

Foreword

IN *VALUES IN TRANSLATION*, anthropologist and legal scholar Galit Sarfaty pulls back the curtain to reveal a surprising conflict within one of the world's most consequential and controversial institutions. As the principal international institution of market-based economic development in the postwar period, the World Bank is formally charged to reduce poverty by providing credit to countries in exchange for commitments to reform and restructure national political economies, to bring them into line with the Bank's expectations about efficiencies and the role of the state. As Sarfaty explains, this mission attracts economists, finance specialists, lawyers, and policy makers who understand the need for international institutions; however, many of them also believe that what she calls "economic rationality" should form the epistemological foundation for decision making.

But the Bank became a target for a wide range of critique and political analysis, especially over the last twenty years, and reluctance to acknowledge the broader political consequences of its lending practices was seen by many critics as a strategy to allow dominant nation-states such as the United States (which holds the largest voting bloc within the Bank and traditionally controls the presidency) to use the Bank to promote policies that ultimately reinforce the position of the world's biggest national economies. Partly as a response to this critique, the Bank expanded its mandate to incorporate formerly excluded "political" programs that would broaden the means through which its formal goal of poverty reduction could be accomplished. These included now-well-known initiatives under the rubrics of "good governance" and "anticorruption," which brought the Bank's programming into areas of national politics and law that had historically been understood to be outside the scope of its Articles of Agreement. As Sarfaty

argues, exclusion of political activities by the Bank had been seen, since the Bank's founding in 1944, as necessary to allay fears on the part of potential client countries—many with fragile or problematic political regimes—that the Bank would not interfere with their sovereignty. Moreover, the formally apolitical nature of the Bank proved to be useful for major donor countries that did not want their financial contributions to be seen as politically instrumental (however much they, in fact, were).

Expansion of Bank projects into political domains unleashed forces, both internal to the Bank and outside it, that have so far only marginally changed the institutional ethos and what might be called a sense of organizational self. But even these small shifts mark an important moment in the relationship between the Bank and its client countries and, perhaps even more far-reaching, between the Bank and the largely well-meaning technocrats who oversee day-to-day operations. It is the latter group that forms the basis for Sarfaty's study. She was given an unprecedented level of access to people and policy making within the Bank itself in order to conduct ethnographic research into the Bank's organizational culture and efforts by a small cadre of Bank employees (mostly lawyers) who have been struggling to find ways to make a concern with human rights relevant to Bank projects and policy making. What results is a powerful inside view of the Bank that holds out at least the possibility of larger shifts to come in the organizational mission, while also revealing the hidden costs to human rights that would result from such deeper institutional changes.

As Sarfaty explains, these internal Bank activists face long odds. On the one hand, human rights have been ignored in at least three ways: (1) the Bank does not consider the impact of lending projects on the human rights of people in client countries, (2) it does not require client countries to comply with international treaty obligations as a prerequisite for development assistance, and (3) it does not suspend projects when client countries are suspected of violating the human rights of their citizens. On the other hand, these activists must make their case within the dominant discursive paradigm of the Bank, in which policy is translated in terms of cost-benefit economic theory. In this way, *Values in Translation* is not just a study of an important conflict within the World Bank but an analysis of the broader struggle that this conflict represents: the neo-Cold War struggle between two dominant shaping logics of the post-Cold War, the logic of rational and ef-

ficient markets and the logic of what Sarfaty calls “social contract liberalism.” What Sarfaty discovers about the course of this struggle as it plays out within the World Bank provides a necessary and essential starting point for those who have called for human rights reforms within international institutions.

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