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The Corruption Chameleon

A case study of corruption within a Malawian NGO

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Philosophy in Development Studies

At

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New Zealand

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Abstract

Over the last decade, a growing consensus has emerged within the development world that corruption is the single greatest obstacle to reducing world poverty. The simplicity of this statement, however, masks the complexity of the issue, as corruption itself is a complicated multi-faceted phenomenon with multiple inter-related causes and effects. Both the term and the concepts underpinning it are highly problematic, as the shape and tone of any discussion on the topic is dependent on who is defining it.

The majority of recent literature on corruption has tended to focus on the role of a single actor: the state. Despite their growing influence, NGOs on the other hand, appear to have attracted only cursory inspection. This thesis attempts to rebalance this by examining corruption with specific reference to development NGOs, and is based around a central hypothesis that they are not impervious to its influences. It seeks to contribute to the understanding of the nature, form, and dynamics of corruption within NGOs operating in a development context.

Based on a detailed case study of an INGO operating in Malawi, the research findings highlighted the nature and extent of internal corruption; indicating that NGOs are subject to similar types and levels of corruption as faced by the broader societies in which they operate. The thesis concludes that whilst Western forms of combating corruption can be effective, they are insufficient to counter deeply entrenched neopatrimonial networks underpinning it. The most effective mechanism for countering such forms of corruption was found to be the same as those supporting and protecting it: access to, and support from, high-level political connections and insider networks. Whilst the key deterrent remains the implementation of a strong internal control system, its overall effectiveness is dependent on support at the highest levels. Instrumental to this is also the presence of a “principled” principal, with sufficient political-will to counter political-interests that may be vested in maintaining the status-quos.
Acknowledgements

The experience gained in this process has been both challenging and rewarding at the same time. None of this however would have been possible without the support of a number of people. First and foremost I would like to thank those within NGO-X who allowed me to undertake the study, and in particular those former colleagues who contributed to it. My deepest gratitude goes to Maggie for the trust that she placed in me during my time as the country director. Without her unwavering support and wise words of wisdom, I would not have been able to fully understand a number of the events that took place or been able to place them in the appropriate cultural perspective. I have been enriched by our friendship. My special thanks also go to the courage and support shown by Anne, Alex, Lonnie, and Mary.

I would like to express my gratitude to my Supervisors, Assistant Professor Glenn Banks, for his patience, guidance and insightful comments, and Gerard Prinsen for his direct and frank feedback. Thank you also to my sister Niki for your time and expert editing input.

Most of all however, I would like to thank my family, in particular my wife Stephanie, for taking on the role of unofficial advisor and co-editor, and providing me with the needed support and encouragement to persevere with this to the end. Not once did you doubt my ability or question my judgement in the events that transpired. For this, and for what you had to endure as a spectator during some of the events related in this thesis, plus much, much more, you will always have my love and admiration. Behind every man is indeed a strong woman!

Last and not least, I need to recognise my mum and dad, as the topic covered here can (in essence) be reduced to one of morality, ethics, and integrity. This thesis is ultimately a testament not only to the values they instilled in me, but to the unconditional support they have shown throughout my life.
Explanation of Thesis Title

In many parts of Africa the chameleon is both loved and hated (Wendland & Hachibamba, 2007), with the image itself having a strong resonance in story and myth (Anders, 2002a). In the context of Malawian mythology, it is a morally ambiguous creature (Schoffeleers & Roscoe, 1985:17-38). Its image been used as a metaphor to depict survival strategies under the authoritarian regime of Hastings Kamuzu Banda (Mapanje, 1981), who ruled Malawi from 1961 to 1994, and, more recently, to describe Malawian politics and politicians since the advent of multi-party elections in 1994 (Dzimbiri, 1998; Englund, 2002). Nazombe (in Collier, 1992:293) makes specific reference to the reptile’s “cunning and elusiveness”, which he sees as the reason it was selected as a totem by two of Malawi’s most renowned poets.

A reptile, the Chameleon’s eyes are able to move independently from each other, allowing it to observe two different objects simultaneously and giving it the ability to maintain a 360-degree arc of vision around its body, scanning the surrounding environment for any potential threats. In addition, the Chameleon is able to change colour and blend in with its surroundings, giving it an extremely effective form of camouflage.

For these reasons, I have elected to use the chameleon as the metaphorical representative of corruption, and the networks that operate and protect corruption, and include it in the title of this thesis.
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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACB</td>
<td>Malawi Anti-Corruption Bureau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADMARC</td>
<td>Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVI</td>
<td>Australian Volunteers International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONGOMA</td>
<td>Council for Non-governmental Agencies in Malawi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPA</td>
<td>Malawi Corrupt Practice Act no 18 of 1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI</td>
<td>Corruption Perception Index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPP</td>
<td>Democratic Progressive Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUR</td>
<td>Euros</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GBP</td>
<td>Great British Pounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNI</td>
<td>Gross National Income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAASB</td>
<td>International Auditing &amp; Assurance Standards Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>MCP</td>
<td>Malawi Congress Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MYP</td>
<td>Malawi Young Pioneers</td>
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<tr>
<td>MWK</td>
<td>Malawi Kwacha</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSO</td>
<td>National Statistical Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>NORAD</td>
<td>Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>INGO</td>
<td>International Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation &amp; Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>OVC</td>
<td>Orphan and Vulnerable Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAC</td>
<td>Public Affairs Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press</td>
<td>Press Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>PWC</td>
<td>PricewaterhouseCoopers</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIDA</td>
<td>Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>TI</td>
<td>Transparency International</td>
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<tr>
<td>UDF</td>
<td>United Democratic Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nation</td>
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<tr>
<td>USD</td>
<td>United States Dollar</td>
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<td>WB</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
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### Case Study Specific Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CBP</td>
<td>Community Based Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBPC</td>
<td>Community Based Programme Coordinator</td>
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<tr>
<td>CD</td>
<td>Country Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCD</td>
<td>Deputy Country Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>ERP</td>
<td>Emergency Relief Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FC</td>
<td>Financial Controller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSC</td>
<td>General Secretariat of NGO-International</td>
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<tr>
<td>HRM</td>
<td>Human Resource Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>KG</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
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<tr>
<td>MC</td>
<td>Medical Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>National Association / Member of NGO-X</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO-Int</td>
<td>International Federation of NGO-X</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO-X</td>
<td>International NGO Based in Malawi</td>
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<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>National Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RD</td>
<td>NGO-International Regional Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RO</td>
<td>NGO-International Regional Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VDC</td>
<td>Village Development Committee</td>
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