The Limits of Weberian on Anti-Corruption Approaches in the Indonesian Municipalities

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Abstract: The study of corruption in the Indonesian municipalities comprises a broad variety of analysis, ranging from patron-client, clientelism, rent-seeking, etc. The various analysis of corruption indicates that there has been a gradual increase in the scholar’s attention associated with the high number of corruption cases in the Indonesian local governments, especially after reform period. Yet, the high attentions of scholars are still insufficient to formulate a best anti-corruption approach. In the public administration discourse, the scholars got often stuck to find a suitable approach to reducing corruption in the Indonesian local governments. The tendency of academia’s has explained solely by a bureaucracy analysis on the part of a Weberian discourse is one sided. Although the Weberian idea has provided some interesting ideas to frame corruption, the scholars still face difficulty in capturing a full image of the corruption problem. That means corruption is not always easy to explain from a single perspective. The failed of Weberian perspective to understand corruption could be reflected through a performance of local governments that is implemented anti-corruption programs in the bureaucracy. Thus, we need to be diagnosed in seeing the failure of a Weberian idea to formulate anti-corruption approaches in the Indonesian municipalities. I also would like to discuss the possibility of alternative perspective in the contextualizing anti-corruption approaches in the Indonesian municipalities.

Keywords: Corruption, Weberian, Municipality

1. Introduction

There are intriguing questions when it comes to corruption. What do you think about it? Would you say that this act is wrong or immoral, closely related to bribery, or about abuse of power, or even other bad things? If one of those answers crosses your mind, this means corruption has a negative tendency. The negative tendency of corruption cannot be separated from the act of violations from corrupt actors. This discussion cannot be kept aside when analyzing corruption, considering that many scholars see corruption as a violations that focuses on the analysis of various illegal actions such as bribery, gift-giving or tips extortion, fraud, embezzlement, nepotism, cronyism, appropriation of public assets and property for private use, influence peddling (Myint, 2000); bribery, extortion and fraud; bribery, nepotism and cronyism, misappropriation, favouritism, trading in influence, patronage, embezzlement, kickback, and unholy alliances (Hart, 2001; Huberts, 2014; Luo in Richter & Burke, 2007; Nye in Heidenheimer & Johnston, 2007; Rose-Ackerman, 1999). Based on this notion, the discussion of corruption is closely related to the presence of actions violating the ethical standards attached to an individual. Some explanations of various arguments of scholars emphasize that most of scholars have similar concern to identify any deviation of behaviour from corrupt individuals in which corruption is embedded.

Interestingly, a survey by Transparency International (TI) indicates that the number of publications on corruption in political and public administration was about 74 of a total of 4,000 books and journal articles in the last ten years (Luo in Richter & Burke, 2007). This percentage was highest compared to other disciplines such as historical (10%), legal (9%), economic (4%), and social, ethnographic and cultural (2%) (Luo in Richter & Burke, 2007). The high number of publications on corruption in public administration indicates that the study of corruption have a huge influence from
public administration. As a result, the domination of public administration corruption discourse has promoted several concepts in the public administration itself. One of them is Weberian concept in the bureaucracy.

This article departs from the general accord in Indonesian academia’s that there is a tendency of scholars to accepted a Weberian idea as standard anti-corruption approaches in the local government. In this article, I argue that the domination of Weberian idea have still insufficient for a reduce corruption in bureaucracy. Thus, the scholars should reflect a weakness of Weberian as anti-corruption approaches. At the same time, the scholars should focus to investigate beyond corrupt act and also attempting to move beyond to arrive at a more inclusive approach on anti-corruption.

2. Methodology

This paper provide a debate of Weberian perspectives on curbing corruption in the Indonesian municipalities. On the one hand, the Weberian idea has a big influence for scholars to explaining corruption. The scholars believed that the accountable government could be achieved through adoption of Weberian principles especially modern bureaucracy principles. On the other hand, the Weberian idea has not fit as universal solutions to curbing corruption because there is a tendency of Western idea. According to my opinion, there are different explanations for corrupt behavior due to different values and norms in each Indonesian municipality. The argument in this paper is to provide some insight into how to improve anti-corruption in the Indonesian municipalities based on own characteristics and not depending on Western principles. In this article, this study used a qualitative method, employing a case study approach focused in the Indonesian municipalities. The analysis of qualitative method focused on documentation especially the collection of laws regarding anti-corruption programs.

3. Results and Discussion

The Weberian has established as ideal concept in the modern bureaucracy. The modern bureaucracy principles based on the Weberian model are legal-rational, hierarchical, technical competencies, impersonal, and formalistic (Constas, 1958). These principles are believed to contribute much new thinking on academic discourses among western scholars, one of which is discussing the ideal concept of government. Western scholars believe that Weberian bureaucracy principles make government as an organization more innovative, oriented to meeting the needs of the public quickly (Londsdale & Bemelmans-Videc in Bemelmans-Videc et al.,2007). In the non-Western case like Indonesia, there is also a general acceptance among scientists of the Weberian bureaucracy model as the main concept on formulating anti-corruption. That means that the debate on corruption is not separated from the Weberian bureaucracy model.

In the majority of the definitions, corruption in the government is defined as some act that deviates from the principles of modern bureaucracy in the Weberian model (Huberts, 2014). Weber emphasizes that modern bureaucracy should be a reflection of the bureaucracy activities of the organization since it involves legal-rational principles. Those legal-rational principles include the obedience and belief of individuals about existence of legality and the presence of logical about order that become the frame of reference for a person's behaviour in a pluralistic power structure environment (Constas, 1958). Thus, the presence of legal-rational in the administration is believed to encourage neutrality for the individual who acts as government officers, so that the threat of such opportunities for corruption can be minimized. Although Weber also discussed that there is a distinction between modern organization with legal-rational characteristic and charismatic bureaucracy with totalitarian bureaucracy characteristic, Weber claimed that legal-rational approach is ideal type of bureaucracy in the democratic bureaucracy. This claimed inspired most of scholars were promoted a legal-rational approach in bureaucracy for their countries. In the anti-corruption context, some countries proposed several anti-corruption policies of local bureaucracy such as law enforcement, merit system, etc.
If we see deeper, some countries have succeed to applied a Weberian approaches in the bureaucracy. In countries like Singapore, for instance, first Singapore Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew was made significant change to eradicate corruption. He has took various measures to combat corruption such as strong leadership, effective legal rules, regulating government officer salaries, and anti-corruption laws (Leak in Stapenhurst & Kpundeh, 1999; Quah, 2011). The popular queto from Lee Kuan Yew ‘if you pay peanuts, you will get corrupt monkeys’ (Anonymous, 2013) showed his commitment on combating corruption in Singapore government through legal-rational principles. Now, how about the influence of Weberian approach for Indonesia bureaucracy?

Nowadays, scholars play a lot of attention to studying corruption comprehensively based on the Weberian approach. Some scholars suggest that law enforcement is a basic foundation to achieve modern bureaucracy (see for example Schwartz in Vigoda, 2002; Jos & Tompkins, 2004). Laws are an essential part of the measurement of government institutions to fight corruption. As an important part, the laws are expected to be able to eradicate corruption from several approaches, i.e., the powerful rules, the re-regulation particularly related to politics and administrative behaviour, the anti-corruption law, and civil service reform (Smith, 2007). Thus, the main principle in the Weberian perspective puts the laws into local government mechanisms legally. This means that local governments have integrated institutional accountability in the form of regulations.

In practice, the stakeholders have produced more than 27 laws and regulations relate anti-corruption programs since President Habibie until Joko Widodo as the current President. For instance, Law No. 14 of 2008 mention that local governments are required to provide extensive information and access to the public. Last laws could be seen by President Joko Widodo such as Presidential Instruction No. 7 of 2015 on the strategies of preventing and eradicating corruption. Various laws and regulations have a purpose of controlling miss behaviour by officials. In that sense, the anti-corruption approaches in Indonesia bureaucracy are always following legally-rationally, which means the Indonesian municipalities are often applied laws to combating corruption.

The discussion on Weberian perspective has been continuously expanding to look at anti-corruption approaches from the role of multi-actors. According to Yang (2011), the actors have a strategic position to participate in anti-corruption programs. In that sense, some explanations of this perspective emphasize the role of multi-actors to curbing massive corruption in the Indonesian municipalities. In practice, there are several actors who usually have legitimacy in the government to control municipalities. Therefore, it is important to note that anti-corruption is done through multi-actors. The advantage of multi-actors is that relative accountability condition will run democratically and clearly where each actor will be involved in the control mechanism. On many occasions, multi-actors have shown an important position to play a watch dog role for local governments.

The last of Weberian influence in the anti-corruption approach can be seen in the technical qualifications of an individual in the government. In the bureaucracy, various rules instruct officials to join the training. In the municipality context, every official from top level until low level should follow the government training for their career such as the training for new officials/ pendidikan kilat prajabatan and the training for job promotion/ pendidikan kilat kepemimpinan 1-4. The essence of this training is improved of capacities and competencies for each officer because their duties have a good or bad impact to the wider community. Therefore, the training is the basis for each individual to be fully responsible for any action taken.

Based on our discussion, a critical distinctions among scholars to understand Weberian perspectives could presence a different anti-corruption results for the Indonesian municipalities. Although various principles of the Weberian model encourage governments to be accountable, the Weberian is misused as the main tool for anti-corruption approaches in the Indonesian municipalities. According to my opinion, the Weberian perspectives have a potential bias as they may neglect corruption characteristics in Indonesia as a combination between social dimensions and an individual motive. Some explanations of this argument emphasize the role of culture in massive corruption by
officials in the Indonesia bureaucracies (see for example Smith, 1971; Anderson in Holt, 1972; Liddle 1996; Dwiyanto, 2006). In the Indonesian case, the terms *beikel* and *upeti*, which mean payment by people of low social status for protection, is not categorized as bribery in the Javanese culture perspective but is rather a kind of appreciation for people who have a high social status (Smith, 1971; Dwiyanto, 2006). In the same culture, the term *bapakism* has shifting definition from father to loyalties of the boss to the government (Liddle, 1996). This indicates that people have extraordinary respect for people with authority. A leader is thought to be superior, and people do not want to take a critical attitude toward anything that a leader does (Anderson in Holt, 1972).

Moreover, the Weberian perspectives have limitation to response a dynamic condition in the local bureaucracy. In the Weberian perspectives, the officials have a less discretion due to a rigid procedure. This becomes an anomaly in the government as public organizations, considering the relationship should be equal between officials and citizens. At the same time, the officials should follow their boss as an implication of hierarchical relations on the government. This means that the every agent are embedded hierarchically on administrative functions of government. Thus, it is not strange that every staff, including newcomers, should follow all instructions by boss including corruption act. If we see deeper, some studies already explained corruption on Indonesian bureaucracy from patron-client due to a monopoly of power by boss (see for example Liddle 1996; Dwiyanto, 2006). Lastly, there are some critiques about the adaptation of a Weberian model in the state. According to Migdal (2001), corruption is defined as something that differs from the violations of the bureaucracy principle in the Weberian model. Migdal (2001) interprets state illegality as an action of resource abuse by individuals who have the upper hand in competing for relations among officials because of the presence of social forces and networks of what Migdal calls the ‘state-in-society’ approach. Moreover, Sissener (2001) emphasizes that the Weberian bureaucracy idea has been developed from perspectives that stem from Western social science. In this argument, the Weberian principles have resulted from the Western characterisation of a government as a ‘rational-legal bureaucratic-organization’ [17]. Thus, although the Indonesian municipalities as non-Western countries adopted the Weberian model, the result is not similar to Western countries.

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

It should be pointed out here that the Weberian perspective leads to a bias on anti-corruption approaches due to differences between Western and non-Western contexts. Differences in opinions on the non-Western societies who consider corruption as a social obligation to help each other indicate that there is a blurred corruption definition in non-Western societies (Cavill & Sohail, 2007; Tidey, 2013; Huberts, 2014). This relates to the notion of developing nations an argument put forward by Scott (1972), who pointed out the difficulties in comparing Western and developing countries, even when the latter adopted a Western-type of system. According to Scott (1972), there are two factors that should be considered concerning the difficulties in making such comparisons: (1) the gap between social practice and legal norms; (2) the difference between private standards and public standards. Consequently, corruption itself can also have an unclear boundary in societies on general and local bureaucracy on particular.

Thus, corruption is present not because of the violations of Weberian principles but because of the morality of the reciprocity in gift giving through solidarity, affective ties, etc. This could be occurring more easily in strong kinship-based societies like Indonesian families, though people know corruption is apparently classified as an unethical action. Therefore, the limitation of corruption aims to remind scholars about this line of thinking. Any study of corruption has to start with the understanding that corruption is not always about the malfunction of public officers in governments but is rather the result of the combination of self-interests and social and cultural pressures through relational approach.
As a result, the anti-corruption approaches in the Indonesian municipalities allow to formulating differently, depending on local perceptions. Therefore, to understand the problem of corruption, one must start from an understanding of the context of corruption including the actor, the type of action and the nature of corruption itself. The need for an understanding of the environment and the contours of corruption in a case is the fundamental element for designing appropriate strategies to eradicate corruption (de Asis, 2006). In that sense, the formulation of anti-corruption approaches should focus to relatedness, which focuses on social relations among corrupt actors and their networks in which they are embedded.

5. References

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