

Power and Poverty

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Abstract

Poverty alleviation is one of the main objectives of the *International Bank for Reconstruction and Development* since the early 1970s. The following analysis based on a sample of texts of the former „World Bank“ president J. Wolfensohn, deals with the poverty discourse of the bank, its topics, aims and strategies. The dominant features of the discourse clearly characterise the organisation as a profit oriented enterprise. The strategies the World Bank and its staff utilise to build up an imposing organisational self, are the same as those other market oriented organisations employ. It is not the aim of this paper to prove, that a bank is bank; the analysis of the corpus rather supports the argument, that there is a more or less hidden contradiction between the Bank's identity and aims at the one hand and its discourse on “fighting poverty” on the other.

The “War against poverty”

In June 2005 the President of the United States of America replaced James Wolfensohn by his Deputy Secretary of Defence Paul Wolfowitz at the top of the *International Bank for Reconstruction and Development*. It seemed quite obvious that George Bush jun. intended to redress the liberal policies ascribed to the outgoing director and make the Bank a still more malleable instrument to serve US-American security interests. “This nomination is of a pattern with that of Condoleezza Rice as US Secretary of State and John Bolton as US Ambassador to the UN. Trusty confidants from President Bush's first term are being moved on to more prominent positions from which they can orchestrate US ‘soft power’ in support of the continuing ‘war on terror’” (Toye 2005) and in the *Washington Post* (28 March 2005:17) Sebastian Mallaby wrote: “Despite the unpopularity of the Iraq war,

Wolfowitz's *strength* is that he'll make the bank a tool of U.S. policy. And if you're going to have an ideology, Wolfowitz has the right one."

Announcing the impending replacement in the web, the Bank's *Office of the President* in early April 2005 set a two-part information on its page which had to the left – as a header – the following sentence: "We need tangible, forceful, practical answers as to how we can improve our effectiveness", and to the right as its comment "presidential succession". (World Bank 2005a) The (underlying) message delivered can be read as: Wolfensohn was no longer "effective" and had to be "succeeded" by somebody more "tangible, forceful and practical". In some way Wolfensohn's successor proved to be "too practical" and had to hand over his job to another Under Secretary of State already by June 2007.

As to the main objective of the Bank since the late 1990s, the "War against poverty", a Deputy Secretary of Defence – at a first glance – seemed to be the adequate choice, even if he had no experience in managing a Bank.¹ Experts in poverty alleviation although were quite skeptical. In an US-American online newsletter (CAPAF 2005) Wolfowitz was depicted as "blind to the impact of global poverty"; the writer quoted Wolfowitz speaking about the world's poor in his *Congressional Testimony* of 6/6/1996: "These people are not fighting because they're poor. They're poor because they fight all the time." In other words, Wolfowitz blamed the needy for their poverty: If only the "Wretched of the earth" would stop to fight each other (and the United States) there would be no reason to wage a war against poverty.

From an analyst's view this option neatly fits into what the World Bank had been already practicing before. Wolfensohn's "liberal policies" might have been too liberal for George Bush jun. Critical minds by contrasts saw the Bank under his command waging a "war against the poor" instead of a "struggle against poverty".

"The pursuit of neoliberal policies, one of whose ideological underpinnings is that such policies will reduce poverty, has become more and more a total war against the poor. In this war, most economists, including those usually

¹ George Bush jun.'s protégée has much in common with one of his predecessors, Robert MacNamara, who, like Wolfowitz, drove the United States into a war they could not win, had no experience as a banker and was in charge of a campaign against poverty (which was lost just as the USA lost their war in Vietnam).

portrayed as sensitive to the social aspects of development – or even those thought of as critics of neoliberalism – such as Joseph Stiglitz and Amartya Sen, do not propose alternatives to neoliberalism's wide deployment. [...] These two ,in-fashion' authors know how to 'surf' on the wave of protests against wild neoliberalism and on the necessity for market regulation to promote a capitalism 'with a human face.' However, this is a serious misunderstanding, because neither of them recommends rebuilding the welfare state, modifying the ownership structure of capital in favor of the public sector, applying a policy of income redistribution, or promoting public services – much less arguing in favor of state-led planned development. In spite of a few nuances or subtleties, their arguments always imply that the state should fully submit to the dominant forces of global capital and help its capital accumulation." (Herrera 2006)

Amartya Sen's popular book *Development as Freedom* (1999) – especially chapter 5 on markets, state and social opportunities – may furnish proof of Herrera's argument.

The change in the World Bank's top management – from one "son of a wolf" to another – might have profoundly stirred up the organisational culture of the Bank, but it did not alter its main characteristics and strategies; maybe some of them would have become more visible if only Wolfowitz would have had enough time to act in his "tangible, forceful and practical" manner.

A wolf in a sheep's clothing?

"Poverty alleviation" during the last decades more than once became a main objective of the Bank (IBRD), widely known as the "World Bank". But how can a bank, supposed to protect wealth and to make capital grow, side with the poor?

On the one hand, the "World Bank" maintains to be "not a 'bank' in the common sense. It is one of the United Nations' specialized agencies [...] the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and the International Development Association (IDA). Together these organizations provide low-interest loans, interest-free credit, and grants to developing countries" (World Bank 2005b). On the other hand the IBRD is supposed "to conduct its operations with due regard to the effect of international

investment on business conditions in the territories of members” as it is stated in its *Articles of Agreement* (IBRD Articles of Agreement 1989: I[v]). Following its mandate the, Bank acts like a bank² and refers to “a bank’s identity” in public discussions (as for instance on the subject of the “undemocratic character” of the organisation, ruled by the mightiest shareholder, the USA which holds 16,39% and is able to veto decisions). Therefore the results of critical discourse analysis – especially the strategies described in the last chapter – have nothing particular in that sense, that they show characteristical features of a profit oriented enterprise. The strategies the World Bank and its staff utilise to build up an imposing organisational self are indeed the same as those other market oriented organisations employ. It is not the aim of this paper to prove, that a bank is bank; that seems obvious. I rather presume, and the analysis of the corpus supports the argument, that there is a more or less hidden contradiction between the Bank’s identity and aims at the one hand and its discourse on “fighting poverty” on the other.

With other critics I share the opinion, that the Bank’s management and experts preach the fight against poverty, but through their handling of affairs they contribute – unintentionally or not – to produce poverty on a global level. Bruce Rich made the point when he wrote in *The Ecologist* (Sept 2000): “It says it has reformed. It says it alleviates poverty. Yet, in practice it increasingly supports the rich” (Rich 2000).

The following analysis provides support to five assumptions concerning the *actual meaning* and *function* of “poverty” in World Bank dominated discourses: (1) “poverty” is a human condition of “others” (from the viewpoint of the producers of the discourse), (2) “poverty” can be measured by using criteria imposed by the “owners” of the global discourse, (3) “the

² “The IBRD raises almost all of its money (95%) by issuing debt securities (bonds) and selling them on the private financial market. The remainder of IBRD financing comes from the initial capital contributions of World Bank member countries. IDA, on the other hand, is government funded, primarily by the G7 countries (France, Japan, Britain, Italy, United States, Canada, and Germany). The IBRD accounts for approximately 80% of the World Bank’s lending to governments, while IDA accounts for the remaining 20%. The IFC and MIGA differ from the IBRD and IDA because these arms lend directly to private corporations, including many of the world’s largest multinationals. The IFC also issues bonds to raise its capital” (<http://www.econjustice.net/wbbb/links/bondinfo.htm>, 5. 2005).

poor” are themselves responsible for the cause of their poverty, (4) “poverty” can be alleviated or even eliminated through (economic) development of the poor societies, without seriously touching the wealth of the “non-poor”, (5) “fighting poverty” in the South is necessary “to protect the rich societies” in the North.

The analysis is based on a random sample of texts produced by James Wolfensohn (or ascribed to him), and some quotations of Paul Wolfowitz; the texts are dealing with poverty and the Bank’s role in the global fight against poverty, or more precisely, the Bank’s contribution to the global discourse on the fight against poverty. I also use general information about the Bank and its activities, and especially its self-portrayal in the web.

“Poverty” – its varied use in discourse

“Poverty” and “poor” belong to a class of words with uneven distribution in human discourse. Unlike fairy tales, the bible or popular novels scientific discourse or political language for a long time showed a tendency of avoidance: “poverty” was neither a subject for scientific research nor for political speeches, unlike for instance “social inequality”; until the 1970s even the international community of development experts and people from the aid business preferred terms like “underdeveloped”, “less developed”, “developing”, “peasants”, “third world people” and so on to “poor” and “poverty”. We spoke of “needs”, but not of “poverty”. Historiography, at least in and on Africa, discovered the poor only in the mid-1970s.

By then, the *International Bank for Reconstruction and Development* – an institution which prefers to be called (and to call itself) the “World Bank” – had already identified “The Poor” as a new target group. Its president Robert (“Bob”) McNamara declared the Bank to be in a position to do away with the terrible problems of 700 million “absolute” and 400 million “relative poor” people in the world. In March 2003 the then World Bank president James Wolfensohn said during a dinner in honour of his predecessor: “It was Bob who, in his famous Nairobi speech in 1973, proposed the term ‘absolute poverty.’ He defined this as a condition of deprivation that ‘falls below any rational definition of human decency.’ For all of us in the development community, his call to action in the fight against poverty still rings in our ears. It is still the greatest challenge facing

the world today and Bob showed us something can be done.“ (World Bank 2003)

Whatever the World Bank did, it did not succeed in reducing poverty. Twenty years after McNamara's speech in Nairobi and two years before James Wolfensohn took office the number of the “absolute poor” had almost doubled to 1.3 billion (Tetzlaff 1996:155). While Wolfensohn praised McNamara for his strategy to multiply the volume of lending in order to boost agricultural production in developing countries, critics brought forward, that the massive support for market oriented, especially export-oriented agriculture (the “green revolutions”) had resulted in “impoverishment, eviction from their lands and death of many millions [...] around the world.“ (Cockburn 2004)

With the *World Development Report 1990: Poverty* the World Bank started another initiative against poverty in the last decade of the century (World Bank 1990). “Poverty” and “the poor” again became important elements of the mainstream discourse in development. The frequency of their occurrence increased. “To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger” is the first and most important of the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs) adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2000. “We, heads of State and Government, [...] resolve further: To halve, by the year 2015, the proportion of the world's people whose income is less than one dollar a day.” (<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>) With other words, the “Nations United” in New York fell back behind what McNamara had promised in 1973 for the year 2000, i.e. to solve the problems of the “absolute poor”, who were now called “people living on less than a dollar a day”.

From then, MDGs and poverty alleviation became the daily prayer in the aid business. The development discourse paid its tribute to the poor; they found their way in the *Austrian 3-Year-Programme* on Development Policy and to many homepages of big, medium and small development organisations. The World Bank's *Development Report 2000/2001* was called *Attacking poverty* and “The Poor” came back again in 2004, when the World Bank published its *Development Report: “Making Services Work for Poor People”*. While even the World Bank's statistics showed, that the number of “absolute” and “relative poor” people was still increasing, the Bank's official discourse continued to praise its activities and especially the role World Bank president Wolfensohn played in “the fight against poverty”.

“This report is the sixth in a series of assessments of how well World Bank activities support the institution’s overarching goal of reducing poverty.” This we can read in the “executive summary” of *Poverty reduction and the World Bank: progress in fiscal 1998*, and the summary continues: „It [the report, but at the same time the Bank, W.S.] finds progress in some areas and concludes that, relative to past benchmarks, performance has been good.” (World Bank 1999:1) President Wolfensohn’s foreword to this publication sounds more decent when he says that the report “is an important contribution to implementing our strategy so as to ensure that tomorrow’s poor will not outnumber today’s.” How does his version of “poverty reduction” match the millennium goal to be attained in 2015: “Reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day”?

Wolfensohn, Wolfowitz and poverty

When I asked *Google* for the items „Wolfensohn+poverty“ in September 2004 approximately 33.600 entries came up, and in April 2005, less than two months before Wolfensohn retired from presidency, the number was “approximately 109.000”. The 17th of May 2007 *Google* promised over 1 million entries for “Wolfowitz+poverty” while “Wolfensohn+poverty” was down to 11.500. What makes people in the *World Wide Web* refer so often to the President of the World Bank speaking on poverty? And why does the global public so quickly forget a discursive champion of poverty alleviation once he is out of office? The answer appears to be quite straight (and sufficiently supported by the analysis of my corpus): the main focus in discourse is on “World Bank” and not on “poverty”. With other words: it is “power” which is focussed by the global discourse, not “poverty”.

Because of the global economic crisis and the “Roaring Nineties”, the “greediest decade in history” (Stiglitz 2003), the number of people affected by poverty increased in the “underdeveloped” regions of the South *and* in the rich countries of the North. Like from a contagious disease people wanted to protect themselves against poverty and looked for the right doctor. The World Bank and especially James Wolfensohn offered their services and became masters of the discourse on poverty alleviation. Paul Wolfowitz had indeed to step into Wolfensohn’s shoes (“Poverty reduction is a unifying goal and one that I believe in deeply”, BBC news, 1/4/2005).

Their way of doing can hardly be better illustrated than by James Wolfensohn himself who wrote (or consented to the writing of somebody else) in his foreword to the *World Development Report 2000-2001* (World Bank 2001: v): "We at the Bank have made it our mission to fight poverty with passion and professionalism, putting it at the center of all the work we do". In an article in the *New Left Review* (13, Jan-Feb 2002) Paul Cammack quoted this sentence and continued by adding another favourite saying by which several of Wolfensohn's prefaces or forewords conclude: "The 4.8 billion people who are our ultimate clients deserve nothing less."

The discourse on "poverty" links two completely different communities of speakers: Wolfensohn, the World Bank, and the aid business on the one hand, the 4.8 billion people on the other. The "actual" (or "external") meaning of "poverty" – as opposed to the "semantic" (or "internal") meaning – used by Wolfensohn and the World Bank clearly differs from the actual meaning used by their "ultimate clients". "Poverty" on the one hand is a surface element realising concepts of "westernness" and connected to strategies of "self-affirmation" or "disengagement" of the World Bank community. For the people (Stuart Hall's "the rest") on the other hand, "poverty" probably means something similar to what Mr. McNamara advanced in 1973: a "condition of deprivation". Unlike "the West", the poorest among the 4.8 billion ultimate clients of the World Bank don't use the word very often. They especially need it, when asking for help from those, who are rich. Majid Rahnema (1992: 161) cites the example of a social scientist who had been working in the Himalaya region: "Helena Norberg-Hodge mentions how the notion of poverty hardly existed in Ladakh when she visited that country for the first time in 1975. 'Today,' she says, 'it has become part of the language.' When visiting an outlying village some eight years ago, Helena asked a young Ladakhi where were the poorest houses. 'We have no poor houses in our village,' was the proud reply. Recently, Helena saw the same Ladakhi talking to an American tourist and overheard him say, 'if only you could do something for us; we are so poor!'"

It is the discourse of "the West" which assigns the attribute "poor" to specific human communities or individuals. The World Bank proudly produced books in a series "Voices of the poor", based on interviews of 60.000 non-western people, picked out and questioned by World Bank experts between 1992 and 1999. But who is talking? John Bender in a review of the publications made the point:

“The study claims to be participant-driven. [...] Yet the research agenda was not set by the participants. Rather, it was predetermined by World Bank staff and the study researchers. [...] Further, the researchers actively intervened in the study process to elicit answers that they regarded as more desirable. For example, while the study claimed to ask the poor, impartially, for their problems and priorities, the study report notes that they 'changed the sequencing of methods as needed'. Changing the sequencing to first asking about problems rather than priorities, for example, was justified on the ethical grounds of not unreasonably raising the hope of the participants. [...] The study was also hostile to the idea of quantifying results, in favour of 'documentation of what was said in poor people's own words'. After interviewing 60,000 people, on what basis were the relatively few quotes cited selected? How, scientifically, can we regard them as anything other than personal, unrepresentative opinions?” (Bender 2001)

Voices of the Poor is overall an instrument of power; it ascribes the quality “poor” to a selected group of individuals among “the 4.8 billion people who are our ultimate clients” and at the same time it introduces concepts of poverty, which neatly fit into the western rhetoric. It is the non-poor, who have the power to name poor people “poor”. Therefore “poverty” is one of the core elements to make poor people “other” and to “construct the self” of those, who are “not poor”. The poor don't need the term “poverty” until they find somebody who is poorer than them or until “being poor” is an asset in dealing with (presumptive) donors.

Speaking of poverty: discourse and power

Mr. McNamara called poverty “a condition of deprivation”, but he didn't say, *who* deprived the poor of *what*. Mr. Wolfensohn first of all defined poverty in relation to the US-dollar, today still the mightiest instrument to measure wealth. „Of the current world population, nearly 3 billion live on less than \$ 2 a day, and 1.2 billion on less than \$ 1 a day.“ (Wolfensohn 2000a) Similar statements we may find repeatedly in James Wolfensohn's introductions to World Bank publications. To symbolize the living condition of poor people by a one-US-dollar-banknote is misleading and atrocious, but it works. Not only the UN and the aid business agreed to this definition. From a social scientist's view measuring poverty only by the criterion of private consumption is a concept belonging to the 1970s, “when poverty

was understood as low income and failure to satisfy basic needs" (McGee/Brock 2001: 9). Following McGee/Brock (2001: 9) there exists today a broad consensus ("at a rhetorical level at least") between the influential development agencies, that "poverty is deprivation or insufficiency of one or more dimensions of wellbeing or capability".

Reading through Mr. Wolfensohn's speeches, you may also come upon similar concepts of poverty, as for instance in the address to the Board of Governors at the *Annual Meetings of the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund* in 1999: "Poverty is much more than a matter of income alone. The poor seek a sense of well-being which is peace of mind; it is good health, community, and safety. It is choice and freedom as well as a steady source of income." (Wolfensohn 2005: 157) Still, the One-Dollar-a-Day symbol dominates World Bank texts and the ongoing discourse of development and global politics.

Another – more recent - case of strongly connected concepts in development discourse is that of "terrorism and poverty". „Fight against poverty, fight against terror linked“ was the heading of a World Bank press release on Wolfensohn speaking to international leaders at the Carter Center, Atlanta, in 2004 (<http://www-wds.worldbank.org/>, 21.9.2004). In a conversation with Stephen Bernhut for the *Ivey Business Journal* two years earlier Wolfensohn said: „And if the world has not learned after September 11 that poverty, wherever it may be, is a domestic issue for developed countries, then we are in deep trouble“ and a few lines later he made clear, what he intended to communicate: „The second issue I would say is that we need to understand that it is not poverty directly which knocked down the World Trade Center“ (Bernhut 2002). A fine example of a hedging strategy: "not directly" makes it possible to say, what otherwise would be considered unsound: "it is poverty, which knocked down the World Trade Center". "Poverty in itself does not immediately and directly lead to conflict, let alone to terrorism. [...] And yet we know that exclusion can breed violent conflict." (Wolfensohn 2005: 314) So, at last it was the poor and not the reaction to US-American hegemonial politics, which ultimately brought down the World Trade Center.

"Poverty" goes together with terrorism, and terrorism is directed against "Us". In consequence, "We" have to "fight against poverty", to protect "Ourselves". Introducing a conference on poverty reduction strategies in

Washington in January 2002, Wolfensohn appealed to representatives of donor countries and civil society. "In our post-September 11 world, the need to address poverty – and its consequences in terms of despair, alienation and violence – has become not only a moral imperative [...], but also a central concern for everyone who strives for national and global security and peace. [...] To those who still believe that we can ignore or merely pay lip-service to the plight of the 20 percent of the world's population living in direst poverty, I say: 'Go to Ground Zero.'" (Wolfensohn 2005: 323) Jan Oberg, Director of the *Transnational Foundation for Peace and Future Research* commented on the poverty-terrorism argument as follows: „In the Fall Issue of *Development Outreach*, World Bank president James D. Wolfensohn reflects on the consequences of September 11 and says that we must fight terrorism and poverty, with 'and' in italics. It is one of these elitist articles that states what an unidentified global 'we' must now do to make the world a better place. While I do not doubt his wish to see a better world, the lack of both causal analysis and strategy for change in this article raises concern“ (Oberg 2002).

A third component of the external meaning of "poverty" in Wolfensohn's texts is its correlation with "corruption". In his conversation with Stephen Bernhut, from the *Ivey Business Journal*, James Wolfensohn stressed the connection between "corruption of leaders" and "poverty": „And we've also discovered that the single most popular issue in a country is in fact getting rid of corruption, because people don't like being poor. They hate being poor if it's at the expense of someone getting rich in an improper way.“ (Bernhut 2002) In the same sentence James Wolfensohn refers to an important dogma of the neo-liberal creed: "getting rich is nothing bad, as long as you do it in the proper way". The conversational implicature of this statements is: Poor people hate being poor "only if their poverty is caused by corruption of their leaders" because it is them who are getting rich in an improper way. "Corruption", Wolfensohn explains on different occasions, "is exclusive: it promotes the interests of the few over those of the many." (Wolfensohn 2005: 81) If his argument is valid, we must call our global economic system "corrupt", because it exactly does, what he said.

To take up a fourth, by far not the last component of meaning which could be discussed, James Wolfensohn is convinced that poverty is a fate; poverty

is the result of unavoidable economic and social processes, uncontrollable environmental and climatic changes but not a phenomenon which has clearly distinguishable actors behind. In a statement to the *International Monetary and Financial Committee of the IMF Board of Governors* in April 2000 Wolfensohn listed several causes for poverty: the “scourge of HIV/AIDS, the deteriorating quality of the environment, the rise in conflicts and social tensions, the growing disparity between rich and poor”, and finally “the recent financial crisis has also increased poverty and the effects persist in many parts of the world.” (IMF 2000) If at all, we can identify somebody who may be responsible for the deteriorating quality of life of the majority of the world's population, than, as illustrated by the previous example on corruption, the “culprits” are identified as incompetent or even criminal governments, as economic and political leaders of developing countries.

“The causes of financial crises and poverty are one and the same. Countries may come up with sound fiscal and monetary policy, but if they do not have good governance, if they do not confront the issue of corruption, if they do not have a complete legal system which protects human rights, property rights, and contracts, ... their development is fundamentally flawed and will not last. [...] Corruption is a core poverty issue, robbing from the poor the little they have.” (Wolfensohn 1999)

Ever since academic critics, members of the civil society and anti-globalization protesters started to attack the International Financial Institutions with growing intensity and efficiency, the World Bank's president and his think tank, in their attempt to defend themselves, came up at last with some critical remarks concerning the governments of industrialised countries, but only as far as their financial contribution to development aid is concerned. Jan Oberg in his short comment on James Wolfensohn's contributions to the global poverty discourse invited him to go past trivial statements: “Our common goal, says Wolfensohn, must be to a) fight poverty, b) promote inclusion and justice, and c) bring the marginalised into the mainstream of the global economy. We can do that, he says, through steps that help prevent conflicts. Such general goal formulations are not exactly new. Stating them with no example of concrete steps to be taken toward their realisation doesn't help anybody. First of all, the World Bank president – himself an investment banker – says nothing about the causes, as he sees them, behind world poverty and exclusion. If

'we' want to do something about a problem, it would be helpful to know what caused it in the first place. Does he simply not know what these causes are? If Wolfensohn is aware of them, are they too controversial to put on print? Is he afraid of singling out certain activities, structures, organisations or actors that are rather more part of the problem than of the solution?" (Oberg 2002)

Strategies in the World Bank's poverty discourse

To Mr. McNamara poverty was "a condition of deprivation", which the World Bank *was able to do away with*. Robert McNamara demonstrated strong confidence in the ability of his organisation and its experts. Mr. Wolfensohn speaking on poverty, was guided by the same intention, i.e. to convince people of the Bank's efficiency and power, making them believe that the World Bank is the most efficient player in the fight against poverty on the globe. A World Bank team of editors published a volume of "the best speeches and writings" of the outgoing president under the imposing title *Voice for the World's Poor*. The title is misleading – the texts are mainly about "We the World Bank".

With Jan Oberg "I do not doubt his wish to see a better world", but I would like to add something else: "While I do not doubt his wish to see a better world, the increase in financial, political and communicative power of the World Bank raises concern." Among all the small and big organisations of the international aid business, it is the Bank which invests most in securing and increasing its power. Through action and discourse the *International Bank for Reconstruction and Development* promotes its "Self-empowerment" and places itself as the strongest player in global aid business.

There are two macro-strategies to realise "Self-empowerment". The first is: (1) "Make people believe, that you have higher professional competence than other actors in the field, respectively try to show, that others have not enough competence to do the job alone, without you". The second is directed toward the object of your action: (2) "Increase the importance of the object of your action and the difficulties in dealing with it".

“Own competence”

“Increasing the others’ belief in somebody’s high competence” may be realised by a multitude of micro-strategies, as for instance:

“Inform almost everybody of almost everything you are doing”

Who is subscribed to the regular information service of the World Bank knows what I mean, but if not – just ask Google. Part of the information network are also international conferences, extensive travelling of functionaries, professional press contacts, meetings with national and international experts and politicians, grants, invitations to visit the World Bank headquarters and internships for students. There is also the *World Bank Institute*, its “capacity development arm“, which in his own words „reaches policymakers, academics, and development practitioners in every corner of the world. In recent years, the WBI has broadened its reach to include parliamentarians, journalists, teachers, youth, and civil society leaders.“ (WBI 2007)

“Build an impressing environment for your professional activities”

Headquarters in central positions – in a global just as in a local sense – and modern design are important elements of an impressing environment. Part of the environment are not only office and residential buildings or conference sites, but also transport facilities, allowances, technical equipment and working conditions for staff and visitors. These realisations of power and importance are the more impressive, the poorer the environment of their “mise en scene” is.

“Increase the number of your staff and make people believe in the individual competences of your collaborators”

While following the neo-liberal creed of deregulation and lean bureaucracy, national political and administrative institutions had to reduce their staff and cut labour costs. To satisfy shareholders’ claims, banks and insurance companies in Germany and Austria laid off part of their collaborators, increased the workload of those who remained and asked their customers to take over part of the job without compensation. As the World Bank is neither obliged to increase shareholders’ profits nor bound to its own neo-liberal prescriptions, it increased and diversified its staff during the 1990s and only slightly reduced it since 2000. “Some 10,000 development

professionals from nearly every country in the world work at the World Bank in Washington, DC, or in our over 100 country offices. We are economists, educators, environmental scientists, financial analysts, anthropologists, engineers and many others. Approximately 3,000 of us work in country offices in the developing world. We apply our skills and the bank's resources to bridge the economic divide between poor and rich countries, to turn rich country resources into poor country growth and to achieve sustainable poverty reduction." (World Bank 2007)

To some extent even the dismissing of a Nobel laureate, as it happened with Joseph Stiglitz, contributes to the making up of the Bank's prestige: it has a team which can dispose of scientific excellence in abundance – no need for an additional Nobel laureate.

"Tell people, first and foremost your competitors in the field, that you have the right instruments and methods to solve the given problem"

The world wide web, publications, scientific meetings, donor conferences, news in printed and audio-visual form, calls for tenders: in many ways the Bank addresses the public not only showing that it has the money to finance projects, but also the best methods and concepts to alleviate poverty. An anonymous admirer writing on "World Poverty and World Bank" told the web: "The World Bank is the world's largest source of development assistance, providing nearly \$ 16 billion in loans annually to its client countries. It uses its financial resources, highly trained staff, and extensive knowledge base to help each developing country onto a path of stable, sustainable growth in the fight against poverty." (Brinkster 2004) James Wolfensohn himself contributed to the myth as follows: "Poverty amidst plenty is the world's greatest challenge, and we at the Bank have made it our mission to fight poverty with passion and professionalism, putting it at the center of all the work we do. And we have recognized that successful development requires a steadily broadening and properly integrated development mandate." (World Bank 2001: v)

"We are the best" is the core information of the forewords and introductions to numerous reports and other publications. "We enter the new millennium with great hopes. For the first time in human history, we have the possibility of eradicating global poverty in our lifetime." Thus J. Wolfensohn began the foreword to the *World Development Report 2004*, leaving open if that "we" is an inclusive "we" or if it is meant to refer to the

World Bank community only (World Bank 2004). He continues by naming several “heightened challenges” before coming back to the main topic of the text: “This year’s *World Development Report*, the 26th in the World Bank’s flagship series, helps to re-ignite and reinforce our hopes by confronting these challenges. [...] this year’s WDR is central to the World Bank’s two-pronged strategy for development – investing in and empowering people, and improving the climate for investment. Next year’s WDR will focus on the second of these. Together, these reports form part of the World Bank’s contribution to meeting the challenge the global community has set for itself – to eradicate poverty in our lifetime” (World Bank 2004: xv).

“Admit others in the field and allow them to contribute to projects, but make sure, that it is you who determines the rules, time, place and instruments of action”

By inventing the PRSP (*Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*), the Bank’s experts and management pretended to have finally created an instrument of development in the hands of the “stakeholders”. In the Bank’s own description, the PRSP “are prepared by governments through a participatory process involving civil society and development partners, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).” (World Bank 2005d) The catch is hidden in the last half-sentence: The Bretton Wood twins reserved themselves the right to decide if and when the program would be ready for implementation and if the progress corresponded to what they agreed to. The more, through attentive reading of World Bank documents and listening to its experts, the target societies learn “what is right and what is wrong” and adapt themselves in anticipation to the rules formulated by the donor.

Another example of admission and control provides the data collection for and the publication of “Our dream: A world free of poverty” (Granzow 2000). The book is based on information from people affected and concerned by extreme poverty and James Wolfensohn (again in the foreword) describes the process of production as follows: “In an effort to better understand the nature and the causes of poverty, we recently asked the poor about their experience [...] We’ve learned that the poor lack access to basic assets such as physical and human capital. They lack the opportunity to convert their enormous energy and hard work into a higher standard of living, and they systematically suffer from lack of influence and voice. These findings make us increasingly aware of the need to rethink our

approach to development.” And what was the result of the rethinking? Everything is to the best. The poor lack “access” and “opportunities” and with the Bank’s help they will convert their enormous energy into a higher standard of living. “This book gives examples of the World Bank’s work with countries at the national and local levels.” (Wolfensohn 2000b)

In line with the “dream-project” James Wolfensohn also praised the poor’s engagement in the fight against poverty in an interview with a German daily: “[...] the world community is overlooking how valuable the poor can be in the fight against the poverty. They are not awaiting charity. These are people who hope for a chance and who want to be part of the solution and not part of the problem. I had the great privilege as World Bank chief to visit 120 countries. I saw villages and farms in the entire world. I met with people in slums. And these were no weak people. If we succeed in integrating them, then they will be a valuable force in the fight against poverty. What one needs is leadership at the highest level.” (Berliner Zeitung 2005). Guess, who will provide for the “leadership at the highest level”?

“Describe your activities as successful, even if they are not, and use methods of high prestige for your research and ways of presentation for the description, which can influence the recipients opinion”

In a review article on the World Bank’s description of “Adjustment in Africa” (World Bank 1994) Sayre P. Schatz, emeritus professor of economics, pointed out how the authors of the report arranged their data in order to demonstrate that the Bank’s macro-economic policies had improved the economic performance of those African countries, which dutifully applied the Bank’s adjustment prescription. By grouping countries and applying selected criteria, the authors made structural adjustment a story of success. For S. Schatz the report is a case of “crude classification” and “a more thorough exploration of the data [...] reveals a quite different pattern, one that does not support the World Bank’s assessment” (Schatz 1994, 680f). To dismantle the manipulative strategy of the World Bank team Schatz applied a slightly different mode of classification, used other criteria for the grouping of African states examined in the study, and obtained the startling result “that the major factor determining growth performance in Africa appears to be alphabetical position” (Schatz 1994: 692).

The analysis of World Bank texts reveals a great many discourse strategies used to deliver World Bank's success stories, as for instance the generalising of single cases, the emotionalising of arguments and the selective use of data. The steadily growing critic assessment from the scientific community (other than the World Bank affiliated experts) and from independent organisations of the civil society did not change or influence the high self-esteem of the Bank's management. A passage of the Chairman's Annual Report 1998 may support the argument: "Last year's *Annual Report* described a year of change and renewal. This year many of those changes have begun to bear fruit. Disbursements and quality are up; projects at risk are down; and our clients are reporting improvements across the institution from more client responsiveness to more humility. This year has seen further changes: the implementation of the Cost Effectiveness Review; further decentralization of decision-making powers to the field; a new budgeting and planning process for the first time linked to strategic objectives; and the introduction of a new human resources policy designed to end the traditional divisions between headquarters and local staff in the field and between regular and non-regular staff. Much remains to be done. But the progress of the last twelve months provides us with a solid foundation on which to build. None of this would have been possible without the wholehearted support and guidance of our executive board." (Wolfensohn 1998)

"Importance of object"

"Produce figures showing that the dimension of your object is growing, but if it is poverty or another negative phenomenon make sure, that you are not identified as the cause of its growing"

The number of poor people on our planet is growing, no doubt. The challenge for those engaged in poverty alleviation even more. „Of the current world population, nearly 3 billion live on less than \$ 2 a day, and 1.2 billion on less than \$ 1 a day. And over the next 15 years, the developing world will add more than 1 billion to its population.“ (Wolfensohn 2000a) Quite clear: the "developing world" produces children and most of them will be qualified "poor" or "poorest of the poor". "They" are the root of the problem "we" have, and we are disposed to solve it.

In an interview with the German daily *Berliner Zeitung* Wolfensohn answered the question if the Bank had succeeded in reducing world poverty as follows: "Yes and no. We put many projects into existence, which improved the standards of living of many people. In China, for example, we helped bring hundreds of thousands of Chinese down from mountain villages to arable fields. We have influenced projects in many countries, which have helped and have given people the chance of a better future. But no matter how successful we are with individual projects, it is not enough. Five billion people still live in developing countries, half of them must live on less than two dollars a day. Eight hundred million of them are 14 years old or younger." (Berliner Zeitung 2005) If there is a chance to approach (not to attain) the poverty reduction goal by 2015, it is due to the success of foreign guided projects in Asian countries. Africa on the other hand is an unsolvable case: "In Africa, poverty does not decrease, it increases. These are our true concerns." The World Bank is "concerned", but it is far from conceding, that by ruthlessly applying structural adjustment to African countries it contributed to increase poverty.

"link the object of your action to other objects, which are currently of global or regional importance"

We already had examples linking poverty and terrorism. The same strategy may connect "poverty and migration", "poverty and AIDS" or "poverty and drug dealing". "Nobody believed that the connection between poverty and hopelessness in Afghanistan had anything to do with us, until the moment when the World Trade Center was blown up. Then people suddenly asked themselves: What is happening in Afghanistan? [...] Today, we are concerned about drug trade; at the same time, Afghanistan is still the largest heroin producer. And nothing will change as long as we do not offer the people alternative ways of income. And as long as we do not make clear to our citizens that what is happening in Afghanistan is of direct concern to us, and that we must do something, nothing will change." (Berliner Zeitung 2005) Of course, James Wolfensohn is completely right in his statement; it is the last sentence which is questionable, the relation between "we", "us", "our citizens" and "them" and the meaning behind the "we must do something". Jan Oberg's comment cited above made already the point: "If 'we' want to do something about a problem, it would be helpful to know

what caused it in the first place. Does he simply not know what these causes are? If Wolfensohn is aware of them, are they too controversial to put on print? Is he afraid of singling out certain activities, structures, organisations or actors that are rather more part of the problem than of the solution?" (Oberg 2002)

"convince your partners in communication that they are involved in or threatened by the object in discourse"

Poverty is something nobody wants to be attained, a "threatening object by itself". Johann Nestroy, probably not only Austria's best playwright but also a born philosopher put it that way: "Poverty?! You could even offer me a million and ask me, to be poor for that money. I wouldn't do it." Those involved in the discourse on poverty usually are not endangered by it. They have a well-paid job, amply offices, travel allowances, rooms in first class hotels while attending conferences on poverty and so on. Wolfensohn lost temper when a journalist asked him: "Your critics nevertheless asked more than once whether a man like you, a former investment banker with a private airplane and four houses, understands what poverty really means. What do you answer them?" His answer was not really adroit: "I tell them it is nonsense. I use my private airplane to travel to the slums. I do not use it to fly to the Cote d'Azur or German tourist destinations." (Berliner Zeitung 2005)

Now, if poverty in itself is no danger, we have to find other threatening elements connected to poverty in order to realise our strategy, and there are plenty of them, as "terrorism", "hords of migrants entering my country" or "fundamentalism": "As to 11 September 2001, „We have to recognize ... that the issues and problems which emerge in some part of the world that you don't know have an impact on what happens at home, in the most developed countries. ... The problem of an extreme form of fundamentalism from Central Asia, housed in Afghanistan, came to Wall Street and to the Pentagon" (Bernhut 2002).

Concluding remark

In his book *Discourse and Social Change* Norman Fairclough (1992) emphasised the use of "critical methods" in linguistic analysis and he continued: "Relationships between discursive, social and cultural change

are typically not transparent for the people involved. Nor is technologization of discourse. 'Critical' implies showing connections and causes which are hidden; it also implies intervention, for example providing resources for those who may be disadvantaged through change" (Fairclough 1992: 9).

The enormous interest in "poverty" which suddenly came up during the late 1990s, quite similar to the discursive explosion of "civil society" in the early 1990s, in this sense raises concern. While I do not doubt, that James Wolfensohn and other donor representatives "wish to see a better world", I am also convinced that the ongoing global discourse on poverty excludes the poor. Critical discourse analysis not only has to disclose hidden connections and causes, reveal covered actors and meanings, but has also to provide access to the dominating discourse for those concerned. While easy to claim, it is enormously difficult to realise against the global aid business, which preaches participation and practices exclusion.

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