

MARTHA
SANUDO

Corruption: History and Future in the Spotlight.

Frank Vogl, *Waging War on Corruption* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012).

Shaazka Beyerle, *Curtailling Corruption, People Power for Accountability and Justice* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2014)

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Inefficient governments, organizational transgressions, and personal greed, are all to be accounted for in the assessment of corruption. Corruption has become the new catch word comprising many social misconducts; it appears to be the common root of global injustice. This is good news if one wishes to find a clear-cut location of where the problem lies in order to develop focused strategies to uncover, expose and solve it. Corruption is evil, but it is not natural or cultural, it is circumstantial and we need to learn how to prevent it, mitigate its allure and be wise in fighting it. Two books offer a differing prescription for this global ill.

Waging War on Corruption, by Frank Vogl (2012) is a book vital to understand the history – rather brief to the reader’s dismay – of the awakening of international awareness and the beginning of an organized front against corruption. It is written by a former senior World Bank official whose work led him to co-found the reference NGO on anticorruption, *Transparency International* (TI); thus, one welcomes all the personal references and biographical accounts of a man who was at the outbreak and persists in the international war against corruption. The details of how Peter Eigen and Vogl championed the idea in 1993 of creating an international NGO, that would be ‘a coalition builder at the international and national levels with the aim of bringing civil society, governments, and business together to find constructive ways to curb corruption’¹ is enthralling. One learns that TI has been the catalyst of so many other anticorruption initiatives around the world; some springing out of TI itself, such as the making, extending and promoting of the Corruption Perception Index, the Partnership for Transparency Fund, and the Advocacy and Legal Advice Centers. And in other cases, TI seems to have been essential to push the anticorruption agenda inside the World Bank, the UN, the OECD, the US congress, the EU and the G20; and that it has been the inspiration of other

¹ Vogl (2012), p. 65.

renowned anticorruption organizations such as the Open Society Foundation, Trace International, Global Financial Integrity, Revenue Watch Institute, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, and ProPublica.

One thesis of this book is that there is a correlation between corruption and genocide; where there is more corruption there are more unjust deaths. Thus, learning through Vogl's book about the relentless work of some few concrete men and women who in the past 25 years have been shaping a global consciousness against one of 'the most vicious crimes that abound',² makes the reader appreciative and especially thankful; it reads as a case of 'so much owed by so many to so few'. However, for those of us having being raised up very aware of this vicious evil (owing perhaps to the good work of the local chapter of TI!), and cognizant of the Watergate's, Lockheed's, Mobutu's and Suharto's scandals, the big revelation in reading this book is to realize that up to 1992, the Western industrial world did nothing to oppose corruption in developing nations. Vogl states that the

'United Nations was silent on the subject of corruption. As was the largest and most powerful development assistance agency, the World Bank. The media was also not interested. (I served from 1981 to 1990 as the World Bank's chief press spokesman and as its director of information, and I cannot recall receiving questions from the Washington press about global bribery.)'³

Vogl points out that World Bank executives, until rather recently, traveled first class, stayed in top luxury hotels, wine and dined with prime ministers and finance ministers and did not raise questions about corruption or democracy or human rights issues, since they felt their duties were bound to 'economic' issues.⁴ But even though by the end of the 1990's 'there was barely a major multilateral official organization that had not publicly released its own anticorruption policy',⁵ almost two decades later, Vogl warns, there is 'an Everest of corruption still to climb'.⁶ From the book one can infer some particular persistent cases, let us say they are the slippery glaciers in the Everest of corruption. These are the cases of three industries, each in its turn revealing the hypocrisy of governments of Western industrialized countries. One is the extractive industries. Vogl suggests that President Sarkozy of France attending in 2009 the funeral of Omar Bongo, Gabon's dictator for forty-two years, encourages leaders of nations rich in natural resources to continue their 'grand

2 Vogl (2012), p. 27.

3 Vogl (2012), p. 168.

4 Vogl (2012), pp. 175-176.

5 Vogl (2012), p. 188.

6 Vogl (2012), p. 267.

corruption'.⁷ During Bongo's rule Gabon became the 'world's highest per capita consumer of champagne'.⁸ Second is the arm's manufacturers. Vogl makes a call to the international community to see the obvious link between corruption, selling of weapons, terrorism and national (in)security. But the call is not heard, and 10 years of US intervention in Afghanistan does not teach political leaders to see 'the big elephant in the room'.⁹ Even more, Vogl tells us how simple it would be for the IMF, or even the World Bank to use their influence to require that countries receiving loans or grants disclose their arms spending. They do not 'because their major shareholders (the Western governments) do not want them to'.¹⁰ Finally, the third hard case, is the nauseating story of bank secrecy. From the Chilean Pinochet, to the Nigerian Abacha and the Serbian Milosevic, the numerous widely known cases of dictators who siphoned billions of dollars from their country's treasure, and were able to launder and even keep their money in banks of the US, UK, Switzerland, France and others, is preposterous. Vogl states that '[e]ven when massive thefts by government leaders have been exposed, Western governments have largely been uncooperative in ensuring that the funds deposited in Western banks are repatriated to the countries where the original thefts took place'.¹¹

The organization of the book is elusive; even though a neat structure is unnecessary for such biographical account, a detailed index might have helped understanding its arrangement. I mentioned that one main point of the book seemed to be Vogl's insistence that corruption is a major crime, an association that should be instilled in judges so that they associate corruption with murder, rape and starvation and not with transgressions requiring a slap on the wrist, and lenient fines. Another point that Vogl recurrently touches upon is that the internet and the mass media are bringing 'a new age of transparency'.¹² To Vogl, the Arab spring of 2011 is an example of this new age where the anticorruption message can be spread, at no costs, around the globe. Vogl, writing in 2012, only hints at this new age. Perhaps he has decided to pass the baton, and it is precisely this baton that is the starting point of the next book reviewed.

The book, *Curtailing Corruption, People Power for Accountability and Justice*, by Shaazka Beyerle, tells us how the new era of accessible technology can empower grassroots movements to curb corruption. The book is constructed around seven cases, each giving a detailed report of one country. The reader is

7 Vogl (2012), p. 125.

8 Vogl (2012), p. 241.

9 Vogl (2012), p. 221.

10 Vogl (2012), p. 226.

11 Vogl (2012), p. 91.

12 Vogl (2012), p. 9.

taken from Korea to Brazil, Indonesia, Italy, India, Afghanistan and Uganda, learning of the varied anticorruption movements that have successfully achieved social change for the good. And indeed, the book often dwells on the good, which is a major difference with much of the literature on corruption, including Vogl's book, in which the emphasis is on fighting and eradicating the evils. Beyerle's book often reminds us that curtailing corruption means achieving positive goods: 'information, accountability, participatory democracy, freedom, and last but not least, human dignity'.¹³ The cases detailed for each country were chosen, Beyerle informs, for fulfilling the following criteria: a) they were 'popular' initiatives, b) nonviolent, c) involved organization and planning, d) employed multiple nonviolent actions, i.e. not one-off events, e) articulated objectives and demands, and f) were civic initiatives sustained over a period of time.¹⁴ After the seven country cases, there is a chapter devoted to five shorter accounts of successful actions in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Egypt, Kenya, Mexico and Turkey. Then a chapter giving an overview of what can be learned from all the cases mentioned, and finally a chapter reflecting upon how the international community should foster, and not restrain grassroots' initiatives to curb corruption.

Reading Beyerle's extensively researched book one gains confidence in being well and widely informed of the state of the art in anticorruption grassroots movements around the globe; at moments it reads like a 'handbook' of how to begin or sustain an anticorruption campaign with insightful tips of what and why an anticorruption campaign might succeed or flounder. After 12 chapters there is the list of Acronyms, informing of the various country-based organizations fighting corruption which were used throughout the book. It lists more than 60 organizations. Next is a Glossary of key terms related to the book, some of which are intuitively understandable such as 'reverse boycotts', but some disclose the complexity of the subject's argot. Take this example:

'Dilemma action: a nonviolent tactic that puts the oppressor in a situation whereby the actions it takes will result in some kind of negative outcome for it (lose-lose) and some kind of positive outcome for the nonviolent campaign or movement (win-win).'¹⁵

Then in the 'Appendix' one finds a most enlightening list of the nonviolent tactics used across the twelve cases of the book grouped in 5 categories and providing ample examples for each of them, with a mention of the country in which the tactic was employed.¹⁶ The categories are: 1. *Tactics of Disruption in*

¹³ Beyerle (2014), p. 3.

¹⁴ Beyerle (2014), p. 3.

¹⁵ Beyerle (2014), p. 292.

¹⁶ Beyerle (2014), pp. 295-302.

the Physical World, 2. *Tactics of Disruption in the digital sphere*, 3. *Tactics of Engagement*, 4. *Tactics of Empowerment*, and 5. *Defining Methods*.

Reading this book lends an upbeat tone to one's consciousness, it provides the reader with a planetary account of what grassroots movements can achieve in real life situations. It also grants a sort of consolation-cum-empowerment in the sense of grasping that the reader's own country's grievances are apparently repeated, sometimes with more cruelty and cynicism, elsewhere in the globe. After reading this book, one might feel inspired to join forces with any of the local groups that might profit from one's updated view of how it is indeed possible to competently curb corruption.

One could agree that the books reviewed are complementary. The first is more historical and tells the story of the victims and the heroes of the international anticorruption battle. The other is a current appraisal of how civil society is organizing given the possibilities of Twitter, Facebook and the likes. There is however, one peculiar issue in which the two books could not be reconciled. It is the value given to the institutionalization of the anticorruption fight. Where Vogl takes for granted that any anticorruption initiative gains strength by becoming an internationally known NGO, Beyerle sees a threat in such institutionalization. A threat to fail to recognize that citizens have agency and power, prior and independently, of the structural conditions of a given society and its institutions. Interestingly, Beyerle takes as an example of the perils of institutionalization, the subtle implications of a statement made in the website of Partnership for Transparency Fund (PTF):

'PTF believes that in most cases collaborating with the public sector, while addressing a corruption problem, provides the greatest chance for long-term change ... The hypothesis is that consensus building and collaboration yield better and longer-lasting results than confrontation'.¹⁷

Beyerle sees in this statement

'an underlying ambivalence and discomfort about citizen dissent. [PTF's statement] considers some forms of nonviolent action – consensus building and collaboration- as more legitimate and effective than other forms. It appears to imply that when citizens raise their collective voice and exert nonviolent pressure –people power- they should behave in a nonchallenging manner'.¹⁸

But to Beyerle the main problem is that PTF's statement may cause self-

¹⁷ Beyerle (2014), p. 266.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

limiting, since it stifles the drive for bottom-up action every time citizens believe that consensus building would not be possible. It also disregards many other nonviolent tactics available in citizens' contexts to push the anticorruption agenda such as

'public forums, street actions (protests, vigils, processions, marches, etc.), street theatre, stunts, visual dramatizations, cultural expressions (songs, poetry, ringtones), graffiti, displaying symbols, petitions, digital resistance, information gathering, publicly exposing corruptors and graft, citizen-generated blacklists, and disseminating information about citizen's rights and public sector fees outside government offices'.¹⁹

Beyerle's criticism of the rigidity of established International NGO's is a defense of unlimited human creativity, and a support for civil society's freedom to escape predetermined formulas or patterns of organization. According to Beyerle to change one's country's social shape, one needs not to wait for any preconceived structure, nor any precise law, governmental consent, or institutional support; rather, one can link up through the social media with other willing citizens, use technology to innovate or to be inspired by other grassroots' activities around the globe (often a South to South exchange), and creatively make big changes happen.

Finally I can say that these two books are portraying two different generations' take on the newly urgent fight to curb corruption.

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¹⁹ Beyerle (2014), pp. 266-267.