4)

<sup>46</sup> Foucault (1978:14-15). An aspect of every discourse is how it can "limit the scope and forms of *expressibility*: "what is it possible to speak of? What has been constituted as the domain of discourse?... what has been designated as the subject; what has one wished to make a descriptive science of..."

<sup>47</sup> Gadbow and Richards (1997:1)

The incorporation of the term "corruption" into the range of concepts acceptable to the Bank followed a two step process of "demystification." First, institutional 'governance' factors had to be recognised as relevant to Bank practice and be acted upon, thereby broadening the Bank's "interventionable" field. This process included reconceptualising political categories to fit economic forms of understanding and expression. As a second step, the actual word 'corruption' could be relieved of its 'taboo' status because it could be controlled by placing it within this newly expanded and economised sphere.

The first stage is exemplified by Robert Klitgaard's findings when in 1989 he was invited to interview staff about what the Bank could and should do about the "phenomena grouped under the label of 'corruption'." He summarised the sentiment he found among those interviewed as follows:

- "1. Avoid the word corruption, emphasizing instead administrative efficiency, institutional development or the structural adjustment of government itself.
2. Sensitivities will be eased if practical and workable ways to reduce corruption could be identified."<sup>48</sup>

This passage illustrates two points. One is that the division between economic and political spheres seems to be defined by the applicability of a certain interventionist approach to that sphere, rather than by other characteristics. Thus, 'administrations', 'institutions' and even 'governments' become non-political and open for intervention as soon as they are connected with 'efficiency', 'development' and especially 'structural adjustment'. The second, related, point is that the definition of the concept of corruption is made dependent on the perception of currently possible interventions, instead of adapting the range of appropriate interventions to a broader analysis of the issue.<sup>49</sup>

We can identify three further aspects of the corruption discourse, which have the effect of minimising dissonance with existing Bank self-conceptions. First, and centrally, corruption as a word is an "othering" tool. It is not descriptive of a specific action (such as theft) but rather is a negative evaluative concept which tells us less about the behaviour itself (a transfer of assets) than about the value system of the person or society labelling it. Euben notes that "to call a regime corrupt is to say something about the speaker's preferences, not about the regime itself."<sup>50</sup> As an illustration, 'corruption' - the English word - does not have a simple correspondent in most languages. This lack of correspondence in itself shows that the connotations of the English word are not self-evidently shared around the world.<sup>51</sup> A study of the variation in meanings is beyond the scope of this paper, but we can note that many African languages use terms which are more ambivalent in their value judgement or do not contain a value judgement at all. Bayart discusses the example of the Cameroonian expression "politique du ventre", or politics of the belly, and observes that this and other common

---

<sup>48</sup> quoted in Tesh (1999:2)

<sup>49</sup> See Ferguson (1994:177) on the Bank's tendency to define situations so that it can intervene in them.

<sup>50</sup> Euben (1989:230)

<sup>51</sup> See as a similar case how the languages around the world have up to 40 different words to refer to the various meanings inherent in the single word "poverty". Rahnema (1992:158)

expressions are used descriptively to refer to a certain set of human relationships which can either be misused or followed to success.<sup>52</sup>

Using the English word, however, brings with it the connotations of degeneration and decay of an original ideal state of being.<sup>53</sup> The website of the World Bank Anti-Corruption Knowledge Centre expresses this clearly: "Corruption is a symptom of institutional *dysfunction*, thriving where economic policies are *poorly designed*, education levels are *low*, civil society is *underdeveloped*, and the accountability of public institutions is *weak*."<sup>54</sup> Thus, one of the central effects of the word's use is to create a dichotomy between the "corrupt" and the "good" state, institution, public servant, etc. Because of the "othering" character of the discourse, the Bank takes on the position of expert and champion of the "good", simply by expressing the inferiority of corrupt systems.

A second means of controlling the 'corruption' discourse is to build a consensus on what kinds of information may legitimately contribute toward finding the "truth" about corruption. Foucault describes this as a central characteristic of a discourse: "by production of truth I mean not the production of true utterances but the establishment of domains in which the practice of true and false can be made at once ordered and pertinent."<sup>55</sup> The spheres of knowledge accepted by the Bank are universalising, empirical, quantitative, institutional, and based on the assumption of the calculating and rationally maximising individual. Alternative views, such as moral, cultural or political understandings of corruption, are considered to be naive, specious or malicious arguments made by interested parties such as corrupt businessmen or politicians. Gadbow and Richards reflect this manufactured consensus when they write: "in country after country in all regions and among all major cultures of the world, this cynicism [of cultural relativism in defining corruption] seems to have been swept away" by overwhelming "evidence" of the "magnitude and scope" of the "problem."<sup>56</sup>

Third, variation in conceptions and experiences of corruption in different countries, while rhetorically acknowledged,<sup>57</sup> are only considered in addition to certain fixed core characteristics of corruption. According to Schmitz, "the ingenuous message boils down to trusting in Western benevolence and superior knowledge. Then, *and only then*, can one make allowances for adaptations appropriate for local conditions."<sup>58</sup>

In spite of these strategies to make the discourse 'safe' for the Bank, the process of adopting and adapting a discourse is conflictual: perceptions on corruption are not homogenous throughout the Bank, and the process of adaptation is not unidirectional. As discussed above, the discourse may even endanger the Bank's practice and self-understanding. However, there are five dichotomous categories

---

<sup>52</sup> Bayart (1993:ix)

<sup>53</sup> Euben (1989:222). Scholars who have argued in the past that corruption may have beneficial effects on development do not change the underlying value judgement inherent in the etymology of the word.

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/publicsector/anticorrupt/helping.htm>, emphasis added.

<sup>55</sup> Foucault (1981:9)

<sup>56</sup> Gadbow and Richards (1997:3)

<sup>57</sup> WB (1997b:12)

<sup>58</sup> Schmitz (1995:59), emphasis in the original.

which centrally structure World Bank conceptions of corruption. These are discussed below.

#### **4.1. Crisis / Continuity**

The World Bank's discourse on corruption must deal with two levels of change and continuity. One is how it analyses crisis and continuity in its subject (for the purposes of this paper, corruption in Africa), and the second is how it constructs the process of change and continuity of response within the organisation. I suggest that both are presented so that fears of radical change in Bank policy from outside and inside the Bank are allayed, while the actual activities are expanded substantially.

It is very common for development policy texts to construct a set of problems, ideally a state of crisis<sup>59</sup>, in order to justify intervention.<sup>60</sup> It is interesting that the Bank does not do this to justify intervening in the new area of corruption. In the 1997 framework document, there is no mention of a sudden increase in corruption or of crisis; rather the "causes of corruption" are all presented as ahistoric, static models.<sup>61</sup> The novelty which justifies intervention is portrayed as a rise in external demand to which the Bank is responding: "corruption is of growing concern to donors, non-governmental organisations, and governments and citizens in developing and industrial countries alike... a small but growing number of countries has approached the Bank for assistance."<sup>62</sup> The construction of external demand serves the double purpose of making the "new" focus less threatening, and absolving the Bank for not having addressed such a "major barrier to sustainable and equitable development"<sup>63</sup> before.

The historical factors which made this demand appear now, and which allowed the Bank to respond to it, are not mentioned. Neither is a historical perspective on corruption's causes in Africa. This is part of the construction of corruption as external to the Bank, and to colonialism, decolonisation, debt and the international economy. The conception of the Bank or the international economy as contributors to negative "development" effects is outside the "sayable" boundaries of the discourse,<sup>64</sup> since it would endanger the project of continued and expanded intervention along neo-liberal lines.<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> See the title of the 1989 World Bank study "Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth. A Long-Term Perspective Study." See also Bernstein (1990:5) who questions the validity of the description/diagnosis of 'crisis' in Africa.

<sup>60</sup> Moultrie (1998:3)

<sup>61</sup> WB (1997b:12-14)

<sup>62</sup> WB (1997b:1).

<sup>63</sup> WB (1997b:2)

<sup>64</sup> see Foucault (1978:14-15).

<sup>65</sup> A simple example is that institutional reform programmes, including anti-corruption programmes, are financed through loans to the government, not through grants. Institutional programmes are unlikely to increase revenue to the state in the short-term, not even if they function as planned. Therefore they increase the debt burden on governments and societies and are likely to have effects which exacerbate the problems which the anti-corruption and institution-building programmes are supposed to address.

The strategy of justifying intervention only through demand clashes, however, with the need to show the extent of the damage caused by corruption. Gray and Kaufmann of the EDI report that in a survey of 150 high-ranking public officials from 60 countries, the respondents ranked public sector corruption as "the most severe impediment to development and growth in their countries."<sup>66</sup> This would suggest a very acute crisis indeed, so why had it not been identified by those public officials before, and why not by the World Bank, which carried out the survey?

In the foreword of the World Bank framework document which first introduces the "new" topic, the balance between novelty and continuity in the Bank's *responses* to corruption is also skewed toward continuity. "The Bank has long been concerned with controlling fraud and corruption in its projects... the Bank is already supporting policy and institutional reform that, among other things, contributes to the fight against corruption."<sup>67</sup> Structural adjustment programmes in general, the Bank claims, by "reducing economic rents," have helped to reduce opportunities for corruption.<sup>68</sup> This construction of continuity parallels how the approach to 'governance' was presented in the 1992 report Governance and Development: "there is no need for additional criteria to reflect concerns with governance: merely the effective and consistent application of existing criteria."<sup>69</sup>

Despite this rhetoric, both voices in and outside the Bank interpreted the "concern with governance," to be a significant break from previous parameters. The legal department urged great caution in not overstepping the Bank's requirement to remain non-political.<sup>70</sup> Some member countries, such as China, accused the Bank of attempting to infringe on their sovereignty,<sup>71</sup> and while some NGOs welcomed what they interpreted as a loosening of the Bank's distinctions between political and economic conditionalities,<sup>72</sup> others protested at the "brazenly patronizing interference" of the Bank.<sup>73</sup> There is a similarly unclear relationship between the rhetoric of continuity and actual expansion regarding anti-corruption programmes.

Finally, if the Bank has been reducing opportunities for corruption with structural adjustment programmes since the 1970s, why has corruption persisted or even increased in significance? The Bank does not analyse how continuity in its own actions from the past to the present may actively contribute to encouraging corruption. Early structural adjustment loans with high levels of discretion for borrowing governments, for example, are considered to have encouraged large-scale, high-level embezzlement and corruption in the 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>74</sup> The contribution of the World Bank to weakening and delegitimising governments, and thereby encouraging corruption, is discussed further in the next section.

---

<sup>66</sup> Gray and Kaufmann (1998:22)

<sup>67</sup> WB (1997b:2, 3)

<sup>68</sup> WB (1997:2)

<sup>69</sup> WB (1991:19)

<sup>70</sup> WB (1995)

<sup>71</sup> WB (1997a:53)

<sup>72</sup> Gillies (1992), writing for the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development

<sup>73</sup> News and Notices (1999:38)

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Hansjörg Elshorst, 20.08.2000, Berlin

## 4.2 Political / Economic

*Always use the proper name for things.  
Fear of the name increases  
fear of the thing itself.*

J.K. Rowling. *Harry Potter and the  
Philosopher's Stone.*

"Corruption" was considered "taboo" because it was defined as a "political" concept. The exclusion of the "political" from the Bank's ambit is enshrined in its Articles of Agreement.<sup>75</sup> The separation of the economic and political was introduced because the Bank is a multinational institution; its members are formally states, and in practice governments, that do not want their political choices influenced or constrained. Thus, "in the past, the Bank was often reluctant to confront corruption openly because of the issue's political sensitivity and the lack of demand from borrowers for assistance in this area."<sup>76</sup> Now, however, corruption has been defined as an economic concept whose root causes, "weak institutions.. and specific government policies,"<sup>77</sup> such as regulation, can be addressed by "specific economic and institutional reforms."<sup>78</sup> The very definition chosen replaces "public *power*", used for example by Transparency International, with "public *office*," thereby limiting the focus to abuse of a specific position rather than more general abuse of the public trust.<sup>79</sup>

Not only is the "political" excluded from active consideration; it is also constructed as inferior to the economic view. The Bank has developed a limited and antagonistic conception of politics which is reflected in its treatment of the problem of corruption. As illustrations, I will look at the Bank's construction of 1) the role of the state; 2) the realm of 'politics'; 3) the role of 'political will' and government choice, and; 4) the relationship of 'data' to politics.

### 4.2.1 The role of the state

The Bank constructs the state purely as a service provider for the economy, rather than as a political entity whose legitimacy is derived from the creation of identity for its citizenship and accountability toward them. The 1997 World Development Report makes it clear that the concept of legitimacy has been transmogrified into a technical problem of credibility, primarily toward international investors.<sup>80</sup> What most governments, especially in countries with weak states, are primarily concerned with is not serving the market, but, rather, strengthening their support base, either through the transfer of resources or the establishment of a normative measure of legitimacy. For both these strategies, corruption or its condemnation are central. Because of its simplistic understanding of the state, the Bank cannot take into account such political uses of corruption

---

<sup>75</sup> See WB (1990)

<sup>76</sup> WB (1997b:5-6)

<sup>77</sup> WB (1997b:12)

<sup>78</sup> Gray and Kaufmann (1998:21)

<sup>79</sup> WB (1997:8) and TI (1999:3)

<sup>80</sup> Munro et al (1999:82)



and corruption fighting as a constituent factor of state- and nation-building,<sup>81</sup> although its own anti-corruption programmes are invariably reinterpreted in light of the political struggles taking place in the client state.<sup>82</sup>

#### 4.2.2 *The 'political'*

Where the Bank does in principle recognise that "corruption ... has a political dimension and reflects the way power is exercised in a country,"<sup>83</sup> it has a highly circumscribed definition of "the political." It is based on an institutional understanding of the distinction between "bureaucratic" and "political" corruption according to the formal status of the actors: political corruption, therefore, involves parliamentarians and other elected politicians. This 'type' of corruption is seen as beyond the Bank's scope.<sup>84</sup> By not acknowledging a wider conception of politics ( i.e. struggles over the maintenance or change of power relations) the Bank veils the fact that its own interventions in the activities of states, which it defines as purely economic, also have great effects on the power structures of these states.<sup>85</sup>

#### 4.2.3 *The role of 'political will'*

Even where the Bank concedes the prior necessity of "political will", the actual freedom of choice offered is highly constrained. The artificial separation between local actors who provide the "political will,"<sup>86</sup> and the Bank, which "must be concerned only with economic causes and effects,"<sup>87</sup> has two effects. First, it seems to place the initiative and defining power with the government, which of its own choice invites the Bank to assist it. While outwardly this may be the case, the background of an invitation to fight corruption may often be the government's need for credit and the concomitant adoption of the newest fashionable development rhetoric. In any case, the freedom to define terms of engagement is limited, since the choice consists of accepting or not a programme which matches the Bank's conception of anti-corruption reform, i.e. neo-liberal economic reform and institutional capacity building after a Weberian bureaucratic model (see section 4.3). The Bank's seeming self-constraint in only "advising on economic policy reform and strengthening institutional capacity" obscures the extent of its control over the content of the decisions made by politicians. Mosely et al emphasise the process of negotiation in policy-based lending and conditionalities,<sup>88</sup> but while (at a formal level) this may include determining, for example, which state enterprises are privatised in an anti-corruption programme, it is unlikely to extend to the possibility of challenging the prescription of privatisation, let alone the economic and institutional basis of the Bank's conception of corruption.

---

<sup>81</sup> Mazrui (1999)

<sup>82</sup> See Mwale on how the Bank's corruption conditionality in Kenya was used by the political opposition to argue for political (not economic) reforms. Mwale (1997)

<sup>83</sup> WB (1997b:5)

<sup>84</sup> WB (1997b:10)

<sup>85</sup> see Mwale (1997)

<sup>86</sup> WB (1997b:5)

<sup>87</sup> WB (1997b:24)

<sup>88</sup> Mosely, Harrigan and Toye (1995:xiii)

Second, the very separation of the economic from the political sphere has an effect on the legitimacy of the government and the state. Control over economic processes is a central means for states to gain and retain popular legitimacy. This is especially the case in newly independent countries, including almost all of Africa, whose legitimacy is based on welfarist promises and where the state is still by far the most important economic actor. Once it becomes clear to the population, including civil servants and politicians, that economic decisions are not freely made by their elected government but, rather, by an external actor, commitment to the state may fall. It will most certainly not increase, in direct contradiction of the stated aim of anti-corruption reforms: to increase "trust in government."<sup>89</sup> Thus, reforms based on the separation of economic from political decisions may even contribute to the increased practice and/or acceptance of corruption, rather than helping to combat it.

#### 4.2.4 *The primacy of 'data'*

We see that, for the Bank, the role of politics is to accept and create acceptance of the economic logic provided by the Bank. This economic logic is based on "data" and "evidence", which is explicitly defined in contrast to political judgement. The gathering of "hard data" based on "rigorous methodologies" is seen as a means of overcoming political resistance, assumed to come only from those who are corrupt themselves.<sup>90</sup> This empirical approach has a central place in the project of depoliticising corruption.

"Data" is not only intended to inform or challenge political judgement; it is constructed so as to *replace* the need for political judgement. The claim is that enough data will inevitably lead to correct policy prescriptions. Furthermore, the "empirical, technocratic approach" is thought to be "empowering" for reformists and civil society and can generate the transparency which "can fuel a participatory process."<sup>91</sup> What is not considered is that this data is based on a particular definition of corruption, which in turn is based on the informational needs of the Bank. More fundamentally, the Bank's new lending conditionality is based on just this data. So while it is being presented as a liberation from the uncertainties of politically manipulated perceptions, it is also a new means of control.

The two sides of data are not necessarily mutually exclusive: doubtless local initiatives to measure corruption can provide useful material to press for local reforms.<sup>92</sup> But the Bank's view of how civil society can be empowered through data is highly ambivalent. Kaufmann enthuses that "well presented and simple comparative charts illustrating findings on corruption can help mobilise and give voice to previously silent and disparate citizenry groups." While, on the one hand, a field of experience (that of the poor who suffer silently under daily corruption) is legitimised, on the other hand, this experience is only allowed very limited expression through media provided by experts (comparative charts). The implication is that the "silent citizenry" did not really know how badly they were faring and that all that was needed for action was more information.

---

<sup>89</sup> WB (1997b:3)

<sup>90</sup> Kaufmann, Pradhan and Ryterman (1998) and Kaufmann (1998:153)

<sup>91</sup> Kaufmann, Pradhan and Ryterman (1998)

<sup>92</sup> See initiatives in Bangalore, India and Bangladesh. <http://www.transparency.org>

There are differences between World Bank departments in how much political aspects of corruption are emphasised. The working group which drafted the framework document *were* aware that the economic approach to corruption was partial, strategic and institutionally particular to the Bank. The EDI, in contrast, persists in universally extolling the virtues of data over politics. However, the tendency to mistrust and circumvent local and national politics, while itself acting politically, is fundamental to the Bank's general approach. There are alternative approaches on the fringes, such as Landell-Mills and Serageldin's paper on the political aspects of governance,<sup>93</sup> but these have had little effect on mainstream policies.

The depoliticised approach of the Bank stands in contrast to the actual political importance of corruption in domestic politics around the world, which can only be hinted at here. As Theobald states: "corruption in many [underdeveloped countries] is probably the most salient political issue; governments rise and fall on the strength of what they have done or failed to do about it. The ending of rampant corruption is the most frequent justification for military take-over."<sup>94</sup> The use of anti-corruption rhetoric as a means of diffusing opposition to the incoming regime, placating external agencies and securing tenure of office is a routine feature of politics around the world.<sup>95</sup> Even if the Bank's economic definition is accepted *pro forma*, politicians will not stop using anti-corruption rhetoric, and the manipulation of anti-corruption programmes, for political ends.

#### ***4.3 Public / Private and Political / Administrative***

In defining the social space in which corruption is seen to occur, the distinction between politics and economics is closely connected to the formulation of separate spheres for state and society (public and private) and within the state (political and administrative). Both these distinctions, I argue, are based on constructions of 'ideal types'<sup>96</sup> which have grown out of specifically European experiences but do not accurately describe relationships even in the "West." This stands in contrast to the unproblematised World Bank assumption that its administrative reforms and institutional strengthening measures are based on an universally applicable image of the state and of state-society relations. These assumptions inform the design of anti-corruption programmes, since they provide the implicit model against which the "dysfunctional" corrupt state is measured.

##### ***4.3.1 Public/Private***

The common 'Western' conception of corruption, including that used by the Bank, depends on the existence of a public domain which is recognisably separate from a private sphere, with different codes of acceptable conduct in each. While in the

---

<sup>93</sup> Landell-Mills and Serageldin (1991:13)

<sup>94</sup> Theobald (1990:9), see also Agedah (1993: ii, 13-15)

<sup>95</sup> Camerer (1999:2)

<sup>96</sup> An "ideal type" is a methodological tool developed by Max Weber to distil the essential characteristics of a social phenomenon, such as the bureaucracy, and to develop a conception of how that bureaucracy *should* function under ideal circumstances. The danger of the approach is that its normative and approximate, rather than descriptive, character are easily forgotten.

private sector, firms and individuals are expected to seek personal profit and enrichment, organisations and individuals in the public sector are expected selflessly to fulfil a duty to a greater public good. A corrupt action is one which contravenes this model. Akhil Gupta argues from an anthropological perspective that this distinction between public and private is far from universal and is predicated on a particular European cultural and historical experience.<sup>97</sup> As Theobald points out, "both the idea and the reality of public office are very recent historical developments ..., in pre-modern times the all-important distinction between a public and a private sphere did not exist."<sup>98</sup> In much of Africa, this distinction has not been internalised, especially since in the colonial regimes which introduced the idea of the 'modern state,' the 'public' sector was concerned with seeking and extracting profit.

#### 4.3.2 Political/Administrative

The perceived contrast between politics and administration is also central to the Bank's interpretation of corruption. 'Western' conceptions of a non-political administration are invariably based on a simplified reading of Max Weber's 'ideal type' description of a rational-legal bureaucracy.<sup>99</sup> A "career public servant," in this view, "allegedly makes decisions on the basis of neutral, universalistic criteria and scrupulously segregates public affairs from personal interests."<sup>100</sup> Indeed, the Bank states: "Corruption opposes the bureaucratic values of equity, efficiency, transparency, and honesty."<sup>101</sup>

This conception of bureaucracy is inherently normative. As Susan Rose-Ackerman points out "normative statements about corruption require a point of view, a standard of 'goodness'..."<sup>102</sup> While the Bank clearly states what is wrong with the systems and societies under review, there is rarely a clear statement of what the ideal administration would look like. Any positive formulation relies on highly ambiguous and value-laden words such as "*professional* civil service, *sound* financial management, *disciplined* policy making."<sup>103</sup> This ideal image of the characteristics of a bureaucracy is not based on an actual analysis of how industrialised bureaucracies work (see below), but nonetheless serves to "implicitly provide a basis for contrast with Third World bureaucracies which are allegedly riven with favouritism, factionalism and personalism and are highly politicised."<sup>104</sup>

In addition, the World Bank abstracts administrative activities from any political significance they may have. "The concern here is not with the exercise of state powers in the broad sense, but specifically with the appropriate management of

---

<sup>97</sup> Gupta (1995:376)

<sup>98</sup> Theobald (1990:4)

<sup>99</sup> Weber's analysis of the bureaucracy as a rational administrative apparatus was actually grounded in the experience of Wilhemine Germany as a late developer with a highly state-led push for industrialisation; not, one might expect, what the Bank currently supports. While Weber did see the rational-legal model as a superior form of controlling society, he was aware that the "ideal type" bureaucracy could only be approximated. See Gerth and Mills (1948:196-244)

<sup>100</sup> Theobald (1990:3)

<sup>101</sup> WB (1997b:17)

<sup>102</sup> Rose-Ackerman (1978:9), see also TI (1999:3)

<sup>103</sup> WB (1997b:39), emphasis added

<sup>104</sup> Theobald (1990:13)

the public sector and the creation of an enabling environment for the private sector."<sup>105</sup> This passage suggests that it is possible to separate good management techniques ("a concern for rules which are actually applied and institutions which ensure the appropriate application of these rules..."<sup>106</sup>) from the political content of what is being managed. Furthermore, there is no recognition that the very existence, scope and activities of the bureaucracy can have political significance. Within the context of the "late developing" African state, the civil service is a crucial space for elite consolidation, appeasing opposition factions, and managing conflict over access to state resources.<sup>107</sup>

A final problem with the strict division of 'political' and 'administrative' is that, from an institutional perspective, it does not describe actual decision-making processes. As micro-institutional theory points out, bureaucratic decisions are not neutral and impartial, but also influenced by individual considerations of power, gain, and interest."<sup>108</sup>

It would be wrong to claim that the World Bank intends to impose a single conception of the "good state" on the world, not least because its own conception has changed significantly over time. Within the space of a few years in the mid-1990s, the Bank went from advocating "no government is best government" to supporting a "right sized" (sic) government.<sup>109</sup> Nevertheless, the assumption of a distinction between 'the state' and an external society, as well as the contrast between political and administrative values and practice, lies deep and fundamentally affects the way corruption is measured and how anti-corruption programmes are designed.

#### ***4.4 Individual / Institutional and Moral / Rational***

*We talked about science and morality  
as if the two were the same thing.*

Geoff Ryman. *Was*

Another central characteristic of the World Bank discourse on corruption is its focus on institutional structures rather than the individual actor.<sup>110</sup> The corrupt individual is constructed as a rational maximiser responding to incentives, rather than as a moral agent. Therefore, institutional reform is emphasised, so as to prevent future corruption, as opposed to prosecuting individual perpetrators of

---

<sup>105</sup> WB (1997b:24)

<sup>106</sup> WB (1997b:24)

<sup>107</sup> Bayart (1993)

<sup>108</sup> Downs (1967) quoted in Theobald (1990:13). See also Pujas and Rhodes (1999) for a discussion of corruption and the lack of distinction between public and private in European bureaucracies, and Schaffer (1984) on bureaucratic decision-making.

<sup>109</sup> WB (1997c)

<sup>110</sup> EDI (2000)

past corrupt acts. Furthermore, institutions are reformed by evoking rational criteria of efficiency, rather than a moral model of a 'good polis.'

Moral conceptions are specifically rejected by the Bank, since "condemnation" is seen to impede "objective analysis." I have shown above that even the claim of an 'objective' analysis has a normative element. Furthermore, the dominance of an amoral, i.e. rational, secular conception of corruption is very recent and not universal even today. Religious conceptions of corruption still influence U.S. American political rhetoric, and in the orthodox Islamic world, corrupt acts are conceived of as sin. The question is what function the institutional discourse has. In addition to conforming to the general rational, secular modernist approach of the Bank, it serves as a strategic means of initiating change at a level which is amenable to external intervention; it also avoids openly challenging the power status quo in terms of the individuals in power.

Defining the dichotomy as between individual-moral and systemic-rational is itself restrictive. What is excluded is a conception of the morality of the political system or 'polis' as a whole; common characteristics of the modern, capitalist society are never questioned on moral grounds. Latin American religious leaders, in contrast, issued an Ethical Declaration Against Corruption which states:

"In our Latin American countries, the dominant culture is one that is marked by increasing individualism, consumerism, the domination of the market, a weak public commitment, a certain political mindset that dispenses with an ethical value system, the seeking for power and an excessive desire for material goods at any cost, all of which are sources of corruption."<sup>111</sup>

In tracing the genealogy of corruption from the Greek republican tradition of Aristotle, through its transformation in the liberal tradition of Hobbes, to contemporary institutional political theory, Euben argues that "political science and theory were "invented" as a response to, a way of making sense of, and in hopes of ameliorating the political corruption that plagued classical Athens... It is [also] clear that the [pre-independence] debate over what America was and ought to be took place in the language of corruption and virtue."<sup>112</sup> This "debate over what [society] is and what ought to be," i.e. what the final state of good governance entails, has been stifled by the assumption that the model of the good society (capitalism and liberal democracy) is known and accepted (although both were considered the epitome of corruption in classical Greece<sup>113</sup>) and it only remains to be implemented more effectively.

#### ***4.5 Policy / Implementation and Process / Outcome***

*"But that would be putting the clock back," gasped the governor.  
"Have you no idea of progress, of*

---

<sup>111</sup> Ethical Declaration against Corruption (1997). See also Agedah (1993) on a similar analysis of 'social decay' in Nigeria

<sup>112</sup> Euben (1989:243)

<sup>113</sup> see Plato's Republic.

*development?" "I have seen them  
both in the egg," said Caspian.  
"We call it 'Going Bad' in Narnia."*

C.S. Lewis. *The Voyage of the Dawn  
Treader, Chronicles of Narnia*

Many of the above dichotomies underpinning the Bank's approach to corruption directly affect its conception of the process through which its anti-corruption programmes are to be carried out. Two related aspects will be discussed here. First, the Bank works on an implicit model of policy and implementation which is a classic example of what Bernard Schaffer calls the "common sense policy fallacy." This model assumes that policy is a "voluntaristic, thematic activity...undertaken ...by various actors [who] are seen as innocent outsiders." Implementation is separate and "takes place later."<sup>114</sup> Schaffer argues that this model does not describe what really happens and is not appropriate for achieving the best results, but serves the purpose of bureaucratic policy-makers (in our case Bank employees) since it absolves them of responsibility for failures of implementation. Policy-makers, according to the model, are not responsible for taking into account the actual difficulties of implementing their ideas when devising plans. Concerns with 'good governance' and corruption might be seen as a step toward becoming more aware of the holistic implementation issues surrounding structural adjustment reforms. However, the partial goals of better governance and less corruption are unlikely to be achieved themselves because the limited models of governance and corruption used in policy formulation cannot capture the relevant complexities.

The separation into stages of research, policy, and implementation,<sup>115</sup> is exacerbated in the Bank's case because it is correlated with a complete separation of actors. The model dictates that policy should be made by the Bank, whilst national political actors are charged with preparation and implementation of reforms.<sup>116</sup> This separation reduces the amount of co-ordination between different parts of the overall process of "directed change" and allows both sides to accuse the other of faulty work in the case of failure. As Schaffer notes, this prevents learning from past mistakes and reduces "possible room for manoeuvre toward alternative and better policies."<sup>117</sup>

The second point relates to the conscious manifestation of the relationship between the process of policy-making and its outcomes, i.e. the amount of ownership needed for a successful programme. I argue that the Bank's understanding of how to address corruption is logically contradictory to the new orthodoxy of maximising ownership.<sup>118</sup>

The idea of developing increasingly effective programmes to reduce corruption is incompatible with the idea of increased government ownership since the same actors are simultaneously constructed as being the main problem and the

---

<sup>114</sup> Schaffer (1984:143)

<sup>115</sup> EDI (2000)

<sup>116</sup> Woods (2000:825)

<sup>117</sup> Schaffer (1984:142)

<sup>118</sup> See Kaufmann (1998:146), EDI (2000) and Woods (2000:824)

solution. Early forms of structural adjustment lending were provided with high government discretion as to where and how to spend the funds. This is now considered to be one of the causes of increased corruption in the 1980s.<sup>119</sup> But what is changed by replacing the term 'discretion' (which is closely associated with corruption through Klitgaard's equation  $\text{Corruption} = \text{Monopoly} + \text{Discretion} - \text{Accountability}$ ) with 'ownership'?

The Bank argues that it has adopted a pluralistic conception of ownership which focuses on civil society rather than governments, and that there are always individual reformers and less corrupt departments within the state. However, this celebration of grass-roots co-operation is countered by an increasing trend towards highly complicated technical plans as a basis for interaction with client governments. The institutional reforms which are part of governance-strengthening and anti-corruption packages require a highly efficient bureaucracy to carry them out, which, by definition, is not present in these clients states. Within the Bank, there is often not even a pretence that these plans can be carried out by the government of the client country alone.<sup>120</sup> How can we explain this simultaneous propagation of two mutually contradictory practices? In the medium term, the Bank has to be seen to act on issues that have become significant in the public perception of development. Therefore, activities and texts are needed to ward off criticisms that the Bank is not doing enough about corruption. In the long term, the (unrealistic) responsibility placed on client governments absolves the Bank of their (likely) failure. One might even see the World Bank as a "victim" of the technical, but also moral, development discourse it has helped to create. There is a strong pressure to act everywhere (because 'they' are suffering so much) and to show success quickly (because we have to show that we know better). This is combined with a pragmatic awareness of the Bank's dependency on public opinion and creditor (government) money, which means there are limited resources and limited patience for long-term processes of conscientisation and institutional change from below.

## 5. Conclusion

---

This paper has only been able to suggest the general outlines of the World Bank's discourse of corruption. It is a first introduction to an approach which is still largely unexplored. The characterisation of the discourse in terms of dichotomies helped to uncover internal inconsistencies which need to be recognised and addressed. However, dichotomies gloss over many subtleties and may make the Bank seem overly simpleminded and monolithic. Granted greater variation than I could include here, there are significant underlying patterns within the Bank determining what are considered acceptable and unacceptable means of structuring knowledge about societies; these have been played out once again in the corruption discourse. These patterns are closely related to the political economy of the organisation's internal structures and external relationships with

---

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Hansjörg Elshorst, 20.08.2000, Berlin

<sup>120</sup> Interview with Hansjörg Elshorst, 20.08.2000, Berlin; see also Bernstein (1990:23) on the contradiction between the goal of the "leaner state" and the increased administrative capacity, technical expertise, efficiency and control needed to carry out structural adjustment programmes.



donors, 'clients,' and the public. An in-depth analysis of this relationship between discourse and institution is still needed.

What effect is the adoption of this particular discourse likely to have on the 'developing world'? This question informs the entire endeavour of deconstructing the discourse of corruption; an answer requires further study of the conceptions of corruption already in use around the world, which interact with the World Bank's anti-corruption interventions.<sup>121</sup> Corruption may be just another "fashion" for the World Bank and the development industry.<sup>122</sup> Nevertheless, my analysis suggests that it is firmly embedded in the Bank's larger project of modernisation and indeed extends its reach further into the lives and minds of its target societies. Far from resulting in mere technical adjustments within a largely functioning system, the discourse of corruption categorises and thereby delegitimises entire societies. "A good society is a modernising one; a corrupt society is one that inhibits 'development.'"<sup>123</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup> See the work of J.P. Olivier de Sardan on local conceptions of corruption in West Africa.

<sup>122</sup> Tesh (1999)

<sup>123</sup> Euben (1989:243)

## Bibliography

---

- Achebe, C. 1964. "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation" in *Nigeria Magazine*. Lagos. pp.157-160
- Ades, A. and Di Tella, R. 1996. "Causes and Consequences of Corruption: A Review of Empirical Contributions." *IDS Bulletin: Liberalization and the New Corruption* 27,2 (April), p. 6-11
- Agedah, D. 1993. Corruption and the Stability of the Third Republic. Lagos: Perception Communications
- Andvig, J.C. 1991. "The Economics of Corruption: A Survey." *Studi economici* 46 (4-2)
- Anechiarico, F. and Jacobs, J.B. 1996. The Pursuit of Absolute Integrity; How Corruption Control Makes Governments Ineffective. London/ Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Bayart, J.-F. 1993. The State in Africa; The Politics of the Belly. NY: Longman
- Bayart, J.-F., Ellis, S. and Hibou, B. 1999. The Criminalisation of the State in Africa. Oxford: James Currey
- Bernstein, H. 1990. "Agricultural 'Modernisation' and the Era of Structural Adjustment: Observations on Sub-Saharan Africa." in *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 18(1)
- Berry, S. 1993. *No Condition is Permanent: The Social Dynamics of Agrarian Change in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press
- Bracking, S. 1999. "Structural Adjustment: Why it Wasn't Necessary and Why it Did Work." in *Review of African Political Economy*, June, Vol. 26, No. 80, pp. 219-226
- Camerer, L. 1999. "Tackling the Multiheaded Dragon - South Africa," Institute for Security Studies Occasional Paper, No. 38
- Crush, J. 1995. Power of Development. London: Routledge
- Derrida, J. 1978. Writing and Difference. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul
- Dia, M. 1993. "A Governance Approach to Civil Service Reform in Sub-Saharan Africa." World Bank Technical Paper No. 225, Africa Technical Department Series. Washington D.C.: The World Bank
- Doriye, J. 1992. "Public Office and Private Gain: An Interpretation of the Tanzanian Experience" in Wuyts, Mackintosh and Hewitt (eds.), Development Policy and Public Action, Oxford: Oxford University Press

- Downs, A. 1967. Inside Bureaucracy. Boston: Little, Brown and Co.
- Eade, D. (ed.). 1997. Development and Patronage: a Development in Practice Reader, Oxford: Oxfam
- Economic Development Institute. 1998. Annual Report. Washington D.C.: World Bank
- Economic Development Institute. 2000. Helping Countries Build and Implement Effective Anti-Corruption Strategies.  
<http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/governance/tools.htm>
- Eigen, P. 1996. "Combatting Corruption Around the World" in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.7, No.1, Jan.
- Escobar, A. 1995. Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World. Princeton: Princeton University Press
- Escobar, A. 1997. "Anthropology and Development," in *International Social Science Journal*, 154, pp.497-515
- Esteva, G.1992. "Development" in Sachs, Wolfgang (ed.). 1992. The Development Dictionary. London: Zed Books
- Euben, P. 1989. "Corruption." in Ball, T., Farr, J., and Hansom, R., (ed.), Political Innovation and Conceptual Change. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Evans, P. 1997. "The Eclipse of the State? Reflections on Stateness in an Era of Globalisation." in *World Politics*, Vol. 50, No. 1, Oct.
- Ethical Declaration against Corruption*. 1997. Department of Social Development and World Peace and Latin American Episcopal Council
- Fairhead, J. and Leach, M. 1997. "Webs of Power and the construction of Environmental Policy Problems: Forest Loss in Guinea" in Grillo, R.D. and Stirrat, R.L. 1997. Discourses of Development: Anthropological Perspectives. New York: Berg
- Ferguson, J. 1990. The Anti-Politics Machine: 'Development', Depoliticisation and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Ferguson, J. 1994. "The Anti-Politics Machine, 'Development' and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho." in *The Ecologist*, Vol. 24, No. 5, September/October, pp.176-181
- Financial Times*.1996."World Bank chief accuses staff of resisting reforms." 29 March
- Foucault, M. 1978. "Politics and the study of discourse" in *Ideology and Consciousness*, Spring 1978, No.3

- Foucault, M. 1980. "Two Lectures" in Colin Gordon (ed.), Power / Knowledge. NY: Pantheon Books
- Foucault, M. 1981. "Questions of method: an interview with Michel Foucault" in *Ideology and Consciousness*, Spring 1981, No.8.
- Gadbaw, R.M. and Richards, T.J. 1997. "Anti-corruption as an International Policy Issue: It's Origins, Dirction and Implications." March 17. mimeo
- Gallagher, M. 1991. Rent-Seeking and Economic Growth in Africa. Boulder/Oxford: Westview Press
- Gerth, H.H. and Mills, C.W. 1948. From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology. London: Routledge
- Gillies, D. 1992. "Human Rights, Democracy, and 'Good Governance': Stretching the World Bank's Policy Frontiers." paper prepared for International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development
- Gilpin, R. 1995. "Economic Change and the Challenge of Uncertainty," in Ross, R. (ed.) East Asia in Transition, London: M.E. Sharpe
- Gray, C. and Kaufmann, D. 1998. "Corruption and Development" in in New Perspectives on Combating Corruption. Transparency International and Economic Development Institute of the World Bank
- Gray, C. and Langseth, P. 1998. "Building Incentives, Capacity and Values to Fight Corruption; Learning by Doing," World Bank presentation, Washington D.C., May 4th
- Grillo, R.D. and Stirrat, R.L. 1997. Discourses of Development: Anthropological Perspectives. New York: Berg
- Gupta, A. 1995. "Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics and the Imagined State," in *American Ethnologist* 22(2), pp. 375-402
- Harriss, J. and De Renzio, P. 1997. "'Missing Link' or Analytically Missing?: The Concept of Social Capital" in *Journal of International Development*. Vol. 9, No. 7, pp.919-937
- Hart, G. 1991. "Engendering Everyday Resistance: Gender, Patronage and Production; Politics in Rural Malaysia." in *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol.19, No.1, Oct., pp.93-121
- Heimann, F. 1997. "Combatting International Corruption: The Role of the Business Community" in Corruption and the Global Economy. Washington D.C.: Institute for International Economics
- Hobart, M. 1993. An Anthropological Critique of Development: The Growth of Ignorance. London: Routledge

- Kaufmann, D. 1996. "Listening to Developing Countries Spell the C..... Word: The 'Tackling-Corruption-Taboo' Myth Meets Some Evidence." World Bank draft paper, mimeo
- Kaufmann, D. 1998. "Challenges in the Next Stage of Anti-Corruption" in New Perspectives on Combating Corruption. Transparency International and Economic Development Institute of the World Bank
- Kaufmann, Pradhan and Ryterman. 1998. "New Frontiers in Diagnosing and Combatting Corruption." PREM Notes, No. 7, October; The World Bank
- Kiersey, N. 1998. "The Political Economy of the East Asian Financial Crisis," unpublished.
- Klitgaard, R. 1998. "International Cooperation Against Corruption." in New Perspectives on Combating Corruption. Transparency International and Economic Development Institute of the World Bank
- Landell-Mills, P. and Serageldin, I. 1991. "Governance and the External Factor", paper for the World Bank Annual Conference on Development Economics
- Levett, A., Kottler, A., Burman, E. and Parker, I. (eds.). 1997. Culture, Power and Difference: Discourse Analysis in South Africa. London: Zed Books
- Mackintosh, M. 1992. "Questioning the State" in Wuyts, Mackintosh and Hewitt (eds.), Development Policy and Public Action, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Mauro, P. 1997. Why Worry About Corruption. Washington D.C.: IMF
- Mazrui, A.A. 1999. "Introduction" in Mazrui, A. (ed.) General History of Africa: VII Africa since 1935. Oxford/Berkeley: James Currey/ University of California Press/UNESCO
- Moore, D. B. and Schmitz, G. J. (eds.). 1995. Debating Development Discourse: Institutional and Popular Perspectives. London: Macmillan Press
- Moore, D. B. 1995. "Development Discourse as Hegemony: Toward an Ideological History - 1945-1995" in Moore, David B. and Schmitz, Gerald J. (eds.). 1995. Debating Development Discourse: Institutional and Popular Perspectives. London: Macmillan Press
- Mosely, Harrigan and Teye. 1995. Aid and Power, 2nd Edition. London: Routledge
- Moultrie, T. 1998. "(Re)constructing South Africa: 'Development' Discourse in South African Economic Policy Proposals". Unpublished Dissertation, LSE
- Munro, Padayachee, Lund and Valodia. 1999. "The State in a Changing World; Plus Ça Change?: Reflections from the South on the World Bank's 1997 World Development Report" in *Journal of International Development*, Vol. 11, No.1, Jan-Feb., pp.75-91

- Mwale, S. 1997. "IMF can only treat the symptoms of corruption" in *East African*, Week 33
- News and Notices*. 1999. "Governance Conditionality: Is the Bank overstepping its Mandate?" March
- Onoh, Chief, C.C. 1990. Monumental Corruption in Anambra State, 1987-1999, no publisher
- Parker, I. 1992. Discourse Dynamics. London: Routledge
- Pujas, V. and Rhodes, M. 1999. "A Clash of Cultures? Corruption and the Ethics of Administration in Western Europe" in *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol 52, No.4, Oct., pp-688-702
- Pope, J. 1999. The TI Source Book, Third Edition. Berlin: Transparency International
- Powell, M. and Seddon, D. 1997. "Editorial", in *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 71
- Rahnema, M. 1992. "Poverty", in Sachs, The Development Dictionary. London: Zed Books
- Ranis, G. 1997. "The World Bank Near the Turn of the Century," in Culpeper, Berry and Stewart (eds.) Global Development Fifty Years after Bretton Woods. London: MacMillan Press
- Rich, B. 1994. "The Cuckoo in the Nest. Fifty Years of Political Meddling by the World Bank" in *The Ecologist*, Vol. 24, No.1, Jan/Feb.
- Rose-Ackerman, S. 1978. Corruption: A Study in Political Economy, New York: Academic Press
- Rose-Ackerman, S. 1999. Corruption and Government : Causes, Consequences, and Reform. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Ryman, G. 1999. Was. London: HarperCollins Publishers
- Sachs, W. (ed.). 1992. The Development Dictionary. London: Zed Books
- Said, E. 1995. Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient. London: Penguin
- Schaffer, B. 1984. "Toward Responsibility: Public Policy in Concept and Practice" in Clay, E.J. and B. Schaffer (eds.) Room for Manoeuvre: An Exploration of Public Policy in Agriculture and Rural Development, London: Heinmann Educational Books
- Schmitz, G. J. 1995. "Democratization and Demystification: Deconstructing 'Governance' as Development Paradigm" in Moore, David B. and Schmitz,

- Gerald J. (eds.). 1995. Debating Development Discourse: Institutional and Popular Perspectives. London: Macmillan Press
- Seidel, G. 1985. "Political Discourse Analysis", in T. van Dijk (ed.) Handbook of Discourse Analysis, Vol. 4. London: Academic Press
- Shihata, I. 1996. "Corruption- A General Review with an Emphasis on the Role of the World Bank." paper based on a keynote address delivered at the International Symposium on International Crime, Jesus College, Cambridge, UK, Sept. 9
- Stevens, M. 1998. "The World Bank on Corruption." in *Governance*, January, pp. 8-12
- Sturzenegger, F. and Tommasi, M. 1998. The Political Economy of Reform. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press
- Tesh, S. 1999. "A Short History of Anti-corruption Activities in The World Bank" in *1818 Society Newsletter*, No.70, Jan./Feb.
- Theobald, R. 1990. Corruption, Development and Underdevelopment. London: MacMillan
- Thiel. 1999. "Editorial" in *Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit*, 40 Jg., November
- Voutira, E. and Brown, S.W. 1995. "Conflict Resolution; A Cautionary Tale," a RSP Report for the Economic and Social Committee on Overseas Research, ODI. April
- Washington Post*. 1999. Nov. 10, p.39
- Woods, N. 2000. "The Challenge of Good Governance for the IMF and the World Bank Themselves" in *World Development*, Vol. 28, No. 5, pp.823-841
- Woost, Michael D. 1997. "Alternative Vocabularies of Development? 'Community' and 'Participation' in Development Discourse in Sri Lanka." in Grillo and Stirrat (eds.) Discourses of Development: Anthropological Perspectives. Oxford, New York: Berg
- World Bank. 1989. "Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth. A Long-Term Perspective Study." Washington D.C.: The World Bank
- World Bank. 1990. "Issues of Governance in Borrowing Members- The Extent of Their Relevance under the Bank's Articles of Agreement, Legal Memorandum of the General Counsel," Dec. 21
- World Bank. 1991. "Managing Development: The Governance Dimension. A Discussion Paper". mimeo
- World Bank. 1992. Governance and Development. Washington D.C.: The World Bank

- World Bank. 1995. "Prohibition of Political Activities in the Bank's Work, Legal Opinion of the General Counsel," July 11
- World Bank. 1997a. "Should Countries Care About Corruption?" in Annual General Meeting of the World Bank and IMF: Programme of Seminars, Summary of Discussions, Washington D.C.: World Bank
- World Bank. 1997b. Helping Countries Combat Corruption, a report of the Poverty Reduction and Economic Management network.
- World Bank. 1997c. World Development Report: The State in a Changing World. NY: Oxford University Press
- World Bank. 1998a. "The World Bank's Anti-Corruption Policy: A Long-Term Strategy for Better Governance", 1998 Annual General Meeting World Bank Group Issue Brief.  
<http://www.worldbank.org/html/extdr/am98/corr.htm>
- World Bank. 1998b. "The World Bank: Anti-Corruption Action Plan for FY99." mimeo
- World Bank. 1998c. World Development Report 1998/1999: Knowledge for Development. NY: Oxford University Press
- World Bank. 1999. Development Report 1999/2000: Entering the 21st Century: The Changing Development Landscape. NY: Oxford University Press
- Worsley, Peter. 1999. "Culture and Development Theory" in T. Skelton and T. Allan (eds.). Culture and Global Change. London: Routledge

Websites:

<http://www.worldbank.org/publicsector/anticorrupt/helping.htm>  
<http://www.transparency.org>