

‘Embedded Practices’: A Review of
Political Corruption in Africa: Extraction and
Power Preservation **Inge Amundsen (Ed.)**
Cheltenham: Edward Edgar Publishing
ISBN 978 1 78897 251 2 (cased); ISBN 978
178897 252 9 (eBook), (2019) pp +201

Olajide Oloyede

What does this book bring to our attention? The answer to this lies in the Preface, just as it is reflected in the title. What screams off the cover is political corruption in Africa which, in essence, is what the book is all about. Just as well, it is what it brings to our attention; but not so much that it focuses on political corruption rather than political corruption is “much more an impediment to development in the developing world than bureaucratic corruption.” But, as a matter of course, this is not new, that is, political corruption as an impediment to development. This has long been established in the field of development studies by academic researchers and in the observational reports of the NGO fraternity. So, what then is new? As it is, there are two routes to answering this question: from the perspective of the book, and the context of the subject matter of the book. In all intent and purpose, this is the adopted review strategy.

From the perspective of the book, the answer lies in the rationale: to bring the analysis of corruption to the track. What is this track? One can only assume that by track, the editor of the book, meant focus. But there has always been focus in studies of corruption, and the focus has always followed different tracks, which is to say, there is no single track to bring the readers back to. But, assuming that there is a single track which the book’s editor, in his wisdom, is convinced that there is. What justifies bringing us back to it? We are told that there are four arguments to this:

- * Political corruption is very different from bureaucratic or administrative corruption
- * Political corruption has two elements; it is about getting the money in, and it is about reinvesting it in safeguarding the hold on power. The former is extractive, the latter is power.
- * Political corruption serves the interest of the ruling elite.
- * Political corruption is abuse of power – a democratic power.

The above, to sum up, is what the book, a collection of different essays by various writers, is devoted to discussing. A collection of different essays it might be, disparate collection, it certainly not. This, we can say about the contributions from the outset. The introductory chapter by the book's editor is the pillar of the collection. By definition, a pillar is a holding 'element', so to say. This chapter, considered as such, enumerates the four earlier listed arguments; in all appearances, it has the feature of a critical literature review, and for those coming into the scholarship of corruption generally, it serves as a good *entre*. The chapter makes a distinction between political and administrative corruption. This is a rather fine-grained nuanced distinction in which political corruption is of two variants: extractive and power-preserving. Both sharpen the distinction, which the book's editor, Amundsen considers as having implication for research in that "these qualitatively distinct social phenomena require different analytical frameworks, conceptual models, and investigation and data methods." Further "Bureaucratic corruption can fruitfully be understood within the principal-agent framework, and measures to stem bureaucratic corruption can be implemented in terms of monitoring, oversight, sanctions and punishment. These can be very effective in curbing corruption if the principals, the government, have the political will to do so." The absence of political will is the thread that runs across all the essays. And when there is no political will, political corruption is writ large. Asante and Khisa present this picture in the case of Ghana discussed in chapter 2. Ghana's two main political parties alternate to govern the country in an economy they both point out as unproductive suggesting that this fuels corruption. A party in opposition runs an election on anti-corruption platform only to be enmeshed in corruption once in power. It is a sequence of reciprocal cause and effect which intensifies and perpetuates corruption because the political will to deal with it by the party in government is absent. The party in government does whatever it can to safeguard power, an element of political corruption discussed by Amundsen in the introductory chapter. This served as the conceptual framing of the discussion of the four prominent cases described by Asante and Khisa in the Ghanaian case. Preservation of power looms large in Michelle D'Arcy's "Big Men and Poor Voters: political campaign and elections in Kenya" in chapter 3. It is an analysis of the use of power preserving in election campaigns in Kenya and the ways in which such preservation requires substantial amount of money, described as 'War Chest' to stay in power in Ojo, Prussa and Amundsen's chapter on Nigeria which documents political corruption in the country. The distinctive nature of political corruption is drawn out clearly in Khisa's discussion of Museveni's Uganda in chapter 5. Khisa lays bare the resources extracted by the Museveni government which "go in part in oiling the political system to sustain its status quo."

Personal enrichment as the route to secure political power which in turn enables personal enrichment is the conclusion drawn from the not-so-secret Secret Loans Affair in Mozambique narrated by Nuvunga and Orre in chapter 6. As gathered from both writers, the loan, secret it may be, was within a legal framework which

makes Dulani to suggest that a weak legal framework that governs political parties in Malawi contributes to high levels of political corruption in the country. Where else is such high level political corruption so glaring and reported with vigour in the continent than in South Africa? South Africa is often portrayed as unique in quite a number of analysis of politics, economy and society in Africa; the shortcomings of this portrayal notwithstanding, one could not help being inclined to it on reading Budhram's chapter in the book. The uniqueness is the existence of a 'shadow state' and the system of patronage that date back to the colonial period, accentuated under the apartheid era governments and taken to its highest level under the presidency of Jacob Zuma. The focus of Budhram in this chapter is "power and its ability to corrupt." The 'shadow state' makes the difference and of course anything shadowy is inherently corrupt, and corrupting.

By its nature, corruption is behavioural: it entails the behaviour of a social actor and such behaviour is purposive. Understood this way meant it applied to all social actors in a society. As it appears, it is barely so in usage; when used, it is behaviour that applies exclusively to a group of social actors in society, mostly servants of the state, public officials as they are widely known or public officials. For example, the definition quoted by Amundsen as classic "corruption is behaviour of public officials which deviates from accepted norms in order to serve private ends." And that it is "behaviour that deviates from the formal duties of a public role (elective or appointive) because of private-regarding (personal, close family, private clique) wealth or status gains; or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private regarding influence." It is this definition that drives the conceptual framing of the contributing essays in the book, mostly empirical observations in some selected African countries. They all make interesting and arresting reading but generally guilty of failing to barely rise above mere descriptions of known cases of corruption by political figures and public officials. There is hardly theoretical framing of the discussions given the behavioural nature of political corruption. Indeed, because it is behavioural suggests also that it is a social practice, an act involving more than an individual in interaction. It is in this sense relational and better described as social actions within the context of social relations of power. It is in the final analysis, embedded social practice. Ascribing a label to a behaviour on the premise that such a behaviour meets the defining criteria of the behaviour falls short of providing insight into the behaviour. Yes, we might know that there is political corruption in Africa distinct from administrative/bureaucratic corruption, but missing is what enables it as well as gives it the characteristics that distinguishes it from bureaucratic corruption. We are in the end stuck with one overarching point: power begets corruption which begets power. And this, from the perspective of the subject matter better answers the question earlier asked: so, what is new?