

# ***The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute***

(The *JRAI* is the principal journal of the oldest anthropological organization in the world.)

Vol. 12, Issue 1, March 2006, pp. 231-2

Journal, ISSN: 1359-0987, Online ISSN: 1467-9655

Publisher: Blackwell Publishing

## **Between Morality and the Law: Corruption, Anthropology and Comparative Society**

Italo Pardo (ed.)

Aldershot, Hampshire (UK) & Burlington (USA), Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005.

viii + 187 pp., hb £45.00, ISBN 0 7546 4290 9

This book is a rather ambitious project by ten scholars, mainly anthropologists, whose aims include identifying paradigms of corruption, grappling with the ethnographic variety and complexity of corrupt practices across the world, and challenging the long-held view which seeks the roots of corruption in some 'cultural disposition'.

In the introduction to the volume, Italo Pardo argues that corruption as 'abuse of power' is a perennial feature of systems where there are marked asymmetries of power. Pardo also contends that expectations about a total eradication of corruption would be unreasonable (p. 10) and, together with some contributors, holds that in some cases corruption represents a 'necessary evil'.

The volume consists of ten essays which are rather inappropriately called chapters. In spite of Pardo's claim that the book is a 'concerted attempt' (p. 3), the anthology remains largely an eclectic collection, offering fragments rather than a holistic picture of corruption. Likewise, the essays are not necessarily about corrupt practices in Western and non-Western societies, as Pardo claims. Such a dichotomy reflects a Euro/West-centric mindset which ironically enough several contributors often criticize.

The essays could be classified into three main 'groups'. In the first 'group' one could include chapters 2 to 4, where Corbin, Pardo, and Miller focus on cases of abuse of power in Spain and Italy. Corbin draws attention to a Spanish paradox in the 1960s where the legal was not considered as moral and the criminal was not deemed as immoral. Pardo assesses the implications of the *tangentopoli* (bribesville) scandal in Italy in the early and mid-1990s. Concentrating also on Italy, Miller highlights the need for international legislative co-ordination in the fight against corruption and for the gradual construction of a 'European juridical space' (p. 54).

The second 'group' includes chapters 5 to 8, where the focus is on corruption in post-socialist Albania and Mongolia and in three former USSR republics: Russia, Kazakhstan, and Latvia. In her inappropriately titled essay ("The Devil is not as wicked as people believe, neither is the Albanian": corruption between moral discourses and national identity'), Prato rightly argues that fighting corruption emerged as one of the pressing goals of legal reforms in post-Communist Albania. In their piece on Buryatia (southeast Siberia) and Mongolia, Humphrey and Sneath assess how *blat* (the use of contacts to obtain goods and services) in Soviet times turned into 'bureaucratic appropriation' (p. 88). Of particular interest in Rigi's essay on Kazakhstan are the analysis of 'the deconstructive effects of the monetization of social relations on interpersonal trust' (p. 106) and the insight into

the 'logic of commodification of coercion' (p. 110). In his article on the duplicity of discourse, Sedlenieks draws attention to a constant shifting of the meaning and definition of corruption in Latvia.

The third and last 'group' includes chapters 9 and 10, which address the issue of corruption in an African and Latin American context. Concentrating mainly on Ethiopia, in her essay, Harrison attempts to go beyond the 'simplifying caricatures' that dominate a donor-influenced discourse of corruption, especially that in Sub-Saharan Africa. Gledhill uses examples from Peru, Guatemala, Mexico, and Colombia to deconstruct two basic approaches to corruption in Latin America: that corruption is a pathology of 'underdevelopment', and that its sources are embedded in Latin American culture and history. Both Harrison and Gledhill emphasize that more research needs to be carried out on the nature and level of corruption in Africa and Latin America.

Some conclusions on the level of corruption in certain countries are based on anecdotal evidence, which is acknowledged by several contributors. The fact that evidence about corruption is hard to come by (p. 139), however, can hardly justify the lack of statistics in most essays, where the prevailing tendency is to offer 'a descriptive analysis' of local notions and practices of corruption. Humphrey and Sneath's and Sedlenieks's essays indicate that corruption can be approached empirically and that it is essential to strike the right balance between quantitative and qualitative research methods.

The volume does not seem to address the issue of corruption in a typically Western context; 1960s Spain and Italy are hardly the best examples of the Weberian rational-legal state. Moreover, the anthology ignores corruption at corporate level, especially in the USA. One could detect a tendency for repetition in chapters 4 to 8.

The anthology is a praiseworthy attempt to approach and to some extent 'measure' corruption in several countries over the last fifty years. The case studies included would prove useful to anthropologists, ethnographers, sociologists, and other social scientists who in the future would be interested in approaching the ubiquity of corruption on a global scale.

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