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Does African “corruption” exist?

William De Maria

Abstract. This paper travels into what De Sardan calls the unexplored “social mechanisms of corruption” (1999, p. 25). One of the great contemporary assignments for ethics, sociology and ethnography scholarships is accounting for the enormous distance between judicial, political and donor condemnation of African “corruption” on one hand and their frequency, banalisation and outright cultural legitimacy by ordinary people on the other. To do this the paper is set within the unremitting colonialism that is the African tragedy. It depicts the current interventions by the West into African “corruption” as the third wave of colonialism, and anticipates two further waves. Using the outlooks of a post-colonial ethnography I explore the Western takeover of the management of African corruption and consider the motives that drive this new colonialism.

Key words: Africa, corruption, neo-colonialism.

Introduction

The West has returned to Africa (again), this time with a focus on “corruption”.¹ The “C” word is on everybody’s lips and is a set piece now in policy manoeuvres across Africa. Because the special style and execution of “corruption”-hunting will stand to fundamentally condition African public and cultural life for generations to come it is important to thoroughly examine Western rationales that drive it. This paper acknowledges a strong interface between African “ethics” and African “corruption”. Both must be understood within the continuing context of colonialism.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First I attempt to show that the West’s construction of African “corruption” is shallow, oblivious to cultural variance and ultimately designed to serve Western economic and geo-political interests under the guise of weeding out something falsely portrayed as a universal negative. The second purpose is to recover, and join forces with, a

Dr William De Maria teaches ethics and government-business relations in the UQ Business School at the University of Queensland. The central focus of all of his work is the development of critical analysis. His current research interests are in the areas of organisationally imposed silence and secrecy, and corruption with a particular focus on Africa. He has been a visiting fellow to Transparency International’s world headquarters in Berlin. His critique of the Corruption Perception Index is due for publication soon. His research has been published nationally and internationally and in 2007 his award winning analysis of international whistleblower legislation was published.

minority scholarship that connects “corruption” to culture, as a Quixotic counterpoint to the current conceptual orthodoxy.

Such a project is immediately faced with the difficulty of getting on to the main thoroughfares of development scholarship which are jam-packed now with studies that see African “corruption” everywhere. It is a broad motorway of intellectual energy constructed from the materials of Western outlook (Mercer, 2002). This scholarship previously drew on public administration, sociology, political science and law, but not, it should be emphasised, anthropology and particularly ethnography (De Sardan, 1999, p. 25). Now, since the 1990s (with clear sponsorship from trans-national bodies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) economics has confidently marked out its territory. Studies are in abundance now that purport to connect “corruption” to economic performance (Abed & Gupta, 2002, ch. 1; Campos, Lien & Pradhan, 1999; Hope, 2000, p. 23; Keefer & Knack, 1995; Mauro, 1995). This hyperactive scholarship services the new realities of transnationalising capitalism, technology transfers and trade liberalisations. It is showing all the signs of victor scholarship. The market, deified in the scholarship, is the gold standard against which all else must seek accommodation. This includes indigenous appraisals of “corruption”, an important point in this paper.

The complete monopoly of the field of “corruption” scholarship is frustrated by a strident trickle of black African contributions seeking indigenous solutions to Africa’s troubles (Adedeji, 1990; Kankwenda, 2004, ch. 4; Onimode, 2004, ch. 2). The intention of this paper is to support this activity by providing a companion analysis to this black scholarship, albeit from a Western outside position. I attempt to muster an alternative view, a counterbalance to west-led development scholarship as it pertains to the issue of African “corruption”. For this purpose the paper reviews and orchestrates the works of Ekeh (1975), De Sardan (1999), and Smith (2001) into a subversive chorus against this new (and as I hope to demonstrate) flawed orthodoxy that promotes Western solutions to African “corruption”.

First the paper explores “corruption”, a central language symbol of the victor-donors. A simple framework of unremitting colonialism is then used to explain how anti-“corruption” is but the next wave of Western intrusion into Africa. In that framework the paper zeros in on a definition of “corruption”. The standard explanation of “corruption”, as the exploitation of private benefit under the guise of public duty, is

rejected for its sociological naivety and Western sympathies (Nye, 1967, p. 419). The paper champions ethical relativism, and true to its requirements, argues that the empirical occasion of cultural variance requires the essence of “corruption” to remain *permanently* the subject of disputation about what moral standards should apply at the private-public interface.

Western words: Western failures

In February 2005 it was reported that twenty six Mauritanian cabinet ministers had awarded themselves a 600% increase in salary, in order to “fight corruption” (CNN, 2005). This story and thousands like it demand some explanation as to why this paper carries the title *Does African “corruption” exist?* One would have thought that “corruption” in Africa is a foregone reality. There is no doubt that something very serious exists. State treasuries get raided, customs officials take bribes, and elections are rigged. This we know. Who defines this as “corruption” is an extremely important question in this paper. The prerogative to define flows to the prerogative to act, which in turn flows to the prerogative to control. The power to ask and answer this question, I maintain, is ebbing from African public life, and has been for some time (Ndulo, 2003, p. 367). “Corruption”, what it is and what can be done about it, is in the process of capture by dominant Western sense-making. Ahluwalia ably grabs hold of this notion when, in making a more general point, he says:

The inability of the African state to deliver ‘development’ has meant that it is no longer permitted to engage in activities which a normal state would perform. Rather these functions have been usurped, and the African state today is entrapped within a discourse of power whereby foreign institutions and agencies map out its future. In this new configuration, it is the World Bank, the IMF and a host of non-government organizations which determine and dictate fundamental policy. They are in many respects, the new ‘colonial administrators’ (Ahluwalia, 2001, p. 54).

A counterpoint is desperately needed. Not so as to nostalgically hark back to some pre-West era but to encourage indigenously grounded ethical opposition to the tsunami of anti-“corruption” washing towards Africa, as this effort is driven by Western economic and political interests. I argue that like other neo-colonial adventures, anti-“corruption” stands to bypass, and indeed further oppress the ordinary African.

A contextual point first. This new anti-“corruption” era (which has spurned a lively and lucrative anti-“corruption” industry, (see Michael, 2004b) is understood in this paper as but the latest in a long history of Western intervention and meddling in Africa.

The following table presents this idea.

TABLE 1:
Layers of Colonialism

Layer	Colonial Character	Dates
Classic Colonial	Resource and human exploitation; missionaries, governance control.	Berlin Conference (1884) – 1960s
Cold War	all above + Cold War diplomatic manoeuvring	1950s – 1990s
“Corruption”	all above + anti-“corruption” programs	1990s– continuing
Democracy	all above + pro-democracy programs	1990s – continuing
“Terrorism”	all above + anti-“terrorist” programs	2000 – continuing
New Cold War	all above + geo-political manoeuvrings (USA vs China and Russia?)	Future

Western interventions in Africa have not ceased since the Berlin Conference. In terms of this logic of continuity, as displayed in the table above, eras do not finish. They are not eliminated by history. Thus African independence did not sweep away colonialism. Rather, new incursions are layered on previous interventions (De Sardan, 1999, p. 37). For example religious conversion is a constant feature of Western contract in Africa. Today it adopts more of a fundamental Christian look than it did in the previous missionary era of the nineteenth century. But it is still there. These previous interventions moderate, indeed co-shape, current and subsequent eras. Thus while there are specific reasons why the West is back in Africa now on an anti-“corruption” mission, the style of this era and the limits to action are moderated by the previous era’s history.

The Democracy and “Terrorism” eras are considered to be coterminous with the anti-“corruption” era. Harsch for instance sees the democracy movement giving added impetus to the effort to strike out African “corruption” (1993, p. 33). We can expect a good deal of cross-referencing between the programs that separately emerge here. For instance, Africa, once the abode of communists during the Cold War, is now seen as a host for “terrorism”. This US led interest in African security will interact with the new anti-“corruption” paradigm in ways still too early to understand (Volman, 1993). Our understanding of the way these colonialist layers emerge, interact and then blend with following layers is not well understood and remains unfortunately outside the scope of this paper.

October 1996 is a good marker year for the start of the anti-“corruption” era. That was when World Bank president (at the time), James Wolfensohn, and IMF managing director, Michael Camdessus controversially announced that from henceforth they would use their donor leverage with African countries to stamp out “corruption” (Op De Beke, 2000, p. 255).

Although standardised figures do not yet exist, Western interventions into African “corruption” are on

the dramatic increase (Michael, 2004a, p. 321).² We do know that from 1988 to 2007 (when the last group of currently approved programs will finish) Germany, UK, Norway, and the Netherlands together funded 194 anti-"corruption" projects in Sub-Saharan Africa, at the cost of about US\$900 million.³ These projects range from the large US\$64 million grant by the UK Department of International Development to improve government services in the poor areas of Kenya to US\$4,880 grant from NORAD (the Norwegian aid agency) for a survey of donors' views on Zambian "corruption" (Utstein Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, 2005). In fiscal years 2001-2002 (the latest figures) US funding for anti-"corruption" projects in Sub-Saharan Africa averaged about US\$33 million per year (US General Accounting Office, 2004, p. 15). It is anticipated that this level of funding will rise dramatically as a result of the recently initiated US Millennium Challenge Account that will fund US\$1 billion worth "good governance" projects in 2004 with significant increases proposed by 2006 (US General Accounting Office, 2004, p. 1). In 2004 the World Bank committed US\$16 billion to Sub-Saharan Africa, of which more than 20% was for public sector governance, which is the main category one would expect to find the anti-"corruption" programs (World Bank, 2005). Up to 2000 the World Bank had funded 350 specific anti-"corruption" programs to 95 donor countries, many of which are in Africa (Wolfensohn, 2000). So the anti-"corruption" era is well on its way.

In this paper "corruption" is more than an oft copied entry in a Western dictionary. It is a vexed, possibly indefinable idea, only making sense after one has delved the deepest parts of conflicting and usually esoteric cultural experience. I reject the Western fashion to give up on this troublesome concept by detaching it from its context (even though that is usually robustly denied), and reposition it, dumped down, as the vernacular of powerful bodies such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and emergent anti-"corruption" bodies like Transparency International and the proto-Western African Union. Indeed we appear now to be at the stage where the concept is so above suspicion that new studies spend no time at all struggling with the definition of "corruption" they will apply in their work (Deininger & Mpuga, 2005, p. 171).

"Corruption", through Western eyes, commonly pertains to matters such as personal conflicts of interest and extracting private benefit from public office. It is a concept drawn from the depths of Western outlook. As such it is tempered with sociological naivety and other-culture indifference. The Western understanding of "corruption" is determined to a great extent by the canonical power of individualism to fashion our view of this phenomenon. Individual responsibility (therefore personal culpability) is positioned in the forefront of our consciousness. Family, village, history, and ethnicity are pushed aside in the search for stand-alone culprits.

The Western mind easily cultivates narrow and socially detached meanings for the entirety of its core characteristics. "Corruption" is a case in point. It is defined as the malpractice of *individual* rogue citizens (although rivers of ink write the counter narrative about the systemic nature of "corruption") who have gained privately from positions of public trust. True to that logic and free from the need to negotiate cultural "noise", we exploit extremely unhelpful medical metaphors. "Corruption" is deemed to be a trans-cultural "disease" that must be surgically removed from all sovereign states. Hope has referred to "corruption" as the "AIDS of democracy" and a "pandemic" with its spread reaching "cancerous proportions" (2000, pp. 17, 19). Former World Bank head, James Wolfensohn, also saw "corruption" as a "cancer". Even the recent Commission on Africa report described "corruption" as a "spreading rot" (p. 32). Portraying "corruption" this way licences a view that it is (like all diseases) no respecter of culture. This allows Riley to see nothing "African" about African "corruption". "It is", he says, "part of the strong global growth in corruption" (2000, p. 138). This of course opens the gate for standardised international intervention and collides with recent assessments which context "corruption" into specific histories. Michael for example treats "corruption" in Eastern Europe as specific to issues of transition from command to liberal economies (2004b). This is definitely not a history shared with Africa. Other literatures also dispute Riley's uniformity of "corruption" thesis (De Sardan, 1999, p. 25).

This paper champions a converse view. The indisputable reality of cultural variance requires "corruption" to remain permanently the subject of disputation about moral standards that should apply to the bearers of public trust and duty. At the very least this position validates non-Westernised African voices in the discourses about "corruption" and targets the West's self-elected mandate to determine the boundaries of this discourse and penetrate African public policy.⁴

We in the West seem confident that we "know" what "corruption" is. This is a brash deception. We cannot even agree that "corruption" causes social and economic damage (Fjeldstad & Tungodden, 2003, p. 1459; Von Alemann, 2004, p. 25). For what of the literature that sees "corruption" contributing to market efficiency and political access? (Leff, 1979, pp. 325-340). Kahn risks heresy by disputing the popular claim that "corruption" compromises development (2002). A feature of neo-colonialist economic outlook is that corruption is inimical to growth. Most analyses would favour this conclusion (Maoro, 1995; Paul, 1995). Yet how do we account for the high corruption-high growth countries of East Asia? (Campos, Lien & Pradhan 1999, p. 1059). The following table simply collects together recent GDP and corruption figures for a general incursion into this point.⁵

TABLE 2:
Linking Growth and "Corruption"

Country	GDP 2003 (%)	Corruption score 2004 (0=poor; 10=good)
<i>Developing World</i>		
China	9.1	3.4
Vietnam	7.5	2.6
Thailand	6.4	3.8
Mongolia	5.6	3.0
Indonesia	4.1	2.0
<i>Developed World</i>		
Finland	1.9	9.7
New Zealand	3.5	9.6
Denmark	0.0	9.5
Iceland	2.6	9.5
Singapore	1.1	9.3

Sources: World Bank, Transparency International, CIA Fact book.

The high "corruption" countries have growth rates far higher than the low "corruption" countries. If empirical support can be found for the proposition that "corruption" is not inimical to growth then it throws a wild card on the research table and along the way damages Huntington's famous claim that "corruption" is just the early stage of development (1968, pp. 59-71).

Notwithstanding an active dissension in the literature, Western-based certainties about the nature of "corruption" prevail. The irony is that this certainty has failed to yield any worthwhile measures of the phenomenon. The rich cultural discordance embedded in the meaning of "corruption" is suppressed in favour of a standardised approach trafficked by international donors and development agencies. The best we seem to be able to come up are perception-based methodologies. Western governments are starting to commit their resources to the "clean up" of Africa on the basis of these flawed measures.⁶ This firmly puts us into the realm of uncertainty. If we don't know how to measure "corruption" how can we evaluate the impact of the plethora of anti-"corruption"?

The early evidence from the field is that anti-corruption projects are not living up to promises (Kaufman, 2003; Michael, 2004b, pp. 4-5). In fact Michael reminds us that we cannot even be sure that civil society involvement (a standard item on the anti-"corruption" menu) reduces "corruption" (Michael, 2004b, p. 7). The next question that needs to be considered is what is drawing the West back to Africa?

The recent emergence of an internationalised attack on African "corruption" is partly the result of major geopolitical shifts by the USA and its Western Europe allies following the end of the Cold War (Alesina & Weder, 2002; Riley, 2000, p. 140; Williams, 1999, p. 487). The old game of propping up African dictators to variably encourage or prevent the spread of Communism and gain access to cheap natural resources and easy import markets, has given way to a new interest by the big

Western powers in corrupt-free administrations. "Corruption" is now the common weed in the new open market seed beds cultivated by strategically positioned Western companies. For example, in 2002 United States trade with sub-Saharan Africa was valued at nearly US\$24 billion and US direct investment in the region currently exceeds US\$10 billion.

"Corruption", once the concern of moralists, is now confronted by a politics driven agenda by expansionist economic and political interests. Simply put, the new mantra is, "corruption is not good for [First World] trade". It is seen to distort the cash nexus, requires expensive regulatory regimes, shelters inefficiency and retards competition (Centre for International Private Enterprise, 2003; US General Accounting Office, 2004, p. 4). The solutions are the old Bretton-Woods shibboleths such as trade liberalisation and privatisation. Competition from imports is believed to produce efficiencies, cleanse the local market of state-caused unproductivity, and guarantee lower commodity prices. World Bank officials are now saying that growth in Africa must be driven by private investment in "corruption" free climates (Deinginger & Mpugu, 2005, p. 171).

This is what we are faced with. In the next section a counterpoint is suggested utilising the minority scholarships of Ekeh, Smith and De Sardan.

Subversive murmurings

What is missing from much of the Western orthodoxy on "corruption" is an ethnography bled dry of its old colonialist biases. In other words a game plan about "corruption" that can only appear through cultural immersion. It is the sort of ethnography that Prasad describes as "restoring subjectivity...taking native standpoints seriously...and privileging local meanings over universal social pronouncements" (2003, p. 150).

Ekeh and the Two Publics

The Western construction of "corruption" depends on a polarisation between public and private. This is a peculiar Western philosophical achievement, an outcome of the modern state. Some have pejoratively observed that this polarity is not part of the African condition. In fact Andreski and Rose-Ackerman explain the existence of "kleptocratic or vampire states" as ones in which public assets are treated by (usually powerful) Africans as private property (Andreski, 1968; Hope, 2000, p. 19; Rose-Ackerman, 1997). That is obviously the case. However, it is a typically unrefined conclusion about the complex interchange between the public and private in African culture.

Ekeh says that this public-private duality does not transfer easily to Africa. There is a private realm but he insists that it is differentially associated with two public

moral universes; the *primordial public* and the *civic public* (1975, p. 92). The former (to do with kinship) operates on the same moral imperatives as the private realm. The latter is associated with the colonial administration and based on the civil structures such as military and the police. It has become identified with popular politics in the African post-colony (p. 92). Its major characteristic is that it has no moral linkages with the private moral realm. In fact Ekeh goes as far as saying that the *civic public* is amoral. Thus we have political actors operating in two realms; a moral-based primordial realm and a moral-free (or moral-muted) civic realm.

Life in the primordial public (e.g. life in post-colonial tribal-familial clusters) is a life full of obligations to the larger group and concern for its welfare and continuity. The group, or culture, or history is transcendent. The group member is merely an ingredient in its value or a moment in its continuity. In return for looking out for the group, the member receives, among other things, identity and psychological comfort (p. 107). These are non-transactional as they are in the West. In other words the obligations to the primordial public are not offered in exchange for rights.

This is out of kilter with the Western conception which endorses a transactional balance between rights and obligations. In the West, rights are extracted from the body politic (e.g. the right to practice a particular religion) in return for generalised citizenship obligations (e.g. to tolerate the religious beliefs of others). Or to rephrase this in the idiom of the paper; one has, as a right, access to a free market in which all are obliged to act incorruptly. In this context "corruption" is not (and can never be) systemic. It is the behaviour of individual rogues breaching moral standards that are as applicable to private life as to public life. There is no disconnection here. Dishonesty makes as much sense in family life as it does in business activity.

However African life in the civic public is another thing again. Ekeh says that while many Africans bend over backwards to benefit and sustain their primordial public, they seek to gain from their involvement in the civic public:

...the individual's relationship with the civic public is measured in material terms...While the individual seeks to gain from the civic public, there is no moral urge on him to give back to the civic public in return for his benefits...Duties...are de-emphasised while rights are squeezed out of the civic public with the amorality of the artful dodger (p. 107).

For Ekeh, the unwritten law is that it is legitimate to rob the civic public as long as the purpose is to strengthen the primordial public. Practices defined in law as "fraud" and "embezzlement" are sanctioned (or at the very least, tolerated) as long as the target is the government, not organic clusters such as extended families, neighbourhoods etc.

Ekeh traces this necessary anti-state sentiment to the colonial period and the ensuing struggles for independence across the African continent. These struggles entailed sabotage of colonial administration through absenteeism, pilfering, strikes, tax evasion and the like (p. 102). For Ekeh, these subversive activities did not stop at independence. They carried over to post-colonial rule. The author has witnessed similar transfer effects in the countries of the former Soviet Republic such as Poland and Hungary. In those countries the hated state was fair game in the daily struggle for personal and familial welfare.

This being the case "corruption" becomes very problematical as standards to measure the alleged wrongdoing are not usually germane to the civic public realm. This is the realm, by the way, that formally operates state governance (anti-"corruption" commissions, police, and judiciary). It is the dialectic conflict between the primordial and civic realms that characterise for Ekeh the shape of modern African politics. By that he means that the West's insistence on adding its own brand of anti-"corruption" policies and procedures to the African civic realm (e.g. through anti-"corruption" conditionalities in foreign aid) is opposed by Africanist interests. Tilyenji Kaunda, son of founding Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda, has recently voiced the African side of this dispute:

While we are looking for genuine partnership, they [Western countries] have other interests of gaining out of our resources cheaply. Our first contact through the liberation struggle and neo-colonialism have left us with serious scars. And we have continued to be bruised by their inhuman policies and programmes (Phiri, 2005).

The spirit of Ekeh's interesting formulation has been used by Smith, whose work we consider next.

Smith and the Igbos

Up until now, "corruption" has been deemed an unsuitable topic of study for ethnographers. Smith's fieldwork in Nigeria with the Igbo-speaking community of Ubakala is one of the few ethnographic studies of African "corruption" (2001). Nigeria is regularly rated amongst the most "corrupt" counties in the world by organisations such as Transparency International and the World Bank Institute. One can suggest that what we are measuring in these surveys is not indigenous Nigerian "corruption" patterns as much as Western failure to eradicate a Western construct ("corruption") from the public life of Nigeria.

Formulaic Western solutions are based on a view that "corruption" is *produced* in non-variable patterns within the state by elites or aspirant elites with access to power (Achebe, 1983, p. 38). Smith's special

contribution is that he diverts our gaze from this explanation onto kinship realities where “corruption” is *reproduced* by ordinary people. In this respect he is very close to Ekeh, whose work was considered above (Smith, 2001, p. 345).

Smith concluded from his study that ordinary Nigerians had a stake in reproducing “corruption” and that what may appear to be “corruption” can look like moral behaviour from local perspectives...as they navigate Nigeria’s “clientelistic political economy” (p. 345). But he warns that this explanation is not totally satisfactory as “people condemn the very practices in which they participate and lament the effects of a system they feel obliged to reproduce” (p. 346).

The Nigerian political economy is really a moral economy in which the spoils of the state (e.g. tariff revenues) are distributed totally or partially through horizontal and vertical networks of patronage. According to Smith no Nigerian he interviewed could justify it. He detected, in other words, a complex moral ambivalence that would be susceptible only to the most perspicacious Western observer.

Among the Igbos that Smith studied were people who accessed needed resources through reciprocity and obligation practices long embedded in family, lineage and community (p. 350). Why? Because Western forms of access through highly organised welfare state programs, expansive markets and adequate salaries (among a list of many pre-conditions) is not part of the Nigerian political economy. Yet in their absence the West judges such access behaviour as “corrupt”!

Every person in the 13 villages that Smith researched in Ubakala was expected to assist members of his or her patrilineage (*umunna*), matrilineage (*umunne*), and a host of other connections created by ties of residence and association (p. 351). In Ekeh’s concept, previously considered, this is the weblike primordial public.

However these give and take transactions are governed by subtle conventions that would escape all Westerners bar those with the eye of the insider. Smith’s education example shows how the indigenous line is drawn between “corruption” and legality. Nneka scored well on her secondary schools admission test but not good enough to guarantee entry to the school desired by her parents. Nneka’s mother found out that her sister had a friend in the Federal Ministry of Education in Lagos. The friend said she would try and get Nneka admitted to the favoured school by having her name on the minister’s discretionary list. The parents had to pay the woman a considerable sum for this. By now the Western eye has identified a “corrupt” act. But is it so? Not according to Smith. Even though payment was an essential part of the process, he maintains, from the ethnographic evidence, that it was not a bribe (p. 353). The feature that made inclusion on the discretionary list possible was not the money but the connection. As Smith explains:

The money actually represented a social distance in the connection. The woman in the ministry almost surely would have refused any [payment] to help her own sister’s daughter. A complete stranger offering money to get on the ‘Minister’s list’ would likely have been rejected outright... To accept money from a stranger to facilitate admission of a child who was not qualified based on her exam result is wrong: the rules of the state apply in such an impersonal case. To help your relation get admission when her scores were below the cut-off is expected and morally justified: the [moral] rules of kinship, community and reciprocity apply when the stakes are personal/communal (p. 353).

Finally we explore the contribution of De Sardan.

De Sardan and the Moral Economy

The French scholar J.P. Olivier de Sardan has made a striking contribution to the resistance of Western prerogatives in the field of “corruption”. He shares Ekeh and Smith’s view that this whole area is immeasurably more complex and fraught with social and political difficulties than the designers and promoters of Western solutions to African “corruption” would have us believe. His intention in writing his classic *A Moral Economy of Corruption in Africa?* was to:

...insist on as subtle as possible a restitution of the value systems and cultural codes which permit a justification of corruption by those who practice it (and who do not necessarily consider it to be such – quite the contrary), and to anchor corruption in ordinary everyday practice (1999, pp. 25-26).

De Sardan’s moral economy reaches beyond “corruption” to what he calls the “corruption complex” (which covers a range of illicit practices such as influence peddling and prevarication) which are technically distinct from “corruption” but nevertheless also contradictory to notions of “public ethics”, “public property” and “public service” (p. 27). Here he resonates with Ekeh (the two publics) and Smith’s horizontal and vertical networks of patronage.

A natural consequence for De Sardan anchoring “corruption” in ordinary everyday practice is best spelled out in one of his notable observations: “Corruption” is neither “marginal” nor “sectoralised” or “repressed”, but is “generalized” and “banalised” p. 28). De Sardan embraces Ekeh’s explanation here; there is no shared and internalised conception of the public domain. Why? De Sardan blames *inter alia* the traumatising experiences of colonialism, the absence of public property at the village level and inter-tribal rivalries (p. 31).

De Sardan moves on from Ekeh and Smith when he focuses on post-colonial governance issues. He is

pessimistic that "corruption" will retreat as long as three circumstances continue to exercise influence: the crisis of the African state, the underpayment of public servants and the stream of foreign aid ending in elite coffers (p. 32). Interestingly he sees these circumstances congealing patterns of "corruption" which are unaffected by the type of regime in place. While he states there is empirical grounding for this proposition, De Sardan does not provide proof. Nevertheless it does remain a tantalising idea and a rebuke of the Western approach to "corruption" which places enormous credence on democratic forms of administration as inherently less-"corrupt" than non-democratic forms. De Sardan says this is nonsense (p. 34).

His final contribution to this field is to identify five "logics" profoundly ingrained in African social life which promote and incubate behaviours easily misunderstood in the West as "corruption". These "logics" or "cultures" are, for ease of understanding, tabulated below.

TABLE 3:
Cultures of "Corruption"

Type	Characteristic
Negotiation	The superimposition of various legal systems, e.g. Western, Sharia, local, (see Table 1 above) provides considerable opportunities to bargain the nature of an act from "corrupt" to "not corrupt".
Gift giving	The traditional moral duty to say thank you for a benefit bestowed merges easily into bribes to ensure a certain administrative result.
Solidarity	Each individual is enmeshed in wide circles of obligation which entail solidarities and pressures to dispense and receive favours.
Predatory authority	Longstanding practices that holders of public office have a "right" to tributes and special access to benefits not enjoyed by everyone.
Redistribution	The capacity to redistribute accumulated assets is founded on patrimonialism. Such bequesting to extended family, business associates and underlings allows for the manifestation of cardinal values such as generosity and gratitude.

Source: De Sardan, 1999, pp. 36-34.

It should be noted that there is no normative sub-texts in De Sardan's thinking here. He is simply pointing to the role played by various cultural factors in the ubiquity and banalisation of "corruption".

The simple message put out by Ekeh, Smith and De Sardan is that Western solutions to African "corruption" will surely fail because they do not harmonise with the deep factors of African cultural life.

Conclusion

Commenting on a report accusing numerous top officials of corruption the Gambian President, Yahya Jammeh, said recently:

Heads will roll. I will deal with anybody whose name appeared negatively in the report. There will be no sacred cow. Even if my mother is on these pages I will deal with her.

Notwithstanding the histrionics, this is a very curious statement on a number of levels. Whether it is genuine or contrived is beside the point. The statement indicates how well advanced the rhetoric of the anti-"corruption" era is in Africa.

This paper has positioned itself at the start of this era, the third colonialist wave to wash over Africa. The wave is coterminous with the democratisation and anti-"terror" eras now also emerging to fill Africa's public policy spaces. Within that context the whole issue of the marginalisation of Africans in the management of "corruption" was explored through the way the concept "corruption" has been driven by the demands of international capital for "corrupt" free markets. The structural adjustments forced on Africa, clearly observed in the large scale privatisations that have taken place, have served the long term goal of making Africa safe for trade and further resource exploitation.

The direction taken in the paper will hopefully stimulate new research in a number of emerging areas. One concerns the effects of the colonisation of western "corruption" management practices on indigenous processes that have traditionally responded to issues of local deviance. The anthropological and sociological literature is surprisingly silent in this area. Deviance control has traditionally been affixed to the work list of families, villages and more recently, sovereign states. If indigenous leadership on all manner of deviance (including what might locally be defined as "corruption") is being sidelined, what will be the long term social and economic effect? Or perhaps this supplantation process is not as advanced as I suggest it is here. In that case, is there an undocumented hybridisation of local-transnational anti-corruption programs flourishing beneath the research radar?

Research is also needed to scrutinise a central concept of this paper. The argument was that intervention eras, once they are "over", do not fall into history. Rather, they are absorbed in following eras. Is this correct? If so how, in specific policy and ideological terms, is this continuity organised? This seems to be an important question. For if we are to understand the current anti-"corruption" era washing over Africa, it seems right we do so with full knowledge of its era history.

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Address correspondence to:
William de Maria
UQ Business School
The University of Queensland
AUSTRALIA
b.demaria@business.uq.edu.au

1 Putting the word corruption in inverted commas throughout the paper signals to the reader that in my view the concept is not as easy to define as we are led to believe.
2 In fact Michael says that the World Bank diffused its original anti-"corruption" program thinking from its African projects to eastern and central Europe in the mid 1990s (Michael, 2004b, p. 3).

3 This figure is a general indicator. It comes from the Utstein Anti-Corruption Resource Centre database. Euro values have been converted to US dollar values at the exchange rate for 31 March 2005.

4 Michael has a similar orientation when he argues that Eastern Europeans must become responsible for their own anti-corruption programs. See Michael, 2004b, p. 9.

5 This table is only offered for the purposes of discussion. It offers nothing definitive in the quest for understanding the connection between growth and development. The "corruption" scores are from Transparency International. The following endnote records problems with this index.

6 Berlin based anti-corruption NGO Transparency International, in conjunction with the Internet Centre for Corruption Research at the University of Passau in Germany, has been publishing the international corruption perception index (CPI) since 1995. The CPI annually rank orders an increasing number of countries in terms of perceptions of corruption. The CPI is now the subject of methodological controversy (Galtung, 2005). The other major corruption perception index is done by the World Bank Institute (WBI). WBI produced its first corruption index in 1996, and updates it every two years. At the time of writing the 2002 survey was the most recent available. The WBI Index covers twice as many sub-Saharan countries as the TI Index because it will assess a country on the basis of one survey, whereas the TI Index requires a minimum of three surveys per country. Both TI and WBI indexes assess perceptions rather than actual incidence of "corruption". Because of the similarities in data sources, there is a high correlation between TI and WBI indexes. As such, both these instruments are imprecise. As far as the paper is concerned the biggest failings of these indexes are that they rely on Western definitions of "corruption", yet claim to be measuring universal phenomena, and the data is based on what respondents perceive to be "corruption". Country level "corruption" surveys are done from time to time. However it is the TI and WBI indexes which produce the most publicity and influence the flow of anti-corruption resources from the West. African governments are becoming vocal in their condemnation of these indexes.