"Only the Secret is Seductive...the Secret is the Clue!":

Selective Silence as a Communication Strategy of the World Bank to Respond to Citizen Criticism in Egypt

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ABSTRACT

Citizens' criticism of development organisations' projects and policies is a historical and contemporary issue. From critiquing nation-wide policy reforms (cases of Asia and Africa); to recent serious allegations of sexual misconduct and abuse by contractors (in Uganda), The World Bank has been the subject of academic and public criticism. At the heart of this narrative is the assumption that explicit and frequent communication is effective in addressing such criticism. Through in-depth elite interviews with thirteen World Bank employees in Egypt, this study sought to understand how The World Bank responds to citizens' criticism of its policies and projects in Egypt. The findings indicate that selective silence is not due to a lack of communication. Instead, it is employed as a communication tactic which is justified by ownership and historical image factors that are anchored in power, knowledge production and historical contextualisation elements. Through this analysis, the study seeks to investigate the question of the donor-partner's accountability and agency and builds on postmodernist and postcolonial insights according to which communicative acts are sets of practices that deeply implicate power play, knowledge production and political, economic, and historical contextualisation.

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INTRODUCTION

This study critically examines what communication strategy The World Bank employs to respond to citizens' criticism of its policies and projects in Egypt. It uses a standard World Bank project as a lens for this examination. The research is anchored in investigating the historical and knowledge production elements that underpin The World Bank's communicative choices. It is inspired by both the historical and contemporary context of the World Bank's operation in developing states and situations where its policies and projects are criticised (Hibou, 1998; Abbasi, 1999; Polzer, 2001; Ravallion, 2016). Most studies on The World Bank critically examine its projects and policies through a developmental lens (Ferguson, 1990; Stiglitz, 2000; Wade, 2009; Hillebrand, 2017; Hussein, 2017), and there seems to be little research on the Bank's communication strategy, let alone on its responses to criticism. Since development organisations work for less-privileged citizens, the study realised the need to critically examine The World Bank's mechanisms for addressing criticism.

In 1944, The World Bank was established as a development institution for reconstruction and fighting poverty by providing technical and financial assistance (Clemens and Kremer, 2016). Together with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), they were known as Bretton Woods sisters (Edward and Robert, 1973; Hillebrand, 2017). To date, The World Bank's mission is 'ending extreme poverty and promoting shared prosperity' (The World Bank, 2018c). It has been operating in Egypt for 25 years with total approved operations financed at US$ 1.15 billion in Fiscal Year 2018 (The World Bank, 2018b).

The World Bank supported economic policy reforms and currency liberalization are historically criticized as in the cases of East Asia (Wade, 2001) and Africa (Ward *et al.*, 2009). During 2015–2017, the government of Egypt launched an economic reform that was supported by a World Bank Development Policy Financing (DPF) program with a total value of US$ 3.15 billion over three years (2015–2017) (The World Bank, 2017d). According to the Bank Information Centre (BIC), DPF is a financial instrument that constitutes over a third of all the Bank's annual lending (more than $16 billion in 2016) (2017). It is the only financial instrument that makes policy reforms a condition for lending, which has a significant impact on a state's overall economic strategy (BIC, 2017, p. 3). Hence, it is arguably The World Bank's most powerful intervention.

In an assessment of The World Bank's DPFs in Egypt and other countries, it was highlighted that the DPF's conditionality severely impacted the environment (BIC, 2017). Evidently, the

reform included an energy subsidy aimed at lifting and liberating the exchange rate (The World Bank, 2016a). These two measures, while aiming to restore macroeconomic stability, have had an adverse impact on prices which rapidly increased following the implementation of the reform measures and particularly affected the living standards of the poor and middle classes (Hussein, 2017). This resulted in controversial views circulated through social and traditional media; demonstrating a state of rage and discontent (Abdelaty and Noueihd, 2016; Shaban, 2016).

Studying citizens' criticism of World Bank-supported policy reforms in Egypt is important because it is the third largest shareholder in the Middle East and North Africa region (The World Bank, 2017e). According to World Bank annual reports, Egypt was ranked seventh and sixth in the top ten country borrowers globally in 2016 and 2017, respectively; qualifying it as the largest portfolio in the MENA region (The World Bank, 2016b, 2017c).

In this paper, I argue that The World Bank employs selective silence in its communications responding to citizens' criticism. This silence sheds light on a power play between government and The World Bank that is related to ownership and responsibility; and it is justified by an overarching set of knowledge production and historical contextualisation. The study demonstrates that silence is a communication tactic; not simply an absence of communication and that its evaluation is contextually bounded. Moreover, it argues that negotiated power dynamics between donors and partners enable them to assert their agency and accountability. It also problematises how a certain set of knowledge productions discredits local knowledge which negatively impacts on the efforts, communication goals and efficiency of development. Finally, it calls for addressing the root causes of criticisms side by side improving how to address them through communication.

The literature review offers a hybrid theoretical framework that discusses theories of development as well as corporate organizations' image, identity and reputation. Adopting a blended postmodernist and poststructuralist orientation, the study probes the causes of criticism by laying out the historical context that affects The World Bank's image and operations in Egypt as well as the political-economic factors that underpin The World Bank's power. From a postcolnialist postmodernist lens, the paper critiques knowledge production propagated by many of The World Bank's development practices and its implications for local knowledge and representation. It examines theories about silence as a communication strategy and justification that is utilised by organisations. Since the Bank's reforms affected mainly the low and middle classes, 'citizen' refers to those two segments in this paper. To answer the paper's question "What communication strategy The World Bank employs to respond to

citizens' criticism of its policies and projects in Egypt", the study conducts elite interviews with thirteen World Bank staff in Egypt. The results are analysed and discussed thematically.

Despite its importance, research on the role of Public Relations (PR) and strategic communication in the development field remains rare (Molleda and Laskin, 2005). Theoretically, the research contributes to the fields of communication and development by responding to calls by academics (Schwarz and Fritsch, 2015) to move beyond the narrow study of PR activities as forms of strategic communication in development organisations towards a wider examination of overarching types, such as those conducted in coordination with governments to highlight issues of tension and power dynamics. This paper builds on the few studies focusing on how development organisations use strategic communication differently (Dozier and Lauzen, 2000; Taylor, Kent and White, 2001). It departs from the common crisis-related case studies of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) (Sisco *et al.*, 2010) to provide an holistic examination of the organisation's overarching strategic communication in response to criticism.

The study discussed in this paper challenges a conventional understanding of silence as a lack of communication by demonstrating that silence is a communication strategy. The analysis has real-world significance since it critically examines the communication strategy of a powerful organisation such as The World Bank in responding to citizens' criticisms, an under-researched historical and contemporary phenomenon that is relevant not only to The World Bank, but to other development organisations.

The methodological approach of conducting elite interviews with World Bank staff enriches the field providing contextual knowledge about 'the activities that take place out of the public or media gaze, behind closed doors; or "off-stage"' (Lilleker, 2003, p. 208,213); as well as insight into the theoretical positions of The World Bank's staff vis-a-vis the organisation's official messages.

While there are plenty of studies on private corporations' responses to criticism (Thomas, 2015; Khattab, Fonn and Ali, 2017), development organisations' responses to criticism seem under-researched. Notwithstanding the similarity between international development organisations and private corporations' strategic communication (Tench and Yeomans, 2006), insofar as they have a different set of goals, this calls for a focused study of development organisations' communication. Finally, despite its frequent use, the scarcity of studies about strategic silence is alarming, since most studies have been conducted about silence in politics or journalism (Brummett, 1980; Lentz, 1991). By examining the use of silence in strategic communication, the study links up with advances in fields such as anthropology, semiotics and feminist studies (Dimitrov, 2015)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication Strategy: Identity, Reputation And Image

Due to The World Bank's dual identity as a financial institution and a non-governmental organisation, it was decided to adopt a hybrid approach by combining theories from both International Non-Governmental Organizations and private corporations to critically examine the Bank's strategic communication. Crucially, the study was conducted reflexively and treated hybridisation as a point of departure to a further study on INGOs' communication strategies. The field of communications can benefit from focused studies of communications in INGOs, apart from communication of the for-profit corporations. The concepts of PR and strategic communication are used to designate strategic communication as the big umbrella, and PR as one tool of strategic communication that takes the form of different activities, such as TV appearances, press releases, media publicity, etc. (Schwarz and Fritsch, 2015). A core technique of PR is to achieve the corporation's target by 'both influencing through discourse and seizing the discourse' (Dimitrov, 2018, p47). The study goes beyond a narrow focus on PR activities to critically examine the overarching strategic communication The World Bank employs to respond to citizens' concerns.

The study adopts Hallahan et al.'s definition of strategic communication as 'communicating purposefully to advance the organisation's mission' (2007, p. 4). With the rise of strategic communication, creating a positive image and reputation among stakeholders have become key goals of development organisations (Alvesson, 1990). The earlier role of communication to educate and convince has been rather neglected as the focus shifted to image building (Lash, 2002). According to Tench and Yeomans (2006), organisations are very concerned about their image and reputation since these are considered to offer a comparative advantage among competitors to attract partnerships, boost political influence, and recover from organisational crises.

Corporate identity is a central concept in this study because it accounts for the positionality of The World Bank, its 'self-representation...the cues which an organisation offers about itself via the behaviour, communication, and symbolism' (Van Riel, 1995, p. 36). It is the practice of 'who we are' and 'what we stand for' which is translated into a planned process that connects an organisation's strategy with its image and reputation (Tench and Yeomans, 2006).

Image is defined as 'the set of meanings by which a 'company' is known and through which people describe, remember and relate to it' (Dowling, 1986, p. 110). To maintain a credible

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image, there must be an integration and coordination between what the organisation says and what it does (Benoit, 2014). The complexity of the image within international organisations such as The World Bank lies in the diverse stakeholders who perceive it differently (government, segments of citizens, donors, member states, etc.).

Corporate reputation is linked to image in the sense that it is the 'longitudinal judgment of who the company is and what it stands for' (Schultz, 2005, p. 43). The evaluation of organisational reputation is tied to how organisations' practices are in harmony with (or not) different stakeholders' beliefs and values (Schultz, 2005; Tench and Yeomans, 2006). For private corporations, communication is linked to the values of profitability, client satisfaction, etc. (Van Riel, 2005). For INGOs, it revolves around humanitarian causes but also involves reputational reliability and trust (Schwarz and Fritsch, 2015). Due to its dual identity, with each identity linked to a different set of values (Tkalac and Pavicic, 2009), The World Bank's image and reputation are judged differently by various stakeholders. Moreover, it is argued that historical and political-economic factors can result in a stigma, articulated by Devers et al. as a 'fundamental, deep-seated flaw' (2009, p. 157). This stigma has a long-term effect on the organisation's image which continues from past to present (Devers *et al.*, 2009). The following section sheds light on historical factors in Egypt that have tainted The World Bank's image to date.

Historical Context

The importance of contextualisation is celebrated by postcolonial theorists who argue that phenomena take place in relation to contextual factors such as the historical, geopolitical, economic, etc. and that attempts to analyse them out of context will be reductive and limited (Hall, 1997; Said, 2003). The World Bank's operation in the Middle East in general and in Egypt specifically is tainted with historical and political antagonism sparked during the Nasser era in the 1950s and 60s when the Bank withdrew funding from the Aswan High Dam project (Reynolds, 2017). As a result, and fuelled by government-communicated messages, a public hostility towards the Bank emerged. This antagonism was further inflamed when the Egyptian leadership nationalised the Suez Canal to fund the Dam; a move that sparked the Suez Crisis (Sorby, 2002).

Foucault (2008) contended that discursive practices can be better understood within the context of their historical production. Arguably, historical factors continue to impact the Bank's image and operation not only in Egypt but in the Arab region. However, history is only

one aspect as there are political-economic structural factors inherent in its foundation that are examined in the following section.

The Political Economy of The World Bank's Power

Defining The World Bank is challenging due to its dual nature. It partly fits Lewis's definition of INGOs as 'high-profile actors within public policy landscapes at local, national and global levels' (2003, p. 326) which aim to create awareness and provide services on various social, political and environmental issues (Schwarz and Fritsch, 2015). However, The Bank is not a typical INGO because it provides loans to borrowing states and generates a return as profit; and it is governed by a board of directors that holds the senior decision making positions in determining its financing and policy direction (The World Bank, 2018c, 2018a). The World Bank is an international organisation because it falls into the category of centralised global organisations that have headquarters and country offices (Van Tulder and Van der Zwart, 2005).

The source of The World Bank's power is that it is a key financer and partner with most development agencies, a 'powerhouse of research' thanks to its resources (Ross, 1994, p. ii; Stiglitz, 2000) and it is a 'knowledge bank' whose data and reports are drawn upon by governments, international markets, donors and academics (Ravallion, 2016). This knowledge production determines the development model that is seen as right and common sensical (Kothari, 2002; Melkote, 2003). I defined Development through adopting Swilling and Russell's (2002) definition, and define it as: a means to improve the social, cultural and economic conditions and well-being of specific segments of society.

Despite promoting 'partnership' (The World Bank, 2018c), The World Bank has been criticised for its conditionality and dictating 'one-size-fits-all' models that serve Western modernising aspirations (Escobar, 1995; Stiglitz, 2000; Kothari, 2002; Wade, 2009; Hillebrand, 2017). These models may not be applicable effectively in developing states' contexts and may even be directly at odds with the interests of populations in the Global South to whom they are applied. For example, the World Bank's negligence of the local rural and socio-cultural dimensions of its Thaba-Tseka Development project in Lesotho (Ferguson, 1990) resulted in the project's failure. Recently, The World Bank's Power Project in Egypt was inspected and critiqued for its dangerous negligence of local context and the consequent destruction of the agricultural setting (The Inspection Panel, 2013). However, many scholars argue that attributing absolute power to organisations such as The World Bank fails to account for states' agency and counter-power (Kofi, 2002; Rossi, 2004), an argument that aligns with post colonialist and

poststructuralist constructs of power as open to challenge, and not fixed (Foucault, 1982; Hall, 1997).

A strong element of The World Bank's power that feeds its communicative practices and operations is its knowledge production not only in the form of economic models, but equally crucially, in the form of constructing discourse and representation about developing partners, local knowledge and local citizens which is a subject of academic critique, as the next section discusses.

Knowledge Production

The World Bank asserts its comparative advantage as a 'bank of knowledge' and not just as a financial institution (The World Bank, 2017b). Foucault argued that power and knowledge production are interdependent; those who possess power dominate knowledge production and vice versa in what he called a 'circuit of power' (Foucault, 1982). He argued that with a 'toolbox' fastened to language and history, groups attain power over language and discourse and can influence other practices such as communication and development (Foucault, 1980b).

This is particularly important when discursively practiced by a powerful institution such as The World Bank because its set of knowledge acts as a hegemony that authorises a particular type of truth as 'universal, consensual, and legitimate' while discrediting others – local knowledge and voices – and renders them faulty (Gramsci, 1971; Foucault, 1982; Escobar, 1995; Mehmet, 1999). It also creates patterns of representation of citizens in developing states who are categorised in essentialist fixated patterns as 'ignorant, non-factual, emotional, etc.) (Hall, 1997; Said, 2003; Baaz, 2005; Mohanty, 2013). Therefore, many post-development thinkers such as Escobar (1995) and the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) school (Kay, 1989) called for challenging development knowledge production in order to reform development practices from their roots.

In responding to criticism, knowledge production arguably plays a key role in strategic communication design and in the evaluation of whose voices are valued, and hence, guides The World Bank's decisions to strategically communicate or remain silent. The next section discusses how silence is used as a strategic communication tactic.

Silence

Although there are plenty of resources in the communication field depicting how organisations discursively communicate (Van Riel, 1995; Tench and Yeomans, 2006; Schwarz and Fritsch, 2015), little has been done to examine silence as a strategic communicative tool. Silence has been examined from the spiritual and philosophical viewpoints (Picard, 2002) or as a tactic used by politicians (Erickson and Schmidt, 1982). Yet little research has been conducted to explore the significance of silence as a rhetorical tactic used by organisations (Johannesen, 1974). This study addresses this deficit by critically assessing how a development organisation as powerful as The World Bank communicates through silence and how its silence is justified. By overlooking silence in communication, the we have lack insight into the significant motivations for using it and the role it plays in power dynamics. The paper argues that silence is neither good nor bad as a communicative choice; instead it is argued that its ethics and strategic role are context dependent, especially in the global south context [2].

A key articulation of how "full emptiness" works as a strategy in itself is explained by Baudrillard when he describes it as a "strategy of absence…of metamorphosis…to divert, to set up decoys, which disperse evidence, which disperse the order of things and the order of the real…look…to the empty centre of the act, at the empty centre of the weapon." (2012, pp. 58–59). Hence, when examining the communication strategy of The World Bank, it is important to examine "emptiness", or silence, and its justification by employees.

Silence is used as a tactic not only to conceal but also to reveal and convey messages (Thomas, 2015; Dimitrov, 2018). Foucault (2008, p. 27) argued that there should not be a binary distinction between saying and not saying, but rather different levels of communication in between, as he points out

> How those who can and those who cannot speak …are distributed, which type of discourse is authorised, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences; and they are an integral part of strategies that underline and permeates discourses

The importance of silence is that it can be a tool or an outcome of power to strengthen, but also to challenge it (Foucault, 2008, p. 101). This study builds on these insights to highlight the crucial relationship between power and silence in The World Bank's communication.

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[2] Many proverbs in Hindu and Buddhist traditions value silence as a means to purify the mind (Mahathera, 1962; Suzuki and Dixon, 2010).

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According to Foucault, power works best when it is hidden (1980a). As Baudrillard b(2012, p. 56) rightly articulates

> There is nothing seductive about truth. Only the secret is seductive: the secret which circulates the rule of the game, as an initiatory form, as a symbolic pact, which no code can resolve…there is, for that matter, nothing hidden and nothing to be revealed

Organisational silence occurs most frequently when entities cannot conceal their wrongdoings and misuses of power; they start masking it through 'censorship or bureaucratic language' (Dimitrov, 2018, p. 49). According to Dimitrov (2018), silence is also employed when an organisation is so powerful and visible that it sees no need to communicate further. In the case of The World Bank, selecting when to speak in response to public criticism and when to resort to silence is arguably an exemplification of its power. The following section discusses how organization's communicative choices and strategies are justified.

Justification

Boltanski's work *On Justification* (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006) provides a sociological perspective on The World Bank's choice to resort to selective silence in encounters and within certain contexts such as in the case of Egypt. The concept of justification sheds light on how The World Bank negotiates its presence within certain communities through justification and helps us to understand the root causes of its strategic organisational decisions. According to Boltanski (2006), justification is related to what is 'just'; that is, how the organisation articulates its actions as fair and legitimate by linking them to its identity. I argue that Justification operates on macro and micro levels at The World Bank.

On the macro level, this concept helps our understanding of The World Bank's policymaking and knowledge foundation. That is, we can ask what justification is used by The World Bank to validate its communicative decisions and its economic reforms in the developing states. Its set of knowledge production is justified as 'scientifically viable, recipe and international best practices'. On a micro level, justification provides a lens through which to examine why The World Bank communicates in a way when it selectively chooses to reach out or remain silent. The Bank continuously evaluates and justifies its presence and operations and why, how and when it communicates. Hence, organisational silence is justified and legitimised by linking the Bank's activities? to corporate identity, and its perspective on value, knowledge production and power dynamics in a given geopolitical and national context (Edwards, 2018a). Justification is significant here because it allows us to explore the connections between

discourses that are produced (or silenced) and The World Bank's broader goals and meaning making.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

According to Seldon: "warm, vivid contemporary history has almost always been written by authors who have conducted interviews' (1988, p. 9). The elite interview method used in this study was useful for its ability to 'inform practitioners and policy makers about how policies are put into practice (or not) in "real life"' (Durand and Chantler, 2014, p. 46). Adopting Weber's (1949) approach to studying issues through the eyes of those being studied (Heath and Devine, 1999), this allows acceptance of numerous perspectives on reality as articulated by interviewees.

Empirically, and due to under-theorisation, the definition and criteria for identifying elites is contextually bound (Parry, 1998; Smith, 2006; Harvey, 2011). In the context of this research, elites are defined as 'highly skilled, professionally competent' persons (Smith, 2006). The term 'elite', despite the dichotomy between elite and non-elite, is relevant to describe the interviewees. It is not used here as a 'label'; but to describe the field within which the interviewees operate without attributing absolute power to them (Smith, 2006). Accordingly, instances of power plays can be considered without undermining individual agency, given there can be no certainty about how elites' power will transfer to the interview setting (Smith, 2006). In fact, in the interviews for this study there was a certain level of self-critique, receptiveness to criticism and uncertainty demonstrated by some interviewees.

Local knowledge is central for strengthening empirical research (Fairclough, 2003; Bauer and Aarts, 2010; Terry *et al.*, 2017). Egypt was selected not only for my native contextual knowledge, but for its empirical value. According to The World Bank's annual reports, Egypt's DPF is the largest in the MENA region[3], four times that of Jordan (USD 1 billion/USD 250 million) in 2017 (The World Bank, 2017c). As indicated above, studying The World Bank is valuable due to its dual international position as a financial institution and as a knowledge bank. Applying the typicality factor (Robson, 1993), DPF is a standard, typical World Bank

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[3] And Iraq

financial instrument which has created public controversy in developing states which occurs on social and in traditional media (Abdelaty and Noueihd, 2016; AlAraby, 2017).

The research used Bauer and Aarts' corpus construction criteria of relevance and homogeneity (Bauer and Aarts, 2010, p. 31). Relevance was achieved by applying targeted sampling (Watters and Biernacki, 1989) and selecting thirteen interviewees who match a set criteria: World Bank employees who work in the Cairo office and have a role in DPF. Homogeneity was followed by designing a consolidated topic guide with a set of questions (cf. Appendix 1). The researcher remained flexible by allowing for follow ups or the ommission of questions that were not appropriate for a given participant.[4]

Sampling proceeded using standard socio-demographic practice (Gaskell, 2010; p.41) of balancing gender inclusion. To achieve saturation and representativeness (Bauer and Aarts, 2000), I included in my categories: role in DPF (4 communication, 2 economists, 3 specialists, 4 others); gender (7 males, 6 females); nationality (9 local, 4 international); job seniority (9 senior, 4 mid-junior); duration of service (5 less than four years, 8 four years or more)[5]. Two interviewees were recommended by staff in a snow ball fashion (Noy, 2008).

The literature review was conducted prior to interviewing to design a relevant topic guide and enhance trust and credibility (Richards, 1996; Harvey, 2011; Durand and Chantler, 2014).[6]While requesting interviews, transparent disclosure of the research scope was offered to avoid cancellation for 'not wanting to talk about this' (Lilleker, 2003, p. 210)[7]. The researcher adopted interpretive and flexible strategies (Richards, 1996) acknowledging there are various perspectives on reality depending on people's circumstances (Goffman, 1961; Durand and Chantler, 2014).

The topic guide adopted a semi-structured technique to allow for reflexivity (Berger, 2011). Following two pilot (Skype) interviews, it was revisited to be focused and informative (Gaskell, 2010). Questions were reviewed to eliminate leading questions and biases (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002).

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[4] Some questions were relevant to communication practitioners only

[5] Four years was the criterion to ensure the respondent's presence during the WORLD BANK 's CPF 2015.

[6] Literature was developed further, considering interviews' data

[7] Interviewees' names were anonymized, Consent forms were signed during the interviews

Thematic analysis was selected as the most appropriate method of data analysis. This is a flexible method that allows for a systematic engagement with data (Terry *et al.*, 2017) in 'search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of a phenomenon' (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 3). Because thematic analysis yielded extensive themes and findings which made it notably challenging to narrow down themes, operationalizing criteria of similarity, difference and frequency (Saldaña, 2009, p. 6) provided some help to centre the study's focus. For instance, some themes emerged as more recurrent and frequent (historical image), and some themese were viewed differently by interviewees 'value of local knowledge" so applying the above criteria helped organizing and keeping the study focused.

Techniques of familiarisation, generating codes, constructing, reviewing, defining and naming themes and then producing reports were applied (Attride-Stirling, 2001). I transcribed the interviews[8], read them repeatedly, color coded primary then secondary to group organizing themes under global themes. My analysis was both deductive and inductive. My reading and coding of transcripts were anchored in my theoretical framework. Yet, inductive technique came in play when the transcripts provided further themes such as the power play between Egypt's government and The World Bank. In general, majority if not all of the organizing themes emerged from an inductive approach. Also, inductive analysis generated additional yet vital themes. A thematic grid was produced. Triangulation was operationalised to cross reference some of the interviewees' answers.

Limitations

Representativeness was addressed by setting criteria for identifying potential interviewees. Excess flexibility (Terry *et al.*, 2017) and the 'limited interpretative power' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 27) of thematic analysis as the method of analysing data were addressed by anchoring results and arguments in a clearly defined theoretical framework and research question. Elite interview method poses limitations of subjectivity due to small sampling and accessibility (Lilleker, 2003; Durand and Chantler, 2014). Subjectivity is minimised by rejecting the positivist approach of interviews as a way of 'establishing' the truth (Richards, 1996) and by remaining reflexive and critical. Although power is argued to be one of elite interviews' limitations (Richards, 1996), this argument was contested by adopting a poststructuralist stance.

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[8] Because of lengthy interviews, two were transcribed by a transcriber, reviewed by the researcher and the transcriber signed a Non-Disclosure Agreement

Elite interview is deemed a successful method in answering the research question by probing into theoretical perspectives and views of development practitioners. However, using this method requires flexibility to adjust to scheduling changes. Despite benefits of having large sample and lengthy data, it required exhaustive transcription, analysis and selection of themes. So, tight management of sample is recommended. Applying triangulation was beneficial to find facts related to interviewees' accounts[9]; which minimized subjectivity and improved validity. Future research with wider time and scope could benefit from combining elite interviews with ethnography or CDA to enrich findings.

While paying attention to context, time, and project specification, the study can be replicated for other developing states where The World Bank operates. The present results are limited to the Egyptian context in the time where the research was conducted. Results can be extended beyond the interviewees and Egyptian context if used in a comparative study with another developing country (in a specific time) where The World Bank operates to examine if different or similar results will emerge.

Ethics and Reflexivity

Reflexivity is means for using self-knowledge to improve and inform the research process (Probst, 2015) and accepting its limitations and interpretative nature (Rose, 1997). I was inspired by Banaji (2017) and Cammaerts *et al.* (2014) to embrace my position and beliefs and also to let the data speaks for itself. I acknowledge my dual position as an employee of The World Bank and a national of the country where this study was implemented. Methodologically, my reflexivity and objectiveness were enhanced by adopting an inductive approach and listening openly to what the data says apart from my assumption or convictions. For instance, the assumption that the Bank employs complete silence in responding to criticism was not supported by data and hence rejected. Also, before conducting interviews, I subjectively assumed interviewees, especially the ones who designed the communication strategy and DPF will be defensive of its perfection, but data demonstrated a considerable reflexivity and openess to reform projects and policies by most interviewees. I therefore acknowledged this in my analysis.

My dual identity was helpful since I was able to balance and cross-check as a means of countering the other, which minimised prejudices. My personal interest in the topic and values

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[9] Inspection panel, BIC's, annual reports, projects documents

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and theoretical position are acknowledged (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Terry *et al.*, 2017). Nonetheless, I used them or 'exploring these moments we might begin to decenter [sic] our research assumptions and question the certainties that slip into the way we produce knowledge' (Valentine, 2002, pp. 125–126). Researcher's ethics and reflexivity were put to frequent tests when critical themes about The World Bank emerged. I had to reposition myself as not only an employee but a citizen who cares about poor and justice.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

As explained by Jihan, a communication practitioner interviewed in this study, the communication strategy of The World Bank incorporates headquarters and regional strategies within a local strategy that is guided by the country partnership framework (CPF). The findings identify the Bank as a federal organisation where the headquarters takes charge of overarching policy making and country offices take charge of country-specific strategies and implementation processes (Young, 1989). Regarding the Bank's goals, there was a consensus among interviewees that image is a priority:

> We have worked a lot, at least for a decade, if not more, on improving the Bank's image and making sure people understand how the Bank functions and what is the relationship between the Bank and the government…it's always a subject of worry, our image among the public. (Jihan)

The findings confirm that concepts of image, corporate identity and reputation are essential in this organisation's communication as indicated by (Tench and Yeomans, 2006). Interestingly, Erfan stated that a good image attracts partnerships and inspires trust:

> [There is a] positive image in the society of The World Bank among all the development partners. We are being seen as the institution with the greatest influence on what is happening, so The World Bank is a partner of choice for Egypt. That is the ultimate, right? (Erfan)

The thematic analysis of my data demonstrates that, for development organisations, sustaining a favourable image is an essential goal of communication (Benoit, 2014) and that this goal is motivated by a desire to sustain partnerships (Tench and Yeomans, 2006). The following section discusses four themes that emerged in the analysis? which are summarised as a thematic network.

Figure 1: Thematic Analysis Network
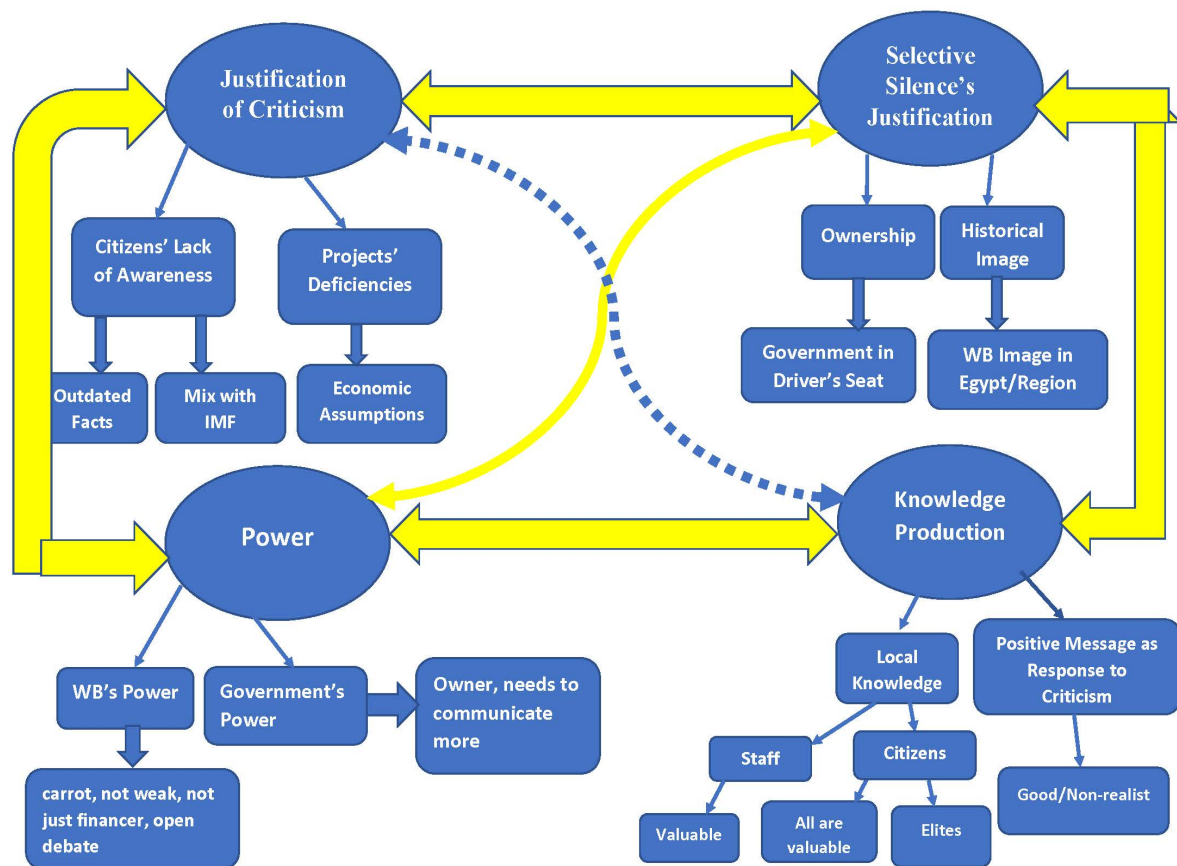
Justification of Criticism

Interviewees' answers to questions about reasons for criticising The World Bank are grouped into two organizing themes: 1) Citizens' Lack of Awareness, and 2) Project Deficiencies. These themes emerged inductively from the transcripts

Citizens' Lack of Awareness: Outdated Historical Facts and Mix with IMF

It was believed by some interviewees that there is a general lack of knowledge of The World Bank's role which causes criticism:

> Most of them are just, [criticising] out of ignorance of what the bank does, and so on. (Mounir)

Some interviewees argued that outdated facts about the Bank's old structure are a reason for criticism:

> The World Bank as an institution belongs to a Bretton Woods framework which has a very dominant role in some of the Western countries. So, sometimes they might think that it is actually influenced by the policies of one or two particular countries and if they feel that somebody has a conspiracy and is trying to change my country, The World Bank becomes a part of this whole thing. Now, that is not completely true because each country, including Egypt, has an executive director representing it in the board and the country office works primarily for the needs of a country. So, DPF is completely structured for what is right for Egypt, not for what other countries would like Egypt to do. (Zafer)

Some interviewees acknowledged that negative perceptions about the Bank are rooted in historical facts such as 'structural and adjustment programs in Africa, where the Bank used force', as Aida clarified. Such acknowledgment revealed a level of self-reflexivity by employees. It was stated that the new reality is different, and The World Bank's structure changed.

Lack of awareness was also articulated in terms of mixing The World Bank's identity with the IMF, which was raised by most of the employees:

> It was a comic of three people in a row, the one in the back, a gentleman with dark glasses and black hat and black suit, and he has a machine gun to the back of another gentleman who represents the government. The government has a knife and is putting it in the back of the citizen [pause] and the entire joke is about the IMF, but it was translated as The World Bank. (Mounir)

This issue indicates the challenge of 'reputation commons', when the reputation of one organisation is stained due to the action/reputation of a sister organisation (King, Lenox and Barnett, 2002).

Project Deficiencies

Some interviewees stated that some projects have defects which legitimise citizens' criticism. Hazem acknowledged criticism of the DPF suggesting that some of the economic assumptions behind it are not accurate:

> The suggested policies from the government or the bank should not be always right. The studies, for example, in the beginning predicted that the dollar exchange rate would be L.E. 14

or 13, while it reached L.E. 18. This is for sure a painful impact that the citizen is suffering from. (Hazem)

The DPF document was examined to tringulaize and extract the data to which Hazem referred. It stated 'the Egyptian pound depreciated from the pre-float official exchange rate of EGP 8.8 per US\$ to almost EGP 19 per US\$ in January 2017, reflecting some overshooting' (The World Bank, 2017a, p. 6). The higher exchange rate resulted in higher prices from which lower and middle-income class citizens were deemed to have suffered the most (The World Bank, 2017a, p.54).. Hence, citizen criticism was legitimized in the view of some interviewees. The argument about project deficiencies raised by Hazem is important because it challenges a knowledge foundation that introduces the economic theories on which development projects are built as 'recipes, right, evidence-based' (Melkote, 2003). This was indicated by other interviewees when they commented on why all DPFs advise the same policies irrespective of contextual differences:

> The theories are the same everywhere. It is like, white collars in the financial sector, and they think the same way because there are recipes to be able to solve major financial problems and budget deficits. (Jihan)

The contested views and debate about economic theories highlights the potential room for reform in the Bank's policy and procedures. Notably, most interviewees regarded criticism positively as an opportunity to create a societal debate:

> It can be a little bit upsetting, but you can consider it a bitter medication we need until we reach the point of mutual trust and the people's voices can be heard and the governments would be interested in reaching out to the public (Raafat)

> We learn from our criticism also – if things are not doing well, you need to have in all of our projects' mechanisms or tools for our people to write for us and if there are critical views, then I think we need to respond to them. (Erfan)

Responding to criticism, those interviewees attributing criticism to citizens' lack of awareness urged more communication. Conversely, structural reform was emphasised by interviewees who critiqued economic theories and technical shortcomings. The following theme indicates how The World Bank responds to criticism by selective silence.

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Selective Silence and Justification

The analyses of interview transcripts, silence appeared to be a recurrent theme in how interviewees articulated the World Bank's strategy to respond to criticism. However, The World Bank did not adopt utter silence in the face of criticism. It rather employed what the research terms a 'selective silence' that is driven by strategic motives: ownership, and historical image.

Ownership

Interviewees highlighted that The World Bank's communication should not seek to outweigh the communications of the Egyptian government to reinforce the latter's ownership:

> In our policy, we like to give the ownership to the government. We only support. There is a very fine line...we are financing government projects. We are not in the driver seat. Right? (Aida)

> The government is leader, so we cannot talk on behalf of them…The bank is a financier and technical advisor. (Mounir)

The emphasis on government ownership and responsibility was shared by most interviewees and perceived as the motive for reducing the amount of communication. This indicates that 'there is not only strategy in silence. There is also silence in strategy' (Dimitrov, 2018, p. 47). Interviews showed that The Bank intentionally employs silence to emphasize that the borrowing government is the leader and The Bank is just supporting the country's economic reforms. By explicitly communicating its identity as a 'supporter' or 'adviser', The World Bank does not 'tacitly imply – it explicitly denies a meaning. It is indirect silence as well' (Dimitrov, 2015, p. 642). That is, interviewees justified using silence because The Bank is just an adviser and hence, can not speak on behalf of the government. Findings show that The World Bank's communication strategy employs silence strategically and selectively to assert government ownership while denying its own, and defining itself as a supporter. Hence, the interviewees' view was that government should communicate with citizens.

Historical and Political Economical Tainted Image

Saying little and keeping a low profile were regarded as being justified by the Bank's historical image:

[Letting go of some criticism] is very beneficial here…I can say that the bank had a very bad image in Egypt, ok. For history, very old reasons. (Nora)

The fact that the Bank is low profile is not a bad thing. The Bank's reputation in some countries like Egypt is not good, since the High Dam. When setting a policy in a country, or a lot of countries, they would refer to the Bank, because the history is distorted. (Hazem)

All interviewees referred to the Bank's historical image in Egypt and how this continues to affect its operation and reputation. Notably, this factor was used by the interviewees to justify the low profile and silence. This seems to confirm Edwards' observation that 'we make choices not only in the present and as a function of our ambitions for the future, but also based on what we know about ourselves and others from the past' (Edwards, 2018b, p. 10).

Knowledge Production

This theme is discussed in relation to two organizing themes: 1) local knowledge evaluation, 2) responding with positive messages to criticism.

Local Knowledge Evaluation: Elites

The analysis reveals that responding to criticism is guided by the nature of the profiles of citizens who criticise the Bank:

You have to be very selective… for example on social media, we are saying that common people will just comment and send you negative comments … sometimes, you just get one comment coming from an influencer who has like millions of followers, this means that you have to go and deal with this…you have to evaluate the weight of the writer. (Nora)

We respond to either a critical article or criticism issued by a prominent credible party, either by a main newspaper, or a newspaper in general (Mounir)

Being selective was justified by some interviewees so as not to encourage more criticism:

I start answering, what would happen next is that [another person], who is in a different newspaper, will start mentioning The World Bank again because he will be mentioned and answered by the Country Director of The World Bank. (Nora)

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Moreover, many interviewees stated consultation is a way of addressing criticism. When asked who participates in consultations, there was a distinction between consulting on a country's overall strategy and specific projects:

> When you are discussing country partnership, who should be there? Intellectual people who could speak and could discuss with the Bank why these are the priorities, major economists. These are the ones we interact with at that level – academics, definitely – private sector, gender related representatives, youth. (Mounir)

The analysis reveals that the development discourse created by dominating entities determines whose opinions matter and should be listened and responded to (Foucault, 1982; Escobar, 1995; Kothari, 2002; Baaz, 2005). The CPF is the country-World Bank's five-years framework for working on development. It determines development priorities, what country's sectors the Bank's loan will be directed to etc. So, the consultations on CPF influence the direction of the development projects and efforts in the countryas supported by the Bank. Hence, voices of those involved in the consultations feed into the development dicosurse and effort within the country and by excluding some segments also produce knowledge on whose opinions affect and determine development path and efforts.This discourse sheds light on the construction of reality and the production of knowledge which dismisses certain opinions if they are not elite or educated according to a certain criteria (academic, fluent in English etc..) (Foucault, 1980b, 2008). Some respondents believed that those who take part in consultation should be scientific, factual and intellectuals as explained by Mounir above. Though having a factual and evidence-based communication is a valid Habermas's concept (Calhoun, 1992), its implication is neglecting segments of citizens who are mostly affected by development projects -yet not educated enough to speak scientifically or with academic references- because their knowledge is perceived as 'emotional, or not scientific' (Ferguson, 1990; Escobar, 1995).

Local Knowledge (Citizens and Staff) is Valued

Many interviewees contested the earlier argument by some interviewees that only elites and educated people's knwoeldge is valuable; and pointed out that the Bank's mission is to serve the less privileged. Hence, their concerns and voices should be addressed. A senior regional leader laid out the strategy to respond to any citizen's criticism.

> Provide objective factual corrections/or counter facts, watch evolving social media traffic, be prepared to provide key arguments but do not engage in social media ping pong. (Gable)

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> Even if something is not valid was mentioned… it is your responsibility to validate…. have a counter argument… if you are responding to misconception then do it across the board. (Hayat)

This view by many interviewees highlight that all citizens' opinions matter and should be addressed with attention, facts, objectiveness and respect. They elaborated on the value of local citizens' views, from all backgrounds:

> Through one of the consultations, a comment has been mentioned resulted in changing the project direction … That comment was that you will do disposal from treatment plants with a low treatment level which will impact fresh water … it should be a triple treatment… The one who has said it is a person from the health unit of the village… They ignored him… We cannot say that people are ignorant as they are not, the ones ignorant of the local context are us …We are the outsiders, the strangers from those communities because you will hear the relevant from those people. (Hayat)

Hayat's account of how a comment from a village mitigated future criticism by shedding light on alarming risks supports the argument that local knowledge is a cornerstone in development projects that should not be conducted using a check list or 'pour la forme' fashion (Ferguson, 1990; Kofi, 2002; Ward *et al.*, 2009).

While citizens' local knowledge was contested among interviewees, there was a consensus among all that Bank staff's local knowledge is an asset:

> When you come to attend the consultation and probably you don't know Arabic, then you will not take what is behind people's eyes, who is waving, who disagrees, [their] body language, [the] dynamics of [the] meeting, who is poor and who is rich, who is big and who is small, and people come from local government to fill in the chairs. All these matters need a local person. (Hayat)

Positive Response to Criticisms

When asked how criticism is being addressed, the four communication practitioners who took part in the interviews argued that a positive message is an effective tactic:

> *If you are on the hot seat and someone is constantly attacking you, just always be prepared in your mind with a very positive statement that is very relevant to development, international peace, prosperity, humanity, etc. so, you don't answer what he said and you do not put yourself in the shoes of being defensive … build your rosy image and give your very positive messages supported by facts. (Jihan)*

It was interesting to note how silence is employed in the form of not directly addressing criticism and using positive rhetoric. The interviewees noted that tension emerges?? when operational staff critique this method for being unrealistic:

> It was always this positive message that is not necessarily realistic. I always feel we have the problem of being able to identify the problem and talk about it transparently. Communication messages should be logical and acknowledge negative impact. It was like newspaper talk "kalam garayed", or political speech… highlighting the positive aspects without acknowledging the impact on people. (Raafat)

> We are too optimistic, too positive, but I'm a realist. (Ezz)

This seem to indicate that there is a debate about what constitutes a logical, transparent and realistic communication message. Some interviewees who work on projects (operation) were not entirely convinced by how the Bank's communication is designed. Since design is a headquarter–regional–local integrated product, this suggests a tension and debate between organisational identity and the communication vision on one hand and The World Bank's staff's identity and beliefs on the other (Schwarz and Fritsch, 2015). It was argued by some interviewees that being too positive is unrealistic, promotional and tells only partial truths (Mickey, 2003; Edwards, 2018b).

Power Play in Silence

Selective silence, its justification and knowledge production are tied to power dynamics between The World Bank and its counterpart. The counterpart refers to a certain ministry that changes according to the project (for ex. Ministry of Transport is the Bank's counterpart for a project on roads). To avoid broad claims and generalization, I will use the term Egyptian Counterpart to specifically mean the ministry/ies that constituted the counterpart in this study's context. The analysis reveals that neither the Bank nor the Egyptian counterpart possesses absolute power. When interviewees were asked to reflect on matters of ownership and responsibility and how they guided communication choices, there were different viewpoints.

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The Bank's Power and Leverage

Some interviewees pointed out that the Bank has a power:

> We [The World Bank] do have a say. You do have huge opportunities to push for these countries…You possess the money and CPF. You have five years' duration which is not there for another donor …which means you really can introduce change. (Hayat)

> They [the Egyptian counterpart] started the subsidy reforms ... because the bank did research in 2010 about the cost of subsidies in the Arab world, some countries started to think, and this is the value of the Bank, that you do some analytical pieces and the decision makers approach as a result. (Aida)

When previously asked why the Bank stays silent or communicates less towards criticism, same interviewees stated that the Bank is not in the driving seat. However, here the interviewees suggested that the Bank has power in terms of its financial and technical knowledge resources which informed and supported the economic reforms in a country like Egypt. Also, interviewees reflected on the meaning of partnership:

> We have leverage, it all depends on your dialogue with the government…on the level of trust. You are talking about big portfolios … you are talking about a relationship, which means development partners, it's not about that I am aiming to impose or not. This relationship is supposed to be used in a good way. (Hayat)

Hayat here reflects on partnership as a positive relation to collectively share responsibilities and inspire change. How partnership is viewed here sheds light on how the rhetoric of 'partnership' needs to be used constructively as Hayat mentioned, not to conceal power differences (Baaz, 2005), and not as an 'insurance policy' to blame failure on a partner's incapacity (Mohan, 2001, p. 21). In addition, most interviewees affirmed that the Bank has leverage as an advisory body to the government and this can help its communication strategy and to create a societal debate:

> We should communicate more not as The World Bank, but in pushing the right policy debates that need to happen in the country…The World Bank should play a much bigger role in making sure that there is right data in the right set of questions with the right level of depth that is involved in these questions delivered by people, because superficial debates do not really lead to deep reforms. (Zafer)

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The Power of the Egyptian Counterpart

Conversely, other interviewees asserted that the Egyptian counterpart is powerful and accountable for responding to criticism of the policies it introduces, and for communicating more extensively about them:

> The government is the leader, and the bank is not telling them what to do. We provide financial and technical assistance only. And ... we cannot even suggest something unless we are asked. So, if we are asked for advice, there are limits to advice. And people must know that the Bank and the IMF cannot work in a country if they are not invited. (Jihan)

> The criticism or discussion should be between citizens and the counterpart: "why are we borrowing?" and the government must explain (Mounir)

On the basis of the analysis of the interview data, it seems clear that the interviewees thought that both The World Bank and the Egyptian counterpart possess agency and power, and that each utilises them to achieve their goals and objectives. This result aligns with postcolonialist (Hall, 1997; Said, 2003) and poststructuralist (Foucault, 1980a, 1982) observations that power is constantly circulating and negotiated among players. It is a battlefield where each side resists and challenges the power of the others (Gramsci, 1971).

DISCUSSION

In the foregoing analysis there are moments of agreement and disagreement among interviewees. This suggests that there is room for improvement and reform in The Bank's overall structural policies. As Hazem pointed out:

> *There is always a conflict inside the Bank between two sides: one side is trying to defend the rights of the poor. The other side tries to move the policies in the direction of helping the government in the development projects.*

The analysis suggests a two-sided argument between The World Bank's role in working mostly for the people or for a government. A remarkable level of self-reflexivity and reflections was noted among interviewees. All interviewees acknowledged gaps in The Bank's communication strategy and admitted that the organization can do better. It was highlighted by interviewees that the Bank is reforming and willing to improve its operation and communication. This was evidenced by arguments among staff on the value of local

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knowledge and of engagement with all citizens. Given The World Bank's leverage, the will to change among interviewees can be viewed as a glimpse of hope for internal reform., which has the potential to impact the development field at large.

In this study, the analysis indicates that the Bank's silence was driven by factors including the Egyptian counterpart's ownership of policies and reforms; and the Bank's need to keep a low profile due to its historically tainted image. By remaining selectively silent, The World Bank was reinstating its power by simultaneously denying ownership and affirming the Egyptian counterpart's responsibility for communicating about its reforms and projects. Accordingly, it delegates the duty to address criticism to the local counterpart. At the same time, the Bank was shown to exercise its power by strategically deciding when and how to respond to criticism raised by influencers to maintain its image. Its power was also manifested by adhering to an advisory role to the national government to enhance its communication.

The analysis suggests that The World Bank's power works best when it is silent and 'hidden' (Foucault, 2008). Foucault's argument in Dimitrov's *Strategic Silence* rightfully points out how:

> it is harder to identify who has the power but easier to see who does not. Secrets emerge as an issue …when some cannot "freely" hide their power and start masking it by force. Taboos, censorship, bureaucratic language and double speak work that way. There is no secret in being clueless; the secret is the clue. Being "secretive" is already curious if not suspicious. It means the holder of power cannot any longer hide it without extra effort. (2018, p. 49)

Hence, The World Bank's communication strategy seems to selectively employ silence as a tool and outcome of power, to downplay its own power and emphasise it at the same time.

The interviewees' emphasis on the Egyptian counterpart's power in their discussion about communication strategy appears to contest a view of The World Bank's absolute power over states (Woods, 2006). In fact, the argument that the local counterpart has power is healthy because it ensures accountability towards its citizens. Portraying the local counterpart as powerless is neither correct nor productive (Rossi, 2004). As stated by Mounir and others, government agrees to loans and hence, accountability necessitates investigating reasons for such loans, their expenditure and their impact on the poor. Asserting the agency of both is helpful in many ways: in the case of Egypt, the evidence of the government's agency indicates opportunities to renegotiate The World Bank's policies similar to cases in Japan and China where The World Bank's policies were challenged by states and CSOs (Wade, 1996, 2009; The Inspection Panel, 2013). In parallel, the Bank's leverage may be capitalised upon by pushing the development agenda further to ensure: 1) allocating more funds for social protection projects to mitigate the harsh effects of reforms on the poor and 2) improving clarity of communication before and during reforms. Within the time and context of conducting this

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research, I suggest that both The World Bank and the Egyptian counterpart have a share of power and a responsibility.

Crucially, despite employing silence to downplay The World Bank's ownership and power, some interviewees scrutinised and problematized the economic theories cited as the basis for The Bank's interventions in their attempt to address citizens' criticism from the roots. The study initially was intended to critically examine The World Bank's communication strategy. However, the discussion about improving communication's role in responding to criticism of The World Bank led to an equally important discussion about reforming the root causes of criticism. The analysis revealed that DPFs and some other projects are regarded as having inherent structural deficiencies which stir public controversy in Egypt; and in some cases, have led to the suspension of a whole portfolio as in the case of Uganda's sexual allegations about the behaviour of construction workers who were contracted under The World Bank's contract to implement a transport and road project (The World Bank, 2015). Despite partial validity of the argument that criticisms are the outcome of poor communication strategies (Heide, 2009), even the impact of improved communication strategies are likely to be short-term if structural defects are not addressed.

In this study, interviewees confirmed that image and reputation are of central importance to the Bank and are key goals of its communication strategies (Balmer and Gray, 2000; Benoit, 2014). This was demonstrated by how selective silence was justified in the light of the Bank's historical image in Egypt. As Foucault (1982) points out, we can only understand statements when we understand the contextual and historical conditions of their production. In the PR literature, a threat to image is related to responsibility for an act (Benoit, 2014) and in the case of The World Bank, this is linked to its historical, political and economic role in the High Dam context in Egypt (Reynolds, 2017).

In the interviews, image was emphasised by reference to how The World Bank uses positive messages and promotion of accomplishments in responding to criticism. Adopting Foucault's approach to 'know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known' (1985, p. 9), the evidence in this study suggests that a development organisation such as The World Bank's communication would be more effective if there is a paradigm shift away from safeguarding its image and from a top-down communication strategy. To revive the Bank's function of increasing awareness and creating debate about socio-economic issues in a participatory inclusive way that shapes policies (Alvesson, 1990; Mozammel and Odugbemi, 2005; Coombs and Holladay, 2010; Hallahan, 2015) this shift is crucial. It is crucial because communication that is not merely focused on image building, is likely to be perceived as more credible by the public (Apaydin, 2011). It is

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noteworthy that in many incidents around the world, The World Bank's image was impacted due to operational shortcomings (Wade, 2009; The Guardian, 2016; Reynolds, 2017). Hence, structural reforms (revisiting the economic theories, projects' structure, implementation and supervision modalities) are arguably beneficial for The World Bank to sustain its image and partnership.

Knowledge production came into play in this study as a method of justifying communicative choices for responding to criticism. The interviewees suggested that a categorisation of citizen profiles is used by The World Bank to determine if they deserve a response to their criticisms. It was explained that a priority is given to influential educated citizens whose criticisms may draw wider attention. The implication is that this approach is likely to undermines the possibility of communication that is dialogical and inclusive of all views (Coombs and Holladay, 2010) done with people, for people and not be about people (Mozammel and Odugbemi, 2005). More crucially, it also sheds suggests that there are shades of representation with the opinions of some local citizens being perceived by some as not worthy of a response (Ferguson, 1990; Escobar, 1995; Hall, 1997; Said, 2003). However, the opportunity for reform was suggested by interviewees who referenced local wisdom and called for giving it equal attention. A call for inclusive consultation was manifested by interviewees as a way of mitigating criticism throughout all project cycles.

The findings reveal connections between four recurrent themes: selective silence and its justification, power, knowledge production and contextual historical factors. The analysis indicates that selective silence is employed as a strategic communicative tool by The World Bank to respond to citizens' criticism of its projects and policies in Egypt. Selective silence has been shown to be interlinked with power dynamics between the Bank and the Egyptian government counterpart and to be driven by set of knowledge production about local knowledge and contextual historical factors such as the image of the Bank. The theme of justification ran through all themes. It was highlighted in why silence is employed as a communication strategy, why the Bank responds to certain segments of Egyptian citizens; and why it includes certain segments of citizens in its consultation.

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CONCLUSION

The results of this study of the Egyptian case provide a basis for suggesting that selective silence is used as a communication strategy by The World Bank's to respond to citizen criticism. Selective silence was shown to be justified by the interviewees' insights into issues of ownership, historical image, and citizen profiles which are underpinned by contextual political economic history and a set of knowledge. This set of knowledge sheds light on problematic issues of local knowledge and economic theories. The aim of the analysis has not been to evaluate selective silence as being good or bad because as illustrated here, silence is contextually bounded. Instead, the results indicate that selective silence can be used as a communication tool and tactic in a power play between The World Bank and its partner/counterpart; even while some of those involved critically examine the contextual root causes of such a tactic. In this study, the analysis of silence has been contextualised by probing who is silent in relation to whom and for what purpose; and it has revealed how power can be present and absent at the same time through silence. Consequently, silence needs academic attention to study it not as the absence of saying/communicating, but as a communication strategy, communicating through silence. More importantly, the analysis showed that the interviewees were willing to report arguments and counterarguments among World Bank employees which highlight room for reform in The World Bank's communication strategy and operations.

The implications of the study's findings are many. The findings from Egypt's case tend to confirm communications and development theories as argued in the literature review. For instance, the findings on image are consistent with theories discussed in the literature review about the implication of focusing on image, which narrows the function of communication, and the call . to move beyond the narrow study of PR activities as forms of strategic communication in development organisations towards a wider examination of overarching types, such as those conducted in coordination with governments to highlight issues of tension and power dynamics.

The data on how communication can be used to stir healthy public debates instead of serving PR purposes demonstrates how communication practitioners can have a better role informing organizational reforms on both communicative and operational fronts. Furthermore, findings on power relation is consistent with post structuralist theories on how power is never absolute and always resisted; which in turn, highlight agency and accountability of all parties (citizens, World Bank, government). The study aligns with the post sturcuturalist post colonial emphasis on the necessity of contextualisation (historical, political etc) to understand a communicative phenomenon such as selective silence because these factors evidently

informed its selection as a tactic. Hence, a different context and time would yield different findings.

Crucially, and in line with post colonial approach, the study suggests how development and communication efforts are compromised when certain knowledge reproduces patterns of representation and meaning-making that denigrate local knowledge. By selectively incorporating elite views, development projects lack local insights which undermine its outcome as seen in many cases. Also, selectively responding to citizens according to their profile undermines communication's mandate to be dialogical and respectful to all perspectives. In summary, the study's objective was to identify weaknesses in The World Bank's communication strategy as a first step to inform policies of improvement in communication and development.

The field could benefit from more studies on development organisations' communication strategies that are different from private corporations. Applying post-colonial, post-structuralist theoretical foundation (or using them as a point of departure), other studies could investigate the implications of applying economic theories developed in the Global North to the Global South as a one-size-fits-all approach. Studies on communication can investigate further the issue of citizens' consultation. Studies with more time and spatial span can examine perspectives of a given government's officials vis-à-vis that of The World Bank's in a certain country and context. More notably, future researches can build on this study to examine silence as a communicative strategy (not the lack of) within a contextual framework.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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APPENDIX 1 TOPIC GUIDE

What communication strategy does The World Bank in Egypt employ to respond to citizens' criticism of its policies and projects? A case study of the Development Policy Financing (DPF) project 2016

1- Can you tell me your name and position?

2- Have you read, understood the information sheet and consent form?

3- Any objections or concerns about the consent form?

4- Tell me your story, how u start working here, etc.

5- How long have you been employed with The World Bank in Egypt in this position?

6- What has been your role in the Development Finance project implemented in Egypt?

7- Can you tell me about Egypt's office's communication strategy; and Egypt's DPF's communication strategy in specific?

8- Did Egypt's DPF's components include a communication plan?

   - If the answer *(yes),* can you tell me more:

   - Do you have a target audience? Who were the target audiences?

   - What channels (press, social media, TV, etc.)? in Which language?

   - The duration of the communication campaign?

9- How you evaluate the communication strategy of this DPF in Egypt?

10- How did Egyptian citizens, Lower and Middle classes receive the communication campaigns? Are you aware of any feedback/response?

   - Yes, positive… In what way?

   - Yes, negative…can you elaborate more

11- Is there data on segments of Egypt's society "class/geographical areas" that shared critical feedback/concerns over DPF?

12- In your opinion, why was there criticism of DPF and/or Bank's policies and projects in Egypt?

13- What was the team's response to Egyptian citizens' comments/feedback?

   - Responded: how?

   - No response: what are your thoughts on the no response action?

14- What is your evaluation of such a response? any thoughts?

15- In your opinion, how you evaluate Egypt's office communication strategy for this DPF?

16- What are the strength and areas of improvement in the Bank's overall communication strategy?

17- Is there anything you want to add, on/off record?

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Notes for contributors:

Contributors are encouraged to submit papers that address the social, political, economic and cultural context of the media and communication, including their forms, institutions, audiences and experiences, and their global, national, regional and local development. Papers addressing any of the themes mentioned below are welcome, but other themes related to media and communication are also acceptable:

Communication and Difference	Mediation and Resistance
Globalisation and Comparative Studies	Media and Identity
Innovation, Governance and Policy	Media and New Media Literacies
Democracy, Politics and Journalism Ethics	The Cultural Economy

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Papers should conform to the following format:

6,000-10,000 words (excluding bibliography, including footnotes), 150-200 word abstract

Non-numbered headings and sub-headings are preferred

The Harvard system of referencing should be used

Papers should be prepared as a Word file (Graphs, pictures and tables should be included as appropriate in the same file as the paper) and should be sent to Bart Cammaerts (b.cammaerts@lse.ac.uk)

ISSN: 1474-1938/1946