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Lili Di Puppò: Anti-Corruption Interventions in Georgia: From Rhetoric to Practice

About the author:

Lili Di Puppò is a PhD candidate at the European Viadrina University Frankfurt (Oder). She is writing her dissertation on 'Anti-corruption interventions in Georgia: From rhetoric to practice'. She has a diploma (M.A.) in political science from the Free University Berlin. She is currently lecturing at the Ilia Chavchavadze State University in Tbilisi, Georgia, and she is editor-in-chief of Caucas.com.

Email: lilidipuppò@gmail.com

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Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen

Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen

Klagenfurter Straße 3

28359 Bremen

Germany

e-mail: fsopr@uni-bremen.de

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyse external anti-corruption interventions in Georgia and shed light on the transfer of anti-corruption norms and standards in a local context. I assume that there is a disjuncture between the formal anti-corruption objectives of donor organisations and the practice of anti-corruption programmes and projects in Georgia. My main hypothesis is that the disjuncture between rhetorical goals and practice can be explained by processes of translation, re-contextualisation and appropriation of an external anti-corruption discourse by local actors. I use anthropological studies of development (Mosse & Lewis 2006, Rossi 2004, Long 2002) that focus on the role of agency in the development practice. These approaches challenge homogeneous views of development by questioning claims to order and predictability and emphasising the heterogeneity of perspectives and interests characterising the local context. I analyse the adaptation of an external anti-corruption discourse on two levels: in national anti-corruption discourses and in concrete donor-funded anti-corruption projects.

1. Introduction

Behind the apparent order of development, the study of disjuncture reveals the multiplicity of interests characterising the development practice. My research interest is to shed light on the difference between the normative expectations of the development rhetoric and the development practice. I use anthropological approaches that analyse the relation of discourse and agency (Rossi 2004) and policy and practice (Mosse 2002) to explain development outcomes¹. My assumption is that the official discourses of donor organisations are not just statically imposed on a local context or resisted by local aid recipients. Local development actors rather manipulate and re-interpret discursive objectives in the light of their own interests. They use donor discourses to push their own agendas and legitimise their course of actions. The anti-corruption discourse is adapted to local power struggles. I will analyse this local interpretation of an external anti-corruption agenda on two levels: in *national discourses*, which are seen as an adaptation and a response to international discourses, and in concrete *donor-funded anti-corruption projects*. First, the analysis of national discourses will help me understand how local actors attribute different meanings to the fight against corruption and use a particular interpretation in local power struggles. Secondly, the analysis of the practice of development projects will help me develop a hypothesis on the disjuncture between rhetoric and practice.

2. Anthropological Approaches to Development Interventions

In order to analyse the adaptation of an anti-corruption discourse by local actors, I use anthropological studies of development (Mosse & Lewis 2006, Rossi 2004, Long 2002) that focus the attention on the role of agency and on the ways local actors manipulate development rhetorics.² These studies challenge the homogeneous view of two different approaches to development. The first approach is instrumental and understands development policy as rational problem-solving. In this approach, development equals management and policy directly shapes the practice. The challenge is to identify 'best practices' and produce the right policy models. The second critical or deconstructionist approach (Escobar 1995, Ferguson 1990) inspired by Michel Foucault's work on discourse as power assumes that development 'problems'

1 See Lewis, David & Mosse, David: Encountering order and disjuncture: contemporary anthropological perspectives on the organization of development, Oxford Development Studies, Vol. 34, No. 1, March 2006; Rossi, Benedetta (2004) 'Revisiting Foucauldian Approaches: Power Dynamics in Development Projects', Journal of Development Studies, 40:6, pp. 1–29.

2 See Lewis, David & Mosse, David: Encountering order and disjuncture: contemporary anthropological perspectives on the organization of development, Oxford Development Studies, Vol. 34, No. 1, March 2006; Rossi, Benedetta (2004) 'Revisiting Foucauldian Approaches: Power Dynamics in Development Projects', Journal of Development Studies, 40:6, pp. 1–29; Long, Norman: 'An actor-oriented approach to development intervention', background paper prepared for APO meeting, Tokyo 22–26 April 2002.

are constructed.³ Critical approaches view development as a rationalising discourse concealing hidden agendas, for example a neo-liberal agenda, behind the veil of rational problem-solving. Anthropological studies examining the relation of discourse and agency (Rossi 2004) or policy and practice (Mosse 2003) and so-called actor-oriented approaches (Long 2002) criticise deconstructionist approaches for failing to consider the role of practitioners on the ground in shaping development outcomes. Critical approaches are deemed restrictive for three different reasons: 1) the local context is viewed as homogeneous; 2) discourses are understood as ‘unacknowledged structures’; and 3) development outcomes are seen as predictable.

Critical views of development assume that local actors will react in a uniform way to development interventions, for example by resisting an agenda of bureaucratic expansion. They assume a cultural homogeneity of the local context. Anthropologists of development (Mosse & Lewis 2006) questioning these homogeneous views have proposed to focus the attention on the study of disjuncture to reveal the fragility of claims to order in development. The study of disjuncture reveals that the appropriation of development products in a local context does not produce predictable outcomes. The outcomes of development projects are unforeseeable rather than scripted. Local actors follow different trajectories to translate and appropriate these products. For example, Orlandini refers to ‘consumer practices’ (de Certeau 1984) to analyse the adoption of the concept of good governance in Thailand.⁴ She refers to the act of consumption as a creative process. Different actors in Thailand seize the concept of ‘good governance’ and endow it with different meanings, a process resulting in the existence of several ‘good governances’. Similarly, in Georgia, an external anti-corruption discourse is translated in a local context in different ways.

Considering that development organisations have limited control over the ways development products are used in a local context, they exert control on the way outcomes are interpreted and presented. Against this background, Mosse asks whether the development practice is really driven by policy or whether the purpose of policy is in reality to conceal the practice.⁵ The heterogeneity of interests and contradictory practices are concealed behind coherent official representations. The results of development projects are validated through an authoritative framework of interpretation provided by the conceptual work of policy. Policy follows rather than directs action. Beneficiaries of development programmes themselves have an interest in sustaining these official representations, considering that development is a source of income as well as a source of legitimacy for different actors.

Discourses constrain the actions of development actors to the extent that they have to interpret the results of development projects in a way that conforms to official policies. Official representations are reproduced and maintained by local beneficiaries in order to attract donor funding and secure official positions. The apparent conformity to dominant discourses does not necessarily mean that they are accepted by the beneficiaries, however. Moreover, the effects produced by development discourses cannot be seen as the outcome of entirely ‘unacknowledged structures’, nor are these discourses simply accepted or overtly resisted.⁶ Actors rather re-interpret these discourses to push their own agendas. They enjoy a degree of contextual freedom, or room for manoeuvre, with respect to dominant donor discourses. This room for manoeuvre is provided by 1) the vagueness of donors’ policy objectives and 2) the skills acquired by local

3 See Escobar, A.: *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1995; Ferguson, J., 1994 [1990], *The Anti-Politics Machine. ‘Development’, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

4 Orlandini, Barbara: Consuming good governance in Thailand, *The European Journal of Development Research*, Volume 15, Number 2, December 2003, pp. 16–43(28); de Certeau, M.: *The practice of everyday life*, Berkeley and Los Angeles; University of California Press, 1984.

5 Mosse, David: ‘Good policy is unimplementable? Reflections on the ethnography of aid policy and practice’, Paper to be presented at the EIDOS Workshop on ‘Order and Disjuncture: the Organisation of Aid and Development’, SOAS, London 26–28th September 2003, p. 3.

6 Rossi, Benedetta (2004) ‘Revisiting Foucauldian Approaches: Power Dynamics in Development Projects’, *Journal of Development Studies*, 40:6, pp. 1–29, p. 5.

development actors. Specific skills such as the use of development language, for example when writing project proposals, and access to donor agencies enable project workers to manipulate donors' rhetorics.

3. Three Anti-Corruption Discourses in Georgia

To study the translation of an external anti-corruption discourse into local agendas, I analyse national anti-corruption discourses. I want to show how different actors use a particular interpretation of an anti-corruption discourse to promote their agendas, adapting an external discourse to local power struggles. The existence of various interpretations of the fight against corruption in Georgia and diverging views on which activities belong to the anti-corruption domain challenges the assumed universality of anti-corruption measures. In the World Bank's view, anti-corruption programmes can be universally applied, regardless of the local context. National discourses in Georgia are seen as a reflection and a response to an international discourse. I want to analyse how corruption and the fight against it is important to different actors in Georgia to the extent that it serves as a vehicle to push various agendas and political visions. Furthermore, the use of a particular interpretation of the fight against corruption reflects power struggles. The meaning attributed to corruption and the labelling of an activity as anti-corruption reflect power. This is visible in Georgia, where the arrests of high officials by the post-revolutionary authorities in a speedy process as part of the official fight against corruption were criticised in public debates. The labelling of a practice as anti-corruption is a political act that opens an intervention field.

To analyse discourses, I use Grillo's definition: '*A discourse (for example, of development) identifies appropriate and legitimate ways of practising development as well as speaking and thinking about it.*'⁷ A dominant anti-corruption discourse has the effect of legitimising certain ways of speaking about anti-corruption and certain courses of actions, while marginalising alternative meanings and practices. I distinguish three anti-corruption discourses or three interpretations of the fight against corruption in Georgia: 1) liberal/technocrat/managerial, 2) nationalistic/conservative and 3) communitarian/democratic.⁸ The three discourses are represented by different actors. For example, the Georgian government tends to use the nationalistic/conservative discourse, while civil society organisations (CSOs) use the communitarian/democratic discourse. The liberal/technocrat discourse is used by international organisations (IOs) and elements of it are adapted by local actors.

The Georgian government has framed the fight against corruption in a nation- and state-building project. The most immediate outcome of the post-revolutionary reform agenda has been the reinforcement of the executive. The governmental anti-corruption discourse can be seen as a mixture of elements of an international anti-corruption discourse with an emphasis on economic liberalisation and a national-conservative discourse embedded in moral references. This combination shows how government actors in Georgia creatively invest anti-corruption standards, which are officially adopted as a means to establish Western-style institutions, with local meanings and references. They creatively assemble different elements via references to Georgian national history and the restoration of the Golden Age combined with a modernisation project. The national-conservative discourse serves to sell reforms to the Georgian population by portraying them as a necessary step on the way to rebuilding Georgian statehood. At the same time, it allows the government to promote a statehood discourse and strengthen power within a narrow circle of insiders. The government's anti-corruption discourse can be considered as a 'mix' of different elements, depending on what constraints the Georgian government is trying to respond to, whether national or international.

7 Grillo, R. and R. Stirrat (eds.), 1997, *Discourses of Development: Anthropological Perspectives*, Oxford: Berg. Quoted in Rossi, Benedetta (2004) 'Revisiting Foucauldian Approaches: Power Dynamics in Development Projects', *Journal of Development Studies*, 40:6, pp. 1–29, p. 1.

8 I use the classification developed by Orlandini (2003) to study the appropriation of the concept of 'good governance' in Thailand. Orlandini, Barbara: *Consuming good governance in Thailand*, *The European Journal of Development Research*, Volume 15, Number 2, December 2003, pp. 16–43(28).

Local civil society organisations (CSOs), for their part, use an external anti-corruption discourse to emphasise the lack of a checks-and-balances system and of control mechanisms in post-revolutionary Georgia. Both actors (the Georgian government and local CSOs) use two different elements of an external anti-corruption discourse: the economic liberalisation dimension and the control mechanisms dimension. In both cases, anti-corruption discourses are used to advance certain agendas in a power struggle between the government and CSOs. Local actors tend to moralise and politicise the rational and technocrat anti-corruption discourse represented by donors. Georgian CSOs use the democratic anti-corruption discourse not only to legitimise their own practices, but also to marginalise and delegitimise the anti-corruption practices of the Georgian government, which do not conform to this discourse.⁹ By marginalising the government's version of the fight against corruption and its anti-corruption practices, CSOs not only justify their anti-corruption interventions, but strengthen their position in a power struggle with the authorities. For example, CSOs criticise the arbitrariness of the Georgian government's fight against corruption, thus emphasising the need for oversight bodies and civil society monitoring. They argue that in the absence of an independent judiciary, donor organisations must help fund civil society monitoring. This way, they justify their own existence in post-revolutionary Georgia.

These two interpretations of an external anti-corruption agenda can be differentiated on the basis of the control on the state. In the democratic discourse of CSOs, oversight bodies such as auditing structures or a democratic checks-and-balances system must be put in place to ensure self-control of the state. Transparency, accountability and participation are key notions in this vision. On the opposite side, the nationalistic-conservative discourse of the Georgian government emphasises the moral responsibility of public officials, asserting that these 'good and honest guys' are self-disciplined and cannot be corrupt. In the power struggle between CSOs and the government, each actor constructs a certain representation of its 'opponent'. CSOs construct government actors and government institutions as 'targets of anti-corruption intervention'. In the anti-corruption discourse of CSOs, government structures and agents are conceptualised and represented as objects that need to be 'monitored'. The rhetoric of transparency and accountability has the effect of extending governable spaces, spaces where actors can intervene and control.¹⁰ By constructing government bodies as a 'target of intervention', CSOs legitimise their intervention. To legitimise their work, CSOs have to sustain certain narratives. For example, the legitimacy of the work of CSOs engaged in monitoring projects depends upon the legitimacy of the narratives of non-transparency in government structures and democracy and participation as remedies against corruption.¹¹

4. Contextual Constraints and Local Strategies

I further analyse how an external anti-corruption agenda is adapted and translated into local agendas by studying concrete anti-corruption projects. This analysis helps me explain the disjuncture between rhetoric and practice, between official donor policies and the practice of anti-corruption projects. By highlighting how local actors interpret discursive objectives in the light of their own interests, I do not mean that these actors follow a clear strategy. They rather benefit from room for manoeuvre and interpretation

9 As Orlandini notes, 'to define corruption as evil – a weakness that can be overcome with a more accountable and transparent system – and to translate this idea into public sector reform programmes and projects supporting civil society organizations, is to legitimize the discourse on corruption framed in these terms, delegitimising in turn other possible perspectives', in Orlandini, Barbara: Consuming good governance in Thailand, *The European Journal of Development Research*, Volume 15, Number 2, December 2003, pp. 16–43(28), p. 26.

10 As noted by Orlandini, 'notions of 'accountability' and 'public participation' become the means to impose practices of control'. in Orlandini, Barbara: Consuming good governance in Thailand, *The European Journal of Development Research*, Volume 15, Number 2, December 2003, pp. 16–43(28), p. 21.

11 As Orlandini notes, 'to define corruption as evil – a weakness that can be overcome with a more accountable and transparent system – and to translate this idea into public sector reform programmes and projects supporting civil society organizations, is to legitimize the discourse on corruption framed in these terms, delegitimising in turn other possible perspectives.' Orlandini, Barbara: Consuming good governance in Thailand, *The European Journal of Development Research*, Volume 15, Number 2, December 2003, pp. 16–43(28), p. 21.

provided by the vagueness of official objectives of donor organisations. I take into account structural and contextual constraints to understand the context in which actors develop their strategies. On the level of the external anti-corruption discourse, the diversity of interests linked to the anti-corruption agenda of donor organisations (economy, democracy, security) results in vague and broad objectives. This provides local actors with room for creativity in the interpretation of official donor policies. The vagueness of objectives has also a purpose, as it serves to attract a large number of supporters with multiple interests and allows for the multiplication of criteria of success.¹² Development terms like participation can mean different things to different people and allow for a diversity of interpretations.

Local actors are constrained by different factors. For example, NGOs in Georgia are still highly dependent on donor funds. This has led to the proliferation of 'donor-driven projects' often mentioned in conversations with members of the Georgian NGO community.¹³ Financial constraints determine the strategies of NGOs. Secondly, in the post-revolutionary context, civil society organisations (CSOs) have lost the legitimacy they formerly enjoyed in the Shevardnadze era. Moreover, CSOs in Georgia are more accountable to donors than to the social groups they are supposed to represent. Donor funding has been redirected to government agencies and numerous former NGO representatives have moved to government positions. CSOs have to justify their existence to maintain their position in post-revolutionary Georgia. If we use the concept of 'field' developed by Bourdieu, we can understand the activities of NGOs in post-revolutionary Georgia as a struggle to accumulate economic capital (donor funding) and symbolic capital (legitimacy).¹⁴ The NGO community in Georgia represents both a source of revenue and of career opportunities as well as a way to build political legitimacy. Finally, CSOs are constrained by the external discourse of donor organisations in the sense that they have to frame their practices in this discourse if they want to get their projects funded. The financial power of donor organisations allows them to set specific discursive boundaries. At the same time, within these boundaries, local actors enjoy room for creativity.

Development projects are inscribed into a particular discourse and serve to maintain specific dominant donor discourses and representations. The disjuncture between policy and practice is not a gap between intention and action that can be solved by better management, but is rather actively maintained.¹⁵ The success of projects is necessarily based on this autonomy from policy goals and practice. Development practice, which is characterised by diverging interests and perspectives, must remain hidden behind the official representation of the project. Mosse argues that policy eventually serves to legitimise practice by mobilising support, rather than orientate action.¹⁶ The search for broad support in the form of an 'interpretive community', which serves to validate and legitimate certain actions, rather than the search for efficient alternatives to solving a problem is what ensures the success of projects.¹⁷ Development projects work as systems of representations.

12 Mosse, David: 'Good policy is unimplementable? Reflections on the ethnography of aid policy and practice', Paper to be presented at the EIDOS Workshop on 'Order and Disjuncture: the Organisation of Aid and Development', SOAS, London 26–28th September 2003, p. 11.

13 Georgian NGOs stress, however, that there are less and less donor-driven projects.

14 Jeffrey uses Bourdieu's conceptual framework to analyse NGOs in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Jeffrey, Alex: The Geopolitical framing of localized struggles: NGOs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, *Development and Change* 38(2): 251–274 (2007).

15 Lewis, David & Mosse, David: Encountering order and disjuncture: contemporary anthropological perspectives on the organization of development, *Oxford Development Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 1, March 2006, p. 5.

16 Mosse, David: 'Good policy is unimplementable? Reflections on the ethnography of aid policy and practice', Paper to be presented at the EIDOS Workshop on 'Order and Disjuncture: the Organisation of Aid and Development', SOAS, London 26–28th September 2003, p. 11.

17 Long, Norman: 'An actor-oriented approach to development intervention', background paper prepared for APO meeting, Tokyo 22–26 April 2002, p. 6.

5. A Civil Society Anti-Corruption Project in Georgia

When analysing anti-corruption projects, my focus is not on the concrete outcomes that this or that project has achieved, but rather on the way project results are *represented* and the practices concealed behind this representation. I understand anti-corruption projects as ‘representations’ whose success depends on the *interpretation* of results (rather than objective measurable outcomes) and the conformity of these interpretations with official donor policies.

Using this conceptual framework, I analyse a project aimed at preventing and combating corruption through civil society pressure and public participation in Georgia, implemented by two Georgian NGOs with the financial support of a major donor organisation. The general project objective was to prevent corruption through civil society pressure (the NGOs’ anti-corruption training) and active public participation (raising public awareness through discussions). An examination of the individual strategies of local project managers reveals that the main objective pursued during the implementation of the project is not the prevention of corruption. In the course of implementing the project, higher policy objectives (fighting corruption through civil society pressure and civic participation) are translated into practical interests (the training of NGOs and network-building with regional NGOs; the testing of a particular methodology imported from the United States; legitimisation of the work of NGOs in post-revolutionary Georgia as mediators between society and the state). An interview with a project participant reveals that the anti-corruption dimension is not a central aspect of the project. ‘I’m not sure that it was a specific training for anti-corruption NGOs [...] I think the goal was to give them [local NGOs] some specific skills, not concretely how to deal with anti-corruption’.¹⁸ Although the project was aimed at discussing different views on the fight against corruption, thus acknowledging that there are different ways to combat corruption and different opinions in society, the project is still inscribed into a particular anti-corruption discourse. This discourse states that the means to combat corruption are more democracy, more public participation and increased civil society pressure. The discourse defines appropriate ways of talking about anti-corruption. The project works to maintain and stabilise this interpretation. By using this discourse, the NGOs implementing the project also legitimise their own work and the necessity to fund civil society in post-revolutionary Georgia. They present themselves as mediators between society and the government. In interviews, project managers emphasise how the current government is disconnected from the general population, while NGOs mediate citizens’ demands and opinions (one project objective was to ‘convey the public voice’). As one project manager says, ‘We wanted to tell our government that not all the ways they use in their fight against corruption are liked by the population or at least to see what really people want.’¹⁹ The project marginalises the government’s anti-corruption practices by representing the government’s actions as spontaneous and lacking a long-term strategy. For example, project managers question the professionalism of the government, e.g. ‘In my organisation we are doing our plan and we know that we have to do this, this, and this in order to get this. And I am not sure that the government has a similar plan.’²⁰ One of the three models presented during the public discussions organised in regions of Georgia and consisting of arresting corrupt officials (a method used by the Georgian government after the Rose Revolution) is implicitly rejected and marginalised by project managers.

The success of the project is not assessed through concrete outcomes such as the reduction of corruption, but based on its conformity with a dominant anti-corruption discourse emphasising public participation. Rather than a means to prevent corruption, public participation is viewed normatively as an end in itself. Success is produced through an interpretive work that gives meaning to different events by binding them

18 Interview with project participant, Tbilisi, 12.03.2008. As Tisne and Smilov note on anti-corruption civil society projects in the Balkans, ‘The clearest effect of the civil society projects analyzed was often precisely their benefit to strengthening civil society organizations.’, in Tisné, Martin/Smilov, Daniel: ‘From the ground up – Assessing the record of anti-corruption assistance in Eastern Europe’, Policy Studies series, Central European University Center for Policy Studies, 2004, p. 33.

19 Interview with project manager, Tbilisi, 01.02.2008.

20 Ibid.

into a coherent sequence and connecting them to higher policy goals. The project is presented as successful, despite not achieving some core objectives, such as influencing decision-making, preventing or reducing corruption, mobilising citizens for public actions, and training NGOs to implement anti-corruption projects. The apparent conformity to an official discourse does not signify its acceptance. In particular, two project managers criticise the approaches of donor organisations that are seen as supporting the Georgian government while neglecting civil society. Contradictory statements during interviews reveal that depending on the context where they act and talk, local beneficiaries can change their interpretations of the project results. One project manager implicitly admits that Georgian citizens might have different expectations of NGOs, questioning the relevance of this project. 'Sometimes we thought that talking with these people about corruption is much too much, because they do not have even their basic needs satisfied and you are talking to them about corruption and policies.'²¹

At the beginning of the project, the donor organisation imposes a certain view, constructing a representation of the project that corresponds to higher policy goals. The final report on the project mentions the absence of applications from NGOs in a region of Georgia populated by an ethnic minority. Since this region is a priority target of the donor organisation, applications from local NGOs were directly solicited. The inclusion of the region does not correspond to specific local needs, but conforms to higher policy goals. One project manager mentions the irrelevance of this inclusion, referring to the public discussion in this region as the least successful.²² The importance of the project as a 'representation' is also visible in the fact that half of the copies of the project results were published in English (the other half was published in Georgian and given to public officials). Despite the fact that no public officials attended the final presentation of results, the presence of the media and international organisations is nonetheless seen as a success by project managers.

Finally, the multiplicity of perspectives is mentioned in one interview with a project participant, showing that the project community is not a homogeneous group.²³ Project participants from local NGOs discussed the contents of a small brochure used during the public discussions. Some participants disagreed with defining the arrests of high officials from the Shevardnadze era as an anti-corruption initiative and putting these initiatives in a positive light. One project participant explains, 'For example, there was one part which was saying that the new government began a very aggressive fight against corruption and some kind of anticorruptional activities. Not every participant in that project believed that these activities were assessed the right way and things like that... The anticorruptional movement, first anticorruptional steps of this government that we have in Georgia after the revolution were very problematic and discussed.'²⁴ 'For example, the sentence was that the Georgian government began to fight against corruption for example in November of 2005 or something like that... [...] and most of the participants thought that the thing that they had begun cannot be called a fight against corruption'.²⁵ This discussion shows that the definition of what belongs to the anti-corruption domain is contested, and the decision regarding this issue is a political one. The final report on the project says, however, that project participants' comments on the brochure were only aimed at making it more understandable. This shows how the inscription of the project into an official narrative conceals diverging interests and contradictory practices while producing an appearance of consensus.

6. Conclusion

The paper has challenged visions of order, predictability and homogeneity in development by studying the local adaptation of an external anti-corruption discourse in Georgia. First, the analysis of national

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Interview with project participant, Tbilisi, 12.03.2008.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

anti-corruption discourses in Georgia reveals that local actors creatively invest an external discourse with local meanings and references. They moralise and politicise this discourse and use different interpretations in local power struggles. They use a particular discourse to construct other actors as 'targets of anti-corruption interventions', while delegitimising their practices. Secondly, the analysis of anti-corruption projects shows how local actors within the development community in Georgia pursue different strategies under various contextual constraints. Dominant donor discourses constrain their practices to the extent that they have to interpret project results in a way that conforms to official policies. They have an interest in maintaining authorised official representations in order to attract donor funding. At the same time, the vagueness of the donors' objectives and the specific skills acquired by local beneficiaries enable them to creatively manipulate development rhetorics. They enjoy room for manoeuvre that allows them to interpret official objectives in the light of their own interests. The same actors try, however, to conceal diverging interests and contradictory practices behind an appearance of order and consensus. Success is constructed through broad support and the building of 'interpretive communities' that serve to validate certain actions. The enrolment of supporters is needed, considering that the reality of a development project is always in question. The reality of a project depends on an interpretive work that gives meanings to different events by connecting them to higher policy objectives. The study of the 'anti-corruption field' in Georgia reveals the existence of several anti-corruption discourses and the creative ways in which local actors use a development product. It challenges the universality claims of the international anti-corruption discourse.