

Handbook on the Geographies of Corruption, edited by Barney Warf, Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, UK & Northampton, MA, USA, 392pp. (2018), Hardback £121.50, \$154 (ISBN: 978 1 78643 474 6), eBook from £38, \$48 (eISBN: 978 1 78643 475 3). The eBook version is priced from £38/\$48 from Google Play, ebooks.com and other eBook vendors, while in print the book can be ordered from the Edward Elgar Publishing website.

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“Corruption,” writes Barney Warf, “consists of an insidious set of practices through which government officials use their offices for private gain. Corruption exists in virtually all countries across the planet and has numerous debilitating economic, political, social, and environmental costs” (2018, 1). These two sentences open the *Handbook on the Geographies of Corruption* and, in microcosm, illustrate both the ambitions and the shortcomings of this impressive volume. The handbook aims high, aspiring to be the definitive reference for the state-of-the-art. While other recent handbooks restrict the focus to a relatively narrow slice of corruption, such as the political (Heywood 2014), the economic (Rose-Ackerman and Søreide 2011), or a given region (Gong and Scott 2016), Warf’s *Handbook* seeks to be global in scope and all encompassing in its theoretical rigor. In this, it is similar to Graycar and Smith (2011), whose earlier handbook on corruption was also published by Elgar. Though this *Handbook* improves on many aspects of the 2011 publication, it also suffers from some of the same drawbacks, and for similar reasons. Nevertheless, this work is important and well done, and Warf has succeeded in marshaling a team to create a reference that scholars of corruption cannot afford to miss.

Structurally, the *Handbook* is divided in two parts. After a brief introduction (the traditional editor’s prerogative), Part 1 comprises six chapters oriented around establishing conceptual common ground. Chapters here range from the causes and consequences of corruption, to a mostly global literature review of corruption research, to a welcome focus on the understudied intersections of corruption and gender. After

this, Part 2 is composed of 14 national case studies that illustrate the global diversity of corruption, corruption research, and occasional suggestions for policy to combat this worldwide scourge. Together, these parts are impressively done and reveal an appreciation for the multiple varieties and outcomes of corruption, as well as the heterogeneous methodologies of researching the topic. Nevertheless, there are several important moments where the work falls short, whether through oversight or unnecessary overlap. Warf's *Introduction* (2018, 1-13) and his Chapter 5 *World regional geographies of corruption* (2018, 67-105) exemplify these moments that are the primary weaknesses in this otherwise outstanding work.

In his introduction, Warf cannot help but open by defining corruption, its causes and its consequences, before sharing the ambition of the *Handbook* and outlining the chapters to come. There are two issues here that I will detail in turn, as they represent the primary shortcomings of the work overall. The first issue applies to all edited volumes and is not a problem restricted only to Warf and the authors he has collected here. One danger with edited volumes, I find, is the potential for a disconnection between chapters (they are authored separately by different scholars, after all) that might cast a book as a smattering of disparate threads rather than as a cohesive whole. One of the ways this disconnection makes itself visible is through the continued repetition of various conceptual definitions. So too is it here, in this *Handbook*, as most chapters take pains to define and redefine the same terms before launching into their arguments. The authors cannot be faulted for this – it is a requirement of good scholarship after all, and more a failure of the genre than of the individual – but still the effect on the reader who takes the book as a whole is one of needless repetition. And truthfully, is it necessary for Warf in his *Introduction* to provide an overview of the nature, causes, and consequences of corruption, when there are three full chapters dedicated to these very questions? Perhaps his summaries are necessary, but to me it feels superfluous, particularly as he touches on those same ideas only a few pages later in his editor's preview of the chapters to come.

Beyond these definitional repetitions, I found a surprising lack of conceptual coherence between the more theoretical chapters in Part 1 and the case studies in Part 2. While the scholarship in both parts is almost always first-rate, I was frustrated by the failure of the authors in Part 2 to make reference to the foundational work in Part 1. For instance, in Chapter 4, Stensöta and Wängnerud call for further explorations into the ways in which

gender relates to corruption and institutions for accountability. This seems like a thread with substantial potential but it is not taken up by authors in Part 2. The other empirical chapters suffer from the same lack, seeming to exist in a realm separate from Part 1. It should not be too much to ask that Part 2 might refer back to Part 1, particularly as the chapters so often cover similar ground. This lack of extended coherence strikes me as a missed opportunity to raise this *Handbook* to a higher level.

The second issue with the *Handbook* stems from its worldwide focus. Though it aspires to a global scale, no single work could hope to be truly comprehensive and there will inevitably be oversights and omissions. That said, I find the selection of national case studies puzzling and would have appreciated some transparency about why certain countries were highlighted and others left out. Why a chapter on Bangladesh but not on Sri Lanka? Why explore South Africa but not Nigeria? Why Brazil but not Colombia? This suggests that the *Handbook* might have benefited from a different organizational structure, perhaps orienting national case studies around a given concept or theme, but this was not pursued. Instead, Part 2 – despite each chapter being fascinating on its own – comes across as somewhat jumbled, rather than as a coherent and organized achievement.

In Chapter 5, Warf attempts to remedy some of the excluded nations with a nearly global literature review on corruption. It is a mammoth effort and he should be commended for providing such value to the academic community. All the same, there is an important oversight here and it is one that plagues the *Handbook* overall. Despite Warf's repeated acknowledgments that these are global issues, and regardless of his attempts to argue beyond a framing of corruption as solely the problem of poor countries, this *Handbook* in general and Chapter 5 in particular feature a glaring lack of attention to corruption in the wealthy countries of the Global North. This risks reifying the very misconceptions that he aspires to dismantle, and I can see no good reason why there are no chapters featuring work on Western Europe, Canada, Australia, South Korea, Japan, or the United States. Warf's contention that "corruption is most obvious in less developed countries, particularly those with totalitarian governments and centralized systems of power" (2018, 1) is not sufficient explanation for this oversight. Further, Warf explains that his global review chapter "does not address corruption in Russia, North America, or Oceania" (2018, 67). No justification is given for these decisions and the book is poorer for it. To

be sure, Part 2 features chapters on Russia, Ukraine, East Central Europe, Central Asia, and China, all of which should be of interest to readers of this journal, but still these oversights in Warf's review, and in the book as a whole, stand out.

Aside from these issues, I have three remaining areas to criticize. The first pertains to the uneven engagement with policy proposals to address corruption. The entire third section of Graycar and Smith (2011) – ten chapters – are dedicated to this end. In this *Handbook*, several authors also devote sections of their chapters to policy, but it is not evenly done, and this contributes to the somewhat scattered feel of the work overall. Second, there is no mention of the dangers or difficulties in researching corruption. A methodological chapter in Part 1 that covered these topics would be welcome. And finally, there is no concluding chapter that might address some of these lacunae and provide researchers with a roadmap for future work.

Despite my criticism, however, I am resolutely impressed with the *Handbook on the Geographies of Corruption*. Overall, the disconnection between chapters I felt here is much less severe than in many other edited volumes and handbooks, and Warf deserves credit for keeping a steady hand on the wheel of this project. The *Handbook* does suffer from its aspiration to an all-encompassing, global approach, which brings to light questions about why certain areas and nations were omitted. And while the work could be accused of reifying regional container thinking instead of advancing a relational understanding of corruption (what about all the London and Zurich banks that are only too happy to hide the ill-gotten gains of corrupt autocrats worldwide?), overall this *Handbook* is, in a word, excellent. Worf et al. have made a significant contribution to the literature and succeeded in crafting an indispensable resource for scholars of corruption in almost every country.

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