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Citation for published version:

McVittie, C & Sambaraju, R 2019, Discourse of corruption and anti-corruption. in J Ellis (ed.), *Corruption, Social Sciences and the Law: Exploration across the disciplines*. Taylor & Francis, pp. 149-165.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429197352-9>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.4324/9780429197352-9](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429197352-9)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Corruption, Social Sciences and the Law

Publisher Rights Statement:

This is an Accepted Manuscript of a book chapter published by Routledge in Corruption, Social Sciences and the Law on 15 May 2019, available online: <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780429197352-9/discourse-corruption-anti-corruption-chris-mcvittie-rahul-sambaraju?context=ubx&refId=6474b47e-26b5-4feb-ba23-6f51f887eddd>

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Discourse of corruption and anti-corruption

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Introduction

Much has been written in recent decades about the need to address corruption in countries across the globe, whether to facilitate development (Gray & Kaufmann, 1998), to allow international aid to be granted and used effectively (Brown & Cloke, 2011), or to promote morality and integrity (Sampson, 2005). This focus on addressing corruption has been accompanied by a growth in anti-corruption agencies and initiatives, to the extent that cumulative attempts to counter corruption have been described as an ‘anti-corruption industry’ (Sampson, 2010) or an ‘anti-corruption package’ (Sampson, 2015). Yet, notwithstanding the growth in efforts to address corruption, there is a consensus among many writers that such efforts have failed and that corruption across the globe continues unabated (see e.g. Brown & Cloke, 2004; de Sousa, 2010). As Gebel notes, what anti-corruption initiatives undertaken by different bodies and in different contexts share is ‘their lack of significant success in reducing corruption’ (Gebel, 2012, p.109). Thus, interventions that seek to reduce or eradicate corruption often have little or no impact upon social practices that have continued regardless: in many instances corruption appears to co-exist without difficulty alongside the very attempts made to address it (Sampson, 2010).

For many critics, the consistent failure of anti-corruption initiatives results inevitably from how corruption is understood. A major target for criticism has been the World Bank's definition of corruption as 'the abuse of public office for private gain' (World Bank, 1997, p.8). This definition has been highly influential in underpinning many anti-corruption efforts undertaken by the international community. It has nonetheless been widely critiqued for its limited scope and utility in proceeding on the basis of a distinction between the public realm and private realm of a state's activities. To define corruption in this way is to rule out immediately the possibility of examining instances of corporate activity that might be viewed as tantamount to corrupt practices (Brown & Cloke, 2011; Harrison, 2007). Corruption so defined could not include, for example, the financial irregularities that led to the 2002 collapse of Enron (Craig & Amernic, 2004) or the alleged fraud that resulted in the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers in 2008 (Mollenkamp, Craig, McCracken & Hilsenrath, 2008). At the same time, it is argued that this distinction proceeds on the basis of a form of social arrangements that is idealised and that cannot be achieved in practice (Harrison, 2007). In consequence, critics argue that efforts to address corruption are, at best limited, and at worst doomed to failure from the outset.

In this chapter, we argue that what is to count as corruption, and the apparent lack of success of anti-corruption initiatives, can usefully be understood through detailed examination of how the issues are worked out in specific contexts. While previous writers have pointed to the difficulties encountered when broad notions of corruption encounter local circumstances, little or no work has considered the detail of how corruption and anti-corruption are negotiated in local settings. Our interest lies in studying how individuals and agencies discursively construct what is to count as corruption and how they categorise the actions of others as corrupt. Rather, then, than viewing descriptions of corruption as (merely) depicting identifiable behaviours, or as a

means of promoting certain forms of social arrangements, here we approach attributions of corruption as actions that are designed to accomplish particular social outcomes.

Discourse of corruption

The term corruption is often treated as being self-explanatory: the World Bank describes its definition as one that is 'straightforward' (World Bank, 1997). Critics however have argued that attempting to define corruption is inevitably problematic. For example, as Harrison (2007, p.672) notes, the term 'corruption' is commonly treated as being interchangeable with other terms that are not necessarily synonymous, leading to it being used 'sloppily' and with insufficient regard being paid to its use in individual instances. Similarly, Adaja (2014, p.28) argues that 'the various manifestations of corruption have made the concept so vague and nebulous that it has become difficult to capture all the features in a single definition'. What is to be understood as comprising corruption is, then, by no means as straightforward as is suggested.

Moreover, many writers have argued that references to corruption, and broad definitions such as that offered by the World Bank (1997), as well as being limited in scope, incorporate elements that are not immediately obvious or transparent but that nonetheless have very real impacts in practice. On this view, what is to constitute corruption is not so much a process of identification as it is one of construction: language of corruption reflects and enacts particular forms of social organisation and the roles of social actors within social practices (e.g. Di Puccio, 2010). Thus, for instance, critics argue that the distinction between the public and the private sphere found within definitions such as that proposed by the World Bank reflect neoliberal assumptions based on Westernised values and ideals about social structures but which have little relevance for developing states (Hindess, 2005). On this argument, where international agencies

require developing states to address corruption as a condition of their receiving international aid, such actions involve the imposition of external values on local settings and amount to little more than neo-colonialism (de Maria, 2008). Thus, it is argued that anti-corruption efforts amount to a merely technical exercise that legitimises the promotion of neo-liberal forms of social organisation under the guise of rational problem solving rather than effecting ethically desirable forms of behaviour (Bukovansky, 2006). The success of anti-corruption initiatives is thereby seen to lie not in achieving reductions in instances of corruption but rather in the ready acceptance of talk of corruption in relation to developing states: ‘the very success of anti-corruption rhetoric may result in more and more people believing that corruption *is* a problem’ (Harrison, 2007, p.674, original emphasis).

Corruption and everyday talk

The studies considered above draw attention to the need to examine the language of corruption rather than treating it as self-explanatory or accepting anti-corruption talk as necessarily well intentioned or beneficial to those on the receiving end. Focusing, however, on broad forms of discourse omits from consideration two elements that are particularly relevant to understanding how talk of corruption and anti-corruption functions in social life. First, although adopting a very different approach from that of attempting to define corruption, studies that have prioritised the study of language of corruption share with that approach one key element: they have reified what is being studied. Instead of considering corruption as a clearly delineated topic of study, they have treated discourse of corruption as a topic that is equally delineated. Thus, on this view, it makes sense to talk of discourse of corruption, or discourse of development, as if it were a singular identifiable entity. Second, and relatedly, such a focus omits from consideration

how matters of corruption or anti-corruption are worked out locally. There is little consideration of what happens, more precisely, when those living in developing countries and elsewhere seek to make sense of their actions and those of others. For example, do local social actors take up, challenge, rework, or otherwise deal with the neo-liberal or idealised arguments being put to them or are these rejected or reworked in conjunction with previous or alternative understandings? A focus on discourse as a broad and historically located monolithic entity allows no room for the fluidity of social life as lived there and elsewhere.

For such reasons, we adopt here a different approach to the study of discourse, one that prioritises the study of how discourse (talk/text) is actually employed in particular social settings. Discursive psychologists (e.g. McKinlay & McVittie, 2008; Potter, 1996) argue that discourse has particular properties or features: first, discourse is *constructive*, in that discourse constructs particular versions of events, actions, and agents. Second, discourse is *occasioned*, which refers to the feature that talk or text is always used on particular occasions. Third, discourse is *action-oriented*, in that, constructions of actions, events, and agents are used on particular occasions accomplish particular social actions. Discursive psychologists then argue that analysis of discourse should proceed in ways to identify and examine first, how the relevant issues are constructed and, second, the social actions that are thereby accomplished.

This approach has particular implications for examination of broader topics, such as corruption. While there exist several definitions, researcher conceptions, and common-sense ideas of corruption and anti-corruption, a ready use of these in the analysis of talk poses problems. One sort of problem is thrown-up by research findings discussed above: any one notion of corruption or anti-corruption misses several appropriate aspects that are relevant in specific instances. Another sort of problem is the potential importing of analytical constructs that

may not be demonstrably relevant for the phenomena of study. Schegloff (1997) argues that rather than employing certain pre-conceived notions of phenomena under study, analysis should primarily focus on the perspectives of those who live, construct, and engage with the phenomena of interest. In other words, the analytical thrust is to foreground the constructs and categories of agents who produce and participate in the phenomena. This supplants the use of analytical constructs and categories derived from researchers or analysts, no matter how well intentioned. What this means for the study of corruption and anti-corruption is that discursive psychologists examine how particular agents, in specific occasions, construct and manage issues of corruption and anti-corruption in discourse.

On this approach analysis of corruption, and anti-corruption, begins with examining how actions are categorised as corrupt, rather than asking whether particular actions constitute corrupt practices. Discursive psychologists treat discourse as a topic of study in its own right (McKinlay & McVittie, 2008; Potter, 1996), studying how individuals construct and categorise events, actions, and agents in selective ways, on particular occasions, and the social actions accomplished in doing so. As we will see below, such analysis offers useful insights into what it means for people to engage with corruption and anti-corruption in their own terms.

Constructing corruption

Defining corruption

We begin by returning to the matter of how corruption is constructed in the talk of international agencies. A useful starting point is the much-quoted definition provided by the World Bank (1997), still commonly found in discussions of corruption.

Extract 1

We settled on a straightforward definition— the abuse of public office for private gain

(World Bank, 1997)

As noted above, this definition rests upon a binary distinction between what is ‘public’ on the one hand, and ‘private’ on the other hand. This distinction thereby constructs these as separate realms of social activity, an assumption that has attracted the attention of many critics. Moreover, it also suggests that what falls within each realm is readily discernible, a point to which we return in the next section.

A further point to note is the basis offered for selection of the definition itself, in that it is described as ‘straightforward’. No further detail is given as to the process by which the World Bank ‘settled’ on this definition involved, nor is there mention of any other criteria that might be applied, for example, whether it constitutes an inclusive option or a widely recognised one. This definition thus is presented not as prescriptive but instead as merely one of a set of possible definitions. Finally, we can note that the definition makes no reference to human actors. Instead, it refers to corruption as an abstract entity, without suggesting how it might be applied to any particular actions.

The outcome of these features is that this definition is set out here as only one of a set of possibilities and that it leaves entirely open the issue of if and/or how it might be applied in any specific case. We see similar elements in the definition below from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Extract 2

One frequently used definition that covers a broad range of corrupt activities is the abuse

of public or private office for personal gain

(OECD, 2007, p.19)

This OECD definition on first sight appears to be potentially more inclusive than that seen in Extract 1, in conjoining ‘public or private office’ rather than distinguishing between them. In other respects, however, it proceeds similarly to the World Bank definition. As before, we see the provisional status given to the definition. Here its application to matters of corruption is doubly qualified. First, similarly to the World Bank’s definition, the OECD describes this as ‘one frequently used definition’ indicating that an unspecified range of other definitions might be available. Second, the definition is set out as covering ‘a broad range of corrupt activities’, allowing for the possibility that certain ‘corrupt activities’ might not fall within the scope of what is proposed. And, similarly to the previous definition, there is no reference to human actors or to behaviour. The outcome is that, again, the status and scope of the definition is left uncertain and it is not applied to particular individuals or forms of behaviour.

Below we see a more recent definition provided on the website of Transparency International.

Extract 3

Corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. It can be classified as grand, petty and political, depending on the amounts of money lost and the sector where it occurs.

(Transparency International, 2018)

Unlike the definitions in Extracts 1 and 2, this definition begins in authoritative terms in

stating ‘corruption is . . .’. As it continues, however, this tone of certainty gives way to a more provisional one. We are told that corruption ‘can be classified’ in a number of ways, thereby introducing the notion that corruption is not a singular entity but one that includes multiple possibilities. Moreover, the application of any of these possibilities is stated as ‘depending on’ other factors that are left underspecified. Similarly, however, to the previous two definitions this one does not refer to human actors or to their activities. Corruption, once more, is set out as a somewhat abstract notion.

In each of these three extracts, we can note how the definition fails to offer any authoritative statement of what precisely is to be understood by corruption. Instead, each definition is at best provisional and unrelated to any description of human actions. This is perhaps unsurprising: these definitions come from communications that are targeted at potentially wide and diverse audiences and specific details might not be relevant to every case. Nonetheless, the outcome each time is a definition in terms that are qualified and that is not applied to any named action, even potentially. The issue of what is to comprise corruption in particular instances is left entirely open.

Negotiating what is to count as corruption

Against a background of the general and qualified definitions of corruption examined above, the issue of how individual actions are to be understood and what is to comprise corruption in any specific case remains to be worked out in local contexts. Below we consider one such case. The extracts in this section are taken from a study of the coverage in the Norwegian media given to a criminal court case involving charges of corruption in the defence sector. The case revolved around the expense claims submitted by an admiral in the Norwegian

navy, Atle Torbjørn Karlsvik, in particular the suggestion that he received from the navy a refund of personal expenses that did not relate to his professional duties. In Extract 4, we see how one newspaper initially reported the events at the trial.

Extract 4

It might be insinuated that Karlsvik made an admiral's mistake with brass knobs on when he listed the porn magazine "Sextase" on a travel invoice that had to be paid by the public. Or two sets of golf shoes. Or a visit to Tivoli [amusement park] in Copenhagen, bed linen in Bergen, sun chairs in the Caribbean and ski cards in Hemsedal [an exclusive winter sports resort]. [...] If the admiral had only used public funds for a tattooed anchor, a book on astronomical navigation, a deck chair or a boat magazine for men! At least then he could have argued that the expenses were job related. (*Verdens Gang*, January 10, 2006).

(Breit, 2010, p.625)

We can immediately note from the extract above that the allegations of corruption made against Admiral Karlsvik rely on the very distinction between 'public office' / 'entrusted power' and 'personal gain' / 'private gain' seen in the definitions proposed by the World Bank (1997) and others. Specifically, it is alleged that the Admiral claimed from public sources refund of expenses that are clearly to be viewed as incurred on personal items. The descriptions of these items thus mark them as being private and unrelated to the Admiral's post and work within the defence force, in that they included the purchase of a 'porn magazine', and of 'golf shoes', and personal travel activities comprising a visit to an amusement park and use of 'sun chairs' and 'ski cards'.

The descriptions of these items in themselves suggest that they ordinarily would not be associated with the duties of a navy admiral. The listing, however, serves rhetorically to emphasise the extent of the admiral's claims. Moreover, these items are contrasted with other items that are set out in ironic terms, for which the Admiral might possibly have claimed in that he 'could have argued' they were 'job related'. Here, the use of 'argued' signals that even these potential items would not necessarily be treated as 'job related' and thereby distances further the items actually claimed for from the sorts of expenses that might reasonably be met from 'public funds'. The description thus emphasises the Admiral's culpability in submitting such an invoice 'to be paid by the public', a criticism that receives further force through the characterisation of his action as 'an admiral's mistake with brass knobs on'.

The attributions to the admiral of engaging in corrupt actions, then, are made on the basis of a distinction between what is public office on the one hand, and what is private gain on the other hand, with the admiral's claim for refund belonging in the latter category. In this respect, the allegations of corruption might appear consistent with the definitions provided by international agencies as seen in the section above. From a discursive psychological perspective, however, such discourse cannot be treated as necessarily reflecting any external state of affairs, nor as straightforward description of what is involved. Instead, the discourse has to be examined for how it constructs the events, actions, and individuals involved and the actions that are accomplished. The description in Extract 4 offers only one version of the Admiral's actions in this specific instance. As the trial proceeded, it soon emerged that his actions could be constructed somewhat differently, as we see in Extract 5.

Extract 5

It was a good day today for the Rear Admiral accused of corruption. One after another, previous generals appeared in court to provide their statements regarding the golf trips to Spain. They all agreed that it was useful for Atle Torbjørn Karlsvik to participate in the trips, where the organizational changes in the Defense Force were supposed to have been the topic for large parts of the days. (*Dagbladet*, May 5, 2007)

(Breit, 2010, p.626)

The description in Extract 5 above offers an alternative characterisation of one of the admiral's activities relevant to his expenses claim, namely 'golf trips to Spain'. While such activities had previously been presented as personal in character and therefore not part of the 'job related duties' of being an admiral, here they are by contrast described as a useful part of those duties. Indeed, the relevance of participation in such activities to the admiral's job is emphasised through reference to 'organization changes in the Defense Force' and its importance to the admiral highlighted in that this job related aspect comprised 'the topic for large parts of the days'.

We should also note the source quoted for the descriptions that support the admiral. These claims are attributed to 'previous generals' and are stated as a matter of consensus in that the generals 'all agreed' with the proposed view of the admiral's actions. Not only does this emphasise the extent of the agreement but the descriptions of those providing this account as 'generals' draws upon their expertise in relation to the armed forces and hence their entitlement to speak on these matters. This then is no mere reframing of the actions for which the admiral sought refund but one that carries the authority of individuals who can determine how his actions are to be understood.

The description provided by the generals is of course very divergent from how the admiral's claims were initially depicted in the court and in the press. What we see then is that there is no single and identifiable version of individual actions or other social phenomena; rather different versions are discursively constructed and mobilised on different occasions according to what a speaker seeks to accomplish. What is to be regarded as corrupt, therefore, depends upon the person providing the description and how actions are constructed in any specific case. And, where an ascription of corruption is challenged successfully, the very act of alleging corruption can itself come in for scrutiny and potential criticism. Following Karlsvik's subsequent acquittal at the trial, those who were deemed responsible for bringing unsubstantiated allegations of corruption found themselves under fire, as seen below.

Extract 6

The Karlsvik case is not only about a man and his travel invoices, but also about a deep division that is about to poison the Defense Force. And a Minister of Defense that appears to have lost her way. (*Verdens Gang*, March 1, 2008)

(Breit, 2010, p.629)

As we see here, in subsequent media coverage of the case, criticism came to focus on the actions of the Defense Force. These actions are framed in highly criticisable terms through the statement that they are 'about to poison the Defense Force', a statement that suggests serious if not terminal damage to the force. This is immediately followed by a criticism of the 'Minister of Defense' who, it is argued, has 'lost her way' and who therefore acted reprehensibly in arranging to bring against the admiral charges of corruption that were unsubstantiated. Ultimately, therefore, it was the actions of those deemed responsible for anti-corruption efforts that were

criticised in this instance.

Lay attributions of corruption

What is to constitute corruption, then, is not simply a matter of applying a definition (of whatever form) but rather is seen to be an issue to which participants attend in their interactions with others. In doing so, individuals are of course alive to the negotiability and flexibility of the term corruption, and the actions that can be accomplished through mobilising or rejecting such attributions. One feature of the term corruption when it is applied to individuals or groups is that it is, of course, far from a neutral description: usually it ascribes to those who are being described a characteristic of being morally wanting or culpable for actions in which they engage or have engaged. In this section, we examine such uses.

The next extract comes from a study of the discourse of Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang, an extreme right wing political party in Belgium (Moufahim, 2007; Moufahim et al., 2007). For a time this party attracted substantial support from Flemish voters, in one election attracting nearly one million votes, a quarter of the Flemish electorate. In 2004, however, Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang was forced to disband following a legal ruling that outlawed its existence on the grounds of 'repeated incitement of discrimination'. Extract 7 comes from the party's website prior to its disbandment.

Extract 7

Belgian establishment party politicians do not serve the people. Instead, they serve their own parties, their immediate circles and their trade unions. Embezzlement of public funds, corruption and political scandals are too common in Belgium [. . .] The Vlaams

Blok refuses to play this corrupt game. We will always resist the scourge of political appointments and the accumulation of sinecures.

(Moufahim, 2008, pp.33-34)

We see above one instance of how Vlaams Blok 'marketed' itself to the Flemish electorate in order to gain their votes. The description takes the form of a contrast between Vlaams Blok and its political opponents. The latter, described as 'Belgian establishment party politicians', are depicted in highly negative terms in being interested only in serving 'their own parties' and designated others. These interests, it is argued, are evidenced by a list of activities that are described as clearly culpable and indeed illegal, in comprising 'embezzlement of public funds, corruption and political scandals'. The description of Vlaams Blok that follows states that it 'refuses to play this corrupt game' and will resist other activities that are characterised as 'a scourge'. This contrast between the stated activities of other Belgian politicians, and those attributed to Vlaams Blok, emphasises rhetorically the culpability of others and the credentials of Vlaams Blok. Thus, without having to make explicit what is involved in 'corruption', Vlaams Blok could rely upon deployment of the term to criticise others and to increase its attraction to Flemish voters, at least until the point when it was forced legally to disband.

We see similar uses of the term corruption in Extracts 8 and 9. These extracts come from a different political context, one involving a speech made by former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan. This speech was given to the People's Democratic Party in Nigeria on 8 September 2010, the date on which Jonathan declared that he would run as a candidate in the 2011 presidential elections.

Extract 8

I set the stage for free and fair elections by constituting an electoral commission comprising of Nigerians with impeccable credentials for firmness and incorruptibility. I charged our anti-corruption agencies to speed up the war against corruption, and respect no sacred cows in the process. In the management of the economy, I advocated a more transparent banking industry, price stability, low inflation, and aggregate increase in productivity as a way to drive us to a more prosperous economy.

(Bello, 2013, p.88)

Extract 9

You are all my friends and we share a common destiny. We will fight for JUSTICE! We will fight for all Nigerians to have access to POWER! We will fight for qualitative and competitive EDUCATION! We will fight for HEALTH CARE REFORMS! We will fight to create jobs, for all Nigerians! We will fight corruption! We will fight to protect all Citizens! We will fight for your rights! My dear countrymen and women, give me your support, give me your votes and together we will fight to build a great nation of our dreams!

(Bello, 2013, p.90)

Similarly to Extract 7, in Extracts 8 and 9 we see the speaker explicitly refer to corruption in seeking to establish political credentials for the subsequent election. Here Jonathan sets out corruption as something that has to be addressed vigorously, through the conduct of a 'war' or a 'fight'. He also aligns himself with other Nigerians in seeking to take these steps, in Extract 8 referring to 'Nigerians with impeccable credentials for firmness and incorruptibility' and 'our

anti-corruption agencies’, and in Extract 9 simply deploying the collective pronoun ‘we’ to indicate that what is proposed will involve other Nigerians.

Nowhere does Jonathan specify to any extent what is involved in corruption. However, by situating his claims to address corruption within a listing of other positive outcomes that he seeks to achieve (Extract 8), and by including a fight against corruption in actions in all Nigerians will participate (Extract 9), he can use the term to further his own claims as a suitable person to lead the Nigerian people.

In these two cases, then, we see how speakers mobilise language of corruption to accomplish particular social outcomes, aimed at electoral success. Here, as elsewhere, there is little to be gained by asking if Flemish politicians other than Vlaams Blok or Nigerians other than Goodluck Jonathan are really engaged in activities that amount to corruption, or if the speakers’ own efforts will really affect the corrupt practices of others in these settings. Rather, these descriptions of the speaker and of opposition politicians present occasioned versions of their respective actions that are designed to promote their own interests while criticising others. Thus, without any need to ask how corruption is defined, we can see how speakers use discourse of corruption to accomplish outcomes in particular local contexts.

Discussion and conclusions

In this chapter, we have examined in detail how individuals and other agents negotiate corruption and anti-corruption. In so doing, our aim has been to argue and demonstrate that a discursive examination of corruption and anti-corruption talk offers fruitful insights. In distinction to previous work (e.g. Breit, 2010; Harrison, 2007), discursive psychological analysis of corruption talk relocates the site of examination from broader discourses or social scientific

understandings to individuals and their orientations. As the above analyses demonstrate, individuals' constructions of corruption, and, other activities and agents, vary and centrally attend to accomplishing social action.

As seen in the first set of extracts, the ways in which agencies and agents define corruption are not merely aspects of accurately identifying certain practices as corrupt. Rather, differing ways either exclude or obfuscate the role of certain agents. In the second set of extracts, we see that what falls within the realm of public office or within that of private gain, and what is therefore to count or not to count as corruption, can be specifically constructed for an occasion of use to achieve particular outcomes. Such outcomes include those of initiating legal proceedings against specific individuals or criticising those who allege corruption. The flexibility as to how individuals deploy discourse of corruption also extends to ascribing corruption or anti-corruption to themselves or other agents and groups, as is seen in the final set of extracts. Here, political spokespersons presented themselves as fighting corruption and others as corrupt agents, in making claims to legitimate political leadership. What these analyses show is that what counts as corruption (and anti-corruption) is a thoroughly social matter. The language of corruption, then, can usefully be examined and understood as actions produced by individuals or agencies in specific settings to accomplish particular outcomes.

The analyses included here carry particular implications for studies of corruption. First, the ways in which corruption is defined has relevance for the social actions being accomplished. While several researchers (Brown & Cloke, 2011; Gebel, 2012) point to issues with defining corruption, what the present analyses demonstrate is that a focus on how various definitions are being used is likely to be more fruitful. These definitions of corruption are better analysed as *occasioned* constructions and negotiations offered by individuals in pursuit of some social

action, rather than as stable reflections of any ‘real’ state of affairs.

Second, talk of corruption attends to political and moral projects. In their talk, speakers can categorise corruption as involving particular individuals and/or collectives. Ascribing corruption or corrupt practices to others is treated as offering legitimacy in pursuing particular political projects. However, as McKinlay & McVittie (2008) argue, categorizing particular practices or individuals as corrupt is an ‘open’ matter. This can be done in various ways to offer a range of inferences in the pursuit of accomplishing social actions. These inferences can make relevant various issues of morality that are sensible *in situ*. As the analysis of coverage of the actions of Admiral Karlsvik demonstrates, categorizing particular actions as corrupt or otherwise involved treating the actions as benefitting the Admiral in a personal capacity and therefore problematic or as routine. In contrast to other approaches (Gebel, 2012) that might conceptualise of morality in terms of ethical practice or common-sense ideas, here we show that these are concerns for people themselves.

Third, the present analyses demonstrate the role of context in how individuals make sense of corruption (and anti-corruption). In political settings, such as rallies, talk of corruption accomplishes actions of political representation and stance-taking. In more interpersonal settings, such talk might attend to accusations, legal proceedings, and negotiating these claims.

Finally, the present analyses carry implications for applied prospects. One implication following from the analyses presented here is that identifying particular practices as corrupt or as those that might minimize corruption is problematic. Rather, as noted by other critics such identification runs into problems for prioritizing the perspectives of those in positions of power such as the World Bank. While some critical discourse analysts (Di Puccio, 2010) take-up such a position, we argue for an examination of how individuals in specific settings make sense of and

negotiate issues of corruption. Our analysis takes such critique further in foregrounding situated discursive practices and actions of various agents and stakeholders involved, including those with power and those who are without. Just as there is no single version of corruption, since different versions are constructed and negotiated for specific outcomes, particular practices and reforms that are cast as countering corruption are similarly aimed at specific outcomes, such as those of controlling local politics or interfering in the governance of developing nations (Harrison, 2007). In particular, claims to anti-corruption, which themselves might involve particular versions of corrupt activities, can legitimize particular forms of funding or specific reforms. These anti-corruption activities might then substantially deviate from situated understandings on the ground (*cf.* Bukovansly, 2006).

In case of corruption and anti-corruption, particular agencies claim to play a prominent role. Thus, we have definitions given by the World Bank and others, which are oriented to promoting particular policies and reforms in developing societies. Alternatively, understandings of corruption that are routinely involved in anti-corruption initiatives also seem to emanate from settings outside of their application, such as in the 'West' (Hindess, 2005). One potential explanation then for the apparent failure of anti-corruption initiatives is that such efforts miss the local understandings and meanings of corruption. Alternatively, it might be argued that the rhetoric of corruption and the deployment of anti-corruption initiatives are as much to do with the legitimisation of the roles of international actors as they are to do with bringing about meaningful change in practice. The approach demonstrated here, makes the case that there may well be a range of constructions of corruption and anti-corruption that are used in challenging the imposition of certain practices. An examination of these phenomena then enhances the understandings of how and why certain anti-corruption measures might or not work.

Another implication of these findings and the approach taken here might be of relevance for activists. Activists in the form of individual agents or groups that work to address issues of corruption, could then pay attention to how it is that various versions of corruption are constructed in specific settings. The settings could either be those that involve particular activities of actors or organisations. Perhaps activists could consider that talk of corruption involves more or other than mere accurate identification of actions and agents as corrupt or otherwise. Rather that, a recognition that such talk is social and that it attends to social outcomes could be particularly useful for them in accomplishing their objectives. This focus on corruption-talk could also reflexively inform their own practices in so far as they could consider the social outcomes of versions of corruption and anti-corruption that are adopted.

The claim here then is to re-focus the analytic lens onto particular instances where individuals (or agencies) use versions of corruption to accomplish particular social actions. What this means for efforts at addressing corruption issues is that such efforts can take cognizance of the arguments being made here. In particular, an approach to corruption and anti-corruption as situated constructions and orientations that are inevitably linked to specific action projects would offer a more grounded and socially relevant means of addressing relevant issues. In sum, we argue for treating discourse as an active medium where speakers make sense of and negotiate what is to count as corruption (and anti-corruption) and manage the issues that arise.

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