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Book Review: Shaazka Beyerle, *Curtailling Corruption*

Review author: Valesca Lima Holanda

Shaazka Beyerle, 2014, *Curtailling Corruption: People Power for Accountability and Justice*. London: Lynne Reinner Publishers (261 pp., paperback, \$25.00)

Making politics more open and transparent is one of the main challenges for civil society. In *Curtailling Corruption: People Power for Accountability and Justice*, Beyerle puts together an interesting text that describes and analyses different approaches to fight corruption around the globe. To that end, she uses a mixed methods approach and a variety of case studies. From Latin America to Asia, this book sharply dissects social movements and civil society strategies to abolish corruption in different social contexts. Going beyond geographic boundaries, the author lays out an important analysis on theories of new social movements.

This book could be valuable for academics interested in understanding social movements' capabilities and strategies in contemporary politics. It may also be useful to activists involved in anti-corruption movements, since this book presents both an analysis and a detailed account of anti-corruption movements' emergence, development and goals.

The idea of nonviolent resistance is the core of *Curtailling Corruption*. Beyerle offers elaborate descriptions of anti-corruption movements, which implement non-violent strategies to tackle the corruption and lack of accountability of power holders.

The author sets the scene by offering a few useful characteristics of corruption nowadays. Corruption affects citizens' trust in politicians; and, as she explains in the conclusion, anti-corruption movements help to empower local citizens and encourage confidence in politics. Beyerle also makes an important clarification regarding the meaning of corruption: the real meaning of corruption, she says, has to do not only with personal gain, but it has also implications for human rights. In that sense, beyond being a criminal activity or an act of egoism, human rights activists argue that corruption is an act of oppression and must be abolished.

Despite efforts to fight corruption, impunity permeates all cases included in this book. It is interesting to observe, as the author develops the narrative, how top-down approaches to preventing corruption are ineffective most of the time, and only when social movements join in does the political scenario start to change. Beyerle includes strong analysis and explanations for the need for reform to come from *outside* institutions; as in many other contexts, those on the inside cannot see corruption or are benefiting from it (her case studies make these situations clear and contextualised, as in the case of Indonesia).

Curtailling Corruption includes contemporary and vivid case studies. Through them, the author builds her argument and reinforces it: efforts against corruption include active citizens' participation, as popular intervention may make corruption risky and difficult for those practicing it, a conclusion Beyerle shares, and which supports other academic work, such as Kaufmann (2005).

After two initial chapters addressing the current debates on anti-corruption movements and some analysis on contemporary politics, the author moves to case studies, which make up the bulk of this work. It is possible to observe that *Curtailling Corruption* is the result of an extensive fieldwork, as the author visited and interviewed social actors in distinct countries.

It was great to see the richness of the cases and the level of engagement anti-corruption movements promoted in their communities. But one could ask: was it that easy to fight corruption in the contexts presented in the book? That was one thought that did not leave me while reading the book. Beyerle provides a full account of each country's social and political contexts, which gives the reader gets a sense of what was happening internally and what motivated citizens to act the way they did. Despite the fact that the countries analysed have huge differences in income, size, population and corruption practices, it was clear that local actors opted for similar strategies. The challenges, however, were not as clear as the processes of fighting corruption. The case studies are well-selected and interesting, but after seven full chapters describing and analysing the movements it gets a little repetitive and tiresome. A summary of cases, as in the section "Highlights from Five Cases: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Egypt, Kenya, Mexico, Turkey" could have made the reading easier and more enjoyable.

The downside is that the book includes only successful cases. Besides that the author gives the feeling that the challenges described were simple, it seems that every case ended positively. It should have been possible to show how and why anti-corruption movements have been successful but also fail sometimes. This flaw does not disqualify the chosen cases and analysis, but a comparative chapter on social movements in countries which tried to fight corruption but were unsuccessful would have made this book even more interesting.

Beyerle makes a strong case for supporting active citizens' participation in day-to-day political activities, and argues that these practices have a strong impact on local governments. The case studies include urban and rural resistance against corruption and suggest that successful experiences should be shared outside academia. The message is clear: politics of information and transparency are shaping the way social movements and social actors act to fight corruption in their local contexts. A stronger analysis would include movements that failed in a comparative perspective. Criticism notwithstanding, *Curtailling Corruption* is a must-read for everyone interested in social movements and anti-corruption movements.

References

Kaufmann, Daniel. 2005. "Human Rights, Governance, and Development: an Empirical Perspective". Pp. 352-402 in *Human Rights and Development: Towards Mutual Reinforcement*, edited by Philip Alston and Mary Robson. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

About the review author

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